

## Daily life 661

### Chapter 661 Price Of Greed (11)

Ling Qi took a moment to recollect himself before he continued with his testimony. Yang Qing being intimately familiar with the burden of guilt having gone through it himself, only too recently, could tell Ling Qi was still clothed in it, but he seemed much better than he was a few seconds ago.

The little interlude seemed to have done him some good for now. But much later, when it was just him and his thoughts, that was something else.

"They didn't mention, but when the tricolored white-eyed tortoise retaliated, Daoist Hua Ying and Daoist Wu Shen took the brunt of its attack while Daoist Xin who has the highest speed, tried to help me avoid what was left.

We still ended up getting caught in it.

The cover they provided was what gave me the chance to use my cultivation spell to try and contain the poison.

From the moment it launched its toxin toward us, I knew it wouldn't be something simple, but I didn't think it would be that bad. It was virulent, beyond anything I've ever seen.

While the Lunar Petal Wave isn't a universal bane against toxins, it is something the sect master, a few elders of the sect, myself, and some alchemists from the Summerfield Kingdom, took the time to refine.

We have continuously refined it over the years and have seen the effort bear fruit. The art forms a water wave with strong detoxifying properties against a good number of poisons including a few potent ones such as the ghost fog poison of the ghost blade mantis or the decaying poison of the decay-spike centipede.

If it can't detoxify the poison, it acts as a barrier that delays or encloses the poisonous substance giving enough time for an escape or counterattack.

When I launched it, I thought to myself that no matter how potent the poison of the tricolored white-eyed tortoise seemed, the Lunar Petal Wave could restrain it, even if for just a few minutes, providing room for Daoist Hua Ying and the rest to counterattack, or even flee if need be.

But it didn't last even a second against it. The poison seemed to have assimilated my art and used it as a medium to spread itself to a wider range.

My greatest achievement and confidence were decimated and used against me in but an instant.

But at least the art had an inadvertent effect on the poison when it mixed, which made the poison slightly heavier giving us a chance to dodge a few of the splashes, but not enough to escape unscathed.

The effects struck instantly with immobilization first, followed by rapid permeation, and then corruption and erosion of our blood and qi, which it used as a conduit to spread to the rest of our bodies.

I have never seen poison spread so fast. It felt almost sentient, especially with how it reacted to all the detoxification measures we used against it.

Anything we used, it seemed to retaliate aggressively, almost as if to warn us against trying anything.

None of the recipes or detoxifying natural materials we had on hand seemed to work on it. It was only when we were at the end of our ropes, did one of the supreme elders of the sect suggested something he had read on a scroll.

It was unverified and highly dangerous. The scroll was a traveling journal of some unknown herbologist. Neither their name nor rank was recorded on the scroll.

Said herbologist liked to tour places in search of exotic herbs, and that search led him to the Green Fog Region..."

Ling Qi paused as his mind seemed to float to that moment which elicited a wry smile from him.

"Only now do I realize, how desperate the situation was..." Ling Qi said with a slight shake of his head, a hint of fear evident on his face.

Wu Shen and the rest joined in, as they smiled fearfully themselves.

Yang Qing filled with curiosity about their reactions asked,

"Why is that?"lights

"The scroll...well...it wasn't exactly a normal one.." Ling Qi said with some slight hesitation born out of embarrassment which only served to draw in Yang Qing's curiosity.

"The scroll was more of the rumblings of someone who thought they were about to die than a standard discovery journal.

It looked like something had happened to the herbologist, and it prompted them to create the scroll. However, it seemed that whatever it was that they were suffering from seemed to affect their mind.

Instead of the scroll containing their legacy or something that one would want to entrust to others before they met their demise, theirs was different. The author was delirious, with thoughts all over the place.

One minute, he would be describing spiritual herb harvesting techniques, the next he would go into vivid details about how he loathed someone by the name of Li Yao who stole someone he liked, and how he would torment him as a ghost, then he would go back to talk about plants, and then jump over to describing whatever symptoms he had with his panic state showing up in the words.

The method used to try and slow down the spread of the tricolored white-eyed tortoise was obtained from those rumblings.

As the author was busy cursing his luck, he did write a few remedies he had thought up that may have worked against the poison that afflicted him, and one of those remedies was fighting a virulent poison with another virulent poison and balancing the reaction with a parasite, specifically a baneblood leech.

I'm surprised the supreme elders were crazy enough to try it considering how deadly the baneblood leech is or using poison to fight off the tricolored white-eyed tortoise's poison.

When I read that scroll, I still can't believe they went through with it. That author had even suggested kidnapping a taotie and forcing it to devour his poison as one of the remedies.

I can't believe they went through with some of his suggestions..but I am glad they did. The sect used the five flames poison to counteract the venom within our bodies and used the baneblood leech as the tether that prevented the two poisons from overrunning our bodies.

The method worked but not completely as the five flame poison and the baneblood leech were unable to completely contain the tricolored white-eyed tortoise's poison.

After six weeks, the five flame poison was drained and the baneblood leech had died. Another batch couldn't be created as it seemed like the poison had evolved, had they tried using the five flame poison or the baneblood leech again, we would have died instantly and in the most violent way possible.

Long Zemin's arrival was timely as we had nothing else to rely on. Despite being an alchemist organization ourselves, our circle of connection is rather small so we couldn't verify his background and could only judge him based on his abilities.

Since we couldn't verify his background and whether he was from the Ocean Refining Crucible Pavilion, the vice sect master thought the only way to measure the man, was through his abilities, so he used some covert means to test his understanding.

He used some of the discoveries they made with the poison to test him out and Long Zemin showed to have extensive knowledge of the matter, extensive enough to entrust our care to him..."

Ling Qi paused as he sighed, his eyes flashing with complex emotions.

"He did heal us and singlehandedly managed to do something our entire sect couldn't. As alchemists ourselves, we intimately understand how wonderous his abilities are, seeing how he handled the venom.

This was why in addition to the resources we agreed to give him, our Moon Essence Cauldron Sect added 30 unique recipes we researched ourselves and a botanical report of the spiritual herbs around the Deer Mountain Range that we have come across since we came here.

We did it not to even repay him for saving our lives but as respect and recognition of his abilities..."

"Ling ..You?" Xin Zephyr asked with a stupefied look. She wasn't the only one as Hua Ying and Wu Shen showed looks of surprise too.

Clearly, they had no idea of the trade the Moon Essence Cauldron Sect had made. What they gave was no different than giving away their legacy art as it the recipes and botanical report were something born out of their blood, sweat, tears, and lives.

They were surprised the Moon Essence Cauldron Sect would hand it over to a stranger, a stranger who conned them at that.

Chapter 662 Price Of Greed (12)

Seeing their looks, Ling Qi cleared his throat awkwardly as he said,

"What he did aside, his skills as an alchemist are the real thing. Dealing with the poison of the tricolored white-eyed tortoise needed astronomical skills, especially considering how far it had spread to our bodies and the tortoise sacrificing its blood essence to make it more potent.

His skills were worthy of our respect as those who know how hard it was to pull off what he did.

Sharing a few alchemy recipes and a botanical report isn't considered much. We would not lose what is contained in them just because we handed them out.

We would still retain the wisdom contained within them, but gifting the two objects to him is our way of showing respect to him as juniors on the same path.

The recipes and the report would achieve so much more in his hands than it would in ours. Who knows some never-before-seen legendary alchemical discovery may come out of what we just shared.

Sharing the recipes and the botanical report was our way of entrusting our hopes to Long Zemin and also thanking him.

But his actions afterward with what he did to our bodies, it was like spitting to our faces. It's the part I can't forgive, even though just like Wu Shen, some part of me is grateful to him and even respects his achievements as a healer, as a fellow practitioner myself.

I can't understand it,...why he did what he did, it just doesn't add up. Why would someone skilled enough to detoxify the venom of a tricolored white-eyed tortoise go through the trouble of healing four strangers from the brink of death, only to do something to their bodies after?

Maybe it's just wishful thinking on my part, but I want to know why he did what he did.."

Ling Qi paused as he turned to face Yang Qing with a solemn expression.

"I beseech for the Order's help in the matter. An answer to why Long Zemin did what he did.."

"We will do all we can.." answered Yang Qing.

"Thank you all for your testimonies. I still can't come to a verdict yet as the other half of this equation is still missing.

But worry not, a colleague of mine is working on it. In the meantime, you can relax as we wait for her, while I make a call..." Yang Qing said as he waved his sleeves and a few lotus cushions appeared in front of the four cultivators who cupped their fists in gratitude.

"By the way, where was your sect master in all this? " Yang Qing suddenly asked, directing his question to Ling Qi.

"Earlier you said it was the vice sect master who went to meet up with Long Zemin. If a figure of such skill appeared in your sect, especially after revealing a token from the Ocean Refining Crucible Pavilion, even if you were not sure if it was real or not, by virtue of the importance of such a matter your sect master should have been the one to meet with Long Zemin after making the appearance.

You also said the method used to contain your poison was done by one of the supreme elders, which seems to elude to the fact that your sect master was absent. Where was he?" asked Yang Qing with a slight glow in his eyes.

Ling Qi looked slightly startled by the question before he answered,

"Our sect master had already left the sect a few months before, to help a friend in handling a complex ingredient.

He wasn't sure how long it would take, he had therefore delegated his duties to the vice sect master and the supreme elders.

When we got stuck by the poison he still wasn't back.."

"Is that so?" Yang Qing ominously asked with a small smile.

"It is.." Ling Qi answered as he tried to hide how nervous he felt beneath Yang Qing's piercing gaze.

"Okay, thanks. You can all rest for a bit. Su Jinjing shouldn't be long.." Yang Qing casually said as he took out his communication talisman.

The four cultivators exchanged glances before they took seats on the futons Yang Qing had provided.

They all simultaneously chose to rest their eyes even though they couldn't meditate.

..

"Yang Qing, this is strange, after you graduated, you rarely call. What is it? Your grandfather isn't looking for more samples from my garden, is he?"

Tell him the last batch I gave him six months ago was the only one I had ready. If he wants more he will have to wait for four more months until the next samples are ripe for harvest, not a moment sooner.

I could have gotten him the samples sooner, but a certain someone is swimming in merit points now, and thus no longer has the time to assist me.."

"Grandpa?!... Wait, Instructor Lu Bei, you mean to tell me Grandpa has been coming to you for those experimental plants?!"

Yang Qing's voice suddenly raised a bit before he hurriedly toned it down while setting up a sound barrier around him and Luo Meili.

"He didn't tell you? I have been supplying him ever since your days at the Institute..."

"Did he tell you what it was for?!" Yang Qing fearfully asked the owner of the voice at the other end of the communication talisman.

"What else if not for his body refinement experiments? He said he noticed my spiritual plants seemed to blend well with other natural stones and minerals they use in the soaking brew. That discovery has helped increase the odds of achieving the gold body.."

"I knew it.." Yang Qing said as he leaned back in his seat with a deflated expression.

Only his grandfather would be crazy enough to use some experimental spiritual herbs grown using refined spiritual metals as fertilizers.

Yang Qing in all his gluttony and natural immunity to poisons was wary of eating even a single fruit from said plants but his grandfather seemed to have been using it for years, and by the looks of it, in large quantities at that.



"Doesn't the Medical Valley monitor what he does? I already told them how dangerous he is." Yang Qing fearfully thought before he decided to push that matter to the back of his mind.

"So if you didn't call about your grandfather, what are you calling about?"

Yang Qing snapping back to reality said,

"I was sent to the Deer Mountain Range to fill in as the temporary Branch Chief.."

"So it was you they sent.." Lu Bei said with a sigh.

"Yes, though it's only for a month before the Judicial Committee decides what to do next after Branch Chief Li Wan and the rest become stable.."

"I don't know much about Li Wan but I have heard he has a will as strong as an immovable boulder. He will likely come back, Hao Da too, I feel, but the last surviving inquisitor, I don't know...it's not easy.."

"That it isn't.." Yang Qing said.

"So what is it you wanted?"

"I have a case that may or may not have ties with the Ocean Refining Crucible Pavilion. I remember you saying you knew one of their founders. I was wondering if you could confirm something for me.

I have two names here, one of them is Long Zemin, and the other is Shi Huan. I wanted to confirm if they are from the pavilion.."

"What did they do?" asked Lu Bei.

Yang Qing went on to explain the gist of the matter as per the testimony given.

"The ambitious heart of cultivators sometimes invites their doom if they blindly follow it... Long Zemin, Shi Huan, there is no one by that name there, but it does have ties to someone there.."

As Lu Bei was talking the doors of the courtroom opened and two figures walked in. One of them was a young lady with short hair, an ordinary-looking face with unique soulful eyes, and a crudely crafted spear in her hands. Next to her, was a middle-

aged man with long flowing silver hair, a genial smile, and an air of nature to him.

The four cultivators sensing the disturbance, looked behind them, and their bodies instantly froze when their gaze fell on the middle-aged man.

"I was told in passing that one of their founders by the name of Li Yao uses those names to roam around the continent. Long Zemin is the name of his junior apprentice-brother, and Shi Huan was the name of their deceased master.

He uses the name Long Zemin to flash out his apprentice brother who curses him out in every book, scroll, talisman, cafe, and inn all over the continent every chance he gets.

They have quite a dysfunctional relationship, those two..

Long Zemin goes around badmouthing Li Yao for ruining his chances with a certain lady, while Li Yao goes around doing all sorts of wondrous deeds under his junior brother's name knowing it will tick him off. I was told it has been going on for almost 2,000 years now," Lu Bei said with a light chuckle.

Chapter 663 Price Of Greed 13)

"Seeing how they are acting, one wouldn't think they were skilled professionals in their respective areas.

Long Zemin is a blue-grade herbologist and zoologist while Li Yao is a blue-grade alchemist and healer.."

Yang Qing whose gaze was on the middle-aged man walking with Su Jinjing asked,

"What about their master?"

"Their master wasn't that skilled. They met him when they were kids. He was more like their adoptive father than their master.

From what Shu Mei told me, their master was in the qi refinement realm and was the one who helped them break through to the body refining stage. Though the best he could help them achieve was the iron body, the rest they learned by themselves after he passed from an injury he sustained when harvesting herbs..."

"Earlier you said Long Zemin isn't from the Ocean Refining Cauldron Pavilion, then how did he reach his level.." asked Yang Qing.

"Despite their dysfunctional relationship, the two apprentice brothers are close. Back when they stumbled onto the legacy of the soul lake alchemist, Long Zemin was with them, it's just that he opted against founding the Ocean Refining Crucible Pavilion with them, and decided to go on his own as a wanderer and adventurer of the Odyssey Horizon Guild.

I've read some of his books. Cursing his apprentice brother aside, his research into spiritual herb care is extensive and he has researched even rare ones like the ones in the Green Fog Region and places similar to it..."

"Instructor Liu Bei thank you for the help. I'll need to go as Su Jinjing has walked with who I presume is Li Yao..."

"Yes, yes, go...when you get time make sure to pass by the farm. I am already at the cusp of a major breakthrough in the plants. I already heard from your grandfather that your abilities have vastly improved from back then. I need your help, Yang Qing.."

"When I'm replaced here, I will make sure to stop by.."

"Great!!"

After ending the call, Yang Qing dispelled the sound barrier around him and Luo Meili, who was just as surprised as him when they realized Long Zemin's background.

"Long Zemin!! You bastard!! You dare show your face here.." said Huo Ying as she shot death glares at the middle-aged man whose response was a light smile accompanied by a polite nod.

Su Jinjing led him to the extreme left next to where Ling Qi from the Moon Essence Cauldron Sect was standing.

Ling Qi was just as shaken as the rest to see him. He clenched and unclenched his fists a couple of times as his mouth opened and closed a few times.

In the end, he let out a sigh of exasperation as he asked,

"Did you trick us?"

"I didn't.." casually answered the middle-aged man still wearing the same smile on his face as he looked at Ling Qi and the rest.

"You all seem to be doing better than I when I last saw you.." he added.

Hua Ying and Xin Zephyr seemed like they were about to explode as they reflexively reached out for their weapons with throbbing veins appearing on their livid faces.

The middle-aged man unperturbed by their murderous glares, sighed as an elder would when they saw a child do something wrong.

Su Jinjing walked ahead to Yang Qing's podium where she had a few exchanges with him via a secret voiceless transmission.

"This is Long Zemin, I found him thanks to senior Ye Xun's help. He was harvesting herbs in the territory of a palace realm Cyan Peacock.

Ye Xun told me he is at the fifth stage of the palace realm himself, and with a very powerful soul, similar to that of a soul cultivator who has reached the late stages of the palace realm.

I thought he was some no name, but this, Qing, I'm sorry but I think we have brought you a complicated case..." Su Jinjing said in an apologetic tone.

"It wasn't intentional, I swear, right Meili.." she added while looking to Luo Meili for support.

Yang Qing couldn't help but chuckle. Su Jinjing always had a pure heart like a child's which got her in no small amount of trouble as she conducted her duties when nefarious cultivators mistook her purity for being gullible.

"Don't worry Jinjing, it's okay, and the case itself isn't as complicated as it seems and he holds the key to everything. If it is as I suspect, I won't even have to do anything.." Yang Qing said as his gaze fell on the middle-aged man whose cyan eyes that were filled with wisdom were looking at him.

"I take it you are Long Zemin, or should I call you, Li Yao, one of the founders of the Ocean Refining Cauldron Pavilion.." Yang Qing said with a smile.

The middle-aged man smiled as he placed his right hand above his chest,

"Seems like my disguise has already been revealed before I even managed to do it myself. While I would like to wear the name Long Zemin a little more, it wouldn't be right for me to use it here, I guess I have no choice but to revert to Li Yao.."

The statement was like a thunderclap that had exploded in the four cultivators' minds as they went wide-eyed, with one of them even trembling.

"F..F...founder.." Ling Qi muttered beset with shock as he stared at the middle-aged man standing next to him with a carefree air and a genial smile on his face.

Hua Ying who had exploded on him just a moment ago turned pale white with a horrified look. She wasn't the only one, as Xin Zephyr shared the same look as her.

The only person who seemed mildly okay was Wu Shen who smiled as he said,

"Figures.."

"I don't know if my colleague managed to fill you in on why you are here?" asked Yang Qing.

"Not all the way through, as we arrived here before she could finish.." Li Yao said as a bitter smile appeared on his face when he recalled how he had just been grabbed out of the blue when he was harvesting a blue mist moss.

A blonde-haired lady appeared before him and before he could react he felt his vision change as he was absorbed into some sort of space.

"So that's what a domain space feels like.." he wondered to himself before he focused back on the court.

"But seeing my young friends here, I can guess why. They probably said I did something to them.." he added as he threw the four cultivators a playful smile.

"They did, but I take it, that's not so. Would you care to share.."

Chapter 664 Price Of Greed (14)

"I don't mind. It's for their sake, right? You must have already seen through it by now.." said Li Yao.

"On their present condition yes, as for the others, I only have a few guesses here and there.." answered Yang Qing.

After a bit of the shock had waned from his body, Ling Qi alternated his gaze between the founder of the Ocean Refining Cauldron Pavilion, and Yang Qing trying to make sense of what they were talking about.

He wasn't the only one who seemed confused by the conversation of the duo as the remaining three cultivators all seemed confused along with Su Jinjing who had just arrived with Li Yao.

"Seeing that you could tell my name, you probably know of my background already, not with the Ocean Refining Crucible Pavilion, but before that.." said Li Yao with a nostalgic gaze.

"I only know of a bit, especially your 2,000-year relationship with your apprentice brother.." Yang Qing said with a light chuckle.

"Looks like Shu Mei sold me out to Instructor Lu Bei.." Li Yao said with a bitter laugh.

"As strange as it may sound, we use it to keep in touch with us wandering in different places for years on end, it's the only way we can find out about each other whilst also telling each other where we are and we are okay.

I know a communication talisman would do the job well, but it's something we got used to. It's hard to change.." added Lu Bei with an awkward smile.

"It's quite the unique way of keeping in touch.." said Yang Qing as he thought the two apprentice brothers were truly cut from the same cloth if badmouthing and impersonating each other was their way of checking in on each other.

"You're not one to judge, Yang. Don't you have the same relationship with Senior Lei Weiyuan.." whispered Su Jinjing.

Yang Qing who had been leaning comfortably on his seat almost fell over backwards from Su Jinjing's words.

It took extreme control to prevent himself from tipping over.

"Jinjing you? Are you cursing me?! What do you mean the same?! Old fiend Lei isn't my brother, nor do we check on each other.. well I do faithfully curse him when I wake up in the morning and eagerly check on him to see if it worked, but that's it..

It is not the same!!"

"Yes, yes, boss...It's not the same.." Su Jinjing said in a pacifying tone.

"Meili, tell her!" Yang Qing pleaded.

"Jinjing, stop teasing him. You know he is not ready to admit it yet..that he enjoys coming to work because of Senior Lei Weiyuan.."

"You?! Forget it.."

Yang Qing seeing that he would easily lose out and get teased endlessly decided to throw in the towel early rather than give them more material to torture him by.

"Jinjing, I thought you were the nice one.. the only ones I can rely on now are Bolin and Haishi.." thought Yang Qing as he made a silent note to take them out to relax at Meifeng's place after the case was done.

The exchange between the trio wasn't long, lasting just a few seconds, ending just about when Li Yao was resuming his testimony.

"Long Zemin and I were orphans when our master found us. We used to do odd jobs here and there, some good, some unsavory. Whatever we could do to get food in our bellies we would do.

It was during one of our escapades that we stumbled upon our master, Shi Tian. This short, scruffy-looking old man with a genial face and old worn robes.



We had not started cultivating at the time, so we couldn't tell he was a cultivator and judged him to be just another passerby who could possibly be our meal ticket for the day either willingly on his part or unwillingly in case he didn't see things our way..."

Li Yao couldn't help but smile as memories of that day flashed in his mind.

"So, me and Long Zemin approached him, playing the part of obedient and curious little kids with saint hearts looking to help a stranger in an unfamiliar place.

Our master played along and even gave us a few silver coins for showing him around a place where there wasn't much to see, and we even made plans the next day to take him to the neighboring small forest to help him pick some herbs.

We embellished and oversold our expertise in that area. We did know the forest intimately, not because of its components, but because it was the best place to mug someone, especially a weak-looking stranger from out of town.

The next day arrived, me and Long Zemin had been sleepless the previous night as we stayed up all night giggling about how we were going to take our master for all we could, the moment we stepped into the forest.

The flawless and easiest robbery we expected to happen transformed into one of the most flawless beatings we have ever received.." Li Yao said with a slightly scared smile.

"Though Long Zemin cried more than I that day. I didn't know he could yell that much.." he added with a cheeky laugh.

Yang Qing nodded in appreciation of Li Yao's strict adherence to the petty dao. As an occasional dabbler of the particular dao, Yang Qing respected Li Yao's commitment and discipline in it.

Even when giving his testimony, he didn't forget to pull his brother a peg or two down.

"After receiving a beating that could last us several lifetimes, our master made us his assistants for herb picking, and what started off as something temporary, that would last maybe a few days ended up lasting years.

Two rough-looking kids who didn't know any better and couldn't see beyond their next meal ended up seeing and experiencing more than they could have imagined, and it was all thanks to our master.

He was temperamental, easily embarrassed, loved his face a little too much, a shameless braggart, and too stingy even with things he shouldn't be stingy about but despite his numerous, oh-so-numerous flaws, neither I nor Long Zemin would be here today if it wasn't for him.

He gave us an opportunity to a life we would have never had a chance to see if left to our own devices and expanded the scope of what we knew.

He wasn't that good at herbology but even though he wasn't good at it, he loved learning about it.

Just because you were not good at something doesn't mean you can't love it he always said, so he moved from place to place studying all sorts of plants he could come across.

To him, plants were a marvel, they were stuck in the same place but for immobile things, they were the most adaptable things he had ever met.

They could endure and transform themselves to adapt to whatever was thrown at them. He admired their resilience and grace because they could also transform the area around them into something better, something that wasn't only beneficial to themselves but to those around them.

It was the reason he took us in. I'm not sure if he was just bragging at the time, but he said he could tell we were talented from the moment he laid his eyes on us.

He knew for him, Qi refinement was the highest he would ever get and before his time came, he hoped just like the plants he so admired, he could maybe emulate them and transform the life of someone and give them a chance at something.

He did that..." Li Yao said with a somber sigh.

"even at the cost of his life, he did it just like the plants he admired, he provided an opportunity for two rough buds that were destined to shrivel to overturn their fate and grow into something they didn't think possible.." he added.

Chapter 665 Price Of Greed (15)

After a brief pause, Li Yao continued,

"After he passed, to honor his life, we lived it as he did, which was travel from place to place taking in the sights and studying the local flora whether it was valuable or not.

Gradually Long Zemin and I developed our own interests during the travels.

Long Zemin had the same fondness as Master did for spiritual plants and he added spirit beast zoology into the mix too, specifically insect spirit beasts.

As for me, I don't know if it was guilt...Our master died from succumbing to injuries he sustained from a blackscale centipede.

He had gone to search for a particular herb that would help us breakthrough from the iron body to the bronze body and got injured in the process.

The injuries were severe and no matter where we went, or how much we begged, no one was willing to help us, and we could only watch him as his life flowed out of him.

I could never forget that day no matter how much I tried. I think that's why Zemin decided to study insect-based spirit beasts as for me, my interest went into alchemy and healing.

We traveled from place to place, honing our craft with whatever resources we could find or afford, and it was in that journey that we met the other founders of the Ocean Refining Cauldron Pavilion, who had been wandering for reasons of their own.

We teamed up and managed to form a deep bond. Those years were not easy, especially for rootless weeds like us with no background, but they were worthwhile nonetheless and eventually, we stumbled onto a mysterious realm that completely altered our fates.

Our master's sacrifice wasn't in vain.." Li Yao said with a smile that was a mixture of regret and relief.

"With what we obtained we were able to improve in leaps and bounds to where we are today. I decided to create the Ocean Refining Crucible Pavilion in the hopes that just like Master, I would be able to transform the lives of those around me, while Long Zemin decided to roam the continent, just like Master did, and write books and journals on his discoveries while he was at it.

He ended up joining the Odyssey Horizon Guild. As for me, even though I had the Pavilion, I still traveled whenever I could, and instituted that requirement to the Pavilion as a way to keep the flames of my master alive.

And said travels brought me here under my traveling identity of Long Zemin.

I was walking about when I detected a particular aura that reminded me of Zemin. That aura came from that young man's sect, the Moon Essence Cauldron Sect.." Li Yao said as he pointed toward Ling Qi.

"Using five flame poison, and baneblood leech to contain the poison of the tricolored white-eyed tortoise is something Zemin would have done.

He had refined the art of fighting poison with poison. Due to how much time he spends in the Green Fog Region, with how poisonous its inhabitants are, he quickly and painfully found out how difficult it is to detoxify the venom of most of its inhabitants through normal means and that's how he accidentally discovered using one poison to counteract the other when he got bit by two different creatures in that swamp.

Over time, he refined the process, and what I saw at the Moon Essence Cauldron Sect had the earmarkings of his work.

Other than our unique means of checking up on each other, I hadn't seen him in fifteen years, so on detecting one of his techniques, on a wistful whim, I decided to see his technique in action so I could give him an earful of its shortcomings in person.

In character, I met with the elders of the sect, and as a thank you for them letting me see my junior apprentice's technique, I decided to heal them.

It was when I was healing them that I discovered something else lurking within their bodies that I had seen with a few occupants of this range.

They were tainted with the curse of the graveyard torch.." said Li Yao.

"There is one here?!" Yang Qing asked in surprise.

"There is. It is not a big one, but there is one, and the four of them must have interacted with an inheritance enlightenment blood crystal from there.

Unlike the others who had passive effects from the curse, they had a high concentration of it, they likely knew what they were handling.

If it weren't for seeing them use my junior brother's technique, I would have left them to their own devices.." Li Yao coldly said, with his earlier genial look vanishing, as was replaced by an austere face.

The sudden change in Li Yao made the four cultivators suddenly flinch as they felt a fearsome undercurrent that would destroy them both body and soul, in but an instant.

"A graveyard torch huh...no wonder the two spirit beasts who would normally not be caught together, appeared simultaneously outside of their territory and attacked them, with one of them even going to the extent of sacrificing its blood essence.

They're lucky it's just those two.." muttered Yang Qing in mild surprise as his gaze fell on the four.

"Are you that desperate to join the Deer Mountain Kingdom?" he gently asked, directing his question to the four cultivators, who had lowered their heads in shame.

"We don't have an option. We can't move away from this place, and staying here has been getting harder by the year. The spirit beasts seem to be getting stronger, and soon we may be overrun.

Our only option is to join the Deer Mountain Kingdom, but we can't do it without one of us reaching the palace realm.

Using the crystals is the only way we can achieve it in the shortest time possible.." answered Hua Ying in a guilt-ridden tone.

Yang Qing sighed as he said,

"You don't understand the gravity of what you're dealing with here. If the Kingdom knew it, I don't know if they'd accept you, even if one of you becomes a palace realm expert.

What you have done is no different than declaring yourselves the enemy of every single spirit beast that inhabits this place.

Not even the Deer Mountain Kingdom can protect you from them if they decide to punish you for what you did.."

Chapter 666 Price Of Greed (16)

As Yang Qing said those words it was like the courtroom had been plunged into an abyss as the four cultivators stood rooted in fear.

Yang Qing couldn't help but sigh when he saw their dumbfounded looks. What they did was a case of a newborn calf not being afraid of the tiger or greed blinding them to the dangers around them.

All they could see was them having one of their own use the inheritance enlightenment blood crystals to break through to the palace realm and move to safety in the Deer Mountain Kingdom.

But what they did, assuming they didn't end up dying from having prolonged contact with the crystals was put a bull's eye on their collective backs which would follow them everywhere regardless of whether they got into the Deer Mountain Kingdom or not.

In fact such a thing would have doomed the Deer Mountain Kingdom which was already in a precarious position even further.

"You've lived here for so long, how could you not have realized the danger of what you were doing," Yang Qing muttered still in disbelief.

"Who from the Deer Mountain Kingdom made that offer to you?" asked Yang Qing.

After a brief pause from shock, Hua Ying answered,

"His name was Jia Shun, he said he was the Imperial Secretary of the Deer Mountain Kingdom. I have seen images of him before so I believe it was him.."

After a slight hesitation, Hua Ying added,

"He was also the one who informed us of places we could find the crystals.."

"The Imperial Secretary? You're sure?" asked Yang Qing with a frown.

"Yes, I am sure it was him.." answered Hua Ying with a look of confusion and wariness on her face when she saw Yang Qing's consternation.

"Seems like you know the Imperial Secretary?" said Li Yao when he saw Yang Qing's look.

"I only met the person for a day, but from my impression of him, he is not one to do such a thing as making such a suggestion is tantamount to risking the safety of the Kingdom, which is something he would never do even if the King commanded him to do so, he would likely not do it.." said Yang Qing.

The Imperial Secretary went as far as divulging the condition of the king's grandfather without the King's knowledge or permission, all so that the kingdom could not descend into further turmoil.

Such an act though well-meaning, at a different angle, could be considered a betrayal as the Imperial Secretary divulged something vital and sensitive concerning the King, and he did so behind his back and without his express permission.

Yang Qing could tell the Imperial Secretary had an internal struggle on the matter, but he still did it because of his dedication to his kingdom.

Would such a person tell a bunch of strangers to go harvest inheritance enlightenment blood crystals knowing full well such a thing would likely invite disaster to their kingdom?

Yang Qing didn't think so. He felt the four organizations were likely duped by someone pretending to be the Imperial Secretary.

Considering both organizations lacked a palace realm expert, any palace realm expert with decent beguiling and transformation techniques would easily trick them without them even knowing.

"Sorry to say this, but I think you were misled. I don't know the Imperial Secretary too much but I am certain he would not give you such information for you to make use of.

Whoever did, I can only assume did so in the hopes that the ensuing consequences that you would invite, would drag the Deer Mountain Kingdom into said troubles..." Yang Qing said as he drummed his index finger at the table with gears turning in his mind.

"It is actually a good plan, really when you think about it. They feed you the information under the guise of the Imperial Secretary, you make use of said information and maybe successfully break through into the palace realm.

Regardless of whether the Imperial Secretary made the offer or not, the Deer Mountain Kingdom would not reject having another palace realm expert within their ranks and since it is taboo to pry into each other's secrets, they would likely not ask how you actually managed to breakthrough into the palace realm.



After successfully being integrated into the kingdom, you would likely be given territory at the fringing on the body, the frontier territories.

When calamity strikes because of what you did, and indeed it may, you will be the first to bear the brunt of it from the border before it spreads to the rest of the kingdom.

Your chances of survival is likely to be low because whoever set this whole thing into motion will likely want to cover their own tracks and involvement.

If you don't die to the vengeful spirit beasts, you will likely die at their hands, through underhanded means of course, or a legitimate one like say being accused of inviting calamity to their kingdom.

The perfect scapegoat and poisonous dagger to use against the kingdom and no one would be the wiser that this was someone's well-crafted plan.." said Yang Qing as he clasped his hands together.

"As occupants of this place, surely you know about the graveyard's torch, right?" asked Yang Qing bringing the four cultivators out of their stupor.

"W..we h..have.." answered Ling Qi in a stuttering voice.

"Considering what you did, I'm guessing what you know is particularly limited.." said Yang Qing with his gaze falling on the four.

"Graveyard's torch.. the resting grounds of spirit beasts who hope to nurture the next generation, hence the name torch.."

Yang Qing paused as he leaned forward.

"Consider this information a gift so next time, if there is a next time for you all, remember to act with propriety.

When a spirit beast dies, the norm is for them to be cannibalized by another spirit beast. It can either be willingly or unwillingly. It's their way of life as they do grow stronger by cannibalizing each other, after all.

However, not all of them go through this route. Some when they reach the end of their tether either through old age or a fatal injury they can't heal, go to a place, a special place that has the blessing of the land.

Usually, the spirit beasts who go there are those without close relationships, recluses so to speak, though even those with close relationships have been known to go to such a place.

That place serves as their resting place. When they reach there, they slowly disintegrate their bodies along with their wisdom pearls.

All their attainments, and everything that made them, them, is released into that place so it could serve as a foundation for the next generation of spirit beasts..."

Yang Qing opened his palm and within and around it, there was a swirl of mystical lights and fog that combined to form a hallowed ground. It was green, silent carrying the weight of remnant wills.

Spirit beasts of all kinds appeared within that hallowed ground, with a tranquil look to them they disintegrated into tiny mots of light which combined with other mots of light as if guided by an otherworldly force, they combined to form pristine red crystals that had ethereal lights swirling within it.

"Those spirit beasts give back, they give everything they have ever achieved and gained; their attainments, their bodies and souls. That act garners them the respect and acknowledgment of the world itself, which in respect for their actions, provides the force required to store their sacrifice for eternity until it meets the fated person as a respect of their will.

That embodied will is these blood crystals. They are no different from dao natural treasures as they have been baptized by it upon receiving the acknowledgment and respect of the world.

If you gather a sufficient amount, you can indeed use them to break through to the palace realm as they are known to induce enlightenment in cultivators.

However, despite those crystals being usable even by humans, they are not ours to take, and in doing so, we spit on the sacrifice of those spirit beasts.

Spirit beasts more often than not don't see eye to eye and are ruthless against each other, but when it comes to the graveyard torch, their thoughts and attitudes are one. It is a place of honor and respect.

They will never fight in that place, no matter how deep the hatred. Every feral instinct they have is instantly quelled from the moment they step into that place.

You taking those crystals is no different than desecrating the heritage of every spirit beast around the world. You can imagine what they will do to you when they find out.

I reckon the two spirit beasts you fought against must have already caught the scent.

Other than the potential risk of annihilation.."

Yang Qing paused as he held his chin as one of the crystals in the swirling image on his palm suddenly enlarged from pea-

sized to the size of a mango seed.

"Not just anyone can handle these crystals. These crystals contain the embodied will of those spirit beasts, and if anyone other than a spirit beast tries to use it or steal it, those wills form a traceless curse that slowly consumes the life force of all who get into contact with it.

It's called the curse of the graveyard torch. It's silent just like that hallowed ground, and you would never realize you were cursed up until your death and when you die, your bodies will turn into these crystals.."

Chapter 667 Price Of Greed (17)

The four cultivators grew even paler when they heard the ramifications from Yang Qing. Hua Ying seemed the most struck of the four. She seemed like she wanted to flee the place. She wasn't the only one, as Ling Qi exhibited the same level of distress like he had somewhere he desperately had to get to.

Their reaction more or less confirmed to Yang Qing that the leaders of their respective organizations more than likely handled the inheritance enlightenment blood crystals.

"You touched taboo power.." Yang Qing ominously said as he dispelled his technique.

"As known with taboo power, once you get in touch with it, there is usually a price to be paid.

Lucky for you four, Pavilion Master Li Yao helped you pay something small for what you did.

You shaved off a bit of their life essence and a natural treasure born out of a variated form of life dao. Considering they had not used the crystals themselves, losing a bit of their lifespan and the treasure as a reactant, was enough to quell the curse.." said Yang Qing as he faced Li Yao.

"You are right, Judge Yang Qing. I'm amazed you were able to tell all that with just a glance. I'm in awe with the depth of your insight.." Li Yao said with genuine admiration in his tone.

"It's nothing much, it just happens that I am a little more sensitive than most to certain energies and auras.." Yang Qing said as he waved his hands.

He wasn't playing at being humble, as his yin-yang jade bones did make him sensitive to things that touched upon the life dao.

From the moment he laid eyes on the four he could feel something off with their lifespans.

The only thing he wasn't certain of, was the reason why. Before he knew of Li Yao's identity, he had surmised that maybe Li Yao may have been a fiendish cultivator siphoning lifespans from the unsuspecting.

But when he heard of the curse of the graveyard torch, the affected lifespan of the four, made sense.

Normally human cultivators would avoid the graveyard torch because of the trouble it would bring. Messing with one would invite an eternal enmity of every spirit beast living in the area or even ones that have ever lived in the area and then there was also the curse to consider.

Most would avoid the inheritance enlightenment blood crystals despite their ability to help a cultivator induce a state of epiphany that enables them to gain insight into the dao.

Of course, some were reckless and desperate and would thus ignore the risks involved. Those who did this usually had nothing else to lose, for example, old cultivators reaching the end of their lifespans whose only shot at reaching the next level was those crystals.

Those cultivators wouldn't care if they ended up getting cursed, or put a bull's eye on their back from the spirit beasts living in the area. To them, they were dying anyway and didn't have anything to lose.

Then there were those like the four cultivators before him, those whose recklessness was driven by not knowing enough along with ambition, greed, and a little bit of desperation.

Because of the insatiable depths of human greed, cultivators managed to find a workaround on how to properly harvest those crystals without suffering the backlash. A skilled alchemist, someone with a top-tier wood element physique, someone with a karmic treasure, someone with skilled with a variated form of either the life dao or death, they would be able to overcome the challenges associated with the crystals, and there were even remedies for those who got cursed.

One of the remedies was called the yin-yang life conversion tribute where two energies would be used to offset the cost of the curse. The two energies were yin and yang in nature just like the name. The cursed person provided the yin, while the yang was an external treasure filled with natural yang energy that was dense in life, the denser the better because the more dense it was, the less the yin energy the cursed would have to pay.

Yang Qing's unique physique predisposed him as the ultimate bane of that curse. Were he the one who performed the treatment on the four, they would not have had to pay a price for it.

This also meant he could harvest the crystals without fear or knowledge of some specific harvesting skill to eliminate the risk of getting cursed. His body was completely immune to its curse.

Though even if it was easy for him to acquire the crystals, his conscience would never allow him to do so, the same way sentient spirit beasts never raided the ancestral tombs of humans despite their feud.

It was a line neither side, crossed.

Of course, there were exceptions to the rule. It wasn't common knowledge, but there were differences among the graveyards, and there was a unique one among them that was capable of inciting the greed of even the morally bound cultivators.

What made that graveyard unique was the formation of the eight-petal ascendant concentrated rose. A rose that grew at the center of the graveyard. The rose had eight different colored petals, with each petal containing a refined form of dao.

The rose was capable of creating eight domain experts, one for each petal. Such a bounty was capable of eroding whatever conscience a person had.

Had such a rose been present where the four organizations went, he did not doubt that the Deer Mountain Kingdom even with all the troubles facing it, would have risked acquiring that rose, no matter the consequences.

"I wonder if that story is true.." wondered Yang Qing as the tribulation of the domain realm tested not only one's accumulations but one's spirit. He wondered if people who robbed a hallowed grave to advance themselves would be able to overcome such a tribulation.

To him doing such a thing meant you were not confident of reaching it by yourself. With such doubts swirling within you, would you be able to face a tribulation known to have the highest mortality across all known realms?

Yang Qing had his doubts, though he knew his reasoning had loopholes within it. Cultivators robbing graves wasn't anything new. Ruins and mysterious realms could be considered as burial grounds in some way. The ascension of a cultivator was steeped in bloodshed and death, what did robbing the sacred ground of spirit beasts matter to them, they would likely rob their ancestor's grave if it gave them a shot at power.

Pushing those morbid thoughts aside, Yang Qing focused his attention on the four cultivators.

"The reason your bodies' felt different was because of the treatment technique cast on you. The treatment consumes two things to rid you of the curse, one is a treasure and the other is your lifespan, the grade of the treasure determines how much lifespan is consumed.."

Reading the leading cue from Yang Qing, Li Yao continued,

"Since they had not been in contact with the crystals for long, I used the vitality spectrum dahlia as the yang treasure. Its grade is at the top tier of sky grade, which looked like it needed just a few hundred years of absorbing pure yang energy for it to reach the monarch grade..."

The four, especially Ling Qi who knew the value of that flower, looked dumbfounded before shame started creeping in.

Li Yao laughed slightly at their reactions and said,

"Don't worry I only used a few shavings of it and not the complete thing. Even if I was a bit sentimental at seeing my junior apprentice brother's technique on display, that feeling wasn't enough for me to burn an entire vitality spectrum dahlia on you.."

Ling Qi's, Hua Ying's, and Xin Zephyr's faces instantly burned red in embarrassment.

"With the help of the shavings, the yin cost was cut down to three years. Even though three years isn't much to cultivators like yourselves, losing it in a single moment leaves an impact on the body that requires some time to heal from.

Losing three years' worth of your life essence is essentially you losing your ability to live those three years. Other than maintaining the basic instincts that keep your body functioning, you lose everything else like being able to cultivate or meditate.

For such a loss, the healing time ratio is usually 1:0.5. That means you will gain full functionality of your bodies in one and half years, one year, and four months to be exact since two months have already passed by.

Of course, there are ways to shorten that period, but you need ascendant-grade treasures for that which sadly I don't have.." said Li Yao as he exaggeratedly showed the empty pockets of his robes.

An air of silence and awkwardness descended into the courtroom. Other than Wu Shen, the other three cultivators looked out of sorts like they were standing on flaming coal that was slowly burning their feet, especially Hua Ying, who couldn't even look up as her head hung low filled with shame and trepidation.

Since the case started, she had been the most vocal, not hiding her anger toward Li Yao. Filled with such venom, before the whole matter was revealed, there was no doubt she would have attacked Li Yao with reckless abandon given the chance.

But here she was, the man she had likely tortured several times in her mind over the past two months for swindling her, was, in fact, her benefactor who not only healed them of the venom of the tricolored white-eyed tortoise but also cured them of a curse they didn't even know they had.

And the surprise didn't stop there, the 'scammer' was the founder of a rank 3 alchemist organization, a seasoned blue- grade alchemist and healer, and a palace realm expert to boot.

Whether it was her, or the entire Hua Clan, no one was worthy of meeting such a huge figure let alone getting personally healed by him and yet she was, and what she did as a thank you was curse about him to anybody who would listen, and she even had the guts to display killing intent when he walked into the courtroom. She even had half a mind to hire an assassin to get rid of him after the case because of how livid she was with him robbing her of her ability to use her bloodline techniques.

It was the worst misunderstanding and blunder she could ever make, a blunder that could consign her clan to oblivion.

Then there was also the matter of being tricked by someone impersonating the Imperial Secretary of the Deer Mountain Kingdom to consider, and the death warrant they had signed for themselves because of those crystals.



Surviving without every spirit beast out for their heads was already hard enough, how harder would it be now that they had desecrated their hallowed ground even if they were misled into doing it?

"And to think three months ago I thought the Hua clan's rise was all but guaranteed. The patriarch would make use of the blood crystals with the refinement help from sect master Zhu Jian from the Moon Essence Cauldron Sect.

He would breakthrough to the palace realm, and we would get the rights to live in the Deer Mountain Kingdom, where we would no longer have to look over our shoulders. Living in constant fear that we would end up in some spirit beast's stomach at any moment even within our own grounds.

When the tricolored white-eyed tortoise arrived, I thought even the heavens were in support of us by sending such a treasure trove to our doorstep.

Who would have thought it was the gates of damnation beckoning us.."Li Yao thought as her frame grew weaker and desolate by the second.

Before she could sink further into despair, Yang Qing cleared his throat to grab their attention.

The four cultivators looked up.

"With all facts on hand, the whole matter is now evident and I shall now pass the verdict.

I, Yang Qing, in my capacity as a judge and the Branch Chief of the Deer Mountain Branch, finding all materials presented meeting the threshold for a clear judgment do declare Li Yao, the pavilion master of the Ocean Refining Crucible Pavilion innocent of all accusations against him brought on by Xin Zephyr of the Xin clan, Hua Ying of the Hua Clan, Wu Shen of the Flowing Fist Sect, and Ling Qi of the Moon Essence Cauldron Sect.

The case is hereby closed.." Yang Qing said as he brought his gavel down.

Even though the sound made by the gavel was a low one, to the four cultivators it was like the drum of hell had been sounded and Yang Qing's next words didn't help either.

"My guess is you picked up those crystals for someone in the Hua clan to use them to break through to the palace realm.

He may be cursed already.." Yang Qing paused as his gaze fell slightly on Pavilion Master Li Yao who shook his head.

"Helping them once is the best I can do, the rest they will have to handle themselves.." said the Pavilion Master.

Hua Ying looked like she was about to collapse. Ever since she found out about the dangers of the crystal, among the hundreds of concerns that popped up, her clan patriarch's condition had been high up. She didn't expect Li Yao to help them again after their behavior but hearing the outright denial made her sink further into despair.

"Well, that's that..His condition aside, your four organizations need to think very carefully about what to do next.

You have made an enemy of the entire spirit beasts in this place and I can tell you, they are much scarier and more powerful than the Deer Mountain Kingdom..much much stronger....they are the overlords of this place and what you did is an affront to them that they would not let go.

If the red pine flame porcupine and the tricolored white-eyed tortoise found you, you can be sure the rest are not that far behind, it's just a matter of time.

Considering the nature of your actions, as it is taboo, the Order can not step in as this is no different than a blood feud between you and the spirit beasts of the Deer Mountain Range.

My advice to you is to leave, leave immediately, and don't linger as every second you remain here, you risk the complete annihilation of your respective organizations.

Stay and your fate is all but guaranteed to end in death, if you leave maybe you might have a chance at life.." Yang Qing said with an austere tone.

"Where will we go?" Xin Zephyr weakly asked with a bleak look.

"Anywhere but here.." Yang Qing said with a sigh.

"Removing the curse cost you something, and surviving will cost you another. Decide what price you want to pay, because one way or another, it will be collected. Sadly, there is no escaping it, and it will be steep," he added.

Chapter 668 As Long As You're Alive, There Is Always A Chance

The four didn't need Yang Qing's reminder of how dire bordering on catastrophic their situation had been but his words nonetheless made their impending doom seem much more real than some abstract thing that they were half hoping wasn't true.

Hua Ying looked to be the most affected of all. A couple of times her legs looked like they were about to give out, and she couldn't conceal the dread in her eyes. She was pale, sweaty, and looked just about to vomit.

The healing period of the life essence that was sucked out for the remedy of the curse of the graveyard torch turned out to be a blessing in disguise for her. Without being able to cultivate, or meditate meant that she was essentially a non-cultivator and was therefore not at risk of her qi turning erratic because of how unbalanced she was.

All she had was an accelerated heart rate increased perspiration and maybe a bout of nausea and dizziness which were child's play in comparison to what qi deviation would do to her body or if her mental demons were triggered.

The four cultivators slowly walked out each lost in their thoughts.

Yang Qing seemed hesitant about something but ultimately decided to go through with it.

"Wu Shen...Don't turn just continue walking.." Yang Qing said as he used his palace sense to transmit his words to Wu Shen without notice from the other three.

As a palace realm master himself, Li Yao did detect the undulations of a palace sense being deployed, but he didn't say anything only throwing a curious glance at the group of four.

Wu Shen whose legs had jerked slightly from the appearance of Yang Qing's voice in his mind, quickly regained firmness in his steps as he continued walking, heeding Yang Qing's suggestion.

"Earlier you said when Pavilion Master Li Yao healed you, you felt like he had preserved a vital part of you. You were right, his intervention managed to protect something. He protected your budding dao heart.

I bet for some time now you could already feel that whenever you executed your fist art it felt vastly different from what it normally was. Like they were guided by some mystical force.

Your fist felt like it had a soul of its own so to speak.."

Wu Shen subtly inclined his head to show his agreement with Yang Qing's assessment.

"That feeling is evidence that you have started to develop a fist intent which I am sure you have heard, but that doesn't happen without a dao heart being established.

Dao hearts can be established in different ways, but the reason I mention it is that one of those ways is through the influence of a cultivation art.

Cultivation arts that are at the blue grade and above have this ability. The deeper the understanding a cultivator has towards them the easier it becomes for them to form a dao heart as a consequence of it.."

Wu Shen inadvertently paused with a look of confusion on his face. He knew the cultivation art they practiced was definitely not a blue-grade one.

Seeing his confusion, Yang Qing added,

"Other than cultivation arts that are at the blue grade and above, there is another type that can do the same thing...a growing cultivation art, which is what I suspect your cultivation art to be..."

Without waiting for Wu Shen's confusion to grow, Yang Qing continued,

"This is purely my conjecture, Cultivation arts are born out of a cultivator's interpretation and understanding of the mysteries of the world around them.

The grade of the art is influenced by the level of understanding that they have which is why there are different ranks to them.

Cultivation arts ultimately to me are an abstract representation of the truths that the cultivators see around them. The more truths they glean, the better and more profound the cultivation art, as it is a reflection of it.

But you see, there are times as cultivators, when we feel something, some truth that is just at our fingertips but we can't fully grab hold of it. Something within us tells us there is something there but our minds are not yet caught up to what our ethereal senses are picking up.

Growing arts are a product of that state. They're arts that have long since met the requirements of being baptized by one of the mysterious truths and have just fallen short of one single step. That step is opening the door to the mysteries it guides to.

The key is already there in the art, it just needs someone who knows it well enough and to the door it points towards.

As long as you or anyone from your sect deepens their understanding of your cultivation art, eventually, you will see that door, that door that has eluded most, the door to the palace realm.

You don't need the inheritance enlightenment blood crystals, nor do you need to ride the coattails of someone else who you think has better chances than you at producing a palace realm expert.

Your chances of reaching that level are much much higher as long as you are willing to assiduously walk on the path your cultivation art is guiding you toward.

As to why I'm telling you all this, let's just say I have a sentimental spot for cultivation arts, and I am curious to see what heights yours will reach rather than it getting buried in the annals of time.

I don't know what your friends from the Xin Clan, Hua Clan, or the Moon Essence Cauldron Sect will decide, but for you, your sect has a choice at a life outside of here.

Even if starting over is difficult, for you it will be slightly easier as long as you have your cultivation art. You will be able to gain a solid footing.

Like I told your compatriots, the waters of the Deer Mountain Range are dangerously deep, deep to the point that even the Deer Mountain Kingdom cannot guarantee its safety.

Choose wisely, and if you don't know where to head, you can try the territory of the Diamond Body Sect, they will relish the opportunity of having your sect in their territory. It's a fair distance away from here, but you can use mercenary escorts to guide you there.

I would recommend the Wind Gliding Mercenary Escorts. As long as you're alive, there is always a chance, don't forget that. That is all.." Yang Qing said as he disconnected his palace sense from Wu Shen.

They were already at the boundary of the array that covered the branch. Wu Shen took the lead and bowed in gratitude to both Li Yao and Yang Qing.

The other three emulated his actions, but they seemed distracted even while doing it. After their gratitude, they all turned and left, each to decide with their respective organizations what was next for them.

Chapter 669 Trade With Li Yao

"Seems like you favored one of them?" Li Yao curiously said as his gaze fell on the disappearing silhouettes of the four cultivators.

"Not so much favor, it's more of being willful so I have as few regrets as possible.." answered Yang Qing.

"Understandable.." said Li Yao with a smile.

"Thank you for your assistance with the case. I hope you were not interrupted in the middle of something vital.." said Yang Qing with an apologetic smile.

Su Jinjing had already informed him that it was Ye Xun who found Li Yao and brought him over.

Knowing her, Yang Qing felt she likely swallowed him within her domain space the moment she saw him regardless of what Li Yao may have been doing. Yang Qing felt the stoic gold eagle guard wasn't the most socially sensitive person.

Li Yao's eyes flashed briefly as he recalled the experience before he smiled awkwardly.

"No, I wasn't doing anything of note. Just admiring the scenery and taking notes of a few herbs here and there."

Yang Qing noticed the awkwardness in Li Yao's demeanor but didn't say anything about it.

"Once more, on behalf of the Order, I'd like to thank you for your time and assistance on the case.." Yang Qing said as he cupped his fists.

"It's nothing much. It was my pleasure. I have never been to one of these. It was quite the experience.." Li Yao said as he cupped his fists back.

"What you told them about the dangers of this place...Is it that dangerous?" asked Li Yao as he turned to face the scene outside of the branch, his gaze seemingly piercing thousands upon thousands of kilometers from the area where they stood.

Yang Qing seeing no need to hide it, answered,

"Extremely. Earlier you said you've been here for a few months, right?"

"I did.."

"Then you must have felt the violent fluctuations that appeared about a month ago.."

"Everyone around the range must have felt it. With how terrifying they were, I had fled close to the border for fear of attracting their attention.

I still can't believe there were such terrifying spirit beasts around. Even without seeing it in person, I could feel its terrifying abilities, and it just wasn't one.

Late-stage spirit beasts...How has the Deer Mountain Kingdom remained standing all this time.." said Li Yao with some wariness.

"Luck, a whole amount of luck.." answered Yang Qing with memories of his conversation with Meifeng flashing in his mind.

"Those spirit beasts..are they still around?"

"No, they are not, but there are others that are more powerful than them still lurking around..." said Yang Qing.

"Do be careful where you wander around the range, stay especially clear of the southeastern region, there is peak palace realm spirit beast there. Though it's currently in seclusion, but, I'd still advise steering clear of that area. One can never be too sure.." added Yang Qing.

"Thank you for the reminder.." said Li Yao with a solemn expression.

He had misjudged the danger level of the Deer Mountain Range and thought with his fifth stage palace realm cultivation base, he could go anywhere leisurely taking in the sights and collecting spirit herbs.



He was gallivanting around a lion's den without even realizing it.

"By the way, pavilion master Li Yao, how familiar are you with the Deer Mountain Kingdom?" asked Yang Qing.

"Not much, though we do have some dealings with the Song family from there. We procure various herbs and certain unique potions from them. It was one of the reasons I decided to come here in the first place.

This region is filled with unique herbs, half of which I've never heard of, as they are unique to this region. Similar to the Green Fog Region.

I felt the urge to come and study them and the number was larger than I could imagine. I had planned to spend four months, but it has already been eight.

I would like to stay some more, but with your news, I don't think that would be wise.." Li Yao said with a sigh of regret.

"Well, I doubt it would be that dangerous. As long as you share a bit of your findings with us, we could guarantee your safety during your team here if you want.." Yang Qing said with a mercantile smile.

"Deal!!" Li Yao said without hesitation filled with enthusiasm, that it caught Yang Qing slightly off guard.

He had expected Li Yao to agonize over it a little.

"Haven't you agreed to it a little too fast? Shouldn't you think over it a little?" asked Yang Qing.

"Fast? I don't think so. I was already planning to write a book based on some of my findings and share it with the Jade Leaf Academy. One way or another, the information would have still ended up in your hands.

I am the one benefitting here. I have my safety guaranteed by a monolithic figure like the Order to do what I love. With your protection, I can wholeheartedly pour my whole energy into researching the spiritual herbs in this place..!" Li Yao said with visible excitement.

His hands were even trembling from the excitement. He looked like he couldn't wait to start roaming about the range while collecting samples.

"On behalf of the Order, it will be a pleasure working with you..." Yang Qing said as he extended his hand for a handshake with Li Yao.

"To a fruitful partnership." Li Yao said with a blissful smile plastered on his face.

"I will tell my colleagues of the deal, so they can keep track of you after you leave here.."

"Thank you...thank you!!" Li Yao said as he remembered the domain expert who brought him here.

A hint of pride couldn't help but well up within him.

"A domain expert as my bodyguard. Zemin is bound to vomit blood with envy when he hears this. He's liable to think I'm making this up.."thought Li Yao.

"By the way why were you asking about the Deer Mountain Kingdom?" asked Li Yao after the excitement of showing off to his junior apprentice-brother had waned a bit.

Yang Qing took out a map from his storage ring as he said,

"Have you ever seen anyone from the Song family around these areas? It doesn't even have to be from the Song family, just anyone who left you feeling strange.."

Yang Qing highlighted all the areas Meifeng had highlighted as the area the Obsidian Serpent's daughter and the fire adler bear frequented.

Chapter 670 Su Jinjing's Plea

"By anyone suspicious, you mean someone from the Deer Mountain Kingdom?" asked Li Yao as his gaze alternated between the areas Yang Qing had highlighted and Yang Qing himself.

"Partly yes, but another part is someone suspicious, someone more vigilant than usual, or someone with a strong soul with yin undulations coming from them..." said Yang Qing.

Seems like they suspect the Kingdom of colluding with whoever it was that was part of that calamitous fight a few weeks ago, thought Li Yao.

For someone who has seen the winds and rains of countless eras, it wasn't difficult for him to figure that the Order may have had some involvement with the fight that happened a few weeks ago. Even though he had been too far to unearth the culprits, with how terrifying and powerful the waves were he had been able to glean something from them, even while being at the border, which was tens of thousands of kilometers away from where the fight was taking place.

He could feel that some of those terrifying waves came from a human source and more than one at that. In particular, he had sensed two distinctive overwhelming forces. One of them was a powerful sword intent that made him feel as if he had been submerged in an ocean of swords, while the other was a suffocating force of the earth. It felt like the whole Deer Mountain Range was bearing down on him.

From his understanding, not that he looked down on the Deer Mountain Range. For them to survive in this range, they had to be capable but he didn't believe that those two energies came from one of their members, if it did, they would not have holed themselves up in their territory as they did, they would have long tried to expand it as they did all those years ago.

If it wasn't from the Deer Mountain Kingdom, then there was only one other culprit, a terrifying entity that had people who would definitely produce those two energies in spade and that was the Order.

Even if he knew the Order was definitely involved and some part of him was curious about what happened, he had enough propriety to know he should not ask what he should not ask. The Ocean Refining Crucible Pavilion was strong both in terms of the abilities of its members and its connections, but that did not mean it had the qualifications to involve itself in certain matters. That was a sure-fire way of inviting calamity.

Pushing his thoughts aside, Li Yao focused on the map.

"I haven't reached this part yet, but here...."

Li Yao's brow came together as his eyes flashed.

"I found a foundation circle here, and by the looks of it, it was done by very capable people across different schools and their attainments were no different than mine. If it was done by one person, then their attainments are definitely higher than mine.

There was nothing I could add to it or do differently. Building a foundation circle in the middle of a forest filled with spirit beasts.." as he said this his gaze inadvertently fell on Yang Qing with meaning.

"It isn't ours, the fire adler bear I was warning you about, did that.." Yang Qing said as he smiled wryly.

"A spirit beast?!" Li Yao asked with widened eyes.

It wasn't that he looked down on them, but spirit beasts did not need foundation circles, they were already endowed with superior and powerful bodies. As far as he knew, the gold body, which most human cultivators struggled at attaining was something newborn spirit beasts with weak bodies had at birth.

As far as the constitution of spirit beasts went, he knew that some were so absurdly powerful that at birth their raw strength was enough for them to defend against an early-stage core formation expert.

What would such a spirit beast need a foundation circle for?

When he found the area, he left it immediately after a cursory glance because he automatically assumed it was the Order's handiwork. Only they would have such expertise and be daring enough to set up such a thing in the Deer Mountain Range.

Hearing it was a spirit beast's handiwork, was a huge shocker for him.

"They were using it for something else entirely which I can't share.." Yang Qing said when he saw the confusion on Li Yao's face.

His response only made the pavilion master's eyes twinkle with curiosity which he reigned in as he concentrated on the rest of the areas.

After a minute, he shook his head as he said,

"I haven't seen anyone suspicious in these areas in my time here... I have seen the Song family around though, during my surveys, but their routes are usually here.." Li Yao said as he pointed to an area northeast of the areas Yang Qing had highlighted.

Yang Qing estimated that the area was roughly 200,000 kilometers away from the areas he had mentioned.

Yang Qing sighed as he took back the map.

"Thanks for your help, Pavilion Master Li Yao.." he said as he put the map into his storage ring.

"I am sorry I couldn't be much help.." answered Li Yao.

"No, you've helped. At least I can cross out eight months from my list of timelines.." Yang Qing said with a sincere smile.

He exchanged a few pleasantries with Pavilion Master Li Yao before the latter eagerly left like a kid who was afraid of missing out on playing with his friends.

Even while looking at the map, Yang Qing could tell he was fidgety like he couldn't wait to leave the branch and go explore the range of its spiritual herbs.

Yang Qing couldn't help but chuckle as he turned back meeting Su Jinjing and Luo Meili who seemed to be waiting for him.

"Is it okay to leave them like that? With our presence here, we could guarantee their safety..." said Su Jinjing, her face rife with worry.

Knowing what she was referring to, Yang Qing placed his hands on her shoulder to comfort her as he said,

"We can't Jinjing. If we can't do the same for the Kingdom who have been our gracious hosts, then we can't do it for them either.

If we intervene, forgetting the outcry that would likely happen once news of our interference breaks out, bringing our impartiality into question, it will also trigger another thing.

If we intervene, every organization would treat us as their babysitters. They would go make a mess out with no caution or care because in their mind they'll be thinking, if the Order did it for the Xin Clan or the Hua Clan then they would do the same for us.

Our acting will set a precedent. We address injustices not recklessness.

Jinjing, what if the tricolored white-eyed tortoise was the one who came in today to file a complaint?.." Yang Qing said as his gaze fell on Su Jinjing whose limpid big soulful eyes flickered slightly.

"This is a blood debt Jinjing, and had the tortoise asked for a fight to the death with them or any other spirit beast from this area for that matter, I would have granted as is their right for something like this.

They broke a taboo, they should not have, even if they did not know. The road to hell is sometimes paved by what we may sometimes judge as good intentions... Whether it's them or us.. " Yang Qing said with a sigh.

"We have already done the most we can do, which is give them critical information and advice, same as what we did for the Deer Mountain Kingdom.

Whatever happens later for them is a consequence of the decisions they make. All we can do for now is wish them luck and hope for the best.

Jinjing we are each responsible for our own choices. The four have a responsibility to make their own and live by it. It's not your burden to carry.

We have done our responsibility, which is to give them all the information that they need to decide what's next for them.

Choice is a gift, Jinjing. No matter how it ends, it's something we can't deny them..." Yang Qing said as he left for one of the jade platforms next to one of the quaint rivers in the area.