

Walker 91

Chapter 91 - Briefing The Leader

Hei Bao inwardly sighed with relief upon seeing the veiled woman who had just entered the safe house.

'Finally, she's here.' Hei Bao thought.

Hei Bao had been extremely stressed ever since last night's events. He had experienced one shock after the other and was becoming more and more worried. Their investigations were not bearing fruit for a while, but now that they actually had some leads, it just seemed like a mountain fell on his mind.

It started with the emergency signal called by Hei Wen, then the appearance of the culprit's corpses, after was that the surprise of Lin Mu's status and then finally the incident with Hei Wen this morning. Hei Bao felt that everything was occurring too fast and it was beyond his capacity to handle the alone.

Hei Bao walked forward and greeted the Veiled woman personally.

"Greetings leader. We have been waiting for your arrival." Hei Bao spoke.

"So what was the emergency for which you have summoned me here?" The Veiled woman coldly asked.

Hei Bao took a deep breath before speaking again,

"I'm afraid we have more than one issue that needs to be addressed."

"If you may please." Hei Bao added while gesturing towards the other room.

The veiled woman did not speak anything, but simply followed Hei Bao's lead. Hei Bao brought her to the locked room, which he opened to let her inside. This was the same room where the plates which were used to send an emergency signal were kept in. These plates were very precious, thus were kept securely locked in this room, which also served as a meeting room for important matters.

The room was fifteen meters long and ten meters wide in size. It had a tall ceiling, from which multiple lamps were hanging. There were also some vents that were at top of the room, which supplied fresh air to it.

On one side of the room, there were multiple tables on which the rectangular metal plates were kept. These plates hung from a stand each and had a circular cutout in it. This circular metal disk would start spinning whenever an emergency signal was triggered.

The veiled woman looked towards the rectangular plates and quickly spotted the one plate whose inner disk was not in the right place. Hei Bao noticed this and quickly spoke,

"It was Hei Wen who used the distress whistle to trigger the emergency signal."

The veiled woman looked towards Hei Bao and continued following him to the large table that was kept on the other end of the room. She then sat down at its helm, on a large and comfortable chair before speaking.

"So is Hei Wen fine now?" The veiled woman asked.

"He was when we originally returned last night, but today in the morning there was an incident." Hei Bao answered.

"What kind of an incident?" The Veiled woman questioned.

Hei Bao took a deep breath and thought about everything for a second before starting his explanation. He knew that it was going to be long and winded, thus wanted to get all his thoughts in order first. The veiled woman waited patiently in silence, for she trusted her subordinates.

Hei Bao then started explaining all of the events of yesterday. His explanation lasted for a good fifteen minutes and he added every minor thing during it as he didn't want to miss anything. He knew about his leader's capabilities, thus knew that the more thorough he was in his explanation, the more concise conclusion she would reach.

After finishing his explanation, Hei Bao took another deep breath and stopped. The veiled woman also went silent and thought for five minutes before speaking again.

"I would like to see the corpses of the culprits and also the evidence you had found."

Hei Bao nodded and retrieved the blood-stained piece of paper from his pocket before passing it to the leader. She looked at the paper and read it quickly before analyzing it's every inch. She even smelt it for a moment just to get an accurate judgment.

"Let's go and see the corpses now." The Veiled woman ordered.

"Yes, leader." Hei Bao replied politely.

Hei Bao then guided the veiled woman to the storage room where the dead bodies of the culprits were stored. As soon as they reached the cold room, the woman approached the bodies. Hei Bao suddenly felt a certain wave pass through and understood that it was just the spirit sense probe of the veiled woman.

The veiled woman did not touch any of the bodies, but instead just scanned them with her spirit sense. She seemed to have frowned for a moment, but it wasn't visible under her veil. A minute later, she was done with the observations.

"They are death warriors, low-level ones, but death warriors indeed." The veiled woman concluded.

"We can also confirm that the town guards may be involved in this. From now on, all the town guards are to be closely investigated." The veiled woman added.

"Leader, the boy named Lin Mu also wants to meet you." Hei Bao spoke with bated breath.

"Yes, I want to meet this boy as well. The lord is especially interested in him." The veiled woman replied with a little interest in her voice.

"Leader, I'm afraid that we may be going beyond our limits with that boy. I can tell with a great surety that he is a category four party." Hei Bao seriously spoke.

The Veiled woman's pupils widened underneath her veil.

"That boy also knows about the other category four-party in the town; Old man Jing." Hei Bao added.

If the veiled woman's shock was hidden because of her veil at first, now it was completely revealed as even Hei Bao could hear her breath getting rough. He could swear that he even saw her tremble for a brief moment.

"Do you have an estimate about his cultivation base?" The veiled woman questioned.

"I did not dare confirm it myself, but Hei Wen is sure that it should be at the peak of the Qi refining realm as the boy has refined his spirit sense as well. We also witnessed the carnage he had caused. All the bodies that you see here are his handiwork." Hei Bao explained.

"He... he... he has skills that are rather strange and terrifying, Hei Wen seemed to have experienced it and has become very disturbed because of it." He added.

Chapter 92 - The Leader Meets Lin Mu

Fifteen minutes before the arrival of the leader.

Hei Wen had taken a brief rest and was now feeling a bit better. Even still, the thoughts of the nightmare that occurred before haunted him. He could even remember the pain of being cut to pieces by millions of swords, clearly.

Hei Wen wondered what kind of cultivation technique or skill Lin Mu practiced that even his mere presence caused him to experience this kind of a backlash. Just him hearing the esoteric chants was enough to defeat him.

Though after experiencing this, Hei Wen did not completely regret it.

'At the very least, I'll be able to inform the Lord about this. That way he won't be at a disadvantage.' Hei Wen thought.

With this thought in mind, Hei Wen went to find Hei Bao. Hei Bao had already asked him to come to meet with him after resting, so this just met his purpose. Hei Wen soon found Hei Bao in his personal room. He saw that the door was already open, thus he just walked in. Hei Bao was currently sitting on his desk while reading a report from a scroll in his hand.

'Preparing for the arrival of the leader, I see.' Hei Wen inwardly said.

Hei Bao noticed Hei Wen's footsteps, thus looked up to see him enter.

"Are you feeling well now?" Hei Bao questioned.

"Not completely, but better than before at least." Hei Wen replied.

"You should just rest more then. The leader won't mind your absence, I'll inform her of your condition." Hei Bao replied with concern.

"Yes, I'll do that. But I need to tell you about what happened to me before that." Hei Wen interrupted.

Hei Bao nodded in response and spoke,

"Go on ahead then."

Hei Wen then started to tell Hei Bao of what happened from the very start. How he saw Lin Mu speaking some esoteric chants and how he got curious and listened to them. He then told him what he felt after that and then how he was trapped in his mind and experienced the nightmare of being chopped into innumerable pieces by a million swords.

Hei Wen also told Hei Bao, how he had also heard Lin Mu speak similar chats during the battle with the culprits, and how those chants seemed to have immobilized the culprits until they were killed by Lin Mu.

The more Hei Bao heard, the more shocked and concerned he got. Hei Bao knew that there were as many cultivation techniques in the world as there were drops of water in an ocean. There were common cultivation techniques that were similar to each other, and then there were cultivation techniques that were completely unique.

Hei Bao had heard rumors or more like legends about forbidden cultivation techniques that only a chosen few could cultivate. These cultivation techniques were highly attuned to their user and would cause a backlash for others that tried using it.

But even then, he had never heard of a cultivation technique that could harm another person if he was just in the presence of one. From the vivid descriptions and the expressions of Hei Wen, Hei Bao could tell that this was no mere exaggeration and was truly what he said it was.

'If just his presence is this dangerous, then what would it be like when he actually attacks someone with his full strength.' Hei Bao thought.

Hei Bao could tell that Lin Mu did not use his full strength during the previous battle either. He now understood how lucky they were that Lin Mu chose to join their side and was not their foe, well at least not now.

'I can't let this happen though, who knows what kind of background that boy has. For all we know, his history could all have been faked and he must've been trained by hidden experts.' Hei Bao thought.

After Hei Wen was done with his explanation, a slight expression of relief could be seen on his face, as if a burden was lifted off of his mind. Though what he didn't know was that this burden had not disappeared, instead it had just transferred over to Hei Bao and had even increased in size.

"Thank you for informing me of this, it was wise of you to do so. You should go and rest now, I'll take care of the rest." Hei Bao spoke.

Hei Wen simply nodded and left the room to go and rest again.

"The leader should be arriving soon. I better gather the others and wait at the entrance." Hei Bao muttered.

Hei Bao stored the scroll that he was reading back into a drawer and then left the room as well.

"Gather at the main hall Hei Corps, the leader should be arriving any minute." Hei Bao shouted out.

Present time at the storage room inside the safe house.

Hei Bao had just finished telling the veiled woman who was the leader of the Hei Corps about Lin Mu. After hearing his entire explanation, the veiled woman was fully shocked and could not help but praise their luck. Though she still could not tell whether it would turn to misfortune in the future or not.

"We better take this one step at a time. The most basic thing would be to avoid conflict with this boy 'Lin Mu' and to prevent any enmity." The Veiled Woman concluded.

'Perhaps the lord should personally meet this boy.' The veiled woman thought.

"As you say, leader." Hei Bao responded.

The veiled woman then nodded and spoke again.

"The others will go and try to gather more clues about the culprits. In the meantime, we should go and meet up with this Lin Mu."

Hei Bao gestured for the veiled woman to follow and then led her to the room where Lin Mu was currently residing in. They reached the room in a minute and Hei Bao opened the door. He walked in first and looked for Lin Mu. He instantly spotted Lin Mu as he was still sitting in the same position on the bed.

Lin Mu was not as focused on cultivating right now, thus was easily able to detect when the door of the room opened. His eyes snapped open, and he saw Hei Bao entering the room, with another person in tow. This person had a veil on their face that hid their features, but Lin Mu could tell that it was a woman.

"The leader of the Hei corps," Lin Mu softly muttered.

"Keep your spirit sense alert, she may try to probe you," Xukong ordered.

"Yes, Senior." Lin Mu replied in his mind.

Following senior Xukong's words, Lin Mu extended his spirit sense and kept it alert. In the next moment, Senior Xukong's words came true as he sensed the collision of another spirit sense with his own. This was his first time experiencing the spirit sense of another person except for senior Xukong, Duan Ke, and Old man Jing.

Lin Mu saw the distance between them and estimated that the range of the spirit sense of the veiled woman should be a little less than ten meters, most probably at nine meters. Lin Mu could also observe the difference between the veiled woman's spirit sense and the other spirit senses he had experienced. It was much weaker than any of the other ones he had observed.

Of the spirit senses he had experienced before, Senior Xukong's was the strongest, while Duan Ke's was the weakest. But even still, the veiled woman's spirit sense was at least ten times as weaker than that of Duan Ke's. Lin Mu even had the confidence that he would overtake the veiled woman in a few weeks' time.

Similar to Lin Mu, the veiled woman had also thought of trying to estimate Lin Mu's cultivation base. But when she felt her spirit sense probe being blocked by Lin Mu's own, she instantly retracted it. She could feel the density of Lin Mu's spirit sense and did not want to probe further, as it could end up offending him.

'His spirit sense is already denser than mine, and his range should be wider than mine as well, he must just be restraining it.' The veiled woman thought.

'He should be at the very peak of the Qi refining realm, the same as me. But his cultivation technique should be much stronger and superior.' The veiled woman pondered.

Lin Mu could not have imagined that in the brief moment their spirit senses collided, the veiled woman would have thought of so many things and even had overestimated his cultivation by a long shot. He didn't mind the spirit probe the veiled woman used and was fine with it as she instantly withdrew it after meeting his.

The veiled woman came close and stood in front of him.

"Greetings, I'm Lin Mu." Lin Mu greeted the veiled woman with cupped hands, as was the proper etiquette.

In a surprise to him, the veiled woman actually reciprocated his greeting.

"Greetings, fellow cultivator. My name is Hei Wan." The veiled woman replied respectfully.

Hei Bao was also surprised by this, not because of how the veiled woman greeted Lin Mu respectfully, as it was already expected; but because of the tone of her voice. The leader who was always cold and straight with her tone had suddenly switched it for a mellow and genial tone that was bordering on the realm of sweet too!

Chapter 93 - The Hei Corps Meet Old Man Jing

The Veiled woman named Hei Wan gestured Lin Mu to take a seat.

"Please be at ease, we'll just talk casually." Hei Wan spoke.

Lin Mu nodded and pulled a chair from the side to sit on. Hei Bao too slid a chair forward for Hei Wan to sit on, while he himself stood at the side. Lin Mu saw this and looked at Hei Bao, but he just shook his head. Understanding his intention, Lin Mu didn't question it.

Hei Wan had many questions that she wanted to ask, but knew that she had to show some restraint and keep to herself, lest she ends up offending the cultivator in front of her. In her first non-verbal interaction with Lin Mu, she had already grasped a part of Lin Mu's personality and understood that he was rather mild and reserved. Compared to the other young and talented cultivators who were often arrogant and upturned, he was much more reasonable.

Hei Wan could not help but think of the upbringing he must have received for him to be this humble. She had investigated and learned about the situation with Lin Mu's parents and knew that he was an orphan. She could only attribute Lin Mu's current standing to a hidden master.

At this point, Hei Wan could only hope that whatever background Lin Mu had was either amicable or at the very least neutral with theirs. Hei Wan was already extremely wary when she heard that the boy in front of her knew about Old man Jing. She could still remember when she and her lord had their first run-in with Old man Jing a few years ago.

A few years ago, in Wu Lim city.

A thin man who had a scholarly aura was sitting on a luxurious-looking chair and was listening to a person speak. He was sitting in a room that looked like a study and was illuminated by softly glowing lights. There were five more people in the room and all of them were dressed in dark blue robes. Of the five people, only one person was not wearing a mask and was instead wearing a veil.

This person was none other than the leader of the Hei corps, Hei Wan and the scholarly man sitting on the luxurious chair was the 'Lord' that the Hei corps followed. If one could sense it, then they would find out that the four men who were wearing masks were all Core condensation realm cultivators. Such a lineup wasn't something that could be seen every day.

Currently, one of the masked Core condensation realm experts was speaking.

"We have completed our initial reconnaissance of the Black dawn kingdom and the Eastern Ming dynasty. Most of what we discovered was the same as before, but there were still some abnormalities that we detected." Said the man who was standing in front of the Lord.

"We think that someone has been manipulating and hiding their involvement. The recent conflict between the royal family of the Black dawn kingdom also seems to be their doing." Another masked man that was standing to the right spoke.

The Lord stroked his beard a couple of times before replying,

"That's fine. It is indeed as I expected. We will just need to continue monitoring it further then. For now, just assign a few of the lower members to keep an eye on the situation and if it gets more complicated only then, will we interfere."

The Lord then looked at the masked men and scanned them before speaking again,

"Anything else of importance?"

One of the Masked men seemed to be hesitating, and this was hidden behind the mask, yet the Lord detected it.

"Do you have something to say?" The Lord asked in a calm voice.

"I do, but I don't want to waste my Lord's time." The masked man answered respectfully.

The Lord then waved his hand and spoke,

"Go on ahead, we still have some time left."

The masked man then cupped his hands in respect before speaking,

"While returning from the Northern Frontier, this servant passed through the Northern town and took a halt for a brief amount of time. There I sensed something different. I felt as if the flow of spirit qi in the air was abnormal and seemed to be gathering towards a certain area."

"Thus to investigate this, I went forward towards the area, which was an unassuming and abandoned alley. The first strange thing I found out was that there was no one in the alley, all of the shops in the alley seemed to be old and rundown." The masked man took a breath before continuing.

"I then sensed the second strange thing, my spirit sense was blocked when I tried to probe the alley. It was as if there was a barrier set up there that was surrounding it. No matter what direction I tried, my spirit sense was always blocked. This Servant then decided to enter the alley himself to see what was the cause for this.

As soon as I entered the alley, I could sense the concentrated spirit qi in the air. I looked around and concluded that there was an illusory formation placed on the area. Then suddenly, I felt as if I saw someone in the sky, but they then disappeared in the next second. And along with this, the formation that was covering the area also disappeared. A few seconds later, the concentration of spirit qi in the air also returned to normal."

The expression on the Lord's face was getting sharper by the second.

"How did you leave the alley?" The lord asked with a cold tone.

The other people in the room were currently a little shocked by the masked man's words, thus did not detect the faint aura that was rising from the Lord's body.

The masked man, who was speaking, suddenly had a confused expression on his face after hearing his Lord's question.

He was lost in his thoughts for a few seconds before speaking.

"I... I... I don't know how? I can't remember when I left it either." The masked man uttered while stuttering

An enraged aura suddenly burst out of the scholarly man. An aura that was stronger than the aura's of all of the people here combined together.

"YOU FOOL! You've been under the effect of a confounding formation all this while and you did not realize it." The Lord shouted with fury bursting out of his eyes.

The veiled woman who was standing to the side suddenly widened her eyes in realization.

"The area had a confounding formation placed on it. What if you've been followed all this while?" Hei Wan spoke out loud.

It was at this time that the other members of the Hei corps realized the seriousness of their situation. Suddenly, as if to justify their fears, an imposing aura that was even stronger than the Lord's descended upon the room.

"WHOO?" The Lord shouted as he struggled to bear the weight of the aura.

The other people in the room were already unable to bear it as they all instantly collapsed onto their knees. Then, in the next moment, the roof of the room was split apart as two people descended from the sky.

The two people that descended into the room were an old man that looked ancient and had a long beard, along with a young woman that was wearing a green-colored Daoist robe and had a wooden hairpin in her hair that was in the shape of a poplar leaf.

These two were none other than the pair of grandfather and granddaughter, Jing Wei and Duan Ke. The pair looked at the people in the room and finally settled their gazes onto the Lord.

~Humph~ "A group of measly Core Condensation realm cultivators." Duan Ke scoffed.

"Seems like you were right, Ke'er, I was overthinking this. They're not worth our time." Jing Wei spoke.

"Should I finish them off?" Duan Ke asked without moving her petrifying gaze from the Lord.

Jing Wei seemed to be thinking as he did not answer right away. Instead, a wave of imposing spirit qi emanated from him and spread around. A few seconds later, he seemed to have reached a conclusion as he spoke,

"No, leave them for now." Jing Wei spoke while looking at his granddaughter.

He then turned back to the Lord and spoke in a grandiose tone.

"This is your first and last warning. Do not interfere in our matters and don't intrude our territory either."

Each and every person could feel these words being carved into their minds. They all then nodded their heads in acceptance, albeit with difficulty.

"Let's go, grandfather." Duan Ke spoke and then withdrew a spirit sword from her spatial treasure.

The pair of grandfather and granddaughter were just about to jump on the spirit sword and leave, when the Lord gritted his teeth and spoke out.

"May I have the names of your Excellencies?" The Lord asked while bowing his head.

An annoyed look appeared on Duan Ke's face after being interrupted. She was just about to speak, when Jing Wei gestured to her and she settled down while letting out a harrumph.

"You can call me Old Man Jing." Jing Wei answered in his hoarse voice.

"This junior will forever remember the grace that the senior has shown me." The Lord spoke with a tone that was overflowing with awe and respect.

The Members of the Hei corpse simply kowtowed on the ground, without being prompted to do so, they could not speak anything due to the imposing pressure, anyway. Jing Wei faintly nodded before mounting the spirit sword and flying away.

But a moment after they left, Duan Ke's voice echoed again.

"You better keep this to yourself." She spoke in a cold and menacing tone.

Chapter 94 - End Of The Meeting

A few minutes after Jing Wei and Duan Ke left, the people in the room were finally able to relax and take control of themselves.

The Hei Corps could barely lift themselves up from the floor right now. They sat up from the kowtowing posture with the support of their arms and looked at the aftermath. They saw the rubble that was

strewn around due to the collapse of the roof and the book shelves that were fallen as well. But in the end, their gazes settled on one of their comrades.

It was the same person who had reported about the abnormality and the same one who was also scolded by the lord. The person in question was currently stuck in the kowtowing posture. Unlike others who had lifted themselves, he was still stuck there.

One of the masked men dragged himself to the man who was still kowtowing and spoke,

"Hey! Are you fine?" He spoke.

Suddenly the lord, who was bowing all this time, plopped down onto his throne.

"It's no use. He's already dead." The Lord spoke with a tired tone.

"Wha... what?" Everyone uttered in unison.

The masked man who was near the kowtowing man shook him and saw him fall over onto the other side. The masked man who was kowtowing until now was bleeding from his eyes and mouth. His pupils had overturned into his skull and he was no longer breathing.

The veiled woman gasped and looked over to the lord and calculated her words before speaking.

"My Lord, were they?"

"I fear yes." The lord shortly spoke while rubbing the bridge of his nose.

The lord could already feel the headache coming. He hadn't thought that a routine mission would end up causing such a huge mess. He had lost one of his Core condensation realm cultivators and had also offended a hidden expert that was at the very least a Dao shell realm cultivator.

The other masked men were finally able to lift themselves off the ground. They stood up shakily and looked over to their lord.

"What was their cultivation?" One of the masked men asked.

The other masked men also joined in on the question as they were curious too. They did not understand the meaning of the interaction between their leader and their lord.

The Lord heard the question and sighed with dissatisfaction.

'It was good that I chose Hei Wan to become the leader, even if she is weaker than them.' The Lord thought.

"The old man was at least a Dao Shell realm cultivator, while the woman was probably a core condensation realm cultivator since she was able to fly using a spirit sword. Though she could be stronger than that too." Hei Wan answered for her Lord.

Hei Wan could sense the growing dissatisfaction in her Lord, thus answered for him. She also wondered how they were going to approach this matter in the future.

Lin Mu was looking at Hei Wan, trying to grasp her personality. The genial way she had talked to him had made him feel strange, thus he wanted to know a little more about her.

"So you say these people have been abducting mercenaries?" Hei Wan asked.

"I don't exactly know, but it does seem like it. They even had memory confounding poison with them." Lin Mu answered.

Lin Mu then withdrew the small vial of memory confounding poison that he had stored in the ring. He then passed it to Hei Wan, who took it. She looked at it for a minute and seemed like she was using her spirit sense to determine its authenticity.

"It is indeed, memory confounding poison." Hei Wan concluded.

"They also found some Beast inciting powder on a mercenary." Hei Bao spoke up.

Hei Wan's eyes narrowed upon hearing this.

"You found it on a mercenary and not on a culprit?" She asked to confirm.

"Yes, I found it on one of the dead mercenary's body. I actually wanted someone to look at it and find out where it came from." Lin Mu replied.

"While I know a little about poisons, I'm not really an expert in this. I'll have to ask someone else." Hei Wan spoke.

Lin Mu nodded in understanding. He already knew that they would need an alchemist to take a look at it, as only the people capable of making it would be able to know what it was.

"But even then, we still need to investigate its source." Hei Wan spoke and then turned towards Hei Bao.

"Investigate the identity of the mercenary first and try to find out his associates." Hei Wan ordered.

"Yes, leader." Hei Bao answered.

Hei Wan and Lin Mu then talked about a multitude of topics. Lin Mu told her about his side of the story, and Hei Wan intently listened. While she already knew most of this, she still wanted to hear a firsthand account.

Hei Wan could feel goosebumps on her body upon imagining the scenes of Lin Mu fighting against the culprits. Her curiosity about Lin Mu's background was increasing by the minute. But she knew that asking it outright might be troublesome, thus she decided to wait for an opportune moment.

Hei Wan and Lin Mu's conversation lasted for over an hour, and they only stopped when one of the masked men that came with Hei Wan entered the room. Hei Wan looked at him and gestured with her hand for him to speak.

"It looks like the residents are finally waking up. The town head has also issued a warning." The Masked man reported.

Hei Wan nodded her head in response and turned to Lin Mu.

"Seems like our conversation ends here. You can leave for now, we'll inform you when we find more about things." Hei Wan spoke.

"Sure." Lin Mu answered.

Hei Wan then turned to Hei Bao and spoke.

"Give him an identity badge as well."

"As you command, leader." Hei Bao replied, and then gestured for Lin Mu to follow him.

Lin Mu then exited the room along with Hei Bao and went to the room where the emergency signal plates were kept. After entering the room, his attention was instantly pulled towards the metal plates that were kept on stands.

Hei Bao walked up to his desk and withdrew a hexagonal badge from it. He then handed it to Lin Mu and spoke.

"This is an identity badge for our corps. You can use this to enter the safe house if you need to report something or if there's an emergency."

"Thanks." Lin Mu replied and then looked towards the plates.

"What are those?" Lin Mu asked.

Hei Bao looked at where Lin Mu was pointing and saw that it was the emergency signal plates. He wondered if he should tell him about it or not but then decided to tell him. He had seen how the leader was very respectful with Lin Mu and already knew that they would probably be allies in the future.

"They're used for emergencies. Whenever a member is in the most dire of emergencies they can use the whistle to alarm us." Hei Bao answered.

Lin Mu then remembered the small tube that was hanging on Hei Wen's necklace. He had blown on it and called for help.

"How does it work though?" Lin Mu questioned.

Hei Bao had a confused look upon his face after hearing Lin Mu's question.

"I actually don't know exactly how. Our Lord designed this and the only thing I know is that it makes a noise when a whistle is blown." Hei Bao replied.

Lin Mu used his spirit sense to observe the metal plates and found out that they were actually of different thicknesses. Although the plates looked the same, there was a difference in the thickness and size.

"This is rather innovative. Someone actually found a way to use earthen spirit metal without placing formations on it." Xukong suddenly spoke.

"Earthen spirit metal?" Lin Mu asked.

"It's a common type of spirit metal that's used in the manufacture of spirit tools and spirit weapons. Usually in order to use it, one needs to place formations on it. But the way these are designed, they

don't need any formations to work. These can actually be called as primitive spirit tools." Xukong answered.

Lin Mu's curiosity was ignited once again after hearing senior Xukong's words.

"So does this mean senior knows how it works?" Lin Mu inquired.

"Yes, I can. These plates work due to a phenomenon called as qi resonance. When air is blown into an emergency whistle, it is also charged with spirit qi. This qi is absorbed by the whistle and is then released in the form of a certain type of wave.

As long as the person using it is in the range of the plate, the disk in the center of it will start resonating and will spin. And due to the difference in the dimensions of the plate, the emergency whistles can be made uniquely for each individual." Xukong explained.

Lin Mu intently listened to senior Xukong's words and felt amazed at learning this.

"Whoever this Lord is, we can safely assume that he is very smart. He used such an ingenious method that it would actually be appreciated in some of the higher worlds as well." Xukong praised.

Chapter 95 - The Mercenaries' Situation

After hearing senior Xukong's praise about the Lord, Lin Mu understood that he must be careful with him. A person as smart as the Lord must be carefully dealt with.

Hei Bao saw that Lin Mu was still staring at the metal plates, thus spoke out,

"Are you fine?"

Lin Mu snapped out of his thoughts and hurriedly spoke,

"Ah yes. Let's go now."

Hei Bao nodded and led Lin Mu out of the safe house. A few minutes later they were standing in the shop upstairs. There, Hei Bao went to talk with the old woman and spoke to her about Lin Mu and their current situation. The Old Woman did not speak much and only nodded, before leaving the room to do her own tasks.

Hei Bao showed Lin Mu off to the door and let him leave. Lin Mu stepped out of the door and saw the dim sunlight that was illuminating the town and the clouds that were trying to block it. There did not seem to be any snow today, and the previous day's snow had melted too. He let out a breath and saw it fog up.

"Should I take a look around the town?" Lin Mu muttered to himself.

"I think you should; get an idea of what's actually happening. You may also need to talk with those people from the night vigil." Xukong advised.

"Ah yes! The night vigil. I nearly forgot about them." Lin mu replied.

Having decided what he was gonna do, Lin Mu chose a path and started walking on it. He first decided to go check on the mercenary camp as it was close by. The safe house was located in the western part of the town, thus this was the most obvious choice.

Lin Mu saw some people while walking and observed that they seemed to be unnerved and some seemed to even be scared. Lin Mu spotted some familiar faces, but they were not the residents of the eastern part. He continued on and reached the mercenary camp.

As soon as he got close to the mercenary camp, he could hear the increase in the noise. He crossed the exit and saw the mercenaries gathered up in an area. They all seemed to be shouting about something, and a tall and muscled mercenary seemed to be directing them.

Lin Mu went to the group to try and listen to what was happening. He glanced at the tall and muscled mercenary and could sense that he was different. He got even more closer and narrowed his eyes after hearing their shouts.

"We won't stand this anymore! They did not listen to us when mercenaries disappeared, and now that it happened to their own townsmen, they're up in arms about it." The tall and muscled mercenary shouted.

"YES!" The crowd shouted.

"They did not give us answers first and now they suspect us, we won't bear this injustice!" The tall and muscled mercenary shouted.

"YES WE WON'T!" The crowd shouted again.

Lin Mu was a little stunned after hearing the mercenary's shouts. He would have never thought that instead of doing a proper investigation, they were instead trying to pin it on the mercenaries.

"Has the town head become senile?" Lin Mu wondered.

"The machinations seem to be running deep. There's more to this than we think, but unless we look more into it, we won't know." Xukong replied.

"Should we interfere in this though?" Lin Mu questioned himself.

"You're not directly involved in this, except for the part where you were attacked. I would say that you should just watch and wait, let these 'Hei corps' do their part. Though the final decision is still up to you." Xukong advised.

Lin Mu thought it over for a minute and then made up his mind.

"We'll wait and watch, only if push comes to shove, will we act. Besides, I still need to cultivate." Lin Mu spoke.

Lin Mu then turned around and was just about to walk away when he suddenly felt something.

"Spirit sense!" Lin Mu whispered and turned around.

The instant Lin Mu turned around, his eyes met the eyes of the mercenary that was directing the crowd. Their gazes clashed and Lin Mu understood. He spread his spirit sense probe and started to observe

everything more closely. Lin Mu found the source of spirit sense and determined it to be the mercenary. The leading mercenary showed momentary shock when Lin Mu did this.

The leading mercenary then withdrew his spirit sense and nodded at Lin Mu before gesturing with his eyes. Lin Mu understood this and walked aside.

"It seems like he wants to meet you," Xukong spoke.

"Indeed, let's see what he has to say." Lin Mu replied and readied himself.

While waiting for the mercenary, Lin Mu probed the other mercenaries in the crowd and discovered that there were two more cultivators in there. These cultivators were standing near the leading mercenary and did not detect anything when Lin Mu used his spirit sense to observe them.

"Hmm, these two probably don't have spirit sense and haven't experienced it before either, I think." Lin Mu guessed.

"Or they're good at hiding their expression," Xukong spoke.

"It doesn't seem like it. Their cultivation was at the early stage of the Qi refining realm, unlike the other mercenary who is at the peak stage of the Qi refining realm." Lin Mu replied.

"You will have to be careful, he may already know your cultivation base as well," Xukong advised.

"Yes, senior. Though I feel confident that I can deal with it if things go sideways." Lin Mu spoke with determination.

'Haha, at least his confidence is increasing well.' Xukong thought with mirth.

Lin Mu waited for the mercenary and kept on listening to the shouts of the crowd.

"My fellow mercenaries, even if we are from different companies, we need to unite. Our superiors are out there working hard and thus can't help us currently. We need to deal with this ourselves." The leading mercenary said before shouting one last time.

"YES!" The crowd shouted in unison.

The leading mercenary then left the area, and the crowd dispersed into smaller groups. The shouting had stopped, yet the mercenaries were still discussing amongst themselves in the groups. The leading mercenary spoke to the two other cultivators and then started walking towards Lin Mu's location.

Lin Mu was standing a little distance from the crowd and was leaning against a tree. He watched as the three cultivator mercenaries approached him. Their expressions seem to be neutral and they were walking with an unhurried gait.

The trio reached Lin Mu and stood in front of him.

"Greetings fellow cultivator." The trio greeted with cupped hands.

'I should have guessed this beforehand.' Lin Mu thought with a chuckle.

"Greetings." Lin Mu responded.

The three men then lowered their hands and a neutral yet amicable expression appeared on their faces.

"I am Hong Luo from the Crimson fang mercenary company. May I have the opportunity to know fellow cultivator's name?" The leading mercenary spoke.

"I am Lin Mu."

The two accompanying cultivators had an irked expression upon hearing Lin Mu introduce himself in this way. But then the leading mercenary seemed to have secretly tapped them, after which they abruptly changed it back. This happened in nearly an instant, yet Lin Mu was able to detect it.

"Why are you here, brother Lin Mu?" Hong Luo asked.

"Oh, I was just passing by and heard some shouts, thus I came to look." Lin Mu spoke.

"Ah yes. We are, you see, in a rather complex predicament." Hong Luo replied.

"What's exactly happening, though? I would like to know more." Lin Mu questioned.

"I'm sure brother Lin Mu must've heard about the recent incidents of mercenaries disappearing." Hong Luo spoke.

"I did indeed and something happened in the town as well, I reckon." Lin Mu replied.

"Since you already know this, then its more simple to explain. The town head basically suspects that someone from the mercenaries is to blame for the disappearances. They did not listen to us when the first incident happened and now when the townsmen disappeared, they have the audacity to blame us." Hong Luo explained.

"That is rather wrong of the town head." Lin Mu replied.

Lin Mu did actually feel that something was wrong with the town head. He seemed to be acting strangely and was taking absurd decisions.

"Brother Lin Mu is on the same page as us, that makes me delighted." Hong Luo spoke, while the other two cultivators nodded.

Lin Mu then realized that the two cultivators had not spoken anything yet.

"And these two are?" Lin Mu questioned.

"Forgive me, I forgot to introduce them. These two are the Ming brothers and they are both mute, thus they can't speak. They are part of the Crimson fang mercenary company as well." Hong Luo answered.

"So what did you want from me?" Lin Mu asked the actual question that he's been meaning to do.

Upon hearing Lin Mu's question, Hong Lou's expression became serious.

Chapter 96 - Hong Luo's Request

Hong Luo took a deep breath and thought for a moment before speaking.

"Brother Lin Mu, as you can see, we don't have many cultivators left here. While we have many mercenaries in the Body tempering realm, there are only the three of us left here now." Hong Luo spoke.

"Only three of you? The last time I came here there were at least ten cultivators here. Where did everyone go?" Lin Mu interrupted.

While Lin Mu had known that a few mercenaries that were also cultivators had disappeared, there were still at least ten cultivators remaining. Now that there were only three of them left here, it was a little surprising to him.

"Another elite team of mercenaries had to leave for the mission in the Northern forest about a week ago. I was appointed to keep watch on the camp and to relay any message to the teams working in the forest, but as you can see the incident happened." Hong Luo spoke and sighed.

"Then did you inform your superiors about this?" Lin Mu questioned.

"Yes, I did. But the problem is that the elite teams are hunting spirit beasts deep in the forest. Just reaching their location would maybe take around five days, and if we were to add the time required to find them, it would be increased even more."

"I sent one of my junior cultivators to inform them about three days ago, but I fear that by the time they know about this, something worse could have happened." Hong Luo answered.

Lin Mu was now starting to understand more about their current predicament.

"Then what you require from me is help?" Lin Mu asked.

"Yes, we do." Hong Luo simply answered.

"But why me?" Lin Mu curiously asked.

Hong Luo and the other two sighed in helplessness upon hearing Lin Mu's words.

"We tried asking the other cultivators in town before. But the two hunters that are cultivators have disappeared, and the only other remaining cultivators are the captain and the two vice-captains of the town guards. Obviously the latter are not going to help us." Hong Luo explained.

Lin Mu thought over what Hong Luo had said until now and wondered how he should approach this. He didn't want to get involved as it would take up his time and will slow down his cultivation progress. Another reason was that with the conspiracy and machinations that were going on in the underbelly of the town, Lin Mu did not know what kind of powers he would face.

While he had been able to fight against the culprits who were at the Mid-stage of the Qi refining realm and was confident that he would be able to hold himself against one at the peak stage of the Qi refining realm; he did not know if he will be able to do the same with a cultivator that was at the Core Condensation realm.

"I think you can try helping them if they offer you proper benefits. Don't forget that you are still lacking in resources." Xukong spoke.

Lin Mu knew that while he was able to cultivate on his own with little problems, he still needed certain resources that could help him. Even if he were to ignore resources that could directly help him in increasing his cultivation speed such as spirit pills and spirit stones, he would still require certain life-saving items like restoration and healing pills.

Lin Mu had learned from senior Xukong that such healing and restoration pills were a big advantage that could turn the tide of a Battle in the blink of an eye. While he did have the Four vessels restoration pills, they were rather precious and it would be a huge waste to use them for anything other than life-threatening injuries.

Finally, after thinking for five minutes, Lin Mu had made up his mind. While Lin Mu was thinking about his decision, Hong Luo and the others waited patiently for him and did not disturb him. They knew that it was a big decision and one would not just straight away accept their request.

"I can help you, but I have a few conditions." Lin Mu said with a nutria tone.

"Of course brother Lin Mu, you can speak your mind." Hong Luo responded amicably.

"First, I want to know in what way I would be helping, and second, I want some resources in exchange." Lin Mu stated.

"There are three things we want your help in brother Lin Mu. We want you to keep an eye on the mercenaries in the camp during the night and also watch out for any news you may hear about the incidents. While we can get some information on our end, it's still a tad difficult to get it from the town officials and guards, as they have been told to ignore us it seems." Hong Luo spoke and took a pause.

"As for the last thing, I don't know if this would be completely possible, but I need you to investigate this incident if you can. We have to manage the mercenaries here thus we can't do it ourselves and anyway we are not welcome in the town." Hong Luo added.

"And what about the resources?" Lin Mu asked with raised brows.

"That would depend on what kind of resources brother Lin Mu requires. Though the thing is, you will only be able to get them after my superiors return, since we ourselves don't have them." Hong Luo replied.

Lin Mu heard Hong Lou's words and started to think that perhaps he should reject his request. He didn't know when Hong Lou's companions would be returning, and if something happens to him before they returned, it would just defeat the main purpose in the first place.

Still, Lin Mu thought he should at least put forward his demand, and perhaps they could come to some kind of compromise or decision.

"I would prefer it if you can give me healing and restorative pills." Lin Mu spoke.

Hong Luo took a breath of relief after hearing what Lin Mu spoke.

"If it's just healing and restorative pill, then I can accept this. We do have some of those pills that I can give you, but if you want more, you will have to wait as I said." Hong Luo replied with a calm tone.

"You can accept this, I think. Remember, you can actually take the help of the Hei Corps and make it easier for yourself." Xukong spoke.

Lin Mu thought about it and found it to be reasonable. It would align with his goals, and using the Hei corps would be shooting two birds with one arrow.

"I accept." Lin Mu answered after deliberating.

"Then I look forward to our cooperation." Hong Luo said as he extended his right hand forward.

Lin Mu shook hands with Hong Luo and confirmed their cooperation.

"Now then, let's go to my tent so that I can give you the pills that you require." Hong Luo said.

Hong Luo then turned around and started walking towards the camp. The Ming brothers also walked along with him, while Lin Mu followed at the back.

'He's rather trusting, isn't he.' Lin Mu inwardly spoke.

"No, it's more like he has no other option rather than to trust you. He seems to be at the end of his line." Xukong replied.

"Hmm, perhaps." Lin Mu muttered.

They soon reached Hong Lou's tent. The tent was rather large and tall enough that anyone could stand and walk in without any obstruction. There were two mercenaries that were standing guard outside of the tent and kept an eye out for any person that passed by.

Lin Mu used his spirit sense to probe their strength and discovered that they were actually at the tenth stage of the Body tempering realm! This was the second time Lin Mu was seeing a warrior that was at the tenth stage of the body tempering realm other than him. All the other people he had seen, even the ones who were Qi cultivators, were only at the eighth stage of the Body tempering realm.

Lin Mu tried observing closer and found out that while there two were at the tenth stage of the body tempering realm, they were barely at the border of it. Lin Mu probed even deeper and could sense that there seemed to be some abnormalities in the vital energy that permeated their body.

"This is rather strange, why is their vital energy like this?" Lin Mu inwardly spoke.

"It seems they have forcibly raised their strength to the tenth stage of the body tempering realm by certain means." Xukong guessed.

"They can do that? Doesn't a person need to train and consolidate vital energy properly in order to raise their straight?" Lin Mu curiously asked.

"That is indeed true normally, but there are still certain methods by which they can raise it further. In the case of these two mercenaries, it's likely that their Innate talent was not enough, and they stalled at the ninth stage of the body tempering realm. They probably used some unorthodox technique or a resource to raise it in this way." Xukong answered.

"What method do you think is the most likely, Senior Xukong?" Lin Mu questioned.

"In their case, seeing how unstable their vital energy is, I can conclude that it's a pill."

Chapter 97 - Getting The Pills From Hong Luo

This was new information to Lin Mu. He didn't think that a pill that could do something like this existed. But now that he knew this, he wondered how much it cost and what the side effects of such a pill could be.

He had already seen the unstable vital energy of the mercenaries, thus knew that it was one of the side effects, but wanted to know if there were more.

"What kind of pill do you think it is, senior Xukong?" Lin Mu asked.

"I can't exactly tell. There are far too many pills that would fit the description, and different worlds may have different names for the same kind of pill. Unless you see it with your own eyes, it will be impossible for me to tell for sure." Xukong explained.

Lin Mu nodded upon hearing senior Xukong's words. It was reasonable that he couldn't know everything. He would just have to see it himself to know about it.

'Perhaps I can ask Hong Luo.' Lin Mu thought.

The four people then came to a halt in front of the tent. The two guards greeted Hong Luo before moving aside to let him enter the tent. Hong Luo lifted the curtain of the tent and entered inside while gesturing for the others to do the same.

One by one, everyone lifted the curtain and entered the tent. Upon entering the tent, Lin Mu could see that while it looked big from the outside, the insides of it were rather cramped. There were far too many items kept in the tent to allow a person to move freely inside it without bumping into something.

Lin Mu looked around and saw a multitude of items kept in the tent. He saw a bed that was kept on the other end of the tent, a little to the right side, and a set of table and chairs right next to it. Other than this, most of the tent was occupied by trunks, chests, and sacks, some of which were haphazardly strewn about.

Hong Luo turned around with an embarrassed expression on his face.

"Forgive me, brother Lin Mu. The tent is a bit... untidy. After all the elite mercenaries went on the mission and the disappearances happened, I had to move all the precious items in the camp to here." Hong Luo explained.

"It's fine, I understand." Lin Mu spoke while nodding.

Lin Mu had seen his fair share of messy places, thus he was not bothered by this much.

"Let me find the pills for you then." Hong Luo spoke.

He then turned around and went up to a chest that was placed upon another trunk. The chest had a small lock placed on it and looked sturdy as it was made out of some kind of metal, probably steel. Hong Luo then took out a small key from his pocket and inserted it into the lock on the chest and turned it around.

The lock on the chest opened with a snap, and Hong Luo lifted the lid of the chest. Inside the crate, three glass bottles were kept. One of them was opaque and could not be seen through, while the other two were transparent.

Hong Luo picked up the two transparent bottles and showed them to Lin Mu, who was standing behind him. He placed them on the table to let Lin Mu check them out. Lin Mu looked closer and saw that while the pills in both of the bottles seemed to be of a white color, the pills in one bottle were smaller than the other.

The bigger pills were three in number while the smaller ones were five in number.

Hong Luo pointed to the smaller pills and spoke,

"These are the lesser wound restoration pills and can be used to heal minor wounds such as cuts and flesh wounds."

Hong Luo then pointed to the bigger pills and spoke,

"These are the internal replenishment pills. They can be used to heal minor internal injuries such as hemorrhage and shocks."

Lin Mu then picked up the bottle with lesser wound restoration pills and opened its cap to smell them. There was no particular smell to the pills, and it seemed like they would only release their scent upon consuming them. He then picked up the bottle with the internal replenishment pills and opened its cap as well to smell them.

This time he could smell a scent that was floral in nature while also having some hints of pungency. He placed the cap back onto the bottles and pretended to store them in his pouch, while actually storing them into the ring.

Lin Mu now started to wonder about the origin of these pills. He knew that pills such as these could only be made by an alchemist, who were usually part of sects and were seldom independent or with other organizations. The reason for this was that in order to raise an alchemist, a great amount of resources were needed and if they wanted to progress their craft further, an even greater amount of precious materials and herbs would be needed.

It also took a long time for a cultivator to become an alchemist, as they needed to learn a lot of knowledge; knowledge which was often monopolized by the cultivation sects. Lin Mu wondered if these pills were from the Tri-cauldron peony sect as well.

"Where are these pills from?" Lin mu questioned.

"I do not know that brother. These pills are often given to us by the mercenary company for our use. They usually acquire these from the markets in Xiangwei city, thus these pills could be manufactured by any of the sects or other organizations." Hong Luo answered.

Lin Mu then looked at the last bottle of pills in the Chest and spoke,

"What kind of pills are those?"

Hong Lou's brows furrowed upon hearing Lin Mu's question, and a complex expression appeared on his face. He seemed to be deliberating on whether to tell Lin Mu or not. But in the end, he decided to go ahead and speak.

"They're a special kind of pills that can forcibly increase the strength of a person that is still in the Body tempering realm." Hong Luo spoke.

As soon as Lin Mu heard Hong Lou's words he knew he had hit the jackpot.

"What's their name?" Lin Mu asked further.

"They are called as vital spring pills." Hong Luo answered.

"Is that how the two guards outside reached the Tenth stage of the Body tempering realm?" Lin Mu probed.

"Ah, so brother Lin Mu noticed. It seems that your attainments in Spirit sense are higher than mine. Even I can't tell the difference between them and normal tenth stage Body tempering realm warriors. But of course, it was expected from a person of a standing such as yours, brother Lin Mu." Hong Luo replied.

Lin Mu noticed the probing tone of Hong Luo but did not mind it and just let it pass. He did not want to put too much focus on it and just let the other party make assumptions of themselves. So far it had only helped him from what he could learn from his experience of meeting the Hei Corps.

Seeing that Lin Mu did not speak further and did not react to his words in any way, Hong Luo confirmed his thoughts.

"Well then Brother Lin Mu, I guess we'll see each other in the night. And if you're in the town, you now know what to do." Hong Luo said.

"That I do, indeed." Lin Mu politely replied.

Lin Mu then turned around and left the tent. A few mercenaries saw Lin Mu exit the tent and seemed to be shocked by this. They then walked away while speaking to each other in hushed voices.

"Well, now that I have this, I'll have more advantages in a battle." Lin Mu spoke in his mind.

"That you do indeed, but still it's better if you never get any injuries in the first place," Xukong replied.

Lin Mu just nodded inwardly and reentered the town. His next destination was the southern side of the town. He wanted to see what was happening with the guards and also wanted to meet up with the members of the Night Vigil.

Lin Mu reached the southern part of the town after five minutes and walked towards the barracks of the town guards. Upon reaching there, he saw a huge crowd of people gathered around the barracks. Lin Mu went closer and saw that these people were all the residents of the eastern part of the town. They were all the people who had been affected by the strange phenomena last night.

Lin Mu saw that they seemed to have absolutely enraged expressions on their faces and were very close to exploding. They were gathered and were currently talking in whisperers, seemingly waiting for someone.

Lin Mu stood at the very back and waited with them. He did not want to disturb them right now and first wanted to see how the situation would progress. A minute later he saw the doors of the guard barracks open and out walked three people.

Lin Mu craned his neck to look and saw that it was actually the captain and vice caption of the town guards themselves.

Chapter 98 - The Vice-Captain's Orders

Lin Mu had seen the captain of the town guards a few times before, thus knew what he looked like. But when looked at the vice-captain, he was surprised. This vice-captain was not the one that he knew. Of the two vice-captains, Lin Mu had killed one, and the other was alive, but this person was not the same one.

"Who's this person?" Lin Mu muttered.

The captain and vice-captain seem to be discussing amongst themselves when they were walking outside. When they finally came in front of the crowd, only did they stop. They scanned the crowd with their eyes and gauge it.

Lin Mu knew that they may use spirit sense, thus he stood at a far enough distance such that it won't reach him. Though he himself wanted to use his spirit sense to observe the cultivation base of the two people.

"Residents of Northern town." The captain spoke in a loud voice, which silenced the muttering crowd.

"We have heard your complaints and concerns. We have also done a preliminary investigation of last night's incident. The Town head has also listened to it and has decided on a course of action..." The captain spoke and was then interrupted by the crowd.

"What do you mean complaints and concerns! This is a threat to our life." People from the crowd shouted.

"Yeah, we had to make our own night vigil because the town head didn't agree to assign guards."

"You people only found out because of the night vigil. If they were not there who knows what would have happened."

The crowd could no longer keep silent and everyone started shouting. The captain could be seen getting more and more tense with each passing moment. But it was now that Lin Mu saw something that pulled his attention.

The vice-captain that was standing beside the caption was not getting tense. Instead, he seemed to be getting annoyed instead.

"SILENCE!" The vice-captain shouted.

"One more word and we shall arrest all who defy." The vice-captain declared.

The crowd went silent for a moment from the vice captain's shout and then erupted in an even greater uproar.

"You can't do that."

"We are not in the wrong here, you are."

The people from the crowd hooted.

~crack~

Suddenly a cracking sound was heard, as the vice-captain disappeared from his position.

~aaagh~

"MY ARMMM!!" shouted the man who had protested.

The vice-captain was standing above him and had his leg placed on the man's arm. From the awkward angle, it was bent at, one could tell that it was broken, if not from the painful shouts of the man.

"Anyone else?" The vice-captain spoke with a domineering voice.

The people were stunned upon seeing this act. Soon fear replaced their stunned expressions, and they stepped back a few steps.

Even the captain of the guards seems to be shocked by the vice-captain's actions. He quickly came towards the vice-captain and spoke to him.

"Why did you do this? This was too harsh." The captain said with concern.

~hmmph~

"These people will not understand unless we make an example." The vice-captain spoke after harrumphing loudly.

The Vice-captain then lifted his leg from the injured man's arm and walked back. The captain too followed him.

"Now listen to this with all your attention, because I'm only going to say it once." The vice-captain spoke.

The people in the crowd all gulped and listened with intent. The vice-captain nodded with a little satisfaction and looked at the captain with a smug look. The captain did not speak anything and just sighed.

"From today onwards, no one is to leave their houses at night under any conditions. The guards will be patrolling at night and if anyone is found wandering out at night, they will be arrested on the spot." The vice-captain spoke.

The vice-captain then took a pause and looked around in the crowd.

"We suspect that the culprits of last night's incident may be one of the townspeople, thus if we find anyone wandering out in the night they will be arrested without any excuses and sent to prison." The Vice-captain added.

The people in the crowd became even more fearful after hearing the orders and gulped. After this, the captain came forward and placed his hand on the vice-captain's shoulder.

"Fear not though, as long as everyone follows the orders they will all be safe." The captain spoke in an assuring tone.

The crowd finally calmed down a little bit after hearing the captain, even though it wasn't as much because the injured man was still grunting in pain.

"Also, the town head has ordered to meet all the people who were part of the night vigil. So all those that are already in the crowd should come forward now and the rest shall report here later as well." The captain informed.

"Now, disperse." The vice-captain ordered.

The crowd quickly left, for the fear that the vice-captain stuck had in their hearts was still fresh. Lin Mu was feeling incredibly suspicious of all the words that the captain and vice-captain of the town guards spoke.

Though the most suspicion he had was on the vice-captain. He did not know this person who had suddenly popped out of nowhere and had also become so domineering. The town guards had never behaved like this before. Sure, they were overbearing sometimes, but never as much as the vice-captain.

Lin Mu was standing a little distance away from the crowd, so the captains had not seen him yet. He then stopped a random person who was walking by and spoke to him.

"Brother, do you know who that vice-captain is?" Lin Mu asked the man.

"That's the new vice-captain of the town guards. His name is Han Lei." The man answered.

'Han Lei? Is he related to the Han Xu somehow?' Lin Mu thought.

"Why was the vice-captain replaced though, and where is the other vice-captain as well?" Lin Mu asked curiously.

Lin Mu wanted to know what the people knew about Han Xu after he had killed him. He also wanted to know why the other vice-captain was replaced, as he certainly seemed to be someone with a higher authority. Even the captain did not dare to stop him when he acted and just spoke a few measly words after he injured the man in the crowd.

"Oh, you didn't hear? Vice-captain Han Xu disappeared after the spirit beast attack. Most people think that he was eaten. Because of this, the other vice-captain went to investigate the matter and got injured in the process as well. He was then promptly sent to Wu Lim city for treatment." The Man answered.

"Then where is this Han Lei from?" Lin Mu asked.

"Oh, he is former vice-captain Han Xu's elder brother, who came here from Wu Lim city as his replacement." The man spoke.

"Wait, doesn't this mean there should be an additional vice-captain then?" Lin Mu questioned.

"There is, but I don't know who it is. We haven't seen him yet." The man answered.

Lin Mu nodded to the man's reply and thanked him before leaving.

"This is extremely strange." Lin Mu spoke in his mind.

"Seems like the people behind the incident are making their move. The town head declaring a curfew like this is probably due to their intentions." Xukong speculated.

"That seems like it senior. If they are able to order the town head, then this means that he is involved in it too. Han Lei being Han Xu's brother leaves little doubts as well." Lin Mu replied.

"How should we approach this now? I'm supposed to help Hong Luo at night and they have told all the members of night vigil to report as well. This seems extremely suspicious." Lin Mu asked.

"Perhaps you should consult your new allies. The rest, I'll leave it up to you. You need to learn how to judge situations like these yourself and make your own decisions." Xukong spoke in a calm tone.

Lin Mu did not mind senior Xukong's words and took them in a good stride. He knew that he was only doing to help him learn and grow.

'Seems like I can't meet the Night vigil members for now. It would only complicate things further.' Lin Mu thought.

Lin Mu decide to walk back to the safe house of the Hei corps instead of his own as there was a chance that some people may spot him in the residential district. He reached the safe house after thirty minutes and saw that the carriage was no longer there in the alley.

Lin Mu knocked on the door and waited for it to open. It had been a little more than two hours since Lin Mu had left the safe house, thus the people in the safe house were not expecting him to return this fast. The door of the safe house was opened by the old woman who saw him and let him inside.

Chapter 99 - Planning An Approach

Upon walking inside, Lin Mu saw that there was someone else sitting in the shop. The man was dressed in the clothes of a high official and he had seen him before. It was one of the men that had come with the leader of the Hei corps, Hei Wan.

Lin Mu nodded to him in greeting and saw him reciprocate as well. He then walked inside the other room under the guidance of the old woman. The old woman came to a stop in front of the wall and held out her hand.

"The badge." The old woman spoke.

Lin Mu withdrew the badge from the ring while putting his hand inside the pouch and handed the badge to the old woman. She looked at it for a moment, before inserting it into a small slot that was hidden in the seam of the wall.

The wooden panel of the wall shifted and Lin Mu walked inside it. After stepping in, the panel closed back, and he started walking down the passageway, into the stairwell. He reached the entrance of the safe house a couple of minutes later and opened the door.

As soon as the door was open, he saw two people standing in front of the door. They seemed to be alert and ready to attack. But after seeing Lin Mu, they relaxed and sat back down on their chairs.

"I need to report something. Where's Hei Bao?" Lin Mu questioned.

The man who was sitting in front of Lin Mu was one of the members of the Hei corps that Lin Mu had not met yet.

'He's probably someone that came with Hei Wan.' Lin Mu thought.

"You can head on inside. The captain is having a meeting with the rest of the Hei corps." The man spoke.

Lin Mu simply nodded and went to the room that was to the right. He opened the door and saw the ten members of Hei corps standing around Hei Bao and Hei Wan. They turned around to look and saw Lin Mu entering.

"You're here already?" Hei Bao said.

"I have a couple of things to report and I also would be needing your help with something." Lin Mu replied.

"Go ahead." Hei Wan spoke in affirmation.

"The town head has declared a strict curfew at night. The captain and new vice-captain of the town's guards declared to the residents." Lin Mu spoke.

"We already know about the curfew." Hei Bao spoke.

"That's not all, I learned a few more things. Apparently, this new vice captain is named Han Lei, he's Han Xu's brother. He's meant to be his replacement." Lin Mu spoke with a serious tone.

"Then that means..." Hei Shi spoke before she was interrupted.

"The culprits are making their move. They are probably controlling the town head as well." Hei Bao postulated.

"This Han Lei is rather overbearing too. He broke the arm of a resident just to make an example out of it. The captain did not seem to stop him either and there's another new vice captain that we don't know of." Lin Mu added.

Hei Wan turned towards Hei Bao after hearing Lin Mu's report and spoke,

"Forget my previous order, from now on focus on the Vice captains and the town head as well. It's no doubt that they are part of the culprits. This curfew only helps them in their acts. Now they can just abduct people and say that they were arrested for wandering outside."

"Yes, leader." Hei Bao responded.

Hei Wan then turned back to Lin Mu and spoke again,

"Now, what kind of help did you need from us?"

"I went to the mercenary camp an hour ago and met their current leader. He's named Hong Luo and is also a peak stage qi refining realm cultivator. He has asked me for help." Lin Mu answered.

"And what does he need help in particular?" Hei Wan questioned.

"It's with regard to the disappearance of the mercenaries. He wants me to help investigate the matter and also to help him keep a watch during the night. But now that the town head has declared a curfew it would be difficult for me to go out, although that's not my main concern. The town head also wants to meet all the people who were part of the Night Vigil, thus one way or the other I'm gonna have to meet him." Lin Mu explained.

Hei Wan went silent for a minute and seemed to be thinking about it. The other members of the Hei corps also stayed silent, so as to not disturb their leader.

"It should be no problem, I'll dispatch some of our members to keep watch on the mercenaries at night. It aligns with our goals, anyway. As for the investigation about the disappearance of mercenaries, we are already on it." Hei Wan spoke after thinking for a bit and then turned to face Hei Bao again.

"I know what to do." Hei Bao spoke before Hei Wan could even speak.

Hei Wan simply nodded in appreciation.

"Now about this meeting with the Town Head, what are you going to do?" Hei Shi asked.

"I'm going to meet him right now. Better get it done as soon as I can. Delaying it would be no use as they should already know about me because of the other people from the Night Vigil." Lin Mu replied.

"That should be fine, but just in case have Hei Shi follow you. That should help avoid any untoward incidents." Hei Wan suggested.

"I'm fine with that." Lin Mu answered.

"Okay then. Now everyone knows what to do, so get going." Hei Wan ordered.

"Yes, leader!" All the members of the Hei corps replied in unison.

Nodding in understanding, Lin Mu turned back to leave. Hei Shi too followed behind him and left the room, while the other members dispersed as well and went to prepare for their missions.

Before walking out the door of the safe house, Hei Shi picked up her mask and put it on. She also brought an additional mask with her and handed it to Lin Mu.

"What's this for?" Lin Mu asked although he knew why.

"Have it just in case. You are an ally of the Hei corps now anyway, so you have the right to use it." Hei Shi answered.

Lin Mu nodded and took the mask. He then opened the door of the safe house and walked up to the shop above it. The old woman who was watching the shop handed him the badge back before he left.

"I'll take another route and keep on following you. If you find anything suspicious just signal me by putting your hand up with three fingers." Hei Shi informed.

Lin Mu nodded in response but chuckled when he heard Senior Xukong speaking in his mind.

"If you're the one who has trouble, I doubt she will be able to do much. You're already much stronger than her." Xukong spoke.

"That is true." Lin Mu simply spoke before leaving the alley.

"Now then, it's time to go to the guard barracks." Lin Mu muttered to himself.

Lin Mu went to the southern district and reached there after thirty minutes. Along the way, he saw many people discussing and gossiping about the town head's order. They were also talking about the vice captain and how he had injured the innocent man.

'Seems like the people won't mind it if this vice captain disappears as well.' Lin Mu thought.

Lin Mu was just about to enter the guard barracks when someone called out to him.

"Lin Mu!" A voice called.

Lin Mu turned back to see and saw that it was Lu Xiao who had called him.

"Where did you go last night?" Lu Xiao asked.

Lin Mu was dreading this moment for a while now, but now that it had finally come he had prepared his answer.

"I couldn't find the guards and thought it was dangerous to head on alone, so I headed back. But when I came back I couldn't find any of you, so I went back to my house." Lin Mu spoke.

While his excuse had multiple flaws that could be picked out, Lin Mu didn't think that it would be as troublesome. No one had seen him after he left, so no one could verify his claims either.

"Oh, okay then." Lu Xiao simply replied.

"What happened with you guys' last night?" Lin Mu asked.

"We searched the houses as we had decided to and actually found a few more people that were awake. We informed them of the incident, but some of them disagreed with us and refused to leave their homes as they were scared." Lu Xiao replied.

'That understandable. Most people would not think of leaving their homes after an unexplained incident like this.' Lin Mu thought.

"What happened after that? I mean someone informed the guards, right? Did you guys find a guard?" Lin Mu questioned.

"Oh, we didn't just meet any guard, we met the new vice captain himself. Apparently, he was out on his patrol and was heading towards the residential district himself." Lu Xiao answered.

Chapter 100 - Reporting To Han Lei

Lin Mu was a little surprised upon hearing that it was Han Lei that the people from the night vigil met, but did not show it upon his face.

"Patrolling? As if! We were right, he's most likely a part of the culprits." Lin Mu spoke inwardly.

"The circumstances do point towards it. But still, you need more information." Xukong replied.

'But if he already met the people of the Night Vigil, why didn't he take them then and there.' Lin Mu thought over for a moment.

"Who else was with you when you met the new Vice captain, last night?" Lin Mu inquired.

"Oh, it was just me, Yuan Tu and Fu Lao, the old man who was leading the Night vigil. The rest of the newly awakened people were out looking for other people." Lu Xiao answered.

'That makes sense. If it was just the three of them, then he should have become cautious since there were others still spread out.' Lin Mu thought.

"This Han Lei probably didn't want the news to be released in an uncontrolled manner. So he opted to instead release it by himself, in the morning." Xukong spoke.

"Han Lei was going towards the residential district, this means that he was probably heading to that old warehouse as well. But we still don't know what's their purpose behind the dead mercenaries." Lin Mu spoke in his mind.

Lu Xiao looked at Lin Mu, who was thinking and seemed to be lost in thought. He did not mind it for a minute, but then started to feel strange when Lin Mu just stood still for over a minute.

"Lin Mu? Are you fine?" Lu Xiao asked.

"Ah yes. I am." Lin Mu hurriedly answered.

"You need to stop doing that as often. Make sure that you have a normal expression when taking with me with other people around." Xukong chided.

"Yes, senior. I'll take care not to." Lin Mu replied in an embarrassed tone.

"I think we should head inside now." Lu Xiao suggested.

Lin Mu simply nodded in affirmation and walked ahead towards the guard barracks. They were then stopped at the entrance of the barracks by two guards.

"What are you two here for?" One of the guards questioned.

"We're here to report to the Vice captain. We are the members of the night vigil." Lin Mu answered

"You can go on inside, the vice captain has been waiting for you people." The guard replied.

The guard then moved aside and allowed the two to enter the barracks. The second guard gestured for them to follow him inside. Under the guidance of the guard, the two swiftly reached the vice captain's chamber. They then came to a stop in front of the door of the chamber and the guard knocked on the door.

"Who is it?" A voice called from inside the chamber.

"I've brought the people from the night vigil." The guard answered.

"Come in." The voice said with an annoyed tone.

The guard then opened the door and let the two inside. The guard then closed the door and returned back to his post. Lin Mu and Lu Xiao entered the room and looked around. The first thing they saw was the desk that was located right across the room and a man sitting behind it in a guard's armor.

"I've been waiting for you." Han Lei spoke.

Lin Mu looked went closer and gazed at the face of Han Lei.

'His facial features do match those of Han Xu.' Lin Mu thought.

"What did you want to talk to us about, vice captain? You didn't explain to us last night." Lu Xiao spoke.

The expression that Han Lei had on his face became even more annoyed after hearing Lu Xiao's question.

"The town head will speak to you about that. You don't need to speak unless you are asked to." Han Lei spoke curtly.

Lin Mu's brows furrowed upon listening to Han Lei's words, and he too started to feel annoyed.

"Now then, what are you two's names?" Han Lei questioned.

"I'm Lu Xiao."

"My name is Lin Mu."

The two of them responded. Han Lei seemed fine upon hearing Lu Xiao's name, but he seemed to become a little troubled after hearing Lin Mu speak his name.

"So you are the one who disappeared last night. Care to tell me where you went?" Han Lei questioned.

Lin Mu then gave Han Lei the same explanation he had given to Lu Xiao.

"Huh, so you just got scared and ran away." Han Lei said with a demeaning tone.

"Yes, I did." Lin Mu replied, not minding the tone of Han Lei.

"Fine. Let's go, the others should already be done reporting at the town center. You two are the only ones that are late." Han Lei ordered.

Lu Xiao felt a little strange upon hearing that the others were already done reporting at the town center before them, even though he had hurried here as soon as he heard about the orders.

"Umm, how did the others reach the town center before us?" Lu Xiao asked with a meek tone.

"Some of them were already here when we informer the residents, while the others were brought to the town centers by the guards. You two were the only ones that were at your homes." Han Lei spoke and glanced at Lin Mu for a second before looking away.

"He suspects something," Xukong spoke.

"I know. I also want to gauge his cultivation base, but it will be problematic if I do it right now." Lin Mu spoke in his mind.

"Wait till you are in a crowded area and then use your spirit sense. Though it does not seem to me that this Han Lei has refined his spirit sense yet." Xukong replied.

Lin Mu silently nodded and continued walking along with Han Lei and Lu Xiao. They left the barracks and headed towards the town square. While on the way they passed many other people, but the crowd wasn't large enough for Lin Mu to use his spirit sense with little risk.

They went past multiple people, but Lin Mu still could not find the right opportunity. Finally, when they were at the town square, Lin Mu got the chance to use his spirit sense. To his luck, the mercenaries had once again gathered in front of the town center, giving him the perfect opportunity.

Lin Mu released his spirit sense probe and observed the cultivation base of Han Lei. To his surprise, he found out that Han Lei was at the late stage of the Qi refining realm. He was even at the ninth stage of the body tempering realm and was probably at the very cusp of it.

Han Lei had become the first cultivator Lin Mu had met until now that was at such a high level of the body tempering realm.

"He's stronger than his bother. Though it still should not matter as much." Lin Mu spoke inwardly.

While Lin Mu was gauging Han Lei's cultivation base, he had suddenly become alert. Han Lei had felt the spirit sense probe and was now looking around, trying to find its source. But since he didn't have a spirit sense of his own, he could not pinpoint the location of the probe. Having the tens of mercenaries around didn't help him either.

"These damned mercenaries, meddling where they don't belong." Han Lei cursed under his breath.

Lin Mu and Lu Xiao too stopped after seeing Han Lei halt in his tracks. Lu Xiao looked at Han Lei and then at Lin Mu.

"What's he doing?" Lu Xiao whispered.

Lin Mu didn't answer but just shrugged his shoulders, indicating that he didn't know either. After looking around for a bit, Han Lei's gaze finally settled onto Lu Xiao and Lin Mu. He glanced at the expressionless Lin Mu and the lost Lu Xiao and just grunted in response.

"Come on, don't waste my time." Han Lei uttered.

The Trio then passed by the mercenaries who were standing in front of the town center. The mercenaries gave way to them after seeing that it was the vice captain, but not before giving him mean looks.

Soon they had entered the town center and were on their way towards the town head's office. They had to climb two floors before they reached the town head's office, which was located at the very top of the building.

Lin Mu looked around and saw some luxurious vases and calligraphy scrolls hanging on the walls along the way and even more in the office itself. After entering the office, they saw that the town head wasn't present in the office.

'This is rather decadent.' Lin Mu thought with unease.

These kinds of luxuries were rather uncommon in the Northern town, so Lin Mu Was a little surprised on seeing them here. Wherever the town had presented himself to the public, he was always in plain clothes, thus it gave a different impression to most of the people. But now that Lin Mu had seen this, he understood that there was more to the town head that was hidden to the eyes.

"This is a rather common thing which you will see in nearly all worlds. There is no lack of people that pretend to be something else in front of others. They obtain more benefits by appearing weak and meek than being opulent. They will take advantage of the weak and suppress them while fulfilling their desires." Xukong spoke in a sagely tone.

"But this... isn't this too much? Most of the town's residents can barely get by through the winter and whenever they ask for aid from the town head, he just says he does not have the resources." Lin Mu spoke frustratingly.

"It is indeed as you say. But this is the true reality of this world." Xukong replied.

"This... This is wrong!." Lin Mu muttered under his breath.

But unlike before, Lin Mu's mutter was a little too loud and was heard by others as they turned around to look at him.

Unknown to Lin Mu, something snapped in his mind, and the mysterious ring started humming.