

Old Gods 551

Chapter 551: Great Desert Moonlight

In the dead of night, the clouds retreated, and the rain ceased.

The vast sky was adorned with twinkling stars, and the bright moon hung high.

A desolate beauty emanated from the silver moonlight, spreading across the vast barren desert and falling upon the peak of a lonely mountain, illuminating two figures.

Seated on the ground, the woman in the white dress leaned slightly, resting in the arms of the person beside her, her beautiful eyes closed in serenity as she quietly listened to his narration.

Suddenly, Jiang Ruyi lifted her head from Lu Ran's embrace and softly asked, "The Sculpture Garden? In your spiritual realm?"

Lu Ran gave a gentle nod.

Deep shock churned within Jiang Ruyi's heart. The statues of all gods, all demons in this world—Lu Ran possessed a set of them in his mind?

Lu Ran could steal the powers of all gods and demons?

As Jiang Ruyi absorbed this astonishing revelation, she was silent for a long, long time before softly asking, "Immortal Sheep Lord... when did he give it to you?"

Lu Ran wore an apologetic expression: "The day I became an Immortal Sheep Believer."

Jiang Ruyi's gaze grew increasingly complicated.

And to think, in the past, she worried so much about him!

She had resolved, no matter if he dragged her down, to team up with him, to take him on missions, at least ensuring he could graduate smoothly—to survive in this brutal world.

But in the end...

From the moment Lu Ran became an Immortal Sheep Believer, he was already a god.

A dormant and quietly rising Fake God.

A new god, lying in wait to seize the positions of all gods and all demons!

"Don't be angry..." Lu Ran whispered, feeling uneasy under Jiang Fairy's gaze. He hurriedly added, "It was Immortal Sheep Lord who prohibited me from saying it!"

Jiang Ruyi: "..."

Lu Ran explained further: "I tell you, Immortal Sheep Lord is so domineering!

If he tells me to shut up, I have to shut up. If he tells me to sleep, I have to sleep. He treats me like the perfect girlfriend... cough, cough."

Jiang Ruyi shot him a playful, reproachful glance.

She knew in her heart that everything Lu Ran said must be true.

As weak as he was, how could he have the power to defy a god?

Moreover, to accomplish such a "rebellious and blasphemous" grand ambition, caution was certainly mandatory!

"You've hidden this for so long, why reveal it now?" Jiang Ruyi asked softly.

"The situation is urgent; I can't afford to hold back anymore." Lu Ran smoothed her jet-black hair, pulling her once again into his embrace.

Jiang Ruyi's gaze softened, letting herself be held by him.

Lu Ran added, "The Holy Spirit Mountain Realm is a remote and desolate place, the reach of the gods barely touches here.

The believers here cannot communicate with the gods; they can't snitch."

Jiang Ruyi quietly nodded, favoring this answer from Lu Ran.

He was someone entrusted with high expectations by Immortal Sheep Lord, a man with ambitions to alter the order of the world, and who had the qualifications and potential to match that dream.

Anything Lu Ran did should not be driven merely by selfish motives; it was imperative to consider more.

"Today, everyone who witnessed your use of advanced skills must be properly dealt with." From his embrace, Jiang Fairy's signature icy voice emerged.

"Furthermore, the people of the Mountain Realm are different from the devout believers of the human world." Lu Ran spoke with a deep voice. "Everything here is enough to make the believers confront the true face of the gods.

Ruyi, do you see it clearly?"

Jiang Ruyi lowered her eyelids and whispered, "We are livestock kept by gods and demons, generations upon generations of servants."

Indeed, as brilliant and perceptive as she was, how could she not deduce this?

Lu Ran lowered his head and kissed her hair lightly.

Perhaps it was comfort.

Having confirmed it further, Jiang Ruyi closed her eyes in pain, silent and wordless, leaning against his chest.

The tragic beauty of moonlight added a delicate radiance to the two silhouettes atop the desolate mountain.

Jiang Ruyi's thoughts seemed to influence the atmosphere around them, as if the whole world was steeped in melancholy.

Lu Ran's hand gently cupped her face, lifting the profile of the Immortal in his arms, then leaned down and kissed her lips.

One second, two seconds, three seconds...

Slowly, Jiang Ruyi's mood shifted, her lips faintly responding to his.

The atmosphere around them also swayed with their hearts.

After a long while, Lu Ran finally let her go.

Jiang Ruyi's gaze looked slightly hazy, she panted lightly, her face reddened and buried herself in his arms.

Through the surrounding aura, Lu Ran could distinctly perceive that the Jade Person in his embrace was no longer as sorrowful as she had been before.

"Tell me the story of your journey into the mountains." Lu Ran whispered.

"You go first." A muffled voice emerged from his embrace.

"You go first." Lu Ran stroked her jet-black hair, though unfortunately, it lacked the familiar fragrance of jasmine.

But that was fine; Lu Ran could picture it vividly in his mind.

Just like seeing an eraser—Lu Ran didn't need to possess an actual eraser to "smell" its unique scent; a picture sufficed.

"You go first." Jiang Fairy repeated.

"I'll kiss you again if you don't start!" Lu Ran laughed, greedily inhaling the jasmine-like scent in her presence.

Jiang Ruyi: "..."

Is that your method of threatening me?

Suddenly, Jiang Ruyi raised her head, her pitch-black eyes directly meeting Lu Ran's gaze.

"Alright, alright, I'll start!" Lu Ran muttered, "Why so fierce?"

Jiang Ruyi looked at Lu Ran with a mix of irritation and amusement.

"I landed with the Big Nightmare in the eastern-central area of Holy Spirit Mountain..." Lu Ran began recounting his journey.

Jiang Ruyi's heart followed the ups and downs of his tale, intertwined with his adventure.

Facing attacks from Tiantu Mountain, fishing Dragon Carp in alpine lakes.

Repeated hunts at Sword Mountain Peak, surviving one danger after another.

Venturing eastward to the sea, subduing Xun Luo's twin Divine Generals, taking root at Cloud Sea Cliff.

Heading north to Sword Ridge Peak, retrieving stranded allies from icy storms.

Journeying to Wuji Peak, slaughtering wolf packs to rescue the Immortal.

Reuniting with old friends, forming alliances at Big Wind Hall; crossing the sea to claim Seven Star Island...

Too much, far too much.

In a mere half-year, Lu Ran's experiences were outrageously thrilling.

A continuous effort to grow, to rise stronger and higher—he was either fighting or on his way to a fight.

Yet, when narrating, Lu Ran only shared the highlights.

Events like battling Night Charm, or cleansing the Withered Wood Forest, guarding Cloud Sea Cliff, confronting the Shi siblings, or repelling raids by sea clans were all left unmentioned.

Listening to this grand and robust saga, Jiang Ruyi's heart surged with waves of emotion.

She had countless questions, held them back repeatedly, but eventually couldn't resist interrupting to ask, "Sister Xian'er is with you?"

"Yep~" Lu Ran replied cheerfully.

Originally, he intended to surprise Jiang Ruyi with this news.

But upon reconsideration, it was unnecessary—Jiang Fairy knowing sooner would ease her worries sooner.

Lu Ran continued reassuring her, "She's at my lair, training diligently every day. There's even a Sea Realm Great Power stationed at Cloud Sea Cliff; it's relatively safe. You don't need to worry too much."

Oh, would you like to talk with her?"

"Oh?" Jiang Ruyi raised an eyebrow lightly.

Lu Ran pointed to his temple: "To liberate Sister Xian'er from Lie Tian's torment, I helped her sever the master-servant contract with the gods.

Now, Sister Xian'er is bound to the Divine Sculpture of Lie Tian in my Sculpture Garden. I can transmit messages to her at any time."

"No need; I don't want to risk distracting her during her cultivation. Let's speak when we return."

Though Jiang Ruyi spoke thusly, her thoughts were lively, her gaze subtly shifting.

"Alright!" Lu Ran smiled mischievously, "That's perfect—we can give Sister Xian'er a big surprise when we return!"

Suddenly, Jiang Ruyi spoke up: "Can I sever my contract with Jade Talisman and bind myself to one of the Divine Sculptures in your Sculpture Garden instead?"

Lu Ran deliberated for a moment, then said solemnly, "Ruyi, severing the contract comes with grave consequences! Sister Xian'er had no choice; Lie Tian's torment over her was worsening daily. We had to resort to this solution."

He then elaborated in detail on the dire aftermath of lowly Human Clan members severing their master-servant contracts.

Jiang Ruyi listened silently, absorbing his explanation.

After finishing, Lu Ran added, "When we return to the human world, we can ask Immortal Sheep Lord for assistance—he can resolve it from a higher dimension.

That way, you won't lose ranks! That's how the Big Nightmare overcame it."

Jiang Ruyi fixed her gaze on Lu Ran, her soft lips parting: "But I don't want to remain a believer of Jade Talisman.

I don't want to be a livestock kept as part of their herd, nor a servant any longer..."

As Lu Ran stared into the determined eyes of the woman before him, he opened his mouth but faltered, unable to speak.

It was clear that ever since Jiang Ruyi had realized the gods' true nature, she harbored intense resentment toward them.

She had been deceived far too long...

In the past, her faith in the gods had been boundless—now, her hatred was just as boundless.

Since entering Holy Spirit Mountain, coming to full awareness, Jiang Ruyi had been riddled with pain, burying her turmoil deep within.

For she had no recourse; in this perilous world, she could only use the tools provided by the gods to protect herself.

But now, everything was different!

She had Lu Ran!

A man possessing countless Pseudo-God Stone Sculptures, determined to steal the power of all gods and demons!

"Ruyi." Lu Ran pleaded gently, "Just this afternoon, you mentioned you could break through to Jiang Realm·Fifth Rank.

Once you reach the peak, you could step into the Sea Realm at any moment.

If you cut the contract now, chances are you'll lose ranks—this could seriously set you back..."

Before Jiang Ruyi could respond, Lu Ran pressed on: "You're different from Sister Xian'er—she was desperate! She was Lie Tian's emotional dumping ground; if she continued, she'd go insane.

But not you; Jade Talisman at most makes your demeanor colder—it doesn't significantly hinder your growth."

Jiang Ruyi said softly, "But my thoughts, my emotions—they'll become a barrier, perpetually disrupting my growth. Even if I lose ranks, I'm willing to accept it!"

Lu Ran furrowed his brows tightly.

Different people make different decisions based on their personalities. If these struggles weighed so heavily on her, it indeed called for early resolution.

On the other hand, binding Jiang Ruyi to a Pseudo-God Stone Sculpture sooner had its perks.

She could integrate with the Stone Sculpture earlier, raising her personal potential ceiling, accelerating cultivation progress!

Jiang Ruyi abruptly declared, "You mentioned you still need several months to advance to Jiang Realm·Fifth Rank; if I lose ranks, I'll consider it as waiting for you."

Lu Ran: ???

What kind of remark is that? It stings!

A fleeting smile crossed Jiang Ruyi's face, replaced by a serious expression as her beautiful eyes locked onto his: "I trust you."

Lu Ran's breath caught slightly.

Jiang Ruyi rose to her knees, her delicate hands cradling Lu Ran's face as their gazes met head-on.

Her eyes burned with unwavering resolve, and she repeated with absolute earnestness, her voice steady and clear:

"Lu Ran, I trust you."

"Hmm, okay."

Lu Ran gazed at the face so close to his, leaning in to capture her soft lips.

Of course, you can trust me.

The Pseudo-God Jade Talisman Stone Sculpture I prepared is for you.

You...

Were always meant to trust me.

....

Chapter 552: Determined Heart

At the foot of the desolate mountain, beside the tunnel entrance.

A towering, burly bald man stood guard with two others.

This was Xiong Xiong, the former leader of the Splitting Mountain Gang, now reduced to having only two underlings.

One of them, who appeared particularly dejected, was Shi Yong—a man who had joined the gang not long ago with his wife.

His wife, Wan Fangling, had perished in the previous turmoil.

This devastating loss had shattered Shi Yong, leaving him listless and disheartened. At this rate, this River Realm believer might lose his rank!

Xiong Xiong had attempted to console him.

But having suffered such a significant blow, how could Shi Yong move on in such a short time?

"Sigh..." Another Shanwei disciple couldn't help but let out a deep sigh.

This man, also surnamed Shi and named Shi Biao, was already in his forties.

It was clear that the preferences of the God Shanwei were blatant.

Xiong Xiong, Shi Biao, and Shi Yong were strikingly similar—towering figures with vicious looks.

Compared to Xiong Xiong, Shi Biao and Shi Yong at least had hair and slightly more decent appearances.

But not by much.

"What are you sighing for!" Xiong Xiong shot a glare at Shi Biao, lowering his voice to scold him.

The emotions of a River Realm Great Power could influence the surrounding environment!

With Shi Yong feeling so despondent and now standing post with him, Xiong Xiong's mood was already foul. And now Shi Biao was sighing as well?

"Boss..." Shi Biao grinned awkwardly, unable to fully express himself.

"What is it?" Xiong Xiong asked irritably.

Shi Biao hesitated for a moment before speaking: "Pavilion Master Jiang is like a fairy—her demeanor is icy cold and aloof. She wouldn't even bother tormenting us.

She thinks hitting me is beneath her.

But the Lu Sect Master..."

"Shut up!" Xiong Xiong hissed fiercely, as if itching to smack the back of Shi Biao's head!

You fool!

You've been on Holy Spirit Mountain for years and still haven't learned to be cautious, relying solely on "dumb luck" to stay alive?

If you want to die, fine—but stop dragging me down with you!

The Lu Sect Master wields countless Divine Techniques and Evil Techniques; who could foresee his moves?

Do you think no one can hear you just because it seems like no one is around?

"Whew~"

Two elongated silhouettes slowly descended from above.

Xiong Xiong: !!!

Shi Biao shuddered violently, terror filling his brutish face, and quickly knelt down.

"Sect Master, Lady!" Xiong Xiong also dropped to his knees, bowing his head, and tried to maintain a calm tone.

Lu Ran's gaze swept over both of them before landing on Shi Yong, who was sitting near the cavern entrance.

Shi Yong hung his head, motionless, a deep aura of sorrow emanating around him.

Lu Ran sighed as he observed this scene.

But Xiong Xiong and Shi Biao misunderstood the sigh, trembling in fear and breaking into cold sweat.

Jiang Ruyi frowned slightly, finding these Shanwei believers utterly terrorized.

She was aware, though, that earlier this morning, Lu Ran had burned Dead Souls with Soul Prison and Soul Fire—a horrifying display that had etched an indelible shadow in their minds.

Perhaps, in the hearts of these people, Lu Ran was seen as nothing short of a tyrant.

At least, his methods were unmistakably cruel!

Jiang Ruyi gently held Lu Ran's hand, giving his palm an assuring squeeze.

Lu Ran snapped out of his reverie and looked at the two trembling figures, somewhat resigned. He said, "From now on, kneel on one knee instead."

Xiong Xiong and Shi Biao froze for a moment.

Expecting punishment, they were caught off-guard by this instruction...

This subtle change in posture meant something entirely different.

"Yes, Sect Master!" Xiong Xiong thought deeply but did not dare dawdle, instantly making the adjustment.

"Comfort your companions more," Lu Ran said, holding Jiang Ruyi's hand and heading toward the tunnel entrance. "We're brothers in the same trench; look out for one another."

"Understood."

"Understood!" they replied in unison.

Lu and Jiang stepped into the narrow tunnel, walking deeper into the mountain.

Behind them, Shi Biao remained stricken with fear, while Xiong Xiong glared at him in annoyance.

Moments later, Xiong Xiong stepped forward and smacked the back of Shi Biao's head, lowering his voice. "Watch your words from now on!"

Shi Biao: "Ah."

Xiong Xiong grew angrier, landing another slap to the back of Shi Biao's head!

"Dumb luck" was certainly an apt description of Shi Biao's survival.

Earlier in the day, a Sea Realm believer of the Drought Sea had swept up three Shanwei disciples using thorny sand vines and flung them toward Elder Peng.

Peng chopped two of them apart with a single axe swing!

Clean and brutal!

The only survivor was Shi Biao, who was thrown a few meters away from Elder Peng and thus narrowly escaped death.

Inside the tunnel, Lu Ran walked forward steadily while quietly shaking his head.

He had, of course, heard every word.

The seemingly uncouth leader Xiong Xiong was, in truth, extremely shrewd.

It didn't matter whether Lu Ran was lenient or hadn't overheard; Xiong Xiong ensured his actions covered every base.

After all, if the Lu Sect Master had heard the conversation just now, he must also be hearing each slap that followed.

On this devouring Holy Spirit Mountain,

those with weaker abilities found survival unbearably difficult.

Walking through the winding tunnel, Jiang Ruyi noticed a faint light ahead.

The duo quickly stepped into the cavern and saw a small goldfish shimmering with pale golden light gracefully swimming through the air.

Its radiant golden rain illuminated the cavern.

Currently, Yu Changsheng was seated with three Jade Talisman disciples and two West Desolation believers, deeply engrossed in discussion.

Deng Yuxiang and Jing Hong were not inside the cavern; they were outside keeping watch.

Luo Ying was also absent, likely resting.

Even though this cavern was temporarily excavated, several individual rooms had been created.

"Sect Master!"

"Lady!" Upon seeing Lu and Jiang enter, everyone rose to their feet.

"Sit." Lu Ran gestured for them to sit while scanning the unfamiliar faces.

Xue Fengchen, however, wasn't entirely new; Lu Ran had some impression of him.

Feng, huh!

Lu Ran recalled how netizens often mocked Xue Fengchen.

Our great phoenix of the West Desolation, the first to ascend to River Realm Great Power and exceed the talents of his peers!

Yet somehow, he scored poorly, ranking at the bottom every time...

A testament to the idea: The stronger the power, the weaker the results!

The woman inseparable from Xue Fengchen, Gao Yunyan, Lu Ran also recognized.

A phoenix and a swallow.

This pair of birds had escaped Tianhuang Mountain's prison and now soared side by side.

The remaining three Jade Talisman disciples weren't unfamiliar to Lu Ran. Among them, the reserved and imposing man named Song Yu was particularly favored by the Jiang Fairy.

"Mr. Conglong." Lu Ran sat cross-legged, addressing Yu Changsheng. "I plan to return to Cloud Sea Cliff as soon as possible, to settle things down early."

Yu Changsheng pondered briefly before responding, "Sect Master, think carefully. Traveling to the northwest is no simple task."

His tone was understated but significant.

Lu Ran nodded. "This afternoon, we extracted valuable information from Elder Peng and You Tianyao regarding the distribution of various Evil Demon races.

I intend to meet the Evil Dog clan tomorrow.

Three days to complete the task, seven days to return to Cloud Sea Cliff."

Yu Changsheng listened to Lu Ran's clear plan and immediately nodded in agreement.

Lu Ran then turned to the others. "The disciples from Luoxian Pavilion will follow Pavilion Master Jiang and accompany me back to Cloud Sea Cliff."

Everyone nodded without objection.

Among them, An Xian's expression seemed unusual.

Luoxian Pavilion, Ran Sect...

You two still keep things separate?

Aren't we all yours to command?

Lu Ran stood up, his hand firmly holding Jiang Ruyi's slender one, as if worried she'd wander off. "Mr. Conglong, come with me."

Yu Changsheng rose with a smile, amiably clasping hands to greet the crowd.

The River Realm individuals felt honored and hurriedly returned the gesture to the Great Power of the Sea Realm.

[Big Nightmare, have Jing Hong come find me.]

[Understood.]

Holding hands with Jiang Ruyi, Lu Ran led Yu Changsheng into a private room.

"Pop~"

Yu Changsheng summoned a small Dragon Carp, gazing at the pair of young lovers with curiosity.

What could they want from me in a moment of reunion and heartfelt conversation?

"Ruyi plans to sever her divine contract," Lu Ran said to Yu Changsheng. "Since she's made up her mind, the sooner the better!"

The earlier the contract was severed, the sooner Jiang Ruyi could recover and integrate with the Pseudo-God Stone Sculpture.

Yu Changsheng hesitated but eventually remarked, "I've heard Lady Sect Master is already ready to advance and breakthrough to River Realm Peak. If she severs the contract now..."

Jiang Ruyi replied coolly, "My Dao Heart insists—it must be done."

Yu Changsheng raised his eyebrows slightly.

With that single statement, Jiang Ruyi had preemptively dismissed all his follow-up arguments.

Yu Changsheng suddenly had a thought.

What if she advanced first, breaking through to River Realm Peak, and then severed the contract?

She would lose rank anyway!

That way, perhaps Lady Sect Master would only drop to River Realm Fourth Rank, rather than falling further down...

No, wait.

Yu Changsheng reconsidered—maybe that calculation wasn't accurate.

The higher one climbed, the harder the fall.

So, does Lady Sect Master need to sever the contract now?

After much deliberation, Yu Changsheng finally resorted to pleading, "Lady Sect Master, please reconsider!"

Jiang Ruyi replied calmly, "My mind is made up, Mr. Conglong. Do not try to persuade me further."

With that, she turned her face toward Lu Ran.

Reflecting on her entire cultivation journey, Jiang Ruyi's belief in her Dao had never been as resolute as it was today!

As for her faith in Lu Ran...

Jiang Ruyi was unwavering.

Severing the contract would undoubtedly result in physical repercussions, but on the level of Mental Realm, Jiang Ruyi believed she would remain unaffected.

On the contrary, embracing Lu Ran would only stabilize her Mental Realm further!

Yu Changsheng: "..."

The look in Lady Sect Master's eyes was so hauntingly clear... brimming with devotion to Lu Ran.

The Sect Master sure is fortunate... *hiccup*

Too much sweetness—overloaded...

"Sect Master, you called for me?" Jing Hong rushed in hurriedly.

"Yes." Lu Ran nodded gently.

A few minutes later, Jiang Ruyi sat cross-legged on the floor as waves of energy surged around her. The hem of her snow-white dress spread out like undulating waves.

Amid the pale golden drizzle, her long hair swayed in the air, a beauty so breathtaking it tugged at the heart.

But this exquisite sight did not last long.

A torrential flow of energy converged toward her head and exploded with a thunderous roar!

Humans of the Human Clan bore humiliation in self-destructive acts, tearing apart contracts they had made with Gods.

"Argh." Jiang Ruyi's complexion turned ghastly, her eyes filled with anguish.

"Ugh~~~"

The low drone of the Calming Horn echoed throughout the stone chamber.

"Pop~Pop~"

The Longevity Carp and Resurrection Carp floated toward the woman's forehead.

Lu Ran knelt beside Jiang Ruyi, his heart aching non-stop, gripping her tightly clenched hand and channeling his own Black Fire into her.

Suddenly, Jiang Ruyi turned to stare at Lu Ran.

"What's wrong?" Lu Ran asked, alarmed by her sudden gaze.

Within his field of vision, the agony in her eyes began to dissipate, leaving only...

Resolve.

...

Chapter 553: Long time no see

Jiang Ruyi dropped a rank.

From Fourth Rank of River Realm, she fell to Third Rank of River Realm.

Is it just one rank lower?

Lu Ran didn't think so. After all, before tearing up the contract, Jiang Ruyi had already reached the bottleneck in her cultivation and could have ascended to Fifth Rank of River Realm at any time.

Calculating in this way, she actually dropped two ranks...

Lu Ran felt utterly distressed.

It wasn't just because of the damage to Jiang Ruyi's strength and realm, but also because of her fragile, injured appearance.

Throughout the night, Doctor Lu, Great Doctor Yu, and Spiritual Therapist Jing Hong stayed by Jiang Ruyi's side.

A three-way consultation team, indeed...

At the break of dawn, the patient's condition finally showed signs of improvement.

Doctor Lu transformed into the Master of Pseudo-Gods, appearing together with the pseudo-gods in the garden.

"Hoo~"

A massive phantom expanded from Lu Ran's body.

Jiang Ruyi, seated on the ground, looked frail with a pale complexion.

She slowly lifted her gaze and saw a phantom behind Lu Ran—a figure familiar to her.

Pseudo-God: Jade Talisman!

One day, this pseudo-god would become a true god.

Jiang Ruyi pressed her thin lips together; Lu Ran had already told her everything.

She understood that she would continuously merge with this stone sculpture, inheriting all its attributes until she surpassed and ultimately replaced this pseudo-god statue completely.

And after that...

Jade Talisman,

Ruyi once revered you, worshipped you, and offered sincere devotion to you.

Even within the Immortal Sheep Sect's grounds at Luoxian Mountain, Ruyi specially sought out a house at the foot of the mountain for you, erected a shrine, and prayed to you every day before descending the mountain.

The world believes that gods are saviors.

Ruyi was grateful and dared not slacken even slightly in her worship.

Yet, I was just livestock.

The night of the fifteenth... it was a trap set by gods and demons together.

Generation after generation, we were livestock to eternally satisfy your endless appetites.

Jade Talisman,

You truly disgust me.

Just you wait for me...

"Ready?" Lu Ran asked softly.

Jiang Ruyi's gaze turned cold; she said nothing, but held Lu Ran's hands and pressed them against her forehead.

She slowly closed her eyes, carefully feeling the warmth of Lu Ran's palms.

That heat finally brought a trace of warmth to her cold heart.

"Hoo~"

The phantom leaned down, letting its hand overlap with Lu Ran's.

Jiang Ruyi's body gently trembled.

The contract was formed!

Another pseudo-god took shape under Lu Ran's hands.

The phantom of the pseudo-god quietly dispersed, vanishing completely.

Jiang Ruyi still held Lu Ran's hand, lowering it slightly to her cheek, softly rubbing against it.

Yu Changsheng: "..."

He silently turned his head away, adopting a "don't look at anything inappropriate" demeanor.

Jing Hong, however, observed this tender scene with a smile—a kind of amused "auntie's smile."

Her own children in the human world must have gotten married by now.

She wondered what their husbands and wives were like.

Jing Hong wasn't expecting her children's partners to be divine figures like Master Lu and Lady Jiang.

She simply hoped that their relationships might be as deep as those shared between the sect leader and his wife... that would be more than enough.

"Ooh~~~"

Jing Hong blew the Soul-Calming Horn once again, soothing the spirits of all beings.

"You may leave." As the deep sound faded away, Jiang Ruyi's calm voice echoed inside the stone chamber.

Yu Changsheng immediately bowed and left without saying anything, taking Jing Hong with him.

They left in such a hurry~

Watching the two figures disappear down the tunnel, Lu Ran felt exasperated.

I am your sect leader, alright!

Didn't even glance at me—Jiang Ruyi gives an order, and you follow like that?

"Lu Ran?"

"Oh." Lu Ran snapped back to reality, sitting beside the girl to pass her the Cage Fire. "Feeling better now?"

Jiang Ruyi leaned against Lu Ran: "Don't worry. It won't take long before I'm back to Fourth Rank of River Realm."

"Mm-hmm." Lu Ran gently smoothed her jet-black hair.

Beauty Jiang clearly had no inclination to lie.

If she said she could, Lu Ran naturally believed her.

"Hah..." Jiang Ruyi exhaled deeply, only feeling that her upward path had never been clearer.

Once upon a time, she had rare moments of childishness, demanding that Lu Ran carry her step by step up the stone stairs to the summit of Luoxian Mountain.

In the deepest part of her Dao Heart, she had long since erected a divine temple.

The temple always honored one person alone.

Now, her inner convictions had perfectly aligned with reality!

Everything was as Jiang Ruyi had previously imagined. After tearing up the contract, she experienced no moments of confusion or emotional turmoil.

On the contrary, her mental state had only grown more steadfast.

"Hmm?" Jiang Ruyi suddenly opened her eyes.

In front of her floated a beautiful treasure gourd.

"Hoo~" The Fiery Phoenix Patterned Gourd swayed back and forth, as if greeting her.

"Hello, Little Chi Feng." Jiang Ruyi leaned against Lu Ran's shoulder, her face softening into a tender smile.

"Chirp~"

The phoenix patterns shimmered.

Little Chi Feng flapped its exquisite phoenix wings, flying out of the gourd.

Jiang Ruyi raised a hand, letting Little Chi Feng rest on her palm.

But in the next moment, an apologetic expression appeared on her face: "In the future, I'll miss you too."

Lu Ran didn't know the specifics of their conversation, but he could guess.

He silently chuckled to himself.

Little Chi Feng is so tiny—you could just fool it!

As he mused, Lu Ran sensed something strange near his hand.

A cold sword hilt carefully prodded his fingers and slipped into his palm.

Cold Night Sword?

A voice spoke directly into his mind: "Did you miss me?"

Lu Ran nodded immediately: "I missed you, missed you so much."

Cold Night Sword possessed a voice as cool and crisp as Jiang Ruyi's, though its tone carried a faint hint of bitterness:

"Liar."

Lu Ran: "..."

Awkward!

Lu Ran grips the sword hilt, hastily changing the topic: "By the way, have you unlocked your Divine Weapon Domain yet?"

"No."

A single solitary word, icy cold—reminiscent of how Jiang Ruyi acted around strangers.

Lu Ran's tone softened: "Haven't decided on the path to take?"

Cold Night Sword: "I decided long ago."

"Then why haven't you...?"

"Blocked off. There's some mysterious power that won't let me delve deeper along this path."

"Oh?" Lu Ran furrowed his brow slightly. "Where is it? Can you sense its presence?"

Cold Night Sword: "Not in the human world, nor in the Mountain Realm."

Lu Ran laid the Cold Night Sword flat on his knees, his fingers gliding along its icy blade: "Silent Night Blade was also blocked at the gateway.

Don't lose heart. We'll find them sooner or later."

"I trust you." Cold Night Sword replied.

That voice, identical to Jiang Ruyi's, made Lu Ran feel momentarily dazed.

"Buzz~" Cold Night Sword suddenly trembled lightly.

Lu Ran looked puzzled, then realized he had stopped moving.

He smiled faintly and stroked the sword again with his fingertips.

Amusingly, the Fiery Phoenix Patterned Gourd nearby also snuggled into its master's arms, like a child seeking affection.

The stone chamber fell silent.

A sword and a gourd.

A pair of quietly nestled souls.

...

In the following days, Jiang Ruyi led the main forces to rest inside the cavern.

Meanwhile, Lu Ran continued to reposition his subordinates, leading small teams on several expeditions.

Armed with information from Elder Peng, he easily located the territory of the Evil Dog Clan, eliminating numerous evil dogs.

Lu Ran did not rush headlong, avoiding trouble in the Evil Dog Clan's headquarters.

Though this slowed the progress of the mission, it greatly increased safety.

This was also at Jiang Ruyi's repeated urging, and Lu Ran certainly did not wish to add to her worries.

Over the course of five days, Lu Ran successfully completed his mission.

Thanks to careful preparation, the task was carried out without incident, and Lu Ran swiftly pulled his team back, avoiding prolonged engagement.

The Ten Thousand Blade Mountain region was perilous!

Not to mention Tianhuang Mountain standing tall there.

Given the current strength of Ran Sect, they had no way of contending with such a major faction. The sooner they left, the sooner they found peace of mind.

Besides, Lu Ran did not find the rugged terrain to be an obstacle.

Once he ascended to Sea Realm, he could execute Sea Grade: Mirror Flower Moon, enabling teleportation over a radius of three thousand kilometers!

At that time, Lu Ran could traverse the continent freely.

Ten Thousand Blade Mountain?

He could come and go as he pleased!

And so, the Ran Sect members embarked on their journey home.

On the 29th day of the eighth lunar month, those maintaining their post at Cloud Sea Cliff received good news from Bai Yanhui.

Elder Bai announced: "Something good will happen today."

Such words seemed entirely out of place with the solemn character of Holy Spirit Mountain!

Si Xianxian immediately sensed something was up and sent multiple "voice call" requests to Lu Ran, eventually receiving the reply she hoped for.

As Mad Immortal Guardian spread the message, the people on the cliff grew excited.

Especially Xun Yifei!

He hadn't seen his wife for nearly a month—his children had been crying day after day for their mother for the entire time...

Finally!

Their mother had returned, and their father was finally saved!

At last, he'd be able to show the kids that their mother hadn't abandoned them. Although... um, it was true that their mother had run off with someone else, she still loved them.

"Hoo~"

A standing mirror suddenly appeared at the west side of Cloud Sea Cliff, along the only mountain path leading in.

"Hiss!" The eerie lilting voice of the Night Charm Clan reverberated, echoing far into the distance.

"!!" Lu Ran stepped out of the mirror and gestured downward toward the rushing Night Charm figures, motioning for them to halt.

The Night Charm members stopped mid-flight, hovering in place.

From inside the mirror, more figures began to emerge, catching sight of this scene with secret astonishment.

During the past few days, these people, who had "never stepped out of Ten Thousand Blade Mountain in a lifetime," found every sight and sound utterly novel.

When they saw the rolling mountain ranges and lush forests, they nearly jumped for joy.

When they caught sight of the endless blue ocean stretching to the horizon, they were dumbfounded!

In mere days, they had moved from the barren, sand-laden expanse of the Great Desert to the lush Sea Cliff forests under cerulean skies...

Two different extremes?

It was practically two separate worlds!

"Sect Leader, you've returned." A tall figure teleported close to Lu Ran, offering a respectful bow.

Lu Ran glanced at Yan Shuangzi and spoke: "You've worked hard during this time."

"Haha! So you're finally back..." A delighted voice rang out in the distance but abruptly cut off.

Si Xianxian hesitated as her gaze fell upon the woman in white beside Lu Ran.

Jiang Ruyi smiled, looking at her dearest friend from her days in the human world—the one who had stayed by her side through thick and thin.

"Good heavens..." Si Xianxian looked stunned.

Jiang Ruyi's gentle eyes remained unchanged, warm as ever.

Just by standing quietly, she could pull Si Xianxian back to the human world, to the tranquility and serenity of Luoxian Mountain.

Si Xianxian's nose twitched, her eyes reddened, and she rushed forward: "Ruyi..."

"Oh." Jiang Ruyi took a small step back but soon adjusted her stance to steady herself, embracing the girl rushing into her arms.

"Why on earth would you come to such a hellish place!" As she spoke, Si Xianxian quickly let go of the hug, inspecting Jiang Ruyi up and down. "You aren't hurt, are you? Is anyone hunting you?"

Seeing through her heart...

Jiang Ruyi already knew from Lu Ran about Si Xianxian's experiences since entering the mountains.

Thus, Si Xianxian's panic and fear was unsurprising.

Entering Holy Spirit Mountain meant inevitable suffering.

Fortunately, we each encountered individuals who ended that suffering.

Jiang Ruyi reached out tenderly, brushing Si Xianxian's cheek and wiping away the moisture from her eyes:

"It's been a long time, Sister Xian'er."

...

Chapter 554: Flying Immortals

The council hall was filled as everyone took their seats.

Lu Ran looked at the disciples gathered together from various factions, feeling a slight sense of accomplishment.

All along, Ran Sect had taken the elite route, with nearly every believer personally recruited by Lu Ran.

Yet this time, Jiang Ruyi had built her own faction and brought a full eight people!

It truly added some liveliness to Ran Sect.

"You've all met each other now." Seated at the head, Lu Ran spoke, "From now on, we are partners who live and die together."

The crowd seated around the table showed solemn expressions and nodded in agreement.

"On the way back, I discussed with Pavilion Master Jiang merging Luoxian Pavilion into Ran Sect." Lu Ran glanced at the eight newly joined believers.

Naturally, no one dared to raise objections.

You two lovebirds decide everything; whatever you say goes.

"Xiong Xiong, Shi Yong, Shi Biao." Lu Ran called out three names.

"Screech..."

The sound of wooden chair legs scraping against the floor broke the silence as three burly men immediately stood up.

The vibe of these three was entirely different from everyone else in the room.

The scene was quite amusing~

Lu Ran looked at the bald man and said, "The three of you will join Demon Control Hall. Xiong Xiong will be Vice Hall Master, and Shi Yong and Shi Biao will be hall members.

Later, go and report to Hall Master Jing Hong."

"Yes!"

"Yes." The three responded on the spot.

For Xiong Xiong, the former leader of Split Mountain Gang, Lu Ran had given him a position.

A reward for leading his people to side with Jiang Ruyi.

The Shanwei Sect's perception technique, Mountain's Intent, was exceptional. It could detect hidden enemies inside mountains and deep underground, making it perfect for guarding the stronghold.

Demon Control Hall's primary duty was to guard Cloud Sea Cliff.

With the increasing number of Evil Demon troops, Jing Hong, previously a lone commander, naturally needed help.

"Demon Control Hall will be under the leadership of Nightmare Guardian." Lu Ran glanced at Deng Yuxiang.

The woman gave a slight nod but didn't say anything.

Lu Ran turned his gaze to the "Two Birds of the West Desolation," namely Fengchen and Yunyan. "If it weren't for you two defecting to the light, whether I would have been able to see Ruyi remains uncertain."

Gao Yunyan responded solemnly, "Sect Leader, you flatter us."

Xue Fengchen added, "Actually, it was Lady Ruyi who saved us."

Lu Ran chuckled. "Ran Sect has a sequence called the Eight Divine Generals.

Both of you are disciples of the Second-class God-West Desolation and are at the peak of the River Realm.

How about this: whoever advances to the Sea Realm first will get the title of Divine General, and the other will serve under them. How does that sound?"

Gao Yunyan smiled and looked at the bold young man beside her.

Xue Fengchen: "..."

Lu Ran then turned his attention to the Jade Talisman disciple trio: "Today, Ran Sect establishes its second branch—Feixian Hall.

Song Yu will be Hall Master, and Zhang Zhenghu and An Xian will be hall members."

"Yes!"

"Yes." The three immediately stood up.

Lu Ran observed keenly, noticing Song Yu's subtle expression, seemingly harboring some excitement.

Sigh...

He couldn't help but wonder how loyal this diehard follower would be to Jiang Ruyi.

Whether Song Yu would willingly cooperate later was a question lingering in Lu Ran's mind.

Lu Ran surveyed everyone present and said, "Cloud Sea Cliff is remote and rarely visited by believers.

However, everyone should still stay vigilant.

Xun, later arrange accommodations for everyone."

Xun Yifei promptly nodded.

Back when Lu Ran was in the Northwest, he had reached out to Evil Shadow Guardian to ask Xun Divine General to help build houses.

Lu Ran added, "Alright, you've all worked hard during this period. Go back and rest."

The crowd rose one by one.

Jiang Ruyi spoke softly, "Feixian Hall."

Song Yu looked to the girl and asked respectfully, "Lady?"

Jiang Ruyi nodded lightly. "Stay behind."

An Xian and Zhang Zhenghu exchanged glances and obediently stood behind Song Yu.

As the others departed, Lu Ran looked at the three members of Feixian Hall:

"Do you all know what Feixian Hall represents?"

Song Yu appeared somewhat puzzled.

The Sect Leader had given him the title of Hall Master but hadn't explained his exact responsibilities.

Lu Ran smirked. "I wanted to name this hall the 'God Creation Hall,' but Jiang Fairy said it sounded unpleasant."

Jiang Ruyi turned her head and playfully rolled her eyes at Lu Ran.

Song Yu's mind raced.

God Creation Hall?

Feixian Hall... and the Sect Leader deliberately referred to Jiang Ruyi as "Fairy."

Jiang Ruyi sat in the chair beside Lu Ran and examined the three disciplined Jade Talisman disciples. "We've been in Holy Spirit Mountain for over a month now.

You've all seen the situation here with your own eyes."

The trio nodded.

Jiang Ruyi spoke softly, "In this slaughterhouse, do you all still hold the same reverence for the gods as you did in the human world?"

Listen carefully to the tone.

Though Jiang Ruyi posed it as a question, her stance was evident.

Perhaps, she was testing them?

An Xian nervously wrung her fingers, bowing her head silently.

The term "slaughterhouse" was first uttered by her, and fortunately, Lady Ruyi hadn't pursued the matter.

"Xian?" Jiang Ruyi gently called out.

"Lady?" An Xian jumped in surprise, raising her gaze.

"Speak honestly," Jiang Ruyi encouraged.

An Xian took a leap of faith. "I... I think the gods put us here under the guise of gathering Holy Spirit Energy, but it's actually to clean us out!"

Jiang Ruyi nodded in satisfaction and turned to Song Yu.

Understanding Jiang Ruyi's intentions, Song Yu spoke boldly, "Gods and demons alike are heartless, treating all beings as fodder."

Lu Ran nodded silently, finding the summary precise.

These people were clever, keeping their true thoughts hidden until now.

Jiang Ruyi shifted her gaze to Zhang Zhenghu.

With the precedent set by the other two, Zhang Zhenghu nodded vigorously. "I think so too!"

Jiang Ruyi nodded. "Since the gods are heartless, would you all be willing to break your contracts with them?"

"What?" An Xian's eyes widened in shock.

How perilous was this realm?

Even if she resented the gods, breaking the contract was unthinkable!

Without it, how could one even survive?

Jiang Ruyi stepped forward, positioning herself behind Lu Ran's chair, resting a hand on his shoulder as her gaze fell upon the trio:

"No more faith in the Jade Talisman.

From now on, believe in us.

Whatever the Jade Talisman can give you, we can provide as well."

"Gulp." Zhang Zhenghu swallowed hard, struggling to process everything.

Song Yu was shocked to his core but didn't believe the duo was lying.

An Xian trembled and stammered, "Believe... believe in the Sect Leader and Lady?"

Lu Ran chimed in at the right moment. "You've all seen me wield techniques from various factions, yet I'm not a believer of these gods or demons.

I can steal the powers of all gods and demons and make them my own."

The trio: !!!

The fact that Lu Ran could use different techniques had sparked curiosity among many.

But none dared discuss it openly.

Now, Lu Ran explicitly revealed he could steal the powers of all gods and demons...

Lu Ran casually beckoned and pinched a piece of White Jade Talisman with two fingers. "With the stolen power, I can cultivate brand-new gods."

As he spoke, Lu Ran tilted his head slightly, gesturing toward Jiang Ruyi behind him.

The implication was clear:

Jiang Ruyi is the new god I'm cultivating!

The council hall fell deathly silent!

Cultivating... gods?

Since they first met Lu Ran, he had already been mysterious and intimidating in their eyes.

But these words still left them flabbergasted.

"Damn it! What did I say earlier?" Zhang Zhenghu's mind raced. "I actually voiced the truth, and now I'm really facing a genuine god!!"

Jiang Ruyi spoke softly, "I am no longer a Jade Talisman believer. A few days ago, the Sect Leader passed the Talisman's power onto me.

I know these words sound incredible, but I truly am on the path to replacing the gods.

If you are willing, you will be my first believers."

"Thump!"

Song Yu immediately knelt down, his voice firm. "Song Yu is willing to serve Lady."

Zhang Zhenghu quickly knelt down in response.

His actions were hurried, as if fearing a delay might provoke the young gods' displeasure.

Only An Xian remained somewhat dazed, struggling to react...

"If Xian has reservations, you don't have to break your contract," Jiang Ruyi said as she looked at An Xian. "You'll still be a part of Ran Sect and Feixian Hall. It's alright."

An Xian finally snapped out of her daze.

Noticing the situation in the room, she quickly knelt down to declare her loyalty. "Oh, Lady! No, I've no reservations. I believe in you! My life is yours!"

Jiang Ruyi observed the three trembling followers, paused for a moment, and gave an order: "You can leave now.

I'll bring the doctor to find you later; we'll break the contracts then."

"Yes!"

"Yes." They responded in unison, rising and departing.

Lu Ran watched their retreating figures and let out a long breath.

Immortal Sheep Lord had explicitly stated that in the world of gods and demons, supreme rules reigned.

In the human world, when Lu Ran entered into contracts with believers, the believers had to pray in his presence. Only by doing this could the fake god sculptures in the sculpture garden absorb the Power of Faith.

If believers strayed too far from Lu Ran, the Power of Faith would be taken by true gods who possessed divine positions!

But Holy Spirit Mountain was different!

The gods themselves were stuck in Da Xia, unable to reach further into this realm.

If Lu Ran used fake god Jade Talisman stone sculptures to sign master-servant contracts with these three, their prayers would direct condensed faith power into Lu Ran's body and the sculpture garden!

Paying respect to gods and cultivation were not mutually exclusive.

In the human world, believers were already accustomed to kneeling before small god shrines and cultivating while offering prayers in devotion.

At Cloud Sea Cliff, they could build a "Immortal Worship Hall" or something similar nearby.

Close to Lu Ran's residence.

Feixian Hall members could simultaneously cultivate and pray, continually providing energy to the fake god Jade Talisman stone sculptures.

Until now, Lu Ran had only two methods to cultivate stone sculptures:

One was through battles, and the other was painstakingly gathering Holy Spirit Energy.

If this new method worked, could Lu Ran start cultivating Divine Sculptures simply by staying home?

Of course, this was merely Lu Ran's idea for now. Whether it would succeed required careful experimentation.

If the results were favorable, Feixian Hall could continue to expand...

"What are you thinking about?"

Jiang Ruyi patted Lu Ran's shoulder.

Lu Ran grinned slyly. "Snatching believers from the Jade Talisman feels kinda nice~"

What's the point of believing in that crappy Jade Talisman!

From now on, believe in your Sect Leader!

...

Chapter 555: A Stray Dog

Under the protection of Yu Changsheng and Jing Hong, the two doctors, the trio from Feixian Hall tore apart their contract with the gods.

Pain was inevitable.

Their fall in cultivation level was expected as well.

Song Yu and Zhang Zhenghu fared better—they had previously been at the Second and Third Segments of the River Realm. After their demotion, their Great Realm remained within the River Realm.

Only An Xian, who had been at the River Realm-First Segment, fell straight down to the River Realm, suffering a massive blow to her strength and cultivation level. From now on, she would need to eat and drink just to sustain her life.

The Vast River had thus become a mere mortal.

An Xian was deeply pained and dejected.

Lu Ran watched all this unfold and couldn't help but feel a twinge of guilt.

In the future, he had to treat his first batch of believers more kindly...

Lu Ran continuously released Resurrection Carp and worked with Yu Changsheng and Jing Hong to heal the trio from Feixian Hall. Several hours later, as he saw their expressions relax, he finally breathed a sigh of relief.

To his surprise, the three of them unexpectedly fell asleep.

This left Lu Ran both amused and helpless.

Come to think of it, none of them had enjoyed a single night of peaceful sleep since arriving in the Holy Spirit Mountain Realm, right?

Exhausted in both body and mind, today they had suffered a heavy blow, been healed both physically and emotionally by the doctors, soothed in heart and spirit. Falling asleep was to be expected.

Watching the trio sleep peacefully, Lu Ran finally felt at ease.

After exchanging a nod with Yu Changsheng, he stepped outside.

"Ha..."

Lu Ran stood in front of the residence and let out a deep breath.

It was afternoon, and clouds churned in the sky again, casting an oppressive feeling over the world.

"You've done well by them already." Out of nowhere, a cool and clear voice came from behind.

"Hmm?" Lu Ran turned to look.

Jiang Fairy wore a white veil, her white dress gently swirling in the mountain breeze, so beautiful it took one's breath away.

"You've given them shelter. That alone is a great kindness," the cold beauty said, stepping forward to gently take Lu Ran's arm.

"Ruyi, Ruyi..." Before Lu Ran could respond, a figure hustled over hastily.

Si Xianxian walked to Jiang Ruyi's other side and affectionately held her arm, asking, "Are you done with everything?"

"For now, they're all resting. Once their spirits recover a bit more, Lu Ran still needs to sign the contract."

"So you're free for now?" Si Xianxian's eyes sparkled brightly.

"Mm." Jiang Ruyi, looking at the girl's longing gaze, couldn't help but soften her heart.

"Come on, let's take a stroll at Cloud Sea Cliff!" Si Xianxian clung tightly to Jiang Ruyi's arm as if afraid of rejection.

"Alright."

"Let me tell you, Ruyi..." Without hesitation, Si Xianxian started talking.

Lu Ran watched the two tall, graceful figures walk away and realized one thing.

Am I being left behind?

Is this the power of close friends?

Little Ruyi, just now you were holding my arm; now you've let go without a second thought?

In his line of sight, the two women suddenly stopped. Si Xianxian turned around to look at him and asked, "Why are you just standing there?"

Lu Ran: "..."

Si Xianxian laughed and waved him over: "Come, come, young master, accompany the lady!"

Lu Ran's expression turned strange.

Lady and young master—aren't they from different generations?

Isn't the lady supposed to pair with the lord?

"Hurry up!" Si Xianxian urged. "Come accompany the lady to check out your territory!"

Lu Ran rolled his eyes and strode forward.

Jiang Ruyi couldn't help but laugh softly and said, "Let's stop by his residence first."

"Sure!" Si Xianxian quickened her steps, smiling bright-eyed, and added, "Don't worry, madam! The young master has always lived alone.

He's so good, so good~

Although the Holy Spirit Mountain Realm doesn't have much in the way of laws or morality, the young master is still quite respectable—not the type to exploit men or bully women."

Jiang Ruyi gave Si Xianxian a look, half amused and half exasperated.

"Hehe~" Si Xianxian only laughed more joyfully and quickened her pace again.

Lu Ran's residence was located near the eastern cliffs of Cloud Sea Cliff, a high altitude and rather secluded place.

The Cloud Sea Residence wasn't small. It nestled in a small valley surrounded on three sides by rocky hills and dense forests, with a carefully maintained fenced courtyard in front of the house.

Serene, hidden.

When Jiang Ruyi stepped into the courtyard, she found herself immediately drawn to it.

It was truly peaceful.

If only Sister Xian'er's chatter could quiet down for a moment, it would be even better...

The southeast corner of the courtyard housed a stone table and several stone chairs. The sight reminded Jiang Ruyi of the garden at Luoxian Mountain's Luoxian Residence.

Jiang Ruyi took in the surroundings and walked step by step, eventually pushing open the door to the Cloud Sea Residence.

Inside was a guest hall with a bedroom to the left and what seemed to be either a training room or a study to the right.

The room was sparsely furnished; in the center stood a desk with a small wooden rack on which rested a highly ornate short dagger.

The blade emitted a cold gleam; the hilt, crafted of pure gold, was set with seven multi-colored gemstones.

Jiang Ruyi stepped inside, picked up the Seven-Star Blade, and casually toyed with it: "Do you often come to tidy up this house?"

"Not at all." Si Xianxian noticed the spotless condition of the spacious house and speculated, "Maybe the Evil Shadow Guardian helps clean it."

"Evil Shadow." Jiang Ruyi sighed inwardly.

Another soul fated for hardship...

From Lu Ran, Jiang Ruyi already knew about Yan Shuangzi's general situation.

This close friend of the Big Nightmare had endured immeasurable suffering in the devouring Holy Spirit Mountain Realm.

If suffering could be measured, then everyone on Cloud Sea Cliff—each and every one—would pale in comparison to Yan Shuangzi's plight.

Even Bai Yanhui!

Jiang Ruyi also knew that Lu Ran had led the Ran Sect members north to Sword Ridge Peak and forcibly rescued her from the North Wind Sect's base!

He had freed Yan Shuangzi, granted her dignity, hope, and purpose.

He'd given her a new life.

Just as he had once done for Deng Yuxiang.

Jiang Ruyi trusted Lu Ran's judgment of people and trusted that Yan Shuangzi was utterly loyal to him!

Only someone like her deserved to sign an "Inheritance Contract" with the God and Demon Sculptures imprinted in Lu Ran's mind.

Transforming from a stone sculpture, surpassing the sculpture... taking its place.

In the future, no matter what Ran Sect had to face—whether being condemned by all or enduring endless calamities—the Evil Shadow Guardian would remain unwaveringly by Lu Ran's side.

And within Lu Ran's Sculpture Garden, there were still many sculptures waiting to be bound!

Each inheritor must be carefully chosen...

If they were all like Deng Yuxiang and Yan Shuangzi, that would be ideal.

Jiang Ruyi pondered quietly, her gaze drifting toward the door. As her line of sight passed through the main hall, she saw Lu Ran standing at the entrance to the bedroom in a daze.

She looked at the figure that could now be considered "tall," her beautiful eyes carrying a faint look of admiration.

As for Lu Ran at that moment...

His mind was filled with mischievous thoughts!

Lu Ran was a man.

A young, vigorous, and energetic young man!

His mind had been tightly wound for the longest time, but now, returning to the serene Cloud Sea Residence after completing his duties, he looked at the double bed...

"Ugh." Lu Ran shook his head.

In a little while, he still had to sign master-servant contracts with the trio from Feixian Hall!

He'd endured for half a year already; he could hold out a bit longer.

Until nightfall!

Dark nights with high winds—perfect for action...

Lu Ran turned to leave, only to meet Jiang Fairy's gaze.

Somewhat flustered, he diverted his eyes and noticed the Seven-Star Blade in her hand.

Lu Ran said, "Do you like it? Why not take it for yourself as a means of self-defense."

Jiang Ruyi lifted the Seven-Star Blade. The weapon was excessively ornate, dazzling in its splendor.

It didn't quite match her aura.

It might be difficult for her to make it stand out.

Lu Ran spoke again: "I still have many weapons to cultivate and can't devote my focus to this one. It'd be better for you to foster its growth instead."

This blade has excellent potential and a solid foundation."

Jiang Ruyi gently shook her head: "Perhaps you should give it to Nightmare or Evil Shadow—mm... Nightmare's aesthetic aligns better."

I noticed she only has a broken blade, which she's already cultivated into a Divine Weapon."

Lu Ran raised his brow slightly, looking surprised.

All along, Jiang Ruyi and Deng Yuxiang hadn't seemed particularly close.

Jiang Ruyi recognized the expression on Lu Ran's face and smiled: "We're all on the same side, aren't we?"

This Holy Spirit Mountain had undoubtedly brought about a significant change in the girl's worldview.

Now that she knew all of Lu Ran's secrets and understood what he sought to achieve, the strength of those loyal to him naturally mattered the most.

Everything else paled in comparison to his safety and survival.

Lu Ran smiled too: "Alright, will you give it to her?"

He naturally wished for harmony between the sect leader's wife and the guardian.

"Mm." Jiang Ruyi replied offhandedly, returning the Seven-Star Blade to its rack on the desk.

"Come, let's go take a look by the sea," Lu Ran invited, already heading out of the house. "I often go there to zone out."

"Zone out?" Jiang Ruyi followed, chuckling as she asked.

"Obviously~" Lu Ran shrugged. "It's the perfect place to think about you."

Jiang Ruyi slowed her pace slightly, her gaze on Lu Ran softening visibly.

Si Xianxian tilted her head: ???

What's this now?

I feel like a stray dog kicked to the curb for no reason?

Lu Ran exited the courtyard and turned back to Jiang Ruyi, suddenly breaking into a mischievous grin:

"Hehe~ Just kidding, I didn't think of you at all."

Jiang Ruyi looked at the seemingly insincere man and gave a gentle "mm" in response.

Lu Ran's expression turned serious: "Really, I hardly thought of you."

Si Xianxian froze in place, sensing his sincerity, which didn't seem like a lie.

What's going on?

Is Lu Ran ill? Getting annoyed at how close you two are?

Jiang Ruyi herself seemed mildly taken aback.

Only after a long pause did she softly say, "You've been busy surviving, busy fulfilling missions—it's understandable you had no time."

Little Ruyi remained as gentle as ever, whether for her own sake or for Lu Ran's.

"That's not it." Lu Ran resumed walking and spoke softly, "It wasn't a matter of not having time.

Instead, I didn't dare to think about you.

Much less think deeply."

Jiang Ruyi's heart trembled slightly, clearly understanding the deeper meaning behind Lu Ran's words.

She could empathize completely.

Indeed, back in the human world at Luoxian Mountain, there had also been a lone figure standing silently and gazing at the vast Cang Mountain and Erhai Lake.

To long too deeply can lead one astray.

Si Xianxian felt utterly exasperated!

What even is this?

Did I attempt to learn something that's utterly useless? -->

Chapter 556: First time being a god, not much experience...

Lu Ran had finally experienced the true dexterity of Si Xianxian's sharp little mouth.

She was like a machine gun, chattering nonstop!

It seemed she had endless things to say, dragging Jiang Ruyi around to explore Cloud Sea Cliff, talking all afternoon until dusk...

Sister Xian'er was like a child lost for a long time, who suddenly found a parent. She clung to Jiang Ruyi, desperately seeking a sense of security.

Crying, laughing, shouting, and making a fuss.

Jiang Ruyi remained gentle the entire time, soothing this wounded soul.

Lu Ran looked at them and felt deeply moved!

There weren't many people who could receive such tender care from Jiang Fairy.

Sister Xian'er was truly fortunate.

Hmm, and so am I.

As the group circled around and finally arrived at the western part of the sea cliff, near the residence where Song Yu and the others were staying, Lu Ran bade farewell to the two women and went to check on the situation with Feixian Hall.

Without Si Xianxian at his side, Lu Ran immediately felt like the entire world had quieted down!

"Sect Master."

"Sect Master!" As soon as they saw Lu Ran enter, everyone in the house greeted him.

"You've woken up?" Lu Ran first nodded toward Yu Changsheng and Jing Hong, then turned his gaze to Song Yu and the others.

Their condition was now largely stable.

Yes, it was time to gather believers!

"Sect Master, the few of us here..." Song Yu hesitated, his words trailing off.

It was clear that losing their Divine Techniques had left them tremendously anxious.

Even Song Yu, who was usually calm and composed, was visibly unsettled.

"I said I'd do it, and I will." Lu Ran swept his gaze over the three. "Now, I will sign a contract with you and grant you the Divine Techniques of the Jade Talisman Sect."

"Thank you, Sect Master!"

"Yes!" The trio responded respectfully.

"Hoo!!"

A phantom image of the Jade Talisman unfolded from within Lu Ran's body.

A cold, imperious gaze bore down on those below, carrying tremendous pressure.

"J-Jade Talisman Lord!" An Xian shivered in fear.

The sudden apparition of the Jade Talisman's phantom form made her heart race uncontrollably!

After all, she had betrayed the Divine Sect and carried a deep hatred for this deity...

Song Yu and Zhang Zhenghu also wore dark expressions.

Lu Ran: "You called the wrong name."

An Xian snapped back to her senses, panicking. "S-Sect... Sect Master, I..."

"It's alright." Lu Ran replied in a soothing tone, half comforting and half promising, "You've suffered enough. From now on, Ruyi and I will take good care of you all."

As he spoke, the Jade Talisman's phantom lowered itself, its ethereal hand overlapping with Lu Ran's own, pressing onto Song Yu's forehead.

Beside him, Yu Changsheng lightly fanned himself with a paper fan, observing the trio's expressions—ranging from awe to devotion—and found an apt description:

"An Immortal brushes my crown, binding my hair to longevity!"

The contract Lu Ran signed with the three from Feixian Hall were, of course, master-servant contracts.

Only Jiang Ruyi was a genuine inheritor, having signed an inheritance contract with the Stone Sculpture.

No one knew whether, from now on, Jiang Ruyi might benefit through the worship and prayers of Feixian Hall's members.

Lu Ran held a pessimistic view on this.

After all, until Jiang Ruyi fully merged with and replaced the Stone Sculpture, her and the sculpture's realms of power were counted separately, growing independently.

When would the inheritor truly merge with the Stone Sculpture?

The Immortal Sheep Lord had once said it would require reaching exceptionally high realms.

Perhaps... at the Peak of the Sea Realm.

Or maybe even beyond the sea?

All Lu Ran knew was that the Sea Realm-First Rank wouldn't cut it.

Currently, both Deng Yuxiang and the Night Charm Evil Sculpture were at Sea Realm First Rank.

Deng Yuxiang hadn't managed to transform into a Divine Sculpture.

Sigh...

The road ahead is long and arduous.

"Alright." Lu Ran retreated a step and looked at the trio. "Try it out."

The trio immediately attempted to use Divine Techniques.

Energy surged in their hands, but they were unable to summon the white jade slab.

Their faces instantly turned pale!

"S-Sect Master?" An Xian couldn't help but ask in a trembling voice, looking up at Lu Ran.

Lu Ran furrowed his brow, mentally connecting with the Jade Talisman Stone Sculpture within the God Demon Sculpture Garden.

The room fell into a deep silence.

Exactly ten seconds later, Lu Ran closed his eyes, then said, "Try again now."

"Hoo~"

An Xian's fingertips emitted traces of frost while Song Yu and Zhang Zhenghu summoned Golden Jade Talismans.

"It worked, it worked!" An Xian exclaimed in excitement, her mood fluctuating wildly.

"We can use Divine Techniques now. Thank you, Sect Master!" Song Yu looked up at Lu Ran, his gaze even more devout.

In Jiang Ruyi's camp, Song Yu was a senior figure, someone meritorious from the start.

He eventually earned the role of Feixian Hall's Hall Master.

But here, under Lu Ran, he was one of the first batch of believers!

If the day came when Lu and Jiang overturned the heavens...

To be among the first followers of a new god—what an honor, what an esteemed identity that would be!

"It's my first time being a god. I don't have much experience, so bear with me." Lu Ran glanced at Zhang Zhenghu, who still seemed frightened, and said apologetically.

At that moment, Zhang Zhenghu was still shaken, worried about never being able to use Divine Techniques again.

Everyone: "..."

Yu Changsheng couldn't help but laugh and shake his head.

The Sect Master... Just what kind of things were he saying...

Hmm, he should privately advise him to maintain a more dignified presence before the believers.

"No need to worry. Moving forward, you'll be able to cast techniques normally." Lu Ran spoke again.

After a brief exchange and manipulation just now, he had adjusted the permissions of the Jade Talisman Stone Sculpture to allow his believers to cast techniques freely.

Any believer who wished to cast techniques would find their requests approved by the Stone Sculpture.

For a long time, the contracts Lu Ran signed with Deng Yuxiang, Yan Shuangzi, and others were all "inheritance contracts."

The protectors were already bound to the Stone Sculpture, holding superior positions. Although they hadn't fused entirely with the sculpture, their essence was essentially connected to it. They could cast any skills without needing permission.

This was Lu Ran's first time signing "master-servant contracts" with members of the Human Clan.

When Feixian Hall's trio cast Divine Techniques, they naturally required approval from the Fake God—the Jade Talisman Stone Sculpture!

From this perspective...

Chapter 557: First time being a god, no experience..._2

Lu Ran,

has truly ascended to the rank of a True God!

As long as Lu Ran wills it, he can command the Pseudo-God Stone Sculpture to forbid the believers from using Divine Techniques—then people like Song Yu would be left powerless!

"Hmm." Lu Ran nodded secretly.

This tactic is absolutely domineering!

It firmly grips the lifelines of everyone in Feixian Hall!

Would the believers dare not obey?

In this turbulent world, if you don't have a Divine Technique to protect yourself, isn't it the same as being at the mercy of others?

And the Stone Sculpture's formidable powers surely don't end here, do they?

Recall back in Beifeng City, when Divine·Beifeng intended to collect Deng Yuxiang's soul and life—it seemed like he could do it with just a wave of his hand?

Hmm... once I return, I'll study this more carefully.

[The three of you, activate the Golden Jade Talisman and begin your prayers.] Lu Ran looked at the trio.

Each of their expressions varied, but all three received Lu Ran's voice transmission. Not daring to tarry, they hastily cast their techniques and began praying.

Lu Ran closed his eyes and carefully attuned his perception.

In just a few short moments, he sensed wisps of energy surging forth. Though faint, it was incredibly pure!

It wasn't Holy Spirit Energy, nor was it Divine Power.

Perhaps it ought to be called the Power of Faith!

The Power of Faith gathered by the Human Clan flowed through an invisible channel into Lu Ran's pupils, merging into his spiritual world, and finally integrating with the Stone Sculpture of the Jade Talisman.

An invisible channel?

More precisely, it's the spiritual thread formed after signing the "master-servant contract" between god and humanity.

It's intangible, yet undeniably real, connecting the Divine Sculpture to the believers of the Human Clan.

"Interesting."

Lu Ran murmured, savoring the sensation of Becoming a God.

The Stone Sculpture, silently and serenely, absorbed the Power of Faith emanating from the Human Clan and continued to process it.

Evidently, the Stone Sculpture can cultivate this peculiar force!

[Continue!] Lu Ran issued his command, and his figure flashed.

He appeared a hundred meters away, quietly sensing.

The Power of Faith from the Human Clan still surged steadily into the Pupil of the Dead World through the delicate threads of the contract.

"Whoosh~"

Lu Ran's figure flashed again!

This time, he leaped five hundred meters away.

"That far?" Lu Ran couldn't hide his delight. The Power of Faith could still be transmitted?

Shortly after, Lu Ran teleported again.

Through multiple experiments, Lu Ran even brought out the Evil Mirror Technique·Mirror Flower Moon!

When Lu Ran reached the mountain forest a hundred kilometers away from Cloud Sea Cliff, he was astounded to find that he could still sense the Power of Faith from the believers in Feixian Hall!

Initially, Lu Ran hadn't received it.

He had assumed that the distance was too great and it wouldn't work.

But upon transmitting his voice to inquire about the trio's casting progress, Song Yu reported that they were still activating their Golden Jade Eight Talismans.

So, as long as the threads of the contract exist, no matter how far Lu Ran travels, the believers can still connect to the Stone Sculpture and perform the respective techniques.

However, the Power of Faith supplied by the believers, under the influence of the rules of the world, was intercepted midway by a True God occupying a Divine Position.

At least, that's what Lu Ran believed. Though, as it turned out, he couldn't have been more wrong!

He thought deeply for quite a while. Just as he was about to head back...

The Power of Faith arrived!

Lu Ran was slightly bewildered.

Was the delay in receiving the Power of Faith purely due to it needing time to traverse the distance?

"Wow!!" Lu Ran was elated.

Could this possibly be true?

In the Human World, believers must pray devoutly in Lu Ran's presence for it to be effective.

Yet, atop Holy Spirit Mountain, is distance truly irrelevant?

The "supreme law" described by Immortal Sheep Lord only applies to the Human World and doesn't affect Holy Spirit Mountain?

Lu Ran was overjoyed!

He warped and experimented repeatedly.

With each attempt venturing farther from Cloud Sea Cliff, his hypothesis was further and further validated!

When Lu Ran finally returned to Cloud Sea Cliff, the night had turned pitch black.

Upon reentering his residence, he found that the two doctors had already left; only the three members of Feixian Hall remained, devotedly praying.

Lu Ran said: "From now on, focus on cultivation, pray earnestly, and strive to restore your realms as soon as possible.

Feixian Hall will continue to grow stronger in the future.

You three elders must develop the abilities necessary to manage this branch for me and Lady."

"Yes!"

"Yes, Sect Master!" Song Yu replied with outward composure but inward excitement, bowing respectfully.

In high spirits, Lu Ran continued: "Tomorrow, I will construct a Feixian Hall within the cliff for your management.

That's all for tonight; you're free to go."

With those words, Lu Ran flashed away.

He directly returned to Cloud Sea Residence, intending to share his good news. However, upon arrival, he noticed Jiang Ruyi and Si Xianxian sitting at a stone table in the corner of the courtyard.

Si Xianxian held her erratic hammer, surrounded by an illusory shadow, with the hammerhead ablaze like a giant torch.

"Still chatting?" Lu Ran couldn't help admiring Si Xianxian. "It's so late—go rest already."

"Young master's back!" Si Xianxian immediately said, "I was just telling Lady how we wiped out that gang of troublemakers from Tiantu Mountain!"

"Ah." Lu Ran took a seat on the stone stool. "How about... saving it for tomorrow?"

Si Xianxian pouted: "I'm almost done!

I was just recounting how we lay in wait at Tiantu Mountain, picked our ambush point, and practiced our tactics."

Lu Ran grinned. She's not even close to finishing!

After some thought, he suddenly blurted: "Sister Xian'er, did you turn off the lights before you left?

Did you tighten the faucet?"

"Ah!" Si Xianxian jumped up. "I—wait?"

That's not right!

I'm living here at Cloud Sea Cliff—how the hell would my place back home even have running water or electricity?

"Haha~" Jiang Ruyi chuckled lightly at Si Xianxian's bewildered look.

"Go back already, Sister Xian'er." Lu Ran put a hand on Si Xianxian's shoulder, gently nudging her toward the courtyard's exit. "Hurry back and check if you locked the door!"

Chapter 558: First time being a god, no experience..._3

"I want to sleep with Ruyi tonight..." Si Xianxian muttered while being pushed forward.

"You're dreaming!" Lu Ran leaned close to Si Xianxian's ear, speaking as he activated the Transmission Mirror, casually shoving Si Xianxian inside.

A little maid, daring to climb into the Lady's bed?

How outrageous!

Si Xianxian: ???

Just as she was about to reveal her true face and prepare to curse up a storm, she realized she was already home.

Meanwhile, in the small fenced courtyard of Cloud Sea Residence.

Lu Ran turned his head to look at Jiang Ruyi.

After Si Xianxian left, the courtyard lost its source of light.

The sky tonight churned with the Cloud Sea, no stars nor moon, and the interior of Cloud Sea Cliff was engulfed in pitch darkness.

Jiang Ruyi couldn't see a thing.

But she could feel someone's intense gaze.

"Hoo~"

The night breeze whispered, rustling the leaves and filling the silent night with clear sounds.

Jiang Ruyi pressed her lips together, naturally aware of the mischievous thoughts brewing in someone's mind.

The wind, the rustling leaves, everything was clear.

The sound of her heartbeat and the sound of footsteps were equally distinct.

A faint blush slowly spread across Jiang Ruyi's face. She softly broke the silence: "Those ones at Feixian Hall, were they accepted as believers?"

"Accepted." Lu Ran approached Jiang Fairy's side, sensing for a moment before adding, "Those three haven't rested yet; they're still contributing their Power of Faith to me."

"Oh?" Jiang Ruyi raised an eyebrow slightly.

"Feels a bit exploitative," Lu Ran remarked, his expression peculiar. "Now, we can literally grow stronger by lying down."

Jiang Ruyi shot a reproachful glance: "How much Power of Faith?"

Lu Ran shook his head regretfully: "Very little, extremely thin."

I fear we'll need to recruit tens of thousands of believers before the energy you gain becomes anywhere near substantial."

"Me?"

"Indeed, they're providing Power of Faith to the Jade Talisman Stone Sculpture! Eventually, you're meant to replace this Stone Sculpture... Ah, let's not digress."

Lu Ran leaned down, wrapping one arm around her back and the other beneath her knees.

In a bridal carry, he lifted Jiang Fairy off the ground.

"Mmm." Jiang Ruyi lowered her gaze, her face flushed crimson.

The supposedly lofty and aloof immortal now looked so delicate and enchanting that Lu Ran felt the flames of desire roaring within him!

He strode toward the house, lowered his head, and captured her soft lips.

"Mmh..." Jiang Ruyi closed her eyes tightly, responding faintly between breaths.

Lu Ran quickly advanced into the bedroom, but abruptly halted his steps.

"What's wrong?" In the pitch-black surroundings, Jiang Ruyi's voice was small and tinged with uncertainty.

Lu Ran responded tentatively: "Evil Shadow?"

"Master." A cold female voice spoke from behind.

The Evil Shadow Guardian appeared in a flicker, kneeling half-way behind Lu Ran with perfect composure.

Jiang Ruyi's eyes widened slightly!

There was someone here the whole time?

Yan Shuangzi?

Jiang Ruyi's thin skin betrayed her; she was utterly mortified, even the delicate white tips of her ears flushing faintly pink.

She pressed her lips tightly together and buried her face in Lu Ran's arms out of sheer embarrassment.

Lu Ran, for his part, only felt relief!

Thankfully, he remembered the shadow lurking nearby.

Speaking of which, Yan Shuangzi was proving more impressive by the day—no sound, no emotional leakage at all.

Lu Ran spoke up: "Uh, you... you should take the night off and go home."

Behind him, all was silent.

Others might not understand, but Lu Ran knew Yan Shuangzi well enough to recognize this as silent resistance.

When it came to staying by Lu Ran's side, she was extremely obsessive.

The problem was,

This lord can't host live broadcasts!

That's a whole different price tag...

Feeling exasperated, Lu Ran slightly hardened his tone: "Follow orders."

"Yes." The Evil Shadow Guardian murmured her response before finally flickering away.

Lu Ran waited for a moment before carrying the jade-like beauty in his arms and stepping toward the bedchamber.

Jiang Ruyi whispered: "Has she left?"

"Probably."

Jiang Ruyi was equal parts shy and annoyed: "You... mmh."

Chapter 559: Good fortune coming?

The sun had risen high.

In the tranquil interior of Cloud Sea Residence, within the expansive bedroom, a man and woman still lay fast asleep on the bed.

"Hmm..."

Lu Ran let out a faint nasal sound and slowly opened his drowsy eyes.

It took him a while to realize where he was.

It wasn't the barren Great Desert, nor the dry, sweltering caves of the desolate mountains.

It was Cloud Sea Cliff beneath the clear blue skies, the serene and comfortable Cloud Sea Residence.

The taut nerves in Lu Ran's body gradually relaxed.

The grueling years of battle on Spirit Mountain had really taken a toll on him, nearly driving him to insanity...

Lu Ran turned his head and saw an exquisitely beautiful face.

Her peaceful sleeping expression was extraordinarily lovely.

Lu Ran even thought he was dreaming.

Even though he had reunited with Jiang Ruyi almost ten days ago, every time he opened his eyes to see her, he still felt somewhat dazed.

Since entering the mountain, he had endured endless hardships inflicted by Spirit Mountain.

Now, with heaven suddenly treating him so well, Lu Ran found the situation eerily unreal.

"Hmm?" Lu Ran suddenly noticed that her long eyelashes were gently trembling.

The steady, rhythmic sound of her breathing had also ceased.

Was she... awake but pretending to sleep?

Lu Ran grinned, leaned closer, and kissed her on her luscious lips.

"Hmm..." Jiang Ruyi couldn't keep up the act, her cheeks flushed red, and it took her a moment to escape his clutches.

Propping herself up with one hand on the bed, her jet-black hair cascaded over her shoulder, flowing downwards.

"Your hair has grown so long, it reaches your waist now." Lu Ran ran his fingers through the silky strands, smoothing them from top to bottom.

"Your hair has grown long too." Jiang Ruyi glanced at Lu Ran, speaking softly, "Shall I help you cut it?"

Unexpectedly, Lu Ran blurted out, "This is the Spirit Mountain Chapter—Ran Shen exclusive skin."

Jiang Ruyi: "..."

Lu Ran also sat up, leaning against the headboard, jokingly adding, "The bamboo hat and bamboo clothes are part of the costume too."

"My wardrobe is packed with white robes and outfits, but I haven't touched them~"

Jiang Ruyi glanced at the corner of the bedroom, where a large wardrobe stood.

Spirit Mountain was remote and desolate.

But the Cloud Sea Residence's furnishings were surprisingly complete!

A collection of wooden furniture that, while not impeccably crafted, was nonetheless presentable.

All the tables, chairs, stools, beds, and wardrobes naturally were products of "Father Xun's handiwork."

Xun Yifei, unlike others struggling to survive within Spirit Mountain, had a complete family. Thus, Father Xun's "Skill Tree" had many more branches illuminated compared to others...

Jiang Ruyi, somewhat curious, draped a robe over herself and got out of bed.

Her fair toes lightly touched the ground.

The Water Flow Armor, like an exceedingly thin and faint veil of water, nearly invisible to the naked eye, ensured her jade-like feet remained untouched by dust.

Lu Ran stared, spellbound by her graceful and ethereal silhouette, momentarily captivated.

Jiang Ruyi opened the wardrobe and, as expected, found numerous white robes in various styles.

Lu Ran snapped out of his daze, quickly explaining, "These were all items I confiscated from Tiantu Mountain."

After a brief moment of thought, Jiang Ruyi understood Lu Ran's implication.

Her fingers lightly brushed across the garments, ultimately selecting two loose white robes before turning to face Lu Ran.

"Do you want to wear these?" Lu Ran asked, "Maybe I should take them to the seaside to wash?"

The robes were already clean, but Lu Ran wanted to thoroughly wash them before putting them on.

Jiang Ruyi asked, "Don't you have other matters to attend to today?"

Lu Ran considered for a moment, then replied, "Later, I plan to meet with the Divine Seeking General, pick a location, and bring along the Ghost General Team to build a Feixian Hall within the cliff."

"Then go ahead and take care of your tasks." Jiang Ruyi examined the loose robes, imagining how they would look on Lu Ran, "Meanwhile, I'll go take a look at the sea."

Lu Ran hesitated briefly before suddenly calling out, "Evil Shadow."

"Master." Yan Shuangzi appeared silently.

Jiang Ruyi's fingers clutched the robes tightly for a moment, her movements slightly stiff.

Yan Shuangzi had never left?

No, she wouldn't disobey Lu Ran's orders.

Surely, she had come again after the night had passed.

Jiang Ruyi pressed her lips together, trying to comfort herself.

Lu Ran said, "Could you help me wash those two robes?"

"Yes." Yan Shuangzi approached Jiang Ruyi, reaching out to take the two garments.

Still lost in thought, Jiang Ruyi didn't release them, prompting Yan Shuangzi to softly inquire, "Lady?"

"Hmm?" Jiang Ruyi looked at the woman with sunken eyes.

Unexpectedly, Jiang Ruyi's gaze became somewhat complex.

"Lady, please hand them over." Yan Shuangzi gently requested.

"Thank you." Jiang Ruyi softly replied, releasing the robes.

Yan Shuangzi bowed slightly and disappeared in a flash.

Turning to look at Lu Ran, Jiang Ruyi's expression became playful.

Lu Ran, meanwhile, displayed a face of innocent compliance, saying, "It's for the Feixian Hall being dedicated to you—we'll pick the site together."

Jiang Ruyi suddenly recalled something, her gaze turning wistful: "Master?"

Last night, the Evil Shadow Guardian had referred to him the same way.

At the time, Jiang Ruyi, overwhelmed with shyness, hadn't thought deeply about it.

"Don't even mention it." Lu Ran sighed, appearing helpless, "I corrected her countless times, but she's stubborn to the core.

When people are around, she occasionally calls me 'Sect Leader'. But even then, she doesn't always get it right.

Her protector codename—it was me who forcibly changed it; initially, she insisted on calling herself Evil Dog..."

Not able to change?

Taking a step back—even if she modifies her words superficially, it's all just surface compliance.

Jiang Ruyi shook her head. She only knew bits and pieces of Yan Shuangzi's story.

Her curiosity deepened regarding this woman, whose Dao Heart had supposedly been reshaped, prompting her to say, "You go choose the site yourself and summon Nightmare to me—I'll be waiting for her in the study."

Lu Ran: "..."

Seeing his wounded, pitiful expression, Jiang Ruyi couldn't help but smile faintly: "Go now, I'll chat with Nightmare one-on-one. Maybe I'll even give her the Seven Stars Saber."

As she spoke, Jiang Ruyi walked over to the bedside, rare initiative guiding her movements as she leaned down, cupped his cheeks in her hands, and kissed him lightly.

"Alright then." Lu Ran pouted, hastily throwing on some clothes before flashing away.

As his figure vanished, Jiang Ruyi chuckled helplessly.

Both Yan Shuangzi and Lu Ran were mysterious in their comings and goings, making it genuinely difficult for her to adjust.

Calming her mind, she settled at the writing desk in the study, kneeling down as she focused on the ornate Seven Stars Saber atop the desk, drifting into reverie.

"Knock knock knock~"

The door to Cloud Sea Residence suddenly came alive with the sound of knocking.

"Study." Jiang Ruyi spoke softly.

She knew that Deng Yuxiang, as the Night Charm Evil Sculpture, would surely hear her.

Indeed, Deng Yuxiang pushed the door open, entering the residence with her right turn bringing her to the study doorway. As she gazed at the serene woman seated behind the desk, she respectfully said, "Lady."

"Sister Yuxiang." Jiang Ruyi lifted her lashes, her smile warm as she looked at her visitor.

Deng Yuxiang raised her brow slightly, an almost imperceptible gesture.

That term—seldom heard from Jiang Ruyi's lips.

Even more astonishing was Jiang Ruyi's next sentence: "Privately, just call me Ruyi."

Deng Yuxiang paused momentarily before nodding gently.

It was a sign of reconciliation.

Though somewhat lofty in nature.

Having grasped Lu Ran's abilities and grand aspirations, Jiang Ruyi had clearly undergone a transformation.

Lu Ran needed loyal allies and, even more importantly, a united team.

Jiang Ruyi, generously letting go of past grudges with Deng Yuxiang, was resolved to bury their bygone disputes.

Deng Yuxiang intuitively understood: The newfound recognition and aspirations of the Lady of Luoxian Mountain were now elevated enough to step into the mantle of the Ran Sect Sect Leader's wife.

"Sit." Jiang Ruyi invited.

Deng Yuxiang stepped forward and knelt before the desk.

"You've safeguarded him well." Jiang Ruyi murmured.

Deng Yuxiang removed her bamboo hat, recalling Jiang Ruyi's instructions from their time in the Human World: "Protect him well."

And the unceremonious words that had haunted Deng Yuxiang's mind ever since—You owe him.

Deng Yuxiang shook her head slightly, her voice low: "He's been the one protecting me."

"As long as you're alive." Jiang Ruyi didn't delve further, instead picking up the short blade on the desk and handing it to the woman across from her.

"This is?"

"Your Night-cutting Blade has already ranked as a Divine Weapon. Consider nurturing another one now."

Jiang Ruyi spoke softly.

"Understood." Deng Yuxiang accepted the Seven Stars Saber, her fingers brushing lightly along the blade's surface.

"Sister Yuxiang, tell me about your journey into the mountain." Jiang Ruyi asked gently.

Deng Yuxiang: "Little Lu Ran hasn't told you?"

Jiang Ruyi smiled: "You know how he is—always worried about making others anxious, narrating events as if they're insignificant.

I'd like to hear your account."

Deng Yuxiang chuckled, Lu Ran's image surfacing in her mind: "Alright."

Meanwhile, on the north side of the cliff...

Lu Ran, accompanied by the Divine Seeking General, the Feixian Hall trio, and Jing Hong's Ghost General Team, had finally chosen a site.

"Let's settle here." Lu Ran stood amidst tall, flourishing woods, surveying the surroundings, "Oh, Divine Seeking General, the scale of this Feixian Hall should be larger than the Council Hall."

"In the future, this hall will be used for displaying the Stone Sculpture."

Xun Yifei appeared thoughtful, nodding: "Understood."

Lu Ran turned to Song Yu and the others: "You guys, follow Divine Seeking General's instructions and collaborate to complete the hall."

The group voiced their agreement in unison.

"I won't get in your way." Lu Ran gave Xun Yifei's shoulder a friendly pat and vanished in a flicker.

Moments later, he was standing on the east side of the sea cliff, gazing out at the boundless ocean.

"Something good is going to happen?"

Lu Ran murmured softly, anticipation rising within him.

Earlier, while gathering the construction team in the Council Hall, Old Master Bai Yanhui had informed him of this.

This left Lu Ran somewhat surprised.

In a place like Spirit Mountain, could anything positive truly occur?

For the people here to just make it safely through a day—that would already count as a blessing, wouldn't it?

"Tch." Lu Ran clicked his tongue, habitually sitting at the edge of the cliff, legs dangling over the abyss.

Jiang Ruyi had explicitly declared that she wanted to converse privately with Deng Yuxiang, leaving Lu Ran currently "homeless"...

He swung his legs idly, closed his eyes, and entered cultivation mode.

Before long, Lu Ran faintly heard footsteps approaching from behind him.

"Hmm?"

Lu Ran turned his head to see the Two Birds of the West Desolation.

"Apologies for disturbing you, Sect Leader."

"Sect Leader!" The two promptly halted and addressed him respectfully, keeping their distance.

Lu Ran smiled and said, "Are you settling in alright?"

Noticing that Lu Ran wasn't reprimanding them, Gao Yunyan stepped forward: "It's been almost two years since I came to Spirit Mountain, and I've never slept so soundly."

Compared to the harsh conditions of the northwest desert, Cloud Sea Cliff felt like paradise.

For Gao Yunyan, however, much of that "comfort" was likely psychological.

"Glad to hear it." Lu Ran turned back to gaze at the sea, "After facing the desert winds and sands for so long, if you want to go swim or bathe, feel free to enjoy yourself."

This sea area has already been claimed by our Ran Sect."

Gao Yunyan and Xue Fengchen exchanged looks, reading a trace of astonishment in each other's eyes.

Truthfully, when the two first arrived at Cloud Sea Cliff yesterday and saw Lu Ran situating his base by the sea, they'd been utterly shocked!

Ten Thousand Blade Mountain was undoubtedly perilous.

But the ocean... it was no less menacing, was it?

Now, hearing Lu Sect Leader's words and observing his calm demeanor...

This sea area—is already under your control?!

"It seems you both have quite a lot to say to me?" Lu Ran suddenly spoke, still gazing at the ocean without turning around.

The two stepped forward, Gao Yunyan pinching Xue Fengchen's arm midway.

Xue Fengchen winced but continued, stopping a few meters behind Lu Ran, his bold, familiar image etched in their minds as he said in a deep voice:

"Sect Leader, we have many questions—would you be able to..."

To their surprise, Lu Ran was unusually approachable, casually replying: "We're brothers, right? Ask away~"

...

Chapter 560: good things keep happening

By the sea cliff, Lu Ran conversed with Feng Yan for a long time.

Even though the two had prepared themselves mentally, they were still momentarily stunned upon learning of Lu Ran's abilities, unable to speak for a while.

"Whew~"

The sea breeze brushed past, lifting Lu Ran's hair, creating a horizontal flutter.

Lu Ran closed his eyes, savoring the moment.

Just now, Gao Yunyan mentioned how comfortable it was to sleep on Cloud Sea Cliff?

Ha.

No matter how comfortable you feel, could it compare to the ease of rummaging through a plastic bag?

"Sect Leader." Xue Fengchen's expression grew increasingly solemn, "Then what about your future...?"

"You've hit the key issue." Lu Ran lifted his head, slowly opened his eyes, and gazed at the surging clouds in the sky above. "The gods and demons have ruled us and enslaved us for far too long.

What do you think?"

Ah~

Lu Ran truly felt at ease.

Rummaging is the answer!

"Gulp." Xue Fengchen's Adam's apple visibly moved.

"Feng-er."

"Present!" Xue Fengchen looked at Lu Ran.

"Why do you think we came into this world at all?" Lu Ran asked.

Xue Fengchen pondered deeply, not responding immediately.

Lu Ran: "Were we humans born merely to suffer exploitation and oppression, to endure enslavement by the gods?"

This time, Xue Fengchen answered decisively, "Of course not!"

Gao Yunyan's voice rang out with firm conviction: "Nor should it be!"

Lu Ran nodded in agreement: "In the past, you had no alternatives. On this ruthless Holy Spirit Mountain, you could only rely on Tianhuang Mountain for temporary safety.

Now, the two of you have chosen to follow me, and your fates have changed.

We must not only survive on this Holy Spirit Mountain..."

Lu Ran tilted his head back, staring at the sea of clouds in the sky above. "You must also follow me and pierce the heavens!"

Xue Fengchen's bold eyes shone brightly, instinctively turning to look at the woman beside him.

He discovered that Gao Yunyan's gaze was equally fervent, fixated on Lu Ran's silhouette.

It seemed she was engrossed in some indescribable emotion.

She saw nothing but Lu Ran.

Lu Ran finally turned around, his gaze enveloping the two generals, Feng and Yan: "This path will undoubtedly be arduous, brimming with thorns and trials. We might very well end up shattered..."

"Buzz!!"

Lu Ran's words abruptly stopped as his eyes narrowed, focusing on Gao Yunyan.

Gao Yunyan's black hair flowed, her large hoop earrings at her earlobes swaying continuously. A terrifying energy fluctuation surged from within her.

From beginning to end, her inflamed gaze remained locked on Lu Ran.

In this world, there has never been a shortage of people brave enough to fight.

What these people lack is capital, opportunity, or an insightful guide.

Lu Ran and Jiang Ruyi filled the void Gao Yunyan faced entirely.

In just a single month, Gao Yunyan had ascended two significant tiers within her mental realm!

Initially, stifled by her surroundings and circumstances, Gao Yunyan had to begrudgingly endure life at Tianhuang Mountain, mingling with villains.

Jiang Ruyi's arrival provided Gao Yunyan with a brand-new path to survival.

Seizing the chance, she broke free from the mire at last.

Regardless of how treacherous the road ahead might be, or whether she would perish along the way, she and Xue Fengchen resolutely decided to forsake the darkness for the light, pursuing their true selves under Lady Luo Xian's guidance.

This marked the first layer of transformation in her mental realm!

Now, she had joined the Ran Sect, stood behind Lu Ran, validated Lu Ran's earth-shaking power to destabilize the gods and demons, and heard the ambitions of their leader striving to overturn heaven and earth...

Transforming from cultivating merely to survive,

to cultivating to overthrow the tyranny of gods and demons, achieving eternal glory and a place in history.

This marked the second layer of transformation in her mental realm!

At just thirty years old, Gao Yunyan had reached the fifth rank of the River Realm. With two massive leaps forward, she slammed open the door to Sea Realm advancement!

"Huff!!"

Xue Fengchen's face revealed an astonishment as he stepped backward, raising a hand to shield his eyes while gazing at his companion's formidable aura.

"Haha!" Lu Ran, upon realizing what had occurred, burst into laughter, "Excellent!"

I remember Elder Bai mentioned today that something favorable awaited at Cloud Sea Cliff!

It turns out that my Ran Sect is gaining another presence in the Yangyang Sea!

Deng Yuxiang, Yu Changsheng, Xun Yifei, Luo Ying...

Counting Gao Yunyan, I now have five Sea Realm great powers under my wing!

Look across Holy Spirit Mountain—Ran Sect's collective strength can now be ranked among mid-tier forces, can't it?

How satisfying~!

Sea Realm disciples from West Desolation—how terrifying are they?

The divine figures from West Desolation, as second-class gods, possess Sea Realm techniques capable of causing mountains to quake and the earth to split!

They instigate genuine earthquakes, unparalleled in destruction!

At once, Lu Ran summoned the Ancient Bronze Mirror, only to switch to the Transmission Mirror instead: "Behind the mirror is a seclusion room.

Yan God General, you are invited!"

Without hesitation, Lu Ran granted her the title of Divine General.

"Thank you for your guidance, Sect Leader!" Gao Yunyan's voice rang with sharp clarity, her eyes gleaming as she strode boldly into the mirror.

As the figure of the woman vanished, Lu Ran dispersed the Transmission Mirror, turning swiftly toward Xue Fengchen.

Suddenly adopting a mournful expression, Lu Ran said:

"Poor Feng-er."

Xue Fengchen: "..."

Lu Ran continued, "But don't lose heart. Yan God General should be six or seven years older than you, right? It's normal for her to surpass you in strength and realm."

Xue Fengchen replied awkwardly, "Six years."

"Well, as they say—'a woman three years older is a golden brick.'" Lu Ran chuckled, "If you managed to snag her, maybe you'd get two!"

Xue Fengchen's mouth twitched awkwardly.

You—the rising new god—can't you act more solemn and sacred?

What kind of talk is this...

Lu Ran's grin widened, adopting a reminiscent tone: "Not only two big golden bricks, you even snagged a Sea Realm great power!

Tsk tsk, you truly are blessed..."

The imposing yet elegant Xue Fengchen was slightly embarrassed by his words, and after a moment, congratulated: "Congratulations to Sect Leader, on acquiring a Divine General."

That statement truly pleased Lu Ran.

"Alright then, Feng-er!" Lu Ran took on a magnanimous expression. "We were both Heavenly Prides of the same generation. I'll give you another month!"

If you can enter the Sea Realm within thirty days, I'll give you the title of Divine General as well. How does that sound?"

Xue Fengchen cupped his fists and bowed: "Your subordinate will do his utmost!"

Lu Ran felt dissatisfied inwardly.

The young man, in the prime of his youth, should be charging ahead fearlessly—why doesn't he even dare to speak confidently?

Lu Ran paused, lost in thought, then suddenly said, "Do you still remember He Qifeng?"

Xue Fengchen, of course, knew Da Xia's second Heavenly Pride, though he didn't understand why Lu Ran suddenly brought her up.

Lu Ran: "She was one step behind you in advancing to the River Realm. Not too long ago, she already entered the Sea Realm."

Xue Fengchen asked in surprise, "Is He Qifeng also in this realm?"

Lu Ran nodded: "Not only is she in the Sea Realm now, but she's also established herself as a City Lord!"

Uh... The causal order seemed reversed.

He Qifeng had established a city, boldly taking the first significant step toward her grand ambition, and in doing so, illuminated her Dao Heart, allowing her smooth ascension to the Sea Realm.

"Those details aren't important!" Lu Ran quickly added, "The important thing is, she advanced to the River Realm later than you, yet she's already entered the Sea Realm!"

Xue Fengchen nodded emphatically, bowing deeply: "Your subordinate will spare no effort!"

Finally appeased, Lu Ran commented, "Very well! Go to the Council Hall and report to Nightmare Guardian. She will assign you tasks."

The next stage was to guard Cloud Sea Cliff and escort Yan God General through her breakthrough safely.

"Understood!" Xue Fengchen received his orders and left.

Meanwhile, in the study within Cloud Sea Residence...

Jiang and Deng both noticed that the energy within Cloud Sea Cliff was growing increasingly dense.

Deng Yuxiang suddenly tilted her head slightly, receiving a sound transmission from someone.

A moment later, she looked across the desk: "Ruyi, the West Desolation disciple Gao Yunyan has just broken through her bottleneck under Little Lu Ran's guidance and is advancing."

Under Lu Ran's guidance?

Jiang Ruyi marveled inwardly, shaking her head with a smile: "Gao Yunyan is at the River Realm Peak."

"Indeed." Deng Yuxiang's face also lit up with a smile. "I need to arrange the mountain's defenses."

"Go ahead." Jiang Ruyi nodded lightly. "Thank you, Sister Yuxiang."

"It's within my duties." Deng Yuxiang repeated Yu Changsheng's habitual words, picking up the Seven-Star Treasure Blade and rising to leave.

Jiang Ruyi, sitting on her knees behind the desk, turned her head slightly upon hearing a faint sound and gazed at the Divine Weapon - Rosy Clouds Blade hanging on the wall.

"Swsh~"

Lu Ran suddenly appeared at the door, stepping in as he caught the Rosy Clouds Blade flying toward him: "Cold Night, you come along too."

"Buzz!" On the wall, the Cold Night Sword also flew down.

"Over the next few days, the mist at Cloud Sea Cliff will be dense. I need you to help patrol..." Lu Ran explained briefly, letting go of the paired blades. "Go now; Rosy Clouds will guide you along the patrol route."

The Divine Weapon Sword hummed incessantly, following Rosy Clouds Blade as it flew out of the study.

Lu Ran turned his gaze to the aloof immortal behind the desk. Without hesitation, he leaned forward, stretched out his arms, and lifted her into the air.

"I'm about to have my fifth Sea Realm great power!" Lu Ran was elated.

Kisses, hugs, spinning circles~

Little Chi Feng also noticed the scene and came trotting over, circling around its masters with delight.

Joy filled the air~

"Hehe~" Jiang Ruyi was infected by the jubilance, letting out a soft laugh. "I think I might be nearing my own cultivation bottleneck."

"Ah?" Lu Ran's expression froze. "Really?"

Had Jiang Ruyi recovered so well?

Indeed... She had once received genuine blessings from the gods, possessing natural beauty and extraordinary constitution, excelling in physical prowess and innate talent—far surpassing other cultivators of the same realm.

Furthermore, she was now bound to the Pseudo-God Stone Sculpture, becoming an inheritor.

But more importantly, her unwavering mental realm stood as the most critical factor.

From a certain perspective, Lu Ran even felt that she might be more determined than he was...

"Why would I lie to you?" Jiang Ruyi gently rolled her eyes at him. "I told you that very morning after breaking the contract. It wouldn't take long for me to return to the fourth rank."

"Haha!" Lu Ran laughed heartily. "Elder Bai didn't let me down!"

What a marvelous River Realm Peak, this Great Curse Master!

Cloud Sea Cliff is positively overflowing with good fortune today!

Jiang Ruyi: ???

Why is it that, while holding me, your thoughts dwell on someone else?

And it's an old man at that?

"Come, Little Chi Feng." Lu Ran released the jade-like person in his arms, grabbed Little Chi Feng with one hand, and opened a Transmission Mirror with the other. "Behind the mirror is the first seclusion room, located at the mountain's core.

Take the Fiery Phoenix Patterned Gourd and train within!"

"But what about guarding Cloud Sea Cliff..."

"That's not your concern!" Lu Ran cut her off. "Yan God General's Sea Realm breakthrough will cause dense energy to flow through heaven and earth for as little as five days up to ten days!

This is an immense blessing—you must catch this east wind!"

"Alright." Jiang Ruyi complied without hesitation, taking the Treasure Gourd.

Before stepping through the Transmission Mirror, she turned back, her beautiful eyes glancing toward Lu Ran, who seemed overjoyed by her actions.

Her typically aloof voice was tinged with warmth:

"Wait for my good news."

"Mm-hmm!" Lu Ran nodded repeatedly.

Watching the immortal silhouette fade away, Lu Ran felt as if the clouds had parted to reveal sunlight.

Being on this Holy Spirit Mountain,

it truly feels increasingly full of promise!