

## Immortal 261

### Chapter 261: Assassination

Zu An swallowed. He had a bit of history with this Wailing Whip himself. As for how it felt... he really didn't want to bring back those memories.

Who could blame Cheng Shouping for screaming so miserably?

Chu Huanzhao had gotten more and more frustrated as time went on, and had come back for an explanation from Zu An. Who knew she would end up hearing Cheng Shouping say these things as soon as she returned? She was already fuming to begin with—this was simply pouring fuel on the fire!

One lash wasn't enough to make her feel better. A second strike followed.

Seeing that she was about to strike out a third time, Zu An immediately rushed in to stop her. "Okay, okay! This pitiful kid is going to die at this rate."

Chu Huanzhao became more annoyed the more she looked at him. She raised her whip, about to strike him again.

In the end, she decided against it. She huffed angrily before turning around. "I don't want to talk to you!"

Zu An chuckled at her tantrum. Wasn't this lass getting more and more adorable?

Didn't I say this before? Good genes and a pretty face are all that are important in the end. Even if she throws a bit of a tantrum, no one will find it that annoying.

He then turned around to give Cheng Shouping a look. "Honestly, you're going to get done in by that mouth of yours sooner or later. Be more careful in the future, and don't blabber about everything all the time."

"Ow..." Cheng Shouping had a resentful look on his face. What the heck is this? The one who went to the Immortal Abode was young master, and the one who got to enjoy himself was also young master! Why am I the one getting beaten just for casually bringing this up?!

Hmph! I thought highly of the second miss and young master all this time, but it's been all for nothing! I'm only going to support the first miss from now on!

Seeing his hurt and indignant expression, Zu An tossed him a silver tael. "Get some medicine for yourself and rest up. Don't go with me to the academy today, lest lil' Huanzhao gets angry at you again."

The silver immediately made Cheng Shouping's eyes light up. He said with a beaming smile, "Thank you so much, young master! Young master really is the best!"

Someone as straightforward and generous like the young master deserves to have a different girl by his side every night! Of course, he didn't dare say this out loud, out of fear that he'd get whipped again.

Zu An couldn't stand his fawning look anymore. He turned to run after Chu Huangzhao.

Usually, she always waited for Zu An before heading to the academy together. Yet today, she had mounted a horse and ridden off immediately.

Only after great effort did Zu An finally catch up. “Aiyo, who was it that made our lil’ Huanzhao so angry?”

Chu Huanzhao’s expression was still furious, and she refused to say anything.

Zu An nudged his horse over. “Are you still upset that I didn’t get you a gift? I’ll buy you whatever you want right now! Big bro has money~”

Chu Huanzhao couldn’t stand his pestering. “You know that’s not why I’m upset!”

“Then why are you upset?” Zu An asked with a smile.

Chu Huanzhao’s turned her head away. “You already know the answer.”

Zu An’s put on a pensive expression. “Was it because of what happened in the Immortal Abode?”

Chu Huanzhao huffed angrily. Her small, snow-white face became a bit colder.

“I really was dragged there by those second and third branch fellows! They wanted to find out about your older sister’s condition, so I had to deceive them and say that it wasn’t a big deal! But they aren’t stupid, so how would they trust me that easily?

“They wanted to bring me along with them to the Immortal Abode as a test. If there really had been something wrong with your older sister, then I wouldn’t have had the heart to go and play around.

“I had to beat them at their own game. This was really a huge sacrifice for me! In order to make them think that Chuyan was fine, I had to brace myself and go to that sort of place!”

Zu An said all of this with a deadly earnest expression. He was even slightly amazed at his own ability to bullshit his way through.

As for Chu Yucheng and Chu Hongcai... the two of you can just carry all the blame for me! It was your fault for calling me out anyway.

“Are you telling me the truth?” Chu Huanzhao’s expression finally eased a little.

“Of course! You know that I’ve always been an upstanding person, so how could I let myself willingly enter such an establishment if I had a choice?!” Zu An said in a righteous manner. He stuck out his chest as he spoke, making himself look even more tall and upright.

“But... but I heard that the Immortal Abode’s courtesan queen chose you... chose you to... enter her chambers alone,” said Chu Huanzhao angrily. Why do all of these wretches keep going after my brother-in-law day and night?

Zu An said with a chuckle, “You’re worrying too much. The two of us only chatted over some tea. We ended up running into Blackwind Stockade’s Chen Xuan before our conversation even got that far.”

“Chen Xuan!” Chu Huanzhao gave a frightened start. Even someone like her who paid little attention to the clan’s matters knew about this great bandit. Chen Xuan plundered the trade routes around Brightmoon City, and had given the Chu clan much grief over the years.

“Brother-in-law, nothing happened to you, right?” Even though he looked perfectly fine, Chu Huanzhao still tugged on his arm in worry, trying to check for injuries.

A warm feeling surged within Zu An when he saw her sincere concern. Even though this brat was a little crafty and unruly, she really did treat him well.

When he’d landed in this world filled with dangers, she’d been the only one who had made him feel some warmth. “Don’t worry, I’m fine. A mere ant like Chen Xuan can’t do anything to me.”

You have successfully trolled Chen Xuan for 431 Rage points!

Zu An was stunned by the sudden influx of Rage points. What kind of situation was this? Why did he end up receiving his Rage points?

Don't tell me...

Just in time, he noticed a streak of black approaching. All of Zu An's hairs immediately stood on end. He grabbed Huanzhao and leaped off of their horses.

Almost at that same instant, an arrow landed where he had just been. The poor horse he’d been on just a moment ago exploded under the powerful impact.

Chunks of flesh splattered everywhere. Chu Huanzhao's horse was absolutely horrified, rearing up on its hind legs before bolting for the hills.

If Zu An hadn’t grabbed her earlier, the consequences would have been too horrible to imagine.

"What happened?" Chu Huanzhao was so scared that her face had gone deathly pale. She was usually extremely bold, but she had never seen flesh flying everywhere like this before! She held onto Zu An's sleeves tightly, her body shaking uncontrollably.

The surrounding Chu clan guards snapped out of their shock. All of them hurriedly drew their weapons, protectively encircling the two of them as they began to scan the surrounding area vigilantly.

The people around them were in even greater panic. With all of them screaming and running around hysterically, how were they supposed to find out where the assassin was hiding?

Zu An seemed to have picked up on something. He turned his head in a certain direction. A red-haired man was standing behind a pillar on the third floor, a large bow in hand. When Chen Xuan realized that he had been discovered, he smiled cruelly. He raised a hand and drew his thumb across his throat before disappearing without a trace.

Zu An frowned. This guy was actually a master at assassination! He immediately fled the scene after a failed attempt.

Zu An would have preferred to fight the other party right here. If he could hold him here, the problem would have been dealt with once the City Defense Army or more Chu clan guards arrived.

What a pity!

No wonder this fellow was still alive and well despite being constantly pursued by both the Chu clan's and the City Lord's forces.

Zu An's expression grew grim, knowing that he now had to be constantly on guard against a powerful assassin. This fellow could fail all he wanted, but his life would be forfeit if he messed up even once.

"Second miss, young master! We weren't able to find the assassin!" A skinny Chu clan guard reported after searching the surrounding area.

This guard's name was Jiao Shanhe. Although he looked a little like a monkey, he was the most outstanding scout in Chu clan's private army, and was known to be extremely sharp and astute. After Snow's assassination attempt on Zu An, the clan had arranged for him to protect Zu An.

"The assassin has already left," Zu An said with a disappointed tone.

Those guards were all stunned. How would you know that? But, having been around him long enough, they had come to recognize that this young master had some secrets, so they didn't doubt his words.

"Let's head to Brightmoon Academy first, just to be safe," said another guard. This was Feng Daniu, the most evenly-tempered of the three guards. He was built like an ox, tall and large, just as his name suggested.[1]

"Indeed, no one will dare to cause trouble in the academy. The Chu clan will receive news about this soon, so Commander Yue will be there to escort the young miss and young master back." Another guard swept an intimidating look over anyone who tried to approach them.

This person was another guard the Chu clan had assigned to watch over Zu An, named Zhou Lujun. His blade technique was just as cold and sharp as his appearance.

"Okay!" Zu An had no objections. The academy was full of powerful individuals. Chen Xuan would be completely outmatched if he went there.

Zu An took in the young lady's alarmed expression, so he tried to console her in a quiet voice.

"Huanzhao, don't be scared. The assassin has already left." She was still young, after all.

"Brother-in-law, did you get hurt anywhere? Oh my goodness, there's so much blood!" Chu Huanzhao finally snapped out of her daze. Her small hands searched his body, a worried expression on her face.

"I'm fine, this is all horse blood. That horse really had it rough!" Zu An felt terrible inside. He hadn't spent that much time with that horse, but he had always been someone who got attached easily.

He would definitely make Chen Xuan repay this debt that was owed.

"That's good, that's good." Chu Huanzhao slowly recovered from her shock. After such a bad scare, she had completely forgotten about the previous matter.

Seeing these two holding each other, comforting each other so intimately, Jiao Shanhe and the other guards looked at each other in dismay.

"Aren't the second miss and the young master a little too close?"

"I don't think we should get too involved in Master's family affairs."

"But what if something really does end up happening between them? Will Master and Madam blame us?"

"I don't think they will. Besides, second miss is still so young. Would young master really do something like that? Does he look like a savage?"

"He kind of does to me."

...

Their party rushed to the academy. A few guards remained at the entrance, while Chu Huanzhao left to attend her classes.

Zu An went back to his staff dormitory instead. He wanted to wash up and get all of this blood off of him first.

He had just taken off his clothes when he suddenly heard some activity by the entrance. His heart trembled. Did that Chen Xuan really sneak into the academy?

With the Tai'e Sword tightly clenched in hand, he swung the door open and thrust outwards.

"Ah!"

There was a cry of alarm. Zu An pulled back his sword in a panic. He immediately grew embarrassed when he saw the stunning beauty before him. "Big sister Shang, why are you here?"

"I noticed someone was in when I was walking by. We haven't chatted in a while, so I decided to drop in." Shang Liuyu was dressed in a long green skirt today. She quickly recovered from her shock. "Who did you think I was? Why would you suddenly pull a blade on me..."

Before she finished her sentence, she noticed the incredible muscles on his exposed upper body. A light flush of color immediately spread across her neck.

## **Chapter 262: Clinging On**

"Please come in first." Zu An stepped to the side and gestured for her to enter. It really would be embarrassing if a passerby saw him standing half-naked outside like this.

Shang Liuyu hesitated, giving his exposed upper body another look. In the end, her curiosity won out. She entered gracefully.

Zu An closed the door and said, "We ran into an assassin on the way to the academy, so my mind was slightly on edge."

"Assassin? Someone wants you dead?" Shang Liuyu's beautiful eyebrows drew together in a frown. She couldn't think of anyone who would be brazen enough to attack him out in the open. After all, he was not just the young master of the Chu clan, but also a teacher at the academy.

“Blackwind Stockade’s Chen Xuan.” Zu An filled up a basin of water, and then he explained what happened while he wiped away the horse blood that was still all over him.

Shang Liuyu turned her head awkwardly to the side, pretending to admire the garden’s scenery.

“Blackwind Stockade’s Chen Xuan? How did you end up provoking him?”

“He is brothers with Silverhook Casino’s Mei Chaofeng.” Even though the two hadn’t spent that much time together, Zu An still trusted Shang Liuyu’s character. He didn’t feel like there was a need to hide anything from her.

“So that’s what happened,” Shang Liuyu said in a gentle voice. “I’ve heard Chen Xuan is at the sixth rank. What are you going to do now?”

“Don’t worry. I’ve always been a tenacious fellow. I won’t die that easily!” Zu An said with a smile.

But inside, he didn’t feel that great at all. If they’d fought head on, the Phoenix Nirvana Sutra’s power boost might give him a chance at winning.

However, Chen Xuan didn’t have any intention of doing that! He’d gone straight for assassination instead. Zu An was lucky to have been alerted by the Rage points this time, but no one knew if his luck would still be that good the next time.

Shang Liuyu pondered a while, then fished out a pendant-like object. “Keep this with you. It might be able to save your life at a crucial moment.”

“What is it?” Zu An thought that it was a jade pendant at first, but after turning it over in his hands, he found that it was much thinner than a normal jade pendant. It’s quite pretty, though. This white object seems to be glowing with a faint blue light.

Shang Liuyu hesitated, then replied, “You can just treat it as a jade pendant. It can help you block a single fatal attack. But remember, it will immediately shatter after blocking this attack, so you will be on your own afterwards.”

“It’s already really amazing, even if it can only block a single fatal attack!” Zu An never expected this little thing to be that useful. He was at a loss for words. He hurriedly tried to return it to her and said, “There’s no way I can accept something so precious!”

Shang Liuyu smiled, but made no move to take it back. “Even the most precious item cannot be as precious as a life. Keep it. I really do not wish to see a rare friend lose his life just like that.”

“Alright, I won’t reject your kindness then. This really is something I need right now.” Zu An put away this ‘jade pendant’. “But I don’t have anything to give you in return at all... do you want money?”

He didn’t have anything precious on him right now. Those heaven-grade ki stones were Mi Li’s, and he didn’t dare to give them away, especially after she had scolded him. He didn’t have any Marrow Cleansing Pills either. Even if he did, Shang Liuyu didn’t even seem like the type who cared that much about cultivating, killing, or stuff like that.

The only things of value on him were banknotes. Otherwise... he couldn’t just offer his body, right?

He didn’t really mind that at all, but it was clear that she wouldn’t agree.

Shang Liuyu smiled faintly. "I'll pass on the banknotes, but I am indeed a bit curious about what went on in the dungeon. You seem to have changed quite a bit after coming out."

"No problem!" He smiled to himself. Of course I've changed a lot! I'm no longer a virgin anymore! Wait... was she really able to tell?

"Put on some clothes first." She awkwardly averted her gaze as he stood up. All of that masculinity hitting her in the face was just too much. This fellow seemed so delicate and dainty before, but he's actually like this without his clothes on.

"Where have my manners gone? Haha..." Zu An was used to going shirtless in his previous world. He was just about done with cleaning up, so he threw on some clothes, then proceeded to tell her everything that happened in the dungeon.

He was quite the storyteller, so his tale sounded exceptionally thrilling.

Of course, he had to leave out some details because of his promise to Mi Li.

Even so, Shang Liuyu was astonished. "Many Brightmoon Academy students have entered the dungeon throughout the years, but all of their experiences added up together still pale in comparison to yours!"

Zu An laughed proudly. "But of course! This just proves that I'm the chosen one!"

"I really like this optimistic version of you." Shang Liuyu had a gentle smile on her face, which soothed his soul like a comfortable autumn breeze.

Zu An fumbled about his pockets. "Oh, I should return that seashell I borrowed from you the last time." He suddenly froze up.

Only now did he remember that he'd lent Qiu Honglei his robe last night, and had forgotten to take the seashell out.

Seeing his awkward expression, Shang Liuyu said with a smile, "What's wrong? Did you accidentally lose it?"

"I definitely didn't lose it. I just left it in a different robe." Zu An was extremely embarrassed. "I'll bring it to you another time."

"There's no rush." Shang Liuyu got up and said, "It's time for my class, anyway. Let's catch up another time."

"Sure~"

Zu An watched her figure slowly disappear into the distance. No wonder she has such a great reputation in the academy. How can anyone dislike her?

Zu An had to get to his class too. This time, it wasn't as a teacher. Arithmetic was only an elective in Brightmoon Academy, after all, so there weren't that many classes to teach.

Most of his time in the academy was still spent in the Yellow class, listening to the lectures of his 'colleagues'.

However, just as he reached the door to his classroom, a hint of fragrance tickled his nose. He heard a cold, arrogant yet dignified voice right by his ear. "Follow me to my office."

The voice carried unquestionable authority. Who dares to talk to me in such a tone?! Aren't you making me skip my class?

But when he turned around and saw those elegant glasses, the body-hugging outfit, and those stunningly long legs, his expression immediately became obsequious. "Understood, gorgeous principal!"

All of the students in the class popped their heads out of the window when they saw the two of them leaving together.

Among them, Wei Suo's neck was definitely stretched out the furthest. He gasped. "Principal is wearing nude-colored stockings again today! She seems to be quite fond of this style recently. Why doesn't she wear some black stockings?"

"What do you know? I think this color looks great," someone beside him scoffed.

"Pah! Of course black looks the best!" Another student supported Wei Suo.

"If you ask me though, gray is more spicy." Someone else offered up a different opinion.

The students grew extremely worked up.

"Um... do none of you like white tights?" said a quiet, feeble voice.

The others all turned around towards him. "Pervert!" they shouted in unison.

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Zu An followed behind Jiang Luofu, his eyes glued to her swaying figure. The cadence of her walk was perfect, and only served to enhance her exquisite beauty.

If her stride was even a bit longer, it would have seemed vulgar. Just a little shorter, and it wouldn't have fully displayed her natural, mature charm.

The principal really is amazing!

Zu An sighed in admiration. He really couldn't figure out why that pervert Ji Dengtu showed no interest in her.

Please don't tell me the principal isn't some crazy crossdresser!

Zu An's mind froze in fright. He immediately examined her carefully.

After a thorough assessment, he was certain that she was the most outstanding among all women.

This made Ji Dengtu a case worth pondering over.

Lost in his own thoughts, he was startled when he heard Jiang Luofu's voice. "Close the door."

"Oh..." Only then did Zu An snap out of his daze. The two of them had already arrived at her office.



Once the heavy door was closed, Jiang Luofu casually kicked off her heels and found a chair to recline into. Her long legs, which drove countless men crazy, were propped up on a stool.

Her skirt was quite similar to the pencil skirts of Zu An's previous world. It was difficult for her skirt to cover everything.

Zu An really had to applaud her. Although he clearly couldn't see a thing, endless temptation still lurked within.

"Do I look good?" Jiang Luofu's teased.

Zu An shivered, and immediately looked away. "I didn't see anything!"

Jiang Luofu sniffed disdainfully. "Who was it that kept staring at me on our way here, then?"

Zu An's thick skin immediately activated. He hurriedly explained, "I was studying the respected principal's gait! Your cultivation is amazingly profound, and even your walking is rich in cultivation insight! I took a few extra glances in the hopes of obtaining a breakthrough in my own cultivation..."

Jiang Luofu couldn't hold back her laughter. "You really know how to twist words in your favor! What do you think, then? Did you gain any insights?"

Zu An shook his head. "I haven't studied it enough. If the gorgeous principal is willing to let me observe earnestly for research purposes, I might just be able to come up with some unstoppable movement technique."

His shamelessness left Jiang Luofu momentarily speechless. "There is no need for that," she finally said. "The movement technique you displayed during the Clans Tournament is already outstanding enough."

"No, no, it's absolutely essential! I am a man who believes self-improvement has no bounds. I cannot let myself become complacent!" Zu An hurriedly changed the topic, worried that she might ask about the Sunflower Phantasm.

Jiang Luofu rolled her eyes at him. "Enough. We have more important matters to discuss. I heard that you were attacked by Great Bandit Chen Xuan on your way here?"

"Gorgeous principal, you have to take responsibility!" When Zu An heard this, he immediately ran over and hugged her legs, bawling his eyes out.

"What does this have to do with me?!" Jiang Luofu said impatiently, resisting the urge to send him flying with a kick.

"It's obviously because the gorgeous principal killed Mei Chaofeng! Chen Xuan has enough self-awareness to know that he is nothing before you, and so he's directing all of his hatred at me!" Zu An explained the relationship between Chen Xuan and Mei Chaofeng, and their relationship with the Shi clan.

"No wonder no one could get rid of Chen Xuan after all these years. There was a mole in the upper echelons of Brightmoon City! So it was the Shi clan..." Jiang Luofu was so startled by this information, she forgot to kick him away immediately.

"Is this enough to bring down the Shi clan?" Zu An asked.

That fella Shi Kun really is an annoying prick. He even has such a huge clan backing him! He is way too dangerous to have as an enemy.

"How could it be that easy..." Jiang Luofu was just about to reply, but her beautiful brows came together in a frown. "Have you had your fill of touching me? Let go already!"

### **Chapter 263: Fragrant Barf**

Zu An clearly hadn't gotten enough of her legs yet, but he didn't want to die, either.

He immediately let go, his expression as pure and honest as it could be.

Jiang Luofu finally nodded in satisfaction. She continued, "The Shi clan is one of the bigger clans even in the capital, and their members are scattered all over the court's positions of power. We don't have much substantial proof to back our claims, and even if we did have something on them, they would just toss out a random scapegoat to take the fall. It wouldn't even cause a dent in their foundation."

"Then how do I take down a clan like this?" Zu An asked, feeling a bit annoyed inside. It sounded like the Shi clan was the only who could mess with him, while he was powerless to retaliate.

How could he stand this?

"The only way is to have a big clan backing you as well, although big clans wouldn't usually fight to the death even if tensions escalated severely." Jiang Luofu replied with a frown. "Of course, you can just ignore all of these things if you become strong enough yourself one day. But there's no way things would be so easy. Even if your cultivation surpassed the emperor's, there would still be too many things to worry about."

Zu An stayed silent. He remembered learning about the emperor's conflict with King Qi from the Chu clan. The emperor was already publicly acknowledged as the strongest expert, yet he still couldn't accomplish what he wanted. This thought immediately discouraged him.

Noticing his crestfallen expression, Jiang Luofu tried to console him. "You don't need to feel too down. You already have the Chu clan backing you. Together with your status as a student of the academy, the Shi clan wouldn't dare to threaten you openly, no matter how powerful they are."

Zu An sighed. "Unfortunately, they have no intentions of dealing with me in the open..."

Without anything linking Chen Xuan to the Shi clan, neither the Chu clan or the academy could do a thing even if Chen Xuan really did kill him.

"You just need to make it past this period," Jiang Luofu continued. "Shi Kun has already left Brightmoon City and returned to the capital. He's already too far away to do anything even if he wanted to."

"He's really left?" Zu An had also picked up a few rumors, but assumed that it was just some bluff.

"Indeed, and he left in quite the hurry too." Jiang Luofu rubbed her temples. She clearly didn't understand this matter, either. "Do you have any idea why he would leave?"

"No idea." Zu An pretended to look puzzled, but in his mind, he guessed that it probably had to do with the sudden disappearance of Shi Lezhi.

"Let's talk about another important matter. Do you still remember what you promised me before entering the dungeon?" Jiang Luofu asked.

Zu An was a little confused. "Are you talking about the takeover of Plum Blossom Sect's property?" he hazarded.

"Correct." Jiang Luofu smiled in satisfaction. "Mei Chaofeng is already dead, and Plum Blossom Sect has gone up into smoke overnight. Countless people are eyeing their properties and other assets. Like I said before, the academy can't really step in, but everyone knows that you have a promissory note from the Plum Blossom Sect. It's perfectly justifiable for you to get involved.

"You don't need to worry about the specifics. I'll send some people to help you out when the time comes."

Zu An said, "So I'm only doing this in name, like some sort of representative. The real takeover of all the assets will be taken care of by your people?"

"You can think of it that way." Jiang Luofu leaned back into her couch after saying this, twirling a brush between her fingers in a relaxed manner.

Zu An didn't voice any objections. He'd already made a deal with the academy—in exchange for the promissory note for seven-and-a-half million taels that he had no way of redeeming, the academy would grant him the position of a teacher. Jiang Luofu had even helped him get rid of Mei Chaofeng personally.

This was also largely the reason why he was able to casually converse with Jiang Luofu like this.

Otherwise, this greatly-respected principal would have buried his irritating and troublemaking self six feet under a long time ago.

He turned matters over in his mind. Even though he was adequately satisfied with how things had turned out, there was still something worth bringing up. "Honestly, I don't even know if I'll be alive in a week. How can I possibly focus on taking over the Plum Blossom Sect's property?"

"This Chen Xuan situation is indeed tricky. I don't care much about his strength, but he really is a slippery character. However, his intent to kill you has given us a good opportunity to capture him." Jiang Luofu stood up, gazing out at the view of Brightmoon City outside her window. "Let me mull over it a little more. I'll contact you when I think of something."

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Jiang Luofu's final words continued to echo in Zu An's head as he walked out of the principal's office. Why did it sound like he was going to be bait?

Either way, there wasn't anything he could do about it. He was merely a pawn in the schemes of others.

Zu An returned to the classroom in a gloomy mood. Unsurprisingly, there weren't many people who dared to look down on him anymore. Even the teachers had begun treating him much better after the

events of the dungeon, especially after he'd demonstrated his prowess by almost cleaving Shi Kun in half with his blade.

The class he returned to was a lecture on the theory of war.

He actually wanted to learn more about this topic, but he didn't know anything about this continent's history. He'd never heard of any of these battles or the ancient countries mentioned, so all of this was gibberish to him.

He gave up helplessly, and instead began to tally up the Rage points he'd accumulated.

This was always the happiest moment for him. He was like a squirrel who stored acorns day in and day out, and was now finally able to enjoy the fruit of his labor.

When he saw the total amount of Rage points, he almost jumped in fright. Ten, hundred, thousand, ten thousand, hundred thousand...

He thought that there was something wrong with his eyes at first. After checking several times, he realized he'd already hoarded up 321,765 Rage points!

The two biggest batches of Rage points had come from the Immortal Abode the night before, as well as when he'd used his massive member to assert his dominance in the dungeon.

A thought suddenly came to his mind. If I'd made a trip around Brightmoon City butt-naked that day, would the system have exploded from the crazy amount of Rage points?

He quickly dispelled this thought. The sacrifice he would have to make was too much.

Forget it. This bro still wants to maintain some dignity. My life really would be over if my reputation were completely trashed as well.

What he was most worried about were those at the very top of society. No matter their cultivation level, he knew for certain that all men cared deeply about this sort of thing.

If I end up provoking some freak, he might just cut it off out of jealousy...

A chill ran between his legs, and they immediately drew together.

Forget it, I'll just stick to the old plan. I'll farm the shit out of those simps with a few hot chicks. That's way safer.

Having decided on his main source of Rage points going forward, Zu An began drawing the lottery.

321,765 Rage points meant that he had 3,217 chances.

The more Rage points I get, the more times I'd have to draw. Won't my wrist break at this rate?

Zu An grew momentarily worried about his future, but he still pressed the 'Enter' key to start drawing.

He'd used to come up with all types of shenanigans, praying to his grandfather and grandmother, doing all types of dumb rituals just to see 'Thanks for playing!' show up on the screen. As such, he already became numb to it.

He had more than three thousand chances now anyway, so he didn't bother with any preparations.

The light marker flickered continuously. Instead of landing on the 'Space' key, it came to rest on top of the '8' key.

Zu An's eyes went completely round. He checked his loot excitedly.

A small bottle appeared in front of him, containing some sparkling green liquid. Below it was a description:

Poison Bottle, thrown projectile. Targets caught in the area of effect will become numb and powerless. Ignores the defenses of those at the fifth rank and below.

Only now did he remember that he'd drawn this item before. He'd been much weaker back then. It was how he had defeated the Blackwind Stockade members who attacked Yu Yanluo that time.

The item's defense-ignoring properties had been extremely important for his past self.

However, he didn't need such items anymore against the opponents that he would be facing.

This Poison Bottle would be little help against other fifth or sixth rank experts, since it was practically useless against those above the fifth rank.

As for those of even higher cultivation ranks, he might as well just bend over and let them have at him. Unless they were female, of course.

No, I don't even have the Heiress' Ball of Delights anymore. I can't do anything even against cultivator beauties. I'll only have my looks to depend on at that point.

He put away the useless Poison Bottle and resumed his drawing.

After a series of 'Thanks for playing!' notifications, he finally managed to draw a Ki Fruit.

He had three thousand pulls anyway. Zu An pressed the enter key numbly while reminiscing about the button fairy from his previous world.

Suddenly, his eyes lit up. He noticed that the light marker had come to rest on the 'K' key.

Congratulations on obtaining the skill 'Fragrant Barf'!

Skill information: When you use this skill, anything that comes out of your mouth will sound like the utmost provocation and mockery. Enemy targets who hear your words will become enraged. Enraged enemies will have all their attributes buffed by 10%, and they will do everything they can to kill you. All Rage points produced by this skill will not be collected.

Friendly warning: Use this skill cautiously. Once used, the effect will never expire. There can only be two results—Either the user kills the enraged target, or the enraged target kills the user.

Zu An was immediately stupefied when he saw this final warning.

What kind of stupid-ass skill is this? It buffs the enemy instead?!

This Keyboard can go to hell before I use this skill!

This skill might be useful for someone else, but this was a talent he had been naturally born with! He could infuriate everyone with just a few words, and even earn some Rage points along the way—why would he give his enemies a buff, let alone start a fight to the death?

What meaning did this skill have for him?

No wonder there's no limit to the usage of this skill. The good stuff like the Heiress' Ball of Delights and Knock-You-Up Eyes are full of restrictions.

Only a good-for-nothing ability like Whatcha Lookin' At has no limitations.

This Fragrant Barf skill is probably no better.

### **Chapter 264: Probing**

Zu An's face was as black as charcoal. The chances of getting a skill were just too rare! Yet now that he'd finally gotten one, he'd ended up with this garbage.

Seems like it going to be one of those days...

Sure enough, other than Ki Fruits, there were only 'Thanks for playing' messages.

He didn't even get a single bottle of medicine. He really wanted another bottle of Faith in Brother Spring!

He had no idea when Chen Xuan would pop up again. Knowing that guy, there was no way he was going to up just like that.

If he had a bottle of Faith in Brother Spring, he could still bounce right back if he was unlucky. Since he didn't have this to count on, he had to constantly remain on guard.

This round of drawing netted him a total of 320 Ki Fruits.

Considering the odds, his luck wasn't actually that bad.

His mood improved slightly. Making sure no one was paying attention, he tossed these fruits into his mouth one after another.

His face immediately went rigid when he examined himself.

What the heck? Why did only a tenth of the formation fill up?

This was the most Ki Fruits he ate in one sitting!

He examined himself carefully, and then he noticed where the issue lay.

He was now already at the eighth step of the third rank. Since the number of Ki Fruits needed for each formation increased in accordance with the Fibonacci Sequence, he would need 2,584 Ki Fruits to reach the ninth step.

He'd only eaten 320, so naturally, it would only fill up by slightly more than a tenth.

In reality, the seventh and eighth formations, which required 987 and 1597 Ki Fruits respectively in order to fill completely, wasn't something he could have easily achieved through Rage points alone.

It had been all thanks to that blood-soaked battle against Mi Li... but of course, that had just been a one-sided butchering.

Under the effects of the Heiress' Ball of Delights, his body had suffered countless fatal blows, suffering slash after slash, with blood flying everywhere. Only in such a situation did the Phoenix Nirvana Sutra show its true prowess, allowing him to gain two steps.

Trying to fill in these formations without such external help seemed like an extremely slow process.

It was already so hard for him to advance, even when he was only at the third rank. Once he climbed higher, wouldn't the number of Ki Fruits he needed really reach astronomical quantities? It seemed almost impossible to reach the lofty heights of cultivation.

He couldn't find a way to solve this issue no matter how he racked his brains, so he gave up on thinking.

I'll just cross that bridge when I get there.

Without him noticing, the class came to an end. His desk-mate Wei Suo, unable to hold himself back any longer, immediately scooted over. "Boss, so how did the courtesan queen... taste?"

He'd been dying to ask this as soon as Zu An had come back, but after seeing his knitted brows and gritted teeth, he hadn't dared ask him anything.

Since Zu An seemed back to normal, he eagerly seized the chance to ask.

He was fully aware that Qiu Honglei was far outside his league. However, he could still share this divine experience indirectly through his boss!

All of the nearby students rushed over when they heard Wei Suo's question. News of the courtesan queen's choice had clearly spread like wildfire. All of them looked at him with eager eyes.

Zu An was embarrassed to admit that nothing had happened, especially in front of all these hopeful eyes. He immediately began to brag. "It was obviously the best! Really a divine experience..."

He blurted out whatever came to mind, throwing them some random plot from an extremely explicit web novel he'd read before.

Even though Brightmoon Academy had many students from influential families, there were also many from ordinary backgrounds, which was especially true for the Yellow class.

All of them were still quite young, so they didn't have much experience in this area. Their blood began to boil as they listened, their faces and ears flushing red. Their eyes were filled with a jealous hatred.

You have successfully trolled the Yellow class for 66... 66... 66...

Zu An was miffed. These fellas really have no conscience. They're getting a free audiobook here, yet they still have the nerve to get angry.

Hmph, whatever. Since you're already providing me these Rage points, this young master won't stoop to bicker with the lowly. You're all forgiven.

A student ran over to pass on a message. "Ah Zu, someone is looking for you by the door."

Everyone was already used to his nickname.

Some students had already been completely sucked into his tale. They grew angry at this sudden interruption, wondering who it was that was disturbing them.

When they turned around, they saw a traditional beauty in a long skirt standing by the doorway, waving at Zu An with a smile.

"Isn't that the ninth-ranked beauty Zheng Dan?"

"She truly is a fairy-level girl! The fuglies in our class don't stand a chance."

"Her manners are so wonderful. This sort of gentle and sweet-tempered woman is definitely the perfect candidate for a wife!"

"Keep dreaming, man. She's already engaged to the Sang clan's young master. Besides, even if she wasn't, you wouldn't stand a chance."

"Then why is she here looking for Ah Zu? This isn't even the first time."

"Dammit, now that you mention it, is there some kind of scandal going on here as well?"

...

Zheng Dan's cheeks flushed from all the whispered gossip, and she lowered her head in embarrassment. Her appearance was perfectly bashful and reserved.

Zu An walked over to the doorway. This shy-looking young lady dressed in a long skirt really was the textbook example of a Green Tea Bitch from his previous world.[1]

But she's just too damn pretty! No wonder it wasn't really the men who hated this type of green tea...

"What did Miss Zheng need me for?"

Zhen Dan pursed her lips, hesitating as her eyes darted around. "Can we find another place to talk? This place is too embarrassing..."

"Sure, let's go for a stroll." Zu An thought about bringing her to his staff residence, but he soon abandoned the thought. There wasn't much time between classes.

The two of them walked off, shoulder to shoulder like a pair of lovebirds.

Wei Suo immediately prostrated himself in admiration. "Boss is truly worthy of the title Great Boss! You just played with a courtesan queen last night, yet Miss Zheng is already throwing herself at you today!"

"Hmph, it's probably nothing dirty, and not at all like what's in your head. Miss Zheng is engaged, okay? She probably needs to consult him on some proper business," another student retorted immediately. Learning about the Qiu Honglei affair from the night before had been enough to fill his heart to the brim



with jealousy and resentment. Yet now, Zu An was immediately getting together with another beauty right in front of his eyes! The student felt that his small heart was on the brink of shattering.

“Are the matters between men and women not considered proper?” Wei Suo glared at him. “So what if she’s engaged? Wouldn’t conquering someone else’s fiancée bring an even greater feeling of victory?”

Someone else to the side couldn’t help but laugh. “Aren’t these some bold words coming out from your mouth? Are you really imagining yourself in Ah Zu’s place, since such a thing is impossible for you? Don’t you feel any sense of shame?”

Wei Suo’s face became red. “Nonsense! I am just feeling happy for my boss.”

...

When he saw this new stream of Rage points flow in, Zu An grew curious as to what those guys were doing back there. He’d already left, after all. Why were they still angry at him?

“Ah Zu, I heard that you were attacked by Chen Xuan on the way here. Are you okay?”

The two of them had moved to a more secluded area. Her bashful and reserved appearance had disappeared completely, and was replaced with an extremely concerned expression. She nervously tugged his hand, searching his body for injuries almost frantically.

“I’m gonna have to charge you if you keep touching me.” If he hadn’t already guessed at her intentions, Zu An might really have been bewitched. Her acting skills were far too good. She really did look like a deeply concerned young lady.

“Really, what am I going to do with you...” Zheng Dan’s face flushed slightly. “Since you can still talk like that, you’re probably fine. I’m so relieved.”

“Many thanks for Miss Zheng’s concern.” Zu An reached out smoothly and grabbed her hands. Just what kind of routine does she have to make her hands this soft? Do you soak them in milk every day, or something?

Zheng Dan pulled back her hands somewhat awkwardly. The image of this man stroking her bare leg flashed into her mind again.

She really didn’t know what had come over her the last time. Things had really gone too far. Zheng Dan warned herself sternly not to repeat that particular disaster again.

She hadn’t forgotten the reason why she’d come looking for him today. “Ah Zu, I heard that Chen Xuan is at the sixth rank! If he’s determined to kill you, you’re surely in great danger!”

“What can I do? Anyway, if push comes to shove, I’ll just hide out in the academy every day. I don’t think he has the guts to enter the academy,” Zu An replied.

“You’re actually still quite safe in the Chu Estate. Brightmoon Duke is a mighty eighth rank cultivator, after all, and there are so many other experts in the estate. You even have a master that you can rely on for help.” Zheng Dan smiled sweetly, acting as if she was just chatting casually.

## **Chapter 265: Caught in the Act**

“Master?” Zu An was taken aback. “What master are you talking about?”

Zheng Dan said with a smile, “Your lips seem to be sealed pretty tightly. Such a great movement technique like yours doesn’t come out of thin air, does it?”

Zu An chuckled. “I’ve always been a genius among geniuses—of course I’m self-taught! Miss Zheng, are you trying to pry some intelligence out of me? It seems your skills in this field are still a little lacking.”

“If you don’t want to talk about it then forget it,” Zheng Dan said in a huff. “I was genuinely worried about your safety, and yet you’re somehow suspecting my motives!”

Zu An looked her up and down, then said, “If my memory serves me right, I believe Miss Zheng is engaged. How can I not be suspicious when you suddenly seek me out?”

Zheng Dan sighed deeply. “As I expected, this was how everyone would see this... and you, apparently, are no exception.”

She stepped away from him, her eyes becoming unfocused as she gazed at the distant horizon. “My marriage into the Sang clan was arranged by my father. Even though my clan is known as one of Brightmoon City’s four major clans, we are nothing more than a merchant clan in the end. We’re nothing compared to an established, top-level clan.

“That’s why all our clan elders were ecstatic when they received the Sang clan’s proposal, and agreed without a moment’s hesitation.”

“Although the Sang clan doesn’t have such a rich history, they are still one of the rising stars in the capital, and Sang Hong is one of his imperial majesty’s favored ministers. Given another year or two, they should rise to become a top-level clan. The only reason they proposed an alliance with our clan through marriage was because they’re using this time to grow. How could the Zheng clan’s elders pass up such an amazing opportunity?

“It’s just... Why did no one ever bother to ask me for my opinion? Why didn’t they ask me if I like that person, or if I were willing to marry him?”

Her eyes misted over slightly as she spoke.

Even Zu An couldn’t tell if these were her true feelings, or deliberately feigned. “To be honest, you have no reason to be so discontented either. The Zheng clan has provided you with all sorts of advantages since birth, so it’s only natural that you have to bear some responsibility. When you come from an important clan, this is just the way things are. Sometimes, you don’t have the freedom to make your own choices.”

Zheng Dan gave him a look of shock. “No one has ever spoken like this to me! Even my closest friends have always comforted me, sympathized with me over the unfairness of fate... Your point of view is truly different from everyone else’s.”

“I’ve always been a fan of saying things as they are. It’s good that you didn’t take it personally,” Zu An replied.

As she stared at him, a conflicted look flashed across her eyes. "You really are different."

Zu An raised his brows smugly. "Is it because I'm incredibly handsome?"

Zheng Dan blushed. "Hmph! Incredibly shameless, you mean," she scoffed.

The two then chatted idly. Because of what had just happened, neither of them chose to steer the conversation in any real direction. As such, their conversation meandered in a carefree manner, and it became a relaxing and enjoyable experience for the both of them.

The bell rang, signaling the start of the next class. Just as they were about to go their separate ways, Zheng Dan turned around with a reluctant look. "Ah Zu, you really have to be careful... Don't let Chen Xuan do anything to you."

Zu An laughed. "Relax! I still have so much to talk with Miss Zheng about. How could I let someone do me in before then?"

Zheng Dan smiled coyly. "Pah! Can't you just be decent at least once in a while? You're still womanizing even though you already have a wife."

Zu An laughed heartily. "Don't you have a fiancé as well? Our situations seem to be matchmade in heaven!"

Zheng Dan couldn't stand any more of his directness. With an indignant huff, she turned around and left quickly, her face red.

She hurriedly turned a corner and leaned against the wall. She pressed her hand against her chest, bewildered by the pounding drumbeat of her heart.

Wasn't I the one who was supposed to be taking advantage of him? How did our roles end up swapping?

...

The rest of the day's classes passed by rather quickly. When they were finally dismissed, a wild Chu Huanzhao immediately appeared, snorting angrily at him.

"Why did that Zheng girl go looking for you?"

Zu An was a little surprised. "News seems to get to you pretty quickly."

A hint of cockiness appeared on Chu Huanzhao's face. "But of course! This lady has many helpers in this academy..."

She was just about to boast about her glorious achievements when she suddenly noticed something amiss. She huffed angrily. "Stop changing the topic! Why did that slut go looking for you?"

Zu An couldn't help but say, "You're still just a kid. Stop throwing the word 'slut' around all the time. It's really not a good look."

"That's just how I am! Besides, she still goes looking for you even though you have a wife! If she isn't a slut then what is she?" Chu Huanzhao's eyes went completely red, as if she was the one suffering a great injustice. "What, are you already head-over-heels for her?"

When he saw how close to tears this little girl was, Zu An's heart softened. "Of course not! She wanted to ask me about Chen Xuan's assassination. She was just a bit worried about my safety," he hurriedly assured her.

"When did the two of you get so close? Why would she care that much about you?" Chu Huanzhao's eyes flickered dangerously, her hand subconsciously reaching for her Wailing Whip.

Zu An's expression grew panicked. He explained in a hurry, "I did save her once before, after all. Besides, isn't it normal for fellow students to care about each other?"

Chu Huanzhao snorted. "That girl looks all gentle and dainty on the surface, but I'm sure it's all fake! I just don't like her."

Zu An felt his head beginning to throb. "Okay, okay, okay. I'll just associate with her less in the future, all right?"

Drama really starts easily between girls. This kid's still so young, but she is already a budding talent in this field.

Zu An immediately diverted her attention, worried that she might continue pursuing this matter. He pulled out a fine little bottle and said, "Huanzhao, didn't I promise you a gift? I never figured out what I wanted to give you before, until I recently picked up this interesting thing. Hurry and take a look!"

Chu Huanzhao was taken aback by the flask filled with green liquid. "Is it perfume? I've never messed around with those before. But if it's a gift from brother-in-law, I guess I can at least give it a try."

Dark lines appeared across Zu An's forehead. "Perfume my ass! Have you ever seen green perfume before?"

"I guess there isn't any green perfume..." Chu Huanzhao chuckled in embarrassment. "What is it, then?"

"It's a bottle of paralysis poison." Zu An roughly explained its effects to her, and then he added, "It ignores the defenses of all those at the fifth rank or below. Those caught in its effects will lose all ability to resist."

"This thing seems pretty good! It's much more interesting than perfume." A look of excitement appeared on Chu Huanzhao's face. She immediately fell in love with it.

Seeing her enthusiasm, Zu An gave an inner sigh of relief.

The poison bottle was useless to him, so it made the perfect gift for this girl. That was why he was content just to give it away.

He had been slightly worried that such a gift would be a weird thing to give a girl. Who knew that it would just happen to suit Huanzhao's naughty nature?

Chu Huanzhao fiddled with it for a while before carefully putting it away. Then, she looked at Zu An and asked, "Brother-in-law, what rank are you now?"

Zu An hesitated. In terms of cultivation, he was currently at the eighth step of the third rank, but his real strength was far greater.

As he grew in his understanding of the world and gained more knowledge about cultivation from the academy, he'd reached an interesting conclusion.

Just by filling up his formations one after another using the Phoenix Nirvana Sutra, his real strength would be much greater than other cultivators at the same level. This was without taking into account the Primordial Origin Sutra tempering his body.

Chu Huanzhao didn't seem to mind his hesitation. She'd already gotten what she wanted. "You haven't reached the fifth rank yet, have you?"

"I haven't." Zu An replied without thinking.

"Perfect." Chu Huanzhao's lips spread in a sly smile.

Zu An immediately sensed something amiss. "What are you getting at? Why are you asking such a thing?"

"Nothing~" Chu Huanzhao snickered inwardly, her previously sulky mood vanishing without a trace. She began humming to herself, waving her small hands about and skipping energetically ahead.

Zu An stared blankly after her.

Why do I feel like I've shot myself in the foot?

...

Aside from Jiao Shanhe and the others, there was another troop of Chu clan guards waiting by the entrance to the academy, led by Chu Hongcai.

"Yo! Brother Hongcai, fancy seeing you here."

This fella always had a cold and calculating look on the outside. However, after seeing his fanboy side the night before in the Immortal Abode, Zu An suddenly found him much more likeable.

"When he received news of the assassination, Master dispatched a troop to escort the two of you home after school." Now that he knew that his goddess hadn't gone to bed with Zu An the night before, Chu Hongcai's demeanor towards him was also more relaxed.

He had previously held the post of Vice Commander of the estate's guards, and had been in charge of security around the spiritual creek. Following its contamination, his guilty conscience had led him to resign.

However, in the eyes of the members of the Chu clan, he was still extremely reliable. That was why he had been assigned this task.

"Then I'll have to trouble brother Hongcai and the others." Zu An knew that the Madam was most worried about Chu Chuyan's safety. With her current condition, and the incident with the eighth-ranked intruder, the commander Yue Shan had to remain in the estate to protect Chu Chuyan.

They were already treating this affair quite seriously by sending the previous vice commander.

Even though their escorts weren't a match for Chen Xuan individually, they were all elites of the Chu clan. It would be difficult for Chen Xuan to deal with all of them if they worked together.

Of course, this was only if he didn't bring his own subordinates. But after the events of the night before, the Chu clan and the City Lord had already cracked down on all the suspicious people in the city. It was one thing for him to hide out in the city alone, but keeping a huge group in the city was plainly courting death.

...

Cheng Shouping was already standing by the entrance when they returned to the Chu Estate. When he saw Zu An, he rushed over excitedly, waving an invitation card in his hands. "Young master, young master! The Immortal Abode's Qiu..."

Just when he was about to continue, he suddenly caught sight of Chu Huanzhao behind Zu An. The smile on his face instantly froze. His hands disappeared behind him. The feeling of her whip was clearly still fresh in his memory.

Even though he'd received a bonus from Zu An, the pain from the Wailing Whip wasn't something even some as greedy as him wanted to experience again.

"The Immortal Abode what?" Chu Huanzhao looked at him suspiciously.

"Nothing!" Cheng Shouping said hurriedly.

"Is that so? What is that you're hiding behind you?" Chu Huanzhao tried to look behind him.

Cheng Shouping hurriedly said, "Second miss, your respected self is mistaken! It really is nothing!"

His hands suddenly became empty, as the item he was clutching onto was snatched away. He immediately panicked. He turned around and was just about to demand it back, but he realized he was staring at Madam Qin Wanru. The words caught in his throat, and he forced them back down.

Qin Wanru didn't pay him any attention. She opened that invitation card on her own. Her expression immediately turned cold. She stared at Zu An and said, "Heh, so this is an invitation letter from the Immortal Abode's Qiu Honglei? Amazing... Absolutely incredible!"

## **Chapter 266: I'll Leave If I Have To**

Many of the men present had jealous expressions when they heard that it was Qiu Honglei's invitation card.

Even the Chu clan's guards knew about Qiu Honglei's reputation.

This girl was the most popular girl in all of Brightmoon City, and perhaps even in all of the Linchuan Commandery. There wasn't a single man who didn't want to get close to her.

"The young master really has mad skills... he is even on good terms with Lady Qiu!"

"I really couldn't figure out why our beautiful first miss would end up favoring the young master. It seems like I am still too inexperienced."

"But Madam has gotten involved... the young master's in trouble now."

...

Some of them were overjoyed and others were worried, but most of these guards were content to watch the drama unfold from the sidelines. When Chu Hongcai heard that it was Qiu Honglei who had personally sent Zu An an invitation, he almost ripped his eyes out in jealousy.

He was a die-hard fan of Qiu Honglei, and yet, he had never heard of her taking the initiative to send anyone a personal invitation!

Normally, for her to accept an invitation and perform a song, or even just make an appearance, was already an incredible honor.

Even though nothing had happened between the two of them the night before, Lady Qiu was already taking the initiative to contact him! Wasn't it just a matter of time, then?

After all, he didn't really think that anyone could resist Qiu Honglei's beauty and charm.

Just thinking about how the goddess of his dreams would soon be ravaged by Zu An was enough to drive him to the brink of tears.

Gah! They should've just gotten it over with last night. Why are you tormenting me like this? Just end my suffering!

You have successfully trolled Chu Hongcai for 233 Rage points!

Zu An glanced at him in surprise. There really wasn't much he could do about this.

I can't really blame him for breaking the bro code. His goddess is just too hot.

"I'm talking to you! Why are your eyes wandering off?!" Qin Wanru was already in a terrible mood to begin with. Those other drafted son-in-laws are all nice and submissive, and have a healthy fear of offending their wife's family. Why doesn't this fellow have a shred of obedience in him?

This scoundrel even had the nerve to play around with a brothel girl, and this girl had even chased him all the way back home!

Once news got out, what dignity would the Chu clan have left?

You have successfully trolled Qin Wanru for 404 Rage points!

The notification snapped Zu An out of his daze. Why is this woman always so on edge?

He was just about to say something when his eyes locked onto her body. Last night's 'little accident' appeared in his mind, and his expression turned bizarre.

"We'll talk about this inside!" Qin Wanru's brow furrowed slightly when she saw him staring at her blankly without responding. She didn't want to deal with him at the entrance to the estate and turn the clan into a laughingstock.

The guards all gave him looks that were both encouraging and pitying at the same time. Cheng Shouping tried to hide at the back of the crowd.

Zu An glared at him. Couldn't this guy just give it to me in secret? He just had to blabber about it right at the entrance and let everyone know.

Sigh, I really need to swap him out for someone sharper when I get the chance.

They headed straight for the study, and Qin Wanru took a seat. After everyone else withdrew, she slammed the table hard. "Do you understand what you've done wrong?!"

"I have no idea what I did wrong," Zu An replied with a frown. "But since we're on the topic of committing wrongs, isn't it more inappropriate for you to rip open someone else's private letter?"

This woman was always trying to start something with him. This shit is getting really annoying.

Qin Wanru's eyes went wide with bewilderment.

She thought she'd heard him wrongly for a moment. How could this guy have the nerve to talk back?

"You are out of your mind!" Qin Wanru's entire body was shaking. "You are nothing but a drafted son-in-law! Your entire existence belongs to the Chu clan! There is no such thing as a private letter to you!"

You have successfully trolled Qin Wanru for 530 Rage points!

Only now did reality strike Zu An. This world was entirely different from his previous one. Drafted son-in-laws, fugitives, and people of the lower class were all on the same rung of the social hierarchy. When the country was in danger and it was time to boost the military ranks, they would be the first to be drafted in.

Even though his status as the Chu clan's young master made him more than an ordinary son-in-law, he wasn't much better off.

The concept of basic human rights didn't exist in this world. It seems he had expected too much.

Even so, as a man, I can't let someone treat me like this!

Zu An said coldly, "Since the Madam holds me in such contempt, then forget it! I'll just leave this Chu clan if I have to!"

This woman keeps harassing me again and again! If it wasn't because of Chu Chuyan and lil' Huanzhao, I would've already left a long time ago.

He'd helped Chu clan keep their share of the weapons market. That alone had saved the Chu clan a fortune.

He'd then given Chu Chuyan the Evanescent Lotus, which had brought her cultivation to the brink of the seventh rank. She was now the greatest cultivation prodigy in this entire world! Having a talent like that in the family would bring them endless glory. Such status could never be bought using gold.

Right now, he was even toiling hard every night to save her eldest daughter's life!



Despite it all, she had never offered him a word of gratitude. Instead, this woman found all types of ways to hound him.

What had just transpired was truly the last straw. He'd finally had enough.

Perhaps his mindset had been greatly altered by his life-or-death experiences in the dungeon. He'd already fought against a ninth rank cultivator, and some who were ranked even higher!

Returning to Brightmoon City, was like returning to a newbie starting town. Even though there were still many experts in this city that could crush him to death instantly, he was much less afraid now.

After all, he even survived a place like that dungeon. How could this current situation scare him?

It would only mean moving out of the Chu Estate. He'd already reached a sufficient level of cultivation to be able to protect himself, and he had money. There was even a residence ready for him in the academy.

As for Chu Chuyan, he could always sneak back in to administer her treatment.

This was just the way human hearts worked. Before he had built up enough support to back him up, he had to silently endure whatever came, even if it was injustice wrought upon him by the Chu clan. Now that he'd gained sufficient strength, his confidence had also grown.

His sudden outburst left Qin Wanru completely speechless.

Did I hear him wrongly? Has this brat finally gone crazy?

You have successfully trolled Qin Wanru for 999 Rage points!

Chu Huanzhao was already scared out of her mind. She immediately rushed over to her mother's side. "Mother! That's not what brother-in-law is trying to say! Don't take his words seriously!"

Qin Wanru finally snapped out of her daze. She pushed away her daughter and focused on Zu An. "You really are letting things get to your head!" She said, her voice cold as ice. "So, you want to spread your wings and leave the Chu clan? Do you think it's so easy? If our Chu clan doesn't approve, do you really think you can leave just because you want to?"

Zu An was taken aback. He finally recalled a similar case that had been used as a study in Brightmoon Academy's criminal law class. A drafted son-in-law couldn't break his contract just because he wanted to—he had to obtain the agreement of his spouse's clan first.

But how could his wife's clan possibly agree? If they made their daughter go through a divorce by kicking out the son-in-law, it would be terribly difficult for her to remarry in the future!

His face darkened at this thought. Was this something he would never be able to get rid of in this lifetime?

Even though he didn't mind mooching off his wife, he preferred the sort of mooching where he was still free to do what he wanted. He hated feeling like he'd been kidnapped and trapped.

Chu Huanzhao grew ever more anxious. She shuttled back and forth between the two of them, trying to calm them down. However, both of them were stubbornly furious, and neither side was willing to back down.

The two of them were clearly stuck in an impasse, and no one knew what to do. At this instant, Chu Chuyan, who had heard the news, rushed over.

“Mother, Ah Zu, what are you two doing?” she demanded, then broke into a fit of coughing.

When she heard her daughter’s coughing, Qin Wanru immediately rushed over to support her. “Why did you leave your room? It’s so windy outside! You might catch a cold.”

Chu Chuyan smiled faintly. “Mom, I’m not that weak.”

Qin Wanru was hardly reassured. “Your illness is extremely strange. It was clearly quite serious when Physician Bao examined you previously, yet your condition mysteriously improved later on. We really don’t know if it’ll worsen again, so you have to be careful!”

Bao Youren had served the Chu clan for many years, and everyone recognized his skills in this field. He was not one to make rudimentary mistakes.

That was why, after their initial panic had passed, Duke Chu and his wife quickly realized that Ji Dengtu had done little to help. Rather, their daughter’s condition had suddenly improved on its own.

Knowing this only made them more cautious. Since her condition could suddenly improve somehow, then it could conceivably worsen in the same fashion., with no one able to control what happened.

Chu Huanzhao suddenly said, “It didn’t suddenly make a turn for the better all on its own! It was because of brother-in-law’s treatment!”

“Him?” Qin Wanru gave Zu An a look. Her voice was full of contempt. Clearly, she was unconvinced that he possessed this sort of skill.

“It really was brother-in-law!” Chu Huanzhao became anxious. She was afraid that this would be her last chance to reveal this to her mother. After all, if her mother really did kick her brother-in-law out of the Chu clan in a fit of rage, what would she do then?

Unfortunately, her usual behavior and personality didn’t lend her words any natural credibility, and it was difficult for her mother to trust her.

As such, she turned a pleading gaze at her older sister.

Chu Chuyan affirmed her. “She is correct. It is indeed Ah Zu who has been treating me. It was because of him that I was pulled back from the brink of death.”

Qin Wanru’s expression was doubtful. Are my daughters saying this just to save him?

But when she saw the serious expressions on their faces, her doubts slowly faded. “It really was him?”

Chu Chuyan nodded in confirmation.

“But I’ve always been with you these past few days. Just how did he treat you without me noticing?” Qin Wanru’s brows furrowed tightly. She still found this hard to believe.

“I fed you some drugs...” Chu Huanzhao said weakly.

Qin Wanru was flabbergasted. She stared blankly at her second daughter.

Chu Huanzhao repeated her words again, quietly. Keeping her brother-in-law from being kicked out of the clan was all that mattered—she couldn’t be bothered with anything else right now.

When she registered her daughter’s words, Qin Wanru almost fainted.

Did I really give birth to her myself?

Are there truly daughters that do such things to their own mothers?

No wonder I’ve been feeling so light-headed recently. I don’t even remember much about the evenings. It was all because of this foolish girl!

The more she thought about it, the angrier she became. She immediately dragged Chu Huanzhao over and began to spank her ferociously. This girl is going to learn today the true meaning of ‘mother’s benevolence, daughter’s obedience’!

She was utterly furious, and her beating was ruthless. She smacked Chu Huanzhao until the latter begged for mercy.

Chu Chuyan said hurriedly, “Mother, little sis only did this to save me. She wasn’t the only one in on it. I also struck your acupoint last night to knock you out.”

Her eldest daughter’s words made her freeze up completely. She blinked her eyes in utter incomprehension. She couldn’t immediately process what she’d just heard.

In order to save her little sister and share the burden of punishment, she explained, “Ah Zu administers my treatment in the evenings, but mother insisted on keeping me company. He snuck into the room last night, without knowing that you were there with me. I was worried that you would find out, so I... I struck your acupoint.”

By the time she finished her explanation, her previously pale skin was already completely flushed red. She had always been obedient ever since she was a little child, and had never done something like this before.

Qin Wanru was completely dumbfounded.

Just what kind of sin did I commit in my past life? How did I end up giving birth to these two little fiends?

## **Chapter 267: The War Horn Sounds**

Qin Wanru took a long moment to gather herself. She looked nervously at her daughter. “Even Physician Bao couldn’t do anything. How does he know the correct method of treatment? I’ve never heard of him having any medical skills!”

“He probably learned it from his mysterious master.” Chu Chuyan gave Zu An an embarrassed look, and then continued, “He used acupuncture to extract the cold energy bit by bit from my body. I could even sense the changes happening to my body.”

“Acupuncture?” Qin Wanru’s expression grew alarmed. She said in a hurry, “Physician Bao and Divine Physician Ji have both mentioned that everyone’s bodies are unique. Trying to remove your cold energy this way without having a sound understanding of your body’s condition can easily result in irreparable harm! Stop this treatment immediately! You’re not allowed to do something so risky!”

“He is different... he knows my body well.” Chu Chuyan lowered her head in embarrassment, and her ears started to burn.

Qin Wanru blinked her eyes as she tried to comprehend her statement.

What do you mean, ‘he knows your body’?

Chu Chuyan had no choice but to reveal the events that had transpired in the dungeon. She hurriedly added on, “I think it’s because the technique he learned from his master is special. Either way, I can clearly feel my condition improving. Mother, you should be able to tell that my body has become warmer these days too, right?”

“You really do have such skills?” Qin Wanru was still skeptical, but a different thought suddenly came to mind. She quickly pulled her daughter to the side and asked quietly, “When he removes the cold energy through acupuncture, do you... have to take off your clothes?”

Chu Chuyan’s face immediately flushed bright red. She lowered her head and mumbled out a confirmation.

“You took off your clothes?” Qin Wanru was absolutely floored. She stared blankly into space for a long moment.

She knew better than anyone why the Chu clan had taken Zu An in. His marriage to Chuyan was a sham, a ruse to deceive outsiders.

Her daughter had always been extremely proud ever since she was young. She was surrounded by geniuses, yet she had turned down so many other men.

Qin Wanru really found it hard to understand why her daughter would undress in front of Zu An.

She was struck by an even more serious issue. “Then the two of you have already... done the deed?” she asked in a rush.

“Mother, what are you saying?!” Chu Chuyan blurted out immediately. She was still rather inexperienced when it came to such matters, and her habits as a young lady weren’t easy to change. How could she shamelessly admit to this in front of her mother and sister? “He only needs to see my back in order to administer the treatment. The rest of... my body is covered.”

Qin Wanru sighed with relief. Even so, it was hard for her to understand why her daughter had agreed to this.

Yet another matter surfaced in her mind. She lowered her voice and said, "Did he... do anything disrespectful to me last night?"

When she thought about how she had not only been drugged by her younger daughter, but had her accupoint struck by the older one, the last of her energy seemed to drain out of her.

Chu Chuyan recalled how Zu An had hugged her mother all over, thinking that she was her, and her cheeks heated up. She immediately said, "No. I made sure to cover you up properly."

She knew that her mother was already furious. She might really go mad if she found out what happened last night.

Either way, nothing had really happened, so what she'd said couldn't truly be considered a lie, right?

It had always been Chu Chuyan's nature not to tell lies. But after she met Zu An, she noticed herself beginning to blurt out all sorts of white lies.

At her daughter's words, the great boulder that had been weighing down on Qin Wanru's chest finally disappeared.

"I don't feel like dealing with this terrible mess anymore. Since the two of you stirred it up, you can also clean it up on your own." With that, she stormed off with a huff.

Her own daughters had drugged her and struck her accupoint, and even dared to go against her to defend another man! This really was too much for her heart to take.

All of this stemmed from this brat Zu An!

You have successfully trolled Qin Wanru for 44... 44... 44...

Zu An was speechless. He hadn't expected this woman to still hold so much resentment towards him.

Chu Huanzhao also felt a little guilty. "Mother, let me accompany you..." She tried to console her mother, following her as she walked off.

When they were out of sight, Chu Chuyan turned to Zu An. "You don't want to stay in the Chu clan anymore?"

Zu An felt his resolve wavering as he looked into her enchanting eyes. "It's mostly because your mother keeps harassing me..."

Chu Chuyan shook her head. "My mother only acts tough on the surface. She had everyone withdraw from the study to help you maintain some dignity. She was going to let you off with some light scolding, but she never expected you to charge at her head-on. This left her in an awkward position."

"I can't just remain her punching bag forever, right?" Zu An said with a frown.

Chu Chuyan said, "Mother isn't as terrible to you as you think. Her words might have been a little harsh today, but a different clan might have ordered you flogged immediately. This is well within the laws of the Great Zhou Dynasty, but she didn't resort to it in the end. Despite her anger, she decided to leave out of consideration for me and Huanzhao, in order to let the matter come to a close. If the situation had become even messier, our Chu clan would have been thrown into chaos."

Zu An shuddered when he heard her mention flogging. The drafted son-in-laws of this world really don't have any human rights...

Of course, if she had taken it that far, there was no way he would have suffered it willingly.

His status as a drafted son-in-law really was a ticking time bomb. Who knew when it would be used against him?

Chu Chuyan's voice grew gentle when she noticed his awful expression.

"Please be understanding. Mother's mood has been quite terrible recently. First, she was worried about my sudden illness, then Governor Sang Hong began to pressure our clan for contributions through a court decree. It's been very stressful for her. On top of all of this, you just refused to back down, which led to things getting so out of hand..."

She cut off as another bout of coughing came over her. All the talking had clearly agitated her.

Zu An immediately helped her to sit down. "You shouldn't get too worked up, especially since you're not fully recovered yet. You need more rest while your body is still weak."

Chu Chuyan sat down and drank some water. Her complexion became a lot better.

"What are these contributions that need to be offered?" Zu An asked curiously.

Chu Chuyan explained it to him. "Whenever the country needs money for disaster relief or any large scale projects, they will always call for donations from rich merchants. These are the so-called contributions."

"That's actually a thing?" Zu An blinked in puzzlement. "If it's something voluntary, can't we just refuse?"

"How can it be that simple?" Chu Chuyan shook her head. "It seems voluntary on the surface, but in actual fact, it isn't. Those asked to make these contributions are all great and wealthy clans, and the reason why these clans had been able to grow in the first place was mostly due to the policies of the royal court."

"If you refuse to contribute, the smaller clans under you would be more than willing to take your place. They're eager to obtain this sort of opportunity, because it could influence the court to enact policies that are favorable to them."

"Our Chu clan is involved in the salt and arms trade. We are the most wealthy clan in all of Brightmoon City, perhaps even within the nearby commanderies as well. There is no way for us to dodge the payment of these contributions."

...

Zu An gradually picked up on the situation. "According to what you're telling me, this contribution is a political contribution. The rich merchants offer up some of their wealth, and the court will treat them favorably, resulting in a win-win situation. Why would this be such a vexing situation for us?"

Chu Chuyan explained, "Let's explain things using the salt industry as an example. The royal court's certifying system has helped some salt merchants achieve market dominance and earn tremendous profits, and the royal court expects some form of reciprocation. Those same salt merchants understand that the reason for their current success is completely due to the royal court's policies. That's why they don't oppose these contributions at all.

"But, if the court were to ask for contributions every few days, no clan—no matter how rich or powerful—would be able to tolerate such blatant milking.

"Even more galling is the fact that our Chu clan has owned our land for centuries. Our prosperity today isn't because of any favor bestowed on us by the royal court. Rather it is built upon the salt and iron mines that we obtained through our own blood and sweat. In fact—and this is heartbreaking—our Chu clan has owned this land since before the Great Zhou Dynasty had even been founded.

"Not only have we not received any benefits from the court these past few years, yet we're now being pressured to make contributions. Of course there's some unwillingness on our part."

Zu An was flabbergasted. "From your tone, it's almost as if the Chu clan has already decided to rebel," he observed.

"Don't spout such nonsense," Chu Chuyan replied, giving him a stern look. "We are merely a little dissatisfied. Things haven't reached that point yet. Besides, the royal court is currently rich and powerful. Even if we did have such thoughts, acting upon them would be nothing more than courting death."

"This will definitely make your clan a thorn in the side of the royal court, though." Zu An sighed. "If I were the emperor, I would get rid of you first."

"Actually, there are still quite a few clans like ours who are similarly powerful, and cannot be eliminated just because the emperor wants them gone. If he did so, the whole country could easily rise up in rebellion," Chu Chuyan replied. "That is why the emperor can only act through the system of laws. Sang Hong came here precisely to carry out this task. They have their eyes set on our salt and iron mines, but they can't blatantly steal them from us.

"Both sides will continue to fight covertly to see who can have the last laugh."

Even though Chu Chuyan's voice remained calm throughout, her brows slowly knitted together with worry.

Zu An was compelled to offer his opinion. "As the saying goes, 'the branches of a tree will always be at the mercy of the roots'. I can't help but feel that your Chu clan is walking further and further down a path of destruction."

Chu Chuyan narrowed her eyes at him. "Of course we're aware of that. But we can't just let the foundations established by our Chu clan ancestors crumble under our watch, right? That's why, even though we know the odds are stacked against us, we still have to try our hardest. This is the glory and devotion we hold towards our clan."

Zu An was stunned. Her face seemed to glow with a strange radiance as she spoke.

Rarely did his previous world have families like this, so it was quite hard for him to understand their decisions. This was eye-opening for him.

If it was a question of morality, then regardless of whether it was the emperor, the royal court, or the Chu clan, none of them were wrong. They all had their own motives and objectives. In the end, this was just a clash of interests.

“By the way, what’s with that Qiu Honglei? Why did she suddenly contact you?” Chu Chuyan asked. She stared at him with a strange expression.

“I don’t know what she’s thinking either. Don’t worry, nothing happened between us. I still have to defend my purity for your sake!” As Zu An said this, he suddenly recalled what had transpired between him and Snow, and his resolute attitude crumbled.

Although, now that I think about it, wasn’t Snow offered to me right from the start? Strictly speaking, I didn’t really let Chu Chuyan down.

His self-righteousness immediately shot back up.

“Defend your purity?” Chu Chuyan sneered. “Was she the one that left you that lipstick mark last night?”

Zu An ground his teeth silently.

Why do you still remember that?

Chu Chuyan sighed, then said, “Just don’t run around anymore today. Chen Xuan already tried to assassinate you this morning. Don’t give him another chance.”

As she spoke, she fished out a booklet from her inner pocket and handed it to him. “This is for you. If you spend your idle time cultivating, it might just give you another layer of protection against Chen Xuan.”

“What is this?” Zu An was stunned. He reached out to take it. The cover bore the words ‘Snowflake Sword’.

## **Chapter 268: Lust Leads to Bitter Consequences**

“This...” Zu An was overawed when he saw these words. Isn’t this the clan’s most important technique?

Chu Chuyan blushed. She turned away to avoid his gaze, and said with exaggerated casualness, “I just don’t want that Chen Xuan to kill you. If that happens, I won’t have anyone to treat me anymore.”

Zu An laughed heartily, a huge smile on his face. He put the booklet away. “I’ll definitely treasure such a precious thing properly.”

Chu Chuyan nodded, satisfied at how carefully he stowed it away. “Look it over on your own first. You can ask me about anything you don’t understand. I’ve already studied it before, after all, so I have more experience.”



Zu An patted his chest and said, "Relax! Don't you know how talented your husband is? There's no way I wouldn't understand it! I'll master it quickly."

Chu Chuyan stared at him, her mouth falling open.

Wasn't this guy's aptitude at cultivation already extremely clear? He was in the Yellow class, for goodness' sake!

She chose not to say anything, treating it as empty masculine bravado. She'd just find a way to help him out when he needed it.

"Make sure you take good care of this secret manual. You absolutely must not lose it," Chu Chuyan warned him. After all, she knew how frivolous this fellow normally was.

Zu An scooted over to her with a smile on his face and nudged her slightly. "What's wrong? Is it because this manual is actually a great Chu clan secret? Aren't you being a little too careless, allowing someone like me to learn it?"

Chu Chuyan shrunk back, avoiding him somewhat uncomfortably. "Stop thinking nonsense. You're the young master of the Chu clan, so you aren't an outsider. It isn't out of the question for you to learn it. As long as you... as long as you don't go out and teach this to other girls."

Zu An's eyebrows twitched. "Are you jealous?"

"If you don't have anything else to say, I'll take my leave." Chu Chuyan spun on her heels, her face red. She was clearly not used to talking about such things with him.

"Wait!" Zu An hurriedly grabbed her hand. The smile on his face also gradually faded. "The Chu clan seems quite troubled by this issue of contributions. How much silver do you need? I still have quite a bit. It should be enough to help the Chu clan get through this."

Chu Chuyan shook her arm subconsciously, but couldn't shake him off, so she let him have his way. "Keep that money for yourself. The Chu clan hasn't fallen so far as to require our son-in-law's personal fortune to bail us out."

Zu An's face scrunched up slightly.

Why do these words sound so strange? It's almost like what those men from the past would say, like 'I won't ever use my bride's dowry', or something.

Seeing his expression, Chu Chuyan thought that she had somehow hurt his ego. "Don't think about it too much," she quickly assured him. "Our Chu clan is still a huge clan. Things have just gotten slightly more difficult now, mostly because our arms business has suffered a huge blow, which is affecting our revenue.

"On top of that, the illicit salt trade has started to get out of hand recently, so our Chu clan is facing difficulties even selling our salt. That's what's been causing headaches all around."

"Illicit salt?" Zu An stared blankly. That term had confused him.

Chu Chuyan explained the situation to him. “According to the court’s decree, after any salt is extracted through boiling, it must be sold to a government agent, who will purchase all of it. The transportation, buying and selling of salt all has to be done through the royal court. Everyone else is prohibited from circulating salt.

“However, illicit salt is inexpensive, so ordinary people would choose to purchase this illicit salt instead, which fuels the illegal trade. Smuggling illicit salt is also extremely lucrative, so there are always eager criminals willing to take part, no matter how many smugglers get caught.”

In the past, she would have never spoken about these things to anyone else, and would have shouldered the responsibility alone. Yet she had just unexpectedly told Zu An everything. Perhaps, because of what they’d gone through together in the dungeon, she had subconsciously decided that he was trustworthy, and that he could help her share this burden.

Zu An couldn’t help but sigh. “The illicit salt is so much cheaper than yours, but their profits are still so high. Can’t you guys just drop the price a bit? That way, there won’t be room for the illegal salt trade to survive, and no one would be willing to take the risk of purchasing illicit salt.”

“If only it were that easy,” Chu Chuyan said, sighing deeply. “Do you think we want to keep the price of salt so high? It’s just that the costs of selling salt legally are so much higher than just selling it illegally, and that’s discounting all the other ways the government abuses their authority. Take the salt permits, for example. We need to pay the authorities 1.5 silver taels for each salt permit, and each permit only allows us to sell around 200 jin[1] of salt. Just securing these permits costs a small fortune.

“Moreover, because there may be a shortage of permits, we would need to purchase some ahead of time. This adds another 2.1 silver taels on top of the base cost of 1.5 silver taels. These are all costs the court has added onto us.

“Other headaches, like the contributions that the court has requested, also drives up our costs.”

“You can now imagine just how high the costs are just to sell salt legally.” Chu Chuyan seemed extremely familiar with all this. “It only costs us ten qian[2] to cook and process the salt. However, after being weighed down by all these extra costs—and taking into account any seasonal fluctuations in price—we can only make a profit if we sell our salt at between one hundred to three hundred qian per jin.

On the other hand, illicit salt doesn’t incur such crazy costs at all. That is why it’s sold at around twenty to thirty qian per jin. Who would ever buy our legal salt?”

Zu An looked at her with a dazed expression. He’d never expected the calm, elegant and otherworldly goddess Chu Chuyan to speak about matters of business in such detail, down to the very finest margins.

“What are you looking at me for?” Chu Chuyan noticed his change in expression as well. Her cheeks started to feel warm.

Zu An gently took her hands in his. “You’ve had to manage the affairs of such a big clan all alone, and for all these years. It must’ve been difficult,” he said solemnly.

Perhaps because of the serious injuries she’d suffered recently, her body, heart and mind all seemed to have softened slightly.

Chu Chuyan's heart suddenly ached when she heard Zu An's words. For so many years, she had never spoken about these troubles to anyone else before.

Although she enjoyed cultivation, much of her attention had to be directed towards managing the Chu clan's businesses.

If it wasn't because of this, her cultivation might have already reached another level, especially given her aptitude.

Not only that, she had always been fond of reading romance novels ever since she was young. She adored anything related to romance and love, just like any other girl. Yet, in order to make sure others took her seriously, she always put on a cold and haughty exterior. Over time, even she had begun to forget which was her true self.

"It's no big deal. I've already gotten used to it a long time ago." Chu Chuyan took a deep breath to calm her emotions. Her vision blurred, and she turned away to prevent Zu An from noticing.

Zu An's voice was heavy with emotion. "It'll be different from now on. You have me now. I will help you deal with some of your burdens."

When she noticed his intense gaze, Chu Chuyan suddenly felt her heart tremble. She pushed him away instinctively. "Sorry, I've said a little too much today."

She didn't wait for his reply. She fled without even turning back once.

Zu An was completely dumbfounded. What's going on? I've already made such a serious vow. Can't you at least give me a response?!

As he looked at Chu Chuyan's diminishing silhouette, Zu An began to stroke his chin, in perfect imitation of a domineering CEO from his previous world. Woman, you have succeeded in drawing my interest!

...

When Zu An finally left the study, his stomach suddenly growled. Only then did he realize that no one had called him for dinner.

Qin Wanru definitely didn't want to see him after what just happened. There was no way she would call him over to dine together.

It seemed that no one else wanted to get caught in the mess either, after witnessing Madam's anger.

Zu An felt like he'd been completely forgotten.

Since he wouldn't be able to get anything to eat at home, he figured that he would look around outside instead.

Didn't Qiu Honglei invite him to meet her? He'd just mooch dinner off of her, then. Besides, he still had to retrieve Shang Liuyu's seashell.

He retrieved the invitation card from Cheng Shouping. When Cheng Shouping heard that he was headed to Immortal Abode, he was taken aback. "Young master, Madam got mad at you not too long ago! Isn't it a little inappropriate for you to go out now?"

“If you don’t talk about it and I don’t either, how will Madam know?” Zu An snorted. “Besides, Madam’s anger has already been dealt with. You don’t have to worry about it.”

Even though he spoke casually, Cheng Shouping still wasn’t fully convinced.

Zu An patted Cheng Shouping’s shoulder. “Didn’t you say that you wanted to tag along the next time I went to the Immortal Abode? Look how well this young master treats you! Just follow me, and you’ll get to broaden your horizons.”

His invitation frightened the living daylights out of Cheng Shouping. “Young master, please spare me! I still want to live a little longer!”

Just the idea of facing Madam’s fury left him beyond terrified, let alone the terrible beating he would suffer if the second miss learned of this. He didn’t dare take his chances.

The young master might get away with a light scolding on account of his status, but I’m just a humble servant! I’ll definitely get the shit beaten out of me!

When he saw that Cheng Shouping wouldn’t go no matter what, Zu An didn’t waste any further effort on him. He decided to head out on his own.

As he was about to leave, Jiao Shanhe and the other two guards who were assigned to protect him rushed over. When they learned that he was headed to the Immortal Abode, all three of them advised against it.

“Young master, this really is too dangerous!”

“Indeed! Chen Xuan is still lurking in the shadows and waiting to kill you! The only reason he hasn’t attacked again is because he can’t do anything to you in the academy or in the Chu Estate, and there were guards escorting you on the way back today. We might be able to deal with an ordinary attacker, but Chen Xuan is at the sixth rank! He’s also a slippery character. I fear that we won’t be able to protect the young master if you go out now!”

Zu An ignored his guards’ earnest and well-meaning advice. “Don’t worry. If it comes to that, I’ll protect you guys.”

With that, he strutted out.

Jiao Shanhe, Feng Daniu and Zhou Lujun stared blankly after his departing silhouette.

The young master has been completely bewitched by beauty! He is actually willing to take such huge risks to see that Qiu Honglei!

Lust really does lead to bitter consequences!

His Keyboard system came alive with notifications about incoming Rage points. Zu An didn’t bother to explain himself.

He’d given some thought to the issue of Chen Xuan, and had a plan in mind to settle things once and for all. After all, he wasn’t willing to spend the rest of his life running scared. What he needed to do now was to bait him out.

He was heading to the Immortal Abode precisely because he wanted to give Chen Xuan an opportunity to assassinate him.

## **Chapter 269 - Who the Hell Said Mooched Food Doesn't Taste Good?**

Jiao Shanhe and the other two guards suggested that Zu An travel in a carriage today. There was no way anyone could recognize him if Zu An was inside an enclosed carriage. This would add another layer of protection.

Zu An rejected this suggestion. If they did this, his line of sight would be blocked, and he wouldn't be able to notice danger ahead of time.

This was a matter of life and death! He didn't want to hand his enemy the initiative.

Zu An rode proudly along the street as if announcing his presence to the entire world. His three guards were left completely speechless. However, since things had already turned out this way, they could only grit their teeth and pray that nothing happened.

A distance away, a peddler secretly released a pigeon into the sky.

A short while later, the same pigeon landed in a hidden courtyard, and a red-haired man removed a small slip of paper from its leg. He frowned when he read the coded message. "He left so quickly, and with just three guards?"

One of his subordinates beside him said excitedly, "This kid really has a death wish! This is a great opportunity! Let's just get rid of him now and avenge the second boss!"

Chen Xuan immediately roared back at him, "Remember what I've taught you! Never underestimate your enemy—only then can you live a long life! This bastard Zu An took down Plum Blossom Sect and even ended your second boss' life! Do you really think he's some idiot?"

That subordinate shook his head. "I don't think so."

"That's more like it." Chen Xuan snorted. "In my opinion, this is surely a trap to draw me out."

"But what if it isn't? It'll be such a huge waste to let this chance go..." the subordinate muttered.

Chen Xuan pondered a moment. "I'll take a look around and make a move if there's an opportunity. The rest of you, stay here. There are people looking for us everywhere in the city. It'll only be more dangerous if all of you come along."

"You have to be careful boss!" The others all clasped their fists and voiced their acknowledgement.

Chen Xuan grunted in approval, and slipped out of the residence secretly. Only after noticing that there was no one around did he remove the thin mask on his face.

With the mask removed, his face began to change slowly, his features becoming ordinary, and plain enough that he wouldn't draw any attention in a crowd.

Even his head of fiery hair turned black, which was the most commonly-seen color.

This was the Blackwind Stockade's Chen Xuan, someone who had run rampant for so many years. He had done so many outrageous things, yet no one could ever catch him. How could someone like him be hot-headed and impulsive?

His appearance in the Immortal Abode—with a head of bright red hair and an arrogant and aggressive demeanor—was an image he had deliberately created. He wanted everyone to associate him with red hair.

How could someone like Chen Xuan be dumb enough to show his true appearance to others?

Not even the members of the Blackwind Stockade knew that he always wore a mask.

He was already well-acquainted with betrayal in all its various forms, having walked the thin line between life and death since his youth. There was no way he would reveal his trump cards to anyone else.

Chen Xuan took off, heading straight in Zu An's direction. With his natural speed, he was able to quickly catch up.

He observed Zu An for a while in secret, but didn't notice any sort of ambush nearby.

An evil grin appeared on his face. Just as he was about to make a move, he suddenly noticed Zu An's excessively carefree expression. The brat looked like he was marching in a parade or something, as if he was scared others wouldn't notice him.

He hesitated. What the hell?

He took a few moments to reconsider. A thought suddenly struck him. He'd figured out what was going on!

Against someone like him, a normal ambush wouldn't work. There had to be another top-level expert hiding nearby. It might very well be Chu Zhongtian, or even the academy's Jiang Luofu.

With the considerable skills that those two possessed, he obviously had no way of locating them.

Holy shit! I almost fell for his trap!

Chen Xuan mopped away the cold sweat pouring from his forehead. He stared fiercely at Zu An, who was still a distance away.

This little bastard really is treacherous!

You have successfully trolled Chen Xuan for 666 Rage points!

Zu An felt a chill run through him when he saw the Rage points come in. He put up his guard immediately, and secretly examined his surroundings, trying to find out where Chen Xuan was.

There was no way for him to know that Chen Xuan's current appearance wasn't that of the red-haired man he had in his mind.

Even though he was discreet with his movements, they didn't escape the detection of an experienced cultivator like Chen Xuan.

A wave of shock ran through Chen Xuan's mind as he immediately picked up on Zu An's unusual behavior.

With his cultivation level, there shouldn't be any way for this kid to have noticed me!

Did that hidden expert notice him?

He began to panic. After all, he was appearing as his real self right now! It would certainly spell trouble if he were to be seen.

However, he was still a veteran in this field. Maintaining a casual air, he continued his act as an ordinary pedestrian and left the street.

He continued walking for a few more blocks, making sure that no one was following him. Satisfied that he had evaded any pursuit, he finally sighed in relief. "I have to be more careful in the future. That was too close..."

Meanwhile, Zu An scoured his surroundings thoroughly, But couldn't even find a single trace of Chen Xuan. He didn't receive any more Rage points from him either.

He finally came to the conclusion that Chen Xuan had probably slipped away.

Did I make it too obvious?

Zu An reviewed his actions. From the intelligence he'd gathered on this fellow, Chen Xuan was craftier than a fox, and more cautious than a mouse. It might not be that easy to bait someone like that into a trap.

Without being aware of it, they had already arrived at the Immortal Abode. Upon seeing the personal invitation card from Qiu Honglei, a servant girl quickly brought him to Immortal Abode's rear courtyard.

After the disturbance the last time, Qiu Honglei didn't bother with anything as extravagant as a river boat this time. She received him in her room instead.

Zu An planted himself unceremoniously at the table and began wolfing down the food in front of him. Qiu Honglei was stunned. "Not many men think of food when they come to this sort of establishment. You might be the first."

"I can't help it, I'm starving. My stomach was rumbling the whole way just thinking about all the good food here," Zu An said as he shoveled more food into his mouth.

Qiu Honglei handed him a cup of tea. She frowned disdainfully at his rather sloppy table manners, but quickly covered it with a slight smile. "Slow down, no one is trying to steal your food."

Her expression was so alluring, it would have been enough to suck the soul right out of one's body. It was a pity that Zu An was completely preoccupied with his food, and paid scant attention to the beautiful scenery in front of him.

"By the way, how are those buddies of mine doing?" Zu An asked, drinking the tea she gave him.

Qiu Honglei's smile broadened. "Aren't you the loyal one? Don't worry, they will be suitably entertained, to ensure that their trip wasn't made in vain."

Zu An was a little stunned at her ambiguous statement. He just wanted to get those guys a bite to eat as well. Why did he suddenly feel like he'd signed up for some huge package?

After all, with Qiu Honglei's status, how could her arrangements be poor?

Those fellas really are getting a good deal here! That idiot Cheng Shouping has no idea what he's missing out on.

Hold on... I'd better not be the one footing the bill for their expenses...

Damn it, I've been scammed. I only came here for free food. I didn't get anything special for myself, while those guys are having the time of their lives. Yet I'm the one who has to pay?

He began to curse himself for his stupidity. Something seemed to spark Qiu Honglei's curiosity. "Does the glorious Chu clan not even provide you with a meal?"

"It's complicated..." Zu An gave her a rough summary of what went on between him and Qin Wanru, leaving out some confidential details.

Qiu Honglei's indignance was plain to see. "How can the Chu clan treat someone with young master's character and competence so poorly?! Honglei feels injustice in young master's place."

Zu An chuckled. "Can I interpret this as you secretly inciting disharmony between the Chu clan and me?"

Qiu Honglei sniffed in displeasure. "I only said this because I treat young master as a friend! Who would dare speak poorly of Brightmoon Duke's clan otherwise?" she whined playfully.

"All right, it's my bad for doubting your noble character." Zu An couldn't help but sigh inwardly. Everyone always says that brothel girls know exactly what to say to make you feel better. It seems like I've gotten firsthand experience today.

Even though it was clear to him that this girl was still putting on a show, it still felt amazing.

Qiu Honglei smiled. "This humble one doesn't have a noble character. I am just an ordinary girl. I am already truly thankful that young master doesn't find my words too short-sighted."

"Lady Qiu must be joking. How is this considered short-sighted? Then what do we call the countless men from Brightmoon City who prostrate themselves in front of you?" Zu An replied with a smile.

"It doesn't matter how many other men prostrate themselves before me. If I cannot move the young master's heart, then all of that is completely meaningless." Qiu Honglei's large and beautiful eyes stared into his own, two beautiful, swirling pools filled with an enchanting radiance.

Zu An inwardly praised her skills. This woman really was a seductive witch, the sort that dragged others down straight to hell.

Qiu Honglei clearly didn't want to take things too far. She quickly softened her gaze and said with a gentle voice, "By the way, Is it true that young master was attacked by Chen Xuan in the morning?"

"News really reaches lady Qiu quickly," Zu An said in surprise.



"I too was almost harmed by Chen Xuan last night, so I paid special attention to any information on him. Young master, please wait a moment." Qiu Honglei suddenly got up and hurried into the inner hall. She came back soon after, and handed him a set of jade strips. "Please accept this. It might be of some help to the young master."

Zu An was stunned. He noticed some words on the glossy surface: 'Mirror Mirage'.

With a flicker of light, the words faded into the jade strips again.

"What are these?" Zu An asked curiously.

Qiu Honglei replied, "The cultivation method 'Mirror Mirage' is recorded in these strips. This secret art allows one to hide their cultivation, and can also mask your aura. Your enemies won't be able to sense these things about you.

"Chen Xuan is currently hiding in the darkness, waiting for an opportunity to assassinate young master. After much thought, Honglei decided that a movement technique would be unhelpful, as it would be too hard to learn quickly. That's why I found this secret technique. This might grant young master a higher chance of survival against Chen Xuan's attacks."

Zu An was awestruck. Shang Liuyu had gifted him a jade pendant, Chu Chuyan had given him 'Snowflake Sword', and now he had obtained a secret art of camouflage from Qiu Honglei...

Who the hell ever said mooched food doesn't taste good?

## **Chapter 270: A Beautiful Woman's Deep Affection**

Who else has reached my level of awesomeness as a man?!

It's not that I want to criticize all of the men I've met so far, but all of you are trash!

If Zu An had a tail, it would be pointing straight at the ceiling right about now.

However, he did find things a little strange. For better or for worse, Shang Liuyu was already a close friend of his. After the interactions that they had, it wouldn't be a stretch to say that even their souls had grown closer together. There was even less of a need to talk about Chu Chuyan—she was his wife, after all. The two of them had gone through a life-or-death ordeal together, and had even engaged in the most intimate exchange...

It wasn't strange for them to give him such items at all.

But this Qiu Honglei, on the other hand...

The two of them had clearly tried to deceive each other right from the very start, both of them scheming endlessly in hopes that the other would fall into their trap first.

Their interactions seemed full of joy and affection, but Zu An knew just how much of it was merely an empty show.

Right now, however, he had no idea what in the world this lass was trying to do.

He didn't take it in a hurry. Instead, he looked calmly into Qiu Honglei's beautiful eyes. "This thing is way too precious. Why would the lady give me something like this?"

"Young master's words truly leave me broken hearted!" Qiu Honglei's expression was full of sorrow. "My heart already belongs to the young master! I don't want the lover I have chosen to face an early death... I'm still waiting patiently for the day young master takes me away from the Immortal Abode..."

Zu An pressed his lips together tightly.

His rational mind told him not to believe a single word coming out of this woman's mouth. However, there was no way his heart could be unaffected by a show of such deep affection!

He took a deep breath, doing his best to settle his chaotic thoughts. He finally said with a chuckle, "Thanks a bunch, then! I'll come to claim my lady when I get a chance!"

What do I have to be scared of? I'm a man, after all! Besides, it's not like I have anything to lose anyway.

Even if there is some trick behind this, if worse comes to worst, I'll just offer my body or something as compensation.

Qiu Honglei smiled. "Young master better not turn your back on me."

The tenderness in her tone was enough to melt even the most well-tempered steel. Zu An immediately warned himself to stay calm. "Lady Qiu is so beautiful, I don't think there's any man in the world who could turn their back on you."

Qiu Honglei gently shook her head, her expression slightly melancholy.

"How can a lasting relationship be built on looks alone? Honglei has always been seeking someone who is truly caring. I hope the young master doesn't disappoint me."

Damn it, damn it I can't take it anymore! This woman is too bloody good! "Ahem, ahem... since this Mirror Mirage can hide one's cultivation and aura, I wonder if the lady's cultivation is extremely high? Was this the skill you used to deceive the eyes of everyone in Brightmoon City?"

Qiu Honglei smiled. "The young master's imagination is truly rich. All types of guests come to Immortal Abode, and Honglei only has a small reputation. Many of them bring all sorts of precious gifts, hoping to see me smile. How could I refuse them? That's why I've ended up collecting so many secret manuals. If the young master has a need, you can see if there is anything else that catches your eye."

Zu An felt as if he was being tossed about in a storm. There are always many sims around, regardless of what world you're in... They have no idea their precious things are being used to curry favor with another man!

Hm? But why does this make me feel so good?

Zu An smiled. "Gorgeous lady, your affection for me is too strong, and I really don't know how to repay you. How about I devote my body entirely to you?" With that, he threw himself at her.

Qiu Honglei tapped her feet lightly. Her dress fluttered about, as she perfectly escaped his grasping hands. "Ah Zu, you've already made me a promise! Only after you take me in will I... will I... serve you."

Her words were punctuated with a natural shyness, truly taking her performance to the next level.

“Honglei, it seems like I’ve been too rude to you.” Zu An laughed heartily, but his mind was incredibly clear. It seems like this woman really is putting on an act.

His actions had looked willful, but he had actually paid special note to the angle and timing of his approach. There shouldn’t have been any way for this lass to escape, yet she had done so effortlessly. As expected, her cultivation was high.

It even seems to be much higher than mine.

Zu An grew depressed at that thought. Why are all the girls I run into so terribly strong?

Can’t I run into some that are weaker, to boost my confidence a little?

That brat Huanzhao immediately appeared in his mind. At least there’s lil’ Huanzhao to keep me company.

“Ah Zu~” Qiu Honglei was elated that Zu An had changed the way he addressed her, and she called out to him intimately in response.

Zu An was still trying to figure out her objective, but it somehow kept eluding him. He let the matter rest. At least it doesn’t seem like she wanted to harm him.

In that case, he would try to make use of her as much as he could.

He thought for a moment, then asked, “Honglei, your Immortal Abode has an excellent information network, right?”

“Men from all over the world love to frequent this place. You know how men are—once they’ve had a little to drink, they would easily run their mouths in front of women. That is how our Immortal Abode gets to know about many things.” Qiu Honglei favored him with a sweet smile. “I wonder what it is that Ah Zu wants to know?” she asked.

“Do you know about the situation surrounding the illicit salt trade in Brightmoon City?” Zu An’s mind came to rest on the issue that was troubling Chu Chuyan deeply. He couldn’t help but ask about this.

“The illicit salt trade?” Qiu Honglei’s heart skipped a beat. “Ah Zu is worried about the Chu clan’s current situation?”

“Honglei is exceptionally intelligent, as expected,” Zu An said with a bitter smile. “The Chu clan is slightly troubled by the rampant trade in illicit salt, and is struggling to find a suitable way to deal with this issue.”

He wanted to test the waters using the Chu clan’s current situation, in order to see which side Qiu Honglei was on.

Qiu Honglei frowned. “Brightmoon City’s illicit salt trade has indeed begun to spread unchecked, mostly because the profits from it are too great to ignore. All those who engage in the illicit salt business are known criminals. In order to find the strength to stand against the authorities, they’ve come together to form their respective underworld gangs.”

"Gangs?" Zu An was stunned.

"Indeed." Qiu Honglei gathered her thoughts before continuing. "From what I know, the largest gang in the area is the Whale Gang, and they have amassed a fortune precisely through this illicit salt trade. Their leader has always been a mystery. There are many different speculations over his true identity, without a single definitive conclusion."

"The Whale Gang..." Zu An wore a pensive expression. "Is there any other information?"

Qiu Honglei shook her head. "You know full well what my current status is. A person like me rarely comes into contact with such people. I've never paid special attention to this affair either, so I don't know too much," she said apologetically. "But, since you want to know so badly, I can help you look into it over the next few days. I might be able to gather some information."

"You have my thanks, Honglei!" Zu An was overjoyed. The Chu clan was still considered part of the government, after all, so it would be hard for their investigations to produce anything. However, the Immortal Abode straddled the line between the legal and illegal. It would surely be much quicker for him to discover the information he needed in such a place. Moreover, Qiu Honglei's status would help to move things along as well.

"Why is there a need for thanks between us?" Qiu Honglei said with a smile.

...

Zu An chatted with her a while longer. Eventually, the sky grew dark, and he got up to bid her farewell.

Qiu Honglei didn't pressure him to stay. She was worried that he might do something that crossed the line if he stayed over. She saw him out.

When she returned to her room, Gu Yueyi was already waiting by the doorway.

His eyes were still completely bewitched by her appearance, but he was smart enough to show more restraint, especially after what had happened the last time. He immediately lowered his head and asked, "Junior sister, why do you treat that fellow so well? You've even passed on your clan's special skill to him!"

Qiu Honglei leisurely sat down on a chair. "I hand-picked him personally, after all. How can I allow him to be killed by Chen Xuan just like that?"

Gu Yueyi raised his head to sneak in a peek. Her dress rustled as she sat down, and he hoped that something would be revealed. Unfortunately, he saw nothing.

Screw that absolute area!

Worried that she might notice his actions, he hurriedly asked, "Do you really want to help him deal with the illicit salt traders? Those fellas are all ruthless and cold-blooded criminals!"

"Are we any different?" Qiu Honglei sneered. She folded her legs in an extremely natural manner. "I was worried about how to get myself involved, but it seems a good opportunity has presented itself. Zu An's standing in the Chu clan is still too low right now, and he won't be beneficial for our future plans."

“If we use this chance to help him stamp out this illicit salt trade that is troubling the Chu clan, it should allow him to slowly climb up the clan’s ranks. I can even use this opportunity to get closer to him. He’ll come to realize that he would definitely need our help if he wants to have some say in the Chu clan.”

Gu Yueyi stared at her legs and swallowed. “It seems junior sister has thought far ahead after all!”

Qiu Honglei snickered. She reached out her hand and clenched it into a fist. “Even though that fellow is somewhat different from other men, he still won’t escape my grasp.”

...

“Achoo!”

On his way back to the Chu Estate, Zu An suddenly sneezed. “I wonder which beauty is thinking of me.”

Jiao Shao and the other two guards exchanged glances. They idly wondered how this fellow had trained himself to develop such thick skin.

However, the three of them had had a wonderful time in the Immortal Abode, and they knew that it had all been because of Zu An. As such, their eyes carried a little more admiration for him than usual.

Zu An paid them no attention. He was constantly scanning his surroundings, but failed to find any trace of Chen Xuan.

I didn’t get any Rage points, either. He’s probably not here.

With that, Zu An began to flip through the jade strips he’d received from Qiu Honglei.

He channeled a wave of vital energy into one of the jade strips, and a streak of light flickered across the surface. He sensed a series of words entering his mindscape.

“The body is the tree of wisdom, within the heart rests a mirror. Wipe it frequently, do not let it grow dusty...”

Upon careful study, he discovered that the principles of this secret art bore a similarity to the Buddhist philosophy of his previous world—they both pursued a state of ‘nothingness’.

If one wanted to completely conceal their cultivation and auras, they had to become ‘nothing’ first.

The further he comprehended ‘nothingness’, the greater the effects of concealment. This would enable him to hide his cultivation from even higher level experts.

He continued to ponder over the principles of this secret art on the journey back. Just as they were about to reach Chu estate, Jiao Shan, Feng Daniu, and Zhou Lujun all turned around suddenly, and let out identical cries of surprise.

“What’s wrong?” Zu An asked.

“Nothing. It could be that our perception failed us. Young master seemed to have suddenly disappeared just now.” Zhou Lujun replied. The other two nodded in agreement.

Despite what they had sensed, Zu An was clearly still there! Could it be that they had enjoyed themselves a little too much in the Immortal Abode, and their minds had become weak?

It seems like we really need to show a bit more restraint in the future.

Shame burned within the hearts of all three guards.

In contrast, Zu An was delighted. He was a genius with transcendent talent after all! He had already mastered this secret art so quickly!

When he reached the estate, Zu An returned to his room first, then secretly made his way to Chu Chuyan's residence.

It was time for his dear wife's treatment again.

Peering into the pitch-black interior, Zu An suddenly felt a wave of hesitation wash over him. Qin Wanru won't be inside again tonight, will she?