

Medical 271

Chapter 271 Remarkable Achievement

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The audience was convinced that the tension between these two young men stemmed from their desire to win and prove which family held the best foundation for the City Lord's position.

What the audience couldn't understand was the true reason behind the sudden hostility. Every time Wang Julong looked at Rong Ming, he didn't think about how Rong Ming's family had once been that of the City Lord. To him, it didn't matter.

Wang Julong grew up in the Wang Family. Although his family was one of the high-level noble families in the city, he had never experienced life within the City Lord's mansion, and thus held no animosity toward the current City Lord.

What occupied his thoughts was the memory of his clashes with Yan Xiaobao whenever he saw Rong Ming—a reminder of how his pride had been sullied. To Wang Julong, Rong Ming was nothing more than a stepping stone for another battle with Yan Xiaobao.

Wang Julong showed no intent to take the initiative, as he was shielded by his Qilin Lightning, which forced Rong Ming to make a vow. Quick as the wind, Rong Ming moved silently toward his opponent.

As Rong Ming approached swiftly, Wang Julong's face took on a focused expression as a burst of Qilin Lightning flashed like a hurricane, targeting Rong Ming in Okinawa.

Sensing the impending danger, Rong Ming trusted his instincts, sliding his body downward, rolling on the floor, and springing back with speed. In doing so, Rong Ming managed to dodge the first instance of Qi Lightning, shrinking the distance between the two.

When Rong Xing wielded a small dagger, Rong Ming deployed a martial arts attack skill called the Qi Sword. True to its name, the skill conjured a luminous pearl-white sword for Rong Ming.

This sword was created from pure white Qi. However, although the Qi was free of any blemishes, it did not emit the brilliance and radiance seen in the weapons of Wang Julong and Yan Xiaobao.

Arcing flashes of lightning shot out from the defensive stance, clashing against Rong Ming's Qi Sword in frantic explosions. Despite the chaos, Rong Ming deftly dodged, diving across the stage in evasive motions.

The spectacle outside left the audience visibly shocked. Though Rong Ming was known as a peerless genius who entered the practitioner realm at fifteen, he was currently battling a ten-year-old child.

A ten-year-old breaching the threshold of disciple level at such an age was regarded as a remarkable feat.

When Rong Ming realized that his current strategy was yielding no results, he gritted his teeth and opted to evade all of the Thunder Lightning strikes, rushing directly toward Wang Julong, who was shielded within a surrounding whirlwind.

A thick line of Qi surged out from Rong Ming, merging with the sword in his hand, transforming it into a larger, heavier blade that he swung with all his might.

Sparks from the whirlwind of Qilin Lightning struck the ground, causing shockwaves within, until the whirlwind collapsed alongside the sword. The whirlwind destabilized before dissipating into calm air, leaving only seven streaks of Qi Lightning beside Wang Julong.

Witnessing this, Yan Xiaobao's eyes narrowed. Just as he predicted Wang Julong was about to lose, he noticed the sword in Rong Ming's hand had shattered into fragments.

As a student specializing in Qi weapons, Yan Xiaobao knew exactly what this meant. Once a Qi weapon was destroyed, it couldn't be recalled until the user had reabsorbed the Qi spent to forge it.

Conversely, Wang Julong had also lost his whirlwind. Contrary to Yan Xiaobao's expectations, Wang Julong grinned, spreading his arms to reveal twenty dazzling Thunder Lightning Balls, each burning with fervent energy, ready to explode at a moment's command.

Seeing this, a bitter smile curled on Rong Ming's lips. He knew he had lost. Even though Rong Ming's vitality was stronger, he had given Wang Julong too much time to create Thunder Lightning streaks. Regardless of his strength, relying on his weaker Dantian meant that the onslaught of twenty Qi Lightning strikes would be enough to cause severe injury.

"I concede," Rong Ming shrugged and sighed. In some ways, the sight of Yan Xiaobao diminished his sorrow. At the moment, this young boy was staring intently at Wang Julong, a bloodthirsty smile flashing in his eyes, making it clear that Yan Xiaobao wanted nothing more than to challenge Wang Julong.

Hearing that the City Lord's son had conceded left everyone stunned, sparking discussions about the implications this would have for the future. Some nobles mulled over switching factions to join the Wang Family, while others insisted that Rong Ming hadn't unleashed his true potential because he wanted to avoid harming a weaker opponent.

After this battle, only one remained, but Yan Xiaobao was most concerned about his advancement to the top eight, along with Wang Julong.

Both boys silently faced each other, blue eyes meeting black eyes. Neither was willing to budge or yield, yet each demanded the other do so.

"Better not lose the next match," Wang Julong muttered, turning to rejoin his brothers and family.

As the final eight contenders were determined, the battered arena from prior battles stood empty. Over the next few days, these top eight students engaged in closed-door training sessions, each striving to hone the critical details that might tip the scales of victory in their favor.

Rong Ming's loss shocked the entire audience, as he had been the top seed of the entire tournament. This spurred rampant speculation about who might rise to claim the championship title.

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Currently, there are two participants in the nine-star disciple rankings: one is Gao Yan, and the other is Li Cheng. Li Sheng currently holds the highest student ranking, and his age combined with his rank gives him a distinct advantage. As such, most people believe Li Sheng will emerge victorious.

Some spectators think Wang Julong will win, considering his ability to deal with Rong Ming. Most of Wang Julong's supporters are nobles seeking to establish relations with the Wang Family.

Other nobles are betting on Gao Yan, with the theory that due to his frequent interactions with the Rong twins, he may have learned some mid-ranked Martial Arts Techniques. If his techniques prove to be superior, he is likely to win the tournament.

There are also those rooting for Yan Xiaobao's victory. These individuals are mainly fans captivated by flyers detailing one particular attack he hasn't yet used as well as the fact that he has remained an enigma to others.

Among the audience, everyone knows that Yan Xiaobao possesses a past that offers him substantial advantages, yet he remains a cultivator ranked at the student level.

In the midst of these discussions, Yan Xiaobao ignored everyone who came to greet him. Instead, he focused solely on his transforming weapon skill's sword form, a smile briefly flickering across his face only to be replaced by a frown.

"Controlling a sword is much harder than handling twin blades," he murmured, gazing at the sword formed from his solidified Qi before sighing. Unfortunately, it could only maintain its shape for about three minutes before dissolving into vapor that evaporates into the air. Each sword consumed about one-fifth of his internal Qi and lasted only a brief time, demonstrating that swords are still unreliable for Yan Xiaobao in actual combat.

Despite this, happiness radiated from the young boy, as he observed how the sword now manifested—even if only for three minutes—marking vast improvement from its previous long tubular misty spinning form.

After sighing again, Yan Xiaobao sat beneath a tree in the courtyard, preparing to enter meditation once more when a sudden thought struck him.

Wang Julong was currently training in a neighboring courtyard. Although he had defeated Rong Ming, it was clear that Wang Minglong had won due to Rong Ming's blunder. Evidently, Rong Ming was attacked right at the outset, leaving Wang Julong with insufficient time to craft the twenty Qi Lightning bolts poised to strike his opponent.

While Thunder Lightning is considered an advanced skill suitable for both defense and offense, it obviously comes with a major limitation—its reliance on significant time to channel Qi essence into the lightning.

At this moment, Yan Xiaobao was convinced he could use his transforming weapon to defeat the Thunder Lightning, yet deep down he felt an inexplicable sense of disappointment, akin to experiencing a pit of filth within his stomach.

Winning solely due to his higher-ranked Martial Arts Skills wouldn't feel like a proper victory. It was a predictable triumph, prompting Yan Xiaobao to climb a tree to observe the neighboring courtyard.

Entering the courtyard was impossible. Each courtyard was surrounded by inscriptions, ensuring only the masters and teachers could access it. Even sound couldn't escape the inscription barrier. However, noises within the courtyard, such as knocking, were audible.

Sitting atop the tree, Yan Xiaobao could see into the adjacent courtyard. As he contemplated, he picked up a branch and tossed it into Wang Julong's residence.

As expected by Yan Xiaobao, the branch didn't land peacefully but instead struck an invisible force, breaking apart mid-air and scattering into small wood chips.

Nevertheless, the branch accomplished its purpose. A thunderous noise reverberated from the courtyard, prompting an infuriated Wang Julong to rush outside.

At first, Yan Xiaobao was puzzled by the stormy look on Wang Julong's face. However, as he observed the boy standing in the center of the courtyard, something suddenly didn't add up to him.

A single realization struck Yan Xiaobao, causing him to lose his balance and fall off the branch he was seated on. Grateful that no one outside the courtyard could hear him, he breathed out a sigh of relief because he had no desire for anyone to approach him right now.

His face flushed a deep red, his mind a chaotic mess.

"He has breasts," Xu Yue remarked, peeking at the stone wall separating the two first-year prodigies. "Truly," he added, referring to the nickname "Xiao Ruafeng."

"What a pity they're wrapped up," Lan Feng commented with a mischievous grin, prompting an embarrassed Yan Xiaobao to cough at the cursed bird.

Inside the courtyard, Wang Julong wore simple black silk training pants. However, "his" upper body was only wrapped in silken ribbons, tightly bound but barely concealing the chest.

"What are you planning to do now?" Lan Feng asked curiously. For him, it was merely entertaining. He never perceived threats from the small humans inhabiting this little city. On the other hand, Yan Xiaobao had wrestled with Wang Julong's existence for months, yet Lan Feng could sense the hostility dissipate entirely in an instant.

"I'll fight her as promised, then pretend I never found out anything," Yan Xiaobao sighed at last. "She's relying on abilities I can easily overcome. Let's leave it as is."

Yan Xiaobao finally calmed down, releasing a long sigh. Nobody knew that what he had just witnessed was of utmost importance—something the Wang Family would likely not want others to learn.

It seemed everyone in Liluo City harbored secrets that others shouldn't uncover. Yan Xiaobao hid Lan Feng, Deng Wu had Little Dragon, and now Wang Julong concealed her identity as a girl.

"Alright, there's no helping it," Yan Xiaobao eventually decided. He sat beneath the tree he fell from and resumed his cultivation.

Outside Liluo City, seven men dressed in black finally approached the city gate. Upon being spotted, the City Lord's guards escorted them to Lord Rong Liang's mansion, where the City Lord awaited them.

Inside the City Hall's office, Rong Liang sat reviewing documents. Though every major figure in Liluo City had gone to the academy, Rong Liang refrained from leaving the mansion, opting instead to send officials to observe and record the battles on Memory Stones.

Upon hearing that Rong Ming and Rong Xing had been eliminated before reaching the quarterfinals, Rong Liang felt neither anger nor the disappointment others might expect. Instead, he was pleased, realizing Rong Xing was gradually beginning to understand his inferiority in resolve. He was content with Rong Ming's loss, knowing his son's passive reaction at the start led to his defeat by Wang Julong.

Lord Rong Liang was a principled man, uninterested in trivial competitions among the younger generation. Given his status as a top-tier nine-star King, he was poised to ascend to Emperor rank at any moment.

For him, serving as City Lord wasn't a long-term ambition. Yet whenever the Wang Family encountered problems, he fulfilled royal decrees dutifully. Rong Liang was both loyal and hard-working, striving daily to meet the Royal Family's expectations.

"My Lord," a servant opened the door hesitantly to address the City Lord, his voice trembling with fear. He had knocked multiple times without receiving a response, only daring to peek inside when he saw Rong Liang meticulously reviewing Memory Stones and arranging his scrolls.

"What do you want?" he snapped at the servant, annoyed by the interruption. Though clearly irritated, Lord Rong Liang swiftly stood and bowed deeply toward the seven men entering uninvited.

"Honored Crusaders, I, humble Rong Liang, welcome you. This lowly individual cannot fathom why individuals of your stature have graced this humble city with your presence." Lord Rong Liang maintained his bowed posture with utmost respect, slowly straightening his back afterward.

Rong Liang was uncertain about the expertise of these Crusaders. All he knew was that the Sun Kingdom's Royal Family had commanded every City Lord to cooperate fully with the Crusaders, treating them as emissaries of the King himself.

Knowing this, Rong Liang resigned himself to obedient servitude, albeit with satisfaction, as Rong Liang had always been willing to act in service of the Royal Family.

The black-clad figures appeared indifferent to Rong Liang's words. Instead, one of them gestured lightly, summoning a Memory Stone. The Memory Stone floated in front of Lord Rong Liang, who promptly placed it against his forehead.

"Assist these Crusaders in locating the expert ranked among Saints who sells these skills. His name is Sang Yang."

This command came from the Rongrong City Lord. Though brief, it left Rong Liang completely perplexed. The Saint-level expert in the city was a woman named Li Fen, not Sang Yang.

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Chapter 273 In the Midst of Danger

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Lord Rong Liang could understand if this nameless expert was concealing their identity, but even a Holy Name Expert could not possibly disguise themselves as a woman. Rong Liang sighed deeply; he realized he would have to notify and assist them in capturing Li Fen. He picked up a blank Memory Stone and placed it against his forehead.

In his mind, all the knowledge he possessed about "Li Fen" transformed into a silver mist, then left his forehead and floated into the unremarkable black Memory Stone in his hand.

After finishing, Rong Liang handed the stone to seven Crusader soldiers.

"Attend to me!" Lord Rong Liang shouted. Moments later, a servant opened the door to his office.

"What does milord request?" The servant glanced at the seven men dressed in black and asked. Although the servants knew nothing, they could still sense their master's humility toward these individuals, and the sight of their engraved black cloaks stirred a deep fear within their hearts.

"Prepare a remote courtyard for these esteemed experts and provide each of them with a city insignia," Rong Liang spoke wearily, then bowed once more towards the honored experts.

Once the Crusaders were situated in the courtyard, one of the experts began moving around, casting spells and inscribing runes around the perimeter while another fused the Memory Stone provided by Lord Rong Liang.

When he finished absorbing the information from the Memory Stone, he displayed no emotion akin to a Crusader's demeanor but instead made several hand gestures. A shadow detached itself from his black cloak and morphed into a small black bird.

This bird was unlike any other. It had no eyes, nor did it emit any sound. It was nothing more than a shadow. Yet, the shadow bird perched on the Crusader's shoulder.

Slowly, the shadow opened its mouth. The Crusader placed the Memory Stone into it, and it disappeared inside the bird. In an instant, the shadow ascended into the sky, flying toward the distant icy castle of Beast Mountain.

As Yan Xiaobao rushed toward Gao Yan on the stage, his beautiful azure eyes turned as cold as a frozen sea while blood seeped from his abdomen.

Just a few minutes earlier, the first match of the finals had already begun. Gao Yan had leapt onto the now blood-soaked stage, brimming with vigor.

Gao Yan's opponent was Li Cheng, a cultivator ranked as a nine-star second-tier disciple. Every spectator hoped this battle would become the most thrilling and intense performance among all the quarterfinals. However, it ended in mere minutes.

"Medic!" someone finally screamed, breaking out of their daze. The referee's face was pale, with green spots appearing on his hands. This man was a cultivator ranked at the Master level with an affinity for the wood element.

However, this Master was not specialized in human treatment, so he could not perform any major restoration. Nonetheless, he still managed to stop the bleeding as friends and mentors rushed onto the stage.

The Rong twins were pale. When their eyes fixed on the pool of blood, all the color drained from their faces. Although Gao Yan was no longer bleeding, it was clear he had lost a substantial amount of blood. His life was in grave danger.

As the Rong twins focused on Gao Yan, Yan Xiaobao watched the smug Li Cheng, narrowing his eyes. When he scanned the bustling stage, his sharp eyes grew wide with alertness, but every time his gaze passed over the now-unconscious Gao Yan, a certain contempt and scorn flickered in them.

From the beginning of the fight to its conclusion, Li Cheng had used only one attack. This attack appeared to be a medium-tier Master-level skill. While it wasn't as rare as a high-level skill, it was undoubtedly formidable.

This particular martial arts technique created a Qi Whip. The whip was as agile as any sword. The main issue was that, while the attack was fierce and sharp, if the opponent used their Qi ward defensively, it would quickly lose efficacy.

This drawback led Li Cheng to go all out immediately, striking deep into Gao Yan's abdomen and causing severe injury.

The medics had now arrived. As one focused on treating the injury, the others carefully moved the injured Gao Yan onto a stretcher; afterward, they rushed toward the temporary infirmary tent.

"What do you think?" Deng Wu asked Yan Xiaobao in a low voice. Evidently, while the Rong twins were consumed by sorrow and worry, Deng Wu and Yan Xiaobao, together with Ma Kong, were analyzing the situation.

Once Yan Xiaobao saw the injury, he sent Ma Kong to deliver a message to Lord Rong Liang. The contents of the message included a video recording. Yan Xiaobao chose to report to Lord Rong Liang because the mayor had personally sponsored Gao Yan. Whether he survived remained an open question, and informing his parents would undoubtedly fall to the lord.

"He could have won without causing such a grievous injury," Yan Xiaobao murmured as he continued to look at the grinning Li Cheng, as though the man had done nothing wrong.

"Let's hope I am his next opponent," Yan Xiaobao said sinisterly, his eyes gleaming with a cold light. "I would love to repay him for his gratitude toward Gao Yan."

With these words, Yan Xiaobao turned and walked briskly toward the infirmary, with Deng Wu following close behind.

"He will survive," a medic said while inspecting Gao Yan's abdominal wound. "His Dantian is destroyed, but he can live a crippled life," the medic continued coldly as she swiftly withdrew her hands from the wound, halting her healing and allowing the blood to begin flowing again.

Chapter 274 Danger Amidst_2

"Can you repair his Dantian?" Yan Xiaobao walked over to the tent and asked. The young boy was followed by a slightly older, more intimidating boy, Deng Wu. Yet the speaker, Yan Xiaobao, was merely ten years old and acted as if he were in complete control.

"Listen here, little boy," the nurse said disdainfully as she looked at Yan Xiaobao. "This is just a civilian boy. While I can repair his Dantian, can you afford to pay for it?"

Hearing her words caused a stir, but Yan Xiaobao's first response was to pull three spirit coins out of a Memory Stone and toss them onto the nurse's face.

"Repair his Dantian, and never show your face before me again." Yan Xiaobao said with undisguised contempt in his voice. A sudden gust of cold wind entered the tent, sending shivers down the woman's spine. In his icy blue eyes gleamed a chilling and arrogant aura that filled the woman with an uncontrollable sense of dread.

The nurse was shocked. She had just been threatened by a ten-year-old boy. Despite him clearly being at the student level, he still managed to instill a deep fear within her. She was a Master, someone who gathered cultivators together!

Picking up the coins, the nurse quickly shook off the fear and instead focused entirely on treating Gao Yan's damaged Dantian.

"I'm back," Ma Kong said, panting as he entered the tent. If possible, Rong Ming and Rong Xing now looked paler than ever. Even Deng Wu seemed pale, as he hadn't even tried using this moment to approach Rong Xing. Quietly standing behind Yan Xiaobao, Deng Wu observed with patience as he watched the green light entering Gao Yan's abdomen.

"His Dantian was destroyed," Yan Xiaobao explained, his gaze never leaving the nurse. "We're repairing it. Unfortunately, his Qi has scattered, and he'll need to cultivate from the start again."

Hearing this, a flash of murderous intent momentarily darkened Ma Kong's expression, as he understood all too well what such news entailed.

"Don't worry," Yan Xiaobao calmly assured Ma Kong while observing everything that had already transpired. "I'll help Gao Yan rebuild his cultivation base so that his loss won't be too devastating."

These words brought some color back to everyone's faces, albeit reluctantly. Although Yan Xiaobao was known to have many secrets, he had never behaved with such gravitas before. He was no longer merely a child; he seemed instead to embody the weight of responsibility for the entire group.

Yan Xiaobao and the others stood guard by Gao Yan for an hour. During this time, the nurse worked tirelessly, exerting all her skills.

Finally, the last flicker of green light disappeared, and the nurse collapsed onto the ground, exhausted, letting out a heavy sigh.

"Uh..." Gao Yan slowly awakened, his voice weak and disoriented. "What happened?" he asked, rubbing his eyes. A faint sense of emptiness consumed him—an utterly powerless feeling.

"Your Dantian was destroyed," Yan Xiaobao stated bluntly, shocking everyone around. "It's been repaired, but you'll have to rebuild your cultivation from scratch."

Upon hearing this, an ugly expression crossed Gao Yan's face, but it lasted only a moment before transforming into shock.

"Why would you waste time fixing my Dantian? I'm just an ordinary person," he asked curiously, as his gaze lingered on the exhausted nurse, seated cross-legged on the ground before them.

"Yan Xiaobao paid for the treatment," Deng Wu said bluntly, causing Gao Yan to feel a wave of gratitude wash over him.

"I have some things to explain. Let's return to my courtyard," Yan Xiaobao said and turned to walk away, his voice quiet yet firm.

Despite feeling weak and having no cultivation base at the moment, Gao Yan was still able to muster the strength to walk back to the courtyard. His body bore no visible scars, thanks to the nurse's flawless work.

The six of them walked at a slower pace than usual, but they remained cohesive as a group. Yan Xiaobao led at the forefront alongside Deng Wu, while Ma Kong walked on the other side. Gao Yan and the Rong twins followed them as quickly as they possibly could.

On the way to the residential mountain, Yan Xiaobao briefly left the group as he headed toward the apothecary's exit. None of the students knew the reason, and Yan Xiaobao offered no explanation. The only person who seemed to understand was Deng Wu, who kept his silence.

Upon returning to Courtyard 1009, Yan Xiaobao went to his room, removed his student badge, and instructed the others to do the same.

"Why do we need to remove our student badges?" Rong Ming asked curiously as he complied.

"Badges can record everything they observe," Yan Xiaobao explained matter-of-factly. "What I'm about to tell you is something no one has ever known—not your family or your friends."

Hearing this, curiosity spread like wildfire among the group, and they quickly removed all their Memory Stones, including storage gems and information gemstones. One couldn't be too cautious.

After setting aside their Memory Stones, everyone left the courtyard and gathered under a tree, sitting in a circle.

"As you've likely all noticed, I've kept some secrets to myself that I haven't wanted to explain before. But now, I feel I need to tell you," Yan Xiaobao began, taking a deep breath before continuing.

"While wandering through the mystical forest, I encountered the tomb of an ancient expert," Yan Xiaobao slightly altered the story, as he knew the full truth would be beyond their comprehension. It was something Deng Wei was privy to.

"This ultimate expert's soul was sealed within a magical artifact. When I touched it, the soul entered my body. The two of us now share a single form."

With each word Yan Xiaobao spoke, the group's eyes widened further until they seemed impossibly large.

"This expert is helping me increase my cultivation and teaching me advanced techniques for survival," Yan Xiaobao said.

Ma Kong chuckled before bursting into laughter, "You're Li Fen!" he exclaimed. Hearing this, the others immediately realized the truth, their eyes filling with reverence.

Yan Xiaobao merely smiled, neither confirming nor denying the statement. Instead, he pulled out a jade box and placed it in front of Gao Yan.

"These are Qi Pills," Yan Xiaobao said as he opened the jade box to reveal a hundred pills. "Take them," he said, pushing the pills toward Gao Yan.

"I'll provide you with a cultivation method," Yan Xiaobao continued, looking at the now crippled Gao Yan. "This method won't produce Qi as pure as mine or Wang Julong's," Yan Xiaobao explained, "but it'll slightly enhance the quality of your Qi, allowing faster cultivation."

As Yan Xiaobao spoke, Lan Feng moved inside the Dantian Cave, quickly taking control of Yan Xiaobao's body. A single finger pressed against Yan Xiaobao's smooth, youthful forehead, emitting a silver glow. The light illuminated the wizened hand before swiftly transferring to Gao Yan's forehead.

The light shone brightly for a moment before entering his head. This was Lan Feng's cultivation method from when he was still known as Blue Phoenix. It was a respectable method originating four thousand years ago, notable for its speed that far outmatched the techniques Yan Xiaobao had been using.

Cultivation methods determine how a user absorbs and refines essence into Qi. These methods serve as foundations; though one can change their cultivation method mid-cycle, it's generally disadvantageous and potentially harmful.

If the Qi within the Dantian varies in quality, it's likely to become imbalanced, resulting in significant harm to the cultivator. This imbalance also renders Martial Arts Skills unreliable, as Qi impurities disrupt synergy during activation.

"Gao Yan, this cultivation method alongside Baihui Hall's pills is my gift to you. As for the rest of you, I'll provide high-level Martial Arts Skills to ensure you can protect yourselves in the future. I won't allow my friends to be hurt."

The weight of Yan Xiaobao's words, alongside his actions toward Gao Yan, struck deep chords within the remaining five. People don't do such things unless they truly care about the recipient.

Chapter 275 Descendants of the Vermilion Bird

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Ma Kong was the first to lightly cut his fingertip, then he applied a few drops of potion to the wound.

"I, Ma Kong of the Ma family, hereby pledge a Blood Oath. I will never speak of today's events outside of the five of us present here."

As these words left his mouth, the world seemed to flash crimson red, for the droplets of blood he pressed out transformed into golden threads and were forced back into his body.

Seeing Ma Kong's Blood Oath declaration, the Rong Sheng twins and Gao Yan nodded solemnly before following suit.

In Yan Xiaobao's small courtyard, a series of blood-red veils appeared one after another as they each made their Blood Oaths, swearing never to reveal the events of that fateful afternoon.

After the blood oath ceremony, Gao Yan moved to a secluded corner of the courtyard and resumed his cultivation.

Yan Xiaobao observed that the cultivation methods taught to him by Lan Feng were completely different from the dominant practices used on the continent today.

At the beginning, Yan Xiaobao knew that forming the bird hand seal was essential. He initially thought this was purely for Lan Feng's benefit due to the latter being a bird. However, in recent years, Yan Xiaobao discovered that these gestures could connect cultivators to the twelve zodiacs, thus accelerating their cultivation speed.

When Yan Xiaobao realized the bird hand seal linked to the rooster zodiac, he found it amusing and was struck by the thought that Lan Feng might indeed be a chicken.

Though the cultivation method relying on the rooster wasn't the strongest among all techniques, it was the most effective for Yan Xiaobao, as his soul was bonded to Lan Feng.

Lan Feng's distinctive cultivation techniques were based on the twelve zodiacs and could establish various connections to the zodiac. The stronger the cultivator's bond with the zodiac, the more efficient the cultivation technique.

Currently, Yan Xiaobao's soul was connected to Lan Feng, who was a descendant of the Vermilion Bird—the sovereign of all birds. This heightened the compatibility between Lan Feng's cultivation method and the rooster technique to an astonishing degree.

The cultivation method Yan Xiaobao passed on to Gao Yan was associated with the dog zodiac. Though its effectiveness hadn't reached Yan Xiaobao's level, it far exceeded the mundane cultivation techniques reliant on earth and soil while neglecting the zodiac.

Yan Xiaobao also sat down quietly for a moment. During his meditation, he was communicating with Lan Feng to devise the most advantageous attacks for each of his friends present.

"Consider carefully what you're actually giving them," Lan Feng said as he deliberated over which skills to impart. At first, Lan Feng strongly disagreed with Yan Xiaobao's decision to share these techniques, but he recognized how deeply Hui Gao worried for Yan Xiaobao to the point of bleeding out, while Lan Feng himself was powerless to help.

Yan Xiaobao was not someone who considered himself particularly noble, nor was he deeply attached to this world. However, there were a few individuals in this world who treated him with a degree of caution and care.

Yan Xiaobao was a person who repaid kindness when he received it, and now it was time to uphold that principle. Hearing these truths caused some hesitation in others, but they realized that Yan Xiaobao was sharing his greatest secrets with them. He had let go of everything without asking for anything in return. Their Blood Oaths came naturally.

"I've got it!" Lan Feng said excitedly as he slowly merged with their bonded form, settling Yan Xiaobao within the Dantian Cave as mental preparation.

"You're up," Lan Feng spoke through Yan Xiaobao's mouth, leaving everyone present astonished. Lan Feng pointed to Rong Ming, the young twin who cautiously approached, transforming into a Holy Beast in front of the crowd.

Lan Feng once again radiated strands of brilliant light containing high-level martial arts techniques, which he placed onto Rong Ming's forehead.

"This is Striking Qi. It's a low-level King-ranked martial arts attack skill. It can condense into a blade that moves according to your will and cuts through any defense. It's not a sword-like blade but a peculiar weapon. You cannot control it directly, but it will act upon your command."

Every word Lan Feng spoke left the others breathless, their eyes filled with awe. There was no doubt this was an exceedingly rare advanced martial arts skill with no harsh prerequisites for cultivators to overcome.

Rong Ming was stunned as the knowledge poured into his mind like a surging flood, sweeping through his meridians, ultimately settling in the Qi Qi Cave. Rong Ming quickly became proficient. Moving to a quiet corner of the courtyard, he immediately began training, utterly absorbed in his own world.

Next was Rong Xing. She received Floating Qi Fan, a weapon she could manipulate through thought. If her Qi was strong enough, she could use the fan to glide through the air. Floating Qi Fan was also a low-level King-ranked martial arts attack skill.

Rong Xing moved to another empty corner of the courtyard, casting a glance at Rong Ming as she analyzed the imprints of martial arts techniques and temperament, sinking deep into thought.

The next skill was given to Ma Kong. It was a mid-level King-ranked martial arts attack skill named Explosive Qi Flower. As the name suggested, it allowed Ma Kong to create flowers from his Qi strand, which he could throw, causing them to explode upon will. This skill had the most potential of all those shared so far, but Yan Xiaobao felt it suited Ma Kong's needs best.

One must remember that while Yan Xiaobao taught these skills to his friends, the knowledge remained preserved in Lan Feng's mind, allowing him to transmit them back to Yan Xiaobao whenever needed in the future.

Chapter 276 Descendants of the Vermilion Bird_2

Once Ma Kong accepted the technique, his expression was filled with surprise, followed by a certain stubbornness. He walked towards the only corner of the courtyard. There, he closed his eyes and sat down to meditate, deciding to thoroughly analyze it before attempting to create any manifestations.

"So, it's just the two of us now," Deng Wu said with a smile, observing the four youths practicing their personal skills with intense focus. Yan Xiaobao nodded in response but remained silent, his gaze fixed on Gao Yan. A glint of coldness flashed through his eyes, sending a shiver down Deng Wu's spine. Deng Wu didn't want to be like Li Cheng, but even he felt that this older boy needed to face the punishment he deserved.

At the moment, Lan Feng returned to the Dantian Cave, and Yan Xiaobao returned to his own body.

"I've given Little Dragon's friend the technique that suits him best," Lan Feng thought to himself as he spoke. Yan Xiaobao nodded slightly. Deng Wu already possessed a skill, so giving him another didn't seem important, but Lan Feng seemed to disagree.

"At first, I might not have trusted this person. But since Little Dragon accepted him, he can't be all bad," said Lan Feng. "Let's see if he has the capacity to learn the Qi Guard. He already has an offensive technique, so this time we'll give him a defensive one."

Yan Xiaobao nodded in agreement. He also felt that Deng Wu was trustworthy, though a bit dramatic and difficult to read.

"This time, you teach him the Qi Guard," Lan Feng said with a yawn. "Transferring knowledge from the mind is rather exhausting. You've perfected the Qi Guard, so if he learns it from you, that'll be enough."

Upon hearing this, Yan Xiaobao raised an eyebrow slightly and waved at Deng Wu.

"I have a technique for you," he said, closing his eyes. "But you'll learn it from me, not from Lan Feng."

Hearing this caused Deng Wu to be extremely surprised. Lan Feng would only let Yan Xiaobao train techniques of the highest caliber. Little Dragon had spent an extended amount of time explaining to Deng Wu Lan Feng's perfectionism and obstinance. This signaled that the skill Deng Wu was about to learn was undoubtedly extraordinary.

Yan Xiaobao grumbled slightly as he quickly searched his mind for all information on the Qi Guard. All of this knowledge converged into a glowing ball of light, which Yan Xiaobao slowly pulled from his forehead.

Since Yan Xiaobao couldn't completely separate the offensive skill of the Qi Guard from his amassed knowledge, the light ball ended up being larger than the one Lan Feng had provided.

On the other hand, acquiring this knowledge was beneficial for Deng Wu; it would make training much easier but might limit Deng Wu's ability to adapt the skill, as he would train in the exact same way Yan Xiaobao had, reducing the potential for skill evolution.

"Qi Guard?" Deng Wu said in shock as he finally comprehended the defensive technique Yan Xiaobao had used against Wang Julong's Qi Lightning.

Deng Wu was highly knowledgeable about his own skills, but when he realized that this ability had been perfected by someone who had lived only ten years, he was even more astonished.

Unlike the others, Deng Wu didn't immediately begin training. After carefully observing the others for some time, he eventually started practicing a technique Yan Xiaobao had provided him earlier—the Qi Dance Pillars. Deng Wu had learned from Yan Xiaobao how important it was to perfect one skill before

moving on to another, a practice that Lan Feng often emphasized. The older boy chose to follow this advice.

Putting everything before his companions put Yan Xiaobao at ease. Yan Xiaobao had owed much to the Rong twins from a young age, and everyone in the courtyard was someone Yan Xiaobao trusted completely.

Watching Deng Wu train, Yan Xiaobao smiled before losing himself in the practice of transforming the weapon into a sword shape version.

The six youths remained in the courtyard, interrupted only once when the door opened, revealing Lord Rong Liang, who came upon the injured Gao Yan.

Lord Rong Liang's expression was stern. He had already requested the academy initiate an investigation to determine whether the incident was accidental, but Gao Yan stopped him.

That very day, Gao Yan had climbed to second place in the student rankings, and his current condition was better than before. Gao Yan quickly realized that although he had lost his cultivation base, the new cultivation technique offered him greater prospects for the future.

Lord Rong Liang was quite taken aback by Gao Yan's current cultivation base, raising numerous questions. However, no matter how much he probed, Gao Yan declined to answer. In the end, Rong Liang could only shake his head, exiting the courtyard and allowing the six youths to return to training.

Finally, the much-anticipated day arrived, and Yan Xiaobao was set to fight again. The semi-finals paired Yan Xiaobao against a civilian victorious in Group Three and matched Li Sheng against Wang Julong.

A complicated emotion arose in Yan Xiaobao's heart. Everything he had done throughout the competition was to confront Wang Julong, but now the animosity between Yan Xiaobao and Li Sheng far outweighed that original intent.

Personal pride did not matter to Yan Xiaobao; avenging his friends was his priority. Nevertheless, Wang Julong was no pushover. Though she was a woman, her achievements were far from laughable.

As he looked at Wang Julong, Yan Xiaobao noticed she was also gazing in his direction.

"Win," she said as she approached Yan Xiaobao. "Win your match. I will wait for you in the finals. A blot like seriously injuring a schoolmate deserves no respect."

In her brown eyes, he saw a mixture of determination and indifference. Yan Xiaobao responded with a nod. Even Wang Julong was willing to seek revenge for Gao Yan. In that case, Yan Xiaobao felt no lingering apprehension.

As Yan Xiaobao stepped onto the stage, he saw his opponent—a civilian and one of Gao Yan's followers. The opponent's face twisted with anger and hatred, but his emotions were evidently directed not at Yan Xiaobao but at Li Sheng standing by the arena's sidelines.

"I forfeit!" the young man shouted loudly, shocking everyone present. As he walked down the stairs, he approached Yan Xiaobao, placed a hand on his shoulder, and whispered, "If Li Cheng makes it to the finals, make sure he never steps off this stage again."

Standing on the stage, the final semi-final match still undecided, the tension within the arena grew more intense. A palpable sense of expectation hung heavy in the air.

The outcome of the first semi-final had been shocking, yet it was fleetingly volatile. The idea of a semi-finalist forfeiting right at the beginning was utterly unexpected. For the civilians competing, the prize money was often their lifeline.

Taking time to process the situation only made it more astonishing. Clearly, the civilian had forfeited to retaliate against Li Cheng, but this presented yet another surprising layer of conflict.

Yan Xiaobao, merely a nine-star-ranked cultivator, had once caused a late-ranking disciple to retreat, choosing instead to trust a boy of the lowest cultivation realm to seek vengeance on his behalf.

At first, it was assumed that the young cultivator stepped down to quell the feud between Wang Julong and Yan Xiaobao, a hostility that had long been evident to all.

From beneath the stage, two students of the Wang Family—Wang Tonglong and Wang Jialong—observed the scene. Wang Tonglong had managed to defeat Rong Ming’s top seed. Considering someone had taken down Rong Ming, it was expected that Li Sheng would also be left to face the ten-year-old boy.

Others speculated that Wang Julong had only defeated Rong Ming because the older student let his guard down. It was unlikely that Li Cheng would fall for a similar ploy. Given his attack on Gao Yan, it was highly probable that the first exchange of techniques would leave Wang Julong seriously wounded.

The two young students stood on stage, facing one another as they awaited the judge’s arrival. On this day, as it was a semi-final, the referee was one of the Royal Academy elders. These elders were significant not only within the academy but also throughout Liluo City.

Today’s elder was the youngest among those assigned to the Liluo City Royal Art Academy. His name was Qin Zeng, and so far, Yan Xiaobao had a positive impression of this middle-aged man.

Qin Zeng had become an elder a year ago when he received the title of Duke. Like most elders of the Royal Art Academy, he immediately chose to align himself with the city lord’s faction. After all, Lord Rong Liang had been appointed by the Royal Family.

"Let the battle begin!" Qin Zeng’s voice roared across the energized stage, drawing everyone’s full attention to the two young figures standing in the arena. All other sounds faded away.

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Chapter 277 Sudden Strike

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As soon as the sound rang out, the wind began to sweep across the entire area, accelerating rapidly towards Wang Julong, forming the familiar tornado around her body.

Wang Julong narrowed her eyes, keeping her focus on Li Cheng while anticipating a sudden strike aimed at her, yet nothing happened.

Step by step, she retreated, creating space between them—the only action she could take while waiting for her Qi Lightning Torch to charge and grow, stacking them around her body.

Suddenly, a flash of white devoid of Qi darted towards Wang Julong from afar. Fortunately, Wang Julong didn't lose her focus and swiftly unleashed two Thunder Lightning Balls from the safety of her tornado, shooting them directly at the merciless slash targeting her.

Wang Julong conjured a fierce defensive gust within the wind, generating a thunderous roar across the arena. A furious gale surged from the impact site, causing her tornado to spin around her at an astonishing speed, blurring her figure in the center.

Li Sheng's face twisted into an unpleasant grimace as he recreated his whip attack. The previous one had been completely obliterated upon clashing with the Qi Lightning, but his expression betrayed no hint of defeat.

The same scene unfolded once more. As the serene white sphere of Qi shot toward Wang Julong, two Qi spheres exited the safety of the tornado. The explosions filled the sky, yet unlike before, the whip managed to endure and continued advancing towards Wang Julong.

Hidden within the tornado, Wang Julong's expression was unseen by anyone. Nonetheless, Xu Yue could sense an air of frustration emanating from her.

The tornado hadn't lasted long enough to stockpile a reserve of Qi Lightning Balls. Each attack consumed the spheres as soon as they were formed during the relentless strikes.

Currently, Li Cheng's advantage was evident to everyone. Li Cheng's mastery of Qi far surpassed that of Wang Julong, and his superiority was clear, causing Wang Julong to grit her teeth as she unraveled her defensive tornado.

"I'm relieved..." Before she could finish her sentence, the whip lashed toward her, forcing her to retreat hurriedly. Luckily, Wang Julong maintained her vigilance and acted swiftly. The whip, charged with aggressive energy, promised to end her life had she not responded promptly.

When he realized Wang Julong had narrowly escaped death, Li Cheng's face darkened, rage coursing through his meridians unrelated to his Qi as it surged within him.

On the stage, Wang Julong evaded death but was covered in gashes, blood seeped from her arms, and her muscles were visibly severed.

Just as Wang Julong opened her mouth, ready to counter once again, Li Cheng unleashed another volley of whip strikes upon her, inflicting greater damage than before.

Her clothes hung in tatters. Though the fabric barely concealed her secrets, the once-beautiful blue material swiftly darkened, the blood staining it nearly black.

Blood streamed down her face, obscuring her vision. It flowed freely from her body onto the ground, creating slick patches, while her right arm was nearly severed, white bone visible amidst the torn flesh.

Wang Julong attempted to counter again, opening her mouth, but, as before, Li Cheng made sure to disrupt her attempts.

This time, however, Wang Julong had no energy left to move. She merely stared at the figure standing before her.

Seeing this, another figure leaped onto the stage, sending a chill down Yan Xiaobao's spine. Earlier, as his Qi began flowing through his meridians, Yan Xiaobao had instinctively activated his Speed Flow, and his current movement speed was too fast for Li Cheng to keep up.

In less than a second, Xu Yue landed on the stage and picked up Wang Julong before leaping off the platform.

Everything happened so quickly that no one had time to react. From the moment he first entered the tournament, Yan Xiaobao's mastery over Speed Flow had significantly advanced, moving as swiftly as the wind while rescuing Wang Julong.

An uproar immediately spread across the stage. Some reacted with relief, while others were left confused, and a few felt disappointed.

"What do you think you're doing?!?" A voice roared across the stage, stopping Yan Xiaobao in his tracks and prompting him to turn back to see who had spoken.

"She has forfeited," Yan Xiaobao said coldly, like the chill of a winter morning in his eyes. "You didn't end the match when she forfeited. Shouldn't I be the one asking why you allowed someone to continue fighting after the forfeiture?"

Upon hearing this, the judge's face flushed with anger. The judge, acting as part of the City Lord's faction, had been hoping to severely injure or weaken the tournament's greatest prodigy. Seeing a mere child like Yan Xiaobao stand against the City Lord's greater interests infuriated Qin Zeng.

Rong Yue, always flanked by the Rong twins, and Lord Rong Liang brushed past with polite indifference. Everyone expected Yan Xiaobao to merely watch as Wang Julong suffered injuries or was killed by Li Cheng.

"She never completed her statement; I demand an explanation as to why you think a child like you might interfere!" Zeng Guanghui felt himself humiliated by Yan Xiaobao, not to mention shamed in front of all the nobles in Liluo City. To him, this was unacceptable, and he glared daggers at Yan Xiaobao, who casually walked away, carrying Wang Julong in his arms.

"Wait, explain yourself first!" the old man shouted again. Yan Xiaobao stopped in his tracks, turning his head again toward Qin Zeng, but this time it was more like the face of a white rakshasa than that of an angel.

Chapter 278 Sudden Strike_2

"Scum like you have no right to question me." Yan Xiaobao's deep and steady voice resounded, carrying a heavy pressure that overwhelmed everyone present.

This pressure didn't come from Lan Feng's influence on Yan Xiaobao, but rather from Yan Xiaobao's disdain for Li Cheng and Qin Zeng.

Qin Zeng felt as though he had fallen into a frozen lake. As his heartbeat grew erratic, his entire body started trembling, and goosebumps appeared all over his skin.

Hatred consumed the old man as he sensed the oppressive aura coming from someone who was only ranked as a student in cultivation. He opened his mouth to respond.

"You... you're disqualified!" he yelled at Yan Xiaobao as he walked away. But the young boy neither paused nor slowed his steps as he strode toward the infirmary.

"Who would have thought it would end this way," Yan Xiaobao joked to the battered girl. "To think that you're actually a girl—what a surprise." He continued, his body beneath her stiffening.

"How did you know?" she asked, growing wary, clearly concerned about what might happen next.

"Well, even if you are a girl, you're really quite plain," Yan Xiaobao continued as though he hadn't heard Wang Julong's question at all.

From Wang Julong's perspective now, Yan Xiaobao was carrying her like a princess. Unfortunately, one of his hands had gone astray, resting on her bandaged chest.

"You pervert!" Wang Julong exclaimed, her cheeks burning red, drawing curious but peculiar looks from the crowd gathering near them.

Despite the agony and bleeding all over her body, Wang Julong still blushed at the earlier comment.

"Don't worry," Xu Yue said with a smile to the girl in her arms. "We'll settle the score in next year's rematch."

Yan Xiaobao glanced back, spotting a satisfied smirk as Wang Jingshen and a group of people hurried over.

The approaching figures seemed to be elders from the Wang Family, their faces alight with anxiety and consternation.

"Thank you, student," one of the elders said as they reached Yan Xiaobao. "We'll take it from here," he continued, quickly snatching Wang Julong from Yan Xiaobao's grasp.

Yan Xiaobao noticed a faint smile on the elder's face, as if the man was worried Yan Xiaobao might uncover their secret.

"I'll leave the rest to you, esteemed elders," Yan Xiaobao said with a slight bow. They nodded in acknowledgment before swiftly rushing toward the makeshift infirmary.

Yan Xiaobao stood behind, watching them disappear into the distance. Various thoughts swirled in his mind, but he couldn't grasp any of them clearly.

He let out a deep sigh, turned around, and made his way back toward his friends, a complex expression etched on his face.

When Yan Xiaobao returned to the group, Deng Wu noticed his furrowed brows and faraway blue eyes, as though they were perceiving a world different from their own.

Initially, everyone wanted to ask about Wang Julong, but upon seeing the trance-like state Yan Xiaobao was in, no one dared to speak. A strange tranquility enveloped the boy who was slowly returning to reality.

The dreamy look in his blue eyes sharpened, and a sense of calm settled over his body, leaving behind no visible trace of his earlier daze.

Seeing his friends staring at him with visible confusion in their eyes, Yan Xiaobao let out a shy smile.

"Sorry," he said softly with an awkward tone, "I was just thinking about a few things. Did you say something?" His words, accompanied by his embarrassed smile, made Deng Wu snort. Knowing Yan Xiaobao so well, Deng Wu instantly recognized the boy's attempt to avoid being questioned.

Deng Wu simply smiled and shook his head, redirecting his attention to Li Cheng and Qin Zeng, who were still standing on the stage. The two were no longer alone. All the elders within the academy had gathered on the stage, quietly discussing among themselves.

Finally, the principal of the academy straightened his back and stepped forward.

"The winner of the semifinals is student Li Cheng," he announced, his voice unassuming yet echoing across the entire stage with each word. "Five days from now, student Li Sheng will face off against student Yan Xiaobao in the finals."

After the announcement, an odd silence filled the vibrant arena, as though no one dared to break it.

Eventually, a few people cleared their throats and started cheering for Li Sheng's victory. However, the applause appeared to come from only a few adults before it slowly spread throughout the spectators.

Although Li Cheng had shown a desire to kill Wang Julong, the audience was overwhelmingly aware of his sheer strength. A strong man, after all, commanded respect.

Yet, despite the kind attitude adults displayed toward him, not a single student clapped for Li Cheng. Everyone was shocked by the fact that he had contemplated killing a fellow student—a thought he'd entertained twice now.

Without saying a word, Yan Xiaobao turned around and began walking slowly toward his courtyard. Following behind him were five other young people, each quietly wondering what exactly had transpired when he and Wang Julong went to the infirmary.

As a thought crossed his mind, Deng Wu paid particular attention to Yan Xiaobao, and he began to chuckle softly to himself.

The boy's laughter snapped Yan Xiaobao out of his contemplative thoughts. He shot an irritated look at Deng Wu for laughing.

Ever since Yan Xiaobao encountered the elders of the Wang Family, he couldn't shake the feeling that something wasn't quite right. The elders had been quick to take the injured Wang Julong from his arms, making it evident they were fully aware of the young master's true identity as a young lady.

This pointed to a deliberate decision by the family. What truly unsettled Yan Xiaobao was the moment when, as the elders approached and tried to take Wang Julong, she instinctively clung to his clothes, as though she wished to stay with him just a bit longer.

The proud rival Wang Julong seemed to prefer being in Yan Xiaobao's arms rather than leaving with the elders. Sighing deeply, Yan Xiaobao thought to himself. There was nothing more he could do now, though a strange bond had formed between the two, born out of mutual recognition as rivals.

These feelings were new to Yan Xiaobao, who spent the entire walk back to his courtyard sighing, entirely unaware that the five people following behind him had now dwindled to just one.

Rong Xing had dragged her brother, Gao Yan, and Ma Kong back to her own courtyard, where she intended to train with all four of them. Though their original plan had been to follow Yan Xiaobao, this intent quickly changed when they noticed the pensive expression lingering on his face.

The only reason Rong Xing hadn't brought Deng Wu along was because he'd been laughing all the while, as though he had figured out something the rest of them hadn't.

"You know Wang Julong's secret too, don't you?" Deng Wu asked with a grin. Together, he and Yan Xiaobao were now in Courtyard 1009. Having paused his steps, Yan Xiaobao finally turned and raised an eyebrow at Deng Wu's question.

"You know?"

"Little Dragon told me," Deng Wu replied smugly, watching for the young boy's reaction. Yet, contrary to what Deng Wu had expected, there wasn't even a hint of confusion in Yan Xiaobao's eyes.

"You knew she was a girl?" Yan Xiaobao turned to Lan Feng. Lan Feng laughed and said, "I did tell you not to worry about such a small opponent." His comment made Yan Xiaobao roll his eyes in irritation, letting out an exasperated snort like an annoyed bird in Qi Cave.

"I knew she was a girl," Yan Xiaobao admitted, sitting under his favorite tree and sighing as he gestured for his old friend to take a seat beside him.

"What do you know about the Wang Family?" Yan Xiaobao suddenly asked, tilting his head to gaze at the autumn sky above.

"The Wang Family used to be the City Lord," Deng Wu began, though it was information Yan Xiaobao already knew. "Eventually, their economic status began to decline, and the city fell behind on taxes. At the time, the Royal Family sent Rong Liang here to take over as City Lord. The Wang Family was granted land to construct their family compound within the city and received a large sum of money to compensate for losing their position."

This was news to Yan Xiaobao, who listened attentively. Things began to make sense as he pondered why Wang Julong had been forced to live as a man.

"The Wang Family still wishes to regain its former status, but they can't defy the Royal Decree. If they're foolish enough to attempt that, the Royal Army would wipe out the entire family before they could hold the City Lord's position for more than a few days."

Yan Xiaobao nodded; it all made sense. "So the reason for making her live as a boy was to prove that they have a young heir more suitable than the City Lord," Yan Xiaobao said, nodding thoughtfully. It did indeed make sense.

"In the end, though, it's all just theory," Deng Wu sighed, leaning his back against the cold tree trunk, closing his eyes to bask in the chill air.

After a brief moment, Yan Xiaobao began practicing with his transforming weapon, Wind Blade. Within minutes, he was completely absorbed in his training, entirely oblivious to Deng Wu's changing expression. Deng Wu was no longer smiling but instead looked at him with an unreadable, complex gaze.

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Chapter 279 A Deep Sigh

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As he stood up and walked toward the courtyard gate, a deep sigh escaped from Deng Wu's lips. Before leaving, he turned around, and as he stepped out, pain flickered in his eyes.

Some things you don't need to know, Deng Wu thought as he slipped away from his yard. The sorrow deep within his heart was evident, but no one was there to see it.

Early the next morning, before sunrise, Yan Xiaobao once again sat beneath his favorite tree, stringing the essence chain. When he heard the knock on the door, Yan Xiaobao gestured for them to enter, and the door slowly opened, allowing Deng Wu and others to pass through.

The Rong twins, along with Deng Wu and Ma Kong, sat before Yan Xiaobao, waiting for him to awaken. As they patiently sat there, each wore a solemn expression, avoiding looking elsewhere.

The heavy atmosphere stirred different emotions inside Yan Xiaobao. At first, he was glad to see his friends patiently avoiding disturbing him during his cultivation, but the intensity of their gaze made him curious about what could be so important as to bring all five of them here staring at him like this.

Their well-meaning intentions soon sparked Yan Xiaobao's curiosity, and after a few minutes, he refined the essence he had previously collected.

"What's wrong?" he asked as the Qi line joined the rest of the vortex.

"We've been wondering," Rong Ming started, "The cultivation technique you provided to Gao Yan, is there any chance we could have something similar?" Even Deng Wu seemed intrigued, his hope evident, but Yan Xiaobao had no choice but to shake his head. Lan Feng had previously explained this to Yan Xiaobao when he had posed the same question.

"Your current Qi cannot withstand the alteration of cultivation methods. Your only option is to empty your lower Dantian and start cultivating from scratch. If you wish for the finest Qi, you must accept that it might take you ten years to regain your current rank. Perhaps even longer."

Upon hearing this, the excited expressions gradually darkened as they felt slightly disappointed by the answer.

"I do have another way," Yan Xiaobao slowly said. "I have quite a number of spirit coins, which my teacher gave me after selling advanced martial arts skills," Yan Xiaobao continued. "I plan to use them to purchase medicine pills. Some of these pills will further purify your already refined Qi. If you put in enough effort and work hard, then when the time is right, you should be able to break through to the upper Dantian."

Rong Xing and the others were initially hesitant to accept this offer, but the prospect of free medicine pills was too tempting. Excitement rekindled in their eyes as they listened to the boy's words.

Although Yan Xiaobao was five years younger, everyone considered him a person with profound knowledge in various fields. The expert residing within Yan Xiaobao allowed the youngest among them to become the one they turned to whenever faced with difficulties.

For this little boy to offer free pills, all those present vowed never to disappoint Yan Xiaobao. Even if he were to ask them to accompany him on a suicide mission, none of them would say no after witnessing his unwavering honesty.

After returning with medicine pills from the medicine pill outlet and distributing them to everyone present, Yan Xiaobao sat under his favorite tree once more. Lost in thought, his eyes fixated on the distant horizon.

Yan Xiaobao was neither thinking about Wang Julong nor about the competition or why he became stronger.

"Why do I feel such an intense impulse every time I fight?" He pondered as he asked Lan Feng, "What is it that you're doing?" He questioned.

"No," Lan Feng slowly replied, then continued, "I don't know why you think this way. I must admit, I too find the killing intent within you overwhelmingly strong." The Phoenix sounded alarmed, confused by the entire matter.

"I believe this killing intent locked deep in your heart might be strongly tied to why I returned with you to your previous world."

This made sense, but Yan Xiaobao had never killed anyone! Where did this immense killing intent come from?

"It might originate from your predecessors," Lan Feng mused. "Considering you were forcibly reincarnated, perhaps some remnants of your past lives have resurfaced."

"Another life?" Yan Xiaobao was stunned as the words echoed in his mind. He had never truly considered that he might not always have been Yan Xiaobao—that this could merely be one of his many incarnations, even though his only memories were of this life.

"Is it too overwhelming?" Lan Feng asked, perplexed. "Didn't I already explain this when we talked about your little chick? When you die, your soul enters the meditation world, roaming there until all your memories fade. At that time, you will be reborn as another person on a different plane, commencing another life."

"You did mention that," Yan Xiaobao said, but he was only now beginning to grasp how heavy it would be if he suddenly remembered countless past lives.

"This is what you intend to do to Li Fen," Lan Feng remarked. "Are you certain about dragging out her memories from her previous incarnation? Is that really what you want?"

Hearing this, Yan Xiaobao couldn't help but feel shaken. Indeed, everything stemmed from his selfish desires.

"I know," he sighed. "But something feels incomplete. I'm not trying to resurrect Li Fen in hopes that she'll suddenly love me; I just feel the need to tell her how I truly feel. I never had the chance to do so before, but once I am strong enough, I can tell her. If, as it turns out, she's already married with children, I'll resurrect her entire family and find them a good place to live out a second life."

This decision hurt Yan Xiaobao deeply, but he still steadfastly made up his mind. Yan Xiaobao was well aware that Li Fen had never looked at him romantically, but he still wanted to tell her to shut the door. He needed this so he could move forward. If Li Fen became angry with him, he could always help her forget all the memories and start a new life as originally planned.

Considering all this, the previously curious Yan Xiaobao grew dejected, overwhelmed by the thought of an enraged Li Fen.

Seeing this, Lan Feng snorted coldly. Love doesn't belong in a world where only the strongest survive.

"Don't let your little brain dwell on worries," Lan Feng tried to comfort him. "Before you ascend to God's level, the path will be eternal. So before that, you should enjoy your youth and the lovely women around you. Personally, I suggest you see what you can do with this adorable little girl pretending to be a man. She's not bad. On the other hand, Rong Xing is a very beautiful lady, and she's already quite fond of you."

Lan Feng continued talking about various girls at the academy for a long time. Thankfully, Yan Xiaobao had long learned how to block out the annoying chatter of the perverted bird, and he quickly resumed training. If he planned to defeat Li Cheng, he needed every ounce of Qi he possessed.

The days of rest passed quickly. During this time, Courtyard 1009 was teeming with enthusiasm, as everyone was either training or cultivating.

Lan Feng crafted a training schedule for each of his friends, just as he had half a year ago, but this time he cut out certain parts, such as body strengthening.

Gao Yan cultivated like a madman. He didn't sleep, nor did he eat anything apart from medicine pills.

Each time he consumed a pill, he would practice his Qi fusion until it fully integrated. Then, he would rely on another pill to further enhance his cultivation base.

Lan Feng's method created miracles for him. Gao Yan had already become the subject of envy and jealousy from everyone present due to his astonishing speed, especially from Yan Xiaobao, who had reached this level only after ten years of arduous training.

Despite Gao Yan's rapid ascent, he still lacked the flawless purity of Hui Yue's aura. Though his aura was now much purer than before, in comparison to the young boy's essence, his white chain remained plain and unremarkable. This was one thing that kept the young boy grounded.

Yan Xiaobao rose to his feet, stretching his exhausted body, and let out a sigh. He had completed a long night of preparation, gathering his final strands of Qi before stepping toward the arena. It was finally time for the last match at the Liluo City Royal Art Academy. freewebnovel.com

As he approached the stage, people expected the young boy to show signs of nervousness or panic, but the closer he got, the more he felt the surrounding atmosphere.

Yan Xiaobao never believed he would lose this match. It was a battle he had to win, not just for Gao Yan, but also for Wang Julong.

Though Yan Xiaobao felt confident about victory, he understood that Li Cheng was no easy opponent. His senses were as sharp as Yan Xiaobao's. His entire young body braced itself, tense yet alert, analyzing everything happening around him.

The thought of Li Cheng stirred Hui Yue's domineering aura to greater heights, so much so that his friends eventually avoided standing near him due to the suffocating air that threatened to destabilize their heartbeats and hinder their ability to breathe easily.

Today's referee was the Academy Chair. This was due to the incident during the previous fight, where Wang Julong was disqualified because the judge showed favoritism toward a faction.

The Academy Chair had never joined any factions, nor was he disturbed by worldly possessions or titles. That was why he was assigned to a small branch like the Royal Art Academy, rather than the main branch in the Capital.

As Yan Xiaobao stepped onto the stage, he exuded an aura of killer intent so intense that it left every student struggling to breathe, while spectators began murmuring among themselves. To witness such a young child produce such a thick killing aura was almost inconceivable.

On the other hand, Yan Xiaobao fought to intensify his focus, using his mental strength to suppress the overwhelming killing intent. He sought to maintain control and ensure it wouldn't erupt during the battle, leading him to kill Li Cheng or aim for his life.

Despite his dislike for Li Cheng, Yan Xiaobao didn't want to end the life of a fellow student. But he knew that the bloodlust buried deep within his soul core might take over. This bloodlust was Yan Xiaobao's greatest challenge.

Yan Xiaobao possessed the demeanor of a killer. The air around him was heavy and cold, his eyes gleaming like frozen winter lakes. As he stood across the stage, the domineering aura hit Li Cheng directly.

Gradually but steadily, Yan Xiaobao managed to choke out his killing intent, and the suffocating air suddenly cleared, as if swept away by a breeze flowing from the edge of the stage to the center.

Facing the killing intent, Li Cheng remained unshaken, his face showing no surprise, fear, or shock. The only visible expressions were the smile on his lips and the seriousness reflecting in his eyes. He dared not underestimate this ranked cultivator.

In turn, Yan Xiaobao enveloped his senses around everything happening on stage. Li Cheng was unlike any other opponent he had faced before. The young boy couldn't afford a foolish mistake, like underestimating the youth before him, which could lead to his downfall.

Yan Xiaobao gasped, allowing his Qi to flow freely through his meridians and fill his entire body, preparing to activate Speed Flow as the battle began.

Bent forward with knees slightly bent, everyone could see clearly that once the fight began, Yan Xiaobao would be endlessly on the move. No one criticized him for this—Li Cheng was clearly circulating his Qi and was ready to engage in a speed duel.

The Academy Chair stepped onto the stage, his pace unsteady and slow. He was like a reincarnation of ancient times, radiating deep power that roared beneath his skin, prompting Yan Xiaobao to watch the man with guarded attention.

"Let the final match begin," he said in a voice that sounded ancient and frail, yet everyone in the academy heard each word strike the quiet stage like thunder.

As soon as those words were spoken, a flash of white appeared. Li Cheng swung his whip with blistering speed, testing whether his Qi Whip could match the advanced rank technique the boy before him was using.

Although Yan Xiaobao had mastered high-level martial arts skills, he knew he was at a disadvantage. His senses were pushed to their limits as he managed to avoid each strike of the Qi Whip aimed at him.

Yan Xiaobao's breath grew faint as Li Cheng's expression brightened. Though Yan Xiaobao had evaded the first attack, it was obvious that the Qi Whip carried immense power. However, power wasn't the only issue he faced—the speed of the Qi Whip was equal to that of Speed Flow. Despite avoiding harm until now, Yan Xiaobao's clothes had been grazed, leaving his shirt ripped slightly.

Eyeing Li Cheng, Yan Xiaobao realized he couldn't afford to waste time thinking anymore; he randomly began running across the stage while simultaneously working on creating copies.

Yan Xiaobao's two clones darted across the stage like shadows, continuously evading the whip strikes, leaving streaks of white slashing through black blurs.

While darting around, Yan Xiaobao summoned dual daggers, attempting to close in on Li Sheng; so close that he could finally deal some damage. Yet every time he tried, the Qi Whip blocked his path.

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