

## Immortal 341

### Chapter 341: Another Wolf

Still drowsy, Zu An subconsciously reached out a hand to hug her. "You're finally back, honey? Come and get some sleep."

Did Chu Chuyan change her perfume? She always wore an elegant orchid fragrance—why did he smell a sweet rose fragrance?

"Ahem, ahem..." There came the sound of a light, displeased cough.

Zu An turned around. Qin Wanru and Chu Chuyan were standing beside the bed.

Both of them had clearly not slept a wink. Their eyes were slightly bloodshot, and they were both slightly paler than usual.

However, gorgeous women would always be gorgeous women. If anything, their current appearance actually lent them a different sort of appeal.

One was voluptuous and mature, while the other was reserved yet exquisite. The pair of them formed a beautiful sight that seemed to brighten the entire room.

Qin Wanru's brow furrowed when she saw him staring at them.

Zu An shivered at her unpleasant expression. He sat up at once and said, "I didn't expect mother-in-law to be here as well!"

He didn't understand why Qin Wanru would come to her daughter's room so early in the morning. He needed to find a way to tactfully tell her not to intrude into their private love nest.

Sensing his confusion, Chu Chuyan said, "We chatted all night. We didn't find you in your room when we went looking for you in the morning, so we assumed that you had already gone to the academy. But when we came here to retrieve some things, you were... here."

Her face slowly turned red as she said this. Even though the two of them were husband and wife, many people believed that their marriage was in name only.

The two of them had tried their best to hide their real relationship from everyone else, yet her mom had now seen him fast asleep in her own bed. There was no way they could use the excuse that they were only sleeping together to treat her illness anymore.

Qin Wanru was also shocked. Even though she knew that the two of them had consummated their marriage as husband and wife, she was still under the impression that the two of them only slept together because of Chu Chuyan's illness. However, judging from how Zu An now seemed to have free rein over this room, the two of them had definitely bonded many more times.

Sigh, my daughter has grown up.

Zu An had the decency to be embarrassed. "What did you need me for?"

Chu Chuyan was just about to speak when her eyes froze and her cheeks burned up. "Just put on your clothes already! We'll wait for you outside."

The two of them had spent every night together recently, so she had obviously come to know her husband's habits. This guy loved sleeping naked, and she did not want her mother seeing what was underneath the covers.

Qin Wanru had already spied the huge bulge in the middle of the blanket. As an experienced woman, how could she not know what this signified?

Even Qin Wanru's heart began to pound when she saw the exaggerated size of it. She turned around stiffly, pretending as though she hadn't seen anything.

Suddenly, it seemed clear to her why her aloof and prideful daughter had been done in by this man.

This thought left a sour taste in her mouth. Her daughter, who was outstanding in every aspect, had been forced into submission by such a simple and crude method. It was truly loathsome,

However, once her initial anger had passed, she began to accept her daughter's point of view. After all, her experience had taught her that the relationship between a man and woman wasn't actually that complicated. In the end, physical attraction was still the most important factor.

Zu An got dressed and walked out soon after. Not a hint of embarrassment showed on his face.

Qin Wanru sighed. This fellow's skin really is thick!

Instead, it was Chu Chuyan who seemed embarrassed. "Ah Zu, please accompany me for a while. We need to ask some people for help."

Qin Wanru spoke as well. "Indeed. There is no way we can gather sixteen million taels of silver on our own, so we need to borrow some money from others. Our Chu clan has been kind to others over the years, and we should be able to call in some favors. You and Chuyan have a few places to visit, while I seek out some of my friends."

In his heart, Zu An scoffed. He would consider it a win if no one kicked them while they were down. However, he kept this to himself, afraid that his words would provoke her. Instead, all he said was, "Understood!"

As the two of them set out, Zu An asked, "Where to?"

"The academy!" Chu Chuyan looked towards the distant academy building.

"The academy?" Zu An was shocked. How could they still be heading to school in such a situation?

"We've made considerable donations to the academy over the years," Chu Chuyan explained. "The Chu clan has always maintained a cordial relationship with the academy and the Chu clan, which makes it the best place to start."

Zu An felt enlightened. Just as he was about to say something, a happy voice chimed from beside him. "Sis, are you coming along with us to school?"

Chu Huanzhao skipped her way over and grabbed Chu Chuyan's hand.

“Yes, we are going to the academy.” Chu Chuyan dotingly stroked her younger sister’s head.

“It’s been so long since I’ve gone to school with sis!” Chu Huanzhao said, her voice tinged with nostalgia.

Chu Chuyan’s tone was apologetic. “I’ve been so busy these few years that I haven’t had time to keep you company.”

Chu Huanzhao shook her head. “You are taking care of important matters! How can I have the nerve to bother you?”

Chu Chuyan was surprised. She rubbed her head and said, “Our Huanzhao is all grown up now.”

Chu Huanzhao pouted. “Why do you and brother-in-law love touching other people’s heads? I spend a lot of time on my hair in the morning you know?”

Chu Chuyan subconsciously glanced at Zu An. Did this fella always rub her sister’s head too?

Zu An felt guilty. “Come on, don’t misunderstand what she’s saying. I only rub her head like this.”

He reached over and ruffled his hand through Chu Huanzhao’s hair thoroughly, making it look like a bird’s nest.

Chu Huanzhao looked like she was about to explode.

“Stinky! Brother! In! Law!”

You have successfully trolled Chu Huanzhao for 333 Rage points!

Chu Huanzhao was really angry this time. She chased after Zu An and kept hitting him.

Chu Chuyan smiled when she saw the two of them playing around. It wasn’t a bad thing for the two of them to be so close. Their clan sorely needed more of this kind of warmth.

However, her heart grew cold when she thought of the attitude of her second and third uncles.

Chu Huanzhao was still a young girl at heart. After chasing him around for a bit, her anger quickly disappeared. She ran back to grab her big sister’s arm.

“Stop right there! That’s my wife you’re touching. Don’t try to steal her from me!” Zu An shoved his way in between them and put a hand around each of their shoulders.

“You’re so stingy!” Chu Huanzhao grunted disdainfully. However, she still ended up leaning against him.

Chu Chuyan frowned slightly. “Please put your arm down, and conduct yourself properly in public.”

Zu An’s voice was indignant. “What’s so improper about hugging my own wife in public?”

Chu Chuyan’s face became red, but offered no rebuttal in the end.

From their recent interactions, she had grown to appreciate this man’s many strengths.

The eyes of Cheng Shouping, Jiao Shan, and their other followers grew wide. They had fully expected the first miss to erupt into anger when Zu An brazenly hugged both sisters. Who knew she would silently allow it?

Chen Shouping giggled as he shrugged his shoulders towards the others. He said quietly, "It seems like we don't have to wait much longer. Pay up, pay up."

It seemed that some of them had bet privately about whether Zu An would end up marrying the second miss as well. Cheng Shouping was clearly a staunch member of the 'two sisters' faction.

Even though Jiao Shan and the others saw how close the second miss and the young master were, none of them believed that it would turn out like what Cheng Shouping predicted. After all, Zu An was of a certain background, and the Chu clan had its own reputation.

Both factions were unwilling to back down, and that was how this bet came about.

Cheng Shouping insisted that the second miss would definitely be the young master's as well. Jiao Shan and the others were unconvinced, so they all bet against it.

There was no way Cheng Shouping could keep from acting smug when he saw the scene currently playing out in front of them.

Jiao Shan and the others still stubbornly refused to acknowledge defeat. "Hmph, they haven't gotten married yet. How can we call the results right now?"

"Are you trying to back out?" Cheng Shouping was upset.

Jiao Shan defended himself. "Do I, Jiao Shan, look like someone who doesn't acknowledge his debts? This here only proves that they are on good terms with each other. It doesn't offer conclusive proof."

The other members of their escort spoke up one after another. Some were on Cheng Shouping's side, and they offered their opinions as well.

Chu Chuyan suddenly turned around. "What are you all talking about?"

"Absolutely nothing at all!" All of them jumped in fright and shut their mouths.

The first miss handled most of the Chu clan's affairs in recent years. She was well-respected and revered within the clan.

Cheng Shouping curled his lips. These people actually dared to underestimate the young master! Once they had lost their bet, their eyes would finally be opened.

Forgetting about the second miss for a moment, the Chu clan had a third miss as well. There was no way she would escape the young master's clutches either!

...

Meanwhile, Qin Wanru had arrived at the nearby Li clan estate.

Even though the Li clan wasn't considered one of the great clans, they were still a large clan in Brightmoon City.

The Chu clan maintained good relations with the Li clan, and Chu Zhongtian had always shown favor to the Li clan.

This was why the Li clan was Qin Wanru's first stop.

Li Zhenjian, the master of the Li clan, received Qin Wanru in his study. He expressed his sympathies towards the Chu clan's situation.

Sensing the friendly atmosphere, Qin Wanru posed her request.

Li Zhenjian walked over to Qin Wanru with a smile. "Brother Chu and Madam have both shown great consideration for me all these years. How can I ignore this situation?"

His hand moved sneakily to Qin Wanru's generous bottom, trying to cop a feel.

## **Chapter 342: Doubt**

Desire filled Li Zhenjian's eyes. He had been captivated by this beauty for far too long! However, he clearly understood their difference in status, and he never dared to aim at something so clearly out of his league.

The only thing he could do was to have a concubine wear the same clothes as Qin Wanru, and do up her hair in a similar way. He had even made her wear a similar fragrance at night.

With that, he could satisfy whatever desire he had while imagining that she was Qin Wanru.

Unfortunately, after every such encounter, he would be reminded of the stupidity of it all. After all, these concubines were no match for Qin Wanru herself.

Perhaps heaven itself had finally felt pity for him, and presented him with such an opportunity!

The Chu clan was mired in a terrible scandal, and even Chu Zhongtian was now locked behind bars. His goddess had come to visit him on her own. What else could this be but a blessing from heaven?

The unapproachable woman with such magnificent pedigree was now finally within reach.

Just as his palm was about to cup her well-rounded bottom, pain shot through his arm. His hand had been grabbed by the other party.

Qin Wanru gave him a cold look. "What is the meaning of this, Clan Master Li?"

Li Zhenjian smiled in embarrassment. "I'm obviously trying to help the madam."

"Is this how you offer your help?" Qin Wanru said coldly.

Li Zhenjian lost his smile. "If Madam grants me what I desire, then I will surely grant Madam what you desire."

"Shameless!" Qin Wanru was so angry that her entire body trembled. She had never expected that this man, whom she had respected for so long, would be so small-minded and despicable.

She slapped his face across the face.

She couldn't be bothered to waste any more breath on this shameless man, and stormed off in anger.

Li Zhenjian rubbed his own cheek, then brought his fingers to his nose, and sighed. "It smells so good..."

An advisor walked out from the back room. “Master, the Chu clan is still a dukedom after all. It might not be a great idea to offend Madam Chu,” he said, his voice tinged with worry.

Li Zhenjian gave a dismissive snort. “What dukedom? They’re already a relic of the past. The royal court is dead set on dealing with the Chu clan, and even Governor Sang is involved. What can the Chu clan possibly do?”

The advisor hesitated a little. “But what if they actually manage to...” he said haltingly.

“How many ‘what if’s’ can there be?” Li Zhenjian waved a hand. “Do you really think I’m just some idiotic lecher? How was I supposed to refuse Qin Wanru if I hadn’t resorted to this? Now, we can use this chance to sever ties with the Chu clan and announce to everyone that we are no longer allies with the Chu clan. Heaven forbid we end up caught up in this disaster of theirs as well!”

“The master is wise and brilliant after all!” The advisor was full of praise on the outside, but his heart was full of disdain. Your words sound so dignified—but do you really think that I didn’t see how you were behaving earlier?

...

Elsewhere, Zu An’s group finally arrived at Brightmoon Academy, and Chu Huanzhao went off to class.

Zu An and Chu Chuyan sought out Jiang Luofu.

Jiang Luofu straightened after hearing what Chu Chuyan had to say.

After taking a moment to herself, Jiang Luofu said, “First of all, let me express my sincerest condolences for Brightmoon Duke. However, I believe the Chu clan has indeed violated the law this time. The academy has never interfered in governmental affairs, so I fear that we cannot render our aid in this situation.”

Chu Chuyan had fully expected something like this to happen. Should Brightmoon Academy offer their assistance, it would be the same as openly defying the imperial household.

However, she had hoped that the academy would leverage its independence and overlook this issue.

Coupled with their close relationship with the Chu clan, it was still a possibility that they could render some assistance.

Unfortunately, the end result was disappointing.

“In that case, I apologize for disturbing the principal.” Chu Chuyan forced a smile. Not even the academy—that they were on good terms with—was willing to help. Their other options were most likely going to fall through as well.

Zu An shook his head. Chu Chuyan was truly remarkable in all aspects, but she had always been too outstanding ever since she’d been a child. This clearly made her care too much about her reputation.

With the situation that they were in, there was no place for etiquette.

He pulled her back and stepped in front of Jiang Luofu. “Gorgeous principal, you’re making a mistake.”

“Ah Zu!” Chu Chuyan tugged at his arm. Principal Jiang was strong, and she had tremendous status in Brightmoon City. Even though she wasn’t willing to help them, neither would they act against the Chu clan. Things would go terribly wrong if they ended up provoking her.

Zu An patted her hand to tell her not to worry.

“And what is this mistake?” Jiang Luofu asked indifferently from her chair.

Zu An took a step forward. Suddenly, his eyes widened. Jiang Luofu was wearing a pair of reflective, nude-colored stockings today, which made her alluring legs give off an intoxicating radiance. Matched with her decorative glasses and her well-ironed clothes...

She really was a fatally seductive beauty!

He hurriedly calmed his emotions—which had been thrown into disarray—and said in a serious voice, “From what I know, Brightmoon Duke has always treated Principal Jiang quite well. Moreover, the Chu clan has made great donations to the academy, in terms of both funding and resources. Yet now that the Chu clan is now experiencing difficulties, Principal Jiang is content to just watch from the sidelines. How could this be?”

“I haven’t spent much time in Brightmoon Academy, but I know that the academy holds the virtues of repaying kindness and returning favors in high regard. Won’t your actions tarnish the dignity of the academy? How could the academy have the gall to continue preaching such morals to its students in the future?”

“Ah Zu...” Chu Chuyan’s heart had climbed all the way up into her throat. She hadn’t expected his words to be so harsh. It was too late to stop Zu An now, even if she wanted to.

Jiang Luofu narrowed her eyes and stood up. Her tall and dignified figure was more than a match for Zu An’s bluster, and her aura surged powerfully. “Very good! It’s been a long time since anyone has dared to speak to me in such a way!”

She stalked towards him as she spoke. The pressure she exerted was so great, even Chu Chuyan subconsciously took a step back.

Zu An swallowed with difficulty. He was the one who bore the brunt of the pressure, but he was simply too stubborn to back down. He didn’t want to appear weak in front of a woman.

He stuck out his chest, standing his ground as if his feet had been nailed to the floor, without budging an inch.

Even though the pressure Jiang Luofu emitted was great, it still couldn’t compare to Mi Li’s.

He’d survived Mi Li’s trial—there was no way he would fall here.

Jiang Luofu fully expected him to back down, but he somehow managed to hold his ground. Because of this, her final step took her right next to him, and their lips almost touched.

Her reactions were quick. With the slightest movement, she drew back from him, creating a gap between them.

For a brief moment, a tinge of red touched her dignified features, although it was unclear whether it was from embarrassment or anger.

Chu Chuyan hurriedly walked up to her. "Principal, Ah Zu didn't intend to disrespect you! Please do not be offended."

Jiang Luofu waved her hand. "It's nothing. I'm not that petty. The two of us are closer than you think."

Chu Chuyan was stunned. Jiang Luofu sounded as if she were talking about an old friend. Just how did Ah Zu establish such a relationship with someone with such a high status?

Zu An also smiled. "The gorgeous principal was behaving so coldly, I thought we had somehow become enemies."

Jiang Luofu glared at him. "I'll settle this with you later."

She turned to Chu Chuyan. "Chuyan, I was planning to render assistance personally, without involving the name of the academy. However, Ah Zu has reminded me of a plausible reason for the academy to get involved.

"However, the academy isn't run by me alone, and I don't have the final say over many matters in the academy. There is a limit as to how much I can help. At most, I can offer you about a million taels of silver."

Chu Chuyan was both surprised and overjoyed. "Thank you principal!"

This figure was already far beyond her expectations.

Jiang Luofu smiled. "I will also pay a visit to Glorious Sun City and seek out Governor Sang. Perhaps there is a way for the punishment to be lightened."

Tears swam in Chu Chuyan's eyes. "I really don't know how to thank you, Principal Jiang!"

Jiang Luofu said, "There's no need to thank me. You should be glad that you have a good husband."

When the two of them had left the office, Chu Chuyan looked at Zu An, her gaze flickering left and right. Her expression grew complicated, and she finally said, "Is there something going on between you and Principal Jiang...?"

### **Chapter 343: Good For Nothing But Losing**

Zu An was stunned. "Do you really think there is something going on between the two of us?" he asked, laughing.

Chu Chuyan was embarrassed. "It doesn't seem likely, but the two of you are much closer than I expected."

"I would love to develop that sort of relationship with her, but I'd die from a single kick of hers," Zu An said regretfully. "I only grew closer to her because of the matters regarding the Plum Blossom Sect. I guess your husband is really just too awesome, though. She recognized my potential from the beginning.



With a single look, she could tell that I was destined for greatness... Wait, honey, why are you leaving? Sigh... why does no one believe me when I speak?"

...

The two of them left the academy and headed to the Wang clan estate.

After exchanging the usual pleasantries, Wang Fu's expression grew troubled. "My niece, I know I should be helping brother Zhongtian out, given this situation. However, you know that our Wang clan is in dire straits as well. I really have no ability to help you!"

Chu Chuyan was full of understanding, "Uncle, of course I know about the troubles afflicting the Wang clan. I'm not looking for that sort of help from you today."

Wang Fu was surprised. "Oh, then why did you come?"

"I need to know how many people in the Wang clan knew about this plan to use the advance salt permits," Chu Chuyan said.

Wang Fu's expression clouded over. "Is niece worried that one of our clan members leaked this secret and caused harm to befall Brightmoon Duke?"

Chu Chuyan replied, "That's not what I meant. I obviously do not suspect uncle. However, the Sang clan has spies everywhere. There is a chance that someone else has unwittingly leaked out this information."

"That's impossible!" Wang Fu said resolutely. "Most of the guards that were escorting the caravan died in the attack. Only I, Yuanlong, the butler, and a few others know about this, and every single one of these others have been with the Wang clan for several decades. They are absolutely trustworthy."

Chu Chuyan smiled when she heard his response. "It seems I've made a mistake, then. By the way, does uncle have any advice for the Chu clan regarding our current situation? Also, is there anyone else in Brightmoon City who we can talk to help ease our efforts to resolve this matter?"

Wang Fu quickly replied, "Of course I know some people! However, now that this situation has gotten so out of hand, I'm not sure if any of them can be of help..."

...

When they left the Wang clan, Zu An said, "You guys said that the idea to use advance salt permits ahead of time was proposed by Wang Fu. Isn't there a chance that he already went to Sang Hong's side? Maybe they are colluding against us together"

Chu Chuyan shook her head. "The Wang and Chu clans have been allies for a few centuries, and our bond runs deep. I do not believe this to be the case, although it's not entirely impossible... However, it's meaningless to continue pursuing this matter. Our top priority is still finding a way to help the Chu clan make it through this crisis."

"You're right," Zu An agreed. "What's next on the agenda?"

"We are going to the Xie clan!" Chu Chuyan said in a serious tone.

Zu An saw the logic in this as well. There were only so few clans with the strength to help the Chu clan out of their current predicament. Both the Yuan and Zheng clans opposed the Chu clan, and so did the Wu clan, from the neighboring commandery. These clans would be of little help, so they were left with the Xie clan.

The reason Chu Chuyan hadn't turned to the Xie clan first was most likely because she feared that King Qi was backing them.

However, they were already at the end of their rope, so they had to give this a shot.

The two of them arrived at the Xie clan estate. The servant at the gate went in to announce them, but came running out a moment later, apologizing profusely. "Young miss Chu, Master has gone out to take care of some matter, and has yet to return."

Chu Chuyan frowned. "Do you know where Master Xie has gone? How long will it take for him to return?"

That servant shook his head. "Please forgive me, miss Chu, this is not something a servant like me would know."

Chu Chuyan looked disappointed. "Thank you for your trouble." With that, she turned away and walked off.

That servant sighed inwardly as he admired her departing figure. First miss Chu was even prettier than the rumors claimed! She was so polite and modest as well. This servant would brag about this short conversation for the rest of his life.

"We're leaving just like that?" Zu An couldn't help but ask.

"What else can we do?" Chu Chuyan sighed. "Whether City Lord Xie has really gone out, or whether he's just ignoring us, it doesn't make a difference. It's clear what his attitude towards us is."

Zu An hesitated a moment, then said, "It's actually not that hard to enter the Xie Estate."

Chu Chuyan was stunned. "You have a way to get in?"

Zu An smiled mysteriously. "Just watch me!"

When that servant saw him walk over, he immediately waved his arms and said, "Our clan's master isn't here!"

This guy doesn't seem that much more handsome than I. How did he ever end up marrying miss Chu?

Zu An tossed him a coin. "I didn't come here to see Master Xie. I came to meet with the first miss of your clan."

From their earlier visit to the academy, he knew that Xie Daoyun hadn't gone to the academy today.

Heirs of influential clans like the Xie clan only attended classes if they felt like it. If they weren't in the mood, or if they had some other matters to take care of, they would just skip class.

That servant's eyes brightened as he weighed the heavy silver coin in his palm. "Okay, I'll notify our first miss of your arrival. However, I can't guarantee that the first miss will meet with you."

Zu An smiled. "I only need you to tell her who I am."

The servant nodded and ran inside. A while later, he re-emerged. "Our clan's miss welcomes the young master."

The servant was in complete disbelief. Their young miss rarely welcomed guests, yet she had immediately allowed Zu An in when he paid a visit. He had never seen the young miss so excited before!

Zu An waved his hand towards Chu Chuyan, beckoning for her to enter with him.

That servant was a bit troubled. "Our clan's young miss didn't say..."

Zu An cut him off before he could finish. "She didn't forbid her from coming in, did she?"

That servant was stunned. "She didn't."

"What's the problem, then? Your clan's first miss and mine share a good relationship, after all." Zu An grabbed Chu Chuyan and walked straight into the Xie Estate.

Now that they had made it inside, it became inappropriate for the members of the Xie clan to chase them away. They were meeting with the young miss, after all.

Chu Chuyan grabbed Zu An's sleeves along the way. "How did you get so close to miss Xie?"

She was well-acquainted with Xie Daoyun's nature, since they were both from Brightmoon City. Even though young miss Xie often participated in various poetry meetings, she rarely received men into the estate.

Zu An smiled. "When a man is handsome, women can't help but treat him better!"

Chu Chuyan glared at him, but held her tongue.

She felt a sense of déjà vu. The same thing had happened at the Zheng clan as well—he had gained entry through the Zheng clan's young miss.

Every single beauty in Brightmoon City seemed to have some kind of relationship with him.

She grew alarmed. "Ah Zu, you are hiding many things from me!"

Zu An shrugged. "I've told you guys plenty of things, but none of you ever believed me."

Chu Chuyan was about to continue pressing him when she saw Xie Daoyun walking over.

The smile on Xie Daoyun's face froze when she saw Chu Chuyan. However, she quickly recovered. "I was wondering what made young master Zu suddenly pay me a visit. It turns out he was merely serving as an intermediary for this beautiful lady."

Zu An clasped his fist apologetically. "We wanted to meet with your esteemed father, but we were turned down. This was the only way we could enter. I hope lady Xie can help us."

Xie Daoyun grunted in acknowledgement. She walked up and held Chu Chuyan's hand. Her voice was gentle and kind. "I have heard about what's happened to Brightmoon Duke as well. Please don't worry too much. He is a respected duke, after all. The governor wouldn't dare go too far."

Chu Chuyan expressed her gratitude. They were both well-known beauties in Brightmoon City and even fellow students, which meant they were quite familiar with each other. They quickly struck up a conversation.

Zu An curled his lips in a sneer. This was the perfect example of a beautifully plastic relationship. They weren't actually close, so why did they have to pretend as though they were?

After they had carried on for a while, Xie Daoyun said with a smile, "How about this? I'll bring you two to see my father. I believe he should be back by now."

She wasn't a fool. There was no way she would blatantly expose her father.

Chu Chuyan was overjoyed. "Thank you so much!"

"It's no problem at all." Xie Daoyun nodded towards her. At the same time, she used this chance to move beside Zu An. "You owe me a song for this," she said quietly.

Zu An had known that this was the prerequisite, and he had no choice but to agree. "Sure!"

He began to ponder over what song he would use.

Even though they had spoken quietly, there was no way they could escape Chu Chuyan's ears.

She seemed completely unfazed on the surface, but it was just a mask concealing the shock she felt inside.

Ah Zu and Xie Daoyun were actually this close?

Qiu Honglei's previous visit had been shocking enough, but the courtesan queen had suddenly gone quiet. It was safe to assume that that girl had ulterior motives for pursuing Zu An, and didn't actually like him.

However, from what she'd seen so far, Principal Jiang and Xie Daoyun both seemed quite close to him! She also knew about his relationship with Ji Xiaoxi, Zheng Dan, and the academy teacher, Miss Shang...

Just what kind of strange power did this guy have?

I did say that I didn't mind it if you looked for other girls... but did you have to grab so many of them?

Xie Yi was sitting leisurely in his study when he received word that his daughter was bringing the two Chu clan members to meet him. His smile froze instantly.

After a moment, he sighed deeply and said, "Daughters are really good for nothing but incurring losses after all!"

He felt that it wasn't the right time to make his move, and that the Chu clan needed to be squeezed a little further first. Now, Xie Daoyun had completely messed up his plans. How could he not be upset?

## **Chapter 344: Fighting Back**

When he saw Chu Chuyan's group arrive, Xie Yi's frown instantly turned into a smile. "Distinguished niece, I have only just returned, and heard that you were looking for me! I was worried that you might have already left."

Zu An shook his head. These fellas were all incredibly crafty. He had clearly been home all this time. He had refused to meet with them earlier, yet he was now pretending as though nothing had happened.

Chu Chuyan was clearly used to such things. Her smile betrayed no hint of discontent. "Chu Chuyan greets Uncle Xie."

"It's not great being your uncle right now," Xie Yi sighed. This girl hadn't addressed him in his official capacity as City Lord, but had addressed him as uncle. She clearly wished to speak with him as a friend of the Chu clan. "I have a rough idea of why you are here. Your Chu clan has really gotten into big trouble this time!"

"You've always been a level-headed girl. Chu Zhongtian clearly wasn't thinking straight. Why did you agree to this as well?"

Chu Chuyan said gloomily, "Many things are easier said than done. The illicit salt business was running rampant. With the state of our expenses, the Chu clan was unable to make ends meet. When the salt permits were stolen, we were left with no choice. Other clans have always done this over the years, and it has become an unwritten custom. We never expected Governor Sang would... enforce things so earnestly."

Many who operated salt businesses had run out of salt permits before. If they had adhered strictly to the rules, the costs of selling salt would have risen much higher, and nobody would have been able to purchase any for consumption.

That was why the clans involved in the trade had tacitly agreed to overlook the use of some advance salt permits.

The salt commissioners were all on good terms with the Chu clan, and all parties had coexisted harmoniously while Chu Zhongtian was head of the clan. Who could have expected Sang Hong to make such a move?

Xie Yi sighed. "Even though it is an unwritten custom, once you oppose the court, you make yourself a potential target."

Chu Chuyan's voice was sullen. "We know that this is a troublesome matter. That is why we need to ask Uncle Xie for your assistance."

Xie Yi smiled bitterly. "You know that I am but an insignificant City Lord. Governor Sang is my immediate superior, and he is acting on the emperor's orders. I can't do much to help, even if I wanted to..."

Chu Chuyan's face darkened, and she became quiet.

Xie Yi continued, "Even though I cannot do anything, there is someone who can."

Chu Chuyan maintained her silence. Xie Yi had a smile on his face. A strange atmosphere began to permeate the room.

Zu An was confused. What kind of game were these two playing at? "Who?"

Xie Yi didn't explain himself. "I believe my niece knows."

Chu Chuyan finally spoke up. "Uncle, you are surely aware of the principles that our Chu clan has always held onto."

Xie Yi gave her a meaningful look. "Sometimes, it really isn't easy to remain neutral. It often comes at a huge price."

Chu Chuyan got up. "I'm sorry for disturbing you today. I hope uncle does not take offense."

Xie Yi rose to his feet immediately and urged her to stay. "Child, why are you in such a hurry to leave?"

"How about this? Since we share such a close relationship, I'll be more direct." Xie Yi paused for a moment to find the right words. "I won't advise you all to pick a side. However, if your clan is willing to hand over a certain item, someone will naturally step forward to help you resolve this matter."

Chu Chuyan's face became overcast. The silence stretched out, before she finally said, "I will carefully consider this later."

Xie Yi's eyes brightened. It was good that she hadn't refused him on the spot. "That's to be expected. It's not a small matter. You can discuss this with the rest of our clan members as well."

When the two of them left the Xie Estate, Zu An couldn't hold back his curiosity any longer. "What the heck was City Lord Xie talking about?"

He had deduced from their conversation that Xie Yi was advising them to side with King Qi. After Chu Chuyan had refused, he proposed something else.

Zu An couldn't figure out what this second thing was at all.

Chu Chuyan hesitated for a while, but decided to reveal the truth to him. "Ah Zu, you aren't an outsider anymore. There are some things that you should know about. What the City Lord was talking about is an account book..."

She explained the whole story behind the account book.

Zu An was furious. "Isn't this Xie Yi profiting from our misfortune?"

He suddenly remembered that Pei Mianman had asked him to help her search for an account book as well. Back then, she had told him that it contained the transactions of the Chu clan's weapons and salt businesses. Now, he knew that she hadn't been telling the truth.

Sigh, this world really is a scary place. On the surface, she looks like Chu Chuyan's confidante, but that thing she's after could bring down the entire clan!

He felt uncomfortable when he thought of this. Even though Pei Mianman acted hypocritically towards the Chu clan, she had always treated him well.

He didn't know what to think anymore.

Chu Chuyan sighed. "We are already strung out like meat on a chopping block. Even if he wants to take advantage of us, what can we do?"

Zu An snapped out of his daze. "Do you really plan to give him the account book?"

"Of course not. I just didn't want to show any overt hostility." Chu Chuyan replied.

Zu An couldn't help but say, "I'm actually quite confused. Why aren't you making use of such a powerful weapon?"

"Make use of it?" Chu Chuyan was stunned. "How could we make use of it?"

Zu An said, "This is basically a nuclear weapon! ... Ahem, don't ask me what a nuclear weapon is. What I'm saying is that the livelihood of so many important officials are within your grasp. You can use this to threaten them!"

Chu Chuyan frowned. "Wouldn't that turn all of them completely against us?"

"The Chu clan is already practically finished! Why do you care so much about that?" Zu An said.

"We've always maintained good relationships with them. Perhaps they would still be willing to help us out, given our history. If we provoke them like this, what's to stop them from standing idly by when we are in need?" Chu Chuyan's voice was filled with worry.

"You really worry about all the wrong things!" Zu An said. "Let me ask you this, then. The Chu clan has been in trouble for so long now, yet how many of these people have come to our aid?"

Chu Chuyan opened her mouth, but no sound came out in the end.

Zu An sighed. "If I were them, I would be praying that the Chu clan would meet its end sooner rather than later. That way, no one would have any leverage over them anymore. Why would any of these people be willing to help you?"

"No wonder..." Chu Chuyan wasn't stupid. She had just been overwhelmed by the overall situation before. Now that Zu An had pointed it out to her, it seemed clear as day. "Then what should we do?"

"Find those people and threaten them!" Zu An said. "If they don't help us, then we'll take them down with us! Based on what you said, those fellas are already scattered across the imperial court. They are surely a huge force to be reckoned with!"

"The Chu clan has been continuously suffering setbacks because Sang Qian has been secretly acting against you.

"Even if we deal with this current problem regarding the advance salt permits, Sang Hong will find another way to deal with the Chu clan. We'll lose eventually.

"That is why we need to tear out this issue from its roots. Not only do we have to free the Chu clan from its current crisis, we need to dispose of Sang Hong. If what you told me about that account book is true, these people definitely have the ability to help us eliminate this headache which is Sang Hong. However, this only works if you force them to!"

Chu Chuyan remained quiet for a long time. Her gaze slowly became firm. "Okay, I will pay the capital city a visit. These greedy people have taken so much from us over the years, yet the Chu clan has always been cleaning up after them. It is now time for them to do something for the Chu clan!"

### **Chapter 345: Account Book**

Zu An laughed. "Sounds good. I'll go with you."

Chu Chuyan shook her head. "No, please stay behind."

Zu An was confused.

Why did he feel like he'd shot himself in the foot? He wouldn't have suggested that if he had known this would be how it would turn out.

"Ah Zu," Chu Chuyan said, "my dad is currently detained by Sang Hong. If I leave as well, only my mother and Huanzhao will be left at home. You know that Second and Third Uncles have always coveted the position of power that our man branch holds. Not to mention that the Sang, Wu, Zheng, and Yuan clans are all staring at us like tigers waiting to pounce as well. How can I feel at ease, with trouble brewing both inside the clan and outside?"

"Huanzhao is still immature, and my mother has a bit of a temper. If I leave, they will definitely cause trouble."

Zu An wore a troubled expression. "Honey, you know how your mom feels about me. There is no way she'll listen to me! There's no point in me staying behind at all."

"My mother doesn't actually hate you. She was only acting that way before out of concern for me." Chu Chuyan held his hand. "Ah Zu, we've really done you wrong all this time."

Zu An wrapped an arm around her waist. "How could I feel that I've been wronged when I have such a beautiful wife keeping me company every night?"

Chu Chuyan's cheeks grew red. She couldn't hold back a snort. "You're so annoying."

Zu An pulled her into his arms. "But honey, I don't feel comfortable letting you go to the capital alone!"

Chu Chuyan said with a smile, "I've traveled alone before I met you. Besides, my cultivation is still higher than yours! Hmph!"

Zu An's face darkened. "Do you have to rub salt in that wound?"

This really was a sore spot for him. He had all sorts of cheats, yet the girls around him all had higher levels of cultivation than him.

Even that brat Chu Huanzhao's cultivation had been higher than his at first. She even bullied him for a period of time.



Chu Chuyan leaned against his shoulder. "Ah Zu, I know that you're different from what the rest of the world believes you to be. You're actually really amazing, and I believe that you will protect my mom and my little sis while I am gone."

"Please don't place such high expectations on me!" Even though he said this, Chu Chuyan's praise had left him feeling overjoyed. He felt as if he was on cloud nine.

When they returned to the Chu clan estate, Chu Chuyan called a meeting with Qin Wanru and Chu Huanzhao, and told them her plans.

Qin Wanru was excited. "Perfect! We should have started our counterattack a long time ago. Your father is an excellent person, but he is just too indecisive. We're already being attacked on all sides—how can we keep being so concerned about what-ifs?"

Zu An clicked his tongue inwardly when he heard this. This woman really was a hothead, never pulling her punches.

Chu Huanzhao looked reluctant. "Big sis, how long are you going to be away for?"

Chu Chuyan hugged her little sister and said gently, "If things go smoothly, I should be back in three months. Otherwise, it could take half a year. You have to listen to your mother and brother-in-law while I'm gone, and you can't play around so much anymore."

Chu Huanzhao gave her acknowledgement. "Don't worry, I won't cause any trouble!"

The recent events seemed to have helped her grow in maturity.

Qin Wanru was somewhat shocked. Telling Huanzhao to listen to her was one thing—why did she have to listen to her brother-in-law as well?

And yet, Huanzhao hadn't even thrown a temper. She willingly accepted this without a hint of resistance.

Chu Chuyan passed a booklet to her. "Mother, please take care of this account book for me. I don't want to bring this with me to the capital."

She obviously couldn't carry her trump card with her, especially if she were going to provoke and threaten these individuals. She couldn't take the chance that this book would fall into the enemy's hands, especially if these people decided to abandon all restraint and somehow kidnap her.

Naturally, Qin Wanru knew what she was thinking. She carefully stored the booklet away. "Don't worry, mother will safeguard it until I die!"

Zu An couldn't help but say, "Madam, we haven't reached such a stage yet. Please do not say such ominous things."

Qin Wanru glared at him, but for the first time, she didn't argue back.

Chu Huanzhao's voice was colored with worry. "Big sis, will you be in any danger?"

Chu Chuyan rubbed her head. "Don't worry Huanzhao, given your sister's level of cultivation, taking care of myself is no issue."

“Even though big sis is strong, there are so many old freaks in the capital! What if those old farts throw caution to the wind and target you somehow?” Even though Chu Huanzhao often behaved in a carefree manner, it didn’t mean that she was dumb.

Chu Chuyan smiled. It seemed that even her little sister had begun to make reasoned calculations. “Don’t worry. As long as the account book exists, none of those people will dare to make a move against me.”

She then turned to the other two with a serious expression. “Mother, Ah Zu, I will send you a letter every so often, just so you know I’m safe. If you don’t receive any news from me for several days, that means that something has happened to me. If that happens, you should go ahead and expose the contents of the account book. Our entire Chu clan was forged on the battlefield, through hard work and determination. We are not scared of taking everyone down with us.”

Qin Wanru tightly gripped her daughter’s hands. Choking back her emotions, she called her daughter’s name. “Chuyan!”

Even though she was strong-willed, she was still a woman. Something bad had happened to her husband, her daughter was headed on a journey into the unknown, and the future of the Chu clan was shrouded in mist. It was inevitable that the softer side of her would surface.

Seeing their mother like this, her two daughters could no longer hold themselves back.

Zu An subconsciously wanted to separate them, but he knew that it would be terrible for him to say anything at this time. As such, he let them have their moment. Better to release all of it now, instead of letting it fester in their hearts.

The three women sobbed together for a while, then gradually calmed down.

Only then did Qin Wanru seem to realize that Zu An was still there. Her face grew red, and she quickly straightened, hastily wiping away the tears staining her cheeks. “By the way, Chuyan, since you’re going to the capital, pay your third... third brother a visit. He’s been alone in the capital for all these years. We’ve really let him down.”

Zu An had known for some time that the Chu clan’s youngest son was studying in the capital. It was a pity that they’d never met.

I wonder if I’ll get along with this brother-in-law.

I guess it doesn’t matter if we get along or not. If it comes to it, I’ll just whoop his ass, and then we’ll become best buds.

Chu Chuyan nodded. “I will.”

“Also, look for your grandfather if you need any help,” Qin Wanru advised her.

A flash of understanding suddenly hit Zu An. The Chu clan was a dukedom. For someone like Qin Wanru to marry Chu Zhongtian, and even prevent him from having any concubines after all these years, she had to have some pedigree of her own. It was just that no one in the estate had ever mentioned her side of the family.

Chu Chuyan seemed unsure. "Mom, isn't grandfather's clan and our Chu clan..."

"Blood is thicker than water. He wouldn't turn a blind eye, not when things are so dire." Qin Wanru hesitated a little before adding, "If he really is so heartless, then you can seek out your aunt. She will definitely help you."

A smile appeared on Chu Chuyan's face when she heard Qin Wanru mention her aunt. "Okay."

When they returned to the Unvoiced Residence, Zu An asked Chu Chuyan, "Your mom has a younger sister?"

"Yeah." Chu Chuyan began to pack her things.

"Is she a blood relative?"

"Of course. My aunt has always treated me well, but I haven't seen her for a long time." A faint smile appeared on Chuyan's lips as she was reminded of the past.

"Oh," Zu An replied. A thought struck him. "By the way, you have to remember that you are threatening those people to help and not begging them for help," he reminded her. "Don't do anything stupid for the sake of the clan's interests."

Chu Chuyan was stunned. "Stupid?"

Zu An hesitantly explained, "For example, some clans might demand your innocence as one of their conditions in order to help the Chu clan. You absolutely cannot agree to such things."

Those melodramatic TV shows from his previous world were rampant with trashy plots like these. He definitely didn't want to see it happen to him, and so he was warning her in advance as a precaution.

Chu Chuyan smiled. "Oh my goodness, are you getting jealous?"

Zu An sniffed. "I'm just warning you."

"Don't worry, I'm not that foolish. Besides..." Chu Chuyan's face reddened slightly. "In my heart... no other man can compare to you."

Zu An was overwhelmed with emotion when he heard this. He picked her up in his arms and walked off towards the bed.

"Wait..." Chu Chuyan panicked. She took out a book. "Keep this properly."

Zu An gave it a look. It was written in large words on the cover: 'Sweet Pampered Wife: Dominating Sword Immortal's Ninety-Nine Days of Searching For Love'.

### **Chapter 346: Another Way**

Zu An was stupefied. "What the heck? Why are you giving this to me?"

Chu Chuyan's face reddened further. "I am going out for official business, so it's not appropriate for me to be seen reading this book. I need you to keep it safe."

Zu An was utterly stunned.

“Surely no one would touch it even if you left it in your room!”

Chu Chuyan said, “No way. I’d die of humiliation if anyone in my family saw it.”

Zu An laughed. “So, it seems our First Miss Chu is also afraid of embarrassment!”

Then again, I guess this book really is embarrassing. My social life would probably be finished as well if I were caught with this book.

“Whatever! You’re the only one who knows about this now, so this is a secret between spouses. You cannot let anyone else know.” Chu Chuyan buried her head in his chest. Clearly, she was already extremely embarrassed.

“Okay, okay, I’ll hold onto it for you.” He rarely saw her act in such a juvenile manner. Zu An breathed in the scent of her hair, feeling incredibly refreshed.

“You have to promise me that you won’t let anyone else see it, and you can’t lose it. I still want to keep reading it when I come back!” Chu Chuyan’s eyes were hopeful.

Zu An was surprised. “It’s just one book. You still haven’t finished it?”

Chu Chuyan pouted. “I don’t have much time to read. Besides, can’t I read it slowly if I want to?”

“Of course you can, of course you can.” Zu An smiled. “I’ll do this for you, but you’ll have to do something for me as well.”

“What is it?” Chu Chuyan asked curiously.

Zu An smiled maliciously. He moved close to her ear and whispered something quietly.

Chu Chuyan’s face immediately flushed red. “No way!”

“Then I’m not doing it either,” Zu An huffed.

“You...” Chu Chuyan wanted to bite him.

Zu An had already carried her to bed. He instantly undid her clothes, and pulled the covers over them.

Now that it sunk in that the two of them would be apart for a while, Chu Chuyan also grew more proactive. She embraced her man and welcomed him in her most gentle manner.

...

After a long while, Zu An whispered his request in her ear again.

Chu Chuyan’s entire face was red, but she didn’t reject him this time. She only looked at him with a mixture of charm and bitterness. Then, she turned around.

This gorgeous view was enough to make any man go crazy. How could Zu An hold back any longer? He pounced on her with the roar of a tiger.

...

Before daybreak the next day, Chu Chuyan was ready to head to the capital.

She left through a small side entrance, with no grand sending off. They didn't want anyone else to know about this.

Qin Wanru and Chu Huanzhao looked on reluctantly.

"Big sis, why does your skin look so good today?" Chu Huanzhao said suddenly, her voice full of curiosity.

Chu Chuyan's face flushed completely red when she heard this. "Maybe... maybe I was able to sleep well last night."

Chu Huanzhao wanted to probe further, but Qin Wanru stopped her.

She quietly gave Zu An a look. His expression seemed a little off as well.

Zu An's face turned gloomy. Huanzhao's words had made Chu Chuyan too embarrassed to even bid him farewell.

As he watched Chu Chuyan's beautiful silhouette disappear into the distance, Zu An couldn't help but feel a sense of loss.

In the morning light, Qin Wanru appeared thin and pallid. The events that had taken place recently had clearly left her physically and emotionally exhausted. She had spent the whole night worrying over her daughter's safety, and she had to see her off this morning as well. She had finally reached her limit. "Ah Zu, please bring Huanzhao to the academy," she instructed.

With the Chu clan constantly buffeted by the storm facing it, the academy had become a comparatively safer place.

After all, the academy held a special status in the Great Zhou Dynasty. Neither faction would choose to cause trouble in the academy.

The academy's teachers possessed high levels of cultivation as well. Most other powers didn't dare provoke them.

Qin Wanru paused for a moment before continuing. "I've heard that you have a residence in the academy."

"Yup." Zu An nodded. He didn't know why she asked him this question.

Qin Wanru said, "Huanzhao should stay there for now. The two of you should stay there for as long as you are able to."

"What?" Chu Huanzhao cried out in alarm. Her heart began to pound. She snuck a look at Zu An, then quickly flicked her gaze away.

Zu An frowned. Something was clearly amiss. "Why would you suggest this, Madam?"

"It's nothing serious. For some strange reason, my eyelid has been twitching constantly recently. I just have a bad feeling about this." Qin Wanru rubbed her temples. "The Chu clan is facing some troubled

times. I'm afraid I won't be in time to protect you both if something happens, so I want Huanzhao to take shelter in the academy. There, at least, your safety should be guaranteed."

"But..." Qin Wanru changed the topic. Her piercing stare bored into Zu An's skull. "Ah Zu, you cannot... bully Huanzhao."

"Do I look like that type of person?" Zu An bristled immediately when he sensed that his moral character was being questioned. "But that's beside the point. I promised Chu Chuyan that I'd protect all of you. How can I hide in the academy?"

"You'll protect me?" Qin Wanru scoffed. Even though she didn't say anything more, her implications were obvious.

Zu An didn't bother defending himself. He didn't really feel like bragging about himself, so he decided to let her think what she wanted.

Chu Huanzhao also snapped out of her daze. "Mom, I don't want to live in the academy. I want to stay with you at home!"

Even though living with her brother-in-law in the staff residence was tempting, her mother was also important to her.

"Fine, the two of you can choose where you think it best to stay, depending on the situation. I will send some of the clan's guards to accompany the two of you to the academy." Qin Wanru gave some instructions, then went inside on her own.

Zu An and Chu Huanzhao headed to the academy together.

"Brother-in-law, do you think big sis will be successful this time?"

"Don't worry, she'll definitely succeed."

"Brother-in-law, do you think the Chu clan will survive?"

"It will."

"Brother-in-law, will you always stay with us?"

"I will."

...

Their conversation drifted over to the guards walking behind them, and they all sighed. The second miss was getting more and more attached to the young master...

Cheng Shouping cockily brought up their bet again. He urged everyone to pay up. "Madam has already given the second miss permission to live with the young master at the academy in the future! She even instructed us to not kick up a fuss for nothing. Is this still not enough?"

"That doesn't say anything! Now that Master is in trouble, what's wrong with having her live in the academy for her own safety?" One of the guards, Zhou Lujun, countered.

“What do you know? The second miss doesn’t have a residence in school, so where else would she live but with the young master?” Cheng Shouping giggled. “I’ve heard that the academy’s dormitories are extremely private. Once they lock the door, no one else can enter from the outside. The two of them would be all alone... doesn’t that mean that the Madam has already...”

Feng Daniu was troubled. “You might actually be right.”

Jiao Shanhe smacked him on the back. “Right my ass! Another day it takes for them to get married is another day we won’t admit defeat.”

“How long would I have to wait for that?” Cheng Shouping was clearly unhappy.

Jiao Shanhe said, “An engagement is fine as well.”

Cheng Shouping asked, “What if the rice is already cooked?”[1]

The others all looked at him with strange expressions. This guy was a natural at courting disaster. No wonder he had been driven off to work in the kitchen.

After seeing Chu Huanzhao to class, Zu An went looking for Zheng Dan.

He wasn’t interested in wasting time trying to discuss the Chu clan’s current situation with the senior members of the academy.

He came this time because he had thought up another way to help the Chu clan out of their predicament.

He didn’t want Chu Chuyan to shoulder the burden alone. He wanted to bear some of the weight as well.

Quite a few students were already present when he finally reached the Sky class. However, Zu An didn’t let this bother him. He walked towards Zheng Dan and gestured for her to come out for a chat.

Unexpectedly, Zheng Dan showed no signs of moving. She smiled and said, “Teacher Zu, I am a woman who is already engaged, yet you are always looking for me. I have to turn you down sometimes to avoid suspicion, right?”

Zu An was not amused.

This girl was still putting on her act?

Wu Qing, who was sitting close by, jeered at him as well. “Oh my, isn’t it first miss Chu’s husband? Why are you running to someone else’s fiancée all day? Could it be that first miss Chu doesn’t have a good leash on you, or does the Chu clan no longer seem so great to you?”

## **Chapter 347: Sea of Jealousy**

Zu An gave her a sidelong look. “I wonder which clan’s dog is making so much noise?”

Wu Qing exploded in anger. She slammed her palm on the table and shot to her feet. “Who are you referring to?!”

You have successfully trolled Wu Qing for 335 Rage points!

Pan Long and Fu Feng, who were close by, leapt to her defense.

“You dare call our young miss Wu a dog? You really have guts!”

“Exactly! Your words are so crude. I guess that’s to be expected from a commoner! Even though the Chu clan took you in, there’s no way you’d learn to act like a noble so quickly.”

You have successfully trolled Pan Long for 233 Rage points!

You have successfully trolled Fu Feng for 233 Rage points!

Zu An snorted. “I didn’t say who the dog was, but since both of you jumped in so eagerly... Honestly, how can the two of you associate your young miss with a dog? Do you guys hate her that much? Are you finally unable to hold back your resentment?”

Sure enough, Wu Qing’s attention shifted to them. She looked at her two attendants suspiciously.

Zu An smiled as he watched this scene play out. As a master troll in the online forums of his past world, he had more than enough tricks under his belt.

“Of course not! We would never dare to treat the young miss Wu with disrespect!” Pan Long and Fu Feng instantly defended themselves in a panic.

Zu An had no further interest in these two. “Student Zheng, I see that you have a strong talent in arithmetic, and I want to properly nurture that talent. I want to make you a teaching assistant. Please come with me to my office.”

Zheng Dan said with a smile, “Thank you, Teacher Zu.”

Now that she had a legitimate reason, she showed no further hesitation. She rose to her feet and walked with him to his office, leaving Wu Qing and the other two to argue amongst themselves.

The other students in the classroom launched into a heated discussion.

“Teaching assistant? This is the first time I’ve ever heard of a student being called to become one.”

“Zheng Dan really is blessed.”

“Tsk, it’s just an arithmetic class. I wouldn’t become the assistant of something like that even if I was asked.”

“Exactly!”

“Why do I feel like that guy is doing this because he has a crush on Zheng Dan?”

“I don’t think so. His own wife is already so pretty.”

Suddenly reminded that a pig like Zu An had managed to snare the goddess Chu Chuyan, all of them cursed at the same time. “Damn it all!”

...



The flood of Rage points made Zu An feel ecstatic. These students really were cute! They always contributed so many Rage points to him.

Zheng Dan followed a few feet behind Zu An, maintaining the proper distance between a man and a woman.

Along the way, the students who saw them were full of praise for her. Young miss Zheng really was a paragon of virtue! Her mannerisms and sense of propriety were flawless.

When they finally reached a place devoid of bystanders, Zheng Dan promptly lost her proper and composed appearance. She threw herself into Zu An's embrace and showered him with kisses.

Zu An pinched her. "Weren't you making fun of me a second ago?"

Zheng Dan cried out. She looked at him with glistening eyes. "We were right in front of everyone just now! I can't just show all of them how close we are, can I?"

"Then what are you going to do to soothe my hurt feelings?" Zu An said.

"How do you want to be soothed?" Zheng Dan said, licking her red lips. Her expression was enchanting and seductive.

Zu An felt a flame light up within him. He immediately pulled up her dress.

Zheng Dan quickly pushed his hands away. Zu An looked at her in confusion, and her face turned red. "Today... is a bad day."

Zu An's countenance fell. "Why are you still tempting me, then? That's rather irresponsible of you."

Zheng Dan pursed her lips. Her eyes moved around, and then to his shock, she slowly got to her knees.

Zu An swallowed. His breathing became ragged.

This woman really was a demon! She was self-taught in so many different areas. And yet, she was somehow known as the epitome of etiquette and propriety! This huge contrast was truly astonishing.

There was the sudden sound of approaching footsteps. The two of them quickly separated in a panic.

"Huh? Ah Zu, Zheng Dan, what are you two doing here?" Discipline Master Lu De looked at the two of them in confusion.

Zu An laughed. "Haha, nothing at all! We were just discussing some matters regarding arithmetic class."

Lu De gave Zheng Dan a suspicious look. "Zheng Dan, did he bully you?"

Zheng Dan hurriedly wiped the corners of her lips, her face red. She shook her head.

Lu De sighed inwardly. This young miss of the Zheng clan was truly a lady among ladies. Her mannerisms were perfectly graceful.

He felt rage boiling within him when he thought about that crude son of his back home. Look how obedient this child is!

With this good impression of Zheng Dan in mind, Lu Den pulled Zu An to the side and said, "Teacher Zu, I know that there is some conflict brewing between your Chu clan and the Zheng clan, but you can't use your status as a teacher to bully their young miss, is that clear?"

"But I didn't bully her!" Zu An felt slightly guilty. Was what he'd done even considered bullying?

"Wasn't she kneeling in front of you?" Lu De glared at him. Anyone would burn with the feeling of injustice when they saw such an obedient girl being bullied.

You have successfully trolled Lu De for 138 Rage points!

Zu An laughed awkwardly. "I was just helping her back up. She tripped accidentally."

Lu De wasn't in a mood to listen to his nonsense. He turned to look at Zheng Dan. "Is this true?"

Zheng Dan nodded in agreement.

Looking back at Zu An, he said, "This girl is too good-natured. She's clearly been bullied to the point where she doesn't even dare speak up for herself! Forget it, you had better shape up. The Zheng clan won't take kindly to provocation, and she is the fiancée of the son of the Sang clan. If they find out about this, it will tarnish the academy's name."

"I accept the discipline master's criticism of me." Zu An replied, secretly winking at Zheng Dan.

Zheng Dan's face somehow managed to grow redder.

The mischievous smile on Zu An's face only served to inflame Lu De's annoyance. However, he couldn't go any further, since Zu An was also a teacher, and even seemed to enjoy Principal Jiang's backing. He gave an angry snort and walked off.

When he had left, Zheng Dan let out her indignance. "It's all your fault! We were almost caught!"

"How is this all my fault?" Zu An was gloomy. Something tickled his mind, and he looked at her. "You can speak again! That means..."

Zheng Dan's face was so red it resembled a beet. "Discipline Master Lu kept asking me questions. It would have been more suspicious if I kept quiet all the time! So I could only... could only..."

She seemed about to explode from embarrassment.

Zu An couldn't help but roar with laughter. He pulled her straight into his embrace.

Zheng Dan held him gently. "Ah Zu, why did you want to meet with me?"

"I wanted to ask you about the deal Chen Xuan struck with you all. Where are those salt permits he stole?" Zu An said.

The stolen salt permits were the key reason behind the Chu clan's troubles this time around. If he could recover them, it would greatly ease the situation, and they wouldn't have to pay such a huge fine either.

He knew that Chen Xuan had made a deal with the Whale Gang previously, but both sides had fallen out with each other before the salt permits could be delivered.

Zheng Dan's expression turned chilly. She pushed him aside. "Hmph! It turns out you only wanted to meet with me because you needed me to help that Chu clan woman!"

You have successfully trolled Zheng Dan for 567 Rage points!

She turned around immediately and stalked off.

### **Chapter 348: Flirting with Disaster**

In a panic, Zu An quickly pulled her back. "It's all my fault! I can't help that I'm still a part of the Chu clan. If they go down, I'll be screwed as well. I have to try to help them through this difficult situation. It's not what you think! I'm not just trying to help her..."

Even he himself couldn't get over how trashy his behavior was. He had just been part of an emotional family farewell, and here he was, jumping straight into the arms of another woman. Not to mention, these two clans even hated each other.

Zheng Dan snorted. "You can just leave the Chu clan, then. Why do you have to stay there?"

Zu An sighed. "If I leave the Chu clan, could I just join your Zheng clan, then?"

Zheng Dan opened her mouth, but she was reminded of her own situation, and she didn't know what to say.

Zu An continued, "I won't ask you to help me for nothing. I'll give this back to you if you tell me where those salt permits are."

He pulled out a promissory note for five hundred thousand taels of silver, which he had won during the Clans Tournament. Back then, the gambling den that he'd placed his bet with had paid out five hundred thousand taels, and had given him this note for another five hundred thousand.

Zheng Dan's expression grew uncomfortable. "What does this debt note have to do with me?"

Zu An said with a smile, "Miss Zheng, do we still need to keep up this pretense? We've already been together for so long. I already know that that gambling den has ties to your Zheng clan."

Zheng Dan snatched the note from him with an angry snort. "So what is this? Fees for a whore?"

Zu An was utterly stunned.

"Couldn't you phrase it in a nicer way? We are clearly in love!"

"Love?" Zheng Dan sneered. "Do you truly believe that yourself?"

Zu An held her hands and looked into her eyes. "I do!"

Zheng Dan's face went red. "Look at this guy, always trying to seduce me!"

Zu An sighed. "I don't want to become enemies with your Zheng clan either! Don't worry, I won't do anything to harm the Zheng clan's interests."

"Hmph! Helping the Chu clan is the same thing as harming the Zheng clan." Zheng Dan was extremely unhappy. However, she still said, "I don't know where those salt permits are either. Chen Xuan wasn't stupid enough to give us the salt permits upfront. You know what happened afterwards."

"Based on my suspicions, those salt permits should be in the hands of the Blackwind Stockade."

Zu An was taken aback. He thought of the people that had been with Chen Xuan in the Immortal Abode.

"Do you know anything about them?" Zu An asked. Zheng Dan had been a gang boss at one point in time, after all. Even though the Whale Gang had been destroyed, surely she still maintained her own information channels.

"Nothing at all." Zheng Dan laughed coldly. "What? Do you feel like you've wasted your five hundred thousand taels of silver now?"

"Of course not!" Zu An pulled her into his embrace. "Even if I had given it to you for free, it wouldn't have been a waste. At least now I know that the salt permits are with the Blackwind Stockade."

"Hmph! Just empty words." Despite this, Zheng Dan's expression softened.

Zu An showered her in another round of honeyed words. Only then did Zheng Dan smile again.

...

When the school day came to a close, Zu An waited around for Chu Huanzhao to accompany her home.

When she saw him, Chu Huanzhao immediately said, "I heard you went looking for that Zheng Dan today."

Zu An was shocked. "News gets around to you pretty fast, huh?"

"Of course! Don't you know what standing I have in class?" Chu Huanzhao had a cocky look on her face. However, her expression quickly collapsed. "Why are you looking for her? Everyone in the academy is calling you a Chikan." [1]

Zu An was speechless for a while.

How did such a word even exist in this world?

Chu Huanzhao only grew angrier. "Is big sis not enough for you? Why do you have to fawn all over this woman? Big sis only just left today!"

You have successfully trolled Chu Huanzhao for 33... 33... 33...

Zu An felt a headache coming on. "I needed to talk to her about something important. It was to help the Chu clan through these troubled times."

"The Zheng clan hates our Chu clan. Why would she help us?" Chu Huanzhao clearly didn't believe him. "Stinky brother-in-law, at least cook up a good excuse if you're going to use one!"

"Of course, she usually wouldn't lift a finger to help, but your brother-in-law is just too handsome!" Zu An scoffed.

"Shameless!" Chu Huanzhao cursed. However, his interruption made her forget the words she was going to use to berate him.

When they returned to the Chu Estate, Zu An told her to head inside on her own.

"Where are you going?" Chu Huanzhao grew curious when she saw that he wasn't planning to head back to his own room.

"I..." Zu An was just about to reply when a thought struck him. His expression grew rigid. "Don't ask me so many questions! If I'm going out, I definitely have some important matters to take care of."

"You're probably going to drink with girls!" Chu Huanzhao shot back. "Hmph!"

She stormed into the estate, purposely stomping her feet along the way. Her face was a dark cloud.

Speechless, Zu An could only stare at her as she departed.

A woman's intuition truly was terrifyingly sharp!

He was really planning to go to the Immortal Abode. However, it wasn't to drink, but to see if he could get some intelligence from Qiu Honglei.

After all, she was the one who had first given him the news about Chen Xuan. She might know something about the whereabouts of the salt permits too.

...

He arrived at the Immortal Abode. News of his arrival traveled quickly, and a maid came out to lead Zu An to Qiu Honglei's room.

When his gaze fell upon the ravishing woman, Zu An couldn't contain his surprise. "Honglei seems to have quite a few matters on her mind."

Qiu Honglei stared blankly for a moment. She said with a smile, "Young master Zu has sharp eyes. I didn't expect you to be able to see through me."

Zu An couldn't hold back a sigh. "Honglei, we've drifted apart. You used to call me Ah Zu."

Qiu Honglei was speechless for a moment.

Why is this guy always so unpredictable?

Thankfully, she was already used to his nature. She said with a smile, "Ah Zu, you might not see me again in two days' time."

Zu An was surprised. "You're leaving?"

To be fair, the last time they'd met, her voice had already taken on a strange tone.

Qiu Honglei nodded. "That's right."

"Where are you going?" Even though he knew that her affection for him was completely fake, he still felt a sense of regret when he learned that she was leaving.

Qiu Honglei shook her head, but said nothing.

Seeing her unwillingness to tell him anything, Zu An didn't continue to press her further.

Silence quickly descended on the room.

Qiu Honglei was the first one to break it. "So, why did you come here today?"

"Can't I come looking for you without any particular reason?" Zu An couldn't stop looking at her. She was just as beautiful as before, but now, she would soon slip out of his grasp.

Sigh, men are all trash. You know that everything she showed you was fake—why do you have to feel disappointed?

Qiu Honglei said with a smile, "I've been here for so long, but I don't think you've ever taken the initiative to meet with me."

Zu An smiled awkwardly. He could only reveal his true reason for coming.

Qiu Honglei couldn't help but sigh. "You really do share a deep relationship with first miss Chu. You're searching for help everywhere for her sake."

Zu An stared deeply into her eyes. "Is Honglei getting jealous?"

Qiu Honglei met his gaze. "Ah Zu, do you want me to feel jealous?"

Zu An laughed. "Which man in this world wouldn't want a beauty like Honglei to feel jealous over them?"

Qiu Honglei smiled. "Your lips are always so sweet. No wonder first miss Chu has fallen so hard for you."

After a pause, she added. "I just happen to know a thing or two about where the salt permits are. However, I cannot tell you."

"Why?" Zu An was stunned.

"I have my reasons." After a slight hesitation, she said, "I advise you to stop looking for them. You'll only bring a huge disaster upon yourself."

## **Chapter 349: A Helping Hand**

Qiu Honglei had grown dead serious. Zu An was confused. "Why? Isn't Chen Xuan already dead? At this point, what can the Blackwind Stockade even do?"

Qiu Honglei shook her head. "It's not the Blackwind Stockade that you should be worried about. There is another organization that you cannot afford to provoke."

Zu An grew more and more puzzled. Even though the Chu clan was in a sticky situation, a starving camel was still bigger than a horse. They still had a private army at their disposal. He himself was the young master of the Chu clan, and he had the backing of the academy as well. Why would Qiu Honglei still feel like this power was one that they couldn't handle? Just what kind of organization were they?

“Honglei, could you at least give me some hints? Just how strong is this organization?” Zu An probed.

Qiu Honglei sighed. “I cannot tell you anything else. This is already all that I can reveal. The rest is up to you.”

A sudden thought struck Zu An. “Is this the organization that is backing you?”

Qiu Honglei’s background had always been a mystery. There was no way such a beautiful girl could remain untouched for so many years in a place like the Immortal Abode, unless she had a formidable power backing her.

She had even been able to provide him with information not even the Chu clan could obtain. This had set alarm bells ringing quietly in the back of Zu An’s mind before.

Qiu Honglei’s expression clouded over. “Don’t ask anymore. Knowing more won’t help you at all.”

Zu An nodded. “Forget it then, I won’t make things harder for you by questioning you further. However, this matter regarding the salt permits is serious, so I can’t drop it just like that. I will transfer more men to track them down, and I won’t stop until I find where they are.”

With that, he got up and bid his farewell.

Qiu Honglei stamped her foot in agitation. “Why won’t you listen?!”

She hesitated some more, before she finally said, “Whatever! I’ll tell you more, before you really do something stupid.”

Zu An turned around to look at her. “Honglei, you really are too good to me,” he said with a sigh.

Qiu Honglei smiled. This smile made her entire being seem absolutely enchanting. “Did you only realize this now?”

“To be honest, I’ve always been slightly wary of you since you first approached me,” Zu An replied. “I figured that you surely had some ulterior motive in mind. I have to apologize for that.”

Qiu Honglei’s face went red. She was moved by the sincerity in his voice. She sighed. “I indeed had ulterior motives in approaching you. There’s no need for you to apologize.”

Zu An couldn’t hide his disappointment. “Ah... so you didn’t really want to become my concubine...”

Qiu Honglei stared at him, speechless.

Is this guy actually an idiot?

But she knew that this was just his nature. Wasn’t this precisely the reason why she felt like he was different from other men?

The two of them joked around a while longer, then Qiu Honglei’s smile slowly faded. “There will be a black market auction in three days. During which, the Blackwind Stockade will auction off the salt permits to the highest bidder. If you want to take back those salt permits, you’ll have to purchase them with money.”

“Black market? Auction?” Zu An suddenly remembered the ki stones he’d received from the academy when he first arrived in this world. His cultivation method was different, so he couldn’t absorb the ki inside them. Wei Suo had mentioned that he could sell them on the black market.

However, he’d made a ton of money soon afterwards and forgot about this small change. That was why he never went to the black market.

The black market had existed for so many years in Brightmoon City without any sign of collapsing, which meant it had the backing of a formidable power. He hadn’t expected Qiu Honglei to be a part of this same group.

When she saw the change in his expression, Qiu Honglei quickly said, “You absolutely must not try to steal them. Since those who run the black market have already agreed to auction these items, they will take responsibility for them. If you try to steal them, you will be clashing head-on with them. If that happens, I fear that you...”

She trailed off, but the implication was clear.

“Don’t worry, I won’t be that reckless.” Zu An could sense her meaning. If he tried to steal them, not only would he fail, he might just throw away his life too.

However, it seemed like a miserable deal to have to spend money to buy back these salt permits, especially since they were the Chu clan’s to begin with.

What kind of joke is this? There’s no way I’ll ever let someone wrong me like this.

He was well and truly trapped in a dilemma.

Qiu Honglei warned him again and again to not act recklessly. Only when he agreed not to did she let him go.

After Zu An left, a man entered from a side door. It was none other than Qiu Honglei’s senior, Gu Yueyi.

He sneered. “Junior sister, you actually leaked such important intelligence to him?”

Qiu Honglei’s tone was indifferent. “This can’t be considered leaking. I’m merely helping to find suitable clients to attend the auction. Everyone knows that Zu An has made a lot of money recently, so I believe he has the right to take part in this auction.”

“Junior sister really has a slick tongue. I might not be able to win against you in a debate, but the sect master might not be so easily swayed.” A small trace of fear flashed across his eyes when he brought up the sect master.

“That’s not something you need to worry about.” Qiu Honglei rested her chin on her arm and leaned against the table next to her.

Gu Yueyi was completely enchanted by her alluring figure. He couldn’t help but say, “Junior sister, why are you willing to take such a risk for a single man? Don’t tell me you actually like him?”

Qiu Honglei’s eyes widened instantly. “That has nothing to do with you!” she huffed. Her tone was cold.



Gu Yueyi felt a sudden flash of anger. "What's so special about a drafted son-in-law like him? He only knows a few shoddy songs and a bit of poetry. His appearance might be all right as well..."

He froze midway through his sentence. Why did it sound like he was praising that guy?

His anger flared further.

You have successfully trolled Gu Yueyi for 250 Rage points!

Taking a moment to calm himself, he continued, "These are nothing more than tricks. In this world, strength in cultivation is what matters in the end! Why in the world would junior sister like a person with such low cultivation? Compared to him, I..."

Before he even finished his sentence, Qiu Honglei cut him off. "So noisy!" she cried out in annoyance.

With a wave of her hand, Gu Yueyi was thrown out of the room.

Gu Yueyi felt his anger explode.

...

You have successfully trolled Gu Yueyi for 711 Rage points!

Zu An was puzzled when he saw the notifications for these Rage points. Where did this Gu Yueyi pop up from?

I guess it's natural for a popular guy like me to be the target of others' jealousy. Zu An dismissed it casually, and instead focused his attention on how he was going to acquire those salt permits.

A shadow fell across him. He raised his head and saw someone standing in front of him. It was Wei Suo's older brother, Wei Hongde.

"Brother Wei, what a coincidence." Zu An was startled. He clasped his fist in greeting.

Wei Hongde smiled. "It's not a coincidence. I came seeking you."

"Seeking me?" Zu An's heart skipped a beat. Did they find out what he had done that night in the Wei Estate?

"Brother Zu, there is no need for alarm. You are Wei Suo's friend, so you are naturally my friend as well." As if sensing Zu An's sudden change in mood, Wei Hongde cut straight to the chase. "I wanted to meet with you. We have a way to help your Chu clan out of your troubles."

### **Chapter 350: A Change In Status**

"What?!" Zu An was shocked. He immediately grabbed Wei Hongde's hand. "Brother Wei knows a way out?"

Wei Hongde smiled. "I'm not the one who knows what to do. My father is the one who came up with it. I don't know what it is myself."

Zu An's expression grew gloomy. "Are you toying with my feelings?"

“You misunderstand me, brother Zu,” Wei Hongde said. “Your friendship with Wei Suo has shown you to be trustworthy. That’s why I sought you out today. There is no one more suitable than you that I could approach. However, juniors like me and you don’t have the authority to make any decisions.”

Zu An couldn’t help but say, “Why do I feel like I am being looked down on?”

Clearly, Wei Hongde meant that someone important from the Chu clan had to meet with Wei Dabao to discuss this matter.

Wei Hongde smiled. “I am being frank because of your friendship with Wei Suo. I hope brother Zu can forgive me if I offended you somehow.”

Zu An grunted. “Could you at least tell me a little more? If not, what am I supposed to tell the rest of the Chu clan when I go back?”

After a slight hesitation, Wei Hongde finally said, “We’ve heard that the Chu clan needs monetary support. We can provide you with some help on that front. I really don’t know any further details.”

Zu An shivered. Are these guys trying to be loan sharks?

The Wei clan had always maintained a low profile in Brightmoon City. Everyone knew that their clan had its roots in the capital city, and they could even have connections to the imperial palace, but that was it.

They didn’t participate in the affairs of Brightmoon City. It was almost as if they didn’t even exist. It was merely out of fear of their perceived backing that no one chose to offend them.

That was why the Wei clan was almost invisible. Why did they suddenly plan to get so deeply involved?

After bidding Wei Hongde farewell, Zu An hurriedly returned to the Chu clan. He found Qin Wanru and told her about the Wei clan’s offer.

He didn’t bring up the information about the salt permits, since he didn’t know how he was going to use this information yet. Besides, the information had come from Qiu Honglei, and so it wasn’t the most convenient thing for him to share with her.

Qin Wanru immediately called the Chu clan’s trusted aides over for a meeting, and extended the invitation to the members of the second and third branch as well.

Zu An was confused. “The second and third branch are all vicious wolves. Why do you have to discuss this with them?”

Qin Wanru shook her head. “Even though they all have their own agendas, when all is said and done, they are still members of the Chu clan. If the Chu clan is dissolved, it will not bode well for them either. They have no choice but to help the clan through this crisis.”

Zu An had to disagree with her assessment. There were so many instances throughout the history of his previous world where internal strife had torn families apart.

However, she was a stubborn woman, and Zu An wasn’t stupid enough to clash with her over this.

A large group quickly gathered in the discussion hall. Perhaps because of what Chu Chuyan had said before she left, or because Zu An was the one who had brought this information back, Qin Wanru didn't chase him out. He was made part of this important meeting.

The others present were shocked to see Zu An attending the meeting, whether it was Chu Tiesheng, Chu Yuepo, butler Hong Zhong, and even guard leader Yue Shan.

After all, this meant that he was now officially part of the Chu clan's decision-makers.

Before this meeting, he had only been a drafted son-in-law who no one cared about. After this day, however, no one in the Chu clan would dare look down on him again.

Chu Tiesheng was still skeptical about this, but Chu Yuepo grabbed his hand to forestall any action. He said via ki transmission, "Sister-in-law is all alone now, since Master isn't here. She needs someone around to help her maintain some dignity. Just let her do what she wants."

Chu Tiesheng acknowledged his advice and decided not to press the issue. However, he still asked, "Sister-in-law, why is Chu Chuyan not here?"

Qin Wanru said, "Chu Chuyan has gone on a trip, so she won't be joining us today."

She didn't elaborate further, and she seemed to have no intention of revealing anything else.

The others present in the meeting hall exchanged glances. They all began to wonder where Chu Chuyan had gone.

Qin Wanru cleared her throat to get their attention again. She then outlined the Wei clan's proposal.

The hall broke out into low whispers when she was finished.

Chu Tiesheng was the first to speak his mind. "Something feels off about this. The Wei clan has maintained a low profile for so many years. Why would they suddenly choose to get involved now? They are definitely plotting something."

Chu Yuepo had different thoughts. "From what I know, there has always been a secret organization in Brightmoon City that offers loans to clans in need. This organization has always been shrouded in mystery. However, it seems now that it could be the Wei clan who is behind this. Since we're in need of money, I don't see any issue with borrowing from them."

Qin Wanru declined to comment. Instead, she looked at their butler. "Elder Hong, what do you think?"

The Hong clan had been a staunch supporter of the Chu clan for generations. Hong Zhong was also a shrewd and noble figure who had served under the previous head of the Chu clan. He was held in high regard within the clan, and Qin Wanru had the utmost respect for him.

Hong Zhong's tone was serious. "There's something else that concerns me. The Wei clan has the imperial palace backing them. I can't help but wonder if this offer was instigated by the emperor. I wonder if the emperor is using this loan as just another scheme to deal with us."

A few of the others nodded when they heard his words. Even Zu An couldn't help but look at him with respect. This elder really is worthy of being the Chu clan's butler! He seems to possess knowledge and experience far exceeding that of ordinary people.

But then again, how did he end up giving birth to such a dumb son?

Objectively speaking, Hong Xingying is okay compared to his peers, but he is just too fickle and scatterbrained. He doesn't have any of his father's steady demeanor at all!

Speaking of which, I haven't seen that kid for a while. Did I scare him off? He seems to be avoiding me in the academy.

While Zu An was lost in his own thoughts, Chu Yuepo spoke again. "It might not be a conspiracy at all. From what I know, all high officials in the capital are extremely wealthy, but it is considered inappropriate for any of them to act openly. The capital has strict regulations as well, and so many of them rely on intermediaries to facilitate profitable loans and other such financial transactions for them. The Wei clan is probably one of these intermediaries. The imperial palace may be backing them, but it might not be the emperor himself. It could easily be some imperial concubines, palace eunuchs, or even some ministers in the capital... Either way, I think the chances of it being the emperor are extremely low."

...

Animated discussion began to break out amongst those present. Both sides had provided compelling arguments.

Zu An gave Yue Shan a curious look. This man hadn't said anything all this time.

His name fitted him like a glove. He was as steady and reliable as a mountain. No wonder he had maintained his position as Chu Zhongtian's most trustworthy subordinate.

Qin Wanru allowed the discussions around her to continue for a while longer, then called for order again. "It is hard to say what the Wei clan's motives are right now. However, our Chu clan is in need of funds at the moment, so we have to meet with them."

The thought of Chu Chuyan and herself going around begging for money caused her anger to surge within her. The head of that Li clan had even brazenly harassed her!

She reached out a hand to forestall any further argument. "Don't worry, I won't go too far. Meeting with them doesn't mean that I will end up borrowing money from them. We'll make a decision after I hear what they have to offer."

That helped to quell any further opposition from the others.

With the meeting adjourned, Zu An made to leave. However, Qin Wanru stopped him.

"You are coming with me to the Wei Estate!"