

Immortal 581

Chapter 581: No Middle Path

Zu An immediately waved his hands and said, "I'm not sharp at all, nor do I know how to read people! I'm also terribly clumsy, and I definitely can't tend to your majesty properly!"

The corners of the emperor's lips curved upwards as he took in Zu An's nervous expression. "You can learn if you do not know how. There are many experienced old eunuchs in the palace who can teach you slowly."

Zu An gritted his teeth and said, "I'm sure Your Majesty needs me to take care of something. If you dare to turn me into a eunuch, then there will be no further discussion. I'd rather die than let that happen!"

The emperor's eyes narrowed, and the room chilled a few degrees. "Are you threatening me?"

Zu An braced himself and said, "I am merely speaking the truth."

The emperor snorted. "You really are quite brazen. Forget it, I'll let you keep your two taels of flesh for now. But I'll send you to the castration room if you handle things poorly."

Zu An was not amused.

My jewels definitely weigh more than two taels. You might be mentally scarred if I show them to you.

The emperor removed the green hat from his head. After caressing it gently, he picked up a book from his desk and tossed it to Zu An. "Memorize the contents, and then find a way to get it into King Qi's hands."

Zu An instinctively caught it. The cover of this book seemed made of gold, but at the same time, it wasn't. It was surely something extraordinary. The book felt simple yet ancient, as if it had existed for over ten thousand years.

This wasn't what shocked him the most. What threw him off the most were the words written on the cover, in bold and flamboyant calligraphy—Phoenix Nirvana Sutra!

Had the emperor already managed to obtain the real Phoenix Nirvana Sutra?

Zu An immediately broke out in cold sweat. However, he quickly realized that, if the emperor really knew the Phoenix Nirvana Sutra, he would already be a dead man.

The emperor frowned. "You seem nervous. Why?"

Given his cultivation, even the slightest acceleration of the heart rate or the subtle opening of the pores could not escape his notice.

Zu An knew that the emperor was already suspicious, and did not dare act carelessly. He carefully considered his reply, then said, "I'm still a nobody. Now that I've been drawn into the struggle between Your Majesty and King Qi, I realize that either one of you could kill me with just a thought. That was an alarming insight."

This was actually something that worried him. After all, he'd faced all manner of assassination attempts on the way to the capital. Even though he wasn't certain if King Qi was related to all of them, he was definitely involved somehow.

King Qi was definitely powerful in his own right, if he dared to go against the emperor. He could sense that the clash between the two factions had reached a climax even while he was still back in Brightmoon City. If he got involved in this on his own, he might not make it out alive, even if he had nine lives.

The emperor seemed relieved by his explanation. "You're already involved. It is too late to try to stay out of it."

Zu An fell silent. He'd been forced into this struggle from the moment he leaked out news regarding the Phoenix Nirvana Sutra.

However, he didn't regret making this technique public. Without the emperor to keep the various powers in check, he might not have been able to survive long enough to become one of his pawns. Without this lifeline, being kidnapped and tortured for the secrets of the Phoenix Nirvana Sutra would have been a likely fate.

Now, he had just barely managed to forge a path to his own survival. Even though it was still dangerous, it was already more than he could have asked for.

Zu An opened the book. He could tell that the technique recorded within was also profound and mysterious. Since the emperor was giving it to King Qi, though, it was surely nothing good.

If he recalled correctly, King Qi was the emperor's brother.

He thought that he was already quite crafty, but he paled in comparison to the emperor.

"By the way, even though you are quite sharp, I have to mention that the Chu clan and Qin clan are in-laws. I'm doing this to warn you not to do anything foolish at a crucial moment. The Qin clan is one of the core forces within King Qi's faction. If you subconsciously side with King Qi and betray me, heh... The castration room always welcomes more eunuchs, and the entertainment department always needs more women. The Chu clan seems to have several outstanding candidates, such as their Madam and the young misses... I've given you fair warning."

Zu An forced himself to remain silent.

This dogsh*t emperor is going too far! He's blackmailing me so openly!

The emperor snorted when he saw his expression. "Don't think I'm a vicious person. Consider everything carefully. Who was trying to kill you along the way, and how many losses did they suffer because of you? There is already an insoluble hatred between you and them. Your only choice is to follow me. Only then do you have any prospects.

"I'm sure it stings to be known as the drafted son-in-law of the Chu clan, and the Qin clan has no love for the Chu clan. Many clans are more formidable than the Chu clan. Even if you seek out King Qi's faction, hoping that they are willing to look past all their losses and take you in, you will only be a drafted son-in-law attached to the Chu clan. You won't have any status to speak of. As long as you do your job well, I

can grant you the Madam and the young misses of the Chu clan. You can even have your pick of the ladies in the capital. I believe you know which choice you should make.”

As an emperor, he rarely spoke this much, but this matter was just too important. He had to explain it all personally, to avoid a third party getting wind of this.

Zu An secretly berated the emperor. Do I need your help to get the women of the Chu clan? I can get them just fine on my own.

“Huh? What was that about Madam?” He subconsciously blurted out.

My dear emperor, do you have some weird fetish? She was almost one of your concubines before!

Furthermore, such a thing was absolutely taboo, given his relationship with Chu Chuyan.

The emperor was stunned. He had made that as an offhand comment. However, when he realized the meaning behind his words, a strange smile appeared on his face. “So, you’ve harbored such thoughts towards Qin Wanru.”

As the emperor, he wasn’t scared of his subordinates having desires. What he feared was a lack of desire. Their desires made them easier to control.

Zu An’s face darkened. You were the one who said it. What does it have to do with me?

The emperor continued casually, “Of course, such things are easy enough to deal with. Once King Qi falls, the Chu clan, if it is tied to King Qi’s faction, will have to pay a price. Their women will be taken in by the entertainment department. When that time comes, you can ransom them to your own manor and do whatever you wish with them. No one else will know what happens there. They themselves will only have tears of gratitude for you.”

The entertainment department was where the wives and daughters of traitorous officials were sent. Even though they were considered court prostitutes, they were treated even worse than private prostitutes. The girls in normal brothels still had a chance to ransom themselves, but those in the entertainment department had no hope of getting out. The only way to freedom was if the emperor himself agreed to it.

But the emperor sent those women to the entertainment department precisely to punish officials who broke the law, as a warning for others. Why would he ever let them out?

Of course, if Zu An served the country well and asked for such a favor, it was entirely possible for the emperor to grant him a few of them. However, such a boon was rarely given, so the emperor wasn’t lying when he said that the women of the Chu clan would be extremely grateful to him.

Zu An was slightly disbelieving.

Such a ploy was just too evil! He had considered himself a battle-hardened veteran in this field, given the training he’d received from all his online teachers. Only now did he discover that he was an innocent little flower, pure and white, when compared to the nobility of this world.

The emperor spoke calmly, as though speaking about a completely ordinary matter. Apparently, such things were common among the princes and dukes.

Zu An had to admit anyone else might have been thoroughly convinced. Unfortunately, though, he was a young man who had experienced a modern education. How could he do something like harm the Chu clan for his own selfish interests?

Of course, he wasn't stupid enough to correct the emperor then and there, since this was the only way for him to survive the battle between him and King Qi. On the contrary, it was better for the emperor to harbor such a misunderstanding.

Zu An did not pursue this matter further. "I wonder how Your Majesty plans to make King Qi trust me," he asked instead. "Are you going to pretend to imprison me, and have King Qi's people save me?"

Was he supposed to be a double agent? Unfortunately, no spy in modern history ever met a good ending...

The emperor nodded in satisfaction when he saw how quickly Zu An had accepted his new role. "That won't work. It's too obvious. King Qi has always been careful. He wouldn't fall for something like that."

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"Furthermore," The emperor paused and smiled coldly, "If he really had the chance to get to you, he might be just as happy to kill you as to save you."

Zu An remained silent. He also knew that that was true. He had faced assassins from King Qi's faction on the way to the capital. Even though the two of them had never met, there was already a great enmity between them.

Of course, the emperor wasn't bringing this up time and again out of the goodness of his heart. He was clearly trying to portray himself as benevolent, and that he cared more about Zu An. But was that really the case?

Wei Dan was the emperor's trusted eunuch, and had served him to the best of his ability. However, the emperor hadn't yet asked a single question regarding his death.

His death was likely linked to Zu An, so he was deliberately avoiding this issue. After all, Zu An was currently more useful to him.

He did not know if the emperor would seek to settle this matter in the future. However, regardless of what would eventually happen, the emperor was definitely a cold and decisive man.

"Then what should we do?" Zu An knew that the emperor definitely already had a plan, and was quick to show his cooperation.

The emperor gave him a token of authority. Zu An turned it about in his hands, and noticed the engraving of what seemed like a unicorn on it. This was the mythological animal, the xiezhi, a creature known for its ability to discern between good and evil. He had seen it before on the uniforms of the Embroidered Envoy, but this one was golden, and seemed to carry much more authority.

The emperor said, "I will grant you this golden token, which symbolizes the status of an Embroidered Envoy, placing you only beneath Zhuxie Chixin. You may use it at your own discretion as necessary."

“Thank you, Your Majesty.” Zu An was overjoyed. He quickly put the token away. This is good stuff! Those embroidered envoys had honestly seemed pretty badass as they carried out ‘heaven’s will’. Most importantly, he was now highly-ranked, even among the Embroidered Envoy. Wasn’t he now free to do whatever he wanted?

As if reading his thoughts, the emperor said, “You should not expose this identity. After all, you have a special mission to carry out. Once someone finds out that you are an embroidered envoy equipped with a golden token, your death may come even more swiftly.”

“Thank you, Your Majesty, for your reminder.” Zu An reminded himself to stay alert. The Embroidered Envoys were the emperor’s most trusted aides. If King Qi’s faction found out that he possessed this command token, they might not trust anything he said.

The emperor continued, “This is merely a hidden identity that I am granting you, out of consideration for your safety. Do not tell anyone else about it. I have to give you another public identity. Hm... Since King Qi is currently the crown prince’s imperial preceptor...”

He thought for a moment, and then he called in a eunuch. “Pass down the order. Because Zu An has offered up the Phoenix Nirvana Sutra, he is to be granted the title of Baron for his contributions. His title is...”

He paused for a moment, as if deciding on what would be most appropriate. His eyes quickly lit up. “His title is Phoenix Man.”

Zu An felt his jaw fall to the floor.[1]

“Your Majesty, please give me a different title!” Zu An’s face had turned green. How the hell was he supposed to face anyone with the nickname ‘Phoenix Man’?

The emperor seemed displeased. “Nonsense. You’ve offered up the Phoenix Nirvana Sutra. What else would I call you if not Phoenix Man?”

He wanted to use this title to provoke King Qi’s faction, so he was not so easily put off. He continued, “Furthermore, appoint him as the crown prince’s palace secretary. He will supervise and accompany the crown prince in his studies.”

Zu An immediately understood what the emperor was thinking. The crown prince’s palace secretary was equivalent to a study partner, although he would hold a higher status. He would also concurrently hold the positions of secretary and chamberlain. Since King Qi was the crown prince’s imperial preceptor, they would both be serving as officials within the eastern palace. Contact would be unavoidable, and it wouldn’t draw any suspicion.

In his heart, Zu An was secretly ridiculing the whole situation. King Qi and the crown prince are going crazy fighting over the right of inheritance, yet you made King Qi his goddamned teacher? I wonder which genius came up with that idea.

Of course, that wasn’t even the main point. He still did not want to be known as the bloody Phoenix Man!

The emperor wasn't in the mood to discuss this with him any further. He dismissed him with a wave of his hand, as he already discussed almost everything that had to be discussed. As an emperor, he had many matters to deal with. He couldn't waste any more time on Zu An.

Zu An wanted to complain some more, but the eunuch assigned to escort him was so frightened that he quickly tried to drag him out.

The eunuch was obviously not strong enough to manhandle him, but with a wave of the emperor's sleeves, an invisible force pushed Zu An out of the room.

The instant he was forced out, he saw the emperor pick up the green hat and put it on again. He stroked the hat as he fell into deep thought. It was clear that, even though he sounded as though he did not actually care about this, the temptation of immortality was not so easily brushed aside, especially when he was close to death.

Zu An's lips curved into a smile. Hmph, you said that you didn't want it, but your actions are betraying you.

At this moment, Zhuxie Chixin's voice came from outside. "Congratulations, Phoenix Man!"

The emperor had not prevented those outside from hearing the latter part of his conversation, which was why Zhuxie Chixin knew about this.

Even though his words were congratulatory, his tone was cold, which sent an instinctive chill through Zu An's body.

Zu An's eyelids twitched. "Just call me by my name. Don't use this title."

Zhuxie Chixin was confused, but he wasn't about to argue. "Follow me. I'll escort you out of the palace."

He turned around and led the way.

This was truly a pain in the ass for Zu An. Just walking with this person left him feeling extremely uncomfortable. He opened his mouth to speak several times, but hesitated each time. He wanted to announce that he was an Embroidered Envoy too, but his companion's expression was so unapproachable that he had no chance to do so.

They left the imperial study and wandered around the palace. Zu An suddenly realized that they were still within the inner palace. Clearly, Zhuxie Chixin was allowed inside, so why had he hand Zu An over to Elder Li earlier on?

He was probably in cahoots with the emperor, and they were both trying to lure the snakes out of their holes. They were probably looking to catch the hidden conspirators in one fell swoop.

King Qi's faction had truly suffered disastrous losses as he had made his way to the capital. He had probably cost them a great deal during his journey.

After walking for a while, Zu An suddenly observed, "This isn't the way out of the palace."

Zhuxie Chixin replied, "The words earlier were meant for the eunuchs. His majesty has already secretly identified you as an Embroidered Envoy, so I am bringing you to your residence within the palace first."

"I'm going to be living in the palace?" Zu An was well and truly surprised.

"The Embroidered Envoy are His Majesty's most trusted agents," replied Zhuxie Chixin. "It's only natural that they have to maintain a constant presence within the palace."

"Oh." Zu An was actually a little excited. He was going to live in the imperial palace! This was the dream of countless keyboard warriors!

The imperial palace was such a mysterious place. There were all manner of beautiful concubines and princesses living here...

Pah! I'm a decent person! I'm nothing like them.

"Even though the Embroidered Envoy are the emperor's personal agents, granting them the freedom to enter and leave the inner palace, they are not permitted to enter the inner palace on their own, without an imperial command," warned Zhuxie Chixin. "Anyone found to have violated this will have all of their possessions confiscated, and their clan will be eradicated. I hope that you bear this in mind."

Zu An nodded. This made much more sense. How could the emperor completely let down his guard against him?

The path Zhuxie Chixin chose was rather secluded, and they did not encounter any concubines or maids.

Soon afterwards, they reached a quiet and remote residence. Zhuxie Chixin handed him a key token.

"This is your residence, and this is the key that unlocks the restrictions around this courtyard.

Remember the path you took to get here from the imperial study. His Majesty will summon you to his study often."

As a cultivator, his consciousness was much more formidable than an ordinary person's. Once a cultivator reached a certain rank, they would naturally develop a highly retentive memory. That was why Zhuxie Chixin wasn't worried that Zu An would forget the route, despite only walking through it once.

"Then what about the rest of the compound? I'm not too familiar with this place. Can the Chief Commander show me around?" Zu An asked.

Zhuxie Chixin gave him a warning glare. "The other compounds are where the concubines, the princess, and the young prince live. You should not be going to those places. What are you trying to do?"

Zu An's heart skipped a beat. "I was just asking about it... haha... Thank you for your reminder."

Zhuxie Chixin dismissed his behavior as the curiosity of someone from a poor background. "Familiarize yourself with your residence here. After that, I'll take you to your residence outside the palace."

1. "Phoenix Man" is slang for an ugly duckling, or someone who grew up poor in the countryside, but managed to move to a big city and become successful.

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“Sure.” Zu An had his own staff residence back at Brightmoon Academy, so he was familiar with the unlocking mechanism. He opened the door and took in the rather sizable courtyard. There were even several different rooms within. The environment and layout were rather nice, but of course, it emphasized safety and secrecy. This was probably an occupational hazard of the Embroidered Envoy.

“Where are the other embroidered envoys?” Zu An asked curiously.

Zhuxie Chixin replied, “This is your personal residence. Why would there be any other embroidered envoys here?”

“My personal residence?” Zu An was stunned. Are the benefits really this good? He assumed that he was going to be thrown into a common barracks with other envoys.

Zhuxie Chixin gave him a strange look. “Of course you’ll be living alone. The identities of embroidered envoys are wrapped in mystery. They are almost always masked while on the job. Aside from the emperor, even I do not know the true identities of some of them. Of course it’s not possible for us all to live together.”

“Then where do the others live?” Zu An probed further.

“Their residences are scattered throughout the palace, like your own,” replied Zhuxie Chixin. “However, not many embroidered envoys are qualified to live within the palace... In short, if others come by, you absolutely cannot show your real face to them. You must wear a mask. Masks, uniforms, and other equipment can be found inside. You can look through them later.”

Zu An gasped. “Everything was prepared so quickly? It seems His Majesty had already made these arrangements a while ago.”

Zhuxie Chixin clasped his fist in the direction of the imperial study. “We subordinates cannot presume to know His Majesty’s thoughts.”

Zu An curled his lips in disdain. Why are you sucking up to him all the way over here? There’s no way the emperor can hear or see you.

“By the way, where are the residences of the other embroidered envoys in the palace? I should pay them a visit. It’s better to get to know them sooner rather than later, right?” Zu An asked.

Zhuxie Chixin frowned. “The embroidered envoys usually prefer to remain independent. It’s best if you do not mingle amongst yourselves privately. Furthermore, almost all of them are out investigating cases. They do not spend much time in the palace.”

“They don’t spend much time in the palace?” Zu An was momentarily shocked, but a thought struck him. Investigating cases was probably a secondary reason. The main reason was probably the restrictiveness of living within the palace. None of them would be allowed outside their own residence, and spending all day in this small space was akin to imprisonment.

It would be a disaster if they accidentally ran into a concubine or princess. That was a transgression that would result in the eradication of their entire clan.

Clearly, no other embroidered envoy would wish to live in the palace. Zu An was probably the only one who was this excited.

Zhuxie Chixin was beginning to grow annoyed. "Are you done looking around yet? If you are, we'll be leaving the palace. I'll show you to your residence outside the palace."

"I have another place outside the palace?" Even Zu An was beginning to feel embarrassed. Not only were they distributed tasks, they were distributed houses as well! He had received two of them in one go, one within the palace and one without. He would have been incredibly rich if he'd been given two houses like this in his previous world.

"Of course. We of the Embroidered Envoy have to assume different identities when carrying out our respective tasks. Besides, you also hold the position of the crown prince's secretary, and have no relatives in the capital. We can't just have you sleeping on the streets," said Zhuxie Chixin.

Zu An looked as though he was moved to tears. "The emperor has truly taken good care of me. I will never be able to repay this kindness even in a thousand lifetimes!"

"As long as you have this mindset, then the emperor's trust in you was not in vain." Zhuxie Chixin's expression eased slightly.

It seemed to Zu An that Zhuxie Chixin really was one of the emperor's most loyal men after all. He didn't have enough information earlier on, which was why he had suspected this guy of setting him up.

The two of them swiftly made their way to the palace gates. Along the way, they crossed paths with a lavishly-dressed beauty. Zhuxie Chixin immediately pulled Zu An to the side and lowered his head in greeting.

Even though the commander was devout and respectful, Zu An wasn't so honest. He secretly raised his head to take a peek. He saw a group of maids and eunuchs escorting a beautiful woman past them.

She had a charming and graceful figure, and there was a natural sway to her gait. Oddly enough, she did not give off an aura of seduction. Rather, he only sensed a pure, gentle and graceful bearing.

Hm? It's actually her.

He'd met this woman not too long ago. It was Concubine Bai.

This lavishly-dressed beauty was actually bored to death, and was out for a stroll. She paid no heed to the guards bowing towards her, since it was a habitual sight.

However, she quickly noticed that one of them was actually sneaking looks at her. She was shocked. Did this little guard not understand the rules, or was he truly so brazen?

She was kind-hearted by nature, so she was not about to make a huge fuss over it, in case she harmed his prospects.

She was just about to pretend that she hadn't seen anything when she suddenly exclaimed in surprise. She had already recognized the guard as Zu An. "It's you?"

Her voice was warm and moving, flowing like a gentle stream.

Zu An smiled. "I did not expect that we would meet again so soon."

His words caused a tinge of rosiness to appear on this beauty's cheeks.

Zhuxie Chixin frowned. He had just warned this fella not to interact with the palace concubines, yet an incident had occurred so quickly, and right in front of him as well!

Wait, why does this guy sound so flirtatious?

He could only do his best to remedy the situation. "If I may speak, Concubine Bai. He has just been granted the title of Phoenix Man by His Majesty, and will also serve as the crown prince's secretary. This subordinate is escorting him out of the palace."

Bai Rouxue was completely bowled over by this news. She was familiar with the matters surrounding Zu An. She thought that he was dead for sure, but he had not only been granted a noble title, he was now the crown prince's secretary! How did he manage to accomplish this?

She quickly put aside these thoughts and said with a sweet smile, "This young master has truly been blessed. I'll leave you to take care of the crown prince in the future."

These were appropriate remarks from the crown prince's concubine.

"That is my duty," replied Zu An. "The crown prince and I felt a strange familiarity when we first met. I believe we can become kindred spirits."

"I thank you again for your trouble." His words stirred a strange feeling within Bai Rouxue, but she did not pay them too much heed. She nodded her head and smiled faintly, before the palace maids and eunuchs escorted her away. It was clear that they did not want her conversing with another man for too long.

Zu An breathed in the faint fragrance lingering in the air. Suddenly, it seemed as though he wasn't in such a bad spot after all.

When Concubine Bai left, Zhuxie Chixin frowned. "I warned you before. Why did you take the initiative to talk to her? Thank goodness I was by your side today. If news of this circulates to the wrong people, you won't be able to bear the consequences alone."

Zu An disagreed privately. After all, the emperor still needed him to take down King Qi. Why would he blow up over something this petty? "I was almost punished by the crown princess earlier," he replied, "and I was only able to get out of it thanks to Concubine Bai. I only wanted to express my gratitude to her."

Zhuxie Chixin nodded. He had heard a little about Zu An's encounter with the crown prince and princess. "We'll ignore this for now. Don't do something like that again. You need to be careful while you are in the eastern palace. It'll be bad enough if you provoke the crown prince's other concubines, but you absolutely must not provoke the crown princess or Concubine Bai."

Zu An was stupefied. That damned fatty seemed rather slow, yet he actually had so many girls around him!

Who the hell said that I was fickle in love? I'm not even worth mentioning when compared to these nobles.

"I can understand why I should be wary of the crown princess, but Concubine Bai is only a concubine. Why do I have to be so careful around her?" asked Zu An curiously.

Zhuxie Chixin hesitated, but he knew that the two of them were going to be working together in the future, so he offered Zu An an explanation. "Concubine Bai was personally bestowed to the crown prince by His Majesty. Furthermore, she was the one who gave birth to the crown prince's only son. Naturally, she enjoys special status."

Zu An suddenly felt an urge to gossip, and he fired off a series of questions. "I've heard that Concubine Bai used to be His Majesty's concubine. Is that true? Did His Majesty show her a lot of affection? She and the crown prince..."

The torrent of words caused Zhuxie Chixin's eyelids to twitch uncontrollably. "Shut up! You shouldn't be asking about these things!"

The Embroidered Envoy was traditionally made up of reserved individuals who quietly got things done, yet this fellow had suddenly popped out of nowhere to shatter that custom. It made him doubt the emperor's arrangements for the first time.

His face was gloomy as he led Zu An out of the palace. He stopped in front of a residence outside the capital city. "This residence will be yours."

Zu An saw the characters 'Ding Manor' on the plaque outside the entrance, and peered through the gates. "But there's still people living inside..." he said hesitantly.

"Not for long." Zhuxie Chixin waved his hands. Several embroidered envoys wearing masks appeared, seemingly out of thin air, and rushed into the residence. Several screams erupted, but they were quickly silenced.

"From today, this will be your home," anno

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Zu An frowned. "I could've just bought a place with my own money if you didn't have any vacant buildings. Why did you have to seize someone else's place like this?"

"Do you think that you can buy a house in the capital just because you have money?" said Zhuxie Chixin indifferently.

Zu An snorted. What, is there a bloody lottery system for this too?

"Even if you can't buy one, couldn't I just live in an inn? I really can't stomach this sort of killing."

"You are an Embroidered Envoy, and the crown prince's secretary as well. It would be a huge scandal if we made you live in an inn, and it would be terribly damaging for the reputation of the imperial court," Zhuxie Chixin said with an angry huff. However, he continued, "There's no need for you to fret. The master of this clan was shown the emperor's favor, but he proved disloyal, double-crossing His Majesty and colluding with the Devil Sect. This is the fate they deserve."

Zu An fell silent. Even though he understood the rationale behind it, he had come from a civilized world. He just couldn't accept how human lives weren't valued in this world.

At the same time, he realized that Zhuxie Chixin had deliberately brought him here and showed him this scene as a warning. He was reminding him that, if he did not discharge his duty towards the emperor, he would end up just like this clan.

It took the embroidered envoys some time to clean out the interior, after which, Zhuxie Chixin showed him in.

Zu An had to give the Embroidered Envoy credit. There were no bloodstains left inside. These were definitely true professionals.

Zhuxie Chixin said, "Why don't you stay here from now on? I'll arrange for some maids and servants."

"There's no need. I'm used to living alone, and this place isn't that big. I can take care of everything by myself." Zu An quickly refused the offer. Who knew how many spies would be watching him if he let him arrange for helpers!

Zhuxie Chixin frowned, but he wasn't about to argue over something so trivial. "All right, then. Rest up today, then report to the eastern palace on your own tomorrow morning."

He waved a hand, and a subordinate appeared with several sets of clothes and a command token.

"These are the uniforms and the command token of the crown prince's palace secretary. You can use these to enter the palace, but you must leave the palace before dawn." Zhuxie Chixin lowered his voice. "Of course, given your status as an Embroidered Envoy, you can still stay in the palace, but that might compromise your identity. You can act as you see fit."

"Thank you for the reminder, Chief Commander." Even though Zu An had seen his fair share of degenerate harem web novels, and he secretly desired a harem himself, he wouldn't let that mess with his mind. Besides, the emperor was the number one expert in this world. His divine senses covered the entire imperial palace. Nothing would escape his detection.

On top of all of that, he had bumped into many restrictions while Zhuxie Chixin was escorting him around the imperial palace. If he were to wander around an unfamiliar place like the inner palace, he could easily run into trouble.

Zhuxie Chixin taught him several secret methods of contact unique to the members of the Embroidered Envoy, then got up to leave.

"It's already time to eat. Let me act as a proper host and invite you to a meal." Even Zu An felt as though his tone wasn't all that sincere.

Zhuxie Chixin shook his head. "The Embroidered Envoy avoid interacting privately with each other. Do not bring up things like entertaining guests in the future. I'm leaving."

He turned to leave. It seemed as though he had only taken a few steps, but he vanished into the distance in the blink of an eye.

Zu An snorted. These fellows didn't even have a social relationship with each other. The Embroidered Envoy only looked cool from the outside.

He suddenly turned around. "Show yourself!"

A charming figure entered. "You're getting more and more vigilant."

Zu An smiled when he saw the person's exquisitely braided pigtails. "I'm also pretty strong now, okay? How did you know I was here?"

"I was waiting for news at the palace entrance this whole time," replied Qiao Xueying. "I wanted to see if there was a chance to rescue you, but I never expected you to leave completely safe and sound! Zhuxie Chixin was beside you, so I didn't dare get too close, lest I be discovered. I only came after he left."

Zu An felt his heart soften, and he instinctively drew her into his arms. "Snow, you're too good to me."

Qiao Xueying smelled really nice, and her hair was giving off a natural, flowery fragrance, nicer than any shampoo. He supposed it was because she was an elf, which gave her a natural affinity to nature.

She sighed. "What can I do? You're the man I've chosen, after all." Qiao Xueying hugged him, laying her head against his chest. "After you went in, I was really worried that you wouldn't come out again. My cultivation isn't high enough, so I didn't even know how I would save you."

Zu An felt his heart surge with compassion. "You silly girl. Given your current cultivation, you'd be cut down before you could even make it through the gates."

He still remembered how this woman just hadn't gotten along with him when he first entered this world. After they had confirmed their relationship, her vicious temper was nowhere to be seen, replaced with gentleness instead. He was probably the only one in this world who could enjoy this side of her.

Qiao Xueying raised her head and looked at him with glittery eyes. "But you made it out safe and sound. When you said that you had a plan, I didn't really believe you. Just how did you do it?"

Zu An said with a smile, "It's already dark. Let's find a place to eat and chat some more."

"Okay. I'm familiar with the capital, and I know a place." Qiao Xueying held his hand. She was practically skipping as she walked.

Zu An knew that she had to shoulder the responsibility of keeping her clansmen safe at a young age, and now, she had to blend in with the Shadow Group. That organization was surely a dark and lonely place to be in.

"Snow, do you have to stay in the Shadow Group?" he asked. "I think it's better if you left. It's just too dangerous."

"Don't worry," replied Qiao Xueying. "I've struck a deal with the Shadow Group. I'll have my freedom as long as I complete one final important task for them."

Zu An jumped in fright. Do you have any idea what kind of flag you're planting for yourself? "What is this important task? Is it dangerous?" he asked quickly.

Qiao Xueying shook her head. "I don't know the details yet. There's no way there wouldn't be danger. It's a mission being given to an assassin, after all. However, I don't think it'll be too difficult. I am rather competent, you know?"

"You have to be careful!" Zu An warned her. "I've read too many stories where something happened to the character after they declared that the next mission would be their last!"

"Pui, pui, pui!" Qiao Xueying said disdainfully. "There's no way I'm going to be that unlucky!"

"At least let me know when you're about to carry out that last mission. I'll see if I can help you out," said Zu An.

"Of course." Qiao Xueying wasn't worried about the Shadow Group's rules of secrecy, given their closeness. Knowing that her lover cared so much about her filled her soul with joy.

They soon arrived at a restaurant. The restaurant wasn't that big, but it was quiet and secluded. She asked for a private room and ordered a large number of dishes. Having spent so much time with him in the Chu clan, she knew his preferences well.

Zu An was surprised. "These are all my favorites! Order some stuff for yourself as well. I'll pay."

Qiao Xueying shook her head. "Have you forgotten that I'm an elf? Even though I don't live off of nature alone, I am not that interested in human food."

Even back in the Chu clan, she had only eaten a few vegetable dishes. She was much more interested in the desserts. Now that she didn't have to put up a front anymore, she was obviously not going to eat any of the food.

Zu An thought for a bit, then called over a waiter. He instructed him to bring over some fruit juices and teas, as well as a large plate of melon seeds.

"Seeing how you're always shooting out vines and other plants, it's important for you to drink enough liquids to prevent dehydration. I remember that you loved chewing on melon seeds too."

Qiao Xueying's eyes immediately lit up. She immediately pulled over the plate of seeds while sipping on the different types of juices. She looked like she was really enjoying herself.

Zu An smiled. Seeing her enjoying the melon seeds really brought him back to his time in the Chu clan.

He then told her all that had happened in the palace. He didn't even hide his status as an embroidered envoy.

Even though the emperor and Zhuxie Chixin had warned him repeatedly not to reveal his new identity to others, living in this world just wouldn't be worth it if he couldn't even trust someone who had shared half her lifespan with him.

"The conflict between King Qi and the emperor has already reached its climax. It'll be extremely dangerous for you now that you're caught in the middle of it." The melon seeds suddenly tasted like ashes in her mouth. "Miss Chu's grandfather is from the Qin clan too, which is part of King Qi's core force. What is she supposed to do?"

This was a huge headache for Zu An as well. After some thought, he said, "I don't think King Qi and I are at the point where we cannot coexist. As for what's to come, we just have to take things one step at a time. By the way, did you return Chu Youzhao?"

Qiao Xueying rolled her eyes. "What, were you worried that I would kill him behind your back? Relax, I won't harm him, out of consideration for his sister. Oh, I discovered something else when I returned him. Miss Chu is being detained by the Qin clan."

Zu An's face sank. "Chu Youzhao mentioned this when he sought me out. It's one thing if the Qin clan doesn't plan to help me, but they're just causing more trouble. It's truly hateful."

"Madam Chu and Elder Qin had a falling out many years ago," replied Qiao Xueying. "That's why the relationship between the two families has always been strained. However, the Qin clan has still treated the first miss and the young master quite well."

Zu An was stunned. "What about Huanzhao?"

Isn't my lil' Huanzhao's existence just too pitiful?

Chapter 584, Part II: Murong Qinghe

Qiao Xueying giggled. "She rarely visits the capital. They haven't met that often."

Zu An knew that he had been overly worried. The two of them carried on with more personal matters. He asked her about what she did after she returned to the capital, and she was also curious about his encounters during this period. Both of them were amazed at the other's experiences.

A while later, Qiao Xueying got up. "Let's go."

"Where are we going?" Zu An asked.

Qiao Xueying rolled her eyes. "To visit Chuyan in the Qin Estate, of course. I can sense that you're feeling a little unsettled."

Zu An smiled in embarrassment. "It wasn't that obvious, right? She was trying to save me, yet she ended up being placed under house arrest by the Qin clan. I'm worried that she might do something stupid."

The dramas of his past world always had such stupid plots, which left him rather traumatized.

"We should let her know that you're safe and sound." Qiao Xueying held his hand. "You aren't familiar with the capital, so you probably don't even know where the Qin Estate is. I'll take you there."

The two of them headed for the exit. Qiao Xueying suddenly thought of something and turned around. Zu An stared in shock as she stored all of the remaining seeds into her pouch.

"You really do like chewing those seeds..." Zu An tapped her cheeks. Her teeth were still white and sparkling, showing no wear from the constant chewing. Uh... I suppose the bodies of cultivators really cannot be judged based on what I know from my previous world.

Qiao Xueying blushed. "It's only because I've been busy. I haven't had the spare time to chew on them, not like when I was in the Chu clan."

Zu An chuckled and patted her head. "I'll buy some more for you next time."

"No! If you buy too many and they get damp, they won't taste good anymore!"

"I can wield the fire element now. I'll help you roast them again later."

"Hmph, I'm a wood element cultivator, so I hate things like fire. I suppose I'm doomed to be curbed by you for the rest of my life."

"You can actually use water too. You can put out a fire if you try a little harder."

"What do you mean I have water..." Qiao Xueying looked confused. When she saw his strange smile, she immediately realized what he meant and started hitting him. "You're a horrible person after all! I knew it from the moment I first saw you!"

"Hahaha..."

The two of them traded jokes as they walked. Eventually, they found themselves in front of a grand residence.

Qiao Xueying gestured at what was in front of them. "There. All of that is the Qin clan's property."

Zu An was stunned. He thought that the Chu Estate was already large enough. However, it was nothing compared to the Qin Estate.

There was no end in sight. It was basically a small-scale imperial palace! All of this, even in an expensive place like the capital.

"Bloody rich bastards!" he spat mockingly.

Qiao Xueying shared his sentiment. "The Qin clan is the most important military clan, so it is indeed much more powerful than the Chu clan. However, this is still nothing compared to the Yu clan. Theirs is true extravagance, comparable to the imperial palace."

Zu An remembered Chu Chuyan mentioning that the Yu clan was not only of the highest echelon of authority within the court, but that their clan also ran a ki stone business. They were the pinnacle of wealth.

Yu Yanluo appeared in his mind, in all her devastating beauty. His soul had been stirred by her previously, but it had already been so long that he wasn't as enamored as before.

Hmph, Yu Yanluo, you'd better not let me catch you again. If you ever ghost me again, there'll be hell to pay!

Qiao Xueying said, "Ah Zu, I won't go in with you. I have a lot of things to take care of myself, and given who I am, it might not be best for me to meet with them."

"Okay, go take care of what you need to first." Zu An remembered that she used to be a spy within the Chu clan. Even though Chu Chuyan had forgiven her in the end, Chu Chuyan clearly did not hold much sway within the Qin clan. It would be terrible if the Qin clan ended up doing something to her.

Qiao Xueying was slightly saddened, but she then heard him say, "Are you going to come to my place later, or should I head to yours?"

Qiao Xueying's cheeks immediately turned red. "I don't know when I'll be done... It'll be more convenient if I went to you."

Zu An wrapped his arm around her waist and kissed her gently on her small lips. "I'll be waiting."

When she remembered how she had almost been snapped like a twig the night before, Qiao Xueying's face reddened further. She wanted to refuse him, but to be honest, she felt an urge to carry on as well.

I'll definitely figure out what a steering wheel is today...

When Qiao Xueying left, Zu An smoothed out his clothes before walking towards the entrance to the Qin Estate. He thought about sneaking in, but changed his mind. He wasn't a criminal anymore, so there was no need to sneak around like that.

He arrived at the entrance and informed the guards of his name and his reason for his visit. The guards were all shocked. They did not dare let him in right away, and told him to wait outside before rushing in to inform the master.

Zu An had a strange look on his face. He expected that he'd have to face some arrogant and condescending people who'd try to stop him, like in the fiction novels he'd read. He didn't expect things to go so smoothly.

As soon as the thought emerged, a female voice interrupted him. "So, you're Zu An."

The voice was rather pleasant, but had a cold edge.

Zu An turned around and saw a tall and slender woman eyeing him from not far away.

This young lady was clearly beautiful, but it was her tall, graceful figure that truly caught the eye. She was not wearing a dress, like other demure young women, but a set of tight-fitting clothes, and she stood straight as a spear. He could tell from a single look that there wasn't a single ounce of unwanted fat on her body.

Yup, even her breasts are nice and firm. It's not too exaggerated, but they are large and perky enough.

Her skin was also different from that of women from distinguished clans who rarely went out. It was nicely tanned, clearly from a healthy amount of sunlight, yet it did not seem crude on her. On the contrary, it seemed like honey-colored jade, smooth and exquisite.

Together with her long, straight legs, she was the perfect example of a tall, athletic beauty, with a hint of wildness to her. Even though he didn't know her, he could tell that she was a girl who loved life, someone who was full of energy.

The young lady's face immediately darkened when she saw his probing look. "What are you looking at?"

You have successfully trolled Murong Qinghe for 244 Rage points!

Murong Qinghe?

Zu An searched through his memories. He hadn't heard of this name before.

Seeing her furious expression, Zu An smiled and said, "You were the one who called out to me. Of course I have to look at you closely to see if you're a friend of mine."

The young lady snorted. "Who are you calling a friend?"

"You shouldn't jump to conclusions." Zu An said. "I had a dream in which you were a good friend of mine. I remember that you told me your name was Murong Qinghe. Is that your name?"

The young lady was clearly startled, and subconsciously took a few steps back. She was sure that she had never met this fellow before. The only reason she knew his name was because he had just announced his identity at the gates of the estate. Why did this guy know her name? Could it be that they had really crossed paths in a dream...?

Pah!

The young lady's face turned completely red. "How could I possibly have met someone like you in a dream, let alone reveal my name to you? Hmph! Many people in the capital know my name. You definitely saw me in the city while hiding out somewhere. That's surely it!"

Zu An couldn't help but sigh. Are all pretty girls really this self-confident?

"Since you seem certain that we never met in a dream, why do you recognize me?" Zu An noticed that no one from the Qin clan had come to receive him yet. Since he was bored, playing around with a young lady didn't seem all that bad.

"You just said it..." Murong Qinghe suddenly reacted. "I was almost distracted! Mister Zu, since I just happened to run into you here, I'll use this opportunity to settle our debt!"

With that, she charged at him. Her body was strong and healthy, and she had covered the distance in the blink of an eye. With her long legs extended, she aimed a kick squarely at his chest.

Chapter 585: Girl on Girl?

Zu An felt his heart sink. Why are all these pretty girls so irritable?

However, he had no time to spare on idle thoughts. He quickly raised his arm to block her kick. Oh? Judging from her ki fluctuations, she seems to be at the fifth rank. Given her age, this level of cultivation is enough to mark her as a prodigy.

Murong Qinghe's shock far surpassed his. What the heck is going on? She could not understand how he had blocked her confident attack so easily.

How high is his cultivation?

He was still so young, after all. How could such a thing be possible? Furthermore, it was rumored that Chu First Miss had married a nobody from the streets. How could this brat be at all formidable?

I'm sure I went easy on him subconsciously, which was why he managed to block it so effortlessly.

She could feel the heat from his palm, from where he had grabbed her leg. She was both ashamed and annoyed.

You have successfully trolled Murong Qinghe for 444 Rage points!

Her body twisted about her waist, and she spun in the air, sending her other foot at him. This rotation helped her to utilize all of her strength. The power of this kick was far greater than the first.

Zu An was not expecting her to be able to carry out another attack so quickly. Her combat instincts were rather sharp.

He had no choice but to let go of her foot and take a step back to ward off this second attack.

After breaking free of his grasp, Murong Qinghe unleashed a flurry of attacks, battering him with her long legs.

She danced quickly from side to side as she struck, pummeling him with blows from all directions.

This woman is doing tsunami kicks straight into roundhouse kicks! No wonder she isn't wearing a dress.

He was amazed that his mind still had the capacity for such distracted thoughts. He did not know it was possible in such a situation.

Her attacks were becoming increasingly impatient. Zu An raised a finger, then jabbed it at her when he saw an opening.

Shining Finger!

He had attacked her weak spot instinctively, but he immediately regretted it as his finger sank into a soft, tender spot. He had jabbed her inner thigh.

Murong Qinghe screamed and collapsed to the side. She instinctively tried to rise, but the soreness immediately spread out through her entire leg. Her legs were so weak that she almost couldn't remain still. Her expression grew extremely bizarre.

Zu An was wondering if he should explain himself, but she was clearly the one who was out to kill him. Apologizing at this point would just be sad.

Murong Qinghe was about to say something, but her eyes suddenly darted to his finger in shock. "What is this move of yours called?"

Zu An was stunned. She isn't crying or throwing a tantrum over how I've infringed on her purity?

What was up with her reaction? She was actually only interested in knowing the name of his technique!

Was she one of those legendary martial idiots?

Despite this, he still subconsciously replied, "Shining Finger."

"Shining Finger?" Murong Qinghe remained silent for a moment. "That's not a bad name at all. However, you better watch out."

She removed two short spears from her waist. She hadn't used her weapons earlier due to her pride. She thought that her legs were enough to deal with him. Now that she knew he was an expert, though, she wasn't about to show the least bit of negligence.

"Haiyah!" With a cry, she flew at him, the two spears striking at him, one from the left and one from the right, cutting off almost all means of escape.

Zu An could sense the killing intent from the spears even from a distance. It was an aura that seemed to have been tempered in the blood of her enemies on the battlefield.

He had noticed the two spears from the very start, but had believed them to be some strange ornaments. Apparently, they were actually ferocious weapons.

This girl didn't look that old, yet she already had the aura of a war hardened soldier.

Despite the thoughts running through his head, he did not stop moving. He took a step to the side and used his Sunflower Phantasm.

Murong Qinghe was sure that her two spears would hit, yet her opponent suddenly vanished in the blink of an eye.

By the time she reacted, he was already next to her. Alarmed, she hurriedly retracted a spear, bringing it back in front of her just in time to intercept the incoming finger.

Zu An was quite impressed. Her earlier attack had been excellent. Even though her cultivation wasn't that high, her combat sense was much higher than those of her peers.

It was worth mentioning that the sixth rank assassins had been eliminated by him in mere moments, yet this young lady at the fifth rank had managed to keep up with him after so many moves.

Even though he was holding back, her response was still remarkable.

Murong Qinghe felt her arm go sore. The force of the blow was too much for her fingers to handle, and one of her spears was sent flying.

Zu An smirked. I've already disarmed you. Isn't it time to concede?

Unexpectedly, Murong Qinghe thrust her other spear outward, catching up to the spear that had been knocked flying a moment ago. With an audible clack, the two short spears combined together to form a long spear.

Zu An's eyes widened. Something like this exists?

Without hesitation, Murong Qinghe thrust her spear out, flying at him like a silver dragon.

Zu An frowned as he watched the multiple images of spear-points jabbing towards him closely. He reached out with two fingers, and the images disappeared. There was only a single spear point, gently clasped between his fingers.

Murong Qinghe's face was entirely red. She couldn't wrench it free no matter how she tried. She was horrified. How could he have such strong fingers? She shuddered to think what would happen if those fingers struck her body.

"Stop trying already. You won't be able to get it free. If you want your spear back, it's not a problem at all. Just beg me to return it, and I might just do so," Zu An said casually. In his previous fights, if it wasn't an eighth rank cultivator he was facing, then it was a ninth rank one. I can stomach getting bullied by them, but if I let a young woman bully me as well, I don't know where to hide my face.

Murong Qinghe was furious. "Keep dreaming!"

You have successfully trolled Murong Qinghe for 999 Rage points!

Her rage seemed to feed her strength. She let go of her spear and wrapped her forearm around the spear shaft instead, then began to twist.

The spear began to spin along with the rotational force she was exerting.

Not even Zu An could hold onto it, and he quickly let go.

Murong Qinghe's lips curved upwards. She was just about to retract her spear when her smile stiffened.

Zu An had reached out two fingers to clasp her spear again. At the same time, his fingers slowly moved up and down the shaft. "What a fine spear!" he marveled.

"Let go!" Murong Qinghe was incredibly embarrassed. After all, she had been trained in the art of the spear since she was young. After more than ten years with it, she had formed a bond with this spear. It was like an extension of her body.

Him fondling the spear was no different from fondling her body!

She didn't mind if he ended up touching her while they were fighting. After spending such a long time in the army, she had long grown accustomed to ordinary physical contact with her enemies.

However, this spear was the source of her pride and glory. If she wasn't using it to cut down enemies, then she was beating people into submission with it. Yet now, it had been seized and fondled by this awful man. She felt a strange sense of humiliation.

Zu An noticed her body trembling slightly. His first thought was that she was angry, but he quickly realized that this wasn't the case. He too was vastly experienced. He immediately realized that this was how Qiao Xueying was when she had been stimulated the night before.

Zu An was stupefied. Come on. Really? You're getting aroused just because I'm touching your spear?

What kind of weird fetish is this?

At this moment, the gates to the Qin Estate opened, and an alarmed voice called out. "What are you two doing?"

Murong Qinghe seemed as though she had received a great amnesty. She even lost all interest in retrieving her spear. She rushed over to the newcomer's side and pointed at Zu An. "Big brother Chu, this guy is bullying me!"

Zu An's eyeballs were about to pop out of their sockets. Where had that valiant woman who brandished her spear so ferociously go?

The tomboy had suddenly transformed into an obedient little girl?

She was clearly slightly taller than Chu Youzhao, yet she was suddenly acting all cute and helpless, staring at him with starstruck eyes. Zu An's eyes went wide. Had this woman made some sort of mistake? Had she fallen for the cross-dressing Chu Youzhao?

Chapter 586: A Deal

It took Zu An a long time to react to what was happening. He couldn't believe that this starstruck woman was the same valiant and formidable warrior from before. Does she have any idea that the man she adores is a cross-dressing trap?

Or maybe she does know?

Huh? Why do I sense some girl-on-girl romance going on? But they're both beauties... What an interesting pair...

Chu Youzhao was about to speak up for Murong Qinghe, but the moment she saw Zu An, her eyes widened. "It's you!"

Zu An nodded. "Who else would it be? I never expected you to be this popular with girls."

Chu Youzhao obviously knew what he was implying, and her face immediately turned red.

She quickly ran over to him and pulled him to the side. "You're not allowed to expose my identity!" she hissed quietly.

Zu An was stunned. So she really does think you're a man? If I'm not mistaken, isn't Murong your grandmother's clan? Doesn't she know the truth?

Then again, this issue was the Chu clan's greatest secret, since the fate of the Chu clan's noble title rested on it. It wasn't a surprise that they did not know about it.

Sorry, Miss Murong, your love is doomed to be unrequited.

The whole thing was quite strange to him. It seemed like one's outward appearances really didn't say much about one's preferences. Murong Qinghe was such a tough-looking girl, yet she had ended up falling for a pretty boy like Chu Youzhao.

Chu Youzhao had an artifact that hid her feminine traits. Even though she looked quite dashing, there was still a feminine side to her appearance. So this is Murong Qinghe's type?

"Why should I?" Zu An replied in amusement.

Chu Youzhao bit her lip, which might have seemed slightly disgusting if she really was a guy. On the other hand, knowing that she was a woman made the gesture rather alluring. That was the benefit of having good looks.

"Because you're my brother-in-law! Why would you leak out the Chu clan's secrets?"

Zu An raised his eyebrows. He was extremely pleased that she had called him brother-in-law. "So I'm not a scoundrel?"

Chu Youzhao snorted. "You're clearly my brother-in-law, yet you touched your wife's little sister. What else are you but a scoundrel?"

She had been terribly upset that her amazing eldest sister had ended up marrying a completely useless man. She did not approve of it one bit, and she was also worried about her big sister's happiness.

However, she had seen with her own eyes how easily he had taken care of those powerful assassins. She had to admit that he looked rather gallant right then.

Unfortunately, this fellow just had to touch her there. Back then, she had been embarrassed and furious, but she gathered her composure again after one night. What else could she do about it? She couldn't just kill him since he was her brother-in-law, after all. She couldn't beat him either... She could only console herself that, at least, it hadn't been an outsider.

Zu An couldn't believe she still held it against him.

"I was trying to save you, okay? I never thought that you were... hmph."

Chu Youzhao's lips curved upwards in a half-smile. "All I know is that you touched me. I'll just tell my eldest sister if I have to. Let's see what she thinks about that."

Ugh, what a pain. Zu An had just gotten together with Chu Chuyan's best friend. When she found out, Chu Chuyan hadn't been sure if he would manage to stay alive, so she couldn't bring herself to get angry, which allowed him to weather that storm. Who knew if she'd bring it up again? If she found out that he touched her little sister, she might really lose it...

Chu Youzhao was delighted when she saw him grimacing. It went a long way to soothe her sense of injustice. "So? How about it? You keep my secret and I'll keep yours."

"Why do I feel like it's not fair?" Zu An said, hesitating. "How about you call me brother-in-law a few more times?"

"No way!" Chu Youzhao was annoyed. "I'll tell my eldest sister, then."

"What are you two doing?" Murong Qinghe was confused by the sight of the two of them whispering in a corner.

"Uh... I'm going to help you teach this guy a lesson since he's bullying you!" Chu Chuyan turned around and replied, draping her arm around Zu An's shoulder. "Come on, show me some consideration and play along."

Zu An had a weird look on his face. Did you forget something, perhaps? If you put your arm around me like that, I can feel everything! What happened yesterday was an accident, but now you're doing this on purpose...

Chu Youzhao immediately realized what was going on as well, and she flushed red. She punched him in the gut. "Scoundrel!" She was only going to put on an act at first, but in the end, she didn't hold back one bit.

Zu An cried out. "Why didn't you hold back?!" he hissed at her.

"It's your fault for taking advantage of me!"

"What...? Young lady, you were the one who came on to me, okay?"

"You're still talking about it?!"

"Ah!!"

...

Murong Qinghe was now the one who was embarrassed. She rushed over to them. "Big brother Chu, I think that's enough..."

They were from the same clan, after all. If they fell out because of her, how was she going to marry into the Chu clan...?

Chu Youzhao shoved Zu An away, her face red. "Enough! I'll spare you this time, but only because of little sister Qinghe."

"Little sister?" Zu An studied Murong Qinghe. Chu Youzhao was already young enough, yet this girl was actually even younger? She doesn't look it, though, judging by her height and how developed she is...

Murong Qinghe sensed his gaze and shot him a hateful look, but when she thought about how they were going to be seeing each other often in the future as family members, she swallowed this anger back down.

Hmph! I won't lower myself to argue with you because of big brother Chu!

Chu Youzhao waved at Zu An. "Big s... ahem, ahem... Grandpa invites you inside."

Zu An nodded. He was quite curious to find out what Chuyan's grandfather, the legendary, most highly-ranked figure in the military, was like.

As they headed inside, Chu Youzhao asked Murong Qinghe, "Qinghe, why are you here today?"

Murong Qinghe gave Zu An a sidelong glance. "It's all because of him! In the court session this morning, His Majesty was furious, yelling about how it was intolerable that there would be a public assassination attempt within the capital. My grandfather was the Security Officer, and was in charge of public safety within the capital. Because of this, my grandfather obviously had to take responsibility. He was relieved as Security Officer and moved to the position of Supervisor of Attendants, which has no real power. Hmph!"

Zu An couldn't help but chuckle. No wonder she was so upset. The Security Officer wielded great authority, and was feared within the court. Even though the Supervisor of Attendants was considered one of the nine Ministers, and seemed to enjoy an elevated status, several of these ministerial positions were slowly becoming figureheads, with their authority being transferred to the other branches. One of these weakened ministerial positions was the Supervisor of Attendants.

In theory, the Supervisor of Attendants was supposed to be in charge of the imperial bodyguards, but the military leadership within the palace was tangled and complicated, each power intricately balanced against another. There was the Left General and Right General of the palace gates, as well as the Brave Rider General and Guerilla Warfare General who were each in charge of their corresponding troops. There was also Zhuxie Chixin, commander of the Embroidered Envoy, which maintained a large presence within the capital. The Supervisor of Attendants was only required to arrange the ceremonies that preceded the emperor's departure on long journeys outside the capital.

“How is all of that my fault?” Zu An retorted. “I’m clearly the biggest victim. Your grandfather wasn’t able to maintain security within the capital, which was why I was attacked as soon as I entered the city. I almost lost my life, you know?”

Murong Qinghe pouted. “My grandfather isn’t the only one in charge of keeping peace within the capital, though. It feels as though we’re being punished for no reason... We’re in this position because of you.”

Zu An knew that the emperor was merely finding excuses to shuffle aside important ministers loyal to King Qi’s faction. Of course, he couldn’t say this out loud.

Chu Youzhao quickly tried to mediate this situation. “Both of you are victims! The assassins are the ones we should blame for all this.”

She had almost been killed by those assassins yesterday, and she had only been saved thanks to her brother-in-law’s intervention. Hm? Why do I recall dreaming about something really embarrassing last night? Something about brother-in-law riding a horse?

They quickly found themselves entering a study. Within, a tall and sturdy elder cast his gaze over the three of them. His eyes shifted to Murong Qinghe, a smile appearing on his face. “Little Qinghe, you must have come to play with Youzhao again.”

Zu An’s face darkened. This elder was deliberately ignoring him in a clear show of strength.

Chapter 587: The Devil Sect’s Retaliation

A slight blush came to Murong Qinghe’s tanned skin. “That’s not it,” she explained quickly. “My grandfather wants to hold a banquet tonight, and he’s invited you and the State Duke of Prestige for a chat. I agreed to come over since I wasn’t doing anything”

The master of the Qin clan, Qin Zheng, was the State Duke of Triumph, while the head of the second branch of the Qin clan was the State Duke of Prestige. These two national dukes came from the same clan, and they both wielded great authority. Clearly, the Qin clan was a clan covered in glory.

A state duke was the highest rank of all the nobility. Chu Zhongtian, as Brightmoon Duke, was a rank lower. However, the Chu clan had their own feudal land and army, so their true power was far greater than an ordinary duke’s, almost on par with a state duke.

Zu An wrinkled his nose in disdain when he heard Murong Qinghe’s awkward cover up. Who are you trying to fool? You’re sneaking looks at Chu Youzhao even as you’re speaking! Anyone can tell what your true objective is.

Does the master of the Qin clan know about Chu Youzhao’s real identity or not? At this rate, it’s not just the Murong clan’s young miss whose affection will be unrequited. This deception is going to prove costly to your own people...

Qin Zheng nodded. “All right, I will attend the banquet promptly with my brother tonight.”

He obviously knew the reason behind the Murong clan's invitation. He glanced at Zu An subconsciously when he thought of this, rage surging within him.

The battle between King Qi and the crown prince was going so well, yet this stupid variable had shown up out of nowhere. King Qi's side had suffered disastrous losses, and even a Security Officer was stripped of his important position!

You have successfully trolled Qin Zheng for 724 Rage points!

Zu An felt the beginnings of a headache when he saw the Rage points. He could roughly understand why, but this situation wasn't really his fault. I'm a victim too!

It seemed that things weren't going to go too smoothly this time.

Chu Youzhao quickly said, "Grandfather, brother-in-law has something he wishes to discuss with you."

"Brother-in-law?" Qin Zheng frowned. "When did you have a brother-in-law?"

Chu Youzhao still hadn't figured out the situation yet. She quickly introduced Zu An. "This is Zu An, my eldest sister's husband..."

Qin Zheng cut her off before she could finish. "The Chu clan has already written a letter of divorce, annulling their marriage. How can he still be related to your eldest sister?"

Chu Youzhao was immediately at a loss for words. Strictly speaking, this was indeed true.

Zu An frowned. Yet before he could even say anything, Qin Zheng spoke again. "Young master Zu, I've heard that you offered up the Phoenix Nirvana Sutra to His Majesty, and were granted the title of Phoenix Man in return?"

Even though his tone was polite, it was still aloof.

Since this was Chu Chuyan's grandfather, Zu An set aside his usual pettiness and replied, "Indeed. I offered up the sutra to His Majesty earlier."

Qin Zheng stared at him. "Is there really a means to gain immortality in this world?"

"It does if you believe it, and it doesn't if you don't," Zu An replied casually.

Qin Zheng sneered. "If there really is a way of gaining immortality, why would His Majesty leave you alive?"

"Is the State Duke of Triumph suggesting that His Majesty is narrow-minded and cruel?" Zu An asked in return.

Qin Zheng choked on his breath. He hadn't expected himself to give into his emotions and make such a careless mistake. "That's obviously not what I meant. It's just that His Majesty is the ruler of an empire, so he cannot be judged as an ordinary person. He must make considerations for the longevity of the empire, so certain decisions he makes are excusable."

Zu An replied, "His Majesty has read through the sutra and believes that, even though the Phoenix Nirvana Sutra is of benefit to cultivators, it cannot grant immortality. That was why he let me go."

Both he and the emperor had agreed to this story. After all, it would be way too dangerous for him if he claimed to have the true secrets to immortality. He would be so busy dealing with all the annoying flies buzzing around him that he wouldn't be able to focus on his mission.

Qin Zheng nodded. "That makes sense." If it could truly grant immortality, then the emperor would not have let him go. Furthermore, he had only granted Zu An the lowest rank of nobility, which proved that what he had offered up was rather mundane.

The intelligence he'd received from the palace stated as much. The emperor had also specially emphasized that all those who wantonly discussed immortality were to be executed.

Despite this, he wondered whether the emperor was deliberately trying to pull the wool over everyone else's eyes. He had to discuss this with Murong and the others.

Zu An noticed Qin Zheng's flickering expression, and had to admit that the emperor's plans were brilliant. It was hard to tell reality from falsehood. These people were left dumbfounded, and forced to come up with unfounded theories.

Zu An coughed and explained his reason for coming. "I'm here to bring Chuyan back home."

Now that he'd expressed his request sincerely, it was the Qin clan's turn to respond.

"Back home?" Qin Zheng's expression darkened. "There's nothing between you and Chuyan. What do you mean, 'bring her back home'? Besides, this is her home."

Zu An's voice became cold. "If I recall correctly, the State Duke of Triumph has already severed his father-daughter relationship with Chuyan's mother. Strictly speaking, the two of you are unrelated. How can this be considered her home?"

"You!" Qin Zheng erupted in fury. He was someone who enjoyed a high status and great authority. When has anyone ever dared to speak to him like this?

You have successfully trolled Qin Zheng for 999 Rage points!

Zu An remained expressionless. He'd made it through the debacle with the emperor. No matter how formidable Qin Zheng was, he could not compare to the emperor.

"Grandfather, please don't get angry!" Panicked, Chu Youzhao tried to mediate the situation. "Brother-in-law, you don't know everything! Grandfather has taken excellent care of us siblings all these years."

Qin Zheng scoffed. "Who cares about an outsider's opinion on my relationship with my daughter? Regardless, we are still related by blood. Things are different when compared to someone like you."

Zu An replied, "If you truly think of her as family, then why did you place her under house arrest like a prisoner? Is this your idea of family?"

"You!" Qin Zheng was so angry that he almost laughed. Do you really have no idea why I put Chuyan under house arrest? It was because I was worried that she might do something stupid for your sake!

You have successfully trolled Qin Zheng for 999... 999... 999...

Zu An was rather pained when he saw the incoming Rage points. Is everyone in the army this hotheaded?

Now that things had reached this point, though, he wasn't about to back down. "If the State Duke of Triumph refuses to release her, then I will ask His Majesty himself to judge this matter."

"Not even His Majesty can get involved in our family affairs." Even though this was what he said, Qin Zheng was beginning to hesitate. This damned brat had handed over the Phoenix Nirvana Sutra, which made him a rising star in the emperor's eyes. If Zu An really got the emperor involved, he might end up becoming the laughingstock of the entire court.

He restrained his anger and said, "There is no point arguing the matter. Why don't we hear what Chuyan has to say? We'll see if she is willing to go with you or not."

After a slight hesitation, Zu An nodded. "Fine."

He would have no choice but to brace himself for the worst if he insisted on keeping her locked up. Leaving aside the guards, Zu An could judge from this elder's ki fluctuations alone that he was the peak of the master rank. He was no match for him.

Soon enough, Chu Chuyan appeared. He could see that her face was slightly thin and pallid. She had clearly been worried about Zu An while at a loss as to how to save him, leaving her both mentally and physically exhausted.

When she saw Zu An, though, her eyes immediately lit up. She threw herself into his arms. "Ah Zu, you're okay?"

Zu An patted her trembling body and said softly, "I'm fine. I've made it through the worst of it."

Chu Youzhao felt her eyes go wide. Her big sister was always as cold as ice, and she always looked the part of a successful career woman. She supported half of the Chu clan on her shoulders all by herself! Who the heck is this weak and helpless girl?!

Murong Qinghe was also shocked by what she was seeing. Chu Chuyan had always been one of her greatest idols. She was always dressed in a stunning white, and her talent was exceptional. Murong Qinghe saw her as a role model, and had cultivated bitterly with the hope of surpassing Chu Chuyan when she got to her age, then gradually catching up to her.

However, she never expected the gap in their cultivations to be so huge. Wasn't increasing one's cultivation supposed to get harder as one progressed? She thought that she was on her way to catching up now that she had five ranks of cultivation, yet Chu Chuyan was already at the seventh rank!

Why would such a woman respond to a man this way?

Then again, she remembered her fight with him earlier, and decided that Zu An wasn't as bad as the rumors put him out to be. Hmph, is that kid from the Shi clan blind? Why does he keep calling this guy trash?

Of course, he's still worse than big brother Chu.

Her eyes quickly shifted to Chu Youzhao, and her clear, sharp eyes immediately glazed over.

Qin Zheng couldn't keep watching this anymore. "The two of you are already divorced. What kind of scandal are you trying to start, holding each other like this? You're making a joke out of yourselves in front of outsiders!"

Murong Qinghe was about to say something, but hesitated. I'm not an outsider... I'm going to marry big brother Chu sooner or later!

Chu Chuyan blushed. She gently pushed Zu An away before saying, "Grandfather, the reason we annulled the marriage was because Ah Zu was worried about our Chu clan getting involved. Since the matters have already been taken care of, we can go ahead and restore our marriage. Besides, a marriage agreement doesn't mean much to me. In my eyes, he has always been my husband."

Qin Zheng stared blankly at her. It seemed like he had traveled back in time. Back then, Qin Wanru had argued with him in the same manner. In the end, she had chosen that bastard Chu and eloped with him.

Hmph, it's true that daughters only cause the clan to suffer losses!

He calmed down and said, "It doesn't matter what you believe. What's important is that the two of you are no longer husband and wife, and everyone else knows this as well. Your actions will only bring shame to the Chu clan and our Qin clan."

Chu Chuyan curled her lips in contempt. She clearly did not agree, but was not about to argue with her grandfather over this.

Qin Zheng had not forgotten his reason for summoning her. "Make your decision. Are you going to stay in the Qin clan or let this rascal take you away?"

Chu Chuyan was confused by his question. Chu Youzhao quickly ran over to fill her in on what had happened.

After listening to what she had to say, Chu Chuyan replied, "Grandfather, may I speak privately with Ah Zu?"

Qin Zheng frowned. He waved his hand, letting them go ahead.

Chu Chuyan led Zu An out of the study and into her own room.

Zu An sighed. "I know what choice you will make, even if you don't say anything. You're someone who cares a lot about duty. How can you abandon the Qin clan just like that?"

Chu Chuyan looked apologetic. "I'm sorry, Ah Zu. My grandfather and my mother severed their relationship as father and daughter, and even though my mother never said anything, I know that she has always regretted her choice. Because of their stubborn nature, neither one of them is willing to submit, so it's up to the younger generation—us—to ease their relationship. Youzhao has been under my grandfather's care all these years, and that has gradually improved the relationship between the two clans. If I leave now, all of our efforts will amount to nothing, and there won't be another chance to fix my grandfather and my mother's relationship ever again. Besides, what will happen to Youzhao in the Qin clan?"

Zu An sighed. "You're always thinking about others, but you never consider your own happiness. You're always the one sacrificing for your clan..."

Chu Chuyan smiled. "If it wasn't because of these sacrifices, how could I have met you?"

Given her beauty and cultivation, she had her pick of the outstanding men of the other great clans. However, for the sake of the Chu clan, she had had no choice but to settle for a randomly-chosen drafted son-in-law, and eventually found Zu An.

She had been willing to sacrifice a lifetime of happiness, but she never expected that she would stumble upon the perfect match for her.

Zu An didn't expect her usually cold self to pour everything out. He took her into his arms and bent down to kiss her.

Chu Chuyan was embarrassed. "They're still waiting for our reply."

"Let them wait." Zu An scoffed, and continued to kiss her.

Chu Chuyan relented. She gave a lot of consideration to her clan, yet she hadn't given much consideration to her lover. She knew that she had made Zu An suffer. She felt like she had let him down, and therefore let him do as he pleased.

...

While the two of them were passionately engaged with each other, in another residence within the capital, the members of the Devil Sect were giving their reports to an incredibly charming woman. "Lady Saint, Lord Ding was killed by the Embroidered Envoy and the residence has been granted to another official."

That woman snorted. "If the Embroidered Envoy lays their hands on our people, they'd better be prepared to pay the price. Kill the new owner of Ding Manor as a warning. We are not a force to be trifled with!"

Chapter 588: Persona Destroyed

"Yes ma'am! We will take care of all who dare offend our Holy Sect! Blood for blood!" Those subordinates rushed out excitedly to organize this attack.

The charming lady was naturally Qiu Honglei. She was currently reclining on a soft couch, perfectly displaying her seductive figure. However, none of the surrounding sect members dared to sneak any disrespectful looks. The saintess' status was great. She was definitely not someone they could offend. Furthermore, even though she was beautiful, she was also vicious and decisive.

Qiu Honglei yawned lazily and casually asked, "Right, who is the new official taking the place of Ding Manor? It's not every day we see the Embroidered Envoy personally cleaning out a manor for an official."

The capital city division replied, "I believe it is some fella named 'Phoenix Man'. He offered up something to his majesty and received great favor. I think his name was Zu An or something?"

The capital city division didn't participate in the attack on Zu An, so they didn't know about their relationship.

Qiu Honglei's originally disinterested expression immediately froze. She sat up from the couch and ordered, "Tell them to cancel the attack immediately!"

Everyone from the capital city division: "???"

There was someone who immediately voiced his doubts. "Why are we cancelling the attack? Are we not going to retaliate against those who challenge us? Our Holy Sect will become the laughing stock of the entire world!"

"Because... because..." Qiu Honglei also felt a huge headache. How could she have expected that this random manor would be connected to Zu An? But she couldn't explain their relationship. However, her mind was starting to move quickly again, so she quickly thought of a solution. "Because I plan to personally set out myself."

"There is no need for our saintess to take care of such a small matter. Our people will deal with it nice and cleanly. We will definitely chop that fella up to pieces and make him regret being born!" The capital division's people expressed their loyalty one after another. How could they give up such a good chance to show off in front of the saintess?

"I am glad that everyone is so brave and loyal..." Qiu Honglei was all smiles, but she was cursing them to death inside. She wasn't in the mood to praise them at all.

All of these capital city division members relished in this moment. They were all thinking to themselves that there were definitely going to be great benefits from receiving the saintess' favor this time.

After thinking for a bit, Qiu Honglei said, "The sect master will come to the capital soon and prepare that important matter. I am worried that this might be a trap set up by the Embroidered Envoy. We might end up alerting our enemies if we send out our subordinates now, so it's best if I make a trip myself and adapt to the situation."

"The saintess is wise and farsighted after all, far greater than what we could ever hope to match..." Everyone flattered her like crazy. "We will arrange for some experts to accompany the saintess. They'll be able to protect you then."

"There is no need!" Qiu Honglei immediately refused. When she saw her subordinates' alarmed expressions, she coughed lightly and returned to her usual charming voice. "I alone am enough. It will cause too much of a disturbance if more people go."

Her thoughts were all over the place right now. After her separation with Zu An last time, she didn't expect him to really make it through his predicament. She definitely had to hear just how he managed to get out of that kind of situation today.

...

Zu An wasn't in the mood to think about anything else. The only thing in his mind was what he was going to do to this ice beauty in his arms.

At first, Chu Chuyan only allowed him to hug her closely, but that quickly developed into groping, which she tacitly accepted with a red face. However, this fella was going further and further, insisting on continuing. How could she accept that? “No, stop! There are still people waiting outside!”

“It’ll be fine as long as I finish quickly.” The more she acted like this, the more evil thoughts appeared in Zu An’s head.

Chu Chuyan bit her lip. “When have you ever finished quickly...” When she recalled how she was tormented by him in the middle of the night, her body would go weak no matter how cold she was.

How could Zu An still hold back when he saw the bit of sweetness in her expression? He pounced.

Chu Chuyan moaned. She tightly embraced the man in front of her. As a well-behaved daughter of a wealthy clan her entire life, she discovered that ever since she met this fella, she developed a bunch of bad habits. She learned how to lie, and then there was all of this stuff... she became shameless.

She knew that all of this stuff was absolutely crazy from her upbringing, yet for some reason, she always felt a strange sense of excitement. She became much more sensitive than usual.

...

A while later, there were small and quick steps that sounded. “Big sis, brother-in-law, are you guys not finished... Huh?”

The two of them were already extremely nervous. When they suddenly heard this sound, both of them jumped in fright.

Chu Chuyan cried out. Her entire body shook fiercely like ripples.

Zu An sucked in cold air. Who was the one who cultivated the Heaven Devouring Sutra here? He couldn’t hold back at all under the waves of powerful suction force. He released everything.

Chu Youzhao, who was standing by the entrance: “.....”

She was completely stupefied. Her big sister was always like an ice queen who stood at the peak of a frozen mountain, cold and proud. She was like a goddess who accidentally stumbled into this secular world.

She wasn’t the only one who had this thought. This was what all of the young masters in the capital thought.

Whenever Chu Chuyan entered the capital, just a single glance of her graceful figure would be enough to drive those young masters crazy. All of them pursued her madly, yet her big sister didn’t pay them any attention.

Those people could only ask about her big sister through her, because they were ‘sister and brother’. All of them wanted to slide in through this roundabout way, treating this ‘younger brother’ extremely well while asking her about some of her big sister’s hobbies and interests.

Chu Youzhao suddenly felt sympathy for all those bootlickers. If they knew that their queen from the heavens was being ravaged underneath another man, as if she would give birth to his child as long as he

gave the word, would die for him if he said so, she wondered just how many of those men would decide to just hang themselves.

Your persona is falling apart, big sis!

Chu Chuyan was already so embarrassed she wanted to find a hole to hide in. However, Zu An was shameless enough. He helped her sort out her clothes while getting up. "We were busy discussing our opinions and suggestions on this matter. We didn't expect time to pass by so quickly, haha..."

Chu Youzhao: "....."

There is actually such a shameless person in this world?

This guy is a big scoundrel after all!

It's good that you are helping my big sis with her clothes, but why aren't you putting on your own pants?!

Chu Youzhao immediately covered her face with her hands. However, she secretly peeped through the gaps between her fingers. "Um... Grandfather is getting a bit impatient. He told me to come and see how things are going."

Chu Chuyan finally recovered a bit of composure. "Alright, we will head over soon."

At the same time, she pinched Zu An's waist. This fella really was a wicked scoundrel!

Chu Youzhao had a weird look on her face when she heard her big sister's usual clear and cold voice. Your cover is already blown, big sis! The only thing in my head is the two of you...

"I'm... going to report to my grandfather so that they don't send anyone else." Chu Youzhao was still a young lady after all. Even though she was a bit curious at first, her embarrassment still won out in the end. She quickly ran away.

"It's all your fault." Chu Chuyan was already about to cry.

Zu An chuckled. "It's fine, we're all from the same family anyway. Youzhao won't tell anyone else. But really, that kid really is something for watching the whole thing."

Chu Chuyan bit her soft red lip and said quietly, "It's not that big of a deal for Youzhao to see, because she isn't my little brother, but... my little sister."

Even though this was the Chu clan's greatest secret, there was no need to hide this from him. She was worried that he might mind that Chu Youzhao saw them, that this would leave behind some unnecessary misunderstandings. It was best that she explained this sooner.

Zu An subconsciously replied, "Yeah, I know."

"Huh? Why do you know that?" It was now Chu Chuyan's turn to be surprised.

"Uh... I saved her when we were attacked during the assassination and found out then." Zu An said ambiguously. He couldn't just say that he accidentally touched her chest, right?

"I didn't expect you to have already saved Youzhao too." Chu Chuyan said with a sigh. "Our Chu clan really owes you too much. I have no idea how we are going to repay you."

Chapter 589: Wrong Person

Zu An gently embraced her soft waist. "We're already one. Don't treat me like an outsider now."

Chu Chuyan blushed. She quickly pushed him away. "Stop messing around already, everyone is already impatient outside."

Zu An was a bit sad when he saw how she looked at him like a pervert. Am I that type of person?

The two of them quickly returned to the study. Qin Zheng said indifferently, "So? What is your decision?"

He stared at Chu Chuyan. He was actually a bit nervous. She better not run away like Wanru did back then... He might just die from anger if he had to go through that twice.

Chu Chuyan's face was still a bit red from before. She said with a gentle voice, "Of course I will stay in grandfather's house."

Qin Zheng roared with laughter. "Excellent! That's my granddaughter! Mister Zu, did you hear what she said?"

Zu An was speechless when he saw his provocative expression. Bro, how old are you, man? You're acting like a kid. You might just die from excessive anger if you found out what I did to your precious granddaughter just now.

I hope Chu Youzhao can keep a secret. Even though I am shameless, I don't think Chu Chuyan could take it.

He subconsciously glanced over at Chu Youshao. For some reason, she just happened to be looking at him as well, so their eyes met. Her heartbeat quickened. She quickly shifted her eyes away, unknown what she was thinking.

Murong Qinghe's attention was always on Chu Youzhao. She also quickly noticed that something was strange.

Hm? Why is Big Brother Chu's face red?

But he's still sooooo handsome!

Big Brother Chu's skin is so good. It's fair with a bit of a pink blush. It's not dark like mine...

She actually didn't know just how attractive her tanned and healthy skin was to other guys. She was just used to seeing fair-skinned girls everywhere in the capital. Even though she didn't really mind normally, she couldn't help but worry in front of the person she liked.

Big Brother Chu's skin is so fair, will he dislike my darker skin?

Should I ask the others what they use to make their skin pale when I get back?

But what if they laugh at me...

...

Zu An spoke up at this time. "Since it is Chuyan's own choice, then I will respect it. However, I hope that the State Duke of Triumph will not keep her under house arrest anymore.

The two of them discussed already that as long as Chu Chuyan recovered her freedom, then they could just meet whenever they wished. The main thing was that they had to make sure they weren't found out.

Qin Zheng harrumphed. "Do I need you to teach me how to take good care of my granddaughters?"

The reason he detained Chu Chuyan was only because he was worried that she might act on an impulse and try to save Zu An. Now that Zu An was already safe, there was naturally no need to detain her anymore.

I should have Chuyan set out and make some indirect inquiries about the details regarding Zu An's deal with the emperor.

He definitely couldn't bring himself to ask these things now, and he wouldn't even believe her even if she did reply.

After reaching an agreement, Zu An got up to leave. Otherwise, being together with a fuming old man really wasn't fun at all.

Chu Chuyan was embarrassed because of what just happened. She had her younger sister see Zu An out.

Murong Qinghe wanted to follow them out, but Qin Zheng kept her behind to ask her about her grandfather. She could only watch with jealousy as the two of them left. Even though she knew that it would only be a short while before she would see her Big Brother Chu again, she still didn't feel good.

Furthermore, why did she feel like there was a bit of green in the air while watching their rear figures?

Zu An finally couldn't take it anymore when they reached the entrance. "What the heck is wrong with you? Why are you staring at me?"

Chu Youzhao harrumphed. "Do you really have no idea why I am looking at you like that?"

Zu An replied, "Look at you, following bad examples from a young age and thinking all those bad thoughts. Be careful or you might end up ruining yourself."

Chu Youzhao: "....."

Who the heck was the one doing the bad things here? Are you really spouting this sophistry to me right now? This guy really is hateful!

You have successfully trolled Chu Youzhao for +233 Rage points!

She took a deep breath. "Did you bring me back last night?"

"Of course." Zu An didn't want to expose Qiao Xueying.

"I was unconscious back then. How did you bring me back?" Chu Youzhao's cheeks were pink.

Zu An had to admit that this cross-dressing dude was pretty attractive. No wonder that silly Murong Qinghe ended up being obsessed with her. "I carried you back of course, how else did I bring you here? I'm a cultivator. Forget about a person, I could easily lug back a pig, so you don't really need to be that grateful."

"You're a scoundrel after all!" Chu Youzhao stomped her feet. She turned around and ran back.

Zu An was stunned. I said you don't need to be that grateful, so why are you cursing me?

But he quickly tossed this thought out of his head, because he still had more important matters to tend to.

It wasn't Chuyan alone who worried about him.

Pei Mianman returned home and wasn't at the capital. He couldn't contact her even if he wanted to. However, the emperor informed the entire world about his new status, so she should be able to find out soon after.

However, there was someone else he cared about at the hospital. Zheng Dan was still here with the Sang clan's father and daughter.

He already found out before that after the Sang clan's father and daughter returned, the emperor showed pity on the old man. His crimes were reduced to some minor offenses, and they were placed under house arrest.

When the clans who were opposed to Sang Hong found out that he wouldn't have any more successors, they were all incredibly happy. They didn't bother arguing with the emperor, which was why they all tacitly accepted this result.

What did it matter even if you chose the prettiest daughter-in-law? She can't even help you give birth to a son. Furthermore, Sang Hong is already incredibly old, he doesn't even have the ability to have another child. He was doomed to be without an heir.

Since you want to become a lonely subject of the emperor to the end, then so be it.

The Sang clan was actually quite famous in the capital. Zu An knew the general direction. After asking around a bit along the way, he quickly arrived at his destination.

He had just visited the magnificent Qin clan, so the Sang clan seemed much poorer in comparison. Not only was their territory much smaller, there were many dead leaves by the entrance that hadn't been swept away.

There was a bleak and defeated aura that filled this place.

Zu An wanted to head in from the main entrance, but he saw some people monitoring this area from the shadows. House arrest was also a type of punishment, so he couldn't let them catch him.

He didn't want to expose his relationship with Zheng Dan either, wishing to avoid bringing unforeseeable dangers to the two sides.

He moved over to a secluded courtyard wall, and then leapt over with a tap of his feet.

With his cultivation, those watchers outside couldn't detect him at all.

When he entered Sang Manor, he discovered that there weren't many servants inside, let alone any guards. It wasn't like the territory of a governor at all.

He figured that this was likely due to Sang Hong's fall from power. The people of the manor all abandoned this sinking ship.

Zu An couldn't help but sigh. Even though he was enemies with Sang Hong in the past, that was merely because they were in different factions. He still admired that man's ability and methods. He felt a bit of sympathy when he saw someone like this fall so low.

He walked inside and discovered that this was probably the rear garden. Even though he called it a garden, it wasn't that large either.

He saw a white figure moving about.

When he thought about the bleakness he saw along the way, Zu An was alarmed. Was there a female ghost wandering this place?

But he immediately laughed at himself. This was a world of cultivators. He already saw his fair share of zombies, skeletons, and ghosts in the dungeons. Why was he still stuck in the thinking of his past world?

He walked around the corner and finally saw that white figure. Sure enough, it was a white clothed woman. Her back was facing him, her figure seated on a swing, swaying back and forth absentmindedly.

Zu An quietly leaned over. "The lady seems rather lonely. Could you use a companion?"

Who else could this familiar figure be but Zheng Dan?

The woman jumped in fright. She turned around nervously, but forgot that she was still swaying on the swing. She lost her center of gravity and fell.

Zu An quickly caught her. She swung her hand to strike him, but she was stunned when she saw who it was. "It's you?"

Zu An's face was about to turn green. The one in his embrace wasn't Zheng Dan at all! It was the Sang clan's first miss Sang Qien!

Chapter 590: Leading a Wolf Into the House

Sang Qien was currently in the air, so Zu An couldn't just let go right now. However, it didn't seem appropriate for him to keep holding onto her as well.

Zu An gulped. "Would you believe me if I said that I thought you were someone else?"

Sang Qien's face turned red. She gently pushed him away and stood up on her own. She was as lithe as a swallow, her movements extremely graceful. "Then who did you think I was?"

"I thought that you were..." Zu subconsciously reacted, but he suddenly realized that he shouldn't say Zheng Dan. This was her sister-in-law! Wouldn't it be a slap to her face if he told Sang Qien that he was looking for Zheng Dan?

He could only change the topic and point at her white clothes. "Why are you dressed up like this?"

Sang Qien's eyes turned red. "Did you forget that my big brother was killed by Mosquito Daoist? Because we were prisoners before, we could only bury him in the wilderness. His corpse was just brought back recently, so we are currently keeping watch."

"My condolences, Miss Sang." Zu An sighed. Even though he and Sang Qian had a grudge with each other, the man was already dead. It was already all in the past.

"Thank you." But Sang Qien's mood was still downcast.

Zu An suddenly thought of something. He took out Mosquito Daoist's corpse from the Brilliant Glass Bead. "This is the one who killed your big brother. I made sure to collect her corpse because I knew you guys might need it."

After a long time had passed, it was normal for a corpse to shrivel up. That was why he didn't have to worry about others wondering if Mosquito Daoist had her essence blood sucked out.

"Mosquito Daoist!" Sang Qien immediately recognized her brother's murderer. She was shocked and overjoyed. "How did she die?"

She saw Mosquito Daoist in action before. Not even her father was her match, so it seemed like there was no hope in getting revenge. However, she actually died!

Zu An said, "I was lucky and managed to take her down. I wanted to just burn up the corpse to settle the issue, but I remembered that you guys will definitely want to see her corpse. That was why I kept it with me."

Sang Qien was a sharp girl. She didn't ask about how he killed Mosquito Daoist, because everyone had their own secrets. "Thank you Brother Zu! You are a great benefactor of our Sang clan."

She only thanked him half-heartedly earlier, but this time, it was sincere.

"I'm already happy that you don't hate me." Zu An smiled bitterly. After all, there was no way the Sang clan would let him go after finding out his relationship with Zheng Dan.

Sang Qien instead thought in a completely different direction. "Brother Zu, you cannot say that. We were enemies because we were on different sides. Whoever won and lost depended on the other's skills. We can only say that we were outplayed when we lost back then, so how can we blame you? Furthermore, strictly speaking, it was my father who acted against you all first, so you only retaliated because you had no choice."

Zu An was a bit speechless. "Miss Sang's open-mindedness truly leaves me surprised."

"Brother Zu, please head inside as our guest. I will let my father know." Sang Qien's eyes suddenly lit up and she waved behind herself. "Sister-in-law, please help me entertain Brother Zu. I am going to bring Mosquito Daoist's corpse to my father. He will definitely be pleased."

It originally didn't seem proper to make a widowed sister-in-law receive an outsider man, but the Sang clan was already in dire straits. They didn't have many servants left, and there was no better choice for the task. She was also in a hurry to contact her father, so she didn't think too much about these things.

Zu An turned around and saw that Zheng Dan was standing not too far away in white mourning clothes, her face full of joy when she saw him.

As expected, a classic dress never disappointed. Zheng Dan was already extremely beautiful, but now, these snow-white clothes made her look even more lovely.

"No problem, Little Qien. I'll look after him." Zheng Dan did her best to make her voice sound as calm as possible.

"Thank you, sister-in-law." Sang Qien was only thinking about her task right now, so she didn't think too much about it. She brought Mosquito Daoist's corpse with her so that she could tell her father the good news.

When she left, Zheng Dan nodded towards Zu An. "Young master Zu, please follow me."

Zu An knew that she was worried about being seen, so he couldn't help but laugh. It was as if he returned to his time back at Brightmoon Academy again. Back then, she used to pretend that she wasn't close to him, and they used their identity as teacher and student to deceive everyone else.

Zheng Dan didn't close the door after they arrived at the room. A man and a woman being together in the same room would draw unwanted rumors if they closed the door.

She brought Zu An behind the door, to a place no one else could see. She could no longer hold back her emotions and threw herself into his embrace. She said while choking on emotions, "Ah Zu, you're really okay?"

Even though he told her again and again that he had a solution, the one he was facing was the emperor, the number one expert in this world. She didn't believe that he could safely make it through the crisis no matter how much she trusted him.

"Yup, I'm perfectly fine. I already dealt with everything." When he sensed how her body was shaking slightly, Zu An knew that she was extremely worried during this period.

His clothes were already drenched in tears soon afterwards. Zheng Dan really is a water element cultivator... is she freaking made of water or something?

The two of them exchanged some intimate words, and they also talked about what happened after they separated.

"Why are you wearing these clothes too? Are you also mourning over Sang Qian?" Zu An was a bit jealous.

Zheng Dan giggled. "No way. I didn't want to wear them, but... Forget it, I don't want any bad karma."

Zu An's heart softened. "I know what you were going to say. You were worried that I might be killed today, so you put it on for me."

"But thankfully, you're okay." Zheng Dan helped him sort out his messy clothes, feeling a bit embarrassed when she saw how his clothes were soaked in her tears.

Zu An was moved by her affection. He lowered his head to kiss her.

Zheng Dan moaned. She wrapped her arms around his neck and received him enthusiastically. Compared to the bashful Chu Chuyan, she was much more proactive. They did plenty of this type of stuff back in Brightmoon Academy, so this was nothing strange to her at all.

Zu An was interrupted by Chu Youzhao when he was in Qin Manor, so there was no way for him to get it all out during that short amount of time. Now that Zheng Dan, this lovely and pitiful widow, was in front of him, Zu An felt more and more aroused.

A light cough sounded at this time. Then, Sang Qien's voice sounded. "Young master Zu, my father has invited you up for a chat."

Zheng Dan jumped in fright. She quickly pushed him away.

Zu An was also a bit embarrassed. However, he was always rather shameless and quickly recovered his composure. He walked out and said, "I wanted to meet with Sir Sang as well. Hm? Miss Sang, why is your face so red?"

Sang Qien gave him an annoyed look. She opened her mouth to say something, but then stopped. In the end, she didn't say anything about what just happened and only said, "Maybe it was because I tried to get here as fast as I could."

Zu An obviously knew that she was using a coverup. With her cultivation, she wouldn't break a sweat even if she ran at full speed. Did she see something?

But this shouldn't be the case! If she really saw anything, then wouldn't she immediately become hostile? This was her sister-in-law he was messing around with!

While Zu An was thinking to himself, he quickly arrived in the Sang clan's main hall. Sang Hong already came out to greet him. "You are our benefactor. Please accept this old one's respect."

Zu An jumped in fright. He quickly helped Sang Hong back up. How could he possibly dare to let him bow to him? "Sir Sang is being too formal! There is no need for this at all."

Sang Hong sighed. "My son lost his life to Mosquito Daoist. Her cultivation was too high, and none of us could even hope to stop her. There are many people who want her dead, yet all of their efforts were wasted. I thought that there might be no chance for revenge in this life of mine, but she actually ended up dying under your hands. What are you if not our benefactor?"

Zu An said. "Mosquito Daoist's cultivation was far greater than mine. I was only able to kill her through luck."

Sang Hong didn't ask him about how he killed Mosquito Daoist. "This is what the heavens have dictated. Since you are not willing to receive my respects, then little Qien, please bow in place of your father and brother."

Sang Qien bit her lip, her face flushed blood red. She was more than willing to bow her head before, but after what she just saw, it became much harder.

But even so, she was still a smart and caring daughter. She knew that her father felt terrible during this period, so it was best if she didn't tell him the truth. Sigh, I'll shoulder this truth alone.

As such, she turned towards Zu An in embarrassment. "Our benefactor..."

Zu An quickly supported her to her feet. "Please don't do this! The reason I brought back Mosquito Daoist's corpse wasn't because I wanted to be repaid with gratitude. We all traveled to the capital together and even fought side by side, so we're already comrades. That was why I brought her over to you guys. You'll make me feel sorry if you do this."

Sang Qien blinked her eyes. This man wasn't as disappointing as she imagined him to be.