

Immortal 1291

Chapter 1291: You're Dead if You Turn Around!

Normally, jumping into a hot spring while experiencing extreme cold would be extremely harmful to their bodies. At the moment, however, that was the least of their worries. Cultivators' bodies were powerful, so they were supposed to be able to withstand the shock of switching between extreme temperatures.

After she jumped into the hot spring, Yan Xuehen felt rich natural ki within. She thought, As expected, any hot spring that could exist in the Great Snowy Mountain would be exceptional. Soaking in here for a long time might even improve our constitution directly.

Of course, that wasn't her priority at the moment. She continued to use her hands to scoop water over Zu An's body. When she saw that the thin layer of ice around his body showed signs of melting, she immediately felt happier.

At first, she had been worried that the snow lady's cold poison would be too powerful and that an ordinary hot spring might not be of much help. Naturally, however, this world was miraculous, and all things had something that counteracted them. Even though the terrifying snow lady existed, so did such a magical hot spring.

Yan Xuehen noticed that, apart from the ice around Zu An's body melting, even the wounds all over him were starting to heal. Even though both processes happened extremely slowly, that was at least a good sign.

However, she was worried that his clothes would be a barrier to the hot spring's warmth, keeping it from removing the cold poison. After some hesitation, she helped him undo his clothes, her fingers trembling. At first she had hoped Zu An would wake up earlier; now, however, she was worried that he might wake up too soon, leaving her unable to explain her actions properly.

Soon afterward, Yan Xuehen had completely removed Zu An's clothes and tossed them aside. Her normally ice-cold skin was bright red as she thought, If this guy were awake, he might say something along the lines of how I saw him naked again, and so I got a better deal or something.

The corners of Yan Xuehen's lips curled up into a pretty arc when she thought about all of the different things that had happened between the two of them.

After she calmed herself a bit again, however, she noticed that her body was sticky and extremely uncomfortable. Being in a hot spring with all of her clothes on didn't feel all that great, as expected.

She herself had been tormented badly by the cold too, and her lips were a bit pale. Thus, she thought about soaking in the hot spring for a bit to completely remove the cold poison within her. Otherwise, as she was an ice element cultivator to begin with, and she was severely injured at that, she was highly susceptible to it. If the terrifying cold poison took root within her body, it was possible for her to never be able to recover her grandmaster rank cultivation.

But taking off my clothes in front of Zu An...

She hesitated. She considered going to a different pool to soak in, but Zu An was unconscious at the moment. Without her support, he might fall in and drown.

"This guy really is going to be the end of me..." Yan Xuehen muttered with a sigh. In the end, she couldn't bring herself to leave.

She immersed herself as deeply into the hot springs as possible, and only kept her head above the water. Then, with some rustling and a few ripples on the water's surface, she tossed her clammy, wet dress ashore. She gave Zu An a worried look. Only when she saw that he still showed no signs of waking up did she sigh in relief.

However, she immediately scolded herself inwardly. Why am I acting like this? The most important thing right now is his safety. In this kind of situation, so what if he sees me? Either way, he's already seen everything he shouldn't see...

Yan Xuehen swam over to Zu An's side and touched his skin. She couldn't help but frown. Why is his body still so cold?

She set her previous worries aside and gently embraced him from behind, using her body's temperature to provide him with warmth. One hand pressed against his chest, while the other hand rested on his dantian. She used her skills to help him eliminate the cold poison.

Previously, her efforts to help Zu An remove the cold poison had been ineffective for two reasons. One of them was the fact that she was seriously injured and unable to use ki how she wished, and the other was that she herself had been affected by the same cold. When her ki entered his body, even before it could help him with the cold poison in his body, it had become affected by the very same poison. That was why the remaining ki hadn't been of much help at all. Now, however, with the assistance of the hot spring's heat, she no longer had such difficulties. She could feel at ease while helping him remove the cold.

Zu An had cultivated the Unshakable Daoist Manual too, making it easier for Yan Xuehen to control his ki. A loop formed between the two of them, cycling the heat and natural ki from the hot spring into their bodies to eliminate the cold poison.

Strictly speaking, such an action was already tantamount to a daoist dual cultivation technique. Such methods required both parties to completely lower their guard, as well as exposing their own vitals for the other party to control, letting ki flow in and out at will. That made it so that there would be almost no secrets left between them at all. As such, for the most part, only the most intimate daoist partners would do such a thing.

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After a long time had passed, and their ki had cycled several times, Zu An's body gradually stopped being so frigid and began to recover a bit of warmth. Still, Yan Xuehen didn't dare act carelessly. She continued to guide the hot spring's heat and natural essence into his body.

With a groan, Zu An moved a bit, then slowly woke up. He discovered that he was inside a hot spring!

His situation left him puzzled. After using Keyboard Come and suffering its backlash, he had fainted. There were many things he couldn't recall at all. He couldn't help but rejoice that he had managed to

survive that situation, though. Just then, he had been a bit too greedy. He wasn't willing to use a certain trump card and had almost kicked the bucket for it.

It was only thanks to the Last Breath Talisman and Kong Nanwu's feather that he had been able to survive. He hadn't expected that feather to have such miraculous effects. Next time, he definitely had to thank her properly. She had actually given him such a precious gift!

However, he suddenly realized something. Where is Yan Xuehen?

Suddenly, he felt something strange behind him. He was about to turn around to see what it was when Yan Xuehen shouted in embarrassment, "You're dead if you turn around!"

Zu An was alarmed. At that instant, he finally understood what the poetry line 'the water of the hot spring gently caresses her fair skin' meant. His heart rate couldn't help but quicken. Soon, he realized that Yan Xuehen had acted to help him get rid of the cold poison. To be honest, he had never expected Yan Xuehen to use such a method to save him. Based on the way she usually acted, such a sacrifice should have been too great.

"Can you use your own cultivation to remove the cold energy inside you now?" Yan Xuehen asked. She already seemed about to let go.

Zu An wasn't stupid; he obviously wouldn't admit to that in such a situation. He replied, "Uh... Not yet. I can't."

Yan Xuehen fell silent, seemingly suspecting that he wasn't telling the truth. However, she still didn't let go in the end. Just like that, the two of them stuck to each other tightly.

"Where is this place?" Zu An asked. He didn't say 'thank you' or anything of the sort; given the situation that would really dampen the mood.

Yan Xuehen calmed down a bit, then replied, "You fainted earlier. I noticed that your body temperature was too low, so I wanted to find a place where the wind and snow were weaker. When I came to this valley, I saw that there was a cave here, and there were hot springs inside..." She gave him a rough account of what had happened.

Zu An was surprised, wondering, "How could there be such an incredible place in the Great Snowy Mountain? Is this maybe the territory of some powerful being?"

Yan Xuehen sighed and replied, "I had those worries too, but the situation at the time gave me no choice."

A strange silence fell. Yan Xuehen could even hear her own heartbeat. In order to ease the awkwardness, she asked, "How severe is the rebound of the skill you used? I fed you the Prime Souldew to temporarily seal up your wounds."

Zu An was curious about the state of his injuries. When he heard that, he suddenly realized what was happening. He examined his own body, and eventually said with a frown, "Unfortunately, there wasn't enough Prime Souldew. It can keep the injuries under control for another two hours at most. Then, the wounds will act up again."

It was thanks to the Last Breath Talisman and the peacock feather that he had been able to neutralize a portion of the backlash. The herbs he ate had also contributed greatly. Otherwise, he might have just perished on the spot and wouldn't even have had a chance to make use of the Prime Souldew.

"Then what can we do? Is there a way to save you?" Yan Xuehen asked nervously.

Zu An hesitated. In the end, he shook his head and said, "There isn't."

Yan Xuehen opened her mouth, but she didn't say anything. She had already personally seen a certain process before, so of course she knew about 'that' method. He's probably only saying that for fear of troubling me...

Zu An wasn't willing to just resign himself to his fate. Thus, he began to treat his own injuries. Whether it was the Phoenix Nirvana Sutra or the Primordial Origin Sutra, he tried everything he had. There were still many people waiting for him to come back; he couldn't just die like that.

Yan Xuehen felt extremely embarrassed when she sensed the ki within Zu An body flow around. This guy actually lied to me and said he couldn't treat himself yet! But will it end up affecting him if I let go now?

While Yan Xuehen was feeling conflicted, Zu An suddenly coughed out a mouthful of blood. He tried to say something, but before he could, he passed out.

Chapter 1292: You'd Better Not Think of It as Anything Else

"What's wrong?" Yan Xuehen exclaimed, jumping in fright. However, she quickly thought of something and said with a scowl, "I'm not falling for your tricks again this time."

However, Zu An didn't reply. His body even began to slide powerlessly into the water. Yan Xuehen thought that he was taking advantage of her and instinctively moved backward in alarm. She covered her chest with a hand to prevent him from touching them with his head. And yet, Zu An didn't react at all and instead fell straight into the water.

Only then did Yan Xuehen realize that he really had fainted. She jumped in fright and quickly supported him, calling out, "Ah Zu, what's wrong? Don't scare me like this!"

She reached out and checked his condition. She immediately found that his ki was a mess, and the surface of his body was beginning to crack again. Wispy strands of blood began to seep out of his skin.

"Why is this happening?" Yan Xuehen exclaimed in alarm.

These were clearly the symptoms of his skill's rebound! Hadn't the Prime Souldew temporarily sealed up his injuries, though? Shouldn't he still have had two hours according to what they had concluded?

Her gaze shifted toward the steaming hot spring, and she suddenly realized something. The hot spring was quite miraculous, and was able to melt even the terrifying snow lady's cold poison. Could it be that when Zu An began to transfer his own ki, the heat and medicinal strength of the hot spring had entered his body, thus melting the Prime Souldew's preservative effects?

She was still a grandmaster, after all. In such a short amount of time, she had already deduced the most likely reason.

Her expression changed several times. She had been planning to discuss how Zu An could treat his rebound after he regained consciousness, but how could she have expected that it would instead become her problem to solve?

As a grandmaster and the White Jade Sect's master, there weren't many whose knowledge of cultivation exceeded hers. Even with so much knowledge, however, she couldn't think of a single way to treat Zu An.

Unless...

And yet, if they did that, how would they face each other in the future? How would she face Chuyan? How would she face the others?

Yan Xuehen bit her lip so hard that it looked as if blood might come out. She glanced over towards Zu An's face. She saw that even while unconscious, his expression was one of pain. Memories of how he had saved her multiple times over the past few days appeared in her mind one after another.

Yan Xuehen, Yan Xuehen, he already saved your life several times, and yet you're still worried about such a small thing?

If you reach the supreme unshakable state, even if that kind of thing happens, it'll merely be a passing event of the past. Right, nothing will change.

She continued to console herself for a while. In the end, a resolute look appeared on her face. Then, her entire body seemed to radiate holy light. She lowered her head and kissed Zu An's lips, sending her ki into his body.

Previously, when they held each other, that could indeed be considered dual cultivation. However, it was only that in a very broad sense. Dual cultivation in the truest sense required the two cultivators to be in their most intimate state, and only then could they truly intersect, their yin and yang energies harmonizing completely. Between that and the healing abilities of Zu An's Primordial Origin Sutra, it was likely enough to neutralize the near-collapse produced by the rebound.

Yan Xuehen came from the orthodox sects, so she naturally knew those methods. When she was young, there had been fellow male students who were interested in her. However, her nature was cold and she hadn't found them interesting at all. Between her naturally aloof temperament and the rapid growth of her strength, in time, no one dared to have such thoughts again.

When they had been in the Yu clan's mines, she had even made mental preparations to save Zu An and repay his kindness that way. In the end, however, because of his special technique, his wounds had been cured by doing 'that' with Yu Yanluo. Back then, she had been mocked by Yun Jianyue and embarrassed badly. Who would have thought that in the end, they would still have to circle back to such a method to save him?

Still, Yan Xuehen wasn't an ordinary person. She might have felt conflicted before making up her mind, but once she set her resolve, it wouldn't be that easy to change her mind anymore. She knew she couldn't waste any time at the moment. As such, she took the initiative to guide Zu An along. She was glad that she had taught him the Unshakable Daoist Manual previously, which made it much easier to guide the energies within his body.

First, she cycled their energies between them a few times to establish a foundation. Afterward, only the final step was left.

Yan Xuehen's jade-like complexion had already turned bright red. A month before, she definitely wouldn't have thought that she could ever initiate such a thing with another man. She released a long sigh as she followed her sect's heart cultivation method to move Zu An's blood through his body.

However, she quickly jumped in fright upon seeing the result, thinking that there was something wrong with her technique or something. It would be absolutely terrible if he exploded from within.

Afterward, however, she quickly recalled what the spectators back in the Snake race territory had said when Zu An fought against the Golden Crow Crown Prince. She sighed. No wonder he was mistaken for someone from the Donkey race.

Even though she had already decided that she wouldn't regret it, now that she had reached the final step, she was still frightened.

Am I really going to do this...

If I do this, there's no going back.

She hesitated, but then she quickly calmed down. She looked at the man right before her and muttered, "I really must have owed you in my past life or something." Then, she ceased her resistance and her body gradually entered the water.

The unconscious Zu An mumbled some unclear words. Yan Xuehen furrowed her brow tightly, an expression of pain appearing on her face. She thought, Why are there so many foolish men and women in the world doing this kind of thing if it's so uncomfortable?

Yan Xuehen didn't think about that any further and quickly began to use her sect's profound chants, bringing their yin and yang energies together.

A special dao rhythm began to emerge between the two of them. The entire cave, and even the hot spring's ki, began to surge frantically toward the two of them. The cracks on Zu An's body visibly began to stop forming, then gradually started to heal.

At first, Yan Xuehen took the lead all the way, cycling their ki back and forth according to the method that was recorded in the sect's texts. At some point, however, Zu An's body suddenly began to release waves of suction force that seized the initiative.

Yan Xuehen was shocked, but she quickly realized what was happening. Back in the mines, this was the method he had used to treat Yu Yanluo! It was definitely quite an extraordinary skill. She couldn't help but feel a bit envious when she thought of that. No wonder he's so skilled! Even when he's unconscious, his body can activate its energies on its own.

But what she hadn't expected was that his skill could actually seize the advantage, proving that it was of much higher quality than her sect's secret method. How could that be, though? Her technique was already the very best her sect had!

Even though she didn't dare to believe it, reality was right before her. At least, she thought, she could secretly observe and remember the paths the skill moved Zu An's ki through, to see if she could gain some kind of enlightenment from it.

However, she was alarmed. No matter how calm and aloof she normally appeared, she knew nothing about such things. How could she remain completely indifferent doing 'that' when it was her first time?

A while later, Zu An's entire body trembled slightly. He began gradually waking up after his dao wounds were healed. In his mind, he felt as if he had experienced a dream. He felt as if he was among cottony-soft clouds. It really was gentle and comfortable. He found that really strange. Shouldn't he have been seriously injured and in extreme pain? Why was he having such a blissful dream instead?

He was about to slowly open his eyes when his vision darkened. He felt a warm and soft hand covering his eyes.

"You're not allowed to open your eyes!" Yan Xuehen cried in embarrassment. Uncharacteristically for her usual cold demeanor, her voice seemed to be shaking a bit.

Zu An was stunned, but he gradually recovered his consciousness. At his cultivation rank, people didn't even need to use their eyes to see anymore. He thought, Did Yan Xuehen lose her wits somehow? How is she making such a rudimentary mistake?

However, when he sensed the charming and gentle situation that had come about in the hot spring, he immediately realized what had happened. He didn't dare to believe that it was real.

Yan Xuehen's snow-white skin was still completely red. She clearly realized that she couldn't hide from him and could only say quietly, "I'm just doing this in order to save you. You'd better not think of it as anything else."

Chapter 1293: Breakthrough

Zu An finally snapped out of his daze and said seriously, "You've sacrificed so much to save me. I have no idea how I can even repay you!"

When she heard no frivolousness whatsoever in his voice, Yan Xuehen thought to herself, So this guy still has a bit of a conscience. She sighed and said, "You don't need to repay me. You've already saved me several times. I'm merely returning your kindness."

"Is that all there is?" Zu An instinctively asked.

"All of what?" Yan Xuehen replied. She didn't know why, but she suddenly felt embarrassed for some reason.

You have successfully trolled Yan Xuehen for +55 +55 +55...

Zu An became quiet. Their relationship was indeed a bit tricky.

When she saw him fall silent, Yan Xuehen was a bit frustrated too. That was clearly what she had been hoping for, so why did she feel such negative emotions?

Right then, Zu An suggested, "Big Sis Yan, why don't I just marry you?"

Yan Xuehen's entire body shook in fright when she heard those words. She protested, "What kind of nonsense are you saying?!"

Zu An's breathing quickened. Yan Xuehen's emotional state was completely reflected by her body! However, he replied in the end, "I'm not speaking nonsense. You've made such a huge sacrifice in order to save me. I know how you usually conduct yourself, and I'm not someone who does things casually either. That's why I'll take responsibility."

Yan Xuehen suddenly felt all of her resentment disappear when she heard his powerful promise. However, she quickly said, "No, I did this purely to save you this time. Don't think too much."

Zu An sighed and replied, "Would you use this kind of method to save anyone else?"

"Of course not..." Yan Xuehen began. Halfway through, however, she realized something and quickly changed what she was going to say. "I admit that my relationship with you is different, and too many things have happened as of late. Due to various factors, I was willing to save you, but this really was just to save you. After today's matter, we'll act as if nothing happened at all. We'll be just like before, so don't act strangely and reveal anything to others."

Zu An was stunned. He replied, "Then, are you saying that when we're in private, we can..."

"That's not okay either!" Yan Xuehen cried, her cheeks turning bright red. This guy was clearly about to die, and yet he could actually think about such things?

Zu An said with a hint of bitterness, "After something like this happened, how can I just pretend that nothing has happened at all?"

"You have to do it even if it's difficult," Yan Xuehen said, biting her lip. After some hesitation, she added, "Think of Chuyan."

Zu An fell silent when he heard Chuyan's name. Right, the two of them are master and disciple.

Even though he had joked around about riding one's master and ancestors, that was just a joke on the internet. Even though the relationship between master and disciple in this world wasn't at the same level as it was in ancient Chinese society back on Earth, it definitely wasn't something that could just be ignored.

"Anyway, don't think about those things anymore. Today's matter was an exception, so just forget about it all. Even if you can't forget it, I'll never admit to it. Don't blame me for becoming hostile," Yan Xuehen said. In truth, although she used both gentle methods and force in her argument, she also felt quite dejected inwardly. I'm clearly the one who has the worst of it here, so why do I have to go so far to coax him?

"That would be an injustice to you, though," Zu An said, giving Yan Xuehen a pitying look.

Yan Xuehen's heart skipped a beat when she saw the affection in his eyes. She didn't dare to meet his gaze as she quickly said, "I'm not being wronged. You should know what I care about and what I pursue. Forgetting about these things is the best choice for me."

"I don't want to forget, though," Zu An said, even though he knew her nature and realized that she absolutely wouldn't agree to being with him.

Yan Xuehen gritted her teeth. Why isn't this guy listening to me no matter what I say? As such, she could only draw a clear line. "You've saved me a few times, so I'm returning the life you saved. It's just that the method used is... a bit special. It doesn't mean that I feel anything for you. You wouldn't be so naive as to think I loved you or anything, right?"

"Besides, you used that 'Love is More Solid Than Gold' skill on me, so that's probably what made me save you. It's already quite a good result that I don't hate you, so don't try to push your luck."

She regretted what she said as soon as they left her mouth. Is this a bit too much?

Still, she was flustered at the moment. Furthermore, her reason told her that she had to take decisive action, or else the situation would only get more complicated. As such, even though she opened her mouth again, she didn't explain anything in the end.

Zu An could more or less guess the reasons why she had said such things. However, he didn't dare to try to confirm them. After all, if anyone were to say that the revered White Jade Sect Master would be so intimate with him just a month before, people would all laugh.

The silence made the mood a bit awkward. Yan Xuehen frowned and asked, "Have your injuries recovered yet?"

"It was somewhat helpful, but I'm still far from healing," Zu An replied.

Yan Xuehen asked, "Then what can I do to help you? Just say it."

Her sacrifice had been so great, after all. If she couldn't even heal him, she wouldn't be able to sleep at night afterward.

Zu An had a strange expression as he replied, "You'll help me? I'm scared that you'll just beat me to death after I say anything."

Yan Xuehen was stunned. She had really just been asking what she could do to help him, but she wasn't stupid. She quickly realized the meaning behind what he said. She said in embarrassment, "Even though we're in this kind of situation, you're still thinking of that nonsense... Ah, you're not allowed to move!"

"I'm healing myself, though."

"..."

Even though Yan Xuehen knew Zu An's intentions, how could she refuse in such a situation? Either way, his injuries were the most important thing. As for everything else, she would just forget it all later.

On the other hand, however, Zu An was starting to get a bit worked up due to Yan Xuehen's attitude. He wanted to make sure that she would never forget it for the rest of her life.

Even though Yan Xuehen was a grandmaster, she had no more experience in such things as a young maiden. Furthermore, she was weak from her serious injuries, so how could she be a match for the seasoned Zu An? She was soon utterly defeated.

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After an unknown amount of time passed, Yan Xuehen got up weakly from the hot spring. When she tried to get to her feet, she staggered and almost fell. She gave the one responsible a hateful glare, but just felt extremely embarrassed when she saw his proud expression. This guy wasn't even willing to call her master normally, and yet just then, he had been shouting it so enthusiastically. The worst part was that she had disappointed herself, her body completely surrendering when she heard that!

He really is the devil incarnate!

She quickly took out a clean set of clothes from her storage pouch and asked with an unhappy expression, "This should be enough now, right?"

"Nope," Zu An said, lying against the side of the hot spring while enjoying the wonderful figure before his eyes, the once-untainted goddess he had just dragged down into the secular world just moments before. The entire situation felt unreal, like a daydream.

Yan Xuehen gritted her teeth. This guy had used all sorts of excuses to fool her many times. At first, she really had believed him and foolishly played along, but eventually, she realized that she was being fooled.

However, there was something else that had shocked her. She asked, "What kind of method did you use? It seems to be much better than even our daoist sect's secret techniques!"

Zu An put away his smile when he realized that they were talking about important matters. He explained, "This is a skill called the Primordial Origin Sutra. It is something that I obtained from an Unknown Region."

They had already experienced life and death together several times. They had even shared such close physical intimacy just then, so there was naturally no need to hide anything from her.

When she heard that it came from an Unknown Region, Yan Xuehen sighed in amazement. She said, "No wonder it was so miraculous. Just now, though..." Her face turned red and she didn't continue.

Zu An chuckled and replied, "Big Sis Yan can try it again and experience how the technique works."

"Hmph!" Yan Xuehen harrumphed. Her face was scalding hot.

Just a short while earlier, she had wondered why there were so many stupid people who did these kinds of things. And yet, at that moment, she suddenly felt almost as if she had lived for so long for nothing.

Still, she quickly warned herself to expel those thoughts. Then, she walked over to the rocks and sat down with a grumpy expression. Worrying that Zu An might tease her, she decided to just pretend to cultivate.

As soon as she began to circulate her ki, however, she suddenly opened her eyes in surprise and exclaimed, "Huh?"

Zu An jumped in fright, asking, "What's wrong?"

Yan Xuehen said absentmindedly, "My wounds seemed to have recovered a lot."

She had been seriously injured again and again, practically reducing her to a novice cultivator. Now, however, her strength had actually recovered quite a bit. At the very least, she wasn't weaker than Yun Jianyue anymore. Furthermore, her cultivation that had remained stagnant for so many years was even starting to show signs of progress.

She instinctively looked at Zu An, but then she noticed something that left her completely shocked. She exclaimed, "You... broke through to the master rank?"

Chapter 1294: Noobs Compared to Other Grandmasters

Zu An was stunned. He had been so focused on admiring Yan Xuehen's beauty that he didn't notice the changes within himself. Upon hearing her reminder, he noticed that the dao wounds caused by Keyboard Come had already mostly recovered. The ruptured wounds on his body were also starting to heal.

He felt incredibly refreshed. At that instant, it was as if the entire world felt noticeably different to him. His body was filled with surging power, greater than ever before.

Furthermore, he noticed that a new diagram had appeared in his mind, outlining a large, strange bird. It was clearly just an image in his mind, and yet it seemed as if it were thousands of li wide; its wings were like clouds that covered the sky. In the corner, two small characters were written: 'Kun Peng'.

Zu An was a bit stunned. Kun Peng? He wondered if the creature had anything to do with the fiend races' Peng race. Afterward, he tried to test and see whether the Kun Peng had any use.

Suddenly, he frowned. There was a powerful sensation coming from his back. He reflexively looked behind him, thinking, Why does my ass feel a bit hot?

Yan Xuehen was also a bit distracted. Just how long had it taken for her to reach the master rank? Just how many years had she been stuck for? Countless individuals were geniuses in their youth, but could never cross that step. And yet, Zu An had succeeded just like that?

Dual cultivation could indeed speed up the partners' rate of cultivation, but that could only be by around ten to twenty percent at most. Never had Yan Xuehen heard of it being able to increase cultivation speed by that much! Otherwise, no cultivator would cultivate slowly and earnestly, and they would instead find dao companions to sleep with.

The key was that her own benefits weren't anything to scoff at, either. Not only had her injuries recovered at a shocking speed, her cultivation that had remained stagnant for so many years was even starting to show signs of progress.

Could it be that his Primordial Origin Sutra really is just that miraculous?

However, her knowledge was great, and she quickly rejected that thought. She had experienced the Primordial Origin Sutra herself just then. It only had healing effects, but it couldn't make her cultivation experience a breakthrough. Furthermore, even the recovery it granted shouldn't have happened at such ridiculous speed.

She thought back to how Yu Yanluo had also been seriously injured and dying, and how that was the case for her disciple Chuyan too. Then, after Zu An had treated them, they recovered quickly. Suddenly, she realized something.

The legends must be true... The blood essence of individuals with transcendent aptitude really is an incredible nourishing tonic.

The fact that this guy hasn't been sucked dry by an evil woman really is a miracle in itself.

She fully understood just how alluring such a thing was for cultivators. Even someone like her, who practiced the cleansing of desires, was a bit tempted.

She wanted to warn Zu An to never reveal the news regarding his transcendent aptitude, but she was also worried that he might misunderstand that she wanted him for herself. In the end, she was too embarrassed to say anything.

Either way, this guy is pretty sharp, so I don't think he would be that foolish.

She noticed that Zu An was doing something. She couldn't help but ask, "What are you doing?"

"I feel as if there's a painful sensation behind me for some reason," Zu An said, feeling a bit embarrassed. He was clearly the one who had taken her first time, yet for some reason, he felt as if he had been the one to be attacked in that spot.

Yan Xuehen didn't think any strange thoughts and said, "That's quite normal. Those who have just entered the master rank all feel that sensation."

Zu An was stunned. He asked, "Do all masters really feel as if their bottom... Ahem, feel this sensation?"

Yan Xuehen was a bit surprised. She replied, "You didn't know? Those under the master rank cultivate their skin, bones, and internal organs. At the master rank or above, they cultivate the soul. Strictly speaking, it refers to cultivating the three immortal souls and seven mortal forms. Once you enter the master rank, what you cultivate is the hero mortal form of the three souls and seven forms."

"Three souls, seven forms?" Zu An repeated. He seemed to have heard of that from somewhere before.

Yan Xuehen explained, "The three immortal souls refer to the heaven soul, the earth soul, and the fate soul. Meanwhile, the seven mortal forms are the ascension, wisdom, air, power, core, essence, and hero mortal forms."

"The location of the hero mortal form is at the lower extremity of the tailbone, the butt... Ahem, the area around the buttocks. That area is also known as the muladhara, the place where the spiritfire lies dormant."

"Spiritfire?" Zu An asked in confusion.

Yan Xuehen frowned. She remarked, "Your strength is clearly high, but your basic knowledge is lacking, to the point that you don't seem like someone from this world."

Zu An chuckled in embarrassment. He really wasn't from this world, after all. His knowledge about cultivation had come from Brightmoon Academy, but those who studied there were all from the

younger generation. There wasn't a single grandmaster in that entire city. That was why his knowledge was lacking.

When she saw his reaction, Yan Xuehen could only continue, "The so-called spiritfire doesn't refer to the same fire as the element, but rather the flame of life. As long as one is alive, their body carries heat. That's actually an effect of the spiritfire. For those who haven't reached the master rank, though, it's difficult for them to perceive its existence, let alone use it.

"After reaching the master rank, and when the soul is condensed, one becomes able to sense it. The hero mortal form is like a sea, while the spiritfire rests at the bottom of that sea. Once you break through into the master rank and the spiritfire awakens, the entire master rank journey causes the spiritfire to rise up; then, it will be refined and reside in the other immortal souls and mortal forms. The reason why you feel that scorching sensation is because the spiritfire is waking up."

"So that's what it was," Zu An said, sighing in relief. Otherwise, he would have thought that something else might have happened to that area. However, he quickly changed the topic when she saw her strange expression. "Right, how many levels are there in the master rank? If there are three souls and seven forms, then are there ten levels?"

"Of course not," Yan Xuehen said with a frown. "Actually, there isn't that great of a difference between masters and grandmasters, because they both cultivate the soul. Furthermore, the seven mortal forms are split into three sections for several reasons. The lower two are the hero and essence mortal forms, while the central three are the core, power, and air mortal forms. Those five are tied to the master rank. Once your cultivation reaches the upper two, the wisdom and ascension mortal forms, you can be said to have reached the grandmaster level."

Seeing the blank look on Zu An's face, she harrumphed and added, "Hmph, I told you to call me master, and yet you were unwilling. I'll have to properly lecture you today."

Zu An grumbled, "Didn't I say it a lot just now? It was you who kept saying you didn't want me to."

Yan Xuehen was extremely embarrassed. She shot back, "Are you going to listen or not?"

"I'll listen, I'll listen. Master, please teach me," Zu An said. After what had just happened, it wasn't hard at all for him to call her master.

Yan Xuehen gritted her teeth, but there wasn't much she could do. She continued her explanation, saying, "What you need to focus on refining first is the hero mortal form, which is located by the tailbone.

"The next step is to guide that flame forward, toward... toward that place where you do evil. That is where the essence mortal form is. It can prevent a cultivator from being bound by their desires and creating heart demons, which are extremely dangerous. That is why the more powerful the cultivator is, the more difficult it often is for them to have children."

Zu An immediately cried, "I mean, I don't really mind if I don't cultivate that essence form. If I don't have any desires left, what fun is there left in life?"

Yan Xuehen shot him a look and snapped, "Is your brain only filled with those dirty things? The so-called desires are varied, such as greed. It isn't just that single one you're speaking of."

"I wasn't talking about that one though..." Zu An said with a pout. "Furthermore, to be human is to have desires; how can you call them filthy?"

Yan Xuehen didn't want to argue about that detail with him and continued, "After that, you have to bring the spiritfire up to the abdomen. It's easy for the spiritfire to rise, but difficult for it to settle. At that level, it becomes important to pay attention to the spiritfire's rise, and then its settlement.

"The next step is to refine the power mortal form near the heart. At that level, even without borrowing the force of the world, one becomes able to lift mountains.

"After that is the air mortal form, by the throat. Master rank cultivators at that level can release their voice across a thousand li. They can even easily kill others at the first level of the master rank."

When she saw Zu An's exaggerated expression, Yan Xuehen added, "Don't worry. Even though you're at the first level, your strength is quite strange. There's no way a mere voice can kill you."

Zu An felt a bit more at ease when he heard that.

"Then, there's the wisdom mortal form, between the brows. At that level, you can create your own domain. Once that becomes possible, you'll have an overwhelming advantage against anyone of lower level than you. That huge difference is why this level was designated the grandmaster rank. Both Yun Jianyue and I are currently at this level," Yan Xuehen continued.

Zu An remarked with a strange expression, "I thought that you and Big Sis Yun were incredible, but it turns out you two were just noobs compared to other grandmasters..."

Yan Xuehen was dumbstruck.

Chapter 1295: There's Not Enough Time

Yan Xuehen almost stopped breathing right there and then. Why is this guy's mouth always so vicious?

"If that witch heard you say that, she would properly teach you what it means to be a grandmaster," she said unhappily. "Do you think grandmasters grow like cabbages? There aren't many who are stronger than us, and those are people who can't act freely for various reasons. With our cultivation, it's already enough to go and do whatever we please. Even among those at the same level, that witch and I are definitely among the best."

"Okay, okay, okay, you and Big Sis Yun are awesome. Then, what about the step after that?" Zu An asked, snickering inwardly. Yan Xuehen was normally so calm and indifferent; it was rare to see her defend herself so nervously. Was this the so-called pride of the strong?

"I don't want to talk to you anymore," Yan Xuehen snapped. She looked away, clearly still annoyed.

Zu An quickly moved over and said, "I'm sorry. I was wrong, okay? Here, I'll help you massage your back."

"Don't touch me," Yan Xuehen said, quickly moving aside. Her face was completely red as she added, "You don't even have any clothes on. What are you trying to do?"

"It's not as if there's anyone else here, anyway," Zu An protested.

Yan Xuehen looked away and didn't dare to look at him again. Her heart began to race when she remembered how she had been tossed around earlier because of him. She took a deep breath to calm herself down, then said, "I already said that it was only treatment earlier. After that matter, we have to pretend that nothing happened. Don't go back on your word."

"I never agreed though..." Zu An mumbled. When he saw her brows shoot upward, however, he didn't dare to provoke her too much and quickly changed the topic. "Master, hurry and tell me the rest."

"Don't call me master!" Yan Xuehen snapped. She felt that that method of address really left her worked up for some reason. She was worried that he might continue to annoy her about the subject and quickly said, "The next cultivation step is to cultivate the ascension soul by the head and condense a yin spirit."

"A yin spirit?" Zu An asked in surprise.

"You can view it as a soul body as well. Its appearance is completely identical to the real person, but it isn't the same. It can even leave the body, but it must return to the body before dawn. Otherwise, once the sun rises, it will be burned and extinguished. That's why it's called the yin spirit," Yan Xuehen explained.

"The next realm is to cultivate the three immortal souls' life soul. The yin spirit of that level won't fear the blistering sun anymore, and the distance it can travel outside of the body will also increase greatly. By using it with a weapon, you can even achieve the legendary 'beheading from ten thousand li away'."

Zu An began to feel a bit of longing when he heard that. Just how incredible would it be to be able to behead someone that far away? He wondered when he could reach such a level.

Yan Xuehen continued, "At that level, you can gain many other abilities. For example, you can attach your soul to another's body, or even possess them and take over their body."

Zu An exclaimed in shock, "Then wouldn't that mean that you've essentially achieved immortality?" He suddenly remembered how the emperor Zhao Han had hidden his soul in the crown prince's body. It was probably through that ability.

"As if it could be that simple," Yan Xuehen said, shaking her head. "There are no easy loopholes to exploit in the natural laws. Even though you can possess another, you can only do it three times. Furthermore, whenever you do that, the lifespan of the new host substantially decreases, and so does their strength. Furthermore, the upper bounds of cultivation also become restricted.

"After three possessions, your cultivation will only be a bit stronger than that of an ordinary person, but your lifespan will be far inferior. Furthermore, those who have reached such a level are all extraordinary individuals. Which one of them would be willing to live like an ordinary person, powerless against the whims of others? That's why, unless it's absolutely necessary, no one makes such a choice."

Zu An felt relieved when he heard her say that. The difference before and after possession was too great. The world of cultivation was a merciless one, after all. People always fought over treasures, trampling on each other to reach a higher stage. How could they stand being humiliated that way? Furthermore, possession was something the entire world looked down on, making that kind of deed even more undesirable.

Wait, does what I did count as possession... Zu An thought, suddenly beginning to question life.

Yan Xuehen said frankly, "Because that level cultivates the three immortal souls, and cultivators at that point are stronger than ordinary grandmasters, some people already refer to it as the earth immortal rank. However, that rank is clearly weaker than a true earth immortal. So, the cultivation world usually calls such cultivators half earth immortals. Overall, they're still close to the level of a grandmaster."

"Then, what about a real earth immortal?" Zu An asked. His relationship with Zhao Han would end sooner or later, so he needed to learn more, knowing both himself and his enemy.

After some hesitation, Yan Xuehen said, "I don't understand that level too well. I can only describe it based on the sect's records."

"The first level of the earth immortal rank cultivates the earth soul of the three immortal souls, producing a yang spirit. The yang spirit is different from the yin spirit. It doesn't fear scorching heat, and has a tangible form. It isn't too different from the original body, and it can roam through the world. Furthermore, to a certain degree, earth immortals can control the laws of causality."

"Laws of causality?" Zu An repeated in shock.

He wasn't surprised that the yang spirit could roam the world, because he had seen Zhao Han use the imperial decree to appear far away and easily kill any enemy. However, the laws of causality were troublesome. Those were pretty much all ultimate skills!

"I don't know the exact details either. I've only read about it in the White Jade Sect's records," Yan Xuehen said, shaking her head.

"Is that the level Zhao Han is at?" Zu An asked gravely.

"No, he's a level higher!" Yan Xuehen replied. She couldn't help but feel a bit of admiration when she said that. After all, Zhao Han was the most stunning being in the last few centuries. He was someone who even had hope of becoming a true immortal! She continued, "He cultivates the heaven soul of the three immortal souls. It's rumored that a primordial spirit can be cultivated at that level."

Zu An waited for Yan Xuehen to continue, but she instead stared right back at him. He was stunned, asking, "And then?"

"I don't know anything else," Yan Xuehen admitted, feeling a bit embarrassed. "After all, that level is too high. Apart from the emperor, no one else has been able to reach it. The fact that the White Jade Sect only knows that you can cultivate a primordial spirit at that level already proves its power."

Zu An couldn't help but laugh, remarking, "You sound pretty proud while saying that."

Yan Xuehen harrumphed, clearly a bit unsatisfied.

Zu An's smile faded. That made things much trickier. Forget about him, even Yan Xuehen and Yun Jianyue were several cultivation realms beneath Zhao Han. How was he even supposed to fight someone like that in the future? Even though he had won by a fluke, relying on all sorts of methods in the Westhounds' secret dungeon, that had just been a soul fragment. Compared to Zhao Han's real strength, the difference was too great.

Yan Xuehen was both beautiful and intelligent. When she saw how worried Zu An looked, and thought about how he had kept asking about Zhao Han, she couldn't help but ask, "Don't tell me you've offended Zhao Han?"

"Yeah," Zu An replied. He thought to himself, It's not just offending him.... I've slept with his empress and his daughter-in-law, and there's the truth of the Phoenix Nirvana Sutra, and then the destruction of his split soul in Westhound Tomb... There's no way the two of us could still reconcile with each other.

I really am crazy... I ended up sleeping with the two women who shouldn't have been touched the most.

But it's not really my fault, right? The empress initiated it herself, and I couldn't avoid her even when I wanted to.

As for the crown princess, you can't blame me for what happened in Westhound Tomb either. It was clearly because Zhao Han, for the sake of immortality, continued to pressure us again and again.

"Just how did you offend him? According to the White Jade Sect's intelligence, you're quite welcome in the Eastern Palace. All of this couldn't have happened without his assistance either," Yan Xuehen said in surprise. She really couldn't understand.

"I'm nothing more than a chess piece he's using to deal with King Qi. Once King Qi dies, I'll be next," Zu An said. He naturally couldn't tell her about the empress and crown princess.

Yan Xuehen nodded and said, "Indeed, Zhao Han is a ruthless person. Not many of his subordinates have met good ends. However, you don't need to feel too worried either. He's already experiencing heaven and man deterioration. Time is on your side."

Zu An had a bitter smile. With their grudge, the emperor would definitely eliminate him before he went down himself. Of course, there was no need to talk about any of that, because it would only add to Yan Xuehen's worries.

Yan Xuehen glanced outside and said worriedly "Ah Zu, we might not be able to reach Cloudcenter Commandery in time. It's already almost daybreak."

Chapter 1296: Passing of the Finest Judgment

Zu An glanced outside. He could already see the sky turning a bit white; it was already daytime. He had actually known full well that rushing to Cloudcenter Commandery in a single night would be extremely difficult. After running into the snow lady the previous day, he had already used up quite a bit of time. Even if he hadn't been injured afterward, he wouldn't have made it back on time.

Don't tell me I'll really have to wander around the fiend race territory...

When she saw Zu An fall silent, Yan Xuehen tried to console him. "You don't need to be too worried. Even if you're accused of some crimes, I can help you testify. I think that should be enough to prove your innocence."

Inwardly, however, she didn't have much confidence either. Even though her prestige carried quite a bit of weight, those who wanted Zu An dead similarly carried a lot of power. It was possible that she alone wouldn't be enough. However, she had to console him first so he wouldn't feel too much pressure.

Zu An chuckled and asked, "If I became a traitor and you spoke out for me, wouldn't I be dragging you down too?"

Yan Xuehen said indifferently, "Even though you saved Yu Yanluo, you haven't betrayed the human race. Furthermore, Yu Yanluo is a fiend who carries goodwill for the human race. She's done a lot of virtuous things for the people. I feel no guilt or shame whatsoever by speaking out for you."

Zu An sighed and said, "I thought that you were going to speak out for me because of our relationship."

Yan Xuehen's cheeks heated up a bit. She shot him a look, replying, "I already said that we were to pretend that nothing happened, and that I wouldn't admit to it either. This is the last time. If you talk about those things again, don't blame me for leaving immediately!"

Upon hearing her strict tone, Zu An knew she still couldn't cross over that mental block. He couldn't provoke her further either. He replied, "Alright, alright, I was too hasty."

Yan Xuehen hadn't expected him to suddenly become so agreeable. She was momentarily distracted.

"I'm going to get up and get dressed." Zu An said.

Yan Xuehen turned around and said, "If you're going to get up, then just get up. What are you telling me for? It's almost as if you think I want to look at you or something."

Even though that was what she said, a memory of the two of them from before couldn't help but appear in her mind. She now knew every inch of his body. When she thought of that, her ears turned a bit red.

Zu An put on his clothes while saying, "This place is a bit strange. These hot springs are clearly rich with natural ki, so it should be incredibly attractive for both people and beasts. Why is it that even after so long, we still haven't seen any sign of another living being?"

Yan Xuehen also realized that something was off when she heard him mention such an important detail. She said, "There are a few possibilities. The first is that this place is hard to get to. There could be several formations and natural barriers in the way. However, I didn't encounter much obstruction when I brought you here. The second is that this is a dangerous place, and those from the Great Snowy Mountain know it is, so they don't dare to approach."

Zu An shook his head and said, "This is clearly a rare paradise. There's not even a trace of danger here."

The two of them had just personally experienced the hot springs. Whether in terms of their wounds or their cultivation, they had clearly benefited.

Yan Xuehen released a long sigh and continued, "Then it's the worst-case scenario. This place is the territory of someone extremely strong, and because of its presence, no one dares to approach. The only reason why we were able to remain safe and sound must be that it isn't here."

Zu An's expression also changed. Just what kind of a concept did a powerful being from the Great Snowy Mountain represent? The snow lady they had encountered was still fresh in his memory. He said, "It's been so long already. Will it come back?"

Yan Xuehen was also a bit worried, replying, "That's why we should hurry and leave this place as quickly as possible."

She leaned over to sort out her clammy, wet dress as she spoke. She quickly remembered what had happened before, and her heart began to pound.

Zu An was about to tease her a bit when he suddenly felt a terrifying pressure spread out from the depths of the cave. Their expressions instantly changed. That powerful individual hadn't left this place; it had always been within the cavern depths!

"Run!" Yan Xuehen exclaimed, feeling ashamed and upset. Didn't that mean someone else had seen everything that happened between her and Zu An?

However, she didn't have the time to be conflicted over that. The most important thing at the moment was leaving this place.

However, Zu An didn't budge an inch. Instead, he looked toward the cave's depths, remarking, "Wait, why does this feel a bit familiar..."

Why is he standing still and wasting time? Isn't this completely giving up any chance of life? Yan Xuehen thought. Still, she couldn't bring herself to run away on her own. She decided to stay behind and help him fight against the enemy. Her injuries had recovered quite a bit, after all, so it wasn't as if they didn't have any chance. However, her legs weren't quite...

Suddenly, Zu An took a step into the cave's depths. Yan Xuehen was completely shocked. Isn't he just courting death?

...

Meanwhile, far away in Cloudcenter Commandery, inside the Civil Affairs Manor, Cloudcenter City's strongest members were all gathered together. They were arguing noisily about something.

One side seemed to be led by Xu Yu, while the other side was led by the Imperial Envoy, Sang Hong. Meanwhile, Cloudcenter City's City Lord, Pei Shao, seemed to be in a faction of his own.

The two leaders didn't personally participate in the dispute, both remaining silent. Xu Yu had a grave expression, while Sang Hong instead had a smile.

The two of them glanced at the giant recording mirror resting against the cliff wall. The capital's morning court session would end soon. Once it did, that would be the real faceoff.

Pei You quietly moved over to Sang Hong's side, asking, "Sir Sang, could it be that you have some good news?"

Sang Hong sipped on his tea while saying through a ki transmission, "No."

"Then why is sir smiling so happily?" Pei You asked, stunned.

"Now is obviously not the time to show weakness and ruin our own side's morale," Sang Hong replied.

Pei You was speechless. However, he still had questions and asked, "Then why is Xu Yu's expression so grave? I thought he had received some unfavorable news."

"Because he used all of his resources for this impeachment. He will either succeed or die trying. That is why he is so worried," Sang Hong explained.

“Sir Sang, Gao Ying has just about managed to get his soldiers in line. He said that if things go bad, he could...” Pei You said, gesturing with a hand.

Sang Hong gave him a look and replied, “Nonsense. His majesty and all of the court’s officials will be watching us. Are you hoping for his entire clan to be eradicated?”

“Then what else can we do? Could it be that we’re really going to let Brother Zu be declared a traitor?” Pei You asked. He obviously understood the severity of the meeting. Zu An could be consigned to eternal damnation soon.

Sang Hong sighed and said, “At this stage, we can only entrust it to fate.”

Naturally, he wasn’t as calm as he looked on the surface. Meanwhile, Pei You and Gao Ying were only acting out of loyalty toward Zu An as his friends. Even if something really happened to Zu An, it wouldn’t affect them too much. However, for him, things were different. The entire Sang clan was being carried on his back. If something happened to him, the Sang clan would most likely be finished too.

Qien’er, you won’t blame your father, will you...

Suddenly, a sound rang out from the distance in the city. The expressions of those in the room changed. It was almost time.

Xu Yu looked around and asked seriously, “Is the commandery duke not here yet?”

A subordinate replied, “According to the messenger, the commandery duke is recovering in seclusion and cannot come out.”

“Recovering in seclusion...” Xu Yu sneered. He didn’t say anything else.

However, the others in the room sensed something else. All sorts of major things had happened to the Yu Clan as of late, especially what had happened to Yu Yanluo. Even though Cloudcenter Duke had acted tough at first, he had laid low the entire time afterward.

People all knew that the relationship between Cloudcenter Duke and Yu Yanluo wasn’t just one of husband and wife; in fact, they had been each other’s strongest allies.

After something happened to the Yu Clan, many of the Jian clan’s powers couldn’t stand still anymore. They had all rushed to seek an audience with Jian Yanyou, but he had always been missing. Now, there were even rumors coming from the Jian clan that the duke was no longer in the manor. Some even said that he had already died from his serious injuries.

At first, people just thought of those things as rumors, but the duke never came out to clear things up, and many powers under the Jian clan had even begun to seek out other backers. As things continued, eventually, people began to wonder whether something really had happened to him.

The Yu Clan is finished, and the Jian clan is also done for!

The other powers all looked like sharks that had gotten a whiff of blood. They were definitely going to get a good cut of the two great clans’ assets after this.

Chapter 1297: Pressured More and More

Just then, the recording mirror shone, leaving the people in the room startled. They knew that the call from the imperial court had arrived.

Sang Hong glanced outside the room and didn't see Zu An anywhere. He sighed. Zu An had said that he would definitely hurry back in time, so he had actually carried that unrealistic hope. If he thought about it, though, it was obvious that there was no way Zu An could return to Cloudcenter Commandery from the fiend race territory in under half a year.

He gathered his composure to prevent others from sensing anything. Then, he walked over to the dark mirror and began controlling the runes. Soon afterward, the surface of the mirror rippled like water, and an image of the throne room appeared.

Two rows of subjects were lined up within, all dressed in official robes. Even though the people on this side were all the most powerful individuals in Cloudcenter Commandery, in terms of importance, they were nothing compared to the big shots from the capital. Most Cloudcenter residents would never even have a chance to witness what the morning court session looked like. Even through the recording mirror, they could feel the pressure coming from those court big shots.

However, those courtiers weren't the main characters today. The onlookers' attention was drawn to the yellow-robed man seated on the dragon throne. He was like a sun; no matter how splendid the civil and military officials were, they were merely stars. Once the sun appeared, not even a glimpse of them would remain.

"We greet the emperor; long live, long live, long long live!" The officials in the room didn't dare to stare directly at the emperor. They trembled all over, unable to do anything but kneel down respectfully.

Sang Hong felt a hint of superiority. These people had all acted incredibly arrogant for some time, and yet in front of his majesty, they were all so unsightly. Still, he knew it wasn't their fault. He had had a similar reaction the first time he met the emperor.

The emperor didn't speak. It was instead a eunuch who shouted, "All of you may rise!"

Judging from his court eunuch attire, those who were well-informed quickly realized who he was. He was Eunuch Wen, his majesty's trusted aide, someone with tremendous authority!

Sang Hong watched what was happening in secret. He saw many officials from King Qi's faction, and grew more and more nervous by the moment.

Zu An's work in Cloudcenter Commandery had screwed up the plans King Qi had been laying for many, many years. It would be strange if King Qi's group let him go. Still, even though Zu An had clearly done so for his majesty's sake, the emperor had chosen to hold the trial instead of helping Ah Zu. From the looks of it, he was already going to abandon Zu An.

Based on Sang Hong's understanding of the emperor, he knew that was something the emperor did often. He only cared about his own reputation. As for anyone else, he was willing to use them as a scapegoat. That was why his subjects all privately thought of him as cold-hearted. Sang Hong still hadn't expected him to abandon Zu An so quickly, however. He felt a lot of dissatisfaction, and even resentment, but he didn't dare to express any of it.

He glanced toward the top seats of the court, but he didn't see Yu Xuanchong anywhere. As the Imperial Secretariat's Left Confidential Assistant, Yu Xuanchong was almost always among the highest seats. It seemed that after his son-in-law Yu Nan had had that jealous love affair, damaging the royal family's reputation and being forced to leave office, and with the matter of Yu Yanluo on top of everything, Yu Xuanchong had been placed in quite a difficult situation.

The only thing Sang Hong was grateful for was that the crown princess had actually appeared in the morning court session for the very first time. From the looks of it, she planned to protect Zu An.

Zu An had already grown into a central figure in the Eastern Palace; thus, the crown princess obviously wouldn't let him go that easily. Furthermore, Sang Hong had long since heard that Ah Zu seemed to be highly regarded by the crown princess. In the Royal Academy's secret dungeon, he had even saved the crown prince and princess. Comparatively speaking, the crown princess was much more loyal and true than his majesty.

Even though he had always been on the royal family's side, when he saw the crown princess' grace and bearing, he still sighed in regret. For someone like her to be with the crown prince, it really was as if a bunch of flowers had been poked into a pile of manure.

The emperor spoke up just then, asking, "How has the disaster relief work in the mines progressed?"

All the officials shivered. His majesty hadn't even called them the Yu clan's mines! From the looks of it, the emperor had already made the decision to completely pull the Yu clan up by the roots.

There were some officials who had still been hesitant, worried that the Yu clan might make a comeback. After all, the Yu clan was one of the most powerful clans! The court's Yu Xuanchong occupied the Imperial Secretariat's Left Confidential Assistant position, while his son Yu Nan had been the Secretariat Assistant Director, and his son-in-law Lian Yu was the Secretariat Director. Several intermarriages had even happened between the Yu clan and other top clans such as the Pei clan and the Jiang clan.

Yu Yanluo's fiend race blood was something tied to her alone. If those higher up hadn't pursued the matter, they could easily have used another Yu clan elder to take the blame as the clan leader. Furthermore, Yu Yanluo's prestige had once been so great, it was rumored that even his majesty had confessed his feelings in the past. As such, there had been rumors going around, stating that it was possible for Yu Yanluo to be let off lightly.

However, when they heard his majesty's statement, those present sensed the implications behind the way he deemphasized the Yu clan. All of them began to scheme about how they could get a good slice of the cake that was the Yu clan.

Xu Yu quickly replied, "Over the past few days, we have kept in mind your majesty's instructions..."

He knew that the emperor cared about his reputation, so he added extravagant embellishments to praise the way the emperor loved the common people as his own children. Of course, he knew that the emperor didn't really care about the people. What he cared about more was whether the mines could be restored, and if they would be able to continue offering the court a sea of cultivation resources. As such, he implicitly pointed out how long it would take for production to return, and so on. The emperor continued to nod as he listened.

Sang Hong had to admit that this guy's way with words was quite formidable. It had clearly been a complete catastrophe, and yet he managed to change the narrative of a mine that had been completely destroyed into one that could be restored in a few years.

The emperor asked a few more questions, which all received satisfactory answers. Then, Eunuch Wen stepped forward to declare loudly, "Those who have important matters are to submit a report. Those who do not, withdraw from the court."

An official from the court stepped forward and said, "This official presents a memorial to the emperor. Recently, there have been many secret reports that accuse Green Hat Viscount, Eastern Palace Chamberlain Zu An of rescuing Yu Yanluo and colluding with the Fiend races. He has betrayed the court!"

The expressions of those present changed. The main act had finally begun.

Sang Hong recognized the official as the Censor-in-Chief Yi Chong. Those who accused officials of misconduct were usually his subordinates, and yet he had actually personally done the deed today. That Xu Yu really did have some influence.

"Sir Yi's words are wrong!" a young official protested, stepping forward. "After arriving in Cloudcenter Commandery, Sir Zu has spared no effort to solve many cases. People all know that he has restored justice to Cloudcenter Commandery, even solving a case involving smuggling to the fiend races. How could he have colluded with the fiend races and betrayed our country?"

"Who is that person?" many Cloudcenter officials whispered. They were initially amazed by how handsome the young man was, but the words he spoke seemed to have slapped all of Cloudcenter Commandery's officials in the face. Expressions of anger spread among them.

Those who were well-informed recognized him. "That's Jiang Boyang's grandson Jiang Gui, known for his handsomeness in the capital. He's currently the herald to the crown prince, an official from the Eastern Palace. It makes sense for him to speak out for Zu An."

Sang Hong also knew that, apart from being spurred on by the crown princess, Jiang Gui's mother was Yu Xuanchong's daughter. Whether it was for public or private reasons, he had to help Zu An.

"Contributions are contributions; crimes are crimes. Sir Zu indeed established great merit previously in Cloudcenter Commandery, but his rescue of the witch Yu Yanluo is also a fact. Furthermore, according to a tip, Yu Yanluo has already returned to the Snake race territory, and one person was seen accompanying her. Judging from the description, that person resembles Zu An strongly," another noble dressed in official robes stepped forward and said. "If we connect all of these things together, the uncovering of the fiend races' smuggling affair in Cloudcenter Commandery might have just been a ploy to deceive us."

Sang Hong's expression changed. This person's identity was special. He was the Thornsun Duke, the Lone Rider Attendant Zhao Shu. More importantly, his father was King Fufeng, the Great Western General Zhao Cang. Zhao Cang was the emperor's uncle! It seemed that this time, King Qi's faction had suffered too much in Cloudcenter Commandery. Even the core members of the faction couldn't sit still anymore.

Sang Hong naturally couldn't just watch without doing anything anymore. He loudly said, "Sir Zhao's claims are flawed. This official was this mission's Imperial Envoy. I take full responsibility for the investigation of the fiend races' smuggling, and the officials of the Imperial Envoy can all serve as witnesses. If Sir Zhao claims that all of this was just a ploy, then could it be that our entire Imperial Envoy fleet has betrayed the nation? Or perhaps, are you claiming that his majesty had poor judgment in choosing who to send?"

Zhao Shu broke out into a cold sweat. He replied, "Of course that is not what I mean. Do not try to frame me."

The crown princess couldn't step up herself, so her older brother Bi Ziang obviously had to help his little sister out. He retorted, "Just who is trying to frame whom? The fiend race territory and Cloudcenter Commandery are far apart. The shortest time it would take to travel between the two places would be over half a year. However, Sir Zhao said that you received information that Yu Yanluo had already returned to the fiend race territory, and you even baselessly claimed that the one at her side was Zu An. Dare I ask where this information came from?"

Zhao Shu's face turned completely red. He replied, "This matter touches upon military secrets, so I am afraid that it is inappropriate to release it to the public. If young master Bi wishes to press the issue, you can follow me to the imperial study to seek his majesty's ruling."

Sang Hong jumped in fright when he heard that. Don't tell me the empire really has spies in the fiend race territory?

Bi Ziang frowned, but he was a quick thinker. He quickly deduced that even if there were spies, it wasn't possible for there to be such precise information so quickly. As such, he said loudly, "If there really is reliable evidence, why would there be a need to hold this kind of general assembly?"

Zhao Shu was momentarily stumped. The intelligence was indeed a bit vague and not enough to condemn Zu An to death.

Xu Yu spoke up just then, saying, "A spy's report alone is, of course, not enough. However, when you account for Yu Yanluo's escape and Zu An's mysterious disappearance, that is already enough to answer many questions."

He faced Sang Hong and said, "If I recall correctly, Sir Sang said that Zu An disappeared because he was carrying out an Embroidered Envoy's secret mission. Now that Chief Commander Zhuxie is here, we can ask him if such a secret mission exists or not, yes?"

Chapter 1298: To Dress as a Man

Even though Xu Yu seemed to be asking Sang Hong on the surface, he wasn't really asking for the other man's opinion at all; rather, he was taking the chance to consult Zhuxie Chixin.

Sang Hong frowned. In a moment of desperation, he had used the pretext of an Embroidered Envoy mission to cover for Zu An's sudden disappearance. Either way, Xiao Jianren and Zu An had a good relationship and wouldn't expose him. He hadn't expected Xu Yu to ask Zhuxie Chixin directly.

After his initial alarm, however, he quickly calmed down. Zhuxie Chixin was his majesty's trusted aide, so he would definitely speak in favor of Zu An.

Unexpectedly, however, Zhuxie Chixin voiced his surprise. "There was something like that? I have not received any reports from the Embroidered Envoy in Cloudcenter Commandery. Of course, it might be because the situation is so urgent that he has not been able to report anything yet."

Sang Hong widened his eyes. He had thought that even if Zhuxie Chixin said something, he would have chosen a neutral position. Who would have thought that he would actually reply that way?

Zhuxie Chixin was the Chief Commander of the Embroidered Envoy, the publicly acknowledged number one. He had absolute control over the Embroidered Envoy. If someone like him said that perhaps his subordinates hadn't issued a report yet, would anyone believe that?

Sure enough, a commotion broke out among King Qi's faction when they heard that. The officials all got worked up, demanding that the court condemn Zu An for his crimes. At the same time, some of them even accused Sang Hong of misconduct. After serving the court as an independent figure for so many years, Sang Hong had made quite a few enemies. How could they let go of such a good chance?

Bi Linglong glanced at the emperor in disbelief. Without the emperor's incitement, there was no way someone like Zhuxie Chixin would dare to say something like that.

Zu An had done so much for the crown prince. Others might not know about that, but how could his majesty not? And yet, now the emperor was working with King Qi's faction to condemn Zu An. Then, in the future, wouldn't that make all those who were loyal to the royal family feel bitterly disappointed?

Sang Hong's ears were ringing. When he heard that the emperor had agreed to hold this interrogation, he had already gotten a bad feeling. Still, he hadn't expected the emperor and King Qi to actually work together in this matter! At this point, not even a daoist immortal's descent could save Zu An!

Just then, the Central Secretariat Assistant Director Pei Lian stepped forward. He said, "Fifth brother, as the City Lord of Cloudcenter City, you should know best about the things that have happened here. Why not tell us what exactly happened?"

The fifth brother he spoke of was, of course, Pei Shao. The two of them were both the sons of Waterfront Duke, Chief Attendant Pei Zheng. The Pei clan's Waterfront Duke's line was publicly known to be a core supporter of King Qi's faction.

Pei You had a hopeful expression in his eyes when he saw his grandfather, Imperial Secretariat Director Pei Ming, hoping he would say some things to help Zu An. After all, their group was also close to the crown prince's side. However, his grandfather didn't show any signs of speaking up. Considering his understanding of his grandfather, that meant he planned to just watch from the side as a bystander.

Meanwhile, Gao Ying also looked at the Guard General Liu Yao expectantly. However, he knew that during the Brightmoon City trip, his maternal uncle had been embarrassed quite badly because of Zu An, so he had never been too fond of Zu An. Even though Zu An had saved Gao Ying in the dungeon, he was nothing more than an outsider who was living off of their charity and his words carried no weight. Sure enough, Liu Yao also seemed to just be present to watch something interesting happen.

Pei Shao coughed lightly and said, "Ahem, according to what this humble official knows, Sir Xu kept Yu Yanluo in custody; the security was incredibly strict, with guards acting covertly and overtly. However, she ended up being broken out, so we all suspect that the one who saved her must have known the

inner layout and workings of the prison. That means it must have been someone on the inside, and their position had to be rather high. Otherwise, they would not have been able to know the details so clearly.”

Even though he hadn’t answered the question directly, the implications were extremely clear.

“Indeed,” Xu Yu said, wanting to strike while the iron was hot. “When that witch Yu Yanluo was first captured, Zu An tried to save her. He did not even hesitate to openly declare that he would go against the court. That is something many Cloudcenter officials can attest to.”

Those same officials all spoke up in agreement.

Xu Yu continued, “If we then consider Yu Yanluo’s rescue and Zu An’s disappearance, and how Sir Sang has fabricated all kinds of lies to protect him, I believe it is easy to see what has really been going on.”

Sang Hong protested angrily, “Then are you saying that I have conspired with Sir Zu, and colluded with the fiend races in betraying the country?”

Xu Yu shook his head and replied, “That may not be. I believe that Sir Sang probably did what you did for the sake of cherishing talent, and that was why you covered for Zu An. However, you could never have expected him to have done something so disgraceful.”

Xu Yu knew that Sang Hong’s relationship with the other officials wasn’t good. However, he was well known for his dedication and loyalty toward his majesty. No one would believe Xu Yu if he tried to attack him in that aspect too.

Sang Hong’s face darkened. He knew that the situation was already irredeemable. The only thing he could do was to try his best to stall for time.

He was about to say something when the emperor spoke. “This emperor recalls that there were some other Embroidered Envoys who went as well, no? Have them come out and speak.”

Zhuxie Chixin obviously knew who had been sent. Xiao Jianren quickly stepped forward and said, “Reporting to your majesty. From what this humble official has seen during this journey, Sir Zu conducts himself honestly and magnanimously. He upholds justice for the common people. Someone like that definitely would not collude with the fiend races and betray this country.”

Sang Hong gave him a look of surprise. The Embroidered Envoys were usually reclusive and feared by the people. He hadn’t expected this person to actually speak out for Zu An at such a crucial juncture. That kind of action could very well ruin all of his future prospects!

On the court’s side, Bi Linglong was surprised. She was about to say something when Zhuxie Chixin interrupted Xiao Jianren. “What his majesty wishes to know is whether Zu An rescued Yu Yanluo, or where Zu An was when Yu Yanluo was rescued, if you saw him. Remember to respond with the important points.”

Bi Linglong’s beautiful brows drew together into a frown. She couldn’t hold herself back anymore, calling out, “Does the Chief Commander not feel that your words arouse a bit of suspicion?”

The others looked at her in shock. After all, she was someone who had always paid great attention to her bearing, someone who was publicly known to carry the grace of being the country’s future mother.

She did not show her own position on many matters, but she had many subordinates who could speak up in her place to let her reach her objective. And yet today, she had spoken out personally, so it seemed Zu An was indeed quite important to her.

Still, none of them were too suspicious of anything. Even though there had been a scandal between her and Zu An before, that matter had already been dealt with. Who would dare to bring it up again? They would just be seeking their own embarrassment. The most likely reason for her to be protecting Zu An like this was that she treated him as her own trusted aide already.

Meanwhile, King Qi's officials all enjoyed her predicament. Zhuxie Chixin, that central force of the emperor's forces, was now in conflict with the crown princess. How would they cooperate in the future?

Only King Qi, who was in the seat of honor, frowned. It made perfect sense for him to act against Zu An, but why was the emperor also targeting him? Zu An was someone on the emperor's side who had been sent to Cloudcenter Commandery; afterward, the plans he had arranged for many years ended up being ruined!

Are those two working together to deceive me? King Qi thought in horror. He could no longer remain as calm anymore.

...

Xiao Jianren replied just then, "I do not know who rescued Yu Yanluo. At that time, Sir Zu was resting in isolation in his room. His poor condition was something that everyone in Cloudcenter Commandery should know about."

Xu Yu asked, "You said that he was cultivating alone in his room, but did you confirm that yourself?"

Xiao Jianren hesitated. As an Embroidered Envoy, however, he didn't dare to utter any lies in front of the emperor and the Chief Commander. He said, "I did not."

Sang Hong said gravely, "Since he was cultivating in seclusion, it is natural that he could not be disturbed by any outsiders. How can that be used as proof?"

The courtiers clearly voiced their displeasure, feeling that this evidently made Zu An more suspicious.

After everything that had happened, Xu Yu already had victory in his grasp. He said, "Sir Sang, even though you have showered us with all these flowery words, you have still not explained where Zu An has gone. If he is innocent, why has he not appeared yet even though such a major event has happened? Could it be that he is unaware of how great of a matter betraying our country and defecting to the fiend races might be? Or... Perhaps he is in the fiend race territory, and he cannot return at all?!"

"Who said he wouldn't be able to return?" a clear and melodious voice rang out. A figure appeared by the entrance.

The expressions of those who were in the room changed. That strange mask, those clothes filled with fierceness... More importantly, the fact that it was decorated with golden borders...

"Golden Token Ele-!" Xiao Jianren and the others exclaimed, overjoyed. However, their voices came to a screeching stop halfway through their sentence.

Xiao Jianren unwittingly rubbed his eyes. Unfortunately, because he spent all his time reading in the archives, his sight was poor to begin with. No matter how he rubbed them, his vision still didn't get much clearer. He asked Dai Seventh and Chen Eighth next to him with a ki transmission, "Can you two see his face clearly? Why do I feel as if it is a bit strange?"

"It is a bit strange. Maybe it's because it's already been too long. Why do I feel as if boss has gotten skinnier? It might be because he has had too many things to deal with recently," Dai Seventh replied.

"Really? Why do I feel as if boss' chest is a bit sturdier than usual?" Chen Eighth remarked, feeling a bit confused.

Sang Hong was also shocked. Golden Token Eleven had always observed from the shadows. Now that he had stepped forward, it was clearly to speak in Zu An's favor. But why did it feel as if Golden Token Eleven was a bit different this time?

Those from the court had strange expressions. Bi Linglong looked at the person before her carefully. She had been saved by Golden Token Eleven before, and her heart had even fluttered then. It was just that later on, she had ended up meeting Zu An. But why was it that when she saw him again, she felt he was a bit unfamiliar?

Zhuxie Chixin was also stunned. He obviously knew who Golden Token Eleven was. Just what in the world was going on? He instinctively glanced toward the emperor, but the emperor's brows were also slightly furrowed.

On Cloudcenter City's side, however, Pei Shao's expression suddenly changed. The feeling he got was just too familiar! He immediately sent a ki transmission. "Manman, what kind of nonsense is this?!"

Chapter 1299: Vicious and Merciless

Naturally, the so-called 'Golden Token Eleven' in the room was Pei Mianman. If one were to ask who in this world understood Zu An the most, whose relationship with him was closest to one of husband and wife in this world, it wouldn't be Chu Chuyan, nor would it be Zheng Dan; rather, it would be Pei Mianman, who had spent several decades with Zu An in the Yinxu dungeon. She knew about Zu An's Golden Token Eleven identity, of course. Zu An had even left a set of his clothes with her.

When she had learned that Zu An's situation was unfavorable, that he might have betrayed the human race and defected to the fiend races, she almost lost her head out of anxiety. That was why she had decided to just dress up as a man and try to save him with Golden Token Eleven's identity.

However, she hadn't expected her cover to be blown so quickly. She had clearly done her best to hide her identity, and even tied up her chest to make it smaller, so how could they tell? However, she could only brace herself and continue.

"Do you not know that deceiving the ruler like this is a crime punishable by clan eradication?!" Pei Shao exclaimed, panicking when he didn't hear her reply. The happiness he had felt from seeing victory in sight was already gone without a trace.

Pei Mianman harrumphed. She said through ki transmission, "Since you know the severity of the matter, don't expose me. On the contrary, help me hide my identity."

Pei Shao was left at a loss for words. She's making so much sense that I don't even know what to say. But why do I feel so wronged then?

Those from the court were confused about what was happening. Thornsun Duke, Lone Rider Attendant Zhao Shu couldn't help but ask, "You said he could return. Where is he then?"

"He went to carry out a secret mission assigned by me," Pei Mianman said. "I have not had time to make a report to the chief commander yet, so I must ask for the chief commander's forgiveness."

Others might not know who Golden Token Eleven was, but how could the emperor and Zhuxie Chixin not?

The situation was quite tricky. Pei Mianman was confident that the two of them wouldn't want to expose the fact that Zu An was Golden Token Eleven, resulting in the current situation. Of course, she was also smart, giving Zhuxie Chixin a chance to back down.

Zhuxie Chixin's face darkened. Since this person could turn into Golden Token Eleven, they obviously knew of Zu An's other identity too. She had chosen her stance well, at that. They could either let this end here, or choose to struggle to the end, exposing the fact that Zu An was Golden Token Eleven.

At that point, whether it was those secret missions Zu An had completed, or the Embroidered Envoy that had always remained loyal and true, the consequences of revealing that a Golden Token Envoy had been proven to have colluded with the fiend races and betrayed the state would be devastating.

Zhuxie Chixin was starting to get a headache. He secretly looked toward the emperor, but he wasn't able to pick up anything from Zhao Han's expression.

Because King Qi was overly suspicious, he had been secretly observing Zhuxie Chixin from the start. Even though the other person's movements were slight, they couldn't escape his detection. He couldn't help but find it a bit strange. Why was it that after Golden Token Eleven appeared, Zhuxie Chixin and the emperor had begun acting so strangely? When he recalled all of the things that had happened, he felt more and more that this Golden Token Eleven was completely different from the other Golden Token Envoys. He was definitely special.

The other officials, who didn't understand the ins and outs of the situation, waited for Zhuxie Chixin to retort. After all, he had already stated that he hadn't received any reports. However, he remained silent, not responding directly. The officials were all old foxes, and quickly realized that the situation had changed.

Bi Linglong sighed in relief. Never could she have expected the situation to take such a turn. She looked at that person with great curiosity. Just what kind of a relationship did they have with Ah Zu?

Sang Hong was also confused. Those on the court's side might not be able to tell through the recording mirror, but he was close enough to deduce that this person was actually a woman.

In the past, he had been a bit unhappy with how Zu An sowed his seed everywhere. The series of events that had happened this time was also because of a woman. And yet, the one who had come to save the situation was another woman... Events in this world really were hard to predict...

Just then, Xu Yu asked, "Are you really Golden Token Eleven?"

He had already invested far too much in his accusation, so at this point, he could only succeed or die trying. When he saw that the situation was rapidly changing, he couldn't sit still anymore. He didn't know why his majesty and Zhuxie Chixin refused to expose the imposter. Since they weren't going to say anything, he had to be the one to do it.

Pei Mianman was alarmed, but she replied calmly, "Even his majesty and Chief Commander haven't expressed any suspicion. Could it be that Sir Xu believes that your knowledge exceeds theirs?"

Xu Yu immediately began to sweat buckets. This guy's mouth really is vicious!

Still, after being in political circles for a long time, he was able to react quickly as well. He said, "This humble official's poor knowledge obviously cannot compare to the Chief Commander's, let alone his majesty. However, they naturally cannot see too clearly through the recording mirror from their side, while I am a bit closer to you, so it is easier to see some details.

"According to what I know, Golden Token Eleven should be male, right? You are clearly a woman dressed as a man. Impersonating an Embroidered Envoy is a great crime. Furthermore, deceiving his majesty is a crime punishable by clan extermination. Speak, who was the one who made you do this?" he concluded, his expression and voice equally fierce.

Pei Shao was scared witless when he heard the criminal charges. If Pei Mianman's identity was exposed, as her father, he would be finished too! As such, he coughed and asked, "Is this a woman dressed as a man? I do not have that impression. Sir Xu, please do not speak recklessly."

Inwardly, he cursed his daughter halfway to death. At the moment, though, he had no choice but to help her out of this situation.

Sang Hong gave him a look of surprise. He would never have expected Pei Shao to speak up to help their case.

Xu Yu was alarmed. He couldn't understand why his ally would suddenly stab him in the back! Could it be that he received some information I don't know of? When he recalled Zhuxie Chixin and the emperor's strange attitudes, he immediately began to panic.

With Pei Shao taking the lead, his trusted aides spoke up in agreement. After all, Pei Mianman had disguised herself carefully. With the embroidered uniform hiding her figure, as well as a mask covering her face, only a select few who were extremely familiar with Golden Token Eleven would be able to tell the difference.

Xu Yu clenched his teeth. At this point, even if he backed down, he was screwed. As such, he braced himself and said, "It is easy enough to determine whether that is true or false. Just have him undo his upper garment in front of everyone and we will all see the truth."

"Nonsense. Even though there is a recording mirror between us, this is still the court! How can we do something so disgraceful here?" Bi Linglong objected. Inwardly, however, he had felt that this Golden Token Eleven was strange from the beginning. After Xu Yu's reminder, she finally realized that it was actually a woman.

I wonder which one of Zu An's female friends this is... For some reason, she felt jealous and angry as she thought of that.

Considering that the crown princess herself had spoken up like that, normally, a subject was supposed to know to back down. However, Xu Yu knew that he was already going for broke. If this matter wasn't dealt with, the consequences for him would be even more horrible. As such, he continued, "Then have an older woman bring her to a room to examine her. This matter is related to our entire country, so I hope that the truth can come to light."

Pei Mianman sneered. "We Embroidered Envoys have always been the ones to investigate others; there has never been an instance of others investigating us! Must I prove my own innocence because of your ignorant words? How laughable!"

Bi Linglong nodded. This close friend of Zu An is quite smart. This isn't a situation where you can act according to ordinary logic.

King Qi's faction and the Eastern Palace's members began a war of words, making the place quite noisy. The officials on Cloudcenter Commandery's side were speechless. They thought to themselves, Big shots are big shots after all; they're able to quote the classics even while fighting.

Xu Yu stepped forward and said gravely, "Chief Commander Zhuxie, this is your subordinate. Whether or not she is to be investigated rests on your decision."

He was also extremely upset. This was clearly something they had already tacitly agreed on, so what were they shrinking back for? He couldn't just fight for it all by himself, right? Dragging in his majesty was out of the question, but there was no way he would let Zhuxie Chixin watch the situation as if he had nothing to do with it.

Zhuxie Chixin's expression changed greatly. While he was at a loss for what to do, his ears suddenly twitched a bit, as if he had received some instructions. He thus said, "Golden Token Eleven is indeed not a woman. For the sake of the truth, guide him to the next room for an investigation. If he is innocent, then Sir Xu, you have falsely accused a Golden Token Envoy, which is a crime that bears heavy punishment. If he is a fake..."

He gave Xu Yu a fierce look. Xu Yu immediately understood. If that was the case, the fake naturally wouldn't be given a chance to return to the room to cause further trouble.

Chapter 1300: Conclusive Proof

Pei Mianman panicked. She had still underestimated the emperor and Zhuxie Chixin's ruthlessness in the end. She had thought that there was no way they would dare to expose that Zu An was Golden Token Eleven in front of so many officials. How could she have expected that they would take such drastic measures, to accuse her using a different method? That way, even if there was an issue, she wouldn't have any more chances to speak.

Pei Shao also panicked. Once she was taken next door, Pei Mianman's identity would be exposed. At that point, the Pei clan would be finished.

But now that Zhuxie Chixin had said such a thing and the emperor tacitly agreed, with the entire court watching, he couldn't even find any excuse to stop in anymore.

Just then, Bi Linglong said, "I feel that this plan is unsuitable. The Embroidered Envoy has always represented the dignity of the court, and the Golden Token Envoys more than any other. How can someone like that be randomly investigated because of some mere words?"

The officials could all tell that there really was something wrong with this Golden Token Envoy. However, what the crown princess said wasn't entirely without reason. Another fierce round of debate started in the court.

In the end, it was Zhuxie Chixin who said, "Our Embroidered Envoy has always equated to loyalty and righteousness. We cannot allow others to bear suspicion against us and shake the prestige we have built up over many years. Comparatively speaking, what does an individual's honor and disgrace count for? I trust that Golden Token Eleven can understand this as well."

Pei Mianman wanted to shoot back 'like hell I understand', but Pei Shao quickly stepped forward to say, "In that case, this humble official will follow as a witness."

At the same time, he said to Pei Mianman through ki, "You've already done everything you could, so don't cause any more trouble, or else you'll be exposed. It won't just be me; all of your other brothers and sisters will be involved too. Is that something you have the heart to do?"

He wanted to find a chance to have a proper talk with her. He had clearly planned to marry her off to King Qi's heir before; when had her relationship with Zu An become so good? She had even taken such a huge risk to help him. Even though he and Pei Mianman didn't share true affection between a father and daughter for various reasons, they still had that relationship in name. When he thought about how the pretty daughter he had raised was actually so close to another man, he felt as if his clan had been robbed.

The officials on the court's side all expressed their approval. Pei Shao was from the Pei clan, which was close to King Qi. Furthermore, neither Xu Yu or Sang Hong were that close to them. As such, there wasn't a more suitable judge for the matter.

Pei Mianman was about to say something, but then hesitated. She really didn't care about this father of hers, but after living in the Pei clan for so many years, there were many servants who had watched her grow up. Some brothers and sisters had even taken care of her sometimes. If all of them were punished because of her, how could she forgive herself for that? And yet, if she left just like that, wouldn't Ah Zu's fate be set in stone?

Suddenly, a voice rang out through the place, loud and clear. "I heard that this meeting was talking about me, so how can the main character be missing from it?"

Pei Mianman's entire body trembled when she heard the familiar voice. She quickly turned around and saw an equally familiar face.

Who else could it be but Zu An?

Pei Mianman was pleasantly surprised. She had always wondered why Zu An would suddenly vanish, and she had even wondered if he really had done some irrational things after developing a fondness for the capital's number one beauty. Now that she witnessed his return, all of her worries and nervousness completely disappeared.

Sang Hong's body relaxed completely. He had only pretended to be calm the entire time before that. The others might have thought that Zu An was just temporarily missing and had a chance of returning, but he had known better than anyone else that Zu An really was over in the fiend race territories. That was why he had felt greater despair than anyone else.

Just then, he felt a chill run down his back. It turned out his clothes had already been drenched in cold sweat. Still, what he was the most curious about was how Zu An had managed to return in just a single night.

However, with their happiness came the disappointment of others. King Qi's faction immediately hung their heads dispiritedly, with only King Qi remaining calm. Ever since he had realized that the emperor was also determined to condemn Zu An, he had begun to think about possible reasons for that. He wasn't in such a hurry to eliminate Zu An anymore.

Xu Yu exclaimed in shock, "You... Why are you here?"

He was sure that it was Zu An who had rescued Yu Yanluo. Even though the message he had received from the fiend race territories was vague, it had confirmed that Zu An and Yu Yanluo returned to the Snake race together. So how had he manage to come back?

He thought about how someone had even had to impersonate Golden Token Eleven, and began to wonder if this Zu An was a fake. After all, modifying one's appearance wasn't entirely impossible.

Zu An laughed loudly and replied, "I'm a member of the Imperial Envoy who was sent to deal with Cloudcenter Commandery's affairs. Isn't it perfectly reasonable for me to be here? What, it almost sounds as if Sir Xu really doesn't want me to be here." At the same time, he gave Pei Mianman a look, gesturing for her to not worry anymore. The two were too familiar with each other, so he almost instantly recognized her as Big Manman.

Xu Yu's face darkened, but he didn't reply.

The Censor-in-Chief Yi Chong had always remained silent after speaking up in the beginning. Just then, however, he spoke again. "Sir Zu has come at just the right time. The meeting today is precisely to discuss your breakout of Yu Yanluo and your betrayal of humanity to side with the fiend races. Do you have anything to say for yourself?"

"Of course I do!" Zu An replied loudly. The officials all perked up their ears to hear what kind of explanation he had to give. but who would have thought that he would shout, "What a bunch of nonsense!"

Yi Chong frowned. Thornsun Duke Zhao Shu scolded Zu An, "Sir Zu, this is the court session, so please watch your words. All things need proof. Do not speak crudely like those who live on the streets."

Zu An harrumphed. "You want to discuss proof? You accused me of colluding with the fiend races and betraying the country, but did you talk about proof then? You're instead hypocritically going to ask for proof now?"

Zhao Shu was left at a loss for words. He was someone from the royal family, and furthermore a glorious duke. Being criticized by a mere viscount was way too humiliating.

Fortunately, Xu Yu helped him out of the situation by retorting, "Do you want proof? That is easy enough." He clapped his hands, and a few servants came over. He said, "These are servants from the Imperial Envoy. They usually prepare the meals for each room and do all of the cleaning. According to what they have said, when Yu Yanluo was being broken out of prison, you just happened to be missing from the room. You went missing when she went missing too. How could there be such a huge coincidence in this world?"

Sang Hong's expression changed. No matter how careful he had been, it seemed that Xu Yu had still managed to plant some spies.

Zu An sneered. "Sir Xu, are you really a deputy leader? Why does it sound as if you're not familiar with professional work at all? Can even something like this be considered proof?"

"This kind of proof is a bit flimsy, I admit," Xu Yu said. He continued, "But I have heard from the guards who were watching Yu Yanluo as well. They saw everything with their own eyes, but even though they did not see the appearance of the one who broke Yu Yanluo out, his physique was identical to Sir Zu's."

Zu An roared with laughter. "The same physique? Chief Commander, even if it were the Embroidered Envoy investigating a case, could this kind of thing be used as proof?"

Zhuxie Chixin's face darkened, but he still said, "That alone indeed cannot serve as evidence."

However, Xu Yu seemed to have received some hidden hints. He continued, "Sir Zu has publicly spoken out for Yu Yanluo several times. You tried to save her even though her fiend race identity was exposed. That is something these officials from Cloudcenter Commandery have all seen. All of them are witnesses."

The officials under him all voiced their support.

Bi Linglong said coldly, "Sir Xu's claims have all been baseless accusations. If this alone is enough to condemn a court official for a crime, is that not attaching far too little importance to the court?"

She had more officials under her. When they all voiced their agreement, it was obviously enough to drown out Xu Yu's side.

Zu An thought to himself that having a close female friend with so much authority really was great. It meant he had a lot of little brothers to help him out. As such, he gave Bi Linglong a smile in response. The others just treated it as the gratitude of a subordinate, while only Bi Linglong's face turned a bit red; the real meaning of that look was something only the two of them knew about.

Eunuch Wen called out in a loud and clear voice, "Silence!"

The emperor then spoke. "What are all of you causing such a fuss for? If there is no new evidence, then Zu An is clearly innocent. This assembly will be concluded here."

Sang Hong felt as if he had found a new lease on life. He really hadn't expected this matter to have been fixed just like that.

He was about to congratulate Zu An when Xu Yu gritted his teeth and took out a confidential letter, saying, "I have more proof. My spy has braved death to send this information back from the Snake race territory. It records in detail that when Yu Yanluo returned, she had a human man at her side. His

appearance was identical to Zu An's, and most importantly, Yu Yanluo even intimately called him 'Ah Zu'."