

Immortal 131

Chapter 131: A Final Chance

Snow's face also twisted when he saw the eyewitness' face. She quickly explained the current situation to Shi Kun.

Needless to say, Shi Kun was infuriated that the tables had been turned in such a manner. He turned to Mei Chaofeng, spitting him with a piercing glare. How dare you ruin my plans for the sake of your lust?

"Who are you?" Xie Yi quickly asked the eyewitness, keenly noticing the reactions of both Mei Chaofeng and Shi Kun.

The woman who had been brought in by the guards of the Chu clan knelt on the floor and said, "City Lord Xie, I am the wife of Tan Wei, Madam Zhang."

"Tan Wei?" Naturally, Xie Yi knew who Tan Wei was. He began assessing the various people present in the court, a meaningful gleam in his eyes.

A slight furrow also formed on Sang Hong's forehead. It looks like their plan is going to fail once again.

"What are you doing here? Go back right now!" Mei Chaofeng finally snapped out of his daze and rushed toward Madam Zhang, attempting to chase her away.

His sudden, aggressive movement left Madam Zhang cowering in fear, a clear sign that she was extremely afraid of Mei Chaofeng.

Chu Chuyan immediately stepped between the two of them and said calmly, "Are you trying to intimidate my eyewitness?"

Mei Chaofeng immediately rebutted her, anxiety coloring his tone. "How can she possibly be an eyewitness? She's no more than my concubine!"

"No, I'm Tan Wei's wife! You resorted to despicable means to force me to do your bidding!" Madam Zhang looked at Mei Chaofeng with eyes filled with hatred.

Mei Chaofeng felt as if he had been plunged into icy-cold water. The woman before him suddenly looked foreign to him. She had been so subservient towards him in recent days, never hesitating to fulfill his requests. The dominance he had enjoyed over her made him feel rather cocky, and he even bragged about it before Snow. Yet...

Was it all an act?

Xie Yi secretly shot a glance at Sang Hong and saw that the latter wasn't responding at all. This gave him a good idea as to what was going on. "Madam Zhang, feel free to describe any injustice you have suffered. We'll redress all of your grievances in this court."

With tears in her eyes, Madam Zhang began to explain everything she had been through.

As it turned out, she and Tan Wei were childhood lovers, but the Zhang clan opposed their relationship out of scorn for Tan Wei's impoverished background. So, Tan Wei joined the Plum Blossom Sect in hopes of making it big, and his willingness to dive headlong into danger and the tenacity he displayed against the sect's enemies allowed him to swiftly rise through the ranks. It didn't take him long to make a name for himself, along with a tidy sum of money.

Eventually, at Madam Zhang's insistence, her parents reluctantly accepted their marriage. The fulfillment of their love after such a long and difficult path made them cherish each other even more, and they lived together in great bliss. But one day, the sect master of the Plum Blossom Sect paid them a visit and became enamored with Madam Zhang's beauty.

So, he laid out a scheme to take Madam Zhang's body for himself, which incurred Tan Wei's rage. Tan Wei tried to stand up for his wife, but there was just too huge a difference in their cultivation ranks. In the end, it was only with Madam Zhang's help that Tan Wei barely managed to escape with his life.

In order to keep her husband safe, Madam Zhang chose to lower herself in service to her enemy, allowing Mei Chaofeng to demean her in any way he wanted to. She was able to persevere only because Mei Chaofeng had promised her that he would let Tan Wei go.

However, not too long ago, she received news that Tan Wei had been killed by Plum Blossom Twelve, and that drove her into despair. She considered ending her life there and then to accompany her husband in the afterlife, but her anger and indignance stopped her. She couldn't allow Mei Chaofeng to be let off the hook just like that.

So, she changed her attitude. She began going along with Mei Chaofeng, in order to win his affection. She made Mei Chaofeng think that he had conquered her with his charm, and he lowered his guard against her.

In truth, she had been secretly collecting evidence of Mei Chaofeng's wrongdoing, and she was only waiting for an opportunity to make her move. Earlier that day, the first miss of the Chu clan had paid her visit, and she immediately knew that her chance had come.

"Rubbish! It was this lowly woman who seduced me, coveting my power and authority. Tan Wei chose to leave on his own accord, out of humiliation. I've never tried to force myself on Madam Zhang before!" Mei Chaofeng defended himself anxiously.

There was no way Zu An was going to miss this perfect opportunity. "Hah! A woman, seducing you on her own accord? Did you think that you're the same as me? You should get yourself a mirror and take a hard look at your own face!"

Mei Chaofeng felt blood rushing into his head. If not for the fact that they were in the middle of a courtroom, he would have rushed forward and given Zu An two tight slaps.

You have successfully trolled Mei Chaofeng for 501 Rage points!

Chu Chuyan also fell silent. She felt a little offended by what he had just said.

It was then that Vice Magistrate Pang Chun spoke up, offering the court a reminder. "Madam Zhang, what you've just mentioned is unrelated to the current case. We'll try your case separately afterwards."

"No, it's related to the current case!" Madam Zhang raised her head and spoke resoundingly.

"Yesterday, I personally heard Mei Chaofeng ordering his subordinates to falsify the evidence. He was also the one who killed Plum Blossom Thirteen. In the entire Plum Blossom Sect, he seems to be the only one who has the ability to imitate some kind of academy sword art."

Her words understandably raised a huge uproar. Even the kin and friends of Plum Blossom Thirteen turned to look at Mei Chaofeng, their eyes widened in disbelief.

"You slut! How dare you frame me?!"

In his heart, Mei Chaofeng felt deeply regretful. If only he had gotten rid of that woman while he could, he would never have ended up in his current plight. However, if he could do it all over once more, he would probably make the same choices. For some reason, he simply couldn't grow sick of Madam Zhang no matter how he toyed with her.

Madam Zhang chose to disregard him and continued on with her testimony. "Lord Yang Wei's death seems to have something to do with him too. I believe his killing was committed by some influential figure."

Everyone was shocked to hear those words. Yang Wei's wife tried to dash towards Mei Chaofeng in a frenzy, attempting to claw his skin off with her nails, only to be held back by the courtroom guards.

Excited whispering broke out amongst the crowd as well. Despite the lack of any concrete evidence, they had already chosen to believe Madam Zhang's testimony. Mei Chaofeng's act of killing Tan Wei and dominating his wife was so vile that it incensed the crowd.

"That useless trash!" Shi Kun was infuriated. How could he possibly not be? They were just moments away from condemning Zu An to hell, but their scheme had now been unraveled, all for the sake of a mere woman!

Shi Lezhi sent a voice transmission to Shi Kun in order to reassure him. "Young master, please do not worry. You aren't directly involved in this matter, so there's no way Madam Zhang knows your identity. Besides, Mei Chaofeng knows his place. He'll step forward to shoulder the blame if it looks like things are going awry. He would never dare to give you away."

"Hmph!" Shi Kun snorted coldly, but Shi Lezhi's reassurances did little to lift his mood.

Xie Yi slammed the wooden brick on the table once more before issuing his order. "Men, arrest Mei Chaofeng and all of the eyewitnesses who accused Zu An of murder earlier. We'll be interrogating them. I'll make sure to get to the bottom of this case so that those who have died can rest in peace!"

Mei Chaofeng was a powerhouse who had ruled the underground world for many years, so he was unfazed by the guards in the courtroom. His first thought was to bust out of the courtroom and flee, but he swiftly brushed off that urge. After all, Governor Sang, City Lord Xie, and Brightmoon Duke were present as well. Even Vice Magistrate Pang was more than a match for him. There was no way he could get away, and any attempt to do so would only serve as proof of his guilt.

Instead, if he stayed put, there was still a chance to turn things around. He still had quite a few connections in the city, and young master Shi held great power in his hands as well. It was possible that he could yet be vindicated.

With such thoughts in mind, he gave up struggling and allowed the guards to shackle his limbs.

While he was being taken into custody, Zu An walked up to him with a smile and said, “What a surprise, don’t you think? Just two hours ago, you were trying to shackle me, and yet you are the one being shackled now. The world sure is a mysterious place, isn’t it?”

“You bastard! Don’t act so smug. You might have gotten lucky today, but you won’t stay lucky for life. All it takes is you slipping up once, and that will be the end of you!” spat Mei Chaofeng furiously.

With the help of young master Shi’s influence, he could continuously hatch schemes against Zu An. Even if one failed, all he had to do was to try again. Even if Zu An managed to survive ninety-nine of the schemes, as long as he slipped up the hundredth time, he would still be a goner.

You have successfully trolled Mei Chaofeng for 998 Rage points!

“What a pity it is that you’ll never live to see that day,” said Zu An with a smile.

The crime of killing an official of the imperial court, together with the other murder cases under his name and all the underhanded deeds he had committed over the years—all of these were more than enough to have him executed multiple times over.

“Zu An, I’ll make sure to drag you down with me even if I die!”

Even while Mei Chaofeng was being pulled away, his roars could still be heard from afar.

“Incompetent people sure love to talk big.” Zu An shook his head in disdain.

He was just about to put down Shi Kun and earn a few more Rage points when he noticed that he had vanished from view. It seemed he was in no mood to remain here any further, especially after seeing how his plan had been unraveled.

Following all this, Xie Yi assigned several guards to Madam Zhang in order to protect her until the storm died down. With that, the court was dismissed.

The spectators slowly dispersed, but the excitement from the drama they had just witnessed had yet to ebb. It was inevitable that, within the next few days, everyone in Brightmoon City would come to learn of every single detail regarding this incident.

Before Sang Hong left, he directed a long look at Chu Zhongtian before remarking, “Brightmoon Duke, you really do impress me.”

“You’re impressed by me? What for?” replied Chu Zhongtian.

Sang Hong glanced at Zu An before explaining himself. “I’m impressed by your sharp eyes. While everyone was looking down on him, you chose to defy the odds and take him in as your son-in-law. It seems like your ability to judge people is far sharper than mine.”

It was rare to see Sang Hong so frustrated. Chu Zhongtian delightfully accepted the praise and replied, “Governor Sang, you’re too kind. Hahaha!”

After that brief exchange, the two of them went their separate ways.

On the way back to the Chu clan, Chu Chuyan couldn't help but ask, "How did you know that Madam Zhang would help you?"

The corners of Zu An's lips inched upward as he explained, "To be honest, I encountered Tan Wei during my journey out of town. I learned that he had a sum of money stashed away in the wall of his residence. I was still quite poor back then, and since he was already dead, I thought of taking his money for my own. Unexpectedly, I stumbled upon Madam Zhang, who was secretly paying respects to her deceased husband at the residence.

"It was then that I realized that the rumors about Madam Zhang willingly becoming Mei Chaofeng's lover might have been a lie. By paying respects to her deceased husband, it showed me that she cared a lot for him, and the fact that she had to do it secretly meant that she was trying to conceal it from the Plum Blossom Sect. Piecing together all of these clues, I was able to roughly figure out her intentions, which is why I told you to bring her over to the courtroom earlier.

"I knew that only the prestige and standing you hold as the daughter of a duke would be enough to convince her to make her move."

Chu Chuyan felt a deep admiration for Madam Zhang. "She's truly a strong woman. In order to exact vengeance for her husband, she was willing to suffer such humiliation. It's truly a blessing that her sacrifice hasn't been in vain."

"Yes, she is indeed someone worthy of respect." Zu An nodded in agreement. "If something happens to me, will you be willing to put aside everything and exact vengeance for me too?"

Chu Chuyan rolled her eyes. "Haven't you heard of the saying, 'good people die prematurely, but vermin plague the world for centuries'? I doubt that any harm could possibly come to you."

"Ahahaha, I'm flattered by how highly you think of me." Zu An laughed.

His reaction made Chu Chuyan scoff under her breath. I'm not complimenting you over here! "Speaking of which, weren't you just mentioning that you were going to take Tan Wei's money for your own? Madam Zhang is already so pitiful. Surely you aren't going to keep her husband's money after learning her story?"

"Of course not," replied Zu An. "I gave the money to her on the spot. If not, how could I have been so certain that she would help me out this time around?"

"It looks like you aren't rotten to the core yet." Despite her slightly harsh remark, a smile slowly formed on her lips. She was quite satisfied with how Zu An had handled this matter.

It was then that Zu An suddenly realized a new problem. If Mei Chaofeng was done for, wouldn't the Plum Blossom Sect be the next to crumble? If so, the promissory note for seven-and-a-half million taels of silver guaranteed to him by the Plum Blossom Sect would become a mere empty check!

It's fortunate that I magnanimously donated it to Brightmoon Academy beforehand. Oh well, I guess it's Jiang Luofu's problem now.

...

Night descended upon Brightmoon City. In one of the cells of the Yamen, Mei Chaofeng was just about to start cultivating when he suddenly sensed a disturbance. He opened his eyes.

He could vaguely hear deep groans coming from not too far away. It was the sound of the patrolling guards being knocked out.

Soon, a figure appeared before his cell. The figure whipped out a key that he had just swiped from the prison warden and unlocked the cell.

"Mister Shi!"

Even though the figure was masked, Mei Chaofeng was still able to recognize the other party.

"The young master has sent me here to get you out," replied Shi Lezhi.

Mei Chaofeng frowned. "Are we escaping just like that? Isn't that as good as admitting to my crimes?"

"Are you still dreaming of being vindicated? You should have known better and kept that thing between your legs under control!" Shi Lezhi ground out with an angry huff.

"That slut! I'm going to kill her!" Just thinking about the matter was more than enough to stoke Mei Chaofeng's anger.

"Madam Zhang is under the protection of the City Lord Estate at the moment. You shouldn't even bother thinking about it," replied Shi Lezhi. "The young master has tasked me to save you in order to give you one last chance. As long as you're able to get rid of Zu An, the young master will send you to another city, where you can continue to live freely. Otherwise... you should know better than anyone else what happens to those who prove themselves useless."

Chapter 132: Murder Ploy

Mei Chaofeng's face darkened. He pointed out grimly, "I'm not useless. I still have the Plum Blossom Sect."

To be frank, he was unwilling to assassinate Zu An. It was bound to be an incredibly dangerous undertaking, for Zu An was no longer the same person he used to be. On top of that, even if he succeeded, he wouldn't be able to stay in Brightmoon City anymore. Both the Chu clan and Brightmoon Academy wouldn't let this matter rest easily.

He was the sect master of the Plum Blossom Sect, but he was being treated as a sacrificial pawn here!

"The Plum Blossom Sect?" Shi Lezhi sneered coldly. "The news that you have killed Plum Blossom Thirteen has already gotten out, and it hasn't been long since you killed Plum Blossom Seven too. Those subordinates of yours have already lost their respect and loyalty for you. You can't be thinking that you're still the same high and mighty sect master you were, right?"

Mei Chaofeng gritted his teeth furiously.

I also knew that killing Plum Blossom Seven would make my subordinates lose trust in me, but what choice did I have? Young master Shi issued a direct command to me!

Plum Blossom Thirteen was my most trusted aide, but your Shi clan forced me to kill him in order to put your plan into action. Yet, you're blaming all of these on me now?

Mei Chaofeng felt incredibly indignant, but knowing the current position he was in, he dared not to voice his thoughts aloud.

"Let's get out of here first." Even with Shi Lezhi's powerful cultivation, he dared not to get careless here. Raiding a prison was definitely not a small matter. If he were to get caught, even the Shi clan would suffer a huge backlash.

The two of them quickly left the prison to head for a remote residence within the city.

"You shouldn't return to the Plum Blossom Sect for the time being. Once they notice that you're gone, they would surely issue an arrest warrant for you. Rest here for the time being instead," said Shi Lezhi.

Mei Chaofeng looked at the dilapidated walls around him as he thought about how he was still feasting on meat, gulping down wine, and surrounded by beautiful women yesterday. He couldn't help but wonder how he had fallen so low in the blink of an eye.

Noticing the dissatisfied look in Mei Chaofeng's eyes, Shi Lezhi said, "You need not get too depressed. Once you've accomplished the young master's mission, you'll be able to live grandly as you previously did in another city."

Mei Chaofeng frowned. "Killing Zu An is not hard at all, but the problem is that he has the protection of the Chu clan. He has guards with him wherever he goes, and he spends his time either in the academy or the Chu clan. There's no chance to assassinate him at all!"

If we could kill Zu An that easily, why would we even bother plotting the earlier scheme for him? We would have just assassinated him outright!

"Don't worry, we've found a way to kill him," replied Shi Lezhi.

"Oh? What is it?" Mei Chaofeng's interest was piqued. He would love nothing more than to kill that bastard with his own hands and vent his anger.

"Do you remember the bizarre melody he played on the dueling ring yesterday?" asked Shi Lezhi.

"Of course I do! He calls it bee gee em or something," replied Mei Chaofeng in a huff. Even he had to admit that the melody was quite cool, albeit excessive.

"Zu An uses a seashell to play the music, and based on the results of our investigation, the seashell is the personal possession of a foreign language teacher of Brightmoon Academy. It seems like she has never lent it to anyone else before," said Shi Lezhi.

Mei Chaofeng was surprised. "Is that fellow involved with Shang Liuyu too?"

Zu An's wife was the number one beauty of Brightmoon City, and he was rumored to be in a relationship with many beautiful women in the academy too. To this day, the legend of the Moochlord was still spreading all around the city, creating a huge hype.

Mei Chaofeng could understand if that was all there was to it. Those women were mostly young lasses who tended to be gullible after all. But who could have thought that even a gorgeous, mature woman like Shang Liuyu would be involved with that fellow too?

He began doubting his own common sense. Are men like Zu An in trend nowadays?

He thought about how he could only toy with women like Madam Zhang—and it even brought him trouble in the end!—whereas Zu An was involved with several of the most beautiful and distinguished women in Brightmoon City all at once. This disparity left him feeling so sour as if he had been plunged into a vat of vinegar. He was envious.

“We don’t know what his relationship with Shang Liuyu is, but it seems like they are quite close with one another,” said Shi Lezhi.

“Tomorrow, when he arrives at the academy, we’ll ask him out for a private meeting using Shang Liuyu’s name. In one of your reports to the young master, you mentioned that Plum Blossom Thirteen spotted them together in a gazebo near the academy. We’ll ask him out there. I reckon that he wouldn’t turn down the invitation.”

“Very well. I’ll make sure to tear off that bastard’s kin and rip off his tendons so as to vent my anger!” Mei Chaofeng clenched his fists tightly.

...

You have successfully trolled Mei Chaofeng for +812 Rage!

Looking at the sudden inflow of Rage points, Zu An snorted. That fellow sure carries a huge grudge for me. Oh well, he’s locked behind bars right now, so he’s no longer a threat anymore.

So, he turned his attention back to Chu Chuyan and said, “Honey, you really aren’t going to consider allowing me to move over? I mean, you even went to the extent of admitting to sleeping with me in public!”

“What about it?” Chu Chuyan’s tone was impassive.

“Just think about it! What a loss it would be if you have to bear such a reputation when we aren’t even staying together, right?” explained Zu An. “It’s out of consideration for you that I’m suggesting for us to stay together with one another!”

“...” Chu Chuyan.

Knowing that it was impossible for her to win this thick-skinned man in an argument, she decisively shut her doors on him.

Zu An’s nose was nearly struck by the slamming doors, and he hurriedly backed away in fear. Then, he sighed deeply. “Haaa, it looks like there’s still a long way to go.”

Meanwhile, at the master bedroom of the Chu Estate, Chu Zhongtian explained everything that had happened in the courtroom to his wife. In the end, he concluded wistfully, “Ah Zu looks like a reckless person on the surface, and his words tend to be jarring too. However, he has a sharp mind that allows

him to analyze a problem and tackle it at its roots. There were many times where I was still in the midst of processing the situation when he had already launched a counterattack.”

“Is he really that formidable?” asked Qin Wanru skeptically.

“I’ve already told you everything that happened, so you should be able to come to a judgment yourself. If you still reserve some doubts about this matter, you can seek Chuyan for further clarifications too.” Chu Zhongtian was a little displeased to hear his wife’s doubt. Do I look like someone who just runs my mouth without careful thought?

Qin Wanru frowned. “Then why does he portray himself as a good-for-nothing all these years?”

Chu Zhongtian shook his head. “I don’t know either. We should find a suitable time to ask him about it.”

“Say, is it possible for him to be a spy sent by other clans?” asked Qin Wanru.

“It doesn’t seem like it,” replied Chu Zhongtian. “To be honest, I was indeed surprised when he won the Clans Tournament back then, but I didn’t think much about it. After all, he’s only at the third rank. However, his performance in the courtroom today made him realize that he’s a person with keen situation awareness. I think it’s more likely that Chuyan just happened to stumble upon a good husband.”

“You shouldn’t come to a conclusion that quickly.” Qin Wanru harrumphed. “Have you forgotten Chu Chuyan’s intention for seeking a husband? If Zu An is as capable as you put him out to be, and he intentionally hid his capability thus far, there’s a good chance that he might have his own plans in mind. His presence might not necessarily be a blessing for the Chu clan.”

“Surely it’s not as severe as you think?” replied Chu Zhongtian sheepishly.

“Have you forgotten about our Youzhao?” exclaimed Qin Wanru. “We might be able to keep his conditions under wraps from outsiders, but there’s no way we can hide it from Zu An for long. If Zu An learns of Youzhao’s condition and bears ill will toward him, what will become of our Chu clan? By then, what will happen to our Chuyan? She would be put in a difficult position!”

Chu Zhongtian hesitated for a moment and said, “If that’s the case, we should consider having Chuyan inherit the Chu clan. She has sacrificed too much for the Chu clan over the years.”

“But the royal court and the other clans would never approve of it!” Qin Wanru sighed deeply. “Forget it. We’ll just have to take a step at a time and see how it goes.”

...

The following morning, Zu An woke up and headed for Brightmoon Academy. Now that he was a teacher, attending the academy didn’t feel like a chore anymore. On the contrary, he looked forward to exploiting his authority as a teacher everyday.

Chu Huanzhao wanted to accompany him to the academy, but Qin Wanru stopped her. The latter felt that her second daughter was getting far too close to her brother-in-law, so under the pretext that she was still injured from the Clans Tournament, she insisted on having her rest at home.

As for Chu Chuyan, she hardly went to the academy in the first place, not to mention that she was also injured at the moment. Naturally, she didn't go with Zu An either.

Due to that, Zu An's silhouette looked particularly lonesome today... Well, that lackey Cheng Shouping couldn't really be considered as a companion after all!

Earlier in the morning, the Chu clan received the news that Mei Chaofeng had escaped from prison. Out of worry, Chu Zhongtian assigned more guards to Zu An's side in order to protect him. These guards were from the Red Cloak Army, and they were skilled in collaborative assault. Even when faced with an enemy of higher cultivation rank, they could at least hold their own until reinforcement arrived.

So, Zu An was able to arrive at Brightmoon Academy without any problem. He was a little disappointed as he thought that Mei Chaofeng would try to spring an assault on him on the way, but it turned out that he was just a coward who had chosen to hole himself up.

To be frank, he was even more infuriated at the City Lord Estate. He didn't think that they would be so incompetent as to allow Mei Chaofeng to escape from prison. Had it not been for the fact that they were in King Qi's faction, he would have thought that the City Lord Estate had intentionally let Mei Chaofeng loose.

Having arrived at the academy, Zu An looked at the ravishing youthful women walking by him, and he suddenly felt refreshed. This was much more of a pleasing sight than the disgusting Shit Kun and Mei Chaofeng.

Seeing that there was still some time before the first class, he headed over to Shang Liuyu's residence, intending to use the pretext of returning her recording seashell to her in order to visit her.

This was a trick he had learned from his peers in his previous life. One of the most common tricks they used to approach a woman was to borrow some of their items so that they could ask them out to return it later on. By repeating this process several times, it was only a matter of time before they got close to one another.

He skipped merrily all the way to Shang Liuyu's residence and knocked on her door. When the door finally opened, he saw a properly-dressed Shang Liuyu sitting on a swing in the courtyard, stroking her zither lightly.

What a bummer. I thought that I might be able to see her in her sleepwear or something by coming by earlier.

There was a smile on Shang Liuyu's face as she took her seashell back from Zu An. "It looks like you have stirred quite a storm over the last two days. Your name has been echoing through the streets of the entire Brightmoon City."

"You don't look too surprised," remarked Zu An.

Even quietly watching the woman before him was enough to make Zu An feel fulfilled. It was no wonder why people called it 'feast for the eyes'.

"Someone who's able to compose that kind of melody can't possibly be a wastrel." Shang Liuyu gently stroked her zither, and a soothing note played under her fingers.

Zu An laughed. "You do have sharp eyes! I have innumerable strengths hidden within me. You'll soon come to realize that I have a treasure trove in me waiting to be uncovered!"

"..." Shang Liuyu.

She had no idea how to respond to those words at all. As if reflecting her feelings, a slight dissonance emerged in the melody she was playing.

Zu An continued hanging around for a bit longer before finally taking his leave. When he finally walked out of Shang Liuyu's residence, his footsteps were lighter than ever. Be it her euphonious voice or the melodious tunes she played, it made him feel like he was having an orgasm.

Not too long after returning to his classroom, a student suddenly stuffed a paper note into his hands, saying, "Teacher Shang told me to pass this to you!"

Zu An was taken aback. He unfolded the paper note and read its message: See you in the gazebo two hours from now.

Hm? Could this possibly be the start of the legendary confession scene I've seen so often in dramas and animes?

However, he quickly tossed away that thought. Something smells very fishy here. We have just met one another a moment ago, so how could she possibly be in such a rush to ask me out once more?

No matter how narcissistic he was, he didn't think that his charm was great enough to make the mild-tempered Shang Liuyu approach him so proactively.

More importantly, there was no way Shang Liuyu would task a student to pass a note to him on her behalf. This could easily spark rumors about their relationship in the academy, and it was something which she had been careful to avoid thus far.

He thought about how Mei Chaofeng had escaped from prison earlier in the morning, and a moment later, he decisively made his way toward the administrative office.

It didn't take long for him to arrive in the Principal's Office, where Jiang Luofu sat in her chair with her long legs resting casually on the flower pots in front of her.

Light grey color!

It was amazing how the color of Jiang Luofu's stockings was constantly changing, though what was even more remarkable was how everything simply looked nice on her.

It looks like having beautiful legs is the key here.

Yup, I'm definitely not ogling over here. I'm just looking at it on Wei Suo's behalf in case he asks me about it.

"You're here. It just so happens that I was about to look for you." Before Zu An could reveal the purpose behind his arrival, Jiang Luofu had already spoken up in advance.

Chapter 133: Surprise!

“What’s wrong?” asked Zu An in surprise.

“It’s about the slots into the dungeon,” replied Jiang Luofu as she crossed her legs leisurely. It was as if she was unaware of how tempting her casual movements were to men. “Do you want to enter the dungeon as a student or a teacher?”

After Zu An’s feat of defeating Yuan Wendong and Yuan Wenji in the dueling ring, no one would question his qualification to enter the dungeon anymore.

“Naturally, I want to enter as a teacher!” replied Zu An.

It was better being a teacher. It looked good on him, and he could exploit his standing too.

“As a teacher, you’ll have to be responsible for the students’ safety in the dungeon,” said Jiang Luofu.

Zu An was taken aback to hear those words. He was entering the dungeon in order to look for the Evanescent Lotus, so it would be inconvenient for him to have to take care of the other students on top of that. So, he argued, “Isn’t the very purpose of the students entering the dungeon is to challenge themselves? It’s counterproductive to assign teachers to shield them from danger. Those kids would never mature if we keep tucking them under our wings like little hatchlings!”

“Kids?” Jiang Luofu was rendered speechless. That fellow is a student himself too, and he’s trying to preach here like he’s superior to the rest of them.

She exhaled deeply before explaining the matter, “The dungeon is as much of a menace as it is an opportunity. There would always be casualties each time a dungeon opens, which is why the academy is forced to put some restrictions in place in order to manage risk. Only fifth rank and selected fourth rank cultivators are allowed to move freely in the dungeon. As for the rest, they are to follow a group led by a teacher.”

After gaining a rough grasp of the situation, Zu An finally nodded and said, “No problem. It’s not as if any students would select my group anyway.”

“...” Jiang Luofu.

This fellow’s thought process really is different from the others. Haaa, forget it. I’ll just send more teachers in then.

“Alright. Let’s move on to the second matter then,” said Jiang Luofu. “The academy needs you to step forward and take over all of the businesses of the Plum Blossom Sect in our stead. You should be aware that it isn’t apt for us to step forward to handle this sort of matter.”

Zu An was amused. “Didn’t I already hand the debt note to you? You should be the one handling the aftermath, so why are you leaving it to me now?”

“I was planning on making a move, but that lawsuit of yours ended up sending Mei Chaofeng straight to jail. The Plum Blossom Sect is on the verge of collapsing right now, and there are many people eyeing their lucrative businesses right now. It’s just that they are curbing one another at the moment, so no one has been able to make a move yet,” said Jiang Luofu.

“However, it’s different from you. Everyone knows that the Plum Blossom Sect owes you 7,500,000 silver taels, so you have the legitimacy to take over its businesses. On top of that, the academy will be providing you support from the back, so you should be able to handle it with ease.”

“Aren’t you pushing me out to borrow the Chu clan’s name for this matter?” Zu An pointed out.

It was likely that Brightmoon Academy had its own plan to collect the debt, but Mei Chaofeng’s sudden imprisonment messed things up. Everyone’s eyes were on the businesses of the Plum Blossom Sect right now, leaving Brightmoon Academy was in an inconvenient position to make a move here. It was still an academy under the royal court after all, so it wouldn’t look good if it were to get involved directly in such matters. As such, it needed someone to step forward in its place.

The best candidate here was indubitably Zu An. Not only did he have legitimacy, but he also could borrow the name of the Chu clan to pressure the others. Even if he was doing it on his own accord, the other powers would still think he was representing the Chu clan.

Once the other powers realize that the academy had joined hands with the Chu clan, they would have no choice but to back down.

“It isn’t a good thing for a man to be too smart.” Jiang Luofu tapped her brush lightly on the table as she looked at Zu An with a playful smile.

“I won’t do it. It’s not like I’m getting anything out of this anyway,” Zu An rejected it without any hesitation.

“Oh?” Jiang Luofu was unfazed by Zu An’s rejection. “I guess I’ll have to pick another person to take your slot for the Ursae Dungeon then.”

Zu An immediately slapped a smile on his face and replied, “Ahahaha, I’m just kidding. As a teacher of the academy, it’s only right for me to do my part and share the academy’s burden. Besides, I was the one who gave you the debt note in the first place. It’s only right for me to clean up the mess. Leave it to me!”

Jiang Luofu stared at Zu An silently for a long moment before exhaling deeply. “I must say, you’re the most thick-skinned person I have seen in recent years... Speaking of which, you were looking for me?”

Zu An’s eyes immediately gleamed as he began speaking, “Actually, it’s the same matter as what you were saying...”

He quickly explained the situation to Jiang Luofu.

“You want to get me to subdue Mei Chaofeng for you?” Jiang Luofu harrumphed.

“I mean, just think about it. Mei Chaofeng definitely knows a lot of secrets surrounding the Plum Blossom Sect, such as its accounting logs, cash flow, procurement of resources, and so on. Even if you take over the Plum Blossom Sect’s businesses, you’ll have trouble maintaining them without such vital information, right?” explained Zu An.

“I guess your words do make some sense. Fine, I’ll accompany you then!” Jiang Luofu finally stood up from her chair, which made her tall stature even more apparent.

Along the way to the gazebo, the two of them began chatting.

"I'm quite curious as to how you managed to defeat the Yuan brothers in the dueling ring the other day. Your swordplay was a little different from our academy's Elementary Swordplay."

"It can't be helped. I'm simply too talented, so my understanding of the sword art goes far deeper than anyone else's."

"... You're obviously on good terms with Shang Liuyu. You still lied to me previously that you don't know her at all."

"How could I possibly dare to lie to you? I really didn't know her back then!"

"How far have you progressed with her? I haven't seen her allowing anyone to enter her residence for many years now, let alone lending her personal possession to others."

"Is it really fine for you, the principal of Brightmoon Academy, to gossip about your own subordinates?"

...

Amidst their conversation, they finally arrived in the vicinity of the gazebo. Jiang Luofu kept a distance away while Zu An walked toward the gazebo by himself.

Even from a distance away, he could see a person with long fluttering hair sitting in the gazebo, dressed in an attire that resembled that of Shang Liuyu's.

But bro, have you ever seen how wide your back is? Even if you wear a woman's clothes, there's no one in the world who could possibly mistake you for a lady, let alone someone as beautiful as Shang Liuyu!

Who could have possibly thought that the sect master of the Plum Blossom Sect would actually be a cross-dressing perv!

However, out of consideration that Mei Chaofeng had gone all out to even dress up for the occasion, it would be rude of Zu An not to cooperate with him.

"Big sister Shang, why did you ask me out here?" Zu An called out Mei Chaofeng with a tender voice. Of course, he made sure not to get too close to the gazebo lest the latter OHKO'd him.

"You thought that it was Shang Liuyu, but it's I, Mei Chaofeng! Hahahaha!" Mei Chaofeng tossed the wig he was wearing aside, ripped up the dress he was wearing on top of his clothes, and turned around to face Zu An triumphantly.

"H-how could it be you? Where's big sister Shang?!" exclaimed Zu An in horror.

In the shadows, Jiang Luofu rolled her eyes. Wow, his acting sure is horrendous.

"There's no big sister Shang here. It has been me from the start to the end! Are you surprised? Hahaha!"

The fluster in Zu An's eyes left Mei Chaofeng feeling so exhilarated that he could moan in pleasure! He had suffered so much due to Zu An over the last few days, and he was finally able to return the favor now!

"It's you!" Zu An subconsciously staggered backward in fright. "No, this can't be. How could your arms possibly stretch into the academy too?!"

"It's all thanks to the young master's massive influence, or else it would have been hard for me to grab hold of the slippery loach you are!"

Mei Chaofeng was in no hurry to kill Zu An. It's all due to this bastard that I ended up losing everything. How could I let him off the hook so easily? I need to make him suffer and enjoy his screams of agony in order to placate the wrath boiling in my blood!

"Is the young master you're talking about Shi Kun?"

Zu An already knew their relationship beforehand, but the same couldn't be said about the woman listening in to their conversation. He was trying to get Mei Chaofeng to confess to it before her.

"Of course it's..." Halfway through his words Mei Chaofeng suddenly realized that he was being sounded out here. So, he harrumphed coldly and said, "Hmph, you want to know who the young master is? I won't let you have your way! I want you to die indignant and ignorant!"

"You want to kill me?" Zu An clasped his head in horror. "I'm the son-in-law of the Chu clan, as well as a teacher of the academy. If you dare to touch me, neither the Chu clan nor the academy will let you off!"

"Hahaha, I might have hesitated over that in the past, but what do I have to lose now? Thanks to you, I've lost everything. There's no way I can remain in Brightmoon City anymore. After killing you, I'll head to another city and live a carefree life. Once I'm gone, what can the Chu clan or the academy do about me?" Mei Chaofeng laughed coldly.

"They have already put out a warrant for you. You could have simply left the city, but you chose to bear the risk in order to assassinate me. Someone must have promised you a new life elsewhere if you successfully take my life!" Zu An continued trying to probe deeper.

"Does it make a difference? You're an eyesore to me. I should have sliced you into pieces right from the start!" sneered Mei Chaofeng. "Why don't you try kneeling down and begging me for mercy? I might just consider having mercy on you and bestow upon you a quick death!"

Of course, even if Zu An really pleaded for mercy, there was no way he would let Zu An die an easy death. He wanted to humiliate Zu An by making him beg like a dog before plunging him into despair by reneging on his words.

Seeing this, Zu An sighed softly and said, "What makes you so certain that you'd be able to kill me?"

"Your confidence must be bursting after defeating Yuan Wendong in the Clans Tournament yesterday," scoffed Mei Chaofeng. "You must be unaware that Yuan Wendong is a weakling who has only barely managed to reach the fifth rank. Despite his weakness, he still got complacent and fell for your tricks, resulting in his defeat. But before me, you stand no chance at all!"

Right after saying those words, his powerful aura burst forth as he took a step forward. He eyed Zu An intently, hoping to relish in the terror reflected in the latter's eyes.

Unfortunately, Zu An wasn't giving him what he wanted. "It's no wonder why you ended up serving others your entire life. The scope and depth of your thoughts are narrowed by your long years of

subordination. All you think of is minor schemes and pitting your life against others. However, for those who are in positions of power like me, we don't even have to lift a finger to deal with someone like you."

"???" Jiang Luofu.

Mei Chaofeng was taken aback by those words. He anxiously scanned the surroundings, and after confirming that there was no one around, he laughed disdainfully. "Don't even bother with that pathetic act of yours. The Chu clan's guards are currently waiting at the entrance of the academy, so there's no way they'll be able to make it here on time. Even if they did come to your rescue, they aren't a match for me either."

"Who said that I'm talking about them?" Zu An shrugged. "Shouldn't you have looked into my background before assassinating me? You should know that my nickname in the academy is 'Moochlord'. Except for special cases like the Clans Tournament, I wouldn't even bother dirtying my hands with my enemies' blood!"

"You're the most shameless man I've ever seen. You don't even have the slightest sense of shame for mooching off other women!" scoffed Mei Chaofeng.

"It's a capability in itself to be able to mooch off others; what do I have to be embarrassed about?" replied Zu An disdainfully. "If you're jealous, why don't you try mooching off a woman too? If you can, that is."

You have successfully trolled Mei Chaofeng for +514 Rage!

"I..." Mei Chaofeng choked at Zu An's remark. It took him quite a while before he was able to compose himself. "Yuan Wendong might be trash, but he did get one thing right—it's futile to rely on women. In the end, the only one whom you can really count on is yourself. Look at the current situation, who can you summon to save you now? Chu Chuyan? Pei Mianman? Or Shang Liuyu? Try calling them here now then."

The Shi clan had already done its homework in advance. Chu Chuyan and Pei Mianman were not in the academy today, and Shang Liuyu wasn't known for her cultivation. As for Chu Huanzhao, Ji Xiaoxi, and the others, they didn't pose a threat to him at all.

"Try calling a woman out right now then. Aren't you proud of your mooching skills?" sneered Mei Chaofeng.

Zu An shook his head and said, "Someone like you is destined to never understand the frustrations of a popular man like me. Forget it, I'll fulfill your wish this once then. Gorgeous principal, come out!"

"Gorgeous principal? Jiang Luofu?!" Mei Chaofeng gasped in horror.

If Zu An wasn't lying to him, it would really be disastrous. A cultivator of Jiang Luofu's level could slaughter him as easily as squashing an ant. Out of fright, he quickly scanned the surroundings, but to his relief, nothing happened at all.

"Hahaha, you're making me laugh my head out! You actually thought that you could mooch off Principal Jiang? Who do you think you are? Stop daydreaming here!" Mei Chaofeng was finally able to set his

heart at ease. "However, you did remind me that we are too close to the academy right now. Someone might just come by if I continue to dawdle here. Since that's the case... meet your death!"

Blue lightning crackled around Mei Chaofeng's fist as he charged forward and smashed it toward Zu An. The sheer force of his attack was so great that even before it landed, Zu An already found himself suffocating under its might.

"Holy shit!" Seeing that Jiang Luofu wasn't making a move at all, Zu An realized that he might have gone too far this time around.

Chapter 134: They Are My Wife and Children Now!

Zu An immediately used the fake Sunflower Phantasm to dodge to the side, successfully surviving Mei Chaofeng's first strike.

Unfortunately, Mei Chaofeng had seen his movement skill the other day too, so he knew how to overcome it as well. With a cold harrumph, he hurled another punch over, but this time, he made sure to seal off Zu An's path of escape.

Cornered, Zu An had no choice but to use the real Sunflower Phantasm to dodge this strike. While evading the attack, he cried aloud, "Gorgeous Principal Jiang, I know my mistakes now! Save me! If I die here, there won't be anyone to help you take over the Plum Blossom Sect!"

"Hm?" Mei Chaofeng had no idea how Zu An managed to dodge his attack at all. Perplexed, he hurriedly tried to follow up with another attack, only to recoil in shock in the next moment.

A woman had suddenly appeared right in front of Zu An.

Her long beautiful legs were as attractive as ever, but Mei Chaofeng's attention was captured by the pencil she was holding in her hand. "P-Principal Jiang!"

Zu An heaved a sigh of relief. "Principal Jiang, you're finally willing to come out!"

"Didn't you say that someone who is in a position of power like you and need not lift a finger at all? What a wonder it is for me to spot you in such a terrible position, isn't it? Hm?" remarked Jiang Luofu with an enigmatic smile.

"Hahaha, my useless mouth just can't help but brag. Don't mind it too much!" Zu An laughed it off sheepishly. This woman sure is narrow-minded. She actually got offended by those remarks.

"I heard that you're intending to mooch off me too?" However, Jiang Luofu wasn't intending on letting him off the hook so easily.

"Of course I am!" replied Zu An matter-of-factly.

"What did you say?" Jiang Luofu frowned.

"I mean, I haven't managed to mooch off you yet." Zu An quickly changed his words. "Hey, Mei Chaofeng is getting away!"

While the two of them were chattering off, Mei Chaofeng immediately sprinted off with all his might. From the moment Jiang Luofu appeared before his eyes, he had already realized that there was no way he would be able to kill Zu An anymore. In fact, under normal circumstances, he would have already been a goner, but by a stroke of luck, she ended up getting distracted, creating an opening for him to escape.

Jiang Luofu raised her head calmly before casually swiping the pencil in her hand across the air with a cold harrumph.

Mei Chaofeng felt a chilling sensation on his legs before abruptly tumbling forward.

“What happened?”

Bewildered by this mystifying situation, he turned around to take a look, only to see his legs standing upright on the ground several meters behind him. Then, he lowered his head to take a look at himself and saw that half of his legs had been amputated. It was also then that the pain finally started setting in, and he let out of a shriek of agony.

Zu An gulped. He secretly glanced at Jiang Luofu’s side profile as he quietly patted his chest in relief.

Holy shit! I didn’t know she was this strong! If she really held a grudge against me for all of the remarks I’ve made, wouldn’t I have already died several times by now?

Just look at what happened to Mei Chaofeng!

Ah, but again, he isn’t as good-looking as I am. It might just be the disparity in our looks.

“I’ll leave the rest to you.” Jiang Luofu couldn’t even be bothered to talk to Mei Chaofeng. She took a seat in the gazebo and naturally rested her legs on the bench.

Zu An walked over to Mei Chaofeng’s side gleefully and gazed down at him from above, “You thought that it was just me, but Principal Jiang is here too! Are you surprised?”

“...” Mei Chaofeng.

You have successfully trolled Mei Chaofeng for +1024 Rage!

He would have never known that the tables would be turned on him so quickly. The words that he had just spoken were returned to him right away.

“You son of a bitch! What are you acting so smug for? You’re nothing more than a weakling who relies on women!” Mei Chaofeng gritted his teeth furiously.

You have successfully trolled Mei Chaofeng for +1024 Rage!

Zu An sighed deeply and said, “Don’t you think that it takes true skills to be able to tap into the strength of others?”

“How could you possibly be able to get Principal Jiang’s help? This is impossible...” murmured Mei Chaofeng in disbelief. He couldn’t accept how things had turned out.

"This is the privilege entitled to good-looking people like me. Hideous beings like you will never understand it." Zu An looked at Mei Chaofeng in pity.

"..." Mei Chaofeng.

You have successfully trolled Mei Chaofeng for +666 Rage!

Zu An took a step sideward to dodge the blood spurting out of Mei Chaofeng's wounds due to his emotions getting the better of him.

Wow. The people in this world sure are tenacious like cockroaches. Even in such a state, he still hasn't fainted yet.

"This reminds me of my encounter with Plum Blossom Twelve. He also persevered for a very long time before he finally collapsed," remarked Zu An cheerily.

"You were indeed the one who killed Twelve!" Mei Chaofeng glared at Zu An furiously. Just thinking about how he had the tables turned on him yesterday despite having spoken the truth made blood rush to his head in a fit of anger.

You have successfully trolled Mei Chaofeng for +999 Rage!

Zu An walked up to Mei Chaofeng and squatted down in front of him. "Plum Blossom Twelve tried to kill me, so I returned the favor to him. It's justified self-defense. Now that I've satisfied your curiosity, it's time for you to spill the beans. Tell me where your accounting book and assets are. And not to forget, your connections with other officials, your supply routes, and all of the vital information concerning your businesses."

Mei Chaofeng had chosen to lie down on the ground, seemingly having accepted his fate. Nevertheless, Zu An's words still made him laugh in ridicule, "Just how foolish do you think I am to tell you all of those?"

You have successfully trolled Mei Chaofeng for +730 Rage!

"Don't you know that being able to die an easy death is a blessing as well?" Zu An sighed deeply as he gazed down at Mei Chaofeng with eyes filled with sympathy.

"Hmph! Try your worst then! I won't be a man if I even let out even a squeak!" The Plum Blossom Sect had tortured innumerable people over the years for information, so Mei Chaofeng was familiar with how interrogation worked.

"It looks like people in this world really do lack imagination. Well, let me educate you a little." Zu An moved a boulder from the side over and settled himself down on it, reminiscent of a bard getting into a comfortable position for a long story.

"You should have heard about how eels and loaches dive into any holes that they see, right? If I strip you bare and throw into a barrel filled with eels and loaches, where do you think they'll head into?"

"If that isn't enough for you to talk, we could have you buried into the ground, revealing only just your head. I'd slice the skin at the top of your head and pour mercury in. Before long, you'll find yourself itching from head to toe. It would be so unbearable that you would be wiggling desperately, hoping to

alleviate the itch, but of course, what could you do when you're stuck in the ground with nowhere to go. Eventually, you're left with no choice but to dive out, tearing your skin out of your body. Hmmm, would a person without skin start bleeding profusely? I guess we could put that to the test."

...

Those bizarre torture methods made even Jiang Luofu's heart skip a beat. Where in the world did someone as young as him learn of all of these vicious means?

"Brat, kill me if you want to! There's no use talking such crap with me!" Despite Mei Chaofeng's words of bravado, his quivering voice gave his fear away. He suddenly felt that the Plum Blossom Sect didn't look that vile anymore compared to the great villain standing before him.

You have successfully trolled Mei Chaofeng for +444 Rage!

"I'm not done yet. Based on what I know, you fooled around with quite a few women over the years. You don't harbor any feelings for most of them, but it seems there's an exception. If my memory fails me not, there's a woman living in the northern part of the city who goes by the name of Wang Cuihua. She bore twins for you, did she? Ahh, it must be relieving for you to depart with the knowledge that your blood continues to exist in this world even after your death," remarked Zu An with a smile.

Mei Chaofeng's eyes immediately reddened. He quickly turned to Jiang Luofu and roared anxiously, "Principal Jiang, is the academy going to condone such actions? 'Never bring one's family into the picture'—that's a rule that even those in the underworld like us observe!"

Before Jiang Luofu could respond, Zu An had already cut right in. "Who says that I'm going to harm them? I just want to reassure you that you don't have to worry about them after your death. I'll make sure to take good care of your wife and raise your children as if my own. Ah, I should probably call them my wife and my children now."

"You!!!" Mei Chaofeng was so angry that he wanted to lurch at Zu An to tear his head off, but Jiang Luofu's earlier strike had severed his ki meridians as well, leaving him utterly powerless at the moment.

You have successfully trolled Mei Chaofeng for +999 Rage!

"Have you thought it through yet?" asked Zu An. "Do you want to just get it over and done with, or do you want to first suffer a little first before finally caving in to my demands? I don't particularly mind it either way."

Why in the hell did I get myself involved with this demon!

Mei Chaofeng began sobbing sorrowfully. He was intending to grit his teeth through Zu An's torture and die a valiant death, but he wasn't even given that option at all. He knew deep down that he would never toil through the tortures Zu An spoke of, not to mention that the latter was even holding his wife and children as hostages against him.

This wasn't even a choice at all.

"There are two accounting books for the Plum Blossom Sect. One of them is in the secret chamber in my study room, and the other one is located in a secret compartment in my bedroom..."

Mei Chaofeng stared numbly at the blue sky above him as he monotonously revealed everything regarding the Plum Blossom Sect.

“Fucking Zu An, you’ll die a horrible death!” Mei Chaofeng cursed with gritted teeth. He could already feel himself coming closer to death’s embrace as blood continued to flow out of his legs.

You have successfully trolled Mei Chaofeng for +999 Rage!

Zu An smiled in response, “My apologies, but according to my wife, good people tend to die prematurely whereas vermins plague the world for centuries. It looks like I still have hundreds of years ahead of me.”

Pu~

Unable to take it anymore, Mei Chaofeng spurted a mouthful of blood.

Just like that, the powerhouse who had ruled Brightmoon City’s underworld for decades was angered to death. Even in his dying breath, his eyes continued to glower in indignation.

You have successfully trolled Mei Chaofeng for +1024 Rage!

Zu An rushed over to the gazebo and exclaimed excitedly, “Gorgeous principal, I’ve accomplished my mission perfectly!”

Jiang Luofu looked at Zu An with a conflicted gaze. “It must be agonizing to be your enemy.”

Zu An flashed her an innocent smile in response, saying, “I’m also glad that you’re a friend too.”

Jiang Luofu harrumphed softly before rising to her feet. “Let’s go, I’ll get someone to clean up this area afterward. As for the takeover of the Plum Blossom Sect later on, I’ll send someone over to help you with it later on.”

“You can leave it to me!” Zu An patted his chest as he gave his guarantee.

Just like that, the two of them returned to the academy.

...

Two hours later, Shi Kun finally heard of the news and ended up dropping his cup onto the floor. “Mei Chaofeng is dead? How can that be possible?”

Shi Lezhi replied grimly, “I’ve verified it personally. There’s no doubt about it.”

“This doesn’t make sense. Mei Chaofeng is a pinnacle fifth rank cultivator, so killing Zu An should have been a walk in the park for him. How could he have failed?” Shi Kun couldn’t understand what was going on.

Snow remarked softly by the side, “Young master, someone spotted Zu An returning back to the academy together with Principal Jiang.”

“Jiang Luofu? Are you saying that she’s working with Zu An now?” Shi Kun was appalled. Jiang Luofu’s cultivation and standing made her a dangerous enemy. He would think twice whether he really had the means to deal with her right now.

"It should just be a coincidence. Mei Chaofeng might have just been unlucky to bump into her," remarked Shi Lezhi. Not even in his wildest imagination could he fathom any sort of relationship between Zu An and Jiang Luofu.

Shi Kun also shared the same thoughts too. "Goddamnit! Why does that scoundrel have such good luck?"

This was not the first trap he had laid for Zu An, but the latter was able to overcome them every single time.

"Young master, the Ursae Dungeon will be opening three days from now. No one will know if we make a move against him there. I'll make a move personally then to destroy him for good!" said Snow.

Shi Kun nodded in agreement. "That's the best we can do for now. I'll bring in a batch of people into the dungeon to aid you."

As Zu An got stronger, the threat he posed would become greater as well. Every night that passed, there was a chance that the woman he had set his eyes upon could lose her chastity. This was not something he could accept.

Chapter 135: The Tenth Beauty

Over the next three days, Zu An busied himself with taking over the businesses and connections of the Plum Blossom Sect under the aid of the academy.

Shi Kun was aware of his movements, but he chose not to make a move at all. That fellow is dead meat once we enter the Ursae Dungeon anyway. There's no reason for me to deal with him right now.

Meanwhile, the academy also began holding selections for the dungeon slots. All fifth rank cultivators received a free pass whereas the others had to undergo an intense tournament to prove themselves qualified.

The dungeon was filled with dangers after all. A weakling who couldn't protect himself in the dungeon was likely to end up dying in vain.

At the end of the selection, the weakest cultivator to get selected to enter the dungeon was at third rank.

The world of cultivation was truly pragmatic.

Just like what Jiang Luofu had mentioned, chances were reserved only for those who proved themselves worthy. The round of selections ensured that those who could enter were all experts, and the opportunities offered in the dungeon would only further widen the disparity between the strong and the weak. This meant that the weak would never be able to catch up with the footsteps of the strong.

It looks like it's the same for all worlds, huh? Lag behind others for one step, and you'll lag behind them your entire life.

Once again, Zu An was gladdened by the connections he had. He was able to reserve a slot for himself without having to undergo the selections at all. Wahahaha!

The morning of the third day, the selected students marched off to the mountain at the back of Brightmoon Academy, a place which was usually forbidden to both students and teachers alike.

A major reason why the royal court had been able to monopolize the dungeons was because most major academies were established in the vicinity of dungeons. There were even some academies where a dungeon was located on the academy compound, and such was the case for Brightmoon Academy.

Dungeons had existed in this world since time immemorial, and the ki around them tended to be far richer. Having academies established near dungeons created favorable cultivation conditions for the students.

There was a clearing in the middle of the bamboo forest behind Brightmoon Academy, where several straw huts stood. In each of these straw huts resided a senior teacher of the academy. It seemed like they were camping out here to guard something.

At the very center of the clearing was a gate-like structure that somewhat resembled a door. Space in the center of this door appeared a little distorted, creating something reminiscent of a vortex.

"This is the entrance into the dungeon. This door usually looks no different from the gates you would see in the city, and only on specific days would you see it in its current state. It should take a while longer before the portal is fully opened." Chu Chuyan was here with Zu An today. Noticing the curious gleam in his eyes, she began explaining to him how things worked here.

"You seem to be very knowledgeable about all of this. Have you entered this dungeon before?" asked Zu An.

Chu Chuyan shook her head and replied, "This dungeon only opens once every few decades, so it's my first time here too. It's a pity that Huanzhao is missing this opportunity due to her injuries."

Chu Huanzhao wanted to come too, but the injuries she had sustained at the Clans Tournament were simply too severe. Her fighting prowess was only so-so even at her peak condition, let alone in her weakened state. Out of worry for her, Chu Zhongtian and Qin Wanru forbade her from entering the dungeon.

Due to this, she threw quite a huge tantrum. In the end, she forced Zu An to bring back some 'local specialties' from the dungeon for her before finally revealing a smile.

"I still don't understand why you insist on entering this dungeon. You should have heard of the dangers that lurk within dungeons, right?" asked Chu Chuyan.

A smile formed on Zu An's lips as he replied, "Are you worried about me?"

Chu Chuyan replied impassively, "I'm just giving you a warning lest you die foolishly in there. It would be troublesome for our Chu clan to find another son-in-law!"

"Rest assured, I'm a person born under a lucky star. I'll definitely be able to walk out of the dungeon alive," replied Zu An cheekily.

Chu Chuyan turned her head away with a cold harrumph.

“Chuyan, your husband is going in too? Do you need us to look after him as well?” a seductively sweet voice suddenly sounded.

Zu An turned around to take a look, only to find himself faced with huge racks.

Pei Mianman keeps strutting around parading that good figure of hers. Does she not know how embarrassing it is for men to have a bleeding nose in public?!

“There’s no need for that. How can he mature under the protection of others? Besides, he’s entering the dungeon as a teacher. It wouldn’t do for him to be taken care of by his students instead,” replied Chu Chuyan.

“Oh? You’re finally acknowledging that I’m a teacher now, uh? Come, call me Teacher Zu~” said Zu An.

Chu Chuyan choked on her breath. Unable to stand this fellow anymore, she ignored him and stomped away.

“How does it feel to have a beautiful wife whom you can see but not touch?” Pei Mianman walked over to Zu An’s side and asked teasingly.

“Why don’t you let me touch you, and I’ll give you an answer to your question?” replied Zu An.

“Are you cheating on your wife in public? What a horrible man you are~” Pei Mianman giggled softly.

Seeing their interactions, Chu Chuyan frowned a little. “Mianman, what are you doing over there?”

While she didn’t think that she was fond of Zu An, he was still her husband in-name. How could he flirt together with other women right in front of her?

“I’m coming~” replied Pei Mianman. She blinked at Zu An and said, “Your wife is getting jealous. This is a good start. Don’t forget our deal. You need to help me look for my accounting book.”

Leaving behind a peal of seductive laughter that seeped right into one’s bones, she turned around and took her leave. The men in the vicinity felt their hearts tingling in response to her laughter, which induced them to direct irked looks toward Zu An.

Just what’s so great about this guy that he’s able to win the fancy of so many beautiful women?

Shi Kun had also been watching their interaction, and his eyes flickered in worry. “I didn’t think Pei Mianman is on such good terms with that scoundrel. Will she get in the way of our plans?”

Shi Lezhi shook his head and replied, “I don’t think so. However, to be safe, we can get someone to lure her away first before making a move.”

Shi Kun nodded in agreement. “It’s a pity that you aren’t able to enter the dungeon with us, or else assassinating Zu An would have been a walk in the park.”

Shi Lezhi looked at the teachers guarding the dungeon’s portal and said, “Jiang Luofu will be personally standing guard with these teachers while the portal is active in order to prevent unauthorized cultivators from entering the portal and threatening the students. I don’t think it’s possible for me to

sneak in under their eyelids. However, the squad we have prepared is more than enough to kill Zu An ten times over, so I reckon that nothing will go wrong.”

“It’s fortunate that we spent a great deal of effort to slip Snow into the academy back then. It looks like we’re finally reaping the fruits of our labor,” replied Shi Kun with a nod.

“Speaking of which, the cultivation technique Snow practices is rather queer. It’s bizarre how no one in the academy has found out about her yet,” remarked Shi Lezhi.

“It seems to be a special ability of her clan. We should ask her more about it after this.” Shi Lezhi looked at a slender figure standing amidst the students with a satisfied smile on his lips. He was confident about his preparations too.

More and more people were gathering in this clearing, and all of them had excited looks on their faces. They were looking forward to entering the dungeon and stumbling upon all sorts of fortuitous encounters. If things go well, it might just spell their rise to greatness.

Zu An noticed that there were quite a few familiar faces amidst the crowd, such as Bai Susu, Lu De, Xie Xiu, Wu Qing, Zheng Dan, Ji Xiaoxi, and many others. Of course, there were many more students that he didn’t recognize, but they were likely to be students from the Sky class or Earth class.

Spotting Zheng Dan amidst the crowd, Zu An couldn’t help but wonder why she hadn’t been using her honey trap on him in recent days. News of Mei Chaofeng’s death had already spread far and wide, so it should have been an opportune moment for her to strike so as to claim the businesses of the Plum Blossom Sect. Or was she remaining idle because she thought that the 7,500,000 silver taels debt note had become scrap paper?

Ji Xiaoxi still looks as adorable as ever; it’s just a pity that she’s lathered with poison all over. I can’t even touch her hand.

While scanning through the students, Zu An caught sight of a slender figure dressed in light green. Despite having concealed her face with a translucent veil, the faint outline of facial features left hardly any doubt that she was a beautiful woman.

Who is she? I don’t recall having seen her in the academy before. She’s ravishing.

Hm? Her facial features look a little familiar...

It was also about then that he heard whispers coming from the students around him.

“Waaa, is that the mysterious tenth place of the Sweetheart Ranking?”

“It’s extremely rare to see her at the academy. It looks like she’s finally making an appearance due to the dungeon.”

“Hmm, what’s her name again? Why can’t I remember it?”

“I think she’s called Qiao Xue-something?”

“Isn’t it something Xueying?”

“Nonono, I remember it to be Qiao something-Ying.”

...

Zu An burst into laughter upon hearing their discussion. Those dunces. If you put it all together, isn't it just Qiao Xueying? Ah? Why does this name sound so familiar?

Wait a moment, what's her name again? Why can't I remember it all of a sudden?

Zu An's mind suddenly fuzzed out. Many names suddenly popped up in his mind simultaneously, and every single one of them seemed right yet not really so to him, leaving him utterly muddled.

You have successfully trolled Qiao Xueying for +233 Rage!

What?

The sudden notification from the system cleared Zu An's mind in an instant.

It's Snow! What is she doing here?

When he spotted Shi Kun earlier, he scanned the latter's entourage and noticed that Snow was conspicuously missing. It was weird why her name was popping up here all of a sudden.

He began to scan the entire clearing for anyone who could possibly be Snow, and eventually, his eyes fell upon the mysterious tenth place of the Sweetheart Ranking.

For a moment there, he seemed to see rage reflected in her eyes, but it vanished in a split moment that it left him wondering if he was seeing things.

He thought about how Wei Suo was unable to recall the name of the tenth beauty while introducing the top ten of the Sweetheart Ranking to him, and he suddenly noticed something really queer about that. Given Wei Suo's personality, it was nigh impossible for him to forget the name of a beauty.

Just earlier on, the whispering students knew all of the characters to her name, but for some inexplicable reason, they weren't able to piece it all together with certainty. Even Zu An himself ended up forgetting the name in a sudden moment of daze.

If not for the system's notification, he could have ended up like the other students too.

So, the elusive tenth beauty of the academy is actually Snow?!

No matter how wild Zu An's imagination could have been, there was no way he could have fathomed such a plot development. She's a maidservant in the Chu clan, but at the same time, she's also a student in the academy too? How in the world did she manage to do it? Shouldn't the Chu clan be aware of it too?

In fact, it's bizarre how someone as meticulous as Chu Chuyan failed to realize that her personal maidservant was her classmate too!

While he was still shocked over this matter, Jiang Luofu suddenly began walking toward the portal. As per usual, her legs veiled in stockings swiftly drew heated gazes from the nearby men. For some reason, she was wearing a pair of glasses today, which had the effect of mellowing down her usual domineering aura to draw out an air of elegance instead.

The crowd immediately fell silent. Other than Zu An, there was hardly anyone who would dare to act unruly in Jiang Luofu's presence, especially not with that imposing disposition of hers.

Jiang Luofu walked to the front of the crowd and shot a sweeping glance across the students before saying, "There's still an hour before the Ursae Dungeon opens. Before then, there are some things which I have to remind you of.

"You are elites of the academy, chosen through careful selections. Most of you are ambitious and bear great expectations for the dungeon, hoping to stumble upon all kinds of fortuitous encounters inside. There's no doubt that there are many opportunities awaiting you, but you ought to know that there are all kinds of dangers lurking within there too. Despite our warnings and the measures put in place, we would still have several casualties each time the dungeon opens. I don't expect it to be any different for your group. There are bound to be some who would lose their lives inside the dungeon for good."

Unease appeared on the faces of the crowd as they began whispering softly to one another.

Chapter 136: Who's Taking Care of Who?

Everyone had some idea of the dangers they were going to face in the dungeon, but subconsciously, they were still more focused on the gains rather than the risks. However, having someone of Principal Jiang's standing emphasizing this issue forced them to take the risks seriously.

"It's not too late to back down now. Once you enter the dungeon, you'll have to last till the tenth day, when the dungeon finally closes, in order to be teleported out. There's no way for you to leave in advance once you pass through the portal," Jiang Luofu scanned the crowd as she pointed out the risks calmly. "All of you have signed the liability waiver beforehand, so you should know that the academy will not be taking responsibility for anything that happens to you inside the dungeon."

The students glanced at one another in uncertainty, but none of them was willing to back down. It was hard for them to come this far, so they couldn't bring themselves to back out now just like that.

"The map of the Ursae Dungeon is randomized each time we enter it. Even with teachers guiding the way, it won't make too much of a difference," said Jiang Luofu. "All fourth rank and fifth rank cultivators will be moving on their own inside the dungeon. With your cultivation rank, you should be able to protect yourself. If you really wish to put your abilities to the test and sharpen your edge, it'd be best for you to move independently. As for the rest of you, you'll be following a teacher and exploring the dungeon in a group."

At this point, Jiang Luofu paused for a brief moment before continuing on, "In previous years, if an individual wishes to move independently, we would allow him to do as he pleases. However, there seems to be something unusual about this dungeon this time around, so it'll be better to tread carefully. If you haven't reached fourth rank yet, I recommend you to stay close to a teacher."

The crowd was a little disappointed to hear those words. They knew that it would be safer being by a teacher's side, but that also meant that they would get less out of the dungeon as well. Any fortuitous encounters they stumbled along the way would have to be shared with everyone else.

At that moment, a voice suddenly sounded, "Principal Jiang, are there any rules as to which students are paired to which teacher? After all, there are some teachers whose levels of strength are a little concerning to us. Wouldn't it be unfair if we are forcefully assigned into their groups?"

It was from Shi Kun.

If they wanted to deal with Zu An, it would be best for there to be fewer people by his side.

As he said those words, he turned his gaze toward Zu An, and laughter broke out amidst the crowd. It was indeed true that Zu An's cultivation rank was lower than many of the students present, so how could they count on him when danger struck?

Jiang Luofu naturally knew whom Shi Kun was referring to, and she replied calmly, "Since this involves the safety of our students, we won't be enforcing the student to join any groups. The students are free to choose which teacher they wish to go with."

As soon as those words were spoken, the students immediately rushed over toward some of the teachers, as if fearing that the academy would back down on its words.

"I choose Teacher Bai!"

"I choose Discipline Master Lu!"

"I choose Uncle Wang!"

...

It didn't take long for the students to finish their selection. There were many students who picked Bai Susu and Lu De, which wasn't surprising since they were the strongest teachers in the academy. Most teachers also had a couple of students around them too.

There was just one glaring exception—Zu An. He didn't have a single person by his side at all.

Laughter sounded in the clearing. Most students still tried to hold it back a little, but Shi Kun didn't even bother concealing his ridicule at all.

Chu Chuyan frowned. Zu An was still her husband in-name, so it made her feel uncomfortable to see him being publicly humiliated. She instinctively wanted to group with him, but she suddenly thought about the earlier advice for fifth rank cultivators to move independently. If she were to go to his side now, it would only make others think that she was trying to protect them, thus embarrassing him even further.

Qiao Xueying hesitated a little too. She was thinking of joining Zu An's group, and she could do so as her fifth rank cultivation hadn't been revealed yet. Being in the same group would make it much easier for her to make a move on him.

But she decided against it in the end. It was simply too jarring for her to join Zu An's group right before everyone. Furthermore, if she was the only one to return from the dungeon despite being paired with him, she would surely come under doubt too. It wouldn't be wise for her to make herself stand out right now.

It was then that a timid voice sounded. "I'll... join your group."

Ji Xiaoxi shyly shuffled to Zu An's side. Just saying these words aloud had sapped her courage dry, leaving her small face completely reddened.

Zu An felt touched. She sure is kind. It was obvious that she was intending to choose Bai Susu earlier, but upon seeing that there's no one by my side, she chose to come over here instead.

He was intending on rejecting her—just her goodwill would be enough for him—but on second thought, he remembered that his motive in the dungeon was to look for the Evanescent Lotus. Ji Xiaoxi was well-versed in all sorts of medicine, so she might be able to offer him substantial help regarding that. Thus, he decided to accept her in the end.

"Miss Ji, you must think twice! It's too dangerous being by his side!"

"Indeed! He's only a third rank cultivator. You should come with us instead."

...

Ji Xiaoxi's popularity was really showing through right now. There were many people who stood forward to advise her to change her mind.

"It's fine. Teacher Zu is actually quite formidable too," Ji Xiaoxi shook her head as she replied with a soft tone.

Pei Mianman secretly poked the cold beauty standing next to her and said, "Hey, it looks like your husband is quite popular with women."

Chu Chuyan was surprised by Ji Xiaoxi's action too. She had heard that Ji Xiaoxi had stood up for him once in the academy, but still, the fact that she was choosing him under such circumstances showed that they were really quite close with one another.

"Tsk, yet another one has stepped forward." Pei Mianman nudged Chu Chuyan and gestured forward.

Chu Chuyan raised her head and saw Zheng Dan walking toward Zu An's side as well.

"What's going on?"

The crowd was bewildered. They had never known Zheng Dan to be on good terms with Zu An.

Seeing this, Zu An found himself unable to stifle his smile. "Is Miss Zheng intending to join my group too?"

Zheng Dan shook her head and said, "That's not it. There's just one thing I would like to inform you of."

"Oh? What is it?" Zu An was perplexed.

Zheng Dan leaned closer to him and whispered softly, "You need to be careful. Someone is intending to take your life in the dungeon."

With those words, she flashed him a ravishing smile before returning back to her group.

The crowd exhaled deeply in relief upon seeing Zheng Dan's departure. It would be insane if even Zheng Dan chooses Zu An too. There's just no way a man can be that popular.

Zu An, on the other hand, fell into deep thought. Someone is intending to kill me? Is it Shi Kun and his group? Since even Snow is here today, it's likely that they're trying to pull something.

Zheng Dan looked at the grave expression on Zu An's face, and her lips curled up a little.

If Zu An was too weak to escape from Shi Kun's scheme, it wouldn't change anything at all, so Shi Kun wouldn't blame her either. However, if Zu An managed to get away, he would remember this debt and bear goodwill toward her.

This was a sure-win situation for her no matter what happened.

It's just a pity that Shi Kun is planning to have him assassinated in the dungeon. It would have been a good opportunity to get close to him if I could join his group. But now, I should probably keep my distance to avoid getting implicated.

Jiang Luofu frowned a little when she saw Ji Xiaoxi choosing to go with Zu An, but she chose to refrain from commenting on the matter. With the group selection completed, she began wrapping up her speech, "The deeper you proceed into the dungeon, the greater the degree of danger you'll face. Know your own limits and don't blindly charge ahead. Ultimately, what you can obtain in the dungeon depends on luck. There's no need to force it."

"Yes, Principal Jiang!" the students answered in unison.

It was then that the portal behind Jiang Luofu suddenly began distorting further, creating circular ripples across its surface. It took a while before the ripples finally calmed down, forming a light-blue translucent gateway. Concentrated ki could be sensed coming from the other side of the gateway.

The crowd was excited. If the concentration of ki was already at such a high level even while they were at the entrance of the portal, wouldn't it be even more amazing once they were inside?

"The portal into the dungeon has fully opened. I wish all of you the best of luck," said Jiang Luofu.

With Lu De and Bai Susu leading the crowd, the students began making their way through the portal into the dungeon. Shi Kun paused at the entrance for a brief moment to turn around and look at Zu An. There was a hint of glee on his face.

Zu An suddenly thought of something. Since that fellow is planning to make use of the secrecy of the dungeon to assassinate me, can't I do the same too?

Chu Chuyan walked over to Zu An's side and reminded softly, "There's something wrong with how Shi Kun is looking at you. You should follow me once we're in the dungeon later on just to be safe."

However, Zu An shook his head. "I'm one of the teachers leading a group after all. How could I let a student protect me?"

Chu Chuyan frowned. "Look at the occasion. You shouldn't be bothered about such stuff at a time like this."

"If you really want to help me, help me keep a lookout for the Evanescent Lotus," said Zu An.

The more hands to help him, the better it would be. At least it was much better than him fumbling around all alone.

“Evanescent Lotus?” Chu Chuyan was surprised. “What do you need it for? It’s a legendary treasure known to be able to raise a person’s cultivation. Even if I manage to find it, I don’t think that I’ll be willing to spare it to anyone else.”

“That’s pretty frank of you. Oh well, treat it as if I hadn’t said that then.” Zu An shrugged, not thinking much about it.

However, Ji Xiaoxi spoke up in agitation, “Big sister Chu, my father prescribed medicine for him that only lacks the Evanescence Lotus now. He needs it in order to cure his... trauma.”

The shy look on Ji Xiaoxi’s face was more than enough to tell Chu Chuyan what she was referring to. Chu Chuyan shot an awkward gaze at Zu An’s crotch as her face reddened as well. “Alright, I’ll help you keep a lookout for it then. However, you shouldn’t bear too much expectation out of it. It’s an elusive treasure that has mostly only been heard of in stories.”

Feeling too embarrassed talking about such a topic, Chu Chuyan quickly turned her head away and walked off.

“Oh? What did you say to your wife for her to walk away in embarrassment?” Pei Mianman walked over and asked in curiosity.

“It’s a secret. Haven’t you heard of the saying ‘A secret makes a man, man’?” Zu An shook his finger.

“Your mouth sure spouts interesting stuff.” Pei Mianman chuckled softly. “Alright, you should take care of yourself. Don’t get killed in there.”

After saying those words, she made her way into the dungeon.

Soon, the only ones left in the clearing were Zu An and Ji Xiaoxi. Just as they were about to head to the portal, Jiang Luofu suddenly stopped the two of them. “Take good care of her. If she loses even a strand of hair, you need not bother coming out of the dungeon anymore.”

Zu An burst into laughter. “Principal Jiang, you’re too kind! I don’t need Miss Ji to take care of me. Besides, you’re asking too much out of her.”

Jiang Luofu harrumphed coldly. “Are you an idiot? I said to take care of her! You better make sure that not the slightest harm comes to her!”

“???” Zu An.

Chapter 137: Too Big!

Even when they were already inside the dungeon, Zu An was still unable to snap out of it. He continued staring at Ji Xiaoxi in bewilderment, trying to process what had just happened.

Ji Xiaoxi felt a little flustered under his intense stare. “Teacher Zu, what are you looking at?”

“You’re being too distant, addressing me as a teacher.”

“Big... brother Zu.”

“Call me Ah Zu.”

“Ah Zu?”

Zu An circled around Ji Xiaoxi as he assessed her intently. He found it hard to connect this adorable little lady before him to the cold, domineering Jiang Luofu. Unable to take the intrigue anymore, he finally asked, “Is Principal Jiang your mother?”

Ji Xiaoxi hurriedly shook her head. “That’s not it. She’s my little aunt.”

“Little aunt?” For some reason, Zu An heaved a deep sigh of relief upon hearing that Principal Jiang wasn’t her mother. Indeed, how could ordinary men be worthy of Principal Jiang? Only someone as suave as me can barely qualify!

At the same time, he finally understood how Jiang Luofu came to know about the sealing of ‘little Zu An’. He was still worried that those of a certain cultivation rank could see through his condition, but fortunately, that wasn’t the case. He wouldn’t dare to walk onto the street anymore if the whole world were to learn of his impotence.

But speaking of which, while they were relatives, wasn’t it extremely unprofessional of Ji Dengtu to share his condition with Jiang Luofu? Wasn’t patient confidentiality the number one value all physicians had to uphold?

This also explained why Ji Dengtu, despite ogling at all of the women around, chose to turn a blind eye to the most beautiful Jiang Luofu. It turned out that he wasn’t in a good position to make a move at all.

Eh, that doesn’t make sense either. Ji Dengtu isn’t blood-related with Jiang Luofu at all. Given his perverted nature, it’s odd that he bears no lustful thoughts toward her at all!

“What’s wrong, Ah Zu?” Ji Xiaoxi noticed that the furrow on Zu An’s forehead was tightening and loosening every now and then, so she asked out of concern.

“Ah? It’s nothing at all. Oh right, where’s your mother? I don’t think I’ve ever heard you mention her before.” Zu An tried to probe a little deeper.

Ji Xiaoxi lowered her face. “She was already gone while I was still an infant. I have no recollections of her at all.”

As she spoke, her long eyelashes began quivering slightly as tears glistened in her eyes. Seeing that she was on the verge of tears, Zu An immediately panicked. “I shouldn’t have asked about that. Sorry, please don’t cry!”

Ji Xiaoxi sniffled a little as she wiped off her tears. She forced on a smile and said, “I’m fine. I’m already used to it.”

With this, Zu An dared not to continue probing anymore. He would just have to find another chance in the near future to enquire about it.

Following that, he began to assess their surroundings. They were on a plain filled with yellowish blades of grass at the moment. It seemed to be autumn here right now. There were a few smaller forests scattered here and there on the plains, as well as a few short hills.

He could spot bits of black and yellow by the horizon, which appeared to be a mountain range or something. It was just too far away that he wasn't able to confirm it.

This dungeon looks more normal than I thought.

Zu An heaved a sigh of relief. He had expected to be teleported into a world where dinosaurs and all sorts of monsters ran rampant, but it turned out to be not much different from the world outside.

The crowd who were still excited from entering the dungeon also gradually calmed down too.

"Mianman, let's go." Chu Chuyan saw that Zu An was having fun chatting away with Ji Xiaoxi, but her expression remained impassively cold as per normal, making it hard to discern her thoughts. Her dress fluttered with a tap of her feet, and within moments, she was already nothing more than a disappearing dot in the distance.

"As expected of the number one prodigy of the academy. Her movement skill is truly amazing."

"As if it was her movement skill really caught your eye. You're making it so obvious that I feel bad trying to expose you."

"Wipe your mouth. You're drooling."

...

"Protect yourself well. Don't let yourself get killed~" Pei Mianman shot a seductive look in Zu An's direction as she relayed her voice to him via ki. Leaving behind peals of tinkling laughter in the air, she also headed off in the direction where Chu Chuyan had departed toward.

It would appear that they were planning on exploring the area together for now, but considering the massive size of the dungeon, it was likely that they would part ways eventually.

"Woah, that laughter. I feel like my soul almost got sucked out of my body."

"Ahhh, I feel like my body is going to melt just by listening to it."

"Nah, your body is just weak."

...

Hearing the discussions around him, Zu An shook his head scornfully. Look at how useless all of you are! I had my body pressed right next to hers on the floor before, but I don't even bother to boast about it. Yet, all of you are getting so happy just because you got to listen to her laughter... Haaa, it's no wonder why you all are just students whereas I'm a teacher!

Shi Kun looked at the silhouettes of the two women and fell into deep thoughts. I haven't paid much attention to it in the past, but Pei Mianman is truly alluring. From the way she looks to the way she acts, she emits an irresistible seductive charm that men are fallible too. Those like Chu Chuyan are suited to be wives, but Pei Mianman's type would make perfect lovers.

If I recall correctly, she's not a member of the main lineage in the Pei clan. I might just have a chance to make her mine.

In order to avoid suspicion later on, Shi Kun made sure to not come into contact with Zu An or even look at him. No one would be able to pin the blame on him this way.

"Good luck, everyone. I'll be making a move first," Shi Kun clasped his fist at the crowd as he spoke. Other than Zu An and a few others who knew of the devious plan he had concocted, his etiquette was perfect. Paired with his good looks, it was likely that this gesture would win him quite a bit of goodwill from the crowd.

The other fifth rank cultivators also began departing too.

"Those in my group, make sure to follow me closely so that you don't get lost." Lu De beckoned to the students under him and led them off too. He wasn't particularly fond of Zu An, so he didn't bother bidding the latter goodbye.

Bai Susu, on the other hand, sashayed over and said, "Teacher Zu, would you like to come with us?"

Zu An replied with a smile, "Teacher Bai, I appreciate your goodwill, but we're intending to explore on our own."

You must be kidding! In all of the novels I've read, when has the protagonist ever gone along with the group before? He would always move all alone so that fortuitous encounters can fall on him and him alone.

My luck will be sullied if I follow you all!

"Alright then. You must make sure to take care of Xiaoxi, alright? There are many in the academy who are fond of her, including me. If anything happens to her... we won't let you off," said Bai Susu with a coy laugh.

"Teacher Bai, I can take care of myself!" Ji Xiaoxi's face reddened. She didn't want to bring trouble to Zu An.

"You're truly a kind person, Xiaoxi. Here, take this. If you ever find yourself in a dangerous position, open it. I'll rush over right away to save you if I'm in the vicinity." Bai Susu passed over an item that looked a little like a signaling stick over to Ji Xiaoxi.

"Thanks, Teacher Bai." Ji Xiaoxi accepted Bai Susu's goodwill.

Even after Bai Susu left, there were still quite a few people who came over, hoping to change Ji Xiaoxi's mind. Seeing that her mind was made up, they eventually settled with giving her medicine, weapons, or defensive artifacts.

Zu An was amazed. "Xiaoxi, I didn't know you are so popular in the academy. It's almost as if you're the academy's pet!"

"Ah~ Aren't you making fun of me by saying that I'm a pet?" Ji Xiaoxi pouted in dissatisfaction.

"I'm saying that you're adorable." Zu An couldn't help but think that even a pouting Ji Xiaoxi looked incredibly adorable. He instinctively wanted to pet her head, but recalling how his hands became hopelessly swollen the last time he did so, he could only hesitantly retract his hand.

It's almost like Ji Dengtu is projecting himself on the rest of the world. He thinks that all men are as perverted as he is, so he goes to such an extent to protect Ji Xiaoxi, not leaving any gaps at all.

His explanation placated Ji Xiaoxi, and she broke out in a smile. "Here, I can't use all of it myself. I'll give some to you too."

She stuffed some of the bottles of medicine and hidden weapons into Zu An's hands, which conveniently brought him a huge inflow of Rage points too. He quickly took a look around him, only to see many of the male students glaring daggers at him.

He was initially intending to attempt to reject the gifts out of politeness, but the reactions of those around him changed his mind. He accepted everything Ji Xiaoxi gave him heartily and said, "Thanks, Xiaoxi! Hahaha!"

It was yet another flood of Rage points.

Tsk tsk tsk. As your teacher, let me give you all a life lesson here: Bootlickers have no future at all! You can fawn on women all you want, but it'll never get you anywhere!

"Cough cough. It looks like Brother Zu is always in the limelight no matter where you go." Xie Xiu walked over with a smile, feeling deeply impressed with Zu An. He couldn't fathom how Zu An was able to survive to this day with how he was constantly attracting aggression from those around him.

Zu An straightened his back and cleared his throat before saying, "Please call me Teacher Zu instead."

"..." Xie Xiu.

What the hell? How am I supposed to follow up with that?

However, Zu An quickly changed his tune and said, "But in view of our relationship, I'll allow you to just call me Ah Zu!"

"Ah... Alright, Ah Zu." Due to Zu An's disruption, Xie Xiu nearly lost his train of thought. "The dungeon only opens once every few decades. If something happens here it'll be nigh impossible to investigate the matter. Due to that, it has always been an ideal place to kill and plunder. You must make sure to tread carefully over the next ten days."

"Hahaha, I didn't expect you to be so concerned about me. Alright, I've made up my mind. I'm going to make a friend out of you!" It was at this point that Zu An abruptly changed the topic. "Speaking of which, that beautiful woman sitting next to you during the previous Clans Tournament is your older sister, right? Why didn't she enter the dungeon too? Can you introduce her to me?"

Xie Xiu was rendered speechless. Are you just trying to get close to me in order to flirt with my big sister?

"My big sister isn't interested in dungeons and that sort of stuff..." Xie Xiu laughed awkwardly before swiftly fleeing the area. It felt rather uncomfortable for him to be trying to get close to a man.

Before long, the only ones left at the starting point were Ji Xiaoxi and Zu An. Ji Xiaoxi couldn't help but remark, "Ah Zu, you're a bad person."

"How am I a bad person?" asked Zu An.

"You're still trying to flirt around even though you're already... already..." Ji Xiaoxi shot a glance at Zu An's crotch, but her shyness made her eyes flicker around awkwardly. "... like that down there."

"What do you know? This is called preparing for the future! I'll be up and going by the end of this dungeon anyway!" replied Zu An. "Only fools would prepare for what that is right ahead of them. Those who are truly wise like me are constantly thinking multiple steps ahead!"

Ji Xiaoxi blinked her eyes in surprise. She didn't expect him to be so optimistic. After all, finding the Evanescent Lotus in this massive dungeon was like searching for a needle amidst the boundless ocean.

She felt that Zu An's optimism was unfounded, but she couldn't bear to point it out and dampen his morale.

"Where should we head to?"

"We'll head west! West all the way!"

...

The two of them chatted merrily while heading westward, but all of a sudden, Zu An heard the sharp rustle of the wind. He immediately grabbed Ji Xiaoxi's arm and pulled her to the side.

Several yellowish thorns had pierced into the very spot they were standing on earlier. Had they not moved away earlier, the thorns would have penetrated their body, dealing severe damage to them.

"What's going on?"

Zu An noticed a rat clicking its teeth in their direction. While it did resemble a rat in terms of appearance, it was massive in size, comparable to a warthog!

However, what was more important at the moment was the numbing pain assaulting Zu An's arm. He turned to Ji Xiaoxi with an exasperated look as he said, "Xiaoxi, the antidote~"

Chapter 138: Don't Raise Flags!

Ji Xiaoxi was still staring at the humongous rat monsters in bewilderment, having never seen them before despite frequently exploring the Hidden Dragon Mountain.

Zu An's words snapped her out of her thoughts, and she quickly took out a blue pill from her bag and passed it over to him. "Hurry up and eat this. You should be immune to my poison once you consume it."

Zu An was surprised to hear those words. "Are you certain you want to give it to me? Aren't you afraid that I might attempt something once I'm immune to the poison on your body?"

Ji Xiaoxi's face reddened as she said, "You aren't like any other men. Besides, we'll have to survive in this dungeon for ten days, so we'll definitely need to look out for one another. It'll be inconvenient if you get poisoned every time you touch me."

Needless to say, Zu An understood what she meant by 'you aren't like any other men'. He didn't expect that being impotent would actually bring about such a benefit. It was no wonder why many men in his previous life posed as gays to approach women. It turned out that just by appearing non-aggressive could greatly lower the guard of a woman.

"Did your father give you this pill?" asked Zu An.

Considering the extreme lengths Ji Dengtu went to in order to protect her, it was unthinkable for him to prepare such an 'exception' too.

"I concocted it myself," replied Ji Xiaoxi. "I learned quite a bit from my father over the years, so I tried making it myself."

Zu An nodded in realization, but he quickly noticed another problem. "Is the pill safe? Are there any side effects from consuming it?"

Ji Xiaoxi quickly waved her hands and said, "Ah, don't worry! I've chosen medicinal herbs with milder properties, so you don't need to worry about suffering from side effects."

Zu An was finally able to put aside his worries and swallow the pill. As promised, the numbing pain on his hand swiftly vanished. To test out the immunity effect of the pill, he tried touching Ji Xiaoxi's robe, only to ecstatically realize that the poison really wasn't acting up at all.

He tried to touch her hair and pinch her cheeks, but the numbing pain didn't set in anymore.

"Ah Zu, you're hurting me." Ji Xiaoxi rubbed her pinched cheeks as she complained grudgingly.

Zu An laughed off her complaint awkwardly, saying, "You have good skin."

"Jip jip~ jip jip jip~"

The furious squeaking of the humongous rat sounded. It couldn't understand how those two could remain calm in its presence and even flirt with one another. It was as if they were treating it to be invisible!

Its enraged protest brought Zu An and Ji Xiaoxi's attention back to the present.

"Xiaoxi, do you recognize that rat over there?"

"I've never seen it before, but it doesn't seem too powerful based on the aura it's emanating."

"My thoughts exactly."

While the rat couldn't understand what the two were saying, it could still sense the disdain in their eyes. Knowing that it was being looked down upon, it flew into a state of wrath. With loud squeaks, it charged toward the two of them, ready to sink its teeth onto their flesh.

Unfortunately for it, Ji Xiaoxi and Zu An were already third rank cultivators. As fast as the rat was moving, the two of them were still able to dodge its charge with ease.

"It seems to be at the second rank." Based on the rat's speed and strength, Zu An was able to deduce its rough cultivation rank. If that was all it had, it wouldn't pose much of a threat to him.

However, what he was concerned about were the thorns that shot out from the ground earlier.

On the other hand, seeing that its charge had failed to work, the rat suddenly stood upright, and its size suddenly expanded by half. Taking a closer look, however, Zu An realized that it was not that its body had expanded but that its fur was standing upright, making it look larger than normal.

"Be careful!" Ji Xiaoxi suddenly exclaimed.

Three sharp thorns suddenly shot out from the rat's body toward Zu An.

"A long-range attack!"

Zu An exclaimed as he dodged the thorns with ease. With his current level of speed, even without resorting to Sunflower Phantasm, he could still easily deal with attacks from a second rank cultivator.

He noticed that there was a clump of fur behind the rat's head that was yellowish in color as compared to its overall beige fur. The thorns that were just shot out seemed to have come from the clump of yellow fur.

The rat grew even more agitated upon seeing that its attack had missed, so it arched its back and shot out a few more thorns.

Same as before, Zu An dodged the fur, but on top of that, he also whipped out his sword to test the accuracy of his swordsmanship. With a slash of his sword, he successfully deflected some of the thorns.

This is kind of weird though. Why isn't this fellow attacking Ji Xiaoxi at all? Could it be biased toward good-looking people? I don't think I pale anywhere in comparison to her though...

The rat continued firing several rounds of thorns, but not a single one of them struck. It belatedly realized that it was outclassed here, so it immediately turned tail and fled.

However, Zu An leaped forward to stop its path. "Hey, don't go! I haven't had my fun yet."

The enraged rat immediately shot out another three more thorns toward Zu An, only for it to be dodged with ease yet again.

So, it tried to flee once more, only to be stopped yet again. Just like that, the process repeated several times, and by the end of it, the rat was left with a huge bald patch behind its head.

You have successfully trolled Goldenfur Monstrous Rat for +6 +6 +6 +6...

Zu An was amused. So this fellow provides Rage points too! Another reason not to stop then.

So, he continued messing around with the rat, and it didn't take long for it to turn completely bald. It was only then that Zu An finally decided to end its life.

“Ah Zu, can we let it go instead? It’s so pitiful,” pleaded Ji Xiaoxi. The tears brimming in the rat’s eyes had evoked her sympathy.

“Alright.” Of course, Zu An wouldn’t reject such a simple request coming from the adorable Ji Xiaoxi, so he waved his hand, gesturing for the rat to get lost. Utterly relieved to be spared, the rat darted off into the forest right away.

“This world doesn’t seem as dangerous as I thought.” Zu An was still worried at first, but after the earlier easy victory he had against the rat, his confidence was now bursting. “Isn’t the academy being far too cautious?”

Pui pui pui! What in the world am I saying? After watching so many drama serials, I should know better than to raise flags!

Ji Xiaoxi shook her head and said, “We’re probably still in the outer perimeter of the dungeon, where the cultivation ranks of the ferocious beasts tend to be weaker. If we proceed deeper in, we should encounter more troublesome enemies.”

Zu An nodded in response. He was still more worried about Shi Kun’s assassination ploy at the moment as he didn’t know how the latter would move.

Would he attempt the assassination himself?

That’s unlikely. Those in positions of power like him wouldn’t be willing to sully their hands when they have underlings to do the dirty work for them.

Hm? Why did I call it ‘dirty work’?

It was then he suddenly heard a series of weird rustling noises. He quickly turned his companion and asked, “Xiaoxi, did you hear something?”

“Ah? I didn’t hear anything.” Ji Xiaoxi was confused.

“Oh.” Zu An nodded before returning to his thoughts.

Snow did enter the dungeon this time around too. If Shi Kun is unwilling to make a move himself, it’s likely that she would do the dirty work instead. But after the previous fight we had, she should have already been traumatized by the labor pains she experienced. It’s unlikely that she would be making a move alone.

Rustle rustle~

The noises sounded again, and this time, even Ji Xiaoxi heard it too. The two of them turned their heads around warily, only for their faces to warp in horror. They found themselves faced with quite a few Goldenfur Monstrous Rats.

‘Quite a few’ might be a major understatement, for there was a whole army of little beady eyes staring at them. Such a sight was more than enough to induce panic in just about anyone!

“How many of them is this?” Zu An gulped.

“There are definitely a few hundred of them at least. I can’t really see their backline clearly, but their number could easily go over a thousand.” Ji Xiaoxi also felt flustered too. It was normal for a woman to be afraid of such stuff.

One of the Goldenfur Monstrous Rats leaped out and began squeaking to the largest of its kind, its paws pointing toward the two of them. While Zu An and Ji Xiaoxi had no idea what it was saying, the indignant tone in the squeaks was more than enough to tell them that it was complaining about something.

“Don’t you think this rat looks a little familiar?” Zu An eyed the bald patch of skin behind the rat’s head as he asked.

“It seems to be the one we met earlier.” Ji Xiaoxi was incredibly nervous as well.

The largest Goldenfur Monstrous Rat let out a few piercing squeaks, and the rest immediately rose on their back feet.

Realizing that things were going awry, he immediately grabbed Ji Xiaoxi’s arms and fled.

You must be kidding! If it’s just a couple of thorns, we might still be able to handle it with ease. However, if it’s going to be thousands of them, that’s like facing an arrow rain from an enemy! No matter how I dodge, I would still be porcupined in an instant!

A split moment later, the spot where the two of them were standing on earlier was bombarded with thorns. The Goldenfur Monstrous Rats were furious to see that the two of them had dodged their attacks, so they immediately gave chase with enraged squeaks. Like the march of an army, they trampled down everything that stood in their path. From afar, it looked almost as if a tsunami was crashing down on them.

“It’s all my fault. If I hadn’t asked you to spare it, we wouldn’t have ended up in such a position,” said Ji Xiaoxi apologetically.

“It’s not your fault. None of us expected things to end up like that,” said Zu An. “Let’s stop talking for now lest we run out of breath.”

The two of them ran off for quite a while, but the pursuing Goldenfur Monstrous Rats showed no signs of letting up at all. While they were unable to catch up, they were still biting persistently onto their tail.

“What should we do now?” asked Ji Xiaoxi nervously.

“Weren’t you fine entering the Hidden Dragon Mountain all alone? Why would these darned rats dare to chase you?” asked Zu An curiously.

“It was too busy chatting with you that I forgot to bring out the medicine earlier. It’d be too late to do it now since they have already seen our looks. Just smell itself won’t be enough to deter them anymore,” replied Ji Xiaoxi.

Actually, she had methods to make these rats ignore her, but she couldn’t allow Zu An to brave through danger all alone. That was also why she was still running with him.

“...” Zu An.

He was frustrated, but he couldn't bring himself to blame Ji Xiaoxi for this. None of them expected to be faced with such a situation at the outer perimeters of the dungeon—or to be more exact, there was probably no one as unlucky as them to encounter this.

Ahh, maybe heading westward isn't a good idea after all.

Noticing Ji Xiaoxi's worried expression, he consoled, "Don't worry, they're bound to give up soon!"

It was not like they had a huge grudge between them. It was not as if he had killed their brethren; all he had done was to make one of the Goldenfur Monstrous Rats go bald. Unless this fellow was the son of the Rat King or something, it didn't make any sense for them to continue chasing him.

Such a thought was swiftly dispelled from his mind by the end of the second hour. Zu An's heart had completely sunk by then. It was as if the army of rats knew not of exhaustion at all; they continued chasing them with fervor.

"Ah Zu, I... I can't run anymore!" Ji Xiaoxi was gasped for breath.

"There's a mountain valley ahead. We'll have more room to maneuver around there!" Zu An's eyes lit up as he caught sight of a mountain valley right ahead of him.

The problem right now was that they were running on a plain, where there was nowhere they could hide at all. If they tried to fight the rats in a place like this, they would just get swamped down in an instant.

However, it was different in the mountain valley. There were all sorts of obstacles, giving them the room to hide and even launch counterattacks. After all, the rats weren't too powerful individually.

There was just one issue—mountains tended to look deceptively close.

Zu An was initially running with Ji Xiaoxi's hand in his, but after a couple times where she nearly fell down, he decided to just lift her up and carry her in his arms. It was fortunate that she was small in size, so it hardly took any strength to carry her.

Being held in a princess carry made Ji Xiaoxi's face redden in embarrassment. She had never been so close to a man before. She could only console her again and again that big brother Zu was just trying to save her here, and that he was different from other men...

Finally, Zu An arrived at the mountain valley.

A chilling cold gale blew his way. His body was still burning hot from all the running he had done, but astonishingly, the gale blew all of the heat away and made him shudder in coldness.

"What's going on?" Zu An was confused.

However, this wasn't a good time to be thinking about other matters. He hurriedly scanned his surroundings for good spots where the two of them could hide and recover a bit.

It was then that Ji Xiaoxi suddenly exclaimed with a hint of delight in her voice, "Ah Zu, look! Those rats aren't following us here!"

Zu An turned his head around, only to see that the Goldenfur Monstrous Rats had stopped just a few meters short of the mountain valley. They were pacing around the perimeter of the mountain valley in frustration, but at the same time, they dared not to come in.

“Is there some sort of terrifying existence in the valley that instills fear in them?” murmured Zu An worriedly.

Chapter 139: Come Here!

Zu An quickly scanned the surroundings. There wasn’t anything different about the mountain valley he was in other than the fact that the air was unnaturally crisp and refreshing.

“Ah Zu, what should we do next?” asked Ji Xiaoxi.

“Let’s just wait here for the time being. There’s something weird about how the rats are reacting to the mountain valley.” Zu An couldn’t see anything amiss about the mountain valley, but he felt that it would be better safe than sorry.

Ji Xiaoxi nodded in agreement. She took out a water bottle from her waist pouch and took a sip. The earlier journey had really tired her out.

After hydrating herself, she passed the water bottle over and asked, “Do you want to have a sip too?”

Zu An shook his head and said, “Nah. I’ll probably finish up the water in that small bottle of yours in a few gulps. You should save it for yourself instead.”

“Don’t worry, this is actually an artifact my father had a runemaster make for me. Despite its small appearance, it’s able to store a lot of water. It’s plenty for the two of us.”

“A storage tool!” Zu An was impressed.

He took the bottle over and examined it, but he couldn’t spot anything different. However, when he tried gulping it down, he realized that there was almost no end to the supply of water it contained.

Ji Xiaoxi couldn’t help but notice that Zu An was drinking right off the rim of the bottle, and her face reddened. She thought that he would pour it into his mouth instead. Isn’t this an indirect...

Nevertheless, she quickly calmed herself and said, “It’s not really a storage tool. It can only be used to store water.”

So it’s a downgraded version of a storage ring, Zu An nodded in realization. “Are storage tools artifacts that only exist in the legends?”

“It’s exaggerating it to say that they only exist in legends, but they’re indeed quite rare. Only top-notch runemasters are capable of forging them, and the space in most of them is limited. Even the larger ones can only store this amount of stuff...” Ji Xiaoxi gestured with her hand to give a rough idea.

So, around a meter cubed big?, Zu An thought.

"Is there anything you want to eat? My father prepared quite a lot of food for me." As she spoke, Ji Xiaoxi took out all kinds of food from the little pouch. There were desserts, biscuits, and even fruits.

"Woah, are you Dora*mon?!" Zu An was utterly amazed. How in the world is such a small pouch holding so much stuff?!

"This is also another artifact my father had a runemaster forge for me. It should be considered as a type of storage tool." There was a faint tinge of red constantly lingering on Ji Xiaoxi's face as she spoke, making her look incredibly adorable.

"..." Zu An.

It was just a moment ago you told me that storage tools are extremely rare, but it turns out that you have two of them with you. Aren't you trying to show off to me right now?!

"These are osmanthus cakes bought from Xu Ji. It's absolutely delicious. These are peach blossom cakes, a special product from the neighboring province. If you don't like sweet food, I also have nuts with me too..." Ji Xiaoxi fished out a large bunch of tidbits and began introducing them one by one. The gleam in her eyes showed that she was excited to show off her little stash.

Zu An was rendered speechless. "It feels like you're here to enjoy the scenery as a tourist than to explore the dungeon."

Ji Xiaoxi scratched her head in embarrassment. "I wasn't planning on taking so much stuff with me, but my father was worried that I wouldn't have any food to eat while I'm in here, so he stuffed all of these into my pouch."

"..." Zu An.

Wow, who could tell that Ji Dengtu actually would be such a doting father?

Speaking of which, why didn't the Chu clan prepare anything for me then? Ahh, this disparity sure is heartbreaking. Hmmm, it doesn't seem like Chu Chuyan brought anything with her too though. I guess the Chu clan is stricter with its family members; they think of it as a trial.

Zu An tried his best to make himself feel better.

There was an expectant look in Ji Xiaoxi's eyes when she offered her desserts to him, so Zu An felt that it wouldn't be good to disappoint her. He tried the osmanthus cake, and his eyes immediately lit up in delight. "It's fragrant!"

Meanwhile, the army of Goldenfur Monstrous Rats, who were still camping outside the mountain valley, flew into a state of rage. What the hell? It's tired for us to chase you all the way here too! Do you know how parched our throats are after running so several hours straight? How could you picnic right in front of us?!

You have successfully trolled the Goldenfur Monstrous Rats for +6 +6 +6...

Zu An's eyes lit up. He was receiving a small number of Rage points from each of the rats, but one must know that there was an army of them here. It was quite a sizeable amount in total.

Knowing that this was a good opportunity to squeeze out more Rage points from them, he turned to look at the army of rats and beckoned them over with a wag of his finger.

“Oh? Why are you all sitting there so pitifully? Why not come in and share our snacks?”

Behind him, Ji Xiaoxi blinked her large eyes in confusion, She couldn’t understand why Zu An was provoking those rats right now, but his tone was so annoying that even someone as mild-tempered as her felt an urge to beat him up.

As for the rats, they couldn’t understand what Zu An was doing, but his provocative tone and gesture were more than enough to fan their anger.

You have successfully trolled the Goldenfur Monstrous Rats for +6 +6 +6...

Some of them couldn’t stand it and tried to charge over, but barely a few steps later, they hesitantly came to a halt before retreating back down.

Looking at the huge influx of Rage points, Zu An was overjoyed. A true keyboard warrior wouldn’t give up on an opportunity to troll, so he continued taunting them gleefully.

You have successfully trolled the Goldenfur Monstrous Rats for +6 +6 +6...

Finally, one of the rats finally couldn’t stand it anymore and charged right in. There was a notable bald patch at the back of its head.

With this rat leading the pack, the rest quickly succumbed to their rage and charged in as well. While rushing forth, some of them pricked up their fur, preparing to shoot their thorns.

“Crap. It looks like I accidentally went overboard.”

Alarmed, Zu An immediately turned tail and ran, only to realize that Ji Xiaoxi was still doltishly sitting on the floor, munching on her snacks. He quickly rushed out to grab her arm and pulled her away with him.

“Ahhh! My candied fruits! I was just about to eat them!!!” Ji Xiaoxi stared at the snacks she had left on the floor with a horrified look on her face.

“I’ll buy them for you once we’re out of the dungeon!” shouted Zu An.

“You said the same thing when you borrowed my handkerchief last time. You still haven’t repaid me yet,” murmured Ji Xiaoxi in discontentment.

Zu An laughed sheepishly. He had really forgotten about that. “That too. I’ll pay everything back all at once.”

After charging into the mountain valley and seeing that nothing was happening, the Goldenfur Monstrous Rats were further emboldened. With furious squeaks, they continued to chase Zu An tenaciously. That damned human is too hateful! We must rip off his flesh and gobble down his bones in order to vent our anger!

Due to the complicated terrain around the mountain valley, it was much easier for Zu An and Ji Xiaoxi to escape this time around. However, to their dismay, they were still unable to shake the rats off their tail.

There were simply far too many of them, and they had a sharp sense of smelling too. No matter how well the two of them were hiding, the rats would find them swiftly and summon their comrades to encircle them.

In the end, they were forced to a corner and decided to seek refuge on a big tree.

Unfortunately, the Goldenfur Monstrous Rats still managed to find them in the end. It took only a few moments for a huge crowd of rats to gather beneath the tree.

They tried to climb up the tree trunk, but unfortunately, there were only so many rats that could climb up the tree trunk at once. Zu An was stronger than each of them, and he also had the advantageous high ground here. As a result, he could basically kill one of them with each slash.

The leader of the Goldenfur Monstrous Rats stepped atop one of the boulders and began squeaking away. Soon, they abandoned their initial plan to climb up the tree and instead began to nibble away at the tree trunk. Once the tree was felled, they would pounce forward and tear those two humans to shreds.

Hearing the wood gnawing sound coming from below, Zu An started to panic a little. "Xiaoxi, do you have any poison that can knock all of them out?"

Medicine and poison were two sides of a coin. Considering her competence in medicine, it was likely that she was fairly well versed in poison too.

"I do have something like that," replied Ji Xiaoxi hesitantly.

"???" Zu An.

He was just asking out of desperation, not really expecting much out of it, but who could have thought that she really had something like that? If that's the case, why didn't you use it earlier? We wouldn't have to end up in such a desperate position in the first place!

Seemingly seeing through the doubts he had in mind, Ji Xiaoxi explained meekly, "I didn't think that they have done anything too overboard to justify that. Strictly speaking, we were the ones interrupting their peaceful lives. It feels wrong to poison them to death."

"..." Zu An.

She's simply too kind! I really can't imagine how in the world she managed to survive in this dangerous world to this day with that kind heart of hers.

"What if the tree falls and we get eaten by them?" asked Zu An.

Ji Xiaoxi hesitated a little before replying, "I don't know. They might just retreat soon. If things really come to that point, I... I'll poison them."

Zu An knew that Ji Xiaoxi's personality, and he felt that it would be going too far to force her to do something that went against her conscience. In truth, things weren't that dire yet either. He could use Grandgale the moment the tree felled to escape. At the very least, they should be able to break out of the rats' encirclement.

As for whether they would really be able to escape from the rats or not, he would leave it to the calling of fate.

The two of them didn't notice that when the corpses of the killed Goldenfur Monstrous Rats fell on the floor, their blood seeped through the ground at an unusually swift pace. There were no puddles of blood at all.

A while later, one of the Goldenfur Monstrous Rats was in the midst of nibbling on the tree trunk when it suddenly cried out in misery.

Zu An quickly took a look, only to see a bone palm striking through its back. As crimson blood flowed down the white bones, it created quite an eerie spectacle.

This sinister event only marked the first of many soon-to-come deaths. More and more screams of agony echoed throughout the mountain valley as the other Goldenfur Monstrous Rats fell to the same fate, penetrated by a white palm.

"Where did those things come from?" Zu An was appalled. He felt like he was watching a horror movie unfolding right before his eyes.

"Big brother Zu, I'm afraid!" Ji Xiaoxi subconsciously hid behind Zu An's back as she gripped his sleeves tightly.

"Xiaoxi, don't be scared. I'll make sure to protect you well," consoled Zu An.

He was flustered by the unexpected happenings too, but somehow, the presence of a woman in need tended to embolden the guts of a man. He couldn't allow himself to show cowardice before Xiaoxi.

He carefully examined the situation and soon figured out what was going on.

These bone palms hadn't appeared out of nowhere; they were rising from the ground. They weren't just limited to the area around the trees. Where his eyes could see, the soil was loosening as palms rose up and strike at the Goldenfur Monstrous Rats.

"Just how many of them are there?!" Zu An gulped.

Panic devoured the Goldenfur Monstrous Rats. Coming under such a frightening assault, how could they still be in the mood to nibble on the tree trunk? They fled for their life right away, but to their dismay, it was futile. White hands rose from the soil to grab their legs.

The rats squeaked in desperation, but those bones, despite looking so brittle that they would snap at any moment, harnessed terrifying strength that they couldn't break out of.

Soon, skeletons began rising from the ground. They weren't entirely bones yet; most of them were still half covered in flesh, and there were traces of clothes to be seen on them. It was just that their clothes had mostly decomposed from being buried for far too long.

It might be much more accurate to term them as 'zombies'.

The zombies picked up the Goldenfur Monstrous Rats in their hands, brought them up to their mouths, and began munching down on them. Blood splattered all over the air. The mountain valley was swiftly

dominated by two sounds—the despaired cries of the Goldenfur Monstrous Rats and the ripping of flesh.

It was as if hell had descended upon the world.

Chapter 140: Hell on the Mountain Valley

Even the largest Goldenfur Monstrous Rat King was panicked. It rammed the closest zombie down to the floor, forcing it to release the latter to release the rat that it was chomping on.

Without any hesitation, the rat king bit down on the zombie's bone with a loud cracking sound. Before long, the zombie had already lost several of its fingers.

The zombie tried to climb to its feet, but crushed under the weight of the rat king, its attempts were futile.

"Jip jip jip!" The rat king squeaked furiously at the zombie, possibly trying to brag or utter words of justice for its deceased comrades.

Its squeaks were reciprocated by a resounding thwack on its head.

Bam!

Another zombie swung a wooden bat in its hand, sending the Goldenfur Monstrous Rat King flying for several meters before finally crashing back down on the ground.

"Jip!"

The infuriated rat king arched its back and directed the golden fur behind its head right at the zombie.

"Holy shit!" Zu An was alarmed. The rat king was clearly far stronger than its companions—its thorns were a meter long, and every single one of them was shining with a golden lustre. They looked just like javelins.

Shoosh shoosh shoosh!

The thorns shot out a speed far faster than a slow zombie could dodge. It was struck squarely by the thorns, and the sheer impact pinned it onto a cliff face.

"Jip jip!"

The Goldenfur Monstrous Rat King squeaked in glee. It had returned the favor for the earlier bat to its head.

Ji Xiaoxi remarked in astonishment, "If those thorns were to strike us, we might just lose our lives!"

Zu An nodded in agreement. He wasn't too familiar with the power level classification of ferocious beasts in this world, but the Goldenfur Monstrous Rat King seemed to be around pinnacle third rank to early fourth rank.

He wasn't confident of defeating the rat king in a direct battle without relying on his cheat keys.

“W-what is that!” exclaimed Ji Xiaoxi. Her voice quivered as she pointed her finger at a certain direction.

Zu An quickly looked over, only to see the zombie that had been pinned to the cliff face had started moving. It lowered its head to glance at its chest, causing its eyeballs to pop out a little from its face. It felt almost like a literal expression of horror.

Then, it stretched its hand forth and began plucking the thorns out of its body. There was no splattering of blood; there was just a mysterious dense fluid flowing out a little.

Zu An’s lips twitched. It was fortunate that he didn’t eat too much earlier, or else he might have just retched at this sight.

As for Ji Xiaoxi, she had already long turned her face away, not wanting to look any longer.

The zombie plucked off all of the thorns before charging toward the Goldenfur Monstrous Rat King once more with the bat in its hand.

“Jip~”

The fur on the rat king pricked up, but it was not out of aggression but fear. It had already resorted to its strongest move, but its enemy remained completely fine despite being struck by it squarely. How could it possibly fight against an opponent like this?!

So, it turned tail and fled. It might still feel compelled as a king to protect its own people, but it realized that the current circumstances were so dire that it would be a blessing if it could escape with its life.

Watching the scene from above, Zu An couldn’t help but frown. The defensive prowess had shocked him. He didn’t think that they would be able to remain unfazed even after suffering such a heavy blow. He couldn’t even fathom just how much it would take in order to kill one of them.

“Xiaoxi, are there any records about zombies in this dungeon?” asked Zu An.

Ji Xiaoxi shook her head in response. “I have never heard any records of zombies in the Ursae Dungeon before. There’s nothing on that in the academy’s archive, and my father has never mentioned it to me before.”

Zu An felt a little unnerved. He recalled hearing that the dungeon had opened ahead of its anticipated time, and Jiang Luofu had reminded him that there was something amiss about the dungeon this time around too.

Is something happening right now because I’m here? Hell! Isn’t that special treatment accorded only to novel protagonists?

While making internal retorts, Zu An’s mind was still whirring to process the situation. “Are there light elemental spells or something in this world? How in the world are we supposed to kill off such monsters?”

“Light elemental spells?” Ji Xiaoxi frowned. “I don’t know much about spells, but there are cultivators who have grasped the light element before, just that they are incredibly rare. I don’t think that there are any light element cultivators in Brightmoon City. As for dealing with the zombies, there are some

records relating to that. It seems like they would stop moving once you sever off their heads. Aside from that, there are rumors that they are vulnerable to fire element cultivators.”

“Fire element?” Zu An frowned.

Will ordinary fire work against them? But again, it seems almost impossible to light up a fire in this windy mountain valley.

He swiftly ran through all of the skills he had learned, but none of them seemed to be useful against these zombies. Even his prided ‘Bixie Swordplay’ didn’t seem too useful against these incredibly high defense zombies. He could totally imagine his sword striking down on a zombie’s neck, only to rebound off.

In the end, only a third of the Goldenfur Monstrous Rats managed to make their escape. Most of them were picked up by a zombie and chomped down on like a sandwich. It was unfortunate that they were land creatures, and a huge number of zombies happened to be lurking underground.

In fact, the only reason why a third of them could escape was because there weren’t too many zombies who awakened at the start. However, as the scent of blood began to fill the mountain valley, more and more decrepit zombies climbed out of the land in seek of prey.

“Do you have any medicine to erase our scent? Hurry up and scatter them around us, or else it’ll be too late!” said Zu An anxiously.

It felt like they had just fallen deeper into danger. It was just Goldenfur Monstrous Rats lurking beneath them earlier, but now it had been replaced by the even stronger zombies. There was no chance for them to escape at all even if they wanted to. Their only hope right now was for them not to be discovered.

“I do.” Ji Xiaoxi whipped out a medicine bottle from her pouch and began sprinkling it around them.

Zu An finally heaved a sigh of relief.

“How long will it take for them to return back to the ground?” Looking at the zombies lurking under him, Zu An felt his heart growing heavier and heavier.

According to the movies, zombies usually shied away from light. It was still daytime at the moment, but natural sunlight was blocked off by the surrounding mountains in this valley, dimming the surroundings. To make things worse, the sun appeared to be setting at the moment.

Are these corpses going to roam for the entire night?

Zu An found himself wondering how these dungeons came to be. The concepts of day and night applied in here, and there was a sun during daytime too. He wondered if the moon would rise when night fell later.

Meanwhile, the zombies were happily feasting heartily on their prey. Flesh and blood seemed to be utmost delicacies in their eyes, but the same couldn’t be said about the humans present.

As the stench of blood grew thicker and thicker, Zu An felt his stomach churning, but he forced it down.

Ji Xiaoxi, on the other hand, wasn't that fortunate. In the first place, she was afraid of such things, and she ate a lot of stuff earlier too. The heavy stench of blood and the sight of zombies chomping off the Goldenfur Monstrous Rats all around her were challenging the tolerance of her stomach. She eventually succumbed and started vomiting.

I guess even the most adorable of fairies don't vomit strawberries and rainbows.

"Shit!" Zu An's heart skipped a beat, for there was something worse occurring.

The slight ruckus caused by Ji Xiaoxi's vomiting caused the feasting zombies to turn their gazes over. Most of them didn't have eyeballs, but Zu An could be certain that they were staring at them.

Some of those that failed to secure a Goldenfur Monstrous Rat for themselves earlier began making their way toward the tree.

Zu An shuddered in fear. The tree was already unstable from the nibbling the rats had done to it earlier, and it wouldn't take much to fell it. Just thinking about the pitiful plight of those rats that had fallen into the clutches of the rats made a shiver run down his spine.

He quickly turned to Ji Xiaoxi and asked, "You should have no qualms using your poison against zombies, right?"

"My poison only works on living beings. The undead isn't afraid of it," replied Ji Xiaoxi with a pale face. "I'm sorry. It's all my fault."

Had it not been for her earlier gluttony, she wouldn't have drawn these zombies over to their side.

"There's no point talking about this now," said Zu An. "I'll lure them off. Make sure that you don't make a noise at all."

Ji Xiaoxi was alarmed. "You can't! We should go together!"

Zu An shook his head and said, "I have a movement skill that should allow me to maneuver around these slow zombies. It's likely that both of us will die if we go together. Besides, if I lure the zombies away, you'll be able to bring the others over to save me too."

"Big brother Ah Zu~" Ji Xiaoxi's eyes reddened. She knew that she would only add to his trouble by sticking together with him, but human's emotions didn't always obey logic.

She felt that she was the one who landed Zu An in such a dangerous position.

Noticing the dull look on Ji Xiaoxi's face, Zu An quickly said, "You mustn't do anything foolish, or else my efforts will be in vain!"

"Alright... but big brother Ah Zu, you must promise me that you'll stay alive!" Tears were brimming in Ji Xiaoxi's eyes as she spoke.

"Are you planning to repay me by betrothing yourself to me if I manage to survive this ordeal?" Zu An teased as he assessed the situation below.

Ji Xiaoxi's face reddened. "But you already have a wife..."

“Hahaha, my wife doesn’t mind me having other women. Alright, I’ll be going off!” With a smile, Zu An leaped toward an opening below that he spotted.

The zombies were alarmed by him. Most of them turned their sights toward him right away, but there was still a small number of them who were looking toward the crown of the tree Ji Xiaoxi was on.

So, Zu An clapped his hands loudly and shouted to attract their attention. “Hey, you boney freaks! I dare you to catch me! If you catch me, you can stick your bones into me wherever you want!”

Maybe it was because the zombies understood his words or that he was simply making too much of a commotion, all of the zombies immediately turned in his direction and charged over.

Before such a terrifying threat, Zu An executed Sunflower Phantasm right away to weave in between the gaps of the zombies, trying to lure them further away from Ji Xiaoxi.

Unfortunately, there were simply far too many zombies that dodging was no easy feat, even if he had a powerful movement skill in his arsenal. There was once where barely after his foot touched the ground, a black shadow smashed right down on his head. It happened to coincide with his downtime, the split instant where he was gathering momentum once more for the next move.