

Doctor 1371

Chapter 1371: Let the Fertile Water Not Flow into Others' Fields

To the dozens of Innate Experts, including the white-haired elder, the ability to dispel the dan poison and retain their lives was nothing short of a divine blessing.

Moreover, Fang Bai's promise that as long as Yu Wei joined the Huaxia Sect, he could help him reach the realm of Innate Perfection, left the majority among the dozens of Innate Experts deeply moved.

From Fang Bai's words, it was clear that joining the Huaxia Sect not only meant survival but also further progress on the Martial Dao. Such an opportunity was rare and incredibly hard to come by.

Besides, Fang Bai's strength was formidable, and he was also a supremely skilled Alchemist. Joining the Huaxia Sect would mean gaining a powerful backer and no longer worrying about a lack of various elixirs.

As for why the Huaxia Sect was obscure in the True Martial Realm, that was entirely irrelevant—nobody cared.

While Yu Wei hesitated, the white-haired elder and the others, who were long tempted beyond resistance, rushed to Fang Bai, clamoring to join the Huaxia Sect.

It wasn't that Yu Wei was unwilling to join the Huaxia Sect; rather, as a Loose Cultivator, he was used to freedom and unrestrained living. He feared that joining Fang Bai's sect would bind him with various constraints, hence his brief hesitation. However, Yu Wei knew all along that after hesitating, he would ultimately agree.

Seeing others seize the opportunity before him, Yu Wei grew both anxious and upset. After much effort, he finally squeezed his way to Fang Bai. Bowing deeply, he said solemnly, "Senior, I am willing to become a member of the Huaxia Sect."

Li Chenzhou, seeing dozens of Innate Experts scrambling to express their desire to join the Huaxia Sect, secretly gave Fang Bai a thumbs-up.

"Brother Fang's move is masterful! If he can bring these dozens of Innate Experts into the Huaxia Sect, the once-obscure Huaxia Sect will swiftly rise to prominence and become one of Huaxia's top-tier Innate Sects!"

Li Chenzhou mused inwardly, brimming with admiration for Fang Bai.

Only someone like Fang Bai, a true prodigy, could possess such strength and charisma to leave dozens of Innate Experts in awe, willingly pledging their loyalty.

Previously, Zu Hanjiao had used the Heart-Eroding Pill to manipulate Yu Wei and dozens of other Innate Experts, forcing them to do her bidding without offering them any benefits. Although Yu Wei and the others outwardly showed respect and obeyed Zu Hanjiao's orders, in truth, they loathed her to the core. How could they ever truly be loyal to her?

Thus, after Zu Hanjiao's demise, not a single one of them mourned her death.

However, after Fang Bai dispelled the dan poison from their bodies and revealed his intention to recruit them, they wholeheartedly chose to follow Fang Bai and join the Huaxia Sect.

Fang Bai's strength surpassed Zu Hanjiao's, and he was also highly skilled in alchemy. He could have easily used forceful means, just as Zu Hanjiao had, to control the dozens of Innate Experts.

But Fang Bai did not resort to such methods. Even his invitation for Yu Wei to join the Huaxia Sect was extended with a tone of inquiry and negotiation.

This respect shown toward them, Yu Wei included, made the dozens of Innate Experts feel dignified, while also sensing Fang Bai's sincerity.

Thus, Yu Wei had no reason to refuse Fang Bai's invitation.

"The Huaxia Sect is not an Innate Sect, and its cultivation resources are quite scarce. You should consider this carefully before joining,"

Fang Bai said with a wide smile.

Yu Wei and the others were momentarily stunned, but then quickly understood. They reasoned that the Huaxia Sect was likely a sect Fang Bai had recently founded, and thus had not yet been classified as an Innate Sect.

However, with a powerhouse like Fang Bai at its helm, the rise of the Huaxia Sect was only a matter of time. And with the addition of these Innate Experts, the rise would undoubtedly be expedited.

In the near future, the Huaxia Sect would surely stand proudly at the pinnacle of the True Martial Realm's Innate Sects.

Therefore, Yu Wei and the others did not hesitate further, steadfastly insisting on joining the Huaxia Sect.

"Your decision to join the Huaxia Sect will significantly enhance the sect's overall strength. I am very pleased,"

Fang Bai said with a smile, his gaze sweeping across the dozens of Innate Experts around him. Unhurriedly, he added, "Within the same sect, we are family. It won't be long before you'll feel fortunate to have made today's decision!"

"Brother Fang, with the Huaxia Sect now boasting dozens of Innate Experts, it can look down on all sects in the True Martial Realm. It wouldn't be an exaggeration to call it the 'Number One Sect of the True Martial Realm.' This is truly worth celebrating!"

Li Chenzhou approached with a hearty laugh, congratulating Fang Bai.

Having already pledged allegiance to Fang Bai and joined the Huaxia Sect, Li Chenzhou was naturally delighted by the sect's growth.

"Does anyone here know where Ruoshui Palace is?"

Fang Bai called out loudly, "I believe everyone is aware of the reward I announced a few days ago, correct? The reward is still valid! However, it's no longer meant to locate the Huaxia Sect but to find Ruoshui Palace. Whoever can lead me to Ruoshui Palace, the reward will go to them!"

Pausing briefly, he continued, "From what I've learned, Ruoshui Palace is an Innate Sect where the majority of disciples are women. Its location, however, is extremely secretive, and few people know its whereabouts due to the rarity of its disciples' appearances."

Now that Wu De was guiding them, they would soon find the Huaxia Sect, allowing Fang Bai to check one task off his list.

However, Fang Bai had promised Zhuge Lian that he would help her search for her mother, who had deep ties to Ruoshui Palace. Thus, Fang Bai decided to continue using a reward system to mobilize the Martial Artists in Spirit Lake City for the search.

"I've heard of Ruoshui Palace before, but I truly don't know where it is..."

An Innate Expert muttered.

Yu Wei and the others furrowed their brows in contemplation.

As that Innate Expert mentioned, though many among them had roamed the True Martial Realm for years, and some had indeed heard of Ruoshui Palace, most had only encountered its name without knowing its location.

"How about this..."

Seeing Yu Wei and the others exchanging helpless looks, Fang Bai realized they too didn't know the whereabouts of Ruoshui Palace. He said, "I'll stay in Spirit Lake City for ten more days. During this time, I hope to receive news about Ruoshui Palace. You can all take this period to gather information as well."

After some thought, he added, "I am increasing the reward. If anyone discovers the exact location of Ruoshui Palace within these ten days and leads me there, I'll offer twenty bottles of superior-grade

elixirs, two hundred thousand superior-quality Essence Stones, and two superior-grade Spiritual Artifacts as payment. Once you leave, spread this news throughout the city."

Li Chenzhou clicked his tongue and remarked, "Brother Fang, your reward this time is double the previous amount! I suspect the millions of Martial Artists in Spirit Lake City will go crazy over this."

Wu De, his face filled with envy, said, "So many cultivation resources, and you're giving them away without hesitation. Brother Fang, you're truly generous!"

Wu De guessed that Fang Bai must have obtained a significant haul of cultivation resources from the Martial Artist Remnants at the bottom of Linghu Lake, which allowed him to issue such a lavish reward.

The value of Fang Bai's reward was so immense that even Yu Wei and the other Innate Experts couldn't help but feel their hearts race. They could already imagine the sensation this news would cause throughout Spirit Lake City once it was announced.

Chapter 1372: Siblings

Whether it is high-rank superior elixirs, high-rank superior Essence Stones, or high-rank superior Spiritual Artifacts, obtaining even one of them could significantly enhance strength. For Innate Experts, they possess an irresistible, compelling allure.

After consulting Fang Bai's opinion, Yu Wei and dozens of other Innate Experts eagerly departed, heading toward different regions of Spirit Lake City.

Yu Wei and the others had some connections within Spirit Lake City. They planned to mobilize all their friends and family to gather information about Ruoshui Palace and vie for Fang Bai's reward, ensuring the benefits stayed within their circle.

Once Yu Wei and the dozens of Innate Experts dispersed, Li Chenzhou went outside Spirit Lake City to locate Wu De and Xia Chenyu, bringing them both back.

That same day, the four of them settled into Yuezhi Inn.

Now, the original owner of Yuezhi Inn, Lei Hong, along with its secretive master Zu Hanjiao, had both fallen. Fang Bai seamlessly became the new proprietor of the inn.

As for the Essence Stones accumulated by the inn over the years, Fang Bai did not hoard them like Zu Hanjiao. Instead, he allocated a large portion to Yu Wei and the dozens of newly recruited Innate Experts within the Huaxia Sect.

Another smaller portion Fang Bai planned to distribute among his friends and family from the secular world once they arrived at the Huaxia Sect.

Over the years, Yuezhi Inn had amassed an astonishing number of high-rank Essence Stones. The share distributed to Yu Wei and the numerous Innate Experts was substantial, which filled them with surprise and gratitude toward Fang Bai.

Previously, after eliminating Zu Hanjiao, Fang Bai did not find any high-rank cultivation resources within her Spatial Ring, leaving him somewhat disappointed. He speculated that the resources she had brought from the Three Thousand Great World to the True Martial Realm were likely already exhausted.

However, Fang Bai did gain valuable information by using the Soul Capturing Heart Refining Technique on Zu Hanjiao's mind. He learned a great deal about the Three Thousand Great World, including how Zu Hanjiao came to the True Martial Realm and ways to return to the Three Thousand Great World.

Especially the method of returning to the Three Thousand Great World, which was of vital importance to Fang Bai.

Compared to the True Martial Realm, the Three Thousand Great World belonged to a higher dimension.

In that world, the air was filled not with Essence Energy, but the more potent Spiritual Energy.

For martial artists there, Essence Stones were no longer commonly used; instead, they cultivated with Spirit Stones.

Spiritual Medicine there had an age of five thousand years or even surpassing ten thousand years.

Spirit Beasts in that world were larger, more ferocious, and their attacks incomparably powerful.

People there, from the moment they were born, were bathed in Spiritual Energy. Almost everyone could cultivate, and almost everyone could become Innate Martial Artists.

However, Innate Martial Artists were considered the most basic existence in that world.

Martial artists with promising potential and excellent aptitude, with the chance to achieve Foundation Establishment, might be noticed by sects or prominent clans, recruited as disciples, and through years of arduous cultivation, possibly rise to become mighty experts admired and respected by all.

Conversely, those Innate Martial Artists with mediocre talent and little hope of achieving Foundation Establishment had no choice but to spend their lives performing menial tasks like growing Spiritual Medicine or taming Spirit Beasts—a tedious and mundane existence.

Of course, there were occasional martial artists with average aptitude who encountered rare opportunities or fortuitous chances, overturning their fate and embarking on the path to becoming great beings.

In sum, the Three Thousand Great World was a place of survival of the fittest, rife with schemes and deception, yet wondrous, diverse, and vibrant.

It was in that world that Fang Bai was born in a past life and first embarked on his Martial Dao journey.

Fang Bai yearned to return to that world and resume his pursuit of the Dao, aiming to reclaim the Immortal Emperor's legacy.

In the blink of an eye, six or seven days passed. During this period, some of Yu Wei's group returned to Yuezhi Inn, but they failed to bring back any information about Ruoshui Palace, leaving Fang Bai somewhat disappointed.

By the tenth day, Fang Bai instructed Yu Wei's group to temporarily stay in Spirit Lake City to manage Yuezhi Inn and continue investigating Ruoshui Palace's whereabouts. Meanwhile, he prepared to depart for the Huaxia Sect with Xia Chenyu and Li Chenzhou.

Once they reached the Huaxia Sect and stabilized everything, he would notify Yu Wei's group to regroup with them.

Fang Bai, Li Chenzhou, Xia Chenyu, and Wu De had packed everything and were just about to leave Yuezhi Inn when a man and a woman unexpectedly showed up.

The two were Universe Level experts who had yet to reach the Innate Realm. Their appearances bore five or six similarities, resembling a pair of siblings.

The pair lingered near Yuezhi Inn for a long time before cautiously and secretly entering, requesting an audience with Fang Bai, as though terrified of being noticed.

Fang Bai, through his Divine Sense, had already detected their presence. When they arrived at the inn and named Fang Bai specifically, he felt a subtle stir in his heart and had Xia Chenyu lead them to his room.

"Junior Zhu Huan greets Senior Fang!"

"Junior Zhu Yue greets Senior Fang!"

Upon seeing Fang Bai, the pair immediately dropped to their knees and respectfully bowed.

The news of Fang Bai killing the inn's owner and taking its place, as well as issuing the grand bounty to locate Ruoshui Palace, had spread throughout Spirit Lake City and beyond, thanks to the deliberate efforts of the dozens of Innate Experts like Yu Wei.

Yu Wei and his group did this under Fang Bai's instruction.

Fang Bai's intention was to lure disciples of Ruoshui Palace out with this news, as this method was far more effective than aimlessly searching the world for the sect.

The reason for publicizing his takeover of Yuezhi Inn was also to boost his reputation, urging Ruoshui Palace to learn about his search for their sect.

Fang Bai believed no matter how hidden Ruoshui Palace might be, they would undoubtedly have disciples traveling across the True Martial Realm, with numerous informants gathering intelligence.

As long as the news of Fang Bai's bounty reached Ruoshui Palace's upper ranks, Fang Bai did not believe they would remain indifferent.

Yet, what amused Fang Bai was that while his reputation indeed spread swiftly across Spirit Lake City and neighboring regions, it also brought unexpected troubles.

Many reckless individuals dreaming of renown came to challenge Fang Bai, hoping to use him as a stepping stone to fame.

Given Fang Bai's current identity, rank, and strength, he naturally disdained engaging with such people. Yet, every day he was exasperated by martial artists shouting for him outside the inn, calling him out for battle.

Fortunately, with Wu De, Li Chenzhou, and others shielding him, no one managed to intrude into the inn.

A man's reputation casts a shadow as a tree casts shade.

For ordinary martial artists like Zhu Huan and Zhu Yue, Yuezhi Inn was more intimidating than the legendary, unfathomable Innate Sects.

As the new owner of Yuezhi Inn, the mere name "Fang Bai" exerted a suffocating pressure upon them.

As Universe Level martial artists meeting Fang Bai, they trembled slightly in awe, not daring to lift their heads.

"Zhu Huan... Zhu Yue... are you siblings?"

Fang Bai looked at the kneeling pair before him and asked with a gentle smile.

"Senior Fang, we are indeed siblings!"

Zhu Huan answered earnestly with utmost respect.

The elder brother Zhu Huan appeared to be in his thirties. He cultivated a Fire-based Technique and possessed Universe Level perfection cultivation.

His younger sister, Zhu Yue, looked about twenty-four or twenty-five years old, similarly cultivating a Fire-based Technique, with Universe Level high-rank cultivation.

The siblings were neither particularly unattractive nor outstandingly beautiful—essentially average-looking individuals who would blend seamlessly into a crowd.

However, considering their ages and cultivation achievements, they evidently had commendable aptitude.

Chapter 1373: Disciple of Ruoshui Palace

"You've come to see me. Do you have news of Ruoshui Palace? Don't be nervous, I'm actually quite easygoing."

After confirming the identities and backgrounds of Zhu Huan and Zhu Yue, and realizing they were not lying, Fang Bai finally spoke with a smile.

Even though Fang Bai didn't release a trace of Martial Artist Aura, Zhu Huan and Zhu Yue felt a formless pressure the moment they stepped into the room.

Hearing Fang Bai's voice, the siblings mustered the courage to lift their heads. But when they saw Fang Bai's face, their eyes widened in shock, their expressions filled with disbelief.

In their impression, Innate Experts were all over a hundred years old. Fang Bai, having killed Lei Hong—the owner of Yuezhi Inn and a practitioner of peak Innate Cultivation Level—had proven himself even stronger.

By that logic, even if Fang Bai wasn't over a hundred years old, he shouldn't be far off.

What they didn't expect was that the Fang Bai before them looked no more than twenty-something.

The siblings immediately thought of "rejuvenation," but quickly rejected the idea.

In this world, while some experts could reverse gray hairs to black and regain youthful appearances at the peak of their cultivation, the deep-seated weariness from centuries of life that reflected in their eyes could never be entirely concealed.

But Fang Bai's eyes were bright and clear, pure like water, exuding unshakeable confidence, as if nothing in this world could defeat him—precisely the kind of spirit Martial Artists of his age should possess.

For such a young expert to now be the owner of Yuezhi Inn, not just Zhu Huan and Zhu Yue, but nine out of ten people in all of Spirit Lake City would find it utterly unbelievable.

Staring at Fang Bai's excessively youthful face, the siblings momentarily forgot to respond to his question.

"Ahem..."

Li Chenzhou, noticing the siblings dazed and silent, couldn't help but cough deliberately.

The siblings were jolted back to their senses. Seeing Fang Bai looking at them with a genial smile and no sign of annoyance at their impoliteness, they secretly heaved a sigh of relief.

"Yes, Senior. We do indeed have news about Ruoshui Palace."

The elder brother, Zhu Huan, nervously looked at Fang Bai and cautiously replied.

"Speak, then. What news do you have?"

Fang Bai asked with growing interest.

His instincts told him that this pair of siblings likely knew quite a bit.

"This..."

Zhu Huan hesitated, glancing at his younger sister Zhu Yue, before gritting his teeth and loudly asking, "Dare I ask, Senior Fang, are you an ally or a foe of Ruoshui Palace?"

Fang Bai was slightly startled and then smiled, asking, "Does it matter that much?"

"It's very important!"

Zhu Huan, as if throwing caution to the wind, said, "If Senior Fang is an enemy of Ruoshui Palace, we siblings can lead you there. If Senior is their ally, then treat this as if we never came, and we'll leave right away."

"Brother..."

Zhu Yue weakly murmured, her face already streaked with tears as she lifted her head.

Zhu Huan's gaze revealed a trace of hesitation. Then, as if making up his mind, he loudly declared, "What are we afraid of? If we must speak, we will speak. At worst, we die! I've had enough of living this life of constant hiding and fear!"

Zhu Yue's body trembled, her tears flowing even more freely down her face.

Fang Bai exchanged a glance with Li Chenzhou and Xia Chenyu, then smiled and said, "It's clear your grudge with Ruoshui Palace runs deep."

Without waiting for Zhu Huan to respond, he waved dismissively and added, "We are neither foes nor allies with Ruoshui Palace. I'm only searching for them as a favor for someone else. So, feel free to speak your mind."

Hearing that Fang Bai was not an enemy of Ruoshui Palace, Zhu Huan seemed a bit disappointed.

But when Fang Bai clarified that he was definitely not a friend, Zhu Huan visibly relaxed, a glimmer of hope flashing in his eyes.

After deliberating for a moment and weighing the pros and cons, Zhu Huan finally began to speak: "My younger sister was originally a Core Disciple of Ruoshui Palace. During a recent mission outside the palace, she fell in love with a Loose Cultivator Martial Artist and became pregnant..."

As Zhu Huan spoke, he seemed to find it difficult to continue. He turned to look at his younger sister, who had lowered her head further, and let out a long sigh.

"After my sister became pregnant, she planned to elope with the Loose Cultivator Martial Artist. However, they were caught by Ruoshui Palace's enforcement disciples and brought back to face severe punishment. My sister was demoted from Core Disciple to menial servant, forced to perform the harshest and most exhausting tasks, enduring relentless humiliation. As for the Loose Cultivator Martial Artist, they severed his tendons, crippled his martial arts, and abandoned him deep in the mountains to fend for himself..."

"Later, risking my life, I ventured into the mountains to rescue the Loose Cultivator Martial Artist. Afterward, the two of us retrieved my sister, who had seized an opportunity to escape Ruoshui Palace,

and the three of us fled to Spirit Lake City to hide, evading the pursuit of Ruoshui Palace's enforcement disciples..."

As Zhu Huan recounted this, fear and dread filled his eyes as he spoke in a trembling voice: "Ruoshui Palace is a top-tier Innate Sect, among the most powerful in the True Martial Realm, with countless eyes and ears. Their enforcement disciples, all Innate Experts, make hiding forever unrealistic. Eventually, they will find us. That's why... that's why we came here after hearing of Senior's bounty..."

Li Chenzhou, Xia Chenyu, and Wu De couldn't hide their surprise. They exchanged baffled glances, unable to believe the siblings were from Ruoshui Palace and had endured such hardships.

Xia Chenyu took a closer look and indeed noticed Zhu Yue's slightly protruding belly. It was clear she was pregnant. Thinking about how her beloved had been crippled and how she lived every day in fear of Ruoshui Palace's enforcement disciples, constantly on the run, Xia Chenyu couldn't help but feel deep sympathy.

Xia Chenyu parted her lips slightly, about to speak, when Fang Bai suddenly let out a cold laugh: "Heh. Your Ruoshui Palace's Palace Master is named Zhou Qingyan, isn't she?"

His question was directed at Zhu Yue, who was still bowing her head and crying.

Zhu Yue's entire body shivered. She nodded obediently and softly replied, "Yes."

"That old hag!"

Fang Bai snorted and spoke impatiently: "She was heartbroken by love and filled with hatred, convinced that every man in the world is unfaithful and heartless. That's why she forbids her female disciples from interacting with men... But how ironic that her own daughter ran off with another man. What an incredible joke."

Hearing Fang Bai's words, Zhu Yue was both shocked and terrified, unable to comprehend how Fang Bai knew these secrets of Ruoshui Palace.

Especially the romantic history of Zhou Qingyan, the current Ruoshui Palace Master—a past strictly classified as top secret within Ruoshui Palace. Even as a former Core Disciple, Zhu Yue had only learned about it by chance. She couldn't fathom how an outsider like Fang Bai had such in-depth knowledge.

"You two, are you not showing me your true faces?"

Fang Bai's piercing gaze swept over the siblings, his slight smirk revealing his astuteness.

Having disguised themselves to avoid detection by Ruoshui Palace's enforcement disciples, Zhu Huan and Zhu Yue panicked, realizing that their façade had been seen through by Fang Bai.

Chapter 1374: Heart Stabilizing Pill

Martial artists have two common ways of disguising themselves:

One is to apply a specially prepared disguise ointment directly on the face, thereby changing one's appearance.

However, this disguise technique is too simple and can easily be seen through by sharp-eyed experts.

The second way is to shift the muscles, bones, and flesh of the face to achieve the purpose of disguise.

This disguise technique is very sophisticated and effective, often used by martial artists who like to conceal their identities.

However, this kind of disguise requires consuming a certain amount of True Yuan, which ordinary martial artists cannot maintain for long.

Zhu Huan and Zhu Yue, the brother and sister duo, used the second type of disguise. They are both high-rank Universe Level martial artists, able to maintain the disguise for several hundred breaths without change.

Their disguise successfully fooled Xia Chenyu at the scene, but could not escape the Divine Sense of Fang Bai and Li Chenzhou.

In fact, no matter how exquisite the disguise technique is, there will always be some flaws, but the bone-shifting and shape-changing disguise technique covers these flaws to an extremely subtle degree, discoverable only by innate experts with Divine Sense.

From the moment Zhu Huan and Zhu Yue stepped into the room, Fang Bai and Li Chenzhou saw through their disguise and guessed the brother and sister had their reasons for not wanting to show their true faces.

Indeed, Zhu Huan and Zhu Yue were worried about being discovered by Ruoshui Palace's enforcement disciples, so they disguised themselves to come to Yuezhi Inn.

Zhu Huan and Zhu Yue originally thought they could successfully deceive everyone with their disguise, but to their surprise, they were seen through by Fang Bai, causing their faces to flush with embarrassment and leaving them at a loss.

"Rest assured, here in Spirit Lake City, no one dares to touch you! So... you can reveal your true appearances."

Fang Bai understood what the brother and sister were most worried about, so he gave them a Heart Stabilizing Pill.

In the past, within Spirit Lake City, there were nearly a hundred sects, prominent clans, and gang inns, all vying for the dominant position of Spirit Lake City, often engaging in both overt and covert struggles.

However, since the appearance of Yuezhi Inn, with the innkeeper Lei Hong and dozens of innate experts as the overseers, it naturally became the uncrowned king of Spirit Lake City.

The leaders of those sects and gangs were wise people, understanding that the dominant position of Spirit Lake City belonged to Yuezhi Inn. Hence, they ceased their conflicts and followed Yuezhi Inn as their leader, showing their respect by offering an annual "tribute" to avoid trouble from Yuezhi Inn.

For the "tribute" offered by those sects and gangs, Yuezhi Inn not only graciously accepted them all but also brazenly demanded that the tributes increase yearly. Otherwise, they would not be able to establish themselves in Spirit Lake City, which secretly infuriated those sects and gangs.

Now, with Lei Hong and the dozens of innate experts subdued by Fang Bai, Fang Bai became the new owner of Yuezhi Inn.

To the relief of those sects and gangs, the day after Fang Bai took over Yuezhi Inn, Yu Wei and others spread the news that they would no longer collect any "tribute" from those sects and gangs and invited them to collectively maintain the safety and stability of Spirit Lake City.

Fang Bai's approach won the favor of those sects and gangs, earning their allegiance and making Yuezhi Inn the acknowledged overlord of Spirit Lake City.

It can be said that in today's Spirit Lake City, anyone daring to cause trouble for Yuezhi Inn would find themselves in big trouble, even without Fang Bai needing to personally intervene, as other inns and gangs would ensure the troublemaker pays dear for it.

Even though Ruoshui Palace has ten thousand disciples, if they were to launch a large-scale attack, they would achieve nothing.

Fang Bai and his dozens of innate experts are certainly not to be trifled with.

Zhu Huan and Zhu Yue came to find Fang Bai because they recognized this, hoping to seek protection from Yuezhi Inn for their safety.

In truth, they came to the right place.

The brother and sister were extremely fearful of Ruoshui Palace, while Fang Bai did not regard Ruoshui Palace as a concern. In fact, due to the matter with Zhuge Dingtian, Zhou Yuruo, and Zhuge Lian, he harbored no fondness for Zhou Qingyan, the Palace Master.

Knowing that Fang Bai intended to protect them, Zhu Huan and Zhu Yue were overjoyed, exchanging glances as their facial muscles and bones rapidly shifted and changed, returning to their true appearances within a few breaths.

"We disguised ourselves to avoid being pursued by Ruoshui Palace's enforcement disciples. Please forgive us, Senior Fang!"

Zhu Huan clasped his fists and bowed deeply in salute.

Fang Bai waved a hand and said, "I can protect you for a while, but not forever. If you want to be completely free from Ruoshui Palace's pursuits, you might as well follow me to the Huaxia Sect. What do you think?"

Given Zhu Huan and Zhu Yue's age and their rank in the high level Universe Level realm, it proves they have noteworthy potential, so Fang Bai thought of bringing them into the Huaxia Sect.

"Also, your martial dao partner was crippled, right? Bring him to me later; maybe I can heal him and put him back on the martial dao path."

Fang Bai added, addressing Zhu Yue who had been silent with her head down.

"Really... Can he really be healed?"

Zhu Yue, upon hearing this, sharply raised her head to look at Fang Bai, eyes gleaming, and because of her excitement, her voice trembled slightly.

It's clear that Zhu Yue cares deeply about her martial dao partner, standing by him even when he was crippled and unable to cultivate.

In Fang Bai's view, a woman of such loyalty and affection is very rare.

Li Chenzhou chimed in with a smile, "What's there that can't be healed? Don't forget, this Senior Fang is an extremely skilled alchemist. Your martial dao partner's severed tendons can be cured with a superior high-quality Marrow Cleansing Pill. As long as you're willing to join the Huaxia Sect, I doubt this Senior Fang would be stingy with such a pill."

As soon as he finished speaking, Zhu Yue knelt on the ground and said to Fang Bai, "Senior Fang, we are willing to join the Huaxia Sect! Please grant us the elixir!"

Zhu Huan immediately also knelt down, saying, "I beg Senior Fang to take us in."

Fang Bai waved a hand, gesturing for the brother and sister to stand, then flicked two bottles of elixir towards Zhu Yue, saying, "One bottle of Marrow Cleansing Pill and one bottle of Creation Pill, all of superior high quality. Take them back for your martial dao partner to ingest one of each. By tomorrow morning, his strength should be fully restored. Then the three of you can come here, and we'll set off together, first returning to the Huaxia Sect, then proceeding to Ruoshui Palace."

Zhu Yue, coming from the innate sect Ruoshui Palace, might not have had access to superior high-quality elixirs even as a Universe Level martial artist, yet she knew their worth. Upon receiving the two bottles of elixirs flicked by Fang Bai, she merely glanced inside and confirmed they were indeed superior high-quality elixirs.

After her martial dao partner's body was crippled, knowing only a superior high-quality Marrow Cleansing Pill could possibly heal him, she went into hiding in Spirit Lake City with her martial dao partner, accompanied by her brother Zhu Huan, while secretly searching across the True Martial Realm for a Marrow Cleansing Pill.

However, the main ingredient needed to refine a Marrow Cleansing Pill was extremely rare and expensive, and they couldn't afford the high alchemy fees charged by alchemists, hence the delay.

Now that Fang Bai casually gave them a bottle each of Marrow Cleansing and Creation Pills, which were the superior high-quality elixirs they had long dreamed of, how could they not be overwhelmed with gratitude?

Chapter 1375: Return to Huaxia Sect

Zhu Huan and Zhu Yue, the brother and sister pair, expressed their heartfelt gratitude before departing the inn in high spirits, carrying the two bottles of elixirs gifted by Fang Bai.

"Everyone should return to their rooms to rest. Recharge your energy tonight, and tomorrow morning, we will travel at full speed."

As Fang Bai thought about reuniting with his friends and relatives at the Huaxia Sect soon, an eager anticipation began to stir within him.

With that, everyone returned to their respective rooms to meditate and recuperate.

Early the next morning, Li Chenzhou, Xia Chenyu, and Wu De, now fully rested, emerged from their rooms one after the other and gathered in Fang Bai's small courtyard.

Soon after, Zhu Huan and Zhu Yue arrived, bringing along a burly man with an honest demeanor. His cultivation level was at the perfection stage of the Universe Level Realm.

Upon seeing Fang Bai, Zhu Yue tugged at the burly man's sleeve from a distance and whispered something in his ear.

The burly man's face showed gratitude as he strode toward Fang Bai. With a loud "thud," he knelt on the ground, kowtowing as he declared, "Senior Fang, your gift of the elixir is a profound kindness I can never repay. Please accept this bow from Zhou Huming!"

Fang Bai observed the burly man named Zhou Hu and guessed that he must be Zhu Yue's Martial Dao companion. After giving him a once-over, Fang Bai smiled and said, "Stand up and speak... Hmm, it seems like your recovery is going well."

Zhou Hu got up, looking somewhat reserved, scratching his head as he chuckled honestly. "The elixir you bestowed upon me, Senior, is truly miraculous! Not only did my injuries heal overnight, but my cultivation level has also returned to its former peak."

Fang Bai saw some resemblance between Zhou Hu and his disciples from the secular world, Niu Ben and Xiong Yingxiong, which made him feel a sense of goodwill. He asked, "Do you want to become an Innate Expert?"

Though simple in demeanor, Zhou Hu was no fool. Hearing this, he knew that Fang Bai intended to mentor him. His face immediately flushed with excitement, and he straightened up as he exclaimed, "I do!"

Fang Bai said, "Very well. Follow me to the Huaxia Sect, and within a year, I will help you advance to the Innate Realm! How does that sound?"

Zhou Hu's current cultivation level had already reached the perfection stage of the Universe Level Realm, just one step away from the Innate Realm.

Yet, don't underestimate this single step. Without encountering Fang Bai, Zhou Hu might not have been able to take that step, even in another ten or twenty years.

Fang Bai's promise to help Zhou Hu advance to the Innate Realm within a year left Zhou Hu utterly overjoyed.

Being a straightforward and honest man without much guile, Zhou Hu wholeheartedly trusted Fang Bai, who had already shown him immense kindness. Upon hearing Fang Bai's offer, he nodded without any hesitation.

Fang Bai's pledge to help Zhou Hu reach the Innate Realm filled Zhu Huan and Zhu Yue with envy.

After all, the difficulty of advancing from the Universe Level to the Innate Realm was far greater than that of advancing from the Cosmic Level to the Universe Level. Without a fortuitous opportunity, the vast majority of Universe Level Experts would remain forever barred from the Innate Realm.

"You don't need to envy him. As long as you join our Huaxia Sect, you too will have the chance to reach the Innate Realm in the future."

Fang Bai said this with a warm smile to the Zhu siblings.

If anyone else had said such a thing, Zhu Huan and Zhu Yue might have thought they were being mocked.

But Fang Bai, who had slain Innate Experts with perfection-stage cultivation and was also a Pill Master capable of crafting top-tier elixirs, was a peerless figure in the world. Could his words possibly be false?

Zhu Huan and Zhu Yue were overjoyed and secretly celebrated their bold decision to visit yesterday. Otherwise, they might have missed this life-changing opportunity.

Before departing for the Huaxia Sect, Fang Bai gathered Yu Wei and several dozen other Innate Experts. He instructed them to temporarily guard Spirit Lake City and manage the Yuezhi Inn.

Fang Bai planned to devote himself entirely to cultivating his friends, relatives, and confidantes within the Huaxia Sect into Innate Experts. If, in the future, he could lead them all into the Three Thousand Greater Worlds, their strength in numbers would make it easier to handle any challenges they encountered.

However, nurturing hundreds of Innate Experts would require not only Fang Bai's guidance and mentorship but also an astounding amount of cultivation resources. With Yuezhi Inn's substantial annual income in Essence Stones, it could directly benefit the cultivation of Huaxia Sect disciples.

According to Wu De, the journey to the Huaxia Sect spanned over one hundred thousand miles. On foot, it would take a considerable amount of time to reach.

Thus, Fang Bai had instructed Yu Wei the day before to spend a hefty sum to purchase several Swiftwind Horses with exceptional speed and endurance in Spirit Lake City.

At dawn, as the sun began to rise, Fang Bai, Li Chenzhou, Xia Chenyu, Wu De, and Zhu Huan, Zhu Yue, and Zhou Hu—all seven of them mounted on seven horses—left Spirit Lake City, galloping toward the east, their path illuminated by the morning sun.

With Wu De leading the way, the group traveled smoothly and swiftly. In just half a month, they had already entered the territory controlled by the Huaxia Sect.

At present, the Huaxia Sect had risen to prominence within a radius of a thousand miles, attracting thousands of martial artists from all directions. In terms of overall strength, it had achieved the rank of a second-tier sect.

The territory under the Huaxia Sect's control had also doubled in size compared to the sect's early establishment.

Among Fang Bai's earliest friends in the secular world, Wu De's impressive cultivation level, coupled with his unique talent for detecting Essence Stones, had made him instrumental in locating a small Essence Stone Vein for the Huaxia Sect. This discovery alleviated the disciples' resource shortage, earning him the distinction of being a key benefactor to the sect.

Moreover, Wu De's affable and sociable nature endeared him to the Huaxia Sect disciples, among whom he was immensely popular and widely recognized.

Soon after Wu De and the others entered the Huaxia Sect's territory, several disciples returning from training in the nearby mountains recognized him.

"Elder Wu, you've returned?"

These disciples, who had recently joined as External Courtyard members, surrounded Wu De enthusiastically to greet him upon recognizing him.

Although Wu De held the esteemed position of an Elder in the sect, he carried no airs. Responding with a hearty laugh, he nodded to the disciples and casually asked, "So, you've all been out training, huh? Did you make any worthwhile gains this time?"

"We did!"

"This time, the yield was quite good!"

"We teamed up and hunted down a mid-tier Spirit Beast!"

"I managed to collect a few high-quality Spiritual Medicines!"

"Me too!"

"Let's bring out everything we've gathered for Elder Wu to see!"

"Elder Wu, if you find anything you like, feel free to take it!"

...

Like children showing off their treasures, the disciples eagerly retrieved their gains from their Spatial Rings and laid them out in front of Wu De.

Knowing well the thoughts of these disciples, Wu De let out a laugh and turned to Fang Bai, saying, "These kids are being so enthusiastic because they hope I'll make time to guide them in their Martial Arts Techniques."

Fang Bai, with a warm smile, replied, "Then guide them. Once they've joined the Huaxia Sect, they are like family. You don't need to hold back."

Wu De flushed slightly, rolling his eyes as he quipped, "I might've been able to provide some guidance before, but now that you and Brother Li are here, how dare I showcase my meager skills? From now on, if the sect disciples need instruction in Martial Arts Techniques, it must surely fall to the two of you!"

Turning to the disciples, who looked somewhat stunned, Wu De added, "Don't say I didn't warn you. These two are incredible! If you can earn their guidance, your future cultivation will surely skyrocket!"

Chapter 1376: I'm Back!

The disciples of the Huaxia Sect saw that Li Chenzhou was not much older and Fang Bai was even younger than them, so they didn't take Wu De's words seriously, dismissing them as mere jokes.

"A bunch of fools! You don't know how to seize the opportunity! There will come a day when you'll regret it!"

Wu De saw the Huaxia Sect disciples remaining indifferent and angrily laughed while cursing.

The seven riders galloped ahead, heading in the direction of the Sect Master Hall of the Huaxia Sect.

The Huaxia Sect disciples hurriedly collected the cultivation resources placed on the ground into their Space Rings and followed after them.

By dusk, the seven passed through a range of connected peaks and were greeted by the sight of a vast valley spanning tens of miles dotted with hundreds of buildings.

Some of these buildings were constructed from wood, others stacked with Essence Stones, and still others made from green bamboo. Each was elegant and imbued with an air of ancient charm.

Various kinds of spiritual medicines were growing among the buildings, and a stream meandered through the scenery, evoking the sense of an unparalleled paradise—a land beyond mortal realms.

"It's truly beautiful!"

Xia Chenyu took one look and immediately fell in love with the place.

She gracefully dismounted the Swiftwind Horse and dashed toward the stream, kneeling down as if about to scoop up water to wash her face. Suddenly, she saw a young girl, about eleven or twelve years old, playing nearby. The girl was gleefully chasing after a panicked Snow Jade Rabbit.

The young girl wore a cute pink dress, her hair styled in twin buns. Her skin was soft as a baby's, pristinely white like snow, and her large black-and-white eyes made her look like a character straight out of an anime.

"Is that... Shi Xiaolian? Alian?"

Upon seeing the girl's face clearly, Xia Chenyu stood up in amazement, cupped her hands around her mouth, and called out crisply, "Alian!"

The girl playing with the Snow Jade Rabbit was none other than Shi Xiaolian, whom Fang Bai had met during his mundane journey in the remote Shigong Village of Huaxia.

Back then, Shi Xiaolian lived with her grandfather. Fang Bai had seen her promising potential, performed Marrow Cleansing for her, and guided her briefly in cultivation techniques before floating away.

Later, after her grandfather's passing, Shi Xiaolian buried him with the help of villagers. Alone, she set out to find Fang Bai and eventually joined him and others in the True Martial Realm.

Currently the youngest in the Huaxia Sect, Shi Xiaolian's youth proved advantageous as her mind remained pure and focused in cultivation, allowing her Martial Dao progress to surpass her peers.

Shi Xiaolian's nickname was Alian, and those familiar with her were accustomed to calling her that.

Shi Xiaolian was happily playing when Xia Chenyu's call reached her. She paused, turned her head, and saw Xia Chenyu, whereupon her small mouth opened slightly, her joy radiating across her face.

"Sister Xia!"

Shi Xiaolian exclaimed in delight and transformed into a pink blur, rushing toward Xia Chenyu.

Xia Chenyu spread her arms out, catching Shi Xiaolian as she reached her, spinning her around several times before stealing several affectionate kisses on her tender cheeks. Then she set her down, gently patting her head and said, "Alian, it's been so long! You're getting prettier by the day!"

Shi Xiaolian examined Xia Chenyu's beautiful face closely and sweetly remarked, "Sister Xia, you've become even more beautiful too!"

Xia Chenyu giggled warmly, playfully touched Shi Xiaolian's nose, and teased, "Not only has Alian gotten prettier, but her words are growing sweeter too!"

Shi Xiaolian asked, "Sister Xia, how did you find the Huaxia Sect? I've missed you so much!"

After a pause, her expression darkened and she murmured quietly, "And Brother Fang Bai... I miss him too! Sister Fang Yun, Sister Wen Rou, and Sister Wumei have already sent many Huaxia Sect disciples to search for Brother Fang Bai, yet they still haven't found him... I'm really worried!"

Fang Bai had irrevocably changed Shi Xiaolian's destiny, occupying the most important place in her heart—one that no one else could replace.

Watching Shi Xiaolian's reddened eyes and the tears welling up in them, Xia Chenyu felt pity for her. She turned to point at Fang Bai, Li Chenzhou, and Wu De, smiled, and said, "Alian, look—who's coming toward us?"

Shi Xiaolian followed Xia Chenyu's finger and spotted a handsome man with sharp eyebrows and bright eyes confidently strolling toward them.

The man was dressed in white, exuding elegance. A warm grin played on his lips like the gentle rays of sunlight. Seeing Shi Xiaolian looking his way, he raised his right hand and waved lightly.

"Is that... Brother Fang Bai? Am I... am I dreaming again?"

Shi Xiaolian whispered, hesitating to make a move toward Fang Bai, yet held back out of fear.

In the days since they had been separated, Shi Xiaolian had seen Fang Bai countless times in her dreams. Each time she tried to embrace him, she'd find herself grasping only empty air, resulting in heartbreak and waking up sobbing.

This time, seeing Fang Bai again, she worried it was another dream. She rubbed her eyes vigorously before gazing at the ground by Fang Bai's side.

"If this is a dream, then Brother Fang Bai wouldn't cast a shadow on the ground..."

Shi Xiaolian thought to herself.

At that moment, the setting sun illuminated Fang Bai, casting a long shadow that edged closer to Shi Xiaolian with his every step.

"It's not a dream! It's really Brother Fang Bai!"

Shi Xiaolian clenched her delicate fists tightly, her flushed face beaming with excitement.

"Your Brother Fang Bai has been talking about you this whole journey! He misses you deeply too! Go, Alian, give your Brother Fang Bai a big hug and tell him everything you feel!"

Xia Chenyu gently patted Shi Xiaolian's back and encouraged her warmly.

Alian nodded fervently, then rushed toward Fang Bai.

Meanwhile, Xia Chenyu turned, sensing the motion behind her, and looked toward the numerous Huaxia Sect buildings in the distance.

As Shi Xiaolian ran toward Fang Bai, countless figures emerged from the buildings. The first group included Fang Yun, Tang Wenrou, Ye Wumei, Qin Yaorao, Su Linglong, Linghu Qianjiao, Linghu Baimi, Dongfang Ruhua, Zhuge Lian...

The next group comprised Ghost Hand, Niu Ben, and Xiong Yingxiong...

Following them were Fang Gang, Yang Mei, and hundreds of martial artists from the mundane world.

They all emerged from their respective dwellings, rushing toward Fang Bai and the others. Each person carried an expression of joy, excitement, and enthusiasm.

In the mundane world, Fang Bai had been their pillar of support. Even after founding the Huaxia Sect in the True Martial Realm, they had felt uneasy without Fang Bai's presence.

Fang Bai's return was like the Sea-Calming Divine Needle, allowing the anxious martial artists to finally find peace of mind.

On the other side, Shi Xiaolian had already been embraced by Fang Bai. The two, one tall and one small, wore expressions of indescribable happiness as they exchanged whispers, walking over to Xia Chenyu.

"I'm back!"

As Fang Bai faced the surging crowd of hundreds of dear friends, cherished companions, and beloved confidants—some covering their mouths to stifle sobs, others laughing loudly—he waved at them in greeting, his nose tingling as his eyes moistened with emotion.

Chapter 1377: Ruoshui Palace of East Shengzhou

On the far eastern land, separated from Shenwu Continent by the sea, lies East Shengzhou.

East Shengzhou is even more vast than Shenwu Continent; however, its temperatures are extremely low, with perpetual blizzards and icy storms raging year-round. Glacial rivers and snowy peaks can be found everywhere.

Such a harsh natural environment is naturally unsuitable for human habitation.

As a result, the expansive East Shengzhou rarely has traces of human life. The majority of the land is barren, desolate beyond measure.

On the contrary, certain frost-resistant water-attributed Spirit Beasts and Spiritual Medicines regard this place as a paradise.

The numerous snowy peaks and glacial rivers of East Shengzhou render the Water Element Qi in its atmosphere exceptionally abundant.

Many Martial Artists from the True Martial Realm who specialize in cultivating Water System Techniques take risks to venture into East Shengzhou for training and tempering. Those who manage to leave alive often see significant improvements in their cultivation levels.

East Shengzhou hosts various cultivation treasures, the majority of which are occupied by powerful sects, prominent clans, gangs, and academies.

However, the Lotus Pool Secret Realm located within the Heaven-Reaching Mountain remains a cultivation treasure shared by all the True Martial Realm's Innate Sects, with no single sect able to claim exclusive rights.

The Lotus Pool Secret Realm is renowned for two reasons: firstly, the mysterious power contained within the waters of the Seven-Colored Lotus Pool, which grants unimaginable benefits to any Martial Artist who bathes and cultivates within; secondly, the "Heavenly Talents Ranking" held there every five years, widely deemed the foremost event of the True Martial Realm.

Now, with the Heavenly Talents Ranking looming closer, the major Innate Sects of the True Martial Realm are mobilizing. They are selecting their most talented disciples to head to the Heaven-Reaching Mountain and compete for spots in the Lotus Pool Secret Realm.

At this moment, within the Practice Battle Arena of Ruoshui Palace, located ten thousand miles from the Heaven-Reaching Mountain, twenty chosen Ruoshui Palace female martial talents who have emerged victorious through rigorous selection processes are assembled here, fully prepared to depart under the leadership of two palace elders.

Among Ruoshui Palace's one hundred thousand disciples, the majority are female. The small number of male disciples accepted are typically of mediocre talent, relegated to menial servant roles, responsible for heavy labor and tiresome chores.

The twenty female martial talents chosen through layer upon layer of selection are naturally all female disciples. They consist of ten core disciples and ten direct disciples, each one young, beautiful, and gifted, with several possessing the rare Innate Spiritual Root.

Among the twenty, apart from four identical sixteen- or seventeen-year-old beauties, the rest are aged between twenty and thirty.

The twenty outstanding female disciples are dressed uniformly in Ruoshui Palace's black long skirts, standing in two rows, their heads held high, exuding elegance, charm, and extraordinary bearing. They resemble twenty vividly blooming flowers.

Within these twenty talented female disciples, two individuals in the back row, standing farthest to the left, stood out due to their distinctly superior physique, looks, and aura.

Both of these young women are slightly over twenty years old—one carries an icy demeanor, radiating a cold aura that keeps people at a respectful distance; the other holds her chin high with unrestrained arrogance, her expression revealing annoyance as if to say, "Don't provoke me, I'm already irritated," akin to a rose with thorns.

If Fang Bai and the Martial Artists from the Secular World saw these two disciples of Ruoshui Palace, they would surely recognize them.

The one with the icy temperament is Dongfang Rushi.

The thorny rose is Baili Mingyue.

Years ago, Dongfang Rushi and Baili Mingyue were transported through a Teleportation Array to East Shengzhou's desolate ice fields, where they faced an attack from a pack of frost wolves. At the critical moment, they were rescued by a passing elder of Ruoshui Palace.

The Ruoshui Palace elder, noticing their exceptional beauty and the fact that both possessed Innate Water Spirit Roots, was overjoyed and brought them back to Ruoshui Palace.

Upon arriving in the True Martial Realm, Dongfang Rushi and Baili Mingyue found themselves unfamiliar with both the people and the environment. Without knowledge of Fang Bai's whereabouts, they decided after a private discussion to temporarily join Ruoshui Palace to ensure their survival in the harsh lands of East Shengzhou.

The two planned to leverage Ruoshui Palace's cultivation resources to improve their own strength while gathering news about Fang Bai's whereabouts. Once their strength was sufficiently enhanced—or if they managed to contact Fang Bai—they would leave Ruoshui Palace to reunite with him.

When they first joined Ruoshui Palace, they were only at the Desolate Level, ranking even lower than Ruoshui Palace's menial disciples.

However, with their exceptional talent, the cultivation techniques Fang Bai taught them back in the Secular World, and the abundant cultivation resources invested in them by the higher-ups of Ruoshui Palace, the two women made astonishing strides in their cultivation levels within less than two years.

Starting from Desolate Level, their rapid advancement stunned everyone, and their cultivation skyrocketed to High Rank Universe Level, earning them spots among the ten core disciples of Ruoshui Palace.

Such unprecedented speed in cultivation progression had never been seen in Ruoshui Palace's history, leaving other talented disciples in awe.

The leaders at Ruoshui Palace, including Palace Master Zhou Qingyan, were ecstatic, considering Dongfang Rushi and Baili Mingyue gifts bestowed by heaven—an omen of future prosperity. They believed the duo would become the pillars of Ruoshui Palace in the near future.

It was of no surprise that Dongfang Rushi and Baili Mingyue were among the twenty selected to compete in the Heavenly Talents Ranking, and the high-ranking members of Ruoshui Palace placed immense hope in them.

On the northern high platform of the Practice Battle Arena, Ruoshui Palace's current Palace Master, Zhou Qingyan, along with four elders and eight stewards, stood solemnly. They were prepared to deliver their send-off for the twenty disciples competing in the Heavenly Talents Ranking.

"Palace Master, the disciples are about to depart. Perhaps you could say a few motivating words," suggested one elder on the high platform as icy winds howled.

Zhou Qingyan nodded, stepping forward and casting her gaze across the faces of the twenty talented disciples. She said calmly, "The Heavenly Talents Ranking is the grandest event in the True Martial Realm. Thousands of gifted disciples from the Innate Sects will participate, yet only one hundred will ultimately make it onto the ranking..."

The twenty disciples standing below the stone platform perked up at the mention of the Heavenly Talents Ranking, focusing their attention on Zhou Qingyan.

She continued, "Securing a placement on the Heavenly Talents Ranking not only promises extraordinary opportunities for you personally but also brings immense benefits to our sect! Every time the ranking is finalized, the sect with the most placements will be granted the largest share of cultivation resources in the True Martial Realm for the next five years. These resources are critical for the growth and prosperity of a sect!"

"You twenty are the most outstanding disciples among Ruoshui Palace's younger generation. In this journey to the Heaven-Reaching Mountain for the Heavenly Talents Ranking, you shoulder great responsibility. I hope you will live up to expectations and bring honor to Ruoshui Palace's one hundred thousand disciples!"

"Rest assured, Palace Master, we will do our utmost!"

The twenty talented disciples of Ruoshui Palace cupped their fists in unison, responding crisply.

As Dongfang Rushi and Baili Mingyue made the same gesture, they exchanged a subtle glance, spotting traces of helplessness in each other's eyes.

Chapter 1378: So Scared

Ever since joining the Ruoshui Palace, Dongfang Rushi and Baili Mingyue noticed that almost all disciples of the palace maintained solemn expressions all day long, rarely cracking a smile.

The atmosphere of the entire Ruoshui Palace was akin to the weather before a storm—stifling and oppressive.

Especially the Ruoshui Palace Master Zhou Qingyan, who, regardless of when she appeared in public, always wore a taut face, an air of deep resentment and bitterness, as if the entire world had wronged her.

Dongfang Rushi and Baili Mingyue overheard a few Ruoshui Palace disciples gossiping in private, saying that the palace master Zhou Qingyan hadn't always been like this. It was only after she suffered heartbreak and turned love into hatred that her demeanor drastically changed.

To the vast majority of Ruoshui Palace disciples, Palace Master Zhou Qingyan was cold, ruthless, and unbearably strict. Even the smallest mistake, if discovered by her, would result in merciless punishment.

Dongfang Rushi and Baili Mingyue had once been harshly scolded by Zhou Qingyan just for exchanging a few lighthearted jokes. She berated the two for being frivolous and improper in their conduct.

Dongfang Rushi took it in stride, but Baili Mingyue fumed inwardly, secretly cursing Zhou Qingyan as a "cranky old woman."

What baffled Dongfang Rushi and Baili Mingyue even more was that Ruoshui Palace strictly forbade female disciples from casually interacting with men from the outside world, let alone falling in love with them.

If a female disciple was found to be romantically involved with an outsider, it wasn't just bad luck for her; it would also implicate the man. The outcome was that the female disciple would have her cultivation crippled, and the man would be killed.

Dongfang Rushi and Baili Mingyue had once witnessed with their own eyes an external courtyard female disciple who had fallen in love with a loose cultivator. The two were caught and brought to Ruoshui Palace, where Palace Master Zhou Qingyan, in front of numerous disciples, struck the male martial artist dead with a single palm and then destroyed the female disciple's cultivation entirely.

In the end, the female disciple, unable to bear the humiliation, committed suicide on the spot.

Witnessing this, Dongfang Rushi and Baili Mingyue trembled with rage, but they dared not voice their anger, fearing they might face the same tragic fate as the pair of Martial Dao lovers.

What disheartened them even more was that all the Ruoshui Palace disciples, from top to bottom, appeared indifferent to the matter, as though utterly numb to it.

From that moment on, Dongfang Rushi and Baili Mingyue harbored a deep aversion toward Palace Master Zhou Qingyan and increasingly felt no sense of belonging to Ruoshui Palace. They longed to leave as soon as possible.

However, at that time, the two young women lacked sufficient cultivation strength to recklessly leave Ruoshui Palace, so they secretly conspired to wait until their cultivation levels were strong enough before finding an opportunity to escape.

From then on, the two women cultivated with doubled effort, advancing their skills at an astonishingly rapid pace.

Of course, this was partly thanks to the guidance from the higher-ups of Ruoshui Palace and the abundant cultivation resources provided by the palace. However, the main reason for their rapid progress was that they had been secretly practicing the martial arts techniques Fang Bai had taught them long ago. Otherwise, their cultivation levels could not have advanced so quickly.

In their daily sparring matches with other Ruoshui Palace disciples, the two women were careful never to reveal the martial arts techniques Fang Bai had imparted to them, lest they attract unwanted trouble.

Before the arrival of the Heavenly Champions Ranking, the two women had already advanced their cultivation to the high rank of the Universe Level, believing they now possessed sufficient power to protect themselves. They planned to take advantage of this opportunity to leave secretly during the mission to the Heaven-Reaching Mountain for the Heavenly Champions Ranking and reconnect with Fang Bai and other friends and family in the secular world.

However, the two women were not heartless. They decided they would represent Ruoshui Palace in this year's Heavenly Champions Ranking first, striving to win two spots for the palace to enter the Lotus Pool Secret Realm. Only then would they make their move to leave, feeling that this would at least repay Ruoshui Palace for saving their lives in the past. After that, they would part ways forever, never to meet again.

As for the prosperity or decline of Ruoshui Palace, they couldn't care less.

After a round of Zhou Qingyan's stern motivational speech, twenty of Ruoshui Palace's most talented disciples set off under the lead of two elders, riding Swiftwind Horses toward the Heaven-Reaching Mountain.

At the very back of the group were four identical young maidens. If Fang Bai were there, he would have recognized them as the "Fortune's Blessing" quadruplet sisters.

The four sisters, core disciples of Ruoshui Palace and standout members of the younger generation, were representing the palace in the Heavenly Champions Ranking battle for the first time. Their expressions were alight with excitement and anticipation.

The sisters, in the prime of their youth, were naturally lively and outgoing by nature. However, their personalities had been suppressed by the severe rules of Ruoshui Palace, forcing them to wear solemn facades at all times.

Only after passing through the palace gates did a hint of youthful exuberance return to their faces. Had the two elders ahead of them not been leading the way, they might already have burst into cheers and laughter.

In truth, the disciples of Ruoshui Palace feared only one person—Palace Master Zhou Qingyan. The other higher-ups weren't nearly as cold or harsh. Toward them, the disciples felt more respect than fear.

After leaving the palace gates, one of the leading elders glanced back toward the Practice Battle Arena within Ruoshui Palace. Upon realizing Zhou Qingyan was no longer in sight, seemingly having returned to the Palace Master Hall, the elder breathed a sigh of relief.

"Once we're outside the gates, there are fewer rules! Speak your minds, and laugh if you wish!"

The elder, now visibly at ease, said this to the "Fortune's Blessing" quadruplet sisters.

After Zhou Qingyan's temperament changed years ago, the entire Ruoshui Palace became stifling and oppressive. Even among some of the higher-ups, this atmosphere of severity was hard to endure. Yet, out of deference to Zhou Qingyan's position as palace master and her formidable strength, they were compelled to mimic her demeanor, maintaining solemn faces at all times. Otherwise, Zhou Qingyan's wrath would spare no one, not even them.

The two elders leading the team had long felt suffocated. For them, as much as for Dongfang Rushi and the other twenty disciples, this journey to the Heaven-Reaching Mountain felt like a kind of liberation.

The twenty talented disciples of Ruoshui Palace, all fairly young, were at an age where they loved amusement and play. Some even retained traces of childlike innocence. Seeing the two elders easing into smiles, they too shed the masks they habitually wore, revealing their true selves.

"Ah... so wonderful!"

"I wish we could always train in the outside world!"

"I still cherish the last time we went to train outside! I wonder where Brother Fang is right now... Do you think Brother Fang might someday come to Ruoshui Palace to visit us?"

"Shh... Keep your voice down! If the palace master hears of this, you're dead!"

"I won't say more... I'm terrified..."

"It's better if Brother Fang doesn't come. Otherwise, the palace master won't spare him, and we'll end up in trouble too!"

"You're right!"

Upon hearing the elder grant permission to be lively, the "Fortune's Blessing" sisters let out a cheer, like birds flying free from their cages. They spurred on their Swiftwind Horses, galloping ahead with joyful cries, using the Thread Condensation Sound Transmission Technique to converse.

"Junior Sister Rushi, Junior Sister Mingyue, come chase us!"

Within Ruoshui Palace, Dongfang Rushi, Baili Mingyue, and the "Fortune's Blessing" sisters always shared a certain camaraderie. Occasionally, the six of them would sneak away to joke and play where no one could see. Now, without restrictions, the quadruplet sisters passed by the two women with bright laughter, calling out loudly.

Chapter 1379: Zhou Yuruo

Twenty disciples of the Ruoshui Palace, led by two Elders, galloped towards the Heaven-Reaching Mountain Range, thousands of miles away.

Just after they left Ruoshui Palace, a woman dressed in a black skirt and masked with a black veil suddenly appeared on a peak towering a thousand meters high, several kilometers from the entrance of Ruoshui Palace.

Although her appearance and age were hidden, one could deduce from her fair skin, graceful figure, and the strands of silver hair showing between her locks, that she was likely an older beautiful woman.

"Another five years have passed... Time flies so quickly! Dingtian, our daughter Lian'er is already twenty years old this year. Her eyes and nose resemble yours, while her face shape and mouth resemble mine. She has grown even more beautiful... Lian'er is now serving as an Elder in a small sect called Huaxia Sect. I secretly went to see her. She is living well and happily..."

The woman stood atop the mountain peak, gazing towards the direction of Ruoshui Palace. Suddenly, her eyes welled up with tears as she murmured to herself, "But what about you, Dingtian? Why have you been out of contact all this time? Do you know that for over ten years, I've waited here for you every day regardless of the weather, hoping that you would come to Ruoshui Palace to find me so we can reunite with Lian'er? But why haven't you come? Could something have happened to you? Dingtian, I'm so worried about you..."

As she spoke, tears welled up and soon soaked the black veil covering her face.

The woman on the mountain top was named Zhou Yuruo. The "Dingtian" she referred to was her martial companion, Zhuge Dingtian, and "Lian'er" was their daughter, Zhuge Lian.

Back then, Zhuge Dingtian had to part with the pregnant Zhou Yuruo to escape the pursuit of Zhou Yuruo's mother, Ruoshui Palace's Palace Master Zhou Qingyan. Unexpectedly, this separation lasted for over ten years without any news from him.

In the first few years, Zhou Yuruo firmly believed that Zhuge Dingtian would come to find her after escaping, but as time passed with no word from him, she realized something was amiss, leading to sleepless nights and constant anxiety.

Zhou Yuruo was intelligent and understood that something must have happened to Zhuge Dingtian, yet she was unwilling to accept it, constantly comforting herself.

She lived in the Xuannv Sect, a third-rank small sect on Tiansheng Continent, for some time and gave birth to her daughter Zhuge Lian. Afterward, she entrusted her daughter to the Xuannv Sect Master and quietly returned to the vicinity of Ruoshui Palace in East Shengzhou.

Although Ruoshui Palace's Palace Master Zhou Qingyan was Zhou Yuruo's mother, a rift formed between them due to Zhuge Dingtian.

During these years of Zhou Yuruo's disappearance, Zhou Qingyan did not send anyone to look for her, and Zhou Yuruo had no desire to see her mother again.

Zhou Yuruo built two small stone houses in a deep mountain several miles away from Ruoshui Palace. During the day, she would keep watch from the mountain peak outside Ruoshui Palace, hoping to one day see Zhuge Dingtian. At night, she returned to the bamboo cottage to rest.

Days passed like this, year after year, until over a decade had gone by.

Like a statue, Zhou Yuruo stood atop the mountain peak, unmoving for a long time. It wasn't until the sun slanted westward that she sighed in disappointment, turned around, and prepared to leap down the peak to leave.

At that moment, the distant mountain path echoed with the faint whinnies of Swiftwind Horses. The sound grew closer, heading straight towards the entrance of Ruoshui Palace.

Zhou Yuruo looked in the direction of the sound and saw two Swiftwind Horses rounding the mountain corner ahead, speeding as fast as the wind. The riders on the horses were a young man and woman of similar age.

Both were Martial Artists, and both were only in their early twenties. What surprised Zhou Yuruo was that she could not see through the cultivation level of the male Martial Artist.

As for the female Martial Artist, although her cultivation level was at Cosmic Level perfection, she possessed the rare Innate Fire Spirit Root.

"Lian'er... It's Lian'er... Why is she here?"

When Zhou Yuruo clearly saw the face of the female Martial Artist on the Swiftwind Horse, her body shook, her eyes widened suddenly in surprise, and a look of joy appeared on her face, quickly followed by a perplexed and puzzled expression.

She couldn't understand why her daughter, Zhuge Lian, who was happily staying in the Shenwu Continent's Huaxia Sect, would appear here and what her purpose for coming might be.

Thinking of this, Zhou Yuruo's gaze suddenly fell upon the male Martial Artist riding alongside her daughter.

Being experienced in matters of the heart, Zhou Yuruo immediately noticed the deep relationship between her daughter and the male Martial Artist.

A parent's heart always cherishes their children.

With this thought in mind, Zhou Yuruo began to scrutinize the male Martial Artist with a critical eye.

The young man and woman on the Swiftwind Horses were Fang Bai and Zhuge Lian.

After reuniting with family and friends from the Huaxia Sect, Fang Bai stayed there for a while. Once everything was settled, he left Li Chenzhou to assist his sister Fang Yun in managing the Huaxia Sect, while he took Zhuge Lian to Ruoshui Palace to find Zhou Yuruo and fulfill the promise he made in the Secular World regarding Zhuge Dingtian's remains.

Despite Ruoshui Palace's secrecy, finding its location was not difficult for Fang Bai, who had dozens of Innate Experts as subordinates.

When Zhou Yuruo sneaked a look at her daughter at the Huaxia Sect, Fang Bai and Li Chenzhou had not yet arrived at the Huaxia Sect, so Zhou Yuruo did not recognize him.

Young, handsome, extraordinary temperament, and an unfathomable strength... After observing Fang Bai from a distance, Zhou Yuruo found no flaws in him, secretly thinking her daughter had great taste.

Zhou Yuruo did not know that Fang Bai had already sensed her presence before she discovered Fang Bai and Zhuge Lian.

"Someone is watching us!"

While traveling, Fang Bai turned his head to speak to Zhuge Lian beside him.

With his Divine Sense scan, Fang Bai saw that Zhou Yuruo's cultivation was only at Innate High Rank, and since she showed no hostility, he didn't give it much thought, guessing she might be a Mountain Guarding Disciple from Ruoshui Palace.

"Ah?"

Hearing someone was watching them, Zhuge Lian became a little nervous, slowed the Swiftwind Horse, and looked around.

Ruoshui Palace was the foremost Innate Sect in the True Martial Realm, with formidable overall strength. Its Palace Master, Zhou Qingyan, was also Zhuge Lian's grandmother, whom she had never met, so Zhuge Lian felt somewhat uneasy on her first visit.

According to reason, her grandmother was considered a close relative, and the relationship between grandmother and granddaughter should be particularly close. But after learning from Fang Bai about the old grievances between her parents and her grandmother, Zhuge Lian found it difficult to feel close to her.

However, the grandmother was still an elder, so even though Zhuge Lian harbored countless grievances against Zhou Qingyan, she couldn't truly hate her. However, she hadn't yet figured out how to face her grandmother upon meeting, causing some inevitable panic.

"Don't worry, the person watching us harbors no hostility. She seems very interested in you and seems to have a great deal of affection for you."

Fang Bai spoke softly again.

Chapter 1380: To See or Not to See

With Fang Bai's current cultivation level, his Divine Sense diffused outward just enough to cover Zhou Yuruo atop the mountain peak.

Fang Bai noticed that the woman's body was trembling slightly, and the eyes beneath her veiled black scarf often focused on Zhuge Lian, carrying an unmistakable expression of deep maternal love.

This discovery stirred something within Fang Bai.

In this world, Zhuge Lian had few relatives or friends. Beyond the former disciples of Xuannv Sect and the current members of the Huaxia Sect, there were only her missing mother Zhou Yuruo and her grandmother Zhou Qingyan, whom she had never met.

Zhou Qingyan could be heartless enough to disregard the very existence of her own daughter Zhou Yuruo, let alone her granddaughter Zhuge Lian. Therefore, in Fang Bai's view, the woman atop the mountain peak could not possibly be Zhou Qingyan.

If she wasn't Zhou Qingyan, then there was only one possibility.

The woman was Zhuge Lian's mother, Zhou Yuruo.

"Brother Fang, do you think... could she be... could she be her?"

Zhuge Lian, clever and perceptive, followed Fang Bai's train of thought and quickly arrived at the same conclusion. She couldn't help but tremble, her voice shaking as she spoke.

Her purpose in coming to Ruoshui Palace with Fang Bai was to find her mother. If the watcher was indeed her mother, wouldn't it mean her wish had finally come true?

Yet Zhuge Lian felt puzzled. She had been separated from her mother since childhood and had never seen her since. She didn't even know what her mother looked like—how could her mother recognize her?

Unbeknownst to her, Zhou Yuruo had occasionally kept tabs on Zhuge Lian's whereabouts even after entrusting her to Xuannv Sect years ago. It wasn't until Zhuge Lian joined Huaxia Sect that Zhou felt reassured enough to remain close to Ruoshui Palace, vigilant but discrete.

Fang Bai knew whom Zhuge Lian was referring to and nodded as he said, "Yes, besides her, I can't think of who else it could be."

Zhuge Lian felt a surge of emotion, her nose tingling with the urge to cry and her eyes reddening. She pulled the reins abruptly, halting her Swiftwind Horse. She scanned her surroundings and choked up, "Brother Fang, where... where is she?"

"Over there."

Fang Bai pointed towards the snow peak ahead and to the left.

From their current position, the snow peak was a thousand feet away. With her cultivation level still below the Innate Realm, Zhuge Lian could not detect Zhou Yuruo's presence. Yet, she faintly sensed through her Martial Artist instincts that a pair of caring eyes were watching her.

"After giving birth to me, she left me in the care of the Xuannv Sect Master, and I haven't seen her for over a decade. How could she possibly recognize me?"

Zhuge Lian murmured under her breath.

Fang Bai said, "The bond between parent and child cannot be so easily severed, unless by someone utterly cold-hearted—like your grandmother. I think... though your mother may not have been by your side all these years, she's undoubtedly been protecting you and watching over your growth from the shadows."

Zhuge Lian's eyes lit up momentarily, but then dimmed again as she replied despondently, "Then... why doesn't she want to see me?"

Fang Bai pondered for a moment and replied, "Perhaps she has her reasons, some predicament she cannot avoid."

Zhuge Lian sighed, bowing her head in silence.

"And you? Do you want to meet her?"

Fang Bai asked.

Zhuge Lian abruptly lifted her gaze and stammered, "I... I..."

Ever since coming of age, she had often heard stories about her mother from the Xuannv Sect Master and fantasized about her appearance. Although she yearned deeply to see her mother, when the moment arrived, she couldn't help feeling fear.

She feared that the real-life mother she was about to meet would be nothing like the gentle, kind, and loving figure she had envisioned, leading only to bitter disappointment.

"Don't worry. From your father's last words, we know that your mother has a kind heart and values emotions and loyalty. Such a mother is someone worth knowing."

Fang Bai seemed to understand Zhuge Lian's apprehensions, lightly patting her shoulder as he reassured her with a smile.

Zhuce Lian bit her lip gently, hesitated for a brief moment, and then her eyes gradually became firm. She said to Fang Bai, "Brother Fang, please take me to her."

Fang Bai nodded, took hold of Zhuge Lian's right hand, and condensed a pair of Wind Wings from his Essence Energy behind his back.

"Hold on tight. Let's go!"

Fang Bai whispered in Zhuge Lian's ear, then activated the Wind Wings, lifting off from the Swiftwind Horse's back. Braving the fierce wind, his figure darted through the air like lightning toward the snow peak where Zhou Yuruo stood.

When Zhou Yuruo saw the young Martial Artist pulling her daughter Zhuge Lian into the air and flying directly towards her, she was taken aback, realizing her whereabouts had been detected by him.

Standing atop the thousand-foot snow peak, Zhou Yuruo could watch the young Martial Artist and Zhuge Lian without difficulty, but for him to detect her presence—something infinitely more challenging—spoke volumes of his incredible strength.

"That young man's cultivation level... Could it be at the perfection stage of the Innate Realm? Such a young Innate perfection expert is exceedingly rare in the True Martial Realm! It's a pity, though; his temperament seems a bit rash."

As the young Martial Artist and Zhuge Lian flew closer, Zhou Yuruo grew increasingly anxious, thinking, "He has triggered such forceful Essence Energy fluctuations by condensing his Wind Wings for flight. Weak Water Palace's high-ranking elders are bound to notice it. At this rate, the three of us will all be doomed."

Just as Zhou Yuruo feared, no sooner had the thought crossed her mind than she sensed a dozen Martial Artist auras emerge from Weak Water Palace.

Soon after, more than ten Innate experts wielding True Essence Wings surged out from Weak Water Palace's gates, flying in their direction.

Zhou Yuruo knew the dozen Innate experts were elite members of Weak Water Palace, many of whom shared her cultivation level. Because of the young Martial Artist and Zhuge Lian, her position had been compromised, and escaping seemed impossible. She let out a bitter laugh and sighed.

"No! I cannot let Lian'er fall into their hands. My mother would likely imprison her in Weak Water Palace, just as she did to me, never letting her leave. While I can endure this fate, Lian'er is in the prime of her youth—how could she withstand such solitude?"

Resolved, Zhou Yuruo's gaze hardened as she looked longingly at her daughter flying toward her. She leaped into the air, forming a pair of True Essence Wings, and charged toward the dozen swiftly approaching Weak Water Palace experts.

"Zhou Yuruo, disciple of Weak Water Palace, is here!"

As she thrust forward, Zhou Yuruo shouted sharply, aiming to attract the attention of the a dozen Innate experts from Weak Water Palace.

At the same time, she urgently transmitted her thoughts to Fang Bai and Zhuge Lian, "I will hold off the Weak Water Palace experts. You must leave immediately! Lian'er, forgive me. If fate allows, we shall meet again! Young man, please take care of my daughter—I'm entrusting her to you!"

The dozen Innate experts halted when they heard the name "Zhou Yuruo," each focusing their attention on her. One among them emitted a piercingly long and sharp whistle.

Zhou Yuruo understood that the whistle was a call for Weak Water Palace's Sect Master. In a matter of breaths, her mother, Zhou Qingyan—the current Ruoshui Palace Master—would be in front of her.