

Medical 281

Chapter 281: The Ranks of Disciples

...

Clenching his teeth, Yan Xiaobao felt his Qi gradually dissipate, his Qi Acupoint being emptied bit by bit. He knew he had to do something.

As Qi continued to be wasted, a brilliant smile appeared on Li Cheng's face, for he sensed his victory closing in. Nevertheless, he didn't lower his guard—not even for a moment—and instead tried to increase the speed of his whip attacks.

Yan Xiaobao vowed. All his focus was placed on evading the Qi Whip, which inadvertently caused him to lose control over the killing intent that was slowly rising within him.

As the killing intent intensified, the sinister aura began to seep out again, forcing Yan Xiaobao to move even faster than before. This, in turn, slowed down the Qi Whip.

Unfortunately, the killing intent also caused Yan Xiaobao's Qi to plummet rapidly, leaving him with only a few traces of it in a short amount of time.

With a roar erupting from Yan Xiaobao's throat, he thrust his palm forward to confront his opponent. The remnants of his Qi were compelled to flow around his meridians, forming the Flame Spark Skill.

As the Qi Spirit passed by Lan Feng, the bird silently raised a hand, and a droplet of silver liquid trickled from its fingers into the Qi Line. This, in turn, caused the Qi Line to expand and transform into silver, radiating a moonlit glow.

The silver streams of Qi coursed through his body, making his blood roar. His meridians trembled as if struggling to hold together, and finally, his palm burst forth with a Flame Spark much larger than he had previously created. The fireball in his palm grew at an astonishing speed, gradually moving above his head, consuming everything on stage in mere moments and reducing it all to ashes.

The wind surged violently, causing the Qi Whip to miss its mark and instead be drawn toward the fireball, further fueling its growth.

As Yan Xiaobao felt the last trace of his Qi forcibly leave his body and his killing intent soar to an unprecedented height, the fireball suddenly ceased to expand.

His icy blue eyes were as merciless and indifferent as a mass murderer's, entirely unperturbed, as Xu Yue hurled the fireball at Li Cheng, who stood on the same stage.

The moment the fireball left Yan Xiaobao's hand, he felt his body begin to absorb the essence of heaven and earth, forcing him into a state of refinement at an unprecedented speed.

"Congratulations," Lan Feng remarked cheerfully within the Dantian. "You've finally become a disciple cultivator."

Yan Xiaobao felt his body rupture from within. Every muscle in his body split and stretched, brimming with power. His bones felt as though they had shattered entirely, yet none had truly broken apart. Instead, Yan Xiaobao's body began to expand. His height increased by a few centimeters, and his muscles swelled.

Although Xu Yue appeared quite feminine earlier, he now clearly resembled a handsome young man. His muscles were more defined than before, but he remained lean, with the play of his jade-like skin beneath them. His striking face grew even more refined, with a chiseled jaw projecting steadfast determination through his cold eyes out into the world.

His shoulder-length hair had grown significantly longer, now pooling on the ground, and the malicious aura he once emanated was completely concealed within, replaced instead by an air of tranquility.

This transformation seemed as though someone had replaced the moon with the sun—a sun so radiant that everyone in the audience observing the youth standing amidst the flames fell silent as he gazed at them, as if they were insignificant before him.

In truth, the flames posed no threat to Yan Xiaobao because they were born of his own Qi and strengthened by Lan Feng's spiritual power. If one's own flames could harm a cultivator, every fire specialist would exist in perpetual agony.

However, this was unknown to the audience. All they knew was that Yan Xiaobao had just ascended to the Disciple Rank, and it was evident that he lacked practical skills and spiritual energy.

Watching Yan Xiaobao standing amidst the flames, his white hair billowing in the wind, his cold eyes sweeping across everyone present—it felt like an omen. This boy would ignite the world and unleash terror that would shake the very earth.

The calm emanating from this boy was far more frightening than his previous killing intent. The serenity manifested on his face filled every person present with fear, for it clashed starkly against the intensity of his previous aura.

Within those icy eyes was a mere flicker of his earlier killing intent, yet gazing upon him now, he seemed like an otherworldly figure, as though an Angel had descended upon the mortal world.

This tranquility was something Hui Yue had experienced when breaking through to the Disciple Rank. Located in the lesser corner of his Dantian, two small acupoints began forming. Inside one was a red mist filled with hatred and bloodlust. Within the other was a tranquil blue mist that floated gently, exuding a sense of tenderness. It was this serene mist that Yan Xiaobao had now touched, enabling it to flow through his meridians and merge seamlessly with his aura.

Yan Xiaobao stared into the sea of fire, furrowing his brows. The killing intent in his Dantian rampaged, and a dangerous sensation emerged in his mind.

Hui Yue noticed how the Qi Whip emerged from the flames, followed by a severely injured adversary. Li Cheng, badly burned, lunged at Yan Xiaobao with fury in his eyes.

Chapter 282: The Ranks of Disciples_2

A trace of cold emotion appeared in Yan Xiaobao's eyes as the newly forged pair of daggers moved with sudden speed.

The sinister aura returned once again, and this time, Yan Xiaobao was too slow to suppress it. He craved blood, yearned for killing, and his hands flung the two daggers towards Li Cheng's neck. Feeling no resistance, Yan Xiaobao suddenly felt warm liquid spread across his hands.

Li Sheng's eyes widened in disbelief, filled with terror, as he collapsed to his knees, blood spurting from the wound at his throat. His hands rose to clutch at the injury, yet before he could act, the student who had already knelt fell lifelessly to the ground, his essence vanishing into the air.

Everyone fell silent, as the fire on the stage raged. Then, as if triggered by a countdown, chaos erupted.

Elders skilled in water manipulation rushed to extinguish the flames using various spiritual arts. The extinguishing process took far longer than expected, and a thread of fear wound its way into the hearts of these cultivators. These weren't ordinary flames. They seemed to be birthed from spiritual energy, growing as if alive.

Yan Xiaobao stood next to the now lifeless Li Cheng. Behind him, quietly observing, was the Academy Chair. It was impossible for him to escape, so Yan Xiaobao didn't even make the effort.

Within the boy, a roaring battle was taking place. Two mental projections stood within the Qi cavern: one shrouded in red mist, the other enveloped in white cloud.

A third Yan Xiaobao, neither adorned with cloud nor mist, sat against the wall of the cavern beside Lan Feng. He observed his two replicas as they debated whether killing Li Cheng had been the right choice.

'What do you think?' Yan Xiaobao sighed as he glanced at Lan Feng, but the Phoenix within the Qi seemed lost in thought as the issue was discussed.

"This is utterly bizarre," Lan Feng said, his eyes widening with incredulity evident in his voice. "Even if you recall certain things from your past life, you shouldn't have three souls."

"I have three souls?" Yan Xiaobao inquired curiously. Although he hadn't wanted to kill Li Cheng, the outcome had been inevitable. One day, killing would be necessary, and if he didn't allow the killing intent to erupt and take control, he doubted he'd have the ability to emerge victorious.

Still, his body trembled when he remembered the act of cutting through flesh—as effortless as slicing through butter—and then the sensation of warm blood pooling in his hands.

Ignoring these feelings, Yan Xiaobao looked again at his two versions, then slowly clapped his hands to quiet them.

'Killing him was our only option this time,' Yan Xiaobao declared firmly. A smile bloomed on the red mist-covered Yan Xiaobao, while a frown appeared on the white-cloud-shrouded version. "That said," he continued, "I don't want to kill unless I have no alternative."

This led to the expressions of the two replicas switching places, before both dissolved into mist and gradually returned to their previous positions within Yan Xiaobao.

Yan Xiaobao's consciousness returned to Lan Feng as he once again sat down.

"So, what were you saying?" he asked curiously, sliding against the Qi cavern wall. Outside, his physical self sat in meditation, seemingly adjusting his body to stabilize the breakthrough he'd achieved. In such a critical moment, no cultivator would be interrupted.

"Certain aspects of your soul have changed," Lan Feng said gravely, his brows furrowing. 'These two are extensions of your soul. But somehow, I cannot sense them. They are unrelated to me.'

"How could this happen?" Yan Xiaobao asked curiously, observing how the once-dominant mist now seemed docile, resting peacefully. It appeared to activate only during combat.

"You're the only person I've known whose soul could undergo such strange mutations," Lan Feng said, as if even he couldn't believe it. "We won't find answers anytime soon. Someday, you'll learn why you've changed in this way. Until then, we need to practice controlling these aspects."

After saying that, Yan Xiaobao nodded and returned to his physical body. The elders surrounded him, as though preparing to prevent him from leaving.

"Student Yan Xiaobao," an ancient voice spoke, prompting Yan Xiaobao to turn and face the Academy Chair, giving him a respectful bow.

"You killed your fellow student Li Cheng. Do you have anything to say in your defense?" the Academy Chair, displeased with the outcome, questioned. Yet he fully understood that Yan Xiaobao hadn't had any choice but to end the battle in that decisive moment. If he had hesitated, Li Cheng would've killed him.

"I truly had no choice," Yan Xiaobao replied unapologetically, meeting the elder's gaze. "I just entered the Disciple Team; my strength wasn't stable. How could I have known that a senior like Li Sheng couldn't withstand my attack? He charged at me, and I was scared. There was no other option."

Those icy blue eyes, previously filled with killing intent, had transformed into wide, innocent orbs—like a deer caught in headlights. The boy standing before the Chair looked as though he'd never done anything wrong, as if bullied into the situation.

Many students felt like spitting up blood, revolted by the sheer innocence and naivety radiating from his face, though everything he said made perfect sense.

Throughout the battle, Yan Xiaobao had been fighting against overwhelming odds—a full tier beneath his opponent—having only just entered the Disciple Team. By all accounts, it should've been Yan Xiaobao who perished. His victory was nothing short of miraculous. If he hadn't fought with all his might, winning would've been entirely impossible.

The death of Li Cheng was tragic, but it was clear he had been an unremarkable student, fortunate enough to find a decent martial arts skill in the Academy's Martial Arts Hall. Losing him was a great loss, but a competition without death was nearly impossible to imagine.

Combat between students was both a showcase and a test of abilities—abilities designed for killing. The majority of talented youths didn't live to see adulthood.

The Chair sighed deeply and waved his hand, signaling for the murmuring crowd to quiet down.

"Unfortunately, student Li Cheng left this world at the conclusion of the match. This year's champion is student Yan Xiaobao." Once the announcement was made, the elder turned and departed, needing to rush to his office and relay the news to the Royal Family immediately.

It wasn't just the Chair; every major family and clan within Lילו City was pondering the same thing. Each of them wanted to win favor with this unknown child. Though geniuses rarely survived long, Yan Xiaobao seemed capable of overturning the world—a gamble worth taking for every faction.

Another reason was that these families didn't truly care whether the boy survived in the long term. What they truly desired was mastery of the advanced martial arts skills he already possessed. He seemed to have perfected at least a few of them, and whatever he mastered could be passed along to others.

After all, he was merely a ten-year-old boy, but one with the potential for ruthless killing—even cold-blooded murder—the kind of power these families presumed was untrained. To acquire mastery over his advanced martial arts techniques was their true aim.

Suddenly, rumors and chatter surrounding the stage shifted to the martial arts skill sold at the Black Market Auction House half a year ago, plunging discussion into silence. For a student of this age, it was clear he required a teacher.

Moreover, that teacher couldn't possibly be a typical cultivator, for they had imparted such incredible martial arts skills, ensuring a child achieved perfection at such a young age.

An expert ranked within the covenant, who had relocated half a year ago, might well be Yan Xiaobao's master.

Following the tournament's conclusion, Yan Xiaobao returned to his courtyard, locking himself inside and refusing to meet nearly all visitors. The only individuals seen entering the Genius Courtyard were the Black Market Auction House's manager and a messenger from the City Lord.

Typically, a genius like Yan Xiaobao would immediately become a target for assassination after choosing a faction, but despite his apparent alliance with Lord Rong Liang, no one dared act against him—fearful of his mysterious master.

Throughout the ensuing months, Yan Xiaobao received countless invitations to visit the noble families of Liluo City. He rejected every one, even invitations to the City Lord's mansion and the Ma Family Mansion.

This led the Wang Clan to suspect that Yan Xiaobao hadn't yet aligned himself with any particular group but had already demonstrated the benefits of acquiring martial arts and spiritual attack skills from Li Fen, who seemed to be selling them.

...

Chapter 283: The Pursuer

...

Yan Xiaobao's academy life underwent a massive change. Just as he was leaving his courtyard, he noticed someone waiting for him outside. A deep sigh escaped Yan Xiaobao's lips as he looked at the diminutive figure before him.

Wang Julong's hair was long, piled atop her head, and under her snow-white skin she wore a striking black robe. As the wind rose, the fabric billowed around her frail silhouette. Yan Xiaobao straightened himself with a jolt of spirit. How could he have thought Wang Julong was a man?

Thinking in this direction, his handsome face turned somber as he began to comprehend how his own sentiments stood in stark opposition to the fateful feelings Rong Ming carried year after year on that same day. Some things were better left unknown.

"Why do you wait for me every single day?" Yan Xiaobao asked with frustration, knowing that as long as she spotted him, he could not escape this neighbor of his. He had tried many times, but somehow, she always managed to find him within seconds.

Eventually, Yan Xiaobao gave up, letting the woman become his pursuer. This shift led to a number of students at the Royal Art Academy resenting Wang Julong, as they all believed she had once hated Yan Xiaobao but was now trying to attract him since he had demonstrated his true potential.

Unlike most people, Wang Julong cared nothing for the chatter of others. She proudly stood at Yan Xiaobao's side. She rarely spoke, merely observing him in silence, and her piercing gaze always left the

white-haired boy feeling somewhat uneasy. This, in turn, made it nearly impossible for him to leave his courtyard, forcing him to lock himself inside, longing for a shred of privacy.

"I need to keep an eye on you," Wang Julong said, her cheeks tinged red. "I can't let you reveal my secret to anyone."

Yan Xiaobao had posed the same question numerous times, but while her answer never changed, Wang Julong's attitude shifted over the course of the month. Initially, she had been a proud and aloof figure, but day by day, she softened, until she became the rosy-cheeked girl standing before him now.

As he began walking toward the classroom, another sigh escaped Yan Xiaobao's lips. It was now time to select another subject for the remaining part of the year. A naive hope surged within Yan Xiaobao's heart: he could choose a topic Wang Julong hadn't picked! freewebnovel.com

"She will definitely choose the same as you," Lan Feng said in a dry tone, disrupting the joy bubbling up within Yan Xiaobao's inner mood. When he realized the bird was right, an acidic expression spread across his face. Regardless of what subject he chose, Wang Julong was bound to follow him.

Knowing this, Yan Xiaobao opted to focus on the topic of refining goji berries and ultimately decided to skip all lessons, retreating to his courtyard to cultivate either alone or with his friends.

After reaching Disciple Rank, Yan Xiaobao spent an entire month understanding the changes his body was undergoing.

The first was physical transformation. As previously noted, Yan Xiaobao grew taller and stronger. His features had acquired a subtle masculinity, transforming him from an effeminate boy into a handsome young man.

While these changes seemed profound, they were insignificant compared to what was happening within Yan Xiaobao's body.

When Yan Xiaobao forced his final strand of Qi out during his battle with Li Cheng, he forcibly advanced into Disciple Rank. His body turned into a sponge, ravenously absorbing essences from the heavens and earth.

This essence no longer required Yan Xiaobao to refine it; instead, it activated itself through cultivation techniques taught by Lan Feng, constantly cycling the essence until it exhibited a pearl-like luster of extraordinary purity.

His meridians sustained minor injuries in the battle, but after weeks of rest and consistent nourishment with Qi, they healed stronger than before.

However, the most significant change was neither in his physical form nor his meridians, but within his Qi Spiral itself. The spiral had grown to more than twice its original size, and roaring sounds could be heard from within.

Not only had the spiral expanded, but it had also begun rotating in the opposite direction to its initial spin. Within the Qi Spiral, a duplicate of Yan Xiaobao's hands remained locked in the Bird Hand Seal. This replica continuously absorbed and refined Qi at optimal speed, maintaining the same level of purity as manually refined techniques.

If he willingly sat down and cultivated using the same technique, Yan Xiaobao could further accelerate the refinement process. But he no longer needed to worry much because his replica was busy working.

Another major transformation was the expansion of the Qi Caverns within Yan Xiaobao's Qi Nexus from two to nine. However, seven of these caverns were blocked by a thin misty shield, which Yan Xiaobao could neither break through nor see past.

Staring at the two open caverns, Xu Yue felt a sense of longing. A desire stirred in his heart, but no matter how much Yan Xiaobao contemplated the matter, no answer seemed to alleviate this yearning.

Instead, Yan Xiaobao partnered with Lan Feng to conduct a series of tests to understand the blood-red mist and sky-blue cloud.

When Yan Xiaobao entered combat or faced danger, the red mist would appear. This crimson haze would gradually envelop the Qi vortex surrounding his Qi, granting it an overbearing power and sharpening Yan Xiaobao's senses.

The Qi affected by the red mist would expand, and the previously pearl-like white glow would develop a faint red tint, seemingly emanating from within.

Chapter 284: Pursuer_2

Yan Xiaobao had already learned how to suppress the red mist with as little energy and effort as possible, but his current level was too low to truly control it. He couldn't activate it, nor did he have the ability to keep it calm within the cave.

In this aspect, the tranquil blue cloud was much simpler. This tranquility was typically the kind Xiao Bao activated to suppress his killing intent. When his consciousness touched it, the cloud would be activated, and unlike the red mist, when traveling through meridians, the blue cloud emitted a cool and calming energy.

Under the influence of the blue cloud, Yan Xiaobao could calmly understand and react to the happenings around him, with his keen senses seeming to observe everything in slow motion.

This tranquil feeling was easy to control. As long as Yan Xiaobao willed it, the cloud would gather from the meridians and return to the caves, calmly waiting to be summoned by Hui Yue next time.

The blue cloud's other benefit was that it increased Xiao Bao's cultivation techniques, allowing an improved Qi ratio, but all these advantages came with downsides.

Every time Yan Xiaobao used the red mist or the blue cloud, the mist would gradually diminish with the energy used. If one type of energy was used more than the other, an imbalance would occur within Yan Xiaobao, leading to the opposite energy leaking; this could plunge him into a frantic killing state or an isolated tranquil state.

As Yan Xiaobao exhausted all energy, when both caves were completely emptied, it would take a full month for the mist to restore to its original size.

The cause of these two unknown phenomena was something Yan Xiaobao absolutely did not know, even though Lan Feng seemed to fail to see either, spending an hour each day in the cave observing the contrasting powers.

"One day," Lan Feng sighed, "one day, when you become stronger, we'll be able to find out the results and causes of these phenomena."

"What about the other caves?" Yan Xiaobao asked curiously, looking at the sealed entrance of the other caves, but inwardly he saw nothing, nor did any energy emanate. They were completely sealed off.

"When they open, they will open," Lan Feng said indifferently to the world. To this ancient Phoenix, everything that happened was exciting and was something new, bringing thrill and great promise to Yan Xiaobao's future.

Winter was turning into spring as beautiful flowers sprouted from the cold soil. Soon, the snow melted, the sun rose, and spring turned into summer. Yan Xiaobao had been at the academy for almost a year now. The Rong's annual visit to the Magic Forest time had come.

"This year you must come with us," Rong Ming said with a beaming smile. "Since the two of us broke into the ranks of practitioners, we'll lose the guards this year. Perhaps we can even invite others to enjoy a pleasant journey!"

Hearing Rong Ming speak of the Magic Forest as a playful destination brought a slight smile to Yan Xiaobao, although he indeed thought it a good idea to have six people go together. If they were all together, as long as they did not wander too far in the forest, they should be able to survive.

Yan Xiaobao couldn't help but feel a tinge of excitement in his heart as he also realized it would be the first time in a year that he could visit his parents.

Though Yan Xiaobao was born with the mindset of a twenty-four-year-old, he also knew he was deeply cared for by his new parents.

Hui Lifan as his mother did her utmost, and though they were poor, Yan Xiaobao always had everything he needed. Yan Xiaobao also valued his father greatly, but nothing in the world compares to a mother's love, an experience Yan Xiaobao looked forward to reliving once more.

Another thing Yan Xiaobao anticipated was finally letting his friends see where he came from. So far, only the Rong twins knew of his humble background.

He had told Gao Yan, Ma Kong, and Deng Wu about his family, but they all expected to see a wild man who fought daily against Demon Beasts. They expected to see a wild tribe dwelling on savage lands.

The truth was not aligned with their expectations, but every time Yan Xiaobao tried to correct their impressions, they wouldn't listen to him. Eventually, he entirely gave up trying, deciding instead to show them. These five young people were those to whom Yan Xiaobao entrusted his deepest secrets and most sensitive information.

Having reached the disciple level, with his cultivation techniques evolving into his own copy, his refining speed was now much faster than ever before.

On the other hand, the Rong twins had not made smooth progress due to their Qi purity being lower, with only a few Constant Stars breaking through in the last half-year.

Rong Ming had stepped into the two-star physician level, while Rong Xing was now a three-star physician. The twins both heavily relied on Yan Xiaobao's limitless supply of pills, consuming Qi Medicine as if it were candy.

These pills allowed their previous Qi purity to surpass the average, making the pearl white, though lacking luster and sheen, they were still enough for both of them to enter the master rank later on.

Though Yan Xiaobao's cultivation technique hadn't changed much, it was still unable to compare to the cultivation speed used by Gao Yan.

Gao Yan was using a cultivation technique very similar to Hui Yue's, relying on one of the constellations within it, and this particular technique sacrificed some purity for rapid advancement. Yet, compared to the world's average cultivator, its purity was still considered very good.

Relying on this cultivation technique, Gao Yan spent half a year focused on constant cultivating, resulting in his breaking into the ranks of physicians in a short time.

Seeing Gao Yan successfully move through the student rankings during these months almost made Yan Xiaobao cough up blood. His ten years of hard work suddenly seemed wasted.

If not for the slightly different Qi Pool purity, Yan Xiaobao would spend time finding a method to beat Lan Feng into introducing him to this slow and arduous technique.

During these months, Ma Kong had reached the nine-star disciple level, and he had been gifted by Yan Xiaobao with a box of pills, hoping to aid him in breaking through to the physician level before their departure to the Magic Forest.

Formally, Deng Wu was also at the nine-star disciple level, gifted a box of Mixed Medicine. Some were Qi Medicine, and others were Qi Boosting Pills.

While everyone expected Deng Wu to break into the physician level, he was actually breaking into the main rank. The first among them all to unlock the Middle Dantian as a cultivator.

Yan Xiaobao, himself, had reached the third star in the disciple level, during which time he perfected the transforming weapon, Sword Style.

Even though Yan Xiaobao's sword style was perfect, he could not compete with a Sword Master, yet his skills were not lacking, constantly improving by practicing the sword movements he had previously taught himself.

Initially, Yan Xiaobao had no intention of developing more weapon skills, but after hearing they would be entering the Magic Forest as a group of six, he quickly picked up the bow style of the transforming weapon.

Another day took place, and suddenly the journey was getting ready to begin. To procure the necessities for such a long trip, Yan Xiaobao went to Liluo City, where his first stop was a high-end Memory Stone store.

Yan Xiaobao purchased two large-capacity Memory Stones. These large-capacity Memory Gems were the size of a fist, yet light as a feather. The stones were embedded into a small pouch, which was crafted to hang on a belt for quick access.

Before continuing his spree, Yan Xiaobao quickly hung one of these memory stone pouches on his belt.

One Memory Stone was quickly filled with assorted meats. Some were fresh, others cured. Some were smoked with salt. Grains and wheat were stocked in sacks, barley, and other rice. Fabrics of various qualities accompanied the food, with beverages being the last addition. Some of the drinks he bought included rice wine, barley beer, and fruit wine.

Finally, Yan Xiaobao entered a bank, where he purchased a coin storage Memory Stone, placing three thousand gold coins into it. Gold coins were easier to use than spiritual gold coins, and after doing this, he tucked the coin Memory Stone into his first purchased Memory Stone.

Chapter 285 - 225 No Regrets

...

Then he stored this stone in the Memory Stone attached to Yan Xiaobao's belt, a satisfied smile spreading across his face.

The first stone he filled was a gift for his family and village. Even though Xu Yue had been away from home for a long time, he still knew where his roots lay. With the funds he had acquired from Lan Feng and the continued cash flow from the Deng Family, Yan Xiaobao believed this was the least he could do for the people he had spent ten years raising money for.

After picking out gifts for his family, Yan Xiaobao finally started gathering items for himself.

Unlike his family, he only purchased dry provisions for himself—dried meat strips, military rations like biscuits that could last a long time, as well as dried fruits and berries.

Since Yan Xiaobao was allowed to buy his own drinks, the first item he purchased was a canteen, enabling him to store water for the journey. Beyond that, he also bought several bottles of fruit wine and lighter alcoholic beverages.

Food wasn't the only thing Yan Xiaobao prepared. Enough blankets were bought to cover each of his friends, and some were so large they could be used to create a tent for sleeping, should the weather not be warm or cloudless.

A variety of tools were purchased. Some were for starting fires, in case Hui Yue ran out, leaving him unable to create sparks. Others were meant for cooking or digging. Ropes were tied with hammers and a handful of nails.

Though Yan Xiaobao knew most of these items might not be necessary, he also knew it was best to be prepared for all contingencies; he packed everything he used to bring when camping in his old world.

His packing made it seem like he didn't have a cultivation base, leading his Memory Stone to be completely filled with belongings, but Yan Xiaobao had no regrets. He would rather be safe than sorry.

On his way back to the academy, Yan Xiaobao was intercepted by Ma Kong. Everyone had gone shopping to buy supplies, and they had originally planned to meet at the Liluo East City Gate in two days.

"Yan Xiaobao!" Ma Kong called out in an unsteady, high-pitched voice, his anxiety apparent. "The old steward asked if you'd like to join us for dinner tonight," he continued, pausing briefly. "You haven't yet met the other elders of our family—they have gifts for you as a token of gratitude for introducing the concept of insurance to us."

Hearing this, Yan Xiaobao smiled faintly. While the Ma family expressed their thanks for the insurance business idea, they likely hoped Yan Xiaobao would hold positive feelings toward supporting his mysterious teacher. Not that he particularly cared.

After a few moments of thought, Yan Xiaobao quickly agreed and followed Ma Kong back to the Ma Family Manor.

On the way, Yan Xiaobao and Ma Gang needed to pass through the City Lord's mansion. Just as they were passing by, Yan Xiaobao felt a shiver run through his body—a sudden sense of impending danger washed over him. As the red fog within his lower Dantian began to stir, he swiftly scanned his surroundings.

Yan Xiaobao struggled to suppress the red fog, but when he saw seven black-clad men entering the City Lord's mansion, he couldn't help but exhale sharply.

These seven shadowy figures spoke to no one and seemed to notice no one. They walked with determined steps, as if every servant instinctively moved out of their way. The guards didn't stop them but instead opened the gates for them immediately.

These seven men were identical to the ones Yan Xiaobao had encountered a year ago when he sold two advanced attack skills at the Black Market Auction House. They had tried to surround him but hadn't engaged him in combat.

Ma Kong glanced at Yan Xiaobao. It was clear he had noticed the boy's shift in demeanor, but when he saw the cold glint flash in the blue depths of Yan's eyes, he quickly decided to remain silent.

Yan Xiaobao was left with a lingering question in his heart. He instructed Gao Yan to activate the beggar and servant networks within Lילו City. Yan Xiaobao was willing to pay a high price for any information regarding these seven shadowy figures. He needed to know whether they were still here to capture him or if their target was an unknown expert named Li Fen.

Dinner at the Ma household exceeded everyone's expectations. Yan Xiaobao, an adorable yet somewhat naïve eleven-year-old, left a favorable impression on all the elders.

The only people who truly understood Yan Xiaobao's preferences were Ma Kong and the steward hosting the dinner. Yet neither thought it necessary to inform the elders about this specific detail, as it didn't affect their dealings with the young boy.

"Young Master Yan Xiaobao," the steward said respectfully. Yan Xiaobao was not truly a young master, but the steward couldn't find any other title befitting him, considering his significance far surpassed that of a typical young master. "We have heard that you are about to embark on an adventure with your friends, and we wish to gift you something to enhance your chances of success."

With that, the steward motioned with his hand, and a servant hurried over. In the servant's hands was a small pillow, upon which lay a long black knife.

The knife was forged from a black metal unknown to Yan Xiaobao, but its sharpness was evident at first glance. However, at the center of the blade was a circular inscription, adorned with silver radiance.

"This is a knife made of black iron," the steward stated reverently. "It has been ranked by a Duke as suitable for a cultivator with expertise in Metal Affinity. The inscription ensures the blade will never dull. It will forever remain sharp—a weapon destined to remain in the hands of any cultivator for a lifetime."

Chapter 286 - 225 No Regrets_2

Hearing this left Yan Xiaobao in shock. Currently, he only possessed one inscribed artifact—armor he had won in a tournament—but the allure of this blade was captivating.

"Thank you," he said in a deep voice. As he picked up the blade, Yan Xiaobao's eyes sparkled. When he sent his Qi into it, he felt an astonishing change within his Dan Cliff Cave.

The moment Yan Xiaobao grabbed the black blade, the red fog inside his Dantian Cave started roiling uncontrollably, unable to be suppressed further. If Yan Xiaobao had abandoned suppressing his killing intent, he thought it might explode among the elders present, but contrary to his expectations, it didn't happen.

All the mist that rushed out from the lower levels of his Dantian Cave flowed into his meridians, then surged out from his palms and entered the blade, making it feel as if the weapon were an extension of his own arm. A streak of red light appeared on the blade, and everyone in the room could sense just how dangerous Yan Xiaobao was as he wielded it.

"Uh," the manager cleared his throat, his spine shivering for a moment. "This is our gift. Can you think of a name you'd like to give this weapon?" he asked.

Yan Xiaobao thought for a moment before furrowing his brows. Staring at the crimson-black weapon, a smile emerged on his face. Only one name popped into Yan Xiaobao's mind, the only one worthy of such a grand blade.

"Black Blood," he said with a sinister smile, his childish innocence nowhere to be found. "This is Black Blood—a dagger darkened by seas of blood."

Upon hearing this, everyone felt a sense of impending doom, for there was no mistaking that this child was anything but ordinary. Yet, they did not regret their gift. Clearly, the dagger was perfect for Hui Yue, and a perfect gift brought joy—the kind of joy that allowed the young boy to boast freely in front of his teacher.

This visit had gone far beyond his expectations, and Yan Xiaobao managed to bring both the manager and Ma Kong significant esteem within the family. Even though the insurance business was still expanding, their chances to become a major focus in other big cities across the Sun Kingdom were growing.

Yan Xiaobao nodded with respect toward the Ma family members before rushing back to an inn, where he lodged until their journey to the Magic Forest began.

"Lan Feng," Yan Xiaobao began, his curiosity finally overwhelming him as he stepped into his rented room. "I've been hearing a lot about inscriptions lately. Why haven't you told me about them?"

Lan Feng snorted at the curiosity in Yan Xiaobao's voice. "Each elemental affinity has a specific power that can be harnessed for creation or crafting. You've already noticed Wood being used in alchemy and healing. You've also seen how the wood affinity can restore things to their former state."

Yan Xiaobao nodded, recalling how his training dummies healed themselves due to the wood affinity embedded in their cores. He also remembered how Gao Yan and Ma Kong had perfectly recovered with the help of masters in wood elemental affinity, though he had never truly dwelled on the matter.

"The metal affinity has the obvious ability to shape metal, but it also has the capability to extract energy from Magic Cores or beast cores and utilize that energy to create inscriptions."

Lan Feng paused slightly, as though piecing together all of his recollections on inscriptions.

"Inscriptions can be used in various ways," Lan Feng said hesitantly as he recalled their applications. "First, they can be used to enhance items, like the ones on your armor and blade. Second, inscriptions can be used to embed specific spiritual skills that the creator knows, allowing other cultivators to carry out additional attacks. These can be weaker than a cultivator's original abilities, but they offer significant advantages to buyers."

Hearing this, Yan Xiaobao nodded in acknowledgment. Inscriptions seemed at least as useful as alchemy but felt less rare because they didn't require dual-attribute affinity.

"It's also possible to inscribe actions or awareness into items—like how your training dummies can respond to your drills. But this is incredibly difficult to learn, as it requires the creator to absorb the soul and instincts of a living Demon Beast and inscribe them into their metal creation. This is considered the pinnacle of career and life's pursuit for cultivators with the metal affinity."

"Your second affinity is the earth element, isn't it?" Yan Xiaobao asked inquisitively as he leaned against the wall in the modest rented room.

"Yes," Lan Feng nodded. "Earth is simple but powerful. Everything in this world relies on the essence of earth—birth, stability, death. Everything is brought about by the elemental essence of the earth. We rely on the soil to nourish us, just as the land beneath our feet relies on us. It's what gives life to everything. Without earth, there is nothing. Since I cannot obtain the wood affinity, I have to admit that earth is the next affinity I'd choose. When you control the earth, you control life itself. And in controlling life, death is also within your grasp."

Yan Xiaobao felt a surge of excitement upon hearing this revelation. After the Soul Fusion, Yan Xiaobao now possessed a portion of Lan Feng's soul, meaning he also had an affinity for the earth element as well as fire. His affinity was significantly weaker than Lan Feng's but still present, and it might greatly enhance his abilities in the future.

"When you have wood, you can manipulate the timing of plants, helping them sprout, grow, or wither and die. As a Wood Element cultivator, you must work with plants that are at least in seed form. Before they can allow spiritual energy to be infused into them, there must already be a plant or seed. Lan Feng paused briefly before continuing. "Earth is different. Every plant is born from the earth; every rock and mountain rises from the soil. With an affinity for the earth element, you can create things from nothing. Your spiritual energy allows you to summon seeds from the soil, germinate them from the ground, or even manipulate the very land humans stand upon."

Chapter 287 - 225 No Regrets_3

Hearing the words of Lan Feng, Yan Xiaobao felt his heartbeat reverberate throughout his body. Before this, he had not held earth in high regard, but after hearing those words, he couldn't help but feel his entire body trembling. He had vastly underestimated the affinity of the earth element.

"Earth is sacred," Lan Feng continued, sensing Yan Xiaobao's reaction. "All energy is distributed between heaven and earth. Viewing earth as an affinity is heaven's gift, enabling people to better understand the divine secrets."

"Divine secrets?" Yan Xiaobao furrowed his brows and asked. This was something he had never heard of before.

"To ascend to immortality, you need to comprehend the truths of heaven and the secrets of earth. But don't overburden your little mind with such matters for now. If you manage to break through the Middle Dantian in the coming years, then we will be satisfied."

Yan Xiaobao nodded, agreeing with Lan Feng's words. However, when he heard about the truths of heaven and secrets of earth, a flame of unyielding determination ignited within his soul.

To be honest, Yan Xiaobao was grateful to Lan Feng. If Yan Xiaobao had stayed in his old world, his life would have turned into a sorrowful love story, but here, he no longer thought about his past misfortunes.

Indeed, Yan Xiaobao had died, but with death came his rebirth. Yan Xiaobao was forging his own path; he was paving a road ahead, a path of cultivation leading to the ascension of immortality. Compared to the hollow life he had once lived, this path suited him much more, and Yan Xiaobao felt deep gratitude toward Lan Feng for bringing him here.

This was the purpose of Yan Xiaobao's existence. This was the path he wanted to walk. As he slowly closed his eyes, forming a birdcage shape with both hands while sitting down, a fierce determination radiated from his gaze, and then he immersed himself in his Dantian Cave, where he continued to refine essence.

The next day, as Yan Xiaobao was about to leave the inn where he was staying, he suddenly bumped into Deng Wu. This time, his friend invited him to dine with the Deng Family, whose motives were much like the Ma family's, though they clearly had another agenda during this visit.

"Welcome to the Deng Family," Deng Zeng said, seated on the leader's chair in the grand hall of the house as he addressed Yan Xiaobao.

The Deng family had summoned Yan Xiaobao because, nearly a year ago, he had become a respected expert that anyone would revere, and the Deng family was deeply grateful to him.

This expert had not only given them immense prestige and elevated their status within the city but had also gifted them blueprints for a water mill that allowed their business to grow rapidly.

Six months ago, this expert had even presented another gift to the Deng family—she provided Deng Wu with two advanced martial arts skills that were known by all the elders of the family.

These skills were actually a gift from Yan Xiaobao to Deng Wu, but this was something Deng Wu absolutely couldn't disclose to his family.

The Rong twins, Ma Kong, and Gao Yan had also concealed the secrets of obtaining high-ranking skills from Yan Xiaobao, though the case with the Deng family was slightly different. After thorough discussion between Yan Xiaobao and Deng Wu, they chose to disclose the skills because the Deng family was aware of Li Fen's connection to Deng Wu and his true understanding of his cultivation foundation.

Knowing these skills hadn't changed much yet, as Deng Wu still hadn't mastered them. As a result, he couldn't store them in memory gemstones to preserve them as part of the family's heirlooms.

Even so, a son within the Deng family had secretly practiced one of the two advanced martial arts skills, which nonetheless helped pave the way for their future and turned him into another critical piece in Deng Zengying's plans.

Chapter 288 - 226 Shenzhou Flower

...

Deng Yue stood in front of Deng Jiaying and eight elders of the Deng family, feeling a certain pressure. Yet, his small, innocent face showed no signs of discomfort. He bowed deeply in respect.

"I am honored to be invited. My master instructed me to convey his best wishes," Yan Xiaobao said politely, ignoring the complaints from the birds within his Dantian, chirping, 'I've never said anything would be for such a small family.'

Nevertheless, hearing these words astonished everyone present, both the elders and juniors alike. This was the first time it was revealed that Yan Xiaobao acknowledged Li Fen as his teacher. The reason behind his decision to disclose this was a secret known only to Yan Xiaobao and Deng Wu.

The sudden revelation filled the Deng family with a renewed sense of advantage, knowing they had gained the favor of this elusive expert. They immediately resolved to keep this information confidential.

Deng Zeng displayed a smile on his face, waving his hand and summoning a servant in the same manner the Ma family had done the day before.

Unlike the Ma family, the Deng family did not produce any weapons or armor. Instead, they brought out a white jade box containing a red satin ribbon.

On this ribbon was a pattern, and when Hui Yue gazed at it, he was stunned to discover that inscriptions covered its entire surface.

"This can't be..." Lan Feng muttered with excitement inside the Dantian Cave.

"This is a gift we wish to offer to your master, as gratitude for his ongoing assistance to us," Deng Cengying said as he stood and ascended the stairway, placing himself on the same level as Yan Xiaobao.

He carefully picked up the jade box with both hands and approached Yan Xiaobao. Spiritual energy began to stir in Deng Zengying's hands, clearly indicating that he was circulating his power.

A few moments later, the sound of a sharp click could be heard, as a potent spiritual aura emanated from within the box, filling the entire room.

Appearing within the box was a small white flower. This flower, as white as Yan Xiaobao's Qilin, had a blazing sun at its center, with liquid droplets shimmering on its delicate petals.

The flower was merely a blossom—no stem, no apparent way to absorb nutrients—yet it showed no signs of wilting or decay.

"To think they possess something like this..." Lan Feng spoke in awe. Yan Xiaobao felt the greed, astonishment, and shock stirring deep within his soul. Lan Feng's emotions raged fiercely.

'What is this?' Yan Xiaobao quietly asked Lan Feng, as he stared at the exquisite flower before him. Somehow, the sensation he received from it caused the blue cloud within his Dantian Cave to boil with excitement. Yan Xiaobao silently rejoiced at his decision to inform these people that 'Li Fen' was his master.

"In this world, some plants are capable of cultivation," Lan Feng said, panting. 'These plants are considered medicinal herbs. They absorb the essence of heaven and earth to grow stronger, enhancing their own cultivation. As these plants take in the essence of heaven and earth, their potency increases, evident in the effects of such herbs. This is why older plants are more beneficial than younger ones.'

Hearing this, Yan Xiaobao nearly nodded in agreement, as it aligned with knowledge he had already gained.

'All medicinal plants grow from seeds derived from the same kind of mother plant. They all possess cultivation capabilities, but none of them are like the plant before you.' Lan Feng remarked, his voice tinged with surprise.

"This is a Shenzhou Flower," Lan Feng finally stated after a brief pause, but he was unable to elaborate further.

Both of them remained in the Deng family's hall, while all the members of the Deng family gazed at the subdued expression that passed over Yan Xiaobao's face.

"Oh, I apologize," Yan Xiaobao quickly said, his earlier shock now completely concealed behind an impeccable poker face. "I am simply astonished by the beauty and aura of such a flower. I have never seen anything like it before." Yan Xiaobao continued to commend the magnificent flower before him.

At this moment, Yan Xiaobao could swear before the heavens that he did not know what the flower in front of him truly was, and thus had no fear in playing the role of an unknowing boy.

"This has been a treasured flower within our house's treasury since the time of our first generation," Deng Zengying said with a smile, addressing the young boy before him. "No one has ever discovered anything special about it, but its beauty is undeniably exceptional."

In fact, everyone in the hall wholeheartedly believed Yan Xiaobao's reaction of surprise to its beauty. Except for Deng Wu and this particular young man, all others wore knowing smiles on their faces, confident that the item they gifted Yan Xiaobao had inherent value.

"We hope this gift will be appreciated by your master," Deng Cengying added, relying on a touch of spiritual power to reseal the box.

"Anyone possessing spiritual energy can open this box," he explained, as Yan Xiaobao bowed deeply before him. "I trust your master will find it precious."

Upon hearing this, Yan Xiaobao could only silently agree. He could sense the surging waves of excitement and joy in Lan Feng's heart, which reverberated through his own soul.

Later, in a nearby building next to the hall, Yan Xiaobao sat beside Deng Wu for the next meal. The entire meal felt like a prolonged trial for Yan Xiaobao, as everyone at the table spent the time discussing Deng Wu, deliberately belittling him, unaware of Yan Xiaobao's knowledge of his actual cultivation level.

Chapter 289 - 226 Shenzhou Flower_2

Yan Xiaobao quickly noticed that the elders were clearly unaccustomed to insulting Deng Wu. Their expressions showed evident discomfort, yet Deng Wu's father, Deng Zengying, insulted him and called him trash without hesitation.

At first, Yan Xiaobao found it strange but thought Deng Zengying might simply be a talented actor. However, after half an hour, it became evident that he genuinely enjoyed belittling his son. Yan Xiaobao couldn't help but feel astonished, as none of the elders seemed to understand the parent's true feelings.

Yan Xiaobao looked at Deng Wu, wondering if he might respond to his father's apparent hostility. However, the boy merely shook his head slightly. It was clear this was a family matter, which he intended to handle alone.

The meal concluded, and impatience lingered on Yan Xiaobao's side. Though he smiled and chatted with everyone, his greatest desire was to return to the inn and gather more information about the Shenzhou Flower.

Could it be a flower capable of cultivating divine powers? Was it a special type of flower that could outshine the abilities of any other cultivators? No matter what Yan Xiaobao thought, he couldn't arrive at an answer, for Lan Feng remained completely silent within the Dantian Cave. The only thing betraying his anticipation was the bubbling joy and excitement that filled his soul.

For the Holy Beast ranking Divine Beast to show such extraordinary interest, it was undeniably a monumental treasure. If the Deng Family knew about this, they clearly wouldn't give it up to anyone, even a revered expert.

The sky outside gradually darkened, the moon rising over the Deng family's courtyard. Yan Xiaobao bid farewell and slowly made his way back to his inn.

The day brimmed with returns for Yan Xiaobao. First, there was the mysterious Shenzhou Flower he still didn't fully understand; second, the increased knowledge about Deng Wu's background.

Sitting in the inn, Yan Xiaobao held a jade box in his hand, patiently waiting for Lan Feng to start speaking.

'The last time I saw a Shenzhou Flower was in the Sacred Underground City,' Lan Feng sighed, recalling the scene of his departure from Yan Xiaobao. What was the Sacred Underground City?

"Do you remember the medicinal plants I told you about?" Lan Feng asked first, his satisfaction audible when he noticed the knowledge resurfacing in Yan Xiaobao's mind.

'Those plants were born from seeds left behind by Ancestors, just as humans are born from other humans, but there are certain flowers that emerge from nothing at all.' Lan Feng paused slightly. 'These flowers are born from seeds created by the essence between heaven and earth.'

'In places rich in essence, this essence will gather into a nourishing seed, until it sprouts and transforms into a flower. The petals are made of Qi, water droplets refined into spiritual energy, and the blazing sunlight is Wu Wei. Such a flower will never die; as long as it remains in a place of heavenly essence, it will grow to become a great treasure.'

"But what does it do?" Yan Xiaobao asked in amazement, the fresh glint of surprise evident in his eyes.

'You eat it,' Lan Feng stated bluntly. 'Consume it and absorb its internal energy. At the center of this flower, bathed in brilliant energy called Wu Wei, is the seed from which it sprouted. You need to absorb this seed and place it in your vortex. If it resides there, it will attract the essence of heaven and earth, allowing your cultivation techniques to refine Qi faster than ever.'

Upon hearing this, Yan Xiaobao couldn't help but be stunned. It was indeed a tremendous fortune, but he couldn't help but wonder why no one from the Deng family had tried consuming it.

"Clearly," Lan Feng sighed, puzzled. "Do you remember when I told you that consuming a beast core would harm rather than benefit you, as it would deplete all the Qi you spent time refining?"

Yan Xiaobao nodded. He'd heard about it years ago, and it was one thing he'd never forgotten. Consuming a beast core was something he would absolutely never do.

'This flower is a great treasure, but it might function like a beast core. Once consumed, it will feed on the cultivator's cultivation base. Yet, because there is only one flower, they cannot test its effects on lower-ranked family members, as doing so would waste it. Even a treasure of this magnitude comes with pros and cons when its functionality remains unclear.'

Yan Xiaobao wore a pensive expression. If he hadn't been told to consume the flower, it wouldn't have crossed his mind—especially considering what happens when one consumes a beast core. Most medicinal plants are refined, so one might assume that this flower could also be refined.

However, upon hearing that it was formed from Qi, spiritual energy, and Wu Wei, Yan Xiaobao understood it couldn't be refined like other medicinal plants. Even so, he still didn't feel inclined to consume it—not yet.

'What are you waiting for?' Lan Feng asked, his voice brimming with excitement, evidently impatient to see his companion eat the flower. Yan Xiaobao wore a foolish smile as he used his spiritual projection within the Dantian Cave to move closer to Lan Feng. Lan Feng held a drop of spiritual energy in his hands, the necessary power to unlock the jade box containing the flower.

Slowly, Yan Xiaobao allowed this drop of spiritual energy to flow through his meridians, dripping it onto the ribbon securing the box shut. A clicking sound echoed as the ribbon unraveled, and the box began to open, releasing a dense energy that started to permeate the room.

Yan Xiaobao's heart skipped erratically as the atmosphere thickened with energies. Reaching out, he held the flower in his hands, noticing how its emitted energy rapidly coursed through his meridians, clearing pathways until flowing into the Dantian Cave, where it intertwined with the cultivation technique of the Hui Yue text.

Yan Xiaobao's eyes reflected shock as he slowly raised the flower, studying its beauty before gently placing it in his mouth.

The energy from the flower surged through his veins, meridians, muscles, and bones, flooding his entire being. Yan Xiaobao felt his body purified by the boundless energy, and moments later, sweat began to bead across his body, followed by clouds of black steam—impurities expelled by the Divine Flower.

The petals composed of Qi disintegrated slowly in his mouth, splitting into pure Qi as it traveled down his throat.

Witnessing this, Yan Xiaobao finally grew serious, as his spiritual projection welcomed the emergence of new strands of Qi's Chain. He carefully merged these purified strands of Qi into his existing ones, sighing with relief.

Variations in Qi purity often lead to instability within the Qi Cave, sometimes wreaking havoc on cultivators and rendering martial skills unsteady. Yet from the looks of these strands, they aligned perfectly with Yan Xiaobao's own techniques.

After spending so many years refining these strands, they finally yielded results. Yan Xiaobao allowed the Qi threads emitted by the flower to fill the Qi vortex within his Qi Cave.

Thread by thread, they joined and expanded the vortex into a massive spiral. The strength coursing through his body made him tremble with power, his eyes gleaming with astonishment.

He was breaking through to the Fourth Star of the Disciple Rank!

The Fourth Star breakthrough wasn't the culmination of the Divine Flower's blessings. One strand after another continued flowing smoothly into the massive vortex, expanding it further and larger. Soon, Yan Xiaobao reached the peak of the Fourth Star. As the final petal disintegrated into strands of Qi, Yan Xiaobao breached the threshold of the five-star Star Disciple ranking.

As the last petal vanished, Yan Xiaobao felt his Qi vortex achieve astonishing strength, reaching the apex of the Fifth Constant Star.

However, the Qi was merely the flower's petals; its other energies continued surging, rushing through his youthful body.

Each petal dripped with spiritual energy, its potency on par with the energy of an entire Duke Level star. This spiritual energy coursed through Yan Xiaobao, purging impurities, but it also had a specific purpose—it flowed directly toward Lan Feng's soul.

The Blue Phoenix's face glowed with elation as he greedily absorbed the immense spiritual energy. His white feathers began shimmering with an ethereal luster, just as the drops of energy radiated brilliance. Joy blossomed within Yan Xiaobao, as he felt the power of Soul Fusion steadily intensifying.

...

Chapter 290 The Magical Forest

...

A strange premonition filled Yan Xiaobao as he analyzed the petals, giving him an odd sensation. When he realized this feeling originated from the fusion of his soul with Lan Feng, he was astonished. If he pulled the connected thread, he could withdraw the spiritual power absorbed by Lan Feng.

The fused soul indeed allowed the other party to borrow strength. Relief washed over Yan Xiaobao's face as he realized he no longer needed to retreat in fear of the invisible black-clad individuals now residing in the City Lord's mansion. He could burn them himself.

Although the spiritual energy and Qi had been absorbed by Yan Xiaobao and Lan Feng, a golden energy far surpassing other energies continuously swirled around his meridians. It cleansed his body, causing

the steam to expand, and sweat to turn into harsh, filthy water, which was forcibly discharged from his pores.

Finally, as the spiritual energy and Qi were fully absorbed, this golden sun burst forth from his body in a dazzling beam of light, flying toward the Dan Ding Cave atop the vortex where it hovered.

The glorious radiance from the miniature sun caused the Qi vortex to absorb every ray of light, leading to the vortex's size swelling and splitting into two, further enhancing Yan Xiaobao's strength.

Suddenly, the sun shattered like an egg, revealing a small object resembling a pearl within its golden shell.

The pearl slowly descended from the cracked shell, hovering within Qi, above the human figure formed by Yan Xiaobao's cultivation method. There, it stabilized and began rotating, mirroring the Qi vortex itself.

Yan Xiaobao felt a sudden suction emanating from his body as the newfound essence surged into him. He was shocked to see how the absorbed essence gathered around the pearl before being drawn into Yan Xiaobao's copy, slowly yet steadily refining into pure Qi.

The golden shell gradually turned into streaks of light. Since Yan Xiaobao hadn't yet opened his Upper Dantian, he had expected these streaks to float toward Lan Feng. Although this didn't occur, streaks of light again passed through Yan Xiaobao's body until intense pain flared between his eyes—it seemed like something was forcing its way through a closed door.

Yan Xiaobao ultimately felt as though someone was repeatedly stabbing his head. The agony grew unbearable until he lost consciousness.

Yan Xiaobao finally regained consciousness at midnight. The pain had completely subsided. He instantly sensed his eyes but felt no sensation in his fingers.

Instead, Yan Xiaobao directed his consciousness inward to observe, but nothing seemed any different; everything was as before.

Hui Yue furrowed his brows, shifted into a lotus position, then performed a mental calculation before approaching Lan Feng, hoping to hear what had happened.

"You were dazed and lost consciousness," Lan Feng said in his eternal tone, happiness clearly evident. Seeing the Phoenix so joyful, Yan Xiaobao couldn't help but smile, revealing his teeth.

Although the pain had subsided, Yan Xiaobao felt greatly benefited from absorbing the Shenzhou Flower. He could sense his body now absorbing essence at a speed he had never experienced before. Whenever he looked at the vortex-like pearl within his Qi spiral, his heart stirred with excitement.

As Yan Xiaobao sat meditating, the pearl almost reduced the required refining time, continuing its refinement without absorbing further energy.

"What happened to the golden light?" Yan Xiaobao asked curiously, sitting beside the happily smiling Lan Feng.

"It forcefully entered your Upper Dantian," Lan Feng replied matter-of-factly, shocking Yan Xiaobao.

"But my Upper Dantian isn't unlocked yet!" Yan Xiaobao exclaimed. This was the first time he had heard of energy being stored in a sealed Dantian.

"You collapsed because it wasn't opened yet," Lan Feng sighed. "Everyone is born with three Dannies, but most people cannot unlock their full potential."

Lan Feng gave Yan Xiaobao a long look and broke into a smile. "This isn't the first energy stored in your Upper Dantian," he chuckled. Though intrigued, Yan Xiaobao could sense Lan Feng had no intention of elaborating, so he smiled, gently shook his head, and admired the spiral Qi vortex rotating on the replica of the Holy Flower's cultivation technique.

It was an incredible pleasure to witness his hard work evolve into a perpetually spinning mechanism.

"You mentioned Shenzhou's underground city," Yan Xiaobao asked curiously. "What is it?"

The name sounded so extraordinary that Hui wanted to learn more, but he hadn't come across any mention of it during his readings in the library.

"Ah," Lan Feng's face bore a nostalgic expression. "You'll find out later," he said dismissively. "When you manage to unlock your Middle Dantian, I'll take you there. Although we can't go too far, we can always explore the outskirts. That should be very beneficial."

Hearing this, Hui Ye raised his eyebrows, a faint smile crossing his face. Their aspirations were aimed at the distant future. Yan Xiaobao needed smaller, achievable goals along the way. His current goal had shifted from defeating Wang Julong to unlocking the Middle Dantian as quickly as possible.

Since discovering her identity as a girl, Yan Xiaobao hadn't underestimated Wang Julong. However, he realized that while she worked hard, she couldn't keep up with him because she limited her cultivation methods.