

## **F Disciples 471**

### Chapter 471: The Long Awaited Challenge (I)

Immortal Drifting Axe Han Baohu left the Virtuous Order, never to return. He wasn't the only one as more rejected acolytes soon followed him out the door. Everyone being kicked out was those from the subcontinents and the men that replaced them were all from the Seven Potentates. Some of them weren't even Spirit Lords yet. It was utter humiliation.

This second phase of the Gift Giving Ceremony turned into nothing more than a public display of might for the Seven Potentates of Jiannan. Although the Virtuous Order's influence went far beyond the Martial Brilliance Continent, the seven ruled this school. They ruled the southern half of the continent and few, if any, could stand up to their will.

Long Yifei watched the show keenly. She saw that some of the acolytes sported relieved expressions. Others were dejected or outright sad. But none were angry. They had all been subjugated already.

The reactions of the Sacred Daughters also varied. Some were happy but more were unhappy. A few even shed a few tears when their old acolyte left them. Even though they were Sacred Daughters, precious women in the eyes of the continent, they were still weak and powerless. Their fates were controlled by others and they lived their lives based on the whims of men.

For her who yearned for peerless power and the freedom it provided, Long Yifei found the scene before her intolerable. All these women were being traded between men like they were nothing but livestock. It showed the truth behind the Virtuous Order which had promised her immortality and power beyond her dreams. That future might be possible for her but not for these women. They would be nothing but the property of others.

She glanced at Chen Wentian. His face was stiff and expressionless but his eyes flashed with fire. It was probably even more difficult for him to watch this. These immortals leaving one by one were like him in many ways, independent cultivators who came to the Order with great hopes, hopes that now seemed so fleeting.

She squeezed his hand which was still clasped with hers. He glanced over and she gave him a reassuring smile.

"Are you alright?" She asked gently.

He snorted, "I'm fine, just tired of this stupid waste of time."

"Me too." She smiled lightly.

He was like an open book to her. She could read him so easily and this fact comforted her. He was an uninhibited person, a straight shot, someone who lived by their own rules. He was an independent immortal who answered to no one and who had had the power to fight back against those that tried to restrain him.

He was a blue dragon soaring carefree in the blue sky. She would have the most freedom staying beside a person like him and no one else. She was right where she needed to be.

"If there is nobody else, this is the end of the second phase..."

Long Yifei looked up at Abbotsess Li's bright voice. Chen Wentian also tensed up.

"... We have been introduced to so many powerful acolytes tonight. The Virtuous Order cannot help but thank each and every one of you. You are now a vital partner in the order. Our success is now tied to yours. I wish that we may have a successful relationship for many decades and even centuries to come. Now, it is time for the final event of the Gift Giving Ceremony, the third phase!"

Li Shishi paused. Nervous energy built up all around upon her words.

Li Shishi smiled mysteriously and continued, "The third phase of the ceremony is perhaps the most misunderstood one out of them all so let me explain again. The relationship between a Sacred Daughter and their acolyte is supposed to be a symbiotic one. One raises up the other, supporting each other so that they may reach new heights unobtainable without their counterparts. This is our ideal but in reality, it sometimes doesn't work out. Relationships can turn toxic. They can become parasitic. In these situations, despite the best intentions of both parties, one side can't help but drag the other down due to their lack of talent, lack of resources, or other factors."

"It is the duty of the order and our affiliates to identify such relationships, call them out, and rectify the situation. If a Sacred Daughter is not performing up to the standards of their acolyte, this is a problem

for the whole Order. Conversely, if an acolyte is not performing up to the standards of their Sacred Daughter, this is also a problem. But please understand that this is not an attack against the sacred bond between a Sacred Daughter and their acolyte. Rather, this third phase exists exactly because we care so much about that bond. We must maintain its integrity. We must ensure that this critical bond cannot be corrupted by faithlessness, incompetence, and neglect."

"Now, I open the third phase ceremony to everyone present. If anybody has any grievances or challenges against anyone else in this grand chamber, you may speak up now as long as you honor the guidelines I have just explained. If you speak up, you must do so for the great good of the Virtuous Order and for all parties involved."

Li Shishi stopped speaking, leaving a deafening silence across the grand banquet hall. Over a thousand pairs of Sacred Daughters and Acolytes held their breath, waiting for something to happen. Some people were nervous about themselves or their partners, unsure if their performance was adequate and if they would be publicly challenged. Others were confident in themselves and were merely waiting for a good show.

Several distinct immortal auras flared up as if they had been waiting for this moment all evening. They came from the group of lonely men that remained standing at the rear. Since they hadn't been involved in the first phase or the second phase, only the third phase was left. Any challenge could only come from them and nobody else.

One spiritual aura in particular locked onto Chen Wentian and Long Yifei. He turned towards it, locking eyes with the detestable face in the crowd that belonged to Immortal Bamboo Wave Yang Gehu.

The other man scowled.

He responded with a sneer and a silent challenge, 'If you think you can take her, come and try it!'

Yang Gehu stood up abruptly, spiritual energy billowing off his body in great waves as if he was about dive into a vicious battle.

His strong voice rang throughout the hall, "I, Immortal Bamboo Wave Yang Gehu, challenge the acolyte of Sacred Daughter Long Yifei named Chen Wentian. I challenge him for failing one of the core covenants for all acolytes. An acolytes must be able to adequately provide for their Sacred Daughter and

not impair their growth. This Chen Wentian is too poor and cannot provide enough gifts for Long Yifei. In addition, I submit to the Virtuous Order and the executive council of the Millennium Mountains Campus that I should be the one to replace him as Long Yifei's acolyte from this point forward!"

#### Chapter 472: The Long Awaited Challenge (II)

Gasps and murmurs swept over the grand banquet hall. Surprise, excitement, and worry were just some of the emotions that emerged. Third-phase challenges didn't always appear every year. But for those that did, they were always drama-filled events that would go down in the historical records.

The bond between a Sacred Daughter and her acolyte was precious. Trying to forcibly break it was akin to a public declaration of war. Sometimes, conflicts caused by the third phase led to long and bloody feuds and great shifts in power.

This challenge against Chen Wentian was a long-awaited one. Long Yifei's talent was widely known even after two short months. She was like a beacon in the night, shining through the fog of mediocrity. Compared to her, Chen Wentian was a nobody with no future. It was truly a fresh flower stuck into cow dung.

The challenger, Immortal Bamboo Wave Yang Gehu, was a well-known name. He was a rising star among the Seven Potentates. He had the reputation of an intelligent yet serious man. Almost everyone in the chamber held him in high regard.

A sea of eyes swept over the three people caught in the sudden maelstrom. The Yang Clan of Great Waves wanted Long Yifei, a rare gem of a Sacred Daughter who was beyond precious. They all wanted to see what would happen and how this insignificant Chen Wentian could possibly fight back.

"Immortal Bamboo Wave Yang Gehu..." Abbotess Li said, "You have accused Immortal Blue Dragon Chen Wentian of failing to meet one of the core covenants for acolytes. Do you have adequate proof? Do you understand that if your challenge fails, you will be subject to great punishment."

"Yes, I do." Yang Gehu answered, his tone carrying the utmost confidence.

"Noted. Sacred Daughter Long Yifei..." Li Shishi continued, "A serious accusation has been levied against your acolyte. Will you fight it? If you do and it is proved accurate, your relationship to be severed. He will never be allowed to be your acolyte again. He will also be banished from the Order for the next one

hundred years; prohibited from being anyone's acolyte and prohibited from setting foot in any territory that the Order controls for that length of time."

"However, if you simply concede, your relationship will still be severed but he will not suffer banishment. He just cannot be your acolyte again. But either way, I remind you that you are under no obligation to accept Yang Gehu as your new acolyte... You may take a few moments to consider before you decide."

"I have already made my decision, Abbotess Li." Long Yifei said firmly, without hesitation, "I will fight this challenge!"

There was no way she could give up. That would be a silent admission of guilt, a coward's way out. It was the most humiliating option and she would never subject her master to something like that.

Li Shishi remained impassive, "Immortal Blue Dragon Chen Wentian, acolyte of Long Yifei, do you also intend to contest this challenge?"

The tension in the grand banquet hall shot up. Many immortals from the Seven Potentates all targeted Chen Wentian with their spiritual auras as if trying to intimidate him into submission, wishing he would simply give up.

But he wasn't going to give up. A pillar of blue flames roared to life and blazed towards the ceiling. He turned toward Yang Gehu with a fiery stare and silent promise. If this challenge was a declaration of war, then he wasn't going to let his enemies off easily.

"Yes. I will contest this insult against my honor and reputation!"

"Very well, the executive council of abbotesses will judge this challenge. You three may come up here." Abbotess Li said.

There was a swift surge of spiritual energy across the stage at the front. The loosely arrayed tables and chairs disappeared, making way for a single row of seven chairs on a raised platform for the executive council.

Seven of the most senior abbesses, including Li Shishi, took their seats. Chen Wentian and Long Yifei landed in front of the council, holding hands. Yang Gehu arrived soon after, standing next to Long Yifei at arm's length. Chen Wentian found that intolerable and quickly brought Long Yifei to his other side. This elicited a few giggles from the crowd and the slightest possible smile from Li Shishi.

Chen Wentian didn't let his guard down. He didn't expect any help from these old hags in front of him. Even if they were quite beautiful compared to the witches of the subcontinent, he wasn't fooled.

Pa!

Abbess Li clapped her hand to draw everyone's attention, "The executive council of the Millennium Mountains Campus of the Virtuous Order of Chunzhen is now gathered to judge this case. Immortal Bamboo Wave Yang Gehu, your accusation is against one of the covenants for acolytes of the Order. It is that acolytes must be able to adequately provide for their Sacred Daughter and not impair their growth. Tell me, how will you prove your accusation against this covenant?"

"Wait a moment!" Chen Wentian cut in.

Abbess Li glanced at him with another slight smile while the six abbesses glared at him like he was the worst kind of sinner. He ignored them and focused on Abbess Li, the leader of this monkey trial and the craftiest of them all.

"Abbess Li," He said, "You have described my punishment in detail should I fail but what about my opponent should I prevail? You have not mentioned any specifics regarding this."

"We can discuss this after the trial. That is more important, don't you think?" She asked.

The other abbesses nodded in agreement. It was as if they all expected him to fail. There was no reason to waste time on Yang Gehu's potential punishment that would never come to pass.

"Abbess Li, I disagree." He replied defiantly, "Although I am a newcomer to the Virtuous Order, I have read all of your covenants and laws. I know that the accuser's punishment can be made clear before the trial instead of after it. In fact, this was the only option in the beginning before the rule was modified."

Li Shishi's lips split into a faint smile. He wasn't sure if she was congratulating him or mocking him. The accuser's punishment wasn't of great importance for her or the council because they assumed he would lose. The third phase of the Gift Giving Ceremony was created with good intentions and gradually turned into a weapon to bully others. But rules were still rules and they could not completely do away with the original ones.

"Immortal Blue Dragon Chen Wentian has spoken correctly. Let us determine the accuser's punishment should the accusation prove to be untrue. There are many options within reason as long as the council and both parties approve of them. Often, it has resulted in a heavy monetary penalty. Or the acolyte may seek to reclaim their honor through a duel to the death. Tell me, what do you want?" Abbotsess Li asked.

Chen Wentian cocked his head and glanced at Yang Gehu who still sported a calm and confident demeanor. Regardless if it was a combat ability or wealth, his opponent had an abundance of both. It was difficult to properly punish a person like this but luckily, Chen Wentian knew of something that could hurt Yang Gehu and hurt him for a long time.

"Abbotsess Li," Chen Wentian replied brightly, "I have decided. Please punish my accuser in the same way you would have punished me. He should be prohibited from being an acolyte and banned from the Virtuous Order for a hundred years."

#### Chapter 473: Battle of Words (I)

Yang Gehu's handsome face faltered as the ghost of a frown briefly flashed past. What Chen Wentian proposed was the most punishing penalty for him. It was perhaps even worse than death. The woman he desired most would be denied and it would directly affect his future.

Even if he didn't have Long Yifei, a person of his stature might have nurtured three or four Sacred Daughters in the span of a hundred years. They would help improve his Dao and assist him in breaking through to the Spirit King Realm. If he suffered Chen Wentian's punishment, his future would be destroyed. His talents would go to waste and his clan would cast him aside.

But it was still just an idea at the moment. It still had to be approved by the council.

Yang Gehu glanced around at the gathered abbotesses and landed on a particular one. She returned his look with a brief nod. She was known as Immortal Archivist of Waves Yang Mengshi. She was as her

surname suggested, a member of the Yang Clan of Great Waves and Yang Gehu's greatest supporter within the council.

Pa!

Abbottess Yang slapped her armrest, drawing everyone's attention.

"This punishment is unacceptable, pick another one!" She snapped, "Yang Gehu of the Yang Clan has the potential of becoming the patriarch of the clan. His future is immeasurably bright, unlike this surnamed Chen from the subcontinents. Yang Gehu cannot be ruined by such an unreasonable punishment, I will not allow it!"

Chen Wentian resisted the urge to roll his eyes. He knew about Yang Mengshi, a vile woman who held great influence at the school and across the whole continent. Her logic had glaring flaws but it was pointless trying to argue with a pig-headed person like her.

He also disliked verbal spats that spun round and round the drain, leaving nobody satisfied. His status was the weakest in the whole grand banquet hall, even lower than the mortals. He was an independent cultivator with nobody backing him. His words wouldn't sway anyone.

But this wasn't the case for Long Yifei. She was a Sacred Daughter so her status was naturally higher than his. Also, just by standing on the stage, she was already attracting many people with her sheer beauty.

It couldn't be understated the amount of influence she had on those gathered. She was tall and slender, curvy without being obscene. She was the epitome of pure beauty, everything that Virtuous Order and their affiliates looked for.

Long Yifei's brilliance shone through even as she stood before seven abbottesses who could be considered the most powerful and beautiful creatures at the school. She was a long-stemmed rose amongst a field of weeds. Her beauty could even shake the heart of a blue dragon. It was far from ordinary, it was divine.

So, when she spoke, she captivated everyone, men and women included.

"Abbottess Li, Abbottess Yang, respected abbottesses of the executive council, may I?" She asked.

The room quieted down so that not even a rustle could be heard. After cultivating the Dao of song, her voice was much more potent than before. It was magnetic, it was irresistible. Her voice was a honed knife slicing through their minds and touching their spirit. It was an indisputable sign of her astonishing genius and for many, it took their breaths away.

Abbottess Li gave a genuine smile, "Go ahead."

"Thank you Abbottess Li," Long Yifei said and turned to Yang Mengshi, "Abbottess Yang, your words just now were illogical and unfair."

"You..." Yang Mengshi blurted but a wave of spiritual energy from Li Shishi cut her off.

Li Shishi's smile remained, encouraging Long Yifei to continue. Even though it was an executive council of abbottesses, her status was a step above the rest.

"As I was saying, how can Abbottess Yang claim that banishing Yang Gehu from the Order for a hundred years is unfair when the same punishment will be applied to Chen Wentian. How is that fair? How is that logical? Both sides having the potential for the same punishment should be the only standard. The bond between a Sacred Daughter and her acolyte is a blessed one. It is a core foundation of the Order and it cannot be broken in such an unjust way."

Across the banquet hall, many heads nodded involuntarily, compelled by her voice and her appeal filled with emotion. Even some immortals aligned with Yang Gehu and the Seven Potentates found it difficult to resist.

"What would you suggest then?" Li Shishi asked.

"Abbottess, the Order is supposed to uphold virtue and righteousness. This includes honesty and justice as well. I am willing to accept any challenge against my acolyte as long as it is fair and equal. Otherwise, the challenge is invalid, it goes against everything this Order is about. I cannot accept a challenge like this, I refuse!"

Long Yifei's voice reverberated through the air, filled with spiritual energy and firm intent. She was perhaps the only mortal who could talk like this in front of a gathering of a thousand immortals. She was the only person who didn't fear the council. She was a divine daughter. The Order needed her far more than she needed them.

This was what she and Chen Wentian had decided beforehand. When push came to shove, she would do all the talking. As long as her words were reasonable, she would find support. It wouldn't be a lot but hopefully, it would be enough.

Abbotess Yang frowned heavily, revealing deep wrinkles that marred her previously perfect complexion. "You... fine! What do you want? Speak quickly, we don't have all day. We still have to judge the actual challenge."

Long Yifei smiled gently, making her appear even more angelic and pure, "I think there is no need for so much animosity between us. My acolyte and I are simple cultivators from the subcontinents. I have no quarrel with the Yang Clan of Great Waves or the Seven Potentates of Jiannan. Since this is the Gift Giving Ceremony, I assume Immortal Bamboo Wave Yang Gehu has brought gifts to the challenge. If so, how about this? Nobody needs to suffer a one-hundred-year banishment, not my acolyte, not Lord Yang. Instead, the loser will simply relinquish all their gifts to the other party and we will all leave it at that."

Murmurs of assent greeted her idea. They could find no fault in her words which were filled with kindness. Even in the face of a difficult challenge, they were impressed with how she could remain so benevolent. This was indeed a perfect example of womanly virtues.

Despite this shifting tide, the instigators of the current situation remained firm. A rapid series of spiritual messages passed between Yang Gehu, Yang Mengshi, and several other abbotesses. Out of the seven on the council, three others were also direct descendants of the Seven Potentates. Together with Yang Mengshi, they had a clear majority to reject any development that went against their goals. And giving Chen Wentian such a light punishment directly went against their goal of kicking him far away. He could never return to the Order or else their goal of obtaining Long Yifei would be almost impossible.

Abbotess Yang let out a harsh laugh and shook her head, "Your idea is unacceptable. An acolyte being negligent and negatively affecting the future growth of a talented Sacred Daughter, this is an incredibly serious matter that demands serious punishment. We don't care about something like forfeiting gifts. Chen Wentian must be banished from the Order for a hundred years!"

Chen Wentian glanced at Long Yifei. There was a trace of sadness in her eyes. They had already talked through all the scenarios and this was one they had already prepared for. However, what would happen afterward was unknown.

Long Yifei took his hand and squeezed it. She found comfort in his warmth and it swept away the last of her uncertainty. She looked back at the seven abbesses, her sparkling sapphire orbs filled with determination.

"In that case... I was mistaken. The Virtuous Order does not align with my values and my goals after all. There is no need to move forward with this challenge, this so-called Gift Giving Ceremony."

She paused to let her words sink in. Nervous energy arose as people caught on to her meaning.

"I have read all of the covenants and laws of the Virtuous Order of Chunzhen. Nowhere does it say that a Sacred Daughter cannot withdraw from the Order. We are not disciples. We are not bound by oath. We are students and followers of a virtuous ideal. But now, that ideal is leading down a different path than my own. I now stand before this junction and I have already chosen."

"I, Long Yifei, will withdraw from the Order!"

#### Chapter 474: Battle of Words (II)

The storm of mutterings and heated murmurs erupted all across the grand banquet hall. The reaction to Long Yifei varied from person to person and wildly according to their backgrounds. Some were shocked, others angry. Disbelief was on everyone's minds but for different reasons. Some couldn't believe she would willingly throw her future away. Others couldn't believe they hadn't thought of it themselves.

This had always been an option, at least for Sacred Daughters who entered the Order with an acolyte. The Virtuous Order of Chunzhen was not the same as ordinary cultivation sects. Nobody in the Order was her master. Only Chen Wentian was her master, the person she had bowed and sworn fealty to.

For ones like her, this place was exactly like a school so it was not unreasonable to leave. Leaving had been the result of many third-phase challenges in the distant past. It was just that nobody had ever such a public declaration of withdrawal.

"You." The voice that broke the hubbub belonged to Abbotess Yang.

"You want to leave? Have you thought it through? There is no need to be hasty. Leaving doesn't benefit anyone." She said with barely hidden agitation.

Long Yifei shook her head, "It is not that I want to leave but that you are giving me no other choice. If the challenger cannot receive the same punishment, then it is unacceptable."

"Impudent!" Abbotess Yang spat, sending out a wave of spiritual energy due to her anger.

Long Yifei's body swayed but she managed to remain upright with Chen Wentian's help.

Abbotess Yang continued, "This is the Virtuous Order! Not some street market where you can haggle prices up or down. You dare make a mockery of this Gift Giving Ceremony? It is a holy night for all Sacred Daughters. Do you think you are better than the Order?"

"Abbotess Yang, everything I have said is in accordance with laws and tradition. My acolyte is a person very dear to me. He is my master. My respect for him is as deep as the ocean. My devotion to him is profound like the starry skies. Yet despite this, as long as this challenge is fair, I am still willing to go through with it. I am willing to follow the conventions of the Gift Giving Ceremony, even at the risk of my master losing his acolyte status. If I am willing to do this, why cannot my challenger face the same consequences? How am I making a mockery of anything? If anything, it is this unfair challenge making a mockery of everyone present!"

Long Yifei's voice was bright and determined. In the ways of verbal arguments, she had plenty of experience dealing with the stubborn elders of Glacier Palace. They never liked her status the sect master's favorite and gave her a lot of trouble. Old people were like blood-sucking demons that fed on youth and inexperience. They loved to argue and they loved to see their victims wilt under mere words, without having to lift a finger. The best way to deal with people like this was by slapping them across the face over and over again using laws and tradition. It was the best way to drive them crazy.

"You... you..." Yang Mengshi pointed a trembling finger at Long Yifei, now thoroughly enraged.

"Enough." A different abbottess cut in before she could form coherent words. This one sat on the other side of the row of seven and glanced over at Abbottess Yang disdainfully, "Can we just get on with the actual trial part of the challenge? If we keep this up, we'll be here until the roosters crow."

Another one chimed in, ignoring Yang Mengshi's livid expression, "That's right, why are you acting so scared. A challenge is a challenge. If Yang Gehu is brave enough to bring forth a challenge, he should be brave enough to suffer consequences should he fail. Fair is fair, I find no fault with this sacred daughter's words."

"Abbottess Yun, how can you say that?" An abbottess on Yang Mengshi's side shot back, "Don't try to pretend like you don't know what kind of status Yang Gehu holds in the Yang Clan of Great Waves. Even in the Seven Potentates, he is among the best of the younger generation of Spirit Lords. He will be a leader for centuries to come."

"That's right!" A third one added.

"Really? I can't tell..."

"You dare?"

"I dare!"

Shouts erupted across the executive council. Abbottesses on both sides threw fiery arguments at each other, with only Li Shishi remaining out of the fray. Four abbottesses supported Yang Gehu while two were adamantly against him. These two groups of old but good-looking women never saw eye to eye. They were probably using Long Yifei's situation to get even on some old grudges.

Chen Wentian turned to Long Yifei who gave him a small nod. This was what they had banked on all along, this faction of abbottesses within the school. Although the Seven Potentates held great influence at the Millennium Mountains Campus and across the Martial Brilliance Continent, they were still a local power. The Order would not allow them to have complete authority over their school so they had installed their core members onto the council. It was the only way to ensure that local powers did not run amok and sully the principles of the Order.

Chen Wentian looked toward Li Shishi. She was a wily, unreadable person. She was the head abbottess, the leader of the executive council. She was, of course, a core member of the Order. There was no way such an important position could go to someone aligned with the Seven Potentates. He knew that she wanted Long Yifei and that she wanted him out of the way. But he also knew that handing Long Yifei over to the Seven Potentates was even more impossible.

This was what tonight hinged on, whether or not they could force Li Shishi to help them even though she didn't want to. So, they waited anxiously as the dispute between the abbottesses dragged on, waiting to see if Long Yifei's threat of leaving the Order would finally compel Abbotess Li.

After what seemed like forever, after the abbottesses seemed to run out of steam for the moment, Abbotess Li finally clapped her hands, bringing silence to the hall.

"Very good arguments from all sides. What a spirited debate! But we really should move along. We can't hold the entire ceremony hostage over a single challenge. The food is getting cold and the wine is getting stale." She paused and glanced at Chen Wentian with an indecipherable smile, "People have places to be, places to go. This matter we've been arguing over for so long is really a trivial one. It should not cost the Order one of our best young talents. I don't want to see Sacred Daughter Long Yifei leave and I don't think anyone here wants this. So... Immortal Bamboo Wave Yang Gehu."

"Yes, Abbotess Li." Yang Gehu spoke up for the first time in a long time.

"I want to ask you a very simple question."

"Please."

"You were brave enough to challenge this acolyte beside you. If you prevail, he will be banished from the Order for a hundred years. Tell me, are you brave enough to face the same punishment as him if you fail? Are you confident in your own abilities?"

Yang Gehu didn't answer immediately, instead looking towards Abbotess Yang.

"I asked you, not your babysitter." Abbotess Li snapped.

Yang Gehu's expression darkened. She was directly calling out his manhood, his honor, his reputation. There was nothing Abbotess Yang or the other abbotteses on his side could do anymore. In front of the gathered heroes and heroines of the Martial Brilliance Continent, there was no other answer he could give. Everyone already knew this as soon as Abbotess Li made her intentions clear.

"I am... willing." Yang Gehu finally said.

#### Chapter 475: Gift Duel (I)

A wave of relief washed over those gathered. Chen Wentian and Long Yifei looked at each other and shared a smile. There were still many uncertainties to follow but at least they had managed to step over the first hurdle. Long Yifei had done her part and now it was his turn.

Someone started clapping and soon others joined in. It wasn't clear if they were commending Yang Gehu's conduct or simply happy that this ridiculous argument was finally over. The only ones displeased were the four abbotteses aligned with the Seven Potentates.

"Abbotess Li!" Yang Mengshi hissed, "You shouldn't have made such a decision without a vote from the whole council? Are you trying to go against us?"

Li Shishi giggled and waved her hand, "Why are you so angry? Mengshi, see how I protected Yang Gehu's honor. Look how they are clapping for him. Isn't this the best outcome?"

Yang Mengshi's expression darkened even further and she replied with dripping sarcasm. "Abbotess Li's grace is overwhelming. The Yang Clan thanks you for your efforts. But remember that the outcome of all challenges is determined by the full council and not by the head abbotess."

"Are you afraid that Yang Gehu will fail?"

"Impossible!"

Li Shishi left it at that and addressed the crowd which had quieted down, "Let us proceed to the main event, the challenge. Yang Gehu has made a serious accusation. Since this is the Gift Giving Ceremony, we will let gifts decide. Whether or not Chen Wentian is too poor and cannot adequately provide for Long Yifei, it should be determined with a classic Gift Duel."

Everyone knew what a Gift Duel was. It was a part of the Order's history, where two men competed for a Sacred Daughter's affection using gifts instead of fists. Each side would present several gifts which would be compared one by one. One gift could only be used for one round of the duel and the one who won the most rounds would be the winner. This prevented anyone from winning with a single expensive gift. It also prevented a large number of inferior gifts from winning.

She glanced at the two men in front of her and then at the abbesses beside her, "Does the council agree?"

Six hands rose into the air as one.

She also raised her hand and spoke loudly, "Does everyone agree?"

A roar of agreement reverberated around the grand banquet hall. After a long and tedious evening, there was now a Gift Duel. Everyone was excited to finally see some action regardless of how they felt about the participants.

"Good!" Li Shishi clapped her hands.

Two stone plinths appeared out of thin air and landed before the two men. Soon after, the tops of each plinth were covered by large opaque spheres of white spiritual energy, making them seem like peculiar lanterns.

Li Shishi continued, "Tonight's Gift Duel shall have the following rules. First, gifts must be something the Sacred Daughter can use to cultivate, it cannot be something far surpassing her realm, ability, or natural affinity. Thus, gifts at the Spirit King Realm are not allowed as Long Yifei will not be able to use such a gift until she reached the immortal realms."

"Second, there will be five rounds and one gift per person per round. Quality is always better than quantity. A pile of cheap gifts can never compare to a few exquisite ones, just as ordinary women cannot compare to Sacred Daughters of the Order. Whoever wins three out of five rounds shall be the winner."

"To maintain fairness, in each round, the challenger and the acolyte will reach their hands into the spheres, bring out their gift from their spatial bag, and place it onto the plinths. These shields of spiritual energy will hide your gifts from each other so that neither side can gain an advantage over the other.

"Third, the executive council will vote on each round and determine which side wins. We shall take into account all factors such as the market price of the item, difficulty of obtaining it, and suitability for the Sacred Daughter based on what we know after two months of schooling. Our judgements should be fair and reasonable. We cannot let biases and personal feelings affect our judgement and sully the solemn nature of this challenge."

"Does the council agree with these rules?" She asked in conclusion.

The council all affirmed the rules.

"Good, do you both understand the rules?"

"I do." Chen Wentian and Yang Gehu replied together.

"Very well, let us begin." Li Shishi said.

Chen Wentian and Yang Gehu both walked forward, stuck their hands into the white spheres, and retrieved their gifts.

The audience looked on in anticipation, wondering what kind of gifts would come out. Everyone already assumed that all of Yang Gehu's gifts would be priceless and exquisite. He was a young master of the Yang Clan of Great Waves so this was to be expected.

On the other hand, Chen Wentian was just an independent immortal. No matter how rich a single person could be, it was difficult to compare with the resources of a Spirit Emperor Realm sect like the Yang Clan.

To those experienced with gift duels, the worst case for Chen Wentian would be if he had only mediocre gifts. Then, there was no chance he could win a single round against Yang Gehu. The best case for him

would be if he had the foresight to concentrate on three expensive gifts and two cheap ones. That way, he might be able to win one or two rounds or even three if he was really lucky.

However, even the base case scenario for Chen Wentian still came down to luck. There was no way to ensure he could win the Gift Duel unless he had five top-tier gifts that were all better than Yang Gehu's and there was no one who believed he could pull that off.

Li Shishi spoke up again after both of them stepped away, "Great. As the challenger, Yang Gehu, you may present your gift first."

"Thank you, Abbotsess Li. This is my first gift." Yang Gehu said.

The white sphere of energy around his plinth fell away, revealing a familiar stone tablet. Chen Wentian recognized it. It was the same one that he had lost to Yang Gehu at the Golden Basin Auction House.

Yang Gehu continued speaking, "Esteemed members of the Order, this is an artifact from the ruins of the Huan Dynasty. The archeologists named it 'Hymns from a Wintery Flower Orchard'. Properly translated, it contains six complete songs that are well suited for Long Yifei. Please take a look."

The plinth rotated, allowing all the abbotesses to get a good look. Those aligned with the Seven Potentates immediately began a spirited discussion, praising the quality of the stone tablet.

"An excellent artifact from the past. The Huan Dynasty was the founding power of the Martial Brilliance Continent. Although their demise remains a mystery, their power was undeniable. Although these songs are at the lesser realms, they are all extremely profound."

"That's right. Such an artifact is difficult to find and even more difficult to obtain. An excellent gift."

"That's not all. Long Yifei's chosen classic is in song and dance but her background is an ice-attribute Dao. These songs that contain mysteries of ice and snow will fit her perfectly!"

The praises poured in from the abbesses on Yang Gehu's side while the others and Li Shishi remained silent. If one didn't know any better, they might have assumed that this tablet was a heavenly treasure. In reality, it was just a piece of barely legible rock with some minor benefits.

"Alright, Chen Wentian, your turn." Li Shishi said after hearing enough.

#### Chapter 476: Gift Duel (II)

The shield around Chen Wentian's plinth fell away to show a stone tablet similar to the one Yang Gehu presented, except this one was twice as large.

Chen Wentian gave his opponent a smirk and spoke up, "Abbesses of the council, what I have here is also an artifact from the ruins of the Huan Dynasty. It actually comes from the same set of songs as 'Hymns from a Wintery Flower Orchard'. However, this one is much larger and contains many more songs. I had an expert translate it and it produced fourteen complete songs. Also, you'll notice that the edges of the two tablets match. If Yang Gehu loses and gives his tablet to me, I can combine them and produce many more complete songs for my Sacred Daughter!"

However, his presentation was met with a dull silence. He had expected nothing from the four abbesses on Yang Gehu's side but even the other three didn't say anything to support him. This was the worst-case scenario and showed how little they cared for him.

"The text on this tablet is a bit illegible." Abbess Yang said finally. She shot him a mocking smile and continued, "I have a background in ancient history but even I cannot tell if it is authentic or not. Chen Wentian, you are new to the continent so you are inexperienced. Even so, you cannot trust any random seller on the streets just because you are desperate for gifts."

The other abbesses shook their heads as if disappointed by his silly mistake. They were all putting up an act, a blatant display of bullying. These experienced cultivators could all tell at a glance that Chen Wentian's tablet of songs was authentic. Yet, none of them spoke up to refute Abbess Yang. And as long as they said nothing, there would be no proof of any unfair judgment. The simple fact was that they all wanted him gone. The rules that Li Shishi had so proudly declared weren't intended for people like him.

But he wasn't so easy to bully!

"Abbottess Yang!" Chen Wentian's voice was bright and defiant, "You are an expert in ancient history and artifacts, is this right?"

"That's right." Abbottess Yang answered simply, unsure what he was doing.

"You have studied both stone tablets closely, yes? Both stone tablets are made of the same material, are in the same condition, and exude an identical spiritual aura. Anyone can see from the jagged edges that these two pieces should fit well together. They are both clearly authentic. Yet you say one is fake and the other real. Are you confident?" He asked.

Abbottess Yang frowned, a bit of doubt creeping in. But it wasn't quite enough to overcome her disdain and desire to humiliate him.

"I am confident." She replied

"You are? Are you willing to stake your reputation on it?" He asked again.

She was about to blurt out something but she paused and stared at him suspiciously.

He smiled, "No?"

She scowled and refused to answer.

"That's unfortunate." He said, "Lucky for me, I did not buy my gift from a random street vendor but from an absolute authority."

A golden scroll appeared in his hand. He unfurled it to produce a distinctive immortal aura that sailed over the stage.

"This is the proof of purchase as well as the guarantee of authenticity from the Golden Basin Auction House. I obtained this item directly from them, just like Yang Gehu did for his. If you all want to question how the Golden Basin Auction House does business, be my guest!"

The golden aura of the scroll momentarily combined with his blue flames, producing a multicolored light show of blue and gold. Those that wished for him to succeed in the audience were filled with sudden confidence. Those that wished for him to fail were instead struck with doubt.

What was the Golden Basin Auction House? They were only the most reputable auction house on the entire continent. Their items were always better than anywhere else and their quality was guaranteed. Trying to claim an item from the auction house as fake was a useless exercise.

This was a direct slap across the face of the abbesses that had been trying to bully him. Many in the audience were unsatisfied with the blatant bias shown by the Seven Potentates but they couldn't say anything. To them, Chen Wentian's counterattack was simply refreshing. It was wonderful!

Abbess Yang's face seemed to have aged several decades in a few seconds. She no longer looked like a stunning mature beauty but a weak and wrinkled grandma instead. She glared at Chen Wentian as if this was all his fault when, in reality, it was her fault for acting so arrogant and stupid.

A woman like Yang Mengshi was innately nasty, narrow-minded, and foolish. Even with all the resources of the continent and envious talent, it was still difficult to change a person's true being. Even being a Spirit King and an abbess couldn't change that. Compared to her, Long Yifei was like an angel. It was night and day.

"You." Abbess Yang spat, "How did you get that scroll? It has to be fake!"

"Come now!" Li Shishi interjected loudly before Chen Wentian could retort. The head abbess shot him an inquisitive smile and continued admonishing Abbess Yang, "Mengshi, don't be ridiculous. We can all sense Golden Emperor Hu's spiritual intent within that badge. It is impossible to forge. Stop humiliating yourself and making a mockery of the executive council!"

"You..." Abbess Yang wanted to retort but she was finally shut up by the other abbesses on her side.

Li Shishi chuckled, "Now that I have had a long look at this second stone tablet, it is indeed a prized artifact from the Huan Dynasty."

"That's right." The one named Abbotess Yun chimed in, "This one is much larger and contains twice as much text so its value is naturally greater. Pity these two pieces are separated, it would be great if they could be reunited."

The third abbotess on their side quickly added their own praise.

However, this didn't mean they had suddenly changed their minds and were now supporting him. These three abbotesses only spoke up for him after he revealed the origin of his gift and not before. Their desire to see him disappear had not changed. They were merely speaking logically based on new developments so they wouldn't be ridiculed by everyone.

It was also possible that Li Shishi already knew. Yet she still forced him to reveal his secret first. She used him to attack Abbotess Yang, saving herself the trouble and channeling all of Abbotess Yang's fury away from herself and onto him. She was a really troublesome woman.

"Alright, I think everybody is satisfied. Let us judge the first round." Abbotess Li said.

Six sets of spiritual energies rose above the executive council. They were multicolored, reflecting each abbotess' Dao. The six all showed the symbol for Chen, signifying that they had voted for Chen Wentian, some more reluctantly than others.

The only one that hadn't voted yet was Abbotess yang. All six turned in her direction, silently demanding her to stop acting like an idiot. Even her allies could not accept her behavior. She had been put in her place by a mere Spirit Lord but there was nothing else to do but accept it.

This was the Gift Giving Ceremony, an event for many Sacred Daughters and acolytes from different backgrounds. There were many esteemed guests from various powerhouses across the continent, not just the Seven Potentates of Jiannan.

If Yang Mengshi acted like a spoiled brat at the Yang Clan, nobody would care. However, this was the Virtuous Order and she held a high position as an abbotess. She couldn't make a fool of herself and drag down the reputation of the Order or her clan. She couldn't afford to remain stubborn in the face of overwhelming pressure.

"Fine..." She muttered, finally raising her hand.

"Good!" Li Shishi said with a wide smile, "Acolyte Chen Wentian wins the first round of the Gift Duel."

The gathered audience politely applauded the result which went against their expectations. Nobody could have guessed that Chen Wentian could produce a much better gift than Yang Gehu. There was no way for anybody to refute his win, even the people that hated him.

"Well played." Yang Gehu said to Chen Wentian, "I didn't expect you to be so full of tricks. You let me win that piece of the 'Hymns from a Wintery Flower Orchard' because you already found a better piece. Don't think you've won by guessing my first move. That gift is cheap and insignificant compared to what I have prepared. Just watch. You won't get to win another round!"

Chen Wentian scoffed, "Words are cheap, let your gifts do the talking!"

Li Shishi's voice cut in before they could continue arguing, "Let us move on to the second round!"

#### Chapter 477: Victory of Defeat by Chance (I)

The second round started with the same procedure as before. Both men placed their gifts within the protective shield. Nobody knew what the other had chosen but Chen Wentian guessed that it was something expensive to counteract the first round. As such, he quickly chose an adequate response.

"Great! This round, Chen Wentian, you may present your gift first."

On the plinth was a thin booklet made of plain paper which gave off a serene, melodic aura. It was cool and comforting but it was only at the first lesser realm and not much more. All in all, it was far inferior to the previous gift he had brought out.

"Abbotesses, this is my second gift." He said, "Called 'Reflections Beside an Icy Stream', it is a collection of songs created by a member of the Order and this school, Immortal Winter Hymn Xuan Xina. The songs in here are highly suitable for my Sacred Daughter specifically."

The abbesses all blinked and stared at the insignificant booklet. The reaction to his presentation could only be described simply as disappointment. Xuan Xina was a well-known prioress but she was just a Spirit Lord and still young. Her songs were good but had not gained the same fame as established songwriters. In terms of both quality and price, it was wholly lacking.

Nobody wanted to discuss the merits of his gift and Li Shishi quickly moved on to Yang Gehu.

As expected, his gift was spectacular. It was a set of three tomes, each thicker than a loaf of bread. The bindings were made of shiny black ivory from an unknown spiritual beast. The pages were lined with gold thread. The entire set gave off a deep, immeasurable aura as if a peerless expert was about to emerge from its pages.

"Everyone, this is my second gift." Yang Gehu began to explain, his voice strangely tight as if he was angry at something, "It is called 'A Complete History of Martial Songs'. It is something that has been compiled by the one known as Song Queen Yang Yan, the genius songwriter that only composes one song per year. This collection contains all the songs she has ever created that are below the Spirit King Realm as well as detailed explanations about each verse, each word, and each melody. This is something not available to ordinary people. I was able to obtain it because, like me, the song queen is a member of the Yang Clan."

"Hahaha! Amazing! Now, this is a real gift!" Abbess Yang blurted excitedly.

She was well acquainted with Yang Yan and went into a long diatribe about the song queen's immense talents. When she finished, her allies added their own anecdotes. Together, they raised this collection of songs to near holy status, as if merely perusing through this set of books could directly propel Long Yifei to the Spirit Lord Realm.

Chen Wentian's pitiful gift was long forgotten. Nobody even gave it a second glance.

"Well, I think we have all made our decisions." Li Shishi said, "Let's judge!"

Seven sets of spiritual energies rose into the air, forming the symbol for Yang. It was a clear victory.

Cheers and applause erupted across the grand banquet hall. To say that people were impressed was an understatement. Yang Gehu's gift was simply priceless and it was immensely useful. It contained so many songs of all levels that it could be considered a mega gift. Its quality was also the highest possible with the best songs at the peak of the Spirit Lord Realm. It was probably the most expensive gift within his arsenal and a fitting counterattack against his loss in the first round.

Everyone was happy and excited but there was one person who wasn't... but it wasn't Chen Wentian. It was actually Yang Gehu. He should have been happy but instead, he understood that he had been played by Chen Wentian again.

"You turtle bastard." Yang Gehu said through gritted teeth. "How did you know?"

"How did I know what?" Chen Wentian chuckled.

"Tell me!"

Chen Wentian shook his head, "How did I know... that you would bring out a really expensive gift? How did I know to counter with my cheapest one, thus effectively wasting your biggest weapon? I don't know, just a lucky guess? Hahaha, this Gift Duel is quite interesting don't you think? The founders of the Order came up with a truly exquisite way to torture people. Victory or defeat relying on chance, what a wonderful way to cause endless mental anguish!"

"Fuck your mother! The score is still one-to-one. Don't act so arrogant!"

Chen Wentian ignored the enraged man. He actually did know a lot about Yang Gehu's gifts. Through Chen Mo and many living souls he had taken over, he had managed to gather enough information and could guess, with some certainty, all five gifts that his opponent would use.

The stone tablet and the obnoxious song collection were gone but there was still a water-based dance routine, a special costume that would enhance a person's power of dance, and a medicinal pill that would greatly strengthen a person's vocal cords.

These three were all good gifts but they varied in quality. The medicinal pill was of the lowest quality and was at the peak of the lesser realms. The dance routine was next and was rated at beginning of the

Spirit Lord Realm. The dance costume was the best and was around the middle of the Spirit Lord Realm. It doubled as spiritual armor so its value was extremely high.

Chen Wentian's three remaining gifts were better than Yang Gehu's as a whole. He had one gift at the upper limit of the Spirit Lord Realm, one at the middle, and one at the entry-level of the realm. Using the resources of the Golden Basin Auction House, he had adjusted his own gifts specifically to counter Yang Gehu's gifts.

If the three remaining rounds of gifts lined up properly, he would win all three without much issue. Each of his gifts would be clearly superior to his opponent's and the abbesses could not rule subjectively. Even if he was a little unlucky, he would still be able to unequivocally win two rounds out of three and capture the overall win.

However, he could still lose if he was really unlucky. His lowest quality gift could go against his opponent's highest quality one and lose. Gifts of the same quality could be matched against each other, leaving the victor to be determined by favoritism and bias.

Chen Wentian had prepared for this Gift Duel with everything he had but it was still too difficult to ensure a certain victory. The Golden Basin Auction House also had been more than generous. Combined, the five gifts in his arsenal were worth over two hundred kilograms of orange spiritual crystal. This was equivalent to two billion taels of gold or two kilograms of yellow spiritual crystal. It was a staggering amount and ten times what he could have afforded on his own. It would have been impossible to ask for more.

"Alright, let's move on to the third round!" Li Shishi's voice interrupted his thoughts.

Chen Wentian sighed and focused on the task at hand. This Gift Duel was truly mental torture.

#### Chapter 478: Victory or Defeat by Chance (II)

Both men, acolyte and challenger, approached the plinth to place their gifts. The entire banquet hall and thousands of people waited anxiously to see what the next round of the Gift Duel would produce. The score was tied one-to-one but few thought that Chen Wentian could win the whole thing. Affiliates of the Seven Potentates still had complete faith in Yang Gehu. He was a young master of the Yang Clan of Great Waves. The resources at his disposal could surpass even Spirit Kings.

Yang Gehu, on the other hand, wasn't feeling as confident. He had suffered two consecutive blows and a strand of doubt had taken hold of his mind. He paused as his hand was stuck inside the bubble shield and looked toward the abbesses.

"What's wrong?" Abbess Yang's voice reached his ear.

"I... I'm not sure which gift to pick." He replied through spiritual energy.

Yang Mengshi frowned and a rapid burst of spiritual transmissions shot between her and the other three abbesses on her side.

She then went back to Yang Gehu, "What are you worried about? Chen Wentian's first gift should have cost him over ten kilograms of orange spiritual crystal. That should account for a majority of his wealth. You've seen his second gift. He is a poor bastard. It doesn't matter what he brings out, you'll win for sure!"

"Alright!" Yang Gehu said, his confidence returning.

While this covert discussion was happening, another one was taking place between Chen Wentian and Long Yifei.

"Which gift do you think he will bring out?" Chen Wentian asked via spiritual energy.

"He should be saving the Wave Strider Robes for last, that is his best gift. The choice is between the pill and the dance routine. Master, we should send our middle gift so that it can earn the next round against either one. Then, it doesn't matter what happens in the fourth round. Our best gift will beat his best in the fifth. We will assure the third win and the overall victory."

"Smart. Let's do as you say!"

Long before the ceremony, they had discussed all possibilities of the Gift Duel and solutions to all kinds of scenarios. Given how the first two rounds played out according to their most optimistic plan, her plan was the best approach.

"Yang Gehu, present your third gift!" Li Shishi's voice brought an end to the conversations.

"Yes, abbotess." Yang Gehu said.

He removed his hand from the white shield which fell away afterward. Left on the plinth was jade bottle that emitted a rich medicinal aroma.

"This is my third gift. It is a medicine for singers called the Dew Voice Pill. It enhances one's vocal cords and lungs, giving their voice more power and endurance. There are a hundred pills inside this bottle which should last several years. They will allow Long Yifei's voice to grow leaps and bounds."

The council studied the bottle and gave their feedback.

"Yang Gehu is so thoughtful about Long Yifei's future cultivation. Although this gift is not as breathtaking as the previous one, it is still a very important one."

"That's right. A person's voice is naturally fragile without proper training. These pills will allow her to practice harder and longer without suffering any injuries or other mishaps. It is purely beneficial, without any drawbacks!"

"I couldn't have said it better myself, sister! Suitability is what makes this gift excellent!"

"I agree!"

Their praises quickly petered out. Despite their best efforts, this gift was still the cheapest one that Yang Gehu had prepared. Everything that could be praised had already been uttered. It was impossible to paint a pig and turn it into an elephant.

"Alright, Chen Wentian, your turn." Li Shishi said.

"Yes." Chen Wentian said.

Yang Gehu had behaved as Long Yifei predicted but they were unlucky. They had hoped that Yang Gehu's third gift would have been that costume instead of the medicinal pills which was the cheapest gift. They had lost the fifty-fifty coin flip but it didn't matter. If anything, the pills made a victory this around a certainty.

The shield around Chen Wentian's plinth gave way to a pair of slippers. They were made of some kind of feathery cloth and were a pale blue color like the sky. At a glance, they seemed plain but that couldn't be further from the truth. These slippers gave off a tremendous aura that was solidly at the Spirit Lord Realm. It was rich and deep. There was no denying that this was a treasure!

"Everyone," Chen Wentian said, "This immortal item set is known as the Shangyang Sky Slippers. You all should have heard of this already. They are made from the feathers of the fabled shangyang, a divine beast that rules the sky and controls weather and rain. Wearing this, my Sacred Daughter will be able to master all types of dances. These slippers will provide her grace, agility, and the strength to perform the most difficult moves of any dance routine. They will serve her well for many years to come."

He finished his short speech and was met with stunned silence. Nobody expected him to bring out such a precious gift. An immortal set of equipment was the expectation for Yang Gehu, not him. He was a Spirit Lord from the subcontinent. Someone like him could barely afford a Spirit Lord item for himself. It should have been impossible.

Chen Wentian smiled in the face of many ugly expressions. Abbotess Yang's was particularly terrible. There wasn't a trace of beauty to be seen. Yang Gehu was alternating between disbelief, fury, and regret. His face contorted and twisted wildly, ruining his handsome features.

All of the abbotesses on the Seven Potentates' side refused to comment on Chen Wentian's gift but the other three eventually did so. It wasn't like they had a choice. The Shangyang Sky Slippers was an iconic item in the Gift Register, one of the best gifts described within it. A pair would pop up every decade or so and all the Sacred Daughters who practiced the Dao of dance wished for it. The rumor was that they came from a reclusive Spirit Emperor who managed to befriend a shangyang. There was overwhelming demand but no supply.

"Does anyone have anything else to add?" Li Shishi asked, looking at Abbotess Yang in particular.

Yang Mengshi and the other three on her side didn't make a sound, having been beaten into submission for the moment.

"Good, let's vote."

Three votes for Chen Wentian rose into the air from Li Shishi and the two abbesses on her side. There was an awkward pause before another one appeared, reluctantly but also with the symbol for Chen. Two more soon followed but Abbess Yang refused to budge, adamantly refusing to cast vote for anyone.

Li Shishi didn't bother to wait and clapped her hands, sweeping the six votes away, "Acolyte Chen Wentian wins the third round!"

#### Chapter 479: Shamelessness, Injustice

The third round of the Gift Duel was over. The score was now two to one in favor of Chen Wentian. Nobody could have expected this result. The Shangyang Sky Slippers were simply too mind-boggling. It was probably worth over fifty kilograms of orange spiritual crystal, an absolute fortune. He was now one win away from defeating Yang Gehu and prevailing against the accusation against him.

Out of everyone gathered, it was Yang Gehu who felt the most pressure. He should have been easily ahead in this gift duel but his assumptions had been shattered over and over. Now he faced the very real possibility of losing the Gift Duel, of suffering public humiliation for a century.

How could he, a candidate to be the future clan leader, fall down due to a nobody like Chen Wentian? Impossible!

He shot Chen Wentian a fierce glare. His pride and his future couldn't be crushed like this. He absolutely could not afford to lose the next round. He couldn't worry about the final round right now, he had to give it his all in this next round!

All of this did not go unnoticed by Chen Wentian. He saw each of his opponent's facial expressions and felt every pulse of spiritual energy that was filled with indignation and misplaced pride. It wasn't too difficult to guess what Yang Gehu would do.

Chen Wentian was the master of Anatta Soul Nirvana Art. He had taken over countless souls belonging to men similar to Yang Gehu, young masters and princes with all kinds of backgrounds and experiences. He knew many people like Yang Gehu and he could estimate Yang Gehu's next move with enough confidence. If he couldn't, then it was a complete waste of his heaven-defying soul art.

The Gift Duel continued with the fourth round. Chen Wentian revealed his gift first which was a set of medicinal pills. Unlike the ones Yang Gehu had presented in the previous round, his were intended to benefit a dancer's physique, increasing their flexibility, stamina, and concentration. The pills had different prescriptions for each lesser realm and were designed to guide a Dao of dance cultivator all the way to an immortal breakthrough.

The set of medicine was known as the Dancer's Bounty and was also a popular item within the Gift Register. It was unusual for acolytes to procure the entire set in one go as breaking through all of the lesser realms wasn't a sure thing for many Sacred Daughters. But with Long Yifei, there was no reason to worry as she would definitely reach the Spirit Lord Realm.

Yang Gehu went next. His gift, as Chen Wentian expected, was the Wave Strider Robes. It was his most expensive gift remaining and he had sent it out to ensure a victory.

Abbotess Yang and her posse immediately started fawning over the robes like a group of puppies around a feeding bowl. They described the gift's benefits for dancers over and over again until everyone was sick of hearing about it.

Still, Chen Wentian had to admit that it was indeed an impressive immortal item. It was considered an armor set, similar to Li Qingcheng's Golden Serpent Robes. In terms of both quality and price, it was clearly superior to his pills.

"Challenger Yang Gehu wins the fourth round!" Li Shishi said soon after the judging finished.

"I told you." Yang Gehu hissed at Chen Wentian, "I told you not to act so arrogantly. You thought you could win with those pitiful pills? My victory is now assured. You should just give up and leave now to save yourself the humiliation!"

Chen Wentian ignored his opponent who had missed the point completely. Even now, his opponent still had not realized what his limit was. He had willingly lost two rounds to let all of his enemies walk into his

trap step by step. He had lost the fourth round so that he could win the fifth and last one with overwhelming force.

"My, my, what an exciting Gift Duel!" Li Shishi said excitedly, "Who could have thought that we would still be tied at this point? It is now the fifth round, the final showdown. Whoever wins this will win the Gift Duel. If the challenger Yang Gehu wins, Chen Wentian will no longer be an acolyte and be banished from the Order for a hundred years. If Chen Wentian wins, the challenger will be banished for a hundred years instead. Do you both understand the consequences?"

"Yes!" Both men replied.

"Good! Yang Gehu, you may present your final gift."

The white sphere around his sphere fell away, revealing a thick tome that exuded two auras simultaneously, one icy like a snow storm and one sharp like a well-honed sword. Long Yifei was the first to recognize it as she had been very interested in it during the Gift Exhibit. Ironically, it had also been that night when Yang Gehu became infatuated with her.

"Abbotesses of the executive council, what I have here is the complete Snow Sword Dance that was created by my Yang Clan of Great Waves. It is the full text, not a word has been left out. It also includes many secrets and hints left by previous Dao of dance cultivators that used this tome. If Long Yifei cultivates this, she will be able to reach the Spirit Lord Realm in ten years at most!"

The Snow Sword Dance was a classic dance art known throughout the continent. It was one of the fundamental arts of the Yang Clan of Great Waves. Although it peaked at the entry-level of the Spirit Lord Realm, it held another secret. It was a precursor to the Blizzard Wave Dance, one of the preeminent and most powerful arts of the clan that allowed one to reach the Spirit Emperor Realm.

Yang Gehu gifting this to Long Yifei showed his desire and his shamelessness. He was blatantly coveting Long Yifei in front of everyone. The meaning of such a gift was that Long Yifei should hurry up and join the Yang Clan as his Sacred Daughter, that Chen Wentian's time was over.

Few could find any fault in Yang Gehu's conduct. In their eyes, Chen Wentian wasn't worthy of Long Yifei. Only someone like Yang Gehu was worth a peerless talent like her. So what if it was shameless? powerful men were always shameless!

"Alright, we've heard enough for the challenger's gift, let's see what our acolyte has prepared."  
Abbotess Li said, "Chen Wentian, show us."

Then tension in the grand banquet hall rose to unbearable heights. This was the last gift, the moment of truth. Spiritual energies clashed together in the air as everyone focused on the white bubble that hid Chen Wentian's last wager, that hid his fate.

The white bubble fell away.

The hall erupted.

"What is this?"

"Impossible!"

"How did you get that?"

Chapter 480: Shamelessness, Injustice (II)

The gift that laid atop Chen Wentian's plinth was also a book. It was thinner than Yang Gehu's Snow Sword Dance but nobody paid attention to its physical features. What caused the massive reaction was a unique aura, one that was famous throughout the continent. This single aura contained two clashing elements, searing flames and arctic ice, two elemental attributes that should have destroyed each other but instead were existing in perfect harmony.

It was the aura of Frostfire!

"Frostfire Battle Dance..." Yang Gehu muttered, his whole body shaking with a storm of emotions.

"Yes, this is the Frostfire Battle Dance." Chen Wentian said, his voice carrying over the hubbub of the crowd behind him, "It is the famous battle dance of the Frostfire Nation and the Frostfire Sect, a dancing art that is effective from the mortal realms to the Spirit Emperor Realm. Of course, this booklet contains

only the first five movements and stops at the peak of the Spirit Lord Realm. But, I think this should be a far better gift for my Sacred Daughter than the Snow Sword Dance."

His statement was a massive understatement. The Frostfire Battle Dance on display wasn't a simple dance at the Spirit Lord Realm, it's potential far surpassed the beginner immortal realm. The Snow Sword Dance was cute but it was a whole tier below the much better Blizzard Wave Dance. It was like comparing a treasure sword to a dull kitchen knife, it wasn't even a competition.

"Nonsense!" Yang Mengshi finally blurted out, "There is no way someone like him could have obtained the first five movements of the Frostfire Battle Dance. It's complete nonsense!"

"That's right! Smelly brat, where did you steal this book from? This belongs to the Frostfire Nation! If I find one word of falsehood, I will strike you down where you stand!" Another abbottess shouted.

The abbottesses on Yang Gehu's side were ready to do anything to discredit Chen Wentian. They could not allow this gift to stand. They could not let Chen Wentian win!

"Calm down." Li Shishi interrupted, "Mao Ling, what do you think?"

The abbottess she asked was Immortal Frostfire Bell Mao Ling who was a member of the Frostfire Nation, a member of the Seven Potentates of Jiannan. Abbottess Mao was petite and youthful, with a face that didn't seem to age. Her expression was far milder than the abbottesses in her faction as she studied Chen Wentian with great suspicion.

Mao Ling responded in a small, high-pitched voice, "The Frostfire Battle Dance of the Frostfire Nation is not an art that can be obtained by outsiders. It is not for sale and even if a copy was stolen, nobody would dare to sell it or publicly declare that they own it. Strange..."

"I had heard of a recent rumor but I didn't believe it then... Could it be?" She rubbed her narrow chin and then pointed a finger at Chen Wentian, "You, surnamed Chen! Tell me, where did you obtain this book?"

"The Golden Basin Auction House." Chen Wentian said simply.

Mao Ling's mouth opened slightly as if she had realized something. She suddenly fell silent and deep in thought.

"The Golden Basin Auction House again. Tch. Did you get the Shangyang Sky Slippers from there too?" Another abbottess butted in.

"Of course." He replied, not bothering to elaborate.

Abbottess Yang scoffed loudly, "Auction house this and auction house that. What do you think that place is, your personal market? There is no way you can afford the Shangyang Sky Slippers, let alone obtain the Frostfire Battle Dance. Why don't you drop the act and tell everyone where you stole these items from? You will suffer less if you do!"

"Why can't I afford the Shangyang Sky Slippers? Why can't the Golden Basin Auction House give me the Frostfire Battle Dance? Tell me, what do you think this is?" Chen Wentian said, raising a golden badge above his head.

It was the badge of the Golden Basin Auction House. It radiated golden warmth and a sense of endless wealth. It signified his special status as a distinguished client of the auction house, a status that few in the continent could hold.

"What in the nine hells is that?" Abbottess Yang retorted.

Li Shishi let out a mocking laugh as a second source of the same golden aura appeared in her hand, "Some of you may not know. This is a distinguished client badge for the Golden Basin Auction House. It is quite rare. You all don't have one but I do. It is a pleasant surprise to find that this young acolyte does so as well."

Li Shishi gave Chen Wentian a sly smile and he realized that she had been playing him all along. She knew far too much and the reason why was right in front of him. The Golden Emperor had probably told her everything about him already.

"So? Is that impressive? So what?" Abbotess Yang shot back, "It still doesn't solve the issue of the Frostfire Battle Dance. This item doesn't belong to Chen Wentian so he cannot use it as a gift. Yang Gehu should be the winner!"

Pa!

Abbotess Yun on the other side slapped her armrest angrily, "Who cares? Chen Wentian has shown his distinguished client badge. Who cares how the Golden Basin Auction House obtained this copy of the Frostfire Battle Dance. They had it and they gave it to Chen Wentian. So, he is the rightful owner and that's all that matters. Just give up already, Chen Wentian is the winner of this Gift Duel for certain, stop trying to delay the inevitable!"

"Bitch, shut your mouth!"

"What did you say?"

The claws and fangs came out. The two factions of abbotesses tore into each other with a viciousness that was breathtaking. So many insults were hurled so quickly that it seemed like they would start fighting right on stage.

"So, this is what you're about, Chen Wentian?" Yang Gehu said, jumping in on the action, "You couldn't find a good gift so you had to resort to robbing the Frostfire Nation. You've got guts. But in the end, you're still just a poor bastard. Haha, is this the kind of man Long Yifei deserves? Huh? Answer me!"

Chen Wentian didn't answer him so he shouted at Long Yifei, "Beauty Long, is this the kind of man you like? He will lead you down the path of ruin! Don't be fooled!"

Long Yifei rolled her eyes and ignored the noise.

"Enough, that's enough!" Li Shishi shouted over the chaos. Her spiritual energy swept over the council, finally bringing back a sense of order, "We're not here to settle old grudges. We're here to judge the final round of this Gift Duel and determine the fate of Chen Wentian. Come on, no further arguments will change anyone's minds. Let's vote."

"Fine, let's vote." Abbotess Yang snapped back.

Two sets of spiritual energies rose into the air, three in each group.

The ones that had voted for Chen Wentian were Li Shishi and the two abbotteses on her side. The other three that voted for Yang Gehu were Abbotess Yang and two others of her faction.

Only one person had yet to vote and that was Immortal Frostfire Bell Mao Ling. She was staring at Abbotess Yang and the other two with an unexpected level of anger.

"You three voted for the Snow Sword Dance? Are you trying to insult my Frostfire Nation?" Mao Ling hissed, "You all know how special the Frostfire Battle Dance is, how can a mere Snow Sword Dance compare?"

The question wasn't directed at Yang Mengshi but at another abbotteses answered in her stead. This one was known as Immortal Porcelain Star Wei Jiarong. She was a member of the Starry Wei Clan and second only to Abbotess Yang in seniority in their faction.

"Don't be so dramatic. A man's gift is a representation of their ability. Chen Wentian's background and his true limits, we all know that they are far inferior to Yang Gehu. It doesn't matter if he managed to obtain a distinguished client badge. It doesn't matter if he somehow swindled the Golden Emperor into helping him this time around. There is a limit to what the Golden Basin Auction House can provide Chen Wentian while the Yang Clan's support of Yang Gehu is limitless!" Wei Jiarong's tone was calm yet sharp at the same time, showing signs of competence that were missing in her counterpart from the Yang Clan, "So what if we vote for Yang Gehu? We are voting on his ability and his potential. This Chen Wentian is a wilting flower that has already reached its peak while Yang Gehu is a young sapling who can grow into a pillar of support for Long Yifei and the Order."

Mao Ling shook her head, "Nonsense, all nonsense! You know nothing and yet you are so shameless. I cannot let this injustice stand. We are here to vote on gifts, not on a man's potential. Otherwise, why duel with gifts at all."

"Mao Ling, you..." Wei Jiarong said, stunned.

Mao Ling continued, abandoning her prior allies to uphold the honor of her nation, "There is not a single continent, blessed realm, or holy world where anyone can claim that the Snow Sword Dance is better than the Frostfire Battle Dance in any way, under any criteria!"

A burst of blue and crimson spiritual energy rose from her palm, quickly transforming into the symbol for Chen.

"Hahaha, good!" Li Shishi cried out, "The vote is four to three. Acolyte Chen Wentian prevails!"