

Immortal 601

Chapter 601: Interrogation

The overbearing Eunuch Lu withdrew when he saw that the empress was no longer upset. He returned to the shadows, as if he had never appeared.

Zu An couldn't help but give him another look. He noticed that the eunuch was looking at the empress behind the pearl curtains. His expression was no longer as ferocious as before, but rather full of tenderness.

Zu An was dying for some popcorn. There was something going on between the two of them! But it seems like a one-sided love from Eunuch Lu's side.

Zu An couldn't help but think that the man was rather stupid, though. No matter how much you like someone, it's not worth losing your pp over, is it?

No matter how much a girl likes you, if you don't have your little one anymore, then what's the point, no matter how much you love her? No wonder the empress never paid you much attention.

Eunuch Lu withdrew his gaze. He noticed Zu An looking at him, which confused him. What's up with this guy's sympathetic look?

The empress' amusement passed. "I heard that something happened in the eastern palace today," she remarked.

"Yes. The other crown prince's secretary, Shi Kun, was wounded in a vital area during a game. The imperial physician wasn't able to save him, so he died an untimely death." Zu An said with an expression of great regret. He was quite impressed with himself. He was now just like those wily old foxes. Lies rolled off his tongue with ease.

"Pushing the blame onto the imperial physician isn't a bad choice." The empress chuckled. "I believe this was what the crown princess taught you all to say, was it not?"

"This is indeed what happened. There's no need for anyone to teach me to describe what happened." Zu An found it hard to figure out what this empress was really thinking, so he did not dare speak the truth yet.

The empress looked at him with surprise. "I thought that you were a slick person, but I didn't expect you to have a bit of character as well."

"Thank you, your highness, for the praise." Zu An's expression was gloomy. Why did it sound like she was mocking him? Whatever. When your butt is bigger... wait, no. I mean, when your responsibilities are greater, your words matter more.

"You've met the crown prince more than once. How do you feel about him?" The empress asked gently.

Zu An wasn't surprised that she knew that he had met with the crown prince more than once. As the empress, it would be way too incompetent of her if she knew nothing about the happenings within the palace. "The crown prince's down to earth nature resembles those of our dignified ancestors."

The empress snorted. "You're throwing the same words that you gave the emperor at me. Speak honestly."

Zu An was momentarily speechless.

If you really want me to speak the truth, then I'd say that the crown prince is retarded, and a kid with learning disabilities. But will you accept that?

Even if you didn't blame me for saying such things, how am I supposed to survive in the palace afterwards?

However, this was a question he couldn't ignore. He thought of something and quickly said, "Even though the crown prince's talents are ordinary, things should be fine, especially with the crown princess assisting him."

It was common for mother-in-laws and daughter-in-laws not to get along. You brought up the crown prince on your own earlier, so I'm sure your relationship with her isn't much better off.

Sure enough, when she heard the words 'crown princess', the empress subconsciously frowned. "Linglong is indeed capable, but she is too ambitious. The crown prince might become her puppet."

Zu An stared blankly for a moment. Lady, I've only just met you. Is it right for you to speak to a stranger like this? Or has your resentment towards your daughter-in-law already reached an unbearable degree...?

"Why am I telling you these things?" The empress laughed in self-mockery. "Are you going to tell the crown princess about this?"

"Did you say something, Your Highness? I didn't hear anything," replied Zu An immediately.

The empress stared at him silently.

Eunuch Lu couldn't help but look at him as well. Someone this shameless actually exists?

"You are quite sharp," replied the empress with a sigh. "But it doesn't matter whether you tell anyone else or not. Either way, she already knows."

The gears within Zu An's mind began to turn. On the surface, it looked like a struggle between King Qi and the crown prince for the throne, which meant that the empress and the crown princess should be on the same side. However, because the empress wasn't the mother of the crown prince, even if the crown prince gained the throne, she would still be left in a rather awkward situation.

The crown princess represented the Bi clan, while the empress represented the Liu clan. Future conflict between the two would be unavoidable.

It would have been all right if the crown princess had been a sweet-tempered person, but she was headstrong, with a fierce temperament. This would be an extremely uncomfortable prospect for the empress.

Is she telling me these things because she wishes to rope me in? After all, I can be considered one of the crown prince's men.

"Don't think about it too much," said the empress. "All you need to do is complete your job, which is protecting the crown prince and supervising his studies. Don't put too much weight on what you heard today."

Zu An bowed. "Understood."

"Oh, one other thing. Can the Phoenix Nirvana Sutra really grant immortality?" the empress asked suddenly.

Zu An was taken aback. All that rambling earlier on had been a smokescreen. This was her true objective. "His Majesty has already declared that there is no such thing as immortality in this world."

The empress smiled. "You and I both know that he only said that to convince the masses. That's why I am now asking you personally."

"I have already offered the Phoenix Nirvana Sutra to His Majesty," replied Zu An. "If the empress is curious, why don't you ask His Majesty for it, so that you can examine it for yourself?"

The empress' expression altered slightly. She had indeed asked him about it, but he had told her that the scriptures existed in a spiritual form, and that it could only be read three times. Eunuch Mi had read it once, Zu An had read it once, and the emperor had now read it once, causing the scriptures to vanish. That was why he couldn't show them to her.

At the time, she had assumed that he just didn't want to tell her, so she didn't probe any further. However, there was no way for her to know that Zu An's 'Hat of Forgiveness' was only valid for a one-time use. After using it, it would turn into an ordinary hat, and its spiritual contents would scatter. Zu An had thought of this three-time restriction to explain this, and managed to convince the emperor. He did not expect to fool the empress with it as well.

When Eunuch Lu saw the empress in deep thought, he spoke up in her place. "When the empress asks you a question, you reply immediately. Why are you bringing all this up? Are you the one questioning Her Highness, or is she questioning you?"

Zu An scoffed disdainfully inside. What a masterclass simp. Keep white-knighting. You still won't get her. "Practicing the Phoenix Nirvana Sutra does not grant immortality. The emperor would not have let me live otherwise."

The empress nodded. She had suspected as much. "Fine, I won't ask you any more about this matter. There is something else I wish to know. Where did Wei Dan go?"

Alarmed, Zu An quickly said, "I do not understand the question, Your Highness. Who is this Wei Dan? Why are you asking me?"

The empress said indifferently, "Eunuch Wei served for several years in the Palace of Peace and took good care of me. Later on, he was transferred to His Majesty's side. His Majesty might not feel sentimental about those around him, but I am different. I want to find out the truth.

"In the past, Eunuch Mi betrayed us and escaped with the Phoenix Nirvana Sutra. We never received any news about his whereabouts. Only recently did we hear that he seemed to be in Brightmoon City. His majesty sent Wei Dan to capture Eunuch Mi, ordering him to bring back the Phoenix Nirvana Sutra. Both Eunuch Mi and Wei Dan have both gone missing, while the Phoenix Nirvana Sutra is with you. If I do not ask you about this, then who else would I ask?"

Zu An smiled bitterly. "Does your highness think that I killed him? Even though I arrived in the capital not long ago, I have already heard many people praising Eunuch Wei for his profound cultivation. How could I possibly kill a master rank cultivator like him?"

"You're not going to deny that you know him anymore?" said the empress with a snort. "Even though your cultivation isn't high enough to challenge Wei Dan, you might have interfered in his battle with Eunuch Mi. You could have killed them both to steal their treasures."

Zu An said, "Your Highness thinks too highly of me. They are both masters. No matter how badly wounded they are, I could never consider going up against either of them. I only came into possession of the Phoenix Nirvana Sutra because Eunuch Mi passed it on to me before his death."

Eunuch Lu cried out in surprise.

"From the sound of it, Old Mi was the one who killed Wei Dan," the empress exclaimed. "But how is that possible? Wei Dan's cultivation is above Old Mi's."

Zu An said, "Your Highness has forgotten that Old Mi had cultivated the Phoenix Nirvana Sutra for several decades. He was already a very different person. However, Wei Dan's cultivation was still extremely profound. Even though Old Mi was able to kill Wei Dan, he suffered a mortal blow as well. Old Mi and I were both in the Chu clan, and had developed a close relationship. That's why he decided to pass it on to me."

Most of what he said was the truth. He wasn't afraid that they would find out what really happened. Either way, everyone knew that he had the Phoenix Nirvana Sutra. It was fine as long as he didn't reveal Old Mi's plan to possess his body.

However, the one thing he had been worried about was exposed. "Rubbish!" exclaimed Eunuch Lu with a snort. "Mi Lianying has always been a cunning and treacherous man. He would rather take the Phoenix Nirvana Sutra with him to the grave than allow anyone else to have it. Why would he help someone else?"

Zu An sighed. It takes one eunuch to know another. This fellow could be considered quite close to Old Mi. Of all people, he would know that Old Mi did not have such a magnanimous side to him.

While he was thinking of a response, a cry of alarm was raised from outside. "Assassins!"

As soon as the warning was shouted out, several dark glints streaked through the windows, flying straight towards the empress inside.

Chapter 602: Empress' Flight

Zu An was quite familiar with these dark streaks of light. They had shown up a few times on his way to the capital. These were the arrows of assassins! They flew much faster than regular arrows and covered large distances almost instantly.

Eunuch Lu, who was hiding in the shadows, rushed out in front of the pearl curtains, flinging his spacious sleeves outward. The arrows, which seemed powerful enough to blast apart rocks, were crushed by the strange, flexible force within his sleeves.

Without breaking stride, he flew straight out like a bolt of lightning. He planned to quickly deal with the assassins outside.

Since they were in the imperial palace's inner courtyard, there shouldn't have been many assassins. If he acted immediately, he could quickly contain the situation.

He realized his error as soon as he rushed out. There were assassins everywhere, and they were engaged in a vicious battle against the palace guards.

Eunuch Lu was shocked. "How is this possible?" He even wondered if King Qi had finally rebelled and brought his own army in.

He did not slow at all. He snapped the spines of the two assassins closest to him, then rushed back inside. Protecting the empress was his top priority.

However, things didn't go as planned. Someone suddenly rushed out at him from within the group of black clad men. The two of them exchanged three palm strikes.

Eunuch Lu was alarmed. Ninth rank!

He was instantly on guard. He knew that it wasn't possible to evaluate an assassin's strength by their cultivation alone. They often trod the line between life and death, and so their real strength was much greater. They could often defeat cultivators of higher rank than themselves.

Eunuch Lu sharpened his focus immediately. He had overcome his initial alarm, and found calmness again. The assassins before him weren't soldiers. King Qi hadn't rebelled.

These fellows looked like assassins from the Shadow Group. Hmph, the Shadow Group cares more about money than lives after all. They even dare to attack the empress!

He knew that, as long as he could hold these people off long enough, the palace's military would provide assistance. These assassins would all be dead once they were surrounded.

Zu An felt a piercing headache. Why did he run into these things wherever he went? How could there even be an attack on the empress' Palace of Peace? No one would believe him even if he told them!

Unfortunately, the intense sounds of killing outside and the blood spraying against the windows reminded him that all of this was real.

He instinctively turned to look at the empress seated behind the pearl curtains. Her expression hadn't changed, although she was slightly paler than before. She was still much more composed than the people attending her. The eunuchs and maids around her were shaking with fear.

He looked for little Zhuo and little Gui. They weren't with the others, but huddled together in a corner of the hall, trembling. Clearly, they weren't important enough to be allowed by the empress' side yet.

There was a loud bang, and the doorway was smashed open. Several palace guards flew through it, their bodies covered in blood.

They were immediately set upon by several black-clad assassins, who hacked madly at them.

Little Zhuo and little Gui stared at the sight, their mouths wide open.

They began to shake even more fiercely.

The black-clad assassins paid them no attention. Their focus was on the woman behind the pearl curtains. They charged at her, blades in hand.

Eunuch Lu had been keeping an eye on the situation inside. When he saw this, he flung his sleeves out, and the blades that had fallen to the ground immediately shot out at the assassins running at the empress like bolts of lightning, impaling them to the ground.

Zu An felt a chill run through his body. Ninth rank cultivators could harmonize with the world's natural power. The speed and power of an idle attack wasn't something an ordinary person could handle.

After all, these assassins that had just rushed in were also cultivators, yet they had all been dispatched from so far away.

Zu An thanked the heavens that he had the Sunflower Phantasm. If not for this miraculous technique that allowed him to avoid clashing with these types of experts head on, as well as his other pile of trump cards, he would have died a hundred times over on his way to the capital.

Eunuch Lu groaned. He'd been distracted while dealing with the assassins inside, and his opponent was not about to let such a glorious opportunity slip by. He dealt him a serious blow.

Eunuch Lu was more or less spent. He had managed to even the odds a little, but he was in no state to help out with what was going on within the palace hall.

Another batch of assassins stormed in, charging ruthlessly at the empress.

Zu An sighed. He couldn't just look on without doing anything. He was now a court official, and had even been made an embroidered envoy. He would face a long list of crimes if he didn't try to save the empress.

Of course, he wasn't hot-headed enough to rush straight in and put his life on the line. He had no relationship with the empress, and he refused to believe that she didn't have anything up her sleeves.

This was a world of cultivation after all, where status was often decided through strength. Even though he gradually understood that this rule wasn't as absolute as he previously thought, and that many great clans were able to place mediocre people in official positions, generally speaking, strength still reigned

supreme. The emperor was the strongest person in this world. Even though the empress was likely not ranked second, she should at least be a top-level expert.

That was why he chose to only confront two assassins, one at the fifth rank and the other at the sixth rank. Even if someone questioned him later, he could defend himself. After all, in the eyes of most people, he was but a fifth rank cultivator. The fact that he stopped two assassins on his own would have been considered taking a great risk.

More guards of the Palace of Peace entered the fray as well, but were stopped by yet more assassins. They could only look on as the assassins who had made it past them ran at the empress.

Zu An's eyelids twitched. Who had the home advantage, and who were the attackers? Why were these armored guards at a disadvantage instead?

In a heartbeat, the four assassins had already made it to the empress.

The maids and eunuchs at the empress' side mustered their courage and leaped in front of the empress. After all, they were her personal guards, and they wouldn't be let off the hook if something happened to the empress. These individuals seemed like they had been trained, but the fact that they were servants meant that their cultivation talent was ordinary at best. Even though they had some cultivation, none could stand against these vicious assassins.

There was a quick succession of pitiful screams, as servants dropped into puddles of blood one after another.

The empress frowned. She finally made her move, sending her fair palm outward. Her movements were clearly extremely slow, yet the assassin across from her just couldn't avoid it. Her hand touched his head.

This assassin loved heading to the brothels and entertainment districts in his free time, and he loved being pampered by the girls' soft hands. This hand was much more beautiful, fair, and soft than the hands he was used to... If he ever caught a glimpse of such a beautiful hand in a brothel, he might have climaxed right away.

He was rising now too, but he felt as though he was getting lighter and lighter. Afterwards... there was no afterwards.

Everyone in the hall looked on in shock. Even Zu An couldn't believe what he was seeing. He'd expected the empress to be strong, but wasn't this a little overboard?

Her fair palm moved again, touching the chest of another assassin. The assassin wanted to dodge it, but the air around him seemed to have solidified. He couldn't get out of the way. He could only watch despairingly as that beautiful yet terrifying palm inched towards him.

Just as it was about to touch him, however, it suddenly stopped. The empress coughed out a mouthful of blood.

Zu An was even more perplexed by this turn of events.

This assassin, who survived by the skin of his teeth, was overjoyed. "Her cultivation went astray in her earlier years, and she never fully recovered. Everyone, attack!"

He sent a fist flying towards her as he said this, causing her to retract her palm. The other assassins, who had been immobilized a moment ago, frantically brandished their blades at the empress.

The empress gritted her teeth. These assassins would have been nothing for her to deal with if she hadn't been wounded!

She quickly raised her hands, preparing to deal with her attackers. Even though it was hard for her to muster any strength, her sight still remained. She barely managed to avoid or deflect the incoming blows of the assassins.

Unfortunately, she couldn't evade the fist behind her. That fist flickered with an earthen-yellow radiance. Her attacker was an earth element cultivator who had harnessed the power of the earth, and his fists carried tremendous power.

The fist smashed into her lower back. Blood gushed out from her mouth, along with the last bit of her strength.

She tried to use the momentum of the blow to propel herself outside. Eunuch Lu was outside, and the palace guards as well. They were much more useful than the eunuchs and maids inside.

However, she underestimated her long-term internal injuries.

Midway through her flight, her ki suddenly ran out. Her body fell out of the air, directly towards Zu An, who was below her.

Zu An subconsciously caught her. What the hell

Chapter 603: A Man Among Men

Everyone inside the palace was stunned.

Little Gui, who was trembling in the corner, almost forgot his fear.

Little Zhuo was staring incredulously as well.

This guy really is daring! He even dares to hug the empress! His Majesty is the only one in this world who can hold her, and yet you dare to put your hands on her?

They began to regret accepting the pearl that Zu An had given them. They did not know if they would be caught up in the aftermath once this matter was looked into.

Both of them looked at Zu An pitifully. Even if this fellow was lucky enough to avoid death, he would most likely become one of them. When that happened, should they call him little Zu, or little An?

Zu An was obviously stunned as well. He had planned to ride this out without having to step in, watching from the sidelines as the empress showed off her skills. Perhaps he would cheer her on a bit.

Now, though, everything had been flipped on its head. The tremendously powerful empress was suddenly spent, and then the situation had been completely reversed!

Sis, can't you just run the other way? Why the hell are you coming towards me?

You're even jumping straight into my arms... Wow, this body is really soft, and she has a really good bottom... Ahem, that's not important right now. If I hold her like this, is it considered skinship?

Will the empress be able to accept this? Will the other officials accuse me of misconduct?

Will my punishment be execution, or castration?

His legs closed subconsciously. If he had known that this would happen, he would have let her fall.

He'd only just dealt with the matter regarding the Phoenix Nirvana Sutra, yet he somehow managed to provoke the emperor again. Should he burn some incense to chase away the bad luck?

But His Majesty put on my Hat of Forgiveness, didn't he? He probably shouldn't have it out for me...

His head was once again filled with nonsense.

The empress hadn't expected to fall into the embrace of another man. Her alluring face reddened slightly, either from shame or from her injuries. However, she was a mature woman, and not an innocent young lady. She quickly composed herself and yelled at him, "What are you staring at? The assailants are coming!"

Zu An snapped out of his daze. It wasn't just the assassins who had been going after the empress. The two assassins that he'd faced off against also brandished their swords.

What a pain in the ass. For a split second, he considered throwing the empress at them.

However, that would certainly spell his doom. He might still survive if he saved the empress' life.

I just want to do my job without any drama. Is that so hard?

The only thing he could do was to run, all the while holding onto the empress and cursing. These assassins were all experts, while he was carrying someone, with his arms completely occupied. How was he even supposed to fight?

The empress wanted to say something to help him avoid these attacks. After all, even though she was wounded, she could still see. Unexpectedly, Zu An's figure twisted a few times before she could open her mouth, leaving several afterimages behind and managing to avoid the incoming attacks with ease.

This movement technique... it looks like Mi Lianying's Sunflower Phantasm!

No, even though it's similar, it's much more profound. When she noticed that he was about to run outside, she quickly stopped him. "Don't run outside!"

Zu An stopped and looked at her in confusion. Why the hell not?

The empress blushed and said quietly, "If you appear in front of everyone while carrying me, I won't be able to protect you from the consequences even if I wanted to..."

Zu An suddenly understood what she was saying. Right now, only a few people had seen what was going on. As long as the empress didn't bring it up, the situation would be resolved easily.

Outside, however, there would be countless pairs of eyes watching. They couldn't cover this matter up even if they wanted to. At that point, even if both the empress and emperor did not pursue the matter

further, the righteous factions within the court and the imperial censors would certainly not let him off the hook. When that happened, the emperor would have no choice but to execute him.

Zu An felt a chill run up his neck. He quickly dodged backwards and hid behind the door that wasn't broken, making sure that no one outside could see him.

Another thought struck him. "Can't I just put you down?"

He was about to drop her when the empress quickly grabbed his hand. "No! I can't move. I'm not in a good condition."

Zu An stared at her.

Sis, what the hell?

Huh? Why is there something soft on my arm?

He looked at his arm, and expression became even more grave. Yup, there's no way the emperor is going to let me go.

The assassins were about to catch up to him again.

Zu An was incredibly pissed. It's all these guys' fault!

"Piss off!" he yelled at them.

He summoned Snow Phoenix, sending out a blast of frost. The incoming assailants' eyes widened in shock, and their movements gradually slowed to a stop.

A layer of frost could be seen covering their clothes. In moments, they were turned into ice sculptures.

Little Gui and little Zhuo felt as though their eyes were about to pop out of their sockets. Why is this guy so strong? Was he really the same guy that just bribed them?

The empress' eyes widened too. She had just seen him use that strange movement technique and she also knew that he had cultivated the Phoenix Nirvana Sutra, so she knew that his cultivation should be rather high. However, she never expected that he could be this strong!

He dealt with the assassins just like that?

What sort of ability was that? It seems slightly similar to the Chu clan's 'Snowflake Sword'.

This was precisely why Zu An had chosen to use this technique. He had many trump cards that he did not wish to reveal. The Snow Phoenix indeed had similar properties to Chu Chuyan's 'Snowflake Sword', and he was confident that no one would grow suspicious if he used it.

The empress' mind was on another topic. If this fellow was so strong, why did he pretend to be in danger while battling two assassins? I was dying over there, yet you were loafing on the job?

You have successfully trolled Liu Ning for 55... 55... 55...

Zu An almost dropped this woman when he saw the incoming Rage points. What the hell is wrong with you? Why would you get angry at me for saving you?

Fortunately, the amount was small, indicating that the situation could still be redeemed.

He coughed and said, "Empress, where do we go now?"

The empress bit her lip. "Carry me to the inner room."

"Alright." Since they couldn't go outside, he would let her rest inside for now.

The empress frowned as they passed little Gui and little Zhuo.

Zu An knew that she was thinking about killing them. Even though she was gentle by nature, as empress, she was often placed in situations where she had no choice.

With a sigh, he said, "These two eunuchs treated me quite well on my way here."

He did not say that they were his friends, since that would only harm their cause.

He had to express his intent more tactfully.

The empress obviously understood his plea. He had just saved her life as well, and she owed him that much. As such, she stared at the two lesser eunuchs coldly and said, "If I hear a word about what happened today, your families' lives are forfeit."

"This servant doesn't dare!" The two lesser eunuchs pounded their heads against the ground, and their bodies began to tremble even more violently.

The empress nodded in satisfaction. "My eunuchs have just been killed. The two of you will be my personal servants from now on."

Little Gui and little Zhuo were momentarily stunned, then joy overwhelmed them. "Thank you, Your Highness, for your grace!"

Before this moment, they had only been two lesser eunuchs with no status within the Palace of Peace. Now, they had been elevated to the empress' personal eunuchs! Such a rise in status was a glorious gift that they had never dared to even dream about.

They looked at Zu An gratefully. They knew that they had not only been saved, but also shown such favor, all because of this man.

It had all started out as nothing more than a friendly greeting. They never expected him to actually be this loyal.

Such an act is worthy of the man who dares to even hold the empress in his arms! This is a man among men! Following him in the future is definitely the right choice!

Zu An wasn't to know that these two eunuchs wanted to set up a shrine for him in their homes right at that moment. He carried the empress into the inner room. The smell of the precious incense inside soothed his mind. It was truly a nice feeling.

The empress pointed at the phoenix couch that To one side of the room. "Take me to bed."

Zu An was so shocked he almost dropped her.

Chapter 604: Who's Threatening Who?

Seeing Zu An's dazed expression, the empress finally realized what she had just said, and her cheeks flushed red. "What the heck are you thinking of? My injuries are severe, and I can't sit. I have to lie on the bed!"

Zu An smiled in embarrassment. "You scared me to death! I thought that you..."

The empress snorted, "You thought that I wanted to sleep with you? What kind of dumb thoughts go on inside your head? I really have no idea what Chuyan saw in you."

Zu An, carrying her to her bed, was stunned. "Your Highness, you know Chuyan?"

"We met once in the past. Both her looks and her character are first-class, and countless noble sons tried to court her." The empress's voice carried quite a bit of praise.

Her entire body suddenly went rigid. Her brows were knit together in a tight frown, and she was unable to speak any further.

She could feel something hard pressing against her. She had assumed that it was a dagger or some other weapon at first, so she did not pay it too much attention.

However, she suddenly felt it change, and that was when she realized the truth. This was the imperial palace! How could he have brought a weapon in?

Her face grew red at first, then darkened. "You damned brat, you really are daring! How dare you have such thoughts towards your empress!"

You have successfully trolled Liu Ning for 233 Rage points!

She wasn't young nor innocent, so she was not shy or embarrassed about it. Instead, she immediately berated him.

Zu An grumbled inwardly. He could only try to explain himself. "You can't blame me for this! Any normal man would have the same reaction if they were holding an incredible beauty like yourself. It would be weirder if there was no reaction at all."

Even he felt that his explanation was rather shameless. What sort of situation were they in?

The empress sneered. "Isn't your reaction too exaggerated?"

Zu An's skin was harder than a city wall. "This only means that Your Highness' charm is just too formidable."

The empress was so angry that she laughed instead. "Oh? Do you think I should be happy about it, then?"

Zu An placed her on the bed with a sigh. "Empress, you're not an ordinary woman. You should know that it wasn't on purpose. I never even wanted to get involved in all of this from the very start. It was you... Ahem, it was fate that willed it. There's no need to argue over such a small matter."

The empress obviously understood the reasoning behind this. However, she was already used to her high and mighty stature. Letting him off the hook for this transgression did not sit well with her. “Hmph! How can such a thing be considered a small matter for us women? You’ve dared to disrespect me, which shows how little consideration you have for rules and etiquette to begin with, and proves that you’re just a scoundrel. Well then, should I tell His Majesty about this and have you beaten to death?”

She noticed the hint of viciousness that flashed across Zu An’s eyes the moment she said this, just before heavy force pressed down on her.

“What... What are you doing?” The empress flew into a panic at the weight of a man pressed so closely against her. Her calm expression fled, and she shrank backwards.

Unperturbed, Zu An pressed down on her shoulder and fixed her with a cold stare. “Woman, you’re the one who does not understand the current situation. I just saved your life! It’s one thing if you don’t thank me, but you’re threatening me instead.”

The empress’ eyes went wide. “That isn’t a sufficient reason for you to be disrespectful towards me!”

She was already starting to regret her actions. Her threat had been an ordinary political tactic used to scare the other party, giving her room to rope him in afterwards. However, she never expected him to act so differently, and strike back at her.

Could it be that this fellow had no knowledge of court regulations? Notwithstanding that, she was still the empress! How did he dare to treat her like this? He truly is a scoundrel with an utter lack of respect for authority.

She could never have known that, ever since he entered the palace, Zu An had been strung up like a tightrope. He was surrounded by powers too great to comprehend. The empress, King Qi, or the other clans in the capital—he was not strong enough to protect himself if they demanded his life.

Walking this tight line had left him extremely stressed out, and he was already suppressing a great deal of rage. Now, this empress had come along and given him a hot load of garbage. The way she attacked him, the one who had saved her life, caused something to snap within him, and he could no longer keep a lid on his anger.

He was still a transmigrator, and did not have the same level of respect towards the monarchy as the natives of this world did.

Zu An’s gaze was icy-cold. “Empress, please understand clearly that you threw yourself at me. Even so, I did not suspect you of seducing me at all. How can you turn around and claim that I treated you with disrespect?”

“Me, seduce you?” Even the empress, who was normally rather even-tempered, couldn’t help but grow furious. “I am the mother of an empire, the glorious empress! Why would I seduce a shameless scoundrel?”

You have successfully trolled Liu Ning for 444... 444... 444...

Zu An harrumphed. “That’s hard to say. The empress may have a pristine appearance, but it does get lonesome within the palace. You might have missed the feeling of a man.”

The empress' gaze grew frigid. "Absolutely disgraceful! Don't you know that these words alone could lead to the eradication of your clan a hundred times over?"

You have successfully trolled Liu Ning for 999... 999... 999...

She was on the verge of ordering the execution of all of his relatives!

Zu An was incensed as well. "Your Highness, I'm afraid you don't understand the situation you're in. There are many assassins outside right now. Even if I kill you, everyone will believe that it was the assassins who did it. No one would suspect me."

The empress' breathing grew ragged, and her large chest rose and fell rapidly. However, she refrained from taunting him any further.

Everything that this man had done up to the present moment proved that he had no reservations. She wasn't about to throw her life away now because of some fleeting emotion.

Her eyes flickered about. She decided on a plan, and mellowed her tone. "Fine. I was the one in the wrong earlier on. I'll offer you an apology here. Please get off me so we can speak properly."

She had already decided that, once everything was said and done, she was going to order Eunuch Lu to secretly get rid of this scoundrel.

Zu An saw a constant stream of notifications—You have successfully trolled Liu Ning for 1024 Rage points!—coming in through his Keyboard system. If I didn't have this Keyboard system, I might have really been fooled by you.

He sighed. "Your Highness plans to kill me off after pacifying me. Isn't that right?"

The empress was shocked. Can this fellow read minds? How does he know my thoughts?

Her face immediately paled, because she knew that things were turning sour. Why would this guy ever let her go if he knew what she planned to do? There were so many assassins outside as well, and he could easily put the blame on them.

The only two other witnesses were the two lesser eunuchs outside. However, they were not cultivators, and it was easy enough to dispatch them.

This thought dispelled any lingering hesitation. She had finally accumulated some ki again. Gathering her strength, she sent a palm flying towards her chest.

Zu An was already prepared. He grabbed her wrist and pressed it against the bed. The strength, which she had mustered with great difficulty, instantly vanished.

The empress was on the verge of tears. Her cultivation was sufficient to dominate the entire world. In the past, she could have killed him with a single strike. Yet now, she had fallen so low that she was being bullied by a dog—No, pressed down under a dog! It was a truly tragic fate.

Zu An instinctively whipped out the Poisonous Prick from his Brilliant Glass Bead, the blade flashing towards the empress' neck. The empress could clearly sense the chill of the blade. This was a weapon that cut straight at the soul. This was imminent death. She cried out and instinctively closed her eyes.

The Poisonous Prick stopped a hair from her snow-white neck. Zu An's expression flickered. Frankly, he wasn't an indiscriminate murderer. Killing someone like this wasn't something he wanted to do if he could afford not to.

Yet if he didn't, the consequences would be endless.

There was no way he could stop halfway.

The empress sensed his hesitation. She opened her eyes and sneered. "What, you don't dare lay a hand on me now? If you respectfully kowtow to me three times in apology, I might just consider forgiving you."

"Kowtow my ass!" Zu An exploded with rage. His palm smacked straight down on her large, juicy and peach-shaped cheeks.

All rational thought disappeared from the empress' mind. She stared at him in a daze, temporarily unable to form a coherent sentence.

Since he was committed, Zu An couldn't stop halfway. He smacked her viciously. I've gotta admit, this does feel rather nice...

"Ah!! What are you doing?"

"Stop hitting me!"

"I... was wrong! Isn't that enough?"

"Ah~"

...

The empress let out a high-pitched yet slightly muffled cry, leaving Zu An slightly stunned. Isn't she giving up a little too easily?

The empress' eyes were already filled with tears, and her body was shaking uncontrollably. "I will chop up your corpse into ten thousand pieces!" She said through gritted teeth. It sounded like she was sobbing.

She had been born into a great clan. From her earliest memory, her older sister had been the empress, and she later assumed the mantle of empress as well. She had always enjoyed a lofty status and an extravagant life. When had she ever been subjected to something like this?

She was about to curse again, but her mouth was suddenly covered by his. "Mmm...mmm..."

Zu An straightened, wiping off the drool around her mouth. His voice was cold. "You keep saying that I've offended you, and even use this accusation to threaten me with death. Fine. Now I've truly offended you. If anything happens to me in the future, I will let the emperor know that you were violated by another man. Let's see how you continue being the empress when that time comes. I'm sure your choice is clear enough."

The empress was completely dumbstruck. However, after her initial rage had passed, she realized that she really had no way of getting back at him...

At that moment, cold, mocking laughter drifted over from the doorway. “What a spectacular pair of adulterers!”

Chapter 605: Reunion

The empress was extremely vexed. She had been prepared to use Zu An’s disrespect towards her as a bargaining chip to threaten him further, which would eventually allow her to control him completely.

However, Zu An just had to turn this phony ‘offense’ into something real. This made things much more troublesome.

Whether or not his earlier actions constituted an offence was up to her discretion, which left her some leeway as to how to proceed.

However, now that he had truly disrespected her, it was all in His Majesty’s hands. If the emperor really looked into this matter, Zu An would be dead for sure, but the emperor would forever loathe her.

She had only planned to use this little secret to keep Zu An on a leash, but it was now a secret that both of them were forced to keep.

If she only had herself to worry about, she might have risked it and tried to get rid of Zu An for this offence.

However, she wasn’t an island. She had the massive Liu clan riding on her shoulders, and she dared not take the risk. If something untoward happened, the entire Liu clan would go down with her.

Was she just supposed to swallow it down like that?

She was the glorious empress of this empire, yet she had to let this man kiss her and mess around with her?

She turned the matter over in her mind, but finally realized that there really wasn’t anything she could do.

The more she thought about it, the angrier she felt.

You have successfully trolled Liu Ning for 1024... 1024... 1024...

The incoming rage points were all Zu An needed to know that he had truly provoked the empress this time. However, there was nothing he could do. There was no better option that he could think of besides killing her.

The empress was about to say something, but was interrupted by a cold, mocking laugh. “What a spectacular pair of adulterers!”

The two of them turned and spotted a black-clad assassin staring at them from not far away.

The empress felt her head explode. She was still thinking of what to do about Zu An, but this new development required urgent attention. “Hurry... hurry and kill him!” she said instinctively.

This was something only she and Zu An knew about. Once they had hashed out a secret agreement, they could still keep it under wraps. However, things would get messy if a third party found out.

She had already subconsciously put Zu An in the same camp as her. After all, they were stuck in the same boat when it came to this affair.

Zu An was vexed as well. There was no way for him to escape execution if an assassin leaked out what had gone on in this inner chamber.

Without hesitation, he flew at the assassin.

The assassin reacted even more quickly, and took off immediately.

Zu An froze. Wasn't this assassin here to kill the empress? Why did he flee?

The empress was already on the verge of tears. When she saw him staring blankly, she yelled, "Go after him! Once he gets away, he doesn't even need his blades to kill us both!"

Zu An snapped out of his daze and ran after the assassin.

The situation outside was completely different from before. Guards from other areas of the palace had rushed over, and more and more assassins were being cut down. They were no match for these elite troops.

One of the Shadow Group assassins blew a whistle loudly, and the remaining assassins began to withdraw.

The one who had confronted Eunuch Lu was clearly the leader of this Shadow Group operation. He used the force of Eunuch Lu's final strike to withdraw, retreating under the cover of his companions.

Eunuch Lu did not pursue, since the assassin was at the same rank as him. He was also carrying an injury, and he did not wish to fight someone of the same level at such a disadvantage.

Most importantly, he was worried about the empress' safety. He saw a black-clad assassin and Zu An rush out, one after the other. He immediately charged in, a panicked expression on his face. I hope nothing happened to the empress!

Zu An sighed in relief when he saw Eunuch Lu rush inside. His biggest worry was that another assassin would sneak in and kill the empress while he was busy chasing after this one. That would be the absolute worst-case scenario.

Judging from the empress' tone, a tacit agreement had been made. As long as they could maintain a certain degree of balance, neither one of them would dare mention what happened, and both of them would protect this secret.

The only thing he needed to do was to silence this Shadow Group assassin.

After pursuing the assassin for a while, Zu An began to frown. Why does this person seem familiar? He was certain that he had never heard this person's voice before, though. That was why he kept up his pursuit.

He found his quarry rather strange. Even though he was slowly catching up, it would still take him some time to do so. Zu An began to panic. Just as he was about to pull out one of his trump cards, two guards rushed out.

The attire of the Shadow Group's members was infamous. The two guards immediately drew their blades to confront him. "Stop!"

The two of them attacked the black-clad individual from two directions. The black clad individual tried to dodge, weaving about, but could not find an opening to flee. Instead, he was pressured into a dangerous situation.

Zu An was overjoyed. As expected, there were many hidden experts in the palace! These seemingly-ordinary guards were actually both at the fifth rank, and they had clearly practiced fighting together. They were much stronger when they coordinated with one another.

The black-clad assassin soon found himself in a compromising position. A palm struck his shoulder, making him groan.

Huh?

The voice sounded slightly familiar! The voice that he had heard in the inner chamber had been that of a man, yet now, the assassin clearly sounded like a woman.

The two guards were not about to show mercy just because she was a woman.

The black-clad woman unleashed her true power. She suddenly raised her hand, and countless vines tangled around the two guards.

"Wood element?" The two guards panicked. Their blades were quickly wreathed in flame.

Ordinarily, it would have been easy enough for the black-clad woman to deal with these guards, given their respective cultivations. Unfortunately, she had just happened to run into fire element cultivators, which naturally countered her own element.

"Ah!!" The woman let out a cry of alarm. One of the guards' blades had found their mark. Even though she evaded quickly, it still left a bloody cut left on her body.

How could Zu An still wait? He rushed over and said, "Guard brothers, let me help you!"

The two guards took note of the official uniform that Zu An wore. He had also been in pursuit of this assassin earlier on, so none of them were on guard against him. "Stay back and block off her escape route! You'll get in our way if you join the fight."

"Okay!" Zu An answered eagerly, continuing to charge at them.

"What are you doing?" These inner palace guards were extremely vigilant. They quickly noticed that something was wrong, and put their blades up in a guard position.

However, a black hole seemed to appear from nowhere, sucking their ki dry.

There was no way for them to have predicted such a thing. The sudden feeling of nausea almost caused them to vomit.

Zu An used this chance to strike out with his finger twice, once for each guard, ending their lives.

Even though he didn't like to kill needlessly, he was never soft-hearted when someone he cared for was in danger.

After dealing with the two guards, Zu An turned towards the black-clad woman. "Snow, how are your injuries?"

"Huh? You recognized me?" The black clad woman removed her veil, revealing her delicate face. Who else could she be but Snow?

"I thought you looked familiar, but I wasn't sure because you had the voice of a man." Zu An felt joy well up within him. He hadn't expected to run into her in the palace.

Qiao Xueying removed a small jade pendant from her neck. "This is one of the Shadow Group's artifacts. It can change your voice and conceal your identity to a certain degree."

After offering the explanation, she huffed angrily. "Of course you wouldn't have recognized me, though. You were busy fooling around with the empress."

"That's a misunderstanding..." Zu An broke out in cold sweat. How could he have predicted that sort of situation? He was just about to explain himself when he heard footsteps approaching. Clearly, more guards were on their way.

"The assassin is over there!" Some of them had noticed them.

Qiao Xueying's expression changed. She was dead for sure if she was trapped here. She might even drag Zu An down with her.

Chapter 606: The Sorrow of Parting

"Follow me!" Zu An pulled her into an alley.

Qiao Xueying suddenly felt at ease when she felt his hand around hers. With him beside her, nothing seemed that dangerous anymore.

She had already made her decision. If she really couldn't get away, she would find a way to cut off all relations with him, so that she wouldn't drag him down with her.

As she was pondering her future moves, she found herself led along a very complicated route. She was shocked. "Ah Zu, how are you so familiar with these roads?"

"Have you already forgotten that I'm now a palace official?" Zu An said with a chuckle. They were already in front of a residence.

Qiao Xueying was completely dazed when she saw him open the door casually. Her lover was becoming more and more incredible!

Zu An closed the door behind her and took out a set of clothes. "Change into these clothes and wear this mask."

Qiao Xueying was shocked when she saw the unique embroidery. "This is an Embroidered Envoy uniform!"

Zu An smiled. "What did I just tell you? Is your memory that poor?"

He had more than one set of the uniform. They were slightly too large for Qiao Xueying, but with some adjustments, it would look all right. With guards running about everywhere in the palace, it was difficult for her to leave. However, dressing as an embroidered envoy would make it that much easier to escape.

Snow stuck out her tongue. "There was so much going on that I forgot, all right?"

She picked up the clothes, and her face suddenly turned red. "Can you turn around?"

Zu An laughed. "We're already partners. What is there to be embarrassed about?"

"Who are you calling your partner?" Qiao Xueying said with a huff. She was still shy about it, though, and ran behind a screen to change.

"Why did you guys try to assassinate the empress?" asked Zu An from the other side of the screen
"Don't you know how dangerous that is?"

In his opinion, it was suicidal. They might have been able to catch the palace unprepared, but once the guards reacted, the assassins were most certainly dead.

"This was a massive mission that the Shadow Group accepted. The client offered a great reward for this mission. As long as the price is high enough, the Shadow Group is willing to even kill a deity. That is their creed," explained Qiao Xueying. "This was my final task that the Shadow Group assigned to me. I didn't know what the mission was either. I only realized what was going to happen after I was brought into the palace, but by then, it was already too late. I could only brace myself and follow through with it, since it was a chance at a new life. Who would've thought that I would find you fooling around with that empress? Hmph!"

You have successfully trolled Qiao Xueying for 23... 23... 23...

"It's not what you're thinking!" Zu An finally had some room to explain himself. "I had no choice, I had to do it in order to protect myself in the future..."

He gave her a rough explanation of the events that had transpired.

Qiao Xueying was stunned. She poked her head out from behind the screen, her fair collarbones faintly visible. "You said that you spanked the empress and kissed her? And in the end, not only were you not punished, she even had to protect you?"

"I think so." Zu An had a strange look on his face. "I actually have to thank you. If you hadn't frightened her, she might not have reached that decision."

Qiao Xueying gave him a long look. She had so many thoughts in her head that she didn't know where to start. "That's you, all right," she said in the end.

Zu An smiled in embarrassment, then quickly changed the topic. "Didn't I tell you the last time to let me know before you go on your last mission? Thank heavens I just happened to be in the imperial palace as well. The consequences might have been too tragic otherwise!"

Qiao Xueying disappeared behind the screen again. "I didn't see you at your place, and there wasn't enough time. I had to set out together with the rest of the Shadow Group." She laughed. "The fact that you saved me in the palace means that we really are destined for each other after all."

"We might not be that lucky next time." Zu An shook his head when he glimpsed her smile. It seems all women care about this stuff about destiny. "So, do you know who the client is?"

Qiao Xueying shook her head. "I don't know. Shadow Group always maintains absolute secrecy when it comes to their clients, especially for such a massive undertaking."

Zu An knew that this was a pointless line of questioning. "After today's affair, the imperial court will surely go after the Shadow Group. You shouldn't go back to them."

"Okay. I've already fulfilled my agreement with them, so I'm now completely free." Qiao Xueying said this as she tidied up her clothes.

Zu An's eyes lit up. Qiao Xueying was an attractive person to begin with, and these clothes lent her a slightly heroic air. The words 'cosplay foreplay' suddenly appeared in his mind.

Qiao Xueying immediately looked down at her outfit when she noticed his stare. "What's wrong? Did I put them on wrongly?"

He replied with a firm hug and a deep and passionate kiss.

Only after a long moment did Zu An reluctantly separate from her. He looked at the young lady in his arms and said, "Snow, you really are beautiful."

The young lady was extremely happy to hear his praise. Her eyes sparkled as she looked at him. "Ah Zu~"

Zu An felt extremely moved. He picked her up and moved her to the desk, then swept everything off it.

Qiao Xueying's heart began to pound even harder. "I just finished putting on these clothes..."

"That's just how I like it." Zu An kissed her.

"Mmm..."

...

A while later, a mass of hurried footsteps sounded outside, followed by the raised voice of a guard. "The assassin seems to have escaped in this direction. Everyone, search this area carefully."

"Ah!!" Qiao Xueying cried out in alarm and quickly pushed her lover away. Her face was red as she smoothed out her messy clothes.

Zu An was irritated. Why did these guys have to come now? However, he knew that proper business was their top priority, so he didn't whine about it.

He put on an Embroidered Envoy uniform as well, and helped Qiao Xueying put on her mask. In moments, there were two Embroidered Envoy inside the room.

Zu An looked at her and nodded in satisfaction. Although she was slightly smaller in stature, she didn't look much different from other Embroidered Envoy.

There were short men in this world too, so it wasn't a big deal.

When they were ready, he and Qiao Xueying walked out.

"Show yourself!" Guards quickly surrounded them.

Zu An fished out a command token and waved it in front of them.

"Golden Token Embroidered Envoy!" The shocked guards immediately greeted him respectfully. After all, the Embroidered Envoy was a mysterious group to begin with, enjoying great status, and those that held golden tokens were second only to Zhuxie Chixin.

Only ten Embroidered Envoy were granted golden tokens, and every single one of them had a large number of silver- and bronze-token envoys beneath them. These golden-token envoys were of extremely high status, and these guards did not dare provoke one of them.

The guard leader mustered up the courage to ask a question. "If I may ask, My Lord, have you seen an assassin running past?"

Zu An's voice was stern. "I did not. I don't believe any assassins have appeared within several zhang of this place."

The guard felt relieved. "If you say so, My Lord, there is no mistake. We're leaving!"

With a wave of his hand, he led his group in a different direction.

Zu An and Qiao Xueying both walked towards the entrance. Qiao Xueying was bouncing. "I didn't expect your status to be so useful!"

Zu An chuckled. "Your lover is extremely capable, you know?"

Qiao Xueying snorted. "Hmph, rascal." However, there was no trace of annoyance in her voice.

The departing guards also began to discuss amongst themselves. "Leader, something doesn't seem right with those two. I've never heard of two Embroidered Envoy exiting from the same room before."

That guard snorted. "I know what you are trying to say. I might have suspected something if it was any other Embroidered Envoy, but he had a golden token! Those with golden tokens all have tremendous cultivations. How could an assassin pass off as one of them?"

The others chuckled. "You are right, sir."

"Although, I have always heard that each embroidered envoy lives alone. It feels weird to see two of them living together."

"Did you notice that the one next to the golden-token envoy was slightly shorter?"

“Was she a woman? Are there women among the Embroidered Envoy?”

“Even if she isn’t a woman, he has to be the petite and pretty type. Many high-ranking officials love that type. He is a golden-token envoy, so it’s expected that he would pick up a subordinate like that.”

“Leader, why do you sound so excited when you’re discussing this matter? Please don’t have those thoughts about us!”

“Pah! You should take a good look in the mirror first!”

...

Zu An had already led Qiao Xueying to one of the palace entrances. Even though the security around the imperial palace was strict, the golden token of the Embroidered Envoy was too powerful. The guards did not ask a single question when they saw his attire and token, and let them straight through.

“Ah Zu, we have to part ways. I need to bring my clansmen home,” said Qiao Xueying reluctantly.

She had only stayed in the capital, and even worked for the Shi clan, in order to rescue her elven clansmen that had been trapped inside from the previous war.

Later on, she found out that, even though the Shi clan promised to help her rescue her clansmen, they had only used it as a leash around her neck. They did not do much, and even took part in the elven slave trade themselves.

After she turned against them, she used the strength she had accumulated over the years and the strength of the Shadow Group to successfully rescue many of her clansmen.

She had already sent several batches out of the capital. This was the final batch, and she was going along with them. The human world wasn’t her home, after all, and she held special status among her clan. The clan had continuously urged her to return to complete an important ceremony.

Zu An felt a great reluctance. “Snow, I really don’t want to part with you, but I have too many things to take care of. I can’t leave with you.”

Qiao Xueying snorted. “You’re making it sound as if you’re actually willing to leave behind Chu First Miss and the others... I won’t be unreasonable and make you give up everything to return home with me. But if you have a chance, please visit me. I’ll be with the elven clan.”

“I will surely come looking for you,” said Zu An seriously.

Qiao Xueying beamed. She got on her tiptoes and kissed him on the cheek. “Ah Zu, you’re the best!”

Zu An sighed. Separation always hurt the most.

All sorts of conflicting emotions rose up within him. He was about to say something, but his Embroidered Envoy golden token flickered with radiance, transmitting a strand of divine will. “All Embroidered Envoy near the palace are to cease whatever they are doing and render aid to the eastern palace at once!”

Chapter 607: Exposed

Having to part with Snow left Zu An with a heavy heart. He still had many things that he wanted to say to her. At the very least, he wanted to see her off.

Unfortunately, the message transmitted to his golden token caused his expression to immediately change.

The one sending this message was Zhuxie Chixin!

Besides serving as a proof of identity, the Embroidered Envoy token also served as a communications device. It was similar to the walkie-talkies of police officers, which could easily convey orders from superiors.

Of course, this function would only be used for major emergencies.

Furthermore, if an envoy did not respond immediately, and was caught slacking on the job, the formation on the golden token could record everything, such as the distance from the emergency site and other relevant information. Reward and blame would be properly apportioned amongst the Embroidered Envoy, depending on the outcome.

Zhuxie Chixin had told him of all this when he first became an Embroidered Envoy. Fortunately, the golden token only recorded distance and other such data, but couldn't record videos like a security camera. If it could, he would already be exposed.

This was to be expected, though, since every single one of the Embroidered Envoy was individually outstanding. Pride often grew with competence. Which one of them would tolerate having a security camera on them that recorded every action?

Having a token with communication capabilities that only recorded basic information for the apportioning of rewards and punishments was the best compromise.

"What's wrong?" Qiao Xueying asked. She could sense that something was amiss.

Zu An explained what had just happened as he wondered about what was going on. There had just been a bunch of assassins in the empress' palace. Why would there suddenly be assassins in the crown prince's eastern palace as well?

Did all of the guards decide to go on vacation at the same time?

Also, wasn't the emperor the number one expert in the world? His divine senses are rumored to cover the entire imperial palace. Why wasn't he taking action, even when something so serious had happened?

Snow voiced her surprise. "I didn't hear anything about the Shadow Group having another operation! Besides, all of our elites should have been involved in the attack on the empress. I don't think even a group as powerful as the Shadow Group could attack the eastern palace simultaneously."

Zu An came to the only logical conclusion. "Then it's probably another power."

Several things still weren't clear, though. Weren't these two powers too well-coordinated? The guards had all been drawn to the Palace of Peace, then dispersed to pursue Shadow Group's retreating assassins, after which, there was yet another attack on the eastern palace. There was no way the guards would be able to make it in time. No wonder Zhuxie Chixin had ordered the Embroidered Envoy to provide aid as quickly as possible.

Wait, I haven't seen Zhuxie Chixin around either.

Unfortunately, the token only allowed for one-way communication, and was used only to distribute orders.

Qiao Xueying said, "Ah Zu, you should go. If you don't, you might get into trouble when they review the situation."

Zu An hesitated. "That means I won't be able to see you off."

Qiao Xueying smiled. "You've already accompanied me so far outside the palace. I'm more than happy."

Zu An took the young woman into his arms, feeling her delicate body pressed up against his. "Snow, I will surely visit you."

Qiao Xueying beamed, and her voice became incredibly sweet. "All right, then. I'll be waiting for you."

After he left her, Zu An put on his mask and returned to the palace, hurrying towards the eastern palace.

Annoyed by the summons, he had made up his mind. Since they forced him and Snow to part ways, he would only do the bare minimum to help out.

Any faction that could attempt an assassination on the crown prince had to wield a terrifying power. He had no interest in risking his life to protect a fool that he had only met twice.

He hadn't succeeded in his plan to slack off at the Palace of Peace. This time, he was definitely going to learn from that experience.

However, he did not waste any time along the way. The token recorded his position constantly, so if he moved too slowly, it would come back to bite him.

By the time he reached the eastern palace, it had been turned into a slaughterhouse.

The ground was littered with the corpses of guards and black-clad assassins, and the ground was covered in rivers of blood.

The eastern palace guards were clearly at the point of collapse. Only a single middle-aged man and a few guards were hanging on.

Judging from his uniform, this was likely the crown prince's lesser tutor, the eighth-ranked Cao Hou.

King Qi was the crown prince's great tutor, but given his status, there was no way he would continuously stay by the crown prince's side to serve as his teacher.

This lesser tutor was the crown prince's real tutor.

Zu An had been summoned to the Palace of Peace, and had not had the chance to formally meet this man.

There was a sense of dignity about this man, perhaps because of his long service as the crown prince's tutor. His attacks were also strong and disciplined, and he beat away the assassins' best efforts.

Zu An was impressed. As expected of an eighth-ranked cultivator!

They were heavily outnumbered, though. Despite his individual strength, he was just barely holding on.

Zu An looked around, and saw that even the crown princess was fighting, a sword in her hand.

The crown princess was already pretty, with a tall and slender build. As she fought, her dress fluttered about her, and she looked just like a goddess in a painting.

Zu An silently evaluated her. She's only slightly behind my Chuyan.

She was protecting the crown prince, who cowered behind her, curled up in a ball and trembling. Even though he had been bestowed all manner of treasures from birth, and he was stronger than an ordinary person, he lacked the courage to help his own wife.

He was flanked by two eunuchs. They were none other than little Xu and little He, one wielding a wooden stool, and the other a broom. They were also quaking with fear, their eyes darting desperately about.

Zu An was speechless. Are you guys kidding me? Grab a damned blade or something! There are corpses everywhere. Any random sword would be better than what you're holding!

The crown princess' cultivation seemed to be around the fifth or sixth rank. She would have been considered a rather formidable cultivator in the outside world. Most of the assassins were also around this level.

Despite this, she was a crown princess, used to living a pampered life. She didn't have much actual martial experience.

She was almost injured several times, but was saved by a petite figure who was weaving and darting around her.

Bixie Swordplay?

Zu An was momentarily surprised, but he quickly realized that it only looked slightly similar.

He had already identified this person. It was the crown princess' personal maid, Rong Mo. Her cultivation was much higher than the crown princess'. Each time she moved, she left a wound on her opponent.

Most shocking of all was her weapon. It wasn't a blade or a sword, but a fine embroidery needle!

She doesn't seem like Invincible East. She seems more like...[1]

He pondered this at length, and finally found a close-fitting description. This was just like how Granny Rong stabbed Xia Ziwei in 'My Fair Princess'!

She really does bear resemblance to that assassin, Granny Rong!

Zu An really couldn't associate this petite maid with the wrinkled face of Granny Rong.

No, wait. Her cultivation seems to be around the sixth or seventh rank! Those with Chu Chuyan and Pei Mianman's aptitude had to have been given a plethora of opportunities in order to rise to the sixth rank. How did this maid do it? How is her cultivation this high?

He quickly came to a conclusion. She was definitely not as young as she looked. In fact, she might actually already be a granny.

A number of embroidered envoys had reached the eastern palace as well. They had clearly been nearby, and rushed over when they received the summons.

Unfortunately, almost all of them had bronze tokens, and there was only a single silver-token envoy. Even though his cultivation was decent, he wasn't able to turn the tide, and could only alleviate some of the pressure on the crown prince's entourage.

Zu An made sure that his mask was on properly. He figured he could probably get away with just dealing with one or two assassins. However, his appearance did not escape either side. When they saw that another embroidered envoy had shown up, the combatants on both sides frowned, but did not seem to care. These embroidered envoys were not individually strong, and they wouldn't be carrying the emperor's powerful decrees if they weren't completing a task for the emperor. The assassins were not cowed by his presence.

However, several of the embroidered envoys grew excited when they saw Zu An. "It's a golden token lord! We're saved!"

At this sudden exclamation, everyone turned to look in Zu An's direction. Several individuals, whose cultivations were clearly much higher than the rest, rushed straight at him.

Zu An could barely hold back his rage.

Motherfucker! I even put away my damned golden token in order to blend in. How the hell did they still recognize me?!

Chapter 608: I Wanted to Keep a Low Profile, But My Opponent is Too Strong!

One of the assassins facing the crown prince's lesser tutor rushed at Zu An.

Seventh rank!

Zu An quickly deduced his cultivation from his charge.

He began cursing in his heart. This fellow is clearly the number two expert attacking Cao Hou. Why the hell is he leaving him behind and coming after me instead? He's even bringing some of his buddies along, all of them at the sixth rank!

Where is your integrity? You should be attacking Cao Hou or the crown prince. Why the hell are you coming at me?!

Zu An felt this way because he didn't truly know what a golden-token embroidered envoy represented. He hadn't spent enough time as a member of the Embroidered Envoy to fully understand this.

There were only ten golden-token envoys in the entire Embroidered Envoy, and every single one of them were sharp and reliable. The most basic requirement was powerful cultivation, and they were all the strongest amongst the Embroidered Envoy.

They were all at the seventh rank at least, and it was rumored that some were even at the ninth rank.

Huang Huihong, who had been sent to arrest Zu An, was only a silver-token envoy. This illustrated just how high-ranking a golden-token envoy was.

In the eyes of these assailants, the threat posed by a single golden-token envoy was even greater than that posed by the crown prince's lesser tutor, Cao Hou.

After all, they didn't know which one of the golden-token envoys it was. If he was at the ninth rank, the fight was all but over.

They had to pit their greatest strength against him right from the start.

Zu An didn't dare show any negligence. He quickly raised his palm to ward off the seventh-ranked assassin.

The assassin felt his own strength disappear, leaving him horrified. "Holy sh*t, this one is at least at the eighth rank!"

He didn't know that this was because of the Heaven Devouring Sutra, and therefore put it down to his opponent's cultivation surpassing his own. However, Zu An didn't seem like a ninth rank to him. If his opponent had been at the ninth rank, the palm strike would have ended his life.

The assassins cursed their bad luck. If only it had been a seventh-ranked envoy instead!

All those defending the crown prince were stunned. The crown princess swiveled her beautiful eyes in his direction. She had to properly thank this individual when everything was over.

Zu An was baffled as well. He knew that his cultivation couldn't be evaluated through ordinary means, but the fact that he was facing someone at the peak of the seventh rank without being at a disadvantage was still unexpected.

I'm already this strong?

Two more assassins rushed at him, one from the right and one from the left, clearly intending to alleviate some of the pressure on their seventh-ranked companion.

Zu An knew that these assassins were proficient in the art of killing, so he didn't dare take them lightly. It would be a disaster if he were to be defeated and exposed.

He didn't want to reveal his identity by using his usual set of skills, so he harnessed the Heaven Devouring Sutra instead. Even though he couldn't form black holes like Wu Geng had back then, he could already form a powerful vortex in his palm.

It completely sucked away the ki from the longsword of the assassin on the left. With a twist, he crushed the sharp longsword into an unrecognizable lump of steel.

Alarmed, the assassin quickly withdrew, but Zu An wasn't about to give up on such a great opportunity. Speed was his forte. He rushed over and smashed a palm against the assassin, who spurted out a stream of blood.

All those present were stunned. This man is so strong!

Even the lesser tutor, Cao Hou, gave him a look of surprise. Who is this Embroidered Envoy? Why can't I see through his cultivation? His cultivation didn't seem that high... Could it be that he is hiding his aura through a great skill, and that he is pursuing a dao that is close to the natural laws? Could this man's cultivation be far above mine, which is why I cannot understand him?

The crown princess was starry-eyed. It wasn't that she liked this Embroidered Envoy, She was merely comforted by the presence of a reliable protector at such a critical moment.

The looks of adoration directed at Zu An left him on cloud nine.

What's the point of cultivation? It's obviously for showing off!

At the same time, he sighed in amazement. The Heaven Devouring Sutra was a supremely useful skill. It could neutralize an opponent's attack, making it practically impossible for them to evaluate his real cultivation. It turned him into a wolf in sheep's clothing!

Of course, he wasn't going to show off the cultivation-absorbing ability of the Heaven Devouring Sutra. He did not want to become a public enemy of the entire world. This ability would have to be used in secret.

You have successfully trolled Qiu Honglei for 123 Rage points!

...

He received a continuous stream of notifications for the Rage points he was accumulating. These assassins had clearly been angered by the death of their companion. However, one name left Zu An stunned.

Qiu Honglei?

She's here as well?

Zu An immediately scanned the battlefield. Almost everyone was wearing black, and the battlefield was enveloped in chaos. It was hard to tell who was who.

While he was momentarily distracted, the assassin on the right attacked again.

Zu An deftly evaded this attack. His main opponent was the seventh-ranked individual. That man posed the greatest threat.

The seventh-ranked expert used all his skills when he saw Zu An flying at him. Seizing the initiative right now was absolutely vital.

Zu An frowned, and secretly summoned Hundredwarble to launch a spiritual attack.

There was no way this seventh rank was Qiu Honglei, so he did not feel a need to hold back.

He desperately wanted to maintain a low profile, but his opponent was way too strong!

In that case, he'd just pretend to be a great master. Either way, he had a mask on right now, so no one knew his true identity.

He was only worried that he might end up ruining whatever Qiu Honglei's plan was. Unfortunately, that was outside of his control. He could only take things one step at a time, and secretly rescue Qiu Honglei afterwards.

There was no way his seventh-ranked opponent could have anticipated this attack. His vision blurred, and he immediately felt dizzy. When he finally snapped out of his daze, a palm had already been smashed into his body. He was flung to the ground, blood gushing out of his mouth.

A sword was thrust towards Zu An's back. The assassin he had evaded earlier was back on the offensive.

As his sword thrust out, he saw Zu An seriously wound his seventh-ranked companion, and his entire body went cold. He knew that this would probably be the end of him. Unfortunately, his sword had been thrust forward, and it was too late to retract it. He leaned into the attack with all his strength, risking it all on one blow.

Two of Zu An's fingers darted out and clamped down on his sword. With his other hand, he sent a strike flying towards the assassin.

"Shining Finger?" The assassin exclaimed in shock.

Zu An was taken aback. I've already deliberately changed my technique, but it was still recognized!

Few people in the world had seen this technique, and those who knew its name were even fewer in number.

However, he had never heard this assassin's voice before!

He suddenly remembered that Qiao Xueying had deliberately changed her voice to hide her identity, and he was struck with a moment of realization. He moved his hand three inches to the side so that the other party could easily evade his blow. "Honglei?"

No wonder this assassin was so flexible! Sigh, I'm not familiar enough with her body. Otherwise, I would've recognized her from the start.

"Ah Zu?" The assassin cried out in surprise. She reverted to her original voice.

Zu An was overjoyed. As they fought, Zu An sent his voice to her via ki transmission. "Why are you a part of this assassination?"

She seemed much weaker than usual, probably because she did not have her Empress Lantern. Using it would surely have exposed her identity.

"How did you become an Embroidered Envoy?" replied Qiu Honglei with a question of her own.

"It's a long story," Both of them said at the same time.

Zu An felt slightly pained by the situation. "Let me find a way out for you first."

Qiu Honglei shook her head. "No. We're all in on this, and have no way to retreat. We must kill the crown prince."

"When did your Devil Sect come into conflict with the crown prince?" Zu An was confused.

"It's hard to explain everything right now. I can't just leave my companions and run off on my own right now, can I?" Qiu Honglei was extremely troubled. She had convinced herself that she would succeed in this mission or die trying, but now that she had met Zu An again, she discovered that she didn't want to die. Unfortunately, there was no way for her to escape alone.

The two continued to converse while fighting. It looked like a dangerous battle, but two intelligent individuals working together could make any situation go smoothly.

The rest of the combatants were confused. This golden-token envoy had just finished off a seventh-ranked expert almost instantly. Why was he having trouble with this new opponent, who was only at the sixth rank?

Those allied with the eastern palace wondered if this sixth-ranked individual possessed some secret skill.

The rest of the assassins were overjoyed. "All hail our Lady Saint! She is truly formidable!"

Qiu Honglei's expression suddenly changed, and she sent out a warning. "Be careful, my master has arrived!"