

Immortal 71

Chapter 71: Knock-You-Up Eyes

Zu An blinked. "Perhaps it was my good luck?"

It wasn't exactly a lie. He had won the bets due to his good luck, he just didn't disclose the reason behind his good luck.

"Good luck?" Old Mi frowned, clearly dissatisfied by his answer.

"What else could it possibly have been? I couldn't possibly cheat under the noses of those veteran dealers at the Silverhook Casino, right?" replied Zu An.

Old Mi saw some sense in those words. He was well aware of the limits of Zu An's capability, so he decided to let the matter go. As he walked out the door, he said, "For the next few days, don't head out if you don't need to. You have a note for seven-and-a-half-million silver taels from the Plum Blossom Sect. They won't let you off that easily."

Zu An felt a surge of warmth suffuse his heart, and he wondered if he had misunderstood this old man. It looks like he still cares for me. He isn't coveting my wealth despite knowing that I've struck it rich.

Little did Zu An know that there was no need for Old Mi to covet his wealth. After all, the money would all be his once he possessed Zu An's body in the future.

Once Old Mi left the room, Zu An quickly shut the door. He double-checked that there was no one else in the room, then proceeded with his washing ritual. With that, he was ready to start drawing the lottery.

He summoned the Keyboard and loaded up the lottery function. As he prepared to hit the 'Enter' key, he suddenly noticed some slight changes. Taking a closer look, his eyes were drawn to a notification.

You have successfully accumulated a total of 100,000 Rage points. The letter keys are now unlocked for the lottery drawing.

Zu An was stunned for a moment, then his heart erupted in frenzied joy. Did this mean that he could draw prizes from the letter keys now? The Heiress' Ball of Delights and the Poisonous Prick might have looked like troll items at first glance, but they had proven to be incredibly useful. It was likely that any other he obtained from the Keyboard would be pretty decent.

His heart full to the brim with anticipation, he hit the 'Enter' key.

Unsurprisingly, he was greeted with a curt 'Thanks for playing!', but that did little to dampen his excitement. He had seen with his own eyes the light marker moving across the letter keys on the Keyboard, which proved that it was possible for him to obtain a different reward if the marker halted on one of them.

He launched into another round without hesitation.

Thanks for playing!

Thanks for playing!

Thanks for playing!

...

Congratulations, you have won a 'Ki Fruit'!

...

Thanks for playing!

Thanks for playing!

...

After a while, Zu An was able to confirm his earlier conclusion that the chances of drawing a Ki Fruit were around one in ten. Unfortunately, the probabilities of drawing a Poison Bottle, Fortune Pill, and Faith in Brother Spring were still uncertain.

As he continued drawing, Zu An's excitement started to fade. All his successes thus far had only been Ki Fruits.

I have enough Rage points to draw the lottery 602 times. I can't be so unlucky as to be unable to draw anything new at all, right?

As soon as this thought arose, he slammed his palm on a nearby wooden table and threw it out of his mind. What in the world am I doing here? Knock on wood! I can't be raising flags and jinxing myself like that!

Fortunately, on something like his five-hundredth draw, the light marker finally stopped on the 'D' key.

What could it be?

His heart pounding, Zu An quickly looked at the item he had received, only to see a pair of thin, transparent lenses that looked oddly like contact lenses.

Congratulations, you have won a 'Knock-You-Up Eyes'!

Zu An's face scrunched up.

His last few experiences with the Keyboard had given Zu An a glimpse into its ridiculous naming sensibilities, so this notification wasn't too surprising. He brushed past it and moved on to the item description.

Knock-You-Up Eyes: This item is renowned as one-half of the 'Ultimate Insemination Duo', the other half being the 'Thousand-Li Chastity Robbing' skill wielded by an expert only known by his surname Song.[1]

Artifact Effect: When wearing this item, you may select whether to activate the item's effect when you look at a target. As long as the target makes eye contact with you, they will immediately experience pain equal to that of delivering a 10-month-old child. This effect doesn't discriminate against gender or race. The pain inflicted by this item will last for an hour. Uses: 3

Angry black streaks flashed across Zu An's eyes. He would have much preferred to obtain the 'Thousand-Li Chastity Robbing' skill instead. He had no idea who that expert was, but he was definitely worthy of respect.

Still, this 'Knock-You-Up Eyes' looks pretty useless. It only makes the target feel pain, without dealing any actual damage. What's the use if the individual were to recover once the duration is over?

It honestly feels more like voodoo magic to prank a friend...

As he pondered further, though, he realized that this skill could work wonders at critical moments. He remembered reading a scientific study in his previous world that stated the pain experienced during childbirth as the highest possible level of pain a person could experience. The scientists then developed a machine that simulated the pain of childbirth, and many of the men who had been subjected to it—whether voluntarily, out of love for their wives, or involuntarily as some form of revenge—ended up crumbling to the floor wailing.

He could definitely use this item to incapacitate an adversary during a critical moment in a battle to turn the tide.

It was a pity then that this item had a limit of three uses, which meant that he couldn't abuse it.

He wondered as well if this item could work on multiple people at once. If he activated this item in a situation where he was glaring at multiple people, would he be able to incapacitate them all at once?

All sorts of possible scenarios surfaced in his mind, and he broke out into deranged laughter.

Zu An turned his attention back to drawing the lottery, but the light marker never fell on the letter keys again. All in all, he managed to draw fifty-eight Ki Fruits.

He swallowed them one after another and relished the soothing feeling of ki gushing through his body. The second formation in his muscles swiftly began filling up with golden matter, but there wasn't enough ki to fill it completely. It eventually made it to two-thirds full.

Based on the Fibonacci Sequence, 89 Ki Fruits were needed to fill this second formation. He had already filled it up a little previously, and adding in the fifty-eight Ki Fruits he had just eaten, he would need about twenty more in order to make a breakthrough.

Zu An couldn't help his frustration. It hadn't been easy for him to earn 60,000 Rage points, and yet it couldn't even fill up a single formation. Not only that, gaining strength would only get harder as he progressed further. It would take an astronomical sum of Rage points to fill up every single formation. He couldn't imagine just how long it would take for him to reach the higher cultivation ranks.

Seeking to distract himself, he stretched his body to test out his newfound strength. Currently, he wielded the strength equal to two hundred grown men combined. He felt that he was becoming superhuman, but then recalled how the cars in his previous world boasted hundreds of horsepower. With this bit of strength he had, he wouldn't even match up to the force of a car accelerating at its maximum.

Of course, now that he had started comparing his physical ability with that of a car, there was no way he could be considered an ordinary mortal anymore. Once again, he found himself wondering just how terrifying the power of high-rank cultivators in this world was.

Little did he know that that was the wrong way of looking at the situation. Higher rank cultivators gained the power to tap into the raw ki around them, so it was no longer accurate to gauge their strength using 'human-power' as the unit of measurement.

With nothing else to do after drawing the lottery, Zu An decided to drop by the Reflection Room to see how Cheng Shouping was faring. He was curious to see how many others he had hired.

When he finally arrived at the entrance of the Reflection Room, he saw Cheng Shouping gritting his teeth, the brush in his hand flying swiftly across a sheet of paper. He was all alone inside the room.

Zu An stared at him for a moment.

This fellow is really nut over money! He can't even bear to use some of it to hire someone else to help him out. But since that's what he wants, so be it.

Zu An left his study companion to his task and returned to his residence. He headed straight for his room, and was just about to enter it when he noticed a broken strand of hair on the wooden door latch. He froze.

Ever since he found out that someone in the Chu Estate was out to kill him, he had been keeping his guard up. Every time he left his room, he would set up a small mechanism to let him know if an intruder were to sneak in—and the mechanism had clearly been triggered.

Right now, the question was whether the person who had snuck into his room was still inside.

Zu An slipped the Poisonous Prick into his sleeves, then carefully nudged the door open and headed in. This would be a good opportunity to test out his newfound strength.

As soon as he stepped inside, a strong gust of wind assaulted him from behind, carrying with it a black figure that charged straight for him. Zu An had been well prepared, and quickly rolled away before stabbing with the Poisonous Prick toward the black silhouette.

The black-robed assassin was surprised that her attempt had failed, and her target was far faster than she'd anticipated. Her own attempt to evade him was just too slow, and the dagger made a solid contact.

Despite this, Zu An was less than pleased. He sensed that, while it had connected, the tip of the dagger had failed to pierce flesh.

"Hm?"

The black-clad figure had retreated several meters and was crouched on top of a table. Her exclamation revealed her astonishment. Zu An's swift reflexes did not fit with his image as a wastrel, and the dagger he'd brandished had been sharp enough to pierce through her Ki Armor and slice right through the fabric of her clothes. Had she been just a hair slower, she would have been wounded by his unexpected riposte.

Zu An was himself assessing his would-be assassin. She was dressed in black cloth, and her hair had been carefully wrapped up to avoid giving away any hints of her identity. Nevertheless, from her crisp and pleasing voice, he could tell that the figure was a woman, and likely a beautiful one at that.

Her eyes were well hidden beneath a veil, but they seemed very familiar to him. A spark flashed across his mind, and he remarked instinctively, “Snow!”

The black-clad assassin gave a start. She slowly took off her veil. Her face was cold. “You’re actually a cultivator?”

Zu An’s earlier reaction had been faster than any ordinary mortal’s.

In response, Zu An chuckled softly and replied, “Aren’t you one too?”

“I always thought that you were a wastrel, but it turns out that you’ve been putting on an act all along. What are you scheming?” Snow growled.

Zu An sighed deeply and replied, “A powerful cultivator like you, serving as a mere maid in the Chu clan. I should be the one asking you what you’re scheming.”

“Forget it, it doesn’t matter. You’re going to die tonight anyway!” Snow fired back hotly.

Zu An retorted indignantly, “Aren’t you a vicious one? We might have our differences, but it doesn’t change the fact that we had once shared a night in bed with one another. As the saying goes, a day as a couple, a hundred days of gratitude—”

“Shut up!” Snow shrieked.

You have successfully trolled Qiao Xueying for 444 Rage points!

That matter was a constant thorn in her side. Every night, she would dream about how her pure body had been defiled by his vile hands, and she would jolt awake in revulsion.

Conditioned by all the verbal sparring that she’d exchanged with him over the past few days, she reflexively responded to Zu An’s provocation. “You aren’t even a man at all. Where do you find the courage to say such words?”

As she insulted him, she shot a disdainful glance between his legs, making sure to express her full scorn for him.

She had expected Zu An to fly into a state of fury or to wither in embarrassment, but he was somehow completely unfazed. “Even though we didn’t manage it in the end, I reckon that what we shared counts as half a day of couplehood, at least. That would equate to fifty days of gratitude. How can you be so heartless as to assassinate someone whom you owe fifty days of gratitude to?”

What the hell! Is that saying even supposed to work that way?!

Chapter 72: What Did You Do to Me?

Snow felt like she was being driven crazy. She must have sinned deeply in her previous life for her to have to encounter such a fellow. “Not only will I kill you today, I’ll sever your tongue and feed it to the dogs!”

You have successfully trolled Qiao Xueying for 500 Rage points!

Zu An was still thinking of the right response to squeeze more Rage points out of her, but Snow gave him no chance. She darted forward for a second attack.

She’s fast!

Realizing that he would be unable to dodge in time, Zu An channeled every last bit of strength in his body to protect himself. Her palm crashed into his raised fist. Zu An jerked as though slammed head-on by an onrushing truck and was sent flying, smashing into the wall behind him. His hands felt like they were moments from shattering, such was the sheer force of the impact.

He tried to rise back to his feet quickly, but the pain was too severe. He vomited out a puddle of blood.

How could such thin arms and legs wield so much strength?

Snow was equally surprised by their exchange. She stared at the red imprint on her own palm as she recalled the strength he had used to meet her strike. She remarked in astonishment, “Hm? You’ve actually reached the third rank!”

Zu An felt as though his innards had been wrecked, but he forced out a calm smile and said, “Did you just realize that on top of my good looks, I’m also an incredible cultivation prodigy? Did that make you fall deeply in love with me?”

“Fall deeply in love? Don’t bullshit me!”

You have successfully trolled Qiao Xueying for 211 Rage points!

Her face darkened further, and she rushed forward to plant a vicious kick squarely in Zu An’s abdomen. He was sent tumbling backwards, making a few revolutions before finally coming to a halt.

“Zu wastrel, you have really managed to stoke my ire today. I won’t let you get off the hook easily today. I’ll make sure that you suffer so much that you’d wish you were dead!”

This lass sure knows how to bear a grudge. Zu An silently took out the Heiress’ Ball of Delights and prepared to activate it, but froze as he belatedly realized a problem.

Right now, he had a debt note worth a hulking seven-and-a-half million silver taels on him. That meant there were only a handful of people who were richer than him in Brightmoon City. Even if the seven-and-a-half million silver taels wasn’t something he could cash out in the short-run, he still had a-hundred-and-fifty thousand silver taels on hand right now.

There was a strict condition to the Heiress’ Ball of Delights—the enemy had to be a woman richer than him in order for its effects to be invoked.

Surely a maid like Snow can’t possibly be richer than me, right?

The only reason why Zu An had been able to keep calm all this while was due to this trump card he had on hand. Using the combination of the Heiress' Ball of Delights and the Phoenix Nirvana Sutra, he had managed to stand his ground even against a fifth rank cultivator. No matter how powerful Snow was, he was sure she couldn't be more formidable than the renowned prodigy Pei Mianman.

He never imagined that his newfound wealth would be the reason behind his own downfall. In the blink of an eye, he found himself in a precarious situation.

Unwilling to give up on this possibility, Zu An asked out loud, "Hey, can I ask you a question? How much money do you have?"

Snow was stunned. Of all the possibilities she'd come up with, she hadn't expected Zu An to ask such an irrelevant question. "That's none of your business. All you need to know is that I'll be very rich once I kill you."

Her response drew a deep sigh from Zu An. It seemed that using the Heiress' Ball of Delights was out of the question. The item was his strongest trump card, and he couldn't bear to waste it if the situation wasn't clear-cut.

Zu An's mind whirled to action as he tried to think of a way out. "Why do you want to kill me?" He hoped to extract some information while she was still in a mood to gloat.

"Despicable and shameless scum like you do not deserve to live on the face of this world!" Snow spat out angrily.

You have successfully trolled Qiao Xueying for 99 Rage points!

Zu An was stunned. He didn't think that Snow's grudge toward him ran this deep. Is it really possible to hate someone as handsome as me so thoroughly?

"Are you trying to stall for time? Don't even dream about it!" Snow leaped into the offensive once more. She decided to target Zu An's limbs this time, intending to rip them off.

Unexpectedly, Zu An managed to avoid her initial attack with a quick backflip, after which, they traded a few blows. Despite Zu An spurring out blood each time her strikes connected, he somehow seemed to get faster and stronger the more severe his injuries became. In fact, Zu An was almost approaching her level of strength.

Zu An knew that this was the effect of the Phoenix Nirvana Sutra. He would be able to exert an extraordinary amount of force when he was severely injured, but without the Heiress' Ball of Delights to keep him alive, he had no idea when he would exceed his limit and drop dead. He prepared to summon and use Faith in Brother Spring as soon as he sensed he was approaching his limit.

"Did you learn some sort of secret art?" asked Snow.

There were techniques that significantly boosted a cultivator's strength for a short period of time, but they tended to come with overwhelmingly negative side effects.

"If you call me 'big brother', I'll consider letting you in on the secret," said Zu An with a chuckle.

You have successfully trolled Qiao Xueying for 111 Rage points!

“You’re courting your own death!”

A silver needle suddenly appeared in Snow’s hand, and in an instant, Zu An saw a barrage of needles flying in his direction.

What the hell! A hidden weapon?

Zu An tried desperately to dodge the needles, but he still ended up getting pierced by quite a number of them. Fresh blood streamed out of his wounds, and he lost his grip on the dagger in his hand. It fell to the ground with a loud clang.

“You have strength, but you know nothing of combat skills. You’re just a fat pig waiting to be slaughtered!” Snow sneered coldly.

Zu An stayed silent. Was that barrage of needles considered a combat skill? I haven’t learned anything of that sort yet, but if I could learn such skills, I might be able to exert far greater power for the same level of physical strength.

“A piece of trash will forever remain trash. I’ve no idea how you managed to cultivate, but it all ends here.” A cold sneer rested on Snow’s lips. “Any last words?”

Zu An spat out a mouthful of bloody saliva and chuckled. “You stabbed me with your needles today. I’ll make sure to return the favor and stab you hard one day.”

“It’s not like you can use needles...” The smile on Snow’s face suddenly vanished as the innuendo finally sunk in. She trailed off, her face cold as winter. “I really don’t know whether I should be impressed with you or not. Even with your dying breath, you still want to take advantage of me.”

You have successfully trolled Qiao Xueying for 404 Rage points!

Zu An wiped his lips, leaving a bloody trail across his cheek. He looked at her in a bizarre way. “How do you know I’ll die?”

“Do you have any other trump cards then? Take them out and impress me then!” scoffed Snow.

“I’m just afraid that you won’t be able to bear it.” Zu An had hardly any strength left in his body. He had to lean against the wall just to maintain his posture. “Have you ever been pregnant before?”

Snow’s eyes popped, first in bewilderment and then in unrestrained fury. “What nonsense are you spouting?”

You have successfully trolled Qiao Xueying for 303 Rage points!

How dare a man ask a maiden like her whether she had been pregnant before? Snow resolved to tear out Zu An’s tendons one by one to satisfy her anger.

A sinister smile had crawled onto Zu An’s lips. “I can make you pregnant.”

Snow had grown numb to Zu An’s taunts. She didn’t bother with getting angry. After all, it would be wasted on someone who was going to die very soon.

She walked right up to him and gazed upon him from above. "Hand over the promissory note, and maybe I'll..."

She trailed off before she could finish, and subconsciously touched her abdomen. What's going on? Why does my stomach suddenly feel so bloated?

She glanced quickly at her abdomen, but it was still completely flat. Without warning, her body suddenly arched backward as an aching pain spread out from her lower back.

"What did you do to me?"

Snow began to panic. She had never experienced these sensations before, and whatever was happening to her transcended the realms of her understanding.

Zu An laughed lightly. "Didn't I tell you that I could make you pregnant? Did you take my words to be a joke?"

It was indeed impossible for him to turn the tables with his own strength, and he had to resort to using the Knock-You-Up Eyes. To his astonishment, however, the item didn't produce intense labor pains right away. Instead, it seemed to induce the sensations of pregnancy first. This subtle difference could spell a huge difference in a pitched battle, and he would have to take careful note in the future.

There was no way Snow would believe that she was truly pregnant. In a moment of rage, she resolved to end Zu An's life there and then, but she was stabbed by a sudden, excruciating pain in her abdomen.

"Ahhh~"

She tried her best to stifle her cries, but the pain had grown truly unbearable. She collapsed into a squat, and felt the urge to curl up into a ball and roll around. She clutched at her abdomen, her face pale and sweaty.

Zu An immediately took advantage of this opening to leap on her. He was in bad shape after their previous exchanges, and he dared not give her a chance to make a comeback. He wanted to force her down onto the ground and into a close-quarters brawl, where he was more confident of defeating her.

Shocked, Snow hurriedly raised her hand to push him away, but she was engulfed in yet another wave of excruciating pain which caused her arms to jerk to a halt. She was slammed to the ground, and the weight of her attacker fell fully on her.

Snow panicked as she found herself pinned under Zu An's body. She tried to retaliate by striking at his head, but the constant, stabbing pain in her abdomen made it impossible to exert her strength properly.

As soon as she raised her hand, Zu An had already pinned her wrist back down onto the ground. She struggled against his grip, but for some reason, Zu An's strength seemed well on par with hers, and she wasn't in the condition to exert the full extent of her prowess. The awkward position she was in made it hard for her to maneuver, further complicating her attempts at defense.

In the end, her struggling did nothing but give Zu An more chances to take advantage of her body.

Zu An had to admit that, despite Snow's ferocious temper, she did have a good figure. It wasn't as exaggerated as Pei Mianman's, but her slim and soft body felt refreshingly youthful.

Somehow, he couldn't bear to kill her quickly.

Snow's cheeks flushed red. "What did you do to me?" she demanded. She realized that her struggles did nothing but give Zu An pleasure, so she stopped moving altogether.

"As I've told you, I'm giving you a taste of what pregnancy feels like. Why don't you believe me?" Looking at how Snow had been fully incapacitated by the sheer pain, Zu An wondered how a man would react in response to it.

"You shameless lout!" Snow's anger was shot through with humiliation. Unaware of the existence of the Knock-You-Up Eyes, she thought that Zu An was mocking her yet again. After all, she only knew of one way to get pregnant in this world.

You have successfully trolled Qiao Xueying for 798 Rage points!

"So, it's alright for you to kill me, but I'm shameless for trying to retaliate?" Zu An sneered coldly. "Who's the one who sent you here? Speak!"

Snow turned her face to the side. She tried to silently gather her ki and turn the tables with a single blow, but whatever ki she could gather would dissipate with each new wave of labor pains.

What's going on? This pain keeps coming back, and it's even growing stronger!

As a young maiden herself, there was no way for Snow to know that this was a unique sensation experienced by mothers in childbirth.

"You refuse to speak? I guess I'll tear off your clothes and parade you in front of everyone in Brightmoon City then!" said Zu An.

"How dare you!"

You have successfully trolled Qiao Xueying for 444 Rage points!

Chapter 73: Unexpected

From her experience of who Zu An was, she knew it was completely possible for this despicable and shameless scum to follow through with his threat. Just thinking of the sheer humiliation she would suffer threw her into a panic.

She opened her mouth to speak, but a new wave of labor pains set in and reduced her words to pained moans.

"You think I dare not do so?" Zu An threatened her. "Let's try it out then!" He ripped off her outer garment.

He had searched her room once before, but all he'd found were melon seeds and other tidbits. After having spent some time in the Chu Estate, he was certain that it wasn't Chu Zhongtian, Qin Wanru, or Chu Chuyan who was out for his life. That suggested that there was someone else behind Snow.

Being under the gaze of an unknown enemy was simply too dangerous—he didn't even know who to put up his guard against! He was determined to figure out who the mastermind was today. He wouldn't be able to sleep in peace otherwise.

Ripping off Snow's outer garment revealed her fair and slender arms. Even Zu An had to admit that her name was fitting for her appearance. Her skin really was as fair as snow

"I'll definitely kill... Aiyooo~"

You have successfully trolled Qiao Xueying for 998 Rage points!

"Are you still refusing to speak? I must tell you that there isn't that much left for me to take off... Wait a minute, are you doing this on purpose to seduce me?"

Seduce you? To hell with you!

You have successfully trolled Qiao Xueying for 1024 Rage points!

Snow was on the verge of losing her mind. As if the inhuman pain radiating from her abdomen wasn't enough, she still had to suffer the torture of his words as well. Just wait until I recover! I'll surely rip your mouth off!

"If you still refuse to talk, I'm going to rip open your clothes!" Zu An grabbed her collar with both hands, but stopped short of actually going through with his threat. All he wanted was to force her to reveal the mastermind who was trying to kill him.

"You're the one who forced my hand!" Snow's voice became chillingly cold, and her eyes began to shine with a strange green glow.

Zu An felt his goosebumps rise. Without hesitation, he summoned Grandgale and instantly moved tens of meters away and out of the room, whipping up a furious wind.

At the same time, Snow's hair suddenly began to grow, as if a seal had been removed. Strands of hair darted forth in Zu An's direction like vines.

What the hell! What in the world is this? Zu An was horrified. It was as if the woman in front of him had suddenly turned into Medusa, and he felt a terrifying pressure.

The force of her hair was strong enough even to pierce through the walls, tearing holes in them. Had he not summoned Grandgale to teleport away, he would have been utterly decimated there and then.

Snow didn't expect that Zu An would have the means to escape so quickly. She moved swiftly to chase after him.

"Zu wastrel, I'll tear you into shreds... Aiyo~" Snow collapsed by the doorway, clutching her abdomen.

You have successfully trolled Qiao Xueying for 500 Rage points!

Zu An swallowed in fear. Isn't this woman much too scary? She's actually able to withstand the pain of childbirth and attack me! If she comes after me once more, I'll be in real danger!

The sounds of a disturbance came from not too far away. Someone in the estate had finally sensed the commotion and was rushing over.

Conflict flickered across Snow's face for a moment. Instead of attacking him, she staggered toward the wall of the estate. As she reached it, she turned around and glared at Zu An hatefully. "I'll be back!"

Then, she leaped over the wall and disappeared under the cover of night.

Not long after Snow had made her escape, a figure flew over, her white skirt fluttering as she descended like a fairy—Chu Chuyan.

She recoiled in horror as she caught sight of Zu An covered in blood. "What happened? What's wrong with you?"

Zu An finally heaved a sigh of relief. He flashed her what he thought to be his most charming smile before fainting in her direction.

He was already severely injured, but he had still been forced to deplete all of his ki in order to summon Grandgale and avoid Snow's ultimate attack. He had been hanging on by sheer will thus far, but Chu Chuyan's presence melted his remaining tension, causing him to pass out on the spot.

Chu Chuyan's first reaction toward Zu An falling into her embrace was to push him away, but she hesitated as she took in the extent of his injuries, which bought enough time for Zu An to land softly into her arms.

She thought about how the man had tried similar tricks to take advantage of her in the past, and a furrow formed between her brows. If you're tricking me this time too...

However, such thoughts were swiftly banished once she checked his condition with her ki. To her shock, Zu An's life was really hanging by a thread.

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When Zu An finally regained his consciousness, he found himself lying on a bed, surrounded by people. Other than Chu Chuyan, Chu Zhongtian, Qin Wanru, and those from the second branch and third branch were all present. Most of them were examining the marks on the wall caused by Snow's lashing hair, clicking their tongues in amazement.

It's fortunate that I kept Poisonous Prick back into the Keyboard. It would have been troublesome if one of them had found it.

Zu An realized that he was bandaged from head to toe. It seems like I'm constantly getting severely injured. This was definitely not the first time he had been bandaged like this.

All of a sudden, he felt a warm handkerchief gently dabbing his face, wiping off his sweat. He tried to focus his gaze, and saw Chu Huan Zhao sitting by the bedside, taking care of him with a look of serious concern.

Zu An felt heartened and conflicted at the same time. He noticed Chu Chuyan standing not too far away, a nonchalant look on her face, as if she had nothing to do with all of this. Her attitude made it seem as if

he were someone else's husband. In the end, the one who cared the most for him was still his sister-in-law.

Chu Huanzhao noticed that Zu An had opened his eyes and exclaimed in delight, "Father, mother, big sister, he's awake!"

Chu Zhongtian quickly rushed to his side and asked, "How are you feeling?"

Zu An took a look around before murmuring, "It hurts~"

Chu Zhongtian nodded in sympathy before adding, "Chuyan used her ki to sustain you earlier, buying enough time for our physician to treat and bandage you. You were really in grave danger for a moment there."

Zu An was a little surprised to hear that. He took another look at Chu Chuyan, but her face remained as impassive as ever. It was impossible to tell that she was the one who had saved his life. But still, it looks like I've misread her.

Qin Wanru walked over and asked, "What happened? How did you land yourself in such a state?"

"Snow tried to kill me earlier," replied Zu An.

He regretted not being able to force Snow to reveal the identity of her master, but his interactions with Chu Chuyan and her parents had given him confidence that it was unlikely to be one of them. Thus, he wasn't afraid to reveal the truth out loud.

As he spoke, he watched the reactions of the others around him closely, hoping to discern something. Unfortunately, no one looked exceptionally suspicious to him.

"Snow?" Zu An's words shocked everyone, and all eyes turned to Chu Chuyan.

Even Chu Huanzhao was panicked at that revelation. "Brother-in-law, how could my big sister possibly make an attempt on your life?"

Zu An rolled his eyes in response. "I'm quite certain I said Snow instead of your big sister."

Chu Huanzhao could think of a fair number of retorts. Snow is my big sister's personal maidservant. Wouldn't everyone suspect her if you say it in such a pointed manner?

Chu Chuyan frowned under the sudden scrutiny. "I haven't seen Snow around for quite a while."

"Men, bring Snow over!" Chu Zhongtian ordered.

He wasn't going to assume Snow's guilt just because of what Zu An had said. After all, Snow was his daughter's personal maidservant. There was a need to investigate this matter properly.

The servants soon returned with news. "Snow is not in the estate at the moment. We aren't able to find her anywhere."

Chu Zhongtian's face darkened. It seemed Snow had managed to escape from the estate after being exposed.

Qin Wanru sat down by the side of the bed. "What happened earlier on? Fill us in on the details." Her silk dress flowed along the gentle curves of her waist and buttocks, drawing glances from the leader of the second branch Chu Tiesheng.

Zu An briefly laid out his encounter with Snow, though he wisely chose to conceal his abilities.

The frown on Qin Wanru's forehead tightened as she heard the story. Chu Tiesheng remarked, "Sounds like a load of nonsense. If Snow really intended to kill you, how could a piece of trash... I mean, how could you have possibly been able to fend her off?"

Zu An shot him a searching glance. He wondered if Chu Tiesheng could be the one pulling Snow's strings. However, if that were really the case, it was foolish of him to speak up for Snow at a time like this.

Chu Huanzhao stood forward and spoke on Zu An's behalf, "My brother-in-law is more formidable than you know. He suffered several strikes from my Wailing Whip without even letting out a cry, and he even subdued a group of third rank and fifth rank cultivators in the academy earlier today."

No one in the room believed in her words. It was simply too ridiculous. It was one thing for Zu An to be able to stand his ground against third rank cultivators, but she had roped in fifth rank cultivators as well!

Third branch leader Chu Yuepo burst out laughing. "Lil' Zhao, you're simply being too kind! How could he possibly have the strength to deal with a fifth rank cultivator? Would anyone even believe that?"

Chu Tiesheng nodded in agreement. "Indeed. I see that you have been speaking up for Zu An all this while. I think that you should maintain an appropriate distance from him, so as not to encourage any rumors. This is especially important given how the two of you shared a bed during his wedding night..."

Qin Wanru immediately glared at Chu Tiesheng and bellowed, "Watch your mouth! Are these words that should be coming out from the mouth of an elder? She's still young, and she's only speaking up for Zu An as a fellow family member. Don't try to twist her words with that dirty mind of yours!"

Chu Tiesheng turned his head away in a huff, his cheeks coloring in embarrassment. "I was just worried about the Chu clan's reputation."

As much as Qin Wanru disliked Chu Tiesheng's words, she had to admit that there was some sense in what he had said. Her second daughter had indeed been too close to Zu An in recent days.

She couldn't possibly have fallen in love with him, right?

She dismissed the thought as quickly as it had come. How could that be possible? Zu An doesn't have a single quality that could win a woman's heart! How could Huanzhao possibly fall for him?

Qin Wanru knew that her second daughter was a rowdy one, so Zu An's antics probably just looked interesting to her. After all, Chu Huanzhao hadn't had anyone to play with in the Chu Estate over the years.

While Qin Wanru doubted that the two of them would ever strike up a serious relationship, she resolved to find some time to talk to her second daughter about this. It was probably best if they kept some distance between them.

Meanwhile, Chu Zhongtian had been examining the marks on the walls. “Based on Zu An’s earlier description, Snow should be a fifth rank wood element cultivator.” he declared in a deep voice.

Wood element?

Zu An recalled how Snow’s hair had wreaked havoc around the room. For a moment, she had seemed like Medusa’s incarnation.

“Fifth rank?” Chu Zhongtian’s statement sparked a huge commotion.

None of them could have imagined that obedient little lass who was often caught snacking on melon seeds was actually a fifth rank cultivator.

Chapter 74: I Need to Become Poor

“How could he still be alive if a fifth rank cultivator wanted him dead?” Chu Tiesheng remarked contemptuously.

This question was shared by everyone in the room. Seeing that everyone’s eyes were on him, Zu An responded slowly, “Her stomach suddenly started hurting halfway through, or else I would really have been dead.”

Hurting?

Everyone was stunned. They hadn’t expected such a childish excuse. For a fifth rank cultivator to fall victim to a stomach ache in the midst of a battle and fail to kill a mere mortal—no, someone even weaker than an ordinary mortal—was simply inconceivable.

Doubt was plastered on everyone’s faces, except for Chu Chuyan’s. “I don’t think he’s lying.”

The other clan members looked at her as if she’d lost her mind.

Qin Wanru frowned, wondering if her daughter was speaking up for Zu An out of consideration for their marriage.

“I realized some time ago that there was something wrong with Snow. She hid it well, but after all the time we have spent together, it was inevitable that she would let things slip now and then. I kept it a secret so that I could investigate who was directing her.”

Her words were slow and unhurried, but her leisurely and composed manner seemed appropriate to the situation at hand.

She continued, “However, I don’t understand why she would make a move on you.” She turned a questioning look at Zu An.

“I don’t understand it either,” replied Zu An innocently. Had I known that you weren’t the one she was working for, I would have exposed her right from the start. I wouldn’t have had to feel so jittery around her for so long, then.

Her words surprised those present, but also cleared up their doubts about Zu An's story. They were amazed by how well Snow had concealed her identity, and were puzzled as to who the mastermind behind her could be.

Chu Zhongtian silenced the buzz in the room with a cough, then turned to Zu An. "You should recuperate from your injuries first. I'll assign a few personal guards to protect you. We can't allow such an incident to happen again."

"Personal guards? How personal are they going to be?"

Zu An's mind drifted of its own accord to the beautiful bodyguards he had seen in dramas in his previous life.

Chu Zhongtian calmly gestured to the buff men standing at attention by the doorway, shattering whatever unrealistic thoughts had formed in Zu An's mind. He left Zu An with some consoling words, then gestured to the others to leave the room with him and to let Zu An get some rest.

Chu Huanzhao stayed on, reluctant to leave. She was bugging Zu An over the money he had won in the casino, and was aggrieved that he hadn't brought her along for something that fun.

Qin Wanru had already walked out of the room, but then noticed her second daughter was conspicuously absent. She turned back around and saw Chu Huanzhao acting chummy with Zu An. Her frown returned and she bellowed, "Huanzhao, let's go!"

You have successfully trolled Qin Wanru for 3 Rage points! ... 3... 3...

Zu An was amused by how hot-tempered his mother-in-law was. Are you afraid that I would steal your second daughter too? What are you so worried about? Is it because I'm too good looking?

Chu Huanzhao reluctantly pulled herself away from the bedside at her mother's insistence. Chu Chuyan was the last one to leave, a brooding look on her face.

Once everyone was gone, Zu An took a look at the Rage points he had earned—6,929. Of course, most of them had been from Snow.

He didn't rush into drawing the lottery this time around. He knew, based on previous experience, that he would not be able to draw anything worthwhile with such a paltry amount of Rage points. It was probably best to wait until he had saved up more. Perhaps it might even improve his luck.

Anyway, given that he had just drawn an item in his last sitting, there was no way he would draw another one so soon. At least that was what his gambler's instinct told him.

Thinking of this made him deeply regret using the Knock-You-Up Eyes so quickly. It's all Snow's fault! I really need to give her a good wallop in the future!

This brought him to another extremely important question—his wealth. He was far too rich at the moment for his own safety!

How much was seven-and-a-half million silver taels? Even considering the whole wide world, there were probably fewer than a handful of people who were richer than him.

Unknown to Zu An, the only reason why the situation had turned out the way it had was because the Silverhook Casino had intentionally removed the betting limits in order to reel him in. Had it been any other customer, the casino would have prohibited such a huge bet on the outcomes with high payouts.

Ultimately, Zu An's reputation as a wastrel played to his advantage. The casino thought that it could take advantage of him, but they had ended up doing themselves in instead.

Coming back to the present and to Zu An. The earlier fight with Snow had highlighted a major consequence of his victory at the casino—he was no longer able to use the Heiress' Ball of Delights!

One of the requirements of the Heiress' Ball of Delights was that his assailant had to be a woman richer than him. Now that he had a promissory note worth seven-and-a-half million silver taels on him, there was no way of satisfying this requirement.

The loss of this trump card could prove fatal. As important as money was to him, he treasured his life far more.

If he had been able to cash out the seven-and-a-half million silver taels, he could have recruited a group of top-notch experts to protect him. Unfortunately, all he had was a promise written on a piece of paper, which complicated matters significantly.

He had to think of a way to make himself poorer!

While it was unlikely for him to be able to recover the full amount of the debt, the note itself still had value. Just throwing it away was not an option, as he would lose the massive amount of leverage he had over the Plum Blossom Sect. It would be best if he could get something out of it somehow.

Zu An racked his brain for ideas. He thought of ways in which characters in the movies squandered their money. He came up with plenty of them, but shot them down one after another. Most of the ideas were impossible to execute in this world.

As he stressed over this problem, a shadow suddenly loomed over him. A hunchbacked figure had materialized by the side of his bed, giving him the shock of his life. His head jerked up, but it was Old Mi.

"Elder, you keep appearing out of nowhere. One of these days, I'll really suffer a heart attack."

As Zu An said those words, he glanced at the doorway discreetly. Chu Zhongtian should have assigned some guards to protect him. How did they still allow Old Mi to slip in?

"Don't bother looking. Those children can't possibly sense my presence," said Old Mi, his face carrying a hint of smugness.

Zu An's expression turned bitter. "It looks like the Chu Estate is really lacking in talent. I heard them talking about how their guards were carefully selected but groomed, but it seems like it was all talk."

Old Mi sniffed at Zu An's grumbling. "What do you know? Just because they aren't able to stop me doesn't mean that they are helpless against other intruders. Those guards are actually quite decent. They would be enough to ensure your safety in Brightmoon City. Even if Snow returns, she won't be able to harm you as long as you are under their protection. At the very least, they'll be enough to buy time for the arrival of reinforcements."

Zu An sighed in relief. Finally, he could reap the benefits of having powerful backers. This is how it's supposed to be. As a young master of a ducal clan, I shouldn't need to deal with my own enemies personally. I should command an army of guards ready to wallop anyone who stands in my way!

"I hadn't expected something to happen right after I left. You need to be more careful in the future. Don't go around causing trouble," instructed Old Mi.

Zu An's heart warmed. He didn't know Old Mi had been so concerned about his safety. "Thank you for your concern, elder. I'll be more careful in the future."

Old Mi nodded in reply, and shuffled over to feel Zu An's pulse. "Your injuries are extensive, but it's fortunate that you were treated promptly, and there doesn't seem to be any permanent damage. Also, it seems like your cultivation has risen quite a bit due to this encounter too."

Zu An hadn't been able to check on his own condition earlier. A quick inspection showed that the second formation had been completely filled, and the third formation was around one-third full. He had reached the third step of the third rank.

He had to eat fifty-eight Ki Fruits just to fill the second formation by two-thirds, and the third formation was bound to require more—to be exact, a hundred and forty-four of them. That equated to 150,000 Rage points or so.

So far, the most he had earned in a single setting was around 60,000 to 70,000 Rage points, and that was when he had the benefit of a crowd around him. Such opportunities were rare, and he didn't have the confidence to pull them off often.

On the other hand, the injuries he suffered from fighting with Snow had, through the effects of the Phoenix Nirvana Sutra, raised his cultivation by the equivalent of eighty Ki Fruits—equivalent to roughly 80,000 Rage points. That was more than the total amount of Rage points he had earned in a single event previously.

Of course, using such a situation to raise his cultivation was like walking on a tightrope between two tall mountains—it was simply too dangerous! All it took was a moment of carelessness for him to fall to his death!

This was real life, not some video game. He couldn't just set a save point and restart if things went awry. Relying on the Phoenix Nirvana Sutra to raise his cultivation was asking for trouble. At the very least, he wouldn't resort to it unless he was really desperate.

Old Mi relayed some additional instructions to Zu An before leaving the room. Oddly enough, even though Zu An's eyes had been fixed on the frail old man all this time, he realized that he wasn't sure how the latter had even walked out of the room. He was right to treat Old Mi as an unfathomable expert.

Zu An was left alone in the room once more. He turned his full attention back toward how to squander off the fortune he had just earned.

...

Meanwhile, in a courtyard several li away, the night was split by the sound of a teacup shattering on the ground.

A beautiful figure rolled around restlessly on her bed, grabbing her blanket tightly. Her hair was matted with sweat, and her maidenly face was contorted in pain. "Zu An, I swear that I'm going to take your life if that's the last thing I'll do!"

This woman was none other than Snow.

She hadn't dared to return to her rooms in the Chu Estate. She knew that her actions had alarmed the members of the Chu clan, and the pain in her abdomen was overwhelming. Instead, she fled to a residence she had prepared beforehand.

She had been so confident that the assassination would go smoothly, but somehow that scum had managed to best her! What sorcery did that bastard cast on me to make me suffer such unbearable pain?

She half-suspected that she'd unknowingly sustained a hidden injury. It was hard to believe that Zu An had the ability to pull off something like this.

Regardless of the true cause, the fact remained that she had failed, and it was safe to assume that her identity as a spy in the Chu clan had been revealed. She had put an unimaginable amount of effort into infiltrating the Chu clan, but she'd ended up failing her mission thanks to a mere ant. Her frustration at this turn of events drove her to the brink of insanity.

After what seemed like an eternity, the unbearable pain suddenly vanished without a trace. It wasn't a gradual reduction, but an instantaneous disappearance.

Just a second ago, Snow had been writhing in pain, but in the next moment, the pain had miraculously subsided.

She initially thought that it was a mere hallucination, but when the pain didn't return after some time, her heart was finally put at ease.

So, what in the world was that?

Snow rose from her bed and wiped off the sweat trickling down her face. She felt incredibly fatigued, and her clothes were completely soaked.

She quickly grabbed a new set of clothes and changed into it. She reminded herself to visit a physician for a thorough check-up, just in case she had been inflicted with some sort of weird disease.

Right now, however, she had something more important to attend to. Once she was done changing, she hurriedly left the residence.

...

In the headquarters of the Plum Blossom Sect, Mei Chaofeng's eyes widened in astonishment after listening to Snow's story. "What? The assassination failed even though you had personally made a move?"

Chapter 75: The Treatment

Snow's face reddened. Failing to deal with someone of Zu An's caliber was utterly shameful. "I'm still not sure what happened, but I suddenly felt an unbearable pain in my abdomen. That fellow is simply too lucky to have encountered me in such a state."

As she said those words, she recalled that this wasn't the first time she'd been done in by Zu An.

"Yes, that fellow does have oddly good luck," replied Mei Chaofeng. Could someone who had won seven-and-a-half million silver taels from his casino in two rounds possibly have bad luck?

Women really can't be trusted. Snow acts as if she owns the world, but she messed everything up as soon as she got down to business. If I'd known she was so untrustworthy, I would never have written out the promissory note for seven-and-a-half million silver taels!

It was his faith in her ability to easily retrieve the note that made Mei Chaofeng accede to writing it out in the first place. Who could have known that Snow would actually fail in her mission, and leave a huge, steaming pile for him to clean up?

A murderous glint flashed across Mei Chaofeng's eyes. "It looks like I have to personally make a move then!"

The seven-and-a-half million silver taels' debt was a curse that constantly plagued him no matter what he was doing. He was constantly worried about complications that could arise from it. Things would remain manageable if the note stayed with Zu An, but what if Zu An were to pass it on to someone else?

Snow was quick to advise him, "You mustn't act recklessly. After the recent incidents, the Chu clan would surely tighten its security and assign some personal guards to protect Zu An. Even if you make a move, the chances of success would be slim at best."

"What should I do then?" Mei Chaofeng was exasperated. It was still this woman's fault for alarming the Chu clan. "We can't touch him in the Chu Estate, and it's even more impossible in the academy. In fact, I suspect that Plum Blossom Twelve's death might have been the doing of the academy."

He suddenly recalled Plum Blossom Thirteen's report that Zu An had been chatting amicably with Shang Liuyu in the gazebo. He couldn't shake the feeling that there was more to that meeting, especially considering everything that had happened recently. He couldn't wrap his head around how a piece of trash like Zu An managed to obtain the help of so many distinguished individuals.

A smile crept onto Snow's fair face. "Don't worry, I'll arrange something soon. It won't take us long to drive him out of the academy."

Mei Chaofeng knew that Snow was a special envoy dispatched to Brightmoon City by the young master, and she had access to many resources if required. He did not doubt her words.

"As long as you can get that scum expelled from the academy, I'll personally make a move to ensure his death." After all that had happened, Mei Chaofeng dared not delegate the matter to his subordinates anymore. To prevent further mishaps, he had to deal with this problem personally.

Snow was relieved by his declaration. "With Sect Master Mei personally making a move, that fellow's days are numbered!"

She was confident she could deal with Zu An by herself, but the excruciating abdominal pain she had suffered earlier had left her traumatized. It was an experience she never wanted to go through ever again. Mei Chaofeng's decision to take a personal hand in this was truly a blessing.

...

The following morning, Zu An woke to the sight of a beaming Cheng Shouping standing right beside his bed. He recoiled in shock, then asked warily, "What are you up to?"

"Young master, Master has told me to inform you that you don't have to head to the academy today. You may stay at home to recuperate from your injuries," Cheng Shouping replied, his smile growing more delighted.

Zu An nodded and asked, "Is that why you have that silly look on your face?"

"I'm just feeling happy on young master's behalf. It looks like Master and Madam regard you very highly. They even sent professional guards to your side in order to ensure your safety. This is a special treatment that even the young miss doesn't enjoy!"

As Zu An became more valued in the eyes of the Chu clan, Cheng Shouping, as Zu An's study companion, would be pulled up well. It looks like a brilliant future awaits me. I'll become the most respected among the servants, and the maids will be desperate to gain my favor. Even Snow...

Thinking about Snow, Cheng Shouping's smile suddenly froze. "Young master, was it really Snow who injured you last night? It's hard to imagine that such an adorable girl could actually be so ferocious."

Zu An glared impatiently at Cheng Shouping and berated him. "Do you think that I'd lie to you about that? My father-in-law and my wife have already investigated the matter, and they concluded that Snow had infiltrated the Chu clan with ulterior motives. She's serving another master. Hm? It can't be that you have some sort of special relationship with her, right?"

Cheng Shouping stiffened. He hurriedly waved his hands in denial. "No no no, please don't misunderstand. I am completely unrelated to Snow. I knew that she wasn't a good person right from the start. Despite being the First Miss' maidservant, she dressed herself up and threw tantrums as though she were the mistress of the estate. It looks like I was right after all; she was indeed a spy. If I were to see her on the street in the future, I'll surely bring her before you so that you can punish her accordingly!"

Zu An was shocked by Cheng Shouping's ability to change his tune faster than even the most experienced of opera singers. If you really met Snow, all she would need to do is to toss her hair gently, and you'd be a goner. Tsk, you're really all say.

"Ahem ahem~"

A light coughing came from outside. Zu An raised his head, and a smile broke out on his face as he saw Chu Chuyan standing by the doorway. "My wife dotes on me the most. She's the first one in the entire estate to visit me personally."

Cheng Shouping eyes were filled with indignant hurt. Am I not a human to you? Of course, he dared not put himself on the same pedestal as the First Miss, so he quickly stepped aside and invited Chu Chuyan in. "First Miss, please."

Chu Chuyan stared at the two of them, a complicated look on her face. She'd heard the conversation between the two of them loud and clear. Birds of the same feather do flock together.

She did not enter the room, but spoke from where she was. "Divine Physician Ji will be coming over to treat you later on. He's an eccentric person, so I came to warn you to restrain yourself in front of him. Make sure that you don't offend him with your words."

From the time they had spent together, she'd concluded that Zu An was a troublemaker through and through. It was as if his vile mouth existed for the sake of infuriating everyone around him. She wouldn't have cared if it were anyone else, but Divine Physician Ji was no ordinary man. She was worried that Zu An would create a scene in front of Divine Physician Ji, and came to offer him a piece of advice.

"Divine Physician Ji? That's great!"

Zu An was stunned for a moment before exploding in joy. He had thought of slipping out to look for Divine Physician Ji, just to find out how preparations for the treatment of 'little Zu An' were coming along. However, the personal guards assigned to him were, in every sense of the word, personal. There was no way to shake them off, and he could come up with no legitimate excuse for him to leave Chu Estate.

Just as his frustrations mounted, the Chu clan had actually invited Divine Physician Ji over for him.

Chu Chuyan's mouth dropped open slightly, then she nodded. "Ah, I nearly forgot that you're acquainted with Ji Xiaoxi. There should be no problem then."

She had already heard about what had transpired in the academy.

"Honey, Ji Xiaoxi and I are only friends. There's nothing going on between us."

"Hm? Why are you clarifying that to me?" Chu Chuyan was baffled.

"There's no need to be shy," Zu An said with a chuckle. "An amazing man like me is bound to attract the attention of women no matter where I go. But, honey, there's no need to get jealous. I swear that you're the only one I like. I'd never do anything to let you down!"

Chu Chuyan stared at him, speechless, and Cheng Shouping mirrored her expression.

"Speaking of which, honey, were you the one who specially invited Divine Physician Ji over to care for me? Ahh, my wife is really the best!" Zu An walked over and seized the moment to hold her hands.

Chu Chuyan left the room, her face livid. I should never have dropped by this fellow's room!

Cheng Shouping stared at Zu An, a complicated look in his eyes. Finally, he muttered, "Young master, now I understand how you were able to marry the First Miss."

"Is that even a question at all? It's all due to my charming looks!" Zu An boasted smugly.

Cheng Shouping shook his head. "No, it's because you're thick-skinned."

Zu An's eyes narrowed sharply. "Oh? Are you done copying the family rules?"

Cheng Shouping immediately lost his bravado. He put on a fawning smile and replied, "Ah... Hahaha, not yet. I'm still on my break."

"Break, my ass! Hurry up and finish copying them!" Zu An bellowed. "I already gave you the money. You were the one who chose to be a scrooge and not hire any helping hands!"

"I'll head over right now..." replied Cheng Shouping hurriedly. The young master is not just thick-skinned, he's narrow-minded too. I must pay heed never to offend him.

Shortly after Cheng Shouping left the room grumbling, the butler, Hong Zhong, showed Ji Dengtu into Zu An's room.

"Divine Physician Ji, this way please!"

Hong Zhong's austere manner was highlighted by how he dressed. His hair was combed neatly, without a single strand out of place, and his clothes were free of wrinkles. All these gave him an imposing presence.

At the moment, though, he was conducting himself humbly and respectfully.

Zu An was reminded of Chu Chuyan's personal visit to offer her warning. From the looks of it, this licentious physician was really quite a big deal.

Hong Zhong began introducing the two men to one another. "Young master, this is Divine Physician Ji. He boasts incredible medical skills, so please do not offend him." He bowed toward the divine physician. "Divine Physician Ji, this is young master Zu An of our Chu clan. He was severely injured by a fifth rank cultivator last night. We've already treated him at the manor last night, but we'd like for you to take another look, just to be safe."

"Oh~" Divine Physician Ji's reply was perfunctory. He stroked his beard and put on an arrogant air. However, when he finally caught sight of Zu An on the bed, his eyes immediately widened in astonishment.

Hong Zhong was thrown off by his reaction, and he asked hurriedly, "What's wrong, Divine Physician Ji? Is there a problem here?"

Divine Physician Ji coughed lightly to conceal his surprise before replying, "I'm going to examine him now, and I need some privacy."

"Yes, please go ahead. We'll be right outside, so feel free to give us a call if you have any need for us." Hong Zhong knew that Divine Physician Ji had many rules when it came to treating a patient, so he didn't enquire further. With a wave of his hand, he gestured for the other servants in the room to leave.

Once they were all gone, Divine Physician Ji walked over and sat beside the bed. He slapped his hand down on Zu An's thigh and exclaimed, "Not bad! I didn't think that you would be able to escape from a fifth rank cultivator. You sure are a bag of surprises, aren't you?"

His physical greeting had been none too gentle, and Zu An gasped in pain.

Zu An had a strong feeling that Divine Physician Ji had done it on purpose. Didn't I earn just a few silver taels from your daughter back then? Do you really need to go this far?

"It was just luck. She fled in a hurry when she noticed the experts in the estate rushing over. I only survived by a hair's breadth," said Zu An almost truthfully. There was no way he would reveal his trump cards to others.

Divine Physician Ji nodded in understanding. "Dumb Chu is an eighth rank cultivator after all. It's normal for any assassin to fear him."

The way Divine Physician Ji addressed Chu Zhongtian as 'Dumb Chu' made Zu An wonder if there was some conflict between the two of them. Considering that perverted request Divine Physician Ji had made, could it be that... he had pursued Qin Wanru in his earlier years, only to have Chu Zhongtian beat him to it?

That's not right. If that was the case, why would the Chu clan invite him over to treat him?

Forget it, I will have nothing to do with whatever grudges they hold. What's important right now is that one little matter.

"Divine Physician Ji, have you found a cure yet?"

"Why don't you go out to the streets and find out who I am? How could it be impossible for me to cure you?" Divine Physician Ji scoffed. "Don't worry, I've brought it here!"

Zu An looked out of the doorway, and saw Butler Hong and the other guards standing not too far away. He was a little hesitant to talk about this in the presence of so many outsiders.

"Don't worry," Divine Physician Ji assured him, "they won't be able to hear what we're saying."

Chapter 76: Evanescent Lotus

Zu An was stunned. What rank is this fellow at? From the way he speaks, he seems quite incredible. He must be pretty strong.

However, the matter concerning 'little Zu An' was more important at the moment. So, he struggled out of his bed and rummaged through his cupboard. At the bottom of a pile of clothes, he took out a silk dudou. It was the one which he had 'borrowed' from Snow's room the other day.

After Snow's blatant attempt on his life, he had no qualms giving away her personal possessions to this perverted physician.

Divine Physician Ji was impressed that Zu An still had the strength to get off his bed. "You have quite a special constitution. Despite being so severely injured, you're still able to move about on your own. It looks like you have managed to fool the entire Chu clan."

Zu An rolled his eyes. Of course. The bliss I will experience for the rest of my life hinges on this. For that, I would have crawled my way over even if I couldn't walk.

"Here, I got the thing you wanted. You should be able to treat me now, right?"

Divine Physician Ji casually accepted the dudou, but after taking a closer look, he frowned suddenly. "Whose is this?"

"It's Qin Wanru's." Zu An knew that Divine Physician Ji was no fool. If he were to say that the dudou belonged to Shang Liuyu or whoever Qiu Honglei was, the latter would surely doubt him. After all, there was no way he could have gotten his hands on their personal possessions. The only name he could realistically get away with was Qin Wanru.

I'm sorry, mother-in-law, but for the sake of the happiness of your daughter's marriage, I'll have to wrong you this once.

Divine Physician Ji narrowed his eyes doubtfully. "Are you sure you didn't buy this off the street to fool me?"

Zu An's heart skipped a beat, but he kept his nervousness from showing on his face. He bravely doubled down on the lie. "Look at the material. Do you think that it's possible to buy such well-made goods off the street so easily?"

Divine Physician Ji carefully examined the dudou before nodding in agreement. "I guess you're right. The material is of fine quality, and this is indeed something that came from the Chu clan."

Zu An was shocked into stillness. This fellow can actually tell whether or not a piece of underwear came from the Chu clan? You pervert! Just how many dudous have you stolen from the Chu clan over the years for you to be able to differentiate them from the rest?

"I did what you asked. It's time for you to fulfill your end of the promise." Zu An looked at Divine Physician Ji expectantly.

This matter was the overriding concern of his right now.

Divine Physician Ji hugged the dudou to his breast. "I've found a way to remove the seal, but I'm still lacking the main medicinal herb."

Zu An's face darkened immediately. "Are you toying with me? I've already brought you the item you needed, but now you're telling me that you aren't ready yet?"

"Do you think that it's that easy to release the Great Yin-Yang Pulse-Severing Palm? Even with my skills, I still had to look up over a hundred ancient manuals before I managed to find a reliable way to resolve your issue. The formula to forge the Spirit Root Unsealing Pill requires eighty-one rare medicinal herbs, and I've already found eighty of them for you. However, the last item on the list is proving particularly difficult to come by," replied Divine Physician Ji.

In truth, he had exaggerated matters quite a bit. Most of the medicinal herbs were common ones that could be easily bought from the local apothecary. The key to the treatment was actually the formula itself, which fused the essences of these common herbs in an ingenious manner to create something incredible.

He hadn't expected Zu An to complete his mission so quickly, and being caught off-guard was what drove him to concoct such an elaborate story. However, the part about him lacking the main ingredient was true.

Spirit Root Unsealing Pill?

Zu An's eyelids twitched at the name. Wow, its name sure is straightforward, huh? "What's the main ingredient you're lacking? No matter how much it costs, I'll buy it for you!"

He had a hundred and fifty thousand silver taels with him at the moment, as well as a promissory note worth seven-and-a-half million silver taels. With such wealth, he could definitely be considered a tycoon.

Yet, Divine Physician Ji shook his head and said, "You won't be able to buy the herb even if you have the money."

"What is it called? I don't believe that there's anything in the world that can't be bought with money!" exclaimed Zu An anxiously.

"The herb is called the Evanescent Lotus. It's said to only flower once every thousand years, and its petals are rumored to possess the ability to raise a person's cultivation by a whole step. Do you think that something as precious as that can be valued with money?" Divine Physician Ji shot the nouveau-riche Zu An a disdainful look.

"Something like that exists in the world?" Zu An was stunned. "That doesn't make sense. There should be a difference in the amount of ki needed for a high-rank cultivator to make a breakthrough as compared to a low-rank cultivator, right?"

"That's what makes it so mystical," replied Divine Physician Ji. "It seems to possess some sort of supernatural power. The effects of the flower petals don't conform to the established rules. Regardless of whether one is a high-level cultivator or a low-level cultivator, a flower petal can indeed raise one's cultivation by a whole step."

"If that's the case, shouldn't cultivators keep the flower petal until they're strong before consuming it? No one would be so foolish as to waste such a precious treasure when they're still weaker," asked Zu An.

"What you said isn't wrong, but the world isn't always that convenient. Many cultivators die prematurely before reaching their peak, and the items they stockpile often end up benefiting others instead," said Divine Physician Ji. "It's a dangerous world we live in, and there are many stumbling blocks along the path of cultivation. What's most important is still the present."

Zu An was surprised to hear those words. Is the world really that dangerous?

"Besides, the Evanescent Lotus only flowers for several hours. Once that window is missed, the lotus will wither and lose its miraculous effects. So, anyone who obtains it would always consume it right away instead of saving it for the future," added Divine Physician Ji.

"Couldn't you have said that right from the start?" Zu An scoffed disdainfully. "Then where can we find the Evanescent Lotus? Aren't there merchant associations out there who could get you whatever you needed for the right price?"

In the cultivation novels he had read in his previous life, there would always be some mysterious merchant association that could acquire anything as long as you had the money. These mysterious merchant associations would often be incredibly powerful, and were not beholden to any other power.

“There are indeed such merchant associations,” replied Divine Physician Ji. However, he shook his head and continued, “The problem is that the Evanescent Lotus is simply too rare. It only flowers once in a thousand years. Even I have only read about it in old records. I haven’t seen it in person before. It’s highly unlikely that merchant associations would have them either.”

Zu An’s brow furrowed immediately. “Wait a moment. You’ve never seen it before? Then how do you know that the treatment will work? Is this a scam? Are you trying to get me to find the Evanescent Lotus for you so that you can use it to raise your cultivation?”

Divine Physician Ji flew into a fit of rage. “Go out into the streets and ask around then! I, Ji Dengtu, am the very hallmark of professionalism. Do I look like the kind of person who would do something like that?”

The image of Divine Physician Ji secretly flipping through an erotic magazine came straight to mind, and he nodded subconsciously in response. “You do.”

Divine Physician Ji sputtered, choked with anger. In the end, he turned his head away with an indignant sniff. “I wouldn’t have bothered with treating you if Xiaoxi hadn’t begged me to help you! I’ll be frank with you, the Spirit Root Unsealing Pill is something I came up with after browsing through countless old records. I might have never seen the Evanescent Lotus in person, but there are others who have. Combining the notes they had left behind with my sharp intuition for medicine was what helped me come up with the formula.”

“In other words, this pill hasn’t been proven to work yet?” asked Zu An sharply.

Divine Physician Ji was really fuming this time around. “You have no trust in my medicinal skills? If that’s the case, you should find someone else whom you trust instead!”

Then, he turned around and stormed off.

Zu An lurched forward to grab his arm and apologized sheepishly. “It was just a passing remark. Divine Physician Ji, why would I ever doubt you? Here, I’ve prepared a small gift for you. Please quell your anger.”

He secretly slipped the older man a small booklet.

“What’s this?” Divine Physician Ji shot a disdainful glance at the booklet, not bothering to hide his indifference.

Zu An gave him a secretive smile and nudged him lightly. “Just take a look.”

Ever since he’d seen Divine Physician Ji getting bought by an erotic magazine, he had prepared one of his own just in case. There was no harm in getting close to Divine Physician Ji, especially since his expertise was needed to treat ‘little Zu An’.

Divine Physician Ji disinterestedly flipped the booklet open, and was greeted with these words written on the first page: Everyone has their own misfortunes...

It seemed perfectly bland, but as he read on, his breathing began to hasten. He swiftly kept the booklet into his robes. It’s too wasteful to read good material like this early in the day. I’ll take my time to slowly appreciate it later at night.

"You're quite a talented one, lad!" Divine Physician Ji patted Zu An shoulders with an approving nod.

Zu An sighed in relief and chuckled gleefully inside. You're already impressed with just this much? Hah! You'll be floored by the huge collection I have stored in my mind right now. People in this world really lack good entertainment.

"Where did you manage to get such good stuff?" asked Divine Physician Ji secretly.

"I heard it from a traveling monk." Zu An dared not claim credit for it. He'd have to hide his face in public if word ever got out that he had written such stuff down.

"That monk sure is..." Divine Physician Ji bobbed his head in awe. I guess monks haven't been spending their days meditating in vain after all. I sure have underestimated them. "For a moment, I thought that you were the one who wrote this story. I would have been truly impressed if you were able to write such an exciting story despite your equipment being nonfunctional."

Zu An's face darkened. If not for the fact that I still need you to treat my affliction, I'd have made sure to squeeze every single Rage point out of your miserable body!

"If the Evanescent Lotus is really as rare as you say, wouldn't that mean my case is hopeless?" Zu An felt his heart falling into the abyss of despair.

"There's no need to be so glum. Since you've offered me something good, I'll give you a clue." Ji Dengtu stroked his beard leisurely, putting on the air of an expert.

"Yes, I'd be deeply grateful if you could offer me some guidance." Zu An almost couldn't stand his own subservient attitude.

"I recently heard rumors that a stalk of Evanescent Lotus has been found in the Ursae Dungeon. Whether you'll be able to lay your hands on it or not, would depend on your own capability," replied Ji Dengtu.

"Ursae Dungeon?" Zu An was dumbfounded. He had no idea what that was.

Ji Dengtu frowned. "Aren't you from Brightmoon Academy? Why don't you know about it?"

"Am I supposed to know everything just because I'm from Brightmoon Academy? I only enrolled there two days ago!" Zu An retorted hotly.

Ji Dengtu admitted that what Zu An said made sense. "As you can imagine, there are many formidable cultivators out in the world. Over time, they have conquered new lands and expanded human territories. However, the world is vast, and there are still many secrets that we have yet to uncover.

"Dungeons can be found in every prefecture. No one knows where these dungeons came from, but their existence has been traced back to the oldest human records. It's almost as if they have been there since the creation of the world." There was an expectant look in Ji Dengtu's eyes as he spoke.

"Rumor has it that these dungeons are small worlds created by ancient deities. Some of these small worlds look just like our world. However, there are also those which are fraught with danger but also contain possible rewards."

Zu An nodded. Basically, they're the same as the dungeons in games, right?

"Over time, most of these dungeons fell under the control of the royal court, and the court now uses them to nurture new batches of loyal cultivators. In other words, only the students of official cultivator academies have the right to enter these dungeons," Ji Dengtu concluded.

Chapter 77: The Right to Enter Dungeons

"Are you serious! The royal court is actually that dominant?" exclaimed Zu An.

He had no notion of the royal court's power thus far, but Divine Physician Ji had just given him some idea of just how powerful the Great Zhou Dynasty was.

From his description, dungeons were places that were likely filled with fortuitous encounters and treasures, and seemed the perfect places for cultivators to significantly raise their prowess. Yet, the royal court had been able to monopolize these invaluable resources.

Such an overbearing move would surely have been met with severe objections from individual sects and unaffiliated cultivators, who would have contested this decision fiercely. Nevertheless, the royal court still managed to maintain their control, and everyone else had been forced to acknowledge it.

Either you submit to the royal court and join the academy, or you give up your dream of ever seeing the treasures in these dungeons.

"Why do you think most of the experts in the world decided to take on roles in the royal court?" Ji Dengtu chuckled in response.

"Wait a moment." Zu An suddenly noticed a gap in Ji Dengtu's logic. "Based on what you've said so far, these dungeons have existed for a long time. If cultivators have been visiting dungeons since the inception of time, surely they would have been stripped of resources by now?"

Ji Dengtu shook his head. "You're underestimating the scale of these dungeons. These dungeons are independent worlds with rules of their own, and many of them are of a size comparable to our world.

"They have their own ecosystems, so many of the items in dungeons would regrow over time. It's similar to how an apple tree doesn't stop bearing fruit just because you pluck one apple off it."

"But if cultivators abuse the resources, they would still eventually run out," said Zu An.

If the dungeons were under his control, he would have made sure to scrape out all of their resources for his own benefit. Surely other cultivators before him had harbored such thoughts.

"As I said, these dungeons are complete worlds of their own. Sometimes the entrances lead to different places within the dungeons, with completely different layouts. Only a miniscule part of these dungeons have been explored to date. It's simply not possible to empty out their resources." Ji Dengtu rolled his eyes. "Besides, dungeons don't remain constantly open. Most of them only open once every few years, and stay open only between several days to several months."

Zu An slowly started to form a clearer picture. "So, you want me to enter the Ursae Dungeon to find the Evanescent Lotus? Based on what you've said, the Evanescent Lotus should be an incredibly valuable resource coveted by many experts. How could someone like me possibly snatch it under the eyelids of those experts?"

Ji Dengtu waved his hands impatiently. "You really are ignorant. In dungeons, it's not the strongest person who will stumble upon a fortuitous encounter; it's the one who is blessed with luck. As long as you're lucky enough, the item will naturally appear right before you.

"There are strong people who are born with bad luck, and so they miss many of these encounters. That being said, most experts do have good luck, or else they wouldn't have been able to attain the strong power they boast."

Zu An's face turned bitter. Had he known this earlier, he would have never used his Fortune Pill in the casino. His heart sank with the weight of regret.

Ji Dengtu mistook his expression for worry over acquiring the Lotus, and tried to console him. "Don't worry, I can tell that you're a person with great luck. After all, despite being an utter good-for-nothing, you were still chosen by Chu First Miss as her husband. As long as you can earn the right to enter the dungeon, you might just be able to stumble upon something good."

Ji Dengtu had neglected to mention just how rare something as valuable as the Evanescent Lotus was bound to be. The chances of finding it were equivalent to trying to find a single needle in the vast ocean. In fact, he had no faith that Zu An would be able to obtain it at all. The only reason why he bothered with such lengthy explanations was to safeguard his reputation.

I have already given you the treatment method. There's nothing else I can do for you if you can't find me the last ingredient required, so don't point your fingers at me.

Ji Dengtu suddenly remembered the booklet he had just received, and his conscience pricked at him. So, he took out a blue pill from his robe and passed it to Zu An. "This is the Spirit Root Unsealing Pill that I crafted using the other 80 medicinal herbs. All that's missing is just the Evanescent Lotus. Bringing the Evanescent Lotus to me before it withers will be difficult, so you should carry this blue pill around with you instead. All you have to do is to swallow the blue pill and the Evanescent Lotus simultaneously, and you'll be able to release your seal."

Zu An carefully accepted the blue pill, but still directed a wary look at Ji Dengtu. "I don't know much about medicine, but are you sure you aren't toying with me? Aren't you supposed to combine the ingredients together in a cauldron or something for it to work properly? Will it really work if I just eat the two of them simultaneously?"

"Are you doubting my skill as a physician?" Ji Dengtu glared at Zu An imposingly. "Who do you think I am? Don't put me on the same level as those inept physicians out there! Medicinal herbs like the Evanescent Lotus shouldn't be refined. Trying to do so would only cause it to lose its medicinal properties for nothing!"

Zu An couldn't shake his skepticism. "Is it possible that the Evanescent Lotus is all it takes to release my seal, and your so-called Sealing Pill is just for show?"

Ji Dengtu was deeply offended by Zu An's words. He reached a hand out to swipe the blue pill back. "If you don't want it, give it back to me!"

"I'm just joking~" Zu An quickly stowed the blue pill away in his robe before flashing Ji Dengtu a cheerful smile.

Ji Dengtu huffed impatiently. "If not for the booklet you offered me earlier, I wouldn't have even given you the pill! Speaking of which, do you have more of such stories? Why don't you give them to me as a sign of respect for your elders?"

You old pervert, Zu An thought, careful not to let it show on his face. "Why don't you finish this story first, and I'll think of more later on?"

Of course he would never give out everything in one shot. He would definitely require Ji Dengtu's help in the future, and it would be better to keep some bait to dangle in front of him in those moments.

The news that Zu An had more of such stories in reserve brought glee to Ji Dengtu's face. "Wonderful! Even though you might be inept in certain aspects, your weaknesses are made up for by your talent in this field. I see a brilliant future ahead of you, lad!"

Zu An's face darkened. Aren't you insulting me here?

Ji Dengtu gave a start. "Ah, I nearly forgot. Rather than worrying about whether you're able to find the Evanescent Lotus inside the Ursae Dungeon, I believe that your efforts are better spent on making sure you can enter the dungeon at all."

"Ah?" Zu An was taken aback. "But I'm a student of Brightmoon Academy! Do the restrictions still apply to me?"

"Of course they do!" Ji Dengtu stared at Zu An as if he were an idiot. "Even though dungeons tend to be fraught with dangers, they are also filled with fortuitous encounters, and all cultivators naturally desire an opportunity to enter and discover their rewards. There are simply far too many people coveting a limited resource, so restrictions have to be put in place.

"A prefectural dungeon is usually controlled by the academy nearest to it, but, as you know, a prefecture has many academies. These academies would usually send their students over prior to the opening of the dungeon. Only a limited number of slots are available, so out of fairness, a selection tournament is held to decide who will be allowed in."

Zu An's rage boiled over. "Do you take me for a fool? A selection tournament? How could I possibly win something like that?"

He had managed to secretly raise his cultivation to the third rank thus far, but he was well aware that there were plenty of fourth rank and fifth rank cultivators in Brightmoon Academy. Furthermore, students from the other academies in the prefecture would be participating in the selection tournament as well. Unless he were to reveal all of his trump cards, he stood absolutely no chance.

Of course, he would never choose to reveal all of the trump cards he held. Doing so would only expose his techniques to his enemies.

Moreover, Ji Dengtu wasn't aware that Zu An was able to cultivate. He had told him about the Evanescent Lotus clearly knowing that it was a hopeless cause.

"Calm down, calm down!" Ji Dengtu said sheepishly. "Even though it's probably impossible for you, you do have a capable wife. Chu First Miss can be said to be one of the most outstanding cultivators amongst the younger generation. There's no doubt that she would be able to get into the dungeon. So, you can just get her to find the Evanescent Lotus for you."

Black streaks crisscrossed Zu An's face. "As you said, the Evanescent Lotus is an incredible treasure, and even a single petal could raise one's cultivation by a whole step. Even if she did manage to find it, she would just eat it herself."

"Aren't you her husband? If her husband is ailing, then it's her duty to help you. Or does she intend to live her entire life and die an old maid?"

Zu An glared daggers at Ji Dengtu. If he'd been strong enough, he might have just slit his throat there and then. This bastard was really jabbing all of his sore spots today.

"Then again, it probably isn't a wise decision to count on your wife. Couples tend to split up in the face of adversity, after all." Ji Dengtu suddenly changed his tune. "However, you do have other means. Take for example, big-breasted Pei from Brightmoon Academy... Ah, I mean Pei Mianman. Isn't she interested in you too? If you can't count on your wife, you could turn to your lover instead. She'll surely be willing to help you."

Ji Xiaoxi had informed Ji Dengtu of the events that had transpired in the academy, and the divine physician was honestly impressed by Zu An's exploits. "I must say, you are quite a wild guy. You're still able to win the affection of so many beauties despite your troubles down below. If you don't mind, could you share your secret with me?"

Zu An's veins began popping out of his temple. You just have to keep mocking me, huh? Just you wait! I'll remember this! Once I recover from my affliction, I'll make sure to dig up all of your old wounds and slather salt over them!

Of course, he dared not say these words openly in front of him.

Ji Dengtu realized that Zu An wasn't responding well to his teasing, and gradually grew bored of it. "Oh right, I nearly forgot. The Chu clan invited me here to treat your injuries."

As he spoke, he began to inspect Zu An's physical state, clicking his tongue in wonderment. "There's really something strange about your body. An ordinary human would have died after suffering such severe injuries, but you're still alive and kicking. Not only that, your natural rate of recovery seems to be much faster than average too."

The news surprised Zu An. Perhaps this is another effect of the Phoenix Nirvana Sutra. This is a skill that relies on getting hurt in order to grow stronger, so it makes sense that it would strengthen a practitioner's recovery. Otherwise, they would die before they ever become strong.

Ji Dengtu prescribed him some medicine then left with an excited look on his face. He was in a rush to enjoy the little booklet he had just obtained.

After Ji Dengtu's departure, Zu An lay down, deep in thought. How can I earn the right to enter the dungeon and find the Evanescent Lotus?

A while later, his lips gradually curled into a smile.

...

The following morning, Zu An struggled up from his bed, insisting on heading to the academy. Chu Zhongtian and Qin Wanru were very pleased to see his proactive attitude towards learning, and for once, they felt that there was hope for him. However, they were still quite worried about Zu An's injuries, so they called the estate's physician over to examine him.

To their collective astonishment, they found that Zu An had already mostly recovered from his injuries.

"Hm. It looks like Ji Dengtu's reputation wasn't just hearsay." Chu Zhongtian had no way to know that this was the result of Zu An's cultivation technique, so he attributed the credit to Ji Dengtu.

Qin Wanru chuckled softly and said, "You weren't thrilled to let him enter the estate back then."

"That fellow keeps eyeing you lecherously. How can I possibly allow him to enter the estate?" Chu Zhongtian sniffed.

"Aiyo~ Are you getting jealous over there?" Qin Wanru gently nudged Chu Zhongtian as she felt her cheeks heat up slightly.

Chapter 78: The Eighth Beauty

Zu An felt that Chu Zhongtian had been wise to reject Ji Dengtu. There was a good chance that he might have been cuckolded otherwise. Then again, given how desperate Ji Dengtu was to resort to stealing women's dudous, he was probably a typical shut-in who was all bark and no bite.

Since Zu An seemed fine, there was no reason for Chu Zhongtian and Qin Wanru to stop him from going to the academy, although they still arranged for a couple of bodyguards to escort him.

Zu An knew better than to be one of those nitwits in the movies, who desperately tried to escape from their bodyguards, only to fall into real danger later on. Right now, he only wished that the Chu clan would assign him even more guards. There was no telling when Snow or Mei Chaofeng might just pop out from a random alley and try to take his life.

While Zu An maintained his wariness, Chu Huanzhao seemed to be in a cheerful mood. She was a happy-go-lucky person who rarely allowed anything to bother her for too long.

"Brother-in-law, brother-in-law! Hurry up and tell me how you managed to earn so much money from the Silverhook Casino the other day! My mother dragged me away before you were able to tell me anything!" Chu Huanzhao's eyes were gleaming with curiosity.

"Doesn't the Chu clan strictly forbid gambling?" Zu An asked. "Aren't you afraid that your mother would punish you for asking about such things?"

"I'm just asking about it. It's not like I'm going to gamble. Besides, my mother doesn't care that much about me anyway!" Chu Huanzhao grabbed Zu An's arm and began shaking it. "Brother-in-law, just tell me, all right? Please~"

Zu An's heart skipped as he felt her soft palms on his arm. Why does this lass have no concept of the proper distance between people of opposite genders? This won't do. I really need to educate her properly so that she doesn't get taken advantage of by some stinky brat in the future!

To be frank, he was quite proud of what he had achieved in the casino the night before, and it was truly a waste to keep such a great story to himself. He heaved a helpless sigh, as if he was giving in to Chu Huanzhao's pleas, before finally recounting the exciting chain of events that had him crowned as the God of Gambling.

Ji Dengtu's reaction to the booklet he had prepared let him know that, even though the people of this world were strong, there was little in the way of entertainment in this world. It wasn't like his previous life, where TV dramas and movies were readily available for consumption.

Zu An's riveting story gripped Chu Huanzhao's attention tightly from beginning to end. Even the guards of the Chu clan looked at him with respect, impressed with his storytelling ability.

Even if he does get kicked out of the Chu clan in the future, he'll still be able to make a living for himself by telling stories on the bridge.

As his tale drew to a close, Chu Huanzhao exhaled deeply. "It's such a pity that I wasn't able to see it with my own eyes." Her voice was full of regret. "Brother-in-law, if you're planning such exciting things in the future, you must make sure to bring me with you, all right?"

Zu An nodded in agreement. "All right, all right~"

Despite how fierce Chu Huanzhao had been when they'd first met, it seemed that she had warmed up to him pretty quickly.

"Let's hook pinkies to seal the promise then!" Still worried that Zu An would leave her behind, she stretched her little finger forth.

Her long, slender fingers reinforced Zu An's belief that she was truly a beauty in the making. It was just too bad that she harbored the soul of a reckless young boy. What a waste of a good face and body.

"All right." Left with no choice, Zu An stretched his hand out and hooked pinkies with her.

"This seal of promise will last for a hundred years!" Delighted, Chu Huanzhao's eyes curved into beautiful crescents.

The guards of the Chu clan were astonished. What special charm does this useless drafted son-in-law have? Not only did Chu First Miss choose him as her husband, but even the Chu Second Miss seems to be on close terms with him too!

Should I find an opportunity to consult him on this? While it's impossible for us to get close to the young misses, there are still many beautiful maids in the estate.

Only Cheng Shouping stood limply some distance behind. Snow, my beautiful Snow. Why must you be a spy? My sorrow is like the raging tides of the river. I fear that I'll spend a life devoid of love.

A sudden commotion startled the group.

"Step aside, step aside! The horse is running wild!"

They turned around and saw a carriage careening rapidly along the street towards them. The coach master sawed at the reins with all his might, but the horses had run amok and were beyond his ability to control.

"Young master, be careful!"

The guards of the Chu clan quickly formed up around Zu An and Chu Huanzhao to shield them from the oncoming threat. Cheng Shouping darted into the formation and hid behind the two of them.

Just as the carriage was just about to collide with the group, a guard dashed forth and grabbed the harness along the horse's flank. The muscles on his arm bulged as he forcefully pulled the two crazed horses to a halt.

The surrounding crowd broke out in applause, impressed by the guard's brave heroics.

"Aiya~"

There was a startled feminine cry, and someone tumbled out of the carriage. The abrupt halt had caused the person sitting inside to lurch forward and out.

Everything happened so quickly that the guards of the Chu clan had no time to react. The person staggered past them and rammed right into Zu An.

Dazed, Zu An subconsciously reached out to catch the person. The sheer impact staggered him a few steps backward. Chu Huanzhao quickly reached out to support him, saving him from an awkward fall.

"Y-young master, thank you for your help." A slightly frightened voice came from within his embrace. The voice was beautifully crisp and gentle, like the melodious clinking of pearls.

Zu An lowered his head and saw a beautiful woman laying in his arms. There was a tinge of redness on her fair cheeks, and her eyes gleamed brightly. Her dress was embroidered with flowing water and fleeting clouds, and woven out of the finest threads. A single glance was enough to determine that she was from a rich family.

Her extravagant dress was in no way vulgar, and her beauty was enhanced by the solemn grace with which she carried herself. All who saw her felt nothing but goodwill towards her.

Standing at Zu An's side, Cheng Shouping finally took a proper look at her appearance, and he shuddered as if struck by a bolt of lightning. This is bad, this is bad. How could there be such a beautiful woman in the world? I can't resist anymore. I think I'm already in love with her!

"Zheng Dan, what the hell are you up to?" Chu Huanzhao demanded in a huff.

Zheng Dan?

The name was familiar to Zu An. If he remembered Wei Suo's account of the Sweetheart Ranking of Brightmoon Academy correctly, Zheng Dan was ranked eighth. No wonder Chu Huanzhao recognized her, since they attended the same academy.

Zu An would be lying if he did not admit Zheng Dan was gorgeous. Looking at her close-up, her fluttering eyebrows, enchanting eyes, and inviting red lips all called to him sensually.

Zu An wondered who the creator of the Sweetheart Ranking was. So far, every single one of the women he had seen who were in the Top Ten of the Sweetheart Ranking were indeed ravishing beauties, worthy of their fame.

"Hey, how much longer are you going to continue holding onto her?" Chu Huanzhao demanded impatiently. She was annoyed at how the two of them were still staring at one another lovingly.

At her remark, Zu An finally snapped out of his daze and put the woman down. "Young miss, are you all right?"

She really has a soft body. It's almost as if she has no bones at all.

"T-thanks for saving me." The woman quickly tidied up her slightly-messy hair before favoring Zu An with a smile.

Cheng Shouping's regret was immense. He should have rushed forward earlier! Not only would that have demonstrated his loyalty toward the young master and Chu Second Miss, he would have been able to hold an absolutely gorgeous babe in his arms as well.

"You would have fallen to the ground if I hadn't supported the two of you. Why aren't you thanking me?" Chu Huanzhao snapped.

Zheng Dan bowed slightly to Chu Huanzhao and remarked with a smile, "My gratitude to Chu Second Miss too."

"I don't hear any sincerity in your voice at all." Chu Huanzhao crossed her arms and turned her face away, refusing to acknowledge Zheng Dan.

Zheng Dan kept her cool despite Chu Huanzhao's rudeness. She turned back to Zu An and said, "Our horses were frightened by something earlier, but thankfully you managed to catch me as I was thrown out. The consequences would have been dire had I fallen on the ground."

"Any man in my place would have surely offered his help. It would be a loss to all men in the world if such a beautiful face were to be scarred," replied Zu An with a smile.

Zheng Dan chuckled softly at his compliment. "Young master, you flatter me."

Chu Huanzhao couldn't stand any more of this farce. "Hey, hey, hey! Why are the two of you flirting right in front of me? Don't you think that this is too much?"

Zheng Dan turned to Chu Huanzhao in surprise. "Chu Second Miss, is he your lover? My apologies."

Chu Huanzhao's face immediately reddened. "Pui! He's my brother-in-law. Stop feigning ignorance! I don't believe that you don't know who he is!"

Zheng Dan's eyes widened in astonishment. "Ah! So you're the husband chosen by Chu First Miss! I've heard many things about you. It's a pleasure to finally meet you."

"Mere rumors can't hold a candle to the real me, right?" Zu An couldn't resist asking.

Zheng Dan shook her head and smiled softly. "Young master, you have a truly heroic heart. Indeed, the rumors don't do you justice."

Flowers of happiness bloomed in Zu An's heart. He was aware that Zheng Dan was just being polite, but that didn't dampen the joy of being praised by such a beautiful woman.

Ever since he'd arrived in this world, all he had been hearing was 'wastrel' and 'trash'. It was rare that someone had such a high opinion of him, and even rarer than she was such a great beauty.

It looks like I have pretty good luck with women after all.

"I still have some matters to attend to, so I won't take up any more of your time." Zheng Dan smiled again, then bowed slightly before taking her leave, leaving a faint fragrance in her wake.

Chu Huanzhao noticed that Zu An and Cheng Shouping were still dreamily staring at Zheng Dan's departing figure, and was overwhelmed by rage. "What are you staring at? She's already gone!"

You have successfully trolled Chu Huanzhao for 100 Rage points!

Zu An couldn't resist remarking, "Sister-in-law, it's not that I want to nag at you, but you should learn a thing or two from her. Every gesture of hers exudes gentleness and femininity, leaving a lingering impression in the hearts of others."

Cheng Shouping also nodded vehemently in agreement.

Chu Huanzhao nearly exploded on the spot. "What did you just say? You want me to learn that disgustingly tender act she puts on? It's already nauseating enough for me just to witness it!"

You have successfully trolled Chu Huanzhao for 348 Rage points!

Zu An frowned. "You shouldn't insult her just because she has good looks and acts demurely."

"Only licentious men like you will be fooled by her appearance. Do you know that she's already engaged? Despite having a fiancé, she still got all touchy with you in public instead of trying to keep her distance. That should be more than enough to show what kind of person she is!" Chu Huanzhao scoffed.

She's engaged?

Zu An felt a palpable sense of loss. This was simply how men were. Even though he harbored no feelings for Zheng Dan, he still hoped that all beauties in the world would revolve around him.

Cheng Shouping shared in his despair. My budding love... Is it going to come to an end once more just like that?

Chapter 79: Honorary Teacher

Chu Huanzhao was elated by the disappointed reactions of the two men. "Her fiancé is none other than Sang Qian, the man you met last night. Sang Qian's father is obviously coming after our Chu clan, and the Zheng clan has quite a few business-related conflicts with us here in Brightmoon City. Zheng Dan surely has an ulterior motive in mind in approaching you. Only perverts like you would fall for her honey trap!"

Sang Qian's fiancé? Zu An fell deep into thought as he recalled the arrogant young commander from the casino.

...

The ornate carriage of the Zheng clan sat in a remote alley. The panic on the coach master's face had long since vanished. His voice was calm and composed. "Young miss, did you manage to obtain the debt note?"

Zheng Dan shook her head. "It wasn't on him. It seems we'll have to try a bit harder."

When Zu An had caught her earlier, she had snuck her hands into his pockets and searched them. Unfortunately, she hadn't found anything.

"That wastrel must have used up a lifetime's worth of good fortune for a chance to touch our young miss' body with his unworthy hands!" the coach master spat in a huff.

Zheng Dan smiled faintly. "It's fine. I was fully-clothed, and he hadn't dared to let his hands wander about. I suffered no outrage."

The coach was relieved. "Young miss, I've been by your side since you were young. I can't bear to see anyone taking advantage of you. Speaking of taking advantage, that Sang fellow sure is ridiculous. How in the world could a man possibly think of having his fiancée lay a honey trap for another man?"

Zheng Dan brushed the matter aside. "Uncle Yue, calm down. First and foremost, my engagement with Sang Qian is a political marriage, a relationship built on mutual profit. It's inevitable that there would be some give and take."

The coach master named Uncle Yue sighed deeply. "Young miss, you've suffered much for the Zheng clan."

"It's for myself too," Zheng Dan replied with a smile. "Anyway, I won't really let Zu An take advantage of me. Besides, the earlier encounter with him has made this matter even more interesting."

...

Chu Huanzhao continued to assault Zu An's ears with her ranting, and the torture only came to an end when they arrived at the academy. Chu Huanzhao headed straight toward her classroom, but Zu An headed for the administrative building and the office of the beautiful principal.

He knocked on the door. "You may enter," Jiang Luofu's captivating voice came in response.

Zu An pushed the heavy door open and walked in. There were many interesting objects inside the office, but it was still Jiang Luofu herself who stood out the most.

Under the rays of the morning sun, her skin looked fair like snow. Her eyes were deep and enchanting, her nose was sharp and lofty, and her bright red lips looked ever so inviting. She was the perfect blend of imposing and seductive, two seemingly opposite characteristics somehow working in perfect harmony.

Her long, lustrous hair, put up in a perfect bun with a golden hairpin, was just begging to be let loose. Her cascading long hair would feel smoother than silk flowing through Zu An's fingers.

It was only out of fear that he dared not make a move.

"What a coincidence, I was just about to look for you." Jiang Luofu was mildly surprised by Zu An's visit. She gently waved her hand, and a light breeze blew across his face. The heavy door behind him closed smoothly.

"Principal, you have something for me?" Zu An wasn't so narcissistic to think that Jiang Luofu had somehow fallen for his good looks.

"You're acquainted with Shang Liuyu?" Jiang Luofu arched an eyebrow at Zu An as she fiddled with a hairpin that was the twin of the one holding her hair in place.

"Shang Liuyu?" Zu An shook his head. "I don't know her."

His thoughts began to race. Could it be that Ji Dengtu's request to have him steal Shang Liuyu's dudou had been exposed? Probably not. I haven't even met her before!

"You don't know third place Shang Liuyu of the Sweetheart Ranking?" Jiang Luofu's eyes narrowed skeptically.

"I mean, I have heard of her name, but I've never met her in person."

Zu An was oddly reminded of Wei Suo's starry-eyed excitement over Jiang Luofu, and his gaze slowly drifted down to take in the beautiful principal's legs.

Hmm, they do look as smooth as jade. Oh, nude stockings today? Wow, they look good on her.

Jiang Luofu swiftly noticed his crude stare, and her eyes narrowed in displeasure.

Zu An gave a frightened start, and he quickly added, "I think that those are nothing more than empty rumors. How can that Shang-something possibly be more beautiful than you? With those legs you have, there's no way she could hold a candle to you!"

Zu An's extremely earnest tone drew an amused chuckle from Jiang Luofu. "I've received countless compliments from others in the past, but you're the first one to dive into such elaborate detail."

Spurred on by her playful tone, Zu An straightened his back and doubled down, "Of course, it's a sincere thought from the bottom of my heart!"

"Shang Liuyu will be upset to hear your words," Jiang Luofu replied with a teasing smile. "Don't you think it's ungrateful of you to talk badly of her behind her back?"

"Ungrateful?" Zu An was confused. I don't even know this person, so how could I possibly be ungrateful to her?

Jiang Luofu took out a book from her drawer and began flipping through it. "Didn't I tell you not to reveal the fact that you possess transcendent-class aptitude? You mentioned the aptitude test you had at the school entrance, and I said I would deal with the relevant records. However, someone else had already dealt with them before me. I did a little digging, and it was Shang Liuyu."

She stared at Zu An intently for a moment before asking once more, "Are you certain that you aren't acquainted?"

"Hmm... Could my charm have reached such a level where I unknowingly made a woman fall head over heels for me?" Zu An lightly caressed his face as he remarked with astonishment.

Jiang Luofu didn't know whether to roll her eyes or laugh.

Wow. This guy's skin must be as thick as the city walls.

"If you don't know her, then forget I ever asked." Jiang Luofu cleared her throat. "You were looking for me?"

Zu An walked over and casually pulled himself a stool. He sat down opposite her. "Yes, I was. I want to become an honorary teacher at the academy."

Amused by what she had just heard, Jiang Luofu crossed her legs subconsciously. "Are you insane, or am I out of my mind? Did you just say that you wish to be a teacher at our academy?"

"That's right!" Zu An nodded vigorously.

Now that he was closer to Jiang Luofu, he was able to truly savor her beauty. Her ample breasts led down to a slim waist in a perfect curve that excited his visual senses. Just staring at her like this would likely make his nose bleed.

Jiang Luofu scoffed at his request. "Don't you know the requirements to become a teacher in our academy? If you wish to teach cultivation-related subjects, you need to be of the sixth rank or above. A teacher of literary subjects can be of a lower rank, but these staff we employ are all officials from the royal court who are skilled in their respective fields, be it laws, rites, or social affairs. May I ask if you're a sixth rank cultivator or an official of the royal court?"

"Of course I know all that, but I'm not planning to apply the proper way. I'm hoping that it's possible for me to become an honorary teacher or something by sponsoring the academy," replied Zu An sheepishly.

Most institutions in his previous life had such a 'hidden clause'. A tycoon sponsoring a school would be able to get a building named after him, and his children would get preferential treatment when it came to enrolment. If the donor had a high standing in society, he might even be conferred the title of an honorary professor.

"Sponsor?" Jiang Luofu blinked her eyes in surprise. She had never heard of something like this before, but it did sound like a worthwhile option to discuss. After a moment, however, she shook her head.

"Tsk, you're just a drafted son-in-law of the Chu clan. How much money could you possibly have?"

"Is seven-and-a-half million silver taels enough for you?" replied Zu An.

The promissory note he held was utterly useless if it remained in his hands. He didn't have the ability to cash out the money, and it was more than likely to bring him more trouble in the future. Most of all, holding on to it nullified his greatest trump card, the Heiress' Ball of Delights!

That was equivalent to losing a life!

Money was wonderful, but survival came first.

After careful contemplation, he had decided to donate the money, but where and how to donate the money were questions worth pondering. It was best if he could get tangible benefits out of it.

"Seven-and-a-half million silver taels?" Jiang Luofu's eyes widened in shock. Even by her standards, this was a ridiculous amount of money. "Where did you manage to get so much money?"

Sensing Jiang Luofu's doubts, Zu An quickly shared the encounter he'd had at the Silverhook Casino with her.

"How did you manage to do it?" exclaimed Jiang Luofu.

She had never been too bothered with the affairs in Brightmoon City, which was why she was only hearing about this major incident now.

"I was lucky, I'd say," replied Zu An shyly.

It wasn't technically a lie, since he had used the Fortune Pill to boost his luck.

"If you aren't willing to speak the truth, then no matter. Well, well, well, you're really piquing my interest here." Jiang Luofu leaned forward slightly to reassess Zu An. "Everyone says that the First Miss of the Chu clan has married a useless husband, but why does it seem like there's more than meets the eye? You sure are hiding many secrets, be it your transcendent class aptitude, your cultivation; even a trip over to the Silverhook Casino easily scored you seven-and-a-half million silver taels from Mei Chaofeng!"

Zu An cowered slightly at Jiang Luofu's sudden approach. His gaze was filled with a snowy valley that was so enticing, he was afraid that he would inadvertently make a move to offend the beautiful principal.

Attraction usually starts from interest. After careful contemplation, Zu An felt that informing her of her immodesty was the best choice. "Your skin is peeking through your clothes."

Jiang Luofu lowered her gaze to her own attire, and the edges of her lips inched upward. "You're not like any other men. I don't mind showing myself off if it's you."

Zu An was taken aback. "Really?"

Dammit, I should have taken my own sweet time looking! Could I actually be a lady killer? How could I have won goodwill from Jiang Luofu and the legendary Shang Liuyu so easily, otherwise?

"Of course. You aren't a real man in my eyes; more like a fellow sister, I'd say." Jiang Luofu waved her hand dismissively.

Zu An had expected her to say 'little brother', but being viewed as a 'fellow sister' was not a remark that he could tolerate. "Principal, what do you mean by that?"

Jiang Luofu chuckled softly at Zu An's livid expression. "Don't worry, I won't tell anyone about it."

The sympathetic gaze directed at his crotch was more than enough for Zu An. In that instant, he felt a tremendous urge to smash his head against the wall and end his pitiful life right there.

What the hell is going on? Why are more and more people finding out about it?!

Chapter 80: Intentional

"Are all high-rank cultivators able to sense my affliction with a glance?" Zu An couldn't help but ask. If that was really the case, he couldn't bear to face anyone anymore.

Still chuckling, Jiang Luofu shook her head and replied, "Don't worry, I learned about it from another source. You don't have to worry about anyone sensing this about you."

Zu An felt a great weight lift off him, but he was also consumed by a burning rage.

It must be that darned Ji Dengtu! He must have revealed my condition while flirting with someone else. What the hell! Aren't doctors supposed to have a code of ethics that they're supposed to follow?

"Ahem, ahem, it looks like we have strayed off-topic." To clear away the awkwardness in the air, Zu An quickly brought the focus back to the main purpose of his visit. "I don't expect any wages or tangible benefits from my title as honorary teacher. Naturally, I won't be teaching any classes either. All I need is official recognition."

Jiang Luofu gave the matter some thought, but she eventually shook her head. "If a powerful cultivator with a good reputation had donated the seven-and-a-half million silver taels, I would have explored the possibility. However, you should be well aware of your reputation. If I really bestowed on you the title of honorary teacher, I'll probably be covered in spit. Brightmoon Academy would also become the laughingstock of the country. I can't afford to take that risk."

She paused for a moment before adding with a helpless smile, "Who asked you to behave so wildly over the years? You've only ended up hindering yourself."

Of course, Jiang Luofu had no way of knowing that the original Zu An had been real trash, so she assumed that he had just been slacking off.

Her decision didn't surprise Zu An. He'd fully expected Jiang Luofu to turn down his request, and was only using this as padding before revealing his true intentions. "If I can't become an honorary teacher, I want you to give me a slot to participate in a dungeon then."

It seemed a huge waste to spend seven-and-a-half million silver taels for a slot to enter a dungeon. But factoring in how he was unlikely to be able to cash out the promissory note, and also that it rendered the Heiress' Ball of Delights useless, the price was just about acceptable.

If he were to participate in the selections while banking on his own capabilities, he wasn't fully confident of emerging victorious, even if he used all of the means he had. It would be all over for him if he were to encounter some monstrously talented prodigy from another academy, or something like that.

This matter concerned the welfare of 'little Zu An' and his future happiness; he needed guarantees. In a sense, it was like insuring against the worst possible outcome. On top of that, he hoped the sum of money could buy him the goodwill of Brightmoon Academy's directors, which would make the deal much more worthwhile. It had only been a few days since he had transmigrated over to this world, but it was already apparent to him that academies held an incredibly high standing in this world.

Jiang Luofu's face darkened. "Don't you know that the dungeons only open once every few years? There's high demand and the slots are limited; each academy would only send a few of their most outstanding students to enter the dungeon. Even prodigies have to go through intense competition in order to earn the right to qualify. How could I just give a slot away that easily?"

Zu An shrugged. "I don't believe that you, as the principal of the academy, would lack such authority. It's seven-and-a-half million silver taels we're talking about here. I can't just be giving it away for free, can I?"

Jiang Luofu stared at Zu An with eyes so sharp that they seemed able to penetrate any lies he dared to spout. "What do you intend to do in the dungeon?"

"Of course it's to search for treasures and see if I'm lucky enough to stumble on any fortuitous encounters!" replied Zu An.

He didn't intend to talk about the Evanescent Lotus so as to avoid any unintended trouble.

Jiang Luofu nodded. "I can see where you're coming from. Dungeons do hold many enticing opportunities for cultivators. However, the slots to the dungeons are monitored by many eyes, including the Ministry of Rites. I can't just give the slot away on a whim."

Zu An immediately lost his patience, but before he could say anything, Jiang Luofu raised her hand to forestall him. "Calm down and allow me to finish. While I can't give the slot to you directly, I can still pull some strings from the shadows and assign you relatively weaker opponents. This way, you'll be able to rightfully obtain qualification, and the academy will be free from unwanted scrutiny."

"Doesn't that mean that I'll have to fight for the slot then?" Zu An was a little hesitant about this plan. He wanted to keep his trump cards hidden as much as possible. He preferred to be the one pulling the strings from the dark instead.

Jiang Luofu straightened. "I don't know why you've been slacking off all of these years, but this is a world where the strong are respected. As long as you're able to prove your worth, you'll be able to receive high standing and ample cultivation resources. If you continue to lag behind the others, you'll only be overtaken by everyone else. The gap between you and those ahead of you will continue to increase, and you'll find it hard to catch up to them.

"I'll be honest; I don't really understand your thought process. Despite what might be in your past, you should know that you're a student of our academy now. You don't have to fear or cower before any

enemies anymore. You can feel free to reveal your talents under our protection, and only then will I be justified to allocate more cultivation resources to you.”

Zu An was moved by Jiang Luofu’s words. He could sense that she really had his welfare in heart. However, his reasons for laying low were a little complicated. First and foremost, there was no way he could tell her that the old Zu An had been real trash, and that he was totally different.

To give himself cover, he replied with a random rebuttal. “If my enemy is the emperor, will you be able to protect me too?”

Jiang Luofu was full of passion after her rousing speech, but Zu An’s question choked her up. Her fair face immediately flushed red. “If that’s the case, I’m afraid I can’t do anything about it. Then again, who do you think the emperor is? How could you possibly have the capability to offend him?”

“I’m just joking! Don’t worry about it. I’ll take your words to heart and do whatever that is needed. All right, I think I should be heading off to class now,” replied Zu An.

Jiang Luofu wagged her finger. “Aren’t you forgetting something?”

Zu An subconsciously leaned his head forward, wondering if she was asking him for a goodbye kiss. Are my charms really that powerful? Well, I guess it doesn’t hurt for me to give a small peck on such a beautiful face.

Perhaps out of instinct, Jiang Luofu suddenly recoiled backward, creating some distance between the two of them. “Where’s the seven-and-a-half million silver taels you promised?”

Zu An finally realized what she was referring to. With a sheepish smile, he took off his shoes, pulled out a piece of paper, and placed it on the table.

Jiang Luofu froze for a moment, totally speechless.

Then, with a face dripping with disdain, she picked up a brush and used its tip to unfold the note. She frowned as she read the contents. “It’s a promissory note?”

Zu An laughed sheepishly. “With the academy’s influence and your wits, I believe that it won’t be hard for you to squeeze the money out of the Plum Blossom Sect.”

“I was wondering why you would be so magnanimous as to donate so much money to the academy... Forget it. I thought that I was taking advantage of you earlier, but this more than soothes my conscience. I’ll deal with the matter concerning the dungeon slots. You should hurry to class now,” replied Jiang Luofu.

“Alright! See you, my gorgeous principal!” Zu An waved goodbye and dashed off, faster than a hare.

Jiang Luofu’s cherry lips curved into a slight smile. “What an interesting lad he is,” she murmured under her breath.

She turned back to the promissory note that was freshly dug out from the fellow’s shoes, and her smile turned sickly. There seemed to be an awful stench wafting from it, although it could be just her imagination. She stowed the note away with a disgusted look before tossing the brush into the rubbish bin.

Meanwhile, Zu An leisurely strutted his way to the classroom, his heart much lighter now that it was finally relieved of the boulder that had weighed it down. Although, deep down, he still felt that it was a waste to give away seven-and-a-half million silver taels just like that.

Forget it, I'll just leave it in the gorgeous principal's hands for a few days as dowry. I'll bring her back home, together with my money, in the future!

If anyone in the academy could hear his thoughts right now, they would have been absolutely floored. Plenty of men were fond of Principal Jiang, but he was the only one who dared to harbor such thoughts.

By the time Zu An returned to the classroom, he noticed that the class had already started. The teacher was a scrawny middle-aged man with oily hair arranged in a distinctive center parting.

Zu An discreetly snuck to his seat, but his attempt at secrecy was disrupted by a sudden loud slam on the podium. "Who allowed you to enter the classroom?"

This loud slam jolted many of the snoring students awake. All of them quickly turned their eyes on Zu An.

The way this fellow lashed out at him so abruptly seemed ludicrous to Zu An. "You were focused on the lesson earlier, and I didn't want to interrupt you. I chose to come in quietly instead."

"The least you can do is to report your arrival after being late! And yet, you dare to strut in openly like it's perfectly normal. This is a blatant show of disrespect for your elders!" the teacher berated him hotly.

Zu An felt more than a little exasperated. This teacher was blowing up a small matter for no good reason. I don't even know him, so why is he so hostile towards me?

Most of the students in the class were pleased to see Zu An getting scolded. They had fallen into despair as they lamented how a man like him could have won the fancy of so many beautiful women while they remained single. Naturally, they were more than happy to see him suffer.

Despite the heat directed at him, Zu An replied unhurriedly, "I was late because Principal Jiang summoned me over to have a word. Teacher, if you don't believe me, you're free to ask Principal Jiang about it."

The middle-aged man choked at Zu An's words. Is this fellow trying to one-up me by bringing the principal into this?

You have successfully trolled Yang Wei for 44 Rage points!

Zu An gasped upon seeing the name in the system. The man's physical appearance finally started to make sense.

Yang Wei felt the need to be cautious.

Is this fellow really related to Principal Jiang? I've never seen her so personally involved in a student's affairs before. I thought that he was just a normal student who would be easy enough to deal with, so I agreed to help that fellow without hesitation. However, it seems like the matter is more complicated than I thought.

Well, it's too late to change my mind now.

"Why did Principal Jiang summon you?" Yang Wei asked, trying to investigate their relationship.

Zu An shrugged. "She just asked me how's school been, and if I'm adapting well to school life."

The furrows on Yang Wei's forehead deepened. "You should return for your seat first."

As he continued with the lesson, his mind was distracted by this unknown relationship between Zu An and Principal Jiang. The Principal Jiang he knew of was not someone who would be so concerned with a student.

It suddenly hit him that Principal Jiang had been alone all of these years. Other than the child in the nother class, she didn't seem to have any relatives or friends. How could she possibly be related to Zu An?

Most likely, the Brightmoon Duke has asked her to take care of Zu An, and she is just doing this on his account. Hmph! I nearly got duped by him!

You have successfully trolled Yang Wei for 58 Rage points!

Zu An was taken aback. What is wrong with this fellow? Is he really intent on going against me?

He wondered if he had offended this fellow somewhere, but nothing came to mind. Could it be that my good looks have seduced far too many women, including a woman whom he's interested in?

"Boss, you're formidable!" exclaimed Wei Suo.

"There are plenty of things I'm formidable at. To which are you referring to?" asked Zu An.

Wei Suo gave him a thumbs-up. Such extraordinary shamelessness... As expected of my boss! "Needless to say, I'm referring to how you won seven-and-a-half million silver taels from the Silverhook Casino yesterday. News has already spread all around the city, and everyone is curious to know how you managed to do it!"

Zu An laughed humbly. "Naturally, it's due to my one-of-a-kind character!"