

Immortal 561

Chapter 561: Fatal Red Lips

Zu An was speechless. We almost lost our lives in that stupid Shang Dynasty trial, yet this woman somehow ended up in that other place?

Does this dungeon bring people of different cultivation levels to different places?

The things Mosquito Daoist had just spoken of were familiar to him. In the world written about in the 'Investiture of the Gods', there was an incredibly powerful Mosquito Daoist, but how she came to be, no one knew. This Mosquito Daoist only made a single appearance, but it was definitely one that left an impression. She feasted upon the famous Holy Mother Tortoise, sucking her dry and leaving nothing but an empty shell.

What was this Holy Mother Tortoise? She was one of the four disciples of the Grandmaster of Heaven! She had been restrained by the Western Sect's Sect Master, Guidance Daoist, which allowed Mosquito Daoist was able to suck her dry.

After this Mosquito Daoist sucked the Holy Mother Tortoise dry, she headed west, and absorbed three layers of the Western Sect's Twelve-Layered Golden Lotus, delaying the Western Sect's plans by a thousand years.

Nothing else was recorded about this Mosquito Daoist within the pages of the 'Investiture of the Gods'. She seemed to have appeared out of thin air, and then vanished again in the same way.

Zu An was rather alarmed. Given how things were, could it be that the Mosquito Daoist mentioned was the same as the one in front of them?!

How was he even supposed to go up against someone from that world? There were gods and buddhas everywhere in that world, and immortals were as common as stray dogs! If Mosquito Daoist was allowed to do whatever she wanted to, even in such a place, what were the two of them supposed to do against her?

Zu An was not about to give up, but went ahead to test the waters. "If we didn't drag you out of the dungeon, you might have been killed by the Western Sect's Guidance Daoist once he returned. You should really be thanking us instead."

Pei Mianman was completely bewildered. She had no idea what he was talking about.

Mosquito Daoist was surprised. "How does a brat like you know about Guidance Daoist?"

Zu An was equally shocked. There really was a Guidance Daoist in there! "What is your cultivation rank now?" he asked quickly.

Perhaps because of his apparent knowledge of the world she had been in, Mosquito Daoist seemed inclined to chat. "To be honest, I should be thanking you. This dungeon has provided me with a bountiful harvest. Other than the obvious benefits, I am most grateful for the privilege to have experienced such a completely different world. I've learned that cultivators could actually become that powerful! I've

gained a clear sense of direction. Now, the cultivators of this world seem like nothing more than ignorant frogs sitting at the bottom of a well.”

She said all this in an even, unhurried tone, sounding like a renowned scholar. It was easy to imagine that, after a period of seclusion, she would surely emerge as one of that world’s top-notch experts.

Zu An cursed. Are you the damned protagonist, or am I?! If I had gone to that world, I just might have been able to get my hands on some remarkable treasure...!

However, he wasn’t fully convinced by her story. The world that Mosquito Daoist had been sent to might not have been real. After all, Wu Geng had built YinXu all by himself. Even though he was strong, he wasn’t strong enough to create the world that was mentioned within the ‘Investiture of the Gods’. Mosquito Daoist had probably been led to nothing but a facsimile of that world.

Wu Geng was a god within that dungeon, after all, and he could do whatever he wanted within it.

But how did Wu Geng come to know about the ‘Investiture of the Gods’? Did he read that novel, or was it personal experience?

Mosquito Daoist continued, “What you say is also correct. If you didn’t draw me out of it so quickly, I might have died there...”

Her face turned red when she said this. She had been caught by Guidance Daoist not long after she had arrived in that world. There was nothing she could do, and she was locked up for a long, long time. Later on, she managed to sneak out when the boy set to guard her grew careless, and she proceeded to absorb three layers of the Golden Lotus. However, as she was doing so, she could already sense the aura of Guidance Daoist returning. She decided to risk it all and absorb the entire Golden Lotus, even though she knew that Guidance Daoist would kill her in revenge.

Zu An clasped his fist towards her. “Since we’ve done you a favor, I won’t ask for anything else. We’ll go our separate ways, and we’ll meet again if fate wills it.”

He was just about to lead Pei Mianman away when his vision blurred. Mosquito Daoist was already in front of them, blocking their way. “You want to leave? Dream on! Hand over the Phoenix Nirvana Sutra, and I’ll consider giving you two an easy death.”

Zu An was speechless. “You’ve experienced an entire world of flying immortals and buddhas, and absorbed three layers of the Golden Lotus, and yet you’re still bickering about a book that might not even grant you immortality? Are you kidding me?”

Mosquito Daoist was slightly embarrassed as well. She snorted and said, “It is precisely because of my experiences within that world that I yearn for immortality even more! If I had been able to completely absorb all twelve layers, I might not need your Phoenix Nirvana Sutra. Unfortunately, since I couldn’t, I can only look to you.”

As the words left her mouth, her hand was already reaching towards Zu An, trying to grab him. She was extremely fast, much faster than the last time they had faced each other. Her strength had clearly increased after her sojourn within the dungeon.

Of course, Zu An's cultivation had also increased. He quickly used the Sunflower Phantasm, sending the three images of him flying off in different directions.

Mosquito Daoist sneered. "This trick again!"

A hint of golden light appeared in her eyes, outlining the vague form of a lotus.

"I've found you!"

She paid no attention to the mirror images, and charged straight at his real body.

Zu An reacted quickly as well, bringing his sword in front of him to block her strike.

A crisp, clear note rang out as they clashed, then Zu An's body was blown backwards. It took him a while before he finally found his footing again. Blood trickled down from the corner of his mouth. The strike had made a mess of the ki flowing within him.

Mosquito Daoist's eyes fell on his Tai'e Sword. "Your sword is quite excellent. I'll take it for myself later, if you don't mind."

Having faced off against it several times before their entry into the dungeon, she was already well-versed in its capabilities.

She continued her assault. She had reaped such extraordinary benefits from her time in the dungeon, and she was confident that she could take him down within three moves.

A fiery black rose bloomed, causing Mosquito Daoist to frown. She could sense the devastating power within the black flames, and was cautious not to get caught within its blast wave.

She raised her palm, and the stunning black rose was blown apart.

She looked at Pei Mianman. "That kid's movement technique is a bit tricky, but your own strength is still far off."

Despite her words, her eyes still unconsciously lingered on Pei Mianman's chest for a few seconds. The force from her palm strike had forced Pei Mianman back a fair distance, and her chest was still bouncing from the sudden impact.

Mosquito Daoist looked down at her own chest, and a hint of vexation flashed across her eyes.

Hmph! I'm definitely going to suck that low-class chest dry later!

Pei Mianman somehow retained her composure. "Is that so?" she replied.

A small owl statue appeared in her palm, which quickly began to grow.

A massive owl took flight, swooping across the area, shrouding the surroundings in darkness.

This darkness was extremely strange. Cultivators were generally still able to see, even at night, although not as well as in the day. However, this darkness seemed to swallow up all light, and even cultivators were left blinded by it.

Zu An realized what was happening. Pei Mianman had described this as one of the abilities of Fu Hao's owl statue—that it could create a domain of darkness. No one else could see within this domain, but everything within it would be as bright as day to Pei Mianman.

He quickly dodged to the side to avoid an attack from Mosquito Daoist, guessing her movements based on what he could remember about her last position. He could do nothing more but to put his trust in Manman for now. He didn't want to cause any trouble for her.

Unexpectedly, Mosquito Daoist's wanton laughter echoed out around the darkness. "Hahaha! Little girl, you really are a big-breasted bimbo! Have you forgotten that mosquitoes are most active at night?"

As soon as the words left her mouth, Pei Mianman let out a muffled groan, and the darkness gradually cleared.

Zu An knew that things had taken a bad turn. He was just about to move when he felt a hand clamp down on his shoulder, followed by the sound of Mosquito Daoist's mocking voice. "You really are a slippery one. Instead of asking you again, how about I just suck out all of your blood essence, and read through your memories later?"

Zu An could finally see again. Mosquito Daoist was standing a few inches in front of him, snuggling against his chest as if she was his lover.

Her lips moved towards his neck, as though she were about to kiss him there. However, she suddenly bit down on him fiercely.

Zu An felt a wave of weakness spread through his body, as he felt all of his blood essence being sucked out, flowing into her treacherous mouth.

Chapter 562: The Embrace of Death

Mosquito Daoist's entire body trembled, and disbelief was etched all across her face. "This is the legendary transcendent-aptitude blood! Hahaha! Absorbing this might be on par with absorbing the Twelve-Layered Golden Lotus! It seems the heavens have not forsaken me! Today, I am going to completely refine the Golden Lotus with your transcendent-aptitude blood. Once I cultivate the Phoenix Nirvana Sutra as well, no one in this world will be able to stop me!"

Pei Mianman wanted to dash forward to help him, but she was still recovering from Mosquito Daoist's previous blow, and could not move at all.

Unexpectedly, Zu An's hands slowly moved upwards, wrapping around the waist of the woman in front of him.

Mosquito Daoist was surprised, but she didn't mind it much. After all, those whom she preyed on were always weakened and left completely powerless, with no ability to resist.

Mosquito Daoist's lips spread out in a smile when she considered her prospects. "Hmm? Do you wish to hold me before you die? My body is rather fine, if I do say so myself. Since you've given me so much, I guess I can let you get away with this."

Given her current cultivation, she didn't even need to use her mouth to suck out his blood essence. Just resting her hand on his shoulder was enough to absorb his blood essence, so talking did not interfere with this process.

Zu An sighed. "It would have been great if you couldn't speak while sucking my blood."

Mosquito Daoist's smile grew wider. "Are you trying to beg for mercy?" she said. "To be honest, you don't look all that bad. If you're willing to become my boy toy, I might keep you alive to play around with. Of course, you'll have to hand over the Phoenix Nirvana Sutra first."

As she spoke, she deliberately slowed down the rate at which she was absorbing his blood.

Even though she could read his memories by absorbing all of his blood essence and obtain the Phoenix Nirvana Sutra in that way, it wasn't a hundred percent foolproof. It would be a tragedy if some unexpected mishap occurred and she failed to obtain the entire thing. The best thing for her would still be for Zu An to cooperate willingly.

Zu An sighed. "Even though you aren't particularly beautiful, I guess your looks are still passable. I'm actually quite an open-minded person, and I don't really mind if you are some monster girl. If you were some other type of female monster girl, I might just take you up on the offer, but you're a mosquito monster, so that's a bit... a bit hard to take in."

Mosquito Daoist was infuriated by the disdain in his voice. "You're courting death!"

You have successfully trolled Mosquito Daoist for 1024 Rage points!

Even though her cultivation was profound, she was still a woman. Mocking her in such a way drove her mad beyond belief. She lost all thoughts of trying to subdue his will. All she wanted to do was to suck him dry immediately.

However, she soon found herself rather confused. Why was he still so fleshy? His complexion even seemed to have improved.

She had already lost count of how many experts she had sucked dry. Among them, many had cultivations that were much higher than his. She could suck them dry in just a few heartbeats if she went all out—why did he still look perfectly fine even after she had sucked on him for so long?

She suddenly noticed a strange sensation around her waist. There seemed to be waves of heat spreading out from that area, accompanied by a feeling of numbness. She knew that Zu An's hands were there, but the touch of a man shouldn't have been enough to make her feel that way. Was he some aphrodisiac in human form?

She was at a loss as to what to make of it. However, as someone who had been at the top of the food chain for a long time, she was quick to notice that something else was wrong.

She finally realized that her own vitality was leeching out of her from her waist at an alarming rate. There seemed to be a powerful suction force within his palms.

Mosquito Daoist was shocked. "What kind of trick is this?"

Zu An said with a smile, "You're sucking on me, and I'm sucking on you. We just happen to balance out."

He had actually planned to do this from the get go. Mosquito Daoist's cultivation was far stronger than both his and Pei Mianman's, and they had already fought several intense battles against her before entering the dungeon. She knew the extent of most of his abilities. That was why there was no way for him to match her in a fair fight.

This meant that he had to use the Heaven-Devouring Sutra to see if he could win through cheating her.

Even though the Heaven-Devouring Sutra could absorb another's cultivation, it was hard for him to even touch her, given the difference in their cultivations. As such, he figured that he would use himself as bait. That was his only chance to close the distance.

Mosquito Daoist wanted to brush his hands away, yet she discovered that she was completely powerless. Things that were usually incredibly easy for her to do suddenly seemed impossible.

She looked at the man in front of her in horror and said hatefully, "Do you really think that this random absorption ability that you picked up is enough to deal with me? Let's see who can absorb the other faster, then!"

She was a fiend race monster to begin with, and sucking out blood essence was her innate skill. She had cultivated it for so long that it was her specialty. She obviously wasn't scared of facing someone when it came to this.

This fella clearly had not known this technique beforehand. She didn't know where he picked it up, but there was no way he could win out in such a battle.

It didn't take too long for her confidence to erode, though. It seemed that she just couldn't get the upper hand.

Of course, it wasn't that her skills at absorption were inferior to his at all. There was no way that her opponent could win out either.

The two of them were stuck in a stalemate, each one sucking away at the other's cultivation. Neither side could find an edge.

Zu An grumbled inwardly. After all, this was the first time he was using this Heaven-Devouring Sutra, and he was not at all proficient at it. Just being able to match Mosquito Daoist's rate of absorption was enough to prove the might of this Heaven Devouring Sutra.

Pei Mianman finally recovered and leaped forward, thrusting her sword at Mosquito Daoist's back.

Sensing what she was trying to do, Mosquito Daoist did not panic. Instead, she sneered.

Zu An immediately shouted out a warning. "Manman, stop! We are in a strange state of equilibrium right now. Anything that approaches us might be devoured. If you approach, you'll be instantly sucked dry by the both of us!"

Pei Mianman's face paled, and she stopped at once. "Then what should I do?"

Zu An frowned. He couldn't come up with any good ideas either.

Mosquito Daoist said, "Since neither of us can defeat the other, how about we agree to lay down arms?"

Zu An sneered, "Do you take me for a fool? If I stop now, you have a million other ways to kill us."

He had only managed to fashion this situation by catching her off guard. How was he going to catch her with the Heaven-Devouring Sutra a second time?

Mosquito Daoist smiled. "That's an easy task. I'll swear a blood oath."

Immediately, she intoned, "May the heavens serve as my witness. If I kill the two of you after we agree to lay down arms, I will let you suck me dry and kill me. Is that good enough?"

She sneered secretly as she said this. I'll just suck you dry without killing you!

Furthermore, with the difference in their cultivations, there was no way she would give him a chance to use his absorption ability again. That way, there would be no way for him to fulfill the second part of the oath of sucking her dry and killing her.

Zu An nodded. "Fine."

Pei Mianman began to panic. "Ah Zu, that woman is incredibly crafty! You can't trust her that easily!"

"Oh come on!" Mosquito Daoist smacked her lips. "Do you really want your lover to die alongside me? Perhaps you already have another man in mind? I could tell that you are a fickle woman from the moment I saw your flirtatious eyes."

Pei Mianman was so angry her entire body was shaking. "You...!"

Zu An interrupted them. "We'll count to three. We'll both let go of one hand first, and then let go of the other hand. What do you say?"

"That's fine!" Mosquito Daoist seemed to have a sly look in her eyes.

"One... Two... Three!"

"Huh? Why didn't you let go?"

"Hah, brat, you're quite treacherous yourself. I don't see you letting go either."

"But you were the one who made the blood oath."

"Fine, I will definitely let go this time."

"One..."

After Zu An said 'one', he didn't continue on any further. Instead he summoned the Tai'e Sword, and activated its unique domain of power!

The Tai'e Sword was a sword that walked the dao of power. He had rarely used this skill ever since he had come into possession of the sword, but always held onto it as one of his final trump cards.

He did not hesitate to bring it out now. The Tai'e Sword's domain of power erupted at close range.

A draconic cry surged outwards from the sword, and an incomparable aura of domination swept outwards.

Even Pei Mianman was scared witless, and she felt a sudden urge to kneel down.

How could Mosquito Daoist possibly fend off this power under such close range?

Despite her cultivation, she felt a tremor run through her body, and she seemed to have been thrust back to her weakest moments. The moment when she was still a young larva, being chased by other, more terrifying larvae. The moment when she finally turned into a mosquito and took to the air, and instantly had to fend off the vicious dragonflies all around her, the malicious toad tongue, the spiderwebs between the leaves...

In an instant, all of the most terrifying things she encountered in her life filled her mind, and her entire body began to shake.

Zu An used this chance to summon the full might of the Heaven-Devouring Sutra.

His two palms turned into black holes, sucking in Mosquito Daoist's ki essence.

In moments, Mosquito Daoist's body began to shrivel up.

Mosquito Daoist let out a horrified cry. "Stop... don't..."

Zu An sneered at her pleas. "You've sucked away the blood essence of countless people. Having your own blood essence sucked away today can be considered a form of retribution."

"No..." Mosquito Daoist's voice was incredibly weak, but she still cried out frantically, "We made a blood oath..."

"That was your own doing. I didn't do anything," said Zu An indifferently.

Mosquito Daoist grew livid.

"Damn you, you won't have an easy death!"

You have successfully trolled Mosquito Daoist for 1024... 1024... 1024...

Mosquito Daoist was confident in her superior cultivation, and had only focused on crafting a loophole within her own oath. She didn't even consider that she could be injured by the two of them.

Now, she finally understood that the other party had never planned to let her go. However, it was already too late.

Zu An took her firmly into his embrace as her body shriveled up more and more. Eventually, she became just like the dried-up corpses that she had turned all the others into.

Zu An squeezed, and Mosquito Daoist's spine snapped with an audible crack.

He felt the woman in his arms turn into a pile of mush. He looked at the horrific state of her corpse, and felt his stomach churn. He immediately tossed her aside.

Just like that, this vicious fiend race monster who had terrorized many outstanding heroes for such a long time ceased to exist.

Chapter 563: What it Means to Court Disaster

Pei Mianman quickly ran over to him, and was shocked by the scene that greeted her eyes. “So this is the power of the Heaven-Devouring Sutra?”

She knew that Zu An had obtained a secret manual from the dungeon, but she had not seen him use it yet. As expected, it was ridiculously powerful.

“Yup.” Zu An nodded. A ball of fire appeared within his palm. He was going to burn Mosquito Daoist’s corpse. The thing really seemed disgusting.

Pei Mianman guessed what he was thinking, and said, “I think her corpse still has some uses. She sucked away all of Sang Qian’s blood essence, drawing the great ire of the Sang Clan. If you hand her corpse over to the Sang Clan, you can forge a friendly relationship with them. Perhaps they might even turn a blind eye to you stealing their daughter-in-law.”

She had already deduced his relationship with Zheng Dan after fighting alongside them.

Zu An eyed her sideways.

“What do you mean, ‘stealing’? We just get along well, okay?”

“Of course, of course,” Pei Mianman said with a smile. “You get along really, really well with someone else’s widow.”

Zu An decided that it would be pointless to defend himself.

Even though he wasn’t too happy about it, he still stored Mosquito Daoist’s corpse into the Brilliant Glass Bead.

“One other thing. I think it’s better if you don’t reveal your new technique to others. Personal cultivation is the most important thing to cultivators, since they only acquire it through bitter training. If you reveal that you can absorb their cultivation so easily, every single one would call you a devil and turn on you.” Pei Mianman’s warning was a serious one. Mosquito Daoist was so notorious precisely because everyone feared her ability to suck out blood essence.

Zu An nodded. “I won’t.”

This was common sense to him. The ‘Star Devouring Art’, the ‘Darknorth Technique’... which one of these weren’t despised by the general populace?

Pei Mianman was relieved to hear this. “What is your cultivation rank now? Why can’t I tell?”

Zu An was stunned. He quickly examined himself. What he saw left him stupefied.

The formations within his body lit up one after another, almost blinding him with their brilliance.

One, two, three, four...

Earlier on, when he examined himself, only the fifth formation of the fifth rank was filled. Now, all of his fifth rank formations were lit up!

All of his bones seemed to sparkle like polished jade. Even without anyone telling him so, he could sense that his bones were far stronger than an ordinary person's.

This was the result of reaching the pinnacle of the fifth rank—tempering one's bones.

He saw that a new set of formations had appeared on his bones. From what he learned about cultivation in the academy, this was probably bone marrow cultivation.

He slowly counted the formations. There were nine, and all nine were already lit up!

He had reached the peak of sixth rank!

All of his bones were surging with seemingly-endless amounts of life force.

Zu An was stunned. Did he just jump straight to the sixth rank?

Reaching the fifth rank at his age already made him a cultivation genius, even within Brightmoon City. Those with cultivation aptitudes like Chu Chuyan or Pei Mianman had spent bitter years cultivating since childhood. Their clans provided them a nearly endless supply of cultivation resources for them, and it was considered incredible for them just to barely reach this level. What the hell was he, then?

He thought back to what the academy had taught him about cultivation. Sixth rank cultivators could surround themselves in elemental armor, making it nearly impossible for lower rank cultivators to face them.

He had not awakened an element yet, so he couldn't use elemental armor. Now that he could borrow Daji's fire element, though, it was easy enough to surround himself in a shield of flames.

After testing out the defensive strength of his armor, he immediately became grateful that he had the Tai'e Sword and Poisonous Prick. Without their strange ability to cut straight through these elemental armors, he wouldn't have had any chance of defeating the experts he had faced in the past.

The Tai'e Sword and Poisonous Prick were probably exactly like ki penetrating weapons in wuxia novels.

He sensed that the powerful wave of ki that he had absorbed was not yet spent. After refining his bone marrow, it began to temper his blood.

Nine vague formations could be seen within his blood vessels.

The leftover ki filled three of these formations before finally stopping.

Cultivators who reach the seventh rank could replenish their own blood at any time. Even if they suffered horrendous injuries, as long as the damage was not irreversible, and they were given enough time, they could eventually make a complete recovery.

Zu An tested this out as well, but noticed that the speed of recovery was much less than what the Primordial Origin Sutra afforded him. It wasn't that useful to him at all.

Of course, he knew that he only thought of it like that because of the Primordial Origin Sutra. For other cultivators, this ability to recover quickly was absolutely vital.

Against cultivators of lower cultivation, any damage taken could be repaired through passive healing.

Against experts, it was almost impossible to avoid injuries. The ability to recover quickly was equivalent to a second life.

Zu An felt rather dazed. He had just managed to jump two whole ranks.

“Seventh rank?” Pei Mianman couldn’t help but chuckle when she heard what he said. “Seven ranks of cultivation is enough to make you a city lord. This is ignoring the fact that you are still so young.”

Which woman didn’t want their lover to be outstanding? The more formidable he became, the happier she was.

“But...” She frowned. She walked around him and continued to examine his body. “You seem different from other seventh rank cultivators.”

Zu An was confused. “How so?”

Pei Mianman pursed her lips. “It’s hard to say. I’ve seen quite a few seventh rank cultivators, so I could roughly sense their cultivation. You should be at the third step of the seventh rank, so I should be able to sense it too. But I can’t seem to sense your cultivation at all.”

Zu An didn’t know what was going on either. He hadn’t been cultivating very long, so there was no way he could compare to Pei Mianman, who had been born into a great clan, when it came to this matter.

“There’s something stranger.” Pei Mianman said. “Mosquito Daoist should have already reached the master rank. Why did you only increase two ranks after absorbing her cultivation?”

“Is increasing two ranks considered little?” Zu An was stunned. After all, every single formation of his required a ridiculous amount of Ki Fruits to fill. Now that he reached the seventh rank, the requirements were even crazier. He was already overjoyed by his sudden progress.

“Of course it’s not a lot! Mosquito Daoist was at the master rank, and might have been just outside grandmaster rank as well. Her cultivation was incredibly formidable, yet absorbing all of it only gave you two ranks. Could it be that too much of it was lost in the transfer?” Pei Mianman was rather confused as well.

“Perhaps.” Zu An had spent some time studying physics in his previous world. He knew that a large portion of energy was wasted during conversion. There was no way he could have absorbed all of Mosquito Daoist’s cultivation.

Pei Mianman stared at him for a long time before saying, “There might be another possibility.”

Zu An was confused, but she continued, “For you, the third step of the seventh rank may be different compared to ordinary cultivators. It might be much more formidable than theirs. Whether against Cash Warrior or Mosquito Daoist, your cultivation was clearly beneath mine, yet the threat you posed was greater. Furthermore, you showed no sign of ki exhaustion. Your combat strength doesn’t match your rank at all. This is probably an amazing effect of the Phoenix Nirvana Sutra.”

“Ki exhaustion?” Zu An looked at her quizzically.

“Mhmm.” Pei Mianman had a strange look on her face. “Even though those at the eighth rank can harmonize with the world, they can only forge a momentary connection. It cannot be sustained forever.

Only those who reach the master rank can link with heaven and earth at any time, and gain an endless source of ki. Those at their level don't have to worry about ki exhaustion.

"For cultivators like us, no matter how strong we are, once our ki is used up, we won't have much fighting strength anymore. However, you don't seem to face this issue, nor have I seen you eat any medicine to replenish your ki."

Zu An finally understood. She was talking about mana regeneration, or recovering internal strength in the worlds of wuxia novels.

However, he had never experienced any sign of ki decline, despite the difficult battles that he'd fought so far.

"You've only realized this now?" snorted Mi Li from within his mind.

Zu An was instantly delighted. "Big sis empress, you're awake!"

"Hmph, you were making so much noise with that damn mosquito earlier. How could I continue sleeping? You've never used that Heaven-Devouring Sutra before, so I did not expect you to defeat her. Good thing you have a pretty sound head on your shoulders." Mi Li's voice carried quite a bit of praise.

"But of course!" Zu An said, self-satisfied. "Right, you were saying that I don't face the problem of ki exhaustion. Why?"

Mi Li replied, "Two reasons. Firstly, apart from repairing your body's injuries, the Primordial Origin Sutra also replenishes ki. Your Phoenix Nirvana Sutra also stores a large reservoir of ki within your body, one so large that it's hard even for you to use all of it up. Why else do you think it's so hard to cultivate using the Phoenix Nirvana Sutra? It's because every single rank requires several times the ki when compared to an ordinary cultivator."

Zu An now understood why he was able to bring Daji to the peak of the fourth rank with just 700 ki fruits, but for him, that number was hardly worth mentioning.

Mi Li sighed. "Legend has it that immortality is possible once the Phoenix Nirvana Sutra is cultivated to its mastery. After living tens of thousands of years, even the most powerful cultivators can only add years to their lives. That isn't true immortality. It only makes sense for the Phoenix Nirvana Sutra to be so hard to cultivate. Ordinarily, it would require a crazy amount of ki, and successfully cultivating it shouldn't even be possible.

"Yet a stupid brat like you keeps finding lucky breaks over and over again. Who knows, you might actually succeed and achieve immortality."

Zu An was confused. "Didn't you live for ten thousand years too? Isn't that immortality?"

"It isn't," Mi Li replied. "My situation is different. I was sealed in an underground mausoleum, which, surprisingly enough, had its own benefits. Time flowed extremely slowly under the seal, which is why, even though I seem to have lived for ten thousand years in your eyes, I didn't actually experience that much time myself. In a sense, it only felt like a deep sleep."

Zu An was overjoyed by this. "I thought that you might be some ten thousand-year-old hag. I never expected that you'd have the mental age of a teenager. Come and greet this big brother!"

Chapter 564: No, You Came at the Perfect Time

Mi Li was stunned into silence for a moment.

You have successfully trolled Mi Li for 1024 Rage points!

“Brat, you’re courting death!”

She was absolutely livid. Out of thin air, a ruler appeared in her hand, which she used to smack his head repeatedly. “You really want someone to call you ‘big brother’? Why don’t you say it yourself?!”

Ah Zu was beaten until bumps appeared all over his head. He covered his head and dodged for his life. This woman is too bloody fierce! She’s only a soul—why can she dish out physical attacks? This makes no sense!

“Ah Zu, what’s wrong?” Pei Mianman saw him muttering to himself weirdly, and then he seemed to be holding his head in pain. She rushed over to check on him. “Does the Heaven-Devouring Sutra have some type of side effect?”

“It’s nothing, it’s nothing.” Zu An smiled in embarrassment. The beating she just dished out seemed to do much for Mi Li’s temper. When she saw Pei Mianman walk over, she returned to the Tai’e Sword and didn’t make another sound.

“That’s good. I was really scared.” Pei Mianman patted her chest, making it ripple.

Zu An offered some words of consolation, then suddenly noticed that there were two new strange bird diagrams inside of him and grew excited. Whenever he broke through a new rank, he would gain access to a strange bird. Grandgale, Hundredwarble and Blue Mallard had all proven extremely useful. He wondered what he would awaken this time.

The fifth rank formation looked like a phoenix, but this phoenix was entirely white, like a fairy draped in snow. Two small characters were engraved on the side. “Snow Phoenix!”

It was really beautiful!

Zu An sighed deeply. The other strange birds weren’t all that good-looking, but this Snow Phoenix was absolutely outstanding. If he could remove it and raise it as a pet, it would instantly charm every girl he met.

He thought especially of Chu Chuyan, who was also an ice element cultivator] This phoenix would be the perfect match for her. Unfortunately, he couldn’t give it away as a gift.

With a wave of his hand, the cry of a phoenix sounded, and a snow phoenix flew out. As expected, it left a trail of ice and snow wherever it went.

Pei Mianman was dazzled by the sight. “This bird is so pretty! And it even generates such extreme cold. Its power can’t be underestimated!”

“These are abilities that I can awaken once I reach a certain level.” Zu An didn’t hide this from her, and gave her a rough explanation of how it worked.

“You have so many strange abilities. Even I am getting jealous,” Pei Mianman said, but her expression was full of happiness. “It’s a pity that you didn’t awaken the ice element. The power of this ability would surely be even greater.”

A sudden thought struck Zu An. He had only summoned these strange birds on their own previously, and had never thought about pairing them with their corresponding elements.

No wonder he felt as though Blue Mallard's ability wasn't too special, and only gave him some affinity with the water element. It seemed that these strange birds only revealed their greatest power when they were paired with their corresponding elements!

He wanted to give it a try, but none of these birds were of the fire element. Right now, he could only borrow Daji's fire element.

Then what about the other strange bird I've unlocked?

Zu An looked at the sixth rank formation, and noticed that its imprint was shaped like a peacock. Its feathers were beautiful, and its tail feathers were exceptionally long. Its two wings were covered in many eye-shaped patterns, colored orange and white.

He saw its name next to it: Blue Luan!

Zu An was curious. What did this bird do?

He summoned it, and as soon as its blue figure appeared, it cried towards the sky, “I don’t fear death, I will fight!”

It looked as though it was going to challenge the entire world.

Zu An was bewildered.

This bird can talk?

Zu An tried to communicate with it, but apart from repeating these words, it couldn't actually speak.

As it cried out, however, its entire body turned into a giant sword. It rushed into the sky, and then crashed back down from the heavens. The incredibly powerful sword ki that it released could be sensed even from far away.

There was a loud boom, and the surrounding area was carpeted in craters the size of basketball courts.

The plants and trees around those craters were all blown to dust, leaving no traces of life behind. In addition, the ground within the craters was covered in fine cracks, as if it had been sundered by the sword ki.

A wave of weakness swept through Zu An, causing him to stumble slightly. This was clearly not a technique he could use often.

Thankfully, it was very powerful. He could use it as his killing move.

Pei Mianman's jaws had fallen wide open with shock. “Who knows how many times stronger this move would be if you were a metal element cultivator! Isn't your strength increasing way too fast?”

Zu An felt as though he'd just upgraded all his gear. He'd learned the Heaven Devouring Sutra and sucked away all of Mosquito Daoist's cultivation, and even obtained these two new skills as well. He was overjoyed.

He pulled Pei Mianman to him. "Manman, you're so smart! I never thought about using my own elemental ability with these skills!"

Pei Mianman blushed. She felt as though her observation wasn't of much use. After all, he seemed to have awakened the fire element ability...

She was just about to say something when his lips pressed tightly against hers.

She moaned, and her entire body went limp. She enthusiastically embraced the man holding her up.

"Ahem, ahem..."

A light cough interrupted them. The two of them subconsciously turned around and saw a large group of people standing nearby.

At the center was an incredibly pale, middle-aged man. His dark red robes and his lightning sharp eyes lent him a sinister, icy-cold aura. Right now, though, he wore a strange expression on his face.

This was the leader of the Embroidered Envoy—Zhuxie Chixin!

Despite this, the two of them weren't looking at him right now. Rather, they were staring at the woman whose white clothes were as beautiful as gentle snowfall in winter.

The woman was standing still, calmly watching them. A gentle breeze lifted the corners of her dress and set her fine black hair fluttering. She looked like a snow lotus that bloomed on a great glacier, crystal clear and elegant.

An ambiguous smile graced her beautiful face as she looked at them.

Her eyes were clearly extremely cold, yet Pei Mianman felt as if she was being burned. She immediately pushed the man in her arms away and backed up a few steps. "Chu... Chuyan," she greeted her guiltily.

A thoughtful expression appeared on Chu Chuyan's face. "Did I come at a bad time?"

Zu An really wanted to channel Xiaoli Feidao right now and say 'No, you came at the perfect time' before spreading his arms wide.

After some hesitation, however, he decided that he didn't want to die just yet.

Pei Mianman felt incredibly gloomy inside. Chu Chuyan had already divorced him, so why did she still feel so guilty?

She was about to say something, but Chu Chuyan walked over to them, causing her to lose all confidence.

When he noticed how red her face was, Zu An realized that now wasn't the time to hide as a man. "I..."

Before he could even explain himself, though, his nose was filled with a fragrant aroma. Chu Chuyan had already thrown herself into his arms.

Zu An was stunned. Chu Chuyan had always been cold and emotionless, whether it was because she cultivated the Snowflake Sword or if it was her natural disposition. This was the first time he had seen her so emotional, especially when in front of so many people.

“Ah Zu, I’m happy as long as you guys are okay.” Chu Chuyan’s body was shaking slightly. She embraced him tightly, as if she was scared that he might disappear at any moment.

Zu An felt a wave of tenderness surge within him, and he clung to her tightly in return.

The two of them had just gotten married when their clan had been thrown into turmoil. They were forced to separate for a long time, and had only just been reunited.

They held each other as if no one else was here. All the surrounding warriors watched silently, each of them feeling the urge to cry.

These soldiers had already been completely enamored by Chu Chuyan after traveling with her.

Even though they knew that she had married before, it was irrelevant when it came to someone this beautiful.

Besides, it was common knowledge that the wedding had been annulled, and that Chu Chuyan was single again.

Despite feeling that this woman was way beyond their league, their male instincts still made them simp after her, and they had been at her beck and call for most of their journey.

This was especially so after Zu An went missing. Many of them spoke words of consolation to her, but they were actually secretly delighted.

No one expected this fellow to make a return!

Even so, his reappearance was of little consequence. The emperor had already ordered his arrest, so he was dead for sure.

Furthermore, everyone had seen him with another woman, and young miss Chu had even caught them in the act.

Hmph! Miss Chu definitely saw how much of a playboy this man is and won’t care about him anymore. We finally have a chance!

Wait, hold on... what is going on? Why isn’t it going as expected?

You’re at least supposed to slap his face a few times, right?

Or maybe teach this mistress a lesson!

Wait, this mistress is quite pretty. She doesn’t seem to be inferior to young miss Chu in any way. Her chest is massive as well...

Uh... I guess we can’t blame Zu An...

Zu An’s mood immediately improved when he saw the Rage points pouring in. These fellows really knew how to welcome him!

Zhuxie Chixin coughed. He clearly didn't feel comfortable watching this public display of affection. "Where is Mosquito Daoist?"

Chu Chuyan quickly sent Zu An a voice transmission. "When we heard that you guys were being chased by the Mosquito Daoist, we tried to find you as quickly as possible. However, we were too late, and saw her disappear into the dungeon with you two. We couldn't go inside the dungeon and could only wait outside. We rushed over immediately after sensing the ki eruptions over here."

Zu An gave her a grateful look. Then, he said to Zhuxie Chixin, "Mosquito Daoist got away not too long ago."

"She ran away? She didn't go after you?" Zhuxie Chixin was clearly still suspicious. "Then why are there traces of battle all around us?"

Zu An obviously didn't want to give away his trump cards. Pei Mianman stepped in to cover for him. "Two mysterious experts appeared to fend off Mosquito Daoist. They left just before you arrived."

"Mysterious experts?" Zhuxie Chixin looked around. One of the experts should be a metal element cultivator wielding a sword, while the other was an ice element cultivator. "Who were they? Why did they save you?"

Pei Mianman shook her head. "I don't know. We didn't have time to ask them anything."

She secretly gestured towards Zu An while speaking. The plan was to muddy the waters further and let him guess the identities of those two mysterious experts.

Sure enough, Zhuxie Chixin fell deep into thought. Countless possibilities appeared in his mind, but he rejected them one after another. His head began to throb, but he still couldn't figure it out.

"We'll take the criminals back to the capital first." Zhuxie Chixin said. He would investigate this matter using the Embroidered Envoy's information network, but only after bringing them back with him. He will find out who dared interfere in this matter.

Zu An wasn't planning on running to begin with, so he cooperated with them.

Chu Chuyan walked over to Pei Mianman and said with a smile, "Manman, isn't there something you ought to tell me?"

Pei Mianman panicked. In the end, she decided to lay it all out in the open. "Chuyan, Ah Zu and I have already become a true husband and wife in the dungeon."

Either way, Chu Chuyan and Zu An had already divorced each other. She might as well use this chance to solidify their relationship. That way, she wouldn't have to subconsciously avoid this woman when she saw her in the future.

"A real husband and wife?" Chu Chuyan gave her a look. "But you're clearly still a virgin."

Pei Mianman was stunned into silence.

Only now did she realize that, even though they had lived as husband and wife throughout several generations and tried almost everything, it was their souls that had entered that trial. In the real world, she was still a virgin!

Pei Mianman's face immediately became red. She was both ashamed and annoyed. That scoundrel is actually going to take my chastity three times!

Chapter 565, Part 1: The Most Badass Little Miss Perfect in the Zhou Dynasty

Chu Chuyan saw Pei Mianman's expression grow downcast and assumed that she was embarrassed. She sighed and said, "Manman, I didn't have many friends growing up. You are my best friend."

Pei Mianman's face heated up. "Sorry."

She told herself that the two of them were already divorced, and that there was nothing left between Zu An and Chuyan, but she knew that she couldn't deceive herself. After all, the divorce had been forced upon them due to the situation, and she had already gotten involved even before the divorce happened.

Chu Chuyan couldn't help but laugh when she noticed Pei Mianman blushing like a young newlywed. "Do you think I'm angry at you?"

"Wait, you don't mind?" Pei Mianman was stunned by Chuyan's tone.

"If things were normal, then of course I would mind," said Chu Chuyan with a sigh. "But who knows what will happen to Ah Zu now? We're in the middle of a crisis, yet you were still willing to stick with him. This shows that you really do love him. How can I blame you for what happened?"

Pei Mianman fell silent, her initial happiness replaced with worry. Zu An had provoked someone much too strong this time. There didn't seem to be any hope. "He always insisted on going to the capital. He said that he can settle this issue once he gets there. Do you have any solutions?"

"He really said that?" Chu Chuyan was shocked. "What kind of solution could I have? To be honest, I was hoping that the two of you would just go into hiding after leaving the dungeon. Unfortunately, Zhuxie Chixin still found you."

Pei Mianman bit her lip. She'd obviously thought about this before. "I suggested this to him, but he didn't want to leave you behind."

Chu Chuyan was stunned. Her eyes wandered over to Zu An, and she seemed lost in her own thoughts.

"If there really is no other choice, you could try asking your grandfather for help," said Pei Mianman. "Given your grandfather's status, the situation might not be completely hopeless."

Chu Chuyan looked worried. "You know of my clan's relationship with my grandfather's clan. My grandfather did not approve of my mother's decision back then, and he has already cut off all overt contact..." she sighed. "I'll try asking him again. We can't pass up any little crumb of hope."

Pei Mianman voiced her agreement. "I will return to my clan and see what I can do, but I don't have much confidence. You know about my awkward position in the clan."

Chu Chuyan held her hand. From a certain point of view, they were fellow sufferers, which was why they had become close friends. Even though their personalities were entirely different, they were kindred spirits in many ways. However, she never expected the two of them to end up liking the same man.

The soldiers nearby continued to sneak looks at them. The fight that they had envisioned did not materialize. Instead, the two women seemed to get along perfectly. What the hell is this?

Even two ordinary married women should not be behaving like this in such a situation, let alone two stunning beauties. What kind of black magic did that Zu An fellow possess?

Zu An couldn't help but turn around when he noticed the continuous inflow of Rage points. He too was stunned when he saw the two women holding hands.

Are those two super open-minded, or do they actually not like me that much? How can they get along that well after finding out the truth...?

...

Wrapped up in their own worries, the group of them quickly returned to the nearby inn. It wasn't actually that far away.

Chu Chuyan saw him looking around and said, "The father and daughter of the Sang Clan, have already been escorted back to the capital, along with young miss Zheng."

Zu An only grunted in acknowledgement.

Chu Chuyan wanted to ask about his relationship with Zheng Dan, but when she considered the uncertain fate that he was facing, she lost the urge to confront him.

King Liang and Liu Yao returned as well. They had been out looking for Zu An. Zhuxie Chixin gave them an update as soon as he found them.

King Liang and Liu Yao both sighed with relief when they saw that Zu An had been detained again. Too many things had happened on this trip. Now, they could leave the rest to Zhuxie Chixin. Whatever happened from here on out would not be their concern.

King Liang stroked his beard when he saw Pei Mianman. He walked over and said, "Miss Pei, we received a letter from the Pei Clan two days ago. Here it is."

Pei Mianman was confused. She opened the letter. When she saw the keepsake inside, her expression instantly changed.

"What happened?" Zu An and Chu Chuyan both noticed that something was wrong, and quickly showed their concern.

Pei Mianman bit her lip, conflicting expressions flickering across her face. After a while, she said in a dejected voice, "Ah Zu, I might not be able to accompany you to the capital. There's something I need to do. I need to return to my clan."

"What happened?" Zu An was really worried. This girl always had a half-smile on her face. He almost never saw her like this.

“My mother sent me a note, but she didn’t include any details. I’m not sure what’s happened either.”
Pei Mianman looked around her. She took out the keepsake inside and said in a quiet voice, “I made an arrangement with her that we would never use this signal unless the situation was absolutely urgent. That’s why I have to go back and find out what’s happened.”

Zu An’s tone grew serious. “In that case, you should hurry. Also, be careful. Who knows what could be going on.”

Pei Mianman wanted to say something, but she hesitated. “Ah Zu, if I leave now, I’m afraid that we’ll never meet again.” She knew that, after making this trip, she might not be able to get to the capital in time. By the time she arrived, it could already be too late.

Zu An stroked her head with a smile. “What are you thinking? How could vermin like me die so easily? I’ll be waiting for you at the capital. I’m more worried about you. You must take care of yourself. I don’t want anything to happen to you after I sort out my own situation.”

“Hmph! Can’t you say anything nicer?” Pei Mianman said with a snort. She looked over at Chu Chuyan. “Chuyan, please take care of Ah Zu.”

Chu Chuyan had a strange look on her face. “Manman, have you forgotten that Ah Zu is my husband? I would take care of him even if you hadn’t said anything.”

“But you’re already divorced,” Pei Mianman retorted with a snort. She leapt into Zu An’s arm and got on her tiptoes, giving him a big kiss.

Even though Zu An made it sound simple, she didn’t have that much confidence in him. If the emperor wanted him dead, who in the world could prevent it?

She knew that this separation might really be eternal, which was why she poured everything into this kiss. If not for all the eyes around them, she would even have offered all of herself to him right now.

Within the dungeon, only their souls had been entwined together. In the real world, she was still a virgin. She was sure she would feel endless regret if this separation turned out to be eternal.

The eyes of the surrounding guards and embroidered envoys went wide. What the hell is this? Why does a criminal on death row have such crazy luck with the ladies?

Miss Chu, why aren’t you doing anything about this?!

You have successfully trolled the Soldiers for 1024... 1024 ... 1024...

Chu Chuyan sighed. She actually sympathized with Pei Mianman. However, she noticed everyone around them looking at her with strange expressions, and felt extremely uncomfortable. She felt as though she should be doing something right now, yet she didn’t know what it was. The uncertainty within her was truly hard to express.

In the end, she could only turn her head to the side. Out of sight, out of mind.

What a beautiful green meadow. Those trees in the distance have tender green branches, and even the birds seem like dark green parrots...

This is such a beautiful scene, full of life.

But why do I feel so strange?

When their lips finally separated, Pei Mianman's gorgeous face seemed even more beautiful. She looked wistfully at her lover, and said through voice transmission, "Ah Zu, if something ends up happening in the capital, then I will follow in your steps."

Zu An jumped in fright. "Don't say such foolish things!" he said hurriedly. "You cannot believe that I am dead unless you see my corpse! Wait, no. Even if you see my corpse, I might be alive through some other secret method! I don't want anything tragic to happen, for example, you killing yourself when I'm not even dead! If that happens, no tears will come out even if I feel like crying! Even if you insist on doing something like that, please wait at least a decade after you're sure that I'm gone..."

Pei Mianman knew that he was saying this on purpose, to ease her anxiety. As such, she didn't argue with him. Instead, she replied, "All right. I will only make my decision after I am certain. But I still hope that both of us can meet again in this world. I... my body is waiting for you."

These words immediately made Zu An's blood boil. He also knew that what had happened in the trial was merely a mingling of their souls.

Pei Mianman smiled when she noticed the changes in his body. She quickly walked away, her face red. "I hope everything goes smoothly."

Zhuxie Chixin was surprised. "Miss Pei's cultivation seems to have increased quite a bit."

King Liang nodded. "She looks to have already reached the pinnacle of the sixth rank, perhaps already touching the gates of the seventh rank! She is still so young!" His voice mirrored the other man's shock.

Liu Yao seemed rather wistful. "Truly, the world of cultivators will always have capable people. Each generation will replace the last."

He had only barely reached the ninth rank despite cultivating his entire life. He wasn't even sure if he had reached the fifth rank when he was her age.

Zhuxie Chixin and King Liang gave him a look of disdain. This fella really was ignorant. Should you really be saying this right now?

Inside their hearts, however, they shared similar sentiments. Pei Mianman was at the peak of the sixth rank, while Chu Chuyan was already at the seventh rank. Both of them were only young adults. The speed at which they cultivated really was frightening.

But then, why did both of these stunning girls end up falling for Zu An?

Because Zu An was using his Mirror Mirage to hide his aura, he only appeared to be at the fifth rank, which made him seem like a pile of sh*t beside a dazzling flower.

Wait, no. He's a pile of sh*t beside two beautiful flowers.

You have successfully trolled Zhuxie Chixin for 233 Rage points!

You have successfully trolled King Liang Zhaoyi for 999 Rage points!

You have successfully trolled Liu Yao for 999 Rage points!

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Zu An couldn't be bothered about these Rage points right now. He watched Pei Mianman leave with a deep sense of frustration.

"Stop looking already, she's gone." Chu Chuyan appeared at his side. Her voice wasn't as calm as before.

Zu An chuckled. "Are you jealous?"

"Who would be jealous of you?" Chu Chuyan snorted and left.

Zhuxie Chixin walked over. "We're returning to the capital. Bind him up with Soul-Reaping Chains."

Chu Chuyan, who was just leaving, immediately returned to her husband's side. "He decided to come back on his own, which showed that he has no plans of running. Why are you still restraining him with those chains?"

Zhuxie Chixin frowned. "It is merely a precaution. We won't be able to always keep watch over him."

Chu Chuyan was undeterred. "He's had many chances to run away already. If you insist on binding him with Soul-Reaping Chains, then we'll just fight to the death here! Either way, he's dead when he gets to the capital anyway. What difference does it make?"

Zhuxie Chixin's brow tightened further, but King Liang stepped in. "Commander Zhuxie, we may still face many dangers along the way. If we are all held up, and someone tries to kill him while he is powerless to defend himself, things will go poorly for us."

This was exactly what had happened to him. Strictly speaking, even if Zu An escaped, it would still be better than for him to die to his assassins. If he got away, they would still have the chance to recapture him. If he died, that would be permanent. Where would the emperor find another Phoenix Nirvana Sutra then?

Zhuxie Chixin snorted. "Now that I'm around, that won't happen."

Despite his words, he did not insist on tying Zu An up.

Zu An was finally put into a special carriage. Even though it wasn't as splendid as Liu Yao's carriage, it was much better than a prison carriage. After so many assassination attempts, they didn't dare place him in an open prison carriage. The walls of this carriage had been carved with special formations that could block the arrows of any potential assassins.

Chu Chuyan demanded to be placed in the carriage as well. Zhuxie Chixin's first reaction was to refuse.

What kind of joke is this? How can a criminal be allowed to freely interact with others?

When Zhuxie Chixin learned that Zheng Dan and Zu An had shared the same carriage, he secretly wished death upon his former jailers.

Absolutely preposterous! Putting a man and a woman together like that... If something happened, it would shame the entire court.

Seeing Chu Chuyan's cold expression, though, he figured that that was the least of his worries. However, since the emperor himself had ordered this arrest, it was still best to prevent others from interacting with him.

Unexpectedly, it was Zu An's turn to kick up a fuss. He railed about how this was his final journey, and that it was inhuman not to allow a husband and wife to spend their final moments together. He threatened to fight to the death instead of allowing himself to be escorted to the capital.

Zhuxie Chixin felt his head begin to throb. He was finally experiencing King Liang and Liu Yao's earlier frustrations for himself.

"I can protect him inside and serve as a final line of protection," Chu Chuyan said.

Zhuxie Chixin pondered it over, and finally agreed. Even though he believed that he had brought enough men to deal with any situation, it was still better to be safe than sorry.

He was also aware that there could be spies among their party. If they found an opening and attacked Zu An, things would become truly dicey.

He might suspect anyone else, but there was no way Chu Chuyan would collude with any other powers.

...

Their group set out. Outside the carriage, the guards were extremely vigilant. On the contrary, it was much more peaceful inside.

"Why are you staring at me?" Chu Chuyan asked. She touched her own face, feeling slightly uncomfortable under his gaze. She thought that she had something on her face.

"My wife, it's been too long. You've become prettier and prettier." Zu An said with a chuckle.

Chu Chuyan's face froze. "Who are you calling your wife? We're already divorced."

She didn't want to cause trouble while Pei Mianman had been around, but now that they were alone, she did not need to worry about that.

Zu An was unfazed. "Even though you say that, I know you still care about me. You helped me out by convincing Zhuxie Chixin to agree to this arrangement."

Chu Chuyan sighed. She knew as well that now wasn't the time to get jealous. She sent him a ki transmission. "I argued for this arrangement because I wanted to give you a chance. I'll help you escape when a good opportunity presents itself."

Zu An looked at her. "But if we do that, what about you? What about the Chu Clan?"

Chu Chuyan became quiet. After a long silence, she said, "I can't be bothered with all of that now, given how things stand. The emperor cannot destroy our clan over this matter, even if he wants to. Our clan still has some connections. We didn't have time to use them in Brightmoon City, but we definitely will not submit so easily this time."

Zu An shook his head. "There is no need for you and the Chu clan to take that risk. I'll just go to the capital. I might still be spared."

Chu Chuyan was curious. "Just what kind of plan do you have?"

Zu An shook his head. "I actually don't have that much confidence in it. If I talk about it now, I'll only lower the chances of success."

"Then I won't ask about it anymore." Chu Chuyan bit her lip. "I'll seek someone out once we reach the capital. If he's willing to help, he might be able to free you from the emperor's hands."

Frightened, Zu An quickly said, "Please don't do anything foolish! You aren't allowed to sacrifice your own purity for my sake!"

All the stupid TV dramas he'd watched had left him with lasting trauma. For the sake of the male lead, the female lead would beg the villain for mercy. The villains would inevitably demand that she offer her body as payment, to which she would agree...

Did the directors make up all that garbage because it was their fetish, or did they do it to mess with society?

Chu Chuyan's fair cheeks blushed when she understood what he meant. "Hmph! What kind of nonsense are you thinking of? I was going to ask my grandfather for help!"

Zu An was surprised. "Who is your grandfather? Is he really amazing?"

After all, the emperor wanted to get him to hand over the secrets to immortality. He really couldn't picture a single man persuading someone like that to let him go.

After a slight hesitation, Chu Chuyan said, "There is no point in hiding it from you at this point. My grandfather is Qin Zheng, the Vanguard General. His brother, my granduncle, is Qin Se, the Defense General."

Qin Zheng, Qin Se?[1]

Zu An was just about to mock them for their weird names when he suddenly remembered what Shang Liuyu had said about these positions, back in Brightmoon Academy.

The Vanguard General was in charge of the six armies to the north. The entire dynasty's elite troops were under his command.

The two guard armies that the cocky Liu Yao commanded were part of these six armies. He served under the Vanguard General.

The Defense General was in charge of all of the mid- and high-level military officials. He also managed the troops in the outskirts of the capital.

In the army, the Great General and White Rider General held the highest ranks, but these were more positions of honor rather than real authority.

On the contrary, the Vanguard General and the Defense General were active members of the military. To a certain degree, her two grandfathers were considered the number one and number two officers in the military.

Zu An was rather stunned. “Your grandfather’s clan is so powerful! Why are there so many people in Brightmoon City bullying your Chu clan?”

Chu Chuyan sighed. “It’s an old story. Back then, my grandfather did not agree to my mother’s marriage to my father, and arranged a different marriage for her. Later on, my mother chose to elope with my father, leaving him furious. He severed all ties to her.

“Both my grandfather and my mother are stubborn and unyielding, and they haven’t contacted each other, even after all these years. Only in recent years did they slowly begin to reach out to one another because of her children. Even then, it was only out of concern for us.

“Grandfather hates my father. The fact that he hasn’t tried to do anything to my father is already a blessing. Why would he step in to help the Chu Clan?”

Zu An laughed, and then clung to her thighs. “I never expected this at all! I ended up marrying the most awesome Miss Perfect in the entire country, as well as the granddaughter of the most badass officials! I definitely have to cling tightly to these thick thighs.”[2]

Chu Chuyan tried many times, but just couldn’t push him away. In the end, she had to let him do what he wanted. Her face was beet red. “What nonsense are you spouting? There are so many girls with similar or better backgrounds in the capital! I’m nothing like what you describe. Furthermore, strictly speaking, it was I who married you... Also, what do you mean when you say my thighs are thick?”

Are they chubbier than Pei Mianman’s? Of course, she was too embarrassed to ask him that.

Zu An now remembered that he was a drafted son-in-law, but he didn’t care. “Either way, we’ve already divorced, so the past doesn’t count. I’ll just have to court you again this time.”

Chu Chuyan’s cold and emotionless exterior shattered instantly when she sensed his hands inching up her thighs. Her face flushed red. This fellow really is a rascal through and through

Chapter 566, Part I: Scandal

“Stop...” Chu Chuyan cried out and stopped his naughty hands. “There are people outside!”

Zu An knew that she was easily embarrassed and that he probably wouldn’t be able to do anything intimate with her within this carriage, so he did not persist. He wrapped his arms around her waist instead. “This is okay, right?”

Chu Chuyan’s body was cool to the touch, and wrapping his arms around her was extremely pleasant. It was the perfect feeling in the summer heat.

“We’re already divorced, we shouldn’t be doing this...” Chu Chuyan’s face reddened slightly.

"We can still be friends even if we're divorced. It's not as though we've never held each other before," Zu An said shamelessly.

"Do you know of any friends who hold each other like this...?" Chu Chuyan said with a snort. However, she knew that they had only divorced because they had no choice, so she did not push him away. Instead, she buried her head in his chest. "Ah Zu, what happened to the two of you? Can you tell me about it?"

Zu An chuckled and said, "You're probably most interested in what happened between Pei Mianman and I, right?"

"You really have some nerve." Chu Chuyan straightened. She felt her teeth aching when she saw his mischievous smile. "I didn't see you for a few months. Then I lost my husband, and now I find out that he'd gotten together with my friend. Despite it all, I'm not holding it against you."

Zu An immediately hugged her and said apologetically, "What does my wife want to know? I will tell you everything in great detail..."

Chu Chuyan's heart softened when she heard the words 'my wife'. Even though the two of them were officially divorced, that was not how she felt inside. She was still extremely happy that he addressed her as such.

Leaning closely against each other, they shared what had happened to each of them over this period. Of course, Zu An had the most to say.

"You spent several decades with Manman in the dungeon?!" Chu Chuyan was rather envious. She hadn't felt that way earlier on, since she hadn't been sure what Zu An's fate would be, and since Pei Mianman was also her good friend and not a complete outsider.

However, when she learned that they had spent several decades together as true spouses, she lost her cool. Why did it now seem as though they were the real married couple, while she and Zu An hadn't spent nearly enough time together?

Zu An felt a bit guilty. "To be honest, I don't think it was actually a few decades. The flow of time in the dungeon was quite strange. If someone told me that it was a few decades, I would have believed it, although, in reality, it was only a moment. We didn't really spend decades together."

"Even if it wasn't a few decades, it was still at least a few years!" Chu Chuyan said, glowering. She didn't know why she was so angry, yet the more she thought about this, the worse she felt.

You have successfully trolled Chu Chuyan for 233... 233... 233...

Zu An gently took her into his embrace again. "My wife, I am so happy that you're jealous about what happened. I thought that you didn't care about me anymore."

Chu Chuyan finally lost her composure. "Why do you only feel happy when you make others angry? Are you some sort of freak?"

Zu An knew that persisting with this topic wasn't a wise choice, and that it might really spiral out of control. He quickly changed the topic and said, "My dear wife, please tell me more about the capital. That way, I won't be going there completely ignorant."

He'd heard some things about it from the Sang father and daughter earlier on, but they had little time for leisurely chatter since they had been on the run. He was still pretty clueless about the capital.

Chu Chuyan's expression grew serious, now that he had turned to more important matters. "Besides His Majesty, there are eight people who are considered to hold the highest official positions, and command the greatest prestige. Everyone refers to them as the Eight Dukes: The Grand Preceptor, the Grand Tutor, the Grand Protector, the Minister of Education, the Minister of Works, the Grand Minister of War, and the Great General."

"By the way, the father of Shi Kun, whom you offended in Brightmoon City, is one of the eight dukes. He is the court's Grand Minister of War, Shi Miao." [1]

Zu An had a strange look on his face. "Why does everyone have such weird names?"

Chu Chuyan was momentarily speechless.

What goes through this dummy's head every day?

She continued, "Of course, you don't need to be too worried. Even though the Eight Dukes possess high social standing, these positions do not possess any real authority. They do not manage any official affairs. That's why, even though you've offended the Shi clan, things aren't as bad as you think."

Zu An chuckled. "That Shi Kun always looked so smug, and I've always thought his clan was powerful. I guess he's just a paper tiger."

"I only said that because I didn't want you to feel too much pressure," Chu Chuyan said in warning. "However, even though the Eight Dukes are only nominal positions, their status cannot be denied. Their disciples are scattered throughout the court, and many of their own descendants hold high positions. You cannot lower your guard."

Zu An chuckled. "I've already offended the emperor himself. Beside him, the Shi clan is nothing."

Chu Chuyan sighed. "You're really optimistic." He was right, though. As of this moment, the greatest foe was the emperor. The Shi clan was insignificant compared to him.

She began to explain the various powers in the capital. "Under the eight dukes are the White Rider General, the War Chariot General, the Vanguard General, the Defense General, and other generals...

"The Vanguard General and the Defense General are my grandfathers. I already told you about them earlier... King Qi holds the title of White Horse General. This was originally a nominal position, without an actual military command, but King Qi is an entirely different case altogether. He still has trusted men under him."

Zu An nodded. "I understand. Anyone who can go against the emperor can't be an ordinary person."

He'd heard much about King Qi back in Brightmoon City. King Qi looked as though he was battling his nephew, the crown prince, for the throne, but in reality, his battle had always been against the emperor. There was no way he was a weakling.

"The War Chariot General, Liu Guang, is the father of the empress, as well as the older brother of Liu Yao."

Zu An figured that this position was equivalent to the leader of the royal relatives. The emperor probably put him in such a lofty position to keep King Qi in check.

Even though Liu Yao had nine ranks of cultivation, he seemed a bit too hotheaded and crude. Zu An wondered if his older brother was more competent.

“Then what position does King Liang hold?” Zu An said curiously. There was no way he was only a noble without any official post.

Chu Chuyan replied, “King Liang holds the position of Rear General.”

“Rear General?” Zu An was stunned. This position sounded quite complicated.

Chu Chuyan explained, “Let me explain. The six armies are the Vanguard, the Defense, the Left and Right Guard, the Brave Riders, and the Guerillas. The Vanguard leads the military into battle, while the Defense is in charge of defending the army camp. The Left and Right Guard are commanded by the Left Guard General and Right Guard General. They ensure the safety of the imperial palace. The Brave Riders and the Guerillas are the mobile forces of the imperial palace, and are used to deal with any sudden emergencies. These six armies make up the military force of the imperial palace.

“Besides these forces, there are four armies within the capital city that are in charge of the city gates and public security. Each army is in charge of one region—front, rear, left and right. The ones in command are known as the Front, Rear, Left, and Right Generals. King Liang is the Rear General.

“The Garrisoned Rider, Infantry, Monster Rider, Eternal River, Roaring Fire, and Reserve armies are stationed in the city outskirts. Their commanders are known as the six high military officials. These six armies make up the core force of the empire’s battlefield operations. They are the first to set out to battle.”

Zu An nodded. “So that’s how everything is set up!” He finally understood the military structure of this world.

Chu Chuyan continued, “The core of authority in the court resides within the Imperial Secretariat, the Central Secretariat, and Chancellery. The Imperial Secretariat is made up of the emperor’s own trusted ministers, who discuss important matters together with His Majesty. They are in charge of drafting up edicts. The Chancellery are in charge of the examination and approval of edicts. The Central Secretariat is in charge of implementation and dealing with specific governmental affairs...”

Zu An asked some questions from time to time, and soon understood the workings of the government. The Central Secretariat was a place where many extremely important matters were decided.

The Secretariat Supervisor was in charge of the Central Secretariat, and the Director was his second-in-command. There were several assistant ministers and other officials under them.

The Chancellery was composed of many eunuchs, and served as assistants to the emperor in his daily life. While the officials within the Central Secretariat were not allowed to live in the imperial palace, many of those in the Chancellery were eunuchs and palace attendants, so there was no issue here.

Of course, there was no way a palace eunuch could take care of everything. After all, a eunuch's knowledge and experiences were limited. That was why the emperor granted many of his trusted aides in the Chancellery the authority to come and go freely about the palace.

The heads of the Chancellery were the Chief Attendants, and there were normally more than just one. There were four in the current dynasty, and under them were the court gentlemen, comprehensive duty personnel, and other officials.

The Imperial Secretariat was the organization in charge of implementation. It was led by the Director of the Imperial Secretariat, and his assistant directors served under him. Beneath them were the high officials of various departments.

In his previous world, many theatrical works involved the main character carrying out a grand scheme. Once he took care of the Imperial Secretariat, his mission would be complete... In reality, though, these various Imperial Secretariat officials weren't really the ones who had most of the authority, because they merely implemented the policies, but had no say in making them.

Even though these three major departments were equal in name, strictly speaking, the Central Secretariat and Chancellery had greater power than the Imperial Secretariat. Of course, nothing was absolute. If the emperor was weaker and less prestigious, or if he wasn't competent, then the Central Secretariat and Chancellery may lose power, and the Imperial Secretariat would instead become the main arm of the government.

However, the current emperor was the most powerful cultivator in the world. That elevated the status of the Central Secretariat and the Chancellery.

"Oh, right. The Imperial Secretariat, Pei Ming, and the Chief Attendant of the Chancellery, Pei Zheng, are both from the Pei clan. That's the same major clan that Manman comes from," Chu Chuyan suddenly added.

566, Part II: Scandal

"Your clans are all so powerful?" Zu An's eyes went wide. The clans that these women were from wielded such staggering power that he almost didn't feel like trying so hard anymore.

Chu Chuyan frowned. "Manman's status in her clan is a little... awkward. It's not as glamorous as you think."

"What is going on in her clan?" Zu An asked quickly. "There's also the issue of her mother. She looked like she was in a hurry to go see her."

Chu Chuyan opened her mouth to speak, then hesitated. "I think it's best if Manman tells you about her situation herself. I don't think it's something I should talk about."

Zu An had a pensive look on his face when he saw her uncertainty. Was it an affair...?

Chu Chuyan got back to the main topic. "Besides these three departments, there are nine major ministers. They are in charge of various political and economic affairs in various fields. For example, the Minister of Ceremonies is in charge of academies country-wide. They wield great authority."

Zu An knew that Brightmoon Academy had outstanding teachers, and also nurtured many talented individuals. There were many academies like this throughout the various commanderies within this empire. All of them added together were truly a formidable force.

“This is a rough summary of how the capital is structured. You haven’t met them yet, so you might not be able to match names to faces. I’ll introduce them to you one by one in the future, if we have a chance.” Chu Chuyan grew dejected. She wasn’t sure if Ah Zu would even be alive after his meeting with the emperor.

Zu An pondered over what he’d heard, then said, “One last question. Of all of these people you mentioned, who is in King Qi’s faction, and who remains loyal to the emperor? Who has remained neutral?”

The Chu clan had been buffeted by both sides in Brightmoon City. The battle between the two factions would surely be more intense within the capital.

It was imperative that he sort these things out first, to give him some confidence when he faced the emperor later on.

Chu Chuyan looked about cautiously, then said through voice transmission, “No one will publicly admit to these things. However, it is still possible to tell which camp they are in through their day-to-day words and actions.

“The core of King Qi’s faction should be the Qin, Yu, and Pei clan. The Qin clan is my grandfather’s clan. My grandfather’s older sister is King Qi’s mother. As King Qi’s maternal uncles, they naturally support King Qi...”

Zu An clicked his tongue. Only now do I find out that your grandfather is a firm supporter of the King Qi party. Why then did the Chu clan bother to remain neutral all this while...?

“The leader of the Yu clan, Yu Xuanchong, is one of the Imperial Secretariat’s confidential assistants. The Yu clan started out in the ki stone business, which made them an extremely wealthy clan.”

Zu An’s expression suddenly grew strange. “What is Yu Yanluo’s connection with the Yu clan?”

He remembered that he had saved a stunning young madam in a valley not long after arriving in this world. She seemed to be in the ki stone business as well. In the past, she was known as the capital’s number-one beauty.

That woman turned out to be insincere, though. She said that she was going to repay his kindness, yet he couldn’t find her in Brightmoon City afterwards!

Damn it all! Pretty girls are all liars...

Chu Chuyan was surprised. “You know about Yu Yanluo?”

“Wasn’t she the number-one beauty in the capital some time ago? She should be famous, right? Why is it weird that I know about her?” Zu An looked as if he were stating the obvious.

Chu Chuyan’s face reddened, and she snorted. “Men are all pigs!”

She finally knew why her mother always reacted this way whenever her father talked about Yu Yanluo.

However, she still went on, "Yu Yanluo is from the Yu clan. The Yu clan has always produced handsome men and beautiful women. They are a clan that many great clans wish to intermarry with. Yu Yanluo is the most outstanding among them..."

Zu An wrapped his arms around her soft waist and gave her a peck on her cold cheek. "I don't think the Yu clan is all that special. The Chu clan's women are prettier."

Chu Chuyan knew that he was praising her. She couldn't help but feel happy inside, but there was no way she would admit to it. "You might not say that if you saw Yu Yanluo in person. After my dad saw her once, he never forgot about her since. Hmph..."

"It's not like I've never seen her before..." Zu An mumbled.

When he thought back to their first meeting, though, he had to admit that she was stunning.

Chu Chuyan continued, "The Pei Clan has two main branches. The first branch belongs to Waterfront Duke Pei Zheng, the clan leader. His official position is Chief Attendant, and he is also Manman's grandfather."

"So he's Manman's grandfather." Zu An immediately had a much better impression of him.

Chu Chuyan wanted to say something, but hesitated. "The situation might not be that harmonious. You shouldn't let your impressions be so easily swayed."

She continued, "The other branch is led by Greatdeer Duke, Pei Ming. He is the Director of the Imperial Secretariat. Pei Zheng's branch is a firm supporter of King Qi, but Pei Ming's allegiance is much more ambiguous. As a whole, though, the clan should be leaning towards King Qi's faction.

"The emperor's faction includes the Yang and Meng clans, as well as King Liang. You have already met King Liang and the people of the Yang clan. The leader of the Meng clan, Meng Jing, is one of the Eight Dukes. He is the Minister of Works, and enjoys great prestige. His son, Meng Yi, is the Central Secretariat Supervisor, who manages the Central Secretariat..."

"What is his son's name again?" Zu An asked in shock.

"Meng Yi. Do you know him?" Chu Chuyan was confused.

Zu An sighed. This is Meng Yi we're talking about! Which man doesn't know about him? What was his father thinking when he gave his son that name?!

Chu Chuyan didn't understand what he was getting at, and continued. "Meng Yi has a daughter, who is married to the reserve ruler, Zhao Ping."

"Reserve ruler?"

"The reserve rulers are the crown prince's younger brothers. The crown prince has many younger brothers. You've already met King Wu in North Order Commandery. He is also one of the reserve rulers."

"Ah, King Wu. I remember that guy." Zu An had a strange look on his face. Not only did he remember him, he had a deep impression of that man. He was even more familiar with Madam Wu.

Chu Chuyan stared at him, her cheeks turning slightly red. "Why do you have that look on your face? Are you thinking about something nasty?"

Zu An's face heated up. He was too embarrassed to talk about what had transpired between him and Madam Wu, so he quickly changed the topic. "Oh, right. Since the crown prince has so many younger brothers, and all of those younger brothers seem quite intelligent, why does the emperor still insist on making a dummy the crown prince?"

Judging from his dealings with King Wu, apart from some seemingly strange fetishes, he seemed much smarter and more capable than the average person. He was definitely more than qualified to hold the position of crown prince. As for the current crown prince, even though everyone spoke ambiguously about him, he was clearly an idiot.

Chu Chuyan replied, "I reckon His Majesty wishes that one of his more... normal... sons could be the crown prince, but it's just not meant to be. I'm sure you're familiar with the story behind the emperor and King Qi. Even though the two aren't blood brothers, the current emperor was given to his uncle to adopt. This uncle was the late emperor when he was younger. However, the political situation was confusing back then. As King Qi was still too young, the current emperor, who was an adult, succeeded him. King Qi actually has the qualifications to succeed the throne.

"His Majesty sustained great injuries from the battles against the foreign tribes in his earlier years, so his time is already limited. Meanwhile, King Qi is wise and capable, and many ministers believe that the throne should pass to King Qi. His Majesty wishes to pass the throne to his own son, and the only way he could do that is by sticking to the rules and passing it onto the eldest son of his first wife. If he skipped over him and chose someone else, the choice of successor would become a competition of the worthy. If that happened, which current prince could compare to King Qi?"

"That's why, even though his majesty knows that the crown prince is rather slow, he has no choice but to designate him the crown prince."

Zu An was confused. "Would a dummy like that be able to keep hold of his position, though? Doesn't the current emperor fear that our entire country might collapse under his rule?"

Chu Chuyan explained, "Even though the crown prince isn't too bright, he isn't blatantly stupid. With wise subjects to assist him, ruling isn't impossible. The crown prince has heirs as well. Even though they are young, they don't have any problems with their intellect. Things would settle down once the throne passes on to one of them."

Zu An was shocked. "I've heard that the crown prince only got married recently. Yet he already has a son?"

Chu Chuyan blushed. She quietly said, "The heir wasn't birthed by the crown prince's wife. Back then, his majesty was worried that the crown prince wasn't... wasn't familiar with the ways of the world, so he granted him a beautiful palace concubine. Subsequently, this concubine became pregnant. Because she didn't want to cause any conflict with the crown princess, she returned to the palace to give birth there."

Zu An had a weird look on his face. "Does this child come from the stupid crown prince's seed or the emperor's? How could the concubine go back to live in the imperial palace? This surely is a huge scandal!"

Chapter 567: The Capital City

Chu Chuyan was alarmed. "Please watch what you say!"

She looked around quickly. Satisfied that no one had heard anything, she said quietly, "The Embroidered Envoy are His Majesty's eyes and ears, and Zhuxie Chixin is the emperor's most loyal aide! If news of what you said reached the emperor's ears, you'd be dead for sure!"

However, Zu An didn't seem to mind. He shrugged and said, "I'm already in such dire straits, it doesn't really matter. If His Majesty finds out, then so be it."

Chu Chuyan gently held his hand to comfort him. A moment passed before she spoke again. "Actually, several rumors that echoed your thoughts did spread. Without proof, though, they only remained as speculation."

Zu An smiled. "How can anyone other than the main actors have any proof? There is something else that I'm curious about. All the other princes seem incredibly intelligent. Why is the crown prince the only one who is dumb?"

Chu Chuyan frowned. "There's no consensus on this subject either. The fiend races claim that His Majesty has too much blood on his hands, and that this is retribution. Some humans believe that someone might have done something to the crown prince while he was still young, leading to his current state... Of course, these are just rumors, and might not be true."

"Wind in an empty cave has to come from somewhere. They might not be completely unfounded." Zu An slipped into deep thought.

When they were done discussing important matters, they turned to more personal things. Chu Chuyan said with a gentle voice, "Ah Zu, the Chu clan is truly grateful for what you've done. If it wasn't for you, we might have been destroyed. We've never had a chance to formally express our gratitude yet."

Zu An laughed and said, "Aren't you my wife? Who else would I help if I don't help you?"

Chu Chuyan shook her head. "Many married couples aren't willing to go that far for each other. There are too many examples of couples giving up on each other before a real disaster. You even placed yourself in danger for the sake of the Chu clan. Few husbands in the world are able to do something like that."

Zu An leaned backwards. "Yes, keep stroking my ego just like that. How are you going to thank me, then? You can't just use words, right? That wouldn't be sincere at all."

Chu Chuyan blushed. She moved closer to him and gave him a kiss.

Right when she was about to pull back, she felt a pair of arms wrap tightly around her waist, and a pair of warm lips pressed against hers.

Chu Chuyan's entire body went rigid, but she quickly relaxed, and warmly received her lover's affection.

Her head was in an absolute mess. However, a sudden slight chill caused her to quickly snap out of her daze, and she pushed him away in a hurry.

It was one thing for him to reach his hands into her clothes, but this fellow had actually begun to remove her clothes!

There were still so many people outside. Her fair, snow colored cheeks were already completely red.

This rascal is getting more and more skilled! He probably practiced it on Manman in the dungeon...

Annoyed by this thought, she moved closer and bit down on his shoulder.

"Ssss!" Zu An sucked in air through his teeth. Where did this come from?

Is she blaming me for what I just did? Aren't we already so familiar with each other? He had no idea that she was currently jealous of another woman.

"I'll take my leave for now. I don't think it's a good idea for me to stay inside this carriage all the time," Chu Chuyan said with a huff. She left the carriage after sorting out her clothes.

Zu An grew gloomy. He began to fiddle with his spatial storage out of boredom, and mentally went through the things he had learned. He wasn't going to forget something as important as the Primordial Origin Sutra's exorcism properties again.

Unexpectedly, he found a secret manual: 'Flame Blade'. He hadn't been able to cultivate this before because he hadn't awakened the fire element. Now that he could borrow Daji's fire element, he could give it a try.

Zu An even summoned Daji to see if she could learn it as well. After all, she was also a fire element user. Unfortunately, she couldn't cultivate it without her soul. Zu An gave up after trying several times. "I should've let Manman give it a try." Then again, he remembered how powerful her combat skills were. Her flames could transform into a fire dragon or a rose flower. Those skills were probably better than this one.

He calmed himself down and began to examine it closely, and the various moves within the Flame Blade manual slowly played out in his mind. His only regret was that he couldn't put it to the test immediately.

Nothing else unusual happened along the way. With Zhuxie Chixin, King Liang, and Liu Yao here, as well as a large contingent made up of the Embroidered Envoy and Imperial Guards, there was no way a small group of assassins could do anything. Only a giant rebel army would stand a chance.

As they drew nearer to the capital, Chu Chuyan grew more and more worried, and regret began to creep into her heart. They were already in critical danger, yet she had let petty jealousy overcome her earlier!

Several imperial guards came by, trying to gain some favors from her, but she only found them annoying. She gave a few curt responses, then went back inside the carriage.

Those guards sighed as they stared at her graceful figure. "She really is a goddess, descended from the highest of heavens! Why is that Zu An so lucky?"

“Is he though? We’re almost at the capital. He doesn’t have many days left to live.”

“Who cares, man. If I could be young miss Chu’s husband for even a single day, I wouldn’t give a sh*t if I died tomorrow.”

“Look at this disgusting bootlicker.”

“What, you wouldn’t?”

“Of course I wouldn’t! I need two days at the very least.”

...

Meanwhile, inside the carriage, Zu An couldn’t help but chuckle. “It seems your charm is still as potent as ever.”

Chu Chuyan blushed. “Even you are making fun of me,” she said with a snort.

She could vaguely pick up what they were saying behind her back as well. Even though she was a little annoyed, she wouldn’t really do anything about it. Cutting out their tongues as soon as they said something unpleasant was something only a witch would do. It just didn’t match her style.

She suddenly wrinkled her nose. “Huh? Why is there a strange smell in here?”

Zu An began to sweat buckets. It was probably Daji’s scent, lingering in the air. That’s strange, though. Daji doesn’t even have a soul, so there’s no way she would wear any fragrances on herself. Where the hell did this smell come from, then?

Also, this bloody woman’s nose is like a dog’s! Why is she so sensitive towards other people’s smells? Everything is the same to us guys—it all smells good anyway.

He didn’t dare summon Daji to introduce her. After all, Chu Chuyan had already been so jealous just a few days ago. He’d only be asking for a swift death if he summoned another woman now.

He’d tell her about it after she calmed down a little.

Zu An quickly changed the topic. “Didn’t you say that it was better if you didn’t stay inside this carriage all the time? Why does it seem like you’ve been staying longer and longer recently?”

Chu Chuyan sighed. “Ah Zu, it’s only three days before we reach the capital.”

Zu An was stunned. He knew that she was worried for his safety. After all, from her perspective, his future looked grim.

He couldn’t reply to her, though, because a pair of soft lips were pressed against his.

After his initial shock, Zu An reacted quickly. He knew that she was being so proactive because she was afraid that they would soon be separated forever.

Zu An felt a tender warmth surge within him, and he immediately embraced her slim waist.

Suddenly, Chu Chuyan moved her tender body upwards, and faint snowflakes seemed to flutter around the two of them.

"What is this?" Zu An asked curiously.

Chu Chuyan's cheeks were rosy and beautiful. Her voice was incredibly soft. "This blocks any sound from getting out..."

Zu An trembled. He never expected such a proactive move from her usually cold and easily-embarrassed self. He could no longer hold himself back and threw himself at her. "Don't... don't take off my clothes. There won't be enough time if someone comes in..." Chu Chuyan said, biting her lip. She never imagined that she would one day utter such words.

When she thought about how much Zu An had done for her, she gradually calmed down.

Her warning made sense to Zu An. If someone caught them in the act, he would be the one losing out. He let it be, and the two of them made do.

They were newlyweds, yet they had been forced apart due to family circumstances, and were only reunited after such a long time apart. When sparks flew, there was no way for them to hold themselves back.

Chu Chuyan clenched her teeth and held it all in. Even though she had already done what she could to stop any sound from leaking out, she still didn't dare make any noise. However, the longer things went on, the more quickly her body failed her...

...

Meanwhile, the imperial guards outside glanced at the carriage from time to time.

"Why does it seem like the carriage is shaking a little? Do you think..."

"Shut up! First Miss Chu is a goddess among goddesses. There's no way it's what you're thinking!"

"You're right, haha... But he is still her husband. My mind can't help but wander when they're both hiding inside."

"There's no need for you to worry. That Zu fellow doesn't have many days left to live, anyway. Once First Miss Chu recovers her freedom, she'll be fair game for all of us."

"As for me, I don't even have any excessive expectations. I'd be satisfied if I could just exchange a few more words with her."

"Pah! Disgusting bootlicker. I'm honestly embarrassed to be in the same group as you."

...

After what seemed like an eternity, this unattainable goddess was left lying in Zu An's embrace, drained of all energy. Her rosy complexion and her blissful expression belied her earlier bliss.

"Ah Zu, I'll have to go off on my own earlier. We'll meet again at the capital." Chu Chuyan's fingers gently caressed her lover's face, her eyes filled with reluctance.

Zu An knew that she was going to ask her grandfather for help. Even though he knew that there was little chance of success, he didn't want to dampen her mood. He lowered his head and kissed her

glistening red lips. “Let’s leave everything to fate. There’s no need to try to force an outcome. You have to trust me. I have my own way out.”

Chu Chuyan grunted in acknowledgement, then snuggled against him like a kitten. She wanted to stay like this, forever and ever...

Unfortunately, they still had to separate in the end. After a short rest to recover her strength, she left.

...

Zu An was bored to death after she left. Fortunately, they reached the capital in three days.

Zu An was quite shaken when he saw the magnificent city gates. He could vaguely sense a strange pressure surrounding him after entering the city.

As if sensing his confusion, Zhuxie Chixin said, “There is a large formation protecting the capital. It intimidates petty scoundrels and restricts all flight. Those who wantonly cause trouble in the capital will suffer a vicious rebound from the formation. Don’t say I didn’t warn you.”

Zu An smiled. “I don’t have many days left to live in the capital anyway. These restrictions don’t matter much to me.”

Zhuxie Chixin was taken aback. “You’re surprisingly open-minded. It is already dark, so we’ll spend the night in the city. We’ll leave for the palace tomorrow morning.”

Zu An frowned. What kind of joke is this? This is the technique for granting eternal life that the emperor needs! Forget about it being dark—even if the emperor was plowing away at a concubine, he should immediately summon me once he learned that I arrived, right?

Why are they keeping me out in the city for a night? They’re taking risks for no reason.

Something’s not right!

Chapter 568: Pretty Features

Zu An was taken to a secluded residence to spend the night. It wasn’t far from the imperial palace, and he could vaguely make out the vermillion walls and bright yellow glazed roof tiles of the imperial palace from where he was.

This place was probably chosen as it provided quick access to the imperial palace the next morning.

The security was rather tight, even though King Liang and Liu Yao both left, most likely returning to their own duties.

Zhuxie Chixin left as well, presumably to report to the emperor.

Zu An was a bit confused by the remaining guards outside. Was Zhuxie Chixin really that confident? Even though these guards weren’t terrible, the top three experts had all left. Did they not fear that someone might seize this opportunity to make a move?

He even wondered if Zhuxie Chixin had been bought by a certain faction. However, both the members of the Sang clan and Chu Chuyan seemed fully convinced that Zhuxie Chixin was the emperor's most trusted subordinate.

If even such a confidante could be bought, it would only prove the emperor's incompetence. There was no way such a person could have risen to become the world's most powerful expert!

Zu An really couldn't figure out why they would make him wait a whole night before entering the palace. He felt like a sick person waiting for his shots. The needles weren't even that bad—what was most agonizing was the wait.

He was also curious why Chu Chuyan hadn't appeared. She promised to meet up again at the capital. Shouldn't they already be together again?

...

Chu Chuyan was currently in the Qin Manor, a panicked expression on her face. "My respected grandfather, I have never asked you for anything in my life. But if you refuse to do anything now, Ah Zu will die for sure!"

Across from her was a tall and valiant-looking elder. Even though his hair was streaked with silver, he did not seem frail or aged, but gave off an aura of authority and power.

Despite his advanced age, his brows were sharp and his eyes were clear, and his complexion was excellent. It was easy to imagine how handsome and suave he had been in his younger years.

This was none other than Chu Chuyan's grandfather, the number-one ranked official in the imperial military, Vanguard General Qin Zheng.

At the moment, he was focused on the paper in front of him, his brush making meticulous strokes as characters slowly took form. He seemed completely deaf to Chu Chuyan's pleas.

Chu Chuyan bit her lip. Her anxiety was killing her. Her grandfather was clearly a military leader, yet he loved to act like a cultured snob. He loved it when others praised him for his scholarly side.

His calligraphy was clearly average, yet he just had to act as though he was some sort of master.

Of course, Chu Chuyan would never speak such thoughts out loud. Her grandfather was rather open-minded when it came to other things, but he would immediately lose his temper if anyone brought up this touchy subject.

The standard of his calligraphy was far below that of any master, but there was a certain grace to his movements with the brush.

This was the first thing that made people take notice and praise him for, but it soon got out of hand. Over time, their praises ended up making this man think that he really was some reincarnated master of calligraphy.

Qin Zheng finally completed the piece in front of him, and brought out his private seal to mark it. There was a satisfied expression on his face. "Chuyan, come over here and tell me what you think of this piece."

Chu Chuyan's eyelids twitched when she saw the words: 'tranquility yields transcendence'. This was clearly a warning for her to guard against pride and impatience, and to calm her mind first.

But Zu An had already arrived at the capital! How could she remain calm?

Chu Chuyan forced herself to utter some faint praise, since she truly needed his help.

Qin Zheng snorted. "Aren't you being too obvious with your false flattery? Hmph. I remember that you were never a liar before. You've picked up a pile of bad habits after marrying that hoodlum."

Chu Chuyan became unhappy. "Zu An is not a hoodlum."

"He's just a local rascal from the streets. What else can he be but a hoodlum?" Qin Zheng was clearly unhappy. "I really didn't know what your useless father was thinking. He actually picked a random hoodlum from that small place as his son-in-law! It's utterly preposterous."

Chu Chuyan knew that her grandfather still resented her father. As someone from the younger generation, though, it wasn't her place to butt in, especially on this topic.

Qin Zheng was clearly not done. "Given your beauty and cultivation aptitude, every outstanding man would desire to be with you. Yet that disgraceful father and muddle-headed mother of yours ended up letting you marry that piece of trash. Now, you're even a widow!"

Chu Chuyan forced her voice to remain calm. "Ah Zu is not trash. In my view, no other man in this entire world can compare to him."

"What the hell did that fellow do to your head?" Qin Zheng frowned. "You and your mother are of the same breed after all."

Chu Chuyan bit her lip. Things were clearly not going well. But for Zu An's sake, she held her temper and tried to reason with him. "Which other man can cause His Majesty such concern? The fact that Ah Zu was able to obtain the Phoenix Nirvana Sutra alone proves that he is extraordinary."

Qin Zheng sneered. "I was still feeling fine until you mentioned it, but now that you've brought it up, I've grown annoyed. All was well for King Qi's faction, but now, some stupid brat has appeared with the Phoenix Nirvana Sutra, which supposedly grants immortality! We have no choice now but to lay low."

Chu Chuyan couldn't help but say, "Grandfather, I don't understand why the Qin clan insists on joining this feud. Even though my great-aunt is King Qi's mother, that alone isn't enough for the entire Qin clan to be tied to the same ship! A single mishap will lead to the entire clan's eradication!"

Qin Zheng grew serious. "You are a cultivator as well, so you should understand the reasoning behind my belief that stagnation is equivalent to regression. Even though the Qin clan is the top military clan right now, can the same be said in the next one or two decades? There are many clans eyeing our position, waiting to take our place, wishing to enjoy the glory and honor that we do, and to seize our resources. How can I do nothing about this?

"It is all your mother's fault!" Qin Zheng grew more and more worked up. "Back then, your great-aunt was married to King Qi's father. Our plan was to marry your mother into the palace as a concubine. This way, we would have our feet in both puddles, so it wouldn't matter which side won and lost. We would

have come out ahead either way. However, your mother was possessed by a pig, and insisted on eloping with that trash Chu Zhongtian, leaving us with no choice but to throw our lot in with one faction.”

Chu Chuyan was speechless.

This was the first time she was hearing about this. Her father was truly formidable, to be able to steal away the emperor’s woman!

I wondered why His Majesty was always out to get our Chu clan. I never knew this angle existed.

Qin Zheng grew increasingly unhappy when he saw the corners of her lips lift upwards. “What are you smiling about? Giving birth to daughters is truly equivalent to losing money! Your mother acts like this, and you as well!”

Chu Chuyan knew that he was only saying this because he was angry, not because he really bore her malice. She helped him back into his chair. “Grandfather, please drink some tea to ease your mood.”

Qin Zheng took the teacup from her to quench his dry throat. “You used to be so cold to everyone, but now you’ve actually learned how to curry favor for that Zu An’s sake. Now, even I am growing a little interested in seeing what kind of person that kid is for myself.”

Chu Chuyan was delighted. “Grandfather, are you agreeing to save him?”

Qin Zheng shook his head. “This is the emperor we’re talking about. If he wants someone dead, who can save that person? Let alone the fact that it isn’t just the emperor who wants him dead.”

Chu Chuyan’s expression changed slightly. She was just about to probe further when Qin Zheng flicked out his hand to strike her acupoint. “Take the young miss away. She is not permitted to even take half a step out of her room for the next few days.”

“Grandfather!” Chu Chuyan cried out in alarm. However, Qin Zheng remained unfazed no matter how she implored him.

After she was brought away, Qin Zheng looked in the direction of the imperial palace and sighed. “Back then, I was too tenderhearted towards your mother, and ended up ruining the rest of her life. I will not repeat that disaster this time.”

...

As all this was going on, Zu An was meditating in his room, when the door suddenly flew open. He opened his eyes, and was stunned by what he saw.

He expected to be faced by some vicious assassin, but he was instead greeted by an extravagantly-dressed young man. This young man was handsome and had a slim build. He looked a little frail, but his bearing was perfect, and his suave appearance left a deep impression.

This young man would surely be idolized by all the young girls in any school in Zu An’s previous life. Even the hottest stars would pale in comparison.

After arriving in this world, the most handsome man he had seen was Xie Xiu. Of course, this was putting aside what he saw in the mirror every day. However, this world actually had someone who was even more beautiful, and even more feminine Xie Xiu!

Zu An glanced at his chest. There was nothing outstanding there.

He then looked at his throat, and could vaguely make out an Adam's apple.

Zu An's mouth twitched. It wasn't a woman masquerading as a man. How boring.

The young man was also sizing him up curiously. When he noticed Zu An's rude and intrusive eyes, he immediately grew angry. "What the hell are you looking at? I have no idea what the heck my big sister sees in you!"

Chapter 569: Younger Brother-In-Law and Younger Sister-In-Law

Only now did Zu An notice that this young man bore a slight resemblance to Chu Chuyan and Chu Huanzhao. He sighed. These really were outstanding genes!

He was stunned speechless by his words, though. It was another brat! What kind of tone is that?

He might have been slightly more tolerant if he was a girl, but this was a damned man! A potential sister-in-law had suddenly become a brother-in-law. This difference between expectation and reality only served to make his crass tone seem worse.

"Of course she fell for me because I'm handsome and outstanding. She was charmed by me, and did not fall for a certain someone who blurts out crude words at the very first meeting."

This young man's expression flickered when he heard the mockery in Zu An's voice. "The rumors were true, after all! You're just a smooth talker, a good-for-nothing hoodlum."

You have successfully trolled Chu Youzhao for 477 Rage points!

Zu An immediately became annoyed. "Damned brat, where is your respect for your brother-in-law? What the heck is all of this nonsense? Has everything you've studied in the capital all these years passed out of your ass instead of going to your head?"

"Such filthy speech!" Chu Youzhao scoffed. "Leaving aside the fact that my big sis already divorced you, I would never acknowledge you even if you were still together!"

You have successfully trolled Chu Youzhao for 571 Rage points!

Zu An leaned casually into his chair. "Your elder sister acknowledged me, and your dad and your mom did too. Who gives a sh*t about your opinion? Do I need your approval?"

Who knew what lay ahead for him? Moreover, he was already annoyed because he didn't get to meet Chu Chuyan or Pei Mianman. Since this brat had shown a terrible attitude from the start, it was only expected that he would receive the same in return.

"You!" Chu Youzhao immediately erupted in fury.

You have successfully trolled Chu Youzhao for 999 Rage points!

He finally couldn't hold back anymore, and sent a fist flying towards Zu An's face.

Zu An's eyes narrowed. Peak of the fourth rank! This kid's pretty good for his age.

However, Zu An was already used to opponents on a whole different level. If they weren't at the eighth or ninth rank, then they were master rank or higher. To him, any attack on this level would be full of flaws.

He turned to the side and grabbed his fist. With a pull and push, he disrupted Chu Youzhao's center of gravity, and then easily twisted his arm behind him, pressing his body against a nearby table.

"Aren't you embarrassed by your lack of skill? It's honestly a miracle that you've managed to survive for this long," Zu An said with a sigh.

"I was just caught off guard! If you have the guts, then let me go and face me again!" Chu Youzhao was ashamed and angry. Why is this guy so strong? Could his cultivation be much higher than mine?

Impossible! The teachers at the Imperial Academy and the seniors of the family all praised me for my outstanding aptitude! Only my big sis could compare to me back when she was my age!

With such amazing aptitude, access to a sea of resources from a young age, and the best teachers at his disposal, there was no way a random hoodlum who had grown up on the streets could be stronger.

Perhaps it's a lack of fighting experience. This fellow had grown up in the slums, after all, so he was surely more experienced when it came to a real fight. I was surely just caught off guard.

Zu An picked up one of the decorative scrolls from the table. "All right, your brother-in-law will teach you your first lesson today. If you lose, you lose! There's no excuse for losing. Would your enemies give you a second chance?"

With that, he slapped the scroll that he had picked up against the brat's buttocks. This little brat seemed to have been spoiled, growing up in a luxurious environment. He was used to being bossy and unruly, and was in urgent need of a beating.

"You... how dare you hit me there?" Chu Youzhao was instantly dazed. A mixture of shame and anger made his face go red.

You have successfully trolled Chu Youzhao for 999 Rage points!

"What do you mean? Do you want me to hit your face instead of your buttocks?" Zu An smacked him again.

He still had the Chu clan and Qin clan to consider. If he hit his face, it might leave a mark, which would make things awkward for everyone.

However, there was no problem if he smacked the brat's bottom. Even if this kid told on him, there was no way he would pull down his pants as proof.

"I... I'm going to kill you!" Chu Youzhao struggled fiercely. Unfortunately, Zu An was too strong, and he could not wiggle free.

“Your brother-in-law will teach you your second lesson now. You should submit when it is time to submit. A wise man submits to circumstances.” As soon as the words left his mouth, Zu An smacked the scroll down again.

“Ah!!” Chu Youzhao screamed. “You hoodlum, how dare you do this to me! My father, my big sister, and my grandfather will never forgive you for this!”

You have successfully trolled Chu Youzhao for 999 Rage points!

Zu An snorted. “Weren’t you acting all high and mighty just a second ago? Why are you suddenly relying on others now? It’s time for your third lesson from your brother-in-law. When outside, you need to rely on yourself. Don’t abuse your position to kick others around.”

Chu Youzhao was about to go crazy. When had he ever been treated like this before? He couldn’t stand being hit in such a sensitive spot by a man. He cursed Zu An furiously.

Unfortunately, each curse was met by a furious strike.

Zu An couldn’t help but laugh. “Hey, do you have some weird fetish? Are you cursing more, hoping that I’ll hit you harder?”

“You!” Chu Youzhao was almost whimpering at this point. He didn’t dare curse anymore. In fact, he was starting to grow afraid after such a fierce beating.

The worst thing was, even though it had hurt in the beginning, a strange feeling had now begun to arise within him each time the scroll hammered down, making his heart rate quicken.

Zu An was speechless when he saw the tears brimming within the brat’s eyes. “Come on, you’re already a grown man. Are you really going to cry just like that? Ah, forget it. I’ll let you go if you call me ‘brother-in-law’.”

Chu Youzhao turned his head to the side and pursed his lips tightly, stubbornness written all over his face.

Zu An wasn’t freaky enough to force a man to call him ‘brother-in-law’. Since he wasn’t willing, he immediately turned his attention to something that was puzzling him. “How did you get in?”

There were guards everywhere, and he was a criminal. How had this fellow managed to strut right in?

Chu Youzhao wanted to ignore him at first, but when he saw that Zu An was about to hit him again—and he was not willing to call him ‘brother-in-law’—he had no choice but to reply, “My grandfather told me to come here. He gave me his command token. He is a high-ranking official in the military, and my elder sister... wanted me to pass some words to you. We’re all family, sort of, so those guards didn’t stop me.”

“Where is your big sister? Why isn’t she here? Also, what did she want you to tell me?” Zu An asked impatiently.

Chu Youzhao snorted. “My big sister obviously feels disinclined to meet with you, so she told me to tell you to cease your delusional thinking. The two of you have been fully separated... Ah!!! Why are you hitting me again?!”

You have successfully trolled Chu Youzhao for 233 Rage points!

“Why would your big sister tell you to say that? You’re obviously making that sh*t up, so you deserve to get hit.” Zu An obviously didn’t believe a word. “Your big sister was probably detained by the Qin clan and couldn’t come.”

“How did you know?” Chu Youzhao blurted out.

Zu An snorted. He’d seen this cliché far too many times in TV dramas.

Chu Youzhao said, “Indeed, my elder sister wanted my grandfather to save you, but grandfather refused. His Majesty wants your life. How can my grandfather save you? You’re dead anyway, so if you really care about my big sister, then just be the bigger person and write a letter of separation. It’s better to get the pain over with than to prolong the agony. My big sister is so beautiful and stunning. How can her life be ruined at the hands of... Ah!!! Why are you hitting me again?!”

Zu An sneered. “You were trying to instigate your brother-in-law’s separation from your own sister. Doesn’t that deserve a beating?”

“Nonsense! You’re clearly hitting me because you like it!” the hint of a sob crept into Chu Youzhao’s voice.

“You’re not even a pretty girl, and I’m not a freak. Why the hell would I enjoy this?” Zu An let him go with a disdainful expression. “Look at you, already a man yet still crying so easily. Stop being a sissy.”

“I...” Chu Youzhao, filled with anger and embarrassment, almost charged at him again after just being released. However, as soon as he saw Zu An’s expression, he immediately grew terrified and hurriedly said, “I’m only doing what’s best for my big sister! You can’t be so selfish and ruin her whole life just for your own sake!”

“Look at you, sitting on your moral high horse.” Zu An eyed him coldly. “Keep spouting such nonsense, and I’ll hit you again.”

“You!” Chu Youzhao could not erase the humiliation from his mind, and he charged at Zu An again. “I’m going to fight you to the death!”

Right then, a glint of cold light streaked into the room. Chu Youzhao was about to run straight into it. Zu An pressed a hand against his chest and pushed him away. “Be careful!”

Staggered by the sudden shove, Chu Youzhao fell onto his bottom. A black arrow was stuck to the wall behind where he had been standing, still vibrating. It was easy to imagine what would have happened, had they moved a moment later.

Zu An stared at his hand absentmindedly, then looked at Chu Youzhao, “You’re a...”

The softness he’d felt was just too real. What man had pecs like this?

Zu An was stunned. So the heir to the Chu clan was actually a girl! Should he praise Chu Zhongtian or blame him for not trying harder? He’d actually sired three daughters in a row.

Having been in this world for quite a while now, he understood the order of succession within the Zhou Dynasty. It was common for clans to lose their titles if no male heirs could be produced. It wasn't surprising at all that Chu Zhongtian would choose to pass his youngest daughter off as a man.

Chapter 570: One Step, One Kill

Her chest looked flat and ordinary, and there even seemed to be an Adam's apple on her neck. These were probably just illusions created by an artifact.

Her chest was already so well-developed despite her young age. What more when she grew older?

Zu An sighed. These sisters all came from the same mother, so why was it that the oldest sister and the third sister had inherited Qin Wanru's assets, while the second sister was as flat as an airport runway?

Poor Chu Huanzhao!

Chu Youzhao was left in a daze by the touch on her chest. Getting her bottom smacked by a man was one thing, especially since Zu An had thought that she was a boy, but what now? If he ever made mention of what had just happened, she might just die of embarrassment!

She saw him wiggle his fingers a little, a strange smile appearing on his face. Something snapped within her, and rage and humiliation overwhelmed her. "You shameless pervert, I'll take your life!"

You have successfully trolled Chu Youzhao for 1024 Rage points!

She drew a short sword and stabbed it at him. Despite her earlier anger, she had only wanted to fight him bare-handed, since he was still her brother-in-law. Now, however, all she cared about was getting revenge.

Although she was quick, someone else was quicker. A black figure shot past her, also aiming for Zu An.

"Get lost!"

The assassin saw her as a nuisance and flung her aside.

Chu Youzhao saw the cold glint in the other person's hand, and quickly brought her sword in to defend herself. She was rather surprised by her own impressive reaction.

A clear tone sounded as her short sword clashed with this newcomer's unknown weapon. A tremendous shock jolted her whole body, causing her to tumble backwards and slam heavily into the wall.

She coughed out a mouthful of blood. The qi within her was all over the place and she couldn't muster any more strength.

She was horrified. Her cultivation was at the pinnacle of the fourth rank. She was first among her peers, and was considered an excellent warrior, even by the standards of the wider world. How was it that she couldn't even handle a casual blow from this assailant?

She noticed that most of the assassin's concentration was on Zu An. This idle attack probably only had twenty to thirty percent of his strength behind it.

This assassin is probably at the sixth rank.

Many teachers at the academy were at this level, which was why she was able to roughly gauge his level.

Isn't this pervert dead for sure, then?

After all, he was just a hoodlum from the streets. Even though she had heard that he'd encountered some opportunities recently, his upbringing was much too poor. There was a limit to how much he could improve in such a short amount of time.

Chu Youzhao bit her lip. Even though she had cursed death on Zu An, she had only done so out of anger. In the end, he was still her brother-in-law. She felt extremely conflicted. Watching him get assassinated would be an entirely different thing.

Zu An's eyes narrowed when he saw his assailant's pitch-black clothes. He had been attacked by similarly-dressed people on the way to the capital. His previous attackers had been dark elves, but the person in front of him now did not seem to have the same slim build.

He finally identified the cold glint of metal on his assailant's hands. These were tiger-claw blades, which he had attached to his fists. Those who used such weapons were fighters skilled in close-quarters combat.

He was also a cultivator at the pinnacle of the sixth rank!

In the past, he might have been forced to constantly evade, and would have had no choice but to hold on as he suffered wave upon wave of relentless blows.

However, after absorbing Mosquito Daoist's cultivation, his assailant seemed to be moving in slow motion.

He stretched out his fingers, and instantly clasped the vicious tiger-claw blades between them.

Shining Finger!

Chu Youzhao was looking on with great worry, and was immediately stupefied when she saw this. She subconsciously rubbed her eyes. What the heck is going on? Is there something wrong with my eyes?

The claw-wielding assailant was stunned as well. Something's not right! Shouldn't I be the one overwhelming my opponent and battering him with a storm of attacks?

The intelligence had stated that his target was slightly unusual, but surely this was just too much!

He tried to free his blades several times, but they did not budge.

Zu An sighed. "Do you think you're Wolverine?"

His fingers twisted as he spoke, snapping one of the blades. Then, with a casual wave of his hand, he cut through this assailant's arm muscles, then brought the broken blade up to his neck. Since he had attacked first, there was no need for Zu An to show him any mercy.

Halfway through these motions, an alarm went off inside his mind. He quickly backed up and kicked this tiger claw assailant in the chest, cutting off his life force.

He harnessed the reaction force to send himself backwards. The spot he was just standing in was covered in a dozen six-pointed throwing stars.

He turned around to see an assassin—who looked like a ninja—swinging a blade at him.

So, there are ninjas in this world. Zu An was shocked. With a light tap of his toes, he used the Sunflower Phantasm to evade this attack, then struck this new assailant with his Shining Finger.

He expected to immediately immobilize his opponent, but a frown appeared on Zu An's face as he sensed that something was off.

A sharp 'Thunk!' accompanied his strike. His opponent had somehow turned into a block of wood.

Ninjas were always full of tricks.

With another flash of cold light, a pitch-black sword thrust at him maliciously.

Chu Youzhao felt extremely ashamed of herself. She had never seen such a fast sword thrust! She had been quite satisfied with her own display of skill earlier on, but it was dirt in comparison to this one.

"Be careful!" She yelled out subconsciously. However, her voice came to a strangled halt, because she saw that a sword had already passed through Zu An's neck.

Is he dead? She shivered. Even though she found him annoying, her eldest sister liked him a lot. She would definitely be heartbroken once she found out what happened.

Her eyes suddenly widened in disbelief, however, as she suddenly saw Zu An appear in another corner of the room. A finger was already thrusting into the middle of the swordsman's back.

Spurt!

Blood burst out from his chest. The blood vessels within his heart had been forcefully ruptured, causing him to die instantly.

Yet another assassin had just broken in. He had a strange bow in his hands, full of sharp edges. This was clearly not an ordinary bow, but rather one that was geared for close-quarter combat.

The archer was already regretting his choice. He had hoped to complete his mission as quickly as possible by entering the room, since it was difficult for him to line up a clean shot from outside. There was no way for him to know beforehand that his opponent would be far stronger than his intelligence had stated. It was too late to retreat to a safer distance now.

Zu An had noted the power of the initial arrow, and knew that this opponent would pose a huge threat if he was allowed to get away. As such, he immediately summoned Grandgale to close the distance instantly.

The archer spun his bow rapidly as he danced about, showing off a set of outstanding martial skills. There were no openings in his defense.

He knew that all he had to do was hold on long enough for his companion to mount an attack. He could use that opportunity to retreat to a safer distance, which would give him time to take down his opponent.

Unfortunately, a strange bird suddenly appeared in front of him, and a terrible pain seemed to reach deep into his soul. The slightest hint of sluggishness crept into his impregnable defensive movements.

In that split second, a sword flashed through.

This assassin had always admired his companion, whose sword techniques were outstanding and tricky to deal with. He had always felt that his companion's swordsmanship was unmatched, given his cultivation level.

In this instant, however, he knew that he'd been wrong all along. He couldn't even see this sword strike clearly. It was just a blur before his eyes, then he felt a chill slip across his throat.

As an assassin, he obviously knew that he had been struck in the neck. In the final moments before his death, he could only curse the one who had provided them with the intelligence for this mission.

Bloody hell! Didn't they say that the target only had five levels of cultivation? Even if you say that he possesses strange and unpredictable skills, four sixth rank assassins should be more than enough to spare!

As assassins, they never fought enemies head-on, and every one of them had the ability to challenge those whose cultivations were higher than their own. Many of them had even killed seventh-ranked experts before.

Despite all this, this fellow had slaughtered them like chickens!

Is he at the eighth rank already? No, not even an eighth rank could take us out that easily! Is he at the ninth rank, or even a master?

How the hell is that possible?!

Zu An whipped around suddenly. He frowned as he looked towards a corner of the room.

The ninja assassin had finally revealed himself. Unfortunately, he was holding onto Chu Youzhao, his blade pressed up against her neck. His voice was hoarse and unpleasant. "Don't move, or else your friend dies!"