"Qi-Tian, why are you here? Come on in!"

Mike Jones, the young master of the Jones family, came out to greet Chu Qi-Tian after he had been informed of the latter's arrival.

Mike Jones was a jovial man who enjoyed making friends.

As the young masters of families under Chu Sect, they had had numerous dealings with each other. Mike Jones was naturally happy to see Chu Qi-Tian and led the latter into the hall immediately.

"Qi-Tian, stay for the evening and have dinner with us. I've gotten a few bottles of great wine recently. Let's have a drink later, shall we?" said Mikes Jones with a smile.

"Let's have that drink another time. I'm here to visit your sister. I heard that she disappeared for some time a while ago and was recently found. Is she alright?" asked Chu Qi-Tian with some concern.

Mike Jones was a little startled when he heard that. "You're here for my sister?"

His sister kept to herself and wasn't good

with crowds at all. She had enrolled in a school started by Chu Sect. The students had all come from rich families of influence. She hadn't been popular at all and had been ostracized by the other students. Everyone had thought her strange and eccentric, and had sometimes subjected her to cruel bullying.

Exasperated, Mike Jones' father had brought her home and kept her protected and sheltered in their own home.

For many years, Angie had had no friends and no contact with anyone else besides her own family.

The only exception was Meng Wan-Yu, Tang Yun's disciple, who visited her every now and then.

That explained why Mike Jones was surprised when Chu Qi-Tian had told him that he was here for his sister.

"What's wrong, Mike? Is she busy?" asked Chu Qi-Tian when he caught the strange look on Mike Jones' face.

Mike Jones shook his head and smiled

wryly. "It's alright, I'm just surprised. I'm glad that my sister's earned your concern though. I'm happy for her. Hold on, I'll go get her."

Mike Jones smiled, then turned away and headed for their backyard.

It was noon and the sun was glaring brightly in the sky.

Under its harsh heat, a petite young girl could be seen dragging weights that weighed nearly a hundred kilograms, undergoing physical training alongside the guards of their family on the training ground.

Beads of sweat streamed down her delicate face.

One could see the streaks of blood and slight bumps on her forehead and wrists.

She had gotten them when she had tripped and fallen during her runs.

The guards who were training with her couldn't help but feel terrible when they saw the bruises and cuts littering her skin.

"Young Mistress, please give up."

"You shouldn't put yourself through this!"

"We won't forgive ourselves if you overexert yourself and collapse from exhaustion!"

'That's right, Young Mistress!"

"Please stop your training..."

"Why are you doing this to yourself?"

"We'll be there to protect you from danger."

"We'll risk our lives to save you!"

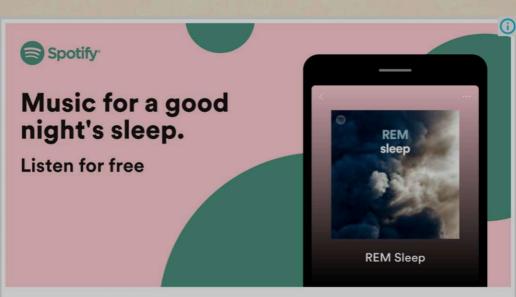
"You have the entire family clan as your shield. Why do you put yourself through all this pain and hardship?"

The guards of the Jones family pleaded with Angie tirelessly.

But she wasn't going to listen at all.

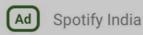
She simply clenched her jaw and bore with the terrible exhaustion and pain wracking her body.

"If you can take it, so can I! I'm going to be a martial artist. I'm going to learn how to kill a





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man. I want to have the power to help Fan!"

Her voice was filled with determination.

No one knew what this young girl had gone through when she had gone missing.

They had no idea why the weak and innocent young girl had transformed into a different person when she had returned.

She had been afraid of hardship and had despised martial artists. But now, she had transformed into someone with a steely determination to master martial arts.

The others realized that Angie wasn't going to listen to them. There was nothing they could do but give up and continue their training.

"Young Master, you're here!"

Mike Jones walked up to them. The others greeted him immediately when they saw him.

"Where's Angie? Is she still being difficult?" asked Mike Jones casually after greeting them with a nod.

"That's right, Young Master. Please say something to her. I'm worried that she's not going to last if she keeps this up," the men lamented.

"Alright, I know. Get on with your training and leave the rest to me."

Mike Jones waved at them and told them to continue with their daily training exercise.

He walked up to Angie and smiled.

"Angie, take a break. I've baked your favorite cake. Come and have a bite. The dress that's tailored for you is here too. I got someone from Europe to make that dress. It's in pink, your favorite color."

Mike Jones tried to tempt his own sister with treats like he would a child.

In the past, the silly girl before him would have jumped in joy and followed him.

Mike Jones was surprised when his countless attempts at luring her away from the training ground failed today.

"Angie, how long are you going to keep this

up? Father and I will never agree to let you join the martial arts circle. It's a dangerous and risky life, one that few survive. It's not a life for young and weak girls like you. I'm telling you. You should give up right now," shouted Mike Jones as he finally lost his patience.

"That's rubbish! Aunt Tang practiced martial arts and she became the sect leader of Chu Sect. Wan-Yu is a girl and she practices martial arts too. Why can't I?" yelled Angie stubbornly.

"They're different!" Mike Jones said coolly.

"The sect leader lost her father when she was a child. The other men in her family are useless. Without anyone to count on, she had no choice but to step forward to save her family."

"You're different. You have your father and me, your brother. You have us to protect you from everything. We have only one wish and that's for you to live a long, healthy and happy life. We want you to be protected and sheltered forever. We want you to be our princess, forever. Why can't you understand what we're doing for you? Why are you making things so hard for yourself?" pleaded

Mike Jones.

Mike Jones hadn't paid much heed to his sister in the Amazon rainforest when she had declared that she wanted to practice martial arts. He had thought it an impulse and that she would give up after she experienced the hardship of training.

Mike Jones didn't expect his sister to persist in her training after months had passed. She appeared to show no signs of giving up at all.

She continued obstinately in spite of the angry disapproval of her father and brother.



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"I don't need you to protect me. I want to become powerful too. I want to be able to protect the people that I love," said Angie stubbornly.

"You're going to drive me to an early grave. That scoundrel's gotten to you, hasn't he? What did that Chinese punk say to you? You're like a changed person. I'd advise you to give up now if you're only practicing martial arts to help Ye Fan. He's dead. The Chinese have announced the news of his death. You should think carefully about what you're doing," scoffed Mike Jones before he turned and left. His sister was driving him up the wall.

He left Angie behind, eyes red and tearing as she wailed.

"You're lying! Fan isn't dead! He can't die. Someone must have saved him. He's not dead. I'm going to find him after I've mastered my martial arts..."

Everyone had something that they couldn't let go of and that they truly wanted.

Just like how Ye Fan couldn't cast aside the humiliation and shame that he had suffered

many years ago.

He practiced martial arts because he wanted to protect his mother and make sure that no one could ever bully them again.

Angie, on the other hand, had found something that she truly desired during the fight in the rainforest.

She had realized then that she didn't want to be useless.

She didn't want to be the person who could do nothing but cry when her family and friends were in danger.

She hated the feeling of being helpless.

She hated how she could do nothing in the face of danger.

She hated how she had only been a burden on others.

She wanted to prove herself and she wanted the world to know her worth and recognize it.

Mike Jones left his sister alone. He knew his

sister. She wasn't going to give up until she hit her head against the wall repeatedly and got herself bruised and bloodied in the process.

"Forget it. Let's see how long she lasts. Learning martial arts is tough. Not everyone can endure that kind of hardship."

Mike Jones gave his sister another look. She was still busy working on her basics. He shook his head, sighed heavily, then returned to the hall.

"I'm sorry, Qi-Tian. My sister isn't feeling well. I'm afraid she can't talk to you today. I'll bring her along to your place in a few days and say hi," said Mike Jones.

Angie was adamant to learn martial arts. She couldn't even be bothered to talk to her own brother. She wasn't going to waste her time talking to someone who wasn't even family.

Mike Jones could only try to make an excuse for her absence.

"Alright then."

Chu Qi-Tian didn't press him further. After all, they had plenty of opportunities to see each other again.

Tang Yun's sleeping quarters in Chu Sect, where she took her rest, was a large room that was carefully though not lavishly decorated.

Its flower arrangements and hanging scrolls of calligraphy added life to a bedroom that was both luxurious and forbidding at the same time.

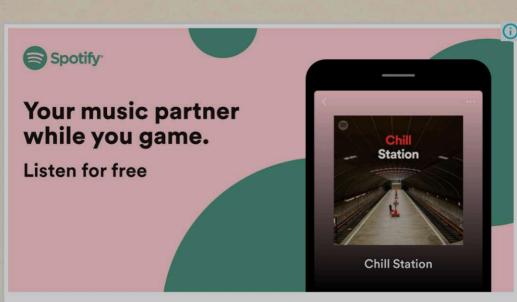
Tang Yun was presently seated on the bed and in the middle of a trance.

Her lovely face appeared slightly pale and lined with exhaustion.

She had rested an entire night since the battle yesterday.

In the past, she would have recovered swiftly from such a battle.

Yet, strangely, she was still feeling a little tired after a night's rest.





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This wasn't the first time she had experienced the prolonged lingering effects after a battle. Since her return from the rainforest, Tang Yun had sensed her body's gradual deterioration.

She got tired more easily. She felt lethargic and slept more. She appeared more sensitive and ate less.

Her strength was diminishing.

The strange transformation that she was undergoing was something that Tang Yun had never experienced. She was a little worried about her diminishing strength.

She had not yet fulfilled the ambitions of Chu Sect or carried out her master's final wishes.

She had so many more things that she had to do. Without sufficient power, she wouldn't be able to fulfill any of her plans.

"Why? Ever since my return from the rainforest, my strength has been fading. Why?"

It was fading slowly, almost imperceptibly,

and even though it had taken a long time for her to realize it, Tang Yun knew that she was no longer at the peak of her strength.

"Is this the result of forcibly absorbing the ice spirit fruit?"

Tang Yun frowned as she attributed her physical ailment to how she had absorbed the ice spirit fruit in the cave.

After all, she had not heard of that particular way of cultivation before.

Without Ye Fan, she wouldn't have thought of absorbing the energies of the ice spirit fruit in that manner.

She might have succeeded then, but she had had no idea if that had left her with any lasting symptoms or side effects.

Because she knew little of the cultivation method that she had used then, she had thus attributed the physical changes to her body to her internal absorption of the ice spirit fruit.

She had no idea that regardless the method of absorption, any danger that she might

have suffered for absorbing the energies of the ice spirit fruit only existed while she was doing so.

There were no lasting side effects after she was done absorbing the fruit.

There was an exception and it was if there was something wrong with the ice spirit fruit. Consuming the fruit then would lead to discomfort. But that had nothing to do with the method in which she had consumed it.

"Who's outside?" said Tang Yun coolly as her eyes turned cold. She had sensed the barest of movement outside her door.

"Master, it's me, Wan-Yu. I've brought you breakfast," a young woman replied meekly outside her room.

She was none other than Meng Wan-Yu, the woman who had appeared on Mount Yunding to meet Ye Fan on Tang Yun's behalf.

Meng Wan-Yu was the daughter of someone who was a friend to the Tang family. She had grown up under Tang Yun's watch and Tang Yun had treated her as her disciple.

As the Tang Yun's only female disciple, she took care of Tang Yun's daily meals.

Meng Wan-Yu had noticed that the sect leader had become increasingly sensitive recently, but she had no idea what had been the cause of her transformation.

The sect leader would grow tense at the slightest breeze.

It was strange and confounding behavior indeed.

"You may enter."

When she realized that it was only Meng Wan-Yu, Tang Yun eased her guard and allowed her to enter the room.

"Sect Leader, I've just warmed some milk for you. Please drink it while it's hot." Meng Wan-Yu entered the room with a tray of milk and pastries.

A supreme grandmaster might not need to eat, but eating was still a habit that Tang Yun had cultivated over many years. She would still take her daily meals.

"Alright." Tang Yun nodded before taking the warm milk from Meng Wan-Yu. After a few sips, she felt a sudden queasiness in her stomach. Then, she threw up the milk that she had drunk

"Are you alright, master? Were you injured in the fight yesterday?" asked Meng Wan-Yu worriedly.

She had witnessed how powerful the strange young woman had been yesterday.

Even though Tang Yun had claimed that she had forced the other woman into a retreat, Meng Wan-Yu had no idea if Tang Yun had been injured in the process.



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