

Immortal 801

Chapter 801: Before and After

Bi Linglong replied, "The Director of the Imperial Secretariat Pei Ming has two sons, Pei Zuo and Pei You. The one who they sent was Pei You. He's always been sharp, and he's also a well-known figure among the Pei clan's younger generation."

Zu An thought to himself, The ones who are coming aren't the best after all. Looks like the crown prince's faction did think this through. He thought that it might have been Big Manman, but it seemed he might have been overthinking it.

"What is it? You seem to be a bit disappointed," Bi Linglong asked out of curiosity.

"It's nothing." Zu An obviously wouldn't be so stupid as to mention another woman in front of the girl in front of him. "Right, are you guys close to the Pei clan?" he asked. Why did he seem to recall Pei Mianman saying that their clan was part of King Qi's faction?

Bi Linglong shook her head. "It'll take a while to explain our relationship. To put it simply, the Pei clan is split into two parties. The first belongs to the Waterfront Duke, Chief Attendant Pei Zheng. He has many children and they're connected to King Liang, the Liu clan, the Jiang clan, and other powers in marriage. They appear to not be under anyone's faction, but I know that he supports King Qi more."

Zu An nodded. That seemed to be the party Big Manman had been talking about.

Bi Linglong continued, "As for Pei You, he comes from the Greatdeer Duke, Director of the Imperial Secretariat Pei Ming. Because he's also a member of the Imperial Secretariat, he doesn't really get along with my father..."

Zu An was surprised. "Why would you let his grandson participate in this exam if they don't get along?"

Bi Linglong explained, "Perhaps it's because you don't understand our clans' unwritten rules. A clan isn't necessarily all stuck together. There are bound to be different opinions. Even though Pei Ming doesn't get along with my father, his second son Pei You is close friends with my older brother. Furthermore, Pei Ming's wife is extremely close to my sister. With these relationships, that's why we obviously wouldn't refuse Pei You's participation."

Zu An sighed. These clans were all joined in marriage, so even clans that were part of different factions could remain close. He smiled and said, "If Pei You's grandmother and your mother are close, shouldn't he call you auntie?"

Bi Linglong blushed. "That's only if you look at family seniority. In terms of age, we're about the same."

Zu An was about to tease her a bit when he suddenly thought of a problem. Pei Zheng and Pei Ming are clan brothers, while Big Manman is Pei Zheng's granddaughter. Doesn't this mean that Big Manman needs to call Bi Linglong auntie as well? Then isn't she also my aunt...

Zu An's smile froze on his face when he realized that. Pah! I'll just mind my own business. This stuff has nothing to do with me.

Bi Linglong said, "Because of the existence of the Pei clan's other faction, I suspect that Pei You approached my brother precisely for infiltration purposes. That's why I have no choice but to be on guard against their people. This time, our attention will mainly be focused on Pei You in preparation for any sinister plots."

"Alright." Zu An nodded. This woman was rational, not letting friendship cloud her judgment. She was a natural politician.

Bi Linglong continued, "Apart from him, the Liu clan sent in Liu Xian. He's General Liu Yao's second son, a hedonistic child. He's only barely reached the fifth rank despite being well into his thirties. It really is embarrassing."

Zu An was stunned. "The crown prince's exam is extremely important. Why would you bring in a straw bag idiot like him?"

To be honest, the fifth rank wasn't low at all. In some rural areas, five ranks already represented an incredible existence. But this was the capital where geniuses were everywhere. That was why he paled in comparison.

Most importantly, he was already in his thirties. The fifth rank students of Brightmoon City were geniuses, and they were only in their teens. A fifth rank in their thirties, furthermore one that had reached that level due to endless resources, really could be called a good-for-nothing straw bag.

Bi Linglong said with a bitter smile, "There's nothing we can do. This exam is too important, so the different clans are all sending some of their children to make it look as if they care. After all, in the eyes of most people, this exam will probably be filled with dangers. If they could somehow overcome this trial with the crown prince and complete this mission, that would be a tremendous contribution. Everyone has their own goals, and as their ally, I have to pay attention to the interests of all of these clans. I can't refuse his addition.

"But the Liu clan understands the importance of this trial. Apart from sending in Liu Xian, this spoiled young master, they also sent in his sister's outstanding son. He's much more capable. He's roughly the same age as Liu Xian, but he's already reached the peak of the sixth rank. Furthermore, his steadfast nature is reassuring."

Zu An smiled and remarked, "Looks like the Liu clan aren't all idiots."

Honestly speaking, even that old fart Liu Yao was quite mediocre, so it wasn't surprising that he had produced a son like that. Zu An thought, Out of everyone in the Liu clan that I've met so far, it's still the empress who's the most formidable, both on and off the bed...

Bi Linglong rolled her eyes. "It's fine if you say that in front of me, but don't think you'll be able to get away unscathed if the empress or other important ministers hear you."

Zu An smiled and replied, "I'm only saying this in front of you because you're no stranger."

Bi Linglong blushed. Was this fellow using this chance to take advantage of her? She instinctively wanted to criticize him, but she was also worried that she would end up hurting his feelings. She still had to rely on him for the upcoming examination.

Furthermore, after she thought about it, those words didn't seem to be too disrespectful either, so she just let it go. She changed the topic and said, "By the way, the Meng clan sent their second young master Meng Pan. This person is a bit more formidable than Liu Xian and has already reached the sixth rank."

After having spent so long in the capital already, Zu An knew about the Meng clan. The Meng clan's elder was one of the empire's eight dukes, Minister of Works Meng Jing. However, he was already old, so the acting clan leader was actually his son Meng Yi. Meng Yi was the Central Secretariat Supervisor and had many sons. Furthermore, his youngest daughter was a king's wife.

"King Liang Manor's forces will be led by King Liang's son Zhao Xi. Zhao Xi is also a talented individual," Bi Linglong continued.

She then explained, "The Bi clan will be led by my older brother's trusted aides, Gu Heng and Gu Xing. These two are from the Bi clan's branch, the Gu clan. They studied and grew up together with the Bi clan's children, so they're part of our core forces. These two brothers are hardworking and diligent, and their aptitudes aren't bad. They've both broken through to the sixth rank."

Zu An had a weird look on his face as he asked, "Oh? Childhood sweethearts?"

Bi Linglong quickly replied, "Don't think such random things. They're only like family to us." She was stunned even as she replied. Why am I explaining this to him?

She was worried that he might pick up on something and quickly said, "And as for you, I've already added you to the list through my father's connections. Even though your cultivation has surpassed the seventh rank, it doesn't go too far above, so it shouldn't be a problem. Rest up well today; we're entering the secret dungeon together tomorrow."

Zu An smiled. He thought to himself, This lass is still using her own clan's power and has no idea that the emperor already put everything together. However, he didn't say anything and only replied in the affirmative.

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The next morning, Bi Linglong woke up early and got dressed. Since today was an important day, she hadn't gotten much sleep the night before. Fortunately, she was a cultivator, so it didn't affect her too much.

Her maid Rong Mo, who was helping her with her hair, sighed from time to time. "Your highness, you should sleep a bit more if you didn't sleep well. Why are you getting up so early, and moreover putting on your makeup so carefully? You weren't even this meticulous when you were getting married back then."

"What does a brat like you know?" Bi Linglong blushed. She looked at her reflection in the mirror. She looked even more beautiful than usual, leaving even herself shocked. Why was she doing this? Was it because she was going to meet that person? Her heart rate quickened. She quickly explained, "This matter is related to the crown prince's prospects, so of course I need to appear at my best. Not only is this war against King Qi's faction, it will also inspire our own men."

Rong Mo smiled and said, "Your highness is so pretty, those men will definitely fall over themselves for your favor."

Bi Linglong harrumphed. "How can you say nonsense like that?"

"The crown prince isn't here anyway." Rong Mo didn't seem bothered. "Honestly, recently, your highness' mental state has become much better than before."

"Really?" Bi Linglong was stunned. She hadn't even noticed that herself.

"Of course." Rong Mo chattered continuously. "Your highness was always shrouded in worry whenever you woke up in the past, but now, there's even an uncontrollable smile between your brows."

"Nonsense! How could I have changed that much?" Bi Linglong was startled and immediately criticized her. Then, she looked at the stunning woman in the mirror. She reached out her hand to gently caress her own face. Could it be... because of him?

Chapter 802: Childhood Friends

A while later, a maid outside reported that someone had arrived at the Eastern Palace.

"Is that so? Hurry and let them in," Bi Linglong said as she stood up. Just as she was about to head outside, she suddenly stopped and turned around to check herself in the mirror one last time, making sure there weren't any blemishes. Then, she lifted her dress to rush out.

Rong Mo was incredibly shocked. What's up with the crown princess? Is there really a need to be that excited when you're greeting a subordinate?

The crown princess stopped her little sprint when she reached the guest room. She sorted out her dress, which had become a bit messy from running, and recovered her usual calm and graceful appearance. Then, she lightly cleared her throat and said, "Why did you come so early, sir..."

She froze halfway through her sentence, because she saw the people in the hall. It wasn't the person she was expecting.

The two young men in the hall were seated and sipping on tea. Even though their appearances were a bit similar, their bearings were entirely different. The one with the beard was sitting upright in his chair, his figure giving off a feeling of steadiness. The other had one leg crossed over the other, and his feet were fidgeting constantly. There was a frivolous expression on his face as well.

When they heard the door open and saw that it was Bi Linglong, they immediately stood up and walked over.

"I greet the crown princess!"

"Sister Linglong!"

"So it was you guys." Bi Linglong felt a bit disappointed. The two in front of her were Gu Heng and Gu Xing, these two brothers who she cultivated with from childhood. The steady one with the beard was the older brother Gu Heng, while the slightly sloppy-looking one was the younger brother Gu Xing.

"Who did sister Linglong think it was?" Gu Xing asked with a smile.

Bi Linglong's good mood faded, replaced by the formal smile of someone of high status. She said, "I was waiting for you two. It has been a while."

Gu Heng sighed as he looked at her. "Indeed, ever since you joined the palace as the crown princess, we have never seen you since." There was deep sentiment and regret in his eyes.

Gu Xing was much more direct. "Long time no see. Linglong has grown more and more pretty."

Gu Heng frowned. "Brother, she has already become the crown princess. Our ranks are different, we cannot address her like we used to anymore."

Bi Linglong said with a smile, "It's fine; all of us grew up together, so there's no need to be such strangers. Please sit down."

Gu Xing remarked to Gu Heng with a smile, "Big bro, what did I say? Linglong won't change; she's still just as good at understanding others as before."

Bi Linglong had a gentle smile on her face as she sat down in the highest position. The friendly regard in their eyes didn't escape her gaze. She had been sharp ever since she was little, so how could she not know that these two liked her?

But she didn't expose them. She had always pretended that she didn't notice anything. In her opinion, after she became the crown princess, these two would have given up on those thoughts. Furthermore, there wasn't anything wrong with these two liking her. As someone of high status, she was capable of making use of their adoration. It made it easier to control her subordinates.

"Hm? Why don't I see the crown prince anywhere?" Gu Heng looked around out of curiosity.

Bi Linglong replied, "He's still in bed."

"The crown prince really has a vast breadth of mind, not being worried at all." Even though Gu Heng was praising him on the surface, there was a bit of disdain in his eyes.

Gu Heng's tone was also sour. "The crown prince really is blessed... He's probably so tired that he has to sleep more."

When he thought about how that stupid pig tormented his goddess night after night, and that was why he was so tired, he was about to go mad from jealousy. But what can I do? He's the crown prince.

Bi Linglong was able to sense their resentment. Even though she was extremely dissatisfied with the crown prince, there was no way she would end up with these two. She wouldn't berate them before heading into battle for fear of harming morale. Her eyes subconsciously drifted to the door. Why wasn't that person here yet?

The Gu clan brothers were extremely excited to see Bi Linglong again and had endless things to say. They brought up one childhood memory after another.

Bi Linglong replied at first, but when she saw that the two were getting more and more excited, she couldn't help but frown. Even though they had grown up together, there was etiquette that had to be followed. As such, she took the initiative to shift the topic to the secret dungeon task.

Gu Xing immediately patted his chest with a big smile. "Don't worry, Linglong. We will take care of the crown prince's exam! We will take care of everything."

Gu Heng also said, "Absolutely! I collected a lot of information about the Moon Jade Serpent, and I've also practiced how to take it down with my warriors. Nothing will go wrong!"

A sincere smile finally appeared on Bi Linglong's face. "Then I'll really have to thank the two of you ahead of time."

Gu Xing laughed and said, "Linglong, you are too polite. There's no need for any of that; are you treating us as outsiders...?"

Bi Linglong smiled, but she didn't reply. There were no identifiable flaws in her etiquette.

Even though the two brothers sensed a bit of estrangement, they simply felt it was natural. She was the glorious crown princess now after all, so this type of bearing was within their expectations.

They discussed all kinds of scenarios that might happen in the dungeon, and time unwittingly passed. Even the crown prince was woken up under the eunuchs' care. However, Zu An still hadn't arrived.

The Gu clan brothers also sensed that something was off. Gu Heng couldn't help but ask, "Is the crown princess waiting for someone?"

Bi Linglong nodded. "I am waiting for the crown prince's chamberlain, Sir Zu An."

"Oh, Brightmoon City Chu clan's drafted son-in-law," Gu Xing sneered. His voice carried a bit of contempt.

Bi Linglong frowned inwardly, but she didn't say anything.

Gu Heng coughed and said, "Brother, speak properly. Sir Zu is now the crown prince's chamberlain."

Gu Xing grumbled, "But wasn't he originally from Brightmoon City? And he is the Chu clan's drafted son-in-law. Am I wrong?"

Bi Linglong calmly said, "He no longer has any connection with the Chu clan. Do not use words like 'drafted son-in-law'."

"Ah, I remember. I think he was rejected by the Chu clan," Gu Xing said. "But that's a good thing, or else we'd really feel injustice for Chu First Miss. How could someone like her be with a rat off the streets?"

Bi Linglong frowned inwardly again. The contempt in his tone was something common among influential clans toward those of lesser backgrounds. After some hesitation, she decided that it wasn't convenient for her to defend Zu An with her status.

Gu Heng also asked, "How about we head to the academy first? Sir Zu will naturally head there later."

Bi Linglong shook her head. "I will just wait for him here. I told him yesterday that we would set off from here."

Gu Heng and his little brother exchanged a look. It seemed this Zu An was someone special to the crown princess. No wonder he could become the crown prince's chamberlain in such a short amount of time.

Both of them felt a sense of danger, but they didn't pay too much attention to it. After all, no matter how much the crown princess cared about him, he would be nothing more than a subject. However, it's different for us brothers; we grew up and cultivated together with the crown princess. We're childhood friends.

Gu Xing was about to say something else, but Gu Heng stopped him and said with a smile, "It's not that early anymore. It won't matter even if we wait a bit for Sir Zu." Gu Xing frowned, but he didn't say anything in the end.

Bi Linglong felt that waiting around like this wasn't a solution either, so she brought the two of them to see the crown prince. At the same time, she had the maids bring in some food.

Even though the brothers had already eaten before they came, having a meal at the Eastern Palace was a huge honor. All of them had smiles on their faces and continued to complement Bi Linglong. They even praised that fat pig of a crown prince they looked down on.

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After a joyous and harmonious meal, Bi Linglong continued to glance toward the door. Unfortunately, that person never appeared. That made even her frown. Why wasn't he here yet? Did he oversleep? But that doesn't make any sense! This is such an important matter, so how could he have made such a huge mistake?

Or maybe something unexpected happened along the way? Did King Qi's people ambush him? But she should have received news about that by now if something did happen!

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While Bi Linglong was lost in her concern, Gu Xing finally commented unhappily, "Is that guy named Zu or something going to come or not? So many of us are waiting for him. Don't tell me he got cold feet because he's scared of death?"

The crown prince had been sipping on some soup. When he heard Gu Xing, his face jiggled. "Death? Is this trip going to be dangerous?"

Bi Linglong immediately consoled him. "Crown prince, don't worry. We won't be in any danger."

Gu Heng gave his brother a look. He quickly said, "My brother has misspoken. I hope the crown prince will not mind."

At the same time, he felt more and more disdain. How could this damn pig be the crown prince? And his goddess Linglong had actually ended up being married to him? Sigh, apart from his background, how is he better than me in any way? Is this fate?

Chapter 803: Clear and Logical

Just like that, their group waited for a bit longer. However, Zu An still didn't appear. Bi Linglong's originally high spirits gradually died down.

Gu Xing said in dissatisfaction, "Linglong, I think that guy is too scared and won't come. But you don't have to worry; with us brothers here to protect you, there won't be any problem at all with this mission."

Bi Linglong forced a smile and said, "One more person is an additional share of strength."

Gu Heng also spoke up. "It sounds as though the crown princess favors this Sir Zu quite a bit."

Rong Mo pouted and said with strong resentment, "That's exactly what it is! There was supposed to be one seventh ranked cultivator who could enter. The crown princess didn't take me and insisted on choosing him."

"Don't speak frivolously. This is the conclusion everyone reached after a discussion." Bi Linglong shot her a look. This girl was getting more and more out of hand.

The Gu clan brothers exchanged a look, both of them seeing shock in each other's eyes. Judging from all their experience with the Bi clan, they knew just how important Rong Mo was.

Even though this woman looked young, she actually wasn't young at all. Otherwise, how could she have cultivated beyond the seventh rank? It was just that she had been raised by the Bi clan since she was little and forced to cultivate away from the rest of the world, which had caused her psychological age to be a bit lower than her real age. That was why she had been assigned to Bi Linglong as her maid. From that, it was also clear to see just how much the Bi clan and Bi Linglong trusted her.

And yet the crown prince's exam was such an important matter, but Bi Linglong actually wasn't going to bring her and had instead chosen Zu An. The implication behind that was obvious. Either Zu An's cultivation was far beyond Rong Mo's, or he was more important to her.

Rong Mo was already at the seventh rank, while Zu An was young and had grown up a commoner, nor did he have any special cultivation education. How could he possibly surpass her?

In their opinion, it was the latter. Both of them felt a strong sense of danger when they thought of that.

Gu Heng thought for a bit, and then said, "Crown princess, if Sir Zu still does not come in the end, will we just continue to wait here forever? It is not a problem for us brothers to wait, but it is improper for the crown prince to wait here like this. Furthermore, it will be bad if we do not enter the dungeon and it closes."

Gu Xing nodded in admiration. His big brother's thoughts were in line with his own, but he was able to hide his real objective behind some high-sounding reasons. He had always felt that that was too hypocritical, but he now felt his big brother was much more likeable.

The fatty also became noisy when he heard that. "Exactly, exactly! It's so boring just sitting here."

Gu Heng and Gu Xing silently exchanged a look when they saw the crown prince's reaction. A small smirk appeared on their lips.

A look of disappointment flashed through Bi Linglong's eyes when she saw how the crown prince was making a scene, his behavior unlike how a crown prince should act at all. She said quietly, "Momo, all of you should escort the crown prince to the academy first. I will pay Sir Zu's home a visit."

“Yay! We’re going to play at the academy!” the crown prince exclaimed, running off excitedly.

Rong Mo didn’t even have time to say anything. She quickly rushed out to escort the crown prince. Many guards from the Eastern Palace quickly followed behind them.

The Gu clan brothers didn’t move. They said, “In that case, we will remain here to ensure the crown princess’ safety. We want to see just what kind of hero this Sir Zu is as well.”

Bi Linglong was actually going to personally pay his home a visit? Both of them felt incredible jealousy. They obviously wanted to follow along to take a look for themselves.

The crown princess frowned. She could sense their hostility toward Zu An. It wasn’t a good idea to bring them with her.

However, after thinking about it, she felt that it might be beneficial for them to meet each other now, since they would be spending some time together in the dungeon later on. As such, she nodded and called over Piao Duandiao and Jiao Sigun from outside. After all, she had never been to Zu An’s home before.

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Zu An’s residence was inside the city. They quickly arrived outside. Bi Linglong didn’t have anyone else send a message, and instead walked straight toward the house.

When the servants saw the crown princess, they panicked and greeted her. Bi Linglong didn’t see Zu An anywhere after looking around, asking, “Where is Sir Zu?”

“Sir Zu left early in the morning,” a maid replied.

“He left?” Bi Linglong was stunned. Why hadn’t she seen him yet, then? Then did something really happen to him along the way?

After having that thought, she quickly asked Piao Duandiao, “Guard Piao, did any fights happen in the city today?”

Piao Duandiao shook his head. “I didn’t receive any information of the sort.”

Bi Linglong frowned. Then where is that guy? This was inside the city, after all. With Zu An’s cultivation, there was no way he could have been kidnapped without anyone knowing.

Gu Xing remarked with a smile, “Maybe he found out about how dangerous a secret dungeon was, so he was too scared and ran away?” The crown prince wasn’t here, so he didn’t have to worry about that anymore.

Jiao Sigun harrumphed and said, “Sir Zu isn’t that type of person.” He was already extremely pissed off from hearing these two talk badly about Zu An on the way here.

“It’s possible to know someone for a long time without understanding his true nature. You can see the situation for yourself right now. He didn’t show up at the agreed upon time, did he?” Gu Xing remarked with a shrug.

“Sir Zu might be held up by some other matter.” Piao Duandiao also spoke up.

Gu Heng frowned. Looks like this Zu An is quite popular in the Eastern Palace... Even these two lesser guards were speaking out for him.

Gu Xing burst out laughing. "What could possibly be more important than the crown prince's exam today?"

Piao Duandiao was at a loss for words. He didn't know how to reply.

Gu Xing gave the house a look. "Maybe Sir Zu only pretended to leave, but he's just hiding inside." He walked straight in after speaking. Because the crown princess was here, none of the servants dared to stop him. They could only anxiously follow behind him.

After some hesitation, Bi Linglong didn't stop Gu Xing in the end. She was actually starting to get angry as well. Zu An had clearly promised her, yet he was actually late for such an important appointment. She had gotten up early and done her makeup for nothing. She also wanted to see what the heck was going on.

You have successfully trolled Bi Linglong for +233 +233 +233...

This courtyard wasn't that big. Gu Xing quickly searched through the entire place, but he didn't see any sign of Zu An. He laughed and said, "Looks like he's hiding outside."

Gu Heng coughed. "Brother, please do not jump to conclusions. Sir Zu might already be at the Eastern Palace."

Gu Xing sneered. "How is that possible? We just came from the Eastern Palace, yet we didn't see any sign of him. Sigh, I guess we can't expect much from a kid off the streets after all. It's fine in normal situations, but when push comes to shove, his cowardly and pathetic nature becomes apparent."

"Nonsense!" Jiao Sigun argued, "Sir Zu even dared to face the eighth ranked King Qi's heir head on, and even defeated him! He fought on par with the ninth ranked expert Han Fengqiu, so why would he be scared of a secret dungeon?"

Gu Heng said, "That battle has indeed roused up the entire capital, but we investigated the matter afterward. There was actually a powerful expert in hiding, and he secretly summoned the water element when King Qi's heir used his ultimate lightning move. That was why he was mysteriously defeated."

"Exactly! Sir Zu was born on the streets after all. If he really were a talented genius, why would he let himself become a drafted son-in-law?" Gu Xing felt a bit guilty when he said that, because he had seen Chu Chuyan's beauty from afar in the past. If a goddess like her was going to take a drafted son-in-law, even he himself would be willing. "Ahem, he's only around the fifth or sixth rank in cultivation. Maybe the seventh rank at most. How could he possibly win against the eighth ranked King Qi's heir? Or fight on equal grounds with Han Fengqiu or whatever? That's even more ridiculous."

He continued, "What kind of strength does someone like Han Fengqiu represent? Everyone in the capital knows that he's at the peak of the ninth rank. Someone like that could easily crush someone at the seventh or eighth rank with just a single finger; how could a youngster possibly go toe to toe with him? It was probably because Han Fengqiu was on guard against that mysterious expert, but that ended up spreading falsehoods of Zu An having some kind of accomplishment. This really is absurd!"

Piao Duandiao and Jiao Sigun opened their mouths, but they didn't know how to retort. After all, to them, someone at the peak of the ninth rank really was someone who was impossible to defeat for someone of lower rank. They looked around in frustration and helplessness. Big bro Zu, where are you?

Chapter 804: Implicit Meaning

Zu An was currently inside the Royal Academy. As it turned out, Jiang Luofu had sent someone to tell him to head over to the academy first. He was initially suspicious, because her clan did have King Qi backing them. He worried that it might be some trap.

However, he quickly gave up on that thought. If he even had to doubt Jiang Luofu, then living in this world really would be too tiring. He knew that Jiang Luofu wouldn't cause him trouble at such a crucial time, so he didn't hesitate and headed straight to the academy first. Either way, the dungeon where the crown prince's test was going to be held was there, so it wouldn't interfere with official matters.

Jiang Luofu was dressed in a dark blue dress. Her black stockings were visible through the slit in the side of the dress. Zu An sighed in admiration when he saw her. "Big sis, are there really no men who chased after you these past few years?"

"Of course there were," Jiang Luofu said with a smile. "Violating a woman through force, coercion, or other methods, or forcing them to do sexual acts, counts as rape. The law punishes these actions with three to ten years of prison time."

Zu An gave her stunning legs a look, and then said, "I'm sure many men wouldn't mind spending three years in prison for you."

Jiang Luofu said calmly, "Don't forget that according to the Great Zhou Dynasty, the victims have authority over the punishment. I've always been a kind person, so I wouldn't go so far as to take their lives. However, the tools used for the crime should be confiscated, no?"

"Confiscate the tools?" Zu An felt a chill run through his legs. This woman had just said something extremely terrifying in a nonchalant manner.

Jiang Luofu continued, "Since I'm a lawyer, then everything I do is backed by the law. You don't need to wonder if my actions are rational and legal."

Zu An said with a sigh, "The law you're speaking of seems to describe only women as the victims. Then what if a man were... humiliated? Then what would happen?"

Jiang Luofu was momentarily distracted. "You've stumped me. Even though that would still be rape according to logic, according to the law, there's no way to convict the perpetrator of rape... Hm, this issue you've brought up is quite constructive. I'll find a way to bring it up to the court and have the law amended."

Zu An was speechless and said, "You don't have to take my words that seriously, haha. I was just joking around."

Jiang Luofu shook her head. "It might be a joke to you, but for legalists, we have the responsibility of making the law more complete so that fewer innocent people will be wronged without any hope of justice."

Zu An felt great respect when he saw the steadfast expression in her eyes and the dignified look on her face. The bit of frivolousness within him also disappeared. "Then I'll thank you in place of all of my male compatriots."

"This is my job; what is there to thank me for?" Jiang Luofu chuckled. Her expression suddenly became distant. "Right, why did you suddenly think of such a rare situation? Don't tell me that you..."

"Screw that!" Zu An immediately jumped in fright. "How is that possible? I've only bullied others; no one has ever bullied me like this."

A dangerous glint flashed through Jiang Luofu's eyes. "I advise you not to break the law in front of me, or else this big sis won't show mercy just because of our friendship."

Zu An smiled awkwardly. "I'm an upright person; how could I possibly do those illegal things? By the way, big sis, what did you call me here for today?"

"There was something I needed to talk to you about." Jiang Luofu opened the cupboard beside her and took out a roll of silk. There were all sorts of diagrams on it. Some areas had red exclamation marks on them. "This is a map of the academy's dungeon. It records the various terrain and vicious beasts in detail."

Zu An was shocked. "You guys even have a map?"

Jiang Luofu rolled her eyes. "Of course. This is the academy's secret dungeon, and it opens up once every few years for the students to train in. The last time it was opened was three years ago... As an academy teacher, of course I know about the situation inside. I believe the various powers know the details of the dungeon as well, just that their maps definitely aren't as detailed as this one." She continued, "You should stay as far away from these red exclamation marks as possible. You absolutely can't get close to them. These places are too dangerous for you."

Zu An felt warm inside. "You've helped me ever since I was in Brightmoon City, and now you've prepared all of this for my safety. There's really nothing I can do for you to repay all of the favors... How about I pay you with my body?"

Jiang Luofu was pretty moved when she heard what he said at first. But when she heard the last part, she immediately shouted at him, "Get lost! You even dare to flirt with me?!"

After they joked around for a bit, Jiang Luofu suddenly said seriously, "Once you enter the dungeon, no matter what happens, your first priority should be your own life. Don't try to show off and be brave. You have to remember how many people are waiting for you outside."

Zu An blurted out, "Are you included among those people?"

Jiang Luofu was stunned. There was a dangerous smile in her eyes. "Oh? It seems you've really grown up now. You dare to even tease this big sis so easily."

"I was never little anyway." Zu An harrumphed.

Jiang Luofu didn't catch the other meaning of Zu An's words. "You're my little brother, so of course I want you to come out safely."

Zu An looked at her cool and elegant face. She was clearly being serious here, and she was giving off a powerful presence, yet he could only think of those office lady videos. The mood became rather strange for him.

He quickly got rid of those messy thoughts and asked seriously, "Big sis, is there something you're not telling me?"

Jiang Luofu shook her head. "I've already told you everything I should tell you. As for the rest, I don't know either. Just remember that your safety is the first priority."

Seeing that she wasn't willing to say it, Zu An didn't pressure her either. However, many possibilities appeared in his mind.

Jiang Luofu got up and said, "Follow me."

"Where to?" Zu An asked.

Jiang Luofu didn't say anything and only led the way. Zu An followed behind her. Even though he was confused, admiring her stunning curves and long legs from behind was still a wonderful thing.

Jiang Luofu suddenly stopped moving. A faint red blush appeared on her neck. She harrumphed and said, "Walk in front of me."

Zu An was stunned. He said, "I don't even know where we're going, though."

"I'll give you directions," Jiang Luofu replied.

"Oh..." Zu An's spirits fell. Who are you even on guard against? Who was the one blabbering about how you didn't care if others stared at you, that being looked at was the best praise? Looks like girls are all liars after all.

The two of them went through several turns and quickly arrived at a secluded courtyard. Judging from the alternating black and white tiles on the ground, Zu An could tell that he had arrived at Hei Baizi's place without even asking.

A handsome man with dark circles under his eyes was holding a game record book and trying to memorize it in a daze. When he saw the two of them, he exclaimed, almost in tears, "Ms. Jiang, Ah Zu!"

"Why do you look like that?" Zu An jumped in fright. Was this still the Xie young master who was even prettier than a girl? His face was wan and sallow, as if his skin had been sucked dry. His hair looked a bit oily and probably hadn't been washed for several days.

"Teacher wants me to play Go with him every day, and I'm tormented by him day and night. Whenever he's satisfied, he just goes back and sleeps, while I have to continue to memorize these Go games. It's been so many days since I've had some proper sleep..." Xie Xiu grumbled. Suddenly, a chess piece smacked the back of his head.

Hei Baizi's lazy voice called out, "You're talking smack behind your teacher's back again? Then add a hundred Go games as punishment."

Xie Xiu became depressed, and tears even began to gather in his eyes.

Jiang Luofu said with a consoling smile, "Your teacher is doing this for your sake. In this way, your mind will be tempered and broadened, and your memory and calculative ability will improve. Then, you'll be able to properly cultivate their Go school's technique."

Xie Xiu was stunned. He clearly hadn't realized that yet.

"Eighth sister, why are you telling that to someone like him? I also intended to work on his temperament. This brat has no discipline at all! Telling him that won't help him." Hei Baizi walked out and spoke discontentedly.

However, when he saw Zu An, his strict expression immediately became polite. He quickly walked over and exclaimed, "So it was Sir Zu! I'm honored by your presence. Come, come inside. Let's have a chat. I already discovered a way to win against the situation from last time. Little Xie, what are you staring stupidly for? Get us some tea!"

Xie Xiu wanted to cry. He was also a human, yet why was he treated so differently? He really couldn't associate this bootlicker with his usually strict teacher. After all, he had been drinking and chatting merrily with Zu An a day ago. He had even given him some advice! But who would have thought that things would change so quickly?

Zu An immediately said, "I still need to enter the dungeon together with the crown prince, so I fear we won't have enough time to play a game."

"What crown prince whatever? How can it be more important than chess?" Hei Baizi asked indifferently.

Zu An was completely speechless. The people in the academy don't seem to treat the royal family with much importance at all...

Jiang Luofu coughed and said, "Senior brother, the reason we came today is because we wish to ask for something from you."

Chapter 805: Last Breath

Hei Baizi harrumphed and said, "Nope."

Jiang Luofu was surprised. "I didn't even say what it was I needed."

Hei Baizi said, "You never visited me that often these past few years. I was wondering why you were becoming friendly all of a sudden. I knew it wasn't anything good."

Jiang Luofu replied with a smile, "Don't be so stingy, fifth senior. I'm not asking for myself, but rather, I wanted to ask for a sacrificial piece from you."

"Sacrificial piece?" Zu An was stunned. What is that?

Hei Baizi frowned. He was clearly a bit hesitant.

Jiang Luofu added, "Ah Zu will definitely be in danger when he enters the dungeon this time. If something happens, no one will be able to play chess with you anymore. Furthermore, you'll never be able to get your revenge after losing to him."

Hei Baizi harrumphed. "Am I that kind of sore loser? Hmph, you're using every way you can to get something from me for him. It's almost as if you're lovers."

Jiang Luofu frowned. "What kind of nonsense are you saying? He's my little brother."

"Don't all guys and girls play those sibling games? Do you think I don't know?" Hei Baizi muttered. He tossed out two chess pieces from his sleeves to Zu An. "In a moment of danger, place the white piece in front of you and the black piece on someone else. That way, the damage you would take will be transferred to someone else. It's a sacrificial piece, so it'll be consumed after a single use. That's why you have to save it for a crucial moment."

Zu An was shocked. "There's actually something so miraculous in this world?"

Hei Baizi stroked his beard. He couldn't hide the pride on his face. "This is the result of my lifetime of devotion; it contains the chess school's principles. I've only managed to refine three sets in all these years. These things are too special, so it would be quite bad if they ended up in the hands of others. That's why normally speaking, I wouldn't give this to anyone else. However, Sir Zu is of noble and lofty character, so I don't need to worry about that."

Zu An received the chess pieces with a serious expression. "Thank you, fifth senior!"

"There's no need for thanks; just play a few more rounds with me once you come out." Hei Baizi chuckled. "Right, I almost forgot to remind you that you absolutely can't get the order wrong with the black and white pieces. Otherwise, you'll end up becoming someone else's sacrifice."

Zu An replied, "I reckon I'm not that stupid."

"You're right," Hei Baizi said with a smile. He then tried to chat with Zu An about things related to chess.

However, Jiang Luofu took a step forward and pulled Zu An back. "Fifth senior, I still need to bring him to other places. The two of you can chat some more when there's some leisure time."

Hei Baizi couldn't help but curse as he watched her leave. "Women only abandon you once they get what they want after all; they're all swindlers... Xie Xiu, stay away from women in the future. I get annoyed whenever I see them."

Xie Xiu had a weird look on his face. Aren't you basically asking me for my life if you tell me not to associate with women anymore? However, he didn't dare voice such thoughts and instead continuously expressed his acknowledgment.

...

Elsewhere, Zu An asked Jiang Luofu, "Big sis, who are we going to meet next?"

"You'll know once we get there," Jiang Luofu said with a mysterious smile.

Zu An began to think to himself. She had brought him there to get the sacrificial piece for him. That meant this trip was going to be much more dangerous than he had imagined!

Soon afterward, they arrived by a pond. Unlike the usual clear colors one would expect to see, this one was pitch black.

Zu An was astonished. "Big sis, be careful not to be poisoned."

"It's fine; this is just ink." Jiang Luofu smiled. Then, she walked toward the pavilion by the lakeside.

"Ink?" Only now did Zu An notice that there were two large, white geese swimming on the surface. If there really was poison, then they would have died a long time ago. Just how much ink was needed to dye an entire pond black, though?

Hm? Wait, if it's ink, then why are these two geese's feathers so white? He looked carefully and saw that there was blue light swirling across the surface of the two large white geese's bodies. This was definitely the power of a formation.

Once they passed a covered walkway, the area ahead of him suddenly became spacious and well-lit. A young lady who seemed to have a graceful and subdued temperament sat in a gazebo. She was copying a stone tablet. Together with the inverted image of the pitch-black water, her presence formed a noble and elegant scene.

The young lady was focused on her drawing. The wind blew away the hair around her temples, revealing a beautiful and familiar face.

"Lady Xie!" Zu An exclaimed. He had only met Xie Daoyun once ever since she came to the capital with her younger brother. Meanwhile, he had met Xie Xiu several times already.

Xie Daoyun's body clearly trembled when she heard his voice. Then, a drop of ink dropped from her brush, ruining the calligraphy she was copying.

Zu An felt rather apologetic. "Sorry, I ended up ruining your work."

Xie Daoyun lowered her brush and slowly shook her head. "It's not your fault. I'm the one who hasn't reached that pure state of meditation the teacher spoke of yet."

Zu An sighed in amazement. They hadn't met each other for a while; now there seemed to be a bit of a gentle and refined aura around her, as if she were a hermit who stood aloof from worldly matters.

"Is that so?" Jiang Luofu chuckled. "Your mind was quite calm when I was standing next to you just now, yet as soon as Ah Zu spoke, your mind was no longer so?"

Xie Daoyun's graceful and aloof appearance was instantly shattered. She even blushed slightly. She couldn't help but exclaim in annoyance, "Ms. Jiang!"

"Alright, alright, let's talk about important matters." Jiang Luofu smiled and asked, "Did you prepare what I asked you for last time?"

Xie Daoyun voiced her acknowledgment. She took out an apricot yellow talisman from the case next to her. On it was a complicated rune drawn in cinnabar. She handed it to Zu An. "Big brother Zu, I heard you were going to enter the secret dungeon, and that it was going to be dangerous. Unfortunately, I cannot help you by your side, so I prepared a talisman for you. I hope it can help you during a moment of trouble."

Jiang Luofu smiled and explained, "This is great senior's Last Breath Talisman. When you place it in front of you, it can negate twenty percent of damage and leave you with one last breath of life. That's why it's

called the Last Breath Talisman. This is great senior's treasure, something even I might not be able to obtain if I asked. It's only because Daoyun is his precious disciple that she managed to get one from that miserly fella."

At the same time, she transmitted to Zu An through ki, "Brat, you better be grateful. Even though that scale little Yu'er gave you last time is incredible, it actually has a limit to the damage it can negate. Once that limit is passed, not even little Yu'er's talisman can preserve your life. However, this Last Breath Talisman is something great senior poured his heart into. It condenses all of his understanding of runes. It uses the damage caused by the attack as its energy source, and then converts that into the power that protects you. That's why no matter how high the other party's cultivation is, it can reduce twenty percent of damage. This means that even if it were the emperor who attacked you, it would still reduce twenty percent of the damage.

"As for whether you can keep your life or not after reducing the damage by twenty percent, that depends on your luck. That's why it's called the Last Breath Talisman.

"Furthermore, it will reflect twenty percent of the damage back at the aggressor. It really is an incredible item."

Zu An was finally shaken up when he heard her explanation. This really was an extraordinary item! He immediately bowed toward Xie Daoyun. "Miss Xie, the dungeon will indeed be full of dangers this time, so I won't pretentiously refuse. However, this talisman is incredibly precious, and it should've been really hard for you to get it to me. I really have no way of paying back such a huge debt..."

Jiang Luofu playfully interrupted him. "And what? You'll repay it with your body?"

"Ms. Jiang, what are you saying?!" Xie Daoyun protested.

Zu An replied with an upright expression, "Why would I say something like that? I've deeply engraved this favor in my heart. I'll never forget it for the rest of my life."

Xie Daoyun quickly said, "There is no need for that! It's just a shame that my skills are not great enough and I cannot draw a rune like this myself. In the future... I will draw some more for you."

Zu An was overjoyed. "Then I really have to thank Miss Xie."

Jiang Luofu rolled her eyes when she saw how well the two were getting along. This fella was starting his nobleman act again. He wasn't like that earlier with me at all, hmph.

When they left Xie Daoyun's place, Jiang Luofu brought him to the rear mountain. She pointed at the small path ahead and said, "You'll reach the secret dungeon if you take this path to the end. The crown prince's faction and King Qi's faction are all there, so I won't join the liveliness. You have to be careful and remember the things I told you."

"Thank you, big sis!" Zu An wanted to say something along the lines of 'once I come back', but he was scared of setting up some bad flags. As such, he shortened his goodbyes and headed down the path.

...

There were people from all different sides at the entrance right now. Since the princess hadn't seen anyone at Zu An's home and the situation was getting more and more pressing, she could only come to

the academy. Unfortunately, she still didn't see him at the entrance. She immediately felt incredible disappointment.

Gu Xing remarked with a big smile, "Wasn't I just saying that guy was too scared to come? He's probably hiding somewhere and will come out once the dungeon is closed, pretending he just missed the timing or something."

Chapter 806, Part 1: Clamoring

"Nonsense! My brother-in-law is a true man; why would he do something like that?!" a young and clear voice exclaimed critically.

Gu Xing turned around. He saw a young man with pretty features staring angrily at him. Next to the man was a tan-skinned young lady. He said, "So it was young master Chu and Miss Murong."

The Gu clan brothers naturally recognized these two after staying in the capital for so many years. One was the heir of the Brightmoon Duke, while the other was the beloved pearl of the Murong clan.

But Chu Youzhao didn't plan to let him go at all and asked, "Mister Gu, why were you shooting your mouth off here randomly?"

Murong Qinghe couldn't help but say, "Talking behind another person's back really isn't what a nobleman should be doing!"

It was only natural that she wanted to help her big brother Chu. While she had been hanging out with Zu An recently, he had saved her clan brother, so she had already developed a good impression of him.

Gu Xing said, "I would say the same thing even in front of Zu An's face. Everything I said is the truth, so what's there to be ashamed of?"

Gu Heng stood up and said, "Young master Chu, if I recall correctly, the Chu clan seems to have already banished Zu An from the family, no? Calling him brother-in-law will be damaging to your dear sister's reputation."

"Our clan's matters are none of your business!" Chu Youzhao exclaimed furiously. "I don't want to see you all talking badly behind my brother-in-law's back. Believe me when I say I'll rip your tongues out!"

Gu Heng's expression sank. "Young master Chu, we respect your opinion, but that is out of courtesy for the Qin clan. Do you think that the two of us are afraid of you? This is the crown prince's territory. It is not a place where the two of you can start trouble." The Bi clan's warriors stepped forward as soon as he finished speaking.

Bi Linglong frowned. She felt quite troubled. According to normal reason, whether it was the Qin clan or the Murong clan, both were central forces of King Qi's faction. Meanwhile, she herself would definitely help the Gu clan brothers who were part of the crown prince's faction. However, they were speaking out for Zu An here. That left her embarrassed and troubled.

“What happened?” A group of young men walked in just then. The crown prince and princess were the ones under the spotlight today, so everyone was paying attention to the activity on their side. They came over to see what was happening when they saw the disturbance.

Bi Linglong could no longer remain indifferent. She showed them a formal smile and said, “Greetings, young masters.”

These people were precisely the disciples from King Liang Manor, the Liu clan, the Meng clan, and the Peng clan, as well as the disciples of the other clans. They were the ones who were joining the crown prince on his mission this time.

Those people all cried out with a bow, “We greet the crown prince and crown princess!”

King Liang’s son Zhao Xi was a fatty as well, but unlike the crown prince’s fat that jiggled whenever he walked, he was more firm and robust with thick eyebrows and big eyes. His arms were big and his waist round, making him resemble a fierce general from the battlefield.

He had always had a rather boorish nature. Together with the fact that he was also part of the royal family, he didn’t feel as many misgivings as the others. He asked, “Crown princess, have you only just arrived? We have already been waiting for a long time.”

Before Bi Linglong had time to even reply, Gu Xing immediately said, “The crown princess was waiting for Sir Zu An. She even specially paid a visit to his home, but we still didn’t see him.”

“Zu An?” Zhao Xi roared with laughter. “That fella who beat Zhao Zhi, that little brat, up to the point that he could only lie in bed all this time? Haha, where is he? I’ve only heard about that person, but was never able to meet him.”

King Liang’s faction had always been close to the emperor’s side and didn’t get along with King Qi. Furthermore, Zhao Xi relied on his own talent, and he was quite arrogant, so he had already been fed up with Zhao Zhi for a while; and yet he just couldn’t beat him. When he heard that Zhao Zhi had been beaten up miserably by Zu An, he roared with laughter and held a huge celebration that night.

Gu Xing didn’t dare to speak rashly when he sensed the other person’s good intentions toward Zu An to prevent drawing unnecessary enmity. It was instead Gu Heng who said, “We have been looking for Sir Zu for the past few hours, yet we still haven’t seen him anywhere.”

“Could it be that something happened?” Zhao Xi frowned. “But that shouldn’t be. With his cultivation, who could take him down that easily?”

A feminine voice sneered, “Your head really is all muscle instead of brains after all. Do you really think someone as young as Zu An could really defeat the eighth ranked Zhao Zhi, and furthermore, even fight on par with Han Fengqiu, who’s at the peak of the ninth rank? Our manor’s intelligence already discovered that there was a mysterious expert at the scene of the battle, so Zhao Zhi’s defeat was purely a coincidence.”

The one who spoke was a man with shiny hair and a powdered face. His features were feminine, his triangular eyes treacherous like those of a viper. His lips were colored even redder than those of a woman.

“Meng Pan, you’re always going against me. Don’t tell me you like me?” Zhao Xi roared with laughter.

The feminine man was precisely the Meng clan’s candidate this time, Meng Pan. He immediately clutched his mouth and looked as if he wanted to throw up when he heard what Zhao Xi said. “Blargh! Take a look in the mirror first before you speak! Even if I liked men, would I like you? Even if I did like someone, it would be someone like the Chu clan’s young master with soft skin and red lips.”

“Ah...” Chu Youzhao felt goosebumps cover her entire body when she was examined by Meng Pan. Murong Qinghe pulled Chu Youzhao behind her. Both of them had looks of contempt in their eyes.

“Let’s go back for now, big brother Chu.” Murong Qinghe really was scared that Meng Pan might go after her sweetheart. After all, there were rumors of Meng Pan liking men going around. She definitely didn’t dare to get involved with someone like him.

Chu Youzhao had originally wanted to speak out against the injustice done toward her brother-in-law, but Meng Pan’s gaze really was uncomfortable. Furthermore, these were all the crown prince’s trusted aides, so they didn’t get along. She decided to follow Murong Qinghe.

Meng Pan licked his lips as he watched Chu Youzhao leave. “That fella is as lovely as a young lady. It really is quite the stirring sight.”

Someone nearby said with a chuckle, “He’s Brightmoon Duke’s sole successor. Be careful, or the Brightmoon Duke might come after you.”

The one who spoke was a man in his thirties. He had rather decent facial features, but the beard he had grown and the smirk on his face just made him seem a bit slimy. He was Liu Yao’s son, Liu Xian, whom Bi Linglong had told Zu An was the spoiled good-for-nothing.

Next to him was someone who seemed to be about the same age. He had thin lips and narrow eyes. His beard was shaved in a nice and orderly manner, while his hair was combed meticulously. In contrast to Liu Xian’s frivolousness, his expression was serious, making him look like a responsible person. He was Liu Yao’s nephew Gao Ying.

Meng Pan couldn’t help but sneer when he heard what Liu Xian said. “Brightmoon Duke? Isn’t he just another setting sun? Why would I be scared of him?”

His grandfather was the Minister of Works, while his father was the head of the Central Secretariat. In terms of status, his family was above the Chu clan, so there was no need for him to fear them.

“Even if you aren’t scared of the Chu clan, you should be scared of the Qin clan, right?” Bi Linglong cleared her throat. After all, Chu Youzhao was Zu An’s little brother-in-law, so she didn’t want something to happen to him. Otherwise, Zu An might go completely mad. Even though she was upset that Zu An hadn’t appeared yet and had gone back on his word, she didn’t lose her reason and still took care of his family.

Meng Pan chuckled when he heard the words ‘Qin clan’, but he didn’t say anything. He might be able to overlook the Chu clan, but the Qin clan was definitely not someone they dared to offend for no good reason.

Liu Xian roared with laughter and said, "Let's talk about something else! Weren't we chatting about that Zu An just now?"

Gu Xing said with a laugh, "We were talking about how it was impossible for Zu An to defeat the eighth ranked King Qi's heir, let alone fight on par with the ninth ranked Han Fengqiu."

"Wasn't the truth already discovered a while ago? There was a mysterious expert at the scene of the battle." Another youngster who had remained silent all this time spoke up. He had a gloomy expression, and he was definitely shrewd. That person was the Pei clan's Pei You.

These youngsters all had their own pride. They refused to believe that that person could defeat someone who was so many ranks higher.

"Haha, well, we can at least say that Sir Zu's luck is good. It's not surprising for the crown princess to care that much about him. With him in the party, our group's luck will surely improve," Gu Heng said. His words sounded fair, but he was actually pouring all of his hatred out onto Zu An.

The others learned that the reason the crown princess was late was because she had been waiting for Zu An, and became dissatisfied.

"There are so many of us here. Is there a need for us to depend on that Zu An?"

"Exactly! Crown princess, please don't worry. We're more than enough for this exam."

"What's so special about that Zu An that the crown princess needs to personally wait for him? Having him won't make a difference."

Bi Linglong had already been annoyed. When she heard all the chattering, she finally couldn't take it anymore and cried, "Enough!"

Chapter 806, Part 2: Clamoring

The crown prince, who had just been watching everything from the side, jumped in fright. He was clearly reminded of the fear Bi Linglong had instilled in him over the past two years.

The other clans' young masters became unhappy. They could clearly sense the crown princess' rage, but they didn't know how they had offended her. They thought, Don't tell me it's all because of that Zu An?

When she saw the others' expressions, Bi Linglong realized that she had lost her composure. She quickly said, "They've already begun to test people's cultivations over there, so let's hurry and head over."

The emperor's and King Qi's factions had reached a tacit agreement. They would allow the crown prince to bring in people with him, but their cultivation ranks couldn't exceed the seventh rank. For the sake of preventing fraud, there was a ki measuring instrument at the entrance, as opposed to having any one person judge people's cultivation rank.

The device was a result of the Royal Academy's research, consisting of a piece of celestial stone paired with complex and intricate formations. It could quickly test a person's ki strength, and thus deduce their cultivation level.

The other warriors had already completed their tests. They were all around the fourth or fifth rank. Only their group was left for this test. There was obviously no need to test the crown prince. Everyone knew what he was like, so there was no point in embarrassing him.

Then, the crown princess walked over. Bi Linglong stepped onto the stage and looked around, but she still didn't see that person. She sighed, and then walked forward. Next to the celestial stone stood a young lady in a witch's hat and dark blue starry robes. She yawned and said, "Put your hand on it, and then just use your ki."

The group of young masters' eyes lit up. Liu Xian couldn't help but catcall. "Who is this little girl? She's pretty cute."

Pei You said coldly, "I advise you to restrain those random thoughts of yours. She's the libationer's last disciple Qi Yaoguang, the junior sister the teachers of the rear mountain adore the most. She isn't someone you can afford to offend."

Liu Xian flipped his hair, and then a charming smile appeared on his face as he said, "Even if those senior brothers dote on her, they can't stop her from courting love, right? If we really do express sincere love, not even the libationer should be able to stop us."

Pei You was speechless. Those gathered looked at Liu Xian with strange expressions. This fellow really had some crazy confidence. Next to him, his cousin Gao Ying's face twitched. He quietly took a few steps away, as if he didn't know Liu Xian.

The test taking place on the stage was already complete. Light was released from the celestial stone as Qi Yaoguang exclaimed, "Sixth rank!"

Those gathered immediately began to whisper among themselves. The crown princess had only been at the fifth rank not too long ago, yet now, she had already reached the sixth rank. Her cultivation talent was quite exceptional!

Many people glanced toward the simple-minded crown prince and shook their heads inwardly. The difference was just too huge! It really was like a flower growing out of a pile of manure.

When the crown princess descended, the others all glanced around in embarrassment. After all, they were all much older than her, so it was normal for their cultivation levels to be higher. However, with their difference in age, that small gap in cultivation made them all feel ashamed.

Liu Xian was the first to say, "I'll head up first!" He had always been rather shameless, known as the capital's publicly acknowledged playboy. He didn't mind being laughed at by others.

He didn't immediately place his hand on the device to get measured, and instead walked in front of Qi Yaoguang with a smile first. "Little sister Qi, hello. My name is Liu Xian, and my father is a general of the court."

"Oh, I know that." Qi Yaoguang subconsciously leaned back. What is such a mature man using makeup for?

Liu Xian was overjoyed, saying, "So little sister Qi knew about me."

"Only just now, through divination." Qi Yaoguang yawned.

“Huh?” Liu Xian was stupefied.

Qi Yaoguang harrumphed. “I also divined that you wanted to pick me up. Hmph, you’re coming after me when you don’t even know what I do; you really are ignorant and senseless. Are you going to take the test or not? Otherwise, go back down and stop holding up the line.” She muttered to herself, “I sensed that I would have some romantic luck, but it ended up being with such a slimy guy. What kind of romantic luck is that? Hmph.”

Liu Xian was momentarily dazed, but he reacted quickly as well. “Little sister Qi’s nature really is straightforward and unruly. I like that a lot.”

He placed his hand on the celestial stone while speaking. He thought to himself that once he came out of the dungeon, he was going to try to hook up with her. This wasn’t the first time he had encountered a little hot pepper like her, yet hadn’t they still ended up moaning under him?

The celestial stone produced a faint layer of light. Qi Yaoguang gave it a look. “Fifth rank? Even many of my students are higher rank than you. Have you lived your entire life so far like a dog or something?”

Liu Xian finally couldn’t take it anymore. However, this was the Royal Academy, so he couldn’t start anything. He could only leave the stage with an ashen expression.

Underneath the stage, Bi Linglong held back an urge to laugh. She was more familiar with these academy teachers. She knew that Qi Yaoguang was famous for her low emotional intelligence, yet this Liu Xian had actually dared to try to court her. He really wasn’t the brightest.

Then, the other disciples headed up one after another. After learning from Liu Xian’s experience, none of them dared to speak rudely to Qi Yaoguang.

The results quickly came out. Liang King Manor’s Zhao Xi and the Liu clan’s Gao Ying’s cultivations were the highest, both at the peak of the sixth rank. The others were either at the middle or initial stage of the sixth rank. The others began to congratulate Zhao Xi and Gao Ying. Gao Ying was a bit calmer, while Zhao Xi couldn’t help but feel proud.

The Gu clan brothers used the opportunity to say, “With the young king and brother Gao here, we’re sure that success is already guaranteed. Why do we need that Zu An or whatever? Crown princess, you don’t need to be worried at all.”

Bi Linglong felt sad inside. She wondered why Zu An hadn’t come. On one hand, she was worried that something had happened to him, yet on the other hand, if nothing happened and he had just gone back on his word, that meant he didn’t care about her at all. When she recalled how Zu An had said to trust him, how she had been moved back then, all of it seemed extremely laughable now.

Suddenly, a familiar voice said, “Sorry, sorry, I’m late.”

Bi Linglong turned around with surprise and happiness. She finally saw that figure she had waited so many hours for. At that moment, she wanted to smile, yet she also wanted to cry. However, she quickly caught herself, because in the end, she was the crown princess. She quickly composed herself and asked, “Why did you only come now?”

You have successfully trolled Bi Linglong for +55 +55 +55...

“There were some things that held me up, sorry,” Zu An said apologetically.

Meng Pan asked with a snicker, “What can possibly be more important than the crown prince’s exam?”

Gu Xing felt refreshed inwardly. Finally, he didn’t have to step in himself.

Zu An replied, “It’s precisely because the crown prince’s exam is important that I’ll explain the exact situation to the crown princess later.” There were many people from King Qi’s faction here. He didn’t want to expose Jiang Luofu, so he could only give that vague explanation.

Qi Yaoguang spoke from the stage. “Mister Zu, are you going to test yourself or not?!”

Bi Linglong said, “You should get tested first. Everyone who’s going to enter the dungeon needs to be tested.”

The Gu clan brothers were happy to see Zu An in a hard spot. They thought to themselves, The crown princess kept praising this fella, but his cultivation doesn’t seem to be all that to us.

If it was over the seventh rank, then he couldn’t even go in. Out of sight, out of mind. If he hadn’t even reached the seventh rank... Heh, just wait and see how we’ll deal with you then.

Even the young masters from the other clans craned their necks. After all, Zu An’s accomplishments were just too outstanding. Even though there had been some speculations that explained what had happened, what if this person really was just that formidable?

Zu An walked onto the stage. He suddenly felt a bit apprehensive. Hadn’t there been a similar ball-like thing when he tested his aptitude in Brightmoon Academy? Back then, that ball had erupted with light and exploded.

Thankfully, Jiang Luofu had helped him cover up that matter back then. However, there were so many powerful experts here, and all of them were experienced. It wouldn’t be so easy to deceive them.

Qi Yaoguang’s voice said by his ear, “Don’t worry, this thing tests cultivation and not anything else.”

Zu An gave her a look. He saw that she didn’t open her mouth and only gestured toward him with her eyes. She had said those words just now through ki transmission.

“Eighth sister wanted me to remind you of that. Do you have some secret no one can know or something?” Qi Yaoguang asked. “This is so annoying; I still can’t see through your fate or future.”

“There are no secrets.” Zu An smiled. At the same time, he felt warm inside. Jiang Luofu had even taken this into consideration, on top of giving him a map and helping him obtain some defensive treasures. She really was meticulous. This type of person would probably become a boss’ most trustworthy secretary, right...

He placed his hand on the celestial stone. At the same time, he stroked the spice bag he had gotten from Concubine Bai. He was actually feeling quite nervous, because he wasn’t sure if it would be enough to let him through.

The celestial stone soon shone. Everyone present cried out in alarm.

Chapter 807, Part 1: Destined to Fail

It wasn't because Zu An's cultivation was too high, but rather because the tested result was too low. He was only shown to be at the sixth rank.

In many people's eyes, the reason why he won against King Qi's heir was that there was a mysterious expert who had helped him. However, the fact that he had lasted so long in that fight meant that he had to either be at the seventh rank, or the peak of the sixth rank. And yet, he was actually just at the sixth rank.

King Qi's officials immediately called the result into question, feeling that there were problems with the test. They didn't want the crown prince to obtain a helper that was too powerful in the dungeon.

The crown prince's faction was already well prepared. Many officials immediately engaged them in a war of words, fending them off. The two sides argued intensely.

At that time, Qi Yaoguang harrumphed and asked, "Are you all suspecting that our Royal Academy is siding with Zu An?" Even though her voice wasn't loud, it was able to penetrate through everything else. The place quickly calmed down.

King Qi's faction members smiled and replied, "Lady Qi has misunderstood; how could we question the academy's standpoint? Since Zu An was tested to be at the sixth rank, he is at the sixth rank."

They didn't want to offend the Royal Academy and push this neutral faction towards the crown prince's side. Furthermore, they had actually already discussed this among themselves before. A single person around the seventh rank wouldn't make too much of a difference. What had happened just now was a pretense so that the crown prince's faction wouldn't go too far.

Bi Linglong's father Bi Qi's voice said by her ear, "Linglong, did you give him an artifact that can conceal his cultivation?"

Bi Linglong was also confused. "I didn't. Where would I get something that amazing?"

"Then is he really at the sixth rank? Is it only some random tricks that make him much more formidable than others at his level?" Bi Qi asked, his voice full of suspicion.

"It might be." Bi Linglong bit her lip. She thought to herself, This fella really is only at the sixth rank? Then it seems this trip is really going to be dangerous... However, when she remembered the solemn vow Zu An had given her the previous night, she suddenly felt at peace again.

Bi Qi said, "King Qi will only approve of us sending in one person at the seventh rank, but you ended up choosing him instead of Rong Mo. Is he really worth it?"

Bi Linglong took a deep breath and replied, "I trust him!"

Bi Qi frowned, but he knew that his daughter was competent and had good insight. Since she was persisting with her decision like this, that meant that he didn't have to say anything further.

While the father and daughter were talking to each other, Gu Xing was instead overjoyed at the turn of events. "After hearing Linglong's praises, I thought he was some amazing fella, yet he's only barely at the sixth rank. Hah, our cultivation might even be higher than his."

Liu Xian coughed, indicating that he was offended by these words.

Gu Heng didn't express his opinion as openly and instead said to Bi Linglong, "Crown princess, you have always been rather kind, so you might not be aware of how treacherous those born from the streets are. I believe you might have been fooled by him."

Bi Linglong said with a frown, "His real strength is definitely higher than the sixth rank."

However, she lost confidence soon afterward. There had never been an issue with the academy's testing device. Everyone could see that his cultivation really had ended up being at the sixth rank!

Gu Xing chuckled and asked, "Linglong, what makes you so sure? In my opinion, some people just don't focus on cultivation and instead have people constantly brag about how strong they are. He might not have been exposed if not for the academy's test today."

"That's not entirely impossible." Meng Pan chuckled. "There were all sorts of rumors surrounding him in the capital recently. I refuse to believe that no one tried to spread those things deliberately."

King Liang Manor's Zhao Xi harrumphed. "Hmph, I actually admired him a bit. Turns out he was only at that level."

Liu Xian instead said disapprovingly, "Even if we don't talk about his cultivation, his skills with girls are the real deal. I really have to find a chance to talk to him and see how he got Chu First Miss' favor with such an ordinary face."

While the others were discussing this with each other, Piao Duandiao and Jiao Sigun were furious. Unfortunately, there was just too great of a difference in their statuses, and the test result really was the sixth rank. They didn't know what to say either.

Bi Linglong was also starting to get affected. When she looked at the figure on the stage, her expression was a bit complicated. She didn't doubt his potential, but potential needed time. If there was even a single mistake in the crown prince's exam, there wouldn't be any time.

The topic shifted because of what Liu Xian had said. Zhao Xi teased, "What, so you're interested in Chu First Miss now? You were even going after Qi Yaoguang just now."

Liu Xian stroked his small beard. "Of course not; going after other people's wives isn't my style. I like those who are obedient and especially pure. You know what, I've already made my decision! Lady Qi will be my next target. I'm going to study in the Royal Academy and attend her class, to admire her beauty up close."

Meng Pan clicked his tongue. "Just give up. The Royal Academy's students are all talented, and Lady Qi is the libationer's core disciple. The key is that she's even capable of divination, making her way too powerful and mysterious."

"Divination?" Liu Xian realized something. "No wonder she knew what I wanted to do ahead of time. Haha, this kind of woman is even more worth subduing."

The others rolled their eyes. They didn't feel like paying attention to his delusions anymore. All of them began to chat among themselves.

“Once I leave this dungeon, I’m going to study some more in the Royal Academy. I only studied carelessly for two years back then. Now, I feel a bit regretful that I didn’t study the most important things from the academy.”

“Yeah, I was thinking the same thing. I heard that there’ll be a selection exam coming up soon in the academy’s rear mountains. With our background, we should be able to sign up for it directly. Only after one gets into the rear mountain can you learn the most important techniques from the libationer’s direct disciples.”

“Which teacher do you all want to become the students of? I like playing Go more, so Hei Baizi’s chess dao seems the most interesting.”

“I hope I can become a student of Mr. Shen Xuzi instead. After all, pills become extremely important once you reach later ranks of cultivation. I heard that he’s even able to control golems in battle. If I had a few golems behind me, wouldn’t I immediately become several times stronger?”

“As for me, I like Ms. Jiang. She has carefully studied the law, and her cultivation is profound. I’m sure I’ll be able to improve a lot by following her.”

“Tsk, do you really want to study the law? We almost don’t even want to expose you.”

“But Ms. Jiang’s black stockings really are incredible; who wouldn’t want to learn from her?”

...

Even though they had lowered their voices, Bi Linglong could still hear everything clearly since they were so close to each other. She was completely speechless when she saw the Gu clan brothers join in with suspicious smiles. These damn men were all good-for-nothing perverts!

Pei You said with a sneer, “Look at you all, being so picky. The selection exam for the rear mountain is extremely strict. All who pass are extraordinary talents. You should be happy if any of the teachers are willing to take you in.”

“I guess you’re right. I don’t even know if I’ll pass that selection exam.”

“Ah, heavens, please help me! I’ll be eternally grateful to the world if I’m accepted!”

All of them immediately became much more humble when they realized the difficulty of entering the rear mountain. They were no longer in such high spirits as before.

Someone with sharp eyes said, “Huh? Aren’t those the teachers of the academy’s rear mountain?”

“You’re right! Those are Shen Xuzi, Hei Baizi, Wang Shuyang, Yin Shi, and wow, those legs in black stockings definitely belong to Jiang Luofu!”

“Huh? Why would all of the teachers come out? It’s been so long since such a thing happened.”

Gu Xing was quick on his feet and immediately spoke out in praise. “Of course it’s because the crown prince and princess are setting out on a mission, so the academy had them come out to see them off.”

Even though the others knew that the academy had always held a neutral position, that they shouldn't do anything that would clearly show partiality toward the crown prince, they couldn't think of any other possibility, so they supported Gu Xing's opinion.

At the same time, they sorted out their clothes and held their heads high. They thought to themselves that their luck this time really was good, for them to be able to share in the limelight of the crown prince and princess. When the teachers came over to greet the crown prince and princess, they had to behave well. Who knew, they might catch the eye of one of the teachers and be taken in as a disciple right there and then.

Zu An had already gotten down from the platform. He walked over to Bi Linglong and nodded toward her with a smile.

Bi Linglong thought to herself, This fella seems surprisingly relaxed. She hoped that he would continue to hold the same attitude once they went inside the dungeon.

Even though the young masters of the other clans didn't think too highly of Zu An, their attentions were completely diverted. Not even the Gu clan brothers said anything else. All of them stuck out their chests and had polite expressions on their faces as they faced the rear mountain teachers.

Gu Xing was the quickest of them all. He rushed out and greeted them. "Teachers, did you come to see the crown prince and princess off? They're over there; I'll lead you guys."

The others cursed Gu Xing's craftiness. They rushed over one after another to curry favor. However, the teachers remained cold and aloof, not paying them any attention.

Chapter 807, Part 2: Destined to Fail

However, the young masters didn't feel dissatisfied at all, but rather felt that this was how it should be. After all, the Royal Academy had never built relationships with any influential clans and only cared about talent. The direct disciples of the libationer in the rear mountain, in particular, were aloof and arrogant. Forget about juniors like them, these teachers might even treat their fathers coldly if they were here in their place.

The group of teachers led by Shen Xuzi arrived in front of the crown prince and princess. They cupped their hands and exchanged some greetings. Then, their attention shifted to Zu An. Their cold expressions immediately changed and were instead replaced with eager attentiveness.

"Sir Zu, why didn't you tell us that you arrived at the academy? I'm already carrying out experiments on the steam engine you speak of, and I feel like I'm on the verge of an incredible breakthrough!"

"Old fourth, stop trying to hog him to yourself, move out of the way... Sir Zu, I already have some insights regarding the male infertility problem I was stumped on; perhaps I'll have already found the solution once you guys come out of the dungeon. I'll need your guidance on the follow-up work afterwards."

"Tsk, all of you, get out of the way. Sir Zu already promised me that he would play chess with me first once he gets out."

“What’s the point of playing chess? It’s more fun to have an intellectual conversation. Only then can we discern the truth of the universe.”

...

The teachers began to argue among themselves. Zu An used this chance to walk over to Jiang Luofu’s side, asking, “Big sis, why did you come here? I’m worried that this might affect your clan’s relationship with King Qi.”

Jiang Luofu smiled and replied, “I was a bit worried, but it doesn’t matter if I come together with the others.”

“That makes sense.” Zu An laughed.

“Eighth sister, you have to be careful! This guy is a playboy through and through, you can’t let him trick you! What if he leaves behind his seed, but then leaves in secret or something?” Qi Yaoguang suddenly came up with such a thought somehow.

Jiang Luofu’s forehead darkened. “Don’t try to sound smart if you have no idea what you’re talking about. Just take care of yourself! You’re the one who’s in a daze all the time; you’re the one who might get tricked by him without even realizing what happened.”

“Ah! You’re telling me dirty things when I’m still little! I’m going to tell on you to master,” Qi Yaoguang replied, leaving Jiang Luofu speechless.

The Gu clan brothers and the other noble children were stunned. What the hell was going on right now? Why did these proud and noble figures suddenly seem to have become completely different? They weren’t just friendly with Zu An; it seemed they were... flattering him?

Bi Linglong couldn’t help but smile when she saw all of them in a daze. For some reason, she felt even more refreshed from seeing that than venting and criticizing them herself. Hmph, they’re all just a group of opinionated fools.

...

In the distance, in King Qi’s camp, Chu Youzhao saw Jiang Luofu and Qi Yaoguang stand around Zu An. Her eyes couldn’t help but be drawn to those long, black stocking-covered legs.

Murong Qinghe sighed in admiration. “Ms. Jiang’s legs are long and beautiful. Even a girl like me can’t help but adore them.”

“Hmph, she’s just a vixen. My big sister’s legs are also beautiful; it’s just that she doesn’t expose them like this,” Chu Youzhao harrumphed.

Murong Qinghe’s expression became a bit strange. There was actually a man who didn’t like Jiang Luofu’s long legs? But she didn’t think too much about it either. She just thought of it as him defending his sister.

Chu Youzhao said, “Let’s go; follow me there.” Murong Qinghe didn’t know why he would say that, but she still followed him over.

Before Chu Youzhao even got close to Zu An, she shouted loudly, "Brother-in-law, you're finally here!"

Zu An turned around. When he saw that it was her, he couldn't help but smile. "So it was Youzhao."

Chu Youzhao walked over, unwittingly arriving next to Jiang Luofu and Qi Yaoguang. Then, she took out a bag, bringing out many things from it and shoving them toward Zu An. "Brother-in-law, these are some things I got for you. I hope they can help you in the dungeon. These are some cakes; you might not be able to find food in the dungeon. These are bug repellents so you don't get bothered by mosquitoes, this is fever medicine for if you get a fever, and these are healing medicines for both internal and external wounds. You'll definitely have to fight a lot inside, so it's better to have some medicine just in case. These are poison resistance medicines that can prevent you from being afflicted by poisonous bugs and plants..."

"Thank you, Youzhao." Zu An became a bit dizzy when he saw all the things she fished out. Ji Xiaoxi had also given him this and that when he was back in Brightmoon Academy, and they really had saved his life in the end.

"Don't treat me like an outsider, brother-in-law! Big sis told me to take good care of you before she left, remember?" Chu Youzhao replied, shooting Jiang Luofu and Qi Yaoguang a pointed look. She had to protect her brother-in-law, or else he might be bullied by these vixens.

The King Qi faction's people began to whisper among themselves when they saw the situation.

Murong Tong walked over to Qin Zheng's side and said with a chuckle, "Daughters really are only good for squandering wealth, and the granddaughters your daughters gave birth to aren't loyal at all either. Chu Chuyan has already divorced Zu An, yet Youzhao still calls him brother-in-law so enthusiastically and gives him so many things. Doesn't this mean that Chuyan's relationship with him is still excellent?"

Qin Zheng's face darkened. "Youzhao really is outrageous. Even his big sister's reputation is going to be done in by him."

You have successfully trolled Qin Zheng for +358 +358 +358...

Murong Tong was all smiles. Nothing had been going well for him these days, but seeing his old friend's daughters being all friendly with the other faction allowed him to finally find a sliver of joy.

Just then, Murong Qinghe also handed Zu An a bag. "Big brother Zu, I don't have much here, so I'll give you this storage sack. It can hold many things, and you can carry everything big brother Chu gave you earlier. It'll be easier to carry it all."

Zu An felt warm inside. "Thank you, little sister Qinghe."

Even though he had the Brilliant Glass Bead with its massive storage space, it wasn't convenient for him to bring that thing out and use it. With this pouch she had given him, he could store and take things out in broad daylight.

Murong Qinghe blushed. "Big brother Zu is too polite. I still have to thank you for all your care and help recently."

In the distance, Murong Tong's smile immediately froze on his face. Qin Zheng's gloominess instantly vanished without a trace. He stroked his beard and roared with laughter. "Indeed, daughters are nothing but liabilities."

Murong Tong was speechless. How could he have anticipated that the tides would turn so quickly?

You have successfully trolled Murong Tong for +399 +399 +399...

It soon became time to enter the dungeon. No matter what King Qi's subjects really thought, they still had to wish the crown prince the best. Bi Linglong knew that the crown prince didn't know how to reply properly, so she did it in his place.

After both sides exchanged fake conversation, King Qi's eyes landed on Zu An as he said, "Sir Zu, I'll have to entrust this secret dungeon mission to you."

When they heard those words, all of the young nobles, including the Gu clan brothers, were furious. By what qualifications?! He's just a trifling sixth rank! Why would we need to depend on him?

You have successfully trolled Zhao Xi for +477 Rage points!

You have successfully trolled Meng Pan for +477 Rage points!

You have successfully trolled Pei You for +477 Rage points!

...

There was no lack of intelligent people among them. They quickly realized something. Why was King Qi paying so much attention to him?

Even though they belonged to different camps, they still acknowledged King Qi's terrifying strength. Furthermore, this was the boss of the other faction, someone who could stand on equal footing against the emperor' someone who their fathers, and even grandfathers, had to lower their heads to. Yet such a person was that concerned with Zu An?

As someone who was also part of the imperial palace, Bi Linglong knew that King Qi and Zu An had already faced each other several times, yet King Qi had never gotten what he wanted. It was completely reasonable for him to have such respect for Zu An.

Zu An wasn't fazed at all when he saw the incoming Rage pints. He didn't regard these people as any threat at all, saying, "King Qi, don't worry. I will definitely ensure that the crown prince passes this test."

King Qi's eyes narrowed. After a moment of silence, he said in a profound manner, "It's good for the young to be ambitious. However, if you're too arrogant, you just might meet a premature end."

Chapter 807, Part 3: Destined to Fail

Zu An said with a smile, "Apart from me, there are so many children from great clans. How difficult can it be to kill a Jade Moon Serpent? It seems King Qi isn't so optimistic about this trip. Perhaps you made some arrangements that would cause us to meet premature ends?"

Zhao Xi and the others stuck out their chests when they heard Zu An's praise. They thought that this fellow at least knew how to talk well.

But who could have thought that he would say that King Qi was laying a trap for them right afterwards? Their expressions all changed. Did this idiot even know the ways of the court? Even though the two factions were already at a point where they couldn't coexist, they were still friendly on the surface. Someone who just spoke whatever they thought really was just a commoner from the streets.

All of them looked down on Zu An. At the same time, they were worried that King Qi might become hostile. If that happened, all of them would be caught up in the disaster.

You have successfully trolled Zhao Xi for +222 Rage points!

You have successfully trolled Meng Pan for +222 Rage points!

You have successfully trolled Pei You for +222 Rage points!

...

However, what was surprising was that King Qi didn't get mad. Instead, there was a refreshing smile on his face. "Sir Zu, you're worrying too much. This king only wished to give you a reminder. I once again wish everyone a smooth journey."

Even Bi Linglong, who hated the man bitterly, had to admit that it was no wonder that King Qi had such prestige both inside and outside the court. This kind of presence and temperament wasn't something just anyone could have.

Soon afterward, Zhuxie Chixin walked over, as if worried that King Qi would do something to them. The emperor hadn't arrived today and had only sent Meng Yi, Bi Qi, Zhuxie Chixin, and other trusted aides over. However, there was no need to worry about King Qi's faction doing anything with these individuals guarding the entrance.

Qi Yaoguang slowly walked onto the stage. Her drowsy eyes became deep like the cosmos. She mumbled to herself as she held a star diagram in her hands. Soon afterward, the air seemed to ripple around them. Those who had higher cultivation levels could sense that the ki in the area was undergoing an intense transformation. Even space and time seemed to be reconstructing themselves.

The small-bearded Liu Xian's eyes widened. "Wasn't the libationer the one who was going to open up the dungeon? Miss Qi... Is she enough for this?"

He wasn't the only one who had such thoughts. Qi Yaoguang looked just too young, almost like a loli. She looked like those daughters of great clans who didn't know anything. It really was hard to imagine that someone like her was going to manage something so major like controlling the secret dungeon.

Bi Linglong was the crown princess, so she had more information at her disposal. When she heard those words, she explained, "Qi Yaoguang is the libationer's last disciple, and what she researches is astrology, fate, and other such profound things. That's why you shouldn't judge her by her appearance.

"Furthermore, the secret dungeon opens up once every four years. The academy has already had centuries of experience in its operation. There's naturally no need for Sir Libationer to do the deed himself."

Liu Xian revealed his trademark smirk. "I'm becoming more and more interested in Miss Qi now. I definitely have to use my masculine charm to completely subdue her once we're back from this dungeon."

The people around him rolled their eyes. The stocky Zhao Xi was the most straightforward of them all. He shot back, "Can you shut up about that already? My breakfast might come out if I listen to any more of this."

Liu Xian harrumphed. "How can a boorish man like you understand the thoughts of a young lady? Talking to you is like playing a lute to a cow."

"What did you say?!" Zhao Xi was furious when he heard those words. He pulled up his sleeves and walked toward Liu Xian.

Liu Xian reacted quickly as well, quickly hiding behind his cousin. Gao Ying was left with no choice but to stand in front of Zhao Xi.

Zhao Xi frowned. Forget about Gao Ying's respectable reputation; the test had just revealed that he was at the peak of the sixth rank. If there really was conflict, it might not do him any good. Yet if he let things go just like that, how could he swallow this down? He was trapped between a rock and a hard place.

Meng Pan had never gotten along with Zhao Xi anyway. He was more than happy to see them start a fight, to the point that he was even tempted to cheer the other party on.

Pei You held his sword in his arms in the distance, remaining completely indifferent.

The Gu clan brothers were excited. They wanted to see these youngsters from top clans duke it out. Only then could backups like them truly shine!

Bi Linglong finally couldn't take it anymore. She remarked in annoyance, "What are you all doing? Are the crown prince and I nothing in your eyes? Are we going to start some internal strife before we even go inside?"

Zhao Xi, Liu Xian, and the others took the opportunity to back down. They all expressed their apologies to her.

Zu An didn't care about this small episode, but was rather preoccupied with another issue. Just now, it had been mentioned that the dungeon opened once every four years, yet Jiang Luofu had said that the last time it was opened was three years ago. That meant it wasn't time for the dungeon to open yet. It seems they're opening it up a year earlier for the crown prince's exam. But are there really no issues with doing that?

After all, to a certain degree, dungeons were spatial rifts that connected independent worlds. If an accident happened, these people would have no hope of ever returning.

However, Zu An saw that the academy's people didn't seem to be too concerned about that. Furthermore, if an issue came up, there was no way the emperor would just ignore it. That meant it was probably fine... Right?

Soon afterward, a wormhole-like entrance appeared in front of the group. Bi Linglong waved her hand. Piao Duandiao and Jiao Sigun led the Eastern Palace's guards inside first to take a look at the situation. Zhao Xi and the others gestured with their hands as well, sending some of their people in as support.

A while later, Piao Duandiao and the others said from the other side, "Everything is normal."

Bi Linglong nodded, and then gestured for a group of guards to escort the crown prince inside. The Gu clan brothers took the chance to move over to her side, as if they were going to protect her. Zhao Xi, Meng Pan, and the others similarly approached the crown prince. These were the two most important people in this mission, so their safety should obviously be prioritized.

Zu An chuckled when he saw how eager everyone was to head inside. He didn't feel the need to do that at all and planned to hold up the rear.

But who could have expected that Bi Linglong would turn around and gesture toward him? She asked, "Sir Zu, why aren't you coming over yet? My and the crown prince's safety is in your hands!"

The others, who were all doing their best to get closer to the crown prince and princess, immediately shot him looks of jealousy. Why did the crown princess trust him that much? Could it be that it really was because his face was a bit more handsome than average? That was the case for Chu First Miss, and now the crown princess was the same. Hmph, women are all superficial after all!

Zu An had an awkward smile on his face when he saw endless Rage points flowing in. Was this woman trying to get him killed?

But he knew what she was thinking as well. It was hard to predict what kind of dangers they would face in the dungeon this time, and worst of all, they didn't know what King Qi was up to. That was why they had to act cautiously every step of the way. That was why she would only feel safe when she had the ones she trusted closest to her.

Chu Youzhao's expression became strange when she watched everyone enter one after the other. "Does the crown princess have feelings for my brother-in-law or something?"

"I don't think so." Murong Qinghe jumped in fright. She quickly warned Chu Youzhao to change to ki transmissions. "There was a huge scandal between the crown princess and big brother Zu. She should be avoiding him if something happened, in order to further prove her clear conscience. Also, she's the glorious crown princess; you're the only one who puts your brother-in-law on a pedestal all the time, as if everyone were out to steal him away or something."

Chu Youzhao became upset right away. "What, is my brother-in-law not awesome enough?"

"Big brother Zu is pretty cool." Murong Qinghe secretly gave Chu Youzhao a look. When she saw how pretty he was, she couldn't help but blush. She added inwardly, But to me, you're the best.

...

On the other side of the portal, Zu An's group had entered the secret dungeon. Their party was made up of carefully selected elites from all sorts of different clans, and all of them had experienced other secret dungeons before. That was why the distribution of roles went smoothly, and they quickly formed a well-knit formation.

Some scouts were quickly sent out to find a safe path. The outer ring was made up of warriors from the different clans, while the ones in the middle were the Eastern Palace guards led by Piao Duandiao. The ones at the very center of the group were the crown prince, crown princess, and Zu An.

They had done their homework ahead of time, so they quickly arrived at Cold Jade Pond. That was the place where the Jade Moon Serpent resided. They were all especially nervous, and they were prepared for a bloody battle. However, no matter how much they scouted the place, there was no activity from the waters at all.

Then, the group directed elemental attacks at the Cold Jade Pond to try and draw the Serpent out. But there was still no response. In the end, they sent some deathsworn knights in to look around. However, they still didn't find any trace of the Jade Moon Serpent.

"That fella isn't here; I don't sense its aura at all." Zu An wasn't convinced and squatted down by the side of the pond. He withdrew his hand after testing it for a while.

He used the jade badge to try to control the fish inside. However, there wasn't even a single shrimp inside. Fortunately, he had the Blue Mallard ability, granting him powerful affinity with water. He sensed the movements of the water element inside the Cold Jade Pond and deduced that there was no Jade Moon Serpent here.

Meng Pan muttered to himself, "Look at you showing off. The deathsworn knights already looked around; do we need you to tell us that it's not here?"

Zu An just chuckled and didn't argue with him.

"Then what do we do?" Bi Linglong frowned. The crown prince's task was to kill the Jade Moon Serpent, yet their objective wasn't even here. Didn't that mean the exam was a failure?

Chapter 808: Divided

"If the Jade Moon Serpent isn't here, then should we just go back and report the situation to his majesty? We can change the exam then." Zu An recalled Jiang Luofu's warning before he had left, as well as the various red-marked dangerous areas. On top of all of that, he had no idea what kind of sinister schemes King Qi had waiting for them. He felt a strange sense of unease.

The others immediately complained about Zu An's suggestion.

"Are you kidding me? Are we going to return in defeat after just setting out? How humiliating is that?"

"Exactly! If we went back, wouldn't that mean we failed? How can we stand that?"

"If you're scared, you can go back first."

...

The others spoke while shooting Zu An looks of disdain. The crown princess trusted him so much, yet he had ended up being a good-for-nothing coward.

Zu An didn't pay them any attention and looked at Bi Linglong, asking, "Crown princess, what do you think?"

Bi Linglong shook her head. "We can't go back. The crown prince's exam was in the works for a long time, and we used too many resources. Returning in defeat would be too great of a loss. Furthermore, there's no guarantee that King Qi's faction won't harass us if we return without completing the mission. Our crown prince's side would be in a hard spot then."

"Exactly, exactly!" The Gu clan brothers straightened their backs and stuck out their chests. "Who knows, perhaps the Jade Moon Serpent not being here might also be part of the crown prince's test. Otherwise, wouldn't this mission be too easy if the Jade Moon Serpent were killed so quickly? After all, this is the crown prince's great exam; it's related to the imperial throne. How can it be that easy of a task?"

"Indeed, the Gu clan brothers make sense." The others quickly voiced their agreement. It was clear that they were thinking the same thing.

Zu An said sternly, "But the Jade Moon Serpent isn't here, and we don't even know if the creature exists in this secret dungeon anymore. If we can't find it and leave later, it'll only make us look even worse. Furthermore, this dungeon isn't as safe as you might think. There are vicious beasts everywhere."

Meng Pan harrumphed and said, "It's just a trifling beast. We have so many people on our side; we can easily overwhelm something like that."

Zu An said calmly, "If we really run into any formidable beasts, I reckon all of you might not even be enough to get stuck in the gaps of their teeth."

"What did you say?!" Meng Pan erupted into fury. "You can throw away your own life if you want to; don't think everyone else is as much of a wuss as you!"

You have successfully trolled Meng Pan for +311 +311 +311...

These young masters were all born from distinguished backgrounds. They had hardly ever encountered any setbacks and were insufferably arrogant. That was why they all agreed with what Meng Pan said.

Pei You spoke up and said, "We don't need to worry about the Jade Moon Serpent's whereabouts; I have a way to track it. I've just examined our surroundings. It most likely took residence deep in the mountains."

"Then what are we waiting for? Let's hurry and chase after it! Otherwise, all of the clues will disappear if we keep waiting!" the others exclaimed noisily. Everyone looked toward the crown princess. They all knew that the crown prince was only here to eat and defecate.

Bi Linglong remained silent for a moment. In the end, she said, "Alright. Most of the troops will continue towards the mountains to search for the Jade Moon Serpent. Also, just in case, we'll send someone to the dungeon entrance to let the others know what's happening inside."

Everyone felt deep admiration. The reason why a pig like the crown prince could even face King Qi all these years was because of the crown princess after all. She always considered the bigger picture.

Zu An nodded in approval inwardly. What Bi Linglong had proposed was indeed the best choice at the moment. He hoped he was just worrying too much.

Their group continued on their mission. Pei You searched for the Jade Moon Serpent's traces at the forefront of the group.

Bi Linglong took the chance to move over to Zu An's side, asking, "You're not mad that I didn't listen to your opinion, right?"

Zu An chuckled and said, "Don't worry, I'm not that petty."

Bi Linglong smiled as well. She asked with a hushed voice, "Is this secret dungeon really that dangerous?"

Zu An nodded. He gave her a rough recount of the map Jiang Luofu had shown him. "The closer we get to the mountain, the more dangerous it becomes. In the past, the students of the academy only trained in the area around. Only rarely would they head into the mountain depths."

Bi Linglong's expression changed. She gave Pei You, who was at the very front, a look. "I've always been worried about one thing. Do you still remember what I told you before?"

"You're worried about the Pei clan being a neutral faction?" Zu An followed her gaze and looked at the taciturn Pei You.

Bi Linglong said, "I'm a bit worried that he might be taking us to a dangerous place... No, this won't do; I have to take some precautions."

She didn't wait for Zu An to reply and called everyone back. Then, she said seriously, "This mission is extremely important, so we can't be careless at all. That's why we all need to be on guard. The secret dungeon's mountains are full of dangers, so you must obey orders and not act on your own. So, I'm going to officially introduce this person to everyone. This is the Eastern Palace's Chamberlain Sir Zu An. He's familiar with this dungeon, and he also has abundant experience in dangerous places. During the remainder of our time here, everyone needs to listen to his arrangements."

Zu An was stunned. He hadn't expected her to give him such an important task. However, when he thought of the unknown dangers they were about to face, he didn't reject it either.

However, how could the others willingly accept that?

"What right does he have to tell us what to do?"

"What ability is he going to command us with?"

"There are so many people with higher cultivation ranks than him. Why do we have to listen to his opinion?"

...

Bi Linglong harrumphed. "Silence! What is this? Do this crown princess' words not mean anything?"

Those who had objected immediately expressed that they didn't dare.

Bi Linglong then said, "This matter is decided; we won't discuss it any longer! I understand Sir Zu's cultivation and skills well. You'll all come to understand during the rest of this journey, so I won't say anything else. We're setting out!"

Only then did the group's thoughts return to the trip. The crown princess had already said those things, so they could only respect her wishes.

When Pei You and the other clans' scouts decided on a path, they asked for Zu An's opinion. Zu An saw that the area was still considered the outer region of the mountain, and that it was still quite far from those truly dangerous areas, so he didn't tell them to stop. As such, their original plans didn't change.

After that process repeated a few times, the group developed contempt for him. They had expected some good opinions, yet he wasn't doing anything.

Zu An could sense how these people were feeling, but he didn't care at all. He only needed to protect Bi Linglong and the crown prince. As for the Jade Moon Serpent, with his current cultivation, facing it alone wasn't an issue at all. He didn't need these people to be in the way. On the contrary, what he was more concerned about was whether there were any traitors among them.

After all, everyone had been watching when the dungeon was opened. There were countless pairs of eyes watching, and King Qi hadn't sent anyone in at all. That was why they were the only ones who had come inside. What could King Qi even do?

The biggest possibility was that there might be a mole in their party. However, these individuals were all important figures in their respective clans and had been carefully selected. That was why he wasn't sure whether his suspicions were correct or not.

He didn't care about his relationship with these people, but Bi Linglong couldn't do the same. When she sensed their resentment, she approached Zu An and quietly said, "Sir Zu, these people are all from distinguished clans, so they're a bit proud and not too willing to submit to others. It's not that they harbor any bad thoughts against you, so please don't take it to heart."

Zu An said with a smile, "Don't worry, I won't use my public duty to avenge any private wrongs."

Bi Linglong thus gave Zu An an introduction to each person and their personalities, including their interpersonal relationships, cultivations, and other information. Too many things had happened on their way here, so she hadn't had the time to tell him all of those things yet.

In the distance, those young masters all felt terrible when they saw how close Zu An and the crown princess seemed as they chatted and laughed with each other.

The Gu clan brothers were even more enraged. They had grown up with Bi Linglong, so they keenly sensed that the way she treated Zu An was entirely different from how she treated others. Even though such suspicion was a bit too outrageous, they still didn't lower their guard.

Gu Xing moved over to his brother, saying, "Big bro, hurry and think of something! I don't know what the heck that Zu An fella did to Linglong for her to be so friendly with him."

A flicker of light passed through Gu Heng's eyes. He quickly came up with an idea. He found a chance to move over to the crown prince's side and said, "Crown prince, Sir Zu and the crown princess seem to be

a bit too close to each other. This really seems to go against what an official should be like. Furthermore, this would easily harm the crown princess' reputation. Crown prince, are you not going to do anything about it?"

In his opinion, no man could tolerate another man approaching his wife, let alone being that close to each other. This crown prince might be stupid in other ways, but he definitely had a strong sense of protectiveness for his own things.

The Gu clan brothers exchanged a look when they saw the crown prince look in Zu An and Bi Linglong's direction. They smirked. Let's see how you deal with this one, Zu An!

But they could never have expected that what the crown prince would say after looking for a while was, "In my opinion, they're not that close to each other."

"That's not even close?" The Gu clan brothers were shocked. The two were shoulder to shoulder, and they even bumped into each other from time to time!

"What's the big deal? Zu An has even carried Linglong before." The crown prince quickly lost interest. He continued to chew on the spiced pig trotters the eunuchs had given him.

Chapter 809: Dead

"What?!" When they heard that Zu An had even carried Bi Linglong before, the Gu clan brothers were shocked and furious.

After all, they were childhood friends. These two brothers actually liked their beautiful little sister. Unfortunately, there was a difference in status between their clans, and she had even become the crown princess afterwards=. Their past affection had finally begun to fizzle out, but it was only buried in their hearts and had never completely disappeared.

They had grown up together, and yet had never even touched her finger. However, this Zu An had even hugged her?

You have successfully trolled Gu Heng for +888 +888 +888...

You have successfully trolled Gu Xing for +888 +888 +888...

Zu An was startled. What the heck was up with these two? Why would they suddenly give him so many Rage points? The Gu clan brothers weren't looking at him, but rather staring stupidly at the crown prince in a daze. What kind of freaking reaction was this?

Your wife is so close to another man, and you're even adding that this man held your wife before? Can someone really live so simple-mindedly for that long? Or maybe this fella has some other weird type of fetish?

The Gu brothers' breathing immediately became hurried when they had such a thought. Their originally calm hearts began to stir. Then didn't that mean the two of them could also...?

When they saw that the crown prince didn't care, they quietly withdrew for fear that Bi Linglong would notice the strangeness in their reactions. As they looked at Bi Linglong's graceful and fair figure, their eyes began to burn with desire.

Suddenly, a disturbance appeared up ahead. Various elemental skills flew outward before the area became calm again. As it turned out, a group of vicious beasts had just arrived. There was a great deal of tension in the group's minds, so they immediately attacked with everything they had. They quickly dealt with the beasts.

Zu An couldn't help but chuckle. These were a group of old friends—a pack of Assrip Wolves. Back then, he had really been put in a difficult spot from these damn wolves, and he had only gotten away by relying on his wit. Now, he didn't even have to lift a finger; there were others who easily dealt with them.

But that made sense as well. Assrip Wolves were only around the third rank in strength. They were only hard to deal with because they usually moved in a pack. The crown prince's exam consisted of a group of fifth and sixth rank experts, and there were quite a few of them. A one-sided massacre was unavoidable.

They ran into some more beasts along the way, but they were all small-scale threats. They weren't that much trouble and were easily dealt with by Zhao Xi. The young masters immediately received a huge morale boost. They felt the place wasn't as dangerous as Zu An had said, and that it wasn't a big deal at all.

Meng Pan sneered. "That fella is only barely at the sixth rank. Of course these situations would seem dangerous to him."

"Indeed, we didn't even need Zu An for this mission," Pei You said unhappily. He could clearly track the Jade Moon Serpent's whereabouts, so he should have been in charge of their itinerary. However, he still had to ask Zu An for his opinion on everything. Later on, during the awarding ceremony, wouldn't Zu An be awarded the most when he hadn't even done anything?

The Liu clan relative Gao Ying couldn't help but say, "But the crown princess said that Zu An's real strength is far above this level. Furthermore, you saw how well those teachers from the rear mountain treated him. At the very least, we can't deny that happened, right?"

Liu Xian chuckled and said, "Who knows; maybe he paid off those teachers to act that out. The Chu clan has their salt and iron businesses, so they have more than enough money."

"That isn't possible!" the others exclaimed, united for the first time. "Those teachers from the Royal Academy all have extraordinary status and aren't people who can be bought through wealth. Even King Qi tried before, and yet he failed, so how could a single Zu An do it?"

"But the respect and adoration they showed Zu An was truly there. So what's going on here?" Liu Xian asked in confusion.

Meng Pan said, "According to what I know, those teachers from the rear mountain are all extremely formidable. They're all at the forefront of their respective fields. For example, Hei Baizi is good at Go, Yin Shi at debates, Wang Weiyang at farming... Since Zu An came from the streets, he probably dipped his

feet in different things that seemed to perfectly suit their tastes. That's why they regarded him so highly."

"I think that's it! Meng brat, who would've thought that you would say something good for once?" Zhao Xi clapped his hands and laughed heartily.

"Uncouth." Meng Pan harrumphed.

Gao Ying frowned. "Those teachers don't even have enough time to research their own fields of specialty; why does Zu An know about so many things?"

"Jack of all trades and master of none." Pei You sneered. "That's why his cultivation is so ordinary."

The others nodded. They figured that was probably the case. Their misgivings toward Zu An because of the academy teachers and Bi Linglong's serious statement gradually disappeared.

A while later, night gradually descended. It was common knowledge that the mountains became more dangerous at night. As such, they didn't continue their advance and instead set up camp. They would continue the journey once the sky became bright again.

Piao Duandiao and Jiao Sigun were Eastern Palace guards who had experienced strict training. That was why Zu An had them arrange for the clans' experts to be stationed on alert around them.

As for the young masters, they obviously didn't need to do such grunt work. They surrounded the crown prince and princess, blabbering away about how they easily defeated the beasts they had encountered during the day. The crown prince was excited by their stories and said that they had to catch a vicious beast tomorrow for him to kill it himself.

The Gu clan brothers both used this chance to bring a carefully roasted chicken to Bi Linglong.

"Linglong, you must be tired after everything that happened today. Please enjoy this chicken."

When they saw the roasted chicken in each others' hands, their eyelids couldn't help but twitch. These brothers really were on the same wavelength!

"Thank you!" Bi Linglong replied. Compared to the crown prince, who was amazed by all the stories and completely carefree, she was far from being so relaxed. She received the roasted chickens and handed one of them to Zu An. "You must be hungry too. Here."

Zu An didn't refuse her and began to eat. He cultivated the Primordial Origin Sutra, which granted his body greater toughness and regeneration than a normal person, but also increased the amount of food he consumed. He needed to constantly replenish his energy. These two brothers might be annoying, but their skill at roasting chicken didn't seem half bad.

Bi Linglong smiled when she saw Zu An enjoy it that much, saying, "Eat slowly, there's still more. You can have this one too."

The Gu clan brothers were completely speechless. They wanted to cry. The two of us worked so hard on those chickens for you!

Zu An couldn't help but chuckle. This scene made him remember a post from his past world, where a guy had lived frugally for several months to buy a precious gift for the girl of his dreams to see her smile, only for her to immediately give his gift to the guy she liked. Sure enough, no matter what world it was, there was no future for bootlickers.

When he recalled all of the things these brothers had said about him along the way, he wouldn't be Zu An if he didn't use this chance to get some revenge. He picked up the chicken bones and waved them in front of the two of them, saying, "Your skills aren't bad at all! How about you roast two more for me? I'm afraid these two aren't enough for my appetite."

"Do you think we're chefs?" The Gu clan brothers stormed off in a huff.

You have successfully trolled Gu Heng for +666 +666 +666...

You have successfully trolled Gu Xing for +666 +666 +666...

Bi Linglong rolled her eyes, saying, "You just had to annoy them on purpose."

"What's so bad about chasing away two flies?" Zu An replied with a chuckle.

Bi Linglong blushed. This guy was getting more and more brave! She thought to herself that she had to find a chance to teach him a lesson.

As time went on, the night deepened. One after another, the young masters returned to their tents to rest. As for the crown prince, after he ate his fill, he had already been snoring loudly in his tent.

Bi Linglong thus sat down with Zu An to discuss the details of the next few days. However, she had barely gotten any sleep the previous night, so drowsiness was starting to overtake her. Her head unwittingly leaned against Zu An's shoulder, and she fell asleep.

When he smelled the faint fragrance coming from the young lady's body, Zu An began to focus on his cultivation. His cultivation had quickly jumped two ranks and urgently needed consolidation.

Piao Duandiao and Jiao Sigun had just finished their patrol and were about to come back to chat with Zu An. They returned with smiles on their faces, but when they saw the scene, their smiles immediately froze on their faces. They gave each other a look, and then quickly withdrew outside.

Piao Duandiao broke out into cold sweat. "Oh no, we're done for. What do we do now?"

Jiao Sigun's face was deathly pale as well, but he was comparatively more calm. "What do you mean done for? It's not as if anything really happened between the two of them."

"This doesn't even count? If someone else finds out, then forget about big bro Zu, not even the crown princess will come out unscathed!" Piao Duandiao muttered to himself, "What is big bro Zu thinking? How can he touch the crown princess?"

"I don't think it's as serious as you're making it out to be," Jiao Sigun replied. "I think it's because they were just too tired and fell asleep unconsciously."

"You really believe that?" Piao Duandiao gave him a look.

Jiao Sigun forced a smile. "We have to believe it even if we don't. Once this gets out, big bro Zu will be done for."

Piao Duandiao hesitated. "But if we know the truth and don't report it, that's a crime big enough to have our families executed!"

"Big bro Zu treated us so well, so how can we harm him? How about this? Nothing happened between them anyway, so we'll just pretend that this never happened. We'll try to advise him again afterward," Jiao Sigun said.

"That's all we can do." Piao Duandiao thought for a bit, and then got up. "I'll transfer the guards a bit further away. You should continue to stand guard here to prevent anyone else from seeing anything."

"Okay!"

The two of them spent the night in utter fear.

The next morning, the rays of dawn scattered across the mountains and trees. Suddenly, a terrified scream echoed through the camp. "There's a dead body!"

Chapter 810: Panic

A commotion filled the entire camp when they heard that bitter scream. They thought there was an intruder, so they grabbed their weapons and charged over right away.

Bi Linglong and Zu An woke up immediately as well. Bi Linglong discovered that she had leaned against Zu An all night. Her face instantly became as red as an apple. But she was the crown princess after all, and wasn't easily flustered like a little girl.

She quickly realized the importance of the situation, so she stood up to head toward the source of the voice. Unfortunately, the awkward posture in which she had slept made her body a bit rigid. As she suddenly stood up, she felt a wave of dizziness and fell.

Zu An quickly supported her. He had to admit that this woman's body really was soft. But he quickly calmed himself down and said, "The voice seems to be coming from outside our camp."

Piao Duandiao quickly rushed in to make a report. "Reporting to the crown princess! We discovered a corpse outside. It seems to be Bi Chang."

His eyes moved to Zu An's hand, which was holding Bi Linglong's waist. He immediately felt his scalp turn numb. What the heck is up with the crown princess? Why isn't she showing the slightest bit of resistance? The crown prince is in the tent right next door! Are you two out of your minds?!

Despite that, he didn't really have a good opinion of the crown prince. The guards all privately liked this beautiful and elegant crown princess more, feeling that the fact she was married to him was like a flower growing out of a pile of sh*t.

But that sh*t is the crown prince! Don't tell me the crown princess doesn't know the consequences of doing this?

Forget it, there are too many filthy things that happen in the royal family; what's the big deal with this? I'll just pretend I didn't see anything.

He had already talked it out with Jiao Sigun yesterday. Whether it was because of their relationship with Zu An or because of their own interests, pretending they hadn't seen anything was the best choice.

Otherwise, once this was uncovered, the crown princess and the Bi clan would easily be in danger. Even if they were punished for that, out of consideration for the royal family, the emperor would very likely get rid of guards like them too.

In the end, they were just nobodies who didn't have any control over their own fate. That was why it would be best if they did their best not to get involved in things like this.

Bi Linglong quickly shifted to the side and naturally freed herself from Zu An's hand. However, her expression changed at once when she heard the name. "What?!"

"What's wrong?" Zu An asked curiously. The name seemed to belong to someone from the Bi clan. Don't tell me it's one of her relatives?

Bi Linglong's expression darkened as she replied, "The one I sent yesterday to report the situation to the entrance was Bi Chang!"

Zu An's expression became grave as well. The messenger they'd sent was actually dead?

Bi Linglong clearly realized the implications as well. A chill ran down her back.

Their group quickly arrived at the scene of the crime. Zhao Xi and the others were already there. They quickly greeted Bi Linglong when they saw the two arrive. "We greet the crown princess." As for Zu An, they ignored him.

Zu An calmly looked at the corpse, which was high up in the air. It looked a bit familiar. Sure enough, it was the messenger who had been sent previously to report back to the gate.

His body was impaled on a tree branch. His face was warped, his eyeballs bulging outward. Tears of blood slid down his face, and his corpse was deathly pale. He looked like a ghost from a horror movie. No wonder the one who had seen his body screamed so loudly.

"Who killed him?!" Liu Xian exclaimed, his voice trembling. He subconsciously moved closer to his cousin Gao Ying.

Meng Pan tapped his toes. He leaped onto the branch, lithe as a swallow. He examined the corpse and said gravely, "Judging from the color of the blood on his chest, this isn't where the murder happened. He was killed, and then placed here."

Zu An was amazed when he saw the other person examine the corpse with a calm expression. It seemed these young masters weren't all good-for-nothing idiots. No wonder they had been chosen to participate in this important mission. They still had skill in their fields of specialty.

"What I'm more concerned about is why his corpse is here. He went in the opposite direction yesterday, so he shouldn't have appeared in front of us." Zhao Xi immediately voiced what Zu An and the others were wondering.

“Could it be that he got lost? Maybe he thought he was going back to the entrance, but he ended up going the wrong way?” Pei You voiced his analysis.

“That’s impossible,” The Gu clan brothers both blurted out. “These are scouts that were chosen carefully. Their cultivation levels might not be the best, but they have a lot of experience in scouting and are individuals who survived countless battlefields. How could he have possibly gotten lost?”

Zhao Xi nodded and said, “Indeed, we didn’t see any maze-like terrain on our way here.”

“Then could it be a beast? I heard there’s a type of Butcher Bird that loves to hang their prey on branches like this,” Liu Xian said. Even though his cultivation was ordinary, he had read all sorts of random books.

Meng Pan shook his head. “That’s not possible. If it were a Butcher Bird, then his body would have signs of being punctured by sharp claws or a beak. However, even though his body is quite heavily wounded, there aren’t any wounds like that. Furthermore, I don’t see any mortal wounds on his body.”

“If there are no mortal wounds, then how did he die?”

“Was it a ghost?”

...

The place became filled with noise. Those gathered all felt chills run down their backs.

Zu An spoke up. “It’s not that there are no mortal wounds; it’s that his mortal wound was hidden. I believe he had his meridians blasted apart. The reason he’s impaled on the branch is to hide the wounds on his heart’s vessels. The other wounds are merely a diversionary tactic.”

As someone who had served as an Embroidered Envoy, he at least had this amount of deduction ability.

Meng Pan was shocked. He quickly examined the body again, saying, “Indeed, his heart vessels suffered severe damage. It seems his life was taken by a single blow.”

The others were actually a bit amazed that Zu An wasn’t as incompetent as they thought. They were all shocked when they heard those words. “A single blow?”

Bi Linglong said in a dismal tone, “Bi Chang was at the fifth rank, and he’s always been a sharp person. Furthermore, he excelled at stealth and self-preservation. Someone who could take his life in a single blow would have to be at least a rank higher than him.”

She had chosen Bi Chang because sending back a message was extremely important. She hadn’t expected this to happen.

“Hm?” The others’ expressions became extremely strange when they heard the crown princess’ analysis. They were the only ones who were at the sixth rank in this mission. Didn’t that mean the murderer was one of them?

Bi Linglong keenly sensed the change in mood. She continued, “Please don’t think random thoughts. The murderer might be an outsider, or one of the indigenous people of this dungeon.”

“But according to our sources, there are no natives in this dungeon. Furthermore, with Sir Bi and the others watching, there should be no way anyone from outside could have come in.” Zhao Xi showed a surprisingly meticulous side as he spoke.

Bi Linglong said, “Let’s not become overly suspicious when we don’t have any proof, to avoid sinking into internal strife.”

Pei You asked, “Then should we send someone else to report back on the situation? I just feel as if something isn’t quite right.”

Bi Linglong gave him a deep look, and then she looked at Zu An. “Sir Zu, what do you think?”

Zu An knew that she was implying something. She had always suspected the Pei clan’s motives, and she had mentioned her suspicion towards Pei You several times the previous night. As such, he replied, “The other party deliberately left the victim’s corpse in such a horrifying state precisely to establish panic among us. In the current situation, we have two choices. We can either withdraw with most of our people, which would signify failure, or we can continue to send people back to make a report. The latter will only further the enemy’s schemes, as the one hiding in the shadows can whittle down our strength bit by bit.”

“But if we don’t send the news back and something does end up happening to us here, then those outside will never know about what happened here.” Pei You frowned.

Zu An said, “You don’t need to worry about that. Since the enemy chose this type of fear tactic to divide us, that means they aren’t strong to face us head-on. That’s why they did something like this. We just need to be more careful from here on out.”

The disturbance gradually calmed down when the others heard Zu An’s analysis. Afterward, their group continued to advance, but their spirits were no longer as high as before. All of them had grave expressions. Thankfully, nothing else happened in the next few days, and the group gradually sighed in relief.

However, Zu An became more and more serious, because they had already entered the mountain’s depths. They were getting closer and closer to the red-marked danger zone on the map Jiang Luofu had shown him. As such, he began to change their itinerary to avoid those red areas as much as possible.

Since they made detours, they had to spend two to three days to reach places that normally would have taken half a day if they went in a straight line. When had these young masters ever experienced such bitterness? They all voiced their complaints along the way. Quite a few of them went to the crown prince and princess to tell on Zu An.

The straightforward Zhao Xi asked in dissatisfaction, “Crown princess, isn’t Zu An making too much of a fuss?”

“Exactly! He keeps saying that this place is dangerous, but have we encountered any danger along the way?” Gu Xing added fuel to the flame.

“When will we find the Jade Moon Serpent if we keep making detours like this? When will we be able to complete this mission?” Meng Pan grumbled.

“Sigh, I miss the soft beds of the capital already... My back is starting to get stiff from sleeping in tents day after day,” Liu Xian said while massaging his shoulder.

...

“That’s enough; everyone needs to trust Sir Zu. It’s because he’s been leading us that we haven’t encountered any danger.” Bi Linglong did her best to appease everyone.

However, a change suddenly occurred in the situation. The scouts they had sent out vanished!