

Immortal 251

Chapter 251: Do You Know How To Blow the Xiao?

When they heard what Chen Xuan said, the rest of the crowd began to parrot him.

“Exactly! Instead of talking so much, why don’t you give it a try yourself?”

“You spout so much nonsense. If you have the skills, why don’t you do it!”

...

It was obvious that everyone was unhappy at having their goddess belittled like this. At the same time, they were worried that Qiu Honglei might really be persuaded by him, and so they naturally went all out against him.

Qiu Honglei was genuinely curious. “I wonder, what is the correct method that young master speaks of? Could you show it to us?”

It wasn’t a big deal if Zu An couldn’t answer her. She already had her own plans. This guy was too arrogant and out of control, and there was no guarantee that she could control him if they worked together in the future.

This would be a good chance to knock him down a notch.

Zu An said, “The method indeed exists. But, before that—what’s in it for me?”

“What is in it for you?” Qiu Honglei was immediately stupefied.

“Yup. I came to the Immortal Abode as a guest to watch the ladies entertain me, yet now, you all want me to perform for you? I’d be losing out if I got nothing out of it,” Zu An said with a smile. Those characters from *Finest Servant* really were worth learning from. There was no way he was going to let an opportunity like this pass him by.[1]

“What sort of reward does the young master want?” Qiu Honglei’s smile seemed just a little too cheerful. This fellow really refuses to be normal.

Normally, she didn’t even have to speak. With just a single look from her, countless men would fall one after the other. When she did speak, no one had ever refused her.

Now, however, this fellow wanted to squeeze some benefits out of her?

“Lady Qiu, don’t agree to him!”

“Exactly! He only craves your body!”

...

The other men instantly grew nervous.

Zu An turned around. “Who was that? Get over here. Stop looking around. Yes you, the one who said something about craving the body.”

The crowd slowly inched away, exposing the young master who had spoken.

That young master began to squirm uncertainly. "What do you want? Are you trying to use your background as a member of the Chu clan to pressure me?"

He didn't fear this Zu An, but he did fear the Chu clan somewhat. After all, Brightmoon City was Chu Zhongtian's fiefdom.

However, as he considered the situation further, he realized that not only was Zu An a drafted son-in-law, he was even one who went out whoring. It would be lucky if he even managed to escape punishment from the Chu clan. Why would they help him out in such a situation?

This train of thought helped to calm him down.

"What was your name again?" Zu An asked.

Just as the young master was about to reply, Zu An waved a dismissive hand in his direction. "Forget it, there's no point in remembering the name of a background character."

That young master was left speechless.

You have successfully trolled Jiang Fan for 233 Rage points!

"You said that I craved her body just now. Does that mean that you don't?" Zu An stared at him curiously.

"I..." Jiang Fan subconsciously gave Qiu Honglei a look. He had never been in such close contact with her before. When he saw her devastatingly beautiful face up close, he almost fainted. "Of course I don't!"

Even though his heart craved her endlessly, he still clung desperately to the appearance of a modest man to leave her with a good impression.

"So you don't think Lady Qiu is pretty?" Zu An looked at him strangely.

Jiang Fan said, "Lady Qiu's beauty is like that of a celestial being. Of course she is pretty."

"Then why don't you crave her? Is her beauty not to your taste?" Zu An frowned. "Lady Qiu is already ridiculously pretty, but that's not even enough for you... don't tell me... you're not a man?" Zu An said with exaggerated horror on his face.

Jiang Fan immediately went red as a beet. "Of course I am a man! I adore Lady Qiu! It's just... it's just that..."

He couldn't think through what to say even after racking his brain. Screw this guy!

You have successfully trolled Jiang Fan for 444 Rage points!

After the ocean of Rage points from earlier, Zu An didn't care that much about this small trickle.

However, when he thought about how even the smallest insect contained some nutrition, he knew he couldn't let it go to waste.

"If you are a man, that can only mean one thing." Zu An sighed. "You are way too fake. You don't even dare to admit your desire for women."

Jiang Fan's mouth worked, but no words came out.

He had somehow dug the perfect hole for himself. However, he just couldn't admit to this no matter what!

You have successfully trolled Jiang Fan for 666 Rage points!

In her second-floor room, Pei Mianman's expression turned bizarre. This guy... I truly pity his enemies.

Qiu Honglei stepped in to rescue the poor young master. "Please don't trouble him further. How about we discuss what sort of benefits you want?"

Zu An stared straight into her dazzling eyes, and a hint of a smile appeared on the corners of his lips. "I want you..."

Thunk!

A strange noise came from upstairs.

"This guy really is a pervert." Xie Daoyun said with a frown.

Pei Mianman's expression became hard to read. She muttered to herself, "Stinky brat, do you even know who she is? You dare take advantage of her?"

At the same time, she began to scrutinize Qiu Honglei for any reaction.

Only now did the rest of the men wake up, and they all began raining curses down on him.

"Have you gone mad? How dare you treat such a beautiful woman this rudely?!"

"How could someone like Lady Qiu agree to this type of condition?"

"You are simply a disgrace to all men! Utterly shameless!"

...

You have successfully trolled the onlookers for 99... 99... 99...

Only Wei Suo secretly flashed him a thumbs-up. His boss was truly the boss after all.

However, seeing just how worked up the crowd had become, he didn't dare voice this thought, lest he invite disaster upon himself.

Qiu Honglei's eyes flickered dangerously for the barest of moments. She said in a soothing voice, "We'll just have to see if young master's method works or not. After all, this is something our predecessors have not been able to solve for hundreds, if not thousands of years. I truly cannot fathom how to make different instruments complement a zither."

When they heard her words, the entire place grew hushed. Exactly! This is a problem not even the greatest names in the music world could solve. What can a little brat like him accomplish?

This thought, shared among most of the crowd, helped to calm their anxiety.

"In that case, let's begin with the second issue of your performance," Zu An said.

"Second issue?" Qiu Honglei was momentarily taken aback, but then remembered that this fellow had brought up two flaws. She was glad that she had at least managed to retain some composure. With a smile, she said, "I must ask for young master's guidance on this."

"Your second issue is that the emotions were too intense. To be able to imbue emotions into one's playing is a wonderful thing, but..." Zu An paused slightly before continuing, "The emotions you expressed were sorrow and anger. Not only are these emotions entirely at odds with the festive ambience of a brothel, they do not match the natural temperament of the zither either."

"Eeeeey~" Watching from the second floor, Xie Daoyun exclaimed in surprise. "What this fellow says actually makes some sense. I didn't even think of this just now."

Qiu Honglei sighed gently. "What young master says is true. This song holds great meaning for me. I was feeling nostalgic at that moment, and I just couldn't hold myself back from playing it."

When they heard her words, quiet whispering broke out amongst the crowd. Does she actually have a lover?

Just who was this blessed man?

Seeing the emotion that flickered in the depths of her eyes, Zu An finally knew that a crack had appeared in her armor, exposing her true feelings. "Lady Qiu, you are in the prime of your life. Your heart should be overflowing with joy, like the radiance of the sun, not wounded and sentimental as if covered in scars."

Qiu Honglei said with a smile, "From the way you describe me, it seems like I've suddenly aged a few decades."

Zu An sighed. "Music comes from the soul. Whether or not the you I describe is true, only the lady herself knows."

Qiu Honglei's sweet smile began to fade bit by bit. She had clearly been moved.

"We asked you to show us the method for bringing different instruments together. Why are you rambling about all of this?"

Chen Xuan had grown impatient from listening. A chorus of agreement chimed out from the crowd.

That plastic smile immediately returned to Qiu Honglei's face. "Exactly, young master. I am still waiting for you to broaden my horizons."

Zu An asked Leng Shuangyue, who was beside him, to fetch a xiao. "Do you know how to blow the xiao?"[2]

"But of course." Qiu Honglei revealed a smile.

Enthusiastic catcalls broke out amongst the crowd, and Qiu Honglei immediately realized her mistake. Her face reddened, and she shot him a resentful look. "Is young master making fun of me?"[3]

“That’s not what I mean at all!” Zu An’s expression darkened, and he glared fiercely at the crowd. These idiots aren’t good for anything else, but they’re incredibly sharp when it comes to picking up such things.

“If we examine all the available instruments, the xiao and zither make the best pairing.”

Qiu Honglei nodded her head. “This is indeed the case. However, this is only true if we compare the xiao with other instruments. The tonal color of the zither is too unique. However, if the xiao is used to accompany instead, the zither will be overwhelmed.. In that case, one might as well perform on the zither alone.”

Zu An smiled in reply. “I just happen to have a song in mind that perfectly suits the combination of zither and xiao.”

“Really?” Qiu Honglei’s eyes brightened. Even Xie Daoyun subconsciously scooted a little closer to her window.

In this world, the zither and the xiao weren’t used in combination because either the xiao would overwhelm the zither, or the zither’s sound would stand out too much. When the two performed as a duet, the resulting sound was mediocre at best, and even the best musicians had eventually given up on trying to make the combination work.

This Zu An seems so confident. Does he really have such a formidable song?

“I’ll write it out for you. Then, I’ll play the zither, and Lady Qiu will help me blow the xiao.” Zu An gestured for Leng Shuangyue to bring him some writing materials.

Zu An had already interacted with that beautiful big sister Shang Liuyu before through music. Since it had proven to be a fruitful avenue, he had continued to pursue it as a means to get closer to her.

This led him to specially look into the music of this world. Even though he was no expert, transcribing the tunes of his previous world in a way that could be understood by the people of this world wasn’t too difficult.

“Sure~” Qiu Honglei accepted the xiao from him. Something occurred to her, and she blushed a bright shade of red.

This guy was doing this on purpose!

Zu An didn’t notice, as he was currently preoccupied with transcribing his song onto paper. He’d originally learned how to play this song, ‘Scenery of Home’ in order to beef up his arsenal of weapons used to chase girls with. Because he really liked the drama series The Smiling, Proud Wanderer, he had memorized that song by heart as well.[4]

This song from The Smiling, Proud Wanderer wasn’t James Wong’s ‘Sea’s Laughter’, but rather the tune composed by master composer William Hu Wei-Li for the drama series starring Jackie Lui.[5]

“Oh? This song seems rather new and original...” As an expert in the musical field, Qiu Honglei could notice immediately that this tune was completely different from any she had seen before.

Could this fellow really make the zither and the xiao work together successfully?

She had merely been going along with the flow earlier. However, after seeing the melody laid out before her, her expression became serious.

“Will Lady Qiu be able to play it?” Zu An asked.

“The music seems slightly unfamiliar, but we can give it a try.” Qiu Honglei grew slightly nervous as she noticed the rather difficult syncopation.

“Then let’s begin.” Zu An sat down in front of the zither, his previous frivolousness nowhere to be seen.

His fingers moved lightly across the strings, producing a confident, relaxed sound that carried throughout the entire hall.

Xie Daoyun’s disapproving expression immediately froze.

Pei Mianman’s expression also became a bit strange. This fellow actually had such a wide set of skills up his sleeve? Did Chuyan already know all about all of this? Was that why she decisively chose him as her husband?

Those other spectators had been eagerly waiting for him to make a fool of himself. However, when they saw how he sat in front of the zither, they immediately sensed something amiss. When he struck the first few confident notes of his impassioned melody, every single one of them was blown away.

Chapter 252: Keeping the Blessings Within the Family

Zu An’s playing was slowly joined by the sound of the xiao, painting out a sorrowful tune. However, Qiu Honglei’s playing didn’t seem as proficient compared to her skill at the zither.

Xie Xiu couldn’t hide his confusion. “This doesn’t seem right. With Qiu Honglei’s skills, her skills with the xiao shouldn’t be so far below her skill at the zither. Why does her playing sound so... so ordinary?”

He had already chosen the most polite way of describing what he was hearing. Qiu Honglei’s playing lacked any semblance of smoothness, with some large hiccups that were audible even to him. If it had been anyone else, they would have long been chased off the stage.

Xie Daoyun frowned. “It might be because she is unfamiliar with this song...”

She quietly trailed off, unable to continue her justification. There’s no way an expert would mess up this badly, is there?

Screech!

With that sharp, wrong note, Qiu Honglei had finally had enough. She lowered the xiao with a reddened face. This really was too embarrassing! She actually couldn’t play the song!

However, no one else doubted her skills. All of them instead rushed to reassure her:

“If not even a master like young miss Qiu could play it, then this song was probably just randomly thrown together!”

“Precisely! Brat, don’t drag Lady Qiu down with you if you don’t know how to play it yourself!”

...

However, quite a few in the crowd had discerning ears. To them, Zu An's playing flowed freely in a natural, unforced manner, and did not sound at all like it had been recklessly put together. Surely, then, such an accusation could not be levelled at the part he had written out for the xiao.

Wang Yuanlong couldn't help but nudge Chu Yucheng. "It seems that I have truly been deceived by the rumors. I thought that the young master of your Chu clan was a good-for-nothing. I never expected him to actually possess such skill! No wonder Chu First Miss chose him to be her husband." He sighed in admiration.

Chu Yucheng also wore a strange expression. He nudged Chu Hongcai, who was next to him. "Did you expect such a thing to happen?"

Chu Hongcai shook his head dumbly. A hint of bitterness spread across his face as he watched how close and intimate Qiu Honglei and Zu An were.

Chu Yucheng seemed to have guessed what he was thinking. He reached over to console his cousin. "You don't have to feel so discouraged. They are only playing a duet together. It doesn't mean anything more. Besides, even if they do end up doing something together, it's better if Ah Zu were the one, instead of someone else. We should strive to keep such blessings within the family!"

Chu Hongcai had no words for his cousin.

What the hell do you mean, 'keep the damn blessings within the family'? Should I be thanking you for your insight?!

Zu An had also stopped to console Qiu Honglei. "This song is somewhat difficult. The melody changes quite abruptly in certain places, and the jumps are quite big. It's hard to play them correctly if you aren't familiar with the tune."

Qiu Honglei smiled at him appreciatively. Even though she normally acted the part of a world-toppling beauty, she was still a young lady deep down. She had never encountered such an embarrassing predicament before, which had left her slightly dazed.

Zu An carefully explained some easy ways to tackle the issues, as well as some areas in the song that deserved special attention.

Qiu Honglei gradually calmed down. She closed her eyes to center herself, and then read through the entire song from start to finish. With that, she finally understood why she kept messing up.

"Let's try it again." Qiu Honglei's expression was full of anticipation. Not only was she ready to redeem herself for her embarrassing performance earlier, but this song really seemed amazing to her, and she was eager to see what it would sound like when it was played properly.

"All right!" Zu An smiled. Seeing that she was ready, he began to lightly pluck the zither.

Qiu Honglei pursed her bright red lips and blew gently, her ten fingers moving along the xiao as if they were dancing.

With the zither occupying the middle register, and the beautiful and serene sound of the xiao floating across it, the music began to tug at the heartstrings of all those present. The melodies of the zither and xiao weaved in and out, going back and forth as if the two were having an intimate conversation, leaving all the men swimming in an endless sea of envy. Each of them wished fervently that they were the ones to have such an incredible opportunity with Lady Qiu.

Xie Daoyun stood by the window of her private room, her eyes glued to the two of them performing this duet. She remarked, "The pairing of the xiao and the zither works for this song, but it lacks that distinct effect he had been bragging about earlier."

Just as she said that, the melody of the zither gradually grew louder, while the xiao retreated into the background. However, the sound of the xiao didn't fade away completely, but lingered like wisps of cloud blown by a gentle wind. This served to take the music to greater, more soul-stirring heights.

"This..." Xie Daoyun's beautiful face was full of awe. She muttered to herself, "So the zither and the xiao can work in harmony together... such a pairing truly is flawless."

The music from the zither grew more forceful, as if heralding the start of a war. However, the xiao remained as gentle and mellow as before.

This carried on for a while, before the zither slowly became quiet again, with the xiao taking its turn to grow bolder. The two instruments continued in this vein, each taking their turn. It was almost as if there were several zithers and several xiaos performing at the same time.

Even though the melodies of the zither and the xiao were complex and constantly changing, each rose and fell in a perfect cadence, beautiful and moving.

Xie Daoyun sighed in admiration. No wonder even Qiu Honglei, with her wondrous abilities, had struggled and failed several times. The song sounded so complex just from an audience's perspective—she couldn't imagine just how difficult it would be for the actual musician.

The expressions of disdain slowly faded from the faces of the crowd, and they felt the blood pumping in their veins as the song reached its climax. They subconsciously rose to their feet, feeling as if they were currently on the battlefield, fighting for their families, fighting for their country, fighting for the fate of this world.

As the music went on, the zither and xiao traded places one final time. With the zither backing it up, the xiao took the lead, its notes swirling higher and higher.

A mysterious wave of sorrow swept the hall, and the audience unknowingly began to shed tears.

With a rousing crescendo of sound, the zither came to a sudden stop, and the music of the xiao faded as well.

A magical silence filled the Immortal Abode, which no one dared to disturb.

Qiu Honglei was completely awestruck. She almost couldn't believe that she was the one who had played such a moving melody.

She lowered the xiao to look at the man sitting in front of the zither table.

She had originally planned to help him out secretly, but who knew that he would be the one to bring her such a pleasant surprise?

“Young master Zu, does this song have a name?”

Zu An stood slowly. “This song is named ‘The Proud, Smiling Wanderer’. I will give this song to the lady as a gift in hopes that the lady can let your sorrows go, and to instead be proud and ever-smiling, just like this song.”

“You’re really giving it to me?” Qiu Honglei couldn’t hide her stunned surprise. After all, in a brothel, a good song was enough to push even an obscure brothel girl to the title of courtesan queen.

Even though she was well known in Brightmoon City, there were many other courtesan queens out there whose reputations far exceeded hers. With this song, however, her name might become well known throughout the world.

“Of course I am.” Zu An said with a smile. It was just a song after all—what was she getting so emotional for?

Pei Mianman snorted. “This guy really doesn’t skimp out when chasing after girls.” Watch me rat on you to Chuyan. She really needs to keep a tight leash on this husband of hers!

However, she really hadn’t expected this fellow to possess such a skill. She would definitely have to get him to write her a song some time in the future as well.

Xie Daoyun also began to mutter to herself, “Given time, Zu An will definitely become famous throughout the world.”

Xie Xiu’s face was filled with shock. “Is this performance really that big of a deal?”

Xie Daoyun rolled her eyes. “You’ve dabbled a bit in music, haven’t you? You should understand that this ‘Proud, Smiling Wanderer’ is completely groundbreaking.”

Xie Xiu couldn’t help but remark, “But then again, this is still a world where cultivation strength is paramount. No matter how deep one’s musical knowledge is, it will always remain a small field.”

Xie Daoyun couldn’t contain her frustration. “Why are your words sounding more and more like father’s? You all are just a bunch of uncultured trash!”

She got up and stormed off in annoyance. Victory and defeat had already been decided. There was no way Xie Xiu would be chosen, and so she wouldn’t have a chance of meeting Qiu Honglei either.

However, her trip here hadn’t been in vain, thanks to this song.

She had many burning questions for Zu An, but the Immortal Abode really wasn’t the best place to pose them. Besides, it would be best if she didn’t expose her identity here, so talking to Zu An would have to wait.

Xie Xiu hesitated a moment before following his sister out. After all, there wasn’t much point in staying here, and this was also the sort of place where crooks were mixed in with honest folk. If something were to happen to his sister, there would be no way for him to redeem the situation.

Qiu Honglei stood as well, and said to the crowd, "I am feeling a little tired, so I will take my leave now. Everyone, please make yourselves comfortable."

After saying this, she turned around and walked off slowly, ignoring the pleas of the crowd for her to stay. Soon, all that was left of her was a lingering fragrance.

Zu An stared blankly. The two of them had been chatting so happily just now. How could things end just like that?

Was she leaving just like this?

You have successfully trolled Chu Hongcai for 233 Rage points!

You have successfully trolled Chu Yucheng for 233 Rage points!

You have successfully trolled Wang Yuanlong for 233 Rage points!

...

Zu An immediately jumped in fright when he saw the Rage points come in. What is going on?

Looking around the hall, he noticed all of the other men staring at him with murderous eyes.

Chu Yucheng walked over to him. "Congratulations brother Zu, congratulations."

"What congratulations?" Zu An was dumbfounded.

"Do you really not know, or are you just acting? Lady Qiu has already taken her leave, which means she has already made her decision. Who else could she have chosen other than you?"

Chu Hongcai's face was darker than coal. This fellow had already gotten what he wanted, and yet he was still acting all innocent. How could he stand this?

You have successfully trolled Chu Hongcai for 345 Rage points!

His heart burned with regret. Why did he bring this scoundrel with him today?

However, it dawned on him that, even if he hadn't brought Zu An, he would still have offended Lady Qiu, and someone else would have definitely been chosen anyway.

Sigh, I guess third brother speaks the truth. I suppose this can also be considered as keeping the blessings within the family.

But then, why do I feel like crying so badly?

"She chose me?" Zu An was momentarily stunned, then erupted in laughter. "Haha, didn't I tell all of you earlier? How can any woman resist my charms?"

Chu Hongcai, Chu Yucheng and Wang Yuanlong shared the same open-mouthed expressions.

As they stared at him, mouths agape, a delicate and pretty maid hurried over. "Young master Zu, our young miss has invited you to meet her."

“Okay, I’ll be right over.” Zu An clasped his fist towards the people at his table. “Brothers should always remain loyal to each other. However, a beauty is calling for me. Please excuse this, gentlemen.”

Chu Yucheng was completely speechless. He hurriedly waved his hands, “Since Lady Qiu is calling for you, you should just go.”

Opposite him, Chu Hongcai’s face had fallen completely to the floor.

Zu An turned and took a few steps after the maid, before suddenly hurrying back. He said quietly, “How much does a night for a courtesan queen cost? I don’t have any experience, and I really don’t know anything about such matters.”

Everyone at the table stared at him, dumbfounded.

Zu An said with an embarrassed smile, “I know that Sister Hua said that all of my expenses in Immortal Abode are waved today, but does that include the night with a courtesan queen? I forgot to bring any money out with me.”

“Piss off!”

His companions had reached the limits of their patience. This guy really had no sense of shame!

How could anyone put a price on Lady Qiu?

If money was all anyone needed to get close to her, countless men of Brightmoon City would have already lost their family fortunes.

Am I going to have to give up on this opportunity? Zu An curled his lips. However, borrowing money from people he knew really was quite embarrassing.

With this in mind, he followed the maid halfway up the stairs before suddenly turning around and clapping his hands, drawing everyone’s attention. “Do you all have any requests for me?” he asked loudly.

In her private room, Pei Mianman was already back in her seat, sipping leisurely on some tea. When she heard his voice, her eyes narrowed suspiciously. What is this fellow up to now?

The crowd was dumbfounded as well. “Why would we want anything from you?” someone yelled resentfully.

If there’s something we want, it’s for you to get out of our sight as soon as possible. Just looking at you is irritating.

“There’s really nothing?” Zu An smile mischievously. “For example, wouldn’t you like me to be... a little gentler to your goddess later?”

Chapter 253: Straw Bag and Trash

“Pfft!”

Pei Mianman spewed her tea everywhere.

Just what kind of life had this fellow been living until now? Wasn't this a little too low?

Everyone in the court reacted, immediately exploding with rage.

"Bloody hell... Don't stop me, I am going to hack that guy to pieces!"

"Where is my sword?"

"How can there be someone this low in this world?"

"Lady Qiu, do you even know what he is saying? How could you pick a degenerate like him?!"

...

You have successfully trolled Chen Xuan for 999 Rage points!

You have successfully trolled Jiang Fan for 999 Rage points!

You have successfully trolled Chu Hongcai for 999 Rage points!

You have successfully...

Zu An went mad with happiness as he watched a new wave of Rage points pour in.

An exceptional person really did have to do exceptional things!

However, these guys already seemed like they were after his life, and there was not way he could possibly be stupid enough to stay here and let them beat him up.

Before anyone could react in any meaningful way, he already escaped without a trace. The furious crowd was barred from following him by the staff of the Immortal Abode.

Sister Hua directed her subordinates to restrain the enraged crowd, throwing a resentful look at Zu An's disappearing figure. This guy really knows how to cause trouble! Now I have this terrible mess to clean up.

Zu An whistled happily as he followed the maid. He wondered if he should visit this sort of establishment again.

Of course, with my amazing character, I would never come here for the girls. But it really is just too easy to farm Rage points here!

After just a rough calculation, he determined that the number of points he'd earned in the Immortal Abode was much greater than at any other time previously.

If he could rake in so many points every day, ascending to immortality would not be such an impossible dream.

Suddenly, his surroundings grew dark. He noticed that he had already left the interior of the Immortal Abode, and was standing in front of the sparkling Brightmoon River. The sky had grown dark, and lanterns were just being lit, which indicated it was early evening. The reflections of the lanterns on the water's surface made it seem as if there were countless moons in the night sky.

Only the liveliness of a brothel street could have such wonderful scenery.

Zu An sighed as he asked the maid, “Cute lil’ sis, where are we headed?”

He looked around him. This doesn’t seem like Qiu Honglei’s lady chambers?

“Cute lil’ sis?” That servant girl was startled. She had clearly never heard anyone being addressed in such a way before.[1]

However, compared to the way others treated maids like her—disrespectfully, as if they existed only to be ordered around—this ‘cute lil’ sis’ sounded rather nice.

Her face grew suffused with happiness. “The young miss is waiting for you on the boat.”

“Boat?” Zu An was bewildered. How was he ever going to get to a boat?

The maid squatted down and slid open a wooden door on the balcony floor, revealing a stepladder. He could just make out a small boat tied off nearby.

“Young master, please.” The maid gestured toward the stepladder.

“So many formalities,” Zu An chuckled. However, this didn’t really bother him. He took the ladder down.

As soon as he got in the boat, it slowly began to move towards the center of the river.

Zu An frowned. This can’t be some trap, could it?

However, he soon dismissed the thought. He didn’t seem to be one worth conspiring against.

Besides, his cultivation had now increased. The more skilled one became, the more daring they became. He quickly calmed himself.

“What a pity that cute lil’ sis didn’t get on as well. I forgot to ask for her name.” Zu An felt a twinge of regret.

“As expected, young master is different from any other ordinary person. You don’t seem to feel any fear.”

A gentle female voice came from within the cabin. It was none other than Qiu Honglei’s unique voice.

“What do I have to be scared of? That the lady will devour me?” Zu An said with a smile.

“Young master really knows how to joke around. Shouldn’t I be the one afraid of being eaten by you?” Qiu Honglei’s voice was smooth and rich, every word tugging at his heartstrings.

“Hurry up and come inside. The wind out there is too strong.”

...

As they chatted with each other, a voluptuous figure appeared on the very balcony that Zu An had departed from.

Pei Mianman stomped her feet as she watched that boat depart. “What a crafty vixen!”

Now that they had set out on the boat, there was no way she could listen in on their conversation.

"Forget it, I'll search her room first. Hopefully I can find something there," Pei Mianman said in a huff. Her figure quickly disappeared without a trace.

...

At the gorgeous woman's invitation, Zu An raised the curtained entrance to the cabin of the boat.

Despite the small size of the boat, the interior of the cabin was warm and cozy. Zu An noticed a small carved table laid out with a few plates of exquisite-looking food. Qiu Honglei was sitting by the table and smiling at him.

Her beautiful eyes seemed to harbor hidden messages within them.

If he didn't know better, Zu An would have thought that she was a wife eagerly waiting for her husband to return home.

A small and exquisite lantern hung from the wall. The faint yellow radiance cast a glow over her body, covering her in a warm amber hue.

"Young master is staring so intently at that small lantern. Could it be that I am not as pretty as that lantern?" Qiu Honglei sounded slightly hurt. However, there was no real annoyance on her face.

"I've just never seen such a yellow lamp before," Zu An said, as he took a seat at the table.

If he'd had his way, he would definitely have sat next to Qiu Honglei, just to be as close to her as possible.

However, this boat was just too small! Just the table alone was enough to fill most of the room in the cabin. He couldn't find a way to squeeze in next to her, so he could only sit down opposite her.

Is this girl doing this on purpose? Who is she even guarding against? Zu An thought resentfully.

"If the young master does not like the lamp, I can put it out." Qiu Honglei rose halfway, revealing her endlessly seductive waistline.

Zu An stopped her and said, "There's no need. The yellow light actually makes me feel warm. Besides, I won't be able to admire Lady Qiu's beauty without it. That would really be a pity."

"Young master's mouth really is sweet. No wonder you were able to please my maid so easily." Qiu Honglei said with an alluring expression.

Zu An jumped in fright. "Do you have clairvoyance or something?" How did she know what he'd done when she'd been so far away?

Qiu Honglei smiled. She gave no explanation, only pointing at the two small pots beside her. "Does young master wish to drink tea or alcohol?"

"Obviously alcohol!" Zu An said without hesitation.

"That is what I assumed as well. Anyone who can compose such an impassioned song as 'The Smiling, Proud Wanderer' is naturally a heroic man who loves alcohol." Qiu Honglei picked up the pot and poured a cup for him.

Out of worry that her long sleeves would touch the food on the table, she gently pushed them up, revealing beautiful arms that were even finer than white jade.

Zu An couldn't help but sigh in admiration. Some people really were blessed at birth. Every single part of her body is a work of art.

"That's actually not the reason why I drink. I just want an excuse to justify any reckless actions after I drink."

Qiu Honglei's smile froze momentarily, but she quickly recovered. "If you had said that before, I would have definitely thought of young master as a pervert. I might even have chased you out immediately."

"What made you change your mind?" Zu An asked in curiosity.

"Anyone who can write such a song is definitely a righteous and valiant knight who is richly talented. I'm sure that your vulgar and unrestrained actions are merely a form of camouflage." Qiu Honglei raised her cup with a smile. "I am really happy that music has brought young master and I closer together in friendship. This humble girl offers the young master a toast."

Smelling the fragrance filling the air, Zu An couldn't help but sigh. "Who says those who have talent can't be perverts?"

Ji Dengtu's vulgar smile appeared in his head. Revolted, he quickly shoved that image out of his head. "Also, that song isn't my work. I am only sharing in the achievements of another."

A wave of homesickness struck him. He worried that he might never be able to return to his previous world again, and grew dejected. Raising his cup, he drained it in one go.

Qiu Honglei lowered her cup, leaving behind an imprint of her lips on the rim. "The young master is too modest. Even though Honglei is foolish, I am familiar with all sorts of songs. This is the first time I've heard of this 'Smiling, Proud Wanderer'. If it wasn't written by young master, who else could it have been written by?"

Zu An seemed on the verge of saying something, but hesitated. He gave up the thought of explaining what was going on. After all, there was no way he couldn't tell her that he transmigrated here, right?

There really is something wrong with this world! Whenever I speak the truth, no one believes me, but they don't question my lies at all!

To hell with it!

"May I ask young master a question?" Qiu Honglei looked calmly at him with her beautiful eyes.

"Please, don't keep calling me young master. Just call me Ah Zu in the future," Zu An replied. "What do you want to ask me?"

Qiu Honglei said, "To be honest, I have already heard quite a few rumors about young master. None of them were too good."

"Perhaps you have heard that I am just a piece of trash? You don't need to worry about my feelings." Zu An laughed in a completely unconcerned manner. "I've already gotten used to it."

Qiu Honglei's face tinged with red. She studied him curiously. "It was only today that I discovered that young master is actually an extremely outstanding man. Why do you normally... treat this entire world like a game?"

She really couldn't find the right words to portray how Zu An carried himself. The word 'lowly' seemed quite fitting, but that was too indecent. How could she say that in such a setting?

"I'm not pretending, though. That's the sort of person I am," Zu An said in a carefree manner.

Qiu Honglei refused to believe him. "It seems like young master still does not treat me as one of his own," she said with a hurt expression.

Zu An cursed silently. Are we husband and wife or something? We haven't even gone to bed yet, and you have the nerve to say this?

Noticing his silence, Qiu Honglei probed further. "Is the young master concerned that being too outstanding might instead make the Chu clan uneasy?"

Zu An stared blankly. "Why would the Chu clan feel uneasy about that?"

Qiu Honglei smiled slightly. "Brightmoon Duke currently has two daughters and a son. The son is serving in the capital as a... he is studying, while his second daughter is publicly known as...

"Publicly known as a brat that throws uncontrollable tantrums. There's no way she could manage the matters of the Chu clan."

Zu An burst out laughing inside. You were going to say that she was publicly known as a straw bag idiot, weren't you? It's a phrase that you're so used to saying, you almost blurted it out.

Honestly though, that young lass and I actually make a good duo. Straw bag and trash, haha~

The merest hint of awkwardness flickered across Qiu Honglei's expression. She continued, "Close to half of the Chu clan's affairs are managed by first miss Chu. First miss Chu is very pretty and extremely talented. She is also the Chu clan's most suitable heir. Unfortunately, she is also a woman.

"That's where the situation with her husband becomes a little awkward. If he is too competent, he might just take over the Chu clan like a turtledove seizing the nest of a magpie.

"That is why first miss Chu would go out of her way to choose a... choose someone like you without any notable background. On the surface, it seemed like they picked someone who didn't have a single redeeming quality as her husband. I thought that I had guessed first miss Chu's intentions correctly. However, after meeting young master today, I have come to realize that I was gravely mistaken.

"Did you deliberately deceive young miss Chu, or did the young miss choose you as her husband because she knew about you right from the start?"

Zu An gently swirled the cup in his hands, casually leaning against the wall of the cabin. His expression grew hard to read. "This doesn't seem like something a courtesan should be concerned with, does it? Just who exactly are you?"

Chapter 254: Losing Money Instead Of Being Paid

"I am the Immortal Abode's Qiu Honglei! Did the young master forget so quickly?" Qiu Honglei pouted at him petulantly.

"You claim to be just a courtesan, yet you are so concerned with Duke Chu's family matters. You've already analyzed everything in such detail. Does that seem like what a simple brothel girl would do at all?" Zu An sneered.

Qiu Honglei sighed. "Wasn't it not too long ago that young master was hollering to those other men that you were going to treat me gently?"

Zu An was left speechless.

No matter how thick his skin was, he still felt extremely embarrassed that she had heard him say this.

"I only said that just now to get them worked up! I was just kidding... Hahaha..." Zu An could no longer keep his composure. Thoroughly embarrassed, he tried desperately to justify himself.

"But I'd already chosen to meet with you alone tonight! By saying such a thing, you've left my reputation in tatters. I'm no longer a pure and innocent girl in their eyes." Qiu Honglei grew more and more broken-hearted as she spoke. An emotional tear trickled out from the corner of her eye.

Zu An really had to hand it to her. This woman's charm was too strong. Even though he was fully aware that she was putting on an act, he still couldn't completely control his emotions.

Qiu Honglei sobbed as she said, "Even though I chose... chose you today, I am not a heartless girl... of course I need to ask about your family situation! I have to ask if your wife is an envious woman, and if her parents would tolerate me.

"That's why I wanted confirmation from the young master! I was trying to make an important decision earlier. I didn't expect to be misunderstood by the young master..."

"After spending all these years in a brothel, I've heard the tragic tales of too many of my seniors. If it wasn't a story of heartbreak, then it was a home with a violent man, or a lifetime of potential happiness in ruins."

"Honglei doesn't wish to repeat their tragedy..."

Her performance seemed completely real, completely like that of a young lady who was worried about her future. Even the coldest of hearts would melt at the sight of her tears.

It was just a pity that Zu An wasn't an ordinary person. He had always seen things rather differently. "From what you've just said, it seems you plan to entrust your entire life to me?"

"If the young master does not dislike my poor self and young miss Chu's family doesn't mind either, then I... of course I am willing." Qiu Honglei lowered her head in a bashful manner, her neck reddening slightly.

Zu An sighed as he gazed upon this incomparably tender and beautiful woman. "If this figure of yours is considered poor, then I fear that everyone in the world is ugly."

Only then did Qiu Honglei's tears turn to laughter. "The young master must be joking. You must not say these things in front of young miss Chu in the future! Honglei doesn't want to be hated so soon after committing myself to you."

She completely immersed herself in this role, speaking as if she was about to become a concubine.

"Don't worry, Chuyan told me herself that she doesn't mind if I look for other girls." Zu An repeated, "You don't have to worry if she will accept you either. In our family, there's no way she will ever disobey me willingly."

Qiu Honglei sneered on the inside. Who would ever believe that?

"But there is one other troubling matter." Zu An wore a conflicted expression.

"What is it?" Qiu Honglei said out of curiosity. Could it be the Chu clan's Madam?

Indeed, if I was Brightmoon Duke, I wouldn't want my daughter's husband to have a concubine. If such a thing happened, how could the Chu clan retain any dignity at all?

Zu An studied her from head to toe. His intent gaze immediately made Qiu Honglei's heart hasten.

"What is the young master looking at?"

"You really are too pretty. This type of face, this type of physique... it isn't too much to call it devastatingly beautiful."

The corners of Hong Qilei's lips turned up slightly. This fellow has finally noticed my charm. "As long as it pleases the young master. However, you still haven't spoken about the other issue."

"This is precisely the issue..." Zu An corrected her. "You are too pretty, and even hold the title of Brightmoon City's most famous courtesan. How could the Immortal Abode willingly let you go?"

Qiu Honglei sighed with obvious relief. "The young master needs not worry. I don't have a regular contract with the Immortal Abode. We have agreed that, were we to part ways, there would be no hard feelings. They will not make any trouble for me as long as I pay them a promised sum."

"But they would surely demand a hefty sum for a star like you! You know that I am but a lowly drafted son-in-law. I really don't have any money..." Touching upon this sorest or sore spots left Zu An full of embarrassment.

Qiu Honglei had to stop herself from rolling her eyes.

Like hell I'll believe you!

Who in Brightmoon City doesn't know that you won seven-and-a-half million silver taels from Silverhook Casino? After that, you even won another million or so from another gambling den during the Clans Tournament. And yet, you still dare to claim that you don't have money?!

You have successfully trolled Qiu Honglei for 256 Rage points!

However, she didn't let her anger show on the surface. Instead, she said with an embarrassed expression, "The young master doesn't need to worry. I have also quietly saved up a little bit of money on the side. It should be enough for me to free myself."

"Then that's great!"

Zu An roared with laughter, but he was frowning inside.

This woman wanted to marry him even if she lost money!

Even though I really am too charming, my face too handsome, with plenty of money in the bank... even though I am a publicly known lady-killer, this is Qiu Honglei we are talking about!

You are the most popular courtesan within a thousand miles, a well-known virgin-slayer! With a crook of your finger, you can make endless men tread through flames for your sake! Would you really give up money instead of taking money to be with a man?

Who would believe you?!

Wait a minute. Could she have somehow subconsciously fallen for my suave greatness?

His mind continuously wavered back and forth, and so did Qiu Honglei's.

This man in front of her was different from other men. He wasn't anything like those dumb pigs who merely seemed astute on the surface.

Having learned from her previous lesson, she realized that she was slightly too hasty. She didn't dare to continue to ask about the Chu clan's matters.

Instead, she brought the conversation back to romance. "Let's not talk about these ordinary affairs for now. I've always been a bit curious about something. Just how did young master create a song like 'The Smiling, Proud Wanderer?'"

"Oh, I uh... seemed to have heard someone play it beside my ears in a dream one day. Then, I knew how to play it." Zu An tried a random excuse. It wasn't because he didn't want to play the part of a talented nobleman. Rather he didn't truly dare claim that he made this song.

After all, he only remembered these few songs. If someone asked him to compose another song, what was he supposed to do?

That was why he had to shake this false reputation as soon as he could, to prevent things from getting out of hand. If that happened, his fall would be even harder.

Qiu Honglei sighed in admiration. "I've read books which claimed that some people's talents come from the heavens, but I never believed them. Only when I met young master did I realize that there really were people like this in the world."

Zu An almost screamed.

Please take me off this pedestal! I really need to keep my low profile...

Zu An couldn't stand being flattered like this. He hurriedly changed the topic. "Speaking of which, the first song you played clearly reflected your true emotions. Who were you thinking about when you played that song?"

"The young master does not need to worry at all, that was merely an artistic piece. Honglei has never set her thoughts on anyone else before. Young master... is the first one." Qiu Honglei lowered her head bashfully as she spoke, and her eyelashes fluttered slightly. This really would make endless men go crazy.

Zu An chuckled. Casually listening to her was fine, but taking her words seriously really might get him hurt badly. All of those girls would be laughing behind his back if that happened.

"Was that story about your parents in the past?"

Bang!

A sharp noise rang out. Qiu Honglei's cup slipped out of her hands and fell onto the table, the smile on her face vanishing instantly.

The silence dragged on for a long time, before Qiu Honglei sighed. "Even if I deny it, I fear that young master won't believe me."

"Just what happened to the two of them? Did your parents really pass away?" Zu An asked curiously. He had picked up some things from Leng Shuangyue earlier, but there was much that she hadn't known.

Qiu Honglei took a deep breath. Her sweet smile from earlier was nowhere to be seen, and her voice was the coldest it had ever been. "I do not wish to talk about what happened between them."

She regretted her words as soon as she spoke them. I've probably offended him deeply.

She had actually made it this far. Ruining everything right at the end like this truly was regretful.

It's all my fault for not being able to let go of things from the past.

She never expected Zu An to laugh instead. "I wonder if the lady knows that your current appearance is much more real, and much more beautiful."

Qiu Honglei gave him a complicated look. "The young master truly isn't anything like the rumors."

Zu An reached out a hand. "Let's introduce ourselves again. I am Zu An, you can call me Ah Zu."

Qiu Honglei stared blankly. Even though she didn't know what kind of greeting this was, she subconsciously reached out her hand. The two shook hands lightly. "I am Qiu Honglei, you can call me Honglei."

She was stunned that she would take the initiative to make physical contact with a man. Perhaps it had been his clear, honest expression just now, or perhaps it had been that split second where she had been so emotionally vulnerable.

The two of them sat in silence, savoring this moment of tranquility. Suddenly, a commotion came from outside.

There was a scream of alarm, followed by the wanton laughter of men.

Qiu Honglei's brow furrowed. She tapped on the wall of the cabin, and inquired of the boatman outside, "What's happened?"

"Young miss, there are bandits... ah!"

There was a splash. Clearly, the man had fallen into the water.

Immediately following that, the small boat rocked violently, as if many people jumped onto it.

"This boat smells so good. Who knows, there might be a gorgeous woman inside."

"If there is a girl, who's first?"

"Why not do it together?"

Wretched and vulgar voices yelled out one after another.

Chapter 255: Fake Meets Real

Zu An was speechless. Am I really going to run into bandits when I'm out here with a girl? Just what kind of shitty luck is this?

Despite this, he wasn't that worried. His trip into the dungeon had boosted his cultivation greatly. As long as he didn't run into some ridiculously strong enemy, he wouldn't have an issue dealing with ordinary people.

Just as he was about to console Qiu Honglei, a sweet fragrance filled his nose. She had already arrived at his side.

"There's no need for young master to fear. I will protect you." Qiu Honglei positioned herself in front of him. Her previously gentle and loving appearance was nowhere to be seen. Instead, her expression was determined.

Zu An's jaw dropped open.

Did we end up swapping scripts?

The curtains were crudely torn away, and several masked men charged in.

When they saw Qiu Honglei's beautiful figure, they all whistled, and their eyes glazed over with infatuation.

Qiu Honglei said in a grave manner, "Who are you all? How dare you all behave like this in Brightmoon City? The Immortal Abode isn't a party you all can afford to offend! If you leave right now, I can still pretend like this never happened."

Zu An couldn't help but feel a dash of admiration. She could still remain completely calm when faced with such a situation! Her bearing was clearly different from other regular beauties.

The masked men were momentarily stunned by her words, but their bravado quickly returned, and they retorted one after another:

“The Immortal Abode? Oh we are so so scared!”

“Before our Blackwind Stockade, your Immortal Abode is nothing!”

“The one we are out to get is precisely your Immortal Abode!”

...

The Blackwind Stockade!

Qiu Honglei’s expression wavered for a moment. She had clearly heard of the Blackwind Stockade before. They were a group of bandits based in the mountain forest, led by Great Bandit Chen Xuan, who plundered the caravans that passed by. Brightmoon Duke and the city lord had sent experts and armies to suppress them numerous times, but with little success. Often, they even suffered serious casualties.

“You all are from the Blackwind Stockade?” Zu An was a bit surprised. He’d just seen Chen Xuan earlier, and he still had some impression of what his subordinates looked like.

Even though these people were masked, they were clearly not the ones Chen Xuan had brought with him into the Immortal Abode. Could they have been waiting in ambush outside?

“What, scared?”

The one in the lead snickered. “Hand over your woman. If we brothers are in a good mood after we’ve had our fun, we might just leave you with your life.”

“Hurry and leave, young master, I will hold the rear!” Qiu Honglei hurriedly pushed him toward the exit.

Zu An was completely speechless. We’re in the middle of the river! Where am I supposed to go? However, he still nodded and said to her, “All right, be careful.”

With that, he turned tail and fled.

Qiu Honglei stared blankly after him.

She had fully expected him to modestly decline, and then frantically try to help her escape. Who knew he wouldn’t even have an ounce of hesitation in him as he left?

The men on the other side roared with laughter. “Lovely lady, the man you’ve chosen really is too stupid and cowardly! Why not follow us big brothers instead? We can promise you that you’ll never go hungry.”

Zu An turned a deaf ear to them. He reached the front of the boat and then looked around. Apart from a smaller boat beside them, there weren’t any other bandits to be seen. The other flower boats were still making their way leisurely along the river, the scene still bustling with liveliness.

He pondered for a moment before re-entering the cabin.

Seeing him return, Qiu Honglei became nervous. “Why did young master Zu come back?”

Zu An gave no reply. The eyes of the bandit leader lit up. "His surname is Zu? Is this the Chu clan's son-in-law, Zu An?"

"What, am I already that famous?" Zu An said in amazement. His voice dripped with self-satisfaction.

Qiu Honglei glared at him from the side. Why did he admit to it so easily?

That bandit couldn't help but ask, "I heard that you won seven-and-a-half million silver taels from the Silverhook Casino, and then won another million from a different wager. Is that true?"

Zu An nodded. "What can I say? My luck has always been amazing. Winning a bit of money like this really isn't much, and isn't worth mentioning at all, if you ask me."

Qiu Honglei placed a hand on her forehead, a resigned expression on her face. It was clear that she had already given up on him.

That bandit roared with laughter. "It appears that I am the one whose luck is in tonight! Not only did I snag a great beauty, I've even gotten myself a cash cow. Hand over the money and I might consider letting you off."

Zu An shrugged. "I didn't bring any money with me today. How about you come over to our Brightmoon Estate and ask my wife for it?"

That bandit sneered. "You can forget about trying to scare me by bringing in Brightmoon Duke. When has our Blackwind Stockade ever feared him?"

Zu An looked at him curiously. "You speak with such confidence. I wonder, what is your position in the Blackwind Stockade?"

"I'm obviously Master Chen Xuan! What, scared now?" That bandit snorted. "Just be a good boy and write a letter to the Chu clan to pay the ransom, or else I am going to chop off your limbs before sending you home."

Zu An couldn't help but laugh. "You are Chen Xuan?"

Standing beside him, Qiu Honglei tugged at his sleeves, saying quietly, "Young master, I believe it's best if we don't anger them."

Zu An didn't say anything. All of this was too strange. If he hadn't learned what the true Chen Xuan looked like from his Keyboard system, he might have truly been deceived by this fellow.

Isn't this an extortion scheme through and through?

He'd read so many stories online about some high-spirited fellows who had gone into sketchy places to meet hot girls, only to end up being extorted and blackmailed by some big bad men.

Wasn't this the same situation?

"What, do I not look like him?" Zu An's expression really was getting on the bandit's nerves.

You have successfully trolled Gu Yueyi for 233 Rage points!

Gu Yueyi? Seeing the name pop up in his notifications, Zu An was momentarily stunned. This was a name he hadn't seen before.

"You do, of course you do!" Zu An couldn't keep the ridicule out of his voice. However, he didn't expose the other party. He wanted to see what this fellow was up to first.

Even with a mask covering most of his face, Zu An could vaguely tell that Gu Yueyi was quite a young lad. The bandit frowned. He had clearly sensed something amiss from Zu An's reply. "Stop spouting nonsense. Hurry up and write the note so I can contact the members of the Chu clan and arrange for the ransom to be paid."

Zu An shook his head. "Your decision doesn't seem all that wise to me."

Gu Yueyi's brow furrowed. "Are you trying to teach me how to do things?"

Zu An chuckled. "I am merely helping you analyze the situation. Look, even if I write a letter for you to send to the Chu clan, what dignity would the Chu clan have left if this glorious dukedom were to obediently hand over the ransom?"

"Not only that, everyone in Brightmoon City already knows that this drafted son-in-law isn't all that well received in the Chu Estate. Who knows, they might just use you all as an excuse to get rid of me, and even pocket my few million silver taels.

"This way, no one will blame the Chu clan for being heartless. Rather, the blame would be on you for resorting to such cruel methods."

The bandits exchanged dismayed looks. Completely at a loss as to what to do, Gu Yueyi asked him, "What should we do, then?"

"How about this? The two of us will go to the Chu Estate, and I'll bring out the banknotes for you," Zu An said.

Gu Yueyi sneered. "Do you take me for a fool? What if you don't come back out after I take you to the Chu Estate?"

Zu An pointed at Qiu Honglei, who was still beside him. "You'll still have her, won't you? With her as a hostage, I will definitely come back with the ransom! That is why you absolutely must not harm her, or else I won't be giving you any money!"

Seeing their continued hesitation, he added, "Even though Lady Qiu is pretty, there isn't enough of her for all of you to divide amongst yourselves. I have a few million silver taels in banknotes back home. That's enough for you to have a different girl every day. Wouldn't that be even better?"

Gu Yueyi was still uncertain. He gave Qiu Honglei a subconscious look, and she nodded slightly in return without batting an eyelid.

Only then did he concede. "Fine," he said gruffly, "but you'd better not play any tricks. Otherwise, not only will we take turns with her, we'll definitely kill you."

Zu An had observed their expressions and exchanges closely. "Don't worry, I am more scared of dying than anyone else."

Inwardly, he still couldn't puzzle out why Qiu Honglei was doing all of this. Did she really covet his few million silver taels?

But with the Immortal Abode's information network, there's no way she doesn't know that most of the silver is in the form of a promissory note. Whether or not the note can even be exchanged for money is still an issue. What could she even do with something like that?

"All right, we are going to the Chu Estate!" Gu Yueyi waved his hand, gesturing for his subordinates to turn the boat about.

"The two of you had better not do anything fishy." As he said this, two of Gu Yueyi's subordinates moved to stand behind the two hostages, and two shiny blades swiftly appeared, hovering in front of their necks.

"Sorry I ended up making you lose so much money," Qiu Honglei said apologetically.

Zu An dismissed her remark casually. "I am someone who loves the carefree life, and I love gorgeous beauties even more. Money can always be earned again, but once you are gone, you will really be gone!" Despite his words, he sneered coldly on the inside. Like hell I'll come back out after I reach the safety of the Chu Estate! You're all probably in on this together, anyway.

Once he was safe, he'd have Yue Shan lead troops to capture and interrogate them, to figure out what they were really scheming at.

When the time comes, I should bring Qiu Honglei back to personally interrogate her one-on-one.

The main reason why Zu An hadn't yet exposed anything was because Gu Yueyi's cultivation wasn't low. The ki rippling around his body seemed to be at the fifth rank. Of course, if he'd been alone, Zu An wouldn't have cared much.

However, Qiu Honglei was also present. Even though she looked soft and tender on the surface, he couldn't see through her at all.

This either meant that her cultivation was either considerably higher than his, or that she had some type of artifact that concealed her aura.

Regardless of which one it was, he didn't dare act carelessly.

A sudden commotion erupted outside.

"Hahaha, I've finally found Lady Qiu's flower boat!"

Gu Yueyi suddenly turned around. "What is going on?"

Several muffled and miserable-sounding screams greeted his question.

His expression growing dark, he immediately drew his blade and ran out. He'd been gone for just a split second before he was sent flying back in, as if struck by an artillery shell.

The walls of the cabin were blasted into pieces by the powerful wave of force, revealing the scene outside.

They were surrounded by several small boats, one of them containing a red-haired man. He stood at the prow of his boat with a dominant stance. He looked down on Qiu Honglei as if he was looking at his spoils of war.

His gaze shifted quickly to Zu An, his lips slowly spreading in a cruel smile.

Chapter 256: Betrayal

“Who are you all? You actually dare to interfere in our Blackwind Stockade’s business?!” Gu Yueyi crawled up off the ground in a sorry state, wiping the blood off the corners of his lips.

From that brief interaction, he clearly understood that the other party’s cultivation was much higher than his own. His only chance was to pull out the Blackwind Stockade bluff and hope that it could scare the other party off.

“Blackwind Stockade?” The red-haired man’s eyes went wide. He looked around at his brothers-in-arms around him, and burst out in laughter. “There’s nothing wrong with my hearing today, is there? Did he just say the Blackwind Stockade just now?”

The rest of them joined him in his laughter, their eyes full of ridicule and pity.

Gu Yueyi cursed inside, but he couldn’t figure out where the problem lay.

Zu An shook his head. It was truly embarrassing to see scammers screw up so badly.

The red-haired man was none other than Chen Xuan, whom they had met in the Immortal Abode.

He snuck a glance at Qiu Honglei beside him. While she had put on a panicked act, her expression still seemed extremely calm.

Chen Xuan turned to face forward again and said coldly, “I was wondering why the reputation of the Blackwing Stockade seemed to be suffering lately. It turns out it was you fellows who were passing yourselves off as us and ruining our reputation!”

Gu Yueyi’s face immediately drained of color. “You... you are...”

“I’ll let you have the pleasure of obtaining this knowledge just before your death. I am Chen Xuan of the Blackwind Stockade!” the red-haired man declared proudly.

Gu Yueyi swallowed in fear. His eyes darted subconsciously towards Qiu Honglei.

Qiu Honglei’s beautiful brows came together in a frown. She clearly hadn’t expected Chen Xuan to brazenly enter the city in such a public manner, even revealing himself before their very eyes.

“Senior, you should retreat quickly,” she said to him via ki transmission.

“Then what about you?!” Gu Yueyi hesitated. To him, this junior sister was just too beautiful. If she was left behind, wouldn’t he merely be leaving a lamb in front of a tiger’s den? There was no way he could forgive himself for this for the rest of his life.

“I have my ways to deal with this.” Qiu Honglei quickly replied. She urged him a second time to leave.

"I guess there's no choice then!"

Gu Yueyi gritted his teeth. After all, his life was still the most important. Besides, this junior was a mystery to him, and to everyone else. No one else could see through her normally, so she might truly have some life-saving tricks up her sleeve.

Making his mind up, he leaped over to where Zu An and Qiu Honglei were seated. He held his blade right in front of them. "Don't come any closer, or I'll kill them in one move!" he warned Chen Xuan.

Zu An smiled faintly at him. "Bro, didn't you just say you were Chen Xuan? How did we end up meeting someone with the same name today?"

"Shut your mouth!" Gu Yueyi was both ashamed and angry.

You have successfully trolled Gu Yueyi for 345 Rage points!

He never expected this Chen Xuan to be so formidable. The other party was rumored to only be at the peak of fifth rank, but from their brief exchange, he was clearly at the sixth rank!

Chen Xuan snorted coldly. "I am unrelated to either of them in any way, and yet you want to use them to threaten me?"

"That Zu brat, especially. I really want to skin him alive and feast on his flesh. I should thank you if you really do end up killing him!"

Gu Yueyi gave Zu An a look. He never expected that this fellow would have been so good at provoking others, even this Chen Xuan. It seemed that he was most certainly going to meet his maker today. "Even if you loathe this Zu kid, what about Lady Qiu? She is the most beautiful courtesan queen of the Immortal Abode. I refuse to believe that your heart isn't moved by her!"

Chen Xuan laughed heartily. "What you said is correct. This girl is indeed quite fine, and perfect in every way. I really am quite fond of her."

Qiu Honglei did her best not to react.

Gu Yueyi was ecstatic. "In that case, let us go, or else I'll kill her!"

Chen Xuan's face sunk. "Ask anyone, and they'll tell you that Chen Xuan has always hated being threatened by others. Even if you kill her, it won't matter. I have never acted recklessly in my life. At worst, I'll just do a quick one while it's still warm, but afterwards, I will definitely skin you alive piece by piece!"

Gu Yueyi stared at him, speechless, and Qiu Honglei had to avert her eyes.

Zu An was also completely stupefied. While it's still warm?

Was this guy really that much of a freak?

While they were still horrified, Chen Xuan stretched out his hand and clenched his fist. The blade in Gu Yueyi's hands crumpled like fried dough.

Metal element cultivator!

Zu An already had his suspicions previously.

Gu Yueyi's reaction was lightning-quick. He grabbed the two companions beside him and threw them at Chen Xuan, while he himself jumped into the river without any hesitation. When his toes touched the water surface, his figure was already several zhang[1] away.

Zu An nodded to himself as he watched. This fella's movement technique wasn't bad at all. He could actually move so easily on water. As expected of a fifth rank.

The two sacrificial companions never expected that they would be thrown under the bus by their own people. Shocked and furious, they brandished their weapons in panic, stabbing them towards Chen Xuan in an attempt to survive.

Chen Xuan didn't bother to dodge. Instead, he took a step forward, letting the long blades strike his body.

Those two were overjoyed at first, but their expressions turned to horror in an instant. There wasn't the familiar sound of metal entering flesh, but rather the sound of metal striking metal. They could even see sparks fly along their blades.

Unfortunately, this was also the last thing that they would see. Chen Xuan reached out to grab their necks in his large, claw-like hands, and snapped them like twigs. Two corpses fell limply to the ground.

Zu An frowned inwardly. At the instant he was struck, his body seemed to produce a flash of metallic radiance, as if his entire body had somehow turned to metal. The blades didn't even leave a single trace on his skin where they landed.

Is he completely invincible to blades?

Zu An felt a headache coming on. If this enemy really was invulnerable to bladed weapons, dealing with him was going to be trouble.

Chen Xuan was having none of this. He tried to chase after the escaping figure. Clearly, he had no intention of letting Gu Yueyi go.

Just then, Qiu Honglei stood up, inadvertently blocking his way.

Chen Xuan stopped, his brow furrowing slightly as he looked at her.

Only now that he was so close to her did he discover how frighteningly beautiful she was. His frown immediately unraveled of its own accord.

Qiu Honglei bowed slightly. "I never expected that Stockade Leader Chen would personally make an appearance. There was some negligence on my part back in the Immortal Abode. I must ask the stockade leader to pardon me for that."

When he saw the high and mighty courtesan greet him so respectfully, her tone humble and obsequious, Chen Xuan's entire body shivered with pleasure.

“Haha, I won’t blame you for not recognizing me. Lady Qiu has shown me too much courtesy.” As he spoke, he reached out a hand towards her. Her exquisite curves tempted him endlessly. Even the great Chen Xuan, who had enjoyed his fair share of women, couldn’t help but feel his breathing quicken.

“Stockade leader really is a great and magnanimous person.” Qiu Honglei took a discreet step backwards, perfectly evading his touch. “Honglei wishes to prepare another feast in the Immortal Abode. I hope the stockade leader can be at ease, and let me properly offer you my apologies.”

Chen Xuan laughed. “That apology can wait. Let me deal with this little bastard first.”

“Little bastard is cursing who?” Zu An suddenly asked.

“Little bastard is cursing you!” Chen Xuan subconsciously replied.

Zu An smiled. “Indeed, a little bastard is cursing me.”

Chen Xuan’s entire body quivered for a moment, then erupted in unrestrained fury. He reached out a meaty hand towards Zu An’s neck. “Damn brat, die!”

You have successfully trolled Chen Xuan for 444 Rage points!

Qiu Honglei hurriedly pulled Zu An behind her. “Stockade Leader Chen, this young master is my friend. I hope Stockade Leader Chen can be magnanimous and spare his life.”

Zu An was somewhat surprised that she had spoken up for him at such a time.

Didn’t this woman try to scam me just now? Why is she trying to save me now? Just what is she up to?

Chen Xuan snorted coldly. “If it was anyone else, I might have spared them as a favor to Lady Qiu. However, I absolutely must kill this fellow.”

“Why? Was it because I hurt your feelings back in the Immortal Abode?” Zu An was curious to find out. From the moment the other party had learned of his identity, he had immediately contributed a huge amount of Rage points. He had always wondered why.

“Why?” Chen Xuan’s face warped in anger. “Do you still remember Silverhook Casino’s Mei Chaofeng? He was my brother! We depended on each other to survive for so many years. He was such a heroic figure, and yet he was killed through the actions of a miserable brat like you!”

You have successfully trolled Chen Xuan for 999 Rage points!

A flash of insight struck Zu An. “So you are someone from the Shi clan!”

Now, he finally realized what was going on. This guy was Mei Chaofeng’s sworn brother, so there was no way he wouldn’t know about the conflict between the Shi clan and himself. They were clearly two brothers working together for the Shi clan—one outside the city and one inside it; one in broad daylight, and one in the shadows.

Chen Xuan licked his lips, his eyes flickering with a hint of excitement. “What a pity that you learned this too late. Today, I am going to break every single one of your bones, and skin you alive bit by bit, to avenge my pitiful brother!”

Now that he had revealed his secret, all those who had heard it would have to die, which would have included Qiu Honglei as well.

However, she really was too ravishing! He grew reluctant at the thought of killing her. Perhaps, if he dragged her back to the mountains to tend his home, his secret would still be safe.

Zu An couldn't help but remark, "Just talk normally if you have something to say. Why do you always lick your lips at me? I'm not a beautiful girl. It's so weird and gross."

Chen Xuan ground his teeth together audibly.

You have successfully trolled Chen Xuan for 666 Rage points!

Qiu Honglei stared at him in stunned silence. This fella's mind really was a bit strange. How could he find the nerve to deliberately provoke the other party, especially considering the situation they were in right now?

"Shut your damn mouth! You will soon regret having such a crass mouth!"

With a face as dark and scary as a thunderhead, Chen Xuan rushed forward. A crackling sound seemed to come from within his hands.

Qiu Honglei narrowed her eyes. Her hand discreetly inched towards the lamp hanging nearby.

Just before her pure white hand reached it, she suddenly pulled it back.

Boisterous laughter cut through the night air. "Young lady-killer, what made you run all the way here in the middle of the night? No one will even know if you ended up getting killed here."

An endlessly alluring figure leapt onto the deck. She landed with considerable force, which made her chest bounce, and the eyes of all of the men on board moved up and down in tandem.

Even though her face was covered, Zu An still recognized Pei Mianman from a single look. After all, her ravishing figure was just too striking.

After Chen Xuan's initial shock, a smile quickly appeared on his face. "Hahaha, my luck really is too great, running into two astonishing beauties in one day. I'll be able to enjoy myself every day in the future."

Even though she was masked, her beautiful eyes and enchanting eyebrows made it obvious that she was also a great beauty.

Besides, with this type of ridiculously gorgeous figure, her face was very much a secondary concern.

When she heard his words, Pei Mianman's expression became cold. "Mister Chen, you seem to have quite the guts."

Chen Xuan patted his belly. "This Chen Xuan doesn't only have great guts. There is another thing about him that is even greater!"

"You are courting death!" Even though Pei Mianman normally seemed charming and affectionate, she was still an unblemished young lady. When had she ever had such vulgar words directed at her? A gout of black flame suddenly ignited, sweeping towards the bandit leader.

Chen Xuan's expression grew wary. It was clear that he sensed the terrifying power of the black flame. He didn't dare face this attack head on like he did the blades earlier.

Seeing the fight begin, Qiu Honglei hurriedly said, "Thank you female hero for your life-saving grace. There will definitely be a generous reward for your actions in the future."

After saying this, she dragged Zu An with her into the Brightmoon River, quickly swimming towards the distant riverbank.

"So cheap!" The last thing Pei Mianman expected was for her to leave just like that. Not only that, she had taken Zu An with her too! Unfortunately, her hands were full with Chen Xuan right now, and there was no way to disengage so easily. She could only watch as the two of them drifted further away.

Chapter 257: All Ulterior Motives Ruined

Zu An hadn't expected Qiu Honglei to flee just like that, either. However, her strength was formidable, even exceeding his raw strength without the effects of the Phoenix Nirvana Sutra.

Caught off guard like this, he was unceremoniously dragged into the water after her.

As soon as they entered the water, Qiu Honglei's waist moved like a mermaid's. Her legs swayed gently, swiftly propelling the two of them far away.

Worried that the bandits of the Blackwind Stockade might notice them, she pulled Zu An deeper into the water, staying away from the surface of the river.

Sure enough, the other Blackwind Stockade members who were searching for them on the water's surface quickly lost track of them.

Zu An was dejected inside. Sis, could you have at least told me to prepare myself? Also, if I had stayed behind and worked with Pei Mianman, we should have been able to beat that Chen Xuan.

However, as soon as he opened his mouth, everything became gurgle... gurgle gurgle...

I'm done for. Am I going to end up like Snow did?

Even though he knew how to swim, he had never tried freediving for long periods before. Not only that, he hadn't been mentally prepared for this. If he'd at least taken a full breath beforehand, he wouldn't have been in such a sorry state.

Noticing his choking and struggling, Qiu Honglei gently swam over to him. Pressing her lips against his, she gave him a mouthful of air.

Zu An's eyes immediately grew wide as dinner plates. He had seen scenes like that before in TV dramas! Back then, he had even complained that this was unrealistic. Who knew that he would personally experience it one day?

As the air flowed from her lungs into his, Zu An's panicked struggling gradually stopped.

His hands automatically moved to encircle her waist and bottom, and he could feel the other party's exquisite figure under his fingers. His resentment of her instantly vanished without a trace.

I want more of this!

When she sensed his movements, Qiu Honglei gently pushed him aside. She glared angrily at him, then began to swim towards the riverbank.

They continued on for a while before Zu An began to flop around again. He continuously pointed at his mouth, frantically gesturing that he needed air.

Even in the dim lighting underwater, he could see Qiu Honglei's face turn red. Resolutely ignoring him, she picked up her pace.

Finally, the two of them broke the surface. Zu An greedily sucked in large gulps of air, as if he had just been born.

Qiu Honglei had a slightly apologetic look on her face. "Are you all right?" she asked in concern.

"You still have the nerve to ask me this?!" Zu An's voice was loud and indignant. "I was gesturing madly at you for help, but you completely ignored me!"

Droplets of water slid down Qiu Honglei's face, her face reddening. "It's your fault for being up to no good."

"Is instinctively hugging you considered as being up to no good? I didn't even stick out my tongue!" Zu An said resentfully.

Qiu Honglei was speechless.

Honestly, she felt slightly regretful. Did she sacrifice too much for the sake of completing the mission?

However, if she hadn't given him some air just now, he might have already drowned.

After Zu An had vented his frustrations, he hurriedly turned to look into the distance. Flashes of light burst out from the centre of the river, lighting up the night sky and illuminating the two darting figures tangling with each other.

Hm? Was Pei Mianman hiding her strength before? Is she actually strong enough to fight on equal footing with Chen Xuan?

As if she had read his mind, Qiu Honglei's scarlet lips parted slightly. "Don't worry, that girl wields the flame element, while Chen Xuan uses the metal element. Fire subdues metal, so she has a natural advantage."

Zu An relaxed slightly, but still couldn't help but remark, "Even if she has a natural advantage, that Chen Xuan's strength is still at the sixth rank. Moreover, they are in the middle of a river, which is unfavorable to a fire element cultivator. That friend of mine is still in danger!"

"This is still the wealthy district of Brightmoon City. The City Defense Army will surely dispatch soldiers here to investigate such a huge disturbance. That Chen Xuan won't dare stay for too long." Qiu Honglei observed with a tight smile, "It seems like young master and that friend share more than just a passing

friendship. She risked danger in order to save you, and you have been worried about her safety all this time."

Zu An smiled faintly. "If the lady is in danger, I will also be worried."

Qiu Honglei puffed out her cheeks indignantly. "I had pegged the young master as an honest and sincere person. However, it seems that you're just another smooth talker with a slick tongue."

There really is more to this fellow than meets the eye! Even a woman with such beauty and strength showed up to help him... it seems like I am not the only one who has noticed him.

"I'll have to disagree with you here." Zu An's tone was deadly serious. "You said that I have a slick tongue, but when we kissed just now, there were no tongues involved at all. It's not as if either of us had the chance to feel the other's tongue," he corrected earnestly.

Qiu Honglei was, yet again, at a loss for words.

In all her years in the Immortal Abode, she had always been the one who teased other men. She had never expected to be left so speechless today.

She gave him a level look instead. Not deigning to reply to him, she instead began to climb ashore.

The water had hidden her body from his sight earlier. Now that she left the water, endless droplets of water slid down her bare skin, tracing an exquisite figure. Every inch of her body offered up endless temptation.

Zu An felt his nose becoming warm. He discreetly brushed it, and was glad that his nose wasn't bleeding. It would have been too embarrassing otherwise.

"Young master, please hurry ashore... ah!" Qiu Honglei had just turned around to help him up when she suddenly noticed his expression. Lowering her head, she realized what he was looking at. She yelped in alarm, and hurriedly covered her chest with her arms.

Zu An's face reddened. He didn't know what to say either. He clambered ashore with a guilty conscience.

To cover his embarrassment, Zu An said, "I'll escort the lady back to the Immortal Abode first, so that you can change your clothes."

He hadn't expected that Qiu Honglei would shake her head. She said in a somewhat troubled manner, "How many prying eyes are there in the Immortal Abode? My current appearance will surely cause a huge disaster."

Zu An was stunned. "Then what do we do?"

Qiu Honglei bit her lips coyly and said, "It might be better to go to young master's home instead. I could borrow some of your clothes once we get there."

This right here is the textbook example of seduction!

Qiu Honglei's exceptional appearance, the emotions that were on display, the situation that they were in, filled with suggestive connotations... surely no man in the world could refuse such a request, could they?

It was a pity, then, that Zu An wasn't an ordinary man. He refused. "This place is too far from the Chu Estate, and the chances of being discovered by others there are also quite high. I believe you should also be familiar with my standing in the Chu clan, and so it's obvious why it isn't a good idea to bring you back with me."

"You are the respected young master of the Chu clan young master. Can't you bring home even a single guest?" Qiu Honglei smiled faintly. This was exactly the type of situation she'd hoped to engineer. She wanted him to realize just how unfavorable his current position in the Chu clan was. The dissatisfaction he felt would surely spur his desire to climb up the Chu clan ladder. Things would then proceed smoothly according to her tempo.

Zu An rolled his eyes. Do you consider yourself a normal guest? You are the most famous courtesan queen in all of Brightmoon City! If I even thought of bringing you back with me, if Madam didn't blow her top, even lil' Huanzhao might stop talking to me.

Besides, this girl's background is questionable, and her motives are impure. On top of that, Chuyan's condition is still poor. Bringing this girl back really isn't a sensible choice.

He ignored her attempts at manipulation and said, "How about this? Why don't the two of us just get a room?"

"Get a room? What does that mean?" Qiu Honglei was confused.

"It's the same as finding a room in an inn. I'll find you a set of clothes for you to change into." Zu An explained, his expression completely earnest.

"I think I'll pass. I can't help but feel like you're suggesting something fishy," Qiu Honglei said with a smile.

Just then, a clamor approached them from a distance away, and soon, a group of people rushed over with torches in hand.

Qiu Honglei gave them a look, hesitation arising in her heart. "These seem to be people from the Immortal Abode."

"Perfect! I would be perfectly at ease if you went back with them," Zu An said with a smile.

"But I don't want anyone other than young master to see my current appearance!" Qiu Honglei looked at him with large and pitiful eyes.

Zu An inwardly praised her formidable powers. This woman really didn't let a single opportunity to tempt him go! She was a true queen of this field!

He removed his outer robe and wrapped it around her. His nostrils were filled with her enchanting fragrance as he stepped closer to her. "This should be enough."

His jacket was extremely long, and he was also taller than her to begin with. It was more than enough to completely conceal her figure from any impure eyes.

Qiu Honglei tightened the robe around her with a conflicted expression. "Does young master know how much of a commotion my current appearance will create?" she asked.

Zu An chuckled. "Weren't you already planning to become my concubine? This would be the perfect chance for you to proclaim that you are already taken. Wouldn't that do?" he replied.

Qiu Honglei stared blankly at him. She hadn't expected the other party to throw her schemes right back at her. She couldn't find a fitting response.

"I'll be taking my leave!" Zu An waved a hand in farewell. Only when she had brought up the Chu clan did he suddenly remember that the frost afflicting Chu Chuyan had to be personally adjusted every day. These first few days were vital. If she missed a single treatment, the frost could easily flare up again and cause even more harm.

As such, his heart had been set on speeding home immediately.

Sensing his hurry to leave, Qiu Honglei tried one last time to stop him. "Ah Zu~"

Zu An had just begun to leave. Hearing her calling after him, he stopped and turned back around. "What's wrong?"

Qiu Honglei's expression was full of wounded indignation. "Do you hate me? Why are you in such a rush to leave?"

"I have something urgent to take care of. I'll meet with the lady again another time!" Zu An waved a hand in farewell, and his figure slowly disappeared under the night sky.

...

Brothel Keeper Hua rushed over her with a large contingent of guards. "Honglei, are you all right?"

"I'm fine." Qiu Honglei shook her head absentmindedly, her gaze still lingering in the direction Zu An had disappeared off to.

Hua Weimian wanted to say something else, but when she saw Qiu Honglei wrapped in a man's robe, her expression grew serious. She immediately shouted out orders to her guards. "All of you are not permitted to speak about today's matters to anyone. If I hear even a single rumor, I won't care who it was that leaked it. All of you will be beaten to death!"

The guards' hearts were chilled by her pronouncement. They immediately nodded in acknowledgment.

They had come ashore not far from the Immortal Abode. The group of them swiftly escorted Qiu Honglei back to the establishment.

When she returned to her room, a maid had already prepared a tub of warm water. Qiu Honglei removed her drenched jacket, revealing a stunning figure that would make any man go crazy. She slowly entered the bathtub.

As she soaked herself in the warm water, she reached out a smooth, snow-white arm. Zu An's robe, which had been hanging on the screen, flew into her hands. She rifled through the pockets, then snorted. "That fellow really is a miser. He didn't even bring a single banknote with him."

Even though she didn't find any bank notes, she did find a pretty conch.

"Eh~" With her knowledge, she naturally knew that this thing could store music.

She fiddled with it and the classic God of Gambling BGM blared out!

Qiu Honglei felt her heart start to race passionately. It was only a long time later that she finally let out a long sigh. "Stinky Ah Zu, how could you still insist that you didn't create that 'Smiling, Proud Wanderer'? You really love lying."

Suddenly, a slight sound came from outside the window.

Qiu Honglei's relaxed expression vanished. Getting up, she hurriedly covered her body with Zu An's robe. She glared fiercely at the figure on the other side of the screen. "Who told you to come in?"

"I only came out of worry for junior sister's safety... I didn't expect you to be bathing." it was the sound of Gu Yueyi's voice. Despite his words, he showed no signs of halting. Even the sound of him swallowing could be heard.

Qiu Honglei's expression grew cold. With a movement of her hand, a delicate bamboo pole with a small and exquisite lantern on one end appeared out of thin air. Bathed in the bright yellow light of the lantern, Gu Yueyi discovered in alarm that he couldn't move at all.

Chapter 258: Completely Exposed

Gu Yueyi felt his hairs standing on end. He awoke from his lustful daze and hurriedly explained, "Junior sister, I was confused earlier. I never intended to provoke you."

Qiu Honglei's voice was cold. She retracted the bright yellow light. "If it happens again, do not blame me for being impolite, even if you are a fellow sect member."

"Yes, yes, yes, this was an accident! There definitely won't be a second time." Gu Yueyi backed away hurriedly, drenched in cold sweat. Even though there was a screen between the two of them, he still lowered his head as close to the ground as possible to avoid angering her.

Even though he already rated this girl extremely highly, he had never expected her to be this formidable.

Also, what's the deal with this lantern? Is it something Master gave her?

Master really is biased!

More cold sweat broke out as he remembered the many times he had tried to take advantage of her previously. He mopped at his face discreetly.

However, something didn't add up. Usually, whenever he provoked her, she would always reply with a sweet smile. Why was she suddenly so angry today?

“Also, in the future, if you are going to escape, then just do it. Don’t treat your own people like shields.” Qiu Honglei snorted coldly. It was clear that she was extremely dissatisfied with his actions on the boat.

Gu Yueyi hurriedly nodded. “Yes, yes, yes. Most definitely.”

He cursed her silently in his heart. Since you’re so formidable, couldn’t you have just made your move on that boat? If the two of us had worked together, I wouldn’t have had to run from Chen Xuan in such a sorry state!

He kept his thoughts to himself, not allowing them to show on the surface.

“Just go.” Qiu Honglei waved her hand dismissively, clearly not in the mood to pay him any more attention.

Gu Yueyi felt as if he’d just received a great pardon. He fled in a hurry.

Qiu Honglei fiddled with the seashell in her hands, a smile returning to her face.

It was all that Chen Xuan’s fault for ruining her plans this time around. However, things were still all right overall. She was sure that this man was worth her investment.

...

“Achoo~” A chill swept across Zu An as soon as he returned to the Chu Estate, making him sneeze violently.

He found a set of clean clothes to change into, then hurried over to Chu Chuyan’s room.

I wonder if she remembered to leave me a way to get in. Zu An gave the sky a quick glance. A bright moon hung overhead. It was already extremely late.

He snuck his way over to Chu Chuyan’s courtyard. Qin Wanru had personally ordered the number of guards to be increased, ever since the previous incident with the intruder.

The security here was practically airtight, but Zu An had the strengthened ‘Sunflower Phantasm’ at his disposal. When there was no way to evade the guards’ line of sight, he resorted to using Grandgale to dash across. This allowed him to sneak in without encountering any trouble.

Zu An was incredibly upset. What the heck is this? Why do I have to act like a thief just to get into my own wife’s room?!

When he arrived in front of the previously agreed-upon window, Zu An noticed that the lights inside had already been turned off.

My wife’s skin really is too thin. She must be worried that others would become suspicious if the lights were still on.

He looked all around him to make sure there was no one around. Then, he placed his hand on the window and gave it a gentle push.

Hm? Why isn’t it moving?

Zu An tried again, this time with more strength. However, it still didn’t budge.

Is this the wrong window? He thought back to the conversation the two of them had had. Perhaps he remembered it wrongly.

He tried a different window, but it wouldn't budge either. What the heck?

He tried the rest of the windows. Not a single one was unlocked.

Zu An's eyes grew wide. Hadn't they reached an agreement beforehand?

He had just rejected such a powerful temptation by refusing Qiu Honglei, and yet, this was what he came back to?

He turned the situation over in his mind, and figured that Chu Chuyan was probably still too shy, and was still unused to this arrangement.

However, the removal of frost during this initial period was too important, and absolutely couldn't be delayed!

He didn't dare call out to Chu Chuyan, for fear of alarming the guards outside. Instead, he drew out a dagger. He gently inserted it into the crack between the window panes, and used it to push the bolt to the side.

He tiptoed his way in, and then closed the window again.

Why do I feel like a thief?

This was clearly his own wife's room!

Zu An felt incredibly unwell inside. He immediately straightened from his crouch.

When he walked to the bedside, he could vaguely make out a wonderfully graceful figure laying on her side.

This girl really needs a good spanking. Just look at how gentle and sweet that Honglei is!

Chu Chuyan had clearly already agreed to leave a window open. Zu An felt his teeth start to ache. He really had to find a way to keep his wife in line.

Without saying a word, he slipped under the sheets and hugged her.

Either way, the two of them already interacted so intimately in the dungeon. Later on, Chu Chuyan had even removed her clothes for him as he performed her treatment.

He felt like he had to be slightly more proactive. Maybe then she wouldn't resist him so much.

As his hands caressed her warm and fragrant body, Zu An grew puzzled. Less than a day had passed since he'd last seen her. How did Chuyan's body suddenly become so well-rounded?

"Dear, don't be so fidgety~"

The beautiful woman fidgeted in her sleep, muttering quietly.

Zu An nearly jumped right out of the bed. He was scared out of his wits. This was clearly Qin Wanru's voice!

Just then, Qin Wanru seemed to have noticed that something wasn't right either. She awoke groggily, and began to turn around to take a look.

A finger shot out from the side, striking her acupoint.

Qin Wanru moaned quietly and fell back to sleep.

A slim and graceful figure sat up on the other side of the bed, revealing a lovely but displeased face. Who else could this be but Chu Chuyan?

Zu An was dumbfounded. He lowered his head to look at the woman in his embrace. She was clearly much more endowed than his wife. She was none other than his mother-in-law, Qin Wanru.

What in the world is going on? Zu An's mind went blank.

"My mother was worried about my condition, so she insisted on sleeping here, to take care of me. I refused several times, but she continued to persist. I didn't want her to become suspicious, so I had to agree in the end." Chu Chuyan had an embarrassed expression on her face.

Zu An was momentarily struck speechless.

What kind of stupid plot is this? How could I have expected this?!

"Why didn't you tell me ahead of time?" Zu An said in confusion. He'd really suffered a huge fright earlier. His frail mind had been dealt a devastating blow, and he had yet to fully recover from his daze.

Chu Chuyan's gaze drifted downwards. "Aren't you going to let go?" she asked, her tone clearly disappointed.

Zu An lowered his head, his face identical to a sad emoji.[1] He hurriedly withdrew his arms. "This... I was in a daze just now and couldn't react."

Chu Chuyan snorted. Finally, she said, "I asked Huanzhao to find you, but she said you weren't in the manor, so how could I let you know? That was why I locked all of the windows to warn you about the situation. How was I to know that you would just barge in?!"

"I thought that you were feeling slightly embarrassed about leaving your room open for the first time... The first few treatments for your illness are extremely important, so I had no choice but to enter." Zu An explained. If he ended up becoming some freak in her eyes, that really would be the end of him.

Chu Chuyan bit her lips, hesitating, before she replied, "Fine. But you cannot act so recklessly in the future. I cannot strike mother's acupoint so quickly every time. If she finds out that you... disrespected her, I fear that you won't be able to remain in the Chu clan anymore."

She knew that her mother had never treated Zu An well. If she found out about this, she would definitely go crazy. That was why she'd had no choice but to knock her unconscious.

"As expected, my wife really does worry about me!" A faint smile appeared on Zu An's face. All the energy he'd spent saving her hadn't been in vain.

"Who is worried about you?" Chu Chuyan's face reddened slightly. "I only wanted to warn you, since this could drag the entire family into an awkward situation," she explained hurriedly.

"All right, all right. Hurry up and strip already." Zu An said while opening the pouch containing the silver needles.

Chu Chuyan glared at him without speaking.

This fellow really doesn't know how to have a proper conversation. This is clearly just a normal procedure, so why did it sound so strange coming from his mouth?

She snorted quietly, then began to slowly undo her clothes.

She had always been a prodigy at cultivation, so she obviously wouldn't settle for spending the rest of her life as a cripple.

Of course, if the one who was carrying out the acupuncture was anyone other than Zu An, she would never have agreed to it.

After the intimate events that had transpired in the dungeon, it seemed her resistance to the idea had been subconsciously weakened.

Of course, she wasn't aware of this change in her at all.

Zu An sighed in admiration of Chu Chuyan's fine, snow-like skin. Her body didn't possess Qiu Honglei's strong fragrance, but her faint scent was still enough to leave a deep impression on him.

He removed a silver needle, and began the acupuncture procedure meant to remove the cold energy from inside her.

"Don't alarm my mother," Chu Chuyan warned him.

Zu An stared blankly, then moved further away from Qin Wanru. "Understood!"

...

The procedure took a while, after which Zu An collected back all of the silver needles. He sighed deeply. "Today's procedure has been successfully completed."

He was still struggling with how he was going to give her the next treatment. I can't scare her away. I have to do things slowly.

"Thank you..." Chu Chuyan quietly put on her clothes. When she noticed the fine beads of sweat on his forehead, her heart softened. She took out a handkerchief, about to help him wipe away his sweat.

However, her hand suddenly froze, her expression turning cold. "Where did you go today?"

"I went for a stroll with Yucheng and Hongcai." Zu An said ambiguously. There was no way he could just tell his wife that he went to a brothel, right?

"That's it?" Chu Chuyan gave an indignant huff.

"What else could it be?" Zu An said guiltily.

Chu Chuyan became quiet for a while. She finally said into the silence, "You have the smell of another woman on you."

"What?!" Zu An immediately smelled his sleeves. I don't smell anything! Besides, I've already changed into a new set of clothes! As a keyboard warrior, how could I possibly make this type of elementary mistake?

How was she still able to notice?

Were women that sensitive towards the smell of other women?

Bracing himself, he said, "Could you be mistaken? Perhaps I still have some of your mother's smell on me?"

Chu Chuyan sneered. "There's lipstick on your mouth."

Zu An was stunned speechless.

He finally realized what happened. Qiu Honglei had pressed her lips against his while in the river.

This damned lipstick is killing me!

Zu An wanted to flee. He continuously cursed the unscrupulous businessmen of this world. Qiu Honglei had definitely used the most expensive rouge and lipstick, which caused him this problem!

Wait, didn't she already give me permission to seek out other women before? What am I feeling all guilty for? Zu An subconsciously wanted to turn around and run, but after taking a few steps, a thought emerged in his mind.

Forget it, I won't poke at this mess.

When he returned to his own room, his body suddenly went rigid. A sword was pressed against his neck.

Chapter 259: A Magnificent Home with Magnificent Women

The chill of the blade raised Zu An's goosebumps immediately. "Venerable hero, do you want money, or do you want... me? We can talk it out! Please don't let your hand slip!"

As he said this, he secretly prepared Grandgale in order to teleport away.

A snicker sounded from behind him. "Money is something I can understand, but as for the latter... is that really something I would want?"

A woman? Zu An sighed in relief when he heard the timbre of his attacker's voice. He might have been slightly worried if a man had come to assassinate him, but women were his specialty!

"Venerable heroine, this is where I'll have to disagree. You can insult my integrity, but you cannot insult my handsome face!" Zu An said with a firm expression.

"Pah, what a slick tongue you have. No wonder that slut Qiu Honglei fell for you." With a whisper of sound, the blade which was resting against his neck disappeared.

Only then did Zu An turn around carefully. A masked woman limped over to his bed, then slowly sat down.

As she sat down, a great wave rippled across her chest.

Zu An swallowed. "Big..." he couldn't help but blurt out automatically.

Even though there probably was a screw loose inside his head, there was usually no way he would so easily lose his composure like this.

But her stealthy bodysuit was just too tight, and her enchanting figure was just too much for him to handle!

He knew that he was in trouble as soon as these words came out of his mouth. Sure enough, the masked woman's eyes grew cold. "What did you say?"

"I was just saying that I detected some... big jealousy from Miss Pei's words." Zu An reacted quickly, immediately turning things around. He could instantly tell who she was by her peach-blossom eyes and massive chest, even if she was masked.

"Me? Jealous?" Pei Mianman removed her mask, casually tossing it to the side. A mischievous smile appeared on her face. "Perhaps I seem a little... too nice to you?"

Zu An immediately felt a great weight lift off his shoulders as she changed the topic. "Forget it. I seemed to have forgotten that, sometimes, those who are too outstanding will always be too easily misunderstood."

Pei Mianman gave a disdainful sniff. "I don't know how in the world Chuyan puts up with you."

"You went to Chuyan's room?" Zu An immediately panicked. He had been busy with administering her treatment, so there was no way he could have paid attention to the activity outside. The security outside was tight, however, so unless she had an instant movement skill like his, she shouldn't have escaped their detection.

"I didn't." Pei Mianman's expression grew strange. She didn't visit her close friend and instead went looking for her husband... "I heard that she hasn't been feeling that well, so I didn't want to bother her tonight," she hurriedly added.

After saying this, she suddenly frowned, twisting her body unnaturally.

"You're wounded?" Zu An noticed that her movements had been a little stiff. It finally struck him as to what was going on.

"Hmph! I came all the way to save you, but you just ran off with that vixen! You left me to deal with that sixth rank Chen Xuan and all those Blackwind Stockade subordinates of his alone! How could you have the nerve to ask me this right now?" Pei Mianman immediately erupted in fury, angry at Qiu Honglei, and angry at Zu An for actually fleeing with her.

You have successfully trolled Pei Mianman for 66... 66... 66...

Zu An was immediately ashamed. "I really didn't expect Qiu Honglei to drag me into the water with her back then! Everything happened so quickly... by the time I could react, I was already choking on water! She guided me to the riverbank. When I finally had a chance to turn around, I saw that the two of you

seemed evenly-matched. Besides, The City Defense Army was on their way as well. I didn't want to go back only to cause more trouble for you."

He naturally left out the part when Qiu Honglei had given him oxygen. He had already pissed off his wife—he didn't want to piss off a second woman.

Thank heaven he had wiped the lipstick off before he returned. Today might really have been the day of his funeral otherwise.

"Hmph, at least you had a bit of a conscience." Hearing that he at least paid some attention to her situation, Pei Mianman's expression relaxed a little. "Bandit or not, Chen Xuan is still a sixth rank cultivator. Against someone like him, you'll be fortunate to get out alive. A small injury is nothing."

Zu An's eyes widened. "Where are you hurt? I have medicine."

That damned Phoenix Nirvana Sutra always left him on the brink of death. After he had made some money, the first thing he'd done was to stock up on healing medicine, most of which was Ji Dengtu's best stuff.

"You're asking me where I got hurt, but why do you keep staring at my chest?" Pei Mianman's smile carried with it a dangerous glint.

Zu An flushed red. "I just wanted to know where you were injured out of concern!" he replied in a rush.

"Stop trying to guess. It's not where you think it is." A puzzled expression lingered in Pei Mianman's eyes. "Just how did Chuyan end up liking a scoundrel like you? I really just can't understand it! Not only her, but that vixen Qiu Honglei seems quite fond of you as well. I don't see a single exceptional thing about you."

Zu An smiled bashfully. "I am someone with more introverted qualities. You'll have to be around me more if you want to find out my strengths."

"You? Introverted qualities?" Pei Mianman immediately burst out laughing, then winced in pain as her injuries flared up. Her beautiful brows drew together.

"You've hurt your back?" Zu An had already figured out that she'd been injured. After all, in the area of getting hurt, he was already a true professional.

"Mm," Pei Mianman grunted in confirmation. When she saw that he was about to examine her himself, however, she immediately raised her sword. "It's none of your business. A small wound like this isn't an issue at all."

Zu An was startled and amused. This woman was always behaving so flirtatiously, but she was actually this conservative inside!

"It'll leave a scar if we don't treat it quickly," Zu An warned.

Pei Mianman sneered. "Do you think I'm like one of those dainty little girls? Cultivators are different from ordinary people, and I've always recovered quickly. I've lost count of how many times I've been injured since I was a child. Do you see any scars from those wounds?"

"I'd originally assumed you were a precious daughter who'd been doted on by a great family, but it seems like you've had it quite hard." Zu An was shocked when he heard that she suffered so many injuries during her childhood. It really was hard for him to reconcile this with her usually cheerful and flirtatious bearing.

Pei Mianman's smile instantly vanished. "I don't need your sympathy!"

Zu An didn't seem to mind her sudden change in attitude. "Don't worry, I won't tell Chuyan about this."

"Why do I care if you mention this to her or not?" Pei Mianman turned away, but her expression relaxed slightly.

"We still have to take care of the wound as soon as possible." Zu An rummaged through his various drawers and trunks. "We can't underestimate a wound from a sixth rank expert. Chuyan is the best example. Because of her negligence, she's still suffering from some hidden injuries she received in her fight against that Wu Di."

"Chuyan's condition is actually that serious?" Pei Mianman's expression immediately grew complicated.

"It's not too bad. With a divine physician like yours truly, it's not a big deal at all!" replied Zu An.

"You?" Pei Mianman sneered. "It was clearly Divine Physician Ji who paid her a visit."

"Life is truly lonesome and desolate as a snow-covered field... no one believes me when I speak the truth." Zu An picked out several different medicines. "Turn around and let me have a look at your injury."

With a slight hesitation, Pei Mianman turned around. "You better not be thinking of taking advantage of me. I won't let you off that easy even if you're Chuyan's husband!" she said coyly.

"Look at how innocent my eyes are! Do I really seem like that type of person?" Zu An was beyond disgruntled.

"Hmph!"

...

After a quick examination, Zu An discovered a three-inch long wound on her back, the clothing around it already soaked with blood. It wasn't obvious at first, only because her bodysuit was black. "That son of a dog Chen Xuan! How could he be so vicious?!"

"Hmph, he isn't anything special." Pei Mianman raised her chin arrogantly. She clearly didn't want to be underestimated.

"Yeah, yeah, yeah, I know you're really strong and awesome." Zu An gently tore the fabric around her wound.

"What are you doing!" Pei Mianman's entire body went rigid. She tightened her grip on her sword.

"Relax! How can I apply the medicine if I don't clean up the area around the wound?" Zu An replied.

"Don't worry, I won't go so far as to take advantage of my own wife's close friend in her very own house."

“Heh, I knew you wouldn’t have the guts to do something like that.” Pei Mianman relaxed as she noticed that he wasn’t going any further.

Zu An dabbed some medicine on the wound, cleaning it up gently. “Does it hurt?”

“It’s fine. Keep going.” Pei Mianman frowned, clearly enduring the pain.

The room quickly became quiet. Only the sounds of Zu An treating her wound could be heard.

Pei Mianman blushed. This was the first time her skin was being touched like this by a man. However, acting shy really wasn’t her style. After a moment, she laughed proudly and asked, “Who’s skin is better—mine or Chuyan’s?”

Zu An smiled and said, “Do you want me to tell you that your skin is better than my wife’s, or that my wife’s skin is more perfect than yours?”

When she saw Zu An kick the ball right back at her, Pei Mianman snorted. “Hmph, you really are as sly as a fox. If I wasn’t so sure that you grew up in Brightmoon City, I really would have wondered if you came out of some old monster.”

Zu An was slightly taken aback by her words. I did kinda possess this body like an old monster... no, I’m a small monster, at least. I was still young in my past world.

When the treatment was completed, Zu An said, “All done. However, you’ve lost a lot of blood, so your body is extremely weak right now. Don’t go too crazy tonight, just stay here. Otherwise, if you end up getting attacked by some scoundrel, my heart really wouldn’t be able to take it.”

Pei Mianman’s eyes flickered with a teasing light. “Why do I feel like I’ll be in more danger if I stay here?”

“Even if you don’t trust my integrity, you should trust Chuyan’s judgment in picking her husband. I’m going to sleep next door, so you’re on your own. You can leave whenever you want.”

After a bit of hesitation, she said, “Don’t tell Chuyan about what happened today... don’t tell any of her family members either.”

Zu An couldn’t help but laugh. “This is just a normal occurrence. Why do you suddenly make it seem like some scandal? Don’t worry, it’ll remain a secret between us.”

“I never should have expected any good words to come out of the mouth of a scoundrel!” Pei Mianman spat, shutting the door in his face.

Zu An’s heart sank. Couldn’t this woman at least let him grab some blankets?

However, for someone with his current constitution, blankets didn’t really make a difference anymore. In any case, he didn’t feel like knocking on the door again.

He went next door and dragged some stools together. Just as he was about to lie down to sleep, his heart jumped. Someone had suddenly appeared beside him.

Chapter 260: Misunderstanding

Zu An suddenly turned around. Just as he was about to release his charged up power, he suddenly noticed an old and wrinkled face.

“Elder Mi?” It was actually Old Mi. This fellow always came and went without a sound, just like a ghost.

Big sis empress said previously that he is at least at the ninth rank. It seems like her suspicions were right on.

“Correct. It seems like you have improved your vigilance.” Old Mi nodded. Despite his praise, there wasn’t even a trace of a smile to be seen on his face.

“Why did Elder seek me out today?” Zu An asked.

He felt extremely gloomy inside. Why did this old man have to always appear so suddenly?

If he appears when I’m alone, then whatever. But if he suddenly appears out of nowhere when I’m bonding with my close female friends, I would really have a heart attack!

Besides, as a man, he really didn’t want other men—even an old one like Old Mi—to see his women.

Unfortunately, Old Mi’s cultivation was way higher than his. There was no way Zu An could tell him what to do.

“I heard that you went to the Immortal Abode, and even managed to secure the affections of their courtesan queen?” Old Mi looked at him with a strange expression.

“Elder has received news very quickly indeed...” Zu An chuckled in an awkward manner. “I guess a guy with endless charm like me really is just naturally attractive to women, haha.”

Even he was somewhat embarrassed saying these words.

Old Mi’s brow furrowed. “Your mood seems to have improved a lot recently.”

“It’s been all right,” Zu An said with an embarrassed smile. He didn’t know what the other party was trying to say.

“You were so depressed that you were on the verge of hanging yourself before, so why are you suddenly so carefree and happy? Don’t tell me that you’ve already discovered a different method of treating yourself?” Old Mi’s eyes shifted to his crotch.

Zu An felt a chill run through his legs. He subconsciously turned his body to the side to evade that gaze.

“Didn’t you say that everything would work out as long as I become a master? Why would I still feel gloomy when I have such prospects?”

Old Mi always exerted a strange pressure on him that made him feel uneasy, and so he didn’t dare reveal everything to him.

He also warned himself to be more careful from now on. If this old man even glimpsed his heaven-piercing pillar, things would turn sour very quickly.

"I see." Old Mi softened his gaze, clearly accepting this response. He continued, "Since your body is no good, you should be more focused on raising your cultivation than chasing girls. It's not like getting with them means anything to you."

Zu An pressed his lips tightly together.

You really make too much sense, old man. I can't argue against that at all.

Old Mi believed that his manhood was completely sealed, so the old man didn't think there was any meaning in him chasing after girls. If he continued to pursue them even with 'little Zu An' out of commission, Old Mi will obviously be puzzled.

"There's more to that Immortal Abode courtesan than meets the eye, so don't get too involved. It's for your own good," warned Old Mi. This was going to be his precious vessel, so he naturally didn't want anything to happen to it.

"Does Elder know anything about Qiu Honglei's background?" Zu An had always been curious about Qiu Honglei's background. However, he was slightly shaken to learn that, although this Old Mi only trimmed the grass around the Chu Estate day in and day out, he seemed to be aware of everything important within Brightmoon City. He really didn't know how this old man accomplished this.

"I don't know the exact details, but there is no way she could be just a simple courtesan. Don't provoke her for no reason." Old Mi stopped for a moment, and then looked towards the wall. "Also, that young lady from the Pei clan next door. I don't know how you two ended up on good terms, but you shouldn't play with fire. If the Chu clan ends up kicking you out because of this, heh..."

Even though he didn't go into specifics, his tone of voice made the threat crystal clear.

Zu An shivered. "I understand."

"Keep in mind what I told you before. Keep interacting with the Wei clan's brothers. Report everything that happens in their family to me, regardless of whether it is big or small. Don't leave out a thing." With that, Old Mi tottered off. Although he looked like might be blown over by the wind at any time, it only took a few steps for him to vanish into the darkness.

The pressure on Zu An immediately lessened considerably. However, just knowing that there might always be someone secretly watching him left him with an uncomfortable feeling that he just couldn't shake off.

Why does he keep telling me to pay attention to the Wei clan? Zu An thought to himself.

While he wondered about this, Old Mi struggled with his own puzzle. Why do women have such a natural affinity for that brat? He is clearly no good down there...

He turned it over in his mind for a long while, but couldn't find a satisfactory reason. With a shake of his head, he let the matter go.

Forget it. What's wrong with having some close female friends? They'll all be mine eventually anyway.

...

When Zu An woke up the next morning, he hurried next door to look for Pei Mianman. However, the room was empty, and the blankets had already been neatly folded. The beauty herself was nowhere to be seen.

He noticed a letter by the window. Zu An walked over and picked it up. There was a single line, written in graceful handwriting: Remember what you promised me yesterday.

Filling his nostrils with the fragrance that had been left behind on his bed, Zu An couldn't help but laugh. Did this woman have a guilty conscience?

Just then, a knocking came from outside. Zu An immediately grew overjoyed. Maybe she regretted leaving just like this and decided to come back. When he opened the door, however, he was instead greeted by a chubby face. His interest instantly vanished. "So it's you..."

"Who else did bro think I was?" Chu Yucheng said in confusion. Behind him, Chu Hongcai also wore a puzzled expression.

"I thought that some goddess had come looking for me," Zu An said in irritation.

Chu Yucheng laughed heartily. "Immortal Abode's Lady Qiu is indeed nothing less than a goddess. So... how was last night?"

He winked at Zu An with an extremely lecherous expression.

Chu Hongcai pricked up his ears as well, his fists clenched tightly. He was clearly extremely anxious.

"Of course it felt so good that I went straight to heaven." Zu An returned his look with a knowing smile.

Chu Yucheng was all smiles when he heard this, but Chu Hongcai almost imploded from anger. He turned on Zu An with an angry huff.

You have successfully trolled Chu Hongcai for 999 Rage points!

Chu Yucheng immediately held him back, and then said to Zu An, "Ah Zu, you know that he's a crazy Qiu Honglei fan, so this really is something hard for him to accept right away. You don't need to worry too much. It's not you that he is angry at."

Zu An said with a chuckle, "I was just joking around. Qiu Honglei invited me to take a boat ride with her, but who did we run into but the Blackwind Stockade? We barely escaped with our lives. It really was the worst."

"What? What about Lady Qiu?" Chu Hongcai demanded in a panic.

"Mister Hoes-before-Bros, aren't you worried about me at all?" Zu An said in annoyance.

"You look perfectly fine to me," Chu Hongcai mumbled.

"Don't worry, your Lady Qiu is fine. A mysterious person came to save us. When the City Defense Army finally arrived, that Great Bandit Chen Xuan had already fled," Zu An explained, giving a series of half-truths.

“Chen Xuan was actually there?” Chu Yucheng cried out in alarm. “That bastard has plundered our caravans several times already. Our Chu clan has dispatched our troops to track him down many times, but we’ve never succeeded. Now, he even has the nerve to brazenly enter Brightmoon City!”

After leaving the Immortal Abode last night, Chu Hongcai had been so brokenhearted with grief, all he wanted to drink his sorrows away. Naturally, Chu Yucheng had followed him. The two of them ended up drinking until they both passed out, and only woke when the sky brightened. That was why they weren’t too clear on what had transpired the night before.

Chu Hongcai nodded in agreement. “We participated in those attacks on the bandits as well, but that fellow is just too elusive. He’s slippery as an eel. No one has ever even seen his true appearance.”

Zu An wore a strange expression. “The two of you have actually seen him before.”

“We have?” The two of them were dumbfounded.

“Not only have you two met him, you’ve even faced him before,” said Zu An with a smile. “He is that red haired fellow the two of you fought against in the brothel last night.”

“So that was him!” The two of them cried out in alarm.

Chu Yucheng cursed. “I knew that guy couldn’t be anyone good. I never expected him to be Chen Xuan, the bandit leader who is guilty of such monstrous crimes.”

Chu Hongcai couldn’t contain his excitement. “This Chen Xuan is courting death! He even dares to run amok in Brightmoon City! We didn’t know what he looked like before, but now that we do, it won’t be easy for him to elude us anymore! I wonder what made him go so completely crazy as to do such a thing.”

Zu An rubbed his nose. He went completely crazy because he wanted to get revenge on me... Of course, there was no need to tell them that. “By the way, why did the two of you seek me out so early in the morning?”

“Look at this memory of mine.” Chu Yucheng slapped his forehead, and then brought out a box of food. “Here’s some steamed stuffed buns from the Cai stall, and some jellied tofu from the He stall. Both are quite famous in our city, and hard to get your hands on. Since it was already early in the morning by the time we returned, we decided to bring some of this back so that we could enjoy it together.”

“No one kisses ass without having ulterior motives.” Zu An secretly wondered if these fellows had poisoned the food.

Chu Yucheng’s face froze. “Hongcai drowned his sorrows in alcohol last night. He thought that Lady Qiu had been... ahem, ravaged by you last night. That is why I dragged him over this morning to find out what happened. There was no way we could come empty handed, right? We never expected Hongcai to be worried about nothing,” he explained with a chuckle.

When he noticed that the two of them seemed to be taking delight in Zu An’s disaster, he hurriedly brought out some bowls and chopsticks. “We should quickly enjoy these while they are still hot. They won’t taste as good when they get cold.”

Seeing the two of them dig in ravenously, Zu An let go of his worries. He scooped a bowl of jellied tofu for himself. Wow, this stuff is great! I haven't enjoyed such wonderful flavors in a long time.

He continued to praise it as they walked to the main hall. "White, tender, and smooth. Absolutely delicious. I'll have to get some more later."

"Haha, Ah Zu is a kindred spirit after all. I'll take you with me next time."

An angry voice suddenly rang out. "Despicable! Shameless! Disgusting!"

Zu An raised his head. Chu Huanzhao was glowering at him, her face entirely red.

You have successfully trolled Chu Huanzhao for 444 Rage points!

Chu Yucheng said teasingly, "Ah Zu, what did you do to upset our little Huanzhao?"

"Damn fatty, you aren't anything good either! Our sister's husband is being ruined by the two of you!" Chu Huanzhao stormed off, huffing and puffing.

Chu Yucheng had a dumbfounded expression on his face. What does the character of your sister's husband have to do with us? We were just talking about tofu just now...

"Young master, young master! It's time to go to the academy! The horse has already been prepared for your amazing self!" Cheng Shouping said this eagerly while crawling out from who-knew-which corner.

Only now did Zu An realize that their three-day vacation that had been granted to them after entering the dungeon had already passed. Today was indeed the day he had to return to the academy.

The thought of attending the academy immediately made his expression sink momentarily. However, when he thought about the gorgeous principal, the beautiful Miss Shang, as well as the students waiting to have their Rage points farmed, his mood immediately brightened.

"Why are you sucking up to me like this?" Zu An asked while walking towards the entrance.

"I've always given you my everything, young master..." Cheng Shouping blabbered a load of nonsense before changing the topic. "If young master could broaden my horizons by bringing me with him to the Immortal Abode the next time, that would be so, so amazing."

"You good-for-nothing servant! How dare you encourage your master to visit such a filthy place?!" There was a whistling sound as the tail of a whip flicked towards him. Chen Shouping's miserable wail echoed throughout the Chu Estate.