

## Immortal 891

### Chapter 891, Part 1: New Function Unlocked

Many memories came rushing back when Zu An heard those words. He hadn't fully reacted just now. He had felt as if his consciousness had been a bit blurry back then, unsure if what had happened was a dream or an illusion. After Mi Li reminded him, many scenes quickly returned.

He looked toward Bi Linglong and said, "Linglong, thank you."

Saying 'thank you' at that moment felt a bit strange, though. He even wanted to smack himself in the mouth. Is my brain still not working properly yet?

Bi Linglong blushed. "You already saved me so many times before, so I saved you this time. Don't think too much about it."

Zu An burst out laughing. Mi Li asked in a strange tone, "What are you laughing about?"

Zu An replied, "I remembered a joke from the past. If a young miss encountered danger in the outside world and was saved by a man, if that man were ugly, she would say, 'I'm afraid I cannot repay the young master's life-saving grace; I will work hard in my next life, in gratitude for your kindness.' But if that man were as handsome as me, then she would say, 'I'm afraid I cannot repay the young master's life-saving grace; I can only devote myself to you.'"

Mi Li and Bi Linglong were speechless.

Bi Linglong immediately began to cry. "Did you have to say such degrading things..."

Mi Li also felt that Zu An had crossed the line.

Zu An sighed and said, "Linglong, you were the one who saved my life, so I'm that young miss who was saved! You're that hero, so I only want to tell you right now... I'm afraid that I cannot repay you for saving my life; I can only devote myself to you."

Bi Linglong's tears turned into laughter when she heard him praise her that way. "You really are annoying! If I knew it was going to be like this, I should've just ordered those guards to beat you down back then when I first met you."

Women might not remember the men who made them laugh, but they would definitely remember the men who made them cry. She really wanted to bite him right now.

Zu An took her hand with a smile. "You really did have a high and aloof appearance when we first met. I was almost dragged down and beaten several dozen times!"

Bi Linglong blushed when she recalled the past too. Times really changed... Back then, she had only planned to teach him a lesson; but he had never been beaten, and she was instead the one that had been pounded many times by his rod...

Mi Li rolled her eyes when she saw that the two's hands had already unknowingly linked together. This brat really was a master at coaxing girls. No wonder those ridiculously beautiful girls all loved to be around him! Pah, filthy playboy!

After Zu An pacified Bi Linglong, he turned around and gave Mi Li a strange look. "Why do I remember that you came inside of my body earlier?"

Suddenly Mi Li's finger thrust out and knocked Bi Linglong out.

"What are you doing?" Zu An jumped in fright.

"What, you already feel sorry for her? Hmph..." Mi Li paused for a moment. She had wanted to say 'Did you already forget about the others because you met a new girl?' But she had quickly realized that sounded inappropriate. "I don't want her to hear what I'm about to tell you."

Zu An calmed down when he heard that. After all, Mi Li's existence was a secret in itself.

Mi Li hesitated before saying, "I think it'd be best if we just silenced her. This dungeon trip has been so chaotic. It wouldn't be strange if she died here too."

Zu An immediately replied in a panic, "No way, no way! Her identity is special and she's the crown princess! If she died and I was the only one who returned, the emperor would never let me go!"

"Isn't that Zhao Ruizhi out there enough?" Mi Li rolled her eyes. "Forget it, I already knew you wouldn't be willing to do that. But with my current state, it would be hard for me to make her forget about my existence. I just can't really feel at ease."

"What's wrong?" Zu An asked out of concern.

"Your body was about to break down earlier, so I stabilized your condition in your place." Mi Li blushed. Even though she had always been rather strong-willed, something like that still made her embarrassed. She quickly changed the topic. "It's honestly all your fault. I always end up using a huge amount of soul force to save you whenever I finally manage to recover a good bit of my strength. I have no choice but to go back to sleeping."

Zu An's attention was successfully diverted. "Is it really bad?" he asked.

"I won't die, but I'll have to sleep for a period of time." Mi Li's tone was rather gloomy.

The Yin Yang Five Elements Formation hadn't actually drained too much of her strength; it had mainly been used on Zu An. The rebound of Keyboard Come was too powerful. For the sake of stopping Zu An's body from breaking down, she had almost lost her own life in the process.

Now that Zu An had woken up, she felt at ease again. But just as she finally loosened up, a powerful feeling of weakness had attacked her.

"Don't worry about me. How do you feel right now?" Mi Li was still a bit worried and asked again to confirm Zu An's status.

Zu An examined his own body. "Ying Zheng left behind the lower half of the Primordial Origin Sutra in my sea of consciousness. I've already reached the fourth layer."

Mi Li nodded in praise. "Your aptitude is incredibly rare. You were actually able to learn such a profound art so quickly!"

Zu An thought to himself, I didn't really learn it myself, it was the Keyboard System that asked him if I wanted to learn it. All I had to do was tap yes. Of course, reaching the fourth layer was still due to his own efforts.

Mi Li continued, "Once the Primordial Origin Sutra reaches the fourth layer, you can send your primordial ki into the bodies of others, helping them treat difficult illnesses. In other words, as long as you want to, you can already become a divine physician."

"A divine physician?" Zu An became excited. Wasn't that something else he could brag about? Didn't everyone from the city back home want their sons to become doctors?

"Doesn't that mean I can treat others without doing 'that' in the future?" Zu An suddenly thought of something. Even though the old treatment method felt amazing, he always felt like a scoundrel whenever he brought it up. Let alone if he ended up running into a man... It was entirely possible for him to have brothers and seniors he would want to save.

Mi Li shook her head. "The fourth layer of the Primordial Origin Sutra only makes you a doctor; it doesn't make you a deity. If you really encounter another instance like Chu Chuyan's situation back then, the fourth layer won't be enough. You'll still need to use that method."

"That's too bad." Zu An sighed.

"Why do I see a smirk then?" Mi Li ruthlessly exposed him.

"What? Me? I never did that. Don't say false things." Zu An immediately refuted her several times in a row.

"Whatever, enough already." Mi Li already understood his nature; she didn't feel like arguing about such a thing. She asked him about some other things before she finally felt at ease. "Alright, I'm going to get some sleep first. I'll leave the rest to you." She turned into a wisp of smoke and disappeared into the Tai'e Sword.

Zu An looked worried. Unfortunately, there wasn't anything he could do about Mi Li's current situation. He searched through the Brilliant Glass Bead and sighed in relief when he saw that the Eternal Spring Flower was still there. He had to gather the other ingredients as quickly as possible and help Mi Li reforge her body; she wouldn't have to go through so much then.

Zu An was about to wake Bi Linglong, but he suddenly thought of something. He sat down and examined his body's interior. When the Primordial Origin Sutra was completed, there seemed to have been a reminder that a new system had been activated. Of course, back then, he wasn't in any state to pay attention to such things.

He checked the message and learned that the new system unlocked was the 'Shop'. The Shop had actually been open before, but it wasn't complete back then. There had only been a few items available for purchase.

The shop was now filled with all sorts of new things, immediately grabbing Zu An's interest. He skimmed through the available stock and discovered that the goods were divided into several major categories.

There were sparkling weapons everywhere. These weapons were practically all heaven grade, and any one of them could serve as the heirloom of a small clan. In the realm of warriors, they would become even more illustrious weapons of slaughter.

But compared to Zu An's Tai'e Sword, Poisonous Prick, and Immortal Beheading Knives, even though two of them weren't in their perfect state, the heaven grade weapons were still less valuable. As such, that category wasn't too interesting for Zu An.

But fortunately, he noticed a small row of text stating that the equipment there could be used on his valkyries. I guess it's not completely useless then, he thought to himself. Daji's weapon suited her quite well right now, but he might need to get something for a future valkyrie.

He continued scrolling. Another major category was 'Materials'. There were all kinds of strange things, many of which he had never even heard of before.

### **Chapter 891, Part 2: New Function Unlocked**

Included among the items were things like Taotie Horns and Dragon Scales.

Zu An was alarmed. So he could have just purchased these things from the Shop! He had been worried that as Daji's skill rank increased, he would need more and more Ki Condensation Pills, Dragon Scales, Taotie Horns, and silver. Silver wasn't too big of a problem, but the other things weren't so readily available! What if he couldn't find the materials needed for the ranking up of other valkyries?

But with the Shop, that problem would easily be solved. He glanced over at the Taotie Horn's selling price. The goods sold here were all purchased through Rage points. He had saved up a good amount since the last time he pulled the lottery system.

But when he saw the string of 0s behind the price, he cursed, "This is a fucking scam!" Do you think it was easy for me to earn these Rage points? Look at the number of 0s behind every single item! Fuck, not even the currency in Zimbabwe was devalued to this extent, right?!

He became gloomy and skipped straight over that section. The next items in line were some more familiar goods, such as Ki Fruits, Marrow Cleansing Pills, and all kinds of ores.

Zu An was shocked. In Shang Liuyu's class in Brightmoon Academy, he had learned that many ores were actually quite precious. They were essential for the creation of high level weapons. He hadn't expected the Shop to have them for exchange. However, the amount of Rage points needed to purchase these ores was also considerable.

He continued to look around. There was only a single item in the fourth category: Tiger Talismans. These were the Tiger Talismans used to pull the Valkyrie System!

"I can buy Tiger Talismans?!" Zu An's eyes lit up. He wouldn't have to do a thing in the future if he pulled a few more valkyries! He'd just throw his harem at the enemy. Even if they couldn't win, they'd defeat the enemy with their beauty.

He almost drooled when he thought of that. He had only saved up 431,472 Rage points so far, however, which was only enough to buy six Tiger Talismans.

But the chance of actually pulling a valkyrie was incredibly low. And with just six talismans, he might not get a single thing. Zu An quickly realized that exchanging for anything directly from the Shop was a pretty bad deal for him... It was better to try and obtain the things present, such as the Taotie Horns, Dragon Scales, and Ki Condensation Pills, through other means.

Zu An's pounding heart calmed down when he understood that, and he continued scrolling. His eyes widened when he saw the last category. He hadn't expected it to be titled 'Apparel'! There were some smaller characters that explained that the clothing in that category could be used by valkyries.

Zu An had tried all sorts of things after he obtained Daji. Even though she had carried out all sorts of orders for him, anything intimate was immediately rejected. Not even simple things like holding hands were allowed.

As for clothing, even touching was out of the question. Back then, Zu An had purchased all kinds of pretty dresses hoping that she would change into them, but she had completely ignored him. She had only looked at him as if he were a complete idiot.

"What the hell? Who the heck would spend that much for a stupid outfit?" Zu An sneered. So what if those valkyries would change clothes if he bought these for them? It was just for looks anyway. Furthermore, their original clothing looked pretty good too, and they seemed to have anti-dust runes on them or something. Those clothes never got dirty and could be worn for the rest of their lives.

The clothes offered in the Shop didn't even grant any skills or assistance in battle. Only a moron would buy these clothes! Zu An firmly made the decision not to.

Even so, he was still worried that he might have missed out on something, so he decided to take a look at the clothes first. However, his eyes widened as soon as he checked out the pieces available. His breathing became rushed as well.

"Wait... There seems to be much less material used in these outfits..."

"Won't their thighs be showing if they wear this?"

"You should be able to see more of her cleavage with this one, right..."

...

When he saw the last outfit, he was stupefied. It was a black-laced bikini!

"I swear, the creator of this system is a damn pervert!"

Zu An couldn't take his eyes off of that outfit. He thought to himself, I have to get at least one set of these clothes, right? It's not that I want to see her in a bikini or anything, I'm just trying to save the keyboard system cloth.

He completely forgot about his firm and decisive choice from a moment before. He clicked the purchase button without any hesitation.

However, a row of characters immediately showed up on the screen: 'Insufficient Rage points!'

"Damn it!" Zu An gritted his teeth. This thing was actually that expensive?!

Ten, one hundred, one thousand, ten thousand, one hundred thousand, one million... He didn't even feel like counting the 0s anymore after a certain point.

"Forget it, everything needs Rage points. I'll hold off on this for now." Zu An continued to console himself. However, he still glanced reluctantly at that outfit in the shop window from time to time, imagining just how amazing Daji would look in it.

Zu An returned to reality and began to think about the purpose of the shop's existence. According to what he had just seen, he noticed that the Shop didn't have many things that could make him stronger. Its goods seemed to mainly be for the valkyries. "Looks like the valkyries have a lot of potential there... Ahem, potential for growth."

After understanding that point, he realized that the Shop wasn't too useful for him at the moment, so he decided not to pay too much attention to it. There was another problem he had to tackle.

Zu An undid the seal on Bi Linglong's fainting acupoint. The beauty in his arms groaned and slowly opened her eyes. Her red phoenix eyes were usually awe-inspiring and majestic, but now, those eyes looked delicate and charming.

"I... What happened to me?" Bi Linglong saw Zu An looking at her up close as soon as she opened her eyes. Her heart pounded crazily.

"You might have been too tired." Zu An used a random excuse. Bi Linglong quickly recalled what the two of them had done. Her face flushed bright red.

Zu An realized the implications behind what he had just said. However, he didn't plan to explain anything and instead said, "Linglong, you're amazing."

Bi Linglong couldn't keep looking at him, and turned her head away. Zu An was used to seeing her proud and mighty appearance. This was a rare bashful side of her. He felt his heart stir, and couldn't help but lower his head for a kiss.

Bi Linglong instinctively wanted to evade him, but she immediately remembered that the two of them already had a physical relationship, so there was no need for her to evade this. As such, she slowly closed her eyes. Her long eyelashes fluttered gently, exposing just how hard her heart was pounding.

Zu An kissed her. He hadn't expected her lips to be that soft. There was even a bit of sweetness. Bi Linglong moaned while leaning her entire body against him, as soft as cotton. Once her defenses were broken, it was hard for her to resist the man she had given everything to.

Zu An had acted without thinking just then. Now that he had recovered a bit of his rationality, he immediately wanted to experience 'that' seriously again.

Bi Linglong's status was special, and she was rather prideful by nature. When had anyone ever done such a thing to her? She was completely defeated by Zu An's proficient skills. She leaned gently into his embrace and looked as if she were ready to let him do anything he wanted.

Just then, Zhao Ruizhi's naive and simple voice came from outside. "Linglong? Linglong, where are you? I'm scared..." His voice sounded wronged and helpless.

Bi Linglong's body went rigid. She instinctively sat up and pushed away the man beside her.

Zu An was a bit unhappy. This damn fatty could have woken up earlier or later; why did he have to wake up just now? He rushed outside the room, and Zhao Ruizhi's voice stopped.

When he returned, Bi Linglong couldn't help but ask, "What did you do to him?"

Zu An replied, "Don't worry, I just knocked him out for a bit. Why don't we continue where we left off?"

Bi Linglong's face turned red. However, she still firmly shook her head. Zu An saw that she had already fixed her messy clothes and knew that there was no chance today. As such, he had some more 'nice things' to say to that damn fatty inwardly.

"Let's talk about what we should do now." Bi Linglong looked extremely worried.

"How about we just get rid of that stupid fatty, and then the two of us will elope?" Zu An asked with a smile.

"I can't." Bi Linglong quickly shook her head. "Even though I don't have feelings for him, we're still husband and wife in name. Just now... I've already let him down, so how can I kill him?"

Zu An smiled. How could someone like her, who had been raised with the etiquette of a noble, be able to do what Pan Jinlian and Ximen Qing from their story... Pah pah pah! I'm no Ximen Qing[1]!

"But things will become tricky if we don't kill him," Zu An reminded her. He didn't want to kill Zhao Ruizhi and then go on the run either, though. After all, there were still so many lovely friends waiting for him! But he couldn't really say that for fear of Bi Linglong feeling that he didn't care about her, so he could only put on an act.

Fortunately, Bi Linglong's reply wasn't anything unexpected. "If his majesty's split soul hadn't perished, I would've run as far away as I could. But his split soul has been devoured by that weird octopus, so that gives us some room to work with." She hesitated a bit at first, but she calmed down the more she spoke. She clearly already had some plans.

She had always been the one managing the Eastern Palace for many years. She felt she was already more than halfway to her goal, and obviously didn't want to abandon everything she had at the capital.

"What happened here is easy to explain, but it might not be so easy to deceive the emperor," Zu An said gravely. To be honest, that old and tricky bastard of an emperor was incredibly tough to deal with."

Bi Linglong moved over to his ear and whispered, "I have a plan. Let's do this..."

## **Chapter 892: I Think You Did That on Purpose!**

Even though there was no one present, Bi Linglong still subconsciously lowered her voice because they were talking about something so important.

As he felt her breath against his ear, Zu An felt more and more at ease. A young lady's aura really is gentle and nice. He turned around and gave her lips a peck. Bi Linglong jumped back like a startled rabbit while clutching her mouth with her hand. She stared at him in annoyance.

Zu An exclaimed with a laugh, "Linglong, you really are incredible! Your plan is just way too good."

Her method was pretty much the same as what he'd had in mind, but it was even more detailed. Many of the finer points were even better thought out than his own plan. If they really acted according to her plan, there would actually be a huge chance of making it through this ordeal.

Bi Linglong forgot about his teasing when she heard Zu An's praise. She had a big smile on her face. After all, how could she have lasted this long in the Eastern Palace without any skills?

"There is another problem, though." Zu An paused for a moment. He looked at her charming face and said, "You've already lost your virginity. You won't be able to escape death if Zhao Han finds out. After all, he's always seen you as his future wife."

This world still had many ways of testing one's virginity if they really wanted to know.

Bi Linglong blushed. She bit her lip and said, "You don't have to worry about that. I have a way of hiding it."

Zu An was stunned. You can even hide something like that?

After Bi Linglong explained the situation, Zu An learned that she actually had a special artifact that could fake a similar state. The reason why no one had noticed that she had never consummated her marriage in the Eastern Palace even after so long was precisely because of that artifact. She could use it for the opposite effect as well, to hide the fact that she had done the deed.

Afterward, the two of them sorted out some details, then prepared to wake Zhao Ruizhi up to 'tell' him what happened. He was a witness, after all. There would definitely be people who would ask him about what had happened once they went back out.

However, Zu An suddenly stepped backward, looking Bi Linglong up and down.

"What?" Bi Linglong was a bit embarrassed. She wasn't used to being looked at like that.

Zu An moved his hand gently through her smooth and glossy hair. "Your hair is too beautiful right now. Zhao Ruizhi saw that your hair became white, and that you were seriously injured from using that forbidden technique. Zhao Han will be suspicious."

"But it's already black; it's not easy to change it back to white. Do we have any dyes?" Bi Linglong was worried. Furthermore, even if there were a dye to use, it still wouldn't escape Zhao Han's eyes.

Zu An looked at her and asked, "Do you trust me?"

Bi Linglong said impatiently, "Don't you know that I... I already gave you everything! Why are you still asking me something like that?"

"Then you have to relax and not be nervous. Trust me," Zu An said while holding her hand.

Bi Linglong's face turned red. Even though the two of them had already had the most intimate physical relationship, everything had happened too quickly. She still wasn't used to it yet.

She was just about to pull her hands back when she suddenly felt a wave of suction force from Zu An's hands. She immediately became incredibly weak. She could clearly feel her cultivation and life essence rapidly leaving her.



She stared at Zu An with wide eyes. In that instant, countless possibilities flashed through her mind, but in the end, the only thing that remained was 'trust me'.

A while later, Zu An let go and asked, "How do you feel?"

"Not great." Bi Linglong's voice was a bit hoarse. She felt incredibly weak, as if she would fall over at a moment's notice.

Zu An said, "I absorbed some of your life essence. It's normal for you to feel weak."

Bi Linglong was stunned. She suddenly thought of something and touched her hair. Sure enough, her beautiful black hair was now already slightly gray. She bit her lip. Tears trickled out from her eyes. What woman didn't want to be beautiful? Furthermore, losing what she had just regained was just too painful.

Zu An quickly consoled her. "Linglong, don't worry. This is only temporary to convince the emperor. I'll slowly return this life essence back to you. Once you're back in the Eastern Palace and receive all kinds of medicines and treatment, it won't be suspicious even if you recover later."

Bi Linglong blinked. There were still droplets around her eyelashes as she asked, "How are you going to return it?"

Zu An replied with a smile, "Did you forget how your white hair became black again?"

Bi Linglong was stunned. Then, she became incredibly embarrassed, exclaiming, "Did you do that on purpose?!"

Zu An cried out, aggrieved. "Of course not! It's all for the sake of deceiving the emperor!"

Bi Linglong gritted her teeth. Her reason told her that only something like this could deceive the emperor. But when she remembered the way he had healed her, her young lady side couldn't accept it.

"Forget it, you don't have to return it. I'll rest and slowly recover back in the palace." Bi Linglong was still too embarrassed to agree to something so embarrassing in the end.

Zu An chuckled. He didn't feel a need to keep bickering over this matter. "Then I'll go and wake up Zhao Ruizhi now, okay?"

"Okay..." Bi Linglong saw Zu An begin to mess up his clothes. Then, he found some blood and smeared it on his body, making himself look even more miserable.

Zu An's body had actually been covered in wounds before, but he had already recovered from those injuries. That was why he had to use such a disguise.

Bi Linglong naturally knew why he was doing those things. She sighed in admiration. This man always seemed so frivolous normally, but he was actually so meticulous.

Zu An brought the now conscious Zhao Ruizhi in. Bi Linglong's expression couldn't help but look a bit unnatural when she saw him again, so she let Zu An 'recount' everything that had happened so far. She only added a few things here and there.

The group decided to look for the way out after giving Zhao Ruizhi the whole story. Zu An actually wanted to loot the place once more, however, since it was the ancestral court of the Qin Dynasty. There were definitely many treasures present.

But no one expected the world to start shaking before he even began. Everything began to break apart. After both Xu Fu and Ying Zheng had perished, some important core substance had disappeared from the dungeon. It could no longer remain together and began to break apart. The fact that it hadn't done so the moment those two died was already a testament to the place's excellent engineering.

Helpless to do anything about it, Zu An could only carry Bi Linglong in one hand and Zhao Ruizhi in the other. He jumped from side to side across floating chunks of land to avoid repeating the tragedy of the world's inversion.

Fortunately, he already had prior, so it wasn't too difficult this time. Furthermore, the world didn't invert itself for too long this time. After half a day or so, Westhound Tomb completely vanished. It was replaced with the previous, familiar dungeon again.

Bi Linglong sighed in amazement when she saw the lush and beautiful scenery around her. "This really is a marvel... I thought it would be doomsday for this world."

Zu An really couldn't understand the principles behind it either. Even if this world wasn't destroyed, shouldn't it at least be in tatters? Why does it seem as if nothing has happened at all?!

"I want to go home! I want to go back to the palace!" Zhao Ruizhi threw a tantrum. This trip wasn't fun at all! He could eat good things, and he could sleep and play whenever he wanted back home.

Zu An and Bi Linglong didn't want to stay any longer either. The group retraced their steps to the entrance they remembered. Soon afterward, they suddenly saw a group of men rush in their direction. The men clearly saw them as well, and they all cheered.

A streak of red light flashed through the air, and one man instantly appeared in front of Zu An's group, exclaiming, "Crown prince, crown princess!" He was naturally the Embroidered Envoy Chief Commander, Zhuxie Chixin. Now that the dungeon had recovered, he had rushed in with his men at once.

This matter was far too important, so he hadn't let anyone from King Qi Manor come in. Even the academy's people were still outside. All of them had low expectations for the survival of the crown prince's party. That was why they wouldn't look for trouble by acting out here. That was also why Zhuxie Chixin was so happy to see the crown prince and princess.

Just then, Zu An said hoarsely, "Chief Commander, I'm fortunate to not have failed my mission. I was able to bring back the crown prince and princess safely." After saying that, he 'fainted' from weakness. A group of people immediately rushed over to examine him.

Bi Linglong was amazed deep down. This guy really had a talent for acting! Hmph, how many times was I tricked by this dummy before?

But jokes were jokes. She still knew what she had to do. She cleared her throat and said promptly, "For the sake of protecting us, Sir Zu slaughtered his way through endless enemies and has suffered grave injuries. Provide him with treatment at once!"

If the others viewed Zu An in that light, the following events would become much easier.

Zhuxie Chixin quickly ordered his subordinates to take care of the matter. However, he suddenly realized something. He looked at Bi Linglong in shock. "Crown princess, why is your hair..."

"It's a long story. I need to meet with his majesty," Bi Linglong said. Proactively asking to meet with the emperor was completely different from being summoned by the emperor. That way, others would subconsciously believe that her loyalty was with the emperor, that they were on the same side.

Zhuxie Chixin nodded. "His majesty is already waiting in the palace. He ordered us to return immediately if we made any discoveries."

Bi Linglong took a deep breath. Whether or not they could make it past this trial would depend on the following event.

The 'unconscious' Zu An's expression was also grave. Even though the two of them had already predicted all sorts of situations, neither of them knew what would really happen.

### **Chapter 893, Part 1: Interrogation**

Zhuxie Chixin glanced into the distance. He asked quietly, "Crown princess, are there any other survivors?"

Bi Linglong shook her head. "There's no one else with us. However, our group scattered earlier, so I'm not too sure."

"Then it looks like there are none." Zhuxie Chixin nodded. "I only found the Liu clan's Gao Ying, Pei clan's Pei You, and two Eastern Palace guards. For some reason, they were all hanging from trees and heavily injured. We already sent them back to be treated at the imperial hospital."

Bi Linglong was surprised and replied, "Then I've troubled Chief Commander." She wondered if those people knew the truth.

But when she remembered that they had already separated back then, that they couldn't know about what had happened afterward, she sighed in relief.

The 'unconscious' Zu An sighed inwardly. The two Eastern Palace guards had to be Jiao Sigun and Piao Duandiao. Even though their cultivation ranks weren't high, their luck really wasn't bad! They had actually survived even after experiencing so much danger!

But that was definitely a happy thing. He had even been feeling a bit ashamed that he wasn't able to properly take care of them.

Zhuxie Chixin left behind some subordinates to search for other survivors, then escorted Bi Linglong's group out of the dungeon with most of his men. Now that he had found the crown prince and princess, his mission was already complete. As for whether or not he could find the others, he didn't care that much.

There was a large group raising their heads and looking around outside the dungeon entrance. Everything boded ill for the crown prince's party after what had just happened in the dungeon. If his party had been wiped out, that meant that no one would be able to compete against King Qi anymore.

As for the emperor's other sons, without the status of being the eldest son, they weren't even worth mentioning in front of King Qi. Many great subjects had egged on the crown prince and showed their support over the years. They couldn't just switch to a new patron immediately.

Those from King Qi's side felt as if the war had already been won, that everything was beautiful. But they were all skilled politicians. Even though they were smiling inwardly, they looked broken-hearted on the surface. They didn't give their political enemies any weaknesses to exploit.

However, there were people among the large group who were truly grief-stricken. A handsome young man stared ahead with reddened eyes, tears continuously trickling down his cheeks. Who else could it be but Chu Youzhao?

"Big brother Chu, please don't worry too much. Big brother Zu is capable and outstanding; I'm sure he'll be fine," Murong Qinghe said in consolation.

A nearby person from the Murong clan muttered, "Why is he crying for nothing? You're acting like a girl."

"You don't know anything! This is called being in tune with his emotions; he's a man full of emotions! He's nothing like all of you who have muscles for brains!" Murong Qinghe shot that person a look as she gently consoled Chu Youzhao.

Chu Youzhao felt as if her heart had become ice cold. She had always been waiting outside. She had constantly been hearing predictions and analyses about what was happening inside the dungeon, but what all of them had in common was that a world-destroying calamity had happened inside. No matter how high her brother-in-law's cultivation was, everything pointed to a disaster...

The people from the academy shared her concern. Xie Daoyun asked Jiang Luofu with a look of worry, "Ms. Jiang, do you think big brother Zu is still alive?"

Xie Xie's mouth widened. If he had seen his big sister like this at any other time, he would have cursed Zu An for not having any sisters, feeling that he was losing out greatly in that respect. But at that moment, he couldn't even bring himself to think about such things.

Jiang Luofu was also quite stressed. "You've kept asking me these questions these past few days; how am I supposed to know? No one knows more about the dungeon than Ms. Qi. Go and ask her."

Xie Daoyun looked at Qi Yaoguang anxiously. Qi Yaoguang scratched her hair and said, "The space inside was chaotic, so I couldn't check what was inside either. But now that the dungeon has been opened again, Commander Zhuxie and the others have already gone in. I'm sure they'll reach a conclusion soon."

Even though her impression of Zu An wasn't bad, that was it. The two of them hadn't known each other for that long or shared deeper feelings. If he died inside, she would feel a bit of regret, but she'd get over it after a few days. Comparatively speaking, she was more interested in what had happened to the dungeon and what exactly had caused it. She wanted to know if there was anything they could do to prevent this kind of thing from happening in the future, or at least be more prepared for it should it happen again.

Jiang Luofu patted Xie Daoyun's shoulder and said, "Don't worry. He has the chess piece Hei Baizi gave him, and he even has that Last Breath Talisman you gave him. He should be able to come out ahead even if he does encounter any danger."

Even though she consoled Xie Daoyun that way, she didn't have any confidence in that regard either. After all, the entire world inside had been destroyed! What could those things do for him in such a situation?

Suddenly, the spatial elements by the entrance rippled. Qi Yaoguang stood up and said, "People are coming out."

Those present had been paying close attention to the entrance. When they saw that, they all rushed over. Fortunately, the Embroidered Envoy was present to maintain order, and didn't allow them to get too close and secretly try anything.

Zhuxie Chixin and the others came out soon afterward. When they saw a chubby body emerge, those from the crown prince's faction were stunned at first, but then they all erupted into cheers.

To be honest, even they had already thought that Zhao Ruizhi had died. After all, something so big had happened inside the dungeon. Even if a master rank cultivator went inside, only death would await them. How could an idiot like the crown prince survive?

The crown prince's faction had been left in low spirits. Some of them had even already been considering how to change sides. How could they not become emotional when they saw him return safely?

Those from King Qi Manor were shocked. The smiles they'd had just a second before froze on their faces as shock overwhelmed them. "How is that possible? How can he still be alive?!" There were trusted aides among them who knew more details. Even if the dungeon hadn't collapsed, the crown prince should have died inside. How had he come out alive?

Even though the crown prince's face was dirty and his clothes were tattered, and he had many injuries, his life wasn't in danger. No, not only that, he was throwing a tantrum and shouting that he wanted to eat the capital's pastries right now.

Unlike those from King Qi Manor's faction, who looked as if their family members had just died, those from the crown prince's faction were beaming and screaming in happiness.

The Bi clan master, Bi Qi, rushed over to his daughter. "Linglong, are you injured? Huh? Your hair..."

The crown prince was alive, but if the crown princess had died, the Bi clan's many years of hard work would have only benefited another.

Bi Linglong shook her head. "I'm fine. I'll explain things to you later, father."

Bi Qi wanted to ask more questions, but Chu Youzhao had already shoved her way over, crying, "Where is my brother-in-law? Crown princess, where is my brother in law?!"

When she saw how panicked Chu Youzhao was, Bi Linglong thought to herself that Zu An's relationship with him really was good. But for some reason, the words 'brother-in-law' really stung. Before she could even decide whether to reply or not, however, Chu Youzhao saw Zu An on a stretcher toward the back of the procession.

“Brother-in-law!” Chu Youzhao ran over while sobbing. Zu An was lying there, not moving at all. Was he already dead?

The ‘unconscious’ Zu An sighed inwardly. This little sister-in-law of his wasn’t so bad after all. She was crying to the point that even he was feeling bad. He wanted to tell her that he was fine through ki transmission, but when he remembered that this kid was really bad at acting and couldn’t hide her real thoughts at all, he could only silently apologize to her and abandon that thought.

Meanwhile, Jiang Luofu and Xie Daoyun also came over. However, they showed much more restraint and didn’t shove their way over while crying like Chu Youzhao. They waited quietly off to the side, waiting for a reply.

Zhuxie Chixin immediately walked over and stopped everyone. “I’m going to bring them back to the imperial palace first. His majesty has summoned them himself. Before then, those uninvolved aren’t allowed to get close to them.”

Chu Youzhao was stunned. She picked up something from his words and asked, “My brother-in-law isn’t dead?”

Zhuxie Chixin didn’t want to reply. He still had his duty, after all. He had to uphold a level of confidentiality before he received further instructions from the emperor.

It was Bi Linglong who replied instead. “Don’t worry, his life isn’t in danger. He was just wounded quite badly from saving me and the crown prince.”

The eyes of the entire capital were aimed in their direction at that moment. She spoke about Zu An’s contributions again in front of all those present. After having been in the palace for so long, she didn’t even bat an eyelid when telling lies anymore. No one present sensed anything strange.

Chu Youzhao finally relaxed when she heard Bi Linglong’s explanation. But she quickly replied, “My brother-in-law is wounded so badly, but you aren’t taking him to see a doctor, and instead bringing him to the imperial palace for an interrogation? You’re all heartless!”

Zhuxie Chixin said with a snort, “This is his majesty’s personal decree. Are you opposing his decree?”

Chu Youzhao wanted to say something else, but Murong Qinghe immediately stopped her, saying, “Big brother Chu, don’t worry. The imperial palace’s doctors are even better.”

Things would be really, really bad if Chu Youzhao ended up saying something disrespectful to his majesty! Everyone in the capital knew that his majesty’s mood hadn’t been too great. Several subjects had made slight mistakes that usually wouldn’t have mattered at all, but because they had incurred the emperor’s anger, they had been punished severely.

If her big brother Chu angered the emperor, there would be nothing good waiting for her at all. Fortunately, Murong Qinghe was able to convince Chu Youzhao. Chu Youzhao decided not to push the issue any further when she thought about the skill level of the imperial physicians.

Jiang Luofu, Xie Daoyun, and the others sighed in relief as well. With how things stood, it wasn’t proper for them to step forward and say anything.

King Liang Zhaoyi roared, “Where is my son, Zhao Xi?!”

"I don't see Xian'er either," came Guard General Liu Yao's voice.

"My clan's Meng Pan isn't here either!" Central Secretariat Supervisor Meng Yi also cried out in alarm.

### **Chapter 893, Part 2: Interrogation**

They had seen a group of people leave the dungeon one after another, but they didn't see any of their own disciples. All of them finally lost their composure.

Bi Linglong opened her mouth, but she didn't say anything in the end. There were too many things that had happened inside; she couldn't explain it properly in just a few words. There were many things she couldn't say here either.

Fortunately, Zhuxie Chixin stepped forward to stop them. Then, he escorted the party back to the imperial palace with his trusted aides.

...

When they arrived at the imperial palace, Zu An and Bi Linglong were separated. After all, Bi Linglong was the only clear-headed person who had survived from this trip. Zhao Ruizhi, that stupid fatty, didn't count. The emperor would immediately question her about what happened.

Bi Linglong was a bit frightened at first, but when she walked past Zu An, she received some ki transmissions from him. She gradually calmed down.

Someone came to check on Zu An's condition soon after Bi Linglong left. That person sat down next to him and checked his pulse. He was clearly a physician.

"How is he?" the guard Zhuxie Chixin had left behind asked.

That physician didn't reply immediately. After studying Zu An's vitals for a while, he said, "His internal energies are a mess, and his injuries are extremely serious. He needs to rest for a long time. Furthermore, even if he recovers from his injuries, an injury of this level will influence his cultivation. He probably won't ever be able to recover all of his cultivation."

Zu An sighed in relief. It seemed he really had managed to deceive the physician after all. With his current cultivation, it wasn't too difficult to imitate some serious injuries. However, he had still been a bit worried because the doctors from the imperial hospital were highly skilled. There had been a chance for something to go wrong here.

"It's that serious?" The guard jumped in fright. After all, one's cultivation was just as important as one's very life! Furthermore, since the doctor had said that Zu An would never recover up to his previous level of cultivation, that also meant there would be no chance of ever increasing his cultivation from today on.

Even though this Zu An had his flaws, he had an outstanding strong point, which was that he already had such powerful cultivation at such a young age. There was almost no one who could compare to him among his peers! If he continued to grow, reaching the master rank would just be a matter of time. Once he reached the master rank, and furthermore at such a young age, he might even receive a noble title!

But now, all of that was already hopeless. The world had never lacked geniuses, but neither did it lack geniuses who had been ruined prematurely.

"I'll prescribe him some medicine for now. Sir Zu's current condition absolutely requires rest. He can't be allowed to fight against anyone for a long time, or else his meridians will break down, turning him into a cripple," the physician warned.

The guard voiced his affirmation. The room became quiet again. Only the sounds of the physician preparing medicine could be heard.

A while later, the door opened with a groan. Zhuxie Chixin asked from the other side, "How is he?"

The guard repeated what the physician had just told him.

"Then when will he wake up?" Zhuxie Chixin asked with a frown.

"Three days at the earliest. Half a month is to be expected," the physician replied.

Zhuxie Chixin shook his head. "We can't wait that long. His majesty is going to ask him some questions soon. Are there any medicines that can wake him up?"

After some hesitation, the doctor said, "There are, but such strong drugs will only worsen his body's condition. Sir Zu's condition is also very poor, so it might worsen his injuries. There's some danger to his life..."

"His majesty is currently waiting in the study. Why don't you explain that to him?" Zhuxie Chixin gave him a cold look.

The physician shivered. He immediately changed his tone. "I'll prepare the drug immediately. Chief Commander, please wait a moment."

He had only spoken those words out of his kindness as a doctor. However, he couldn't throw his life away because of a bit of kindness. Kindness was the most worthless thing in this man-eating imperial palace.

Zu An cursed inwardly when he heard those words. This Zhuxie Chixin calls me 'sworn brother' normally, and yet he doesn't even hesitate to throw me under the bus as soon as something like this comes up!

Even though it was the emperor who had pressured him, it wasn't as if he had no other choice. However, Zhuxie Chixin had chosen the most brute force method. Everyone in the capital claimed that Zhuxie Chixin was the emperor's most loyal dog. Indeed, that seemed to be the case.

Soon afterward, the physician carried over a bowl of medicine. A servant had already propped Zu An up. The physician poured the drug into his mouth.

However, when the drug entered Zu An's body, it was surrounded by ki and slowly refined away. That way, it didn't harm his body. A while later, Zu An coughed violently, pretending to wake up from the drug's stimulation.

"Where... am I?" Zu An began his performance, looking around him blankly.



Zhuxie Chixin's cold expression was nowhere to be seen. There was a huge smile on his face as he moved closer, replying, "Brother Zu, this is the imperial palace! How do you feel?"

The guard and that physician looked straight down at the floor. They didn't utter a single thing.

Zu An sneered inwardly. If not for the fact that he had been pretending to be unconscious, he might have really been deceived. However, he also played along. "My entire body hurts. Also, I don't know what's going on, but my stomach feels as if it's burning."

The physician's lips twitched. However, he immediately stopped after Zhuxie Chixin shot him a fierce look.

Zhuxie Chixin said, "It might be the aftereffects of your wounds. His majesty is waiting for you in his study. How about we head over first? Afterward, this big bro will find some spiritual medicine for you to nurse your body."

Zu An forced out a smile. "I'll have to thank Chief Commander ahead of time then." After saying that, he got out of bed. However, he immediately staggered, as if he might fall at any time.

Zhuxie Chixin immediately supported him in alarm. "You're hurt too badly to walk properly. Men, carry Sir Zu to the imperial study!"

"Won't this be discourteous to the palace?" Zu An asked, pretending to be worried.

"It won't. You saved the crown prince and princess' lives. His majesty is incredibly happy right now, so why would he mind these details?" Zhuxie Chixin replied with a hearty laugh.

Zu An cursed inwardly. So you guys still remembered that I saved their lives! And yet you didn't even hesitate to force me awake through drugs. Do you even have any conscience?

...

Soon afterward, the group brought Zu An to the imperial study. After lowering his stretcher, even Zhuxie Chixin withdrew quietly. Only Zu An and the emperor remained in the room.

"I greet... greet your majesty." Zu An tottered as he tried to crawl to his feet. However, he failed even after trying several times.

"You're seriously wounded right now; there's no need for excessive formalities." Zhao Han's expression was overcast. He was more concerned with other things at the moment, so he obviously didn't care much about these pretenses.

"Thank you, your majesty," Zu An said 'gratefully'. At the same time, he secretly examined the other party.

The two of them had been at each other's throats inside the dungeon. In the past, the emperor's image of unrivaled power had already been starting to grow weaker to Zu An. Now, he already had the boldness and the right to face the emperor head-on.

Zhao Han frowned. He didn't really like how Zu An was looking at him. For some reason, after the dungeon, he felt a subconscious dislike for Zu An. But he just wrote that off as his poor mood over losing

his split soul and didn't pursue it further. He cleared his throat and b, "I heard that you saved the crown prince and princess' lives."

"I was only doing what I could, but my skills were still lacking. They still ended up being injured," Zu An replied.

"I see. What happened in the dungeon? Tell this emperor everything without skipping any details." The emperor straightened his body on the dragon throne, his gaze scorching as he stared at Zu An.

Zu An thought to himself, Zhao Han probably just asked Bi Linglong this question. Looks like Bi Linglong didn't reveal any openings. That girl is reliable in this aspect after all. Now, we just have to make sure that our confessions match up.

He pretended to think for a moment, then slowly said, "When we entered the dungeon, we didn't find the Jade Moon Serpent by Cold Jade Pond. We were forced to head deeper into the mountains..."

He spoke about the Gu clan brothers' betrayal, how Shi Tong had been mixed into their troop, and what had happened with the other young masters in full detail. There was no need to hide any of those things. Then, he talked about how after they had eliminated the Jade Moon Serpent, King Qi Manor's experts had suddenly shown up. Then, their group frantically ran for their lives. Just then, the world began to break down...

Ninety percent of what he said was the truth. The difference was that he had moved the appearance of Westhound Tomb up earlier. That would then explain how they were able to escape from the pursuit of King Qi Manor's master rank cultivators, as well as convince the emperor that Zhao Ruizhi hadn't had to expose his split soul yet.

Then, he told the emperor about his various encounters in Westhound Tomb, saying he had used the world's collapse to kill off those master rank cultivators. He said that he had only managed to barely stay alive through the use of the Royal Academy's Sacrificial Piece he had gotten from Hei Baizi, as well as the Last Breath Talisman he had gotten from Xie Daoyun.

The emperor nodded when he heard that. Bi Linglong hadn't talked about those details before, and things now made sense. Otherwise, Zu An's cultivation wouldn't have been enough to stop the encirclement of so many of King Qi Manor's experts.

Then, Zu An told the emperor that when they arrived on the final island, King Qi Manor's remaining experts had caught up. While Zu An's group was left feeling despair, an ancient formation was activated in the dungeon. A blood octopus monster came out and sucked all of King Qi Manor's experts dry.

No matter how firm the emperor's will was, his eyelids still couldn't help but twitch when he heard that. He asked, "And then?"

The only thing he cared about was how his split soul had died. Of course, all those who knew about the split soul had to die.

#### **Chapter 894: Video Recording Pendant**

Zu An said, "I don't know what happened afterward."

The emperor was perplexed. Zu An quickly explained, "When I saw how strong that octopus monster was, I knew I was no match and quickly left while protecting the crown prince and princess. I didn't expect that octopus monster to chase after us. I did everything I could, but I was still knocked out by a strike from its tentacle. When I woke up, only the crown prince and princess were left, while that octopus monster was nowhere to be seen."

The emperor fell silent. There were many parts where their stories didn't line up. However, most of it made sense. He would have actually suspected the two of them of colluding instead if they'd said the exact same thing.

Bi Linglong had said that after Zu An was knocked out, the octopus monster sent out endless tentacles. As she despaired, she suddenly saw golden light cover Zhao Ruizhi's entire body. Then, she was knocked out by a powerful shockwave and didn't know what happened afterward. When she woke up, the crown prince was covered in wounds, and that octopus monster had already disappeared.

Looks like that split soul died with that octopus monster... the emperor thought to himself. He felt that was the most logical conclusion. He also knew that his split soul's way of thinking was the same as his. With his nature, he knew that there was no way he would leave Zu An alive if he really had to expose himself.

On the contrary, if it were Bi Linglong, he could choose to make her faint first to leave her alive. After all, he was actually quite satisfied with this pretty and capable daughter-in-law. The relationships behind the clans were also complicated, so changing the crown princess would be a big headache.

But what kind of octopus monster could take down my split soul with it? Zhao Han felt that was outrageous. He asked a few more details, including information about the formation that had been activated and other such things.

Zu An replied to the questions one after another. He didn't tell the exact truth, but rather let the emperor deduce Xu Fu's identity and connection to the ancient dynasty himself.

That was just how people were. Anyone would subconsciously be on guard if they heard someone else tell them things, but if they reached the conclusion themselves, they would probably believe it.

Sure enough, the emperor deduced that the octopus monster had been a powerful ancient figure, and that it was for the sake of eternal life that such a malicious formation had been created.

No wonder it was able to take me down with it... What a pity it is that the dungeon has been destroyed. Otherwise, I would've gone there myself to see just how that monster planned to obtain eternal life. The emperor remained silent for a moment, then asked about many more details. His attention was primarily on the Yin Yang Five Elements Formation.

Zu An immediately picked up on that, but he didn't hide anything either. After all, five suitable elemental bodies were hard to find, let alone pure yin and yang bodies. Furthermore, that formation was so complex, and many of its materials were already extinct. The emperor couldn't recreate it even if he wanted to.

Eunuch Wen's voice suddenly emerged. "Your majesty, we've brought the item."

"Come in," The emperor said indifferently.

Eunuch Wen quickly walked in while carrying a jade pendant. His gaze remained fixed during the entire process, and he didn't even give Zu An, who was lying on the stretcher, a look.

Zu An frowned. Why does this jade pendant look a bit familiar?

The emperor received the pendant. At the same time, he asked, "How is the crown prince?"

Eunuch Wen replied, "He's injured, but the hospital staff has already treated him. However, he seems to have been scared quite badly. It might take him some time to recover."

Zu An was alarmed. He finally knew why that jade pendant was familiar. This was the pendant the crown prince carried on him! Why had the emperor taken it?

The emperor said, "Let him rest first and don't disturb him."

"Understood!" Eunuch Wen left the room when he saw that the emperor didn't have anything else to tell him. He even closed the door behind him when he left.

The emperor fiddled with the pendant, then suddenly said, "This pendant is something this emperor placed around the crown prince. I was hoping that if something happened to him, it could record the identity of the one who injured him. This emperor almost thought that it might never come in handy, and yet today, it has."

Zu An immediately felt as if he had sunk into a frozen cellar. I'm finished! I never expected something like this! If this pendant recorded what happened back then, there's no chance of me surviving this!

He reacted quickly and said, "Your majesty truly has acute foresight. This junior has endless admiration."

He did his best to suppress his body's reaction, to the extent that his heart didn't even beat strangely. He didn't dare to use any ki during the process, or the emperor would definitely notice something. He could only force himself to calm down through his powerful will.

In the end, he only succeeded because he had experienced too many things already, making his mind incredibly tough. Otherwise, if it were anyone else, they would have already revealed an opening and been caught by the emperor.

The emperor gave Zu An a look, then slowly said, "That's why I'll ask you one last thing. Of the things you just told me, did you tell any lies?"

Zu An quickly said, "This humble servant is terrified. I wouldn't dare to fool your majesty." Like hell I'd admit to something like that!

The emperor nodded. His eyes moved to the pendant in his hands, as if he were hesitating. A drop of sweat began to form on Zu An's temples. The emperor immediately sensed something and looked up, remarking, "You seem nervous."

Zu An replied, "My entire body hurts. I don't know what kind of medicine the doctor just gave me, but my stomach feels horrible. I've been worried that I might act improperly because of that."

The emperor frowned. However, he was familiar with the palace's methods and quickly reacted. Zu An had probably been given some powerful drug to wake him up. "Then you can withdraw for now," he

said with a wave of his hand. When he saw that Zu An was still on the stretcher, he called in two lesser eunuchs.

“Thank you, your majesty!” Zu An exclaimed as the eunuchs carried him out of the imperial study. He sighed in relief. The reason why he had been sweating was because he had been worried that the emperor would check the pendant in front of him. If that happened, no matter what the pendant revealed, he would immediately be killed.

As he had been released, that meant the emperor at least trusted his words for now. As long as nothing bad was recorded in the pendant, he would have successfully passed this trial.

As long as there’s nothing bad there... He had already done everything he should do. Thus, he could only leave the rest to fate.

In the imperial study, a bit of golden light appeared on the emperor’s finger as he tapped on the jade pendant. The pendant flew into the air, and like a projector, it displayed a scene.

A massive octopus monster wrapped itself around Zhao Ruizhi as tentacles covered everything. The emperor could sense a terrifying pressure even though he was just watching a recording. As he withstood the power of those tentacles, Zhao Ruizhi’s entire body shone with golden light. However, when that golden light erupted, the pendant’s recording also ended.

The emperor was speechless. The ki fluctuations from both sides were probably so powerful that it had prevented the pendant from recording anything further. But the recording was already enough to tell him what he needed. The emperor naturally saw that his split soul had already been forced to use all of his strength.

“Sigh, heaven’s plans supersede those of man. How could I have predicted that such a small dungeon would actually be hiding such a ridiculous monster?” The emperor’s expression changed several times. He suddenly raised his head toward the academy and muttered, “That dungeon is normally operated by the academy. Did the libationer, that old thing, not know about this, or did he plan this entire situation?”

Zhao Han had many doubts. Many possibilities had already appeared in his head in that instant. Thus, he gave the order to gather his trusted aides and subjects. He had something he had to discuss with them.

...

On the stretcher, Zu An grinned. It was because he already knew that he had made it through this trial. If the emperor had really seen something from that pendant, he would have already been turned to ashes.

The two lesser eunuchs spoke up.

“Sir Zu, his majesty has prepared a guard room in the palace for you to stay in. This is a tremendous favor!”

“Exactly! Just how many outer subjects can even obtain the qualifications to live in the palace? His majesty must have decided this out of empathy, since Sir Zu was seriously injured while saving the crown prince and princess!”

The two lesser eunuchs chattered away. They clearly felt that Zu An had brought back tremendous contributions this time, that he would become someone important to the emperor. In that case, they obviously wanted to get closer to him.

Zu An sneered inwardly. The emperor was clearly doing this to lock him up in the palace and prevent any information from getting out. But that's fine too. Staying in the palace has its own perks.

He pointed to the east and said, "I won't return to that guard room yet. I want to go to the Eastern Palace."

### **Chapter 895: Abrupt Inspection**

Zu An cleared his throat when he saw the two lesser eunuchs' confused expressions, explaining, "While my mind is still somewhat clear, I want to pay the crown prince... and crown princess a visit." Even if he was going to go, he had to have a decent reason for it.

Sure enough, the two lesser eunuchs were shocked. "Sir Zu's loyalty is truly deserving of praise!" The two of them praised him endlessly. They obviously didn't dare to stop him from doing such a thing, and thus carried him in the Eastern Palace's direction.

...

Bi Linglong sat restlessly in the Eastern Palace. Even though she had survived, she had no idea how Zu An was doing. The emperor had always been extremely suspicious of others. They would all be done for if he found out the truth.

But then, her subordinate informed her that Zu An was requesting a meeting with her. She couldn't help but become overjoyed at the good news and subconsciously stood up to welcome him.

However, she immediately noticed the startled look in her maid, Rong Mo's eyes. She quickly picked up her teacup and sipped on it to hide her embarrassment. She calmed herself down and said, "Let him in."

She was now no longer that bashful young lady in the dungeon, and had already returned to being the usual noble and dignified crown princess. Her previously panicked heart also gradually calmed down. The fact that Zu An was here proved that their plan had worked.

Zu An was quickly brought in. Bi Linglong grinned when she saw him lying on the stretcher. This guy really does put on quite the performance.

However, in front of others, she still had to act the part. She asked him about his injuries, then expressed her and the crown prince's gratitude toward him for saving their lives. Meanwhile, she had her maid bring the lesser eunuchs out to bring some refreshments, and also to bring out some of the Eastern Palace's precious medicines to treat Zu An's wounds.

When Rong Mo and the two lesser eunuchs left, she asked in a soft voice, "Did you encounter any danger earlier in the imperial study?"

"Is the crown princess worrying about me?" Zu An looked at her with a mischievous smile.

"Hmph!" Bi Linglong harrumphed. She looked around nervously, and when she saw that no one was watching, she then warned him quietly, "We're already back in the palace, so there are ears all around us. We have to be more careful, or others might notice that something isn't right."

Zu An chuckled and replied "What is there to be scared of? I'll just elope with you if it comes to that."

Bi Linglong really wanted to bite him when she saw his carefree attitude. She blurted out, "Then what about Chu First Miss?"

Zu An's breathing suddenly stopped. This was an impossible question! Even though he wanted to confidently say that he wanted everything, actually saying that out loud might get him beaten to death.

The room entered a strange state of silence. Zu An quickly changed the topic. "There was something unexpected that happened in the study though..."

Bi Linglong was also starting to regret what she had said. As such, she tacitly chose not to continue their previous topic. She was startled when she heard that Zhao Ruizhi had actually worn a recording pendant.

"But it doesn't seem like it had anything bad recorded on it. Maybe the energy explosion was too great when Zhao Ruizhi fought against Xu Fu, so it couldn't record everything like it was supposed to." Zu An had been wondering why they succeeded on the way here. That was the most logical conclusion he had reached.

Bi Linglong was a bit hesitant. "Do you think that the pendant recorded those... those things? That the emperor is only holding in his anger to deal with us later?"

Zu An chuckled. "Do you think that's possible?"

Bi Linglong was stunned. Then, her expression also eased up. "You're right, it's not too likely. With his majesty's personality, there's no way he would tolerate that, let alone even you and the empress..."

Her body suddenly trembled and her expression became dangerous. "I almost forgot about that matter. I remember you saying that you and the empress..."

Zu An quickly cut her off. "I was only saying that back then to piss him off because we were going to die anyway!"

"Really?" Bi Linglong was still skeptical. She wanted to ask more, but a eunuch's voice suddenly came from outside.

"The empress' carriage has arrived!"

Bi Linglong was stunned momentarily, but she quickly snapped out of her daze. "Speak of the devil."

She quickly got up and sorted out her attire, then walked out to welcome the empress. She just happened to bump into the empress' procession at the entrance.

"I greet the empress," Bi Linglong said.

"Please be at ease, Linglong." The empress helped her back up in an affectionate manner. "Oh my, your hair has turned all white. My heart aches for you. Hurry and go back to get some rest, don't run around all over the place..."

She supported Bi Linglong and headed inside. Suddenly, she noticed Zu An on the stretcher. She was completely stunned. Bi Linglong's eyes drifted between her and Zu An, and her suspicion grew stronger and stronger.

But the empress was someone who had experienced many things, so she quickly reacted. She said with a smile, "So Sir Zu was here. I heard that Sir Zu has brought back tremendous achievements from the dungeon this time, and that he was seriously injured while trying to protect the crown prince and crown princess."

When he saw that stunning and mature woman, Zu An couldn't help but recall that intense, but evenly matched battlefield the two of them had had that night. He felt a bit of heat start to stir inside of him. But he quickly noticed Bi Linglong's suspicious eyes and snapped out of his daze. He replied seriously, "I don't deserve your highness' praise. This is our duty as subjects."

The empress couldn't help but pat Bi Linglong's arm. "Wow, your Eastern Palace's subjects are starting to even make me jealous. I almost want to steal him for myself."

Bi Linglong's expression turned even stranger. If she didn't know about their relationship, she wouldn't have thought anything of it. But now that she knew that they might actually have 'that' going on between them, hearing those words made her extremely suspicious.

I really suspect the two of them have something going on, but I have no proof... She also replied with a big smile, "Sir Zu is indeed quite excellent. The crown prince likes him as well. After they met, he wasn't willing to receive instructions from anyone else." She immediately countered the empress' ambiguous suggestion of wanting him for herself.

"I only said that on a whim; how can I really take away someone so important to you?" The empress's expression didn't change much. "Right, this empress came mainly to visit you and the crown prince. I heard that your vitality has suffered, so I came with some nourishing medicines."

When they received her signal, the maids brought out all kinds of cases. They carried a strong medicinal fragrance that could be smelled even from far away. They were all extraordinary goods.

"Thank you, your highness, for your care." Bi Linglong thanked the empress while having Rong Mo receive the gifts.

The empress continued to exchange greetings while pretending to have inadvertently looked at Zu An. "Since Sir Zu is here, it's actually perfect timing. I just happened to have brought some extra medicines with me that Linglong might not have a chance to use, but with your injuries, you should be able to make use of them. They can be considered my gratitude for protecting the crown prince and princess."

Zu An felt his throat go dry when he saw her bright red lips. This woman was clearly saying normal things, and yet as her gaze was shifted on him, he felt as if his soul were being tugged on.

"Ahem." Bi Linglong coughed. "Sir Zu, why aren't you thanking the empress for her gift?" There's definitely something up with these two! she thought, based on her woman's intuition.



“Thank you, your highness!” Only then did Zu An react. The young don’t know the benefits of a mature woman; they instead treat young ladies as treasures... Actually, young ladies are pretty good too.

The empress gave him a smile, but afterward, didn’t look at him again. Instead, she said to Bi Linglong, “By the way, Linglong, apart from visiting you, I came bearing another task. His majesty fears that you might have all suffered from some serious injuries, but it isn’t too proper for the regular physicians to check. That was why he had me come with some older nurses.”

Bi Linglong felt goosebumps all over her body when she heard those words. The empress was making it sound nice by saying it was to check for injuries, but it was actually to inspect if she was still a virgin.

Zu An cursed inwardly. The emperor was a naturally mistrustful person. Even now, he had still sent someone to check that.

Bi Linglong forced a smile. “I’m doing okay; it’s just my vitality that has experienced a bit of loss. I’ll be fine if I rest for a while.”

“Sigh.” The empress said with a smile, “You’ll regret it for the rest of your life if you develop some hidden illness. Don’t worry, they’re all skilled older nurses; they won’t hurt you. It’ll be hard on them too if they return without completing their task.”

Bi Linglong knew that there was no way out of this now. She panicked and subconsciously glanced toward Zu An next to her.

The empress frowned. Why had Bi Linglong looked at Zu An first, and furthermore with that kind of expression?

#### **Chapter 896: Trust Ah Zu, Gain Eternal Life**

Zu An cupped his hands and said, “This humble subject isn’t in his best condition, so I’ll withdraw for now.” At the same time, he sent a ki transmission to Bi Linglong. “Don’t worry, I got this.”

Even though she didn’t know what he could possibly do, this man had done the impossible again and again in the dungeon. Bi Linglong immediately calmed down. “In that case, then, I won’t keep Sir Zu any longer. Please rest well.”

She called in the lesser eunuchs after saying so, and she also sent some men to bring over Zu An’s medicines and gifts.

The empress figured that this was because Bi Linglong was embarrassed. She didn’t treat Zu An as an outsider, but how could a young lady like her be comfortable talking about such things in front of other men?

Zu An was surprisingly quick-witted as well, and chose to use the situation as an excuse to leave.

When Zu An left, the empress looked at Bi Linglong with a smile. “There’s no need to be scared; just let those older nurses take a look. It’ll just be for the formality.”

She didn’t think that Bi Linglong would actually do anything that would bring shame to the royal family. After all, everyone had witnessed how she behaved all these years in the palace. She was the definition

of a well-bred young lady, the perfect candidate to become the crown princess. She had never made any large errors like that in the past.

She thought, That emperor really had something wrong with his head when he asked me to do this. He's way too paranoid. Hm... Looks like I have to be more careful in my dealings with Zu An in the future.

Bi Linglong forced a smile. She obviously didn't dare to refuse again to avoid bringing suspicion upon herself. She said, "Then, why doesn't your highness use this chance to visit the crown prince?"

The empress had just brought up the purpose of her visit, so stalling for a bit of time like this wouldn't draw any suspicion from her.

The empress nodded. "I should do that. I reckon that chubby kid has been scared quite badly this time." He was her blood nephew, so it wasn't inappropriate for her to call him that.

Bi Linglong replied, "The crown prince has indeed been frightened, and he has many injuries too. He was crying out in pain when the doctor applied medicine earlier."

The scene of a blood-soaked Zu An fighting Zhao Han's split soul, as well as his battle against Xu Fu, couldn't help but appear in her head. That's what it means to be a real man, not like the way the crown prince is...

"If that brat can cry and scream, that means that he's fine," the empress said with a smile. She clearly understood the crown prince's nature well.

The two of them chatted while walking over to the crown prince's chambers. His butt was sticking out as he played cricket and fought with two lesser eunuchs. But when he noticed that people were coming, he immediately jumped back into bed and screamed 'ouch, ouch'.

Bi Linglong and the empress were left speechless.

The empress was also completely stunned when she saw the crown prince try to deceive her. But she couldn't really expose him in front of everyone. She sat down by the bed and offered her sympathy.

"Auntie!" Zhao Ruizhi began to act cute. Even though he was normally rather slow, he still had such instincts.

"Hmph, you're supposed to call me 'Your Highness the Empress' in the palace." Despite the empress' words, she didn't seem to be upset at all.

Bi Linglong heard her asking questions here and there. She knew that this woman was taking the chance to get more information about what had happened in the dungeon.

But unfortunately, Zhao Ruizhi was too slow. Together with the fact that the emperor's split soul had replaced him during the second half of his dungeon experience, he could only reply 'I don't know' to everything.

The empress was instead left completely baffled. She gave up when she noticed that she wouldn't be able to get any useful information. She was already planning to meet with Zu An and ask that guy some questions.

After warning the maids and eunuchs to take good care of the crown prince, she got up to leave. When she left the room, she stared at Bi Linglong.

Bi Linglong knew that she couldn't dodge that topic any longer. She could only say in an embarrassed voice, "The two older nurses over there, please follow me inside."

The empress nodded and gestured for the two nurses to go in. It was obviously improper for her to be inside when this kind of thing was being done. She would just wait outside.

Bi Linglong wanted to stall for some more time inside the room, but she was cut off by the two older nurses.

"Crown princess, please hurry up. We need to report back after we're done too."

"You can remove your clothing now."

Bi Linglong cursed inwardly. No wonder those lesser eunuchs were all scared of these older grannies. They were all fierce and impatient women. Unfortunately, there was nothing she could do. She could only slowly start to take off her clothes.

She thought of countless possibilities. Could she pretend to faint because of some internal injuries? Or should she just kill these two to silence them? But everything she thought of came with a huge pile of terrible consequences that would only lead to her own end.

When she took off all of her clothes and only had her underwear left, one of the older nurses said with a chuckle, "Crown princess, your skin is so nice! It's white and soft like tofu."

"Wow, look at that waist, that perky bottom. You'll definitely be able to give birth to a prince."

"Crown princess, we just need you to sit over there and spread your legs."

...

These older nurses were already in their later years, and they all spoke bluntly. Their status in the palace was special, so they didn't need to fear the crown princess. That was why they joked around just like women from a marketplace.

Bi Linglong was embarrassed and upset. She really wanted to smack their mouths. At the same time, she began to grumble inwardly about Zu An. That guy had told her not to worry, but where was he now that she was already at this critical juncture?

When she sat down on the bed, the two older nurses squatted down and moved closer to her. A hint of killing intent flashed through Bi Linglong's eyes. Ki flickered across her palms. Now that things had already reached this point, she had to take a risk.

Suddenly, a piece of the bed's wooden frame lifted open. A black figure darted out, knocking the two older nurses out.

"Ah!" Bi Linglong subconsciously cried out in alarm. She had never expected someone to actually jump out from underneath the bed! But she immediately clutched her mouth when she saw that it was Zu An.

Even so, it was too late. Her cry of alarm reached the ears of the empress, who asked, "What happened?"

Bi Linglong reacted quickly and immediately responded, "It's nothing! It just hurt a bit just now."

"Oh." The empress didn't suspect anything and instead reprimanded the two older nurses. "Nurse Du, Nurse Wang, be more gentle! The crown princess' body is precious; you two better not be messing around."

"Of course, of course..." Zu An pinched his throat and said in an ambiguous voice.

Bi Linglong was shocked and overjoyed. She asked, "Ah Zu, why are you here?"

Then, she noticed that he was staring at her. She realized that she was only wearing the thinnest underwear, and that most of her skin was in full view. She quickly grabbed her clothes to cover her chest. She gave him an upset look and asked, "Did you not get enough of a look over the past few days yet?"

"Your skin sparkles like jade; it reflects the beauty of nature itself. How can I ever get enough?" Zu An sighed in praise.

Bi Linglong was happy to hear his sincere praise, but her reservation as a young lady made her too embarrassed to say that out loud. She could only avoid his gaze while blushing.

Zu An said, "I knew that the two nurses came to examine your body, so I used that as an excuse to leave. Then, I waited for a chance to come back, but there were guards everywhere around the Eastern Palace. I could only come in through the secret passage we took before. You won't blame me for that, right?"

"Of course not, but..." Bi Linglong's expression became strange. "But you can't come into my room through this passage without my permission in the future."

"Relax, am I that kind of person?" Zu An said with an upright expression. However, inwardly, he laughed. This was how young girls were. Even though they were completely willing, they just wouldn't admit it. He didn't have to argue with this kind of stuff. When the time came, he'd just come. He'd know how she really felt when he checked to see if the door was locked or not.

Bi Linglong put on her clothes again in a hurry. Then, she looked at the two older nurses on the ground, asking, "What do we do now?"

These two older nurses were elders in the palace, the emperor's trusted aides. They couldn't be bribed. Did they really have to kill them? But what about afterward?

Zu An chuckled. "Don't worry. Trust Ah Zu, gain eternal life."

When he said that, he summoned Daji. Bi Linglong felt a fragrance fill the air. Then, she saw a ridiculously beautiful woman dressed in white appear in the room.

Bi Linglong wasn't too surprised this time, since she had already seen Daji in the dungeon. However, she still couldn't help but give her a few looks. This person looked just like a real person. Was she really just a summoned creature? And she's so pretty too... Did the perverted Zu An do anything weird to her?

Zu An undid the two older nurses' acupoints. They were a bit dizzy when they woke up. The first thing they saw were Daji's deep and beautiful eyes; they were quickly trapped and couldn't escape.

### **Chapter 897: Taunting**

Soon afterward, Zu An patted Bi Linglong's shoulder and said, "It's done. I'm leaving first so they don't see me."

"But they..." Bi Linglong hesitated when she looked at the two nurses.

Zu An moved closer to her face and asked with a smile, "What, you can't bear to see me go?"

"Hmph! Get out, go!" Bi Linglong pushed him toward the secret tunnel, blushing as she spoke. When she closed the entrance, she locked it, and then unlocked it, and then locked it again... She was extremely conflicted.

The empress asked from outside, sounding confused, "Are you still not done?"

Bi Linglong jumped in fright. She quickly fixed the bedding and replied, "It's already done."

The two older nurses also recovered, and rushed over to open the doors.

The empress came in and saw that Bi Linglong's clothes were back on. Then, she gave the two older nurses a look.

The older nurses nodded slightly toward her and said with hushed voices, "She is still a virgin."

Bi Linglong sighed in relief as she listened carefully. She had really been scared badly earlier. That Zu An always managed to change the impossible into the possible somehow.

Since she had already gotten what she came for, the empress didn't want to stay here any longer. She exchanged some more pleasantries with Bi Linglong before leaving with the two older nurses. She still had to report the results to the emperor.

...

Meanwhile, Zu An emerged from the secret passage and returned to the guard room the emperor had arranged for him. Even though he had his Embroidered Envoy courtyard in the imperial palace, that was for Sir Eleven to live in. In this situation, where he couldn't reveal this identity, arranging an imperial guard's quarters was obviously the most suitable choice.

He saw that two guards who were wrapped up in bandages like zongzi[1] were knocking on his door.

"Huh? Why is no one responding? We've already knocked for a long time."

"Is he maybe asleep?"

Judging from their voices, they were clearly Piao Duandiao and Jiao Sigun.

"What's going on?" asked another voice. Zhuxie Chixin just happened to be passing by, and couldn't help but ask when he saw the two guards.

"Nothing..." Piao Duandiao subconsciously replied. Then, he grabbed Jiao Sigun and left.

"We just came out to stretch our bodies out a bit!" Jiao Sigun also replied.

"The two of you were injured quite badly. Get some proper rest instead of running around." Zhuxie Chixin harrumphed. He was just about to leave when he suddenly stopped. He turned toward the door and asked, "Is Sir Zu not inside?"

Piao Duandiao replied, "He's probably asleep. I heard those lesser eunuchs mention that Sir Zu was injured badly, and that he was already feeling bad when he came back."

"Is that so?" Zhuxie Chixin hesitated, but he still knocked afterward. "Brother Zu, brother Zu, are you inside?"

"Let's go inside and take a look; otherwise, something might have happened to him and no one would know," he said while pushing open the door.

Inside, Zu An was lying on the bed. He 'struggled' to open his eyes. "Chief... Commander?" As he spoke, he began to get up.

But Zhuxie Chixin quickly said, "There's no need for excessive formalities. I was just worried that something might have happened to you since you didn't respond. I was going to call over the doctor for you."

"Thank you for your concern, Chief Commander." Zu An sneered inwardly. This person was clearly suspicious of him. If he didn't come back in time, he might have already been exposed. Honestly, weren't the two of us on good terms? We were at least drinking friends. Why is he constantly targeting me now?

Zu An figured that since Zhuxie Chixin was the emperor's most trusted subordinate, his attitude, to some extent, mirrored the emperor's attitude. Looks like even though the emperor trusts me, he still doesn't like me. This bastard Zhuxie Chixin probably wanted to set clear boundaries to avoid drawing any suspicion regarding his loyalty.

Zhuxie Chixin looked around himself without giving anything away. When he saw that nothing was out of the ordinary, he got up and bid his farewell. "Since brother Zu is okay, then please rest well. I won't disturb you any longer." Having said that, he headed out.

Piao Duandiao and Jiao Sigun both got up to see Zhuxie Chixin out. When he left, they closed the door. Piao Duandiao rushed over to Zu An's side and complained, "The Chief Commander clearly did that on purpose!"

Zu An smiled, but didn't say anything.

Piao Duandiao immediately began to chatter on, complaining, "We risked everything in the dungeon to protect the crown prince and princess, and we almost lost our lives! And yet when we came back, not only did we not see any rewards, there were only all sorts of interrogations. It really doesn't feel great."

Zu An shivered inside. It seemed the emperor had already interrogated everyone involved this time. He should already know about my great battle against all those experts. The emperor must think that he's now completely figured out my hidden strength... Okay, that's perfect. He'll think he has everything within his grasp.

Jiao Sigun snorted and said, "You're talking too loud. We'll be in big trouble if someone hears you."

"Why are you being so annoying? Big bro Zu isn't a stranger. I'm only saying this here in private, too," Piao Duandiao said resentfully.

Zu An said in consolation, "Something so major happened this time, and so many people died. It's natural for there to be a serious investigation going on. I'm really happy to be able to see you two again."

Piao Duandiao and Jiao Sigun both began to choke on their emotions. "If it weren't because of brother Zu, we would've already died in that dungeon."

Zu An patted their shoulders. "Don't treat me like an outsider now. Would you two not save me if I were the one in danger instead?"

The two both blurted out, "Of course we would!" But they quickly became dispirited. "But with big bro Zu's cultivation, why would you ever need us to save you?"

"That may not be so." Zu An remembered how the two of them had immediately covered up their actions when they saw Zhuxie Chixin. He felt warm inside.

Piao Duandiao wanted to say something, but he hesitated. He wanted to warn Zu An to not go after the crown princess. The two of them had clearly been a bit too close inside the dungeon. But after thinking about it, he decided not to. It was best for them to keep that a secret forever.

Afterward, the three chatted casually about some things. They reminisced about how they had fought together, and shared in the joy of being able to get out of the situation alive.

Suddenly, a lesser eunuch cried in a shrill voice, "The empress has arrived!"

Then, a lavishly dressed madam walked in with a graceful stance. Piao Duandiao and Jiao Sigun jumped in fright. They quickly stood up to greet her and almost fell down. Only Zu An continued to lie on his bed.

"All of you are brave soldiers who have done much for our country. There's no need for excessive formalities." The empress gestured for them to be at ease with a smile. Her beautiful eyes remained on Zu An.

"Thank you, your highness!" Piao Duandiao and Jiao Sigun were both a bit moved. After all, they were being praised by the dignified empress herself! They suddenly felt as if all of their previous suffering was worth it.

The empress nodded toward the two of them. "This empress has brought some medicines with me. You two can take some to share with the others."

Jiao Sigun thought to himself, We were the only guards who survived this trip. Who are we supposed to share with...

Fortunately, Piao Duandiao reacted quickly and pulled him aside, exclaiming, "Thank you, your highness. Thank you!"

When the two of them left the room, Jiao Sigun was a bit unhappy. "Why are you dragging me out? I still have a lot of things to say to big bro Zu."

"Are you stupid? Her highness clearly has things to say to Zu An. What are you still sticking around like an eyesore for?" Piao Duandiao retorted mockingly.

"So that's why! Besides the crown princess, I didn't expect the empress to favor Sir Zu as well!" Jiao Sigun was envious.

"Shush! Watch your mouth!"

...

While the two of them were chatting with each other, the empress had Eunuch Lu watch the entrance. Meanwhile, she herself gently touched Zu An's bandaged wounds, saying, "I couldn't talk much with you with Linglong there earlier. Does it hurt?"

Zu An breathed in the intoxicating fragrance of the mature woman and said with a smile, "It did hurt before, but now that you've touched it, it's stopped hurting."

"That slick tongue of yours never changes." The empress scolded him with a smile. "I've brought you a bunch of medicines; you can take them when you need to. Don't leave behind any residual illnesses."

Zu An said with a laugh, "Don't worry, your highness. Even if there are residual effects, the most important part will be fine."

The empress' face turned red. She harrumphed. "Hmph, your complexion is clearly awful, and yet you're still putting on a front. If you think you're all that, then just come to the Palace of Peace in the evening."

### **Chapter 898, Part 1: King Manor's Secret**

Zu An felt something stir within him when he saw that she wasn't her usual prideful and dignified self, but rather acting flirtatiously. He said in a somewhat hoarse voice, "Woman, you're playing with fire!"

"So what if I am? You're so weak right now. Don't tell me you can actually teach me a lesson?" the empress said with a giggle.

Eunuch Lu became a bit absent-minded. How many years had it been since he saw the empress so happy?

This was how she used to smile at and tease me... But just because I was too passive back then, she was taken by another man...

Sigh, what's the point of thinking about these things? At this point, I'm happy as long as the empress is happy.

But why do I feel so awful? This is all completely useless...

Suddenly, he heard a groan. He turned around and saw that Zu An had pulled the empress into his arms. The empress' grand phoenix robes were even becoming messy from his groping.



This kid dares?! Eunuch Lu's eyelids twitched. He really... really wished that the man in her arms was himself. Unfortunately, he could only imagine that. He had to stand guard outside for the two of them right now too, or else someone might see something they weren't supposed to.

"I don't like being teased. Since that's what you want, then I'll satisfy you." Zu An fiercely wrapped his arm around the empress' waist and pulled her toward him. The soft and full waist of a mature woman didn't provide any resistance, completely different from the youthful and energetic feeling of a younger girl.

The empress felt something strange. She lowered her head and immediately blurted out, "How dare you!" This fellow had already been injured so badly, and yet he...

Zu An laughed and remarked, "Why don't you report this to his majesty then?"

The empress looked at him with her vivid eyes. "Why do we need to trouble his majesty about such things? I can just call over two lesser eunuchs and have you flogged."

"I fear that your highness won't be willing to see that happen," Zu An said while examining her phoenix robes. Even though the two of them were already quite close to each other, this was the first time he had appreciated those robes so close up. He had to admit that the material was excellent. The phoenix embroidered in golden threads was also beautiful.

The empress' heart pounded. She hadn't expected him to be this daring! She had wanted to control the pace and keep him in check, and yet now, her entire body was growing weak from his groping.

"There are still guards outside..." She wanted to get upset, but when she spoke, there wasn't even an ounce of anger. Her tender voice even gave her a scare.

Eunuch Lu felt more and more bitter inside. And yet, at the same time, he felt strangely stimulated.

"I know," Zu An said nonchalantly. He obviously wouldn't lose his head because of a woman that way.

That was primarily because his relationship with the empress was quite strange. They already had a physical relationship, and yet both of them knew that there wasn't the slightest bit of love or affection. It was strictly an exchange of interests. This was a battlefield, and once one side lost the advantage, they would immediately suffer crushing defeat. That was why the two of them were constantly trying to seize the initiative.

The empress was speechless. What do you mean, you know? What about afterward? She felt as if she were falling into Zu An's pace. Her reason told her that she had to get out, but this entirely new feeling made her reluctant to do so.

Suddenly, Eunuch Lu coughed as he stood by the entrance. The empress pushed Zu An away and stood up from his embrace. She quickly sorted out her messy robes. Eunuch Lu wouldn't signal like this for no reason. He was clearly warning her.

Sure enough, Zhuxie Chixin's voice came from outside. "Hm? Why is Eunuch Lu here?"

Eunuch Lu replied with a smile, "This old servant came with her highness to visit a worthy warrior. It turned out Chief Commander was here; you really are everywhere."

"I just came out of the imperial study, so I decided to walk around this area." Zhuxie Chixin walked toward the entrance as he spoke. He saw the empress inside and immediately greeted her. "I pay my respects to your highness."

He was a bit shocked. The empress really did look glamorous today! She had been an incredible beauty to begin with, but it was because her mood hadn't been great for the past few years that she had become a bit colder in appearance. Recently, her mood seemed to have improved quite a bit. Zhuxie Chixin thought, Looks like she feels at ease again now that the crown prince's position has stabilized.

The empress said with a smile, "There's no need for excessive courtesy, Chief Commander. Since the Chief Commander has returned, then I'll leave this place to you."

Zu An sighed. The palace's women weren't easy to deal with after all! That was true for both Bi Linglong and the empress. The fact that they couldn't fight for the Oscar award was truly a pity.

"This subject will see your highness out." Zhuxie Chixin followed the empress out.

The empress raised her eyebrows, but she didn't say anything. After they walked out into the courtyard, she stopped and asked, "Speak; what did you want to say to me by following me out?"

Zhuxie Chixin began, "Your highness' sight is grand..."

The empress cut him off. "Spit it out." This was the emperor's loyal dog. She found him annoying to even look at to begin with, let alone the fact that she had been interrupted earlier. She obviously wouldn't treat him that nicely.

Zhuxie Chixin had to swallow his words back down. But this was the empress, so he couldn't act out. He said, "I'll have to trouble your highness to not talk about the dungeon's details to anyone. His majesty hasn't yet thought through how he wants to deal with this matter, so it must remain confidential."

The empress was stunned at first, but she realized that this person probably thought that she had gone to Zu An's room to gather intelligence, then contact the Liu clan. She asked, "Are you teaching me how to do things?" She didn't bother explaining the misunderstanding. On the contrary, this was better.

Zhuxie Chixin quickly lowered his head in apology. "This subject doesn't dare. It's just that his majesty has been a bit troubled over this matter recently..."

"Don't try to use his majesty to pressure me. I know what I'm doing," the empress said coldly and turned around to leave.

Zhuxie Chixin had a bitter smile on his face as he watched her leave. The empress' temper had been growing stranger and stranger over the years. In the end, it was still because of how his majesty treated her...

He left after exchanging some words with Zu An. Before his majesty made a decision, he still had to keep his distance from these people.

Then, some guards came to congratulate Zu An. The crown princess' and empress' rewards made them realize that he was definitely going to rise in status quickly. When Zu An was done dealing with them, he lay down and began to think about all types of possibilities. Then, he unwittingly fell asleep.

...

All this time, his vigilance had been so high that he almost hadn't had any chance to sleep. Once he fell asleep, time quickly passed.

Suddenly, he felt something. He rushed out of bed and seized the neck of a black-clothed individual next to him, pressing them under his body.

"What's wrong?" asked a familiar voice from outside. It was Eunuch Lu's voice.

Zu An was alarmed. He saw the noble yet flirtatious look in the individual's eyes. Who else could it be but the empress?

"Nothing, keep watching outside," the empress said when Zu An loosened his grip.

"Mm." Eunuch Lu gave a vague reply. He was clearly a bit upset.

Zu An tore off the black mask, revealing the empress' mature and stunning face underneath. He was surprised and asked, "Why are you dressed like this?"

"Because someone kept saying that he'd come to the Palace of Peace, but never came. That's why I could only come here myself." The empress lay down on the bed. Her hands were raised casually above her head, putting her impressive figure in full view.

Zu An saw the black clothing she wore and he looked outside. It turned out he had slept all the way into the night. After blanking out for a moment, he reacted and said, "Your highness seems to have run around all night. Are you not worried that you might have jumped into the wrong bed?"

The empress' charming eyes narrowed. "You're on this bed, so I didn't come to the wrong place."

Zu An screamed inwardly. If not for Mi Li's warning that this woman was trying to use his essence for her recovery, he might really have been fooled! He might really have thought that this woman was deeply in love with him.

"Then I really have to thank your highness for all the love." He loosened his hand and got up from the bed. He walked over and poured a cup of tea.

The empress was shocked when she saw that this man wasn't in a hurry to pounce on her. She supported her head with her hand and looked at him. "Everyone in the palace is talking about how you're at death's door, but you don't seem wounded at all. Are you not scared that I'll report this to his majesty?"

Zu An drained the tea in one gulp. "If you report this, I'll tell him 'your wife really is amazing'."

## **Chapter 898, Part 2: King Manor's Secret**

The empress was speechless. No matter how much she flaunted her strong will, she almost broke down under those words.

Zu An thought to himself, Don't try these tricks with me. If you knew I really said that in front of the emperor not too long ago, you might just faint from shock!

"Your highness, what's happened in the capital while I was gone?" he asked. He had been brought into the palace and kept there ever since he left the dungeon. He had no idea what was happening outside of the palace.

Without enough intelligence, it was easy to create errors in judgment. But who knew better about what was happening outside the palace than the empress herself?

"Is this empress not beautiful enough? You can still afford to think about these matters?" The empress harrumphed. However, she still replied, "After you all went into the dungeon, King Qi Manor's side seemed to be pretty confident, while his majesty's side was struggling to look calm. Even though I don't know what kind of trump cards both sides were hiding, I'm more inclined to trust his majesty. Zhao Jing can't win against him."

Zu An nodded in deep sympathy. Zhao Han really was an old fox. He had fooled everyone from start to end. If not because they had just happened to encounter Westhound Tomb, Zu An would already be a pile of bones right now.

The empress said with a cold snort, "Then, something happened to the dungeon. The libationer personally concluded that the elements inside collapsed. King Qi Manor's people appeared to be grieving on the surface, but they actually almost burst out laughing in joy." As someone from the crown prince's very family, she clearly didn't have a good impression of King Qi.

"His majesty acted quite weirdly in that period. I've never seen him so panicked before. Even though he did everything he could to hide it, he could fool others, but how could he fool me?" the empress remarked confidently. After all, the two of them had been married for so many years, so she understood him best.

"His majesty's mood has been quite poor. Many of the lesser eunuchs who served him disappeared for some reason. I heard that they were executed because of some small mistakes." The empress frowned. "Only when you all exited the dungeon safely did his mood improve a bit, but even then, it was just a bit. I can still feel the wrath he's holding in."

Zu An thought, How can he not be mad? His split soul was destroyed in the dungeon for some reason. His eternal life project failed at the final step!

"Is there anything else? Did anything major happen in the capital?" Zu An asked.

"Your return was the biggest event already." The empress didn't really understand why Zu An was so concerned with that, but after thinking about it for a bit, she said, "Apart from this, there were several times where our men had conflicts with King Qi Manor's people. Zhuxie Chixin wasn't there either, so many people died. The Chu clan's little young master kept asking after his brother-in-law day and night, as if he were some girl. No wonder the Chu clan has declined; all of them are wusses. The previous minister Sang Hong's clan returned to the capital. His majesty used to trust him greatly, and he seems to be summoning him from time to time to discuss some things..."

She talked about many of the things that had happened in the capital in the meantime. Many of those things really were insignificant compared to the dungeon's events.

Zu An was surprised and remarked, "So Sang Hong came back." A bright and beautiful face suddenly appeared in his mind. Didn't this mean that Zheng Dan had also come back?

"I almost forgot that the two of you had a bit of a grudge in the past." The empress chuckled. "Sang Hong helped the emperor take care of many dirty things back then. It might be his reputation that he'll have no successors. But this might not necessarily be a bad thing. When he was a subject, everyone wanted to get rid of him as quickly as possible. Now that he has no one inheriting his legacy, they don't think of him as much of a threat. Furthermore, with a pretty daughter and a beautiful daughter-in-law, there are quite a few people who are paying more attention to them."

"Sang Hong is the emperor's trusted aide, after all. He seems to be making a comeback now too. Will those people really dare to act recklessly?" Zu An asked with a bit of confusion.

The empress explained, "A rags to riches clan like the Sang clan doesn't have as much backing as the other great clans. After messing up his mission in Brightmoon City, the Sang clan suffered a fatal blow. Furthermore, for some reason, the warriors the Sang clan raised for all these years disappeared overnight. Without that force, why would those young masters fear the Sang clan?"

"Many people in the capital believe that Sang Hong has tacitly agreed to this as well, that he actually wants to marry his daughter off as quickly as possible. This way, he can rebuild the Sang clan's former glory.

"But those great clans aren't stupid. Sang Hong's daughter comes from a family that isn't all that impressive, and the Sang clan carries too many grudges with other clans. No one wants to take the Sang clan's young miss in as their main wife. However, she's just too stunning, so it doesn't seem right to take her in as a concubine. The reason why so many people are being so careful is because they want to get a buy one get one free deal. After all, the Sang clan's widowed daughter-in-law is also a genuine beauty."

Zu An snorted. "There's no need for you to try and test me with these things. The Sang clan and I were detained together on our way to the capital, and we developed some camaraderie along the way. If I can help them, I'll naturally help them."

"Tsk, you're probably thinking the very same thing as those clans." The empress sneered. Men were all up to no good.

"You're overthinking it. How can the Sang clan let those people get their way? An upright gentleman like me obviously wouldn't have those thoughts either," Zu An said with a firm expression.

"You? An upright gentleman?" The empress had a strange look on her face. She really had the urge to spit on Zu An's face at that instant.

"Ahem..." Zu An felt a bit guilty himself. He quickly changed the topic. "Was there anything else that happened?"

The empress slowly said, "There are some other things that happened. Something strange happened in King Qi Manor..."

Zu An waited for a long time, but she didn't say anything else. He couldn't help but ask, "And?"

The empress smiled. "Let me tell you a story first."

Zu An was confused. What kind of story was she going to tell him now? But he still patiently listened.

“Once upon a time, there was a male dove and a female dove. Underneath them was a young sheep that was eating grass. Soon afterward, a big bad wolf came and ate the lamb. What do you think the female dove said to the male dove?” The empress’ eyes flickered with light. There was a mysterious charm in her expression.

Zu An vaguely recalled hearing this story from somewhere, but he replied with an unsure tone. “The lamb below has died?”

“Yup. Below... the lamb... died,” the empress repeated. However, her tone changed a bit. She laid down on the bed and hooked her fingers toward Zu An. She looked at him seductively.[1]

Zu An was speechless. How could he hold himself back, though? He pounced over.

Eunuch Lu’s eyes twitched as he listened to the moaning coming from inside. Then, he released a long sigh, as if something had been satisfied. He silently transferred his ki, sealing off the sound coming out of the room to prevent any guards from noticing anything.

...

Meanwhile, in the Eastern Palace, Bi Linglong tossed and turned about in bed. Her personal maid Rong Mo rubbed her drowsy eyes and came inside to check on her. “Crown princess, what’s wrong?”

“It’s nothing, I just can’t sleep for some reason. You should get some rest yourself,” Bi Linglong replied.

Rong Mo replied with an ‘oh’, then left while yawning.

Bi Linglong suddenly thought of something. She called out to Rong Mo and said, “Right, you can’t come in no matter what you hear later.”

“Why?” Rong Mo was a bit confused. Wasn’t it normal for her to care for the crown princess?

Bi Linglong blushed. She pretended to be angry and said, “I’m already having trouble sleeping, if you keep running in and out, it’ll become even harder!”

When Rong Mo saw her master get angry, she stuck out her tongue and said, “Alright, alright. I won’t disturb the crown princess anymore.”

Bi Linglong sighed in relief when she saw Rong Mo leave quickly and even close the door behind her. She moved her blankets and looked at the lock. After some hesitation, she still locked it.

However, after lying on the bed for a while, she suddenly reached out and unlocked it.

Just like that, sometimes it was open, and sometimes it was closed. She gradually fell asleep during this endless wait.

...

Meanwhile, the storm seemed to have reached a calm. There were fine beads of sweat hanging from the empress’ temples, and her hair was a bit damp. There was a happy and sweet smile on her face.

When she sensed that her damaged meridians had obtained nourishment, that she had recovered a bit, her mood became even better.

"You really don't know how to treat girls properly at all! I almost feel like I'm becoming a tool to vent your frustrations on." Despite having said that, she didn't sound angry at all.

"What, you don't like it?" Zu An also felt refreshed. The pressure he had experienced while being chased by the emperor was so suffocating it was hard to even breathe, so he let everything go during this session.

"You're really a bad man." The empress laughed. "But this empress likes that sort of roughness." A young lady might like someone who was gentler, but for a mature woman like her, she knew what it was that she needed.

"What happened in King Qi Manor?" Zu An didn't want to talk about feelings with her for too long and immediately changed the topic.

"You still haven't forgotten about that?" The empress was a bit unhappy, but she still said, "Whatever. Since you made this empress happy, then I'll just tell you. Just treat it as your fee."

Zu An had a strange look on his face. Judging from how proud she looked, he felt as if she were throwing some dollar bills at him after getting what she wanted.

"King Qi's concubine suddenly lost her footing and fell into a pond a few days ago, drowning to death," the empress said.

"How can that be?" Zu An was stunned. "What about the maids that were serving her?"

Even though that woman was a concubine, for better or for worse, she was King Qi's concubine. Who knew how many people were serving her? Why would something like this happen?

"That's what's strange about it. It was rumored that she ran over to the pond in the middle of the night, so there were no maids to serve her." The empress seemed rather happy about that disaster. "As for her death, there are a few rumors going around the capital. Some say that she really did accidentally lose her footing; some speculated that she was doing something wrong and was caught. Some others say that she saw a secret she shouldn't have seen and was silenced... What do you think it is?"

"An affair?" Zu An asked probingly. She had run out alone in the middle of the night, so he couldn't help but think of that.

"That's what I thought at first too," the empress said with a smile. "But Zhao Jing is pretty handsome and charming, so I really can't imagine why his woman would look for someone else. Furthermore, who dares to have an affair with King Qi's concubine in King Qi Manor? There's definitely something more to this."

Zu An suddenly had a strange look on his face. "In the eyes of others, I reckon that they would never expect their graceful and dignified empress to be doing what we just did, right?"

"You!" The empress was finally defeated. She pounced over and bit him...

## **Chapter 899, Part 1: Unexpected Judgment**

The two of them play-wrestled for a bit, then Zu An grabbed her hands and said, "I want to make a trip out of the palace. Do you have any ideas?"

He had his identity as an Embroidered Envoy too, so it wasn't impossible for him to leave. However, the emperor knew about all of his identities, so that wouldn't work.

"Nope," the empress said without hesitation.

Zu An became upset. "Come on, you're a freaking empress! You can't even send a single person out of the palace?"

"Even if I do have a way, I can't send you out." The empress harrumphed. "The emperor already made it clear that all of you were to be kept here to prevent information from getting out. It'll definitely draw too much attention if I try to send you out. Visiting you during the day is already the limit of what I can do as the empress. If I try to help you further, the emperor will definitely suspect our relationship."

Zu An figured that made sense as well. The emperor was someone who was always suspicious of others. It would be very bad if he ended up drawing suspicion because of something like this. But he wouldn't admit to that on the surface and shot back, "Hmph, then what use does an empress like you even have?"

The empress giggled and looked at him provocatively. "What do you think?" She was like a honey peach ripe for the picking, sweet and juicy. Not many men could resist her temptation. Zu An was naturally no exception.

Eunuch Lu was filled with envy as he stood outside. The stamina of youth really was great...

...

When Zu An woke up again, the beauty he had slept with was already gone. With her status, there was no way she would stay here for a longer time. She had left in the middle of the night. He didn't feel lonely or anything. He thought that an exchange of benefits between a mature man and woman like this was fine.

Knock knock knock!

Someone suddenly knocked on his door. Zu An was stunned. This room of his seemed quite lively. "Come in," he said as he lay back down on the bed and continued with his weak and feeble act.

The door quickly opened. The first thing Zu An saw was a pair of straight and perfect legs. If it were any other time, Zu An would definitely have voiced his praise. But right now, he was the 'hero' of this dungeon trip, so he didn't really feel like doing any of that.

"Oh, it was big sis principal." Zu An was surprised, because the one who had arrived was Jiang Luofu. Why had she appeared in the palace?

"What? It seems like you aren't that happy to see me," Jiang Luofu said with a smile.

Zu An replied, "No way. I just didn't expect you to be able to come inside the palace."



"My status is special. To a certain extent, I'm representing the Royal Academy, or even the libationer himself. That's why no one stopped me from entering," Jiang Luofu explained. "I met the crown princess earlier, then decided to drop by afterward to pay you a visit."

She turned around while speaking and said in a strange tone, "Crown princess, why aren't you coming in?"

Zu An was stunned. He subconsciously looked toward the entrance. Bi Linglong had come too? He saw a beautiful young lady standing quietly by the entrance. However, the usual 'fake smile' she showed others was nowhere to be seen. Instead, her expression was a bit cold.

You have successfully trolled Bi Linglong for +22 +22 +22...

Zu An jumped in fright. When did I offend her? Why are you mad at me so early in the morning?

"It might be inappropriate for me to come in, so I'll just stay here," Bi Linglong said indifferently. She didn't even give Zu An a single look. Jiang Luofu wasn't too concerned. Their status was special, and coming into the room of a subordinate so early in the morning was a bit strange.

Zu An felt that it was a bit inconvenient to talk while lying down, so he crawled up from the covers. He wanted to get up and lean against the bed. Jiang Luofu quickly supported him when she saw him move, thinking he was seriously injured.

As he breathed in her fragrance, Zu An thought to himself that Jiang Luofu was also a mature, high-class woman. But she was very different from the empress. The empress' smell was rich and extravagant, while comparatively speaking, Jiang Luofu's smell was a bit more reserved.

Jiang Luofu wrinkled her nose. "Huh? What is that smell?" she asked. Bi Linglong instinctively turned to look at Zu An when she heard those words.

Zu An began to sweat buckets. He and the empress had tossed and turned all night. He hadn't had any time to clean this place up yet. He absolutely couldn't let them find out!

Even though he was momentarily alarmed, he pretended nothing had happened. "Ah, it's probably the smell of the medicine from the imperial hospital."

"Oh, this medicine smells so weird." Jiang Luofu was puzzled, but she didn't have much knowledge in that field and couldn't distinguish the smell. She gave Zu An a look, then said, "You were injured quite badly after all. Your complexion looks awful."

Bi Linglong looked at Zu An carefully when she heard those words. She saw thick black circles under his eyes, and noticed that his complexion was pale. He looked a bit weak.

"I'm alright; it's not too much of a problem. I should be able to recover after resting for a bit." Zu An thought to himself, My battle with the empress last night left me pretty exhausted. The empress was at the very peak of maturity. She was absolutely deadly in bed and had taken him for a ride.

Jiang Luofu didn't doubt him, but Bi Linglong was confused. She asked through ki, "What's wrong with you? You seemed alright yesterday; why do you look like that today?"

Zu An secretly replied, "Didn't I have to pretend to be unconscious, after which the emperor even asked me all those questions? Zhuxie Chixin made me eat that vicious medicine to force me awake. These are probably the aftereffects." Even he was left admiring his own wit. He had managed to find such good excuses so quickly.

Bi Linglong felt a bit aggrieved, and also a bit upset. "Are you stupid? How can you eat something like that?"

"Zhuxie Chixin was watching right next to me. I had no choice!" Zu An explained. "Don't worry, it's not too bad. I'll be fine if I rest for a few days."

Bi Linglong felt conflicted. So that's why he looks like that... He probably suffered a lot last night, yet I was actually... mad at him. She blushed when she thought of that and looked apologetically at Zu An.

Zu An was a bit confused. Why had her attitude changed so quickly? The thoughts of young ladies really were as fickle as the weather in June. She got angry so suddenly and cooled off just as suddenly.

Jiang Luofu said, "Even though your complexion looks pretty bad, it's better than we imagined. At least there's no danger to your life. Do you know just how worried that Chu clan brat was?"

"Youzhao?" Zu An was stunned. "How did he get mixed up with you?" he asked. After all, the two of them didn't get along all that well.

Jiang Luofu smiled. "He was worried about your safety but couldn't come and visit you, so he could only use me to see how you were doing. Ah, right. These are the gifts he wanted me to bring you."

She took out a Peace Talisman and gave it to him. "This is a longevity talisman he went to the temple to ask for, to ensure your peace. That Chu clan kid is quite meticulous in thought, almost like a girl."

Zu An panicked. He took a mental note to remind that little sister-of-law of his later. Even though she had an artifact to hide her appearance, there were still gaps in her behavior!

He put away the Peace Talisman, feeling warm inside. But he instead asked, "Why didn't he send me something tasty to eat? What's the point in giving me this kind of thing?"

Jiang Luofu rolled her eyes. "Giving you something like this really is a waste of others' good intentions. Chu's young master didn't only bring you this talisman, he also prepared a bunch of medicines; but I couldn't bring them into the palace. I only brought in this Thousand Year Ginseng. It should be of some help to your recovery."

Then, she took out a pill. "This is a Lesser Return Pill Murong Qinghe wanted me to bring you. It's an excellent pill for treating injuries."

Bi Linglong also spoke up. "When did Sir Zu suddenly become so close to the Murong clan's young miss? She's willing to give you such a precious pill?" Even though she was smiling on the surface, there was a bit of chilliness in her voice.

Zu An's survival instincts were powerful. He immediately said, "That brat's entire heart is devoted to Chu Youzhao; this is just a gift by association! She's just doing this to get on her big brother Chu's good side."

Bi Linglong's expression immediately eased up when she heard that. "Hmph, she gave you such a precious gift, and yet look at you, talking badly about her."

Zu An was speechless. You were mad at me, and now you're going to scold me about this? Sigh, being a man is so tough. Wait, why do I feel so guilty in front of her then?

Jiang Luofu gave the two of them a strange look. She just felt that their relationship was a bit strange. But no matter how powerful her imagination was, there was no way she could know what the two of them had gone through together.

She took out a sachet and said, "Right, this is what Daoyun wanted me to bring you."

When she saw the sachet that was clearly from a girl, Bi Linglong's expression became chilly once more.

You have successfully trolled Bi Linglong for +33 +33 +33...

## **Chapter 899, Part 2: Unexpected Judgment**

Zu An received the sachet. There was a faint fragrance coming from it. Those girls all had their unique smells, matching well with their personalities.

"What are you in a daze all of a sudden for?" Jiang Luofu reached out and waved her hand in front of his face. "The gift Daoyun gave you is inside."

Zu An was stunned. He saw that what was inside was a talisman as well, but it was different from the talisman Chu Youzhao had received from the temple. It was a talisman created by a real rune master. He felt a frigid aura just from holding it in his hand.

Jiang Luofu explained, "This is a Calming Talisman Xie Daoyun personally crafted. Whether it's in your recovery or cultivation, carrying it on you will allow you to become more focused. This will help you to increase your cultivation and recover faster. She was worried that carrying the talisman on you all the time wouldn't be too convenient, so that was why she used this sachet to store it properly."

"I'll have to trouble big sis principal to thank her for me then." Zu An put the sachet away. Unfortunately, he wasn't really injured, and his cultivation path was different from most people's, so the talisman wasn't all that useful to him. However, he could feel the sincerity, so he naturally had to take care of it well.

Bi Linglong looked away when she saw him put the sachet away. She didn't know why she was getting so annoyed either. The two of them shouldn't have anything to do with each other, and yet she just didn't feel good at all. It was as if her toy had been ruined by someone else.

Jiang Luofu said with a smile, "You can just thank her later yourself. I don't think she wants to hear it from me."

Bi Linglong pricked up her ears. Didn't this sound as if there really were something going on between them? Damn this womanizer! Why does he have so many girls around him?

Zu An quickly changed the topic when he saw another string of Rage points. "Haha, so many people gave me gifts. Big sis, are you not going to give me anything?"

"Is a visit from this big sis not enough as a gift?" Jiang Luofu replied with a smile. "Furthermore, they already took care of everything with their gifts; I really can't think of anything to give you. Let's just say that I'll owe you one."

Zu An was stunned. "You make so much sense, I can't even argue against you."

Jiang Luofu got up and said, "Alright, I've already paid you a visit, and I've already delivered the messages. I won't disrupt your rest anymore."

Zu An said, "Actually, I wouldn't mind chatting for a bit longer, you know?" He wasn't really recovering in the palace, so he was already bored out of his mind.

Jiang Luofu couldn't help but laugh. "Your status is special. Normally speaking, you can't take visitors. I'm only here while sharing the crown princess' spotlight. I can't trouble her with that. We'll meet again once you finish recovering." She waved her hand after speaking, then walked out with long strides.

"Ms. Jiang, I'll see you out." Bi Linglong followed behind her without even giving Zu An another look.

Zu An was quite sullen. Even though they couldn't act too close in front of others, he still felt that the crown princess was going a bit overboard...

...

While Zu An was bored stiff in his room, the emperor was sitting in the imperial study playing Go with himself.

Zhuxie Chixin stood to the side without uttering a word, scared that he would disturb the emperor. He felt deep admiration. His majesty had clearly been a bit preoccupied these past few days, but he now seemed to have already calmed down fully, recovering his former steadiness.

A while later, the emperor finally said, "Who has Zu An met with during the past two days?"

Zhuxie Chixin replied, "He visited the Eastern Palace, then when he returned to the guard room, Piao Duandiao and Jiao Sigun visited him. Then, the empress visited him."

"The empress?" The emperor frowned. The chess piece he had been about to play remained in midair.

Zhuxie Chixin explained, "The empress didn't only visit him, but also several of the guards, giving them some medicines as a gift and giving them some encouragement."

The emperor thus nodded. These people had saved the crown prince. As part of the royal family, it made sense for her to give them her gratitude. But of course, the reason he didn't suspect anything was because on the surface, Zu An and the empress had nothing to do with each other.

Zhuxie Chixin continued, "The Royal Academy's Jiang Luofu paid the crown princess a visit, then the crown princess brought her to meet with Zu An."

"Jiang Luofu? The Jiang clan can be considered neutral. Furthermore, with the libationer's background, it's not too big of a deal for her to enter the palace." The emperor thought of something interesting, then grinned. "I seem to recall that Linglong didn't get along with her, as the first candidate for the crown princess was actually Jiang Luofu. It was only because Jiang Luofu ran away that she was chosen

instead. This matter has always bothered Linglong, and yet the two of them actually did something together this time."

Zhuxie Chixin said, "Those are already things of the past, after all. The crown princess looks at the bigger picture, so why would she let something like this bother her?" As the emperor's trusted aide, he knew that the emperor was very satisfied with this daughter-in-law. He obviously had to take the chance to praise her.

The emperor nodded with a smile. "Indeed, Linglong is slowly developing the traits of the mother of a country. Her performance in the dungeon this time has been excellent."

Zhuxie Chixin shivered. His majesty's evaluation was extremely high! He quickly took the chance to add some more praise.

A bit later, the emperor suddenly said, "Right, did Jiang Luofu ask anything about the dungeon when she visited Zu An?"

Zhuxie Chixin replied, "She didn't. She only visited him as a friend, and also delivered some small gifts for Chu Youzhao and Murong Qinghe." There had been so many people in that group, so he had naturally had eyes and ears there.

The emperor was stunned. "This Zu An is actually that close to so many people? He's mixed in with all sorts of different sides... Just what is he trying to do?" His voice had become extremely cold.

Zhuxie Chixin gestured fiercely with his hands when he heard those words. "Should this subject use this chance to... Since he's already seriously injured, and it's already been announced that his condition is terrible, I don't think it'll draw any suspicion."

Even though he did share friendship with Zu An, as the emperor's trusted aide, he had already sensed the emperor's killing intent several times. He naturally had to emphasize his innocence to avoid bringing trouble onto himself.

"There's no need for now." The emperor stopped him. "That kid still has some other uses."

"Understood!" Zhuxie Chixin lowered his head. He understood the emperor too well. What he was saying was that once Zu An lost his value, he would then be immediately removed.

"Enough, you can leave." The emperor waved his hand. He stared at the chess pieces on the table and sank into his thoughts.

A while after Zhuxie Chixin left, a voice came from the room. "I would rather turn my back on the people than let the people turn their backs on me!"

...

A few days passed. Zu An wasn't ill, but he was about to be from boredom. The empress didn't visit him again. He didn't know if it was because she was already satisfied, or if she was worried about being exposed.

Zu An had tried to visit Bi Linglong and talk to her, but the secret tunnel was always locked from the other side. Helpless to do anything else, he could only play some games with Piao Duandiao and Jiao Sigun to pass the time.

Today, he received news that he could freely leave the palace.

"But you all need to remember this well; you can't tell anyone about anything that happened in the dungeon. Especially what happened with King Qi Manor's experts," Zhuxie Chixin personally warned them.

"Why?" Piao Duandiao couldn't hold himself back from asking. He and Jiao Sigun were the only two who had survived among all the guards who entered. The others had all died because of King Qi Manor's deathsworn soldiers. They obviously wanted revenge for their friends.

"That's not something you all need to know; you just need to obey. You'll receive the reward you are due, but!" Zhuxie Chixin said coldly, "If I hear any rumors floating about, not only will you die, your families will be buried along with you. The only reason you're all still alive is because of your service in saving the crown prince and princess' lives. You'd better get it into your heads; think about what's good and bad for you."

Piao Duandiao and Jiao Sigun exchanged a look. They clearly felt a bit lacking in confidence.

Zu An couldn't help but ask, "But what if we aren't the ones to leak it out, but someone else who learned of it from a different channel?"

Zhuxie Chixin said indifferently, "All of you will still die." He left immediately afterward

Zu An and the others were left speechless. They soon understood why Zhuxie Chixin was so serious, however. News of all kinds of rewards and penalties was already circulating through the palace.

Because of Zu An's outstanding achievement in protecting the crown prince and princess, he was promoted from a baron to a viscount, and gained a corresponding increase in territory. He was to continue as the crown prince's chamberlain, while holding the concurrent post of Armed Escort Division Commander. He was awarded a thousand taels of gold and twenty chests of silk and fabrics.

Piao Duandiao and Jiao Sigun respectively rose three ranks, rising up to become the leaders of the Eastern Palace guard. They were awarded a thousand silvers and other assorted things.

Gao Ying, Pei You, and the others also received corresponding rewards. Even the deceased Zhao Xi, Liu Xian, Meng Pan, and the others were conferred posthumous titles.

As for the other deceased clan members and imperial guards, their names were all recorded and commemorated on a monument.

The Shi clan's Shi Tong had sneaked into the troop and plotted against the crown prince. The Shi clan master Shi Miao had known about but didn't inform the emperor, so he was accused of treason. The Death Pardoning Token was revoked, and their clan was searched and eradicated. The branch families were all banished.

The Gu clan brothers Gu Heng and Gu Xing had plotted against the crown prince in search of glory. Nine generations of the Gu clan were completely eradicated.

But what was unexpected was that King Qi and the deathsworn soldiers were never mentioned from start to finish, as if they had never even appeared in the dungeon.

### **Chapter 900: Horrible Title**

“Sir Zu, congratulations!” Piao Duandiao and Jiao Sigun looked envious. Even though they had both risen up three ranks themselves, that was only an official position. They hadn’t gone up an order of nobility.

Zu An had risen from being a baron to a viscount, and he’d even had his territory increased substantially! He now had practically three hundred more households to collect tax from, transforming him from a second-rate noble to a true noble in the social circles.

For example, the great clans in the capital would never consider a commoner for marriage. No matter how high one’s official post was, they wouldn’t even consider a baron. However, a viscount was already enough, let alone one that had climbed up to this position properly.

Piao Duandiao asked, “Right, what is big bro Zu’s new noble title...”

“I think it’s called ‘Green’...” Jiao Sigun was about to reply when Zu An cut him off.

“Enough already, don’t say that name.” Zu An’s eyelids twitched. He had given the emperor the Hat of Forgiveness last time. Even though the emperor didn’t know what it signified, he had picked up that Zu An’s expression was a bit off.

Together with the fact that Zu An had given Sang Qian a green hat as a present, the emperor had felt as if that thing might have some deeper meaning. Now that Zu An was a viscount, he had decided to just give him the title Green Hat.[1]

Zu An had almost exploded when he heard that name. What the hell? Why does the world keep messing with me like this? This name is even worse than Phoenix Man!

“I feel like ‘Phoenix Man’ from before sounded a bit better,” Piao Duandiao said sympathetically.

Jiao Sigun immediately argued, “I feel like ‘Green Hat’ sounds a bit more majestic. Just like how those Embroidered Envoys are always dressed in red, leaving the people in terror wherever they go, a color can deliver subliminal messages. Big bro Zu will just wear a green hat when he sets out in the future to match this title. That way, everyone will think of big bro Zu as soon as they hear the words ‘green hat’.”

Zu An was speechless. If that really happens, my reputation will go to shit for all of eternity! He quickly changed the topic when he saw that the two of them weren’t finished yet. “Right, what kind of post is that of Armed Escort Division Commander?”

Apart from being promoted from baron to viscount, he had also been granted the post of Armed Escort Division Commander. The guard system in the palace was extremely complicated, so he wasn’t too sure what that role was.

Piao Duandiao explained, “The palace’s imperial guards are separated into many squads. These squads are called divisions, and the Armed Escort Division Commander is the senior officer of the Armed Escort Division. The Armed Escort Division Commander is mainly in charge of defending the various palace gates.”

Zu An was stunned. He hadn't expected the emperor to give him such a vital position!

After thinking about it for a bit, he guessed at the emperor's intentions. On the surface, he was an outer subject, so he had to leave the palace promptly every day, but his status as an Embroidered Envoy made it so that he had to remain in the palace. He had to leave the palace first and change into the Embroidered Envoy identity before coming back in.

If anyone deliberately investigated that, they might discover some holes. Then, they would deduce his connection to Golden Token Eleven. But now that he had the Armed Escort Division Commander rank, it would be much more convenient for him to enter and exit the palace. He didn't have to put on that act daily anymore.

But doesn't this post also let me pass through the palace gates more easily? That dog emperor gave me the title 'Green Hat' to embarrass me, so I'll make sure to pay him back properly for this! Zu An had a strange expression as his face heated up. Hmph, I'm an upstanding and upright person; would I do something like that?

"Big bro Zu, why are you drooling?" Jiao Sigun asked curiously.

"Was I? Haha, I think you're seeing things." Zu An quickly wiped the corner of his lips and chuckled in embarrassment.

"Anyways, big bro Zu, I still can't accept this result!" Piao Duandiao couldn't help but blurt out after some hesitation. "It's one thing that those King Qi Manor people weren't exposed, but why was even that Meng Pan given a posthumous title? He was just a shameless bastard who ran in the middle of battle, and yet he's being recognized as a hero and praised for countless generations?"

Zu An patted Piao Duandiao's shoulder to console him when he saw how upset he was. "It can't be helped; he's the Meng clan's heir. The crown prince still needs the Meng clan's support, so the court can only do this for the greater situation."

"But it's not fair! So many of our brave companions died while sacrificing themselves, and yet they're being treated the same as that despicable bastard!" Piao Duandiao drew his blade and hacked at a wooden plank off to the side. He used so much strength that his blade snapped. It was easy to see just how angry he was.

Jiao Sigun said indifferently, "That's how the world works. Those who understand understand, and those who don't won't even if you explain it to them."

"I understand your fucking mom!" Piao Duandiao had already been furious. Now that he was being taunted like this, he couldn't take it anymore. The two of them began to wrestle with each other.

Zu An couldn't help but chuckle. He knew that these two were close, and that little fights like this were normal. As such, he chuckled and left the palace. There were still many more people to meet outside.

...

Zu An was stunned when he left through the palace gates, because there wasn't a large group waiting to welcome him the way he had imagined, let alone any pretty girls jumping into his arms while crying. He



quickly realized that they had just decided to let him out. Those outside obviously hadn't known when he would be able to leave.

He shook his head. He didn't really mind, and so decided to go home first. It had been so long since he went home that he wondered if the maids and servants had run away. Soon after he returned, he saw that there was a servant sweeping the ground.

When he saw Zu An, the servant couldn't help but shout, "The master has returned!"

The entire courtyard became lively soon afterward. The maids, cooks, and boy servants all rushed out and surrounded Zu An excitedly. Even though there weren't many of them, it filled the courtyard with a feeling of liveliness.

Zu An felt warm inside. All of this had been brought to him because of Chuyan. All of them had been carefully selected from the Chu clan. She hadn't sent anyone like Cheng Shouping.

He greeted the servants while heading inside. Suddenly, he stopped and raised his head toward the entrance. He saw a placard above the main gate. The placard was a lush green color, and written in large golden characters were the words—Green Hat Manor.

Zu An felt the world spin around him. He almost fainted on the spot.

The little servant boy spoke as if he were presenting a great treasure, "When we learned that master was given the title of viscount, all of us felt that the baron placard wasn't suitable. That's why we worked through the night to make a new one. What do you think; doesn't it look great?"

Zu An's eyes twitched. "Are you Cheng Shouping's brother?"

"I'm not..." The little servant boy was confused.

Zu An took a deep breath. "Let's swap out the placard and replace it with just the title of Viscount. Also, I don't want to see any green colors."

The servant boy replied, "But that doesn't make sense! A title makes you more honorable than those inferior nobles; of course we have to write it on the placard!"

The others all voiced their agreement. They felt that this was better, and that the title couldn't be removed. Otherwise, their manor would look much worse.

Zu An was getting a headache from all of their chattering. He finally couldn't take it and roared, "Are you all the master or am I the master? Change it, or else I'll send all of you back to take care of pigs!" He stormed off in a huff and slammed the door behind him. He didn't want to see it anymore.

F\*ck, you really reap what you sow... Zu An was still furious for quite some time. Out of helplessness, he could only use something else to distract himself.

He had collected a total of 432,022 Rage points, so he could pull the lottery a total of 4,320 times. He hoped that even though the world was disappointing, his gacha results wouldn't be.

After praying for a long time, he pressed the pull button. He had already used this lottery system many times, so he didn't feel like worshiping Buddha and begging the deities like before. He'd just let nature take its course.

Even though he made that choice, his eyes twitched when he saw the pull results. Out of 4,320 pulls, he had only gotten 349 Ki Fruits. Compared to the usual one to ten ratio, that result was absolutely terrible. That made him think it might be better to just buy things properly from the Shop in the future.

He continued to scroll through his pulls and saw that he had gotten a single tiger talisman. He had a few more saved up from before, so he would test his luck later to see if he could pull a valkyrie.

But his attention was quickly drawn to the last pull. The keyboard's light indicator stopped over the G key. Then, a row of text appeared on the holographic screen.

Congratulations, you have successfully won Pin Ru's Wardrobe!