

Chapter 57- Betrothal

Li Yuan woke and grimaced as he felt the faint throbbing in his head. He squinted his eyes and gazed up at the Ice ceiling above him, and instantly recognised it as his own bedroom.

He blindly reached for the other side of bed and felt disappointed when he found nobody there. Zi Mo must be out somewhere.

His eyes finally opened properly and he clutched his head before looking around, the memories slowly coming back to him. The Golden Core Ascension, the Mountain Avalanche, the Ice Wyrms, and that bastard Chu Tianming.

Dead bastard now... heh.

Then, he blinked as he saw someone from the corner of his eyes. For a moment, his gaze almost slid over her, so still she was. But then, awareness caught up to his and eyes focused on her.

Ning Renxue. Zi Mo's Junior Sister. And the one whose actions led to that entire battle. 'If only she had listened and been more patient.' He thought. But really, there was no point in crying over spilled milk.

That same girl was now sitting by the side of his bed. Her posture was perfect, her hands folded neatly over her lap, and her gaze was fixed on him with an intensity that found unnerving. There was also the robes she was wearing. It was not the typical robes of the Snow Sect disciples but a maid outfit similar to the ones worn by the Servant disciples of the sect.

He blinked at that... then shrugged. He wasn't about to question someone's else fetish. Though he was definitely about to question what she was doing in his bedroom.

But before he could do that, she realised that he was awake and rose to her feet in a smooth motion that made Zi Mo seem ungraceful in comparison. Then, she bowed. Deeply.

“Senior Brother Li Yuan,” she said, “thank you for saving my life. Without you, I would not have survived my tribulation.”

Li Yuan blinked. Well, she wasn't wrong there. But she was Zi Mo's junior sister, and like a daughter to her, so it's not like he could stand by and do nothing as she fails her tribulation and dies.

“...okay.” He said, and then paused as she remained bowed. Waiting. What was she waiting for? Li Yuan pushed himself up slightly, wincing as the movement sent another dull pulse through his skull. “You can—uh... you can get up.”

She did so immediately. Her back straightened up and her hands went back to being folded in front of her. She was focused on him but her eyes were lowered, just slightly.

‘Damn. She’s really got this maid persona down perfectly.’ He thought, giving her a mental thumbs up.

But then she continued looking at him, with that lowered gaze of hers and he suddenly started feeling uncomfortable. Was he supposed to say something else?

“Um... don’t worry about it.” He said finally. “With how close you and Zi Mo are, I couldn’t exactly do nothing.”

The girl paused, then shook her head. “Perhaps. But... even so,” she said quietly, “this life belongs to you now.”

The words were spoken so calmly and as a matter of fact that he almost didn’t register them at first. Until he suddenly did.

Li Yuan’s hand stopped mid-motion. “...what?”

He looked at her again, properly this time. The same calm expression and steady tone with no irony. Was she... actually being serious?

“...right,” he muttered. “We’re not doing that. I’m not interested in your life, or whatever you have to offer.”

A faint crease appeared between her brows. As if she was genuinely confused by his reaction and couldn’t understand why he wouldn’t accept her lifelong service.

Yeah. Definitely some kind of trauma there. Either that, or she’s really, really into that maid role-play of hers. He really hoped it was the later case, even though he was beginning to suspect otherwise.

“Where’s Zi Mo?” he asked finally, if only to distract himself from the strangeness of the situation.

“Senior Sister Zi Mo has left the peak,” Ning Renxue replied.

Li Yuan frowned slightly. Figures. “For what?” He asked.

“I do not know the specifics,” she said. “But she departed alongside several elders under orders from Peak Master Wu Yuechan.”

He leaned back slightly, exhaling as another dull throb passed through his head. His fingers pressed against his temple again and he

noticed that the pain hadn't faded. If anything, the pain felt... strange. Uneven in a way he couldn't quite point out. Then he remembered.

'...oh yeah. I cut my mind in half during that battle with Chu Tianming. And then over used one side to watch many, many battle simulations.'

It suddenly made sense why one side of his brain was hurting so much while the other side was relatively fine. If anything, he should be grateful that he's still able to think properly after that reckless move.

"Are you experience discomfort?" Ning Renxue suddenly asked.

"Yeah," he admitted. "My head's a mess. But I'll be fine."

"You should be. I've already treated the damage to your mind. You'll still suffer some pain and discomfort for a few days but it should be fine afterward." Ring Renxue said.

Li Yuan blinked. "...you what? You're a healer?"

Ning Renxue nodded. "My Special Physique gives me a deeper insight on Mind and Soul... as well as minor healing abilities. With that said, please... do not repeat such actions again, brother Li Yuan"

“Thanks...” he said. “I’ll try not to.”

Ning Renxue nodded back, but her expression didn’t change even as something in her posture shifted. As if she wanted something else from him.

It was enough to make him feel uncomfortable.

Oh how he wished he had a technique right that allowed him to read minds. Then he would at least know what she wanted from him.

The two of them stared at each other for a moment, Ning Renxue’s eyes lowered submissively in a way that really made him rethink his decision to refuse her lifelong service.

Then, his stomach suddenly made a growling noise and his cheeks turned red. But this was the perfect excuse to get away from her.

“Can you bring me some food?” He asked. “I’m famished.”

Her posture shifted—just slightly. Like something inside her had clicked into place. “In a moment, brother Li Yuan.” She said and gracefully turned and left the room.

Only once he was sure that she'd left his house did he finally relax and lean back on the bed. 'So that was Ning Renxue.' He thought. 'Yeah... something's definitely wrong with her.'

Then, his gaze wandered lazily across the room... until he noticed something and stopped. Placed upon a bedside table was a spatial ring with a folded note. He reached out and picked it up.

The moment he saw the handwriting within the note, he recognised it as Zi Mo's. He read the contents and a smile formed on his face.

"How thoughtful of her." He said, his gaze shifting toward his Spatial ring. He sent his Qi inside, and felt the giant corpses of the three Ice Wyrms placed within.

Li Yuan chuckled, and the next moment, his figure flickered and vanished. The world shifted and he appeared within his Ancient Spatial Ring.

Without wasting time, Li Yuan stepped forward and summoned the Stele. And in quick succession, he dragged out the first Ice Wurm and fed it to the stele. Then, the second, and the third. And finally... Chu Tianming, or what remained of him, was fed to the Stele as well.

And then...

Points: 118,946

Li Yuan's eyes sharpened and his heart skipped a beat as he such a large number for the first time in his life. A slow grin spread across his face. "That's more like it."

And then, he sat down and immediately begin to upgrade skill after skill, intending to upgrade all the skills to their max. By the time, he stopped, his Status Panel had changed to something like this:

NAME: Li Yuan

AGE: 15

CULTIVATION: Peak of Qi Condensation

SKILLS

Heavenly Star Refining Sutra — 8000/8000 (Complete Perfection)

Mountain-Splitting Stillness Sword – 600/600 (Complete Perfection)

Shadow-Cloud Steps – 800/800 (Complete Perfection)

Veil of Borrowed Heaven – 2400/2400 (Complete Perfection)

Spirit Residue Following Technique – 1000/1000(Complete Perfection)

Yang Flame Restoration — 2400/2400 (Complete Perfection)

2nd-Tier Formation Breaking — 1600/1600 (Complete Perfection)

2nd-Tier Formation Crafting — 1600/1600 (Complete Perfection)

2nd-Tier Spirit Herb Cultivation – 1600/1600 (Complete Perfection)

Infinite Micro Slash Domain Art — 6000/6000 (Compete Perfection)

2nd-tier Alchemy — 1600/1600 (Complete Perfection)

Heaven-Breaking Titan Body Scripture — 20,000/20,000 (Complete Perfection)

POINTS: 99,728

By the time he finished, his migraine had worsened, but there was a huge smile on his face. The Perfectionist within him couldn't stop jumping around in joy.

And then a warm trickle of blood flew down from his nose and he grimaced.

'Yeah. Maybe I shouldn't celebrate so early.' He thought as he wiped his nose and was about to return back to his house when he noticed something.

Chu Tianming's belongings.

He bent down and started perusing through his Spatial ring. And while he found quite a few valuable items inside, including 100,000 spirit stones, and 5 times that much value in other items, none of them interested him as much as the item that had nearly killed him.

The flute.

Li Yuan carefully reached for the item before he paused. Then, he threw a piece of cloth over the item and wrapped it around properly before securing it within a Jade box.

Yup. Not touching it until he could find what it did. For all he knew, the flute tended to suck out the soul of all the cultivators who touched it and weren't its owner.

With that, he stepped out of the Ancient Spatial Ring, and paused as he found Ning Renxue standing exactly where she'd been before she left. Except now, she held a tray of steaming food.

His brows lifted slightly. "...you're fast. No, there's no way you could've gone down to the city to get that." He eyed the tray, then her. "You made that, didn't you?"

Ning Renxue nodded as if it was the most natural thing in the world. Except it was not.

He was pretty sure Zi Mo didn't even know what a kitchen looked like. Hell, the original Li Yuan hadn't known either. In the world of cultivation, most such mundane tasks were left over for the mortals.

The only reason why Ning Renxue could've learned how to cook was if she came from a really poor family. Which explained some of her submissive tendencies, but not all of them.

“Thanks.” He said as he took the plate and started eating. Then immediately paused. Not because of the food, but because of Ning Renxue, who was still standing there, unmoving and watching him as she did while he was asleep.

He side-eyed her. “...you don't have to stand there.”

Ning Renxue tilted her head. “Is the food... not to your liking?”

“It is, but that's not what I—” Li trailed off mid-sentence as it clicked for him. Was that why she was waiting for. Approval? The realisation sat poorly with him.

What kind of life do you have to live to reach the Golden Core realm and still act like this.

“...it's fine,” he said after a moment. “Good, actually.”

Her posture shifted, just a fraction. As if something inside her had finally settled. Li Yuan looked away.

‘...yeah. I don’t like this one bit.’

He took another bite. And then— “Why didn’t you wait?” He asked. The question escaping his lips before he could stop himself.

But if Ning Renxue was so submissive and hungry for approval, then why didn’t she wait when Zi Mo told her to. If he had seen her halo before she started the process, then none of this would’ve happened.

Ning Renxue didn’t answer immediately. Her gaze drifted slightly, somewhere into the distance. Then...

“If I waited,” she said quietly, “I would have continued waiting.”

Li Yuan frowned. ‘What’s that even supposed to mean?’

He gazed at her, wondering if she would explain but she didn’t elaborate. She just stood there. Though he noticed that something about her had changed, even if he couldn’t quite put a finger on what exactly that change was.

It was as if the rigid ‘maid’ facade of her had finally cracked, just a little.

He gazed at her for another moment and then went back to eating, grimacing slightly as the migraine in his head continued to worsen.

‘I shouldn’t have added those points while I’m still recovering.’ He thought as the headache began to worsen until it felt like someone was taking a nail and hammer to his head. And then...

The world split and his vision doubled.

His hand missed, the tray slipped and the world tilted. “—shit—” He mumbled faintly as he fell off the bed... on his way to faceplant on the floor...

Until someone caught him.

Li Yuan blinked, and with his two disorienting gazes, saw Ning Renxue holding onto him with one arm while the other steadied the tray. Then, from behind her emerged two white wings that filled the room with their radiance.

A gentle warmth washed over him, and the migraine in his head slowly started to fade until... his gaze snapped back to one, and the vertigo vanished.

Li Yuan exhaled sharply and looked at Ning Renxue who was still holding onto him. It was only now did he realise how close they were. He pulled back and sat up in the bed once again, his migraine now having been lowered to a dull throb.

Ning Renxue's wings vanished as she placed the tray back on his lap, otherwise showing no emotional reaction to what just happened.

"Your mind has not fully recovered," she said calmly. "Please do not overexert yourself."

"...yeah," he muttered. "Got that."

With that, he returned to eating his meal. Until suddenly, a heavy pressure descended upon his house. It wasn't oppressive and receded as quickly as it had arrived. More like somebody announcing their presence than someone trying to threaten him.

Ning Renxue turned her head slightly toward the door, as if recognising that aura. "...Senior Sister Xue Shiyu." She muttered.

Li Yuan frowned. "...who?"

"The second strongest cultivator on Snow Peak." Ning Renxue replied. "Second only to the Peak Mistress."

That got his attention and he placed the tray aside from standing. Slowly this time, in case the dizziness returned. It didn't and he sighed in relief.

“Guess I'm popular today.” He muttered and stepped out of the bedroom, Ning Renxue quietly following behind him as he walked to the living room and opened the front door. And paused.

Four foxes waited outside for him. They were massive. Each one as large as his house. Their bodies were covered in thick, ice-blue fur, their breath misting in the air. Their sharp fangs and the fur around their mouth were stained red with fresh blood. And so were their claws.

He wasn't quite sure about their species, but the power they radiated was that of 3rd Grade beasts. All four of them. Three of them were at the early stage, while one stood at the Peak. And he would've gotten ready to fight, if not for two things.

The three Early-stage beasts were playing around in his courtyard. And while the Peak-stage beast kept standing there, its gaze trained on him, there was a woman sitting atop its back. One wearing the white robes of a Snow Peak elder.

Xue Shiyu, if Ning Renxue was right.

Her presence was... still. Unlike the Spirit beasts, he couldn't tell anything about her. As if she were a mere mortal. Her gaze was also trained upon him, and her expression as flat and completely unreadable.

Despite all that, when he looked at her, he felt like he was looking at a sword. As if her mere gaze was enough to cut him to pieces. Even the sword peak elder he'd met never gave him such a feeling.

Oh, and there was also a massive sword floating beside her. Sheathed, and nearly ten feet long. Humming faintly with restrained power which told him that it could cut apart any ordinary 3rd Grade Defensive artefact like hot tofu.

'So cool.' He thought.

"The Snow Peak Mistress has summoned you."

Li Yuan blinked.

The voice hadn't come from Xue Shiyu but the fox beneath her. He stared at it for a second in complete disbelief. He'd heard that spirit beasts could start speaking once they grew strong enough. And eventually even gain the ability to shape shift into humans. But this was the first time he was personally witnessing it for himself.

“...right.” He said, nodding.

Xue Shiyu didn't respond or otherwise do anything else to acknowledge him. With a small movement from her knee, the fox turned and flew off, the massive sword gliding alongside her while the three others quickly noticed her departure and followed as well.

Li Yuan watched them go. Then exhaled. 'So cool.' He thought again. 'I need a sword like that for myself. And a few Spirit beasts as well. Maybe a noodle dragon.'

Then, he paused as he recalled why she had come here in the first place. The Peak Mistress had summoned him. He wondered what that was about.

“You wait for me here.” He told Ning Renxue before he climbed atop his flying sword and followed behind Xue Shiyu.

It didn't take long before he arrived at the Ice Palace and felt a chill go down his spine due to the unnerving cold that surrounded this place.

He noticed at once that mist that was once contained to the far back of the Ice Palace, now completely surrounded it. He landed some distance from the Ice Palace and glanced at Xue Shiyu but she didn't even look at him, let alone give him an explanation to what was going on.

Feeling the cold, he took out the bracelet Zi Mo had given him and wore it along his wrist. The cold immediately receded to a manageable level.

A moment later, the Mists vibrated, doing so much more violently than he'd ever seen before and a voice emerged. "YOU'RE HERE."

He immediately clutched onto his ears and felt his migraine return once again. It felt like the voice coming from the mist alone was powerful enough to vibrate him to death, or break his mind and destroy his soul.

'Is this what happens when the Peak Mistress isn't controlling her bloodline?' He wondered, and with that came another question. 'What happened for her to lose control over her power like this?'

A moment later, the Peak 3rd Grade fox walked beside him and let out a icy breath that formed a defensive curtain around all of them.

"Thanks." He murmured before turning to gaze at the mist enveloping the entire ice palace. "You summoned me, Peak Mistress?"

"YES." The voice resonated loudly once again, enough to vibrate the ground but the Ice curtain protected him from any further

migraine. “YOU STOPPED THE INTERFERENCE FROM HARMING NING RENXUE. FOR THAT, YOU SHALL BE REWARDED.”

“That’s really not...” He trailed off as a spatial ring flew in from within the Ice Palace and stopped to float in front of him. “... necessary.” He finished unnecessarily.

He accepted the spatial ring and glanced inside it, his breath hitching as he sensed over two hundred Top-grade Spirit Stones placed within it. That’s two million Low-grade Spirit Stones right there.

He gulped. “Thank you, Peak Mistress.” He said, with a bow.

“DO NOT THANK ME. I NEED YOU TO SHOULDER A BURDEN FOR THE PEAK.”

He suddenly wanted to return the spatial ring back to its owner. Instead, he simply nodded. “What burden?”

“IN THE THREE DAYS WHILE YOU WERE ASLEEP, THE SITUATION WITHIN THE SECT HAS CHANGED.” The mists spoke, and he blinked. What? He’d been asleep for three whole days? Why didn’t Ning Renxue tell him?

“Changed how?” He asked.

“THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SNOW PEAK AND THE MAIN PEAK, AS WELL AS THE BEAST PEAK HAS DETERIORATED.” The mists replied.

“The main peak... I could understand.” He said, after all, Chu Tianming was the sect leader’s son, banished or not. “But why the Beast Peak?”

“THE ICE WYRMS YOU KILLED BELONGED TO AN INFLUENTIAL ELDER FROM THE BEAST PEAK.” The mist replied. “THE ELDER, HER FAMILY, AND HER ENTIRE LINE OF DESCENDANTS HAS NOW BEEN ERASED BY ME. SOME OF THE BEAST PEAK ELDERS TRIED TO PROTEST, AND NOW, THE BEAST PEAK ONLY HAS TWO THIRD OF ITS ORIGINAL STRENGTH. THE MAIN PEAK HAS ALSO SUFFERED SIMILAR LOSSES.”

He blinked incredulously and ran his fingers through his hair.

“So... the sect went through a mini civil war in the past few days. One that I completely slept through.” He muttered in disbelief. “Yeah. Makes perfect sense.”

“You joke, child, but the sect is indeed at the verge of a civil war.” The Peak-stage Spirit Beast spoke up, making him flinch in surprise.

Yeah, he still wasn’t used to the talking murder fox.

“So... do you want me to be ready to join the fight or what?”

“NO. I WANT YOU TO RESOLVE IT.”

Yeah... really not liking where this was going. “How? By singing them. I admit I have a decent voice but it’s not really all that–”

“YOU’LL BE BETROTHED TO THE SECT LEADER’S DAUGHTER.”

“...excuse me?”

The mist remained silent, so he turned to the murder fox who sighed, releasing a puff of cold air. “Despite the situation, neither the Peak Mistress, nor the Sect Leader wants to go to war. And in order to resolve the tension, a member of the Snow Peak will be betrothed to a member of the Main Peak.”

“What about the Beast Peak?” He asked. After all, hadn’t their peak destroyed 1/3rd of their strength as well.

“What about them?” The murder fox asked, as if completely uncaring for the Beast Peak which... yeah... it kinda made sense.

After all, it's not like the Beast Peak has any Nascent Soul cultivator. Meaning, they were in no position to demand anything from the Snow Peak.

This once again reminded him of just how important strength was in this world.

“So... yeah. This sect leader's daughter. She won't happen to be the same girl who was previously betrothed to Xu Chen, right?”

The air suddenly turned even colder and he could see his Defensive arm band heating up. ‘Oh, shit, did I say something bad?’ He wondered.

“Don't mention that boy's name in front of the Peak Mistress.” The murder fox said in a hushed whisper, and the cold slowly begin to recede little by little.

For a moment after that, there was silence. Then, he spoke up. “So... about that girl?”

“Yeah. It's the same girl who was betrothed to that boy.” The murder fox replied.

“The same girl who humiliated him in front of everyone when he lost his cultivation.” He said, grimacing. “Forgive me if I'm not bursting

with joy at the prospect of being betrothed to a girl like... that. Besides, does Zi Mo knows you're doing this."

"ZI MO KNOWS." The mists spoke up once again. "BESIDES, YOU DON'T HAVE TO MARRY. ONLY BE BETROTHED TO HER IN ORDER TO MAINTAIN THE PEACE. NO ONE WILL FORCE YOU TWO TO MARRY."

"I didn't think anyone would either, until you actually said it. Now I'm not longer sure." He replied.

"Listen boy, it's either you or one of the girls within the Snow Peak." The murder fox whispered. "The Peak Mistress doesn't want this either. But she won't force one of the girls into a situation where they might be put into unnecessary danger of losing their special physique. So, it's either this, or it's civil war."

He closed his eyes and exhaled a heavy breath. "Of course it would be a situation like this. Why can't life ever be simple." He said and then opened his eyes, gazing at the mist once again. "Very well. I accept. I'll do this."

"YOU'LL FAIRLY COMPENSATED FOR THIS. THIS I PROMISE."

He shook his head. "There's no need. The Snow Peak is now my home as well. And you've given me a lot already. This is the least I

could do to protect my home. Especially if it's just a betrothal and not an actual marriage.”

The mists were silent at his reply and when no further voice came, he finally turned to the murder fox. “Was there anything else?”

“No. That was all. You may leave now.” The murder fox replied, and he nodded.

With one last bow to the Ice Palace, he climbed his flying sword and flew off. Contemplating this sudden turn of events.

Chapter 58- Peaceful day

A month had passed.

A month since. Ning Renxue faced her Tribulation. A month since he fought and killed Chu Tianming. A month since he was betrothed to the Sect Leader's daughter. Admittedly, he still didn't know what was going on with the entire betrothal thing as he'd yet to meet the girl even once. But it was something he was completely fine with.

Now, Li Yuan stood at the centre of one of his Herb cultivating formations, fingers brushing lightly against a cluster of pale-blue leaves. The herb pulsed once, softly, before he withdrew his hand.

“Not yet,” he muttered. “Another two weeks before this one is ready.”

“How do you even know? You only touched the herb once.” Rou Lin pointed out, having become more incredulous the more she saw him working with plants.

“Because I'm 'that' guy.” He said teasingly.

“What’s that even supposed to mean!?” Rou Lin exclaimed before she walked off, much to the silent amusement of Zi Mo and Ning Renxue who had joined them in harvesting these Yin Herbs for sale in an upcoming Auction.

With that said, the only one who was actually working here was him. And Zi Mo and Rou Lin were merely there to offer their moral support, while looking equally confused about how he’s so good with plants.

Rou Lin was half convinced that he had some sort of special physique regarding plants. When in truth, the Tier 2 Mastery of Herb Cultivation merely gave him the mental experience of having worked with Spirit Herbs for over a century.

Ning Renxue was probably the only one out of the bunch who was actually serious about learning from him and not merely there to offer moral support while he did all the work.

“Senior Brother,” Ning Renxue spoke softly, her gaze shifting to the patch he had just inspected. “This one’s Yin concentration has stabilised. Should it be harvested now?”

Li Yuan didn’t turn and instead gestured lightly. “No. You’re looking at surface density. Check the root Qi flow.”

She paused and then crouched, uncaring of whether her robe would get dirty from the dirt. Her fingers moved with careful precision, parting the soil just enough to reveal the faint threads of energy beneath. She studied it carefully for a moment.

“...it’s still cycling,” she said.

“Exactly.”

Li Yuan finally glanced at her, a faint nod of approval slipping through. “Harvest now and you’ll lose thirty percent potency from the spirit herb. Worse, it’ll effect the next growth cycle of this spirit herb.”

Ning Renxue nodded once and then straightened up, continuing to follow him like an obedient student, learning everything he taught her.

Anyone else in the sect would be shocked upon seeing a Golden Core elder being so obedient to a Qi Condensation disciple. But he wasn’t quite sure if Ning Renxue even realised that she was now a Golden Core cultivator. Or maybe that’s just her submissive personality at work.

Living as a slave for the good first half of your life would do that to you.

It was something Zi Mo had told him. If not for Ning Renxue's master growing old and deciding to sell her off in an auction, then she might never have entered the sight of one of Snow Peak's cultivator who quickly saw through her cultivation potential as well as her special physique and bought her.

The thought of Ning Renxue having lived so long as a slave still upsets him sometimes. But slavery was a thing that existed throughout the entire empire, so he couldn't really do anything about it. At least not now.

Instead, he took a deep breath and focused back on his work. Straightening up, he stretched his arms slight and swept his gaze across the formation.

Rows upon rows of spirit herbs had been planted all around the Spirit Lake, many of them ready to be harvested. His hard work finally paying off.

"Well," he said, clapping his hands once, "that's the last of the low-tier batch."

Rou Lin perked up immediately from her spot. "Really? But what about the other spirit herbs higher up in the slope?"

"Those are higher tier spirit herbs. They're rare and takes much longer to regrow. I would rather save them within the Peak's treasury

than sell them in an auction house.” He said lightly. Or, he could simply turn them into pills, at which point their value would skyrocket.

Unlike the Ten Thousand Vitality Reversion Pill, most 2nd Tier Pills didn't take an entire week of exhausting work. Only a day or two and he'd have an entire batch of pill at hand.

He was now thinking of ways to use Formations into industrialising the pill making process. He wasn't sure if such a thing would even be possible, or possible with all the pills out there. But if someone could do it, then it would be him.

Zi Mo hummed softly. “A pity we couldn't get our hands on that Time Acceleration formation. That would solve much of the problems we face in the Snow Peak.”

His eyes twitched at her words. “Don't remind me.”

Knowing that the empire had placed a ban on Time Acceleration Formations had really raised his hackles. He could understand why the empire did it. A formation like that was a powerful strategic resources. But that didn't stop him from feeling resentful either.

Not that it would stop him, as he still intended to place such a formation within his Ancient Spatial Ring. But it did made getting his hands on such a Formation incredibly risky.

Maybe once he's a 3rd or 4th Tier Formation Master, he could create a Time Acceleration Formation on his own from the ground up. But for now, he would just have to do without it.

"The sun is setting." Ning Renxue mumbled quietly and he nodded, already aware of how late it was getting.

"Yeah. Let me harvest this last batch and then we'll return home." He said and folded his sleeves once again before he got to work. Systematically harvesting the herbs in a way that would allow them to regrow once again in the time period of a few months to a few years.

Li Yuan wasn't interested in a one-time profit but rather creating a sustainable farm that he could scale up in the long run.

By the time they finished, the sun gone below the horizon and the haul was... respectable.

"At least worth 1.5 million Spirit Stones." He guessed. Likely more as he was lowballing the entire thing. Plus, he hadn't yet added the herbs he'd harvested from within his Ancient Spatial Ring, which would go for a few hundred thousand spirit stones as well.

Even Zi Mo raised a brow at the amount.

Rou Lin outright whistled. “Okay, yeah. This was worth it.”

He side glanced at her. Wondering if he should remind her that he and Ning Renxue did all the work while she and Zi Mo merely stood back and watched. But he decided against it. No point in poking the bear. If she’s not interested, then she’s not interested. The fact that she even came to keep him company was something he should be grateful for. She was a good friend.

“One last stop and then we’ll return home and I’ll cook for you girls.” He said as he took to the sky and flew a short distance before arriving in front of yet another formation.

This one was quite different from the other Herb cultivating formations he’d planted around the Crystal Yin Mountains. Mainly because this one had nothing to do with herbs. With it had... were Gu. Hundreds... no, thousands of them.

They crawled over each other in slow, writhing waves, their bodies emitting faint Yin Qi. Some of them were thin and leech-like, while others looked more like mutated centipedes. Some were the size of a finger while others were almost as large as a cattle.

One of them noticed their arrival and lunged at them, only to be held back by the formation humming around it. Luring, Feeding, and Containing them.

Yes, he had finally made use of the Formation Knowledge he gained from the Fallen Prince's inheritance. The formations in that library were mainly for Spirit Beasts, but a few tweaks here and there allowed them to work on Gu as well.

Rou Lin's face paled instantly at the sight of all those Gu. She was still a bit traumatised from that time when she almost got eaten by that carnivorous Gu.

"...Yuan," she said slowly, taking a step back, "what are you going to do with all these Gu?"

"Sell them, of course." He said. "Individually, they're not incredibly valuable. But if I sell them in bulk, then even the upcoming auction might display them in their list." He then turned to look at her. "If you're uncomfortable, you can sit back and watch. No need to force yourself to do anything you don't want to do, Linlin."

Rou Lin took a deep breath but then shook her head. "No. I'm good. Just a bit surprised is all."

He gave her a long look, but noticing the determined expression on her face, he decided not to discourage her and simply nodded.

Then, he took out a multitude of Hibernation Pouches. Activated the Formation so that it would sort out the various types of Gu from one another, and started to place them all within the Pouches.

“How much do you think you’ll get from all these Gu?” Zi Mo suddenly asked.

“I’m not as knowledgeable regarding Gu as I’m with Spirit Herbs. But at a rough estimate, a few hundred thousand spirit stones.” He said. “And that’s mainly due to the lack of time. If I had placed more such formations around the mountain, then I could’ve harvested far more Gu.”

“Is it possible for you to set up more of such formations within the Snow Peak?” Zi Mo asked and he blinked before getting a thoughtful look.

“Maybe. It’ll take time, and selling too many such Gu at once would drop their market value. But yes, I could definitely do it.”

And if they found any combat, stealth, and movement Gu, or any other valuable Gu, then those could be distributed within the Snow Peak Disciples, or kept within the treasury.

Maybe he could even send a few of them back home to his family. After all his contributions, he doubted the Peak Mistress would really mind.

Once he finished placing the last of the Gu inside the Hibernation Pouch, he turned to the three girls, noticing the faint expectant expression on their faces, yes, even Ning Renxue, though hers looked more subdued.

“Well, who’s hungry?”

— — — — —

Now back home once again, Li Yuan carefully finished cooking, adding a few last touches here and there. The dish was made from the meat of a 2nd Tier Spirit Beast, as well as 2nd Tier Spirit Herbs, and cooked to perfection, letting out an aroma that would drive mortals wild from hunger.

As it should be. Otherwise all the points he spent in taking Spirit Cooking to 2nd Tier Mastery would be a waste.

Yes, he had used some of his free time in the past month learning how to cook, and had then used the Stele to upgrade it until even Zi Mo found food made by him irresistible.

Finally, he took the prepared dishes and carefully brought them out the living where Zi Mo, Ning Renxue and Rou Lin were waiting impatient.

“Please be fast, love. I’m dying of hunger here.” Zi Mo said, looking slightly impatience for once.

“That’s literally impossible.” He said, a chuckle escaping his lips even as he rolled his eyes and set up the dishes.

Rou Lin looked at the dishes with a hungry gaze and even Ning Renxue was unconsciously licking her lips.

Li Yuan didn’t look at any of them as he adjusted the portions within each of their plates. But just as he finished setting the last bowl down...

BANG!

The door to his home was kicked open. It broke and fell off its hinges, letting cold air rush in, along with her.

Yang Xiaoling staggered in like she owned the place, one hand loosely gripping a massive liquor gourd that dragged across the floor behind her, leaving a faint trail. Her hair was a mess, her robes half-worn, and the smell of booze clung.

She sniffed the air. Once, twice. Then, her head snapped toward the table.

“...finally found it,” she muttered, voice rough with drink. “Been chasing this smell for weeks.”

“Welcome to my home, Senior Sister,” Zi Mo said flatly, hiding her displeasure behind a calm facade.

Unlike Zi Mo though, Li Yuan didn't bother hiding anything and crossed his arms. “I hope you're planning to fix that door before you leave.”

“Piss on that,” Yang Xiaoling waved him off, already drifting toward the table like a predator that had caught a scent. “What is that smell?”

She reached out and picked up one of the places. She brought it close and sniffed again. Her expression changed and let out a relaxed sigh. “...so good,” she murmured. Then, she frowned slightly in confusion. “is this... food?”

‘Had she never eaten food prepared by a 2nd Tier Spirit Chef?’ Li Yuan wondered. Though admittedly, he had no idea how rare a profession like this was within the Nine Peak sect.

But... there's no way that the entire Sect doesn't have a single cultivator who's walking the path of cooking, right?

To reach Complete Perfection in a 2nd Tier takes about 100 years of daily work. And a Foundation Establishment cultivators roughly lives for 120 years, so that's impossible for them. Leaving only Golden Core cultivators...

And thinking back on all the elders he'd met so far, including those from the Snow Peak, Li Yuan suddenly realised that he might have mistaken the rarity of this profession.

That still didn't mean he would allow someone to act rudely within his own home.

Li Yuan stepped forward and took the plate from Yang Xiaoling's hand, setting it back down in front of Ning Renxue who went completely still at the gesture.

Yang Xiaoling blinked. Then slowly turned to him. "...oi," she said, voice dropping slightly. "What are you doing?"

Li Yuan met her gaze. "The better question," he replied, "is what are you doing?"

She grinned, her teeth looking a little too sharp in that moment, her eyes taking a golden tint. "Taking what I want," she said. "Isn't that obvious?" She took a step toward him and released the powerful

pressure of a Peak Golden Core cultivator. “What? You gonna stop me?”

Despite the immense pressure, Li Yuan didn't look away and met her gaze steadily. “If it becomes necessary.”

Yang Xiaoling paused at his answer, and then stared. Finally, she laughed. “Zi Mo,” she said. “your man's bold! Not very bright... but bold. I, Yang Xiaoling, admire that!”

Zi Mo sighed. “Senior Sister,” she said, already stepping in, “please take a seat. I'm sure Li Yuan wouldn't mind preparing a dish for you as well.”

“Not unless she fixes the door.” He cut in, and Zi Mo sighed, giving him a look that clearly asked him not to escalate this. But Li Yuan simply crossed his arms and continued glaring at the unwelcome guest.

Yang Xiaoling tilted her head, scratching lazily at her hair. “... what's with you and the door?” she muttered. “It's just a door.”

“It's not about the door, but about you breaking it.” Li Yuan said. “I won't tolerate any bad manner in my house. Not even from you. So either fix the door, or get out.”

Yang Xiaoling paused and the air suddenly became very quiet. The hair on the back on his neck rose as he felt like he was being gazed at by a powerful predator.

Yang Xiaoling placed a finger upon the table, a finger that he only now realised had grown a claw at the tip. He placed it on the table, and casually moved the finger around, carving a deep furrow on the table without any apparent effort.

“Oh...” She said, giving him an amused look that sent his heart racing in fear. “And what if I don’t do that? What if I take the food regardless. You think you can stop me?”

“No,” Li Yuan said, not even bothering to hide it. “Even if it meant losing, I’m still going to fight you. And I’ll make it cost you.”

Silence fell in the living room, and for an absurd moment, Li Yuan wondered how the heck had a simple dinner turned into a stand off against a Peak Golden Core Cultivator.

Then, Zi Mo exhaled slowly before she stood up and walked over to stand beside him. Her gaze met Yang Xiaoling evenly.

A moment later, Ning Renxue got up and came to stand beside him as well, glaring at Yang Xiaoling in a way that almost appeared cute. Finally, Rou Lin gritted her teeth and walked up as well, stopping just behind him.

He appreciated that. Because if this really turned into a fight, then it would be best for Rou Lin to not be anywhere close to it lest she suffer harm from the shockwaves.

Yang Xiaoling looked at all four of them for a moment. Then, her shoulders dropped.

“...geez,” she muttered. “You people are exhausting. I just wanted some of that good shit.”

She turned and walked back to the door. She picked it up and then placed it back into the hinges. Finally, a pulse of her Yin Qi ran through the Ice door, and the material knit itself together, restoring the structure as if nothing had happened at all.

She turned back and glared at him. “...there,” she said. “Happy?”

Li Yuan watched her for a moment, then nodded once. “Sit.” He gestured to the side. “I’ll make another plate for you.”

Yang Xiaoling blinked and then rolled her eyes. “...finally.” She muttered and dropped into the chair like she owned the place. “And bring some booze as well, if you got any.”

“Get your own.” Get your own Li Yuan replied as he turned back to the kitchen.

And that was how the wild senior sister became a regular fixture at his home. Having been lured in by a ‘good shit’ as she likes to call it.

If only he’d know that this would just be the start.