

The fact was still unacceptable to Ximen Chang despite knowing that he underestimated Han Jingru. The outcome of Zhong Qishan losing was not the result he envisioned.

Ximen Jin, on the other hand, was showing a more relaxed expression. He envisioned the patriarch position was already within his reach.

“Grandpa, isn’t it obvious that Zhong Qishan is incapable of defeating Han Jingru?” Ximen Jin commented gleefully.

Ximen Jin’s remark frustrated Ximen Chang even more. The latter knew more than anyone else that Ximen Jin had spoken nothing but the truth. Still, he was unwilling to face the truth. As time passed, the slight hope he was holding onto seemed to fade gradually.

“If Zhong Qishan is not enough, we still have other strong fighters within the Ximen family. I don’t believe that he is undefeatable,” stated Ximen Chang.

Ximen Jin was not worried in the slightest bit as

he believed none from the Ximen family could defeat Han Jingru, especially since even Zhong Qishan failed to do so.

“You will pay for underestimating him,” Ximen Jin coldly retorted.

“Don’t just stand there! Go help him!” Ximen Chang ordered the others.

Zhong Qishan was the elite among the Ximen family’s The Elite 28, but the others were no weaklings. As eight of The Elite 28 were in the last Three Stages, this contributed to the ruthlessness of the Ximen family. Ximen Chang cared naught about being the butt of jokes by ganging up on Han Jingru at this point. As long as Han Jingru ended up dead, he was willing to try everything.

“Grandpa, how can you allow others to participate in the battle between the both of them,” Ximen Jin questioned angrily. Although Han Jingru seemed to be on par with Zhong Qishan, but if others were to join the duel, that could turn the table for the latter. In other words,

this would not be good for Han Jingru.

Ximen Chang laughed at the slight panic shown by Ximen Jin. “Ximen Jin, are you scared now? You must be daydreaming, thinking that you could be patriarch.”

As he spoke, all of The Elite 28 joined the battle at that point.

Watching from a distance, Fei Ling'er was not worried about Han Jingru at all, but instead, she was unusually excited.

“The old man is scared now. This is a good sign. Now show me your prowess, Han Jingru. It sure doesn't seem like you have given your all in fighting Zhong Qishan.” The increasingly chaotic scene fueled her trilling sensation further.

“It is despicable for Ximen Chang to be so brazen by ordering the others to gang up on Han Jingru.”

“I can't believe the Ximen family has no shame.”

The hopeful faces of Ran Yi and Ge Zhonglin

dimmed in that instant. The Elite 28 of the Ximen family was well-known throughout the Imperial Court as a group of elite fighters. As such, the situation was hopeless for Han Jingru.

“Can you think of something to help him?” Ran Yi urged He Zhonglin.

He Zhonglin had the intention to help Han Jingru but the few guards he had were no match for The Elite 28, leaving him helpless.

“Unless a miracle happens or else there is no way for him to win,” He Zhonglin said regrettably, shaking his head.

Ran Yi felt tensed as the glimmer of hope he once had was going to be dashed at any moment.

All of a sudden, a silhouette appeared beside Han Jingru.

The pose and gesture of the silhouette at the summit suggested that it was a woman. She had a sophisticated air like an angel who descended from heaven.

“Who is the woman?”

“What is happening? How did she appear so suddenly? Have the Gods descended?”

“What help can a woman do in a battle between men?”

Huang Xiaoyong scanned his surrounding when the audience was in a heated discussion.

How did Jiang Yingying show up alongside Han Jingru when she was just beside me just a moment ago?

“Yingying!” Huang Xiaoyong swallowed with a shocked expression on his face and muttered, “I didn’t know that Yingying is actually an elite fighter...”

“How come you’re here?” Han Jingru questioned in a chuckle when he noticed Jiang Yingying beside him.

“Since the Ximen family is so dishonorable, I will have to help you settle these small fries,”

Jiang Yingying answered.

Han Jingru let out a sigh and replied, “It seems that we will give the Imperial Court quite a shock.”

“Is that bad? No one will dare provoke us in the future,” Jiang Yingying responded delightedly.

Han Jingru’s burden lessened significantly with Jiang Yingying joining the fight, making it easier for them to take on The Elite 28. Han Jingru was not worried as he still had a trump card.

Of course, it won’t be used unless the situation called for it. Otherwise, it won’t be a simple case of just a shock to the Imperial Court.

“Who would have thought that there would be a surprise.” Fei Ling’er’s became tensed. She didn’t expect Jiang Yingying to have such strong abilities, to be facing ten of The Elite 28 with ease.

“Who are they?” Fei Ling’er wondered. It was difficult to understand how they, as fighters,

could just appear in such an abrupt and unrivaled manner without the Imperial Court noticing.

Ximen Chang was peeved at the sudden change of situation.

The Elite 28 was his final trump card.

Supposedly, Han Jingru was at a disadvantage.

However, he did not consider that Han Jingru had a partner. Furthermore, this woman had such strong abilities to be blocking the might of The Elite 28.

If this continued, there was no telling who would be the winner or the loser. This was not the outcome Ximen Chang envisioned.

“Grandpa, what a surprise to see that he has a partner. However, just that woman as his partner alone was sufficient to defeat The Elite 28.”

Ximen Jin felt like a weight had been lifted off his shoulders now.

Ximen Chang was not in the mood to argue with Ximen Jin. He was staring intensely at the battle happening at the summit as the result of the fight

would determine his fate. If The Elite 28 lost, only death would await him.

“How could I, as your disciple, just stand on the sidelines when Jiang Yingying had already joined the battle?” Huang Xiaoyong entered the battle riding his Manticore.

Although Huang Xiaoyong had only achieved the Fifth Stage, he had his Manticore—a seven-star familiar, which enabled him to create disturbances and launch sneak attacks on the fighters.

The burden was reduced further with his help allowing both Han Jingru and Jiang Yingying to achieve a quicker victory.

Ximen Chang’s expression soured as more of The Elite 28 fallen off the summit.

“That’s so powerful!”

“The Elite 28 of the Ximen Family never stood a chance. This person must have achieved the stage of a Pinnacle Master!”

“It’s terrifying! Look at Ximen Chang. He’s already plunging into despair. He must have never thought that the Elite 28 would be defeated just like this.”

Everyone was in awe.

Countless eyes were fixed on Han Jingru with admiration.

Even the cultivators from outside the city were shocked to the core.

Most of the audience had never seen an actual battle in their entire lives. And this time, not only was it an eye-opener, but they also get to witness the most spectacular battle ever to happen in the Imperial Court.

Even Ran Yi and He Zhonglin couldn’t control

their excitement.

“Our prediction was right. It was right!” said Ran Yi in excitement.

He Zhonglin bobbed his head happily and said, “After this battle, his reputation will surely shock the entire Imperial Court. Ximen Chang must have underestimated him. Even if Han Jingru killed him, he wouldn’t be held accountable by the Emperor.”

“Exactly. Only the strong will rule. After all, Ximen Chang was not an important figure. He’s not worthy enough for a Pinnacle Master to be held accountable by the Emperor.” Ran Yi’s hands couldn’t stop shaking. Fearing he might miss out on any details of the fight, his eyes were focused on the battle, engraving every single movement into his mind.

Ximen Chang was gradually becoming desperate. He had never thought that the whole event would have progressed to this point. Moreover, he never expected the mighty Elite 28 to end up in this situation.

Back when Ximen Chang established the Elite 28 to protect the family, it caused countless discussions among the other large families. Many of them envied his ability to assemble these masters. And because of this, many people paid visits to the Ximen family to foster good relations with them.

It could be said that the Elite 28 was the biggest reason for the Ximen family to have the status and influence they had today.

However, as of now, the Elite 28 had fallen one after another. For every member to be defeated meant the power of the Ximen family diminishing. It was the worst nightmare for Ximen Chang.

“Grandpa, you looked rather surprised. However, I have imagined that this would happen.” Ximen Jin looked composed, but he was agitated within. Ximen Chang trained him never to reveal his emotions to anyone. To never let his opponents read his thoughts.

It could be said that Ximen Jin did everything

that Ximen Chang asked him to do. All these moments have gathered Ximen Jin's desire to become the Patriarch, as everything he did since birth was all for the position of Patriarch.

“Ximen Jin, without the Elite 28, do you think the Ximen Family would still have such a high status?” said Ximen Chang while gritting his teeth.

“Of course not. With my leadership, the Ximen family will have an even higher status,” Ximen Jin replied.

“The Ximen family is currently at the peak of its reputation. What makes you think you could say something overly ambitious like this?” Ximen Chang smirked.

Ximen Jin smiled and replied, “The Elite 28 are gone, but wouldn't a Pinnacle Master be as great as the Elite 28? I would do anything for him.”

Ximen Chang held his own chest.

Ximen Jin actually wanted to be enslaved?

How could the dignified Ximen family be enslaved by someone else”?

“Ximen Jin. You actually wanted the Ximen family to become someone else’s slave? Have you gone crazy?” Ximen Chang shouted furiously.

“Crazy?” Ximen Jin looked towards Ximen Chang in contempt. He sized him up and said, “If such an opportunity were presented before you, what would you do? Would you refuse it?”

Refuse?

Ximen Chang had never thought of this. He had never encountered such an opportunity; hence, he didn’t know how to respond to that question when he was asked out of a sudden.

Looking at the silent Ximen Chang, Ximen Jin continued, “You don’t have to think about it. Let me answer it for you, and I’m sure you will agree. You definitely will. The Emperor is wary of the Ximen family. Only a fighter at the Pinnacle stage could ensure the status of the

Ximen family. Do you really think the Ximen family could nurture a Pinnacle Master? So what if you have the Holy Chestnut? You're still not certain if you could do it.”

“Imperial Court may be century-old, but all they have was nothing more than Fei Lingsheng.”

These words made Ximen Chang utterly desperate.

His ideals used to be persistent but seemed naive now.

What Ximen Jin said was true. There was only Fei Lingsheng in the century-old Imperial Court. The Ximen family could not have had the audacity to possess such wishful hopes.

“I will bury you in the most luxurious way possible. I hope you will bless the Ximen family for generations to come.” Then, Ximen Jin stepped down towards to foot of the mountain to welcome Han Jingru, who returned victoriously and to express his loyalty at the same time.

Ximen Chang was miserable. However, his setbacks didn't stop just yet.

At this moment, Ran Yi and He Zhonglin approached him.

“Mr. Ximen, have you ever imagined that something this unexpected would happen?” Ran Yi asked Ximen Chang.

He glared at Ran Yi and said, “You are in no place to ridicule me.”

“For someone who's living on borrowed time to have such a bad temper is not a good thing,” Ran Yi jeered.

“Ximen Chang, do you realize how many people wanted you dead? All these years, your arrogance embedded hatred into countless people. Look around and see how many of them have their eyes on you. Do you really think you could get out of here alive?” He Zhonglin mocked.

Ximen Chang could already feel the sensation of countless glares from the shadows without even

looking. He knew well enough about the enemies he had made over the years. He never worried about it because it used to be trivial for him. The power of those people could never surpass the Ximen family, which meant they had no hope of taking revenge in their lives.

But now, the power of the Ximen family was severely weakened due to the demise of the Elites, which rekindled their desire to wreak vengeance once again.

However, Ximen Chang knew he wouldn't die in the hands of those bunch of trash because Ximen Jin would undoubtedly terminate him with his own hands.

“Do you think I see them as a threat? Even if I were to die, it would not be at the hands of these bunch of trash,” Ximen Chang responded while gnashing his teeth.

“It doesn't matter whose hands you die by. What matters is that you will die today.” He Zhonglin laughed and said.

At this moment, all the Elites had fallen off the cliff on the top of the mountain, except for Zhong Qishan. The battle was coming to an end.



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“Old man, your friends are all dead now. How long can you endure this?”

At the top of the hill, Zhong Qishan gasped for air tiredly, whereas Huang Xiaoyong looked smug on his Manticore.

Even though Huang Xiaoyong was the son of Longyun City’s governor, he never looked as dazzling before. Besides, he never had a fight that was as exciting and satisfying as today.

On the other hand, Zhong Qishan wasn’t surprised by the outcome. When Fei Lingsheng appeared, he knew that Han Jingru’s skills level would be outstanding. Otherwise, Fei Lingsheng wouldn’t be interested in this matter in the first place.

However, expecting the outcome wasn’t equal to willing to accept it.

As a fighter of the Ninth Stage, he never thought that someone could defeat him! It was undeniably a devastating blow to Zhong Qishan!

After all, he was the closest fighter to the Pinnacle Stage in the entire Imperial Court. Once he could achieve the breakthrough, he would be rejuvenated and live a longer life. By then, he could go anywhere he wanted and even be strong enough to explore the Dark Forest.

Nonetheless, if Han Jingru killed him now, all of the efforts that he spent throughout his life would be in vain.

“Who are you?” Zhong Qishan asked Han Jingru. He didn’t understand why there was another Pinnacle Master in the Imperial Court apart from Fei Lingsheng.

“Is it important?” Han Jingru asked him back.

“I can’t accept it. How is it possible to have a second Pinnacle Master in the Imperial Court other than Fei Lingsheng?” Zhong Qishan glanced at Jiang Yingying once he finished. Besides, he couldn’t accept that she was also a strong fighter, of whom he couldn’t tell which stage she was.

Is one strong fighter not enough? Why must there be two?

Since when did the Pinnacle Stage become so accessible?

“I’ve heard that you are the closest fighter to the Pinnacle Stage. So, I believe you don’t wish to die, do you?” Han Jingru asked.

Immediately, Zhong Qishan felt that there was still hope. Since Han Jingru said that, he probably wouldn’t kill him under certain conditions.

Although Zhong Qishan was one of the elites of the Ximen family, it didn’t mean that he had to sacrifice his life for them. After all, staying alive was the most important thing to a fighter like him. Furthermore, once he entered the Pinnacle Stage, he would have a wonderful life, which was also the dream of all fighters.

“What do you want?” Zhong Qishan asked.

“You should know that once a contract is made between a Beastmaster and a familiar, the

familiar will follow all orders given by the Beastmaster,” Han Jingru said.

“You want me to be your servant?” Zhong Qishan asked, thinking that it wasn’t an outrageous demand. Even though he was respected in the Ximen family, he was only a high-level servant in essence. The Ximen family provided him with enormous benefits and training materials in exchange for his service.

He wouldn’t reject Han Jingru’s demand, knowing that he had to become a servant no matter what.

However, what Han Jingru said next totally shocked him.

“It’s far from being my servant. I’ve improvised the contract between a familiar and a Beastmaster to apply it to humans,” Han Jingru explained.

At this moment, Zhong Qishan felt a chill ran down his spine.

Han Jingru wants to sign a contract with me to

control me like a familiar?

If Han Jingru had indeed improvised the contract to apply it to humans, Zhong Qishan's life and death could be decided by him with merely a few words.

Besides, once the contract was signed, Zhong Qishan would probably lose his freedom and become his puppet.

“Rest assured that I won't instruct you to do anything for me. Instead, I just don't want to be betrayed. Besides, you'll also get your benefits,” Han Jingru said. Given that Xenos used to attack Earth once, Han Jingru couldn't let go of a fighter from Xenos easily. Nevertheless, Han Jingru wouldn't have to kill a fighter if he could control him.

Also, Zhong Qishan was known to be a strong fighter. If Han Jingru could control him successfully, he could be of use in the future.

In fact, a crazy idea flashed through Han Jingru's mind yesterday.

Initially, Hang Jingru came to Xenos to investigate why it would attack Earth.

Nonetheless, he was also aware that figuring out the reason behind the attack wouldn't solve the crux of the problem.

As such, he came up with an idea to solve the problem once and for all - he had to rule Xenos.

It was a rather crazy idea because he didn't only aim at ruling the Imperial Court but Xenos instead.

In order to rule Xenos, he definitely needed more strong servants. Therefore, Zhong Qishan was qualified to be his candidate.

“What kind of benefits will I get?” Zhong Qishan asked. Deep in his heart, he was aware that he didn't have any other option. He would never choose death as long as he still had the opportunity to survive. On top of that, he would accept Han Jingru's offer more willingly if there were benefits for him.

“Kill Ximen Chang, and you can have his Holy Chestnut,” Ximen Chang asserted.

“You...” Zhong Qishan stared at Han Jingru shockingly and asked in disbelief, “Is that true? Are you willing to give me the Holy Chestnut?”

“You are certainly aware that the Holy Chestnut might help you in breaking through the barrier to the higher stage. So, is this benefit huge enough?” Han Jingru replied smilingly.

Nonetheless, Hang Jingru actually wasn't sure if one Holy Chestnut would be enough to achieve the Pinnacle Stage. After all, he and Jiang Yingying lost count of the Holy Chestnuts they had because they were hungry back then. Hence, he wasn't sure how effective a Holy Chestnut would be to a fighter of the Ninth Stage.

Even so, one thing was for sure - Having one was better than none.

“In that case, I'm willing to be your servant. Please make the contract with me.” After Zhong Qishan finished, he kneeled before Han Jingru on both of his knees.

Since he decided to be a servant, he certainly had to act like one.

Meanwhile, the crowd, who was watching the fight, went into a frenzy when they saw that.

“Zhong Qishan is kneeling! Is he begging for mercy?”

“I never thought that a fighter of the Ninth Stage would suffer humiliation in such a manner. How disappointing!”

“Well, ordinary people like us can’t understand the world of fighters. Perhaps in his eyes, a fighter of the Ninth Stage and the laymen were mere insects.”

At this time, Ximen Chang, who initially wished for good luck, had lost all of his last gleam of hope.

He understood that there would be no miracle at all, given that the outcome was irreversible. After all, how could he fight Han Jingru because even Zhong Qishan kneeled and begged for mercy?

“I never expected that I would end up in such a miserable situation. Does God really want to destroy me?” Ximen Chang sighed in despair.

Meanwhile, Han Jingru touched Zhong Qishan’s forehead with his finger.

Fei Ling’er, who was looking at the scene at a distance, was curious. *What are they doing?*



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“What is he doing?” Fei Ling’er said to herself. Actually, she could effortlessly figure out what happened by sensing his mind with her power. However, Han Jingru would have noticed it once she did that. Since she didn’t want to reveal her true identity now, she decided to hold her desire in.

Once the contract was made, Zhong Qishan felt that an obvious power was inserted into his body. He understood that the power came from Han Jingru. Also, he could use it to control his life.

In other words, Zhong Qishan had to listen to Han Jingru unconditionally from now on. If he refused to do that, his body would explode and lead to his death in no time.

“Do what you should do,” Han Jingru commanded.

Zhong Qishan nodded in response and went down the hill.

“What’s going on? Did he let go of Zhong Qishan?”

“It seems that Zhong Qishan has betrayed the Ximen family in exchange for his life.”

After coming down the hill, he came up to Ximen Chang.

Meanwhile, the Patriarch was furious with him because he betrayed him.

“Zhong Qishan, I have never thought that you would forgo your dignity. Did you forget that you are a fighter of the Ninth Stage?” Ximen Chang gnashed his teeth while talking to him.

Nonetheless, Zhong Qishan didn't feel ashamed of himself because he had accepted the outcome without regrets.

After all, staying alive was way more crucial than maintaining his dignity. A dead man could have preserved his dignity, yet he was no different from other corpses.

“Since I'm just a step away from the Pinnacle Stage, I don't want to waste the effort that I have put in throughout my life,” Zhong Qishan

retorted blandly.

Ximen Chang looked ferocious when he scoffed at Zhong Qishan. “Humph! A coward like you will never reach the Pinnacle Stage.”

“Is that so?” Zhong Qishan suddenly laughed and continued, “He said that if I kill you, I can keep the Holy Chestnut to myself. With the Holy Chestnut, I’ll be able to reach the Pinnacle Stage soon.”

“You... you want to kill me?” Ximen Chang couldn’t believe his ears. After all, since Zhong Qishan served him for many years, he never thought that he would kill him one day.

“Without your resources, I probably wouldn’t be able to reach the Ninth Stage. As such, I’ve to thank you for that. However, I’m sorry to tell you that humans are inherently selfish. I’m sure you understand this better than I do.”

Once Zhong Qishan finished, he threw a punch at Ximen Chang and pierced through his body directly.

Ximen Chang was baffled but wore a pained expression the next moment.

“Zhong Qishan, you’re an ungrateful wretch.” Blood dripped out of Ximen Chang’s mouth non-stop when he stared at him with hatred.

“Yes, I’m ungrateful because I have no other choice.” Zhong Qishan withdrew his hand and watched Ximen Chang as he fell to the ground. Then, he found the Holy Chestnut from his body.

Zhong Qishan never expected that the Holy Chestnut finally came to him after all the ups and downs.

Meanwhile, Han Jingru had already come down from the hill.

Ximen Jin, who waited for Han Jingru for quite some time, came up to him excitedly and bowed slightly. After that, he said politely, “Mr. Han, from today onwards, Ximen Jin will be your servant. You can instruct me to do anything.”

“I’ve given the Holy Chestnut to Zhong Qishan.

Are you okay with that?" Han Jingru asked.

"Of course," Ximen Jin replied without hesitation. "Zhong Qishan might reach the Pinnacle Stage with the Holy Chestnut. As such, he can unleash the true value of the Holy Chestnut better than me."

"You can get Zhong Qishan's assistance to clear the remaining obstacles in your family. He will stay by your side from now on," Han Jingru announced. Since it wasn't time to use him yet, Han Jingru didn't want to keep him by his side.

Besides, given that Zhe was bound by the contract, Han Jingru didn't worry that he would betray him.

"Thank you, sir." Ximen Jin expressed his gratitude.

After that, Han Jingru stretched his body and said, "I'm going back to take some rest. After all, I'm a little tired after the long fight."

The news about the fight was spread quickly

from Fengshang City. Some painters even recorded certain fight scenes through paintings and compiled them into albums to make some money.

Furthermore, numerous storytellers also embellish the story to become a legend and spread it in various coffee shops and cafes.

Within three days, almost everyone in Imperial Court heard the name Han Jingru.

When the albums were widely distributed, Han Jingru's outfit became a craze within all cities in the Imperial Court. The younger generation would feel embarrassed if they didn't wear clothes that resembled Han Jingru's style.

In particular, the trend caught on with the young ones from wealthy families. Apart from clothing, they even wore the same hairstyle based on the albums. They were determined to make themselves look exactly like Han Jingru.

Such a trend resulted in a unique situation whereby many people on the street looked similar

from behind.

In the Dragon Emperor Palace.

In the meantime, the Emperor also held an album in his hands. As the paintings recorded the moments when Han Jingru unleashed every skill, he felt that he was there in person and witnessed the breathtaking fight.

When the Emperor reached the final page, he couldn't help but heave a sigh and said to his subordinates, "I have never expected that Han Jingru is that strong. He wiped out the Elite 28 like a piece of cake."

"We can almost be certain that he is the Pinnacle Master. Your Majesty, what do you plan to do next?" His subordinate asked.

The Emperor only shook his head in response. Actually, he had sent his men to Longyun City and explained his stance to Han Jingru. However, as he hadn't come to the Dragon Emperor Palace, there was nothing much he could do.

After all, as the head of Imperial Court, he couldn't keep showing gestures of goodwill to Han Jingru. Also, he probably wouldn't come to the Dragon Emperor Palace if he sent his men again. In that case, he would only embarrass himself if he continued doing so.

“Where is Fei Lingsheng?” the Emperor asked.

“She watched the fight from afar and wasn't suspicious in any way,” his subordinate answered.

“I wonder what's the relationship between Han Jingru and her.” The Emperor shook his head helplessly. In fact, now that the situation was uncertain, he wasn't even sure what he ought to do next.

“By the way, Your Majesty, the frontier force reported that there seemed to be some activities in the Dark Forest. They were unsure if a Pinnacle Master of a country entered the forest,” the subordinate reported.

“Would it be that a Pinnacle Master wants to

come to Imperial Court or somewhere else?" the Emperor furrowed his brows and asked as he was confused.

As the frontier force of Imperial Court always guarded the Dark Forest, no one dared to come close to the place. However, a disheveled elder suddenly wobbled out of the forest.

His clothes were torn apart, and his face was covered in dust. It was as if he had just survived a great fight.

"Those beasts were really ferocious. Luckily, I'm back safe and sound," The elder heaved a long sigh and continued to say to himself, "I won't be that miserable if it wasn't because of the woman from Mount Jingwu. Why didn't she take care of her children but challenge me to duel in a boxing ring instead?"

Three days after the great fight, Han Jingru had taken enough rest and left the inn for the first time.

Once he walked the streets, he was dumbfounded to see all the passers-by, who looked similar to him. He was played by self-doubt whenever he looked at them from behind.

Since when did I have so many brothers?

“What’s going on?” Han Jingru asked Huang Xiaoyong.

He explained proudly, “Master, do you know how powerful you are in Imperial Court now? Imitating your outfit has become the latest trend now. Besides, many even purposely changed their names to resemble yours, such as Liu Jingru, Zhou Jingru, and Wang Jingru.

Han Jingru was even more perplexed after listening to his explanation. *Why are they following such a crazy fashion? Do they think that they can be as strong as me after changing their names and clothes?*

Meanwhile, not far from them, two people who imitated Han Jingru's outfit were arguing.

"I'm Wu Jingru. Know your place and run. If you're dissatisfied, let's have a duel at the top of the hill outside the city."

"I, Zheng Jingru, will not be scared of you. I accept your challenge. Mark my words, I'll defeat you at the top of the hill."

Han Jingru couldn't help but feel a headache coming once he heard them. *What are these people up to?*

After leaving the inn for several minutes, Han Jingru hastily went back to his room. He felt that the outside world was full of nauseating peculiarities.

"Master, what's wrong?" Huang Xiaoyong asked curiously. He couldn't understand why Han Jingru would be repulsed by it because he felt that it was something to be proud of.

"How long has this trend been going on?" Han

Jingru enquired.

“I noticed the change within a day after the great fight. Besides, more and more people are imitating you. Apart from Fengshang City, those from other cities have started doing the same,” Huang Xiaoyong answered.

“Damn it!” Han Jingru couldn’t help but curse. *He said the craze isn’t a unique phenomenon in Fengshang City. Does it mean that I can’t get rid of the sight even if I go to another city?*

Will my world be full of Jingrus from now on?

He felt a chill ran down his spine whenever he thought about it.

I mean, it was merely a fight. Why are they so obsessed with it?

For Han Jingru, defeating the Elite 28 of the Ximen family wasn’t something to be proud of. Nevertheless, for many outsiders, the extraordinary feat deserved to be worshipped in various ways. After all, the Elite 28 of the Ximen

family were renowned fighters and dominated the stage in Imperial Court for years.

Despite their strength, Han Jingru almost single-handedly withstood the attack of the Elite 28 and defeated them. As such, many people were deeply impressed by his achievement.

“Weren’t you involved in it too? Why don’t they imitate you?” Han Jingru retorted.

Initially, Huang Xiaoyong did feel that it was a pity because no one imitated him. However, after putting himself in their shoes, he could understand that the people would certainly imitate Han Jingru instead of him. After all, he merely played the role of a helper in the fight by ambushing the opponents. As such, he didn’t really unleash his strength back then.

“Master, even though no one imitates me, there are some who imitate Yingying,” Huang Xiaoyong added.

When Han Jingru glanced at Jiang Yingying, she couldn’t help but roll her eyes at him. Apparently,

she was a little disgusted with it as well.

“Jingru, I think that you can only accept it. Since you’re too influential now, it isn’t something that you can control,” Jiang Yingying persuaded.

“Alas.” Han Jingru shook his head helplessly. In fact, he couldn’t control how the events unfolded because the fight had deeply affected the entire Imperial Court. As much as he was aware of it, he still needed some time to adapt to it. After all, he could hardly bear the sight of numerous Han Jingru walking the streets.

“Where’s Ximen Jin?” Han Jingru asked.

“Master, he asks me to inform you that he went home to get rid of the dissidents. You can contact him wherever you need him, and he will do as you say,” Huang Xiaoyong explained.

Han Jingru nodded in response. Given that Zhong Qishan was at Ximen Jin’s side, the latter would have no chance to betray Han Jingru.

Instead, he was actually unsure about where he

ought to go now.

Since the Emperor in the Imperial Court had been waiting for his arrival, they would meet sooner or later. Nonetheless, he didn't want to meet the Emperor for the time being.

It was because Han Jingru had to act according to his improvised plan. As such, meeting the Emperor now served no purpose for him.

“You should get some rest.” Han Jingru told Huang Xiaoyong caringly.

“Master, I feel energetic now and don't need to rest,” Huang Xiaoyong replied confidently.

“Are you sure? You can still take some rest even if you're not injured. However, if you wish to rest only after you're injured, I can definitely fulfill your wish,” Han Jingru said blandly.

Huang Xiaoyong froze for a moment before realizing that Han Jingru was hinting at him to leave. A thought flashed through his mind. *These two definitely have to talk about some secrets.*

“It’s okay,” Huang Xiaoyong replied nervously and yawned right away. Then, he said, “Master, I feel tired all of a sudden. I should go back to my room.”

After Huang Xiaoyong left, Han Jingru said to Jiang Yingying, “I have a new plan, and I think that you should know it.”

“Jingru, no matter what your plan is, I will be by your side,” Jiang Yingying replied without hesitation.

In fact, Han Jingru had never questioned her loyalty to him. Even if he had to go against Xenos, she would certainly support him.

“My initial plan of coming to Xenos was to investigate the reason that they attacked Earth. However, after contemplating it, I believe that conducting an investigation alone is meaningless. Rather than wasting time, why don’t we rule the whole of Xenos? By doing so, it will not pose a threat to Earth anymore,” Han Jingru asserted.

If others heard his remark, he would probably

become a laughing stock.

After all, the Three Nations existed throughout the several thousand years of Xenos's history. No one was ever able to unite and rule the Three Nations altogether thus far. Furthermore, the Dark Forest, which was the forbidden area, made the Three Nations destined to be divided.

Despite the enormous difficulties, Jiang Yingying didn't feel that his plan was absurd. Deep in her heart, she believed that Han Jingru could achieve anything as long as he wanted it.

Regardless of being on Earth or Xenos, she trusted him fully.

“Jingru, your first step is to subdue the Imperial Court, am I right?” Jiang Yingying asked.

Han Jingru nodded affirmatively. He understood that, as they said, more haste, less speed. Therefore, he had to work toward the goal step by step, and thus the Imperial Court was his first target.

“I need more fighters because I believe that we don’t have enough understanding about the Imperial Court. There must be a reason the Emperor could remain as head of the Imperial Court for so long,” Han Jingru added.



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In fact, Han Jingru had been contemplating the question for a long time.

It was said that the Emperor was only in the Eighth Stage. In that case, there must definitely be a reason he could become the head of the Imperial Court. As such, Han Jingru inferred that he had a trump card, of which even a Pinnacle Master would be afraid.

Nonetheless, he didn't know what the trump card was.

In order to control the Imperial Court, he had to amass abundant resources - fighters of the Imperial Court.

The Emperor's trump card is the group of fighters in Imperial Court.

In fact, many fighters chose the powerful families instead of serving the Imperial Court. That was a sign that Han Jingru's plan to win over fighters was actually achievable.

However, Han Jingru hadn't figure out the

specific ways to execute his plan.

“Jingru, we can establish a new sect to win over fighters, just like how the Ximen family did in the past,” Jiang Yingying suggested.

His eyes sparkled because her proposal had helped to solve his trouble. Apart from training new fighters, they would have a valid excuse to win over current fighters. Therefore, he felt that it was a brilliant idea.

“Yingying, you have given a perfect solution!” he exclaimed excitedly.

Meanwhile, she was also delighted that her suggestion was accepted. She said smilingly, “I’m glad that my idea works. To be honest, I was initially worried that my idea was worthless.”

“Well, you’re a smart girl. Why would your idea be worthless? However, our first problem now is to choose a proper location to establish a new sect,” he said.

“Xixiang City, in which the Ximen family is

based, should be the best option. Given that establishing a new sect requires money, the Ximen family can provide it to us too,” she proposed.

He nodded repeatedly and replied, “Not bad. This is a great idea. Well, I hope that you can solve another problem for me. Please think of a name for the new sect.”

Initially, she thought that he would think of the sect’s name himself because it was the most important. Since he handed the task to her, she decided to devote her effort to it.

“Jingru, I’ll think of several names for you to choose,” she said.

“Okay.”

Three days later, Han Jingru finally left the inn once again. This time, he was mentally prepared to face the peculiarities. As such, he didn’t feel as disgusted with the passers-by who dressed like him.

Many prominent families had left Fengshang City after the auction. Although the city wasn't as happening as before, it was still bustling compared to Longyun City. Moreover, even the brothels here seemed to be classier than those in Longyun City.

Much as the women looked gorgeous, he wasn't attracted by them at all.

“Master, let's have some drinks – my treat this time,” Huang Xiaoyong couldn't help but invite Han Jingru when they passed by a brothel. In fact, he started to get restless and couldn't control himself.

Visiting a brothel was nothing unusual to those from Xenos. Nevertheless, as a human from Earth, Han Jingru was rather reluctant to do that.

Besides, Huang Xiaoyong actually had feelings for Jiang Yingying now. Hence, he would definitely lose his chance if she figured out that he went to such a filthy place.

“Think clearly. If Yingying finds out that you've

visited a brothel, you won't have a chance to court her anymore," he reminded.

Since Huang Xiaoyong didn't purposely hide his feelings for Jiang Yingying, he wasn't surprised that Han Jingru figured it out. However, he still felt strange after his master warned him against visiting the brothel.

"Why though?" Huang Xiaoyong asked curiously.

Han Jingru was rendered speechless. *Isn't it obvious? My goodness, does everyone in Xenos have similarly unique thinking?*

"Give it some thought on your own, but remember that I've reminded you. Don't blame me later if you're still insistent on doing something stupid," Han Jingru retorted.

At this time, Fei Ling'er came over to them.

Han Jingru always kept his guard up against her. However, he was forced to expose his real strength during the fight at the top of the hill.

“You’re awesome! The entire Imperial Court is aware of your great name now. Besides, numerous people here see you as their idol,” Fei Ling’er congratulated Han Jingru with a broad smile on her face.

“It’s not a good thing,” he replied blandly.

“It’s definitely a good thing! Isn’t it wonderful to have so many people admiring you?” she argued.

“You’ve followed me for quite some time. When do you plan to tell me your motive?” he asked. Although he knew that he probably wouldn’t receive an answer, he still wanted to give it a try.

“I’m merely a pitiful beggar who follows you to get free food. Does that count as my motive?” Fei Ling’er looked at him innocently.

He shook his head helplessly and replied, “The longer you conceal it, the angrier I will be. When the truth is exposed, we might not have the chance to talk peacefully. Perhaps when that moment arrives, we will be archenemies.”

Despite his warning, Fei Ling'er remained composed and replied emotionlessly, "Since you're so strong, how can I stand a chance to be your opponent? In fact, you can kill me anytime you want. But the question is, are you willing to kill me? After all, I'm only a pitiful little beggar."

Han Jingru watched her as she blinked her eyes and looked at him pitifully. After a while, he decided to stop talking to her, for he didn't notice any sign that she was lying.

"We're planning to have some drinks. Are you joining us?" he pointed at the brothel and asked.

"Are all men lecherous?" she asked.

"To know if a man is lecherous, you can put your finger under his nose. If you can feel the heat, it signifies that he must be lecherous." Han Jingru went into the brothel as soon as he finished.

Even though Huang Xiaoyong wasn't sure why Han Jingru changed his mind suddenly, he wasn't in the mood to contemplate it. Rubbing his palms, he followed Han Jingru excitedly and said,

“Master, I’ll ask the procuress to get the most beautiful ladies here.”

Unexpectedly, Han Jingru gave him a cold-eyed stare. In fact, he only wanted to get rid of Fei Ling’er with an excuse but wasn’t interested in visiting the brothel. Furthermore, even though Su Yimo was in another space, he would feel guilty to do such a thing.

“Can’t we have some drinks without women?” Han Jingru suggested.

“Master, if you don’t want to look for women in a brothel, we might as well visit a bar instead,” Huang Xiaoyong argued.

Meanwhile, Han Jingru took a sideways glance and found that Fei Ling’er had left. As such, he stopped walking and said, “Okay, let’s head to a bar then.”

Huang Xiaoyong was disappointed that the chance to visit the brothel was gone.

Much as he was dejected, he had no choice but to

follow Han Jingru and leave the brothel.

Meanwhile, Fei Ling'er's expression turned grim when she returned to the inn. She was a little worried after listening to Han Jingru. She didn't get close to him to do him any harm. However, she felt that he was rather dissatisfied because she kept the truth from him. *If he really figured out who I am, will we become archenemies?*



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Just as Fei Ling'er was wondering if there was a need for her to reveal her true identity to Han Jingru, her expression suddenly changed to one of shock. A few seconds later, it changed again to one of confusion.

She could sense a very familiar aura. It was one that had a very low possibility of ever appearing in the Imperial Court.

The person whom the aura belonged to was releasing it on purpose. Whoever it was, they were trying to let Fei Ling'er know that they were around.

“Yi Qingshan, what are you doing here at the Imperial Court?” As soon as she spoke, Fei Ling'er disappeared from the room in the inn.

In Fengshang City, which was located a few hundred kilometers away from the Imperial Court, an old man was devouring food at a road stop. His pathetic figure made the other customers feel rather contemptuous towards him. Besides, his clothes looked extremely strange—although they were in tatters, anyone could tell

that his clothes weren't that of Imperial Court.

A fearsome-looking warrior walked up to him and asked in a mocking tone, "Hey, old fool, your clothes look kind of strange, don't you think?"

"I come from a poor family. These clothes are made from spare pieces of cloth. Of course they look strange!" the old man replied, smiling jovially.

The warrior patted him on the back, throwing a lot of unnecessary force into it.

The old man's expression didn't change. Baldly, he said, "Young man, I might be old enough to be your grandfather, but I'm not someone you can push around so easily. I advise you to leave before you get yourself into any trouble."

Hearing this, the warrior burst into laughter. "Old fool, look how self-confident you sound! You want me to leave? Sure! Now, I don't think you have much money on you—why don't you give me everything you have? I'll let you go after that. What do you say?"

The old man sighed and mumbled to himself, “He has no compassion for the elderly! What a wicked, horrible man. Why don’t I release you from this life so you can reincarnate into a much better person? You might be able to live a longer life next time then.”

Before the warrior could understand what was going on, he suddenly made a grab at his throat. Half a second later, blood started gushing out of a wound in his neck.

When everyone else saw this, they burst into screams and prepared to flee.

However, the old man raised an eyebrow and said, “Trying to run away under my very own eyes? Fat chance!”

There was a blinding flash of white. One second later, everyone in the teahouse collapsed, littering the entire place with corpses.

The teahouse had been bustling with activity just moments before. Now, being the sole living person in the entire place, the old man stood in

the middle of it alone.

At that moment, a woman's voice sounded coldly. "Yi Qingshan, how dare you commit murder within the confines of my Imperial Court? This is simply preposterous!"

Hearing this, Yi Qingshan—for that was the old man's name—turned around and smiled broadly. He replied, "Fei Lingsheng, these people weren't innocent. In fact, they were all pretty lousy characters. I'm helping you to get rid of evil in this world! Shouldn't you be thanking me?"

Fei Ling'er appeared next to him in a flash. Angrily, she snapped, "You want me to thank you for killing off my people in the Imperial Court? Fat chance! You're the most shameless person I've ever known!"

Yi Qingshan looked rather nonplussed. Looking amusedly at Fei Ling'er, he said, "Are you going to start a fight with me over the lives of these measly creatures? Aren't you afraid that more innocent people are going to be killed?"

Fei Ling'er gritted her teeth with rage. If the both of them really went all out and started to fight, the losses that the Imperial Court might incur would be unimaginable. A battle between two Pinnacle Masters was likely to destroy everything within a radius of a few miles, causing countless lives to be lost in the process.

“Why are you wreaking havoc here at the Imperial Court instead of minding your own business in Xia Nation?” Fei Ling'er asked confusedly. “Seeing how pathetic you look, I suppose you must have suffered a great deal to pass through the Dark Forest.”

Yi Qingshan heaved a long sigh and lamented, “Do you think I wanted to suffer so much? Making it out of the Dark Forest alive is no small feat for anyone, even a Pinnacle Master like me.”

“What do you want, anyway? Stop beating around the bush!” Fei Ling'er snapped icily.

“Would you believe me if I told you I'm here to seek asylum at the Imperial Court?” Yi Qingshan asked.

Fei Ling'er burst into laughter and said, "Do you think I was born yesterday? The benefits that Xia Nation can offer you are miles above what the Imperial Court can. Besides, life in the Imperial Court is very different from life in Xia Nation. Are you sure you'll be able to get used to the life here?"

"Indeed. This rotten place of yours is certainly very backward, and it's nothing compared to my villa, which has a very nice view of the river. But I don't have a choice!" Yi Qingshan sighed dramatically. For some reason, Fei Ling'er could tell that he was speaking the truth.

However, she couldn't think of a reason why he would choose to come to the Imperial Court of all places.

"Got it. Are you fleeing from something?" Fei Ling'er suddenly recalled something. Although she thought it was quite impossible, that was the only reason she could come off with that explained Yi Qingshan's presence here.

"Have you heard of the incident at Mount

Jingwu, too?" Yi Qingshan asked.

"A woman showed up one day and decided to challenge all the fighters in Xia Nation to a battle. I heard she even brought her daughter along. Are you sure this isn't just a plot Xia Nation has cooked up?" Fei Ling'er sniffed.

"Of course not. Even I couldn't tell what her skill level was. Anyway, after observing her for a long time, I figured that even if she wasn't at the Alpha Stage yet, she must be pretty close to it," Yi Qingshan replied.

"How's that possible?" Fei Ling'er gasped in shock. The Alpha Stage was a mythical skill level that no one had ever managed to attain. In fact, no one even knew if it was achievable or not. How could an Alpha Stage fighter just turn up randomly in Xia Nation one day?

"I don't think it's possible as well, but that's exactly what happened. If not, why would I have to seek amnesty here? Now, everyone in Xia Nation is calling upon me to vanquish her, but there's no way I'll be able to do that. I had no

choice but to hide out temporarily in the Imperial Court.” Yi Qingshan punctuated every sentence with a sigh, making him seem even more hapless.

Fei Ling'er looked rather troubled. If this was true, she had to drop by Xia Nation and take a look for herself.

However, even Yi Qingshan couldn't defeat the woman and had to flee to the Imperial Court instead. Even if Fei Ling'er went to Xia Nation, she wouldn't be able to do much for the people.

“Do you know where this woman came from?”
Fei Ling'er asked.

Yi Qingshan shook his head and said, “She seems to have appeared out of thin air. Nobody has ever heard of her before.”

Appeared out of thin air.

These five words triggered a distant memory in Fei Ling'er's mind.

Hadn't Han Jingru gained a reputation as the

fighter who had appeared out of thin air?

Did this woman have some connection to him, perhaps?

“Actually, there’s another fighter at the Imperial Court whose skills are definitely comparable to, or even better than, mine,” Fei Ling’er said.

Yi Qingshan had just taken a sip of tea. He spat it out immediately.

“You must be kidding!” he exclaimed in disbelief. “How could there be someone more talented than you in the Imperial Court?”

“This person appeared out of thin air too, and we still aren’t certain of his background.” As she spoke, Fei Ling’er took out the ink scroll that narrated the story of Han Jingru’s battle against the Elite 28 and passed it to Yi Qingshan.

“What is this?” Yi Qingshan asked, confused.

“This scroll details the story of his battle against the Elite 28. Among all twenty-eight of them,

nine of them were among the last three Stages, and one of them had even reached the Ninth Stage. However, they all lost when they tried to go up against him,” Fei Ling’er explained.



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Yi Qingshan's expression turned even more complicated as he glanced at the scroll. Although he had never experienced the ferocity of the battle for himself, he could tell from the detailed illustrations on the scroll that it had been a very fierce fight indeed.

The 28 Elites had lost to one person alone!

“He does have some helpers, but neither of them—particularly the one riding Manticore—prove to be much help to him,” Yi Qingshan said. If Huang Xiaoyong had overheard him, he would've passed out from rage.

Fei Ling'er nodded and replied, “However, we shouldn't underestimate this woman's power. She might not have faced the most powerful member of the Elite 28 back in Xia Nation, but this only means that she has yet to reveal her true strength.”

Yi Qingshan sighed deeply again. He understood what Fei Ling'er was talking about, but he still couldn't understand why so many fighters had suddenly appeared in Xenos.

He had been alive for the past few centuries. During that time, he had seen many fighters battle their way up the rankings. However, he had witnessed these fighters' growth with his own two eyes—it was fighters who appeared out of thin air that unnerved him the most, because he couldn't prepare himself for them.

“What's up with the world? Why are there so many talented fighters appearing here these days?” Yi Qingshan demanded.

“That's what I wanted to find out too, which is why I've chosen to stick as close to him as I can.” Fei Ling'er frowned. Han Jingru kept his guard up around her, which meant that it was going to be difficult for her to get to the bottom of this.

“Well, did you discover anything from him?” Yi Qingshan asked excitedly.

Fei Ling'er shook her head and replied, “Not yet. However, there's something I find a little odd about him. He has the Holy Chestnut, and...”

“What?” Before Fei Ling'er could finish

speaking, Yi Qingshan cut her off agitatedly. To him, the Holy Chestnut was an invaluable treasure.

Everyone knew that the Holy Chestnut grew in the Dark Forest, and only those who had reached the Pinnacle stage and became a Pinnacle Master could attain it.

However, Yi Qingshan, who was a Pinnacle Master himself, knew that searching for the Holy Chestnut in the Dark Forest was a dangerous feat that required much preparation. Just traveling through the Dark Forest this time had scared the living daylights out of him—how could he have summoned the energy to look for the Holy Chestnut?

Hence, he suspected that only the fighters *above* the Pinnacle stage could actually attain the Holy Chestnut.

“Are you sure?” Yi Qingshan asked, his mouth opened in shock. “Could it be...is it possible that he has already reached the Alpha Stage?”

“I don’t know if he has reached the Alpha Stage yet, but he auctioned off the Holy Chestnut. Afterward, he didn’t demand it back from the buyer, but simply gave it away instead,” Fei Ling’er said.

Han Jingru had given the Holy Chestnut away so easily because getting his hands on valuable items was a daily occurrence for him. It probably wasn’t the first time he had given one of those items away.

However, Fei Ling’er found it simply ludicrous.

The Holy Chestnut was a jewel that was precious beyond measure. It would have been very difficult, if not impossible, for most people to get their hands on it. However, Han Jingru had given it away to somebody else so easily.

Yi Qingshan expression changed suddenly into one of contempt. “You’re just making a fool of me, aren’t you? I bet you’re pulling my leg.” He had been suspicious since he saw the scroll just now. Now that Fei Ling’er told him that Han Jingru had given the Holy Chestnut away, his

suspicious were basically confirmed.

“Do I really need to lie to you? Everyone in Fengshang City knows about this. If you don’t believe me, just take a stroll along the streets and ask anyone you see.” If Fei Ling’er hadn’t witnessed it herself, she might have thought the same way as Yi Qingshan. However, she had seen everything for herself. With the evidence right before her, she couldn’t deny that it had happened even if she wanted to.

Seeing the serious expression on Fei Ling’er’s face, Yi Qingshan wiped the contemptuous smirk off his own.

“Wow, you’re serious, aren’t you?” he asked cautiously. If she were telling the truth, his entire life—all a few hundred years of it—would have been a complete lie. He couldn’t believe that there was a person out there who would give away possession as valuable as the Holy Chestnut.

“I saw it with my own two eyes! How could I be lying to you?”

Yi Qingshan collapsed miserably onto the long bench and mumbled, “What’s wrong with the world today? It’s different from the one I know. Has everyone gone crazy or something?”

Fei Ling’er sucked in a deep breath suddenly. Turning to Yi Qingshan, she asked, “Does it have something to do with the thing you mentioned?”

Yi Qingshan sat up immediately. With a very solemn expression on his face, he asked, “Do you mean the Ether Realm?”

Fei Ling’er nodded. Not many people knew about the legends that surrounded the existence of the Ether Realm, but everyone who had reached the Pinnacle Stage like her had some vague knowledge about it. Subconsciously, Fei Ling’er had come to associate Han Jingru with the Ether Realm. After all, he had appeared out of thin air! If he hadn’t come from the Ether Realm, where else could he have come from?

“But the scriptures say that the Ether Realm might not necessarily be a place where magic and power prevails. How could he be so powerful?”

Yi Qingshan asked.

This was something Fei Ling'er couldn't wrap her mind around either. The scriptures described the Ether Realm as a place for the weak, and exalted Xenos as a superior land. Since power in the Ether Realm was thin, it was quite impossible that a fighter of Han Jingru's level could have appeared from there.

“There's another possibility that the scriptures are incomplete, or that the information in there is completely wrong. It's also possible that we haven't finished reading all the information in there yet,” Fei Ling'er said.

Yi Qingshan raised an eyebrow and whistled. “You're not thinking of going to Mount Xenos, are you?”

Fei Ling'er nodded heavily and said, “If we want to get to the bottom of this matter, we have to go to Mount Xenos for answers.”

Yi Qingshan shook his head frantically, as though the very idea of Mount Xenos scared the living

daylights out of him. Quickly, he said, “If you want to go, you can go by yourself. There’s no way you’re dragging me there—both of us might die along the way!”

“Without you, how am I supposed to make my way there?” Fei Ling’er grumbled helplessly. Mount Xenos was located right in the middle of the Dark Forest, and it was considered the most dangerous place in all of Xenos. People often whispered that it was home to the most fearsome beast in Xenos. Nobody knew what the beast was called, how it looked like, or even how many of them there were. In the face of such uncertainty and danger, even fighters who had reached the Pinnacle Stage would be frightened.

In fact, in Xenos, the higher one’s stage, the more likely one was to fear death. Those who had reached the Pinnacle Stage valued their lives the most—since they had gone through so much to increase their lifespans, why would any of them do anything that would put their lives in danger again?

“Even with me around, we might still die if luck

isn't on our side. Don't you know how dangerous Mount Xenos is?" Yi Qingshan chastised her.

"But don't you want to know what's going on? After that incident with the mother-child duo at Mount Jingwu and the one at Fengshang City's mountain peak, aren't you curious about where all those people came from?" Fei Ling'er continued to press.



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“Of course I do!” Yi Qingshan said sternly. However, his confidence deflated almost immediately. “However, if you’re going to make me put my life on the line for this information, then I must turn you down. You must know how difficult it is to get to the Pinnacle Stage—now that I’ve reached it, I must treasure my life more than ever.”

“I won’t lie to you—I’m scared of death. I wouldn’t have come to the Imperial Court to seek refuge otherwise.”

Hearing this, Fei Ling’er heaved a disappointed sigh. She could understand Yi Qingshan’s worries—she, too, knew that it was best to avoid this sort of life-and-death situation. Besides, now that she had reached the Pinnacle Stage, she didn’t really want to risk her life anymore. However, this question had been bugging her for ages, and she couldn’t rest until she had found out the truth.

“Oh, I have an idea!” Yi Qingshan said, smiling deviously. Turning to Fei Ling’er, he said, “Why don’t you make *hingo* with you?”

Han Jingru?

Fei Ling'er knitted her brows into a frown. Not everyone had the right to read the scriptures—it held all the secrets of Xenos. If Han Jingru was truly from the Ether Realm, like they suspected, it might not be such a good idea to let him know about Xenos's secrets.

However, Yi Qingshan's suggestion made the most sense. With Han Jingru around, their chances of making it out of the Dark Forest alive could be maximized.

"I'll think about your suggestion. However, we need to be careful about the way we're going to do this," Fei Ling'er said.

"That's your cross to bear, not mine." Yi Qingshan quickly absolved himself of responsibility. After all, he wasn't from the Imperial Court. He could turn a blind eye to anything that was happening there.

Fei Ling'er asked, "Well, when do you plan to return to Xia Nation?"

Yi Qingshan avoided her eyes guiltily. Truth be told, he hadn't even considered the possibility of him returning to Xia Nation. After all, he had no idea when the woman on Mount Jingwu was going to stop her crazy antics—there was no way he was going to return there while she was still wreaking havoc on the land.

“I'll go and take a walk around. Don't worry about me! And relax—I won't cause any trouble for the Imperial Court,” Yi Qingshan said.

“From today onwards, you'll stick by my side while we're still at the Imperial Court. Otherwise, I'll send you right back to Xia Nation by myself,” Fei Ling'er said firmly. Yi Qingshan had no ties to the Imperial Court, which meant that he might stir up trouble without so much as blinking an eye. If she didn't force him to stick by her, Fei Ling'er would have much to worry about.

“Are you kidding me? You're still suspicious of me, aren't you?” Yi Qingshan pleaded, looking completely devastated.

Fei Ling'er replied coldly, “How am I supposed

to believe you? Don't you remember the trouble you caused the last time you came to the Imperial Court?"

"What happened last time was an accident! An accident, I promise! Don't worry—I'll make sure to mind myself this time around," Yi Qingshan said.

"You don't have a choice in this matter. If you don't do as I say, I'll report you to the Emperor. You're going to have a very hard time while you're here." Fei Ling'er refused to budge at all. There was no way Yi Qingshan would keep his promise and frolic around the Imperial Court harmlessly.

Yi Qingshan sighed and said, "Do you have to be so cruel to me? If the Emperor finds out that I'm at the Imperial Court, the king of Xia Nation is bound to find out, too!"

"Well, the choice is up to you!" Fei Ling'er said, smiling.

Yi Qingshan lowered his head helplessly. How

could he choose to disobey Fei Ling'er while she was holding this threat over his head?

“Alright, I’ll do what you want! It’s all my fault for having liked you for so many years,” Yi Qingshan said shamelessly.

A look of anger flashed across Fei Ling'er's face. Yi Qingshan quickly waved his hands in apology and exclaimed, “It was just a joke! Don’t be angry. We’ve known each other for so many years now—can’t we share a joke?”

“From now on, you’re my younger brother. Don’t you dare say anything weird in front of Han Jingru,” Fei Ling'er reminded him fiercely.

Yi Qingshan laughed heartily. In a flash, he had transformed from a beggarly old man into a young man. Turning to Fei Ling'er, he said, “How do I look? Do I look young enough to be your younger brother?”

Fei Ling'er couldn't be bothered to reply. After all, she knew how Yi Qingshan truly looked like. No matter what he transformed into, it would

never be able to erase the image of Yi Qingshan she had in her mind.

Meanwhile, Han Jingru was getting ready to leave Fengshang City.

If he wanted to start his own clan, Xixiang City was the best place for him to be. He decided to pay the city a visit.

“Master, are we about to leave?” Huang Xiaoyong asked him, his face full of sorrow.

“Do you have something you can’t bear to leave behind?” Han Jingru asked, feeling rather perturbed.

Huang Xiaoyong sighed with bitter disappointment. They had arrived in Fengshang City after a difficult journey, but he hadn’t had the chance to leave his mark in its brothels yet! To Huang Xiaoyong, this was almost too much disappointment as his heart could bear.

Regardless of which city he arrived in, he usually made it a point to drop by the brothels at least

once or twice. This trip had been a shameful exception.

“Master, shall we go and have a few glasses of drinks before we go?” Huang Xiaoyong suggested timidly to Han Jingru.

Han Jingru smacked his head painfully and snapped, “Look at the way you’re behaving! And you still want to chase after Yingying? I suggest that you give up that preposterous idea now!”

Han Jingru had felt obliged to give his blessings to the happy couple at first, but he now chastised himself for ever having thought that way. Both of them were from different worlds and held different worldviews—how were they supposed to get along with each other happily?

For instance, Huang Xiaoyong found nothing wrong with gracing the brothels with his presence every once in a while. To Jiang Yingying, however, this was an absolute no-no.

Unless Huang Xiaoyong changed his attitude regarding this, he would never be able to gain

Jiang Yingying's affections.

“Master, will Yingying really despise me just because I like having a few drinks at the brothels?” Huang Xiaoyong asked, feeling rather perplexed.

Han Jingru was too lazy to explain the problem to him. He merely said, “If you want to remain here in Fengshang City, I won't force you to leave with me.”

Afraid that Han Jingru was going to abandon him, Huang Xiaoyong said immediately, “No, no, no. Master, I made a promise to follow you wherever you go as your loyal and obedient disciple. How could I remain here by myself? When are we leaving?”

Han Jingru shot him a glare. Presently, he went and told Jiang Yingying and Bailing Wan'er to pack their bags. Since they were going to leave anyway, they might as well leave right away. After all, there wasn't anything else that was keeping them from leaving.

Just as the four of them stepped out of the inn, they bumped into Ran Yi and He Zhonglin. From the looks on their faces, they had probably found out that Han Jingru was leaving, and had rushed over to the inn to send him off.

“Mr. Han, are you leaving now?” Ran Yi asked.

“Yes, I am. There’s nothing more that I need to do around here. If I stay any longer, I will only be wasting my own time,” Han Jingru said plainly.

“Thank you for saving my life, Mr. Han. If you need any assistance in the future, I will be the man for you,” Ran Yi said.

He Zhonglin added, “And me! If I can help you out in any way, Mr. Han, please do let me know. I’ll do my very best to be of assistance to you.”

“Thank you for your kind words. We’ll meet again in the future.” After he finished speaking, Han Jingru turned and started walking towards the city gates. Those two people wouldn’t be of much use to him, so there was no need for him to waste too much time on them.

The two men watched as Han Jingru left.

Ran Yi couldn't help but sigh. He wanted to keep in contact with Han Jingru, but even Ran Yi could tell that he wouldn't be of much use to the younger man. Ran Yi was desperate to be of some use to Han Jingru, but Han Jingru would never give him a chance.

He Zhonglin patted Ran Yi comfortingly on the shoulder and said, "It's quite natural that a fighter at his level would pay no attention to us. We can't help him out even if he needed assistance anyway."

"You're right," Ran Yi said, nodding his head despondently. If even Han Jingru couldn't accomplish something, how could Ran Yi and He Zhonglin ever hope to do so?

"Oh, right!" He Zhonglin suddenly remembered something. "Didn't he say that he was going to help you recover from your injuries so you can get back to cultivating your skills again?"

Ran Yi smiled bitterly. He had wanted to remind

Han Jingru of this just now, but he had been too afraid to say anything. Shaking his head, Ran Yi said, “Oh, it’s alright. He has already saved our lives. What right do we have to ask him to do even more for us?”

However, He Zhonglin knew how disappointed Ran Yi was. Ran Yi had been looking forward to it ever since Han Jingru brought it up.

However, there was nothing they could do. How could they expect Han Jingru to remember a promise as trivial as this? He might have forgotten about this a long time ago.

Suddenly, Ran Yi’s expression changed drastically.

“What’s wrong with you?” He Zhonglin asked, confused.

Ran Yi darted abruptly to the spot where Han Jingru had just been standing. He threw himself onto the ground and kowtowed three times respectfully.

“Ran Yi, what’s up with you? He has already left. What’s the point of bowing down to him now?” He Zhonglin asked, feeling a little sorry for his friend.

“I-I feel like—like there’s a ball of energy flowing within my body! I-I think I might be able to start cultivating again!” Ran Yi said agitatedly.

“What?” He Zhonglin yelped in surprise. Had Han Jingru managed to heal Ran Yi’s body without telling anyone?

“Mr. Han, my life belongs to you today. Regardless of whether you’ll ever find a purpose for me, I’ll be waiting for your call, and so will all the descendants of the Ran family! We will all remember your kindness today!” Ran Yi was so excited that he could barely speak. Tears flowed down his face as he cried out in the streets.

Far away, Huang Xiaoyong turned to Han Jingru and asked, “Master, why did you help him?”

“A man should always keep his word. If he can’t even do that, how is he fit to be called a man?”

Han Jingru said coldly.

Huang Xiaoyong nodded as though he understood, although the perplexed look on his face betrayed his confusion. “Master, you are truly a man!”

At that moment, Jiang Yingying turned to Han Jingru and said, “Jingru, Fei Ling’er seems to have disappeared.”

Han Jingru smiled blandly. Fei Ling’er was much like a mythical dragon—she turned up wherever and whenever she pleased. However, Han Jingru believed that she would show up again—this was for certain.

“Don’t worry about it. She won’t have disappeared without a reason,” he said.

Jiang Yingying knew that Han Jingru was very wary of Fei Ling’er. Thus, she couldn’t understand why he insisted on keeping her around. Since Fei Ling’er posed as a threat to him, wouldn’t it be more beneficial to do away with her immediately?

Jiang Yingying asked, “Jingru, why don’t you just kill her straight away?”

“If I kill her now, I’ll never understand what she’s after. If I never get that information, it’ll make me very antsy and depressed,” Han Jingru replied with a smile on his face.

Bailing Wan’er snorted disdainfully and said, “If you kill her now, she won’t be able to get what she’s after. When that happens, you won’t even have to worry about her motivations!”

Bailing Wan’er treated Fei Ling’er as a romantic rival, so she couldn’t help but wish that Fei Ling’er was dead. However, since Han Jingru refused to kill her for now, Bailing Wan’er had no choice but to let Fei Ling’er be.

Han Jingru turned to Bailing Wan’er and said, “I helped to resolve one of your grudges by killing off Ximen Chang. When do you plan to leave me?”

“Why should I leave you when you haven’t made me a fighter yet? If you think that’s too difficult,

you can make me your wife first—that's a much easier task to accomplish," Bailing Wan'er replied.

Her forthrightness reminded Han Jingru of how Qi Bingying had been in the past. Qi Bingying had been as straightforward with him and had never bothered to filter her words around him.

However, Bailing Wan'er had a motive for getting close to him. Qi Bingying, however, had loved him for who he was.

Of course, there was no way Bailing Wan'er could ever take Qi Bingying's place in his heart.

If there was a woman on this earth who Han Jingru felt sorry towards, it had to be Qi Bingying. She was the first and only person who had ever make him feel guilt.

"Dream on! I won't disturb you," Han Jingru said baldly.

Bailing Wan'er bit her lip in anger. In her opinion, Han Jingru wasn't a man at all! How

could he remain so calm and unbothered when a pretty girl like her was throwing herself at him? This wasn't the behavior of a normal man.

However, Han Jingru had managed to remain composed even when Qi Bingying was trying her luck with him. If Bailing Wan'er found out about that, she would probably collapse with disappointment.

They finally arrived at Xixiang City.

When Ximen Jin heard that Han Jingru was arriving, he ordered the entire family to throw a lavish party to welcome him.

Ximen Jin had managed to return home and kill off his remaining dissenters with the help of Zhong Qishan. Now, nobody in the Ximen family dared to speak up against him. Ximen Jin had finally stabilized his position as the patriarch and fulfilled a wish that he had held for many years.

“What do you think he's doing at Xixiang City?” Ximen Jin asked Zhong Qishan.

Zhong Qishan replied coolly, “You shouldn’t be discussing him with me. You should know that I’m his servant and that everything you say will be reported back to him by me instantly.”

Zhong Qishan had no choice but to pledge his allegiance to Han Jingru, because his life was in the hands of Han Jingru. Besides, Han Jingru had gifted him the Holy Chestnut, which Zhong Qishan would always be grateful for.

As a Ninth Stage fighter in the Imperial Court who was closer than anyone else to reaching the Pinnacle Stage, the Holy Chestnut had helped him a great deal in his goal of becoming a Pinnacle Master. Since Han Jingru had done him such great favor, Zhong Qishan felt it was only right to do as he said.

“You’re loyal to him, and so am I. Do you think I would dare to betray him?” Ximen Jin said, laughing. Although he was already the patriarch of the Ximen family, he was still well aware that there were people out there with better skills than him.

He might get away with betraying the Emperor, but betraying Han Jingru meant certain death.

“I believe you know what it means to make a smart decision,” Zhong Qishan said.

“I daresay a day will come when he overthrows the current Emperor and becomes the emperor himself at the Imperial Court. He might even...”
As he spoke, Ximen Jin’s eyes took on a steely glint. Although he was just guessing, this was the future he wanted to see.

“There are certain things you should be careful not to say. The Emperor’s skills are not something we can discussed.”



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Wait! I Have Something to Say!



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Hundreds of members from the Ximen family gathered at the entrance of the Xixiang City.

They stood in two lines to welcome Han Jingru.

Other folks were surprised to see such a large formation, and they did not know what was going on.

They all knew how influential the Ximen family was in the Imperial Court. *Who else would they be waiting for? A big shot?*

“Could it be the Emperor?”

“No way. The Emperor will never leave the Dragon Emperor Palace. Do you not know that the Emperor can only exercise its absolute power when he’s in the palace?”

“But who else? Who else is worthy of the Ximen family’s attention?”

While the folks were still figuring out the mysterious person the Ximens was welcoming, Han Jingru and his men arrived.

Ximen Jin and Zhong Qishan immediately walked toward the carriage when it stopped at the city's entrance.

“Hi there, Mr. Han,” Ximen Jin greeted.

“Make way and let us in,” Han Jingru instructed in a calm voice. He did not expect Ximen Jin to make a big deal about his visit today. To avoid becoming the subject of gossip of the crowd here, he decided to stay in his carriage.

“All right.” Ximen Jin immediately ordered his men to make way. They also stopped the crowd from getting too close to Han Jingru's carriage.

Soon, the carriage arrived at the residence of the Ximen family.

A gold plaque was hung above the door of the residence, and a pair of stone lions were installed at the two sides of the entrance to ward off evil spirits.

Han Jingru got down from the carriage and entered the residence. He felt as if he had entered

an ancient palace. Not only was the residence enormous, but it was also decorated with exquisite items. In fact, it was more majestic than the Chen residence from Longyun City.

Yet, to the Ximen family, it was nothing to shout about. They were, after all, the most prominent family in the Imperial Court.

“Could you tell us why you’re here in Xixiang City, and how can we help you?” Ximen Jin walked beside Han Jingru and asked respectfully as if he was a servant.

“I wouldn’t have come to find you if I didn’t need your help,” Han Jingru said.

“I’m all ears, Mr. Han,” Ximen Jin said sincerely. He had never thought of betraying Han Jingru even after he had achieved the status he desired. Or rather, he did not have the guts to defy or challenge such a powerful fighter.

“I want to establish a sect around the Xixiang City. Could you identify some suitable locations for me?” Han Jingru asked.

Establish a sect!

Ximen Jin's heart skipped a beat.

Before this, Ximen Jin told Zhong Qishan what he thought of Han Jingru and his visit here today. Now, Han Jingru's intention to establish a sect here had further reaffirmed his prediction.

“Some ten kilometers away from the city, there's a place called Mount Phoenix. At the foothill, there's a serene lake, which I think is the most beautiful place in Xixiang. If you're interested to check it out, I can bring you there,” Ximen Jin said.

Indeed, Mount Phoenix had the best view of the entire Xixiang. Ximen Jin had no problem recommending this place to Han Jingru, but he was worried people might associate the Ximen family with Han Jingru's sect in the future.

If Han Jingru truly had the intention to take down the Emperor, then Ximen Jin would have no choice but to side with Han Jingru. Yet, to Ximen Jin, it was not good news. How he wished he

could just be a bystander and observe the drama from a distance.

Though Ximen Jin hated to be stuck in an awkward position, he could only do what Han Jingru said to please him.

“How many sects are there under the Imperial Court’s territory?” Han Jingru asked.

Ximen Jin turned his attention to Zhong Qishan as the latter would know better about the situation.

“There are approximately ten prominent sects here, and they’re under the ruling of the Imperial Court and take instructions from the Emperor,” Zhong Qishan said.

“Are you saying the Emperor trained these bootlickers to serve him?” Han Jingru said.

Bootlickers?

How could he disrespect the Emperor by calling his underlings bootlickers?

Of course, Zhong Qishan dared not have the guts to voice out his thought. “That’s right. These sects work for the Emperor, and they recruit fighters for the Dragon Emperor Palace. Half of the palace’s fighters came from these sects.”

Han Jingru nodded in silence. *It looks like the Imperial Court is more powerful than I thought. I might have a hard time carrying out my plan.*

“I’d like to visit Mount Phoenix tomorrow. I’ve traveled for several days and should get some rest now,” Han Jingru said.

Ximen Jin immediately led him to the biggest and the most luxurious guestroom in his residence.

Soon, Fei Ling’er and Yi Qingshan had also arrived in Xixiang City.

The hustle and bustle of Xixiang City did not amaze Yi Qingshan at all as he had seen skyscrapers in Xia Nation, a civilization that was more advanced than the territory under the Imperial Court.

Han Jingru would definitely find Xia Nation familiar because the development in Xia Nation was on par with where he originated.

Yet, Yi Qingshan did not know what might have caused a stark contrast between these two worlds even though they belonged to the same universe.

One thing he knew for sure was the development in Xia Nation was closely associated with that of the Ether Realm.

“Do you know what’s good about the Imperial Court’s territory?” Yi Qingshan asked Fei Ling’er all of a sudden.

Fei Ling’er had been to the Xia Nation, and she also knew Yi Qingshan would not be intrigued by the cities here, no matter how developed or prosperous they were. Fei Ling’er was surprised that he actually asked the question.

“What is it?” Fei Ling’er asked.

“We get to see the sky more clearly here.” Yi Qingshan grinned.

“Oh, I thought you would mention the brothels.” Fei Ling’er smirked as they walked past a brothel. Inside the brothel, the women were all beautifully dressed. They were trying their best to get Yi Qingshan’s attention.

Yi Qingshan snorted dismissively. “In Xia Nation, we have more gorgeous girls in the clubs, and the way they dress could easily capture any men’s attention. People from the Imperial Court will never understand such beauty.”

Club. I wonder how would Han Jingru react if he hears this familiar term being used here.



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Wait! I Have Something to Say!



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“Do you know what brought Han Jingru to Xixiang City?” Fei Ling’er asked Yi Qingshan. This question had lingered in her mind for quite some time, but she did not have an answer. Yet, she knew Han Jingru would not purposely come here without a plan.

“There are so many bigger problems in life we have to deal with. Why do you let this bother you? Relax, time will tell,” Yi Qingshan said nonchalantly. As a Pinnacle Master, he had all the time in the world to wait for the answer.

“I’m worried he might do something foolish,” Fei Ling’er expressed her concern.

Yi Qingshan immediately raised his brows. “You have feelings for him?”

Fei Ling’er instantly shot daggers at Yi Qingshan, “Are you looking for trouble with me? You want to fight?”

Yi Qingshan waved his hand in the air right away. “I was kidding! I’m just afraid of losing you if you fall in love with someone else.”

Fei Ling'er responded with an eye roll. Many years ago, Yi Qingshan had come to Imperial Court, intending to bring Fei Ling'er back to Xia Nation.

They were a good match for each other since they were both Pinnacle Masters, but Fei Ling'er did not have feelings for him. Yi Qingshan was an old man, but she was not. Though she impersonated an elderly woman, deep in her heart, she could not accept Yi Qingshan as her partner for life.

“Let's find a place to stay first,” Fei Ling'er said calmly.

Over at Ximen's residence, Han Jingru was assessing the impact of establishing a sect and how it would affect the Dragon Emperor Palace. He also wanted to know the Emperor's reaction to his plan.

If the Emperor was offended, then Han Jingru would have to call off his plan.

After all, it would take some time to establish and

strengthen a sect. If the Emperor decided to stir up troubles for him during this period, Han Jingru would then have a hard time growing his sect.

The only chance he had now was to pledge his loyalty to the Emperor, but this would also mean he had to go against his own will.

“I’m sure what we’re doing here would attract the Emperor’s attention. Are there any ways we could avoid becoming his target?” Han Jingru asked Jiang Yingying.

“Establishing a sect is a big matter. You can’t keep it a secret. Besides, with the power you have now, you would have gotten the Emperor’s attention. I don’t think we can hide anything from him,” Jiang Yingying explained.

How is it possible for him to avoid the Emperor’s attention if he was going to establish a sect and take in a large number of disciples?

Han Jingru agreed. He let out a sigh and said, “It would be disastrous if the Emperor starts targeting me as his enemy.”

“I heard the Emperor can only exercise its absolute power when he’s in the palace. I don’t exactly understand this. What do you think?”

Jiang Yingying asked.

Han Jingru heard of this too, but he had no clue what it actually meant. Perhaps, there was something in the Dragon Emperor Palace that gave him the ultimate power.

It could either be a special magical formation or a mythical item.

And the formation or mythical item would only work when it was within the Dragon Emperor Palace.

“The Emperor would probably not be able to exercise his ultimate power when he’s out of the palace,” Han Jingru.

“There must be some secrets in Dragon Emperor Palace. Secrets that only the Emperor knows,” Jiang Yingying said.

“I guess we can only find out when we’re ready

to confront him.”

Over in Ximen Jin’s room, where the Ximen family’s center of power lay, Ximen Jin and Zhong Qishan had a grim look on their faces.

They did not talk to each other, but worry was written all over their faces.

“Do you know what it means when he said he wants to establish a sect?” Ximen Jin asked Zhong Qishan all of a sudden.

“To strengthen his power and challenge the Emperor?” Zhong Qishan took a wild guess. Though he thought this hypothesis was absurd, he could not think of any better explanation.

Han Jingru could have led a peaceful life and stayed away from the chaos. Why is he doing this?

I thought a powerful man like Han Jingru would certainly have looked past the desire for power.

“I didn’t expect my suspicion to be right.

Looking at the turn of events, I'm afraid I'll be dragged into this chaos," Ximen Jin expressed his dismay. Initially, he thought he could be a bystander, but now, he had no choice anymore. The fate of the entire Ximen family now lay in Han Jingru's hands.

Ximen Jin loved to see Han Jingru lock horns with the Emperor, and he loved to see them fight to the death. Yet, he, a small fry, just wanted to stay away from them as he was not ready to sacrifice his life.

"So, what are you going to do?" Zhong Qishan asked.

"What else can I do?" Ximen Jin responded with a wry smile. "Do I have a choice? You and I are on the same boat."

Zhong Qishan sighed. Since he already had a contract with Han Jingru, Zhong Qishan was no longer the master of his own fate. If there came a day Han Jingru instructed him to finish the Emperor off, Zhong Qishan would have no choice but to abide by his order.

“In that case, we might as well give him the support he needs. This is our only chance to survive,” Zhong Qishan analyzed.

Ximen Jin thought about it and said in a steady one. “Others might not have the capability to overthrow the Imperial Court, but Han Jingru has what it takes to defeat them. And if he succeeds, we won’t have to suffer a miserable death. You are right. We should try our best to support him. Who knows, we ourselves might become history makers.”

The next morning, Ximen Jin waited by the door for Han Jingru and his entourage. He was ready to bring them to Mount Phoenix.

Han Jingru woke up early this morning. Having a few hours of sleep was enough for him to replenish his stamina.

Mount Phoenix was actually not very far away from Xixiang City.

Soon, they arrived at their destination. The mountain and the lake did match Ximen Jin's description yesterday. It was indeed a paradise and an appropriate place to start Han Jingru's sect here.

"What a beautiful place. It really is a paradise on earth." Jiang Yingying stood in awe of the breathtaking view. She had never seen something like this in the world where she came from.

"Indeed. It's quite a rare sight in Xenos." Han Jingru was very pleased. *If only I can find a place like this for Yimo and Han Xiang too. How I wish they can live a comfortable life, not having to worry about anything.*

"If you're happy with this place, I'll immediately arrange for someone to do the necessary," Ximen Jin said.

"How much time do you need?" Han Jingru asked.

“At most one month,” Ximen Jin promised. He had the money to pay as many workers as possible to expedite the construction.

“I’ll leave this to you then. I want you to inform the public that I, Han Jingru, want to establish a new sect,” Han Jingru said.

Since the Emperor would find out about his ambition someday, he might as well make a public announcement.

“All right,” Ximen Jin responded.

Soon, the announcement became the talk of the town and had even spread beyond Xixiang City.

Fei Ling’er was very concerned upon hearing the news.

To establish a sect in Imperial Court’s territory, one would need to get approval from the Emperor, but apparently, Han Jingru ignored it. *What exactly is his motive?*

“Han Jingru. What an interesting man.” Yi

Qingshan smirked.

“Just say what’s on your mind,” Fei Ling’er said icily.

“Normally, a master will want to a sect to expand his influence, right?” Yi Qingshan asked.

Fei Ling’er nodded.

“But why does he need to do this? He’s already an influential figure here. What do you think?” Yi Qingshan grinned. As an observer, he could not wait for the drama to unfold. No matter who would win, Yi Qingshan knew, for sure, he would enjoy watching them battle it out.

In the last couple of centuries, no one in Xenos had the guts to challenge the ultimate authority here. This was why Yi Qingshan was eager to observe the development.

“We all know the Emperor is undefeatable as long as he resides in the Dragon Emperor Palace. Even the two of us are no match for him,” Fei Ling’er said.

Yi Qingshan nodded in agreement. This explained why the Emperor could rule the Imperial Court for ages. The same logic also applied to the ruler in the Xia Nation.

“Yes, he is undefeatable when he’s in the Dragon Emperor Palace. What if he’s out of his comfort zone?” Yi Qingshan asked.

“Don’t forget all the powerful fighters who serve the Imperial Court,” Fei Ling’er argued.

“Han Jingru will eventually attract fighters to join him, and he himself can still train new fighters with great potential. Don’t forget about the Elite 28! Don’t you think they might have what it takes to challenge the Imperial Court?” Yi Qingshan explained.

Fei Ling’er shook her head. To her, Han Jingru was just reaching for the moon without considering the circumstances around him. The Emperor, of course, would see him as a threat and destroy him before he had the time to strengthen his position here.

“He won’t be able to achieve all these in a short time,” Fei Ling’er said.

“Of course not. But do you think the Emperor would act recklessly and make Han Jingru his enemy? There’s nothing the Emperor can do now because Han Jingru is beyond his reach. There’s also a price the Emperor needs to pay if he decides to kill Han Jingru,” Yi Qingshan said.

Fei Ling’er let out a long sigh. *He’s right. I’m sure the emperor is also in a quandary.*

Killing Han Jingru would not be the easiest option for the Emperor as he had many other considerations. Since there were many powerful families and sects in Imperial Court’s territory, he must not do anything drastic that might disrupt the balance of power.

“There is, however, one solution,” Yi Qingshan grinned.

“What is it?” Fei Ling’er asked.

“You’re the solution. Only you can help solve

Han Jingru's problem. Perhaps, the Emperor is considering this option as well," Yi Qingshan proposed this after putting himself in the Emperor's shoes. To minimize the damage, Fei Ling'er must intervene.

Fei Ling'er shook her head. "No. I can't."

She opposed his suggestion as it was unrealistic. At this point, Fei Ling'er had no clue which stage Han Jingru was at. She did not even know if she was more powerful than him.

"Well then. I'm afraid things are just going get more complicated then."

Meanwhile, at the Dragon Emperor Palace, the Emperor's expression changed when he received the news about Han Jingru.

The Emperor wanted Han Jingru to be his ally. This was why he did not plan to settle scores with Han Jingru when he killed people from the Imperial Court. After the fight at Fengshang City, the Emperor had been extremely cautious in dealing with Han Jingru.

Never in a million years did he expect Han Jingru would establish a new sect in his territory. Clearly, he had become a threat to the Emperor.

If Han Jingru's influence continued to expand, the Emperor might not be able to control him anymore.

"I didn't expect this Han Jingru to be such a pain," the Emperor gritted his teeth and said.

"Shall we destroy him now?" one of his men asked.

"It'll be a great challenge to take him down. I would have finished him off personally if only he's here!" the Emperor exclaimed.

"How about Fei Lingsheng? You can ask her to get rid of him on your behalf," the man suggested.

The Emperor did not even think about it and responded with a head shake. *I can't simply ask Fei Lingsheng to do things for me as she's a Pinnacle Master. Even if I had sought her help, she might not be willing to do me this favor.*

“Fei Lingsheng should know Han Jingru’s capability better than I do. I don’t think she’ll want to be involved in this mess. If these two were to engage in a fight, even I can’t tell who’ll be the winner.”



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Wait! I Have Something to Say!



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“Who exactly is this powerful Han Jingru? I have never heard of this person before,” the subordinate said in puzzlement. Normally, if there were any breakthroughs within the Imperial Court, then the Dragon Emperor Palace would be the first to receive such news. However, in Han Jingru’s case, he appeared out of nowhere all of a sudden.

The Emperor was troubled over this matter, but he knew that it was pointless to pursue it. Right now, it was their utmost priority to deal with the issue of Han Jingru establishing his own sect. And even if Han Jingru couldn’t be stopped, then the Emperor had to think of a way to minimize the threat towards himself.

The best solution was to make Han Jingru an ally. He might even have to provide Han Jingru a certain amount of resources to help him to establish his own sect.

However, Han Jingru did not step foot into the Dragon Emperor Palace. Hence, the Emperor couldn’t find a reason to be involved with Han Jingru. After all, if the Emperor were to help Han

Jingru for no reason at all, then it would arouse speculation and disquiet, among others.

“Your Majesty, the woman in Xia Nation who suddenly appeared is now in Mount Jingwu. However, she has put the Xia Nation’s fighters in a tight spot,” the subordinate continued.

The Emperor knew everything that was happening in Mount Jingwu because he had been following the incident closely. In just a few days, the woman with the child had already made a name for herself, and almost everyone in Xia Nation had heard of her. Moreover, she had a similarity with Han Jingru. Both of them had appeared out of nowhere all of a sudden.

But to forcibly link the both of them together would be a little too far-fetched.

“Right now, almost all of the Cultivators are rooting for Yi Qingshan. They are hoping that Yi Qingshan will come forward and undermine her power,” the Emperor said.

“That’s right.” The subordinate nodded his head

repeatedly and said, “After all, Yi Qingshan is Xia Nation’s Pinnacle Master, and all of the Cultivators are hoping that he will show up. Unfortunately, till today, we have not heard of any news about Yi Qingshan. There are even rumors that he’s avoiding her because he is no match against her.”

The Emperor shook his head and said, “That can’t be the reason he’s hiding. He probably does not want to fight her because she’s a woman.”

In the eyes of the Emperor, a Pinnacle Master like Yi Qingshan would not go into hiding. He most likely had his reason not to show up. Probably he was concerned about fighting a woman, and the thought about the damage it would cause to Xia Nation if he were to fight her.

Unwittingly, the Emperor was already making excuses for Yi Qingshan. It was because he felt that a Pinnacle Master would not be afraid of such a thing.

But what the Emperor didn’t know was that Yi Qingshan had already passed through the Dark

Forest and arrived at the Imperial Court. And Yi Qingshan was indeed in hiding from the happenings in Mount Jingwu.

Yi Qingshan was afraid that he would be defeated at Mount Jingwu. It would be absolutely embarrassing for him to lose.

“Send someone to Xixiang City.” Suddenly, the Emperor gave out the order to his subordinate.

The subordinate was taken aback. Earlier on, the Emperor had already sent someone to Longyun City to invite Han Jingru. He did not expect the Emperor to extend a second invitation this time around.

“Your Majesty, do you still want to invite Han Jingru?” The subordinate asked cautiously. He was afraid the Emperor would take his life if he were to say the wrong thing to the Emperor.

“Go and see if he needs help,” the Emperor said.

Help?

The subordinate was shocked by his words.. Such treatment had never happened in the Imperial Court before. After all, the sovereign Emperor had never needed to please anyone.

But it was obvious that the Emperor was already trying to please Han Jingru.

The subordinates did not dare to comment further. He had no choice but to do as instructed.

Xixiang City, Mount Phoenix.

Han Jingru took Jiang Yingying for a walk around the foot of the mountain to familiarize herself with the surrounding environment.

“Yingying, what kind of life do you want to live if all of your problems are solved?” Han Jingru asked Jiang Yingying.

“My mother’s biggest wish is to see me get married and to give her a grandchild. I may do that once I’m back there,” Jiang Yingying said. It was the life that an ordinary person should have. Although at the moment she had experienced the

opposite of ordinary, she would always be herself when she returned to her mother's side. Hence, she would still choose to live an ordinary life.

“You don't look forward to more in life?” Han Jingru asked curiously.

“Look forward to my prince charming in his chariot?” Jiang Yingying asked with a chuckle. “I used to have that dream. Unfortunately, there's no such thing in this world.”

“Actually, Huang Xiaoyong is a reliable man. He'll be a good choice if he changes those habit of his,” Han Jingru said. Although his remark was a little heartless, he really wanted to bring these two together. After all, to a certain extent, Huang Xiaoyong was someone dependable.

“That man?” Jiang Yingying snorted disdainfully at the thought of Huang Xiaoyong. Fortunately, Huang Xiaoyong and Bailing Wan'er had gone up to the mountain. He probably would be heartbroken again if he were to see Jiang Yingying's disdainful looks at the mention of his name.

“He has his flaws, and there’s no denying that. But he can change,” Han Jingru said.

“Men are liars,” Jiang Yingying said unwittingly.

Oh no, how could I say those words? Han Jingru will be embarrassed with what I said. After all, he’s also a man.

Just when Jiang Yingying realized that and wanted to explain herself, a young couple appeared in front of them and interrupted their conversations.

“I knew you would show up again. But I didn’t expect you to bring an accomplice with you this time,” Han Jingru said calmly.

Fei Ling’er smiled and appeared innocent. She said, “He’s not my accomplice. He’s my brother who lives in Xixiang City. He came to look for me when he heard that I’d be here.”

“Really? What is his name? If he lives in Xixiang City, then there should be a record of it. If you dare, let me know his name, and I’ll get Ximen

Jin to check it out,” Han Jingru scoffed.

Fei Ling'er nodded, and without a slightest guilty conscience, she said, “Of course. If you want to run a check, be my guest. His name is Fei Qingshan.”

“Go and inform Ximen Jin and get him to look up for a person named Fei Qingshan,” Han Jingru said to Jiang Yingying.

“Okay,” Jiang Yingying nodded and left.

Han Jingru stared at the so-called brother and sister. He knew that the relationship between these two had to be fake. But why did this man appear so suddenly? Could it be that Fei Ling'er sought his help for a certain hurdle?

But Han Jingru had not noticed any strange behavior in Fei Ling'er over a long period of time.

Was I too careless?

Or was it because Fei Ling'er had always been overly guarded and secretive?

He developed a sense of threat as his thoughts ran through his head. It would be a wake-up call for him if Fei Ling'er were to plot something out of his radar.

“Why do you want to establish a sect?” Fei Ling'er asked. She had not panicked when Han Jingru said he would investigate Yi Qingshan's identity, and that was because she had dealt with the matter before she came to see Han Jingru.

At that moment, Yi Qingshan had great admiration for Fei Ling'er. Earlier on, he had not understood why would Fei Ling'er go out of her way. But now, he saw how good she was in taking precautionary measures.

“You really want to know?” Han Jingru asked.

“I wouldn't ask you if I'm not curious. In case you didn't know, you're required to get the

Emperor's permission to establish a sect. It's obvious that you didn't inform the Dragon Emperor Palace about it," Fei Ling'er said.

"Are you from the Dragon Emperor Palace?" Han Jingru avoided answering her question. After all, he couldn't spill out his affairs to someone like Fei Ling'er.

"It seems that we can't get an answer out of each other. It'll be pointless to ask further, wouldn't it?" Fei Ling'er said with a smile.

"How can it be pointless? You're dodging my question, and that shows that you're hiding something about your identity. That's enough to tell me what I wanted to know," Han Jingru said.

Fei Ling'er knitted her brows. Although Han Jingru was somewhat calling her bluff, she knew that she had clearly lost in this confrontation.

"It's so hard to deal with someone like you," Fei Ling'er said with a sigh. In her point of view, Han Jingru was a scheming and manipulative man.

“So, it’ll be best for you to leave as soon as possible.” With that, Han Jingru turned around and left.

Fei Ling’er clenched her fists in anger.

Upon seeing her reaction, Yi Qingshan joked, “I’ve never expected you to be so pissed off. This young man is really pushing your buttons.”

“Am I a joke to you?” Fei Ling’er looked at Yi Qingshan with murderous intent.

Yi Qingshan shook his head quickly and explained, “Don’t get me wrong, I’m not laughing at you. I just thought that this young man is truly extraordinary.”

“Hmph!” Fei Ling’er let out a cold snort and said, “Sooner or later, I will find out everything about him. Nothing can be kept a secret from me in the Imperial Court.”

Yi Qingshan pursed his lips with disdain. *Nothing can be kept a secret from her? She’s so full of herself. She doesn’t even know Han Jingru’s identity.*

Of course, Yi Qingshan kept his thoughts to himself. Fei Ling'er was already boiling in anger, and he definitely wouldn't want to add fuel to the fire.

Although Yi Qingshan was as good as Fei Ling'er, he secretly harbored thoughts about her, and that might make him in a disadvantaged position.

“Think about it, how did the Emperor find out about him establishing his own sect?” Yi Qingshan asked curiously.

Fei Ling'er thought for a while, then shook her head and said, “If the Emperor wanted to stop Han Jingru, then he would have sent someone long ago. As far as I know, there hasn't been any news from the Dragon Emperor Palace. I'm guessing the Emperor chose to close his eyes on this.”

Yi Qingshan sighed wistfully and said, “Even the Emperor himself does not dare to interfere. It

seems that there's going to be a big change in the Imperial Court.”

Although Fei Ling'er wanted to refute Yi Qingshan, she knew that he had a point.

After the news broke out about the opening of a sect in Mount Phoenix, many people had gathered at the mountain. Many of them brought along their children, with the hopes that the children would be able to join the sect.

Most of these people were from the lowest class of the Imperial Court. They were the poor who wanted to have a change in their destiny. Joining the sect was the best choice because they would be free from the lowest class once they've become Cultivators. However, it was extremely difficult for people like them to join the sect.

In the Imperial Court, one must be able to contribute to the sect to join it. Just like the children on earth, their parents would have to fork out a lot of money to enroll them in the best schools. It was an insurmountable threshold for those who were poor.

Therefore, most people brought their children here to try their luck. They had never thought of truly qualifying to join the sect but to at least seize this opportunity to try to change their fates.

“Master, many have gathered in Phoenix Mountain right now. It looks like those people are here to join the sect.” Back in Ximen’s residence, Huang Xiaoyong immediately notified Han Jingru of the news.

It was a good thing for people to show interest in joining the sect because they were in the early stages of establishing the sect. Han Jingru then said, “I’ll leave it to you to deal with this matter, and try to get it settled as soon as possible. I’ve asked Ximen Jin to help out with the badges for the sect. We’ll distribute the badges to them once it’s ready.”

Han Jingru followed the Apocalypse method of using four separate ranks to distinguish the statuses of the disciples in the sect. Each disciple would be equipped with a badge that would serve as their proof of identity.

“But Master, they are poor people.” Huang Xiaoyong said with a look of embarrassment. He was aware that there were other sects that only took in apprentices who were extremely talented and those who could afford to pump in money into the sect. With the money, only then the sect could continue to grow. But the people in Mount Phoenix were from the poor, and it was clearly impossible for them to come up with that kind of money.

If they were to help these poor people, then there would be nothing left for the sect.

“What’s wrong with the poor?” Han Jingru frowned. He was not a snobbish person, and he hated snobs. Therefore, he was annoyed by Huang Xiaoyong’s negative comment.

“Master, if you think about it, these poor people can’t even afford to buy their own food. If they were to join the sect, we’d have to start providing food for them. And that’s going to drain the sect’s financial resources.” Huang Xiaoyong said. He had forgotten that money meant nothing to Han Jingru.

“Huang Xiaoyong, I did not ask you for money when I took you as my disciple. Also, you should know by now how valuable is the Holy Chestnut that I gave to you. If I were to ask you to pay for it, would you be able to?” Han Jingru said coldly.

Huang Xiaoyong’s eyes twitched when he heard that. Even Longyun City’s governor’s residence was of little value compared to the Holy Chestnut. The Holy Chestnut was a priceless treasure.

“I know what to do now, Master,” Huang Xiaoyong said.

“Don’t worry about it. With the financial support from the Ximen family, the sect won’t be entangled in money problems,” Han Jingru said.



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“I’ve got it, Master. I’ll get right on it,” Huang Xiaoyong said.

Han Jingru would not let that cause an estrangement between him and Huang Xiaoyong as he knew he said that for the sake of the Sect. However, he must change Huang Xiaoyong’s thoughts.

Not long after Huang Xiaoyong left, Jiang Yingying came to Han Jingru’s room.

Han Jingru asked her with a smile, “Have you come up with a name for the Sect? It’s such a tall order for you. I believe you wouldn’t let me down, would you?”

Jiang Yingying looked really confident. She was certain that Han Jingru would definitely be satisfied with that name.

“Jingru, I’ve already had an idea. I am sure you will like it,” Jiang Yingying said.

“Let’s hear it” Han Jingru grinned and asked.

“‘Jingru Sect.’ It was named after your given name yet it is meaningful and significant. The Sect is founded by you, and it’s your world. Hence, it brings out the idea of you are the center of your own world. Sounds strong and powerful enough, right?” Jiang Yingying answered. She had been thinking extremely hard for the Sect name before the idea of ‘Jingru Sect’ struck her. In fact, she couldn’t think of anything better than that.

Han Jingru was in a momentary daze. He had been thinking about his Sect name, only to find out that it’s always been there.

Furthermore, the meaning behind ‘Jingru Sect’ is one of a kind.

“Awesome!” Jingru Sect it is then. I am the center of my own world,” he said, with satisfaction in his voice.

Jiang Yingying replied gladly, “I will inform Ximen Jin if it sounds good to you.” It was expected that Han Jingru would be satisfied with the name. She couldn’t help but felt proud to see

his delighted face with her own eyes as she was the one who came up with that name after all.

Besides, 'Jingru Sect' was likely to become the most powerful Sect in Xenos.

"Go ahead and let those disciples know the name of the Sect that they're in," Han Jingru replied.

"We've already got disciples in the Sect?" Jiang Yingying questioned in great surprise. She never expected the Sect to have disciples so soon since it was just founded.

Han Jingru explained, "Some children from the poor. I guess they are taking this opportunity to change their destiny. I believe children like this are tougher. Hopefully, they won't disappoint me."

Jiang Yingying nodded in agreement. She was from a poor family as well. Therefore, she always has empathy for the poor instead of prejudicing them.

Ximen Jin supervised the production of their

gold-painted plaque on his own to ensure everything goes well. There was no margin for error.

He took a deep breath as soon as he saw the golden letters 'Jingru Sect' on the plaque. Things have finally got to that point, implying the battle between Jingru Sect and the Imperial Court could break out at any moment. Both parties were seemed to be spoiling for a fight.

Ximen Jin couldn't read Han Jingru's thoughts on his ultimate purpose. However, he knew that a battle between Han Jingru and Dragon Emperor Palace would begin sooner or later. That would be a battle to determine the destiny of Ximen family.

"There is no turning back at this point," Ximen Jin indifferently said.

"Ever since I signed a contract with him, there was totally no way back." Zhong Qishan replied. His life was in Han Jingru's hands, but he wouldn't waste his time thinking about other things at all. The only thing he cared about was to

follow Han Jingru's footsteps.

“Perhaps, Ximen family could reach an unprecedented level. On the contrary, we would be going to follow the same disastrous road as the Bailing family,” Ximen Jin helplessly said.

There's nothing much he could do but to leave it all up to fate, as Han Jingru had everything in the palm of his hands.

Zhong Qishan then said, “Out of the two possibilities, the former is more likely.”

Ximen Jin looked at him in disbelief. He didn't expect Zhong Qishan would say something like that.

“Why do you think so?” Ximen Jin asked, looking puzzled. There must've been something that he knew, else he wouldn't say such groundless words.

Zhong Qishan still remembered clearly that Fei Lingsheng was sitting on the wall. Obviously, the relationship between Fei Lingsheng and Han Jingru was something they were hiding. If Fei

Lingsheng were to help him, the Dynasty of the Emperor might change hands one day.

The combined power of two Pinnacle Stage fighters was extraordinary. It was something that even the Emperor could not contend with.

“Do you still remember the girl who sat on the wall during the fight at the summit? That girl who reprimanded by your Grandfather,” Zhong Qishan questioned.

Ximen Chang nodded. He did not pay attention to that girl intentionally but it was quite unforgettable for him as he saw Ximen Chang reprimanding her.

“Does it have anything to do with her?” Ximen Jin asked; he was confused.

“Do you have any idea who she is?” Zhong Qishan asked.

Ximen Jin shook his head in response, “Wasn’t she just a young lady? Could she be a big shot?”

Zhong Qishan said with a disdainful smile, “Young lady? Her name is Fei Lingsheng. You could have died a hundred times for disrespecting her!”

“W-what?” Ximen Jin widened his eyes in disbelief.

Fei Lingsheng?

Fei Lingsheng was a well-known Pinnacle Master of the Imperial Court.

I can't believe it's her!

“You are not pulling my leg, are you? How could it be her?” Ximen Jin wiped the sweat off his forehead. He was frightened. As Ximen Chang was reprimanding her that day, Ximen Jin thought in his heart that the young lady was surely asking for trouble. Thinking about it, Ximen Chang had actually been to hell and back.

No one dares to scold Fei Lingsheng in this world.

“Why would I joke about something like this? I’ve met her once,” Zhong Qishan answered.

Ximen Jin took a deep breath, trying to calm himself down.

This was just too shocking for him. Fei Lingsheng was a legend after all. He never thought he would meet a legend in person someday.

“So, you’re saying that Han Jingru will join hands with Fei Lingsheng? His heart started racing furiously the moment he finished his words. The Emperor had a trump card in Dragon Emperor Palace, but he was against two Pinnacle Master. Would his trump card make any difference at this point?

Could it be that Han Jingru would really overthrow the Emperor’s Dynasty?

Zhong Qishan shook his head. He couldn’t tell if the two fighters were going to join hands against enemies, nor their relationship. Since Fei Lingsheng appeared to be around Han Jingru,

there must be something hidden between them.

“Time will tell,” Zhong Qishan said.

Ximen Jin heaved a sigh of relief and said, “How thrilling! I can’t wait to see how things turn out.”



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Ximen Jin felt conflicted. On one hand, he was worried that the Ximen family would follow in the footsteps of the Bailings in this matter. On the other hand, he hoped to see war between Han Jingru and the Emperor.

After all, there was no historical precedent. He really wanted to see if the authority of the Emperor could be challenged and also what could the possible consequences be.

In fact, he hoped for Han Jingru to successfully turn the tables around in the Imperial Court. *What are the odds of seeing this happening?* Now that he got an opportunity to do so, he would definitely want to seize it.

Jingru Sect officially started operations. Though it was a new sect, its reputation had superseded its existence in the Imperial Court. The establishment of a sect requires the acknowledgment of the Emperor. However, that was not the case with Jingru Sect. Therefore, everyone else was looking forward to seeing the reaction of the Emperor.

The sect nearest to Jingru Sect was Piaomiao Sect, which was a hundred miles away.

Within the Imperial Court, Piaomiao Sect was one of the very special sects, consisting of only women. Their principle was not to accept any male followers.

“Madam, what is Han Jingru thinking? He has established a sect without any courtesy for the Emperor. Is he planning a mutiny?” The elder of the sect, Yan Qinghua, was a very charming middle-aged woman. Her gestures and demeanor were filled with exceptional elegance of a mature lady. A single bat of her eyelid would send all men into a frenzy. She loved wearing pink skirts to show off her long legs and that had made many guys go crazy.

The woman standing next to the sect leader was Madam Zhantai Liuyue. Although they were both of similar age, Zhantai Liuyue seemed more sensible and did not look as intimidating. Her looks gave people a refreshing and pure impression. For those who appreciated her beauty, they would regard her as a captivatingly

attractive woman, more so when compared to Yan Qinghua.

Zhantai Liuyue shook her head. Recently, she had heard many rumors about Han Jingru. Each of them spoke about his spontaneity and his peculiarity. *Nobody really understands him, be it his experience in Longyun City or his behaviors in Fengshang City. He seems to be very unpredictable and random, not one who goes by the book.*

“I don’t know what is he thinking, but based on his capability, he can really achieve what he sets his mind to do,” Zhantai Liuyue commented.

“Doesn’t he care about the Emperor? He shall face his wrath if he angers the Emperor,” Yan Qinghua made a passing remark.

Zhantai Liuyue gave an alluring smile. “Didn’t you notice that the Emperor isn’t willing to make an enemy of him?”

“How is that possible? It can’t be that the Emperor is afraid of him?” Yan Qinghua scoffed.

“Of course not, but he has his own set of worries.” After pondering for a moment, Zhantai Liuyue continued, “Do you know why did the Emperor send people to Longyun City for the second time?”

“Wasn’t it to get that fellow?” Yan Qinghua was baffled. *This isn’t any secret. Besides the civilians in the Imperial Court, almost every notable sect and family are already aware of this.*

“If only it was that simple. I heard from a friend that the first team which was sent to Longyun City vanished into thin air. Up till now, three of the Seventh Stage fighters couldn’t be located,” Zhantai Liuyue explained.

“Couldn’t be located?” Puzzled, Yan Qinghua asked, “Madam, what do you mean?”

“No doubt you have a pretty face, but you lack intelligence. What could it possibly mean when the Seventh Stage fighters who went to Longyun City disappeared for no apparent reason? The biggest speculation was that they had been killed by Han Jingru,” Zhantai Liuyue said helplessly.

“What?” A look of utter disbelief sprawled across Yan Qinghua’s face.

Killing the members of the Imperial Court implies a downright disrespect to the Emperor.

How could this be possible?

If he truly were the murderer, would the Emperor let him off so easily?

“Madam, are you sure? If he has killed those from the Imperial Court, why didn’t the Emperor impose any punishment on him?” Yan Qinghua tried to understand the logic.

“That’s the reason why nobody stopped him from establishing his own sect. Even the Emperor was wary of his capability. Though nobody knows which stage he’s in, the way he fought the Elite 28 was sufficient to showcase his status as a Pinnacle Master.” Zhantai Liuyue looked rather serious when she explained the reason behind the Emperor’s leniency towards Han Jingru.

A Pinnacle Master can’t destroy heaven and earth, but it was a pi

ece of cake for him to demolish a city, if he wants to.

“Madam, do you think that he has reached the Pinnacle Stage?” Yan Qinghua asked carefully.

“It’s not just my personal opinion. He has proved it himself.” Zhantai Liuyue sighed. *There are no qualms about his status, as demonstrated during his battle against the Elite 28.*

“If that’s the case...” Yan Qinghua took out an album and a fangirling expression settled on her face. “I wonder if he’s as handsome as the sketches in this album.”

Seeing her reaction, Zhantai Liuyue shrugged her shoulders. *Although the sect has a strict rule for not accepting any male disciples, it doesn’t prohibit the followers from interacting with men. In fact, there are followers who had gotten married, just that they aren’t allowed to bring their husbands into the sect.*

Obviously, Yan Qinghua is behaving like a nympho now.

“Do you actually believe in this nonsense? It’s something that the painter made up in order to earn a living,” Zhantai Liuyue stared in disbelief.

Regardless of the authenticity of the sketches, Yan Qinghua had a good impression of Han Jingru from the moment she laid her hands on the album. She admired how he founded his own sect but acted as if she were repulsed by it, because she was fearful that he would die young as a consequence of disrespecting the Emperor.

Now that she had discovered he was a Pinnacle Master, Yan Qinghua was relieved.

Even if the Emperor were not happy with him, the majesty could only keep this grievance under the carpet.

As long as he doesn’t visit the Dragon Emperor Palace in his lifetime, his life will be spared.

“I better get going. Jingru Sect will officiate its opening tomorrow. As their neighbor, we should prepare a decent gift, right?” After asking the rhetorical question, Yan Qinghua left without

waiting for Zhantai Liuyue to reply.

Zhantai Liuyue had thought about preparing a gift too but she had not come to a conclusion. *Should we maintain close contact with Jingru Sect? It's still not an acknowledged sect. If we get involved and displease the Emperor, the status of Piaomiao Sect could be at stake.*

Zhantai Liuyue walked to her bed and sat down. Looking rather guilty, she examined around and then took out an album underneath her pillow.

The album was a compilation of all of Han Jingru's sketches from the battle against the Elite 28.



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Zhantai Liuyue regarded the album as trash but who would have guessed she kept a copy for herself too. She even hid it under her pillow and read it daily.

“What kind of a person are you? So intriguing, that the hundreds of members of Piaomiao Sect are constantly gossiping about you,” she mumbled.

Though she had flipped the pages cover to cover countless times, she still got goosebumps each time she saw the fighting scenes. It was as if she was present on-site to witness the intense battle.

Meanwhile at Jingru Sect, on Mount Phoenix, Huang Xiaoyong had started accepting disciples.

He did not refuse any comers, so many kowtowed to thank him. However, he was indifferent towards their gratitude because he knew that the expenses of the sect would increase for each disciple admitted from a poor family.

It was not strange for him to have that thought as the hierarchy within Xenos was very apparent. It

was not easy for him to understand the perspectives and feelings of the poor and needy. Although his father was only a puppet ruler, he was still the son of a governor nominally. He led a drastically different lifestyle from the rest.

It was naturally unrealistic for him to accept the idea of being on an equal footing with the poor, let alone within a short period of time.

“Ugh, Master is accepting so many people and each of them is not paying a single dime. Our expenses are going to skyrocket!” Worried, Huang Xiaoyong complained to Jiang Yingying.

“There’s no point for you to rant. If you have any suggestions, feel free to bring them up to the master,” Jiang Yingying scorned.

Xiaoyong shook his head. *How dare I blabber on in front of Han Jingru, I could only grumble privately.*

“Yingying, do you know what Master is thinking? Other sects recruit disciples and make money out of it. As for us, we lose money

instead.” Huang Xiaoyong was completely baffled.

Jiang Yingying knew that Han Jingru was a righteous person. *He wouldn't be able to make the world a fairer place by his own accord, but he tries his very best to demonstrate his beliefs and values through each situation he faces.*

He prioritizes equity and equality, regardless of the person's background.

To him, money is like dirt, it's just mere numbers. Hence, he couldn't be bothered about it.

“If you want to earn money, then you should return to Longyun City. Your father is a governor, so you will have plenty of chances to make money there. Should I ask Jingru to release you?” Jiang Yingying suggested.

Huang Xiaoyong flinched in fear. “Yingying, you must be kidding. I can't bear to leave Master and want to serve him my whole life.”

She gave him a lopsided smile. *Huang Xiaoyong acts like a rogue sometimes. A*

person like him would chase after an easy and comfortable life, but why has he chose to stay by Jingru

“Becoming more powerful is not always a good thing,” said Jiang Yingying.

“You can say so because you’re very capable. Everyone looks out for the strongest seed in Xenos. Why would being powerful a bad thing?” he rebutted.

“Haven’t you heard? With greater power, comes greater responsibility and risks.” Jiang Yingying rolled her eyes. *Huang Xiaoyong is a complete airhead, he doesn’t think things through.*

“What risk is there to worry about when Master is around?” he answered.

Jiang Yingying was rendered speechless. *This fellow clearly has no idea the impact of establishing the Jingru Sect. The people from Dragon Emperor Palace have been seeing us as a thorn in the flesh and wouldn’t blink to have us destroyed.*

It's so tiring to communicate with this silly person. So, Jiang Yingying stopped responding to him.

Throughout the day, there had been over a hundred new disciples recruited into Jingru Sect. A majority of them were Tom, Dick, and Harry who had never practiced martial arts. With that, there was no significant value in elevating the overall status of the sect.

Half a month later.

Although the full construction of Jingru Sect had not been completed, the general layout could be seen already.

The financial strength of the Ximen family deserved a special mention. There were thousands of workers hired just for the construction alone. One could imagine the total expenses incurred daily. Han Jingru compared that to the real estate industry on earth. The only difference was that developers would expect returns of their investments whereas the resources invested by Ximen Jin were considered lost.

What he could earn in return was an opportunity brought about by Jingru Sect.

One day, while Han Jingru was enjoying the warmth of the sun by the pond in his mansion, Ximen Jin approached him with a jar of fine wine.

“Mr. Han, this is specially brewed by the Ximen family. Please enjoy.” Ximen Jin smiled as he shared the wine with Han Jingru.

With regards to drinking, Han Jingru had no preference. Any type of wine, no matter how good it was, would only taste astringent to him.

Since Ximen Jin was already there to pay him a visit, Han Jingru would not turn him down.

“You won’t come all the way for nothing. What can I do for you?” Han Jingru went straight to the point.

“Mr. Han, I do have a favor to ask.” Seeing how direct Han Jingru was, Ximen Jin stopped beating around the bush.

“Go ahead.”

“There’s a restricted area in Ximen family, but I don’t know how to access it. So, I hope that you can help me,” Ximen Jin explained the purpose of his visit. The restricted area belonged to the patriarch. In the past, only Ximen Chang knew how to enter it. After his passing, the access was never made known to anyone. Ximen Jin had tried multiple ways and even got help from Zhong Qishan, but to no avail. Han Jingru would be his last resort.

Ximen Jin had the impression that the most precious items in the family were kept in the restricted area. Therefore, he must find a way to open its door.

“Since it’s the family’s restricted area, it’s not appropriate for me to access the place, don’t you think so?” Though Han Jingru acted calmly, he was very intrigued. *There must be a lot of amazing things inside the restricted area, owned by a prominent family from the Imperial Court. Maybe there’s something worth exploring?*

“There’s nothing inappropriate about it, for everything in the Ximen family belongs to you, Mr. Han. Please don’t hesitate to claim the items if you’re interested in any.” Ximen Jin was a wise man. He had planned his offer to Han Jingru since he needed his help.

Raising both his brows, Han Jingru was pleased. *It’s easy to communicate with someone smart. He already knows what to do before I need to say it.*

“In that case, please bring me to have a look,” Han Jingru replied.



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The both of them forwent the fine wine and headed to Ximen Jin's room.

It was previously occupied by Ximen Chang. Every patriarch of the Ximen family would stay in that room because the passage to the restricted area was in that room.

It was an unbearable thing to do for Ximen Jin to guard the restricted area, knowing that he had no access to it. Otherwise, he would not have asked Han Jingru to help him. After all, getting a favor from Han Jingru would result in some losses.

After Ximen Jin had opened the door to the secret room, they followed the passage and walked further into it.

The passage was so narrow, they had to walk in a single file. It seemed to be quite a distance. After walking for several minutes, they finally reached another door.

“Mr. Han, this door is made of very special material. It can't be opened by force,” Ximen Jin explained. In a way, he was reminding Han

Jingru not to rely on physical strength to open the door.

Han Jingru was stunned to see that the door was made of a type of material he was familiar with. Although he could not determine what it was exactly, he knew it was a type of special steel. *How did this material get to Xenos?*

This is supposed to be something from the earth!

A resource from Earth has landed in Xenos.

He stared at Ximen Jin with a penetrating gaze.

Mr. Yi said that Apocalypse has sent many people to Xenos, but none of them has ever returned to the earth.

Does it mean that Ximen family has something to do with Apocalypse?

Or that the Apocalypse was built by someone from Ximen family? That's why they know the skills well?

Within moments, Han Jingru dismissed his speculations. *Even if they have the skills and the know-how, it must be coupled with the right tool and equipment in order to produce such a perfect door.*

“What’s wrong, Mr. Han?” Ximen Jin bowed his head, as he was terrified by Han Jingru’s gaze.

“Nothing. This door is so strange. I haven’t seen this type of material before,” Han Jingru replied.

Ximen Jin nodded. *I haven’t seen it before either. It seems to be multiple times harder than steel.*

“Mr. Han, have you any idea to open it?” Ximen Jin was eager to find out.

Han Jingru smiled. He had discovered a passcode lock. *It’s not difficult to open the door, it just takes time.*

He could not figure out why would the door appear in Xenos. *If on Earth, this level of anti-theft door is usually used in bank vaults.*

“Have you thought about finding another entry to the restricted area? This door may stop you here, but you should be able to dig your way inside from other locations.” Han Jingru asked.

Ximen Jin gave him a bittersweet smile. He had tried that method before, only to realize that the surroundings of the restricted area were barricaded with the same type of material. It was like burying a metal box underground. There was no other entry, except for the one before their eyes.

Han Jingru was astonished to hear his explanation. *Who left this here? What’s actually kept inside the area?*

“You go out first and let me try,” Han Jingru told Ximen Jin.

Ximen Jin was troubled by it but he quickly hid his facial expression and obliged Han Jingru’s order.

Once Ximen Jin left, Han Jingru started to worry. *I’m not a thief who’s skilled at unlocking doors. This type of passcode lock has its own challenge. If it operat*

es based on the same technology used on Earth, the unlocking process will be barred forever after several failed attempts. When that happens, one can dream on about opening it up ever again.

Han Jingru had actually watched many movies about thefts and had seen how doors were unlocked. However, he could not do much under the circumstance of some missing tools.

“Is there any way to get in there?” he mumbled.

The Ruby-eyed Python on his arm started to get energetic and excited. It had not gotten active for ages. Had it not for Han Jingru who suppressed it in the last great battle, it would have taken action and the outcomes would have been beyond words.

A magical familiar like the Ruby-eyed Python belonged in the Dark Forest. Although Han Jingru could not confirm its rank, it was definitely incomparable with any other familiars.

“Don’t be so thrilled. If you can’t open it, then stay here obediently. If you can, I’ll let you have

fun for a few days. What do you say?" Han Jingru laid out his options.

Hearing those words, the Ruby-eyed Python became very eager and showed its fangs ecstatically.

Suddenly, it exuded a radiant ray of light. It might seem gentle to the eye, but the light contained a great deal of energy.

When it made its way up the door, the door started to melt away and gave out a sizzling sound. Han Jingru was shocked to the bone to witness the massive corrosion.

A cold shiver was sent down his spine when he thought about how long the python had been staying on his arm. *If it uses such incredible power on me, I could kiss my hand goodbye anytime.*

Thankfully, Han Jingru had an agreement with the Ruby-eyed Python that both their lives were intertwined. They were one. Thus, he firmly believed that the Ruby-eyed Python would never

hurt him.

“I didn’t expect you to have such power.” Seeing a big hole on the door, a satisfied smug settled on Han Jingru’s face. *This wasn’t as big a problem as I thought it was. All I needed to do was to watch it happen.*

Right then, the Ruby-eyed Python stopped and showed its fangs to Han Jingru again.

“Rest assured that you’ll get your freedom for a few days if I could get in,” Han Jingru stated.

His assurance motivated the Ruby-eyed Python to work exceptionally hard in corroding the door.

Within moments, the hole became bigger as the Ruby-eyed Python completed its mission.

Han Jingru let it return to his arm before calling Ximen Jin.

When he saw the big hole in the door, he was stupefied. *Zhong Qishan once declared that even a Pinnacle Master could not open the door with force, but Han Jingru did it!*

Doesn't this go to show that Han Jingru is greater than a Pinnacle Master?

“This is your house. Please lead the way,” Han Jingru told Ximen Jin.

“Thank you so much, Mr. Han!” Ximen Jin was so excited to finally entered the restricted area, the place where all the rare and precious belongings of the Ximen family were kept. Only Ximen Chang was allowed to know all these in the past, but at last, he had the chance to reveal the mystery.

Ximen Jin was the first one to enter, followed by Han Jingru.

Though it was named a restricted area, it was more like a secret room in reality. The space was not as big as expected, but they were dazzled by the number of finery before their eyes. A simple wooden box at the corner captivated Han Jingru's attention.

For some reason, there was an inexplicable energy luring him to the box.



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The energy made him walk towards the wooden box automatically. A strange feeling rose within him; a very familiar feeling in fact.

Ximen Jin noticed Han Jingru's peculiar reaction and channeled his focus on the same box.

To him, the box was the least attractive item in the entire room. Yet, he knew that it must be something unique since Han Jingru valued it so much.

I've promised Han Jingru that he could claim any item he wants if we could enter the restricted area successfully. I can't go back on my word.

“What is it, Mr. Han?” he asked.

Han Jingru shook his head. He had no idea what was going on either. There was a strange attraction from the box, but he was not able to describe the feeling literally.

“Do you know what's that?” Han Jingru posted the same question.

Ximen Jin had never been inside the room and was without a clue about anything there. The best answer he could give was to admit his ignorance.

“Only the patriarch of each generation could come inside. So, I don’t know much about the things here.”

Han Jingru nodded. “You haven’t forgotten your promise, have you?”

“If you like it, feel free to take it.” As much as he was reluctant to give it away, he had to. *Nothing could stop Han Jingru even if I refused to do so.*

Holding the wooden box in his hands, Han Jingru did not open it immediately but chose to exit the room.

His action confounded Ximen Jin. He did not expect not to have a chance to view the item inside of the box.

“Seems like the best stuff has been taken away,” Ximen Jin said helplessly after Han Jingru walked out of the room.

Han Jingru darted to his bedroom and shut the door behind him to prevent anyone from intruding.

He had a hunch that the item inside of the box was largely related to him. *It was the same, strong attraction when I was in Apocalypse. Then, it disappeared after coming to Xenos.*

I've not experienced that until today.

Han Jingru was uncertain if the same feeling felt in the past was from the box, but he knew that there was a huge connection between the two.

He opened the box. What was presented before his eyes were nothing close to a rare gem or treasure. On the contrary, it was something unremarkable. In fact, some would even find it inauspicious.

It's a leg bone! A decayed leg bone, to be exact.

When he saw that, he recalled the skulls he received on Earth. He was not sure if the two different bones were from the same body, but

they both gave him a very familiar feeling. .

He took a deep breath. The skulls had been a part of him. Similarly, the piece of leg bone seemed to contain an amazing level of energy. It was as if he had predicted the leg bone would become a part of him too.

Although this would significantly increase my power, I need to find out where did the bones come from. Whom are they for? Why are they able to become one with my body? A series of unanswered questions troubled Han Jingru.

There must be a big hidden secret behind all these. In order for it to be undisclosed, I might need to find a full set of skeletons.

“Who are you? Your energy-filled bones... are they for me?” he talked to himself.

At that moment, a series of continuous knocking could be heard from the door. *That must be Huang Xiaoyong because Jiang Yingying would never disturb me with such quick and rushed multiple knocks.*

He kept the bone before opening the door.

Huang Xiaoyong stood there, panting.

“Did the sky fall?” Han Jingru asked casually.

“Master, something big happened.” Huang Xiaoyong was still trying to catch his breath.

“I’m going to break your leg if it was something petty. Say it, what happened?” Han Jingru said.

“Someone from the Dragon Emperor Palace is here.” Huang Xiaoyong ran all the way from Mount Phoenix to Ximen residence. He was panic-stricken, albeit it was already his third time meeting people from the Dragon Emperor Palace,

Hearing that, Han Jingru frowned. *It must be something of considerable importance. I wonder what plans does the Emperor has this time.*

“Let’s go have a look,” Han Jingru ordered.

As soon as Han Jingru got the news, the spies in Xixiang City released the same news

concurrently.

Since the day Han Jingru established his own sect on Mount Phoenix, many unfamiliar faces appeared in Xixiang City. Some of these were secret agents from other families whereas the others were spies from other sects. They all had the same goal, which was to observe Han Jingru's every move.

Now that there were visitors from the Dragon Emperor Palace, these spies would notify their leaders at the first instance.

Upon arriving Mount Phoenix, Han Jingru noticed that the visitors from the Dragon Emperor Palace were not as intimidating as those who came before. Instead, they appeared approachable this time.

When they saw Han Jingru, they took the initiative to introduce themselves. "Hello Master Han, I'm Yuexia. I serve the Emperor."

Yuexia, what an interesting name. What Han Jingru did not know was that the name represented a powerful and importa

nt figure in the Dragon Emperor Palace.

Yuexia was the trusted aide of the Emperor, ranked beneath one man only. His presence in Xixiang City showed how much attention the Emperor was giving to the matter at hand.

“Hi. If you don’t mind, please call me Mr. Han or Jingru.” Han Jingru was not used to the title ‘Master’.

Yuexia smiled. “Calling you Mr. Han seems very distant. I’ll address you as Jingru.”

Han Jingru raised his brow as he was surprised by the easy-going attitude demonstrated by Yuexia. *This goes to confirm the Emperor’s stance too, that he isn’t looking for trouble.*

“There isn’t a proper place to host our guests here. Hope you don’t mind, Elder Yue.” Once Han Jingru blurted the name, he realized that it might not have been a suitable term to address Yuexia. *Elder Yue was also a nickname for a deity on Earth, who was known for his ability to matchmake. Not sure if there’s a similar myth in Xenos?*

Yuexia observed Han Jingru's change of expression and smiled. "Those who are close to me call me that too. So, it's perfectly fine. Don't worry about it."

"I wonder the purpose of your visit today," Han Jingru asked him directly. He did not beat around the bush because he was certain that Yuexia had an agenda.



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