

Three Realms 1651

[Sovereign of the Three Realms \(WN\)](#)

Chapter 1651: Huang'er's Move Out of the Blue

A mess of emotions swirled in Jiang Chen's heart. He was excited, thrilled, happy, and guilty.

There had only been a handful of people he was close to when he'd been in the Regal Pill Palace. Palace Head Dan Chi was one. Mu Gaoqi and Elder Yun Nie others as well. There were at most ten people he had a close relationship with, the Ling sisters included.

Ling Bi'er was as important to him as Mu Gaoqi. Even though their relationship had never been anything but platonic, she'd been his best female friend at the time. He enjoyed talking to her the most; they were on the same wavelength.

Ling Bi'er was usually quiet and difficult to approach, but he knew through their interactions that a caring heart burned beneath her cold appearance. From her love for his father, her protectiveness of her little sister, and her loyalty to her sect, it was clear that emotions ran deep.

He was beyond himself at seeing Ling Bi'er again in a different world.

Next to Jiang Chen, waves of emotion roiled in Huang'er as well. She'd seen Ling Bi'er when residing in the Regal Pill Palace, and meeting again here was the last thing she'd expected.

Unlike Jiang Chen, Huang'er didn't have a close relationship with Ling Bi'er. They'd rarely crossed paths, but these two extraordinary women were aware of each other. Huang'er even knew that the Ling sisters were in love with Jiang Chen.

Seeing Ling Bi'er show up as the princess of Bluesmoke Isles both surprised and made Huang'er quizzical. She glanced at Jiang Chen out of the corner of her eyes. The look in his eyes betrayed the fluctuation of his emotions. She smiled knowingly.

She believed that her beloved didn't have a relationship with Ling Bi'er, and that he didn't desire her. Ling Bi'er, on the other hand, had been head over heels for him. Was she still the same woman after all these years? Was her love as pure and unwavering as it had once been?

Huang'er fell in deep thought for the moment. She knew that Jiang Chen wouldn't abandon Ling Bi'er. If she was happy here in Bluesmoke, he might let her be. But was she?

Huang'er gave the girl another look. She at least didn't look at all happy about being a princess. If she was satisfied with her life here, even someone as naturally calm as her wouldn't be able to keep her joy bottled up on such occasion.

Yet Huang'er didn't feel anything like that at all. Her instincts told her that Ling Bi'er had been forced to come to the event. She had no choice but to play this role.

Has Brother Chen noticed it? Huang'er wanted to bring it to Jiang Chen's attention, but she couldn't message him, lest the watchdogs of her family notice something off between them.

She smiled. "The princess is indeed beautiful enough to topple a city, cousin Qingsang. However, she doesn't seem to be in a good mood."

Yan Qingsang frowned. "Maybe that's just how she carries herself?"

"Heh, she and I are both women. My instincts tell me that the princess doesn't have much interest in this tournament at all."

Yan Qingsang wasn't convinced. "How so?"

"Look at her. She's only given a token nod since taking the stage. Has she smiled at all? Has she acknowledged the crowd? Has she even looked around? In her eyes, the contestants and the audience might as well not exist."

Her words were addressed to Yan Qingsang, but they were for Jiang Chen's benefit.

Jiang Chen perked up. He well understood what his beloved wanted to tell him. Ling Bi'er might not have volunteered to partake in the tournament. Perhaps she was being compelled against her will.

A mess of tangled thoughts filled his head.

"Your Highness, many brave warriors have fought for you over the past month. Please share some words with them!"

Ling Bi'er threw a fleeting glance at the imperial prince before her eyes swept over the crowd.

"You have all fought hard. The royal family of the Bluesmoke Isles thanks you for your participation." Those faint comments were all she said.

The representative of the royal family looked displeased, but the imperial prince was an expert in bringing an event to life.

"The princess is a woman of few words," he picked up with a smile. "It's rare for her to grace others with her voice. That's it, brave warriors. Let the fights continue. The princess is going to watch the matches today and witness your glory!"

He gave her a meaningful look and transmitted, "It's fine if you don't want to talk, Princess Bi, but you have to watch the matches every day starting now. Orders from the emperor. You aren't going to disobey him now, are you?"

Ling Bi'er heavily disliked showing her face in public. She'd shied away from crowds when she was in the Regal Pill Palace as well. Given the circumstances, she didn't have a choice. She had to endure all this for her plan to return to the human domain.

"Haha, the princess is in the audience, brother. I have to do my best." Yan Qingsang patted Jiang Chen on the shoulder and flew to a stage.

Jiang Chen looked up at Ling Bi'er, deep in thought.

Huang'er turned to him nonchalantly. "Princess Bi is a rare beauty. Isn't Sir Shao Yuan going to give it a try?"

Jiang Chen blinked. Was she joking, or did she have other plans?

She burst into a giggle. "Even I'm a little attracted to her beauty. I'll have a go as well."

She flew to another stage in a flash. Dressed as a man, she looked spirited and carefree, but also graceful and handsome.

Many male cultivators inwardly cursed at her. Where was this pretty boy from? This wasn't the place for him. Had he joined in after seeing how beautiful the princess was? Why hadn't they ever seen him before?

Being good-looking was enough to attract hostility from the other contestants. Incidentally, Huang'er didn't realize how many people had taken an instant dislike to her.

She smiled calmly and cupped her hands. "I am Mu Gaoqi, a wanderer in the jianghu. I'm taking part because I couldn't help myself after seeing the princess."

She raised a cupped fist salute and made a slight bow to greet facing Ling Bi'er.

Ling Bi'er froze when she heard the name, her indifference fractured. Surprise flashed through her eyes as she turned in Huang'er's direction.

Mu Gaoqi?

If she hadn't been a naturally reserved person, her shock would have attracted the suspicion of the royals by her side. Fortunately, she was able to keep herself under control.

He said he's Mu Gaoqi? Ling Bi'er looked over at Huang'er. Something about the man's features did seem familiar to her, but she was sure she didn't know the person. And, there was no way this person was Mu Gaoqi.

Did they happen to share the same surname and given name?

Ling Bi'er didn't want to get her hopes up, but the name wasn't a common one. She couldn't have just randomly run into another Mu Gaoqi in the Bluesmoke Isles, could she?

Moreover, from the way the man introduced himself, he seemed to be purposefully emphasizing his name to her.

Was this someone she knew? Perhaps an old friend from the Myriad Domain?

Ling Bi'er combed through a mental list of all male disciples in the Regal Pill Palace, but she couldn't find a match with the challenger. She expanded the parameters of her search to the six major sects in the Myriad Domain, but still there wasn't someone like this man.

Ling Bi'er was at a loss, but she was convinced that this man must know her. She was thrilled even though she didn't know who he was. It'd been a while since she'd seen someone from home, or even heard about home after coming to Myriad Abyss Island.

Even just a familiar name was enough to cause a ripple in her heart. I wonder who is he?

She wanted an answer. Her first guess was Jiang Chen, but this man looked completely different from him in body shape, temperament, and appearance.

She knew Jiang Chen was a master of disguise, but if it was him, why didn't he just use his name? Her instincts told her that this wasn't Jiang Chen. Even so, her mood was considerably improved.

Jiang Chen realized what Huang'er was trying to do and couldn't be more grateful to her.

Huang'er, Huang'er... Waves of warmth rose from his heart. He couldn't ask for more with a dao partner like her.

She'd had considerably solved the dilemma he was put in. She must know that he cared about Ling Bi'er, but he couldn't possibly fight for her hand while Huang'er was here. That was why she had decisively entered the competition herself!

It was a move completely out of the blue, but a clever decision. It preserved his dignity and enabled her to take part in helping Ling Bi'er.

Jiang Chen was both impressed and moved by her quick thinking. Huang'er had done more than think on his behalf. She'd considered factors that he hadn't even considered.

He'd been concerned, but now allowed himself to relax. Huang'er had gracefully accepted the situation. It wouldn't do for him to be awkward and indecisive.

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Chapter 1652: Meeting With No Resistance

Huang'er hadn't entered the arena out of fleeting interest, nor was she here just to play. Unrestricted, she crushed the competition in the preliminaries. Many who were envious of her handsome face went up to insult her, only to be swept off in a matter of seconds.

Her swift and tempestuous termination of her challengers intimidated the rest into inaction. However, the imperial family was quite displeased at her incredible performance. Huang'er's momentum was so fierce that a clean sweep of everyone seemed inevitable. This was entirely unwanted.

They had set up this event in order to foster relationships with the Ten Divine Nations' geniuses. They weren't planning on marrying off the princess off to a wandering cultivator!

The fellow was certainly extremely handsome and talented, but his self-proclaimed status as a jianghu wanderer gave the imperials a headache. That was just another name for a wandering cultivator!

The Bluesmoke Isles had raised the princess for many years. It wasn't going to give her up to a mere wanderer, even if that meant the entire event was called off.

"Impossible. We have to find a way to get rid of this guy." Bluesmoke began to call in stronger opponents to force the intrepid interloper off the arena.

Alas, it'd underestimated this wandering cultivator's strength. Huang'er easily dismissed both of her new challengers. Her record now totaling ten straight wins, she entered the area designated for the next round.

Amid the cheering of the crowd, Huang'er flashed a dashing smile, cupping a fist at Ling Bi'er. "Princess Bi, I fell in love with you at first sight. I'll win your hand in the finals and sweep you off your feet. You won't marry anyone else other than me!" She finished her speech with a softly ringing laugh and flew off the stage.

Yan Qingsang approached her with a foul expression. "What're you doing, Huang'er?" he intoned in a low voice. "Are you targeting me or what?"

"You've got the wrong person, friend. I am Mu Gaoqi, a wandering cultivator, thank you very much." Huang'er burst out laughing.

"Now you're just trying to tick me off, huh?" Yan Qingsang smiled wryly.

Huang'er shrugged. "Don't take yourself so seriously, Yan Qingsang. There are at least a dozen or so cultivators in the next round who are stronger than you. How much hope do you think you have in winning?"

Yan Qingsang knew as much. He had participated only for some self-gratification; he didn't specifically want to marry the princess, but he hated to lose. He was upset at Huang'er's jab, but only a little. It was something that was easily recovered from.

Jiang Chen smiled and clapped Yan Qingsang on the shoulder. "Brother Yan, it seems that you and the princess aren't fated to be together, hahaha."

Yan Qingsang rolled his eyes, but laughed mirthfully once more. "I admit that I can't beat Huang'er, but I just had another thought. What if the princess picks you, Huang'er? What will you do? Will you marry her and take her with you back to House Yan?"

"Why not?" Huang'er grinned cheekily. "Do you have a problem with that?"

"What? You, m-marry her? Really?" Yan Qingsang stuttered. "You... you can't be serious!"

"I'll take her home and give her to someone else. Why can't I do that?" Huang'er replied seriously.

"Oh?" Yan Qingsang's eyes brightened. "Our surname is the same. We have the same grandfather, right? We're very close..."

"What're you thinking about, Yan Qingsang?" Huang'er raised an eyebrow. "You can't seriously think I'll give the princess to you?"

"What, you won't?" Yan Qingsang blinked.

Huang'er smiled serenely. "Of course not. You have quite an imagination."

"Who, then?" Yan Qingsang was almost despondent.

"Who would I give her to?" Huang'er muttered to herself, then glanced at Jiang Chen. "Sir Shao Yuan, of course. Aren't you guys trying to earn his permanent attachment? If I help him get a wife, he'll settle himself in and help House Yan to the best of his ability. Wouldn't that be nice?"

Huang'er seemed only half-joking. Yan Qingsang opened his mouth, but couldn't find any words to say.

Jiang Chen was the same way. He had no idea how to respond. He suddenly felt that Huang'er's actions had another motive behind them. He smiled wryly to himself.

He'd seen her cleverness back in the human domain, but not how playful she could be. Now, he had the newfound knowledge that she could play pranks with tremendous spirit.

The preliminaries ended under the crowd's collective eye.

Two hundred or so had managed to make it into the second round.

At least half of these were geniuses from the Ten Divine Nations – the very ones who'd attended the ancient jade festival. In fact, most of them were in attendance. Only the few who were especially prominent and skilled, such as Ye Zhou, had abstained.

Evidently, even geniuses from the Ten Divine Nations liked pretty girls and wealth. They didn't feel it below their station to attend an event hosted by a second-rate faction like the Bluesmoke Isles.

After all, there were only so many female cultivators from large factions. Many of the male cultivators wouldn't have an opportunity to marry someone of equal status. Especially talented female cultivators either remained unmarried or married another top genius of equal stature.

The youngsters who'd come to the ancient jade festival were largely not top-tier within their houses, with a few exceptions. Therefore, they weren't about to give up a golden opportunity like this.

It was better to be a small-time leader than a big-time grunt. If one could win the princess's hand in marriage, being the emperor's son-in-law wasn't half so bad. The competition was all the fiercer because of it.

Just as Huang'er had predicted, Yan Qingsang was eliminated after a few rounds. He was mildly saddened by this turn of events.

"Brother Yan, your loss only shows where you need to improve," Jiang Chen comforted the youth. "You missed out on Bluesmoke's princess, but you'll find someone better in the future."

"It's alright, don't comfort me," Yan Qingsang replied sadly. "I know myself well enough. I'm not first-rate even in House Yan. It seems I must really work harder."

"If you trust me, Brother Yan, I'll help you become first-rate in House Yan. First-rate in the Ten Divine Nations, even!" Jiang Chen suddenly declared.

"Hmm? You, help me?" Yan Qingsang was a bit skeptical.

"Yes. The ancient jade we got will definitely help you tremendously. You aren't lacking talent, just resources from your house. If you calculate the jade in terms of resources, you are more well-endowed than the best of your peers!"

Yan Qingsang's eyes brightened. "Now that you put it that way, my fighting spirit is back!"

The young man fixed his gaze upon his friend. No matter how he looked at this Brother Shao Yuan, he was well pleased with his find. If his cousin wasn't in such a sticky situation, he would have liked to shove Huang'er at his companion to ensure everlasting friendship.

"Brother, I know you like Huang'er, yes? Do you know why I'm opposed to it? You must know who Xiahou Zong is. He's the number one genius in House Xiahou and Eternal Divine Nation. Even in the entirety of the Ten Divine Nations, he's touted to be top three..."

“You’re going too far, Brother Yan,” Jiang Chen replied coolly. “I’m not much interested in House Xiahou’s matters.”

Yan Qingsang sighed softly, but held his tongue.

“Let’s keep watching the fights. I’d like to see what my cousin ends up doing.” Now that he was out of the running, the young man from House Yan lightened up completely. He was here purely for the spectacle.

Over the next few days, Ling Bi’er didn’t need to be pressed to watch the fights taking place in the arena. The imperial family was charmed by this change. Had the princess finally accepted what she needed to do? Was her heart being moved by the geniuses from the Ten Divine Nations?

Regardless of reason, it was good to see her be proactive.

Huang’er’s talents were remarkable even in the Ten Divine Nations. If not for the Generation Binding Curse, she would be much stronger than she was now. The fact that the actual top geniuses who’d come to the jade festival weren’t here made her bouts even more trivial.

A few rounds were enough for her to enter the quarterfinals.

According to the rules, the princess could pick her husband from the contestants now. If she wanted to ponder the subject further, then the tournament needed to continue.

“Are you going to choose your favorite now, Your Highness, or shall they fight on?” The middle-aged imperial prince asked with a smile.

“I can choose now,” Ling Bi’er answered impassively.

The imperial family was collectively agape at this. They’d prepared themselves that she would reject making a choice. Thankfully, she was being unexpectedly straightforward. So much so that they didn’t quite know how to react!

Some snickered to themselves. “She usually pretends to be aloof, but she’s actually more anxious than anyone. Looks like she was just feigning her reluctance before.”

Ling Bi’er didn’t care what the imperial family members thought. She was more interested in who the man called Mu Gaoqi actually was. She intuitively believed that he had come for her. Furthermore, he was someone he knew.

She needed to figure out everything related to all this. The marriage itself was immaterial. If she adamantly refused in the end, it wasn’t like he could force her.

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Chapter 1653: I’ll Marry Her

There was an uproar at the news that Princess Bi was going to pick her bridegroom. The eight young geniuses could scarcely mask their excitement. Were they the favored one? Was that why the princess was making her choice early?

Every cultivator was immensely confident in himself. Each of the eight present believed that he was the princess's only choice.

Huang'er was no exception.

However, her confidence stemmed from the feeling that Ling Bi'er was making her choice based on 'Mu Gaoqi', rather than her charisma.

The imperial family was overjoyed. Seven out of the eight geniuses here were from the Ten Divine Nations. One was a wandering cultivator, but the seven-to-one likelihood was small enough to ignore. They didn't believe that Princess Bi would be blind enough to pick a wandering cultivator.

Such a thing was basically impossible as humans had the tendency to head for higher ground.

Princess Bi was no fool. Wouldn't she like a dao partner from the Ten Divine Nations? Wouldn't that elevate her to greater prominence?

Most of the crowd in the arena's stands was filled with a mixture of curiosity, jealousy, and envy. They very much wanted to know who the exceptionally pretty princess would choose. They were also envious of the candidates on stage in the first place. What a fortunate twist of fate!

"Princess, shall I introduce where these geniuses are from?"

"Haha, why not have them introduce themselves?" Two members of the imperial family made some suggestions.

"That won't be necessary," Ling Bi'er replied coolly. "I know them already."

"Well then, it seems that you've made up your mind already, Princess Bi. That is perfectly well and good. Please, make your selection." The middle-aged imperial prince smiled.

Ling Bi'er approached slowly, her gaze pointed downwards. Suddenly, her pure, brilliant eyes looked at Huang'er.

"I choose him." The girl's distant look settled upon Huang'er. "He is the one I am most interested in."

There was emphasis in her crisp voice.

"What?" The imperial prince felt his eyes bulge. "Your Highness, are you sure you're not mistaken? Look a bit more carefully."

"No, thank you. Mu Gaoqi is the one I want." Ling Bi'er declared the specific name.

The imperial prince turned beet-red, his brain spazzing out with incomprehension. The suddenness of this turn of events had backed him into a corner.

Princess Bi was intentionally stirring up trouble. Hadn't she been just fine prior? But now, she was ruining the imperial family's plans! Why hadn't she chosen one of the seven geniuses from the Ten Divine Nations? What was a wandering cultivator worth??

"Princess Bi, you may be seeing things. This wandering cultivator friend..." another member of the imperial family couldn't help interject.

Huang'er flared with displeasure. "Is there a rule against wandering cultivators for this tournament?"

The imperial family member snickered. "Take a look in the mirror. Do you think yourself to be the same caliber as these seven fine fellows? It's good to know one's own limits."

Huang'er smiled faintly, then glanced at the seven geniuses. "Bluesmoke's imperial family seems to think that you don't know your limits. What do you all think about that?"

The geniuses were uniformly shocked. This person was totally shameless! He was the one being talked about, not them!

"Friend, I hope you get the picture. If you leave now, we guarantee you won't be held responsible." The imperial prince was growing irritated.

Ling Bi'er furrowed her brow. "You asked me to pick out a bridegroom in this tournament, but you don't seem to want to accept the person I picked. This isn't my fault then."

The imperial family was incensed. The members present felt rather powerless now that things had come to this. Everything about the situation was odd, but what could they do?

Kill the wandering cultivator? They would become the butt of the entire realm's jokes then. Not accepting the results of a tournament for the princess' hand? Would the princess only marry someone from the Ten Divine Nations?

Why even bother hosting the event in the first place then? An arranged marriage would have been much tidier.

Furthermore, Princess Bi was behaving the very opposite of their wishes. They could threaten her or take other measures in private, but such things were impossible in the public eye.

The imperial prince was quick enough on the draw to remedy the situation. "My friends," he laughed, "Princess Bi is just joking. Perhaps she has someone in mind, but is too shy to say his name outright. Let us adjourn temporarily. We will keep in touch with the eight quarterfinalists. When the princess..."

"Hold on," Huang'er cut in with some annoyance. "What do you mean by 'joking'? Be more straightforward about it. The princess was certainly clear about her choice just now. Is this how Bluesmoke does things around here? Are you repudiating her choice in public? So you think lowly of wandering cultivators in general, eh?"

Two figures shot towards the stage at this time. It was Elders He and Quan.

The two elders of House Yan looked mildly flustered in their own right. "Huang'er, please," they looked at the disguised girl. "Don't make trouble for Bluesmoke's important event."

The Bluesmoke imperials looked at each other, at a loss, then turned back to the two old men before them.

"Excuse the intrusion. A youngster from House Yan is causing a commotion here. Our deepest apologies for any inconvenience." Elder He was very polite.

"House Yan?" The imperial prince's eyes brightened. "This young man is a genius from House Yan?"

House Yan wasn't a bad choice. It was a bit downtrodden now, but still a first-rate faction in the Ten Divine Nations. An acceptable choice for marriage.

Elder He smiled wryly. "The marriage... has to be called off. Please, find another bridegroom for your princess' happiness."

"Why?" The imperial prince blinked. "This young gentleman is both handsome and talented. He's a perfect match for Princess Bi."

Their insults against Huang'er before had quickly turned into praise. His revelation as a young genius of House Yan had instantly caused a hundred-eighty-degree turn in attitude. These Bluesmoke imperials were certainly experts in being weathervanes.

Elders He and Quan were equally embarrassed. They couldn't exactly explain; Huang'er's status as a woman would be a slap to the face in its own right.

But how was this supposed to be resolved without an explanation?

Huang'er giggled. "Elders, what's the big problem if I want to take Princess Bi with me to House Yan? Who made the rule that girls couldn't marry girls?"

What?

There was universal astonishment at her declaration. The imperial family members in attendance were paralyzed – or perhaps petrified. A girl, marry another girl?

Was this young genius from House Yan actually a woman?

Wasn't... this joke a bit too much?

Huang'er twirled about, her sleeve covering her face momentarily. When it was gone, she looked like a woman once more.

The appearance of her real face astounded the crowd anew. The slender, sweetly-smiling girl was an immortal who'd descended from heaven. Her otherworldliness surpassed even Princess Bi.

Even the imperial family members were stupefied and self-ashamed. They were tongue-tied for a long while.

Ling Bi'er on the other hand, was utterly confounded. Who was this exceptionally beautiful girl? Was this her real face? She wouldn't have forgotten a face like this if she'd seen it before, but she didn't recall anything about the challenger.

How did she know about Mu Gaoqi then?

When Ling Bi'er's eyes connected with Huang'er's, her long-sealed memories erupted in a mental geyser. Those dazzlingly pristine eyes caused a tremor to run through her entire body. She suddenly remembered something.

It's her!

There'd been a mysterious girl back at the Regal Pill Palace by Jiang Chen's side. That Huang'er had looked quite ugly at the time; Ling Bi'er had in fact, pitied her for the misfortune.

Those eyes had made quite the impression on her even then. She'd thought them rather extraordinary in their purity and grace.

And now, everything came rushing back to her with Huang'er's smile.

When the two possibly prettiest pairs of eyes in the world met, they came to an intuitive understanding of mutual recognition.

"Let me introduce myself, Princess Bi. I'm Yan Qinghuang, but you can call me Huang'er."

Yan Qinghuang!

Comprehension suddenly dawned on the crowd. This name was incredibly well-known. Of the Ten Divine Kingdoms' sixteen beauties, she was in the top three. If not for the Generation Binding Curse's effect on her cultivation, she would very likely be first instead. How would the crowd not know of such a famous individual?

They hadn't expected this magnificently beautiful fairy to be her. Such a charming sprite as her was supposed to become a cultivation vessel for that bastard Xiahou Zong?

The cultivators hostile towards Huang'er experienced an instant dwindling of enmity. Pity and sympathy surged in instead. In fact, they wanted nothing more than to charge to House Xiahou and strike Xiahou Zong down where he stood!

Ling Bi'er bowed slightly in a form of self-introduction. "Ling Bi'er."

"Hear me out, everyone. Were there any rules against girls participating in this event?" Huang'er clearly intending to be ornery to the end.

She knew that her situation afforded her the advantage of being spoiled. The family would permit such a minor faux-pas. Thus, she was content to see her mischief out just this once.

The crowd rumbled in anticipation of a bigger spectacle.

"No, certainly not."

"I didn't hear anything about not letting girls participate!"

"Take her home with you, haha!"

The onlookers were running wild, taking the atmosphere of the arena with them. The imperial family representatives looked at each other with some consternation.

Yan Qinghuang marry Princess Bi? Was this really alright? Wasn't marriage a union between a man and a woman? How could a girl marry a girl?

But Miss Yan Qinghuang didn't appear to be an easy person to deal with. Their opposition was largely immaterial at this point. They couldn't afford to anger her!

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Chapter 1654: To the Satisfaction of All

This turn of events had made a farce out of the tournament.

If it'd been a female wandering cultivator dressed as a man, Bluesmoke wouldn't have showed such restraint. Their first reaction would be to take the imposter in. This was an affront to their authority.

However, Huang'er was from the Ten Divine Nations. The royal family had to keep up a polite front, no matter how infuriated they were.

A starved camel was still bigger than a healthy horse. Despite House Yan's declining influence, it was still one of the great factions of the Ten Divine Nations. It was unwise to make enemies of such a faction unless the situation necessitated it.

Fortunately, the two elders from House Yan appeared to be friendly, and they'd showed up in time to stop the charade from going any further. If Huang'er's identity was revealed only after a marriage was arranged, Bluesmoke Isles would truly become the laughingstock of the world.

"Elders, Miss Huang'er, His Majesty placed great importance on this marriage tournament. If Miss Huang'er were a man, it would be a match made in heaven. However..."

The imperial prince wasn't about to let Huang'er marry Princess Bi. There was no such thing as a girl marrying a girl!

"Huang'er, you should stop this nonsense, or you might embarrass yourself," Elder He entreated, trying to convince her. "Bluesmoke has been tolerant enough. We shouldn't - "

"Please don't intervene, Elder He. I've attended the tournament and Princess Bi has made her choice. We deserve proper consideration no matter what." Huang'er was normally an amiable person, but she was being surprisingly stubborn this time.

Elder He and Elder Quan exchanged a look. They knew that there was no stopping her once she'd made up her mind. Otherwise, the situation might become even more out of control.

Elder Quan smiled wryly. "This is Princess Bi's marriage we're talking about, Huang'er. We can't treat it as a joke."

"A joke?" she responded coolly. "How do you know that Princess Bi is unwilling? What if she accepts my proposal?"

Resigned expressions hung on everyone's faces. Huang'er had been exposed as a woman. There was no way would Princess Bi agree to the marriage. Even if all decent men in the world were dead, a woman wasn't going to marry another woman, was she?

All eyes were now on Princess Bi. They obviously all wanted her to turn Huang'er down so that Huang'er would give up.

Despite to her aloof expression, Princess Bi's response was equally shocking. "I'll rather follow Miss Huang'er than marry a man I don't care for."

Shock rippled through the crowd.

Huang'er smiled lazily. "Now what do you have to say? Princess Bi has accepted me. On what grounds will you deny us our wishes?"

The Bluesmoke royal family was absolutely livid. Princess Bi's performance made them both enraged and helpless.

Things had gotten completely out of hand. The royal family's reputation was damaged beyond repair. Even a fool now could tell that Princess Bi had never wanted to partake in the tournament. Her acquiescence was just an act of defiance.

What was done couldn't be undone; it would be truly difficult to turn things around. If this Miss Huang'er refused to budge, there was precious little they could do to salvage the situation.

"This will impact the royal family's reputation, Miss Huang'er," the imperial prince pleaded in a low voice. "Please show us some mercy."

"Is the reputation of House Yan not also at stake here? If I withdraw now, what will people think about my house? Tell you what, I have a solution."

"Please do tell," hurried out the prince.

"Instead of getting married, we can become sworn sisters. That will be a satisfactory conclusion to the tournament and a solution to our problem. What do you think?" She had thought things through before she joined the tournament. Every action she'd taken was for this moment.

"Well..." The royals shared a look. The ladies becoming sworn sisters was a passable outcome. The reputation of both parties would be preserved, at least. "But the tournament..."

"It's ended, of course. If there's going to be another tournament, I also need to judge her future husband as her sister, shouldn't I?"

Jiang Chen was quite impressed with Huang'er's plan. She'd approached the situation with a delicate touch and handled it perfectly.

The royals shared pointed looks with one another. They knew if they continued to argue, it would be Bluesmoke that ended up losing face. They decided to just go along with things and put an end to the nonsense.

The end result was still somewhat ridiculous, but at least no one would ended up insulted.

As for when Princess Bi married in the future, Miss Huang'er couldn't possibly claim to have the final say. The royals dismissed the idea, but didn't let it show.

Everyone had thought Huang'er was joking, but she wasn't at all. After the conversation, she lit an incense stick in the dirt to complete their oath of sisterhood.

This was rather to Bluesmoke's benefit. The more formal the ritual was, the better it was for their reputation. At least, the whole situation would seem less like a joke. That lessened the blow to their pride.

Ling Bi'er had been immensely excited ever since she learned Huang'er's true identity. However, she knew she needed to control herself for the time being.

She was more than willing to become sworn sisters with Huang'er. She had no family on Myriad Abyss Island and had felt exceedingly lonely throughout the years even with the royal family taking care of her.

Having an old acquaintance like Huang'er as her sister was comforting. She was in a good mood throughout the ritual.

Ling Bi'er was two years older than Huang'er. She was therefore the older sister.

"Older sister Bi'er, it's such a shame that someone as beautiful and talented like you isn't more known to the world. Why don't you come to Eternal Divine Nation with me to get some fresh air and meet the geniuses there? You'll be more well-known then." Huang'er affected a dramatic tone. On the surface, it was an invitation to Ling Bi'er, but she was actually addressing the Bluesmoke royal family.

Didn't they want to marry their princess off to aristocracy in the Ten Divine Nations? In that case, shouldn't it be in line with their goals for her to take the princess to Eternal Divine Nation?

Ling Bi'er added, "I've long heard about the Ten Divine Nations and I've always wanted to go there myself. My limited cultivation stopped me previously, and now I'd like to go, not to make a name for myself, but to see more of the world."

"Is the imperial family willing to let your princess stay with me in Eternal Divine Nation for a while?"

"Well..." the royals were hesitant.

"What? Are you worried that I'll run off with your princess?" Huang'er smiled superciliously. "Or that we'll actually get married?"

"You've misunderstood, Miss Huang'er," one of the royals explained hastily. "It's just that we're in no place to make a decision for Princess Bi. His Majesty has to give his approval."

"Then I'll wait for His Majesty to make a decision. The day he makes the decision will be the day I leave." Huang'er took Ling Bi'er's hand in hers and continued with a smile. "Us women have to judge our potential husbands carefully before getting married, Sister Bi'er. We mustn't treat our marriage lightly. You're my big sister now and I won't let them marry you off to some random man. Once we're in Eternal Divine Nation, there will be a lot of geniuses from respected families for you to pick from."

Jiang Chen was quite amused. Huang'er's intelligence was truly admirable.

The royal family had no choice but to defer to the emperor. They relayed everything that had happened.

The emperor didn't immediately make a decision. He knew that if he stopped Princess Bi'er from leaving, House Yan might be offended. It couldn't hurt for her to go to Eternal Divine Nation. Huang'er wasn't going to actually marry the princess, after all.

One could run, but no one could not hide.

The emperor gave his permission on the condition that the princess must be protected and served by a group of imperial guards. That way, the royal family would be more at ease.

Huang'er naturally wasn't going to deny them that.

The tournament had ended in an unexpected fashion, but everyone was surprisingly accepting of the results. Princess Bi staying single was a better result than her becoming some genius scion's wife.

Huang'er and Princess Bi's sisterhood became a much told tale. Both women were both remarkably stunning. They made a perfect match in a sense. None of the crowd left dissatisfied.

That was the odd thing about men. If there was a beautiful woman they couldn't get, they didn't want other men to have her either. The end of the tournament was dramatic and satisfactory to all.

Yan Qingsang's wide grin didn't falter on their way back to their temporary residence. He was so happy it was as if he'd been the one to win Princess Bi.

Jiang Chen didn't understand him. "What are you so excited about, Brother Yan?"

"You don't understand, brother. Don't you know that a waterfront pavilion is the first to see the rising moon? Princess Bi is coming to House Yan with Huang'er. There'll be plenty of opportunities for us to interact. One day... hehe."

"You better put that thought to rest, Yan Qingsang," Huang'er warned coolly, suddenly appearing behind her cousin. His expression twisted into one of embarrassment.

[Sovereign of the Three Realms \(WN\)](#)

Chapter 1655: Eternal Divine Nation

House Yan held a brief family meeting once they returned to their temporary residence. They decided to leave Bluesmoke after five days. The youths in the family could use the time to stroll around Miracle City. They could also process the ore they'd acquired in the festival to uncover more value.

Other than Yan Qingsang, none of the members of House Yan had gained all that much in the festival. The ancient jade they'd acquired was far from top-notch. Therefore, there wasn't a need for them to go to the ancient jade market. Instead, they visited brothels such as Jade Revel Lodge every day.

The geniuses were used to keeping a tight leash on themselves when they were within their clan. Being in a different land and environment gave them an opportunity to do whatever they wanted.

Yan Qingsang, on the other hand, was very disciplined. He didn't go to the brothels. Instead, he dragged Jiang Chen to the ancient jade market every day.

That earned him Jiang Chen's respect. Yan Qingsang could sometimes be a little flighty, but when all was said and done, he was a driven, ambitious, and principled man.

"We're going back to Eternal Divine Nation in two days, brother," Yan Qingsang remarked seriously, looking at Jiang Chen. "The two elders have already extended an invitation for you to travel with us. They're not authorized to grant you the title of guest expert, but they said that they will do everything they can in the clan elders' meeting. Trust me. House Yan is serious about recruiting you."

That was exactly what Jiang Chen wanted. All this time, he had refrained from taking the initiative and played hard to get. His understanding of House Yan had been proven right. They'd fallen for his plan: hook, line, and sinker.

Jiang Chen affected a thoughtful look before he answered pensively, "Since House Yan has extended such a sincere hand, I'll go with you, brother. I have to warn you though, if House Yan fails to show me the respect I deserve, then I'll take my leave as soon as I arrive."

Yan Qingsang was pleased. "Don't worry. If the family disrespects you, I won't be shameless enough to keep you still. I can tell you that if martial dao is your lifelong pursuit, the Ten Divine Nations is the best place for you to be. Spending time in Bluesmoke is a waste of your talent."

The youth's opinion of his brother had skyrocketed since learning that Xiahou Xi had been taken out by Jiang Chen.

Jiang Chen then mentioned that he had a disciple he had to take with him. Naturally, Yan Qingsang had no objection.

Jiang Chen returned to the inn and explained the situation to Hua Ming. The boy was delighted. His yearning to go to the Ten Divine Nations ran more deeply than Jiang Chen could imagine.

After paying the bill, Jiang Chen tipped the inn associates and left them a task.

"If a Long surnamed friend comes to this inn and asks about me and my disciple, please tell him that I've gone to House Yan in the Eternal Divine Nation."

"Of course, of course!"

"Pleased to be at your service, sir." Given the tip, naturally they would readily agree to his request. It wasn't something hard to do, anyhow. Relaying a message required no effort.

Jiang Chen took the boy with him back to House Yan's temporary residence. The members of the aristocratic house were slightly curious about his disciple.

However, it wasn't unusual for someone like Jiang Chen to have a disciple, so they didn't probe too deeply. The two elders could tell that despite Hua Ming's limited training, his talent and potential were not to be underestimated at all.

Five days had passed since Huang'er had brought Ling Bi'er into their ranks. The princess was accompanied by an entourage of sixteen — twelve imperial guards and four personal maids.

That was actually a small group, considering the princess was about to travel far. Someone with less restraint might have brought more than a thousand servants.

Huang'er and Ling Bi'er greeted each other with unusual enthusiasm, as if they were best friends who'd finally reunited after a long time. The Yan miss often invited the princess to her room for a round of girl talk. The two of them spent many happy moments together.

Two days later, House Yan returned to home on an airboat.

Their airboat had a unique design. Even though its scale wasn't massive, the boat was intricate. It was a worthy vehicle for a first-class aristocratic family in the Ten Divine Nations.

Jiang Chen sat on the boat, deep in thought. It was surreal to reflect on what had happened. Everything had gone his way since arriving at Bluesmoke Isles, as if he'd been blessed by the gods. Although he'd encountered some challenges, things had generally progressed according to his plans.

Perhaps it'd been fate that had brought him to the Bluesmoke Isles and Huang'er to the jade festival. Happenstance had brought the two together to reunite. No matter what difficulties lay ahead, nothing could deter him after reconnecting with Huang'er.

He knew there were many more challenges to encounter after arriving at House Yan, Xiahou Zong being the most difficult one. He could emerge from closed door cultivation at anytime and arrive at House Yan to take Huang'er away.

Time was ticking away. There was a proverbial sword hanging over their heads. The only thing he could do before the sword fell was to improve himself and become stronger as much as he could. Only then would he be able to deal with the coming threat with more ease.

Even on the airboat, he put aside any unnecessary thought and focused on cultivating. Yan Qingsang marveled at his diligence.

"I finally understand why you're such a remarkable man, brother. You pay no attention to the beautiful scenery beneath us and blatantly ignore the beautiful ladies on the airboat. Your pursuit of dao is pure and your mind focused. You really will be able to reach amazing heights in martial dao." He was highly impressed by Jiang Chen's focus.

Among his peers in the house, Yan Qingsang was one of the most hardworking ones. Compared to Jiang Chen though, he realized that he didn't hold himself to a high enough standard. He wasn't merciless enough to himself.

Even via airboat, it took months to travel from the Bluesmoke Isles to Eternal Divine Nation. If one flew the distance, it would take double the time, not to mention the dangers they would encounter. Jiang Chen had to admit that the sheer size of Myriad Abyss territory was beyond his estimation.

After a long period of time, the airboat finally reached Eternal Divine Nation. Once inside the boundary, the airboat slowed down noticeably.

"We're entering Eternal Divine Nation territory, brother. Remember not to take an airboat inside any divine nation territory unless you have no other choice. And even if you have to, travel as slowly as you can. Don't ever speed. Many factions will consider that trespass and a challenge. Do you understand?" Yan Qingsang explained patiently like the good friend he was.

Jiang Chen made a mental note of it. He'd known nothing about the Ten Divine Nations beforehand. But as soon as they'd entered Eternal Divine Nation, he'd felt something different about the place compared to the previous locations he'd visited.

There were steep mountain ranges everywhere his eyes touched, raging rivers, sacred grounds of martial dao filled with abundant energy, and various exotic realms and locations.

“The Ten Divine Nations truly are one of a kind.” Jiang Chen had only just entered Eternal Divine Nation, but he already had a good understanding of the advantages the divine nations enjoyed.

The abundance of energy made them the center of Myriad Abyss Island. They were worth every bit of their fame.

He’d never experienced the ancient times of Divine Abyss Continent himself, but his instincts told him that the current density of energy in Eternal Divine Nation wasn’t much less than what it’d been on the continent in the ancient times.

Otherwise, those from the ancient times wouldn’t have been unwilling to leave after arriving at Myriad Abyss Island.

Yan Qingsang continued to patiently describe his home to Jiang Chen.

“Brother, in Eternal Divine Nation, people talk about one sacred land, three sects, and seven great houses. The one sacred land refers to Eternal Sacred Land, the royal family’s bedrock. The royals are all born and bred in the sacred land. It’s the origin of their bloodline. The three sects refer to the three biggest sects in the country. The seven houses include us, House Yan.”

“So the aristocratic families are considered third tier among all the factions?”

“Not necessarily. The three sects and the seven houses aren’t that different in terms of their power. The three sects aren’t necessarily stronger than the seven families, just that their focus is different. The sacred land can tolerate expansion of the houses, but not the sects.”

Reading between the lines, Jiang Chen mapped out the overall relationship between the factions.

The Eternal Sacred Land was the overlord. The other factions were dependent on it.

The three sects could not expand without restraint. They would never be allowed to grow strong enough to threaten the sacred land.

On the other hand, the houses would never be able to threaten Eternal Sacred Land no matter how they grew. The houses put too much emphasis on bloodline. As long as biological bonds remained important, the houses wouldn’t be able to expand indefinitely like the sects.

Jiang Chen was quick on the uptake. With the few pointers Yan Qingsang gave him, he was able to see with clarity the political structure of Eternal Divine Nation.

“Brother Yan, is House Xiahou the strongest among the seven houses? Do they stand only below the sacred land, and well above even the three great sects?”

“I won’t say they’re well above the three sects, but House Xiahou has developed rapidly over the past couple of years.” Yan Qingsang’s tone turned grave.

[Sovereign of the Three Realms \(WN\)](#)

Chapter 1656: Obstacles in the Path of Return

Jiang Chen had his mind set on House Xiahou the most.

The key to freeing Huang'er from her troubles was House Xiahou. As long as he got rid of that accursed house, everything else would be instantly solved. But that was hardly an easy task, was it?

"Among Eternal Divine Nation's seven houses, House Xiahou is undoubtedly the strongest." Loathing flickered in Yan Qingsang's eyes. "Actually, House Yan was definitively first place several hundred years ago. But back then, one of our most venerated forefathers unexpectedly failed a tribulation. The collapse of our pillar led to a chain reaction that restricted our house in various ways and weakened its influence everywhere. We've been having a pretty hard time since then." The young man was saddened as he related the story.

"So, House Yan lacks not resources but a supreme expert, someone to carry the house on their shoulders?" Jiang Chen asked.

"You can say that. If our venerated forefather hadn't died, we wouldn't be at the bottom of the seven houses or constantly at risk of losing our status. We wouldn't necessarily crush House Xiahou, but..."

Yan Qingsang smiled wryly. "You saw what happened at Jade Revel Lodge," he remarked with some self-deprecation. "Although Yan Jinnan's behavior was shameful and disgusting, it accurately reflected what position we're in. It's not just the younger generation: the entire house is losing its voice in high places. We are participating less and less in the major events of our nation."

"Heaven is inconstant, just as water is ever-flowing. Perhaps these centuries were a trial sent by heaven for House Yan. No one can guarantee that House Xiahou will be evergreen or eternal. The same is true for your current weakness," Jiang Chen advised.

Yan Qingsang slammed the table. "You're absolutely right. Heaven is inconstant to all! I don't believe for a second that we won't rise again!"

The encouragement raised his spirits. He began to explain to Jiang Chen the state of Eternal Divine Nation in more detail. Several secret topics were touched upon, ones that only a first-rate faction like House Yan knew.

Lower-ranking factions weren't privy to these tidbits; some they'd never even heard of. As they conversed, the airboat suddenly began to land.

"Are we already here?" Jiang Chen watched the vessel descend with alarming speed. It touched earth in only a few breaths.

Yan Qingsang raised his head, confusion plain on his face. "No, we're not there yet."

The two elders came out. "Stay in the airboat," they warned, "and don't come out without a good reason. There's an emergency ahead that needs to be dealt with."

"What's going on?" Yan Qingsang wasn't the type of guy who could sit still. He made as if to stand up and go take a look. As soon as he did, he was stopped in place by the two elders' stern gazes.

The two elders' seriousness prompted Jiang Chen to pull on Yan Qingsang's sleeve. "Brother Yan, don't be hasty."

Yan Qingsang scratched his head, then sat back down. His neck craned outwards to try to get a better glimpse of what was happening. What had caused House Yan's airboat to land before reaching home?

The two elders were outside the boat by now.

“You must be friends from the Starlight Sect, yes? I am an elder of House Yan. We’re on our way back from the Bluesmoke Isles’ ancient jade festival. We are simply trying to pass by. Please let us through.” Elder He was the one speaking.

“House Yan? What of it? Can House Yan venture into our territory without permission? Is House Yan allowed to trespass as they will?” A distant, hoarse voice rebuked, scorn clear in its tone.

It seemed that this Starlight Sect didn’t care much about House Yan’s name and in fact, dismissed the great house.

Elder He responded faintly from awkwardness. “May I ask who exactly are you in the sect, friend? Eternal Divine Nation has its own rules. Any airboat of a large faction may fly freely in the nation’s airspace. As long as we do not cause trouble, we can travel as we see fit without limitation. Are you challenging the nation’s laws by stopping our airboat?”

“Don’t talk to me about rules or laws. Are you trying to scare me with them? Yes, the nation has a rule like that, but are you sure House Yan is still a large faction?”

“What do you mean by this, friend? House Yan is one of the seven houses, a publicly acknowledged first-rate faction. Why is Starlight Sect...”

“Hahaha!”

There was a burst of raucous laughter interrupting the elder. The hoarse voice began on a tirade of mockery. “You really have just come back. You don’t even know what’s happened in Eternal Divine Nation yet! I suppose your entire house might still be in the dark about it. The other factions have decided that House Yan is no longer a first-rate faction. This is a joint decision from the Eternal Holy Ground, the three sects, and the six other houses. House Yan... is out!”

The news boomed at House Yan’s ears like deafening thunder. Elders He and Quan both colored.

“Don’t speak of inventions in broad daylight, friend!” Elder He declared angrily. “Celestial lightning might smite you!”

“Inventions? You’re not fit for us to make anything up,” the hoarse voice replied coldly. “I hear that House Yan has gotten a fair bit of ancient jade in Bluesmoke? And a princess, to boot?”

It cackled giddily, reckless in its rudeness.

Within the airboat, Jiang Chen found all of this rather odd. “What is the Starlight Sect?” he asked in a low voice.

“One of the three major sects,” Yan Qingsang answered with some gravity.

“Is this their territory?” Jiang Chen asked curiously.

“I don’t know. It’s hard to see from inside the airboat. I’d need to go outside to check. But there’s never been any firm boundary markers, if you know what I mean. As long as it’s not a faction’s forbidden

grounds, passage is usually permitted. Starlight Sect is intentionally making trouble for us.” Yan Qingsang was no fool. He saw through the essence of the matter.

Sovereign of the Three Realms (WN)

Chapter 1657: A Safe Return

Jiang Chen remained seated in the boat. As a guest, he was in no place to interfere without his host’s say so. Unlike in the human domain, his martial dao was nothing to boast about in the Ten Divine Nations. He wasn’t that much stronger than the average cultivators here.

It was better to lay low for the time being. There was no need for him to become involved in the conflict between House Yan and other factions. And, it was also apparent that Yan Qingsang was much more furious than he was.

Without Elder He and Elder Quan’s orders however, a fuming Yan Qingsang could only remain put as well. He knew that he would only make things worse by leaving the boat.

Outside, Elder He conversed patiently with the man from the Starlight Sect. He was showing more than enough deference to the sect. The shocking news that’d been freshly delivered had shaken the two elders, pulling the rug out from beneath them.

“We’re in Eternal Divine Nation territory, my friend. House Yan hasn’t trespassed into the Starlight Sect’s forbidden ground. No authority will consider the sect justified in stopping our airboat. Aren’t you worried about punishment from the royal family?”

“Cut the nonsense. The Starlight Sect is entitled to intercept any airboats passing through our territory.” The man brayed with arrogant laughter. “If you’re smart, you’ll do as I say. Otherwise we’ll keep you as our indefinite guests. You will only leave when we allow you to.”

But there was a limit to Elder He’s patience. House Yan was a first tier faction after all. This man had just crossed a line with his insolence.

“Since when has the Starlight Sect become so unreasonable?” Elder He fixed a cold gaze on the man. “Are you sure you’re going to openly bully House Yan?”

“So what if I am? What are you going to do about it? If you want to pass through, leave all of your ancient jade and the Bluesmoke princess behind. Then we might consider happily letting you go, hahaha!”

Within the airboat, Huang’er had had enough.

“Stay here,” she said to Ling Bi’er. “I’ll go deal with them.”

As soon as Huang’er stood up, the other youths in House Yan followed. They had run out of their patience as well. Yan Qingsang and Jiang Chen exchanged a look before following the young geniuses.

Elder He was upset when he saw them exiting the boat, but he didn’t reprimand them. He waved a hand. “What are you all doing? Get back inside.”

Huang'er ignored Elder He and looked at the man. "Friends of the Starlight Sect, Eternal Divine Nation follows its own set of rules. House Yan has no qualms with you. You're being rather short-sighted if you think you can bully us as you wish while we're temporarily down on our luck.

"If you force us to stay, we'll defend ourselves to the death. The royal family will absolutely find you to be at fault. You know better than anyone what the Eternal Sacred Land hates the most - lawbreakers. You may be able to take advantage of us, but will you be able to exterminate House Yan and keep everyone from talking?"

She presented her arguments calmly but assertively, not trying to maintain peace like Elder He had. Her clear explanation of the factors at play here illustrated plainly that she didn't believe that these people would do anything to House Yan. They were merely trying to con the house into giving up their valuables.

If House Yan surrendered, the sect would've gained what they wanted and would be able to spread the news to defame the house.

The best thing to do wasn't to compromise, but to show House Yan's resolution to resist even unto the brink of death. After all, the Starlight Sect wouldn't dare go on a killing spree in broad daylight and kill every one of them.

The sect wasn't bold enough, and the Eternal Sacred Land would never allow them to do so.

"Tsk, you sure have a glib tongue, chit. Are you the famous Yan Qinghuang of House Yan?" A lecherous smile appeared on the leading man's face as he gave her a onceover.

She narrowed her eyes, her expression calm with a touch of disdain.

"What a sharp little girl. Didn't House Yan trade you away a long time ago? What do you care about them? We'll let you pass for House Xiahou's sake, Miss Yan Qinghuang. You may go!" The burly man made an exceedingly dramatic gesture.

His companions roared with laughter. They obviously had no respect for House Yan.

Huang'er nodded and turned to the two elders. "Stop wasting our time on them, elders. Get back in the airboat and depart. Let's see if they truly are bold enough to break the rules in Eternal Divine Nation territory!"

She walked back inside the airboat without sparing the men another glance.

The two elders shared a look and nodded. There was no better way to address this issue. It was pointless to continue arguing with the sect. These men would never listen to reason. They were unlikely to attack once the airboat launched.

If they did, that would mean war. There would be casualties from the fight, which would alert the sacred land.

Once that power was aware of the conflict, House Yan would receive justice despite its declining influence. After all, the rules were the rules.

The Starlight Sect wasn't above the rules, and the Eternal Sacred Land had no reason to tolerate their crimes.

All members of House Yan returned to the airboat.

"Launch and set sail!" ordered Elder He.

The boat launched slowly. The men from Starlight Sect clenched their teeth and exchanged uncertain looks. They hadn't expected House Yan to show such backbone.

The two elders had been wavering, but Yan Qinghuang had been able to turn the situation around with only a few choice words.

In truth, the sect wasn't daring enough to escalate the conflict. It would be easy enough to attack the airboat, and they were ninety percent sure they would be able to keep the passengers here. But if House Yan fought back with no regard for their lives and ended up with casualties, Starlight Sect wouldn't be able to hear the end of things.

It wouldn't be a small conflict then. Once people died in a feud between big factions, no one would be able to cover the incident up.

"Should we do it, Elder Tu?"

"That girl was too cocky. We should take her and teach her a lesson!"

"Let's take them and have House Yan pay a ransom! We'll insist that they've trespassed into our forbidden grounds. What can House Yan do about it, huh?"

"As long as they fall into our hands, we can make up all the excuses we want!"

The men turned in unison to their leader. The burly man was furiously debating what he should do. In the end, the violent glint disappeared from his eyes.

"Forget it. We can't be brash! I didn't expect Yan Qinghuang to be this difficult to deal with, even more so than the two old men. If House Yan fights back with all they've got, things will spiral out of control."

"Are we just going to let them get away? That's too easy on them!"

"Forget it. House Xiahou will demand an explanation from us as well if anything happens to Yan Qinghuang. We can afford to offend House Yan, but House Xiahou... even the sect head has to think twice about provoking them!"

Yan Qinghuang's relationship with Xiahou Zong and the family behind him gave the burly man pause. In the end, he gave up on his original plan. If anything happened to Xiahou Zong's cultivation vessel in their territory, House Xiahou would never let Starlight Sect off the hook.

It was foolish to be enemies with them.

Moreover, they hadn't gained the sect head's permission before intercepting House Yan's airboat. They'd done it of their own accord. If things had gotten out of hand, they wouldn't get off scot-free either.

They'd planned to coerce the Yan elders by exploiting the latter's sense of inferiority, but Yan Qinghuang had completely spoiled the plan.

Jiang Chen silently commended Huang'er for what she did. The men from House Yan, elders and youths alike, were all spineless. It was the woman of the group who'd ended up deterring the bullies.

Yang Qingsang smiled wryly. "In the end, it was Huang'er who got us out of danger."

"She's a heroine more remarkable than any men," Jiang Chen praised.

"It's weird though. Why did the Starlight Sect back off after Huang'er's words? There wasn't anything special about her speech."

Jiang Chen smiled. "That's easy, you didn't identify the key factors."

"What do you mean?" Yang Qingsang was puzzled.

"Those men were using your lack of confidence to rip you off. They never wanted to start a fight. Huang'er made it clear that House Yan wouldn't surrender without one. So of course they didn't want that. Besides, Huang'er wasn't someone they could touch. Even if the Starlight Sect is willing to be House Yan's enemy, they wouldn't dare offend House Xiahou."

Yang Qingsang paused for a long moment to think. He slapped his thigh in realization. "There was a one-two punch to Huang'er's words. One was our resolution to fight to the death. The other was her identity."

"Yes. If you were the one who presented the same arguments, it wouldn't have been as effective."

Jiang Chen wasn't trying to put him down. It was true that Huang'er was the best person to take a stand against the Starlight Sect. None of them dared lay a finger on her. If something had happened to her, they'd have two aristocratic houses after them.

They didn't have the courage to face such consequences.

Yang Qingsang sighed. "I haven't misjudged you, brother. You're more observant and insightful than I am. Those men also said that House Yan has been ostracized by the big factions. Were they lying? Or were they telling the truth?"

That was what Jiang Chen was wondering too. He wasn't sure himself either.

"In my opinion, it's most likely not true, at least not yet. If House Yan was struck off from the list of big factions, the elders wouldn't be completely oblivious. However, there must be people trying to kick House Yan out of the circle. Whether they would succeed depends on two things: if you people are able to prove yourselves, and if the Eternal Sacred Land approves."

The Eternal Sacred Land was the absolute wielder of authority in the nation. As long as they were against the idea, it wouldn't matter how much the other factions pushed for it. If they agreed, however, it would be difficult for House Yan to maintain its status, unless House Yan demonstrated enough power to prove everyone wrong.

So far, the house wasn't strong enough to do so.

The run-in with the Starlight Sect had put a dampener on everyone's mood. The two elders felt humiliated as well. If Huang'er hadn't taken a stand, they would be returning home with nothing but shame.

The fact that they were approaching their home brought them little joy. Instead, their hearts were filled with a sense of relief. The elders had been on high alert during this outing. On one hand, they'd had to ensure the youths' safety. On the other, they had to keep an eye on Huang'er and keep her from stirring up trouble.

The airboat finally entered House Yan territory, which spanned tens of thousands of miles. The house was the absolute ruler in this region. Their headquarters were located in the capital city, while the territory was governed by the various executives and managers in the family.

Of course, a large faction like House Yan had its own board of elders. There were more than a hundred elders in total.

Even though it wasn't as highly regarded as it'd once been, its foundations remained intact. The only difference between it and the other big factions was the lack of a domineering forefather.

The young geniuses relaxed only after entering their home territory.

The elders immediately briefed the board of elders and the patriarch on what had happened.

The patriarch was greatly taken aback. "The Starlight Sect has crossed the line. How dare they intercept our airboat and spread rumors about House Yan? Even I haven't gotten wind that we've been excluded from the list of first tier factions. A mere elder in the Starlight Sect can't possibly get the information before me!"

The elders echoed his sentiment. The sect had gone too far! Many of them proposed filing a complaint to the Eternal Sacred Land.

The patriarch calmed down enough to stop the elders. "Filing a complaint is out of the question. House Yan is stuck in an awkward place. If we file a complaint, the sacred land will dismiss us even more!"

"The patriarch is right. We can't afford to embarrass ourselves again."

"Thank you for your hard work, Elder He, Elder Quan. This journey was far from simple. You exceeded our expectations by returning safely with valuable gains."

"According to your report, Yan Qingsang performed the best, correct?"

"Where is the young man you mentioned? Why don't you bring him to us so we can have a look?" The elders spoke up one after another, making it a lively discussion.

[Sovereign of the Three Realms \(WN\)](#)

Chapter 1658: Senior Executives of House Yan

Not long after, Jiang Chen followed Yan Qingsang to House Yan's headquarters.

Almost all of the senior executives had gathered in the main hall, including the patriarch, the venerated elders, and more than a hundred clan elders. The only exceptions were the ones otherwise preoccupied or in closed door cultivation.

More than a hundred pairs of sharp eyes landed on Jiang Chen as he walked in. The focus of their strong auras shifted to him almost in unison. Some of them were terrifyingly powerful.

“Yan Qingsang is here to greet the patriarch, the various venerated elders, and clan elders. This is my brother Shao Yuan.” Yan Qingsang greeted them all respectfully and introduced Jiang Chen.

Jiang Chen immediately walked up and offered extremely courteously, “This jianghu wanderer is Shao Yuan. Greetings, patriarch of House Yan, venerated elders, and elders.” He could make this kind of rote introduction in his sleep.

He kept his head down, feeling several gazes sweeping over him. He avoided all eye contact to prevent any of them from latching onto him. He knew that some of them would want to test him, be wary, or hostile to him. Therefore he circumvented the problem altogether.

It was a smart decision.

It was difficult enough for a great emperor to stay upright under the scrutiny of so many elders. If he was foolish enough to meet their eyes, they might jump straight into testing him with their consciousness.

The seal on his consciousness might then be exposed, which would lead to many problems. Moreover, Elder Xi, the one who’d taken Huang’er away that year, was here as well.

He was more than competent. If he noticed something familiar about Jiang Chen’s consciousness, his memory might be jogged.

Therefore, Jiang Chen kept his guard up.

His caution didn’t attract any suspicion; it looked like Elder Xi wasn’t that curious about him.

The patriarch gave him a onceover. “Young man, Elders He and Quan have sung high praises about you. Even the prideful Yan Qingsang considers you a brother. Your abilities are self-evident. As a wandering cultivator, you’ve shown your resilience by remaining calm in such an occasion. It’s remarkable for a young man like you to be this capable.”

The patriarch’s tone and movements weren’t domineering. He talked like an average elder who lived in the neighborhood - benevolent and friendly.

But Jiang Chen wasn’t deceived. No clan patriarch could be as simple as he appeared to be. His instincts told him that the patriarch was even stronger than Forefather Embittered Bamboo at their first meeting.

Embittered Bamboo had been a sixth level empyrean expert. The patriarch was likely to be at ninth level empyrean, the final stage of great empyrean realm. This deduction was drawn from the fact that the air around him wasn’t fierce or aggressive. Instead, his martial dao was gentle and humble.

Men like these had either never cultivated, or had reached such high levels that he’d returned to simplicity.

Other than the patriarch, the venerated elders were likely to all be great empyrean experts as well. They ranked among the top in the family.

The clan elders ranked well below the patriarch and the venerated elders. Therefore, the patriarch's praise was weighty with importance.

"I've had some success from relying on my family heritage. Compared to the geniuses from the Ten Divine Nations however, there's still much room for improvement."

"Hahaha, good on you. It's good for a young man like you to be patient and humble. This is something you should learn from him, Qingsang."

Yan Qingsang scratched his head and nodded. "I understand, patriarch."

"Fate's brought you and Qingsang together as brothers, young man, and you've come to House Yan. We are generous to real geniuses. You and Qingsang should cultivate together and help each other. Whatever resources he enjoys, you do too. This seat has only one thing to ask from you, and that is to be loyal to House Yan. Do not turn your back on us."

"Thank you, patriarch. Thank you, elders!" Jiang Chen affected a flattered and humbled look. In truth, he didn't care that much about House Yan's resources. But with the patriarch word's, his presence and status in the aristocratic house had been confirmed.

He was now of equal status as Yan Qingsang. Even though he didn't bear the surname Yan, he had a place in the family.

"Show your brother out, Qingsang. From now on, you're brothers with different surnames. Take good care of him."

"I will." Yan Qingsang was delighted.

The guest he'd brought back to the house had been acknowledged and endorsed by the patriarch, which was a stamp of approval on his own actions.

Once Yan Qingsang and Jiang Chen left, the patriarch turned to one of the venerated elders on his left. "Elder Wanjun, Qingsang is your grandson. It seems that he's improved the most during the trip to the Bluesmoke isles. This seat must congratulate you."

Elder Wanjun was Yan Wanjun, Yan Qingsang's grandfather and one of the venerated elders. He held an exceedingly high status in the family. Even the patriarch had to show him some respect.

Yan Wanjun smiled faintly. "That kid still has a lot of rough edges. I hear that he didn't get along with the other youths in the family during the trip. I'll have to give him a serious talking to."

The patriarch laughed. "Those conflicts are trivial. It's inevitable for proud youth to clash. It's fine as long as familial bonds aren't damaged and house values aren't pushed aside. I hear that Qingsang's made House Yan proud this time. He performed the best in the jade festival."

"The youths have their own destinies. There are some things I can't be bothered with guiding too closely. He can think about them and find solutions on his own." It would be inappropriate for Yan

WanJun to praise his grandson in such an occasion. Besides, Yan Qingsang wasn't among the top in the family yet. There wasn't much to boast about.

"Ah, Elder WanJun, what do you think about Shao Yuan?" the patriarch asked, changing the subject. "How high is his potential? What kind of a person is he?"

Yan WanJun didn't immediately respond. He mused thoughtfully on his response for a while. "Judging his face and eyes, he doesn't seem like the insidious sort," he responded cautiously. "That I'm sure of. I believe everyone has reached the same conclusion as well."

"That's hard to say," a venerated elder piped in with a chuckle. "There are those born an expert in masking their true nature. Villains don't come with a sign announcing their malevolence."

The patriarch smiled. "Does Elder Wanyou think differently?"

Elder Wanyou smiled. "I don't have anything against him. It's rare for a young man to receive such high praise from Elder Quan and Elder He. And his ability is useful to us. As long as he stays loyal to House Yan, it won't hurt to invest a bit in him."

"As long as he possesses true talent, we shouldn't turn him away." The patriarch nodded. "Elder WanJun, the young man is here with Qingsang. Please keep an eye on him. Even though House Yan welcomes talented people, if he turns out to have ulterior motives, you must not hesitate to take him out." A decisive look flashed sharply through his eyes.

"Of course. I'd keep an eye on him even without the patriarch's order. Qingsang was the one who introduced him to the family. If something happens, I'll be responsible as well."

Everyone nodded.

Another clan elder piped up, "Patriarch, venerated elders, if this young man is skilled in identifying ore, this subordinate would like to request his assistance."

"How so?" asked the patriarch with a slight smile.

"This subordinate has been devoted to uncovering resources in the region I govern, but the terrain is overly complicated. Although I can feel something different in the area, I've been unable to detect any spirit veins or mines. I find that very strange. I've been exploring the region myself over the years. I didn't dare invite an outside professional for fear of a breach of confidentiality."

"Do you mean the area around Cloud Camel Mountain?"

"Yes."

"That's right at the edge of our territory, bordering House Feng's," another person spoke up. "If we make too obvious a move, House Feng won't stay idle."

"That's right, patriarch. Our relationship with House Feng has never been good. If they use this as an excuse to start trouble, there will be little that we can do. It's better that we leave the mountain alone. The terrain there is difficult and the place is filled with malevolent energy. There's unlikely to be a spirit vein there."

"Fortune favors the bold," the first elder to raise the topic interjected hurriedly. "House Yan can no longer afford to do things by the book. Besides, the border at Cloud Camel Mountain was drawn according to a historical agreement. Eighty percent of the area belongs to us, and only twenty percent to House Feng. They can't do anything as long as we don't cross the border."

"Ha, you're too naive. House Feng is no House Xiahou, but they're not easy opponents either. Do you think they'll hold a civil conversation with us?"

"Do you mean that we can't even explore our own territory? That we need to consider other factions' opinions first? House Yan has never been so spineless!" The elder was losing control over his emotions.

"Enough, knock it off!" Elder Wanjun stepped in. "It's unbecoming of you to quarrel like children."

One of the venerated elders had intervened. The clan elders shut their mouths and stopped arguing.

[Sovereign of the Three Realms \(WN\)](#)

Chapter 1659: The Two Girls' Thoughts

At last, all eyes focused on the patriarch. Everyone knew that he made the final call in the end.

"Elder Liang," House Yan's patriarch ruminated. "You've been stationed near Cloud Camel Mountain for the past few years. How sure are you of a spirit vein there?"

"Patriarch, I've been researching that mountain and the surrounding geography for a while now. I'm certain there is a spirit vein in that mountain. However, I'm not talented enough to connect all the dots and come up with conclusive evidence. If I had it, I would present it at the earliest opportunity for your judgment!"

There were many elders in House Yan, each with his own responsibilities. Elder Liang was in charge of managing Cloud Camel Mountain and its surrounding demesnes.

"How many others in Eternal Divine Nation will be able to survey it, do you think?" House Yan's patriarch inquired in a low voice.

"I don't want to pass an inaccurate judgment, but I'd wager not more than five. We can't invite any of them, though. They'll take possession of the spirit vein upon discovering it."

The patriarch nodded slightly. "Pay close attention to this affair. Don't make too much of a commotion for now. If you think Shao Yuan has the talent for it, take him for a look around. Remember, we can't be too hasty. The last thing we want is to instigate a conflict."

House Yan couldn't afford further conflict with anyone. They lacked the energy and resources to do so. Pressure was already closing in on them from every side. Straining their relationship with House Feng would only add fuel to the fire.

"Alright. That's enough about Cloud Camel Mountain. Anything else to report on?" asked the patriarch after a look around.

"One more thing, patriarch." Elder He interjected.

“Go ahead.”

“It has to do with Miss Huang’er. In the Bluesmoke Isles, the imperial family hosted a tournament for the hand of their princess...” Elder He related the tale of Huang’er’s adventure in the guise of a boy and how she’d stormed home with another girl in tow.

The other elders were uniformly astonished by the tale. Evidently, they felt that Huang’er’s conduct had been patently ridiculous.

“There’s no problem with that,” House Yan’s patriarch laughed. “The imperial family may be slightly displeased, but we need not consider their feelings. It’s a good thing for Huang’er to be sworn sisters with the princess. I just wonder... how are her nature and talents?”

“Both superb,” Elder He remarked instinctively.

“Oh? We should cultivate this Princess Bi then. If another genius from Eternal Divine Nation takes an interest in her, House Yan will surely benefit from that union.” The patriarch had the same idea as the imperial family.

“The patriarch is wise. I perceive this girl to possess a unique quality to her. She is confident, independent, and a little austere. Her bearing is quite uncommon. If she’d been born in House Yan, she would be quite comparable to Huang’er in skill and presentation. It is quite possible they could’ve been a pair of treasure.”

“Oh?” The patriarch’s eyes lit up. Huang’er was a young girl whose genius was universally acclaimed in all the divine nations. She was near the very top of the sixteen beauties.

If not for Xiahou Zong, Huang’er’s beauty and talent was worthy of being married off to one of the most prominent factions. To someone in Eternal Sacred Land, even. If Princess Bi was comparable, she could fill in the void that Huang’er would create.

Though Xiahou Zong would one day take Huang’er away, Princess Bi could become House Yan’s second young female genius, taking her place among the sixteen golden hairpins.

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Huang’er on the other hand, had finally returned to her own residence. All of the imperial guards and maids were sent outside the residence’s courtyard. Now that they were back in Eternal Divine Nation, these servants had zero authority.

“Big sister Bi’er, we can finally have a proper chat now.” Now that she was back at her own place, a weight lifted off of Huang’er’s chest. She had been carefully watched all the while. No secrets could be divulged in any of her conversations; thus, she had only commented on Myriad Abyss Island at large in their conversations.

Ling Bi’er had been wise enough not to mention their past, either. Only when she heard Huang’er say this, did her heartstrings finally relax.

“I grew up here. No one is allowed to trespass. You can say whatever you like here. Don’t worry about ears on the other side of the wall either.”

Having finally discarded the invisible burden on her chest, Ling Bi'er affixed her bright eyes upon the other girl before sighing sadly. "Little sister Huang'er, I only thought your eyes to be so pretty and pure back at Regal Pill Palace. I didn't expect your real appearance to be so... breathtakingly remarkable."

"Hehe, I had a few reasons for disguising myself back at the palace. How did you get to Myriad Abyss Island, big sister Bi'er? I didn't know you were here, otherwise I would've come for you. Brother Chen's made several efforts to find you after your disappearance. He's looked pretty much everywhere in the human domain."

"Brother Chen? Are you talking about junior brother Jiang Chen?" Ling Bi'er's slender body shivered. Her heart shook uncontrollably when Jiang Chen's name was mentioned.

"Yes." From her reaction, Huang'er knew that this icy big sister of hers hadn't forgotten about her past attachment to Jiang Chen.

"Is... junior brother Jiang Chen, is he alright? Sister Huang'er, why did someone like you from Myriad Abyss go to the human domain?" Ling Bi'er was full of questions.

"Don't worry, he's more than fine. Not only him, but your father, your sister, and many of your peers: they're doing well too."

"Really?" Ling Bi'er could no longer restrain her emotions. Her eyes reddened. If she hadn't been a natural introvert, she would've been bawling loudly already.

"Mhm. When I left, Palace Head Dan Chi, Elder Yun Nie, Mu Gaoqi, and your father and sister were all already at Sacred Peafowl Mountain. Junior brother Jiang Chen has also become young lord of the place, the de facto leader of Veluriyam Capital."

"What? Veluriyam Capital? The city in the Upper Eight Regions?" Ling Bi'er's eyes widened. She thought she'd misheard.

"That's right. Emperor Peafowl took him as a personal disciple. After that, he became a pillar of the city with his own strength."

Ling Bi'er's face was a hodgepodge of rich responses. After a long while, she sighed softly. "As I expected, junior brother Jiang Chen is no ordinary man. Palace Head Dan Chi said long ago that the sect was fortunate to have him, not the other way around. He had some pretty incredible foresight."

"That's not the half of it. I think Brother Chen must have unified the human domain by now."

"How do you know, sister Huang'er? Didn't you say..."

"Yes, he hadn't pulled it off yet when I left, but things were already heading in that direction. Now, I'm almost sure that he has finished his undertaking. Do you know why I think that?"

"Why? Are you in communication with him?" Ling Bi'er's voice trembled.

"Because he's come to Myriad Abyss Island as well." A smile hung on Huang'er's face.

"He... he's come to Myriad Abyss?" Ling Bi'er felt a tug on her heartstrings. "What for? Have you seen him, sister?"

"You and I both have. Do you remember the Winterdraw affair? There was news about that recently," Huang'er looked helpfully at the other girl. She didn't know why, but she enjoyed seeing Ling Bi'er squirm.

"Winterdraw? That's where Polylore Divine Nation held a trial for its young geniuses, right?" Ling Bi'er wasn't quite sure. She didn't usually pay much attention to the outside world. She was more interested in enhancing her own strength, so that she could return to the human domain one day to find her loved ones and rebuild the Regal Pill Palace.

But Jiang Chen had probably done it all by now. She was both pleased and mildly sorrowful. Did they still remember her back home? Did they still need her?

"Yes, I'm talking about Polylore's little problem. Three of its houses put a bounty on someone's head. Do you remember who it was?"

"Jiang Huang?" Ling Bi'er knew that much.

As soon as she said that name aloud, her heart quavered yet again. Gazing at Huang'er, she was clever enough to come to her own conclusions about all this. Finally understanding all, she felt a wave of jealousy creep into her heart.

Jiang Huang, Jiang Huang...

Jiang Chen... and Huang'er?

So, that meant junior brother Jiang Chen and sister Huang'er had already been dao partners back at the Regal Pill Palace? No wonder he'd ignored her and her sister's passionate entreaties.

Ling Bi'er had never felt inferior in her life before, nor had she felt heartache over a man. But she could no longer control these emotions from overflowing.

When Wei Xing'er had teased junior brother Jiang Chen during the trials in Mount Mirage, Ling Bi'er hadn't given her a second thought. Ling Bi'er had felt from the bottom of her heart that she was better than the other girl.

But even if she were better than Huang'er, what then? It was little sister Huang'er who'd made Jiang Chen's acquaintance first and exchanged vows with him.

Despondency filled Ling Bi'er's heart. She was totally lost as to what to say or do.

"Big sister Bi'er, do you know why I went into the arena?" Huang'er giggled as she asked the question.

"Why?" Ling Bi'er sounded weak.

"Because I didn't want you to marry someone you didn't like. Your junior brother Jiang Chen didn't want that, either. It wasn't a good time for him to do something about it even though he was present, so I acted in his stead!"

"He was present?" Ling Bi'er was even more shocked. She'd thought Huang'er's statement about meeting Jiang Chen a joke.

"Yes. Guess who he was?"

Ling Bi'er closed her eyes lightly. She found it daunting to meet Huang'er's gaze, and was afraid that she'd give away the thoughts and wishes that had accumulated over these long years. She was even a bit fearful that Huang'er would think Ling Bi'er was going to come between her and him.

Various people passed through her mind. Her eyes flashed with acumen. "Is it Sir Shao Yuan?" she blurted out.

Sovereign of the Three Realms (WN)

Chapter 1660: Entrusting Jiang Chen

Ling Bi'er was an introverted girl. She'd begun to ponder the question ever since Huang'er's initial revelation. There hadn't been many that both girls had seen. Aside from House Yan's scions, there were only two.

One was Sir Shao Yuan; the other, his student.

These two had stayed in the airboat the entire way. She'd seen them around; though they hadn't chatted, Ling Bi'er's instincts told her that it had to be him.

"Sister Bi'er, everyone said that you were the smartest at the Regal Pill Palace. You definitely live up to the reputation!"

Ling Bi'er's breathing became ragged, her expression tensing. Though she was very much interested in the subject at hand, she didn't want Huang'er to misunderstand.

Huang'er extended a light hand, gripping the other girl's palm in her own. She felt the faint sensation of cool sweat.

"Big sister Bi'er, you aren't mad at me for sticking my nose in, are you? Your junior brother only wanted to make sure you didn't have to marry someone you don't like. He didn't want you to be stuck in a foreign land."

"I... no, I'm truly grateful." Ling Bi'er's voice was barely louder than a buzz. She was perpetually uneasy before Huang'er, as if her feelings for Jiang Chen prevented her from facing her friend properly.

However, her words were indeed sincere. She really was thankful for Huang'er's help. If not for the aid, she would've been forced into marrying some genius from that tournament. She couldn't imagine the horror.

Her thoughts didn't remain here. No matter how pleasant Myriad Abyss was, what then? So what if it was a hundred times better than the human domain?

The only thing that kept her going was the prospect of returning to her long-departed homeland.

How could she not be excited that Jiang Chen had come to Myriad Abyss, and was here in House Yan at this very moment? Struggling to remain calm, she couldn't disguise her surge of happiness.

What was so unforgettable about her former home?

Not just the land, but its people as well. Her father, her younger sister, Jiang Chen... These three people were the ones she thought about, every day and every night. Even Palace Head Dan Chi and the other important members of the sect didn't come close to their prominence in her heart.

Ling Bi'er took a deep breath. "Sister Huang'er," she asked quietly, "you've known junior brother Jiang Chen for a long time, right? Can I ask when you first met him?"

"I first knew of him when he was still in the Eastern Kingdom. But he didn't have a chance to meet me much later, until after the trials in Eternal Spirit Mountain, in the sixteen kingdom alliance. I was afflicted with an evil curse that he diagnosed, then later removed." Huang'er retold in detail everything she'd experienced with Jiang Chen.

Ling Bi'er's heart soared. She was slightly envious of Huang'er, especially after hearing about her adventures with junior brother Jiang Chen in the world after the fall of the Regal Pill Palace. They had wandered long and weathered many storms together... the very thought of it made her heart ache a little.

Would my fate be different if I had been the one by junior brother Jiang Chen's side?

Alas, any hypotheticals were meaningless.

Gathering up her attention, Ling Bi'er made another inquiry. "Miss Huang'er, I didn't expect you to have experienced so much with junior brother Jiang Chen."

Huang'er smiled and nodded. She was both happy and a little grieved. She suddenly clutched Ling Bi'er's hands. "Big sister Bi'er, I have no regrets left in my life after Brother Chen's love. If I really can't escape my fate, I'd like to ask one thing of you."

"Tell me." Ling Bi'er was saddened on Huang'er's behalf after learning about her circumstances. Why should such a nice girl suffer such injustice at the hands of fortune?

"If Xiahou Zong comes for me and Brother Chen hasn't yet perfected his strength, you need to hold him back from doing anything rash. If I'm no longer around, you should take care of Brother Chen in my place. Have him bring you back to the human domain. Myriad Abyss Island is a deep and murky swamp. There's no real reason to stay."

Ling Bi'er quaked with apprehension. She shook her head fervently. "No, no, you'll be fine, sister Huang'er! I'm sure heaven will bless your kindness with good fortune. You're a perfect match for junior brother Jiang Chen. You said that if there were miracles left in this world, Jiang Chen would be the one to bring them about. You need to trust him. You've undergone so many trials together... are you going to lose your faith in him now?"

Ling Bi'er admired Jiang Chen – perhaps even loved him, and still did after all these years – but that didn't mean she would gloat at Huang'er's expense. She had no intentions of taking advantage of the opportunity represented by her friend's misfortune.

Her natural sweetness meant that she was only envious rather than embittered. Thus, she didn't quite agree with Huang'er's pessimism. She wanted to Huang'er to remain healthy and happy.

Huang'er struggled to smile. "Sister Huang'er, I know that you're always gracious and gentle. What I said is... just a possible eventuality. Even if nothing bad happens, I'd still like you to help me take care of him. The burden on his shoulders is far too heavy."

Ling Bi'er froze at these words.

Help her take care of him?

Her face burned with embarrassment. The prospect made her heart race... in a taboo sort of way. She'd never even considered sharing a man with others before. But now that Huang'er had brought it up, it set her heart pounding with desire.

Was such a thing really feasible?

"Sister Huang'er, you... you..."

Huang'er giggled. "Don't try to pull a fast one on me, big sister Bi'er! I've always known about your and your sister's affection for Brother Chen. I'm a little surprised that you haven't gotten over him after all these years, but..."

She flashed a radiant smile at Ling Bi'er as she said this.

The girl was totally flustered. She didn't know how to react to Huang'er's inquisitive gaze. It was as if someone had seen straight into her guilty conscience.

"I know you're embarrassed about it, big sister Bi'er. We can talk about it another time. But there's one thing you absolutely have to promise me. If ... if something happens to me, you need to take care of Brother Chen. Don't let his brashness take control, and don't let him mire himself in despair. He's a great man who has much riding on him. I've always felt that he's keeping much from us. Perhaps it's because their importance surpasses our understanding." Huang'er was very perceptive of others' feelings.

In her relationship with Jiang Chen, she had learned and understood much about him. Still, she believed deep down that he bore heavier pressures that were still hidden to her. He hadn't told her about it not because of selfishness, but rather to avoid bringing stress to others.

She was most worried that Jiang Chen would behave irrationally on her behalf.

In Eternal Divine Nation, impetuosity against House Xiahou would only produce unthinkably poor results. Even though Brother Chen was exceptionally talented and a divine spirit reincarnated, he couldn't stand against the entire house if he lacked the necessary cultivation and strength.

This was Myriad Abyss Island, not the human domain.

In the human domain, Jiang Chen had maneuvered freely about with his suite of trump cards and his unique advantages. In Myriad Abyss, however, there were far too many experts. Brother Chen's ability and genius stood out among the younger generation, but it wasn't enough to wage a war against an entire house.

"Big sister Bi'er, can you promise me this?" Huang'er's eyes looked pleadingly at Ling Bi'er with all seriousness.

The girl being queried sighed softly, then replied in a quiet voice. "I'll try my best. I'm just... worried... that my words won't be enough to persuade him."

"You're his senior sister. He'll listen to you! I know he will," Huang'er encouraged.

"Are you sure there's really nothing to be done about it, Huang'er? What if we run away together again?" Ling Bi'er ventured.

Huang'er smiled with intense sorrow. "I can't," she shook her head. "It's impossible to run away, anyways. I'll only drag other people into this. Elder Shun was the one who brought me out of Myriad Abyss, and his cultivation has been mostly crippled because of it. My father and mother are still trapped in the Boundless Prison too... there will never be an end to their suffering if I run?"

Ling Bi'er couldn't suggest anything more after Huang'er mentioned her parents.

She remembered how her father had been poisoned and understood the kind of pain Huang'er was going through. "Little sister Huang'er," she patted the back of the other girl's hand. "Junior brother Jiang Chen will come up with a way. There's been nothing impossible for him yet, right?"

Huang'er nodded. The two girls leaned against each other in comforting silence.

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Jiang Chen, on the other hand, had been brought by a very enthusiastic Yan Qingsang to his own residence. The location where the young Yan genius lived was atmospheric and spacious. It had plenty of room for master and disciple, and probably twenty more besides.

"Brother, if you don't find this place cozy enough, we can go live on one of House Yan's holdings instead. The land is expansive and its inhabitants few, so we can do as we like."

"Haha, the capital is better. It's more active here and there's more sights to see, no?" Jiang Chen had no desire to move to a more rural area.

He wanted to stay in the capital to come in contact with the highest echelon of Eternal society and understand the minutiae of the nation. This was more important to him than anything else.

Once the two young men were settled in, Yan Wanjun's pageboy arrived with a message to ask his grandson to bring Sir Shao Yuan to him.

Yan Qingsang knew his grandfather likely had something to say, so informed Jiang Chen of the request; the latter readily agreed.

As Yan Wanjun's direct grandson by blood, Yan Qingsang was highly valued. Yan Wanjun had two sons. One of them was Yan Qingsang's father, and the other, Huang'er's.

Yan Qingsang's father was the elder of the two, less talented in cultivation but more in mercantile matters. Currently, he managed a lot of the house business.

Huang'er's father was the younger son. Tremendously gifted in his youth, he'd surpassed his fellows in expertise and passion. Because of this, Yan Wanjun had allowed him to travel about the world, which

ultimately resulted in his meeting and entering a relationship with a foreign woman. This provoked the enmity of his betrothed from House Xiahou, leading to the series of ensuing tragedies.