

Medical 311

Chapter 311 The Half-Snake Woman

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"Relax." Yan Xiaobao smiled at the Snake Woman who had moved beside him, preparing to face off against the cheering men atop the towering buildings ahead of them. "They're cheering," he explained. "When you're happy, you cheer. Those men are glad to see us."

Her beautiful silver eyes narrowed in suspicion, and she refused to step away from Yan Xiaobao's side. A low growl still rumbled from her throat, though she seemed less inclined to attack.

The cheering died down, replaced by a heavy atmosphere that seemed thick enough to cut with a knife. Many of the guards on the ground raised their spears until the group approached, and the first guard noticed the silver eyes.

When he lowered his weapon, shock spread wide across his face, prompting the others to follow his gaze and notice the silver eyes as well. Some gasped in astonishment, while others stood frozen in confusion as they took in the sight of the half-serpent woman.

Although Sha Yun from the Magic Forest was a humanoid beast rarely encountered by humans, she and her sisters were quite infamous among mercenaries. If a mercenary group ventured into one of their territories, they often suffered casualties. In truth, the three sisters were not a match for many mercenary groups, but by employing tactics like ambushes and using their connection to the Holy Position Forest King, it was evident no one wished to cross them.

Yet now, the beast that everyone strove to avoid was entering Lילו City under the clear bond of a Beast Oath. In the minds of these guards, admiration for Yan Xiaobao stirred. This young cultivator was truly remarkable—a figure deserving of respect, even reverence, for being able to subdue the Snake Woman.

Not all the guards felt admiration; some were overcome with jealousy. Yan Xiaobao was just a teenager, yet he had become the apprentice of an expert. And now, he even commanded such an alluring and formidable magical beast.

Step by step, every meter they traveled through the city brought more citizens face-to-face with the striking, towering woman, leaving them awestruck. However, the shock became palpable when people observed the scales adorning her skin, and noticed that her lower half was not two elegant legs, but a long serpentine tail that seemed longer than her entire body. As she moved through the streets, her tail swayed and curled beneath her captivating figure.

In the areas the group passed through, the seven young cultivators discussed among themselves, their tones calm but their eyes wide with amazement. It was clear that some of them held knowledge of magical beasts, as they occasionally muttered words like "humanoid" and "Holy Name."

No one knew exactly what level this magical beast had reached, but it was obvious it far surpassed the average. Taking on a humanoid form was something only extraordinarily powerful creatures could achieve, just as only the strongest cultivators could transform into beasts.

When they had walked just a hundred meters into the city, Deng Wu spoke. With a brief farewell and an awkward smile, he turned his steed toward the Deng Family Mansion. Ma Kong, Gao Yan, and the Rong twins followed suit a few intersections later, leaving Yan Xiaobao to accompany Sha Yun alone.

"Mom, why does that woman have snake legs?" a little boy asked his mother, his wide eyes glued to Sha Yun and his chubby face filled with wonder. Although the mother hurriedly pulled him away and urged him on, Yan Xiaobao couldn't help but chuckle gently at the boy's innocent curiosity. Only children remained unfazed by the Snake Woman at his side since they were unaware of the dangers magical beasts posed. To them, Sha Yun was nothing more than a beautiful, slightly exotic woman—no more threatening than any other citizen.

"Follow me," Yan Xiaobao sighed as he dismounted the magical beast he rode. Holding the reins in hand, he quickly located a city guard and offered two Gold Coins to ensure that the steed would be safely returned to the City Lord's estate.

Once he finally rid himself of the mount, Yan Xiaobao descended to the ground and began showing Sha Yun the sights of the city. He noticed the surprise darting across her silver eyes as she continuously turned her head, marveling at everything from the simple stone buildings to the ornate carriages passing by.

When Yan Xiaobao led her to the bustling marketplace, he let out a laugh as they wandered among the stalls selling all kinds of food and candies wrapped in colorful paper. Although the busy streets had quieted somewhat, a market this massive couldn't entirely grind to a halt, even with the presence of a

magical beast. Before long, Sha Yun managed to immerse herself in the lively market. Yan Xiaobao purchased her a long, sand-colored cloak—not enough to fully disguise her as a Snake Woman, but at least sufficient to make her less conspicuous.

After hours of exploring the market, the sun had set, and the roads were now illuminated solely by moonlight and lanterns hanging from the walls of houses. As they left the market, passing by refined shops selling household goods, Yan Xiaobao couldn't help but admire the excitement now shimmering in Sha Yun's silver eyes. A fondness began to bloom in Yan Xiaobao's chest.

Yan Xiaobao felt that Sha Yun had transformed from an adversary into a friend. Though she was not as close to him as the Rong twins or the others, she was undoubtedly someone Yan Xiaobao could rely on in the future.

Chapter 312 The Half-Snake Woman_2

Happily laughing, while thinking about Sha Yun's excitement, Yan Xiaobao decided it was time to find a place for the two of them to rest at an inn.

"I... I truly apologize, sir." The manager said in a trembling voice, his eyes darting nervously to the threatening presence of Sha Yun standing behind Yan Xiaobao.

"You won't accommodate us because Sha Yun is a magical beast?" Yan Xiaobao repeated incredulously, referencing the statement just made to him. Hearing this, the manager shook his head vigorously, almost to the point where it seemed he might collapse if he continued shaking.

"No, sir, not at all," the manager quickly replied. "We would love to accommodate you both, but we cannot provide her with an individual room. Although this... lady... is very human-like, she is still a beast, and we don't allow beasts to have their own rooms."

Yan Xiaobao let out a sigh. Despite having been in a good mood earlier, the thought of what lay ahead triggered a headache once more. He could easily go to another inn, but he strongly suspected they'd tell him exactly the same thing wherever he went.

"Then give me your largest room." Sighing deeply, Yan Xiaobao handed over a few gold coins before being given a Memory Stone, which served as the key to the room.

As he ascended the stairs, Yan Xiaobao couldn't help but feel satisfied with the quality of the inn he had chosen, which was far superior to any he'd visited previously. The staircase wasn't narrow but spacious, flanked by walls adorned with intricate wallpaper in pristine condition.

Everything was illuminated by beautiful lighting, while sunlight during the day streamed through windows currently hidden behind curtains. The doors lining the hallway were all elegantly painted white, each adorned with small brass plaques indicating the room numbers.

Yan Xiaobao opened the white door, and a burst of dried floral fragrance greeted them as they stepped inside. This scent enveloped them, his headache quickly escalating into a thunderous pang.

As Yan Xiaobao kicked off his shoes, he noticed the soft carpet covering the floor, which felt like a slight luxury against his weary feet as he walked further inside. The large bed was adorned with a shared blanket and two pillows. The entire room was filled with the aroma of dried flowers, fresh roses placed neatly on bedside tables, along with a few small snacks.

Although Yan Xiaobao was well aware that the bed was meant for two people, he wished it weren't true. Alas, there was no way around it now. He sighed heavily as he collapsed onto the soft mattress, allowing his exhausted body to fully relax against the plush bedding.

Closing his eyes, he lazily waved his hand at Sha Yun and said, "You take a bath first, I'll go after."

Sha Yun, having heard Xu Yue's words, complied immediately. The young boy heard the shuffling sounds of her entering the attached bathroom, followed by the light splashes of water. The sound brought a relaxed smile to Yan Xiaobao's face.

Lying on the bed, Yan Xiaobao marveled at how the silky-smooth fabric embraced his skin, cooling him off without making him feel cold. The gentle warmth of the bedding was a welcome contrast to anything he'd encountered during the past few weeks. A look of relief crossed his face. Though there was only one large bed, it certainly wasn't as bad as he had initially assumed.

Yan Xiaobao enjoyed the smoothness of the surface, the softness surrounding him, and the quiet environment. Yet, his brow furrowed upon hearing faint hissing sounds and muffled squeaks coming from the bathroom, even though the closed door muted the noises.

Upon hearing these noises, Yan Xiaobao became increasingly certain that the bathing experience wasn't proceeding as expected. A frustrated sigh escaped his lips, and he forced his fatigued muscles to carry him off the inviting bed onto the short path leading to the bathroom, where he expected to find something that would surely re-trigger his headache.

"Oh!" Entering the bathroom, Lan Feng cheered boisterously from within his Dantian Cave, prompting Yan Xiaobao to narrow his eyes and consider how the situation might unfold.

"You've finally grown a pair, have you?" Lan Feng teased unabashedly, but before Yan Xiaobao could retort, the perverse little bird continued, "This is just like a man. We need to indulge in typical male behavior—such as walking in on a naked woman."

"You do realize she's been naked all day, right?" Yan Xiaobao sighed, pointing out the obvious. Until Yan Xiaobao bought her a cloak, Sha Yun had indeed been without clothing. Even so, her protective scales meant she hadn't truly exposed herself.

"Naked is still naked," Lan Feng stubbornly declared. "Just imagine someone soaked in water." He contemplated deeply, causing an unexpected reflection in Yan Xiaobao's heart, leaving him feeling faintly unsettled.

"If you behave, I might even tell you how to handle a Snake Woman," Lan Feng mused. At that point, Yan Xiaobao had had enough. He shook his head vehemently, trying to dispel Lan Feng's lingering words before gently knocking on the bathroom door, reassuring himself that Lan Feng's provocations were not something he couldn't withstand.

The hissing sounds grew louder, this time more frenzied, accompanied by a massive thud that caused Yan Xiaobao to shut his blue eyes, fearing what might await him.

Slowly opening the door, Yan Xiaobao found the room enveloped in steam, obscuring his vision of what had transpired for the moment. By the time the steam dissipated entirely, Yan Xiaobao strained his eyes to see clearly but instantly wished he had never opened the door.

Spacious and grand, the bathroom lived up to the reputation of being part of the inn's largest room. At the center, a large wooden bathtub was perched atop a small charcoal stove, keeping the water warm within.

Flower petals had once floated atop the water, though at this moment, most were either scattered across the floor or sticking to Sha Yun's skin.

Sha Yun was nestled awkwardly in the bathtub, her overly long tail thankfully wedged into the already-cramped tub, causing her body to sink slightly and the water to overflow.

However, this wasn't the worst detail Yan Xiaobao could notice. The last meter of Sha Yun's tail stuck out of the tub, unable to fit in alongside the rest of her, and in her mild panic over being stuck, she had flailed her tail about, knocking over an assortment of bottles and items.

Yan Xiaobao sighed again as his gaze fell to the floor. Scattered around were broken jade bottles, which had previously contained aromatic oils, scented soaps, and several pills—all shattered by her tail's hectic movements.

Cautiously stepping into the room, Yan Xiaobao approached the tub, observing Sha Yun and considering how to free her. Whatever options he came up with, only one seemed remotely plausible.

Grasping her tail, he began pulling, his face growing red with embarrassment. At first, he had thought it would be easy to help her out, but after exerting all the strength he could muster, it turned out to be arduous. Sha Yun was firmly stuck in the bathtub.

Lines appeared on Yan Xiaobao's forehead as he assessed the situation again. This time, he didn't even consider Lan Feng's earlier teasing; he simply stared at the tangled serpent-like state inside the bathtub, a hopeless smile escaping his lips.

The entire predicament was bizarre enough that even Sha Yun seemed uncertain whether to laugh or cry. Yan Xiaobao tried pulling at her tail from various angles, but whatever he did was futile, with the only result being Sha Yun's uncomfortable grimaces.

At last, Yan Xiaobao had enough. He began circulating Qi within his body, channeling it into his hands, amplifying his strength a hundredfold. Although this might cause slight discomfort, it was nothing compared to the pain Sha Yun had endured during their earlier struggles.

Using Qi resolved the issue swiftly, leaving Yan Xiaobao wondering why he hadn't done so earlier. Finally, he sighed again—an action that had become as natural for him as breathing—and shifted his gaze to Sha Yun, who was now smiling. With one last look at her, he had to admit that she truly possessed an enchanting beauty. Her allure was captivating, her sinuous figure mesmerizing, as she lay in the bath with her coiled tail lazily swaying. She resembled the sirens of ancient tales.

Shaking his head and laughing lightly, Yan Xiaobao finally forced himself to drag his gaze away from the tempting sight and exited the bathroom, returning to the bed. As his tired body sank into the mattress, he immediately drifted into a blissful sleep, long before everything faded to black.

In a different courtyard within Liluo City, Wang Julong sat in her room. From a young age, Wang Julong's focus had always been on training, striving to surpass expectations.

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Chapter 313 Fifth Star Gate

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When Wang Julong's mother went into labor, a fortune-teller in Liluo City predicted that if the Wang Family were to have a son, their development would be extraordinary; but if they were to have a daughter, they would suffer immense calamities.

After hearing the public prophecy proclaimed all over Liluo City, he became curious to see if the newborn child of the Wang Family was a boy or a girl. At her birth, her father personally executed everyone present and then announced to the public that it was a boy.

From that moment on, Wang Julong lived as if she were a boy. She was never given a female name nor allowed to wear women's clothing. Living a life where her father refused to look at her and her mother abandoned her, Wang Julong swiftly found solace in quiet solitude.

She observed the guards meditating, mimicking their gestures. At the age of three, she refined her first strand of Qi, its brilliance so striking that it became notable even then.

The act of refining Qi at the age of three made everyone in the Wang Family suddenly realize that Wang Julong was not just the family's disgrace. As long as no one discovered her true gender, she might become a prodigy for a new generation.

From then on, Wang Julong began to see the world for what it truly was. The strongest and most talented were celebrated as legendary, while others were shunned. If she couldn't become useful, her life would be destined to remain stagnant.

Still, in this world, there was one person who seemed indifferent to her true gender and even gifted her an irreplaceable cultivation technique. Though Wang Julong was young, she deeply appreciated this person and, for the first time in her life, wanted to give thought to someone else.

Until now, her strength had been her way of ensuring safety within the family, but now she hoped to improve herself enough to truly secure her status as Yan Xiaobao's rival.

These thoughts persisted in Wang Julong's mind for days. To cultivate and strengthen her foundation, she completely neglected eating and sleeping. Now, after two months of relentless cultivation, she successfully ascended to the level of a Fifth Star Disciple.

When she finally reached her goal, a sense of profound accomplishment washed over her exhausted body. Yan Xiaobao might still be ahead of her, but she knew she had the ability to catch up, even if his strength was superior by a margin. He had given her this opportunity, and it was one she would never let slip.

Recalling Yan Xiaobao, Wang Julong's cheeks flushed faintly, though she quickly smacked herself in the face. She had been instructed to live her life as a man, and that was what she would do. Still, she couldn't help but quietly hope that someday, she might have the chance to become friends with Yan Xiaobao.

Wang Longlong finally managed to reach the Fifth Star Disciple level. He hadn't had proper sleep for several weeks. While his training was fruitful, it also left him drained from overusing his abilities.

Lying on the bed, Yan Xiaobao finally looked like the innocent child he had once imagined, with no trace of his previous vigilance and sharpness.

Sha Yun, soaking in her bath for an extended period—especially enjoying the bubbles—emerged from the bathroom after more than an hour. Upon entering the room, she noticed the boy asleep on the bed, her expression softening.

Today was the most thrilling day in Sha Yun's life. She witnessed a myriad of events and did not regret initiating the Beast Oath.

Walking to the side of the bed, Sha Yun coiled her snake tail around Yan Xiaobao before lying beside him. She shifted him slightly on the bed, refusing to release his waist and instead pulling him closer into her embrace. As she drifted into sleep, a smile graced her lips.

The sunlight filtered through the curtains, marking the start of a new day. Normally, Hui Yue would be awake by this time, but today, he remained asleep on the comfortable bed at the city inn.

Over the past few weeks, Hui Yue had barely slept, dedicating every moment of rest to improving his cultivation, leaving his body utterly drained. Though he had gained significant insights and breakthroughs during this journey, he now urgently needed time to relax his body or risk collapse.

Little murmurs and faint whispers escaped Hui Yue's lips as he tried to turn over, only to find it impossible, as if something was holding him in place. The previously sleeping Xu Yue quickly awoke, discovering that he, too, couldn't move, though the reason was entirely unexpected.

A long rope was tightly wrapped around his waist, ensuring Hui Yue's inability to move. Behind him, he felt the warmth of someone else sharing the bed. As Hui Yue struggled against the tail currently restraining his movements, the headache from the night before swiftly returned.

As Hui Yue... th..., Lan Feng enjoyed the scene, giggling as he remarked, "Don't you want to know if you were with her last night? Aren't you curious to hear what happened? Think about how you can make use of this moment—I could help you."

Hui Yue couldn't stop his gaze from landing on the scaled woman who appeared to enjoy teasing him, but the only emotion he felt was annoyance.

After some prolonged jostling, Hui Yue finally managed to rouse Sha Yun. The enchanting woman tensed briefly before slowly opening her eyes to greet the day. A vibrant blush spread across her cheeks, and her face was painted with a serene joy, for she had never slept as soundly as she did last night.

Chapter 314 Fifth Star Gate_2

When she lifted her tail, a satisfied expression filled her face. No matter when she wrapped it up, it was heavier than she imagined, and when she treated Hui Yue like he was a sack of potatoes, her puzzled look quickly turned into a smile and surprise.

Xu Yue had long given up trying to gain freedom without harming Sha Yun, so he allowed the Snake Woman to carry him, especially since he could feel how carefully she handled him in her own cautious way.

"What did you just say?" The manager's face darkened upon hearing Hui Yue's earlier statement. "The restroom has already been destroyed." Hui Yue repeated, his expression showing an almost careless indifference typically unseen in managers. Before the manager could truly become angry, Hui Yue flicked his fingers, and a black coin became visible between them.

Waving the coin toward the manager, Hui Yue said coldly, "I believe this covers the damages," and then turned and left, leaving behind a stunned manager.

The coin in his hand was black, with a square hole in the center. It bore no engravings and lacked any metal to offset the black iron. Instead, a pure surge of energy radiated from it, causing the manager's hand to feel slightly warm as he clutched the precious treasure.

"Such a wealthy young lord," the manager muttered to himself. Trying to think of which family could produce such an affluent young man, he was utterly bewildered. While Huili was famed throughout Liluo City, his reputation spread mainly among the upper echelons of society. Few commoners or average shopkeepers knew of him directly—they had only heard whispers of a rumored expert connected to a student from the Royal Art Academy, a student who had briefly visited this city nearly a year ago. How could someone as simple as this manager have guessed?

Xu Yue felt a bit annoyed as he realized that, although he found himself liking Sha Yun, the reason wasn't merely due to who she was—it was because she was someone he felt he could trust. This thought made him frown slightly. Did this mean he didn't genuinely care about her as a friend? Or was it simply because she had submitted to him, so he couldn't see her in any other way?

As Hui Yue pondered this, he suddenly noticed someone approaching him. His earlier doubts were replaced as he greeted Yan Xiaobao and the Rong twins with a smile, followed by the market guards.

This particular market was owned by the Deng Family. Whenever high-ranking individuals walked through its premises, guards typically accompanied them for safety and service. This custom was commonplace in many places. However, Hui Yue received no such treatment because the Deng Family highly valued his privacy, and those who had encountered him chose not to reveal his status to authorities.

"We'll be leaving soon," Rong Xing said with a smile, observing how Rong Ming dashed toward Sha Yun, trying to help her choose bracelets. Rong Ming's face was filled with excitement, his cheeks flushed with healthy rosiness that reminded Hui Yue of the time he proposed marriage.

Those memories made Hui Yue wince whenever he thought of them, but now he couldn't help feeling a little sorry for Rong Ming. His first love had turned into a boy, and then into his next magical beast.

Later that day, Hui Yue once again borrowed a magical horse from the City Lord's estate, leaving behind Liluo City's towering walls as he and the Rong twins set off toward the Academy.

The distance was such that they could have walked it quickly, but today they took their time. Sha Yun turned her head left and right, looking around in awe as they traveled leisurely. The mix of cultivated lands and barren terrain was strikingly similar to what they had seen during their journey from the Magic Forest to Liluo City. However, that time, the group had rushed to make it to the city gates before they closed. Today was the first day she could slowly take in the sights and gain a deeper understanding of how people outside the forest lived.

Riding beside Sha Yun was Rong Ming, who was busy narrating and explaining various sights like rice paddies, water wheels, and small villages. While the brother was occupied with Sha Yun, Rong Xing and Hui Yue finally had time to discuss their future plans.

The National Royal Art Academy competition was about to begin, and Rong Xing intended to participate. Having fought for her life in the Magic Forest for three weeks, she had already grasped the value of battling others to gain insight into her own abilities.

"Hui Yue!" A voice called out from behind, interrupting the youths' conversation and causing them to turn and see who had arrived. Behind them was a Qilin—a magnificent steed radiating an air of arrogance. It was clear this Qilin came from the wild, unlike the domesticated beasts raised by the Rong twins.

Riding the Qilin was Wang Julong, with Wang Jingshen and several other young members of the Wang Family trailing behind her.

"I'll catch up with the Academy," Wang Julong said to the group trailing behind her. They didn't argue but sighed heavily, urging their mounts to increase their speed and race toward the Academy.

Seeing a new addition to the group, Sha Yun immediately focused her attention on the newcomer. But once their eyes met, it felt as if sparks ignited between them.

Like a flash, Sha Yun appeared beside Yan Xiaobao, her tail clattering loudly. Her lips hissed as her eyes shimmered silver, piercing as she gazed at Wang Julong.

Seeing the shifting shadow, Wang Julong let out a disdainful snort. Though Sha Yun was fast, Wang Julong did not doubt her Thunder Lightning skills would once again prevail against this strange beast.

Wang Julong was no fool. It wasn't hard to see that the silver markings in this female beast's gaze represented a magical beast's oath of service. She was clearly under the control of one of three individuals, and the way she protected Hui Yue made it glaringly obvious to Wang Julong that this Snake Woman belonged to him.

"Why would you tame a bug?" Wang Julong sneered, her eyes filled with contempt as she looked at the Snake Woman whom she had derisively called a worm.

At this point, all magical beasts stopped moving and gathered together. Hui Yue was about to speak up in defense of Sha Yun, but before he had the chance, the Snake Woman let out a massive roar from her

throat. She began whipping her tail against the ground, clearly preparing to demonstrate dominance between the two. Instinctively, Sha Yun disliked Wang Julong, and the feelings were mutual.

"Do you think a beast like you has the right to show off in front of me?" Wang Julong sneered as she dismounted her Qilin, ordering it to stay put and wait.

Although she suspected Yan Xiaobao's friendliness toward this impudent creature, the truth was she was holding back her fury as Sha Yun continued to roar and hiss furiously.

Hui Yue watched the scene unfolding before him with a skeptical gaze, shaking his head before finally letting out a laugh.

"If you two want to duel, I won't stop you," he said lightly, chuckling. "But neither of you is allowed to seriously harm the other. Sha Yun, Wang Julong is my friend. Likewise, Sha Yun is under my protection, so I can't let her suffer grave injuries."

Upon hearing this, both participants felt angry but complied with the rules he laid out, nodding solemnly. For them, defeating their rival wasn't the priority—proving their strength was.

"This will be interesting," Lan Feng said from Qi Mountain Cave. "I'd love to see how powerful Wang Julong truly is."

Hui Yue stepped aside, following Sha Yun and Wang Julong. The path they currently traveled was lined on both sides with villages and agricultural fields. Golden corn grew in abundance on either side, reflecting the summer sunlight, creating the illusion of two glimmering golden seas stretching as far as the eye could see.

As Hui Ya turned to the two women prepared for battle, her face showed a deep sigh of exasperation.

"We need to find a barren plot of land," Hui Yue said bluntly. Without waiting for a response, he steered his horse down the dusty road to select an appropriate location.

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Chapter 315 Memory Stone Key

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Sha Yun sped past Wang Julong, quickly following beside Yan Xiaobao as they continued their journey, searching for a place with one or two Crystal Stones.

"We won't be able to find a decent place here," Rong Ming began, also scanning the surroundings. Today was one of the entrance exam days, with families from all over Liluo City and its outlying villages heading toward the academy. Even if this group managed to find barren land, it would still be crowded with families coming and going, and even the friendliest Crystal Stone could accidentally harm a passerby.

As they swiftly moved toward the academy's location, Yan Xiaobao couldn't help but silently agree with Rong Ming. With the scenery growing increasingly barren and pine trees standing amidst scattered stones, it was clear they were approaching the foot of the mountains where the academy was situated.

"We can always use the arena," Yan Xiaobao finally suggested. Initially, he would've preferred not to, as he disliked how every battle would be recorded in their memories, with the results made known to all the teachers.

However, while Yan Xiaobao knew the outcome would be public, he was also fully aware that secrecy was impossible with Sha Yun. Every creature entering the Royal Art Academy had to pass through the entrance gates, which required possessing a Memory Stone Key — a key already held by Qi Yin.

This Memory Stone Key, in turn, enabled any being bearing the Qilin insignia to enter, including Demon Beasts under beast protection. The moment Hui Yue and Sha Yun passed through the entrance, Yan Xiaobao knew that all the academy elders would realize he had brought back a magical beast.

Knowing this, Yan Xiaobao couldn't help but sigh internally; in the end, he understood that within this venue, he could witness how much Wang Julong had improved after cultivation using new techniques.

Returning to the academy gates, Yan Xiaobao saw the queue was far longer than when he first entered. All of these hopeful children patiently waited their turn for testing.

As Yan Xiaobao passed by the line, he noticed most of these children were common folk, their wide eyes filled with envy as they stared at his team.

These children's sole wish was to one day belong to this academy, much like Yan Xiaobao and the others. This academy was their ticket to a better world — a possible future for them and their families.

As Yan Xiaobao gazed at the children, a faint memory surfaced from when he himself stood there a year ago. Though he was much older than the children in this line, he had arrived just as naive as they were.

Initially, he thought himself invincible because of receiving extra tuition from Lan Feng, yet his overconfidence had been thoroughly crushed by Wang Julong. This taught Yan Xiaobao a valuable lesson — in this world, there will always be someone stronger than you. He forbade himself from becoming complacent.

Not only did he learn to remain vigilant, but he also gained a group of friends he could trust fully. These friends were the only ones who knew that Yan Xiaobao shared his body with a specialist. They were also the only ones to benefit from this information. Yet despite trusting them and revealing most of his secrets, Yan Xiaobao still refused to inform them about his reincarnation, nor did he want them to know anything about Lan Feng and how he became a specialist.

Reflecting on the past year, a face emerged in Yan Xiaobao's mind — the face of Li Cheng. Li Cheng was the first person Yan Xiaobao had killed, and it profoundly changed his mindset. Before his first kill, Yan Xiaobao had felt pride and determination, but after it, those feelings hardened into an unyielding will. Yan Xiaobao finally understood the truth of this world.

The strongest survive — only the strongest have the right to decide who survives alongside them. At first, Yan Xiaobao disliked this philosophy. He vowed never to kill a fleeing enemy, and even now, this was a principle he wouldn't waver on. However, despite his rigid stance, when dealing with enemies before him, hesitation no longer had a place in his mind. Any who posed a threat to him or his friends were people he had to eliminate.

As he climbed the academy's stairs, Yan Xiaobao continued mulling over these thoughts. When he finally looked up, he noticed they had arrived at the stage. Staring at the peak of the mountain ahead, a shy smile appeared on his handsome face.

After killing Li Cheng in the final battle, Shunhua had not returned to the mountain peak stage since then, occupied with training in the courtyard and attending classes. But now, standing here once again, he felt no guilt.

Instead of guilt, a small sense of excitement bubbled up within him as he recalled his first day here a year ago, moving onto the small stage where he and Wang Julong had once clashed. The smile on his face grew wider as he thought about not taking part in combat this time and enjoying the spectacle as an audience member.

The summer day was warm, sunlight bathing the ground in comforting rays and enveloping the stage in a welcoming glow. A gentle summer breeze swept over the mountain peak, carrying fresh air that made the warmth pleasant rather than oppressive.

Standing on one of the peaks, Yan Xiaobao curiously watched as Wang Julong and Sha Yun both entered the area in front of the stage. When they turned to face each other, serious expressions adorned their faces.

Sha Yun's face carried a sinister smile, her entrancing features taking on an eerie edge. Her silver eyes gleamed with a strange internal light, and the tip of her tail lightly tapped the solid ground, kicking up a puff of dust with each strike.

Chapter 316 Memory Stone Key_2

Wang Julong did not smile, but her eyes sparkled with an unyielding light. In her hands, a small hurricane began to appear. As always, the wind surged, the hurricane grew, but this time it was no longer just visible air; an immense amount of Qi floated around the young woman. With no trace of Qi Lightning, Hui Yue felt a surge of excitement, guessing that the challenging-to-train advanced martial arts skill had once again progressed in Wang Julong's grasp.

Seeing Sha Feng coil her tail, Sha Feng's lips parted from Sha Yun's lips, forming a spring she used to launch herself directly into the hurricane in front of her.

As Sha Yun sped through the air, she finally activated her Qi. A small, bead-like eye suddenly appeared on her forehead. Qi poured out of her body, engulfing her beautiful figure as it gathered in her hands, forming daggers as long as nails—an incredible precision weapon she wielded expertly.

These Qi Nails were prepared to pulverize the hurricane, but the moment Sha Yun reached Wang Julong, the latter leaped away, carried by the ferocious winds into safety.

Soon, the sound of slicing could be heard, and the wild winds gradually dissipated. Sha Yun had completely dismantled the hurricane, only to find that Wang Julong was not inside it. As she glanced around, the Snake Woman immediately became alert.

Wang Julong was nowhere to be seen. When Hui Yue turned his gaze to the sky, a thunderous roar could be heard. There, Wang Julong currently hung suspended mid-air, lightning wings formed from Qi Lightning affixed to her back. Each wing generated bursts of energy, which converged into a larger Qi Lightning spinning patiently around the young woman's waist.

This evolution was something Yan Xiaobao had never anticipated. It made him wonder about what epiphanies the young woman had to undergo to unlock this transformation.

The massive hissing sound could be heard as Qi—previously used for aggressive attacks—was directed toward Sha Yun's tail. Her tail was wrapped in a protective layer, its scales radiating a bright white light.

Now, as Wang Julong flapped her wings, she sneered, unleashing numerous bolts of Qi Thunder Lightning toward Sha Yun. Seeing the onslaught, the Snake Woman let out an enraged hiss, using her swift reflexes to evade the majority of bolts. The few she couldn't avoid were absorbed by her Qi-shrouded tail.

Both humans and beasts were operating at their peak prowess, as Wang Julong's Qi Pool had significantly depleted from her Qi Thunder Lightning technique. Similarly, Sha Yun drained much of her Qi to offset the incoming bolts. Neither seemed willing to yield to the other.

Sha Yun, a serpent-like Demon Beast, was unlike Wang Julong—she lacked the ability to fly in the sky. However, she had honed several tricks over years of fighting alongside her sisters.

One such trick was poison. Drawing on her Qi, Sha Yun gathered everything within her mouth and spewed venom enclosed in small Qi balloons, hurling it toward the floating woman. She then crafted another poison ball.

Initially, Wang Julong assumed these poison pills would be simple to avoid. Yet, after ten painfully long minutes, she realized Sha Yun's true goal wasn't hitting her directly but instead draining her Qi Pool, forcing her to land.

Gritting her teeth, Wang Julong complied. However, when she landed, contrary to Sha Yun's expectations, her wings did not dissipate. Instead, they transformed into gloves fitted snugly onto her elegant jade-like hands.

Lightning now congregated in Wang Julong's hands. Due to the intense energy fluctuations, crackling sounds rippled, distorting the air surrounding the gloves.

Although Sha Yun had previously underestimated Wang Julong, she dared not do so now, fearing the ferocity of the upcoming attack. In response, she summoned all remaining Qi and infused it into her tail. Ultimately, dealing with such a terrifying strike required her most formidable countermeasure.

Unlike earlier, when Sha Long had channeled Qi to coat her tail in a white protective layer, this time it condensed into three scales distributed at the tip of her tail. These scales shone with brilliance—one blue, one white, and one sandy-colored.

This attack, jointly devised by the three sisters, contained fragments of their cultivation base. It required careful guided execution, and now was the prime moment to unleash it.

Kneeling on the ground, Wang Julong's outstretched arms surged with pulsating energy. As the world turned dark, she forced her consciousness to stabilize her footing, then dashed toward the Snake Woman ahead.

After chasing Sha Yun for a few seconds, Wang Julong suddenly stopped, realizing she couldn't overcome the Snake Woman at her current speed. Instead, she stood still, lightning gloves clenched into tight fists. Beads of sweat streamed down her face, reflecting the mounting pressure. The effort to maintain control of her immense power required vast reserves of spiritual strength, lest she collapse on the battlefield.

Sha Yun found herself in a similar predicament, her breath ragged from Wang Julong's startlingly close pursuit. Despite her agility, her movements felt sluggish against Wang Julong's relentless Qi Lightning techniques.

Suddenly, Sha Yun sprang to action, leaping forward in a serpentine motion. Her tail whipped through the air, building momentum as she charged toward Wang Julong and her lightning gloves.

A deafening explosion resonated, shaking the earth and wide-eyed spectators atop the mountain. Dust billowed, blanketing the stage in sand and making it impossible to discern the outcome of the battle.

Hui Yue swore inwardly, realizing that both combatants might have suffered grievous injuries from their final clash. Though his curiosity got the better of him, it was evident Wang Julong had substantially benefited from the cultivation techniques she had mastered. This also meant she would likely face Yan Xiaobao again in the future.

The prospect stirred mixed emotions in Yan Xiaobao—a mix of joy and excitement, tempered by concern. After all, he was the one who had instigated their duel, and if either was hurt, it would be on his conscience.

As the dust gradually settled, Xu Yue and the others gasped, watching Wang Julong stagger forward. She clutched the arm previously encased in the Qi Thunder Lightning gloves, and it was apparent the exchange had taken its toll on her body.

Without uttering a word, Wang Julong nodded to the crowd before heading toward the infirmary. Her once alabaster-white skin now appeared pale, sweat dripping profusely.

Meanwhile, back on the stage, Yan Xiaobao's complexion turned similarly pale as he rushed to support Sha Yun. The Snake Woman had collapsed onto the hard ground, coughing violently as blood mingled with the earth beneath her.

Drawing closer, Yan Xiaobao noted the situation wasn't as severe as he'd feared. Determination blazed in Sha Yun's eyes as she struggled to stand, wobbling slightly but managing to stabilize herself. She reassured him with an unsteady growl, sputtering up a fresh mouthful of blood as she spoke.

After the battle concluded, an undeniable mutual respect arose between Sha Yun and Wang Julong. Although neither liked the other, there was now a tacit state of acknowledgment between them.

As the new school year began, Wang Julong joined outings with her team, quickly earning their admiration. Sha Yun also became part of the group, always seen by Yan Xiaobao's side.

Since Sha Yun was Yan Xiaobao's Magical Creature, she resided in his courtyard, devoting her leisure time to learning human languages. The first phrase she mastered was "Hui Yue," and within half a year, she had completed her linguistic training.

During this six months, Wang Julong broke through yet again, now matching Yan Xiaobao's cultivation level. The two childhood rivals conversed daily.

Hui Yue focused entirely on cultivation, challenging Rong Xing, Sha Yun, Deng Wu, and Wang Julong almost daily before retreating into meditation to deepen his understanding of martial arts skills and strengthen his cultivation base.

Sha Yun herself underwent remarkable changes after becoming part of the broader world. With her improved linguistic capabilities, her confidence surged. Overnight, she transformed into a true seductress, often causing trouble for Hui Yue. Realizing her alluring appearance, she'd wander the academy alone, flirting with boys and even attempting to tempt the elders responsible for pill distribution.

Each time, she'd be dragged back to Yan Xiaobao, who would scold her to behave properly, but regardless of his words, Sha Yun couldn't fully rein in her newfound impulses after experiencing the most thrilling phase of her life.

As the warm summer waned, preparations for the national competition at the Royal Arts Academy's main branch ramped up. However, feeling his cultivation base lacking, Yan Xiaobao politely declined to participate.

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Chapter 317 Ninth Star

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This was his official reason, but in truth, Yan Xiaobao had no intention of stepping onto the national stage. Although he was renowned in Liluo City, it was merely one of the many cities in the Sun Kingdom.

When a new genius emerges, this phenomenon is quite common. Unfortunately, there are countless talented clouds in the sky.

The Rong twins and Gao Yan were both selected for the national competition. They performed brilliantly in their battles, yet Yan Xiaobao enjoyed his training time at the academy, showing no trace of jealousy upon seeing their prizes.

The excitement of the competition lasted throughout the winter. As the snow melted and cold weather faded, spring returned once more. Years passed, and Yan Xiaobao remained focused on cultivating his Qi, aiming to reach the rank of Master.

At the age of sixteen, Deng Wu had already broken into the Master Rank, an achievement that shocked all of Liluo City. His elemental affinity had evolved into metal and earth; though he could not become an Alchemist, he still strived to become a chronicler.

This astonishing feat led the city into celebratory festivities lasting an entire week, as they witnessed the birth of a true genius. A genius who might one day ascend to the rank of Saint.

Though geniuses, like clouds in the sky, were plentiful, those who could rise to join the Saints Team were exceedingly rare. This was indeed worth celebrating.

A year later, at the age of seventeen, another breakthrough came—this time from Gao Yan. It shocked everyone, for they all knew his cultivation base had been shattered. He was now hailed as yet another unparalleled talent of the younger generation.

The emergence of these two geniuses quickly caused everyone in Liluo City to forget about Yan Xiaobao entirely. Even Wang Rulong faded from memory as the two young men ascended to the Master Rank.

Ma Kong and the Rong twins remained at the healer-level Ninth Star rank, as did the fifteen-year-old Hui Yue.

Although Yan Xiaobao had also reached the Ninth Star healer-level rank, this achievement was not uncommon in Liluo City. Meanwhile, due to the extended absence of any extraordinary experts, Hui Yue's fame gradually waned.

Gusts of wind swept through the barren streets of Liluo City. Everything was cloaked in darkness; a scattering of stars and the moon cast dim light upon the narrow alleys. This allowed a minimal glow to reach the filthy roads—paths that were bustling with life during daylight hours, but now were utterly deserted.

Typically, the windows of the houses would shine brightly, offering flickers of light to the few passersby outside. But tonight, there was none—not even last month—for something terrible had befallen Liluo City.

A month ago, seven corpses were discovered in one of the poorer districts. None were left intact; instead, they had been butchered. Some had their heads severed, while others were missing limbs. Examining the area, it was evident this was a one-sided slaughter, and could not be deemed a proper fight.

It wasn't the only occurrence. A week later, another district of Liluo City faced similar atrocities—this time, ten people were slaughtered. The dead were all mercenaries or guards from middle-class or poorer families, hardworking men who labored by day. Yet, the reason behind their murders remained a mystery.

The City Lord deployed additional guards at night to hunt down the culprit, but no arrests were made. He even tried interrogating families who had lost fathers or sons, but none could provide information about their recent activities. No clues surfaced to explain the cases.

These events heightened Liluo City's vigilance. No one knew whether the person walking beside them might be the killer, nor why these targeted individuals were butchered together. Especially in the poorer districts shaken by the calamities, as soon as the sun set, everyone retreated indoors.

Such was the case tonight. In the darkness, a figure suddenly emerged from a closed door, descending quiet steps. His form concealed itself within the shadows, evading the patrol of city guards combing the area.

The moon broke free from the clouds, illuminating the street in soft, silvery light.

The shadow belonged to a young man. His hair seemed white, yet streaks and patches of black ran through it like flowing drops of water in the rain. His face was beautiful but cold, harshly etched with an icy expression, his eyes glimmering with resolved determination. In his slender hand was a pearl-white sword, forged from pure Qilin. Yet even the blade dripped with thick, crimson blood.

Behind the shadow, another grisly discovery unfolded—a dozen mutilated bodies, dismembered in the same fashion as before. A group of guards stumbled upon the carnage, shivering at the precision of the cuts.

The young man disappeared into the shadows, returning to a nearby inn. He left his companions behind, unnoticed as he ascended from the entrance to the second floor.

"Yan Xiaobao!" Sha Yun cried out in shock upon seeing the blood-stained clothes. The contrast between the young man's pale skin and hair and the crimson stains created an unsettling image. Her expression, initially one of concern, twisted into fury as a roaring sound erupted from her throat.

Before retreating to the bathroom, Yan Xiaobao offered a faint smile and calmly waved his hand. Moments later, the sound of running water echoed as he cleansed the blood from his body and his clothes.

Chapter 318 Ninth Star_2

Watching this, Sha Yun entered the bathroom. She picked up some clothes and went to a sink, doing a much more thorough job than Yan Xiaobao. He then poured several buckets of water over his head. Before casting a satisfied smile at Sha Yun, Yan Xiaobao stripped off the rest of his clothes and sank into a warm bathtub filled with water, allowing his tired muscles to relax.

"Did they show up again today?" Sha Yun asked, her voice still carrying a trace of anger. Yan Xiaobao nodded, recalling the events of the day.

The Deng Family was one of the few families in Liluo City that had not forgotten Yan Xiaobao. They often invited him to join their dining events, fascinated by his estimated potential.

Yesterday had been such a day. Yan Xiaobao followed Deng Wu from the academy to attend yet another banquet. Ever since Deng Wu's potential had been revealed, everyone in the Deng Family had been euphoric. Their social prestige among the city's noble families skyrocketed. Even some families from other cities sent gifts during the celebrations, showcasing their generosity.

As his exhausted muscles cried out in delight under the gentle touch of the warm water, Yan Xiaobao leaned back and sighed, a sound escaping from his lips as he sought relief. Sha Yun had long stopped leaving his side unless ordered to. She became particularly cautious due to the people who frequently appeared in front of Yan Xiaobao.

During each gathering, Yan Xiaobao always ensured that a specific room was reserved for him and Sha Yun to spend the night. Yan Xiaobao would instruct Sha Yun to wait in these rooms while he dined with the Deng Family. Though the Deng Family treated him graciously, Sha Long did not extend such friendliness toward them, considering them akin to a magical beast.

This was something both Yan Xiaobao and Sha Yun disliked, and since the very first occasion, Sha Yun had taken to waiting for Yan Xiaobao's return in the reserved accommodation.

The meal saw Yan Xiaobao seated beside Deng Wu, with other elders and family members present. Although Yan Xiaobao interacted with others, he primarily spoke with Deng Wu. Their conversations, while monitored, were harmless, revolving around daily life, magical beasts, or plans at the academy. Anyone overhearing would find nothing beyond ordinary chit-chat between friends.

As usual, Yan Xiaobao later joined Deng Wu in his courtyard to share drinks. It was during these times they could discuss matters that truly mattered to them—topics like the city's development, critical rumors, or recent happenings. Hui Yue had much to say, particularly on this night, about those mysterious figures gathering in the city and pursuing Yan Xiaobao.

This secret was one Yan Xiaobao hadn't shared with anyone, but Deng Wu was convinced it was connected to the Crusaders, whom they hadn't seen in years. The threat of this secret being exposed loomed constantly.

Since his parents' village encounter that year, Yan Xiaobao had tried persuading his family and the community to relocate closer to the city, but none agreed. They smiled at the young white-haired man and told him they preferred to remain there, for it was home. They had lived there and intended to die there.

There was nothing Yan Xiaobao could do about it, but his growing concern consumed him by the day. His current goal was to become strong enough to protect the people and things he cared about most.

After speaking with Deng Wu, it was midnight when Yan Xiaobao finally departed the Deng Family Mansion. As soon as he stepped away, he felt someone shadowing him. Sauntering slowly from the affluent district toward the impoverished areas, he sighed, prepared to deal with his stalkers away from prying eyes.

The biting cold of the winter night clung tightly to Yan Xiaobao, making him resemble an Ice Emperor. A white long robe draped his slender frame, an exquisite silk material crafted by the Deng Family's water mill.

Luring them step by step into a deserted alleyway, Yan Xiaobao eventually turned around. With his back now against the wall to shield himself from ambush, his sky-blue eyes remained intensely vigilant, showing not a glimpse of mercy.

Qi coursed through Hui Yue's meridians, activating specific acupoints before converging in his right hand. He extended it, quickly forming the shape of a sword. In the dead of night, the sword gleamed with a celestial brilliance.

As Hui Yue stood there, back against the wall, wielding the Qilin Sword in hand, tiny wings sprouted at his feet, waiting patiently for Yan Xiaobao to unleash Velocity Flow.

Ahead of Yan Xiaobao, shadows emerged one after another. These figures, clad in black hooded cloaks, were not Crusaders but cultivators who posed as guards or mercenaries during the day and turned into assassins at night.

Gradually, the assassins assembled into a group—a dozen men standing side by side, ready to pounce on the man in white. Yan Xiaobao's gaze flickered with disdain upon noticing that most of these assassins were "cultivators," with only one among them reaching the level of "Cultivation Master."

Though Yan Xiaobao had no concrete evidence, he suspected these assassins had ties to the Crusaders or their puppet masters, but no one had confirmed this.

At first, he had attempted to interrogate them, but they revealed nothing. Some tried to speak, but when their blood began boiling within their bodies, killing them instantly, he realized the futility. The

sight of them bound by Blood Oaths provoked cold fury, as evidenced by the mocking smirk on Yan Xiaobao's face.

Recently, Yan Xiaobao ceased interrogations altogether. The chaos caused by the Blood Oaths was far worse than the mess Hui Yue left by personally killing them.

The assassins silently encircled him, clearly unused to such precarious missions. Finding security in their numerical advantage, they likely believed the boy would finally succumb. None remembered that everyone who ever attempted to kill him had died.

Yan Xiaobao sneered coldly, his face devoid of emotion, as sharp and unyielding as a mask. His figure blurred as he charged at the nearest opponent. In less than a second, Yan Xiaobao executed a gliding technique, slashing his sword through the man before him.

These assassins posed no threat to Yan Xiaobao, but when using Velocity Flow to create a Clone, he exercised no mercy, allowing neither the original nor the replica to let his enemies roam free.

After years of persistent effort, Yan Xiaobao had mastered the replication aspect of Velocity Flow. His technique had advanced to the point where he could produce a complete Clone. The Clone operated solely based on its creator's intent.

Currently, his Clone was busy sweeping the area, wielding a Qi Sword stained with blood. Yan Xiaobao heaved a deep sigh at the reckless display. Leaving the lower-tier Dantian cultivators to his Clone, he reserved his focus for the Cultivation Master.

The Qilin Sword in his hand had long been perfected, feeling less like a tool and more like an extension of his arm.

Rushing at his opponent, Yan Xiaobao executed a vertical slash, aiming to split the man in two, only to find that the Qi Sword failed to cut deeper than a few centimeters due to the yellow glow radiating from the man. Yan Xiaobao cursed under his breath.

The man before Yan Xiaobao was utilizing his elemental affinity with wood to form a spiritual energy shield around his body for protection. Normally, a simple cultivator like Hui Yue would be unable to

defeat this man. Yet, the Qilin Sword managed to penetrate the shield, albeit only a few centimeters, causing a frown to crease Yan Xiaobao's cold and handsome face.

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Chapter 319 Master Level

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Keeping a cautious distance from the surrounding cultivators, Yan Xiaobao tried to stay ahead of the perceivable assaults aimed at him.

The ground shifted constantly. Boulders erupted from stable earth and hurtled towards Hui Yue, earth nails emerged from the terrain, and sudden walls appeared to harm or block the nimble young man.

Yan Xiaobao no longer underestimated his opponent and issued commands to his clones to coordinate their attacks against the opposing cultivator. They needed to avoid the earth-based assaults while focusing intently on striking with the Qi Sword.

The entire confrontation resembled a dance in which Yan Xiaobao used his speed to penetrate the Master-level cultivator's range, delivering strikes or slashes before rapidly retreating to deplete more spiritual energy. Each assault demanded Qi from Yan Xiaobao, and his Qi Pool drained rapidly, though it was worth noting that his adversary was similarly strained.

Eventually, the golden aura surrounding the Master-level cultivator dissipated. Yan Xiaobao moved swiftly, resembling wind, closing in next to the fellow cultivator. This time, a white glowing sword sliced across their neck, severing the head cleanly from the body.

With the fight concluded, Yan Xiaobao left the area immediately, not sparing a backward glance. Upon returning to the inn where Sha Yun awaited him, he cloaked himself in shadows.

After bathing, Yan Xiaobao's pale skin regained a healthy, rosy hue after sitting in the warm water for an extended period. Though his struggle against the ranked cultivator left him unharmed, his body was utterly exhausted from expending all his Qi during the encounter.

Undoubtedly, Hui Yue held a greater likelihood of eliminating another cultivator sooner, but for that to happen, Yan Xiaobao realized he had to rely more on Lan Feng's spiritual power than his own pure Qi.

When Yan Xiaobao left the bathroom, a contented sigh escaped his lips as his tired yet smooth muscles relaxed. He could hear the faint sound of the retreating youth's footsteps before he headed directly to the large bed in the bedroom. Gazing at the bed, Hui Yue wasted no time reminiscing about his first night under Sha Yun's attentive company but immediately let the familiar black sleep engulf him, dragging him into another dreamless night.

Not long after Yan Xiaobao collapsed onto the bed in deep sleep, Sha Yun climbed onto it, her movements graceful. She adjusted Yan Xiaobao, placing him under the blanket with a pillow positioned, allowing her to curl comfortably beside him.

Since Yan Xiaobao and Sha Yun began living together, their sleeping arrangements had become a significant issue. Sha Yun refused to sleep apart from Yan Xiaobao, leaving the young man feeling pushed to his limits. Still, Sha Yun's stubbornness rivaled Yan Xiaobao's; her habit of curling up beside him in bed persisted, leaving him no choice but to eventually relent.

Sha Yun gazed at the sleeping young man before her, her expression shifting between fondness and solemnity. She leaned forward to gently kiss his forehead before surrendering to the pull of sleep herself.

The next morning, Hui Yue sighed deeply, once again finding himself ensnared by Sha Yun's serpent-like tail, which had been used as cushioning during the night. Though initially challenging to extricate himself without disturbing or further tangling with Sha Yun, years of cultivation granted him the skill to slip away effortlessly. Moving from the bed to the center of the room, Hui Yue sat down to meditate, delving into his body to create a spiritual projection that entered the Dantian Cave.

"There's still not any news about the Deng Family. It seems their knowledge about those assassins matches ours—utter ignorance," Lan Feng sighed, looking at the approaching spiritual projection. Sitting side by side, leaning against the Qi Cave's walls, Yan Xiaobao took a deep breath, closed his eyes, lost in thought.

"The only ones with reason to try and kill me should be those behind the Crusaders," Yan Xiaobao deliberated aloud. "But it's been over four years since their last appearance—why choose to strike now?"

'I don't know,' Lan Feng replied wearily. "We can only wait and see, but their assassins' rankings are steadily rising." Lan Feng continued, frowning his brows. "It feels as though someone is testing you—but for what reason, I cannot say. All you can do now is continue dodging those who seek your life."

Yan Xiaobao kept his eyes closed. The first batch of assassins ranked as disciples, and his decision to kill them wasn't committed firmly. Unfortunately, they returned with guards, nearly capturing him.

Anger flared within Yan Xiaobao when he spotted their arrival. A vicious red aura overwhelmed him until he saw the assassins doomed by their pre-mission Blood Oath upon failing their task.

After that first assassination attempt, every night upon entering the city, Yan Xiaobao shadowed assassins, whose numbers and capabilities at their cultivation bases gradually escalated—similar to the sluggish yet tenacious opposition Hui Yue faced.

Yet, the most troubling force revolved around the red fog emanating from Hui Yue. With each kill, the fog grew stronger and more oppressive, harder to control. Thankfully, the tranquil blue cloud cultivated steadily, a force that helped suppress the suffocating red mist.

"Well, if whoever sent these assassins truly wants you dead, they'll achieve their goal sooner or later," Lan Feng sighed. "By the way, isn't today our birthday?"

Chapter 320 Master Level_2

Yan Xiaobao nodded slightly, slowly letting his consciousness leave Qi Cave. When he opened his eyes, he could only see Sha Yun sitting on the bed, her large, affectionate eyes fixated on him, causing the young man to feel a slight pang of guilt.

For the past four years, Sha Yun had been with him every day. If he hadn't noticed that Sha Yun's feelings for him had long since evolved beyond a mere master-servant relationship, he would truly have to be blind.

Yan Xiaobao had done his utmost to avoid romantic entanglements. He felt he wasn't ready to enter a serious relationship with anyone, as Li Fen still held an important position in his heart. Even though she now had to share that place with Wang Julong, Rong Xing, and Sha Yun, his life made it inevitable for him to care about them.

As for whether these feelings constituted love, that was something he had deliberately avoided contemplating. He tried his best to steer clear of any topics about love that might face him directly. In fact, he had even fled from Sha Yun multiple times, as the Snake Woman was the most forthright among all the girls currently surrounding him.

Yan Xiaobao let out a deep sigh and once again pretended not to notice Sha Yun's gaze as he began to speak.

"Sha Yun, I need to go see the Rong twins, as today is their birthday. It's likely they won't let you in." Yan Xiaobao added apologetically, "You know how they are. Even though you're not actually comparable to other beasts, they still view you as one."

A sorrowful nod was her response. "I know," she said forlornly, "but I'll follow close behind you. You might run into trouble on your way and get delayed."

Hearing her response, Yan Xiaobao didn't know what to say. Considering there was indeed a possibility of encountering trouble on the road—especially given how many assassins had launched attacks on him recently—it was hard to refute her reasoning.

Since the birthday celebration wouldn't begin until the evening, Yan Xiaobao noticed the disappointment on Sha Yun's face, and he thought perhaps it was time to cheer her up. To that end, his face lit up with a smile as he retrieved some small Memory Stones from his storage stone.

These Memory Stones were attached to rings or belts and clearly contained items. When she saw these Memory Stones brought forth, Sha Yun's tail flicked excitedly as she grabbed them and absorbed them back into herself in an instant, her eyes gleaming with interest.

Sha Yun quickly examined the items stored inside the Memory Stones, only to find that most of them were trivial. The majority held no coins for her, and only a few were paired with items. These included an iron dagger and some books, but none managed to capture her interest, and the disappointment on her face was plain to see.

Sha Yun had developed an intriguing habit of combing through every storage stone from assassins, hoping to find any information related to the tracking of Yan Xiaobao. Yan Xiaobao knew that Sha Yun

was driven by a thirst for information, as it gave her a sense of contribution to the constant battle against the assassins targeting her friend and master.

The day was spent traversing the city market with Sha Yun, indulging her in all her favorite snacks to make up for the fact that he had had to leave her the previous night. As Yan Xiaobao glanced at his money storage stone and realized he was still receiving steady income from Deng and the Ma Family, he couldn't help but sigh in relief. Otherwise, he wouldn't have had the funds to spend on pills for himself and Sha Yun's frivolous indulgences.

Even today, this Snake Woman bought jewelry and clothing, often using them when she was bored or in search of new men to play with. Sha Yun was a true witch, fully enjoying her life, spending time with struggling students from the Royal Academy whenever she got bored.

Only when her latest prey involved someone controlled by Gao Yan or someone who had foolishly insulted her in some way did Hui Yue intervene to stop her.

The day of shopping and wandering sped by quickly, and soon they found themselves making their way toward the City Lord's opulent mansion.

Today, many carriages filled the roads, as anyone of status within Liluo City had been invited to the birthday party. No one wished to miss the event, as these gatherings prominently served as a source of juicy gossip.

The sun had set, and the streets were illuminated and bustling with activity, unlike previous evenings. Yan Xiaobao was aware he was being followed, yet no one dared to act as the entire area was patrolled by the city guards.

Step by step, Yan Xiaobao approached the City Lord's mansion, with more and more guests and guards aligning the roads to maintain peace.

As they finally arrived at the gates of the mansion, Yan Xiaobao spotted Wang Julong patiently standing beside the gate, seemingly awaiting someone. She wore a striking black robe with golden embroidery, her long black hair tied with black leather. Wang Julong looked like a dashing young Master.

"Yan Xiaobao!" Her voice rang loud across the assembled carriages as Hui Yue waved to signal he had noticed her. At the sound of her voice, Sha Yun's hand tightened around Yan Xiaobao's arm as she clung closely to him, not letting go until they reached the gates.

"Yan Xiaobao!" Wang Julong called out again, completely ignoring the Snake Woman beside him. With a brilliant smile on her face, she beckoned him to come closer.

As Yan Xiaobao reached Wang Julong, Hui Yue was grabbed by the other arm by Wang Julong, and suddenly his body was pulled in two different directions by two distinct friends.

"Wait a moment." He managed to squeeze out the words between clenched teeth as he began to feel the pain. Neither Wang Julong nor Sha Yun was weak, nor did either like losing to the other. The poor young man caught in the middle inadvertently became a tool to determine which of them was stronger.

Fortunately, both girls let go the moment Yan Xiaobao opened his mouth, allowing him a brief reprieve. He sighed softly as he watched the two girls exchange icy glares amidst the slight commotion in front of the arriving guests.

Yan Xiaobao sighed once more and turned to Sha Yun. "I'm sorry, Yun," he said apologetically. "I'll be heading to the birthday party with Julong now. Be a good girl and head back to the inn for now—I'll come back later."

Having said that, Yan Xiaobao gently patted Sha Yun's head and turned to make his way toward the party hall.

Standing behind Yan Xiaobao was Wang Julong. Sticking her tongue out at Sha Yun, she turned to chase after him, speaking to him with a smile, completely leaving the Snake Woman behind.

Wang Julong quickly caught up with Yan Xiaobao, ignoring the Snake Woman they had left behind. With a bright smile on her face, she soon launched into a conversation about their daily life at the Royal Art Academy.

As they chatted, Yan Xiaobao glanced at the scenery of the mansion. Every garden and courtyard was adorned with lanterns and stones, casting a soft light that illuminated the entire City Lord's mansion.

Servants moved in and out of the kitchens, while the mingling crowd outside chatted among themselves. The closer Yan Xiaobao and Wang Julong approached the main hall, the larger the crowds became—and the higher their ranks in Liluo City's hierarchy.

Hundreds of men swarmed the staircases, moving toward the main hall to greet the birthday pair, while others exited the hall with the intent of mingling with nobles they wouldn't typically meet within their social circles.

Wang Huilong led Yan Xiaobao through the staircase into the fully renovated main hall. The primary decorations were red lanterns, most of which bore congratulatory or blessing inscriptions.

Each guest would write their greetings on these round lanterns using golden ink, letting them float upward to light up the stunning room and its patrons.

The lanterns weren't the only attraction. In different corners of the hall, young and beautiful women synchronized the performance of the same piece of music, creating a pleasant and soothing background melody.

Large fans adorned the walls. Some of these fans were painted with depictions of Rong Xing and Rong Ming battling deadly magical beasts, while others featured portraits of the twins. Some even showcased the beasts they had slain or captured.

One particular area, near the stage where three women danced, boasted far more fans than the rest of the room. Each woman held two exquisite white fans, spinning them, tossing them into the air, and catching them without missing a beat. The mesmerizing dance drew a large crowd to witness their performance.