

Walker 261

Chapter 261 - Heading Back

Upon hearing Senior Xukong's words, Lin Mu started to think of all the sects that could possibly be involved in this.

'If they were able to attack this man, then this means that they were probably from this region. It's unlikely that someone from a sect not from this region came to attack that man. Hmm, if it's from this region then the only sect I can think about is the Tri cauldron peony sect. I don't know what other sects are here.' Lin Mu thought to himself.

But then he remembered something.

"Wait, I have the jade slip that Jing Wei gave me. There is bound to be some information in there about the sects of this region." Lin Mu muttered to himself and took out the jade slip.

He held it in his hand and activated it, browsing through the information that was recorded within in. He soon reached the point where it talked about the sects that existed in the region and discovered that in the region around the Wu Lim City only the Tri cauldron peony sect existed that was a cultivation sect. There existed a few normal sects, but they were merely martial sects that had the body tempering realm cultivators in them.

'So whoever it is, they're likely to be from the Tri cauldron peony sect.' Lin Mu guessed.

"You can't ignore the possibility that it could have been someone else that was following the man. They may have followed him here and attacked so that there would be fewer traces, and it would be harder to track them. This would also inadvertently put the blame on the Tri cauldron peony sect." Xukong advised.

"That's true Senior. We have far too little information to be able to reach an accurate conclusion," Lin Mu said in a calm tone.

"At least our work here is done, I was able to accomplish the goal I set. Though it's a shame that the Dual Circle Ascension vine was destroyed." Lin Mu added.

He then stored the skeleton of the dead cultivator in his ring as he had intended to show this to someone that would perhaps be more knowledgeable, not to mention that this skeleton was an important piece of evidence.

Lin Mu stood up and looked for the Brown Shrubby Forest cat, finding it to be asleep on the side.

"Huh, so you were enjoying your time," Lin Mu chuckled as he petted the beast's head.

~Yawn~

The Brown Shrubby forest cat let out a yawn as it woke up from Lin Mu's action. It slowly blinked its eyes and licked its paws to rub its face. It stretched as it stood up and then rubbed against Lin Mu.

"Let's go, little guy," Lin Mu spoke, the intention of which the beast understood.

Lin Mu took one last look around the area and realized something which made him stop.

"Hmm, Senior the bewildering formation array around the area, what will happen to it?" Lin Mu questioned.

"From what I could gather, that formation array was probably set up by the dead cultivator to protect himself when he was injured, and it has been active since then. The formation array should fade away by itself in a few more months, as I cannot see any other supportive formations that can supply it with spirit qi. Also, the Brown Shrubby Forest Cat was able to enter it. That means the flaws are already appearing in it.

Looking at the items we found and the lack of spirit stones, it's likely that the dead cultivator used them to set up this bewildering formation. There is no other reason a cultivator that too a Nascent soul realm cultivator would have so few resources with him." Xukong answered.

Lin Mu nodded in response and fiddled with the damaged spatial storage ring he had in his hand.

"Can this ring be repaired, Senior?" Lin Mu asked curiously.

"Hmm, it is certainly repairable, but I doubt there are many people who can do it. Perhaps... Jing Wei can do it. He does seem to have some accomplishments in Spirit tool refinement." Xukong replied.

Lin Mu's eyes lit up upon hearing Senior Xukong's reply.

"That's good. If this ring can be repaired, then I can use it. That way, even if I openly store items, I can have a valid excuse. The mysterious ring that I have is not visible to others, thus it is suspicious whenever I use it. If I have an actual spatial storage ring, it will be much easier." Lin Mu state.

"That will indeed deter some overly curious eyes. Something that's mysterious is more likely to catch attention than something that's in the open." Xukong agreed.

Having decided what his next course of action would be, Lin Mu started to head back.

This time it was much easier for Lin Mu to leave the formation array as it only worked in one direction. It prevented people from entering but did not restrict them from leaving.

Lin Mu left the confines of the formation array, with the Brown Shrubby Forest Cat following behind him.

Upon entering the town, Lin Mu first went to his house to drop off the Brown Shrubby Forest Cat before heading to Jing Wei's emporium. This was done according to the advice of Senior Xukong as he did not want them to know of the beast's intelligence as it could lead them to question him about the Dual Circle Ascension Fruit.

Upon reaching the area, Lin Mu saw that the alley the shop was located in was still hidden, but when he approached it, the path automatically appeared for him as the formation array recognized him.

He opened the door of the shop and entered it.

"Oh? Did they clean this place up?" Lin Mu muttered with surprise as he saw the clean shop.

The dust that usually covered the shop was no longer there, though the items in the shop were still scattered around. Putting this to the back of his mind, Lin Mu walked to the back room.

'I'm supposed to blow out this lamp, right?' Lin Mu remembered as he then snuffed it out.

The room suddenly became white and then Lin Mu appeared in the courtyard of the Myriad Armament Canopy Abode.

The faint fragrance of the spirit flowers and the dense spirit qi in the air calmed Lin Mu's mind and made him feel relaxed.

"Ahh... This place is so good." Lin Mu muttered in satisfaction.

Chapter 262 - The Excited Jing Wei

While walking towards the mansion at the end, Lin Mu was wondering where the pair of Grandfather and Granddaughter would be. The mansion was far too large on the inside and it would take him a while to find them.

But just as he thought of this he spotted them sitting at a pergola in the garden that was near the mansion.

Duan Ke and Jing Wei were sitting at the table in the pergola and were chatting about something when they felt the formation array letting someone inside.

"Seems like he's back." Duan Ke spoke.

"Indeed, I wonder what he's here for this time. It's been a while since we saw him." Jing Wei responded as he turned to look in the distance from where Lin Mu was walking.

Lin Mu soon reached the two of them and came to stand at the side of the table.

"Oh? Seems like you've gotten better since the last time," Jing Wei said as he sensed some changes in Lin Mu.

"What brings you here today? I thought you were going to stay in seclusion and cultivate for longer?" Duan Ke asked.

"I was indeed in seclusion all this while but had to stop it for a bit as I had some matters to deal with." Lin Mu replied as he nodded.

"What kind of matters? Do they involve the invader?" Jing Wei questioned in a more serious tone.

Lin Mu's expression straightened as he nodded gently.

"Yes, and not only that... I may have even found the source of the invader, perhaps." Lin Mu revealed much to the shock of the two.

"What! Then we must hurry, let's talk further in the mansion." Jing Wei replied.

Lin Mu went with the flow and followed the two of them to the library, which was a bit surprising to him as he had expected them to be heading to the meeting hall. Upon arriving there, Jing Wei waved his hand and the formation array lit up for a few seconds before disappearing.

"What was that for?" Lin Mu curiously asked.

"It's an isolating formation, it will prevent the contents of our conversation from being heard." Duan Ke answered first.

Lin Mu tilted his head in confusion as he could not understand why they would require something like that now, as there was no one else other than them in this entire space.

Jing Wei saw the confusion on Lin Mu's face and could guess what he must have been thinking about.

"There are certain abilities that we need to protect ourselves from. There are a few pesky and meddlesome sects that love to pry in matters that they have no business in. Even with the courtyard being in a different space, some of them can still discover us, though it's unlikely." Jing Wei said, "but... I still do not want to take any chances." He added.

"But you didn't activate this before? We have even more sensitive discussions back then." Lin Mu asked further.

"It was activated back then as well. But not just this, all the defensive formations were activated last time, which is why you did not notice it." Jing Wei explained.

"Ahh, I see." Lin Mu responded.

"Well then, what did you discover?" Jing Wei questioned.

Lin Mu withdrew the skeleton of the dead cultivator and put it on the ground for the two to see.

As soon as the pair saw it, their eyes went wide.

"Is this..." Duan Ke uttered.

"A Nascent Soul Realm cultivator's remains, there is no doubt. I can sense it." Jing Wei confirmed.

The two then lifted their gaze from the skeleton and looked at Lin Mu.

"This is the source behind the invader, I estimate. I found a bewildering formation array in the forest, and inside there I found this skeleton. It had some items which I believe do not belong in this world. Linking that with the Beast storage treasure and the incidents that happened, led me to believe that they were related." Lin Mu stated his theory.

Jing Wei heard his words and stayed silent for a moment before speaking.

"And what are these items that you found on him?" Jing Wei questioned.

In response to this, Lin Mu withdrew the Damaged Spatial storage ring, the stone badge, and the depleted Peak grade spirit stones.

"Peak grade spirit stones!" Duan Ke exclaimed.

Jing Wei's attention particularly went towards the ring that Lin Mu was holding in his hand.

"... and a spatial storage ring, that too of an unknown design." Jing Wei added.

Lin Mu handed the ring to Jing Wei on cue and let him observe it. Jing Wei held it in his hand and observed it with his spirit sense. With every minute that he held it in his hand, his expression kept on changing. At the start it was calm, which then turned to surprise, then confused, and finally excited.

Lin Mu could understand his emotions but did not know why he had now become so excited.

"Hahaha! This is a masterpiece! Such craftsmanship... such innovation... something like this had never been seen before!" Jing Wei shouted in praises.

Duan Ke and Lin Mu both had perplexed faces, seeing the usually calm Jing Wei acting like this.

"Of course I should have expected this. In a low leveled world such as this, even a spatial storage treasure such as that ring is of the highest quality." Xukong spoke with a sigh.

Lin Mu slightly chuckled which Duan Ke heard and her face became a bit red.

"Grandfather, have some decorum." Duan Ke chided.

"This is no time for decorum, Ke'er. This little ring... it may potentially be the solution to our problems." Jing Wei replied in an excited tone, same as before.

Now even Duan Ke's expression turned shocked upon hearing her grandfather's words.

"Is it really that good?" Lin Mu asked out loud, "I mean, that spatial storage ring is damaged and broken."

Duan Ke's excitement instantly died down after hearing Lin Mu's revelation, but Jing Wei did not even flinch and acted the same.

~Sigh~

Chapter 263 - Repair?

Seeing that Jing Wei had not changed his expression after telling him about the condition of the Spatial storage ring, Lin Mu was now even more confused. He was wondering whether the old man had finally started to show the effects of his old age.

~Chuckle~

"You think I don't know this ring is damaged? I know that of course, I knew the moment I got my hands on it. But that's not all this ring is. Even if it is damaged, I can still analyze and learn a lot of things from it. Merely the techniques and skills used to make this ring are amazing. Even the best Spirit tool refiners in the entire Great Zhou Empire cannot match it." Jing Wei spoke in the same excited tone.

Lin Mu finally understood why the old man was happy and saw that Duan Ke's expression also improved after hearing it. Lin Mu then remembered what he was gonna ask him about and thought that he should do it while they were on the topic of the ring.

"Seeing that you can analyze the ring, can you also perhaps repair it?" Lin Mu questioned.

Hearing Lin Mu's question Jing Wei was a bit stunned and his expression calmed down.

"Hmm, I definitely cannot restore it to how it was originally, as I neither know the techniques nor have the skill to do it. But... I may be able to restore it to a fraction of its full capabilities. Though I cannot tell how big that fraction would be." Jing Wei answered.

Lin Mu's eyes lit up after hearing Jing Wei's answer. It didn't matter to him how much this ring could store, it only mattered that it was functional. Lin Mu had the mysterious ring with a massive storage capacity, the limits of which even Senior Xukong could not perceive, thus this ring would only going to be used as a disguise.

"Can you repair this ring for me then?" Lin Mu asked.

Duan Ke looked at Lin Mu for a moment before turning to her Grandfather. She did not know whether her grandfather would be accepting of such a request or not. If it was in the past, even the big sects would have to wait for months before they could even speak to him. But now here they were, hiding in some small town.

Jing Wei smirked a bit before replying.

"Sure, in payment of letting me study this ring I can repair it for you." Jing Wei spoke in a calm tone.

~Phew~

Lin Mu took a breath of relief after hearing his response, as this meant that he would be able to cover up for another one of his big flaws. No longer would he have to hide or pretend to do something else whenever he got something.

"Though, I do not know how long it would take me to repair it. I have simply not seen anything like it, thus I cannot give you an estimate. How about I contact you with the communication jade when it's done?" Jing Wei asked.

"That would be fine, as long as you can fix it anything is acceptable." Lin Mu replied while nodding his head.

~Ahem~

Duan Ke coughed lightly, bringing the attention of the two men towards the skeleton in the room.

"We were speaking about this and you two already forgot it seems." Duan Ke spoke in a chiding tone.

Lin Mu couldn't help but feel a bit embarrassed but Jing Wei had no reaction. He still seemed to be basking in his previous feeling.

"Ah, of course. Let's get to it shall we," Jing Wei said, trying to nullify the awkwardness.

Duan Ke and Lin Mu both nodded in response and turned their attention to the skeleton.

"So from what I can gather, this is indeed a Nascent soul realm cultivator that came from another world. The ring and the beast storage treasure pretty much confirms that." Jing Wei spoke.

Duan Ke had a slightly confused expression hearing her grandfather's words as a doubt appeared in her mind.

"The beast storage treasure? Isn't it possible that it is not linked to the dead cultivator but rather someone else?" Duan Ke inquired.

"There is a possibility, of course. But... I've seen the craftsmanship in the ring and the beast storage treasure, and there is no doubt that there are certain similarities in them that are definitely not found in this world. I highly doubt there can be another person, that too in this region that came from another world." Jing Wei clarified.

Duan Ke had an enlightened expression on her face as she understood Jing Wei's assumption.

"Oh?... He's good. Much better than I expected." Xukong suddenly spoke.

"What do you mean senior?" Lin Mu internally asked as he tilted his head.

"That old man was able to spot and link the fine similarities in the manufacturing and refinement techniques that were used to make the Beast storage treasure and the spatial storage ring, even though the beast storage treasure was pretty much junk at that point. Looks like the standards of this world may be slightly higher than I thought... or perhaps this old man is the better one of the lot." Xukong explained.

Lin Mu did not reply and simply hummed in acknowledgment as he focused back on the conversation.

"What about the peak grade spirit stones?" Duan Ke asked.

"Hmm, I can't tell much about their source as they are depleted. If they still had a slight amount of spirit qi left in them, then I may have been able to find some traces in them that could have pointed out to the mine that they originated from." Jing Wei answered.

"They can do that?" Lin Mu spoke in a surprised tone to Xukong.

"Indeed, although all spirit stones are pretty much the same, there are still some fine traces in them that can help to identify which mine they came from. The spirit qi in them is absorbed from the area that mine would be in, thus it would have something like a signature on it.

Though this is quite faint and cannot be perceived by most cultivators. Only the Dao shell cultivators and above are able to sense them and that too with special equipment and supportive formations." Xukong explained.

"That's amazing..." Lin Mu muttered in appreciation and awe.

Chapter 264 - Autumn Valley Sect

The conversation continued for a while until it finally came time to discuss the culprits.

"What other cultivation sects are there in the region apart from the Tri cauldron peony sect?" Lin Mu questioned.

Although Lin Mu knew that there was only one mentioned in the records he still asked to confirm.

"There is another one, a rather new sect. All we know is that it is quite small but we don't have an estimate on its number of cultivators and that it was created about two decades ago." Jing Wei answered.

Lin Mu had not expected for his question to bear fruit. Though he wondered why, it was not in the records.

"Why was this not mentioned in the records that you gave me, though?" Lin Mu asked curiously.

"That's because such sects pop up all the time. Some newly ascended Nascent soul realm cultivator thinks they have what it takes and creates a cultivation sect. Though these sects don't last long and soon dissolve due to lack of resources or internal conflicts.

Another thing is that such sects prefer to stay hidden for a while as this allows them to stabilize their roots and prevents the other sects from taking advantage of them.

This is the reason why such sects are not even recorded in the main records. There may be some recent archives, but we didn't have those as you can guess from our condition." Jing Wei explained, with the last part seeming a little wry.

"I found out about the sect last year, but they haven't really done anything and have not officially revealed themselves to the world." Duan Ke added.

Lin Mu was intrigued by their words and was now starting to wonder if this sect was involved in it or not.

"You see, the suspicion I had was that someone hurt this cultivator. But seeing that his ring was left intact and the bewildering formation that was set up in the forest, it was likely that the attacked could not hold back this cultivator from escaping. We know that he was a nascent soul realm cultivator, thus the other party must be one too.

They should be at about the same strength, or such a thing would not have happened and his ring would have probably been stolen. This led me to believe that there was perhaps a nascent soul realm cultivator from one of the sects involved as it seemed to be the most obvious." Lin Mu explained.

Jing Wei and Duan Ke listened to his theory with rapt attention and indeed found it to be sensible. There were far too few nascent soul realm cultivators in the area, and all of them belonged to either the Tri cauldron peony sect or to the kingdom.

"Hmm, this does seem likely. But then according to this hypothesis, the attacker must have been injured as well. But I haven't heard of any news about a nascent soul realm cultivator getting injured. There isn't much chance that news such as this can be suppressed.

And I can tell for sure that it is not anyone from the Tri cauldron peony sect, as all four of their nascent soul realm experts are fine. They all recently showed up to an event a few months ago and all of them were fine and dandy as always." Jing Wei spoke.

After hearing Jing Wei's explanation, Lin Mu wondered if it was not the Tri cauldron peony sect, then could it be the other 'new' sect.

'Speaking of that, I don't know its name yet.' Lin Mu thought.

"What is the name of this new sect that was created in the region? Could they perhaps be involved in it?" Lin Mu questioned.

"That sect is called as the Autumn Valley sect and although they are not a righteous sect, they are definitely not an unorthodox sect. If they were, then the other orthodox sects would have long since exterminated them if they ever got even a little suspicion.

But from the very few interactions they had, it can be determined that they are a neutral sect. Considering their age, I cannot say for sure if they would have attacked this cultivator. Not to mention, this would mean that their only Nascent soul realm cultivator was injured, which would leave them with a lacking leadership.

Thus I cannot say for sure if they could be behind them either. What I think is that it was perhaps a wandering cultivator that discovered him and attacked him. There are actually some wandering Nascent soul realm cultivators in the kingdom. Although determining their location would be difficult. And if one of them got injured, it will be impossible for news to spread out." Jing Wei answered.

~Sigh~

"This just keeps on getting more and more complex." Lin Mu muttered to himself, feeling a bit fatigued.

"Tell you what, Duan Ke will investigate this and try to find any news about it. Another thing is we are in luck as our supplier is coming here today, we may find something from them." Jing Wei revealed.

Lin Mu had certainly not expected to hear this today and suddenly remembered the state of the shop earlier.

"Is that why the shop was clean? I thought it was just supposed to stay like that." Lin Mu asked.

An almost invisible vein popped up on Duan Ke's forehead which went unnoticed by Lin Mu. But Jing Wei felt it rather instantly and knew that his granddaughter was on the edge.

"Yes, yes, whenever the supplier comes, we make it seem like the shop is still active. The formation automatically cleans the shop." Jing Wei said, trying to suppress the volatility before it could even begin.

"Oh? That's amazing. Cleaning formations... now that's something I definitely need." Lin Mu muttered remembering the piles of bones and meat scraps that were left behind each morning after his monstrous meal.

"Ah, those are easy to set up. I'll give you one of the premade ones, they are easy to set up and quite convenient." Jing Wei spoke upon hearing Lin Mu's mutterings.

Just as Jing Wei finished saying this, they felt the formation array activate.

"He's here."

Chapter 265 - Jingming Shang

Lin Mu looked at the duo, waiting for them to respond and see what their next course of action would be. He had no knowledge of this supplier of theirs and wondered what he had brought. From their words, he could also get that this supplier was also someone that provided them with news and intelligence.

"Let's go, he has entered the alley." Duan Ke spoke, breaking the silence.

Jing Wei nodded and started to walk out of the hall. They left the mansion with Lin Mu following behind them as they soon reached the small building that was the exit of the courtyard. The small lamp hanging on the roof was lit and the scenery changed.

The three of them appeared in the backroom of the shop and went to take their place in the shop. Jing Wei sat on a chair at the side while Duan Ke sat at the counter.

Meanwhile, Lin Mu was left standing awkwardly.

"What are you doing standing around dumbly? Go pretend to be a customer." Duan Ke said in a cold tone.

'Why is she mad?' Lin Mu internally questioned.

"Human females are confusing and mysterious. A great cultivator once said that among the eight thousand great mysteries of the cosmos, the minds of the females belong in the top ten." Xukong suddenly spoke.

"Hehe, is that so, Senior..." Lin Mu muttered, finding it to be a bit strange.

~Creak~

The sound of the door opening resounded in the shop, as a man dressed in a delicate-looking robe walked in. The man had his hair tucked into his cap and had a short beard with a rather long mustache that hanged down to his chin.

He had a jade hanging on his waist and a white fan in his right hand, while his left hand was kept on a pouch that hung from his belt. The man looked to be in his thirties, but looking into the man's eyes one would feel confused. They had an innocent look in one moment and then a shrewd one in the next.

Lin Mu felt the faint waves of spirit qi emanating from him and instantly recognized him as a cultivator. He curiously extended his spirit sense and probed the man. But the instant he did so, the man's eyes turned to him and a smirk appeared on his lips.

"Core Condensation realm..." Lin Mu muttered under his breath.

Meanwhile, the man had an interested look on his face after sensing the spirit sense that had just touched him.

"Oh? A fellow cultivator, greetings." The man spoke while cupping his hands and displaying a smile.

The smile seemed to be fine, yet there was a certain emptiness to it. Lin Mu hurriedly cupped his hands as well before speaking.

"Greetings to you too..." Lin Mu said in an awkward tone.

The man nodded in response and did not seem to mind Lin Mu's previous action. He simply went to stand in front of the counter and looked at Duan Ke.

"Ahh! Lady Duan Ke is as beautiful as always. A million flowers shall turn dull before your face." The man praised in a flattering tone that dripped with coyness.

Lin Mu felt shivers on his body after hearing the man's words and subconsciously took a step back. Unknowingly, even the short sword on his waist started trembling and seemed as if it wanted to leave the scabbard. But a few seconds later it calmed down.

The faint vein that was on Duan Ke's forehead suddenly became prominent as her expression turned cold. Lin Mu could suddenly feel the pressure coming from her intensify. Although the pressure was not directed at him, he could still sense her power.

"Oh my, she's strong. The pressure is not even focused on me, and yet I feel threatened. I wonder what's her cultivation base." Lin Mu muttered with slight fear.

"Well, considering the aura she's exuding, there is no doubt that she is at the Peak stage of the core condensation realm." Xukong estimated.

Lin Mu had known that Duan Ke was a core condensation realm cultivator and had even fought with her before, but he was still shocked when her full power was revealed, albeit unwittingly.

"Heavens was I lucky winning against her back then!" Lin Mu thanked his fortune.

Lin Mu then witnessed drops of sweat appearing on the brows of the man who had just tried to flirt with Duan Ke. But even then, the smile on his face did not weaken one bit and instead became more wide.

"Hahaha, let's get down to business, shall we?" The man spoke, trying to defuse the situation he had created.

~Humph~

Duan Ke harrumphed in annoyance as she then withdrew her aura. The man wiped his forehead with his sleeve and then looked towards Jing Wei.

"Oh, Lady Duan Ke's grandfather is here as well? That's good, I have some special herbs that are useful for elderly men in regaining their vigor." The Man spoke.

Jing Wei who was calmly sipping his tea pretending to relax almost spit it out upon hearing the man's crass words.

Lin Mu heard the man's words but did not understand what he meant, thus did not react. But Duan Ke's expression eased up a little bit after that, which she quickly hid behind her cold facade again.

Jing Wei placed his teacup down and spoke, "yes, yes let's. Well then, what goods have you brought us today, Jingming Shang?"

"Oh? So his name is Jingming Shang..." Lin Mu repeated, memorizing it in the next second.

This man was the third person Lin Mu had met after Duan Ke and Hei Yingjie that was a core condensation realm cultivator, thus he wanted to remember his name in case it was needed in the future somehow.

Jingming Shang nodded in response to Jing Wei's words and spread his hands apart.

"Today... I have brought you a wide variety of goods, both material and immaterial." Jingming Shang said with a flourish.

Chapter 266 - Exchange Of Goods

Lin Mu was a bit surprised by the mannerisms of the man called Jingming Shang, but it seemed like the pair of grandfather and granddaughter, Jing Wei and Duan Ke were used to it. It was as if they had seen this many times before and were not bothered by it, even if the man did try to flirt with Duan Ke.

But from the previous interaction, Lin Mu could tell that this man Jingming Shang was not as strong as Duan Ke, who was at the peak stage of the Core condensation realm. But he did seem stronger than Hei Yingjie, or at least as strong as him.

'Hmm, so he's at least at the mid stage of the core condensation realm. I can't tell if that's good or not.' Lin Mu thought to himself.

"Alright, that's enough of your acts. We have a lot to do today. First of all, let us clear out the previous stock." Duan Ke suddenly said, not wanting to see more of Jingming Shang's dramatics.

"If lady Duan Ke says so..." Jingming Shang agreed and then took out a bracelet from his wrist.

The bracelet had been hidden under his sleeves, thus Lin Mu had not seen it. But now that he saw it, he could instantly tell that it was a spatial storage treasure. Duan Ke took the bracelet and went to the back room for a few minutes before returning with it.

She handed it back to Jingming Shang, who took it and closed his eyes for a minute before opening it. This time he had a new glint in his eyes, as if he had found something that he liked.

"Ahh, the goods this time are quite good. I even see a lot of spirit beast cores. Oh? And what's this... A core condensation realm beast core? That too one that awakened a bloodline ability, excellent!" Jingming Shang praised.

Lin Mu had not thought that the man was here to buy all the things that he had sold to Duan Ke before. He had thought that perhaps they were using it to make items of their own, but now it seemed to be unlikely.

"I have more, give me another spatial storage treasure. Or perhaps you can just carry them out yourself." Duan Ke spoke again.

"What is it? I hope it's as good as this." Jingming Shang asked.

"It is beast materials. Pelts, bones and components such as that." Duan Ke replied.

"Ah, that needs no spatial treasure. I'll get the servants to carry it out." Jingming Shang said.

"Alright, tell them to come in through the backyard's door. I'll put them there... there's a large quantity." Duan Ke said.

Jingming Shang had an intrigued look on his face, but he did not question Duan Ke. He simply went out for a few seconds and came back.

"They're entering the yard." He said.

"Good," Duan Ke said and secretly gestured with her hand. "The goods have already been put in the yard." She added.

Jingming Shang raised his brows in response and waited for his servants to report to him.

Lin Mu had seen what Duan Ke had done there. He had felt the formation array activate for a bit, and spatial fluctuations appeared. Another thing was that there was no entrance to a yard before and now that he observed with his spirit sense, there clearly was another door to the side of the building which was not there before.

"Seems like the work of the Myriad Armament Canopy Abode's formation array." Lin Mu inwardly muttered.

Five minutes later a knock was heard on the door of the shop and a middle aged man dressed in a steward's clothes walked in. The man cupped his hands in greetings to everyone in the room in a servile manner. Lin Mu could tell that the man was a servant and was a bit surprised as he could even feel spirit qi fluctuation from the man.

He curiously probed the man and discovered that the servant was an early stage qi refining realm cultivator.

"A cultivator as a servant?" Lin Mu muttered under his breath.

"This isn't unusual, you will see this a lot in the future. The weak will always be the servitude of the strong." Xukong stated.

Lin Mu nodded in understanding and looked back at the people.

"I have recorded all the goods, master." The servant said as he then handed a scroll to Jingming Shang.

Jingming Shang read through it and looked even more satisfied now.

"These are good." Jingming Shang said as he looked at Duan Ke, "you've outdone yourself."

Jingming Shang waved his hand, and the servant left the shop.

"Now then, what is it that you want to buy from me?" Jingming Shang questioned.

In response to his words, Duan Ke took out a jade slip and handed it to the man who read through it before nodding his head.

"Alright, I can get all of this." Jingming Shang replied.

Duan Ke then glanced briefly at Lin Mu before looking back at Jingming Shang.

"We need information on a few matters..." She uttered.

"Oh, what kind of information?" Jingming Shang asked, "and is it fine discussing it with someone else here?" He added.

"Yes, it is fine. He is partaking in the trade as well." Jing Wei was the one who spoke this time.

"If owner Jing Wei says so," Jingming Shang stated.

"We need the information of any nascent soul realm cultivators that have gotten heavily injured in the past year. And we also need the information of the Autumn valley sect." Duan Ke said in a calm tone.

Jingming Shang's expression straightened after hearing the question, and he fiddled with the fan in his hand.

"Surely lady Duan Ke knows that information like this cannot be revealed easily? The price will be high for sensitive matters such as those dealing with Nascent soul realm cultivators. As for the Autumn valley sect, Hmm... it shouldn't be a problem." Jingming Shang replied.

"The price is not a problem. All we need is the information." Duan Ke reiterated.

"The information I'm about to say is highly sensitive, I'm asking you again, are you sure it is fine with a fellow cultivator here?" Jingming Shang questioned again, this time with a serious face.

Chapter 267 - Sensitive Information

"Yes, it is indeed fine. You can say it." Duan Ke spoke in a cold tone.

~Sigh~

"Alright, listen carefully. In the past one year there have been five incidences where nascent soul realm cultivators have gotten injured.

Of these five incidences, the first was because of a mistake cause during cultivating by the nascent soul realm elder belonging to the Wind Zither sect.

The second and third nascent soul realm cultivation realm experts were injured in a friendly spar and belong to the centennial sword sect.

The fourth nascent soul realm expert is a wandering cultivator called the Swan Daoist. He tried to rob one of the convoys of the kingdom and was hunted down by the royal regiment, thus getting injured. We do not know his exact location but know that he was last seen in the Southern plains.

As for the final incident, this... was the hardest one to obtain. An elder of the Sky Precepts sect was fatally injured with his current condition unknown. But the rumors are that he has succumbed to his injuries." Jingming Shang revealed.

During the entire report, neither Jing Wei nor Duan Ke had much reaction, until when the last one was said.

"What? An elder of the sky precepts sect got fatally injured? But how?" Duan Ke asked in a shocked tone.

"I do not know. Even this bit of information cost me a lot to obtain." Jingming Shang replied.

"Hmm, do you know what peak he belonged to?" Jing Wei questioned.

"I... do not know for sure. But from the additional information I gathered, it seemed like there was a change in the populace of the Sky Catching peak." Jingming Shang said cryptically.

Jing Wei's eyes went wide, but he did not say anything. He had already understood what was to be understood from those words and knew that they were not to be stated outright.

The shop became silent for a minute after this as everyone started to comprehend the information that was just revealed. Lin Mu too was doing the same as he had learned quite a few new names this time.

Lin Mu had already known about the centennial sword sect and had also read up about them in the records he had obtained from Jing Wei before. He knew that the centennial sword sect was a sect full of cultivators that liked to battle and that they cultivated sword techniques.

It was common for the disciples to spar with each other and get injured. This time it was just that nascent soul realm cultivators were involved that's all.

Wind Zither sect was a new name that Lin Mu had heard, and he didn't know who they were. He quickly took a look through the records and found out who they were. The wind zither sect was a medium sized sect that was located in the western part of the Great Zhou Empire and was an average sect with nothing particular about them.

The Swan Daoist, this was the first wandering cultivator Lin Mu had heard about. There was no information recorded about him in the records, thus he couldn't do much about it.

But the final bit of informing that was said was also the most shocking one. The Sky precepts sect was the number one top sect of the Great Zhou Empire and was said to be equal if not above the emperor himself. Anything pertaining to them was taken with great importance, and it was thus quite surprising to hear that one of their elders was injured.

As for the Sky precepts sect, there wasn't much information about it in the records, except that it was one of the divisions of the Sky precepts sect.

'Hmm, this doesn't seem to give me much to go on with.' Lin Mu thought to himself.

~Clap~

Jingming Shang lightly clapped his hands to pull the attention and then spoke.

"Now then, about the Autumn Valley sect. There hasn't been much that has happened with them in the past few years, but recently a few of their disciples got into a scuffle with some disciples of an unknown sect. Nothing serious happened, and it was resolved at that time.

Though there was a rumor that someone from the Autumn valley sect was seen in the Wu Lim City."

"Oh, who was it that was seen? Was it a disciple or an elder?" Duan Ke asked.

"It was a core condensation realm cultivator, so it's likely that it was an elder of the Autumn valley sect. The sect only has one Nascent soul realm cultivator that is the sect head, so it's obvious that the core condensation realm cultivators are the elders.

As for their identity, we do not know what their name is, but we do know that it was a woman."

Jingming Shang replied.

Duan Ke nodded in response and then spoke, "that's all we needed. Tally the costs against the goods."

Jingming Shang closed his eyes for a few seconds before opening his eyes.

"Lady Duan Ke, the cost is slightly higher than the goods, but just for you, I'll give a discount. No need to pay the extra cost." Jingming Shaun spoke in the same flattering tone as before.

Duan Ke did not dignify the response with an expression and simply hummed in agreement. An awkward silence descended after this, which was forcibly broken by Jing Wei's cough.

"I guess, we are done here. Till next time, lady Duan Ke and owner Jing Wei." Jingming Shang hurriedly said before leaving the shop, but not before giving Lin Mu a slight look.

~Sigh~

A sigh escaped Duan Ke's lips as she rubbed her forehead as if she was about to have a headache.

"That man... he's strange." Lin Mu said with a wry smile.

"Strange is an understatement. If we were not forced because of our condition, I would have long since taught him a lesson. Ugh! I do not want to see him again. You should have never saved him before, grandfather," Duan Ke said with frustration.

Chapter 268 - Jingming Shang's Debt

Lin Mu didn't know what Duan Ke was talking about, thus he looked at her in confusion. It seemed like there was some past relationship between the two of them and the merchant Jingming Shang. He wondered what it could be as right now it definitely did not seem like Duan Ke liked the man.

Jing Wei noticed Lin Mu's inquiring look and knew that it didn't matter if he spoke about it. They had already been together in this for a while now and it seemed to him that it would be fine, revealing it to Lin Mu.

~Sigh~

"You know why I had to save him back then. We were in need and at that time he seemed to be the only choice. Plus, with us having saved him made Jingming Shang in our debt. Otherwise, our whereabouts would have long since been leaked if we dealt with any other merchants like him.

Although the man is a shrewd businessman, he still has a sense of honor and will follow through with his promise." Jing Wei said in a calm tone.

"If you say so, grandfather." Duan Ke said unwittingly.

Jing Wei looked at Lin Mu and spoke, "I know you want to ask something, go ahead it's fine."

"I just wanted to ask about Jingming Shang. From your words, it seemed like you saved him?" Lin Mu questioned.

"I did indeed. It was a few years ago, and we had been lacking a channel to sell and buy goods through. We couldn't use anything openly, as that would lead to our identity and location being leaked.

Back then we were traveling through the empire and encountered a group of people chasing a man who was none other than Jingming Shang.

He had apparently angered the wrong kind of people by taking over their profits, which led to them targeting him and hunting him down. We decided to lend him a helping hand and repelled his attackers. This led to him promising us a life debt.

Upon finding that he was a merchant, we decided on a deal. He will trade with us while keeping our identity secret. While he does not know who we really are, he still doesn't reveal our location to others." Jing Wei answered.

"I see..." Lin Mu nodded in response.

'Seems like I wasn't the first person they've helped until now.' Lin Mu thought to himself.

~Ahem~

Duan Ke lightly coughed, bringing their attention back to the matter on hand.

"It does not seem like we have anything concrete yet, in terms of a suspect. Although the most likely one is probably a wandering cultivator like we previously thought." Duan Ke spoke.

"Wait a minute, wasn't the elder from the Sky precepts sect also injured. Can it be possible that it was them?" Lin Mu interrupted.

"No, that elder was from the Star catching peak, so it is not possible." Jing Wei replied.

"Why is it impossible? What's the thing with the Start Catching peak?" Lin Mu questioned.

~Huu~

Jing Wei took a deep breath before speaking.

"The Star catching peak is a special existence in the Sky precepts sect. Even in the other top sects, its reputation is known.

They are unlike the other peaks and divisions of the sect. All they deal with is the Star catching formation array. This is a special formation that can monitor and interact with the World's barrier. It can also sense spatial disturbances and fluctuations that happen all around the Great Zhou continent.

All the members of that peak are involved in this and seldom leave the peak, not to mention the sect. There is no chance that they fought with the dead cultivator. Besides, their specialization is in formations and not in combat." Jing Wei explained.

Lin Mu was intrigued by this information, but not for long since Xukong suddenly spoke up in Lin Mu's mind.

"The Star Catching formation array!? What? In a world such as this too..." Xukong uttered with surprise.

"What's the problem senior?" Lin Mu asked with concern.

"I'll explain to you later, after you leave this place. But know this, we may have to do some changes soon." Xukong said mysteriously.

Lin Mu silently hummed in response and did not probe further. He knew that if Senior Xukong had acted like this, there was bound to be something very important that should not be discussed here.

"Alright then, seeing that we can't come to a conclusion right now, I guess it's better to leave it. Perhaps you can find out more about it later on?" Lin Mu spoke, wanting to end the conversation.

"Yes, we will do that. As for the damaged ring, you can leave it with me. I'll inform you on the communication jade, if anything comes up, or if the ring is repaired." Jing Wei replied.

Lin Mu cupped his hand to thank them before leaving the shop and heading towards his house.

Once Lin Mu was gone, Duan Ke looked at her grandfather with a slightly confused look.

"Is it just me or does it seem like he wanted to leave rather urgently? He would usually ask a few more questions considering his past behavior." Duan Ke said.

"Hmm, it does seem like it. But still, we could be wrong. That boy is progressing fast and I do not know how far he can go. There is certainly a great drive in him, and he's bound to have goals of his own. After all, the world's will would not just ordain anyone average." Jing Wei replied in a calm voice.

Back at the house, Lin Mu had just entered the bedroom and was immediately greeted by the Brown Shrubby Forest Cat.

~Nyaa~

Lin Mu kneeled down and petted the head of the beast gently.

"Are you hungry?" Lin Mu asked.

"Hungry" Lin Mu felt in his mind.

"Alright, let's go make something. It will be time for dinner soon, anyway." Lin Mu replied before going towards the kitchen.

There he set up some meat to cook while he looked at the Brown Shrubby Forest Cat.

"Hmm, I should give you a name now, shouldn't I?"

Chapter 269 - Little Shrubby

Lin Mu thought over a name while eating the meat that he had just cooked. The Brown Shrubby Forest cat was also accompanying him in dinner as it ate his own share. Unsurprisingly, the beast was still eating the same amount as before and there was no change in it like Lin Mu's appetite, which was still growing.

"Hmm... That's it, I got it!" Lin Mu exclaimed, surprising the Brown Shrubby Forest Cat.

Lin Mu looked at the beast and petted its head while he said, "Your name from now on will be Little Shrubby."

The beast looked at Lin Mu with confusion, and he then communicated with it using his connection.

~Nyaa~

The beast purred in acknowledgment and accepted the new name that was given to it. Lin Mu once again felt a bit proud about his naming sense as he saw the beast liking its new name. While Xukong simply ignored it and focused on his own cultivation.

After being done with his meal he assimilated the vital energy and checked his progress in the Body tempering realm cultivation, only to find no difference than before.

"Hmm, the progress is getting slower and slower. The last time I had any major progress was when I ate the meat of the Alpha steel back wolf, which was a core condensation realm beast. How long will I need to see more progress, or do I need to get more Core condensation realm beast meat?" Lin Mu muttered to himself.

He pondered on the possibility of getting core condensation realm beast and realized that it would be relatively difficult to obtain it. Although he may not have as much problem in finding one, killing it would become a problem if it was at the late stage of the core condensation realm or above. Not to mention that he would have to travel quite deep into the forest in order to encounter beasts that strong now that it was spring time.

~Sigh~

"Seems like I'll have to just keep on eating the spirit beast meat. My appetite is increasing more and more anyway, I may as well just compensated quality with quantity." Lin Mu spoke in a helpless tone.

"You know, if you want the meat of a core condensation realm creature, the beasts are not the only source." Xukong suddenly spoke, seeing Lin Mu's frustration.

"Oh, what other option do I have senior?" Lin Mu asked curiously.

"Technically meat is meat the only thing that matters is the cultivation base of the creature that the meat belonged to. There is a much closer source of Core condensation realm meat near you. You can... simply eat the other cultivators." Xukong spoke in a disturbingly calm tone.

Lin Mu was shocked silent and did not know how to respond to this. Frankly, the idea had never even come close to what he had thought. On an innate level, Lin Mu felt an utter revulsion to the idea of eating another human.

He was about to protest to senior Xukong when he suddenly remembered, Xukong was not a human... he was a beast. What right did he have to tell him that he did not find it correct, when humans ate beasts all the time and beasts did the same to humans?

At least in that aspect the beasts ate other beasts and did not think much of it... at least the ones that had a higher capacity for thinking. It was not as if beasts were completely unintelligent either. Most, if not all beasts would start to gain intelligence and wisdom as their cultivation base grew. They would eventually become just as intelligent as humans or even go beyond that.

Lin Mu did not reply to Senior Xukong in the end and simply took his words as it is without a comment.

Lin Mu did not know, but today another small thing had changed in him, a change that while small right now, would one day become a mountain.

He then stood up and returned to the bedroom to continue cultivating with Little Shrubby accompanying him. Now he was about to do something that he had been really excited about. The eleven Duan Circle Ascension fruits that he had obtained, he could finally eat them.

Lin Mu withdrew one of them from the ring and looked at it. The fruits were orange colored and were oval shaped. Thin veins were visible on its surface that spread all around the fruit, making it look attractive. Though Lin Mu did not know what they would taste like.

He only hoped that this would not be like his past experience when he ate the purple grape sized spirit fruit.

"Only one way to find out..." Lin Mu muttered as he then popped the Duan Circle Ascension fruit into his mouth.

Nothing happened when the fruit touched his tongue, but when he bit into it a sweet juice burst into his mouth that was quite delicious. Lin Mu chewed a couple of times while enjoying the taste of the fruit before swallowing it down to his stomach.

He now braced himself for any change that may occur, as he was still a bit scared from his previous experience. But surprisingly, no such change happened. Instead, Lin Mu only felt a small wave of energy travel from his stomach to all parts of his body before disappearing.

"Huh, that's it?" Lin Mu said feeling confused.

He used his spirit sense to observe his body, but he couldn't really see anything different in it. His meridians and dantian also seemed to be the same as before, and there was no change in them.

"You should check if you've had an improvement in your cultivation speed," Xukong suggested.

Lin Mu nodded in response before starting to chant the severing heart sutra. His mind stilled, as the spirit qi in the air around him became visible to him. He circulated the spirit qi within his body as he had always done and started absorbing the spirit qi from the air.

Chapter 270 - Eating The Dual Circle Ascension Fruits

The spirit qi wisps entered the pores in his skin and then moved to his meridians before being deposited into the dantian. At first, Lin Mu could not sense anything new, but after a little while, he finally found it.

The reason why he had not been able to see the change inside his body was because it was not there at all. Instead, the change was in the pores of his skin from where the spirit qi was absorbed. Lin Mu could barely tell that they seemed to have expanded more than before.

The expansion was small, yet the change was still there. Lin Mu cultivated for an hour to get a good grasp on how much his pace increased and came to the conclusion that it had increased by about one percent.

~Huu~

Lin Mu let out a breath as he stopped cultivating.

'Hmm, it's a rather small change. But no worries, I still have more Dual Circle Ascension fruits left.' Lin Mu thought to himself.

"Don't think that this is insufficient. Even a single percent increase that occurs in an instant like this is great. You don't know how much cultivators would sacrifice to have even one tenth of such an increase." Xukong spoke.

"I understand, Senior." Lin Mu replied before talking out another Dual Circle Ascension fruit.

He popped it into his mouth and enjoyed the taste, after which he swallowed it. Similar to before, Lin Mu couldn't observe any change in his body. He tried absorbing the spirit qi again and discovered that his speed had increased by another percent.

Lin Mu observed his pores and saw that they had expanded slightly more than before.

"Hmm, if all of those fruits work, then my speed will increase by about eleven percent, hopefully." Lin Mu said to himself before taking out all of the Dual Circle Ascension fruit and placing them in front of him.

But when he did this, Lin Mu saw that Little Shrubby had woken up and was looking at them with longing. It was apparent that the beast wanted to eat the fruits too, but Lin Mu was reluctant to offer them to him.

"You will soon see the effect of the Dual Circle Ascension fruit decreasing, so you will have a few fruits left over. You can give those to Little Shrubby, they will be quite useful to him and should increase its intelligence and cultivation speed." Xukong said.

Lin Mu nodded in response and ate another Dual Circle Ascension fruit. After eating it, he tried to see how much of an increase there was and discovered that it was less than before. Unlike the last two times when his speed had increased by one percent, this time it was less than that.

"Looks like it's already happening... No matter, I'll continue." Lin Mu stated to himself with determination.

He ate the fourth fruit and finally saw his speed increase by another percent, reaching a total of three percent since the start.

"Finally, so the effect is there, but it's a fraction of what it was before." Lin Mu muttered with a little satisfaction.

He then ate the fifth fruit and in a little surprise to him, his speed jumped a little more to about four percent of the original.

"Alright, that's good." Lin Mu muttered as he picked up the next fruit.

Upon eating it, there was a minute increase as expected.

~Sigh~

Lin Mu sighed a little in disappointment before eating the sixth fruit. This time he didn't sense an increase right away, but after a minute it slowly seemed to increase and finally reached to about five percent of the original speed.

"Damn, seems like this is the most it can get. Still, I want to try one more time. If it doesn't have any increase, then I'll stop." Lin Mu spoke.

He then picked up the seventh fruit and stared at it for a few seconds. Each and every Dual Circle Ascension fruit was quite precious, and if Lin Mu ever sold them, they would probably fetch a great price. Thus every Dual Circle Ascension fruit that he ate that had no effect on him was a wasted one.

Lin Mu gritted his teeth and threw the seventh Dual Circle Ascension fruit into his mouth and chewed it quickly before swallowing it. He held his breath in anticipation and waited for any effects.

Unfortunately, even after a while no effects were seen, and it looked like he had reached his limit.

~Sigh~

"Seems like this is it. Still, I guess a five percent increase should still help me quite a bit." Lin Mu said, trying to perk himself up.

Little Shrubby was looking at Lin Mu as he ate every Dual Circle Ascension fruit and slight drool had started to drip from the corner of its mouth. It licked it away every few seconds, but it only kept on coming.

~Chuckle~

Lin Mu lightly laughed as he saw the funny situation of Little Shrubby.

"Here you go, you eat this." Lin Mu said, as he offered little shrubby a Dual Circle Ascension fruit.

Lin Mu didn't know how many fruits it would take for little shrubby to reach its limits, thus he wanted to be a bit prudent.

"The fruits should be a bit more effective on little shrubby, as it is at a lower cultivation base than you. Not to mention that it will still have an effect on its intelligence even if it stops increasing its aptitude." Xukong explained.

"I understand, senior." Lin Mu replied before watching little Shrubby eat the small fruit.

Unlike him, who was able to eat the entire Dual Circle Ascension fruit in one go, it took Little Shrubby a few bites to finish it. But after eating it, the effect was much more pronounced than it was with Lin Mu.

While the change was invisible to the naked eyes, Lin Mu could still sense the spirit qi in the air moving towards Little Shrubby. The Dual Circle Ascension fruit had already taken effect.