

King Hall 451

Chapter 451: Wood Spirit Bead and Godmother!

Once Yang Guowei knew the strength of Xiang Mantang, he lost the will to resist stubbornly.

He had experienced the power of the Divine Realm himself; the Old Dragon King was also a warrior of the Divine Realm. Otherwise, how could he have repelled the foreign enemies and prevented them from invading the Land of Divine Continent?!

Although the Old Dragon King's strength was gradually declining with age, even so, he managed to kill Cain, the master of Fallen Splendor who had just stepped into the Divine Realm.

Yang Guowei, while retired from Dragon King Hall, had secretly joined Withered Tree Quest for Spring, which extended his lifespan and healed his hidden injuries. He even broke through from the peak of Energy Transformation to Half-Step Divine Realm in one fell swoop, yet he was still no match for those in the Divine Realm.

Therefore, since Xiang Mantang had entered the Divine Realm and was among the ranks of Terrestrial Immortals, he was not someone Yang Guowei could contend with!

"The younger generation is to be feared, truly to be feared!"

After sighing a few times, Yang Guowei's once formidable appearance returned to that of a stooped old man, and his entire being seemed to have taken a heavy blow, looking several years older!

After all, he had lived for over eighty years without stepping into the Divine Realm, his foot only half in, while Xiang Mantang, not yet even in his prime, had ascended to the Divine Realm—this was nothing short of a modern-day myth!

"You want the Spring of Life to save the Dragon King, right? Unfortunately, I don't have much left. I'll go get it for you now," Yang Guowei said with a sigh.

At this moment, his attitude toward Xiang Mantang was no longer that of showing a challenging former subordinate who had come of age a lesson.

He had already leveled his mindset, speaking to Xiang Mantang, the current custodian of Dragon King Hall from Beidou Tianshu, as a subordinate of the Dragon King Hall.

Xiang Mantang clasped his hands behind his back and looked at Yang Guowei, saying indifferently, "No need. The Spring of Life isn't of much use to me. I'm here to ask about the location where you found the Spring of Life and whether you discovered anything in those waters."

Hearing Xiang Mantang's words, Yang Guowei's face involuntarily shifted in expression.

"No!" He quickly concealed his shock, feigning calmness.

"It seems there is." Xiang Mantang had been observing Yang Guowei's expression and, seeing the fleeting panic when he had heard his words, easily deduced that he was lying.

Upon hearing this, Yang Guowei's expression changed several times, and finally, with a look of resignation, he said, "It seems I can't hide it from you. Indeed, there is, but not much left."

"Bring it out," Xiang Mantang said in an even tone, yet with a hint of excitement, "I owe you a favor."

A favor promised by a Divine Realm powerhouse could be worth more than billions at certain times.

For Yang Guowei, although tempting, the thought of what he had to give up made his heart bleed.

If possible, he would rather not have Xiang Mantang owe him a favor and would instead keep that thing for himself, even though it wouldn't last much longer.

However, given the current situation, if he were unwilling to give it up, Xiang Mantang, to save his own brother, would probably kill him!

"Alas..."

Yang Guowei let out a long sigh, then with trembling hands, he took a necklace out from his collar.

Xiang Mantang's gaze was immediately fixated on that necklace.

The chain of the necklace was ordinary, just a common red string, but what captured his attention was the pendant.

The pendant was a bead the size of a regular marble, green and clear as if made from Green Emperor Jadeite, but Xiang Mantang knew it definitely wasn't jadeite.

"Pop!"

Yang Guowei reached out and removed the glass cover from the jade-like green bead, and immediately, a righteous and harmonious aura of life, giving a sense of bliss as if basking in the gentle breeze of spring, began to emanate from the small bead.

"This is what I acquired from that Spring of Life; I call it the Wood Spirit Bead. I've been hiding it from Withered Tree Quest for Spring, and no one knew about it—unexpectedly, you did," Yang Guowei said as he passed the bead to Xiang Mantang, expressing his astonishment.

Xiang Mantang reached out to receive the Wood Spirit Bead and said, "My brother did tell me in detail, or else I wouldn't have known. Your method is quite good—if you hadn't removed that glass cover, I wouldn't have had any idea you had such a thing on you!"

Xiang Mantang thought to himself that was close.

Fortunately, he had no intention of killing Yang Guowei, or if his strength was just Half-Step Divine Realm, he wouldn't be able to fully subjugate Yang Guowei.

Otherwise, if they had fought, it would certainly end with Yang Guowei's death, but he might not thoroughly check Yang Guowei's body, preferring to have his underlings take it away.

And if his subordinates discovered the Wood Spirit Bead while collecting the corpse, although they were loyal enough to him, who could guarantee that wealth wouldn't tempt? That was a chance to stand equal with himself!

So, Xiang Mantang really felt lucky!

"Of course, I have to be careful, or how could I rely on the Wood Spirit Bead to fully heal my injuries and enhance my strength by leaps and bounds, right?"

Upon hearing Xiang Mantang's words, Yang Guowei couldn't help but say proudly.

Then he sighed, "However, I have had this Wood Spirit Bead for a while now, and most of the Life Aura within it has been absorbed by me. I estimate it will shatter in about a month, so I don't know if it will be enough to save the New Dragon King!"

When this topic came up, Xiang Mantang also fell silent.

The Primordial Force of life contained within this Wood Spirit Bead was indeed very pure, much more advanced than any Ten Thousand Year Wood Core he had seen, but... there wasn't much left!

And seeing the faint cracks appearing on it, he knew the Wood Spirit Bead wouldn't last much longer.

But still, it was a hope!

"It's alright, thank you Old Yang," said Xiang Mantang as he clutched his fist in a salute to Yang Guowei. "Today I owe you a favor, should you have any request in the future, to go through fire and water, I will not hesitate!"

Yang Guowei slightly nodded, seeing that Xiang Mantang was serious and not just saying it in passing, he felt less heartache.

After all, the remaining Origin of Life in that Wood Spirit Bead was not enough to propel him into the Divine Realm!

"Then I shall not impose on Old Yang any longer, I take my leave!"

Xiang Mantang was eager to return to try out the bead on Mu Jinyu, not wanting to stay long at Yang Guowei's place, and after speaking, he quickly left the courtyard.

"Sigh, I hope it can save the New Dragon King!"

Yang Guowei stood with his hands behind his back, heaving a sigh.

After all, if this Wood Spirit Bead could save Mu Jinyu, then it meant Mu Jinyu and Xiang Mantang both owed him a favor. They would be grateful and feel indebted to him, which would be very worthwhile.

If it did not save Mu Jinyu, the favor owed by Xiang Mantang to him would also diminish in value.

...

Xiang Mantang hurried back to the sanatorium of the Dragon King Hall.

As he approached Mu Jinyu's sickroom, he paused in his steps.

Inside, a gentle woman was leaning over the coffin lid, her head bowed as she looked at Mu Jinyu.

It was none other than Su Zijin!

Hearing the noise, she turned around and noticed the newcomer was Xiang Mantang. Her expression momentarily stilled, and her eyes held a complex look.

Xiang Mantang's gaze was also complex, even the guilt welling up in his heart made him want to flee, not wanting to face Su Zijin.

"Come in," Su Zijin guessed Xiang Mantang's state of mind and gestured for him to come in.

Xiang Mantang pursed his lips, walked in, and said, "Godmother, "

"Godmother?!"

When Su Zijin heard Xiang Mantang address her, she was taken aback, but then her face showed a relieved expression.

She had once hoped to follow the path through Xiang Mantang, so that Mu Jinyu would recognize her as his mother.

Back then, she had suggested that Xiang Mantang acknowledge her as his godmother. However, Xiang Mantang had outright rejected her.

And now, for Xiang Mantang to address her in this way, clearly, he wanted to take care of her in place of Mu Jinyu during his sleep, and at the same time lessen his own feelings of guilt!

Chapter 452: The Qin Family Comes Knocking!

"Eh, take a seat."

Su Zijin nodded at Xiang Mantang, signaling him to take a seat at his convenience.

Xiang Mantang did not sit down but instead spoke with a tinge of apology, "Godmother, I've brought a Wood Spirit Bead, intending to try it on Senior Brother. Perhaps there will be a chance for a turnaround!"

"Oh," Su Zijin, having heard Xiang Mantang's words, was taken aback for a moment before quickly getting up from the coffin lid.

She said somewhat embarrassingly, "Then you go ahead."

As she spoke, Su Zijin thought of something and added, "The kind of water Jinyu is soaking in now, did you arrange that as well?"

When she had come to visit Mu Jinyu a while ago, she had noticed that inside the ice coffin, Mu Jinyu was completely immersed in a kind of emerald liquid, which had initially terrified her.

Thinking something had gone wrong, she hastily called for the medical staff to come and check what was the matter.

Later on, someone explained to her that the water was brought by Xiang Mantang; he did not explain what kind of water it was, but it should supposedly aid in Mu Jinyu's recovery.

After hearing this, Su Zijin was slightly reassured, but still had someone take some of the water to be tested, and it turned out that the green water contained extremely rich active factors, indeed beneficial for Mu Jinyu's recovery.

"It was me," nodded Xiang Mantang, explaining, "That's the Spring of Life, imbued with a lot of Life Source Energy; this water should help Senior Brother's recovery."

"Unfortunately, I wasn't able to find the Fountain of Youth or Fountain of Immortality; otherwise, they probably could have woken Senior Brother directly," Xiang Mantang lamented regretfully.

After expressing his regret, Xiang Mantang didn't want to continue the conversation with Su Zijin to spare himself further guilt, and so he lowered his head, lifted the coffin lid, and then took the Wood Spirit Bead casting a faint green glow and placed it into Mu Jinyu's mouth.

Of course, the Wood Spirit Bead was originally hanging around Yang Guowei's neck, protected by a special glass cover, so ideally, it shouldn't have been tainted with any filth; however, Xiang Mantang had still thoroughly wiped it with alcohol several times on the way here.

And had then sterilized it once more with True Yuan.

Otherwise, he would not have used it for Mu Jinyu like this.

Lest Mu Jinyu woke up to find out that the Wood Spirit Bead used on him had not even been washed, he would surely blame himself.

With the Wood Spirit Bead in Mu Jinyu's mouth, Xiang Mantang watched as his complexion grew increasingly ruddy and healthy, sighing inwardly.

For he truly couldn't guarantee that this soon-to-shatter Wood Spirit Bead could revive Mu Jinyu as the Ten Thousand Year Wood Core did.

Therefore, Xiang Mantang dared not act to bring Mu Jinyu out of his cryopreserved state to then stimulate the Wood Spirit Bead to heal him.

Otherwise, if the Wood Spirit Bead failed to awaken Mu Jinyu and he had prematurely taken Mu Jinyu out of cryopreservation, resulting in his life signs declining once more, then called the doctors to put Mu Jinyu back into cryogenic sleep.

Who knew whether such to and fro would end up squandering the slim hope of saving Mu Jinyu?

Xiang Mantang dared not gamble.

Only when he had absolute certainty that he could save Mu Jinyu would he risk giving it a try.

After watching Mu Jinyu for a while, Xiang Mantang moved once more to replace the coffin lid.

Then after chatting with Su Zijin for a little while, he stood up to leave.

Naturally, Su Zijin meant to see Xiang Mantang out.

They had just reached the doorway when,

"Bang!"

The door in the corridor was kicked open, followed by a group of people striding toward them with an aggressive air.

Xiang Mantang recognized the identity of the person leading the group immediately.

Qin Shi'an, Head of the Qin Family.

And also the father of Qin Qiaochu.

He was also a martial arts expert at the half-step Divine Realm.

Otherwise, he couldn't have inserted his hand into Dragon King Hall and let Qin Qiaochu become a Sub-hall Master.

'It seems the news of Qin Qiaochu's death has already spread.'

Xiang Mantang watched as Qin Shi'an, his face flushed with rage, advanced towards him, his expression cold, not caring in the slightest.

"Beidou Tianshu, did you kill my son?!"

When Qin Shi'an approached Xiang Mantang, he did not lose his reason and attack Xiang Mantang.

Although the pain of losing his son nearly drove him mad, Dragon King Hall was ultimately not a place where he could behave recklessly.

If he acted rashly, the entire Qin Family would likely be besieged by Dragon King Hall!

If he were of Divine Realm, of course he wouldn't fear any of this, but as only half-step Divine Realm, he ultimately could not stand against the entire Dragon King Hall by himself!

Therefore, his only option was to confront Xiang Mantang first!

Xiang Mantang looked at the old face that was almost pressing against his nose, stretched out his hand and pushed Qin Shi'an away, saying indifferently, "Why I killed him, are you not clear about it? Sowing rumors everywhere, inciting Elder Yang Guowei to vie for the position of Dragon King, trying to oust me from power..."

Qin Shi'an's tiger eyes were bloodshot as he roared, "What's wrong with that? Who among the youth doesn't make mistakes? Just for this trivial matter, you directly killed him? Couldn't you have notified me to discipline him?!"

"Heh..." Xiang Mantang sneered, mocking him, "Seeing how little you care, what use would notifying you have been? Would you really discipline him? And is this really a trivial matter?"

Pausing for a moment, Xiang Mantang's face suddenly darkened, as chilling as the Nine Serenities abyss.

"Although I am not the Tiance True Dragon, while Dragon King slumbers, I am the one managing Dragon King Hall in his stead, acting as the Master of Dragon King Hall. He did not respect me, smeared my name in secret, fanned the flames, attempting to divide Dragon King Hall, for that, his crime deserves death!"

"You object to me killing him?!"

Xiang Mantang stood with his hands behind his back, his gaze cold and without a hint of guilt as he locked eyes with Qin Shi'an.

Qin Shi'an, seeing that Xiang Mantang had absolutely no intention of repenting and not even saying a word of apology, firmly believed that Qin Qiaochu deserved to die, and was so angry that he felt like

exploding, shouting, "Beidou Tianshu, now I really think my son was right, the incident with the New Dragon King, perhaps really was your doing, and now that you've just taken over managing Dragon King Hall, you're already hastily starting to eliminate dissenters, you..."

"Hmm?!" Xiang Mantang, seeing Qin Shi'an displaying the same traits as Qin Qiaochu, grew even colder in his gaze, and without waiting for him to finish talking, he raised his right hand and struck out with his palm towards Qin Shi'an!

"Bang!"

Qin Shi'an was always on guard against Xiang Mantang, but they were too close, and he hadn't expected that Xiang Mantang, who had narrowly escaped death, not only did not see a decline in strength but had even made a breakthrough to the Divine Realm.

As their palms clashed, Qin Shi'an's pupils immediately shot out an extreme look of terror and disbelief.

"Pfft!"

With Qin Shi'an's half-step Divine Realm cultivation, facing off against a Divine Realm expert, he should have been able to hold on for at least three moves, but because he never expected Xiang Mantang to have reached the Divine Realm and still thought he was only at Peak Energy Transformation, this underestimation caused Qin Shi'an to be unable to take even a single palm from Xiang Mantang.

He was immediately sent flying, spurting blood.

His right arm twisted into a bizarre shape, like a noodle.

"Family Head?!"

"Family Head!"

The people of the Qin Family who had followed Qin Shi'an never expected that Qin Shi'an, whom they regarded as almost invincible and capable of ensuring the Qin Family's peace alone, could not withstand a single move from Xiang Mantang.

They cried out in shock and terror.

"Qin Shi'an, did you really think I wouldn't dare to kill you?"

Having struck Qin Shi'an with a palm, Xiang Mantang looked at him with frosty killing intent in his eyes, "In my presence, you dare to slander me. If you wish to die, then Xiang Someone will grant you that wish!"

Chapter 453 Informing!

Xiang Mantang looked down at Qin Shi'an, who was slumped on the ground, with killing intent in his eyes so dense it nearly materialized.

These people of the Qin Family, indeed, like father, like son; just as Qin Qiaochu was, so was Qin Shi'an!

Although killing Qin Shi'an would bring quite some trouble, but as they had repeatedly provoked him, Xiang Mantang minded not to kill this old fellow!

"Plop!"

Qin Shi'an felt an intense pain all over his body, and the unwillingness and fear in his heart made it feel as though worms were gnawing at his intestines.

However, upon hearing Xiang Mantang's words, he did not hesitate to struggle to rise and then knelt before Xiang Mantang.

"Master Qin did not realize a Terrestrial Immortal was present and gave offense, please forgive this transgression!"

Those in the Divine Realm were considered among the ranks of Terrestrial Immortals, hence they were often referred to as Earth Immortals.

Although Qin Shi'an was Half-Step Divine Realm, in front of a true Earth Immortal, he was nothing at all.

Just like Yang Guowei, who gave up resistance immediately upon learning of Xiang Mantang's strength.

His only chance for survival was to kneel before Xiang Mantang, hoping to dissipate Xiang Mantang's intent to kill!

At this moment, Qin Shi'an was filled with extreme regret.

If he had known that Xiang Mantang was among the ranks of Terrestrial Immortals, he would have never come to trouble Xiang Mantang over Qin Qiaochu's matter, seeking an explanation!

Although Qin Qiaochu was the Qin family's hope for the future, he himself was the Qin family's Guardian God. If he were to die at Xiang Mantang's hand because of this, then the vast Qin Family would likely fall apart.

To be directly devoured by his enemies!

"Tch!"

Xiang Mantang saw Qin Shi'an kneeling and begging for mercy, but his expression did not change, still cold and devoid of any emotion.

As Qin Shi'an was about to kowtow, Xiang Mantang flicked his finger.

A strand of undetectable Vigorous Qi shot out, piercing through Qin Shi'an's forehead.

"Ugh..."

Qin Shi'an's body trembled, and then uncontrollably collapsed backward, spasming ceaselessly.

His eyes, with pupils dilating in despair, were full of regret!

"Take his corpse away."

Xiang Mantang spoke to the people of the Qin Family in an unemotional tone.

The people of the Qin Family did not dare to say anything to Xiang Mantang, wearing expressions of hopeless despair as they quickly lifted Qin Shi'an's body and ran out.

Su Zijin stood by, watching the scene unfold, her complexion turning slightly pale.

However, as the daughter of the Dragon King, she had seen many great storms and was not going to scream in fear just because of a dead person.

Su Zijin saw the Qin family leaving like bereft dogs, turned to Xiang Mantang with hesitation, and asked, "Did you kill Qin Qiaochu?"

"Hmm," Xiang Mantang nodded. "And Di Yin as well."

He then explained, "Those two were not worthy of life. And Shen Cangsheng—I will sooner or later find the time to crush him to death myself!"

In speaking, a terrifyingly vindictive light flared in Xiang Mantang's eyes.

Su Zijin could not help but step back a few paces.

Seeing this, Xiang Mantang came back to his senses, quickly suppressing the resentment in his heart.

However, Su Zijin still picked up on something, her expression changed slightly, and she pressed on, "Shen Cangsheng, could it be that Jinyu's matter has something to do with him?"

Xiang Mantang brought Mu Jinyu back from the Kunlun Mountain and kept quiet about what had happened inside the valley, thus Su Zijin and Mei Yinxue and the others had always been unclear about what transpired that day.

It's not that they were not curious or had no desire to understand, but seeing the despair and sorrow in Xiang Mantang's eyes whenever they brought it up made it hard for them to ask further.

They knew about the close brotherly bond between Mu Jinyu and Xiang Mantang; if it were possible, Xiang Mantang would have definitely preferred Mu Jinyu to return with his corpse rather than him returning with Mu Jinyu's.

Therefore, seeing Xiang Mantang in such pain, they couldn't bear to continue interrogating her.

Instead, they chose to silently grieve.

Now, when Xiang Mantang just brought up Shen Cangsheng, her expression and eyes became very terrifying. Su Zijin was scared, and she also remembered that she hadn't seen Shen Cangsheng for some time.

She couldn't help but guess something and couldn't resist asking further.

When Xiang Mantang heard Su Zijin's question, her breathing hitched again, and she thought of the day when she watched, eyes wide open, as Chen Qianqian swung a knife at Mu Jinyu. She closed her eyes in pain, breathing rapidly.

Seeing this, Su Zijin suppressed the anxiety in her heart, clenched her hands, and dared not ask any more questions.

"Breath... breathe..."

After taking a few heavy breaths, Xiang Mantang then opened her eyes. The pain, fatigue, and despair in her eyes were still there, but they were no longer as frightening as before.

"Hmm, godmother, you've all been very curious about what exactly happened that day, right? I understand your curiosity and unwillingness to let it go, but I just couldn't bring myself to speak about it before. I'm very grateful that you and my sisters-in-law haven't pressed me too hard..."

Xiang Mantang began speaking in a hoarse voice.

With the status of Su Zijin and Gu Xiyan, they had the right to press Xiang Mantang for answers about what had happened to Mu Jinyu.

But they didn't!

They could see his breakdown and despair and didn't want to drive him crazy, so they chose to share the pain of not understanding themselves.

Therefore, Xiang Mantang was truly grateful for their consideration.

But this matter couldn't be concealed from them forever.

As the hope of rescuing Mu Jinyu had been growing recently and the feeling of guilt and despair in his heart wasn't as overwhelming as in the beginning, Xiang Mantang decided to explain the causes and consequences to Su Zijin.

With Xiang Mantang's explanation.

The shock and anger in Su Zijin's eyes grew denser.

"What!"

"So that's what happened!!"

Su Zijin was so angry her face turned pale, and she clenched her fists, with her chest heaving rapidly.

"Shen Cangsheng!"

After her anger, Su Zijin didn't fall apart, because she had already guessed a lot about the ins and outs of the matter.

But she hadn't expected that it also involved Xiang Mantang's sister and Shen Cangsheng.

So, she began to blame herself.

Because in the end, Mu Jinyu's death could also be attributed to herself.

If it weren't for her past marriage with Shen Cangsheng, and recently making use of him to reengage and force Mu Jinyu to come to the Capital City and beat him up for the sake of an earlier reunion with her son,

Shen Cangsheng probably wouldn't have taken such actions, taking revenge on Xiang Mantang and then using Xiang Mantang's sister to frame and kill Xiang Mantang.

As a result, it was Mu Jinyu who went to save Xiang Mantang and died in his place...

"It's all my fault! It was all because of me!"

"I'm such a vile woman!"

"And I even caused you to... kill with your own hands..."

Su Zijin was filled with self-reproach.

Seeing Su Zijin's self-blaming expression after listening to his words, Xiang Mantang was stunned for a moment before he remembered the engagement between Su Zijin and Shen Cangsheng that he had forgotten.

So he hurriedly consoled her, "Godmother, it has nothing to do with you. Frankly, I was the one who suggested the plan to you to reengage with Shen Cangsheng and use him. So, I deserve this!"

"As for that Chen Qianqian, I also don't know if she is my sister or not, you don't have to blame yourself!"

Xiang Mantang said, forcing a smile.

Chapter 454: Dragon King Hall Repositioning!

Yes, Xiang Mantang had been back from Kunlun Mountain for some time.

But he had yet to take Chen Qianqian's body for testing to see if she really was his sister, Xiang Yinxui.

It wasn't that he was too busy or had forgotten about it.

Rather...

He was intentionally avoiding it!

Just as he avoided the death of Mu Jinyu, he was also avoiding the death of Chen Qianqian, a girl who bore a striking resemblance to his own sister!

He was terrified that if the test results came back and Chen Qianqian turned out to be Xiang Yinxui, it would push him even further into despair.

It would mean that he truly killed his own sister whom he had been searching for, for many years.

As it was, he could still deceive himself and tell himself that he had only killed an assassin called by Shen Cangsheng, just a girl who happened to look somewhat like his sister.

He would rather deceive himself than seek out the truth.

After all, sometimes the truth is often more cruel and unbearable.

"Child, you really have suffered!"

Su Zijin knew that the person who suffered the most after bringing back Mu Jinyu's body from Kunlun Mountain was not them, nor Mu Jinyu, but Xiang Mantang.

They had only seen Mu Jinyu's corpse.

But Xiang Mantang had watched helplessly as his sister struck Mu Jinyu, and saw Mu Jinyu die before his very eyes.

And he himself had personally killed the sister he had been searching for over a decade!

No matter whether Chen Qianqian was Xiang Yinxui or not, that sense of despair was enough to make anyone crumble!

Placing herself in his position, if there was someone who looked very much like her husband constantly attacking their son, and she finally couldn't bear it and killed that person, but Mu Jinyu still didn't survive...

She would definitely break down and take her own life, rather than like Xiang Mantang, still thinking about revenge, still thinking about bringing Mu Jinyu back!

Therefore, Su Zijin came to terms with it, and the tiny bit of resentment towards Xiang Mantang that she might not even have noticed herself, completely dissipated.

Xiang Mantang managed a forced smile at Su Zijin, and seeing that she wasn't obsessing over it anymore, he excused himself and left.

Walking alone in the sanatorium, Xiang Mantang stepped out of the courtyard, then got into a car and ordered the Dragon King Hall official driving to head straight to the Dragon King Hall headquarters.

At the same time, he took out his phone and sent a message to the remaining three Sub-hall Masters, summoning them to the headquarters.

An hour later.

Inside a conference room at the Dragon King Hall's suburban headquarters.

Xiang Mantang sat in the main seat, scanning over Wu Shisan, Jian Ruyan, and Mu Hongchen seated below him, and began, "I suppose you've all heard about the recent events, haven't you?!"

"Hmm!"

The group responded softly.

Wu Shisan had a complicated look on his face.

Back then, after dealing with the Thousand-Year Profound Ice Coffin, when Xiang Mantang was questioning Mu Hongchen, and Di Yin along with Qin Qiaochu were bad-mouthing Xiang Mantang behind his back, he was also there.

He just didn't participate because he did not believe Xiang Mantang would do such a thing.

And with Xiang Mantang acting as the custodian of Dragon King Hall, even though he was unhappy, he did not wish to be like them, ready to tear Dragon King Hall apart.

Who knew that within just a few days, Qin Qiaochu and Di Yin would pay for their loose tongues with their lives!

Xiang Mantang stood up straight, pressing her hands on the wooden table, and said in a deep voice, "Their deaths were well deserved, and now with the Dragon King of Dragon King Hall asleep, two Sub-hall Masters have died, one has fled, leaving only the four of us..."

As she spoke, Xiang Mantang paused and then continued, "Only, among the Twenty-Eight Star Lords, there are not many that can be chosen to take up the position of Sub-hall Master. From the Jinyu Mantang that I currently control, I could pick out four experts at the peak of Energy Transformation, but I do not trust their loyalty, so I propose..."

"The seven Sub-Halls of Dragon King Hall will hereafter be changed to four, no longer divided according to the Big Dipper Seven Stars, but according to the Four Mythical Creatures."

"I myself am the head of the Big Dipper Seven Stars, Beidou Tianshu, so now I will still hold the Donghua Azure Wood Dragon Position, while Jian Ruyan will hold the West-most Metal White Tiger Position, Mu Hongchen will hold the Southern Bright Fire Vermilion Bird Position, and Wu Shisan will hold the Northern Ming water Xuanwu Position..."

Next, Xiang Mantang began to announce one by one. The duties and powers previously controlled by Di Yin, Qin Qiaochu, Shen Cangsheng, and others began to be divided up.

Even more serious was the fact that some of the power in Wu Shisan's hands was also taken away and given to Jian Ruyan and others.

Wu Shisan felt extremely dissatisfied in his heart!

After all, when there were Seven Sub-Halls, he was the Hall Master of Tianxuan Hall, with a status only slightly lower than Xiang Mantang's, and as for Jian Ruyan's change from the seventh-ranked Beidou Yao Guang to the White Tiger General, they were relatively close, so he didn't have much to say about it.

But why should Mu Hongchen, originally ranked fifth, rise to the third?

This caused him, who was originally ranked second among the Seven Sub-Halls, to be reduced to the bottom in the new ranking, and he also handed over a lot of his power and influence.

And what was even more important, Xuanwu was a turtle!

He didn't want to be a turtle.

Therefore, just as Xiang Mantang was about to finish, Wu Shisan finally couldn't resist speaking up to raise an objection.

"I can hand over the power I hold, but I... do not want to hold the Northern Ming Water Xuanwu Position!"

Upon hearing this, Xiang Mantang looked at Wu Shisan, her expression unchanged.

Wu Shisan was different from Di Yin and the others; he wasn't directly parachuted into the Dragon King Hall but was raised by the Old Dragon King, so in theory, he could be trusted.

However, he had been quite close to Di Yin and others recently, so Xiang Mantang thought it over and in the end decided not to kill him, but she also couldn't let him continue to hold an important position.

Xiang Mantang then asked, "Then, which position do you want to hold?"

Wu Shisan shifted his gaze, scanning between Jian Ruyan and Mu Hongchen, and finally looked at Jian Ruyan, saying in a deep voice, "The White Tiger governs killing, and among the four Sub-hall Masters, my strength is second only to you, the Dragon King. Therefore, it should be me who holds this position, and I won't deal with trivial matters anymore; from now on, I will only be responsible for killing!"

In his heart, he secretly deduced that Xiang Mantang's reform was probably because she didn't want to openly assume the role of the Tiance True Dragon, so she changed the division of Sub-Halls to become the Azure Wood Dragon – after all, a dragon is still a dragon.

Others would naturally call her the Dragon King!

And since he himself was addressing her as the Dragon King and handing over his power, she should agree to his request.

Before Xiang Mantang could speak, Jian Ruyan said in a cold voice, "Do you really think your strength is second only to the Dragon King? Then let's try it out!"

"Clang!"

In the midst of speaking, Jian Ruyan drew her sword from its sheath, the cold frost on the blade glinting, sending shivers down one's spine.

"If you can beat me, the position of the White Tiger General is yours for the taking!"

"But if you lose, you will obediently take up your role as the Xuanwu General!"

"Hmm?" Xiang Mantang listened to Jian Ruyan saying this, and without even bothering to tell them to stop calling her Dragon King, she said directly to Jian Ruyan, "There's no need for that; if the arrangement I made isn't followed, I'll just find someone else!"

Her thought was that if Wu Shisan didn't want to be the Xuanwu General, then it was just as well, she could promote the Jiaomu Star Lord to the position of Xuanwu General!

Jian Ruyan, hearing Xiang Mantang's words, gave no face at all, saying harshly, "No need! I want to win people over with conviction!"

She wouldn't give up the position of the White Tiger General arranged for her by Xiang Mantang and intended to take up the role justifiably!

Chapter 455: Jian Ruyan Tells a Joke

Looking at Jian Ruyan's resolute gaze, Xiang Mantang thought for a moment, and finally nodded in agreement.

"Alright, then you two may have a contest."

Xiang Mantang, with his hands propped on the table, stood up and cast a meaningful look at Wu Shisan, saying, "If you lose, just obediently serve as a Xuanwu General and don't think about challenging the Vermilion Bird anymore."

"Of course," nodded Wu Shisan.

He didn't have the face to continue challenging Mu Hongchen for the Vermilion Bird position after losing to Jian Ruyan.

Knowing that Jian Ruyan was about to compete with Wu Shisan, Mu Hongchen, who had a good relationship with Jian Ruyan as they were the only two female Hall Masters of Dragon King Hall, looked at Jian Ruyan with a worried expression.

Jian Ruyan was indeed stronger than her, but only by a limited margin, or else she wouldn't have been just the Yaoguang Hall Master.

Of the original seven Sub-hall Masters in Dragon King Hall, Xiang Mantang was the strongest, possessing the power of Peak Energy Transformation, and Wu Shisan was next in line, at the Complete Energy Transformation Stage, not far from reaching the peak.

Both she and Jian Ruyan were only at the Early Energy Transformation Stage.

Jian Ruyan's chances of losing to Wu Shisan were far too great.

Jian Ruyan, sensing Mu Hongchen's anxious look, didn't coldly ignore it; instead, she turned her head, nodded slightly, and signaled for her to be at ease, indicating that she was confident.

Afterward, the four of them left the meeting room and headed to the drill ground.

Arriving at the drill ground, they saw a group of young people who had recently joined the Dragon King Hall undergoing training by one of the Twenty-Eight Star Lords.

Xiang Mantang's gaze lingered on a woman who was out of breath and whose long hair was soaked with sweat, sticking together in clumps.

This woman was naturally Mei Yinxue.

After Mu Jinyu fell asleep, determined to acquire the ability to protect Mu Jinyu, Mei Yinxue joined Dragon King Hall and subjected herself to devilish training.

However, Mei Yinxue's age was ultimately a factor, and no matter how hard she trained, it was difficult for her to make rapid progress.

Xiang Mantang looked at Mei Yinxue for a few moments, sighed lightly, then shifted his gaze away without going over to greet her.

Then, he led Jian Ruyan and the others to an unoccupied spot and turned around, saying, "Let's do it here, begin whenever you're ready."

Their arrival naturally drew the attention of the newcomers training at the drill ground.

When the Star Lord who was training them saw that Wu Shisan seemed to be about to compete with Jian Ruyan and that his new recruits were too curious to concentrate on training,

and considering that it was almost break time,

he called out, "Stop and take a break, everyone. It's a good opportunity for you to witness the strength of several of our Dragon King Hall's Sub-hall Masters!"

Someone shouted, "Instructor, are they all Sub-hall Masters of our Dragon King Hall? Who is the strongest of them?"

The instructor replied, "Of course, it's Beidou Tianshu who is currently in charge of Dragon King Hall. His strength is at the Peak Energy Transformation. Naturally, there are rumors that Tianshu's current strength has already stepped into the God Realm, making him akin to a Terrestrial Immortal, but whether that's true or not, I don't know; after all, I haven't witnessed it myself..."

The instructor sighed with some regret, then proceeded to introduce the identities of Wu Shisan and Jian Ruyan who were about to compete.

After hearing this, the crowd couldn't help but ask, "Then why isn't it the Tianshu Palace Master or Tianxuan Hall Master who are competing? Why the Yaoguang Hall Master?"

"Yes, the Yaoguang Hall Master ranks last, surely her strength is not as good as the Tianxuan Hall Master's, so why bother competing?"

Mei Yinxue sat quietly to the side, drinking mineral water and listening to their discussion without saying anything.

The instructor, listening to their questions and not knowing the answers, said irritably, "How would I know why the Hall Masters want to duel? Maybe the Yaoguang Hall Master has had a breakthrough in strength, and so he wants to test himself against the Tianxuan Hall Master!"

"Really? Then the upcoming duel should be evenly matched and quite spectacular, shouldn't it?"

Everyone began to look forward to it.

Meanwhile, amidst their discussion,

Wu Shisan and Jian Ruyan had both taken their positions and were adjusting their state, ready to launch an attack at any moment.

Jian Ruyan held the sword hilt, her face as cold and emotionless as a Snow Lotus flower, and looked at Wu Shisan, asking indifferently, "Aren't you going to use a weapon?"

"No need," Wu Shisan replied as he rotated his neck, producing a series of cracking sounds from his bones, and then said, "After all, you're weaker than I am, only at the early stage of Energy Transformation. If I were to use a weapon as well, wouldn't that be bullying you?"

Although they were vying for their rankings, Wu Shisan cared about his reputation; he was at the completion stage of Energy Transformation and could at any moment achieve Enlightenment and step into the peak of Energy Transformation. How could he face someone like Jian Ruyan, who was only at the early stage of Energy Transformation, and still need a weapon? Wouldn't that be embarrassing if word got out?

"Really? Are you sure I'm only at the early stage of Energy Transformation? Haven't I improved at all?" Jian Ruyan, upon hearing Wu Shisan's words, didn't get angry, but her tone did grow much colder.

"Hm?!"

Wu Shisan, startled by Jian Ruyan's response, hesitated for a moment before shaking his head and saying, "How could that be? A year ago you had just entered the early stage of Energy Transformation, mastering the abilities of Energy Transformation. How could you possibly have reached the completion stage in just one year? No amount of pills could achieve that! I don't believe it!"

Jian Ruyan's identity was a mystery, and the fact that she had many Elixirs at her disposal was no secret within Dragon King Hall. Everyone was both envious and jealous of her.

She, however, was only generous with her Elixirs towards Xiang Mantang and somewhat to Mu Hongchen. As for others, unless they were severely wounded and on the brink of death while she just happened to be nearby, she would offer a Elixir to save a life.

But Wu Shisan had never heard of any Elixir that could aid a martial artist's cultivation.

Spirit Stones would be more likely.

Therefore, Wu Shisan said that even if Jian Ruyan crazily consumed Elixirs, she couldn't have achieved the completion stage of Energy Transformation.

Upon hearing Wu Shisan's words, Jian Ruyan's delicate face, which was usually expressionless, suddenly revealed a strange smile. Although it was faint and quickly disappeared, she did indeed smile.

But it seemed more like a sneer.

Jian Ruyan said, "Who told you that I've only gone from early Energy Transformation to complete Energy Transformation?"

"Don't tell me you've reached the peak of Energy Transformation?!" Wu Shisan replied with a touch of amusement in his voice.

"Yes," Jian Ruyan nodded, "your guess, at last, isn't so conservative!"

"Ha, stop making me laugh!" Wu Shisan nearly laughed himself breathless, then said, "Yaoguang Hall Master, this is the first time I've heard you joke like this."

Indeed, inside Dragon King Hall, everyone else was relatively easy to talk to, only Jian Ruyan was almost always silent, carrying out the orders issued by the Old Dragon King without a word.

Therefore, this was the first time Wu Shisan realized that Jian Ruyan could also make a joke.

"You think I'm joking?" Jian Ruyan looked at Wu Shisan as if he were a fool, and finally shook her head, saying, "I intended to remind you not to take me lightly, but seeing you like this, I realize it's no use!"

"Let's begin!" Wu Shisan, instantly erasing his smile, spoke with a face full of solemnity.

Even when a lion fights a rabbit, it uses all its strength; Wu Shisan, despite looking down on Jian Ruyan, would not lower his guard or completely disregard her.

Chapter 456: One Move!

"Let's begin!"

Jian Ruyan, seeing Wu Shisan finish warming up, instantly entered a combat state, and her gaze became stern as she spoke in a deep voice.

"Ha!"

Wu Shisan's angry shout erupted like the Lion's Roar Skill, his voice thundering, causing the group of newcomers watching their fight in the distance to feel their heads ache and their vision darken.

Wu Shisan bellowed, trying to overpower with his momentum, and then his figure, ghost-like, charged towards Jian Ruyan and delivered a kick towards her abdomen.

"Clang!"

At the critical moment, Jian Ruyan suddenly drew her sword from its sheath.

Wu Shisan stopped moving.

Glancing sideways at the long sword resting against his neck, emitting a cold Sword Qi, he dared not move any further.

Wu Shisan roared inwardly, how could this be possible?

Jian Ruyan had just reached the Early Energy Transformation Stage a year ago, how have she reached the Peak Energy Transformation in just one year?

This shouldn't be!

When they had ambushed Nameless together a while ago, her strength hadn't been this strong!

Could it be that she had been concealing her true power all this time?!

If that was the case, then everything would make sense.

"Are you convinced now?"

Jian Ruyan asked, looking at Wu Shisan who was sweating profusely from his forehead, her tone indifferent.

"Convinced, totally convinced..."

Wu Shisan said with a wry smile.

Under the absolute disparity in strength, he was utterly without any chance to retaliate once he made a misstep.

Just as when Xiang Mantang returned to the capital, they had all competed with Xiang Mantang, and all lost to him just as now.

Seeing Wu Shisan concede, Jian Ruyan then sheathed her sword.

Feeling the sharp sensation on his neck disappear, Wu Shisan finally breathed a sigh of relief.

Although he knew Jian Ruyan would not kill him, he was still afraid. What if Jian Ruyan accidentally trembled her hand?

Mu Hongchen witnessed their battle, which ended in merely three seconds, and was stunned for a long while.

Then, she looked up, no longer with a worried gaze at Jian Ruyan, but with a mix of curiosity and astonishment, "Ruyan, when did you step into the Peak Energy Transformation?"

"A few days ago," Jian Ruyan answered indifferently.

It didn't seem like a big deal to her.

They were talking on this side.

On the other side, the instructors and the newcomers were a bit dumbfounded.

"Instructor, didn't you just say that the Tianxuan Hall Master could subdue the Yaoguang Hall Master in three moves?"

"Yeah, how come it was the Yaoguang Hall Master who subdued the Tianxuan Hall Master in one move?"

After being bewildered for a while, the newcomers turned their heads and looked at the instructor with strange expressions, asking.

The instructor was also bewildered.

He thought to himself, even if Jian Ruyan had made a breakthrough, she would just be at the Completion Stage of Energy Transformation, and, being at the same stage, her gap with Wu Shisan was quite apparent; one had just entered this level, while the other was about to advance to a higher level.

But the result, Jian Ruyan subduing Wu Shisan in one move, was too unreasonable, wasn't it?

Hearing the trainee's question, the instructor's mouth twitched slightly as he explained, "Perhaps the Tianxuan Hall Master was careless."

"But, instructor..." someone asked, puzzled, "didn't you just teach us that we can despise the enemy strategically, but must value them tactically? It doesn't make sense—Tianxuan Hall Master should know this!"

The instructor, hearing the trainee's words, became somewhat annoyed and snapped, "Stop prattling on! Have you all had enough rest? Get up and continue training!"

"Yes!"

Seeing the instructor's anger, no one dared to provoke him further. They obediently got up—ready to resume training.

Mei Yinxue hadn't spoken at all; she was just drinking water, resting, and recovering her strength. At the moment, she felt quite good, unlike some who kept chattering nonstop and now struggled to stand, their legs shaking.

The instructor's training was merely a minor incident here.

Meanwhile, Wu Shisan, having admitted defeat, was full of regret.

If only he had known that Jian Ruyan had unwittingly become the second at Dragon King Hall, he would not have challenged Jian Ruyan but instead have targeted Mu Hongchen. Even becoming a Vermilion Bird would have been good!

Now that he had lost, he could no longer challenge Mu Hongchen!

He could only turn into a turtle now.

Mu Hongchen didn't care about Wu Shisan's thoughts. Hearing Jian Ruyan's response, she circled around her a few times, both surprised and envious, "You broke through to the Peak Energy Transformation in just a few days? Why can't I be that lucky?"

Jian Ruyan said indifferently, "Once you understand, you understand. If not, maybe you'll never get it, but it's nothing — with your talent, I dare not say the God Realm but reaching Peak Energy Transformation is only a matter of time."

Mu Hongchen understood what Jian Ruyan meant, like countless martial artists in the country who might spend their entire lives stuck at Peak Dark Energy, never able to step into the Energy Transformation stage.

And some masters of Energy Transformation remain at the Early or Complete stages for life. If they can't grasp the essence, they probably will never integrate and reach the Peak Energy Transformation, becoming a grandmaster of martial arts.

People like Mu Jinyu, Xiang Mantang, and Jian Ruyan, only in their twenties and already grandmasters of Peak Energy Transformation, could possibly comprehend the Unity of Heaven and Man, the union of Essence, Qi, and Spirit, stepping into the God Realm, are truly rare.

Realizing this, Mu Hongchen felt less dejected.

Then, Mu Hongchen glanced at the disheartened Wu Shisan with a bit of schadenfreude and looked towards Xiang Mantang, asking, "Dragon King, now that the rankings of the new Sub-hall Masters have been set, is there anything else to announce?"

"No more!" Xiang Mantang's expression was somewhat complex as he shook his head and said to them, "You and Xuanwu, step back for now."

"Yes!" Mu Hongchen was quite curious about what Xiang Mantang wanted to discuss with Jian Ruyan but dared not defy his command. Along with Wu Shisan, he responded and prepared to leave.

"Wait a minute!" Xiang Mantang suddenly recalled something and reminded, "From now on, don't call me Dragon King. There is only one Dragon King in Dragon King Hall, my senior, you can call me Azure Dragon!"

"Yes!"

Mu Hongchen and Wu Shisan, upon hearing Xiang Mantang's words, felt a chill in their hearts and hastily responded.

They had initially speculated that Xiang Mantang intended to replace Mu Jinyu's title of Dragon King with his position as Azure Dragon. It seems they had thought too much.

Fortunately, Xiang Mantang did not take much issue with it; otherwise, they probably would not have fared well.

After Mu Hongchen and Wu Shisan left,

Xiang Mantang looked at Jian Ruyan with a calm gaze and asked, "Have you been concealing your strength?"

Jian Ruyan's expression remained unchanged, and she replied in a very calm tone, "I couldn't deceive you in the end."

Yes, her claim of having broken through a few days ago was false.

Advancing to the Peak Energy Transformation within a few days usually means one has been long stagnant at the Complete Energy Transformation Stage, having had a sudden insight and naturally progressing further.

But it is impossible to leap from the Early to the Peak Energy Transformation in two stages.

Which means, she originally possessed the strength of Complete Energy Transformation, not same as Mu Hongchen in the early stages.

Xiang Mantang furrowed his brows slightly but did not ask why Jian Ruyan had concealed her strength.

He did not even blame her for hiding it.

After all, during their last encounter with Nameless, even with Jian Ruyan exerting Peak Energy Transformation strength, they still could not capture Nameless.

Xiang Mantang curiously asked, "Why conceal it before and not now?"

Chapter 457: The Look in Jian Ruyan's Eyes!

"Because I want to keep up with you!" Jian Ruyan replied.

"Keep up with me? What do you mean?" Xiang Mantang frowned.

Jian Ruyan said, "I know, after the Dragon King has fallen asleep, you will not be content to let Shen Cangsheng and the others get away with their deeds. Sooner or later, you will seek them out for retribution."

"Therefore, if I were still only at the early stage of Energy Transformation, you definitely wouldn't take me with you then."

Jian Ruyan looked intently at Xiang Mantang and said, "Only if I can keep up with your pace will you allow me to follow you."

Jian Ruyan still had some things she hadn't clarified; the words she had shared with Mu Hongchen were half-true. She had indeed concealed her strength before, but at that time, she was just at the completion stage of Energy Transformation.

However, her current strength at the peak of Energy Transformation was indeed something she had only broken through in the past few days.

The price she paid to break through to the peak of Energy Transformation, however, was known to no one.

When Xiang Mantang heard Jian Ruyan's words, he couldn't help but smile bitterly and sighed, "I really don't know what it is about me that makes you do this."

Xiang Mantang actually also felt that Jian Ruyan's attitude towards him was rather inexplicable.

Jian Ruyan had joined the Dragon King Hall a year ago and had become the hall master of Yaoguang Hall right after she entered. Her background was very mysterious; no one knew how she had joined the Dragon King Hall.

Initially, Xiang Mantang thought she, like Qin Qiaochu and Shen Cangsheng, Di Yin, might have been helped into the Dragon King Hall by the power behind them.

But later, Xiang Mantang noticed that Jian Ruyan did not mingle well and behaved differently from Shen Cangsheng and the others.

Thus, he speculated that Jian Ruyan might be like Wu Shisan and Mu Hongchen, a foster child of the Old Dragon King.

However, Mu Hongchen and the others indicated that they had never seen Jian Ruyan before, meaning she was not another foster daughter of the Old Dragon King.

It was possible to become a sub-hall master of the Dragon King Hall; if not the above two types of people, then one had to climb up step by step like Xiang Mantang had.

But more than a year ago, Jian Ruyan hadn't been in the Dragon King Hall at all.

And the Old Dragon King didn't discuss much with them.

So, the origin of Jian Ruyan remained very mysterious.

This sense of mystery stemmed from her loner behavior, the treasured sword in her hand, and the various elixirs she would occasionally produce...

However, Xiang Mantang didn't care about her mystery, nor did he want to delve too deeply into her origins, because Jian Ruyan's attitude toward him was very good.

Initially, Xiang Mantang stuck to the principle that no work meant no reward and was reluctant to accept Jian Ruyan's goodwill. Yet, after it happened again and again, in the end, he truly appreciated it.

As Xiang Mantang recalled all this, Jian Ruyan spoke, "The next time you have some dangerous mission, could you take me along? I am no longer a burden!"

When Jian Ruyan spoke, her eyes were fixed on Xiang Mantang, and her gaze was a bit tense, as if she was afraid he would refuse.

About the recent event in Kunlun Mountain, Jian Ruyan had already learned the gist of it from Mu Hongchen's side.

She had been very frightened at the time, which is why she hastily worked to break through to the peak of Energy Transformation so that she could keep up with Xiang Mantang.

She didn't want such a thing to happen to Xiang Mantang again, and while she was saddened by Mu Jinyu's sacrifice, she was also relieved that it wasn't Xiang Mantang who had died.

After all, if Xiang Mantang had died, she really wouldn't know what to do!

Whether she could continue to live!

To her, Mu Jinyu was just a leader, even a hands-off kind of leader, whom she barely saw a few times a week.

The only thing that made her feel somewhat fond of Mu Jinyu was his brotherly relationship with Xiang Mantang.

Otherwise, Mu Jinyu would be even more a stranger to her.

"Yes!"

Hearing Jian Ruyan's request, Xiang Mantang thought briefly and then gladly agreed.

A master at the peak of Energy Transformation — he was planning to annihilate the Tianhe Sword Sect and crush Shen Cangsheng into ashes; there was no reason not to take her along.

But...

Xiang Mantang grew increasingly curious and wondered why Jian Ruyan favored him so much.

Was he worrying that he might refuse to bring her along?

After a moment's hesitation, Xiang Mantang asked, "Ruyan, do you... like me?!"

At 25, Xiang Mantang was always alone. With his status and appearance, he had no shortage of suitors, including daughters of prominent families from the Capital City and even foreign princesses.

However, his focus was solely on finding his sister and uncovering the clues and reasons behind his parents' deaths to eventually seek revenge.

Thus, he had never pursued a romantic relationship.

And truth be told, he was somewhat envious of the carefree and graceful Mu Jinyu.

But though he envied him, he was not like Mu Jinyu; he could not offer a woman a future either.

During his interactions with Jian Ruyan, Xiang Mantang had wondered if she indeed liked him.

But considering her status and looks, she probably wouldn't be interested in him, and to avoid being called delusional, Xiang Mantang never delved into that matter.

Now, seeing Jian Ruyan's increasingly special emotional expression towards him, Xiang Mantang became curious if she really liked him, and if so, he thought he should persuade her to give up on him as soon as possible.

Upon hearing Xiang Mantang's question, Jian Ruyan nodded without hesitation, saying, "Yes!"

"Uh..."

Xiang Mantang had thought his question would be dismissed by Jian Ruyan as delusional, or perhaps boldly, she actually liked him and would nod shyly.

Instead, although Jian Ruyan admitted to liking him, her expression remained cold without any change, and her cheeks didn't even blush, not resembling someone who liked him at all.

Her gaze, however, really seemed similar to the way Gu Xiyan and Mei Yinxue looked at Mu Jinyu.

Could it really be that she liked him, and it wasn't just his own wishful thinking?

Xiang Mantang couldn't comprehend, shook his head, and sighed, "I'm sorry, I cannot accept your feelings..."

He hadn't finished speaking when he was directly interrupted by Jian Ruyan.

"It's okay, liking you is my business, it has nothing to do with you!"

Jian Ruyan said indifferently.

Perhaps having spoken out, Jian Ruyan's gaze at Xiang Mantang was no longer restrained and gradually became brazen!

Xiang Mantang felt that Jian Ruyan's words made a lot of sense, only to soon notice that the way she looked at him was a bit off.

Not right...

As Xiang Mantang faced Jian Ruyan's gaze, he felt it more and more inappropriate, unlike the way Gu Xiyan and others looked at Mu Jinyu.

The way Gu Xiyan and others looked at Mu Jinyu was filled with admiration, joy, and happiness, but Jian Ruyan's gaze... was more like how Su Zijin looked at Mu Jinyu.

It was a gaze filled with love, attachment, and indulgence...

It might sound strange, but that's how it felt to Xiang Mantang.

Xiang Mantang frowned in deep thought, trying to figure out why Jian Ruyan's gaze was of that sort.

"Thump!"

Suddenly, someone at the training ground seemed unable to hold on and fainted.

"Hm?!"

Xiang Mantang glanced over, and his eyes suddenly narrowed.

Because the person who fainted was Mei Yinxue!

Xiang Mantang immediately stopped thinking about his and Jian Ruyan's relationship and rushed over!

Jian Ruyan also hurriedly followed and took out an elixir from her pocket.

Chapter 458: An Old Friend?

By the time Xiang Mantang arrived, a female student was already performing emergency rescue on Mei Yinxue.

Initially, a few male students had attempted to give Mei Yinxue artificial respiration, but the instructor, fully aware of Mei Yinxue's identity, sent them flying with a kick and then arranged for a female student to take over.

After Xiang Mantang got there and saw that Mei Yinxue seemed to be without any serious trouble, he just stood by, waiting for the female student to finish the cardiopulmonary resuscitation before sending her to the hospital.

"Make way."

Jian Ruyan, holding a round elixir, parted the crowd while telling the girl administering emergency treatment to Mei Yinxue to step aside.

The girl, knowing Jian Ruyan's identity, obediently retreated to one side upon hearing her command.

Then, Jian Ruyan fed the elixir in her hand to Mei Yinxue.

Soon after, Mei Yinxue's originally pale complexion began to bloom with a healthy flush after taking Jian Ruyan's elixir. Before long, she also opened her eyes in a daze.

"What happened to me... ?"

Mei Yinxue couldn't quite remember what had just happened.

She only remembered being in the middle of training, didn't she?

Why were all these people surrounding her now?

"All right, Sister Mei, you rest first; everyone else, follow me back to training!"

The instructor glanced cautiously at Xiang Mantang a few times, and sighing with relief upon seeing that he bore no blame, didn't dare to ask Mei Yinxue to continue training but instead called the rest to resume!

"Wait for me..."

Seeing that they were about to continue training, Mei Yinxue struggled, trying to get up and join them.

"You should rest for a bit."

Xiang Mantang stood to the side, sighing softly.

"Yes," Jian Ruyan also spoke up, advising, "The pill I gave you is no ordinary one. You should have a cultivation method, right? Hurry up and sit down, circulate your cultivation technique, and cultivate a bit. Don't waste it."

Hearing Jian Ruyan's words, Mei Yinxue reacted and immediately sensed the massive surge of spiritual energy starting to well up within her.

"Is this... the elixir she just administered to me?"

With that thought, Mei Yinxue quickly sat cross-legged, closed her eyes, and began operating her cultivation technique.

She originally had no cultivation technique, only knowing some rudimentary martial arts taught by her adoptive father. As for the cultivation method she was practicing now, naturally, it was given to her by Mu Jinyu when she had been curious about cultivation.

However, no matter how she practiced with Mu Jinyu, there was little progress due to her age, and she had nearly given up on cultivating.

If it weren't for Mu Jinyu's recent mishap, she probably wouldn't have resumed cultivation at all.

At that moment, as Mei Yinxue closed her eyes and started to cultivate using the technique Mu Jinyu had taught her, she immediately felt a warm current begin to flow towards her limbs...

Watching Mei Yinxue immerse into the state of cultivation, Xiang Mantang was reassured, withdrew his gaze, and looked towards Jian Ruyan.

In truth, Mei Yinxue's earlier fainting and shock were not serious, merely resulting from excessive fatigue, which didn't warrant the use of an elixir for treatment.

If it were anyone other than Mei Yinxue, Xiang Mantang would have probably told Jian Ruyan that she was being too wasteful.

But due to Mei Yinxue's relationship with Mu Jinyu, Xiang Mantang naturally had no grounds to reproach Jian Ruyan.

He even understood that Jian Ruyan's wastefulness was completely for his sake.

"What? Is there something wrong?" Jian Ruyan asked, seeing Xiang Mantang looking at her.

"No, thank you!" Xiang Mantang shook his head as he expressed his gratitude.

He then fell silent, calculating the extent to which Mei Yinxue's strength would reach after refining the elixir given to her by Jian Ruyan.

Mei Yinxue was already a martial artist at the peak of Mingjin. With the help of this elixir, breaking through to Dark Energy should not be a problem.

If she were to join him, and with Jian Ruyan's protection, they could possibly enable her to personally exact revenge on Shen Cangsheng!

With this in mind, Xiang Mantang took out his cell phone and started sending messages to San Liu, Nameless, Zeus, and Snake, asking them to quickly come to Capital City.

Indeed, in the absence of any Heavenly Materials and Earthly Treasures, and only having found the Wood Spirit Bead, Xiang Mantang was preparing to head to the Kunlun Ruins to confront Shen Cangsheng and his backing sect, the Tianhe Sword Sect!

Originally, upon learning that the Tianhe Sword Sect's elder ancestor was a strong warrior in the Divine Realm, Xiang Mantang was somewhat apprehensive, and before successfully rescuing Mu Jinyu, he was not planning to rashly seek revenge!

But now that he had also reached the Divine Realm, he had no such concerns!

The elder ancestor of the Tianhe Sword Sect was at most in the Mid Stage of the Divine Realm, whereas he, although in the Early Stage of Divine Realm, would not be much weaker than the elder ancestor when he used the Forbidden Secret Technique "Blood Phoenix Slaughter Art"!

Half a day later.

Sitting in meditation, Mei Yinxue slowly exhaled and opened her eyes, a sharp light flickering in them.

She felt better than she ever had before.

Mei Yinxue also became a Dark Energy Warrior after taking that elixir.

During the time Mei Yinxue was cultivating,

All the top-grade assassins that Xiang Mantang had summoned had also arrived.

"Sister-in-law, are you finished?" Xiang Mantang saw Mei Yinxue awaken and asked.

"Yes," Mei Yinxue nodded, getting up from the ground.

Xiang Mantang said, "I am going to find the murderer who harmed my senior brother and avenge him. Do you want to go?"

Although he thought Mei Yinxue would want to go, he was not entirely certain, so he decided to ask her first.

Mei Yinxue was startled, then quickly nodded and said, "I want to go!"

"Alright, then let's get ready," Xiang Mantang nodded and replied.

Although he really wanted to kill Shen Cangsheng himself, after extensive deliberation, he ultimately decided that Mei Yinxue should be the one to do it.

Since Gu Xiyao and Wen Rou were just ordinary people, even if they understood that Mu Jinyu's death was orchestrated by Shen Cangsheng, they might not have the resolve to kill him.

But Mei Yinxue was already a notable figure in the Jianghu of River City, accustomed to bloodshed, so letting her personally take down Shen Cangsheng for Mu Jinyu's vengeance seemed most appropriate.

"Okay," said Mei Yinxue, preparing to retrieve her Blood-Drinking Sword from her residence. Her gaze casually swept over the people behind Xiang Mantang and suddenly paused, surprised, "Zhu Yeqing?!"

The woman code-named "Snake," when hearing Mei Yinxue's incredulous exclamation, showed no emotion and said indifferently, "Long time no see, Sister Mei. Have you finally noticed me? I thought you had forgotten about your little sister!"

"Hmm?" Xiang Mantang, seeing their interaction, paused slightly and asked, "You know each other?"

Mei Yinxue looked at Zhu Yeqing with a complex expression and nodded lightly, saying, "Yes, speaking of which, we should be considered sworn sisters!"

It turned out that this top-grade assassin codenamed "Snake" was none other than Zhu Yeqing from the Mei Lan and Zhu Ju sisterhood!

Zhu Yeqing sneered and said, "Indeed, thanks to Sister Mei, who drove me out of River City back then; if not, I wouldn't have reached where I am today!"

Even knowing the impressive status of Mei Yinxue, Zhu Yeqing still confronted her without holding back!

Chapter 459: Let Go!

Mei Yinxue was somewhat surprised to see Zhu Yeqing, and couldn't help but sneer when she heard her mockery, saying, "If you few had shown any sisterly affection for me back then, would I have needed to drive you all away? And now you blame me for it?"

Zhu Yeqing, upon hearing Mei Yinxue's taunt, also fell silent.

Indeed, it was her ambition that had blinded her back then, leading her to join forces with Huang Qihua and Gu Youlan against Mei Yinxue.

After all, she believed that even if she hadn't gotten involved, Mei Yinxue would have inevitably been killed by the combined efforts of Huang Qihua and Gu Youlan.

By involving herself, she could at least prevent their power from growing too great.

It was as if Mei Yinxue was paving a way for her before she died.

In the end, who could know that the three of them would fail to take down Mei Yinxue and would instead be driven out of River City by her?

In the first month after being expelled, Zhu Yeqing was full of resentment towards Mei Yinxue, yearning to tear her to pieces and scatter her ashes!

But later, after joining an assassin organization and gradually becoming the president of the world's third top-ranked Assassins Guild, her perspectives broadened significantly, and her resentment from the past began to fade.

She felt only a slight grievance now.

Xiang Mantang, listening to the argument and mockery between Mei Yinxue and Zhu Yeqing, furrowed her brows and turned to Mu Hongchen beside her to ask, "What is exactly going on between them?"

Mu Hongchen knew something of Mei Yinxue's past and began to explain to Xiang Mantang.

After the explanation, Xiang Mantang suddenly realized and looked at Zhu Yeqing with indecisive eyes, uncertain whether to kill this potentially valuable subordinate for Mei Yinxue's sake.

After all, according to Mu Hongchen, Mei Yinxue's three sisters, Huang Qihua, and Gu Youlan had never given up on taking revenge after being expelled from River City.

Thus, keeping Zhu Yeqing by her side, if she, too, harbored thoughts of revenge against Mei Yinxue and succeeded, how would he explain it to Mu Jinyu once she awoke?

After arguing a bit with Mei Yinxue, Zhu Yeqing took a deep breath and said, "Forget it, I was indeed wrong about what happened back then, but you've already driven me out of River City. Nowadays, I no longer care for the underground influences of that place. Can't we call it even and let bygones be bygones?"

Zhu Yeqing still had some conscience, remembering how she and the other three were raised together by their adoptive father and how Mei Yinxue had taken great care of them.

Thus, as an assassin, her resentment towards Mei Yinxue gradually disappeared, and with widened horizons, she began to regret her past choices that destroyed the sisterly bond between them.

As a result, after becoming an assassin, she had no close sisters or friends left.

She could only be an emotionless killing tool that knew nothing but slaughter!

If it hadn't been so, she would have sought revenge against Mei Yinxue the moment she became a top-grade assassin, but since she always felt some grievance and guilt towards Mei Yinxue, she never went to her.

Today, as they encountered each other by chance, although Zhu Yeqing was confident she could kill Mei Yinxue in one move after a few arguments, instead of seeking revenge, she preferred to reconcile with Mei Yinxue and eventually gave in.

Mei Yinxue was slightly surprised to see Zhu Yeqing not opposing her and even suggesting they bury the hatchet.

She wondered if it was because Xiang Mantang and others were nearby that Zhu Yeqing chose to keep up appearances with her?

After all, even after many years, Huang Qiuhua and Gu Youlan had not forgotten their vow of vengeance.

However, Mei Yinxue could sense Zhu Yeqing's terrifying strength and knew that if Zhu Yeqing truly wanted revenge like Huang Qiuhua and others, she could have come back to kill her long ago.

So then...

Did she truly not want them to dredge up the past?

"Okay," Mei Yinxue wasn't interested in revisiting past grievances either. She had only two thoughts at the moment: to save Mu Jinyu and to seek revenge for Mu Jinyu!

And Zhu Yeqing was clearly an ally found by Xiang Mantang, an ally for avenging Mu Jinyu, so Mei Yinxue chose to let go of her animosity towards Zhu Yeqing.

Back then, she spared them out of sisterly affection. Now, since Zhu Yeqing had let go, she, for the sake of helping Mu Jinyu's vengeance, could let go again and not pursue Zhu Yeqing to the bitter end!

Zhu Yeqing was stunned when Mei Yinxue agreed.

Originally, she thought that Mei Yinxue had spared them back then due to her young age, merely driving them out of River City instead of exterminating them. Now that Mei Yinxue had been a major figure in the Jianghu of River City for many years, and since they had encountered each other again, she might opt for total annihilation.

After all, the deaths of Huang Qihua and Gu Youlan were still vivid memories.

So when Zhu Yeqing said she was letting go of the grudge, she was actually signaling to Xiang Mantang to not mess with her.

But she did not expect Mei Yinxue to truly agree.

Suddenly, Zhu Yeqing's gaze towards Mei Yinxue became somewhat complicated.

This big sister, indeed, has not changed a bit from back then!

What happened in the past, it was indeed I who wronged her!

Zhu Yeqing's icy heart also began to feel a tinge of remorse.

Xiang Mantang was still undecided on the sidelines and, seeing their spat turning into a reconciliation, furrowed his brows and asked Mu Hongchen, "Are they... truly reconciling?"

He was somewhat worried that Zhu Yeqing was pretending to reconcile with Mei Yinxue because of his presence.

But since he didn't understand the unfathomable thoughts of women, he had to ask Mu Hongchen.

Why not ask Jian Ruyan?

Does she seem like she would understand these things?

Upon hearing Xiang Mantang's question, Mu Hongchen hesitated for a moment, then shook her head and said, "I'm not sure either."

She wouldn't speak carelessly; if she guessed wrong and something happened to Mei Yinxue later, she wouldn't be able to shake off the blame!

Seeing that Mu Hongchen was unwilling to answer, Xiang Mantang didn't want to force her to respond. Thinking it over, although Zhu Yeqing was a good talent, Mei Yinxue's safety was more important in comparison.

Thus, a flash of murderous intent crossed Xiang Mantang's eyes, and he was about to make a move against Zhu Yeqing.

"Stop!"

Mei Yinxue saw Xiang Mantang's action and quickly shouted at him in a soft but firm voice, stopping him from attacking Zhu Yeqing.

When Xiang Mantang saw Mei Yinxue block him, he had no choice but to stop.

He then frowned and said, "Her presence is a threat to you, sister-in-law."

"It's okay, I believe she truly wishes to reconcile with me," Mei Yinxue shook her head and said.

She wasn't entirely sure about Zhu Yeqing's thoughts, but she was willing to take a chance for the sake of avenging Mu Jinyu.

"Alright," Xiang Mantang said, seeing Mei Yinxue so determined, he could only wait and see how things unfolded.

Of course, he would definitely keep a closer watch on Zhu Yeqing, otherwise, if something happened to Mei Yinxue, he would find it even harder to face Mu Jinyu and Gu Xiyan.

"I will go back to my room to get the Blood-Drinking Sword."

Mei Yinxue still remembered that they were supposed to set off for Kunlun Ruins to seek the true culprit for revenge; she didn't linger to chat more with Zhu Yeqing and hastily ran to her dwelling in Dragon King Hall.

Soon, Mei Yinxue returned, holding the Blood-Drinking Sword that Mu Jinyu had helped her bid for at the auction, and ran back to the group.

Seeing the Blood-Drinking Sword, Zhu Yeqing also had a complex expression on her face.

Chapter 460: Heading to Kunlun Ruins!

She knew that the treasured sword Mei Yinxue had received from his adoptive father had been stolen by the extremely jealous Gu Youlan.

She was also aware of the incident not long ago when Gu Youlan used the sword to try to trap Mei Yinxue, but instead, it backfired, leading to her own death.

All one could say was that fate makes fools of us all!

Of the four sisters—Mei Lan and Zhu Ju—only she and Mei Yinxue were still alive. The other two, unable to let go of their grudge against Mei Yinxue, had ultimately died by her hand as well.

This left her feeling a deep sense of melancholy.

If she had not let go of her resentment against Mei Yinxue, the best outcome would probably have been killing Mei Yinxue and then being pursued and killed by Mu Jinyu!

"Let's go,"

Mei Yinxue, carrying the Blood-Drinking Sword, said to Xiang Mantang.

"Okay." Xiang Mantang nodded and then turned to Wu Shisan and Mu Hongchen beside him. "Look after the Dragon King Hall. If there's anything urgent that I haven't managed to handle, consult each other and take care of it. For routine matters, wait till I return."

"Yes!" Mu Hongchen and Wu Shisan both nodded in agreement.

Xiang Mantang naturally hadn't planned to take Wu Shisan and Mu Hongchen to Kunlun Ruins to trouble the Tianhe Sword Sect.

The reason they had appeared on the drill field was solely because so many top-grade assassins had shown up; they came to check on the situation.

In the end, they would have to stay back to guard the Dragon King Hall.

Xiang Mantang couldn't possibly bring all of the Dragon King Hall's top fighters to the Kunlun Ruins. If something unexpected happened during the trip, wouldn't the Dragon King Hall be left entirely defenseless!

Shortly thereafter, a group boarded a private jet and flew toward Kunlun Mountain.

Sitting next to Xiang Mantang was Jian Ruyan. She could feel Xiang Mantang trembling slightly as they got closer to Kunlun Mountain and knew he was still troubled by the events of that day. She reached out and held his hand.

Xiang Mantang shuddered slightly when Jian Ruyan's small hand gripped his, then he turned his pale face to look at her.

Jian Ruyan said nothing, only gazing at Xiang Mantang with her clear, glassy eyes, quietly shaking her head.

Xiang Mantang remained silent, but his quivering body gradually stabilized.

Later, he was about to let go of Jian Ruyan's hand but noticed it was quite cold. After a moment's consideration, he decided not to release it.

The rest of the journey passed in silence.

A few hours later,

they finally arrived at the outskirts of Kunlun Mountain.

"Follow me,"

By then, Xiang Mantang had already let go of Jian Ruyan's hand, stepping ahead to lead them toward the direction of Kunlun Ruins.

An hour or so later,

Xiang Mantang led them to the place where he had ambushed Chen Wudao last time.

This was the entrance to Kunlun Ruins.

The area was seldom visited by anyone, but to prevent just anyone from accidentally stumbling into Kunlun Ruins, a formation was set up here. Normally, even if someone managed to find their way here, without knowing the specific method to enter, they simply could not access Kunlun Ruins.

As a former Beidou Tianshu, Xiang Mantang naturally knew how to enter Kunlun Ruins.

After some manipulation,

the very center of that clearing began to slowly distort and swirl, eventually transforming into a curtain of light rippling like water.

"Let's go,"

Once Xiang Mantang saw the light curtain appear, confirming everyone could now enter Kunlun Ruins, he stepped forward, walking into the light curtain.

The others saw Xiang Mantang's hand stretch into the light curtain, immediately getting twisted out of sight, followed by his half body, and finally, the whole person disappeared before their eyes.

To those inexperienced with such phenomena, this was somewhat baffling, but Jian Ruyan didn't hesitate and was the second to walk toward the light curtain.

After her, the vengeance-driven Mei Yinxue followed suit and entered.

Eventually, Zeus, San Liu, Nameless, and Zhu Yeqing exchanged looks and followed in as well.

Once they all had entered, the land became much quieter.

The light curtain in the void slowly spun for about three minutes, then gradually began to disappear into the void.

Meanwhile,

after stepping out from the light curtain, Xiang Mantang and his companions were greeted by a much broader world.

Before them lay a wilderness where the grass, dense as swords, bristled with a sharp sword Qi.

"Screech!"

A cry of a bird echoed as an eagle, towering three meters high, fiercely dived from the sky, swooping down toward Xiang Mantang and his companions!

"Swoosh!"

Jian Ruyan's eyes grew cold in an instant; she unsheathed her sword, and with a flash of sword light that vanished as quickly as it appeared, feathers flew and blood rained down!

The group stared at the twitching eagle on the ground, their eyes filled with an unusual mix of awe and trepidation.

What seemed to be an ordinary eagle actually possessed such immensity, and the force of its attack suggested the strength of someone at the peak of Mingjin.

If ordinary people were to come here, they'd hardly make it far before being hunted down by the seemingly random animals!

"Tianhe Sword Sect!"

Xiang Mantang didn't even glance at the eagle's corpse nearby but stood still, recalling the map of Kunlun Ruins and the location of the Tianhe Sword Sect.

After comparing the surroundings, Xiang Mantang then said to everyone, "Let's go this way."

After walking for more than three hours, San Liu couldn't help but ask, "Cousin, how much further?"

"Almost there, about half an hour more," Xiang Mantang replied, though not entirely sure himself.

After all, it was also his first time in the Kunlun Ruins, a world independent from Earth.

"Another half hour!"

San Liu felt somewhat dejected as they had constantly encountered various ferocious beasts during the past three hours of their journey.

Such ferocious animals like tigers, leopards, and wolves, which outside of zoos are seldom seen.

And the beasts here were far larger in size compared to those in the outside world.

A tiger outdoors would typically measure between one and a half to two and a half meters long, but here, tigers could grow over three, nearly four meters long.

Truly terrifying!

Half an hour later, amid the slightly complaining tone of San Liu,

"We've arrived!"

Xiang Mantang suddenly stopped and announced.

Everyone immediately became spirited and looked ahead.

In the distance, they saw a mountain range soaring into the sky, with myriad waterfalls like reversed galaxies and spiritual energy swirling around. Cranes circled in the sky, and many pavilions and towers adorned each peak, all shimmering gold and exuding an aura of immortality!

"Is this the Tianhe Sword Sect? It looks quite grand!"

San Liu, with a hint of envy in his eyes, softly said as he looked at the undulating mountain range.

"Come on, we're almost there."

Xiang Mantang stepped forward again and proceeded.

Having seen the mountaintop, it was naturally not far off.

But as the saying goes, "distant mountains are deceptive to the view," it looked close but still took them almost another half an hour to finally stand before the mountain range.

There were no disciples guarding the gate of the Tianhe Sword Sect; it seemed as though anyone could enter.

"How do we get in?" asked San Liu.

He knew that things were definitely not going to be easy. The gate to Tianhe Sword Sect must be tough to penetrate.

"Simple!"

Xiang Mantang let out a light chuckle, his eyes twinkling with a cold glint. He then motioned for everyone to step back and slowly raised his hand.

As Xiang Mantang's hand rose, the extremely rich spiritual energy of the Kunlun Ruins stirred according to his movements.

"Ha!"

Once Xiang Mantang felt the energy accumulation was adequate, he cried out lightly and fiercely struck forward!

"Boom!!"

Under the watchful eyes of San Liu and the others, it was as if an immense invisible palm had fiercely struck the air in front of them!

What astonished them even more was that as the Giant Elemental Qi Palm hit the air, a loud, bell-like sound resonated there.

Afterward, ripples of golden waves appeared before their eyes.

Finally, everyone clearly saw that there was a giant golden formation, large as a sea bowl, that utterly sealed off the mountain range!