

Immortal 791

Chapter 791: Mysterious Power

"It is a bit strange..." Zu An took out a new set of clothes and changed into them. He looked at Daji. He really found it hard to associate this stunning beauty with history's greatest enchantress. "If we say that she has a will, then her normal expression is too blank, and she can't even speak. If we say that she doesn't have one, then why doesn't she let me even touch her?"

Mi Li sneered. "You're just a pervert after all. You want to do some weird things just because she's pretty."

"Then why don't you give it a try?" Zu An quickly retorted.

Mi Li rolled her eyes. She didn't feel like paying him any more attention. "Since you're now the owner of one of the nine cauldrons, do you know what functions it has?"

Zu An wiped away the blood on his body. Even though his injuries looked frightening, his body was at a level where it didn't really matter. "I didn't have time to check before. Let me see..." He closed his eyes. He linked his mind with that ancient and profound will. A while later, he opened his eyes again with a strange expression.

"So?" Mi Li asked curiously.

"The cauldron isn't complete, so it can only use a small portion of its power. It can be used for pill refinement, and you know the characteristics of its pill refinement as well," Zu An replied.

"I do?" Mi Li was baffled. She had never seen the nine cauldrons herself back then, so how could she know?

"You should have already found out back then when we were with Shen Xuzi. The characteristics of this cauldron are a mix of the Kindhearted, Devil's, Frugal, Extravagant, and all sorts of other furnaces."

Mi Li was shocked and surprised. "Then doesn't that mean it combines all of their benefits?"

"Yup." Zu An also had a big smile on his face. He had already been itching every time Shen Xuzi introduced another furnace. However, they all had their own egos and couldn't be used together. Yet now, one of the nine cauldrons did precisely that! It let him have everything he wanted.

He couldn't help but say, "I wonder if this cauldron has some kind of copying ability and secretly copied the other furnaces' additional effects."

However, Mi Li shook her head. "I feel as if it's the opposite, that those pill furnaces were around this cauldron for a long time and ended up being affected. After all, they weren't ordinary furnaces themselves, so they were able to produce a portion of this cauldron's traits. Of course, no matter how special they are, they're still too far from the nine cauldrons. That's why they could only inherit a small part of its abilities, and still had all sorts of restrictions."

“So that was it.” Zu An felt her analysis made more sense. He quickly brought out the ingredients he had prepared ahead of time. The imperial hospital had given him a good amount of Sky Crane Root and Red Star Jade, but he only had two stalks of Purple Firmament Flower. It was the two stalks he had gotten from that red dragon’s nest outside Brightmoon City. He’d had a few more stalks before, but unfortunately, they had been wasted in the ordinary medicine furnace.

“I hope that I can succeed this time.” Zu An placed the medicines into the cauldron according to the Ki Condensation Pill formula, and then had Daji start the fire.

Daji’s eyes widened, but that might have just been Zu An’s misperception. There seemed to be a bit of unwillingness in her eyes, but she didn’t refuse. She reached out with her slender hand and surrounded the pill furnace with her foxfire.

The two were practically in sync right now. He was able to perfectly control the strength of her flame. Zu An was quite curious about that. Since they were connected like this, then why couldn't he sense what she was thinking?

However, he quickly calmed himself down and began to focus on pill refinement. The cauldron began to sparkle as the foxfire surrounded it, and one could see the ingredients inside being transformed.

Mi Li couldn't help but sigh. “This cauldron is top-notch for refining pills after all. The reason why the success rate of pill refinement is so low is mostly because the process requires tremendous detail. If the amount of ingredients used is even a bit too high or too low, or if the heat is improperly controlled, it can easily result in failure. Only a master alchemist can properly control all of these variables, but you can see the changes to the ingredients inside, so you can adjust things properly. This can save you decades of experience compared to others!”

Zu An’s expression didn’t ease up in the slightest. He said with a grave voice, “This isn’t enough. The flame still isn’t enough.”

“Is it because Daji’s cultivation is too low?” Mi Li asked with a frown.

“No.” Zu An shook his head. “The feedback I’m getting from the nine cauldron is that something is missing. How do I describe it... It seems to need another type of fire, yet I can’t exactly describe it either.”

“Hm?” Mi Li could see the situation inside as well. The ingredients were slowly being cooked, but there was still no change at all. She thought for a bit, and then she realized something. “I understand now. What the nine cauldron needs is probably the combination of yin and yang. Daji’s fox fire is of the yin attribute. If there is only yin, there cannot be life, if there is only yang, there cannot be growth. I believe that another type of yang flame needs to be used together with this yin flame in order to properly make use of this cauldron.”

Zu An was stunned. “But where would I find another flame?”

After all, he didn’t awaken an element like other cultivators when he reached the sixth rank. The reason why he was able to use the flame element was completely because he borrowed Daji’s fox fire.

How was he supposed to come up with another flame on the spot?

If it was any other time, he could take the time to think about it, but he was in the middle of refining a pill right now! He was already committed and couldn't stop halfway, or else the precious pill would be completely ruined. He had no idea when he would be able to gather enough ingredients again.

Mi Li frowned as well, clearly at a loss on this topic. However, she had a lot of experience and quickly thought of a solution.

"Don't you awaken a weird bird every time you make a breakthrough with your Phoenix Nirvana Sutra? And then won't you get a corresponding bizarre ability?" Mi Li quickly said.

Zu An nodded. "Yeah."

There was no need to hide that from her with their relationship.

Mi Li said, "The birds you awakened are Grandgale, Hundredwarble, Blue Mallard, Snow Phoenix, and Blue Luan. If my suspicions aren't wrong, they should be in accordance to the phoenix's nine children."

"The phoenix's nine children?" Zu An was stunned.

Mi Li nodded. "Indeed. It is rumored that the phoenix had nine divine birds as its descendents, each possessing a unique ability. The technique you cultivate is the Phoenix Nirvana Sutra, and there just happens to be several birds. It is definitely not a coincidence."

Zu An had his suspicions as well, but he wasn't as certain as her.

Mi Li continued, "If my suspicions aren't wrong, there is one descendant called the Fire Phoenix, which inherited its ancestor's flames. If you can awaken this bird, then you can produce a yang fire. If we look at the order, then it shouldn't be far off."

Zu An said with a bitter smile, "Now that you mentioned it, it is strange. I always got a new bird ability whenever my cultivation went up a rank, but even though I already reached the eighth rank, there was no new weird bird that showed up."

Mi Li replied, "There is a fundamental difference between cultivators before the eighth rank and after. I believe that it is because you had just broken through the eighth rank doorstep, and your cultivation hasn't fully reached a point where you can unlock the Fire Phoenix's ability."

"Then there's nothing we can do about that now." Zu An felt a headache. "How could I increase my cultivation in such a short time?"

He sucked away Ma An's cultivation just now. He was only at the sixth rank however, so the increase wasn't much at all.

Mi Li's expression became a bit strange. "Did you forget that you have another source of power inside of you?"

Chapter 792: Gold and Fire

Zu An put up his guard. "Don't tell me you're going to beat me up?"

The Phoenix Nirvana Sutra increased his cultivation whenever he took a beating. However, he was at the eighth rank right now, so he needed a seemingly endless amount of ki. It wasn't something that a light beating could fill up.

Mi Li rolled her eyes. "You're now so tough I don't even feel like beating you up. I'm talking about another power. When that Old Mi tried to possess you, his cultivation went inside of you. I sealed that, remember?"

"I do!" Zu An's eyes filled with tears. "You said that it would affect my cultivation foundation and didn't let me absorb it. I missed out a chance to immediately become amazing! I almost forgot about it after all this time."

"Hmph, of course I had to interfere to stop you from ruining your own prospects," Mi Li said. "However, you should be able to absorb it now with your current cultivation."

"Really?" Zu An's eyes lit up. "Then wouldn't I be unstoppable in the capital afterward?"

He had only been around the fifth rank back then. With Old Mi's cultivation, it would have been enough to take him to the master rank. Now, he was at the eighth rank, so wouldn't that mean that he would at least reach the peak of the master rank? Or maybe even the grandmaster rank?

"Is there nothing but crap in that head of yours?" This was a way of speaking that Mi Li had learned from him during this period. She found it quite to her liking. "The doorstep from the ninth rank to the master rank is something you still need to cross yourself. Otherwise, it will similarly destroy your future prospects. Furthermore, once you reach the master rank, the increase in strength isn't purely piling up cultivation, which makes it even less likely that you can jump straight to the grandmaster rank."

"That's why I'll undo a third of the seal this time. It should be enough for you to reach the ninth rank, and you'll be able to awaken a bird."

Zu An was disappointed. "Only a third?"

"The ninth rank... Who knows how many people get stuck at the eighth rank for the rest of their lives, yet you're looking down on it," Mi Li said in dissatisfaction.

Zu An said, "That's only true if you use an ordinary person's standard, okay? My goal is to become like those webnovels' proud and invincible protagonists."

"What kind of nonsense are you spouting? Do you want it or not?" Mi Li asked impatiently.

"Of course I do." Zu An immediately changed his tone.

"Then focus." Mi Li floated over to his side.

Zu An ordered Daji to continue with the foxfire pill refinement. She was capable of acting on her own anyway, so she could complete the task once she received instructions.

He calmed himself down. Then, he sensed Mi Li's finger tap against his chest. Instantly, an incredibly vicious wave of ki appeared in his body. There was no time to think about where Old Mi's cultivation was hidden, or why he couldn't sense it all this time. He quickly used the Heaven Devouring Art the way Mi Li told him to and turned that surging ki into his own.

"It's all thanks to that Heaven Devouring Art you obtained, or else it'd take an incredibly long time to assimilate the cultivation of another. There's no way it would've been as easy as this," Mi Li's voice said by his ear.

Zu An nodded. He didn't dare to be careless now, and focused on refining Old Mi's ki. He could clearly sense formations appearing in his body one after another. Then, one after another, those formations lit up at a visible rate. The eighth rank's first step, second step, third step...

When he broke through into the ninth rank, the formations no longer manifested in a specific portion of his body. Instead, his body seemed to have become a vast universe. The formations appeared in that vast expanse one after another. Then, they once again lit up one after another. The ninth rank's first step, second step...

When it reached the fourth step, Mi Li spoke up. "Enough!" Her finger struck out, and then the surging ki instantly disappeared without a trace.

"Come on, give me a bit more..." Zu An was still immersed in that feeling. Such a feeling really was too wonderful.

Mi Li shook her head. "Too much is just as bad as not enough. Even though your absorption ability can help you increase your strength rapidly, your foundation can easily grow unstable. You sucked away all of Mosquito Daoist's cultivation not too long ago as well, so you can't take in too much right now. This should be the limit before your foundation is damaged."

Zu An was a bit reluctant, but he trusted her judgment.

"What level is your cultivation at now?" Mi Li asked.

Zu An replied, "The ninth rank's fourth step."

Mi Li nodded. "Not bad. The eighth rank allows one to harmonize with the force of the world, while the ninth rank can already start to temper the soul. You're now capable of short term flight, and you can wield things with your mind. That sword controlling technique Han Fengqiu used before was precisely one of the ninth rank's abilities. Of course, different cultivators can control different things. Some control swords, some control blades, and some other things. You need to explore your own combat style on your own."

"I can control flying swords?!" Zu An's eyes lit up. How badass did those sword controlling masters look in those TV dramas? He subconsciously reached out his hand toward Daji, and then the golden hairpin she wore appeared in his hand. Daji gave him a look, but there wasn't any reaction.

Mi Li was speechless. "Your first reaction is to use it to take advantage of girls? You really are a shameless pervert."

Zu An chuckled in embarrassment. "I just wanted to test it out. By the way, why do I feel as if that force was a bit hard to control?"

"It's something that you need to slowly get used to. As your cultivation increases, the farther you'll be able to extend this skill, and the greater the strength you can exert. However, the degree of control and

precision will depend on you. It's not something that can be improved purely through increasing your cultivation," Mi Li said.

Zu An couldn't help but ask, "Then doesn't that mean that someone at the first step of the ninth rank can be even more precise than one at the peak of the ninth rank?"

Mi Li nodded. "There is a chance in theory, but aren't all cultivators who can reach the ninth rank geniuses to begin with? Which one of them would let someone else defeat them in that aspect like this? Furthermore, this control not only relies on talent; it also depends on battlefield experience across the different cultivation ranks."

Then, her expression became serious. "Your cultivation rose too quickly, so you're far from other cultivators in this aspect. Forget about a ninth rank's telekinesis ability; you probably can't even compare to a normal eighth rank in terms of borrowing the world's strength. Your father-in-law, and that Cash Warrior who tried to assassinate you on your way to the capital... Even though their cultivation realms were ordinary, their technique and grasp over these areas left even me surprised."

Zu An knew that what she'd said was true. Even though his combat strength wasn't low, it was because he had relied on all manner of miraculous cheats. In terms of fundamentals, he was far inferior to those who had already remained at their cultivation realm for decades.

Mi Li was satisfied to see that he wasn't behaving as frivolously as usual. She knew that he understood what she was saying. "But there's no need to rush these matters; it'll take time. Why don't we check to see if you've awakened any of those birds first?"

Zu An realized that as well with a start. He immediately examined himself and saw that all the diagrams of the seventh layer had lit up, forming a new diagram. It had a chicken head, a fish tail, a snake neck, and a tortoise shell. It was dazzling gold in color. It looked similar to the phoenix he had seen in his previous world's media.

He quickly looked at the right corner. Golden lines interweaved to form two simple characters: Golden Phoenix!

"It's not the Fire Phoenix?" Zu An felt a bit disappointed. He had been aiming for the Fire Phoenix so he could continue his pill refinement.

When she heard what he said, Mi Li sighed as well. "The nine descendants of the phoenix have never been ordered. There have been all sorts of sayings. Some say that the Golden Phoenix is ranked fourth. Looks like you'll have to wait for your next breakthrough to get the Fire Phoenix. There's nothing that can be done about the ingredients this time. We'll just gather them again in the future."

Zu An felt that this was a letdown as well. After all, these ingredients weren't easy to gather, especially the Purple Firmament Flower. It was something not even the imperial hospital had. He had no idea when he would find more again.

He was feeling disappointed, but he suddenly said, "Hold on!" He sensed some formation threads flickering inside of him. A new strange bird diagram was being formed.

Only now did he remember that the Golden Phoenix should have appeared during his eighth rank breakthrough. The reason it had never appeared was because he'd needed to advance to a certain level

of the eighth rank first. Now, he was already at the ninth rank's fourth step, so he had probably satisfied the conditions for the bird to appear for his ninth rank breakthrough.

Zu An couldn't make out this weird bird's exact appearance; he could only see flames. He could only vaguely make out feathers at their center.

Its name was written next to it in a few strands of flame: Fire Phoenix!

Chapter 793: Birds Resemble Their Master

"There were two birds at once?" Zu An was pleasantly surprised. Happiness really did come suddenly, to the extent where he had a bit of disbelief.

Mi Li was much calmer in comparison. "You rose two ranks in quick succession recently, so it's within reason that you awakened two birds. I almost thought that you would need to reach the peak of that cultivation realm to get one after the eighth rank; this situation is much better than what I anticipated. Right, take a look and tell me what kinds of abilities you got from those two birds."

"Okay!" Zu An nodded. He closed his eyes and began to examine them. Then, he suddenly opened his eyes and said with a strange expression, "The Fire Phoenix has the Phoenix Fire, the world's most sacred fire that embodies both destruction and benevolence. As for the Golden Phoenix... The Golden Phoenix..."

Mi Li became annoyed when she saw him mumble like that. "What about the Golden Phoenix?"

The Golden Phoenix had always been an auspicious creature. Since it was the symbol of grandeur and elegance, it was always used as a decoration for the laurels of the empress. Mi Li had a favorable impression of the Golden Phoenix, which was why she became more and more curious about what kind of ability the Golden Phoenix had.

Zu An replied, "The Golden Phoenix is of the metal attribute. Its ability is 'Love is more solid than gold'. It... It can awaken a girl's lust and make her unable to help but love you."

Mi Li was speechless. She subconsciously took a step back, and then scoffed, "Hmph, looks like the bird is just like its master. Even a glorious phoenix ended up becoming a good-for-nothing because of you."

Zu An's expression became gloomy. "It's not as if this is something I have any control over..."

Mi Li harrumphed. "Is there a prerequisite for this thing? Or is there a restriction on the target's cultivation?"

Zu An shook his head. "I'm not sure... There's no description of it. I have to slowly examine it on my own in the future."

Mi Li took another step back. She exclaimed with a somewhat unnatural expression, "You're not allowed to use that thing on me!"

Zu An snorted. "I'm a real man, and I'm so handsome too. Girls love me! The girls around me are all stunning, so why the heck do I need to use this kind of thing to get girls?"

Mi Li had to admit that was true. "Your luck with girls really is pretty good."

"That's because I'm handsome!" Zu An stuck out his chest. "Furthermore, what are you so scared of anyway? You're just a soul."

"That's none of your business. Either way, just don't use it on me." Mi Li glared at him.

Zu An dropped his frivolity and said seriously, "Don't worry, I won't."

Mi Li sighed in relief. According to their interactions thus far, she knew he wasn't lying. A faint smile appeared on her lips.

"Then let's refine the medicine first. You have to make sure you control the power of the fire. Don't let the ingredients get burned," Mi Li warned. She wasn't scared of anything happening to this cauldron.

Zu An nodded, and then slowly spread out his arms. A golden flame appeared in the center of his palm. The entire room immediately became much hotter.

Mi Li frowned. Her sleeves brushed outward, sending flickering runes all around them. "I've already set up a formation here so the things around us won't get destroyed by the flames. It'll also keep the flames' aura from leaking out and alarming the capital's experts."

Zu An voiced his surprise. Mi Li really was a mysterious person. He could only be grateful that he'd had that Heiress Ball of Delights back then when he faced her. He didn't dare to be distracted, so he quickly sent a strand of the golden flames around the cauldron. It formed a stark contrast to Daji's blue fox fire.

Since he was already in sync with Daji right now, he could perfectly control the strength of the two flames, making them reach the optimal level of harmony. Due to the experience of using the foxfire, he had great proficiency with the Phoenix Fire. He saw the contents of the cauldron quickly melt, and then he continued to manipulate the size of the flames according to the Ki Condensation Pill formula's procedures while gradually adding all sorts of auxiliary ingredients.

The ingredients completely turned to liquid. Then, ki surrounded the liquid so it wouldn't evaporate. The different types of liquid merged, and their impurities were removed. Their essences combined together and reacted to each other.

Mi Li warned from the side, "Be careful, not even an experienced alchemist's success rate can exceed fifty percent, let alone a newbie like you."

As if to prove what she had just said, the different types of liquid wrapped in ki suddenly shook violently, as if everything might collapse at any moment.

Drops of sweat trickled down Zu An's forehead. "This is bad; I can't control it!"

Mi Li also looked nervous, but there was nothing she could do.

Suddenly, the cauldron flickered with green light. A strand of ancient energy surrounded the liquid. Then, the restless liquids miraculously calmed down and merged together, forming a smooth and round pill. A medicinal fragrance that refreshed the mind wafted out from within.

Mi Li's brows unfolded. "Success! Looks like the fifty percent success rate increase kicked in. You can take the pill out."

"Wait, I think there's something else happening." Zu An quickly stopped her.

Mi Li looked at the cauldron in confusion. She saw green light flicker across it, and then several faint auras surrounded the pill medicine. After that, the lights dimmed. When she checked it again, she saw that there was an identical pill right next to it.

"The double pill chance happened! This is the effect of the Extravagant Furnace!" Mi Li was pleasantly surprised.

"Shen Xuze's Extravagant Furnace needed fifty percent more ingredients for this chance, but I only prepared a single portion of the ingredients!" Zu An exclaimed, puzzled.

Mi Li smiled. "The Extravagant Furnace only awakened that ability because of this cauldron, so it was weakened. You managed to save half of the ingredients with this cauldron. What, you're not satisfied with that?"

"Of course I'm happy about this." Zu An was overjoyed. He opened up the cauldron lid and removed the two red pills. Each pill had faint patterns on it.

Mi Li sighed in amazement. "They actually possess innate pill marks too. The pills a newbie like you made were actually of the highest grade."

"Pill marks?" Zu An asked, confused.

Mi Li explained, "Many pills, once refined, are unable to reach the theoretical level of perfection. They suffer various types of damage during the refining process. But when the pill quality is high enough, innate pill marks will form on its surface. Only those legendary pill kings can occasionally make pills of this level, yet you actually succeeded on your first try! Looks like it's probably because of this cauldron."

Zu An couldn't help but examine the cauldron again. Mi Li was stunned and asked, "What are you looking for?"

Zu An said, "There was a Frugal Furnace that could return some ingredients too, but I don't see anything here. There was a Mischievous Furnace in Shen Xuze's collection that would add a property, but I didn't sense any additional traits added to these two pills."

Mi Li couldn't help but scold him, "Hey, how can you be that greedy? Is double the pills not enough for you? In my opinion, the material return and double pill effects probably can't happen at the same time, and only one of them will appear. Just be happy with the result already; the chance of getting twice the pills is lower than the chance of material returns. Furthermore, adding random properties isn't reliable. Having a negative effect added to this Ki Condensation Pill could only ruin it."

Zu An figured that made sense as well. The main reason he was doing this was to raise Daji's skill rank. Ki Condensation Pills were one of the essential materials for that. It would be bad if something ended up affecting that process.

"Daji, come here!" Zu An gestured toward the gorgeous woman. Daji walked over gracefully. He dangled that Ki Condensation Pill in front of her and said, "Go a bit lower; open your mouth."

Daji was stunned. Then, she slowly knelt down in front of him and raised her head. Her red lips parted slightly. Her large and beautiful eyes looked straight into his. This was a gaze that could melt even the toughest steel.

Zu An was speechless. I only told you to go down a bit lower. You don't have to assume that position, right? He felt his entire body heat up. There was an uncontrollable impulse within him as well. This woman really is a vixen. I'm just feeding you; do you have to make it so sexual?

Chapter 794: The Shadow Group's Master

Mi Li was completely speechless. She harrumphed in annoyance. "She's nothing but a vixen after all. She still seduces men by instinct even if she doesn't have a soul!"

Daji seemed as if she hadn't heard anything and continued to kneel like that in front of Zu An, her gorgeous eyes staring pitifully at him.

Mi Li looked at Zu An with an ambiguous smile. "How much longer are you going to make her maintain that stance? Should I leave and let the two of you have your fun first?"

Zu An's face heated up. He quickly calmed himself down and sent the two Ki Condensation Pills into Daji's mouth. However, he didn't know if it was intentional or not, but her tongue seemed to have touched his fingers when she took the pills.

Zu An felt his blood begin to boil. However, he wasn't some inexperienced kid, so he quickly calmed himself down. He took out the four dragon scales that he had already prepared beforehand, asking, "What do I do with this? Do I have to make her eat them too?"

Raising Daji's Fox Charm from the first to second level needed two Ki Condensation Pills, four dragon scales, and ten thousand silver. He really didn't understand why silver was needed. Who was he even paying here?

"How should I know?" Mi Li snorted. She turned around in a somewhat rigid manner. She thought to herself, This fella's zodiac sign is definitely a donkey, and that girl is just a good-for-nothing slut.

Zu An checked the system. It didn't explain the exact process.

Daji slowly stood up. Her beautiful snow-white cheeks seemed to become a bit more rosy after swallowing the two pills, making her appear even more stunning. She took the four dragon scales from Zu An, and then she placed the scales north, south, east, and west of her. Then, she reached out toward Zu An with her fair, jade-like palm, looking at him with her pitiful eyes again.

Mi Li frowned. Did this woman really not have a soul? Her eyes looked very much alive! There was no difference from an ordinary person at all! But she had checked Daji's body before, and she couldn't sense any soul inside.

Zu An realized what was happening and took out a ten thousand silver note, asking, "Is this what you want?" However, Daji didn't take it, and continued to stare at him.

Mi Li said, "I think she needs ten thousand silver taels and not a silver note. Silver is probably the medium for some kind of mysterious power, or maybe it's the energy source she needs to begin with." Her cultivation was profound, after all, and she had read extensively in the past. She quickly reached that conclusion.

Zu An realized what she was saying as well. He took out ten thousand silver taels from his Brilliant Glass Bead's storage. He had the treasure he had taken from the red dragon's nest, and there were also all of the goods he had been awarded in the imperial palace. Ten thousand silver taels weren't too difficult to bring out.

Sure enough, Daji took the silver taels when he brought them out. She arranged the silver in a ring around her, and then sat down at the very center. They could sense the aura of the Ki Condensation Pills coming out of her body. Then, streaks of light swirled about. Four dragon scales lit up, and then the outer ring of silver also started to shine.

"Is this a ripple of ki, or something else?" Zu An asked Mi Li out of curiosity. He could sense a strange aura. It wasn't quite like ki, but it wasn't primordial energy either.

Mi Li shook her head. "This is probably a type of cultivation we don't understand. Sigh, the universe is so great; there are too many things that are worth exploring." A zealous look appeared in her eyes as she spoke.

Zu An had almost forgotten that this woman was also a bookworm! After all, anyone who could read through the Qin royal family's entire library was definitely not messing around.

The silver around Daji slowly disappeared, and it was hard to describe how it was vanishing. It didn't disappear instantly, nor did it dissolve bit by bit. It was as if it were disappearing without anyone's notice. It was the same for the dragon scales.

Eventually, everything disappeared. There were rings of smoke around Daji, as if her entire body were immersed in mist. The smoke quickly lessened, in the end seemingly merging into Daji. Her eyes had already opened.

Zu An was startled. He could already sense the improvement in Daji's skill.

Fox Charm, level two. It allowed her to temporarily control a target of the same cultivation level.

"I hope this is enough." Zu An was a bit nervous. This wasn't a videogame where he could see Ma An's exact cultivation. He had to guess.

Mi Li said, "Don't worry, their cultivation was about the same, and Ma An was already almost controlled before, so I don't believe their cultivation levels are too different. I'm sure Daji's skill will work now."

Zu An became more confident when he heard the assurance in her voice. He dragged Ma An over and undid his seal. Then, he poured a bucket of cold water over him.

"Who, what?!" Ma An's consciousness wasn't too clear right after he woke up. However, the weakness he felt from his body made him gradually recall what had happened. He did his best to remain calm.

"You should just give up; you won't obtain any useful information from my mouth! But if you let me go, I guess I can just let bygones be bygones. I'll just let today's matter go."

“Do you think I’m an idiot, or are you an idiot? Do you really think I’ll believe something like that?” Zu An rolled his eyes.

“If you don’t believe me, then I can use a secret acupuncture method that will make me forget about the things that happened today. That’s why there won’t be any danger for you.” Ma An quickly said. His instinct to survive was making him exert himself like this one last time.

“There’s no need to go through all that trouble.” Zu An waved his hands and gestured for Daji to come over.

Ma An harrumphed when he saw the gorgeous woman. “You still want to use her against me? Forget it...” Suddenly, he was stunned halfway through his sentence. The only thing left in his world were her beautiful eyes, her every frown and smile.

“It succeeded!” Mi Li said excitedly when she saw Ma An. With her experience, she was able to tell that his will had been completely controlled.

Zu An sighed in relief. He quickly asked who the one behind Ma An was.

Ma An shook his head somewhat rigidly. “It isn’t King Qi; it’s master.”

“Who is your master?” Zu An frowned. Why had Ma An called him master?

“Master is from the Shadow Group,” Ma An instinctively replied.

“Shadow Group!” Zu An was alarmed. This wasn’t the first time he had heard that name. Back then, Qiao Xueying had also mentioned this organization. For the sake of saving her clansmen, she had joined the Shadow Group, and he had also faced their assassins in the past himself. He only knew that this was one of the world’s most mysterious organizations.

“Who is the master of the Shadow Group?” Zu An immediately asked.

“I don’t know.” Ma An’s eyes were expressionless. “The Shadow Group’s master has never revealed his true appearance to others; he has always been shrouded within a dark mist. No one in this world knows his true identity.”

Zu An frowned. “Then what else do you know about him?”

Ma An replied, “My guess is that he might be someone in the imperial palace.”

“Someone in the imperial palace?” Zu An had only been asking about the master out of curiosity, and didn’t care that much about who he was. After all, no matter how mysterious he was, he was only the boss of an assassin organization. He didn’t have much of an influence on the court.

Yet now, when he heard the other party might actually be someone from the imperial palace, he immediately felt a chill run down his back. He had spent this recent period in the imperial palace after all, yet he didn’t sense anyone who could be the master of the Shadow Group.

What was even more appalling was that the imperial palace was the emperor’s domain. The Shadow Group had actually managed to hide in the palace under the emperor’s very eyes?

That meant that one possibility was that the master of the Shadow Group was someone working for the emperor. But if this was the case, why would they accept the mission to assassinate Zu An? Back then, the emperor had been waiting for Zu An's Phoenix Nirvana Sutra, so the chances of the two of them being on the same side weren't too great.

This meant that there could only be one possibility, which was that the Shadow Group's master had a different status that allowed him to stay in the imperial palace properly. Only then could he avoid drawing the emperor's suspicion.

But who was this person? Eunuch Wen? Zhuxie Chixin? The Empress? Eunuch Lu? Guo Zhi? What about the crown princess, or Concubine Bai? Or maybe it was a plain palace maid or guard?

Faces appeared in Zu An's mind one after another. It was to the extent that even the ordinary Piao Duandiao and Jiao Sigun appeared in his head.

Zu An felt goosebumps. He knew that if there really was this sort of powerful figure in the palace with him, then that expert might have his eyes on him 24/7. None of his movements would escape notice...

It was one thing if his identity as Golden Token Eleven were exposed. But he had helped Qiao Xueying and Hong Qiulei leave, and then he had saved Yun Jianyue; furthermore, he had even spent a night with the empress... Even one of these deeds was enough to have him killed many times over. If the other party knew about these things, then they would have him by the throat. Wouldn't his life or death be completely decided by that person's whims?

Chapter 795: All-Element Proficiency

Sensing his intense changes in emotions, Mi Li said, "There's no need for you to be too worried. There weren't any suspicious individuals around when you were with Yun Jianyue and when you played around with the empress."

Zu An finally released a sigh of relief when he heard what she had said. Even though he had also been using the jade badge to examine his surroundings, this was the world's most mysterious assassin organization, after all. He really found it hard to believe that the other party didn't have other ways to spy on him.

But now that Mi Li had said that, he sighed in relief. Mi Li's cultivation was far beyond that of an ordinary person. No matter how formidable the Shadow Group's master was, he wouldn't have surpassed Mi Li at her peak.

He recalled that for better or for worse, Yun Jianyue was also a grandmaster. She hadn't noticed anything strange either, so those things they had done probably didn't reach the ears of the Shadow Group's master.

However, he didn't dare to act carelessly. He had only been a nobody back then, so the Shadow Group's master might not have cared. However, he had already climbed his way up in that time, already drawing the attention of several large powers, so the Shadow Group was definitely paying attention to him. He had to be more careful in the future.

Zu An then asked a bit about the Shadow Group's intelligence, but Ma An didn't know too much. As he had already asked about almost everything he could, he began to wrap things up. "Does anyone else know about what happened here between us?" He had to confirm that, or else if he didn't take care of it, wouldn't everything about him be exposed?

Ma An replied listlessly, "I don't have many friends, nor have I trusted anyone. Furthermore, I only came to confirm my suspicions, so I didn't tell anyone. However, just in case, I left a note in my notebook that I would pay Zu An a visit today. If something happens to me, everyone in the palace will know that the one who killed me was Zu An."

Zu An was speechless. This guy really is extremely treacherous! Thank goodness I asked about this, or else I would've been finished! He quickly asked about where the note was, and then finished Ma An off. Even though Zu An didn't like to kill, he wouldn't show any mercy toward someone who tried to take his life.

Ma An fell limply to the ground. Two porcelain bottles, one black and one white, rolled out from inside his clothes. The black bottle had the words 'Frozen Soul' inscribed on it, while the white bottle had the word 'Antidote'.

Zu An picked up the black bottle. It was extremely cold to the touch. Mi Li floated over and said, "This is probably the basis for Ma An's confidence, since he can even poison a master rank cultivator. It was just that he had no idea that you had just made a breakthrough in the Primordial Origin Sutra, so you were already immune to most poisons."

Zu An looked at that candle that was still burning. He thought to himself, This Ma An really is quite unlucky. Mi Li was a spirit-like existence, while he was mysterious. Otherwise, if the two really had been poisoned, Ma An might have at least had the power to negotiate a bit.

Mi Li stretched out her body, revealing her seductive curves. She yawned and said, "All of this has made me tired. I'm going to sleep."

After being around her for so long, Zu An knew that the reason Mi Li needed to sleep so much was partly because she needed to stabilize the Red Tears of Lady Xiang, while the other reason was because she didn't have a body. Her spiritual state was actually quite taxing with prolonged use, so she needed to sleep to replenish her energy.

Zu An had even bought a bed for her and placed it in the Tai'e Sword's storage. He didn't know if her spirit body could sleep on a bed or not.

Just as Mi Li was about to leave, she suddenly thought of something and said, "Right, judging from what I've seen regarding the Phoenix Nirvana Sutra's birds, you're mainly using their distinctive traits."

"Is there something wrong with that?" Zu An was confused.

"Not at all; it's actually quite a ridiculous asset," Mi Li said. She continued in a dignified manner, "I've been wondering why you couldn't awaken any element despite reaching the sixth rank. I originally thought that it was because of the Phoenix Nirvana Sutra, that you could only awaken one when you reach a higher level. But you've already reached the ninth rank now, yet you still haven't obtained any

elemental ability. Furthermore, there's a strange bird that appears whenever you make a breakthrough. I finally realized why that was."

"Why?" Zu An quickly asked. Other cultivators all had different elements to play with; only he alone hadn't awakened any element and had to rely on only his body. That really was quite embarrassing.

Mi Li sighed. "It's because you've already awakened elemental abilities; it's just that you've never realized it. Otherwise, don't you think you cultivated the Snowflake Sword a bit too quickly?"

Zu An replied, "Isn't it normal for a talented genius like me to cultivate quickly?"

Mi Li was speechless. She ignored what he said and continued, "The Snowflake Sword is an ice element battle skill. According to normal reason, you could only get so far without awakening the ice element no matter how great your aptitude. However, you can still perform the Snowflake Sword pretty well, to the extent where you can even release some of the sword skill's innate ice power."

Zu An also began to think to himself. "It's probably because I used the Snow Phoenix's power, right..."

Mi Li cut him off. "It's not the Snow Phoenix's power, but rather the Snow Phoenix's ice attribute that granted you the foundation to use ice element skills. For example, when you cultivated the Flame Blade, you needed Daji's foxfire. However, now that you have the Fire Phoenix, I believe you can use it even without Daji's ability."

Zu An felt an urge to try it out. He used the Flame Blade's skill, but he deliberately chose not to borrow Daji's power. A flame blade appeared in his palm, and it was a dazzling gold, no different from the color of the Fire Phoenix.

"Do you understand now?" Mi Li continued, "Every single bird is of a different attribute. For example, Grandgale is wind, Hundredwarble is spirit, Blue Mallard is water, Snow Phoenix is ice, Blue Luan is wood, Golden Phoenix is metal, Fire Phoenix is fire..."

"This means that it makes sense that you didn't awaken a specific element, because you've awakened every single element. It's just that you're different from others in the sense that you can use them as soon as you awaken the respective ability, but you still have to practice skills related to the different methods in order to develop them."

Zu An immediately became overjoyed. "So that was what happened! Hahaha, what did I say? It's way too embarrassing if the protagonist doesn't have all the elements, hahaha!"

"Did you go insane?" Mi Li was speechless when she saw how crazily he was laughing.

"I just got a bit excited." Zu An chuckled.

Mi Li nodded in understanding. "Cultivators have almost always only had one element, ever since ancient times. Occasionally, if there were any who were proficient in two elements, that was already considered ridiculous. Someone like you who can use all the elements is completely unheard of, so it's extremely normal for you to be a bit excited.

"But I advise you to keep this a secret, or else you'll draw the jealousy of all cultivators. Those who are nicer might capture you for research; those who are more evil will want to get rid of you as soon as possible and kill you before you can grow stronger."

Zu An was unhappy. "But I already found my dao, that a real man should face everything head on and become the strongest!"

Mi Li rolled her eyes. "What's wrong with biding your time for now? There were countless strong individuals throughout history, but those who only knew how to charge forward all ended up dying miserably. I don't care if you die, but don't drag me down with you."

Zu An felt this girl really was a tsundere. She clearly cares about me, yet she just has to make it sound like she's only doing it for herself. He became a bit upset and said, "Then do I have to endure everything, and just swallow the humiliation if someone bullies me?"

"That's different. If anyone tries to take advantage of you, then just find a way to beat them up. As long as you've thought about the consequences, of course. Don't let the entire world find out that you've awakened all of the elements," Mi Li replied.

Zu An nodded. "I understand. I shouldn't show everything, or if I do, then I have to make sure that person doesn't live to see tomorrow. That way, nothing will be exposed."

Mi Li was speechless. She eventually remarked, "You really are an evil little bastard."

"Big sis empress, who are you learning from? You shouldn't say dirty things like that," Zu An replied.

"From you," Mi Li retorted. It was now Zu An's turn to become speechless.

"That's why, if you have the chance to cultivate skills of other elements, it will be beneficial to your strength. Alright, I'm not gonna chat with you anymore. I'm going to get dark circles if I don't sleep now..." Mi Li yawned, and then disappeared into the Tai'e Sword.

Zu An began to think. He had the Snowflake Sword for the ice element, and he had the Flame Blade for the fire element. What about the other elements?

I'll ask Zheng Dan about the water element, Snow for the wood element, and as for the spirit element... Oh, Yun Yuqing just happens to be the spirit element, haha! I'm a genius! A male lion is going to be surrounded by lionesses after all.

But what about wind and metal? Do I have any beauties around me who have awakened these two elements? Sigh, I was getting all cocky, but it looks like this is going to be quite the struggle.

All of this is for the sake of cultivation! Yup, that's definitely it!

Chapter 796: Another One Who Wants to Silence Him

Zu An waved his palm. The phoenix's flames covered Ma An, quickly burning him to ashes. Had been planning to leave after dealing with Ma An, but he gave the quietly seated Daji a look and asked with a chuckle, "So, do you want to take a nap together?"

Daji silently looked away, wordlessly rejecting him.

“Why did you tempt me then, if you had none of those intentions?” Zu An grumbled. He stored her away and changed into his Golden Token Eleven uniform before walking toward the imperial palace under the cover of night.

There was a curfew at night, and there were guards patrolling everywhere. There were even Embroidered Envoys walking around from time to time. The uniform saved him a ton of trouble. Not only did the Embroidered Envoys who ran into him not question him, they only nodded toward him in greeting from afar.

Only when he reached the palace gates was his identity inspected. Zu An handed the guard his waist token. He sighed. The golden token envoy’s identity really was too useful. After all, no matter how much a normal subject was favored, they weren’t allowed to pass through the palace gates once they closed. If there was something urgent where they absolutely had to come back, they had to contact the emperor’s palace first.

It was much easier for Embroidered Envoys to come and go. For normal Embroidered Envoys, coming and going in the middle of the night was still troublesome, but he was currently a golden token envoy at the highest rank, so he had much more authority.

Once he entered the palace, Zu An maintained a hundred and twenty percent of his vigilance. He used the jade badge’s ability to check his surroundings for any suspicious activity. The Shadow Group’s master was hiding somewhere in the imperial palace, so he didn’t dare to act carelessly.

He returned to his residence and changed into a different set of clothes, then put on a mask. Then, he rushed to Ma An’s residence. After spending some time in the palace, he knew where the residences of the imperial hospital’s staff were. Inside the imperial palace, the emperor’s palace and the chambers of the imperial concubines had the strictest security. The residences of the other maids, eunuchs, and doctors were much less secure.

With Zu An’s current cultivation, he easily snuck inside. Once he was in Ma An’s residence, Zu An found the notebook based on the earlier description of where it was. Sure enough, recorded inside was the matter of Ma An seeking out Zu An today.

He looked through the notebook for more information, thinking he might find something useful. Unfortunately, there were only records about the health checkups of visiting nobles, insights regarding medicine, which doctors weren’t easy to deal with, and other such things.

Suddenly, Zu An became vigilant. He quickly put away the notebook and hid behind a bed curtain.

A nearby window opened silently at almost the same time, and a black-clad individual rushed in. The instant they came in, they charged toward the bed, ripping through the covers with their claw-like hands. The pillows inside were torn to shreds.

“Hm?” The black-clad individual voiced their surprise. They quickly pulled back the covers and saw that there were only pillows inside. Ma An was nowhere to be seen.

Zu An, who was hiding in the shadows, was surprised. Judging from the speed and technique this person had just displayed, they were definitely an expert among experts! At the same time, he was curious.

Who was it that wanted Ma An dead? There really was something wrong with this guy's character. He actually had so many people after his life.

He suddenly thought of something. If this person could move freely inside the imperial palace and even had such a powerful cultivation, then who else could this be but someone from the Shadow Group?

The black-clad individual quickly searched through the room, clearly searching for something.

Zu An gathered his focus and concentrated. The room wasn't big, so the other party would soon find this place. That was why he needed to seize the opportunity and strike first. His figure flashed, and his palm struck at the other party.

The black-clad individual didn't expect someone to be hiding in the room, but they reacted quickly. Their body moved strangely, barely avoiding the fatal strike at the crucial moment. Then, they retaliated with a palm.

Both palms met, and both parties couldn't help but become shocked.

The black-clad individual was frightened and asked, "Who are you?" This person wasn't Ma An! How could Ma An possibly have nine ranks of cultivation?!

Zu An became more and more confident. After his cultivation had increased, it was enough to face a ninth rank directly after all. Furthermore, he hadn't gone all out. He was confident he could completely capture this person.

The other party's voice was extremely strange, as if their voice had been deliberately altered for fear of revealing their identity. Zu An became more and more curious, asking, "And who are you?"

The black-clad individual snorted. Killing intent flashed through their eyes. Power surged around them, then their hands struck at Zu An's vitals like the claws of a hawk.

Zu An was shocked. This person had been holding back earlier as well! Their real cultivation was at the peak of the ninth rank!

In a proper duel, both sides could hide their skills and test out their opponent first, making them use their trump cards, and then use their own ultimate moves to take the other party out. But no one would do that in the imperial palace. There was an emperor overseeing this place, and there were many guards and Embroidered Envoys patrolling around. That was why one had to quickly deal with their opponent, so one would always go all out.

Zu An didn't treat this matter carelessly and quickly focused his attention.

The two tacitly chose not to use elemental abilities for fear of alerting the emperor. Even though they didn't use elemental abilities, their attacks were still fierce and vicious. Every attack was aimed at the opponent's vital point without a shred of mercy.

Zu An was still a bit unaccustomed to his new strength, as he had just reached the ninth rank. In fact, he hadn't even fully adapted to his eighth rank cultivation yet. However, ever since he had arrived in this world, he had constantly fought on the brink of life and death several times. He had already experienced many desperate battles.

Together with his Primordial Origin Sutra's powerful regeneration, he could just fight while exchanging damage for damage. The Phoenix Nirvana Sutra would also increase his cultivation the more damage he took.

That was why he was left at a disadvantage in the first twenty to thirty moves, and blood splattered all over his clothes. But after thirty moves, he gradually regained some ground, getting on even footing with his opponent. By the time they exchanged forty to fifty moves, he had already gradually obtained the advantage.

The black-clad individual became more and more shocked. Why was this person's body so tough? He was able to keep fighting after suffering serious injuries as if it were nothing... No, he was becoming stronger and stronger! Since when had the imperial palace ever had this kind of expert?

On several occasions, they almost couldn't hold back and nearly used elemental skills. However, the emperor was in the palace right now, so they could only give up on that thought.

The black-clad individual was starting to become more and more scared. Their opponent's aura was becoming stronger and stronger. They knew they might just be finished if they continued to fight here. As such, they launched a barrage of claw strikes at their opponent. While Zu An was defending himself against the attacks, they rushed out of the window and disappeared into the darkness.

Zu An knew that the black-clad individual wanted to escape, so he had deliberately let them slip away. He wanted to use this chance to see just who this person was. As such, he quickly pursued the individual. Their movements were strange, allowing them to vanish almost instantly. Fortunately, Zu An had the jade badge, allowing him to see everything within a few li. No matter how this person tried to confuse him, he could still remain on their trail.

But even so, he almost lost the person on several occasions. They were just too fast. If it weren't for Zu An's Grandgale ability and the fact that he excelled in speed as well, he would've lost the black-clad individual even if he had the jade badge's radar.

After winding around from side to side, they ended up arriving in front of a palace. Zu An was shocked when he saw the three words 'Palace of Peace'. This person was actually someone working under the empress?

He quickly reacted. That black clad individual was most likely Eunuch Lu. No wonder he felt that the person's attacks were more reserved, and that there was a strange smell coming from them. Now, he realized that was the smell of perfume mixed with the smell of urine.

Why had Eunuch Lu wanted to kill the imperial hospital's Ma An? Don't tell me the empress is the Shadow Group's master?

Zu An didn't dare run into the Palace of Peace. After the last assassin attack, the Palace of Peace's security had been strengthened, and even its rune formations had been upgraded. It wouldn't be possible for him to sneak in silently even if he had nine ranks of cultivation now.

But just because he couldn't enter didn't mean there was nothing he could do. He looked in the Palace of Peace's direction and raised the jade badge. A big black cat that had been working at a small white

female cat suddenly shivered all over. Then, he got off the small white cat and ran toward the empress' palace. The small white cat cried out in resentment, but she still didn't turn around.

You playboy! No, playcat! Zu An thought.

The empress was lying lazily on her seat, her glamorous curves in full view. A seductive smile appeared at the corners of her lips. "The palace's cats are causing trouble again."

A black-clad individual was standing across from her, precisely the one who had just fought with Zu An. He said hatefully, "This servant will castrate that big black cat after this. All he does is torment the courtyard's female cats all day!"

The empress chuckled, "Just because you can't do it doesn't mean you should take it out on other people's cats. That fella is well received by those female cats, so what does it have to do with you?"

The black-clad individual's entire body trembled, as if he had been greatly humiliated. Unfortunately, he couldn't retort against any of the empress' words.

The empress didn't want to incite him any further and changed the topic. "What the heck happened to you?"

Chapter 797: Whore and Dog

The black-clad individual up ahead had already removed his mask. Who else could it be but Eunuch Lu?

All of his clothes were in tatters, and there was quite a bit of blood on his body too. He was in a haggard state. His cultivation was already extremely high, so he always completed his missions easily. When was the last time he had experienced something like this?

Eunuch Lu wiped away the blood from the corner of his lips, saying, "Sigh, I ran into a mysterious expert in Ma An's place just now."

"What happened?" The empress also got rid of her playful expression. She sat up from her seat, her beautiful eyes becoming sharp.

Eunuch Lu said, "I sneaked into the imperial hospital, but Ma An wasn't in his bed. A mysterious expert suddenly attacked me while I was searching his room..."

There was a big black cat lying on a distant window. Its tail curled up lazily.

Outside of the Palace of Peace, Zu An's eyes widened. The empress had wanted to kill Ma An after all! But why?

Inside, the empress frowned. "His cultivation was higher than yours? But after Old Mi and Wei Dan, those two old things, passed on, when has anyone this powerful been inside of the imperial palace?"

Eunuch Lu became upset. "That person's cultivation wasn't necessarily higher than mine, and I could sense that his use of power and his understanding of his cultivation realm weren't steady. However, his body was incredibly tough. I didn't want to use elemental skills out of fear of alarming the emperor, so that was why I ended up at a disadvantage."

The empress gave him a look. "A loss is a loss; when did you start making so many excuses?"

Eunuch Lu's expression became serious. "Your highness is correct."

"You weren't followed, right?" The empress suddenly got up from her seat and walked over to the window. She sighed in relief when she saw that there was no strange activity.

Eunuch Lu said, "Your highness, please feel at ease. With my movement technique, only someone with Old Mi's Sunflower Phantasm would have a chance of catching up to me, and Old Mi is already dead. Furthermore, the Palace of Peace's defenses have been upgraded. We would know immediately if someone followed me here."

The empress nodded. Then, she picked up the big black cat by the neck and took it into her embrace. "You little brat, are you messing around with those female cats again? Your life seems to be even better than that of the one living in this palace."

Eunuch Lu didn't dare to say anything when he sensed the deep resentment in her voice. It was all his fault for making that decision impulsively back then. Now, he didn't even have the confidence to console her.

"Meow~" The big black cat struggled for a bit, but it then calmed down, enjoying the gentle stroking of the empress' long fingers.

Zu An had a weird expression on his face. He had already experienced them himself last time, but he was still amazed. They really are soft... and big.

The empress carried the black cat back into the room. She asked, "Did you obtain any information from fighting against that person?"

Eunuch Lu gave the big, comfortable black cat a look of jealousy. He thought to himself, I bore the burden and worked tirelessly all these years and never enjoyed something like this, yet a brute like you ended up enjoying this first. "That person's moves were varied and mixed; I couldn't tell where he was from. The only impression I had was that his body was extremely hard."

"His body is hard?" The empress suddenly chuckled. "If you say it like that, there is someone that comes to mind."

Eunuch Lu obviously knew who she was talking about when he saw the blush on her face. He was about to explode out of jealousy and anger.

You have successfully trolled Eunuch Lu for +233 +233 +233...

The empress was just making a joke; she obviously didn't think that Zu An could leave Eunuch Lu in such a sorry state. She sighed and said, "Things are tricky now. I didn't expect there to be another power after Ma An. There's no way of knowing if he's still alive or already dead."

Eunuch Lu said, "I believe he's already finished, if someone like that was hiding in his room. Your highness doesn't need to worry."

"I hope that's the case." The empress said, "Pay close attention to the imperial hospital in the following days. Report to me immediately if there is any news."

“Understood!” Eunuch Lu bowed. “Your highness, even though I don’t know who that mysterious person is, this is still a good thing for us. Now that someone else has helped us deal with him, your highness doesn’t have to worry about that matter being exposed.”

The empress sighed. “If I knew Zu An’s blood essence could help me recover, why would I have asked you to get that medicine from Ma An? I was worried that he might instead fall out with us with that piece of information in his hands.”

Outside, Zu An felt a huge headache. Even though she hadn’t gotten into any details, he could already deduce the truth.

When he and the crown princess had had that scandal and he was locked up in the imperial prison, there was someone who had suddenly poisoned his food. He couldn’t find the one who had done that, and he had been wondering why the other party would use a medicine that wasn’t lethal, but rather one that attacked the mind.

Now, everything was clear. Because of the matter between him and the empress, she was worried that he would blackmail her, so she wanted to get rid of him. But she was worried that he had backup outside, that if he died, then someone would immediately announce their secret. That was why when she met with Chu Chuyan, she had agreed on the surface, but she had actually used this chance to get rid of him.

This woman really is vicious! Zu An clicked his tongue. He had even saved her before, and the reason they had even touched each other was also because of that day. He hadn’t expected her to suddenly turn on him like this.

Eunuch Lu spoke up again. “Your highness is thinking too much. Once your highness uses him a few more times and recovers, he will lose his value. Furthermore, there’s no way he would know about this matter. Even if he does, at this time, it doesn’t matter. Unless... Your highness really has developed feelings for him?”

“Feelings?” The empress sneered. “Stop trying to test me like this. Indeed, I like his young and strong body, but he’s nothing more than that. In this life of mine, I had some feelings for you when I was young and didn’t know anything. Unfortunately, all sorts of things happened and I learned that things like feelings are the most useless things in the world. I don’t need love. I didn’t need it before, and I won’t need it in the future.”

Eunuch Lu became excited when he heard that he was the only man she’d had feelings for. Suddenly, he didn’t feel that all of these years of work had been in vain. “After hearing your highness say that, it would be worth it even if I died right now. Your highness, don’t worry. I’ll do my utmost to help you accomplish your dream.”

...

Zu An silently left. He didn’t feel anything within him, because he only enjoyed the empress for her body. He didn’t feel anything for her. He had felt a bit embarrassed about that before, but now, he instead felt relief. This sort of woman was only worth playing around with. Both parties would only take what they needed.

Mi Li's voice sneered in his ear, "A whore and a dog really are a good match."

Zu An was speechless. "Who's a dog?"

Mi Li's figure appeared, a look of delight on her face. "It's fine for this kind of thing to happen. Otherwise, you might really start thinking you could get any girl in the world just because you're talented, even if you were actually just a boy toy for them."

Zu An asked resentfully, "Are all you empresses so cold-hearted?"

Mi Li became furious. "You dare compare this empress with that slut?!"

You have successfully trolled Mi Li for +444 +444 +444...

Zu An laughed when he saw her strong reaction. "I knew you were different."

Mi Li's expression became a bit unnatural. "What kind of nonsense are you saying? It was just something interesting to watch before I fell asleep." She disappeared promptly.

Zu An was already used to her slipping in and out like this. He continued to smile.

...

Over the next few days, Ma An's mysterious disappearance sparked quite the commotion in the palace. The emperor even specially put the Embroidered Envoy in charge of investigating this case.

However, they couldn't find any leads after looking around. The Embroidered Envoy might have invested more resources into the investigation, but the crown prince's test was coming up. Both the emperor and Zhuxie Chixin were thinking about that matter, so the disappearance of a trifling commissioner assistant naturally paled in comparison.

Zu An's days were rather leisurely in that time. The Eastern Palace had given him a vacation, so he usually spent his time resting at home. His little sister-in-law Chu Youzhao visited him from time to time and gave him some stuff because of what Chu Chuyan had told her before she left. She even took him around for sightseeing.

Zu An was bored, so he took the chance to familiarize himself with the capital's surroundings. Chu Youzhao was young and lively, and together with the inseparable Murong Qinghe, having those two young beauties accompany him was also a happy thing.

Because of what had happened, Murong Qinghe completely changed her attitude, to the extent that she was deliberately currying favor with Zu An. He wasn't sure if it was because he had helped her clan brother out in prison, or if it was because she wanted to get along with her future brother-in-law. But the amount of effort she put in made Zu An feel a bit embarrassed. Seeing how nice the little girl was being, he also asked for a favor from the crown princess.

The crown princess had originally planned to use Murong Luo to involve King Qi, but that didn't bear many results. As such, she did this favor for Zu An and let Murong Luo go, making Murong Qinghe behave more and more sweetly toward him.

However, their period of leisure was destined to end. The crown prince's examination was drawing closer and closer. The crown princess called Zu An back to discuss the matter of the exam.

Chapter 798: How Is It Any Different?

The crown princess was discussing official business with important ministers inside. Zu An stayed outside to chat with Piao Duandiao and Jiao Sigun.

"Huh? Why do the two of you look so gloomy?" Zu An noticed that the two of them weren't in high spirits and asked out of curiosity.

Piao Duandiao looked around carefully. When he saw that no one was paying attention, he said in a hushed voice, "The crown princess has just told us that we're going with the crown prince during his exam. I know that as guards of the Eastern Palace, we're supposed to share in the crown prince's tribulations, but... But..."

Jiao Sigun harrumphed. "What are you beating around the bush for? It's not as if he's an outsider. It's just that we know that this exam won't be simple. King Qi's side definitely won't let this chance go. Even though our deaths aren't guaranteed by going, it will definitely be dangerous. This might be the end."

Zu An patted their shoulders and said, "All of you have your own families, and it's human nature to worry, so don't blame yourselves too much. Right, has the crown prince's exam been decided on?"

Now that he thought about it, the emperor had even given him the task of thinking about the exam, but hadn't bothered him about this. Ever since that night in the Palace of Peace, he no longer felt as scared of the emperor as he had before. Furthermore, the emperor didn't rush him either, as if he had already forgotten about this matter, so Zu An was happy to play the fool.

"It has. However, we don't know the exact details." The two of them shook their heads.

Just then, the ministers that had been speaking inside came out one after another. A eunuch invited Zu An to come in. Zu An patted Piao Duandiao and Jiao Sigun's shoulders and said, "Don't worry, I'll protect you guys when the time comes."

Piao Duandiao watched Zu An go inside with a strange expression. He bumped his friend with his shoulder. "Hey, where does big bro Zu get his confidence from?"

"Forget it, there's no point in making him feel discouraged too."

"Yeah, that's what I was thinking too."

...

Zu An went into the study. There was no crown prince inside; that fatty was playing with the eunuchs outside. However, the beautiful crown princess was in the study.

"I haven't seen you for a few days. The crown princess has grown prettier again," Zu An said with a smile.

Bi Linglong blushed. "Sir Zu really says whatever you want. There would be all sorts of rumors if other people heard what you said."

Zu An remained unfazed. "The skies are clear and the moon is bright, so why do we need to be scared of what other people say?"

"The skies are clear and the moon is bright?" Bi Linglong couldn't help but remember that night when they had been together, buck naked. She harrumphed inside. That really is something only this guy would say.

"I heard that the crown prince's test has already been decided?" Zu An asked.

Bi Linglong nodded. "Indeed. The dungeon in the royal academy's rear mountain will open up in three days. The crown prince will kill the Jade Moon Serpent to prove his ability."

"Jade Moon Serpent?" Zu An was stunned. This didn't sound like an easy foe at all!

"It's a seventh ranked vicious beast. It's much weaker than a dragon, but it's a lot more formidable than ordinary beasts." Bi Linglong looked worried.

Zu An was stunned. "Aren't you just sending him to his grave then?"

He was no stranger to secret dungeons, and every single trip was a bitter struggle. Of course, those secret dungeons had all involved Unknowable Regions, so they were different from the secret dungeons this world was familiar with. However, even normal secret dungeons were dangerous.

If one put it nicely, this crown prince was simple, but if one were more straightforward, then he was someone who had learning difficulties and couldn't function on his own. He probably wouldn't be able to make it back after entering a secret dungeon even if he hadn't been given any tasks, let alone if he had to kill a seventh ranked vicious beast!

Even though the seventh rank wasn't high, would the crown prince be able to deal with it? It would make more sense if he ended up becoming a snack for that serpent.

Bi Linglong said, "This is the proposal made by the ministers from King Qi's side, so of course we'll oppose it. Someone suggested that the crown prince was to become the future monarch and not a general who fights on the front lines, so it isn't even his job to fight like this. They said that what mattered more was the strength at his disposal. That was why we suggested that we build a team led by the crown prince to complete this task."

"Not a bad plan." Zu An chuckled. "But there's no way King Qi's side would agree, right? Or else you could all just send your strongest experts to protect him. The crown prince's problem would be easily solved then."

Bi Linglong voiced her acknowledgment. "Indeed. That's what they said, that if we did that, then this test would become meaningless. That's why after arguing with each other, we ended up reaching a compromise. King Qi's side agreed to allowing the crown prince to bring people with him, but there's a limit on their cultivation. They have to be beneath the seventh rank. Furthermore, they can't be Embroidered Envoys or military soldiers who have gone through extensive combat formation training."

Zu An nodded. "That's pretty reasonable."

After all, the cultivation levels of beasts and people were completely different. A seventh ranked beast was much more powerful than a seventh ranked human.

The crown prince's side couldn't exceed six ranks of cultivation, but they would have an advantage in numbers. The candidates that were picked will definitely have specialized skills. That way, even though killing that Jade Moon Serpent would be dangerous, it would still be possible. No wonder the crown prince's side had agreed to the proposal.

"But would King Qi really be that nice?" Zu An couldn't help but ask. This test was extremely important. If the crown prince successfully passed this exam, then King Qi's faction wouldn't have another chance to question his ability. Regardless of which angle he looked at it from, King Qi's faction shouldn't have allowed this seemingly fair test to go through.

"We also feel that they might have messed with the dungeon, but we don't know what they'll do." Bi Linglong's beautiful brows furrowed. "Sir Libationer is in charge of opening the dungeon this time, and he will only let our people in through the agreed-upon matter. Furthermore, the emperor is watching too, so none of King Qi's men can go inside. Just what can they do?"

Zu An couldn't help but ask, "Is it possible for the libationer to be secretly colluding with King Qi?"

Bi Linglong shook her head. "He wouldn't. It hasn't been long since you came to the capital, so you don't understand the libationer's extraordinary prestige. He doesn't even need to rely on any faction to stand on equal footing with his majesty and King Qi, so why would he need to take such a huge risk? Furthermore, his majesty trusts the libationer, and I don't believe he will make a wrong decision."

Zu An thought to himself, If even that paranoid old thing trusts the libationer, then there really is no need to question the libationer's position. He remarked, "But there's no way King Qi will just watch this test happen without doing anything."

"You're right." Bi Linglong looked at Zu An. "That's why I need to send in as many trustworthy people as possible, and you... are the best candidate."

"Me?" Zu An was overjoyed at her trust. "But my current cultivation is higher than the seventh rank, so I don't think I can go in."

Bi Linglong bit her lip. "That is a problem, but you're around that level and not that far above it anyway. I'll try to find a way to sneak you in."

Zu An thought to himself, Um... I'm very far above the seventh rank. I don't think it'll work...

Bi Linglong suddenly raised her head and stared at him with her beautiful, burning eyes. "Are you willing to help me?"

Zu An smiled. "Don't worry, I'll help you."

Bi Linglong smiled sweetly when she received his affirmative reply. Her worry and gloom were swept away, her smile lighting up the entire room. If not for the fact that Zu An was already used to seeing all kinds of beauties, he might have been a bit stunned for a while.

The crown princess blushed when she saw him stare back at her, but she didn't berate him at all. A strange mood settled in the room.

Suddenly, the maid Rong Mo knocked on the door. "Crown princess, his majesty has summoned Zu... Sir Zu."

Bi Linglong finally snapped out of her daze and turned away rather rigidly to avoid his gaze. "His majesty is calling you; you should go quickly."

"Okay." Zu An got up to leave.

"By the way, why does his majesty keep summoning you?" Bi Linglong suddenly asked out of curiosity.

"Maybe because I'm just such a likeable person?" Zu An chuckled, and then left through the door.

Rong Mo arrived at Bi Linglong's side and said in a discontent tone, "That guy is so shameless."

Bi Linglong didn't reply and instead began to think to herself. With her understanding of the emperor, there should have been no reason for him to repeatedly summon an official like Zu An!

Rong Mo continued, "Your highness, are you really going to choose him to accompany you? I can go too! My cultivation isn't beneath his own."

"But you've already reached the seventh rank. You've passed the secret dungeon's restrictions," Bi Linglong said.

"Isn't he the same?" Rong Mo asked.

"That's different."

"How is it any different?"

"For example... He's a man?"

Rong Mo was speechless.

...

On the other hand, Zu An arrived at the imperial study. Eunuch Wen gave him a look and couldn't help but become shocked. It seemed the emperor's mood wasn't too good today.

Sure enough, the emperor immediately used intimidation the moment Zu An walked in, asking, "Have you not completed the task this emperor assigned you?"

"May I ask which task your majesty is referring to?" Zu An sneered inwardly. He had already seen through the other party's political schemes. They might be effective against other people in this world, but for someone like him without any concept of imperial authority, once he realized what was happening, it wouldn't have much of an effect.

"The task you were given to find a solution for the crown prince, of course. The crown prince's exam has already been decided. Do you understand your crimes?" The emperor looked at Zu An with his sharp eyes. A powerful aura crashed down, as if he could see through Zu An's negligence.

Chapter 799: Would You Dare?

Zu An was really suffering, but he didn't show it on his face at all. He said, "The crown prince's exam involves King Qi. It really isn't something an official of my level can get involved in. However, the fact that I was unable to share in your majesty's burden is something that leaves me in great shame and disappointment. Please punish me."

He, who was familiar with the art of ruling, obviously knew that the emperor wasn't really going to punish him. The emperor was just using this chance to knock him down a peg, to give him more reason to complete the task. That was why he played along.

The emperor was completely convinced that Zu An was being toyed with in the palm of his hand, yet he was actually being led by the nose. This sort of feeling really was great.

The emperor was stunned. He hadn't expected this kid to be so obedient. He had prepared a bunch of criticism, yet now, it was completely useless. He was completely caught off guard. Eventually, he gathered his thoughts and said, "Since you already know that you've sinned, I'm not someone unreasonable either. I plan to give you a chance to make up for your mistake."

Zu An sneered inwardly, but he looked overjoyed on the surface. "Please speak, your majesty! This subject is willing to go through anything; not even ten thousand deaths can hold me back!"

The emperor was extremely satisfied with his attitude. His expression eased a bit. "I believe you already know about the crown prince's exam."

Zu An nodded. "I heard a bit about it in the Eastern Palace."

"The crown princess told you, I presume," The emperor said with an ambiguous smile.

Zu An shivered inwardly. He quickly replied, "The crown princess is worried about the crown prince's prospects, so she wished for all of us subjects to pool our wisdom and see if there was a solution."

Looks like this fella is still apprehensive about me and his daughter-in-law being too close. He had almost lost an arm back then just because he had to carry her, so he didn't dare slack in his reply. He immediately expressed his innocence in the matter.

Thankfully, the emperor didn't continue to question him on that matter. He instead said in praise, "Linglong, that child is responsible and diligent. What she worries about isn't without reason. Even I refuse to believe that Zhao Jing wouldn't interfere in this matter."

Zu An keenly sensed that the other party hadn't used the title of King Qi like before, but rather directly used the name Zhao Jing. It seemed the emperor was already slowly considering him one of his own. In truth, they were kindred spirits in a way.

The emperor continued. "This emperor really can't feel at ease, so I plan to send someone to follow the crown prince and look around inside. The first reason is to ensure the crown prince's safety, while the second is to guard against anything from King Qi's side. As a golden token envoy, as well as an important minister of the Eastern Palace, you're the most suitable candidate."

Zu An felt a huge headache. He really couldn't figure out why the emperor would trust him so much. After all, this p;id already be considered one of the first major battles between the emperor and King

Qi's faction. Neither side could afford this loss. Why did the emperor trust someone like him who hadn't been in the capital for that long?

He quickly said, "This humble subject knows how worthless he is. My life is insignificant, but there would be no forgiveness for me if the crown prince were implicated as well. Based on what this subject knows, the most suitable candidate is none other than Chief Commander Zhuxie Chixin. His cultivation is profound, and he's incredibly loyal to your majesty..."

The emperor cut him off before he could even finish his sentence. "Hmph, do you think I don't want to send him? However, both sides have tacitly agreed that no one over the seventh rank will enter the dungeon, and everyone knows that Zhuxie Chixin is already a pseudo-grandmaster. How could Zhao Jing's side possibly agree to him entering the dungeon?"

Zu An had a bitter smile as he said, "But my cultivation rank has also surpassed that level..."

The emperor's eyes narrowed. "Honestly, you've increased in strength a bit too quickly. You were only around the sixth or seventh rank when you first arrived at the capital. Just how long has it been for you to have already reached this point? But this doesn't make sense, because I've already read through the Phoenix Nirvana Sutra you handed over. Your cultivation should be even slower than an ordinary cultivator's."

Zu An shivered. He knew that the emperor was suspicious of him right now. Fortunately, he had already prepared for this. "The reason why this subject's cultivation was fast is because Old Mi tried to possess me, so he gave me all of his cultivation. I've been gradually digesting his cultivation, so that's why I've been advancing so quickly."

The emperor nodded, letting go of his doubts. With his knowledge and experience, he was fully aware of such phenomena. Even though such things were able to bring quick increases in cultivation, they weren't favorable at all for a cultivator in the long-term, as they would damage one's foundation. One would have no hope of reaching higher cultivation ranks.

But the emperor didn't tell Zu An that. His current cultivation was already perfect for what the emperor needed him for. As for problems with Zu An's cultivation in the future, that was for him to worry about himself.

"It doesn't matter if your cultivation realm is higher, because most people believe you're only around the seventh rank. I'll give you a treasure that can hide your cultivation later, and that should do the trick," the emperor said. If it weren't because everyone already knew what level Zhuxie Chixin was at, he might have already given it to him instead.

Zu An was shocked. "There's actually something like that in this world? Isn't this test really easy then? You can just send in some powerful cultivators then; clearing the exam will be a breeze!"

The emperor snorted. "If only it were that easy. Even though there are many items that can conceal your aura, there aren't many that can escape the notice of truly accomplished warriors. This is the only such item this emperor has found even after scouring the world. Don't let down my trust in you."

“Thank you, your majesty, for your grace!” Zu An looked as if he were incredibly moved. Inwardly, even he was admiring his own acting skills. I hope I don’t end up with some bipolar disorder or something by doing this all the time...

Then, the emperor warned him about some things to pay attention to before he entered the dungeon, and that protecting the crown prince was his absolute first priority. Afterward, the emperor said, “You can leave. Pay Concubine Bai a visit later; she’ll hand you the item.”

“Understood!” Zu An withdrew from the imperial study calmly as usual, but there were great emotions surging inside of him. He had never expected the treasure capable of hiding one’s cultivation to be in Concubine Bai’s possession.

He immediately made several guesses. Just what kind of relationship did the emperor and Concubine Bai have? Why would he leave something so important with her? Wasn’t Concubine Bai Yun Jianyue’s junior sister? Don’t tell me that the emperor really doesn’t know that she’s part of the Devil Sect?!

...

While lost in thought, Zu An ended up wandering into the Hundred Flower Palace. When he vaguely made out the scene of blossoming flowers, Zu An felt a chill run down his back. This woman really is too treacherous... He recalled how helpless she had seemed when he had provoked her a bit last time. Now that he thought about it, maybe all of that was fake.

Wait, does the emperor also know that I provoked this concubine of the crown prince? Many thoughts filled his mind, but he calmed himself down after taking a deep breath. Even if the emperor does know, so what? Since he didn’t expose me, that means he still needs me. That gives me room to work with.

He was led inside by the palace maid. Concubine Bai was slowly rocking back and forth on a swing, an infant in her arms. She didn’t seem surprised to see Zu An at all. She waved her hand, gesturing for everyone else to leave.

“Is your highness implying for us to continue where we left off by sending the servants away?” Zu An asked mischievously.

Concubine Bai didn’t look scared and instead gave him an ambiguous smile. “Even the current you? Would you dare?”

Zu An harrumphed. He took a step forward and sat down on the swing. He picked Concubine Bai up and placed her right in his embrace.

Concubine Bai was shocked and furious. After a momentary daze, she began to struggle. “What are you doing? Let me go!”

You have successfully trolled Bai Rouxue for +34 +34 +34...

Zu An sighed. “That’s why you shouldn’t tease men like that.”

Concubine Bai stopped struggling. She discovered that the more she struggled, the more her parts rubbed against Zu An. She forced herself to calm down and asked gravely, “Do you know what you’re doing right now? If I told his majesty, not even nine lives would keep you alive.”

Zu An embraced her fair waist and honey peach bottom. He replied in a carefree tone, "But you won't tell his majesty though, will you?" His mindset was already completely different from before. He preferred to be on the offensive.

Concubine Bai's expression darkened. "Don't think you can threaten me just because you know my relationship with the Devil Sect."

"But that way is quite effective, no?" Zu An didn't press the matter. The reason he had teased her was just to lower her guard towards skinship and to get some more information. He didn't really plan to do anything to her.

Concubine Bai took a deep breath, and then her expression became playful again. "Then what if I told you that I was his majesty's woman? Would you dare to touch me again?"

Chapter 800: Imperial Grandson

However, her face turned red the moment she finished speaking. Zu An's powerful physiological reaction had already told her the answer.

Concubine Bai was starting to feel dizzy. She had originally thought that he would be frightened. After all, the emperor was the world's most powerful man; who dared to offend him in this world? Even King Qi, who had fought with him for so many years, didn't dare to touch his women. However, not only was Zu An not scared, he had instead become even more excited. Did I misunderstand the situation, or is there something wrong with him?

"You're the emperor's woman?" Zu An was momentarily distracted. However, he also snapped out of his daze, because that was what made the most sense. There were many rumors involving Concubine Bai and the emperor.

"If you know, then let go already!" Concubine Bai did her best to put on an angry and dignified appearance. Unfortunately, her figure was too weak and petite. Not only did she not look scary at all, but her appearance would instead only encourage men to think even weirder thoughts.

"Why do I have to let go? Since I've already touched his majesty's woman, then I'm dead either way. In that case, I might as well enjoy myself a bit longer before I die. For better or for worse, I can leave this world without any regrets," Zu An said with a chuckle.

Concubine Bai was completely speechless. Why wasn't this kid behaving the way a normal person would act? She didn't even know how to continue. Eventually, she took a deep breath and said, "Okay, I promise I won't tell his majesty about what happened. Can you please let go now?"

Zu An replied with a smile, "You're not even going to tell his majesty, so shouldn't I make the most of this situation then?"

Concubine Bai was stunned. How can this guy be that shameless? The infant in her arms seemed to have sensed his mother's predicament and immediately began to wail. She began to panic.

While Concubine Bai was racking her brains over how to get out of this situation, however, Zu An actually let go. She was shocked. She quickly stood up and gave him a suspicious look.

Zu An laughed. He had only planned to mess around with her to see if he could obtain some information, so he naturally didn't press the issue further. "I only acted on impulse just now. If I've offended your highness in any way, please don't take offense and take care of the child first."

Concubine Bai harrumphed. "You're really not a good person."

Even though this fellow had groped around a bit, he still hadn't done anything to her in the end. As a rule, if one made a terrible first impression at first, it would only become easier to gain favor afterward.

Zu An didn't try to justify himself either. He said, "We're all in the same boat. Your highness has left me quite troubled with your lies too."

Concubine Bai gently patted the infant in her arms and softly hummed him to sleep. Her soothing voice quickly calmed him down and stopped his wailing. Then, the child began to laugh.

Zu An stared at Concubine Bai's side profile. She was currently radiating a motherly warmth, her figure exceptionally gentle, able to calm even the most agitated of hearts.

After Concubine Bai calmed down the child, she placed him into a cradle and slowly rocked it back and forth. Then she replied, "When have I lied? You never asked me about those things."

Zu An was speechless. He didn't want to play these word games with her. He continued to ask, "Does the emperor know about your relationship with Yun Jianyue?"

"His majesty is more formidable than you can imagine. He knows everything; it's just that he might not tell you," Concubine Bai said in a profound manner.

Zu An sneered. There's no need to try and make that guy seem more mysterious. At the very least, he doesn't know what I did with the empress. The emperor might be able to remain calm on the surface, but there was no way he could avoid Zu An's Rage system.

"Since he knows your identity, why would he let you do as you please, and furthermore treat you so well?" Zu An asked out of curiosity.

Concubine Bai's gaze landed on the child in the cradle. "What do you think?"

Zu An was shocked. "He wasn't the imperial grandson, but a prince after all!"

Concubine Bai smiled and didn't say anything. She squatted down by the cradle and gently stroked the child inside. "I only wish for him to grow up safely. It's fine if the emperor remains strong, and it's fine if the Holy Sect comes out on top. None of it has anything to do with me."

Zu An frowned. There was a huge clash of power going on right now. How could it be that easy to survive on her own?

"Why would his majesty make you the crown prince's concubine and make his son become his grandson instead?" Zu An asked.

He finally understood why Bi Linglong despised Concubine Bai so much. After living with the crown prince for so long, she obviously knew that that stupid fatty had no way of producing a child. That meant this woman and her child's situation was already abundantly clear.

She was worried that the child might endanger the crown prince's position one day, yet she needed his status as the imperial grandson. In her opinion, getting rid of Concubine Bai would solve both problems.

As for Concubine Bai, she had probably been thinking similar thoughts. No wonder that last scandal had almost destroyed the crown princess.

Concubine Bai shook her head. "I don't know either. His majesty probably has his own considerations. I don't dare to ask too much about things he's decided on."

Zu An became quiet. All kinds of possibilities appeared in his head, but he still couldn't figure it out in the end.

Concubine Bai removed a spice bag from her waist and said, "This should be what you need. While you wear it, it can conceal your aura and prevent your ki fluctuations from exceeding the sixth rank."

Zu An accepted it. It was quite the exquisite spice bag, its material similar to silk, yet not quite. There was a small flower embroidered on the surface, alongside the character for 'Bai'.

"Is this yours?" Zu An asked, shocked.

"His majesty bestowed it to me in the past. It was able to conceal my cultivation," Concubine Bai replied. "Take it; I need to breastfeed my child. I don't believe Sir Zu will want to stay here and watch."

Zu An gave her heavy chest a look, and then his face turned red. He quickly shifted his gaze and asked, "Aren't there wet nurses in the palace? Why does your highness need to do it yourself?"

"Because having swollen breasts is uncomfortable." Concubine Bai blushed slightly. She looked at him with an ambiguous smile. "Does Sir Zu really wish to continue having this girl talk with me?"

Zu An was still too embarrassed in the end. He quickly received the spice bag and left.

Concubine Bai picked up the child. When she saw Zu An leave flustered, she couldn't help but chuckle. Then, she said quietly, "My little darling, you must be careful of women in the future. The prettier the girl, the better they are at lying."

...

Time quickly passed. A day before the exam, Bi Linglong brought Zu An into the eastern palace. She quietly stared at him without saying anything.

Even though looking at a beautiful young lady face to face was enjoyable in a way, Zu An still couldn't suppress his curiosity in the end and asked, "Crown princess, why are you looking at me like that?"

Bi Linglong pursed her lips. In the end, she quietly asked, "Can I trust you?"

Zu An was stunned. "Why would you suddenly ask that?"

Bi Linglong said, "I can only try to send in one person whose cultivation level is a bit higher than the limit. The clan actually has another candidate, and I was the one who stood my ground to choose you. However, I'm a bit nervous, because I don't know if I should trust you." The first reason was that she wasn't sure if he was strong enough to take care of this exam. The second was that she wasn't sure if he would help her wholeheartedly.

Normally, Bi Linglong intentionally spoke with a dignified air, but right now, she sounded weaker than ever before. Zu An knew that the crown prince's exam wouldn't only concern her own fate; it was also related to her clan's glory. That was why she was in such a dilemma right now. As such, he put away his usual frivolousness and said seriously, "Of course you can!"

Bi Linglong's deeply furrowed brows instantly relaxed when she heard his reply. Her smile was as beautiful as a flower. "Alright."

Zu An asked, "Have you decided on who will enter the dungeon tomorrow?"

Bi Linglong replied, "From the Eastern Palace, it will be the two of us, as well as Guard Piao, Guard Jiao, and the others. Apart from that, there will be disciples from King Liang Manor, the Bi clan, the Liu clan, the Meng clan, and the Pei clan. Each clan has only sent people at the sixth rank and below."

Zu An couldn't help but smile, saying, "Then that's almost a hundred people in total. I'm sure that's enough to get rid of any serpent."

Bi Linglong smiled as well. "Ruizhi is the crown prince after all, so it isn't going too far to have all of these people accompany him. King Qi's side can't say too much about it either."

Zu An couldn't help but ask, "If all of the elites of the younger generation are heading inside this time, if something happened in the dungeon, or if King Qi messed around inside, then wouldn't the crown prince's younger faction be practically wiped out?"

Bi Linglong shook her head. "The ones that are being sent inside aren't going to be the heirs, precisely to prevent that. However, there's no need for you to worry about them being too weak, because even if they aren't the strongest heirs, they were carefully selected. All of them are the best among the younger generation."