

CULTIVATION SYSTEM: STRONGER WITH AGE

Chapter 41 - 37 Vajra Old Man

If someone were standing in the courtyard right now and saw Lin Xuankong's Cangsong Posture, they would experience an illusion. It would seem as if he were not a Martial Cultivator standing there, but a true, ancient, mighty pine, standing unchanged amidst the flowing clouds and passing time!

Soon, Lin Xuankong, who was meditating deeply in his cultivation, felt his Heart Spirit suddenly stir. He sensed the Qi Blood within his body constantly decreasing and, at the same time, constantly refining. Joy surged within him, but he dared not be overly distracted. Forcefully suppressing the fluctuations in his heart, he continued his cultivation...

After Half a Cup of Tea Time, as his Qi Blood circulated, the sensation of metamorphosis within his internal organs and torso re-emerged.

After another half hour, a tickle rose in Lin Xuankong's throat, and he once again spat out a large, dark red, congealed mass. At this point, he felt mentally refreshed and his body light. The circulation of his Qi Blood was exceptionally smooth, flowing freely through every part of him!

He concentrated his focus on his Life Plate.

[Realm: Transcendence, Second Layer, Late Stage]

[Second Layer Qi Blood (Late Stage): 489/100,000]

[Cultivation Technique: Pine Crane Longevity Technique: Integration 101/150]

Indeed, it's already the late stage of the Second Layer! My [Vigorous in Old Age] Life Plate, combined with my diligent cultivation, has finally given me the opportunity to possess Vajra-like defense!

Lin Xuankong's eyes shone with delight. He quickly walked indoors, grabbed the Hundred-refined Steel Saber from the table, and focused on his little finger. After secretly circulating his Qi Blood, he clenched his teeth and, using 50% of his strength, slashed!

CLANG! Sparks flew from the saber's blade. Lin Xuankong's little finger, gently curled, was completely unscathed.

Resolutely, he lifted the saber once more and, using his full strength, slashed at his left arm. CLANG! His left arm was unscathed; instead, the Hundred-refined Steel Saber shattered!

Lin Xuankong tossed the broken saber aside and turned to look at the steel saw on the table.

He picked up the three-foot-long saw, made of refined steel, placed his left leg on a stool, and positioned the saw over his left knee, ready to saw.

Then, he clenched his teeth, secretly circulated Qi Blood to his knee, and began to pull and push the saw vigorously.

SKREEECH! SKREEECH! SKREEECH!

The steel saw moved rapidly back and forth. Sparks flew continuously from the thick saw blade, and its temperature rose steadily.

After Half a Cup of Tea Time, he lifted the steel saw to inspect it.

He saw that its hundreds of teeth, sharp enough to cut through iron, had all been worn flat. Examining his left knee, he found only a few fallen leg hairs and a white mark. This mark swiftly returned to normal skin color with the flow of Qi Blood!

By this moment, Lin Xuankong's face was filled with elation. He had finally acquired a defense comparable to that of the Bearded Martial Cultivator.

Whether it's my head, face, chest, back, neck, thighs, or even my private parts, wherever my Qi Blood reaches, it's as strong as Vajra! From now on, blades, spears, swords, halberds; axes, hooks, forks; steel darts, Flying Sabers—all are mere scrap iron before me. This defensive power, combined with my Qi Blood reserves... if I were to battle those hundred-odd Marsh Python People again, even if they stood in the lake, doubling their combat strength, and were given hundreds of Hundred-refined Weapons, they would still be unable to shake me, unable to inflict even the slightest injury! The weaker Marsh Python People could even be injured purely from the recoil of my formidable defense!

After his joy lingered for a while, he took out the Wandering Dragon Exorcism Hand. After putting it on his right arm, he carefully sensed it.

Previously, when I was in the mid-stage of the Second Layer, the Wandering Dragon Exorcism Hand felt heavy. Now, however, it feels very light. After my Qi Blood was refined, not only has my defensive power increased, but my strength and Explosive Power have also significantly enhanced. Henceforth, using this 300-pound Wandering Dragon Exorcism Hand in battle will undoubtedly elevate my combat prowess to a new level!

For a moment, Lin Xuankong felt his hands itch for action...

A short while later, KNOCK! KNOCK! KNOCK! The sound of knocking echoed from the door.

Lin Xuankong responded, and Steward Han Lu entered, carrying two bags of medicinal materials.

"Steward Lin," he said, "I've scoured the entire warehouse at the base. These are the last two packs of medicinal materials for the Nine Revolutions Qi Replenishing Soup. Please take them and use them first."

Lin Xuankong, who had been delighted by his advancement to the late stage of the Second Layer, frowned upon hearing this. "Hasn't the Great Marsh Prefecture's hall sent over any medicinal materials today?"

Since advancing to the mid-stage of the Second Layer ten days ago, Lin Xuankong had discovered something. Each dose of Nine Revolutions Qi Replenishing Soup, which previously increased Transcendent Qi Blood by over 30 points, now only increased Second Layer Qi Blood by just over 10 points per dose. Similarly, the Turtle-Poria Elixir, which previously provided 40 points of Transcendent Qi Blood daily, now only provided 20 points of Second Layer Qi Blood daily!

This situation was actually quite normal and, in fact, a good sign. It indicated that Lin Xuankong's current Qi Blood was more refined than before, and its potency had indeed increased severalfold!

The problem, however, was that he would certainly need more medicinal supplements to maintain the original growth rate of the Qi Blood in his Life Plate. The medicinal materials he had brought to Xunyang Town were consumed a few

days ago, and the rewards promised by the Hall Master had not been delivered for various reasons!

For the past few days, Lin Xuankong had been borrowing medicinal materials for the Nine Revolutions Qi Replenishing Soup from other disciples or Steward Han Lu. Now, their supplies were also exhausted...

If this continued, he could maintain his cultivation by relying on the continuous replenishment from the Turtle-Poria Elixir. However, it wouldn't be possible to increase the Qi Blood reserves in his Life Plate. In fact, if he used the Spiritual Crane Finger multiple times or encountered battles, his Life Plate's Qi Blood reserves would be rapidly depleted!

Han Lu frowned as he sat by the table. "Most of the disciples from the Great Marsh Prefecture have been dispatched to the 29 towns of the Outer City. Only Steward Xu's subordinates remain at the hall. They are responsible for transporting the injured, providing treatment, and managing medicinal materials and supplies, so things are very busy."

"You know too, five days ago, Steward Ma Rusong, one of Steward Xu's subordinates, was supposed to transport everyone's rewards and supplies here. However, on the way, they encountered a squad from the Demon People Race and had to retreat! It will likely take a few more days before they can spare the personnel to transport materials to us!"

Wait a few more days for the supplies? By then, I'll have already completed the mission and returned to Great Marsh Prefecture! This Ma Rusong... he's truly more of a hindrance than a help!

Lin Xuankong's eyebrows furrowed as he glanced at the two bags of medicinal materials on the table. "If you give me these last two bags, what about your cultivation?"

Han Lu waved his hand. "I only advanced to the early stage of the Second Layer six months ago. To reach the mid-stage will take at least another year, so a few days won't make a difference! Even when medicinal materials were plentiful, I'd inevitably take rest days! But a Martial Cultivator like Steward Lin, who cultivates diligently from morning till night without a single day off—such dedication is truly something I've never seen! Compared to Steward Lin's diligence, I feel quite ashamed!"

Suddenly, an angry voice came from outside the door.

"Hmph! Han Lu, you've just been appointed Chief Steward, and you're already so slack! You're wasting all my teachings!"

Upon hearing this voice, Lin Xuankong and Han Lu immediately stood up and moved towards the door to greet the newcomer.

Han Lu, in particular—this fierce Steward known for his bravery even when fighting with a broken leg—his face turned pale.

"Steward Ma!" "Master!"

Lin Xuankong and Han Lu bowed to the visitor respectively.

Steward Ma Jiang, fiddling with a few White Jade Dice in his hand, stepped in and nodded warmly at Lin Xuankong.

Then he turned to glare at Han Lu, whose face turned even paler.

"Mas-Master," Han Lu stammered, flustered by the anger on Ma Jiang's face. "I was just speaking casually. While my cultivation may not be as diligent as Steward Lin's, I am still quite hardworking!"

Ma Jiang took the main seat in the living room and gestured for Lin Xuankong to sit. Then, glaring at Han Lu, he said, "Now that you are Chief Steward, you are no longer under my supervision. Whether you strive for advancement or not is your own business. I didn't come here to see you, nor did I get angry because of you!"

Han Lu, unsure if Ma Jiang was telling the truth, remained standing, not daring to sit.

Lin Xuankong asked, "Steward Ma, what brings you here today?"

Could he be here to take back the Wandering Dragon Exorcism Hand? I haven't even had my fill of using it yet! Besides, if Steward Ma isn't angry because of Han Lu, then what is he so furious about?

Chapter 42 - 38: Steward Ma's Gambling Luck, The Fellowship of Gentlemen

Ma Jiang looked at Lin Xuankong, his expression softening. "Of course, I came to see you, our great hero. All five of my Chief Stewards were out on expeditions against the Demon People Race. The other four performed terribly, but only you achieved significant success, making the entire Yin Talisman Sect look at you with new respect. Such a surprising achievement brought great pride to my face. I wish I could have come to drink with you a few days ago. Unfortunately, I was dealing with the Demon People Race near Four-direction City at that time and didn't have a moment to spare until today!"

Lin Xuankong clasped his hands and said, "Steward Ma, you overpraise me!"

Ma Jiang took a closer look at him and sighed. "I originally thought you were just an aging Martial Cultivator at the Second Layer, but your strength is astonishing! Though you are old, you are indeed worthy of being called a Four-Seal Genius. Your Qi Blood hasn't diminished too much; I heard you can even fight continuously for the time it takes two incense sticks to burn. I initially underestimated you, and I feel somewhat ashamed! It's a pity, though, that a hero like you has been covertly sabotaged by some vile characters!"

Lin Xuankong was a bit surprised. *Sabotaged?*

Ma Jiang continued, "I returned to the sect hall today. I was originally tasked with assisting a major town, but then I heard about Ma Rusong transporting medicinal materials five days ago! That cowardly, despicable fellow led over sixty disciples to deliver supplies. But when he encountered just twenty Marsh Python People, he scrambled back to the city, claiming it was to protect the medicinal materials and rewards! What the hell! This clearly wasn't to protect the supplies. It was because he was too embarrassed to face you or his former subordinates! Or perhaps it was because you not only survived but also achieved great merit, so he flew into a rage out of shame and secretly undermined you! I couldn't hold back and scolded that scoundrel furiously. But that damn Steward Xua actually defended him, saying Ma Rusong was prudent and worthy of praise. He also said Ma Rusong is no longer under my jurisdiction and told me not to meddle. This infuriated me to the point that I took the matter straight to the Hall Master..."

After hearing this, Lin Xuankong's face remained expressionless, but his heart had already turned icy.

If it weren't for this Ma Rusong, I would have long since obtained the Turtle-Poria Elixir and a hundred portions of medicinal materials. Who knows how much more Qi Blood would have been stored in my Life Plate by now? The vast amount of Qi Blood in this Life Plate is one of my important trump cards, yet it has been delayed for several days! At this rate, it will be delayed by several more days at least. Ma Rusong is truly a disruptive, despicable character!

Ma Jiang idly rattled the dice in his hand for a moment and continued, "You're clearly a great hero of our sect. It's one thing not to prioritize you for supplies, but

they haven't even delivered your rewards yet! If I hadn't returned to the city by chance, who knows how long they would have dragged their feet with the supplies! This time, while on my way to assist Lindong Town, I detoured to visit you and brought your rewards and those for the disciples. I hope these past few days haven't delayed your cultivation or that of the Cow and Horse Street disciples!"

Hearing this, Lin Xuankong's expression shifted slightly. *Steward Ma specifically brought the supplies and rewards over? Now I don't have to worry about the Qi and Blood Reserves in my Life Plate, and I can freely consume the Nine Revolutions Qi Replenishing Soup to significantly increase my Qi Blood Amount! And with three Turtle-Poria Elixirs in hand, the benefits won't be limited to just Qi Blood... My superior truly is considerate!*

He stood up, clasped his hands, and said, "On behalf of the many disciples of Cow and Horse Street, I thank Steward Ma."

Ma Jiang waved a hand. "We're all on the same side, no need for such formalities! Besides..."

He looked at Lin Xuankong. "Although Ma Rusong is cowardly and vile, the connections he has cultivated are quite significant, so Steward Xua highly regards him and is trying to win him over, making him responsible for managing important affairs such as the hall's supplies. It matters little if I scold Ma Rusong. After all, I've been with the Yin Talisman Sect for over twenty years, and I have old acquaintances throughout the hierarchy; he wouldn't dare to cause trouble for me. Xuankong, in the future... try to avoid provoking him directly. However, if anything happens, don't worry. Just tell me, and I'll make him lose face completely!"

Lin Xuankong frowned at Steward Ma, puzzled. *What price did Ma Rusong pay, and what kind of powerful figure did he find as a backer, for even Steward Ma to speak like this?*

Seeing his expression, Ma Jiang said, "That coward inherited something valuable from his ancestors, and the one who accepted his offering is a prominent figure at the Sixth Layer Realm... Just remember my words!"

With that, he stood up and walked out. "Xuankong, I've left the medicinal materials and rewards in the courtyard! Recently, the Marsh Python, Evil Lizard, Evil Sheep, and other Demons have been taking a severe beating, so the Demon People they've dispatched to harass the area of the Twenty-Ninth Garrison are becoming increasingly aggressive. The mission to assist Lindong Town is urgent. We'll drink next time!"

Han Lu looked somewhat surprised. "Master, are you leaving already?"

Lin Xuankong walked beside Ma Jiang, touching the Wandering Dragon Exorcism Hand on his right arm. "Steward Ma, will your trip to Lindong Town be dangerous this time? What about this Wandering Dragon Exorcism Hand?"

Ma Jiang shook his head at Lin Xuankong. "What danger could there be! As for this Wandering Dragon Exorcism Hand... Last time I bet on you winning, and indeed you won. This time I'm betting on you again, but I'm betting that you'll surpass that Ma Rusong in the future! From now on, this Wandering Dragon Exorcism

Hand is my wager, left here with you. I hope, Xuankong, that you'll achieve great things in the future and not disappoint me! Also, Han Lu, you brat, remember this: if you haven't reached the Mid-grade Second Layer by the next time I see you, there'll be hell to pay!"

With that, he laughed heartily and leaped away.

Han Lu, leaning on his cane, looked somewhat gloomy. Lin Xuankong watched Steward Ma's figure disappear in the distance, a warmth spreading through his heart.

Steward Ma actually left the priceless Wandering Dragon Exorcism Hand with me as a 'wager.' He holds an old man like me in such high esteem... To be honest, I haven't even known Steward Ma for that long!

In an instant, he couldn't help but shake his head. There's a saying: true friends connect as if they've known each other for ages, even at first sight. Steward Ma Jiang has been so generous and righteous towards me; why should I care about the length of our acquaintance!

As for Ma Rusong, who is at the Early Stage of the Second Layer, having a backer...

Lin Xuankong's eyebrows twitched, a flicker of determination in his eyes. In this world where martial prowess reigns supreme, one's own strength is the greatest pillar of support. With the 'Vigorous in Old Age' Life Plate and my unceasing

cultivation, my cultivation speed will only increase, and my strength grows daily at a rate tens of times faster than others! A backer? What a joke... Let's see how long you can rely on it!

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Once the rewards were delivered, Lin Xuankong had someone summon the many disciples of Cow and Horse Street. After distributing the medicinal materials and silver taels, everyone was overjoyed. Li Er, the bald-headed one, laughed heartily and nearly rushed over to hug Lin Xuankong in his excitement. However, remembering how fierce and violent their steward was when killing the Demon People, Li Er decisively restrained his impulse and turned to hug Yang Mountain instead!

Yang Mountain was mortified and indignant. He hadn't even married yet, let alone hugged a woman, and his first intimate embrace was with a bald man! He gritted his teeth and hugged back—a man couldn't be on the losing end of an exchange!

Seeing his disciples so happy, Lin Xuankong naturally felt delighted too. He returned the borrowed portions of medicinal materials to Han Lu and the others. After everyone had left, he took the one hundred and twelve portions of medicinal materials and three Turtle-Poria Elixirs back to his bedroom. Among these, one hundred portions were rewards, and the remainder was his Chief Steward stipend. Steward Ma was indeed meticulous, not forgetting to bring him this salary.

Taking out the three Turtle-Poria Elixirs, Lin Xuankong stared at the Elixirs, which emitted a peculiar, clear fragrance, and thought to himself:

The first Turtle-Poria Elixir increased my Lifespan by three years and provided a continuous daily increase of twenty points of Second Layer Qi Blood. The Qi Blood is still continuing to increase. I wonder if my body has developed a resistance to the Turtle-Poria Elixir. How much Lifespan will these three grant me, and to what extent will my daily Qi Blood increase be enhanced?

Chapter 43 - 39 Lifespan Greatly Increased, Third Task

A typical Second Layer Transcendence Realm Martial Cultivator has no chance of obtaining three incredibly valuable Turtle-Poria Elixirs. Even if they could, no one would ever consume three Turtle-Poria Elixirs in one go!

The Turtle-Poria Elixirs have an extremely potent effect on replenishing Qi Blood. If three are taken together, they would produce around sixty points of Second Layer Qi Blood each day. Unless this Second Layer Martial Cultivator constantly battled and trained non-stop all day, the excess Qi Blood in their body would just dissipate, making it a tremendous waste.

However, Lin Xuankong didn't have to worry about any of this.

The excess Qi Blood produced by the Turtle-Poria Elixirs would naturally be stored in his Life Plate. It would not be wasted but would greatly enhance the effect of his trump card!

Lin Xuankong sat on the bed in his bedroom and placed the three Turtle-Poria Elixirs into his mouth one by one.

Instantly, the elixirs transformed into three warm streams that quickly flowed into his lower abdomen. They merged into a warm mass, continuously increasing Lin Xuankong's Second Layer Qi Blood.

At the same time, the Lifespan section in Lin Xuankong's Life Plate began to transform rapidly.

This transformation lasted for more than two Hours. Lin Xuankong felt light and comfortable all over, almost as if he could float on the spot, before the changes gradually stopped.

He focused his gaze on his Life Plate.

[Lin Xuankong: Remaining Lifespan 25 years and 90 days]

[Second Layer Late Stage Qi Blood: 401/100,000]

The speed at which the three Turtle-Poria Elixirs, combined with the original one, increased Qi Blood was indeed terrifyingly fast, he thought. In just two Hours, my Second Layer Qi Blood has increased by twelve points. In twelve Hours, that would be over eighty points, equaling more than one hundred and sixty points of Transcendent Qi Blood. The Qi Blood Amount in my Life Plate will definitely increase rapidly, making this trump card even stronger... Of course, the increase in Lifespan is even more surprising! The three Turtle-Poria Elixirs increased my lifespan by more than ten years, exceeding my previous estimate of nine years by several hundred days! It seems my concern about developing a resistance to the medicine was premature. The Turtle-Poria Elixirs I've consumed haven't reached the point of causing resistance yet! Furthermore, this suggests that the Turtle-Poria Elixirs refined by the Yin Talisman Sect Leader aren't extremely stable in potency. The three elixirs I just consumed are certainly of better quality than the first one! It's highly likely that elixirs also have different grades. Some batches might be poorly refined, while others are better! Regardless, this sudden increase in Lifespan is truly a cause for celebration! When I turn sixty, the effect of the "Vigorous in Old Age" Life Plate will give me sixty times the Cultivation Speed. By seventy or eighty, it'll be seventy or eighty times! With further breakthroughs in the Pine Crane Longevity Technique increasing my Lifespan, I might live to be over a hundred years old. By then... Currently, with fifty times the Cultivation Speed, I'm already far beyond prodigies like Gu Beicheng. When I'm sixty, seventy, a hundred years old...

After such an unexpected increase in Lifespan, Lin Xuankong lay comfortably on the bed. *If the Young Lady were here now, I'd definitely have ten dishes made to celebrate properly!*

「Five days passed in the blink of an eye.」

With the effects of four Turtle-Poria Elixirs and over a hundred portions of Nine Revolutions Qi Replenishing Soup supporting him, Lin Xuankong naturally trained diligently every day. The progress of his Pine Crane Longevity Technique continuously increased, rapidly approaching the Perfection Realm of the Second Layer!

During these few days, many significant events occurred.

One was Steward Ma's successful rescue operation in Lindong Town.

This Late Stage Third Layer Steward, with his Yin Talisman Thunder at the Entering the Hall Realm and his Wandering Dragon Exorcism Hand, fought for over a thousand rounds and ultimately killed a Mid-Tier Three Evil Lizard Demon People!

It was said that this Mid-Tier Three Evil Lizard Demon People was extremely powerful and able to spread a poisonous fog. Even a small trace of this fog could dissolve the flesh and bones of Martial Cultivators below Mid-Tier Two, turning them into a pool of black water. Even Martial Cultivators at the Mid-stage and Late Stage Second Layer, while not fearing the poisonous fog itself, would have to protect their eyes, ears, noses, and mouths. Otherwise, if the fog invaded their eyes, it would immediately impair their vision. However, Steward Ma was already at the Third Layer and possessed the strong defenses of the Second Layer Perfection Realm, his body flawless and impervious. Even if his eyes were touched by the poisonous fog, he wouldn't be affected in the least!

Upon hearing the news, Lin Xuankong was not only happy for Steward Ma but also felt quite eager himself. *After all, I'll reach the Perfection Realm of the Second Layer in just four or five more days. At that time, my entire body will be as tough as Vajra, seamless and flawless! Even relatively vulnerable parts like my eyes, eardrums, mouth, and tongue will have Qi Blood circulating like Vajra, making them impervious to various attacks. My Vajra-like tongue alone could lick someone to death!*

The second event left Lin Xuankong rather puzzled...

In the battlefields of the twenty-nine towns in the Outer City, a "Conical Hat Strange Guest" had appeared.

According to Han Lu's information, this masked stranger in a conical hat specialized in killing the Marsh Python People attacking the city. His strength was formidable. Each time he appeared, it was like a storm sweeping through fallen leaves; he would slaughter many, gouge out their Forehead Scales, and then depart!

Another major event was the unexpected battlefield breakthrough of Grand Steward Jiang Yuran.

Her Yin Talisman Technique had advanced to the Refined Realm, and her Transcendence Realm had risen from the Fourth Layer to the Early Stage of the Fifth Layer. As a result, she severely wounded a Late Tier Four Evil Sheep Demon.

Deprived of the aid from the Tier Four Evil Sheep Demon, the Marsh Pythons and Evil Lizards that had besieged the twenty-nine towns near the Outer City decisively controlled countless Demon People and retreated into Boundaryless Mountain.

This war, which had stretched across twenty-nine towns and nearly exhausted the Yin Talisman Sect's Primordial Qi, finally ended.

Lin Xuankong naturally returned to Great Marsh Prefecture with his forty-odd disciples, all safe and sound.

The second mission was completed without any mishaps, and the rewards were quite generous: forty portions of Nine Revolutions Qi Replenishing Soup and one thousand silver taels!

「Back at home in their wooden loft, they were eating eight signature dishes delivered from Piaoxiang Tower.」

Lin Xuankong skeptically stared at the Young Lady sitting across from him, nibbling delicately at her food.

"That Conical Hat Strange Guest was you, wasn't it? I noticed the conical hat in the house is stained with blood. I told you to stay home and cultivate properly, yet you ran off to the battlefield. What if..."

Lii Xiaolan shot him a look from her bright eyes, lightly slapped the table, and huffed, "Hmph, just because you've advanced to the Late Stage of the Second Layer, you think you can boss me around now? Who's in charge of this house?"

Lin Xuankong felt a headache coming on. *I really want to break through to the Third, Fourth, Fifth, Sixth, Seventh, Eighth, and Ninth Layers right now, just to suppress this Young Lady's arrogance and her... body! The problem is, the Young Lady has never told me her exact level of Cultivation. The unknown is what's truly terrifying...*

"Of course, we listen to whoever is right!" Lin Xuankong said righteously after a moment's thought.

Lii Xiaolan decisively crushed a chicken bone. "Then who's right?"

Lin Xuankong felt that while the question seemed like a giveaway on the surface, in reality... *It's a trap!*

So he changed the topic. "How many Forehead Scales did you get?"

Lii Xiaolan glanced at him. "Fine, I know you mean well. Actually, I only went out to fight the Marsh Python People after I completed my breakthrough! As for the number of Forehead Scales, once the Marsh Python People gather in large numbers, the Demon Qi erodes Qi Blood too severely, making it hard to fight. So, I didn't get many."

"I counted, and there are two hundred and ninety in total. Sigh, if only I could get a set of Exorcism Armor sooner!"

"Two hundred and ninety? That many?!" Lin Xuankong was surprised.

Two hundred and ninety Forehead Scales! That's a lot. If I were to go kill for them, I'd have to search all over for the Demon People Race, which would be quite a hassle. To buy them with silver would be even more unimaginable; how long would it take to save up that much silver!

He frowned at Lii Xiaolan. "Since you were going to fight the Marsh Python People, you were bound to encounter situations where Demon Qi eroded your Qi Blood. Why didn't you come to me for the Wandering Dragon Exorcism Hand?"

Lii Xiaolan shot him another glance. "If I took it and the Demon People Race attacked your post, what then? How could you ask such a silly question!"

She wiped her hands and rubbed her small belly.

"Hmm, I'm full. I'm going upstairs to cultivate. The Forehead Scales are under your bed. Go and put them away in a bit!"

Lin Xuankong nodded. He didn't even finish his meal, rushing back to his room to retrieve the Forehead Scales from under his bed.

Feeling the pure white, extremely heavy Forehead Scales, he thought to himself, *Two hundred and ninety, plus my own one hundred and eight... that's nearly four hundred! It's half the materials needed for a set of Exorcism Armor! Collecting the materials so quickly... The Young Lady has truly given me a huge, pleasant surprise!*

「During the war that lasted more than half a month, not only did the Outer City's twenty-nine towns undergo many significant changes, but much also happened within the Yin Talisman Sect's Great Marsh Hall territory.」

Due to unfavorable outcomes in the early stages of combat, the Yin Talisman Sect's Great Marsh Hall looked precarious. Small gangs, minor sects, and martial arts halls that had originally depended on them began to waver. Seven or eight of them secretly defected to the Black Tiger Gang and the Spirit Snake Gang.

If Hall Master Xuu Zhenhuan hadn't been personally overseeing the hall, the number of defectors would likely have been even higher...

「The next morning,」 as Lin Xuankong walked toward his station along Cow and Horse Street, he glanced at a now-deserted Martial Arts Hall by the roadside and secretly shook his head. *Those small gangs, minor sects, and martial arts halls that betrayed the Yin Talisman Sect will probably have very complicated feelings when they hear about Jiang Yuran's breakthrough to the Fifth Layer! Although the Yin Talisman Sect lost hundreds of disciples, it gained a new Fifth Layer Transcendence Realm expert and drove away three Great Demons. The Sect's strength hasn't*

decreased; it has actually increased! After all, in this world where martial arts reign supreme, the emergence of high-level Martial Cultivators is extremely crucial. The deterrent effect of a thousand elite disciples can't compare to that of a single formidable Fifth Layer Transcendence Realm Martial Cultivator! I wonder when I'll be able to reach the Fifth Layer and become a powerful Martial Cultivator renowned throughout Great Marsh Prefecture, someone capable of influencing a Sect's power and trajectory... It shouldn't take too long, right?

Upon arriving at his station, Lin Xuankong allocated the various properties and affairs according to the previous arrangements.

His station was the only one among dozens that hadn't lost any members in the fighting. Therefore, while other stations were swamped with troublesome matters like needing new disciples and redistributing various affairs, Lin Xuankong found himself quite idle.

After handling these affairs, he was about to head home when a disciple under Steward Xua quickly approached. The disciple informed him that Chief Steward Jiang had summoned all Stewards and Chief Stewards of the Yin Talisman Sect for an important assignment!

Upon hearing that the charming Daoist Nun had an assignment, Lin Xuankong's heart skipped a beat. *The third task! It's come so quickly! I'm finally just one step away from cultivating the Yin Talisman Technique and the Thunderbolt Technique, which suits me so perfectly... I just don't know what kind of assignment it will be this time, or how difficult... Why would the charming Daoist Nun summon all the Stewards and Chief Stewards? Is it a group assignment?*

Lin Xuankong pondered these things as he left his station, heading toward the hall on Mule Street.

Chapter 44 - 40: Hefty Reward, Chief Silver Jade Steward

The atmosphere in the council hall was solemn.

Jiang Yuran sat upright behind a sandalwood table carved with peculiar runes, her delicate face full of coldness.

Steward Xu Bei and Steward Ma Rusong, who stood before the sandalwood table, were somewhat tense, their heads lowered, not daring to make any sound.

Wu Liangye, Gao Yunchao, and the other four Grand Chief Stewards sat on either side. Wu Liangye, slightly furrowing his brows, occasionally took a sip from a Wine Gourd.

Seated in sandalwood chairs below were Steward Ma Jiang and seven other Stewards, all silent.

The remaining forty-two Chief Stewards sat in order of their entry into the sect, with Lin Xuankong, who had joined not long ago, naturally seated at the very back.

Judging by this stance, the pretty Daoist Nun is about to lose her temper today, he thought. But why would she suddenly target Ma Rusong? He has strong backing and was just promoted to Chief Steward... This Ma Rusong really is more trouble than he's worth. What mess has he caused this time?

As Lin Xuankong pondered, Jiang Yuran glanced at everyone and said, "Esteemed colleagues, you have fought many hard battles on campaign recently, and many have achieved remarkable feats, such as Steward Ma Jiang, Steward Zhao Yufei, Steward Lin Xuankong, Steward Nalan Yunzhu, and others.

Especially Steward Lin Xuankong. Despite his age, he has accomplished great feats, surprising both me and the Hall Master!"

Saying this, her expression softened a bit, and she smiled and nodded at Lin Xuankong, who was sitting at the far end.

The various Stewards present could not help but look at Lin Xuankong, their faces showing both surprise and envy.

After all, being publicly praised by the daughter of the Yin Talisman Sect Leader and the mighty Chief Steward Jiang was a rare honor in the entire Yin Talisman

Sect. This fiery-tempered Chief Steward Jiang was usually either reprimanding people or preparing to do so!

As thoughts swirled among the crowd, Jiang Yuran continued, "Though the hall has already rewarded everyone according to their merits, you all should be allowed some time to recuperate! Unfortunately... something major has happened in the hall, and you must endure a few more days of hardship!"

After speaking, she looked at Xu Bei and Ma Rusong.

"Steward Xu, you are in charge of all matters in the warehouses, correct? Steward Ma, were you guarding the warehouse with several Deputy Stewards and disciples when the theft occurred yesterday?"

Their expressions changed slightly, and they each bowed, saying, "Yes," and "Yes."

Jiang Yuran's face turned cold again, and she shouted, "In that case, how could you let two Flying Thieves steal from the third warehouse, making the entire Great Marsh Prefecture mock the Yin Talisman Sect!"

Ma Rusong looked somewhat grim, while Xu Bei bit his lip and bowed, saying, "Reporting to Chief Steward Jiang, at the time of the theft, I was guarding the first warehouse and was unaware of the situation in the third warehouse. Besides, this cannot be entirely blamed on Ma Rusong!"

These two Flying Thieves targeted the third warehouse, which had the weakest guard. Both possessed Second-Layer Cultivation. Their Dart techniques were extremely formidable, every Dart hitting its mark, almost identical to the techniques of the rumored Conical Hat Strange Guest from some time ago.

Over forty disciples guarding the place were struck down by sharp Darts, more than twenty died on the spot, and three Deputy Stewards along with Ma Rusong fought bravely, nearly losing their lives as well..."

Jiang Yuran squinted her eyes slightly. "So, according to you, I should reward the injured Ma Rusong?"

Xu Bei's face changed. Bowing, he said, "I wouldn't dare! But the Flying Thieves were incredibly powerful and their Flying Sabers sharp, indeed beyond Ma Rusong and the others' ability to resist. Even if other Stewards present here had faced them, I fear the result would have been the same.

I only hope Chief Steward Jiang will give us a chance to make amends by capturing the two Flying Thieves!"

The Stewards seated below looked at each other, then silently shook their heads.

Most of these were early or mid-grade Second-Layer Stewards. Facing Second-Layer Flying Saber experts, they indeed would struggle to resist. After all, mid-grade Second-Layer Martial Cultivators—unlike late-stage practitioners such as Lin Xuankong—had not yet reached the point of being able to resist sharp weapons!

However, a few Stewards who seemed to be late-stage Second-Layer had a trace of pride on their faces.

Lin Xuankong, sitting at the far back, thought to himself: So it was two Flying Thieves who killed more than twenty disciples and looted the third warehouse. No wonder the pretty Daoist Nun is so furious! But Xu Bei saying the thieves were like the Conical Hat Strange Guest is truly an injustice and also underrates my Concealed Weapon Technique!

With my Concealed Weapon Technique, if I were handling forty-odd Martial Cultivators who lacked strong defenses, a dozen flicks of my wrist would leave no survivors...

Beside him, Wu Liangye suddenly took two more sips of wine, stood up, moved to Jiang Yuran's side, and whispered, "Chief Steward Jiang, you may not have received the news while on campaign..."

Seeing this, Lin Xuankong, at the rear, frowned. *Though I can't hear Wu Liangye's words clearly... it's obvious Wu Liangye is pleading for Ma Rusong! What kind of backer has this scoundrel found? Steward Xu is one thing, but even a Grand Chief Steward is pleading for him!*

Jiang Yuran, after listening to Wu Liangye's whispered advice, glanced at Ma Rusong and pondered for a moment before speaking. "If not for Grand Chief Steward Wu speaking on your behalf, and if the problem had not occurred in the third warehouse, which is not the most important, I would immediately send both of you to Four-direction City for hard labor!

But under the Sect's rules, there must be punishment. Xu Bei, for poor management, will forfeit a year's salary. Ma Rusong, for inadequate guardianship—considering his injuries while fighting the thieves, his situation is somewhat understandable—will forfeit half a year's salary...

Alright, you two can go sit down! You will both still have duties in this mission. If you can make amends, your monthly salary will naturally be restored!"

After speaking, she looked at the crowd and shouted, "All Stewards, listen to my orders!"

Everyone stood up upon hearing the command.

"These two Flying Thieves stole two hundred and ten Evil Lizard Demon Blood Pearls, two hundred Marsh Python Forehead Scales, and many other valuable items. They also caused the deaths of many of our Yin Talisman Sect disciples!

This matter concerns the lives of our Yin Talisman Sect disciples, as well as the interests and reputation of the Sect, and must not be underestimated!

All of you are to put aside all other matters immediately. Send out all disciples to strictly investigate these thieves, including all towns in the Outer City. Even if we have to turn the Great Marsh Prefecture upside down, you must drag them out and make an example of them!"

"Yes!" everyone responded in unison.

Jiang Yuran stood up. "Anyone who provides accurate information will be rewarded with two thousand silver taels. Anyone who captures these thieves will, in addition to receiving many spoils of war as a reward, receive a promotion. Stewards of one type can be promoted to Silver Jade Steward, and Stewards of another type can also be promoted to Silver Jade Steward!"

「● ● ●」

After Jiang Yuran and several Grand Chief Stewards finished announcing the mission, they left the Martial Arts Hall and went to the guest room to discuss matters.

Many Stewards began to talk in the council hall, while Steward Ma gathered his subordinates Lin Xuankong, Steward Hu, and three others.

To Lin Xuankong's surprise, Han Lu, who was looking a bit troubled, was also among them. This "Warlord" with an unhealed leg had been reassigned to Steward Ma's command. *It seems Steward Ma is afraid he'll slack off in his Martial Cultivation while serving as a Steward outside!*

"What are your thoughts?" Ma Jiang asked.

The Stewards shook their heads slightly and pondered silently. No one spoke for a while.

Lin Xuankong thought to himself: *The Forehead Scales from the Sect were taken by these Flying Thieves... The other stolen items can be set aside, but two hundred Marsh Python Forehead Scales are incredibly tempting. If I get my hands on them, I'll only need two hundred more to reach my goal of Eight Hundred Forehead Scales!*

I must find a way to catch these Flying Thieves!

Especially since this is my third mission. Even if not for the Forehead Scales, I must complete this third mission to learn the Yin Talisman Technique as soon as possible!

However... he glanced at the many Stewards discussing animatedly around him and thought, This mission will have a lot of competition!

"Xuankong, what do you think?" Ma Jiang suddenly asked.

Lin Xuankong, who was daydreaming, snapped to attention.

He thought for a moment and said, "First, we definitely need to inspect the scene and closely question the disciples who fought the Flying Thieves that day.

Second, we should try to find the Darts used by the Flying Thieves and look for clues regarding their origin and any Martial Cultivators skilled with Darts. We must pay extra attention to schools and Martial Arts Halls that teach Dart techniques!

Third, these Flying Thieves will eventually need to sell those stolen items. During this period, we should have people monitor merchants who collect such goods, as well as the officials' auction houses in Great Marsh Prefecture!"

Ma Jiang nodded repeatedly in approval at his clear and thorough analysis. "Excellent, very comprehensive, and aligns with most of my own thoughts.

Then, the task of investigating the origin of the Darts and looking into the Martial Arts Halls teaching Dart techniques will be your responsibility. Remember, whatever you do, don't alert the thieves!"

Finishing his words, Ma Jiang turned to Han Lu. "What do you think?"

Han Lu was taken aback and said, "Master, you mentioned two people using Darts. Do you think one of them could be the Conical Hat Strange Guest? They're both Experts in Concealed Weapons! Shouldn't we investigate from this angle?"

Lin Xuankong: ...

Ma Jiang frowned. "I shouldn't have asked you. Alright, you will assign people to monitor the merchants and auction houses. That task shouldn't require much thinking!"

Feeling a bit frustrated, Han Lu said, "It seems Master believes I have no chance of becoming a Silver Jade Steward!"

Upon hearing him mention Silver Jade Steward, Ma Jiang could not help but sigh. "This time, Chief Steward Jiang and the Hall Master seem determined to make an example and catch these Flying Thieves, no matter the cost!

It has been decades since our Great Marsh Hall of the Yin Talisman Sect promoted a disciple to Silver Jade Steward.

Silver Jade positions offer twice the monthly salary, medicinal herbs, and other benefits compared to regular Stewards of both types. It's an honorary position that can only be achieved by performing multiple remarkable feats!

For decades, only Hall Master Xu Zhenhuan, who performed numerous meritorious deeds while he was a Steward, became a Silver Jade Steward. He is still acclaimed as a legend today!

It was from that time that he gradually rose to become the second most important figure in the Yin Talisman Sect, second only to the Sect Leader!"

Upon hearing this, Lin Xuankong's eyes glinted. Twice the salary of a regular Chief Steward? Normally, I get two portions of medicinal herbs. If I become a Silver Jade Steward, does that mean I'd get six portions every day? That's so much, I could drink medicinal herbs until I burp them up!

This Silver Jade honor is incredibly rewarding!

However, this mission will also be fiercely competitive. After all, who wouldn't want to gain so many valuable items and become a uniquely prestigious Silver Jade Steward of one type or a Silver Jade Steward of the other type!

But this mission... I must complete it before anyone else. The substantial medicinal herbs from a Silver Jade position, the two hundred Marsh Python Forehead Scales, and the chance to cultivate the Yin Talisman Technique—all these are too important to me! Lin Xuankong clenched his fists tightly.

Chapter 45 - 41 Dragon Blood Fierce Dog, Young Lady's Ingenious Plan (Seeking Follow-up Reading)

Lin Xuankong was deep in thought when he suddenly heard several dog barks nearby.

He turned his head and saw Xu Bei and two other Stewards, each leading a fierce, giant dog from behind.

These three enormous hounds were extraordinarily large, nearly reaching an adult's chest in height.

Their bodies were covered in peculiar blood-colored patterns.

Their eyes gleamed fiercely as they opened and closed.

Furthermore, they had three nostrils, and their four paws shone with a dark lustre.

They appeared quite bizarre and exceedingly ferocious!

Steward Zhao Yufei, who had been praised by Chief Steward Jiang and had achieved great merit in war, walked at the very front.

Now, taking note of Steward Zhao Yufei, the Daoist Nun, even Lin Xuankong, accustomed as he was to the beauty of young ladies, couldn't help but admire her silently. Although Zhao Yufei's features weren't as exquisitely perfect as Lii Xiaolan's, at twenty-seven or twenty-eight years of age, she was at an age of full-blown charm. Combined with her curvaceous figure, long legs, and an ethereal moon-white Daoist robe, she possessed a unique, mature, and aloofly elegant charm, which inexplicably reminded Lin Xuankong of names from his past life's memories like "Li Mochou" and "Zhou Zhiruo"!

Zhao Yufei walked towards the entrance of the council hall, turned to Xu Bei, and said, "The Hall Master has dispatched men to heavily guard both main roads of Great Marsh Prefecture. That Flying Thief will surely be unable to escape and will be caught sooner or later. It's just a matter of who apprehends him first!"

Xu Bei cupped his fists and said with a smile, "If we manage to catch the Flying Thief this time with the help of Steward Zhao's Dragon Blood Dogs, I will definitely not compete with Steward Zhao for the position of Silver Jade Steward. I just want to vent some frustration!"

Steward Huang quickly chimed in, "I also will not compete with Steward Zhao for the Silver Jade Steward position, only to catch the Flying Thief sooner!"

Nearby, Ma Rusong said respectfully, "I've heard that raising these Dragon Blood Dogs requires nearly a thousand Evil Lizard Essence Blood Pearls. Once matured, they possess considerable Spirituality and can even gain some abilities of Demons. Not only are they immensely strong, comparable to Transcendence Martial Cultivators, but their sense of smell is also extremely keen, making them excellent at tracking! For everyone to catch the Flying Thief sooner, Steward Zhao was even willing to entrust such invaluable treasure hounds to Steward Xu and Steward Huang. I, Rusong, am truly moved!"

Zhao Yufei waved her hand. "It's just three Dragon Blood Dogs! Alright, let's dispense with the idle chatter. Catching the Flying Thief quickly is what matters!"

As she spoke, she glanced at everyone present, her expression full of cold arrogance. Then, she, along with Xu Bei, Steward Huang, and their numerous Stewards, headed outside.

Judging by their expressions and words, it seemed they were certain they would be the ones to catch the Flying Thief.

After this group left the Martial Arts Hall, the remaining few Stewards and about thirty other Stewards looked at each other, secretly shaking their heads.

One Steward couldn't help but remark, "Steward Zhao Yufei expended so much effort back then to raise these Dragon Blood Dogs. I always thought she was wasting Evil Lizard Essence Blood Pearls, but I never imagined they would prove useful today! With these highly spiritual Dragon Blood Dogs assisting them, I'm afraid the Flying Thief will be caught by them within a few days. The coveted Silver Jade Steward position will likely belong to Steward Zhao Yufei! It's just, her arrogance..."

Another Steward with a dark reddish complexion said, "Zhao Yufei and Xu Bei are both directly under the Hall Master's jurisdiction. Coupled with the fact that both possess Three-Seal Talent, it's natural they'd be somewhat arrogant and look down on those of us with Two-Seal Talent! Especially Zhao Yufei; her Yin Talisman Technique Talent is Three-Seal, but her talent for cultivating her family's 'Eight Gates Celestial Eye' Abnormal Technique is said to be first-rate. It's rumored that after only ten years of cultivation, she has already developed the Celestial Eye's miraculous ability to confuse an opponent's Heart Spirit! Such a genius is valued even more than Gu Bei City Steward. It's said the Hall Master even intends to arrange a marriage alliance between his children and the Zhao Family. A bit of arrogance from her is understandable! However, if one of them, either she or Xu Bei, really becomes the Silver Jade Steward this time, they'll likely become unbearably arrogant!"

After speaking, this red-faced Steward looked at Ma Jiang. "Steward Ma, what do you think?"

Ma Jiang frowned and said, "No matter who catches the Flying Thief, it's a good thing! At the very least, it will show those filthy degenerates that the Yin Talisman Sect is not to be trifled with! As for the arrogance of Zhao Yufei, Xu Bei, and the others, it's nothing new. If you're unhappy, just tell them off to their faces. We all possess Third-Stage cultivation, all Stewards; who's afraid of whom!"

The red-faced Steward laughed. "Senior Brother Ma always speaks his mind so refreshingly, hahaha! However, not everyone is like you, daring to scold those two so casually! You joined the sect early and are already in the Late Third Stage, almost reaching the Fourth Stage. The few of us don't have such high cultivation! Moreover, the Zhao Family backing Steward Zhao Yufei, even if not comparable to the Guo, Feng, and Huang Families, isn't far behind. How could those of us without deep roots dare to offend the Noble Children from prominent sect families!"

Listening to their conversation, Lin Xuankong couldn't help but frown. *These Dragon Blood Dogs seem quite extraordinary. Not only is their robust physique comparable to that of Martial Cultivators, but they even have an extra nostril—they must have an incredible sense of smell! If they're truly as formidable as described, and the Dragon Blood Dogs excel at tracking, then this mission...*

He couldn't help but feel a surge of anxiety. *Even if I'm not after those two hundred Forehead Scales, even if I don't covet that Silver Jade Steward position, if they complete this mission before me, who knows when I'll get another one! And who knows if the next mission will be even more difficult than this one?*

Just as he was pondering, Ma Jiang spoke up, "It's already approaching noon. You should all return quickly and make arrangements for your disciples! If Zhao Yufei and Xu Bei can catch the Flying Thief, it will naturally be of great benefit to the Sect. However, in matters like this, we can't simply place all our hopes on others!"

Hearing this, Lin Xuankong and the others acknowledged the order and departed.

Lin Xuankong first went to the third warehouse. He carefully inspected the scene and thoroughly questioned several injured disciples before returning to his station.

After summoning his disciples and briefly explaining the situation, he assigned them various tasks that needed to be completed quickly. The assignments were detailed for each person, including secretly investigating every blacksmith and weapons shop in Great Marsh Prefecture, as well as the six martial arts halls and small gangs that taught Concealed Weapon Techniques.

Lin Xuankong knew very well that he absolutely could not give up on this mission, which was extremely important to him. Even if Zhao Yu and Xu Bei had numerous subordinates, hundreds each, and were aided by those highly spiritual Dragon Blood Dogs, and even if those dozens of other Stewards and fellow Stewards chose to give up competing with Zhao Yu and Xu Bei, he still had to strive to take the lead! Until the moment the Flying Thief was caught, he still had a chance! Why is it that only Noble Children like Zhao Yufei can hold this Silver Jade position, while someone like me, a poor person relying on personal effort, cannot!

After he finished arranging matters and returned home, Piaoxiang Tower had already delivered several dishes.

Lin Xuankong sat at the table, meticulously mulling over the Flying Thief situation while eating absently.

Lii Xiaolan glanced at him with some puzzlement. "Hmm, Chief Steward Lin, what's wrong? Why do you seem so preoccupied?"

Lin Xuankong frowned and explained the situation to her. "...The Flying Thief left very few clues. For my part, making any progress will require meticulous, step-by-step investigation! Xu Bei, Zhao Yufei, and the others are all Stewards, with hundreds of men under them. I only have a little over forty. Our efficiency is vastly different. Plus, they have Dragon Blood Dogs to help them. Competing with them will be extremely difficult!"

After Lii Xiaolan finished listening, her eyes curved into crescents, and the corners of her mouth turned up. "I thought it was some earth-shattering catastrophe! It's just catching a Flying Thief; that's very simple!"

Simple? Lin Xuankong was speechless.

Lii Xiaolan noticed his expression and shot him a glare. "Fine, if you don't want me to teach you how to catch the Flying Thief quickly, I won't say!"

She shook her small head and continued to eat, relishing her food with a hearty appetite...

Watching the Young Lady's playful demeanor, Lin Xuankong felt a surge of hope. *That's the Silver Jade position, nearly two hundred Forehead Scales, and an*

opportunity to cultivate the Yin Talisman Technique! If the Young Lady truly has a way...

"Well... tonight, I'll have Piaoxiang Tower deliver your favorite dishes. Eight dishes!"

"Eighteen dishes!" Lii Xiaolan declared, driving a hard bargain.

"It's a deal! Tell me, what method do you have?" Lin Xuankong's eyes held a trace of hope and curiosity. *If the Young Lady can help me catch the Flying Thief quickly, forget eighteen dishes; I'd even arrange an imperial feast for her!*

Chapter 46 - 42 The Number One Manluo Demon Pearl in the World (Please Follow)

Lii Xiaolan smiled, not paying him any mind, and continued savoring the delicacies.

It wasn't until Lin Xuankong had served up to twenty-eight dishes that she finally wiped her small hands and spoke, "Big fool, do you have the Manluo Demon Pearl I gave you on you?"

Lin Xuankong replied, somewhat puzzled, "Of course I have it on me. Last time you returned, you intended to take it back. However, you said your strength had broken through and you didn't need it for the time being, so I've been carrying it with me all this while."

"This Manluo Demon Pearl has an extremely potent ability to trap enemies. It can confine opponents from over a thousand *zhang* away. Although it lacks the attacking effect of the Twin Vine Demon Pearl, you mentioned that once one's legs are bound by the Manluo Demon Grass, even a Sixth Layer expert would find it hard to break free. The Manluo Demon Pearl is indeed strong, but what does it have to do with capturing the Flying Thief?"

Lii Xiaolan's bright eyes twinkled with a smile. "So that's why I called you a fool! The Manluo Demon Pearl can autonomously trap enemies from over a thousand *zhang* away, not relying on your direct control. Then what does it rely on?"

Lin Xuankong's expression changed. "It relies on scent and the distinct aura of each Martial Cultivator!"

Lii Xiaolan nodded.

"This Manluo Demon Pearl... forget it, I won't tell you its origin for now! The Manluo Demon Grass is extremely sensitive to scent and also has a tracking function for the Qi Blood of Martial Cultivators! If you can find an item stained with the scent and Qi Blood of that Flying Thief, and then activate the Manluo Demon Pearl, as long as the Flying Thief is within a thousand-*zhang* radius of the Pearl, it will naturally react. The sprouting Manluo Demon Grass will then automatically spread towards the target."

Upon hearing this, Lin Xuankong no longer had any doubts, and his eyes were filled with hope.

*Ever since he got the Manluo Demon Pearl from the Young Lady, he had never encountered an opponent who could threaten his life, so he had never activated the Demon Pearl. Who would've thought this mission's obstruction would find its breakthrough through the Manluo Demon Pearl! The Manluo Demon Pearl can sense things within a thousand-*zhang* radius; a thousand *zhang* is equivalent to three thousand meters, a full six *li* (nearly two miles)! Although Great Marsh Prefecture City is vast, with his current leg strength, he can circle it a few times with the Manluo Demon Pearl without taking too much time! Of course, the primary task is to first locate an item stained with the Flying Thief's scent and Qi Blood... those dozens of Flying Sabers left by the two Flying Thieves are still at the third warehouse!*

Thinking of this, Lin Xuankong didn't want to waste any more time. He grabbed two chive pies and started walking out quickly while eating them. Seeing him so happy, Lii Xiaolan couldn't help but smile as she rubbed her slightly bloated belly and went upstairs.

「...」

The third warehouse of the Yin Talisman Sect's Great Marsh Hall was located at the northernmost end of Mule Street.

After Lin Xuankong hurried there, he was about to enter when he was stopped by a dozen disciples at the entrance.

One of the round-faced Yin Talisman Sect disciples cupped his hands and said, "Steward Lin, the third warehouse is a restricted area. Without Steward Xua's order, no one can casually enter."

Lin Xuankong frowned. "I came by here this morning."

The round-faced disciple showed an embarrassed expression. "That's precisely because too many people—disciples and various stewards—came this morning. The scene is already a complete mess. So Steward Xua specifically ordered that any steward wanting to inspect the scene must inform him first and get permission, to avoid further damage to the scene!"

Lin Xuankong's face turned slightly cold. *The warehouse was robbed, and Chief Steward Jiang ordered all stewards to jointly capture the Flying Thief. Yet Xu Bei is acting this way... Is he trying to hinder others' investigations so Zhao Yufei and her group can take the lead?*

"So Steward Lin is here?" A familiar voice came from behind.

Lin Xuankong turned his head to look, only to see Ma Rusong leisurely walking over!

At this moment, Ma Rusong looked at Lin Xuankong, his eyes full of humiliation.

This morning, Chief Steward Jiang mercilessly reprimanded me and Steward Xua in front of all the other stewards, yet he praised this Lin Xuankong before everyone! Thinking of the scene when this old bastard was praised, it was like swallowing a hundred live maggots! Especially a few days ago, when Ma Jiang insulted me in front of countless disciples, without considering how I would face my former subordinates... All this humiliation is because of this old bastard in front of me! Humph, now he's fallen into my hands!

Ma Rusong's heart was full of resentment, but his face was amiable. "Steward Lin, please don't make it difficult for these disciples. Steward Xua is protecting the scene, also to help capture the Flying Thief."

Lin Xuankong stared at Ma Rusong. "So, you don't intend to let me in?"

Ma Rusong replied coldly, "My superior has given an order. What can a mere Chief Steward like me do?"

"What can a mere Chief Steward like me do?"... That line is definitely directed at me, Lin Xuankong! It seems this wretched thing has really changed after finding a powerful backer! He used to act neither humble nor arrogant, but now he's learned to speak with sarcasm and behave cynically!

Lin Xuankong's face turned cold. "Then where is Steward Xua?"

"Steward Xua is my direct superior. Would he report his whereabouts to me?" Ma Rusong had an innocent look on his face, but his heart was full of pride.

"What a damned fool, treating a trivial order like an imperial decree!"

A reprimanding voice resounded. Then, Steward Ma, his face cold, dashed forward.

He landed at the warehouse courtyard entrance and, with a wave of his hand, sent Ma Rusong flying several *zhang*.

Ma Rusong landed on the ground, rolled a few times, and screamed in agony, unable to get up for quite a while.

Ma Jiang then turned and looked at Lin Xuankong. "Xuankong, go inside. I'd like to see who dares stop you from inspecting the site, who dares to hinder Chief Steward Jiang's important task, who dares to delay the Yin Talisman Sect's crucial matters!"

After saying that, he stood at the courtyard entrance, fiddling with his White Jade Dice, expressionlessly looking toward the dozen disciples on both sides.

Chapter 47 - 42: The World's Number One Manluo Demon Pearl (Request for Follow-up Reads)_2

When the disciples saw how badly Steward Ma had been beaten, they were terrified and immediately fled a great distance. Ma Jiang's status within the Sect was second only to a few Grand Chief Stewards, and he had close relationships with them, such as Gao Yunchao. If this lord were to kill them on the spot, it was likely no one would hold him accountable!

Lin Xuankong glanced at the haughty Steward Ma, cupped his hands, and said, "Thank you, Master!"

Then, he quickly walked into the courtyard. After several turns, he arrived at the storeroom door and looked down at the scattered bloodstains and some blood-stained Darts on the ground. He carefully inspected the surroundings. Seeing no one else around, he secretly activated the Manluo Demon Pearl, controlling the extending Manluo Demon Grass to wrap around a Flying Saber. When he sensed a reaction from the Demon Grass, he decisively retracted it and walked out of the courtyard.

Ma Jiang was somewhat surprised to see him emerge so quickly and asked, "Did you find anything?"

Lin Xuankong nodded. "I've got a few leads!"

Ma Jiang frowned and said, "Just do your best. Several thousand disciples in the Sect have already been mobilized. Even if we don't catch them, others are searching. Those Flying Thieves definitely won't get away!"

Lin Xuankong quietly sighed. *His immediate superior is completely dedicated to the Sect... Unfortunately, even in the Yin Talisman Sect, filled with elites, there are probably very few people as devoted as Steward Ma. At the very least, I myself am far from being as selfless as Steward Ma!*

As the two of them walked off into the distance, many disciples, who had been hiding at the gate, watched them go. Once Lin Xuankong and Ma Jiang were further away, a round-faced disciple hesitantly looked at Ma Rusong. "Steward Ma, someone broke into the storeroom. Do we need to report this to Steward Xua?"

Ma Rusong slapped him across the face. "Report my ass!"

The round-faced disciple clutched his face and dared not speak again.

Ma Rusong looked up at the retreating figures of Lin Xuankong and Ma Jiang, his face extremely grim. He gritted his teeth and said, "An old, poor wretch who

became a steward by sheer luck now actually wants to compete with a scion of a noble family like Steward Zhao for the Silver Jade position? Are you f***ing serious? So what if Ma Jiang supports you, you pauper? Can he conjure up a Dragon Blood Dog for you? Truly overestimating yourself!"

When the disciples heard Ma Rusong call Steward Ma Jiang by his full name, they exchanged uneasy glances. However, upon seeing Ma Rusong's expression, they could only nod in agreement.

Seeing their reactions, Ma Rusong's eyes flickered, and he turned and entered the storeroom. Once he was in a place where no one else was present, his face twisted, filled with killing intent and venomous resentment. *Ma Jiang, you old bastard! Old Lin! You two are so damn arrogant, so damn brazen, humiliating me, Ma Rusong, in public yet again! Humiliating me is tantamount to disrespecting Elder Hua of the Profound Phoenix Celestial Sect. Even Jiang Yuran has to show Elder Hua respect... Ma Jiang, you old bastard, and Old Lin, just you wait! I will repay these humiliations a hundredfold, a thousandfold, ten thousandfold!*

「In a second-floor private room of a restaurant on Mule Street,」

The two Stewards, Xu Bei and Huang Yinrong, were each holding a wine cup, toasting Zhao Yufei.

Xu Bei spoke up, "The Dragon Blood Dog is the best among Exotic Beasts that Martial Cultivators can raise for tracking. With the Dragon Blood Dogs, the two Flying Thieves have absolutely no escape. When the Flying Thieves are caught, that will be when Steward Zhao is promoted to Silver Jade Steward!"

Nearby, Huang Yinrong added, "The ones currently searching for the Flying Thieves with the three Dragon Blood Dogs are capable and astute subordinates of ours. Steward Zhao doesn't need to search personally!"

Zhao Yufei, who had been looking out the window, retracted her gaze and clinked her teacup with theirs. "I saw Steward Ma Jiang and Lin Xuankong investigating the storeroom earlier. It seems they found some clues... Although I don't care about the monthly stipend of a Silver Jade Steward, it would still be quite vexing if someone else were to obtain the position."

Huang Yinrong was momentarily startled, then waved his hand dismissively. "One is a stubborn fool who only sees things his way, and the other is an old, dying wretch. What can those two possibly accomplish? Even if someone in our Yin Talisman Sect were to get incredibly lucky and find some clues about the Flying Thieves, it certainly wouldn't be them! Besides, judging from what we saw earlier, Ma Jiang and Old Lin have thoroughly offended Ma Rusong. Soon enough, those two will have a bitter pill to swallow!" f.(r)eew ebnov\ll.com

Xu Bei chuckled beside him. "Junior Brother Huang is right. Although Ma Rusong is a good-for-nothing, even Chief Steward Jiang must show a degree of respect to the person backing him. Given how Ma Jiang and Lin Xuankong acted, forget the Silver Jade position; in a few days, whether they can even keep their current posts will depend on that important figure's mood!"

"As for catching the Flying Thieves, what Exotic Beast in this world can compare to the Dragon Blood Dog's tracking ability? Without the help of a Dragon Blood Dog, Ma Jiang and Lin Xuankong couldn't possibly find such untraceable Flying Thieves, even if they wore out their iron shoes! So rest assured, Steward Zhao!"

Zhao Yufei frowned and said, "I hope so! Unfortunately, my three Dragon Blood Dogs haven't been cultivated to a High Tier yet; otherwise, their tracking would be even more effective!"

"But when Steward Xua mentioned tracking ability, there is actually one kind in the world far superior to the Dragon Blood Dog—immeasurably so!"

"I read in my family's secret records that in the Boundaryless Mountain, there is a Manluo Demon Mother that holds sway over ten thousand demons. The Demon Pearl it produces can devour other Demon Pearls and grow indefinitely!"

"Even if that Manluo Demon Pearl hasn't devoured any other Demon Pearls, the Demon Grass summoned by just an Initial Tier Demon Pearl can sense the qi blood of Martial Cultivators within a thousand zhang and can extend over a thousand zhang to bind them. That powerful sensing range is comparable to the mind probe of a peerless expert of the Grandmaster Realm!"

"This Manluo Demon Pearl, with its myriad uses, is indisputably the world's number one when it comes to even its most basic tracking ability!"

Hearing her words, Xu Bei immediately praised, "The Boundaryless Mountain is full of Great Demons; even experts like our Sect Leader wouldn't dare to venture deep into it. I had no idea that one of Steward Zhao's ancestors had actually entered the Boundaryless Mountain and learned about the various demons within!"

"Those are tales of the past! I've only read the ancestors' records; I've never even seen what the Manluo Demon Grass looks like!" A trace of melancholy touched Zhao Yufei's face.

Xu Bei smiled. "Regardless, Steward Zhao, you are exceptionally knowledgeable. People like Yinrong and myself have never even heard of the Manluo Demon Pearl! Besides, Demon Pearls are not things Martial Cultivators can easily encounter. Even in our Yin Talisman Sect, only the Sect Leader, Hall Master Xu, and Hall Master Qiu each possess one. Among the thousands of Sect members, who else could own such an exceedingly rare item?"

Huang Yinrong nodded. "The Black Tiger Gang, Spirit Snake Gang, Guo Family, Feng Family, and Huang Family, all of whom dominate Great Marsh Prefecture, each possess merely two or three Demon Pearls! Take, for instance, the recent incident where Wang Qiluo was found to possess a Twin Vine Demon Pearl—didn't that cause a massive uproar throughout the city?"

Hearing this, Zhao Yufei's eyes flickered, a strange glint appearing in her cold, beautiful eyes. *Unfortunately, the great battle at Guangju Pavilion that night destroyed all traces. Otherwise, I might have been able to use the Dragon Blood Dogs to track that Conical Hat Strange Guest. If I could obtain Wang Qiluo's Twin Vine Demon Pearl from the Conical Hat Guest and give it to my father, the Zhao Family would surely prosper! My father, at the Late Stage of the Fifth Layer of Transcendence, possesses considerable strength, comparable to Hall Master Xu... Yet, to this day, the Zhao Family remains a step below the Huang Family, Feng Family, and Guo Family. Even I had to join the Yin Talisman Sect so the Zhao Family could be affiliated with them! All of this is simply because the Demon Pearl passed down by our ancestors was stolen, leaving our family without that one Demon Pearl capable of granting a Martial Cultivator unparalleled combat power!* Thinking of this, she couldn't help but frown deeply.

Xu Bei and Huang Yinrong, oblivious to her thoughts, saw her frown and simply continued to reassure her that the Silver Jade Steward position was undoubtedly hers.

「At this moment, Lin Xuankong had already changed his outfit.」

He was now wearing coarse cloth clothes with a conical hat hanging on his back, walking quickly through the streets of Great Marsh Prefecture City. Every few hundred zhang, he would secretly activate the Manluo Demon Pearl...

Chapter 48 - 43 Flying Thief Clues, Zhang Wu's Wedding Banquet

Several hours later, as the sun set over the western hills, Lin Xuankong, known for his exceptional stamina, stood at the entrance of Sishui Street.

He glanced at the Black Tiger Gang banners hanging from storefronts along Sishui Street. *I've searched most of Great Marsh Prefecture City; now, only the Black Tiger Gang's territory remains unchecked! The search radius of the Manluo Demon Pearl is six miles. Its search efficiency far surpassed that of a Dragon Blood Dog. It was comparable to deploying dozens, even hundreds, of Dragon Blood Dogs, or tens of thousands of people searching at once! If Great Marsh Prefecture City weren't a major city in the Great Xia Dynasty—second only to the Capital City Liang City and with a geographical area comparable to a first-tier city from his previous life—he*

would have finished searching long ago! The only thing that seemed to limit the Manluo Demon Pearl's search speed was Lin Xuankong's own running speed!

「Two cups of tea later, the moon hung over the willow tips.」

Lin Xuankong, wearing a bamboo hat and swiftly moving through Black Tiger Gang territory, stopped at a corner of the Qingshui Street junction, his right hand reaching for the Manluo Demon Pearl in his bosom. This was already one of the last remaining areas of the Black Tiger Gang's territory.

Lin Xuankong looked at the moon above the wooden building beside him. If the Manluo Demon Pearl doesn't react in the central areas of these territories, there's only one possibility: the two Flying Thieves aren't in Great Marsh Prefecture City. But I can only search the Outer City during the daytime tomorrow! The Outer City is, after all, fraught with danger. Although there are no demons near the twenty-nine towns of the Yin Talisman Sect, the Outer City territories of other sects and prominent families harbor demons to varying degrees. Venturing out alone at night, in the pitch dark, I might stumble into the hunting grounds of some powerful demons...

As he mulled this over, he quietly infused some Qi Blood into the Demon Pearl. To his surprise, the Manluo Demon Pearl suddenly reacted: fine Demon Grass sprouted from it, pointing west.

A flicker in Lin Xuankong's eyes, and he quickly slipped the Wandering Dragon Exorcism Hand onto his right hand before leaping towards the direction indicated by the Demon Pearl.

Although Great Marsh Prefecture City had no curfew at night, it was still a feudal era. Aside from some brothels and pleasure houses, most commoners went to bed early, engaging in their sole form of nighttime entertainment!

At this hour, the streets were almost deserted. Lin Xuankong dashed along the bluestone road, his speed extreme. In just over ten breaths, he arrived near a wooden building with a spacious backyard.

Suddenly, a cacophony of sounds drifted from the distance.

Lin Xuankong looked in that direction. At the end of the street, a large mansion was brightly lit, from which came continuous shouts of a drinking game: "Six, six, six, eight horses...!" People were clearly toasting and drinking.

Large red lanterns bearing the word 'Happiness' hung at the mansion's main gate, where two sentinels were drinking. *It looks like a celebration, Lin Xuankong mused. Probably some bigwig or a Steward from the Black Tiger Gang is marrying a new wife or concubine!*

Retracting his gaze, Lin Xuankong focused on the wooden building indicated by the Manluo Demon Pearl.

He was somewhat puzzled. Normally, if the Flying Thieves were here, the Manluo Demon Pearl should have immediately extended to bind them! Yet now, the Manluo Demon Pearl's tendrils merely swayed, not rapidly extending... Could it be that the two Flying Thieves had resided here for an extended period, leaving behind a strong residual aura, thus causing the Demon Pearl to indicate this location?

But since he had arrived, he had to take a look!

Lin Xuankong silently circulated his Qi Blood, enveloping his entire body in a protective layer, then vaulted noiselessly into the courtyard.

When he silently slipped through a rear window onto the first floor of the wooden building, the distinct stench of blood assailed his nostrils!

Lin Xuankong immediately became alert.

While circulating Qi Blood to protect himself, he held both the Manluo Demon Pearl and the Twin Vine Demon Pearl in his right hand and six steel balls in his left. Then, he proceeded towards the bedroom from which the bloody smell emanated.

A few breaths later, Lin Xuankong stood by the wooden bed in the bedroom, his face cold as he surveyed the scene.

Beside the bed lay a young, robust man, his eyes wide open in an unseeing stare. He was bound securely with hemp ropes, his mouth gagged with a large wad of dirty cloth.

On the wooden bed, towards which the dead man's face was turned, lay a completely naked woman. Her body was in a terrible state, and a wound nearly severed her neck, which was surrounded by viscous blood. Numerous flies buzzed around the two corpses.

Lin Xuankong frowned at the sight for a few moments, then exited the bedroom and cautiously proceeded to the second floor.

Upon reaching the second floor, he spotted two sets of black night-prowler suits tossed onto a wooden bed. He slowed his movements and searched meticulously, eventually finding a white Forehead Scale wedged in a gap between the floorboards!

Picking up the Marsh Python Forehead Scale, Lin Xuankong frowned. *It seems I arrived a step too late! The two Flying Thieves must have returned here briefly after looting the third warehouse, then hastily left with their spoils, even leaving a Forehead Scale behind in their rush. Considering my earlier searches, those ferocious and brutal Flying Thieves must have already left Great Marsh Prefecture City. I just don't know which part of the Outer City they've fled to! However, based on the estimated time of the couple's death in the wooden building, the thieves shouldn't have left too long ago. If I search the Outer City tomorrow, I can definitely catch them, seize the stolen goods, and become the first to complete the Silver Jade Honor Task!*

Leaping out of the wooden building, Lin Xuankong's mood grew heavier as he thought of the couple's tragic deaths. In this world where martial prowess reigns supreme, the lives of ordinary folk are as insignificant as grass, snuffed out so miserably and degradingly!

He couldn't help but recall his own past. *Back then, if not for the Young Lady's help when I confronted Zhang Wu, Ma Xiong, Wang Qiluo, and the others, my death would likely have been no better than this couple's, perhaps even more wretched!*

He turned, crushed the iron lock on the wooden building's main door with his hand, and pushed the door open. *Hopefully, some neighbors will discover this tragically deceased couple tomorrow, ensuring they don't remain unburied!*

Shaking his head, he started walking towards the end of the street. But after just a couple of steps, he abruptly halted, his gaze turning frigid as he looked towards the two Black Tiger Gang sentinels at the street entrance.

At that moment, one of the heavily intoxicated Gang Members was saying cheerfully, "Old Qi, do you think Vice Steward Zhang is targeting the Zhuo Family for their Divine Protection Elixir, or for that Zhuo Yunbing?"

Old Qi chuckled. "The Divine Protection Elixir isn't sold exclusively by the Zhuo Family... So, of course, the boss is after that delicate little beauty!"

"That's true. But that Zhuo Yunbing wench is quite resilient; she's escaped twice! Still, after tonight, once the boss has had his way with her... she probably won't want to run anymore, HEH HEH HEH!"

Standing in the distance, Lin Xuankong's face turned icy. *Zhang Wu, that filthy degenerate! A leopard truly can't change its spots!*

Recalling his past days, lived constantly on edge due to Zhang Wu's machinations, the vicious pursuit and disdain from Ma Xiong, and the disgusting plots and vile expressions of Wang Po, a wave of hatred surged through Lin Xuankong.

For the past ten-odd days, while I've been away in the Outer City on tasks, that filthy degenerate has been living it up! Now that I've nearly reached Perfection in the Second Layer, and I'm right at his doorstep, how can I allow this degenerate to continue his revelry, day after day, constantly taking new brides!

With this thought, Lin Xuankong put on his bamboo hat, retrieved a mask from his bosom, and secured it to his face. He then leaped onto the roof of the wooden building and began to traverse the rooftops, moving swiftly.

Soon after, he stood on the courtyard wall of Zhang Wu's mansion with three courtyards.

The courtyard teemed with Black Tiger Gang Members, making utter fools of themselves in their drunkenness, but Zhang Wu was nowhere in sight. Lin

Xuankong scanned the area, then silently drifted down, landing before the window of the bridal chamber, which glowed with the light of red candles.

Moistening his finger with saliva, he gently poked a hole in the window paper and peered inside.

Through the flickering red candlelight, he saw a beautiful woman in bridal attire. She was bound tightly to the bed with sturdy hemp ropes, struggling to break free. Zhang Wu, his eyes bleary with drink, sat by the bed holding two wine cups.

Chapter 49 - 44 The Terrifying Deterrence of the Twin Vine Demon Pearl

"Miss Zhuo, the Zhuo Family has fallen to such a state, leaving only you, a woman, to desperately hold on. Why must you be so stubborn?" Zhang Wu swayed, his gaze fixed on the woman's chest as he repeatedly gulped. "At this moment, not even Immortals can save you... If you obediently submit to me, you'll become the Stewardess of the Black Tiger Gang. Why bother toiling away at alchemy to earn money?"

"Bah! Do you think I don't know you're scheming for the Zhuo Family's Alchemy Technique? No matter how far the Zhuo Family has fallen, our Alchemy Technique will never be handed over to you or the Black Tiger Gang!" The beautiful woman glared at Zhang Wu, her eyes filled with hatred. "I warn you, if you dare touch me, the Zhuo Family's Alchemy Technique will vanish from this world forever with my corpse!"

"It seems Miss Zhuo is still unaware of my methods. Rest assured, after I've had my pleasure with you tonight, you'll willingly tell me everything!" Zhang Wu sneered, bringing the wine cup to his lips. "Besides, how could I bear to let such a delicate Little Alchemist die at my hands?"

Just then, BOOM!

A thunderous crash resounded as a large hole was blasted into the wall of the bridal chamber. Brick fragments flew in all directions, and dust plumed upwards. The sudden, deafening noise startled Zhang Wu so badly that he nearly spilled the wine all over his face.

From within the swirling dust, Lin Xuankong, wearing a conical hat and mask, stepped through the gaping hole into the bridal chamber. He looked at the stunned Zhang Wu, who had jumped to his feet, his voice as cold as ice, "Filthy wretch! From now on, you'll have no more opportunities to defile women!"

Zhang Wu stared at the advancing Conical Hat Strange Guest. Hearing Lin Xuankong's peculiar voice, altered by the infusion of Qi Blood, something seemed to click in his mind. His expression changed drastically. He whirled around and bolted towards the outside, screaming, "It's that Conical Hat Strange Guest! Everyone, get the hell over here and cut him down!"

In the past ten-odd days, Zhang Wu had already entered the Early Stage of the Second Layer, his strength greatly increased. However, to his astonishment, just

when he thought his power had soared and he could escape the bridal chamber in a single leap, his feet, before he could even exert force, were suddenly ensnared by thick Demon Vines, binding his legs securely.

Countless Demon Vines spread madly, continuously coiling around Zhang Wu's abdomen.

The Demon Vine's entanglement sobered Zhang Wu considerably. With a tremor of his hands, silvery fingernails abruptly extended, and he began slashing furiously at the encroaching Demon Vines.

Unfortunately, he soon discovered to his despair that no matter how fast he slashed, the Demon Vines regenerated even faster.

Despite being a master of the Early Stage Second Layer and delivering hundreds of slashes within mere moments, he couldn't break free!

The Demon Vines already entwined around his legs and abdomen relentlessly tightened. Zhang Wu could clearly feel the flesh of his legs being rapidly compressed and deformed. Agonizing pain shot from his leg bones, foot bones, pelvis, and knees—the kind of unbearable torment produced only by bones fracturing and shattering!

If such pain were inflicted upon an ordinary person, they would have fainted long ago. Fortunately, Zhang Wu was no ordinary man. He was a respected master of

the Early Stage Second Layer. Thus, even though the pain was utterly unbearable, he could only endure it, showing no signs of passing out.

Finally, Zhang Wu could bear it no longer and let out a bloodcurdling shriek, like a pig being slaughtered. This scream was utterly horrifying...

The Black Tiger Gang Members and Leaders, drawn by the commotion and Zhang Wu's orders, rushed towards the room. However, upon witnessing the eerie, Demon Qi-wreathed Demon Vine and hearing Zhang Wu's agonizing screams, they all stopped dead in their tracks, faces aghast. Not a single one dared to charge inside.

It wasn't just them. These Black Tiger Gang Members, who tyrannized Qingshui Street and others, these Leaders who lorded over countless Independent Martial Cultivators—all of them broke out in a cold sweat at the sight of the Conical Hat Strange Guest and the Black Demon Vine, sobering up considerably!

The names "Conical Hat Strange Guest," "Invincible Hidden Weapon," and "Twin Vine Demon Pearl" weren't terrifying to hear about. What was terrifying was seeing the Conical Hat Strange Guest and the Twin Vine Demon Pearl manifest right before their very eyes!

Lin Xuankong paid no heed to Zhang Wu's screams, nor to the Black Tiger Gang Leaders who had gathered around, now frozen in terror.

His gaze fell upon the woman on the wooden bed. For some reason, looking at her, he was suddenly reminded of the woman who had died so tragically in that wooden building. A slight frown creased his brow as he walked over. With a gentle tug, the ropes that Zhuo Yunbing had been unable to break snapped into several pieces.

Zhuo Yunbing's expression flickered as she stared at the Conical Hat Strange Guest before her. Her heart surged with the elation of having narrowly escaped death, yet it was also gripped by a fear of the unknown.

Lin Xuankong then walked over to Zhang Wu, whose leg bones and pelvis were now completely crushed. With a shattered pelvis, Zhang Wu indeed wouldn't have any chance to defile women in the future.

Looking at the now unmoving Zhang Wu, Lin Xuankong couldn't help but recall those two months he had spent treading on thin ice. His eyes narrowed. *For a degenerate Martial Cultivator like Zhang Wu, crippling him is a fate worse than death. For the living, the dread of awaiting death is infinitely more terrifying than dying instantly... Zhang Wu doesn't deserve to die so easily!*

"Zhang Wu, stop playing dead," Lin Xuankong said. "I won't kill you now. Of course, I won't spare you either. In the coming days, I might come to kill you at any time—perhaps tomorrow, perhaps the day after, or perhaps any other day!"

Zhang Wu shuddered, his eyes snapping open from his feigned death. The unbearable pain and intense hatred caused the muscles in his face to twitch uncontrollably. "Who the hell are you?! Don't you know I'm a member of the Black

Tiger Gang? A Steward! The entire Black Tiger Gang stands behind me! You wouldn't dare kill me! You absolutely wouldn't dare!"

"Is that so?" Lin Xuankong retorted. "Xuu Zhongxiong and his subordinates were all members of the Black Tiger Gang, weren't they?"

He ignored Zhang Wu and glanced at Zhuo Yunbing. "Come with me."

With that, Lin Xuankong, leading Zhuo Yunbing, began to walk towards the hundred or so Black Tiger Gang Members. At this moment, fueled by his immense Qi Blood, thick, flexible, tentacle-like Black Demon Vines proliferated around him. These Black Demon Vines followed his steps, constantly advancing, writhing, and extending. Occasionally, they would lift their tips and sway gently, like colossal black pythons seeking prey. The scene possessed a strange, ferocious beauty, as if Lin Xuankong himself had suddenly transformed into a terrifying Demon!

At this critical moment, the Black Tiger Gang—renowned throughout the Great Marsh Prefecture—had over a hundred elite Transcendence Realm disciples and seven Late Stage First Layer Leaders present. Yet, not a single one dared to intercept or obstruct Lin Xuankong. These elite disciples and Leaders scrambled to retreat to either side of the courtyard, clearing a wide path. They could only watch, dumbfounded, as Lin Xuankong and Zhuo Yunbing walked out of the courtyard.

And then... not one of them dared to follow.

「At Sishui Street's entrance,」

Zhuo Yunbing looked at Lin Xuankong. "Thank you for saving me!"

Being near this Demon Vine Manipulator, this Conical Hat Strange Guest, she couldn't stop goosebumps from prickling her arms. Her heart remained constricted with unease, even though she knew he was her savior.

"I saved your life. How do you intend to thank me?" Lin Xuankong asked, his tone devoid of warmth.

I'm no philanthropist; there's no such thing as a free rescue. So what if Zhuo Yunbing is beautiful? Does she think some pretty words are enough before she just walks away? Besides, I'm very curious to find out if acquiring the Zhuo Family's so-called Alchemy Technique would have any effect on my [Vigorous in Old Age] Life Plate!

"You... You?" Zhuo Yunbing stammered, somewhat taken aback.

After a moment of contemplation, she knitted her delicate brows. "Such a great life-saving debt must indeed be repaid. However, my Zhuo Family has already fallen into ruin, and I am penniless. I truly have nothing of value with which to thank you!"

Lin Xuankong did his best to project an image of cold, ruthless indifference, like a killer devoid of mercy.

"Either you give me the Refining Manual for the Divine Protection Elixir," he declared, "or I will take back the life I just saved!"

That should make me sound like an emotionless killing machine. She won't see through my act!

"You...?" Zhuo Yunbing looked at Lin Xuankong, utterly astonished.

Chapter 50 - 45: Conical Hat Strange Guest Stuns Great Marsh, Manluo Demon Pearl Seeks Flying Thief

Zhuo Yunbing didn't see through Lin Xuankong's act, and in the end, she still took out the Refining Manual for the Divine Protection Elixir from its hidden place and handed it to Lin Xuankong.

Actually, in Zhuo Yunbing's view, the Divine Protection Elixir was easy to learn but hard to master. Even if she publicized the refining method to all the countless Martial Cultivators in the Great Marsh Prefecture, there were probably no more

than fifty or sixty who could successfully refine a batch of Divine Protection Elixirs in ten years!

Therefore, Zhuo Yunbing didn't think that this Conical Hat Strange Guest in front of her could learn to refine the Divine Protection Elixir!

In the entire Great Marsh Prefecture, there were five sects or families capable of refining the Divine Protection Elixir, and the total number of official Alchemists in these sects was only about forty or fifty. Even though she had been studying alchemy for over ten years, she could only be considered an Initial Tier Alchemist!

Previously, she had refused to give Zhang Wu the Elixir Formula and Secret Manual, not because she feared Zhang Wu learning alchemy, but because she despised that shameless and lecherous scoundrel...

After handing over the Secret Manual, Zhuo Yunbing watched the 'Conical Hat Strange Guest' leave, furrowing her delicate brows and thinking to herself, *All the Zhuo Family servants have run off, leaving only me. If I want to avoid the Black Tiger Gang's lecherous spies in the future, my only option might be to join the Yin Talisman Sect. This Conical Hat Strange Guest is really troublesome. Since he decided to kill Zhang Wu, why not do it cleanly? What if Zhang Wu hides in the future or finds protection from Black Tiger Gang experts, how would he kill him then? This Conical Hat Strange Guest boasts a lot about taking lives at will... Alright, his Twin Vine Demon Pearl is indeed very powerful!* Zhuo Yunbing bit her lip, feeling somewhat vexed.

「...」

"The Divine Protection Elixir Alchemy Manual?"

Outside the wooden building, Lii Xiaolan looked at Lin Xuankong in surprise. She took the thick Secret Manual, flipped through a few pages, and couldn't help but shake her head. "Why didn't you take the opportunity to ask Zhuo Yunbing for dozens of First-Grade Divine Protection Elixirs?"

"She said she had nothing left on her!" Lin Xuankong responded.

Lii Xiaolan glared at him, obviously displeased that Lin Xuankong hadn't been tough enough with the beautiful woman.

"Women are very good at lying; the more beautiful the woman, the better she lies. How could you believe she had nothing on her without even searching her yourself? What if she hid the elixirs somewhere? First-Grade Divine Protection Elixirs are essential for Martial Cultivators to take after reaching the Third Layer of Perfection. They must consume one approximately every seven days to reduce some of the risks during head tempering! There are four or five families capable of refining First-Grade Divine Protection Elixirs in the Great Marsh Prefecture. They aren't very expensive but do cost around seventy to eighty taels each. You saved that woman's life; it would only have been fair to ask for dozens of elixirs. But in the end, you asked for such a Secret Manual... Do you really intend to learn alchemy with this Secret Manual?"

Lin Xuankong nodded. "Yes, I plan to learn it as a sideline during my Cultivation. If I manage to learn it, even if I don't need the Divine Protection Elixirs myself temporarily, I can give them to others or sell them!"

Lii Xiaolan glanced at him. "Becoming a Pill Master isn't that easy. Even though your speed in Martial Dao Cultivation is fairly... acceptable, you might not have the talent for alchemy! Even if we don't talk about talent, the cost of refining batch after batch of Wasted Elixirs isn't something ordinary Martial Cultivators can afford. Without the wealth and resources of a noble family or a large sect, how could you become a Pill Master? Or will it be decades before we see you successfully refine a batch?"

Lin Xuankong frowned. "Is it that difficult?"

Lii Xiaolan waved her small hand. "Of course. Though, you might get lucky and manage to successfully refine a batch within twenty years!"

After speaking, the Young Lady, who was displeased with him for being too soft on beautiful women, no longer paid attention to the somewhat disheartened Lin Xuankong and elegantly walked upstairs.

Lin Xuankong frowned as he looked at the Secret Manual in his hand, silently thinking: *Decades to successfully refine a batch? It does sound a bit tough!*

However, he didn't need to be discouraged so quickly. Perhaps his Vigorous in Old Age Life Plate could also enhance his elixir refining capabilities! If there's a tens-of-times enhancement, then within a few months, he might casually succeed in alchemy!

Since today's Martial Dao cultivation was completed, and he couldn't go out to the Outer City to catch Flying Thieves at night, he might as well use this time to study the Divine Protection Elixir Refining Manual and see if he could make it work!

Thinking of this, he no longer hesitated. He lit the oil lamp, went back to his small room, lay on the bed, and started to read the Secret Manual.

「...」

「Early the next morning,」

Lin Xuankong first practiced two rounds of the Heart Method, one round of Spiritual Crane Finger, and one round of the Cangsong Posture. Then, he returned to his small room and looked at the thick Secret Manual placed by his wooden bed. Last night, he had read for most of the night, and he had already "devoured" one-third of the thick Secret Manual!

Of course, to memorize all the identification of the Divine Protection Elixir's medicinal ingredients, the processing of herbs, the analysis of medicinal properties,

and the intricacies of alchemy equipment, it should take about three more days. It was uncertain whether his Vigorous in Old Age attribute would be effective then!

After stowing the Secret Manual safely, he was about to leave to search for Flying Thieves in the Outer City, when he heard a KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK at the wooden door. Opening the door, he saw Yang Mountain carrying the Red Tassel Spear.

"Steward, I'm on duty at the garrison today. A disciple under Steward Xu came to inform you to go to the Mule Street Branch; he said there's an important matter!"

Lin Xuankong was somewhat surprised. *A disciple under Steward Xu came to inform me to go to the branch? What important matter could there be?*

After a quick wash, he grabbed a few meat pies the Young Lady had bought after waking up early and hurried towards Mule Street.