The Vagaries of Fate

by abyss1

Summary

Another Mo Yuan/ Bai Qian/Ye Hua story.

Fate wasn’t always set in the stone, it changed and adjusted just as people changed. Sometimes destiny was deep, yet the fate was shallow.

Notes

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Prologue (*Revised)

Chapter Summary

The beginning of this story will follow the story line of 3L3W (TV version) to certain degrees with some significant diversions. Then from the middle to the end of story, it will completely reconstructed according to author's invention.

Chapter Notes

Comments and suggestions are always appreciated. I would love to read your feedback.

Su Su cautiously made her way forward. Her hands clutched the stone railing tightly, as she placed her foot on yet another step.

‘One foot in front of another’, she repeated it like a mantra.

Soon she would go back to where she should have been. Her thoughts drifted back to moments in the past. It was only a few short years, somehow it seemed like a lifetime ago.

Her heart clenched painfully when images from days long passed came to the front of her mind. She still remembered how she met her husband for the first time.

He stumbled into her home, bloody and injured. His horrible state should have made her wary of him; frightened and suspicious even. For all she knew, he could be a bandit-in-disguise, out to ransack her meager belonging and sully her innocence. And yet for some puzzling reasons, she welcomed him instead of driving him away, as any sane person should have done. She knew without any reassurance that he would not harm her and felt compelled to lend a hand.

She took care of him while he recuperating from his injuries. After his wounds were healed; she merely jested that he should repay her kindness. Somehow, instead of offering a bag of coins or pieces of jewelry, he offered himself. To be her companion. Up until that moment, she did not even fancy him in a romantic way; despite his appealing feature. And yet again she accepted him. Two people could accomplish a lot of things together, she reasoned. He was the better cook anyway.

As their life became more intertwined; her heart warmed up to him little by little. Till it became a habit to have him by her side. The first time he left her behind, she thought it would be alright. She had been living alone long before they met and she managed just fine. But each night, as she laid down on her bed, she found herself missing his warmth and his presence.

The second time he disappeared without any warning; she was beyond anxious. Doubting that he got another family waiting for him somewhere and already forgot her. Worrying that he had fallen prey to another ambush. And fearing that he would never come to see her again.
Then one day he appeared before her once again. She was so overjoyed to have him once again. She never bothered to ask him why he had abandoned her for all these years. That night they made love again and again until day broke. She told herself, him being with her was more than enough.

Then she was taken away from her only home and thrown into his desolate manor. She told herself once again it did not matter if he treated her coldly at time. She was still his wife and was bearing him the fruit of their love. She pushed away from her uncertainty of being in a strange and unknown place. She tried to stay strong even when her husband, the only one she could place her trust in, was sent away to the very frontline where battles raged. It seemed he never returned home again.

She bore the hostility of those around her with patience and perseverance. Everything would be better once he came back, she kept reminding herself. It did get better, at first. He was almost as caring and gentle with her the way he once was. Then like a house of cards; bit by bit things began to crumble between them and around them. His family and that woman had tried so hard to come between them; as they did many times before. Yet until that moment, she still believed they would never succeed. Her husband knew her. He still cared for her, protected her and their unborn child as best as he could.

But when the hands that once held her so lovingly finally turned on her. The trust, he unfailingly placed on her, once upon a time, wavered. And by that pair of hands, her eyes were robbed. Her freedom was gone forever. Lady Su Jin was right about one thing; she did not belong here anymore. Not when she no longer felt that love or warmth she once associated with being with him. Not when she was a mere nuisance in his eternal and grander life.

Now all he represented were terror, disappointment, and emptiness. How they came to this ending? She had asked herself more than once. Not that it mattered anymore. She was leaving him and everything behind. Her only regret was her son, Ali. She wished she could have him with her. But they would never allow a lowly mortal such as her to raise their prince.

To them, her station was far beneath a palace maid. Having her as his mother would only shame her son’s honor. She would not be a shameful blight on his glorious path. If letting him go would ensure he would have a bright future and good fortune ahead; she was more than willing to sacrifice her happiness as a mother. She would not be able to watch him growing up and become the man that she would be proud to call ‘her son’. And yet this was definitely the one and only thing she can do for him.

The strong wind blowing from beneath her feet hit her in the face and roused her from her stupor. Su Su realized she finally made it to her only chance of salvation. Although, she had decided to let go of everything - be it love or bitterness - and settled to never looked back to those miserable years again. She still wished to bid him her final farewell. It was such a befitting closure of their ill-fortunate meeting. He stumbled into her life, she out of his life.

Su Su retrieved the bronze mirror from her sleeve and fiddled with it the way he taught her. Once she was certain a connection was made between him and her. She said her part.

"Ye Hua, you let me go. So, I will let you go as well. From now on, neither one of us owes another anything."

There, she did it. She hoped he understood what she implied. She set both of them free. She did not wish to hold any animosity toward him. Bitterness was such a tiring emotion. It ate up everything inside her and left her hallowed. She did not want to feel it anymore.

She tossed the mirror to the ground and let herself go into free fall. The wind blew away the white
stripe cloth that covered her scarred eyes.

"If I could change the past, I wish we never met. Any destiny we have left, I wish no more. Let this lifetime be the last ……..”

Even before she finished her sentence, the vortex of energy under the Zhuxian Terrace already seized her in its merciless hold. It whipped at her, slashed her flesh open and burned her alive. Instead of devouring her soul and destroying her frail mortal body; its powerful onslaught shattered the Ghost Seal Qing Cang had forced upon her two hundred years ago. A retaliation since she tried to shut him back inside the Bell of the Eastern Emperor.

Her suppressed immortal essence leaked out, as the mortal shell began to crack apart. Such was the way the nine-tailed fox queen, Qing Qui’s Bai Qian returned. The unraveled essence of the newly-elevated Goddess rippled outward in short, powerful bursts. The revived Fox Queen shifted her head restlessly and tried to shy away from memories of her previous life. Only to be flooded and overwhelmed. There was nowhere to escape. Darkness came and she knew no more.

A day later. Her family’s old friend and confidante found her unconscious and gravely wounded-self in his Peachtree Woods. With High God Zhe Yan’s skillful practices in medicine; her exterior wounds healed at an accelerated rate. Yet it was the wound inside her heart that still festered.

Bai Qian withdrew completely into herself. She refused to say where she had been for the past three hundred years. Not even her favorite fourth brother succeed in his attempt to pry the truth out of her.

Zhe Yan spoke of how everyone at home searched tirelessly for her but always came up empty-handed. Yet the goddess remained steadfast in keeping her silence. She mentioned briefly that it was just a love trial and did not worth mentioning. Seeing how utterly broken she looked, Zhe Yan chose to let the matter dropped,

Another day passed by. Bai Qian decided she no longer wish to be haunted by Su Su and Ye Hua’s painful memories. After all, it already came to an end. She did not need a constant reminder of her own fall to disgrace.

The Goddess asked Zhe Yan for his special potion, made of the water from the River of Oblivion. Once drank, it granted that person a privilege to forget certain memory. It was high time for her to move on with her life. What would be better than starting from a clean slate?
Chapter 2 : (*Revised)

Chapter Summary

This chapter follows the original timeline/storyline of 3310 drama up to the point Bai Qian entered Grand Zhiming Palace to rescue Mo Yuan's body and take him back to Qing Qiu.

Italic text = Personal POV

:: Qing Qiu 300 years later::

Bai Qian woke up feeling lethargic and sore all over. Ouch. Should not have move too fast. The world tilted viciously with every movement; trying to sit up properly became a real challenge.

She vaguely recalled defeating all Ghost combatants that wretched Xuan Nu staged for her. Before leaving, she even took away Zhe Yan’s concealing magics from the woman. The Goddess remembered the utterly crazed looks on Xuan Nu's face. She reveled in that most satisfying outcomes; a smile of satisfaction adorned her mouth. She should have done that ages ago. It was revolting to watch the vile woman parading around wearing her face for years. Had she not concern about her mentor’s safety, Bai Qian would have gone a few more rounds at that pretentious snake. How dare she lay her rotten finger on his virtuous body! She fumed quietly.

It was quite a considerable feat she managed to bring both of them back to Qing Qiu at all. She blacked out once or twice on her way here; fortunately neither of them fell from the cloud and injured themselves further. Her last vision before completely losing her consciousness was seeing the Fox Den’s opening just ahead of her. Mi Gu must have brought her back inside and treated her injuries.

For once, Bai Qian was glad that Ye Hua and Ali had departed since yesterday to attend the Peach Blossom's Gathering in the Ninth Heaven. It would be more than nuisance and inconvenience to try to explain why she ‘who apparently had no connection to Kunlun Mountain’ had kept the missing body of High God Mo Yuan’s in Qing Qiu since the last Ghost War ended. Some Celestials still searched for him, she knew that much. There was no telling Ye Hua would do either, had he found out.

Although Ye Hua had treated her well from the beginning, she was still uncertain and wary of the real motives behind his prolonged visit to her Fox Den. He surprised her with his gentle handling of Ali. The Goddess never expected that from the man who was rumored to be as frigid as an ice pole. Despite the tentative trust she was willing to give him; she was not ready for him or anyone outside of her immediate family to discover the bond between her and her mentor.

Seventy thousand years already passed, High God Mo Yuan’s name was slowly forgotten and passed into legends among younger generation of immortals and deities. Still he was without any doubts their much revered God of War. If someone learned his body resided here; they are going to take him away from her. Would that mean her long and hard works were all for nothing?
Her trains of thought were cut short when Bi Fang came in bearing her a cup of freshly brew medicine. He fussed over her needlessly and expressed his displeasure that she was injured to such state. It turned out he had been in love with her for her whole life. Bai Qian was truly stumped with the revelation. She had absolutely no idea of his less-than-virtuous affection. Bi Fang hid it well, she had been fooled all along thinking he held some kind of grudges against her. He usually jumped out as soon as she stepped into a room. His unwilling to be in her presence for any extended time befuddled her. Until today. It was not her fault for failing to recognize his feelings if he never gathered enough courage to confess to her.

The man was delusional, Bai Qian frowned. He said if she was willing, he would gladly brave the wrath of the Celestial Clan and be with her. She rolled her eyes at that boastful claim. First, she did not favor him in the romantic way at all. Truthfully, she was touched with his sincerity and flattered with his devotion; yet romance was definitely not going to work between the two of them. Second, son of the Head of Bifang’s Clan or not, he was unlikely enough to stay Celestial's troop advances; if that ever happened to begin with.

_Seriously, the man had no tact._ She lamented.

She tried to let him down gently but he still went on and on with his declaration of love. Bai Qian bemoaned her tragic fate. Today was definitely not her day. With the seriousness of her injuries and left-over fatigue from riding cloud, with her mentor’s coffin, all the way back from Ghost Realm’s border. She was overdue a decent rest and respite. She was barely lucid enough to function, much less dealing with an amorous bird and his pent-up, unrequited love. Even so she tuned down her boredom a notch. She was not a rude person despite her current grouchiness fueled by pain and sleep deprivation. She gave him her honest and sincere appreciation before sending him away.

After drinking that vile, bitter medicine bottom up, she was more than ready to crawl back to her sleep. Bai Qian almost slapped her forehead with frustration when she suddenly remembered her mentor. Although she was certain Mi Gu who was always thorough and attentive to his tasks already placed him back at his resting place. She felt compelled to visit him and make sure he was comfortable there.

Bai Qian yelped when a sudden wave of pain raked her body. She move too fast and the muscles pulled at the way up to her slash wound. The trauma-induced pain forced Bai Qian to put her back against the wall for full support and caught her breathing. She waited until the tremor in her muscles subsided; then gingerly made her way to the Yanhua Cave.

Bai Qian sighed in relief when she saw her mentor laying properly on his usual place upon the stone slab. It seemed Mi Gu had outdone himself. Her mentor’s form looked pristine, as he should be, once again. His hair was combed neatly; he also bore new, clean attire. Bai Qian spent another moment observed her mentor before lowering herself to sit beside him.

She grabbed his cold, limp hand and placed it between her palms then pressed it against her cheek.

“Master, Seventeenth is truly sorry for not coming back in time. Xuan Nu was able to abduct you right from under my nose. She almost desecrated your body with her dark magics. This is because of my own negligence, I truly ashamed. I hope Master could find it in your heart to forgive me from allowing this transgression to happen.”

She closed her eyes and let out a tired sigh. “Master, at least Seventeenth had avenged your honor sufficiently. Did you know, yesterday my Jade Purity Fan of Kunlun drunk so much blood. Who would have thought one day I would make good of my words back then. This will serve them right of trying to use you for their own sinister gain.”
Feeling somewhat drained, she laid her chin down on the stone slab, close to his face.

“Master, Seventeenth have been waiting for you for over seventy thousand years already. When will you come back? Zhe Yan said you will be back soon but I see nothing has changed. How soon is that? Another ten thousand years?”

“Master, Seventeenth miss you. Will there be a day when we return to Kunlun Mountain together? Seventeenth will volunteer to sit in your every doctrines lecture, if that mean you will be back sooner.”

“Master, do you know lately Celestial’s Crown Prince keep coming to Qing Qiu. He claimed that since we are already engaged, it is only right for him to be here, getting to know me and vice versa. He is not a bad person, better than his wishy-washy uncle Sang Ji. Still, Seventeenth would rather stay with you. But mother insisted me to consider this alliance seriously and played no tricks on him. Seventeenth would rather shut the door in his face the first time he showed his face and move in here without the courtesy of 'by your leave.' She snorted rudely. This was still her land, not some places any Celestial can trespass as he pleased.

“He seems to like it here though; his pinched expression lessen somewhat while he stayed here. I think the Ninth Heaven must be too suffocating for him. Who would not? They are so stiff and boring all the time.” She wrinkled up her nose in distaste. "Rule for this, rule for that. Meh.”

"Oooh, I almost forget to tell you!” She perked up a little. "He even cooked for us. Can you believe that, Master? A Celestial's Prince who can actually cook? You should taste some of his dishes; they are really good. I am tempted to keep him around just for that. Mi Gu is useless in kitchen and Xiao Jiu did not come to visit anymore. I bet she is wrecking havoc on someone somewhere out there. The rascal.” Bai Qian smiled fondly at the thought of her only niece.

“Master, I forget to tell you about Ye Hua's son. I call him ‘Riceball’. Cute, isn’t it? His riceball is so adorable. He keeps calling me ‘mother this, mother that.’ I have no heart to correct him. I guess a step-mother or a mother is not that much different anyway. It’s truly pity. That boy lost his mother so early, I must remind him greatly of her.”

“Come to think of it, Ye Hua mistook me for her many times now. He even called me by her name. How infuriating! I should have felt insulted but I actually feel sorry for him. Seventeenth grows up a lot, don’t you see, Master? The old-me would just insult him back. But it is really heartbreaking that he is unable to move on from his wife’s death even three hundred years had passed.” She mused.

“Master, you do not mind if Seventeenth keep your company for a while, do you?” She yawned sleepily and asked, despite no one would deign to answer her. Her heavy eyelids dropped lower and lower. “Seventeenth just want to take a nap.” She laid down her head on the stone slab; her hand still held her mentor's tightly. Soon her breathing even out.
:: Qing Qiu’s Fox Den ::

When Zhe Yan and Bai Zhen made it to the Fox Den, their fifth sister was nowhere to be found. Bi Fang had sent a missive to the West Sea urging them to come back right away. Bai Qian was incapacitated; as to how, they did not have any idea. The bird did not go into details, only insisted upon his fear for her chance of survival.

Both were genuinely surprised learning that news. These days not many immortals across the four seas and eight realms would dare harm the Qing Qiu’s Aunt. Less than a handful would have succeeded anyway, had they tried. The couple wondered what kind of situation she found herself in.

Where is that comatose lass?

The Fox Den was not that complex; there was the kitchen, the sitting room and the bedroom. She was in none of those places. They eyed at each other meaningfully then nodded in agreement. Both left for the only other place they knew to find her.

And there she was, sleeping next to her mentor again.

Zhe Yan came closer to the stone slab; he let his eyes peruse Mo Yuan’s form as if wanting to check over for signs of changes.

No, not yet. It is too soon.

He can not wait to tell fifth sister what he had discovered prior his impromptu return. The fragments of spirit hidden deep inside the Crown Prince of the West Sea was undeniably Mo Yuan’s; weak and incomplete as they were. Her deeply-missed mentor was finally returning.

At one point, he strongly suspected that Ye Hua might be his reincarnation. But immortals normally do not take part in the cycles of life. That idea was inconceivable at best. And yet Ye Hua’s spirit showed too many startling traits similar to Mo Yuan’s. That alone was nearly impossible, for Mo Yuan was Heavenly Father’s only child.

The Winemaker God was more than willing to bet his entire stockpile of wine that if probe deeper Ye Hua’s essence would be exactly the same as Mo Yuan’s. That absurdity of the claim stopped him from announcing his discovery. Dwelling on ‘how was that even possible’ gave him headaches. So, he cast the puzzling thoughts aside.

Zhe Yan grabbed her shoulder and shook her lightly. “Fifth sister, wake up.”

The lass frowned deeply and refused to budge at first. “Zhe Yan, what are you doing here?” She sounded annoyed when his wake-up call was too persistent.

“Bi Feng sent for us, claiming you are almost dead. I am not going to pass up the chance to see you dying. Such a rare occurrence, so here we are.” He said with certain amusement.

Bai Zhen shook his head at his other half’s antics. Instead, he turned his attention on his only sister. “How did you become so injured?”
After Zhe Yan healed her injuries and forced that vile concoction he called medicine down her throat, Bai Qian spared some time to recount the exciting part of her recent escapade.

“So Ghost Lord knows Mo Yuan’s body is here,” mused Zhe Yan. His brow lift. “Wouldn’t that be a problem?"

“He will not breathe a word, I am quite certain.”

The Goddess shook her head, quickly dismissed the notion.

“If he did, he had to go into exact details why this confrontation occurred in the first place. Li Jing is not too keen to put the Ghost Realm on a tight spot like that, especially since it was his own Queen who instigated this fight first.”

Zhe Yan conceded the point and let it dropped. He had a far more pressing matter to discuss with her.

“Anyway, besides coming up here to check up on you. I have news for you as well. Your fourth brother and I have recently been to the West Sea Palace.”

“West Sea Palace, you say? Is this something to do with my first senior?” She glanced over at her elder brother. He and her eldest senior, Die Feng, had been drinking buddies for thousands of years.

“The Crown Prince of West Sea has been sick and bedridden for many centuries now. There is nothing wrong him physically but his condition keeps deteriorating. The King is quite desperate which is quite understandable; nobody has managed to cure him. Hundreds of healers had already tried and failed.”

Seeing her disinterest, Zhe Yan hid his smirk then continued.

“Your brother coaxed me there to see what is wrong with the Prince. It is a good thing he did. You should thank him later.”

Up to this point, Bai Qian only lend an ear, half-heartedly listening to his tale. Her eldest senior seemed fine after all. She blinked once in a while, so not to appear too rude. The Phoenix certainly could drone on and on about most ridiculous accounts when he wished too.

“Did you know what I find out? It has something to do with a certain God sleeping away blissfully over here.”

Or not.

Her head snapped up almost too painfully to watch. The Goddess tugged his hand with great urgency. “What about my mentor? Zhe Yan, tell me this instant.”

Zhe Yan almost laughed at her predictable manner.

“Easy, fifth sister.” He paused, purely for theatrical effect, then announced. “Mo Yuan is coming back soon.”

She dropped his arm unceremoniously; her eyes bulging with surprise. “What?”

“Zhe Yan, that is cruel. How could you joke about this.” She protested after a short silence. “Three hundred years ago you insisted that my mentor might be waking up. He never did. I ended up rejoicing over nothing.”
“I am speaking the truth, fifth sister.” Zhe Yan glared at her mildly. How could she ever doubted his competence? “Believe me. He is really coming back this time.”

Bai Qian slumped back in her seating, dazed and confused. Strangely, Zhe Yan’s voice seemed to come from a place so far away.

“In the beginning, I thought that Die Yong’s celestial aura was quite unusual. So I used my powers to investigate a bit. That was when I realized there are two spirits within him. He is the one who is awake, but the one that is asleep. The other spirit is that of your mentor, Mo Yuan.”

“How would you know?” She hesitated still not fully convinced.

“You learn that magic from me at a young age.” His tone implied how utterly non-sense her question was.

“Someone else is asleep in the Prince's body. I followed the traces and found fragments of broken spirit within him. Who else in all the realms could patch up pieces of spirit with just a bit of magic? Only Mo Yuan could do so,” he concluded.

The Goddess pondered on what he said and grudgingly accepted his reasoning. No one knew her mentor better than Zhe Yan. He was raised by the Heavenly Father and grew up together with Mo Yuan anyway. If there was one person who was able to recognize his celestial aura, it would be Zhe Yan.

“I was truly impressed when I saw him last night, you know. It took him seventy thousand years to recover to this state. His powers are still scattered though. He is in needs of someone else's immortal powers to sustain his spirit. Mo Yuan is now sleeping in the Prince’s body to recuperate,” Zhe Yan said cheerfully. He sorely missed his brother all these years.

“How does that Prince coping with my mentor in his body?” she wondered aloud.

“Die Yong is just about mediocre,” Zhe Yan did not hide his grimace. “Mo Yuan needs someone stronger, with greater cultivation to spare.”

“The Prince’s immortal powers are used to nurse himself and also Mo Yuan. As days gone by his body weakens. It will probably take another seven thousand years for him to wake up, if not longer.” He sounded a little disappointed.

“Another seven thousand years. That long?” The Goddess lamented. Had she not wait for him for so long already? She could almost see him open his eyes right now and call her ‘little seventeenth’ again.

“Let us go now, Zhe Yan.” She shot up quickly from her seating, impatient to see with her own eyes whether it was really him.

“Slow down, fifth sister. What about Ye Hua?” asked her brother. “Is he not living with you here?”

She waved off his worry right away. “He is attending the Peach Blossom Gathering in the Ninth Heaven with Ali. I will just leave a message with Mi Gu that something urgent came up.”

“Since this could take a while, he could go back to Xi Wu Palace and not loitering around here,” she said almost dismissively; a little guilty for not telling him herself.

She was really appreciate for all that he had done for her. She doubted someone else in an arranged marriage would treat her as nice as he did. But right at this very moment, her mentor recovery came
first.

Zhe Yan and Bai Zhen looked at each other with uncertainty and mixed feelings. Both thought she and the Crown Prince were getting along quite well and perhaps their marriage will soon follow. Their sister life had been put on hold since seventy thousand years ago. Only lately she began to go out again. And now Mo Yuan was returning. The wheel of destiny seemed to set in motion again, who knew where it might lead.
Bai Qian searched her brain for a good excuse for her abrupt departure, it wouldn’t do if she offended him somehow. First, she would thank him profusely for helping her on Yuan Zhen’s case. His meticulous plan and insights from Star Lord Shi Ming ensured everything fell smoothly into places. She was beyond impressed with his competence. Ninety thousand years younger than her, he was already able to come up with such a well thought-out plan. When he became the next Sky Lord, the Celestial Clan would be the most prosperous.

She paused for a moment to ponder more deeply; the quill hanging in midair. Ye Hua was also the most astute tactician. At first she was uncertain why would he was willing to help. After all it was his Side Consort who was wronged, even if he insisted he did not have any. Then she met Yuan Zhen, Shao Xin was right about that one. He was such a good fellow; obedient and kind-hearted. It was unimaginable he would try to harass anyone, so it only sounded that he must be accused wrongly or made a scapegoat.

Maybe it had something to do with the long-standing fraud between his parent and the Sky Lord? Considering how insightful Ye Hua was, he must came to this conclusion as well and wanted to intervene the boy’s undeserved fate. The boy was his nephew after all.

Besides should anyone bring this injustice up in the future, he would be able to negate it right away. If Yuan Zhen did not suffered during his time in Mortal Realm, what was there to upset over? To turn over a potential problem into nothing before it even became an issue. Bai Qian approved such a brilliant and well-executed move whole-heartedly. She also congratulated herself on her ability to figure Ye Hua out so beautifully.

After leaving her missive to Ye Hua with Mi Gu, she and Zhe Yan promptly left for the West Sea Palace. On the way he related her how the King of West Sea sought out healers from all over four seas and eight realms just to heal the Crown Prince. Unfortunately, his illness was not something that can be cured. Well, at least until her fourth brother dragged him there to take a look at him.

She simply said it was destined that her senior involved her brother in this matter. If not for him, it would be nearly impossible for them to track down her mentor’s spirit so soon. Zhe Yan warned her for Mo Yuan to recover, Die Yong’s body must be looked after closely. It would be a full-time job. Bai Qian just gave him a shrug. She did not think it was a burden or hardship at all. For her mentor, everything was worthwhile.

When both reached the West Sea Palace, the King was there waiting for them. Zhe Yan introduced her as his Emissary and assured the King she was very skilled in taking care of patients like the Crown Prince. The King looked ecstatic and very much relieved. Bai Qian used her position as his new care taker to make a request.

From now on, no one was to disturb her and her patient. She recited how solitude was critical to nurse the prince back to health. Of course, the King readily agreed.
The Goddess also learned her first senior was still at Kunlun Mountain for some reason unknown. It would be many days before he came back. That revelation was able to put her at ease. Though their mentor was coming back and there was no need for her to hide any longer, she really did not want to explain herself to him.

The King left shortly after introducing her to his eldest son. Bai Qian casted the sleeping spell on him and used the soul searching magic to track down her mentor’s spirit, just like Zhe Yan had suggested.

:: Dreamscape ::

Bai Qian was disheartened; she had walked around in this dreamscape for a while and found nothing. Where was that elusive spirit of her mentor? Just as she was about to lose all hope, she heard something.

The Fox Queen paused and listened carefully. The tune sounded vaguely familiar at first. Then she remembered. It was the chant of Lord Buddha she always heard when her mentor was still around. She decided to follow the voice. Maybe he would be there.

There, in the middle of the room, she stood looking forlornly at a body surrounded with white mist. It turned out he was none other than her perished mentor, High God Mo Yuan. Her heart cried out, she was delirious with happiness. It was really him, Zhe Yan did not lie to her.

She sat down close to him, tears ran down her face. The Fox Queen looked upon him with mixed feelings. The once almighty and powerful of God of War was reduced to this feeble fragments of spirit depending on another’s just to live on. Anyone else but she and Zhe Yan will not even recognize him. Considering Die Yong frail spiritual power, certainly it would take seven thousand years before the mentor’s spirit gaining enough strength to return to his own body.

“Master, I have finally found you. Seventeenth will do anything for you to return quickly. Master, you just wait for me.” She vowed to herself and to him.

:: End of Dreamless ::

Her head spun with numerous thoughts and possible scenarios. If she could borrow Celestial Clan’s Soul-Gathering Lamp, it would certainly speed up the process. But how would she explain why and whom she was asking it for? It would certainly arouse unwelcome suspicions since all of her immediate family were doing just fine. She had no other close friend; that was a well-known fact. Honestly, she rarely stepped her foot out of Qing Qiu for hundred thousand of years.

Bai Qian thought long and hard but can not find a reasonable excuse, unless she came clean about her being Kunlun Mountain’s Si Yin. But that would stirred up a lot of troubles from the past as well. The Celestial Clan no doubt would not be easily pacified.

In the end she decided, no matter the consequences, tomorrow she would go to the Ninth Heaven. Perhaps if she could talk to Ye Hua first, maybe he would lend it to her without probing too much into her business. At least that was what she hope; she closed her eyes and tried to find some sleep.
Outside of the Goddess room, the second prince of the West Sea was pacing back and forth. His handsome face twisted with agitation. When he heard that High God Zhe Yan came to see his elder brother a few days ago, he was worried. He left right after that for Kunlun Mountain. Chang Shan said it was urgent and imperative that he be there. Last night after meeting with his junior, he learned the shocking news of their mentor’s possible return. The Prince wasted no more time and rushed straight home.

His father told him Zhe Yan’s Emissary asked that no one was to disturb the Crown Prince, claiming it was necessary to his recovery. So he came here to ask if she had made any progress but found the Emissary was still resting. Suddenly, the door behind him opened and a woman came out.

“Emissary?” Die Feng was stunned, this woman’s face was very familiar to him.

“Si Yin?” He exclaimed in a tone of incredulity then hastily corrected himself. “No, she is a woman. How could she be Seventeenth? Could she be Xuan Nu?”

Furious that she could be Xuan Nu, he shouted at her harshly. “Speak up! What are you doing in the West Sea?”

Bai Qian let out a long, insufferable sigh; it seemed this confrontation was inevitably now. She stepped closer to him and said, “Senior, it is me. I am your Seventeenth junior.”

“You are Seventeenth? You really are Seventeenth?” His voice was skeptical with a tint of hope.

“I am sorry,” she blurted out; her head bowed down with guilt.

“I was too hasty back then, I took Master's body with me without consulting any of you. I am too ashamed to see all of my seniors.” She admitted.

“Seventeenth, you have kept us searching for years.” Die Feng said tiredly with hints of smile on his lips.

He pulled her form to him and held her tightly. “Seventy thousand years and I have finally found you.”

Then he pushed her back at arm’s length and took a really good look at her. “Why would you disguise yourself as a woman?” he finally asked.

“The maids said that Zhe Yan's emissary is staying here. That is you? Have you been hiding in the Peachtree Woods for all these years?”

“I have always been a girl, senior I only disguised myself as a man to train in Kunlun Mountain.”

She fiddled with her dress nervously; fully expecting his explosive reaction. But he just stared at her; like the fact was slowly sank in his mind that she was really a woman. Seeing disbelief written all over her senior's face, she continued.

“I am Fox King Bai Zhi’s youngest daughter, Bai Qian. I have deceived my seniors and Master for years. This is all my fault.” Her expression was full of regret and sadness.

“You really are a woman?”

“You really are a woman. You... you have deceived us for so long,” he said accusingly; then murmured her name again and again.
“No wonder hundreds of years ago when Qing Cang was said to break out of the Bell once again, it was Qing Qiu’s Bai Qian who sealed him up. She brought peace to all realms once more. I have always wondered how she knew what to do when only a disciple of Kunlun Mountain should know that magic.”

“Good! You have done well,” he praised then placed both of his hands on shoulder, padding it a few times to cheer her.

“Seventeenth, answer me now.” He looked intently into her eyes. “Where is Master’s body? Did you know that recently divine energy soared up in Kunlun Mountain? It is a sign that Master will soon return.”

“Really? There are signs in Kunlun Mountain already?” exclaimed Bai Qian.

Her senior narrowed his eyes. “So you already know that Master is returning?”

“I do,” she said. “This is the very reason why I am here at the West Sea.”

She recounted the story. How Zhe Yan found out their mentor’s spirit was now residing inside his elder brother. How his fragmented spirit appeared so weak and needed more cultivation to anchor his returning spirit. Finally, she informed him of her plan to borrow the Soul-Gathering Lamp from the Celestial Clan.

“Do you plan to reveal yourself as Si Yin?,” her senior, who sat silent through her ruminations, inquired.

“Not really,” she looked abashed. “I hope I could talk Ye Hua around without divesting into my past.”

“Unlikely.” Die Feng said, then he shared his decision with her. “I will do it. Leave it to me.”

“This is about our mentor. I would like to return his kindness as well. He had guided and taught me for so long. As his eldest disciple, this is the least I could do for him.”

She conceded then looked thoughtful for a moment and said, “I have an idea, hear me out, senior.”

“When you ask them for the Soul-Gathering Lamp, let’s just say it was for your elder brother. Everyone knows he has been bed-ridden for a long time. Even the Lord of Medicines could not cure him. If you say that Zhe Yan claimed his illness was borne from damages to the soul, no one would suspect. It fits perfectly with his symptoms.”

“Good thinking,” he commended his junior’s quick-witted. “I will just use that excuse. I have been serving Celestial Clan for many years. It should not be a problem asking for this small favor.”

“That is great,” she beamed at him. In her mind, she was plotting her next move to ensure he would stay put here and not interrupt her second part of the plan later.

“When you get the lamp, senior, you have to safeguard it for three days and nights. During this time, you can not use any magic to keep the lamp burned. You must watch it carefully; only then Master will be able to wake up.”

For one so attentive and determined like her senior, three days without rest should tire him out
enough to put him into a full day of solid, deep sleep.

Die Feng nodded in understanding. “What happens after Master’s spirit fragments are all gathered?”

“Let us not worry about that for now,” she assured him. “Zhe Yan said he know what to do next and I trusted him. I am going to see him now.”

After sending her senior off to the Ninth Heaven, Bai Qian felt like a weight has been lifted off her chest. One matter had settled, now it was up to her to retrieve the divine Fungal Grass from Yingzhou of the Eastern Sea. Her next step would be using half of her own cultivation and the cauldron at Kunlun Mountain to make him an Elixir. After all, Zhe Yan said he need stronger and spiritual power to thrive.

Bai Qian got up and went to check the Crown Prince before turning back and leaving. If she timed correctly, she could be back there, just as the three days and three nights vigil ended. Her mentor’s return would be hastened, she thought happily.

But she had to retrieve something from Kunlun Mountain first.
::At Kunlun Mountain::

With a gesture of her hand, Bai Qian negated the magical barricade protecting Kunlun Mountain. She came to stop in front of its Grand Hall. Six hundred years ago, she stood here saying farewell to the memories of her former life before facing the deadly confrontation with Qing Cang.

Thinking back, she really wanted to hit herself in the head for her own ignorance. Her mentor had sacrificed his spirit to appease the Bell of Eastern Emperor and suppressed Qing Cang inside at the same time. Seventy thousand years passed, Qing Cang begun waking up from his forced slumbering and trying to get free. He would have succeed, if she didn't arrived in time.

Yet no one was the wiser about the possibilities. If the seal was broken even just for a moment, did it also mean remnants of her mentor's spirit left behind to ensure its hold was to be released as well? Six hundred years ago Qing Cang went into his dormant again, so was her mentor's spirit inside the crown prince of West Sea. The irony was that nobody knew, and her mentor was alone in his struggle to come back to life.

Bai Qian shook away her melancholy thoughts and entered the Grand Hall. Die Feng said these days her second senior resided here to take care of the sanctuary. She can't lingered here too long.

She knelt down in front of her mentor's seating and reached out to retrieve the sword from its stand. If her senior didn't tell her before coming here, she would have been surprised. Xuan Yuan was already brimming with divine energy as if it knew its master was near and longed to be in his hand once again.

"Soon, you'll be reunited with your master," she promised. "Master, I must ask for your forgiveness for taking this sword without your permission. But I remembered once you told me a story. I could only hope it is still true."

She took the sword in her hand, taking comfort in its familiar essence that once associated with her mentor then left.

::At Yingzhou of the Eastern Sea::

When Bai Qian entered the cave that four mythical beasts: Hundun, Qiongqi, Taowu and Taotie has been guarding. She didn't expect to see anyone, much less her Sixteenth Senior, the Ghost Princess and out of all people - Xuan Nu.

Seeing her senior was under attack, she quickly drew the blade and launched herself at the Beast, forcing it away from the fallen.

"Beasts! I'm Bai Qian of Qing Qiu and Seventeenth Disciple of Kunlun Mountain," she announced herself as was expected of her. "I don't want to harm anyone here, only to retrieve the grass for my mentor, High God Mo Yuan. Please let me through."

Si Lan who crouched down to protect Yan Zhi looked up gaping at the sudden appearance. He was confused how this woman could be his long lost junior, Si Yin. But nobody dare to lie when battle was about to begin, so it must be true.

Seeing the Beasts still advanced, she glanced down at him taking in his injuries, "Get out of here,
Senior Si Lan."

Si Lan blinked before helping Yan Zhi stand up. "Go now, Yan Zhi. Here is not safe for you anymore. Go!" He quickly ushered her off the cave. "Seventeenth, I'm coming back for you," he shouted.

Bai Qian was too busy evading the Beasts to care, the four of them had her surrounded. She swung the blade to the side, anticipating their next moves. She looked at each of them in trepidation. One of the beasts was circling behind her, breathing fire in warning. The other one perched on the cliff spread its mighty wings, ready to swoop down at her.

Before the Heavenly Father returned to Nothingness, he charged these Beasts with the protection of Divine Fungal Grass, knowing it could be harmful in the wrong hand. The Beasts also gained half of his power to ensure they would succeed in their role.

Yet in her hand was Xuan Yuan the sword her mentor used for three hundred thousands of years to wage wars against rebels and clansmen across the four seas and eight lands. Historical records said it was passed down from the Heavenly Father to his only son, Mo Yuan. But how it came to be was such a mystery. Many speculated that the Heavenly Father divined the sword and bestowed his power in it. But she remembered asking her mentor once, he said it was partially true but there was more to the story. She beseeched him many times for the tales until he gave in.

She learned Xuan Yuan was one of rare items created from the Ocean of Chaos when Heaven and Earth was beginning to form, dwelling deep inside it was the immense power that could move the world. The Heavenly Father used his own essence to bind it to his command. Her mentor had done the same when he inherited the sword. None but two of them had the power to wield the sword to its fullest extent. When her mentor was gone, it was robbed off of its rightful owner and laid dormant until now.

Bai Qian could only hope it would warrant her a free passage inside. What was the harm in trying? If worse came to worst, she would just continue to evade the Beasts, made a grab for the grass and run for her life.

"Beasts, you have inherited Heavenly Father's essence, you should recognize this sword belongs to him," she raised the blade high in the air and let them see it properly.

"I was here today for his son and my mentor, High God Mo Yuan. Can you not feel his spirit trying to return? Though it was weak at the moment, it was there. Surely you must feel it. I come to ask for the grass in his place. Without it, it would take him thousands of years to come back to life. Then who else will protect the world from Calamity?"

She waited with bated breath, not knowing they would acquiesce to her plea or press for attack. Out of sudden one of the Beast roared loudly, the ground was shaking with its ferocious stomping. The other breathed its fire in response. She was certain the attack will come. Then much to her bewilderment, the two-head beast turned its back and unhurriedly retreated deeper into the cave, the rest simply followed suit.

Bai Qian stared at their unexpected exit for a moment before slowly lowered her sword arm. She quickly gathered the grass as much as she could before stumbling out of the cave and collided with Si Lan who went back in.

"Si Yin," he exclaimed. "What the…?"

"Out, out," she pushed him away, fearing the Beasts would came back. When they were a good
distance from the cave, she made a turn ready to leave.

"Si Yin, don't you dare leaving." Si Lan shouted in frustration. "Where have you been all these years? Do you know how long we have been searching for you? I even went to look for you in Mortal Realm."

"There is no time for explanation." Bai Qian turned back to face him. "I must get back to Master quickly. Do you trust me, Senior Si Lan," she asked.

"Master? Is this about Master?" he looked startled. "Is that why you have his sword in your procession?"

"It is," she confirmed. "Master is coming back, Senior Si Lan. But for him to come back, Zhe Yan need this for his medicine." She raised the Divine Fungal Grass in her hand. "Send Yan Zhi back, I'll see you at Kunlun Mountain soon."

"You're not going to disappear again are you?" Si Lan asked skeptically.

"I give you my word," she insisted.

He nodded his head reluctantly, "You'd better be there, or I'll hunt you down, Si Yin."

Bai Qian gave him a reassuring smile then left. However Yan Zhi, who was holding her dying sister-in-law in her arms, decided to put herself directly in her path. She grabbed the Goddess's hand and begged, "Si Yin, please ... please bestow a blade of the Divine Fungal Grass."

Bai Qian looked at her in pity, "You couldn't use it anyway. It's a sacred item of the Celestial Tribe."

"I know but this child is a half-blooded celestial tribesman," Yan Zhi pointed to the small infant in her in-law's arm. "I think that it might work on him. Si Yin, for the sake our friendship in the past, I begged you please bestow a blade of the divine fungal grass to that child."

She glanced back at Si Lan before continued. "We tried to get the grass but the Beasts are too strong. What you now hold in your hand might be that child's last hope. Please, Si Yin."

Bai Qian gave the Princess and the baby who must belong to Li Jing and Xuan Nu's a fleeting look. The baby life was no matter to her but Yan Zhi once tried to sneaking her out of Qing Cang's clutch. She did owe her a debt, she sighed mentally before handing one grass to her.

"I don't think it's going to work. But try if you must."

:: At Kunlun Mountain::

It was by night fall she reached the Kunlun Mountain, Bai Qian hastily made her way inside. If anyone caught sight of her that would simply ask for troubles.

She pushed the grass inside of Elixir Cauldron and began transferring her essence into it. She didn't know how long time had passed but she felt so drained, her consciousness was slipping away. With the last bit of strength she could muster, she sent out another wave of her essence hoping it would be enough. Before she passed out, she thought she heard someone yelling at her.

Chang Shan, the second disciple and keeper of Kunlun Mountain in their mentor's absence was making his nightly round before retiring for the night. Suddenly he saw something moved in the Elixir Cauldron Chamber. When he went to investigate, what he found was not a stranger but a
familiar face. Even dressed as a woman, this was without doubt Si Yin who had disappeared without any traces for seventy thousands of years.

After being gone for such a long time, what was he doing in here? And was that their mentor's sword lying on the ground? Only two days earlier he found out Xuan Yuan was missing over the night and immediately sent a missive to notify his senior, Die Feng, in the West Sea. Was he the one that took it away? He asked himself before lifting his junior from the ground.

Something rolled out of Si Yin's hand and caught his sight. It was a freshly made Elixir. He brought it to his nose and knew immediately it was made from Divine Fungal Grass. But to put it to use, one had to sacrifice his own self-cultivation. He looked down at his junior in dismay. Why would Seventeenth do this and for whom?

Chang Shan spent the night keeping vigil beside his unconscious junior. He had a lot of questions until Si Yin woke up he can't do anything but wait. This was going to be one long sleepless night, he sighed.
The next time Bai Qian woke up, she felt so tired and wore out. There was pounding in the back of her head. She tried to sit up but instantly fell back into the bed, until someone’s arm held her upright.

“Really, seventy thousand years had passed and you are still such a trouble maker.”

Seeing it was just her second senior, she sighed and laid back against him quietly.

“What? You suddenly decided to show up,” he nudged her gently. “You don't have anything to say to your senior?”

She kept her eyes shut not wanting to deal with him right now and pretended to be asleep.

“Don’t go back to sleep yet, Seventeenth. What did you come to do here last night?” he prodded.

Startled at the mention of last night, she frowned then shot up, frantically looking around for the elixir until Chang Shan opened his palm and presented it to her.

“Are you looking for this?” he asked, then shying away when his junior tried to make a grab.

“Don’t tease me, senior. Give it back. It is very important,” she said.

“Perhaps if you tell me what is this for?”

“Senior, it is for Master,” she said flatly, knowing he wouldn’t budge. Unlike her eldest senior who was more lenient to her, Chang Shan was a real stickler. Back then, she always had a hard time getting anything past him.

When she saw him about to ask questions, she put her hand out to stop him. “I know you had a lot of questions. I promise to answer all of them, but time is essential. You must bring this elixir to High God Zhe Yan immediately,” she said urgently.

Knowing Si Yin wouldn’t joke about anything when it concerned their mentor, he relented.

“I’ll go right away. What about you, Seventeenth?” He looked uncertain, his junior still looked haggard and feeble. He can’t imagine what losing years of self-cultivation would do to him. “Are you going to be all right?”

“I’ll be fine,” she waved away his worry. “Please tell Zhe Yan I’ll join him later. “

“If you said so,” he got up preparing to leave right away. “Stay here. Get some rest. And don’t go anywhere, I’ll be back as soon as I can.”

“Senior, wait a moment,” Bai Qian asked.

“Can you keep what you saw last night to yourself?”

He knew Si Yin was talking about using his own cultivation to make the elixir. But he didn’t understand why he wanted to keep it a secret. “Why?”
“I have my own reason,” she said, imploring him to trust her with her eyes. “Please, senior, let it go at least for now.”

He sighed. “Fine, but when I come back, you’re going to explain everything to me. Are we clear?” he threatened.

“Yes, yes, whatever you want. Off you go senior,” she shooed him way and promptly fell back to bed.

When Zhe Yan picked up the proffered medicine from the hand of Kunlun Mountain disciple, he knew right away who had it made. Fifth sister was so tenacious in her own way, not willing to be indebted to anyone. Had she ask him, he would gladly use his own cultivation to make it. Mo Yuan was his brother after all.

He wondered how would she explained herself to Ye Hua. Losing that much cultivation, she could barely called herself a Goddess. And it won’t be possible for her, at least for thirty thousands of years, to take on those Heaven Blazes to become the next Sky Empress. He doubted Ye Hua can wait for her that long. Or did she intend to dissolve the engagement now that Mo Yuan was returning?

“How was Si Yin,” the old Phoenix asked quietly.

“He looks a little haggard when I left but there is nothing life threatening,” replied Chang Shan.

“Good, let’s just keep this between the three of us. You can do that, right?” Zhe Yan gave him a pointed look. If fifth sister asked the elixir to be sent here rather than to the West Sea Palace, she certainly didn’t want anyone to learn about her involvement. That also meant she wanted him to say he was the one coming up with the cure.

Chang Shan felt ill at ease at the request. He was not really good at concealing the truth from anyone. Just as he opened his mouth to say something, he was dismissed from the Peachtree Wood. Seeing there was no other choice than complying with his wish, he took his leave.

When Chang Shan returned to Kunlun Mountain the next day, Zi Lan stood waiting in the hall.

“Zi Lan, you came back,” he greeted.

“Senior, I’m back. I had a run in with Si Yin three days ago. Can you believe that?” Zi Lan said excitedly.

“You did? Me too,” replied Chang Shan. “He was here just yesterday.”

“Oh? He’s already here?” Zi Lan sounded surprised. “When he said he would meet me here, I thought he was up to his old trick again. Where is he now?”

“Back in his old room. Come, let’s go see him together.”

But Si Yin’s room was empty. Chang Shan looked like he was having a headache. “He was gone. Again. I should have known.”

“Come on now, senior. If we found him once, we’ll find him again. This time we’ll just looking for a female deity.” The duo roared with laughter. Only Si Yin would come up with such peculiar idea,
dressing up as a woman to avoid them.

Bai Qian returned to the West Sea a week after Zhe Yan took the medicine to her mentor. She had spent a few days meditating and recuperating in Qing Qiu. Fortunately Mi Gu said Ye Hua only came looking for her twice after she left. He didn’t ask anything after reading the message she left for him, only said he would be back shortly. His second visit was four days ago, just before she came back.

When Mi Gu can’t give him her whereabouts only that she was with Zhe Yan, he asked him to relay a message to her. The Sky Lord had tasked him with some missions in the East and he would be gone for two weeks at most. She silently praised the timing of his absence.

Before leaving Qing Qiu again, she entrusted Mi Gu another message to Ye Hua, should he came back early. This time the story was that Zhe Yan asked for her favor. A patient of his needed help and she was to assist him making some medicine. She might be gone for two weeks or even more depending on the old Phoenix.

Well at least she was telling the truth, Bai Qian thought. Satisfied that it should buy her just enough time, she set out on her journey to the West Sea.

When she arrived at the Palace, her senior was expecting her arrival. After spending some time with him, she visited Die Yong to see how much progress he had made. Her senior said his brother fell unconscious as soon as he took the medicine. But High God Zhe Yan already warned him that could happened and not to worry. His brother was sick for so long, naturally he couldn’t stand the effect of strong medicine.

Using the Soul Magic to get inside Die Yong’s, she found her mentor’s spirit was rapidly gaining strength. She was beginning to hope he would wake up in a month or two.

Another two days passed quickly, she was disheartened Die Yong had yet to wake up. What if he won’t wake up? What about her mentor then, she lamented. Just then the maid said someone from Qing Qiu was asking to see her. It was none other than Mi Gu.

He said Zhe Yan sent him to the Grand Ziming Palace to ask the Ghost Lord for the soul jade. High God said the Ghost Lord owed her greatly when his Queen abducted her mentor. So it was only right for him to give proper compensation to Qing Qiu.

Zhe Yan also said the power of the elixir would be too strong for the prince if he was not engulfed by celestial aura. If she placed this soul jade on him, he would be awake in three days. Bai Qian almost hit him at that, waiting until the last moment before relaying such an important message.

To her delight, Die Yong woke up exactly three days after that. Unfortunately the prince mistook her care for love for him, though he was very grateful to her he can’t accept it. She felt the urge to smack him when he said she was not his type. How ridiculous.

Her senior laughed so hard when she recounted what his brother said to her. He said she devoted herself to his care as she would her mentor’s, anyone else would be just as fooled. He also told her to go back to Qing Qiu to await their mentor’s return. His brother was all right now, there was no reason for her to linger here. She agreed with him and went back home the next day.

::At Xiwu Palace::
Ye Hua had just returned, it took him three weeks to settle the unrest among the lesser clans in the East. Upon his arrival, he immediately went to visit Ali and greeted his mother and was about to go to Qian Qian when Lord Dong Hua summoned him.

When he arrived at Taichen Palace, a bearded, old deity was already there with the Lord. Both seemed to have a deep conversion about something of grave importance.

“Ye Hua greet Lord Dong Hua,” he bowed low.

“Good, you came quickly.”

“Something important just came up, you should know about this too.” He pointed to grey hair deity standing in front of him. “This is the Earth deity I tasked with keeping eyes on the Bell of Eastern Emperor.”

Ye Hua turned to look at him then waited for the Lord to continue.

“He came here to report that there are some anomalies around the Bell last week. Do you know anything about that?”

“Not at all, Lord,” he replied.

“At first I thought it was just my imagination,” said the Deity, “the Bell seemed to vibrate for a few minutes then went dormant again. Then today red mist seems to spread out from the inside.”

“Isn’t the seal supposed to holding out for the next thousand years?” asked Ye Hua.

Lord Dong Hua was silent for a moment then begun to speculate upon the matter. “Perhaps it has something to do with the one sealing it.”

“You mean Qing Qiu’s Bai Qian?”

His heart skipped a beat at the mention of her name.

Lord Dong Hua looked thoughtful but didn’t say anymore. Ye Hua was getting worried now. He hadn’t seen Qian Qian over a month and a half, did something happen to her in his absence? He also have no idea why the Bell would react so. Perhaps they should summon the Ghost Lord. No one knew about Qing Cang better than him anyway.

“Ye Hua will summon the Ghost Lord here now,” he told the Lord. It seemed he won’t be seeing Qian Qian soon after all.

The Ghost Lord arrived shortly after that. Lord Dong Hua asked if something had happened, the Bell was stirring up again.

He looked chagrined before saying, “My elder brother died a month ago.”

“How did his death effect the Bell at all?”

“No one knows,” Li Jing sighed, “But Qing Cang uses us, his children, as his power base. If one of us died, he would grow more powerful. My brother was over hundred thousand years old, he had
considerable self-cultivation.”

“Is that all?” asked the Lord. His fingers move rapidly like he was divining something. Then he stood up and went outside, gazing at the sky for a long time.

Both Ye Hua and the Ghost Lord were puzzled at his manner, still they waited.

“Just now Mo Yuan’s star was shining again,” the Lord said softly. “Back then before Mo Yuan’s spirit vanished, he told all his disciples to await his return. I thought that he was just offering them some comfort. Mo Yuan truly never disappoints,” he commended.

The Ghost Lord staggered back, his face paled white. He had put two and two together and figured it out. “I should have known,” he whispered to himself. “Why else would she be there.”

“If you knew something, then speak up, Ghost Lord,” Lord Dong Hua ordered.

The Ghost Lord appeared to be in distress, he didn’t say a single word.

“Is this about Si Yin?”

He looked up quickly when that name was mentioned. Ye Hua’s eyes widened in disbelief. He always suspected that Si Yin was Bai Qian in disguised but had no proof.

“It is, isn’t it?” The Lord said knowingly. “The Ghost King and Si Yin was once very closed to each other, wasn’t it? You even tried to protect her during the battle. So you met her recently, what then?”

“I met Ah Yin three months ago on the way back from the East Sea King’s banquet,” Li Jing hesitated before continued, “I have always known Ah Yin is a woman but up until then I never knew she is Bai Qian of Qing Qiu.”

Ye Hua had to hold himself tightly when his speculation proofed to be true.

“But there’s more,” he said tiredly. “Over a month ago, my sister brought back the Divine Fungal Grass for my son. She wouldn’t tell me at first how did she obtained it. Later she admitted having a run-in with Ah Yin in the East.”

“The grass could indeed speed up recovery, but the four Beasts guarding them are known to be vicious,” the Lord commented.

“Was she hurt?” Ye Hua asked urgently.

“No, Yan Zhi said she was fine.”

“Impossible,” claimed Lord Dong Hua. “Even the Fox Emperor was injured pretty badly when he went there. Did your sister notice anything strange at all that day?”

“No, she didn’t say,” said Li Jing. “If the Lord really want to know, I’ll send for her.”

“Don’t bother.” Lord Dong Hua sipped the tea slowly. “What’s done is done.”

“I should have known, the only person she would risk herself for is Mo Yuan,” Li Jing said bitterly. “It’s always about Mo Yuan.”

“Why would you say that, Ghost Lord?” Ye Hua said through gritted teeth. “He was her mentor.”

“Your Highness, you don’t know, do you? The relationship between them.”
Of course he heard rumors about them. The record said both of them vanished after the battle at Ruoshui Riverbank. He never believed that, after all Mo Yuan’s soul was sacrificed to appease the Bell of Eastern Emperor. How could he live after that?

Li Jing didn’t wait for his response, he just continued.

“Back then, after Mo Yuan rescued Ah Yin and Ling Yu from Grand Ziming Palace, I followed Ah Yin back to Kunlun Mountain and stayed up there for months. Every time we went out together, she hardly talked about anything but Mo Yuan. She always ditched me the moment something regarding him came up. No matter how hard I tried, she never cared. In her heart, she only cared about him.”

“Since Mo Yuan is coming back. There’s no point in keeping this secret any longer,” Li Jing started before Lord Dong Hua interrupted him. “She had kept his body with her in Qing Qiu all these years, I already knew that.”

“Really?” he laughed weakly. “Did the Lord also know that in order to keep his body intact, she had fed him her heartblood for seventy thousands of years?”

It was Ye Hua who turned pale this time. He never once thought she had been in love with someone before him. A deep and intimate love, enough to sacrifice herself like that. Then doubts filled his minds, did she even cared about him at all? Or he was after all a burden forced on her by their arranged marriage.

“After the Battle at Ruoshui, she came to see me once. At first, I thought she was there to avenge Mo Yuan’s death. But what she sought was not my life, but the soul jade. I knew she planned to use it to save Mo Yuan, so I refused her. Had I known, without the soul jade she had to use her own heartblood to save him, I would have given it to her.” Li Jing said, his regret palpable in his voice.

“The heartblood of nine-tailed fox clan is magical but tricky,” Lord Dong Hua said nonchalantly. “Once use on a person, he or she was to be fed from that fox alone for thirty days without failed. After that once a month is suffice. Again seventy thousands of years is commendable. I have lived this long and never once heard anyone was that dedicated.”

“Ah Yin was injured during the Battle,” Li Jing said, “There was no way she could fed Mo Yuan her heartblood for long.”

“Hence the Fox Emperor Bai Zhi went to retrieve the Divine Fungal Grass from Yingzhou exactly seventy thousand years ago. But that was all in the past.”

“Mo Yuan’s soul had dispersed into pieces,” Lord Dong Hua said, “Anyone want to put them back together has to use the Soul-Gathering Lamp.”

“Die Feng, the Second Prince of West Sea, came to see me last month. He asked for the lamp, saying it was needed to heal his elder brother’s illness,” Ye Hua said, finally realized the connection. He remembered the West Sea King said High God Zhe Yan had gone to see his son. Was that where she went the past month?

“Another disciple of Kunlun Mountain,” the Lord noted.

Did Qian Qian really use her own cultivation to save High God Mo Yuan? The Ghost King seemed convinced. He was agonized over the mere thoughts of her and her mentor.

Ye Hua thought he had listened enough. He had to know. Was that why she wanted to forget about what had happened between them? Not because she was angry at him but because she was already in love with someone else and their past was just a bother to her. He intended to leave for Qing Qiu
immediately.

“Crown Prince,” the Lord called out, “Your personal matter will have to wait. We must go to Ruoshui Riverbank now and see how the Bell is holding out.”

Ye Hua turned around and bowed to his wish reluctantly. The three of them quickly made their way to the Riverbank. They found that the Bell was indeed surrounded with red mist, Qing Cang’s infamous weapon. He was gaining strength, there was no doubt. How long would it take before he breaks out, they wondered.

“Let’s bring this to the Sky King. It can’t wait any longer,” said Lord Dong Hua. “A sentries should also be sent here to keep eyes on it all the time.”

“Ghost Lord,” he turned to Li Jing. “You and your sister will remain in the Nine Heaven for extended time until this matter was resolved.”


“You said yourself both of you are his power base. I know for a fact there were some dissenters within your rank. If either of you were assassinated, Qing Cang will only grow too strong for the Bell to contain him. So go on, grab your sister and come back here at once,” he ordered brusquely not leaving him a chance to speak up again.

Lord Dong Hua just finished telling the Sky King about Qing Cang’s possible breakout when a familiar chiming rang out from afar. Lord Dong Hua, the Sky King and Ye Hua got up and went outside to take a better look.

The Sky Lord asked, “Lord Dong Hua, could you recognize this bell?”

“It is as Sky Lord thinks,” he replied before passing a glance at Ye Hua.

“The bell is chiming in Kunlun Mountain. Mo Yuan has returned already.”

Chapter End Notes

Shifu will made his appearance in the next chapter. But you already know that, don't you? :)

Bai Qian was reading a scroll inside the Den when she heard the Bell chiming. That sound! She knew that sound by heart, it was from Kunlun Mountain. Had something happened to her mentor? She thought then immediately rushed to Yanhua Cave to check up on him.

She stopped abruptly after taking a few steps inside. Her feet stayed rooted to the spot when she saw the figure clad in white sitting cross-legged on the stone bed. Unbidden tears of longing and joy poured out of her eyes. It was her mentor, he was alive!

“Seventeenth, is that you?” The newly revived Mo Yuan opened his eyes and looked upon her. He took in her fair face and large doe eyes and familiarized himself with her changed demeanor. He always suspected she would be one true beauty once grown up and he wasn’t disappointed. Time certainly didn’t wait for anyone. Cute little girl back then had become this refined beautiful female in front of him now.

“Come. Come and let me take a look at you.” He held his arm out urging her to come to him. “Let me see if you’ve made any progress all these years.”

Bai Qian walked shakily across the distance to him before collapsing in his waiting arm. ”Master,” she cried out.

“You're indeed my little Seventeenth,” he put on that soft smile reserved only for her.

“Master, you've finally returned,” she sobbed holding him tightly. “I have been waiting for you for such a long time. I thought you'll never come back.”

They held each other for a long time, contented to be together once again. Mo Yuan gently pushed her head back a little to take a better look at her. “My little Seventeenth looks lovely in this form as well,” he smiled teasingly.

Feeling embarrassed and a little self-conscious of their still pressed body, she lowered her face, murmuring, “Master, you haven't changed at all.” He didn't even look surprised seeing her dressed as a female. Had her mentor knew all along, she wondered.

“Is that so?” he said amused. Using the other hand that wasn’t holding the small of her back to raise her chin up, he gazed deeply into her eyes. “But my little Seventeenth has grown into a beautiful lady.”

Bai Qian face redden at his complement, “Master really mean that?” She looked back at him shyly. The soft glow shining out of those darkened eyes made her tremble slightly. How she missed him looking at her like that. Her eyes unknowingly followed his lips which curled into a small smile once again and her heart quickened in response.

“Every word,” he replied. “Tell me, Seventeenth how have you been these past years.”

“Very lonely,” she admitted, resting her forehead against his shoulder. “After you were gone, I brought you back to Qing Qiu and stayed here with you ever since.”

The hand that touched her hair soothingly paused for a while before resuming its movement. “Is that so?” he said quietly.

Mo Yuan was confused a little when he woke up, clearly this place wasn’t on Kunlun Mountain. But
when he looked around and found the vase on the side table adorning with Peachtree branches, he knew his Seventeenth was around. Only her loved to decorate his room with flowers.

“How long have I been gone?” he asked.

“Too long, Master, too long,” she repeated.

“It has been seventy thousand and six hundred years. I have been waiting years after years for your return.” She had missed his warmth and gentle smile, his arms that held her whenever she cried and the hands that always protected her from harm.

After hearing that Mo Yuan was lost to his own thought. Never had he suspected it would take this long to come back. Didn’t Seventeenth said, she kept his company here all these years? Had her family allowed her to stay with him? Distracted as he was, he didn’t hear the footsteps coming closer until Zhe Yan showed up at his side.

“Mo Yuan, you're finally awake.”

“It’s about time,” Bai Zhen who stood beside him said. “To safeguard your body, our sister has hidden out here in Qing Qiu ever since you were gone.”

Zhe Yan suggested, “It’s too damp and cold in here. Let’s move out.”

When their reached the opening of the cave, Mo Yuan stood still for a moment basking in the warm light and breathing in the fresh air. It was good to be back.

“You must have had a hard time in the past seventy thousand years,” Zhe Yan said.

“My spirit was split into fragments, so it took me quite a lot of time to put them back together,” he replied.

They relocated to the Fox Den after that. Bai Qian drape a cloth over her mentor’s shoulder and brought out the teapot and small cups for everyone.

“Zhe Yan, during the time when I was asleep. Did anyone who looks identical to me appeared?”

“There is one such man. Your little disciple even knows him quite well,” he nodded at their fifth sister.

“Little Seventeenth, you know him?”

“Don’t be shy. Tell him,” Zhe Yan urged her.

“The man you just mentioned… He’s my fiancé. The Crown Prince of the Celestial Clan,” she said in a low voice.

Mo Yuan paused for a moment, “Your fiancé?”

She pointed at Zhe Yan accusingly, “It was his fault. And my father and the Sky King. They all conspired to arrange a marriage between me and him. I didn’t even want it in the first place.”

“Oh? Fifth sister are you saying you want to cancel this marriage?” Zhe Yan glanced back at Bai Zhen, both had anticipated this move already but had yet to confirm it with her.

“Zhe Yan, he was ninety thousands years younger than me. Though he was very nice to me, I still
think he should find someone his own age, experience some love and live a little. I told him as much. I even promised him, if we were married, to find some decent side consorts for him,” said Bai Qian.

Bai Zhen snorted at their sister cluelessness, “How sensible.”

“See, you got my point perfectly,” she beamed at her brother. “We’re not suitable at all. Why must you drag this on? I didn’t mind that his uncle eloped with my maid. That was a long time ago, can’t we just forget about that and move on?”

“You don’t want to marry him but let him living with you here for the whole month?” Zhe Yan raised his eyebrow so high at that peculiar comment.

“What should I do then? He suddenly dropped his son here and used him to get to me,” she defended herself. “That riceball is so adorable, even you won’t be able to say no to him. He keeps calling me ‘mother’, you know? It’s just so sad he lost his mother since young. I must remind him greatly of his mother.”

She added as an afterthought. “Come to think of it, Ye Hua mistook me for her many times. He seems unable to move on from her.”

Mo Yuan listened to her quietly. “So that was my twin brother,” before slowly taking the cup to his lips.

“Brother?” Zhe Yan stared at him hard. “Why haven’t I heard that you have a twin brother?”

“I only learned of it when Heavenly Father passed away. That year, the Four Pillars of Heaven and Earth collapsed. In order to repair them to be able to support the heavens again, my mother nearly had a miscarriage. When she went into labor, she was supposed to give birth to twin sons. But she only managed to keep me alive. My younger twin was lost,” Mo Yuan said.

“Heavenly Father used half of his powers to create a celestial fetus and turned it into a golden lotus. He entrusted it to me and asked me to nurse it until he could be born into this world. When I sacrificed my spirit to the Bell of East Emperor, he was finally awakened.”

Zhe Yan exclaimed, “It’s no wonder. That golden lotus withered when your soul and spirit vanished. Soon afterwards, Consort Le Xu gave birth to Crown Prince Ye Hua. When that lad was born, rainbow birds flew around the pillar for 81 days and the misty clouds in the twilight appeared for three years. Only the son of Heavenly Father could be blessed with such a celebratory sight.”

“Everyone said that Ye Hua resembles Master. I almost mistook him for Master as well when I first met him,” she commented. “Do you want to meet him, Master?”

“Perhaps, a little later,” he replied then he turned to look at her. “Are all your seniors doing well?”

“Master, after you passed away, your disciples searched for us for several thousand years. Then their families came and took them home one by one. They went to fulfill their dutiful roles.”

Bai Qian paused, it pained her to tell him this. “Kunlun Mountain is no longer what it used to be. I don’t wish Master to see what Kunlun Mountain has become now.” She had seen it, even with second senior’s hard effort, Kunlun Mountain was not as glorious as it was once.

“It doesn’t matter. We'll set out toward Kunlun Mountain now,” he said dismissively. “I wish to meditate there for a while.”

“Of course, you should recuperate as soon as possible,” she acquiesced.
Bai Qian smoothed out the fabric in her hand almost absent-mindedly, it was in dark-blue tone he preferred. She had ordered this cloth for her mentor six hundred years ago when Zhe Yan said he would wake up soon.

“Master, I have brought your cloth.” She announced before walking inside the room and placed it on the table nearby. “May I assist you?” She asked, afraid he would exerted himself too much too soon. She had noticed his sluggish movement earlier.

The Elixir she brought him was only enough to wake him up, her mentor need to meditate soon to recuperate. Kunlun Mountain was saturated with divine essence, she understood why he wanted to go back there without delay.

After he changed into new cloth, she helped him to sit in front of the mirror. There was silence between them as she helped him combing his hair, but it was not uncomfortable. Many times when she looked up, their eyes met in the mirror.

Bai Qian looked at her mentor’s reflection and pondered, she remembered Ye Hua once asked her to help binding his hair when they were in the Mortal Realm. Both brother looked almost the same but she would never mistook one for another.

Her mentor’s eyes were always so expressive, brimmed with emotions if one care enough to look for. Though he always feigned indifferent, she knew he was just the opposite. Her mentor was a passionate person so unlike Ye Hua whose eyes sometimes were so cold and cutting. The air of distant civility he put on made him very hard to read and understand at time.

As her hand moved deftly to bind her mentor’ hair, she took in his appearance and made a mental note. She had gazed upon her mentor’s face for seventy thousand years, but there were times she forgot how his lips curved into smile, how his eyes danced with mirth at her antics or narrowed when she tried to bargain her punishment. Seeing him awake and talking just brought those senses of familiarity back. If was like she was relearning her mentor all over again.

“What are you thinking, Seventeenth?” he asked. He had noticed her secretive smile earlier.

“Nothing, just old memories,” she chuckled. “Did you remember the day I became your disciple, I said you looked just like a pretty face?”

“That one was really hard to forget,” he commented dryly. No one ever brave or daring enough to say that to his face, but his Seventeenth said it without care. He was stunned but amused at the same time. Trusted Zhe Yan to send most peculiar disciple to his way.

He had lived for over three hundred thousand of years, had seen and experienced everything – been through countless wars, lives and deaths, love and losses – the world slowly became bland and boring. And he found himself not caring so much anymore. Still he always performed his duties as was expected of him. That was before she came into his life.

Her coming had disrupted his orderly ensemble but not necessarily in the bad way. Such carefree spirit and naivety, the vulnerable doe eyes she wore made him wanted to protect her, to shield her from the harshness life would bring her. Born to the immortal nine-tailed fox clan, chosen by the Jade Purity fan of Kunlun, he knew she was destined for more than a simple life. But greatness always came with prices and suffering, he want to be there for her as long as he could. When that caring and nurturing turned into love, he didn’t know. But it was all the same too late, the world faced calamity and in order to maintain the peace, his spirit needed to be sacrificed. He wasn’t afraid of death, yet his biggest regret was never telling her how he truly felt.
“I was too naïve back then, judging someone with a passing glance,” her voice interrupted his wandering thoughts. “Only years after that I came to see the truth.”

He was intrigued. “Oh? And what was that?”

“You might not have four arms and four hands as I had first thought but you’re just as valiant and ferocious,” she pointed out. “Some would say you’re uncaring and indifferent, but I know you’re compassionate and most understanding. Even when you put on a stern face, you still care.” She smiled at him before a frown appeared on her pretty face. “And you also like to make fun of me, don’t think I forgot that.”

“You know me well, Seventeenth,” he turned around when she was done with the finishing touch and wrapped her small hands in his bigger ones. An odd feeling of warmth flushed into her face as his thin lips slowly stretched into full smile. She cast down her eyelashes, no longer able to look at him. What was wrong with her? This was just her mentor. They had always been closed in the past, didn’t they?

Mo Yuan took in her redden face and averted eyes and smiled softly. He lowered his head and whispered next to her ear. “Should we now proceed?”

She merely nodded not trusting herself to speak, then followed him out to meet with Zhe Yan and Bai Zhen who was waiting outside. If they noticed her subdued manner or flushed face, they didn’t comment on it. The group immediately made their trip back to Kunlun Mountain.

When Ye Hua made it to Qing Qiu later that day, only Mi Gu was there to greet him. When asked where Qian Qian was, the tree spirit stuttered and refused to meet his eyes.

“She’s at Kunlun Mountain with her mentor, High God Mo Yuan, isn’t she?” he asked again.

Mi Gu stammered,” I wouldn’t know, Your Highness.”

“Don’t bother. I already knew she was there,” he said coolly then left.

Ye Hua thought back to the day they met in the East Sea. He had been overjoyed when he knew for certain Qian Qian was his former wife, Su Su. Even if she completely forgot about him, he thought they could start a new life. He was confident he could make her fall in love with him again. But he never suspected, Bai Qian - Si Yin had been in love with someone else for so long. Li Jing voice rung clear in his head: “In her heart, she only cared about him.”

At first he didn’t want to believe him but can’t deny the truth. Seventy thousands of years she chose to stay be his side and waited for him. And for her to risk so much and sacrificed even more for him, it must have been love.

Since then he had doubts, a lot of doubts. Did he meant nothing to her but a mean to an end for her love trial? Did she drink that Amnesia Potion just to forget about him, because that place in her heart belonged only to Mo Yuan?

He want to confront her about her true feeling for him but she was gone again. She left with her mentor as soon as he came back. Now that he was here she certainly didn’t think of anyone anymore, he thought sadly.
When they arrived at the foot of Kunlun Mountain, a collective of immortals gathered there looking toward the Mountain’s top in awe. Mo Yuan signaled to the rest to pull away silently, not to disturb the crowd from their fun. Bai Qian teased her mentor that Kunlun Mountain was so popular right now. In the past, they always kept such a low profile.

Zhe Yan commented that Kunlun Mountain was formed by a protruding dragon's bone. Somehow it had detected that Mo Yuan was returning and welcomed him back with the divine energy.

Using the invisible spell, they went up the mountain without running into anyone. There, in front of the Grand hall, lines of disciples was waiting for them. All of them said at once when Mo Yuan appeared. “Greetings to Master!” Then one by one they knelt down in front of their mentor. It was Die Feng who first spoke.

“Zi Lan sent us news a few days ago that the divine energy in Kunlun Mountain rose greatly and the bell rang on for a long time. Although we didn't know what that meant, all the disciples rushed back here overnight. We didn't know when Master would return to Kunlun Mountain but we all knew that you would.”

“Yet here in the Grand Hall we could sense your celestial aura lingering outside. We hurried over here, but still we didn't arrive in time to welcome you at the entrance of the mountain.”

“Master, you've been away for seventy thousand years. You've finally returned.” Zi Lan eyes were red like he wanted to cry. All of them did.

“I've kept all of you waiting.” Mo Yuan looked upon his disciples, pleased. “Get up now. Get up.”

When they began to move inside Mo Yuan glanced back at Bai Qian who stayed behind. She nodded imperceptibly and followed him inside. She placed herself at the back of the hall, a little apart from other disciples.

When Mo Yuan was seated properly, Zi Lan who sat in the front turned back to look at her.

“Si Yin, Master is back here. Why must you dressed as a woman again? Or you have been in female clothes for so long that you like them too much to change back?” he quipped at her. Her other seniors laughed earnestly at that.

“Senior Zi Lan, do you really think my face is but a disguise of a man?” She looked around as if to ask the rest of them the same question.

“I was worried that you wouldn't confess to it,” Die Feng smiled teasingly. “When you arrived dressed as a woman, I knew what you planned to do. I just didn't dare to say it.”

“Senior, you already knew but you stood watching us like some show?” Zi Lan cried outrageously.

"I wouldn't dare treat it as some show.” Die Feng waved his hand, dismissing the outcry. “Now that Seventeenth is High Goddess Bai Qian of Qing Qiu. Deities in all realms have to address her as Aunt. Even I'd have to greet her formally according to our ranks. Therefore, Sixteenth, how would I dare speak for Seventeenth before she does?"
Zi Lan’s mouth gaped before he composed himself in front of such high ranking deity. He said no more after that.

Bai Qian immediately corrected him, “As long as Master is around I'll always be Kunlun Mountain's Si Yin, and my seniors' little Seventeenth.”

At that her seniors surrounded her, clamoring.” Little Seventeenth! Little Seventeenth, come here!”

One said, “You're so pretty!”

Another blurted in agreement. "Exactly! Seventeenth, I didn't even realize that you're a girl all these years!"

“That's right” they chorused and they really meant it. "We couldn't tell! We didn't know!"

Mo Yuan silently watched his disciples in amusement, he had missed their antics. He smiled fondly when his Seventeenth cried out, “I miss you all so much!” It was just like the old days.

Later that night when everyone retired to their room, Zhe Yan dropped by Mo Yuan’s room. “I've brought Peach Blossom wine with me. Care for a drink?”

“Sure.”

“You answered so quickly?” Zhe Yan was surprised. “In the past, you wouldn't drink so easily.”

“I have much to ask you. Wouldn't it seem lonely to do so without wine?”

After sipping some wine, he turned to Zhe Yan, “Why would Seventeenth take my body back to Qing Qiu then?”

“I knew you were going to ask about that, Mo Yuan.” Zhe Yan said.

“After your soul and spirit were vanquished Seventeenth sat on Ruoshui Riverbank holding tightly to your body. She allowed no one near her. It was as if she had gone mad. She wanted to wipe out the Ghost Clan. Zhen Zhen had to knock her out and took both of you back here. Later the Sky King sent his emissaries to take your body away for a proper burial in the Sea of Innocence. Fifth sister however blew all of them away with Jade Purity fan of Kunlun. After that she drugged all of her seniors and stole your body away.”

He took another drink before continued. “The lass was really stubborn but you already knew that. She can’t accept that you were really dead. She wanted to keep you close so she placed your body in Yanhua Cave. Then she got her hand on the Soul Jade. It had kept you save ever since until you were ready to wake up.”

Mo Yuan found the story a little odd but didn’t comment on it. “Is that all?”

“I think you’ve exerted yourself enough for today,” Zhe Yan got up.

“Get some rest, Mo Yuan, there’s always tomorrow. You can grill me to your heart’s content then.”

Since their mentor was still in meditation retreat, the following day all sixteen disciples spread out all over the mountain in an attempt to restore the sanctuary back to its glory days. It had been abandoned for many years and there was plenty of works to be done.
By nightfall Bai Qian brought Zhe Yan’s medicine to her mentor’s room. “Master, your medicine is here. I’ll bring it inside,” she called out. She came into the room and found her mentor sat cross-legged on the cushion, eyes alerted.

“Master, I brought you the medicine Zhe Yan made. Are you feeling any better?” she asked, placing the tray on the table. “You’ve been meditating since last night.”

“Better,” he replied and walked up to her.

“This time Master has to recuperate properly” she insisted. “I’ll not allow anything to jeopardize your recovery again.”

“Don’t worry, I’ll be fine. You don’t have to turn yourself into stew yet,” he said amused.

She was pleasantly surprised. "Master still remembered that?”

“How could I not, you knelt in front of the cave and cried for days.”

“I was frightened and worried,” she frowned at the memories, her head bowed down in shame. “You did so much for me and I had been the worst disciple ever. Not even worthy of Master’s kindness.”

“Never say it like that,” he pat her head gently. “What is there to disappoint? You have already surpassed my expectation. And my decision to save you, I’ve never regretted.”

Deeply touched by his sincerity, she bit her lower lip to hold back tears. “I’ve never apologized to Master properly.” Back then I sneaked away the Mountain with ninth senior to see my niece's birth, I never thought my carelessness would turned out so poorly. Master fought Qing Cang and became injured because of my own stupidity. Then you suffered even more from those three Heavenly blazes for me.”

Tears of regret slowly slide down her cheek unbidden. “Were you not so injured and had enough time to recuperate, you hadn’t had to sacrifice you soul that day. This has been my biggest regret for this past seventy thousand years.”

Mo Yuan moved closer and gently used his finger to wipe away the tears. “But that was all in the past, I’m here now. Don’t cry anymore, Seventeenth.”

She pressed her face into his chest, relishing in its warmth and vitality, so different from all those time he laid in Yanhua Cave. “I can’t never forget,” she said, the tears kept flowing.

As long as she lived, she would never forget that day. Seventy thousand years had passed, it seemed like it was only yesterday. She remembered vividly how gush of blood spewed out of his mouth, how his face slowly turned colorless and how his body lost its warmth little by little in her arms. Unconsciously she put her hand over her heart where the scar of old stab wound laid. Back then she was so desperate not to lose him, the thought of him withered and turned into ashes was too unbearable. The agony of his death never truly left her no matter how much time had passed.

Mo Yuan wrapped her small body in his arms and let her cried her heart out. He smoothed her hair gently and waited for her tears to subside. Lost in his own thought, he didn’t know how much time passed. He glanced down at his little apprentice, feeling her entire body had gone relaxed. He can’t help but chuckled, his Seventeenth had cried herself to sleep.

Later he carried her back to her room and tucked her into bed. He stayed there and watched her sleep for a long time before went back to his room.
When Zhe Yan dropped by his room before retiring for the night, Mo Yuan waited until he was done fussing over his recovery.

“Zhe Yan, yesterday you said Seventeenth brought me to Yanhua Cave to keep me close.”

“That’s true,” he nodded.

“If she had the soul jade, why moved to Qing Qiu at all? She could just rest my body here and stay with me, no one will stop her anyway,” Mo Yuan slanted his eyes at him.

“I told you the lass was too stubborn.” He looked abashed.

“Zhe Yan, don’t you think I deserved to know the truth?”

“Think carefully if you truly wish to know, Mo Yuan,” he gave him a warming. “By the time I finish answering your questions, I'm afraid that you won't know if you only see Bai Qian as a disciple or more of a woman.”

He paused to think then gave him a faint smile, “Do tell, I wish to know.”

Zhe Yan sighed resigning himself to tell the story. “I told you she used the soul jade to save you, that was true, but only after your spirit had returned.”

“Back then the Ghost Lord had denied to lend her the soul jade, she had used her own heartblood as a tailed-tailed fox, to feed you. Mo Yuan, here,” he placed the hand on his own heart, “she plunged the knife deep into her heart, let the blood dripped drop by drop into the bowl. She fed it to you every day, for thirty days, without rest. Her body had already sustained injuries from the battle. After the seventh day, the blood loss was too much for her.”

“Hadn’t her seniors came to look for her at the Peachtree woods, we wouldn’t even knew what she had done. By the time we found her, her life was already hanging by a thread. If not for Bai Zhi who went to Ying Zhou of the East to retrieve the divine fungal grass and her mother who transferred fifty thousand years of her self-cultivation into her, fifth sister would have followed you in death. I almost thought that was really her wish at the time.”

His eyes grew weak with sorrow as Zhe Yan continued to recount stories of the past. He agonized over the thought of her hurting herself again and again to save him. He never wanted her to suffer for him.

"Then for next seventy thousand years she kept feeding you the heartblood, never once she stepped outside of Qing Qiu fearing something would happened to you. It would be all right, if she knew you’ll wake up one day. But she did that just to save your soulless body.”

“Are there any long lasting side-effect of giving the heartblood away?” he asked.

“Not that I’m aware. Why?” Zhe Yan asked.

“Nothing, I’m just curious.”

Zhe Yan looked thoughtful. “No one would know anyway, since the beginning of time never before the heartblood was used in this way and for such an extended time.”

He went silent then another thought came into his mind. “What happened to her eyes? They looked damaged somehow.”
“So you’ve noticed.” Zhe Yan sighed tiredly. So many questions. “I believed they were cut off.”

“What did you say?” Mo Yuan asked sharply. “Who did it?” His little Seventeenth had been bullied?

“I wouldn’t know, I’ve asked her many times but she refused to tell me. And that was before she begged me for the Amnesia Potion,” Zhe Yan said.

“Amnesia Potion?” he repeated. Seventeenth wanted to forget something desperately? That didn’t sound like her at all. Something afoul must have occurred.

“You didn’t know, six hundred years ago, she went to seal Qing Cang back inside the Bell of Eastern Emperor. Then she disappeared for three hundred years. Her parent, her brothers and I had searched for her across the four seas and eight realms but never found her. Then three hundred years ago, she suddenly turned up in my Peachtree Woods. She was badly wounded, small wounds littered all over her body and her eyes were gone.”

Mo Yuan’s hand that held the teacup trembled almost unnoticeably. “What then?” He asked, his voice hoarse with emotion.

“At the time I looked into her essence, it was different. She had already ascended to the rank of a High Goddess. So those years she were missing, she must have been through her Heavenly trial. I asked her as much, but she refused to elaborate. She said it was just a love trial, nothing worth mentioning.”

“But I had seen her tormented eyes and haunted demeanor, so I didn’t refuse when she begged me for the potion. If she want to forget all that had happened, then let her. It might be better that way. After that we simply told her she had slept through the years, trying to recuperate after her fatal fight with Qing Cang. That her eyes condition was an illness she had since birth, it just acted up when she was badly injured.”

That night, for once, Mo Yuan had to force himself to retreat and meditate. The thought of Seventeenth suffering so much in his absence had pained him. He promised himself one day he would find out the truth and right the wrong done against her.

He also thought of Zhe Yan needlessly concern about his perception of Seventeenth. He had already come to term with his feeling for her a long time ago, but chose not to act upon it until it was too late. He thought he had time, he could wait for her until she became a bit more mature.

But fate was cruel and unyielding. As he was about to die, he couldn’t let the thought of her go. So he selfishly asked her to wait for him. Then he had miscalculated, instead of thirty thousand years, it took him twice as much to come back. Seventeenth ended up wasting half of her life waiting for him.
Chapter 9

The next morning Bai Qian went to assist her seniors with the cleaning chores. She chose to clean out the wine cellar. It was really dirty and full of dust since no one really bothered to look here. Had her ninth senior still lived, his usual haunt would have been spotless.

After an hour of vigorous dusting and wiping, she looked around, satisfied with her work; it looked clean and tidy once more. She felt nostalgic being in this room; there were a lot of memories here, both good and bad.

“Seventeenth.”

At the calling of her name, she turned around and smiled happily at her mentor. “Master, come and take a look. Is this place tidied up well?” she asked.

A bit of dust stained her delicate face, he carefully used his finger to brush it away, caressing her face softly. His light touch reminded her how she fell asleep in his arms last night, then woke up this morning on her own bed. Her face warmed with embarrassment.

“It's very clean. Who would have thought the lazy Seventeenth had changed after seventy thousands of years.”

She ignored his teasing and said, “Master, do you remember? Back then, I made such a big fuss over the break up with Li Jing. Master was forced to leave your meditation retreat early.” She sat down and looked up at him. “It was right here that you sat with me, told me to cry properly and not waste any more of your wine.”

“I do,” the corner of his mouth lifted as he lowered himself to sit next to her.

“Did you already know that I was a girl then?” She asked to confirm her suspicions. Back then, her seniors had thought she was upset over Xian Nu’s betrayal, when it was actually Li Jing’s. She remembered her mentor saying Li Jing’s eyes were very bright yet he had such poor judgment.

“Since the moment you stepped into the Grand Hall of Kunlun Mountain, I knew that you were Fox King Bai Zhi's youngest daughter,” replied Mo Yuan.

“Why did you still take me as your disciple then? Isn't it a rule in Kunlun Mountain not to take female disciples?” She wondered. This very question had been bugging her for a long time.

“Why do you think I took you in?”

She looked thoughtful for a moment, ”I think it was because of Zhe Yan. You must have been scared of being pestered by that old phoenix. Master probably didn't know then but, taking me in as your female disciple would be even more troublesome.”

He shook his head slightly at that, “I didn’t mind Zhe Yan, and I knew very well what he was trying to do.” A busy body who tried to play matchmaker, he thought.

“At first, it was actually because of the Jade Purity Fan of Kunlun. It chose you as its master. I could not allow it to fall into an outsider’s hands. So you became my disciple that day,” he explained. ”But it was also fate that brought you to me.”

He gently lifted her chin up and sought her eyes with his, “Zhe Yan told me that you pierced your
heart to feed me your blood for seventy thousands years. Is that true?”

She nodded and lowered her lashes, suddenly feeling very shy. “Master had shown such kindness to me. You even took on those Heavenly blazes for me. I think that it was totally worthwhile to offer blood from my heart to keep Master intact.”

“These years you’ve suffered so much for me.”

She shook her head lightly, “No hardship. I’m glad I was able to do something for you. Even if I have to sacrifice my life for you, I will,” she said.

He seemed pleased at her conviction. “Seventeenth, do you know why I worked unceasingly for seventy thousands years to repair my spirit?”

“I do,” she touched his hand lightly.

“Zhe Yan said you would never disappoint those you care about. Back at Ruoshui Riverbank, Master told all the disciples of Kunlun Mountain that you’d return. We knew that you would. You’ve worked so hard for us.”

“I’ve never disappointed those I cared about...” he trailed off. “That’s true.”

“But I did it for the one I cared about the most. Do you understand what I am saying?” He gently coaxed her to look up at him. “Little seventeenth, it was all for you.”

Bai Qian clutched his hand tightly in her own and looked deeply into his eyes. Her eyes misted at the finality of his confession, she felt inexplicably warmth at those words. A sweet smile broke across her face.

They continued to gaze into each other eyes, so lost in their own intense longing that they barely noticed the approaching footsteps until someone cleared his throat loudly. She immediately sprung apart from her mentor and spanned around only to find senior Zi Lan stood there with his head bowed down awkwardly. Unconsciously, she stepped back and hid behind her mentor’s back, mortified at being caught in such compromising position.

“Master, a group of immortals had arrived and asked to see you,” he bowed low and kept his eyes glued to the ground, not daring to look at their mentor in the eyes.

He nodded. “I will be there shortly. Go ahead, Zi Lan.”

Seeing his retreat, Mo Yuan turned around and glanced down at Bai Qian. “Stay here and join me in the hall later,” he pat her head softly then left. And she found herself strangely bereft of his warmth and nearness.

That night, Bai Qian went strolling to the back of Kunlun Mountain. She placed herself on the branch of a peach tree, gazing absent-mindedly at the sky, one hand holding the white bottle of peach wine to her side. Her train of thought, since that morning, kept coming back to her mentor’s face. She didn’t know why his choice of words and those pair of meaningful eyes had affected her so deeply.
“A beautiful night filled with warm fragrance of peach trees and a good wine to accompany, yet you wear such a troubled face. What’s the matter, fifth sister?” A voice woke her from her trance.

“Zhe Yan,” she called out. “Why you’re alone? Where’s my brother?”

“He has some business back at the manor.”

She lifted an eyebrow. “And you didn’t go with him? How peculiar.”

“I’ll keep my eyes on your mentor’s recovery for a few more days,” he replied. “So? What’s on your mind?”

“It’s nothing,” she sighed. “It’s just something Master said.”

“Oh?” he turned to look at her, intrigued.

“Zhe Yan, he... I…” she paused. “Why did you tell him about the heartblood, when I specifically asked you not to?”

“I tried but your Master is not stupid, you know? Why? Did he say something?”

“He said he had repaired his spirit without rest all this time,” she whispered softly. “And it was for me alone.”

Zhe Yan’s eyes widened in surprise, he never thought Mo Yuan would actually act on his feelings for her and so soon. Then again, being dead and coming back to life must have changed certain perceptions and thoughts.

He took a moment to study her conflicted face. “And what say you?”

“I don’t know,” she said pitifully. “I haven’t had a chance to say anything.”

“Fifth sister, do you like him, Mo Yuan? Answer me truthfully.”

“Eh? Why would you ask me that question? He is my Master, I certainly like him,” she frowned.

Zhe Yan sighed exasperatedly; Bai Qian was not bad at being a Goddess. How come she was so dim-witted when it came to the matter of the heart? Today, if he didn’t gave her a bit of a push and a shove, those two would certainly dance around each other for another century.

“I mean how you do like him as a man.”

“Zhe Yan, he is my mentor,” she cried out in alarm, “How can I have such an untoward thought about him? That – that’s blasphemy!”

“Oh? Is it? Have you ever asked yourself, fifth sister, why others could accept Mo Yuan was dead, but not you?” He placed both hands firmly on her shoulder. “Are you saying you cut you heart and bled for him to the point of dying, just because he is your mentor?”

She opened and closed her mouth many times, gaping at his absurdity.

“You clung to his spiritless body for over seventy thousand years, when the chance for him to return to life was bleak and beyond hope. You’ve also refused to settle down and have a family. Is that what disciples would do for their mentor?”

She turned her head to the side, her thought strayed at his provocation. Denial was on the front of her
“Now that he’s back, what do you plan to do next, fifth sister?” He prodded. “Do you plan to stay here with him forever as his disciple? What will you do when he gets married and has family of his own? Would you stay and watch their happiness from the side?”

She took a step back from him, startled.

Zhe Yan took in her vulnerable eyes and distressed expression. “Fifth sister, you must look carefully into your heart. If you don’t like Mo Yuan like that, let’s not drag this any further. Both of you would only end up hurt. But if you do, tell him, the two of you deserve the truth.”

“Zhe Yan, you don’t know what you just said,” she shook her head in denial, her lips quivering at that thought. “Master certainly never look at me like that.”

“Oh? I didn’t?” He raised an eyebrow at her ridiculous claim. “Did you forget, I grew up with him. The Mo Yuan I knew barely cared for just about anyone, but he doted on you and you alone.”

“Fifth sister, don’t you know how prideful your Master is?” He asked. “For him to admit that he tried so hard to come back to you, you think that it was nothing?”

“No, definitely not,” she said vehemently.

“Then why did you try to discount his feeling for you? Are you too scared to admit your own heart?”

“I…Zhe Yan,” she struggled for words.

“You don’t have to answer me, just think about what I said.”

He pat her shoulder and left her to her own devices. She stood there alone, looking forlornly at his retreating back; the bottle of wine laid forgotten on the stone floor.

Bai Qian shakily sat back on the ground; Zhe Yan’s questions still rang clearly in her mind. Why couldn’t she just accept her mentor’s death, he said.

Zhe Yan, he didn’t know. Master had promised he would always be there for her, to protect her. And he had asked them to wait for him. How could anyone ever expect her to let go of him then? She always thought she would accompany him forever, never be apart from him. Even when she collapsed beside him, dying of blood loss, she thought about how nice it would be to be able to stay with him in death as well. She could still hear his voice calling her “little Seventeenth” when she closed her eyes for the last time.

And the thoughts of her supposed marriage was even more incredulous. She had met her former fiancé, Sang Ji, during the battle; he was just so plain and boring. Why would she ever want to settle down with him? Ye Hua, his nephew, on the contrary was nice enough and quite interesting. She got to know him a little better when he agreed to help with Yuan Zhen’s trial. She believed his intention for her was quite sincere; it might not be so bad to stay with him.

And yet there was something about him that made her feel uneasy. Every time he held her close to him, it felt just wrong. She was baffled; there was always this inexplicable urge to push him away. If not for Ali’s presence, she didn’t know if she’d ever let him stay with her.

Zhe Yan was right; she really planned to stay with her mentor in Kunlun Mountain as long as he would let her. She never thought about him marrying before. In the past, her mentor had never looked at any females. But if he, one day, was to marry, what then? That place beside him would no
longer be hers. Could she stand by and watch him with another female? The mere thought of him being affectionate with someone else haunted her. Her hand tightly clutched her chest where the scar throbbed and burned painfully.

Was that love? Had she been in love with her mentor all along? Was that why she felt overjoyed when she learned that her mentor was willing to do anything to come back to her, just as she had done for him? Zhe Yan claimed her mentor really felt something for her but was it true? What if he was wrong, wouldn't she despoil what they have together?

As she laid on her bed, her thoughts were all over the place and sleep would not come to her that night.

There was an influx of visitors coming to Kunlun Mountain these past few days. Nobody knew how the news of their mentor’s return got out but all living creatures with even a bit of spiritual power knew that the ancient God of War, Mo Yuan, had returned and came to pay their respects. Bai Qian and her mentor hardly had any free time to be alone together.

At the beginning Master planned to seclude himself in meditation as soon as possible, now it was postponed indefinitely. She was worried his health would deteriorate if he exerted himself too much. None of the visitors had anything worthwhile to say to her mentor anyways. Most just wanted to take a glimpse at him. Some just dropped by to express their well wishes, sipped a cup of tea then bid their farewell.

However, today something unusual happened; a deity dressed in all white dropped by. He had such a handsome face and gentle demeanor, yet their mentor looked disturbed for a moment upon seeing him. She only saw this minute change in his expression because her eyes were already glued to his face. She shifted her attention and turned to observe the newcomer, wondering what could possibly upset him so. This deity not only failed to greet her mentor, but also he stood there lifting his eyebrow challengingly at him.

Bai Qian couldn’t really understand what was being said between them. She guessed they were once familiar with each other. According to him, his deceased sister had come to him in his dream recently. Hence the only reason of his visit today was to relay her message to him: She was so lonely being alone.

She noticed Zhe Yan throw a glance back at her mentor before voicing his own incredulity. That sister had been perished for over a hundred thousand years, he doubted she could be the one sending the message. The man simply brushed off his comment. He stated that Mo Yuan came back from the dead even when his spirit was said to be dispersed. Why couldn’t his sister’s spirit go to him? He bid his farewell and left abruptly after that. When her mentor got up from his seating and left the hall, she felt the need to follow him but was stopped by Zhe Yan. She could only helplessly cast her eyes after his retreating form.

That evening when she took the medicine to him, she found his room strangely empty. After searching for him everywhere, she found her mentor standing next to the lotus pond, looking out unseeingly at the dark night sky.
She always thought her mentor had a past where something disturbing had happened in his long life. But he always excelled at concealing the truth and nobody was any the wiser to the depth of his emotions. Yet today, that visitor’s words had definitely provoked and stirred his peace. Why? She didn’t have any ideas but she was worried for him all the same. He looked so lonely out there; she could almost feel him hurting inside.

Mo Yuan felt a pair of arms reach out for him from behind and slowly circle around his waist. He glanced down and found it was his Seventeenth.

“What’s the matter?” he twisted his head to look at her.

She shook her head then laid it against his back. He probably wouldn’t want to talk about it with her, if she asked. After a while she said, “Master looks so sad. I don’t know what to say. I just want to be here for you.”

“Is that so?” He said softly, placing his hand on her own. “Seventeenth, I’ve lived for a long time. Many things had happened, some are just better left unsaid.”

“Master didn’t have to say anything,” she shushed him quietly, “I understand. I’m not that small naive fox anymore.”

“Back then I used to look up at Master and wondered how glorious the God of War was. You who command the respect from all across the four seas and eight lands. I’ve never thought behind all that prestige, power and triumph, you’d sacrificed who knows what else,” she tightened her arms around him.

“But I also lived this long now. Today I understand this very well. There was no glory in war, no matter how honorable or how justified it was. There was only destruction and losses, pain and heartaches,” she continued. “In war we did things we must because it was demanded of us. And we paid the price for them, no matter if we wanted to or not.”

“I don’t dare say I know your heart,” she raised her head and sought out his eyes. “I only wish to share some of your burden, if you’d allow me to.”

Mo Yuan didn’t say anything at first; he gazed back at her for a long time. “My Seventeenth has indeed grown up.”

That night she laid quietly beside him, looking at the sky. She could only hope her presence was enough to alleviate whatever turmoil that plagued him so.

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Note: Thanks everyone for sharing your thoughts with me, I love them all. The story develops at turtle’s speed, so please bear with me.

And special thank you to Midorizawa who proofread this chapter for us. I really appreciate your help. :)
Chapter 10

For the next three days not much had changed, visitors still came and went. All disciples were busy playing host and couldn’t spend time together. When the last group of immortals departed, their mentor ordered them to close down the mountain for the day. Bai QIan was preparing the tea for her mentor. The other disciples were chatting and laughing among themselves, not far away.

“Master, here’s your tea,” she presented the cup to her mentor.

He turned his face to look at her and reached his hand out. Somehow their hands touched and lingered over the cup. Her cheek turned slightly red at the intimate gesture. She retracted her hand quickly. She eyed her mentor shyly as he put the teacup to his lips, then slowly made her way to join the rest of the disciples. They were talking amongst each other about what had been happening in their lives for the past seventy thousand years.

Die Feng, the first senior, seemed to have the most exciting stories to tell. He did spent many years waging the wars with the Mermaids Clan anyway.

“Seventeenth, seventeenth, hurry, come join us,” her seniors urged.

As she sat down at the table, Zi Lan said, “Tell us what you did for these past years. It is said that Bai Qian hardly stepped out of Qing Qiu. Is that true? You? Normally you can’t even stay put for a few days.”

“I am a bit shocked, you know.” He put a hand on his heart dramatically. “Are you sure you’re really Seventeenth. And not a fake?”

She hit him playfully, “You wish.”

“So any stories?” Zi Lan asked again.

“No, my life is pretty mundane. Nothing much going on in Qing Qiu,” she replied.

“Yeah, except the one day you went on to seal Qing Cang,” Zi Lan said sarcastically.

“Yes, that’s right,” said her other senior. “I heard that a beautiful High Immortal went to Ruoshui riverbank that day. Later Lord Tong Hua said Qing Cang was already sealed once again and there was nothing to worry anymore.”

“But no one know exactly what happened that day.” Zi Lan said. “Only that it was Bai Qian who managed to do it.”

“Well, it is just as the stories that went around. I sealed him and suffered some injuries,” she shrugged. “Then I slept a couple of hundred years to recover. There’s nothing much to talk about,” she concluded.

“Ai, give us a little more detail, Seventeenth,” someone said exasperated.

“I don’t remember much of what happened either, you know,” she said defensively. “Only that I was hit with his dark energy. The last thing I remembered, I was falling through the air.”

She lift the teacup to her lips then continued. “Then I woke up 300 years later in my bed. Fourth brother said when Feng Jiu brought the Sealing Scroll back to Qing Qiu, they knew immediately
what I tried to do. But they were too late to stop me.”

“After searching for me for a long while, they found me injured and unconscious. Then they brought me back to Qing Qiu. And that’s it,” she concluded her story, frowning slightly at her amiss memories.

“And that’s it?” Zi Lan said, not impressed at all.

“You must have advanced in your training to be able to subdue Qing Cang,” said the tenth senior.

“Yes, that’s unbelievable considering that she always slacked off when she was here.”

The rest of her seniors nodded vigorously and laughed, ignoring Bai Qian who was making a sour face at them.

“Seventeenth,” Zi Lan called out suddenly before sending strong burst of energy at her. “Catch this!”

Everyone else laughed expecting her to easily rebuff the playful, surprise attack and retaliated against Zi Lan with one of her own. She always got back at him after all.

“Huh?” Bai Qian was distracted and didn’t see it coming but Chang Shan, the Second Senior did. He shouted a warning at her.

No one could foresee how the High Goddess would be affected by the playful hit. She deflected the attack at the last moment but, some strayed energy inevitably hit her. She coughed up a bit of blood.

“Seventeenth!!” The elder seniors rushed to help her. Zi Lan looked stricken for a moment. He didn’t mean to hurt her. That feeble energy shouldn’t be able to hurt her at all.

“Seventeenth,” he sat down by her side. “I’m so sorry. I didn’t mean to.”

“It’s all right, Senior Zi Lan. I was just distracted earlier,” she said.

“Seventeenth, were you injured?” asked Die Feng. He felt ashamed. He should have paid closer attention to his youngest junior. After all, she did exhaust herself taking care of both their mentor and his Brother.

“Seniors, please stop. Really, it was just old injuries.” She smiled, trying to make light of the situation. “You know I’m always such a lazy girl. After sealing Qing Cang, I’ve lost a bit of my strength and didn’t bother to train. And I had a few petty run-ins after that, so I’m a little bit behind.”

Bai Zhen who was quietly playing chess with Zhe Yan decided to speak up. “Don’t you know these days the Goddess is so mighty that she called fighting a host of Grand Ziming Palace, a petty attack?”

“What!” Die Feng exclaimed. “Seventeenth, was that Li Jing? I know he sent his people scattered across the realms, looking for you.”

“No, I had met him already. It was someone else,” she said.

“A particular queen perhaps?” Die Feng’s face darkened.

“That despicable woman again?” Zi Lan looked disgusted. “She deserved what she got in the end. What did she do anyway?”

“Uh, nothing much, you know, she took something of mine. I went there to take it back. That’s all,
really,” she said quickly, not willing to elaborate on how she had lost then recovered their mentor.

“Yes, until Mi Gu came to the West Sea to find us. He almost dragged me and your fourth brother back to Qing Qiu, claiming you were unconscious and dying.” Zhe Yan said before adding another piece on the board. “We were both very intrigued.”

“You were injured that badly?” Zi Lan looked once over her.

“The old phoenix was just exaggerating,” she denied. “I was up and about the next day. Don’t listen to him.”

“If you say so. If you say so,” Zhe Yan repeated. He glanced sideways to look at Mo Yuan who rested quietly at the back of the hall. His hand were holding the teacup, a small frown appeared on his face.

Bai Qian noticed her mentor getting up from his seating and was about to follow him. But Zhe Yan called her back and said it was about time for him to rest. She looked reluctant before going back to join with the rest. With all visitors coming and going, she and her mentor had little time to chat. And she missed talking with him.

Later that night, Zhe Yan dropped by Mo Yuan’s room to check up on him.

“You’re still awake?”

“Hn.”

“Shouldn’t you meditate?” Zhe Yan sat down. “What is it, this time?”

But Mo Yuan still said nothing. He seemed at a loss, a sight that became increasingly familiar these days. “Ask away,” Zhe Yan sighed, preparing himself for another talk.

“Is Seventeenth really alright?” asked Mo Yuan.

“She just needs some rest; perhaps I should have let her rest a few more days before taking her to see you at the West Sea. But I was excited,” he defended himself.

“What exactly did Xuan Nu do that angered her so?”

“Can’t you make a guess? Fifth sister was away when Xuan Nu disguised herself and entered Qing Qiu. She stole your body from Yanhua Cave.” Zhe Yan gave him an exasperated look. “When it came to you, she would always rush into danger without thinking thoroughly. Good thing she was alright.”

He tapped his shoulders before leaving. “Get some rest, Mo Yuan.”

On his way out, he was met with Chang Shan who was taking a cup of medicine to his mentor. Zhe Yan paused and gave him a meaningful look before walking away. Chang Shan set the cup down on the side table and hasten to retreat.

Mo Yuan was suspicious of their concealed exchange. He thought back earlier that day to when Chang Shan tried to warn Seventeenth of the coming attack. Did he know she was injured? But Die
Feng said Seventeenth had not come back to Kunlun Mountain at all.

“Chang Shan,” he called out.

Chang Shan was already one step out of his mentor’s room when he was summoned back, “Yes, Master.”

Mo Yuan asked quietly. “Is there anything you want to tell me?”

“No, not really,” he responded quickly, perhaps a little too quickly. He waited anxiously for a moment then said, “If Master has no other order, I’ll...”

“Are you sure? What about Seventeenth?” he pressed.

“Master, I didn’t...” he tried to deny it.

“Chang Shan, haven’t I always told you, you are bad at lying,” Mo Yuan said.

Chang Shan fell to his knees abruptly, head bowed down in shame. “I’ve done you wrong, Master. But High God Zhe Yan and Si Yin both asked me to keep my silence.”

“Go on, talk.” He raised the cup to his lips, waiting for his second disciple to continue.

“Two months ago, Si Yin was here. I found him – her unconscious in the Elixir Cauldron chamber. There was an Elixir in her hand. It was made from that divine fungal grass, I’m certain. When she awoke, she asked me to send it to High God Zhe Yan. She said I must keep this quiet and she’ll explain later. But lately, she has been hiding from me,” he paused. “Then I heard High God Zhe Yan went to the West Sea to help you. I can’t help but thinking that...the Elixir was for you. The timing was just too convenient.”

Chang Shan head was bowing down so he didn’t see the hand holding the cup shook and some liquid spilled out. His mentor nodded his head and sent him away after that.

Mo Yuan went to see Bai Qian that night, he hesitated a little before entering her room. His little apprentice was already fast asleep. He sat down beside her on the bed and probed at her essence with his magic. When he found how little she left for herself, he was shaken to the core.

“So foolish,” he whispered, using his finger to trace her delicate face.

He had felt familiar energy nourishing his spirit since waking up. AT first he thought it was from Zhe Yan. But he looked well, a little too well perhaps for a person who lost some self-cultivation. If Zi Lan didn’t create a scene in the Hall today, he might not even realized it was hers. She had done so much for him and didn’t even want him to learn about it. Mo Yuan didn’t know whether he should shake some sense into her or hug her right now.

Bai Qian was sleeping peacefully when something alerted her to another’s presence. When she opened her eyes, she was astonished it was her mentor.

“Master,” she said sleepily. “Was something wrong?”

“So foolish,” he repeated.
“What?” She was confused why she was being reprimanded. She didn’t do anything naughty lately. Well, excepting for tricking Zi Lan into feed those birds again. Surely that wouldn’t warrant this reaction.

“Why did you do it, hurting yourself again and again?” He gathered her into his embrace and buried his face against her shoulder. “The heartblood, the Elixir.” His voice was quivering with emotion when he forced out each word.

Bai Qian was surprised, her mentor wasn’t supposed to know about that.

“Who told you that,” she said, irritation in her voice. “Zhe Yan wasn’t it? He has such a big mouth.” That busy body should have known better, really, she thought furiously.

“Seventeenth,” he held her tightly to himself when she tried to move.

“I didn’t know, alright? For seventy thousand years I’ve waited for you. So what if I lost some self-cultivation, I just wanted to save you.” she cried out in frustration. That desperate need for him to wake up had plagued her mind since the day he was gone. “I just wanted you awake and here with me. Was that so wrong?”

“No, not wrong,” he shushed and soothed her. “I just don’t like seeing you hurt.”

“I’m fine, really,” she hugged him back wanting to reassure him. “I just have to be a little more diligent at self-cultivation. It might take a while but I’ll be fine.”

She didn’t miss the slight tremble in his body while he remained silent. She pulled her head back slightly and looked up. “Master?” She touched his face lightly. He had turned his head to the side from her. Why was it wet? “Master, are you…?”

He gently guided her head to rest on his chest. “Shh. Go back to sleep, Seventeenth,”

“But…..” she said, confused. “What about you?”

“I’ll stay here just a little longer,” he mindlessly pressed his lips to her temple in a soothing manner. “Sleep, my little Seventeenth.”

Bai Qian thought tonight her mentor was acting strange indeed. He also seemed really upset. Not wanting to trouble him any further, she laid back obediently. She took a few deep breathes and closed her eyes. Her mind worked furiously, trying to figure out what was going on with her mentor.

While she was fast asleep in his arms, he laid awake for hours thinking about them. In the past he was the one protecting her, saving her from harm. Then their roles reversed, she spent seventy thousand years protecting his body and sacrificed herself to awaken him. They owed each other many debts; their destiny had become intricately intertwined.

However, he was still uncertain of many things. One thing he didn’t doubt was the depth of his feelings for her. They had gotten close again since his return, almost as close as they were in the old days. But did she feel the same way he felt about her? And there was her pending marriage to his younger brother. She said earlier back in the den that she didn’t give her consent when the deal was made. Yet a month was plenty of time to win a heart, especially if one was living together with the other. Had she changed her mind? What about his brother, did he love her? Or was it just a political match?

So many thought swamped his head, yet not a single resolution. He looked down upon her peaceful, sleeping face and placed a chaste kiss on her soft lips. He closed his eyes tiredly; he only wanted to
stay with her for a little while.

Note: Special thanks to Midoriwaza who proofread this story for us. :)

Chapter 11

When Bai Qian woke up in the morning, she almost believed last night was a dream. But when she nuzzled her face against the bedding, she knew it was real. The light sandalwood scent Mo Yuan usually wore was still fresh. She took a deep breath and let it soothe her. How long did he spend here, she wondered.

Then heat crawled up her neck and across her cheeks when she remembered the light touch of his lips against hers. She covered her face with both hands. Did he actually kiss her?

Zhe Yan had insisted before that her mentor was in love with her, but she was skeptical. There were times when she wanted to ask him outright. However the staggering fear that she would ruin all the great things they had together held her back.

Lately she began to notice those small touches her mentor had initiated. In the past, it was she who would approach him first. More often than not, she would cling to his arm, hug his waist, or hold his hand. Yet her mentor never discouraged or reprimand her for those behaviours. Casual physical contact between them gradually became natural. But she couldn’t mistake the kiss from last night for anything but what it was. It was useless to deny the mutual attraction between them anymore.

Her thought was interrupted when Zi Lan came inside the room. He sat down and propped his head up on one hand, looking at her. “Seventeenth, are you sick? Your face is so red.”

She shrieked at his sudden appearance; then threw a pillow at him. “Get out and knock next time, Senior Zi Lan,”

“I did. Many times. You didn’t answer so I came inside,” he muttered as he deftly caught the projectile in one hand. “Someone is here to see you.”

Actually, he swung by her room twice already this morning. The first time he had backtracked when he saw their mentor leaving her room at an early hour. This was the second time he found them together in an intimate situation. Both had always been closed in the past, but that was before he learned that Seventeenth was actually a woman.

What was really going on between Seventeenth and their mentor? Were they ….together? His eyes widened at the epiphany. He couldn’t wait to see his seniors’ reaction when they hear about this; he snorted. He was so right about them from the beginning.

When Bai Qian went out to see who had come; it turned out to be Feng Jiu. She had another encounter with Lord Dong Hua and was rejected once again. Bai Qian tried to comfort her little niece, but she was inconsolable. Her mentor, Zhe Yan and fourth brother came to investigate who was crying in front of the hall and found them sitting there. She put her finger against her lips to silence them.

“Aunt, father has given up on me. He doesn’t try to stop me anymore. He knew Lord Dong Hua wouldn’t have me no matter what I did. But even if he speaks to me cruelly or bullies me, I just can't forget him,” Xiao Jiu wailed miserably.
“If you were told to forget High God Mo Yuan, could you? You kept waiting for him for how long? Over seventy thousand years? How can he ask me to let go of him?”

“I’m sorry, I should be more empathetic,” Bai Qian patted Xiao Jiu’s head soothingly.

“Aunt, you still haven’t answered me. Could you do it? Let go of him?”

She glanced back at her mentor who still watched their interaction. Bai Qian’s thoughts went back to last night. “I couldn’t,” she said honestly. Her cheek burned with embarrassment.

Mo Yuan lips curled into small smile at her shy admission. Zhe Yan chortled when he saw the covert exchange between the two of them; thus alerting the little lass of his presence. Xiao Jiu was upset and embarrassed that the men were eavesdropping on her. Zhe Yan had to bribe her with his thousand years old wine.

That night, after sending Xiao Jiu back to her bed, Bai Qian went to the back of the mountain to pick up some fresh peach tree branches for her mentor’s room.

As she was about to enter, she heard a familiar tune coming from inside. She smiled to herself. She loved listening to her mentor playing the zither. It always calmed her.

“Master,” she called out. “I’m replacing the peach blossoms in your room. Did I disturb you?”

Mo Yuan shook his head. His long fingers moved gracefully over the strings. Before she came in, he was just thinking back to the old times where she would insist on him playing more songs.

After replacing the new peach blossoms in the vase, she walked across the room and sat down near the window. It was snowing lightly outside. She turned back to face him.

“I remember when I first came to Kunlun Mountain, I was still very immature then. When I learned that you could play the zither very well, I pestered you for a tune every day. Do you remember that?”

“I do,” he chuckled a little. “Perhaps tomorrow we should go sit beside the lotus pond. I’ll play some more for you.”

“More than one?” She tilted her head, asking excitedly. “Is that a promise?”

“If you want, I’ll play for you every day,” he said softly.

“Then I’ll have to stay here every day too?” She smiled at that thought. “You know back then I thought if I could stay here forever, wouldn’t that be nice? I could keep your company and listen to you playing zither. Maybe learning Taoism too.

“You hate Taoism,” he pointed out. “You always fell asleep during the lectures.”

“That’s true,” she laughed at the memories.

“What about now?” He paused then turned to look at her. “Do you think you could stay here?”

“Naturally, Kunlun Mountain is also my home,” she replied happily.

“What about Qing Qiu? You’ve your responsibilities there.”
“Actually, I’m thinking about retiring. Xiao Jiu is old enough. She would inherit my position sooner or later anyway,” she shrugged. “I could always go back and forth between Qing Qiu and here to help her until she is ready.”

“Master, are you tired of me already?” She pouted.

Mo Yuan shook his head and smiled fondly at her. Then he went back to playing.

(Feng Qiu Huang)

This male phoenix has returned to his old home,
from roaming the four seas searching for his mate.

Time was not yet ripe, there was no way to meet her;
then what a surprise: this evening I come up to this hall,
and there's a dazzling maiden in the women's quarters.

The room near but she far: this poisons my guts.

How can we entwine our necks like mandarin ducks?
How can we flutter about, and together soar?

Lady phoenix, lady phoenix: come with me and nest,
be supported, breed with me, forever be my wife.

Exchanging affection in a physical way will harmonize our hearts;
at midnight if you follow me who will know?

Our wings together will rise, fluttering as high we fly.

If your are unmoved by my feelings, it will cause me misery.

Feng Qiu Huang. Bai Qian perked up; she knew this particular tune by heart. Her mentor used to play this song quite often back then. She didn’t know the meaning of this song until much later. She wondered if he played this song for her all along.

She walked back to him and sat against his side. “I remembered, back then, you just began to introduce me to the zither. I only managed to learn a few strokes. What a shame!”

“But now I’ve gotten better.” She asked him shyly, “Later will you teach me how to play this song?”
"You knew what song that was?"

"I do now," she smiled sweetly, holding her eyes steady into his. That night they stayed up late together, she watched the snowfall from the window while he played the zither for her.

Zhe Yan who heard the sweet melodies fill the night, turned his head toward Mo Yuan’s room. “So in love. So in love,” he sighed thinking about Ye Hua. Had he not thought Ye Hua was Mo Yuan’s reincarnation, he wouldn’t have tried to set a match between him and Bai Qian in the first place. Now it was a mess. “Such an unfortunate coincidence.”

The next day, Mo Yuan set up his zither near the lotus pond as promised. Bai Qian was delighted when he started playing for her. She sat there listening and sometimes chatting with him. It was late morning when an unexpected visitor came to Kunlun Mountain.

Ye Hua stood waiting in front of the Grand Hall of Kunlun Mountain when a man clad in disciple’s clothing hurried down to greet him.

“Zi Lan greets the Crown Prince,” Zi Lan bowed respectfully. “What brings Your Highness to Kunlun Mountain today?”

“I’m here under the Sky Lord’s order. He wanted to consult High God Mo Yuan about a matter of grave importance. I’m here to invite him to the Nine Heaven.”

“I see,” he nodded. “Your Highness, please wait inside the Hall. I’ll inform Master of your arrival right away.” He disappeared for a while then came back. “Master said he’ll be waiting for you at the back of the mountain. Your Highness, please follow me.”

When the Sky Lord said he wanted to invite High God Mo Yuan to the Nine Heaven for a consult. Ye Hua jumped at the chance. He wanted to see Qian Qian and talked to her. When he arrived here he was half-hoping and half-afraid to see her, but she was nowhere in sight. He didn’t anticipated seeing her sitting so closely together with High God Mo Yuan, watching him playing the zither.

At the sound of approaching footsteps, Bai Qian turned around to see Ye Hua standing beside senior Zi Lan. She took in the sight of him, he seemed fine to her. She was a little worried when she heard he went to deal with rebels in the East.

“Ye Hua,” she greeted him stiffly. Mi Gu had sent her a missive soon after she left Qing Qiu that he went there looking for her. He also warned her Ye Hua already figured out her association with Kunlun Mountain. Although the secret that she was Qing Qiu’s Bai Qian was out, it was still kept relatively among those in the know only. She had yet to talk to him about their supposed marriage. She winced at that thought.

“Qian Qian.” His eyes swept carefully over her. He tried to determine if she had truly lost her self-cultivation as Li Jing claimed. Then he glanced at Mo Yuan who had moved up to join them. “Ye Hua greets High God Mo Yuan.”

Mo Yuan watched the way his brother eyed Seventeenth intensely. He wondered what was his intention toward her. "Perhaps you should address me as your older brother instead."

"My older brother?" Ye Hua’s wandering attention snapped back to him instantly. He was confused.
Why would this ancient God claim to be his brother? Wasn’t he the only son of Heavenly Father?

“Master, I’ll go help seniors in the Hall,” Bai Qian said quickly; not wanting to stay here when both brothers finally met and had the chance to talk.

“Seventeenth, you can stay,” he caught her elbow as she moved to stand.

She turned to him and pleaded him with her eyes. “Um, Senior Zi Lan said he really want my help and I forgot. You two should talk, I’ll just come back later.”

She smiled sweetly at him when he acquiesced. Both pairs of eyes followed after her retreating back. Mo Yuan cleared his throat and closed the distance between him and his brother.

“Come and sit here with me, little brother, there’s much to talk about.”

Ye Hua slowly learned the true origin of his birth and how he and High God Mo Yuan was supposed to be born as a twin sons of Heavenly Father. When he mentioned the time he was still the golden lotus in this pond; Ye Hua was reminded of the familiar flashback he saw many times along the years. The back of a man in white cloth was not a dream at all. It was Si Yin – Bai Qian all along.

Mo Yuan voice still went on, “That year Seventeenth liked to play with the golden lotus, she often sat there,” he pointed at the edge of lotus pond, ”and talked to you.”

“Zhe Yan said after I died, Consort Le Xu was here; three years after that, she gave birth to you. I’m glad you are finally here. I have been waiting for you for hundreds of thousands of years,” Mo Yuan gave him a smile of satisfaction.

Ye Hua was conflicted. Never once had he imagined Qian Qian’s mentor would be his brother. Many had said before that both of them looked very much alike. Seeing Mo Yuan now, even he couldn’t deny the striking resemblance between them. Had Qian Qian saw him as her mentor all along? Is that why she let him stay with her in Qing Qiu? Ye Hua’s heart squeezed tightly at the mere thought.

They sat together in silence until Bai Qian came back. She quickly walked up to Mo Yuan and pulled at the end of his sleeve anxiously.

“Master, I heard that the Sky Lord asked to see you. What for? You just came back!” she exclaimed before turning to Ye Hua. “What does he want with my Master, Ye Hua?”

_Her Master._ He thought bitterly. “It’s about Qing Cang and the Bell of Eastern Emperor,” his voice was stifled.

Bai Qian’s face tightened at the name of their nemesis. She looked at Mo Yuan in trepidation. Did something happen? Was Qing Cang’s seal weakened because of her mentor’s return? Her heart raced.

“It’s going to be alright,” he patted her head softly.

“I’m going with you. I’m worried about your health. There are so many visitors lately, you’ve hardly had any time to rest,” she decided. “If this is about Qing Cang, it concerns me as well. I want to know everything.”

“And how are you going to explain your presence?” He raised an eyebrow; gesturing at her female clothing.
“I’ll go as Si Yin, of course,” she said, amused.

Mo Yuan sighed knowing she wouldn’t change her mind.

“Can you imagine their surprise? Seventy thousand years they’ve searched for me in vain. And one day I just waltz inside the Grand Hall when they least expect it,” her eyes lit up mischievously. “No one at the Nine Heaven, except Ye Hua, know Bai Qian’s face. Well, I guess his two officers don’t count, they won’t talk anyway.”

“If you’re coming with us, then go change quickly.” Mo Yuan shook his head, resigned, then added. “And Seventeenth, let me do the talking. Alright?”

“Of course, Master,” she immediately obeyed, a secret smile on her lips.

Note: Special thanks to Midorizawa who proofread this story for us. :)}
Chapter 12

When Qian Qian - Si Yin joined them later, Ye Hua let his eyes soak up her appearance. Dressed in disciple’s plain white robe, hair bound high on the head, she looked no different than any other disciples of Kunlun Mountain. The disguised magic she wrought on her person was solid and impenetrable. Was this how she concealed herself and lived among them for so long?

He stole a glance at Mo Yuan. Did he know all along that she was a female? If so, why did he accept her as his disciple? He heard the God had long set the rule; to never accept female disciples.

He had asked his third uncle about them. Lian Song confirmed that these two certainly had something going on between them even back then. High God Mo Yuan was known for being tolerant and impassive, yet he was willing to alienate High Goddess Yao Guang for Si Yin. How deep was their relationship before his demise? His brows furrowed in concentration.

“Master, on the way back, can we drop by Dong Huang Mountain?” Bai Qian pulled at the bottom of her mentor’s sleeve. “The last time we went there, you were still recovering from your injuries. We hardly had time to explore the area. I remember the sunset there was really magnificent.”

“The Dong Huang Mountain?” he repeated. “Perhaps. If you want to.”

Her face lit up with delight. “Master, when you are out of your seclusion, we should go to the Mortal Realm. You still owe me that promise to take me to the Teahouse and listen to the storytelling. You’re not going to go back on me, are you?”

“You don’t remember the tactical strategies or magical skills I taught you,” he said, amused. “But you remember such a trivial matter?”

“Eh. It’s not trifling at all,” she protested. “I’d never forget what you said to me, Master.”

Ye Hua watched the familiar way they interacted with each other. He never saw Qian Qian act so cheerful like this before. She always tried to pose herself as a level-headed goddess. She feigned ignorance and hardly took other’s words seriously. But in front of her mentor, Qian Qian didn’t care as much about what she said. She even made a quip at him. And Mo Yuan seemed to allow it with considerable mirth. Was this how they were around each other back then? How was he supposed to win her heart back?

When the three of them reached the Nine Heaven’s Grand Hall, their paths crossed with the Lord of Numinous Treasures, Lingbao Tianzun.

“Mo Yuan, is that really you?” he seemed surprised to see him here. “I heard you came back. This is really great.” Then he looked to the side. “Si Yin is here with you too. It has been a long time since we’ve met.”

Bai Qian bowed to the Lord, “It has indeed.”

“You’re here to see the Sky Lord, right?” he asked Mo Yuan. “When you’re done, you should visit
the Realm of Supreme Purity and soak in my spring. It would help speed up your recovery.”

“I certainly will. I thank you for your hospitality, Lingbao Tianzun,” replied Mo Yuan.

“Do you want someone to attend you? I’ll make the preparation,” he offered.

“Please don’t bother. I’ll manage on my own.”

“Of course, Si Yin is here. He can take care of you.” Lingbao Tianzun glanced at Si Yin who choked out of turn at the mention of her name.

“When you have free time, we should have tea together.” He said jovially before bidding them farewell.

When Mo Yuan entered the Grand Hall, only the Sky Lord and his eldest son were present. The Sky Lord immediately came down from the dais to congratulate Mo Yuan on his return and praise him for his sacrifice that returned peace to common people of four seas and eight realms.

Mo Yuan just nodded and stood there stoically.

“And who did you bring here?” The Lord of Sky gave a curious look at the handsome man standing behind Mo Yuan.

At her mentor’s imperceptive nod, Bai Qian gave him the customary greeting. “Si Yin greets the Sky Lord.”

He looked up and down and suddenly the name clicked. “You’re Si Yin? The troublesome fox Zhe Yan had adopted and sent to Mo Yuan?”

“The one who threatened to wipe out the entire Ghost Clan when they already surrendered. The one who refused to let Mo Yuan’s body be laid to rest in the Sea of Innocence then disappeared with him for seventy thousands of years,” his voice boomed. He finally met the one responsible for those transgressions in the past. “That was you? You had a lot to answer to.”

“I beg to differ.” Bai Qian said drily. She had heard of the Lord’s overbearing attitude before. It seemed the rumor wasn’t overly exaggerated.

“I thought the Sky Lord should instead thank me. Had I not brought my mentor with me, he would rot and waste away in the Sea of Innocence. Then how could the God of War return and take on his prestigious mantle and glory once again.”

“You! Presumptuous!” The Sky Lord snapped, a purple vein popped out on his forehead.

Ye Hua who stood by the side grew worried about her boldness. Though Qian Qian was a royalty in her own rights, the Sky Lord was not one to trifle with after all. He was about to appease to the Lord’s mood when Mo Yuan stepped up and place himself in front of Bai Qian

“Lord,” he called out. “My disciple merely followed my command. Since I told them to wait for my return, he only did what he believed was best for me.”

“Besides this was Kunlun Mountain’s matter. I hope you would understand,” said Mo Yuan in his
no-nonsense tone. “Today you invited me here to discuss Qing Cang, didn’t you? Shouldn’t we focus on the matter at hand and let the past be the past?”

The Sky Lord suddenly remembered the old gossips of how Mo Yuan favored this particular disciple. Seeing his protective stance today, he decided the rumors did have some merit. Though, even now, he can’t see what was so special about the fox. Still, he bit his tongue and swallowed what he was about to say at that reminder.

Kunlun Mountain’s authority remained attested and unchallenged by any since the ancient days. Save for Mo Yuan alone, no one held an ounce of jurisdiction over the Holy Land. Mo Yuan, as the only son of Heavenly Father, certainly never bowed to anyone’s wishes or command. The Sky Lord begrudgingly sat down and waved his hand at the guard who quickly showed the Ghost Lord inside.

“Ah Yin,” Li Jing looked startled when he saw her there. He rushed to her side and grabbed her arm tightly. “I’ve been looking for you everywhere.”

In front of these many people, Bai Qian was truly stunned by his audacity. She pulled her arm back and hurriedly put some distance between them.

“Ghost Lord, let’s get to the point. We’re here today to talk about Qing Cang,” reminded Ye Hua who seethed at the way he held her intimately.

Li Jing looked at her longingly. Soon he started giving an account of the recent developments of Qing Cang’s possible break out. Qing Cang’s crimson mist had spread out further, signifying that his strength was indeed slowly growing. He summarized without Mo Yuan’s spirit controlling the Bell, it won’t be long before Qing Cang gained enough strength and broke out. It could be years or a few months, no one knew for certain.

The more Bai Qian listened, the more worried she became. She never thought Qing Cang would be so ruthless, using his own children to boost his power. Her mentor was still recuperating. It would take him another hundred if not thousand years to regain his former strength. He was unfit to fight with Qing Cang under any circumstance.

Bai Qian’s face turned grim; if Qing Cang successfully escape from the Bell, there was no doubt he will use the Bell of Eastern Emperor to threaten them again. Her mentor would never allow that to come to pass. Her hands turned cold and clammy. The possibility of losing him again began to suffocate her. Never again. She will not lose him again.

“And you want my Master to do exactly what, Ghost Lord?” Bai Qian’s bitterness and anger was so palpable. “He spent seventy thousands of years patching his spirit and just came back to life. Are you saying he should go out there to fight again?”

“Oh Yin, that’s not what I’m saying,” he protested vehemently.

“Really?” She took a menacing step toward him, decorum was all but forgotten. The Jade Purity fan of Kunlun was held threateningly in front of him.

“We’re in this predicament because of your father’s lust and greed for power. It’s true that the Ghost Clan had admitted their defeat after the war. Yet I don’t see you doing anything for your clansmen.”

The Ghost Lord’s face twisted at her accusation. His head was bowed down in shame, she was right. His whole life was empty and meaningless. She was the only ray of hope in it and he sabotaged their relationship with his own selfishness.
“Such Insolence.” The Sky Lord roared in anger. “He’s the Ghost Lord. How dare you infringe upon his honor?”

She said dangerously, “Why not? I just speak truthfully. And he knew it.”

“Seventeenth.” Mo Yuan urged her to stop.

“Sky Lord, please rest assured. When the time comes, we, disciples of Kunlun Mountain are no cowards.” She bit out between gritted teeth. “If it came to that last resort, you need not bother my mentor. Any one of us are willing to fight in his place. His aspiration and effort to maintain the peace of common people will not be wasted.”

“We’ll see,” he glowered at the insolent brat.

“Although Seventeenth spoke out of turn but he was right. Kunlun Mountain will handle this matter indefinitely.”

Mo Yuan took Si Yin away with him and left the Ninth Heaven.

Bai Qian followed her mentor to the Realm of Supreme Purity. Her mind was preoccupied with the thoughts of Qing Cang’s impending break out and how to prevent her mentor from another disastrous confrontation. This time, she would do anything to keep him from harm.

“Are you going to stay and help me?” Mo Yuan’s voice shook her out of her brooding.

She lift up her head and looked around in surprise; so lost in her thought that she didn’t realize they had arrived inside the spring chamber. Her mentor was taking off his outer robe and was about to get into the spring.

She quickly averted her eyes. “What did you just say?”

His eyes danced with amusement when she refused to look up at him. “I’m asking are you going to stay here and help,” he gestured at the spring. ”soaking might be good for your injuries as well.”

Bai Qian face flushed very red at the mere thought of soaking in the spring alone with him. “No, I’ll leave. You should relax here and perhaps meditate a little,” she said hastily. “I’ll just waiting for you outside. Master, please take your time.” She hurried outside still hearing his lighthearted chuckle behind her.

Bai Qian was making her way to the garden when her arm was grabbed and she was pulled against someone’s hard chest. She glanced back and saw it was Ye Hua. She gulped. He looked upset, his mouth compressed into a grim line. She tried to think if she had offended him somehow.

“Ye Hua, I thought you’re still in the council with the Sky Lord,” she tapped his chest with her fan in greeting, before smoothly extricating herself from his hold. “So how was the unrest in the East, you are not injured are you?” she said in a conversational tone, trying to appease his foul mood.

“Are you worried about me, Qian Qian?” his stern face softened, her concern seemed to brighten him up a bit.
“I knew you’d be fine. If you are here, everything must’ve went smoothly,” she praised.

“I went to see you in Qing Qiu a couple of times, Qian Qian,” he said. “Mi Gu said you were away.”

“Well, I haven’t gone back home for sometime. Have you heard? The Crown Prince of the West Sea had been ill for a long time, Zhe Yan and I spent literally weeks trying to find the right medicine for him. Now he is recovered, isn’t that nice?”

“Then, Master suddenly came back; I haven’t had the time to go home for a while,” she explained quickly, trying to weasel her way out of his piercing eyes.

“Why don’t we go back together? Ali misses you and the three of us should have a dinner together,” he smiled and took both of her hands in his.

“I’m sorry but I’ll stay at Kunlun Mountain for a while. Master is still recuperating, I want to take care of him,” she said guiltily. She missed playing with Ali as well.

“For how long, Qian Qian?”

“I don’t know as long as it needs, I guess,” she laughed awkwardly.

“What about us then? Do you plan to stay with him until the day we wed?” he asked, his stormy eyes immediately darkened.

She pulled her hands free. “Uh, about that, there’s something I really want to discuss with you. Ye Hua… about our engagement, why don’t we just … cancel it,” she said haltingly.

He was stunned. “What did you say?”

“Ye Hua, the Sky Lord will pass on the throne to you soon. During the coronation, you and I will have to take eighty-one sacred blazes and nine holy thunderbolts. Rightfully, I should endure that with you. But I have transferred my own spiritual energy to my mentor. I can’t take on those fires of karma with you. Not for another thirty thousands of years.”

She tried to be honest with him as much as she could. He deserved that much.

“We weren’t supposed to be married in the first place anyways. It was all because of Sang Ji's mistake that embarrassed Qing Qiu. The Sky Lord didn't want to look bad so he arranged for us to be engaged,” she continued. “This time, leave it to Qing Qiu to break off the engagement. We don't really have to care too much about the past.”

Ye Hua looked at her in disbelief. She really did that, giving up her own cultivation for Mo Yuan. Did she love him that much?

“Are you mad? Why did you do that?” He grabbed her arms and shook her hard.

“Master has always been kind to me. He had shielded me from my heavenly trial and saved my life many times. This is but a small thing I could do for him,” she said, refused to meet his eyes.

“Li Jing was right, he’s here and you don’t care about anyone else,” he said sharply. “What about me? What about us? I love you, Qian Qian.”

Bai Qian looked up in alarm at his confession. She never thought he would have such strong feelings for her. “Ye Hua, don’t joke about this. You can’t joke about this kind of thing,” she said weakly.

“I’ve never been more serious in my life,” he insisted. “I love you, Qian Qian. I won’t love anyone
else.”

Seeing she was still bewildered at his profession, he added, “I can wait for you. I will wait for you no matter how long it takes.”

She shook her head, denying him. “No, Ye Hua. I’m so sorry but I can’t marry you.”

“Why? Because of him? Mo Yuan? Do you love him?” he squeezed her arms, seeking to find the truth of her hearth.

Bai Qian remained silent, not knowing how to answer that question. Suddenly, he pushed her back against the lamp post and kissed her hard. She muffled her gasp of surprise, his lips was hard and unyielding against her. She pressed her fists against his chest trying to push him away but failed. He was kissing her harder, deeper, with a fervor to the point of desperation. Then he buried his face into her neck, pulled her collar apart and pressed his searing lips between her now gaping necklines.

“Stop,” she struggled with him. “Ye Hua, don’t.”

But he didn’t stop, his kiss became even more brutal. He moved down lower and lower then suddenly he froze. Above her heart, the scar left behind from feeding her blood to her mentor for seventy thousands of years was never fully gone. It was still visible to this day.

She shoved him away from her and slapped his face, hard. Her own breath shortened to a pant. One of her hands held the collar closed at the neck, trying to salvage her dignity. Tears of frustration welled up in her eyes.

He stood there; looking forlornly at the place he knew the scar marked her body. “I’m sorry,” he spoke brokenly then promptly turned away from her.

Note: Special thanks to Midorizawa who proofread this story for us. :)

PS: I made several replies to comments in review section. Not sure if AOS also sent a notification email.
Chapter 13

After spending a full hour in the spring, Mo Yuan deemed he was sufficiently recovered. He decided to seek Bai Qian out and found her sitting on the steps with her head bowing down. He immediately noticed something was wrong with her. She seemed tired and a little subdued; her eyes were red.

“What happened?” He gently guided her gaze back to his. His eyes secretly perused her unkempt cloth.

“It’s nothing. It’s just that…,” she looked reluctant to continue. “Ye Hua was here. I told him I wanted to cancel our engagement. Then we had some disagreement.”

“Is that so?” His thumb brushed her bruised lips.

“Can we go back now?” She asked quietly.

He put his arm around her shoulder and squeezed it lightly. “Yes, let’s go back.”

On the way back, Bai Qian remained strangely mute. Mo Yuan didn’t ask her any question and just let her bury herself in his arms. He would occasionally stroke her hair.

That night after they reached Kunlun Mountain and settled down, Bai Qian begged him for a song. She sat beside him; her eyes staring unseeingly into space.

“He told me he loves me,” she blurted out all of a sudden. “I never thought that he’d feel something like that for me. This is an arranged marriage after all.”

The song stopped abruptly. Mo Yuan turned to look at her. “Do you want to,” he stopped briefly, “be with him then?”


“He made me so angry at first. Then he looked so…,” she tried to find the right word. “…so crushed. I’d never seen him behave like that before. I just thought that he’s still young, he’d move on from this - this fascination, this infatuation - soon.”

“You don’t want him hanging on to you,” Mo Yuan stated.

“Exactly,” she nodded. She respected Ye Hua too much to lead him on. It’d be unfair to him.

“Master, you won’t blame me, will you?” she clutched his arm tightly. “He’s your brother after all.”

“You’re both adults, capable to decide what you truly want. I think Ye Hua is a decent man. He’d eventually understand and respect your decision,” said Mo Yuan. “Seventeenth, just give him the time to cool off. It’s pointless worrying over what you can’t control.”

The next morning, Zhe Yan came to see her. He said it was about time for her mentor to recuperate properly. Then, he roped her into helping him preparing the elixir.
Since then, she spent her time in the elixir cauldron chamber by day and kept her mentor company by night. She was so busy that she didn’t spare any time thinking about Ye Hua’s overboard reaction the other day, until her senior came to find her.

“Seventeenth,” Zi Lan shook her awake. She had been dozing on and off while brewing the medicine. Zhe Yan insisted that the elixir had to be done quickly, so her mentor could take it during his meditation retreat.

“The Crown Prince is here again,” he informed her. “He asked to see you.”

“I don’t want to talk to him,” she refused outright, still angry at his unwarranted assault on her person the other day.

Zi Lan hesitated, “Si Yin, isn’t he your fiancé? Maybe you should come see him. I left him at the Lotus Pond.”

“He’s not my anything anymore, I’ve called off the engagement.” she corrected him. “And between us everything that need to be said has already been said.”

“Oh? I come at the right time then?” Zhe Yan who just entering the room said. He sounded pleased like he was about to watch a drama unfolded before his eyes.

“If you are the only one to think it is over, it does not mean it is truly over,” Bai Zhen said from the hallway. “If you’re going to move on, you should settle things between the two of you once and for all.”

She pondered his words and found it not without merit. In the end she decided to go and see him. It turned out her brother was right.

It had been two days since their last meeting at the Realm of Supreme Purity, Ye Hua couldn’t stop thinking about her – about them. Was there ever any chance that her heart would belong to him, had Mo Yuan not woken up? Or was it just his hopeful thinking that she would be his to love again?

The sound of footsteps made him look up. He sighed seeing that Qian Qian chose not to come any closer and waited for him to speak. At least she agreed to meet him.

“I came here to apologize. I shouldn’t have taken liberties with you,” he said. “Can you forgive me Qian Qian?”

“Your Highness thinks too much,” she said coolly. “Such a small matter this old bone didn’t take it to heart, you shouldn’t have too.”

It pained him to hear her speak so carelessly. “Qian Qian, don’t say it like that.”

“If that’s all Your Highness wanted to speak to me about, I’ll take my leave. Farewell.” She turned around, having no intention to linger.

“Don’t leave just yet,” he caught her small hand in his and pulled her back slightly. “Qian Qian, I meant what I said the other day. I’m truly in love with you. You are the only one I want to be with,”
he insisted. “It doesn’t matter if you can’t take on those Heavenly Blazes. I can endure them alone.”

Her rigid face softened a little. “Ye Hua, I’m really sorry but I can’t.”

“What?” he asked. “All this time, everything you’ve done for me, was it only because we were engaged? You truly don’t have any feelings for me?” He had to know. “Or did you look upon me as High God Mo Yuan, that’s why you allowed me to stay in Qing Qiu?”

Bai Qian sighed at the mention of her mentor yet again.

“Ye Hua, it’s not just because of the engagement. You have treated me well. I really appreciate for all that you’ve done for me. Someone else in an arranged marriage wouldn’t have treated me as nicely as you did. So naturally, I must reciprocate.”

“And please don’t drag my mentor into this. He and you are two entirely different people. I have never seen you as my mentor, Ye Hua. You should have at least known that.”

“I thought I knew,” he admitted his own insecurity, “Now I don’t know anything anymore.”

“Ye Hua, listen to me, you’re young. One day, you’ll find the right woman who’d love you for you and as much as you love her.”

“Are you saying this to make me angry? Or do you really not care, Qian Qian?” his voice was rough and intense.

“Ye Hua, I’m saying this because I truly care about you. I want you to be happy.”

“My happiness is being with you. Give me a chance to show how much I love you, that you’re the only one for me.”

“I can’t do that.” She gave a slow shake of her head. “It’d be unfair to you.”

“I don’t care,” he persisted. As long as she was willing to give him a chance, he’d fight for her, however slim the hope. He’d be everything she wanted. He wouldn’t let her be sad or suffer anymore.

“But I do.”

——

“Zi Lan. What are you doing?” Chan Song frowned when he becoming increasingly mystified by his junior’s odd behaviour. He had flattened his back against the wall; his head cautiously poking out, toward the terrace adjacent to the Lotus Pond.

“Shhhhh.” Zi Lan turned around and put a finger on his lips to silence him.

Chan Song stretched out his neck and looked ahead, trying to pinpoint the object of his junior’s attention. He only found Si Yin and the Crown Prince standing together. His eyes almost bulged out when he saw the Prince half hugging half holding Si Yin from behind.

“Why’re you spying on them? You should be ashamed of yourself.” He admonished softly.
“I’m not spying on them, Senior. I’m trying to look out for our sister - well Master too.”

“What are you talking about?”

“Senior,” Zi Lan drawled. “Haven’t you noticed something was going on between Master and Si Yin lately?”

“What kind of thing?” He asked, perplexed, and blinked.

“Si Yin literally glued herself to Master these days.” Zi Lan pointed out.

“Didn’t she always do that?” He said drily.

“Last month, I saw them hugging and making moon eyes at each other,” he revealed. “A few days ago, I saw Master leave Si Yin’s room at an early hour. You’re telling me there’s nothing strange about that.”

“Zi Lan,” he looked scandalized. “You can’t talk behind Master’s back like that.”

“I think they’re together, you know. Si Yin and Master.”

Chan Song choked. His mouth opened, gaping like a fish.

“Come on,” Zi Lan made a face. “Haven’t we always suspected this? The only difference is that Si Yin is actually a woman.”

“And they can get married,” Chan Song finished his thought. “No matter, let Si Yin handle this,” he dragged his junior away from the couple. “It’s not right to snoop on them.”

“Oh, no!” Zi Lan suddenly cried out in distress. “If Si Yin gets married to Master, do I have to call her Mistress?”

“Ye Hua, you have to understand; if not for my mentor, there’d be no Bai Qian today. I would’ve been dead long before you ever met me,” she gently reminded him.

“You didn’t know me back then, I was really disobedient and hard-headed. Father and mother didn’t know what to do with me anymore. In the end, they sent me to Kunlun Mountain, hoping Master would be able to discipline me. Even after becoming his disciple, I was not a very good student, always causing trouble upon trouble. Every time I was in danger, Master was always there to rescue me.”

“I would have done the same for you, Qian Qian,” Ye Hua said quietly.

“It’s not just that,” she shook her head, “he was always there for me, you know. When I ran a fever,
he stayed overnight to take care of me. If I drank too much wine, he brewed medicine for me. Even when I was heartbroken, he sat with me and held me when I cried.

“All my life, the thing I regret the most was the day Senior Ninth and I sneaked away and got caught by Qing Cang. Master was injured when he came to rescue us from the Grand Ziming Palace. Then he took on those three Blazes for my Heavenly Trials. He was severely injured then but never told anyone. After that, he even took me travelling with him, knowing I was depressed over my break-up. Back then, I thought he was really getting better. How utterly naive I was. If not because of those injuries, Master would be able to subdue Qing Cang and wouldn’t have had to sacrifice his spirit that day.”

“That last night at Roushui River, he entrusted me with the spell to subdue the Bell of Eastern Emperor. He hoped that one day I’d prevent the calamity before Qing Cang could break free. He had faith in me, Ye Hua. Me, the laziest disciple who always did things half-heartedly. Since that day, I’ve changed. I couldn’t afford to be that spoiled and careless Si Yin anymore. So you see, without him, the Bai Qian before you could never exist.”

“Ye Hua, he did so much for me but never for himself. He would rather suffer alone in silence than make me sad. He had protected me at the cost of his own life. No one has ever been good to me, like he is. How could I not devote myself to him? How could I not love him?” she asked, her eyes implored him to understand how much her mentor meant to her.

“Before, I was too slow to realize my own feelings. I didn’t know what I felt for Master. I was too young to understand and Master died too early. For seventy thousands of years I waited for him, desperate to see him awaken. Still, I thought it was just because it felt natural having him by my side. I never questioned myself, nor looked into my heart why it was.”

“But now that I understand, I couldn’t - I wouldn't do that to you - letting you wait for me,” she said. “Qing Qiu women, once we love someone with all of our hearts, we remain devoted to that person alone.”

So she did love him . His heart throbbed in pain. He never stood a chance.

Her words also unknowingly reminded him how much he had failed her; for all those times she need him the most. He recalled with clear detail the day she jumped down the Zhuxian Terrace. She said that they didn’t owe each other anything anymore. She had truly and completely let go of him, not even a trace of love was left.

Compared to Mo Yuan and her, the love between them over those years was perhaps just a trial for her ascension to high goddess, it was not worth enough remembering and was instead a burden to her. That was why she chose to completely remove him from her memories.

“Ye Hua, hear me out, I truly wish for your happiness but I’m sorry I can’t be that person for you,” she met his gaze. “I am thankful and will never forget your feelings for me. In the future, if there’s anything I can do for you, I’ll be glad to help.”

“I understand,” he spoke in an almost-inaudible low voice. “It was just my wishful thinking all along.”

He had thought they could start all over. He would make her fall in love with him once more. And they’ll be family again. He’ll cherish her with all his might. How utterly wrong he was.

“You truly never felt anything for me, Qian Qian,” he said, disappointed.
He turned around; not wanting her to see the tears in his eyes. Perhaps this was karma. He had wronged her and made her suffer so much. Now he was being punished; to see her happy and in love with someone else. No, it was not someone else - it was his own brother. How absurd it was.

Bai Qian watched him leave Kunlun Mountain with heavy heart. She could only hope he'll understand what she tried to tell him.

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That evening, she took the medicine cup from her senior and went to her mentor’s room.

“Zi Lan told me my brother came here today,” said Mo Yuan after he finished the cup. “What did he want?”

Bai Qian nervously tugged her earrings. “He came to apologize for the other day.”

“Did you make peace with him then? He seemed to care a lot about you,” Mo Yuan commented.

“I tried. The rest is up to him now, I’ve made everything clear to him.” She said with finality. “I could only offer friendship but I can’t be that person for him. I really hope he’ll understand.”

“I see.” he looked thoughtful.

Mo Yuan played the zither long into the night. Bai Qian was half asleep; her head was perched on his leg. He gently shifted her into his arms and brought her to his bed.

Bai Qian’s eyes barely opened when she felt the movement; then she laid her head back against his shoulder.

He tucked her into the bed and sat beside her. “Seventeenth, you’ve said Kunlun Mountain is your home and you want to stay here.

“Yes, I did,” she mumbled sleepily.

He touched her delicate face. “Is that true? Are you really willing to stay here with me forever?” he asked expectantly.

She opened her eyes wide and let them roam his face. Her heart skipped faster at the implication of what he said. Since the day she had that talk with Zhe Yan, Bai Qian found that she had secretly harbored this feeling for him for a long, long time.

The threat Qing Cang posed and the possibilities of losing him all over again had her rethinking. No matter how much time had passed, her heart always yearned for him and him alone. From the beginning until now, it was always him that she wanted. She could no longer deny her heart desire – to spend the rest of their days together - if he would have her.

"Master, I'm a woman. Mother and father want me to marry and settle down. I've missed my marriage arrangement twice already. Now you ask if I want to stay here indefinitely. I'm afraid I'm doomed to end up as an old maid..."

Mo Yuan glanced down at her, amused at her boldness. He lowered his head and placed a feather-
light kiss on her temple, then slowly trailed down her earlobe, to the corner of her lips. "I guess I'll have to volunteer myself to be your lifelong companion then." He brushed a light kiss against her soft lips. “Then this is where you’ll always be.”

Bai Qian closed her eyes involuntarily. Those soft touches sent shivers down her spine. Then he pressed another lingering kiss and then again. When Mo Yuan swept his tongue between her lips and sucked them lightly. She trembled and grabbed his lapel tightly. Soon, she was running out of breath and opened her mouth to breathe in the air. He reluctantly let go of her lips.

“Now - now you’re bullying me,” she panted softly. “you are going to take responsibility, aren’t you?”

He dropped small kisses on her face. “I’ll tell your parents that I wish you to take you as my bride,” he whispered; his hot breath tickled her ear. “Unless you have any objections.”

A delicious shiver went through her. She hid her feverish face in his neck and refused to look at him. “Fine. You do that,” she mumbled breathlessly, still a little dazed from their shared kisses.

Mo Yuan’s chest vibrated with laughter, his spirited Seventeenth seemed really quite-lady-like at the moment.

The next morning, Bai Qian found her mentor had gone from bed before she woke up - which was good, very good in fact. She didn’t know how to face him after last night. She touched her lips lightly remembering how his lips felt on hers and how his small touches had made her whole body trembled.

Her face flushed deeply; she had truly became a pervert. She quickly pulled the quilt over her head and wished she could stay in the room today. Someone was bound to notice how red her face was. Alas, that couldn’t be, she still had to assist Zhe Yan.

When she was done brewing medicine in the evening, Bai Qian decided to seek Zhe Yan and her brother out. She found them concentrating on yet another match of chess. She tried to get them to notice her to no avail. Zhe Yan flicked a covert glance at her antics; he was amused.

“What is it you want to say, fifth sister?” asked Bai Zhen when he could no longer keep up the pretense.

“There’s something I would like to ask you,” she nervously twisted her hands together, “it’s about the wedding engagement between me and Ye Hua.”

“Oh? What about it?” asked Zhe Yan.

“I already told him,” she paused, “I want to cancel it.”

She had gained their full attention now. Both of them turned to face her and waited for her to continue.

“I guess he didn’t take it well,” she mentally winced at the thought of what had happened, “but it’s
done. Now you have to make the annulment official.”

She caught the end of Bai Zhen’s sleeve, begging him. “Brother, will you talk to father and mother for me?”

“And what reason should I give them?” he raised an eyebrow.

She shyly lowered her eyelashes and wriggled uneasily. “Master and I had come to an understanding,” then she blurted out, “we’re together now.”

Bai Zhen and Zhe Yan found each other’s eyes across the table. “Are you certain about this, fifth sister? This matter is not to be taken lightly.”

“I’m certain, brother,” she said, her face was bright red. “I love him. And our feelings are mutual. Master said he’ll talk to our parents. But I think if you’re going to ask them to dissolve the marriage arrangement, why not tell them of this new development as well. This way they’ll be prepared when he goes to see them.”

“Oh, Mo Yuan said that?” Zhe Yan looked intrigued. “Why the rush, fifth sister?”

“I just want to take care of him. I don’t know how long he’ll go into seclusion. It could be ten years. I decided to wait for him here. I can’t do that if my engagement still stands,” she explained. “Will you do this for me, brother?” she asked again.

“Zhe Yan? Maybe you could also help persuade father and mother too?” She said cheekily, “Don’t you want your brother and your sister-in-law to be happy?”

He feigned horror at the thought.

“Fifth sister, what about Ye Hua. Don’t you like him?” asked Bai Zhen.

“I do like him but not like that,” she exclaimed. “I think he’s very capable young man. It’s just he’s so serious most of the time and you know how I am. We’re not really compatible.”

“Besides I don’t really like the Ninth Heaven,” she added, “they’re too pretentious and uptight for my liking, especially that Sky Lord. No wonder Ye Hua feels suffocated living there.”

“And…,” she trailed off. “I always admired Master, you knew that. I don’t want anyone else.”

“Fine, if you know your heart that well, I’ll do what you asked,” Bai Zhen relented.

“Thank you, brother. You’re the best,” she beamed at him and Zhe Yan. “I’m going to see Master now. You two keep playing.”

Note: Special thanks to Midorizawa who proofread this story for us. :)
Chapter 14

This chapter was written from Mo Yuan’s perspective (as part of chapter 11-13)

When Sixteenth told me that the Celestial Clan’s Crown Prince had come, I told him to invite Ye Hua to the back of the Mountain instead of waiting for me in the Grand Hall. This would be the first time we actually meet each other in person. I don’t want to treat it as an official ceremony, one where he’d worship me as the God of War. I had long anticipated to meet my younger brother. I tried to conjure up a picture of him in my mind, from what seventeenth had told me. As far as she could tell, he was a serious young man with lots of burdens on his shoulders, a clever strategist, a great cook, and a doting father. But that was not what I really care about. He was raised almost single-handedly by the Sky Lord; I wonder what kind of person he became.

When Ye Hua showed up, I used the time when he and Seventeenth were greeting each other to observe his personality. He had the bearings of a great leader: confident, cautious and collected. At first, his cold and calculating eyes gave me a small jolt. Then, his rigid face softened visibly when he saw Seventeenth. I could almost feel affection and longing from those pair of eyes. Even I was a little unsettled by its intensity; I was relieved at the same time. He was not as apathetic as I thought he was at first glance. The indifferent and detached and - dare I say - almost hostile demeanor he acted toward me when I told him of our connection made me feel disconcerted. I didn’t expected him to immediately warm up to me, but his frosty attitude pained me. What had that Ninth Heaven done to him?

Growing up, it was true that the Heavenly Father was always strict with me but he never failed to show his gentle side and affection. Under his tutelage, I learned to accept my responsibilities with dignity and graciousness; and not only because I was coerced into them. I wondered if it was the same for him. I tried to put him at ease and show him how much love and hope I had for him during all those years I nurtured him in this lotus pond, but it seemed none of it got to him. His face remained passive; save for some flickering eyes that betrayed his innermost thoughts.

When Seventeenth came back and acted just like her usual self - clinging to my arm and chattering - Ye Hua’s piercing eyes almost burning a hole through me with its scalding intensity. His whole body was tense and poised as if he’d strike at any moment; his back was rigid. That made me realized with a sudden clarity that he was strongly jealous of the interactions between Seventeenth and me.

Seeds of doubt started to grow in my mind. Seventeenth once mentioned they were arranged to be married by the Sky Lord and her parents. Only a few months earlier, Ye Hua and she met each other for the first time. Then suddenly, he maneuvered himself and his son into her fox den and stayed for an entire month. What was his intention toward Seventeenth? Would a few fleeting months together warrant the amount of fervor I just witnessed? I glanced sideway at Seventeenth. I always knew that she was a little slow when it came to matters between men and women, but hadn’t she perceived this level of fixation a bit peculiar? I knew people could fall in love at first sight but considering his
temperament, I doubted that was how it happened.

As usual, I listened to the Sky Lord’s flourishing compliment half-heartedly. It seemed he didn’t changed much over the years. I couldn’t care less what he did, but when he began to give Seventeenth tongue-lashing; I drew the line there. It seemed my prolonged absence made him forget who was the Master of Kunlun Mountain. It was not his place to reprimand those who belong to me; so I gave him a simple reminder. I almost wished he challenged my authority. He had been too complacent during his reign for far too long. He and his father got this position just because Dong Hua and I didn’t want to involve ourself in mundane duties of the Lords.

I spied Ye Hua’s almost imperceptible movement from the corner of my eye. I gave him a silent approval; at least he had courage and was decent enough to act in her interest. His obsession for Seventeenth was deep-rooted. The way he seethed at Li Jing when he grabbed Seventeenth’s hands was truly startling. Young people often lost their heads when they were desperately in love, especially if it was their first love. Was that the case for my younger twin?

Li Jing’s tidings about Qing Cang impending breakout came as no surprise, at least to me. I knew Seventeenth feared for myself and what I would do if the former Ghost Lord actually escaped. That fear and anger made her belligerent and momentarily revert to her former self once more. Even if she was acting rashly, I prefer seeing her like this: free and true to her feelings. I knew she was a ruling queen now; the position came with certain dignities and a measure of decorums. Still, I frowned at how reticent she had become at times.

Sometimes I can’t help but think that I did that to her. What grievances had she suffered in my long absence that made her into the person she was these days. The thought of her digging her heart repeatedly to feed me the blood always agonized me. Not that I was not grateful for her sacrifice and devotion to me, but it was despairing that I was helpless to stop her from hurting herself. I never wanted her to suffer, not even for my sake.

After her adverse outburst, Seventeenth reverted back into herself. She absent-mindedly followed me all the way from the Grand Hall. This girl’s befuddled habit really never changed, I shook my head fondly at her. She was so deep in thought that she failed to notice our arrival at the Realm of Supreme Purity. At this point, her unceasing brooding began to worry me slightly. I decided she had had enough; so I took off my outer robe and prompted for her help. That immediately snapped her out of her stupor. Her reaction didn’t disappointed me in the least. She flushed crimson and practically fled from my presence. Those dreadful thoughts were forgotten at once. I knew it was rather immature of me but she was adoring when she was flustered. I wondered how she would react if I kissed her right now. Would she respond eagerly or shy away from my touch?

I began to collect my scattered thoughts and meditate to calm my mind. I had to retreat into seclusion as soon as I could to replenish my spiritual energy. The extra power boost Qing Cang got from Li Yuan’s untimely death was worrisome. Though the convergence of energy inside the Bell of Eastern
Emperor will not allow Qing Cang to fully regain his former strength, he was still a formidable opponent. And there was the Bell of Eastern Emperor itself to worry about.

Seventeenth said the Bell was damaged considerably the last time Qing Cang tried to break out. There were cracks on the surface and she had to use her own spiritual energy to repair them. That actually gave me an idea. Perhaps destroying the Bell would be a better solution. The Bell of Eastern Emperor was not indestructible. Yet it required a tremendous amount of power to completely dismantle it. If Qing Cang can’t really be contained, I could wait until he blew a hole in the Bell’s side to get out. The initial shattering would cause extensive damage to its composition and render it more susceptible to being wrenched apart. Now that Ye Hua was here, together we should be able to destroy it without either of us losing our lives.

I had no intention to die again. I had done all I could for the common people of four seas and eight realms. This time, I simply wish to spend the rest of my life with those I care about. I had not shared this resolution with Seventeenth yet. Would she be happy? We could live quietly together in Kunlun Mountain or roam the Mortal Realms or any other world. We could be free and far from any conflicts of all realms. I planned to take her away with me after the seclusion. We both need the time-off together to reacquaint ourselves. There were a lot of things I longed to hear from her. Seventy thousands of years was long even by our standards. I wished to know and understand how she came to be the person she was today.

After thoroughly soaking and immersing myself in the divine spring, I felt rejuvenated. The fact that I came up with a viable plan to deal with Qing Cang also lifted my mood. Now, it was time to find Seventeenth. I couldn’t wait to see her thoroughly enjoy herself watching the sunset. It would also give us the chance to spend our time together without prying eyes. To my surprise, I found Seventeenth sitting dejectedly on the flight of steps. At closer look I saw her lips were badly bruised and her clothes were in disarray. She said she and Ye Hua simply had an argument earlier.

An argument? More like he tried to ravish her. I felt a surge of annoyance - and perhaps possessiveness, if I am being truthful to myself - welling up in me. Had Ye Hua completely lost his composure just because Seventeenth wished to end their supposed engagement? I can’t help but frown at this unseeming conduct. Did I misjudge my brother’s character?

An inkling feeling told me I was missing something important. The thought occupied my mind all the way back to Kunlun Mountain. Aside from trying to give her the comfort and support she needed; I decided not to meddle. This entanglement was just between the two of them; not something I can really interfere with. They had to decide what to do on their own. At least she didn’t seem to be incline towards his confession. I could only hope that in the end it would be me that she chooses to be with. I don’t know what I would do if she preferred to be with Ye Hua than me. Without her love, the remaining of my life would be desolate; a life half empty. Even then I will always guard her for life; albeit from afar.
After my death and subsequent resurrection, only one thing in this world mattered to me. Seventeenth was the sole reason I came back. The day I woke up in Yanhua Cave, I told Zhe Yan half the truth: I never stopped trying to pull back bits and pieces of my fragmented spirit and patch them together. What I did not tell him and Seventeenth was that there were times I was so exhausted and powerless to fight for my return that I just wanted to give up and be at peace in the abyss of nothingness.

Yet in my mind’s eye, Seventeenth’s teary face haunted me so. It also reminded me why I was trying to do the impossible again. I would fulfill the promise I gave to her. And I was glad I succeeded. The thought of her continuing to harm herself for the unforeseeable future, had I not returned, unsettled me greatly. Yet, it also gave me the courage to express the long-buried affections I held for her. I was elated when she didn’t reject me and seemed to slowly return those affections. If only I could have her by my side, then I would be content with this second chance at life.

In the beginning, when I heard she was betrothed to my brother, I believed I was too late. It turned out I woke up just in time to secure my place in her heart. A little later and Ye Hua would have taken her forever away from my grasp. It was surreal that both of us would fall for the same woman. I remembered well how Seventeenth was fond of her Golden Lotus; playing and talking to it was her favorite pastime. I suspected it was fate that brought them together, just like it brought her to me nearly ninety thousand years ago.

Sixteenth told me that my brother came here again and asked specifically for Seventeenth. I was half hoping, half wary of the aftermath of their meeting. Seventeenth confirmed that she had made it clear to Ye Hua that she held nothing but friendly regards for him. I felt the knot in my shoulder relax. I was ecstatic yet sad at the same time. Though I sincerely wished for my brother happiness, I refuse to give up Seventeenth. Save if she wanted to leave of her own volition, I am not willing to let go of her.

Myriads of thoughts ran through my mind as I played the Zither for her. I looked down at her sleeping face. She slept so peacefully. In her slumber, her features were perfect... full red dainty lips, long and soft eyelashes fanned out across her porcelain cheeks and cute little nose. Her hair, a long and dark tresse of shining silk, was spread all over my leg. She looked so feminine, so enchanting.

I have waited patiently long enough for her to settle things with Ye Hua. Now I need to ascertain that she was willing to stay with me forever. Though she had voiced her wish to remain at Kunlun Mountain before, I wished to make my intention toward her clear. There would be no room for misunderstandings. I wanted her to realize it was only her that I wanted and she would be my bride - if she so wish.

I shouldn’t have been surprised, Seventeenth turned the table on me in the end. She alluded to me that she would only stay, if I was willing to marry her. I really wanted to laugh but was afraid she would take it the wrong way. I doubted anyone else across the four seas and eight realms would dare
propose to me the way she just did. Her courage was always refreshing to me. And heaven forbid, the upturned, pouting face and mesmerizing eyes she kept on me were too much, I can not help but be tempted. I closed up the distance between us and brought our faces closer. She seemed to shudder every time I whispered near her ear. I took pleasure in that I could affect her so. I did not go straight for her lips, even when I desperately wanted to taste them. Instead I brushed my lips lightly against her sensitive areas and watched how the touch elicited reactions from her.

When I finally kissed her, it was like gaining back another long-forgotten piece of my soul. I could not help but indulge in her soft yielding lips again and again. I relished her timid responses to my touches, perhaps a little too much for a devoted man of Taoism like me. I had a hard time pulling myself back, only she could evoke this kind of passion in me. When I asked if she had any objections to my proposal and she did not refute me, my heart rejoiced. I sought to lavish her inviting lips with my affection again but she hid her face in my neck and refused to look up. Her maiden’s shyness was indeed adorable. The happiness of finally securing her love made me overjoyed. This time I could not stop the soft laughter.

That night I laid my head on the palm of my hand, just watching her sleep. Somehow, it felt right and very familiar. It became my favorite distraction now, I admitted to myself with chagrin. I, Mo Yuan, was acting just like a young lad experiencing his first love. I watched as her chest rose and fell with her gentle breaths. There was always something about her that made me want to take her into my arms and not let go. Even back in the beginning when I did not understand why. I laid down beside her on the pillow and pulled her closer. My face was buried in her soft hair, breathing in the unique peach fragrant wafted from her. My arms held her loosely to me in complete contentment. It was the most peaceful sleep I had since coming back.

Note: Special thanks to Midorizawa who proofread this story for us and to loreinacadis0412 for your wonderful ideas. :))
Chapter 15

Since Ye Hua came back from Kunlun Mountain, aside from for work, he barely talked to anyone. The first three days, he barricaded himself in his room and got thoroughly wasted. Tian Shu and Jia Yun were worried about him. In the end, they decided to invite the third uncle over. Maybe he could pry out what went wrong and help the Crown Prince.

When Lian Song walked inside the room, he saw Ye Hua sitting on the ground, his back resting against the bed. He was holding a bottle of wine in his hand; his eyes were bloodshot. Around him, several bottles were scattered on the floor.

"Ye Hua." Lian Song frowned at his nephew. Normally Ye Hua didn't like to drink, but now he drank heavily. Was something wrong?

Ye Hua lifted up his head sluggishly when he heard his name being called. "Uncle."

"What happened? Why are you drinking so much? This isn’t like you, Ye Hua."

"I lost her again, uncle."

"Who?"

"My wife. Su Su...Qian Qian. Am I destined to always lose her, uncle?"

“What do you mean? You’re not making any sense,” Lian Song blinked in confusion. Last he heard, things went well between his nephew and Qing Qiu’s Bai Qian.

“She’s in love with High God Mo Yuan,” he said hoarsely. “She didn’t care about me at all.”

“High God Mo Yuan, you say?” Lian Song was incredulous. Mo Yuan had been gone for along time. His miraculous return was unexpected. "When have Bai Qian and High God Mo Yuan met? Didn’t he just come back?"

“Uncle, don’t you know? Bai Qian and Mo Yuan’s seventeenth disciple is one and the same.”

“You,” Lian Song looked stunned. “You are saying Si Yin is Bai Qian? But that’s...”

“It explains a lot of things, doesn’t it? Why no one ever found them for the past seventy thousand years. Who would have thought to look for them in Qing Qiu? Then six hundred years ago, Qian Qian went to reseal Qing Cang. Didn’t we always wonder how and why she did it? Only Lord Dong Hua knew what actually went down that day,” he rumbled.

“As his disciple, Mo Yuan must have taught her the magic to seal the Bell of Eastern Emperor. She succeeded but Qing Cang also retaliated. He locked up her divine essence, erased all of her memories and sent her to the Mortal Realm. Then, we met and she jumped down the Zhu Xian Terrace later.”

"It was just a trial for her to become a Goddess, don't you see, uncle.” Ye Hua laughed weakly. “I was just a means to an end for her. Nothing more, nothing less. She didn’t even want to remember me.”

He took another swig from the bottle, then continued. “You know, for him, she stabbed her heart and fed him her heartblood for seventy thousand years to keep his soulless body intact. Then, she went to
Ying Zhou of the Eastern Sea alone, for the divine fungal grass. She also used half of her own cultivation to make an Elixir for him. Tell me, uncle, How can I compete with that?"

“Maybe you just misunderstood her,” he tried to console him. “Those two are very close. She’s Mo Yuan favorite disciple, after all. Maybe she’s just being filial to him, you know.”

“That’s what I thought too, at first,” he shook his head. “But today she admitted out loud that she loves him. You didn’t hear what she said, uncle. There’s really no place for me in her heart.”

Lian Song looked upon his heart-broken nephew with pity. The love between them was truly ill-fated and full of suffering, both back then and even now. He sunk down beside him unceremoniously and grabbed the bottle from Ye Hua’s hand. Then, he raised it to his lips and gulped down the wine.

“Su Su died over three hundred years ago and you pined over her death to this day. I know you want your wife back, so I didn’t say anything back then.” He looked at Ye Hua in the eyes. “I need you to open your eyes, Ye Hua. Despite what you want to believe, Bai Qian is not your Su Su and she’ll never be. You said it yourself, she has no memories of you.”

“They may look alike but they are two different people. Their temperaments are total opposites. I went to war with Si Yin, I knew how she was. She was not that naive, sweet and gentle soul like your Su Su. Si Yin was too domineering; I guess, as a Queen she has to be. I still remembered how she sent those Ghosts scattering all over the place when she was riled up over Mo Yuan’s death.”

Lian Song let out a sigh. “That woman was really hard-headed. Except for Mo Yuan, I doubt she ever listened to anyone. When the Sky Lord sent your father to persuade her not to pick a fight with the Ghost Clan and avenge Mo Yuan’s death, she drove him away without care.”

“Truthfully, I don’t think she’ll ever fit in here among us if you two ever got married,” he admitted. “She’s such a free spirit and bent on living by her own rules. In her eyes, this is just a marriage of convenience for the alliance between Qing Qiu and Celestial Clan. She won’t care as much.”

“Now that she rejected you, what are you going to do?” Lian Song asked. “If she ever got married to High God Mo Yuan, do you intend to keep pining over her as well?”

Ye Hua didn’t bother to say anything back. He had no answer to give. He just drank up more and more wine.

“Have you ever thought that maybe the two of you are just not meant to be together? That's why Su Su was gone all those years. If you keep pushing and going against fates, you’ll only end up bringing calamity upon yourself.” Lian Song said in all seriousness.

“Grieve, vent out your anger, get drunk a much as you want, I won’t stop you. But you must stop living in the past. You must stop deceiving yourself,” he urged Ye Hua to see the truth and move on. A firm hand was placed on Ye Hua’s shoulder. “I also want you to remember, there are those who love you. Your parents, me and your son. Don’t let yourself hit the rock bottom again. Do you understand me, Ye Hua?”

Lian Song spent the whole night at the Xi Wu Palace. He kept his nephew company and listened to his non-sense blabbering and crying when he was thoroughly intoxicated.
Just like they say: time flies when you are happy. Soon, the date Mo Yuan set to seclude himself arrived. Bai Qian accompanied him to the front of meditation cave.

“Here is the Elixir Zhe Yan made.” She gently placed the bottle of medicine in his hand. “It’ll help speed up your recovery. Master, you must take good care of yourself.”

Mo Yuan reached out and cradled the nape of her neck, kneading it softly, his face softened. “You’re not going to stay here?”

She shook her head regretfully. How she wished she could stay but she didn’t want to distract him. And she hadn’t been back to her Fox Den for over two months.

“I’m going to Qing Qiu but I’ll get back here before you come out.”

She wound her arms around his waist tightly and laid her head on his shoulder. Since his return, she never strayed far from his side. This will be, by far, the longest separation they’ve had. It was ridiculous how she was missing him already.

Reluctantly, she shifted away from his embrace and raised herself onto the tip of her toes. “I’m going to miss you,” she whispered against his lips. She hoped he won’t think she was too bold but Qing Qiu women were always straightforward with their affection.

Mo Yuan stood still for a moment when he heard her heartfelt confession and felt her soft lips on his own. He pulled her body flushed against him. His hand slipped into her soft hair, he pressed his lips against hers. He gently nudged those soft lips apart and slid his tongue into the moist warmth of her mouth. He slowly deepened their kiss, savoring her taste, then coaxed her to respond.

Bai Qian hesitated at first but gradually gave into him. Her hands slid up his shoulders and tightened around his neck, she melted against his hard body. Her eyes misted. Even if he didn’t say anything, the way he kissed her spoke in volumes of the longing he, too, felt for her.

“Get back as soon as you’re done. Alright?” He dropped small kisses on her head, his arms still wrapped around her.

“I know.” She whispered. When he entered the cave, she waited until he was completely gone from her sight before heading out.

“Seventeenth,” Zi Lan came looking for her. “Master retreated already?”

“Yes, he did,” she nodded. “I’m heading back to Qing Qiu. Senior Zi Lan, you’ve got to take good care of Master.”

“I know, Si Yin. You’ve told me how many times already? Since when you become such a nag?” he groaned. “Come on, I’m going to send you off at the Gate. Then, we’ll close down the mountain.”

Together they descended down the stairs. When both of them reached the Gate, there was someone there pacing back and forth impatiently. Bai Qian took a closer look and found him somewhat
familiar. It was the little Qilin that used to follow Li Jing around back then.

“High Goddess, you’re finally here. I’ve been waiting for you.” he perked up and rush to her side, as she approached.

“Little Qilin, I remembered you. What are you doing here?”

“High Goddess, you must come with me. You must save him,” he tugged her hand anxiously.

“Save whom?”

“The Ghost Lord. I’m afraid something bad is going to happen to him.” He begged. “Please, High Goddess.”

“I don’t think so,” she tried to extricate herself from his clutch. “What he did has nothing to do with me.”

“But High Goddess, I think it’s about Lord Qing Cang. He has been acting very strange since the day he came back from the Ninth Heaven’s Grand Hall.”

“Qing Cang, you say?” Bai Qian and Zi Lan exchanged uneasy glances.

“He’s supposed to stay in the Ninth Heaven. Lord Dong Hua had decreed it so. But three days ago, he sneaked back to the Ghost Realm and ordered the men to build a ritual platform.”

“And yesterday, I heard him talking with Princess Yan Zhi that he’s going to do something to assure Lord Qing Cang won’t be a problem anymore. High Goddess, you must stop him,” he pleaded.

Bai Qian didn’t want to get involved with him anymore but anything pertaining Qing Cang, no matter how irrelevant, can’t be ignored.

“Zi Lan, I’ll go with him and see what exactly is going on,” she decided. “You go back and take care of Master for me.”

“Definitely not. I’ll accompany you. The last time you went there, you were hurt badly. Who knows what will happen this time.” He said, putting his arm out to stop her. “Say no more, Si Yin. I won’t take no for an answer.”

“I’m going to tell senior first. You stay put and wait for me,” he insisted. “If I come back and you’re not here, I’ll have to tell Master. Got it?”

“Fine,” she glared at him hotly.

Zi Lan looked for his senior in the Grand Hall and kitchen but couldn't find him anywhere. He finally found him sweeping the floor at the back terrace.

“Senior,” he rushed to him. “There you are. I’ve looked for you everywhere.”

“Zi Lan, what happened? Why do you look so alarmed?”

“Si Yin and I are going to the Ghost Realm. Something is going on there,” he pulled his senior’s arm
urgently. “You must send word to Big Brother immediately.”


“I don’t know the details yet. But it’s about Qing Cang,” said Zi Lan.

“He’s not breaking out, is he?” Chan Song exclaimed.

“I don’t know. I guess we’re going to find out soon enough,” his mouth tightened into grim line. “I’m afraid Si Yin is going to do something stupid again if she goes there alone.”

“If something happened to her, I’m afraid…..,” he trailed off. His face turned toward the meditation cave.

“Anyway tell Big Brother to come quickly.” He hesitated, “Senior, you’ve to keep this quiet. We can’t let Master worry about her. Maybe it’s nothing serious. Li Jing might just want to trick her to seeing him after all.”

“I know. Go, go.”

When Bai Qian and Zi Lan reached the Ghost Realm. They found Li Jing in the middle of sacrifice ritual. He let the seals engraved on the ritual platform leeching off his blood and essence. She didn’t know what he was hoping to do. But if this ritual could somehow affect Qing Cang, it can’t be good.

Bai Qian decided she would stop him. But when she stepped forward, a platoon of his men quickly surrounded her and Zi Lan. They raised their swords threateningly at them, fully intent to protect their Lord from the unwelcome Celestials. Zi Lan also brandished his sword, preparing to press his attack if necessary. Two opposing sides came at standoffish, until little Qilin stepped up between them.

“I’m the one that brought them here,” shouted Qilin. “I’m just trying to save our lord. He’s killing himself, can’t you see?”

Li Jing’s men traded uncertain looks. They had their orders: to keep members of the rebellions out. But Fiery Qilin was very loyal to their Lord. He wouldn’t bring enemies here to harm him, would he?

“High Goddess,” little Qilin approached her and asked once more, “Please talk him out of it. No one here will attack you, I give you my word.” Then he turned around to face his Clansmen. One by one they slowly fell back to the sides, their wary eyes were still diligently trained on the strangers.

Bai Qian advanced toward the setup stage. “Ghost Lord, you must stop whatever you’re doing right now,” she demanded.

Li Jing’s concentration was broken. He opened his eyes abruptly when he heard her familiar voice so close to him. “No, Ah Yin. You can’t be here.”

“That’s bit too late. If you don’t stop this ritual now, I’m going to destroy the very platform you sit on, with or without you on it.” She lifted the Jade Purity fan of Kunlun up. Thunders rumbled in the distant sky, rolling mass of cloud moved rapidly and lightning began to dance through the darkness.
“Ah Yin, listen to me first,” he pleaded. “I’m trying to draw Qing Cang’s spirit out. Here, he will be defenseless. I’ll be able finish him off. You must let me continue.”

“Fool! You really think it’ll be that easy, Ghost Lord? With every minute passing, you grow weaker and he becomes stronger. How you’re supposed to conquer him then?” she jabbed at his recklessness. “You’ll end up setting him free and dooming everyone else to death.”

“No, I have to do this,” he denied. "I’ll end him once and for all, Ah Yin.”

“Have it your way then.”

With Jade Purity fan of Kunlun, Bai Qian sent attack after attack straight toward him. Li Jing had no choices but to retract his essence and form a barrier to protect himself. The platform can’t withstand the powerful onslaught and exploded in a loud boom, splinter of woods burst out in every direction. Li Jing flew to her side, he was distressed. “Why must you stop me? He can’t be allowed to live anymore.”

“You really want to do this? Kill him, your own father?” she took him in, weighing his claims.

“I do.” He said solemnly. “What you said that day was true. I’ve never accomplished anything in this lifetime. This is the only thing I could do for you, for my sister, and for my people. If he got out, he’s going to lead a lot of people to their deaths again. I can’t allow that.”

“I see,” she ignored his comment about her. “But this isn’t the way.”

“Then tell me what you want me to do,” he pleaded with her. “You know I’d follow you to the end of the world, Ah Yin.”

Bai Qian frowned. “Not yet, I’ll tell you later,” she said finally. “Go back to the Ninth Heaven, Ghost Lord. I’ll send for you later.”

She signaled to Zi Lan, who stood guard and watched their exchange uneasily, that they were leaving. Taking a couple of steps, she stopped and turned back suddenly. “I totally forgot. Ghost Lord,” she called out and retrieved something from her secret chest compartment. “Here, I’m returning this to you.”

Li Jing took a look at the proffered object in her hand and flinched back visibly when he saw the soul jade. It reminded him of all those times he failed her then lost his chance with her forever. “No. Keep it, Ah Yin. I don’t want it back. It’s a compensation for you after all.”

“If you said so,” Bai Qian shrugged and returned the soul jade back to its resting place.

After Bai Qian and Zi Lan left, Li Jing ordered his most trusted general to keep his men posted at the Roushui Riverbank and to inform him immediately of any changes occurred around the Bell of Eastern Emperor.

Bai Qian bid her senior farewell as soon as their reached the Ghost Realm border, claiming she’d just continue on to Qing Qiu from there. When she made certain Zi Lan was indeed gone, she wrought the disguised magic over her person. Under the disguised of her male counterpart, Bai Qian headed
in the opposite direction of her home, to the Thirteen Heaven.

“Seventeenth disciple of Kunlun Mountain, Si Yin, ask to see Lord Dong Hua,” she informed the Celestial guards stationed at the main entrance of Taichen Palace. Soon enough an official rushed out and led her inside, straight to the lord of manor.

On her way, Bai Qian carefully looked around and sighed in relief, at least Xiao Jiu was not here. No one can’t know about this meeting, or else her plan will be all for naught. When she came to stand in front of the Lord, she bowed in respect.

“Si Yin greets Lord Dong Hua.”

Lord Dong Hua posture didn’t even change when she saluted him. He was reclining against a side pillow and staring intently at the teacup in his hand as if there was something fascinating about it. If Bai Qian found this strange, she didn’t make a comment.

Then without preamble, he spoke up. “I sent your niece back home days ago. She refused to move away from the palace’s entrance. It was bothersome. Such unbecoming conducts for Qing Qiu’s princess.” He placed the teacup down and faced her. “But you’re not here for her, aren you?”

Bai Qian looked chagrin, Xiao Jiu was certainly persistent. After the last turn down that drove her all the way to Kunlun Mountain, Bai Qian thought she had given up already. Still, she can’t blame her niece. She only acted according to her upbringing: true to her feeling and daring to fight for what she truly desired.

“No, this visit is not about my niece. I have a question in mind. I hope the Lord would grant me an answer,” she said, a self-deprecating smile on her lips. Since he had figured out her true identity, she would just asked him plainly.

“Hn.” He barely acknowledged but that was good enough for her to go on.

“This Jade Purity fan of Kunlun,” she spread the fan open. “Is there any way to enhance its power?”

“Shouldn’t you ask Mo Yuan this question?” A slight quirk appeared on his mouth. “It’s of his own making after all.”

Dong Hua slanted his eyes at her when she chose not to answer. “Ah. You plan to confront Qing Cang on your own then.”

Bai Qian kept her face neutral, neither denying nor admitting to his dead-on speculation. She waited patiently for him to continue.

“Speaking of Mo Yuan, he sent this particular set of teacup to me seventy thousand years ago. Your niece broke it.”

Bai Qian sighed inwardly as he continued to feign ignorance and sidestepped her inquiry. “I believe there’re more of it. I’ll personally look for them and send another set to you.”

“He did say he would have his disciple brought more here. I guess he forgot after all,” he spoke in such a bored tone. “The teacup didn’t make it, yet the person that supposed to be here arrived. Strange isn’t it?”

She looked at the Lord in askance. He often spoke in riddle, this she already knew. But his word play gave her such an headache. The admiration she had for her niece’s endless patience with the Ancient Lord went up a notch.
Abruptly his persona changed. “Tell me, which is more powerful; the fan or its wielder?” He gestured pointedly toward the fan in her hand and herself.

“Both are formidable in its own rights, even more when put to work together,” she replied, bewildered with his out of turn questioning.

“Tell me, is the fan or its wielder that’s powerful?” Abruptly his persona changed. He gestured pointedly toward the fan in her hand and herself.

“Both are formidable in their own right, even more so when put to work together,” she replied, bewildered with his out of turn questioning.

“Then together it must be.”

“This fan has been with me for over seventy thousands of years. It hardly ever separated from me.” She was confused. How they were not together?

“As one?” Dong Hua raised an eyebrow as if to mock her silliness.

That comment actually gave her a pause. “You mean that I must become one with the fan,” she said slowly, her brows furrowed deeper, “to strengthen it.”

“A dangerous practice.”

“If I bound it to my own essence, can it be done?” she asked.

“Indeed.”

“Master never mentioned this method to me.” She was skeptical, not that she doubt the credibility of his wisdom.

“Why’d he teach you such a desperate move? Were the fan destroyed, your life would be forfeited as well,” he replied off-handedly.

“Since the Bell of Eastern Emperor, this is the only weapon ever appeared in Kunlun Mountain. How could you think so little of its power? Though it’s not as destructive as the Bell of Eastern Emperor, it’s still a very powerful artifact. Not only because it could summon wind and thunder.”

“So I’m not skilled enough to fully unleash its potentials?” Her mentor once said when she mastered the fan and attained the rank of Goddess, she would be able to turn it into a sword. And she did. Now Lord Dong Hua claimed there was more to it?

“Skills are not too mediocre but you’re certainly not strong enough to withstand its backlash in your current state.”

“I see,” she flinched at his knowing looks.

“Do you?” He prodded. “Inside the Bell, Qing Cang may be weakened but you aren’t his peer either. All it takes is one wrong move.”

“I understand.” This was a forbidden method; she was not supposed to use it, for a very good reason.

Her thoughts race at his revelation. “I’ll trouble you no further. Thank you for your guidance,” she
was grateful of his help.

“Don’t thank me yet,” he said nonchalantly, “you might regret later on.”

She caught on his implied meaning quickly. “If it means Master, my family and others will be alive and well, then I certainly will have no regret,” she avowed, then said aloud. “May the Lord grant me another favor?”

“What favor?” He was half intrigued half amused. She would dare to make a demand out of him. Qing Qiu’s Bai Qian was certainly a fearless lot. He could see why Mo Yuan coveted her so. Beautiful, brave and outspoken. And honest, without any malice, just like her niece. The Fox Clan was truly a wondrous place for nurturing great generations. He would entertain her request, if it was plausible. He had once told Bai Feng Jiu, he and her aunt had fates together and he meant it.

“If worse came to worst, may the Lord help and keep my Master alive and make sure he’ll move on?”

Lord Dong Hua stared at her. For a moment, something moved behind his eyes, and then it was gone. “Understood,” he acquiesced.

“Then all is good,” she was satisfied, knowing he would keep to his promise. “Farewell, Lord.” She gave him a deep bow then left.

Lord Dong Hua got up and looked after her retreating back. He let out a long sigh after she was gone.

“Mo Yuan, Mo Yuan. This disciple you haven’t misjudged after all. Courageous and righteous just like you. She could be the one to stand by your side for all eternity, alas will you be able to keep her?” his speculation sounded ominous.

Note : Special thanks to Midorizawa who proofread this story for us. By the way, I saw an influx of readers lately, or is it recurring readers? lol

Don’t know where you are from but ’Greeting to every visitor’ out there. :>
Chapter 16

As soon as Bai Qian reached Qing Qiu, she told Mi Gu to lock down the Fox Den indefinitely. Then, she went to Yanhua Cave. A thick barrier was placed over its opening to ensure no one would disturb her.

Bai Qian went to the stone bed and placed the Jade Purity fan of Kunlun in front of her and tried to figure out what to do next. She gathered her spiritual power in the palm of her hand and commanded a small yet steady amount of it to her fingertips. She guided it into the fan and initiated the exchanging process. Gradually she opened up her core essence and let herself fully bond with the fan.

Within her mind's eye, she could see the tremendous power it held within. If she concentrated hard enough, she could feel the air caressing the fan and its connection to the surroundings. Between them magic spells were no longer needed, they acted as one entity now.

For next twelve days and twelve nights, she meditated tirelessly and replenished as much as spiritual power as she could. She knew it won’t be enough, but it was the best she could do.

When the soft golden light of a new day appeared in the sky, Bai Qian leaved Yanhua Cave. She discussed with Mi Gu over the matters that needed to be addressed and what went on in Qing Qiu during her absence.

She also asked him to prepare many scrolls she deemed necessary for Xiao Jiu. Though she had yet to talk to her niece about succeeding her position as the Queen of Qing Qiu, it will happen eventually. She will need to study those documents - treaties and agreements between realms, rules and regulations and so much more - for future reference.

Bai Qian could only hope being the Queen will keep Xiao Jiu busy and set her apart from Lord Dong Hua. With enough time and distance, the little fox should be able to forget him and move on with her life. None of her family, aside from Fourth Brother, ever suffered from the love trials to become a God, she hope all the bad luck will not fall on her little niece.

“Mi Gu, have you heard anything from mother and father? Will they return soon?” She asked.

“Aunt, Yung Zheng came here a few days ago with High God Bai Yi’s message, it’s highly likely they’ll be here by the end of next week.”

“Really?” Her smile widened. She missed them so much, both had been gone for such a long time. “I’ll be back next week then.”

It was a good thing they came back quickly. She wanted that marriage arrangement gone as soon as possible; before Sky Lord will get any ideas and pull something on her. At least Ye Hua had stopped pursuing her. She hoped it will stay that way, else it will be so awkward when her parents go to the Ninth Heaven for the annulment.

She also hoped Zhe Yan and her Fourth brother already mentioned to her parents the change in relationship between her and her mentor. Her father maybe uncomfortable with Mo Yuan becoming his son-in-law, they were once colleagues after all. She still believe he will not object them being together too strongly. It was her mother she worried about. She had bemoaned so many times over the decision that sent her daughter off to Kunlun Mountain.
When she wrapped up her business, Bai Qian raced back to Kunlun Mountain. She was impatient to get there before her mentor came out of his retreat. She didn’t anticipate Mo Yuan would leave early on. But as she stepped inside the Grand Hall, she saw him rolling the wooden scroll that laid open on the table in front of him and handed it to Senior Chan Song.

“Make sure he got it done as soon as possible,” instructed Mo Yuan.

“Yes, Master. I’ll go right away.” Chan Song took the scroll, bowed then left immediately.

Bai Qian barely heard their conversation from where she stood. She peered at them curiously and watched her senior left in a hurry.

“Master, I’m back.” She announced her arrival.

Mo Yuan turned his face toward her and gave her an affectionate smile. “Come here, Seventeenth.”

She made her way to him and dropped down by his side. “Master, weren’t you supposed to retreat for another day? Is everything alright?” She was anxious.

“I’m well. Don’t worry. Did you finish your business in Qing Qi?”

“All done,” she nodded.

“Very well. Let’s go then.” Mo Yuan stood up and offered her his hand.

“Where are we going?” she asked curiously, putting her small hand into his much larger one.

“Didn’t you say you want to visit the Mortal Realm?”

Bai Qian eyes’ lit up in joy. “Truly? We’re going there? Oh, I missed the marketplace. It is always lively down there.”

She had missed the old days where she and senior Zi Lan would set up fortune-telling stalls and competed against each other who would attract more customers. Zi Lan lost more often than not even though he was better at telling fortunes and reading bones. He often accused her of using her handsome face to draw the crowd. She told her mentor as much when he asked what she was laughing at.

The city they visited was one of the largest city in Quan Zhou. All kinds of buildings could be seen along the roads. There were crowded with passing townspeople creating a scene full of hustle and bustle. Mo Yuan watched Bai Qian bounced from one stall to another. He noticed her lingered at a particular stall than most. When he walked closer, she was picking a few hair claps and hair pins before placing them back when she noticed he was closed by.

Mo Yuan looked down at the displayed ornaments and picked a golden hair comb encrusted with a pair of mandarin ducks twining their neck together.

“Do you like this one?” he asked.

“I love it,” she smiled shyly at him when he gently put it in her hair.
“When we get back, I’ll make another hairpin for you. How is that?” He looked at her tenderly, his lips stretched into a smile. She thought his smile could brighten thousands of worlds.

“I can’t wait,” she responded in earnest. Her mentor hadn’t crafted anything for a long time. She wondered whether it will held some kind of power.

“You’re so lucky,” the jewelry seller who heard their loving exchanges sighed dreamily. “I wish my husband is as affectionate as yours.”

Bai Qian’s face colored slightly, she was about to correct her that he wasn’t her husband – yet. Then she took note of the small crowd gathering near them, most of which were young females. Some were blushing when they gazed upon Mo Yuan. She was reminded once again how females usually found her mentor’s face irresistible. Not that she was completely immune, she just had a lot of practices and seventy thousands of years to suppressing the urges.

She hooked her arm with his and dragged him away from his admirers; claiming it was already noon and they should find a restaurant. After lunch, Bai Qian brought them to a tea house. When they settle down, the storyteller - an old gentleman with long white-beard - was in the middle of telling the story of the Niulang the cow herder, and his beloved Zhi Nu.

Zhi Nu was the Daughter of Heaven who fell in love with a mortal. They lived together peacefully for a time as a couple before Zhi Nu’s parents took her away. With the help of a celestial cattle, Niulang followed her all the way to heaven. In the end, despite their love for each other, they were forever separated by Silver River and can only be reunited once a year during the mid-summer’s night. Their love was truly tragic, as was most love stories between mortals and celestial beings.

“I don’t understand. Why she let herself falling in love with him when she know they couldn’t be together.” Bai Qian commented when the story was finished.

“Because love is irrational. Sometimes people let their heart decide, rather than their head. The more desperate they feel, the less sensible they become.” Mo Yuan sipped the tea slowly when he replied.

“It’s just not worth the heartache,” she justified.

“Sometimes to love and then lose are better than never love at all,” he said solemnly.

“I’d rather not met Li Jing at all,” she wrinkled her nose at that notion.

Mo Yuan raised an eyebrow at her conviction. “You still hold the grudge against him.”

“No really,” she shrugged. “But it’d be better without him in my life at all.”

“He kept you safe when you were held captive in Grand Zi Ming Palace.” Mo Yuan pointed out.

“There’s no coincidence or chance encounter in life. Everything’s, good or bad, happen for a reason and serve a purpose, Seventeenth. You and him are fated to meet, whether you like it or not.”

“I guess,” she reluctantly agreed.

“Let’s moving,” Mo Yuan got up and waited for her. “Do you want to spend the night here?”

“Do you have some place else in mind?” She asked.

“Actually, I do.”
“Then let’s go. We could always come back later,” she decided.

The journey took longer than she thought. It was already nightfall and they had yet to reach their
destination. Mo Yuan gathered her in his arms and told her to sleep. The cool gentle breeze of the
night and the steady beat of his heart slowly lured her to sleep.

When she woke up the next morning, she found herself lying on a bed. Her face was pressed against
her mentor’s broad chest, his heartbeat beneath her ear, his breath warm in her hair. One of his arm
was flung over her small waist. Down there, their limbs entangled intimately.

She made a note that he even took off her hair ornaments and outer robe, only two layers of white
cloth were left on her body. She flushed crimson red; wanting to extricate herself but was afraid that
her movement will disturb his rest. With few deep breathes, she forced her body to relax and let her
eyes roam his feature instead.

His hair was let down just like the time he layed in Yanhua Cave. She rather liked him this way. He
looked younger, relaxed and at peace without the burdens of being the God of War to weigh him
down. She can’t help but reached out and lightly smoothed his eyebrow and traced down his nose
and his lips with her finger. She wondered if he knew she used to do this while he slept during those
years, would he blame her?

“Awake?” His soft voice startled her out of her reverie. She tried to pull apart but the arm that held
her tightened.

She nodded timidly. “How,” she cleared her throat, “How did I end up in your bed?”

“You cling to me and refused to let go of me last night,” he said impassively. “So I figured out laying
here with you is easier.”

“Ah.”

“It’s still early. Do you want to go back to sleep?”

She nodded again and buried her face deep in his chest. If only she could stay with him like this
everyday, no matter what will happen in the future, she will have no more regret.

The next time she woke up was late morning, judging by the light outside. Her mentor was long
gone, the side he slept on was rather cold. She slowly got up from the bed and begun to explore the
place. It was a simple wooden house that was built into a cave. She peered into the back passage, it
clearly led to somewhere else. The noise coming from another room alerted her to her mentor’s
presence. She padded across the room and began searching for him.
She found him sitting at the table, reading a scroll. Two bowls of steamed rice and some side dishes laid there.

“Are you hungry?” he folded the scroll and placed it away. “Let’s eat.”

“You cook?” She was bewildered. Spending twenty thousand years with him, she never saw him cook before. “But you’ve never cooked!”

“How do you think I survive before becoming the Master of Kunlun Mountain?” He looked at her strangely. “I didn’t cook because someone else already did that.”

She picked up the chopstick and took a couple of bites, it was quite pleasing. Bai Qian was speechless. The sons of Heavenly Father were truly a class of their own. Was it a requisite that they excelled at everything they did? She decided to have Xiao Jiu taught her how to cook when they got back. Simple dish like podridge shouldn’t be that hard to cook, right?

“When you’re done, we should go out. The weather is very nice today,” said Mo Yuan.

“Where are we?” she asked.

“Fusang, far east of Quan Zhou.”

“Across the Great Sea?” She was surprised. No wonder it took them quite some time getting here.

“This area is scarcely inhabited. We won’t be disturbed.”

When she stepped out of the hut, she can’t help but looking in awe at their surroundings. Around them vivid yellow and orange color boughs highlighted the area. The shafts of sunlight caressed the carpet of reds and golds before her. An icy wind blew, the trees shook slightly and golden leaves spinning through the air. She squealed in delight and let them float around her. Some blew past her face and landed lightly on the ground.

“Master, this place is so beautiful.” She looked back at him; her eyes were bright with happiness.

“There is a large pool over that way. Shall we?” He took her elbow and led her away.

It was an enchanting emerald pool, crystal clear, she could see its bottom. Mammoth boulder and ferns surrounded it. The place was so inviting, she was tempted to jump right into it. In the end, she decided to sit down against him.

“How did you find this place?” She rested her head on his shoulder, admiring the magnificent view.

“I stumbled upon this place a long time ago and didn’t have a chance to come back. It’s peaceful and quiet. The energy here is pure enough, suitable for retreat.”

“I like it here,” she turned around in his embrace and smiled at him. “I don’t mind staying here for a while.”

He studied her face. “Won’t you be bored?”

“Give me some good books, I could practically live here for years,” she laughed.

Mo Yuan tried to reconcile the wildfox that loved to run around and played pranks on her seniors with the woman who sat idly with him now.

“I guess it comes with age,” she admitted. “I’m so used to reading books to pass time.”
“It must be hard for you, staying in Qing Qiu all the time,” he said quietly.

He learned from Zhe Yan that she hardly stepped out of Qing Qiu, all because she was busy guarding his body. He knew she loved to sneak out and played. It was in her nature as a fox, he guessed. For her to stay put all years round, it was a feat in itself.

“No at all, I like to keep your company. Sometimes I brought books with me to read.”

She remained there and kept a low profile to minimize the risk of being exposed. It wouldn’t do if someone recognized her face, especially one of her seniors. The Easter Sea King’s banquets was a near-missed, good thing she sneaked out just in time. It would be disastrous to run-in her seniors and Li Jing there.

“The other time, I closed down and practiced there. Yanhua Cave spiritual energy is good for cultivation, maybe not as much as Kunlun Mountain, but it’s good enough for my people.”

“You’ve changed.”

He knew she was bound to change with time. He had gone for a long time after all.

“No really,” she looked into his eyes, “I’m still that lazy fox who prefer lounging around than doing the hard work. That remind me, I want to ask you something.”

“Yes?”

“I could turn the Jade Purity fan of Kunlun into a sword just as you’ve said I would. But my sword skill is rusty, would you mind teaching me again?”

Mo Yuan looked at her and chuckled, “You really have changed. I couldn’t imagine the day you’d ask for lessons in sword fighting. The next thing I know, you’d ask me to recite the war matrix.”

“I’m serious, you know,” she frowned. “And that’d also be useful.”

“It’d be my pleasure, Seventeenth.” He smoothed her hair affectionately. “But why the sudden interest?”

“I told you I want to share some of your burden, if you’d allow me to,” she reminded him.

“I never expect you to,” Mo Yuan took her hand in his and squeezed it gently. “It’s enough that you’re here with me.”

“I know. But this is also my wish,” she sought his eyes, trying to convey her innermost thought.

He was deeply touched that she sincerely wanted to shoulder his responsibilities with him. Not that he would let her actually do it. But the thought alone warmed his heart. He raised her open palm toward his mouth and placed a gentle kiss on it. “I appreciate it, Seventeenth.”

Note: In a few days, I’m going on field trip so there won’t be new chapter this weekend. Please check for the new chapter in two weeks.
Bai Qian stretched out lazily on the blanket. Her eyes pleasantly drank in the breathtaking paint of vivid green, red and golden that nature had to offer. She purposely chose this shady spot, under the boughs of trees, to lay down. It was a particularly hot day. Staying close to the spring and letting the breeze cool her down seemed like the best idea.

Two weeks passed quickly since she and her mentor arrived here. The first week, they spent several days fixing the wooden house. Even if it was protected by magic; the house had been abandoned for a long time and needed some repair.

Bai Qian couldn’t help but chuckled when she thought of her mentor. Seeing him carrying wood to fix the house was a sight she least expected. In her memories, she usually saw him standing serenely in front of the class and taught her and her seniors battle tactics and Taoism. During the time of conflicts and wars, he left his languish persona behind, took up the more aggressive demeanor, and lived up to the title of God of War.

A domesticated Mo Yuan who cooked and did mundane things like any ordinary mortal revealed a new side of him she never experienced. It was a privilege no one but her have ever been privy to. She cherished every simple moment they spent together, either helping him do chores or preparing meals together. Some days when the weather was favorable, they ventured out, side by side, exploring the neighboring woods. He also took it upon himself to demonstrate some sword fighting techniques. And there were nights he brought out the zither and played for her or watched the starry sky with her.

Them being together like this was more than she ever dared to hope. Yet deep down, she was dissatisfied. They had shared several kisses and petting, some were more intense than others. She knew he was affected as much as she was with their little exploration. But he always stopped before it went too far. She knew he did it out of respect for her and her family. But it was becoming annoying.

Were she to be honest to herself, she would have admitted that she was anxious. Qing Cang would sooner or later become a real threat. No one can say for certain about what the outcome will be. Their inevitable final confrontation and what could happen always loomed over what should be the happiest moment of her life.

Bai Qian chew her lip in frustration as she lamented over her mentor’s iron-fisted control over his libido. At the rate things were going between them, that final consummation will not happen anytime soon; unless she did something drastic and grabbed the opportunity with both hands.

She didn't want to miss a thing. There will be no more regret. Despite being untried and physically innocent to carnal desire; she craved for more intimacy. She wanted to know if her mentor was a gentle or fierce lover. Which kind of expression he would make when they became one? Would he
moan for her?

Bai Qian’s face flushed red as her lustful thoughts began spiraling out of control. She blamed it on her seniors; they had corrupted her innocent mind since she was young. All of them thought she was a male, so they didn’t spare many details when they talked about what males and females did behind closed doors at night. She didn’t even dare to think what would have happened back then if her mentor ever learned her seniors had shown her drawings from Kamasutra book and took her to a pleasure house.

She looked over at the inviting spring and decided a dip might be good for her feverish body. She took off her outer robe, folded it neatly and placed it on the blanket. She walked toward the crystal clear spring and swung her legs into the water. The spring on this side wasn’t too deep, only at her chin level. She swam a little before finding a slightly elevated boulder where she could sit down and let the water slosh around her. She placed her head against another boulder, closed her eyes and sighed in contentment.

Sometime had passed before she heard her name being called. Mo Yuan was looking for her. Bai Qian shifted her body toward the direction his voice came from. “In here,” she called out.

He followed her voice and walked closer to edge of the spring. When he found her in the water, he let out a light chuckle. It seemed she was having a good time.

“Having fun?” he asked, taking in her delighted expression.

“It’s hot today,” she defended herself. “Why don’t you join me? It’s really nice here.”

He merely shook his head. “If you want to soak some more, I’ll wait for you.”

So he won’t join her after all, she was slightly disappointed. Then she looked him up and down, her eyes twinkled a little. She swam toward where he stood and raised her hand as if asking him to help her up.

When Mo Yuan bent down and pulled her weight into his arm, she wrapped both of her arms around his neck tightly, lean backward and let the gravitation pulled both of them back into the water. The water splashed loudly and lurched around them.

“Tricked you, didn’t I?” She let out a bell-like laughter.

Mo Yuan who was thoroughly soaked now shook his head at her antics. Since he was already drenched, he decided to entertain her earlier request. He allowed her to lead him to where she vacated a moment ago and lean his back against the boulder. When she wedged herself between his legs and sat against him, he wrapped his arms around her, holding her to him. They enjoyed the moment of tranquility together.

Her head tilted back slightly, her full red lips formed a perfect pout. “It wasn’t that bad, was it?” She asked cheekily and broke their solitude after a time.

“You have grown bold.” His usually serene voice hitched slightly when he looked down. Did she have any idea what image she portrayed just now? Her thin white under cloth was wet, transparent and clung tightly to her every curve, leaving nothing to imagination. His mouth went dry; even her nipples were visible as two distinct pebbles under the wet cloth.
Bai Qian watched him eyeing her almost naked body. She turned her body around in his arm before placing a hand on his hard chest. “Have I?” Her long and wet hair accentuated her small face and made her bright eyes shine out even more. She lowered her eyelashes to hide the mirth in her eyes. Who said only he could tease?

She raised up on her folded legs and brought herself to his eye level. She leaned in, the tip of her nose barely brushed against his cheek. "But you like it, don't you?" Her hot breath caressed his neck. She wrapped her lips around the bottom of his earlobe and sucked it lightly before slowly dragged them back to his mouth. She smiled in triumph when she felt the smallest jump of his muscles under her fingertips.

Mo Yuan closed his eyes, savoring the taste and texture of her mouth, it was so warm and welcoming. She whimpered a little when his tongue slid against hers, stroking and dueling. She wrapped her arms around his neck and pushed herself more intimately against him, her soft breast pressing against his well-defined chest. One of his hand caressed the back of her neck as he kissed her deeply, another kneaded her rear.

Then he pulled back slightly, his lips trailed down her neck to her shoulder blade. Her wet undercloth was pushed to the side, revealing her bare shoulder and the pale and soft flesh of her breast. His mouth trailed down and sought out the pink bud on its top. When he found it, he pulled the flesh with his teeth and sucked until it was hard.

His idle hand reached out to cup the other breast when his fingers accidentally swept across the only jagged scar that marred her otherwise smooth and nearly flawless skin. He paused his administration and shifted his eyes to see the pale white line above her heart. It looked deep and old. Hearing she had plunged the knife into her own heart to let the blood out and fed him was one thing, seeing the remainder of the said acts was an entirely different matter.

During his long life, no one ever did that much for him. It was always him who guarded the world and kept the peace for the sake of others. But these small hands that belonged to his once-little apprentice had guarded him for many thousands of years without fail. A surge of unimaginable love rushed up and swelled in his chest. Mo Yuan gently brushed his lips against the scar again and again as if to apologize for the pain he had caused.

Bai Qian felt as if she was burning alive every time he touched the scar. Her small body began to tremble like a little leaf. She clutched his head tightly to her chest and helplessly let out a long, breathy and torturous moan. “Master, ooooh...”

The sound pulled him out of his foggy mind and back to reality. Mo Yuan looked at her pliant body that laid trembling in his arms and chided himself for failing to control his own urge. He didn’t mean to take liberties with her body. His forehead was laid against hers as he drew several slow breaths to calm his aroused body. He slowly gathered the collar of her under cloth and pulled it closed.

Bai Qian had felt the fast beating of his heart under her fingertips. She knew he wanted her as much as she did. Why must he stop again? She was so frustrated that she almost hit him when he pulled away from her.

“It’s getting cold in here. Let’s go back to the house.” Mo Yuan had turned his head away so he didn’t see flashes of emotion swept across Bai Qian’s face. Incredulity, disappointment and determination.

He lifted her up in his arms and walked out of water back to where she left the rest of her clothes. He
lowered her down and waited until she stood on her own feet. A quick spell dried up their clothes instantly. He picked up her outer robe and wrapped it around her shoulder. They walked back to the house in silence, their hands still clasped together.

During the trip back, Bai Qian’s eyes steeled with renew determination. She won’t tolerate this halfhearted courting anymore. She wanted them belong to each other in every possible way. She seethed. She was a nine-tailed fox, a natural-born temptress. If she can’t even seduced him into her bed, she would have done great disservices to her race.

Her frown was replaced with a secretive smile as she planned, plotted and schemed in her mind. Her family's fox magic aside, she'd use any means to entice him and stroke his carnal desire. If he still resists, she would simply have her way with him then. Let’s see whether he could withstand her willpower. She made a promise to herself; it won’t be long before Mo Yuan belonged to her completely in mind, body and soul.

Since that day, they sometimes left their secret abode and visited towns, listening to storytellings and joining local festivities. Before they knew it, mid-Autumn festival was soon upon them. Both went into town to watch the dragon dance and listen to the singing and worshiping of the Moon Goddess.

Bai Qian brought a few mooncakes back. Tonight the full harvest moon was nigh in the clear sky. They planned to celebrate the occasion near the pool just between the two of them. She laid the banquet on the soft grass and waited for her mentor. He brought the zither and a couple of wine bottles with him.

She raised up on her knees, took a bottle from his hands and gestured him to lay down beside her. “Where did you get these?” She didn’t see him buying anything while they were in town.

“How did you get these?” She didn’t see him buying anything while they were in town.

“From the hut, I keep some here from back then. Today is a good day, so I think we should open them and celebrate.”

“You made this wine? It’s what? Hundred thousand years old?” She gushed excitedly.

Bai Qian carefully opened the lid. The smell alone was divine. She used to steal some of her mentor’s wine, so she knew how exceptionally good his wine was. Compared to Zhe Yan’s, his was richer and stronger in both taste and content. A wine truly brewed for stout men. She remembered how it had burned her throat. Now she knew it was better sipping slowly than guzzling down the whole bottle. That would be a total waste.

She took a small sip and let its flavor seep in and spread through her mouth. “Ah. It tastes better than I remembered.”

“Slowly, Seventeenth,” he cautioned. “The wine is almost too strong for you. Drinking too much, too fast would be harmful.”

“I know.” They drank, ate the mooncake and reminisced about the old days where he found her passed out cold near his wine cellar after having consumed only a few bottles of his trademark wines.

“The full moon is truly beautiful tonight,” she sighed happily.
“A magnificent view, excellent wine and a great companion to enjoy the moment. Let’s doing something special to celebrate the night.” She gazed back at him. He was reclining on his side, sipping his second bottle and watching her.

She tapped her chin with her index finger, pretending to think. “How about I perform a sword dance for you?”

Mo Yuan raised an eyebrow; it was actually a good suggestion. They had worked on her sword skills for quite some time. And he never saw her dance before, with or without the sword. There were rumors of her mesmerizing dances on the top of Zhe Yan’s Peach Blossom trees. Let’s just say he was intrigued.

“Go ahead. I’ll play the zither.”

She turned the Jade Purity Fan of Kunlun into a long sword, stepped out into the open clearing and waited for him. Mo Yuan began with slow rhythm. His fingers played the song he learned by rote. His eyes were trained on the lithe body moving gracefully in sync with the tune. Her body coordination was smooth and well-balanced. The sword in her hand moved like an extension of her arm. Her breasts jutted out enticingly when she arched her back, her sword arm stretch out to the side. She moved like a fluttering butterfly.

When the notes turned short and sharp, reaching a crescendo; her movement became more aggressive and powerful. Her steps were swift yet firm. Her postures were poise and flawless. Bathed in the silver moonlight, she was even more alluring and breathtaking than normal. She truly deserved to be called the first beauty of all realms, he idly noted. As he watched on, Mo Yuan could feel the stirring of tension building inside him. He never took his eyes off her enchanting form even after her performance came to an end.

She slowly walked back to him and sat on his side, shoulder to shoulder. “Did I do well?” she asked.

Mo Yuan looked at her rosy face and the small beads of perspiration forming on her brow. “Very good, your form has gotten better,” he admitted and gently wiped them away from her face with his sleeve.

“You also look beautiful,” he told her as much and watched the crimson spread down her neck. He wondered how far it went.

Her smile widened at his praise. “Where is my reward then?” Back then, he often gifted her small tokens when she did well in class or on her assignment, usually they were tasty morsels.

“Didn’t I just give you hundred thousand years old wine?” He asked wryly.

“What if I want another kind of delicacy?” She asked coyly and settled herself into his lap. Her demeanor made it clear what she wanted from him.

Mo Yuan breathed in her intoxicating scent of peach blossoms. He knew what she was trying to do. She had been pushing and testing his limits lately with her enticement. He tried to reign in his advances but he was a man as well. In his arm was his favorite person and she was oh so beautiful and beyond tempting.

He held her eyes steady before closing the gap between them and captured her lips with his own. He
parted her lips, slide his tongue inside seeking hers. She tasted of his wine but sweeter. Each time their lips met, the kiss became harder, teeth bumping, tongue wrestling. He lifted his head a fraction to draw a rough breathe before reclaiming the lips eagerly seeking his. A throaty moan spilled past her plump lips.

While their mouth performed the age old dance of seduction, Bai Qian slide her hand down to his chest and discreetly pushed apart layers of his clothes bit by bit. Then she pounced on the unsuspecting male and knocked him backward, much to his surprise.

Mo Yuan only had time to support his upper half on his bent arms before her lower body pinned him down to the ground. Her long, dark hair hung like a silken curtain. The silvery moon above made a soft halo around her form. She let his darkened eyes roaming her body before she followed his descent. She pulled his lower lip into her mouth and sucked it hard. Her idle hand slipped inside his under cloth and roamed his bare chest. When her nails grazed his nipple, he shuddered violently. Hot rush of desire exploded within him. He tried to pull away from her.

“We should stop,” his voice was hoarse with want. She didn’t bother to reply but attacked his neck with a fervor, biting and sucking.

“That’s enough. Don’t tempt me, Bai Qian,” he growled hotly against her ear, in warning.

It was the first time he called out her given name. Bai Qian was even more determined not to let go of him. "I don’t want to wait anymore. Qing Qiu folks never pay serious attention to decorum. I love you and I know you’re in love with me. That’s enough.” She kissed him harder. Her thighs cradled his hips intimately as she lean forward, creating sweet friction between their pressed bodies.

Mo Yuan’s body was on fire, he both wanted and didn’t want to get her wiggling body off him. His tight-gripped restraint was waning quickly. Unconsciously, his hips began to push against her lower half with aching need.

“Make me yours, Mo Yuan.” Her soft plea broke through his haze.

Mo Yuan’s eyes darkened when she didn’t called him her Master anymore. He flipped their bodies and rolled on top of her. Both of her hands were captured and pinned down. “What is it you truly want, Bai Qian?”

They watched each other with such intensity, their labored breathing echoed in the quiet clearing. “I want you, only you.”

In the end, the love and the raw desire shone brilliantly in her beseeching eyes were his ultimate undoing. Mo Yuan bowed his head down, kissed her thoroughly and robbed her of breath. She was barely aware of the clothes were slipped off her body until she lay bare to his eyes. Her nipples that stood erect from being exposed to the cold chill, were being swallowed by a hot and demanding mouth. She clutched his head to her chest tightly and let out soft mewls of pleasure.

His calloused hand drifted down to her smooth stomach, caressing her soft hips and and her long limbs. “You’re so beautiful,” he said in admiration as his eyes drank every curve and dip of her exquisite figure. The need to have her completely was painful but he fought the temptation. She was too precious to him, he won’t be rushed. His hot mouth trailed down the path his hand had explored as he worshiped her ethereal form.

“Bai Qian, let me in,” he whispered softly when he gently pried her thighs open.
Bai Qian lifted her head up and looked deeply into his eyes. She knew he would never hurt her. She moaned helplessly when he ran his fingers back and forth at the seam of her wet slit. Her body squirmed and writhed restlessly as his fingers eased inside and began to stroke in and out of her flowing depth.

“Master… Mo Yuan, mm-hm,” came her muffled voice.

When he pressed her nub and slowly circled it with his thumb, she cried aloud. The sensation was an exquisite torture. Before long her body jerked and convulsed as a sudden waves of intense pleasure washed over her.

Mo Yuan watched her expression intently the moment she was about to hit her peak. Those swollen lips parted and let out a strangled gasp. Her head was thrown back, her stormy eyes flared then squeezed shut as the sensation wrecked through her body. Her face flushed deep red. Her pale skin made the flush that spread down to her heaving bosom even more visible under the moonlight.

His blood boiled at the erotic picture she made without even trying. No longer holding back, he guided his length to her slick opening and bore down in one swift move. Bai Qian was still numbed and high from her first release, so she only felt a twinge of pain when something hot and rigid pushed deeper into her feminine folds and filled her completely.

“Ahh…” She cried out at the sudden fullness and pressure deep in her core. She tried to pull her legs close on instinct, her sudden shift pulled his length deeper inside her.

Mo Yuan groaned faintly at her tightness. His body shook with the need to thrust wildly to satisfy his own desperate need for release. But he forced himself to stay in place and let her body adjust to his intrusion. He teased her body with his mouth and hands, trying to stroke her desire again. Soon she began to writhe sensually. He started to move with slow sweeping thrusts. When her face no longer showed any discomfort, he pulled back and push forward quicker, setting a steady rhythm.

Bai Qian’s passion rose as he filled her again and again. She arched her back and thrust her hips against him firmly, urging him give her more. The slow rocking of their hips grew more frantic as another tension tightening, coiling low in her stomach.

“Please,” she gasped out breathlessly. “So close...”

In her desperation to seek the ultimatum, she ran her hand down his tight buttock and grind her hips against him firmly, urging him give her more. The slow rocking of their hips grew more frantic as another tension tightening, coiling low in her stomach.

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“Please,” she gasped out breathlessly. “So close...”

In her desperation to seek the ultimatum, she ran her hand down his tight buttock and grind her hips firmly against him, forcing him to surge forward into her deeper and harder. She became even more aroused when she opened half-lidded eyes and watched his face scrunched up. Beads of sweat pebbled his forehead.

Mo Yuan gritted his teeth to ward off his own release. Her inner muscles clenched and throbbed madly as ripples of pleasure intensified and tingle sensation radiated from her core. Her keen voice pitched in the silence of the night, her whole body shuddered beneath him. He slowed down and watched a tired yet sated smile slowly spread across her lips and she glowed with satisfaction. The heady aroma of their coupling was heavy in the air.

A growl tore from his throat as his control snapped completely. His grabbed her bottom in his hands, lifting her against him. An expression of intense determination appeared on his face as he pounded inside her. The sound of his body slapping against her thighs and the soft wet swish followed every stroke. His hand sought out her nub of pleasure again and rubbed it furiously.
Bai Qian’s eyes widened when she felt her body stirring and tightening again. The sensation was too intense for her already sensitive flesh. What was he trying to do? Kill her with overwhelmed pleasure? She clung tightly to his shoulders, her nails dug deep into his back. She began to sob and quivered violently as another spike of ecstasy threatened to tear her apart again. “Master, I can’t, I can’t….”

Mo Yuan hissed when her inner muscles gripped him so tightly it was painful. A grunt of surrender escaped him, a low and primal noise. He gave a few more rough thrusts before he spilled his essence in her. His legs quaked uncontrollably with his powerful release and he almost collapsed on top of her. The intense stimuli and his scalding release deep inside her pushed her already sensory overload to the brink. Bai Qian's eyes rolled back when her womb contracted and pulsated. She let out a shattered scream as she fell over the precipice.

When she slowly came back to her senses, she felt someone stroking her cheek. She looked up and saw an affectionate expression on his face, it made her heart melt all over again. This strong, handsome and powerful man made her feel beautiful and loved, so much so that she wanted to cry.

Mo Yuan gave her a soft smile as he brushed strayed hair out of her glistening face. He placed a kiss on her brow and her lips, it was gentle and full of promises. Then he shifted her body to lay against him, his arms held her close. Bai Qian closed her eyes, her exhausted body quickly succumbed to sleep.

Note: Special thanks to Midorizawa for proofreading this chapter for us as usual and to loreinacadis0412 for your wonderful and inspiring suggestions. Not sure if I could update next weekend since I’ve another trip coming up. +_+
Chapter 18

:: At Xi Wu Palace ::

Ali sat cross-legged, his small head rested on his hands. It had been over four months since Ali last saw his Mother. In the beginning, Father Prince claimed Mother was busy with her duties. A queen had a lot of duties to perform after all. Then, Father was sent to settle disputes between clans. Ali had wanted to go back to the Fox Den, yet Father said Mother was not there. He did not elaborate where she was though. Ali also did not had the slightest clues why he did not. It must fall under one of those infamous quotes - ‘It’s too complicate for a child such as yourself to understand now’ - adults loved to said. Later Father Prince came back, still he did not take him to see Mother. Ali made a face, his small hands curled into tiny fists and he beat them on his thighs to let out his frustration.

Ali did not understand what happened. Every time he asked, Father’s expression closed down quickly and simply told Ali to wait and that they would visit Mother together later. But that was a month ago! Even if he was a child, Ali was not stupid. Something wrong must happened between the two of them, now they refused to see each other.

Was it Consort Su Jin? Ali heard some servants whispered that Xin Nu, Consort Su Jin’s servant, went down to Qing Qiu and slandered High Goddess Bai Qian’s honor. Ali did not know what ‘slander one’s honor’ actually meant but he knew for certain it must not be very pleasant. Consort Su Jin’s smile always scared him, Ali shivered at the mere thought. Nai Nai said times and times again that he must not be alone with any of them under any circumstances. In his mind, they must have angered Mother somehow and Father Prince was afraid to see her and upset her even more. Ali nodded his head vigorously: yes, that must be the reason. The young prince sprang to his feet, he had to see Mother as soon as possible. If he pleaded with her nicely, she would not hold grudge against Father anymore, would she?

Just as Ali decided his game plan, Ye Hua entered his room.

“Father Prince!” Ali got up and ran to him excitedly with a smile, showing gleaming white teeth. “You are finally here. Ali has been waiting for you for a looong time.”

Ye Hua placed his hand on Ali’s head. “I just finished today’s documents. You shouldn’t have waited. Aren’t you hungry?”

“I’m not hungry yet. I want to have dinner with Father Prince,” he tugged at Ye Hua’s hands and looked at him with big rounded eyes.

“Let’s eat then. It’s quite late already.” Ye Hua led his son by hand to the table. Nai Nai brought out a generous variety of side dishes and served each of them a bowl of rice. Ye Hua picked some from each dish and placed them on Ali’s bowl.

“Father Prince, are you busy tomorrow?”

“Tomorrow?” Ye Hua thought about his schedule. “No. Aside from the new documents Jia Yun’ll bring, I don’t have any appointment tomorrow. Why?”

“That’s great.” Ali said cheerfully. “We should pay Mother a visit then. And maybe we could also slip to the Mortal Realm together too?”

Ye Hua froze at the mention of Qian Qian.
“Faa-ther Prince, you have promised to take me to Mother. Have you already forgotten?” Ali whined, his lips began to tremble. “It has been too long, I miss her so much. Please, Father Prince.”

Ye Hua looked at his son in defeat. How was he supposed to tell him that his mother will not be with them anymore? A month had passed since she told him her intention to annul their engagement.

After drinking himself into oblivion, he had thought about confronting High God Mo Yuan and came clean about his past with Qian Qian. Maybe he would step back then? Again, he was too prideful to sink so low. He also feared her hatred and retribution if he followed through with his plan. When she was Su Su, she merely gave him a cold shoulder when she got angry. But as Qian Qian, she would exact her revenge on him. Qing Qiu’s Bai Qian had such a temper and was not afraid to vent it on those who wronged her.

She had already made him feel like he was intruding on her relationship with High God Mo Yuan. If he came at her too strong again, she might not even tolerate his presence any longer. He knew he had alienated her and lost her trust by losing his temper and being high-handed with her that day. Maybe now was a good time to visit? Maybe she might have calmed down?

She had cut him off so curtly that day, so he should not be pursuing her again; but he did not know how to let her go. Not yet. Perhaps if he stuck around as a friend, he could turn her attention back to him one way or another?

“All right.” Ye Hua reluctantly agreed. “I’ll accompany you to Kunlun Mountain tomorrow.”

“Father Prince really mean that? Mother is there? What is she doing at the mountain?” Questions flew immediately as a bright smile broke out on his adorable face.

Ye Hua patted his head lovingly. “Yes, she is there. Tomorrow we’re going to see her.”

“Yaay!” He squirmed in his seat excitedly. “Finally I’m getting to see Mother!!”

Ali went to bed early that night, it seemed morning could not come soon enough for him. After their breakfast together, Ye Hua picked Ali up and jumped on a cloud to Kunlun Mountain. When they reached sacred ground, the usually quiet and serene haven was bursting with people coming and going. A disciple was showing a group of men on their way out, while two others were carrying boxes of various sizes inside.

Ye Hua looked on in confusion. He was under the impression that immortals and gods had stopped coming to pay respect to High God Mo Yuan sometime ago. So what was happening here?

Die Feng was informed of their unannounced arrival at the Gate. He delegated his tasks to Chan Seng, then came down the stairs to usher the two honored guests into the Grand Hall.

Ye Hua could not hold back his curiosity. “High Immortal Die Feng, what’s going on here? I didn’t expect Kunlun Mountain would still be so crowded.”

Die Feng paused for a second and pondered how to answer this delicate question. Crown Prince Ye Hua was Seventeenth former fiance, despite the official annulment had yet to be announced. To tell him they were preparing for Seventeenth’s betrothal gifts would be too imprudent. Yet he did not want to lie to the Crown Prince’s face outright either.

Die Feng cleared his throat slightly. “Your Highness, Kunlun Mountain will be holding a festivity soon. So we, disciples, are busy making the preparations.” He tried to word his answer as vague as possible.
Ye Hua’s first thought was whether the event will be held to celebrate High God Mo Yuan’s return. If so, him as the Crown Prince of Celestial Clan should offer his assistance as well.

He was about to make an inquiry when Ali spoke up. “Where is Mother then? I didn’t see her at all. Father Prince, you said she is here.”

“Mother?” Die Feng took a glance at Ali. His eyes turned toward Ye Hua in askance. Who was he looking for? There was hardly any female here, except Seventeenth. Surely he did not mean Seventeenth was his Mother? That would be a little far fetched, considering Seventeenth had yet to wed with anyone.

Die Feng suddenly remembered a rumor he heard a long time ago. This child was actually the son born from Crown Prince’s deceased mortal wife. He was not Consort Su Jin’s child as most had believed. The First Disciple of Kunlun Mountain vaguely recalled a brief encounter he had with the woman, who was supposed to be Ali’s birth mother, in Chang Sea.

Ye Hua had brought her along with him despite he was running the campaign against the Mermaid Clan. It was quite inappropriate of him, to bring a woman into hostile territories during the critical times. It was so strange that he remembered that meeting till this day.

Die Feng’s eyebrows furrowed deeper. He could not even remember her name, only that she was quite pleasing to the eyes despite being a daughter of man. At the time, he did not know Seventeenth was a female, so he did not pay much attention to the mortal. Now came to think of it, that mortal’s appearance was eight out of ten points similar to his youngest junior.

Those rumors may be unfounded, still people talked. The Crown Prince and Seventeenth had been betrothed for thousands of years, yet there was a lack of progress from both sides about their pending nuptial. He could understand why Seventeenth chose to leave it at that. She had to look after their mentor after all. What was the Crown Prince’s reason for stalling the unification? If Qing Qiu and Celestial Clan became united through their wedding, that would only solidify his status as the future lord.

Then the Eastern Sea King’s banquet happened, rumors said both had attended and had a chance encounter. After coming face-to-face, the Crown Prince suddenly decided to pursue Seventeenth. He even followed her to Qing Qiu and stayed there for an entire month. It might just be a coincidence but he never believed in pure chance.

Some said he fell in love with her beauty from the start. It was plausible since Seventeenth was indeed charming when she wanted to, but there was also another possibility. Die Feng sucked in his breathe. The Prince was not using their junior to substitute for his dead wife, was he? And yet the child was asking for his ‘Mother’, instead of ‘Mother Consort’ as was her station. Did he teach his son to call her that way?

“High Immortal Die Feng? Did you hear what I just asked?” Ye Hua prompted.

Die Feng pulled his wandering thought back to himself. “Sorry, Your Highness, what did you say again?”

“We come to see Qian Qian. Where is she now?” Ye Hua repeated his question.

The small prince perked up hopefully. “Is she inside? Will you please lead me to Mother?”

Die Feng’s face grew stern, his lips thinned with hidden displeasure. He looked down at the Sky Lord’s great-grandson and tried to speak as nonchalantly as possible.
“I’m sorry but Master left many days ago, Seventeenth also accompany him.”

Ye Hua’s voice took a sharp undertone. “She left with High God Mo Yuan alone? Where did they go?”

“I’m sorry, Your Highness. Master didn’t say and I didn’t dare to ask. He only said he’ll be back next week.”

“I see.” His eyes glinted. Ye Hua lowered his head and addressed to his little son. “Ali, perhaps we should come back later. She isn’t here at the moment.”

Ali chewed his lips and pouted. It was not supposed to turn out like this. Mother and Father Prince should have met and reconciled, then -- then all three of them would stay together again!! He bemoaned their bad luck and bad timing. Ali reluctantly gave his Father Prince a sad nod. Both quietly retreated from the sanctuary, their moods were no longer as pleasant and hopeful as it was when they arrived.

Ye Hua was pensive all the way back to the Ninth Heaven. His thoughts churned, thinking about where High God Mo Yuan and Qian Qian could possibly go. His heart tightened at the thought of them being alone, together, somewhere out there.

:: At Mortal Realm ::

Mo Yuan woke up before dawn as he always did, the habit was too ingrained within him to change. He took the quiet moment to watch Seventeenth sleeping. Her long silken hair spread over the bedding. She had took one of his arm and clutched it to her chest in her sleep. He tried to hold back his mirth, afraid to disturb her peaceful sleep.

After last night, he could not regard her as his little disciple anymore. She was clearly a full grown woman who knew what she wanted and was not afraid to go for it. The corner of his mouth lifted slightly when he looked back how she had pushed him down and settled to have her way with him. He will never admit it out loud that her attempt to be dominant had excited him.

Mo Yuan’s thought took a turn as he pondered more about last night. He wondered whom she had been with, before him. Clearly it had been some time ago, judging from the discomfort she expressed. He did not mind her being in relationship with someone else. It was her body and her decision, he respected that. Needless to say he had been dead the whole time and she did not owe anything to him to stay celibate. But at the same time, he could not help but feeling slightly jealous.

But who could it be? Did Zhe Yan not said she had shut herself in Qing Qiu over the years since his passing. Maybe her brief dalliance with Li Jing back then went further than he suspected? He quickly dismissed the idea. He would have known if that was the case. Seventeenth was not that good covering up if something that big happened.

Then his suspicion turned toward Ye Hua, he had spent days and nights in Qing Qiu with her after all. Perhaps their courting progressed further than he thought? It would not be strange for them being intimate with each other. Seventeenth was beautiful and Ye Hua was a healthy young male. Their betrothal was announced a long time ago and both sides expected the wedding to follow eventually.

Yet her obvious distress that day outside Ling Bao’s spring suggested otherwise. Had she laid with Ye Hua before, it would not have made any sense for her to shy away from his advances. Besides, Seventeenth was not the type to let someone get close to her easily. After Li Jing’s fallout, he knew she had withdrew into herself and closed off her heart. Mo Yuan’s train of thought derailed when his
bedmate moved slightly and alerted him to her waking up.

Bai Qian’s eyes slowly fluttered open, she felt warm and inexplicably languid at first. Then the slight soreness in her nether region reminded her what activities they indulged themselves in last night. She guessed she had no one to blame but herself, for tempting him like that.

Her face burned hotly as she recalled how many times she came apart in his arms. She did not know it could be like that. The feeling of fulfillment and being so loved was so powerful that almost bereft her of her breath. She also loved the intimacy of their entangled naked bodies and how great they fit together.

Her body shifted. She became aware of the soft bedding underneath and the arm in her clutch. She remembered falling asleep under the moonlight; so Mo Yuan must have brought her back here later. Her hand that clutched his arm unconsciously loosened.

He dropped small kisses on her head. “Awake? Any discomfort?” His voice asked tenderly.

She shook her head quickly, too embarrassed to speak out.

“You shouldn’t have pushed me last night,” he admonished her lightly. She carefully lift her eyes and watched his face; it betrayed the inner conflicts he felt.

Her face turned pale. She pulled back slightly as doubts began to fill her mind. “Did you .. did you regret last night?”

“No.” Her body was immediately flushed against his. He raised her chin up and made her look at him. “Never. I could never regret this, us being together. I just want to honor your family and give you a proper wedding first.”

The uneasiness quickly lifted from her chest as she listened to his reason. “I told you I don’t care about that,” she insisted. “I want to be with you now.”

He gave a long-suffering sigh, “You are always so impatient.”

“I’ve waited for your for seventy-thousands of years. It makes perfect sense that I didn’t want to wait anymore.”

She let out a small giggle. “Besides, I clearly remembered you have no complain last night.” Then she shrieked in surprise when he lifted her up bridal style and walked away from their bed.

She wound her arms around his neck. “Where are we going?”

“To the hot spring,” he replied.

Bai Qian laid her head back on his shoulder and let him took care of her. Soaking in the hot spring would be great. She remembered how pleasantly surprised she was when she found out the house’s back passage led to an indoor hot spring.

When they got there, Mo Yuan let her down and turned his back to give her some privacy. Bai Qian slipped off her robes and got into the hot spring quickly. The water temperature here was rather hot, billowing white steam could be seen filling the air around it. She turned around quickly when he joined her in the hotspring. Even if they were already intimated, seeing him in all his glory was still too much for her fox brain. She was afraid it might explode. He chuckled and held out his arm to pull her back to his chest.
“Are you feeling any better?”

She nodded and settled down against him. He dropped a kiss on her neck, right above the fluttering pulse. The gentle brush of his beard against her sensitive skin caused goosebumps to rise on her arms. She could not help but shivered with want again. After some time he turned her head to him and kissed her mouth slowly. She gave a low moan when she felt something hardening against her rear. By the time his mouth left hers, she was rather light-headed.

Mo Yuan nibbled and kissed along her collarbone. One of his hand found her nipple and played with it until it became hard and pointed; while another hand roamed her body freely.

“Master…” Her voice trembled as her desire worked up again with his attentiveness.

“Not Mo Yuan anymore?” His hot breath burned as his nose trailed down the back of her neck.

“You want me to -- to call you Mo Yuan?” She stuttered when his beard rubbed along her spine. How did he do it, wreaking havoc on her senses so easily?

“Would you prefer husband?” More of her soft flesh was sucked into his mouth. Would she? It was hard to think properly when he stirred her body so.

“I...Ummm…” A breathless groan escaped her when his hand went lower and carelessly brushed against her bundle of nerves. The voice she made was half pleasure, half distressed. She wiggled her body, shying away from his seeking touch. The stimulation was both pleasuring and torturing for her.

Mo Yuan hissed when she accidentally grinded her bottom on his fully aroused body. He wished to take her again but held himself in checked. He knew he had been a little rough with her last night. He was ashamed of his lack of restraint, especially since it was their first time. It had been so long since he was with someone, the little minx did not help it either. Her constant enticement had put him on edge for the past months, his needs for her was already on teetering on self destruction. The strong wines made it so much more easily to lose all of his inhibition.

“Stay still if you don’t want to be taken again,” he bit her earlobe in warning and sighed when the squirming ceased abruptly.

Mo Yuan’s arms circled her waist and legs and lifted her up from the water before placing her down on the smooth edge of the hotspring. He took in her flustered face and bent down to kiss her firmly.

His soft lips caressed her smooth stomach then continued downward to her navel. She felt her thighs was slowly pushed apart. A finger began to tease around her feminine folds. Once his head reached her thighs, he ducked between them and swiped his tongue up her heated moist center.

Bai Qian jerked in surprise at the feel of slightly rough tongue on her, moving in a way that was more fluid than his fingers had ever felt. His tongue slowly licked and caressed her labia then moving up to the tip. She shuddered and let out a strangled sob when his tongue swirled around her pleasure button before closing around it and lapping at it eagerly.

“No. Ma-Mo Yuan, no.”

Her inner muscles clenched automatically at the intrusion as he tasted her and stimulated her at the same time. Heat was quickly flooding her core and spreading throughout her body. Her mind became foggy at the pleasure she was feeling.
He pulled back when her body began to tremble and made a light swipe at the tip instead. He carefully added a finger then another and continued to stroke her sensitive inner walls. The movement mimicked the ancient dance he would love to perform with her again. When her thighs started to shake, he pulled the tiny bud into his mouth and sucked on it harder.

Bai Qian clung to his shoulder with one hand and buried the fingers of her other in his hair as his tongue and fingers attacked her relentlessly. Her head swayed from side to side. The sensation was too overwhelmed for her, her body grew taut and her grip on him tightened. Her keen voice broke out the silence and echoed in the confined space as her inner walls rippled around his fingers.

Mo Yuan continued to lap and stoked her heated center, trying to prolong the pleasure. Bai Qian panted softly and tried to catch her breathe. She felt boneless and sated at the same time.

She opened her eyes and turned her gaze upon him; he looked very satisfied with himself. His smugness grated on her frayed nerves. Then her eyes timidly shifted lower, his arousal was still very much evident. It must be painful for him. She pondered what to do, she only heard about it but never had the first hand experience. Even so, she wished to pleasure him as he had done for her.

Yet when she reached out her hand, he stopped her and held it tightly against his chest.

“But you didn’t,” she protested.

“It doesn’t matter. This is about you.” He nuzzled her neck

“I want to pleasure you as well,” her face colored. “But I have never been with anyone before, I don’t know how.”

Mo Yuan paused and studied her face. Bai Qian squirmed under his scrutinizing gaze. Did she said something wrong?

“Maybe later, there’s no need to rush,” he said finally. “Can you stand?”

She nodded and slowly got on her still wobbly limbs. He lowered her down into the hot spring and stayed with her for awhile. Before he left, he told her to soak and relax. She dozed on and off for sometime before getting out and joining him.

Since that day Bai Qian gradually got used to sleeping with him by her side, they kept their regular routines as before. The only different were their not exactly night time extra activities. She gave a shameful cough at that thoughts.

“Do we really have to get back soon?” she asked him one day. They were outside enjoying the cool night in the clearing in front of the hut. Using her fingers, she counted off the time they had spent here. It was over six months already, time really flew by when they were living in bliss.

“Probably next week. It’s time to go back, you’re getting lazier each day,” he mentioned the fact that she dallied around the house so much lately.

“There’s snow out there, it’s too cold. Why can’t I lounge around. It’s really comfortable here,” she murmured sleepily from where she laid her head on his leg.

“You’re not a bear.” His bemused eyes lifted from the scroll he was reading.

“What do you know?” She raised her nose at him. “Foxes don’t like cold that much either. We stay away from it if we could.”
"That’s true for mortal foxes.” His eyebrow arched at her not so sensible comeback.

"Come. Let’s go back inside. It’s rather chill tonight. You’ll get sick wearing such a thin cloth.” He shook her shoulder to rouse her up.

She grunted, then got up and followed him back to their bed. A warm bed and a personal heater, who would say no to that?

The next day, Bai Qian knew it was morning because birds were chirping loudly. She struggle to wake up but found her head was pounding and she had trouble breathing through her stuffy nose.

Mo Yuan touched her forehead and frowned slightly. “Your temperature is too high. I told you, you’ll get sick. Next time wear something warmer,” he sighed.

“Me-un,” she called out pitifully.

Then a cool cloth was placed on her forehead. “Today, stay in the bed and don’t go outside, all right?”

“Hmm,” she hummed and let her heavy head fell promptly back on the pillow.

Being sicked was not so bad, she found out. He made the porridge and fed it to her spoonful by spoonful. It reminded her of the time he used to bring sobering soup for her whenever she got drunk. First Senior usually offered to feed her in his stead, Mo Yuan turned it down every single time. She looked back at those memories fondly.

Because of her sickness, their departure was delayed for a few days. Not that she cared. She was so used to having him all by herself, it will be hard to keep themselves in check around others.

On the day both were supposed to leave, she stood in front of the hut and watched it dejectedly.

“We’ll come back here later.” He hugged her from behind then led her back to Kunlun Mountain.

Note : Special thanks to Noitratoxin who help with proofreading this chapter.
Once Mo Yuan’s vast and familiar aura registered through Kunlun Mountain, young men dressed in white were seen rushing down the Grand Hall to welcome his arrival. They weren’t quite prepared to see their usually reserved Master walking in hand-in-hand with their youngest junior. Some were barely able to hide their mirth when Seventeenth tried to discreetly pull back her hand and failed. She made a pouty face behind Mo Yuan’s back. The faint red tint on her cheeks betrayed the sign of a maiden’s shyness, a look that was so out of place on her mischievous face they all remembered so well. Her anxious eyes glanced around warily as if she was waiting one of them to sprout nonsense at any moment.

Die Feng took a pity on her and turned to address their mentor. “Master, Seventeenth, welcome back. We all thought you’ll take a few more days. We hope you have an enjoyable trip.”

He took a moment to study Mo Yuan’s complexion and nodded in approval. “Master’s face no longer looks haggard, the aura is also filled with vitality and vigor. Seventeenth, you really did well this time.”

“Wha-?” Bai Qian got flustered and choked violently when her senior disciple commended her on her obvious care and attentiveness to their mentor’s well-being. Though he meant well, his innocent yet meaningful praise inadvertently provoked another kind of scandalous image in her mind. If her seniors ever learned what actually helped improve his cultivation, she was certain they would be dying of mortification.

“Seventeenth, are you alright? Your face is so red.”

It was Zi Lan who asked, why she was not surprised? Bai Qian sent him a murderous glare even while she hiccupped. He balked and backtracked immediately, slightly confused by her sudden hostility.

“Breathe slowly.” Mo Yuan’s hand shot out and rubbed her back soothingly. “It was a long trip back here. Seventeenth recently fell sick. She have just recovered.”

Bai Qian gave him a grateful look, everyone aah-ed and nodded in understanding. When her breathing returned to normal, Mo Yuan whispered telling her to go ahead and rest.

“I have something to discuss with your seniors. Go and get some rest. We’ll leave for Qing Qiu early tomorrow morning.”

Bai Qian moved a hand to cover her mouth and faked a yawn. “I’m going to bed. Good day, everyone.” She didn’t wait for a response and left quickly. On the way, she actually felt drowsy and tired. She went straight to Mo Yuan’s chamber, instead of hers. She took off her robe then laid down on his bed out of habit and fell asleep right away.

“Master, I have prepared everything just as you instructed.” Die Feng told him after Si Yin left. As
Mo Yuan’s first and eldest disciple, it fell upon him to help organize the wedding. He had started working on his mentor’s assignments as soon as he was summoned back from the West Sea Palace two weeks earlier.

“Now the betrothal gift is ready and waiting in your meditation cave. The dress is being made as we speak, it'll take some time for the female’s dress. I’m confident it’ll not take more than a month to finish,” he concluded the progress he had made so far.

Mo Yuan trusted Die Feng’s decision implicitly, his boy was meticulous and thorough. His exemplary performance never failed to impress him. He acknowledged his effort with an appreciative nod. “Thank you for everything. I know it is hard work for you.”

“It’s my pleasure to do this for you and Seventeenth.” He smiled pleasantly. “Master, are you going to see her parents tomorrow?”

Mo Yuan nodded his head once, confirming it.

“If Ninth was still here, he’d be begging to accompany you.” Die Feng noted, a touch of sadness in his voice. “He always wanted to meet the Emperor.”

Both fell into their respective thoughts for a moment before Mo Yuan spoke up. “That is all for today. You should get some rest.” When he saw Die Feng had yet to leave, he asked. “Is there anything you wish to add?”

Die Feng threw him an indecisive glance, his stance wavered for a minute. “No, Master. I’ll retire now. I bid you a good night.” He bowed and drew back hastily.

Mo Yuan watched his silhouette disappear into the night, then he got up and headed towards his own chamber.

Bai Qian stirred from her sleep when he came back a few hours later. Mo Yuan was not surprised to see her sleeping in his room. He folded his robe, placed it on the stand nearby and climbed into the bed. He settled down on his side.

“Go back to sleep. It’s already late.”

She rolled over to face him. “I’m not sleepy anymore. Tomorrow, if things go well, what do you plan to do next?” She asked curiously.

“Are you going into seclusion again?” She knew he left the last one early. It would take quite some time for him to get back to full strength.

“I am, a week at most this time. Die Feng will help with the preparation, I’ve already left my instructions with him.”

“A week? It’s going to be hard sleeping alone again.” She raised herself up on her elbows and placed her chin on his chest, watching him with her doe eyes. Her long scented hair spilled over his arm.

“Why, because I make a good pillow?”

Mo Yuan stopped her playful beating and seized her arms before hauling her entire body up against
of him. “You get flustered too easily. Today you almost revealed your thoughts to them.” His lips trailed to her neckline while his hands began divesting her of her clothes.

“You knew what I was thinking? You weren’t reading my mind, were you?” She questioned, her deft hands loosened the knot of his sash, matching his moves.

“It wasn’t that hard to make a guess. You have to get your mind out of the gutter, Seventeenth.” His hand cupped her beautiful, bare breast, kneading it with his loving fingers.

“And whose fault is it?” she muttered. He tempted her and made her crave his touch. Recently, it was all she could think about when he was near.

“You’re blaming me?” He brought their bodies upright and let her straddle him with her knees on either side of his hips. His head bowed down and pulled the tip of her rosy bud into his mouth. He swirled the tongue over the pebbled bud until it became puckered.

Bai Qian arched her back giving him better access and silently begged him to devour her. “What if I can’t get enough of you? You can’t get enough of me, either.” She raked her nails over his nipples, knowing just how sensitive they were. He hissed at the sensation, his hip lift up and rubbed his clothed erection forcefully against her mound.

She moaned in delight. She wanted more of his naked skin against her now. “Lose it.” Her hands sought to pull the rest of his cloth off completely. When it was not quick enough for her, she conjured a quick spell and magicked away his cloth.

“So impatient,” his voice rasped out when she reached down and took his length into her hand. She gripped his hot, hard and pulsating erection tightly. Mo Yuan’s forehead fell on her shoulder, his breathing became harsher as she moved her hand and gave a firm rub all over his length.

When his hand that caressed over her hipbones slide down toward her apex, she used her other hand to brush it away and gently pushed him backwards onto his back. She climbed over his body and looked up into his intense eyes. His length was inches away from her mouth, pearly beads already bubbled up from the crown. Her thumb rubbed and spread the moisture around. Her tongue flicked the sensitive head with soft and careful laps, tracing the kisses up and down its length teasingly.

Mo Yuan could not stifle the rumbling in his throat, a strangled low moan escaped his mouth. His length throbbed with each swipe of her tongue. When she finally took more of him into her mouth and sucked, his entire body shuddered. He held himself tightly so not to thrust up his hip. Her scorching mouth taunted him with heated and determined pulls as she tugged him deeper, trying to coax the release out of him. He gritted his teeth and clamped down hard, determined not to let go yet.

Mo Yuan ran his fingers along her jaw lightly. She looked up at him and saw his eyes were dilated with passion. She was not faring any better than him, her own sex was dripping wet.

“Get back up here, Seventeenth. I wish to be inside you.” His voice shook with barely contained needs.

She released him from her mouth and crawled up his body to straddle him. She placed a hand on his chest, holding herself above him. “Tell me, Master, what you wish me to do?” Her sultry voice asked.

“Ride me.” His husky voice commanded, there was a tone of urgency in his voice. She obediently took his length into her hand once again and shamelessly rubbed it along her wet slit. Finally, she positioned him at her opening and slid down, impaling herself on his rock-hard length with
painstakingly slow movement. When she sank down to the bottom, both groaned at the blissful sensation. She started moving her hip slowly and then his hands grasped her, helping her find the perfect rhythm.

She settled into motion and felt her blood boiled at the pleasure of being filled so completely. The angle of their joined bodies caused his length to rub against her, stimulating her as she ground herself on him. She felt herself building to an orgasm. Her moves quickened as she deliberately brought their lovemaking toward the end. Pleasure coiled tighter in her lower abdomen; a sharp and delicious tension spread out from where his length slid in and out of her.

“Ma-aster,” her voice quivered. The muscles in her legs began to tremble.

Mo Yuan grabbed her waist and moved his hips under her to gain a faster pace. His other hand held her jiggling breast, kneading and squeezing the sensitive flesh. He suckled at the hardened bud, the pressure causing a twang of pain and pleasure. Then the heat swept through her, pushing her over the edge. He watched on as her head was thrown back in wild abandonment and her body started to convulse. Her teeth sank into her lower lip, stifling her loud cry. Her heat throbbed and pulsed madly around him yet he never stopped his pace and let her rode out her pleasure until her release was complete.

Bai Qian picked up her pace again as soon as the spasm began to subside. She tightened her inner muscles and clamped on his aching needs like a tight fist, milking his length without mercy. She caught his earlobe with her lips, then her teeth sucking it into her mouth. “Let go. I want you to come for me.”

He answered her call by pushing deeply into her and seated himself to the hilt with each thrust. With one final deep thrust, he jerked and allowed her to milk his release from him. With a muffled groan, he emptied into her, pumping his essence deep into her womb. His hip slowed to a stop while they struggled to breathe. Her body tingled and pulsed with the after effects of their lovemaking.

Separating from the warmth of her body, he brought her down and turned them so his body pillowed her once more. His soft lips touched her temple reverently and then curled into a small smile. “Why are you smiling?” She can’t help but asked.

“Are we back to ‘Master’ now?” He teased. She had stopped calling him like that months into their self-imposed retreat.

Heat rushed to her face, she totally forgot she had called out to him in her heightened state. When they were alone together, calling him by his name gave her the feeling of intimacy she craved. Now they were back in Kunlun Mountain, she unconsciously slipped back into her old habits.

Anyway, she will definitely not calling him ‘Mo Yuan’ in front of her seniors, they will probably tease her to death if their reaction today was any indication. So, she chose to ignore his question and instead snuggled into his chest. “If you keep doing that, you’re going to confuse our children greatly.”

Her opened her eyes quickly and gazed up at him. “Our children?”

“We’re getting married soon, isn’t having children together one day a natural course of life?” His hand ghosted down her back, rubbing along her spine.

“It is.” She chuckled. “I cannot wait to see our son. I hope he looks just like you. I never got to see you when you were young.”
“Why do you think it’ll be a son?” He inquired.

“Have you seen my family?” She jabbed a finger into his chest. “All males, except Xiao Jiu and I.”

“I’d like to have a daughter. One that has your looks and charms.”

She peered at his face then shook her head. “No, you’ll just scare away all of her prospective husbands.”

He raised an eyebrow. “Is that so?”

“I know so,” she retorted. “What are you doing?” She asked when he towered over her body and pressed her body back into the bedding.

“Building up cultivation and practicing for the future.” He replied with a straight face. All the talk about their ‘future prospects’ pumped a rush of renewed desire through his veins.

“Again?” Came her muffled voice, as his lips descended down and enticed hers for another bout of lovemaking.

“Again.”

Note: Special thanks to Noitratoxin who help with proofreading this chapter.
Chapter 20

:: Qing Qiu’s Fox Den ::

The following day they left very early in the morning, caught a lucky cloud and went straight to Qing Qui. When they walked inside the Fox Den, it was rather crowded. The Fox couples, Bai Qian’s fourth brother and Zhe Yan sat around the stone table. Feng Jiu was just emerging from the kitchen.

“Aunt, you come back,” Feng Jiu exclaimed excitedly and rushed forward to embrace her. By then, she noticed another person was trailing behind her aunt.

“High God Mo Yuan is with you too,” she said aloud and announced his presence to the rest.

Bai Zhi and his wife rose up from their seating and awaited the newcomers to join them.

“Mother, Father, I have missed you.” Bai Qian went to her mother’s side first and gave her a tight hug. Then she turned around and wound her arms around her father’s waist. “You have been gone for such a long time.”

The Fox Emperor laughed and stroked his only daughter’s hair lovingly. He watched her countenance closely and reveled in the happiness that radiated from her person. Her eyes were filled with merriment once again, almost like when she was younger and less weighted by tragedies of the past. It seemed Mo Yuan’s return had brought back her spirit. He approved this change wholeheartedly.

“Are you sure? I thought you already forgot everyone here,” he teased. “Mi Gu said you hardly come home anymore. Zhe Yan just mentioned you haven’t dropped by his PeachTree Woods to snatch his wines at all. How is that even possible?”

“She found herself another kind of addiction. Didn’t I tell you that, Bai Zhi,” Zhe Yan injected.

Bai Qian gave him a daggered look then turned her attention back to her father. ”Faa-ther, Mi Gu was over-exaggerated. I was here just a few weeks ago,” she protested.

“Hmm, I see. He just conveniently forgot that, didn’t he?” Bai Zhi smiled, stroked his beard and nodded his head to her.

She gave him another squeeze and glanced back at Zhe Yan who was still seated at the table with her brother.

“Old Phoenix, just so you know, you were right. I just found a new addiction. Recently, I have tasted hundred thousand years old wine that Master brewed. It’s both superb and divine. You’d better brush up your crafts or I’m certain you will lose your reputation to him in no time,” she said sarcastically.

Zhe Yan faced her direction, he gave a long sigh and looked almost disheartened. “This is what I got for feeding the girl with my rare and precious wines all these years. Look at how unappreciative she is.”

His next sentence was aimed for Mo Yuan who stood watching the family reunion with a slight smile on his face. “Mo Yuan, from now on, let her usurped your wine cellar since mine isn’t good
enough for her anymore.” He said sourly.

“Ehhh. That isn’t what I mean,” Bai Qian’s eyes grew big in alarm. She only said that in jest. He shouldn’t have teased her first. Why was he so touchy today? She hastily tried to salvage the situation. He can’t cut off her supply just like that!

“Look, I’m merely trying to motivate you to make even more superior wines. There’s always room for improvement, right? Then no one can dispute your wines are the best of the best.” When Zhe Yan failed to made a comeback, Bai Qian left her father and tried to cajole the Old Phoenix into a good mood.

Mo Yuan knew Zhe Yan only wanted her to sweat a little after her scornful remark, so he let them be and used this chance to present himself formally to Bai Zhi.

“Emperor Bai,” Mo Yuan greeted him with a slight bow. Normally he, the Son of Heavenly Father, needed not to perform such ceremony to anyone. But today he was here to ask for Bai Qian’s hand, showing a little deference was both customary and appropriate gesture.

“Mo Yuan,” Bai Zhi inclined his head in greeting. “I guess I owe you a congratulation on coming back. We heard rumors of your resurrection on our journey. It wasn’t until Bi Fang found us that we learned it was true.”

“Thank you, Emperor.”

“It’s good thing you are finally back. Fifth can move on with her life now,” said Bai Qian’s father.

Seeing an opening, Mo Yuan got straight to the point of their visit. “Emperor, I’m here today to ask for Bai Qian’s hand. I wish her to be my wife.”

“I know,” Bai Zhi said. “Zhe Yan already told us about your intention.”

He caught his would-be son-in-law’s eyes and held it steady. “Mo Yuan, are you certain about this? You’re almost triple her age. Not to mention you’re her mentor. Once it gets out that she is your Seventeenth disciple, people will talk. You know how gossips could get ugly. I don’t know, don’t you care? At all?”

“I’m certain. My intention will never change, no matter what.” Mo Yuan was quick to assure the concerned father. “We both have been through so much. Now that we found each other again, I sincerely want to spend the rest of my days with her. Truthfully, I haven’t been her mentor for a long time, Emperor.” He continued. “And we both know that people always talk no matter what. Let them talk. Nobody will dare to assault her honor, much less in front of me.”

Bai Zhi stroked his long beard thoughtfully. He wasn’t really against the idea of Bai Qian marrying his once classmate, as long as she was happy. He knew Mo Yuan would take good care of her. He was always honorable and considerate to those he cared about.

Honestly, he would be more anxious if she wed into the Xiwu Palace. Celestials had too many rules, he was afraid she will find the life there stifled to her free spirit. To make it worst, Fourth had brought to his attention the presence of Crown Prince’s side consort and his son who was born out of yet another mortal wife. It seemed the Prince was quite a player, despite the cold facade he always wore. He should have known, Celestials and their harem fetish!

His daughter might be strong in terms of cultivation and characters but as a father he didn’t want her to live in constant rivalry with his harem and political undercurrents that ensued. At least with Mo Yuan, he knew she would be happy and carefree. Besides, Mo Yuan was not the type to take on
many lovers. His daughter will be the only gem in his heart.

“If you said so, I guess I have no more to say.” he said at long last.

It was then the Fox Empress stood up and walked over to her husband’s side. She stood in front of Mo Yuan, openly stared him down. “And how do you plan to keep her safe?” She launched into a tirade against the one responsible for her daughter’s miserable life. Her tone was frosty, biting.

“Time and again I regretted ever sending her to Kunlun Mountain. It was because of you, she almost died from blood loss. Then she suffered greatly when she went to confront Qing Cang because you had to leave that sealing spell with her. I have yet to mention all those years she stabbed herself to feed you the heartblood. I know you have done so much for her and I am grateful for that. But you are God of War, you’ve made a lot of enemies in your days. How do I know she will not suffer, for your sake, again?”

Bai Qian came back and tugged at her mother’s sleeve; she was being rather harsh. She threw a perturbed glance at Mo Yuan, afraid he would be upset.

Mo Yuan bowed his head. “Empress, I was guilty of all those charges, I have no excuses. I’m also willing you to understand. I have never wished Bai Qian to suffer, not even for me. She is very precious to me as well. I cannot guarantee that no misfortunes will ever happen to her again. I could only offer my promise that I will protect her with my very life.”

Bai Qian gave him an encouraging smile. The lovers shared a brief yet meaningful glance with each other.

“As for my duties to Celestial Clan, I plan to retire as soon as I am done with Qing Cang. I will stay with her at Kunlun Mountain in solitude, never take part in any conflicts between Clansmen again, save for those events that threaten to compromise the wellbeing of all common people.”

Bai Qian was stunned with his startling revelation. He had yet to discuss this sudden decision with her but she was pleased nevertheless. She hated seeing him weighed down with burdens not of his own doing. Celestial Clan had Ye Hua now, as their future lord he should be the one to keep and maintain their own peace. Mo Yuan had done his part and shouldered their responsibilities for far too long.

The Fox Empress looked slightly appeased. “I hope you would stay true to your words. If you fail to fulfill your promise, remember that we will take her back.” She advised him to proceed with caution before retreating to her seat.

Bai Zhi exhaled his bated breath. “Well then, now that’s out of the way. I accepted this proposal and agreed to let my daughter, Bai Qian, wed you, Mo Yuan. I welcome you into our family, son-in-law,” he said formally.

“Zhe Yan,” he called out, beckoned at the Phoenix to join him. Then he addressed Mo Yuan. “Zhe Yan and I will pay the Sky Lord a visit today to settle the previous arrangement.”

“Fifth, you’ve discussed this with the Crown Prince already?” he asked his daughter.

“I did,” she replied.

“And he agreed?”

Bai Qian didn’t respond as quick this time, “I don’t know, father. He seemed reluctant.”
‘Reluctant’ was to put it mildly, she sincerely hope he wouldn’t object too strongly and made a scene. A person could only take so much embarrassment.

“I see.”

The Emperor and Zhe Yan’s eyes met across the room. It dawned to them things were much more difficult than it seemed. “Nevertheless, Celestial Clan owed this to us. They’ll have no choice but to agree.”

He put his hand on his daughter’s shoulder, trying to offer his reassurance. “Don’t worry, Fifth. Zhe Yan and I set up this marriage too hastily. We’ll certainly clear it for you.”

“Maybe I should accompany both of you,” Mo Yuan offered.

The Fox Emperor put his hand out, telling him to hold that thought. “I think we should save it as a last resort. There’s no need to aggravate the Sky Lord further. You know how he is.”

Mo Yuan nodded. He would simply follow them later, in case things went awry.

“Mo Yuan, please inform us when you picked the wedding date, so we could begin the preparation,” said the Emperor. “Come on, let’s get moving.”

Bai Zhi left the Fox Den and quickly caught a cloud. Zhe Yan with Bai Zhen, who decided to tag along with them, jumped on Bi Fang’s back and followed him quickly.

Bai Qian followed Mo Yuan out of the Den after the trio had departed.

“You’re going too?” she asked.

“Yes, perhaps I could lend them some assistance, if the Sky Lord prove to be too stubborn.”

She frowned. “I’ll go with you then.”

“Did you forget what happened the last time you went there? Your presence will only provoke him further. Look, it will be alright.” He tried to soothe her nerves.

“I believe between you and Father, he won’t pose too much problems. It’s Ye Hua I’m worried about.” She had told Mo Yuan everything that happened between them. “Besides, he’s your brother. I never want you to alienate yourself from him just because of me.”

He flicked his finger lightly at her forehead. “You’re worrying too much.”

“I’m serious, you know” she pouted.

Mo Yuan shook his head. “I don’t think he’ll be that petty. Even if it comes to that, we’ll find our way again.”

“Anyway did you just refer to me as ‘Master’ again when you talked to Zhe Yan? I thought we’ve talked about this.” He invaded her personal space and held her around her waist.

He switched the topic so suddenly that she was disoriented and forgot what else she was about to say. “You know how incorrigible your ‘brother’ is. He’s even worse at inappropriate comment than Zi Lan when he put his mind to it.”

The two lovers put their forehead together while talking to each other. “I thought you didn’t care
about what he said?"

Well, she did. She refused to give Zhe Yan another ammunition to ridicule her love life. “Can’t we just agree to disagree? You get to call me ‘Seventeenth’, why can’t I do the same?”

“And who said that she will always be ‘my little Seventeenth’?”

“I did because it’s true. Others may call me Bai Qian, Qian Qian, Qing Qiu’s Queen or even goddess. but I’m only ‘little Seventeenth’ to you and you alone.”

Her voice was full with such conviction, Mo Yuan found her simply too adorable to resist. His hand gently cradled her face. “Of course, you are, my little wife.” He brushed his lips against hers and tasted her mouth thoroughly.

“Will you come back later?” She asked breathlessly when he let go of her lips and fluttered small kisses over her face.

“No, I’ll proceed straight from there to Kunlun Mountain. Remember, come back to me in a week, Seventeenth.”

“I will.” She tightened her arms around his neck, not wanting to let go of him either.

“I’ll find a good day and discuss it with your father. Soon, no more than three months.” He left with a promise of their future together. She sent him off and began to wait for her father’s return.

What could possibly took them so long? They were gone the whole afternoon, Bai Qian was in a restless mood and began pacing back and forth. Mi Gu complained that she was giving him a headache and left her alone in the Den. After another hour of restlessness, she gave up and sat idly by, waited for their return. Bai Qian’s head was nodding off when suddenly there was noises coming from the opening of the cave. She blinked away the last vestiges of sleep and looked around.

“That Sky Lord is really something. I wish we’d have done this long time ago.” Bai Zhi came inside and sat down heavily on the stone chair. He was clearly not in a good mood.

“What happened?” Bai Qian looked from her bristled father to Zhe Yan then to her Fourth brother.

“Fifth sister, you’re a free woman now,” Zhe Yan announced.

“But?” she asked, sensing there was more to this story.

“When father suggested that he wanted to cancel the arrangement, the Sky Lord denied outright. He barely listened to reasons, claiming this marriage was necessary for the benefits between our clans.”

Bai Zhen decided to speak up since no one gave her an answer.

“Father tried to assure him we’ll maintain good relation with each other even without the marriage. Still he kept refusing and saying that it was his final decision. He told father should not bring the issue up again.” He snickered at the Lord’s audacity.

“Father had to remind him, not so gently, mind you - that it was the Celestial Clan who wronged Qing Qiu first when Sang Ji eloped with your servant. By rights, Qing Qiu could demand retribution for this act of betrayal but we didn’t. We had graciously accepted when the Sky Lord chose to serve his grandson on the platter to us to save his own face. It’s only reasonable we reserve the rights to
end this arrangement as we deem fit.”

Bai Zhi harrumphed loudly when his son recounted this part.

“Then he had the gall to say that if you chose not to marry Ye Hua; he was afraid you would be single for the rest of your life. No one else would be daring enough to marry you, considering your past failures.”

Bai Qian stood up immediately. “What did you say? How dare he!” She cried out in outrageous and grabbed her brother’s arm tightly, urging him to continue. “What then? Speak quickly, brother.”

“What then? Your mentor showed up, of course. His timing was impeccable. He came just in the nick of time to hear what the Sky Lord said about you. The man’s glare is impressive, I must say. I’m glad I am not the person on the receiving end.”

Bai Zhi and Zhe Yan chuckled softly at this remark. They all knew how biting his frosty glares were, or better yet, what would happened once his stretching-to-limit patience run out and Xuan Yuan was pulled out of its scabbard. Three hundred thousands of years had done a miracle to his once quick temper though. Luckily, this generation of Sky Lord had yet to truly feel the brunt of his full wreath.

“High God Mo Yuan declared in front of everyone his intention to marry you. Father said he gladly accepted and it was fortunate for Qing Qiu to have such glorious future in-law.”

“High God Mo Yuan also said since he’s the revered God of Celestial Clan, the Sky Lord can consider the alliance between two clans withheld and the former arrangement fulfilled. Before he left, he announced that he won’t tolerate any more slights against his bride-to-be. Should he heard anymore slandering, he’ll await the offender at the top of Cang Wu.”

“Brother, surely, you jest.” Bai Qian blinked her eyes rapidly. He said that? He really said that? Bai Zhen shook his head, there was laughter in his eyes. “You should have seen the Sky Lord’s face. It’s highly comical. One minute it was pale white; then another it turned almost purple with rage. I almost think that he’ll cough up blood right there.”

“Good.” Bai Qian sat down and nodded curtly. Had she been there, she wouldn’t be so polite and undoubtedly ended up doing something she would have regretted later. “Brother, did Ye Hua said something?”

Bai Zhen nodded. “Just once, when the Sky Lord asked if he want the marriage dissolved.”

“And?” she prompted him to continue.

“He said no and that he still wished to honor it. After that Sky Lord’s resolve strengthened. That was when he threatened that by denying him, you won’t get marry with anyone either. Had your mentor not followed us there and went all out, things might end badly today.” Bai Zhen sighed.

“That Sky Lord’s too power hungry and overbearing.” She sneered in distaste. “I’m glad we’ll not associate ourselves with him anymore. If I decided to marry Ye Hua for real, sooner or later I’m afraid we’ll clash epically.”

“Brother, did my mentor say anything else before he left?” Bai Qian asked.

“Only that he’ll send his senior disciple here when the date is settled. I guess he meant Die Feng? From then on, he will handle all accounts during your mentor’s retreat.”
“I see. I guess I’ll stay here for a while then,” she said dejectedly.

“Look at this girl. She can’t even stay away from him now. What a shame. What a shame.” Zhe Yan said. He gave Bai Zhi a few slaps on the back. “I’m so glad I didn’t have a daughter.”

“You didn’t even get married!” Bai Qian glowered at him then left in a fit of annoyance. She heard the three of them laughed behind her back.

:: Kunlun Mountain ::

When Mo Yuan made it back to Kunlun Mountain, his disciples lined up, waiting for him. As soon as he was seated properly on the platform, Die Feng stepped up and offered congratulations on behalf of everyone.

“Master, we wish to congratulate you on your pending nuptial. I hope Master and Seventeenth will have a long and prosperous life together.”

“It seems news travel fast these days,” Mo Yuan commented lightly after he took a sip of tea.

Die Feng flushed slightly. “It came from an inside informant I have in the Ninth Heaven, Master.” Since he had been in and out of the Ninth Heaven for a long time, this came as no surprise to anyone.

“Besides, this is truly an auspicious occasion. I dare to say at this very moment the news have already spread over four seas and eight realms,” he added.

“Thank you for your well wishes. From here on, I am afraid everyone will be handful with the preparation. Trouble all of you indeed.” Mo Yuan said with a small smile on his face.

“Master, it is nothing. We’re so glad to be able to assist Master anyway we can,” Chang Shan spoke up solemnly. Many voices murmured in accordance.

“Yes, Master. You and Seventeenth finally ended up together, this is more than we can ask for. I almost thought the Crown Prince would succeed stealing her away.” Zi Lan didn’t fail to voice his own thought.

He jumped slightly when a vicious jab struck his side unaware. “Oww. What was that for?” He quietly hissed in pain and looked around for his attacker, but instead he got many pointed and disapproving glares. Zi Lan snorted and lowered his head, thoroughly chastised by his fellow disciples.

“From tomorrow on, I’ll be in the meditation cave for the next seven days.” Mo Yuan told his disciples. “Die Feng will assign each of you to whatever needed to be done. I hope you will lend him your hands.”

“Yes, Master, we understand,” the boys chorused before taking their leave one by one. Soon only Die Feng was left alone with him. Mo Yuan made a divination with his hand and quickly composed a letter. He handed it to him when finished.

“Send this to Emperor Bai, along with the betrothal gifts you stored in my meditation cave. Tell him this is the date I picked. If he don’t have any other suggestions, the preparation should begin accordingly.”
Die Feng looked at the date and saw it was less than two months away. The preparation would have to speed up multifold to make it in time. “I understand. I’ll send them out immediately.”

Before leaving, he gathered his courage then spoke up. “Master, there’s something….” A trace of uneasiness appeared on his handsome face. “Before, I’m not sure whether I should bring it to your attention. You and Seventeenth are soon to be wed...,” he hesitated again, uncertain if he should continue.

“Don’t be afraid. Speak what’s on your mind, Die Feng.” Mo Yuan encouraged him softly.

“What Zi Lan said was somewhat right.” He bowed his head a little then said. “Crown Prince Ye Hua came here four days ago with his son. They were looking for Seventeenth. I was surprised he let his son called her ‘Mother’ since it was totally not conform to Celestial’s rules and her position. She was after all his father’s consort and only his step-mother.”

“Then...,” he paused. “I was reminded of the time I met his deceased wife and Imperial Great-Grandson’s birth mother.”

“The one who is mortal?” Mo Yuan interrupted.

“You have heard about her?” Die Feng sounded surprised.

“Seventeenth said both father and son mistook her for that mortal the first time they met,” Mo Yuan replied. “They must indeed share similar traits.”

“The Eastern Sea King’s banquet, of course,” he murmured. “I have met his former wife once. The Crown Prince brought her to Chang Sea during his campaign against the Mermaid Clan. I wouldn’t say similar, Master.” He continued. “Had I known before Seventeenth is a woman, I would have paid better attention to that mortal. She was eight out of ten points identical to Seventeenth.”

Mo Yuan was a bit startled at that remark. “What happened to her?”

Die Feng looked thoughtful. “I only knew she turned blind somehow then died shortly after giving birth. Around the time, Crown Prince Ye Hua was injured, the Medicine King was summoned to the Ninth Heaven. He spent several days after that at Xi Wu palace, so his injury must be pretty serious. The rest remains mystery to these days. Star Lord Si Ming claimed he didn’t knew much as well.”

“Somehow those who attended duties at Xi Wu palace at the time were either replaced or gone. I believe something huge must have happened for the Sky Lord to do the cover up to this degree,” he speculated further.

“Blind you say?” Mo Yuan asked. A strayed thought stirred in the back of his mind.

“Yes, Master. That was what Star Lord Si Ming said.”

“Is there anything else?”

Die Feng shook his head at first, then his eyes widened. “Master, High God Zhe Yan might know something.”

“Zhe Yan?”

“Star Lord Si Ming once made a slip. He said High God Zhe Yan was also there during the time,” Die Feng added hurriedly. “He claimed not to know why High God Zhe Yan was there in the first place though.”
Everyone knew Zhe Yan’s disinterest in worldly matter, saved from Qing Qiu and his Peachtree Woods, he hardly went anywhere. The fact that he travelled to the Ninth Heaven on his own, uninvited, hinted there was something unusual going on.

“I see. Thanks for bringing this to me.”

Mo Yuan sent him off after a few more brief exchanges. He sat alone on his platform, carefully going over what he just learned.

A mortal whose looks was startlingly similar to his Seventeenth was blinded. Seventeenth’s eyes was mysteriously gouged out.

The Mermaid War happened roughly over three hundred years ago, Ye Hua’s wife died not long after that. Ye Hua was also severely injured around the time, enough for the Medicine King to stay indefinitely. Zhe Yan was conveniently there for unknown reason.

Seventeenth went missing for six hundred years, none of her family can’t find her or made a head or tail of her whereabouts. Then one day, she turned up in PeachTree Woods, injured. It was Zhe Yan who found her that day. Seventeenth came back from her Heavenly trials and asked Zhe Yan for Amnesia Potion. She refused to elaborate of what happened during the time of her absence or where she had been. This must be the time she was in a relationship with someone. She thought she was still innocent because she had no memory of that time anymore.

But why she chose to forget? Seventeenth might be too emotional but she was not the type to run away when faced with enemies or obstacles. He could only guess that the experiences must be insufferable for her. What or who could rattle his fearless Seventeenth so?

Was there any connections between Ye Hua, that woman and his Seventeenth? Rather than their blindness and shared looks? He tried to figure it out to no avail, it was like a piece was missing from the whole tableau. Something about this felt wrong, he didn't like it – it gave him an uneasy, foreboding feeling like there was something much deeper than he could perceived. Yet, he was certain of one thing. Zhe Yan knew something and kept it close to his heart. After he went off his seclusion, a trip to PeachTree Woods seemed to be the first order of business.

Note : 'Seventeen' in Chinese character sounds quite similar to 'wife.' It's almost like a word play; 'little Seventeen' and 'little wife'. I believe it was intentional before Tang Qi changed her original plot.
Chapter 21

Ye Hua hastened his pace to get away from everything. He didn’t know what to feel anymore, everything happened too fast and he was powerless to stop it.

It started just like any other council’s proceedings, his Father Prince gave his Lord and Grandfather details about the up-coming training exercises for the troops. This year, they will move the training ground to the waste land. The combatants will be divided into three groups. Their mission was to compete with each other, eliminate any obstacles - their opponents included - and breached the strong hold. The first group that could seize the Imperial Flag, reach the top of the Watch Tower and unfurl it in the wind would won. Prospect combatants would be recruited into Special Forces and marked for future promotion.

Ye Hua sat quietly and let the information flow through him. He was no stranger to the troop’s training regiments. It was then an imperial guard rushed inside, he barely finished heralding the arrival of important guests when Bai Zhi, the Fox Emperor, and his son strode inside the Grand Hall. High God Zhe Yan followed them at a more leisurely gait.

The implication of their appearances weighed down his heart. It had been hundreds of years since Bai Zhi last visited the Ninth Heaven. If he was to be specific; since his second uncle’s scandalous elope with that snake spirit. The Fox Emperor and his wife had been constantly travelling around. There was only one plausible reason for him and Zhe Yan to be here together.

Ye Hua had dread this very moment since the day Qian Qian bluntly told him she wanted to cancel their engagement. She had cut him off cleanly, claiming the only one she loved was High God Mo Yuan. He remembered with clarity how she refused to even give him a chance to prove his love. His only consolation was that while High God Mo Yuan favored her so; it didn’t necessary mean he was in love with her or planned to pursue her romantically. From what he was able to glean from everyone, High God Mo Yuan was not very spontaneous. He usually put away so much time to analyze and think everything through before he made a move.

His third uncle tried to talk him around in the aftermath of ‘the break up.’ He warned him not to confused Qian Qian for his Su Su anymore and urged him to move on. His head understood what he tried to convey, but his heart stubbornly refused to accept it. How could he just let their love go? Even if she didn’t remember him or feel a shred of love for him anymore. After two months, he gathered his shattered heart enough to see her again, only to hear that they had left together.

He watched on as the Fox Emperor announced the true purpose of his impromptu visit. It was just like he had suspected. He clamped on his teeth hard and slowed his breath, trying to control the
emotion churning inside him. When his Lord and Grandfather asked for his opinion; he didn’t even hesitated. He told Bai Zhi outright that he still wished to honor their agreement and would gladly accept Bai Qian as his future Princess Consort and wife.

He explained to her father how he found her character delightful after spending some time with her. He sought to assure him that their life together would not be a loveless marriage. She will be treated with uttermost respect and caring when she wed into Xiwu Palace.

The Fox Emperor said that it might be so but unfortunately this wedding can’t happen anymore. High God Zhe Yan put on a slightly embarrassed look. He admitted that he was partially at fault, since he persuaded Bai Zhi to accept the proposal without letting him consulting his youngest first. Nevertheless, now that Bai Qian had voiced her opinion, it will be imprudent to proceed.

He knew the very moment his Lord and Grandfather overstepped his bound. He claimed not to change his mind for any reasons. The agreement was announced long time ago, all realms had acknowledged it and expected the alliance between their houses to follow. It can’t be undone simply because she disagreed with her elders’s wishes.

Ye Hua could practically sense their collective displeasure and rising ire from where he was seated. The Fox Emperor’s stance changed abruptly. Gone was his laid-back attitude, Ye Hua got a glimpse of a mighty Emperor who defeated great many foes and secured his lands almost single-handedly during the time of chaos and unsettles.

Bai Zhi’s frosty tone bit deeply when he explicitly and meticulously reminded all that presented how and why this arrangement came to be. Ye Hua flinched when he accused Celestial Clan for being ignorant. Perhaps Qing Qiu should have sought retributions from them that day, rather than graciously accepted their offer. Then his daughter wouldn’t have been unjustly ridiculed and disrespected for the last millennial on account of Celestials’s dishonor and indiscretion.

At that point, his Lord and Grandfather realized his faux-pas but he was too obstinate and prideful to back down. Nobody bought his seemingly benevolent act when he said he was genuinely concerned for Bai Qian’s prospect marriage in the future, were she failed her second attempt at marriage.

Ye Hua cringed inside seeing Bai Zhen’s normally immaculate face twisted into a furious one at the veiled threat against his younger sister. He turned his face and looked straight at Ye Hua, silently asking that they really thought Qing Qiu would suffer such humiliation?

He knew their patience was reaching the breaking point. He was about to speak up and cleared the air when a voice, neither too loud nor too soft, interrupted them. Ye Hua was surprised when a deep
silence fell on the whole gathering. He turned around only to come face-to-face with High God Mo Yuan.

What came of his mouth rendered everyone speechless. High God Mo Yuan claimed that he had known Bai Qian for a long time and was very fond of her. Her family was well aware of their mutual affection. Yet circumstances and the aftermath of Second Ghost War set them apart. Now that he was back and Bai Qian didn’t wish for an arranged marriage, he would gladly wed her, if her father would have him.

Ye Hua felt as if he was struck with lightening. He knew all along that Qian Qian was in love with her mentor. He wasn’t quite ready to believe that someone as grandeur as High God Mo Yuan would actually return her love; even less admit to the public his desire for their union.

Ye Hua bit his inner cheek hard. He fought not to ask aloud; how could he try to place a prior claim on Qian Qian when she was his own disciple all along. Yet he couldn’t and wouldn’t do that to her, giving away tidbits of information to gossip-hungry crowd. It could only be used to hurt her later.

Bai Zhi not only didn’t refute his claim; he declared proudly that it would be Qing Qiu’s honour to have him as a son-in-law. High God Zhe Yan chirped up how strange it was that the three of them ended up join together as one big family.

Ye Hua realized instantly that they had met and talked prior to their arrival. Perhaps this was only a stage play to show off their united front. If Ye Hua had thought that he might have a small fighting chance to sway the Fox Emperor’s decision, High God Mo Yuan’s unexpected arrival completely ruined it.

Three ancient Gods of standing together as one was definitely enough to make the Sky Lord rethink his options. He couldn’t afford to lose his alliance with any of them; let alone all three. Mo Yuan’s aid cannot be remised, especially when the threat of Qing Cang was looming over their heads.

He knew without doubt his Lord and Grandfather was reluctant to go against Bai Zhi, now that he had both High God Zhe Yan and High God Mo Yuan backed him up. Earlier an inner battle warred within him, now he was past the point of caring about his own status. He refused to lose her without a fight. He purposely ignored his Father Prince’s signal to sit down. His most vehement glare and furious head shaking didn’t nothing to deter Ye Hua. Not when he decided to bring the challenge to High God Mo Yuan. The twin’s steely eyes met halfway across the room; in a battle of wills, neither was willing to glance away.

It was then High God Mo Yuan’s oppressive and intimidating aura bore down heavily on him. Ye
Hua felt suffocated and breathless; his body shook with determination as he tried to fight it off. He never felt anything like this for all the time he spent in his brother’s company. His aura was always calm and gentle like a west wind. Now it was imposing and unbearable. Was this the true power of ancient god that frightened everyone? A dose of uneasiness washed over him, what was he liked when he was at full strength?

High God Mo Yuan outward countenance didn’t belie the raging battle of wills going on between the two of them. He looked unruffled and composed while Ye Hua was dripping with cold sweat. His paralyzed limbs refused to cooperate. Every time he tried to get up and move; he felt as if being stabbed with thousands of pins and needles. Ye Hua look him in the eyes. He thought he saw a flash of dismay in those ancient eyes, still the oppressing aura didn’t yield one bit.

High God Mo Yuan didn’t stop just there. He stated further with slightest hint of displeasure; he wouldn’t tolerate anyone who tarnishing his future bride’s honor. Anyone who dare to give her grief will meet his Xuan Yuan. His eyes shifted and lingered on the Sky Lord the longest when he said this. The meaning of his action couldn’t be any louder or clearer: a direct challenge for the Sky Lord or anyone so choose to have further designs on his intended.

Ye Hua grudgingly commended him despite their ongoing animosity; he did everything through and through. High God Mo Yuan left no loose ends. His Lord and Grandfather last and viable argument was overturned with one flawless reasoning. By marrying him, the revered god of Celestial Clan, Qing Qiu had already fulfilled their part of the agreement and the alliance between their families and clans was upheld accordingly. There would be no more confrontation or disputes among any of them. Ye Hua watched as his Lord and Grandfather’s face turned ashen. If he protested, there will be at least three enraged Gods and many more clan's heads for him to contend with.

Ye Hua drew a shaky breath after High God Mo Yuan withdrew his aura and left the Grand Hall. He chanced another glance at his Lord and Grandfather and found him tremble with fury and perhaps apprehension. Ye Hua didn’t care about decorum or anything else at that point, he needed to leave. He needed some time to be alone - far from pitying eyes and concerned relatives. And leave he did, without a single glance back.

:: Junji Mountain, Mortal Realm ::

In the end, he went back to where it all began. Ye Hua let his eyes perused the hut and remembered all the good time he had with Su Su here - the bed where they made love the first time, the kitchen where he cooked for her, the forest where they walked together and the lake where he and she pledged themselves to each other.

Uncle Lian Song once asked him why he must cling tightly to the past and kept torturing himself
when he knew very well there was no going back. Why would he still hang up on her hundreds of years later? Ye Hua didn’t know why either, maybe .. maybe he was afraid. If he accepted the truth and move on, wouldn’t their love and the life that had together became a mere dream?

Then again was it not already? After losing Su Su, he kept hoping against hopes that she would return to him. That one day his family would be whole again, if he didn’t give up. He was overjoy when Su Su came back into his life, even as a stranger. He dreamed that once he won over her heart; everything will fall back to where it used to be. It was a bitter pill for him to swallow the cold truth. Qian Qian had set her sight and mind on his older twin brother long before he was born. Her love for him was reciprocal. It was him who intruded upon their relationship.

Ye Hua picked up the spirit bottle and downed it fast. He needed no more consolation, coaxing or reasoning. Strong and burning liqueur that would numb his thoughts and the pain in his heart suited him just fine.

Note : I followed Shifu into seclusion and just emerged to update.  lol  Special thanks to loreinacadis0412 for your wonderful insights & all readers for your patience and support through this long ride. I can't believe we are at Chapter 21 already. ^^
:: Qing Qiu ::

Bai Qian waved Mi Gu and Xiao Jiu to come over. She silently gestured them to bring out the food and set the table. “Mother, Senior, let’s take a break. You have been at this almost all day,” she gently reminded them.

When she woke up yesterday morning, she found out her senior disciple was already here, in the Den, talking with her parents. Apparently, Mo Yuan had picked up a date and sent him over to discuss the wedding preparation with her family. Though he promised her it will be within three months, she just didn’t think he will rush the date this much.

Zhe Yan didn’t even try to mince his words despite her senior’s presence. He said being desperately in love with her had definitely befuddled Mo Yuan’s head. How he expected to get everything done under six weeks?

Her mother, Mi Gu, Xiao Jiu and her had gone over every details with Senior Die Feng since then. Bai Qian gave herself a mental pat on the back. She never expected planning a wedding ceremony was such a demanding work. At one point, she even protested that she only wanted a small exclusive wedding; one that only her closed relatives, plus Zhe Yan, Kunlun’s disciples and perhaps Lord Dong Hua would attend. Those are the only people Mo Yuan and her ever cared about anyway. Clearly that was not what everyone else could agree on.

Her mother had shushed her, telling her she was being silly. How could a wedding between Celestials’s God of War and Qing Qiu’s Queen be anything less than an elaborate event? Many ceremonies and processions had to be observed carefully as it will reflected on the couple. Needless to say, her senior agreed with her mother wholeheartedly. They got along so well after that; so much it gave her the chill. They had spent hours discussing and debating how and what was to be done about guests. Already she could see them repeating this same step for everything else.

When her mother and Xiao Jiu brought up the topic of bride’s dress, she was so ready to give up the whole thing and begged Mo Yuan to elope with her. Which higher being determined that the bride had to prepare the dress by herself? She sincerely hoped it was not Mo Yuan’s mother. In her long life, she had never done any sewing and stitching; learning how to do just that was beyond her wildest imagination. She would rather submitted herself to recite the whole collections of tactical books or copy ten thousand pages of Taoist scriptures than spending an hour sewing a dress. Was there any spell to weave a cloth at all? She had absolutely no idea.

So Bai Qian fidgeted restlessly, until her senior told her there was nothing to worry at all. Their mentor had already ordered the bride’s dress to be done in advance. He didn’t care what wedding protocol dictated. If a dress was needed, he would gladly provide it for her. Had Mo Yuan been there, she would definitely give him a wild kiss that would make his toes curled. After hours of prolonged discussion, she gave up and just left them on their own. No one seemed to want her input that much anyway. Later, she learned that her senior disciple left the Den in a rush. Bai Qian felt a bit guilty, she didn’t even get to see him out.
Die Feng returned to Qing Qiu two days later. Already he had sent all of his juniors scattered with various assignments. Some were tasked with visiting prestigious guests and giving away their mentor’s personal invitations to the wedding; others went shopping for necessary wedding items and more decorations. It was two very fruitful days, he hummed with satisfaction. When he went inside the Fox Den and can’t find Seventeenth, he hunted her down and finally found her hiding in Yanhua Cave.

“There you are Seventeenth, I have looked for you everywhere,” he said, exasperated.

Bai Qian lift up her head from the novels she bought from Mortal Realm months earlier. “Senior,” she called out in greeting, “you come back.”

He gave her a grin. “I come bearing gift too.”

Bai Qian eyes lit up in delight. “What gift? Didn’t you already give betrothal gifts to my parents?” She got up and walked to him.

“Those are formal bridal’s price.” He brought out a long rectangular box, then placed it into her waiting palm. “Master had prepared this one just for you.”

“What is it?” Bai Qian asked, excited. She brought the box closer to inspect it.

“I wouldn’t know, Seventeenth. Why don’t you take a look?” said Die Feng.

She carefully opened the latch and found a single hairpin was placed neatly inside. One end was decorated with a small white fox nestled the embrace of gigantic golden dragon. The attached hanging pendant, laden with light pink stone, was fashioned in the shape of a petite five-petal peach blossom.

Bai Qian’s smile widened, pleased. “He didn’t forget at all.”

Die Feng took a peek inside. “Master must have crafted this himself. I feel some kind of magic there.”

“I thought as much,” she took the hairpin out of the box and twirled it around her finger as she admired the delicate craftsmanship. “I wonder what does it do. Master didn’t tell you anything, senior?”

He shook his head. “You just have to ask him yourself when you get back.”

Bai Qian put it back inside and magicked away the box. She faced her senior. “You’ll leave again tomorrow, right? How about I take you on a tour then?” She asked. “You were cooped up in the Den every time you visited. I didn’t have a chance to take you around Qing Qiu.”

“That’s a great idea, Seventeenth. Perhaps after I’m done taking to the Empress?” Die Feng suggested.

“In the afternoon then,” she agreed and waved him good bye.

“You are not coming?” He laughed when she made a sour face and left her to her own device.
He called out, loudly. “Seventeenth, what are you doing?”

“Swimming, of course.” Shouting back, she changed her direction and headed toward the bank.

“In this weather?” Die Feng was bewildered. Sometimes, well most of the time, he didn’t really understand her. She always did things at the spur of moment. “Aren’t you a bit cold?”

“No, I went in because it’s rather hot and clammy today,” she spelled dry her cloth. “Do you want to go sit over there?” She pointed at the wooden bamboo hut not far from where they stood. “Or do you prefer walking around?”

“Walking, it is. I wish to see around,” he decided. They spent the rest of afternoon in this fashion, speaking of their shared past and of those years she hid away in Qing Qiu.

“Seventeenth, you’ll become Master’s wife soon. I know you have grown up and matured a lot but Master’s rank is extraordinary. Everything you do will reflect on him much greater than when you were merely his disciple. I wish you to take caution in everything you do, can you understand me?”

“I understand, senior,” she said solemnly. “Rest assure, I will not do anything that will compromise his reputation and honor.”

“That’s great. I still can’t believe you will become our Mistress. Fate works in such mysterious way,” he said, with a good humor. “Who would have thought that our youngest junior, who turned out to be a female in disguised, will ended up marrying our mentor. I wonder if Master anticipated this at all when he received you as his disciple. He even gave you the Jade Purity fan of Kunlun.”

Bai Qian merely side-eyed him, a mysterious smile ghosted upon her lips. She refused to raise to the bait; that secret would remained hers and Mo Yuan’s alone. “I have not thank you yet, senior, for doing all of this. So, thank you so very much.” She dipped her head down, showing her gratitude.

“Don’t be so formal, Seventeenth,” he inclined his head in return. “It’s my pleasure. Make Master happy, that’s all I ask.”

Bai Qian laughed heartily. “Of course, make him so delirious with happiness is my life’s mission now.”

Die Feng gave her a wry smile. “I sincerely hope that’s not an euphemism for headaches.” Their mentor’s days will never be dull now, he thought with humors.

When Die Feng exited his temporary sleeping quarter the following morning, Bai Qian was already there, waiting for him. “Are you leaving now, senior? I will accompany you.”

“You are coming back with me, today?” He asked. Their mentor wouldn’t be out of his seclusion for another two days. His eyes swept over her person, noting that she had dressed up today. The new white dress, trimmed with silvery hanging ornaments, made her looked every bit elegant and radiant. Her beautiful long hair was cleverly styled with the hairpin he brought just yesterday.

“I wish to be early and gave Master a surprise,” she smirked mischievously.

The familiar grin spreading across her face reminded him of various naughty pranks she pulled on them back then. Die Feng threw her a uncertain glance as she dragged him out of the Den. He shook his head; let their mentor dealt with her then. She was not his responsibility anymore.
“Come on. Let’s go, Senior,” she urged him to hasten his steps; then both caught a cloud and headed back to Kunlun Mountain.

Almost half way there, Bai Qian suddenly shouted for her senior to stop. “Senior, look.” She pointed her finger at the far sky; it was tinted with pink hue. “Did you see that? Let’s investigate.” In silent agreement, they changed the direction. Bai Qian eyed the phenomenon with trepidation. An uneasiness began to creep into her heart. There was no knowing what was going to happen if what she suspected proved to be true. Her heart was thumping loudly inside her chest as they gained speed toward the Ruoshui River.

:: Ghost Clan’s Temporary Abode At Ninth Heaven ::

The small fairy on the bed lowered her head and opened her mouth to capture the nipple between her teeth. Her small tongue tugged and lapped at its peak hungrily. She moved her other hand downward and squeezed his length through his legging.

“I can’t wait to take you inside. It’s going to be a ride you won’t ever forget,” she whispered seductively into his ear. Her eyes drank the half-naked Adonis on her bed with pure lust.

Yet her bed warmer’s eyes were empty of feeling. His mind had drifted away from the beauty perching on his chest. She pursed her lips with annoyance when he failed to acknowledge her heated whispering. She doubled her efforts and was rewarded when his body began to stir with pleasure. She smirked and rose up over him, preparing to make good of her earlier promise.

She was startled by a rattling sound at the door. “My Lord, my lord.” The knock became more urgent. “I have important matter to report right away. There’s a new development at Ruoshui River.”

Those two dreadful words instantly pulled said Adonis’s distracted mind back to the present. He carelessly shoved the female fairy who just pleasured him aside. He got up, rearranged his clothes and stride toward the door.

“Speak, Fiery Quilin.” Li Jing gave a brusque order; he beckoned his mount to come inside.

“My Lord, General Murong dispatched ten platoons of men to Ruoshui River just now. I don’t know why but they look very suspicious.”

“Without my order he dared moving the troops?” His handsome faced twisted with anger. “That is a very bold move. He could be charged with treason. What is he trying to accomplish?”

“Many of those who accompany him used to serve the former Ghost Lord, my Lord.” The little Qilin voiced his own observation.

“Qing Cang.” His eyes widened with sudden realization. “That can’t be good.”

He snatched his sword from the bed and left hurriedly to look for his younger sister. Li Jing found her in her designated bedroom; a lot of scrolls scattered around her desk. “Yan Zhi. Yan Zhi.”

Princess Yan Zhi of the Ghost Clan perked up; hearing someone calling her name with such urgency. She came face to face with her brother. He looked ill at ease. He spoke up before she even asked.

“Yan Zhi, Fiery Qillin’s saying just now General Murong had moved ten platoons of soldiers toward Ruoshui River.”
“What did you say?” she exclaimed in fright. What was he thinking? Moving the troops at this time; Celestials might suspected the Ghost Clan was going to renegade again.

“They must have a plan, a big one. They know very well I’ll hear about it as soon as they march.” His face was stony, unyielding.

“Brother, what are you going to do?” she asked worriedly.

“I have to go now and stop them before they do foolish things,” he replied. Like trying to set Qing Cang free, he added silently.

She always knew a certain faction in their ranks wanted Qing Cang to return to the seat of power. They barely hide their contempt for the current Ghost Lord who bowed down to Sky Lord’s every wishes.

“Celestials have placed their own sentries there. They must be alerted by now. Si Yin might already be there...,” he trailed off.

“Shouldn’t you go to the Crown Prince then, brother?” she asked hopefully.

“Why would he care, Yan Zhi? Didn’t you hear, she is no longer his Princess Consort but Mo Yuan’s bride now,” he said bitterly. Seventy thousand years ago or now, he still lost her to Mo Yuan. Her heart never truly belonged to him. “She’ll never let Mo Yuan fight in his weakened state. I have to get there before it’s too late.”

Yan Zhu walked around him, immediately blocking his path. “What could you possibly do?” She was frightened now.

A long silence stretched between them.

“Did you know, Yan Zhi, she said she was so disappointed in me? And I couldn’t agree more.” Li Jing’s eyes lowered to the floor. “I had promised her we would be together for life, I can’t even keep it. My life was a joke; empty and useless.”

The day she destroyed his sacrifice ritual platform, she said she will call upon him when the time came. He knew better. She had no intention going through with her promise. It was merely a ploy to discourage him from making any more risky moves.

"Seventy thousand years ago, because of my pettiness, she suffered so much. I wish for her to see that I have changed.”

He had decided. Even if he had to forfeit his own life to save her, he would do it without any regret. He owed her so much and wish to atone for his betrayal and the hurt he had caused. She deserved so much more, sadly he understood it too late and she certainly didn’t wait for him. This way, even if she didn’t want to forgive him, she would never ever forgotten him either.

“If Qing Cang was to break out and use the Bell of Eastern Emperor again, she will not hesitate to use her own spirit to seal him back. I can’t let her do that.” Li Jing admitted.

“You can’t do that. What about your son? What about me?” She pulled his sleeve, knowing instantly what he was about to do.

“Yan Zhi, the Elixir wouldn’t work for that boy no matter how hard you try.” He told her gently. It would be unkind to tempt her with such false hope. "There’s too much darkness inside. Even if you use Mo Yuan’s elixir cauldron that could cancel our power, you still need someone with virtue
breath to purify it. To do that, one will have to sacrifice his cultivation. Who, Yan Zhi, will be willing enough to do that for a child of Ghost Clan?"

Her arms dropped limp to her sides. She took out the Elixir and looked at it forlornly. “So it’s useless.”

“For us, it is,” He gave a tired sigh and patted her cheek. “Let it go, sister, the boy wasn’t meant to live. This is my punishment for breaking the oath.”

“Listen to me, Yan Zhi. “ He lift her chin up, to see her face properly for one last time. “When I’m gone, you had to become the leader of our clan. Take good care of them. With Fiery Qilin by your side, no one would dare to hurt you.”

“No, brother, don’t do this,” Yan Zhi broke down in tears as she begged him not to go. “You’re all that I have left. Don’t leave me alone.”

Li Jing kissed her forehead softly. “I’m sorry, dearest sister. Remember I’ll always love you.” Then he pressed his finger on the pressure point between the back of her shoulder and neck; she was rendered unconscious instantly. Li Jing caught her body before it went completely limp.

“From now on, protect her well, Fiery Qilin.” He issued his final order. "Annihilate all those that sought to bring her harm. Stay by her side always and forever.” Yan Zhi’s body was passed from him into another waiting arms. Li Jing turned around and left without a glance back. “Farewell, sister.”

Small Qilin’s teary eyes watched as he faded away before him. No matter how long it was, it seemed the Ghost Lord never really escaped High Goddess Bai Qian’s clutch.

Next chapter: Ye Hua finds out why Qian Qian and he crossed path only to become separated again. In the meanwhile, Shifu will be seeing Zhe Yan and demanding the truth about Bai Qian/Ye Hua’s past.

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Chapter 23

Ye Hua climbed up the stone staircase leading to the Stone of Destiny. He set on this journey to the border between worlds because he had to know. Why fate allowed him and her to cross path and fell in love, only to let death set them apart. Why brought them together later again when her heart already chose another.

“Greeting visitor.” An old Deity appeared in front of him just as he was about to touch the Stone of Destiny. “What is the purpose of your visit?”

Ye Hua inclined his head, offering his own greeting. “You must be the Deity that guards the Stone of Destiny. I am Ye Hua, Crown Prince of the Celestial Clan.”

“I see. How may I serve Your Highness today?” He inquired politely.

Ye Hua let his eyes roaming the gigantic stone altar in front of him. Each side of the Stone contained passages of writings. “I heard the Stone of Destiny carries every person’s destiny. Is it true? I wish to learn more about it.”

“A common misconception. While the Stone of Destiny can indeed tell immortals’ destinies; said destinies may or may not be fulfilled.”

Seeing Ye Hua’s confused looks, he delved into explanation. “A destiny is but a path laid out by the Heaven’s will, yet the future is indiscernible. Every single action leads to a different reaction, every choice results in different end. Nothing is indefinitely set in the stone. It always changes and adjusts just as a person changes.”

“Deity, I wish to know what does it says about Qing Qiu’s Bai Qian and I?” Ye Hua asked.

The Deity immediately gave him a caution. “Although destiny is written down as you see it; it doesn’t always stay the same. Heaven’s will is not meant to be revealed. As soon as I tell you, what was written may no longer become true. Sometime it changes for the better, sometime for the worse. Is it wise to uselessly tempt fate?”

Ye Hua was skeptical. What could possibly be worse than losing Qian Qian’s love twice? “What about the past then? Can you tell me those that already came to pass?” Even so, he saw his point and decided to heed his suggestion.

The Deity took a moment to ponder his request and nodded his head once in agreement. He gazed at the Stone of Destiny pensively and spoke up after a stretch of silence.

“From the beginning, there was no fate between you and the Goddess. However, during the time you were the Golden Lotus, you became very attached to her and she was rather fond of you. This connection you formed with her created a chance encounter between the two of you. Yet this fate was so shallow and would later be determined by how you and her upholding each other. You should also know the thread of fate is peculiar thing.”

“How so, Deity?” Ye Hua asked quietly. He was quite disheartened to learn that he and Qian Qian were not fated from the beginning.

“It can only be tied together once.” The Deity said solemnly, he looked into Ye Hua’s eyes before continued. ”In my own humble opinion, the thread of fate is quite akin to the bond of love. Both are very fragile. Both needs mutual nurture and attentive care. Should one party fail to hold up one’s
end, it wouldn’t be able to endure. Once broken, it is impossible to be brought back together again.”

Ye Hua slowly digested what was told. This was the answer he sought to know. It was… so obvious, so absurd, so unbelievable. He let out bitter laughs, each was more forceful than the previous one. He glanced down at his hands in absolute disbelief as memories of the past were being replayed in his mind. He already seized that chance to be with her and destroyed said chance with his own hands. It was his choices that sabotaged their fate and doomed both of them to cycles of misery.

Back then, he had seen enough of what happened to his second uncle to know what his Lord and Grandfather could possibly do to Su Su and him. He had thought they could avoid the same fate, if he could lead everyone into believing she meant so little to him. In order to pull off the acts, however unwilling, he purposely left her in the cold and hard palace, let her fight on her own. He treated her indifferently and refused to listen to her reasons.

By doing that, he had alienated himself from her and let the seeds of doubt fester in her mind. He still remembered, when he was about to take her eyes, how she looked upon him with fear and distrust. It pained him how she flinched away every time he reached out and tried to touch her. Still, he thought he could explain the reasons behind his unforgiving acts and make it up to her later, after she officially became his wife and had her own standing among them.

How ironic. He had avoided the fate his Lord and Grandfather scheming against him and Su Su. Yet, he willingly walked into another deadly trap of his own doing. Only here and now, he could see with sudden clarity how he went about the wrong ways since the beginning.

In his heart, she had left him and Ali. She chose to jump down that Zhuxian Terrace rather than remained with them. How he was so blinded from the truth and didn’t even realize it until now. It was him who let go of their bond first. Su Su merely finished purging remnants of their entangled fate and love. She chose to wipe out her - their - memories and started her life again with a clean slate.

What if he chose to remain by her side and take care of her? What if he secretly told her his reasons for treating her so poorly? What if he prized SuSu’s simple wish to remain with him no matter at what cost? What if he didn’t take her eyes? What if he fought for her justice when she was so wrongly accused, come what may? Then would they still be together today?

But it was too late to ask for a what if.

His eyes squeezed shut, his face upturned, as he fought the tears that threatened to fall out. After drawing in a few more breathe, he opened his eyes again and finally asked the question that caused so many sleepless nights lately.

“Why must she and I cross path again then? What for, if we can no longer be together anymore? Is this some kind of Heaven’s punishment? To forever regret the choices I have made?”

The Deity deemed a small nudge in the right direction would not directly violate what Heaven planned for them. What he chose to do with this revelation was on his own. “This second encounter is indeed fated. Whether it is a punishment or something entirely different, only Your Highness can determine its true purpose.”

The Deity refused to elaborate more on the matter. Despite all the efforts, his continued persistence to obtain an answer seemed unable to shake him, much to Ye Hua’s disappointment.

“Deity, I understand you have no desire to speak about it anymore. There’s another thing I wish to know, I suppose you could give me a truthful answer.” He pushed down the rising uneasiness that
threatened to overwhelm him. “What of High God Mo Yuan and Qing Qiu’s Bai Qian?”

His bushy white brow furrowed at the newly raised question. This generation of prince was really too hard on himself. He stroked the long white beard, humming for a long time. His head bobbed up and down as he contemplated their complicated fates.

“They are destined to become intricately intertwined since the moment they first met. Master and fated disciple were brought together by the instrument of Heaven. Love and devotion, life and death; they owed each other. Fate had set them so far apart yet the thread of fate between them remained, spread thinned over the length of time as it was.”

He continued, his voice hinted with an awe of admiration and profound sadness. “One chose to endure a lifetime of loneliness and endless suffering. Another spent almost a hundred thousands of years, fighting his way out of the chaos of Nothingness and hopeless endeavor to return to her. Their absolute dedication to each other is astounding. It moves even the Heaven’s will. The destinies they shared rewrote themselves. This is but a very rare occurrence. Both have taken the long road to get here and find each other again.”

Ye Hua fell into deep thought. He contemplated on what was revealed and failed to hear what the Deity said next.

“Forgive me for being so bold to say this, but I have been living for a long time, Your Highness. I have seen love of many kinds: familial loves, romantic loves, platonic loves and fidelity loves. Strange as it may sound; love could be either benevolent or harmful to those we love. It could be selfish and possessive or freely given and unconditional. Your Highness has to ask yourself: What kind of love is your choice? What is the most important thing to you?”

Ye Hua politely gave the Deity a mindless nod as if he agreed to what was being said. He was about to bid farewell when he chanced one last glance at Qian Qian and Mo Yuan’s name shown on the Stone of Destiny. It was then he saw her name was fading and reappearing. His breath suddenly caught up in his throat. “Deity, why her name is flickering like that?”

The old Deity sighed. “There is only two reasons for a God’s name to disappear from the Stone. One can be done by cheer force of will. All this time, I only know of one God who accomplished this. Another reason is that the God’s eternal light is diminishing.”

“Even the Heavenly Father faced Calamity,” he reminded Ye Hua gently. “The light of her soul is dimming as we speak, Your Highness. Should the event run through its course; it will be completely snuffed out,” the old Deity replied regretfully.

Ye Hua shook his head in denial. That was entirely non-sense. Qian Qian was with High God Mo Yuan, preparing their wedding ceremony. How could her life be in any danger? His heart lurched when he suddenly realized with an absolute dread.

High God Mo Yuan. Danger. - The Bell of Eastern Emperor.

In a flash of light, Ye Hua transformed his body into his dragon form and soared quickly into the
sky. The Deity watched him disappearing from sight. “This is the Heaven’s answer to your three hundred years of pleading. Choose wisely, Your Highness. See what is the most precious to you, lest you fail yet again.”

Ye Hua pushed himself forward at full speed, ignoring how his body and power was pushed to the extremity. He was determined to reach her side at once. The desolated scene he came upon at Ruoshui River was a nightmare turned true. The sky on every end was painted red with crimson hellfire. The expanded Bell of Eastern Emperor gave out frightening loud groans that could be heard by everyone across the four seas and eight realms. His heart froze with absolute terror and sheer helplessness when he saw the familiar white-clad female rising and disappearing into the raging fire of inferno and destruction.

Flashback of Su Su jumping the Zhu Xian Terrace came to the forefront of his mind. Not again. He can’t see her dead again. “Su Su, do not,” he shouted desperately. Yet he knew he was once again too late to reach her in time.

:: Zheyan’s Peachtree Grove - Earlier that day ::

Mo Yuan put an end to his seclusion two day earlier than he intended. He could no longer wait to lay to rest the doubts he had regarding Seventeenth and Ye Hua’s unlikely connection. He left his meditation cave, caught a cloud and reached Zhe Yan’s Peachtree Woods in no time.

It was only late morning, Zhe Yan was just leaving his hut when he saw Mo Yuan stood with his back turned towards the entrance, waiting patiently. He became immediately intrigued at his sudden appearance. “You come this early? For what I owe this surprise visit, Mo Yuan?”

“There is something I wish to discuss with you,” he said softly, not giving away how conflicted he was feeling inside.

“Let me guess, you can’t decide what betrothal gift you should give Fifth Sister?” He asked teasingly.

“No, Zhe Yan. I already sent it to her.”

“Oh? How about …” Zhe Yan tried to come up with yet another idea.

“It has nothing to do with the wedding at all,” Mo Yuan stopped him from making further speculation. “I wish to ask about Ye Hua and his mortal wife.”

“I see.” Zhe Yan said, his demeanor was no longer jubilant. He led Mo Yuan to a stone table nearby and invited him to sit down. “Why the sudden interest? You never wish to know about anyone’s love life before.”

Mo Yuan waved away the wine bottle he offered. “I heard that you know my brother quite well. You even healed him when he was gravely injured, didn’t you?”

Zhe Yan didn’t replied right away, instead he studied Mo Yuan face carefully, trying to ascertain what his line of questioning might lead to.

“Or perhaps we could talk about Ali’s mother who was blinded and resembled my Seventeenth so much. What was their story?” Mo Yuan penetrating eyes shifted to meet Zhe Yan’s.
“Why stir up the past, Mo Yuan. She was only a mortal and long gone,” Zhe Yan feigned ignorant. “Other than she looked somewhat similar to Fifth sister, there was nothing interesting about her.”

“Your reluctance to speak about her made me even more curious, Zhe Yan.” Mo Yuan said nonchalantly. “Ye Hua’s questionable attachment to Seventeenth is not as simply as it seems. Did you know he tried to challenge me that day in the Grand Hall?”

“Oh?” Zhe Yan perked up, his interest was piqued. “So that was what happened that day. I felt a surge of struggling powers. I just didn’t know that you two fought.”

“Zhe Yan, even if I don’t know him that well. I’m quite certain Ye Hua’s a very level-headed young man. He knew very well what was at stake, still he chose to defy me in front of everyone. I tried to understand his action, but failed to grasp it.” Mo Yuan admitted, for a moment he looked truly perplexed. “If you know anything at all, then tell me now. I have been going over every possibilities and had yet to come up with a sound explanation.”

“Can’t you let the bygone be bygone, Mo Yuan?” Zhe Yan asked again.

“I only wish to know the truth, Zhe Yan” he insisted. “I could spend days debating with you why it must be done.”

“Honestly? I didn’t know either. I could only speculate from bits and pieces I learned. Is it the truth, I can’t tell.”

“That’s all I ask. Tell me what you know, from the beginning,” Mo Yuan told him.

Zhe Yan opened his mouth and recounted the first time he met Ye Hua’s wife.

“That day, I went to Taichen Palace to ask Dong Hua for a clue of Fifth sister’s whereabouts. Weeks earlier, I have looked at her star and found she was well and being in love with someone out there. I even joked with Zhen Zhen perhaps that was why she didn’t returned yet. Dong Hua didn’t offer anything useful though. He only let me known he already knew of her true identity. On my way back, I saw a woman accompanied Ye Hua. She was stumbling down the steps. There was a thin white cloth covering her eyes; the rest of her face looked quite familiar.”

He pointed out. “Yet, what intrigued me was the faintly discernible peach blossom scent around her. You should know that the scent of my peach blossom is quite unique. I knew for a fact that she was mortal and the chance of her being related to Fifth sister was inconceivable. For some unknown reason, that doubts lingered in my mind days after the encounter. I decided to return to the Ninth Heaven to seek her out again. There I found out, by odd chance, Ye Hua’s life hanging by thread. His injuries was too severe even with the Sky Lord’s partially transferred cultivation.

“At the time, I really thought he was your incarnation, no matter how farfetched it sounded. The feel of his soul is almost identical to yours. Naturally, I decided to save him. Later, I learned that his wife had jumped down the Zhuxian Terrace. So my guess was that his injuries was from trying to save her.”

He stopped Mo Yuan from asking. “Don’t ask, I don’t know why either. Then upon my return, as I approached the edge of my Woods, I felt a familiar aura. Upon investigation, I found Fifth sister. She was lying there among the grooves, her body was covered with blood and wounds. After I healed her, she told me Qing Cang had sealed her memory, her power and left her on Mount Junji. She said of her Heavenly Trial but refused to tell me what exactly happened and how she got her injuries or became blinded. You already knew the rest of the story.”
Mo Yuan nodded; he remembered the Amnesia Potion and their fabricated stories to convince Seventeenth of her supposed long slumber.

“Three hundred years later, out of sudden, your brother paid me a visit one day. I learned from him that he had met Fifth sister. He asked me three specific questions. One was about her eyes problem; another about those three hundred years she was allegedly unconscious. The third was the most peculiar. Hear this, Mo Yuan, he asked: ‘Did she ever forgotten something?’ I began to suspect he might know a thing or two about those years she went missing. Or he may be the one Fifth sister wanted to forget.”

“Later, I learned of them spending some time together in the Fox Den. Then Fifth sister went to the Mortal Realm to help her former maid’s son to overthrow his deadly trial. I was intrigued once again, I didn’t see Ye Hua the type to freely offer his aid to just anyone. By then, I found out that your spirit was trying to come back and was busy helping out. I completely forgot my earlier suspicion about Ye Hua and Fifth sister’s past.”

“Recently, by pure chance, I learned from Feng Jiu that there was dissension in Xi Wu Palace and Sky Lord’s family regarding Ye Hua’s mortal wife. The little lass claimed to meet Su Su, Ye Hua’s former wife, on many occasion. She said: ‘She seemed lonely and unhappy most of the time. Those around her also treated her so poorly.’ And that was before she became blind.”

“Su Su? That was her name?” Mo Yuan repeated the name slowly.

“Aye,” Zhe Yan nodded. “The lass didn’t know either how she became blinded or what actually caused her to end her life that way. It is just as I told you, I only know bits and pieces of what happened. If you want the whole story, I’m afraid only Ye Hua could give you the answer.”

“I see.” Mo Yuan closed his eyes. He had contemplated this possibility once but crossed it off. It was highly unlikely they were the same person. Now, with what he just learned from Zhe Yan, there was a strong chance that Seventeenth might indeed be Ye Hua’s mortal wife. If so, why she chose to forget him once she got her memories back? What really happened between them back then?

Did Ye Hua know for certain she was his former wife or he merely suspected? Mo Yuan thought back about his interaction with Seventeenth. Perhaps that was the reason he was willing to go to great lengths to pursue her; he believed he was getting his wife back.

For once, Mo Yuan was uncertain of where he stood in this trickery of fate. He needed time to contemplate on what he had learned and perhaps arranged a meeting with his brother. It was very crucial to learn what actually happened between them all those years. There was also her determination to forget Ye Hua to consider. Only then, he would know how to proceed.

After everything they had been through together, could he really let her go if his suspicion proven true? If Seventeenth was really Ye Hua’s former wife and Ali’s birth mother? He knew it was righteous and sensible decision; and yet the mere thought of her leaving his side was most unbearable.

He refused to stoop so low as lying to himself; he also needed her desperately. Only she could fill the void in his soul; the emptiness that he once thought didn’t matter as long as he served the purposes of his life and responsibilities as the son of Heavenly Father, Celestial’s God of War and Master of Kunlun Mountain. He had borne everything fates hurled at him with dignity and perseverance, on his own, for hundreds thousands of years after all.

Just as he pondered what to do next; the sky rumbled angrily. Mo Yuan got up instantly and watched bolts of thunder streaked through the sky. He recognized the happening for what it was at once.
“Jade Purity fan of Kunlun.”

With every fiber of his godly essence, he felt the disturbance stirred by unleashing of great and terrible power. A bad omen came over him as thick clouds fled over them and headed rapidly toward Ruoshui River. “Seventeenth is in trouble.”

Seeing Mo Yuan sudden disappearance into thin air, Zhe Yan followed him quickly. He prayed and hoped with all his might that ill fate will not befall Fifth sister yet again.

Note: In my opinion, there is no ‘absolute’ destiny. Once you are born, you may have certain destiny laid out and waited for you. Yet different choices may lead to different outcomes. One or series of actions might circumvent even a pre-ordained setting; if it has enough weight/impact on its course (of life/lives). It is ill-conceivable to think a being is so powerless to determine his/her own fate just because your destiny said so. Fictional-wise, Dijun and Feng Jiu's outcome in the Pillow Book could attest to that. Hope you find this chapter enjoyable. Until next week. :)
This is outrageous ... Plagiarism of novels is bad enough. But copying 20-30+ chapters-worth of other writer's fanfiction and got them under your own name!!??

Unbelievable...Seriously, have you no shame, at all?


*Take a good notice of how she changed the date back to months earlier to make it appear as if she's been writing this for a long time.
Whoa. It shows she has every intention to usurper my work.

Here I captured only some chapters here. Already you can see how she copied my work word-for-word.
A Mo Yuan-Bai Qian Story.

Having watched the drama series, Ten Miles of Peach Blossoms, I was really disappointed that Bai Qian ended up with Ye Heself, Su Su. Not to mention the cruelty meted out by the God of War. So this story is dedicated to Mo Yuan. Though he is also home, not the Nine Heavens. It loosely follows the book's direction.

One thing that really stood out in my mind, is that the female character was very prominent, so I have included more components of Taoism.

Also, in the book, Si Yin's naughty behavior, while a few examples are given, so I have added many instances as filler.

Then there is Bai Qian's temper, which according to the novel, her temper really shown at its fullest. I will bring this out.

And let's not forget, Mo Yuan wasn't just the God of War. Of which will be added to this story. I have included Feng later became a Poem then a song. All other songs and poems will be added.

**Please ask permission before sharing or using elsewhere.**

**This story is still in the making and I will add new chapters regularly.**

Lastly, a reminder, that this is restricted to Adults due to...

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Bai Qian was reading a book on her bed. She had just finished a chapter on the peach blossoms...

Suddenly the men appeared...
Prologue
Su Su carefully made her way back to where Su Ji was. She pulled her towards herself, causing Su Ji to lash out at her. She lashed her face and said, "There was nothing special about your cooking. I had to cook with the petals at this time of the year."

Her thoughts went haywire and she somehow started seeing images - from the dining table of the Xu family. She could see Ye Hua just a moment before he threw his long hair at her, Ye Hua had those eyes whenever he looked at her...
yuan.

Seventy thousand years had passed. She had been forgotten among the nine Dharsa of the Kunlun Mountain for too long to risk venturing out again.

Her thoughts were interrupted when Bai Qian entered the room. She had been brave enough to return to the Palace, but she had dared not profess any anger that Ye Hualian had been as her fiance.

Her head hurt.

Bai Qian tried hard to recover from her injuries, but she wanted to talk to her. She had always thought highly of her, and when he had spoken to her, it was with the utmost sincerity in his tone. However, she let him...
When Zhe Yan and Bi Fang had nowhere to be seen, I noticed the dried leaves.

Bi Fang had gone for a walk across the four seas. She had succeeded in harming her enemies with her fighting skills, which were injured to the point of being useless.

Anyway, where was Zhe Yan? I thought meaningfully and... And there she was, her eyes scanning Mo Yuan... He couldn’t wait to...
Bai Qian searched with his temperan without explaining helping her on Yu Star Lord Shi Ming place. She was bey thousand years your well thought out p Clan would be the

She paused for a m air. Ye Hua wa uncertain why he who was wronged Yuan Zhen, Shao X obedient and kind anyone, so he mus
With a gesture of her hand, Mo Yuan stopped protecting Kunlun.

Six hundred years ago, Mo Yuan had been a part of her former life by choice.

Thinking back, she couldn’t help feeling a bit of regret. Her mentor, the Eastern Emperor, had forced her to slumber and stay asleep for seven thousand years. It was only when the Chengshi Chamber was about to arrive that she had awakened.

Yet no one was the first to test her. Not even for a moment, she wondered. After all, the world left behind to ensure that the future would be safeguarded.

Years ago, Qing Cang had been the only one to care for the sanctum and her mentor was...

Bai Qian shook awake in the Chengshi Hall. The Fang said that the sword from its...
When Bai Qian awoke from her sleep, she found her head pounding in the back of the car seat. She tried to sit up, but it was back into the bed, sizes smaller.

"Really, seventy three years old, you're just a trouble maker."

Seeing it was just Qianzhu, she turned and said quietly.

"What? You suddenly got old? I don't have anything to eat."

She kept her eyes open, but no longer showed any pretense to be as weak as before. She asked.

"Don't go back to sleep, what happened last night?" he prodded.

Startled at the mention of "last night," Bai Qian frantically looked at her hands. She traced the palm and presented.

"Are you looking for this? I tried to make a grand entrance for you, but I killed your kiss."
Kun

*Here I will begin to add...*

With a gesture of her hair, she protected Kunlun Mountain. Six hundred years ago, she protected her former life before thinking back, she really ignored the ignorance. Her mentor had been the Eastern Emperor and such. Seventy thousand years forced slumber and tried to see if she hadn’t arrived in time.

Yet no one was the wiser, even just for a moment, left behind to ensure its years ago Qing Cang was inside the crown prince, and her mentor was along. Bai Qian shook away her Hall. Die Feng said these care of the sanctuary. Sh
Bai Qian was reading a scripture. That sound! Shouldn't she be in her mountain. Had something happened? She immediately rushed to her mountain.

She stopped abruptly at the spot when she saw him. He was on the stone bed. Tears of joy filled her eyes. Her mentor, he was alive!

Suddenly the memories of her past came flooding back at him. Her first day as his disciple, being rescued from the dungeon, being rescued while he tried to meditate. His arm was broken, endlessly trying to break the Ghost war and his daughter. She couldn't move, couldn't even hope that this vision of his mother was a dream.

"Seventeenth." The news upon her. He took in her...
When they arrived at the Grand Imperial Palace, the immortals were already in awe. Mo Yuan signaled to them not to disturb the crowd from the outside. Kunlun Mountain was so powerful that they kept such a low profile.

Zhe Yan commented that the dragon's bone. Somehow, and welcomed him back to life. When they went up the mountain, they were all so excited.

There, in front of the Grand Imperial Palace, All of them said at once, "Zi Lan sent us news a few days ago. Then one by one they kn..."
Mountain rose greatly and didn't know what that meant overnight. We didn't know about Mountain but we all knew something was wrong.

"Yet here in the Grand Hall trying to defend me. Outside. We hurried over and welcomed you at the entrance to the Grand Hall."

She ignored his teasing. "I made such a big fuss over him. It was right here that I first met him. "It was right here that I first met him."

"I do," the corner of his mouth curved up. "I met her."

"Did you already know that?" She asked with raised suspicions. Back then, he must have known about his mentor's betrayal, when it was his mentor saying Li Jing's name during the trial.

"Since the moment you showed up on the top of Kunlun Mountain, I knew that you were his disciple."

"Why did you still take him in?" She asked him. She had suspected he knew, with him, but fear of being deceived kept her quiet.
"Why do you think I took
She looked thoughtful for
You must have been scap
"I didn’t mind Zhe Yan, a
meddlesome busy body
"At first, it was actually as I
chose you as its master. At
hands. So you became me,
also fate that brought you
She ignored his teasing,
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She looked thoughtful for You must have been sc

"I didn't mind Zhe Yan, a meddlesome busy body

"At first, it was actually b chose you as its master. hands. So you became r also fate that brought vo

The Dragon and The Fox. A Mo Yuan-Bai Qian St byAuaric

Qing Qiu's Fox Den
The following day they left cloud and headed straig

by Auaric

Shang
Second Brother and his Second Sister were around the stone table. I was standing silently by them, and Mi Gu standing silently near the entrance of the room.

"Aunt, you're back!" Fen Xue said, rushing to her feet and embracing her. "I missed you so much."

"High God Mo Yuan is with us, so it's only his presence to the rest of the family who have to accommodate to his presence to the rest."

Bai Zhi and his wife rose to greet the newcomers to join them for a meal.

"Mother, Father, I have much to report. I first and gave her a tight hug around her father's waist while the Fox Emperor laughed.

The Fox Emperor laughed, "He observed her counteract your presence by placing him in the middle of the meeting."

What could possibly be happening? Was Bai Qian well?" Mi Gu asked, concerned."

The Dragon and The Fox. A Mo Yuan-Bai Qian Story...
by Auaric

by Auaric
Mo Yuan had said he would be together in solitude once he break out was inevitable to fight him again, conceding little time to sit and plan. Thinking of what she had hear her father's return this time ago. "That Sky Lord is really a monster!" Bai Zhi stomped on the chair. He was clearly not satisfied.

"What happened?" Bai Qian asked, then to her Fourth brother.

"Fifth sister, Ye Hua is not in the announced.

"But?" she asked, sensing disposition.

"When father suggested..."
Kunlun Mountain

When Mo Yuan made it, waiting for him. As soon Feng stepped forward amid everyone. "Master, we w nuptials. I hope Master a prosperous life together.

"It seems news travels fast; after he took a sip of tea Die Feng flushed slightly. Ninth Heaven, Master." So Heaven for so long, this o

"Besides, this is truly an moment the news has al realms," he added.

"Thank you for your wel be kept very busy with th you indeed." Mo Yuan sa

"Master, it is nothing. We we can," Chang Shan spec accordance.

"Yes, Master. You and Se more than we can ask fo
This time however, the layout and planning was different. It wasn’t so much the place itself that was noteworthy, but rather how publically it was advertised. And not just advertised, but loudly and without warning, causing a scene that even the imperial palace was unable to suppress. It was a scene of utter chaos, as if the world was unaware of the relationship between the two.

Until today.

The Sky Lord was still trying to contain the lives of Ye Qing Qiu, was also the Sky Lord who should have been right here in this hall on this day. It was only then that he publicly ranted in front of the crowd. He was furious and, when the Sky Lord heard him and the Sky Lord’s words were so carelessly said, he became even more exasperated with his raging temper.

To add salt to the already burned food, not only did he publicly demand that Ye Qing Qiu be put away, but also, his thinly veiled threat could be heard by everyone.

That alone was enough to make the crowd’s blood boil.

When you don’t copy word-for-word, it’s not a story as a background.

Huh?

The man who has wome...
Zi Lan didn't know what to call Seventeenth Mortal, a mortal woman who had earned an appropriate title for her role as Grandson of the Celestial Mountain. Unescorted to the correct, he needed to see her.

"Imperial Great Grandson," he said pointing to the top where abouts and I also. Taking A Lis hand, giving top of the mountain.

On entry, A Lis stood at the edge of the entry inside to look around.

"And who do we have here?" she reached forward to touch Zhe Yan, when a flash of light hit her eyes.

Spinning around guiltily, she was afraid she may have inad. Lis' mouth dropped. "For the Imperial Great Grandson, Prince Ye Hua."
:: Qing Qiu Fox Den ::

The Fox Express sipped the tea all the while studied the parchment in her hand. From the corner of her eye, she caught Mi Gu scurrying around the Den.

"Mi Gu." She called him over.

"Yes, Empress." He came instantly. "Do you wish for something?"

"Did you see Qian Qian? I can't find her since morning. Xiao Jiu too. Where are they now?" She finally lift up her head, looking at the tree spirit intently.

"Erm..." Mi Gu scratched the back of his head nervously. "Aunt accompanied her First Senior back to Kunlun Mountain. Small princess, she – she…. I don't really know where she is, Empress."

In fact, he had an inkling where she went but wisely chose to keep his mouth shut.

"That girl! She can't bother even her own wedding." The Fox Empress complained about her daughter's absence yet again. "What am I going to do with her, Mi Gu? She was gone every time I want to discuss things with her."

Mi Gu merely kept his head down, hoping her irritation would abate soon enough.

"Mi Gu, is Fourth around? Or did he leave with Zhe Yan again?" She asked him, in a sharp voice, fully expected him to say yes.

Mi Gu face lit up. "High God Bai Zhen is in his room, Empress. Should I call for him?"

"Yes, please." She nodded, satisfied, at least one of her children remained home. It took a while before her son arrived.

"Mother," he sat on the table beside her, reached for the kettle then filled both of their cups with tea. "Did you send for me?"

"Zhen Zhen, would you be a dear and help your mother out? Fifth had gone back to Kunlun Mountain this morning. Please fetch her and bring her back here. Tell her I have something important to discuss with her. It won't take her too long, then she could go back to her beloved Master." She sounded a bit miffed.

With all preparation going on in full swing, she hardly spent time with her youngest anymore. She sighed, she had a thought to have that talk with her daughter before she left for Kunlun Mountain again. She could not quite put her finger on anything specific. There was something different about her, called it a mother's instinct.

"Mother, don't tell me, you are jealous of High God Mo Yuan?" Bai Zhen chuckled at his mother's cross looks.

"Ouch, ouch. I'm only jesting. Don't take it out on me." He exclaimed when her sharp claws pinched his arm mercilessly.

"I'm going. I'm going now." He got up, crushing his abused limb tightly to his chest and back away
from her quickly.

The Fox Empress shook her head at the son's dramatic departure and laughed softly. She did not really blame Qian Qian for wanting to get back to her lover. They had been separated for too long; it was only natural she wanted to spend every moment with him. Why wouldn't she understand, she too was young once. And lovers they were indeed; the intimate little touches and kisses they shared when they thought no one was looking betrayed them. She snickered.

:: At Roushui River ::

When Si Yin suggested they should investigate what was really happening at Ruoshui River, Die Feng didn't anticipated a malicious machination to bring about an absolute destruction of all realms was already set in motion.

As they approached the Bell of Eastern Emperor resting in the middle of the river, the heavily saturated Ghosts energy in the air made the fine hair on his neck stood up with apprehension. A premonition went through him as he came to see what type of situation they was going on.

On the far side of the river, within the Ghost's territories, men - no, combatants, from the looks of their outfits - were being brutally massacred. One minute they were full of flesh and blood; the next their bodies were being sucked dried and withered away. Even their bones were reduced to nothing but ashes and scattered in the wind. Judging from the shredded armors already strewing across the forsaken ground, at one time there were hundreds, if not thousands, of them.

Fractions of Celestial's defense force stationed at the river were attacking and bringing down the Ghost's force shield bit by bit; the rest forming a tight circle and fending off Ghost's fighters. Bai Qian came to an abrupt stop when she caught sight of what they were trying to protect. A silver-haired male sitting on the ground with someone in his lap.

Her breath hitched, hoping with all she had that person was not her niece, still she did not see Xiao Jiu in the Den since morning. In the blink of an eye, before she could ascertain that was whom she thought, they was hidden from her sight by the melee.

"What the devil is going on here?" Die Feng exclaimed when he had a good chance to take in the horrendous scene before him.

She blinked, her senior's voice claimed her attention once more.

"Their life force are being sucked off." Bai Qian approached and came to stand by him. "Look at where they stood, senior." She pointed out the runes within intricate patterns of triangles and circles, it covered a good portion of the open area next to riverbank on the far side.

"Someone drew enchanted circles, lured them in and trapped them inside. They must figure out a way to siphon all harvested energy and redirect it. My guess is that, to strengthen Qing Cang's own. Although it will not be nearly enough, nor on par with Li Jing's or Li Yuan's spiritual power, it might give Qing Cang the boost he needed to break apart the restraining spell."

They watched on as the screams of dying men in pure agony died down. So it had begun, just as she feared. A cold shiver run down her back.

How could this possibly happen? A blood sacrifice of this magnitude was clearly premeditated. Why no one was alerted of this plotting and scheming? Why the Celestial backup didn't come yet? Why was the delay? The sentry must have alerted the rest of the Celestial troops already. Didn't they know
how perilous this situation was?

"Seventeenth?" Die Feng cautioned her as she stepped forward.

"Maybe I can try casting the restraining spell again. Hopefully, it will buy us some time," she explained and cautiously approached the Bell of Eastern Emperor. The revolting aura around it made her whole body tensed up. She held the Jade Purity fan of Kunlun tightly and called forth its power, just in case he tried to use underhand tactics again.

Qing Cang opened his eyes the moment he felt that particular spiritual essence coming closer. His menacing voice boomed from inside.

"Si Yin. Is that you? All these years, I have been waiting for you to come back. Where is your Master? Is he so afraid to face me now?"

She snorted quite unladylike. "Why bother my Master? Just the two of us is more than enough to handle you."

"Really? The last time you tried, I turned you into a mortal, didn't I? How did it end?" Qing Cang cackled sarcastically. "Was it a sad, painful? Or perhaps better off dead? Tell me, so I will make it far worse for you this time."

"Qing Cang, don't be so arrogant. I will make sure you stay locked up in there for all eternity!" She retorted hotly, too riled up with his cutting remark to notice the surprised glance her senior gave her.

"You are so full of yourself, Si Yin. Do you think you could suppress me again? You are as weak as a babe right now, I can tell." Qing Cang mocked her.

She simply tuned him off, concentrating on chanting the sealing incantation.

"The spell is useless, you are already too late. Hahahaha. Hahahaha. I am going to enjoy maiming you so slowly. Let Mo Yuan bear witness to your tragic final moment. After that, since I am feeling generous, I will send all of you, Master and disciples, to the realm of Nothingness together. You should thank me."

Qing Cang raised both of his arms above his head, harnessing, redirecting the extra power boost he just got to blast open the Bell of Eastern Emperor. Gigantic maelstrom of Ghost energy swirled dangerously both inside and outer side of the Device of Destruction. It built up and up and up, finally it snapped. A distinctive tearing sound was heard by all. Small breach became bigger, until the whole section of surface became unhinged.

The Bell groaned loudly under the onslaught attack, then came the sudden brightness too intense to look at. Those in the close vicinity had to raise a hand to shield their eyes. Bai Qian cried out when her sensitive eyes were exposed to the blinding light. In a flash, a thin white cloth appeared and covered her eyes from the light beams. It took her several seconds to regain her composure.

Just as Bai Qian had predicted, the secondary source of power gave the former Ghost Lord the power augmentation he needed. Qing Cang blew his way out of the Bell of Eastern Emperor. The already vulnerable metal yielded quickly, allowing Qing Cang to free himself from his eternal confinement and emerging once again into the world.

For the first time in over seventy thousands of years, he breathed in the fresh air. Qing Cang glanced around watching the gathering of Celestial men, his sworn enemies, with hatred and contempt. The time for vengeance had come.
Die Feng watched the Bell of Eastern Emperor warily, the convergence of power was reaching its height, making the Bell highly unstable. He pulled at his junior's elbow, drew her back from it for a good distance and pushed her behind him in a protective stance. Then he had a foresight to create a force field, protecting them both from the oncoming force of impending explosion.

After the bright light, strong burst of winds blew past them, hurling and spraying pieces of broken metals outward. Some realized the danger too late to protect themselves, sharp metals embedded deeply into their flesh. Only a handful got away without suffering injuries.

The wind barely subsided when Qing Cang summoned the Double-Crescent Halberd into his hand and flew directly to where both Kunlun disciples stood. He shattered the protective shield in one sweeping down motion. Die Feng and Bai Qian leapt way to the side, narrowly avoided his blade.

Die Feng captured Si Yin eyes with his own and gave her an imperceptive nod. With eyes motions and hand signals, he silently conveyed his plan to attack to Si Yin. Twenty thousand years of going under the same tutelage gave her a clear insight into his thoughts.

Bai Qian immediately transformed her fan into a sword. With both swords raised, they began to circle Qing Cang and waited for the right moment to press attack. Suddenly, Die Feng lunged toward the former Ghost Lord. Qing Cang raised his own weapon to block him. He skillfully maneuvered Die Feng's sword and had it caught between cross blades. Qing Cang used the momentum to yank him closer within striking range.

Bai Qian immediately rushed from the sideline and engaged him; giving her senior a chance to retreat and prepare another attack. Qing Cang swat her sword away; he twisted his upper body and immediately turned his blade against her. Seeing she back away in time, he came at her again. His raised blade swung forcefully downward at her head.

Bai Qian lifted her blade up to counter the all-out attack; her sword arm shook with strain. She gritted her teeth, mustering up her strength and deflected the blow to the side. A thin trickle of blood emanated from the corner of her mouth and slowly trickled down. She took a few steps back, far enough from his combat range, biding time.

Above them, Die Feng flew high up and dived down at Qing Cang. Qing Cang didn't anticipate this move and belatedly thrust his blade up to stop him. Die Feng's blade plunged deep into his shoulder and scored a fatal wound. Qing Cang staggered back a few paces; then disappeared quickly.

The sky grew darker and lightning randomly flashed around them; effectively hiding him from their sights. Bai Qian stood back-to-back with her senior, both looked around cautiously, trying to locate from which direction Qing Cang would come.

Then Qing Cang rematerialized and stuck Die Feng unaware on his left side. They began to parry back and forth. Their attacks fierce and brutal; each trying to gain the upper hand. Die Feng gained ground on him at times, losing at others.

Though her senior was highly proficient in sword fighting, his two hundred thousand year worth of spiritual cultivation was also praised-worthy, he was still hard-pressed against a one-on-one fight with someone of Qing Cang's caliber.

Bai Qian watched both combatants fought anxiously. Her senior was forced backward again. She tried to find an opening but couldn't. They fought in close combat now; she dared not attack wildly, least she accidentally hurt her fellow disciple.

Die Feng thrust his blade forward aiming to inflict the open wound on Qing Cang's shoulder. Qing
Cang saw through his move and feigned to the right, waiting until Die Feng's swung his blade at him again. He caught it between his crescent blades wrenching the weapon out of Die Feng's hand and gave him a long, deep slash across the chest.

Die Feng did not have enough time to regain his footing; an incoming blast of dark energy caught him off-guard. The impact propelled him backward; he skidded to a stop before falling through the sky. Bai Qian cried out seeing he was struck down. She rushed after him but was intercepted by her nemesis. She now became his next target.

Since the day she came back from Taichen Palace, Bai Qian had let the Jade Purity fan of Kunlun soaked up as much spiritual energy as it could. Aided by her own spiritual power, it now harnessed considerable power. Still she will have only a few chances to unleash its attack before it weaken her own.

She knew it was best not to rush her attack; all she need was an opening and a right moment to slip through his guard and made sure he would stay down. Unfortunately, her plan went awry as Qing Cang raised his sword; channeling the energy from lightning into him.

Bai Qian commanded as much spiritual power as she could spare and merged it with her blade, knowing this could be their decisive move. If she cannot hold on his attack or waited until her senior came back, she might be as good as dead.

Qing Cang pointed his blade at her, the dark energy swirling around its tip erupted outward in a formidable display of power. Bai Qian struggled to counter it with her own. Black and white energy clashed and sparked powerfully. Discharged energy pulsed in every direction; anything coming into contact was blown away. Some strayed attack spiraled toward the host of Celestial watching the fight from the ground.

Bai Qian was feeling light-headed, knowing full well she would not last against him much longer. Seeing she began to falter, Qing Cang unleashed another burst of his energy attack, and finally overpowered hers. The backlash hurled her a great distance through the air and landed her on her back.

Blood gushing out of her mouth as she struggled to get back up, only to find him already moving in on her. She rolled away escaping the killing swoop by a hairsbreadth. When he struck down again, she braced herself.

Then strange thing happened. A translucent pinkish force field raised on its own, shielding her from the blow. Bai Qian gazed at the magical shield, astonished.

"Mo Yuan." Qing Cang snarled, recognizing the energy signature infused with the force field instantly. "You are so protective of her, aren't you? Even the blessed Nuva Stone, you dare to gift her. Good. I will enjoy killing her even more now."

"Let's see how long you can hide behind that." He bared his pointed fangs at her, hell bent on bringing down her last protection.

Bai Qian panted softly, even the force field gave her a respite; the bite of his malicious power had weakened her considerably. Still she refused to cower before him, reaching out for her sword, she used it as a clutch to lift herself up.

Her eyes looked past Qing Cang’s shoulder, narrowing to slits. A slow, wicked smile flashed across her face. "I need not to hide. Your days are already numbered, Qing Cang. If I were you, I will worry about the bigger threat at your back."
"Such bravado. You really think I will fall for your foolish trick, Si Yin?" He ridiculed her attempt to distract him. "I always know when a Celestial is at my back. Your senior is already incapacitated. He won't get back up so soon. Now, let us finish this."

His posture poised for attack; suddenly, intense pain bloomed in his chest. Qing Cang's eyes widened as he stared down unbelievingly at the large blade protruding from his heart. He made a gurgling sound in his throat, choking in his own blood.

"Maybe you should, you might live yet." Bai Qian smirked sardonically. She wipe the blood from her face. "And who said it is a Celestial?"

"I have been waiting to finish you off for years." The one behind him spoke up. The blade dig deeper into Qing Cang's soft flesh, inflicting more damages.

Qing Cang grunted in excruciating pain when the blade was viciously twisted around. He glanced over his shoulder and confirmed his suspicion. Rage and hatred swamped in his red-hazed eyes.

"Bas - Bastard!" He split the blood in his son's face. "I should have killed you a long time ago."

"Don't act like you are merciful, Father." Li Jing sneered. "You only keep us around to use as your own power vessel."

"You would kill your own father? Ungrateful bastard!" String of curses fell from his blood-splattered lips.

"Why not? You killed her, my mother!" He shouted. "You deserved to die a thousand times."

Qing Cang realized he did not have much time left, he was determined to drag the bastard son of his to hell with him. "Ha…You are always a loser, Li Jing"

He grabbed the tip of the sword that got stuck in his chest, yanked it into him to the hilt, effectively robbed it out of Li Jing's hand. Then he twirled around, struck the Crescent Moon between Li Jing's neck and shoulder blade and dragged it across his body. "Die, bastard. Die."

Li Jing's hands clutched his throat, blood spurted forth like a fountain. His hateful eyes still trained on Qing Cang's face as he staggered back and fell down.

Qing Cang didn't fare any better than him. More fresh blood poured out of his chest. His leg gave out; the whole body lurched forward, descending through the sky. The impact of his fall caused a deep and smoking crater on the ground.

Bai Qian flew down and went to see her senior first. Luckily Celestial guards had caught him mid-air and lent him aid, else he might suffer even more injury from the fall. She check out his slash wound; the cut was extensive but not life threatening. She sighed in relief.

"You think you won? When I'm gone," Qing Cang lift his head up; he smiled a chilly, crooked smile, "every single one of you will follow me. Hahaha." A maniac laugh left him panting heavily.

Bai Qian's brows furrowed when she heard his threat. He was dying. What else he planned?

Clang.

The blood in her veins freeze at the familiar sound that haunted her dreams for over thousands of years.
That sound!

She stood up staring in disbelief as the Bell of Eastern Emperor flew higher up and grew in size.

The Earth Deity guarding Roushui River stepped out of the protective circle, terrified that the Bell was reactivated. "What have you done to the Bell of Eastern Emperor?"

"Nothing much, I merely use this seventy thousands of years of isolation productively." He barked out gleefully. "The Bell is linked to my life-force. It reactivates the moment I'm dying. Soon the whole realms will burn with hell-fire. Everyone will join me in death. Isn't that beautiful?"

Qing Cang coughed up more blood and bled out all over the place. His limp body slumped to the side as he watched the Bell began to pull in its victims one by one.

"Burn, consume them all." He whispered with sadistic pleasure.

Bai Qian immediately understood what he had done. After all, they had chosen to do the same thing, connecting their lifeline with the weapon of choice. She glanced upward in despair, the Bell kept growing bigger and bigger. With every minute passing by, its power became more devastating.

Celestials and ghosts alike were sucked up into the Bell. The whole sky burned with crimson hell-fire. Ghost energy began to dissipate as Qing Cang's body disintegrated and turned into black dust.

She knew what had to be done. A spirit needed to be sacrificed before the whole realms fell into perils. Her parents, her brothers, her niece, her people. And him. All will be wiped out if she hesitated.

Even so, she will not just surrender her life just like that. Before the Bell could consume her whole spirit, she will give it a try to break down the Bell. Its continued existence would only come back to bite them later. Besides, Qing Cang's escape already inflicted serious damages to the Bell's integrity; far worse than the last time.

The goddess gathered up all of her waning spiritual cultivation and flew directly into the Bell. She had dreaded this moment all along but hoped with Qing Cang's demise, it might not come to this. It seemed she was mistaken once again.

She consoled herself, grateful for those blissful months she had with Mo Yuan. To finally have his love and be his wife, she should not have any regrets. Still, she grieved for the future that awaited them, for the children and grandchildren they would have one day.

Forgave me.

She silently begged for his forgiveness. Tears streamed down her face and blurred her eyes, she didn't want to leave him like this. How she longed to see his face for one last time.

Her blade struck into the Bell where extensive crisscross cracking could be seen. The Bell shook violently and gave out a little, still it endured. She yanked her sword off, looking to try again.

It was then she felt the magic of the Bell sweeping through her body, delving into her essence and seeking to destroy her spirit. Sooner than she thought, consuming agonizing pain came, she let out wordless screams. Her body convulsed, blood bled out of her nose and her mouth, everywhere; yet the pain never stopped.

In her fading consciousness, she thought: Was this how Mo Yuan felt back then? She was truly
grateful he didn't have to endure it again.

It felt like an eternity had passed. Before she completely lost her awareness, she heard screams - screams for her - from afar.

_Seventeenth, come back._

_He was here._

_He came._

Then she knew no more.

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Note: Thank you so very much for your support for 'what you know', I'm sorry if some readers out there found it annoying. It's finished, done. So let's put it behind us and move onto new chapters!
Chapter 26

:: At Ninth Heaven ::

Yang Cuo listened carefully as the sentry from Roushui River concluded his report. When he fell out of earshot, Yang Cuo turned to address the Sky Lord.

“My Lord, the situation seems to escalate quickly. Qing Cang might actually made his escape this time. Should we not send in reinforcements immediately?” he suggested.

“My Lord?” His tone became more urgent. Yang Cuo admitted he was confused. Why his father had yet to give the order to move out and assist their battalion at the border.

“Kunlun disciples are already there. Did you not hear his update?” The Sky Lord replied, he did not seem to be in a hurry. “High God Mo Yuan is not there yet. There are only two of his disciples and a handful of soldiers. They might not be able to handle Qing Cang.”

What was the cause for delay? The Lord should realize his apprehension had merit and not overly exaggerated.

Instead, the Sky Lord gave him a bland smile. “Let us not worry. Another sentry already went to Kunlun Mountain, he and the rest of his entourage will be there shortly. Did you forget Mo Yuan once said Kunlun Mountain will deal with Qing Cang when the time comes?”

“This is the chance for him to reclaim his rightful place and rise against as the God of War. Should we hinder his chance of glory, Yang Cuo?” He reminded him slyly.

“But...,” Yang Cuo hesitated.

“Of course, I will send the reinforcements. I, Lord of Celestial Clan, am bound by the ancient oath to lend my aid to Kunlun Mountain, am I not? You will take fifty regiments of guards and join them, Yang Cuo.”

The Sky Lord continued nonchalantly. “Just remember, before moving out, you have to explain the situation to your troops in details. Give your lieutenants the chance to discuss and find the best solutions to deal with Qing Cang; just in case he successfully escapes. We have suffered such a big loss the last time because we did not planned enough in advance. Do you understand what I am saying?”

Yang Cuo lowered his face down and avoid eyes contact to hide his discomfort. It was not that hard to figure out the Lord’s true purpose. Yet this sort of sneaky, underhanded ploy to get his revenge was petty and inappropriate. The situation at hand was just too precarious to risk for some little personal grudges. A swell of anger and disappointment washed over him. Yang Cuo forced it down.

“What about the Emperor, my Lord”? He hoped Dong Hua’s name might change his mind. The Sky Lord usually avoided risking his ire. “Won’t he be displeased over the inordinate delay?”

“Dong Hua Emperor can look after himself. He, of all people, understands the needs for meticulous planning and careful consideration.”

He raised his hand up, prevented his eldest son from saying further. “That is enough. See to your
Mo Yuan’s worry intensified ten folds the moment he rematerialized on the Riverbank. He looked around and took in the sight of fallen Celestials and Ghosts bodies lying the ground and of large areas that were laid waste. The long dormant Bell of Eastern Emperor awoke, actively claiming live once again. It was like time was turned back to seventy thousand years ago.

Then he saw her, his little Seventeenth, dressed in billowing white dress, a total contrast to the burning hellfire and darkened sky. His heart sunk when he saw her heading up into the Bell.

No.

She can’t.

But she would.

Another voice from the recesses of his mind whispered. It was him who instilled the sense of duties and the responsibilities to the lesser and weaker beings into her. Disciples of Kunlun Mountain were taught to always uphold his teachings and principles, to devote their entire lives to the causes and to maintain the peace and orders of all realms.

"Seventeenth, come back," he shouted in despair.

Suddenly, the Bell of Eastern Emperor shuddered and gave out a sharp and shrill cry. It stopped growing in size and kept on swirling in circles; its destructive vibes seemed to lessen visibly. Mo Yuan spared no time to ponder the reason behind its unexpectedly altered behavior. In this suspended moment; there was only small a window of time for him to rescue her and destroy the Bell. Without Ye Hua here to back him up the outcome was uncertain; still he had no choices but to try.

He disappeared and reappeared once again beneath the Bell, trying to catch hold of her body and bring her to safety. He kept one eye on her, another on the Bell’s movement. His arm reached out and finally made a contact. When he was about to crush her body to his side, she was tugged away from him. His eyes followed the arm that attached to her other limb and met with Ye Hua’s. Neither of them was willing to let go of her.

Then another loud groan reverberated above them, Mo Yuan glanced up and studied the interior of the Bell. Aside from the opening Qing Cang must have made in his escape attempt, the light that flooded from outside showed him numerous fracture lines and cracks littering all over the Bell’s surface. His hope went up a notch. Ye Hua’s arrival had increase their chance of survival.

“Listen to me, Ye Hua.” He drew his twin’s attention to him, his face stern, the tone of his voice brooked no argument. “Help me destroy the Bell now. We might not have a second chance once it resumes the killing.”

“How? I thought it was indestructible.” Ye Hua frowned.

“It is not indestructible, just borderline impossible under normal circumstance. Now, find the weakest point on the surface. On the count of three, hit it, give it all you have.” Mo Yuan gave his instruction. His Xuan Yuan pointed out the far side of the Bell. “And release her to me. I will keep her safe, Ye Hua.”
Ye Hua glanced down at Qian Qian’s pale and bloodied face. He reluctantly let go of her limp forearm. Mo Yuan quickly pulled her close to his chest and surrounded the three of them with strongest force field he could make. Ye Hua nodded in understanding. He pulled his own sword, Qing Ming, from its sheath, turned around and flew in the opposite direction.

Mo Yuan shouted; both of them were in position. “One, two, three ... Now!”

Both Xuan Yuan and Qing Ming struck down at the Bell’s weakest points at the same time. With their combined effort and the power bestowed by both mystical swords, the Bell’s whole structure was compromised and prone to crumble at any moment.

“Again, Ye Hua,” Mo Yuan urged him.

The Bell’s metallic surface, already swelled and distorted from the infernal heat of crimson hell-fire, cannot sustain another blow. Their second attack induced a total break down and started a series of huge explosion. Mo Yuan did not forget those who were still on the riverbank; he shouted in warning.

“Raise the force field. Protect yourselves.”

A moment later a bright light, followed by deafening explosion, erupted from the Bell of Eastern Emperor. Its resounding echo was strong enough to cause loud ringing in the ears. Chunks and shards of shattered metal spread out like falling shooting stars. Celestial soldiers on the riverbank gritted their teeth and put everything they had into maintaining the protective shield against the deadly scattered debris.

A lone and barren mountain range that stood quite a distance away from Ruoshui River trembled and slowly crumble down; soon it was completely leveled to the ground. The water in the river below receded, rolled up high in the sky, then fell back with a vengeance. The energy whiplash from its destruction could be felt far and wide. Every immortals and deities would never be able to forget how close their lives almost ceased to exist that day.

Mo Yuan made his descent when everything started to calm down. He stumbled a little; one of his leg collapsed to the ground. He had given up most of his strength to ensure the Bell would be destroyed while maintaining the force field. The exertion took its tolls on his still recovering body, yet Mo Yuan could not find it in him to care. A feeble tug of his robe already captured all of his attention.

Bai Qian fought desperately to keep her consciousness from slipping away again. She came back to herself briefly after the shock of explosion was unleashed.

“You are here,” her voice was so faint he almost missed it.

“Seventeenth,” he caressed her face gently. “Hush. Save your strength.”

She clutched his hand in hers, grateful for the chance to be in his arms again. “I thought I would never see you again.”

He pressed his lips on her temple. His voice shook slightly with turmoil and suppressed emotions. “Speak no more. I will save you, you will be fine in no time.”

She tried to shake her head but ended up coughing up more blood. “You are alive,” her voice grew weaker. “So go - good.”
“Never for-get...” Bai Qian was too tired to even keep her eyes open. “I love you.”

“No. Seventeenth, stay with me.” He held her limp hand tightly to his lips, begging her to hang on. “Fight it, I know you can.”

’Sorry’ was the last word she whispered.

Zhe Yan rushed out from the crowd and kneeled down beside them. He tried to pry Fifth sister’s body out of Mo Yuan’s hold but he would not budge. She was fading quickly, there was no time for hesitation. Zhe Yan took the risks and pushed some of his eternal fire to sustain her.

Mo Yuan watched her lifeless face with despair. He had failed her. He cannot even protected his own female. It was laughable he was supposed to protect all realms.

“Mo Yuan, what are you doing?” Zhe Yan looked up at Mo Yuan in alarm; he felt it the moment his spirit began to let loose. He knew his brother loved her deeply. It never crossed his mind that, without her continue survival, he would choose to give up.

“You already knew how hard I fought to come back. Times and again, I just want to give up,” Mo Yuan said tiredly.  “But she is too stubborn to let me go, so I kept trying. What is the point of returning if she is not here anymore.”

“Do not be irrational. Fifth sister would never want this. ” Zhe Yan tried to reason with him but he remained catatonic. “Do you even hear me, Mo Yuan?”

Right there, Zhe Yan eyes caught sight of the tall, silver-haired Emperor walking toward them. In his arm was none other than Bai Feng Jiu. She was obviously injured. What was up with Fox Clan’s women? Were they actively seeking death? Zhe Yan lamented silently.

“Dong Hua, help me talk him out of this madness.” Zhe Yan’s tone was helpless.

Dong Hua threw an uneasy glance at his old friend. It had come to this outcome after all, he sighed. Whether they could get past this hurdle was now up to them.

“Mo Yuan, do you really wish to waste this life and follow her in death?” Dong Hua asked without preamble. “Then all she had done for you was for naught? Are you going to tell her just that when you meet her again?”

“Mo Yuan, listen to me. Listen to me!” Zhe Yan got in his face and yelled. “Stop this foolishness. This is not like you. You must will yourself to live.”

"I have sustained her body with my eternal fire but it will not last long. Yes, she is still on the brink of death. Her spirit is weak, broken, drained, but it is here nevertheless. Do you understand me? We might be able to save her yet.”

Zhe Yan grabbed his arm and jerked on it. “I’m not lying to you. Mo Yuan, get a grip on yourself. She needs you now more than ever.”

It took a while for Zhe Yan words to sink in and register in Mo Yuan’s grief-stricken mind. He choked back a strangled sob when his essence touched her barely-there prove of life.

“What do I do?” he finally asked.

“At this time, I am afraid nothing short of the divine fungal grass could save her.” Zhe Yan hesitated
then continued. “Even then....”

“I will get it,” Ye Hua, who was initially sidetracked by the gathering of former ruler of Heaven and High Gods, spoke up from behind them.

“It is not that easy. There are four savage beasts left by Heavenly Father to guard them. Even if you succeed, Ye Hua, I am afraid your return might be too late.” Zhe Yan told the Crown Prince evenly.

“What then? We stand here doing nothing?” he said in a crisp, cutting voice.

“What if I transfer my spiritual power to her now,” Mo Yuan suggested. “She have fed me her heartblood for thousands of years. Part of her essence is in me, that should count for something.”

“There is still the risk of falling into the demon side.” Zhe Yan gave a slow shake of his head. “Right at this moment, you are weak, Mo Yuan. You barely got back your lost cultivation and you just spent most of it to bring down the Bell. If anything went slightly wrong, what then? Have you thought about that?”

“What choice do we have? Let me try.” Mo Yuan insisted.

“No. Absolutely not. It is too risky.” Zhe Yan refused outright.

Mo Yuan looked to the back, at his brother; their eyes met. “If something happens to me, you will take care of her, right?”

Ye Hua took a long, good look at his older twin brother before he inclined his head in acceptance.

“Let me through.” A small, feminine voice suddenly rang out as she made her way to the inner circle. “High God Mo Yuan, you were talking about the divine fungal grass just now?”

“Princess Yan Zhi.” Mo Yuan recognized her at once; she was the only female general that rode with Qing Cang back then, during the last Ghost War.

She came to stop, knelt down in front of Mo Yuan and retrieved something from her sleeve pocket. “Here, take it.”

In the palm of her hand was an almost Elixir. She confided in him. “Si Yin gave me some of the Divine Fungal Grass a few months earlier. I tried to make it into an Elixir but my brother said there is too much darkness inside for it to work.”

“For us, at least.” She corrected herself. “If this Elixir could keep Si Yin alive, then take it.”

“You are certain about this?” Mo Yuan asked; not that he did not trust her. Her name came up more than once in their conversation; clearly she was considered a friend of sort to Seventeenth.

Yan Zhi’s head bobbed up and down. She swallowed a lump in her throat and blinked back her tears. “It would be my brother’s wish too, if he was still here,” she said, her voice was soft but firm.

“I will take it then.” Zhe Yan quickly plucked the Elixir from her proffered hand. He took a good sniff of it, flipped it in his hand and nodded in approval. The princess assumption was correct. “We must return to Kunlun Mountain immediately. I need your Elixir Cauldron to refine this,” he added.

Mo Yuan slowly got up, he waved off Zhe Yan’s offer to carry Bai Qian. After he carefully secured Bai Qian’s body in his arms, he was ready to leave.

“Thank you, Princess. I will never forget this.” Mo Yuan told her before he jumped on Zhe Yan’s
Lord Dong Hua with Bai Feng Jiu in his arms and Die Feng who regained consciousness followed them in tow. Ye Hua stood there, lost, for a moment before deciding to make his way to Kunlun Mountain as well.

:: At Kunlun Mountain ::

When they reached Kunlun Mountain, Mo Yuan immediately took Bai Qian to his room. He left everything in Chang Shan’s capable hands. Chang Shan, though petrified at the sight of their beaten, battered and blood-splattered appearance, recovered from his initial shock as swiftly as he fell into it. He jumped right back into works and gave out orders in quick succession.

Zi Lan was sent to prepare Seventeenth’s old room for her niece and waited on Dong Hua’s Emperor. Thirteenth was tasked with patching up their First Senior’s wound. Tenth was redirected to the Grand Hall, just in case more visitors came later. He also appointed Fourteenth and Fifteenth to prepare and assist High God Zhe Yan in the Elixir Cauldron chamber. Only after everything had been arranged and seen to, he allowed himself into his mentor’s room.

Chang Shan padded across the room in silence; he placed the water basin and wash cloth on the bedside table and bowed respectfully.

“Master, I brought some water in case you wish to clean up.”

Chang Shan lift his head up and threw anxious glances at his mentor and Seventeenth. He got nothing from his mentor’s blank expression. Seventeenth was the opposite; her almost colorless feature and blood-stained white dress gave him a fright.

“Master, I will remain close by, please summon me if you wish for anything else.”

He made his retreat out of the room, careful not to disturb any of them. A faint ‘thank you’ was Mo Yuan’s only response. Chang Shan decided to drop by Senior Die Feng’s room next. He was the only one capable to fill him in on the details of what took place today.

Zhe Yan was busy preparing the medicine when Ye Hua came to Elixir Cauldron chamber to speak with him.

“High God Zhe Yan,” Ye Hua approached him. “Can I have a moment of your time?”


“You are making the Elixir for Qian Qian,” he started.

“I know certain amount of spiritual energy is required to refine it. High God, I am asking you, will you please let me do it?” he asked quietly.

Zhe Yan raised an eyebrow at his request, surprised. “Why?” He flat out asked. “Because she was once your wife?”

Ye Hua was a bit startled. He did not think anyone had realized the truth of what happened between him and Qian Qian three hundred years ago. “So you have figured it out.”

“I have my own suspicion, you just confirmed it with your request,” Zhe Yan replied.
“That day you were rescued after you followed your mortal wife, who looked strangely just like Fifth sister, down the Zhu Xian Terrace. I already had my doubt. Then I found Bai Qian, wounded and injured, in my woods almost the same day. When she said, she became a mortal and just experienced a Heavenly trial. I made a theory of my own.”

Zhe Yan summed it up in not so many words. “If they were not the same person, what else would made you so willing to make such sacrifice?”

“Is this why you refused to tell me the truth when I asked you all those questions about her back then?” Ye Hua narrowed his eyes. “You knew it does not matter if she really was Su Su or not; she has set her sights on Mo Yuan a long time ago.”

Zhe Yan did not comment on it. What was the point to explain when things already came full circle?

“Today Qian Qian obviously chose Mo Yuan’s life over her own. And he - when he thought she was dead, he almost followed her.” Ye Hua rumbled on. "I found my resolve shaken for the first time. I used to think I will never be able to let her go, no matter the circumstance."

“You doubt the depth of love their share, Ye Hua? Or you think only you can love her that much?” Zhe Yan asked humorlessly.

Ye Hua pressed his lips into a thin line, his silence spoke for himself of what he really thought.

“I am afraid I do not know anything anymore,” he admitted.

“Ye Hua, the sooner you learn to let go, the quicker you put yourself and your loved one out of misery.” Zhe Yan said sagely.

Ye Hua snorted wordlessly. Did he not already know that? Everyone told him just that, repeatedly, all the time. Even Fate conspired against him.

“I owe her so much, High God Zhe Yan.” Ye Hua spoke. “I cannot undo the past, at least allow me this chance to repay my life debt.”

“I do not think it is wise, Ye Hua.” Zhe Yan was quick to decline.

Ye Hua saw through his facade of uncertainty. “You think I will use this chance to my advantage,” he retorted, not minced any words.

“Will you?” Zhe Yan shot the question right back at him. “Because if that is your intention, then you can forget about it. She would hate you even more when she knows you tried to manipulate her feelings. Trust me, I know it for a fact.”

Ye Hua would never admitted it aloud, the very thought came across his mind.

He thrust the palm of his hand out, silently asking for the Elixir. “What if I give you my oath that I would never ever use this Elixir to my own gain? Will you allow me to do it?” He asked again. It may be the very last unselfish thing he could do for her; other than letting her go.

Zhe Yan paused for a moment and reconsidered his request. He studied Ye Hua’s face and found it quite sincere.

“Oath or not, I think Qing Qiu cannot accept such generosity. What would the Sky Lord say?” A voice suddenly interrupted their conservation; it carried over from the entrance of Elixir Cauldron chamber. Bai Zhen stepped out of the shadow and strode toward them.
Note: How does the new story development live up to your expectation/anticipation? Next chapter would be here in a few days, or so I hope. :))
Chapter 27

On his way to Kunlun Mountain, Bai Zhen was besieged by strong ripples of unknown energy whiplash; he did not see it coming and was knocked off his cloud. When he traced back to the source, he learned with dread of the tragedy that befell his sibling. After that Bai Zhen made a mad dash for Kunlun Mountain. On his arrival, one of Kunlun disciples pointed him here. He was about to make his way inside but found Zhe Yan was deep in conversation with someone else. Since Bai Qian’s name came up, he decided to stop and found out what was going on.

It turned out Ye Hua wish to offer his cultivation to made Fifth sister’s elixir. Zhe Yan was right to question his motive. He cannot understand why he would want to do that after their disastrous parting. What he hoped to get in return for helping her?

Ye Hua was the last person he deemed a charitable sort. He usually did everything with specific purposes in mind, used all the cards to get the upper hand and came out as a winner. That was the very reason he was praised among his peers and elders, even if he had yet to hit his first hundred thousand years.

Besides, he should have known he was the last person the Fox Clan want to be indebted to. Who knew what kind of complication of Ye Hua’s sacrifice might cause in the future; the relationship between their clans was strained enough as it was.

As he listened in, what he learned made his blood boiled. Ye Hua turned out to be Fifth sister’s husband during the time of her heavenly trial. The old phoenix had hidden his secret well. All this time he told him not a single word about his suspicion of Ye Hua. Bai Zhen seethed with anger. How dare he hid such critical information from him!

The mention of her jumping down Zhu Xian terrace brought tears to his eyes. His baby sister, the one he practically raised from a mere fox cub by himself, had suffered such grievance. He did not even known until now. Why? Why must she carry all burdens by herself? Did he not remind her times and again she had brothers and family who love her and would always stand by her side, come what may?

Another doubt plagued his mind. Was Ye Hua also responsible for her blindness? He bared his teeth and growled at that possibility. Was it the reason she asked Zhe Yan for the Amnesia Potion? Because she wanted to forget that miserable and torturous lifetime with Ye Hua? Right at that very moment, Bai Zhen really wanted to throttle Ye Hua, no, he would annihilated him. Celestial’s Crown Prince be damn.

He had warned Ye Hua once if he ever hurt his sister; there will be retribution. The only thing that held him back was the thought of Ali. He cannot believe that chirpy boy was actually his nephew. Fifth sister was currently incapacitated; not that it would make much different since she completely forgot about Ye Hua and their son. It was his duties as her family to protect the child.

Bai Zhen took many long, deep and slow breaths and reminded himself not to be rash. If he went in there and picked a fight with Ye Hua now, at best he would get the scuffle he sought and some meaningless apologies. At the end of the day, Ali would still be in the Ninth Heaven with them and his sister’s suffering left inadequately avenged.

He needed to know what else he missed. Bai Zhen planned to squeeze the rotten phoenix for every little tidbit of information he knew about those two’s past. His parents needed to be informed as well. Together they would find a way to obtain Ali and brought him back to Qing Qiu; then they would
seek justice for his sister.

It would be foolhardy and pointless to clue Ye Hua in on their plans before they were good and ready to collect all the debts owed. A faint, humorless, icy smile ghosted upon Bai Zhe’s perfectly formed lips. Let Ye Hua enjoyed his remaining days before all hell broke loose.

For now, he had a wayward plan to sabotage. It was shameless of him to try using that elixir to get back into Fifth sister’s good graces. Whatever happened between them during her time as a mortal already came to an end. It did not bode well for her to get involved with him in any capacity; especially since she was vulnerable and had no memories of her past. Had she been in her right mind, he doubted she would even tolerate his presence.

“I am sorry, I just happened to hear about what you are offering,” Bai Zhen inclined his head towards Ye Hua. He had to use every ounce of his control to remain indifferent to him.

“Zhen Zhen, it is good you are here.” Zhe Yan’s mood brightened a little when his eyes fell on the person he had been missing for days. He turned blind eyes to said person’s daggering and accusing glare and asked pleasantly. “How long have you arrived?”

“Just in time to hear Ye Hua offering his cultivation for the Elixir.” Bai Zhen face darkened slightly. With one side-glance at him, Zhe Yan could tell he was lying through his teeth. That meant Zhen Zhen had been here long enough to learn about Bai Qian’s tragic past. He gave him a bland smile and an imperceptible nod, they would talk later. Already he could imagine how earful that conversation would be, Zhe Yan thought with chagrin.

Bai Zhen let Zhe Yan off the hook for the time, he had the bigger fish to fry. “Ye Hua, on behalf of Qing Qiu, I am thankful for your generous offer but I have to decline.”

He put on his most charming face. “You see, my sister is about to marry. Even if High God Mo Yuan see you as his younger brother, it seems highly improper for her to accept help from another man who is not even her family. I hope you could understand?”

A uncertain, tensed smile tugged at the corner of Ye Hua’s mouth. He doubted Bai Zhen’s sincerity when he claimed just arriving. His eyes roamed over the older man’s face but found nothing betrayed him. Maybe he was too paranoid.

From what he knew of Bai Zhen’s personality, he had quite a temper and very protective of his sister. If he heard half of what took place in the past between him and Qian Qian; he would never pulling his punch or let Ye Hua go so easily. This might as well be for the best, Ye Hua sighed in relief. Now was not a good time to stir trouble with the Fox Clan.

“As much as it is great to see you, there is no time to waste. Please step out of the room, so we could begin our work here.” Bai Zhen informed him.

Since his offer was shot down twice in a row, Ye Hua had no choice but to vacate the room. With Ye Hua gone, Bai Zhen walked over to Zhe Yan with a scowl on his face. “I do not even know where to start with you. How could you? You are in so much trouble, old man.”

"Give me the Elixir now, I promise not going too hard on you later.” Bai Zhen made his demand known.

“I can not and will not. Do not argue with me yet, Zhen Zhen.” Zhe Yan sharply cut him off, a deep furrow quite evident on his forehead showed how deadly serious he was. It was not often Zhe Yan rose up against him, Bai Zhen’s earlier irritation with him made him annoyed more and more.
Zhe Yan stood his ground refusing to give in to his demand. He already made his decision even before Ye Hua came in. He had watched Bai Qian growing up from small to big. She became very dear to him, almost like a younger sibling he never had. He had been living longer than most and cultivated a lot of spiritual power along the way. Losing a little cultivation was no matter to him; he never involved himself in the politics of all realms and lived relatively in peace.

“Fifth sister will need time to recover, who know how long it would take.” Zhe Yan hoped he realized the situation at hand. “Not only the Northern Territories rely on your strength for its protection, there is Qing Qiu to consider as well. Your niece is injured. Even if she is not; she is not ready to rule in her aunt’s stead.”

Zhe Yan jab his finger into Bai Zhen's hard chest. “That leaves you. Only you can take care of people of both kingdoms. Do you understand now why it could not be you, Zhen Zhen?”

Zhe Yan’s remark hit the nail on its head when he brought up the needs to maintain civic duties in both lands. “I get it, I get it all right! You have all the good reasoning. It does not mean I have to like it.” Bai Zhen, as usual, threw a hussy fit at him.

“This is my sister we are talking about,” he punctuated the word ‘sister.’ “My baby sister, for whom you are asking me to sit on my hands and do nothing.”

“You? Sitting idly?” Zhe Yan retorted incredulously. “I can practically hear the wheels in your head turning furiously. Ah, I will have none of that.” He waved his finger in front of Zhen Zhen; not giving him any chance to deny it. “Leave Fifth sister’s well-being to me, then you can busy yourself with your scheming.”

“So can I have some peace and quiet? I need to concentrate on making the Elixir now.” He shooed Bai Zhen out of the room and set in the Elixir inside the cauldron.

Bai Zhen turned his nose up at Zhe Yan. “Do as you please. It is not as if I could change your mind, you never listen to me anyway.” He stomped out of the room; his voice carried over inside, to where Zhe Yan stood. “Just remember, I am not done with you yet. You, old, rotten phoenix.”

Zhe Yan was used to his occasional temper tantrum; he merely shrugged his shoulder and went right back into purifying the medicine.

A while later, Zhe Yan brought the freshly-made pill to Mo Yuan’s room and fed it to Bai Qian. Mo Yuan did not even move from his position by her side. He hunched over her form and held her hand against his own forehead, effectively hiding his face from the world.

“Mo Yuan, I need you to step back. I am going to use the Soul Magic to check on her.” Zhe Yan asked him and waited patiently for him to move away. “You may already done that but I have to be certain.”

Mo Yuan wordlessly tucked her arm back under the bed cover and back away a few steps.

What Zhe Yan found was nothing short of mysteries and unbelievable miracles. Large portion of her spirit held together; only some of it was damaged and missing. He felt as if the heavy weight was lifted from his chest; she had better chance at recovery than he first suspected.

As he delved deeper; Zhe Yan found the presence of Soul Jade in her aura. It could attribute to the reason why her spirit did not dispersed immediately. He guessed it had buffered and took away the full blunt of the hostile energy of the Bell.
Zhe Yan recalled his magic and studied her profile intently. He had seen the way the Bell’s destructive power had toned down. That could only happen when the Bell already consumed a strong spirit. How did she survive then? Zhe Yan frowned at the unlikely notion.

“I could tell you her spirit is there, not whole but there nevertheless.” Mo Yuan’s soft voice pulled him out of his deep thought.

Zhe Yan lifted his head and met his brother's eyes straight on, only then he could see his expression bleak and hopeless. The haunting agony swarming in those once beautiful eyes almost robbed him out of his breath.

Before he could even asked, Mo Yuan spoke up. “I know you did not miss how the Bell stopped for a moment and what it meant. Now you are asking yourself how it could be. The soul jade, useful as it is, did not had that kind of power. Nor the small slices of Nuwa stone I gave her.”

A preposterous idea slowly formed in the back of Zhe Yan’s mind, he gasped out and immediately turned back to Bai Qian. As he delved into her essence again; he found what he had missed the first time. The presence of what was once there but no longer. Zhe Yan’s face lost its parlor; he looked at Mo Yuan for a few prolonged silence.

“Mo Yuan, this... She …,” Zhe Yan stammered incoherently; one look at Mo Yuan’s distraught face, he swallowed down the rest of his denial.

“I did not know. How could I not know, Zhe Yan?” Came his strangled cry. “Had I known, I would never let her far from my side. Then this would never happened.”

“I know, Mo Yuan, I know.” Zhe Yan said soothingly in his most gentle voice. He dropped his hand on his brother’s trembling shoulder and pulled him in tight.

The way he hunched his back in utter defeat pained Zhe Yan. Gone was the illusion of the mighty God of War, Conqueror of Demon Overlord and Savior of the World. In front of him was a grieving husband and father.

If the physical and emotional pain of Bai Qian near-death pushed him to the edge and wrecked a havoc on his already frail body and mind; the loss of their child was simply too much for him to cope with. Fates was indeed cruel to him for landing devastated blow on him one after another.

Zhe Yan wished with all he had that he would be able to pull through this highly troubled time.

“Listen to me, you can not blame it on yourself.” Zhe Yan spoke slowly, giving him the time he needed to absorb it. “It is too early to tell. I doubt even Fifth sister knows it.” He offered that little bit of information; hoping to give his brother a small consolation.

“No, she definitely did not know,” Zhe Yan swiftly corrected his earlier saying. “Do you really think she would risk her life if she knew she is pregnant with your child?”

Even if Qian Qian’s brother told him to leave, Ye Hua could not make himself to walk away without learning her condition first. He took off of the Elixir Cauldron room to avoid further confrontation and bided his time by the lotus pond instead.

It felt like an hour had passed when he saw a white-clad disciple walking passed him. Ye Hua could not remembered his name but he was usually the one running errands for High God Mo Yuan. Ye Hua intercepted him and tried to pry information about Qian Qian; unfortunately, he could offer nothing new aside Zhe Yan had finished his Elixir and was tending to her.
“This medicine is for High God Mo Yuan?” Ye Hua motioned the tray in his hands.

“Yes, Your Highness. High God Zhe Yan said to bring it to Master when it is still hot,” replied Mo Yuan’s second disciple.

“I will take it, I am going there anyway. You must have your hands full right now.” Ye Hua did not waste his time; he helped himself to the tray. “Please attend to your other duties.”

Chang Shan opened his mouth to decline the offer when the tray simply taken from him. He looked at him in askance, blinked, then said stiffly. “Thank you, Your Highness. I will take my leave now.”

Ye Hua carried to tray to High God Mo Yuan’s room; he was about to knock when he heard voices from inside. He could barely made out what was being said; but one sentence stood out loud and clear. The tray in Ye Hua’s hand slipped from his shaking hands and fell to the ground.

*Clang.*

The metal cup hit the stone surface loudly; the voice echoed through the silent hallway. Before he even known, his feet carried him off on their own. He unknowingly fled all the way from living quarters into the woods. His robe got caught by a tree branch, putting a stop to him running blind. His back hit the tree trunk; he slid down and slumped against its base. Only then what he learned truly registered in his brain. For the first time, Ye Hua laughed hysterically at the twists and turns of his life. It was over, truly over for him and her. There would be no off-chance of her ever returning to him after this. Even him could no longer convince himself with false hope.

“Who’s there?” Zhe Yan dashed out of the room when he heard the loud crash. He found no one there; only a medicine cup and a tray laying forgotten on the ground. Mo Yuan’s disciples were too respectful and too disciplined to spy on their mentor. Bai Zhen was supposed to be with Feng Jiu. That left only one person.

“Ye Hua, why must you brought more misery on yourself.” He sighed in resignation and went back into the room.

“Zhe Yan, please leave us.” Mo Yuan asked softly.

“I will send in your new medicine later. Get some rest, Mo Yuan, you need it.” Zhe Yan turned around to leave, then paused and threw another worried glance back at Mo Yuan. “I am truly sorry for your loss, brother.”

The door shut off and the room fell back into silence. Mo Yuan gathered Bai Qian’s upper body in his arms with aching slowness. He held her close to his chest. Tears coursing down his cheeks unchecked and dropped on her pale face.

No matter what Zhe Yan claimed, he should have noticed the signs. She got tired quickly and sleep a little longer than usual. He just chalked it up on her being her usual lazy self. When she clung to him and was needy of his touches; he teased her for being unable to get enough of him.

“I have failed you, Seventeenth. You and our child,” he whispered brokenly. His whole body shook as he sobbed for the small life that was snuffed out before it had a chance to be born into this world.

“From the beginning, I was supposed to remain dead; me returning to life is unnatural, Heaven tried to impede my resurrection every way it could. I know then, when I opened my eyes again, there will be repercussions for my action but I do not care. You are all that matters. For what it is worth, it never occur to me you would use your heartblood to save me. All this time, I have reconciled myself
to embrace any retributions. Fates had thrown everything at me all my life. What is but a few more?"

“But I never thought the price would be so high. A life for a life. The balance is restored, a justice served. Such is the way of Heaven. What will you say, my little Seventeenth when you know the truth? Would you blame me? Hate me? Could you find it in your heart to forgive me? For my part in condemning our child’s life?”

Alas, she cannot gave him the answer he sought; his question left hanging in the air.

Zhe Yan planned to hunt Ye Hua down and finish the talk, one that Zhen Zhen had interrupted, with Ye Hua. After he made sure a new cup of medicine was sent to Mo Yuan’s room properly this time, he went to check up on Feng Jiu.

Thankfully the lass’s injury was not far too serious; he fed her an immortality pill and let her rest. On his way out he discreetly observed how intensely Dong Hua stared at her face, or how one of his hand kept patting her hair. Zhe Yan did not know if he was conscious of his action and of the picture they made. Dong Hua might succeeding in hiding his affection from everyone else, including the lass, but for someone who knew him for almost hundred thousands of years; his veiled attempt was obvious to him.

Zhe Yan gave a slow shake of his head. “Bai Zhi, Bai Zhi. Who would have thought the oldest and most powerful ancient gods are nibbled by your descendants just like that? Hao De likes to think he is the most powerful and influential figure in all realms, having Mo Yuan and Dong Hua on his side; in truths, it is you.”

Next chapter: Many of our characters deal with the fall out from the Bell’s destruction. There would be many talks among them as they tried to settle their differences. Until next weekend then. ^^
Chapter 28

It took a while before Zhe Yan was able to pin down Ye Hua’s aura. He was hiding in the peachtree grove at the back of Kunlun’s Mountain. Not many people went there, perhaps that was why.

Ye Hua lifted his head up when he noticed a pair of feet appeared just in front of him. In a cold, detached voice, he asked. “What wisdom you wish to impart to me now, High God Zhe Yan?” It was obvious he wanted to be left alone.

“It was you outside Mo Yuan’s room,” Zhe Yan stated plainly without a hint of disapproval or accusation. Then he flipped the end of his robe backward and sat down besides him. “I did not tell him about your offer to make the Elixir, nor your accidental hearing of her condition.” Zhe Yan decided Mo Yuan had more than enough on his plate right now. He did not need to concern himself about Ye Hua’s interference as well.

“I am here to tell you something, whether you want to acknowledge it or not, he is still your brother. The same one who spent over a hundred years looking out for you tirelessly.” Zhe Yan pulled out a wine bottle from his sleeve pocket, took a swig from the bottle and offered it to Ye Hua. Since his unwilling, silent companion showed disinterest; he shrugged then continued.

“Back then the Heavenly Father used half of his remaining power to create an immortal fetus and turn it into the golden lotus, which is you, Ye Hua. Even so an immortal spirit still needs nourishment to gain power. Mo Yuan would never say it but keeping you safe and nurturing your spirit had not been an easy task for him.”

“One hundred and twenty thousand years ago, after the Heavenly Father faced his Calamity and departed for the realm of Nothingness, there was a war between Celestial and Demon Clan. Mo Yuan suffered fatal injuries after taking on the Demon’s Overlord. He almost did not make it. Even as he struggled to remain alive; a part of his cultivation was spent on you. That was not the only time; in the following years, Mo Yuan had been through almost every skirmish and battles both within and between clans, you can guess how often he was injured.”

“Some thought him spending a lot of time in seclusion to replenish his cultivation. Others said he was just that dedicated to the way of Taoism. Only a few know the true reason behind his frequent absence. Those extra cultivation was used to sustain and nurture your spirit. His only hope was that one day you be strong enough to take your human form again. Before the last Ghost War ended, he went to see Lingbao Tianzun and asked him to take care of you, were something happened to him.”

Ye Hua never once interrupted Zhe Yan’s chattering. At first he ignored most of it; not being in the mood to listen to anything about him. Zhe Yan either did not care for his response or just wanted to vent it out; so he kept going on. Before he even knew it; he was drawn in by the tale. The name of Lingbao Tianzun gave him a jolt of recognition; Ye Hua always felt the venerated God was affectionate and kind to him. He just did not know the reason behind his actions until now.

“I am not saying all this to make you feel obligated to repay his kindness. Mo Yuan would never want such charity either. I just want you to understand him better. Your brother remained celibate and devoted his long life to safeguard peace of all realms out of his unfailing dedication for the sake of others. During the peaceful times, he taught and shaped up younger generation, molding them to follow his cause, his vision. You see his disciples; they were his pride and joy, almost his children. For a long time, your well-being, the peace of all realms and his disciples were all that matters to him.”
“When I sent Fifth sister to Mo Yuan, I hope her carefree spirit and temperament would liven up his monotonous life just a little. I never thought Mo Yuan would come to care about her deeply or their feeling would be mutual. For her, he did many things I never thought he would, you may heard some of them.” Zhe Yan gave out a long, deep sigh. “Alas, fate was never on their side. Mo Yuan, in the end, chose the duty over his love for her. He had done what was demanded of him. *Wait for me*, he said in his final moment. I guess there was something he cannot just let go after all.”

“After first twenty thousands of years, I lost all hope of him ever coming back, even with the trust I had in him. Fifth sister however remained steady in her belief; years after years she looked for his return. I asked her once, if another fifty thousand years pass and Mo Yan still not coming back, what then? She told me then she will wait for another fifty thousand years or an eternity. I never know what give her the courage to cling to the hopelessness of his return.”

Ye Hua’s hands that gripped his kneecaps curled into white-knuckle fists. He knew that she had waited for him but never thought she was willing to forsake an eternity waiting.

“When Mo Yuan woke up, he told me it was almost impossible patching his spirit back piece by piece all those years, but he did it anyway. I suspect then his feeling for her must be deep-rooted. From what I saw today, I guess I underestimated his feelings for her yet again.”

Ye Hua never admitted it but seeing High God Mo Yuan almost followed Qian Qian into oblivion forced him to look at him in a new light. The God of War was not perfect nor infallible as they painted him to be. He too was flawed, blinded by his feelings, his love for a woman.

Zhe Yan turned to face toward the younger man, his eyes narrowed down. “Ye Hua, I hope you know that your brother would not hesitate to sacrifice his life for you. Bai Qian is different though. He is no longer able to give her up, not because he did not want to but because he can not. She becomes the very reason he lives for now. I am saying this, not because I am discounting your feelings for her. I know you also love her. But you already have your chance at happiness. You have Ali and your family. What does he have? What I am asking is, before you decide to do anything in the future, take all those years he watched over you out of a brother’s love into consideration.”

Ye Hua turned slightly away from Zhe Yan; his eyes staring into the unknown, thinking, pondering what was being said, what was asking of him.

“You must think I am asking too much but take it from someone who has the experience, sometimes being with the one you love is not as important as seeing her happy. ” Zhe Yan eyes took on a distant look as he began reminiscing the old times.

“In my youth, I was enamored with Bai Qian’s mother. She is unlike any woman I know. Above her ethereal beauty, she is vivacious, elegant, witty and charming. I found her utterly desirable and wanted her as my wife, I never fell for anyone that hard before. Back then, Bai Zhi and I pursued her relentlessly. He and I began as love rivals, competing for her heart. She favored him though. In the beginning, I did not see his appeals at all. He was dense, rigid, quick to anger and hard-headed. Only after our head literally butt against each other, I began to see what she saw in him.”

Zhe Yan gave a light-hearted chuckle; remembered how they went all out at each other that day. “He is brutally honest, loyal to the fault and totally devoted to her. Most important, he brought smiles to her lips and joys into her heart. Just being with him lit up her face and made her delirious happy, so I decided to let her go.”

“Looking back, it was the hardest and at the same time the best decision I ever made. I lose a lover that day but gained so much more. Her family becomes my family. A big one at that. My life is never dull with her children around. I gain confidantes, companions, both old and young, and successors of
my trade and wisdom. Anyway that is my choice of loving her, I could not be the voice of reason for you. Whatever you want to do next is on yours then.”

Ye Hua glanced at him from the corner of his eyes when he got up and prepared to head back inside. His parting words still reverberated in his mind long after he departed.

Mo Yuan traced his finger lightly along her spotless cheek; not a single of blood drop was left. He took note of the slight color that returned to her once colorless face. For a while, it seemed like her continue survival was a touch and go; now the danger had passed. He let out a soft, relieved sigh knowing Zhe Yan’s Elixir had taken its effect. His spiritual-enhanced medicine would replenish and strengthen her reserves which was alarmingly lacking ever since she sacrificed her own for him. It would be a long, arduous recovery for her but he planned to be there for her every step of the way, just like she once did for him. He planned to ask her parents to let her stay here indefinitely. Kunlun Mountain’s aura was heavily saturated with divine energy; it would speed up the healing and restoring of her essence even as she slumbered.

It was then a bone-deep weariness had set in, Mo Yuan felt like he suddenly aged thousands of years in day. He carefully arranged her body to settle comfortably against a nest of pillows; her unbound hair spread loosely on them and the bedding. Then he settled down beside her, slowed his breathe and begun to meditate. There was several matters waiting for him to settle later, right now it was imperative for him to gain back his peace of mind and some much needed strengths.

After a brief stop to check up on Xiao Jiu, Bai Zhen went to to find Zhe Yan. A Kunlun’s disciple manning the medicine room claimed he left for Mo Yuan’s room some time ago. Bai Zhen did not want to disturb their rest and decided to wait for him in his designated room.

It was quite late when the old phoenix came back to the room. Bai Zhen’s earlier anger at him melt as he took in his exhausted demeanor. It was not often he looked so worn out; the Phoenix, in his advanced years, was usually full of spirit. Perhaps it was his laid-back attitude that made it seemed so. Grudgingly, Bai Zhen decided to forgive him for hiding the truth about his sister from him; today he had done well saving her life after all.

He softened his stern face and asked. “Are you alright? You look terrible.”

“You are not raving mad at me anymore?” Zhe Yan asked, a little wary.

“Do you even know when to stop?” Bai Zhen scowled lightly. His earlier annoyance reared its ugly head again. “I told you I am not done with you yet.”

Zhe Yan wiped a weary hand back across his face, it had been a long, tiring day. “I will tell you everything, Zhen Zhen, just promise you will not be mad at me again before I finish.”

Bai Zhen pursed his lips and narrowed his eyes. “That depends on what you are going to tell me.”

Zhe Yan spend half of the night repeating the same tale he told MoYuan earlier that day to Bai Zhen;
then watched him pacing back and forth in agitation. At some point the young fox could not stop growling and baring his teeth. Zhe Yan had to ask him to sit and calmed down.

“I should have killed him where he stood.” Bai Zhen’s palm hit the table with a loud bang.

“Great, then we can go to war with the Ninth Heaven.” Zhe Yan’s voice was heavy with sarcasm.

“You, of all people, are saying we should pretend nothing happened?” He asked incredulously.

“What I am suggesting is,” Zhe Yan began patiently, he rubbed his temples in slow, circular motions, “before you go to your parents, let us give Mo Yuan a chance to talk with Ye Hua first.”

Bai Zhen retorted, almost shouting. “What is there to talk about? How my sister suffered at his hands?”

“Perhaps about what you do not already know?” Zhe Yan snapped back at him, irritated, then sighed deeply. “Peace, Zhen Zhen. You are too emotional right now and not helping. All I ask is time for Mo Yuan to clear things up with him. Do you think you are the only one furious with his horrible treatment of Fifth sister?”

Bai Zhen glared daggers at him for a long time. “Three days, that’s how long I will wait,” he practically growled out.

“Give him two weeks at least. Do you really think he will leave Fifth sister’s side at this time? It has been hundreds of years, what is but a few more days?” Zhe Yan took his silence as a sign of agreement.

“How is she, Zhe Yan?” Bai Zhen made a quiet inquiry. “Her senior said you already brought her the Elixir. I went to Mo Yuan’s room after you but the room was sealed-off with a barrier. I decided against entering and came here instead.”

“Nothing the Elixir, certain amount of time to recuperate and a Soul Gathering lamp could not fix.” Zhe Yan decided not to mention about her pregnancy. That was between Fifth sister and Mo Yuan alone.

Bai Zhen furrowed his brow, groaned. “We have to borrow that lamp again?”

“That is why I told you to stay put for the time,” Zhe Yan shook his head at Bai Zhen’s quick temper. Young people really had no patience, he thought.

“I remember a certain Arsehat Lord still owes you a big favor for saving his equally stuck-up grandchild,” Bai Zhen snorted decisively; ignoring the phoenix’s disapproving glance at his cussing.

“That is one card I do not want put on the table, Zhen Zhen. Actually, I do not want to use any card at all,” he admitted, never wanted to get involve with that family’s messy affairs more than absolutely necessary.

He changed the topic abruptly. “Are you going back to Qing Qiu tomorrow? Your parent must be worried sick by now.”

“Do not worry, I already sent Bi Fang home with my message.” Bai Zhen got up and gave him a nod. “If Feng Jiu is well enough to travel, then yes. If not, I will wait a few days. I think I am going to rest now; you should as well.”
“What a day it is,” he mumbled softly on his way out. “I hope this time all of Fifth sister’s bad lucks had run out. She can not kept us on our toes like this again; it is a good thing we are not weak-minded.”

The first thing Mo Yuan did the next morning was checking up on Seventeenth. Her overall physical health had improved quite a lot from last night. Her spiritual wound was another concern, he needed the Soul Gathering lamp for her broken spirit. Maybe he would ask for it when he visited Ye Hua.

It was only then Mo Yuan realized the Jade Purity fan was not with her. With everything going down yesterday, he completely forgot about her weapon. Mo Yuan quickly conjured the summoning spell, soon it appeared, hovering in the air in front of him. As he grabbed it in his hand, Mo Yuan took an immediate notice of its altered essence. He inspected the fan closely and found traces of Seventeenth’s essence within the fan’s core.

He looked carefully into its composition again, the result remained the same. Her essence had bonded with the fan’s. That should not be possible, he never taught her such a dangerous practice. Besides the method was already lost to the time; not many living person knew about it. It became forbidden for its highly destructive side-effects on the spell user.

Then another thought hit him, Mo Yuan’s mouth pressed into a hard line as he concentrated, three fourth of those in the knows currently resided here, at Kunlun Mountain. Under any circumstance, Bai Zhi would never ever suggested it to her. Zhe Yan might but he doubted it, he cared about Seventeenth as much as he did.

Yet there was one person who would not pay much attention to how harmful or disastrous it would be in her hand; given the outcomes met the goals he had in mind. *What he hoped to accomplish?* Mo Yuan thought furiously. He knew Dong Hua very well, actually understood his ways of thinking better than anyone, he never did anything without good reasons but this time he really went too far and crossed the line.

Mo Yuan peered down at her sleeping face thoughtfully then sighed. “What have you done, Seventeenth? Why would you endanger yourself like this?” He tightened the fan in his grip and left looking for Dong Hua. On his way, he crossed path with Chang Shan and told him to keep watch over her for the time.

Dong Hua opened his eyes and got off his meditation when the door of his room swung open. He lifted his brows at how Mo Yuan strode quickly inside the room without uttering a single greeting.

The Master of Kunlun put down the Jade Purity fan in front of him and asked. “Why?” His voice betrayed the agitation he felt churning inside.

Dong Hua, barely glanced at the fan, got up and move away from Bai Feng Jiu’s bedside.

“Why what?”
Mo Yuan toned down his voice, still glaring at him. “You know what I am talking about”

“I am?” Dong Hua looked back at him blankly. “Which one are you asking again, Mo Yuan? Why did she came to me and not you? Why did I tell her about the spell? Why do you not know of what she planned? Or why she decided to do it even after I told her the downside of it?”

“I know why she went to you, the one I can not figure out is you. Why did you decided it is a good idea to send her to her death?” Mo Yuan demanded angrily. “I could have handled Qing Cang on my own.”

Dong Hua snorted at the absurdity of Mo Yuan’s claim. “Why should I not? She already made up her mind when she came see me. Do you think the outcome will be any different; had I not told her the spell? Then you are more deluded than I first suspected, Mo Yuan.”

A part of him knew it would not matter. It was just how she was, stubborn to the fault. There was no going back once she made up her mind. Even then he can not forgive Dong Hua either. He could have contacted him and warn him of her plan; instead after practically pushed her off the cliff he chose to remain silent.

Mo Yuan walked up closer and got into his face when Dong Hua did not even try to deny his accusation. “Perhaps because you knew, even with the essence-binding spell, there was no way she would be strong enough to defeat Qing Cang on her own. That is suicidal.”

“Did you just mentioned the possibility of a better outcome? Fine, let us talk about it.” Dong Hua took on the brunt of his anger unfazed. “With the meager of cultivation she gave you and your barely recovered power, you are absolutely certain you will win. Is that what you are saying?”

“No, you would be dead as well.” He said as matter of factly, no judgement in his voice. “She came to me because she wished to protect you and was willing to pay the price. I have two choices: let you died, again, or let her take her chance with Qing Cang. Between her life and yours, it is not really a hard choice, I picked you. She had better chance against him than you anyway.”

“Mo Yuan, you are the Heavenly Father’s son, need I remind you of your duties to all those people out there? They need your strength, your unwavering dedication. You may not be able to sacrifice her but I am; I would do it again if it mean all living beings will survive at the end of the day.” Dong Hua made it clear that he meant what he said.

Before he even knew, Mo Yuan brought his fist back and swung hard at Dong Hua’s face.

one after another. The blows made him stumbled backward and landed in a heap on the floor. A stretch of silence hang between the two of them, saved for Mo Yuan harsh breathing, no one made the move to speak.

Dong Hua sat up and wiped the blood from his the corner of his nose and mouth. “Are you feeling any better now?” He winced with the effort of talking, Mo Yuan really packed a punch this time.

Mo Yuan, having composed himself once again, said unamused. “Not really, just for your second comment, I am considering deck you a few more times. You really should have told me.”

“For someone who seems to know it all, you failed to anticipate a possibility.” His voice wavered slightly before continued. “It was not just her life you have sacrificed, Dong Hua, she was pregnant with my child.”

Unbeknownst to them, the sound of their scuffle had disturbed her peaceful resting and woke her up. They were too busy arguing to pay attention to the faint, gasping voice coming from the bed...
Dong Hua’s head bowed down, eyes closed, jaws tightened. “If I were you, I would have ran a sword through me by now,” he admitted. The sound of his voice somber and heavy with regret. “I apologize for what it is worth.”

Mo Yuan blew out his breathe heavily. “It did not have to turn out like this. I already planned to ask Ye Hua to help me destroy the Bell.” He too flopped down on the floor; feeling exhausted after letting off his bottled-up anger at Dong Hua.

“When did she went to see you?” Mo Yuan wondered aloud

“A few days after Qing Cang crimson-hellfire’s spreading got worst.” Dong Hua’s long fingers rubbed the bridge of his nose; trying to soothe the throbbing pain. “I heard you already went into your seclusion at the time,” he added.

It was that long, Mo Yuan realized, even before they went to the Mortal Realms. He knew she was worried about Qing Cang since that meeting at the Ninth Heaven, he just did not expected she would go behind his back and seek Dong Hua out.

During their time together in the hut, she rarely asked about Qing Cang, he should have noticed something was off. She usually talked of anything and everything. The fact that she avoided that specific topic should clue him in. Sometimes, he forgot she was no longer the little fox who loved to blurt out her every thought to him. She learned to conceal her feelings and mastered the arts of feigning ignorance.

She even asked for the sword lesson, Mo Yuan was angry at himself. Seventeenth had planned to confront Qing Cang all along; he just did not realize it in time. He wished he could blame her for deceiving him but could not; he never asked and she simple did not informed him.

“She made that decision because you refused to tell her anything.” Dong Hua said; it was not hard to guess the direction of his thoughts. “You asked her to be your wife, your lifelong companion, but you still coddle her, treating her as you would your disciple.”

“I certainly did not,” Mo Yuan denied.

The corner of Dong Hua’s mouth tugged up a little; then he frowned. “Then you did not hide things from her to protect her? You know very well once she learns of your plan, she would not allow you to take the risk. She might even beg you to let her do it. The two of you really make a pair, do you know that?”

“I can not risk her life, Dong Hua, and I will not.” Mo Yuan took a deep breathe; trying to keep at bay the sense of despair that threatened to take over him again. The sight of her lifeless, blood-soaked body still haunted even his waking moment.

“She is not a helpless child that needs your constant protection anymore. If only you would stop underestimating her and see it.” Dong Hua reminded him. “While you were sleeping, she grew up, got stronger, found her own resolves. Is it such a surprise that she wants to protect you as much as you would do for her? You shielding her from the truths is the danger in itself. Talk to her, open up with her and do what you have to sort out your issues. What happened yesterday cannot be repeated
“You are the one to talk,” Mo Yuan glanced sideways at the one sleeping on the bed and looked squarely back at him. “You cannot even take your own advice.”

“Our situation is different,” Dong Hua said stiffly, he looked uncomfortable out of the sudden.

Mo Yuan snickered at his rebuttal and threw his words, from earlier, right back at him. “If you really believe that, then you are more deluded than I first thought.”

No woman could ever get close to him, if Dong Hua did not allowed it. He usually threw them out of his palace so fast and without a second glance. Yet he turned blind eyes when it came to Bai Feng Jiu and let her followed him like a lost puppy. Right now she was incapacitated and can not hold on to him; the fact that Dong Hua still stayed with her, by his own free will, spoke volumes of his less than noble feelings for her.

They both fell into their troubled thoughts after that.

“There is one more thing we need to discuss.” Dong Hua said, he prolonged his stay over the night just to address this issue with Mo Yuan. “At the Roushui River, did you perhaps take note of something amissed?”

“The backup troop did not show up, yes, I noticed.” Mo Yuan nodded. “I can not say I really am surprised at his pettiness, after what happened between us. It just that he picked the worst timing to vent it.”

“I care not about his personal feelings, nor his mindless revenge. He overstepped his bound this time and risked the safety of all realms with his thoughtlessness. That, my friend, is unacceptable.”

“He has been blind-sighted by his lust for power for a while now, you and I know this. I just hope he could gather his act together and change somehow. But enough is enough, I see your point, Hao De is no longer fit to rule.” Mo Yuan figured out certain actions needed to be taken. The two of them looked at each other in the eyes and nodded in silent agreement.

“I thought you just questioned my ability to judge a moment ago,” Dong Hua said sardonically then added. ”It will be a lot easier if you could convince him to help.”

“I will pay him a visit.” Mo Yuan ignored the jab; Dong Hua loved to hold grudge like that. “We have a lot to talk about anyway.”

Dong Hua gave him a knowing look, the awkward predicament Mo Yuan found himself in with his brother was certain entertaining. Perhaps he could convince Zhe Yan to spy on them later. Things were pretty boring as of late. “I am sure you do. What do you think of him?”

“He has no valid reasons to refuse.” Mo Yuan thought of the well-hidden defiance flashed in his eyes when he looked at the Sky Lord at time. “He is definitely not one to remain shackled and controlled for long.”

Note: Special thanks to loreinacadis0412 for your wonderful insights & suggestions. Sorry but next update might take a while since I have to work this weekend. =="
Chapter 29

:: Xi Wu Palace ::

Ye Hua finally made it back to his palace by nightfall. Tian Shu was waiting anxiously for him at the front of his mansion. Ye Hua knew instinctively that his aide had urgent matters to address, so he let him stay. Tian Shu quickly relayed what transpired earlier that day to him in detail.

“So he only knew it was Kunlun disciples, but not who exactly?” Ye Hua asked for clarification.

“Not quite, Your Highness,” Tian Shu replied. “The sentry recognized the Second Prince of West Sea but not the other one. He only discerned that it was another disciple of Kunlun.”

“I see. If that is all, then you are dismissed.”

Ye Hua sat there in silence long after he left. At first, he questioned why the old lord would risk the alliance he painstakingly kept going all these years with such ill-considered moves. Later it became clear; he thought they were just someone expendable and did not care as much for their lives. The cunning lord was usually well-versed in manipulating the power play and getting what he wanted. Yet this time, it seemed his ignorance would cost him.

Trouble was brewing from afar; it would come knocking on their door sooner than he would like. High God Mo Yuan would most unlikely overlook this double-crossing. Nor would Qing Qiu. By delaying to send in his men, his Lord and Grandfather had successfully offended at least three fourth of the most powerful figures in all realms without even trying.

Ye Hua gave out a long, deep, tired sigh and slumped back against the chair. He was beyond physically and mentally exhausted. His gaze fell upon the old drawing of Su Su, hanging on the divider, next to his workspace. He rose from his seat, walked around the desk and sat in front of her painting.

One day. It was only a singular day. So much happened in such a short time. It seemed like a higher power was dumping everything on him all at once; pushing and driving him to see, to hear and to face the ultimatum. Learning Qian Qian and he were not meant to be and their thread of fate had been broken beyond repair was a hard, bitter pill to swallow. Yet he could ignore all of those talk about destinies and fate; he always believed in fighting for himself and his future after all.

What shook him to the core was when Qian Qian offered her spirit to seal the Bell of Eastern Emperor. The image of her form rising and disappearing into the most destructive device ever created haunted him even now. It was like his nightmare came to live and revisited; suddenly he was back there at Zhuxian Terrace, helplessly watching her killing herself again. The terror he felt for her gripped him so hard, it made him light-headed, nauseated.

As full realization of the real reason behind her act set in, blinding fury came over him. He wanted to scream at her, shake her until she came to her senses. How could she have such little regard for her life? Did he mean so much that she would rather die than live without him? Then his inner voice whispered to him. Wouldn’t he do the exact same thing to save her? His answer was definitely yes. He would bargain everything, pay any price even at his own suffering and death, just so she would be alive. As much as it pained him to admit it, Qian Qian was the same. She would not do any less for High God Mo Yuan, and he for her as he found out later.

Ye Hua ran his hand over his chest distractedly. He remembered the sharp, agonizing pain that
pierced his heart so strongly and left him gasping for air. It took him a moment to realize the phantom pain was not his own, but High God Mo Yuan’s. The dread of suffocating emptiness that followed drowned him and threatened to swallow his entire soul. Only then Ye Hua came to realize how strongly his brother felt about her. He was as devastated as Ye Hua was when Su Su died. No one else understood that desperation better than him. Without her smile, her love, her presence; nothing was worth living for anymore. That same despair compelled them both to follow her, even in death.

Since the earliest days of High God Mo Yuan’s resurrection, Ye Hua knew their spirits were connected on some level. Even so he never truly perceived the profound trickery of their attachment. At least not until the very moment High God Mo Yuan’s spirit began to scatter. He felt it happening; fragments of spirit intimately intertwined with his own was viciously ripped away from him. It was indescribably hard to describe the acute loss and sheer hollowness that followed. He was still reeling from the backlash when it was suddenly cut off. Zhe Yan’s timely intervention prevented him from going too far. Ye Hua almost expected his brother to no longer be among the living, but there he was, not only breathing but trying to save their beloved.

Ye Hua looked at High God Mo Yuan, truly looked at him when he was asked to take care of Qian Qian if his plan went wrong. He heard the clear conviction in his voice, saw the sincerity behind those eyes and knew he meant every word he said. Were their role reversed, Ye Hua knew, he would not be able to do the same. If she was his, he wanted her to remain his all the way. He knew he was being selfish. It was the only way he knew how to love.

The short time he had with Su Su might have opened up his heart, warmed him with her boundless compassion and unconditional love but ingrained habit of a lifetime was hard to shake off. It was not surprising High God Zhe Yan saw through his veiled attempt. The thought really came across his mind, however briefly, he could use his cultivation to make her felt obliged to his request. Most of all, his essence would fill and merge with hers and make him a part of her for all eternity. High God Mo Yuan may be her chosen life companion but it would be him who was closer to her in every way possible.

Later he sat down and ridiculed himself for entertaining such ludicrous, forlorn hope. It would not make any difference in the end. His last viable claim on her, as a husband and a father of her child, was gone. He truly had no place by her side to go back and definitely no love to rekindle within her heart. While he gave himself one last quiet moment to wallow in his total and absolute defeat, High God Zhe Yan sought him out. Ye Hua did not want to listen to him but he was determined - persistent even - to talk.

The tale he told was something unheard and unknown to Ye Hua. He can not help himself being lured by his curiosity. He knew that his brother had guarded him ever since the Heavenly Father entrusted the Golden Lotus to him. But Ye Hua never once realized his brother’s cultivation was used to nurture his spirit all along. Perhaps he was not supposed to even learn about it at all, had High God Zhe Yan did not bring it to his attention.

But why? Why did his brother not mention this to him when they met? Ye Hua did not understand it at first. His sacrifice would earn eternal gratitude from him. He could hold it over his head, use it as a leverage for his own gain but he did not. While Ye Hua understood intellectually that High God Mo Yuan was his brother; he never regarded him as one. In his eyes, he was the person Qian Qian chose to replace him with, his rival and the usurper of her love. He had been giving him the silent treatment every chance he got. The Immortal God either chose to overlook their estrangement or did not care as much.

Looking back, perhaps he went about everything the wrong way. Even when he tried to challenge him for his rights to Qian Qian’s hand; his brother did not let others know of their personal struggle
and saved him from taking the full brunt of the Lord’s wrath. Was it brotherly love that still his hand? Ye Hua asked himself. Did he not resent Ye Hua for trying to steal his love from him?

From his earliest years, Ye Hua strived and struggled to live up to the high expectations placed on him. There was no time to spend idly, no friends to play with. Everyday different instructors came and taught him how to be a wise and competent ruler. He was expected to excel at every subject he learned. His worth was often judged by comparing it to High God Mo Yuan’s accomplishment. There was no room for errors, even the slightest failure was unacceptable. As the future Crown Prince, he must be the perfect role model for his people, skilled and competent at everything he did, sharp and level-headed when dealing with problems at hand. His grandfather laid down his rules before him, he either acted and performed accordingly or faced punishment.

Since young he only had so little time to spend with his parents; family dinner was a rarity between them. His Father Prince was a strickler, he was attentive to him but at the same time held him at arm’s length. Ye Hua cannot recalled the last time he gave him a warm hug; perhaps it was before he turned five hundred. His mother was the only one showing love and kindness to him. He could remember vaguely the soft lullaby she sang to him when he was just a little boy. He felt safe and relaxed in her presence. She let him talk and act like the young boy he was. But that meager piece happiness was forcefully taken away from him as well.

One time his mother let him take an afternoon off because he was feeling depressed and cannot concentrate on the lesson. Later when his grandfather learned about it; he took him away from her and forbade them to see each other. Ye Hua did not see her again for the next thousands of years; the only time they met was during Imperial banquets and feasts. It was only after he passed his first trial to became a high immortal at the bare age of twenty thousand years; she was allowed back in his life.

Ye Hua never had a true friend in his life either. Third uncle was the only one who came closest to be called his friend and confidante. The thought did not bother him as much. He learned, even as a child, there was more to those people who approached him than meet the eyes. Sometimes they just wanted to win his favor; often than not they were seeking personal gain or had hidden agenda in mind. So he treated them the same way, used them as one would use a chess piece in a game. To his subordinates; he treated them equally and fairly, he was their future lord and them the people he will command and lead one day after all.

The only time he formed a deep, strong attachment with someone was Su Su. She thawed the ice he created around his heart with her sincerity and kindness. Her infectious sweet smile made him inexplicably warm inside even if it was the coldest day in winter. The genuine love and affection she had for him filled the void of loneliness he refused to acknowledge. It was only with her he felt at peace and was able to be himself. A simple man who wanted to spend a simple life with the woman he loved. Not a prince, a commander or a subject of his grandfather’s court. The unwavering trust and devotion she placed in his hands gave him the courage to defy and break the very rules that kept him in line all his life. She remained faithful to him, waited for him for years, after he left without explaining himself. Perhaps that was why he clung to her presence and her memories like a lifeline; no other can gave him the feeling of being well loved.

And yet there was another who loved him and cared for him all along, he just never knew it until now. It was such an irony, Ye Hua thought humorlessly. His so-called family could care less about his desire and happiness. Their wishes, their visions, their rules were more important than his well-being. It was the one person who had been dead for over seventy thousands years that did so much for him and demanded nothing in return. And he returned his kindness by trying to take away his fated person at every turn. What did that make him? Ye Hua wished he could find a solid reason to continue hating the man because it would be so much easier that way.
The Deity of Stone of Destiny asked him earlier what was the most important thing to him? The question was very easy to answer. Qian Qian’s happiness had always been his heart’s desire but it came with a price; one he was reluctant to pay.

High God Zhe Yan admitted his decision to let go of Bai Qian’s mother was hard but he never regretted it. He was being cruel, Ye Hua decided, for dropping a bombshell in his wake and left. His mouth said those thousands of years of love and caring was not required to be repaid when he knew full well Ye Hua can not just ignore the truth of his brother’s sacrifice. What was left unsaid came through loud and clear. The best thing Ye Hua could do for the two people who loved him that much was to let them be happy with each other.

So everything came down to this, him letting go of his beloved and hundreds years of longing and attachment. All these time he believed he was just an instrument of Qian Qian’s Heavenly Trial. Perhaps that was not entirely true; perhaps she was also the catalyzer of his own trial. And that maybe the reason why they were fated to meet again. Because after all these times he still did not understand and can not accepted what was in front of him.

Ye Hua grazed his finger on her painting as if he was really touching her face. "When we met again, I have thought I could compensate for all the wrongs I have done to you, love you with everything I have, in the way I should have done back then. But if this is what your heart truly desires, then I will set you free." There, he said it aloud. "Perhaps it will be the last thing I could do for you."

This may be the path the Heaven laid before him and waited for him to make his choice all along. Ye Hua lifted his head up, his eyes focused on that place far beyond the edge of universes.

“All these years of pain and suffering, is this the lesson you wish me to learn and overcome, Father? Heaven decided to give me the ultimatum because I have never been compassionate and understanding of other’s struggle; nor honestly willing to forsake my own happiness for anyone. Alright, I concede your point.”

Losing her love was still very raw and very hard for him but for once in the long time; he felt at peace, lighter and not conflicted with himself anymore. He knew if Su Su was here; she would approve of his decision. He could almost see her radiant smile in his mind-eyes.

Note: Special thanks to Noitratoxin who help proofreading this chapter and to loreinacadis0412 for your wonderful suggestions.
Chapter 30

:: Kunlun Mountain ::

Dong Hua decided it was time to leave, he had kept to his promise and Mo Yuan seemed to be getting better already. He walked back and sat down near the bed, hoping to check up on Jiu-er before he left. He had watched over her throughout the night. Her injuries were light; she got off easy. Her desperate attempt to save him really gave him a fright. If Qing Cang was up to his former strength and level of cultivation, the hit would have been deadly.

Watching her endangering her life also touched a chord in him. Never before had someone went to such great lengths to protect him, it was always the other way around. His plan to alienate her and push her away had backfired. He doubted he would ever succeed his endeavor after this. But would it really be fair to her fated person and herself; to let her continue to love him when it would lead them to nowhere but heartache in the end.

Dong Hua reached out to touch her hair. She had shifted in her sleep and laid down on her stomach, facing away from him. Only then he heard the suppressed sob and noticed the slight tremor from her shoulders and he just knew.

"How long have you been awake?" he asked quietly.

Bai Feng Jiu did not turn around; she refused to look at him. If she had not heard it with her own ears, she would never believed it could be true. How could he be so ruthless? This was her aunt, her person. He knew full well how much she adored her. And yet ... and yet he sent her to her death without a bit of remorse.

When his heavy hand was placed on her shoulder, she shrugged it off her. She knew he could be cruel at time but this went beyond that. He did not ever consider to spare her from the pain of her aunt’s death. He did not care about her at all. She knew this since the beginning but was too stubborn to accept it. She ignored how coldly he treated her after they came back from the Mortal Realm. It was only through sheer stubbornness that she stayed with him when he tried to push her away. She had been hoping against hope to win his love someday, if she stayed.

And she thought she finally weakened his resolve. Why else did he come running and rescuing her from harm again and again? Those little acts of caring sent her hope soaring. Thinking back she was so foolish; always lied to herself that he really did have some affection for her. Clearly it was a figment of her forlorn imagination.

Her father was right to be furious with her. She swallowed her own pride and humbled herself before him time and time again despite his snide and harsh words. Her father warned her not to continue down this path of self-destruction but she did not want to listen. What she got in the end, she had no one to blame but her traitorous heart.

All the sudden two strong arms suddenly rolled her over the bedding. She shoved them off harder than before. Her hand searched blindly for something; then made a grab at the headrest. She lifted herself up and threw it straight at him. Tears rained down her cheeks harder than before with her self-disappointment. She could feel his penetrating gaze on her, watching, dissecting her.

Dong Hua deflected the flying object to the side with ease. “If you have something to say; then out with it. Stop throwing tantrum like a child; it is unbecoming conducts for one of your station.” His disinterested tone of voice carried over to her; it felt like a dose of ice water on the burning flame and
the effect was unmistakably spontaneous.

“What more is there to say?” She asked bitterly. “I understand everything with perfect clarity now. Everyone was right, all this time, the affection I have for you blinded me to see the truth right in front of me. It doesn’t matter how much I love you or willing to sacrifice for you; nothing I did ever affected you or touched your heart. Because if it did, you will never do this to me, knowing it will completely break my heart.” She watched him standing there; his face betrayed nothing but the perpetual indifference. What else did she expect from the one who was born out of rock? She chided herself.

“What do you want me to say, Jiu-er?” He inquired. “That I am sorry for sacrificing your loved one for the sake of all immortals and the rest of the world? You are not a simpleton, Jiu-er, but the future Queen of Qing Qiu. Must I remind you what is at stake here and what is more important? I did what must be done, it’s irrelevant how it would affect you. Your aunt understood the risks and what my suggestion entailed; she was not afraid to face it. I suggest you learn that sense of duty and responsibility from her, you will need it in the future.”

Bai Feng Jiu weeped silently at his hurtful words; he openly admitting he couldn’t care less about her feelings. It was the last straw she needed to get over him and her sad excuse of one-sided love. She wiped her face clean of tears, steeled her resolve and looked up.

“In the past, I had always placed you in the highest regard. You are that immaculate God who is smart, powerful, all-knowing and can’t do no wrong. You know things most people are not even aware of. With your analytical mindset, you never failed to come up with the best solution and get the desirable result you want. No one could have done what you did. Truth is, they can’t, not only because they are less knowledgeable than you are but because they care too much of how their action will affect others. You don’t, you never have. You just do what feels right regardless the consequences,” she scoffed.

“I realize now how wrong I am. You are not perfect, in fact, you are very flawed. Not caring is your biggest mistake. Because even as Immortals and Gods, we are but a living-beings. We feel, we love, we want as mortals do. And we act on those feelings; that makes us into who we are now.”

She looked at him in defiance; her large doe eyes clashed with his. “My aunt’s choice was done out of her love for my uncle-in-law, for me, for our family and those she loves; not because the situation demanded it or it was logical things to do.” She whispered. “It saddens me that you will never understand what really drives us to live and fight for.”

Bai Feng Jiu decided right then, she can never again pursue him. She can no longer trust her heart with this man who was so willing to sacrifice her aunt. “Thank you for saving and taking me here, Lord Dong Hua. I will not trouble you further with my bothersome self.” She gave him a curtsy, then straightened herself and walked past him. Her head still bowed down; refusing to meet his eyes. She did not want him to see how hard it was for her to walk away.

Without throwing one last glance in his direction, she left the room, him and their past behind. If she heard him calling out her name; she did not stop or bother to acknowledge it.

Bai Feng Jiu walked down the corridor leading to the cauldron room with heavy heart. How she wished her aunt was awake and well now. Her aunt always lend her a sympathetic ear and let her vent out her sorrow without criticism.
As she approached the room; Zhe Yan and fourth uncle’s voice drifted from inside. She tiptoed to get closer to them, hoping they would not take notice of her arrival.

“I am going to intercept my parents and delay them, Bi Fang said they are on their way now with second brother. You must quickly notify High God Mo Yuan of their arrival,” Bai Zhen said.

Her eyes grew big in alarm, her father was coming here? That would not do at all. By now, he must have heard what she did yesterday. She winced, just thinking how furious he would be with her. This time, her aunt was not here to save her either, Feng Jiu lamented. She took an unwilling step back and contemplated on running away to hide. Finding refuge in the Mortal Realm sounded appealing to her with every second that passed. At least until his anger abated, she thought.

“I am going, Zhen Zhen, don’t you forget what I told you earlier. You can’t mention about Fifth sister’s past as Su Su to them yet. You must not let it slip-,” Zhe Yan reminded him.

“Not until High God Mo Yuan talk to Ye Hua. Yes, I remember that perfectly, thanks for repeating it again,” Bai Zhen replied, his voice was almost exasperated.

Bai Feng Jiu did not pay them any mind, not since the word ‘Su Su’ got mixed up in their conversation. Her hands covered her mouth tightly to hide her cry of surprise. Surely she heard it wrong. There was no way her aunt and that mortal could be related in anyway, was it?

She ran half way back to her room then remembered Dong Hua could still be there. Bai Feng Jiu decided to disappear; she needed time to process what she heard just now. She jumped on the cloud, skipped her way into Zhe Yan’s Peachtree Grove; slumped down on a stone chair and stayed frozen there for the longest time.

Though she was glad for the chance to occupy her mind with something else other than Dong Hua’s betrayal. This was not really what she expected. Flashes of past memories came back to her. Su Su ... the mortal she kept going back to see. At first, she was fed up that a mere mortal took the very place that should rightfully belong to her aunt. Then she found out she was quite an innocent person. It intrigued her how a daughter of man could have similar features to her aunt, the renowned beauty among immortals and gods. Then came the pity and the need to comfort her just a little. The poor woman had spent years being withheld and mistreated by those in Xi Wu Palace after all; she even lost her eyesight in the end. Bai Feng Jiu eyes widen in horror; was that mortal really her aunt. But how?

She pondered her aunt mysterious disappearance for six hundred years and her sudden return with inexplicable eyes illness and memory lost. Then.. then the Celestial’s Crown Prince’s visit not long after her aunt’s return and his peculiar question about Si Yin’s whereabout. Si Yin. The Jade Purity Fan of Kunlun. Right there! It must be connected somehow.

Bai Feng Jiu forced herself to remember. That day, Lingbao Tianshun’s mount went crazy at the gathering and injured her. She learned later from Star Lord Shi Ming that it was provoked after seeing the Jade Purity Fan of Kunlun. At that time, she also wondered why the fan was even there. It submitted to no one but her aunt and High God Mo Yuan. Su Su ... she was also there that day. If she was really her aunt; then it made perfect sense the fan rose to protect her.

“I have never heard of anyone forgetting their own past because of Heavenly Trial before,” she whispered. That was the explanation her family gave her about her aunt’s illness and she had believed it without questions. “Zhe Yan must give her the amnesia potion. Gosh. I’m so stupid, I should have known. Everyone was acting really weird back then.”

Every missing puzzle piece seems to fall into place. If Su Su was her aunt turned mortal, she needed
to learn what really happened all those years. Most importantly, how she was led to her tragic ending. She still recalled how crestfallen and sad Su Su was when the Prince left her in the palace all alone. He turned a blind eye when his own wife was being tortured by that Sujin character and everyone else in Xi Wu Palace.

No, that was not right. It was him who hurt her aunt the most. She scoffed at Zhe Yan’s idea to ask for details from Celestial’s Crown Prince. She doubted he would sincerely admitted his own shortcomings. It would be a waste of time to bother with his lies. But where else should she begin to cover the truth? Those maids in Xi Wu palace were all removed and sent away. Star Lord Shi Ming might know a little more but she did not want to alert him with the true identity of her aunt yet. So where did that leave her? She bemoaned. She needed to find an insider who knew everything right from the start, someone … like that maid in the Yilan Fanghua.

Bai Feng Jiu spring jumped to her feet in excitement. How could she forget that one; the maid who was always with Su Su. She rubbed her hand gleefully. She was so going to grill her relentlessly until she got all the answers she sought. Perhaps her fourth uncle and Zhe Yan would want to ask their own questions too? To the Ninth heaven then, how long since she was last there?

:: Ninth Heaven ::

Before she breached the perimeter of Ninth Heaven, Bai Feng Jiu shifted into her fox form and followed the familiar route to Yilan Fanghua. The manor was quiet; Bai Feng Jiu looked around and made sure no one saw her entering. She used her acute sense of smell to hunt down the maid and finally found her and some other maids preparing what seemed to be some afternoon snacks. Bai Feng Jiu yipped and called the maid’s attention to her.

“Little fox, it is you,” Nai Nai exclaimed, coming over to see her. “You have been gone for a long time.”

Bai Feng Jiu caught the hem of her robe in her mouth and began dragging her outside, they need some semblance of privacy for what they were going to discuss.

“You want me to ….follow you?” Nai Nai frowned, a little confused. “Okay, but not for long, I still have to finish the snacks before the little prince come back.”

Bai Feng Jiu stumbled a little, as she turned back and looked at Nai Nai in shock. Prince Ali, of course, she completely forgot about him. He was Su Su’s son. That made him her cousin, right? She yipped ecstatically, she was not the youngest child of the family anymore. Now she had a cousin to play with and pass on her knowledge just like her aunt did for her.

Then her hope plummeted as realization set in; he belonged to Celestial’s Clan and her aunt was no longer betrothed to their Crown Prince. There was no way Celestials would allow him to spend time in Qing Qiu now. Unless…. her grandparents knew the truth. They would, without any doubts, demand him to be sent over there or even stay for an extended period of time with them. Her tails swished back and forth as she considered her options. All she had to do was made sure they knew.

Her eyes zeroed on a secluded spot along the way, no one was around to hear their conversation, she decided. Bai Feng Jiu shifted back to her human form. In a flash, she had to cover Nai Nai’s mouth tightly to block out her screaming. “Don’t scream just yet,” she hushed, “Or else every guard will rush here within a minute.”
Nai Nai nodded obediently; signaling to her she had calm down and will not react badly anymore. She remembered this woman’s face from Ling Bao Tianshun’s Gathering. It was the little princess from Qing Qiu. Had she spied on her Mistress all along back then? Was it because her Mistress would have wedded into Xi Wu Palace and became one of her uncle-in-law’s harem had she not died before? But now Qing Qiu’s Bai Qian was no longer engaged to their Crown Prince, she frowned. What was the Princess’s true reason for being here then?

“Little Princess, why you led me out here?” Nai Nai asked fearfully. “Did I do something to offend you? I apologize if I did, I ….”

“Oh, hush, I’m not planning to bring you harm.” Bai Feng Jiu admonished her softly. “Good grief. What's wrong with you Celestials, always worry about offending this and that. I only want to ask you about something. It’s best not to talk around so many guards and palace maids. I know how much they love to gossip, like all the time,” She sighed, for a moment she had a flashback of her time as a maid in Taichen Palace. She cleared away that depressing thoughts with a small shake of her head.

“I don’t know if I could answer your question, little princess,” Nai Nai looked sheepish, her voice wavered a little in fear.

“Nonsense, I know very well that you could. Why else I come to you? Just answer the questions I ask, all right?” Bai Feng Jiu gave her a smile; if it came out a little predatory she cannot help it.

“Nai Nai, I want you to be truthful with me,” said Bai Feng Jiu. She caught the maid’s forearm tightly in her grip. “What actually happened three hundred years ago between Su Su and the Crown Prince? I know some from Su Su, and some more from stories I heard. I bet you know every other details, don’t you?”

“You want to know about my former Mistress? Why now? She was gone for a long time,” Nai Nai seemed confused.

“I have my own reasons. Come on, tell me what you know,” Bai Feng Jiu felt impatient but tried not to scare off the maid.

“But..,” Nai Nai was hesitant, “The Sky Lord ordered us not to talk about what happened. I could be punished, little princess.”

“I am not one of his subject, Nai Nai, you can tell me. I have never believed Su Su did what she was accused of anyway but I must know the fact. It is very important to me. I promise I will not tell anyone that I heard it from you, all right?” Bai Feng Jiu tried to persuade her again. She even gave her the pinkie to prove her commitment. “Besides, you just said it, she was dead for a long time. What could an old story hurt anyone? Trust me, you will feel better letting all out. I know it must be very hard for you to keep quiet all these years.”

Nai Nai’s lips trembled at the reminder, “You are right, little princess. It has been very hard for me, I miss her so much. I really believe she would come back one day but she didn’t. She is dead and nothing will change that.” Tears of sadness and disappointment welled up in her eyes. “All right, if you really want to know, I will tell you everything I know about my former Mistress and her miserable life here on this heaven.”

:: Kunlun Mountain ::

Bai Zhen rushed down Kunlun Mountain’s long stairways to the mountain’s foot. He could sense his
parents’ aura closing in on fast. Just as he walked pass the Gate, they jumped off their cloud and made their ways up.

“Father. Mother. Brother.” Bai Zhen greeted each of them. “You come quickly.”

“Zhen Zhen,” the Fox Empress took the first step toward her son. He could see the worry lines showing on her face. “How is your sister? Is she hurt badly?”

“It is just as I mentioned in the missive. She is alright now, mother. She just needs some time to recuperate,” Bai Zhen tried to soothe her nerves.

“What really happened, Zhen Zhen? Your missive is rather vague. What caused her to be injured so badly that Zhe Yan had to use his cultivation to save her?” Then her eyes narrowed down in suspicion. “Is this injury involved with what went down yesterday?”

Bai Zhen winced at her quick mind. He tried not to mention Qing Cang and Ruoshui incident in his missive; still she had made the connection. He schooled his face and offered them a weak smile.

“Mother, why don’t we get inside first? Then I will fill you in on what happened.”

“Where is he now, my supposed son-in-law?” She asked in a low, controlled voice. Her eyes searched around quickly, looking for the Master of Kunlun.

“High God Mo Yuan has been tending to Fifth sister since yesterday, mother. He refused to leave her side.” Bai Zhen replied a little nervously.

“Is that so?” She lifted her eyebrows dubiously at his answer. “Lead the way then, Zhen Zhen.”

Together, all four of them climbed up the stairs, walked pass the ceremony lines Kunlun disciples formed to greet their honorable guests and into the Grand Hall. There, they met with Mo Yuan and Zhe Yan who awaited their arrival. Bai Yi immediately took Zhe Yan to the side and asked about his daughter and her whereabouts. Zhe Yan had nothing to offer, he had yet to see her since morning.

When Mo Yuan greeted her; the Empress nodded at him stiffly without offering any smile. She demanded him to lead them to their daughter immediately. Once inside Mo Yuan’s sleeping quarter, she quickly sat down by her daughter’s side and checked her over. Her husband walked over and joined her a moment later. He smoothed their daughter’s hair out of her face, relieved to see that she was not at Death’s door like the last time.

“Zhe Yan, how is Fifth really,” she called out at her family’s long-time friend. "When is she going to wake up?”

“The lass is fine physically. She is merely under temporary sleep-induced recovery. Her spirit suffered some damages but that could be easily mended with the help of the Soul Lamp. After that she will awake on her own when her spiritual power replenishes and stabilize itself,” Zhe Yan offered his explanation and reassurance at the same time.

“What’s wrong with her spirit? How can it be broken at all?” Bai Zhi frowned deeply; then his eyes widened in realization as he came to the same conclusion his wife had voiced earlier.

Even Qing Qiu was protected by their own brand of magic, which was very powerful, the unleashed power of great destruction that washed over all five of their realms could not be mistaken. “She didn’t. Tell me she didn’t, Zhe Yan.” Bai Zhi frantically asked his friend for confirmation.

“Knowing her, which one would surprise you more, Bai Zhi?” Zhe Yan eyed him skeptically. “That she did or did not.”
Bai Zhi’s improved mood deflated quickly. “Of course, she did,” he sighed dejectedly. “She’s too righteous and stubborn for her own good.”

The Fox Empress watched their cryptic exchange impatiently, she singled her fourth son out. “Zhen Zhen, I believe you owe us a full story, please start from the beginning.”

“She did what?” The Empress’s voice rang out in disbelief; she stood up and stalked towards Mo Yuan. “Why didn’t you stop her? How could you let her offer her spirit?”

“Mother, High God Mo Yuan was in his meditative seclusion, did you forget? He went there as soon as he could and he did save her.” Bai Zhen reminded her gently. “Had he not rescue her in time and destroyed the Bell, Fifth sister might really be too far gone to be saved.”

“He should not create that awful artifact in the first place. Its very existence threatened to destroy everything in its path. Qian Qian shouldn’t have attempted to do what she did.” She exclaimed loudly, “Haven’t she done enough the last time? Why must she throw herself into danger repeatedly. This is clearly your fault.” She pointed her finger at Mo Yuan accusingly, “Had you not brainwashed her with your ideology, she wouldn’t have suffered so much.”

Seeing her in full-blown rage, Bai Zhi sought Zhe Yan’s eyes from across the room, their eyes locked together in wariness. They nodded imperceptibly at each other; each went separately to give their family moral support.

Bai Zhi approached her and laid a calming hand on the small of her back. “It is not fair to lay all the blame on him, don’t you think, my love? You know how headstrong our daughter is, she hardly takes counsel from anyone. Besides, what other choices she had but tried to stop the Bell? Xiao Jiu was there as well. Fifth would never let any harm came to her.”

He continued in his most soothing voice while holding her close to him. “I know, my love, seeing her in this devastating state really breaks your heart. But don’t you remember what was said about her destiny? You divined it yourself when she was still young. Our daughter is meant for great accomplishments, perhaps this is one of them. Hundred thousands of Immortals owe their very lives to her. Who else in the entire Immortal realms has the courage to do what she did? She survives and Zhe Yan promises her good recovery. Let us rejoice on that. That is all that matters, isn’t it?”

“Of course not.” She objected. Mo Yuan’s stoic countenance grated on her nerves. He looked far too composed for her liking. And he did not even offer any excuses for his failure to protect her only daughter, that infuriated her even more. “Don’t you have something to say for yourself?” She demanded aggressively.

Mo Yuan shifted his gaze to her. ”You are absolutely right, Empress, I am truly at fault here. I know my apology probably means nothing to you, but I really am.”

“You are not wrong, it didn’t. At least you have the decency to admit you are in the wrong here. Since you have broken your own promise to never let her come to harm again, I am taking her back to Qing Qiu. You are not allowed to see her under any circumstances.” Her pissed voice thundered through the room.

Mo Yuan pinned her with his own steely eyes. “She will not go anywhere. In my eyes, Bai Qian is already my wife, so it is my duties to take care of her. Besides, Kunlun Mountain is filled with strong divine aura, it will help to speed her recovery along even when she slumbers.”
The Empress glowered at his audacity, after all that happened, he still insisted to keep her with him.
“Let’s not forget she is my daughter first. If I want to take her back, I will. You will not stop me.”

“Leaving Kunlun now would cost her hundreds of year in recovery time, if not more. Is that the chance you are willing to take? What about the Soul Lamp? How do you plan to pry it off the Sky Lord’s clutch now?” He quirked his eyebrow in a direct challenge before he continued. The questions came out more sharply than intended but he refuses to lose his wife. “I am not trying to withhold her family members from seeing her but her well-being is my first priority. If staying here is in her best interest; then she will stay. When she wakes up; she can decide on her own whether she wants to go back to Qing Qiu or remain here.”

“I think it is not totally a bad idea to let her remain here.” Zhe Yan stepped up from the sideline. If would be disastrous if their argument turned into an all-out confrontation. At the rate they were getting at each other’s throats, it would not be long before they reach that breaking point.

“The sooner she is well, the better right? Feng Jiu has to begin her lessons on governance very soon. You are the best to guide her and ease her into her roles. Mi Gu will be busy helping her and overseeing Qing Qiu’s business in Fifth sister’s absence. Zhen Zhen is already hard-pressed. He will have to go back and forth between Northern Manor and the Fox Den.” He let the words hang in the air, then pressed on.

“Wouldn’t it be so much more convenient to let Mo Yuan take care of her? His disciples are here; they will be more than happy to help. She is their youngest junior anyway. Feng Jiu can come and attend to her from time to time. You can also visit anytime, of course,” he pointed out so many promising advantages of Bai Qian’s extended stay in Kunlun. His reasons were all valid and could not be easily ignored.

Bai Zhi stroke his beard thoughtfully as he listened. Zhe Yan’s proposition actually made sense. He found himself leaning toward Zhe Yan’s argument more and more. Fifth would love to stay here, Mo Yuan was right about taking advantage of extra healing properties from Kunlun’s divine aura. The rest of them had their duties to Qing Qiu as well. “I have to agree with Zhe Yan’s points,” he announced his decision.

“Ah Zhi, I want our daughter back home,” The Empress raised her voice.

Bai Zhi took his beloved’s hands in his own and pat them softly. “I understand my love, but this is the best choice for everyone. I promise we will swing by here and check up on her frequently.”

She looked at her second eldest then her fourth son for their opinions; each of them gave her an encouraging smile. Zhe Yan’s intense, heavy stare weighed her down. His eyes shifted pointedly over to her daughter. She knew what he meant to say. This was what Qian Qian would have wanted as well. Fine. She would let Qian Qian stay here. But it did not mean she would go easy on him; he failed to live up to his promise after all.

“If everyone agrees she should stay, then I will say no more. But you have placed her here in your own sleeping quarter, this is highly inappropriate for an unwed maiden. If you insist to keep her here, you could at least make an effort to protect her virtue and reputation. I trust you can find somewhere else to sleep?” She looked at him sharply.

“I understand your concern, Empress, I will vacate the room right away,” Mo Yuan said without a second thought. He did not mind her grudge against him; if it made her feel better. Moving out was the least of his concern; where he slept mattered little to him as long as Seventeenth remained here, within his reach.
“Don’t be so quick to agree, I am not done yet. You will not enter this room and see Qian Qian under any circumstances. My family will be taking care of her from now on. Your disciple may come inside, only when asked. But that’s it.” She said in her most authoritative voice.

“Now, isn’t it a bit too harsh, my love?” Bai Zhi said softly.

Allowing Qian Qian to stay here was the most leniency she could offer. She could not care less about his unease. “He can accept my conditions or not at all.”

“That's fine with me, Emperor,” Mo Yuan stopped him. He did not want to stir discord within her household; the relationship between them was already strained as it was.

“Your requests are duly noted, as long as she is fine, I will not enter this room. But if her condition declines, all bets are off. I will be by her side no matter what your opinion of me is.”

“I guess that's fair enough.” She stuck her nose in the air. “My condition starts now. I suggest you retrieve whatever you will need for your new room and leave my family in peace.”

Note: Comments, critics and suggestions are most welcome. The FJ/DH's arc isn't essential to the plotline, I didn't plan to write about it. But my good old loreinacadis0412 suggested the idea and I love it. So they're here. I think a lot of us had it with how lovesick she was with Dijun in the drama; the FJ in the PB is much more mature, elegant and smart. I chose her to be the one letting the cat out of the bag instead of YH; so now she meddled instead of moping. Not sure if it's for better or worse.

PS. Special thanks to Noitratoxin who proofread this chapter for us; amd to loreinacadis0412 for your wonderful contribution, as always.
Chapter 31

:: Ninth Heaven::

Bai Feng Jiu squeezed Nai Nai’s hand tightly, her face was as paled as a ghost when the maid told Su Su’s backstory up to the day she lost her eyesight.

“He was the one who took away her eyes? But I thought, it shouldn’t...” her voice wavered, tears of mixed emotion, mainly bitterness and anger, well up in her eyes. “How could he be so cruel?”

“Little princess, the Crown Prince didn’t really have a choice. Consort Su Jin and her family would never let Lady Su Su go free without punishment. If he didn’t do it, others would.” Nai Nai interjected quickly before Qing Qiu’s little princess could go further. She did not want others to think ill of her master. He had done his best.

“That’s the most absurd thing I ever heard. There are always choices in life. It’s just that you have to be willing enough to brave them. Clearly, he was not, not for her anyway.” Feng Jiu protested vehemently. Her new-found hatred for her aunt’s ex-fiancé reached new heights. She sent a quick prayer to the Heavens and praised the small blessing that he would never be a part of their family now.

“I remember seeing her a while after that. What happened next? How did she die? Was it during the childbirth?” Feng Jiu prodded her to continue.

“Of course not, although there was some difficulties at first but her birthing went through. The little prince was born very healthy,” Nai Nai smile was tremulous and teary.

“You are not being entirely truthful with me,” Feng Jiu’s eyes narrowed in suspicion, “What kind of difficulties?”

Nai Nai squirmed uneasily under her scrutiny before answering. “Those palace guards refused to inform the Crown Prince that she went into labor. I have to beg the Third Prince for his mercy.”

“How barbaric,” Feng Jiu sucked in her breath, “to turn away even a distressed mother in need. Celestial always boast themselves to be the most prestigious of the Immortals Clan. The way I see it, you lots are in fact the biggest, conniving, no good bullies of us all.”

“Shhhhh.” Nai Nai looked around frantically and made sure no one heard her. “Little princess, please don’t be so upset.” She tried to appease the upset royal.

Feng Jiu was incensed at how inhumane Celestial’s royal family treated her aunt. She took several slow, deep breath, not that it helped much. “What then, after the birth of the Celestial Great Grandson? The Heavenly Lord had her killed, hadn’t he? He let her live long enough to give birth. Figures.”

“No, he didn’t, little princess. It’s...she,” The dam of tears finally burst out, Nai Nai hiccuped. “I didn’t - didn’t know that she had planned it all along. Had I known,” her wailing grew louder and increasingly hysterical, “I would never bring her back there again and again.”

Feng Jiu casted an instant privacy spell around them, Nai Nai’s earnest cry might attract unwanted attention. “What are you going on about? You are not making any sense?” Feng Jiu frowned. “My - I mean Su Su, she planned to do what?”
“Lady Su Su had asked me to walk her to Zhu Xian Terrace many times. She always claimed to like the smell of flowers along the way there and I was so foolish to believe her.” Nai Nai wiped the tears from her eyes.

“That day I was busy feeding the little prince, when I came back to find her, the other maids said she had already left. Later I learned that she had jumped down the Zhu Xian Terrace, her spirit and soul was obliterated.” Nai Nai truly ached for her late Mistress ill fates. Even at the last moment of her life, the peace she craved eluded her.

“I only came to see the truth of her untimely death months later. Consort Sujin deceived her yet again. Lady Su Su was led to believe that was the only way for her to return to the Mortal Realm. She always wanted to; instead she walked to her own demise. Had I been there with her, I would have stopped her in time.” Nai Nai looked distraught. This very thought had plagued her minds for the hundreds years. “Then she would still be alive.”

Bai Feng Jiu staggered back from the maid in disbelief. Her mind went numb at the startling revelation. She had been there with her - Su Su - but never stopped to help the poor soul. If her aunt ever remembered their meetings, would she be disappointed in her? Blame her for not recognizing her and save her from the pain of betrayal? Xiao Jiu failed her - her aunt who always lavished her with affection and treated her kindly. Along with her self-blame, came the righteous anger and the need for vengeance. She vowed that those who had wronged her loved ones would pay dearly for their sins.

Her first thought went to the Crown Prince; the real culprit of her aunt’s suffering. She wanted to see how he would explain himself and his consort’s deception that lead to her death. She took first few steps toward Xi Wu Palace then stopped. “No, this is not right.”

She gave a slow shake of her head and whispered almost inaudibly. “My family. They also need to know about this. They have no idea what she went through.” She turned around and grabbed Nai Nai’s wrist tightly. “Nai Nai, you must come with me.”

“Go with you?” The maid looked frightened; she cried out. “Why? To where?”

“Don’t you want justice for your Mistress, Nai Nai? And retribution for those who wronged her?” Feng Jiu demanded in her most agitated voice.

“Of course I want it, but that is simply impossible. The Sky Lord always listens to Consort Su Jin, not even the Crown Prince can do anything about it,” she said sadly. “Trust me. There is nothing you can do, little princess.”

“I beg to differ, you just haven’t tried it my way.” Feng Jiu lowered her voice to a whisper. “If I tell you your Mistress still lives, what say you?”

For once Nai Nai was stunned into silence. “Little princess, your joke is too cruel,” she was dismayed by her coarse jesting.

“No, no joke. What if I am not telling you a lie? What if I could prove it to you?” Feng Jiu decided to test her resolve. “Will you come with me to repeat the story you have just told me? Then together we might find a way to get back her justice and her eyes.”

Nai Nai bit her lips nervously and hesitantly. What if Bai Feng Jiu did not really try to pull a prank on her? No, her Mistress was too important. Even if this might turn out to be an elaborate joke, she must be certain. “I can’t. No. I mean I can, I want to. But I can’t leave right now. The little prince -
the little prince is coming back soon, I have to tend to him.”

“How about later?” Feng Jiu suggested then resumed her walk again. “I promise to bring you back here before dawn.”

Nai Nai rush ahead and blocked Feng Jiu’s path. “My Mistress, she is really alive?” Nai Nai looked at Feng Jiu for a confirmation; her tone was hopeful, full of longing, perhaps a little scared.

“Come with me and you will see. I have no reasons to deceive you, haven’t I?” Feng Jiu threw the question right back at her.

Nai Nai took a much needed moment to make her decision. “I will come to see you after the little prince lay down for the night.”

“Good.” Feng Jiu gave her a winning smile. “Nai Nai, you can’t tell anyone about this. Not the Crown Prince, nor the little Prince. Do you understand? If words go out, I am afraid troubles will come find her back was finally coming true.

Then another thought came to her. Was it possible that Lady Su Su did not want to see them anymore? Nai Nai still remembered how she estranged herself from both father and son in her last days. If that was the case, Nai Nai would respect her wish.

Moreover if she refused, the little princess might not take her to see Lady Su Su at all. Nai Nai had no choice but to agree to her terms. “Rest assure little princess. My mouth is sealed, I swear no one will know about her miraculous return to life.” For now, she added silently.

Feng Jiu watched Nai Nai slowly walked back to Xi Wu Palace. Every few steps, she would stop and looked back as if she was still uncertain. She gave the maid a nod and somewhat reassuring smile, gesturing her to go and come back swiftly.

:: Kunlun Mountain, sometime later ::

“What is this place?” Nai Nai looked at a very robust, majestic stone architecture in front of her in awe. She shivered in delight. The purity of this land was astounding; just standing her made her so euphoric and energized. She used to serve the Deity of Mountains when she was younger. The holy atmosphere emitted from those sacred mountains was not even a blip compared to this particular place.

“We are at Kunlun Mountain and that is the Grand Hall where they receive visitors.” Feng Jiu pointed at the towering building ahead of them. “Come, Nai Nai, follow me.”

“Little princess, you are sure we should be here?” Nai Nai pulled at her arm tightly. “Isn’t this where High God Mo Yuan and his disciples reside? Won’t our arrival disturb them?”

“There is nothing to worry, High God Mo Yuan is my uncle-in-law.” Feng Jiu said cheekily.

“Bai Feng Jiu, there you are.” The old phoenix’s familiar voice made her wince silently, she turned around and came face to face with Zhe Yan. Feng Jiu groaned. She thought she had successful sneaked in without alerting anyone of her presence.
“Where have you been? Your family have looked for you since morning.” Zhe Yan gave her one of his disapproving looks again.

“Oh well, I was just here and there. Wait, is my father still here?” She asked sheepishly.

“Everyone is here,” the old phoenix looked bemused when she acted like a deer caught in the headlights. “And who is the young lady that’s accompanying you?” He gestured Nai Nai who hid behind Bai Feng Jiu’s back.

“She is a just a friend of mine.” Bai Feng Jiu said distractedly.

“Why did you bring her here, Xiao Jiu?” Zhe Yan glanced at the small fairy in suspicion. “You didn’t kidnap her, did you?”

“Of course not! She came here on her own volition,” Xiao Jiu took offence at his presumption; then pouted. Technically she did not kidnapped the maid; she just come after some coaxing. “Why you always think the worst of me?” She scrunched up her face.

“Because you usually don’t think everything through before you act. You just react most of the time,” he said as matter of factly. “So what is her reason for being here?”

“She has first-hand knowledge of something very important. I thought it will be useful to know. So I persuade her to join me,” Feng Jiu faltered before finishing lamely. “And here she is.”

“What exactly are you referring to?” Zhe Yan gave her the once over scrutinize. The lass was covering something up. She tended to rumble when she did that.

“I am talking about what really went down three hundred years ago, when Su Su was still alive. I trust you knew her very well?” Feng Jiu looked at him pointedly, just as she unceremoniously dropped the bombshell on him.

“What did you just say?” Another voice came closer and asked. “Su Su?”

Feng Jiu wanted to bang her head against the wall. She chanted *not good, not good* repeatedly in her head. High God Mo Yuan was in on the secret now. Her aunt was going to kill her once she wakes up. Anxiety poured off her in waves; she guessed everything was on the table now.

She tugged at Nai Nai’s elbow, push her forward and motion her to follow her suit as she lowered her head down and greet her uncle-in-law. “Bai Feng Jiu greets High God Mo Yuan.” She heard a faint gasp of surprise coming next to her.

“Can I talk to you, alone?” Zhe Yan stepped in. He caught her arm and let her further away from the rest of them. “I understand what you are trying to do, Xiao Jiu but now is not the time.”

“What do you mean? Do you have ideas any what she went through?” Feng Jiu exclaimed and pointed in the direction of her aunt.

Zhe Yan tried to reason with her patiently. “Your grandparents are having a difficult time coming to terms that your aunt was almost lost to them forever. Again. The emotional upheaval was already too much for them. Exposing the truth of her past to them now would be unnecessarily rubbing salt to the deep, raw wound. You understand that, don’t you?”

“I do, really. But, Zhe Yan, she knows things …,” Feng Jiu started.

“Have you ever thought what will happened once she learns the true identity of her former
Mistress?”

“I didn’t plan to tell her that Su Su is actually my aunt.” She defended herself weakly. “And Nai Nai promised not to talk.”

“First, you bring her here to see your family, someone who couldn't possibly be connected to Su Su in any way. You truly expect the maid won’t be suspicious of the connection and come up with a conclusion on her own? She can’t be that slow, nor clueless of what was happening around her, no matter how innocent she looks. How else she survives living in Xi Wu Palace for this long?”

Feng Jiu flushed red in embarrassment. Zhe Yan was right, she really thought Nai Nai would be none the wiser to her aunt’s true identity, if she just glossed over how she came to be here and omitting out the facts. ”But High God Mo Yuan plans to talk the the Crown Prince anyway,” she muttered.

“That’s different. Ye Hua knows enough to whom and what to say (and not to say.)” Zhe Yan sighed. “Whatever you felt the need for them know, say it to me and Mo Yuan. We will bring it to their attention when the timing is right.”

Zhe Yan peered down at her. “As for allowing her to see Fifth sister, you have to clear it with Mo Yuan first. This is not something you can just decide on your own.”

Feng Jiu gave a sign that she understood his meaning. “I will make a formal apology to him and ask for his permission then.”

“You do that,” Zhe Yan gave her his approval.

“Wait.” She held Zhe Yan back. So much had happened in such a short time; she totally forgot what she learned, by accident, this morning. “My aunt, she’s really fine now? What about my cousin? You can’t really do nothing to save him or her?”

“Where did you learn about that?” Zhe Yan stared at her, perplexed. He cursed the one who thoughtlessly mentioned it to her.

“I...overheard Dong Hua and High God Mo Yuan,” she admitted gullibly.

“Of course you did.” Zhe Yan sighed exasperatedly. He rubbed his forehead, annoyed that there was no privacy in this place anymore. Everyone stumbled on the very things not meant for them to know. “Your aunt is fine now, she will recover in time. Sadly, the same could not be said of her child. It was beyond my ability; I wish I could have done more.”

“Listen, Xiao Jiu. This also falls within the ‘when the timing is right’ categories that I just mentioned to you. All right?” He waited until she acknowledged and concede to his point.

“Earlier your grandmother was so enraged with Mo Yuan, she almost took your aunt back to Qing Qiu and forbade him to ever see her again. We had to convince her, for a long time, to even let Fifth sister stay here.” He continued. “Can you imagine what she will do if you mention this tidbit of information to her? You can’t let it slip accident by either. Mo Yuan’s suffering now; he will be inconsolable if your aunt is taken from him. You don’t want that to happen, do you?”

“Of course not,” Feng Jiu protested then asked tentatively. “Grandmother was that angry?”

“Don’t you know her?” Zhe Yan snorted. “She is barely seeing reasons now. I am waiting until she calms down to talk some sense into her. Remember, don’t stir and create more troubles. Do you understand? It is imperative that some of us keep a level head and maintain the little peace of mind
we have now."

“At least, you are sensible enough not to broach the subject in front of Mo Yuan,” he added as an afterthought. “Let’s go back to them.” he beckoned her to follow.

Nai Nai gasped when her eyes fell on the renowned God of War for the first time. Many had claimed that the Crown Prince bore strong resemblance to High God Mo Yuan. Nai Nai always thought they merely exaggerated. Seeing him with her own eyes today; they obviously knew what they said. His outward appearance was almost the same as her Master, save for the beard. It added the sense of seniority and intimidation point to his whole persona. Both excluded the same detached, imposing and quiet attitude but his eyes were not as cold and piercing as her Master.

“And who might you be?” The gentle but firm voice jolted her from the wandering thoughts and back to his question.

She curtsied to him, a little shaken, her head bowed down in respect. “High God, my name is Nai Nai, I’m a personal maid to Celestial’s Great Grandson, Prince Ali.”

“You work for the Crown Prince?” He looked genuinely surprised for a minute.

“Yes, High God, Qing Qiu’s little princess brought me here, she said...,” she stuttered a little; then said the rest in a rush. “She said, my former Mistress is still alive and that she needs my help.”

“Who is your Mistress? One of Ye Hua’s consort?” Mo Yuan asked for confirmation even if he had an inkling whom she was talking about.

“No, High God, I used to work for Lady Su Su, his former Consort, when she was still alive,” Nai Nai answered him truthfully.

Mo Yuan fixed his sharp eyes on her when she said that. “You did? There were a lot of speculations of what really happened with Ye Hua at that time.”

“Yes, High God. I have heard a few of those rumors. Most of them are just that, speculations,” Nai Nai played along. She was not sure whether he was the one little princess wanted her to meet.

“Yes, it will be useful to know what came down that year,” Mo Yuan said. “Your Mistress can no longer remember her past.”

“So she’s really alive?” Nai Nai perked up, excited, then added, “I heard mortals never survives the malevolent energy of Zhu Xian Terrace. Their spirit and soul would be totally obliterated. It’s miraculous enough she survived; I guess it can’t be help if her memory was lost,” she whispered brokenly.

Nai Nai’s thoughts turned sad. Was this was the reason little princess asked her not to tell anyone just yet? Because to her, they were strangers, whom she did not recognize anymore. It was a blessing in disguise; at least she would not be miserable anymore. But it also meant she can not stand up and fight for the justice she deserved on her own. Nai Nai decided then to forego her initial reluctance to talk to these people. They were all honorable beings if they wanted to help out a helpless female.

Just then, Zhe Yan and Feng Jiu came back and joined them. Zhe Yan gave him an imperceptive nod; letting him know everything was all right now.

“You promised to take her to see her Mistress?” Mo Yuan addressed to his would-be-niece.
Bai Feng Jiu curtsied to him, asking for his forgiveness for her reckless behavior. “I am truly sorry, High God. I am acting too impulsive by bringing her here without asking for your permission first. I didn't think through of the ramifications of exposing her.”

The secret of Seventeenth’s past may not be kept any longer once he confronted Ye Hua. But Feng Jiu’s careless act could not be ignored if she was to succeed Seventeenth’s position. “Someone of your position could not just do what you want on whims. There are always consequences of our actions. Sometimes, even the smallest mistakes brought dissension or even war to your doorstep sooner than you realize. I hope you learn a valuable lesson from today.”

“I understand, High God, I will always keep that in mind from now on.” Feng Jiu bowed down to his discipline.

Mo Yuan instructed her to take the maid away. “When you are done, bring her and come find me in my meditation cave.”

“Yes, High God,” Feng Jiu gave him another curtsy.

“Wait here for a while, I am going ahead. Perhaps I could persuade them to take a break. Then you don't have to lie to your family about her presence. You are not very convincing at it anyway.” Zhe Yan told her before he left.

“Thank you so much for your assistance.” She shouted after his back.

Zhe Yan gave himself a rueful smile. The things he did for these children, Bai Zhi really owed him a lots and lots of favors for keeping him from certain headaches.

“Come inside, don’t be afraid, Nai Nai,” Feng Jiu called out. Nai Nai looked around uneasily; when she was positive there was no one in sight, she entered the room. As she approached the bed; she took a good looked at the one lying there. It was really her Mistress! Though she seemed a little different from the last time Nai Nai saw her. Nai Nai was not certain how she came back and why she was here of all places but it was definitely her.

Nai Nai knelt down by the bed and took hold of her hand. She rolled over the sleeves of her left arm and revealed the telltale red scar just above her wrist. “Mistress, it really is you. Praise the Heavens. You finally come back, I have been waiting for you for a long time.” She pressed her tear-stain face into the hand of her Mistress. It took her a while to compose herself, then she turned around to Qing Qiu’s princess. “What is wrong with her? She looks unconscious. Is she still injured from the jump?”

“She is alright. She only needs sometimes to rest and recuperate then she will be fine.” Feng Jiu told her.

Nai Nai gently tugged her Mistress’s hand back inside the blanket. She stood up reluctantly. “I see. I am ready to do what you ask of me now.”

“Good, follow me then,” Feng Jiu said grimly. “The truth needs to come out.”

Note: There’s something I really don’t understand, the first time Su Jin jumped down the Zhu Xian Terrace, she was injured and lost her eyes. Why would Su Su believes Su Jin when she said that the same Zhu Xian Terrace will lead her back to Mortal Realm, instead of hurting her? It doesn't make any sense. In my opinion, Su Su might be innocent but she's not stupid. ==”

PS. Very special thanks to Noitratoxin who speed proofread this chapter for us on such short
notice. :))
Chapter 32

:: flashback::

"I have served the Crown Prince for a couple hundred years, starting before he took his position and his office. He retrieved me from the Deity of Mountain, from the lower realm. He told me I was promoted to a palace maid, from then on my only duty was to attend to his mortal wife. He told me I had to stay close to her all the time and report to him immediately if anything unusual happened around her."

"What was he worried about?" Mo Yuan asked confusedly. "Almost nothing gets past the palace guards. Where did he think the danger would come from?" His eyes narrowed suspiciously. "Or did he believe the danger might come from the inside?"

"There are legitimate reasons for him to be worried. My Lady is but a mortal in the city of Immortals. Many are displeased with her presence among them, especially... especially..." Nai Nai trailed off fearfully.

"Especially, Crown Prince's Consort, Lady Su Jin, his mother, Lady Le Xu and the Sky Lord himself." Feng Jiu finished her sentence, seeing Nai Nai was too distressed to give away their names.

Feng Jiu let out a sound of disgust. "The ladies are bad news with their constant nasty rivalries among harem women. But out of three of them, he is the one that threatened her life. They treated her so horribly, almost inhumane even. For over a year, she was locked up in an unused room alone, even if they know she was with child."

Nai Nai who gathered her courage once again continued. "I heard some of the palace maids talked about that - it happened before my time. Actually there's more, some sort of magical fire broke out where she was imprisoned. My Lady would have died in the fire if she wasn't rescued by Ghost Lord Li Jing. He broke her out of the confinement and saved her. Unfortunately, that fire burned her somewhat; even now she still bore the burn mark on her person."

Nai Nai went on. "The Crown Prince took me to her sometime after that and I stayed with her almost ever since. He said I must be extra watchful and always on my guard, especially if his Consort approached my Lady in any way."

"Despite his warning, I am far too innocent to see through their pretense and conniving minds. Before I knew, I fell for their trickery not just once but twice. The first time, Consort Su Jin lured Lady Su Su to a gathering and tried to frame her. That day, Lord Lingbao Tianzun's phoenix went crazy when my Lady's fan was dropped. It attacked everyone wildly but little princess here," she turned her face toward Feng Jiu, "was injured the most. Lady Su Su and I tried to tell them the truth, we were tricked, nobody wanted to listen. The Sky Lord was very angry and wanted to punish her badly. Had Lord Lingbao Tianzun not stepped in; he might really take her life that day. Little princess is right, he had always wanted to get rid of her."

"Not long after that, Lady Su Jin came up with another plot. It worked this time." Nai Nai voiced her disbelief at the woman's cruelty. Her mind was corrupted with the madness of hatred and jealousy of Su Su, so much she was willing to do anything to get rid of her, even at her own cost.

"She took Lady Su Su to Zhu Xian Terrace and made it looked Lady Su Su pushed her forward and made she fall into it. The Crown Prince rescued Consort Su Jin in time but her eyes were damaged.
To compensate her, Lady Su Su's eyes were taken and given to her. The Sky Lord also wanted to sentence my Lady to three years of lightening punishment. Had the Crown Prince not take the punishment upon himself, she would be dead at the time.

"That's funny how you put it in his favor." Feng Jiu said dryly. "They punished her because they could. Why blame the mortal when the problems lie with him? None of this would have happened if he didn't broke the rule in the first place."

"Nai Nai also forgot to tell the part where he gouged out her eyes by himself," Feng Jiu added. She wanted everyone to know that particular part since she cannot even believe it the first time she heard about it. "Or how she begged him to believe in her, stand up for her and not take her eyes. Obviously, he failed to fulfill any of her pleas for help."

Nai Nai looked really miserable and crestfallen when she heard that.

"After my Lady lost her eyesight and gave birth to the little prince; she completely shut down and distanced herself from everyone. When the Crown Prince informed her about their upcoming wedding; she didn't seem happy at all. She even refused to hold the little prince in her arms; not once since he was born. Everyday, she asked me to take her to the lotus pond near the Zhu Xian Terrace. I didn't have any ideas she was planning to leave us." Nai Nai's regret was deeply etched on her face.

:: end of flashback::

:: Kunlun Mountain ::

"I am going to check up on Fifth sister. Are you coming with me?" Zhe Yan announced as he got up from his seat, his voice had snapped Mo Yuan out of his memories. Mo Yuan looked up at him. They had remained in the cave, long after Bai Feng Jiu took the maid back to the Ninth Heaven. Zhe Yan continued to fill many gaping holes in light of Su Su's revelation.

"You know I am banned from seeing her." Mo Yuan shot him a wilted glare. The idea of seeing her was tempting.

Zhe Yan lips were spread in a sly smile. "I don't know. I remember the instruction your mother-in-law dished out quite differently. She said something about you not entering the room and seeing her daughter," he said, with a hint of mirth in his voice.

His mood was infectious. Despite the circumstance, Mo Yuan can not help but find the hilarity in his brother's shrewdness. "Semantics. Even if I manage to get her out of the room while blindfolding myself, I doubt she would be thrilled with my creativity."

"So you are going to sit here and brood?" Zhe Yan wiggled his eyebrows.

"Of course not." Mo Yuan decided to accompany him. After what he learned about Seventeenth's tormented past as Su Su, the need to see her and reassure himself that she was indeed alive and well was overwhelming. Even a glimpse of her would be worth it.

So many things went through his mind. Before he realised, they were already standing in front of his old bedroom. Zhe Yan got inside the room and deliberately left the door wide open, allowing a full view of the room while Mo Yuan remained outside and let his eyes feast upon her face.

Mo Yuan could almost smell the sweetness of her unique fragrance from the room. The lingering feel of her essence washed over him. It soothed his worries and freed his mind from turmoil. It had only
been a day and a night since they were set apart, but somehow it felt much longer. He longed to wrap her in the cocoon of his arms and feel the heat of her body against him again. With each passing hour, it became harder to bear this aching loneliness.

Mo Yuan only had a short time to bask in her presence before the Empress appeared at the door frame. He sighed when the door was shut in his face and retreated back to his meditative cave.

"You shouldn't be so hard on him." Zhe Yan watched the woman he almost wed at one time walked back inside after she made sure the room was locked. "I understand it is easier to take all of your anguish and frustration out on him. But you are not doing anyone a favor with where you are going with this. Circumstances led Fifth sister down this path. She didn't deliberately seek death, especially when she was about to get her heart's desire. Or you really believe that Mo Yuan wanted her to shoulder this responsibility for him?" he asked dubiously.

"Failure will be failure. It doesn't matter what I believe." The Fox Empress replied. She sat back by her daughter's side and conveniently turned her back to him and his disapproving stare. "There's no need for you to find excuses for him."

"Don't I? I don't see you going out of your way to scold Dong Hua. He got there before any of them did, in case you forgot." Zhe Yan blatantly put the blame on the absent former Ruler of Heaven. "If you really want to point the finger, make sure it's aiming at the right place. Qing Cang wouldn't have been able to break out of the Bell at all had the sentry at Ruoshui River did their duties better."

Zhe Yan walked around her and bent down to meet her icy glare. "In all the years I have known him, Mo Yuan never grieved so openly. Not even when Heavenly Father and Mother passed. You were not there, so you have no idea of what happened. You didn't feel his spirit begin to scatter when Fifth sister lay dying in his arms. Had both Dong Hua and I not intervened in time, he would have followed her into oblivion." Zhe Yan let the information sink into her mind.

"He had just returned after spending many thousand of years gathering his scattered spirit, only because he promised her he will. You can not pin everything that went wrong in your life on him." Zhe Yan knew he was being hard on her but she needed to understand their situation before it went too far.

"Fifth sister decided to use her heartblood to save him. She refused to marry anyone, nor step out of Qing Qiu and have a life. Mo Yuan had no say in any of that; he was dead. That was her decision alone. Had the situation been reversed, would you really blame him? For heaven's sake, give him a break, woman."

The Fox Empress kept her eyes on her daughter's face and pretended not to hear anything her friend said. She got it, what Zhe Yan was trying to make her understand. Despite his flaws, Mo Yuan really loved Qian Qian with all of his being. He would even rather welcome death than to live without her again. At least her daughter's sacrifices were not in vain; she was glad to know that.

Mo Yuan was just too good at bottling his emotion. The man hid his feelings and his heart from everyone under his indifferent mask. She would not deny that she had many doubts when Zhe Yan first revealed to them Mo Yuan wished to take Qian Qian as his bride. What if he found their daughter not living up to his expectation after the marriage? What if he only felt responsible for her wasted chances at life? There were times she was uncertain how true were his feelings for her daughter. Had she not see the longing and the bittersweet expression on his face just earlier; her suspicions would have never been laid to rest.

But she was a mother. It was her duties to protect and care for her children. Even if they might need
not it anymore since becoming an adult. She can not simply let this transgression slip without taking any actions. It was good to see him fully wrapped up and emotionally invested in Qian Qian. But Mo Yuan also needed to learn to take better care of her or face her family's wrath. She would let him wallow in guilt and suffer from their separation for awhile. She was not deluded enough to think that she could hold him back forever.

Mo Yuan stood and looked out at the mountain ranges before him. His mind refused to settle down, not even when he forced it into a deep trance. The maid's words kept haunting him all through the night. He had tried to conjure every possible scenario, find any plausible explanation for Ye Hua's mediocre decisions. Every time he came up empty. Nothing was good enough to justify the heavy hands he dealt with Seventeenth, nor how he simply let thing running its course, thus leading to her ultimate ending.

Mo Yuan really wished he could blame it on the young one's hot-headed, irrational, reckless behaviour. Somehow it did not sound like his younger brother at all. Above anyone else, Ye Hua was taught how to conduct himself with the utmost propriety under Celestial's tight rules. He cannot claim to be honestly ignorant and negligent of the consequences of breaking the most fundamental rules of the Immortals might incur. The fact that he tried to hide Su Su's existence from everyone was a testament in itself. He was very conscious and extremely intentional of what he was doing.

He was also well aware of how his Grandfather ruled his long reign with iron fist. It was unthinkable of Ye Hua to keep up and prolong his clandestine affair with her. Hao De never tolerated anyone he deemed less than worthy; much less a mortal. Ye Hua knew the risks and the punishments that awaited them but stubbornly went along with his poor choices. By doing so, he doomed both himself and Seventeenth to a lifetime of heartaches and sufferings.

The more he thought about it, the furious he became with the Celestial's royal family, his brother included. Mo Yuan really wanted to storm the Ninth Heaven, put Hao De on the spot and demanded a retribution for her grievance. But that meant every single Immortal would learn of her vulnerability and disgrace. It was one thing he knew Seventeenth could do without. She was always a very proud and strong person. For the whole world to know she was once at another's mercy and helpless to do anything to defend herself would make her extremely distressed and humiliated. He could already picture cranky and pissed-off Seventeenth knocking down the people who had wronged her and lay waste to the Ninth Heaven. A sight to behold, he was certain, but one that practically begged for troubles.

Seventeenth's lost memories were both a blessing and a curse. She no longer felt any attachment toward Ye Hua, be it love or hatred. But what if she learned of her forgotten past? Would she go back to Ye Hua? They had a child together after all. Mo Yuan pondered the possibilities. Based on her personality alone, he doubted she would welcome anyone who brought her so much miseries with open arms. But that was a problem in itself, she might turn him away too. At one time, he knew she believed no one was worthy enough for him, not Yao Guang, not even her. If Seventeenth still had an ounce of those ludicrous ideas; she might condemn herself and stayed away just from him just to protect his so-called reputation.

And there was her family to consider. Mo Yuan felt his temple started to throb with an oncoming headache. Bai Feng Jiu was not the type to deliberately withhold the truth from her family for long; not when she was actively out for blood. Once Bai Zhi caught wind of what was happening right under his nose, he had no doubts things would spiral downward from there. The Fox Emperor never did anything by halves, he would get to the bottom of her past grievances. When he did, he would demand a retribution for his daughter's shame and sufferings. All five lands of Qing Qiu would rise to protect and fight for her honor.
Before anyone could blink their eyes, war would rage between their Clans. Celestial's armies might have a lot of trained soldiers to spare but their cultivation were barely passable. While Qing Qiu's simplistic ways of life brought its people closer to the magics of the land. It was not surprising any of them, even small children, surpassed their brethrens in Ninth Heaven in terms of spiritual power. The clash between them will leave both sides opened and vulnerable to outside attacks, especially the Demon Clan who had bide their time and waited for the right moment to strike.

Perhaps it was time to give some serious thoughts to Dong Hua earlier's suggestion.

:: Xi Wu Palace ::

The palace guards looked at each other in panic as High God Mo Yuan, also know as God of War, made his unannounced appearance known to them. It was not often the Master of Kunlun Mountain frequented the Ninth Heaven, much less as of late. It was quite understandable though; especially since that *incident* in the Grand Hall happened a while back. It was supposed to be known about by only a handful of people; somehow the story leaked out and spread through the palace.

Once they regain their mind from stupors; they left their posts and kneeled down to pay their respect to the venerable God. Some began to guess the real reason behind his visit but found nothing worth mentioning, until he asked for the Crown Prince.

One of the guards, braver than the rest of them, summoned his courage and replied. "High God, the Crown prince went to the audiences with the Sky Lord. If you wish to speak with him, perhaps I…"

His sentence was cut off with a raise hand from Mo Yuan.

"I am here on personal visit. If Ye Hua isn't inside at the moment, I will come back later." Mo Yuan said.

The guard glanced sideway at his companion, silently asking for confirmation. Then he turned back and began to address to their guest. "High God, if you don't mind, please come inside to wait. The Crown Prince usually comes here first when he returns."

Mo Yuan acknowledged his request and let the guard show him inside but half an hour passed still there was no signs of Ye Hua.

Just then Jia Yun, Ye Hua's aide, walked inside carrying a tray of documents. He bowed deeply to the Master of Kunlun. "High God, I apologize on his Highness behalf for the delay, the audience session is almost come to an end."

Mo Yuan dismissed him and gestured at the wooden scrolls in the tray. "Are those from the Sky Lord?"

"Yes, High God, these last few years the Sky Lord send more and more documents for the Crown Prince to review." Jia Yun answered truthfully.

"I see. Please carry on. Don't mind me." He watched the aide took the tray deeper inside the room and went behind an elaborated divider then promptly took his leave.

Mo Yuan approach the divider to get a better look of the painting of a small, cosy hut within forest. He heard Ye Hua was very good at painting. Was this one of his works? Behind the divider was once a spacious table, now occupied with stacked of documents. Seeing it was Ye Hua's personal workspace, Mo Yuan turned back to return to his seat when his eyes caught sight of a roll of paper lying on the floor. The aide must have pushed it from the table in his haste to leave.
Mo Yuan picked it up; it seemed to be another painting parchment. He was curious and felt compelled to take a good look at it. The painting was beautifully done as was the woman in it. Every stroke was filled with precision, every details was artfully portrayed. Her warm, inviting smile can put anyone heart at ease while her almost childlike innocence drew out their protective instinct. This was no doubts the famous Su Su, Seventeenth's mortal counterpart. She looked a bit different than he remembered from before his death. Sweeter, more subdued and opened. It was no surprise his brother was tempted to eat this forbidden fruit.

Mo Yuan let his eyes perused her entire being; time became lost to him. The happiness that shone brightly in her eyes and the glow on her face was well captured and bare for all to see. This picture must be painted from before her time in the Ninth Heaven. How he wished for her to remain forever blissful and that cruelty never touched her during her shorten life.

A shift in the balance of energy told him his brother had arrived. Mo Yuan turned his face toward him. Some unreadable feelings lurked deep behind his dark eyes as Mo Yuan stared him down. He did not said anything to Ye Hua for a long time; watching his younger brother's uneasiness grew brought him a small satisfaction.

"Had you succeeded in making her fall in love with you again, would you tell her of your shared past?" Mo Yuan asked without any preambles. His eyes went back to the painting; leaving no more doubts whom he was talking about.

"What are you -?" Ye Hua faltered. A hint of confusion entered his eyes before it cleared and replaced with understanding. The moment of truth had come; it was sooner than he expected. Ye Hua's face grew grim, his mouth pressed firmly into a thin line.

"Would you?" Mo Yuan repeated his question. He glanced at Ye Hua from the corner of his eyes and caught the unyielding expression on his face before it faded away. "I see. Why spoil your second chance at happiness and risk her wrath uselessly when you could have her love and devotion for all eternity. What she doesn't know, won't hurt her, right?"

"I wouldn't know. Considering I have already lost her to you," Ye Hua said stiffly.

"While the unknown might be unable to hurt her you, on the contrary, are still very capable of inflicting the pain on her even as we speak. Aren't you curious of how you accomplish that without even trying, Ye Hua." Mo Yuan arched his eyebrows at him in challenge.

Ye Hua frowned, feeling slighted with his insinuation. Aside from his past mistakes, he had done nothing wrong to deserve this condescending attitude. He only tried to help Qian Qian. "Please enlighten me then, High God, what are you accusing me of?" The Crown Prince returned his daggering glare with one of his own.

"Do you know what Bai Qian enjoys the most? Her preferences are simple, nothing extravagant like any other women. She likes to venture out into nature, waiting for sunrise or watching the snow-capped mountain ranges. But she can't enjoy those smallest things anymore. Now the glowing sun burns her eyes, the reflection of snow blinds her. But what I found to be the most unforgiving is that you knew and didn't bother to do anything about it. You let her eye affliction cripple her and put her life in serious danger." Mo Yuan waited for the realization and the weight of his ignorance to set in.

"If a mere reflection of light caught on a sword could interfere with her ability to see, then imagine how full exposure to bright light will blindsight her. A deadly disadvantage she can never afford in any fights. Be grateful that Qing Cang didn't have enough time to catch on, or her life would be forfeited even before we reached her. But next time, will she be so fortunate? Any opponents will
"I have asked myself more than once whether you are considerate enough to foresee her struggles with being so handicapped. If so, why have you let it continue? If not, what are you thinking?" Mo Yuan revealed his mistrust towards Ye Hua's disregard for Seventeenth. "The way I see it, your only concern is winning her love and making her yours again. You don't see her current suffering, just as you never really perceived her pain of being abandoned by you back then."

Mo Yuan's accusation push Ye Hua over the edge; his infamous self-control waning quickly. "You don't know a thing. You don't know what happened between us. What we went through together. Just because you are her chosen now, you have no rights to come here and give me a tongue lashing."

"Contrary to your believe, little brother, I have heard more than enough. You thought you were being so clever in feigning indifference to her." Mo Yuan replied evenly. Ye Hua had greatly underestimated the length his Grandfather was willing to go to rid his grandson of his human's pest. So anything Ye Hua planned failed spectacularly. "I must commend you though, your deception worked like charms on both side. She had fallen for your lies and believed she was a mere charity and a burden to you. In her opinion, you have never loved her. Perhaps that was why you abandoned her all those years when she had no one else to turn to and why you were so willing to take her eyes."

Were Bai Qian here, she would gawk at Mo Yuan's vehement dressing down with slacked jaws. It was so rare anyone get to hear Mo Yuan's voice reverberated with anger and frustration.

"What do you know? I did what must be done to save her. I love her more than anything, enough to leave this life just to be with her." Ye Hua threw his words right back at him.

"Is that what you really believe? That you could just walk away and live freely with her?" Mo Yuan shook his head at his thoughtlessness. Ye Hua didn't missed the sheer disappointment and deep sadness reflected in his elder brother's eyes either.

"Despite your many plans, you did not save her at all, Ye Hua. You have only condemned her further. The more you struggled to keep her, the more she suffered. Your Grandfather was very determined to push her from your side. Lady Su Jin is not the only pawn in his game. He has many other ways to make her life a living hell. Had she not died when she did, how much longer she has to endure? Until she loses all the joy and the will to live perhaps?"

"That's enough!" Ye Hua growled back. Mo Yuan's cutting remarks plunged deep and reopened the barely healed wound in his heart. His failure to love and protect her as she deserved was always his sore spots.

"No, it is not. I am not done with you." Mo Yuan gripped Ye Hua's shoulder tightly and stared him down. He did not remembered the last time he was so incensed at anyone. Not even Dong Hua and his blasted idea to sacrifice Seventeenth.

With Ye Hua, it was more than some righteous anger. This was the person who once shared their's mother's womb. The very same one he painstakingly nurtured and cared for hundred thousands of years; only for him to turn around and torment his beloved behind his back. Mo Yuan held him accountable for his poor handling of Seventeenth's well-being; his lack of restraints and foresights of the severity of his actions only made it worse.

"Marrying her and making her your consort is your way of make it up for your wrongdoings? You
really believe you could compensate her? That she will forgive and forget after all that went down? Is this what you learn growing up in the Ninth Heaven? It's alright to abuse others as long as you made up for your mistakes while others just has to take it?

Ye Hua shrugged his hand off him. His eyes dulled and the urge to fight back left him at that reminder. A flashback of Su Su disengaging her hands and turned away from him when he informed her of their pending nuptials came back to him. Of course, at the time, he had hoped everything would turn out fine again. He would make her understand his reasons for hurting her and hope for her forgiveness. She had bigger heart than most and would give him another chance. He knew she could do it again. It would just take times and patience for her to forgive him and to allow him to love her again. Clearly, he was wrong, she had already decided to abandon him and their young son. Su Su's love for him was replaced by hatred; she would rather forget him and move on with her life. She would rather marry someone else than coming back to him.

"So you are here to punish me for my past failure?" Ye Hua asked in his defeated voice.

"I come here for some answers, I guess I got them now. And believe me you will know if I want to punish you." Mo Yuan told him before he left. "Send the Soul Gathering Lamp to Kunlun Mountain. Bai Qian needs it. I trust it won't be too hard for you?"

"I never meant to hurt her," he whispered.

"But you did, more so than anyone else. Your action was inexcusable, no matter the reasons. You could have walk away and let her live out her life but you let your personal feelings to cloud your mind, against your better judgement." With his back turning away, he said. "You owe her so much, Ye Hua, to make it right again. I hope you can see that."

Mo Yuan decided not to return to Kunlun Mountain just yet. There was one more person he owed a visit.

:: Tai Chen Palace ::

Dong Hua observed the way Mo Yuan strode inside and sat down on the chair, quietly fuming.

"You have been to Xi Wu Palace then?" Dong Hua asked knowingly. "Did you mention it to him yet?"

"I didn't. We were arguing. The emotion run too deep for any of us to discuss anything else. I was so furious with him and the ways he treated her." Mo Yuan admitted. "Even now that he found her again, he didn't think to give her a choice or be honest with her. He just took advantage of their former engagement and her lost memories to pursue her again. It seems to me all that matters is what he want. That thought disturbs me greatly."

"He was just a boy learning to love. He didn't know how to love and cherish her yet." Dong Hua spoke up.

"That was before but now? Shouldn't he have learned from past mistakes?" Mo Yuan angled his face toward him and accepted the teacup that was passed to him. "Did you have any ideas he planned to quit and elope with her?"

"I have suspected he tried to fake his own death in his final battle with the Mermaid Clan. From the stories I heard, he went down too easy." Dong Hua offered what he knew.

"He disappointed me so much, Dong Hua, when he said that." Mo Yuan sighed. "Did he ever
stopped to think what will happen in the wake of his supposed death? How both Clans will deal with the fallout? The war would rage for another centuries by his action alone. He shirked his responsibilities, in the name of love, and left for the others to clean up his mess. No matter what Hao De did, he didn’t deserved that. Nor the rest of the Clan."

"It gives me doubts. Would he really make a better lord than his Grandfather?"

Mo Yuan questioned Dong Hua openly.

"When his head is no longer messed up with frustration of unrequited love, yes." Dong Hua intoned. "You know the alternative outcome will not be pleasing."

Mo Yuan’s silence that followed spoke of his grudgingly acquiesce and understanding between them.

"So what next?" Dong Hua mulled over their plan.

"Ling Bao Tianzhun."

"A good choice. He's Ye Hua's teacher and knows the struggles within the Clan well." Dong Hua hummed his approval then raised his eyebrow at him. "Not Bai Zhi?"

"I am saving him for the last." Mo Yuan rubbed his temple for a few times.

"He will be furious with you." Dong Hua snickered. "Family, they just complicate everything."

Mo Yuan did not made a came back this time; he already knew that. He stayed there for a while then proceeded to the Realm of Supremacy.

Note: I decided to go with flashback scene instead since we (as in me & my proofreader) agreed that the whole conversation will be too long (after the cut, it's still 5xxx+ words. Ouch.) Some might find it a little (?) boring. This way the story move somewhat.

**Very special thanks to Noitratoxin; my hard-working proofreader. May she enjoys her holidays. :))**
Chapter 33

: Kunlun Mountain ::

Ye Hua stood watching the Grand Hall for some quiet moment; as expected, a disciple came out to
greet him and took him inside. If Ye Hua was intrigued by why he was being led to the meditative
cave instead of the Hall, he did not bother to ask. After being announced, he found his way inside
the cave and came face to face with High God Mo Yuan.

Ye Hua passed over the secured package in his hand to him wordlessly. The air between them
seemed tense and awkward more than ever. Ye Hua gave in and decided to bite the bullet when the
silent standoff stretched too long.

"There is no need to return the Soul Gathering Lamp soon. Take the time, as long as you need." Ye
Hua said lamely, hoping it will be enough to break the ice between them. Yet he found no solace in
High God Mo Yuan's cool, steady gaze, being directed at him.

If Ye Hua had a habit of rolling his eyes in exasperation, he would do so. Since he did not, he
resigned to do what he came here for. "The other day, you said I was being selfish and ignorant to
her sufferings. It is true that I haven't done anything for her," he admitted as much. "It is not because
I couldn't careless about her plight but reclaiming Qian Qian's eyes is not as simple as it may sound."

Knowing Mo Yuan just came back from the dead, Ye Hua explained the current situation of
Celestial's court to him. "You should remember the Su Jin Clan. After all, they volunteered to fight
and die for you during the last Ghost War. All ten thousand men perished just to give the opening
you needed to attack the Ghost Clan. Su Jin, the Side Consort my Grandfather tried to give me, is the
lone orphan left of that Clan. My Grandfather considers them martyrs and decided to adopt her into
our family and raised her as a princess to show his gratitude and generosity."

"Su Jin has good relationship with the current heads of the Clan. They have certain sway among our
Clansmen, even my Grandfather has to listen to them to a certain degree. Without a good cause, I
can't simply take away her eyesight or they will condemn me for being impartial to Qing Qiu. Had
Qian Qian agreed to marry me, it would make her life in the Ninth Heaven much more difficult than
it already is."

"And just so you know, were she in a fight, I will never let her face any opponents alone. I will be
right there with her." Ye Hua enjoyed the sight of his brother's eye twitching in slight irritation. He
can not resist making that little jab and rubbing his failure to keep her safe into his face just a little.
High God Mo Yuan's high and mighty attitudes had rubbed Ye Hua the wrong way the other day.

"I also realized something else. If you care enough to rip into me for giving Su Su grief and scold me
for doing nothing to fix her eyesight, then you certainly will not let those who wronged her get away
unscathed either." Ye Hua narrowed his eyes at Mo Yuan suspiciously. "You are planning to do
something, aren't you? What exactly do you have in mind?"

Mo Yuan's gaze deepened as he answered Ye Hua's question. "Are you sure you want to know?
Because once you are in the know, you are going to be a part of it." He said in warning. "You might
want to stay away, it will be easier for you in the future."

Ye Hua quirked his eyebrows at Mo Yuan, unamused. He was no shirker, nor a coward who was
afraid of going the distance and getting implicated.
"I see. You are intending for something with a larger consequence than I expected then, if you are worrying about my standing with the Clan hereafter. I guess it will have to be, especially if it by any chance involves with what went down at Ruoshui River that day." Ye Hua added slyly and gave Mo Yuan his pointed looks, letting some of his irritation shimmer through. "Count me in whatever you and others are planning," he said.

"Very well." Mo Yuan acknowledged his decision and gestured him to come closer.

"Your plan will only work if prominent deities and prestigious immortals turn away from him or stay silent without asking for lenience on his behalf." Ye Hua commented, once he was clued in on their plan.

"Someone has to come forward and present their case, proving how the Sky Lord has been abusing his authority and power. The more influential and well-respected they are, the better. None would be so quick to jump in and side with him." Ye Hua saw Mo Yuan looked at him with bemused expression and realized he already had those angles covered.

Ye Hua assumed High God Mo Yuan had already made some contacts, he was highly reputed for his cunning plans and execution after all. Ye Hua wondered how many he had successfully recruited for the plan. The Fox family, for their great stature among Immortals and all realms would probably make the most impact; yet they were from another Clan. If it was someone within their rank that stepped forward, the blunt effect would be more swift and staggering.

"I might have someone worth of our interest." If he could persuade him to make the move against the Lord; Ye Hua added in his own head.

"If you think they will help our cause and can be trusted." Mo Yuan echoed his thoughts.

Ye Hua tilted his head, asking. "When will you execute the plan?"

"The first day of Spring Festival," was his short reply.

"Until the end of next month then," he acknowledged. A big gathering would be held on the day; all Clan's heads usually tried their best to make their appearance. It would be their most optimal opportunity to strike.

There was so little time, he had to move things along faster. Ye Hua got up, signaling he was done with this conversation. He hesitated for a moment. "There is something I wish to ask." Knowing Mo Yuan and Qian Qian just lost their child; he did not want it to come out as insensitive.

Sensing High God Mo Yuan was waiting for him to continue, he went on. "I wish you would allow my son, Ali, to come and visit Qian Qian sometime. He is too young to truly understand why she would no longer be with us anymore and clamored incessantly to see her. I would rather not let him down, if possible."

Mo Yuan had long accepted the truth of Seventeenth being a mother of another man's child. Sooner or later he would see his nephew, who would also become his step-son. The complicated relationship between them was both ironic and amusing.

"You can bring him here." Mo Yuan gave his consent readily. "As for seeing her, bring him to Zhe Yan first. If the Fox family allows it, Ali can come and visit her anytime. I will not begrudge the mother and son's meeting."

"Thank you," Ye Hua said with his utter most sincerity. It came as a surprise to learn that the Fox family were residing here and seemed not to leave anytime soon, if his implied answer was any
"You are in the dog's house, aren't you?" Ye Hua realized the true reason his brother hid here, in this cave, of all places. At least, he was not be the only one to suffer their wrath.

Ye Hua left the cave a while later, still bemused at his elder brother's misfortune. As he walked pass the Lotus Pond and heading toward the staircase; High Immortal Die Feng stepped into his way. He did give Ye Hua his customary greeting but with stony face.

"Is there something amiss?" Ye Hua cannot help but ask, a little bewildered at his strange behaviour. Die Feng was probably one of the most refined and respectful person he had ever met.

"I have a request for you, Your Highness." The first disciple of Kunlun Mountain said stiffly.

"What can I do for you, High Immortal Die Feng?" Ye Hua sought to ascertain where his displeasure came from.

"Of course, you could." Die Feng drawled. "With due respect, Your Highness, I ask you not to come back here again unless absolutely necessary."

Immediately Ye Hua swung his eyes up to meet Die Feng's and met with his steely, sharpened scrutiny. He could almost feel the weight of the stare. "Have I offended you somehow?" he said softly; a sombre question in his eyes.

"I think you know that answer better than anyone, Your Highness. I do not feel comfortable with you traipsing around our sanctuary anymore," Die Feng told him bluntly, "especially with Seventeenth around."

At first, Ye Hua was a little taken back from the forcefulness in his tone, but his next phrase explained where his hostile reaction came from.

"When Qing Cang said that he had condemned her and turned her into a mortal, everything became clear to me. The irregularities in her story about her supposed slumber years after she went to seal Qing Cang, your sudden pursuit of Seventeenth and her eyes affliction. Had I knew the mortal you brought along that day was Seventeenth, I would never let her go with you."

Die Feng kept his eyes steady on the Crown Prince. "So, I am asking you not to come here and tempt her anymore. Not when she no longer holds the memories of that lifetime with you. After she recovers, she is going to marry our Master. It will be best for all involved, if you conveniently take your leave from around here."

"That's between me, her and your Master, in case you forgot yourself, High Immortal Die Feng." Ye Hua replied frostily. If his daggering eyes could kill, Die Feng would be shred into pieces right now.

"That is where you are wrong, Your Highness. She is a disciple of Kunlun Mountain. If you hurt any of our brothers, or sister in this case, you will answer to all of us." Die Feng stood up to his full height. "Our Master is too noble. He will likely scold you at most, considering you being his younger brother. Some of us are not so forgiving as he is, so from now on please tread carefully. It would be fortunate if Seventeenth never comes in contact with you again."

Zi Lan stopped in his track and pulled Chang Shan back; effectively hiding both of them behind the rock slab. They were just on the opposite side of the Lotus pond, heading to the kitchen to retrieve lunch for their guests when they run into the Crown Prince and their eldest senior.
"Zi Lan, what are you doing?" Chang Shan exclaimed when he was dragged back and almost tripped over his own feet.

"Shh. Look ahead, senior." Zi Lan swung his eyes toward the scene ahead of them. "Don't you find their interaction a little ... off?"

"Off? How?" Chang Shan followed his gaze and concentrated on them instead. Both were too far to hear their conversation. After watching their body languages for a moment, he hushed unbelievingly. "Are they arguing? Senior looks really angry. The last time I saw him this upset was when Li Jing came here to pursue Seventeenth."

"But this is the Crown Prince," Zi Lan reminded him, "Senior always has the utmost respect for him."

"Clearly not anymore," Chang Shan added. His eyes grew big when Die Feng advanced on the Crown Prince and stood toe to toe with him. "I wonder what madness pushes him to openly challenge him like that. Senior is the most level-headed of us all."

"I don't know. Let's go and find out, huh?" Zi Lan asked him. Chang Shan agreed, before long both joined their senior on the other side.

"Greeting to the Crown Prince, Senior." Second and Sixteenth greeted them and watched fascinatedly at the silent glare exchange going on between two men. "Um, pardon our interruption but there seems to be a situation developing here?" Chang Shan shifted his eyes from the Crown Prince to their senior. "Senior?" He prompted.

"Nothing important." Die Feng said dismissively. "I merely caution the Crown Prince to not wasting his energy by making his trip here. Any messenger could relay his message in his stead. He is obviously still recovering from using his cultivation to destroy the Bell of Eastern Emperor."

"Is that what is happening?" Zi Lan sounded not fully convinced.

"And I am telling your senior; his concern is misplaced. I know perfectly what I am doing." If Ye Hua's voice was not so biting; they might believe him yet.

"Which might not be the best for your health." Die Feng's smile turned even more dangerous.

Before their confrontation could escalate further, a voice rang out. "What's going on here?" All three of them turned around and faced the Master of Kunlun.

Mo Yuan came out to see what was holding Ye Hua's interest in Kunlun Mountain. He doubted Ye Hua would dare to see Seventeenth when he knew full well the whole Fox family was here. But as his essence continued to linger and swell out suddenly like a raging storm; Mo Yuan was curious, enough to leave his cave and investigate. He was baffled to see his disciples, Die Feng in specific, locked in what suspiciously looks like a heated confrontation with his younger brother.

Mo Yuan watched all three of his disciples intently; only Die Feng refused to meet his eyes. He sent Ye Hua away and commanded them to follow him back to the cave. As soon as Mo Yuan sat on his platform, Die Feng fell to his knees, bowing his head to the ground. Second and Sixteenth looked at each other skeptically before following suit.

"Die Feng, would you like to explain to me what was happening back there?" Mo Yuan frowned at his eldest disciple.

"I must beg for your forgiveness. I knew I failed to conduct myself properly and brought shame to
your name. Master, please punish me." Die Feng remained bowed in front of his mentor but refused to elaborate and explain himself.

Mo Yuan turned his questioning eyes to the other two. Chang Shan gave out under his mentor's increasing ire. "Master, I have no idea what went down before I come; it seems to me they were arguing. So, Sixteenth and I decided to look into the matter. I only heard first senior telling the Crown Prince not to visit Kunlun Mountain anymore."

"Is that so?" Mo Yuan raised his eyebrow; turning to Die Feng once again. "What compelled you to tell him off?"

Die Feng slowly sat up straight. He calmly informed his mentor. "Master, you often impress on us; we brothers must take care of our own, especially Seventeenth since she was naughty, reckless and most likely to offend others. I always take your words to heart. Once I learned that Seventeenth and Su Su is one and the same, I can not let the Crown Prince's horrible treatment toward Seventeenth slide. His actions were inexcusable no matter the reasons, so I told him not to come here and tempt her anymore."

"Senior, what are you talking about? Who is Su Su and what crime did the Crown Prince done to her to rouse your anger?" Chang Shan cried out in confusion.

Zi Lan, being the sharp-witted person he was, quickly made the connection. He sucked in a deep breath as realization dawned instantaneously. Yan Zhi once told him of her meeting with a strange mortal named Su Su who owned the Jade Purity Fan of Kunlun. Was that Seventeenth?

Die Feng decided he would rather brave Mo Yuan's wrath than stay silent. "Master, I will take any punishment you deem fit, but I have to ask you. Are we not really going to do anything? Her honor was compromised, her eyes taken, even her life was forfeited. It pains me that I did not do anything for her injustice."

"What!" Chang Shan and Zi Lan shouted. "Master, what senior said, is it true? Seventeenth she . . . she " Zi Lan trailed off, too horrified to finish the sentence.

"Master, she is our youngest junior, they have the rights to know too." Die Feng bowed low again, beseeched him to reveal the truth to everyone.

Mo Yuan gave out a heavy sigh. While Die Feng was very filial and one of the most understanding disciples. He was also very determined and firmly believed in what was right and wrong. Knowing his characters, he will not simply drop the matter and retreat back into the corner. And what First, Second and Sixteenth knew; the rest of the boys would learn not soon after. He never wanted to hide anything from them either. Die Feng was right, they deserved to know the truth from him rather than the grape vine.

He relented. "Very well."

The more tales spilled out of their mentor's mouth, the more Second and Sixteenth became disturbed and resentful toward the Ninth Heaven's ruling family. They understood now why their first senior did what he did. As for Die Feng, even if he knew some parts of Su Su's life, he was not aware of the full extent of her tragic life. The sight of his bowed-down head and bended-back was painful to watch. Second and Sixteenth could tell he was blaming himself for his inability to find her and render aid in time. The mood of all presented in the cave was sombre and subdued.

"Master, may I make a suggestion?" Die Feng spoke up. He appeared to have collected his thoughts.
A determined expression adorned on his face. "I believe my family can be of help to you in this endeavor. Though my father is not very sociable and doesn't go out much, he is still the West Sea King. His support will undeniably add strength and power to our alliance."

"I appreciate your consideration but before you go further," Mo Yuan reminded him, "your father might not want to be a part of this."

"Master, my father may prefer his solitude but he is a righteous person. He never condones deplorable behaviours from his entourages, he will be less tolerable toward the ruler of the Ninth Heaven. I am certain once he learns the truth, he will not be_adversed to join our cause." Die Feng told his mentor confidently. His uncle might be a coward but he father was not; he would want to stand up for what was right. "If Master agrees, I will leave immediately and talk to him."

Mo Yuan gave him his permission but also cautioned him. "The debts your family owed me was paid in full when I used your brother to recuperate my spirit. Your father doesn't have to do anything unless he wants to. Do you understand me?"

"Very clear, Master. I will take my leave at once, I bid you farewell." With that, Die Feng left Kunlun Mountain in haste and headed back home. He has a very important mission to accomplish after all.

Zi Lan waited until both of his seniors left for his chance to speak with his mentor alone.

"Master, there might be one more person I could talk into joining our side," he spoke up a little hesitant.

"Whom are you speaking of, Zi Lan?" Mo Yuan questioned him.

"The Ghost Clan are in total chaos since Li Jing's death. They are divided into factions, each listens to no one. What if someone takes up the reins and assumes their control? Someone they will bow down to and follow?" Zi Lan continued.

"You are talking about the Ghost Princess, correct?" Mo Yuan said knowingly. Seventeenth once or twice mentioned in passing about Sixteenth and the Ghost Princess. She pointed out they were being rather close together. Mo Yuan was curious about the true nature of their relationship; if he was confident enough to sway her into taking the troublesome mantle of leadership of the fallen Ghost Clan.

Zi Lan flushed slightly under his mentor's searching looks. "Yes, Master. What if she becomes the next Ghost Lord then agrees not to add her voice to the Sky Lord when asked?"

"You want to put her on the spot, Zi Lan?" Mo Yuan was surprised with what he proposed. "Have you ever thought she might not want to ascend to the throne? Or risk her entire clan for unforeseeable outcomes? She is not obligated to implicate herself in this manner."

"It is her birthright, it doesn't matter if she wants it," Zi Lan said grudgingly. "Sooner or later, the Ghost elders would find her and force her into it. It is better if she could gain an upper hand first and find a formidable alliance on her own. She could offer peace treaties between our Clans. That alone would appease a lot of people. And I have every confidence in your plan, it will work as it has always been." He smiled knowingly.

"And there is one thing I believe she will risk everything for," Zi Lan added. "Her niece. The one she tried to make the Elixir work for. Master, if you offer her the divine fungal grass, I believe she will definitely be more inclined towards us."
"She still can not make a working Elixir," Mo Yuan contemplated his suggestion, "unless you already has a solution."

Zi Lan swallowed hard, his mouth went dry. He knocked his head upon the ground with a loud thud. "Master, this might come out as being unfilial to you, but never for a moment have I sought to betray your trust. You have taken care of me, an orphan without a family's name, prestige or social standing, for twenty thousand years, I would never forget that. But I really want to help Yan Zhi, she deserves better. At least, if her niece is alive, she will have something to live for. Please, Master, allow me to refine that Elixir for the child."

"You wish to sacrifice your own cultivation for her? A Ghost Princess?" Mo Yuan asked for confirmation that it was indeed his final decision. It seemed he was enamored with the Ghost Princess more than he let on.

Zi Lan mistook his question for reprimand; his heart was swarmed with remorse, guilt and self-hatred. "If Master allow me this, I will spend the rest of my days guarding the Sea of Innocence to atone for my sins."

"And what sins are you committing to merit such harsh punishment?" Mo Yuan intoned gravely. It saddened him that young Zi Lan believed he deserved such torment.

Zi Lan looked up at his mentor's face at that probing question. "I wish to help our once sworn enemy. It is wrong of me to even think about it, I know that."

"Zi Lan, have you learned nothing in all the years you spent here," Mo Yuan sighed. "Nothing is wrong with having compassion. In fact, it is the greatest quality any Immortals could live by. Or I would have stopped Die Feng from helping Xuan Nu back then, when she was left to die at our steps. Whatever Qing Cang did was on his own and not his children's, I never fault any of them for their father's sin. Everyone is responsible for their own actions after all. What you are trying to do is saving a child's life. I see no wrong with that, then how could I punish you or let you foolishly punish yourself?"

"Master!" Hot tears dripped down Zi Lan's face unbidden. He crawled closer to his mentor; holding his leg firmly and cried. His life was so fortunate to find the most understanding mentor and caregiver. He promised himself to never fail his expectations and served his mentor to the best of his abilities.

Mo Yuan pat his head gently. "Tell the Princess I will give her the divine fungal grass and my peace offering. Kunlun Mountain will not attack the Ghost Clan unless challenged, that is my promise to her." With that he sent Sixteenth away from his side to find and locate his Princess.

Dong Hua, Ye Hua, Mo Yuan and his disciples had gone their separate ways and made contacts with their trusted individuals; each fulfilling their roles in the grand design. A whole month flew by with a flurry of activities, now they were ready to make the move. Only one key person was left unknown and unaware of their plan. It was truly a blessing that Bai Yi took Feng Jiu back the Fox Den; thus forwent the chance of her spilling the beans to the wrong person. Now was high time to bring Bai Qian's father in.

Zhe Yan led Zhen Zhen to the side, away from the prying eyes of his family and asked for his assistance. Mo Yuan and him planned to bring Bai Zhi to Taichen Palace for private discussion. They can not chance the Fox Empress to gain any knowledge of what was about to happen before the time came, or all would be for naught. Bai Zhen and he had a heated argument before the younger fox relented and agreed to play his part, albeit begrudgingly.
Bai Zhi remained clueless of the true purposes of their impromptu visit to Dong Hua's manor; until Mo Yuan slowly unfolded the mysteries behind Bai Qian's disappearance six hundred years ago.

"What did you just say?" Bai Zhi stood up abruptly and knocked his chair back down. His roaring voice reverberated through the spacious room. "Tell me, you did not just inform me Qian Qian is that Celestial's Crown Prince mortal's wife? And that the whole family tormented her and forced her to kill herself?"

Dong Hua watched his still hot-headed former classmate burst into fury, as anticipated. Had he been in his true form; Dong Hua did not doubt his fur would bristled all over. A sight he had yet to see, he snickered under his breath. "That seems to sum it up nicely." He commented humorlessly; earning himself a warning glare from the Master of Kunlun.

Bai Zhi walked towards his would-be son-in-law with long, angry strides, his whole body pulsating with a rage. "You! You knew this all along and didn't tell me. How can you sit there and do nothing? I can't believe this. If you do not care enough about Qian Qian, fine. I will deal with this myself. I will make Hao De regret the day he ever laid a finger on her." He pushed Mo Yuan's shoulder away from him and headed for the manor's entrance.

"You need to calm down, Bai Zhi." Zhe Yan placed himself in the angered Fox Emperor's path, blocking his exit.

"You too. Not a word." Bai Zhi pointed his finger at Zhe Yan accusingly. "You are in cohort with them, aren't you? How could you? I thought we are family."

"Nobody here wants to deny you the truth but certain precautionary measures are needed to be taken. The plan is far more important than worrying over your slighted feeling." Dong Hua's apathetic voice carried over across the room.

"What plan are you talking about?" Bai Zhi paused then turned around. His eyes swept over each of them warily. "What did you lot do behind my back?"

"If you will just quiet down, you will learn none of us treat her sufferings lightly, Mo Yuan in particular." Zhe Yan picked up his cue to continue. "Yes, we have executed parts of our plan without your knowledge. But You, Bai Zhi. You will be the one making it happening. So, cool your head and sit back down, so we could begin."

"Definitely not." Bai Zhi rejected out right when he heard the plan the first time. "You want to put him on the throne? How is that a punishment for what he did to my daughter?"

"Look at the bigger picture, you can vent your anger on him later." Dong Hua said. "The alternative is Qing Qiu going to war with Celestial."

"I see no problems with that." Bai Zhi scoffed. "Let us see whose people are the better, stronger ones."

"Bai Zhi, don't be rash. Fifth sister almost sacrificed her life to save the whole Immortal world. Do you think she will be pleased, knowing you have started a war in her name when she wakes up?" Zhe Yan said in a soft admonishment. "Wouldn't her efforts be in vain then?"

The Fox Emperor let out an impatient huff and turned his face away. "Mark my words. I still believe it's the worst plan ever."
Note: There will be no update this weekend. I'm sorry but I'm taking my much needed vacation. :)

*I've talked to a reader on the other site and tried to reason why YH did what he did. I've not much love for him, as you know it. But I guess I understand the whys. They might be wrong though, just my two-cent opinions. First, he's being a strategist first and a lover last. He sees everything as winning and losing. He didn't do anything to help Su Su because he knows it won't make him winning over his grandfather in the long run. Things would be worse for Su Su. (in his opinion, not mine.)

Then, remember, YH was abused as a child when he was growing up. He's highly intelligence but a bit low on the EQ side. Hence, he did not fully understand others’ plight. He has no sympathy toward young SJ from the start; it makes everything worsened. What he did to Su Su is practically what others did to him. I see the pattern here. He's forced to endure and being abandoned by those he loves, albeit unintentionally. His parents never truly fought for him either. They just left things be, left him to fight for himself. Unconsciously, he thought it's okay to do those same things to Su Su as well. I mean he only stepped in when it's threatening her life. All in all, he misjudged everything based on his own experiences which is so sad.

As I said, it was just an idea of mine and I'd like to share it with you. ^^
Chapter 34

Chapter Notes

The events in the dreamscape set around the first few months into Mo Yuan and Bai Qian's retreat in the Mortal Realm.

Bai Qian discreetly watched her mentor from the corner of her eyes. She kept her pretense of reading the bounded-paper novel she bought from the mortal realm. Her eyes perused his long fingers, currently wrapped around a wooden scroll which she would bet was yet another book of philosophy of Taoism, to his toned arm, his bicep and finally his face. The same face that she spent unimaginable years watching without being bored.

There were times she itched to caress his soft lips, his pert nose, his scuffed beard or rake her fingers through his long hair. Suffice to say anywhere on his body she could lay her fingers, now that she could do it without being accused of defiling and ravishing her own respectable mentor. She wanted to breathe in his sandalwood scent, to feel the heat of his flesh under her claws and to listen his heartbeat to convince herself he was really here; alive and very much in love with her. Bai Qian’s brows unknowingly furrowed deeper as she got lost in her thoughts. She knew Mo Yuan well enough to recognize that his feeling for her was genuine. The way his eyes swept across her was full of fondness, warmth and caring. His lips tugged up and spread into smiles more often when they were alone.

Honestly speaking, the very fact that he was in love with her still boggled her mind. When did it start? Was it love at first sight? Did he see her true identity through Zhe Yan’s disguised spell and was enamored by her beauty? Bai Qian immediately scoffed at her own ridiculous speculation. While many praised her to be the first and foremost beauty among the Immortals; she was not deluded enough to believe that her looks alone was enough to turn Mo Yuan’s head. It was given that Mo Yuan had met countless of stunning beauties along his long life. Yet never before he got together with someone, much less asked any of them to be his lifelong companion. At least, if what she heard from Zhe Yan and her family was correct. So what gives? What did he find in her that made her desirable to him. She bit down her lips; wracking her brain to find the reason.

Mo Yuan watched her watching him from under his eye lashes with great amusement. He was fascinated with the ever changing expressions on her face. At first, she was checking him out discreetly, or at least that was what she thought it was. Then she became annoyed with something else and started chewing her lips mindlessly. Now she was being skeptical; the lingering, hesitant gaze she trained on his person was very telling.

He moved silently over to her, seeing she completely retreated into her own inner thought. He rubbed his thumb gently over her abused flesh. “What is it that has you upset over?” Her doe eyes
looked up at him; her gaze staring straight into his own, searching, looking intently for the answer her inquisitive mind yearned for.

“Seventeenth,” he reminded her of his question. This habit of falling into trance at an inappropriate moment seemed never really leaving her after all these years.

Bai Qian licked her lips nervously; the soft tip of her tongue swept over his thumb by accident, sending a shiver of desire down his own spine at the innocent yet suggestive gesture.

“I’m merely wondering,” she whispered. “Why me? Out of all female immortals you could have had, you chose me. What is it that you see in me? What is it that you want from me?”

Despite her vulnerability; she looked at him in earnest and did not shy away from the intensity of his answering gaze. “Why not you? You intrigue me. A feat not many succeeded.” His reply was lighthearted, almost teasingly.

For once, Bai Qian seemed incredulous. “I got you intrigued?” her voice pitched high in disbelief, “That is your answer?”

He chuckled at her affronted expression. "It is not necessarily a bad thing." So this was what twisted her knots? Mo Yuan swallowed his grin, lest it provoked her ire again. "Honestly, I never plan to fall for anyone; least of all you. You are my disciple after all,” he shushed her protest, placing his index finger upon her lips.

“Admit it, you are a walking contradiction, Seventeenth. You defy everything that a proper, high-born lady is supposed to be. You spent twenty thousand years in Kunlun Mountain learning tactical strategies and how to wage war instead of running a household. You live your life with abandonment and unbidden by rules. Why else did you get yourself entangled with Li Jing? Someone you were not supposed to fall for?” Mo Yuan said.

"At the same time you are sensible, honourable and righteous as one of your station should be. You often stand up when faced with prejudices and injustices even when it is not directed at you. You can be unforgiving and ruthless, ready to tumble with any ruffians, yet gentle, compassionate and caring to the weak and helpless."

Mo Yuan ran his finger through her long, smooth hair, reassuring and conveying his affection for her. "You are witty and borderline sarcastic, brash and disrespectful at times but you did not do it
out of pure spite. You simply do not follow or trust blindly and only listen to those who earned your respect. Those qualities are what hold my interest.”

Bai Qian felt the heat rising to her face. She doesn’t know if she should be offended or pleased with his observation of her characters.

Mo Yuan cupped up her face in his hand, not allowing her to turn her face away from him. “Does that answer the questions you ask of me, Seventeenth?”

“I suppose so,” she murmured softly, shyly even. But she did not stop there, more questions spilled from her mouth. “So that’s why but how? And when did you know you’re in love with me?”

Mo Yuan lifted his eyebrows at her unrelenting demands. He took a long time to reflect upon himself. “It is just like I said, I never plan to fall for anyone. For a long time. I believed what I felt for you was a fatherly affection towards a young girl who is a daughter of my old friend.”

“Perhaps..,” he trailed off, “Perhaps, the first cue was when Yao Guang kidnapped you and held you captive.”

“When you were delirious with high fever, you kept repeating Yao Guang or anyone else is not worthy of me. Then you refused to let of my hand and held it tightly against you all night. Your obvious possessiveness of me warmed my heart and made me inexplicably happy.”

“Then Qing Cang kidnapped you. You came to me in my vision, in distressed. Your fear-stricken face haunted me so. Despite the timing was not right and the consequences could be disastrous, I rush out alone to save you and Ninth. When I got there and you flew straight into my arms and hugged me so tightly; I felt relieved, calm and whole again. That was when I realized the depth of my feeling for you is far beyond that of mentoring.”

“So that’s why you took my trial upon yourself? You were afraid I would get hurt?” Bai Qian wondered aloud. Her hand reached out and clutched the lapel of his front tightly.

“Wait. If you know you are in love with me by then, why didn’t you say anything to me? Why did you let Li Jing pursue me freely?” She frowned, a little disturbed at that realization.

“What would you do if I professed my undying love for you back then, Seventeenth?” Mo Yuan
asked. “Would you accept my suit?”

“Of course, I will!” She cried out, then pouted. “Did you ever have any doubts?”

“I did not doubt you would say yes but for what reason?” He turned the question right back at her. “Were you truly in love with me or it was merely a young girl’s crush? How would you know the difference between true love and infatuation?”

Bai Qian looked miffed. “I would have know. I am not that dense.”

“No, you would not, Seventeenth.” Mo Yuan shook his head at her. There was a slight smile on his lips. “Your dalliance with Li Jing, however brief, disappointing and painful it was, made you grow up. You come out as an adult who understands the world better.”

“Genuine affection for one another is not enough for a couple to last. A pledge of love and future together is but a word of mouth. Honesty, commitment, dedication, timing, circumstance, your family, who you are and your responsibilities to your station .. all play a crucial part in a relationship that last. How can you make your decision until you understand that truth?”

“Seventeenth, our life are eternal. If we are not certain of our feelings, we might as well doom the rest of our life to heartaches and regrets. Won’t that be even more insufferable then? Until you know your own heart and what you truly want, I refuse to involve you in my selfish desire to have you, only to have you regret your decision later. Can you understand that?” He stared at her, waiting patiently for her acknowledgment.

Bai Qian pursed her lips disapprovingly. She understood why he was cautious but it was foolish and such a waste of opportunity. They kept dancing around each other when they could have the happiness they always wanted, however short-lived it would be. Then another thought came across her mind. He had said ‘timing, circumstance and responsibilities.’ Did he foresee what was going to happen since that far back?

She felt strong emotions swelled in her chest, her breath hitched, as understanding dawned on her. Her mentor knew Qing Cang had the Bell of Eastern Emperor secured in his hand and was not afraid to use it to seize his victory. He had predicted the worst and prepared to sacrifice himself even then.

Bai Qian closed her eyes to hide the tremulous dismay she felt. She buried her face into his chest and
nuzzled her face against his warmth. He hid his affection for her to spare her from the pain of his miserable death. He let her choose her own path to freed her from being bounded by his love. That sounded very much like him. Were they lovers back then; she highly doubted she would survive the separation caused by his sudden demise. Young, irrational and grieving as she would have been, she would kill herself and follow him into oblivion without second thought.

“Or perhaps you were wrong and what I felt for you was truly love,” she said softly.

Bai Qian finally took control of her inner turmoil. She looked up at him as she bared her soul to him. “Even years after your supposed death, when I close my eyes I can still see your face clearly in my mind, hear your voice in my ears. The feel of your essence and your scent is still deeply ingrained in me. I cannot forget the warmth of your hand or the small smile on your lips. I maybe too oblivious to recognize my own feeling as romantic love rather than filial love, but it is there still burning as bright as it once was.”

“I am certain that were I drink the water from the River of Oblivion and be born again; my feelings for you will never change. My eyes will still search for this face, these eyes; my heart will still yearn for your presence.” Her hand reached up to caress his face. “If that is not love, I don’t know what it is.”

Mo Yuan’s heart skipped a beat after hearing her heartfelt confession. Love and affection that shone brightly out her eyes and filled her voice warmed his heart and made him elated with joy. One of his arm wrapped around her small frame and brought her closer to him until the whole length of their bodies were pressed up against each other. He rested his forehead on hers and felt their warm breath mingled intimately.

A soft, faint whisper of endearment reached her ears. Bai Qian’s eyes widened with excitement and wonder. “Say that again.” Her trembled voice pleaded; her fingers clutched his strong, calloused hand tightly.

Their head parted a little and allowed a small space between them; she saw briefly a tug of smile on his lips. She watched his face came down closer to hers, closed her eyes and waited for him. The first touch of his lips was light and swift. Disappointed, Bai Qian stretched higher. She stood on the tips of her toes and pressed forward, letting him bear her full weight and seeking more of his warmth. Her hands curled around his neck and pulled his head down to her.

Their lips touched again; firmer, harder, with growing fervor this time. His warm tongue touched against her lips, silently asking for entrance. When her mouth parted, he slipped his tongue inside, touching and sliding it over hers, seeking the sweetness that was uniquely hers. She let her tongue entwine with his, softness to softness, incredibly intimate.
Bai Qian broke the kiss and panted softly when she pulled back. She allowed the air to fill her lung then started it all over again. This time she did to him what he had done to her. Mo Yuan opened himself to her and took what she gave freely. Thrust by thrust their tongue met, sliding back and forth; in and out; mimicking the ancient dance they would love to perform together one day.

His hands moved to her bottom and her shoulder, lifting her up and bending her neck down as his mouth worked against hers. She sighed with disappointment as he drew away then purred sensually when his mouth found its way from the corner of her jaw down the column of her neck. The burning heat of his lips left a hot, wet trail on her soft skin.

“Aaah..” her breath escaped in a strangled, broken sob at the foreign sensation he had awaken in her. Her fingers slide from around his neck, slipped into his hair and held it tightly. She wanted his lips to touch every single part of her body.

As if fueled by her faint cry of passion, Mo Yuan’s other hand moved away from her shoulder and rubbed down her back, Bai Qian instinctively wrapped her legs around his waist to stabilize herself. Her face heated up and she blushed furiously when her lower part pressed up intimately and suggestively against his strong and lean body. Even with their clothes in between, she could feel the heat radiated from him. Then his heat became hers and it spread throughout her body.

In her maiden shyness, she squirmed restlessly against him, wanting to get closer and putting a little distance between them at the same time. The move created sweet friction between them. She whimpered in delight and pressed down harder.

“Ma..ster, oooh..” Bai Qian moaned breathlessly; she was melting inside. She both wanted this sweet torturing to stop and never stop. Her thighs tensed up and shook hard. “Oh, please..” She pleaded softly against his ear and nipped its tip lightly in reprimand when he did not give her what she wanted.

She did not missed how rigid his body became when she did just that. Bai Qian hid her smirk; she never knew he was sensitive around that area. Experimentally, she lightly wrapped the tip of her tongue around the bottom of his ear and pulled it into her mouth. The instant reaction she got from him was far greater than she ever suspected.

Mo Yuan groaned deeply and harshly against the slight sheen of sweat on the nape of her neck. His hips jerked up involuntarily and rubbed against her warm center when she sucked hard on his earlobe. Heaven forbid, she was growing to be even more tantalizing and tempting. His hands reached out to cup her bottom more firmly, preparing to crush their bodies tighter and chase after that elusive overwhelming sensation again. Suddenly her weight was gone, all he caught was
“Seventeenth!” Mo Yuan cried out, his hands still reaching out in a futile attempt to catch her. Only then he realized it was but a mere dream, a memory of their time together in the past. He sighed heavily and adjusted his pants in discomfort before taking several calm and deep breath to cool down his aroused body. It seemed his beloved loves to play prank on him even in his dreams but he would not have it any other way. He missed her presence and the feeling of her warm body pressing up against him so much.

The dream also brought him some small comfort. For the past month, no matter how hard he wished to deny nothing had changed between them, the thought of her past entanglement with Ye Hua had troubled his mind and loomed over their relationship. Although he knew she loved and was head-over-heel in love with him; it was still hard to shake off the cold, hard truth that she was someone else’s wife and mother for a time.

The undying commitment and solid promise in her demeanor, brought back by the dream, reminded him he should never doubted the depth for her feeling for him. He refused to believe that, were she to regain her memories, her trial as a mortal could and would overweight the millennials they spent together. If his small Seventeenth was too stubborn to let go of him seventy thousand years after his death; it was ridiculous to ever suspect she would leave him for the remnant of memories from her years as a mortal. A lifetime that was disastrous, full of betrayals and heart-wrenching to begin with.

Mo Yuan shook his head at his own foolishness. Dong Hua was right about one thing - Mo Yuan grudgingly admitted in the silence of his head - being in love had indeed fooled his head and muddled his perceptiveness. Now he had no more time to spare those thoughts anymore. Today was the day he would get back what was owed to his beloved.

When Mo Yuan reached Kunlun Mountain’s Grand Hall, all fifteen of his disciples were already seated in their line, awaiting his arrival. After placing himself on the dais, his gaze swept over each of them, one by one. He nodded imperceptibly, with no less than satisfaction, when he found the answering ferociousness in their eyes. None of them would back down come what may happen today. They are his protégés, his legacy and his family. He was proud of them all.

“Remember the reason of why we are doing this,” he reminded them. “We are not seeking petty revenge or picking a fight blindly.” They only had one common goal in mind: to protect and take care of their own.

“We understand, Master,” they gave their words as one.

“Then let’s move out,” Mo Yuan told him. By this time, guests should be arriving at the Ninth Heaven. The ball was in Ye Hua’s court now. Mo Yuan’s lips twisted into a strange smile; he cannot
wait to see how it played out.

Note: Special thanks to Noitratoxin, my proofreader for all the hard work. Thanks so much for your help!
Chapter 35

:: Ninth Heaven ::

It seemed the Sky Lord was in a great mood today, judging from how often he bellowed a laugh while chatting with his guests. And he had every reason to enjoy himself as such. This year, respectable guests from many prestige clans and families had answered the invitation to attend the annual Autumn Festival Banquet held by Celestial Clan.

Earlier, the newly self-proclaimed Ghost Lord, Qing Cang's youngest and only remaining child, had presented their clan's tribute to him; solidifying their continued acceptance of being conformed to Celestial's ruling. Since Lord Dong Hua was also there, the Sky Lord made a grandiose show of his generosity and benevolence toward the future cooperation by accepting the tribute and returned it with gifts of his own. He also pardoned the rest of the Clan for Qing Cang's recent rebellion. He claimed that Qing Cang and a few loyalists' revenge was personal and he did not doubt the sincerity of the Ghost Lord to continue their alliance with Celestial Clan.

To his delight, even the reclusive West Sea King and his family came as well as some of estranged army generals. The Sky Lord remembered they rarely attended any festivities held by him in the past. Those fools were Mo Yuan's strongest supporters back then. After the God of War's demise, they pretended to ally themselves with him but often remained indifferent to his directives. The Sky Lord seethed in annoyance at that particular recollection. It was quite a surprise they chose this opportunity to show their support to the Clan.

Perhaps, it was the ultimate defeat of Qing Cang that brought the changes. Now that his own people and other clans had witnessed how powerful and far superior the Celestials had become. The Sky Lord did not bother to ascertain his speculation; the fact that all of these guests being here was enough to send warnings across other opposing clans; should they ever ponder another uprising.

The Sky Lord's train of thoughts was cut short when Yuan Zhen appeared in front of the dais. The boy dropped to his knees and offered many eloquent praises for his victory over their long-standing nemesis. The Sky Lord looked to the side at his second son just in time to witness him nodding his approval. So the boy did it upon his son's suggestion to gain some favors from him? With that thought in mind, he saw no harm in letting him continue.

"Your Highness, I also wish to take this opportunity to express my gratitude," Yuan Zhen smiled tumultuously at all the attention he garnered. Once he started; he would have nothing to fall back on and could only keep moving forward. He drew in a deep breath, built up his courage, then repeated the script he had memorized by heart.
"Your Highness has always treated me well, I owe Your Highness and Consort Su Jin a sincere appreciation for an unforeseen blessing in disguise. Although Your Highness sent me to the mortal realm as a punishment after I was charged with sexually harassing Consort Su Jin, I did not suffer any bitterness. On the contrary, I met a resourceful and renowned mentor. Were I not reincarnated as a mortal at that time, under normal circumstances, it is unlikely for me to be able to become her disciple. It's truly fortunate for me."

"Such scandalous offence. The North Sea King's son harassed Consort Su Jin? Why haven't I heard of this before?" Someone amidst the lines of high table spoke up loud enough to be heard by the rest. It was none other than the secluded West Sea King. Suddenly, confused murmur of voices could be distinctly heard from all around. Before today, none of them ever heard such disgrace ever happened; not even from Celestial's Third Prince's blabber mouth.

Yuan Zhen ignored the loud exclamation erupted around him at his blundering announcement. He hurriedly took out the Cloud Clearing fan from the secret compartment inside his cloth and showed it off, all the while feigning his foolish pride at obtaining such treasure. "My Master is very generous and kind. Your Highness, please take a look, she even gave me this precious magical fan as a parting gift."

Lingbao Tianzun who sat not far away from the Sky Lord leaned forward to take a better look at the fan. When he got a clear sight of the fan in Yuan Zhen's hand, his expression changed. "Your Master gave you this fan? Who is she? What is her name?" He questioned the boy immediately.

Yuan Zhen puffed up in pride and replied the Lord with an air of boastfulness, "She did give me this fan, my Lord. My mentor is none other than Qing Qiu's Bai Qian."

When Yuan Zhen first mentioned the crime he had committed; the Sky Lord realized his mistake of leaving him there. He had done Yuan Zhen's trial in secret to hide the scandal, so not many Immortals knew of what came to pass. It was unthinkable of the boy to bring the old incident out in the public. The Sky Lord gave the boy his fiercest glare, signaling him to stop at once, but it seemed the boy was oblivious to his ire and kept babbling more nonsense.

Now his prattle invoked unwelcome interest from many honoured guests. The Sky Lord was about to send him away and redirect their attention somewhere else when Lingbao Tianzun made his unexpected inquiry. His felt an oncoming headache when the name of Ye Hua's former fiancée was dropped suddenly.

Since Mo Yuan's declaration to wed Qing Qiu's Queen, many eyes kept closer watch on the Fox Emperor's family more than ever. Now that Yuan Zhen spoke of the mysterious bride-to-be and piqued their curiosity; it was almost impossible to stop his tattletale anymore.
Su Jin, who sat in the back, was stunned into silence when her alleged molester mentioned her name and their past indiscretion carelessly. How could he ruin her name in front of all guests just like that? The nerve of that wretched boy; she fumed. She regretted ever pleading the Sky Lord for his life. As she was about to get up and shut him down once and for all; Ye Hua's mother tugged at her hand and yanked her down roughly.

"Sit back down. Don't you make a scene here." Lady Le Xu threw her a side-glance; her face set in a mask of indifference. "Leave it to the Sky Lord to deal with him."

Su Jin forced out her smile with effort and dipped her head once; putting a show of perfect obedience before she sat down slowly. Under the disguise of her sleeves, she balled her hands into tight white-knuckled fists, sharp nails digging into her own flesh as she raged on silently in her head.

"Qing Qiu's Bai Qian?" Lingbao Tianzun repeated in surprise.

A guest who sat two rows down from him, the East Sea King, also exclaimed in recognition. She had sent gifts to his newborn son's celebration ceremony after all. "It seems the High Goddess loves to give gifts. She also granted one of her famous night pearl to my youngest," he announced happily. Only then, he took note of Lingbao Tianzun's bemused expression. "Is something amiss, my Lord?"

Lingbao Tianzun shook his head dismissively. "It's nothing. It's just that I remembered gifting this fan to Mo Yuan's Seventeenth disciple. How come it fall in the hand of the daughter of the Fox Emperor?"

"Qing Qiu's Bai Qian is truly generous. She didn't only forgive her maid's past digression but also accept her son as a disciple." Another voice from the left side of the high tables spoke up.

Wang Yi was a sub-clan's head and had good relationship with Celestial Lords. He had witnessed the Sky Lord's displeasure at Yuan Zhen's careless blabbering from the beginning and tried to diffuse the tension. Many guests in attendance seemed to show agreement with his comment.

"While the High Goddess is truly praise worthy, I'm more interested in what the boy said about his crime." The West Sea King's voice boomed and destroyed the good humor going on. Many winced at his rude interruption and glanced back at the Sky Lord warily. Wang Yi threw a nasty glance at the ignorant ruler of the West Sea who failed to recognize the situation for what it was.
"If the boy truly committed such hideous crime, why was his punishment so light?" The West Sea King inquired skeptically.

It was Ye Hua who answered this question, since it was his Consort who was violated. "I was not there at the time, so I did not known all circumstances. I only heard that Yuan Zhen was drunk and did it without any intention. Since it was his first offence, and inebriated, the Sky Lord took pity on him and lessened his punishment."

"The Lord is too generous. Were he a member of my family, I would let him experience a far worse fate. Only then, he would learn his lesson and not to repeat his mistake again." The West Sea King turned to face the North Sea King, whose face paled significantly. "I truly question the way you raise your son." His voice was tinged with reproach and heavy with disapproval.

"I also found it highly alarming that a drunk child can sneak past the royal guards inside the manor so easily. I hope the Sky Lord gave them severe punishment for their unforgivable ignorance. The security of Xi Wu Palace is no laughing matter after all."

Ye Hua made an astonished face as if he realized something all the sudden. "I was away at the time. Since the Sky Lord already took the matter into his own hand, I leave it at that. But I'm quite certain I didn't hear any of palace guards were punished or removed from duties after the incident."

"Yuan Zhen," Ye Hua called out his name. "Tell me the truth, how did you get inside the manor?"

As if on cue, Yuan Zhen quickly addressed the Crown Prince. "Your Highness, I honestly didn't have any idea."

This was the moment he was waiting for, since the day the Crown Prince came to his father and revealed his plan. This was the one and only chance for him and his family to prove he was innocent and all charges against him were falsified. And if it could help his mentor getting her justice, it was all the more reasons for him not to fail. After coming back from the Mortal Realm, Yuan Zhen learned the truth of his parents and his mentor's past. He was beyond grateful for her timely intervention on his behalf, despite the prior dispute between the three of them. He could not and would not let his mentor down. He would show her he had grown up and could stand on his own now.

"All I remember is that I was talking to Consort Su Jin on my way back to the Grand Hall, then things became muddled and I lost my consciousness. The next time I open my eyes, I was already inside the manor and the Consort was crying and accusing me of molesting her somehow," said Yuan Zhen. He hoped his voice came out strong and confident.
"That's enough." The Sky Lord got up from his seat, his face darkened with fury and disbelief the boy dared say as much. He pointed his shaking finger to the ungrateful, damnable grandson. "Your trial was concluded and you were found guilty. It's pointless to deny your sin. Have I not spared your life once? What are you trying to do here?"

"My Lord, I found his story highly disturbing. And the West Sea King is quite right. If there is such security loophole in my palace, it must be investigated thoroughly. I couldn't chance another breach, what if next time Your Majesty is the target of some assassination attempt?" Ye Hua insisted; his concern was sounded and reasonable. Many Immortals expressed their apprehension on the precarious safety of their own and asked the Sky Lord to let the Crown Prince get to the bottom of this suspicious attack.

The Sky Lord opened his mouth, fully intending to deny their requests; then shut it. They were already suspected the Ninth Heaven's defense was lacking, based on Yuan Zhen's words. If he ordered Ye Hua to cease the interrogation now, many would question his decision. Some might even think there were conflicts or mutiny within their rank. That would not do at all. The Sky Lord gritted his teeth and dropped himself unceremoniously back on his seat. He waved his hand and let Ye Hua continue.

"Yuan Zhen," Ye Hua said to him in a grave tone. "You mean to say you got drunk and lost control then?"

"That isn't the case, Your Highness," Yuan Zhen cried out pitifully; still a little shaken seeing how furious the Sky Lord was. Had they not be surrounded by guests, he did not doubt he would be severely punished for speaking his mind.

"I didn't drink any spirit that day. The only drink I had was a cup of tea offered by Consort Su Jin. How could anyone get drunk on tea? Besides, even if I really got drunk somehow, how could I know where Consort Su Jin live? It was my first trip to the Ninth Heaven after all."

"If that was what truly happened, why didn't you tell the truth to the Sky Lord?" Ye Hua frowned. "Why wait until now? If you're trying to wreak havoc here for your petty revenge, know that things won't end well for you and your family."

Yuan Zhen looked at the Crown Prince and the people around him. Helpless and dejected, he admitted in a small, defeated voice. "Consort Su Jin insisted that I did it. She even tried to hang herself afterward, saying her honour was tarnished. The Sky Lord was so angry, I really haven't a chance to explain myself as I do now."
The boy raised his fist and palm to honor the Sky Lord. "But the Lord was kind enough to spare my life and only sent me to experience six bitterness in the Mortal Realm. I was beyond thankful of his mercifulness. What's more could I ask? Today, if Your Highness didn't demand the truth from me, I dare not speak openly of the past."

Hushed whispers echoed furiously around the Hall as the North Sea King's son confession came out. Anyone with enough sense and clear head was able to glean the unspoken in his words. Some Immortals wore peculiar pensive expression on their faces. It seemed the Royal Family of the Ninth Heaven was more scandalous and corrupt than any could ever imagine; if a suspect could be charged with such serious accusation then sentenced based on mere words of mouth.

Before the Sky Lord could refute the veiled insinuation made against him. A group of men seemed to gather outside the Grand Hall. He squinted his eyes to get a better look and saw Mo Yuan was in the lead. There was more than ten people trailing behind him. What were they doing here? He had sent an invitation to Mo Yuan as it was custom. The Master of Kunlun rarely attended this kind of gathering anyway. Today he not only came out of his hiding hole but brought all of his disciples. The Sky Lord had a foreboding feeling that their unusual appearance suggested something unpleasant is bound to happen soon.

Note: Don't forget to check out Chapter 34, there're 2 updates this week. Special thanks to Noitratoxin, my hardworking proofreader.
“High God Mo Yuan, what a surprise! I thought you won’t come today.” Despite his earlier misgivings, the Sky Lord plastered a fake smile on his face and got up to welcome Mo Yuan. “Come, sit with us!”

His smile faltered when Mo Yuan did not accepted the invitation to join him. All fifteen of Mo Yuan’s disciples remained rooted to the spot, with sour expressions on their collective faces.

“Usually you bring along just one or two followers. What’s with the big entourage today, Mo Yuan?” The Lord of Luminous Treasure took an immediate note that Mo Yuan’s constant companion was missing though.

“Never mind that.” Sky Lord announced. “I would like to use this rare opportunity to make a toast to you and your people for saving all of us from the end of the world.”

For the first time since their arrival, Mo Yuan spoke up. “We are not here for the feast, nor a toast, but rather for a long overdue matter that needs to be settled.”

The Sky Lord’s smile became more strained; his demeanor grew anxious. “Surely, there’s no rush. This is the time to relax and enjoy ourselves after all.”

“Merriment can always wait.” Mo Yuan encountered. “A while back, an alarming concern was brought to my attention. I have made inquiries of my own and ascertained the claim was genuine. Since leaders from distant lands and different clans are already here; it might be prudence for them to know as well.”

“My Lord, it’s so rare for High God Mo Yuan to be so impatient; this matter - whatever it is - must be really important. I don’t think it would take much of our time to hear him out.” Zhan Ying, a minor Lord of Fairy Clan got up and spoke on behalf of Master of Kunlun.

“Well, I don’t know about anyone else but I’m always looking forward to exchange ideas with Kunlun’s elites. It has been so long since we last sit down and talk. Welcome back, High God Mo Yuan.” General Yang Ling of the Dong Hai Sea lift his goblet up to salute Mo Yuan.

Emperor Dong Hua, who was drinking quietly from his golden chalice spoke up. “Yes, enlighten us. What dire circumstances drove you all the way from Kunlun Mountain to here?”

“I reckon it will be much more interesting than all this,” he gestured at the sumptuous meals in front of him and the gathering in general. “I heard you made an impression the last time you were here after all.” A small smile quirked the Emperor’s mouth.

Mo Yuan glanced at him briefly, then he turned his attention to the Sky Lord and the crowd. Mo Yuan’s penetrating sharp eyes swept over each lord, deity, and immortal sitting there. The intensity and the weight of his gaze made them sit up straighter.

“Prior to Qing Cang’s breakout, the Crown Prince had ordered a constant surveillance around Ruoshui River. But on that day, platoons of Ghost soldiers marched to Ruoshui’s riverbank undetected, before they were lured into the sacrificial circles and met their ends. Unfortunately, our sentry didn’t fare any better than them. Ghost assassins snuck into our camps and launched a simultaneous attack on us.”

“As you all know, my disciples joined the battle and engaged Qing Cang to give our men time to
regroup and strengthen their defense. What you may not know is that from the first time our blades crossed with the enemy’s and until the Crown Prince and I arrived on the spot to destroy the Bell of Eastern Emperor; no reinforcement ever made it to the battlefield.”

“Master, if I may?” Die Feng stepped out from the side. When he got an approval nod from his mentor; he picked up where his mentor left off.

“I am Die Feng, Senior Disciple of Kunlun Mountain. What my mentor told you is all true. That day when Qing Cang stabbed me with his halberd, I was too badly injured that I could only stay on the ground. Aside from the last unit of our sentries that stood bravely, no one else came to our rescue. They alone had to create a force shield to protect themselves and fight off those assassins. ”

“Meanwhile, my seventeenth junior faced off against Qing Cang single-handedly. Had Ghost Lord Li Jing not intervened in time; my junior would have died at that point. Alas, Qing Cang’s demise only called forth the magic of the Bell back to life. Seventeenth had no other choice than to offer her own spirit to stop the destruction. Although High God Zhe Yan’s excellent healing methods had saved my junior's life, Seventeenth is still bed-ridden and unconscious to this day.”

Mo Yuan signaled him to stop and leave it to him handle the rest. Die Feng gave him a deep bow then obediently fell back in line with his brothers.

“So many precious lives were lost that day. Don’t you think you owe it to your own people and mine an explanation for such blatant oversight?” Mo Yuan asked. A hushed silence descended over the audience after his question.

The Lord of Ninth Heaven was incredulous. He never thought Mo Yuan’s reaction would be so extreme. For all this posturing, was it only to avenge his disciples? He gritted his teeth and toned down the frustration in his voice.

“High God Mo Yuan, I hope both of your disciples are recovering well. While your concern is worth mentioning, the fact remains that it was a result of series of ill-timing and unfortunate coincidences. There is no conspiracy going-on; like you have suspected.

“The army recalled some of their men from the post at Ruoshui River and they were supposed to report back for duty immediately after. Nobody anticipated another uprising of Ghost rebels; they had been laying low for a while now. When I learned of the attack, I ordered Prince Yang Cuo to put together a reinforcement right away. But organizing different companies of soldiers from different regiments took some time. You know how it works, High God Mo Yuan.”

“By the time, they crested the hill near the riverside, things had already began to die down. They came back here just in case Ghost rebels had another insurgent planned. With all the commotion going on, it’s very easy to fail to notice our retreating force.” Hao De’s voice was tinged with a touch of regret and self-blame; his lies came out smoothly and convincingly.

“This is most peculiar. The story I heard is completely different from yours,” Mo Yuan commented lightly. “There is this possibility that our intelligence networks have been infiltrated and become compromised. Why else do we keep getting different reporting?”

“High God Mo Yuan, please hear me out.” Prince Yang Cuo decided to step out since the situation seemed to escalate quickly.

“Despite what Sky Lord said; there was no excuse for my failure to assist you and our people in
time. All the blame should rest upon me. I’m ready to accept any punishment you deem fit for my unforgiveable incompetence.”

“While your willingness to shoulder the responsibilities is commendable, I can’t allow it.” Mo Yuan said bluntly. “And it’s not a fault of your own. A subject must always follow the directive given to him after all.”

“I’m afraid I don’t understand your meaning, High God.” Prince Yang Cuo said carefully.

“Nor me. What are you implying, Mo Yuan?” Lingbao Tianzun frowned. “Are you implying the reinforcement came late on purpose? This allegation is rather harsh. As much as I respect you, I could not rely on your words alone. I hope you can understand that.”

Mo Yuan dipped his head a little to show his mutual regards.

“Still, it won’t do if Kunlun Mountain and Celestial Clan remains alienated.” Lingbao Tianzun said. “Therefore I suggest a full investigation into this matter. We also need someone with sound judgement to act as an intermediary. I think no one is better than you, Dong Hua. You have both authority as once Emperor of all realms and seniority to fulfill the task, I hope you wouldn’t object this role.”

Since it was the Lord of the Numinous Treasure who asked; Dong Hua nodded his consent. After Lingbao Tianzun secured a compromise from Dong Hua; he turned to Mo Yuan. “What evidences are you proposing?”

Right on cue, a man came out from behind the line of Mo Yuan’s disciples and kneeled down in front of Dong Hua.

“Tell us who you are, what you do and what you know. Speak only of those you witnessed with your own eyes and not a single words of rumors and your own speculations.” Dong Hua gave him a short and sharp order. “If I find the slightest inconsistency in your story, you will be punished severely. Do you understand?”

“Perfectly, my Lord,” he answered. “I am Private Lua Fang. For the last two months, I was stationed at the temporary post near Ruoshui River. Some of us survived the attack, they can vouch for my identity.”

He took a deep breath; gathering his wit then continued.

“A day before Qing Cang’s final breakout; some of us were called back and yet no replacement came. I didn’t know why. Needlessly to say, our force suffered from the lack of manpower. Then the attacks came in the early morning, swift and unexpected. We struggled to protect our own against trained assassins and losing badly. I was sent here to ask for reinforcement. But I was dismissed almost immediately after submitting my reporting.”

One and a half month ago, Lua Fang’s younger brother was slain during the fight at Ruoshui River. Lua Fang came to know of his Lord’s deceitful nature by chance; before he was powerless to avenge his sibling and brothers-in-arms. Or so he thought. They were foot soldiers, lowest of the rank, nobody cared whether they live or die.
One day Crown Prince Ye Hua approached him and asked if he was looking for vengeance. Lua Fang jumped at the offered chance without a second thought. He owed no more allegiance to this so-called High Lord of Ninth Heaven; he who betrayed them in cold blood. Lua Fang made a promise to himself, one day he would drag him off his high horse and down into the mud.

“Usually I would join force with my new company and lead them immediately back to the battlefield. Instead I was told to wait indefinitely; our sentries can’t hold out for long. So I decided to spy on them and find out what was really going on. Had I not hear it with my own two ears, I would never believe it. Our lord, the one we swore our allegiance and pledged our life to had pointedly ordered Prince Yang Cuo to delay his arrival.”

Lua Fang quoted the Sky Lord’s exact order, from his memories, word by word.

When Lua Fang finished his story; two things happened at once. First, the inside Grand Hall descended into chaos; someone from Army’s field corps stood up and let out their outrageous cry of disbelief and vehement protests. The other was the roaring angry voice of the alleged Lord of Heaven.

“Lies. He’s lying through his teeth!” The Sky Lord barked a quick order at his royal guards. Lua Fang was about to be dragged away and punished for his insolence. Dong Hua immediately overruled his order and set Lua Fang free. Distrustful stares from Lingbao Tianzun, new Ghost Lord and some other deities weighed heavily on the Sky Lord’s conscience. 

“Lord Dong Hua, don’t tell me you believe him? A lowly soldier’s words. I’m certain he did it on someone’s order.” The Sky Lord said impatiently.

“You are so quick to forget, Sky Lord. I was also at Ruoshui River that day. Whether there's truth in what he said, I’ll be the judge of that.” Dong Hua dismissed him completely.

“Prince Yang Cuo,” Dong Hua called; he had some questions for him. “Was your company ambushed on the way to Ruoshui River?”

“No, my Lord.”

“Did you get the wrong intel about where the skirmish happened and led them to the wrong place then?” Dong Hua asked again.

“No, my Lord.”

“Then what was the cause of the prolonged delay then? You know full well Qing Cang was about to break free and Celestial’s meager defense at Ruoshui River could collapse anytime. Do you have anything to say in your defense?”

Prince Yang Cuo’s face closed up as he replied. “It’s truly an error of judgement on my part. It has been so long since I lead a troop of my own, I guess I wasted too much time to coordinate our troop. It’s very understandable our soldiers felt they were abandoned in times of need. High God Mo Yuan is right to be concerned with their morals and condemnation at my mistake. I humbly submit myself to your judgement, my Lord.”

“Prince Yang Cuo,” the corners of Dong Hua’s lips pushed up slightly. “You would really have us
believe that your company marched all the way down to the River, witnessed the fallout of Qing Cang’s attack and then left quietly as your Lord mentioned before?”

“What about your son then? For all we know he could have been on the brink of death as well. But you didn’t bother to stop by and check up on him before you went away again. I found that more intriguing than your claim of incompetence.”

Yang Cuo paled when Lord Dong Hua pointed out that little ruse in his tale.

“The only plausible conclusion I come up with is that your company set out but never made it to Ruoshui River at all. I believe you harbor no ill will toward sMo Yuan or anyone else. This idea does beg further question. Why? Were you coaxed to do it against your will by someone with authority? One that you can’t ever object despite your misgiving?” Dong Hua glanced pointedly toward the dais.

During the interrogation many guests had moved closer together, trading their opinions earnestly; wild speculations of what actually happened at Ruoshui River flying, spreading, around the Hall.

When Dong Hua’s final verdict came through; people grew even more agitated and disturbed. Betrayal within their own rank left bitter taste in their mouth. Their once steadfast respect for the Sky Lord was put into questions. Some braver ones began to voice their uneasiness, with regard to their Lord’s dubious honour and integrity.

“Mo Yuan, what say you?” Dong Hua turned around and asked for his opinion.

The Master of Kunlun shook his head. “I’ll leave the judgement in your capable hands, although I do have one more thing to say to the Sky Lord”

“Sky Lord, I hope you still remember the ancient agreement between Celestial Clan and Kunlun Mountain?” Mo Yuan asked.

“Your predecessor had sworn to my father, under any circumstances, Celestials will never turn their blades against me and my followers. He also pledged to assist and support my endeavor when it is due. Since you no longer wish to honor this oath. I see no point to continue the obligation on my part.” Mo Yuan further added.

The Sky Lord breathed in shakily. A sense of foreboding crept up his spine. Mo Yuan would not dare to pull the rug from under him just like that, would he?

“I, Mo Yuan, set Celestial's Lord free from our binding oath. From this day onward, Kunlun Mountain holds no ties to Celestial Clan. I will not intervene on behalf of Celestial affairs anymore. If there’s war, it is also no longer any of my concern.”

When Mo Yuan finished his declaration, there was a screeching noise echoing in the air from afar; it sounded almost as if a metal cord was cut off and snapped back into place.

The Sky Lord’s face ashened. Mo Yuan’s will was weighed and accepted by Heaven. “You can’t do that. That’s against Heavenly Father’s wish.” He yelled furiously.

Mo Yuan ignored the constant pleadings from his surrounding, asking him to reconsider his decision. He watched the Sky Lord’s display of anger with disinterest.

“You are being irrational, Mo Yuan. I know you did it because of your favorite disciple was harmed but this is too much. Don’t you think?” Said the Sky Lord.
“That’s where you are wrong. I didn’t come to my decision lightly.” Mo Yuan’s eyes narrowed. He had had enough of this sleazy, conniving Lord, who even now still tried to twist his words to his own gain.

“You should never forget Kunlun Mountain has always been my domain; its people are my responsibilities. Make no mistake, every single one of them matters to me. I don’t care if you want to get back at me for our prior quarrel. But your personal vendetta had put my bride’s life in jeopardy. That’s an unforgivable insult to me. Had Heavenly Father been here, he would understand my reason.”

“Your bride...?” The Sky Lord uttered confusedly. “How did High Goddess Bai Qian get involved with this? Isn’t she at the Fox Den?”

Lingbao Tianzun coughed up loudly and drew their attention to him. “I think it’s pretty obvious by now. Mo Yuan’s Seventeenth disciple is none other than Qing Qiu’s Bai Qian. Am I right?”

“That can’t be true. Mo Yuan laid out the rule long ago; he would not accept any female disciples.” The Sky Lord argued. “There is no way a girl could deceive all of us and live as one of them for so long. You are just making this up.”

“No, it makes a lot of sense. This certainly explains why Yuan Zhen has the Cloud Clearing fan in his possession. I have met Si Yin on many occasions, never once I suspect him being a woman.” Lingbao Tianzun rubbed his beard absent-mindedly. "This must be Zhe Yan’s work. His disguise spell really has no match these days.”


“Hao De. Hao De come out this instance.”

Just then a commotion seemed to be stirring at the entrance of the Grand Hall. Royal guards trickled inside, some stumbled back on their feet in their attempt to placate the newcomers. Some guests were curious; they move around to get better view and find out what was going down.

The Sky Lord looked onward at the group of men and women. In the front, stood the Fox Emperor and his wife. To his right were High God Bai Yi and his daughter. His youngest son, High God Bai Zhen lagged behind them, walking shoulder to shoulder with High God Zhe Yan. It was obvious they were not here for the feast; judging from the swords in the hands of the Fox Emperor and his sons.

“Hao De, get down here and come face me, you bastard!” Bai Zhi roared out angrily, dropping the Lord’s title on purpose. His sword pointed threateningly at the Sky Lord.

“Emperor Bai Zhi, what is the meaning of this?” Bewildered and upset at the provocation, the Sky Lord demanded with barely repressed fury.

“I want to ask the very same question. I have always been your closest ally. I agreed to let my only daughter wed into your family. Even after your son turned my child into a laughing stock, I forgave you and still counted you as a friend. For the life of me, I never thought you would repay my kindness by stabbing me when my back was turned.”

The more he said; the louder his voice become. The immortals that rushed to to get a better view earlier shrunk back in fear after seeing the Fox Emperor had unsheathed his mighty sword.

Mo Yuan glanced at the Fox Emperor from the corner of his eye. He hoped that Bai Zhi wouldn’t
waste this opportunity by letting his anger get the best on him.

“Emperor Bai Zhi, you must calm down and come to your senses. I won’t tolerate you accusing me of the crime I haven’t even done.” The Sky Lord’s face darkened.

“That’s how you want to play it? Very well, I’ll humor you then.” Bai Zhi sneered. “Three hundred years ago, did you not order Crown Prince Ye Hua to gauge my daughter’s eyes? Did you not imprison her for over a year? Did you not conspire with your former consort to force her to commit suicide?”

“That’s not true. I have never-..” The Sky Lord paused. His eyes widened a fraction in recognition. He realized whom Bai Zhi was talking about now, but couldn’t find it in him to believe the Emperor. There was not a trace of immortal’s essence within that woman. For the life of him, he cannot reconcile Ye Hua’s dead mortal wife with High Goddess Bai Qian. He threw a covert glance at Mo Yuan and saw his posture remained unchanged.

Someone let out a sharp gasp; followed by a loud crash and a heavy thud. The Sky Lord turned toward the disturbance, his eyes fell on Consort Su Jin, who was sprawled unceremoniously across the floor; shuddering uncontrollably.

When the Fox Emperor mentioned that Ye Hua had taken away someone’s eyes; Su Jin knew immediately what or whom he was referring to. Then she came to her sense; Su Su turned out to be Qing Qiu’s Bai Qian; daughter of the Fox Emperor and bride of High God Mo Yuan. In her fitful fright, Su Jin got up too hastily on her quivering legs. She tripped on her clothing and landed on her rear. Su Jin slowly collected her composure and sat properly again; she did not dare to lift her face up. She whimpered silently in pain, embarrassment and sheer terror.

Her violent reaction did not escape Bai Zhi's observation. “It seems someone is finally remembering.”

“Three hundred years ago, my daughter went to Ruoshui River to seal the Bell of Eastern Emperor. She went missing for hundreds of years. One day, she turned up blinded, wounded and very distraught. She didn’t talk much about those years she were away and we are none the wiser of her suffering. But there’s no secret in this world, the truth wants to come out.”

“We learned recently that Qing Cang had bound her immortal essence and power. He wiped her clean of her memory and sent her to Mortal Realm. My daughter lived her life peacefully until one day she met a man and agreed to become his wife. Her life took a turn for worst. Don’t you want to know why?” Bai Zhi rapped his finger on one of high tables and glared at Celestial’s Third Prince, Lian Song, who was seated there.

“That man is not an ordinary human but an Immortal. He also had another wife, who was so very jealous of my daughter. Her in-laws detested my daughter with a passion; she was just mere a mortal and unworthy of their glorious family. Together the wife and the in-laws plotted her ultimate demise. It almost sounds like a play, doesn’t it?”

“What if I tell you that man is none other than Crown Prince Ye Hua. The wife, Consort Su Jin. And the in-laws………” Bai Zhi glided his hand in a sweeping manner at the entire Celestial’s royal
For the third time that day, the crowd went into uproar. It came as a shocking revelation for all of them. High Goddess Bai Qian was actually that infamous disciple of High God Mo Yuan. The one who was rumored to have a broken sleeve relationship with the Master of Kunlun and disappeared together after the Last Ghost War.

Many female immortals, who once set their sight on the Crown Prince, shuddered in apprehension. The Xi Wu Palace was far more a hostile place than they ever imagined. They sighed, pitying the Goddess's obvious suffering when she was still a mortal, and congratulated themselves for never ever caught the Crown Prince's eyes. There was no telling that twisted family would have done to them if they too were deemed unworthy of their grandeur. The audience barely hide their contempt and dismay toward the Great Lord of Heaven. There was an old saying: Know the face but can't tell the heart. Today they came to see his true face and his malicious heart; it was both disheartening and perturbed.

“Bai Zhi, how did you come to this conclusion again? Isn’t High Goddes Bai Qian unconscious at the moment? Perhaps you got it all wrong. Someone might try to sabotage our friendship by feeding you false details.” The Sky Lord changed his tactics and tried to appease to his reasonable side.”

“Me? Got it all wrong?” Bai Zhi laughed heartily. “Why don’t you ask you grandson first? He knew it all along.”

Ye Hua came to the front and knelt down in front of at the Sky Lord. “My Lord, I ask for your forgiveness for concealing the truth until now. The first time I met High Goddess Bai Qian, I knew she was my deceased wife. Su Su had a burn mark on her right wrist. High Goddess Bai Qian has the same exact scar. We all know any scar caused by Ghost’s Crimson Hellfire cannot be removed. I have no doubt she was Su Su.”

Yan Zhi stood up from her seat and gave support to his claim. “The Crown Prince is not wrong. I also remembered my brother mentioned about that incident once or twice. He claimed Lady Su Su bore striking resemblance to one of his acquaintance in the past. Now, that explains a lot.”

“You..you..well done.” The Sky Lord said through his gritted teeth. Ye Hua knew Qing Qiu’s Bai Qian was his former wife and still let her marry Mo Yuan? Unacceptable. Now those two formed a formidable alliance; he was left alone powerless against them. For once in his life, he really wanted to throttle this foolish grandson. “Why did you not tell me sooner?”

“My Lord, I only respect High Goddess’s wish.” replied Ye Hua. He and Mo Yuan had agreed it would be best not to mention Qian Qian had already forgotten everything from her past life. If her amnesia became known; it would only spur their lies further.

“Are you two about done now?” Bai Zhi asked impatiently. “Hao De, what has my daughter ever done to you to deserve such fate? Think wisely of what you are going to say. You might not like the consequences.”

“Are you threatening me, Bai Zhi?” The Sky Lord descended down the dais and approached Bai Zhi. “Don’t go overboard just yet.”

“Both of you, back off, please.” Lingbao Tianzun decided to step in and set them apart.

“Bai Zhi, you want justice for your daughter, don’t you?” Lingbao Tianzun asked.

“Justice and retribution.” Bai Zhi replied. “Mark my word. Those who wronged her in any way will
not get away unscathed.”

“Sky Lord, do you still wish to settle this dispute peacefully? There’s no need to escalate this situation into full blown confrontation. Do you agree with me?” Lingbao Tianzun asked again.

“Then I propose we do a fair trial. Everyone will get a chance to explain and defend himself. I am sure we could come to a mutual and agreeable conclusion eventually.” Lingbao Tianzun tried to reason with him.

“Or we could just go straight to war,” Bai Zhi said matter of factly, “and save us time listening to more lies and excuses.”

“Bai Zhi, don’t be like that. I don’t think Bai Qian would appreciate that you cause a war in her name.” Lingbao Tianzun unknowingly echoed the same thing Zhe Yan said to him a week ago.

Bai Zhi shrugged off his comment. “She wouldn’t be able to do anything; my daughter is still unconscious. Remember?”

“Since Lord Dong Hua already agreed to be the judge for the day, I guess one more trial won’t make much different. Do I have both of you consent? Bai Zhi? Sky Lord?”

Note: Very Special thanks to my hardworking editor slash grammar spotter, Noitratoxin.
Chapter 37

Let Dong Hua be the judge?

It was then the Sky Lord came to see what was happening today in a new the light. First, Yuan Zhen came forward and exposed the flaws in his judgment. Then Mo Yuan put him in tight spot by cutting off any remaining ties between him and Celestial Clan. Now the Fox Clan picked today of all day to storm the Ninth Heaven and take revenge in Qing Qiu’s Bai Qian name.

The Sky Lord did not believe in coincidences. He could practically smell an on-going plot against him now. What are they trying to pull off? What was their endgame? He glanced suspiciously at Lord Lingbao Tianzun. Is he a part of this orchestrated charade?

Then another thought, far more terrifying than the first, occurred to him. Is Dong Hua? Cold sweat trickled down his temple as he pondered the possibility. It took him a while to compose himself again.

What choices does he have? He was caught off guard today and ill-prepared to deal with the whole family. Each of them were strong and skilled fighters. It would be best if they can settle the matter without resorting to violence. He refused to believe he cannot get himself out of this tangled mess.

“This is a private matter. I would prefer some discretion.” The Sky Lord suggested after a long silence.

“Not a chance.” Bai Zhi denied outright. “I have nothing to hide, anyone are welcome to listen in on the trial. Are you afraid, Hao De? That others would come to see how terrible you really are?”

A corner of the Lord of Heaven’s mouth curled. “Of course not. I am merely concerned a public hearing might compromise your daughter’s honor.”

Bai Zhi seethed over the remark. “How considerate of you. If I were you, I would worry about my own.” His smile was vicious; showing a set of long, sharp, pointed teeth.

Ye Hua was the first to be interrogated by Emperor Dong Hua. He told the Emperor a short account of his and Su Su’s life together in the Mortal Realm before he left her on an extended leave to settle the dispute with the Mermaid Clan. He claimed not knowing much of what came to pass during the years he was away. Bai Zhi’s not so quiet cursing ‘the arrogance of the youth’ could be heard in the background.

The Sky Lord was quick to assure him; despite their initial misgiving about Ye Hua having an affair with a mortal; Su Su was treated rather well here.

Feng Jiu’s mocking voice rang up loud and clear. “The hospitality of the Ninth Heaven has obviously been declining if you call putting a pregnant woman into isolation, under lock and key, for a whole year as ‘being treated well’.”

The Sky Lord snapped at her. “You know absolutely nothing of what you’re talking about.”
“That’s where you were wrooong.” She drawled. Feng Jiu did not miss a beat when faced with multiples wilt glares. She lift her chin up in defiance. “I spent my time - under disguise of course - around here and had chance meetings with Lady Su Su during her stay under your hospitality many times. That makes me a witness as well.”

Back when the rest of the family learned the full truth of what had befallen their beloved daughter and sister; Feng Jiu had asked for her chance to help uncover the Sky Lord’s past misdeeds. She would not fail her aunt again.

Her casual remark found its intended mark on the bane of High Goddess Bai Qian’s existence. Jolt of apprehension and sudden disquiet befell the two accomplices. Yet they were more willing to treat it as a bluff; simply because the alternative was too unthinkable.

A devious smile twisted her pretty face. “Lady Su Jin, I must commend you. You are bolder than I suspected. You even dare to use Lord Lingbao Tianzun’s presence at the Gathering as an accessory to execute your plan.” Feng Jiu paused. “Hmm..what are the chances of you learning the past animosity between his mount and my aunt? The Ghost’s Ruling family perhaps? They frequented here quite often around that time, didn’t they?”

The little princess’s remark hit too close to home, Su Jin’s small frame shuddered involuntarily. “No, she lies. I didn’t…” She choked out her denial.

“I did no such thing. You can’t go around and accuse someone falsely.” After a moment to collect her thoughts; her voice gained back some strength. Without proof; no one would not able to condemn her, not even the Emperor.

“I forgot just how natural you are at deceiving and staging a play. I almost became the collateral damage of your scheming myself.” Feng Jiu sighed dramatically. “To prove your innocence, I guess you won’t objected explaining to everyone just how the Jade Purity fan of Kunlun suddenly turned up during the Gathering?”

The audience cracked a little at her well-timed jab. Yet when they saw the veins on the Sky Lord’s forehead was dancing and popping dangerously; the giggles degenerated into snickers and coughing fits.

Su Jin shook her head. “How would I know? Su Su must have told her maid to bring it to her.”

“I was with her the whole time. Su Su didn’t ask anyone to fetch the fan for her.” Ye Hua said matter-of-factly.

“And yet it turns up nevertheless, just in time to turn Lord Lingbao Tianzun’s phoenix crazy on everyone. Someone had to pay for a devastating ruckus like that.” Feng Jiu smirked knowingly. “How convenient it would be if the blame was pinned down on the only mortal in the vicinity. I mean, who would defend her, right?”

Seeing Ye Hua had turned the table on her, Su Jin pitched voice flared; long kindled resentment alight with frustration. “You always sided with her. Never once you did anything for me! Why, Ye Hua, I am your consort!”

Ye Hua watched her pitiful wailing with disinterest. “Fact is always fact. Just because you are bestowed to me as my Consort, it doesn’t make you my Consort.”
Su Jin gasped at him in disbelief; her whole body felt limp and lethargic.

*Did he just denounce her in front of everyone?*

When Lady Su Jin’s name was brought up by Bai Feng Jiu; everyone thought back to how young Yuan Zhen was being manipulated into his crime. The audience became skeptical of her credentials. From there, Emperor Dong Hua’s meticulous interrogation went on and on. Under his relentless questions, Su Jin began to crack. Her increasingly incoherent statements revealed more and more inconsistencies.

“Lady Su Jin, how do you think a mortal - who was locked up for over a year and lived almost a secluded life - knows what kind of a place the Zhuxian Terrace is? And that we, Immortals, are vulnerable to its energy.”

“I don’t know. Anyone, her maid, could have told her.” Su Jin said tiredly.

“Oh? I’m under the impression that the Crown Prince brought her from the Lower Realm.” The Emperor said mildly.

“Told me?” Su Jin’s refused. “The point is she wanted to see the place; so I led her there.”

“So you offered to accompany her there; then caught off guard and fell down the Zhu Xian’s terrace later. That’s about right?” Emperor Dong Hua asked for confirmation.

“Yes. One minute I was standing next to her and before I know it I was falling down. I don’t know whether or not she planned it. I mean she was quite upset that I stole the Crown Prince’s attention from her,” said Su Jin.

“Interesting. Lady Su Su was pregnant with the Crown Prince’s first heir, yet you deemed it appropriate to expose them to a place that is heavily-saturated with malicious aura. You also led her right to the very edge of the terrace and needlessly put both of you in harm’s way when you believe she was upset with you. What did you hope to accomplish?” Dong Hua commented humorlessly.

“When you put it like that. I feel really silly. I just want us to get along, I didn’t think everything through. And …. and she looked so innocent. The - the thought that she wished me ill never crossed my mind,” Su Jin stammered nervously.

“Lady Su Jin, according to the Crown Prince’s statement, at first you claimed Lady Su Su pushed you. Later you changed your statement again, saying it could be an accident. I will give you one last chance to make up your mind. If you tell me the truth now, I will give you a fair judgement. Don’t expect any more leniency from me after this.” Emperor Dong Hua told her impassively.

“Well, I remembered someone bragging to Lady Su Su that she got her eyes transplant and those eyes once belonged to the Lady herself.” Feng Jiu said in a cool tone.

She continued. “That actually made me thinking. Did you not maneuver yourself into that position? A poor and hapless victim who fell prey to a vicious and heartless mortal in a fit of her jealousy. You certainly made sure no one would plead for her leniency this time.”

“I found it is hard to believe a small fairy like her has the courage to act so wantonly against the heir-apparent times and again. There must be something else. Since she’s not very forthcoming. Dong
Hua, why don’t you give her an incentive?” The Fox Emperor glanced toward the dais meaningfully.

“Lady Su Jin? You heard the Fox Emperor. If you were coerced into committing these crimes, now is the last chance for you to speak up.”

The Fox Empress suggested almost helpfully. “I’m quite sure going back to the place will help jog her memory. Shouldn’t we try that, husband?”

Su Jin visibly recoiled in repulsion at the prospect of going back there. What if they throw her down there? She crawled on her knees toward Ye Hua and clutched his leg tightly; tears pouring down her face.

“Ye Hua, please, say something. At least for the sake of the old times, save me.” She begged, throwing away any remaining dignity she had.

Ye Hua only stared back at her with his unreadable eyes. He pulled her hands off his leg and dropped them unceremoniously. “You reap what you sow, Su Jin. No one can save you now. The least you could do is admitting to your crime. Perhaps the Emperor might take a pity on you yet.”

Su Jin casted a backward glance toward her uncles; silently begging them to come forward and plead for her. Yet each of them refused to lift their head up and meet her eyes. Her gaze slide over to the Sky Lord, her last pillar of strength, hoping he would say something to deflect those accusations. She only shrunk back in fear when she saw the warning ablazing in his guarded eyes. With a sinking feeling, she came to the horrible truth; everyone had forsaken her.

She had incurred the Emperor’s wrath in the past; he would never stay his hand for her sake. The Fox family would never let her get away from their crutches either. Her only survival chance hinged on how she confessed to her sins. They wanted to implicate the Sky Lord, so be it. It was his own fault; he should have defended her in the first place. These were not her sins alone. If she went down, so would he.

Su Jin crawled on her hands and knees and prostrated herself in front of the Emperor. She knocked her heads trice on the ground, pleading.

“Emperor, I beg you. You have to believe me, I did not mean to bring her harm. Everyone knew how much the Sky Lord despised Lady Su Su. He wanted her gone forever at all cost. He told me I had to help him get rid of her or suffer the consequences. What choices did I have but follow his order?”

“Su Jin, you wretched woman. Don’t you dare put the blame on me!” The Sky Lord pointed at her crumpled form accusingly. “I said no such thing. It was you who came up with that gruesome idea. I thought you were being sincere about protecting the Crown Prince, so I spared your hide. I even warned you to perish the thought. It could only end badly for you. I should have known you are such a viper.”

“You? You warned me not to do it?” Su Jin barked a short, bitter laugh. “You went so far as to promise me the position of Crown Prince’s consort if I succeeded. Remember?”

“Nonsense.” The Sky Lord roared at her. “Only because of your liaison with the generals that allowed you to bluff your way into that position.”
Su Jin shrieked. “That isn’t true. You said .. you said someone as ambitious and resourceful as me should stay by his side. You encouraged me to find a way to get rid of her.”

“You are clearly delusional, woman.” The Sky Lord’s face darkened; she had said too much already. “You lied all along, didn’t you? Every dreadful things you said about her was your own doing. I can’t believe I listened to you.”

“I did it. I served her on the platter. But you...you let her got away again. I risked my life, everything, to create that chance and you wasted it. You ruined me.” Su Jin wailed, throwing her arms into the air in frustration.

“You failed to kill her! Only I succeeded.” She laughed hysterically,

If looks could kill, he would incinerate her alive. “Su Jin, mind your words, you just admitted you are responsible for her death.”

“Yes, yes, I did it. Per your order.” Su Jin cackled maddeningly; her eyes sparkle with a crazed glint.

“Su Jin! Stop right there--”

“That’s enough!” Emperor Dong Hua stern voice broke off their verbal fight. “Since neither of you are capable of telling the truths; I will let the truths speak for themselves.”

Emperor Dong Hua raised his palm up, summoning an object into his hand. It turned out to be the Miaohua mirror - one of the sacred items Emperor Dong Hua made eons ago. Usually it was hung in Jiuchongtian Hall in the Seventh Heaven. It was said that, with the right ability, the mirror could look into the past and present lives.

The Sky Lord snickered at his futile attempt. The Miaohua mirror could only look into mortal lives; it would never work on the Immortal realms. Obviously the Emperor thought he could use it to trick them into a confession.

Emperor Dong Hua wrote something on a small piece of paper and threw it into the glass. Soon after a clear little scene began to appear. The scene within the looking-glass showed the first moment Lady Su Su was brought to the Ninth Heaven. Then it changed and showed the succeeding years she suffered in silence of her abandonment.

They witnessed how she struggled to survive as everything and everyone were hurled against her. They saw the light of happiness in her eyes dim with each passing day until one day the windows of her soul were forever robbed from her. They pitied her decision to jump down the Zhuxian Terrace to escape this tortuous life; only to face death.

As scenes changed, the mood in the Grand Hall gradually became sombre. The unraveled fate of the poor mortal brought tears to many. Some bowed their heads in shame. Was this how far they had fallen?

Thousands if not millennial were spent in practicing to attain the higher spiritual power; yet they failed one mandatory requirement that granted them a higher standing among all beings created by Heavenly Father and Mother: the virtue of compassion.
Mo Yuan had been privy to the early insight into Seventeenth’s disastrous past by courtesy of Bai Feng Jiu and Nai Nai. Nothing prepared him well enough to withstand the horrendous outcomes that laid bare in front of his very eyes. He could still hear her agonized cry for help ringing in his ears. For the umpteenth times, Mo Yuan felt the weight of his failure to protect his beloved. If only he pushed himself harder, he could have return early. Only three hundred years sooner, he could have spared her from the ultimate pain of death and betrayal.

The illusion of grandeur and the foolish pride in his prestigious bloodline were not the only factors that forced the Lord’s ruthless hand in Seventeenth’s case. Ironically enough, the real culprit was a healthy dose of fear. The fear that festered in the Sky Lord’s heart ever since the first time Ye Hua rose to protect Seventeenth against his decree.

The Lord of Heaven no longer recognized his own grandson - *this stranger* - who refused to bow down to his every wish. And that spooked him. Seventeenth cannot be allowed to stand by his side, not when her very being threatened the Crown Prince’s integrity. For her crime, *death* was the only punishment for her.

At this moment, Mo Yuan regretted ever promising the revenge of Seventeenth to her father; no matter how much logical and appropriate it would be. He wished it would be by his own sword that the Sky Lord fell prey.

Mo Yuan’s gaze shifted over to his twin brother; the harden edge in his demeanor softened slightly. He got more than a glimpse into Ye Hua’s thoughts. Despite how poorly he handled the situation that was forced upon him and Seventeenth; his brother’s affection for her was genuine. He had at least tried to protect her and spare her suffering in his own way. Still it was not enough. His ridiculous arrogance and misplaced self-confidence to outplay the Sky Lord and Su Jin had cost him and Seventeenth dearly. The price both had to pay was way too steep that they cannot find a way back to each other anymore.

Feng Jiu hissed in pain when her father suddenly gripped her wrist tightly. She winced when looking back at the looking-glass; it was showing Star Lord Shi Ming carrying her bloodied, unconscious herself back to Taichen Palace after being attacked by the Phoenix. She took hold of his arm and buried her face against it. Feng Jiu made sure to give it some nuzzles, hoping to soothe his frayed nerves.

Bai Zhi let out an unwilling choke when he heard his daughter’s tormented plea to not take away her eyes. It was one thing to hear the story - apparently a heavily edited one at that - from another but to witness firsthand the sufferings his daughter had been through was a pure torture. He glanced sideways at his wife in concern when her quivering body sagged against him. An arm extended and reached around her shoulder, bringing her body closer to him as he silently gave her the comfort she needed. They would mourn their daughter’s heartbreaking past in privacy later, now they had to remain strong for her.

Bai Zhen gripped the sword in his hand so hard his knuckles turned white. His well-practiced self-restraint barely held him back. The screams of his sister’s terror pierced deep into his heart; until it bled and flowed. He did not even know when he took a step towards the Crown Prince, sword unsheathed. Zhe Yan however was hot on his heel and held both his arms captive. He hissed ‘*not now*’ into the younger fox’s ears and dragged him backward.

Ye Hua did not missed the deadly promise for blood in his eyes. His heart sunk at the barely veiled
contempt and the loathing Qian Qian’s family was throwing at him. He knew it would be too much to hope for their forgiveness. Still he wished for a little understanding. His hands were tied; there was nothing much he could have done in those situations lest he invoked more wrath on Su Su. He sighed; it would be a long way for them to even be on speaking terms again.

Die Feng closed his eyes to block off the haunted expression on Seventeenth’s face. This was what he had allowed to happen right under his nose. For seventy thousand years he searched for her in vain. When she appeared in front of him; he let her slipped through his fingers again. It was then a warm hand was placed on his shoulder. Die Feng looked up and met with his mentor’s understanding eyes. Die Feng’s spirit lifted up a little; he returned his kindness with a hint of grateful smile on his lips.

“Never thought I would say this but I’m glad she forgot all of these.” Zi Lan said to no one in particular. The hands hanging by his side were balled into tight fists. “Nothing worth remembering at all.”

Die Feng glanced at him and nodded. Yes, it was better this way. Never again would they allow anyone to hurt her. They swore silently to bring more happiness to her life; it would not made up for her regrettable past life. At least it would be something they can do for her.

Mo Yuan studied and observed the reactions of the crowd. The way they looked upon the Sky Lord had indeed changed. Gone was the unwavering trust and loyalty they once bestowed on him. It was replaced by doubts, distrust and disappointment. Mo Yuan gave an imperceptive nod to Emperor Dong Hua.

“Is there anything else you wish to add?” Dong Hua Emperor raised his eyebrows pointedly at the Sky Lord who was shaken with anger and shame from being exposed.

His ashen face looked at Emperor Dong Hua with so much hostility. He had expected a slap on the wrist or an outright condescending at most. Never had he thought the Emperor would humiliate him like this.

“What do you plan to do with me then? Force me to abdicate?” He let out a dry, humorless laugh.

“Can a lord without willing and loyal subjects still be called a Lord?” Emperor Dong Hua gazed upon him. “Look around, Sky Lord, you already lost their trust and the legitimacy to lead in their eyes.”

“Don’t bother trying to reason with him, Dong Hua. He’s too unrepentant in his old stubborn ways.” Bai Zhi advanced toward them; his whole body was bristled with unabated fury. A sword was thrown down at the Sky Lord’s feet.

“What is the meaning of this, Bai Zhi?”
Bai Zhi growled low. “You know what. Pick it up, so we can settle this score once and for all.”

Meanwhile, Wang Yi crept toward the dais in silence. He sent a combination of hand signals to his men and some Celestial guards he roped into helping. Their order was to discreetly pan out and hold their designated position around the Hall and awaited for the right moment to secure their Lord; then pushed back his assailants. However, as soon as they inched closer to their target; Wang Yi found their path was blocked by men in white disciple robes.

“It would be best if you go back to your tables.” Mo Yuan suggested lightly.

Wang Yi squinted his eyes. “High God, you just said you will not interfere with Celestial's affairs anymore.” He said it in such an accusatory tone.

Mo Yuan gave him a fair warning. “It’s within reason for Bai Yi to issue his challenge. Try not to interfere, least the whole Clan winded up in another war.”

“How could -,” Wang Yi started.

Before he could finish the sentence, he was treated with High God Mo Yuan’s infamous glare. Wang Yi swallowed his breath as he felt the tattletale overbearing aura encroached upon him. He quickly distanced himself from the promise of death in the God’s eyes, should he persist. Wang Yi nervously took the second glance at the battle-readied young men then sighed in defeat.

After a brief eye contact with his Lord; Wang Yi offered him an apologetic headshake. Well, he had at least tried, hadn’t he? He did not have a suicidal wish by going toe-to-toe with High God Mo Yuan and his band of irritated warriors.

If he read the situation correctly, a new Lord of Heaven will rise soon. It would be a sacrilege and downright stupid to antagonize both Kunlun Mountain and the Fox Clan further.

The Sky Lord hesitated. *Fight against him?* Save for High God Mo Yuan and Emperor Dong Hua, the Fox Emperor was unrivaled for his unmatched strength and excellent skills in sword fighting.

Emperor Dong Hua was useless; he will not fight in his or the Clan’s name, he already knew as much. Nothing could sway him. Had Mo Yuan did not cut all ties with the Clan from the beginning, he might even beg for his help. He could not asked Ye Hua either, Bai Zhi would certainly use this chance to maim him and get away with it too.

They had planned this all along. His fury came back ten folds. And like a fool he walked into their trap.

He waited for anyone to come up with a reasonable excuse to put a stop to this fight. Alas, all seemed to hold their bated breath and did nothing else. A graveyard was far more boisterous than the Grand Hall now. Even his own sons refused to step up for him. Had he been such a terrible person in their eyes?

“What’s in it for me?” The Sky Lord asked in a low tone of voice.
“A chance to redeem yourself somewhat in their eyes.” Emperor Dong Hua said quietly.

His eyes glinted with hope. “What is going to happen if I win?”

“I will spare your life and go back to Qing Qiu. How you Celestials deal with the fallout is not my concern.” Bai Zhi paused and said gravely. “But if you lose, you are going to lose your title and submit yourself to Dong Hua’s judgement.”

“You didn’t give me a choice at all, Bai Zhi.” The Sky Lord accused him. It was a lose-lose scenario for him no matter how he looked at it.

“It’s more than you ever give anyone.” The Fox Emperor said grimly; the finality in his voice was very telling. “Take up the offer and fight for your chance or decline and lose everything.

The Sky Lord turned his back to them and walked away. “I’ll use my own sword.”

Sometime later the Sky Lord and Bai Zhi were found standing face-to-face not far from the lotus pond; waiting to battle out their dispute. For the first time in over a hundred thousand years, the Sky Lord donned his old armor and picked up his old, trusty sword.

A protective barrier was casted around them; to ensure their fight will not physically harm the people and buildings within its proximity. Earlier more than half of the guests rush out in a hurry to get away. It was more prudent and self-conscious of them to stay away for the time. The rest did not share the same opinions and gathered around to watch the fight of the millennium.

The Sky Lord knew he could not win over Bai Zhi with brute force; nor simple illusions. The fox magic was far superior to any spells he could conjure. His eyes glinted with malice. If underhand tactics could give him an edge over Bai Zhi, then why not?

They began to circle each other from a distance; eyes alerted, sword ready. On the third round the Sky Lord flew at Bai Zhi at full speed. His thrust flew into a swing then into a two-handed chop. Bai Zhi blocked and deflected it to the side with practiced ease. Long years of fighting countless battles and the memory muscle guided the Fox Emperor’s hand.

The Sky Lord’s attacks played out without landing a single hit. Then Bai Zhi launched his own attack; he struck back and parried in a flurry of blows. He fought with controlled ferocity. Steels ringing on steels. It was obvious who got the upper hand.

Bai Zhi feinted his swing then reversed the direction of his sword; he scored a clip on his opponent’s forearm. Thin river of blood ran down the Sky Lord’s arm from where he was cut. The Sky Lord narrowed his eyes; with certain intricate moves of his hands, he vanished.

A moment later, Bai Zhi side-stepped and moved his sword in a counter-swing move just as the Sky Lord reappeared and rushed him from behind. The tips of the deflected sword glanced off Bai Zhi’s blade harmlessly; until it nicked at Bai Zhi’s hand. A crooked smile flashed on the Sky Lord’s face. It won’t be long now.

The Sky Lord threw a flurry of two-handed swings at the Fox Emperor’s head; forcing him to block
the heavy blow. Their swords clashed and locked up in a clinched. He shoved the Fox Emperor backward, trying to knock him off his game.

Bai Zhi shook his head and tried to shake off the multiple likeness of the Sky Lord coming at him at once. Being a Master of Illusions himself, he knew it was not a spell-induced illusion that cause this alteration but something else. He narrowed his eyes to slits. *That sword!*

His eyes cannot be trusted now; this fight had to end soon. Bai Zhi did not know how long his blood could fight off the drug’s hold. Already he could feel the palm of his hand turned clammy. Bai Zhi opened his sense and his mind; let the instincts honed over the years took over.

Seeing the poison was taking its hold; the Sky Lord drove relentlessly into the Fox Emperor’s opening. Bai Zhi still beaten back his attack though with much less agility. They parried back and forth until the Fox Emperor’s leg wobbled under one particular heavy strike, then fell to one knee. The Sky Lord lunged again at Bai Zhi’s head; this time his blade was caught with the Emperor’s own.

Bai Zhi swept his leg at his opponent’s leg and got him off balance. The Fox Emperor smashed the end of his sword into the younger one’s snarling face. The hit struck hard at his temple, sending the Lord of Heaven sprawling onto his back. Before the Sky Lord could get back up; the Fox Emperor’s blade already caught at his throat, biting into the soft skin.

“You just have to cheat your way around until the very last moment, don’t you?” Bai Zhi said in disgust. “I’m handing him over to you now, Dong Hua. If I have to look at his deceitful face a moment longer, I cannot guarantee his continued existence.”

“Any last words, Sky Lord?” Emperor Dong Hua asked again; yet his answer came in a snarling, illegible noises.

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Note: A great appreciation to *my editor-in-chief* Noitratoxin. And to loreinacidis0412 my friend & consultant rolled into one for inspiring me to write this *Kick the Sky Lord's arse arc*. Your golden suggestions/reviews made this happen. ^O^ My schedule has been hectic lately and will likely continue, so please bear with the sporadic update.
Chapter 38

:: Ninth Heaven ::

A look of utter disdain clouded over Bai Zhen’s face as he glanced, from the corner of his eyes, over at the fallen Lord of Celestial and the crumpled form of Consort Su Jin. Like his father, he no longer cared how the once ruler of all realms would deal with these two accomplices. They had accomplished what they set out to do; with added bonus of exposing their less-than-honorable plotting against his sister to the eyes of the public.

He did not know the Emperor had such tricks up his sleeve; he doubted his father ever foresee how today would play out as well. High God Mo Yuan on the other hand might, seeing how he was content with leaving everything in the Emperor’s capable hand. He guessed he should not be surprised, after all the Emperor had a vast resources of knowledge at his disposal.

Bai Zhen shook his head, driving away his idle thoughts. He took a step forward. "Emperor, before you pass on the judgment, I would like to make a request."

He paused for a sign of acknowledgement from the regal god before continued. “My sister’s eyes should be returned to us immediately. They were exposed to malicious aura for hundreds of years already. I fear any prolonged exposure would do them serious physical harm. Not to mention she might try to sabotage them in her desperate attempt to get even.”

“If you feel it necessary, do as you must,” was his only reply.

Bai Zhen bowed to the Emperor and made his way toward the usurper of Bai Qian’s eyes. He casted an immobility spell preventing her to crawl away from him. Once he stood looming over her prone body; he bent down and spoke in a low tone so only the two of them could hear it.

“Be glad there are so many eyewitnesses here, else I will make sure you suffer every minute as I gauge the eyes out with my claws.”

Then the sound of his sword unsheathed was deafening in the eerily silence of the Hall; followed by wailing screams of terror then whimpering of painful gasps. The immaculate face of the youngest son of the Fox Emperor betrayed nothing as he walked back toward the gathering of his family. He dropped the reclaimed possession into the waiting hand of Zhe Yan.

“I hope the damage is not too severe. I don’t feel so generous today.” He noted with a careless shrug. “How long before you could the exchange?”

“I will have to cleanse them thoroughly first. The impurity embedded in them is rather strong. It will take some time,” the God of Medicine checked the pair of eyes in his hand with practiced ease.

By his own binding words, the Sky Lord was stripped of his title and presented to Emperor Dong Hua to await his final verdict. He did not cope with his fallen from grace that well. He pushed away and took offense at anyone getting too close to him.

“Su Jin, for your crime and your failure to repent, from this moment on you are no longer counted as one of us. Never again you will return to any of immortal realms, not even the lower realms. For five hundred times, you will be reincarnated into mortal and suffer the six bitterness.” Emperor Dong Hua
proclaimed.

“Emperor, you can’t be serious. She jumped down the Zhu Xian Terrace on her own and … and it’s
the Sky Lord who took her eyes. Why am I the one to carry all the blames? You can’t punish me so
severely, I’m the last of my family. The Clan of Martyr. Did you forget what they did? What would
the others say?” She pleaded and threatened with foolish arrogance.

The Emperor’s eyebrow quirked, unamused, at her boastful claim. “Your ancestor will thank me yet
for giving you a lesson of humility. You are nothing but a blight on their honor, a disgrace of their
valiant effort.”

“A martyr? Please...” Bai Feng Jiu scowled. “Seriously, what have you ever done? Did you march to
the battlefield and fight against the Ghost combatants? Did you reseal Qing Cang inside the Bell of
Eastern Emperor? Or did you sacrifice your soul to prevent the total destruction of all realms?”

“You. Did. Nothing.” The young fox said forcefully. “The only thing you ever accomplished is
bullying a weak, hapless mortal and earned yourself undying hatred from your own husband.”

Su Jin moved her head left and right, frantically tried to pinpoint from where Feng Jiu’s voice came.
The wet trails of blood trickling down her face made her look alike a vengeful spirit rather than a fair
fairy. “You have no right to say that. You have no right!” She hollered in protest.

“Silence.”

Bai Feng Jiu jumped at the loud, commanding, crisp voice. It appeared the Emperor’s patience was
running short. She pursed her lips in annoyance but said no more.

“You will learn well from those years as mortal and better yourself, Su Jin.” The Emperor’s tone was
edgy, a warning of sort. “Or else you will be eternally condemned to be born as labor animals to
repay your sins.”

“No, you can’t do that to me. You just can’t.” Su Jin repeated. “I’m a fairy; a beautiful, graceful
being. How can I be a beast of burden?”

The once Crown Prince’s consort was half crazed now, realizing she would be endlessly doomed.
How could he be so cruel to her? She was innocent! Did he not see that?

“No, no, no. I will not. I will not.” She uttered in absolute denial even as she was being dragged
away from his presence.

“What about you? What compensation you deem fit for all these?” The Emperor swept his hand
around, casually asking the fallen Lord of Heaven as if the judgment would be passed on someone
else but him.

Hao De snorted derisively at the Emperor’s shrewd approach. If he insisted on light punishment; it
would only cement their belief in his unrepentant attitude. Worse, it would spark another round of
glaring dispute with the Fox Clan. Ye Hua could not afford that on top of his own definite offense to
the whole Clan. Truthfully, at this moment, he cared not of his once well-kept fame and reputation.
Nothing was left to be savaged anyway. Not after being ousted by the Fox Emperor for his attempt
to best him with less than ideal underhand-maneuver.

“I chose to be reincarnated as mortal. Same amount of time.” He announced at length. “After I have
done my time, I will take my leave and spend the rest of my days at the Sea of Innocence.” The ex-
Sky Lord swallowed the painful truth. He was done for in possible every way. There was no more
place of power for him within this realm. As an exiled Lord, he did not have that much choices.
Emperor Dong Hua made a furtive glance at Mo Yuan and got a tentative agreement. The Fox Emperor, on the other hand, was slower and a bit reluctant to give the nod to the silent question.

“So be it,” the Emperor echoed his decision. The Sea of Innocence was far enough and quite deserted, save from occasional visitors. The ex-ruler will not be around to sway the next Sky Lord’s decision, nor be able to influence his will upon those remaining loyalists. The Emperor reminded himself to station his own spies at that place; once Hao De came back and took his residence there.

The crowd began to dispersed, slowly groups by groups took their leaves, seeing there was nothing more to entertain themselves with. Some remained, locked in heated discussion with their peers, speculating about the future and the implications of today’s revelation will bring upon their own Clan.

As usual, Star Lord Shi Ming trailed after his Lord to return to Taichen Palace. When he walked pass Bai Feng Jiu, he stopped to converse with her, briefly. The little fox princess’s face lightened up by whatever he conveyed to her in secrecy. She was seen slapping his shoulder in encouragement, much to the bewilderment of those who spied on them discreetly.

“What was that?” Bai Zhen did not hold his curiosity for long.

Feng Jiu gave him an enigmatic smile, then replied. “Shi Ming promised he will write mean fates for both of them .”

“Oh?” Now Zhe Yan and the rest of the family were equally intrigued and hang on her every word.

“He intends for them to be born together, for every incarnation. He even thought of making one of them, or both, crippled or disfigured by birth. Or born with hideous disease. They will be shunned by their own respectable family and strangers alike, so they could only rely on each other. Then he planned to let them torture and betray each other in the worst possible way too.” Feng Jiu cackled gleefully. “Splendid, isn’t it?”

“Hmm. I never peg him that devious.” Zhe Yan said thoughtfully. “It seems he does learn something from his Master after all.”

“That’s right. I praise his wonderful ingenuity as well.” Feng Jiu smiled mischievously. “I bet aunt would be dying to read their stories,” then she sighed, “only if she’s awake now. Are we going back to Kunlun now?”

“We still have an unfinished business.” Bai Zhi said before heading ahead.

“We do?” Feng Jiu blinked owlishly then hurriedly rushed after him.

Crown Prince Ye Hua, now the uncrowned Sky Lord, perked up from his conversation with his parents, seeing the Fox Emperor heading his way. He winced internally at the incoming confrontation. Judging by the stormy expression of the fox ruler; nothing good would come out of it too. The young ruler resigned himself to his inevitable fate.

Emperor Bai Zhi stopped just in front of him and stared hard at the bane of his daughter’s existence. The strained silence between them dragged on. Had Ye Hua had the habit of squirming in agitation
under such intense intimidation, he would. Sadly, he was too dignified to succumb to such restlessness.

“You are forbidden to enter any lands under Qing Qiu’s.” The older ruler started with slow burning aggression.

He dictated his one-sided terms and carelessly forced it upon Ye Hua. “You will not contact my daughter or see her under any circumstances, unless by her expressed wish. Which I highly doubt she will. You will not come between her and Mo Yuan as well.”

The Fox ruler tilted his head back to look at his family briefly, addressing them and Ye Hua at once the punishment for breaking his stipulation. “Any violation of my words is punishable by death.”

“Emperor, surely we could…” Yang Cuo, Ye Hua’s father, started. He looked disturbed at the laid down terms.

“I am not done,” said the Emperor.

“We are not done.” The Fox Empress mirrored her husband. She eyed her spouse momentarily; knowing for what and why he instigated this discussion.

“There’s the matter of our grandson,” she said drily, “whose existence remains unknown to us until now. That, too, will change. He will come back with us, starting from now.”

“That is a little too harsh. Don’t you think?” Lian Song, the forever diplomat of the family, spoke up softly. “For better or worse, he’s Ye Hua’s son as well.” Not that it meant anything to the Empress, from the way her eyebrow arched into the hairline.

“Ali is still too young to grasp the change. A sudden, full-time relocation to the fox realm will confuse him greatly.” Ye Hua reasoned. “Qian Qian is still unconscious and cannot take care of him. Please allow at least one of his parent to be with him.”

“May I suggest an alternative? How about him splitting time between here and there then?” He tried to offer a sound compromise, knowing he could not win against the Emperor if he really wanted to take his son way.

“Ye Hua,” Consort Le Xu exclaimed. “You cannot allow that! Ali still has his studies here. He’s the future Crown Prince now. How can he skip those lessons just to spend time away? No offense, Emperor, but I doubt the education in your land is on par with our standards.” She said quite haughtily.

“High Goddess Bai Qian is such a prime example. Her upbringing is too bizarre. Apparently, she possesses not a single bones of gentle and refined Lady. A quite predictable outcome; considering how she spent her early years living among men; learning how to wage a war rather than womanly roles and duties.”

A silence hung heavily in the wake of her criticism against the only High Goddess in all realms. The Fox Empress halted her sons from speaking out of turn. Her smile was still serene when she spoke up, quite nonchalantly.

“My daughter is a High Goddess, she’s by all means your better. Were she here, by your own rules, you will have to humble yourself and kowtow to her. I believe the Ninth Heaven also has a rule against speaking so ill of their superior. What is the punishment for that again, hmm?”

If the Fox Empress enjoyed the way the color drain so fast from the Consort’s face, she did not
showed it. “Now where are we? Ah, the child rearing and upbringing.”

She smiled brightly. “If my daughter is such an exemplary case as you said. What about Lady Su Jin then? You raised her from young, did you not? She grew up to be such a bitter and vengeful person who refused to see any reasons. She was so willing to go the greatest length to satisfy her selfish wishes. I wonder where she learned that kind of behaviors from.”

The Empress continued her verbal attack blissfully. “And there is your son who is so emotionally stunted that he could not cope with his life positively. Who in their right mind come to the conclusion that the only way to protect his wife is to abandon her and leave her to fight her own battle when she was not even equipped to do so? Or intentionally harmed her to save her so-called life?”

“Do you see it now? You failed them as their mother. Twice.” The Empress tutted disapprovingly. “After all that came to pass today, you still have to gall to bring my daughter into question. What does that say about you?”

The Empress’s eyes hardened. “My good conscience will not allow me to let such a bad influence on my only grandson. If Prince Ali needed a good female role model in his life; my family will gladly provided it. Each of us have accomplished great many things in our lifetime, anyone can attest to that. Doubtfully the same could be said about yours or you.”

Consort Le Xu’s face reddened so much she could felt the heat spreading down her neck. She opened her mouth then shut it, knowing she could not completely refute the accusations the older woman flung at her. Her own inability to maintain a good head on her shoulders was seriously criticized and shredded into pieces. Hot tears borne of being utterly humiliated dripped down her face unbidden. And she wept in silence.

Seeing the situation was spiraling downward, Ye Hua curved down his rising uneasiness at being called out as an emotionally-inept person and stepped in.

“Emperor, Empress, I wish to offer an apology on my mother’s behalf. The stress must have gotten to her, making her behave erratically. I sincerely hope you would not take her words to heart.” He bowed low to Qian Qian’s parents to appease their anger.

“As for Ali, I have every confidence under your tutelage he would learn great many deals. Your family is renowned for both innate power and strength of characters. But Ali has spent many years studying. It would be a waste not to fulfill them to fullest capacity, especially those lessons taught by the Lord of Luminous Treasures himself.”

He continued. “So I humbly beg you, to let him stay at least half a year with me. I believe learning his heritage from both sides will grant him a better opportunity in the long run.”

The Fox couple consulted each other with their eyes. They were not completely heartless to tear away the child from one of his constant parent. In the end a compromise was reached. In a month, Ali would come to Qing Qiu and stay with them at his mother’s Den, getting to know his other family.

:: Two weeks later, Kunlun Mountain ::

Ali was skipping and dancing his way all the way back to his mother’s room. Nai Nai trailed after
him at a more sedated pace, she was too tired to keep up with his youthful exuberance.

In his hand held a few branches of Peach Blossom. He was told it was a tradition, for his mother at least, to decorate the room with them. Ali had no problem followed said tradition. The Peach Groove in the back of Kunlun Mountain was fun to play around, even on his own.

Ali let out a happy squeal as he jumped up and tried to make another grab at the flying creatures. Kunlun’s people were very funny and welcoming. They brought so many toys for him, including the spell-woven paper butterflies currently fluttering merrily around him.

The young prince also adored the Master of Kunlun, even if they did not talk that much, something he determined to change soon. Ali was unable to pinpoint it, there was something about the older man that make him feel safe and relaxed. Not much different from being with his Father Prince.

The boy chew his lips, rather frustrated. He still cannot decide the proper term to address the man.

:: flashback ::

Ali craned his head looking at the long-winded stone staircase; standing tall at the end of their path was an enigmatic, awe-inspiring, monolithic structure. He tugged at Nai Nai’s hand, asking questions, not for the first time since they started this journey. Jia Yun, their appointed guard, followed them at a much greater distance.

“What is that? The giant stone building?” His tone reflected a childlike wonder.

Nai Nai giggled softly. His excitement was quite infectious. She was quite in awe with this place as well, even it was her second time here.

“That’s the Kunlun’s Grand Hall. They use it to welcome visitors, very much like your Father Prince’s Grand Hall.”

Ali shook his head. “No, no, it’s nothing alike. I mean this is huge!” He insisted; spreading the gap between the palms of his hands to elaborate his point. He looked up at his companion, asking hopefully. “My mother, she’s really here?”

“Yes, she is.” Nai Nai responded quickly to assure the young boy.

“High God Mo Yuan…..,” he hesitated, tilting his head to the side. “What should I call him father..err no ..step-father? Or umm, uncle?”

Nai Nai raised her hand to her mouth to hide her amusement. “Just go with what you feel comfortable. It will be fine.”

His brows only furrowed deeper. They crossed the threshold and finally arrived at the inner hall. Ali observed the two lines of men clad in white robe with pure fascination. Each of them sat ramrod-straight, proud and quite intimidating to his eyes. Not as frightening as his Grandfather per se but still quite daunting at first glance. Let’s just said the princeling was impressed.

“Nai Nai.” The boy tugged at his caretaker’s hand urgently; eyeing the man occupying the slightly elevated seating platform. “He looks just like Father Prince. Are you sure that’s not father in disguised?” He whisper-yelled and failed to see how his hushed exclamation brought humor to those men, his supposed uncle included.
“I am quite sure he is not. They are an identical twin. Of course, they look alike. Did you forget what
the Crown Prince told you?” Nai Nai giggled then confided in him fondly. “Now let’s greet him
properly, shall we?”

Ali bobbed his head up and down and grinned excitedly. He bowed from the waist to show his great
respect to one of the oldest god.

“AllI greets uncle, step-father, God of War High God Mo Yuan. Ali thanks you for your hospitality
for having me here today.” He said in a rush before he forgot his practiced speech.

As soon as he finished, the sound of suppressed mirth reached his ear. The little prince gawked at the
man sitting on his left side who still chuckled for good measure.

A sigh ensued, followed by a ‘Zi Lan’. The way by which it was worded almost sounded like a
chiding.

Did he say something wrong? Ali blinked in confusion with no less self-doubt. He cannot let
anyone saying he had less than an impeccable manner. He was representing both his Father Prince
and his mother after all. Ali puffed up at that thought. So, naturally, he tried again.

“AllI hope his presence will not trouble High God Mo Yuan, the God of War and Master of Kunlun;
uncle turned step-father, too much.” And he waited.

Much to his chagrin, most of them now burst out in laughing, except the Master himself and the
stern-looking man on his immediate right hand. Though their faces were expertly schooled; Ali’s
eyes spied a small, curved lips lifting at the corners.

“What a delightful child.” Someone wheezed another laugh while he tried to catch a breathing.

“Definitely Seventeenth’s son. Though I doubt she was this polite.”

“I bet she was a true menace at that age.”

Another added, oddly cheerfully. That comment certainly set off another round of laughter.

“That’s quite enough, all of you,” came the gentle reprimand.

Ali was enraptured by their light-hearted exchanges. Kunlun’s people was not as boring as he first
suspected. They were rather interesting, and definitely something else? Lately the mood in the Ninth
Heaven became quite somber for no reason. Perhaps it was due to his Grandfather and Consort Su
Jin’s sudden disappearance? Even his grandmother’s good-natured smile came far and few in
between now, Ali lamented.

At least there would be no more stuffy old guys pushing him to study harder to compensate those
months of upcoming vacation he would spend in Qing Qiu with his grandparents. He brightened up
at that thought. The little prince quickly flashed them his winning smile. Nai Nai always said that no
one could resist his ‘megawatt smile’. Whatever that was. He hoped it was enough to win them over.

“Ooh, look at that smile. Come here, boy.” They waved at him to come closer.

It seemed the formality had ended, Ali decided before standing up and taking off toward them. Soon
he was surrounded and engulfed by disciples of the God of War. His day was already looking up!

:: end of flashback ::
“Nai Nai, I am running ahead,” the little prince shouted at his escort.

Ali cannot wait to visit his mother again; even though she was still sleeping all the time. He was content just sitting and playing close to her. High God Zhe Yan assured him she would wake up in no time. Ali hope it would be very sooner than later. He missed her so much.

Note: Special thanks to my editor 'Noitratoxin' for her help as always.

The final arc of this story is finally here ... Again, thanks everyone for your encouragement and patience. Appreciate it a lot.
:: Kunlun Mountains ::

Ali pushed the door open and peeked inside; much to his surprise no one was there, save for the lady owner of the room.

Small feet pittered and pattered across the room to the sleeping platform. The young boy lifted himself up, then proceeded to give the sleeping person a peck on her cheek, all the while careful not to crush the flowers held captive in his arm.

Young Ali studied his mother’s figure. Tilting his head left and right, trying to discern any changes that might occur in his short absence. When he found nothing amiss or more accurately changed, he pouted slightly and climbed off the platform.

The Celestial prince looked around the room for a suitable vase to hold the flower branches. He found a decent-sized pearly white vase and messily dumped them all inside. Once free from his burden, Ali sat down at the low table and thought of the magic scrolls given to him earlier that day. He gleefully rubbed his hands together, impatient to try out some of the spells.

At first, Ali was hesitant to work on any of them here. What if he accidentally conjured them wrong and caused unduly disturbances among his respectful elders? Before he was sent here, his Father Prince impressed upon him many times the importance of being on his best behaviour when staying in Kunlun Mountains. It was until Uncle Chang Shan reassured him these were but simple spells and practically harmless, “There was no way you could make a fool of yourself, simply by reciting the incantation.” The young boy’s face visibly brightened once he heard that.

Ali reached into his pocket sleeve and drew out a scroll. He browsed the content quickly. This one was about summoning snowflakes. His brows wrinkled. Cold would be bad for a recovering patient, wouldn’t it? With that in mind, he tossed the wooden scroll aside and fetched another one. Spreading it over the table, he skimmed and scanned the text quickly.

“A-ha.” He exclaimed in triumph.

This one would do nicely. If mother cannot go out and watched the star-lit sky with him, Ali would bring the stars inside! It would add more ambiance to the currently bland room, he thought happily. He carefully recited the incantation and soon, small bulbs of light appeared in front of him. Ali pumped his fist, congratulating himself on being successful at his first try. He could not wait to show off his achievement to Nai Nai. She would be so proud of his progress.

The sound of the door opening then closing signaled the one he was waiting for arrived. Ali got up and rushed over to his personal maid. He tugged at her hand, beckoning her to follow him.

“Nai Nai, there you are, just in time.” He grinned at her, excited.

The Celestial maid took in his giddy expression and sparkling eyes and wondered what could have made him to be so ecstatic. A quick glance over at her once lady’s still form dashed her forlorn hope. Yet, for the sake of the child, she allowed a smile on her lips.

“In time for what, my prince?”
Ali shook his head, his dimples never faded. “Just you wait, I’m going to show you something truly wonderful,” he promised. Then he turned around and ran back to the table.

“Come and sit with me, Nai Nai.” He patted a vacant spot next to him. His eyebrows drew close as he poured his concentration into recreating his earlier performance.

“Oh my!” Nai Nai exclaimed in delight. She stared at the floating bulbs of light surrounding her. They were unmistakably conjured by the child. “How? This is so incredible, since when did you learn how to do this?”

The obvious awe and admiration in her tone made Ali puff up his chest in pride. “Just now. I am telling you, this is only my second attempt,” he cannot help but boast a little.

“Do you think Mother will like them?” He asked hopefully. “I wish to show them to her. When she is awake, that is.”

“Of course, she will. They are really captivating.” Nai Nai gushed. “And if you could fill the whole room with them; it will be almost like a scene from the fairy realms. She will definitely love it.”

Ali perked up at that. He had never been to any other foreign realms except Qing Qiu, Underwater World and Mortal Realms.

“I guess I have to practice harder.” He eyed the floating objects. The numbers of the bulbs he created were still far too sparse for his liking. He wanted them more, a lot more.

The young prince muttered the incantation again; more light bulbs appeared from the thin air. There were almost a hundred of them by now. He quickly repeated the process again and rush the summoning, the last barely ended when the new one started. Somehow in his haste, he mispronounced what should be well-practiced words. The result was disconcertingly spontaneous.

“Ahhhhhhh!!” Nai Nai screamed, frightened when so many light bulbs burst simultaneously. An unlucky paper screen divider suddenly caught fire and so did the cloths that lay over the wooden shelves.

She rushed past the young boy and frantically tried to put down the flame before it spread all over. She did not hear him shouting there was another small one on the other side of the room.

Ali stared helplessly when another inflammable item - a white paper lantern that usually floated during the Lantern Festival - also caught fire. Seriously, who hung a lantern inside a bedroom? He tried to tell Nai Nai about it to no avail. She was busy swatting the cloths to the floor to extinguish the fire.

His mouth turned grim. He had to do something before the burning lantern set off the nearby shelves filled with scrolls. He would bet all his fortunes that those belonged to High God Mo Yuan. Ali winced thinking of the punishment he would get once this incident reached his Father Prince’s ears.

“I need a spell to counteract it,” he said to himself.

The boy absent-mindedly failed to see nobody corrected his questionable solution. “A strong wind will blow over the fire, right? Just like the Cloud Clearing fan blew everything away.”

“Yes, that will definitely work.” Ali nodded his head fervently. He recited another summoning spell. Much to his relief, it worked!! A whirlpool of wind formed in the midst of the room and blew everything out, including the fire.
“Yessss,” the boy cheered. Operation divert disaster was a success. Ali was dancing circles around himself until a loud, delayed sound of crash destroyed his temporary disillusion. “Oops.”

He gazed incomprehensibly upon the broken shards of the once elegant lamp. A broken lamp was way better than putting the whole room on fire, wasn’t it?

Ali had no time to ponder further upon the subject when white fog began to fill the room. What now!!! Was that smoke? But… but the fire was all put out. He shrieked mentally.

The smoke, fog, or whatever it was, cleared and morphed into moving pictures. There were so many of them. Ali gasped at the woman who looked just like his mother. She looked a bit different from now. There was a red mole in the center of her forehead. Ali cannot remember ever seeing it on her face. Then his Father Prince also showed up. The scenes were sporadic, jumping from one to another. Ali had a hard time understanding any of them.

A moment later, Nai Nai returned to the room with High God Mo Yuan’s Second and Sixteenth disciple in tow. They found the boy standing there in stupor, gazing forlornly at the devastated room.

Sixteenth mistook the boy’s silence for him fretting over his mistakes and took a pity on him. “It will be alright. Comparing to the unimaginable havoc your mother had wrecked through her years as a disciple; this is nothing to have a fit over.”

He placed his hand on the smaller shoulders and squeeze them lightly. “It’s a good thing that Master is visiting High God Zhe Yan. He won’t be back until tomorrow. We have time to put everything back into its place, tidy up the room and fix whatever burned.”

“Or damaged.” He added belatedly when he took in the non-salvageable room divider. At least that was what he believed. Alas, some damages cannot be undone.

“Sixteenth, I don’t think it will be that easy.” Chang Shan bent over the pile of broken glasses. He picked up a shard and lift it up for his junior to see. His bafflement and apprehensive looks was very telling of how serious the situation just became. Even before he uttered the dreadful words, Zi Lan knew.

“It’s the Soul Lamp.”

Zi Lan sucked in his breath. “Please tell me this won’t affect her recovery.”

“I don’t know, Zi Lan. I hope so.” His senior’s voice wavered.

“Master said, we only need to put it near her and waited for a few weeks. It has been months already. So, it should be fine, right?” Zi Lan’s demeanor betrayed his desperation.

Kunlun’s Second disciple remained grim. “Even so, what if it’s still needed?”

“Should we send for Master now?” Zi Lan asked.

“No, he will be on his way back here soon. We will just miss him if we leave now. And someone should be here to watch over her in the meantime.”

Zi Lan sighed deeply. He certainly did not want to be the one carrying the message over to his mentor.

Ali’s turned his head back and forth, looking between two of them, while they talk. He tried to wait patiently but the anxiety won over his ingrained politeness.
“Uncles, does this mean I am really in trouble now?” Ali asked both of them in his smallest voice.

:: Dream Sequence ::

Bai Qian flipped the page of her newest novel she was currently reading. She hummed softly, contented with her new found peace. Everything was quiet, no disputes for her to intervene or settle. Mi Gu did not come in and demand her to do more boring chores. Her fourth brother did not drop by and urge her to get out more often. The old phoenix must be keeping him occupied again. Her mentor was sleeping as quietly as he did for the past seventy hundred thousand years. No strangers had ventured into her land to search for him either. All was fine and splendid in her opinion.

Or maybe she was too hasty to say that.

An abrupt change in the air around her heralded something that was approaching fast. Bai Qian looked up and saw an ominous, volatile wisp of cloud encroaching. It was just a hairbreadth away from where she stood. Honed by her years of training, she got into a defensive position right away. In less than a blink of an eye, the cloud completely surround and trapped her in its unyielding hold. She tried to fight it off but failed miserably.

The Goddess racked her brain for a counter spell. Despite her numerous attempts, nothing paid off. Her spiritual power had absolutely no effect on the formless assailant. Her brute attack passed through it as if it was nothing. Bai Qian began to think it was an illusion, created to deceive her, to make her see things that weren’t there. To prove her theory and save her energy for later, she stopped her futile struggling and observed it warily instead. No sooner than she stopped fighting; the wisp of cloud seeped through her mind and overpowered her consciousness.

Let’s just said Bai Qian had experienced a lot of strange, hard to explain things through her seemingly long lifetime but this situation she found herself in was definitely ranked higher than most on the scale of weirdness.

The Goddess found herself becoming a voyeur of a stranger’s life; a mortal woman by the looks of it. There should be nothing wrong with the watching part - other than she was coerced into it - unless one counted on how that mortal looked freakishly just like her.

The first time the scenes played out, Bai Qian thought it was an elaborate hoax someone put together to confuse her for one reason or another, she had not figured that part out yet. All hypotheses she came up with did not pan out convincingly. So she decided to treat it like watching one of her favorite plays.

It was actually quite enjoyable in the beginning, watching how her splitting-image struggled to make a living. Bai Qian snickered when the woman almost burned her own hut down when she tried to cook rice. But the smile was wiped away from the Goddess’s face as soon as a watered-down version of Ye Hua stepped into the picture.

Why would someone make her human replica playhouse with the Celestial Prince? Who was perverse enough to concoct something like this? She hope it was not one of Ye Hua’s ploys to get her to fall in love with him. Confused yet intrigued at how the story will continue to unfold, the Goddess sat back and watch them carry on with their domestic life.

Heaven forbid. She yelled non-stop at her look-alike counterpart for putting up with the treatment Ye Hua’s copy gave her. Her throat was so sore afterwards. Bai Qian silently scratched Ye Hua’s name
off the list of unknown culprit. Her corrupted perception of him - well, his look alike - would stall whatever progress he wished to make with her. Hence, this setup should not be his doing.

The Goddess truly pitied this poor imitation of her. Really. Were it her, she would never take him back after the first time he left. The man left her alone for a year then came back abruptly one day and she simply allowed him back in her heart … and her bed? What was wrong with that woman’s head? Was she so weak-minded she can not endure the loneliness? Bai Qian scoffed. Against her outgoing nature and the needs to venture out; Bai Qian had entirely shut herself in Qing Qiu for seventy thousand of years for the sake of her mentor. Not quite alone but with much less contacts than her former-self would have liked. She persevered just fine.

Bai Qian rolled her eyes in exasperation. It was getting better and better after her look-alike got herself with child. She figured the Prince’s copy cannot wait to leave her be, he hightailed on her soon after she became pregnant. The family she married into turned out to be one to those bad soap opera types. A dysfunctional family which consisted of the in-laws who barely tolerate her presence, a jealous and scheming second wife, a tyrant head of family and an absentee husband.

Bai Qian was glad she never married. Just witnessing selfish, narcissistic and self-centered man like Ye Hua’s copy was enough to make her skin crawl. He reminded her of Li Jing. Amorous, attractive, silvered-tongue but never loyal, faithful or sincere. They were the epitome of reasons why remaining a single was the better and wise decision.

The Goddess despaired as the events progressed; the woman uselessly clung to the hope that her husband still loved and wanted her. Was the mortal too blind to see that he had another woman clinging to him like a leech? The shameless woman flaunted her superiority in their presence with every chance she got. His family did not even bother to hide how they favored the other woman over her poor self.

She was right, her doppelganger was really blind. Literally, now. The Queen of Qing Qiu sighed with regret; she had foreseen that coming up a long way back. Why can’t the poor woman see it? Her so-called husband had all but abandoned her to her own fate since the beginning.

Her inevitable end saddened the Goddess. In her meager human years, the woman suffered so much hardship and humiliation. Despite her failures to move on from her loveless husband, Bai Qian had found a semblance of respect for her. For such a frail creature, she was quite resilient and put up quite a fight against her abusers. Bai Qian had to give it to her determination to pull through all that were hurled against her.

By the tenth time the scenes played out, Bai Qian began to notice many things she failed to discern earlier. A disconcerting feeling swelled in her chest. What if this was not a hoax but a reality of the past?

By the twentieth time the scenes played out, Bai Qian was convinced that it was not a play. She had been subjected to watching the past of her estranged fiance. The poor mortal woman was indeed Ali’s birth mother and Ye Hua’s deceased wife. But why show all this to her, at all?

By the thirtieth time the scenes played out, Bai Qian began to questioning a lot of things. She knew there was a hole in her memories; those six hundred years she slept like the dead after sealing Qing Cang back into the Bell of Eastern Emperor. She certainly did not feel like she had been apathetic for that long. But everyone in her family insisted that was what happened. At the time, she simply took it at face value and never questioned it further. Her family would not mislead her, wouldn’t they?

But if she was really hibernating as they said, how did the Jade Purity Fan of Kunlun fell into the hands of her look-alike? That fan only ever recognized her as its rightful owner. Save for her mentor,
no one else can summon its power. Apparently, the mortal can. The fan rose to protect her from harm. How and why remained a mystery to her.

There was also the matter of her eyes that she found peculiar. Her fourth brother reasoned that it was a hidden illness showing itself because she was suffering from Qing Cang’s attack and losing great amount of her cultivation. Then why the sickness never showed up when she was dying from the loss of heartblood back then? Her condition was way worse then. Unless that was also another lie.

If her eyes were indeed lost or in this case gouged out, Zhe Yan’s incomparable healing skills aside, the loss would still be evident. Unless her eyes’ anomaly was explained by a very convincing explanation, then she would be none the wiser of the truth behind it. A sinking feeling weighed in the Goddess’s bosom. And that was what happened, wasn’t it?

By the fortieth time the scenes played out, Bai Qian reluctantly admitted the possibility that her look-alike might actually be her. It certainly explained the abnormalities and loopholes in her life. From that moment on, it was not watching someone else’s life anymore. Not when that person’s sufferings unknowingly became hers. Like an asunder pathway had been reconnected; a flood gate of memories of a forgotten lifetime opened once more. Joy, love, sadness, longing, disappointment, pain of betrayal; everything came back and hit her with its full force.

Her slender shoulders shook violently with sheer weight of the sudden onslaught. Tears brimmed then fell unbidden from her unseeing eyes. She had no desire for this so-called revelation, this unwanted truth. She did not want to remember being led on and fooled by love; a conceit love that was both meaningless and undeserving.

By the fiftieth time the scenes played out, Bai Qian was more than ready to storm the Ninth Heaven and demand her retribution. Never in her life, the Goddess was this furious; not even when Li Jing made a fool out of her. She wanted to crush the Sky Lord and trash that deceitful bitch of Consort. The consequences can be damned. She was confident the family would support her if it came down to that. She would make sure that lying, two-timing ex-husband of hers would pay for betraying her trust and her love. No, she corrected herself immediately. That was the mortal’s husband, not hers. On the other hand, the boy that was her son, she would keep him. He was adorable and Bai Qian had always liked him.

By the hundredth time the scenes played out, Bai Qian had nothing left to say, or feel. The melancholy that filled her entire being, diminished. Her tears had long dried out. The burning need for her justice and slanted honor that boiled her blood cooled down. She was strangely … numb and apathetic.

The Goddess simply wished for the scenes to end. She did not know how much longer she could endure this mind torturing with her sanity intact. She refused to be treated and subjected to her fate like that mortal. Bai Qian picked herself up again; a look of fierce determination in her eyes. She would break off this enchantment. It had to stop. Right here, right now.

:: End of Dream Sequence ::

Unknown to the sleeping dwellers of Kunlun Mountains, the air and the stillness that surrounded their beloved Seventeenth’s form was disturbed. Dainty fingers began to move, sluggishly at first. Her small, lithe frame grew increasingly restless, rigid and taunted. An arm lift up and swat weakly at the air as if fighting off an invisible offender. The body then lurched forward and jolted abruptly into harsh wakefulness. Heavy breathing was the only sound permeated the quiet night air.
The Goddess’s dilated pupil refocused and sharpened. Somehow, she was back in Mo Yuan’s room. The recent events from her brush with death furiously rushed back to her. She winced once remembered how both Mo Yuan and Ye Hua had come to her rescue. She did not expect to survive the experience but she did. Out of instinct, Bai Qian probed her surrounding for Mo Yuan’s energy. It came as a second nature to her now whenever they were apart. She got used to it eventually. Upon her search; she only found traces of his lingering aura resonated from the meditation cave. That meant he had left the perimeter only recently. She wondered where he went. It was unlike him to leave her side when she was incapacitated. How long had it been? Days? Weeks?

Bai Qian buried her face into her hands; she was both regretful and relieved at the same time for his absence. She would love to be able to bask in his soothing presence and lean on his quiet confidence. And yet she was not ready to confront him now; not after her almost suicide attempt when she tried to deal with the Bell of Eastern Emperor on her own. He was going to give her a lecture of a lifetime on how irresponsible and reckless she had behaved. She was quite certain of it.

More importantly, she did not know how to act around him; not after the dream. Bai Qian wanted to believe that it was a mere figment of her wild imagination; a nightmare at best. But she knew better, in her heart, it was true and real. The Goddess truly do not know what to think of it, or how to handle it.

The last time she pulled through death, the excruciating pain from being exterminated by the energy of Zhu Xian Terrace, the resurrection as an immortal being and the abrupt return of thousand millennial worth of memories on top of Su Su’s powerful emotions had overwhelmed her. The just-ascended Bai Qian was in pain, physically and mentally too worn-out to sort out the mixed-up feelings between her and her previous incarnation. She merely wanted them all gone and picked the easiest way available to her, namely Zhe Yan’s Amnesia Potion. Had she put any serious thoughts into her problem-solving plan, she would have realized it was undeniably a poorly thought-out solution. But who cared at that point?

But now? Everything became much more complicated and insanely entangled. Ye Hua turned out to be Mo Yuan’s younger brother. And she and Mo Yuan became husband and wife in all, barring the official ceremony. What was she going to do about her recollection of past life? Should she follow her initial desire to seek out her justice and retribution? Would the cold truth shake the foundation of life she and Mo Yuan had created for themselves. Or perhaps she could carry on with their life as if nothing had changed. Would she really want to hide their past from Mo Yuan? Ironically, she knew she could not.

Bai Qian could feel the headache developing behind her eyelids; her temples throbbed dully. She was too confounded to think rationally. She was desperate for a drink. Surely, she had time to ponder how to deal with her new found revelation … and jumbled feelings. It was not like anyone else knew of her true past. Well, except from Ye Hua. The Goddess derailed when her thoughts fell upon the man that led her down this memory lane and made her life far more than a disturbing complication.

As such, upon the very moment she was thrust back into the world of living, Bai Qian did what she did best when faced with problems she had no desire to deal with. She emptied Kunlun’s wine cellar, fled to her solitude and got herself stupidly drunk.

Note: A hundred thanks to my editor ‘Noitratoxin’ and ‘loreinacadis0412’ for reviewing this chapter
for us and for giving lots of food for thought; it's very fruitful. To all of readers, I give you my very belated Happy New Year. May this year be another year filled with love & happiness for every one of you.

Chapter End Notes

If case you're having a confusion:
The timeline of the dream sequence settles some time after the Eastern Sea King's banquet. Bai Qian and Ye Hua had already met each other (again) at that point. Since it's a dream, it doesn't follow as much of the current timeline. That's why Bai Qian thinks Shifu are still sleeping away; only when she awakes everything comes back to her.
Chapter 40

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

*italic text* = Personal thought

:: Kunlun Mountain ::

The moment Mo Yuan stepped back on his eternal dwellings, with Zhe Yan right on his heels, he immediately singled out an irregularity in the atmosphere. It was glaringly obvious to him for some reason that Bai Qian's familiar, ever-present aura was missing. He turned his quizzing eyes on his resident disciple; silently asking him what had gone amiss in his short absence.

The boy’s head bowed down under his mentor’s scrutiny. He squirmed uncomfortably before straightening his back and finally managed to meet his elder’s eyes; thus allowing Mo Yuan to catch a glimpse of apprehension and guilt warring in another pair of eyes. Since there was no sign of despair or acute panic in his countenance, Mo Yuan was willing to believe whatever transpired prior to his arrival cannot be that dire. His guarding stance relaxed somewhat.

“Seventeenth is missing.” Chang Shan blurted out, then grimaced at his lack of tact.

He had decided being straightforward with his mentor was the best way to go around their latest situation at hand. “We - I mean Sixteenth and I - went to check on her early this morning. She was not there. Her bed was cold and empty as if she got up and left in the night,” he paused.

“At first, we suspected some kind of foul play or even kidnapping. But then Kunlun’s protective spell is still active and holds strong. We would have known if someone actually slipped past our defense. So we split up trying to locate her; then Sixteenth came to see me. He said the jars in the wine cellar are almost all gone. We have looked everywhere for her since but have trouble pinpointing her whereabouts, Master.”

Mo Yuan quickly caught on with what he was implying. That sounded very much like what Seventeenth usually did when she was upset about something and gone into hiding.

“Had something happened yesterday when she woke up?” He inquired softly. Despite the circumstance, he cannot help but feeling elated that she had finally woken up.

“That is the most bizarre part, Master. She did not even stir or showed signs of waking up at all. Then the next thing we know, she pulled her disappearing act. Again.” The frustration in his disciple’s voice was unmistakable.

The Master of Kunlun was quite intrigued at this point. “I would like to hear the full account of whatever occurred around here. From the beginning, please.” Mo Yuan suggested.

“...until Nai Nai came calling us. When Sixteenth and I arrived at the scene, we only found everything in the room scattered and in disarray. I discovered broken shards of what used to be the
Soul Lamp on the floor, near her bed. We cleaned up the room, fixed whatever we could. I even checked up on Seventeenth; nothing seemed wrong with her. There was neither discomfort, nor pain in her feature. Everything looked fine, or so we thought. Then we left for the night and I came to check on her again this morning. You already know the rest.”

When Chang Shan finished recounting yesterday’s mishap in his bedroom; Mo Yuan caught Zhe Yan’s surprised expression from the corner of his eyes.

“The Soul Lamp is broken?” The Phoenix’s eyes gleamed oddly.

“We were afraid it would ruin her chance of recovery,” Chang Shan admitted. “I am really glad we were so wrong.”

“Did Nai Nai or Ali mention anything else?” Mo Yuan finally spoke up.

Chang Shan shook his head. “No, Master. But the boy looked quite disturbed when we found him. It is as expected, considering what happened.”

Then he blinked and looked thoughtful. “Perhaps, he left something out when he told us the story? Come to think again, he seemed oddly disquiet after that. I am going to see him now, Master. Maybe I could get him to talk to me.”

Mo Yuan nodded his acquiesce, then added. “Chang Shan, keep Seventeenth’s return quiet for the time.”

“Eh?” The disciple exclaimed in confusion.

“Until we finally locate her and determine what actually happened yesterday, let’s not announce her return just yet. Especially, not to the child.”

Chang Shan nodded reluctantly. “I understand, Master. I will inform Sixteenth this as well. Hopefully, he is still searching for her and did not have a chance to talk to anyone yet.”

“I will take my leave now. Good day, Master, High God Zhe Yan.” He religiously gave them both a deep bow and retreated quickly.

“You suspected something else took place last night.” Zhe Yan brought up his speculation as soon as the boy cleared out. He shrugged when Mo Yuan threw an unspoken question right back at him:

And you don’t?

“The Lamp was kept hidden for hundred thousand of years in the Sea of Innocence until Dong Hua revealed its secret hideaway. I believe no one ever try to lit the lamp for hundred years straight before. Ye Hua is certainly persistent to get her back,” he chuckled humorlessly, then cleared his throat loudly when he realized his erroneous chatter.

“And certainly, all this time, none ever shatter it so thoroughly. There might be some unknown side effects, or nothing at all. Just Fifth Sister being her eccentric-self once again. Who knows.” The owner of Peachtree Groove tried to lighten up the mood. “At least, we no longer have to figure out how to rouse her from her unusual slumber now. That ought to be good, right?”

“She emptied my cellar and disappeared.” Mo Yuan looked pointedly at his brother in all but blood. It was Bai Qian’s certified shout-out that something went amiss.
“The lass is known to do to the same outrageous raid on my stockpile when she felt like it. Then she hid away at her brother’s Manor for months.” Zhe Yan encountered without missing a beat.

“Do not fret too much, Mo Yuan. She might just want to loosen up a little after she came to be. Don’t forget the last time she was aware; her soul was a hairbreadth away from being totally obliterated. It must be rather traumatizing, even for her.”

Mo Yuan went back to his quiet contemplation, after a while he stood from his seating atop the dais and headed out of the Grand Hall.

“I am going to stay here, in case Chang Shan actually gets something from the young child.” Zhe Yan shouted after his back.

“I sincerely hope it is merely her thirst for spirits needed to be quenched, otherwise …..” The Phoenix shook his head and muttered to himself.. “I’m getting too old for this.”

Mo Yuan abandoned the search for Bai Qian’s distinctive aura and followed the almost discernable void of sort that he detected earlier in Kunlun’s atmosphere. Soon he found himself on a lesser traveled path leading to an isolated cave on the other side of the Mountain’s foot.

When he discovered a shield camouflaging the cave’s opening, he was quite certain he found his wayward Seventeenth. A hint of smile raised a corner of his lips. She was being smart, hiding herself like this. Instead of suppressing her aura like most do, she created a bubble of void and used it to cloak her presence. Second and Sixteenth must not have thought to look for her otherwise.

And there she was sleeping on a stone slab with a jar of wine still clutched in her hands. He pried it out of her fingers then studied the scene. Chang Shan was not exaggerating at all when he claimed she had emptied his cellar. She must have been drinking non-stop from the night till dawn to consume this much wine. A few jars were left untouched on the ground, presumably because she passed out from sheer intoxication before she had the chance to open them.

Mo Yuan frowned deeply as his eyes spied two of his concentrated wine among the stash she had gone through. The last time he witnessed her this wasted was when she and Li Jing had broken up. Zhe Yan claimed she rarely drowned herself in spirits after he died, for fearing it would contaminate her system while she was feeding him her heartblood.

*What the devil prompted her to consume this much?* He pondered. Contrary to Zhe Yan’s speculation, Mo Yuan did not share his opinion of her being traumatized by her near-death experience. She was made of stronger, tougher spirit than that. If Bai Qian did not cower from the imminent doom that was ready to take over her, she certainly would not do so in the aftermath. And yet, it was always a matter of the heart that becomes her downfall as proven far too many times in the past.

The God of War carefully wrapped his arm around her shoulders and pulled her languid form towards his chest. His other arm supported her legs, just under her kneecaps. Mo Yuan spent a brief moment relishing the feel of her warm, soft and pliant body against him. The perpetual, hollowed emptiness that lurked inside his heart ever since her valiant but dreadful attempt to save their world and the following enforced separation by her mother, seemed to cease to exist. His felt warm and whole once again with her nearness. Foolish as it may seem. It was joy, satisfaction and exhilaration all rolled up together; nothing could be compared.

Once he made certain she was properly secured in his arms, he took a step. Both of them disappearing from sight, only to re-materialize within the confinement of his bedroom. Until he could get to the bottom of what recently came to pass. The Master of Kunlun preferred to keep the
knowledge of her awakening to a selected few. Once she was laid down properly on the bed, Mo Yuan turned his attention to the multiple tasks at hand. He fed her the sobering soup, cleaned her with warm, damp washcloth and changed her into a new attire.

After that he kept watching over her sleeping form; his hand smoothed away the small creases in her forehead. Mo Yuan enjoyed the oddly therapeutic sensation of running his fingers through her long, silky hair. He breathed in her now untainted natural fragrance. How he longed to caress her soft skin under his fingertips, watch she flashing her coquettish smile at him and breathe his name in her husky and sensual tone.

As if on cue, Zhe Yan made his appearance at the doorway. The old phoenix stood there, transfixed at their huddled forms, yet did not take another step inside. Mo Yuan gleaned some sort of uneasiness from his wary stance.

Mo Yuan looked at him quizzically. “Zhe Yan?”

Zhe Yan shook his head and quickly approached the couple. “It’s just something Ali said.”

Now that his beloved was found, Mo Yuan found his spirit lighten up enough to tease his brother a little. “What could spook millennial old and wise one such as yourself?”

“The child said he saw some confusing sights when the Lamp shattered into itty tiny bits.” The reclusive God paused briefly. “He remembered seeing the hut his parent used to stay in the Mortal Realm. He claimed to see his birth mother. She wore that little white-strip cloth over her eyes and looked exactly like her painting in his father’s study.”

The Phoenix’s sharp eyes spied the almost imperceptible stillness of Mo Yuan’s form. The silence that hung afterward was poignant. Neither of them missed the possibilities of what it could be. Zhe Yan waited for his brother’s response as time trickled by.

“I see.”

“That’s it? That’s all you are going to say?” Zhe Yan eyed him almost incredulously.

“If her past memories truly return, I think it is prudence to send Ali away for the time.” Mo Yuan continued almost nonchalantly. Almost. But not quite.

“It will be confusing enough as it is for her when she comes to be; without the added burden to explain to her son what he had actually been witnessed to.” Mo Yuan reasoned.

Zhe Yan narrowed his eyes almost accusingly at him. “That’s not what I mean and you know it.”

“Until she comes to me and say it, there is nothing I could possibly do, could I?” His answer was so simple. “If time and space to think everything through is what she needs, I will certainly give her that.”

“Where does your preemptive strike strategy go? Will you wait until she goes to Ye Hua before you decide to do something? Anything? I hope not, because you would only regret that decision for the rest of your lonely life.” The winemaker left with an irritated huff; his premonition hanging in the air between them.
Bai Feng Jiu’s arrival in Kunlun Mountain the next daybreak was truly well-timed. It took away the awkward necessity of explaining to the young Celestial prince why he was being sent away from Kunlun. The younger Fox Princess came with express wishes (and orders) from her grandparents to retrieve their only grandson to Qing Qiu. After all, he was expected to spend a few months with them as both parties already agreed early on.

Nevertheless, the boy was inconsolable when he realized he had to leave. “Am I being punished for the ruckus I caused earlier?” He sobbed quite pitifully; then burst into baleful tears.

Despite the reassurance from everyone present that was not the case, he simply refused to listen to them. “If I promise not to cause any more problems, can I stay?”

Unable to see the young boy so disheartened, Mo Yuan bid him to come to the dais. When Ali plopped himself down just opposite of the God, Mo Yuan waved him to come closer. Ali ended up kneeling beside the Master of Kunlun; his small hand fisted tightly into Mo Yuan’s clothing.

“Listen to me, Ali. No one here hold it against you for what happened the other day. You are not being punished for making some mistakes. Sometimes, things simply did not go the way we want it to be, despite our best intention.”

The Master of Kunlun said patiently. “What is more important that is that you learn from your mistake and never repeat it again.”

Ali sniffed. “I will never ever recite spells so carelessly again.” He solemnly vowed to the man and to himself. “I will practice each spell slowly and properly until I could get them straight and perfect. I will not treat any of them as a amusement or something to show off anymore.”

“Then you have already learned a valuable lesson.” Despite his firm tone, the God’s voice was gentle. “How about we will not mention this incident to your father then?”

“Truly?” Ali exclaimed in surprise, relieved that he would not be admonished later on. “Do you really mean that? You are not allowed to take back your words!” The young prince covered his mouth tightly with his hands once realized he had said out of turn. He peered timidly at the God from under his eyelashes, rather abashed with his faux pas.

“Indeed.” Mo Yuan’s lips stretched in a thin smile at that familiar expression. “Now that the misunderstanding is cleared out, you and Nai Nai are to pack up and follow Bai Feng Jiu back to Qing Qiu. Your grandparents are looking to spend time with you. You do not want to disappoint them, do you?”

Ali shook his head vehemently; he longed to met his mother’s family for a long time. Now that he was certain he was not driven out of here on purpose and could return again at a later date, Ali became very excited with the idea of getting to know the rest of the Fox Clan. His imagination ran wild. How do they look like? Would they look just as old as his grandfather? Were they strict and big on decorum like his own family? But their folks were so lively! Ali recalled his one time visit to the marketplace with his parents.

The young prince pouted a little. “Will you not accompany me on the trip then?”

“Master has many important matters to tend to, Prince Ali. If you wish for more companions along the way, how about I come with you?” Zi Lan quickly interrupted. Now that Seventeenth was awake, his mentor would want to stay with her indefinitely. He made a quick glance at his mentor for
his approval.

Certainly enough, the Master of Kunlun gave him a firm nod, with a faint smile of appreciation.

“This is going to be a fun trip!” Ali whooped excitedly, his earlier fretting was all but forgotten. He was oblivious to how devastating his small mistake would cost those he cared about the most.

When Bai Qian roused groggily from her deep sleep, the whole plane of existence tilted unpleasantly. She squeezed shut her bleary eyes and let her heavy head fell back into the headrest. Why was it so bright today? She bemoaned miserably.

She tried to sit up again but found her body lethargically uncooperative. She was expecting to fall back into the mattress again when strong hands reached out and steady her.

“Lean forward, put your weight on me,” the voice instructed her. She was grateful for the support and readily submitted her body to the owner of said voice.

“What happened?” She asked in her raspy voice, still disoriented from her return to consciousness.

“You did not remember how you drained the spirits in my cellar faster than a drainage?” The voice asked, amused.

“I did?” She repeated, stupefied. Memories of her waking up from a nightmare-come-true trickled back to her. The Goddess’s head snapped back to look up at the one beside her; once she realized whose voice it belonged to.

“Master,” she whispered.

Her hands move of their own volition to cradle his face between her palms. She remembered seeing his obscure face with her dimming vision, before the dark oblivion dragged her under and consumed her whole. She had thought it was the last time she would see him. Seeing him here and now brought back the desperation she felt in that last moment of her life.

“Master.” Her strangled voice repeated.

Her fingers crawled up his nape and found purchase on his neck. Then she threw herself at him and began to smother him with passionate kisses. Mo Yuan was thrown back from her sudden advance. When he got his bearing; he tipped her head back, angled her mouth and fit his lips to hers. His tongue invaded her mouth, swept across the moist cavern and tasted her sweetness.

Not to be outdone, Bai Qian tangled her own with his. Both tongues slide back and forth in an endless dueling. Sometimes, she sucked his tongue into her mouth with her lips; their teeth clashed with the urgency of their moves. There was nothing gentle or teasing or tame in the way their kissed. It was messy, demanding, and a tiny bit aggressive. Her lips burned, bruised beneath the demanding pressure.

The sheer intensity of their kissing made her feeling light-headed; so much she laid limp against his hard body. Bai Qian held onto him for all she was worth; she did not think she could stay upright on her own if she ever let go. It took them awhile for their furious, frantic kissing to calm down and turned into softer, gentler caresses.

Her head rested on his shoulder; she listened half-heartedly to the thudding of his heart. Her hand still
kept touching him here and there. “Thanks the Heaven you are alright.” She broke the silence between them; her voice hitched with relief.

Since she was brought back to Kunlun Mountain and could feel his and her fellow disciples’ lingering aura around; she supposed all had resolved in a good way.  *No one was dead.* It was as good as it gets for her.

“You don’t look so ... well.”

Her fingertips touched a side of his face gingerly, noticing for the first time the tattletale dark hue under his eyes. *Was it because of her?*

“I am good enough. I am not the one trying to offer my soul this time around,” he said evenly.

Bai Qian winced at the well-recognized tone of his silent aggravation. Her hands dropped back to her laps, knowing he was displeased with her dubious exploit. “Would an apology help? I know my decision is not very fair to you.”

“To us, you mean,” he said dryly.

Despite the guilt weighed down heavily on her conscience, she retorted almost challengingly. “What other option do I have?”

Then her voice wavered and shook slightly. “I dare not even imagine about losing you again, not after the last time. The mere thought of you lying dead in my arm once again terrifies me. Contrary to popular belief, I am not that strong. Your death would completely destroy me. Then what good it will do even if I survive?” She scoffed bitterly.

The hand that circled and held onto her waist tightened.

“I just …. I just think if it were you, you would be able to pull it off. To survive.” Without me. She left it unsaid; speaking it aloud was too ugly and horrible.

“That is selfish of me. For that, I am truly sorry.” She confessed.

“You thought wrong.” He contradicted her claim. Bai Qian was so startled with the conviction in his voice; she stared at him with her mouth opened.

“And we do have other option. I certainly do not plan to die again.” *Not with you here.*

Mo Yuan thought of the improbable consequence of his death with morbid apprehension. He could not point out which outcome was worse. Her vision of him leaving her and, unknowingly, their unborn child behind. If only the price of her plan was not so steep, Mo Yuan might come to terms with it easier. The loss of their child still pained him like no other; yet now was neither time, nor place to let her know. He was willing to shoulder this hard, unbearable truth for however long it would take; if it meant she had one less hurdle to meet head on.

“How would I know? You never told me that.” She grumbled.

While her plan was not exactly the brightest, nor quite feasible - if she was being honest to herself - even so it followed through in the end, albeit so many things could have gone wrong. Could he not at the least acknowledged that? She thought sourly.

Mo Yuan let out a soft sigh. Dong Hua was right, Mo Yuan had grudgingly accepted that. He was partially to be blamed. It was just that he was not accustomed to explain himself and share his every
thoughts with someone. He had been alone, independent and had only himself to answer to for far too long. Reluctantly, he told her exactly that and gained another surprised look from his beloved.

He pushed her chin up with his thumb and index finger and met her eyes straight on. “I am always here for you and with you no matter what. I want you to keep that in mind. From now on, we will talk freely of what is on our mind. Your last stunt and my unwillingness to share spoke for themselves how disastrous it could be when we did not.”

Bai Qian’s whole body went stiff when he proposed that. Her dilated pupils flickered with myriad of emotions - fear, doubt, indecision - and then all vanished as quickly as they came. Yet it was more than enough to confirm his suspicion. Had he not purposely looking for her reaction, he would have missed it as well.

“Of course, we will.” Her smile was shaky and strained.

Under his hand, her pulse sped up unwillingly. She belatedly realized with dread that her over indulgence must look suspicious to him. He knew her well enough to recognize her agitation for what it was. He just did not know the reason behind it. And here he was asking her to open up to him.

Bai Qian wanted so much to sob her heart out to him, but she cannot. How could she possibly explain to him that she had betrayed his love by marrying his younger brother? It did not matter whether she had no recollection of her true self at the time. The deed was done; the fruit of her labor was here. How could she ever denied that truth, that connection?

“If we are going to be honest, then I admit that I kind of get carried away with my personal celebration. I know you don’t like it when I drink too much. I just thought ‘why not, it’s not every day one escapes the Bell’s deadly crutch’.” She tried to made her tone light-hearted.

Mo Yuan’s left eyebrow arched almost into his hairline. “Zhe Yan said exactly the same thing but I contradict his ridiculous notion.”

“Well, he knows how bad my penchant for spirits hit me randomly. I unearthed his hidden stashes often enough.” She feigned laughter and brushed it off.

Yet he did not laugh along with her; his penetrating eyes aggravated her frayed nerve. “Just remember, I will be there when you are ready to talk. But really, you should not consume any more wine. Your body is only just recovering and can barely tolerate such level of intoxication.”

The Goddess let out a shaky sigh, glad that he seemed to drop the subject for the time. It was unlikely he would simply let her got her way for long. He usually waited until she let her guard down. Then she would be caught unsuspecting by his ambush question and probing insight. More often than not, she end up confessing everything to him. Bai Qian resigned herself to such fate.

Just not now. She needed time to sort everything out, at least in her head.

“I know, I don’t think I can take on anymore,” she conceded.

“You should rest now, I have already fed you the sobering potion. You will feel better when you awake again.” He helped her lying back down on the bedding and pulled the blanket over her form.

“Just like the old time,” she mused loudly.

He answered her sentimental recollection by placing his hand on her head, then tugged her loosen hair behind her earlobe. If Bai Qian noticed he had a peculiar expression on his face; she did not mull over it. Instead, she let the warmth of his gentle hand lured her to sleep.
The next time she opened her eyes; the world no longer shifted as she move. Mo Yuan was not sitting with her anymore; there was someone else seated at the low table. The Goddess narrowed her eyes when she realized it was only the old Phoenix. What was he doing here?

As if he could feel her stare on his person, Zhe Yan lift up his head. When their eyes met across the room, he placed whatever scroll he was reading back on the table and move over to the sleeping platform.

“Good. You are awake,” he commented lightly. “How is your head? Still uncomfortable?”

Bai Qian burrowed her face back into the bedding and did not bother to answer him. It was too soon for her to deal with his berating. Too soon, old man. She moaned irritably in her head.

“You really have a knack for worrying people, do you know that?” He sat down close to her; her unwillingness to talk to him did not deter him one bit.

“You really crossed the line this time, Fifth Sister. And you almost dragged those you love down with you with your poorly thought-out move.” Zhe Yan’s tone took a turning point; it was no longer casual.

It hinted at something grave and foreboding. Bai Qian rarely saw him this deadly serious in all her years with him.

“I never expected Mo Yuan could ever do something so foolish until that day. I guess I severely underestimated the thread of Destiny between the two of you. But so were you. I sincerely hope that in the future you will apply that hard-earned intellect you learned from your mentor before you volunteer yourself to do something utterly suicidal and stupid again.”

Zhe Yan spotted on her bewilderment at his rumbling but refused to elaborate further. “Save all that burning questions for Mo Yuan. You two should really talk about what happened at the Roushui River.”

He stopped her protest even before it slipped past her lips. “No, I do not think you do. Now hush, I am going to check up on you.”

While Zhe Yan worked his magic on her body; her mind went back to what he said earlier. He was hinting that something else happened that day. Something Mo Yuan did not reveal to her despite his suggestion for them to talk openly. Zhe Yan would not bother to bring it to her attention if it was negligible. He was not that vain.

After a time, he gave her a hum of approval. “You are recovering nicely, unless you decide to worsen your condition with another bout of overindulgence. Your spiritual power is so low at the moment, deliberately harming yourself with spirits is plain foolish. If you could actually practice certain abstinence from anymore spirits; it would do you a lot of wonder.”

“Thank you for the vote of confidence.” The Goddess snipped sarcastically.
“Oh, I almost forget. How are your eyes, are they itchy or uncomfortable, at all?” Zhe Yan inquired.

“My eyes?” Bai Qian wondered aloud. Why wouldn’t they be alright? She blinked at him repeatedly, almost experimentally. “All is …..great?”

“Good then.” The God nodded approvingly then got up; he paused briefly on his path to the doorway. “As it should be, these are your original pair of eyes after all.”

His offhand remark almost made her falling out off her sleeping platform. “What did you just say? The original…..” But the old Phoenix already left and she was in no shape to run after him now.

A chilly thought ran through her when she focused her energy inward, around the eyes. Zhe Yan was speaking the truth. These were really her eyes; the ones dug out by Ye Hua and given to Su Jin years ago. How did her eyes return to her?

What had she missed in her sleep? Zhe Yan’s suggestion that she and Mo Yuan should really sit down and talk seriously popped up in her head. There was this thing everyone was tiptoeing around, without really coming out and just saying it. She was positive.

Bai Qian became breathless when a possibility formed in her mind. No, it cannot be. Zhe Yan could not possibly know about that, could he?

Another flashback of Mo Yuan suddenly suggesting both of them should talk freely replayed in her mind’s eyes. How he insisted to wait until she was ready to open up to him. It was so obvious now that she looked back. She felt like someone just sucker punched her in the middle.

He knew.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter took longer than I thought to finish; hence the unfashionably delay. Thank you for your patience. Hope you enjoy the new development. And remember I need to be alive to write the next chapter. lol

**Special thanks to loreinacadis0412 for reviewing the content and pointing out many gaping hole in the first plot. You’ve my eternal appreciation. :)**
Bai Qian drew a shaky, uneven breath as the tightness in her chest increased.

*He knew about the affairs between her and his younger brother.*

*How much did he knew? How did that happened?*

*Did Ye Hua tell him?*

There was a slight possibility that he might. Perhaps. But why? Without knowing she regained the memories from her previous incarnation, what advantages imparting that truth would give Ye Hua? It did not make any senses to her.

*But if it is not him, then who?*

Who else knew about her obscured past life? It can not be one of her family, nor the old Phoenix. She had never fully revealed the sufferings of Su Su's lifetime to him. Not even before she drank his Oblivion Potion.

The Goddess could feel the throbbing headache, fuelled by her furiously-working mind, renewed its vigor. She rubbed circles around her temples to soothe the pain.

*But how were her secrets revealed?*

Clearly she was missing something here. That would not do at all. She needed to know everything that had transpired when she was sleeping. Only then she could figure out the predicament she found herself in. She supposed she could ask Mo Yuan directly. But she would be ill-prepared to face the consequences, had her suspicions proven true.

Zhe Yan spoke of her eyes exchange so casually. The Goddess frowned. She would like to think that only Mo Yuan and the Phoenix knew about her past. But what if she was wrong and someone else knew? Her eyes snapped open; an idea suddenly occurred to her. If there was one person aware of all things going on in Kunlun Mountain, certainly it would be him.

Bai Qian dragged her feet and stumbled into the Cauldron room. She propped herself unceremoniously down on the nearest chair with her eyes closed; completely ignoring the other occupant of the room. She did not get to see how her sudden appearance unnerved him; not until the ladle in his hand slipped and hit the floor in a loud clunk. The Goddess visibly shuddered at the loud noise and let out a hapless groan. "Nggg.."

"Seventeenth! You .. you wake up." He stammered.

Bai Qian rubbed her eyes and eyebrows furiously; her discomfort plain in her pale face. "Not so loud, senior."
"Ah, you still have a hangover, I see." He was almost sympathetic with her pain. Almost. "Serves you right. You shouldn't have drunk so much," he scolded her. "Master had to feed you like three or four cups of sobering potion."

"Lay it off, senior." She shot back, her voice irritated. "If I have my way, I am still going to get myself drunk again."

"Seventeenth, why would you do that? You are just awake from your comatose state. You should be grateful you are still alive and well enough after your latest idiotic exploit." Chang Shan shook his head; almost exasperated with her devil-may-care attitude. She made all of them fret and worry over her for months!

"Tell me, senior, if you wake up from your oblivion and found out everyone suddenly gain an insight into your deep, dark secrets and most humiliated moments of your past life. Can you still be cheery and grateful?" She snarked at him.

"What … what nonsense are you talking about?" Although his face remained neutral, the dilated eyes and slight tremor in his voice gave him away.

Bingo.

"Don't be like that, you know what I am talking about, senior. How long do you honestly think Zhe Yan can keep any secrets from me?" The Goddess snorted derisively. "If anything, don't try to spare my feelings. You can stop pretending to be clueless. Seriously, I don't even care anymore. Who else don't know how far the Goddess has fallen, right?" She drawled on.

"Qing Qiu's Bai Qian was bullied and bested by a nobody Celestial. I must really become such a laughing stock to the whole world." Her weak chuckles were dark and full of bitterness.

"Seventeenth." Her second senior's hesitant and concerned eyes fell on her face.

"Don't look at me like that. I don't want your pity," she chided him. "And you wonder why I prefer to be inebriated."

If Chang Shan was wary of her pulling her specialty brand of bull-shitting over him again - he got a lot of those back in the days - he no longer was. True, their mentor had cautioned them not to reveal the confrontation to her just yet; this was different. Seventeenth had drank the water from Oblivion River. There is no way she could remember those details on her own; unless being told by someone. And considering how close she was with the elusive Phoenix God, it was quite plausible that he was her unwilling informant.

The second disciple of Kunlun completely dropped his guard down. He stepped closer to the chair she currently occupied and dropped down to his knees. "It is not pity, I ... we feel for you, Seventeenth. If anything, we were disappointed with ourselves. You are our youngest junior. You have done so much for Master and for us; we all but failed you. None of us was there for you in your desperate time."

"First senior is inconsolable. He was there the day the Crown Prince brought you up here. In his ignorance of your true identity, which of course no fault of his, he let you slipped past him unaware. He blamed himself the most, do you know? Saying had he stopped you that day, you wouldn't have suffered so much."

"He is being too hard on himself again," she blinked her long lashes in quick succession. "Truthfully, I don't think anyone can save me, I failed to save myself too."
"Please don't joke about this, Seventeenth," he murmured sadly.

"Hey, at least I got my eyes back. You have no idea how hard it was to live with that replacement eyes." Bai Qian said almost forlornly. "I forgot when I last watched a decent sun rise or fireworks."

"I still can't believe the Crown Prince is capable of such cruelty. We got him all wrong all this time. I mean, you were his wife, the mother of his child." Disapproval laden his voice. A latent fury burned behind his eyes at her obvious misery. "Then again, seeing how dishonourable the Sky Lord became, I guess I shouldn't be so surprised. Celestial's royal family are all disgraceful and hypocrite."

"That they are, senior. That they are. "Right down to every single one of them," she agreed. A self-deprecation smile on her lips. "I never like his 'I am all high and mighty Lord' attitude anyway. Who would have known he was destined to become the bane of my existence, huh?"

Her senior said gravely. "I am really glad your father and Emperor Dong Hua taught him a lesson. You should have seen it."

Her heart quickened with anticipation. *What did they do to him?*

"The Fox Emperor really lives up to his name. Your mother and brother too," Chang Shan continued to voice his admiration. "They really presented a formidable, united front against the family that day. Even your niece; she is so brazen, fearless just like you,"

Bai Qian immediately played along. "I am not surprised. The Emperor is always through with his punishment. If only I was awake, I would make him taste the same humiliation I suffered ten folds." She scowled, for real.

Chang Shan pat her shoulder gingerly. "Both the Sky Lord and Consort Su Jin have their very own version of punishment now. They can't bother you anymore, Seventeenth. Even the Crown Prince can't reach to you now; not with Master's decision to cut all ties between Kunlun Mountain and Celestial Clan."

The Goddess had to bite the inner cheek of her mouth to stop the gasp from coming out. *He did whaaat!?*

"Actually, between filling in on the Sky Lord's duties and fixing the vacuum of power left behind his abrupt departure, I am certain the Crown Prince will be tied to the Ninth Heaven until next century comes." Chang Shan snickered. "I don't want to think how will he salvage his relationship with Qing Qiu. Your son is his only saving grace now. If not for Prince Ali's sake, I bet your family will be actively out for his blood."

Under the cover of her long sleeve dress, the knuckles of her tightly-fisted hands turned white. "Father has his moment with temper," she responded half-heartedly.

"Temper?" The second senior choked. "He overwhelmed the Sky Lord in a fight despite being poisoned. Now, I know why Ninth was so taken with him."

Bai Qian forced as much teasing as she could muster into her tone. "How easily impressionable you have became."

Chang Shan chose to ignore her taunt. Just then he remembered what she said when she stumbled into the room.

"Celestials are busying themselves with the shift of power. They are also struggling to balance their forces; now that they no longer have the support from Kunlun Mountain. I doubt they will have
anytime to pry into your life, Seventeenth." He tried to reassure her. "Just ignore the bunch of them and concentrate on getting better. All right?"

"That is quite optimistic of you, senior. Perhaps, we will see." She replied non-committal. "But seriously, what I would give to be there and see the retribution with my own eyes. Senior, you must describe to me how it played out step-by-step. The Phoenix was stinky with his details as usual," she faked a long, insufferable sigh.

After giving her a deadpanned look that almost read as: 'Of course, he had better things to do than satisfying your odd quirks.' Chang Shan fulfilled her request to the extent. In the end, Bai Qian got more truth out of her senior than she bargained for. She dismissed his outcry for her to take another cup of sobering potion, stumbled out of the room and fled to the solitude of her room.

The overloaded of information swarmed her head, making her even more befuddled than when she first woke up. The Goddess swayed dangerously with dizziness; she rested her back on the closed door and closed her eyes. She put together everything she learned so far, with little guesswork it was enough to figure out the rest on her own.

By some design of fate, Mo Yuan re-lived that life of hers. He knew every sordid detail that ever happened.

*Was he bothered that she married his brother? That she bore another man’s child?*

Her thought drifted back to their recently shared kiss. *How silly of her.* Of course, he was not unaffected despite his usual impassiveness. His kiss proved it. He never kissed her like that; forceful as if he wanted to punish her. And she thought he was returning her affection with equal fervor. *How laughable.*

When he implied that 'it wouldn't be as easy for him to survive her supposed death'. *Was he merely humoring her so not to hurt her feelings?* His proposition for them to talk came as a surprise. Whether it was partly his way of probing into her head or simply because he really expected them to. But the fact remained; she had tainted their love.

*Is it really possible for them to pick up where they left off?*

The Goddess was drowning in despair. She needed an out; somewhere she could mourn her loss. She could not stay here; not without his celestial aura rebuffing against hers every now and then and reminded her how she had wronged him.

Bai Qian paused mid-stride and looked up at the towering building behind her. Indecision warred over her delicate feature.

*Was she making a mistake by leaving?*

*But she needed this, desperately. She needed to be by herself and think.*

Her mouth tightened grimly. "Forgive me," she whispered. "But I need to do this."

Before she had the chance to leave; a voice so achingly familiar stopped her. "Shouldn't you take a
warmer cloth with you? Your body is still weak and not suitable for the cold during the travel."

Bai Qian did a total turn-around. Her eyes rounded when her gaze fell on the tall form stepping out of the shadow. "How did…?"

No sooner than she finished that thought, he reached her and dropped a warm, thick overcoat over her shoulders and proceeded to tie the strings at her neck.

The Goddess looked at him, aghast. "If you know I intend to leave, why didn't you say something earlier?"

"Would it made a difference?"

She gripped his hands tightly, stopping him from finishing his task. She sputtered. "Does it not bother you? That I am leaving?"

"Is that what you really think?" Mo Yuan asked in his deceptive soft voice.

For some reasons, his question rubbed something deep inside her the wrong way and she snapped. "Then you won't mind if I am going to look for him? Or even go back to him?" A tense moment of palpable silence hung between them. Bai Qian dropped his hands and took a step back; once she belatedly realized her outburst.

"Despite what you may believe, Bai Qian, this is not easy for me." He broke the silence first. "For all I know you might already regret this relationship we are having. How do I know you don't want to go back to your husband and child? I offer you a chance to talk but you prefer to run. What should I think?"

"So it is my fault now? Then why didn't you say something earlier. You were content to leave it be."

She covered her eyes with the back of her hands and tried not to let out a strangled sob. "Do you even care, anymore? Or you will just accept it and send me back to him on a golden platter, if he asks?"

"My feeling for you, do you take it so lightly?"

His bluntness stopped her short. The Goddess lift her head up; really, truly looked at him. The pitch black eyes that gazed back at her drew her in; she was lost for words in their dark, stormy depth. The muffled sound of protest died in her throat. There was a hidden anguish flashing in those beautiful eyes she so loved; one that she had missed and did not know better to look for, so blinded by her own pain and heartaches. Bai Qian wanted to cry. For once, she forgot the bitterness that plagued her mind.

"Also you were wrong."

It seemed Mo Yuan had something more to say to her.

"The me from seventy thousands of years ago was in love with the idea of being with you. Yet he did not entirely submitted himself to your love and your passion. You may be right in that regard; he would give you up and let you be happy with your choice."

Bai Qian looked at him sharply.

"That option isn't available for me anymore."

The Goddess was half in awe and half disbelief. His off-hand admission of desperately wanting her,
enough to go against her wish, floored her.

"Are you saying …. that you are willing to fight for me?"

Those words barely spilled out of her mouth and she realized the futility and absurdity of her own questioning. Suddenly, she was thrown back in time to the moment the two of them standing so close together and gazing into each other eyes just like this.

:: flashback ::

"At first, it was actually because of the Jade Purity Fan of Kunlun. It chose you as its master. I could not allow it to fall into an outsider's hands. So you became my disciple that day," he explained. "But it was also fate that brought you to me."

He gently lifted her chin up and sought her eyes with his, "Zhe Yan told me that you pierced your heart to feed me your blood for seventy thousands years. Is that true?"

She nodded and lowered her lashes, suddenly feeling very shy. "Master had shown such kindness to me. You even took on those Heavenly blazes for me. I think that it was totally worthwhile to offer blood from my heart to keep Master intact."

"These years you have suffered so much for me."

She shook her head lightly, "No hardship. I am glad I was able to do something for you. Even if I have to sacrifice my life for you, I will," she said.

He seemed pleased at her conviction. "Seventeenth, do you know why I worked unceasingly for seventy thousands years to repair my spirit?"

"I do," she touched his hand lightly.

"Zhe Yan said you would never disappoint those you care about. Back at Ruoshui River, Master told all the disciples of Kunlun Mountain that you would return. We knew that you will. You have worked so hard for us."

"I have never disappointed those I cared about…," he trailed off. "That is true."

"But I did it for the one I cared about the most. Do you understand what I am saying?" He gently coaxed her to look up at him. "Little seventeenth, it was all for you."

Bai Qian clutched his hand tightly in her own and looked deeply into his eyes. Her eyes misted at the finality of his confession, she felt inexplicably warmth at those words. A sweet smile broke across her face.

:: end of flashback ::

How did she forget that? Why did she ever doubt him?

For the first time since she found herself back in Kunlun Mountain again, Bai Qian felt a veil lift from her eyes, revealing crystal-clear clarity. She realized her distrust of his feelings, of his
acceptance of her past mistake and their future together was never an issue. It was merely the excuses she used to justify her needs to flee.

Truth is she was too scared to find out what Su Su's love for Ye Hua meant for her (and him). She was fearful of his reception of her past life; a lifetime where she loved and devoted herself wholly to another man who was not him. She had allowed her own guilt, insecurities and shame of inadequacy to set a rift between them rather than confront her own demon. It was not him who was at fault here, but her. And she had hurt him with her thoughtlessness.

"I am sorry. I shouldn't have said that."

"No, you are not. You meant what you said." Mo Yuan said matter-of-factly.

Bai Qian fisted her hand into his clothing and clung to it like a lifeline; as if the connection would give her strength to go on. He had bared his most vulnerable thoughts to her. She owed him at least the truth. "I was scared and confused. I didn't really think." She offered it as some sort of explanation and apology for her unfair treatment toward him.

Her head bowed low to hide her distress. "I never want to leave your side. I just don't know what to do if you really wish to have nothing to do with me anymore. The thought of you letting me go, or being disappointed with my past suffocate me," she confided in him. "It is just easier to not be here and see it happen. I am sorry I am such a coward."

"You said once that despite not knowing your heart; you are already in love with me. If you still have your memories, tell me, Bai Qian, would be ever give your heart to another?"

Her whole body stilled; every muscle in her body was drawn tight.

"Would you?" he repeated.

Bai Qian shook her head furiously. Even after seventy thousand years, the longing for his presence still weighed heavily in her heart. That was why there was no one else for her; despite the loneliness she felt so keenly but denied to ever exist.

"Then your trial did not have to mean anything, if you do not want it to be."

He held her gaze, full of incredulity and doubt, with his.

A sigh. Then he drew her closer and guided her head to settle against the crook of his neck. "I was and am never disappointed in you, Seventeenth. There are times I might disagree with some decisions or oversights you made in my regard. But never disappointment."

"Your fear of rejection is understandable but misplaced. You said earlier you wouldn't stand a chance of survival had I die. No truer words has ever been said." He tightened the arm that encircled her waist. His voice became solemn. "Our hearts and souls are too entwined to be apart. How could I ever let you go now?"

"Your trial," If he felt her body tensed up against him, he ignored it. "is of the far past. A fated hindrance that you could not foresee or escape until it was done. All I see now is us, in the present. If you wish to sort out your feelings or find some semblance of closure; then go ahead. Make peace with the ghost of your past. Then come back to me, so that we will never have to look back at it again."

"Even if it means I will be seeing Ye Hua?" She asked in a small voice.
"Especially that." He sighed again. "You can not avoid him forever, Seventeenth. He is still the father of your child. Like it or not, there will always be a connection between the two of you."

"I am not really going to see him. Honestly, I would rather not to." Bai Qian wrinkled her nose. "It won't be wise. Who knows, I might end up maiming him."

"No cripples, please. It would look bad if the new Sky Lord lost a limb or two before his coronation." He said drily.

"I am serious." She slapped her hand against his chest. "If I had my way, I will make him suffer a fate worse than death!"

"Seventeenth, what Ye Hua did to you is inexcusable. But he already paid the price and has his own pain and sufferings to endure. Certainly, you knew that. Perhaps if you give him a chance to explain himself; you would find that answer which you seek."

Bai Qian was then reminded how she was robbed of her righteous justice. She raised her head and locked her eyes with him. "Why did you do it?"

When she saw his quirking eyebrow, she quickly clarified. "I knew what you and my family have done. The only thing I didn't get is why going to such great length? Surely, there are other ways to properly get back at him. Them."

"Honestly? It was not just for you or about you." Mo Yuan gave her a wry smile.

"Hao De becomes too enamored with power. He always sought to defeat and conquer other clans, then added them and their territories to his seat of power. The prestige and leverages he got blindsighted him to trails of dead bodies left by his greed. Before long, dissenters will rise. When they united and rebelled against him, it will be an all-out war."

Bai Qian gaped and looked at him in askance.

"It is my wish to retreat from the affairs of the Immortal world and live the rest of my days with you." Mo Yuan explained. "For that, a new reign of peace and some changes for the better must happen. Dong Hua had suggested once before to remove Hao De and his power-base but I resisted the idea. I wish to maintain the status quo until Ye Hua is equipped enough to reign all aspects in his hands."

"So, you robbed my chance of vengeance and use it to further your scheming. Unbelievable." She complained, loudly.

"Your father fought for your honor; as his every right to do so. Those who wronged you were exposed of their crimes and punished accordingly. You gained your eyesight back. I believe it is fair enough."

However the Goddess kind of disagree and sulked in silence.

Despite her great reluctance to leave - now that she made things right between them again - Mo Yuan accompanied her down to the lower gate of Kunlun Mountain.

"I still can't believe you made me leave," she grouched.

"You were leaving on your own before that," He pointed out drily.
She pulled at their entwined hands. "That is different and I changed my mind."

It was time like this she reminded him of young Ali. "Seventeenth."

_Heaven forbid, she hated it when he slanted his eyes and looked at her like that._ "I know. I promise to listen to him._ Just a little and very reluctantly._ She added the last part in the silence of her mind.

"If nothing else, consider you are doing it for Ali." He suggested another incentive that may strengthen her resolve to see the meeting through to its end.

The Goddess's head snapped up, startled. "You have met him? Already?"

"Ye Hua allowed him to spend time here at his insistence to see you. The Ninth Heaven must not a very favorable place for him right now. Your parents also demanded him to stay over with them for the next three months."

"Do not worry. He is a delightful child, full of spirit and curiosity. Not much different from you when you were still young, I guess." He said fondly.

"So you do like him. Is it .. not weird?" She pried tentatively.

"Well, he is _your_ son and _my_ nephew."

"Which is a weird combination, considering." She bit her lips, worried.

Mo Yuan did not even bat his eyelashes. "Weird is but a relative term."

"You are taking this easier than I do," she grumbled; envious that he was seemingly very accepting of the tumultuous times they were going through.

"Does it make that much differences knowing he is of your blood?"

Bai Qian paused and pondered his question carefully; then shrugged. "No, I guess not. I am very fond of him from the first moment we met. It is just...this is awkward?" She revealed her troubled sentiment. "I have no inkling how to deal with him."

"There is no rush, Seventeenth. You have all the time you want to figure it out."

The Goddess hummed and acquiesced to his wisdom, albeit dubiously.

_________________________________________________________________________

"This is where we part." Mo Yuan touched the side of her head, encourage her to go on.

Bai Qian bit her lips and clung to his front. "What really happened at the Roushui River? Zhe Yan hinted something but he won't say. He said I should ask you instead."

"That story will have to wait." The Master of Kunlun stiffened almost imperceptibly. Had Bai Qian paid close attention to him, rather than dwelling on her reluctance to see Ye Hua, she would have picked up on it. "But he said …."

"You are stalling, Seventeenth. This is unlike you." Mo Yuan chided her. "Where is your usual determination? Are you that scared to face him?"

"But you have talked to him, don't you? No, I know you definitely did. You could just tell me
whatever you learned right now."

"This is something you have to do on your own." He insisted. "The sooner you deal with it, the quicker you can put all behind you."

Bai Qian huffed. "Fine. I will see him." She agreed but not without letting her displeasure be known. "Don't blame me when I damage your brother. Because I would say 'I told you so'."

Mo Yuan gave her an enigmatic smile as if he knew that would never happened. It was rather unnerving to the Goddess that he always knew things about her even before she realizing it by herself. Nevertheless, that was one smile she could not resist.

The Goddess leaned on his chest and kissed him full on the lips. It was slow and soft, comforting in ways that words would never be. A promise of much more to come. The world fell away and there were just the two of them. His hand rested just below her sensitive ear; his thumb caressing her soft cheek as their breaths mingled. She ran her fingers down his spine, pulling him closer until there was no space left between them and she could feel the beating of his heart against her chest.

She pulled apart not really wanting to let go as he lean in a little closer; their foreheads touching. "Wait for me," she asked breathlessly.

"Always."

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**Note**: As usual, my thanks to Noitratoxin, loreinacadis0412 and my other lovely reviewers for sharing your opinion/comment to me. It's always fun to read your feedback. 😊❤️😊 
After leaving Kunlun Mountain, Bai Qian did not immediately set to seek Ye Hua out. She did not feel like stepping into the Nine Heaven; so she wandered off aimlessly for a while then decided to visit the Mortal Realms. She descended to the Far East where she and her sixteenth senior usually frequented all those years.

Lost in her thoughts, her feet slowly took her from busiest streets of Laoyang into the suburb. The more she walked, the less human she encountered along the way. Before she knew, the Goddess found herself somewhere in a mountainous area. She squinted her eyes looking for clues of her current whereabouts. It seemed she lost her way again; not that it was anything new to her. She should really bring Mi Gu’s stick with her. The Goddess pondered shifting into her animal form to spend the night out in the wild, only to decide against it. The risk of running into hunters was too high.

As she was about to turn around and find a semblance of shelter for the night, something caught her eyes. A lone swing, big enough for two adults, nestled among the bough of trees just ahead of her. The Goddess stood rooted to the spot. Flashes of old memories came to her, her heart began to pound furiously.

She started off with a quick pace that turned into a run. A quick turn to the left around a small roadside shrine, another turn at the end of the path leading her from thick trees into yet another clearing. She stood there for the longest time, looking at the small, wooden hut at the end of the path. Her eyes widened in recognition. A hesitant step forward, then two. She walked toward the familiar hut as if hypnotized. Her fingers dragged across the square-wooden table situated next to the steps leading into the hut.

With each sweep of her hand, she remembered the beginning of her mortal life. She had found this abandoned hut by chance after waking up on a small, beaten path that seen better days.

:: Flashback ::

The amnesiac female trudged along, her stiff legs throbbed in protest for the lengthy distance she had covered. Earlier that day, she had woken up with a blank state of mind and empty hand; not knowing who she was and what was she doing there in the middle of nowhere. She had been walking and walking and walking all over the place, hoping to find someone. Anyone. Her stomach continued to growl viciously. The day was almost over and she had yet to meet any human settlements in sight.

She jumped in fright when the sky rumbled with thunder. Her gaze observed the dark cloud rushing in her direction. Her footsteps quickened. Her eyes frantically sought out for a place she could huddle in, a hollow in the tree, anything to escape the angry rain that was coming. Her thin, tattered cloth would not offer much protection against the chill. It seemed luck was still on her side. She came upon a failing, barely stand hut. It stood slightly off-track, from where she stopped earlier. Since no one seemed to occupy it; she made it her temporarily shelter.

At first, she planned to leave and sought a more suitable lodge to live in. Who knew what perilous encounters would find a lone female living in the forest. Yet, as if fate was against her idea. On the same day she decided to leave, she had a horrible run-in with forest scavengers. Those three men she met and asked for directions to the nearest town openly leered at her bare calves and made a lot of
rude suggestions.

She started backing off when they began discussing among themselves about their lucky find. One with bushy eyebrows almost unclothed her with his hungry eyes as he convinced the others to save the troubles and just enjoy their prize right then. Despite her inexperience in the world of men; foreboding feelings crept up her spine and her instinct took over.

She remembered being chased all through the woods then stumbled over a tree root. Her hard collision with the ground knocked the air out of her and bruised her side. She could only laid there in heap and gasped in pain. With her now sprain ankle; she could not even get back up. It took less than a blink of an eye for them to catch up with her. She saw lust and ill-intent as clear as day in those ravenous eyes as they came closer and loomed over her prone form.

Now they were arguing among themselves. The bulkier one who started the chase backhanded one of his companion, the shorter one with crooked teeth, and trashed him to the ground. The other one with shifty eyes was a true coward. He backed off and immediately bowed out of the challenge. Her would-be offender threw his wooden basket filled of games and his bow and stacks of arrows to them. They scurried and made themselves scarce, leaving the hapless female to deal with the amorous man. They chance would come later, they knew.

The Bushy Eyebrows made a grab at her injured ankle and immobilized her movement with his strength. She whimpered in pain and protested. Her offender began to rid himself of the knives he carried on his person. She was scared witless when he untied the sash around his waist and the string of his legging. Even with her face turned to the side, she could see from the corner of her eyes pieces of clothes being tossed to the ground.

Her body shook like a leaf when he crouched down next to her and pulled her by her injured ankle toward him. He loomed over her; his rough hands tore her tattered robe to pieces and push her thighs apart. She squeezed her eye tightly shut and struggled to get away with renewed vigor. Nothing worked; he barely budged. Then she heard screams; screams that should belong to hers, yet not.

Her saving grace came in the form of roaring voices and trembling ground. The frightening howls, akin to that of a mindless beast, became louder and more maddening. The earth shook at every steps it took. Something large, heavy and dangerous was definitely going to be upon them very soon. Faster than any of them could finish that thought; a fire-billowing, lion-like creature stomped its way in and towered over them. Thick saliva dripped from his lolling tongue. The unclad man’s scream barely left his throat; the beast’s glistening fangs already found its mark. A fountain of blood sprayed from his pierced neck, followed by sickening munching sounds.

When the rest of the men finally caught on with the slaughter that was happening; they did not bother with her anymore. Weapons and games were left forgotten on the ground as the duo ran for their lives. When the creature bared its mouth, full of sharp teeth at her; she knew the real end had come. She huddled herself into a tight ball, her head buried between her knees and chest. There was no escape from this harbinger of the death.

She failed to see how the beast flinched from the golden ray of light that came out of nowhere. When the pain never came and the sound of footsteps hitting the ground got farther away; she stretched her back and crane her neck to look around. There was no living beings there, save for her. She warily glanced around again before deeming it was safe enough for her to move away. As she struggled to regain her footing; she stepped on something hard and almost tumbled down again. It was a white fan with jade laden on both sides. She bend down and gingerly picked it up and flipped it open. Curious, her fingers traced the unfolded fan before pocketing it into her robe. The almost crystal-white jade ornament was invaluable; she knew that much. Perhaps, she could pawn it off and earn
herself decent meals and nights at some inns. Now she had to figure out how to drag the discarded
games and weapons back to her shelter.

Ever since that day the beast did not return, not even once. She no longer had bouts of unsavory
encounter with other mountain inhabitants. Everything was quiet as if the whole population of the
mountain suddenly vanished. When her bruises were healed and she could walk around again
without using a cane stick; she had abandoned her idea of seeking a new home. If those crude men
were any indication; the world outside might be a place to be wary of far more than she first
suspected. At least here, in this forsaken forest, she would not be disturbed and left relatively in
peace.

:: End of flashback ::

:: Mount Junji ::

The Goddess padded around the small hut and relived her days as a mortal with crystal clarity; a
cursory courtesy of the broken Soul Lamp and her never-ending dreamscape. Her eyelids dropped
halfway as she inhaled the familiar fragrance of the old house. Touching the wooden shelves and
sitting at the table made her distant past became more solid, real and touchable than ever.

For over two human years, she lived her life here. Alone, save for occasional strays she picked up: a
fallen little bird here, a trapped rabbit there. A few times she found a wounded game that escaped the
hunters’ arrows and sought refuge in her forbidden mountain. All it took to bring her cursed life to
full circle was a black serpent-shape creature.

At first, the Goddess suspected Su Su suffered head injuries while being tossed off heaven and down
to Mortal Realms. A lone man, bloody and injured suddenly appeared in the midst of deserted forest
and stumbled into the only house someone actually lived. If that in itself was not suspicious already;
his reluctance to leave after being healed should made her stopped and took notice. But no; what did
she do? She let him stay.

What about the mysterious voice at the back of her mind that whispered ‘he will never hurt her’? Or
how surreal she developed a strange rapport with him in no time? After her unfortunate encounter
with males with questionable actions, it should be impossible. Instead of being averse of his
presence, she welcomed him wholeheartedly.

The Goddess decided, she was a hapless victim of circumstances-predestined. There was simply no
other explanations for all those dubious decisions she made in that lifetime.

When he offered his body and himself to repay her kindness; she just accepted it without questions,
again. It appalled the Goddess that Su Su failed to see through his proposal. It was obviously ‘not
normal’. Whom in their right mind was willing to wed an acquaintance who was always tight-lipped
about his shrouded past? It was clear as days that he had something to hide. His secrets were indeed
devastating and life-threatening, as she came to realize and experience them in person later on.

The Goddess snorted. Things kept getting better and better from there. Thanks to her obliviousness,
or divine-predestined in this case, she never questioned his intention when he disappeared for years
only to come back one day. She acted as if nothing had changed. Unbelievable! How had she not
realize the severity of her abandonment; the first of many more to come. The accounts of her
foolishness only kept piling up as years gone by. It should have come as no surprise that her
ridiculously blind faith in him led her to the ultimatum.

Circumstances-predestined indeed. The Goddess wondered had she not hit the bottom line, would
she wise up after all?

:: Nine Heaven ::

Ye Hua felt it the moment the barrier protecting his dwelling in the Mortal Realm was breached. Whoever trespassed must be exceptionally strong in spiritual power to pass through his intricately-woven shield unhindered.

The Crown Prince put down his quilt and stood up abruptly. “I have urgent matters to attend to. Leave the rest of the documents here, I will take a look at them later.” He passed the finished parchments to Jia Yun and made a grab for his outer robe.

Ye Hua immediately halted his personal guard, Tian Shu, from following him. “Stay here, I will only drop by real quick to check up on the hut. If I failed to come back after the incense stick burned over, you can come look for me then.” Then he swooped past the guard; his dark robes billowing.

Tian Shu could only bowed down to his order and let the Crown Prince leaved unattended. He turned around and quirked his brow at the other aide and got a clueless shrug for an answer. The suddenly jobless bodyguard sighed and went back to sorting the stacks of unread documents.

:: Mount Junji ::

Ye Hua could not believe his own eyes when he came upon an illusion of Qian Qian sitting in their family hut. His thoughts raced at an alarmingly speed. Had his own subconsciousness tricked him yet again? It would not be the first time. He saw figments of his own imagination welcomed him into their home often enough. How many times he ran to catch her, only to grab at the thin air?

However an apparition could never fake an immortal essence; much less one so refine and ancient like hers. But if this was really Qian Qian, what was she doing here? And how did she know to find this place? The barrier he renewed after Ali’s accident not only hide the whole vicinity from sights but was also imbued with compelling spells. Anyone approaching the hut would feel a strong urge to turn around and steer away. It was nearly impossible to find this place; unless he or she already knew the hut was here.

Ye Hua swallowed thickly at the implication of what her presence here could be. Did it mean she remember her past and their life together? Perhaps, she came back for him? He felt his ruined hope soaring again. He closed up the distance between them, slowly, cautiously, one silent footstep after the next; until she was an arm length away from him.

“Qian Qian,” he whispered with all of his pent-up longing for her. His arms secured tightly around her shoulders. Her reaction was instantaneous but not one he was hoping for. Her shoulders tensed up; before he knew he skidded and backed a good distance from where he stood before.

Bai Qian stared at his kicked expression non-pulsed and refused to say anything. She promised Mo Yuan she would at the least listen to what his brother may have to say to her. She did not promise to be civil.

“Qian Qian.” His eyes and voice pleaded with her frozen demeanors; the condemnation so blatantly clear in her eyes confirmed his suspicion. “You remembered. You really remembered.” He both hoped and feared this very moment. It could bring them back together or severe whatever remaining ties they had once and for all.
“I am sorry, I am so sorry, Qian Qian. I knew nothing could ever justified all the wrongs I have done to you. I was foolish. I failed to realize my struggles to keep you by my side only jeopardized our love and irrevocably pushed you away. I hurt you when I never ever meant to.”

His sorrowful eyes tried to capture and hold hers. “I thought I won the day I secured our imperial wedding and your position as my legitimate consort; truth is I lost everything I ever had with you.”

It seemed as if he was talking to a stone wall, save for flickers of light from her eyes, all he heard was his own voice.

“Are you punishing me with your silence? Please say something, Qian Qian. Scream, hurl your insults at me. Hit me, anything.” He reached his hand out for her again but she merely sidestepped. Her distrustful stare was like a blunt dagger stabbing into his chest.

He decided to change the tactics, perhaps reminding her of their better time together may soften her enough to open up to him.

“Remember, we were so happy together. You really enjoyed my cooking and liked to pose for me to draw. Then there was our evening stroll in the fields of blooming flowers. You barely can wait to go back there. We could have that again, Qian Qian. You like to spend time at the PeachTree Groove, do you not? We could visit there as often as we want.”

“Give me a chance to prove myself to you again. I know I am asking too much from you but please. I promise to spend the rest of my life making up to you.” He pleaded with her. “If not for us, then think about our son. He needs you. Six hundred years without you is hard enough for him. You have no idea how much he made a fuss for his mother when he was a toddler.”

“Come back to us, Qian Qian. Let us be a family again”

Bai Qian looked upon the one-time love of her life. After all that came to pass; he was still so confident that they could be reconnected again. Did he even bother to ask for her opinion? No. This was not about her but what he wanted. If there was one thing Bai Qian detested the most; it was people who tried to manipulate her, to bend her to their bidding. For him to use her own son against her was just too much. Then again she should not be surprised, he had sent Ali to her Fox Den for that very same purpose in mind.

How her mortal counterpart ever believed the sincerity of this man? What did Su Su ever see in him? Yes, he was handsome, good-looking and charming when he wanted to be. But so was her Mo Yuan. They wore the same face after all. Bai Qian could never called that facial feature otherwise. Appearance aside, they were different as nights and days. Mo Yuan, under all his feigned indifference, was genuinely kind and caring. He always thought of others and put them before himself. That was what made all those close to him willing to help and support him in whatever he decided, even at the cost of their own life. He inspired admiration, loyalty and dedication into everyone he met.

A thought then occurred to her. The Goddess began to study his profile seriously. What if she was wrong? What if it was not only the divine-predestined that guided her actions? From her first life, Bai Qian was secretly and deeply in love with her mentor. Why else she was willing to sacrifice everything for him without any regards for her own? During her time in Kunlun Mountain, she got to see this very same face for twenty thousand of years. And hundred thousands more while he rested in Yanhua Cave.

Who could confirm that an amnesiac person really forgot everything they experienced? Names,
places and past occurrences can be forgotten. What about deep-seated feelings and emotion? Subconsciousness was a powerful drive. What if Su Su associated Ye Hua’s presence with the one her head had forgotten but never her heart? If her subconsciousness recognized Ye Hua as her beloved mentor, would she not place her absolute trust in him and followed him without questions? Would she not sacrifice yet again anything to be by his side?

Bai Qian already knew the answer. It was as simple as that; she was so blind to never realize the truth until now.

Her unwavering heated gaze unnerved him. Ye Hua found he could not figure out the meanings in its hidden depth. When her lips twisted into a mirthless smile; his heart sunk.

“You really never change, do you?” She said at long last. “All these years, you still have no ideas where you went wrong. Mo Yuan was right. Again, when he was not? The answer that I sought is in front of me the whole time yet I failed to see it until now.”

“I am not your Su Su,” she announced proudly; her eyes bright with resolute acceptance. Without her vast memories and experiences as an immortal, her hard-earned lessons of life and regret and her absolute commitment to Mo Yuan, she and Su Su were different person. Despite them sharing certain temperament and instinctual habits; their rational thinking differed, thus their choices in life.

Bai Qian would never choose the same paths Su Su did. She was too proud and practical to lay down and simply accept what others planned for her. Therefore there should never be a beginning between Ye Hua and her, had she had her memories. The only thing that drew her to him, like a moth to the flame, was her lingering affection for another who share his appearances. Their meeting was an unfortunate accident spurred by her heavenly trial; nothing more, nothing less.

“You also assume much to think that Su Su still love you after all that happened. Let me tell you one thing, Ye Hua. The reason she left is not because she hated you.” Bai Qian waited until that sentence registered in his mind before she finished the rest. “She left because she no longer felt anything for you. Be love or hatred.”

When his face lost its parlor and he stumbled back from the blow of her merciless words, she watched on with morbid satisfaction.

“In the beginning, she was perturbed because you never trusted her enough to explain your reasons for treating her like that. But she always placed her faith in you, did you know that? Almost until the end. However blind and utterly foolish that was.” There was a hint of wistfulness in Bai Qian’s voice.

“Her steadfast resolve was shaken and tested every time you ignored her silent pleas to listen to her. If her voice never truly reached you; what was that said about her love for you? Did she even matter in your eyes anymore?” She continued, almost disinterested.

“It is so sad, really. How she grieved for her loving husband who became a total stranger. You became someone she could touch but never reach. In the end, she was tired of those nasty feelings that ate her up and left her empty and raw. Is it such a surprise that she chose to let go?”

Su Su’s decision to completely let go of him was what fulfilled her heavenly trials. The killing energy of Zhexian Terrace merely paved the way and made it possible for her transition. If her mortal counterpart did it, Bai Qian could do it as well. She refused to let skeletons of the past to interfere with the life she had yearned for half of her lifetime.
“You do not really mean that, Qian Qian,” his voice shook. “You said that because you merely want to hurt me back. How could you not love me? Our love is meant to be; it is fated! Why else did we meet in Kunlun Mountain then here and again in the Eastern Sea? You are always meant for me.”

Bai Qian looked at him with pity. “She did not love you, not at the beginning. Only after months of living together as husband and wife, she began to fall in love with you.”

“That can not be true. You allowed me into your heart and your home. Why would you do that unless it was for love? You are too cruel, Qian Qian.” When Bai Qian did not outright refute his claim, Ye Hua thought he finally reached out to her.

With or without her memories, Bai Qian knew her true-self yearned for Mo Yuan alone, as she always did for over seventy thousand years. No spells, no curses would ever take away that deeply engraved affection she had for him.

“You wore his face,” she whispered barely loud enough to be heard but he heard it along with the hidden meaning loud and clear. After all, he also found Su Su’s ghost in her.

“Please, say no more.” Ye Hea’s broken voice pleaded. Her honesty was too brutal. She was hinting their relationship was a mistake from the very beginning because he was the wrong person.

“It is the truth that you have to learn to live with. A wise man once told me: ‘There was no greater shame than deluding yourself into false beliefs. It is a sign of weakness.’

“And that wise man is Mo Yuan?” he laughed bitterly, his voice hoarse. “Were you ever mine, Qian Qian?”

The Goddess met his eyes, her lips pressed grimly. “Cherish the good memories you and Su Su once have together, Ye Hua. Because that is all you will ever have of me.”

“For you, it has always been him, is not it?”

It was more of a statement; rather than a question. Bai Qian did not bother to confirm or deny it. Not when both of them recognized it for what it stood.

“Even if you claim to love another, I refuse to believe that you felt nothing for me, Qian Qian. I know you did. I can taste your love in every kiss we share; every time we make love.”

The Goddess could see he was grasping at the last straw. “Let the past lies in the past Ye Hua, only then you could move on with your life.”

“What if I do not want to? How can I forget our life together, you are my wife, the mother of my child! You mean everything to me.”

“Then you live a futile life; pining on the same old pain that takes you nowhere. But again who am I to convince you otherwise?”

Ye Hua’s dark eyes swept across her face; so familiar and yet so different. He had expected a hysterical Qian Qian crying or throwing insults or angry words at him. Qian Qian who stood now before him did no such thing. She was accepting to the point of indifference and fully confident in her one, true love for another man.

“You really are not her, are you? My Su Su would never be so harsh with me. She might be angry at me at times but she never held my failure against me. She cares for me deeply; that is why I know she would forgive me.”
Bai Qian wriggled her eyebrow. She already said the part that Su Su already let go of everything. If he chose to hold onto his belief, then it was his choice. His logic was flawed though, forgive and forget were entirely different matters. Su Su might have a bigger heart than her to be able to forgive Ye Hua completely. But falling back in love and in relationship with him again? Hardly.

The Goddess decided her errand here was finished. She had found what she was looking for. She glanced at Ye Hua’s bow head as she headed straight for the door. Once there, she paused as if uncertain of what she was about to impart.

“Even if it is not really my place to say it, I would like you to reconsider one thing.”

“Despite what happened between us, Mo Yuan is still your brother. The same one who painstakingly took care of your spirit for over hundred thousands of years,” she stated matter-of-factly. “That could never been easy for him, consider the time of conflicts and disturbances he lived through. Who know how many times he fell and sustained injuries, how many life threatening those were. But still he always watched over you.”

“You might not even know but Mo Yuan asked Lord Lingbao Tianzun to take care of you, in case he perished in the last Ghost War. That is how much he cares about you. Whatever happens from here on, please have a care, Ye Hua.” the Goddess reminded him. “Do not take it out on the hands that nurtured you. Blame me, be angry with me, if you must. He did nothing to deserve your contempt and alienation.”

“Farewell, Ye Hua,” was the last words she said to him before leaving without a single glance back.

Note: This is a my take on what happened at the beginning of BQ's life as a mortal. I always wonder why she chose to stay in a hut so far away from others.
Chapter 43

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

/Italic text/= personal point of view

Riding atop the cloud on her way back to Kunlun Mountain, Bai Qian pondered on the epiphany she experienced while talking with Ye Hua. From there another conversation with another man replayed in her mind.

:: flashback ::

“You said once that despite not knowing your heart; you are already in love with me. If you still have your memories, tell me, Bai Qian, would be ever give your heart to another?”

Her whole body stilled; every muscle in her body was drawn tight.

“Would you?” he repeated.

Bai Qian shook her head furiously. Even after seventy thousands of years, the longing for his presence still weighed heavily in her heart. That was why there was no one else for her; despite the loneliness she felt so keenly but denied to ever exist.

“Then your trial did not have to mean anything, if you do not want it to be.”

. :: End of flashback ::

Had her lover come to the same realization she just did? Or perhaps an inkling of the truth? Knowing him, it was more likely than not. But if he had already figured it out, why not just tell her?

She grumbled sullenly to herself as she recalled his famous last word. Oh, she knew why. She was supposed to learn on her own. Mo Yuan, must you always be so ruthless? She bemoaned her injustice. All that fretting and anxiety she went through. You could give me a hint and save the trouble!

A presence at the back of her mind suddenly reared its head; its voice dripped with sarcasm: Say you, you would not believe him if he tried.

Bai Qian scoffed. “This is not true, I certainly will.”

Liar. The voice rebuked her instantly. You would pick a fight with him and accuse him of misleading you on purpose, just to prove him wrong.

“Hey!” She cried indignantly at the insult.

Since when you graciously accept whatever truth anyone throw at you? Never. You, stubborn girl, you always take the hard way and complicate your life.

The Goddess do not need any more scorn. She opened her mouth, prepared to defend her actions
only to become aware of the absurdity of arguing with herself. “Oh, shush you,” she hissed instead.

Just then the sight of snow-capped peaks of Kunlun Mountain ranges greeted her. A warm excitement began to bubble inside her being. Bai Qian promptly ignored her pointless argument with her own conscience. Deep down, she too recognized the futility of contradicting what she knew constituted the truth.

The Goddess jumped off her cloud and rush up the flight of stairs. She crested upon its top in no time and hurried along the corridor leading to the Lotus Pond. A soft, melodic song drifted over to her. She quickened her pace, smile alighted her now brightening face.

:: Kunlun Mountain ::

“I am back,” she pleasantly announced her return.

Mo Yuan had stopped playing the zither when she first appeared in his line of sight. He waited for her to come to him. His hand, once rested on the strings, lift up and extended toward her in a clear invitation. The Goddess placed her smaller hand in his then promptly let out a startled yelp; disoriented by the quick, pulling down motion. Before she could even register; her body was already shifted and sank down into his laps.

“Welcome back, Seventeenth.”

She giggled, loving the attention she got. “You said it all wrong.” Her long, nimble fingers smoothed the confused lines that pinched his forehead. Her head pulled back a little to look at him better. “You should say ‘welcome home,’” she smiled coyly.

The way her eyes looked pointedly and meaningfully at him had he studied her face more closely. “Is that so?” His lips stretched out thin as he took in her lightened mood. “You come back earlier than I have thought.”

The goddess pursed her lips. “We run into each other unexpectedly.” It was unnecessary to clarify whom exactly she was referring to. “At first, I planned to meet him at the PeachTree Groove. It is more of the neutral ground. I suppose it is a trying time enough for the Celestials; there is no need to aggravate them further with my intrusion.”

“It is truly impressive that you are this considerate,” Mo Yuan complimented her. The Goddess caught onto his jesting. She slapped her hand against his solid chest and tried to give him a glare.

He intoned, curiously. “So what changed?”

Bai Qian shook her head slightly. “I just wanted a small time-off to cool my head first. Mortal Realms seemed like a good choice. Never had I thought that we will end up at the same place.”

Mo Yuan frowned. “He left for Mortal Realms?” It was quite risky of him to leave the Nine Heaven vulnerable at the moment.

“IThink he noticed someone was trespassing the property, so he came to take a look.” Seeing the question on his face, she elaborated. “I was losing my way in the woods, then can you believe it? I stumbled into a hut by chance. It turns out to be the very same one my mortal-counterpart used to live in.” She wisely omitted the obvious.

Mo Yuan carefully observed her demeanor as she talked animatedly. Her eyes were clear; no longer tainted with rage or bitterness. Whatever happened between them had cleared any lingering
confusion and doubts from her mind. The tight knots in his shoulders slowly melt away at this finding.

The Goddess also studied her lover in return, though more discreetly. Whoever ever said her Mo Yuan was an unfeeling creature must have never looked deep enough. Or they were simply not that courageous to meet his cool, penetrating, searching gaze. His eyes were so expressive at time.

“I take it all went well then?”

She paused for a moment, to think. “Well ... I can not speak for your brother but it is enough for me.” No longer she felt conflicted and divided. “I guess we parted as amiable as we could.” Somehow his skeptic looks irked her. “I did not even assault him. You can be assured; not a single hair on his head fell out,” her face scrunched up in a slight scowl then smoothed out.

“I also realize something else,” her fingers plucked at the front of his robe as she thought of how to word it. “The reason Su Su took up with him in the first place; even if she did not love him yet. Do you know? Even with your mustache and his constant frozen expression, both of you resemble one another a tad too much.”

“You did not tell him just that, do you?” Mo Yuan’s voice asked warily, almost as if he already resigned to hear her answer.

“That he always wears a stuck-up face?” She arched her eyebrow, playfully.

“You know very well my meaning,” he sighed. “Ai, Seventeenth, one of these days your brutish honesty will cost you yet.”

“Well, how else can I make him understand? Admit it, your brother is more stubborn than a mule. His fixation is borderline unhealthy. But you already know that, do you not?”

“And I just commended that you have learned well how to be courteous,” he chuckled.

“I can be courteous,” she said haughtily. “I am just picky about the person I show it to. And I am still saying, I actually did him a great service. It is better rip the bandage off quickly than let the wound underneath fester,” she added sagely.

“Yes, but there is no need to be so tactless about it. If you keep this up, everyone is going to say the courtesy of Kunlun Mountain is declining.” He flicked her forehead affectionately. “Perhaps I should discipline you, so you will act more fitting to what your new station demands.”

The Goddess flushed cutely at his imply of her impending status. Their wedding had yet to be rescheduled. Then she realized; he was making fun of her again! “Quit it, will you? I am not a child anymore. And you do like me just fine the way I am.” First senior would foam at the mouth if he ever heard her talking back to their mentor so rudely.

“Adults can be disciplined too; just with different approaches.” He said deadpanned. “I guess that lesson starts now.”

She squirmed in his laps; trying to scoot away from the perceived threat. The hand that circled her waist tightened; another caged the back of her head and force it down. In the end, one of them was persuaded so thoroughly into submission. If this was the kind of correction he had in mind; then she had no objection.

“So what now?” She asked after a time. Her soft, pliant body laid languidly against his chest; too
content to move away from her warm, personal cushion. He smelt so good. She greedily took in another whiff of his scent; some burning incense mingled with mountain mist. She surmised he must have gone out of his meditation earlier that day.

“Whatever you wish. Though we should pay your family a visit and inform them of your recovery.”

She was almost lured to sleep by the hypnotic, repetitive manner his hands rubbed her hair. What he said next however brought her out of her languor to full wakefulness. The Goddess winced once she thought of the scolding of the centuries she would likely face should she drop by Qing Qiu now.

“Perhaps next week,” she bite her lips anxiously. “Next month sounds good too.”

“You made everyone worry about you, your mother especially.”

Her neck twisted and crane up to get a better look at him. Though his tone was still even and without emotion; her gut was telling her something was amiss.

In the past, her mother had lamented time and again how she should not have entrusted Zhe Yan to take her only daughter to Kunlun Mountain. She had deemed the ill-fortunes that befell her once spirited, cheerful youngest child were all Mo Yuan’s fault. Now her mother learned of her sufferings as a mortal. An undeniably direct result of her attempt to deal with the gruesome legacy Mo Yuan left behind after his demise. Combined that with her recent effort to close the Bell of Eastern Emperor, her mother was bound to react badly. Very badly. Who else she would turn all that pent-up aggression to, if not him.

“When I was out, did my mother gave you a hard time?” She asked tentatively. “No, do not answer that.” She groaned. “She accosted you, did she not?”

Bai Qian could almost perceive her mother’s thoughts. Most likely her honored mother would see it differently than she did. In her mother’s eyes, Mo Yuan had manipulated her to fulfill his unfinished task; one that could claim her life if not careful. And it almost did. She was lucky to survive; not that the alternative ending was any more favorable.

In a way, he did indeed manipulated her but not because he wished to. Bai Qian just understood him better than most. What other candidate did he have but her? The spell was too dangerous to entrust with an outsider. Among her disciple brothers, only she has the capacity and the capability to carry out his plan and see it through. Bai Qian was not about to endanger her beloved ones with her responsibilities either. Knowing Mo Yuan, Emperor Dong Hua would most likely be his last resort; a backup in case all of his plans went awry.

Honestly speaking, it was not Mo Yuan’s fault that Bai Qian did not get out of her confrontation with Qing Cang unscathed. How was he supposed to know that she would cut up herself and bleed for him for the years that followed? While her heartblood donation no longer threatened her life; it drained her considerably and continually of her magic and spiritual power. An extra price she was more than willing to pay in exchange to keep his body preserved. But seventy thousand years was by no mean a short time, even by immortal’s standard. Despite many regular, prolonged meditation retreat to replenish and cultivate her spiritual power; in the end it was not nearly enough to battle out with someone of the former Ghost Lord’s caliber.

The only comforting thought she had, before she completely blacked out and fell down to the Mortal Realms, was her foresight to pass down the spell to another capable hand. Bai Qian did not doubt the ruthless, former ruler of heaven and all realms would finish her mentor’s endeavor one way or another had she failed.
“She totally did, did she not? I knew it” Bai Qian said, chagrined.

“The anger she held for me is more than understandable. I am here this time around. It was not your place to risk your life on my behalf again. I failed my promise to her to keep you protected and safe. Naturally, she reacted.”

For a sliver moment, Bai Qian swore she glimpsed a desolate expression on his face. Then it went as fast as it came; she wondered if it was her imagination. “So, it is that bad?” She pried. What she just witnessed might be a trick of light. But the slight, almost unperceivable tremor that passed under her fingertips was no mistake. She wondered what else he left out.

“I deserve her berating. It is done and over with. Let us not dwell on it,” he concluded. His hand tipped her chin up and made her look at him. “If you do wish not to see your parent right away, what else do you have in mind?”

Bai Qian recognized an evasive maneuver when she saw one. It cemented her suspicion that something monumental happened without her knowledge. One even her senior did not know. Whatever it was, she can not quite put her finger on it yet, was very serious. And it seemed he did not want her to know.

The Goddess chose to file it away for later. Perhaps a drop by PeachTree Woods was direr than she expected. She covered his hand with her own and said cheerfully. “How about we spend time together? Or simply having a day out?”

He looked bemused. “Are you that eager to go back to Mortal Realms?”

“Actually, I am proposing Zhe Yan’s Woods. We have not been there together for as long as I remember. So this time, let’s stay there for a few days. My fourth brother is most likely not around at this time either.”

She chattered on and showed good amount of her genuine interest in their upcoming outing. In the end, Mo Yuan bowed down to her wish and she garnered herself a promise from him to play the zither together. “I am really looking forward to it now.”

The day after that, after she bid her farewell to her seniors and promised to bring back some of Zhe Yan’s finesse wine; they set out for the PeachTree Woods.

“Why are you looking at me like that? Have I not already promise not to partake any wines in the foreseeable future?” Bai Qian said defensively when she noticed Mo Yuan stole a side glance at her. “I will only bring some bottles for Senior Zhi Lan; he has not tasted any since…”, she tapped her chin thoughtfully, “since everyone scattered and went back home after you were gone, I guess.”

He nodded and shifted his eyes to the path ahead of them. “After the stay with Zhe Yan, perhaps we could go back there for a few weeks. There are nothing that demands our immediate attention right now.”

It took Bai Qian a while to catch on with what he was mentioning, “You mean your retreat in the Far East? Truly?” She felt giddy at the prospect of going back to their haven. “I thought you are going to suggest I start cultivating soon for my lost spiritual power.”

The corner of his mouth tucked up a little. “If you already think about it then I do not have to impress upon its importance. I really have no wish to see you so vulnerable, Seventeenth.”
“I have given it a thought, I really do,” she insisted. His arm was trapped against her side; her face draped over his toned muscle intimately. “I just want us to have some time for ourselves first, before we visiting my family and I beginning my meditation retreat.”

“I know, Seventeenth.” He patted her hair softly.

He honestly wished for the same thing and privacy on top of all. He had yet to reveal to her the repercussion of her almost self-sacrifice. When the time come, he knew she would be devastated by the truth. It would not be easy to placate her. A distance place from prying eyes and time for her to regain her footing will be necessary.

“As much as I love my parents and my siblings, they are going to be suffocating and insufferable for a while. You have no idea how Fourth brother, Xiao Jiu and Mi Gu watched me like a hawk after I came back from my trial. Now, at least, I knew why they did that.” She shuddered at the memories. “If I am going to be subjected to their constant vigil again, at least let me take a break first.”

The first half of the journey was well-spent riding on the cloud. For the second leg, a shorter and brief one, Bai Qian suggested them taking a walk. She wished to enjoy the sightseeing on the ground. It certainly brought back the memories from the time she accompanied him to some public functions.

They arrived at the PeachTree Woods quite late that morning, Bai Qian cupped her hands and shouted for Zhe Yan when no one came out to greet them. “This is strange. What is keeping the old Phoenix occupied? I hope it is not Fourth Brother. He should be with mother and father at the Fox’s Den.”

Bai Qian was about to shout his name again when a small, high pitched voice called out to her from afar. Heavy and urgent footsteps quickly stomped over to where they stood.

“Mooooother. Mother. Mother.”

“Ali?” Bai Qian exclaimed once she got a clear view of whose voice it belonged to. “What is he doing here? Should he not be in Qing Qiu?”

Mo Yuan followed her eyes and saw Ye Hua’s son approached them extremely fast.

“Mother.” Ali shouted gleefully as he jumped over the last remaining gaps and hang to her waist for all he was worth.

“Ooh! Ummpph,” the Goddess grunted at her sudden added burden. It was a pure reflex that her two arms wrap themselves around his small shoulder and tightened his little body to her. The impact made her a little breathless; her boy was certainly energetic.


She was dizzying with the way he blurted out everything on his mind at once. Did he even take a breath in between? Though the boy seemed not affected and still went on and on.

“Ali, slow down, take a breath.” She squeezed his forearm and slowly steadied him, as he stood on own feet again. The boy took in a large gulp of air per her request; his eyes never strayed from her face.
Then he began to tremble and hiccupped. “I thought ... never wake ... I ... you …. always .. still.” Torrents of tear poured down his chubby face. His little fingers still clutched at her dress tightly. “...you …. leave ....again ....”

Bai Qian looked down at her first born with heavy heart. Although at the time she gave him up and left him with good intention; the pain of separation was still hard on him.

“Shh, I am here, Ali.” She hushed. “See, I am not going anywhere.”

Mo Yuan’s eyes transfixed on the embracing pair and their emotional reunion. His chest tightened up with the swelling of unnamed emotion. An icy mask fell over his features as he felt the barest hint of spiritual power that herald his brother’s arrival.

Bai Qian smiled ruefully, Ali had such a high hope that she would return to him and stay a family. It was regrettable that it will never be. She loved Mo Yuan so much and for so long to deceive herself to stay with Ye Hua just for his sake. Bai Qian hugged Ali closer; still she could try to be a better mother for him. Her hands stroked his little head and pat his back, offering comfort and loving embrace to the distraught child.

When she raised her head; she saw Mo Yuan standing a good distance away with Zhe Yan by his side. She failed to take note since when the old Phoenix had shown up. It seemed a conversation was going on between them; though Mo Yuan was clearly keeping an eye on them. Bai Qian tilted her head to the right, toward extensive patches of grass next to the green pond. It seemed her message got crossed. He gave her a nod and take Zhe Yan away; leaving the mother and son on their own devices.

Bai Qian bent down and gathered her son in her arms, carrying him over to the clearing she meant for them to spend time together. My, he was heavier than he looked. But she liked the way his cheeks filled out. The Goddess kissed the top of his head with fond smile. Once her destination came up, she sat down putting her back against a tree trunk and rearranged his body. His earlier emotional outburst had obviously tired him out; Bai Qian gently placed her son’s head in her laps. She started humming a lullaby that her mother used to sing to her when she was still a little foxling.

She felt an immense affection and gratitude toward her parents for demanding the rights for Ali to stay with them. While it will not make up for the lost time and missed chances, her son would grow up knowing what it felt to love and be loved. He would learn how to be a child and live without so much restrictions that will only weigh down his free spirit. At least when he was with them. Bai Qian knew for certain with her family positive influence he would grow up strong and healthy in both body, spirit and mind.

Ali’s father doted on him and looked after him with best care and love he could provide, she knew that. But growing up in the palace with estranged parents looking from afar and only strictler grandfather and maids as his companion; Ye Hua himself was robbed of closeness and bond only loving members of family could give each other.

He might be skilled and well-versed in his ruling and governing duties as well as magic and fighting prowess. But he never coped well with personal emotions; be it anger, hatred, love or else. The cold and harsh treatments he was put through as a child left big, ugly scars on his dampened spirit.

As much as he despised his Lord and Grandfather, Ye Hua can not help but unknowingly follow the former Lord’s mistakes. He lacked compassion at times, cunning and manipulative to get what he wanted and prone to overlook other’s feelings. It was not his intention; nor his own choosing that he became this way. For that, she was truly sorry for him. Yet she definitely did not want her only son
to end up as his father.

Her gently fingers combed through the loosened hair as she let her eyes peruse his small face. He had good feature and fine body structure. She had no doubts once his growing spurt hit, he would be just as tall as his father and uncle. She liked to say he got the charming factors from her though. His opened yet shy smile will certainly be more than enough to break someone’s heart once he hit puberty. The Goddess snickered silently.

She kept the humming going on. She and her son would talk later. Now let them bonded through physical contact and loving touches in this rejuvenating ambiance of her favorite hideout.

:: PeachTree Groove ::

“Since you two are amiable enough to take a stroll here, I take it things on Ye Hua’s end has been resolved?” Zhe Yan cut right into the matter once they sat down at the table inside his hut.

Mo Yuan threw him a look and sipped from his offered teacup slowly. “I should hope so.”

“What kind of answer is that?” He frowned and tried again. “Fifth Sister decided not to go back to Ye Hua, yes?”

“That she did.”

Zhe Yan looked relieved and nodded approvingly. “That is great, now I can stop worry about the two of you.”

“She also said she fell for him because of this face.” The Master of Kunlun added quietly. The stunt expression Zhe Yan displayed was priceless.

“To Ye Hua? That is harsh. Sounds like her though.” He blinked once then his lips slowly twisted into a sly smirk. “That ought to feel good, right?”

“He is my brother, Zhe Yan.”

The Phoenix let loose a disbelieving chortle. “And your major rivalry for Fifth Sister’s heart. What are you afraid of? It is only two of us here. Do not be a prude, Mo Yuan.” A thoughtful looks overshadowed his face. “Come to think of it, do I have reasons to worry about Ye Hua now? Should I offer him a cup of my Oblivion Potion?”

“It is better for you to stay away, Zhe Yan. It is a trial he has to pass on his own.” Mo Yuan commented lightly.

“Hmm, I guess so. What now then?” He echoed Bai Qian earlier question. Mo Yuan was obliged to answer him.

“I can not believe you still held her out of that. It could be troublesome, you know.” Especialy had Ye Hua mentioned it to Fifth Sister without her prior knowledge. It had the potential to backfire spectacularly. Zhe Yan added to himself.

“What can I say, Zhe Yan. It is not a topic I can spring to her out of the blue. You should not get involved with this too.”

“Yeah. Yeah. I know what to do.” He waved his hand dismissively. “Tread lightly with how you deliver it, Mo Yuan. I am afraid this might be another time bomb waiting to explode.”
Bai Qian did doze off eventually, up until small hands shook her awake. She opened her eyes to the sight of her son’s petrified face. Her instinct was put on alert in an instant. “Ali? What’s wrong?”

The boy shook his head furiously and merely let out his shaky breath. Then he climbed into her laps and placed his head on her chest without uttering any words. Bai Qian was a little baffled by his strange behavior; yet she put her hand on the small of his back and began to rub it in small circles. It seemed to calm the child down. Perhaps, now she could converse with him and gleaned how much he understood the confusing entanglement between his parents, plus one.

“Ali, I have a lot of things to tell you. But first I need to know if your father have ever explained the changes that took place lately?” She started and hastily explained further when his upturned face went blank; a picture perfect of cluelessness. “I mean like how I am going to stay with High God Mo Yuan from now on.”

“Oh? Ooh!” Ali’s head bobbed up and down; finally caught on with her earlier questioning.

“Father Prince said you have to remain at Kunlun Mountain. Because you have a prior … a prior commitment there.” His youthful face fell with disappointment. “Mother, what does that mean? You really will not come to live at the manor with me and Father Prince anymore?”

“It means, a long time ago, I already pledge myself to remain there for the rest of my life.”

“I do not understand,” he pouted in dismay, “Is it more important than being with me?”

“Ali, are we not being together now?” She prompted him gently to see reasons. “Though we live on a separate location, I could still visit you, could I not? And when you come to the Fox Den again in the future, I could stay, weeks, months with you. Or, if you prefer Kunlun Mountain, I could also get you there. I will always be around.”

“But you will not be with Father Prince anymore. Why? Did you not love him and me? Nai Nai said... she said people who love each other, stay together.”

Bai Qian winced internally; that was one tough cookie to clear up. How was she to explain that the love her mortal counterpart once held for his father was no longer there? “Ali, do you know every immortal goes through series of trials as they grow up?”

“I know.” His face brightened, already hook up to the new topic. “My teachers also said I have to study really hard to prepare for one of my own. Though it will be in a long, long time.”

“Well, it always pays off to be diligent and well-prepared.” She said gravely, remembering how her laziness and ignorance has cost her. “Anyway, each trial differs from one person to another. It comes with specific set of designs to determine whether that particular immortal is worthy enough.

“Ah, I know this part!” He rocked back and forth in excitement. “If I fail my first immortal trial, I will get all wrinkles and grey and wither away.” He visibly shuddered at that mental image.

Bai Qian chuckled at her son’s depiction, “Yes, you are right. There is also a second trial. Only a handful immortals pass this particular test.”

“To become a God or Goddess like Mother,” he shouted.

“You are right again. But that is beside the point. When mother reincarnated as a mortal and met
your father; it was supposed to be a part of my trial. We fell in love with each other yet some circumstances forced us apart. Perhaps you will understand better when you are a grown up.”

Bai Qian held her son’s eyes steady. “Listen to me well, Ali. Never forget that you were born out of that love. Your name ‘Ali’ is not a condemnation. Mother named you this way to let you know despite being a world apart you will always be the one in my heart. I did not abandon you, on the contrary, I left because it was the best option to ensure you will have a bright future here. Can you understand that?”

She was beyond pleased when he returned her smile. Although she doubted how much he grasped at what she was trying to convey. “When mother reborn again as an immortal, she remembered once more her pledge given to another millennial earlier. She still wishes to fulfill that promise. And by doing so, she can not stay with your father.”

“Mother loves High God Mo Yuan too? For that long?” His eyes grew big. He could barely begin to count that numbers with his hands and feet.

“You have been waiting for Mother for over 300 years, so you do know right? How hard it is to let go once you meet again.” She asked.

“No! I am not letting Mother getting away again.” His arms wrapped around her body possessively and refused to budge.

“That is exactly what Mother feels for High God Mo Yuan as well.”

Ali felt crestfallen. He wished to protest her absence but dare not upset her; Mother just got better after all. “But what about Father Prince? If Mother goes with High God Mo Yuan, Father Prince is going to be sad again.”

“Ali, your father is a wise man. Eventually, he will come around and find a way to be happy again. You can help him by cheering him up, you know.”

“I can do that!” The boy cried, glad that he could help. “I am going to tell him lots and lots of funny stories, then .. then Father Prince will laugh and not sad anymore, right?”

Bai Qian rubbed his little head. “That is great idea, Ali. Good boy.”

Ali squeezed her with another tight hug. A silence stretched on between them until the boy spoke up again, faintly, “I guess you can stay with High God Mo Yuan. Only as long as you promise to come visit me always!”

“Of course, dear boy, you need not to ask that. It is also my wish.” She laughed with good humor at his antics. “Ali, Mother will be absent for some years to regain her cultivation. After that, she will be able to visit and stay with you often enough.”

She lovingly nuzzled his face with her own. An intimate gesture that the Fox Clan used to convey their love and affection; especially with their young. “Thank you. Your understanding means so much to me.”

It has been sometime; Bai Qian and Ali still did not come inside. Mo Yuan went out looking for them and came to the scene of bonding mother and child with mixed-up feelings. On one hand, he was truly happy for them for reestablishing their ground and getting reconnected as they were supposed to as a family. On the other hand, a pang of regret and sorrow hit him. For that could be their child she was doting on and showering her lavish affection upon. If only, their child survived.
He turned around and headed the other way. A walking would clear his thoughts. Lingering on what could have been was never his style; but this one proved harder to be push away.

Chapter End Notes

Note: My forever thanks to loreinacadis0412 for your insight and suggestions and all reviewers, I really enjoy our chitchat/exchanges of ideas. ⊂((・▽・))⊃
When Zhe Yan announced that he was about to take Ali back to Qing Qiu, Bai Qian quickly intercepted him. "Can I talk to you, Zhe Yan?" She looked pointedly at a spot far enough from where Mo Yuan and Ali stood.

Zhe Yan smiled at her. "Of course."

"So, what this is about?" The Phoenix asked, after allowing her to drag him away for a good distance.

"When you see my parents, can you ... not telling them I am already awake? At least, not until I drop by." She quickly amended when his skepticism was obvious.

He tilted his head, studying her for a moment. "For what reason?" Then a leering, sly looks fell in place. "Hmmm, actually I think I can make a pretty good guess." His sidelong glance at Mo Yuan was very telling.

Bai Qian flicked with the tip of her earring at his knowing gestures. "Well, that ... is not all of it." It seemed her discomfort only added to his amusement.

"Oh? Then what is it?"

"I am not sure if you know. The last time Mother came to Kunlun Mountain, she and Mo Yuan were not exactly agreeable. So, since I will need a time-off for a quick meditation retreat, I figure it would be good for us to make a detour together before I get home." She faked a cough to cover up her embarrassment. "There is that, I guess we will be away for a while."

"So basically you want more smooching time with Mo Yuan and do not want your mother to give him anymore troubles. And it falls to me to cover up for you. Again."
"You do not have to make it sound so foul, you know?" She grumbled.

"Fine, I will do it but know this, Fifth Sister, your family really concern about you." Zhe Yan said matter-of-factly.

"I know that. It would not be long, I promise. We will just visit the mortal realms for a week or two. My parents would not even notice me missing for such a short time."

"All right, it is settled then." Zhe Yan nodded, ready to walk away when she seized the bottom of his sleeve.

"There is one more thing I wish to ask." Bai Qian hesitated. "What exactly happened that day at the Roushui River? And, no, I am not talking about Qing Cang or the Bell of Eastern Emperor. I am talking about Mo Yuan. Something definitely happened to him. Something monumental. And I know for certain you know what." There was a threatening edge in her voice.

Zhe Yan had long foreseen this line of questioning. His feature shifted with trepidation and uncertainty. "I can not, Fifth Sister." He raised his hand up, forestalling her on-coming drilling questions. "It is really not my place. There is only one person who has the rights to give you the answer."

"But there is one thing I can tell you." Zhe Yan told her. "Wait for him to open up to you. Do not push him with your usual aggravation, do you understand?" There was no traces of jovial mood left on his stern face.

Bai Qian realized then whatever Mo Yuan was keeping from her was no trifling matters. But what could affect the sensibility of the Great War God so much that old phoenix felt the needs to heed her a warning? She nodded at him absentmindedly.

Zhe Yan’s voice called after her. "And check out the second shelf next to the door in my hut before you leave, I left something you may find useful there."

So lost in her thought, she barely pay attention to what he said.

Bai Qian smiled and waved her hand back a few times. With every few steps her son had taken, he would stop and turned to look at her and waved his goodbye. Zhe Yan by then would prompt him and they resumed their walk again. This unending farewell kept up for a good while; the mismatched duo did not get very far from where they started.

‘Love you. Bye for now,’ she mouthed the word to the child and watched his lips trembled slightly again; the stubborn tear was withheld though this time. Ali nodded his head vigorously; his right hand thumped on his chest lightly, in return. This time the young boy did not turned back again; he walked along the pathway with steady pace.

Bai Qian watched their back getting farther away until they completely disappeared from her sight. "Oh! I totally forgot." She exclaimed; just realized that she had yet to ask why Ali was here in the first place.

“Do you require something from Zhe Yan?” Mo Yuan turned his face sideways.
“Oh, no. It is just ... I meant to ask how he came to spent time here with Ali.”

“Your father and mother is taking your niece to meet other clan’s elders and leaders. Your Fourth Brother got back to his Mansion early. So, Zhe Yan promise them to look after him for a few days.” Mo Yuan said, already asked that question.

“Why would my pa-......? Oooh...” It seemed Bai Qian finally caught on. “Her coronation date must have been set, that is why Father want to introduce her to everyone.” Her tone softened, almost sad. “It should be me to prepare her for her new duties. I am such a bad aunt.”

“I doubt she would fault you, Seventeenth, with your condition. Besides, I believe it is likely that the Empress will put her under her wing anyway.”

The Goddess laughed merrily; her voice sounded like tinker bells. “You are absolutely right. Xiao Jiu is in a good hand, my mother is always through with her lessons.”

Her eyebrows drew tight. “But why would Fourth Brother hurried back to his mansion at this time? I really hope those two are not in quarrel again.” She leaned back against Mo Yuan’s chest for a bit. He merely smiled down at her faintly.

“I do hope he will not drag Ali all the way up to the Northern Mansion just to pursue brother,” her lips jutted out slightly. “It is so dizzy seeing one of them chasing after another all these years.”

Then she suddenly spoke up. “Ah, well. I guess that leaves two of us now, all alone in this PeachTree Groove.” Her smile became mischievous.

“What do you wish to do then?” Mo Yuan’s hand tightened against her side.

“You promised to play the zither with me, did you already forget?” She pouted.

“Of course not. Out here?” He asked.

Bai Qian nodded happily. “I am going to fetch Zhe Yan’s. I will be right back.”

When Bai Qian walked back to their chosen spot with a borrowed-zither, Mo Yuan was already seated there with his own zither. There was also a bottle of wine ready by his side. She ogled the wine shamelessly and swallowed her dry throat. “This so unfair, you know that I cannot drink. Must you tempt me so?” She whined.

Mo Yuan shook his head at her obvious penchant for wine. “Perhaps a sip or two will not be harmful.”

The Goddess’s eyes glowed, giddy and pleased at the same time. “Oh, you are the best.”

“So, what song do you wish to play?”

She smiled secretly and placed her hands on the strings. Her deft fingers began to create a familiar tune. This song she could remembered by heart; despite not knowing its name for a time. Mo Yuan raised his brow at her choice of song. Out of all songs she wanted them to play together, she chose this one. Nevertheless he was pleased. He matched her keynotes stroke for stoke. His eyes watched her intently. He needed not to look at the instrument to recreate this particular song. After all, he had
played it countless of time for her for thousand years.

Bai Qian returned his gaze with her most dazzling smile. She allowed the song’s notes to convey her heart desire, knowing he would not miss its underlying meaning. Now this was not the song he played for her anymore; but the song they would always play together for the rest of their life.

The ambiance in the Grooves became intimate, full of love and expectation for future. Peach blossom swayed in the gentle breezes as if being lured by the soft, hypnotized sound. Its leaves swirled in the air and slowly fluttered to the ground around them.

“That is beautiful.” Bai Qian sighed in satisfaction when their song came to an end. She took the initiative to move to her lover’s side and laid her head on his shoulder.

Mo Yuan sought to capture her eyes. “Why do you pick this song?”

She looking deep into his eyes. “So much has happened lately; we barely be together any more. In the future, I wish us to be more like this song: ‘together we soar, forever harmonize our hearts.’”

Mo Yuan put his hand under her chin and angled her head. Slowly his head bend down, gliding his soft lips against her shell of ear and whispered. “We will.”

Bai Qian shifted her face slightly. She sought his lips with her own and pressed against them intimately once found. Her lips parted, waiting for him to deepen that most basic and complex of contacts. He tasted like wine; Bai Qian noted in her haze. Her tongue went after the rich, burning sweetness he promised earlier; to gather more of the delicious treat.

She whimpered, bereft, when his lips broke away. Mo Yuan gathered her small body and seated her atop his lap, facing him. His burning lips glided over to her throbbing pulse point and molded themselves to her skin. He explored, kissed and nibbled along the column of her throat. Her hands hold his head against her neck and pressed it closer as she trembled with anticipation. She had missed this, the feeling of his mouth feasting upon her.

As if he sensed the urgency in her movement; his long, deft fingers traced along her side, slowly and sensually, to the underside of her breast, She shuddered in delight when they finally graze the pebble bud that peaked for his attention. Moan of ecstasy tore its way out of her throat when his thumb making slow, lazy circles around each dusty circle. Arousal began to cloud her mind; faint shortened gasps filled the silence. Her fingers slipped into his dark hair and tucked at it.

“She almost failed to recognize that blatant, needy voice belonged to her.

Bai Qian sighed in relief as her dress was slipped off her small, narrow shoulders, allowing the fresh air to cool the feverish heat that rose from her skin. She cried in earnest when his lips captured her rosy bud in a bold kiss and sucked hard, teasing each in its turn without mercy or respite. Goosebumps up and down her body when he ran his open, calloused palm down the flat plain of her belly, down to her rib cage and stomach.

Her breath hitched as his hand parted the front of her dress until it fell apart. He gently nudged her thighs apart and gained access to the source of the most unbearable aches of all. Through the silken material of her panties, he began to touch and knead her most secret place with a deliberate, slow and steady motion. Her blood rush through her vein under his tantalizing touch. The fierce sensation he awoke in her was maddening.

Bai Qian fought the unstoppable feelings that threaten to over take her too soon. Her finger gripped his hair and pulled him back to her breast, offering him her delectable pink bud instead. The
masterful motions of his hand and the feel of his lips on her erect nipples was a torturous bliss. Then his fingers began to ease aside her panties and invade her, first one finger then two. He crisscrossed his fingers inside her warm, tight cavern and made room for another one. She began to sob at the heightened pleasure.

Sensing her growing needs, no longer he made an effort to keep the stroking light or slow. Bai Qian shuddered every time his fingers plunge deep into her core. She needed more; a deeper, more fulfillment only him could give her.

“Please, I need you.” She begged, writing haplessly under his unrelenting hand.

She knew he was always watching, paying attention to her responses. Instead of heeding her plea and fulfill her wish, he bent his head down, sucked her earlobe in his mouth and up his ante. Her body grew more heated, more feverish as his fingers quickening the thrust against her pulsing nub of pleasure. Aroused beyond words; she thrust her hips upward and met him with abandonment. Beads of perspiration gathering on her forehead betrayed her desperation for release. Her thighs began to tremble, her pulse quickened in sync with her skyrocketing needs.

“Ugh...”

Strangled moans push past her lips as she gave in to the overwhelming sensation and tumbled over the edge. Her sharp claws dig deep into his shoulders and her back taut, liquid fire licking up her spine. The sheer suddenness of her orgasm took her breath away. Her spent, boneless body slumped against his hard chest, panting and ragging. His hands ran up and down her quivering body soothingly before he leaned over to give her a slow kiss. When they broke off, she gave him a lazy, satisfied smile only a well*sated woman could make.

Bai Qian buried her face in his nape, basking in the marvelous afterglow. Hot flush painted her face prettily when his bulging, pent-up desire for her finally making itself known. She shifted her body clumsily, allowing her languid legs to fall on either side of his waist and straddled him. Her hands fumbled with his cloth as she pressed closer to kiss him.

The heady fragrance of her sexual gratification still permeated the air around them. It was intoxicating. Her dainty lips trailed all over his shoulders. She sucked the flesh into her mouth, lapped the abused flesh and soothed the sting her claws must have left. Her fingers rack down his nipples to his taut abs at the same time.

She nibbled the underside of his ear and whispered. “Take me.” Her hip undulated in its slow, deliberate motion, grinding down on his hard, obvious desire rhythmically. “I want it all. Our life together, our children.” Her hand slipped past his cloth; seeking the warm, rigid prove of his arousal.

Never before Bai Qian foresaw the effect of her simple solicitation would be on him. But when his body stiffen and jerked out off her embrace; it gave her cause of alarm. She looked at his face, confused. Was it her imagination that his face turned a shade paler?

“What? What did I say?” She sat up straighter, using her weight to pin him down. She cupped his face between the palm of her hands. “Mo Yuan?”

“What exactly are you asking for, Bai Qian?” The way his face closed off made the uneasiness in her growing steady.

“What am I asking for?” She repeated slowly, haltingly. Her thoughts running around inside her mind at his strangeness. “I think it is obvious? I wish us to be family and I long to see a child of our union. Did I say something wrong?”
“But here? Now?” He swallowed thickly.

“What is wrong with here and now?” She narrowed her eyes at him. “Is it not normal to want to have a child with the one you love?”

“That is not what I meant. It is just that now might not be the right time.”

“How is it that now is not the right time?” Her voice raised, partly hurt that he rejected her so readily. She began to suspect that he had another hidden reason for objection. Perhaps one that just showed up earlier that day. Her heart clenched at the mere thought.

“Your body is still weak, Seventeenth, your cultivation is low.” His voice took on the more familiar, controlled mien. “Pregnancy will take a toll on your already strained body. Birthing process can also be dangerous for you. I never want to endanger you like that. I have lived this long, what is but a few more centuries of waiting?”

Her eyes grew soft at his genuine concern for her. Bai Qian’s heart twinged with guilt for jumping to conclusion. “But you are not young anymore; we seriously need to catch up.” She tried to lift the stifled mood that befell them. But he did not look amused at the least.

“Ali is ever growing. There is no child of his age around, so he must be lonely.” Her head bent down slightly. “I completely missed watching him growing up. I just thought that if we start now. We could give him a playmate. And our child will have a big brother to watch over him or her. Would that not be nice?”

She laid her forehead against his and curled her fingers around his neck. “I know you are worrying. But I will have time to recover my strength, at least during the first stage. Women birth child everyday, while there is some risks, it is manageable. Zhe Yan will be there, you will be there. Between the two of you, you can manage anything.”

“Do not you want to hold our child in your arm and watch him or her sleep, speaking the first word to you, calling you papa?” Her voice was pleading.

Mo Yuan struggled to rein in his emotions. He knew she strongly wished to pursue this course but he can not. Not after what happened the last time. It could happen again. How would he be certain the price for his sin for defying against the natural course of life and death had been paid in full? His jaws clamped tightly together as the thought of watching another life of his blood be taken away again while he was powerless to stop it.

“I am still saying we should just wait,” he said with the most even voice he could muster.

Bai Qian pulled away from him, her shrill voice cut through the air. “That is not all, is it not?” She could not believe he still refused her. Her reasons bore truths and not flaw in the slightest. If Su Su can endure all the hardship thrown at her and still birthed Ali safely, why not her?

Tears blurred her vision. Those were just excuses he used to justify his unwillingness to sire a child with her. But why? What was his reason, the real motif, she needed to know. “There is something else you are not saying.” Her tone was sharp and accusing. “Is it because of Ali?” She paused. “Or Ye Hua? You are bothered that I bore him a child after all. If you are that disgusted with me, why did you just not say so!”

“Say not what you do not meant to say, Bai Qian, You might regret it otherwise,” he gripped at her forearm tightly. “You know I never fault you for your past. Not even if that was what you wanted. Do you really think so little of me? That I will be so jealous of your former husband and Ali to
“Punish you this way?” Her body was jolted suddenly to look up at him.

“If not that; then why? Tell me, talk to me!” She cried out, stunned and scared at his rare display of vehemence. She wanted him to say anything, give her something that she could work with. Anything was better than this.

“You do not know what you are asking of me.” His voice was harsh and short with her.

For once, Mo Yuan was truly enraged. The feeling swell wildly inside him; so much he wanted to destroy something. He was furious at the undeserving fates that befell them, angry that she could think of him so petty. And most of all, he was infuriated with himself for his failure to protect her and their child. How could he, the son of mighty Heavenly Father, the renowned War God, do nothing to save his blood? What this how his Honored Father felt when he lost his younger son back then.

The overwhelming regret, disappointment, resentful was too strong. “This is not how I want to tell you.” He shook his head and pushed her away from him abruptly.

Bai Qian wrapped her arms around her waist and watched after his retreating back. Push her away; gotten so angry with her; he never did that before ever since they started this relationship. She just did not understand where they went wrong. They simply never fought like this. Her form crumbled to the ground. Their fleeting happiness and loving moment together just now was it an illusion? Tears dripped down her cheek, unchecked and unbidden.

That night she waited for him in their given hut. The neigh of night had come and gone; still he did not come back. Her tears fell freely, in rapid succession, so much it soaked wet her head rest. It felt as if the sun was setting on their relationship. She did not know how they are going to fix this. Bai Qian cried long into the night until exhaustion claimed her and she fell into fitful, restless sleep.

In the dead silence of the night, a silhouette crept toward the hut on silent footstep and went straight to the bed. He sat down on its edge, took note of the pinch expression on her face, her swollen eyes and the wetness of the bedding. Mo Yuan lightly touched her face with regret. He never wanted to see her cry; especially not because of his doing.

“I thought you will never come back,” the one lying on the bed whispered. She hardly fell asleep. The barest hints of his presence alerted her to his arrival. “I did not meant to say all those mean things to you.” She placed her head on his thigh and clung tightly to his waist. “I am sorry, so sorry,” her hoarse voice begged for his forgiveness.

“You are not alone at fault,” he rubbed her hair. “I was wrong too, for turning my back to you and walked away. You deserve an explanation. It just that…,” he trailed off, distractedly, “This is harder than I thought. I thought if I kept it away, contained, just like how I always keep the lid on anything that went wrong in my life, it will be just another one of those past regrets.”

“It was foolish of me.” He let out a heavy sigh. “Seventeenth, there are certain thing you do not know yet. Thing that I barely have the heart to tell you.”

“You are not alone at fault,” he rubbed her hair. “I was wrong too, for turning my back to you and walked away. You deserve an explanation. It just that…,” he trailed off, distractedly, “This is harder than I thought. I thought if I kept it away, contained, just like how I always keep the lid on anything that went wrong in my life, it will be just another one of those past regrets.”

“It was foolish of me.” He let out a heavy sigh. “Seventeenth, there are certain thing you do not know yet. Thing that I barely have the heart to tell you.”

“Tell me, make me understand,” she pleaded with him. “There is nothing worse than what we had faced together.”

“But there is,” he said. “There is nothing more painful than watching the one we love perished and we can do nothing to change it.”

Bai Qian said nothing, knowing his statement was too right. To these days, nothing was more
haunting and distressing than watching him offered his spirit to the Bell of Eastern Emperor and died in her arms. Even if he already returned to her, the memories still taunted at her.

“And there is no greater regret than a parent watching their child die and is hapless to save it.”

The way he worded it, full of grief and remorse, tucked at her heart. Had he ever lost a child before? She did not know that. In all twenty thousand of years she lived at Kunlun Mountain, she never saw a woman by his side, any woman, but her. But his life was long and enduring, there were things shrouded in his past that she would never learned of. He was not the type to share his thought freely either. Was that why he never spoke of children? Had she inflicted upon his old wound with her cluelessness? She thought of his obvious agitation and agreed that might be the case.

While Bai Qian was musing to herself, Mo Yuan was struggled with his indecision. A canned of worms once opened was hard to keep it contained. “Have you ever wondered why you survive that day, Seventeenth?”

She knew he was talking about that fateful day at the Roushui River. Zhe Yan confirmed her suspicion that something else really happened that day. The fact that he refused to delve into the details told her this was not something to be taken lightly. Her Phoenix may speak too much at time but when it came to what really matters; he would shut his mouth so fast and became elusive with his answers.

Bai Qian failed to grasp the connection between the reason of her survival and her desire to have a child with him. Yet her mind snapped back to the present at the prompt question. “Yan Zhi gave me the divine fungal grass and Zhe Yan fed me his Elixir.”

“You know how the Bell functions.”

“It will not stop until a strong spirit is sacrificed,” she supplied dutifully. “You and Ye Hua arrived in time to intervene though, your destruction of the Bell saved my spirit that day.” From the way his brows knitted tightly, she had somehow misjudged the situation. What did she miss?

“Listen to me well, Seventeenth.” Mo Yuan wounds his arm around her and kept her close. “That day we did not arrive in time. The Bell was slowing down after consuming a powerful spirit. Ye Hua and I merely used the chance it was vulnerable to break it apart.”

“I do not understand.” Bai Qian was truly confused now. Her spirit did not scattered like his did back then. It was only damaged to certain degrees, hence the needs of the Soul Lamp, or so she was told. “Whose spirit was sacrificed then?”

Bai Qian winced. The way his arms tightened around her became too suffocating. She could hardly breathe. Before she had a chance to tell him to loosen them just a little, his next word stopped her cold. “You were pregnant then, Seventeenth.”

She felt as if someone struck her with hundreds of heavenly blazes. “What did you just say?” A feeble voice that did not sound like hers at all asked. The blood in her chest churned violently. Its warm, metallic taste burst past her lips and dripped down her chin. Then her world tilted upside down and everything went dark.

“Seventeenth!”

Chapter End Notes
*Feng Qiu Huang (鳯求凰) The full song and its meaning can be found in chapter 11, in case you forgot.
** Many thanks to loreinacadis0412 for your golden reviews/suggestions.
Chapter 45

Chapter Summary

Final Chapter - Part 2/2

Chapter Notes

Epilogue will be up later. Please be noted that in the future, I intend to start a collection of oneshots/drabbles. Whatever lies in the future, maybe also the past, of Shifu and BQ will be found there. Though, it will be told differently. In a more aloft style, each begin and finish in one single shot. The contents might jump from a period of time to another. There will be no specific plot line for them. The update will also be sparse, irregular at best. So, when that happens, please use the subscription button since you (or me) will never know when a new chapter will be added.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

** Warning: This chapter contains highly graphic adult materials. **

*italic text* = Personal thought

:: Peach Tree Groove ::

Mo Yuan sent bursts of his spiritual power inside her body to stabilize her. His lips pressed grimly; he should have known it was too soon for the revelation. But he had no other explanation to give her, save for the truth. He never lied to her and he would not start it now. His fingers let go off the pulse point on her wrist; at least her heart and lung were not damaged too badly. Slowly, he laid her body back down on the bedding and let her rest.

He rush over to Zhe Yan’s hut knowing the Phoenix healer kept some of his elixir readily at hand. After sniffing a few bottles and confirmed that it was the one he was looking for; he hurried back to her side. He could not chance her waking up alone after that.

When Bai Qian came back to the world of consciousness; she tilted her face to the side and became disoriented. She fluttered close her eyelashes and waited until the dizziness went away. She opened her eyes again and looked straight into his worrying face.

“I have the strangest dream ever. You told me that I was pregnant and lost my child even before I knew it,” her voice cracked. She waited, hoping him to confirm that it was just the weirdness her twisted mind conjured on its own. But the agony in his solemn eyes told her otherwise. “It is all true,
is it not? That day, Qing Cang … this is what everyone is hiding from me. Zhe Yan, he refused to
tell me.”

What had she done? She had believed she did something good, saving him, saving all of them. In the
end, she saved no one. Her life was almost extinguished. And her child… Mo Yuan’s and hers. The
child she wanted so much to birth someday. A link to prove their love and commitment to each
other. A hope for their future together as a true family. No more .. her child was gone even before
she had a chance to cherish him or her. Gone because of her stupidity, her ignorance.

Why did she not know it? How could she not know? There must be signs that she was carrying but
she was too careless, too blind, to see them. She had no one to blame but herself. Was it painful
when its spirit was being decimated? The pain was excruciating for her. How much of agony it
would cause her child?

It was hers; by her own hands that she condemned her child not only to its undeserving end, but to
be tormented to death. What kind of mother was she? She was a monster! Why did she survive? She
should be dead, not her child. It was so unfair, why would her child paid a price for her mistake?

"Seventeenth," Mo Yuan tried to stir her from her listless silence. The way her face remained apathy
disturbed him greatly. Her blank eyes staring up, past him, past the hut’s ceiling into nothingness.
He shook her body roughly to rouse her, still she showed no signs of awareness. He could tell she
truly did not recognize his presence there.

Just as he thought that her mind was taking leave of absence from reality; her head slowly turned his
way. Her blank eyes stared into his — eyes so bleak and hollow that made him ached for her.

"Why are you still here?” She finally asked.

"There is no where I want to be rather than here, with you.” he told her gently.

"You should not be here. Why do you not hate me? Do you not see it? I killed our child. With these
hands, I killed it with my stupidity.” She cried out, on the verge of hysteric after learning the sin she
had committed.

"Seventeenth, do not say it like that.”

"It is no wonder you do not want a child with me. Who would want such a monster for their
children?” She laughed bitterly. Her small shoulder racked with inconsolable sob. “What an irony, to
think I could be a better mother for Ali. I am a menace even to myself. How could I be any child’s
mother?”

“They says misery loves company. You really should have gone far away from me, leaved when
you had the chance. Then you would not have to witness your child getting killed by a heartless
mother like me.”

For a moment, Mo Yuan almost did not recognize her; he had never seen her like that. Broken like
ragged dolls being stomped upon too many times. So bitter and thoroughly shattered. It made him
worry that she would shut down and shun him out.

He did not take to heart though, how she lashed out at him, in her moment of pain and grief. “You
did not know, Seventeenth. Do not do this, do not blame yourself.” He reached out for her to soothe
away her pains.

“That says a lot about me, does it not? What kind of mother did not know she is with child?” She
brush his hand off and turned her back to him. She did not deserved his gentleness. Did he not get it?
“Seventeenth, it was too early to tell for a first time mother. Zhe Yan said so himself.” Mo Yuan confided in her, although he knew it would not make much different to her. “And if anyone is at fault here, it would be me.”

“How so? You would know my body better than me?” came her muffled voice.

“I could have taken better care with you, when you fell ill.” Had he paid more attention to her sickness, they would have found out early on about her pregnancy, long before Qing Cang, the Bell had a chance to take their future away.

“You just said that to make me feel better,” she said pitifully, her back still to him.

“It is the truth. I should have suspected it when you were acting all too calm ever since we came back from the Nine Heaven that day,” he spoke further. “You barely prodded at me how I planned to deal with the Bell. That could only meant you were plotting a plan of your own. It was negligent on my part.”

Mo Yuan took a deep breath, preparing to drop the final tidbit that would shake them up. “And if you want the specific, I am undeniably the one at fault here. It is me who condemned our child’s life,” he intoned gravely, with all seriousness.

Bai Qian rolled back and fixed him with an incredulous stare. “Are you out of your mind? I am the one that decided to tempt fate and sacrificed my spirit to the Bell. How is it that you condemned our child? Because you built the Bell, is that not a little far fetched?”

“Seventeenth, when you were studying with me, did I not teach you there is a price for everything we do? Breaking the most fundamental law of heaven is a grievance not to be taken likely. My return from the Nothingness is unnatural. It defies everything we stand for. I always know there will be repercussions. Perhaps another calamity that awaits me.” Needless to say, he ignored all possible consequences at the time. Returning to her was always at the forefront of his mind. “I just never thought the tragedy would strike at our child, instead of me.”

“You really are out of your mind.” Bai Qian slowly got up and stared him down. She gripped the front of his robe tightly. “Did you forget for a second that it was me who refused to let you go? It was me who kept forcing that heartblood into your mouth. It was me that refined that Elixir from divine fungal grass and fed it to you. If the fault lies with you for trying to come back from the Nothingness, what is that said about me? Am I not also condemning our child?”

“Had I stopped repairing my spirit even for one day, all of your sacrifices will be for naught,” he reminded her bluntly. “I should have known better.”

The shame and pure remorse in his voice cut her deep. Bai Qian can not believe his gall to say that. “Better than what exactly? Better than never returned at all? Or better than being with me? If you said that, I am going to hit you.” And she literally meant it.

“I am not saying I regret coming back and getting together with you, because I do not. Even so, I could have protected you and our child better.”

For the moment, the grief and self-loathing evaporated from her mind and replaced with irritation. “How?” She was so frustrated with him for taking all the burden unto himself like the usual. “You will put me into shackles and refuse to allow me to go anywhere without you? You would intervene every time something trivial happened to me? I am not one of those weak, pitiful females waiting for
someone to save me. I fight my own battle. Always, you know that.”

Fiery glares being exchanged between them until Bai Qian scoffed and let go of him. “Look at us, what a pair we made of. Both of us are trying to put all the blames on our own.”

“I am serious about what I said, Seventeenth.”

She pressed her face into his shoulder; drained from her emotional breakdown. “Do I not know that?” She replied wryly. Over their heated argument, she managed to get a grip on herself and gained back some semblance of sanity. Allowing tumultuous emotions to overwhelm her senses again will not help them.

“No, you still do not understand.” He stared past her shoulder into the empty space; his looks matched his sober voice. “There is no way to know for certain whether the repercussion for my second chance at life have been paid off.”

She reached for his arm and gave it a squeeze. “What are you saying?” Her heart raced with that feeling of dread, already had an inkling of what he hinted at.

“What if the retribution is not cancelled out with this one sacrifice? But wait to strike again in the future?”

Her head understand his wariness. The possibility that their next child could be doomed as well. But her heart can not accept it. The idea that she would never bare him children was too painful to swallow. “You do not know that. You are making a guess.”

“One with high probability and reasons.”

She shook her head vehemently. “I refuse to believe that. Heaven would not be so cruel to us. One life spared, another was taken. How could they take any more?”

“Then what do you want me to do? Get you with child again and wait for another tragedy to fall on our head and rob yet another child from us?” Mo Yuan’s deceptively soft voice asked; hints of despair leaked through despite the tight control he had exerted over himself. “Do not ask that of me, Seventeenth.”

For the first time, Bai Qian noticed the swimming tears in his eyes. Gone was the stoic, larger than life God of War; now in his place stood a man weighed down with guilt and grief. “Mo Yuan,” the words died out in her throat. The desolate looks on his face utterly broke her heart. Never before she saw him so lost, so vulnerable. He was always so strong, a pillar of strength for her and everyone else. They all looked up to him when the world fell apart around them.

It was not her alone who grieve or agonize over the death of their child. He was suffering as well and perhaps more so than she did. She was fortunate enough to lose her consciousness and remained blissfully unaware until now. But the same courtesy did not extend to him. He had to witness her dying moment in the most gruesome way. And while her life was still hang by a thin thread, he was tormented with another loss, an innocence life that was snuffed out too early. One that he could not fix, nor undo it.

It was then Bai Qian came to grasp the true depth of his misery. She could not fathom the helplessness he must have felt at that moment. So powerless to change anything when he thought it was his own fault. And how long he had borne such burden alone? Without saying anything to her? Months, it was months since then. Tears spilled forth her eyes. All this time, he suffered in silence for her sake. And she made it worse for him without even knowing. This was why it shook him so bad
when she asked for children. She had put him through that pain, that agony again.

She made a silent promise that he would never suffer alone again. She needed to stay strong for him too. For that reason, she could not let herself become lost in grief, in self-loathing and what could have been anymore. She failed to be there for him these past months because of her ignorance. But no more. Bai Qian was determined to be the safe port amid the storm of life, welcoming him with peace and love and giving him the respite he needed. She could not be selfish and asked more of him. Not when he was not ready. “I would not ask again,” her promise was given.

“That will leave you childless. I should never touch you again if I am not going to give you what you rightfully deserve.” He confessed his weakness.

“I already have Ali, did you forget? And, most important, I have yet to believe you.” She pulled back a little and pleaded him to look at her. “We will turn every pages, every books to find a clue, we will talk to Emperor Dong Hua when he emerges from his isolation, and we will do everything we can to figure it out together and clear this doubt away. I will ask Zhe Yan for his peach contraceptives, I will take them a long as it takes. But I will not forsake this intimacy, this closeness that proves we are alive and together. Do you hear me, Mo Yuan?”

Despite their despairing circumstance, her optimistic enthusiasm alleviated the heaviness in his heart. “You are too stubborn.”

“For our own good this time,” she encountered quickly. “Promise me, you will work with me. I can not do this without you. We will mourn for our child but we will not lose hope. I refused to believe that heaven will turn its back on us. This world, all the lives we had saved meant something; karma must be smiling on us in the end.”

He wanted to ask from where she had gain such confidence but dared not destroy her hope. The future would be so bleak and empty then. His long fingers wiped away the remnant of her tears.

“Promise me, Mo Yuan. You will never ever forsake me.” Her hand move to cover his and squeezed it tightly.

“Did I not tell you before, I can not anymore. I need you to be here.”

“I am here,” she insisted, “You really need to let loose, Mo Yuan, keeping all that emotions bottled up inside can not be healthy.” She said pointedly. “In the future, if something happens again, you will tell me right away. I am here for you; you can lean on me for a chance. Do not keep things to yourselves anymore. I am more than willing to share your burden. Do you hear me now?”

Her words touched a chord in him. He had been raised from a very young age to protect the weak, to shoulder everyone’s burdens, to be their rock and shield. They relied on him and no other way around. It was not in him to admit being vulnerable or unable to handle his own grief. Yet this young woman was telling him to lean on her and share himself with her. His heart grew warm; it was comforting to know he would not be judged for his momentary weakness.

Bai Qian wished to offer her comfort, the only way she know how. Years and years of being tough would wear someone out. Yes, pressure and hardship molded him into what he was today, the much revered God of War. But even the most brilliant and strongest god could crack under too much pressure. The loss of their child was one of those catalysts.

She reached out and entwined her arms around his shoulder. He did not fight her, when she pulled him into her tight embrace, nor he yielded to her completely. “Let me,” she whispered. Her head dipped down allowing her little nose to nuzzle softly against his head. Soothing circles were rubbed
into the hard planes of his back and shoulder. After a time, it seemed to be working; the tension in his muscles melt away. His arms tightened around her waist; more of his weight shifted off her. They stayed like that, clinging to each other, for how long she did not care to know. She did not protest when he backed off and loosened his arms around her.

Mo Yuan raised his head and looked deep into her eyes. Despite her puffy eyes and blotchy face; she was still gorgeous. His heart swelled as he saw how fierce the love and concern for him shone brightly out of her eyes. Affection and love blossomed in his chest. This life, only have her was just enough. He leaned up and claimed her lips for his own. “I love you.” He watched on as stunning faded from her face and replaced with beautiful radiance.

She bent down, her hair fell like a curtain around them. Her soft lips brushed against his lips, his temple, and his pert nose with the gentlest touches. Mo Yuan closed his eyes and relished the loving touch she bestowed on him. He blinked his eyes open at the feel of her hands glided over to his headpiece and unbound his hair.

Bai Qian watched as his hair tumbled in a dark cascade down his back. She always loved seeing him this way, younger and more carefree. She brush the stray hairs off his face; her fingers caressed along his distinctive masculine jawline. He turned his head slightly; his lips pressed flutter-light kisses over her fingers. They eyed each other and slowly their heads drew closer together. She cupped his face in her palms and fasten her lips to his.

Their kisses were slow, simple and comforting in ways that words would never be. The air around them changed; the anxious tension bleed away and heartbreaking distress turned into something more light and sensual. Maybe they should not be doing this so soon; emotions still ran high. But both of them needed this closeness, this reassurance of being together, to fill the void in their hearths.

With a soft nudge, Bai Qian push him away and help him getting out of his cloth. She fumbled with the knots of his sash, too clumsy to get it undone. It was quiet moments until he burst out a chuckle. Her head snapped up, surprised but glad to hear such a sound coming out of his mouth. Laughter was good; it was a balm on a hurt soul.

She pulled at his inner cloth until the last article of clothes fell away from his body. Her mouth nibbled along his jaws and his throat. Whispers of endearing and cheerful words that things would turn out for the better slipped past her tongue. Two pairs of lips brushed against one another languidly, unhurriedly, savoring the sweet taste of love and acceptance. Her hands roamed freely and lightly across the broad expanse of his chest and his back.

Her fingertips traced the soft hair leading toward the apex of his leg; a wet trail of kisses was planted along the path. She kissed and nipped the rippled hard muscles and smooth, warm skin with her lips, her teeth, and her tongue. When her small hand move lower and wrapped firmly around his maleness; he answered with a hitched voice. Bai Qian smiled and pressed a feather-like kiss against his stomach. Already leakage dropped from his slit, telling her he was affected by her bold touches. She smeared those drops of wetness all over the crown and lowered her head to get a taste. Before she could go any further; long fingers slipped into her hair and tugged at it. She looked up and found him watching her with a tight focus; the question was on his lips.

Bai Qian held his gaze steady, silently asking him to let her take care of him. She wanted him to know how much he was loved. His eyes softened and his hand smoothed out her hair. She shifted her attention back to the scalding-hot, rigid flesh in her hand. Her curious fingertips slide it up and down and around with care. Her tongue lapped the underside and slid over the large, velvet head experimentally. Above her, Mo Yuan’s eyelids fluttered shut. Long, hissing noise escaped his lips. Every nerve in his body focused on her gentle caresses. When she engulfed him whole with her
mouth and drew him deep in; his entire body grew taut in response, almost leaving the bedding.

It was pain and pleasure to let her have a free rein on his body. And Bai Qian exploited the liberties he allowed to the fullest. Stroking, caressing, massaging with her lips, her tongue and her mouth. She tried everything she ever eavesdropped from her seniors’s lewd talks. Her effort seemed to pay off beautifully, judging from the harsh, labored sound of his breathing. She relished in her ability to give him such pleasure and continued to work on him fervently.

When his face tightened in a grimace; she wondered if she did something wrong. She had no time to ponder further though; his hand cupped the back of her head and urged her to get up. Bai Qian scraped her teeth against the flare head of his arousal in retaliation. He groaned aloud and his length start to pulsate in her hand. She filed that spontaneous reaction away for later. The tightening sensation at her hair came back, this time she allowed him to pull her upward.

She climbed over his body and straddled on top of him. His ridge abdomen muscles flexed as he sat up in a sitting position. He wrapped his arms around her waist and lean up to kiss her deeply, tasting his own flavor on her lips. His free hand kneaded her breasts and toyed with her nipples; soon it was joined with his lips. She leaned back on his supporting arms and push more of the sensitive flesh into his waiting mouth.

Bai Qian could only moaned and whimpered as he feasted upon her. As much as she loved him playing with her body; she ached to become one with him. Already her lower treasure was weeping for him. Unconsciously, she began to rub her lower half against his thighs, to ease off the tension that was building up there. She let out a sigh when his lips pulled away. When two strong hands lift her her bottom up; she quickly wound her arm around his neck and hold tightly.

She cried out at the sensation of being penetrated when he slowly slid her body over his and filled her sheath. Her inner muscles clenched and tightened over his intrusion. The slickness helped, and accepted more of him into her body. It was such an exquisite torture going slow. Mo Yuan watched her face intently for any pain or discomfort. He saw the initial discomfort gave way to pleasure. Her mouth parted in a silent gasp when she completely took all of him inside her depth. They have never done it like this before but today he wanted to hold her close and loved her at the same time.

He nipped her earlobe, urged her to move with his hands on her rounded bottom and earned himself another gasping shudder. His mouth wandered down the column of her throat; sucking and nibbling the sensitive fresh. She was always a quick learner; with few guides she began to move on her own and tortured both of them with her languid moves.

She let out a shaky breath when her body lifted all the way up, then slowly began the descent. The sweet friction was both exquisite and maddening. Never before she was filled so deep, so full to the brim. She sought his mouth and fasten her lips to him, mimicking what they were doing with their lower halves. It was not long before they began to rock into each other earnestly and chased after that elusive pinnacle together. Bai Qian made that mewling sob at the back of her throat; her nails sharp at the back of his neck and shoulder. It would not be long now.

Mo Yuan thrust up into her again and again with raw, devastating needs. When her inner muscles began to contract; a long, feverish moan was wrenched from her. He watched as her eyes glazed over with passion as onslaughts of pleasure shook and ripped through her entire being. Harsh, helpless groans rumbling up from deep within his chest as he shook and pulsed with the nearing ecstasy. He felt himself growing even harder and bigger inside her and then, with a loud grunt, he pulled out and exploded all over her stomach.

When he finally force his breathing to even out; she was already slumped down over him. Her body still shook and convulsed from the aftermath of her completion. He run his hand down her side and
stroked her back soothingly. His lips showered her neckline with light kisses then sipped at her mouth. He kissed her with care, with longing, with his love for her infusing every touch and hoping she would feel it too.

Bai Qian tangled her fingers into his hair, answering his kiss with equal love and passion. Her other hand gently caressing through his hair. Occasionally, she pressed her kiss to the side of his head and nuzzled his face softly. She enjoyed the intimacy they shared far too much to let go; despite the uncomfortable stickiness between their pressed up bodies. It also reminded her to look up for some of those peaches. Hopefully, Zhe Yan had some stashes left for her.

Much later, Mo Yuan got up and left. When he returned to their bed; he brought along a basin of hot water. She took the washcloth from him and slowly cleansed the remains of their passion from his body then hers. She pulled him to lay down next to her and looped her arms around his front. Her small, light kisses rained down on the side of his head until she felt his body gone lax and his breathing even out.

Before today Bai Qian shared the same insight, as many other did, that Mo Yuan was an insurmountable mountain, always stood tall and proud no matter how years and seasons changed; the same way Kunlun Mountain stood. But today seeing him also susceptible to the same vulnerability they all had wiped off that image and reminded her that he was still a being of fresh and blood. Even a pillar of strength itself needed shoulders to rest on and hands to support as well.

Their road to recovery will be a long one. She was not so naive to think that things will smooth out right away between them; the edge was still there in both of them. The cause of their misery remained unfathomable. Even so now that she learned of the truth; she was confident they could overcome this hurdles together. His speculation about the condemnation placed on their future children, while preposterous and surreal to her, needed to be dealt with properly. It maybe have some truths in it or not at all.

She was more inclined to believe this was a single, one-time happenings. An oversight on their part that allowed tragedy to come forth, rather than a divine retribution. But even if there was, they would find a way to be happy and content together. Bai Qian closed her eyes and held him tighter. They would have each other, their friends and their family at their side; so anything was possible.

:: Fin ::
** A lot of heartfelt thanks to loreinacadis0412 who patiently listened to me hatching out ideas and going over the details far too many times this past week.
* Illustration taken from Pinterest, so thanks whoever made it. ^^!
Epilogue

Chapter Summary

Epilogue Chapter: BQ's letter to the Fox Empress, written after the event in chapter 44-45.

Chapter Notes

I wish to clarify something here. Some saying it's not like Shifu to be fearful of having another baby. I wouldn't say that it is the 'fear' that drove his decision.

I always asked myself why Heavenly Father didn't just resurrect Shifu's original twin right after the infant died. It was not because he can't but he won't. Why? Because it's just plain wrong to go against the very laws of nature. Leave the dead to the death. So he took the other option, the lesser evil one and saved YH's spirit (in lotus form) so he could be born again someday.

And *hear this* he perished soon after that (partly because he tried to save the worlds from falling into Chaos). Let's ask the why again. Isn't it because, he went against the supposed course of destiny? Returning one to life is possible, it can be done at a price: a half of his remaining strength (and his own life.) The divine fungal grass is forbidden by him for the same reason.

Follows that logic, Shifu's return is simply wrong. With a plotline this big on retribution, for his return to life to have no repercussion at all is too unrealistic. And what punishment for that tressgression is most unbearable, if not for it to fall on his most treasured firstborn.

Shifu is stronger in body, mind and spirit than BQ. I don't ever question that. But with more experiences and in-depth knowledge and understanding of how the universe and laws of nature function, he is more wary of what could be than her. Their child's death reflects poorly on his inability to change the course of a staged destiny. That's exactly why it makes him think twice to chance for a new baby. To loss another or more means a devastated, inconsolable BQ. Wouldn't Shifu choose the more sensible or logical choice? This's just my own thoughts, you are welcome to disagree.
Mother,

When you are reading this letter, I am already on my way to the North. Unfilial daughter for not coming to visit you first. I know everyone desperately need to get away far from this suffocating life, so I can to pass during my time of slumbering. On one hand, I am glad just I can do without the aggravating memories of my past incarnation. How I wish to forget all of that again; there was nothing there except knew that.

When you sent me to Kunlun Mountain I never thought the course of Have I ever thank you for letting me remain there? There are so many regret those twenty thousand years; despite the gruesome wars and have followed. Perhaps such is the way of Fates.

Before Master's return, I already resigned myself to the loveless me. I never dare to dream Master and I could be together like we are not finally have our happy together forever this time. Life is never that especially by his side. But I am not complaining, I will always choose
Mother, please do not fault Master for my decision anymore. He never
than you do. I wish to make a change for the better for everyone and
outcomes that followed are not really anyone’s fault but mine. I was to
to see otherwise. And I paid such a steep price for my folly.

I guess Zhe Yan did not tell you this either. I just learned it last night
at the time. All my life, save for Master’s fall during the last War.
at myself. My child was lost forever. No miracle in this world will ever
dying again but then there was Master. He took the death so hard and
everything. It pains me to see him so broken inside; knowing I have a

Mother, tell me how do we come back from that? Will we ever? Now he
on our future children by coming back to life. I still have doubts though
heard or encountered such a thing. Returning from the Nothingness rea
a life for a life is not just enough? He seems to believe strongly in it,
for any references regarding this. If we are indeed cursed, there must
giving up. If not, I want Master to see it so that he can put this imp
I know you have tired yourself out planning the wedding for me. But it is most important to me. I wish to be there with him and for him. It will make me happy to see him in his new clothes.

I hope you will come to see my points. They said time heals all wounds, but love could heal his broken heart. I do not know what the future will hold, but I hope it will be on the brighter side. I know for certain that Master and I will always try to look on the bright side, no matter how circumstances change.

Mother, I ask you to be happy for us and do not worry anymore. I know you will be happy when we are ready, until that day comes. I bid you a farewell.

Bai Zian,

Your daughter.

PS. Please give my best wishes for Xiao Jiu. I am not certain we will see each other again after our marriage. She would make a fine queen and make us proud someday. I am certain that I am still keeping our promise, though it might be delayed a little longer.
Special Omake & Parting Note

Chapter Summary

Irrelevant, silly, Omake and small parting note. Don’t forget to read the Epilogue chapter.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

:: Special Omake ::

Bai Qian : Wait! What do you mean this is an ending? This can’t be an ending!

Abyss : But it is. Consummatum est. Finished. All done.

Bai Qian : Nooo, you can’t end it here. I want a true happy ending. Mortal stories always end with male and female leads getting their happy together forever.

Abyss : But you guys are happy together and your life is forever already. Jeez.

Bai Qian pull at her hair : No, that’s not how I envision it. First, I want a grand wedding. Second, I want children, lots of them. Third, where is my honeymoon? You, mortal, if you don’t give me my happy ending right now. My Kunlun Fan is going to taste blood!

Abyss : Shifu!! Save me. Your wife has gone mad.

Shifu looks at her sideways with a deadpan expression : …..

Abyss : Shifu, don’t you give an oath to protect the weaker ones? You must help me!

Shifu : A wise man knows where to pick his battle. And this one is not worth getting myself potentially locked out of the bedroom. You are on your own.

Bai Qian : Ha, see? Perish the thought, mortal. Shifu will not help you. How cruel you have treated us. Always pull us apart and don’t give us enough smooch.

Abyss perked up at that : I’m going to give you guys lots of smooch from now on. Cross my heart (and hope to die.)

Bai Qian : You are all but tease! I can get it on with my husband just fine without you peeping. Now, stay put, mortal.

Abyss : OMG, she’s turning it into a sword. OMG, I’m going to die here. Shifuuuuu!! I’m your ever loyal follower, saaave meeenee!!!
The real ending is here, it seems, for me. (ノд`) 

Chapter End Notes

: Special Parting Note ::

I wish to take this small space to thank you every readers for your kudos, comments,
suggestions, etc. Your continued support meant so very much to me, especially when I’m depressed over works and personal issues and on the verge of giving up writing this fanfiction. Yes, there were such a time during this past year.

In this one long year, I’ve met new faces here (and on other TMOPB sites by association) and even make friends out of some. It’s always enjoyable to be able to talk, joke around and share our opinions with other TMOPB’s fans. And we really come from different parts of the world, some country of origin make me very surprised. It shows how far and wide TMOPB’s popularity has spread.

I couldn’t also thanks enough my two editors, namely Midorizawa and Noitratoxin, for their help with editing my story. Poor them, they had to contend with my weird style of English. Hey, but at least I improve over the year. Riiiiight? (๑＞﹏＜๑)

And also ‘loreinacadis0412’ or our ShopShop, we started out as strangers and become good friends eventually. There’s so much fun when we talked about next and next chapter. Mostly, we end up saying almost the same thing, or coming to the same idea, regarding TMOPB without meaning too. Those moment are really hilarious. Although she usually has not enough time to get some shut eyes; she’s always willing to help out. I’m super grateful for both your help and getting to know you.

To the rest, who has been riding along this fanfiction with me, I may not name each or everyone of you, but know that you are remembered. I cherish every conversation where we hit back and forth with our ideas regarding TMOPB’s.

I guess it’s time to say goodbye. (for now) Perhaps until I has my filled of loitering around (I barely make a dent in my ever-growing stockpiles of dramas and C-novels) and get swept away by a second wind of inspiration. We’ll see each other again then.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!