

Immortal 1571

Chapter 1571 – Heartbeat

Zu An had just left the crown princess' place and was still feeling rather accomplished. Furthermore, he had always been rather on guard against the empress, and his vigilance told him to maintain some distance from this woman. However, Little An was just too disappointing!

Little An was really being wronged here, though. It wasn't that it was disappointing, but rather that this woman had too many tricks up her sleeves.

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Two sighs filled the air at the same time, but each of them represented something different.

It was as if an elaborate lock, after being sealed away for many years, had finally met the key it was destined for. Once the lock was unraveled, the empress gradually sensed the ki that had previously disappeared starting to return.

At the same time, her five senses became even more sensitive than usual. She had a lovable smile on her face and was about to say something when she suddenly frowned, as if she sniffed something in the air. She exclaimed, "Huh? Why does there seem to be another woman's smell on you?"

Zu An immediately broke out into a sweat. Does this woman have the nose of a freaking dog? She can even smell something like that?

He had already used water element magic to wash his entire body after leaving the Eastern Palace, but that wasn't a true shower. He had only washed his outer clothes.

"No way!" Zu An replied. He began to use his own ki to help circulate her ki, not giving her a chance to think about anything else.

The empress figured that made sense as well. The palace's women all belonged to the royal family. Apart from herself, who would be so brazen? Afterward, though, she was bombarded by his surging ki to the point that she didn't have the room to think about such things at all.

Zu An took the chance to ask, "What did your highness mean when you told me that Violet Mountain wasn't so simple?"

The empress was feeling incredible, so her tone was no longer as proud as before. On the contrary, it was soft and considerate as she explained, "I don't know the exact details, but according to my sources, there seems to be a large net cast over Violet Mountain. There's a storm approaching. Furthermore, I'm proficient in celestial divination methods, and have seen that there's a huge danger approaching Violet Mountain; there are ten parts to it, at that. Whenever such signs appear, rivers of blood and mountains of corpses follow, with few survivors. That's why I gave you that warning."

Zu An was surprised. He knew that the master of celestial divination was the academy's Qi Yaoguang. He hadn't expected the empress to be good at it too.

When he heard how serious she sounded, he couldn't help but feel a bit pessimistic about the situation. He prepared to ask the empress where she got her information from. Normally, there was no way she

would tell him, but in her current state, everything was under his control. He felt as if her very life were at his mercy, so he just asked about it.

However, as soon as he spoke, Little Zhuo's high-pitched voice suddenly called out from outside, "I pay my respects to your majesty. Long live, long live, long live!"

The two inside the chambers were horrified. Zu An immediately wanted to pull out, but just then, the empress also instinctively lowered her leg to stand up. When those two forces met, both of them were suddenly prevented from separating.

If not for Zu An's body being as well-tempered as steel, the chicken would have flown the coop, allowing the eggs to be broken.

However, the more they panicked, the harder it was for them to get out of this situation. Furthermore, when they thought about how they would be dead for sure if the emperor noticed them, both of their minds went blank. Their bodies became countless times more sensitive.

Zu An grunted. Fortunately, he was able to stop the sounds in his throat. Meanwhile, the empress felt as if endless volcanoes were erupting inside of her. In that instant, she almost fainted on the spot.

Fortunately, both of them retained their final vestiges of composure and finally separated. The empress' face was incomparably pale as she muttered, "I'm done for, I'm finished."

Zhao Han was no fool. If he saw the two of them together, and furthermore like that, there was no way he wouldn't be able to figure out what had happened. What awaited them went beyond saying. It wasn't just the two of them who would wish they were dead, too; they would even end up dragging down their clans.

A hint of viciousness flickered through the empress' eyes. In that case, she would have nothing to lose, and could just unleash all of her resentment over the years and let Zhao Han have a taste of her wrath. In that instant, countless nasty and vile words to attack Zhao Han formed in her mind.

Fortunately, Zu An grabbed her and shook his head. Then, he opened a cupboard in the corner and entered.

The empress felt panicked and angry. What kind of cultivation did Zhao Han have? How could anyone escape his detection by hiding there?! Still, there wasn't anything else they could do. She quickly sorted out her clothes, then nervously faced the situation.

"Damn servant, what are you making such a racket for?" Zhao Han snapped angrily. He was clearly a bit unhappy with Little Zhuo's loud voice.

Little Zhuo knelt down and kowtowed while shaking, saying, "This servant deserves death, this servant deserves death."

Zhao Han frowned, but he couldn't just punish the servant for something like that. Furthermore, this was someone from the empress' palace. He ignored Little Zhuo and headed straight in.

The empress just happened to emerge to greet him, saying, "Your humble wife greets your majesty."

Empress Liu Ning was scared witless. Her mind was an absolute mess. Her body couldn't help but shake a bit, perhaps because of fear or because of what had happened just then.

Zhao Han was about to say something when his eyes suddenly lit up. The empress' complexion was especially rosy today. Furthermore, her timid appearance was entirely different from her usual proud and unruly self, making even him feel indescribable pity for her. He reflexively walked forward to support her, saying, "Empress, please rise."

When his hands touched her, the empress felt a kind of rejection. She subconsciously moved aside.

Who was Zhao Han? He immediately sensed that, and glowered. This woman was still the same as ever.

However, the empress gradually calmed down, because she discovered that Zhao Han hadn't noticed Zu An. Otherwise, he would have immediately acted up and wouldn't have helped her up in such an amiable manner. She was incredibly shocked, and didn't know how Zu An had done such a thing at all.

Zhao Han was publicly acknowledged as number one. If his divine sense reached out, not a single action in the capital could escape his notice. It was just that normally, he wouldn't waste his energy like that. However, at such a short distance, he should have discovered Zu An's presence in the cabinet without even using his divine sense.

Inside the cupboard, Zu An was really thankful. It was thanks to the Keyboard System being reliable as always. Hidden in the Dark would completely hide his aura when he was in complete darkness, and not even the emperor could sense him then.

Zhao Han asked, "Why is your body shaking so much? Could it be that you are scared of this emperor?" There was a hint of mockery in his voice as he spoke.

Zu An had a strange expression. The relationship between these two seemed a bit strange. Both of them were probably hiding something.

"Your highness inspires awe throughout the world. How could your humble wife not fear you?" the empress replied with her head lowered.

Zhao Han couldn't help but frown when he heard her indirect response. He said, "Raise your head. Why is your face so red?" He couldn't help but feel a bit strange. Wasn't this woman's beauty a bit too abnormal today?

Now, the empress had already fully calmed herself down. After living in the palace for so many years, her mind was already incredibly strong. She said, "It is because I was training my skills earlier."

"Training?" Zhao Han replied with a sigh. "It seems you really aren't willing to be a normal person."

The empress asked in response, "Your majesty, who would be willing if they were in my situation?"

Zhao Han was a bit unhappy, but he still said, "This emperor will have men bring over more medicine. Earlier, the local regions brought over a precious treasure. It might be of use for your injuries."

"Thank you," the empress said, although she sneered inwardly. Zhao Han always spoke such wonderful promises, but if he really had tried to help her recover, would there really not have been the slightest turn for the better?

No, I'm sure he feels that a crippled empress is much more suitable to his interests.

But now, I've already found a solution. I don't need to be bothered by his insincere courtesy anymore.

"You are always like this," Zhao Han said, seeming to have sensed the implications behind her tone. He couldn't help but feel a bit angry. He wanted to lash out, but he still endured it in the end. "It's fine. You still carry a grudge about what happened back then, so this emperor won't blame you."

Zu An suddenly wanted to know more about this drama. Just what had happened back then to make someone as unstoppable as Zhao Han give in to a woman like this?

Chapter 1572: Meeting and Separation

The empress said indifferently, "Your majesty speaks too seriously. This humble wife's loyalty to you is without equal. How could I dare to carry a grudge?"

Her heart suddenly skipped a beat when she said that, because she could feel the thing that had been shot into her earlier seemingly about to flow out. No matter how shrewd she was, saying such words to Zhao Han in this situation still made her feel a bit embarrassed.

Zhao Han harrumphed in response, clearly a bit unhappy about her attitude. However, when he noticed her brief frown, he still asked out of concern, "What is it? Your body seems to be uncomfortable. Should this emperor call over the imperial physician?"

"There is no need. This humble wife is not uncomfortable at all right now. On the contrary, I feel better than ever before," the empress replied. She felt a trembling from her very soul as she recalled what had just happened.

At first, when she heard that Zhao Han was coming, she had been utterly horrified. However, after they averted disaster, she had begun to reminisce about what had just happened. It really was an experience like no other. Perhaps she would never feel more bliss in this lifetime.

Inside the cabinet, Zu An had a strange expression. This woman seemed to be saying those things for him to hear! He thought, Sigh, it's still people like her who know how to mess around in the palace best.

Zhao Han just assumed the empress was saying the opposite of what she was thinking and didn't suspect anything. He said, "This emperor is going to carry out the Fengshan ceremony in Violet Mountain soon. You should come with me."

"This humble wife has heard about the Fengshan matter too. I need to congratulate your majesty for completing such a glorious achievement. You have reached a level no one has reached before, and no one will reach in the future," the empress replied. Her tone was humble, but it seemed to be somewhat lacking sincerity and enthusiasm. "But this humble wife is already a cripple and cannot move as I want to, so I will not participate in the Violet Mountain events. I hope that your majesty can forgive me."

Zhao Han carefully looked at her, seemingly trying to discern whether she was speaking her true thoughts. The empress had already composed herself, however, and she calmly looked back at him. If there was anyone in the world who wasn't scared of Zhao Han, it was her.

After a while, Zhao Han sighed and said, "It's fine. Then you should remain in the capital and slowly nurse your body. In the meantime, you can help me look after the capital."

The empress' eyelids lowered as she said, "This humble wife finds it difficult to even take care of herself, so how could I have the extra energy to take care of the capital's situation?"

Zhao Han's expression darkened. The empress' words always carried some sharpness to them, which really made him annoyed. A while later, he said, "Empress, help me carry out a divination for this trip. For some reason, this emperor just cannot feel at ease."

Zu An suddenly realized what was going on. No wonder the emperor's temper was so good this entire time. It was because he had come to ask the empress for something!

Even someone as powerful as Zhao Han still has to ask the empress to carry out a divination! It seems like her skills in this field are far greater than I imagined.

The empress replied, "It is very auspicious, of course!"

Zu An had a strange expression when he heard the response. That's exactly the opposite of what she just told me!

Zhao Han was a bit unhappy too, saying, "You did not even carry out a divination, and yet you are already saying that it is very auspicious?"

The empress calmly replied, "Your majesty is without equal throughout the world. In the past, the Fiend Emperor was just about the only one who could face you, but he has already died. Who else in this world is even worth mentioning? Even if there are some covert plots, they will be nothing before your absolute strength."

"Hahaha, well put," Zhao Han said, feeling great joy. It wasn't just because those words perfectly scratched his itch, but also because the empress had revealed some information; namely, that there were some schemes involved. That meant the empress had indeed carried out a divination and that she wasn't just speaking nonsense. Besides, her judgment regarding this matter was similar to his own, so there wasn't anything else worth worrying about.

"Empress should get some rest then. This emperor will not disturb you any longer," Zhao Han said. As he had already achieved his objective, he naturally didn't feel like staying behind.

"This humble wife respectfully sends off your majesty!" the empress said, kneeling down on the ground in respect.

When he saw her obedient posture and beautiful face, Zhao Han felt that the empress was especially moving today. When he thought about how he hadn't really shown her much care, he wondered whether it was a waste of a wonderful resource.

He swallowed his saliva and reached a hand out to her.

The empress noticed his movement, and a hint of surprise flickered through her eyes. She was a woman, and a fully mature woman at that. How could she not know what the meaning in his gaze represented? She hadn't expected the normally completely emotionless Zhao Han to actually feel something for her today.

At that instant, she was a bit alarmed. She didn't know what to do now. She thought, Should I resist? But with his cultivation, what would that do?

But what if I didn't resist? Then everything would be exposed! Both Zu An and I would be beyond dead. When she thought of that, she started to feel nervous. Even her body couldn't help but start to tremble.

Fortunately, Zhao Han lowered his hand, and his intoxicated expression gradually grew firm. He didn't have much of his lifespan left, so he couldn't use up even the slightest bit of his vitality. He nodded toward the empress, then left without turning back again.

When he left, the empress fell to the ground, her body now completely weak. Zu An emerged from the cabinet and supported her. The empress reached out an arm and wrapped it around his neck, saying, "I really almost had my soul scared out of me just now..."

Zu An smiled bitterly as he replied, "Did you think it was any different for me?"

This was exactly what he had always worried about before. Back then, the first time he had screwed the empress was mainly because he had just been screwed over too badly by Zhao Han back in Westhound Tomb, so he had formed a bit of a mental knot. It had just been a form of revenge. However, once he calmed down, he had realized the risks of such a thing were too high. He had just made a trip close to the gates of hell just now, after all.

However, after having learned that even Zhao Han had to consult her, Zu An gradually felt that the empress wasn't just a grumbling wife in the harem as he had thought. She still had many secrets waiting for him to uncover.

He was about to ask about Violet Mountain when the empress seemed to guess his intentions. She reached out a hand and pressed it against his mouth, saying, "Don't say anything."

Zu An had a strange expression as he thought, This woman is really crazy! Zhao Han just left, no?!

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By the time Zu An left the Imperial Palace, his legs felt a bit unsteady. When he recalled what had just happened, he couldn't help but sigh. The empress' entire body really was made of water. Still, he quickly sorted out his thoughts. He immediately used Blue Mallard to use some nearby water to clean his body. Then, he returned to his marquis manor.

There, Chu Chuyan was wearing a white dress. She was leaning against the railing, lost in thought as she stared into the sky. The sight formed a beautiful and natural scene.

In that instant, Zu An felt a sense of peace, as if his body and soul had been cleansed. He couldn't help but feel annoyed. Why had he been in such a rush earlier? He couldn't help but feel a wave of guilt. Before the deed, he had been as depraved as a demon; afterward, he had become as holy as a buddha.

When she saw Zu An, Chu Chuyan's expression revealed a hint of happiness as she said, "You're back."

"What are you looking at?" Zu An asked as he walked over, stopping a few steps in front of her; it was as if he was scared he would defile her by getting any closer.

"I was watching as the white clouds gathered and dispersed, dispersed and gathered. Aren't human meetings and separations like that as well?" Chu Chuyan replied with a light sigh.

Zu An was surprised. He could tell that she was leaving. He couldn't focus on anything else anymore and instead just grabbed her hand, asking, "You're leaving?"

Chu Chuyan voiced her agreement, saying, "I was so happy being with you all this time, to the point where I forgot I still have to fight against that Devil Sect Saintess."

Zu An quickly said, "You guys haven't even set a time yet. There's no rush, right?"

"That was the case before, but..." Chu Chuyan paused, her face reddening as she continued, "But because I was so happy being with you, the Unshakable Daoist Manual I cultivated had a backslide. I feel as if my cultivation realm has become a bit unstable. If I continue to stay by your side, my cultivation might even fall. If that happens, I won't be a match for the Saintess. In that case, I'll be ruining the White Jade Sect's reputation. Besides... I don't want to lose to her."

Zu An was a bit upset, remarking, "This Unshakable Daoist Manual really is good for nothing. Just what kind of nonsense is Yan Xuehen teaching you?"

Chu Chuyan's beautiful brows furrowed as he said, "You shouldn't disrespect my master."

Zu An had a strange expression. He thought to himself, Is this considered disrespecting her? If you knew what I've done to her body, what kind of reaction would you have?

Chapter 1573: State Teacher

In the end, Zu An didn't try to dissuade Chu Chuyan from her decision. After all, this battle was really important for her. He didn't want her to lose her sense of identity either. If she gave up everything for him, she would no longer be the beautiful woman he had met in Brightmoon City.

Still, he wondered how Honglei was doing. If she lost too badly, perhaps she would have a hard time on her side too.

Sigh, both of them are equally important to me! What do we do now...

"When are you planning to leave?" Zu An asked with a sigh.

"I was waiting for you the whole time. I was going to leave after talking to you," Chu Chuyan said reluctantly.

Zu An was stunned.

Chu Chuyan seemed to have realized that it was too sudden too. She explained in embarrassment, "I need to spend some time alone in the mountains and clear my thoughts, to slowly return to that emotionless state. Then, I can go to the Devil Sect to find Qiu Honglei, so I don't have much time."

Zu An was dumbfounded. He eventually said, "I really have to have a talk with your master and change that cultivation method of yours. It really doesn't match how a human should behave."

Chu Chuyan and Yan Xuehen seemed to come from the same mold. If he didn't add a bit more worldly spice to their lives, then forget about becoming an immortal, perhaps they would really become frozen women.

Chu Chuyan smiled and said, "That might be a bit difficult. Master is quite fierce, so she might give you a beating."

Zu An cursed to himself, She's never given me a beating, but I've given her one quite a few times.

"Alright, I really have to leave. I'll have to trouble you to take care of Youzhao in the capital," Chu Chuyan said as she got up and gave him a peck on the lips. Then, she left like a drifting cloud.

"Okay," Zu An said. After some hesitation, he decided not to tell her about Violet Mountain. She was about to face a great battle, so there was no need to worry her and disturb her. That was the case even though the Unshakable Daoist Manual was a skill with such damned characteristics.

As he watched her depart into the distance, Zu An couldn't help but feel a bit lonely. The courtyard which had previously been full of joy and happiness now felt especially spacious and empty. It no longer held the warmth of a family.

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In the following days, Zu An's mood became much more sullen. The only thing he could do was distract himself by focusing on work. He collected information about Yi Commandery, as well as any information he could get about Golden Token Seven. He also sent Xiao Jianren, Dai Seventh, and Chen Eighth out to Yi Commandery ahead of time.

In the few days he had left, he brought Zheng Dan to the Royal Academy again, paying Yan Xianggu a visit to formalize the discipleship.

Seeing as the Sang clan was still going through with the posthumous child plan, Zheng Dan couldn't always stay in the academy. Otherwise, there was no way they would get away with it. As such, they had decided Zheng Dan would just visit the place from time to time. After obtaining Yan Xianggu's guidance, she would cultivate at home. Such a request wasn't really showing Yan Xianggu too much respect, but with Xie Daoyun to smooth things over, the process went rather smoothly.

After all, Yan Xuehen always cultivated in seclusion too. There was no need for Zheng Dan to come up the mountain for quite some time.

Zu An was a bit curious. This Yan Xianggu was quite mysterious. Zu An had visited the academy several times, and yet never seemed to have met him before.

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Zu An and Zheng Dan descended the mountain after the fact.

Xie Daoyun secretly stopped Zu An, then bashfully gave him a satchel. When she saw the surprise in his eyes, she quickly explained, "Don't think too much about it. The Exotic Witchesand you gave me last time was too precious, and I didn't have much to give you. After thinking about it, I asked for a Peace Talisman for you. You need to carry it with you at all times. I hope it can turn your misfortune into blessings." Even though that was what she said, however, her red face seemed to be implying something else.

"Thank you, little sister Daoyun," Zu An said as he received the satchel that still carried a bit of her body temperature. Xie Daoyun had given him several talismans before, and each time, they were of great use

to him. But this time, she didn't explain what the talisman's use was. He only knew that it came from a temple or monastery. It carried her sincerity, so he naturally wouldn't refuse it.

When she heard the way Zu An addressed her, Xie Daoyun's heart skipped a beat. She didn't dare to look straight at him. After saying that, she quickly turned around and fled the scene.

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When they left the mountain, Zheng Dan couldn't help but tease him, asking, "Did Miss Xie give you some lover's gift just now?"

Zu An's expression darkened. He said, "It's just an exchange between friends; don't think too much about it. It'll be bad if this ends up affecting Miss Xie's reputation."

Zheng Dan said with a sneer, "She even gave a man a satchel, and yet you're worried about her reputation?"

Zu An said impatiently, "She's your senior sister now, and she helped you a lot. It's not that good for you to be talking behind her back like this, is it?"

Zheng Dan became a bit depressed. She said, "If I had known I would need my man to sell his body, I wouldn't have agreed to come."

"That's not a problem at all. We're still not too far away, so I'll go back and tell Master Yan that you don't want to join the academy," Zu An said, pretending to drag her back.

Zheng Dan quickly pleaded, "Ah! I was just kidding! I'm actually hoping that you find more formidable women like this so you can take even better care of me."

Zu An was speechless. The way this woman thinks really is different from other women.

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While the two of them were arguing playfully, Xie Daoyun returned to Yan Xiang's place of seclusion. She called out, "Master, you called for me?"

Yan Xiang's aged voice emerged from inside. "You should go to Violet Mountain and see if the mountain's form has been tampered with. His majesty is about to hold the Fengshan ceremony there, so there is a chance that some evildoers will arrange some schemes."

Xie Daoyun couldn't help but become stunned. She replied, "The State Teacher is overseeing Violet Mountain! Is there a need for me to go?"

When the Great Zhou Dynasty unified the entire world in the past, they had obtained the support of many people from the nine daoist sects. Among them, the extremely outstanding leader of the Righteous Sun Sect had been greatly rewarded for his merits and was granted the title of State Teacher. Violet Mountain, a place rich with legends and history, had been made into his place of daoist rites. He was someone comparable to the libationer. In fact, many people in the world of warriors wondered whose cultivation was higher between the State Teacher and the libationer.

But the State Teacher was all the way over by Violet Mountain, and he normally secluded himself. That was why he wasn't as famous as the libationer. However, none of the true experts of the world dared to look down on him. As such, Xie Daoyun didn't think anyone could set up any traps by Violet Mountain.

The stone gate remained silent for a long time before Yan Xiang spoke again. "You should not willfully trust anyone. Not even those close to you are dependable, let alone someone who is a complete stranger to you."

Xie Daoyun asked in shock "Could it be that something went wrong on the State Teacher's end?"

If news of such a thing spread, it would be completely earth-shattering!

"That is not what I meant. It is better to be prepared just in case," Yan Xiang slowly said.

Too many possibilities filled Xie Daoyun's mind at that moment. She wasn't able to calm down at all for a long time. Eventually, she said, "Master, if something really is wrong with the State Teacher, this disciple's skills are still lacking. I fear I will not be able to notice anything there."

Even though she believed her talent wasn't bad, and her skills in formation methods had advanced tremendously, she was still nothing compared to the State Teacher.

"Do not undervalue yourself. Just do as I have taught you, and you will be able to deduce if there are any traps in Violet Mountain," Yan Xiang reassured her.

Xie Daoyun sighed in relief when she heard what her master said, replying, "That makes me feel at ease." At the same time, she felt a bit sad. She was going to leave for Violet Mountain soon, which meant that she couldn't meet her big brother Zu for some time...

She was shocked as soon as that thought appeared. Xie Daoyun, Xie Daoyun, what are you doing? Did you not see enough of what your little brother has done? A woman who's too aggressive usually won't be treasured!

Still, she felt conflicted. Big brother Zu really had too many outstanding women at his side. If she didn't become a bit more proactive, then perhaps...

"Your mind seems to be a bit restless recently. Is it because of that man today?" Yan Xiang suddenly asked.

"Of course not!" Xie Daoyun immediately replied. Then, she protested, "Teacher, when did you become so gossipy too?"

"Hahaha, your teacher was young once as well, and that Zu An is quite outstanding..." Yan Xiang continued. However, when he sensed his disciple outside was about to explode, he continued, "If that is not the case, you can just leave today. Rather than reading ten thousand books, it might be better to go on a ten thousand mile trip after all. I believe that this journey will allow your cultivation to make new breakthroughs."

"Understood!" Xie Daoyun replied. When she heard her master bring up cultivation, she became serious.

She quickly went on her way to Violet Mountain. She had no idea that just three days after she left the capital, the court would issue an order stating that on that day, Violet Mountain's Righteous Sun Sect had experienced a huge fire that destroyed many of their buildings. In light of Violet Mountain's buildings carrying great history, Marquis Zu An was to bring the Armed Escort Division and a group of skilled workmen for repair and renovation as a sign of the court's grace.

Chapter 1574: Criticism

Over the subsequent few days, Zu An gradually appeased the upset Bi Linglong. However, he still spent most of his time keeping Sang Qien and Zheng Dan company.

When she learned that he was going to leave, Sang Qien was very reluctant. However, she knew there was nothing they could do about it, as it was an order from the court.

Meanwhile, Sang Hong was enjoying a rather rare period of leisure in life. The only thing he was a bit dejected about was that his daughter and daughter-in-law seemed to care much more about Zu An than himself. Sometimes, it seemed like he was the outsider, not Zu An.

Fortunately, he was quite satisfied with Zu An. Zu An was his daughter's man, as well as his daughter-in-law's man, so he was supposed to be family, someone so close they couldn't be any closer... Huh? Why does this sound a bit weird?

In any event, the two of them had worked together for so long, and he was indebted to Zu An several times over for saving his life. Their relationship was already comparable to that of father and son. The only other thing he could hope for was for his daughter to give birth to a good grandson, and for the child to have a bit of his father's excellence. Then, he could rest in peace.

Still, he was worried that something would go poorly on Violet Mountain, so he constantly called over Zu An to tell him about different aspects of Yi Commandery's officialdom. At the same time, he helped Zu An plan for all kinds of situations that could appear.

With such a veteran of the political circles to guide him, Zu An felt that he had obtained quite a bit of valuable intelligence. He had much more confidence in the Violet Mountain trip now.

One day, Zu An was chatting with Sang Qien and Zheng Dan about everyday things in the courtyard under the sunlight, when a servant suddenly brought in a delicate and refined invitation card. It was an invitation sent personally by Lady Nan Xun from Scarlet Invitation.

Both of the women were alarmed when they saw what was happening. Zheng Dan said with a sigh, "You really are close to courtesans wherever you go..."

Off to one side, Sang Qien said jealously, "Sister-in-law might not know it, but this Scarlet Invitation is the capital's most popular brothel; its reputation is even a bit higher than that of the government brothels, all because of this courtesan Nan Xun they host. Not only is she an exceptional beauty, but she also excels at all of the four arts of zither, go, calligraphy, and painting, as well as singing and all sorts of other musical instruments. Countless high officials and nobles rush there from all over the capital to see her. Normally, even an ordinary ticket costs over a thousand silver, and that can only give you a single glance of her from afar. Even so, those tickets are too hard to find for purchase; let alone one she wrote herself."

Even though she and Zu An didn't have any real relationship on the surface, he was still the father of her child. His being so close to a courtesan from a brothel made her feel really awful.

Zheng Dan seemed to have suddenly realized what was going on. She exclaimed, "I remember now! Just before Ah Zu went to Cloudcenter Commandery, he apparently won Lady Nan Xun's favor in a competition with the other young masters. That night, he was invited behind the curtains, becoming the target of countless men's envy."

You have successfully trolled Zheng Dan for +177 +177 +177...

You have successfully trolled Sang Qien for +177 +177 +177...

Zu An felt a bit depressed, replying, "What do you mean, behind the curtains? We only had a normal chat that night."

Zheng Dan and Sang Qien both rolled their eyes. One was a famous courtesan, and the other was a womanizer. Those two had been in a room alone, and yet they only had a normal chat? Do you think we're stupid?

Zu An felt helpless. Why does no one ever believe me when I'm telling the truth?

...

Eventually, Zu An finally placated the two women with great difficulty. Then, he went to Scarlet Invitation.

Of course, it wasn't because he was really consumed by lust, but rather that he had suddenly remembered his promise to the Peacock Wise King. Because he had just reunited with Chu Chuyan and the women around him were always at each other's throats, he had almost forgotten about that. Now that he had received such an invitation, how could he not pay a visit?

When he arrived at Scarlet Invitation, it was still afternoon, so the place wasn't open yet. However, information traveled quickly in a brothel. When they learned that Nan Xun had invited a man over, all of the women came over to see just what kind of awesome person he was.

"Who's that big brother over there? He's so handsome! No wonder Lady Nan Xun took the initiative to invite him."

"You don't even know who he is? He's the most popular person in the Crown Prince's palace, as well as the youngest marquis in the empire. He's the one with incredible achievements, Sir Zu!"

"Ah! For a man like this, if he's willing to ransom me, I'm willing to become a concubine, or even just a maid!"

"Keep dreaming! Why would he do that for you? If he wants to, I'm even willing to pay my own ransom for him."

"Compared to his status, I appreciate his skills in the arts more. That 'Sword and Song' he gifted General Qin is something that makes me tremble every time I read it."

"I like his 'See You In My Dreams' more. I heard he wrote that just for Nan Xun! If anyone wrote a poem like that for me, I would be satisfied even if I died there and then. But I know myself. Only a courtesan queen could enjoy that kind of happiness."

"That may not be. That popular 'A Chinese Ghost Story' that has been circulating was rumored to have been written by him too. Wasn't that something written for all the women in our trade? It perfectly describes our helplessness and sadness."

"Sir Zu, I love you!"

...

A flock of beauties rushed over. In their eyes, the story where several women had been forced to go out and seduce passing scholars by their boss was really similar to their current situation. They were also kind and good women! However, for various reasons, they could only prostitute themselves. They felt a sense of empathy. From their perspective, Zu An's 'A Chinese Ghost Story' had been written completely out of pity for them, so they naturally felt closer to him.

Zu An couldn't really handle their enthusiasm. Fortunately, Nan Xun swiftly came out and ordered them to stop. Only then was she able to escort him into her own small courtyard. Nan Xun was the courtesan queen of Scarlet Invitation, so no one wanted to offend her.

Still, some other courtesans were a bit unhappy, muttering, "That wench only knows how to take everything for herself!"

As they entered the small courtyard, the beautiful Nan Xun had a smile on her face the entire time. She took out a fragrant handkerchief and helped Zu An wipe the lipstick and rouge that were all over his face and clothes.

"Sir Zu is still as popular as ever. I could hear their shouts of endearment even from far away," Kong Nanwu said as she carried a cute and fluffy little white fox in her arms. She was so beautiful, she really looked as if she had come straight out of a painting.

When the little white fox saw Zu An, it jumped out of her arms excitedly, but was stopped by Kong Nanwu's hand and firmly pressed into her lap. It could only continuously wiggle its tail at Zu An to show its goodwill.

Zu An couldn't help but laugh. If he recalled correctly, this little fox was named Huhu, right? Why did it now seem like a puppy? Still, the little fox was too pretty, so he couldn't help but go over and give its fluffy fur a rub. He thought, Hmm... I should tell Tushan Yu to transform so I can give her a try too.

Huhu also felt comfortable and closed its eyes. Its eyes curved upward with happiness.

However, Kong Nanwu lightly smacked Zu An's hand away. She carried the little fox with her as she moved backward. She shot him an annoyed look and said, "Huhu is a girl; how can you just touch her however you want?"

Zu An chuckled in embarrassment. He had really forgotten that she was a girl and subconsciously treated her as a pet.

Kong Nanwu continued, "The reason why Huhu likes you so much is thanks to the 'Strange Tales' story you gave us. She felt really immersed in that world. This story of yours is quite incredible because it wasn't just Huhu who felt like that; Nan Xun did as well. Even the other women from Scarlet Invitation were really moved. All of them empathized with the story from their own different perspectives, but the results were the same. Young master truly is a great genius."

Zu An was the one who was a bit embarrassed now. He said, "That was nothing more than the wisdom of my predecessors. I'm merely benefiting from their greatness and wasn't of much help myself."

"Young master is too humble," Kong Nanwu said with a sigh. People were very different from each other, as expected... Because she had spent so long hiding in Scarlet Invitation, she had seen too many people boast wildly about themselves to get the favor of beautiful women. Even if they only had a bit of skill, they would be able to multiply it tenfold. Compared to them, Zu An was simply a humble gentleman. No wonder he had been able to write such a marvelous and moving story.

Zu An chuckled. Who could understand the loneliness of being someone whose true words were never believed? He said, "Oh, by the way, the feather that the lady gave me last time was greatly helpful, so I wanted to specially thank you today."

"I actually feel a bit of regret for giving that to you," Kong Nanwu said, her gaze turning a bit dangerous. "Because of you, I somehow became a widow without even getting married. I wonder how you plan to compensate me for that?"

Zu An was a bit embarrassed, saying, "So the lady already knew about the Fiend King Court's situation."

Kong Nanwu gave him a deep look and replied, "Should I call you young master or Regent?"

Zu An chuckled and said, "Actually, you can call me uncle."

Kong Nanwu was speechless. She had felt that the pace of the conversation was completely within her control, but in that instant, she suddenly became a bit dumbfounded.

"When we were at the Fiend King Court, the Peacock Wise King and I referred to each other as brothers, and he even said that he would have his niece pay me a visit out of respect," Zu An said with a deadly earnest expression. "But the lady and I already knew each other beforehand, so we can continue our relationship on our own."

"Pfft!" Off to the side, Nan Xun could no longer hold back her laughter. "My lady, who would have thought that you would end up like this one day?"

The little fox was laughing even harder, rolling on the carpet. Her four cute little paws waved toward the sky.

"All of you, shut up!" Kong Nanwu snapped, no longer able to remain as calm as before. She stared at both of the maids with a reddened face, then looked at Zu An resentfully.

Zu An chuckled and said, "I was joking just now, but Peacock Wise King really did tell me to take good care of you. The situation in the Fiend King Court is quite complicated, so it's best if you don't return for a while."

"I more or less understand the reasoning," Kong Nanwu said as she pouted and looked at Zu An. "You've left me in such a sorry state; are you really not going to repay me at all?"

"I wonder what the lady wants?" Zu An replied, sensing something in her words and became vigilant. He had frequently heard about how resourceful this Peacock Manor's princess was, often toying with others until they spun round and round in her palm. He definitely couldn't grow careless here.

A proud look flickered through Kong Nanwu's eyes as her plan succeeded. She said, "I want..."

Chapter 1575: Entrust

"I want..." Kong Nanwu couldn't help but chuckle when she saw Zu An's vigilant appearance. "I want a new story like 'Strange Tales'. Even though 'A Chinese Ghost Story' is good, I'm already so familiar with it that it doesn't give me that new and fresh feeling anymore."

"That's it?" Zu An asked, feeling a bit stunned. He had thought that she would ask him something that was extremely difficult. He hadn't expected it to actually be something so easy.

When she saw him relax, Kong Nanwu couldn't help but say, "Young master, this isn't a simple matter at all. After all, a story like Strange Tales is something an ordinary person won't be able to come up with even if they spend their entire lives on it. Please don't bring out any random story to try and appease me half-heartedly."

Nan Xun covered her smile with her hand as she said, "As young master was able to write 'A Chinese Ghost Story', how could he be someone ordinary? I'm sure that was just something he wrote casually."

When he saw the two women look at him with eyes full of expectation, Zu An wiped at his cold sweat. If not for the wisdom of his predecessors, how could he possibly come up with a brilliant story? He thought for a bit, then said, "Then I'll tell you about the story of 'Painted Skin'. A long time ago..."

He didn't tell the story exactly the way it had been in Strange Tales, but rather added some plot from the movies Painted Skin 1 and 2. After all, these were young ladies, so they were fairly interested in romance.

Sure enough, when they heard the story, Nan Xun and the little fox both sobbed tearfully. Kong Nanwu was more composed than the other two, but her eyes were also red; clearly, she had been deeply affected.

"That female ghost is just too pitiful. She paid such a huge price for love, and yet she was the one who had to bear all of the tragedy in the end, not obtaining a thing out of it all," Nan Xun said, wiping away her tears. To a certain degree, she was also a female ghost, so she sympathized even more with the lead role.

Kong Nanwu frowned and said, "I feel as if that female ghost was a bit... green tea. Is that how you use that term?" She asked Zu An for confirmation. Green tea was slang she had picked up from him, after all. When he gave her his approval, she then continued, "She knew he was a husband with a wife, and yet she still insisted on going along with it. She even used all kinds of tricks to insert herself between them."

As the Peacock King Race's princess, her status was noble. If she ever got married, she would become the main wife. For example, she had almost become the Crown Princess. That was why she naturally felt a kind of vigilance against such mistresses.

Nan Xun replied unhappily, "Why are you making it sound so bad? She was only doing it out of love too."

The little fox replied in her small voice, "I think that man was really bad. He already had a wife, and yet he still had that kind of relationship with another woman!"

When they heard her words, the women in the room couldn't help but look at Zu An, giving him a huge headache. He asked, "What are you all staring at me for?"

"That male lead actually wasn't that bad; he didn't really do anything. Even later on, when he thought his wife was a monster, he didn't leave her. It was to the extent that in order to prove that he wasn't someone who only judged based on appearances, he even cut his own eyes out and became blind..." Kong Nanwu trailed off, looking at Zu An with a strange expression. There was a trace of a smile hanging from the corners of her lips as she continued, "Could it be that the young master felt that the male lead was too fickle, so you subconsciously painted him in a better light?"

Zu An grumbled, "It's not as if that guy in the story was modeled after me..."

He continued to try to explain himself for a long time. In the end, even though the three women said they believed him, they still had a 'we understand' look on their faces, making him feel a deep sense of powerlessness.

Soon afterward, Kong Nanwu asked Zu An about the events on Violet Mountain. Someone as well-informed as her had naturally learned about his court mission. She said, "Young master, this Violet Mountain trip might be full of dangers. I've received information stating that many evildoers are heading in that direction with unknown intentions."

Zu An was stunned, asking, "Where did you obtain that information from?"

For better or for worse, he was the Regent of the Fiend races. His status was supposed to be higher than hers, right? Despite that, he hadn't even received any information yet, so why did she know about that?

"I've been on the human side for some time now, so I still have some things I've gained," Kong Nanwu replied. She downplayed the situation, but she couldn't hide her proud smile.

Zu An couldn't really push her about the details either. He said, "Thank you for your reminder, Lady Kong."

At the same time, he felt a bit strange. Just what is going on? Why are even those fellas from the world of warriors getting involved with Violet Mountain?

After all, the empire had already pretty much roped in most of the elites. Even though the world of warriors still had some powerful individuals, they were completely insignificant compared to the massive court. They couldn't even get away if the court went after them.

Kong Nanwu picked up the wine pot off to the side and poured out two cups. She brought one of them up to Zu An, her fair wrist being exposed within her sleeves and reflecting on the jade cup's surface. She said, "Cheers! I wish the young master a safe journey."

“Thank you!” Zu An replied as he received the cup and drained it in one go. At the same time, he felt a bit regretful. Weren’t peacocks green? Why was she so white?

...

After arranging various affairs in the capital, Zu An brought a group consisting of the Armed Escort Army and several craftsmen to Violet Mountain.

Zhao Han clearly cared a great deal about the ceremony. The number of men he had sent out this time exceeded the previous Imperial Envoy fleet. It wasn’t just more people, either; there were even two Armed Escort Army generals accompanying them.

One man with a dark-reddish complexion was named Wang Bolin. He always had a miserable look on his face, as if everyone else owed him money or something.

The slightly younger one was named Zhang Zijiang. He always had a smile on his face no matter who he was talking to. However, a glint occasionally flickered through his eyes, showing that he wasn’t as kind as he looked on the surface.

Even though the two of them had different tendencies, Zu An could sense hostility from both of them.

Still, that couldn't be blamed on them. The two of them were quite capable figures in the Armed Escort Division and had even worked as deputy generals for many years. Whether in terms of their ability or prestige, they had already received people’s acknowledgment.

These two normally butted heads with each other, because both of them wanted to stand out and become the new Armed Escort Division General. And yet, after fighting for so many years, that vacant space had been given to a guy named Zu An.

If he had come from an influential clan and had a great reputation, that would be one thing. However, he was so young, even younger than many of the new recruits from the Armed Escort Division! On top of all of that, he had been born to a poor background! There were rumors that he used to be a drafted son-in-law, at that!

As such, even though Zu An had displayed outstanding achievements in the past two years, they still didn’t feel good about it. With such a ‘common enemy’, the two rivals actually felt a sense of unity for the first time.

In the end, Zu An had Bi Linglong to thank. When she learned that these two deputy generals were heading out to Violet Mountain, she had made sure to warn him. Otherwise, how would Zu An have been able to so clearly deduce what they were thinking?

“Even though Linglong has been throwing a fit recently, she still really cares about me, it seems,” Zu An muttered to himself. When he thought about how Bi Linglong was upset, but wasn’t willing to admit it with that proud expression she had, he couldn't help but grin.

“Brother Zu is thinking about another woman again. Look at that lewd smile on your face,” someone said, patting him on the shoulder. Someone wearing a silver mask appeared in front of him. Even though the person was masked, he had eyes that were even brighter than peach blossoms. Who else could it be but Xie Xiu?

When he saw Xie Xiu, who was more beautiful than many women, Zu An inadvertently thought, Is this kid not scared that he might be kidnapped by a dude and r*ped one day?

“Xiu’er! So you had some free time and decided to visit me? Did those female fans of yours come too?” Zu An replied. He still remembered all the women who had followed Xie Xiu during his last trip to the Royal Academy.

Xie Xiu shivered. He looked around and quietly asked, “Can you lower your voice? I actually snuck out this time.”

“You came all the way to see me off even in this kind of situation? You’re a loyal brother,” Zu An said while looking around. He was surprised to find that he couldn’t see a certain graceful figure anywhere.

“Stop looking already. My big sis isn’t here,” Xie Xiu said, rolling his eyes.

Zu An chuckled in embarrassment, asking, “Is your big sister busy with cultivation recently?”

Xie Xiu shook his head and said, “Apart from coming out here to see you off, there was something else I have to entrust you with, which is the mission my big sis accepted. It seems she had to go to Violet Mountain too, and she already left a few days ago...”

He gave a rough explanation of what happened. However, because the trip had been conducted in secret, he didn’t have too many details either. “Even though my big sis’ cultivation isn’t bad, she doesn’t have much experience with the world of warriors. Even though she isn’t completely inexperienced, everyone who came and went from Brightmoon City had some status. They all knew she was the precious daughter of a city lord, so they wouldn’t really try anything. After she came to the capital, she spent all her time studying in the rear mountain, hardly ever engaging in conversations with random people. But this time, she left on a journey all alone...”

“You’re worried that something might happen to her out there?” Zu An replied with a chuckle. “I didn’t expect you to be a bit of a sis-con.”

“What’s a sis-con?” Xie Xiu replied, confused. He shook his head and continued, “Your journeys this time are similar, which is why I wanted to ask you to take care of her. I wanted to go with you too, but that old bastard Hei Baizi seems to have gone crazy or something, giving me a load of tasks to do. I don’t have any time to leave the capital. If something happened to my big sis, how would I explain things to my folks?”

Zu An had a strange expression. Is this really an obedient and filial handsome chap...

“Don’t worry. Your big sis is my good friend too. Of course I’ll watch out for her,” he said, patting his chest reassuringly. He thought to himself, The two of us really do share some affinity with each other. Xie Daoyun was actually sent out to Violet Mountain too.

“It’s enough as long as she’s safe; you don’t have to take care of her too well,” Xie Xiu said vigilantly. “Otherwise, if you took care of her all the way to bed, that would be bad.”

Zu An glowered. He retorted, “Do I look like that kind of person to you?”

Xie Xiu gave him a careful look, then nodded seriously and replied, “You do!”

Chapter 1576: Despair

“What kind of person is brother-in-law?” remarked a ‘young man’ with pretty features, who rushed over when he heard the conversation. Who else could it be but Chu Youzhao?

Zu An couldn't help but sigh in amazement. Even though she was also a handsome ‘young man’, Youzhao was still a bit cuter. Xie Xiu still had one of ‘those’ in the end.

Of course, the tan-skinned Murong Qinghe was inseparable from Chu Youzhao. She was secretly observing Xie Xiu as well, her brows slightly furrowed. The other ladies in the capital had made it sound as if his handsomeness was unparalleled in this world. Some had even said they had found meaning in life through liking him, and that they were able to approach life with greater positivity because of him, and other such things.

However, after seeing Xie Xiu several times, she still felt that her big brother Chu was more handsome. It was to the extent that she even felt big brother Zu was more handsome than him. Just what in the world made all the other women so infatuated?

Xie Xiu knew Murong Qinghe was obsessed with the Chu clan's heir and that they were always together, so he immediately dropped all interest in her. Furthermore, the Xie clan and Chu clan had always been close to each other to begin with. For him, he only liked women who were completely dedicated to him. Other people's wives and girlfriends? That was all heresy. He really didn't understand what kind of pervert would like such a thing.

When their eyes met, they immediately separated. Neither one of them considered the other in the slightest.

Because there were so many attractive men and women gathered in one spot, many people came over to see what was happening. Xie Xiu was worried that he would draw the attention of some crazy women if his identity was exposed. He cupped his hands toward Zu An and said, “Brother Zu, I'll be entrusting you with my sister's safety. Also, remember not to take care of her too much.” After saying that, he put on his mask again and disappeared into the crowd.

Chu Youzhao quickly realized something and asked, “Why do you need to take care of his big sister?”

Her big sister wasn't there, so she had to protect her brother-in-law from random vixens in her place. She couldn't let them steal him away while she was busy.

Zu An gave her a rough summary of what had happened. Murong Qinghe was confused, saying, “Miss Xie comes from a literary family and isn't too familiar with the dangers and ways of the world of warriors. However, why did he tell you to take care of her? Also, who says it that way?”

Zu An began to sweat. He couldn't just say that Xie Xiu was telling him not to take his sister to bed, right? He just found some random excuse to appease her.

...

Eventually, the group began to hurry the onlookers along. Chu Youzhao reluctantly bid Zu An goodbye.

Murong Qinghe looked at Chu Youzhao in confusion, thinking that her big brother Chu was usually pretty manly. Why was it that whenever they met big brother Zu, he started acting like a girl? Besides, wasn't their relationship a bit too good?

She was suddenly shocked, thinking, Could it be that big brother Chu likes men?

She felt very conflicted when that thought emerged. She wanted to ask about it, but she was too scared to. In the end, she could only console herself and say that it was probably because her big brother Chu was still too young, and thus felt a natural adoration toward outstanding heroes. Big brother Zu was indeed much more formidable than the other young masters in the capital. Together with being his brother-in-law, such admiration was normal.

Zu An naturally didn't know that his relationship with Chu Youzhao had ended up being distorted in such a way. When he returned to the departing group, Deputy General Zhang Zijiang said with a smile, "It seems Sir Zu's friends all have outstanding backgrounds. It really is quite enviable."

Off to the side, Wang Bolin harrumphed, clearly believing that Zu An hadn't risen to his current position by relying on his own background.

Zu An just smiled and ignored their hostility. He didn't feel like explaining himself either. He was already someone who only viewed people like the Fiend Emperor and Zhao Han as his competitors, so why would he care about such things?

The group headed toward Violet Mountain. Along the way, Wang Bolin and Zhang Zijiang came to Zu An several times to discuss plans and arrangements for the trip.

"I know that the two of you are veteran generals in the army and are familiar with these details. We'll just do things according to your suggestions," Zu An replied politely.

Wang Bolin only felt more disdain toward Zu An when he saw how meekly Zu An acted. Zhang Zijiang still maintained his respect on the surface at first, but after a few days, he saw that Zu An didn't give any suggestions at all and that the two of them were deciding everything. Furthermore, he couldn't sense the slightest ki aura coming from Zu An, as if he were just an ordinary person, so he couldn't help but start to feel disdain too.

Perhaps this Zu An had had some ability in the past, but he had most likely suffered some great damage to his cultivation. His position had to be completely because of his connections.

Unfortunately, our Great Zhou Dynasty only cares about strength. Those who don't have the skills to match their status only have disaster awaiting them.

Their changes in attitude didn't escape Zu An's notice. However, he didn't take it to heart. In his opinion, the logistics of their trip, such as where to set up camp, the repair of the buildings on Violet Mountain, and eliminating hidden dangers, didn't need his involvement. These two hadn't realized the true danger yet.

...

Just like that, a few days passed. Suddenly, the scouts reported that an intense battle was happening in a valley several dozen miles out. The fight didn't involve any authorities, so it was likely bandits.

Zu An said, "Seeing as they're just bandits, just leave it to the local officials. We have a bigger mission at hand, so we can't let ourselves be hindered by that."

Because Zhao Han was the one he thought of as his opponent, he didn't really want to make enemies with the rebels fighting against the court. He had his relationship with Yun Jianyue, too. If he recalled correctly, the Devil Sect seemed to have its own rebel army. It wouldn't be good if he ended up committing friendly fire.

However, Zhang Zijiang said with a resolute expression, "We are the army of the son of heaven and have the duty of supporting the ruler in governing the country. As we have encountered it, how can we just overlook it?"

Even though the Armed Escort Division in the Imperial Palace sounded amazing, there weren't many areas that needed military intervention, so there weren't any opportunities to accumulate merit. The Violet Mountain trip was a task where they only had to go through the motions. His majesty was unmatched; which idiot would dare to go against him?

He assumed the Violet Mountain mission was nothing more than part of the process. It wasn't some great contribution. However, if they dealt with a group of bandits along the way, that would be different. Even though the world was at peace, because of the rebels led by Lu Sanyuan, there were always sparks of conflict here and there. That left the court with a huge headache.

If he could suppress this group of bandits and establish a great achievement, perhaps he would be able to rise up. Even if Zu An had already taken the position of Armed Escort Division leader, he could go elsewhere, such as the Bright Tiger or First Riders divisions.

Zu An said seriously, "We have our own mission and we don't have much intelligence about the enemy. If we acted hastily and held up our mission, it would be a great crime that would be punished upon our return."

Just then, Wang Bolin sneered. "How can some trifling bandits be anything major? If Sir Zu is worried, this one is willing to lead fifty members of the Armed Escort Division to eliminate the enemy."

He didn't even wait for Zu An to agree. He took fifty Armed Escort Division members he was close to and headed directly west.

Zhang Zijiang panicked when he saw that. If Wang Bolin took all the achievements, wouldn't he be left in the dust? As such, he pointed at fifty other Armed Escort Division Guards and said, "Sir Zu, please rest here for a bit. This one will be back soon." He also took fifty men and rushed out afterward, for of fear of being outdone by Wang Bolin.

The entire Armed Escort Division now noticed the strange things happening with their superiors. They saw that the deputy generals didn't give their leader any respect, and yet the leader couldn't do a thing. As such, the way they looked at Zu An also became a bit strange.

Only the group who had followed Zu An to Cloudcenter Commandery before felt resentful. However, they made up just too small a proportion of the Armed Escort Division, and couldn't affect the overall situation at all.

Zu An's expression remained calm. He looked toward the valley in the southwest. He thought to himself, I've already done what I could. I hope the volunteer army on that side will accomplish what they wish for.

...

Meanwhile, in the valley, a graceful and gentle-looking figure was fleeing for her life. There was a rebel army all around her. For some reason, they all insisted on chasing her down. When she felt the exhausted ki within her, a hint of despair flickered across her face.

Chapter 1577: Regret

The woman was none other than Xie Daoyun, who had set out toward Violet Mountain ahead of time. She had passed through the vicinity a few days ago, but because of her beautiful appearance, she had drawn a lot of attention in a tavern. Some coarse men had quickly started catcalling and hitting on her.

Even though she was normally gentle and quiet, she wasn't so kind to people who harassed innocent women. She had immediately taught them a fierce lesson. After all, back in Brightmoon City, she hadn't been someone normal hoodlums would provoke, let alone now after she studied for two years under Yan Xiang.

Still, she was too kindhearted. Even though she had taught them a fierce lesson, the men had gathered their companions and returned. Their cultivation ranks were much higher, but they still weren't too difficult to deal with for the runemaster Xie Daoyun.

She fended them off easily. Even though she was kind, she wasn't completely naive. Feeling a bit annoyed that these people didn't know when to stop, she had decided to break some of their arms and legs. However, she still couldn't bring herself to take their lives.

She had thought that the skills of a runemaster would be enough to scare them off, but soon afterward, even more people... No, at this point, it was an 'army' coming after her.

As the daughter of an official's clan, judging from their tattered clothes and random assortment of weapons, she quickly deduced that it wasn't actually an army of the court, but rather some kind of local rebel army.

Even though Xie Daoyun's cultivation wasn't low, there wasn't much she could do against an entire army. As such, she fought back while trying to break free, but there seemed to be someone among them who was very good at tracking and always found her trail again. She was never able to truly shake them off.

The two sides had chased after each other just like that, eventually crossing paths with the Armed Escort Division.

After several days of such a high-intensity chase, Xie Daoyun was already completely exhausted, both physically and mentally. The rebel army seemed to excel at such things and always rotated its members out during the chase, while she was alone and couldn't rest at all. After so many days, Xie Daoyun had already used up almost all of her internal energy. She felt that the moment she closed her eyes, she would fall asleep. However, all of the rune formations she had studied required concentration in order to fully display their power.

She was only able to rest for fifteen minutes under a tree before a small rebel army troop caught up. She gritted her teeth. She wondered to herself, Just what in the world is going on here? Why is this army able to go all over the place without anyone stopping them?

But in the end, complaints were just complaints. She could only depend on herself at that moment. She had grown up in an official's family ever since she was little, so the rebel army had always been portrayed as savage and cruel. She was even a woman, so just thinking about what would happen to her if she ended up in their hands made her tremble with fear.

The rebel army surrounded her, but no horses approached. They were still a bit apprehensive, clearly because of how much they had suffered at her hands before. Many of the rebel soldiers raised their bows and fired at her. Others threw their hatchets and spears at her.

Xie Daoyun gritted her teeth. Her hands quickly formed a seal, and a transparent blue barrier appeared in front of her, blocking all the arrows and spears. Soon afterward, however, the formation in front of her began to flicker. She tottered on the verge of collapse.

The rebel army had quite a few cultivators in their ranks too. They quickly deduced her current state. Someone exclaimed, "That woman's internal energy is about to run out. Keep going, everyone!"

Xie Daoyun's face turned incredibly pale. She changed her hand seal and made a throwing motion. All of the arrows she had stopped were thrown back. Bitter screams emerged from the rebel army's side. Clearly, many people couldn't dodge in time and were hurt by the arrows. Unfortunately, most of them were still blocked.

Then, the soldiers screamed and charged at her. It was easy to see just how excited they were from their reddened eyes. This beautiful young woman would be in their clutches soon!

Xie Daoyun's fingers moved quickly. She formed a new seal, then pressed it into the ground. A faint red formation shone on the ground, and the surroundings exploded. The rebel army suffered bitterly. Meanwhile, Xie Daoyun borrowed the cover of the smoke and dust to run for her life.

Still, it only bought her a bit of time. There were many strong people in the army, and some of them rode on beasts that were even faster than many cultivators. Xie Daoyun was already completely spent too. After merely a kilometer or so of running, she heard roars behind her. The rebels flung countless javelins outward, cutting off her retreat.

Xie Daoyun was startled and stopped. In that brief moment, however, she was completely surrounded by the rebel army.

The rebel army's mounted riders formed a circle around her, blowing deafening whistles. It was clear that they were very excited now that the pretty woman they had been chasing for so long was finally going to be theirs.

A hint of despair flickered through Xie Daoyun's eyes. There wasn't even a single sliver of energy left inside her now. However, the look was soon replaced with a resolute expression. She would rather end her own life than fall into this army's hands.

Still, she was sad that she would never see her father, mother, or little brother, and never be able to see that person again...

All of a sudden, the rebel soldier closest to her was hit in the head by an arrow. Everyone around him was shocked and turned around. They heard the sound of hooves, and a mounted army dressed in dazzling golden armor rushed over.

“What kind of army is this?” someone exclaimed in surprise. The rebel army rearranged their formation, still completely shocked. Wasn’t the enemy force equipped way too well? How could ordinary regions’ armies have such elite armor and weapons? Not even a king’s most elite troops could compare to them, right?!

Meanwhile, Xie Daoyun was overjoyed at the unexpected good news. She was the daughter of an official’s family, and she had stayed in the capital for quite some time. She recognized the army as the Armed Escort Division! Furthermore, big brother Zu was the leader of that very army. Her life was already hanging by a thread, and yet he had come to save her! Could it be that they were destined to meet by fate?

As a woman from a wealthy family who enjoyed the arts, she really liked romance stories. She had heard too many similar stories. She hadn’t expected it to happen to her one day, though. In that instant, she felt so blessed that she was about to cry.

Soon afterward, the cavalry rushed over. They were equipped with military crossbows that had been fortified with formations. A rain of bolts followed. The small rebel army troop couldn’t block them even if they raised their shields; the projectiles penetrated straight through. They all screamed bitterly as they collapsed.

“Retreat! Hurry and contact the big boss and second boss!” a survivor screamed. The rebel army wasn’t in the mood to resist at all anymore. All of those who remained began to run.

This Armed Escort Division began to pursue the fleeing enemy. The two generals at the front in particular looked like vicious tigers; their cultivations were clearly a level higher than everyone else. Furthermore, the two of them seemed to be competing against each other, as if they were scared that they would be outdone by the other in terms of kill count. The rebel army’s small troop was almost instantly dispatched.

When they looked at the fragmented remains of the rebel army, the two generals looked as if they still hadn’t fully expressed themselves. However, out of consideration for their status, they couldn’t really steal kills from their subordinates, so they went over to Xie Daoyun’s side.

“May I ask where this lady is from? Why are you fighting against this rebel army?” the red-faced man in front asked in admiration. After all, due to the support of formations, armies usually weren’t things an individual cultivator could deal with. The fact that this scholarly-looking young woman had been able to hold out for so long against the rebel army meant that she was quite incredible. It was unfortunate that she wasn’t a man, or else he would have become sworn brothers with her.

Meanwhile, the other, white-faced general voiced his surprise. “You are a disciple from the rear mountain?” He was a more meticulous thinker and recognized traces of the academy’s style from her tattered, blood-soaked clothes.

“Thank you for saving me, generals. I am a disciple of the academy’s Sir Yan, Xie Daoyun...” Xie Daoyun looked around while replying, but she didn’t see that familiar figure. She couldn’t help but feel a bit sullen. Looks like stories are just stories after all. How could real life have been such a coincidence?

When they heard that this was Yan Xiang’s disciple, Wang Bolin and Zhang Zijiang were both overjoyed by the unexpected good news. After all, the army’s countless formations practically all came from the academy. Yan Xiang was the leading figure in that process, and he would only make talismans and magical artifacts for the highest-ranked generals in the army. Now that they had saved her, didn’t it mean she was now in their debt?

Furthermore, they had vaguely heard of Xie Daoyun’s reputation. It was rumored that in recent years, Yan Xiang had taken in a disciple with exceptional talent, and she was completely capable of succeeding him. Someone like that had been provided assistance while she was in a moment of crisis. How was she going to repay them in the future?

Both of them were extremely excited, but Xie Daoyun felt a bit dejected. She asked, “Why are the two generals here?” After all, the Armed Escort Division was one of the Emperor’s personal armies. They normally didn’t leave the capital.

“We came on orders to go to Violet Mountain...” the two replied. When they realized her identity, their attitudes had become much nicer.

Xie Daoyun was about to say something when her gaze suddenly darted to one side. Her expression changed greatly as she asked, “Why did you only bring this amount of people? This is bad!”

She was the respected Yan Xiang’s disciple. If it had just been that small troop, how would she have been left in such a poor state? What she had faced before was a full army, and the cultivation of their leader was extremely high. That was why all of her internal energy and mental strength had been fully consumed. The group that had chased after her was but a small troop. However, once the main group received a message about what had happened, they would rush over!

Sure enough, as soon as she spoke, the earth quaked and mountains shook as the main army showed themselves. Countless rebel army soldiers rushed forth from different directions in the forest, completely surrounding them.

Wang Bolin and Zhang Zijiang’s expressions changed. There were at least a couple thousand people here! They only had a hundred; like hell they could fight off the attack! They had thought that it was just a small group of ruffians, so they had rushed over excitedly to earn contributions. And yet, it was actually a rebel army on such a large scale! Had the local officials been eating shit all day or something? How could they just let such a large army exist?

Chapter 1578 – Fleeing Within Calamity

When the rebel army saw how well-equipped the troops in the valley were, all of their eyes turned red. As a rebel army, they were always trying to make ends meet. Everything they had was obtained through stealing. That was why their clothing and armor were all of different colors, tattered and full of patches in many places. Their equipment had all been taken from dead officials or bought from the black market after changing hands several times.

In contrast, the small, hundred-man army before them was made up of soldiers riding tall horses and dressed in shining armor. Their weapons looked extremely sharp too.

If there were a thousand of such troops—no, just five hundred of them—they would immediately lower their heads and run. Fighting against an army like that would just result in too many losses. However, there were only a hundred of them. In the rebels' eyes, the troops were nothing more than a hundred fat sheep. If they completely looted the soldiers, they would be able to fully upgrade their equipment. With such gear, invading some local cities in the future would become countless times easier.

The rebel army had a rule of 'finders keepers', in order to give them incentive to fully display their strength. Several rebels roared, charging at the Armed Escort Division's hundred-man army.

Upon seeing such ravenous men charge at them, seemingly intent on stripping them of everything they had, many of the Armed Escort Division members shivered inwardly. However, no matter what, the Armed Escort Division was the emperor's personal army. Even though they usually remained in the capital, they were still elites. Wang Bolin and Zhang Zijiang were skilled individuals too. After their initial alarm, they quickly leaned against the mountain behind them and prepared to face their enemy.

As cavalry, their greatest advantage was their mobility. However, now that they were completely surrounded and the terrain wasn't in their favor, they could end up being annihilated by ten times their number before they could even break out of the enemy encirclement. As such, the best plan they had was to hold their ground.

Armies all had formations. Even small groups of three to five could maintain a formation, while medium groups numbered from dozens to a hundred. Larger formations could encompass several thousand to ten thousand people.

The Armed Escort Division was one of the emperor's five armies. What they trained in normally was more defensive formations, which just happened to be in line with what they needed right now. As such, even though the rebel army was attacking them from all sides, Wang Bolin and Zhang Zijiang still did their best to maintain their formation, struggling bitterly under the crazy barrage of attacks.

Xie Daoyun didn't hold back either. She had finally recovered a bit of energy, and used all kinds of support formations to help the Armed Escort Division. However, she had fought against this rebel army before and understood their strength well. The difference in numbers was just too high. They could perhaps hold on for a short while, but they would definitely collapse in time.

"Sirs, are there any other friendly armies nearby? We should issue a signal to call for assistance," she asked. She had already spent a long time in the capital and knew that the Armed Escort Division didn't normally leave, and if they did, it wouldn't be with such a small force

Wang Bolin and Zhang Zijiang both remained silent, feeling a bit ashamed. After all, Zu An had even warned them that they didn't have enough intelligence about the enemy and to be careful of an ambush, but they hadn't listened. They had even bragged and looked down on him. If they now asked him for help, perhaps they would just die of embarrassment. They both thought that they had to hold on for a bit longer, and if the rebel army decided to back out because of the difficulty, that would be the best-case scenario. After all, the two of them were quite skilled.

Their formation was like a steel shell, and with Xie Daoyun's help, they forced back many waves of the rebel army. After several rounds of attacks only resulted in a pile of corpses, the rebel army also began to stir restlessly. Their morale began to fall visibly, raising Wang Bolin and Zhang Zijiang's spirits. As expected, every cloud had a silver lining, and things would work out eventually.

Xie Daoyun quickly told them, "The two of you have to be careful of two leaders from the rebel army. One has a knife wound scar across his face, while the other looks like a crooked buddhist monk. Both of them are strong cultivators."

"Knife face, buddhist monk?" Zhang Zijiang repeated, his expression changing. "Could it be the Twin Dragon Mountains' Scarface Yang Shen and Monk Lu Zhi?"

The strongest individual among the rebel armies was naturally Lu Sanyuan. It was rumored that he was backed by the Devil Sect. Apart from him, however, several other armies were quite notorious, and the Twin Dragon Mountains were one such army. The duo of Scarface Yang Shen and Monk Lu Zhi was especially ferocious and they had high cultivations. Local officials had sent out armies to destroy them several times, but they had always failed. However, the Twin Dragon Mountains weren't nearby! Why was this army here, so far from home?

They didn't even have time to argue, because a tremendous roar filled the air. A fierce-looking monk slowly walked out from among the rebel army's ranks; each step carried a world-shaking air. He was like a giant, more than twice the size of a normal person. His body bulged with muscles, and draped across his chest was a necklace made of human skulls. In his hands was a boulder the size of a small mountain, which was why his footsteps were so heavy. The monk roared, then flung the massive boulder at the Armed Escort Division Army.

"Defense!" Wang Bolin and Zhang Zijiang quickly commanded, feeling horrified. A streak of blue light rippled around them.

However, they knew that once the massive boulder descended, their Armed Escort Division's formation would be a huge mess. The two of them both rushed forth with their blades, unleashing a flurry of sword ki at the boulder.

Even though their cultivation ranks weren't low, they were still apprehensive about the boulder. They didn't know if their attacks would be enough to stop it. However, to their surprise, as soon as the sword energy approached the boulder, it exploded on the spot like tofu. They were stunned, not having expected their sword ki to be so powerful.

However, the next second, they saw rock fragments fall toward the soldiers below. Every single one was like an artillery shell, causing earthquakes to ripple across the ground. They finally realized that there was actually a hidden attack inside the boulder! It was meant to explode on its own once it reached the Armed Escort Division, sending endless rubble down on its defensive formation.

Xie Daoyun, who was quite adept at formations, was left in admiration. As the emperor's personal guards, the formation was naturally top-tier, because anyone who had the ability to threaten the safety of the emperor would likely be at the highest ranks of cultivation. As such, these formations normally focused on blocking the most powerful attacks. However, in all things, with strengths came weaknesses. Even though the formation's defensive ability was extremely high, its energy consumption was huge.

The monk looked very rough, but he was actually quite a meticulous thinker, having recognized the weakness of their formation. That was why he had launched such a targeted attack.

Sure enough, as the shower of rocks rained down on the Armed Escort Division's defensive formation, the soldiers' expressions became pale. The rate of energy consumption was too much!

Wang Bolin and Zhang Zijiang were shocked and angry. They had tried to stop the boulder, but they could only weaken it by a little. How could that be enough? They could only watch as their formation crumbled. If the defenses were broken through, the hundred soldiers would likely be divided up quickly and completely slaughtered.

The two acted decisively, charging directly at the monk. This guy had just flung a mountainous boulder after adding so many tricks, so he had to be in his weakest state. As long as they took down the leader first, the rebel army would likely just break down on the spot.

Unexpectedly, however, the monk stood in place without any intention of running away. There wasn't the slightest trace of fear visible in his eyes. Both of the deputy generals were suspicious, but a drawn arrow had to be released. They continued to charge at their opponent, although they held back a bit just in case.

Suddenly, a scar-faced man flashed forward from behind the monk. There was a cruel smirk on the corner of his lips. Then, a trace of cold light appeared. The two deputy generals suddenly felt as if all of their fine hairs were standing on end.

Fortunately, they had held back a bit and were able to block with their weapons. With a brittle crack, their weapons broke into pieces. Blood erupted from their chests as well, as the two of them were blown backward. However, Xie Daoyun quickly formed a seal, creating a gentle force behind them and neutralizing a considerable portion of their momentum.

The two barely managed to stand up again. When they saw their shattered chest plates and the broken mirror armor inside, they were horrified. After all, they were the Armed Escort Division's deputy generals, and their armors were naturally of the highest grade. In theory, the inner mirror armor especially should have been able to block a ninth rank expert's full-strength strike, and yet both of their mirror armors were shattered by a single slash of their opponent's weapon!

"You're a master rank?" they both exclaimed, alarm and puzzlement in their eyes. Any master could become a noble in the court, so why would they choose to live as rebels?

Xie Daoyun's face turned even paler. It was precisely because she had faced the monk that she had ended up in such a difficult situation. Now, another master rank had actually joined the fray; didn't that mean they were even more doomed?

Chapter 1579 – Just You By Yourself?

The scar-faced man didn't continue to attack, instead looking at the two of them proudly. He said, "Your cultivation ranks aren't bad. If you surrender to me, I can spare your lives."

Wang Bolin replied furiously, "We are court officials. How can we live as traitors?!"

“Indeed! If you surrender to the court, I might be able to speak up for you to make your sentence more lenient so you can serve the court,” Zhang Zijiang also said in agreement.

Even though their official ranks weren’t too high, they were still proper members of the court. They were normally treated very well, so why would they ever become bandits? That wasn’t even factoring the fact that their families were in the capital. If they became bandits, their families would all be executed without exception.

When he heard their reply, Yang Shen’s expression darkened. The scar on his face was like a sinister centipede as he replied, “You’re courting death!”

He slashed toward them again with his blade. A tremendous streak of blade energy flew forth, filled with such power that it looked as if the entire mountain would be cleaved in half.

The two deputy generals remained inside the Armed Escort Division formation. They knew that if they just relied on their own strength, they wouldn’t be able to block such a terrifying blade attack. As such, they could only order their subordinates to withstand the blow.

Soon afterward, light blue, transparent runes appeared above them, facing the huge blade. As soon as the blade energy struck, the formation began to crack.

The two deputy generals grimaced inwardly. If they had over a thousand people, they might have had a chance of stopping a master rank, but they only had a hundred right now. Not even the most elite Armed Escort Guards could continue to stop such attacks, let alone the fact that their formation was already weak from the earlier battle.

When she saw that the formation runes were about to shatter completely, Xie Daoyun’s hands quickly formed a seal. A rune quickly flew outward and stuck to the cracking formation, and only then did the formation avoid instantly breaking.

However, the formation soon continued to crack audibly. Many of the guards felt their legs buckle, their bodies swaying unsteadily from side to side. At the center of the formation, Wang Bolin and Zhang Zijiang were in an even worse state, each coughing out a mouthful of blood.

Xie Daoyun, who was supporting them from one side, wasn’t having a good time either. Her face was incredibly pale. She felt that she had exhausted way too much mental strength. Her head was in so much pain that it felt as if it would explode. She knew she had already used up quite a bit of her very source’s energy. For cultivators like her, the most important thing was mental strength; if her mind sustained harm, there would be irreversible repercussions.

Fortunately, however, the blade that carried terrifying killing intent stopped eventually. The scar-faced man gave Xie Daoyun a look of surprise, clearly recognizing the importance of her role in the battle. As the Armed Escort Division had already lost its ability to resist, and he still cared about his status, he didn’t continue to attack. Instead, he sent his subordinates out while ordering, “I want that woman alive!”

“We got it! That woman belongs to the big boss, haha! No one is allowed to steal her,” some rebels remarked, and the rest of the rebel army roared with laughter.

This woman really did have a special sort of scholarly air to her, like that of a precious, delicate, and sweet daughter. She was really different from the kinds of women they normally interacted with. This was the kind of woman they yearned for even in their dreams. However, as their boss had already given the word, who would dare to try and compete against him? At worst, they could just wait for a while until their boss got tired of her. Then, all of them would have a chance to get a sip of such delicious soup.

When they thought of that, all of them excitedly rushed toward the Armed Escort Division soldiers. They wouldn't be able to fight over the woman, but wasn't everything else completely up for grabs? Wang Bolin and Zhang Zijiang in particular were dressed in all sorts of good stuff. The rebels definitely had to strip them clean.

Several minor leaders began to target the two deputy generals. Meanwhile, the others knew their own limits and went after the other normal soldiers. Those people's equipment was also enviable, and they definitely carried other things such as cultivation resources and pill medicines. For this rebel army, all of it was good stuff.

The scar-faced man frowned. The reason he wanted Xie Daoyun was naturally not for sexual gratification, but rather because the significance of having a runemaster like that for an army was immeasurable. That was why he had insisted on capturing her all this time. Of course, there was no reason for him to explain all that to his crude soldiers.

Xie Daoyun naturally didn't know what he was thinking. She thought they just wanted to make her the boss' woman. Ever since she was young, she had heard about how violent and cruel the rebel army was, and how the womenfolk of officials who fell into their hands were humiliated. When she pictured how bitter her life would be if she fell into their hands, she gritted her teeth. She took out a dagger and brought it up to her own throat.

Just then, however, a gust of wind swept over her with a clear sound. The short sword slipped from her grasp as she fell to the ground, her face incredibly pale. Could it be that she couldn't even end her own life?

Suddenly, someone remarked with a sigh, "Why does little sister Daoyun have to fret over such trifles?"

Xie Daoyun's entire body trembled when she heard the voice. She turned to look in disbelief. When she saw a figure that couldn't be more familiar, she thought she was dreaming. How is this possible? Why is he here? Is this just some illusion I'm seeing before I pass away?

She had already been disappointed once before. If that happened again, she really wouldn't be able to take it.

"General Zu!" Wang Bolin and Zhang Zijiang exclaimed, both overjoyed as well. They had thought they were dead for sure, and yet reinforcements had suddenly arrived. Even though they had looked down on him before, now they were about to cling to him and call him daddy.

Only when she heard the way they addressed him did Xie Daoyun realize that Zu An really had come. She was incredibly shaken. She was about to call out to him, but a feeling of weakness overcame her. She had been incredibly mentally and physically drained over the past few days and was just barely

holding on. Now that she had seen someone she could rely on, she gave up her last traces of persistence. The entire world spun around her as she fell over.

Zu An was alarmed and quickly rushed over to catch Xie Daoyun. When he saw this woman, who usually cared so much about her etiquette, in such a sorry state, he realized just how much bitterness she had experienced. He quickly infused a bit of his own ki into her.

Xie Daoyun thus finally recovered a bit. She slowly opened her eyes and saw that she was in Zu An's arms. Her face quickly turned completely red as she murmured, "I... I didn't faint on purpose."

She came from a distinguished clan and had read her fair share of romantic novels. There were always scenes of female leads fainting when the male lead appeared, upon which the man would come over to carry her. They often even spun a few times in the air. In the past, she had felt that such a thing was just too fake and cheesy, but today, she had actually played out that very cliché!

What if big brother Zu thinks of me as a woman who would play those kinds of tricks?

When he saw her alarm, Zu An couldn't help but laugh. He replied, "Whether or not you faint is something your body decides, not you. How can that be faked?"

Xie Daoyun sighed in relief when she heard him say that. She pushed lightly against his chest so she could stand up on her own, saying, "Thank you, big brother Zu."

Wang Bolin and Zhang Zijiang looked to either side, but they didn't see any other Armed Escort Guards. Their joy instantly turned to horror. They asked, "General Zu, where are the others? Did you order for them to encircle our enemy from other directions?"

When he saw the pair's expectant looks, Zu An was stunned. He replied, "Why would I do that? I was worried that our trip to Violet Mountain would be affected, so I had them continue along. Meanwhile, I came here to look around alone."

Wang Bolin and Zhang Zijiang both felt depressed, moaning, "We're finished, we're done for!"

If they had the Armed Escort Army, forget about the rebel army, they could even fight a master rank. However, if just a single person had arrived, they were dead for certain.

And he said we were reckless? For better or for worse, we came with a hundred soldiers! This guy didn't even bring a single person! What the hell is this?!

At first, when they saw Zu An's sudden appearance, the rebel army was given a fright. Just then, they all reacted, realizing that it was just one more person, so how could he be a match for all of them? Furthermore, they still had their big boss and second boss present. As such, they screamed as they charged again.

"Pretty boy, let go of the woman our boss has chosen!"

"This old one is going to cut up those filthy hands of yours!"

"You even dare to touch the madam of our Twin Dragon Mountains? Brat, are you tired of living?"

...

When she heard such filthy speech, Xie Daoyun felt both ashamed and angry. At the same time, she looked at Zu An with worry. Even though she knew he was formidable, no matter how strong he was, he was still just a single person.

Suddenly, her worry dissipated as she was left completely stunned, because she noticed layers of golden ripples appear in the sky behind Zu An. One after another, longswords began to appear from those ripples. Every single one of them exuded a terrifying pressure, as if they were all heaven-grade weapons!

Chapter 1580 – Internal Psychological Warfare

Xie Daoyun's eyes widened. She really hadn't had many chances to see Zu An fight. However, as someone from a prestigious family, she still had good judgment. Still, she couldn't really figure out what type of attack it was. Even so, she was incredibly shocked.

At first, Scarface Yang Shen had an expression of contempt because Zu An didn't have any ki aura whatsoever. The only thing noticeable about him was that he was somewhat handsome. However, when Yang Shen saw the scene, his expression immediately changed. He roared, "Retreat! All of you, retreat right now!"

In that instant, he felt his entire body tremble. In all the years he had spent doing as he pleased, this was the first time he had felt such a thing. Unfortunately, his subordinates were all excitedly charging toward their 'spoils of war'. How could they still hear him?

Just then, Zu An didn't forget to ask Wang Bolin and Zhang Zijiang, "Is this the Devil Sect's rebel army?"

The pair's jaws practically dropped to the ground when they saw the display in the air. When they heard the question, they reflexively shook their heads and replied, "No, they are the Twin Dragon Mountains bandit group."

When Zu An saw the injuries on Xie Daoyun and the damage sustained by the Armed Escort Division, he had already been quite unhappy. It didn't seem like the work of a righteous army that was fighting for their freedom and beliefs. Now that he heard that they had nothing to do with the Devil Sect, however, he wasn't worried about hurting Yun Jianyue or Qiu Honglei's feelings.

As such, he just released the Blue Luan Sword Formation. After all, he now had the Rune Weapon Chart to make copies of many weapons. Even though their power didn't match up to real heaven-grade weapons, they were perfect for such an area-of-effect attack.

Swords flew forth like streaks of golden light, resembling a barrage of missiles that crashed into the rebel army's ranks. Each one exploded in a radius of over a dozen meters, and there were thousands of the swords.

...

After the purge of firepower, only a blasted, empty circle remained in front of the Armed Escort Division. There were no corpses or blood, only an uneven pit in the ground.

The rear guard of the rebel army blinked. Where had their comrades, who had charged ahead, gone? Only after a while did they realize the answer. They all screamed and ran for their lives, moving even faster than when they had previously charged forth.

The rebel army wasn't necessarily good at many other things, but they had to be good at running. Those who weren't good at running away already had weeds growing all over their graves.

The rebels didn't care about army discipline or anything like that. They were used to breaking up and fleeing in all sorts of different directions, and only later would they find a chance to regroup. That was always what had left officials' armies with the biggest headaches.

Scarface Yang Shen had thought about saving his subordinates, but when he witnessed the power of the sword formation, he decisively turned tail to run. What kind of a joke was this? Where the hell had this monster come from? He would just be throwing his life away if he continued! He saw that Monk Lu Zhi was already running far ahead of him with his stocky legs and cursed to himself, What a disloyal bastard! He didn't even give me a heads-up before running away.

He had learned the importance of running away over the years. He didn't use his master rank ability to fly, because that would just be practically begging the enemy to chase him. After witnessing the power of Zu An's attack, he didn't even have any confidence in escaping through flight.

His plan was successful. The rebel army had several thousand members; as they began to run, they covered the entire area, and they had all kinds of different appearances. When the two leaders entered the crowd, they didn't look all that different from the other rebel army soldiers.

Zu An wasn't someone who enjoyed wanton killing. When he saw the rebel army escaping, after some hesitation, he didn't decide to wipe all of them out. Just then, however, he felt a mysterious aura enter his body. The experience bar seemed to have moved a bit. He had broken through Level 70, and even advanced a bit more.

Even though none of the rebel army members were all that strong, there were some with unique talents. Furthermore, there had been quite a few of them. When all of them were added up together, they had become a good amount of experience points for him.

Zu An thought, thank goodness he was someone with a bottom line. Otherwise, if it were anyone else, wouldn't they leave the world strewn with mountains of corpses and seas of blood for the sake of growing stronger?

Just then, both Wang Bolin and Zhang Zijiang snapped out of their daze, muttering, "You can't let the leader go..."

They both shut up halfway through their sentence. They thought to themselves that Sir Zu was so powerful, how could he not know about the risks of letting the leader go? With his ability, it wasn't a big deal even if he let them go. If he had done so, he definitely had his own considerations, perhaps even seeking an opportunity for bigger returns later.

Questioning him now would only make us look immature.

When they thought about how they had questioned Zu An and even looked down on him before, both of their faces heated up. Zu An had even warned them before, but they hadn't listened and gone on their own with their men. Then, everything had almost ended up in a disaster, and they had needed Sir Zu to save them.

That was just how human nature was. The words spoken previously by Zu An had only made them think that he was cowardly and timid. However, after they saw his devastating power, they were quickly convinced that Zu An's earlier words were actually profound and that they hadn't understood because they were slow-witted, and there were things they hadn't considered.

...

Zu An had no idea what internal psychological battles the pair was going through. He gave the Armed Escort Division soldiers a look. Even though they seemed injured, fortunately, there was no danger to their lives. The medicine they carried with them was enough to stabilize the situation.

After dealing with his subordinates, he then turned to Xie Daoyun and asked, "How is your condition?"

"My mind has been exhausted quite severely, but I'll be fine after some rest," Xie Daoyun replied with a reddened face.

In reality, the mental strain she was talking about was the most troublesome thing for a runemaster. She wouldn't necessarily be able to recover after readjusting herself for several years. However, that wasn't what she was worried about at all. Instead, her heart was beating like crazy. The image of Zu An in the air with swords glistening behind him, and how with a wave of his hand the rebel army had been turned to dust, was just so handsome...

"Your mind is exhausted?" Zu An replied. He thought for a bit, then said seriously, "You can't treat something like that lightly. It might affect your cultivation prospects if this isn't taken care of properly." After thinking about it, he took out a small jade bottle and said, "Drink this."

"What is it?" Xie Daoyun reflexively asked, but she still drank it without question

She was actually someone who had been raised strictly. Because the seniors in the clan had been used to seeing all sorts of unscrupulous methods used in the court, they had warned her that she absolutely couldn't eat or drink things strangers gave her, especially if it was a man. However, those many years of concern didn't do a thing when she was with Zu An.

As soon as the substance entered her mouth, her eyes lit up. She felt incredibly rich ki flow down her throat, spreading through her entire body. All of the wounds she had suffered were nourished, and even the bit of pain in her head, as well as the dizziness and nausea she felt, were greatly alleviated. She felt much more refreshed.

The substance almost seemed like liquefied natural ki. There wasn't much of it, because how could ki have that much mass? It was just like the ancient legendary natural ki her teacher had mentioned in the past.

Zu An said in passing, "It's spiritual spring water from Feather Mountain, which was created from condensed natural ki. It should be helpful for your soul."

He had had quite a few divine items for treating the soul, such as the Five Aggregates Root and Milk of Purple Frost, but he had already used them up. Now, he only had this Feather Mountain spring water that he had acquired from his last trip to the Unknown Region. Even though Feather Mountain's spring was miraculous, he was concerned that it wouldn't necessarily be the right treatment for her needs.

Wang Bolin and Zhang Zijiang's eyes widened. Sir Zu really invested heavily in chasing after women! He was even willing to give out such a spiritual substance? Even though they were envious, they still understood their limits; let alone the fact that they had offended Zu An not too long ago. The two of them sighed, really wishing they were women too. If they were, they could have been able to get some benefits too.

They exchanged a look with each other and saw each other's faces. When they each imagined what the other would look like as a woman, both of their stomachs churned, and they almost threw up.

Meanwhile, Xie Daoyun stared at Zu An in infatuation. Even though she had never heard of Feather Mountain's spiritual spring, she could sense how incredible it was. It was definitely an incredible treasure!

Sir Zu has given me so many precious things such as the Exotic Witchsand, and now, he's even given me this rarely seen divine substance...

Is he actually interested in me too? Ah, but he has a wife! No, Miss Chu clearly already divorced him...