

Immortal 41

Chapter 41: The Ten Great Beauties

"This is... Jia class talent!" (Equivalent to A)

"My gosh! How many students of Jia class talent has our academy had since its founding?"

"It isn't just our academy. Jia class talent is rare and invaluable across the whole country!"

...

Those gathered around the testing area were astonished. Even the teacher who had conducted the test saw him in a new and positive light. With a warm smile, he began asking Hong Xingying for his personal details.

This was simply what reality was like. For someone who was sufficiently strong, a minor flaw meant nothing.

Not to mention, there was no evidence to back up Zu An's allegations. The truth could have been something very different.

Hong Xingying walked down the stairs with a gleeful smile on his face, basking in the limelight. It felt like eating a chilled watermelon on the hottest day of summer. At the same time, he felt a twinge of regret. If only he had known it would be like this, he would never have wasted his time serving humbly in the Chu Estate.

No matter how well I do, the First Miss thinks of me as nothing more than a servant. If only I had entered the academy a little earlier! I might have become of equal standing with the First Miss by now.

Such thoughts only made him feel greater rage toward the fellow who had conveniently benefitted from his mistake. He walked up to Zu An and said coldly, "Do you finally understand the difference between the two of us?"

You have successfully trolled Hong Xingying for 66 Rage points!

Zu An was a little perplexed. Shouldn't Hong Xingying be feeling fulfilled and overjoyed right now? Why is he still contributing Rage points? Could it be that he's suffering from a hormonal imbalance or something?

"Next, Zu An!"

Upon hearing the teacher's call, Zu An stepped forward. The teacher pushed the crystal ball to him with a frigid expression. "A man should rely on his own strength to defeat his opponent. Stooping to make petty reports is truly unbecoming."

"Who is the strongest person in your academy?" Zu An asked calmly.

The teacher was taken aback by the question. "It's the principal, of course."

"If the principal were to slap you for no reason one day, how will you respond to it?"

"I..." The teacher was at a loss for words. "The principal would never do something like that. Even if such a thing happens, I believe that there would be a deeper reason behind the principal's actions."

Zu An smiled wryly in response. "If I were you, I would report it to his superior. I don't know how you can criticize others when you don't even have the courage to make such reports!"

You have successfully trolled Ni Dian for 233 Rage points!

"Calm down, calm down." The teacher beside him tried his best not to laugh as he pulled his fuming colleague aside. He cleared his throat, then turned to Zu An. "Let's get straight to the test, all right?"

Now that he could examine the crystal ball close-up, Zu An noticed a few nearly indiscernible lines on its surface. It was most likely a formation of some kind. He pricked his finger and squeezed a droplet of blood onto the crystal ball.

"What aptitude could that fellow possibly have?" Hong Xingying sneered coldly, craning his neck to take a look.

There was a brilliant burst of light, as if the crystal ball had turned into the sun itself! Those who hadn't been blinded by this would have been astounded to see that the light was still growing visibly brighter.

"What the hell! I'm turning blind!"

Similar cries echoed out from the onlookers as they covered their eyes in terror.

With a jarring sound, the crystal ball blew up. The blinding light faded, leaving behind glass fragments and a trail of smoke that rose slowly from the charred tabletop.

"W-what happened?"

"Is that... upper Jia class?" (Equivalent to A+)

"That's impossible! Even a cultivator of upper Jia class talent couldn't possibly destroy the crystal ball!"

"Then, is this the legendary transcendent class talent?"

"The transcendent class talent is just a rumor. No one has seen it for the past few centuries!"

...

Walking along a street some distance away, a beautiful figure came to a halt. Her lips curled up into a graceful smile. "The son-in-law of the Chu clan sure is an interesting man."

While the teachers of the academy huddled together, discussing the matter intently, Zu An walked over to Hong Xingying and said calmly, "Do you finally understand the difference between the two of us?"

You have successfully trolled Hong Xingying for 999 Rage points!

Hong Xingying felt his hands and feet turn icy-cold. His eyes reflected confusion, rage, and embarrassment all at once. He couldn't understand how such a situation could have happened. It should have been his turn to shine and make a name for himself, but now he was a mere sidekick to the man he'd looked down upon all this while. Why is the world so unfair to me?!

Meanwhile, Zu An clasped his fist toward those around him and said, "Thanks for going easy on me." He spoke as if they had held back during their own tests so as not to outdo him.

You have successfully trolled Wei Suo for 66 Rage points!

You have successfully trolled Ma Zhu for 66 Rage points!

You have successfully trolled...

He looked at the stream of Rage points he had just earned. Attending the academy suddenly seemed like a decent idea. After all, he had such adorable classmates from whom he could milk Rage points whenever he needed to.

While Zu An gloated, a voice spoke up weakly, "Young master, weren't you only at lower Ding the last time Master tested your aptitude?"

Zu An turned, and saw Cheng Shouping staring at him with eyes full of confusion.

How can anyone be so bad at reading the situation... Once again, Zu An found it miraculous that Cheng Shouping had managed to survive all this while.

Cheng Shouping's revelation was a bright ray of hope piercing through Hong Xingying's despair. He burst into laughter. "I remember now, I remember now! He has been through the aptitude test before, and he's only at lower Ding class..."

He exposed Zu An's identity, and the notorious reputation he had in Brightmoon city.

"He's the young master of the Chu clan?"

"What young master? He's just a drafted son-in-law!"

"How in the world did someone like him catch the eye of the First Miss of the Chu clan?"

"Perhaps he might have some exceptional strengths?"

...

The male students smiled crudely at each other, a knowing glint in their eyes.

The other female students whispered to each other excitedly.

"That man is quite the looker. He isn't as bad as the rumors put him out to be."

"You don't say! How else could he have caught Chu Chuyan's eye otherwise?"

"Heh. No matter how capable Chu Chuyan is, she still ended up marrying such a useless husband."

"Hehehe..."

The teachers who were managing the aptitude test were familiar with the rumors surrounding the drafted son-in-law of the Chu clan. The teacher known as Ni Dian scoffed disdainfully. "I knew it! The crystal ball must have been faulty. Since the Brightmoon Duke has tested this rascal himself, there can't be any mistake. Zu An, lower Ding, Yellow class!"

The academy was divided into three grades, and each grade was further divided into four different classes, namely Yellow, Black, Earth, and Sky. Those of Hong Xingying's talent were bound to be allocated to the Sky class, and so too was the student with upper Yi class talent. As for Wei Suo, his Ding class talent would likely see him allocated to the Yellow class, just like Zu An.

Another teacher was to protest this decision when his ears suddenly pricked up. Far beyond the gathered crowd, in the forested grounds of the academy, a beautiful figure had caught his attention. He gazed at her for a moment, then chose to hold his tongue. With that, the matter was decided.

Zu An had all but given up on his plan to maintain a low profile and survive. However, his frustration slowly dissipated as those around him slowly came to the conclusion that he was indeed of poor talent, despite what the most recent test had revealed. Naturally, he welcomed such a misunderstanding, and did not argue.

Hong Xingying walked up to Zu An and snorted derisively. "A crow is, in the end, just a crow. No matter how desperately it flaps its wings in an attempt to scale higher, it'll never morph into a phoenix." With that declaration, he left. It was almost as if continuing to speak with Zu An would besmirch his honor.

Zu An, still celebrating that one of his worries had been resolved, chose to let Hong Xingying have the last word for now. He turned to Cheng Shouping, "I'll be entering the academy now. You can return to the estate on your own."

"Young master, did I say something wrong?" Cheng Shouping asked with a quaver in his voice.

Zu An patted his shoulder lightly and smiled. "Not at all. You did well."

A brilliant smile broke out on Cheng Shouping's face. "Young master, you're the best to me!"

Zu An immediately pushed him away. "Hey, speak properly. I forbid you from speaking in such an effeminate manner in the future!"

A staff member walked over and led them into the academy. Along the way, the staff member provided them with a reminder. "There are activated formations around the perimeter of the academy. Their main purpose is to guard against intruders, but it would be best if you did not wander around. Accidentally triggering them could be dangerous."

Those words alarmed Zu An. He had been extremely fortunate not to have wandered into one of them and triggered it the day before. However, he was a little curious as to how formations in this world looked like. Could they be similar to the formations that Huang Yaoshi set up on the Peach Blossom Island?[1]

"How dangerous are these formations?" Zu An was curious to know.

"You'll find out in the future," the staff member replied with a smile that could almost be described as dark. He looked as though he had read Zu An's mind.

As they continued on, they passed by an empty field that resembled a schoolyard from his previous life. Curiously, there was a group of youths squatting right in the middle of the field.

"Squat properly! Let's see if you dare arrive late again in the future!" A middle-aged man glared at the bunch of youths, a ruler in hand.

The middle-aged man had a bald patch in the middle of his head, but he had combed his hair across it aggressively to try to cover it up. It was a feeble attempt, as he had very little hair on both sides, and the few miserable strands did little to cover up the big, shiny spot.

The man seemed to sense Zu An's intent gaze, and whipped around to glare at him. "What are you looking at?!"

Oh my, what fiery temper!

Zu An wasn't the type to take such provocation lying down. He loaded up a retort and was just about to fire away when the young man named Wei Suo tugged on his sleeves urgently. "You mustn't offend him!"

Surprised, Zu An turned to look at Wei Suo. "Why? Is he a formidable figure?"

Wei Suo lowered his voice. "He's the discipline master of our academy, Lu De, nicknamed Baldhead. He's known for being extremely strict with students. Do you see the ruler he's using to beat the students?"

"I see it." As Zu An looked on, one of the students in the field was struck by the ruler wielded by the middle-aged man, and wailed in pain.

"The word 'Virtue' is inscribed on the ruler. Every time he teaches the students a lesson, he claims that he's using 'Virtue' to win over the students. It's said that getting hit by that ruler is even more excruciating than being struck by the Wailing Whip, the weapon of the Second Miss of the Chu clan. He's not like the teachers we met earlier on; he wields great authority in this academy. It's best for you not to provoke him," warned Wei Suo.

"What era are we in? Is physical punishment still in fashion?" Zu An retorted. "Is no one going to stop him?"

"Shhh, don't speak so loud!" Wei Suo rushed over anxiously to cover Zu An's mouth. "In the academy, he's the one who boasts the greatest authority after the principal. Furthermore, he's a sixth rank cultivator. Who would dare to butt into his affairs? Besides, there are plenty of arrogant students in this academy who like to cause trouble, and the academy needs someone like him to keep them in line. Because of this, his superiors implicitly approve of his behavior."

Zu An nodded as Wei Suo's explanation sank in. Curious, he asked, "Aren't you a new student in the academy as well? Why are you so familiar with all this? For you to even know about my sister-in-law's Wailing Whip..."

"Of course, I did my homework before coming here!" Wei Suo replied proudly. He thought that he saw respect in Zu An's eyes, and that spurred his desire to show off. He nudged Zu An's shoulder. With a conspiratorial smile, he said, "Have you heard of the Ten Great Beauties of our academy's Sweetheart Ranking?"

1. This is a reference to the Legend of the Condor Heroes and Return of the Condor Heroes.

Chapter 42: Female Principal

Ten Great Beauties?

“What kind of overused cliché is this?” Zu An retorted. “This is the kind of plotline used only in old novels from more than a decade ago!”

“What novels?” Wei Suo was confused by the nonsense Zu An was rambling. Nevertheless, he still continued on. “Who cares whether it’s cliché or not? It’s because people like it that it becomes a classic!”

Zu An burst into laughter. “That makes sense. Go on, who are these Ten Great Beauties?”

Wei Suo nodded in approval of Zu An’s response. A good listener always knew when to fawn and when to respond, if not the speaker would only look like a fool, rambling on on his own. “The number one beauty is, of course, the First Miss of the Brightmoon Duke’s clan, Chu Chuyan. She’s like a snow fairy descended from heaven to the mortal world. She boasts great beauty and powerful cultivation, making her the dream lover of ninety-nine percent of the men in the academy!”

Wei Suo heaved a long sigh of regret and said, “It’s just a pity that she married a few days ago, and it’s rumored that her husband is a notorious good-for-nothing in the city. Many students in the academy were infuriated by the news, and wanted to confront him and challenge him to a duel. I reckon that that fellow is dead meat.”

Zu An clenched his fists so tightly that his knuckles creaked. He grabbed Wei Suo’s shoulder, a bright smile on his face. “What did you say? Can you repeat it again for me?”

“Yowch!” The excruciating pain in his shoulder made Wei Suo realize his mistake. He recalled what he had just heard at the entrance to the academy and quickly put on an apologetic smile. “My bad, I nearly forgot that you were that useless... Pui pui! Brother, you’re a dashing man with great charms. You have at least seventy to eighty percent of my charisma. It’s no wonder why the First Miss of the Chu clan chose you in the end!”

Zu An stared at Wei Suo’s jarring buck teeth. This fellow is so thick-skinned, he almost seems to possess my own flair. “Why do you say that only ninety-nine percent of the men in this academy like her?”

“The First Miss of the Chu clan has too cold of a personality. Her natural disposition seems to be to keep others away from her,” Wei Suo replied.

“Is that so?” Zu An thought of the romance novel that she was reading in secret, and the edges of his lips curled up slightly. “That’s because you don’t understand her well.”

“Of course we don’t understand her as well as you do!” Wei Suo grumbled in envy. You have even interacted with her at a negative distance before, so how can you possibly not know her?

Zu An carried on, oblivious to Wei Suo’s crude thoughts. “Other than the First Miss of the Chu clan, who else is on the list?” It seemed a good idea for him to gather as much intelligence on the academy as possible.

Wei Suo pondered for a moment. “In second place is Pei Mianman, who recently transferred from another academy. Her figure... Hehehe! Let me put it this way, the first thing that comes to the mind of

any man who sets his eyes on her is the bedroom. She's the perfect romantic fantasy of all men in the academy!"

Zu An cast his mind back to the physical brawl he'd had with her previously, and nodded in agreement. "Mm, it's indeed a lethal weapon."

Wei Suo side-eyed Zu An in disdain. You've never seen her before, so why are you talking as if you know a thing or two here?

Zu An noticed subtle differences in Wei Suo's description of the two women. "If she is liked by all of the men in the academy, why is she ranked in the second place instead of the first?"

"Ah, that's because you aren't thinking long-term!" Wei Suo adopted the lecturing tone of a senior student. "She's a dream lover but not a suitable wife. Someone like the First Miss of the Chu clan is far better for a long-term relationship, and that's why she's ranked in the first place."

Zu An was impressed by just how much thought went into sorting out the rankings. "Your wisdom knows no bounds! Who's in third place then?"

Wei Suo replied, "In third place of the Sweetheart Ranking is our academy's foreign language teacher..."

"What? Foreign language teacher?" Zu An was appalled. "There's such a thing as a foreign language in this world?"

Just what kind of bad luck is this? Zu An vividly recalled the torturous days he'd spent learning a second language in his previous life. It seemed like history was going to repeat itself once more in this world. From what he remembered, there was an author called Mars-something that scored really well in his examinations. Unfortunately, he'd failed his English examination, and ended up in a second-rate university.

"Of course there are foreign languages in our world!" Wei Suo stared at Zu An as if he were an idiot. "The previous great war drove the other tribes into the barren lands. Nevertheless, there are still many foreigners in our society, and they have their own culture, language, and practices. Naturally, we should try to learn about them, or else we would be at a disadvantage when dealing with them!"

Zu An was surprised by this information. As he had just arrived in this world, he knew very little about the war between mankind and the foreign tribes. Nevertheless, he could sense the pride and confidence that the humans of this world gave off.

It's good that I got transmigrated into an era of prosperity and peace. This way, I can spend my life in bliss as a scion of nobility, Zu An thought in relief.

"Where was I?" It took some time for Wei Suo to get back on track. "Ah yes, in the third place is the foreign language teacher, Liu Shangyu. On top of her captivating appearance, she has a graceful and gentle personality. If it were up to me, I would have surely placed her in the first place! Unfortunately those brats in the academy prefer women of the same age."

So, this fellow prefers older women despite being a brat himself? Hm, wait a moment! Did he just mention that the foreign language teacher is called Liu Shangyu?

Isn't that the person Ji Dengtu mentioned? Hmmm, it looks like I should find an opportunity to get close to her...

"Do you know what the cultivation level of this foreign language teacher is?" It seemed imperative to gather what information he could now. Being caught red-handed for stealing her dudou could lead to a tragic death otherwise.[1]

"Cultivation?" Wei Suo frowned. "Miss Liu isn't known for her cultivation in the academy, so the information about that is sketchy. I reckon that she should be in the fourth rank at most."

"Fourth rank?" Zu An's eyes lit up. It looks like the gap between us isn't too big. Does that mean that I can give it a try?

Wei Suo ignored his comment. "In the fourth place is our principal, Jiang Luofu. She's definitely a queen bee, and gives off an air of power. Not only is she beautiful, but she's also the strongest cultivator in our academy."

Zu An was surprised. "The principal is a woman?"

"Who says that the principal has to be a man?" Wei Suo looked at Zu An as if he were a country bumpkin blinded by stereotypes. "Principal Jiang could have placed first, but she slid down to fourth due to her busy schedule. I must say that the brats of this generation really aren't up to scratch."

A staff member, who had been listening in intently, cleared his throat and swiveled to glare at Wei Suo. "You dare gossip about the principal behind her back? Are you tired of living?"

Wei Suo smiled apologetically. "Alright alright, I shan't talk about the principal anymore."

Satisfied, the staff member turned back around.

Wei Suo continued to Zu An, "In the fifth place of the Sweetheart Ranking is the young miss of the neighboring Sunspring Duke, Wu Qing. Just like the others, she's known for her good looks, but rumors abound that she has a horrible temper.

"In the sixth place is the young miss of the city lord, Xie Daoyun. She's the older sister of Xie Xiu, whom you met at the entrance of the academy earlier. Unlike her younger brother, she's an incredibly talented woman, with a gentle personality to boot. In my view, the only reason why Wu Qing is ranked ahead of her is due to her father's halo."

"In the seventh place is Ji Xiaoxi, the daughter of Divine Physician Ji Dengtu. Her small stature makes her look really adorable. For hardcore fans of hers, she doesn't lose out to Chu Chuyan or Pei Mianman at all. She's the love of all lolicons. It's just a pity that she isn't my type of dish."

Zu An nodded in response. To think that the young woman he met in the valley would actually be studying in Brightmoon Academy as well. This sure was a huge coincidence. I should probably hang out with her more often. After all, my life as a man rests on her father's shoulders!

"In the eighth place is the young miss of Brightmoon City's Zheng clan, Zheng Dan. They are rumored to be the second wealthiest clan in Brightmoon City, losing out to only the Chu clan. Anyone who marries her in the future will be able to save thirty years of struggling in the corporate world. Of course, that's nothing compared to you, who married the First Miss of the Chu clan."

Zu An sighed deeply. While others thought that he was living a carefree and abundant life in the Chu clan, only he knew of the difficulties and danger he faced every step of the way. No one in the Chu Estate really treated him as the son-in-law of the Chu clan.

But of course, as a man, he still had his own pride to uphold. He pretended to look flattered by Wei Suo's remark.

"However, there are rumors that the Zheng clan is intending to enter into a political marriage with the newly-appointed governor of the Linchuan Commandery. I wonder if the rumors are true." Wei Suo couldn't hide his displeasure. "It really is frustrating. There are so many wolves out there, but so little meat. And yet another one has just been taken."

Zu An patted Wei Suo's shoulder. "Relax, there are still many single women out there. I believe that, with your capabilities, you'll surely be able to find a good wife in the future!"

"Of course!" Wei Suo's chin lifted in pride. Unfortunately, the Sweetheart he was most interested in was Principal Jiang. His motivation left him like air from a leaky balloon, and his tone grew listless. "In ninth place of the Sweetheart Ranking is the Second Miss of the Chu clan, Chu Huanzhao. It's clear that she has the makings of a great beauty, but she has yet to blossom fully. On top of that, she behaves like a rascal, which is why she's placed near the bottom of the rankings."

"As for tenth place, I can't remember her name at the moment. She has a special disposition that makes others subconsciously forget about her..."

"In any case, those who are able to get into the top ten of the Sweetheart Ranking are outstanding beauties. In my view, there's nothing to choose between them in terms of appearance; what really affects their ranking are their personalities and several other external factors at play."

Wei Suo's logical analysis left Zu An with a newfound respect for the buck-toothed man. "I didn't think it possible to look at things from such a perspective. As expected of a veteran!"

Wei Suo waved his hands in a gesture of humility. "You're too kind. My knowledge is limited to mere theories. I'm nowhere on par with you, who have already gotten some action with the number one beauty on the Sweetheart Ranking... Ah, why do I suddenly feel like crying?"

"Enough, enough. The two of you, stop spouting nonsense. Wei Suo, you should head to your class." The staff member gestured to a classroom not too far away. The academy was so large that it had taken them a long time to reach their destination.

Having dismissed Wei Suo, the staff member beckoned Zu An over. "Come with me. The principal wishes to meet you."

Wei Suo was quick to protest. "We're all freshmen! Why is the principal meeting him and not me?" he cried indignantly.

The staff member rolled his eyes at Wei Suo. "You got in here through clearing the entrance examinations, whereas he got in here through his connections. How can the two of you possibly be considered the same?"

Zu An stood to the side, feeling a little awkward. Hey, hey, hey, should you really be saying these words before me? I'm a man with pride, you know!

Hearing the staff's explanation, Wei Suo had no choice but to resign himself to his fate. He began trudging listlessly toward his classroom. A scant few steps later, he turned around suddenly and yelled, "Make sure to take a good look at the principal! When you get back, I want you to tell me what color her stockings are today!"

Zu An was too stunned to respond.

The staff member's face darkened. He looked ready to give Wei Suo a good beating. Sensing his impending doom, Wei Suo dashed into the classroom to seek refuge.

The staff member turned back to Zu An, looking vexed. "Don't listen to that fellow's nonsense. If you were to get on the principal's bad side, not even the Brightmoon Duke will be able to protect you."

Zu An grunted in acknowledgement. He was starting to feel a little curious about this principal.

The staff led him to a tall building nearby, which looked different from the classroom building. An expensive-looking red carpet covered in exquisite embroidery was laid over the stairs of this building.

"How extravagant!" Zu An marveled at how those in power always distinguished themselves from the masses. Regardless of which world one was in, the grandest building in a school was always the administrative building.

The staff member offered Zu An a stern reminder. "The staff office is here too. While most teachers rarely drop by here, it's in your best interests not to mess around."

Zu An favored him with another grunt as he scanned the staff office, hoping to find Liu Shangyu's table. As he did so, it suddenly struck him that there was no way Liu Shangyu would ever leave her dudou lying on her office table.

The two of them walked up the stairs, all the way to the top floor. They walked down a long corridor to the room at the very end. The staff member rapped sharply on the door. "Lord Principal, I have brought Zu An."

"Tell him to come in," a voice sounded behind the door. Despite the formal tone, the uniquely rich and melodious voice was more than enough to spark all sorts of thoughts in a man's mind.

1. A dudou is a woman's traditional undergarment, similar in form to a halter top.

Chapter 43: Tripitaka

"You should go in by yourself. Return to your classroom on your own after you are done meeting the principal," instructed the staff member. It was apparent from the principal's words the staff member was not needed in the room. Knowing his place, the staff member took his leave.

The door to the office was pretty heavy. Zu An pushed it open and entered. He was greeted by a bulky-looking office desk placed centrally in the room. He couldn't tell what kind of wood it was made of, but a single glance was enough to tell that it was definitely not cheap.

Beside the office desk stood a huge bookshelf filled with all sorts of books. Zu An tried to use his enhanced eyesight to scan through the book titles, but was astonished to find that no matter how he squinted, the characters remained blurry and indistinct.. At this distance, he should have been able to easily read the words on the book covers.

A cold voice came from off to the side. "You are Zu An?"

Zu An glanced over, and saw the principal sitting on a sofa on the other side of the room.

The first to come into his line of sight were her long and alluring legs. They were wrapped in dark-colored stockings that shimmered slightly and made his throat dry up from the heat. Her plump thighs, paired with her A-line skirt, hinted at a hidden and unexplored domain that spurred a man's thirst for adventure and knowledge. Her tight-fitting shirt highlighted her well-filled breasts, and her beautiful and impeccable face was accentuated by her slender, swan-like neck, and her hair, which was shaped into a graceful bun. She emanated an air of nobility and elegance.

This was the woman ranked fourth in the Sweetheart Ranking, as well as the principal of Brightmoon Academy, Jiang Luofu.

"Enjoying the view?" Jiang Luofu interlaced her fingers together and interrogated Zu An.

"Indeed," Zu An nodded without thinking.

"I find your gaze highly disrespectful." Her words chilled the room by several degrees.

You have successfully trolled Jiang Luofu for 99 Rage points!

Zu An felt a great pressure weighing down on him and immobilizing him. He spoke up hurriedly, "Soh cah toa?"[1]

Jiang Luofu's face twisted in confusion.

Unwilling to concede, Zu An tried a second time. "I solemnly swear that I'm up to no good?"

Jiang Luofu stared at Zu An as if his brain had somehow stopped developing during infancy. Is this fellow an idiot?

The pressure on him lessened. Zu An rushed toward her excitedly and asked her, "Sis, are you really a transmigrator too? I'll be your lil' bro, so cover me!!"

Before he could leap onto the sofa, Jiang Luofu raised a leg to stop Zu An's advance.

"What do you mean, 'transmigrator'?" Jiang Luofu's eyebrows knit together. She couldn't make sense of the situation. Even though she had heard rumors that the drafted son-in-law of the Chu clan was a wastrel, she had never heard that he was a fool!

Zu An was surprised. "Are you sure you aren't a transmigrator? What's with this office-wear cosplay then?"

“What nonsense are you spewing?” The principle was utterly befuddled by the words Zu An was using. “I acquired this set of clothes in a hidden realm by coincidence. I thought that it looked interesting, so I ordered some tailors to replicate it. Why, have you seen it before?”

“Urk. I happened to see them in my dream once before.” Naturally, Zu An dared not give away his background. As he replied, he wondered just what this ‘hidden realm’ was. It was a pity that the principal didn’t appear interested in offering an explanation.

Following the war against the foreign tribes, as the races began to coexist in harmony, the culture and sense of aesthetics of different races began to overlap. At some point in time, clothing with more modern elements came into fashion. While Jiang Luofu’s outfit was a little avant-garde for this world, it wasn’t completely unacceptable.

“In your dream?” Jiang Luofu frowned in contemplation. While odd, such a thing was not entirely impossible. Occurrences that were beyond human comprehension were common in this world.

Zu An’s gaze drifted downward of its own accord. Given their current positions—Jiang Luofu had one foot raised in order to keep Zu An away—he could vaguely catch a glimpse of something which he wasn’t supposed to see.

Bam!

A great force struck Zu An in the chest as the principal’s kick sent him flying.

Jiang Luofu’s voice was ice. “The Brightmoon Duke asked me to take care of you as a favor to him. However, given your wretched nature, I doubt that you would survive even two days in the academy.”

Zu An climbed to his feet and spat out a mouthful of blood. To his surprise, his injuries weren’t as serious as he thought they would be. Clearly, Jiang Luofu had gone easy on him. “Aren’t you exaggerating things a little?”

Surprised flickered across Jiang Luofu’s eyes as she watched Zu An. “You don’t seem to be as weak as the rumors put you out to be.”

His eyes widened as she continued, “You don’t need to worry. Whether you are seeking a leisurely life, or whether you’re a wolf dressed in sheepskin, it matters not to me. I’m not so close to the Brightmoon Duke as to tell him everything I know of.”

Zu An wiped away the blood trickling out the corner of his mouth. “Thank you, principal.”

Jiang Luofu continued calmly, “While your strength is greater than I expected, it isn’t considered outstanding within the academy. There are many students here who aren’t subordinate to the Chu clan, so I advise you not to go around causing trouble.”

Zu An stuck out his chest. “Do I look like the kind to cause trouble?”

Jiang Luofu blatantly disregarded his question. “Fights are prohibited in the academy compounds, but if both parties agree to it, the right to duel will be granted. The academy cannot take sides in such a situation, so you ought to think it through before accepting any duels.”

"Thank you for your advice, principal." Zu An was a little surprised. He could tell that Jiang Luofu was really looking out for him. Is it because of my relationship with the Chu clan? That doesn't seem like it. She did mention that she isn't close to Chu Zhongtian. If so... could it be that she has been charmed by my handsome appearance?

Jiang Luofu picked up a document that she had just received and began flipping through it. A deep furrow formed on her forehead. "Your talent is lower Ding class? Impossible! Hm? You broke the crystal ball during your aptitude test?"

Zu An sensed the situation going awry. However, the multitude of eyewitnesses that had been present made it impossible for him to deny it. Attempting to hide something that happened in the academy from its own principal was nothing short of foolishness, so he had no choice but to admit to it. "The crystal ball must have been faulty."

"Come over here." Jiang Luofu beckoned with her finger.

Zu An walked up to her as he wondered if this woman was going to send him flying with another kick.

"Give your hand to me," Jiang Luofu ordered with unquestionable authority.

"What are you going to do?" Despite Zu An's question, he still offered his hand to her. What happened next made his eyes bulge in disbelief. Jiang Luofu straightened, then pulled his finger into her mouth!

What's going on? Could it be that the number one expert in the academy, the famously beautiful principal, had succumbed to his dashing appearance and was lusting after his body? Was she going to use her authority and power to take advantage of him?

What a joke! As a man, I, Zu An, will never bow to such tyranny, even from a beautiful woman...

Well, that being said, should I just give in this once? I mean, just look at her! Maybe I should just ask her to be gentler with me later on...

"Ah!"

A sudden spike of pain made Zu An yelp loudly.

"A man like you can't even take this bit of pain?" Jiang Luofu pushed him disdainfully aside.

Zu An noticed a small bite mark on his finger, which was continuously seeping blood. Jiang Luofu licked her lips. The crimson blood staining her cherry lips gave her an irresistible touch of seductiveness.

"Are you a dog?" Zu An gave up caring about the consequences. The contrast between the reality and his expectations was so great, and his disappointment manifested itself as rage.

Surprisingly, Jiang Luofu let the insult pass. She looked at him with eyes that were difficult to read. "Your aptitude has indeed reached the legendary transcendent class."

Zu An's heart skipped a beat. He finally understood why she had wanted to taste his blood.

Jiang Luofu closed her eyes, seemingly considering her options. She took her time, then breathed out deeply and asked, "Who else knows about this?"

Zu An subconsciously took a step back. “Don’t mess around. I’ll have you know that quite a few people know about this. My wife, my father-in-law, and my mother-in-law are all aware of this. There are many people who have my back...”

Seeing Zu An’s guarded appearance, Jiang Luofu burst into laughter, banishing the chill in the air that had been ever-present since Zu An entered the office. “Little brat, are you worried that I’ll take your life? Given how you willingly bore the reputation of a wastrel for so many years, you must be aiming for something huge. Someone that determined wouldn’t tell such a massive secret to anyone, not even your own wife.”

Seeing Jiang Luofu’s confidence, Zu An knew that his scam had failed. So, he bucked up his courage and replied, “Fine, you’re right. I have never told anyone about this. But remember, many people know that I have come to your office today. If anything happens to me, those of the Chu clan will surely hunt you down!”

“Enough, enough!” Jiang Luofu’s head was starting to hurt from all his shouting. She massaged her temples with her thumbs. “Who said that I’m going to kill you?”

“If you aren’t, why are you asking me about all this?” Zu An was so worried that she would make a move against him that he had even summoned the Heiress Ball of Delights in secret. If it came to that, he was willing to wager his own life against hers. As long as he was able to effectively use the Heiress Ball of Delights in tandem with the Poisonous Prick, he might just be able to turn the tables on her.

“I just want to warn you that you’re still too weak at the moment. If others were to learn of your transcendent class talent, it would spell disaster for you,” Jiang Luofu said.

Zu An was stunned. “Is my situation that serious?”

Jiang Luofu rolled her eyes. “All this while, the transcendent class talent has existed as nothing more than a legend. No one has ever witnessed it before. What do you think?”

Fearing that Zu An wouldn’t understand the severity of this matter, she spelled out the dangers facing him explicitly. “A cultivator possessing a transcendent class talent would be coveted by every powerful faction. If they are unable to win you over to their side, their next move will be to destroy you. No matter what, no side could afford to allow a rival power to groom a cultivator that holds as much potential as you do. Furthermore, it’s said that the blood of a human who possesses transcendent class talent can be used to...”

Jiang Luofu’s face flushed a little. “In any case, until you’re strong enough to protect yourself, it’s best for you to keep your true nature under wraps.”

Zu An swallowed as he finally understood the implications of his maxed-out talent. “In other words, I’m like Tripitaka now?”[2]

“Tripitaka? What’s that?” Jiang Luofu was perplexed.

Zu An quickly changed the subject. “There were at least a dozen people who witnessed my aptitude test earlier. What if they were to spread the word?”

Jiang Luofu shook her head in response. "There's no need to worry. Transcendent class talent is, after all, no more than a legend in this present age. It's not something ordinary cultivators would even consider. Besides, you have done well keeping up the pretense of a wastrel over the years, so it's unlikely that anyone would question your true nature. I'll erase the relevant records for you, but you'll have to make sure to keep a low profile too. Give it some time, and everyone will forget about it soon enough."

Zu An nodded earnestly. "Thank you, principal."

There was a moment's silence, then he asked hesitantly, "Principal, why are you treating me so well?"

Jiang Luofu looked at him impassively. "As the principal of Brightmoon Academy, it's my responsibility to protect each and every single one of my students."

"That's all?" Zu An narrowed his eyes in suspicion.

"What else do you expect?" Jiang Luofu's gaze turned cold. "You can't be thinking that I'm fond of you because of your looks, can you?"

Zu An nodded. "I think that reason is much more convincing."

Jiang Luofu stared at him for a long while. "It's truly a miracle that you've managed to survive all along," she observed in wonder.

1. SOH CAH TOA is a helpful mnemonic phrase used to remember the formulae for trigonometric functions, which is ubiquitously taught in schools.

2. Tripitaka, also known as Tang Sanzang, is a Buddhist monk and main character in Journey to the West. He is personally helpless in defending himself, and relies on three supernatural beings to escort him on his journey.

Chapter 44: Blackmail

Jiang Luofu tossed him a sack. "You can beat it and return to your classroom now."

Zu An caught the sack and opened it. Inside were a few medicinal herbs and a red gemstone that was roughly the size of his finger. Intrigued, he asked, "What's all this?"

Jiang Luofu replied, "Cultivation resources that you'll need. The medicinal herbs are used for a medicinal bath, and the energy in the ki stone is to be absorbed and assimilated into your body."

Just to make sure Zu An did not misunderstand her intentions, she quickly added, "All students receive a set of this. This is the amount that students in the Yellow class are entitled to."

"So this is a ki stone?" Zu An took out the red gemstone to take a closer look at it. It looked identical to a ruby from his previous life.

Jiang Luofu was bewildered. "You've never seen one before? How did you cultivate up to your current rank then?"

Zu An was unwilling to reveal the details surrounding his Keyboard, so he quickly changed the topic. "Didn't you mention that I am a transcendent class talent? If so, I should at least qualify for entry into the Sky class, right? Even if you don't intend to assign me there, I should be entitled to the cultivation resources that a student in the Sky class receives!"

Jiang Luofu snorted. "Do you think that I can adjust the amount of cultivation resources you receive arbitrarily? The resources that every student in the academy receives is decided by the royal court's Ministry of Rites. We need to account for every single one of the cultivation resources we distribute to our students, and submit the records for verification. If you don't mind anyone finding out about your aptitude, then by all means, take more."

"Forget it then," Zu An replied sheepishly. He had the Keyboard anyway, so there was no need for him to take on additional risk just for a few ki stones.

"Get lost." Jiang Luofu was afraid that she would begin pummeling him if he were to loiter in her office any longer.

After leaving the Principal's Office, Zu An fantasized over Jiang Luofu's long and sexy legs... Pui pui pui, I'm thinking about what she said! It looks like troubles keep coming one after another. This Tripitaka constitution of mine is sure to invite great trouble in the future. Vixens might start pouncing on me while I'm walking down the street.

He reached the classroom where he'd parted ways with Wei Suo, and saw that almost all the seats inside were taken. The students inside were distracted by the movement outside the room, and directed their curious gazes towards the doorway.

So I'm not just an ordinary freshman, but a transfer student who joined in the middle of the semester?

The teacher standing at the podium was a bland, middle-aged man with average looks. He was the sort of person who could disappear into a crowd easily—that was how forgettable his features were.

Clearly, he had received the news that Zu An would be joining his class. He stopped his lesson and gestured for Zu An to enter the classroom. "Everyone, this is a new student who will be joining us from today. Please give him a warm welcome!"

"Wel~come~"

There was a smattering of applause as his classmates dragged out their greeting lifelessly.

Zu An was reminded of his days in middle school. The scene before him was simply too familiar.

"New classmate, come over here and introduce yourself," invited the teacher.

Zu An walked up to the podium and said, "Zu An. Male. Heterosexual." With that, he walked off.

The middle-aged teacher blinked stupidly at him.

Is that all?

Some of the female students below began whispering amongst themselves.

"Wow, he has an attitude. I like it!"

“How suave!”

“He looks like a philanderer though.”

“Heh, how can someone as good-looking as him not be a philanderer? Bad guys are so much more attractive.”

...

The male students responded very differently. They looked at Zu An with eyes filled with hostility.

“That fellow is really arrogant. I really want to beat him up.”

“How is he good-looking? He’s no match for me at all!”

“Why is it a guy again? Our resources are going to be thinned yet again.”

...

Zu An looked at the several hundred Rage points he had just earned in an instant. All of his new classmates suddenly looked incredibly cute to him.

“Here, here!”

Wei Suo was waving at him from near the back of the class. Zu An was a little hesitant—he wanted to find a beautiful woman to sit with—but his quick survey from the podium earlier showed that there were no particularly gorgeous ladies here. He eventually settled down beside Wei Suo.

Tok tok tok!

The middle-aged teacher knocked on the podium. “Let’s continue the lesson. Where was I?”

He quickly flipped his book before continuing on, “Ah, here it is. All right, I’ll be continuing the lesson...

“Curb the sinners with punishments, and compliment the brave. Reward handsomely those who work for the people, but with tact and wisdom. Enforce the business laws, and evict those who seek to profit illegally. Build commerce but focus on agriculture, for a decline in agriculture shall spread unease and tear the country from within. Should there be spare food, allow the people to donate them for higher standing. In this way, the people will be motivated and not be indolent in their work.

“Just as a pipe with holes will never be full, an official who receives payment that is not earned through his hard work will result in failure. Rewarding the meritorious with official positions; this is what it means to tap into the wisdom of the people. With the people standing brave and motivated, the country will be invincible. If a country gives rewards by merit, the country will govern itself, and doubts will be quelled. This is what it means by using politics to reduce politics, and to use words to destroy empty words. This is why a system of merit and nobility is necessary.

“As long as a country stands strong, it shall be inviolable. Soldiers dispatched will return victorious, and territories annexed can be safeguarded...”

These long texts made Zu An’s eyes glaze over. He understood every individual word that the teacher spoke, but when strung together, they made no sense to him at all.

“What is he talking about?” Zu An presented Wei Suo with a confused face.

Wei Suo shook his head. “I don’t understand either.”

“What is this lesson?” No matter what, Zu An used to be a university student. It wasn’t possible for him to suddenly become illiterate.

“This seems to be a lesson on the principles of criminal law,” Wei Suo explained. “That teacher over there is Zhang San, nicknamed ‘Sinner Beyond Laws’. He’s one of the advisors serving under the vice magistrate, and he’s well-versed in the legal loopholes in the country. He occasionally visits as a guest lecturer to impart knowledge about the legal process to the students. You also know that given our aptitude, it’s impossible for us to progress anywhere in our cultivation. Thus, most of our lessons involve such practical knowledge so that we can do something useful in the future.”

Zu An had a decent understanding of the various official positions and their corresponding cultivation level in this world. The lord of Brightmoon City was at the seventh rank, and serving directly under him were the vice magistrate and the chief administrator. Those two were considered his right-hand men, and the two of them were at the fifth rank.

Under the vice magistrate were the Six Departments, namely the Military Affairs Department, Law Department, Civil Department, Personnel Department, Tax Department, and the Agriculture Department, and they were responsible for managing matters relating to their own fields. The leader of each department was at the third rank.

Of course, the fact that Brightmoon City was a major city played a huge role in explaining why the cultivation levels of its officials were on the higher side. For mid-sized cities, their city lords would only be at the fifth rank, and their vice magistrates and chief administrators would be at the third rank. As for small cities, their city lords could only be at the fourth rank.

The middle-aged teacher lecturing on the podium, ‘Sinner Beyond Laws’ Zhang San, was in the Law Department under the vice magistrate of Brightmoon City. Whenever he had free time on hand, he would drop by Brightmoon Academy to hold lectures and educate the students.

This was a practice that wasn’t foreign to Zu An. There were plenty of part-time lecturers in the university in his previous world too.

“How is it? Isn’t Principal Jiang wonderful?” Wei Suo asked with a knowing look. It was almost as if he was showing off his own girlfriend.

Zu An recalled that warm yet smooth sensation on his finger earlier, and he subconsciously replied, “Indeed.”

“What’s the color of her stockings today?” Wei Suo asked excitedly, almost like a true fanboy.

Zu An backed away a bit to put some distance between them. “Black, I think.”

“As expected of my goddess! Oooh~” Wei Suo let out an incredibly embarrassing moan, as if just knowing the color of her stockings was enough to fill him with pleasure.

Zu An shook his head in disdain. This fellow sure was a pervert!

There was a sudden and sharp whizzing sound, and Wei Suo cried out in pain. A huge bump formed on his forehead.

Zu An noticed a piece of chalk on the floor right beside Wei Suo. Who would have known that all teachers, regardless of which world they had come from, were skilled in this secret art?!

Then again, in his previous life, this would only have resulted in a slight knock. Unfortunately, the teachers in this world were powerful cultivators. If they were to get serious, even a flying piece of chalk could take a person's life.

On the podium, Zhang San glared at Wei Suo, his face livid. "That student over there, come up here and answer this question."

Wei Suo was bewildered. "What question?"

Zu An quietly gave him a thumbs up. This fellow sure is brave to ask such a question.

Zhang San furiously bellowed, "If you don't know, beat it to the back of the classroom and listen to my lecture obediently!"

Without hesitation, Wei Suo beat it to the back of the classroom.

Zu An sat upright while cursing in his heart. Damn it, I hate it when teachers ask questions. It always leaves my heart thumping in fright. Just what did I do wrong to have to go through such torture even after transmigrating into another world?

It wasn't easy for Zu An to survive until the lesson was finally over. He lay on his table, a desolate look on his face. He wondered when these days would finally come to an end.

All of a sudden, a shadow was cast over Zu An, as if the sky had turned dark. He opened his eyes and saw a fatty standing right next to his seat, looking down on him smugly.

"Yes?" Zu An asked with a disinterested tone. If it had been a beautiful woman, he would have considered entertaining her a little, but he really couldn't be bothered with a darned pig.

"I'll be waiting for you in the forest." That fatty threw these words at Zu An, then left the classroom. A few other students who looked like his henchmen quickly followed him.

"Who's that fellow? Is he ill in the head?" Zu An asked, unsure of what just happened.

Wei Suo, walking over from the rear of the classroom, overheard him and shushed him. "Shh, don't talk so loudly! That fellow is the class boss, Man Yu. He's quite a vicious character."

Looking at the fearful look on Wei Suo's face, Zu An let out a small chuckle. "You got beaten up by him before?"

Wei Suo could only laugh awkwardly in response. "I would advise you to head over there for a look. If you turn up, the most he'll do is to take away your ki stones. Otherwise, you're just going to get a beating from him."

Zu An's interest was piqued. "That fellow steals ki stones?"

Wei Suo nodded. "That's right. They took away the ki stones that I just received. It's not a huge deal, since people of our talent aren't going to progress far in our cultivation anyway. Ki stones are useless to us; there's no point offending that fellow over this."

"But I heard that ki stones are quite valuable," Zu An remarked.

"Ah, that's true. I heard that they are worth at least 10 gold taels each on the black market, and that's if anyone is willing to sell it at all," Wei Suo replied.

Zu An's eyes lit up. If you're talking about money, I'm all in. 10 gold taels, that's 180,000 RMB! He was still new to this world, and was more used to the currency in his previous world. It sounded much more relevant to him.

It just so happened that money was the one thing he lacked right now. If he could just obtain a few more ki stones, the problem would be easily settled.

The excitement in his heart grew too much for him to bear. He leaped out of his seat and rushed outside.

It didn't take long for him to reach the forest the fatty had pointed out to him. It was a remote area, and there weren't many people around. Clearly, that pig had scouted out this area beforehand.

"Looks like you still know your place." Upon seeing Zu An, the fatty, Man Yu, sauntered over and stretched out his fleshy hand. "Hand me all of the cultivation resources you received today, and I'll protect you from now onward."

Chapter 45: Can't I At Least Ask About It?

Zu An was unfazed by the threat. Instead of complying, he too stretched out his hand and demanded, "Hand over all of your ki stones, and I'll treat it as if nothing happened at all."

Man Yu lost his temper. "Brat, you're asking for it!" He raised his mortar-sized fist and sent it flying toward Zu An's face with ferocious speed and accuracy. This was the move that he had used to subjugate countless students who refused to obey him. One strike was all it took to erase every shred of confidence of his victim.

You have successfully trolled Man Yu for 177 Rage points!

Zu An was a little dissatisfied. The fatty seemed furious enough, but the Rage points he provided did not match up to his appearance. He raised a hand calmly and stopped the fatty's punch with ease.

Man Yu gasped in utter horror. He tried frantically to retract his fist, but it simply wouldn't move.

Zu An sighed deeply. "I asked you nicely, but you just wouldn't listen. Must things really come to this point? Are you finally willing to hand over your ki stones now?"

His cultivation had already reached the third rank. In terms of strength, he was as powerful as eighty-eight adult men combined. This fatty was lower second rank at most, since he'd been sent to the Yellow class. There was no way this fatty could ever be a match for him.

Man Yu was unwilling to concede defeat. He sent his other fist hurtling toward Zu An, but again, it was stopped with extreme ease.

It seemed the fatty was unwilling to submit. Zu An had to rectify the situation. He tightened his grip around his fist.

“Ouch ouch ouch! Let go, let go!” Man Yu had his eyes squeezed shut in pain, and tears were about to leak out. He had not expected to be overpowered by this skinny monkey.

You have successfully trolled Man Yu for 66 Rage points!

“Cut the crap and hand your ki stones over!” Zu An’s tone was menacing. He tightened his grip further.

“I’ll hand it over, I’ll hand it over...” Man Yu could almost hear his finger bones creaking. He used his gaze to indicate the pouch hanging at his waist. “It’s there!”

Worried that there was some sort of mechanism hidden in the pouch, Zu An released Man Yu’s hand warily and instructed, “Take it out and hand it over to me.”

Man Yu quickly pulled out his pouch and poured out the ki stones inside. As he placed them one by one into Zu An’s hand, the fat hanging on his cheeks began to tremble.

You have successfully trolled Man Yu for 9 rage points! ... 9... 9... 9...

“Huh? Only 7 ki stones?” Zu An could not hide his disappointment. He had dreamed of making a huge killing out of this, but who would have expected this bully to be so incompetent?

“I only managed to gather this many. As you know, very few cultivation resources are allocated to those in our class! This is all I managed to collect from those I can handle!” Man Yu explained anxiously.

“What about the ones you collected before?” Zu An demanded.

You have successfully trolled Man Yu for 666 Rage points!

Are you trying to suck me dry?!

Man Yu’s expression turned indignant as he exclaimed, “I really don’t have anything else. Most of what we collect needs to be submitted upward! Why don’t I just give you 2 ki stones and be friends with one another? I promise that I won’t report this matter upwards. Otherwise, once Boss Ye learns about it, you’ll be in deep trouble!”

“Oho, you’ve even managed to form a supply chain out of this trade?” Zu An was amused. “Who’s the Boss Ye you’re referring to?”

“Ye Chenliang from Third Grade Earth class, cultivation of upper third rank. A mere First Grade Yellow class student like you won’t be a match for him at all!” Man Yu sneered coldly.

Zu An’s forehead creased in a frown. That fellow is stronger than me. This is really a bit troublesome.

Noticing Zu An’s reaction, Man Yu laughed heartily. “Are you finally getting scared now? If you’re scared, you better hand everything over to me now!”

This was how human relationships worked. As soon as Man Yu noticed Zu An's hesitation, he forgot all about his earlier promise of giving him 2 ki stones and instead demanded everything back.

"You sure talk a hell load of nonsense!" Zu An lost his patience and slapped Man Yu in the face, causing the latter's consciousness to flicker for an instant. He stowed his newly-acquired ki stones away. "I'll be taking all of these. Tell your Boss Ye to come and look for me."

"You skwunk! You'll wegwet it!"

"Heh, air is leaking out of your broken tooth. I suggest you stop speaking."

...

You have successfully trolled Man Yu for 666 Rage points!

Zu An returned to the classroom, and saw Wei Suo looking around nervously. As soon as the latter saw him, he rushed over. "How is it? Are you fine?"

Zu An burst into laughter. "If you're really that concerned, why didn't you follow me into the forest to back me up?"

Wei Suo shrugged and said, "Given how weak I am, I would only have dragged you down if I had gone with you. If I had gotten caught and was used as a hostage, you'd have had to waste your energy trying to rescue me."

Zu An rolled his eyes. "It's not like you're a beautiful woman. Why would I bother rescuing you?" Despite that damning statement, he still tossed a ki stone over to him.

"T-this..." Wei Suo stared at the ki stone in his hand in bewilderment. "Where did you get it from?"

"That darned fatty appreciated how handsome I was and gave it to me," Zu An replied casually.

"How is that possible?" Wei Suo exclaimed. "That fatty has someone backing him. You need to be careful of him!"

Zu An didn't think much of it. "Backing? Is his backing bigger than the Brightmoon Duke?" Even though he wasn't highly-regarded in the Chu clan, it was not something privy to outsiders. It would be a waste if he didn't use this card well.

"Indeed," Wei Suo nodded in agreement. "Marrying the First Miss of the Chu clan has really catapulted you up to the moon."

After returning to his seat, Zu An asked Wei Suo in a hushed tone, "How do we use ki stones?"

Wei Suo was intrigued to hear that question. He hadn't expected Zu An to be clueless about something that was so common sense. Nevertheless, he still explained it patiently. "Place the ki stone on your palm and drive your cultivation technique accordingly. Absorb the ki from the stone to nourish your body."

Zu An racked his mind, and realized that the Phoenix Nirvana Sutra didn't contain any techniques that allowed him to directly absorb ki. Unwilling to give up, he placed a ki stone on his palm and willed his body to absorb the ki. Nothing happened.

He recalled that the Phoenix Nirvana Sutra had been described as an alternative route to cultivation. Instead of the conventional method of absorbing ki to temper one's body, it relied on sustaining injuries to grow stronger.

Frustration grew within Zu An. If he'd had a choice before, he would surely have switched out this masochistic cultivation technique for a different one as soon as an opportunity arose. However, his life-and-death fight with Pei Mianman the night before had shown him the true prowess of the Phoenix Nirvana Sutra.

As they had fought, he had found himself growing stronger and stronger, up to the point where his strength had rivalled hers. On top of that, he realized that for every cultivation rank he mastered, he would gain a phoenix hatchling imprint. No matter how foolish he was, it was apparent to him that this technique possessed extraordinary prowess. It would be a waste to give up on it.

This meant that ki stones were completely useless to him. Zu An took some time to consider this issue before nudging the fellow seated beside him. "Hey, lad. You want to buy my ki stones?"

Wei Suo's eyes lit up. "How many do you have?"

"I have 7 of them," Zu An replied. If he could sell them for 10 gold taels each, and factoring in the silver taels that he had saved up thus far, he would be able to pay off his debt of a thousand silver taels.

Of course, he was reluctant to fork out his own money to repay the debt of that dead idiot, but the mysterious woman in the gazebo had warned him that really bad things would happen if he were to break a contract. It was always better to be safe than sorry.

He wondered if he would get an opportunity to see her again. Should I find some time to drop by the gazebo?

"How much are you going to sell them for?" Wei Suo asked.

Zu An wrapped his arm around Wei Suo's shoulders as he said, "You mentioned earlier that hardly anyone would sell ki stones, making it an invaluable resource. Since we're brothers, I shan't take advantage of you. 11 gold taels each. I'll even give you a special discount and round it down. 75 gold taels!"

Wei Suo blinked his eyes. "I know that I'm not very smart, but you shouldn't try to fool me either. Shouldn't it be 70 gold taels after rounding down?"

Zu An grunted in displeasure. "If that's the case, I would have just asked for 10 gold taels each! 75 gold taels is the lowest I can go, and that's after factoring in our friendship as well!" Zu An passed the bag of the ki stones over. "Here, take the ki stones and give me my money."

Wei Suo replied bitterly, "I don't have that much money."

Zu An frowned. "How much do you have then?"

Wei Suo flipped through his pockets, then turned his large, innocent eyes toward Zu An. "I have 54 silver taels."

Zu An nearly erupted there and then. “If you can’t afford it, why in the bloody world did you ask for the price?”

“Can’t I ask for the sake of it?” Wei Suo replied with a shrug.

Zu An’s face darkened. He was done with talking. He pressed Wei Suo down under the desk and began hitting him.

“Hey, didn’t you say that we’re brothers?!”

“It was a lie.”

...

The next lesson was a military strategy lesson conducted by a teacher from the Military Department.

“To win without a fight, leaving the soldiers completely unharmed, that’s the goal of a true general. Compliments! Compliments! Through supporting one another through tough times, a sense of camaraderie and a relationship of mutual interest can be formed. Common enemies will be fought down together, and common interests shall be pursued in cooperation. This is the way to winning without losing a single soldier; an offense without a battering ram; a defense without a moat...

“When a hawk strikes, it pulls in its wings and lies low first. When a ferocious beast assaults, it lowers its posture and prowls warily first. When a true sage moves, it should display the gullibility of a fool...”[1]

Once again, Zu An found himself utterly lost. It was almost as if a fly was buzzing around his ears, leaving him so annoyed that he was on the verge of exploding. He couldn’t accept that he had to go to school again after transmigrating, and be forced to sit through such torturous lessons.

He felt that he was wasting his life away. It was already bad enough that he’d wasted his previous life. Was he going to squander this life away on useless nonsense like this as well?

For a moment, the thought of standing up and walking out crossed his mind. However, the teacher standing before him possessed a cultivation of upper third rank, not to mention he was an official of the royal court as well. It was best for him to keep a low profile.

Yup. It’s not too late for me to run away after his lesson too.

Despite Zu An’s prayers, this lesson didn’t pass by in a flash. It dragged on and on, a long and gruelling ordeal. By the time the class was over, he was on the verge of going crazy.

“This won’t do! I must leave this place!” With a darkened face, Zu An rose and stormed out.

Wei Suo quickly caught up with him and spoke with a fawning smile. “Are you heading to the canteen to have your meal? Let’s go together. I’ll treat you!” It was apparent that the earlier beating had been extremely effective in winning him over.

His comment reminded Zu An that it was already the afternoon. If he left right now, he would still have to eat lunch and waste his precious money on buying a meal! It seemed much better to eat in the academy first before leaving.

As they walked, Zu An suddenly remembered Old Mi's instructions. If he were to leave school without making any progress on his mission, that fellow wouldn't let him off the hook easily. He turned to Wei Suo. "Speaking of which, given how well-connected you are in this school, do you happen to know a person named Wei Hongde?"

"Of course, he's my older brother! Do you know him?" Wei Suo asked curiously.

"Your older brother?" Zu An narrowed his eyes doubtfully. Wow, this sure is a coincidence. "But your names don't sound alike to one another." [2]

"Who says that brothers need to have similar names?" Wei Suo grumbled. "My older brother's name sounds so old-fashioned, unlike mine. Wei Suo, Wei Suo; don't you think my name sounds awe-inspiring?"

Zu An stifled his laughter. "Yes yes yes, your name sounds much cooler. Is your older brother in school right now?"

"He is. His talent is much better than mine, so he's currently in Grade Three Earth class." Envy surfaced in Wei Suo's eyes.

"What does your family do?" Zu An needed to know more. He couldn't figure out why Old Mi wanted him to get close to Wei Hongde.

"My father used to work for the Chamberlain of Palace Revenue, but a few years ago, he chose to move to Brightmoon City for his retirement. Of course, we can't compete with your Chu clan," Wei Suo replied.

Chamberlain of Palace Revenue?

Based on what he knew, the Chamberlain of Palace Revenue was one of the Nine Ministers, governing the emperor's treasure vault. Most of those working for him were the trusted eunuchs and servants of the emperor. What does Old Mi intend to do by having me get close to this Wei Hongde?

A harsh cry echoed through the air. "Boss Ye, that's the fellow who stole our ki stones!"

Sensing what was coming, Wei Suo bounded to one side like a frightened rabbit, as if disavowing any relationship he might have had with Zu An.

1. This is an excerpt from Six Secret Strategic Teachings, Military Secret, attributed to Jiang Ziya.
2. Wei Hongde sounds like an upright name whereas Wei Suo has connotations of being a despicable person.

Chapter 46: I Have Tried it Myself

Zu An was speechless. This fellow really knows no loyalty.

He looked over to where the voice came from, and saw the fatty recounting the earlier incident in the forest to a young man—not forgetting to exaggerate the details, of course. The young man stood in Zu An's path and glared daggers at him. "So you're the bastard named Zu An?"

“No, I’m your father,” Zu An replied.

You have successfully trolled Ye Chenliang for 555 Rage points!

Clearly, this unhinged young man was none other than the ‘backing’ that the darned fatty had mentioned back in the forest, Ye Chenliang.

“Very well. You have managed to provoke me too,” Ye Chenliang grated. He clenched his fists tightly, his knuckles creaking and popping. It had been long since anyone had dared to speak to him in such a tone, especially a student from the lowest Yellow class.

Zu An shrugged nonchalantly. “Looks like you’re a ‘man of words’. If you’re all that capable, why don’t you bite me then?”

You have successfully trolled Ye Chenliang for 666 Rage points!

A cold glint flashed across Ye Chenliang’s eyes. As he readied himself to make a move, a teasing voice off to the side interrupted him. “As a fellow classmate, allow me to remind you out of goodwill that the punishment for fighting on school compounds is expulsion.”

Zu An risked a quick look, and saw a couple sharing a laugh not too far away. The man was no other than Xie Xiu, whom he had met at the academy’s entrance earlier in the morning.

Ye Chenliang ground his teeth. Even though Xie Xiu was an incompetent wastrel, he was still the son of the city lord, and he dared not offend the Xie clan just yet. He suppressed his rage and spitted Zu An with a cold stare. “Very well. I want a duel with you!”

Zu An rolled his eyes. “Do I look like a servant who fights you as and when you like? How embarrassing it would be for me to accept your duel! Rejected!”

Ye Chenliang’s rage exploded from within. “You don’t even have the guts to accept my duel? And you call yourself a man?”

You have successfully trolled Ye Chenliang for 777 Rage points!

Off to the side, Xie Xiu again offered a reminder. “A duel needs consent from both sides. You aren’t allowed to pressure the other party into accepting the duel.”

Zu An knew that Xie Xiu was outlining the academy rules for his sake, although he already knew all of this thanks to his meeting with the principal. Naturally, he wouldn’t fall for such a low-level taunt.

A vicious spark flashed across Ye Chenliang’s eyes. He glared at Xie Xiu coldly. “Second Young Master Xie, I believe that this matter is none of your business.”

Xie Xiu chuckled casually in response. “It is none of my business. But as a senior, isn’t it normal for me to offer some advice to a junior who has just joined the academy?”

Ye Chenliang was seething, but there was nothing to be done about Xie Xiu, so he turned his attention back to Zu An once more. “Everyone says that the First Miss of the Chu clan was blind to have married a wastrel. I had my doubts that Miss Chu could really be such a poor judge of character, but it seems like

there's some truth to these rumors after all. It turns out that you're a good-for-nothing that hides behind his words but doesn't back them up with action!"

The commotion had already attracted a huge crowd. Initially, everyone thought that Ye Chenliang was at it again, bullying yet another lower grade student. Their disdain for his actions, paired with Zu An's fairly good looks, meant almost everyone was subconsciously rooting for Zu An.

However, as soon as it was revealed that Zu An was that useless drafted son-in-law of the Chu clan, the crowd's mentality toward him shifted. The eyes of the men reddened with jealous rage, while the gazes of the women cooled with disdain. Clearly, they all saw this fellow who possessed absolutely no capabilities as worthless. What was the use of looks if there was nothing else inside?

Zu An registered the huge stream of Rage points flowing into his system. It seems like my wife is quite popular after all. Just by learning my identity, all of these male students have contributed several thousand Rage points to me.

His mind turned subconsciously to the Ten Great Beauties of the Sweetheart Ranking that Wei Suo had described in great detail. If I were to flirt with all of them, wouldn't all of the men in the academy contribute an endless stream of Rage points to me?

Zu An smiled smugly at Ye Chenliang. "I had no idea why you were kicking up such a huge fuss, but it turns out that you're yet another one of Chuyan's admirers. No wonder you carry such great enmity toward me!"

"Shut your mouth! Trash like you isn't worthy of even mentioning Miss Chu's name!" Ye Chenliang hollered furiously. In truth, he knew full well where he stood in the academy. Although he seemed fairly well-respected, it was only because those from the major clans mostly ignored him. Compared to those true geniuses from the Sky class, he was still sorely lacking.

As such, despite his desire for Chu Chuyan, he had never tried to make a move on her. He knew that he stood very little chance, if any at all. Yet, who would have thought his goddess would actually fall into the clutches of such a worthless man? Such an atrocity could not be tolerated!

When Man Yu reported that the culprit who stole all of the ki stones was this bastard, he seized on the opportunity to put him down before the entire academy. Through this, Miss Chu would realize that this pathetic creature could never be worthy of, and that he was the superior choice!

Zu An sighed deeply. "I, as her husband, am not worthy of speaking my wife's name? Are you saying that a stranger like you is worthy of it then?"

Ye Chenliang took a deep breath. He observed the agitation of the crowd around him, and slowly composed himself. "I shan't argue with you. Miss Chu is the goddess of our hearts, and you're nothing but a coward who doesn't even have the courage to fight me. Know your own place and get lost!"

This fired up the crowd, who joined in.

"Get lost from the Chu clan if you aren't going to compete!"

"How can a nincompoop like you be worthy of the First Miss of the Chu clan?"

"You are no man!"

“You are no man!”

“You are no man!”

...

The crowd had started off slinging a variety of insults, but at some point in time, everyone somehow began chanting the same words.

Zu An was overjoyed as he basked in their fury. These students sure are adorable. Despite not knowing one another, they are providing me with so many Rage points. That’s another several thousand into my account!

“Rubbish! He’s more of a man than the rest of you are!”

A figure clothed in all red dashed in to stand in front of him.

Zu An almost fell over in surprise. It was actually Chu Huanzhao! He hadn’t expected her to stand up for him. It looked like the beating he’d suffered the other day hadn’t been in vain.

The crowd recognized Chu Huanzhao as well. She was a celebrity in this academy, after all. Besides being Chu Chuyan’s younger sister, she was ranked ninth in the Sweetheart Ranking, and she took her Wailing Whip along with her everywhere. It would be difficult not to recognize her.

Seeing Chu Huanzhao stepping out to defend Zu An, Ye Chenliang frowned. “How do you know whether he’s a man or not?”

Chu Huanzhao tilted his chin upward and stated matter-of-factly, “Of course I know! I tried it myself!”

The crowd exploded in a huge uproar. Wei Suo’s eyes bulged out of their sockets, and he shot Zu An an enthusiastic thumbs up. Big bro, I shall follow you from now on. You must impart to me the tricks you use to pick up girls!

Even Xie Xiu, who was enjoying the show from the sidelines, choked on his melon seeds and ended up coughing violently. His handsome face turned beet red. So did the eyes of every single man present in the crowd.

“You beast!”

“You actually laid your hands on such a young girl!”

“They are sisters! Sisters!!!”

“Now that I think of it, I’ve heard rumors that the son-in-law of the Chu clan climbed into his sister-in-law’s bed on his wedding night!”

“Oh? But the Second Miss of the Chu clan doesn’t seem to be angry about it?”

“Goddamnit, she must have been won over by his skills in bed!”

“I also want such luck with women too!”

...

Zu An nearly cackled out loud. The rate at which Rage points were coming in was increasing exponentially!

Instead of joining their male counterparts in their envious fury, the women exchanged wide-eyed looks, and their attitude toward Zu An began to change.

"A man who can win over the First Miss and Second Miss of the Chu clan surely has his own strengths too, right?"

"It could be due to his good looks."

"Don't you think that his actions are that of a run-of-the-mill scumbag?"

"But he's so handsome~"

...

The angry shouts and excited whispers made Chu Huanzhao realize how badly she'd been misunderstood, and she hurriedly tried to clarify herself. "That's not what I meant! He took seven strikes from my Wailing Whip without even a whimper, that's why I said he's more of a man than any one of you!"

She turned to Zu An and glared at him, her cheeks flushed bright red. "It's all your fault!"

You have successfully trolled Chu Huanzhao for 33 Rage points!

The smile on Zu An's face grew even brighter.

Opposite them, Ye Chenliang sneered. "That's impossible. Even if you wish to cover for him, you should come up with a more plausible excuse. Everyone knows that your Wailing Whip amplifies pain tenfold. There's no way he could have been able to withstand that!"

Chu Huanzhao glared at Ye Chenliang. "You think that I'm lying to you all?"

Ye Chenliang sniffed coldly. "You know best whether you're lying or not. Try asking the crowd then. See if anyone believes that he could take seven strikes from the Wailing Whip without letting out a cry."

"That's impossible!"

The onlookers responded as one, Wei Suo included. Clearly, many of them had suffered the agony of being struck by the Wailing Whip before. Even those who had yet to experience it firsthand knew of the Wailing Whip's effects. None of them believed it possible for anyone to take seven lashes without letting out a cry.

Chu Huanzhao lost her patience. "I'm the Second Miss of the Chu clan! When have I ever lied before?"

Zu An rolled his eyes. This lass does have a fiery temper, but she doesn't possess her older sister's smarts. What's the point of you trying so hard to vouch for your own words?

"Who knows whether you're fabricating lies in order to protect him? There's no way we will believe your words, unless..." Yu Chenliang smirked at Zu An. "Unless you prove it to us right now. Whip him before our eyes and let us witness it personally!"

“Fine!” Chu Huanzhao reached for her whip as she stalked toward Zu An.

Zu An stumbled backwards in shock. It was a common saying that those with large breasts had small brains. This lass was as flat as an airplane runway, so how could she still be such a blockhead?

He had finally realized just how powerful the Heiress Ball of Delights was after his fight with Pei Mianman. It was almost like having an additional life.

He dearly regretted wasting it once on a bet with Chu Huanzhao, and he would have to be insane to do it once more!

“Calm down!” Zu An quickly grabbed her hand.

“It’s all because of you that I ended up being embarrassed here. Let me strike you with my whip once so as to show all of them that I’m not lying!” Chu Huanzhao hissed in agitation.

Zu An thought quickly. “Don’t you find it embarrassing that you’re doing exactly what he’s asking you to? It’s almost as if he’s treating you like a servant!”

“Oh, you’re right too.” Chu Huanzhao nodded, frowning. “What should I do then?”

“Why bother with them? It’s not as if he can force me to duel with him. Haven’t you heard of the saying, ‘Never let a retard pull you down to his level?’”

“Who are you calling a retard?” Ye Chenliang’s face blackened.

“Whoever’s replying to me, of course!” Zu An shrugged, sparing a sympathetic look for his adversary.

You have successfully trolled Ye Chenliang for 99 Rage points!

“It’s no wonder why everyone says that the sister-in-law is the true sweetheart. I’ll have to make sure to marry a wife who has a younger sister in the future too. I just wonder if her family will be as generous as the Chu clan’s as to offer both of their daughters to me!” Ye Chenliang began his counterattack.

Chapter 47: Mooching Requires Skills!

The crowd cheered wildly. Clearly, they agreed with what Ye Chenliang had said.

Chu Huanzhao’s felt as though her cheeks were on fire. “What nonsense are you spouting?!” Unable to take such humiliation, she flicked her Wailing Whip toward Ye Chenliang.

Ye Chenliang was well prepared. He dodged her strike nimbly, and then threw her a question of his own. “Chu Huanzhao, are you challenging me to a duel?”

“That’s right! I’m challenging you to a duel so that I can rip that foul mouth of yours apart!” Chu Huanzhao tried to strike Ye Chenliang a second time.

“The one I want to challenge is that Zu wastrel! Why are you butting into this as well? Could it be that the two of you are really in a relationship?” Ye Chenliang demanded loudly as he again dodged her attack. He had no desire to fight Chu Huanzhao. Setting aside her background as a scion of the Chu clan,

just the pain of being struck by the Wailing Whip was something that he never wanted to experience ever again in his entire life.

Chu Huanzhao's entire face burned red. She maneuvered her whip dexterously, trying to land a clean strike on Ye Chenliang.

Ye Chenliang dodged frantically as he yelled challenges over his shoulder at Zu An. "Zu wastrel, are you really a man? Are you only capable of mooching off women? If you have guts, fight with me!"

Zu An shrugged in response. "It's with my own ability that I'm able to pimp myself out. Why should I make a move when I have others to do it for me? If you're really as formidable as you think, go and find a woman who would stand up for you! Hah! But looking at your face, I doubt anyone will want you even if you paid them!"

You have successfully trolled Ye Chenliang for 233 Rage points!

Chu Huanzhao turned around and glared at Zu An sharply. "You shut up!"

You have successfully trolled Chu Huanzhao for 99 Rage points!

The crowd also turned completely silent. Xie Xiu stared without blinking, his face frozen in a look of bewilderment. Finally, he intoned deeply, "That man has truly reached the zenith of shamelessness!" The crowd around him nodded their heads vehemently.

You have successfully trolled the onlookers for 66 Rage points! ... 66... 66... 66...

Zu An felt his heart soaring to the heavens. I'm striking it rich! If I had known this would happen, I would have come to the academy yesterday as well!

All of a sudden, a figure leaped out to interpose themselves between Chu Huanzhao and Ye Chenliang. "Miss Chu, since Ye Chenliang didn't agree to your duel, it isn't appropriate for you to corner him so."

The figure was wearing a white shirt that fluttered gracefully in the wind. With one hand behind his back, he easily grabbed the Wailing Whip out of the air with the other. He was the spitting image of a gallant and dashing warrior.

A commotion broke out amidst the female students.

"Waaa, it's Young Master Yuan!"

"Young Master Yuan is truly gallant."

"To think that he could catch Wailing Whip so easily... He must have reached the fourth rank, right?"

"What fourth rank? He's already reached the peak of the fourth rank! It probably wouldn't be long before he makes a breakthrough to the fifth rank!"

"Waaa, he's so handsome! He's so much better than that shameless scum whose only talent is hiding behind a woman's back!"

...

Zu An's face slowly turned dark as night. Those women sure are fickle-minded. Just a moment ago they were speaking up for me, but now they're singing an entirely different tune.

The newcomer spoke with a voice as calm as the surface of a lake in winter. "What you're doing is an infringement of the academy rules. If this matter blows up, not even the Brightmoon Duke would be able to stop the academy from expelling you."

"Yuan Wendong, don't stick your head where it doesn't belong!" Chu Huanzhao tried furiously to free her whip from his grasp, but it did not budge no matter how much force she exerted.

The white-clothed man known as Yuan Wendong smiled an impeccable smile. "Chu Second Miss, are you intending to get yourself expelled here?"

Chu Huanzhao glared at Yuan Wendong furiously. "Are you threatening me?"

"I dare not. I am friends with your older sister, so naturally, I do not wish to see anything happen to Chu Second Miss," Yuan Wendong said as he finally released his grip.

Chu Huanzhao hastily pulled the Wailing Whip back to her side, but a look of uncertainty flickered across her face.

Seeing that someone was standing up for him, Ye Chenliang puffed out his chest and strutted over to Zu An. "I'll teach you a lesson today. In the end, this is a world where you can only count on yourself. Someone who relies on external help is bound to fall one day..."

Before he could finish his words, a gentle voice emerged from within the crowd. "T-that's not it! He... He's actually really formidable!"

All eyes instantly turned toward the source of the voice, eager to see who was intervening this time around. A young woman with a face no bigger than the size of a palm stepped forward, blushing furiously. She appeared incredibly uncomfortable being the center of attention.

"Oh? Who's this woman? She's so pretty~"

"Heh, look at how uncultured you are. That's called cute!"

"You must be new here, right? How could you fail to recognize the seventh-ranked woman in the Sweetheart Ranking, Ji Xiaoxi? She's the daughter of Divine Physician Ji, and her talent in pill concoction is second to none amongst her peers!"

"Why is she speaking up for Zu An? Could it be that she also..."

"Don't spout nonsense! How could a fairy like her possibly have any relations with that human scum?"

...

The discussions continued fervently. Even Ye Chenliang was taken aback by this development. He quickly put on a kind smile and asked gently, "Junior Ji, what are you doing here?"

He had to tread carefully here. This Ji Xiaoxi had caused a huge stir from the first day she'd arrived at this academy. Due to her adorable looks, some perverts had begun to harbor deviant thoughts toward

her. Yet, as soon as they came into contact with her clothes, they found themselves poisoned right away. Many of them ended up suffering for up to half a month.

In the end, all of them were expelled from the academy. Some speculated that it was due to the vast network of connections Divine Physician Ji had built up in his earlier years. Many powerful figures owed him favors, and they did not hesitate to lend a helping hand upon hearing that his daughter had been bullied. However, there were others who claimed Ji Xiaoxi herself had powerful backing within the academy.

Regardless of which one it was, it was clear that she wasn't someone whom Ye Chenliang could afford to offend.

"I was just passing by when I saw a lot of people gathered here..." Standing before so many people, Ji Xiaoxi felt a little intimidated. Nevertheless, she gathered her courage and declared, "I saw that you all misunderstood big brother Zu, and big brother Zu wasn't willing to explain himself either. That's why... I stepped out."

She really was doing this for Zu An?

More frantic whispering broke out amongst the crowd. It was unthinkable that the drafted son-in-law of the Chu clan, despite being known for his inadequacy, would not only be able to lay his hands on both of the Chu clan's sisters, but form a relationship with the famous little fairy, Ji Xiaoxi, too!

What in the world is going on here?

Is it because I'm not handsome enough, or am I just not enough of a scumbag? Or is it my cultivation that women take issue with, or perhaps my background isn't good enough?

The men in the crowd weighed these thoughts carefully, and each came to the same conclusion. Other than their appearances, there was nothing about them that was inferior to that shameless man! A burst of rage was unanimously directed towards Zu An.

You have successfully trolled the onlookers for 99 Rage points! ... 99... 99... 99...

The sudden surge of Rage points assured Zu An that he was right not to sneak out earlier. Choosing to have his lunch in the academy was arguably the best decision he had ever made.

Ye Chengliang swallowed as he watched the situation unfold before him, utterly confused. What is going on here? I was just trying to teach this fool his place! Why are so many women stepping forward to protect him?

Something must be really wrong with this world!

"Junior Ji, what's your relationship with him?" Ye Chenliang was unable to accept such a reality.

"He..." Ji Xiaoxi looked at Zu An, and she blushed again. "He's my good friend."

Her face had reddened as she recalled how they had first met in the river, both of them completely nude. While she now knew that he was deficient below the belt, knowing that her body had been seen by a man still made her feel a little peculiar inside.

Those gathered around mistook her reaction for shyness and embarrassment, and their hearts turned cold. How can this be? Even our beloved little fairy has been snared by that man's demonic clutches!

Oblivious to their misunderstanding, she began to explain herself. "I once went to the Hidden Dragon Mountain, and there I saw him kill dozens of Assrip Wolves with my own eyes. Even their leader was not spared."

All of the men nearly burst into tears. It's all over. Our little fairy actually went into the Hidden Dragon Mountain together with him. A man and a woman, all alone in the middle of the wilderness. The mountains must have awakened their primal instincts and compelled them to... Goddamnit!

"That man actually monopolized three of the top ten beauties in the Sweetheart Ranking! Don't hold me back, I'm going to duel him!"

"No one is holding you back, go ahead and fight him! If he really managed to kill dozens of Assrip Wolves, you're just going to be cannon fodder to him."

"Hmph! I'm only waiting for Ye Chenliang to be done with him. I'll have you know that I am not in the habit of ganging up on others!"

"Tsk."

...

As he heard her tale, Ye Chenliang felt droplets of cold sweat form on his forehead. He spared a look at Zu An, lounging in a disinterested manner, before turning to face Ji Xiaoxi with disbelief painted on his face. "He killed dozens of Assrip Wolves? Are you serious?"

Ji Xiaoxi nodded. "I wasn't able to make sense of how he was able to do it, but he did. If you don't believe me, you can go and ask my father. He can testify to this matter."

A chorus of despairing groans rang out from the onlookers. Holy shit! They have even gotten to the stage where they have met the parents!

Off to the side, Xie Xiu's mind was working on a different matter. Ji Xiaoxi specializes in pill concoction, and so her cultivation is weaker compared to her peers. However, she's still a third rank cultivator. Despite this, even she was unable to tell how Zu An managed to kill those Assrip Wolves. Does this mean that he has attained an unimaginable level of speed?

It wasn't just Xie Xiu who had such thoughts in mind.

Many others, including Ye Chenliang, had also grasped the hidden meaning in Ji Xiaoxi's words. It was hard to imagine that she was lying, especially since she'd even brought Divine Physician Ji into the picture. Ji Xiaoxi was known to be an extremely good-natured person, and hardly anyone had seen her lie before. She would never put her father's reputation on the line over something like this!

While every word she'd said was true, the way she had worded her statement had unintentionally led them astray.

"I told you! My brother-in-law is a formidable man, but all of you refused to believe me! Hmph!" Chu Huanzhao's voice was full of vindication as Ji Xiaoxi turned the tables on those naysayers. Despite this,

she still turned around and narrowed her eyes at Zu An. She was curious as to when this fellow had managed to hook up with other women outside.

This won't do. My big sister isn't around these days, so I need to help her keep him in line. I can't let those whor... Chu Huanzhao's eyes fell on the innocent-looking Ji Xiaoxi, and she was unable to finish the word. That really went against her conscience.

The expressions of those gathered there slowly changed as they processed all of the information revealed thus far. Earlier on, Chu Huanzhao's claim that Zu An had taken seven strikes from the Wailing Whip without crying out had seemed an exaggeration to them. But now, with Ji Xiaoxi providing her testimony, they started to wonder if Zu An could truly be an incredible expert of some sort.

As their minds churned, Zu An walked up to Ye Chenliang and shook his head in sympathy. "Allow me to teach you a lesson too. The only reason why you think mooching is unreliable is because you aren't handsome enough. That's why you lack the imagination to fathom just how charming a man like me can be. You can't even deal with either of the two women standing by my side right now, and you still dream of dueling me?"

Chu Huanzhao's jaw dropped to the floor, followed by Ji Xiaoxi's.

Everyone around was staggered by his proclamation. Their eyes had been opened to a new height of shamelessness.

Chapter 48: Mooching Ain't Easy

You have successfully trolled Ye Chenliang for 999 Rage points!

Ye Chenliang had never felt so insulted before. He had been brimming with confidence as he confronted Zu An, fully intending to drag him down from his high horse. Who could have predicted that it would all backfire on him?

At this point, he had already dropped the idea of dueling Zu An. He was definitely not going to tangle with someone who could kill dozens of Assrip Wolves.

"You're merely a lower Ding class cultivator. Why are you pretending to be an expert?" an accusatory voice called out.

Zu An narrowed his eyes. He had already spotted Hong Xingying amidst the crowd. Did I dig up his grave in his previous life? Why in the world is he tenaciously biting onto me like a mad dog?

Those who had been present at his testing earlier on nodded in agreement. "Indeed. His aptitude is only lower Ding class!"

"He's currently in the Yellow class, so how strong could he possibly be?"

All this left Ye Chenliang feeling deeply conflicted. There was no way these people were lying, given that there were so many witnesses testifying to it. At the same time, it was unlikely for both Ji Xiaoxi and Chu Huanzhao to be lying. Just what in the world was happening here?

It was possible for him to investigate further in order to uncover the truth, but, to be honest, he was starting to feel a little intimidated. He had utterly embarrassed himself earlier on, and if he were to make a wrong move here, he could very well lose his place in the academy.

Yuan Wendong noticed the indecision playing out on Ye Chenliang's face, and berated him inwardly for being utterly useless. It seems like I'll have to do this myself.

He stepped forward and clasped his fist toward Zu An. "I was initially unwilling to get involved in this matter, but you are simply too overbearing. You have trampled over the blood, sweat, and tears of the cultivators who have worked diligently to reach their current level. What skill each of us possesses didn't come by coincidence. On the other hand, you chose to walk down a twisted path. If I allow you to get away with this, I cannot imagine just how many juniors will be misled by your example and become degenerates like you. So, I, Yuan Wendong, representing all of the hardworking cultivators of the academy, will challenge you to a duel."

Hearing Hong Xingying mention that Zu An was only a lower Ding class cultivator had boosted his confidence. Besides, even if Zu An was feigning weakness, he still had faith that he would be the victor.

Yuan Wendong's cultivation wasn't at the peak of the fourth rank, unlike what most people believed. Just two days ago, he had managed to break through to the fifth rank. There were only a few people in the entire academy currently at the fifth rank. Apart from those few fearsome monsters, he was confident that he wouldn't lose to anyone.

Besides, Zu An had built up the perfect stage for him to elevate his reputation one step further. This good-for-nothing was just another stepping stone toward greatness. Moreover, the Yuan clan and the Chu clan were currently competing over the arms trade. Zu An's defeat would be the perfect tale to sully the reputation of the Chu clan.

Yuan Wendong's monologue about diligence and whatnot won him the goodwill of the crowd. There was a lingering sentiment of envy and resentment toward Zu An's reliance on women, and most were simply overjoyed to see someone willing to step forward to deal with him. This piece of drama would be enough to satisfy their hunger for the day.

"You speak as if you're the only one working hard. Do you know how hard I have worked too?" Zu An retorted indignantly.

Yuan Wendong snorted. "What have you worked hard on?"

"I worked hard on my mooching skills! Do you think that it's that easy to be a mooch?" Zu An argued vehemently.

The men in the crowd had had enough.

"Shit! This is too much. I really want to beat him up!"

"Me too!"

"Shall we just do it together?"

"Let's allow Yuan Wendong to have a go first."

...

A beautiful figure, who just happened to be passing by, heard Zu An's declaration and burst into laughter. He sure is shameless. I really wonder how in the world he managed to catch Chuyan's eyes.

She continued on her way. This minor scuffle held no interest for her.

Yuan Wendong sneered coldly at Zu An's statement. "Mooching? How meaningless. Do you really expect to count on women for the rest of your life? Take a look at your current circumstances. Who are you going to count on to get you through this quandary? Chu Huanzhao? Or Ji Xiaoxi? Even the two of them combined won't be a match for me. In the end, men should rely on themselves. That's what true strength is!"

Zu An sighed deeply. "I didn't think that you would suffer from a lack of imagination too. What gave you the impression that I can't rely on a woman to get me through this crisis? Pei Mianman! Come here and help me deal with this hateful fellow!"

Pei Mianman?

That name made everyone freeze on the spot. That was the name of a beauty whose reputation in the academy rivaled Chu Chuyan! On top of that, while Chu Chuyan had a cold demeanor and distanced herself from others, Pei Mianman had an alluring figure and a gentle smile that posed a fatal charm to all men. There was no man who didn't fancy her.

Was it even possible for such a goddess to be involved with this shameless fellow?

Impossible! That was the first thought in everyone's mind.

As expected, deafening silence followed Zu An's shout. The crowd began jeering at him.

Yuan Wendong couldn't contain his laughter. "Do you know who Pei Mianman is? How could someone like her possibly be interested in you? You're a toad lusting for the flesh of a swan!"

He had once been entranced by that woman as well, and he had done everything he could to court her. However, he soon discovered that her gentle exterior concealed an utterly cold heart. She viewed all men to be worth nothing at all, which made her an even more difficult target to court than Chu Chuyan.

How could such a woman possibly be involved with the shameless man standing before him?

"I saw you just now. If you leave right now, I'm going to divulge everything that happened between us right here!" Zu An shouted out loud.

The figure who was attempting to sneak away stopped short. Zu An's threat had really triggered her. "Shut up!" she shouted back.

Hurried footsteps sounded, and a young woman dressed in a red top and a black skirt strode across to join the fray. Her skin that was smooth like jade; her enchanting, almond-shaped, peach-blossom eyes that seemed to speak; her proud and commanding figure; all of these made men feel numb all over and made women shy away in embarrassment of their own form.

Pei Mianman had forsaken her usually gentle demeanour. Her face was as dark as the sky in a thunderstorm. She glared at Zu An furiously. "If you dare speak a word about that, I'll kill you right away!"

Her words, and the forcefulness with which she spat them out, settled the doubts of everyone present. The hearts of countless men shattered in unison.

To think that such a thing could be true! Our dream lover has actually gotten into that kind of relationship with this shameless man!

Zu An, meanwhile, was feeling a little perplexed. The Rage points he was obtaining seemed to be only half of what he had reaped earlier. What's going on? Is Pei Mianman's chest not big enough, or is her face not beautiful enough?

I thought that her being the secret guest of this show would push my earnings of Rage points to greater heights, but it's starting to show signs of slowing down instead...

He scanned the crowd with a frown. The angry faces of the men had been replaced with envy... as well as respect.

Even Wei Suo, who had run as far away as he could, had returned. He grabbed onto Zu An's sleeves, eyes sparkling. "Big bro, you'll be my only big bro for the rest of my..."

Before he could finish, he was crushed under the onrushing stampede of men swarming to reach Zu An. "Master, take me in as your disciple!"

"Master, choose me. I wish to inherit your art of mooching, and I believe that I have the qualifications too!"

"Hah, I'm the one who looks more like him! If anyone is going to inherit master's status as a legendary moocher, it's me!"

"Heh, you're already thinking of overthrowing your master despite having yet to be accepted? Master, you mustn't take in that sort of backstabbing bastard as your disciple!"

...

Zu An could only lament at how outstanding he was. Even if the Keyboard had accepted Respect points and not Rage points, he would still have been able to rise to the top of the world.

Following her declaration and the ensuing commotion, Pei Mianman's eyelids had started twitching uncontrollably. She gritted her teeth so tightly that they creaked audibly through her closed lips. "You must be feeling pretty cocky now, hm?"

Zu An casually waved a hand. "Let's not reminisce about the past now. Help me get rid of those two fellows... Ah no, throw that damned traitor over there into the mix too." He pointed to Hong Xingying, who was hiding amidst the crowd.

In truth, Zu An had called out her name with a feeling of trepidation. He hadn't been sure that she would lend him her aid. If she had turned against him instead, he would have had no choice but to try summoning his final trump card, the beautiful principal.

The furious glare that Pei Mianman was directing at Zu An disappeared suddenly, replaced by an unexpectedly tender smile. "All right."

She pointed to Yuan Wendong, Ye Chenliang, and Hong Xingying, and said, "Let's duel. The three of you can come at me together."

The faces of the trio immediately twisted in horror. Yuan Wendong hurriedly spoke up. "Miss Pei, we are..."

Pei Mianman cut him off with a frosty smile. "I thought you mentioned something along the lines of a man relying on his own strength. Yet, the three of you are now afraid to accept a challenge from me? If you're too scared, kneel down and kowtow to Zu An, and I'll pretend as if nothing happened today."

Hong Xingying immediately erupted in anger. "Fine, I'll accept your duel then! Who's afraid of..." Before he could even finish his boast, a black blur streaked forward and sunk a fist right into his abdomen. He collapsed in a heap, his body curled up like a cooked prawn as he gasped desperately for breath.

Pei Mianman casually blew on her fist. "A cultivator who hasn't even reached the fourth rank. I sure wonder where you got your confidence from. The two over there, it's your turn."

Yuan Wendong's face turned pale. He cursed Hong Xingying for being a braindead fool. He knew that the whole academy was watching, and it would be a huge humiliation to back out of this fight like a coward. "Pei Mianman, you better not go too far. You should know that I've reached the fifth rank too!"

As he said those words, golden light began to shine forth from his hands. Numerous swords flew from the sheaths of the surrounding onlookers and began to revolve around him. It was quite an imposing sight.

"That fellow has reached the fifth rank? I thought that he was still at the peak of the fourth rank!"

"He sure hid it well! I wonder who he is plotting against, for him to conceal his strength this way. It's lucky that he was forced to reveal it today."

"Heh, looks like we'll have a good show to watch. Who do you think will win?"

"Do you even need to ask? It's our goddess, of course!"

"It's not so clear-cut. Ye Chenliang is not a weakling. In a two-on-one fight, I reckon that even Miss Pei will find herself a tight spot."

...

Spurred on by the comments from the crowd, Ye Chenliang began driving his ki to form a transparent layer around his body that resembled a tortoise's shell.

Zu An was astounded by the sight. Ye Chenliang was manifesting his ki as an armor around his body, which revealed that he had reached the peak of the third rank. Meanwhile, Yuan Wendong seemed to be attracting metal to himself, just like a certain helmeted fellow he'd read about in his previous life. Clearly, his elemental attribute was metal.

Zu An knew he wasn't a match for either of the two of them. Although, if he used Grandgale's instantaneous movement together with the Poisonous Prick, he might still stand a chance.

Yuan Wendong knew that he who made the first move controlled the flow of the battle. He waved his hand in a grand arc, and the dozens of swords revolving around him flew toward Pei Mianman. At the same time, Ye Chenliang charged forward like a bull, using the flying swords as cover to ram the beautiful silhouette standing before him.

Even someone as fearless as Zu An felt a twinge of worry for Pei Mianman. The woman herself, however, appeared to be completely unfazed. Black flames burst out from beneath her feet and soared up around her like a divine dragon. All of the swords that came into contact with the black flames vanished one after another at an astounding rate.

Chapter 49: The Legend of the Moochlord

Ye Chenliang found himself charging headlong toward Pei Mianman all alone.

He had seen how the dozens of swords had been vaporized in an instant, and it terrified him. If the black flame was even able to melt metal, what chance would a body made out of flesh and blood have?

He had never expected Yuan Wendong's swords to be so useless. At least a rock would still cause a splash when dropped into a pool of water. All of those swords had disappeared without achieving anything at all.

By the time his rational mind had processed the amount of danger he was in, it was already too late for him to stop. He could only watch in despair as his body headed straight for destruction.

A middle-aged man with a bald spot on his head suddenly appeared between the two of them. He placed a hand on Ye Chenliang's head and stopped his charge in its tracks.

"A mere third rank actually attempting to knock over a fifth rank by ramming her. What have you been learning in the academy all of these years?" the middle-aged man bellowed furiously. He turned his glare on Pei Mianman. "You too. Do you need to be so vicious towards your fellow schoolmate?"

Pei Mianman reined in her black flames. "All I did was stand here. What can I do if he so fervently wishes to court his own death by charging in like a madman?" With that, she turned her back on the widely-feared discipline master and walked away.

The crowd, who had just witnessed her strength, quickly opened up a path for her to pass through.

Just like them, Zu An was a little taken aback by Pei Mianman's strength.

It's fortunate that she hadn't used her elemental powers yesterday. I would have ended up being vaporized like those swords! No matter how powerful the Heiress Ball of Delights is, there's no way it can safeguard my life if I've already been burned into ashes.

The discipline master, Lu De, watched Pei Mianman depart in silence for a moment. When he turned to look at Ye Chenliang, his expression had changed completely. "Are you the one causing a fuss here?"

Ye Chenliang felt his soul trying to escape from his body. He pointed frantically at Zu An and exclaimed, "Teacher, it wasn't me! He was the one causing trouble!"

Lu De turned to Zu An, his voice cold. "You were the one causing trouble here?"

Zu An shrugged nonchalantly. "I stood here without making a move from start to finish. They are the ones who insistently tried to provoke me one after another, wanting me to duel them. If you don't believe me, you can ask all the other students here."

The crowd quickly verified Zu An's words. They might have looked down on Zu An for relying on women previously, but the clear demonstration of his unbelievable mooching skills had left them feeling only respect and admiration. Not only was he involved with four out of the Ten Great Beauties of the Sweetheart Ranking, these four even included the top two beauties, Chu Chuyan and Pei Mianman! If they could just learn a thing or two from this master, they would be set for life.

Zu An could have never imagined that for decades, the legend of the 'Moochlord' would continue to be passed down through each generation of students. There was even a group of people who revered him so greatly that they couldn't bear to use his real name, addressing him as 'The Man' instead as a show of respect.

Seeing the students vouch for Zu An, Lu De's face hardened into ice. He began to strike Ye Chenliang mercilessly with the ruler in his hand. "I've long heard that you have been forming factions in the academy to bully the weak! Very well, let me show you what it means to reform a person through virtue today!"

The ruler in the hands of the discipline master was far more formidable than Chu Huanzhao's Wailing Whip. Ye Chenliang shrieked in agony under its blows, his heart filled with a sense of injustice. Yuan Wendong was the one who started the fight, so why are you only hitting me?

Despite his indignance, Ye Chenliang knew better than to voice those thoughts out loud. Yuan Wendong might look like a gentleman on the surface, but that was just a cover to conceal his viciousness. Now that he had reached the fifth rank, Ye Chenliang definitely couldn't afford to offend him.

After dealing with Ye Chenliang, Lu De turned his gaze toward Hong Xingying, who was still curled up on the ground. "The same goes for you too. It's only your first day at the academy, but you've already gotten yourself into trouble. Do you think that I dare not to teach you a lesson just because you're from the Chu clan? I shall make sure to beat the academy rules into your bones today!"

Hong Xingying nearly burst into tears.

I was the one who suffered the most tragic plight earlier on, so why must I endure more suffering now?

It had only been a day since he arrived in the academy, so he wasn't clear about the academy's internal politics. He pointed his finger at Yuan Wendong and whined, "Teacher, why aren't you punishing him then?"

A cold glint flashed across Yuan Wendong's eyes.

Lu De scoffed in response. "He's reached the fifth rank, but what about you? I can tell you frankly that the students who are able to reach the fifth rank are the brightest talents in our country, and they'll be

regarded as treasures no matter where they go. If any of you are able to reach the fifth rank in the future, the academy won't concern itself with your misbehavior, as long as you don't go too far."

Zu An felt his heart skip a beat. Clearly, strength was important no matter which world one was in. The students that had gathered around didn't appear surprised by Lu De's declaration. They were well-versed in these 'implicit rules'.

After Lu De was done saying his piece, he dragged the two wailing fellows away behind him, leaving the crowd praying for their safety.

Wei Suo, who was hugging Zu An's thigh, gulped fearfully. "Boss, there was a moment there that I feared for your life when you talked back to him. Those who fall prey to Baldhead usually don't fare too well."

Zu An chuckled in response. "Since Lu De seeks to reform the students through virtue, it's only right for him to listen to the voice of reason."

"You're probably the only one who dares to reason with him." Xie Xiu laughed heartily as he walked over to Zu An. "I regarded myself as a man who has conquered many beautiful flowers, but it seems I'm still lacking compared to Brother Zu. To think that you would be able to win the hearts of four of the beauties in the Ten Great Beauties. I'm humbled by your accomplishments. I hope that we can sit down together to trade our insights in the future."

"Brother Xie, you're flattering me. Don't you have one by your side too?" Zu An replied.

"By my side? Why am I not aware of it?" Xie Xiu was taken aback. While there was no lack of beautiful women by his side, he didn't think that any of them had reached the level of the Ten Great Beauties.

"Isn't your sister one of the Ten Great Beauties? Brother Xie, it would be great if you could introduce her to us."

Xie Xiu nearly choked on his saliva. "T-that... I still have matters to attend to, so I'll be taking my leave." Completely ignoring Zu An's attempts to make him stay, he stumbled away frantically without a backward glance.

Zu An was dumbfounded. "Why does it look as if he has seen a ghost?"

Unlike Xie Xiu, Wei Suo's reverence for Zu An only deepened. "Boss, you have my highest respect. You aren't content with having the four of them, and still want to conquer young master Xie's older sister. Truly unthinkable. There are none in our generation who can hope to compare to you!"

"You sure have a smooth tongue. You would have surely thrived in the corporate world." Zu An shoved Wei Suo aside, slightly disgusted by all his fawning. He turned his attention to Ji Xiaoxi and bowed slightly. "Miss Ji, you have my earnest gratitude for your assistance in the earlier matter."

Chu Huanzhao butted in before Ji Xiaoxi could respond. "What do you mean by this? I was the one to help you first!"

Ji Xiaoxi's cheeks colored slightly. "It's nothing much, I was just doing what was right. I need to leave now."

Clearly still uncomfortable with being the center of attention, she began to jog away. However, after barely taking a few steps, she turned back around. "I nearly forgot. Do drop by my home when you have some time on hand. My father would like to talk with you."

"Oooh~"

The crowd stared at the two of them weirdly, which surprised Ji Xiaoxi. She belatedly realized the innuendo hidden within her words, but she had no idea how to begin clarifying the matter. In the end, she gave up and ran away, blushing furiously.

"What the hell was that? How dare she seduce you in my presence?!" Chu Huanzhao huffed angrily. The way her small chest puffed in and out looked incredibly adorable.

Zu An rolled her eyes at her. "It's not as if you're my wife, so why are you butting your nose into my business?"

The true meaning behind Ji Xiaoxi's words was clear as day to him. Most likely, it was regarding the trauma he was suffering from. It looked like he would have to make haste in his quest to acquire some dudous. Perhaps, he might just be able to fool that old pervert Ji Dengtu.

"I... I'm just keeping an eye on you on my older sister's behalf!" Chu Huanzhao's cheeks puffed out indignantly. "It hasn't been long since my older sister left, and you're already messing around with other women!"

Zu An replied nonchalantly, "You can go ahead and ask your older sister if she needs you to keep an eye on me."

That wife of mine looks at me the same way a person would look at a stranger on the street. No, I might even be less than a stranger to her. Why should I keep my chastity for her then... Pui pui pui, what the hell am I talking about?

"Hmph! Stop flirting around here." Yuan Wendong walked over with a loathsome look on his face. "Zu An, I don't believe that you can live your life hiding behind women. It won't be long before the Clans Tournament. By then, let's see if you can get a woman to substitute you on the ring!"

Zu An was confused. He turned to Chu Huanzhao and asked, "What Clans Tournament?"

Chu Huanzhao was pouting unhappily, but still answered his question. "Just like our Chu clan, the Yuan clan is involved in the arm trade too, so the competition between our two clans is fierce. In order to avoid escalating the conflict, the two clans have decided to hold a tournament once every three years. The juniors of both clans must participate, and the winner of the tournament will get to decide the market share that each clan gets for each sector for the next three years."

"Do I need to participate as well?" Zu An asked.

Chu Huanzhao nodded in reply. "Everyone in the clan needs to participate. My older sister and cousins from the second branch and third branch were the representatives in the previous tournament. Since you're the son-in-law of our Chu clan, it's likely that you'll have to step forward and represent us too."

Zu An felt strangled by this abrupt news.

What the hell is this? I can't even enjoy the privileges of being the son-in-law of a prestigious clan, but I still need to fulfill my responsibilities?

"Then... is the Yuan clan a ducal clan too?"

Chu Huanzhao shook her head. "No. Their clan has a noble lineage too, but they are without a fief. In terms of position, they are far beneath my father."

"Isn't it embarrassing for a ducal clan to have to compete with minor powers to decide the market share through a duel?"

Before Chu Huanzhao could answer him, Yuan Wendong interrupted her, still wearing the same ugly expression. "The Brightmoon Duke has a high standing, but our Zhou Dynasty is a place ruled by laws. Besides, the Chu clan isn't the only clan with ducal lineage."

Zu An nodded. "Ah, I get what you're saying. In other words, you have someone else backing you. No wonder you're barking so loudly. It turns out you already have a master!"

You have successfully trolled Yuan Wendong for 321 Rage points!

Noticing some academy staff not too far away, Yuan Wendong took a deep breath. "You have nothing but your sharp mouth, so I shan't waste my time bickering with you. Just wait till the day of the tournament..."

Yuan Wendong leaned toward Zu An and whispered softly, "I'll break your limbs and turn you into a cripple!"

Zu An sighed deeply. "I think you should first worry about how you are going to compensate these fine students for their swords."

Lu De's sudden appearance had broken up the fight, and most of the crowd had drifted off. However, a dozen or so students still lingered, casting hesitant glances at Yuan Wendong, shuffling their feet but not moving away.

Yuan Wendong had used their swords to attack Pei Mianman earlier, only to have her burn their swords to cinders with her black flame. While they felt that Yuan Wendong should take responsibility and compensate them, their fear of him had held them back so far.

However, as Zu An brought up the issue, they found their voices and began shouting over one another.

"Compensate us our swords!"

"I spent a lot of money to purchase that sword of mine!"

"My sword is the work of Master so and so, and was known to be able to slice through metal like mud..."

Chapter 50: Fertile Water Should Be Kept In One's Own Rice Pad

Black streaks clouded Yuan Wendong's face. "Shut up! My clan produces the finest arms, so why would I shirk compensation for those lousy swords of yours?"

It took him a great deal of effort to finally placate the riled-up crowd. By the time he was free to turn his attention to Zu An once more, he had already fled the scene.

You have successfully trolled Yuan Wendong for 123 Rage points!

Chu Huanzhao had dragged Zu An over to the cafeteria. It amused Zu An that the design of the cafeteria was pretty similar to those he had seen in the universities of his previous life. The only difference was that there was no need for them to get the food by themselves. Instead, waiting staff were around to take their orders.

Chu Huanzhao tossed him the menu. "I'll treat you, so feel free to order anything you want!" she declared with the generous air of a wealthy woman.

Wei Suo, who had been banished to another table by her, gave Zu An a thumbs-up. This new big brother of his was the perfect role model for all moochers in the world.

Yup, mooching is indeed the way to make it in the world. I should learn from big brother and find a sugar momma to live off. Oof, but Principal Jiang is way out of my league. I should hone my skills on someone easier first...

Zu An didn't even bother to look at the menu. He turned to the waiter who was serving them. "Give me one of everything, then."

He was quite curious about the food in this world, and most of what was on the menu seemed interesting. To be honest, he didn't recognize most of those dishes, so it would be good if he could give everything a try.

You have successfully trolled Chu Huanzhao for 99 Rage points!

"Don't listen to him," Chu Huanzhao hastily instructed the waiter. She shot Zu An a sharp glare. "Are you a pig? Are you sure you can finish all of it?"

"Of course not," Zu An shrugged leisurely. "However, I can just have a mouthful of each of them. As you know, I came from a poor family and haven't tried many things before. Since someone is treating me today, I'll have to try everything I can."

Chu Huanzhao slowly picked her jaw back off the floor.

"This won't do. I'll only allow you to order ten... No, just eight dishes!"

"Why?" Zu An asked.

To be honest, he was rather impressed. He thought that the four dishes would have been more than sufficient for the two of them, especially considering the small stature of his companion. Who would have thought that she would ask for eight dishes?

It looks like nobles really live extravagant lives. I must learn from their example... Ahem, I mean admonish them thoroughly!

Chu Huanzhao's face reddened. "I... I don't have that much money."

Zu An shook his head in disappointment. "Then you shouldn't have told me to order whatever I liked. Why boast when you don't have the means to back up your words?"

Chu Huanzhao could hold her temper no longer. She slammed her palm on the table and shot to her feet, roaring, "Damn you Zu An, are you going to eat or not?!"

You have successfully trolled Chu Huanzhao for 666 Rage points!

"I'm eating. Why would I not eat?" Zu An glanced at the dumbfounded waiter off to the side. "Bring me eight of the most expensive dishes you have here then."

"No problem~" The waiter hesitated, glancing at Chu Huanzhao to seek her approval. She did not object, and he quickly ran off to process their order.

This exchange had not gone unnoticed by a group of guys seated not too far away. They leaned in to whisper to each other.

"Did you see that? Mooching is not as glorious as we think. In the end, he needs to tread carefully around those he's mooching off of. If things go badly, he would be reduced to cannon fodder for them to blow off steam!"

"That's not what I see. To me, it looks like it's his sugar momma who is treading carefully around him."

"Tsk! Who cares who is treading carefully around who? If I could land such a beautiful sugar momma, I wouldn't mind even if I need to be at her beck and call!"

"Me too!"

"Me too!"

"The lot of you are too unambitious... though I'd be willing too."

"Tsk~"

...

Chu Huanzhao glowered at Zu An as she continued her interrogation. "Zu An, you better come clean. How did you get yourself tangled up with those women?"

Zu An knocked on the table and complained, "Hey hey hey, watch how you address me! Call me brother-in-law!"

Chu Huanzhao nearly choked at those words. Her chubby cheeks puffed up once more as she grumbled in displeasure, "Are you going to continue harping on that? I did lose to you in a bet, but I've already called you brother-in-law for so long now. I even stepped forward for you today. No matter how you look at it, I've done more than enough to repay the favor!"

Zu An clicked his tongue. "When you said that you would cover me, I thought that you were a big shot in the academy. Yet, it turns out that you can't even deal with a mere scrub. In the end, I still had to make a move myself!"

Chu Huanzhao was flabbergasted. "You call that making a move yourself? You simply got a bunch of women to stand up for you!"

"Does that make any difference?" Zu An shrugged nonchalantly. "I relied on my own abilities to secure their help."

All those twists and turns in logic made Chu Huanzhao's head spin. In the end, she waved her hands impatiently and said forcefully, "Enough! Hurry up and confess! How did you hook up with them?"

Zu An frowned. "What do you mean by hook up? You're a maiden! Can you not use such awful sounding words?"

Chu Huanzhao's face scrunched up in disdain. "I didn't know that you had such a delicate side. Disgusting."

Zu An: "..."

"I'm trying to teach you something here. A girl shouldn't get mad at everything like a fuse always on the verge of blowing up. If you could just mellow down a little and use some cutesy phrases, you wouldn't be ranked ninth out of the Ten Great Beauties."

"Hah, do I need you to teach me that? I can do it if I want to," Chu Huanzhao sniffed dismissively.

Zu An's interest was piqued. "Oh? Why don't you give it a try then?"

"Stop messing around!" Chu Huanzhao rolled her eyes before pouring herself a cup of tea. She casually propped her leg up on the bench beside her. Her leg was beautiful, but her posture, not so much. Nevertheless, with her neat, shoulder-length hair, she gave off a uniquely feral charm.

Seeing how naturally she'd assumed this sitting posture, Zu An scrapped all ideas of getting her to be more demure.

"After prattling on about so much, you still haven't told me how you met them!" Chu Huanzhao relentlessly pursued her line of questioning.

Zu An knew that she would continue to annoy him if he didn't answer her question, so he tried to be casual with his answer. "I met Ji Xiaoxi earlier when I was looking around the city. As for Pei Mianman, isn't she your older sister's close friend? It's only natural for her to step in when the husband of her close friend is being taken advantage of, no?"

Chu Huanzhao narrowed her eyes skeptically. "Is that all?"

"What else do you think?"

By then, the waiter had started to bring out their dishes. The fragrance wafting out from the freshly-cooked dishes made Zu An's mouth water. Without waiting, he dug in.

Chu Huanzhao, on the other hand, was still caught up in the matter. "That's not right. No matter how I look at it, your relationship with them isn't that simple. Besides, I'm not the only one who feels this way. Everyone is saying the same thing too!"

Zu An wolfed down the food, answering her between mouthfuls. "Those people also see you as a part of my harem. What do you think?"

"Hah! Just thinking about that drives me mad!" Chu Huanzhao gritted her teeth furiously. "It's all your fault!"

Zu An burst into laughter. "Aren't I your brother-in-law? It's only natural to keep the good stuff within the family."

"What did you say?" Chu Huanzhao's eyebrows shot up.

Zu An put up his hands sheepishly. "I mean that we're one family, so we should help one another when in need."

Chu Huanzhao was still doubtful. "Are you sure there's nothing more between you and those women?"

"Of course not." Zu An wouldn't have admitted it even if he'd had a relationship with them, though in this case, that was the truth.

Chu Huanzhao heaved a deep sigh of relief. She finally turned her attention to the table, but half of the dishes served had already been swept clean. She grabbed her chopsticks in agitation and exclaimed, "Are you a pig? Leave some for me!"

Zu An was a little surprised. "As the young miss of a ducal clan, surely you have already had your fill of such dishes?"

Chu Huanzhao stuffed her cheeks full as she answered, "My mother is very strict with me. She barely gives me any pocket money, and these dishes are expensive. I can't bear to spend my money on them on normal occasions."

"Aww, how pitiful. Come, you should have more." Zu An picked up a piece of meat and placed it into her bowl out of sympathy.

"Thanks, brother-in-law." She frowned right after saying those words. Wait, I'm the one spending money here. Why am I thanking you for that?

"Stop putting food in my bowl. You're getting your saliva on my food!"

"It doesn't look like it's curbing your appetite at all though, is it?"

...

After the two of them had their fill, Zu An suddenly asked, "Huanzhao, what do you think of me?"

Chu Huanzhao was surprised for a moment, then replied without much thought. "Even though you're a little hateful, a little perverted, and a little weak, you're still barely passable as a human."

Zu An rolled his eyes. Are you praising me or criticizing me here? "Then, who do you think in the manor doesn't want me to become your brother-in-law?"

Chu Huanzhao was a straight shooter, so it would be good to gather some intelligence from her that could aid in his search for whoever was trying to kill him.

Chu Huanzhao burst into laughter, amused by the question. "There are way too many people to name!"

Zu An held back his urge to pummel her. "I'm referring to those who hate me to the point that they are out for my life."

Chu Huanzhao fell silent, deep in thought. Just as Zu An thought that she had narrowed it down to a certain someone, she suddenly said, "There are still a lot of people..."

Zu An was dumbfounded. It was unlikely this silly lass was lying, which only proved just how hateful the original owner of this body had been. To think that there would be so many people in the Chu clan who wanted him dead!

"What about your older sister then?" Zu An stared into Chu Huanzhao's eyes without blinking, trying to peer through her eyes and see into her thoughts.

Even though it was only a slim possibility, there was no denying that Snow was her personal maidservant. Without her permission, it was unlikely that Snow would dare to act so audaciously.

"My older sister?" Chu Huanzhao was confused. "Why would she want to take your life?"

"Didn't you say that there are a lot of people in the manor who are after my life? Wouldn't your older sister be one of them too?" Zu An asked.

Chu Huanzhao shook her head vehemently. "You're the groom personally chosen by my older sister. My parents had selected a long list of outstanding young men for my older sister to choose from, but she didn't even spare them a single glance. In the end, she chose a wastr... Ahem, ahem, I mean a man like you. Many people tried to stop her, counseling that she was ruining her own future. Yet, she said that she would marry no one other than you. Even to this day, I've no idea what she sees in you."

As she said this, she looked Zu An up and down, her face a mask of sheer contempt.

"Hey hey hey, you're hurting my feelings over here!"

Zu An fell into deep thought. He had heard about this from Cheng Shouping previously, and Chu Huanzhao had just confirmed his story. From the look of it, the only one in the manor who could be ruled out as the culprit was Chu Chuyan.

His eyes fell upon the lass who was wolfing down her food before him, and he swallowed his words back down. No, that's not right. The one who is the most unlikely to kill me in the manor is this lass, followed by Chu Chuyan.

"What is your older sister dealing with nowadays?" Zu An asked.

"No idea," Chu Huanzhao replied without looking up. She was too busy attacking the delicacies before her.

Zu An frowned in annoyance. "You're her younger sister, why wouldn't you know?"

Chu Huanzhao's rebuttal was swift. "And you're her husband, so why don't you know a thing at all?! I'm not engaged in whatever is happening back at home."

“Eat, eat, eat, all you know how to do is eat. Despite being a glutton, it doesn’t look like your chest is growing one bit.” Zu An stared at her flat chest as he wondered. They are born from the same mother, so why is there such a huge difference between the two of them?

“Hold it right there. What do you mean?” Chu Huanzhao had only just finished eating. When she noticed his gaze, she immediately flew into a state of fury.

You have successfully trolled Chu Huanzhao for 666 Rage points!

Zu An was amused. He hadn’t expected her to be so sensitive about her own chest. That being said, he didn’t want to anger her right now, so he said, “I’m saying that you should pay some heed to your own appearance. At least wipe your mouth after eating.”

As he spoke, he reached out to pick off a grain of rice sticking to the corner of her mouth.

Chu Huanzhao’s face flushed a fiery red. “Hey, haven’t you heard that it’s inappropriate for a man and a woman who aren’t in a relationship to have such intimate contact? You can’t possibly be carrying that sort of licentious thoughts toward me, are you?”

Zu An clicked his tongue in annoyance. “It’s only at a time like this that you think of yourself as a woman, huh?”

Chu Huanzhao was stunned for a moment, then nodded slowly, clearly confused. “That’s true too.” From her tone, it seemed like she had given up on thinking altogether.