

## Medical 711

### Chapter 711: Everything Goes Smoothly

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"Please don't mind my friends," Yan Xiaobao said, seemingly unaffected by his companions being discovered. "Not just some cultivators try to shake me off," he continued, his face showing an apologetic expression as he shook his head. "Wherever I go, I need to stay vigilant, so the three of us usually move together," he explained. He wasn't lying, but neither was he stating the full truth. He knew very well he wasn't someone most people welcomed, but the reason he was traveling with his two friends this time wasn't entirely for safety. Even though he hoped the City Lord wouldn't suddenly attack him, it was hard to predict his actions. If the City Lord planned an attack, he would have support; those who ensured the City King didn't return to the faction.

"Of course," the City Lord grinned wide. "It's perfectly reasonable to bring support, but who said I came alone?" the City Lord continued, and with a light motion of his hand, three experts emerged from the shadows; three figures dressed in black, their faces concealed behind masks. Upon seeing these three figures, Yan Xiaobao couldn't suppress his laughter, and it spilled from his lips, breaking the tense atmosphere. His laughter wasn't out of disrespect for these masked men, but because they reminded him of ninjas. Ninjas were figures he had once dreamed of becoming as a child, reading novels and accounts about them. In his youth, he had devoured an entire series of ninja stories.

Yan Xiaobao waved his hand, attempting to stop his laughter. After a moment, he finally managed to regain his composure. His behavior greatly puzzled the City Lord and his followers, even Cai Jie and Deng Wu furrowed their brows, unsure why the usually composed Yan Xiaobao burst into laughter upon seeing the guards.

"I'm not here to threaten you," Yan Xiaobao said, controlling himself once again. "If I wanted to threaten you, I wouldn't bother contacting you first. I also have no intention of fighting Zhan Weisheng. I don't want your supporters; however, I will do everything in my power to gain noble followers, especially those who will support the Third Prince."

"I won't interfere in whatever you intend to do," the City Lord continued. "But I can assure you, unless you provoke me, my faction, or Zhan Weisheng, my faction will not be a problem to you."

Yan Xiaobao nodded gratefully, yet deep down he wasn't sure if he could trust the City Lord. Despite that, he still believed the conversation had been worthwhile. Looking at the City Lord, Yan Xiaobao

nodded again. "If you warn the Third Prince, then don't worry—we won't come to collect your debt," he expressed politely and amicably, his words delivered with the angelic grace of diplomacy, yet as cold as the deepest winter night.

The City Lord couldn't explain why he felt such fear, knowing it stemmed entirely from his instincts. Something told him that even with his three protectors stacked against these three men, the outcome might not favor him. A man of power and age knows when to trust his instincts and when to disregard them, and this time, he would certainly trust his gut.

"Alright, let me summarize why I'm here," Yan Xiaobao said with a smile, stepping closer to the City Lord. "I don't want to fight you, nor Zhan Weisheng. In return, you promise to stay out of my affairs. I will ensure that the prince who usually hinders your ideals won't bother you in the future, or better yet, I'll promise to make him disappear as I secure my faction." Yan Xiaobao pledged, his words leaving the City Lord looking somewhat uneasy, but the old man knew it was the best choice for him. In Muchuan City, since the last coronation ceremony, factions had coexisted amicably, but now that the King was growing older and looking to pass the throne to one of his sons, the dynamics in the Capital had shifted recently. With Yan Xiaobao's arrival, the situation was changing again. Deeply sighing, the City Lord realized he had no choice but to nod and accept the decision. Following that, he turned and slowly returned to his mansion.

Before shifting his gaze to his two friends nearby, Yan Xiaobao lingered for a moment, waiting until the City Lord had entirely vanished. "What do you think?" he asked. "Do you think we can trust him?"

"If he knows what's best for him, then he'll keep his mouth shut, stay clear of the two factions we're targeting, and make sure we have the space we need," Cai Jie answered, his golden eyes fixed on the darkness ahead. They had once consumed the City Lord.

The three young men slowly made their way back to the banquet, surprised to find all the guests still there, engaged and entertained. The City Lord had returned to the banquet table, enjoying one dish after another. Yan Xiaobao could sense his pressure, but it appeared no one else was paying him much attention as usual.

Yan Xiaobao, Cai Jie, and Deng Wu glanced around, spotting Xu Biao engaged in conversation with some guests associated with Ma Kong. Yan Xiaobao personally didn't recognize anyone present, so he found a corner where he and his friends stood together, beginning to discuss everything from the guests to faction dynamics and future plans. Nobles and merchants occasionally exchanged a few words with Yan Xiaobao and his companions. They would chat briefly before moving on to other groups and mingling with more guests. Yan Xiaobao noticed the guests seemed uniformly positive toward him, though he

knew better than to trust such appearances. Just as the night was nearing its end, two Princes approached Yan Xiaobao, both radiating dazzling smiles, their eyes sparkling with excited glimmers.

## Chapter 712: Everything Goes Smoothly\_2

"Young man, you and your followers are truly remarkable cultivators! To have reached the King-level at such a young age, I am deeply impressed!" The speaker was the Third Prince. Yan Xiaobao politely replied, "Compared to the geniuses of the Royal Family, my abilities are insignificant. I happened to be lucky enough to gain some insights among the adventurers outside. If Your Highness were to do the same, I am certain your achievements would be unparalleled," Yan Xiaobao said courteously, his words causing the Third Prince's smile to widen, while the Second Prince's expression turned slightly sour.

"During my humble banquet, being able to extend my blessings to you all fills me with great honor," Yan Xiaobao continued, bowing respectfully to the two princes. The Second Prince quickly shed the trace of dissatisfaction in his eyes. "We have heard of your accomplishments in the Siban Empire," the Second Prince suddenly remarked, his words silencing almost everyone in the banquet hall. All were listening intently while pretending not to. Yan Xiaobao almost scoffed but managed to stop himself in time as he looked at the Second Prince who was speaking. "We've been warned about the Beast Army and informed that they might attack our Sun Kingdom. Can you tell me why you chose to target the Siban Empire instead of our kingdom?"

The directness of the Second Prince's question took Yan Xiaobao by surprise. "Your Highness, the answer is simple," Yan Xiaobao replied plainly. "I did not want the beasts to attack my homeland," he continued, his words eliciting a smile on the Second Prince's lips. Meanwhile, the Third Prince was evidently deep in thought. His brows furrowed as his sharp gaze assessed the young man before him.

"Are you not a half-beast?" he suddenly asked. A plate fell loudly to the floor in the banquet hall, the sound piercing through the silence of the room. The once-quiet hall now reverberated with shock and astonishment. The young man, with his strikingly white hair, was clearly not ordinary, but no one dared question the prodigy of the Royal Family.

"I'm not mixed-blood? Don't make jokes," Yan Xiaobao asked as he looked at the Third Prince. He was deeply taken aback by the question and, for the first time, seriously studied the prince before him. He had sworn to lay down his life for his friends but had to admit that he had always looked down on the prince. While viewed as a genius, the prince had reached the King-level several years later than Yan Xiaobao. The white-haired young man had anticipated him to be a spoiled heir, but recognized there was more to him.

"I never said you weren't mixed-blood, but you're certainly not half-human, half-beast," the prince said, his face revealing curiosity as his lips curled into a smile. "If your beast genes are so distant that they can

hardly account for your unusual appearance, I like you. Why don't you visit me quickly, so we can uncover the true reason behind your peculiar traits? Perhaps it's related to your two friends, especially the one who looks just as peculiar as you." The prince paused while gazing at Yan Xiaobao, his silence making the young man even warier. Yan Xiaobao's eyes remained fixed on the Third Prince, and his heartbeat quickened. "The three of you are the most interesting individuals I've encountered in a long time."

"We must return to the castle now, but observing the Beast Army and Great Marshall was truly fascinating. Tell me, did you manage to deceive them, or are they aware you are someone only pretending to be beastlike?"

Yan Xiaobao looked at the prince, a faint smile appearing on his face. Then, he shook his head. "Some things I cannot tell anyone, not even a prince," he said with a polite pause. "If I have the time, I may visit you someday," he continued, bowing to the Second Prince. "Thank you for visiting my humble mansion. I wish Your Highnesses all the best in the future." With that, the two princes bowed toward Yan Xiaobao, Deng Wu, and Cai Jie before departing the banquet hall and entering the waiting carriage.

Back in the hall, everyone suddenly dispersed, conversing about everything except those nearest to them. The previously quiet room became lively once again, as though nothing had happened. The new discussions centered on the young man of the night, the white-haired individual believed to be mixed-blood and half-human, half-beast. Casual chatter quickly turned serious when the Royal Prince declared he was not. If he wasn't a half-beast, then why did he look so different? This phenomenon seemed to extend beyond Yan Xiaobao to his two companions, sparking theories and intrigue.

"It seems this prince will be trouble," Yan Xiaobao sighed. "No doubt he poses a threat to all of us," Yan Xiaobao whispered to Cai Jie and Deng Wu beside him. "I need to take this more seriously than ever," he continued. "I think I should accept his invitation."

The guests gradually left the mansion in small groups. Everyone whispered and gossiped, stunned by the revelation that Yan Xiaobao was not a half-beast. Despite the young man's noncommittal response, no one dared to doubt the Royal Family's most brilliant prodigy. What they couldn't fathom was what else might explain his peculiar appearance. Multiple theories surfaced. Some thought they belonged to an entirely unique species—neither human nor beast, but sea-dwellers from distant lands. Others speculated their lineage traced back to beasts, embedding rare traits into their bloodline. Among the theories, one prevailed: their cultivation methods were rare. All three appeared remarkably young yet possessed extraordinary cultivation foundations, suggesting the two were interconnected.

As the last person left the mansion, Yan Xiaobao finally found a chair, exhaling heavily as he sat down. "Gao Yan." His friend appeared moments later, a faint smile on his face. "I think many will visit Black Lion tomorrow," Yan Xiaobao said. "Since I'm new here, many will come to inquire about me." He scratched his chin, contemplating his next move. "Aside from my team's goals, you should divulge all the information you have," he advised. "The more nobles can learn about me and my new faction, the easier it will be for them to join us. The one thing you cannot reveal is our ultimate goal."

Though Yan Xiaobao spoke readily, Gao Yan was initially stunned, having intended to blacklist all information regarding Yan Xiaobao. He admired the man and had no desire to sell information about him, but now Yan Xiaobao had explicitly instructed him to do so. Gao Yan hesitated briefly before nodding, deciding only to sell information that painted Yan Xiaobao in a positive light.

"Let's settle in," Yan Xiaobao declared confidently to the banquet hall. He and his companions departed the room, leaving the servants to clean and restore the space to its former state. Ascending to the floor where all the rooms were located, everyone picked doors at random. None knew how different the rooms might be, yet none truly cared. Yan Xiaobao's room was clean and practical, consisting of three areas—a bathroom, a bedroom, and a larger space divided into a living room, library, and office. Surveying the room, the young man nodded in satisfaction. After inspecting the space briefly, he entered the bathroom and quickly washed. Then he approached one of the windows, opened it, and sat under the moonlight. It was now well past midnight, nearing dawn.

Not only was Hui Yue spending the last few hours cultivating, but Cai Jie, Xu Biao, and Deng Wu were all engrossed in their cultivation as well, while Gao Yan worked to craft Memory Stones related to Yan Xiaobao's information. He knew he would need these Memory Gems for his work the following morning.

Ma Kong was busy creating Memory Stones while ensuring all guests had left, commissioning servants to clean the mansion thoroughly. The estate returned to its pre-party state, quiet as everyone focused on their own tasks. As the sun rose in the sky, the servants completed their cleaning. Gao Yan departed the mansion, heading back to Black Lion, while Ma Kong made his way to the Black Market Auction House to deliver the Memory Stones. He also prepared for an influx of visitors questioning Yan Xiaobao's loyalty—a day laden with potential challenges.

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Chapter 713: The Essence of Heaven and Earth

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Yan Xiaobao, Xu Biao, Deng Wu, or Cai Jie had not left their rooms, as everyone was diligently training. The last thing Ma Gang did before leaving was to instruct the servants to prepare breakfast and leave it on a tray outside the door. Although he knew it was unlikely that the experts would open the door to eat, the young people knew that having breakfast would make them feel better, even if they chose to ignore it.

As the sun rose in the sky, Yan Xiaobao stopped absorbing the essence of heaven and earth. He then opened the door and smelled the delicious breakfast outside. After eating, he left the house and entered the park behind the mansion.

Upon entering the park, Yan Xiaobao searched within himself and found the red beast core, allowing the red energy to surge as he transformed his body into that of a red wolf. From the storage stone on his neck, Yan Xiaobao took out a wristband, a shirt, and pants with lead. Once he put them on, Yan Xiaobao began running through the park. He ran so fast that none of the servants in the park could see anything other than a red flash as the strong wind swept past.

Most of his time was spent running in the park before Yan Xiaobao returned to his human form. Then, he began doing other muscle training programs taught by Wan Qiao.

The chaos that appeared within the city after the mansion party the day before seemed not to disturb them. Many nobles dispatched servants to the black lion to gather information about the newcomer, Yan Xiaobao, and his companions. Rumors about this young man were the talk of the town, not just among the nobles, but also their servants and many commoners. These servants heard gossip about the white-haired boy who didn't look like a half-beast, which led them to visit the black lion more frequently to gather or share information. Jin Yan's funds poured in, but the information they obtained was quite similar to the rumors.

News from Gao Yan stated that Yan Xiaobao was indeed the Great Marshall of the Divine Origin Beast Army. It was said that he rented a mansion in the upper district, living with the black lion's Gao Yan, Xu Biao, Deng Wu from the Deng Family, Wang Julong from the Wang Family, and the unknown adventurer Cai Jie. Although Ma Kong did not live in the mansion, the Ma family supported this young man, even hosting a grand banquet to introduce him to the city's nobility.

This information also included the team of Yan Xiaobao and all his friends; however, it did not include any elemental affinities. Apart from Yan Xiaobao's position as Great Marshall, their pasts were not included, nor was any information about their lineage.

Even Gao Yan had no information about these young people living in the mansion, which added to their mystery. Many citizens went to the mansion, hoping to catch a glimpse of the mysterious strangers who had suddenly brought chaos to the capital. It was evident that a new era in Muchuan City's history was just beginning. The following days were spent peacefully and quietly within the mansion. Yan Xiaobao decided to focus on cultivation over the coming days, spending time in the park exercising to care for his body and increase his external strength. He bathed in the gentle moonlight, spending his nights in his room. Not only was Yan Xiaobao well trained, but everyone in the mansion was focused on training and enhancing their strength so that they could prove, even as a new faction, that they were a formidable group of cultivators. They were not to be underestimated.

"I should visit the Prince to see what he has to say," Yan Xiaobao murmured to himself as he ran through the park in wolf form. He returned to his human shape, took out a new set of clothes, quickly put them on, and then returned to the mansion. The environment around the park was so calm and relaxing, contrasting starkly with other parts of Muchuan City. Many citizens came to the mansion, hoping to see Yan Xiaobao or the other two distinct-looking young individuals, but everyone was disappointed as the experts seemed to have set up barriers indoors. No one in the city had any real information about these three young men, and Gao Yan added extra mystery to what he sold, making everyone extremely curious about this person's true identity.

Upon reaching the mansion, Yan Xiaobao went to his room to prepare to visit the Third Prince. He did not inform Cai Jie or Deng Wu that he was leaving; instead, he left the mansion silently without speaking to anyone. He headed towards the Royal Castle, accepting the Third Prince's invitation to visit him. Currently, the Prince should not be aware of Yan Xiaobao's goal of establishing a power base in Muchuan City, but he was supposed to try his best to attract the young man. To gain Yan Xiaobao's support and hopefully gain an advantage over his two brothers for the title of the next Sun King.

"It's clear that things won't go as he wants," Yan Xiaobao muttered while walking towards the castle. Everyone he encountered on the road unabashedly stared at him; their eyes couldn't avert from him for an instant. Though Yan Xiaobao appeared unconcerned, he couldn't help but notice how he was being scrutinized one after another. The walk to the Royal Art Academy was longer than when he lived at the Rong twins' mansion, but Yan Xiaobao did not mind the lengthy walk. He once again chose not to use a carriage; instead, he exposed himself to everyone, unconcerned about the surprise it might cause to those who saw him.

#### Chapter 714 Essence of Heaven and Earth\_2

Arriving at the castle, Yan Xiaobao was surprised to see the guards bow respectfully to him. They did not block his path; instead, they offered to find a servant who could lead him to the Third Prince's quarters. "It seems everyone knows what transpired during the banquet," Yan Xiaobao thought, nodding to the guard in gratitude as they sought out a servant to guide him. Left to his own devices, he would not have been able to locate the Third Prince without assistance.

"There is one thing humans do far better than beasts, and that is gossip," Lan Feng remarked from deep within the Dantian Cave, his words teasing a chuckle out of Yan Xiaobao. "I disagree," the young man replied. "When I lived in the Divine Domain, beasts could chatter as idly as humans, if not more." He grinned, and Lan Feng shrugged. "They must have started gossiping during the four thousand years since I left," Lan Feng retorted stubbornly. Despite wanting to continue the exchange, Yan Xiaobao noticed a servant rushing toward him. The man stopped abruptly, bowing deeply before panting desperately, his hands resting on his knees for a moment before he managed to stand upright again.

"Your master, I beg you to follow me to His Highness," the servant gasped out, gesturing for Yan Xiaobao to follow. The servant's hurried pace relaxed, and his strides were now comfortable for Yan Xiaobao. It was clear the young man was not a cultivator—his power level seemed deliberately low, as cultivators carried the inherent threat of assassination risk. For that reason, only guards were permitted to cultivate, their vigilance akin to that of one paired with a watchdog.

Even in Yan Xiaobao's own residence, all the servants were experts in the Lower Dantian realm. These experts had achieved their cultivation levels naturally, absorbing the essence of heaven and earth with no active effort to cultivate. In the city's civilian districts, schools taught young men and women to cultivate, often starting between the ages of ten to fifteen. By the age of fifteen, they typically began careers as guards or mercenaries. A select few experts embarked on journeys to explore the world, aspiring to make their mark in history as adventurers.

Though Yan Xiaobao was lost in thought about the guards and servants, he kept pace behind his guide. Suddenly, the man leading him stopped. They had walked through parks, gardens, mansions, and halls, finally arriving at a grand estate—three times the size of Yan Xiaobao's newly acquired mansion. The grounds, however, were considerably smaller, lacking a massive park in the rear; instead, at the corner, Yan Xiaobao glimpsed a modest garden.

The servant made no gesture or statement before leaving in haste, bowing quickly to Yan Xiaobao before disappearing. As the servant cast a fleeting glance over his shoulder, a flicker of terror was evident in his expression. Yan Xiaobao shook his head in mild amusement; the young servant was clearly afraid of him. Allowing a small laugh to escape his lips, Yan Xiaobao refocused his attention on the door. Taking a deep breath to steady himself, he walked forward, stepped up to the door, and knocked lightly.

When Yan Xiaobao knocked, the door creaked open slowly, revealing an elderly man standing behind it. The man bowed to Yan Xiaobao, though only slightly, carrying himself with an aura of significance. Anyone observing him would recognize he was no ordinary person—likely the prince's personal steward, charged with overseeing all servants of the estate.

"His Highness will surely feel relieved to see you accept his invitation," the elderly man said in a trembling voice, gesturing for Yan Xiaobao to enter the estate ahead of him. The two walked through the opulent mansion in silence, exchanging no words beyond the initial greeting. After passing through several rooms, they eventually reached the rear of the estate, stepping into the garden—a place Yan Xiaobao had only glimpsed briefly from the outside. Contrary to his expectations, the garden was not as small as it had appeared. It was of decent size, though still dwarfed by the sprawling park attached to Yan Xiaobao's own residence.

The garden was neatly manicured, with grass trimmed with care and stones thoughtfully arranged to create a serene atmosphere. Tall trees encircled the area, providing privacy. As Yan Xiaobao surveyed the garden curiously, his gaze landed on a set of chairs and a table in the distance. Seated in one of the chairs was the Third Prince of the Sun Kingdom, Shao Ye. The man looked as regal and striking as he had during their last encounter. Handsome, his skin smooth and porcelain-like, Shao Ye's hair was meticulously styled, tied back just as it had been at Yan Xiaobao's lavish banquet. This time, he wore white robes adorned with black trim and snake patterns instead of his previous black attire. He was as stunning as ever, a faint smile gracing his lips, his eyes glowing brightly—his excitement about receiving Yan Xiaobao was evident.

Seeing such a friendly demeanor, Yan Xiaobao was filled with uncertainty. The prince had already proven himself shrewder than ordinary men, and Yan Xiaobao sensed that he possessed something—a keen perception and intelligence—that even Mr. Xu admired deeply. To discern Yan Xiaobao's nature, the prince must have extraordinary senses, indicating layers of hidden motives beneath the surface, despite being merely a King-level expert.

The prince must have gathered extensive information about Yan Xiaobao, as he clearly understood that Deng Wu and Wang Julong were part of Yan Xiaobao's faction—two individuals who had strong desires to see the Third Prince dead. Despite this knowledge, Shao Ye greeted Yan Xiaobao with a warm, open smile and stretched out his arms as though welcoming a dear friend. The prince's cordiality unnerved Yan Xiaobao; his gut feeling warned him that the man was not as naive as he appeared. Born into privilege, Shao Ye undoubtedly bore the scars of conspiracies, internal strife, and survival-driven battles.

"Be cautious; his aura is sharper than Wan Qiao's. This man is ruthless, steeped in a scent of blood," Lan Feng commented, prompting Yan Xiaobao to make an internal nod of agreement. Outwardly, Yan Xiaobao donned a brilliant smile as he embraced the Third Prince like a long-lost friend. "I greatly appreciate your allowing me the honor of visiting your private residence," Yan Xiaobao remarked politely, withdrawing from the embrace and offering Shao Ye a respectful bow. The gesture made the smile on Shao Ye's face grow even brighter.

"No need for formalities. Please, don't stand on ceremony. Call me 'Ye'... I'm genuinely impressed by your accomplishments, your extraordinary adventures, and your incredible combat skills despite your youth," the prince remarked, motioning for Yan Xiaobao to take a seat. Yan Xiaobao sat gratefully.

"Your Highness is too kind," Yan Xiaobao said with a smile. "Please, call me Ye!" the prince insisted, to which Yan Xiaobao nodded in gratitude. "Keep your friends close, but keep your enemies closer," he recited an ancient proverb to Lan Feng and Phoenix, nodding slightly to them. Both figures remained vigilant, even though outwardly they appeared serene, never letting down their guard. Yan Xiaobao was convinced that the prince, for all his current friendliness, harbored motives as intricate as his own. Although he doubted the prince would attempt anything so brash as to eliminate him in broad daylight in the garden, Yan Xiaobao maintained a cautious optimism. He waited for an opportunity to glean insights that might aid his pursuit of vengeance as he conversed with the Third Prince.

In the exchange with the Third Prince, Yan Xiaobao needed to stay alert and guarded, preventing any unintentional leaks of information. The prince's line of questioning was sharp and varied, ranging from the Beast Army to the Divine Domain, even delving into the battles surrounding the Siban Empire. Mixed within these inquiries were subtle probes into Yan Xiaobao's allegiance to his friends and the circumstances that had brought him to Muchuan City. Despite the sheer number of topics covered, the dialogue remained balanced overall. Yan Xiaobao attempted to pose his own questions, but the responses he received were vague and noncommittal. As time passed, neither man succeeded in uncovering the other's vulnerabilities. The most Yan Xiaobao learned was that Shao Ye appeared to be a courteous prince devoted to his citizens, cherishing his siblings and holding deep respect for his father. He portrayed himself as a calculating but benevolent individual, contrasted starkly against brothers who orchestrated assassinations and targeted entire innocent families. Yan Xiaobao, on the other hand, came across as a world traveler whose random encounters beyond his control led him to Chenyuan. While there, he shared a few human war strategies with beasts but accomplished nothing particularly noteworthy.

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Chapter 715: Underestimating Oneself

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He drastically underestimated his role, but he refused to disclose the details of his travels. Through random encounters entirely beyond his control, he eventually ended up deep within Chenyuan. There, he did nothing particularly noteworthy except share some human tactics and war strategies with the beasts. He drastically underestimated his role, but he refused to disclose the details of his travels. Through random encounters entirely beyond his control, he eventually ended up deep within Chenyuan. There, he did nothing particularly noteworthy except share some human tactics and war strategies with the beasts. He drastically underestimated his role, but he refused to disclose the details of his travels.

"You are a fascinating person. To think you unintentionally disrupted the Divine Domain and taught beasts human tactics—it truly seems like a coincidence," Xiao Ye remarked, his face alight with eagerness. Yan Xiaobao smiled in response without elaborating on what he had done, but his lack of reply did not seem to irritate the Third Prince; instead, the prince sat quietly, as if deep in thought. After a brief silence, Xiao Ye let out a long sigh, rubbing his forehead with one hand. "I know you're friends with Deng Wu and Wang Julong. I know they both traveled with you for some time," the Third Prince began, fixing his gaze on Yan Xiaobao. "You and I both know they're hostile toward me because of what I did to their families," he continued. Yan Xiaobao couldn't help but nod in acknowledgment. It was a fact—one they both were well aware of. This was a topic they had politely avoided in their previous conversations, but now that the prince himself brought it up, it both surprised and perplexed Yan Xiaobao. He wondered what the prince's true intention was.

"I need you to understand that the way I acted was not because I disliked their families, but because they broke the law. The punishment I imposed on them was the penalty for treason," he continued. "You yourself were part of the battle at Liluo City. You, like me, know that the Deng and Wang families fought alongside the Rong Family and their supporters." The prince pressed on, his expression pained. "Although Deng Wu and Wang Julong both fought for the Rong Family, they were the only two who did so. According to the laws of our kingdom, when pardoning is considered, only two individuals should be shown mercy."

"I understand that the loss of their entire families was an unforeseen blow to them, but as a prince of the kingdom, I must ensure that the law is upheld. If I were to overlook such acts, what kind of prince would I be? If I forgave two treasonous families, who's to say it wouldn't happen again? Should I forgive assassins simply because their families oppose killing? Tragically, I see it as impossible. If there's one thing I must ensure, it is the stability of my kingdom, and to achieve that, I must remain steadfast in matters of law."

Hearing his explanation, Yan Xiaobao felt deeply repulsed as he listened to the prince. Upholding the law was necessary, yes, but in this case, the punishment could absolutely have been limited to the cultivators who participated in the battle at Liluo City. That alone could have easily sufficed. But the Third Prince was far from satisfied. Instead, he killed all the children, women, elders, and servants. Everyone associated with the Deng or Wang families had been slaughtered. Even those who had no connection to the rebellion lost their lives under the prince's orders. This fact alone was enough for Yan Xiaobao to have long since judged the prince's character. Though he appeared sincere, the excuses—likely effective on nobility—would never change Yan Xiaobao's opinion. Still,

with his grievances and reflections swirling, the young man pretended to deliberate as though grappling with an internal conflict. "I understand your point of view," he said slowly, a pained expression on his

face, "but I'm deeply saddened by the loss my two friends experienced. I worry that it's impossible for them to see things from your perspective." His face was etched with distress, a frown creasing his forehead, his eyes trembling slightly. Anyone observing him would instantly realize he was contemplating something of great importance. Watching the troubled young man before him, Xiao Ye's smile only grew.

The Third Prince clasped his hands tightly, wearing an apologetic expression as he looked at Yan Xiaobao. "Don't dwell on it too much," he said with a shake of his head and a faint smile. "I understand if you blame me for this. It was a difficult decision, but one I had to make. Even if the citizens and others see me as a cold-blooded killer," he continued, his sharp eyes carefully studying Yan Xiaobao's reaction.

It was easy to discern what the prince was attempting, but his actions were ineffective at mitigating Yan Xiaobao's reproach. The prince's words were flawless, and his demeanor befitted that of a law-abiding prince—one even willing to cast himself as the villain if it meant defending the law. While Yan Xiaobao's opinion of the Third Prince remained unchanged, he could see how others might be convinced. At the moment, his face wore an expression of confusion and discontent. Seeing Yan Xiaobao's expression, the prince immediately shook his head, spreading his arms to appear inviting and magnanimous.

"Don't dwell on it," Xiao Ye repeated as he stood, patting Yan Xiaobao on the shoulder. "No need to worry. Think it over at home, and you're always welcome to come back and talk with me. It's been so long since I've had a calm and casual conversation about life. I spend all my time managing matters of the kingdom, so this has been a wonderful experience for me," he said, signaling the end of their discussion. Yan Xiaobao instantly understood he was being dismissed. A weight settled over him as he stood, forcing a smile for the prince. "Thank you for taking the time to speak with this humble adventurer," he said, bowing respectfully. "I may take you up on your offer in the future," he added. "I truly enjoyed today, and it's given me much to reflect upon," he concluded as the prince nodded approvingly. With a clap of his hands, a servant suddenly emerged from the shadows of the forest. The servant bowed deeply to both Yan Xiaobao and Xiao Yue, displaying profound respect. Watching the servant, it was hard not to worry whether he might discuss the information overheard in the garden. Noticing the stern look on his guest's face, Xiao Yue swiftly shook his head. "Don't concern yourself about my servant!" he said quickly. "My personal servants are all mute—they can neither read nor write. They wouldn't dare disclose anything about what happens here. They know all too well the penalty for doing such a thing," the prince said with a smile, as if what he described was the most natural thing in the world.

#### Chapter 716: Underestimated Oneself\_2

"I will trouble your servant to escort me out of the castle," Yan Xiaobao bowed to Xiao Ye and said. The Prince nodded in acknowledgment. "Please don't forget my invitation," he urged. "Come back anytime, and you can even bring your friends. Perhaps we might discover a way to reconcile the descendants of the Wang Family and Deng Clan." He said. Yan Xiaobao nodded but said nothing, for he knew

reconciliation was impossible. This world could hardly contain Wang Julong, Deng Wu, and the Third Prince, Ye Ye.

The servant led the way through the massive castle. His footsteps were silent, his breathing barely perceptible; even a King-level expert like Yan Xiaobao could not hear any sound from him. The servant's eerie quiet as he moved was terrifying to such an extent that Yan Xiaobao couldn't help but suspect whether he truly was a frail and unassuming servant. The lack of sound heightened Yan Xiaobao's vigilance, yet despite his internal unease, he betrayed none of it. He continued to follow leisurely, surveying his surroundings as though curious about them, pretending not to detect the servant's peculiarities. Mentally, he had already noted everything to ask Gao Yan about what he knew regarding Shao Ye's personal servants, who were reputed to be no more than disciple-level experts.

When Yan Xiaobao once again stepped onto the bustling roads, the sun had begun sinking behind the city walls, leaving the castle behind. Although the castle was filled with guards, servants, and nobles, it was nothing compared to the busy streets of the city. Merchants, citizens, nobles, and servants hurried to complete their daily tasks or head home after a long day's work. Yan Xiaobao waded through the crowd, heading straight to his own mansion. Though he wished to speak with Gao Yan, he couldn't shake the faint sense of being followed. Even if it was merely a product of his own paranoia, he dared not take any risks. Upon returning home, he went straight to his room and took a bath. Later, he began cultivating. For the entire night and into the following morning, he planned to continue cultivating before his conversations with Deng Wu and Wang Julong. If he had time afterward, he also wanted to meet Gao Yan to try and gather more information.

As conflicting thoughts distracted him on his way back, his mind grew heavy with how badly his friend had been harmed by the Third Prince. Yan Xiaobao arrived at the mansion and retreated directly to his room. Sitting on his bed for hours, he contemplated the day's events with frustration in his heart. Though he had visited the Prince, he still hadn't uncovered the latter's weaknesses. Staring out the window, he watched the moon rise into the night sky and sighed deeply. Setting aside all the concerns he had to address and the pain he knew his friends were currently enduring, he opened the window. Sitting on the floor, he calmed his mind and cleared his thoughts as the last rays of sunlight slowly transformed into moonlight. Remaining motionless, he took a deep breath and let his thoughts fade into nothingness, achieving inner peace while focusing only on absorbing the essence of heaven and earth.

The next day, he woke early, sunlight streaming through the open window into Yan Xiaobao's room. As the sun appeared, the young man paused his cultivation. After sitting through the night, he stood and stretched his stiff body. He had a full schedule today, but no matter what he did, he couldn't shake the sensation of being watched. This presence had lingered since the previous day, and he couldn't help but wonder whether it was merely paranoia or if the Prince had sent a formidable expert—someone even stronger than Yan Xiaobao and Lan Feng—to observe them. Such experts were not easy to find, but if anyone in the Sun Kingdom could produce one, it would undoubtedly be the Third Prince.

"There's nothing you can do about it," Lan Feng sighed deeply. "All you can do is be extraordinarily cautious when speaking with friends or visiting the Black Lion Team." Even the bird felt as though it was being watched, though it could have simply been influenced by the shared emotions of the two. Perhaps Lan Feng merely sensed the impression from Yan Xiaobao's heart.

As he pondered this elusive observer more deeply, Yan Xiaobao concluded that Lan Feng was right—there was nothing he could do for now except keep the warning in mind. As he moved through the mansion, the presence didn't fade; instead, it grew stronger the further he got from his room. By now, he was almost certain someone was surveilling him.

When Yan Xiaobao entered the room, he glanced around and was suddenly struck by the thought that he hadn't seen Sha Yun in some time. In the past, Sha Yun would always cling to him—either tightly grasping his arm or wrapping her tail around him, refusing to let him move alone—but oddly, after a few years away, Sha Yun's demeanor seemed entirely different. She no longer went out of her way to follow him. She didn't feel the need to keep him within her sight at all times, nor did she try to force herself into his space. Thinking it over, perhaps she was deliberately avoiding him. Yan Xiaobao wasn't sure why she was doing this. "Perhaps she was hurt when I greeted Wang Julong," he pondered to himself. But he knew that, while he had never openly expressed his feelings before, Sha Yun had never realized who he truly liked. Still, she had always fought for opportunities to be close to him. Now it seemed she had given up.

Not only was Sha Yun avoiding Yan Xiaobao, but she was rarely ever home. When he looked toward the room belonging to Sha Yun, he realized he didn't even know why she hadn't come back. She hadn't told him anything. She had simply vanished from his sight, leaving the young man alone for so long that he hadn't truly thought about why he hadn't seen her. Until this morning, he hadn't considered her strange behavior.

"Next time I see her, I should talk to her," he muttered to himself, frowning. "I feel bad for not loving her, but I can't truly change my emotions," he continued, though he knew deep down it was impossible. Yet he felt a pang of ache within, especially because he understood all too well the difficulty of living with unrequited love. He had experienced it firsthand.

"I'll try to talk to her. If she wishes to be alone, I'll give her space," he told himself with a nod. Though he didn't love Sha Yun, he deeply valued her friendship. If she needed time alone, he would step back, yet he still wanted to hear it from her directly. He worried about what was consuming her time. "A face I rarely see anymore," he remarked with a laugh as he sat down. "I've been studying the techniques we discussed last time, and I must admit the ability to perform this was truly surprising. Cultivators must

divide their thoughts repeatedly. They must shatter their souls and place tiny fragments within each body," he continued, his eyes alight with wonder. Yan Xiaobao couldn't help but feel grateful that his old friend hadn't mentioned any names. Though Gao Yan wasn't acquainted with An Hee, whether the Third Prince was aware of the latter was an entirely different question.

"Sounds promising," Yan Xiaobao nodded in agreement. "Continue your investigations; I'm sure it will benefit you as well," he said, his tone serious. Deng Wu's expression likewise grew solemn as he nodded. "It has already helped me control the soul shadow's technique. I can now share my thoughts in three separate ways, but to go further, I need to ascend levels. I am completely incapable of shattering my soul. To achieve that, I would need the strength of a Saint-level cultivator." As he spoke about the technique he'd been researching, Deng Wu's eyes glimmered with light.

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Chapter 717 Specific Distance

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Yan Xiaobao still felt that he was being watched, but he hoped that, whoever it was, they would stay at a specific distance so they could not hear the conversation. Speaking of the Third Prince, he understood what Deng Wu was trying to test and why. If Deng Wu and the two surviving descendants of the Wang Family were deemed traitors, it was highly likely that they would be suddenly declared enemies of the state. The Prince himself wished them dead, and although he had surpassed two cultivators, he would never permit them to gain any significant power.

Eating his porridge, the young man sat silently for a while. He wondered what he should say or do. Finally, after finishing his meal, he decided to talk to Deng Wu about the burden weighing heavily on him.

"I went to see the Third Prince yesterday," he said calmly, so quietly that although Deng Wu's eyes widened, the old man made no moves. "What happened?" Deng Wu instead asked, his voice choked with emotion. His eyes were slightly red, but he remained seated, taking a deep breath to calm himself. He guessed that something unusual had occurred.

"I spoke with him for a long time about life. About the adventures we all experienced as adventurers and what it felt like to be a prince of a nation. He spoke of how he had no choice but to follow the law and its rules. Therefore, he was compelled to take action against you and the family of Wang Julong. It was inevitable, he said, because traitors must be executed," Yan Xiaobao said quietly, his voice low and his expression serious. From the demeanor of his younger friend, Deng Wu realized something

significant had occurred, so he refrained from saying what he initially intended, choosing instead to wait silently for Yan Xiaobao to continue.

"I was invited to meet His Highness again," Yan Xiaobao continued. "I might learn more about the laws of this nation and hear more about his troubling orders—like commanding the execution of those who aren't even involved in the rebellion." He spoke calmly, but his voice was very low, as if hoping that whatever he sensed was merely paranoia.

"That reminds me, do you know what Sha Yun is up to?" After a long pause, he asked. This time, his voice returned to a normal level. The shift caused Deng Wu to arch a curious eyebrow at him. "No," he replied. "I don't know where she is. I thought you would. She used to cling to you like a coat, draping herself over you whenever she could," he said thoughtfully before frowning. "Do you think there's something wrong with her?" he asked, concern coloring his tone. Sha Yun was one of his closest friends. The two of them had traveled together for many years, and even though she wasn't as significant to him as Yan Xiaobao, he still saw her as a military sister he could trust completely.

"I don't know," Yan Xiaobao sighed again. "I will look out for her and try to talk to her when I see her, but I have no idea what she's doing," he shrugged. "I'm sure if she had a real problem, she'd come to us," he continued. "She knows that even if I don't love her the way I love Wang Julong, I still care about her deeply. I would never let anything happen to her. I trust she knows that." Yan Xiaobao sighed again, and Deng Wu nodded.

"Speaking of you and Wang Julong," Deng Wu asked mischievously. "When are you taking the next step? From her reactions since your return, her feelings are obvious," he said, a faint smile crossing his face. It was something Yan Xiaobao hadn't seen in a long time. The younger man smiled back as he looked at Deng Wu. "I don't know," Yan Xiaobao shrugged. "I want to, but I don't think she's ready," he sighed. "She still avoids me whenever she can. She lives in this house, but I can count the times I've seen her on one hand. Every time she sees me, she takes off like I'm the plague," Yan Xiaobao sighed deeply, and a comfortable silence settled between them for a while. After some time, Yan Xiaobao tapped the table with his thumb, a faint smile once again appearing on his lips. "And you and Rong Xing?" he asked smugly. "If nothing's happening between you two, you can't call me slow," he teased, laughing. Deng Wu threw up his hands in exasperation. "That woman is more stubborn than a tree! She rejects every advance I make. She keeps telling me she has no time for anything but study," he said with a heavy sigh. The two men looked at each other and burst into laughter. Neither of them had made any progress in their love lives, but they both remained determined to pursue the women of their dreams.

"Life is never as simple as we hope it to be," Yan Xiaobao sighed, nodding as Deng Wu couldn't suppress a smile. The two men leaned back in their chairs as a comfortable silence once again enveloped them. A long time later, a maid entered the room to clear the dishes, surprised to find the two lords still sitting

and chatting beside each other. She soon left, though the magical atmosphere surrounding the two was somewhat broken. After a while, they finally stirred from their seats, letting out deep sighs as they stood. "What are your plans for today?" Deng Wu asked curiously, looking at the young man in front of him. "I need to go and see Gao Yan," Yan Xiaobao said, scanning his surroundings. The sense of being watched had disappeared while he was speaking with Deng Wu, and the sudden change made him more uneasy than ever. Whatever it was, real or imagined, he was thankful for the reprieve. Now he could gather some information from his friend. "I need to leave as soon as possible. I worry someone will show up and follow me," Yan Xiaobao said with a sigh, nodding to Deng Wu. He left the mansion and headed toward the black lion.

## Chapter 718 Specific Distance\_2

Now the feeling of being watched had disappeared, and Yan Xiaobao couldn't help but think it was something he had conjured up himself. This was merely his paranoia, and there really wasn't anything he could do about it. "Either way, I'm powerless to change it," the young man muttered, sighing as he lifted his head, almost stumbling into the impoverished district where the black lion resided.

Yan Xiaobao moved quickly and soon arrived at the black lion's place, but before stepping inside, he stopped outside the door, taking a deep breath to steady his racing heart. He was still paranoid, perhaps even more so now, despite the disappearance of the eerie sensation of being watched. But as he had admitted earlier, there was nothing he could do. With another deep breath, he crossed the threshold into the inn. Unlike the last time, Yan Xiaobao didn't linger in the lower area of the inn and headed straight for the staircase, ascending toward Gao Yan's floor. Everyone followed his movements with their eyes, yet none spoke a word. Yan Xiaobao continued climbing the stairs until he reached the door and opened it, stepping into a room brimming with Memory Stones. Experts stood near the desk, transferring information into the Memory Stones. Clerks sorted these Memory Stones, ensuring the information reached its proper destination. At the back of the room was Gao Yan, absorbed in whatever was spread out on the table before him, his lips moving continuously though no words escaped.

Gazing at Gao Yan, Yan Xiaobao didn't have the heart to interrupt his friend. Instead, he stood there patiently, waiting for the older man to finish what he was working on. The meeting records progressed slowly, yet Yan Xiaobao felt no boredom as he observed the room, noticing the steady appearance of one expert after another. "They make the servants meaningless," Yan Xiaobao thought silently to himself, watching as Memory Stone after Memory Stone was filled with information. "And the fact that they can't write makes it even more meaningless. As long as the information lingers in their minds, it can be recorded onto Memory Stones. Still, the Third Prince seems absolutely certain that none of them will talk about what happens in the garden. His assurance about his servants is baffling for someone who seems so thorough. Therefore, there must be something more than illiteracy and silence. Perhaps an oath, or complete trust; it's hard to believe that mere silence could grant someone such a position within Xiu Ye's inner circle."

While Yan Xiaobao mulled over these thoughts deep in his mind, Gao Yan completed his task and now found himself the one waiting. With an apologetic smile, the young man peeled himself away from the wall where he had been standing and took the seat opposite Gao Yan. "Yesterday, I went to the Third Prince," he began. "While I was there, I encountered people he referred to as silent servants. He told me these servants neither write nor speak, but when they hold a Memory Stone, none of that matters. However, the Third Prince seems completely convinced they won't betray him. That, to me, is strange."

"But that's not all," he continued. "When one of these servants guided me to the exit—a man said to be merely a disciple-level mute—I couldn't hear his breathing, his footsteps, or any other sound. If I hadn't seen him with my own eyes standing right before me, I wouldn't have even known he was there. That's definitely something beyond the ability of someone at the disciple level. Who exactly are these servants?"

Gao Yan remained quiet for a moment, and against Yan Xiaobao's expectations, his old friend didn't start inspecting the specific Memory Stones he had before him. Instead, Gao Yan leaned back in his chair, gazing at his younger companion with a complex expression in his eyes.

"The silent servants are famous for working exclusively for the Third Prince. They are called servants, but no one truly understands them. I once tried to introduce someone into their ranks, but I never saw her again." Silence once again settled between the two, and a deep furrow appeared on Gao Yan's brow. Seeing how focused his friend was, Yan Xiaobao said nothing to interrupt his train of thought. He simply waited for him to reach the end and speak about what he knew.

"Some might think they harbor resentment toward the Third Prince for forcing their silence and illiteracy upon them, but it's actually the opposite. Some families willingly send their children to serve, so they have a chance to join this group and become one of the Prince's most trusted confidants. I suspect they've either sworn a Blood Oath to the Prince or are compelled to remain loyal through some other mysterious technique, no matter what. As for their cultivation... no one truly understands it. No one knows just how strong they are, yet whenever one encounters them, they exude the aura of a low-level Dantian cultivator. Nothing outwardly stronger than a common person."

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Chapter 719 The Silent Moment

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Gao Yan was rubbing his temples during another quiet moment; he hated the lack of sufficient information about anything, and these silent servants were among the few areas where he could not

access information. "When he assassinated his brother's lover, no one knew how he did it. This question remains, and many questions about whether he is still around continue to surface, but I imagine someone as strong as the Third Prince would have powerful forces supporting him. Forces far stronger than himself. These forces can not only protect him but also cater to his every whim. If these experts are silent servants, I can imagine they could easily kill her, but I have absolutely no evidence to prove this matter."

Upon hearing Gao Yan's reply, Yan Xiaobao couldn't help but furrow his brows slightly. Although this mute servant seemed to be nothing more than a disciple, there was an air of danger around him. His ability to move silently convinced Yan Xiaobao that Gao Yan was correct. These servants might be secret forces hidden in plain sight. They were always close to him, but no one accustomed to traveling near the Prince would be afraid. They were perfect combat forces in every aspect.

"I'm wondering," Yan Xiaobao said, stroking his chin as he continued. "Have you heard about Sha Yun? I've barely seen her once or twice since I came back. Her disappearing like this is very unusual."

"I think she found a group of friends to train with," Gao Yan shrugged. "It's the capital of the Sun Kingdom; there are quite a few human hybrids. These people became good friends with Sha Yun. I think she spends most of her time with them," Gao Yan said with a smile, though hearing Yan Xiaobao's words made his heart sink suddenly. Although he didn't have romantic feelings for Sha Yun, she was still important to him. Knowing that she was doing well with new friends made him quite happy. "However, the next time I see her, I need to talk to her." He reminded himself, although he was speaking to himself, his old friend Gao Yan couldn't help but chuckle.

"Do you want to know what your good friend Jin You has been up to lately?" Gao Yan asked, but Yan Xiaobao shook his head. "He's not someone as important as Sha Yun, but he's still a good friend who shares common goals with me. My actions have nothing to do with him, so my work has nothing to do with him. If I'm not mistaken, he's most likely up to something with all the Crusaders in the town. He has a notable hatred for Crusaders." Yan Xiaobao laughed, his laughter and reaction were something Gao Yan had never anticipated, but he nodded in understanding.

"Alright, next I need to meet with Ma Kong, so I'll get going," Hui Yue excused himself as he stood up from the chair he was sitting on. "The weapon I'm using is still black blood, and while it's served me well, it's time I switched to something new." As he turned and left the black lion, he nodded.

"It's not just a new weapon you need," Lan Feng said within the Dantian Cave. "You've been using the same martial arts skills since you were young, as well as the same spiritual art. When you were in the sacred underground city, I didn't teach you anything new because you needed to focus on survival, and

teaching you while Wan Qiao handled your training would've been counterproductive. Even more so, teaching anything during wartime would've been outright foolish," Lan Feng continued. "Now that we're in a kingdom's capital, we can take the time to learn new techniques, including martial arts and spiritual art. Furthermore, we can help you shape your martial power attack more effectively. But before that, you need a new weapon. I'd prefer choosing a sword, as I primarily have techniques that align with sword usage." Lan Feng concluded, and Yan Xiaobao nodded. Until now, he had primarily focused on cultivation, constantly increasing his internal energy, but now he understood he needed to focus on this as well. He needed offense, defensive techniques, and increased strength—not just through cultivation but by bolstering his attack abilities. This would make him much deadlier in combat.

Yan Xiaobao nodded in agreement. It had been far too long since he last learned new skills, and he needed improvement. He needed everything Lan Feng could teach him to grow stronger. He was very aware he couldn't rely solely on his old skills and his beast transformation to win the upcoming battles. Leaving the black lion, Yan Xiaobao headed straight for the Black Market Auction House. He had been there before to sell cultivation stones, but this time, he had come for help. He needed a new weapon—one that suited his current cultivation level, superior to the dagger he had used since he was a Lower Dantian cultivator. The dagger had been a gift from the Ma family, a weapon forged from Black Iron and inscribed with letters. While the dagger was reliable, it was evidently designed for lower-level cultivators, and now it was just a question of when it would break. It couldn't contain all the energy Yan Xiaobao unleashed during an attack.

Until now, Yan Xiaobao had completely avoided using weapons, relying instead on his wolf form, where deadly claws and sharp teeth served as excellent weapons. But now that Lan Feng was ready to train him again, the young man would resume training in his humanoid form.

Bearing this in mind, Yan Xiaobao finally stepped into the Black Market Auction House and nodded at the guards as he entered the massive building. He walked through the maze-like hallways, eventually stopping in front of a door made of heavy wood. He knocked on the door, which opened slowly to reveal Ma Kong and his father. Both were bowing over some documents and Memory Stones. When the door opened, they lifted their heads, surprised to see Yan Xiaobao.

#### Chapter 720 Silent Moment\_2

"Yan Xiaobao, what can we do for you?" Ma Kong's father asked curiously as Yan Xiaobao slowly placed the Memory Stone in his hand onto the table. "Once, when I returned to Liluo City, I was invited to dine with the Ma family. At that time, I met the manager of Liluo City's Black Market Auction House, who gave me the black blood dagger. It's the weapon I've used up to this point," he said. "This dagger has served me well over the years. During those years, I struggled to survive, and it always held a special place in my heart; however, now it no longer suits me. It was designed for cultivators of the Lower Dantian, but I've reached King-level now, and I need a weapon more appropriate for my current capabilities. I'm certainly willing to pay for it, though I can't imagine finding a better place to look for weapons than here."

Nodding, Ma Kong's father considered for a moment. "Knowing you've used this dagger before already tells me much about your worth this year. Although we don't currently have any weapons suitable for auctioning to you, we do have some stored in the family armory. For the sake of our family, we occasionally purchase weapons and store them in our own armory. I'll have Ma Gang take you there, and you can choose any weapon you desire," he continued. "Consider it our gift to you," he said, smiling and gesturing for Ma Gang and Yan Xiaobao to leave. Yan Xiaobao, unsure of how to repay such kindness, simply thanked the two members of the Ma family.

Following his friend Ma Kong, the two young men left the office, walking down corridor after corridor. Yan Xiaobao sensed they were delving deeper underground; the corridors gradually shifted from elegant decor to rugged stone walls. The windows disappeared entirely; instead, torches mounted on the walls provided the light. After walking for some time, they arrived at a massive door crafted from heavy wood. The door was bare of decorations, carvings, or symbols, offering no hint of the treasures it guarded. Draped in robes, Ma Kong finally retrieved a set of forged iron keys. This was quite unusual, as most places were locked using Memory Stones, but these intricately designed keys clearly served a different purpose. It was a door that couldn't be opened with Memory Stones, no matter how one tried.

With the keys in hand, Ma Kong suddenly stepped forward and unlocked the door, producing a crisp click. He then pushed the door open. As the heavy door swung aside, revealing the room inside, the sound echoed. Yan Xiaobao was intensely curious about the appearance of the Ma family's treasury. Following closely behind Ma Kong, Yan Xiaobao stepped into the room, and his mouth went dry at the sight of the overwhelming wealth surrounding him. Shelves numbering in the hundreds filled the vast room. On each shelf lay an assortment of items. As he scanned the surroundings, Yan Xiaobao felt utterly lost about where to focus. The torches affixed to the walls and shelves caused golden treasures to glimmer in the flame's glow. Silver shimmered brilliantly, jewels glittered under the light, and jade artifacts were placed on the shelves, hiding valuable objects within.

Among the items on the shelves, Yan Xiaobao spotted boxes brimming with precious medicinal herbs, jade boxes containing rare herbal medicines, and a select few divine herbs so valuable they were locked away in boxes made of pure gold. Gazing at the herbs, Yan Xiaobao was suddenly reminded of his time in Shen Yun, where he had collected various rare herbs and stored them in a Memory Stone. He had used jade to preserve them, but it had been at least a year since he last opened it; now he found himself curious about how his many rare herbs were faring and whether they retained their potency for treatment.

Yan Xiaobao roamed the treasury, encountering an array of priceless treasures. Some had obvious applications, some were pills carefully refined by alchemists, and others were weapons forged from black iron, gold, silver, or common iron, all inscribed with magical inscriptions to enhance their

durability. Some weapons even bore engraved abilities, allowing their wielders to use these abilities so long as their spirit energy was sufficient.

One portion of the treasury was filled with rare metals. At the bottom lay chunks of black iron, while at the top were bars of silver and gold. Most of these metals were infused with spiritual energy, which made them stronger. Beyond these rare metals, all the gemstones were brimming with spiritual energy. These gemstones could be used in various ways. When vast amounts of natural energy from heaven and earth became trapped within the land or mountains, gemstones would form as the essence naturally refined and compressed over time. The larger the gemstone, the greater the energy it carried, refined and compressed by the earth. These gemstones could be harnessed in different ways. One method was to use them as batteries, enabling individuals to absorb their energy to increase their own spiritual energy. Alternatively, they could be combined with weapons. When embedded into weapons, and with the aid of inscriptions, they could activate the abilities carved onto armor or weapons. This allowed lower-ranked experts to utilize the powers engraved on their gear. Yan Xiaobao, who had once lived in Liluo City and studied at the Royal Academy there, had never encountered such things before; yet here, surrounded by gemstones and inscribed weapons, he saw they were commonplace in the capital. They served as gifts from families to their talented young members, offering safety as they struggled to become the strongest. This allowed lower-ranked experts to utilize the powers engraved on their gear.

Although gemstones could be utilized in various ways, there were also beast cores. Beast cores were similar but contained far more original energy than gemstones. These cores carried the entire cultivation base of the slain beasts, often used to assist individuals in cultivation. They enabled cultivators to slowly absorb and refine their internal Fog Energy. However, unlike gemstones, beast cores couldn't be used to activate inscriptions because their energy was Fog Energy, a type incompatible with the energy humans trained in.

Due to his familiarity with these items, Yan Xiaobao didn't linger long on the beast cores. Walking through the treasury, Yan Xiaobao finally reached the final section, where he found a multitude of weapons. Some hung on the walls, while others rested on shelves. As he gazed at them, his pulse quickened, and his eyes lit up with excitement. Stepping closer, he saw many different types of weapons, and his head spun with indecision. Picking up a rod, Yan Xiaobao curiously observed its intricate details. Playing with it in his hand, he realized it was a long staff, engraved with magical inscriptions.

"Be careful with that," Ma Kong said with a smile as he watched Yan Xiaobao inspecting the item. "If you infuse this staff with your Qi or spiritual energy, it will start to shoot small fireballs, which explode at a distance before reaching their target. These fireballs can travel up to three hundred meters before detonating. As long as you have enough energy, the staff will keep firing. I'm surprised you haven't seen these used in battles. The Siban Empire must have employed them extensively," Ma Kong said, a hint of confusion in his voice. Yan Xiaobao simply shook his head. Perhaps they had been used, but he hadn't

noticed them. Yan Xiaobao returned the staff to the shelf, and his gaze shifted to examine swords, axes, spears, and long pikes. Although he was intrigued by all the weapons, he couldn't help but focus more on the swords than anything else. Picking up sword after sword, he found each to be a masterpiece. Many of them were engraved with inscriptions: one capable of firing fireballs, another designed to summon ice shards, and yet another capable of unleashing lightning strikes. However, no matter which weapon Yan Xiaobao picked up, he couldn't shake a feeling of dissatisfaction. They were exceptional, but none seemed to be what he truly desired. After examining nearly all the weapons scattered throughout the room, he couldn't help but feel a sense of disappointment.

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