

Immortal 21

Chapter 21: An Innovative Idea

"No, that's not..." Ji Xiaoxi quickly averted her eyes. "I didn't think that you were that good-looking." She had been too embarrassed to take a good look at him while in the water earlier on, and it was only now that she finally got a good glimpse of his appearance.

"Indeed. Back in my hometown, my family and friends nicknamed me Sanlitun's Daniel Wu." Zu An was more than delighted to be acknowledged by a beauty. When Cheng Shouping mentioned that the First Miss of the Chu clan had taken him for a spouse due to his looks, he thought that it was just bootlicking. It seemed his looks were indeed considered outstanding in this world.[1]

"Who is Daniel Wu?" Ji Xiaoxi asked in confusion.

"Ah, he's one of the best-looking men back in my homeland," Zu An replied as he began to reminisce about his other world. He missed his handphone and the internet, and the boredom of having nothing to do really grated at him.

"Oh." Ji Xiaoxi's face reddened a little. All of a sudden, she said, "You aren't a good person."

"Ah? Why is that so?" Zu An was astonished. While the young woman was a little naive, there was no doubt that she was stronger than him. If she were to turn against him right now, it could spell trouble.

"You said that the Assrip Wolves were chasing you, and you fell into the water in a moment of fluster. However, there are no Assrip Wolf tracks in this area. Furthermore, your clothes are folded neatly on the riverbank, which means you had been relaxed as you entered the water. The situation is entirely different from what you described," Ji Xiaoxi said as she pointed to the marks on the ground. She was naive, but she wasn't a fool.

Zu An laughed in embarrassment. However, the time they had spent chatting with one another had given him a good grasp of her personality. He quickly explained, "I didn't want to lie to you, but I was afraid that you would misunderstand, especially given the situation we were in. That's why I spun such a tale. However, it's true that I lost consciousness and was swept downstream. I assure you that I wasn't lying about that."

"Is that so?" Ji Xiaoxi assessed him suspiciously from head to toe. "You seem to be in perfect condition though. You don't appear to be ill to me. Give me your hand."

"What?" Zu An was a little perplexed, but she had an air about her that made it hard to refuse. He stretched his hand out obediently.

Three icy fingers fell on his wrist, and in that moment, Ji Xiaoxi transformed into a different person, her gentle tenderness replaced by an unexpected severity.

Even a chatterbox like Zu An dared not say anything out of fear of interrupting her.

"I see. There's indeed a problem with your Sea of Yin Pulse," Ji Xiaoxi retracted her fingers. Her wariness toward him lessened, replaced by pity. "I'm afraid I lack the skills to treat you. However, you need not worry. My father should be able to do it."

Seeing the young woman eyeing the lower half of his body in sympathy, Zu An felt tears brimming in his eyes. Which man would be willing to show weakness to a woman? He wanted to tease her, but now that she'd clearly seen the state he was in... How embarrassing!

Zu An regretted giving his arm to her so obediently. But then again, how was he to know that this young woman was actually such a capable physician?

Wait a moment, her surname is Ji, and she's skilled in medicine too. It can't be that coincidental, right?

"May I ask who your father is?"

Ji Xiaoxi replied with a sweet smile, "My father is Ji Dengtu. He is somewhat famous in Brightmoon City, so you might have heard of him." She had been unsure of him, but she put her wariness aside after learning of his illness. The earlier peeking incident had to have been an unintended coincidence.

"Ah, Divine Physician Ji. I have heard of him," Zu An replied. He considered telling her about how Divine Physician Ji's task had brought him here, but thought better of it.

Mistaking his unfocused look for concern over his illness, she quickly consoled him. "Don't worry. I'll bring you home to meet my father. He should have a way to treat you."

"But I still need to collect goubaos." Zu An was skeptical of Ji Xiaoxi's offer to help. He had seen just how in love with money Divine Physician Ji was, and he had not hesitated to put down his daughter in public. There was little chance someone like that would help him if he did not complete the task.

Ji Xiaoxi hesitated at his words. "But given your strength, I'm afraid that..."

Her meaning was crystal clear. It's not that I want to look down on you, but your strength is indeed trash.

Zu An chuckled in response. "I had been troubled by this matter as well, but I figured a way out after meeting you."

"After meeting me?" Ji Xiaoxi appeared unsure. "But I'm only at the third rank. If I use the dragon feces, those Assrip Wolves would only stay as far away as possible. As for the sedative, I used it all up when dealing with the Crazy Red-Eyed Rhino."

That this young woman had survived all this time seemed a minor miracle to Zu An. She had just given away all of her trump cards to a stranger without any hesitation. Had she never contemplated the possibility that he could be a bad person?

Perhaps she believed that she had no need to ward herself against someone afflicted with his condition.

"Don't worry, I don't need your help. I can settle this by myself," Zu An replied with a secretive smile.

"You mentioned earlier that the Crazy Red-Eyed Rhino is highly aggressive?"

"Indeed," Ji Xiaoxi nodded. Her eyes widened in realization. "You're intending to use the Crazy Red-Eyed Rhino to deal with those Assrip Wolves? Even though the Crazy Red-Eyed Rhino has thick skin, it's much slower than those Assrip Wolves. It'll be hard for it to kill them. Not only that, the leader of the Assrip Wolves appears to have reached the third rank. In a real fight, I'm afraid that the Crazy Red-Eyed Rhino wouldn't be a match for them."

"I have an idea in mind." Zu An replied, still smiling mysteriously. He made his way downstream. Ji Xiaoxi followed closely behind, still perplexed.

They returned to the place they had first met, and saw that the Crazy Red-Eyed Rhino was starting to rouse. As potent as Ji Xiaoxi's sedative was, the amount she'd used had not been enough to knock the massive beast out for long.

Zu An quickly turned to Ji Xiaoxi and asked, "Do you have a handkerchief?"

"I do." Ji Xiaoxi pulled out a clean white handkerchief and passed it to him. It had a light orchid fragrance.

Zu An hesitated. "Do you have one that is used? It'll be a pity to dirty this one."

"It's fine, I'll just wash it afterwards." Ji Xiaoxi waved her hand casually.

Zu An doubted she would even want to touch it once he was through. He said instead, "Okay, I'll owe you a handkerchief then. I'll buy you a new one when we get back to the city."

With that, he took out the Poisonous Prick and wrapped it tightly with the handkerchief, leaving the tip exposed.

Ji Xiaoxi was still confused. "What are you going to do?"

"Stand back," Zu An said without explaining. After making sure Ji Xiaoxi was a safe distance away, he walked up to the Crazy Red-Eyed Rhino. He grabbed the creature's tail with one hand, and used the other to shove the entire dagger, hilt-first, up the rhino's ass.

The rhino brayed in groggy anger.

You have successfully trolled Crazy Red-Eyed Rhino for 2 Rage points! ... 2... 2... 2...

Zu An was surprised. Perhaps these wild beasts lacked intelligence, and therefore generated much fewer Rage points compared to humans.

The abrupt insertion of a foreign object into its rear jolted the Red-Eyed Crazy Rhino fully awake. It rose to its feet and tried to look behind it. However, its body was just too inconveniently bulky. It spun around in a small circle, but could not figure out what had happened.

It heard a whistle, and turned to see a human waving madly at it. This whipped the creature into a rage. This human must have been the shameless culprit who had dared to fool around with its rear end!

Its eyes grew redder and redder, and snorted a breath of white smoke from its nose. It lowered its head and charged like a frenzied bull.

Having successfully attracted the rhino's aggression, Zu An turned tail and fled.

From a distance, Ji Xiaoxi watched the human-and-rhino chase by the side a flabbergasted look on her face. "This is the idea he has in mind? It feels... disgusting."

Still worried about Zu An's safety, she ran after them.

Fortunately, even though the Crazy Red-Eyed Rhino was at the fourth rank, its lack of speed offset its bulky body and powerful defense. Even at maximum effort, it was unable to close the distance with Zu An.

The chase continued all the way to the borders of the Wolf Valley. The Crazy Red Eyed Rhino came to a sudden halt at the valley's entrance. Sensing that it was about to enter the territory of the Assrip Wolves, it instinctively hesitated.

Seeing this, Zu An turned around and yelled, "Hey, you big oaf! How does it feel to have your ass busted? Don't you want to get revenge? I guess yo' mama wasted her effort giving birth to a big lump of trash like you!"

The Crazy Red-Eyed Rhino had no understanding of human speech, but it could sense a taunt. It recalled the insolent act of aggression done to it earlier, and charged forward once more, eyes burning with rage.

Who cares about the Assrip Wolves? My skin is extremely tough. Those lousy dogs and their weak bites are nothing.

You have successfully trolled Red-Eyes Crazy Rhino for 2 Rage points! ... 2... 2... 2...

Laughing arrogantly, Zu An led it straight toward the den of the Assrip Wolves.

The Assrip Wolves lazed in their den, having just finished their meal. It was a huge pity that the human had been so skinny. There had not been enough to share amongst their hundred wolf brothers.

Hunger was not the worst feeling in the world. To only be given one small bite while one was starving, that was the worst. That single scrap only heightened the feeling of deprivation!

All of a sudden, the leader of the Assrip Wolves pricked up its ears. He sensed a small tremor in the ground. Could it be some huge creature had dared to enter their territory?

"Awooooooo~"

The pack leader summoned its pack, preparing to deal with the intruder.

What's this, another human?

The pack leader was befuddled by the brazen behavior of the humans. However, it was not one to turn down a free meal that was delivered to its doorstep.

With a bark, it ordered the pack to encircle the human.

Seeing that the Assrip Wolves were starting to make their move, Zu An spun and ran back the way he came, breezing past the chasing rhino and out of the Wolf Valley. The Red-Eyed Crazy Rhino, with its massive bulk, lacked the agility to execute the same maneuver. It hurtled clumsily onward, straight into the den of the Assrip Wolves.

The sudden appearance of the massive rhino caught the Assrip Wolves off guard. They hurriedly scattered to avoid the impact, but some were too slow, and were violently crushed under the rhino's massive bulk.

The Assrip Wolf pack leader was incensed by this intrusion. If this were a fifth rank beast, it would have swallowed its anger and tolerated it. However, this rhino was merely at the fourth rank, and it was a dumb and clumsy oaf to boot! There was no way it would fear such an enemy!

"Awoooooo~"

The leader immediately ordered its pack to let the human go, and focus on the rhino instead. That human was barely skin and bones, but taking down this rhino would feed them for at least ten days. The choice of prey was obvious.

The pack of Assrip Wolves converged on the Crazy Red-Eyed Rhino, attacking its rear. Some of the more daring wolves leaped onto its back and clamped their fangs down.

The thick hide of the Crazy Red-Eyed Rhino was nothing to scoff at. The wolves almost lost their teeth as they bit down, without leaving as much as a scratch. Despite sustaining no injuries, the attacks from these Assrip Wolves infuriated the larger beast. It tossed them off and ran them down, crushing their bodies.

It seemed to grin smugly at its victory, mocking the wolves for not knowing their place.

This insolence provoked the leader of the Assrip Wolves. It raised its head toward the sky and let out a frightening howl towards its pack members.

Are you all idiots? Have you forgotten what our specialty is? Wreck his ass!

1. Daniel Wu is considered one of the most good-looking male stars in China back in the 1990s-2000s, probably the Chinese equivalent to Tom Cruise. Sanlitun is an upscale district in China, with popular bars and shopping malls.

Chapter 22: There's Poison in its Shit

Upon receiving the orders, the Assrip Wolves came to their senses and changed their strategy. While some stayed in front to distract the Crazy Red-Eyed Rhino, the rest of the pack circled to its back to attack its ass.

The Crazy Red-Eyed Rhino seethed in rage. Why is everyone going after my ass today?!?! While the rhino boasted tough, coppery hide which the Assrip Wolves could not hope to penetrate with their teeth, this protection did not extend all the way to its backside. The softest part of its body was its ass.

The Crazy Rhino tried its best to ram the disgusting wolves, but it was ponderous compared to the agile Assrip Wolves. Each time it charged, the wolves simply danced away. After dozens of attempts, it was left panting heavily, its head spinning from overexertion.

The wolves seized the chance to counterattack, ceasing their probing strikes and launching themselves at the Crazy Rhino's ass.

The larger animal panicked. I really shouldn't have come to this darned place. It's all that damned human's fault!

You have successfully trolled Red-Eyes Crazy Rhino for 2 Rage points! ... 2... 2... 2...

As furious as it was, it did not hesitate to flee when it became necessary. It turned tail and charged toward the opening of the wolf den. The wolves rushed to block its escape. This bountiful meal had been delivered straight to their doorstep, and there was no way they were letting it escape.

Watching from the top of a slope, Ji Xiaoxi felt sorry for the poor rhino. "The Crazy Red-Eyed Rhino is simply at far too much of a disadvantage against the Assrip Wolves. If it was any other wild beast possessing higher offensive prowess and agility, the Assrip Wolves would have been no match."

"Didn't that Crazy Rhino bully you earlier? I'll take revenge for you." The lie slipped easily from Zu An's lips.

"But it's so pitiful!" Ji Xiaoxi exclaimed. "It looks like it won't last long. Should we save it?"

Zu An quickly grabbed her arm to stop her from doing anything. Ji Xiaoxi really has too much sympathy in her. She'll definitely be exploited by others in the future. Also wow, her arm is so soft. "Don't worry, it won't die that easily. Just continue watching."

Ji Xiaoxi was skeptical of what Zu An had just said, but she did as he said. To her surprise, something unexpected occurred.

An exceptionally well-built wolf finally found an opening to bite down on the Crazy Red-Eyed Rhino's ass. Excited by its success, it prepared to rip out its intestines, just like with any other prey. Without warning, a shudder shook the wolf's body and it fell to the ground, completely still.

A second wolf followed, suffering the same fate. Then a third, and then a fourth...

...

It took the deaths of over twenty Assrip Wolves before the pack finally noticed something was amiss. They backed away fearfully from the Crazy Red-Eyed Rhino.

They barked and howled at each other.

What's going on?

I don't know either!

I know!

What?

That fellow's shit is poisoned!

...

The pack leader of the Assrip Wolves was infuriated.

Think about how much shit we have eaten over the years! When have we ever been poisoned before? That big oaf must possess some ability that we don't know of. Be careful, everyone!

This calmed the rest of the pack. It was beyond common sense that a living creature could have poisonous feces. They would never be able to mount a successful hunt if that were so!

The Crazy Red-Eyed Rhino also noticed this unexpected development. Could it be that my ass possesses some unknown power? Why didn't Mama ever tell me about this?

Realizing that the once-arrogant Assrip Wolves were steering clear of its ass, the Crazy Red-Eyed Rhino relaxed its defensive stance and wiggled its ass at the wolf pack, taunting them. 'Come and get a taste of my ass if you dare!' It seemed to shout.

Zu An chuckled at the brazen display of the Crazy Red-Eyed Rhino. "I didn't think that it would behave so immodestly."

Ji Xiaoxi's face, on the other hand, had flushed completely red. This was too much for a demure woman like her. She turned her gaze away, but could not suppress her curiosity. "How did you do it? Was it that dagger?"

Zu An nodded. "I applied a deadly poison on the dagger's blade. When the Assrip Wolves bit down on the Crazy Rhino's rear, the blade nicked them and poisoned them." He wasn't willing to reveal the true secret behind the Poisonous Prick, so he made up a plausible excuse instead.

"I see." Ji Xiaoxi nodded. It seemed reasonable, but she wondered just what kind of poison in the world could remain effective for so long. After all, there was only so much poison that one could coat on the tip of a dagger. It shouldn't have been enough to kill over twenty Assrip Wolves, no matter how potent the poison was.

Down in the Wolf Valley, the Assrip Wolves had gone berserk at the provocations of the Crazy Red-Eyed Rhino. One after another, they dashed forward to sink their teeth into its ass, and each time, the unfortunate wolf would suffer the sting of the Poisonous Prick. The battlefield piled up with Assrip Wolf corpses.

"Ohhhhh~"

When the foreign object had been stuffed into its rear end, the Crazy Red-Eyed Rhino had felt great pain. However, it had slowly gotten used to the intrusion, and the pain had gone away. Now, the object vibrated each time the Assrip Wolves bit down on it, sending spasms of pleasure through the rhino's body. The door to a whole new set of experiences was opening right before it.

The Assrip Wolves pulled back a second time, communicating in panicked howls.

That fellow's shit is really poisoned!

How could shit possibly be poisoned? Are you denying the experience and traditions of our tribe for over the past thousand years? That was the pack leader.

Why don't you go and have a taste then! This was from a wolf almost the same size as the pack leader. The two almost never saw eye-to-eye.

Fine, I'll go then!

The pack leader knew that this particular wolf coveted its position. It also sensed the fear pouring off the other pack members, and knew that it would not be long before it lost the respect of the pack. It had to act personally to reinforce his position as pack leader, and reinstate their confidence in its leadership.

Prowling behind the Crazy Red-Eyed Rhino, it saw an opening and darted forward, swift as lightning. This was the end. Just as it had happened countless times before, it would pull out the intestines of this accursed rhino and bring about its demise.

As the pack leader hung in the air mid-strike, the rhino stiffened. The prolonged and intense battle had caused putrid gases to accumulate in its stomach. The obstruction in its rear end had prevented their escape thus far, but the pressure had grown too much. The rhino felt its abdomen clench, followed by the sound of cloth ripping. A massive, resounding fart escaped its rear end, sending a huge amount of feces flying, together with the foul dagger that had been lodged inside.

The leader of the Assrip Wolves wound up smeared in foul excrement. Enraged, it prepared to launch another devastating attack when its body suddenly seized up, and it fell to the ground dead.

While the dagger had not been propelled with enough force to inflict a lethal wound, it had managed to nick the wolf's face along the way. That was enough to kill it.

You have successfully trolled Assrip Wolf King for 10 Rage points!

A chorus of anguished wolf howls erupted.

Its shit is really poisoned!

Our King has died from shit!

...

All of the other Assrip Wolves were scared out of their wits. They lost their will to fight and scattered, fleeing toward the mountain forest.

The Crazy Red-Eyed Rhino shook its head. It did not fully understand what had happened, but the near-death experience at the teeth and claws of the Assrip Wolves had clearly shaken it. It stumbled away on uneven legs. It was in no mood to find and exact vengeance on the human who had started it all.

With that, peace returned to the valley. Zu An was the first to slide down the slope. At the bottom, he opened his arms wide and called up, "Xiaoxi, be careful. I'll catch you."

Ji Xiaoxi shook her head and replied, "There's no need for that."

She flipped herself into the air, landing gracefully on the valley floor. It was a performance far more spectacular than what Zu An had managed earlier.

Zu An recalled that Ji Xiaoxi's cultivation was higher than his own, and scratched his head sheepishly. He hastened to the middle of the battlefield to retrieve the Poisonous Prick.

It was fortunate that the Crazy Red-Eyed Rhino had relinquished its hold on the dagger. It saved him from needing to use the Poison Bottle to knock it out so that he could retrieve it.

“Argh, the smell!”

Even though the Poisonous Prick had been wrapped in a handkerchief, it still gave off a putrid stink. Zu An took out his water bottle and washed it over and over before finally keeping it.

Ji Xiaoxi had hoped to examine just what kind of formidable poison the dagger was coated with, but found herself too embarrassed to ask. She let Zu An put away the dagger without comment. In her view, everyone had their own secrets to survive in this world, and it seemed a little insensitive of her to ask about such a private matter.

Zu An misread her hesitation for something else. Gingerly, he picked up the handkerchief by a corner and handed it to her. “Here, I’ll give this back to you. You can try washing it to see if it’s still usable.”

Ji Xiaoxi froze, her mouth half-open. She stared at the yellowish stains that covered the handkerchief, which smelled horrendous.

You have successfully trolled Ji Xiaoxi for 1 Rage point!

Zu An was amused by her response. This lady sure has an even temper. Even this only generated a single Rage point. It looks like she’s the kind to never get angry at anyone.

“You can toss it away. I don’t want it anymore.” Ji Xiaoxi forced herself to smile as she spoke. She noticed Zu An’s earnest look, and felt a twinge of guilt.

Zu An casually tossed the handkerchief to the side and said, “I’ll buy you a new one.”

He didn’t want to keep the handkerchief either. Even the thought of washing it was enough to disgust him.

Ji Xiaoxi nodded casually, clearly putting it out of her mind. She looked around at the corpses of the Assrip Wolves and said, “Let’s harvest any goubaos quickly, before the wolf pack returns.”

“Don’t worry. After what just happened, I’m sure those Assrip Wolves have lost any will to fight. I reckon that they won’t be back anytime soon,” Zu An said.

Little did he know that this incident had caused the Assrip Wolves to question their entire existence. Fearful, they stopped targeting the asses of their prey for months, which nearly led to their extinction.

Despite his confidence, Zu An quickly got to work. He tore open the stomachs of the Assrip Wolf carcasses one by one, and managed to collect a total of twelve goubaos, including the one Plum Blossom Twelve had retrieved for him earlier.

It was a pity there wasn’t anything else, like a demonic core or some other fancy fantasy item. He had read a lot of novels regarding transmigration previously, and was still looking forward to obtaining some sort of special reward. However, there was no such thing to be found, even after searching through the carcass of the pack leader several times.

“You’re truly formidable. You managed to kill so many Assrip Wolves,” Ji Xiaoxi remarked in admiration.

“Hahaha, you’re flattering me.” Despite Zu An’s humble words, his expression clearly said he would welcome more praise.

Zu An made sure to tuck the goubaos away securely. Ji Xiaoxi watched in silence for a long while, then said, "I have a request to ask of you. I know that it might sound unreasonable, but I would still like you to hear me out."

Chapter 23: A Mysterious Madam

Zu An was intrigued, especially considering how embarrassed Ji Xiaoxi seemed. "Feel free to speak your mind. Consider us buddies who have gone through tough times and bathed... Ahem ahem, ignore what I just said. What I mean is that I already consider you a friend, so say what you will."

Ji Xiaoxi quickly pulled back her fist, and her earlier embarrassment returned. "You see, my father has been concocting a certain medicine recently, and one of the ingredients required is Assrip Wolf goubaos. Since there aren't likely to be Assrip Wolves in the Wolf Valley for a while, it might be difficult to secure this ingredient. Would you be willing to sell some to me?"

Zu An wondered how Ji Xiaoxi would react once she realized that he was collecting these goubaos for her father. However, his mouth moved far faster than his brain. "How much do you intend to offer for them?"

Ji Xiaoxi replied, "Ordinary goubaos aren't that expensive, but the market price for an Assrip Wolf goubao is ten silver taels each."

Zu An was astonished. These things are actually that expensive? He thought it through, and found it made perfect sense. The Assrip Wolves were savage, and only one in ten of them produced a goubao. Those who wanted to hunt Assrip Wolves had to put their lives on the line. Even the slightest mistake could result in their asses getting ripped.

Zu An's mind whirled quickly, and he replied, "Isn't it wrong to calculate it like that? It seems to me that Assrip Wolf goubaos are impossible to procure in Brightmoon City." If Divine Physician Ji could really buy them off the market, there would be no need for him to put up this task in the first place.

Zu An paused for a moment before continuing. "Furthermore, as you pointed out, there won't be any Assrip Wolves in the Wolf Valley in the short run. The price of Assrip Wolf goubaos will definitely skyrocket very soon."

Ji Xiaoxi blinked her eyes in consideration before nodding in agreement. "You're right, what you said makes sense. My apologies, I failed to take these factors into account."

Zu An was dumbfounded. He was just trying to sound her out, yet she was so quick to apologize? She really was too innocent for the vile world out there. He had a hard time believing that she was related to that conniving Divine Physician Ji.

"How about this? I'll buy these goubaos for thirteen... Ah, no. I mean, fifteen silver taels each. How does that sound to you?" Ji Xiaoxi looked at Zu An expectantly. "I only have that much money on me."

The amount of care Ji Xiaoxi took in making her offer made Zu An feel sorry for Divine Physician Ji. What use was it for him to accrue money so desperately? With a daughter like this, all of his wealth would merely benefit his son-in-law.

“Sure. How many are you intending on buying?” Zu An asked.

“Thank you!” Ji Xiaoxi’s eyes lit up in delight. “I wish to buy ten of them. Is that too many?”

“No, of course not. Here, I’ll give them all to you,” Zu An said with a chuckle, as he handed her all twelve goubaos. His main reason for hunting these things was to avoid paying the consultation fee anyway. He had no further need for them.

Considering that he had just earned 150 silver taels, even if he paid 100 silver taels for the consultation, he would still have 50 silver taels remaining. I wonder if Divine Physician Ji will spit blood once he learns what happened.

Ji Xiaoxi waved her hands and said anxiously, “That won’t do! I don’t have enough money to pay for them all!”

“Don’t worry, I won’t charge you for the extra two. You can treat it as a gift,” Zu An placed his hand on her shoulder as he spoke heartily. “We’re friends after all!”

“Really?” Ji Xiaoxi was overjoyed. “You really are a nice person!”

“You shouldn’t hand out the ‘nice guy’ card so freely,” Zu An said, his face all scrunched up. He let out a sudden, pained yelp. “Ah? Why does my hand... hurt so much?”

Ji Xiaoxi stuck her tongue out and said, “Oh, I nearly forgot. My father applied ‘Anti-Jackass Cream’ on my clothes. I’ll get the antidote for you right away!”

An image of Divine Physician Ji cackling gleefully flashed across Zu An’s mind. He finally understood why that fellow was willing to let his daughter venture into the mountain all alone to gather herbs. He had already prepared her thoroughly.

Ji Xiaoxi grabbed a bottle from her bag and rubbed a little of its contents on Zu An’s hand. She pulled his hand over to her mouth and blew lightly over it. “Does it still hurt?”

He looked at her face, which was the size of his palm, and chuckled. “It did hurt a lot earlier, but after you blew on it, it no longer hurts anymore.”

Ji Xiaoxi’s face reddened. “You’re teasing me.”

Zu An couldn’t help but remark, “Xiaoxi, if you treat everyone so well, bad guys will take advantage of you.”

Ji Xiaoxi replied without any hesitation, “I won’t allow any guy to touch my body though. You aren’t like those normal men.”

Zu An had no words.

Am I being treated like a sister right now? It’s a pity that the Keyboard doesn’t collect Rage points from me. It would be exploding off the charts right now!

Ji Xiaoxi recognized how her words sounded and quickly apologized. “Ah no, that’s not what I mean! I...”

Seeing how Ji Xiaoxi was too flustered to explain herself, Zu An patted her head and said, "Don't worry about it. We're friends, so I won't mind it."

Since he had already been treated as a sister, he might as well take full advantage. In his previous life, there were plenty of trashy men who pretended that they were gay in order to get close to girls, before worming their way into their beds.

Pui! Who is a trashy man? Definitely not me!

As his thoughts wandered, he noticed Ji Xiaoxi looking at him in sympathy. "Ah... I should have told you that the medicine is on my hair too..."

Zu An stared at his hand, as swollen as a bun, and almost burst into tears. Didn't you just wash yourself in the river earlier on?

...

A young man and a young woman walked side by side along a mountainous route leading towards Brightmoon City. As they walked, the young woman moved closer to her companion, but the young man leaped to the side as if she were some kind of poisonous mushroom.

"Don't touch me!" Zu An stared at Ji Xiaoxi warily.

Ji Xiaoxi looked at him apologetically. Her lips pouted indignantly as she said, "I'm sorry. I didn't do it on purpose."

Zu An knew that he had had it coming, and it was immature to blame her for his suffering. "Fine, you didn't do anything wrong. It was my fault for approaching you too carelessly. Speaking of which, how did you produce that wall of water in the river earlier?"

Ever since coming to this world, he had been curious about everything concerning cultivation, and he wanted to know all he could about it.

Ji Xiaoxi widened her eyes. "You were peeping on me back then?"

Zu An's heart skipped a beat. He had completely forgotten about that! "Ah, I didn't hear anything from you, so I took a quick peek out of worry. Rest assured, I didn't see anything at all. You blocked everything off with that wall of water."

Ji Xiaoxi was not convinced, but decided to trust him in the end. "Cultivators of the third rank are able to release their ki a short distance away. They are able to form armor, a ki barrier, or anything you can think of within a radius of three chi[1] around them. I used that principle to create the water wall."

"I see!" Reaching the second rank made one's skin more resilient, and reaching the third rank allowed one to release their ki externally. He looked forward to seeing what special skills he could learn when he advanced his cultivation further.

Ji Xiaoxi suddenly stopped in her tracks. She pricked up her ears, as if picking up on something. "Big brother Zu, do you hear that?"

"What?" Zu An asked. He didn't hear anything at all.

"I hear people fighting." Ji Xiaoxi's eyebrows arched upward. Clearly, she wasn't too fond of violence.

"Let's leave the area quickly," Zu An said. If he were a powerhouse, he would have headed straight towards the fight to show off his strength, but he was currently a weakling, even weaker than Ji Xiaoxi. This world was simply too dangerous for him right now, and keeping a low profile would suit him the most.

As the saying went, the one who laughs last laughs the best!

"I think we should take a look. There might be someone who needs to be treated," Ji Xiaoxi grabbed Zu An and stopped him. Her gentle eyes held a firm resolve.

Seeing her sincerity, Zu An found himself caving in to her request. "Okay then. However, if it gets too dangerous, don't blame me for running ahead of you. Also, I trust that you don't have poison on your hands, right?"

"Rest assured, there's no poison here!" Having secured Zu An's approval, Ji Xiaoxi's eyes became slits that arched upwards to form two smiling crescents.

The two of them hurried in the direction of the ruckus. In another valley, they found a carriage completely surrounded by black-clothed men. Guards circled the carriage, trying their best to fend off the assault, but they were severely outnumbered. The black-clothed attackers also seemed more powerful, their strikes sharp and vicious. Many guards had already fallen, lying in pools of blood.

It was only a matter of time before the remaining guards would be defeated.

Zu An noticed that the guards were all wearing white shirts with golden stitchings on their sleeves. It made them look distinguished.

"How bloody extravagant. Even their guards have such expensive clothes. How rich must they be?" Zu An glanced at his scruffy outfit resentfully. They look more like the son-in-law of a duke estate, and I could pass off as their guard!

"But what's the use of dressing well? It's just all for show!" Zu An's envy was only appeased by the sight of the finely-dressed guards being forced back under the onslaught of their attackers.

"Those men are from the Blackwind Stockade!" Ji Xiaoxi exclaimed in a hushed tone. Even though she was kind and innocent, she was no fool. She didn't rush out blindly just because she saw that there were casualties. Instead, she pulled Zu An behind a bush to observe the situation.

The outcome of the battle was already sealed. They would only be giving their lives away by rushing out now. Nevertheless, Ji Xiaoxi still felt conflicted as she watched the brutal killings happening right before her eyes.

"Blackwind Stockade? That's a name for cannon fodder! This Stockade must be some minor organization that barely sees the light of the day," Zu An scoffed.

"Far from that," Ji Xiaoxi replied solemnly. "The Blackwind Stockade is a bandit gang founded by Great Bandit Chen Xuan. They are known to be strong and incredibly vicious. They make a living by plundering passing merchants, and have already taken countless lives."

Zu An struggled to understand. “Why haven’t the authorities dispatched an army to eliminate them? There are so many experts in the city, after all. Are they all okay with these bandits messing around like that?”

From what he knew, most of the stronger cultivators had been taken in by the government. It was unlikely a simple band of bandits could withstand the fighting prowess of a city’s military force.

Ji Xiaoxi explained, “Duke Chu and City Lord Xie have sent many soldiers out to eliminate them over the years, but these bandits are not that easy to deal with. They are elusive and hard to track down. If the city sends too few soldiers, the bandits eliminate them without hesitation. Too many soldiers, and the bandits merely venture deeper into the mountain and bide their time. As soon as the soldiers retreat, they come out once more. These bandits are a huge menace to Brightmoon City.”

Zu An was embarrassed by the ineptitude of the Chu clan. Despite looking like a huge deal, they couldn’t even handle a mere bandit gang.

Something she said tickled the back of his mind. “You mentioned that the Blackwind Stockade has always been able to move in advance to avoid the army? It sounds like they have an insider working for them.”

Ji Xiaoxi nodded in agreement. “Big brother Zu, you are really clever. That’s what my father said too.”

The image of that greedy middle-aged man flashed across Zu An’s mind once more. It was inconceivable that a scruffy pervert like him could be sober enough to analyze such matters.

“Madam, we have them tied down. You must leave right away!” Down in the valley, a white-clothed guard shouted into the carriage behind him as he shoved an enemy away.

1. About one meter.

Chapter 24: Collusion

Zu An had been paying attention to that carriage in the middle of the scuffle. Its extravagant and imposing construction naturally drew attention.

Is it a Rolls Royce? Appearance-wise, the carriage bore no similarity, but the overall impression it gave made Zu An draw the connection.

Regardless of which world one was in, the aesthetics of humans were quite uniform, and this carriage was a masterpiece from every angle. Every single contour embodied the blood, sweat, and tears of a master craftsman. It was drawn by four handsome steeds, all with a muscular build and lustrous coats that conveyed impeccable majesty.

The carriage wheels and even the hooves of the horses were cloaked in blue light. It was an extremely delicate formation that allowed the carriage to maneuver through difficult terrain without causing the passengers seated inside the carriage the slightest disturbance.

Zu An had ridden in the Chu clan’s carriage before, but it paled in comparison to the one right before his eyes.

A charming female voice came from within the carriage. "Go? Where can I go?" Her tone of voice seemed both coy and languid at the same time, but was colored with more than a hint of confusion.

"What a melodious voice!" Ji Xiaoxi muttered to herself in a daze. Zu An, on the other hand, thought nothing of it. In his modern, digital world, there were plenty of people who made a living using their voices, be it voice actors, vtubers, and other content creators. He had heard far too many beautiful voices to know that a good voice didn't equate to good looks. Countless pitiful souls had been fooled by the false allure of a beautiful voice.

The black-clothed attackers seemed to lose their senses for a moment, then burst into concerted laughter. "Just as we thought, Madam Yu is indeed in there! Brother, let's push on! Soon, we'll be able to have a taste of the previous number one beauty of the capital!"

This drew a chorus of cheers from those in black, spurring them on.

The eyes of the white-clothed guards reddened at these words, but there was only so much they could do against overwhelming numbers. No matter how much they tapped into the hidden potential in their bodies, they could not stand against this onslaught.

"Ah! So it's her!" Ji Xiaoxi exclaimed in astonishment.

Zu An was intrigued. "Why? Do you recognize the person in the carriage?"

Ji Xiaoxi shook her head and replied, "I don't know her in person, but I have heard of her. Cloudmidst's Yu clan deals in ki stones, and they are the most renowned tycoons in the world. Back in those days, the matriarch of the Yu clan, Yu Yanluo, awed the entire capital with her grace and beauty, and countless men still pine for her to this day."

As she mentioned this, Ji Xiaoxi suddenly recalled how her father often proclaimed himself to be Yu Yanluo's number one fan, and her face flushed with embarrassment.

Zu An frowned in confusion. "Judging by what you just said, the Yu clan should be pretty formidable. It doesn't make sense that they can't handle a group of bandits."

Ji Xiaoxi corrected Zu An. "The Blackwind Stockade isn't any ordinary band of bandits. They are an incredibly powerful gang that even Duke Chu is—"

Before she could finish, Zu An cut in, "No matter how formidable they are, bandits are still bandits. Besides, just as you said, the Yu clan is one of the richest clans in the country, and their matriarch is a known beauty. They are bound to attract attention from enemies and other major powers. If this is the standard of the guards they have, how in the world did she manage to survive to this day without any major incidents?"

"Ahh..." Ji Xiaoxi hadn't expected such a strong reaction from Zu An. She pondered for a while before responding, "Her husband, the Cloudmidst Duke, passed away recently in an accident. That could have caused some internal turmoil within the Yu clan, and consequently affected the quality of guards she brings around with her."

“Politics inside major clans sure are messy,” Zu An remarked with a sigh. It had only been two days since he joined the Chu clan, and he had already suffered so many near death encounters. Someone like Yu Yanluo was likely to have faced far more of such run-ins than him.

“Is the one leading the bandits down there Great Bandit Chen Xuan?” Zu An asked, pointing to the leader of the black-clothed attackers.

Ji Xiaoxi shook her head and replied, “It doesn’t seem to be him. Chen Xuan is a sixth rank cultivator, possibly even reaching the seventh rank. None of those below have even reached the fifth rank.”

“Ah, that reminds me of a question I have been wanting to ask you for a long time. How do you discern the cultivation level of a person?” Zu An asked. It was not as if this were a game, where enemy levels were displayed above their heads. His inability to discern the cultivation level of his enemies would make it hard to deal with any future threats.

After all, not everyone was like Plum Blossom Twelve, foolishly giving away their cultivation level.

“You don’t even know that?” Ji Xiaoxi asked in surprise. Nevertheless, she still explained the matter patiently. “In the first rank, a cultivator learns to sense raw ki. In the second rank, a cultivator’s skin hardens, allowing them to deal with ordinary swords barehanded. In the third rank, a cultivator gains the ability to release ki in a radius of three chi around his body to form barriers to block against enemy attacks.

“In the fourth rank, a cultivator is able to project ki away from their body, allowing for long-distance attacks. In the fifth rank, a cultivator awakens their ability to control the elements and imbue them into their attacks. In the sixth rank, a cultivator can form an elemental barrier to defend against elemental-type attacks.

“In the seventh rank, a cultivator’s regeneration is significantly boosted, such that the attacks of low-level enemies wouldn’t be able to keep up with their rate of recovery. In the eighth rank, a cultivator becomes able to communicate with raw ki, allowing him to tap into a far greater reserve of power. I’m not familiar with levels beyond that, but it seems that even flight is possible once one reaches a certain level.

“Those bandits below are incapable of using elemental attacks, which means none of them have reached the fifth rank. I believe that the leader of this group is the Blackwind Stockade’s Third Master, Bao Gang.”

“I see!” Zu An nodded, grateful for her explanation. His new-found knowledge helped him to process the battle more clearly, and he was able to roughly grasp the fighting prowess of the combatants.

Most of the black-clothed bandits below were at the second rank, though a couple of them had reached the third rank. Only the leader of the bandits was at the fourth rank.

According to what he knew, a fourth rank cultivator was eligible to be named the lord of a smaller city whereas a third rank cultivator could serve as a magistrate of a smaller city. It seemed that comparing the Blackwind Stockade to ordinary ruffians was indeed unwise.

The guard captain of the Yu clan was at the fourth rank too, and his subordinates were all at the third rank. Their strength had allowed some of them to survive so far. Unfortunately, their numbers were too small to matter. Their defeat was already sealed.

“Who’s there?” The leader of the black-clothed bandits suddenly turned around. Zu An and Ji Xiaoxi had spoken too loudly, and had inadvertently revealed their presence.

“You should leave, quickly!” Ji Xiaoxi hissed at Zu An. She was the one who proposed coming here to help the wounded. She wouldn’t allow Zu An to get hurt because of her.

She had nearly used up all of the medicine she’d brought with her, and was not confident in dealing with the bandits.

“What about you?” Zu An was surprised. Was this lass really intending to stay behind to hold back the enemies?

“Don’t worry, I can protect myself. Besides, my father is Ji Dengtu. They dare not to touch me,” Ji Xiaoxi said hurriedly.

Zu An shook his head. “Those bandits dared to accost the renowned Yu clan! There’s no way they’ll respect the mere daughter of a divine physician.”

Ji Xiaoxi was taken aback by Zu An’s words. She was about to inform him that her father was actually a really formidable figure, but Zu An instructed anxiously, “Hide yourself well and don’t come out!”

He leaped out of cover and bellowed, “Oho! You dare to commit such atrocities in public, in the middle of the day, under the glorious rays of the sun?”

Ji Xiaoxi’s mouth widened in shock. Was Zu An out of his mind? Revealing his presence to the bandits was one thing, but provoking them on top of that?

As expected, the bandits hollered back, “Where did this nasty brat come from? Are you planning on interfering in the affairs of our Blackwind Stockade?”

Zu An froze. “You’re from the Blackwind Stockade?”

“Of course! Who are you?” The bandit leader stared at Zu An warily. This brat had suddenly leaped out of nowhere, and there was nothing he could use to identify him. It made sense to first do some probing to determine who they were dealing with.

At this sudden development, the battle between the bandits and the guards came to an uncertain halt.

Zu An clasped his fist and introduced himself. “I am Cheng Shouping. Those in the pugilistic world know me as someone with lips as tight as a cork on a bottle!”

Over in the bushes, Ji Xiaoxi blinked in bewilderment. Who is Cheng Shouping?

The black-clothed bandits shared her confusion. They had never heard of such a figure in the pugilistic world before. Nevertheless, they treated him as a formidable expert. No one else would dare to stand before them so calmly.

The guards of the Yu clan grew nervous at this exchange. The guard captain shouted out loud, "That hero over there, we're from the Cloudmidst's Yu clan! If you're willing to lend us a helping hand, the Yu clan will surely repay the favor generously!"

Bao Gang's face darkened immediately. He gestured to his subordinates to go around the forest and seal off this 'Cheng Shouping's' escape route. They could not allow anyone to know that it was the Blackwind Stockade that had carried out the attack on the Yu clan's carriage.

"Generously?" Zu An repeated contemplatively. "How generous?"

Those of the Yu clan were flabbergasted by this response. This man isn't playing by the norms! Shouldn't he say something along the lines of 'a true hero doesn't expect any rewards' and lend us a helping hand?

Despite this, the guard captain replied straight away, "I dare not say the wealth of our Yu clan can truly rival that of the country, but be it gold, silver, legendary weapons, ki stones, or even conferment of nobility, regardless of what it is that you need, our Yu clan will surely satisfy your demands!"

Zu An nodded in response. "That sounds like a fair offer, but I'm a man of culture who appreciates fine art. I heard that your matriarch used to be the number one beauty in the capital. Could I ask for her instead?"

Bao Gang was dumbfounded. He had feared the intruder would come to the aid of the Yu clan, but he definitely hadn't expected such a crude remark! It was all he could do not to rebuke him. In any case, it seemed the intruder was not an immediate threat. He pulled his subordinates back, and ordered them to stay vigilant.

The face of the guard captain darkened. "Please do not joke around."

Zu An shrugged casually. "I'm not joking around. As long as your matriarch is willing to accompany me for one night, I'll settle these men from the Blackwind Stockade for you."

Behind the bushes, Ji Xiaoxi felt heat rising from her face. That man is obviously... yet he still puts on such a licentious act!

But while she was privy to Zu An's circumstances, the Yu clan guards were not. They glared daggers at him.

You have successfully trolled Yu Bin for 99 Rage points!

You have successfully trolled Yu Jun for 99 Rage points!

You have successfully trolled Yu Meng for 99 Rage points!

...

Seeing the huge inflow of Rage points, Zu An marveled at how compatible the Rage system was with him. For him, earning Rage points was almost as easy as breathing. The only regret he had was obtaining this Rage system so late in life. With his skills on the internet forums, he would have earned enough to ascend to godhood by now!

He was surprised that no points had come from Madam Yu. Was she perfectly okay with his rude remarks?

Disregarding the murderous gazes of the guards, Zu An turned to Bao Gang and said, "I have a deep respect for the Blackwind Stockade, especially after hearing of the great deeds you have pulled off. The only regret I have in my life is not having the opportunity to join your ranks. Since fate has brought us together today, may I humbly ask you to take me in? I don't need anything at all. I just hope that you can share Madam Yu with me once you're done here."

You have successfully trolled Yu Bin for 99 Rage points!

You have successfully trolled Yu Jun for 99 Rage points!

You have successfully trolled Yu Meng for 99 Rage points!

Chapter 25: A Chance For Survival

Bao Gang burst into laughter. "Of course, that isn't a problem at all! Our Blackwind Stockade welcomes men from all walks of life. Shall we get rid of these remaining guards together first?"

Despite his words, Bao Gang was thinking of something very different on the inside. Assaulting the Yu clan was a huge matter, and he couldn't risk even the slightest possibility of the news leaking out. If this intruder were to get away, it would spell trouble for them.

He hadn't yet ordered his men to move against this outsider because he was unsure of his background. Moreover, their hands were still full with the Yu clan guards. Eliminating the guards before dealing with the outsider was the best play.

In any case, this man was unlikely to be at the fifth rank or higher, or else he would have single-handedly dealt with the Yu clan guards. There would be no need to propose a partnership then.

Hidden behind the bushes, Ji Xiaoxi grew more bewildered as the scene unfolded. She couldn't figure out what Zu An was trying to pull here. If she hadn't known about Zu An's peculiar condition, she would even have suspected him of meaning exactly what he'd said.

"Sounds good to me!" Zu An drew his dagger and charged towards the nearest Yu clan guard.

The Yu clan guard barely moved, but the impact threw Zu An several meters backward.

Both the Blackwind Stockade bandits and the Yu clan guards wore wide-eyed stares.

They thought that they had encountered an expert in the wilderness, but it turned out that he wasn't even a match for a third rank guard! Not only that, the guard was almost completely exhausted by the bitter battle earlier!

You have successfully trolled Bao Gang for 99 Rage points!

You have successfully trolled Blackwind Stockade Bandit A for 99 Rage points!

You have successfully trolled Blackwind Stockade Bandit B for 99 Rage points!

You have successfully trolled Blackwind Stockade Bandit C for 99 Rage points!

...

Bao Gang felt like an utter fool. He had taken so much care earlier, tiptoeing around this intruder, calculating the best way to victory and scheming to win this man over. Yet, it turned out that the intruder was merely at the second rank!

He felt incredibly tempted to end the brat's life with a slash of his blade. However, he could not discount the possibility that this was all an act to get Bao Gang to let down his guard. He suppressed his murderous urge for the time being. You dare make a fool out of me? Just wait till I'm done with the Yu clan. I'll skin you alive!

You have successfully trolled Bao Gang for 199 Rage points!

Looking at Bao Gang's twitching cheeks, happiness bloomed in Zu An's heart. This fellow sure is kind to provide me with so many Rage points.

As the two sides clashed again, Zu An fell back from the front lines. Instead, he wove in and out of the battlefield, striking with his blade now and then. He was trying to get a feel of the battlefield while adapting to his newfound powers. After all, he had never been in a proper battle before, even when dealing with Plum Blossom Twelve.

His actions only made those from the Blackwind Stockade grit their teeth in frustration. Not only were his antics ineffective, he was actively hindering their attacks! If not for the Third Master's orders, they would have gladly decapitated this nosey fellow by now!

You have successfully trolled Blackwind Stockade Bandit A for 33 Rage points!

You have successfully trolled Blackwind Stockade Bandit B for 33 Rage points!

You have successfully trolled Blackwind Stockade Bandit C for 33 Rage points!

...

The battle was short and sharp, and all of the Yu clan guards were eventually captured. After a moment of hesitation, Bao Gang did not kill them on the spot, choosing instead to place some restrictions on their bodies.

He planned to extract critical intelligence regarding the Yu clan from them, and they could be used as pawns to blackmail Madam Yu.

Seeing that the Yu clan's guards had been subdued, Zu An rubbed his hands licentiously and began making his way toward the carriage. "Finally, I'm going to see Madam Yu's beautiful face in person."

"The Yu clan will never let you off!" One of the guards glared furiously at him, a sword pressed against his neck.

You have successfully trolled Yu Bin for 299 Rage points!

You have successfully trolled Yu Jun for 299 Rage points!

You have successfully trolled Yu Meng for 299 Rage points!

...

Zu An chuckled softly. "We're in the wilderness. The Yu clan will never find out what I did here."

"Bro, aren't you getting ahead of yourself?" Bao Gang's cold and scornful tone drifted over from behind him.

Zu An's eyes narrowed. "What do you mean?"

Bao Gang waved his hand, and his subordinates immediately surrounded Zu An. "There's no one who wouldn't be interested in a beauty like Madam Yu, and there are so many of us, but only one of her. Sadly, there isn't enough of her to go around, so how could we share her with you?"

"You're going to cast me away after making use of me?" Zu An pointed at Bao Gang, his body trembling in fury.

"Pui!" Bao Gang spat coldly. "Where did this ruffian come from? With your measly second rank cultivation, I really wonder where you found the gall to negotiate with me!"

Bao Gang was certain of Zu An's rank after observing him in battle. The latter definitely wasn't feigning weakness.

"Mince him up and feed him to the dogs!" Bao Gang yelled. He instantly felt lighter and more refreshed. He could finally vent all of his repressed anger.

"Hold it right there!"

Ji Xiaoxi had exhausted all her patience. Zu An's situation was desperate. She had no idea what he was up to, but she had to intervene before he was killed.

"There's actually another person here!" Bao Gang exclaimed in astonishment. He had assumed that Zu An's was the only presence that he'd sensed, especially after that brazen entrance. He had been too careless. If that woman were to flee the area and spread the news of their deed... Just the thought of it made him sweat profusely.

"Hahaha, Third Master! It's yet another beautiful lass! Lady luck sure is smiling on us today!" Seeing Ji Xiaoxi's beautiful face, the black-clothed bandits let out catcalls in anticipation.

While they had said that they would have fun with Madam Yu earlier, the men of the Stockade knew their place. There was no way they would be granted someone of Madam Yu's status. Someone like her would be specially reserved for the Masters' use.

However, this young woman was a different matter. She was a nobody who had appeared from nowhere. If they could capture her, she would be theirs!

"My father is Brightmoon City's Ji Dengtu! Release this man immediately. We swear we won't divulge anything that we saw today!" Ji Xiaoxi was well aware that confronting them with her current cultivation level would be futile. The only play was to invoke her father's name.

There was a moment of silence, then the bandits burst into hearty laughter. “Hah, Ji Dengtu is just a mere physician! Who do you think you are trying to scare?”

“Shut your traps!” Bao Gang frowned upon hearing those words. His big brother had laid out the few people in Brightmoon City who were not to be messed with, and Ji Dengtu was one of them.

After a moment, he slowly shook his head. “I have heard of Ji Dengtu’s reputation, but I’m afraid that we can’t risk news of this matter getting out. Brothers, capture her! The first one to bring her to me will get the first taste of her!”

There was a collective roar of excitement, and the bandits rushed towards the lone woman.

“Watch my Finger Flick Secret Art!”

A cry came from behind Bao Gang, and he heard something whizz toward him. Without hesitation, he spun and slashed his sword at the object, shattering it into pieces.

“Hahaha! Is this your Finger Flick Secret Art?” Bao Gang sneered coldly. His malicious laughter lasted but a moment, then blood drained from his face in horror. “Y-you...”

He fell face-first in the dirt, along with the few companions around him.

“Third Master, what’s wrong?” The black-clothed bandits abandoned their attempt to reach Ji Xiaoxi, and rushed back to help their fallen leader. As they reached him, they too collapsed to the ground.

Zu An heaved a sigh of relief. He’d been waiting patiently for the bandits to gather close together so he could make use of his Poison Bottle. Just as the opportunity had presented itself, Ji Xiaoxi’s sudden appearance had nearly foiled his plan.

He’d been prepared to fight the remaining bandits who had strayed out of the area of effect in their attempt to reach Ji Xiaoxi. Fortunately, these bandits were dumber than he’d thought. Too anxious to save their Third Master, they ran into range of the Poison Bottle’s effects and were knocked out, sparing him a great deal of effort.

“You brat! What kind of sorcery did you cast on us?!” Bao Gang bellowed furiously as he lay on the ground. The ki in his body had been completely sealed, and he couldn’t move a single muscle. His entire body felt numb, as if it wasn’t his own anymore.

You have successfully trolled Bao Gang for 333 Rage points!

“I’ve already told you. This is my Finger Flick Secret Art. This technique drains the ki from everything within a thirty-meter radius. You looked down on me, and this is the price for that.” Despite his brave words, Zu An dared not approach Bao Gang. He wasn’t sure whether there were still traces of the poison lingering in the area. If he were to get poisoned as well, that would spell disaster.

“I-I understand it now! We were blind for daring to snub you.” Bao Gang quickly changed his tone after realizing the situation he was in. This intruder was really feigning weakness all this while! “Madam Yu is right in there, and she’s all yours. We won’t compete with you for her anymore!”

The Yu clan guards were still in a daze. Everything had happened so quickly, they were unsure what to make of the situation.

“Pui!” Figuring that the poison had had enough time to fully disperse, Zu An finally walked up to Bao Gang’s side and slapped his face with his knife. “Heh, do you think that you’re in any state to compete with me right now? Who was the one who wanted to mince me up and feed me to the dogs earlier on? Who were the ones who wanted to take advantage of our Xiaoxi?”

As she rushed over, Ji Xiaoxi overheard Zu An’s intimate way of addressing her, and her face reddened.

You have successfully trolled Bao Gang for 147 Rage points!

As the Third Master of the Blackwind Stockade, Bao Gang had lived like a king the past few years. When had anyone dared to slap his face with a knife?

“I have eyes but failed to recognize Mount Tai. Please have mercy on me. Our Blackwind Stockade will surely remember your mercy!” As infuriated as Bao Gang was, he found the composure to invoke the name of the Blackwind Stockade, hoping that it could instill some fear in Zu An.

Zu An was amused by his use of the idiom. “Oh? You have Mount Tai here too? Alright then. Since you have used such a flowery turn of phrase, I’ll give you a chance. As long as you can answer my question well, I’ll spare you.”

The leader of the Yu clan’s guards was appalled by Zu An’s words. “You mustn’t let them go! They are vile criminals who have slaughtered many innocent people.”

Zu An rolled his eyes at him. “Who gave you permission to speak here? If you want to decide on how to deal with them, why didn’t you capture them earlier?”

The guard captain’s face reddened, but he was powerless to do anything. The restrictions placed on their bodies prevented them from acting, no matter what Zu An did.

You have successfully trolled Yu Bin for 111 Rage points!

Zu An approached one of the black-clad bandits and said, “I’ll start with you. What instruments can you play?”

The bandit was stunned. “I can’t play any instruments.” Why in the world would bandits like them, who lived a life of violence and plunder, learn how to play instruments?

“What’s the point of living in the world when you can’t even play good music?” Zu An sneered. He ended the man’s life with a swift stroke of his knife.

You have successfully trolled the bandits of the Blackwind Stockade for 666 Rage points!

Zu An moved on to the person beside him and asked, “What about you? What instruments can you play?”

That man swallowed hard. He couldn’t play any instruments either, but the corpse of his companion was still fresh beside him. There was no way he could admit that out loud. A flash of inspiration came to him, and he replied, “I can whistle!”

“In what bloody world do you consider whistling to be playing an instrument?” Zu An slit his throat as well. The bandit died with a fawning smile on his face.

You have successfully trolled the bandits of the Blackwind Stockade for 666 Rage points!

The soft-hearted Ji Xiaoxi couldn't stand to watch anymore. She walked over to him and quietly tugged on his sleeves. "Big brother Zu, isn't this a little too cruel?"

Zu An sighed deeply. "Xiaoxi, you are too kind. If we had fallen into their hands, they would have shown you what true cruelty is. Besides, didn't I give them a chance to live? As long as they can give me a satisfactory answer to my question, I would spare their lives."

The bandits from the Blackwind Stockade were all on the verge of crying. How does this count as giving us a chance for survival?

Chapter 26: A Goddamned Question

Zu An had no idea how long the poison would last. Once these bandits shook off its effects, the tables would surely be turned on him. He had to eliminate all danger before then.

At least he was not torturing these bandits, unlike the twisted protagonists in some of the novels he'd read.

Ji Xiaoxi knew deep down that Zu An was right about the bandits. The lecherous looks they had directed towards her were still fresh in her mind. Reluctantly, she held back from persuading him away from his course of action.

Zu An moved on to the next bandit in line. That bandit shot a glance at his two dead companions, and yelled defiantly, "Kill me if you want to! Cut out that hypocritical crap of giving us a chance for survival! We're all bandits, not a single one of us knows how to play any instruments!"

Zu An's knit his eyebrows together. "Is that so? Fine, I'll choose another question then. It's a common sense question that any human should be able to give an answer to."

The bandit didn't expect Zu An to be so accommodating. A flicker of hope shone in his eyes. "Fine," he said, "ask away."

Zu An pointed to his own face and asked, "Am I handsome?"

The bandit immediately gushed, "Definitely! I've never seen a man as handsome as you. You're the most handsome man in Brightmoon... Ah, no, it should be the most handsome man in the entire world! Even the elven princes will kill themselves out of embarrassment in your presence! Err... Yes, and even that number one beauty of the capital, Madam Yu, will ovulate right in your presence. Heh, even she wouldn't be worthy of you..."

Given the current circumstances, even if Zu An had resembled an Assrip Wolf, the bandit would have still buttered him up to high heavens.

The other bandits who were still alive looked sympathetically at their companion. Coming up with all these phrases to suck up to their enemy must have been extremely difficult.

Flames of anger burned in the eyes of the Yu clan guards. After witnessing Zu An's cruelty, they dared not direct their rage toward him. They could only glare hatefully at that bandit who had uttered those insolent words about their matriarch.

You have successfully trolled Yu Yanluo for 99 Rage points!

Zu An was entertained by this. This was the first time he was receiving Rage points from Madam Yu. It looked like this bandit had really gone overboard with his bootlicking.

Seeing the smile on Zu An's face, the bandit was overjoyed. He quickly asked, "Does my answer satisfy you?"

"You know too much." With a quick motion, he ended the babbling bandit's life.

You have successfully trolled the bandits of the Blackwind Stockade for 666 Rage points!

The Yu clan guards were dumbstruck. He dares to give such a flippant reason?

"Pfft~"

A trace of laughter came from within the carriage, which was swiftly muffled. Silence returned.

Zu An moved on to the fourth bandit and asked, "Same question. Am I handsome?"

That bandit's eyes darted about. The tragic fate that befell the bootlicker was still fresh in his mind. "You are ugly, but you are overflowing with masculinity..."

Before he could finish his sentence, Zu An had already slit his throat. "You must be blind."

You have successfully trolled the bandits of the Blackwind Stockade for 666 Rage points!

He moved on to the fifth bandit and asked the same question once more.

The bandit felt his bladder loosen as he saw Zu An standing before him. The other two had both been killed despite giving opposing answers! His voice quivering in fear, he replied, "I... I don't know..."

Zu An made quick work of him. He sighed deeply and remarked, "What's the point of living in this world when you don't even know something like this?"

You have successfully trolled the bandits of the Blackwind Stockade for 666 Rage points!

...

Moving from one bandit to the next, he finally reached their leader, Bao Gang. "Yes, it's your turn."

Bao Gang sniffed coldly. "I'm going to die no matter what I say. You're the one who calls the shots anyway. Since that's the case, why bother putting up this farce? Just kill me then. However, I can assure you that my two brothers will avenge me. They'll surely tear you into countless pieces!"

Zu An nodded slowly before replying with a sigh, "You're right. I did go a bit too far earlier."

Bao Gang would have cried if not for his final sliver of reason. A bit too far? I've nearly crapped in my pants!

“How about we do this then? I’ll give you a question that has a standard answer. As long as you get it right, I promise that I’ll release you,” Zu An said.

“Are you serious about that?” Even though Bao Gang knew that it was unlikely, his instincts for survival still compelled him to go along with Zu An’s game. After all, being alive was a wonderful thing. He could plunder other people’s money and sleep with other people’s wives. He could not enjoy these things if he were dead.

Zu An nodded and replied, “Of course I’m serious. This question definitely has a standard answer. If you think my verdict is wrong, I’ll even tell you the correct answer so that you can die in peace.”

Bao Gang gritted his teeth. “Ask your question.”

Zu An said, “‘To sit before a feast of three hundred lychees every day’. What’s the next line after this?” Heh, there’s no way you can possibly answer this ancient poem that came from my realm.

Surprisingly, Bao Gang’s eyes lit up in delight. “I know, I know! The next line is ‘A lifetime I shall be a Lingnan man’.”

Zu An felt his jaw drop. No doubt the culture of this world was very similar to that of ancient China in his own world, but he’d never expected that they would share the same poems too. Didn’t that mean he couldn’t plagiarize poems to flaunt his literary talent, like so many other transmigrators?

“Wrong!” Zu An’s face was livid as he raised his dagger and prepared to plunge it into Bao Gang.

Bao Gang screeched in indignance. “Impossible! I have heard of that poem before! ‘A world of eternal spring beneath Mount Luofu, loquats and bayberries harvested fresh. To sit before a feast of three hundred lychees every day, a lifetime I shall be a Lingnan man!’ I definitely got it right! Why don’t you tell me how I’m wrong?”

Zu An sneered coldly. “The next line is clearly ‘In a year I shall eat 109,500 lychees’! This is a question on mathematics, not poetry!” He raised his dagger up high and plunged it down.

“You swindling bastard!”

You have successfully trolled Bao Gang for 999 Rage points!

Zu An cleaned his dagger on the bandit leader’s body before exhaling deeply. “Now you know.”

“Gulu~”

The Yu clan guards swallowed in fear. Didn’t we scold this fellow earlier on, too? Shit, we’re goners!

However, Zu An paid no heed to them. Instead, he began ransacking the corpses of Bao Gang and the other bandits.

Ji Xiaoxi wondered what he was doing. “Big brother Zu, are you trying to find their tokens to verify their identity?”

Zu An shook his head and replied, “Why would I do that? I’m checking for valuables... Goddamnit, how is that they don’t even have a single copper coin?!”

Ji Xiaoxi was speechless. So too were the Yu clan guards.

Ji Xiaoxi explained weakly, “These bandits are out to plunder. I don’t think that they would bring their money out with them.”

The words made perfect sense to Zu An, but they couldn’t settle the ache in his heart. After all the trouble he had been through, even using up a Poison Bottle, he had ended up empty-handed.

What? Are you asking about the Rage points that they had provided me? Heh, can Rage points be eaten as food? It isn’t an accepted currency in this world!

His fruitless search over, Zu An finally noticed the shivering guards behind him. He quickly put on what he thought to be a kind smile and asked, “I think it’s only fair for me to pose a question to the rest of you too. Now that I’ve saved your lives, how do you intend to repay me?”

The Yu clan guards felt their souls leaving their bodies. They had witnessed the tragic fate that had befallen the bandits of the Blackwind Stockade, and were severely traumatized as a result. Just hearing the word ‘question’ was enough to make them shiver reflexively.

“Young hero, thank you for reaching out a helping hand to us and saving our lives. I am willing to offer you 10,000 gold taels as compensation for your help. May I know if such an arrangement is to your satisfaction?” A feminine voice emerged from within the carriage, which had been silent all this while.

A graceful hand parted the door curtains, and an absolutely gorgeous woman slowly made her way out.

Zu An believed that he had built up a high level of resistance against beautiful women. After all, hadn’t he seen countless different beauties in movies, dramas, and all sorts of internet videos in his previous life?

Be it Chinese, European, American, or even in 2D, he thought he’d seen all the world had to offer while swiping through Tiktok videos everyday. As such, he didn’t take the title of ‘number one beauty of the capital’ seriously. It was probably just a title some country bumpkins came up with, who didn’t know what true beauty was.

As he watched Madam Yu descend from her carriage, he realized that he had been sorely mistaken. No matter how many beauties he had seen through his handphone screen, nothing beat the powerful visual impact of seeing one in real life.

Her skin was more tender than a young girl’s, and it seemed like it was covered in a thin layer of milk, making it both smooth and soft to the touch. Her eyes seemed to reflect the countless stars in the sky, giving off a brilliance that drew people in.

Her face was a flawless masterpiece, and her long neck accentuated her gracefulness. Her hair, which was artfully arranged in a bun, lent her a distinguished maturity.

Zu An’s eyes slowly moved downward and swept over her shapely breasts. Her white dress was slightly tightened around her waistline, which highlighted her slender waist. The curves from her hip to her waist were so perfect that it made one salivate.

Even Ji Xiaoxi couldn't hide her sense of inferiority in the presence of such magnificence. Even though those around her always complimented her beauty, she knew she came nowhere close to matching the mature and elegant disposition of Madam Yu.

"Do I look good?" Despite Zu An's crude, assessing gaze, Madam Yu didn't lose her temper. Instead, her lips curved up in a gentle smile.

"Yes, you do look good," Zu An replied with a nod. "I thought that I was the best-looking person in this world, but you are just a tier beneath me."

"Pfft~"

Ji Xiaoxi failed to tamp down her laughter. Her inner gloom was swept away in an instant.

Yu Yanluo was equally taken aback. She was used to men fawning over her looks, but none of them ever acted so... so naturally.

"You're an interesting person," Yu Yanluo chuckled, covering her mouth with a delicate hand. Her laughter felt warm, like the onset of spring that banished the frost and coaxed flowers into bloom.

"What's your name? You identified yourself as Cheng Shouping, but that lady over there addresses you as big brother Zu. I believe the latter should be your real name, right?"

"I don't have the habit of giving my name away after doing a good deed," Zu An replied with a shake of his head. He had used Cheng Shouping's name so that his study companion would shoulder the blame for whatever he was going to do next. His standing in the Chu clan was precarious. Until he had a firmer grasp on the situation there, he did not want to reveal that he wasn't as helpless as others thought him to be.

Yu Yanluo took in the bandit corpses strewn around, and her lips curled up charmingly. "But I don't have that much money with me now. If you don't tell me your name, how am I going to compensate you for the amount you deserve?"

Zu An scratched his head in frustration, conflicted over this matter. In the end, the money was too great a temptation. "Come with me for a moment!" He grabbed Yu Yanluo's hand and pulled her to one side.

Yu Yanluo glanced at the hand that was grabbing her wrist. A cold glint flashed across her eyes, but she remained silent.

The eyes of the Yu clan guards bulged out of their sockets. They knew that their matriarch hated coming into contact with any man, yet she allowed this rascal to grab her without saying anything?

Some of them contemplated ordering that impudent man to let go of their matriarch, but the memory of the bandits' recent suffering at his hand robbed them of their courage.

Zu An pulled Yu Yanluo to a remote corner before he spoke. "First, allow me to clarify myself. I'm not saying this for the sake of the 10,000 gold taels..."

With a sharp glance towards his hand, Yu Yanluo cut him off. "Can you let go of my hand first?"

Chapter 27: As the Keyboard Emperor, It Goes Without Saying that I'll Destroy All Enemies That Stand in My Way

"Ah, it felt so comfortable that it slipped my mind," Zu An replied sheepishly before quickly changing the topic. "Where were we earlier? Oh, yes. So, I'm not the type of person to leave my name behind after doing a good deed, but I can tell that you're a kind person at heart. Given your sincerity, I fear that you'll be unable to eat well or sleep in peace without knowing the name of your benefactor. I'm a soft-hearted person, and I can't bear to see you suffer like that. Thus, I'm willing to make an exception and share my name with you. However, you must promise me never to divulge it to anyone else, including these subordinates of yours."

A glint flashed across Yu Yanluo's eyes. "You doubt them?"

"I wouldn't say that I doubt them; I'd rather be safe than sorry," Zu An replied. "I heard from Xiaoxi that the Yu clan is a juggernaut known throughout the world, but why are your guards so weak?"

It was not that Zu An had no faith in humanity, but someone like Yu Yanluo was bound to stir the hearts of men no matter where she went. There was no way a group of third rank cultivators led by a fourth rank cultivator was enough to keep her safe.

Yu Yanluo replied, "My other guards had other duties on hand, so they were dispatched elsewhere."

Zu An looked as if he had expected such an answer. "You mean to say that the bandits of the Blackwind Stockade just happened to assault you while your guard was at its weakest? It could be possible, but don't you think that it's too much of a coincidence?"

Even if there was no spy amongst the guards, he was unwilling to take the risk. After all, one additional person knowing his identity meant an additional chance for things to go wrong.

Yu Yanluo chuckled softly. "Your intelligence does you credit. You aren't an ordinary man, that's for sure."

Zu An's chin lifted proudly. "Of course. Didn't you see me defeat those rascals with a mere flick of my fingers? I, Zu An, am like a deity gazing upon the world from my lofty perch. There's no greater sky above me out there. There are millions of Keyboard Immortals out there in the world, but all of them pay homage to me. As the Keyboard Emperor, it goes without saying that none can consider themselves my equal. Who would dare to claim themselves invincible in my presence?"

Yu Yanluo stared at him stupidly.

Sword Immortal? Sword Emperor? This fellow was indeed quite enigmatic. While his cultivation certainly wasn't at the level he claimed, his confidence was clearly on par with that of an expert. [1]

"Your name is Zu An?" Yu Yanluo asked. "Where do you live? I'll have my men send the gold to your residence."

Her suggestion bothered Zu An. To be honest, he found his identity as the son-in-law of the Chu clan rather embarrassing. Furthermore, he did not want those in the Chu clan to find out about him. "Why don't you tell me your address instead? I'll drop by and claim my reward when I'm free."

"That's fine by me too." Yu Yanluo wasn't surprised that Zu An preferred to keep his residence a secret. She withdrew a jade token from her robe and passed it to him. "Here, take this."

Zu An took the jade token and examined it closely. It was a snow-white piece, decorated with the delicate carving of an unfamiliar animal. It still carried the lingering warmth and fragrance of Yu Yanluo. Seeing this, he asked subconsciously, "Is this a token of your love?"

Yu Yanluo was not offended by Zu An's tactless comment. Instead, she smiled lightly and said, "You're not too weak, but you still have many years of hard work ahead of you if you wish to become a man worthy of me. This jade token is an insignia. Present it to my men, and they will let you pass."

Zu An tucked the jade token into his robe. "Look forward to it, then. I'll be knocking on your door a few years from now, to become your man."

Yu Yanluo burst into laughter. She rather appreciated this young man's straightforward attitude.

The two of them made their way back to the carriage. Ji Xiaoxi was squatting by the guards' side, bandaging their wounds. Zu An leaped in fright and exclaimed, "Why are they able to move?"

Ji Xiaoxi blinked her eyes. "I released the restrictions on them. Their wounds were quite severe, and they needed immediate treatment."

"Thank you, Miss Ji." The guards said earnestly. They were mystified as to why a lady who possessed such an angelic nature would be involved with that demonic scoundrel. What if she were to be led astray by him?

They dared not voice their misgivings for fear of offending Zu An. If traumas could be overcome that easily, they wouldn't be called traumas.

"You mentioned earlier that your father is Divine Physician Ji Dengtu?" Yu Yanluo examined Ji Xiaoxi closely. This young woman, full of innocent beauty, was positively charming.

"That's right," Ji Xiaoxi replied shyly. She felt more than a little flustered by Yu Yanluo's mature elegance, and struggled to face her directly.

"I've long heard of Divine Physician Ji's reputation. I didn't think that he would have such a ravishing and capable daughter. I really must thank you for your help today." Yu Yanluo bowed slightly towards her.

"Actually, I didn't do much at all." Ji Xiaoxi bowed anxiously in return. "Ah right, my father seems to be very fond of you. I thought that the two of you might have met each other before."

Yu Yanluo was amused. She had no impression of meeting Divine Physician Ji before. Countless men fantasized about her long after the day they met her in person, but not many of them ever made an impression on her. Perhaps, Ji Dengtu was one of them. However, it probably wouldn't be appropriate to mention this in front of his daughter, and so she replied with a gentle smile, "We might have met before. Unfortunately, so much has happened recently, I'm afraid my memory has gotten a little hazy."

There was the sound of distant hooves approaching. Zu An's face grew serious, but Yu Yanluo quickly reassured him. "Don't worry, they should be my people."

"I don't wish to get involved in the internal politics of your clan. They're too complicated. Farewell. I'll drop by your Yu clan residence one of these days to collect my compensation!" At this, Zu An hurried off, pulling Ji Xiaoxi behind him.

“Ah? We’re leaving just like that?” Ji Xiaoxi was left bewildered by the sudden departure. They were clearly hitting it off with one another just a moment ago!

“Just leave with me first,” Zu An insisted. Ji Xiaoxi replied with a noncommittal grunt, but let herself be dragged away, waving her goodbyes behind her.

A hint of a smile lit up Yu Yanluo’s beautiful eyes as she watched the departing duo. “He’s really an interesting lad.”

Ji Xiaoxi was dragged out of the mountain valley and into the forest. Seeing how Zu An was still holding onto her hands, her face reddened. “Your hand has been poisoned again.”

Zu An was unperturbed. “Don’t you have any antidote anyway? You can just cure me.”

“Oh~” Ji Xiaoxi replied. She blinked her eyes as a sudden thought came to her. There was something amiss about this situation. The substance that her father had concocted was supposed to protect her from getting taken advantage of, but this fellow brazenly touched her body anyway, and even asked her for the antidote!

When they had retreated a safe distance, Zu An pulled her down into a squat and turned to observe the valley.

Ji Xiaoxi fished out the antidote and smeared more of it onto Zu An’s hand. As she worked, she asked curiously, “Why did we need to run away?”

Zu An replied, “You mention that Madam Yu had just lost her husband. Her carriage was assaulted right after that. It’s clear as day that someone’s out to get her, and it’s likely that there are insiders in the Yu clan involved as well. There’s no way to be certain if these reinforcements intend to save her or to kill her. Either way, it’s best for us not to get embroiled in this mess.”

His situation with the Chu clan was already bad enough. Getting mixed in with the politics of yet another major clan would merely hasten his demise.

Ji Xiaoxi grasped the crux of what Zu An was saying. She nodded and exclaimed, “I hadn’t thought that deeply into the situation. Wow, big brother Zu, you are really smart!”

“Duh~” Zu An tilted his head smugly. It felt good to be praised by such a pretty lady, and he waited patiently for more compliments to roll in. However, Ji Xiaoxi was too focused on treating his hand that none followed.

Sighing in disappointment, Zu An turned his attention back to the mountain valley. A group of knights dressed in white robes with golden stitchings was racing toward the carriage. Judging by their valiant appearance, they looked like fairly powerful cultivators. Many of them gave off a commanding aura that felt even more imposing than the Third Master of the Blackwind Stockade.

The leader of the group of knights was a particularly tall man with sharp eyebrows. His eyes seemed severe, but his carefully-trimmed mustache mellowed his appearance and gave him a scholarly air.

“Sister-in-law, I apologize for my lateness. I hope that you’re still safe!” Upon seeing Yu Yanluo, that man leapt from his horse and rushed to her side, a concerned look on his face.

“That’s her brother-in-law?” Zu An muttered. Considering that Yu Yanluo’s husband had just passed away, the sight of a young, beautiful widow together with her suave, dashing brother-in-law... it was hard not to read more deeply into the situation. “Xiaoxi, who’s that guy over there?”

Ji Xiaoxi shook her head. “I don’t know either.” She was still young, and it wasn’t as if she devoted her time to prying into the affairs of others. It was perfectly normal for her not to be familiar with the intricate web of relationships within the Yu clan.

Yu Yanluo replied nonchalantly, “I’m fine. Let’s head to the city first.” She turned brusquely and entered her carriage.

The mustached man was left standing alone in the field. His eyes flashed with anger, but he swiftly reined it in and gestured to his subordinates to help the wounded onto horses. After that had been seen to, he gave the order for the group to set off.

Steering his horse beside the carriage, the mustached man inquired through the window, “Sister-in-law, may I ask how those bandits from the Blackwind Stockade were killed?”

“I’m a little tired. Let’s talk about it later,” Yu Yanluo replied languorously.

The mustached man frowned deeply at her response, and his visage clouded over in anger.

Zu An stroked his jaw idly as he observed their interaction.

Zu An and Ji Xiaoxi made their own uneventful way back to the city shortly after. Once in the city, she looked up at him and said, “Big brother Zu, you should come home with me. I’ll get my father to take a look at your condition.”

Her gaze subconsciously drifted towards his crotch as she spoke. Zu An’s face darkened. Are you going to do this every time?

Zu An had intended to pay a visit to Divine Physician Ji, and accepted her invitation. It was beginning to grow dark. He wondered if the Chu clan had imposed any sort of curfew in their estate, and whether he would be locked out if he returned too late.

Even if that’s the case, I should be able to get Xiaoxi to take me in for the night, right?

His plan seemed less viable as he remembered her father’s disposition.

He entertained these worries as they made their way to the Ji Residence. Before they had reached their destination, someone suddenly shouted, “Miss Ji is back! Miss Ji is back!”

The mass of people camped outside the Ji Residence immediately crowded around her.

“Miss Ji, over here! Please take a look.”

“Miss Ji, please examine me first. I was the first one to arrive here!”

“Miss Ji, my illness is far more severe than the others!”

...

It wasn't Ji Xiaoxi's first time being surrounded by so many people, but she still felt uncomfortable. Her face flushed as she ordered, "Calm down, everyone. Queue up. I'll look at you all one by one."

Zu An was honestly impressed. He had heard from Cheng Shouping that Ji Xiaoxi was very popular among the people of the city, but it was only seeing it in person that he really understood what it meant to be loved by the populace. Every single one of these people here sincerely cherished and respected her.

Despite this, Zu An was not supportive of it. This lass was good all around, except for her soft personality. These people were obviously taking advantage of her kindness to get free treatment. It was no wonder why Divine Physician Ji had been so harsh with them earlier.

1. The words for 'Keyboard' and 'Sword' sound similar in Chinese.

Chapter 28: Dumb Lass

"Big brother Zu, you should head in and look for my father first. Tell him that you're my friend. I'll join you once I'm done treating the patients here," Ji Xiaoxi told Zu An apologetically as she attended to the crowd gathered before her.

"Sure." Zu An had planned to do that anyway. If he let Ji Xiaoxi and Divine Physician Ji compare notes on him, the lies he had spun would quickly unravel.

The entrance to the Ji residence was left empty, as the mass of patients that had blocked it earlier were now crowded around Ji Xiaoxi. The rocking chair out front was empty as well. Clearly, Divine Physician Ji had retired into his residence.

Zu An stated the reason for his visit, and a servant quickly led him into a courtyard. Gesturing toward one of the rooms, the servant said, "The old master is in there. You may enter alone."

Divine Physician Ji considered the areas where he brewed medicine as sensitive areas, and prohibited servants like them from entering them. As for the threat of outsiders possibly harming Divine Physician Ji, that worry was for naught. There was no one in Brightmoon City who would dare to mess around here.

Zu An pushed the door open and entered the room. He heard crude laughter coming from within, and his expression twisted oddly. After a few more steps, he noticed that Divine Physician Ji was not brewing medicine. Instead, he lay on a chair, browsing through a suspicious-looking book. It was probably that erotic book that he'd been bribed with earlier in the morning.

The divine physician's perverted expression and gooseflesh-inducing cackles made Zu An wonder how this vulgar middle-aged man had produced a daughter as sweet as Ji Xiaoxi.

"Hm? You returned earlier than I thought. Did you manage to gather all of the goubaos?" Divine Physician Ji's eyes didn't leave the book for even a moment, but he was still able to accurately identify Zu An.

"I didn't bring any goubaos with me," Zu An replied.

“Tsk. What are you doing here then? Scram, scram, scram, don’t interrupt me while I’m reading my book.” Divine Physician Ji shook a leg leisurely as he impatiently waved Zu An away.

Zu An took out a stack of banknotes and waved them around. “While I don’t have any goubaos, I do have money with me. Do you want it?”

“Heh, why should I decline money that’s delivered to my doorstep?” As swift as a hurricane, Divine Physician Ji flew out of his rocking chair and snatched the bank notes out of Zu An’s hands. They were worth exactly 100 silver taels. “You were a poor bloke earlier. How did you manage to strike it rich all of a sudden? Hm? And why do these banknotes look oddly familiar...”

Zu An began sweating upon hearing those words. Is this man so obsessed with money that he can even recognize his own banknotes? Fearing Divine Physician Ji would discover that he had obtained these banknotes from Ji Xiaoxi, he quickly forged ahead. “I’ve already paid you the consultation fee. It’s your turn to treat me.”

Divine Physician Ji tucked the banknotes into his clothes. “Fine then. Since you’ve delivered the money right into my hands, I’ll be gracious and help you take a look at it. Take off your pants!”

“Huh?” Zu An was stunned.

“What do you mean, ‘Huh’? How am I going to examine your condition if you don’t take off your pants?” Divine Physician Ji shot Zu An a disdainful look. It’s not as if you’re a babe. Do you think that I’m that interested in getting an eyeful of you?

“Weren’t you able to diagnose my condition with a single look this morning?” Zu An found it hard to accept that he had to take off his pants in front of another guy.

“I could only tell that there’s a seal planted on your body. If I don’t take a closer look, how am I supposed to tell what kind of seal it is?” Divine Physician Ji grumbled. “If you don’t want to take it off, so be it.”

“Fine fine, I’ll do it!” Zu An cried out tearfully. His future happiness was riding on this, so he had to put his pride aside for the time being. Considering how happy this middle-aged man had looked while browsing through his erotic magazine, it should be safe to assume that he didn’t swing the other way.

“Oho, it looks quite delicate,” Divine Physician Ji remarked casually.

Black streaks darkened Zu An’s face. If not for the fact that I’m no match for you, I’d have surely pressed you down to the ground and pummeled you by now!

Divine Physician Ji returned to his chair and said, “You need not worry. You have been struck by the Great Yinyang Pulse Severing Palm, which has affected your development. As long as the seal on your body is removed, you’ll revert back to normal.”

Zu An was overjoyed. There’s still hope! He quickly pulled up his pants and asked, “What’s this Great Yinyang Pulse Severing Palm? How do I get rid of the seal?”

Divine Physician Ji replied, “Based on what I know, it’s a domineering sealing palm strike that has been passed down in the royal palace. As long as you raise your cultivation to the Master stage, you’ll be able to tear through the seal with ease.”

Zu An nearly spurted blood. Why was he working so hard if all he got in return was the same damned answer? "I know that already. I wouldn't have bothered consulting you if I could reach Master stage that easily. Return me my money! It looks like your reputation as a divine physician is a mere exaggeration!"

"Heh. There are only a few Masters in the world. Even if you get lucky and reach that level, I reckon that you would have one foot in the grave by then. You wouldn't be able to put that thing to use anymore," Divine Physician Ji mocked him gleefully. "Forget it. Seeing how pitiful you are... I do have another way to treat you. However, it won't be easy."

"What is this other way? No matter how hard it is, I'll definitely do it!" Zu An nearly sobbed in relief. Just as he thought he had reached a dead end, a new door had been thrown open right before him!

"Tsk. Given your capabilities, what can you possibly do?" Divine Physician Ji sneered in disdain. "Forget it, I'll come up with it myself. However, you have to do something for me first before I'll save you."

"What? But I already paid you the treatment fee!" Zu An cried indignantly.

"What treatment fee? It's called consultation fee for a reason!" Divine Physician Ji glared at Zu An coldly. "What I'm setting out now is the treatment fee! Have you never seen a physician before?"

Zu An finally understood why this middle-aged man had so many patients hollering at his doorstep every day. However, this was not the time to be concerned with that. He asked instead, "What do you need me to do?"

"I don't have any hobbies in my life except to collect the dudous^[1] of beautiful women..." Before Divine Physician Ji could finish, Zu An cut him off contemptuously with a raised middle finger. "You're such a repulsive man."

"You don't want to be treated anymore?" Divine Physician Ji sneered.

Zu An bowed obsequiously. "Esteemed physician, please continue speaking."

"That's more like it. If you can get the dudou of Cloudmidst Commandery's Yu Yanluo..." Divine Physician Ji quickly shook his head. "Forget it, you've probably never stepped out of Brightmoon City before, so how could you possibly cross paths with such a legendary figure? Let's see... The Chu clan's matriarch, Qin Wanru, Brightmoon Academy's teacher, Shang Liuyu, or Immortal Abode's courtesan, Qiu Huolei... Well, if you can obtain the dudous of any single one of them, I'll accept it as the treatment fee."

Zu An's eyes widened in horror. He hadn't heard of the last two before, but he did know Qin Wanru. He swallowed and said, "Aren't you afraid that the Brightmoon Duke could learn of your interest in his wife? He'll pin you to the floor and beat you up!"

"Who is he to me? Do I look like I'm afraid of him?" Divine Physician Ji replied proudly.

"If you're that formidable, why don't you obtain their dudous yourself?" Zu An sneered.

Divine Physician Ji cleared his throat before replying, "I am, after all, a divine physician. I need to uphold my reputation! How could I do something as underhanded as that? Listen well! This matter should only be known between you and me. If anyone else were to find out about it, not only will I not admit to it, but I'll make sure that the town learns about your erectile dysfunction!"

Zu An flew into a state of rage. “Just who are you accusing of having a dysfunction!?”

Divine Physician Ji stared blatantly at Zu An’s crotch and said, “Why don’t you try getting it up then?”

“Heh, it’s not like you’re some hot lady. I must be out of my mind to get it up for you!” Zu An hollered in anger.

Divine Physician Ji wrapped his arm around Zu An’s shoulder and said, “Alright, stop being so stubborn. Accomplish what I ask of you, and I’ll make sure you become a healthy man once more.”

A myriad of emotions flickered across Zu An’s face. He reluctantly acquiesced. “Fine!”

For his own happiness, he had to go all out!

Zu An didn’t know how he left the Ji Residence. His mind was so completely preoccupied with his newly-assigned hell-level mission that he even forgot to bid Ji Xiaoxi farewell.

He hadn’t heard of Shang Liuyu and Qin Huolei, but Qin Wanru... Gah...

Recalling the earlier incident in the ancestral hall, he cursed Ji Dengtu’s horrible tastes. Qin Wanru was admittedly beautiful, but her temper was the worst.

On top of that, Qin Wanru was his mother-in-law. If he were to be caught stealing her dudou... setting aside Chu Zhongtian, even Chu Chuyan would skin him alive!

Just imagining the terrifying sight was enough to make him instantly dispel that possibility.

That left Yu Yanluo. It was a huge coincidence that he had saved her not too long ago. That being said, if he were to knock on her door and ask for her undergarment, wouldn’t he be thrown out of her residence right away?

Damn it, that perverted old man! Why the hell did he come up with such dastardly terms?

Shortly after Zu An had left, Ji Xiaoxi finally finished treating all of her patients and rushed back into the residence. However, only her father remained. “Where is he?”

“Who?” Divine Physician Ji asked.

“Zu An. He didn’t come in?” Ji Xiaoxi asked worriedly.

“Ah, that fellow. I have already sent him off.” Divine Physician Ji eyed his daughter suspiciously. “You know him?”

“Yeah, I met him on the road. He helped me,” Ji Xiaoxi replied.

A furrow formed on Divine Physician Ji’s forehead. “Stay away from him in the future. There’s no such thing as a good man in the world. I know just what kind of dirty thoughts are running through his head.”

Ji Xiaoxi’s face reddened. “He isn’t like any other men.”

Divine Physician Ji chuckled. “Heh, he’s indeed different from other men. I guess that’s all right. You have nothing to lose hanging out with him.”

From her father's words, Ji Xiaoxi surmised that Zu An had already been diagnosed. She asked anxiously, "Can he be treated?"

"Of course! Who do you think your father is?" Divine Physician Ji said smugly as he stroked his beard. "However, his condition is a little troublesome. I'll need to spend some time thinking about it."

A smile blossomed on Ji Xiaoxi's lips. "Yes, I believe in father's capabilities. Ah, speaking of which, I managed to procure some Assrip Wolf goubaos. Weren't you looking for them as ingredients for your medical concoction?"

Divine Physician Ji was taken aback. He hurried to check on the goods, and saw that there were indeed Assrip Wolf goubaos. His face turned into a mask of fury. "You went to the Wolf Valley? What if something happened to you? You shouldn't put yourself at risk for something like this!"

He had given something to his daughter to repel wild beasts, but if she provoked and killed an Assrip Wolf, the rest of the pack wouldn't have turned a blind eye. She could have exposed herself to great danger!

Ji Xiaoxi replied with a sweet smile, "Don't worry, I didn't hunt those Assrip Wolves. I bought them from someone else."

Divine Physician Ji heaved a sigh of relief. Then something tickled his curiosity. "Who's so capable as to be able to gather so many goubaos?"

"It's big brother Zu who came in earlier. He didn't tell you?" Ji Xiaoxi asked in confusion.

"You bought them from Zu An?" Divine Physician Ji swiftly sensed amiss. He hurriedly took out the notes he had just received as he asked, "How much did he sell them for?"

"A-around 12 silver tael each," Ji Xiaoxi stammered out.

"Goddamnit! That brat actually sold it to you at such a high price?" The banknotes in his hand seemed to be laughing at him. How did a hawk like himself end up getting done in by a mere worm?!

"Actually, it isn't that expensive. This stuff can't be easily bought in the market after all," Ji Xiaoxi replied, her face and hands flushed with embarrassment. She was glad that she had mentioned a slightly lower price. Her father would never have forgiven big brother Zu otherwise.

"How did I give birth to such a dumb lass!" Divine Physician Ji cried out as he shambled back to his room. That naive look on his daughter's face was enough to exasperate him!

1. A dudou is the undergarment worn by women in the past era.

Chapter 29: Little Aunt And Her Close Friend

Ji Xiaoxi stuck out her tongue in response. As she did so, she spied the book on the chair. Out of curiosity, she picked it up and leafed through it. Just seeing the contents of a single page was more than enough to turn her face red as an apple. She ran up to her father, shouting, "Father, how can you read this sort of improper stuff? If my little aunt were to see it, she'll start arguing with you again!"

It was then that Ji Dengtu remembered that he had left his stuff behind. He quickly snatched the book out of Ji Xiaoxi's hands and scoffed, "Hmph! I have already parted with your mother a long time ago; your little aunt can't do anything to me!"

Ji Xiaoxi stomped her foot angrily. "It's because you always act in such a manner that little aunt doesn't come here anymore."

"Pui! Who wants her to come? You don't know just how carefree I am these days!" Ji Dengtu waved his hands impatiently, dismissing the matter. "You should sleep early tonight. You'll be returning to the academy tomorrow. Let's see how you're going to complain to your little aunt then!"

Ji Dengtu rushed back to his room and closed the door to seek refuge.

Zu An had just gotten back to the Chu clan estate when he suddenly received a notification.

You have successfully trolled Ji Dengtu for 345 Rage points!

Zu An giggled like a small child. It seemed Divine Physician Ji had finally found out who had sold the goubaos to Ji Xiaoxi. To be honest, he did feel a twinge of guilt for scamming that kind young woman.

Back in his room, Zu An fetched himself a bowl of water and washed his face and hands, performing the customary ritual before trying his hand at the lottery. He was interrupted by the sudden entrance of an old man. This old man was dressed tidily; there wasn't the slightest crease to be seen in his clothes. His white hair was combed neatly in place, reflecting his strict character.

Zu An was startled by his presence. He vaguely remembered this man as the Chu clan's butler, Hong Zhong. He was a loyal and responsible man who was deeply trusted by the patriarch of the Chu clan.

"Is there something up?" Zu An asked.

Hong Zhong studied Zu An before laying out the reason for his sudden appearance. "By the instructions of the Master, you're to head to the academy once you have fully recovered from your injuries. Shouping will lead you there tomorrow morning, so I'll have to ask young master to make the necessary preparations."

Zu An was dismayed. "But I haven't recovered from my injuries yet. Aiyoo, it hurts..." You must be kidding me! I still have plenty of things to do! How can I waste my time on studies?

Hong Zhong carried on nonchalantly, "Young master, you need not put on an act. An injured person wouldn't head out to play for an entire day. This matter isn't up for discussion. Someone will be escorting you to the academy tomorrow morning."

Zu An was surprised at how well-informed the old man was. It was then that he noticed Cheng Shouping standing behind the butler, eyes darting about furtively, not daring to meet him in the eye. His rage flared up, as intense as a forge fire. That fellow promised he would keep it a secret, yet he sold me out in less than a day!

Hong Zhong instructed Zu An in a few more matters and departed, leaving Zu An and Cheng Shouping to stare at one another.

“Didn’t you say that you keep secrets like a cork in a bottle?” Zu An clenched his fists so tightly together that his knuckles creaked.

Cheng Shouping rushed to his side and began massaging his back. With a fawning smile, he explained, “The butler dropped by to check on young master’s injuries, but young master wasn’t around. He caught me and started grilling me. What could I have done? I didn’t intend for things to end like this either.”

Zu An scoffed coldly, “But what did you promise me before?”

Cheng Shouping was quick to defend himself “Young master, I didn’t say a single word about you heading to Divine Physician Ji’s place to check on your injuries. No matter how he threatened or bribed me, I didn’t give in at all!”

Zu An was so furious that he almost laughed out loud. “So, I should be thanking you instead, huh?”

“Ahahaha, you don’t need to go that far.” Cheng Shouping replied as he fiddled with his fingers shyly. “However, if you really want to reward me, I’m not against it either...”

Zu An slapped Cheng Shouping on the back of his head. “You really think that I’m complimenting you?!”

Cheng Shouping quickly steadied the two buns on his head to prevent them from collapsing. Full of indignance, he complained, “Young master, can you not hit my head? Like I told you before, this hairdo is incredibly difficult to make.”

“Don’t talk to me in that tone!” Zu An shivered in disgust. “Ah right, where did my wife go?” I’ve been out for an entire day now. I wonder if that lass misses me or not.

“What wife?” Cheng Shouping blinked his eyes in confusion.

Zu An felt like kicking him.

A moment passed, and Cheng Shouping’s eyes widened in realization. “Ah! You’re referring to the First Miss! She went out with the young miss of the Pei clan earlier in the morning. When she returned, she received news that a problem had cropped up with the family business, so she headed out to settle it. The First Miss has been working really hard recently. She supports half of the Chu clan’s businesses by herself, and there are so many things that require her attention. It would have been so much easier if she were a man.”

Zu An’s face darkened. “Are you asking for a beating? If she were a guy, what would I be here for?”

“Young master, that’s not what I mean,” Cheng Shouping protested as he humbly poured a cup of tea for Zu An to apologize for his mistakes.

The urge to pummel Cheng Shouping remained within Zu An. He finally understood why he’d been demoted from serving as Chu Zhongtian’s attendant to working in the kitchens. “Ah right, what’s with Miss Pei?”

He still remembered how that woman nearly caused his death back at the ancestral hall with just a few words, but for some reason, he found it hard to hate her. It was not that he was forgiving, but her chest was simply too big!

“Ohhh~ Young master, you’re such a naughty person. Are you lusting over the First Miss’ friend?” Cheng Shouping favored Zu An with a knowing look as he intentionally stretched his voice out suggestively. “Well, Miss Pei is indeed very attractive. There were no men in our estate who could keep their eyes off her when she visited earlier on. Young master, I’m rooting for you!”

Zu An was beyond exasperated. “It’s really a miracle that the Chu clan didn’t send you to the royal palace to serve as a eunuch.”

Cheng Shouping’s smile turned into a sickly grin. “Young master, don’t scare me!”

Zu An couldn’t be bothered to waste his breath on him. “Who asked you whether she’s good-looking or not? What I want is information on her!”

“According to rumors, Miss Pei appears to be from Eastriver’s Pei clan. That’s a massive clan with over a thousand years of heritage behind them, boasting a history even longer than our Chu clan. She’s on good terms with our First Miss, and it seems like she’s here to study in Brightmoon Academy,” Cheng Shouping offered.

Zu An was intrigued. “She’s here to study too?” The private academy of the Chu clan actually accepted outsiders as well? He supposed that, considering her close ties with Chu Chuyan, it was not all that surprising.

“Of course! Our Brightmoon Academy is renowned far and wide. Those from the other commanderies often come here in hopes of pursuing an education there!” Cheng Shouping said proudly.

Zu An couldn’t understand why Cheng Shouping was feeling so proud about an academy he wasn’t even involved with, but he was rather surprised at the fame of the Brightmoon Academy. It seemed like his father-in-law was quite a prideful man.

However, this wasn’t important right now. He had to focus his attention on completing the task assigned to him by Divine Physician Ji first!

Damn it, that Ji Dengtu is really a bloody pervert!

Zu An cursed him once more in his heart before he inquired, “Do you know Yu Yanluo?”

“Yu Yanluo?” Cheng Shouping’s eyes lit up. “Of course! She used to be the number one beauty in the capital back in those years! You don’t know how many men view her as their dream lover!”

“For a study companion, you know far too much...” Zu An eyed Cheng Shouping doubtfully.

Cheng Shouping looked around suspiciously before leaning closer to Zu An. “Young master, let me tell you a secret that you mustn’t tell anyone. Master used to be one of Yu Yanluo’s pursuers, but he failed in the end.”

Zu An was floored by this revelation. He didn’t think that there would be such a relationship between Yu Yanluo and Chu Zhongtian. That beautiful woman he’d met in the valley earlier hadn’t looked very old. Yet, she belonged to the same generation as Chu Zhongtian?

“Madam flies into rage every time this matter is mentioned. Master nearly had his ears torn off on several occasions!” Cheng Shouping covered his mouth with both hands to muffle his giggling.

Zu An rolled his eyes. His theory had been proven beyond a shadow of a doubt. His father-in-law had shown great mercy in banishing Cheng Shouping to the kitchens. It was no wonder why this fellow was eventually assigned as his study companion. With such loose lips, there was no one in the estate who could possibly tolerate him!

“Young master, you’re the only one that I’ve told this matter to. You mustn’t tell anyone else about this!” Cheng Shouping repeated his warning.

Zu An sneered coldly upon hearing these words. He was willing to bet five copper coins that this was common knowledge throughout the whole estate.

“Where does Yu Yanluo stay in Brightmoon City?” Zu An asked. He had to find an opportunity to visit her. Even if it wasn’t for Ji Dengtu’s task, he should at least claim his compensation for saving her.

“She doesn’t stay in Brightmoon City,” Cheng Shouping replied, perplexed. “She married the Cloudmidst Duke, so she should be staying at the Cloudmidst Commandery.”

“What?” Zu An couldn’t believe what he’d just heard. Is this a scam? Have I been given an empty check?

“However, their clan deals in ki stones, and they have branches in all of the major cities. They have one in Brightmoon City too. Perhaps, she might come by for an inspection one of these days,” Cheng Shouping added.

Zu An let go of the breath he was holding. If he was right, Yu Yanluo should be staying in Brightmoon City for the next few days, which meant that he had some time to collect his money.

He asked a few more questions before sending Cheng Shouping away.

After verifying that no one else was around, he summoned his Keyboard and checked his Rage points balance. He’d had 3000 Rage points left over after drawing all the Marrow Cleansing Pills the last time. Following that, he’d earned quite a bit from the Yu clan guards and the Blackwind Stockade. All in all...

Current Rage Points: 22269.

Woah, I have struck it rich!

Feeling like a tycoon, Zu An immediately began drawing the lottery.

As expected, the first one was ‘Thanks for playing!’.

“It’s fine, I have money!” Zu An thought little of it and continued drawing the lottery.

Thanks for playing... Thanks for playing...

It wasn’t until the thirteenth attempt that the light finally stopped on the ‘4’ key.

Zu An heaved a sigh of relief. He reminded himself that this was the reward for patience and perseverance.

Noticing that the light marker had stopped on a new key, he took a closer look. In front of him was a fruit that glowed golden from its core.

The Keyboard provided a sparse explanation: Ki Fruit. It raises the ki capacity of a cultivator.

Zu An's great experience with games in his previous life granted him instant insight into the purpose of this fruit. It was a basic experience-boosting consumable.

Such good stuff ought to go into his stomach right away, so that his mind could rest in peace. Zu An immediately took it out and bit into it. Unexpectedly, there was no splatter of juice. Instead, the fruit seemed to melt as soon as it entered his mouth, and a stream of ki swiftly suffused his body. This stream of ki appeared to be drawn in by some unknown force and surged straight toward the fourth formation under his skin.

The fourth formation was much larger than the previous three. Even after the stream of ki had been fully assimilated into the formation, it was only a third of the way full.

"Just this much?" Zu An was dissatisfied with the results. Despite sounding so formidable, its effects were still inferior to the whipping he'd received.

He couldn't help his frustration. It can't be that the only way to raise my cultivation level is to be whipped, right? That would be so wrong!

Chapter 30: Hellhole

Zu An's dissatisfaction with the Ki Fruit's effects stemmed from his poor knowledge of cultivation. In this world, ordinary cultivators took months or even years to raise their cultivation by a single step. Even Plum Blossom Twelve had trained diligently for over two decades in order to reach the level he was at, only for Zu An to catch up to him overnight.

The rate at which Zu An was growing his cultivation would have astounded anyone in the world.

On top of that, the Phoenix Nirvana Scroll, which had activated the Keyboard, was no ordinary artifact. It offered the cultivator the unconventional method of raising his cultivation through suffering harm, and its effects far surpassed that of most cultivation techniques. Zu An had no realistic reference point for levelling cultivation, and thus he was less than impressed by the Ki Fruit's amazing effects.

Zu An continued drawing the lottery, and obtained yet another Ki Fruit. In the end, he'd used his 22,200 Rage points to draw a total of 16 Ki Fruits.

"Is this the only thing I can draw from now onwards?" Zu An muttered in disdain. Doing a quick calculation, he'd obtained a Ki Fruit roughly every 14 draws.

He wondered if the chances of obtaining a prize were 1-in-10 or 1-in-20. If it was the former, he was really darned unlucky. If it was the latter, it seemed like his luck was still decent.

Considering how handsome I am, it must be the latter!

Zu An swallowed the Ki Fruits one after another. It took a total of three Ki Fruits to fill up the fourth formation, five Ki Fruits to fill the fifth formation, and eight Ki Fruits to complete the sixth formation. That exhausted his store of Ki Fruits.

Zu An noticed the number of Ki Fruits needed to fill up his formations looked oddly familiar to him. Wait a moment, isn't this the Fibonacci sequence?

As a qualified keyboard warrior, he had to be familiar with all sorts of complicated-sounding terms, so that he could appear to possess superior intellect as he prowled the internet forums. He was aware that many phenomena in the natural world obeyed the Fibonacci sequence—the arrangements of cones, pineapples, tree leaves, the number of petals on a sunflower, the construction of beehives, the patterns on the wings of a dragonfly, the golden rectangle, the golden ratio, and so on.

However, he didn't expect these rune formations of his to obey the golden ratio too. Was the Fibonacci sequence actually some hidden rule of the universe?

Zu An took no delight in his discovery. He knew that the numbers in the Fibonacci sequence grew exponentially bigger as the sequence progressed. That meant the amount of Ki Fruits he would need in the later stages could reach astronomical figures.

He was grateful for the Marrow Cleansing Pills he'd consumed earlier, which helped increase his talent. If he'd had to rely solely on Ki Fruits, he would be doomed!

After a quick calculation, he determined that the rate at which his cultivation had grown when struck by the Wailing Whip was faster than the rate of growth via the consumption of Ki Fruits. This was despite his talent only being at the lower Ding class back then! In the end, it seemed that getting beaten up was a much more reliable method.

Then again, he couldn't possibly go looking for women to beat him up every day, right?

Heaving a deep sigh, Zu An reached for a cup of water to drink. Unexpectedly, the cup shattered as he grabbed it. He stared blankly for a moment, then realized that this was a result of the sudden increase in his strength.

Out of curiosity, he conducted a few more experiments to test out his strength. This helped him to gradually acclimate to the changes in his body.

When he was at the third step of the second rank, his strength had been roughly equivalent to that of 4 adult men. Now that he was at the sixth step of the second rank, his strength was comparable to that of twenty adult men.

This sparked a thought in his mind. He took out a paper and scribbled out some rough calculations. When he finally put down his brush once more, he wore a troubled expression. It really obeys the Fibonacci sequence. If I sum up all of the numbers in the sequence up to this point, it equals twenty.

"What are you doing?" A sinister voice came from the doorway.

Zu An lifted his gaze and saw Old Mi standing at the entrance to his room. His skin still looked like the withered peel of an orange, and he was so thin that it seemed he would be blown away by the slightest gust of wind.

"You're here." Despite his outward appearance, Zu An dared not to look down on him. His instincts screamed that this enigmatic old man was a dangerous person to mess with.

Hm? Why would I think that he's dangerous? Is it because he looks ugly?

Zu An didn't voice those thoughts aloud. Even a keyboard warrior had to prioritize his survival over earning Rage points.

“Hmm, you seem to have grown stronger,” Old Mi eyed him with astonishment. He’s been able to make another breakthrough so swiftly. It seems like the Phoenix Nirvana Sutra is indeed formidable.

“I fought with a few people when I went out earlier in the day,” Zu An replied, trying his best to look honest.

“Try striking me once.” Old Mi had no reason to doubt Zu An, mostly because he assumed Zu An possessed no other means to raise his cultivation.

“I wouldn’t dare to.” While Old Mi was likely an expert, Zu An was hesitant to hit such a frail-looking old man. It would be horrible if something were to go wrong.

“There’s no need to worry, just use your full might against me. You aren’t able to hurt me yet,” Old Mi said.

“Fine, I’ll strike you then.” Zu An’s thoughts echoed Old Mi’s sentiments. He gathered his strength and hurled a punch towards Old Mi’s chest.

Instead of his full strength, he exerted just a third of his might. As a keyboard warrior, it is unbecoming to reveal all of my cards. Hiding behind a veil of anonymity... Pui pui pui! I mean, surviving till the very end is the most important thing of all!

Besides, this was a good chance to test out another one of his theories.

Old Mi raised a shaky hand, but blocked Zu An’s strike without any trouble. “Not bad, not bad. You have already reached the fourth step of the second rank.”

“Really?” Zu An exclaimed in astonishment. Just as I thought, it’s very difficult for others to tell my cultivation level with the naked eye. It’s the same as the last time. He was only able to discern my cultivation after seeing my punch.

That being said, it was still possible for a stronger cultivator to tell roughly what rank a weaker cultivator was at.

“Given your rate of cultivation, it’s not entirely impossible for you to reach the Master stage in the future.” Old Mi’s eyes were filled with delight. He had thought that Zu An was untalented, but who could have predicted he was actually a healthy bud? It shouldn’t take long before he was ready to be possessed.

Old Mi chuckled to himself. “I heard that you’re heading to Brightmoon Academy tomorrow?”

“That’s right,” Zu An replied with a constipated look. There were bound to be plenty of cousins and relatives from the side branches of the Chu clan there as well. His identity as the Chu clan’s son-in-law was likely to invite a great deal of trouble. At least, that was how the plot usually developed in novels.

Foremost in his mind was not the trouble that he might encounter, but the amount of time he would be wasting. There were too many things he needed to accomplish right now.

“Once you arrive at the academy, look for a child named Wei Hongde. No matter how you go about doing it, make sure to build a good relationship with him. It’ll be best if you can become his friend,” Old Mi said slowly.

“Wei Hongde?” Zu An repeated the name. “Who is that? Is he your cousin? What’s the reason behind getting close to him?”

“You need not bother about that. Remember, make sure not to reveal my identity to anyone else,” Old Mi replied with a smile. It looked unnaturally eerie, embedded in his withered face. “I imparted a secret art to you, so it isn’t too much of me to ask something like that of you, right?”

“Of course not! Don’t worry, I’ll definitely do my best to get close to him!” Zu An smiled his most earnest smile. On the inside, however, he was curious as to how an outsider came to be enrolled in the Chu clan’s private academy. Could he be a drafted son-in-law, just like me?

“Alright, you should rest well.” Old Mi patted his shoulder before tottering away.

After sending Old Mi off, Zu An retired for the night and lay down on his bed. He tried formulating a plan to obtain Yu Yanluo’s dudou, and racked his brain to the point where a bald spot threatened to appear on his head. However he was unable to come up with anything feasible. He gradually drifted off to sleep, muttering curses at Divine Physician Ji.

The following morning, Cheng Shouping woke him, bringing his breakfast.

Seeing how his meal had been brought to him, Zu An felt his annoyance at Cheng Shouping lessen. It was nice to have a study companion attending to his every need.

After finishing his meal, he dragged Cheng Shouping off to Brightmoon Academy with him. Since it was an order from his father-in-law, he had no choice but to follow it. He would just have to find a chance to sneak out later on.

“Hm? Why are we leaving the Chu Estate?”

“The Brightmoon Academy is located in the east of the city.”

“Oh...” Zu An was a little perplexed as to why the Chu clan’s private academy was situated so far away from the estate.

His jaw dropped when he found himself standing before a cluster of magnificent buildings. The entrance was tall and imposing, and there was a plaque with the words ‘Brightmoon Academy’ hanging above. Each word seemed permeated with sword ki, giving them a sharp edge.

Dormitories and other buildings with different functions stretched as far as the eye could see and beyond. He was transported back to his days attending university in his modern world. The one difference was that this Brightmoon Academy was, without a doubt, larger than any university he knew of.

“Is the Chu clan’s private academy this big?” Zu An asked in bewilderment.

“What private academy?” Cheng Shouping looked perplexed.

“Isn’t the Brightmoon Academy a private academy built by the Brightmoon Duke?” Zu An was starting to realize that he might have had the wrong idea.

“Young master, don’t spout nonsense! You might bring disaster to the Master!” Cheng Shouping’s face paled in horror. He quickly pulled Zu An aside. “The Brightmoon Academy is directly under the Minister of Ceremonies, the leader of the Nine Ministers. It serves as a facility to nurture talented individuals for future service in the royal court...”

It seemed that in this world, all official positions were monopolized by cultivators, from the Three Lords and Nine Ministers all the way down to normal teachers and tax officials.

In order to prevent nobles from dominating official positions—after all, distinguished families had an innate advantage when it came to nurturing cultivators—the emperor had ordered academies constructed across the country, promoting the idea of education without discrimination. Even ordinary civilians were allowed to attend these academies.

Everyone, regardless of their social status, had to study in a county-level cultivator academy in order to qualify for the Three Tiered Examinations, namely the Prefectural Examination, Capital Examination, and Imperial Examination.

The names were similar to what Zu An remembered from his previous world, but the subjects that were being tested were vastly different. While his own world required knowledge of the Four Books and Five Classics, in this world, one needed to know cultivation.

Ordinary examinations would first be held in county-level academies located in major cities, such as the Brightmoon Academy.

Exceptional candidates would be picked out and sent to Administrative Centers—headed by Prefectural Generals—to participate in the Prefectural Examination, where they would be pitted against the brightest talents from all counties in that prefecture. Those who cleared the Prefectural Examinations would be qualified to serve as officials, but they were limited to lower-ranking positions.

Most chose to proceed on to the capital to participate in the Capital Examinations. There, talented individuals from the various prefectures would compete for the title of ‘Capital Scholar’.

Those who became Capital Scholars would then participate in the Imperial Examination personally hosted by the emperor himself. Doing well in the Imperial Examination ensured a higher-ranking starting post. On top of that, Capital Scholars gained the chance to receive feedback from the emperor himself, who was the strongest cultivator in the world. Just a single pointer from him was equivalent to years of cultivation.

Of course, this path was only available to the most talented individuals. The majority of candidates were eliminated in the county-level ordinary examinations. They could either choose to study harder and attempt the examination the following year, or opt for an academic position, where they would work under an official. Most officials were cultivators who were overwhelmingly concerned with furthering their cultivation, and couldn’t be bothered to handle cumbersome administrative affairs personally. They hired advisors and subordinates to handle them instead.

These advisors and subordinates were usually those who had failed in the county-level ordinary examinations, or had no talent for cultivation at all. Such jobs were seen as fairly adequate.

Clearly, Chu Zhongtian intended for Zu An to walk this path after entering Brightmoon Academy. Aside from cultivation, the academy also imparted to its students essential knowledge on other subjects, such as law, economics, and so on.

“Young master, stop daydreaming over there and go inside,” Cheng Shouping waved him forward. “I’ll be waiting for you at the entrance till you’re released from the academy.”

Zu An rolled his eyes.

Shit. It wasn’t easy for me to finish my studies in my previous life, but as soon as I come to this world, I’m being forced to study yet again? What kind of hellhole am I trapped in?!