

Immortal 391

Chapter 391: No Hesitation

After what seemed like an eternity, Zu An was awoken by distant sounds of birds chirping.

The blades of grass around him, the flowers, the trees... he began to notice them all, one after another. The grass was still the same grass, and the trees were still the same trees, yet everything somehow seemed a little different.

He didn't know exactly how they were different, but it seemed as if he could sense the life force and ki within them. He'd had the same reaction when he first became a cultivator as well.

He slowly looked around him. His gaze fell upon an old, sinister and creepy-looking corpse. It was Old Mi!

Zu An shivered in fear. He immediately leapt off the ground. He had jumped instinctively, yet he instantly soared more than a dozen feet into the air. It took him a while before he finally landed again.

He was stupefied, and looked at his own hands in disbelief. He quickly gathered his racing thoughts.

His final memory was the one in which he had used up all of his trump cards, yet was still no match for Old Mi. He'd been captured, the shining purple sunflower finger was pressed against his forehead, and then he blacked out.

Zu An grew alarmed. I'm done for! Did Old Mi succeed in possess me already?

Even though he still had his own consciousness, he was surely about to vanish soon.

He couldn't help but think of that movie from his previous world, 'Alien'. The aliens in that movie laid their parasites within a human body, but the infected humans would still look perfectly fine on the outside. Only when the parasites matured would they suddenly burst out from within the body of their hosts.

He felt just like a human incubator.

"You've finally woken up," a lazy voice said by his ear.

Zu An was immediately overjoyed. "Big sis empress! Shouldn't I be the one saying that? You finally woke up!"

Mi Li's projection gradually appeared by his side. Her fiery red lips, paired with her red phoenix eyes, made her look just as classy and stunning as before.

Mi Li snorted. "I was already awake a long time ago. You were the one who was sleeping like a pig."

"Why didn't you help me if you'd already woken up? I was screaming my head off calling for you!" Zu An felt resentment rise within him immediately as he recalled his previous despair.

"Forget it, let's not talk about this right now. I really need your help! I was possessed by a damned pervert, and his consciousness is probably still hiding inside me. He might take over any second now," Zu

An said in a panic. Afraid that she wouldn't treat this as a big deal, he hurriedly added, "You and I signed a life-and-death pact! If I really get possessed and die, you'll be a goner as well!"

Mi Li rolled her eyes. "Relax. That Old Mi or whatever failed in his attempt at possession."

"Failed?" Zu An wasn't even close to being done with what he wanted to say, but he immediately stiffened when he heard her words. It took him a long while to gather his wits again. "What do you mean, 'failed'?"

"Are you dumb? Failure is failure—what else can it mean?" Mi Li said in annoyance.

Zu An was in disbelief. "Then where is Old Mi's soul?"

"Extinguished, obviously," said Mi Li. "Strictly speaking, however, you actually absorbed a large portion of his soul, just not his consciousness."

Zu An was stunned. "Did big sis empress help me get rid of him?"

This was the only plausible explanation.

"Nope." Mi Li shook her head. "That Mi guy is a eunuch who was probably castrated at a young age. As such, he never experienced much of what it's like to be a man at all. After occupying your body, his soul suffered a powerful backlash from your yang energy, and it eventually burned away to nothing."

Zu An was bewildered.

"It was that simple?"

Mi Li snorted. "You're the only one who would think that it's simple. Possession techniques have always been dangerous. They only work when you find a vessel that is suitable in every way. If my suspicions are correct, he chose you as his vessel firstly because of your status as the Chu clan's young master, and secondly, because of your previous seal down there. That way, your body would be rather similar to his own castrated self. There was hope in removing your seal as well, so he could have truly become a complete man further down the line after he unsealed himself.

"You were, by all accounts, the perfect vessel. Unfortunately, there was no way he could have deduced that you would undo the seal on your own ahead of time. That was why his cold yin soul was set ablaze by your fiery yang body. The possession failed, resulting in his death."

Her explanation helped Zu An finally understand the entire sequence of events. He was shocked and overjoyed. "I didn't expect that being a real man would have such a benefit! Haha! Thank you big sis empress! Not only did you grant me the chance to become a man again, you've even indirectly saved my life..."

Mi Li blushed from his blabbering. Scenes from her possession of Chu Chuyan, and everything that happened afterwards, continuously flooded her mind.

Zu An came to a sudden realization. "Big sis empress, you should've told me this earlier. You don't know just how much fear and despair I was in!"

“Why did I have to tell you about this?” Mi Li scoffed. “I already knew that Old Mi’s possession wouldn’t work. I just didn’t feel like helping out.

“I’ve warned you before not to depend on me too much. It won’t be beneficial for your own growth,” Mi Li said with a serious expression. “This was a rare opportunity for you to temper yourself. Only then can you grow stronger in the future.”

Zu An was stunned. He was just about to grumble and complain about her lack of help, but he now understood that she had done this for his sake. He was incredibly moved. “Thank you big sis empress. You’re so good to me!”

Mi Li turned her head away when she heard the sincerity in his voice. “You don’t have to thank me. I didn’t do it for you. I just don’t want to be dragged down with you.”

Zu An chuckled. “Regardless, I’m still going to thank you. By the way, I discovered something strange when I woke up. The ki inside of me is so powerful! I managed to jump to such a height with a random hop. There’s a strange feeling inside me, almost as though I’m far stronger than I was before. What the heck is going on?”

Mi Li said, “In order to possess you, Old Mi poured all of his cultivation into you. Of course you’d feel the way you do.”

“Something like that could actually happen?” Zu An’s eyes went round. What cultivation did Old Mi have? He was a ninth-ranked big shot at the very least, wasn’t he?!

Didn’t this mean that he’d already reached the very peak of his life? Couldn’t he do whatever he wished and go wherever he wanted now?

“Don’t get so worked up. It’s not as easy as you think.” Mi Li dumped cold water on his excitement. “You have two paths in front of you. The first is to completely inherit Old Mi’s cultivation and become a master level expert. However, walking this path will leave you completely reliant on Old Mi’s dao. There is too great of a cultivation gap between the two of you, so jumping straight to master rank will destroy your own fundamental dao. Your cultivation will be frozen at his level forever, and you won’t be able to make any further progress.

“The other path requires me to temporarily seal his cultivation away. This way, you’ll climb the ranks yourself. Each time you level up, you will slowly dissolve a portion of his cultivation. Even though this process is comparatively slower, you will be able to stabilize your foundation. Your future accomplishments will definitely be higher than Old Mi’s.”

After saying all this, Mi Li gave him a curious look. “So, which path shall you choose?”

Zu An showed no hesitation. “Of course I’ll take the first one! Hello? I’ll be at the master rank right away! That’s instant success!”

When did such a young cultivator ever manage to reach master rank? Did such a person ever exist in history?

He was on track to become a huge winner in life!

As for that capped potential or whatever, he’d worry about that later.

From what he'd learned in the academy, few cultivators could even reach master level. Moreover, almost all of them were old men, with one foot already in the grave. Only a small handful could reach that level while they were still in their middle age.

Bluntly speaking, by the time he reached that age, there would be no point in bragging about his cultivation anymore.

Just ask those shut-ins from his previous world! Would they choose to start from scratch, work hard, and enjoy their wealth when they were in their fifties or sixties, or would they rather be wealthy second-generation kids from birth, and enjoy their youth surrounded by young beauties and endless luxury?

Chapter 392: What Element Are You?

Mi Li couldn't believe her ears. Dark lines appeared on her face when she heard the conviction in Zu An's voice.

Mi Li couldn't listen to any more of his nonsense. She cut him off and said, "Cultivators of my generation always pursued the pinnacle of dao. We sought eternal life! Never have I ever met someone like you who would willingly limit your own potential!"

You have successfully trolled Mi Li for 999 Rage points!

She was well and truly pissed off.

Zu An didn't really care. "The path of dao is vague and vast," he replied. "The cultivators of history are like carp crossing a river—innumerable. How many of them can really obtain the pinnacle of dao? Most of them can't even reach master rank."

He had to give Old Mi some credit for reaching master rank. Zu An had thought that he was only at the ninth rank at first.

Mi Li said angrily, "That's only true for the masses. But what about you? You have the legendary transcendent aptitude, and already possess two great techniques for cultivation at such a young age! You've had all sorts of encounters and obtained many different skills. With me as your personal guide, how could you possibly be considered ordinary?"

"You're satisfied with just a measly master rank? In my opinion, someone like you being stuck at the master rank would be history's greatest tragedy!"

You have successfully trolled Mi Li for 66... 66... 66...

Zu An could sense how angry she was just by the inflow of Rage points. "It's not that serious, is it? Isn't a master already pretty badass? Why are you making it sound like some useless pleb level?"

He thought about the insane amount of ki fruits needed to fill even a single formation of his Phoenix Nirvana Sutra right now. Forget about master rank for a moment, reaching the ninth rank might even be a near impossible task!

Mi Li gave a dismissive sniff. "That's only because you haven't experienced the broader world yet. If you were in my position, you would realize just how pitiful a level of cultivation the master rank is!"

"Big sis empress, what rank are you?" Zu An asked curiously. This woman sure talked a big game, but what rank was she, actually? Grandmaster? Don't tell me she's an earth immortal!

Mi Li snorted. "Knowing too much won't help you at all."

Zu An curled his lips and mumbled, "Anyone can talk a big game. I remember you saying that you couldn't even prevail against Old Mi."

Mi Li's eyebrows stood up almost vertically. "What did you say?"

Zu An immediately put on an apologetic smile. "Nothing, nothing! All I am saying is that I'm just a petty nobody who doesn't aspire for anything great. How about I just spend some time as a master first, and we explore this later?"

"No way! Choose the second option!" Perhaps because of her past status as a glorious empress, Mi Li's tone brooked no argument at all.

Zu An felt deflated. "Since you've already made the decision, why did you even bother asking?"

Mi Li snorted. "I was testing out your inner qualities."

"So, what do you think? Don't you feel that I'm really an optimistic person?" Zu An said with a chuckle.

Mi Li glared daggers at him. "You really can't carve anything out of rotten wood!"

His lackadaisical expression irritated Mi Li to no end. "Focus! I'm going to seal Old Mi's cultivation away now."

"Can you please, please, please not seal it?" Zu An was still reluctant, and implored her one last time.

Mi Li sneered. "What do you think?"

She was in no mood to banter with him any further. Her slender fingers shot out and struck his acupoints.

A wave of cool energy entered his body. It was comfortable and refreshing, very different from the icy coldness of Old Mi.

Zu An subconsciously relaxed.

"It's done!"

Mi Li finally announced in a cold voice. Her voice carried more than a hint of fatigue.

Zu An's eyes widened. "Big sis empress, are you all right?"

Mi Li snorted. "I'll live."

Zu An narrowed his eyes.

"Take some time to examine your own condition," Mi Li ordered immediately.

Zu An nodded, and did as she said. He didn't feel odd at all. On the contrary, he felt even better than before.

He moved his focus to his internal formations, and was immediately stunned. Filling even a single one of the nine formations that made up his fourth rank seemed almost impossible before, yet now, all nine of the formations were completely filled!

He noticed that nine new formations had materialized across his body, and even the fourth of those formations was already glowing!

"I've reached the fourth step of the fifth rank already?" Zu An muttered to himself.

Mi Li snorted. "Old Mi's cultivation was master rank, after all. Even though most of his cultivation has been sealed away, it's not too surprising for the rest of it to raise you up a level."

Zu An laughed in embarrassment. "I thought that it would take way longer for me to begin reaping the benefits."

Mi Li rolled her eyes. "Since you're already at the fifth rank, let's see what kind of elemental skill you've awakened."

"Which elemental ability is the strongest?" Zu An asked curiously.

Mi Li said indifferently, "Each element is countered by something else. There isn't any element that is strictly better than every other one.

"Of course, it is widely accepted that the lightning and fire elements have more explosive power, and the ice element is excellent for control. The water and wood elements have advantages in healing. The wind element makes you faster, while the earth and metal element excel in defense. However, none of these characteristics are absolute. Every single element has outstanding offensive tools as well as defensive and restorative abilities. It all boils down to the cultivator's own skill in the end."

Zu An couldn't help but ask, "Are these the only elemental types?"

Mi Li shook her head. "No, but these are the most common. There are other rare elements like the spirit element, light element, and dark element. It is rumored that there are even space and time elements. However, these are all rumors that have never been proven."

Zu An was taken aback. "The ones you just mentioned sound pretty overpowered."

"That's not always the case. It still depends on the individual in the end. Of course, these elements do have their own inherent advantages." Mi Li began to grow impatient. "Stop asking so many questions and tell me what element you are already."

Zu An was stunned. "I have no idea. How do I find out?"

Mi Li frowned. "Concentrate on your breathing. Which element around you do you feel the greatest affinity with?"

The academy had taught him a little about the methodology for sensing elements. Zu An closed his eyes and gave it a try. After a while, he opened his eyes in puzzlement. "I don't feel close to any element though. They all seem about the same to me."

Mi Li frowned. "You have no elemental power? How is that possible?!"

Zu An tried again. Sure enough, None of the elements stood out to him.

He was about to give up when he suddenly remembered that a weird bird would show up whenever advanced a rank, which would grant him a new skill.

He immediately examined the formations that made up the fourth rank. Sure enough, they were linked together with lines, which formed the imprint of another new bird.

The weird bird resembled a titmouse[1], but was the size of a peacock, and had a dazzling scarlet coloration.

The characters next to it proclaimed it to be the 'Hundredwarble'.

What did this Hundredwarble do?

Zu An was rather curious. He activated it subconsciously. A dazzling bird flew out, and released a pleasant-sounding call.

It's song was more enchanting than even the most beautiful voice. It truly relaxed the mind.

But what did this bird do?

Was it only good for putting on a show?

If that's the case, I can just bring a recorder around with me!

He immediately turned to Mi Li. "Big sis empress, do you hear anything?"

Mi Li didn't reply. He was just about to repeat his question when he noticed the slack expression in her eyes.

What was going on?

He waved his hands in front of her.

Mi Li's eyes returned to normal. She looked at him with a complicated expression. "You actually awakened the power of the spirit element."

"Spirit element?" Zu An was stunned. It took him a moment to realize that she was talking about his elemental power, which awakened at the fifth rank.

The spirit element was one of the rarer elements.

Mi Li sighed deeply. "I sensed a wave of spiritual force invading my mind. If it wasn't for my higher level of cultivation, my mind might have fallen under your control."

Zu An was overjoyed. "Is this skill that awesome?"

What level was Mi Li at? The Hundredwarble's song had even managed to control someone like her! Even though it had only been for an instant, that instant was long enough for him to do many things!

Mi Li snorted, "It's too early for you to feel smug. I still haven't fully recovered, and even my soul is exposed right now. I wasn't prepared to go up against such an attack at all. If you were fighting against someone with strength similar to my own, your spiritual attack might not do anything."

Chapter 393: Special Training

Zu An laughed. "That's more than enough for now. This skill will probably grow together with my cultivation."

In the beginning, just using Grandgale once would have exhausted practically all his ki.

Yet now, he could use it many times in succession, and the distances he could blink across had become greater and greater as well.

The mind-control ability of Hundredwarble would only grow stronger as well.

Mi Li's expression grew serious. "You shouldn't dismiss this so casually. The spirit element is rarer than other elemental abilities. It comes with its perks, but it's also a double-edged sword. If you use your skill on someone who is way stronger, or someone who is mentally tougher, you could easily suffer a backlash, and suffer a severe injury instead. In the worst case, even your very soul might be eradicated! You'll turn into a human vegetable without any intelligence."

"Relax, I'm not that dumb. I won't use it against anyone whose cultivation is much higher than mine." Zu An knew that what she had described wasn't something that would affect him, as this skill wasn't tied to his own consciousness. He couldn't quite explain why this was the case, though, so he told Mi Li what she wanted to hear to placate her.

Mi Li finally nodded in satisfaction. "All right, let's see you throw a punch."

Zu An gave her a bewildered look.

"Use all your strength. I want to test something out," Mi Li said.

Zu An was slightly worried. "What if... what if I hurt you?"

He felt as if he was full of explosive strength right now.

He wouldn't be worried at all if she had been in peak form. He would not have been able to injure her then, even if he possessed ten times his current strength.

However, she only had a soul body right now, so she was far weaker. Of course he was concerned.

Mi Li smiled confidently. "Don't worry! You can't injure me. Hurry up!"

Zu An could only sigh when he heard her say this. "Fine then. No one has ever asked me for something like this in my life. I'm great at following orders, so here I go!"

He swung at her fiercely as soon as he finished his sentence. All of his ki was transferred into his fist, whipping up a tremendous gale.

Mi Li's face turned red. She dodged to the side and said, "You damned brat, you could've punched me anywhere else! Why did you aim for my chest?"

You have successfully trolled Mi Li for 33 Rage points!

Unfortunately, she had misunderstood Zu An's intentions. He had targeted that area because it wasn't a vital spot, and she even had layers of fat there to protect her. If something really went wrong, he would not have ended up injuring her significantly.

Zu An was surprised to see the Rage points flow in. Why are you getting angry when you are the one who told me to hit you?

Mi Li took a couple of steps back, then she extended a fine white hand to catch his fist.

Zu An felt as if his fist had sunk into a ball of cotton. All his strength dispersed into nothingness.

What shocked him even more was that Mi Li was clearly a soul body, and yet the sensation at contact wasn't very different from what he would have felt if he'd hit an ordinary person. The physical feedback was the same, and her palm even held a bit of warmth.

Mi Li released his fist and sighed contentedly. "I see."

"What do you mean?" Zu An was curious.

Mi Li said, "I felt something strange when we fought in the dungeon. Your strength was somehow far greater than your level of cultivation. I thought that it might have been just the boost that the Phoenix Nirvana Sutra afforded you, but this does not seem to be the case at all.

"You aren't currently injured, so this should be your baseline strength. However, when you strengthen yourself with ki, your power and speed are both higher than what a cultivator at the fourth step of the fifth rank should possess—much, much higher.

"From that test just now, your ki density can match that of an early sixth rank cultivator."

"Early sixth rank cultivator?" Even Zu An was shocked. Even though he'd always felt like it wasn't too difficult to beat someone who was at a higher rank, he never had a good gauge as to how strong he really was.

"It's probably due to your Phoenix Nirvana Sutra. This really is a miraculous technique." Mi Li continued, "However, with these advantages come disadvantages. From what I've seen, your cultivation advances much more slowly than an ordinary person's. You have transcendent level aptitude, so this shouldn't be the case."

"That's what I've been saying!" Zu An shouted. For every rank, the Phoenix Nirvana Sutra would create nine formations, and each formation required many more Ki Fruits in order to fill. The first three ranks had been manageable, but the requirements for subsequent ranks only became more and more ridiculous.

For example, the fifth formation of the fifth rank would require 2,178,309 Ki fruits, and each Ki Fruit could be obtained with, on average, 1000 Rage points. This meant that he would need 217 million Rage points!

Even in his best moments, he could only farm around 20,000 Rage points. He had no idea how many years it would take to gather such a crazy amount of Rage points.

He felt an immediate sense of relief when he heard Mi Li's explanation.

Mi Li found his mental state admirable. "You're not discouraged by this at all?"

"Why would I feel discouraged? Isn't this the mark of a protagonist?" Zu An laughed loudly.

Wasn't this the hallmark of all the main characters in the web novels of his previous world? The main characters always level up at a slower rate than others because of various reasons, but every single level they gained would grant them better powers than anyone else. Finally, they would always prevail against those ranked higher than themselves.

"Protagonist?" Mi Li frowned. She didn't really understand what he meant, but she was already used to Zu An spouting nonsensical words.

"By the way, I was observing your battle against Old Mi. I noticed that the reason you were caught, apart from your gap in cultivation, was because of the movement technique he taught you. You could only split into two copies, so he could just catch both. If you could split into three or more images, it would be much harder for someone like Old Mi to catch you again."

Zu An smiled bitterly. "Two is the best I could do, even after practicing like crazy."

"That was because your cultivation was too low," Mi Li replied. "Now that you're at the fifth rank, you should be able to make three. Watch closely!"

As she spoke, she fetched a stick of bamboo from goodness knows where and struck him with it.

"Ow, ow, ow!"

Zu An immediately felt a scorching line of pain when the bamboo stick had thwacked him, and he screamed in pain.

Even if a normal person hacked at him with a blade, he wouldn't feel any pain, thanks to the Primordial Origin Sutra. Who knew that a random stick of bamboo in Mi Li's hands would be so deadly?

"You are not allowed to strike back. You can only use your movement technique to dodge." Mi Li paused, then added, "Of course, it won't make a difference even if you try to retaliate."

Zu An cursed inside. Is she using this chance to get back at me?

However, the bamboo stick flashed at him again, and he couldn't afford any more distractions. He quickly used his modified Sunflower Phantasm to split into two copies.

Unfortunately, he was forced to let out another pitiful scream. Mi Li's bamboo stick thwacked him with absolute precision on his backside.

"I don't want to play anymore! You're cheating! I learned this movement technique from you, so you can easily guess where I would dodge!"

At least Old Mi hadn't known about his modified movement technique. Mi Li could read him like a book!

Zu An rubbed his butt cheek while he stared at her. Did this woman have some weird fetish? Her looks, paired with that bamboo stick in her hand, made her look just like a dominatrix!

"I won't be able to hit you if you manage to split yourself into three." Mi Li's lips curved upwards. Why did whacking this kid bring her so much... joy?

Her bamboo stick flicked out again as she said this. Zu An yelled immediately and dodged to the side when he saw that she was being serious.

Miserable howls echoed again and again in the wilderness.

"Ah!!"

"Ah, ah!!"

"Huh? AH!!!"

Chapter 394: Three Treasures

It was a long time before the miserable screaming in the forest finally stopped.

Within it, three figures darted back and forth, avoiding the strikes from a bamboo stick again and again.

Continuing this further was meaningless. Mi Li tossed the bamboo stick aside with a satisfied expression. "Not bad, kid! You managed to split into three copies quite quickly. I expected it to take you at least a few weeks."

Zu An gave her a disbelieving look.

Excuse me?!

Did you plan on beating my ass for that long?

Mi Li realized she'd slipped up when she saw his furious expression. She said guiltily, "How else could you learn how to split into three copies that quickly?"

Zu An mulled over her words. They did make some sense. The result of it was good at least, although he was still aching all over.

"Doesn't your Phoenix Nirvana Sutra require you to get beaten up in order to activate? I'm helping you with that as well," Mi Li added helpfully.

"Thank you so, so much!" Zu An said resentfully.

One day, I'll get my revenge and give you a good beating...

Mi Li coughed. "By the way, there's something else I need to talk to you about. You can't just rely on getting beaten up to cultivate either. You should find some ki stones to aid your cultivation."

Zu An shook his head. "I can't. I've tried it before. I can't absorb ki from ki stones."

"You can't absorb ki?" Mi Li frowned. "That's probably a special characteristic of the Phoenix Nirvana Sutra. I'd advise you to find some treasures to ingest, then. There are several pill masters who can make ki pills. I've heard of some cultivation techniques that prevent direct absorption of ki from ki stones as well, but I've never heard of any that negate the use of ki pills or treasures."

Zu An's eyes lit up. That's right! Aren't the Ki Fruits I get from the lottery similar to ki pills? Why didn't I think of this before?

I'll have to ask Ji Dengtu about this later. He is a divine physician after all, so he should have some of these pills.

Mi Li spoke again. "I've helped you seal away Old Mi's cultivation, but at the expense of all of the effort I spent detoxifying my poison. I'll have to start all over again from the beginning... Hmph, I really wonder if I owed you something in my past life! I'm going to sleep again. Be careful."

Even though he knew that she helped him because their fates were closely intertwined, Zu An was still moved by this. "Big sis empress, you've always been the one helping me. Is there something I can help you out with?"

"Help me?" Mi Li sniffed. "I don't need it."

Her soul body began to dissipate. However, just as she was about to disappear completely, her figure condensed again. "Even though I don't think you can do anything for me right now, your luck is honestly kind of ridiculous. Who knows, you might just be able to help me out somehow in the future."

"If you have a chance, help me look for some One Life Water, an Agate of Enlightenment, and a Five-Colored Springflower. These are all essential ingredients I require to reconstruct a body after I fully detoxify the 'Red Tears of Lady Xiang'."

Zu An immediately brightened up. "You can reforge your body with just these three items?"

Mi Li snorted. "'Just three items'? Do you know how rare these items are?!"

"For example, to find a Five-Colored Springflower, we first have to find an extremely rare Five-Colored Springtree with lotus-like leaves. 'Spring begins and jade flowers bloom, spring ends and flowers fall; summer begins and red flowers emerge, summer ends and flowers wither; autumn begins and white flowers appear, autumn ends and flowers decline; winter begins and purple flowers sprout, but all things end with the descent of snow.'"

Zu An was puzzled. "Aren't there only four colors mentioned? Why is it called a five-colored flower?"

"I don't know either." Mi Li said dejectedly.

"You don't even know?" Zu An was blown away. Are you kidding me? This is vital information!

Mi Li grew defensive. "It's because I've never seen this divine tree either. I've only read about it from ancient texts."

Zu An stared at her, speechless.

Mi Li used to be the empress of the Qin Dynasty! The entire world had practically been hers! If even someone like her had never laid eyes on this before, did it even exist? How was he supposed to find something like that?

"How do you know that it can reforge your body if you've never even seen it before?" Zu An asked curiously.

Mi Li snorted. "You don't need to worry about that. I just know."

Zu An clicked his tongue. Women always loved pretending to be mysterious.

Mi Li sighed deeply. "One Life Water and the Agate of Enlightenment are also legendary items. Not only do you need to possess a significant level of strength in order to obtain them, you need tremendous luck as well. Aside from these three things, there is another legendary item that is even harder to find."

"There's something else? What is it?" Zu An asked.

Mi Li shook her head. "Considering your current strength, it would be useless even if I told you."

Zu An had nothing to say in reply.

When he sensed the discouragement in her voice, he couldn't help trying to console her. "Big sis empress, don't worry! Others might have a hard time finding these items, but have you forgotten who I am? It's no problem at all! I'll find them for you."

Mi Li was surprised by the confidence in his voice. "Have you heard about these items before? Or maybe you even know where to find them?"

Zu An shook his head. "I've never heard about any of them before."

Mi Li was so irritated that she laughed instead. "Then where the heck is all this confidence coming from?!"

You have successfully trolled Mi Li for 250 Rage points!

Zu An patted his chest. "Didn't I say I was the protagonist? I'm the freaking king of plot armor!"

Which protagonist in his previous world didn't have the craziest luck? How could his luck be any worse than theirs?

Mi Li was speechless. She didn't feel like talking to him anymore, and went into hibernation. She didn't want to lose any more brain cells.

After she had gone back to sleep, Zu An went into the forest in search of his Tai'e Sword, and hid the Poisonous Prick in his shoe.

He walked over to Old Mi's corpse. Staring at the mummified corpse, he said with a sigh, "Whatever. Even though it was all a scheme, you did help me after all. I'll let you rest in peace."

He dug a grave and buried Old Mi inside. Then, he found Wei Dan's corpse and threw it into the pit as well. "The two of you fought bitterly over an entire lifetime. Now that it's all over, you two can keep each other company."

A thought occurred to him. He took out a case and placed it next to Old Mi's corpse. "Old Mi, I've brought back your treasures. You're complete now. Live out your next life properly, all right?"

As for Wei Dan's treasures, there was nothing he could do about them.

Perhaps because the corpse was too dried up, or perhaps as a final act of kindness, an embroidered pouch fell out from within Old Mi's clothes.

"Huh?" Zu An immediately recognized it as a storage pouch. His mood brightened immediately. "Old Mi, Old Mi! I didn't expect you to be such a grateful person! I'll take that, if you don't mind."

Even though Old Mi didn't seem like the super rich type, for better or for worse, he was still a master rank cultivator. His storage pouch should contain some good stuff.

Unfortunately, he discovered that he couldn't open it at all!

He groped around Wei Dan's body and found another storage pouch. It looked more extravagant than Old Mi's, and probably had better loot as well.

It was a pity that Zu An couldn't open this one either.

Mi Li's voice rang out beside his ear. "Stop wasting your time. There are master rank soul imprints on them. You can't open them unless you're the owner. They're already dead, so you won't be able to take anything out, even if there are items inside."

Zu An was given a sudden fright. "Weren't you sleeping?"

"I haven't fallen asleep yet. Do you have a problem with that?" Mi Li shot back.

Sis, I have absolutely no problem with that. Please, do what you need to do.

"Sigh, I need to sleep, but I sense someone approaching. Be careful." Mi Li let out what seemed like a yawn, and her presence vanished.

Chapter 395: Golden Finger

"Someone's coming?" Zu An jumped in fright. "Hey, come back! Is it a person or a wild beast?!"

But Mi Li was already gone, and didn't respond to him no matter how hard he tried.

"You fall asleep as soon as you say you will... Are you a pig?!" Zu An snorted angrily. She'd only said that someone was coming, but she hadn't said anything else. I'm in the depths of Hidden Dragon Mountain right now! What if some crazy beast came after my ass?

He gripped the Tai'e Sword tightly, his entire body going taut.

Soon, a figure emerged from not far away. It was a person!

Zu An grumbled inside. Those other protagonists always ran into some random goddess or beauty in the wilderness. Why did he have to run into some dude? This dude was old and ugly too.

His clothes were tattered like a beggar's, but his eyes were still pretty bright. He was definitely a cultivator, and a strong one at that.

His shoddy appearance was most likely because he'd spent too much time in the mountains, and did not have a spare set of clothing. The man himself didn't seem to care too much about his appearance.

"Brother, are you out for a stroll in the mountains as well?" After considering his options, he decided to greet this man first. After all, he wasn't one to judge.

The middle-aged man was stunned when he saw Zu An. Then, he laughed loudly and said, "Look who decided to suddenly show up! Brat, count yourself unlucky for running into me here!"

Zu An frowned. "Do I know you? I think there's something wrong with your mind."

The middle-aged man flew into a rage. "Do you know what I had to go through because of you? And yet you don't even recognize me?"

You have successfully trolled Wu Di for 666 Rage points!

Seeing the name appear in his notifications brought the events of the Clans Tournament to Zu An's mind. He blurted out, "Weren't you the one whose mom was calling him home for dinner?"

Wu Di gritted his teeth and stared daggers at him.

You have successfully trolled Wu Di for 999 Rage points!

Wu Di spoke, his voice a dark cloud. "I lost to that brat Chu Chuyan because of what you said during the Clans Tournament. A glorious sixth rank cultivator like myself lost to someone at the fifth rank! Not only did I become the laughingstock of everyone around me, I was sent to the mountains to pick herbs! Battered by the winds day after day, my prospects are in ruins..."

His anger intensified when he thought about what his life had been reduced to.

You have successfully trolled Wu Di for 1024 Rage points!

Zu An blinked. He replied subconsciously, "I'm not gonna lie, but losing to a fifth rank junior as a sixth rank senior is honestly kinda embarrassing."

Wu Di stared at him, speechless.

He expected Zu An to be frightened by his words, or at least feel some remorse or subconscious embarrassment.

Yet this kid was laughing in his face!

He felt as if his lungs were going to explode.

You have successfully trolled Wu Di for 444... 444... 444...

“Damned brat, there were eyes everywhere during the Clans Tournament, and the Chu clan was protecting you as well, so I couldn’t do anything to you. But the heavens have shown pity for me! They have granted me a chance encounter with you in the wilderness! Hahahahaha...” Wu Di’s laughter grew more and more chilly.

He suddenly focused his gaze. He noticed the corpses of Old Mi and Wei Dan next to Zu An, as well as the storage pouches in his hands. A greedy glint appeared in his eyes, and his breathing immediately sped up. “Damned brat, hand over those storage pouches! Who knows, if my mood is good, I might even leave you with your life.”

Zu An nodded and said, “Sure!”

With that, he tossed the two storage pouches over to him.

Wu Di was stunned. He fully expected Zu An to refuse, or at least negotiate with him. How could he have predicted that he would just throw them over?

This kid really didn’t act normally at all!

He was afraid that the two pouches might explode, or contain some other nasty surprise, and he put up his guard immediately. He wrapped himself in ki before catching the pouches. However, when he examined them, he didn’t detect any hidden tricks.

Excitement flooded through his veins. “This aura... these are master rank storage pouches!”

He tried to open the pouches using all kinds of different methods. He even tried using elemental fire, but nothing worked.

He put the two pouches away and looked at Zu An. “Brat, I didn’t expect you to be this cowardly! You surrendered them without even putting up a fight!”

Zu An frowned. “What, are you going back on your word now?”

He actually felt a twinge of regret. He had tossed them over in the hope that this dude might actually have a way of opening them. He was much older, after all, and he was also at the sixth rank. In the end, however, he turned out to be completely useless! He wouldn’t have bothered if he’d known that things would turn out this way.

“So what if I go back on my word?” Wu Di’s lips spread in a sinister smile as he closed in on Zu An. “I’m going to teach you an important lesson today! You shouldn’t be so naïve when you’re in the outside world.”

Zu An sighed. “Can’t you tell that I’m not scared of you at all? At least take a moment to think about why I’m acting like this. Who is the naïve one?”

Wu Di was shocked. He stopped in his tracks and looked all around him. Could it be that the Chu clan had set up an ambush?

He looked around but didn’t see a single person. He snorted and said, “You had me scared for a moment there. I received a report not long ago that something major had happened in the Chu clan. How could they afford to send men into the wilderness like that?”

However, he couldn't shake Zu An's cold and disdainful gaze. He seemed as though he was looking at a dead person. Wu Di's mood grew darker and darker. "Damn you, kid! You will learn today that you are absolutely nothing without the Chu clan's protection!"

He thrust out a hand as he spoke. He had witnessed Zu An's style of fighting during the Clans Tournament. This kid was only at the beginning of the third rank. Only an idiot like Yuan Wendong could be done in by this little bastard.

He had six ranks of cultivation! He could crush this brat like an ant!

Seeing the careless way in which Wu Di was reaching towards him, Zu An had confidence that he could behead him in one move.

However, he had just risen a rank, and he wanted to test out his strength. Wu Di's cultivation would make him the perfect punching bag.

As such, he put away the Tai'e Sword and threw out a fist as well.

This kid is courting death! A mocking look flashed across Wu Di's face when he saw that Zu An had no intention of dodging. The difference between sixth rank and third rank was much too vast! His arm might just explode as soon as they made contact!

Why did the Chu clan choose such trash to be their son-in-law? I'm clearly much better.

The two fists made contact. He subconsciously exerted just enough force to break Zu An's fingers. He didn't want this victory to be decided too quickly. Instead, he wanted to slowly torture Zu An. Only then could he vent all his resentment!

Crack!

There was the sharp sound of bones breaking, and a miserable scream echoed throughout the forest.

Wu Di looked at his fingers, which had bent ninety degrees. His expression was one of sheer horror.

How... how is this possible?!

"You've been going on and on from the start. Do you really think you're anything special? Are you really at the sixth rank?" Zu An didn't seize the initiative, instead remaining exactly where he was. He looked at Wu Di in puzzlement.

The scorn and contempt in his voice almost made Wu Di puke blood.

You have successfully trolled Wu Di for 458 Rage points!

He had a similar question of his own. Was this kid really at the third rank?

Am I dreaming or something?

He didn't dare show any more carelessness, and immediately drew his blade. Red flames covered its surface.

With a roar, he launched a cleaving strike at Zu An. He was ambidextrous, so using his off-hand did little to hamper his fighting ability.

Zu An suddenly recalled the Sunflower Finger that Old Mi had passed on to him. He hadn't had a chance to test it out yet. This was the perfect chance to practice.

When he saw Zu An raise a finger to ward off his blade, Wu Di's lips spread in a malicious smile. I am going to chop off your fingers one by one! If not, I will disown my own name!

Zu An could feel the heat of the flames before the blade even made contact.

He shivered inwardly. He was facing an opponent at the sixth rank, after all. Even though he was strong enough to go toe to toe with an opponent at the sixth rank, Wu Di's elemental power was still a force to be reckoned with.

A light bulb went off in his head. He summoned Blue Mallard, gathering all of the nearby water elements towards him.

There were many trees in the forest, so water was naturally plentiful. He quickly collected a large amount of elemental water. The sensation of scorching heat immediately reduced considerably.

As he watched, the flame blade moved ever closer to him. Zu An's finger moved. He thrust it forward, directly towards the approaching blade.

Wu Di felt as though a strange energy vortex had run along the length of his blade, and he almost lost his grip on it. The raging flames were scattered instantly. Fortunately, he immediately regained his focus, and the blade was again wreathed in gouts of flame.

He was horrified. "What kind of skill is this?"

Zu An raised his finger to the edge of his lips and blew off the smoke rising from its tip. "This is the result of a thousand years of... Ahem, ahem, a skill I created on my own. I call it the Golden Finger. Are you impressed?"

Chapter 396: No Honor

"Golden Finger?" Wu Di's breathing sped up. This name sounded quite extraordinary! He had to learn the intricacies of this technique after he captured this kid.

Movement skills were hard to obtain, and combat skills were similarly rare.

After his long years of service to the Wu clan, besides some ki stones and medicinal ingredients, he had only obtained a few low-level combat skills. Now that he was at the sixth rank these skills were already obsolete.

That was why he was still using the Flame Blade to this day, even though it was a skill that he had stumbled upon during his youth.

Now that he was older, his cultivation had also come to a standstill. He could only improve his combat skills if he wanted to increase his strength. This was something that was constantly on his mind, and now Zu An was presenting him with one right before his eyes!

The heavens are showering me with blessings, sending me exactly what I need! Not only did they send me my enemy, they've also bestowed on me a high level fighting skill and two master rank storage pouches!

He felt as though all of the luck in his life added together couldn't even compare to his luck this day.

A feverish desire began to overtake his mind. He charged at Zu An again. The blade in his hand swung about relentlessly, leaving behind streaks of afterimages. He was extremely satisfied with his condition today. He was somehow fighting at 120% of his usual strength!

He felt unstoppable. Apart from Brightmoon City's City Lord and the Masters of the various major clans, no one else in the city was a match for his current self.

Zu An didn't dare let down his guard. He quickly used his Sunflower Phantasm to dodge the attacks, while looking for a chance to counterattack.

Just like that, the two of them exchanged close to a hundred blows.

This sequence not only allowed Zu An to adjust to his current speed and strength, he also grew accustomed to using the Sunflower Finger.

Wu Di was the one who grew more and more anxious as the fight wore on. He had seized a clear advantage in the beginning, yet this kid was a bloody cockroach. He just wouldn't die!

Eventually, Zu An grew more proficient in his finger thrusting technique. He slowly wrestled back the advantage, and it was Wu Di who soon found himself in a tough situation.

Alarm bells began to ring in his mind. He finally realized that Zu An was actually using him as a practice partner!

You have successfully trolled Wu Di for 513 Rage points!

He knew that he couldn't let this continue if he wanted to avoid defeat.

He changed his strategy, opting to attempt to create an opening through brute force.

He thrust his blade into the ground. A ring of surging heat spread out in all directions around him.

Flames rushed out like vipers, devouring everything in their path.

"Don't you love dodging like a coward? Let's see you dodge this huge attack!" Wu Di said with a snort.

Something changed in Zu An's expression. He saw that he couldn't evade this attack, and quickly summoned the Tai'e Sword, bringing forth his Snowflake Sword technique.

Even though he didn't have Chu Chuyan's ability to freeze everything around him, snowflakes still appeared around him. The temperature cooled enough to resist the incoming flames.

"Snowflake Sword!" Wu Di's pupils contracted. This technique was still fresh in his memory. After all, this was the technique Chu Chuyan had used to defeat him!

Hmph! I refuse to believe that you possess Chu Chuyan's strength!

In fact, I won't lose to Chu Chuyan again even if she were here!

Wu Di was furious. Flames surged across the surface of his long blade. "Absolute annihilation!" he roared.

He raised the blade above his head. The flames extended several dozen meters high, and he brought it down towards Zu An with tremendous force.

Using his Sunflower Phantasm, Zu An instantly split into two.

Wu Di sneered. How could his attack be avoided that easily?

He channeled the ki within his body, and his blade of flame instantly split into a dozen or so different blades arrayed in an arc, all slicing downwards.

If the first blade was a straight line, these dozen or so blades formed a fan shape. There was no way for Zu An to avoid it, no matter how formidable his movement technique was.

There was a huge explosion as the blow landed.

Within the area of effect of the attack, the ground was turned to scorched earth. The grass that had previously covered the area was instantly vaporized, exposing the bare soil underneath. Chunks of rubble flew everywhere, and the air filled with a burning smell.

Could it be that even his corpse was burned to nothing? Wu Di sneered. He got off too easily.

He felt a twinge of regret that he hadn't been able to obtain the secrets of that Golden Finger technique. However, he hadn't dared hold back, not after seeing the shocking strength Zu An possessed.

"Hey! What happened to honor and respect in a battle? You shouted Absolute Annihilation, but the technique you used was clearly Mountain Splitter!"[1]

The voice coming from behind him clearly sounded annoyed.

Wu Di was shocked. He immediately turned around and hacked his blade towards the source of the sound. Midway through his swing, he felt a finger touch his back. Then, his body went limp, and his vision darkened.

How did this guy get behind me? That was his final thought.

Zu An was gasping for air. A sixth rank cultivator was a formidable opponent after all. If it hadn't been for big sis empress bullying him into learning how to split into three figures, he might have met his end right then.

That was why he didn't dare to hold back any further. He seized the opportunity and delivered a fatal blow with his Sunflower Finger. However, he didn't expect this opponent to die so easily, from just a single jab.

If he knew that that would happen, he would have used a little less strength. He could have slowly tormented him for a few more Rage points.

However, Wu Di had already served his purpose as a practice partner, and had outlived his usefulness. This thought made Zu An feel much better.

Zu An brought his breathing under control again, and began to reflect over the details of the battle.

He'd fought against tough opponents before, but he had always relied on the Keyboard System's tricks to catch his opponent off guard. This was the first battle in which he'd relied purely on proper cultivation and skills.

When he finally recovered, Zu An walked over to Wu Di and reclaimed the two master rank storage pouches.

His hand suddenly felt something hard. When he took it out, he saw that it was a package containing some bottles.

Wu Di didn't have any spatial storage devices on him. Spatial storage devices were still quite rare in this world. Even though Wu Di was at the sixth rank, he wasn't deemed qualified enough to have one.

Zu An opened up the package and recognized that the contents were bottles of medicine. However, he could tell immediately that they were common-grade items. Now that he'd seen Ji Dengtu's exquisite concoctions, he couldn't care less about these inferior items.

Zu An continued to search the body. As he searched, he muttered, "Brother, you don't want to sleep out in the open like this, do you? I'll take whatever banknotes you have left on you. If you have a few hundred taels of silver, I can even let you sleep next to those two master rank elders. How great of an opportunity would that be? You can even consult those two elders about cultivation once you're down there."

"Huh? Nothing? Not even a single note? What the heck? You're freaking broke!"

"Wait, what's this?"

Zu An had grown rather furious. In the end, however, he finally found two books that were tightly bound.

One of them had the two words, 'Flame Blade', on the cover.

What the heck? Do you have something to do with Jiumozhi?[2]

He had to admit that even though this Wu Di wasn't particularly special, this skill of his was pretty badass. It would be sick if he could also reach a point in his cultivation where he could control a blade of flames.

The power of the skill doesn't matter. It's all about how cool it looks!

He quickly flipped through it, and his heart sank. An individual needed to wield the fire element to cultivate this skill!

Zu An didn't have the power of flames. There was no way he would be able to learn this skill.

A note in the manual caught his eye. It said that this was a growth-type skill that grew in power together with the strength of the wielder's fire element. The more powerful one's fire element became, and the rarer the type, the stronger each move would become.

This was surely why Wu Di kept losing. His fire was the most basic type of fire! If Pei Mianman—with her special black flame—used this skill, its power would surely be many times greater.

“Whatever. I'll just hang on to this. I can give it to big Manman even if I can't use it myself.” Zu An stored this Flame Blade manual into his Brilliant Glass Bead.

The second book had the words 'Ki Gathering Scroll' on the cover.

Hm?

Zu An flipped through it. The book seemed to explain how to concoct pills.

However, this book wasn't complete. A large portion of it was missing!

Thankfully, the first section of the book gave an introduction to pill concocting, as well as the prescription for a pill called the Ki Gathering Pill. This pill could increase a cultivator's ki and accelerate their growth.

Mi Li had just told him to be on the lookout for some treasures or pills to aid in his cultivation. He hadn't expected to obtain a lead so quickly!

Relying solely on Ki Fruits, which he obtained through trading Rage points, was way too slow. If these Ki Gathering Pills could also raise his cultivation, wouldn't it make leveling up ridiculously easy?

Unfortunately, the more he read, the more discouraged he became. The preliminary condition for concocting pills was that the alchemist needed to wield the fire element. Moreover, the more precious the flame, the better the results of the pill, and the greater the benefits towards their cultivation.

Not learning the Flame Blade skill was still acceptable, but this Ki Gathering Scroll made him realize that he definitely had to find a way to awaken the fire element within him.

He needed a ton of resources in order to gain cultivation ranks, and he could only rely on his own efforts.

However, elemental fire couldn't be awakened through desire alone.

He was already at the fifth rank, yet he hadn't seemed to have awoken any elemental power.

Chapter 397: The Other Side

Zu An collected his thoughts and put everything away, then proceeded to properly bury Old Mi and Wei Dan. He even dug the grave a little deeper, so the wild beasts wouldn't be able to get to them, and then covered them up with dirt.

He'd been reluctant to give Wu Di the same respect, but out of gratitude for the two secret manuals, he still buried him.

Of course, there was no way he would bury him next to those elders since he was broke.

Only after completing all this did Zu An head back to Brightmoon City.

It hadn't taken Old Mi long to fly to the middle of nowhere, but Zu AN only had his two poor legs to rely on to make the return journey.

Leaving aside the vicious beasts that roamed the depths of this mountain, just the density of the trees alone made navigation difficult.

Fortunately, his cultivation had increased, and he had all types of cheats at hand. The dangerous crimson dragon in Hidden Dragon Mountain was dead as well, so he didn't have much to worry about as long as he was careful.

Zu An finally returned to the Chu Estate a day later.

"Huh? How come there's so few people here?" Zu An was surprised.

The gates of the estate had been left open as well.

Did something happen?

He ran inside in shock, and ended up running into someone. It was actually Cheng Shouping.

"Young... young... young master?" Cheng Shouping rubbed his eyes. He cried out in complete disbelief.

"What? Have you already forgotten who I am that quickly?" Zu An's mood improved significantly at the sight of a familiar face.

"You... weren't you captured by those two masters?!" Cheng Shouping asked with a dumbfounded expression.

"Oh?" Zu An was taken aback. "You could tell that they were master rank?"

Chegn Shouping replied, "I heard Feng Daniu and the others say this. Everyone was worried about you. Those are master rank cultivators we are talking about here!"

Zu An snorted. "What's so special about master rank? Did you somehow think that they could stop me?"

Cheng Shouping's eyes lit up. "I knew that young master was unfathomably awesome! This humble one's respect for young master gushes forth like the relentless tides of the river!"

He held back his torrent of praise for Zu An long enough to yell, "The young master has returned! The young master has returned! The young master beat up two master rank cultivators and returned completely unharmed!"

Even Zu An felt a little embarrassed at his display. This young man was squealing like a pig! However, being showered with praise did feel pretty good. He finally understood why so many people loved having their boots licked.

The sleepy Chu Estate came alive as Cheng Shouping's hollering echoed around. People rushed out one after another.

In a moment, a petite figure charged straight into his arms. “Brother-in-law! I thought that you were... that you were...”

Chu Huanzhao was shaking all over. She was so emotional that she didn’t even know what to say.

Zu An’s heart softened. He patted her head. “How could I afford to let myself be captured when I have such a cute little Huanzhao waiting for me back home?”

“Brother-in-law is so awesome!” Tears still glistened in Chu Huanzhao’s eyes. She had been extremely worried all this time, and it was precisely because of this that her current smile was so beautiful.

“Ahem, ahem...” A light cough interrupted them. Qin Wanru looked at the two of them awkwardly. She looked as though she wanted to say something, yet didn’t know what to say. However, there was no way she could observe the two of them acting so intimately without doing anything about it.

Zu An turned to greet her. “I pay my respects to Madam.”

Qin Wanru’s face grew red. She quickly said, “Are you injured?”

“Thank you Madam for your concern. I am not injured,” Zu An replied.

“What about Old Mi and that mysterious expert?” Qin Wanru asked anxiously. This was the question on everyone else’s lips as well. They really couldn’t figure out how he’d escaped from their clutches.

“They’re dead,” replied Zu An.

“Dead?” Qin Wanru was shocked. Master rank cultivators were individuals who instilled fear wherever they went. The death of any one of them was a big deal. “How did they die?”

“They obviously died at the young master’s hands!” Cheng Shouping couldn’t resist blurting this out, desperately trying to steal a piece of the limelight for himself.

Qin Wanru shot him a look. “Nonsense. How could a master rank...”

Zu An spoke as well. “Old Mi did perish at my hands.”

Qin Wanru trailed off, her objection left unsaid.

Everyone else in the estate stared at him, utterly speechless.

This was truly inconceivable to all of them. However, Zu An had returned perfectly unharmed, so they had no reason to disbelieve him.

If there had been a ‘Like’ button around, all of them would have been smashing it right then.

A figure reached out and grabbed him. “Brat, you managed to kill a master? How?!”

Zu An turned around and saw that this was Ji Dengtu. A shy and obedient young lady stood nearby. Who else could this be but Ji Xiaoxi?

Zu An was stunned. “Why are you guys here?” He just couldn’t relax while a pervert like Ji Dengtu was lurking around the Chu Estate.

Ji Xiaoxi's gentle voice came in reply. "Brother Zu, we rushed over to help out when we heard that you were captured. In the meantime, we also gave Madam Chu some treatment."

Zu An smiled. "You really are a good little sister. You rushed over as soon as you heard something happened to me."

Ji Xiaoxi lowered her head in embarrassment, her hands clutching the hem of her skirt. Her face was completely red.

Chu Huanzhao snorted loudly. That girl looks so obedient on the outside, but she's also a cunning fox demon! However, this girl had treated her mother's injuries, so she couldn't bring herself to curse her. Chu Huanzhao was in quite the dilemma.

Ji Dengtu jumped between the two of them. "Brat, what do you mean, speaking as though you two are brother and sister? Are the two of you even that close?"

Zu An knew that it was time to shut up, now that this demon of a helicopter dad had intervened.

"You still haven't answered my question. How did you kill a master rank cultivator?" Ji Dengtu asked again.

"I..." As soon as he began to speak, Qin Wanru interrupted him.

"Let's talk in the study. Everyone else, return to your posts. Recall everyone who has gone out looking for Zu An." There were too many people around, and she was worried that some sensitive information might leak out.

Zu An finally knew why the Chu Estate seemed so desolate. Apparently, many of the guards and clan members had been dispatched to look for him!

It looks like Madam really does treat me pretty well.

Ji Dengtu rushed over to Qin Wanru's side and said with a smile, "Indeed, indeed. Madam is most wise."

Zu An was completely speechless by the behavior of this disgusting simp. Ji Dengtu was clearly a powerful cultivator, yet he was acting like a complete bootlicker!

Qin Wanru frowned but said nothing. She led the small group of them towards the study.

Zu An followed her into the study, where he roughly explained the events that had transpired in the mountain. Of course, he didn't mention the Phoenix Nirvana Sutra at all, since his life hung in the balance when it came to that.

Despite this omission, his story was already incredibly shocking to all who were present. His incredible tale was met by a constant stream of excited gasps.

"So, of the two masters, one ended up dead, and the other injured, and you nipped in to take advantage of the situation," Ji Dengtu said with a hint of disdain when he finally understood what had happened.

Chu Huanzhao was clearly unhappy with his tone. "An injured master rank cultivator is still a master rank cultivator! Brother-in-law really did kill a master rank cultivator! Can you boast about having such skill?"

"I..." Ji Dengtu felt his breath catch in his throat. There was no refuting that logic!

You have successfully trolled Ji Dengtu for 228 Rage points!

He couldn't take his anger out on a little girl, so the best he could do was to redirect it at Zu An.

Zu An didn't really mind. To be honest, the more Rage points, the better.

Qin Wanru clearly blamed herself for her oversight. "I always thought Old Mi was just a normal gardener. Who knew he was a master rank cultivator! I can't believe I didn't notice this, even after so many years."

Ji Dengtu consoled her. "It's not your fault. It's extremely difficult for others to notice a master rank cultivator if they wish to go into hiding."

Qin Wanru frowned. "But then, why was he hiding out in the Chu Estate? Also, who is that other elder, who was also at master rank? Why would the two of them fight to the death?"

Ji Dengtu offered his analysis. "In my opinion, Old Mi might not have been scheming against the Chu clan when he was hiding in the Chu Estate. He was probably just hiding from an enemy. It's highly likely that the other mysterious expert was that enemy."

...

Zu An exhaled softly as he listened to the debate surrounding this possible new conspiracy. This matter involved the emperor's secrets, and he felt it was best if he didn't mention anything further. He didn't want to invite disaster upon himself.

Qin Wanru had yet to recover from her injuries. Now that Zu An had come back safely, she couldn't suppress her fatigue any longer. With Chu Huanzhao supporting her, she headed back to her own chambers for some much-needed rest.

Ji Dengtu and his daughter were satisfied that her condition was stable, and that Zu An was safe. They took their leave as well.

Zu An quickly chased after them. "Elder, do you have any Ki Gathering Pills that can increase cultivation? I'll buy your entire stock!"

Ji Dengtu's face darkened. "I don't have any!"

With that, he stormed off in a huff.

Zu An was stunned. What did I do to tick you off so badly?

Ji Xiaoxi explained, "Big brother Zu, please don't mind him. Something happened to my father before, and that experience made him vow never to concoct such pills again, because doing so would only help cultivators take more lives. That is why he has vowed only to make life-saving medicines."

Zu An was stunned. He didn't expect that pervert Ji Dengtu to have such a noble side.

"Then, do you know how to concoct those pills?" Zu An wasn't willing to give up just yet.

Ji Xiaoxi shook her head. "I don't. My father never taught me how."

Zu An felt his spirits slump. He'd been banking on being able to grab a batch of these pills from Ji Dengtu, yet now, it seemed as though he could only rely on himself. He could only place all of his hopes on that Ki Gathering Scroll.

Chapter 398: Count Me In

"Xiaoxi, we're leaving!" Ji Dengtu's dissatisfied voice floated over. He clearly didn't want his daughter to keep talking to Zu An.

Ji Xiaoxi stuck out her tongue at her dad, and then gave Zu An an apologetic smile, before running after her father.

Zu An gave Ji Dengtu a resentful look. Hmph! I'm going to keep feeding you NTR and leave you with a huge mental shadow.

Sigh, Xiaoxi is super cute though. I wonder if she'll continue to be like that forever.

Her mom's genes must be awfully strong. There's no other way that wretched Ji Dengtu could have produced such a beautiful daughter.

Zu An yawned a few times. He'd been running around all over the place these past few days, and hadn't gotten much rest at all. He returned to his room to get some sleep.

...

The night passed peacefully. During breakfast the next morning, Qin Wanru looked at Zu An and said with a gentle voice, "Ah Zu, you should head to the academy and thank Principal Jiang. She went looking all over for you when she found out that you'd been captured."

Chu Huanzhao was confused. "Mom, why is your tone suddenly so pleasant?"

"What do you mean, 'suddenly'? I've always been nice, okay?!" Qin Wanru frowned.

A shocked expression swiftly appeared on Chu Huanzhao's face. "Mom, why is your face red?"

Qin Wanru was given a fright. She rubbed her own cheeks. They were indeed a little warm. She grew embarrassed and annoyed. "Brat, is your skin itching for a spanking?"

She stood up to grab Chu Huanzhao. Frightened, Chu Huanzhao jumped behind Zu An. "Brother-in-law, brother-in-law! Save me!"

Qin Wanru caught up to her, but her heart leapt into her throat when she caught sight of Zu An and his smile. She quickly took a step back and said, "You two, take your time to finish your breakfast. I'm going back to rest."

With that, she left quickly, harboring a guilty conscience.

Chu Huanzhao walked out from behind Zu An. She couldn't help but wink and say, "Brother-in-law, don't you feel like mom is acting a little strange?"

Zu An smiled in embarrassment. "Not really."

"No way. The both of you are acting weirdly." Chu Huanzhao looked Zu An up and down.

Zu An jumped backwards in fright. He was just about to defend himself when Chu Huanzhao suddenly asked, "Brother-in-law, do you think a bad person is impersonating mom?"

Too much had happened in the Chu Estate recently, and she was beginning to grow paranoid.

Zu An stared at her stupidly.

"What in the world are you thinking? Don't you even recognize your own mother?"

"I guess you're right." Chu Huanzhao laughed awkwardly. "She should still be the same old mom. Her boobs are still so big..."

Zu An's face darkened. Is that really the metric you should be using?

A group of men suddenly approached them, giving Zu An a fright. He was about to prepare himself for a fight when he saw them kneel and offer their greetings.

"Commander Yue, what are you doing? Please get up!" Zu An recognized this person. It was none other than the commander of the Chu clan's guards, Yue Shan.

Yue Shan shook his head. "I was lured away from my post due to my carelessness. If not for young master's actions, Chu Estate would have fallen into the hands of treacherous villains. Young master deserves my respect."

He bowed towards Zu An earnestly again.

Zu An noted his travel-worn face. The heavy bags under his eyes showed that he hadn't gotten much rest on his way back home. He immediately felt great respect for this man. "Commander Yue surely had a rough journey back. Please rise."

Yue Shan sighed. "My journey back was nothing compared to the blood, sweat, and tears that young master shed in defense of the Chu clan. You calmed the rebellion led by Chu Tiesheng and Hong Zhong all on your own."

His heart was filled with incredible admiration. When Zu An had first joined the Chu clan, he'd been more than a little displeased. After all, how could a goddess like Chu First Miss be married to a wastrel like that? However, as time passed, Zu An had gradually revealed his brilliance. This time, he had even pulled them out of such a desperate crisis!

As expected, the first miss really was amazing. Her judgment was truly clearer than anyone else's.

Zu An chuckled. "Commander Yue is too kind. I was just lucky."

Yue Shan's tone remained serious. "Young master has made such great contributions to the clan, yet you still remain so humble. You truly possess an upright and noble character, and you prove yourself a worthy example for us all..."

Even Zu An's face began to turn red from all this praise. He never knew that this honest fellow was actually such a great flatterer! This man was usually earnest, and all his words sounded so sincere.

Chu Huanzhao snorted. "I told you guys a long time ago that my brother-in-law was awesome, and all of you thought that I was an idiot for saying so. I'm sure you guys believe me now!"

Yue Shan forced a smile. "Second miss, your eyes burn bright like torches! This subordinate is fully convinced!"

Chu Huanzhao immediately beamed with joy at receiving praise from the habitually serious Yue Shan.

Seeing how smug she was getting, Zu An coughed and cut in immediately. "The Chu clan is currently facing turbulent times. We'll need to rely heavily on Commander Yue in the days to come."

Yue Shan cupped his hands. "That is my duty. I will pay my respects to Madam first, and take my orders from her."

Zu An smiled. "I will not hold you back any further, Commander Yue. However, you should really get some rest after you meet with Madam. This journey has really worn all of you out."

Yue Shan felt a warmth spread outwards from his heart. "Thank you, young master."

Chu Huanzhao chattered non-stop on their way to the academy.

"Brother-in-law, I was able to borrow some of your limelight today! That Yue Shan doesn't usually care about anyone other than mom, dad, and big sis. He always has that smug and condescending attitude."

"I didn't expect Yue Shan, with his big eyes and thick brows, to be so good at flattering people!"

"Brother-in-law, brother-in-law, tell me more about your battle against Old Mi!"

"Brother-in-law, are you listening?"

...

When they arrived at the academy, Chu Huanzhao went off to class, and Zu An went to the principal's office.

Shang Liuyu was just leaving the office when he arrived. Her long hair billowed behind her, along with her dress, giving her a graceful and elegant air.

Her beauty never failed to stun him whenever he saw her. It was no wonder countless other teachers in the academy considered her to be their goddess.

But then, why did he always see her with Jiang Luofu? Were these two somehow involved with each other?

Zu An couldn't keep his thoughts leashed. Please, don't let it be so! That would be such a waste!

How many men's hearts would be broken if that was the case?

Shang Liuyu seemed just as surprised to see him. "I heard that you were captured by a master rank cultivator."

"Yup. I only just got back," Zu An said with a smile.

“How in the world did you manage to get out of that?” Even the gentle and refined Shang Liuyu was curious. Her beautiful eyes swirled with light.

“I was about to die, but I remembered that the beautiful Teacher Shang was waiting for me back at the academy. How could I afford to resign myself to death? That’s when I went berserk and killed him,” Zu An said.

“You don’t have a shred of decency,” Shang Liuyu scoffed. She left quickly, her face red.

She had always been a gentle and refined person, and there were many things that she had no interest in. She was glad that Zu An had returned safely, and she didn’t really care to know about how he’d made it back.

Zu An lamented Shang Liuyu's departure. She was so pretty even when she was angry! No wonder so many men had fallen for her.

Hm? Why aren’t there any Rage points, though?

Jiang Luofu’s voice came from inside the office. “Are you done staring? If you are, then get inside already.”

Zu An was stunned. Can this woman see through walls?

He pushed open the door and went inside. His eyes immediately widened. Jiang Luofu was draped across her couch in a rather unladylike manner, her stockinged legs casually propped up on the office table.

Zu An was a little displeased by this. I’ve never seen you act like this in front of other people. Why are you only like this in front of me?

What is the meaning of this?

Are you treating me as though I’m not a man?!

Jiang Luofu twirled her brush idly. Her fingers were beautifully fair and slender.

“Brat, did you tease my little Yu again?”

“Little Yu?” It took a moment for Zu An to realize that she was talking about Shang Liuyu, and he immediately replied in a gloomy voice, “When did Teacher Shang become yours?”

Jiang Luofu snorted. “She is my wife, so of course she’s mine.”

Zu An felt his jaw hit the floor.

“Gorgeous principal, is there room for me as well?”

Chapter 399: Transaction

“Look at my lips,” Jiang Luofu said. “Fu-ck-off.”

Zu An looked at her disapprovingly.

“Principal, such vulgar speech isn’t befitting of your status at all.”

Jiang Luofu stretched, which was, in itself, a gorgeous sight to behold. “Did anyone hear anything? I sure didn’t.”

Zu An was speechless. He hadn’t expected this woman to be such a rascal! However, he soon figured out that she had only called Shang Liuyu her wife as a joke between best friends.

Female students in his previous world often did this as well.

He just couldn’t understand why they would do that. If two close male friends called each other husbands, uh...

Jiang Luofu tapped her brush on the table. “Why don’t you tell me how you got away from a master rank opponent? Please save me from that ‘going berserk’ or whatever garbage.”

Zu An felt his face redden. So the principal had heard all his attempts at flirting while he’d been outside her door! He roughly told her what had happened, giving her the same story he had given the Chu clan.

Jiang Luofu was silent for a moment. It was a while before her red lips opened again. “I believe I fought against that other master rank cultivator that you mentioned. Back then, I couldn’t figure out why he would start trouble in the academy, but it now seems as though he was investigating the people around you.”

Zu An immediately launched into endless flattery. “Principal Jiang managed to hold her own against a master rank opponent! My respect to you gushes for like the relentless tides of the river, like the ripples of Brightmoon River...”

“Enough, enough.” Jiang Luofu’s face turned red, and she cut him off immediately. “He clearly held back. That was the only reason I was able to defeat him.”

Zu An changed what he was saying. “Gorgeous principal is honest and upright, you refuse to accept credit for outstanding deeds that do not belong to you! You are simply the noblest among women, a paragon of virtue...”

He continued in this vein for a long time, but still she didn’t cut him off. Instead, she looked at him with great amusement.

He continued to heap praise on her, but inevitably began to run out of gas. He quickly found an excuse. “Sorry, my throat is a little dry from all this talking. I’m going to get a sip of water.”

He grabbed the teacup next to him and drank a large gulp.

Jiang Luofu couldn’t stop him in time. She smiled a strange little smile. “Little Yu just drank from that cup. Isn’t what you did considered an indirect kiss? Countless men would love to have such an experience, and yet you’ve obtained it so cheaply.”

“Ahem...” Zu An was stunned. Only then did he see the faint lipstick mark on the edge of the cup. Even more shocking was that there was another, much clearer mark as well, and the color of this one was quite similar to the lipstick Jiang Luofu was wearing.

“Gorgeous principal, I’m really starting to doubt your relationship with big sister Shang...”

Jiang Luofu snorted. She snatched the teacup from him. “What an unromantic man. This is your reaction after indirectly kissing your principal?”

Zu An had nothing to say to her.

Sigh. I always have a great time teasing Ji Xiaoxi, Chu Huanzhao, and all these young maidens. They flush with anger as soon as I play around with them a little.

However, with this woman, I’m somehow the one who gets played instead!

“Hm? You’ve already risen to the fifth rank?” Jiang Luofu gave him a surprised look. She now sensed the changes in Zu An’s aura. “The cultivation speed of individuals with transcendent aptitude is truly enviable.”

When they had first met, he had just begun on the path of cultivation. Not much time had passed at all, and yet he was already the fifth rank!

There were many publicly acknowledged talents in the academy who had been meticulously nurtured since they were young. However, only a few of them were able to reach the fifth rank!

“Unfortunately, I didn’t awaken any elemental abilities,” Zu An said with a bitter laugh. Mi Li thought that he controlled the spirit element, but that was merely the Hundredwarble skill.

“You don’t have any elemental ability? How can that be?” Jiang Luofu put away her teasing smile and straightened.

“I’m not joking. I don’t sense a special connection with any element around me.” Zu An explained what he sensed to her.

Jiang Luofu remained silent for a long time. In the end, she said, “Usually, all who break into the fifth rank will instantly recognize their elemental ability. I have never heard of anyone in your situation. Maybe it’s different for you because you have transcendent aptitude. Normal people can sense it at the fifth rank, but transcendent aptitude cultivators might need more time. They might need to be at the sixth rank before this happens.”

“What can we do, then?” Zu An was befuddled. Wasn’t his transcendent aptitude supposed to be a means to quickly reach the peak of human existence? Why were there negative effects to it instead?

“Just keep doing what you’re doing,” said Jiang Luofu. “You might just suddenly awaken your elemental power one day. You’ll find a way as long as you don’t despair. Since you have transcendent aptitude, you will definitely awaken to an element.”

“Gorgeous principal is probably the only one who can say such things to me.” Zu An couldn’t help but complain.

Jiang Luofu’s face reddened. “What can we do? There are practically no cultivators in the whole of history who possess transcendent level aptitude, so we don’t have any past experience to use as reference.”

"I guess so." There was no way Zu An could do anything about it, if even the principal had no idea what to do. He suddenly thought about the two fire element manuals he had obtained. "By the way, is there anything I can do if I want to awaken the fire element?"

"Fire element?" Jiang Luofu was surprised. Chu Chuyan possessed the ice element. If he awakened the fire element, wouldn't they clash? "The elemental affinity usually appears on its own as soon as you reach the fifth rank, and isn't something that can be chosen. Of course, there have been exceptions. For example, some with exceptional luck might inherit or encounter certain ability scrolls that can help to awaken a certain element directly.

"However, such circumstances are extremely rare. Only those with exceptional luck have a chance at this."

She never expected Zu An to sigh in relief. "Thank goodness there's a way. If it's just luck, well, I'm hardly lacking in that department."

Jiang Luofu was speechless. She had no idea where his confidence was coming from.

"By the way, you shouldn't publicly announce what happened between you and those master-ranked cultivators. Every single master rank cultivator is connected to endless other parties, and you cannot contend against them right now. I will find a way to contact the Chu clan and help them hide this information for you. I hope that nothing bad comes about because of this." Her expression was tinged with worry. She had a feeling that this matter wasn't going to end here.

Zu An looked at her. "Gorgeous principal, you really are too nice to me! I don't even know how to repay you! Honestly, I don't have any valuable possessions, so I can only give you my body."

"Get lost!"

"Okay~"

Zu An left the office in a much better mood. Even though he still didn't know how he was going to awaken the fire element, he now knew that it was possible. It would all work out eventually.

He walked along the campus boulevard, clearly in no mood to join any lectures. He'd already fought against master rank cultivators, so these classes didn't seem to mean much to him anymore.

With that in mind, he decided to get some shut eye back in his staff residence. However, he ended up running into a ravishing beauty along the way.

"Zheng Dan?" He caught sight of the beautiful girl in front of him, and nodded towards her. She seemed to have grown slightly more plump. She perfectly encapsulated the bashfulness of a younger girl, and the charm of a young woman.

No wonder the fellow students who passed her by couldn't resist casting glances in her direction.

Hmph! All of you are just perverts without any real guts!

If you like her, why don't you walk up to her and let her know? I guess you guys aren't as handsome as me, so you won't get much from her. But, whatever the outcome, you'll at least be able to talk to your goddess.

"Greetings, Teacher Zu." A hint of redness colored Zheng Dan's face.

"I see that student Zheng is still as polite as ever. This teacher is pleased." Zu An also enjoyed this act that they put up in front of everyone else.

"I heard that something happened to Teacher. Now that I've seen that Teacher has returned safely, this student can feel at ease." Her words were well-practiced and totally appropriate.

"Was student Zheng worried about me?" Zu An asked with a smile.

"Of... course." Zheng Dan's face grew redder. She looked around her guiltily. "By the way, I have some questions regarding arithmetic that I could use Teacher's help with."

Zu An knew that she wanted to talk to him in private. He nodded. "Let's talk as we walk."

The two of them walked along a secluded path in the academy. To anyone else, Zheng Dan looked like an earnest student, asking questions with a book in hand.

All who saw her admired her. Miss Zheng really was hardworking! She actually studied arithmetic so earnestly, without her cultivation falling behind.

Of course, some scions of other major clans felt that first miss Zheng had been unduly burdened by the Zheng clan. There were many business matters that had to be taken care of within the Zheng clan, and Zheng Dan had no choice but to spend some more time working on her arithmetic. If this weren't so, her cultivation would surely have been higher than what it was right now.

None of these bystanders had any idea that the two of them had secretly linked hands while walking. What arithmetic questions? They were using her book to hide their passion!

"Ah Zu, I'm actually here as a representative of my future father-in-law to conduct a business transaction with you." Although Zheng Dan's face had turned red from his earlier teasing, she hadn't forgotten her reason for seeking him out.

Zu An was stunned. "What transaction?"

Zheng Dan looked at him with her large eyes. "He wants the medicine that you have."

Chapter 400: Righteous Revenge

Zu An smiled and said, "What medicine? Shouldn't you look for Divine Physician Ji if you need something like that? Even Ji Xiaoxi would be a better choice than me."

Zheng Dan sighed. "Of course we sought out Divine Physician Ji, but there was nothing that Divine Physician Ji could do.

"You know that Sang Qian was seriously injured, and his life is hanging by a thread right now. Even Divine Physician Ji was only just able to keep him from death's door. His health has only declined since then, and there has been nothing that Divine Physician Ji could do to stop this.

“Even though Sang Hong has two children, he only has one son. If Sang Qian dies, then he won’t have any heirs.”

Zu An snorted. “What’s so strange about bad people having bad things happen to them?”

Sang Hong’s scheming in the dark was the whole reason behind the mess that the Chu clan was currently in.

Zheng Dan bit her lip. “That may be true, but a father will surely be driven to further madness once his only son passes away. When that happens, he will show the Chu clan even less favor.”

“Are you threatening me?” Zu An was slightly unhappy. He subconsciously squeezed her hand more tightly.

“Ah!” Zheng Dan cried out in pain, but didn’t dare show it, out of fear that the other students would notice. “I’m not threatening you. I’m just helping you weigh the pros and cons! I’ve already given you everything—are you still going to question my sincerity?”

Zu An snorted. “But you’re speaking on my enemy’s behalf.”

“I’m only passing on his words!” Zheng Dan sighed. “Since we’re so close, I’ll speak plainly. You surely are well aware that the Chu clan’s recent troubles were provoked by him. Madam Chu suffered a mortal wound a few days ago, and even Ji Dengtu was powerless to save her. However, you used a bottle of medicine to save her life.

“Sang Hong was extremely shocked when he heard this, so he wishes to make an agreement with you. He will release Brightmoon Duke and stop any further plotting against the Chu clan. At the same time, the Sang clan will pledge their friendship to you. In return, he only requests for that bottle of medicine.”

Zu An couldn’t keep his annoyance from his voice. “The Chu clan’s salt permits are already back in our hands. What right does he have to keep detaining Brightmoon Duke? Furthermore, his schemes against the Chu clan have already failed. What difference does it make whether he gives up now or not?”

Zheng Dan shook her head. “Things are not that simple. Let’s take Brightmoon Duke, for example. Qin Wanru already had the salt permits, so Brightmoon Duke should have already been released. However, Sang Hong still managed to make up all types of excuses to keep him detained. Following this line of reasoning, if he knows that his excuses won’t work any longer, and he is truly intent on dealing with the Chu clan, then killing Brightmoon Duke wouldn’t be too difficult for him.”

Zu An’s expression changed immediately. “Sang Hong dares to assassinate a duke?”

Zheng Dan explained, “He obviously wouldn’t dare to do such a thing to a normal duke. However, you already know that Sang Hong is merely carrying out the emperor’s will. The emperor was the one who wanted to get rid of Brightmoon Duke in the first place. If something happens to him, the emperor will only criticize him lightly, but he wouldn’t really punish Sang Hong.

“Sang Hong’s plans to take down the Chu clan have failed again and again, and he has already been pushed to his limit as well. There is no way he would let Brightmoon Duke return.

“However, if you can save his son’s life, then he will willingly abandon this mission, and gladly suffer the emperor’s criticism.”

Zu An's expression flickered. He really didn't want to save Sang Qian, but if Chu Zhongtian came to harm because of this, he would be letting down Chu Chuyan and Chu Huanzhao. He would never be able to forgive himself for that.

Moreover, knowing Sang Hong's sinister nature, he would make sure to tell everyone about how he hadn't saved Chu Zhongtian, despite being given the chance to. There was no way to stop such news from spreading at all.

"Does Sang Hong know about the two of us?" Zu An asked suddenly.

Zheng Dan's face turned red. "Of course not. If he does, he would kill me on the spot. Why would he send me here to negotiate with you?"

Zu An wasn't happy. "You haven't even formally married his son yet. He doesn't have the authority to do that."

Zheng Dan rolled her eyes. She didn't bother to reply.

Zu An was aware that the weddings of this world were different from those of his modern era. As such, he asked her further, "What are your thoughts on this matter?"

There was a slight hesitation, but Zheng Dan still said, "Since the two of us are already so close, I won't hide anything from you. Regardless of whether Sang Qian and I get married, I still feel a sense of guilt for what has developed between us, and I want to make it up to him. At the same time, if this agreement goes ahead, the Zheng clan will benefit immeasurably as well. That is why I really hope that you can help me save him."

After a pause, she smiled and said to him, "Of course, if you can make the Sang clan and the Zheng clan agree to me marrying you instead, then I wouldn't have to feel so conflicted over Sang Qian."

Zu An was speechless. "You know that that's impossible. I have no problems with taking you in as my wife, but are you willing to elope with me?"

Zheng Dan sighed. "You know that I bear the hopes of my clan on my shoulders. How can I turn my back on them?"

Zu An gave this matter some thought, and finally said, "It's not impossible to save him, but when I think about how he will marry you as soon as he recovers... Wouldn't I be the one who gets cuckolded? No way!"

Zheng Dan's face turned red. "You are clearly the one who made him a cuckold..."

Zu An sniffed dismissively. "Whatever. I won't agree to this."

Zheng Dan hesitated for a moment, then said quietly, "Actually, there might be a way out. He was injured so badly, after all. If something happens to him and he can't... It would be completely normal..."

Zu An gasped. "You're terribly ruthless!"

Zheng Dan's eyes reddened. "I was thinking for your sake, all right? Why am I the ruthless one here? Do you think that I don't want a normal husband? If there is no way for me to marry you..."

She began to sob towards the end. Zu An immediately helped her to wipe away her tears. "I misspoke. That really does solve my dilemma. I can't be a prostitute and still demand a virgin spouse."

Fortunately, the two of them were already close to the staff residences, so there weren't any students around them. Otherwise, rumors would have already begun to spread like wildfire.

Zheng Dan giggled when she heard what he said. Her face reddened as she said, "Pah! If you're a prostitute, then what am I?"

"You are my..." Zu An whispered a word in her ear.

Zheng Dan's neck instantly flushed red, and her body went limp.

Zu An used this chance to pick her up and walk into his residence. They were soon wrapped around each other.

"So, do you agree?" Zheng Dan pressed against his chest and said while biting her lip.

Zu An's expression grew gloomy. "Can we not talk about this now? You're making me look like a villain! It's almost as if you are consenting to what we're doing only because you want to save your lover."

Zheng Dan rolled her eyes. "Didn't you love playing these types of games with me before?"

Zu An felt blood rush to his head. He immediately got into character. "Heh, heh, heh, whether or not I'll agree to your demands will depend on your performance!"

Zheng Dan immediately put on a delicate and pitiful appearance. "Please! Please spare him! I'll agree to anything you say!"

Zu An whistled in admiration. This woman was a born actress! How could he possibly hold himself back anymore? He immediately began to 'tackle' this question of whether he was going to save Sang Qian or not.

Either way, Sang Hong was blackmailing them with Chu Zhongtian's life, so this was righteous revenge.