

## Medical 251

### Chapter 251 The World Has Changed

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Up until now, Yan Xiaobao could clearly see the kind of world he lived in. It was a world where the strong survive and the weak perish. A world where family bonds were crucial—if you helped them, they would help you in return, but it was always safe. This safety had been enforced with a maddeningly harsh martial law. Even if Hell were to descend upon this world, Hui Yue now understood that the shocking reactions that would happen in his old world wouldn't occur here.

As Hui Yue gazed at the dismantled family compound before him, he finally realized that his world had changed. The transformations in his world were so drastic, but even with all the environmental changes, the change in Yan Xiaobao was the most significant.

Not only had his physical condition undergone immense changes, his appearance and age had altered dramatically, and his mindset had also been deeply influenced by his surroundings.

Destroying the homes of hundreds without guilt was something the old Yan Xiaobao would have never accepted. In this world, during his decade-long life here, more and more people noticed this newfound vigilance. Whereas Yan Xiaobao had once believed people were trustworthy until proven otherwise, he now firmly believed that strangers could not be trusted.

"Rong Xing, my heart, my blossom, my life! How can you look even more breathtaking tonight than when I left you this morning? Your beauty rivals that of a goddess; your eyes shine like the most elusive stars in the heavens. Oh, my queen of the evening, how could this humble warrior be worthy of you? I give you my heart, my soul, my everything!"

As soon as the monologue began, everyone turned toward the speaker, smiling. It always happened when they heard Deng Wu speak, even Yan Xiaobao couldn't resist laughing. Despite Deng Wu's dangerous nature, the two of them had reached an understanding, and Yan Xiaobao knew Deng Wu gained nothing from revealing his secrets to others.

Deng Wu walked toward the group at a slow pace, yet Rong Xing caught everyone off guard by deciding to kick him out, leaving the young man surprised. Deng Wu landed directly on his backside and hurriedly stumbled toward Yan Xiaobao, clearly intending to use him as a meat shield.

Nevertheless, as Deng Wu's hand touched Yan Xiaobao's shoulder, an electric current erupted between the two, sending both of them shooting off in opposite directions.

The surge of energy shocked Yan Xiaobao. Though his body was consumed by pain, his eyes remained locked onto Deng Wu, who was staring at him in return.

Looking at each other, it felt as though time had frozen. Both searched the other's eyes, attempting to discern whether something had been revealed.

When Yan Xiaobao saw the unmistakable shock on Deng Wu's face, his heart sank—but in the beautiful eyes before him, he found apprehension and vigilance, emotions rarely displayed through eyes that usually regarded the world with cold indifference.

Yan Xiaobao had already sensed it—a type of energy strikingly similar to Lan Feng's—and Hui Yue knew exactly where it came from.

Suddenly, Deng Wu let out a painful scream. His arm grasped the finger bearing the storage memory stone ring, and when he finally managed to remove the ring, agony was etched across his face.

His hand bore burn marks, and the smell of scorched flesh filled the entire area. As Huiwei moved toward the ground ring, Yan Xiaobao fell silent, seemingly unaffected by the fiery intensity that had erupted moments ago.

"I'll keep it for you," Yan Xiaobao said in the sweetest tone. "Brother Deng can take it back whenever it suits you." With these words, he shamelessly pocketed the ring, and Deng Wu did nothing to stop him. The storage ring was already bound to Deng Wu's Qi, making it inaccessible to anyone else.

The other four people stared at the two in shock. For now, Yan Xiaobao had turned his back to his friends. Before Deng Wu grabbed his arm and hoisted him up, he quickly added, "We'll talk later," leaving behind a smile that spread across both Yan Xiaobao and Deng Wu's faces, as the cheers around them echoed.

The four people standing nearby were dumbfounded. Though Deng Wu had always behaved in an odd fashion, even for him, this was entirely unreasonable.

Neither Deng Wu nor Yan Xiaobao felt the need to explain what had happened. The four observers, who had just witnessed the scene, didn't feel it was their place to question it. Clearly, if Yan Xiaobao and Deng Wu were closer, there would be no hostility between them.

"That man is a monster," Lan Feng remarked in the Dantian Cave, his celestial voice carrying a tone of both shock and awe.

Whenever Lan Feng connected with Hui Yue through their discussions or by absorbing Qi to refine it into spiritual energy, the ring in Yan Xiaobao's pocket would start to rumble—as though a fierce beast were locked inside it.

"What level is his cultivation?" Xu Yue asked casually while chatting about school with his friends. Only a third of his attention was on the conversation; the rest was impatiently awaiting Lan Feng's answer.

"Don't soil your pants," Lan Feng warned before replying, his voice still heavy with amazement, "He's currently a nine-star ranked physician cultivator."

"No way." Yan Xiaobao was stunned. The Rong twins were regarded as the prodigies of their generation, as was Gao Yan. But everyone had considered Deng Wu merely an ordinary talent—a peculiar one, but no one had ever noticed his rapid advancement, let alone his exceptional growth.

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Thinking about what had transpired over the past few weeks, it made sense to Yan Xiaobao now. He realized that the Deng Family was likely aware of a high-level cultivation genius within their clan.

I bet when the Wang Family bragged about Wang Julong, he must have been laughing. Yan Xiaobao chuckled to himself before accepting that Deng Wu was undoubtedly the top genius in this small city of Liluo.

"He must have received his help," Lan Feng muttered to himself as he recovered rapidly from cultivation, causing Hui Yue to frown slightly. Who was 'he'? However, as Lan Feng resumed cultivating rather than explaining, Yan Xiaobao knew Lan Feng didn't see it as important anymore.

When the young man returned to the academy, everything returned to how it had been a week earlier. Deng Wu did not visit Yan Xiaobao to discuss the ring. Instead, Yan Xiaobao spent a considerable amount of time cultivating, just as he had before.

Finally, after waiting two weeks, Yan Xiaobao had used up all the medicine pills. He shot out punches one after another with excitement gleaming in his blue eyes, testing his strength with his low-level Martial Arts Skills.

Using these pills, Yan Xiaobao had achieved an Eight-star student ranking, and the temptation to purchase more pills and push straight toward the Ninth Star was undeniable, even though he knew better.

While the pills replicated Yan Xiaobao's Qi, they also caused his Qi vortex to destabilize. It moved irregularly because the replicated Qi was made up of Qi Lines of varying thickness, creating imbalance within his lower Dantian.

Yan Xiaobao let out a deep sigh as he resumed his classes, spending time flipping through one massive book after another during lectures, each containing the history of the continent. Unfortunately, he was unable to uncover more clues about the Dark Era.

In his spare time, Hui Yue continued to strengthen his inner resolve, practicing the conversion of Martial Arts Skills. For now, he was able to produce the simplest blade, but upon doing so, Yan Xiaobao realized how formidable he had become in armed combat.

Looking back, the last time he had practiced Martial Arts was when he lived in the old world. Since arriving here, everything he'd done had focused on his body rather than weapons. Now, the lack of practice came back to haunt him, and Yan Xiaobao had to dedicate extra hours to training his Martial Arts, forcing himself to improve.

At night, Yan Xiaobao quietly cultivated, absorbing the essence of the world, then merging with Qi spun from elegant lines. This thickened and steadied them further.

Weeks passed by in peaceful routine—classes and serene cultivation—but Yan Xiaobao hadn't forgotten Deng Wu. Now that his Qi had finally stabilized, he decided he would seek out Deng Wu the next day. If his secretive ally had failed to ascertain his motives, then it was time for Yan Xiaobao to confront him.

Staring out of the darkened window, a faint smile crossed Yan Xiaobao's face. Sleep was one of the few luxuries he allowed himself only in moments of triumph, and tonight he would sleep soundly.

Yan Xiaobao and Lan Feng both slept deeply that night. Whenever he returned to practice and cultivation, Lan Feng immersed himself entirely in refining Qi and blending it with elemental affinity, thereby creating spiritual energy within their Qi Acupoints.

For weeks, Yan Xiaobao hadn't had proper rest. He had spent all his time and effort stabilizing his Qi vortex. With success finally achieved, his young body was utterly fatigued, and he knew it was time to sleep.

Thus, when Yan Xiaobao's head hit the pillow, he sank instantly into deep slumber, with everything around him becoming irrelevant.

Usually, a cultivator—even a student-level one like Hui Yue—would remain vigilant even while sleeping. However, Yan Xiaobao was within Liluo City's Royal Art Academy. Entering the academy without its insignia was impossible.

Moreover, he was in his private courtyard, and his bedroom key could only unlock the door. The key was bound to his own Qi as an additional precaution.

All these layers of security, combined with his exhaustion, led Lan Feng and Yan Xiaobao to sleep without a second thought, their guard completely lowered.

Outside, the moon shone brightly in the night sky, marking the turning of the month, and the second pill distribution day occurred as it had the first time.

This time, however, Yan Xiaobao hoarded the pills and consumed them sparingly, noting that this was unlike his previous habits.

The faint sound of creaking filled the room, and a shadow descended gracefully from the black sky outside through the window. Her entire figure was bathed in moonlight from behind, shrouding her features in darkness.

The shadowy figure silently entered the room, standing still before her hazel-brown eyes began to flash crimson. A sinister smile spread across her beautiful and luscious lips—a predator ready to kill.

Without a sound, the woman moved stealthily, finding herself by the sleeping boy's bedside in an instant.

Her smile, filled with malice, turned savage as the red glow in her eyes intensified, making her look like a fierce beast thirsting for blood.

Two slender hands moved slowly toward the boy, her delicate fingers brushing against his vulnerable neck. Madness replaced the usual beauty displayed on her face, and for a moment, her hands hovered there, poised to strike with lethal precision.

Her fingers gripped the boy's neck tightly but gradually released their hold, and a guttural growl emerged from the woman's throat. In her eyes, the fury was suppressed, overtaken by a deep sorrow that surged like waves.

She swiftly raised her hand, extending a sharp fingernail, and effortlessly slashed downward, leaving a fine line on Yan Xiaobao's cheek.

From that single cut, small droplets of blood began to trickle, painting his pale skin deep crimson. Yet even so, Hui Yue remained fast asleep.

As she gestured toward the wound with her outstretched finger, an irritated sound escaped the intruder's lips. Slowly, three drops of blood rose from the wound, floating toward her.

As the drops neared, the woman lightly touched her belt, revealing a jade bottle in her hand. The three drops landed on the bottle's neck before being sealed away with spiritual power.

Just as she had arrived, the stranger moved toward the window, lingering for a moment and gazing at the sky with reluctant hesitation. At last, she turned her head to look at the sleeping boy, her face displaying a complex and indescribable expression.

"Live, young master. At least until the day we meet again," she murmured softly. As her voice echoed through the room, a massive inscription array ignited, releasing the temporary spell from the courtyard.

As she departed through the window, the woman's back sprouted large hazel-brown, eagle-like wings, flapping powerfully as she soared high into the sky. Moonlight briefly illuminated her figure.

Unlike her previous visits, this time the woman did not fly back to Liluo City, disappearing into the darkness. Instead, she headed toward the frigid north, toward the mountains separating the Sun Kingdom from the Divine Domain.

Yan Xiaobao's heavy eyelids slowly opened as the night's harsh wind stirred him, carrying the morning light through the window. Usually, when Yan Xiaobao allowed himself to sleep, he would wake fully rested and recharged. But this morning, a strange sensation prickled at the edges of his mind—an inexplicable chill crawling up his spine, his chest weighed down with unease.

Yan Xiaobao wasn't entirely unfamiliar with this feeling as he surveyed his courtyard vigilantly. It was akin to the sensation he'd felt when he faced seven black-clad men—but this time, the danger seemed even more profound. A sweeping sense of peril churned within him, and as he looked in the mirror, his eyes widened at the sight of the small wound on his face.

The shock in his eyes quickly transformed into a cold, ruthless hatred, his pupils contracting sharply. Someone had been here last night. Yan Xiaobao's expression turned feral. The night he drifted into peaceful slumber had been the night a visitor arrived.

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After living in this world for a long time, Xu Yue had come to realize that there was no such thing as coincidences, and the visitor who came to see him last night had clearly placed him under surveillance.

I need to hurry, Yan Xiaobao thought with certainty, I need to become stronger. The determination in his eyes shone through. Yan Xiaobao quickly gathered his clothes, washed up, and stepped out into the morning air.

"I'm sure this sky-blue statue is connected to Deng Wu's cultivation speed," Lan Feng said inside Qi Cave, "We need to talk to both of them. If we don't, we may be deceived."

"Both of them? How can we talk to a statue?" Yan Xiaobao furrowed his brow and asked. He knew this matter was far from ordinary, but directly conversing with it was something he hadn't anticipated.

"Don't trouble your little white-haired brain," Lan Feng laughed, "This is good fortune for us. Truly great fortune. When we catch up with Deng Wu and sit down for our delightful discussion, I'll explain it to you."

"Brother Hui Yue!" As Hui Yue stepped out of the courtyard, an excited voice rang out. Yan Xiaobao, snapping back to reality, stared blankly at him and turned around, only to find Ma Kong laughing heartily, his usually composed face breaking into joy.

"They're planning to do it!" Ma Kong said, panting as he leaned forward, hands on his knees to catch his breath. Yan Xiaobao could tell that Ma Kong had run all the way from his own mountain peak to Yan Xiaobao's residence. Warm air surrounded Yan Xiaobao, dissipating some of the resentment that had surged within him from earlier bruising revelations.

However, knowing that Ma Kong had run all this way just to speak with him left Yan Xiaobao feeling a certain warmth deep inside; he savored that warmth and let go of his worries, at least for now.

"What's going on?" Yan Xiaobao asked, raising his brows as he looked at the breathless Ma Kong. If he had just been running, he normally wouldn't be winded—after all, Ma Kong was a cultivator. But clearly, this run had pushed him to his limit, forcing him to sprint the entire distance at full speed.

"I received a response from the elder," Ma Kong grinned, his breath finally steadying. The two of them headed to a nearby buffet restaurant to discuss the matter Ma Kong had mentioned, while sharing breakfast together.

"We had multiple elders spend some time calculating the potential and prerequisites for your insurance concept. They were supposed to announce the results at last night's family meeting," Ma Kong said, his eyes brimming with excitement. Yan Xiaobao couldn't help but chuckle softly. The perpetually persistent Ma Kong now seemed like a boy his age, thrilled over their handling of the insurance project.

"The math is pretty solid. As long as that unknown expert doesn't eliminate any more noble family compounds, we should be able to launch and operate within a few years." Ma Kong's eyes continued to gleam as he looked at Yan Xiaobao. "We need you to visit us and sign a contract, but the elders require a few things."

As soon as Ma Kong mentioned the contract, his excitement immediately subsided, and he began to conduct himself with an air of propriety and dignity. Ma Kong did this unconsciously, and Yan Xiaobao raised his brows. His young friend was excellent at controlling and masking his emotions.

"The contract will give you one-third of the revenue—not one percent but three percent. The reason for this change is because it's not purely profit. If we tragically fail with this idea, then you'll also bear one-third of the losses."

Upon hearing this, Yan Xiaobao suddenly felt a sense of respect for the Black Market Auction House. Yan Xiaobao recognized this as an excellent deal. Yet, it wasn't until now that he understood the thoroughness of their business and investment practices.

This contract condition was clearly a way to test Yan Xiaobao. If this boy was being used as a means for the Ma family to lose money, then at least he would have to share the financial setback. Meanwhile, if he genuinely provided such a good idea as promised through their calculations, then he truly deserved that three percent.

Ma Kong was clearly uncomfortable imposing such terms on his friend, yet as a member of the Ma family, he understood the importance of ensuring their family maintained growth. After all, the Ma family was trying to expand their presence into other major cities across the Sun Kingdom.

The two boys took a brief break during breakfast but ultimately agreed that Yan Xiaobao would follow Ma Kong to the next day's forum to sign the contract.

After the agreement was finalized, Yan Xiaobao climbed to the mountain peak where the Dengwu Institute was located.

Knocking on the courtyard door received no response, but Yan Xiaobao didn't give up. He lingered outside for a few minutes, knocking persistently, knowing that Deng Wu could hear his voice.

While waiting, Yan Xiaobao looked around. When he had started school, this summer was the hottest month, and now another month had passed. During this time, Yan Xiaobao had managed to sell two skills, which provided him with enough money to buy medications to aid him in cultivating into an Eight-star student.

This achievement had been painstakingly built over ten years to raise him to a five-star student ranking. Yet, within just this brief period in the current month, he had now reached the rank of an Eight-star student. His cultivation speed was truly astonishing.

Yan Xiaobao had broken through to the sixth star on his own. Lan Feng had helped him reach the seventh Constant Star, and with the use of pills, Yan Xiaobao ascended to the pinnacle of the Eight-star level.

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Here is the complete translation:

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During this period, Wang Julong had been cultivating relentlessly without any results, his finger pointing at the bone, but even so, he was still only at the peak of the Eight-star student squad.

Yan Xiaobao's lips curled into a satisfied smile. He was now confident that he could defeat Wang Julong. If they fought again as per his evaluation, he would once more knock on Deng Wu's door.

Once again, there was no response. Yan Xiaobao started to feel a little annoyed. It was no longer the warmest days of summer, and the morning breeze had turned slightly chilly, which only aggravated the boy further.

"Brother Deng Wu!" he shouted as loudly as he could, drawing curious and odd stares from passersby: "If you don't let me in, then I suppose we'll have to talk at the door."

Upon hearing this, the courtyard door suddenly opened, revealing a visibly irritable Deng Wu standing at the entrance. His clothing was disheveled and chaotic, evidently having just rushed out of his bedroom.

In stark contrast to Deng Wu, Yan Xiaobao was clean and neatly dressed. His face wasn't angry but was instead brimming with smiles and laughter, giving off the impression that someone had poured a bucket of cold water on Deng Wu.

"Close the door behind you," Deng Wu grumbled as he turned around, permitting Yan Xiaobao to follow. Yan Xiaobao's radiant smile dimmed only slightly, and his young face was filled with an alertness that seemed unfitting for someone of his age.

Finally, the two entered the house and sat across from one another. Neither spoke at first, merely observing the other. Deng Wu had completely set aside his usual arrogant demeanor; instead, he appeared as alert as Hui Yue.

'Give him the ring,' Lan Feng commanded, and Yan Xiaobao promptly complied. The ring contained a black Memory Stone. Seeing Yan Xiaobao toy with it, Deng Wu grew increasingly uneasy.

"How many have you tampered with?" Deng Yue finally sighed as Yan Xiaobao tossed him a ring. Deng Wu acted decisively, catching the ring and examining it briefly. The last time he touched it, it had scorched his fingers. The burn marks were still clearly visible. However, this time, the ring emitted no heat, and Deng Wu allowed it to slide onto his injured finger.

As the ring slipped onto his finger, a faint light appeared. A Sky Blue Dragon statue materialized from within, and Deng Wu placed it on the table between the two of them.

"When I was ten years old, I was allowed to select a small treasure from the family treasury as a reward for being admitted to the Royal Art Academy," Deng Wu said with a sigh.

Ever since Yan Xiaobao arrived here, it was apparent that he knew something. The best course of action was for the two of them to share their secrets and then avoid the rest of the world together.

The reason why Deng Wu decided to explain his history using the small statue was his total ignorance regarding it. However, when he had touched the Huili in Liluo City, Deng Wu had felt that the Sky Blue Dragon statue was the current form of the beast locked within Yan Xiaobao's body. Consulting Hui Yue might yield some answers.

"My father was delighted when I chose this item because everyone thought it was useless, suitable only as a decorative piece. For the first year, I carried it everywhere, just as my father had expected—it truly was useless," Hui Yue said quietly. However, his intuition about the Dragon statue was intriguing, and he couldn't help but wonder what Lan Feng thought upon finding it here when both were so weak.

"One day, when I returned home, someone attempted to steal the storage stone where my statue was kept. It took me three days to retrieve it. I knew it was worthless, but I was still enamored by its beauty," Deng Wu said, shaking his head sadly. Yan Xiaobao only chuckled lightly. If anything, he could understand how one might remove another's fixation on an item. Unfortunately, Yan Xiaobao had once discovered he could kill a person in an hour.

Deng Wu noticed the bitter smile on Yan Xiaobao's face and sensed that Yan Xiaobao fully understood his feelings.

"When I finally got it back, the statue began speaking to me," Deng Wu said quickly and somewhat awkwardly. Deng Wu was well aware of how insane this sounded.

"The statue has many functions. It granted me cultivation techniques far stronger than anything I'd encountered before. It could conceal my own cultivation base, but it could also see through the disguises of anyone weaker than it. It immediately recognized your Divine Beast's aura, though I never imagined it was someone it knew," Deng Wu said, detailing the abilities of the Sky Blue Dragon statue, which this time he did not hide from Yan Xiaobao.

"Cultivation techniques alone couldn't achieve such high rankings in your cultivation base within five years," Yan Xiaobao pointed out with a smile, to which Deng Wu responded with an awkward grin.

"The statue was incredibly powerful when it was alive. It excelled in pill concoction and helped me access various herbal extracts that greatly accelerated my growth," Deng Wu explained.

Yan Xiaobao heard this and quietly pondered Lan Feng's reaction to the revelation. Though an Alchemist interested Lan Feng, he appeared unimpressed.

"I need to talk to my dear roommate. I'm not sure how much he wants you to know," Yan Xiaobao said internally, asking: "Lan Feng, what should we do?"

"Let me speak through you," Lan Feng sighed, and Yan Xiaobao quickly agreed. He wandered inward, achieving a mental projection, and then entered the Dantian Cave. The feathered blue boy began to fade, transforming into a beam of light that exploded into thousands of threads flowing through the meridians before finally transcending the body.

Unlike before, this was not a forced takeover but an ability Yan Xiaobao actively granted to Lan Feng, a skill he didn't know he possessed before his battle with the man in black.

"Listen carefully," Lan Feng's voice echoed from Hui Yue's mouth, startling Deng Wu as the statue on the table emitted an audible humming sound.

"Have you ever heard the history of our world?" Lan Feng continued, while Hui Yue sat within the Dantian Cave, leaning against the wall as the Phoenix took charge of the situation.

"I haven't," Deng Wu politely replied, fully aware that he was now grappling with the genius behind Hui Yue's oration. This mysterious expert had destroyed the Shan Clan's compound with a single low-level attack.

"I won't bore you with a long tale, but this world once belonged to the four Divine Beast clans, until we were deceived and sealed in various decorative objects, dispersed across different planes of the universe," Lan Feng said, provoking a shocked look from Deng Wu, who had never imagined such a thing was true.

"The item in your hand is none other than the descendant of the Sky Blue Dragon. I must admit, seeing him trapped in such a small statue brings me immense satisfaction," Lan Feng said, with a schadenfreude grin. This was karma.

"Descendant of the Sky Blue Dragon?" Deng Wu repeated with furrowed brows. Unlike Yan Xiaobao, he had never heard of the four Divine Beasts. Having grown up in the Sun Kingdom, he had no knowledge of the events of the Dark Era.

On the other hand, Yan Xiaobao remembered learning about the Sky Blue Dragon statue, its lineage of betrayal against others, whether intentional or accidental, and how this betrayal had led to the four descendants being sealed within various decorative objects.

"This world was created by our ancestors after their coming-of-age ceremonies. Unfortunately, someone was deceived by a mere mortal, and this is how we ended up like this," Lan Feng's tone leapt an octave with a sneer. "That useless son in your statue should remain there and reflect on his failures."

"Shut up, you damned bird!" a voice roared from the Sky Blue Dragon statue. "You were deceived as well, and unlike you, I'm still sealed!"

"So what?" Lan Feng retorted. "You caused us to be sealed, and you were the last to be unsealed—it's still unfair."

"You weren't too lucky yourself," the statue sneered. "I found you released from a hairpin, while you were stuck with a dim-witted servant, acting as a brainless child."

"Oh yeah? At least I managed to form a soul contract..." Lan Feng said proudly before his expression shifted to regret. "I shouldn't have said that. I absolutely shouldn't have said that."

Lan Feng was frustrated with himself for inadvertently revealing information, while the statue fell silent. It was likely shocked at the notion of anyone willingly forming a soul contract with a Divine Beast.

Deng Wu stared blankly at the statue and the possessed Yan Xiaobao. The conversation was baffling, and he struggled to follow.

"So I gather you two are old acquaintances," he said calmly, eyeing the pair, both of whom felt a bit awkward.

"Ah, yes," Lan Feng cleared his throat. "As you've likely understood, the statue was once a Divine Beast much like me, and like me, a Saint. At the time, he was even somewhat strong, but now he's certainly weak."

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Lan Feng's tone carried a satisfaction that was impossible to hide, and the smile on his face made Deng Wu wonder what kind of creature this beast was, and how Yan Xiaobao spent every waking moment with him.

"In the end, we both have secrets that no one else should know," Lan Feng continued with a long sigh. "You keep quiet about Yan Xiaobao and our secrets, and in return, we will remain silent about Little Dragon and you."

"Little Dragon?" Deng Wu glanced over, puzzled. "This little statue is named Little Dragon?"

The small statue responded to Harum, and Lan Feng released Yan Xiaobao's body, allowing him to regain control.

"He's named after his father, the Azure Dragon, but using the same name for them both is too confusing, so we never actually call him Little Dragon."

Yan Xiaobao decided it was time for him to return to his courtyard, now that Deng Wu knew the truth about his possessions but also knew they shared the same secret. If one of them were exposed, the other might follow.

After leaving Deng Wu, Yan Xiaobao returned to his courtyard and prepared to visit the apothecary once again, planning to purchase a pill worth three gold coins.

Yan Xiaobao realized that the more he consumed any single medicine, the weaker its effects became. This led him to mix several different types of pills during purchase, in order to compare them with others.

Life within the academy remained exactly as it had since his admission. Students shuffled from lectures to mountaintops. The arenas were full of students harboring grudges against each other or those who merely believed they needed growth to improve their skills.

However, unlike the Royal Academy, Liluo City was bustling with energy and new trends. The Ma family decided to expand their business, no longer focusing solely on the Black Market Auction House.

A large amount of wealth had already been spent promoting the new business concept of "insurance." The Ma family and Yan Xiaobao both anticipated it would take years for insurance to gain acceptance among the city's common folk and noble families. Contrary to their belief, the perks proved overwhelming.

Insurance covering homes was mostly purchased by noble families who had witnessed firsthand how Shan Clan households had lost everything.

On the other hand, personal insurance became very popular among guards, soldiers, and especially mercenaries.

Within months, nearly every household in the city had personal or family insurance, skyrocketing the Ma family's reputation and significance to new heights.

According to their agreement, Yan Xiaobao paid 3% of the profit each month. Though the amount was initially quite small, it was still enough to change the fate of his hometown.

Since leaving for the admission ceremonies, Yan Xiaobao had not returned home. He asked Gao Yan to help him find someone he could trust for a task, and a few days later, a young man volunteered to undertake the mission weighing heavily on Yan Xiaobao's heart.

The job involved traveling to Yan Xiaobao's village once a month and delivering funds from the Ma family. In return, the young man would receive substantial rewards. The rewards were reasonable because the man was a cultivator of cultivators, and Gao Yan insisted on signing a blood contract.

As the name suggests, a blood contract is signed in the "blood" of the partners. Signing a blood contract meant that breaking the agreement would lead to death as an unavoidable consequence.

The Ma family wasn't the only household in Liluo City making rapid improvements. The Deng Family had somehow obtained extraordinary mechanisms, and no outsiders knew much about their plans.

It was clear these mechanisms were hidden beneath stone sheds and wooden shelters near rivers just outside Liluo City. They were currently constructing seven different structures.

The Deng Family also issued an announcement stating that they planned to purchase all the land along a river with strong currents and would richly reward any sellers.

The first of these buildings was completed within six months after breaking ground, and winter was now withdrawing. Though the snow was melting, the icy winds and brief days still ruled the season.

The news that the Deng Family had acquired the blueprints of the renowned expert Li Fen gave them the upper hand in Liluo City, currently making them the most powerful family, second only to the Rong Family.

During these six months, Yan Xiaobao fought intensely with his cultivation and reached the pinnacle of the nine-star student rankings, but he felt there was something still blocking him from achieving further breakthroughs.

As he strolled through the academy grounds, Yan Xiaobao at least wasn't in a hurry. He was content with his current state of cultivation, as he had now stopped using his pills and instead gifted them to the Rong twins as a gesture of gratitude.

Initially, the twins refused to accept the pills, only agreeing after Yan Xiaobao explained he had bought them using funds from the Black Market Auction House. He reasoned that if they were willing to accept his thanks, he would feel much better.

After hearing this, the Rong twins could no longer decline and finally consumed the pills. Their joy was evident as they quickly excused themselves and rushed to their respective courtyards.

In the past six months, Deng Wu and Yan Xiaobao's relationship had grown increasingly amicable. The two of them shared a massive secret neither could ever disclose to anyone else, while they also sought the best way to utilize the knowledge of these esteemed experts.

The Qing Dynasty provided Yan Xiaobao with a list of certain plants he should consume daily at specific times. These plants would help him increase the amount of essence he could collect at once, thereby expanding the duration of Qi refinement during any given period.

#### Chapter 256 Energy and the New Wave\_2

Yan Xiaobao once again informed Qing Lan how to break the seal, but unfortunately, stabbing someone in the heart wasn't a very useful attempt, Qing.

Firstly, if he were to stab someone in the heart, both of them would die. Unlike Lan Feng, Qingqing hadn't gathered all her energy over the past four thousand years; instead, she shared it with Deng Wu, allowing him to advance by leaps and bounds.

Secondly, even if Little Dragon could successfully stab someone in the heart and create reincarnation, they would still lag behind by at least ten years.

Yan Xiaobao knew that Little Dragon was currently being mainly used to disguise Deng Wu's true cultivation base while also being able to see through various disguises and offer good advice. However, Qing couldn't impart any martial arts skills to him, as Yan Xiaobao eventually gifted them to Deng Wu.

The skills Yan Xiaobao gave to Deng Wu were as advanced as the ones he used himself. It was a skill called "Dancing Qi Pillar," classified as an advanced martial arts attack technique.

This technique consolidated Qi into a moving pillar of light at the owner's wish and will. Anyone struck by the pillar would suffer tremendous damage. Although Yan Xiaobao liked the name and technique, he realized his transforming weapon was far superior in power. He hadn't had the time yet to delve into all these skills.

For those around Yan Xiaobao and Deng Wu, it was amusing watching the interactions between the two. No one felt it was their place to comment on it, but they admired how Deng Wu managed to calm down and become an almost ordinary young man.

Yan Xiaobao sat in the classroom, staring outside at the frozen ground, wondering how long it would take for summer to return. He had long since decided to abandon his search for more information on the great sin and the Dark Era, as there seemed to be nothing left to offer him, and his priority now was to grow stronger.

Everyone in the academy kept telling him that one day he would understand the Dark Era. One day when he was old enough. So for now, gathering strength was paramount.

At the other end of the classroom, Wang Julong acted as he normally would, except on this day, instead of his usual contemplation, he gazed at teacher Li Yuan with great interest.

"Students," Li Yuan said in a weary voice, his expression one of shock as he noticed his two star pupils were truly paying attention to him today. "You are likely well aware that the Royal Academy Tournament in Liluo City will be held next month. I need to register you for it. Everyone must participate, and everyone will receive prizes."

Hui Yue and Wang Julong exchanged glances, their eyes brimming with determination and fighting spirit, causing the teacher to sigh deeply.

Yan Xiaobao darted forward to sign the registration form brought by teacher Li Yuan, with Wang Julong following closely behind before doing the same.

After the registration, the teacher concluded the class and handed out essays with general information about the tournament to the young students.

The tournament consisted of eight groups, each with 1,000 participants. These groups were divided based on the year they were from. The battles were organized into lower brackets, conducted as instant elimination rounds.

Ultimately, once a winner emerged from one of the eight groups, they would battle another group and advance to the semi-finals before heading into the finals.

The prizes were luxurious. Everyone received at least one pill; however, Yan Xiaobao was truly interested in the prizes for the top eight competitors.

The first-place prize was a set of leather armor engraved with low-level spirit inscriptions. These inscriptions could repel most attacks from enemies of equal or lesser power.

The second-place prize was twenty pills, a reward that would make any cultivation personnel drool just by imagining it.

The third-place prize was a pair of leather gloves engraved with a specific attack rune capable of firing a fireball every half hour.

The remaining top-eight competitors each received ten Qi Medicines.

Another prize, which didn't concern Yan Xiaobao, granted the top two from each of the eight groups permission to enter a courtyard located atop one of the mountain peaks—an achievement sure to leave most common students gasping in awe.

This was the Royal Art Academy Tournament in Liluo City, intended for audiences across the city. However, compared to the Royal Academy Tournament held three months later in the Capital, this was merely a small gathering.

Yan Xiaobao left the classroom with excitement. It was now time to try and put all his efforts into practice. Instead of rushing back to his own yard, he darted toward Deng Wu, who quickly followed suit. It was time to show Wang Julong who was the strongest between these two.

Yan Xiaobao was currently standing in Deng Wu's courtyard. Sweat dripped down his back and face, and his clothes clung to his body. The past three hours had been spent fighting Deng Wu, and a broad smile now graced Yan Xiaobao's face.

"You're a monster," Deng Wu said, shocked by the damage inflicted on his home. "Mr. Wang is definitely a surprise, but don't forget—I'm also competing, and as of now, you still cannot beat me."

Deng Wu smiled faintly, but it quickly vanished when he noticed the sly smile starting to spread across Yan Xiaobao's face.

"That's true, but will you really show your true cultivation base?" Yan Xiaobao asked mischievously. "I doubt you'll make it into the top eight unless you release at least some of it."

Deng Wu recalled that no one truly knew his full strength. Generally speaking, his innate talent shouldn't have allowed his cultivation base to leap so quickly.

"Fine," he sighed in frustration. "Then you'd better win this thing for me. I'll look forward to seeing your result."

Yan Xiaobao's grin grew wider. He gave a thumbs-up before dashing out of the courtyard toward his own home.

Back in his own yard, Yan Xiaobao still had a faint smile on his face as he swung both hands, summoning two blades. The blades were white and crafted from the finest jade, crackling with pure energy. They were perfectly integrated with the handles in Yan Xiaobao's hands, as if made just for him.

Yan Xiaobao knew without a doubt that transforming weapons were by far the most challenging skill he had practiced to date. After over half a year of training, he had only managed to perfect one weapon among the many options available to him.

When Yan Xiaobao started practicing, he realized his ability to handle blades was utterly terrible, akin to the time he first tried using them. Back then, as a young man, he was filled with shock, thinking he could wield weapons effortlessly due to years of training in his old world. However, even though he had practiced them at the time, it was nearly eleven years since his reincarnation, and during those years, Yan Xiaobao focused solely on cultivating and learning specific martial arts techniques.

As soon as Yan Xiaobao noticed his cultivation had improved, he lost the ability to recall how to move properly as per his previous teacher's guidance. He immediately decided to skip teacher Li Yuan's

lessons and instead used the extra time to concentrate daily on his martial arts training, starting from the basics.

Though Yan Xiaobao's reincarnated body had never undergone such training before, he quickly overcame the basics due to his previous soul's experience. Though he wasn't nearly as powerful as he once was, he was still no easy opponent to defeat.

As Yan Xiaobao gazed at the two blades in his hands, his smile widened more and more. He turned to engage with them, moving toward his newly acquired practice dummy.

Practicing bladework and physical combat was not something emphasized in the academy, as most cultivators focused on their martial arts techniques for both offense and defense. However, Yan Xiaobao decided to blend his advanced martial arts skills with his prior knowledge. In this way, Hui Yue would no longer rely solely on techniques but improve them by integrating them with physical movement.

With this new form of combat, Yan Xiaobao trained exclusively in his own courtyard, ensuring that his fighting style wouldn't be revealed before the tournament. This was the moment to deliver results—the moment to prove Hui Yue was more than equal to Wang Julong.

He wasn't just a white-haired prodigy. He was a silver monster.

These overwhelming emotions led Yan Xiaobao's training to grow increasingly wild. Unfortunately, his courtyard paid quite the price for it. The beautiful walls were deeply scarred, most of the trees were hacked so severely they collapsed, and craters and gouges marred the ground.

Yan Xiaobao ultimately needed help from a top-level master with wood elemental affinity. Wood, the affinity to create life, allowed this cultivator to restore the courtyard to its former glory.

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The cost of restoring the courtyard was an extravagant seven Spirit Coins because Yan Xiaobao insisted she swear a blood contract to never reveal that she had worked for him. However, he found the money well spent.

The next day, he purchased several target dummies crafted by a Master with Metal and Wood elemental affinities.

These target dummies were shaped like humans, adorned with inscriptions that gave them various functionalities. One was stationary, allowing cultivators to strike it repeatedly, repairing itself after each hit.

The second option activated another inscription, causing the target dummy to react to attacks. It lacked Qi but possessed enough capabilities to evade assaults.

The creation of the dummies and inscriptions was achieved through Metal Affinity, while Wood Affinity was used for their continuous self-repair.

These dummies were undoubtedly worth their weight in Gold, though each came at the steep price of five hundred Gold Coins.

Yan Xiaobao laughed again as he activated two dummies, gearing up for a training session. So far, Yan Xiaobao had been able to wield his dual blades actively for half an hour. For the next half hour, the sounds of combat echoed through the courtyard.

"Whew," Yan Xiaobao sighed before yawning, contorting his face. Having depleted his entire spiral of Qi, he had fought against the dummies for nearly three-quarters of the time and felt unimaginably fatigued.

"Looking rather good," Lan Feng remarked appreciatively after observing the melee display. "You seem to have perfected your dual blades. Tomorrow, you can start experimenting with another weapon."

Hearing this news, he perked up excitedly. He had long wanted to try a sword, but since Lan Feng insisted on perfecting one skill at a time, he hadn't yet experimented with one.

Yan Xiaobao was no longer the delicate, frail boy from when he first joined the Royal Art Academy. He was now a few centimeters taller than when he had first arrived. On the other hand, the biggest change was that, while his face still retained its effeminate quality, it no longer resembled that of a girl but rather that of a feminine boy.

The more Qi Hui Yue he gathered, the more mature his aura became. For now, the changes remained small and subtle, though Yan Xiaobao realized that once he broke through the bottleneck and reached the disciple level, his body would undergo significant transformations.

With every breakthrough, Yan Xiaobao could expect his body to undergo substantial improvements. However, the extent of these changes varied greatly from person to person.

It was important to understand, however, that Yan Xiaobao's body was far from ordinary. The fact that he had opened the Chongmai Meridian ensured that his body's enhancement would no longer follow typical patterns.

Unsealing the Chongmai Meridian generally required immense spiritual power, and under normal circumstances, most Mage-ranked cultivators would focus their attention on this feat only after managing to break through to the Master Level.

The reason Master-ranked cultivators opened this Meridian was usually to gain access to one of the additional eight meridians it granted.

Upon reaching the Master Rank, cultivators gained the ability to refine their Qi into spiritual energy. Therefore, most cultivators no longer had much use for their basic Qi, much like how lower-ranked cultivators viewed essence merely as a means of acquiring higher, more refined Qi.

Essence was the energy of the world, absorbed by cultivators and merged into Qi. Every cultivator, regardless of rank, relied on this essence to gain strength.

However, for Master-level cultivators and beyond, essence was no longer the only factor they needed to improve. For those who had opened their Middle Dantian, they now possessed the ability to transform Qi into a stronger form of spiritual energy. This, in turn, made Qi vital to them, much like essence was to lower-ranked Dantian cultivators. As such, they generally avoided wasting it on fortifying their organs.

Lan Feng's guidance of Yan Xiaobao's training had propelled him far ahead of his peers. This also allowed him to fortify his organs and blood without exhausting his Qi, as it was part of his training regimen.

Strengthening the organs and blood was beneficial for two reasons. First, it made these organs harder and more resilient, while being protected by Qi, making it more difficult for enemies to inflict internal damage. Second, the accumulation of Qi blood within the organs and blood could be used in emergencies; though, of course, the cost for this was extremely high.

When Qi entered the organs, it didn't dissipate but instead gathered beneath their surface, forming a protective layer. Once this Qi was withdrawn, the protective layer vanished. If a cultivator wished to restore it, they would have to restart the arduous process of fortifying the drained organs.

This was a process that required several weeks for each organ, and having undergone this process for six months, Yan Xiaobao could deeply appreciate the effort it took to strengthen his organs. Losing it in the blink of an eye would be devastating. On the other hand, Yan Xiaobao was also acutely aware of the amount of Qi stored in his internal reserves. Given how this had been managed for half a year, if Yan Xiaobao relied on these reserves, he could undoubtedly elevate himself temporarily to the level of a three-star disciple.

Though achieving the strength of a three-star disciple didn't sound overwhelmingly strong, the boost was so massive that it would undoubtedly provide Yan Xiaobao the opportunity to defeat opponents one entire realm above his own.

Nevertheless, for now, Yan Xiaobao had no reason to exhaust these reserves. He was realistic and knew his chances of winning the competition were slim, especially considering students like the Rong twins, who had formally broken through to the Physician level.

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Yan Xiaobao fully realized that if they asked whether he and the other participant would forego the competition, he had no interest in winning the tournament. What he truly wanted was a rematch with Wang Julong.

Both boys felt the same way. Although they knew they could fight at any time, an unspoken agreement had formed between them, making both of them tacitly agree to hold their grand rematch during the Royal Academy tournament.

The last month was exactly the same as the previous six months for Yan Xiaobao—spending time persistently training and maintaining his vitality, occasionally exchanging ideas with Deng Wu.

During this month, only Yan Xiaobao seemed so relaxed. The other students of the academy were anxious about the tournament. This tension did not only arise from the high stakes; nor was it solely due to ticket sales starting. No, the main source of everyone's unease was the mandatory attendance.

Usually, the eight tournament groups were ranked according to individual standing to ensure fair competition among students striving for the top eight positions. However, this year the Academy Chair had decided to implement a different system. This year, it was entirely a matter of luck. Looking at the board displayed within the academy, it was clear that reaching the top eight in earlier years seemed unlikely.

Both Yan Xiaobao and Wang Julong felt disappointed about this. They had been placed into Group Two and Group Seven respectively. Seeing the two of them in separate groups far apart caused Hui Yue to reveal an unpleasant expression.

First, winners would be determined within each group. Following this, the winners of one group would fight against those of another group—the victors of Group One and Group Two would face each other, whereas those of Group Three and Group Four would do the same, and so forth.

Once the winners of Group One and Group Two competed and a victor was decided, that person would then battle the champion of the match between Groups Three and Four. Ultimately, unless Yan Xiaobao fought his way into the finals, he would not face Wang Julong.

As Yan Xiaobao resolved to persevere no matter how challenging the path might be, a glimmer of coldness appeared in his handsome blue eyes. He was determined to enter the finals and clash against Wang Julong.

Long ago, the animosity between the two had steadily intensified. However, though they both hoped for the other's demise, it wasn't a hatred born of malice. Instead, it was driven by a fierce impulse—to prove their worth to one another. Yan Xiaobao had never experienced such strange competitive fervor before; it urged him to give his all. He knew Wang Julong would do the same—he had already secretly approved of Wang Julong and his diligent ethics.

Looking back, how could anyone not recognize Wang Julong's strenuous efforts to claim the title of genius? In every class they shared, he was constantly cultivating. Unless absolutely necessary, he never left the confines of his courtyard, choosing instead to cultivate diligently within his home.

Hui Yue began to wonder whether Wang Julong had chosen the history class to foster peace, rather than risk antagonizing Yan Xiaobao, who had also enrolled in the class.

The reason Wang Julong spent so much time enhancing his skills but did not refine his techniques like Hui Yue was related to his current martial arts attack skill, Thunder Lightning.

Thunder Lightning was an advanced technique—the highest-level skill he had been able to acquire thus far. Wang Julong had mastered it and saw no value in stepping back to learn lower-ranked techniques. As a result, his primary focus remained on improving his Qi vortex and breaking through to the Disciple Rank as swiftly as possible.

The only reason Yan Xiaobao had managed to keep up was due to the assistance of Lan Feng. Without Lan Feng and his near-limitless supply of medicine pills, Yan Xiaobao would have struggled to reach the pinnacle of the Ninth Star Student rank. Nor would he have had access to high-level skills capable of boosting his combat effectiveness, let alone the cultivation method he was using to refine the purest Qi.

However, even though Yan Xiaobao had gained so much from Lan Feng, he felt little gratitude toward him. He still believed that Lan Feng was responsible for Lan Feng's death. If Lan Feng had the audacity to kill him, then rescuing himself with his own power was only natural. Especially since Lan Feng's revenge also relied on Yan Xiaobao.

Nevertheless, Yan Xiaobao continued to heed Lan Feng's advice. If there was even a chance that he could reunite with Li Fen someday in the future, he wouldn't hate Lan Feng for killing him. Lan Feng's extensive knowledge during cultivation made following his orders a natural choice for Yan Xiaobao, though it was strictly utilitarian as far as he was concerned.

Yet, ten years later, Lan Feng became the only person who completely understood Yan Xiaobao, and vice versa, forging them into an odd pairing of friends. Yan Xiaobao sighed deeply as he realized his soul had completed its fusion; he would never entirely rid himself of this arrogant Phoenix. His lips curled slightly at the thought.

Yan Xiaobao's gaze locked onto Wang Julong, only to notice that the two of them were staring at each other. They silently established an agreement through sharp looks, clearly conveying the message: "Don't you dare fail before the finale."

Once the message had been delivered, Wang Julong immediately turned and walked back to his courtyard, undoubtedly refining more Qi and aiming to break through the bottleneck between Ninth Star Student rank and First-tier Disciple rank.

Yan Xiaobao, although in the same rank as Wang Julong, showed no urgency in tackling this bottleneck. The lack of feeling was too profound for him. Instead, he focused his efforts on his martial arts skills. Throughout the Royal Art Academy, when it came to martial arts techniques, no one could surpass him.

Hui Yue became a focal point for many students. If they were to face him, nearly anyone in his group expressed willingness to forfeit, causing Yan Xiaobao to feel slightly irritated.

Yan Xiaobao did not plan to reach the finals through opponents' capitulations. If he couldn't beat them, how would he defeat Wang Julong?

The tournament was set to last three weeks. On the first day, four thousand participants would be reduced to two thousand. After each day, there would be a day of rest, followed by another round that halved the number of competitors yet again. This cycle would continue until only eight students remained as group winners.

The first ten days of the tournament would proceed in this manner. After identifying the eight group winners, there would be two days of rest before narrowing the group to four contenders. These four contestants would then rest for three days before being reduced to two. Following this, an additional five days would be allocated for rest before the grand finale.

Guests invited to the tournament were encouraged to stay for the full three weeks. To facilitate guest housing, an additional mountain peak had been cleared, creating a residential sector specifically for visitors. This peak, designated for teachers, ensured that guests couldn't interfere with the participating students.

Adjacent to the arena mountain peak was a large board displaying the names and ranks of all the competing students.

Posters showcasing each participant indicated their ranking, odds of victory, and their first opponent.

Thanks to the medicine pills provided by Yan Xiaobao, the Rong twins were among the top-ranked healers. Although Yan Xiaobao had also given Gao Yan some pills, they weren't sufficient to help him achieve a breakthrough. Nonetheless, Gao Yan remained a Ninth Star Disciple, with a solid cultivation base that allowed him to share the second rank with another youngster.

Due to the Seventh Star Disciple ranking, both Ma Kong and Deng Wu were recorded, which made Yan Xiaobao scoff slightly. If anyone discerned Deng Wu's true cultivation level, they would undoubtedly be stunned, though Yan Xiaobao understood why Deng Wu couldn't disclose it yet.

Yan Xiaobao himself had a relatively low ranking, which was expected, as he was merely a first-year student who hadn't yet broken through to the Disciple Rank in cultivation. Despite being recognized as a genius and a promising talent in his early years, he remained far from being among the academy's stronger students.

Walking out of the courtyard, Yan Xiaobao suddenly stopped, noticing five individuals standing before him. Their shameless smiles made him mirror their expression with a wry grin. Before their cheerfulness lifted his mood, he let out a deep sigh.

"You forgot it was today, didn't you?" Rong Ming asked with a grin. Yan Xiaobao nodded with a sheepish smile.

Today was the first day of the tournament.

The six of them headed to the dining hall together, only to find it packed with students, making it impossible to find seats for all six. They opted not to have a large breakfast, instead ordering stuffed buns to go and heading to the arena.

Across all the venues, even the smaller ones had gathered many adults, several of whom Yan Xiaobao had seen at auctions before. All of them would be present at the academy for the next three weeks, watching the students milling about.

A few individuals drew significant attention, as they included two top-seeded participants—not to mention sons of families who continued to expand their influence across the city.

#### Chapter 259 The First Match

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However, even without them being present, Hui Yue himself was enough to draw everyone's attention. His white hair and blue eyes stood out strikingly among the academy's students, who were predominantly black-haired and brown-eyed.

One could say that the audience's focus was immediately drawn to the unusual boy. It was only after noticing Hui Yue that they turned their attention to the Rong twins.

Yan Xiaobao and the others quickly checked the schedule. Although Ma Kong was grouped with the Rong twins and Wang Julong, the remaining five did not belong to Yan Xiaobao's team. Gao Yan and Deng Wu were also separated.

For now, with the first battle just minutes away, Yan Xiaobao could relax until noon, when it was his turn to step onto the stage.

Yan Xiaobao's first opponent was a third-year student ranked second among the cultivators in the Disciple rankings, with the odds heavily favoring the older student over Yan Xiaobao.

The Rong twins wrapped up their matches within mere seconds, as their opponents forfeited after barely managing three attacks each. Gao Yan experienced a similarly swift victory.

Ma Kong encountered some trouble in his fight. Despite winning the first round, he ended up with a cut on his brow.

At that time, Yan Xiaobao defeated Deng Wu in the opening match.

Yan Xiaobao stepped onto the stage, feeling remarkably calm. Standing before him was someone three years older, significantly larger in size. Yet, to the audience, it was clear that while one stood calm as ice, the other was sweating profusely and visibly anxious about the impending fight.

The audience was stunned. Yan Xiaobao was at a disadvantage, yet why did the teachers look sympathetically toward his opponent, who appeared terrified?

The answer came quickly. As soon as the bell rang, the older boy roared and charged, his eyes wide, gray Qi accumulating around a fist aimed at Hui Yue.

Before the punch could land, Yan Xiaobao stood perfectly still for a brief moment. Qi surged through his meridians, activating Speed Flow, allowing him to dodge effortlessly.

After evading, Yan Xiaobao silently observed his opponent stumble forward. He didn't exploit the opponent's misstep; instead, he waited for the boy to approach again.

As fists were repeatedly thrown, Yan Xiaobao kept retreating, ensuring not even the corner of his clothing got struck by the powerful attacks. The disdain in his eyes was unmistakable.

Yan Xiaobao could have knocked the boy unconscious in mere seconds, but he remembered the incident on Shan Ping. Though he didn't feel guilty about it, he still didn't want his first accidental kill to occur in this tournament.

After dodging for ten minutes, Yan Xiaobao finally lost his patience. He had hoped the opponent would surrender upon realizing his disadvantage, but that didn't happen—forcing Yan Xiaobao to act.

As the pearl-white Qilin vanished into the air, it gathered in his hand. In an instant, he appeared behind his opponent, just as he had done on Shan Ping. This time, however, instead of targeting the temple, he lightly struck the back of the neck, causing the older boy to collapse unconscious.

The teachers shook their heads, recognizing the familiar technique. Though pleased to witness it once again, they acknowledged the immense restraint Yan Xiaobao displayed toward his current opponent.

Meanwhile, the audience was in shock. They had expected the older boy to either thoroughly defeat Yan Xiaobao or, at the very least, secure an easy win. But upon witnessing the incredible skill and pure demeanor of this young boy, they realized they had discovered an unprecedented genius.

This revelation left them perplexed. Students and teachers alike seemed equally astonished at the scene, dimming their excitement slightly. Though it was exhilarating to see a new star rise, many speculated that some powerful family might already have designs to involve him.

The first among the six to be eliminated was Deng Wu. While he performed admirably, it was clear that his cultivation base was suppressed, leading him to voluntarily surrender.

It wasn't due to accepting defeat meekly—not at all. Deng Wu would never give in so easily. Nor was it because he believed he'd lose the fight.

Surprisingly, Deng Wu forfeited because of Rong Xing. How could he risk damaging his handsome face? A disfigured face was the very last impression he wanted to leave on Rong Xing.

After Deng Wu finished his match, the six of them moved to a stall set up within the campus. These stalls primarily served alcohol and delicious food to entertain guests. Fortunately for the students, the academy had no regulations against students drinking, so while everyone else enjoyed chilled beers, Yan Xiaobao stared dejectedly at his lemonade.

As he begrudgingly sipped the slightly tart beverage, he sighed deeply. Hui Yue once again felt the misfortune of being trapped in a child's body.

"Stop complaining about your body," Lan Feng suddenly chimed in from their shared form, "What would you feel if you ended up among those useless commoners, huh? If we couldn't build a proper cultivation foundation, that would be truly terrifying."

Yan Xiaobao knew Phoenix was right, but there were still many limitations that made him feel frustrated.

"Don't stress over the beer," Lan Feng tried to console him, "Being in a child's body has its perks—you get to enjoy sweets more than you would as an adult. So, perhaps you can indulge in extra cake while you still can."

"Yes," Yan Xiaobao chuckled softly, "how could I forget that you're always the ever-enthusiastic Lan Feng," Yan Xiaobao said with a hint of mockery. It was clear Lan Feng only appreciated their appearances because of the snacks he could eat. He truly was a beast.

"My family is very pleased with the insurance ideas you've shared with us," Ma Kong suddenly said after taking a large gulp of beer. "You've really been a huge help to us. The old manager keeps telling me to invite you to visit the elders. I won't let you go; they all just want to see if they can pressure you into coming up with other business ideas."

Whenever he talked about his family, Ma Kong's eyes sparkled. Before this venture into insurance, Ma Kong was considered talented but only slightly above average—a young man who worked hard for what he wanted. At that time, his elder brother was exceptional, so Ma Kong was far from being viewed as an important youth in the family.

Now, the tides had turned. Ma Kong was the one who brought the insurance business concept to fruition, and he was connected to the once-outstanding young man who originally conceived the idea.

The Ma family was heavily reliant on goods and the Black Market Auction House, maintaining good relationships with experts and other families.

Ma Kong had integrated himself with the City Lord's heir, the City Lord's only daughter, and the son of the Deng family's leader. Now this previously unremarkable young talent had become ubiquitous.

In terms of interpersonal relationships among the younger generation of the Ma family, no one could compare to Ma Kong. Unfortunately, despite Ma Kong's networking skills, he lacked a certain ruthless characteristic that was required to run a business. However, that was in the past; all of Ma Kong's positive traits could not compensate for his lack of ruthlessness.

The new branch of the Ma family's business, focused on insurance, had already become an important segment. Although it couldn't rival the Black Market Auction House, it still lagged slightly behind in terms of profit.

Unfortunately, despite trailing behind the Black Market Auction House in profit, the risks were greater, and current profits had been frozen until a certain amount of accumulated funds could be secured—enough funds to ensure insurance payouts were covered.

What made Yan Xiaobao laugh was that he had once visited the office handling insurance matters and saw the staff doing their best to find loopholes to avoid paying out insurance claims. This greatly reminded him of habits from the old world, evoking a sense of nostalgia.

When Ma Kong discussed insurance and his family, his face lit up with a radiant smile. Ma Kong resembled Rong Xing in many ways. He would often quiet down while observing his surroundings. Other times, he displayed polite smiles and listened to people talk, but ever since Yan Xiaobao increased his family's income, Ma Kong had become animated whenever insurance or Yan Xiaobao was mentioned; his usual calm, collected persona transformed into that of a chatty and vibrant young man.

Yan Xiaobao smiled politely. This topic was often prolonged because of his preference, and although it initially brought him happiness and a sense of importance, it quickly became uncomfortable with the continuous praise.

"Deng Wu," Yan Xiaobao suddenly said, attempting to change the subject, "your ridiculously stupid reasons for quitting the tournament were cheap."

Though this was an attempt to steer the conversation, it also gave Hui Yue time to ponder his own matters. Even though Deng Wu intended to conceal his abilities, he had participated in tournaments and duels to fight for a top-tier mountain manor.

Yan Xiaobao suspected Deng Wu had a secret agenda, but no matter how he thought about it, he couldn't deduce a plausible reason.

"My reasoning can only be understood by an adult like me," Deng Wu said theatrically, placing one hand on his chest and gesturing dramatically with the other, as if to demonstrate he truly was a grown-up.

"Yeah, a pervert," Hui Yue frowned, resembling a ten-year-old boy. His eyes radiated an intelligence beyond his years, with all the innocence that should have been present brushed away by a sly sharpness.

Looking into those piercing eyes, Deng Wu sighed and felt a shiver run down his spine. Having learned of Yan Xiaobao's secrets and his combat capabilities, Deng Wu would never underestimate this audacious little silver-shelled monster standing before him.

"I'm not a pervert, just a romantic," Deng Wu explained candidly, his evident fear causing everyone at the table to widen their eyes, squeezing together to see if he was joking.

Deng Wu gazed at them with the tranquility of a newborn kitten. His words came from his heart. Though they felt entirely natural to him, the others were suddenly overcome by an inexplicable urge to laugh and gag simultaneously.

The one among their group who knew Deng Wu best, a boy whose eyes brimmed with confusion, looked disdainfully at his friend. That young man, undoubtedly the strongest student in Lילו City Royal Art Academy, had failed to protect his handsome face from potential embarrassment.

Suddenly, surrendering to the absurdity of the situation, a burst of laughter escaped his lips, and within seconds, the others at the table followed suit.

"What are you laughing at?" Deng Wu frowned in irritation, displeased with the others. "Do you think the beauty of our team should marry a scarred man? No? I don't think so. She needs me to stay handsome. Besides, why should I participate in a tournament I can't win?"

Deng Wu said this with conviction. As long as he didn't unleash his true potential or use the advanced martial arts skills taught to him by Yan Xiaobao, he wouldn't be able to win the tournament.

Although Deng Wu was ranked higher than Yan Xiaobao, his temperament was still lacking. While there was no reason for Yan Xiaobao to withhold some martial arts techniques, Deng Wu was unable to bear the weight of such skills. Their circumstances couldn't have been more polar opposite.

Yan Xiaobao decided that this year would be a year of unwavering commitment. Only after defeating Wang Julong and proving his superiority over the Wang family prodigy would he feel truly satisfied.

Even though some families expressed an interest in Hui Yue, they posed no real threat to him because he wasn't born into a family within the city. The only information available about him was his enigmatic past, which hinted at a unique relationship with the City Lord.

Conversely, having ties to the City Lord meant he was already caught up in the City Lord's faction. Although this could lead opponents to stage an "accident" for him, it was unlikely given his erased past. No one could discern whether it was to cover up a murder or conceal a prince.

Yan Xiaobao's potential identity as a prince was extremely unlikely, but on the other hand, it was plausible he might be a killer. Solving the mystery of this genius made everyone increasingly wary.

"I'm excited for tomorrow," Rong Ming suddenly said, his eyes sparkling and a radiant smile appearing on his face, "My sister and I are in the same group; imagine if we go head-to-head."

Although this seemed a foolish excitement to others, Yan Xiaobao and the others understood what Rong Ming meant.

While Rong Ming ranked higher in the tournament than Rong Xing, they all felt that Rong Xing was actually the stronger of the two. Rong Xing was enigmatic. She was almost always seen with a gentle smile, quietly sitting, observing her friends during conversations.

She seldom joined in on conversations, yet it felt as though she was part of everything being said.

Rong Xing often sparred with Rong Ming, and typically Rong Ming gained the upper hand. Nonetheless, no one had ever seen Rong Xing exert all her strength to defeat someone, nor had anyone witnessed Rong Xing seriously competing.

The student council crest didn't record which fighters exerted the most effort during matches, only recording winners and losers; seed students were ranked based on these results.

"If you're up against Rong Xing, you must forfeit!" Deng Wu said with a horrified look, his worried gaze fixed on Rong Xing. "How could you hit a woman—your own sister, at that?!"

"You know," Ma Kong suddenly said in a calm and steady voice, "I think Rong Xing would prefer a man with scars who dares to face his opponent, rather than a 'pretty boy' who runs away because of injuries."

