

Immortal 901

Chapter 901: Pin Ru's Wardrobe

Zu An was completely stupefied when he saw the skill's name. He quickly continued to read the description.

Skill: Pin Ru's Wardrobe

Skill description: Legend has it that there was a playboy who had a thing with his wife's close female friend. Once, during a meeting, that close friend put on his wife's clothes when she came out of the shower, then said, 'Since I'm trying to seduce you, I might as well go all the way.' Then, the playboy replied with the classic phrase, 'You really are a seductress.' Because his wife's name was Pin Ru, her wardrobe was called 'Pin Ru's Wardrobe'.

Effects: When this skill is used, a wardrobe will be summoned. Female clothes can be stored inside ahead of time, and within the range of the wardrobe, others will mistake the one who wears the clothes for the original owner.

Note: This will only affect the third party. In the eyes of yourself and the wearer, she will still retain her original appearance. The effects will disappear once the target is more than ten meters from the wardrobe.

Zu An was stunned for a while after he read through the introduction. Why were all of the skills he got so shitty?

If you told me that the clothes could turn a girl into someone else once they put on these clothes, then I could at least play around with some cosplay, but her appearance won't change at all in my eyes? It'll only affect the third party?

Damn it! What's the use of having this stupid skill then?

Zu An used the skill, and a normal wardrobe appeared in front of him. He opened it and saw that it was completely empty. He checked out its size, and concluded it would be too hard to fit a person inside.

He shook his head. This skill was really weird. He really couldn't think of any situations where he would need to use it. He put it away at first, but for some reason, he suddenly decided to open up another wardrobe and store a set of Chu Chuyan's clothes inside.

Just then, someone knocked on the door. Zu An jumped in fright and quickly closed the wardrobe, asking, "Who is it?"

"Master, there's a woman outside who wants to meet with you..." a maid said from outside.

"Who is she?" Zu An asked out of curiosity. These Chu clan workers should have been able to recognize who it was, if it were someone like Chu Youzhao and Murong Qinghe.

"I don't know. Her entire body is cloaked, and she says that she's your good friend, and you'll know once you meet her," the maid replied.

"Invite her in then." Zu An was curious as well. This person had come out in broad daylight anyway, so he didn't have to be scared of some bad person.

A woman entirely wrapped in a white cloak walked in. Her hair was also covered with light gauze, hiding her whole body from view. Zu An could only see an excellent figure. He was stunned when he first saw her, but then, a warm smile appeared on his face. He waved his hands toward the maid and said, "You can withdraw for now."

"Oh..." The maid had originally been vigilant and wanted to chase the woman out for Chu First Miss' sake. But Zu An was the master now. Since the master had spoken, she could only leave reluctantly. When the maid left, Zu An closed the door behind her.

The woman giggled and asked, "Sir Zu, what are you trying to do? Won't there be rumors if a man and a woman stay in the same room together?"

Zu An turned around and looked at her, replying, "You're wrapped up so tightly anyway. No one even knows who you are."

"Then do you know?" The woman had deliberately changed her voice to hide her identity.

Zu An took her into his arms, replying "How could I not know, my Dan'er?"

The woman removed the cover around her head, revealing her tender and beautiful face. Who else could it be but Zheng Dan? Her eyes were full of joy as she exclaimed, "I already covered myself up so carefully! How did you know who I was?"

Zu An reached out and touched Zheng Dan's face. Her skin was still so smooth and fair. "Do we need something like that? We've already known each other for so long. I knew it was you from a single glance."

In reality, it was mainly because of her smell. The smells of the beauties around him were all different. After being around Zheng Dan for so long, how could he forget about her smell? Furthermore, he had just received news that Sang Hong had just returned. It wasn't hard to make the connection. Of course, only a stiff guy would say something like that at such a time. As the lord of the sea, how could he forget to add in some sweet words?

"It's been so long, and yet you're getting better and better at making girls happy. Tell me honestly, how many new girls have you gotten in this period?" Zheng Dan harrumphed. Her tone was extremely crafty, yet lovable.

"Why would an upright gentleman do something like that? Furthermore, I was in over my head in danger; I didn't have any time to be with anyone else," Zu An said without batting an eyelid.

"I guess I'll believe you." Zheng Dan didn't suspect him. After all, everyone had known where he was all this time. There was no way he had a thing with the crown princess, right?

Zu An looked at the beauty in front of him. She wore a white dress, making her look even more lovely and endearing. He couldn't help but gently caress her face when he saw the signs of hardships between her brows, saying, "Dan'er, you've become thinner since we last met."

Zheng Dan looked at him with large, misty eyes. "I ended up thinner from thinking about you."

Zu An smiled. This was the Zheng Dan he missed! She looked like a proper wealthy clan's daughter on the outside, but she was passionate and witty in private. He couldn't hold himself back anymore and kissed her. Zheng Dan cried out and fell into his embrace as if she were about to melt.

Couples would become like newlyweds after a long time apart. It had already been several months since they last met. When they kissed, it was as if thunder had struck the earth.

Suddenly, there was another knock at the door.

"Master! Master!" called the maid again.

Zu An raised his head, saying unhappily, "Don't bother me if it's not anything important."

"Sir Sang and Sang's young miss have come to meet you..." the maid said, sounding aggrieved.

"Ah!" Zheng Dan began panicking. She pushed Zu An away and sorted out her messy clothes.

"Hmph, I won't see them," Zu An replied. He told Zheng Dan, "You don't need to worry about anything."

Zheng Dan's face turned red. But in the end, she still couldn't continue doing what they had just been doing. She replied, "I told them that I was going to check on some of the Zheng clan's businesses. If they find me here, all of us will look bad."

Zu An was shocked. "The Zheng clan's businesses have reached the capital?"

Zheng Dan rolled her eyes. Was that really what was important right now?

The maid ran over and spoke again. "Master, Sir Sang said that there's something important they want to talk to you about. They'll leave after just a brief meeting."

Zu An felt a headache when he heard how persistent they were.

Zheng Dan said with a blush, "I'm leaving first. I'll find you again later." She opened the window behind her and was about to jump out, but she jumped in fright when she saw that some maids were sweeping the ground in the rear courtyard. Everyone would know that something was wrong if she left just like that!

Confused voices could be heard from outside.

"Sir Sang, you can't barge in like this!"

"Sir Sang, Miss Sang!"

Judging from the noise, the Sang clan's father and daughter duo were clearly approaching the room. Zheng Dan turned pale and asked, "What do we do?"

Even though she had already made her decision to recover her freedom after Sang Qian was buried, she still hadn't had the time to talk about it. She was still the Sang clan's daughter-in-law. It would be really bad if they bumped into each other ahead of time.

Zu An felt a headache. Suddenly, he thought of something. He looked at the wardrobe and opened it. He handed her the clothes inside, saying, "Change into these clothes."

After having been in Brightmoon City for so long, Zheng Dan obviously knew that they were Chu Chuyan's clothes. She was ashamed and anxious, exclaiming, "Do you know what kind of situation we're in? And yet you're still thinking about these things?!"

She wouldn't mind playing these games with Zu An if it were any other time, but there was a greater emergency right now!

Zu An said seriously, "Trust me. We'll make it through this situation if you put these clothes on."

Chapter 902, Part 1: Alliance

Zheng Dan didn't understand how wearing Chu Chuyan's clothes would help them through the situation. But now that things had already reached this point, there was nothing else she could do either. Her mind was already a mess, so she subconsciously listened to Zu An's instructions.

But female clothing wasn't so easy to change into in this world. She couldn't finish changing even after a long time. She decided to just hide behind a screen.

Zu An moved to stop the Sang clan's father and daughter duo. The best result would be if they didn't see anything. After all, he had never tested out 'Pin Ru's Wardrobe' yet and didn't know if it would work.

But the door slammed open as soon as he reached the entrance. A beautiful figure rushed in.

Zu An stopped her and asked in a serious tone, "What are you doing?"

The figure was alarmed. She quickly covered her chest with her arms, staring at him in embarrassment and anger.

You have successfully trolled Sang Qien for +44 +44 +44...

The young lady that had barged in was, of course, the Sang clan's young miss Sang Qien. Zu An hadn't expected that he would just happen to touch some areas he shouldn't have when he stopped her.

"What in the world are you doing, hiding inside all day!!" Sang Qien was about to cry. It almost looked as if she had been the one throwing herself at him!

"It's your fault for barging in like this. I was just about to open the door." Zu An had been planning to criticize her harshly, but with this unexpected situation, his tone couldn't help but ease a bit.

"Ahem!" Sang Hong exclaimed from outside. "Sir Zu, please don't blame my daughter. She's a bit rash in nature and has bumped into Sir Zu. This old one will apologize in her place."

Sang Qien became sullen. She had clearly been taken advantage of, and yet her father was apologizing instead? Such a feeling really wasn't great.

Zu An had a strange look on his face. I might have believed you if you said that Sang Qian's temperament was rash, but you're saying this about the resourceful Sang Qien?

This old fox was clearly using his daughter to get inside. That way, even if they broke inside, Zu An couldn't really say much.

“Master!” Several servants rushed in with clubs in hand. They looked at the visitors with unkind expressions. Letting the pair barge in was already hugely neglectful of their duty.

“It’s fine, we’re old friends. You can all withdraw for now.” Zu An didn’t want this matter to get out of hand either. He gestured for them to leave for the time being. Then, he looked at the father and daughter and said with a smile, “The two of you burst in like this so fiercely. Others might think that you came to catch an adulterer or something.”

Zheng Dan jumped in fright. This guy really dares to say something like that? Hmph, I want to see what you’ll do once they find out!

Sang Qien blushed and looked away guiltily. But the old fox Sang Hong was clearly much more shameless. He replied with a smile, “I see that Sir Zu is still as fond of jokes as usual. We heard that you were injured quite badly in the dungeon, but we couldn’t meet with you all this time while you were in the palace. When we learned that you had emerged, we immediately came to see you. Qien’er here was too worried about you and barged in. I’ll have to ask you to forgive her rudeness.”

“Dad...” Sang Qien stamped her feet. Even though she knew that her father was using her as an excuse, her young lady’s shyness still couldn’t take it. Sang Hong coughed and pretended to not have seen anything.

Zu An thought of something. He remarked with a smile, “Hm? The two of you came today, but why don’t I see Miss Zheng here?”

Zheng Dan’s heart was about to pop out of her chest. Why does this guy keep talking about our sore spot? He’s completely playing with fire!

Sang Qien gradually recovered her composure and said, “My sister-in-law left earlier. Right, did she come and visit you?” She looked around as she spoke.

Zu An replied with a smile, “Why would your sister-in-law come to find me?”

Sang Qien remarked with an ambiguous smile, “Who knows? You and my sister-in-law are... very good friends, right?”

Zheng Dan held her head in her arms. This little sister-in-law of hers was way too smart! She always felt that this girl actually knew something.

Zu An laughed and said, “But of course! I was locked up in the same cell with your sister-in-law for so long on our way to the capital, so we’ve gone through some stuff together. Of course we’re good friends. I’m also good friends with Miss Qien.”

Zheng Dan blushed when she heard those words. The scene of the two of them sitting together in the carriage resurfaced. This guy really is a little rascal!

Sang Qien harrumphed. Like hell I’d want to be that kind of good friend with you!

Sang Hong had his eyes closed, as if he were taking a moment to rest. Suddenly, though, he looked toward the screen and remarked, “So Sir Zu had another guest over right now. I wonder who it is?”

Zheng Dan’s heart pounded quickly. With Sang Hong’s cultivation, he had obviously noticed her.

Sang Qien suddenly looked toward the screen. Her expression became conflicted. What if it really is sister-in-law? What do we do then?

Zheng Dan was so nervous she almost fainted on the spot. Her head rang with noise. What would she do if her father-in-law and sister-in-law found out?!

Even though her entire marriage with Sang Qian now looked like a farce, and it was mainly in name, the key was that she still hadn't formally broken things off. If she were found out here, it wouldn't just be her reputation, but the entire Zheng clan's reputation that would be ruined.

Zu An said with a smile, "I couldn't deceive Sir Sang after all. The one inside is Chu Chuyan. She just came to visit me. The two of us were just about to get intimate when you two came, so she's a bit embarrassed."

Sang Qien harrumphed. Who do you think you're fooling? Chu First Miss is in Brightmoon City right now, why would she be here?

Sang Hong's eyes twitched. He obviously didn't believe that it was Chu Chuyan. It was more likely to be his daughter-in-law Zheng Dan. He actually didn't really mind the two of them having some relationship in private; since his son was already dead anyway, he could then make full use of his daughter-in-law, turning her into the link that tied Zu An to the Sang clan.

But that couldn't happen out in the open. It would have been crossing the line a bit if Zu An told him that he had been intimate with Zheng Dan just a moment ago.

When he saw Sang Hong's change in expression, Zu An replied with a smile, "Then should I call Chu Chuyan out to say hello? We're all acquaintances already, anyway."

Sang Hong's expression changed again. He quickly said, "There's no need."

Sang Qien also quickly added, "I'm sorry for bothering you. Should we come back at a different time?" She turned to leave after speaking. She really didn't know what she'd do if Zheng Dan came out at that moment. Her dad was so old already, too. What if he ended up getting a stroke?

But Zu An wasn't willing to give up and said, "Sigh, of course we should all say hello! Or else you'll think your sister-in-law is here." He walked over to the screen and pulled Zheng Dan out as he spoke.

Zheng Dan's mind went completely blank. What is he doing? Why does he want me to meet the two of them? I'm completely done for... I can't even go out in public anymore...

But she didn't display her anger or mockery. The entire room became completely silent. She had been the boss of one of Brightmoon City's gangs, so her control over her emotions was exceptional. She had to deal with this matter sooner or later, so she'd just do it now.

But right before she spoke, she saw the Sang clan's father and daughter look at her in shock. Sang Hong exclaimed, "So it was Chu First Miss! We father and daughter have been really rude just now. We hope you don't take offense."

Zheng Dan was stunned. Zu An patted her hand and replied, "We're all friends here, so why are we treating each other like strangers? Why has Sir Sang visited us today?"

Zheng Dan sat down off to the side, puzzled. Countless possibilities flashed through her mind. Why would the Sang clan's father and daughter call me Chu First Miss? Don't tell me they're playing along with Zu An just because they really don't want to create a fuss in public? Ahh, I'm going to die from embarrassment...

"We mainly came to pay you a visit and bring you some medicine." Sang Hong gestured toward his daughter as he spoke.

Sang Qien snapped out of her daze and quickly handed over the gifts they had prepared, explaining, "This bottle of Thousand Year Snow Moon Extract is something my father unintentionally stumbled upon many years ago. It has excellent effects for restoring the body, so we hope it can be of help to big brother Zu." She felt quite strange. Why had Chu First Miss not said anything? Furthermore, her expression seemed a bit different from usual.

When he saw Sang Qien's strange expression, Zu An said with a smile, "Little sister Qien'er's arms are even fairer than this Thousand Year Snow Moon Extract."

Sang Qien's face immediately flushed red, and she pulled back her hands at once. Her attention was diverted, as expected.

You really are a brute... Who wants to be your little sister Qien'er?! Do you think I'm as easy to trick as sister-in-law?... Her thoughts continued to go on and on like a broken record.

Sang Hong had a strange look on his face when he saw the scene. He thought to himself, I already gave away a daughter-in-law. Don't tell me I have to give away my daughter too? He coughed lightly and asked, "Ah Zu, do you know why his majesty didn't openly blame King Qi?"

Chapter 902, Part 2: Alliance

Sang Hong didn't want to call him 'Sir Zu again', but he didn't know if he would offend Zu An by calling him a worthy junior. That was why he decided to just call him 'Ah Zu' to pull their relationship closer together..

Zu An said with a smile, "I don't understand what Sir Sang is saying. Why would his majesty criticize King Qi?"

Sang Hong chuckled. "I know that you have your misgivings, but you've shown tremendous favor to our clan. Our Sang clan only has gratitude toward you, and we've always been wondering how to repay you. We're now in the capital where the various powers are twisted and intertwined. People like us without much of a background should be sticking together and looking out for each other."

Even though he didn't know what exactly had happened in the dungeon, it wasn't hard to guess that King Qi had definitely done something inside. Furthermore, the ones who had come out in the end were Zu An, the crown prince, and the crown princess. That meant King Qi's plans had failed.

Zu An didn't keep up the act when he saw that Sang Hong was already going so far. "Uncle Sang, please don't take offense. The capital is extremely dangerous right now, so I have to be careful with every step I make."

Zheng Dan couldn't help but roll her eyes when she heard Zu An even call Sang Hong 'Uncle Sang'. These two had been at each other's throats just a few months ago, and yet they were now like family? This world really was strange.

Sang Hong said, "We don't have any grudges between us that can't be resolved. On the contrary, there are many areas in which we can work together and combine our strengths."

He had always followed the emperor as a loyal subject with absolute devotion. Yet in the end, he had lost his only son due to an unforeseen event. In the end, it was because the emperor hadn't hesitated to abandon him. He knew that there was no meaning left in remaining a loyal subject, so that was why he changed his mind.

But he had already offended way too many clans from all the dirty work he had helped the emperor with. There was already practically no place left in the capital for him.

However, Zu An was different. He was a rising star, and he had the Chu clan behind him as well. Furthermore, even his relationship with the Royal Academy didn't seem to be bad. More importantly, the two of them had already shared joys and sorrows on their way to the capital. To a certain degree, they already carried a somewhat sturdy friendship. That was why Zu An was the one most worthy of his investment right now.

Zheng Dan was quite shocked. The other party was already being sincere, and he was playing along even though he had seen her right here. That meant he had already tacitly approved of her relationship with Zu An! She was happy, and yet also apologetic inside. She subconsciously looked toward Zu An, her eyes filled with pleading. She hoped that Zu An and the Sang clan could retain a good relationship.

Zu An thought for a bit, then smiled. "I've benefited greatly from uncle's advice about the capital's powers on the way to the capital. I'll definitely need uncle's help more and more in the future."

The previously tense Sang Hong sighed in relief. Zu An had already tacitly accepted their alliance. That meant things would become much easier now.

Zu An didn't hold back anymore and said, "The question uncle raised just now leaves me puzzled as well. Both sides have already fought for so long, and he had a justifiable reason to eliminate King Qi this time. Why would his majesty instead give up such a great opportunity?"

He actually already had his own answer to that question. He wondered if it was because the emperor had lost a portion of his soul, causing his strength to decline greatly and preventing him from winning against King Qi. But he couldn't tell Sang Hong that and discuss it together with him.

As for the threat of Zhuxie Chixin, Zu An didn't really care about him at all anymore.

Sang Hong said, "It's to be expected. Do you know that the capital's situation has always been extremely tense? The armies are all being transferred in private, and the entire capital is like a bucket of gunpowder. With just a single spark, the entire thing will detonate.

"King Qi has already had many years to plan. His power and influence are great, and almost half of the entire court's civil and military officials are on his side. If his majesty decides to break off all relations now, everyone related to King Qi will have no choice but to brace themselves and risk it all. That's a situation his majesty absolutely doesn't wish to see."

Zu An hadn't expected that the two sides were already on the brink of war!

"But is he really going to just let it go like this?" he asked. "With his majesty's nature, I don't believe he's willing to suffer such a loss."

Sang Hong smiled, but didn't reply. Instead, he looked at his daughter with a tense expression and asked, "Qien'er, what do you think?"

Sang Qien was caught off guard, but she still replied, "His majesty obviously wouldn't let things be. If he's acting according to our predictions, he's trying to avoid large-scale conflict, but he'll definitely try to break down the core forces of King Qi's faction first. Then, he'll settle the score when there's an opportune moment."

She gave Zheng Dan a look, then said, "Furthermore, the part of King Qi's faction that will bear the brunt of this will be precisely the Qin clan. The Qin clan's forces are deeply rooted in the military. The reason why his majesty isn't willing to make a big fuss is also because of the Qin clan."

Zheng Dan was confused. Why are you looking at me when you're talking about the Qin clan? Don't tell me you really think I'm Chu Chuyan?

Zu An quickly asked, "Then how do you think his majesty will act against the Qin clan?"

The Qin clan was Qin Wanru's original family after all, and they treated Chu Chuyan and Chu Youzhao well. They would definitely feel bad if something really happened to the clan.

Sang Qien shook her head. "We don't have enough information right now. However, what I can be sure of is that his majesty's first target will definitely be the Qin clan. Moreover, it won't be long before he makes his move."

"Keep going." Zu An sat up straight as well. Sang Qien's analysis was extremely important. He didn't want to miss anything.

"Next will be the Yu clan. If the Qin clan represents military authority, the wealthy Yu clan represents King Qi Manor's financial power," Sang Qien continued. "Of course, it might be the Pei clan. After all, the Pei clan has substantial influence in the court's governmental affairs."

Yu Yanluo and Pei Mianman appeared in Zu An's head. He felt a bit of a headache. Why did all of these people he was close to have to be in King Qi's faction? He shared a huge grudge with that clan's father and son!

As Sang Qien spoke more about her analysis, Zu An felt that he was benefiting greatly from what she said. He sighed in admiration and said, "Little sister Qien'er really deserves your reputation. You really are a female Zhuge."[1]

"Who is Zhuge?" Sang Qien was confused. She had already corrected him a few times, and yet Zu AN still called her 'little sister Qien'er'. She didn't even feel like commenting on it anymore.

"Um..." Zu An thought for a bit before explaining, "A wickedly intelligent person."

Sang Qien's face turned red. She became a bit bashful as she mumbled, "I'm not that great..."

“Little sister Qien’er is being too humble.” Zu An suddenly found that teasing this girl was pretty fun. She was incredibly mature when it came to political affairs, and yet she was as shy as a young lady on normal topics.

Sang Hong coughed and cut short Zu An’s teasing. “Ah Zu, my status is special, so his majesty might start suspecting me if I chat with you for too long. That’s why, if you have anything you need to talk about, please seek out Qien’er. There are many areas in which she isn’t inferior to me.”

“Sure,” Zu An said with a smile. Chatting with a young lady was obviously more interesting than talking to an old man.

But he suddenly felt a small hand pinch his waist. Zheng Dan said in his ear through ki transmission, “Tsk tsk, that old man is trying to give you two a chance to get together in private.” She was slowly starting to see Sang Hong’s plans. She felt a bit unhappy. She had clearly come here first!

After some hesitation, Sang Hong said, “Right, the Zheng clan started some businesses in the capital, and Zheng Dan has always been busying herself there. It’s not easy for her all on her own. Ah Zu, if you’re willing, please look after her too.”

Sang Qien looked at her father in shock. Even though she’d had her suspicions, she hadn’t expected her father to actually say that out loud!

Even though nothing had been said openly, everyone present was intelligent. They knew what those words implied.

Zheng Dan lowered her head. She was so embarrassed she wanted to run away and hide forever. And yet, she was happy inside too. The mountain weighing down on her mind could now finally be shifted aside.

Zu An had a strange look on his face. He said, “Um... I’ll do what I can to take care of her.”

Sang Hong nodded, then got up, saying, “Alright, I won’t disturb your reunion with your spouse any longer.”

“Why don’t you stay for a bit longer? You can leave after a meal.” Zu An pretended to try to keep them, but how could the father and daughter not know his intentions? They obviously wouldn’t stay.

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When the two left, Sang Qien secretly asked her father, “Dad, why does Chu First Miss seem a bit strange today?”

Sang Hong nodded. “She was indeed acting a bit strange, as if she was scared of us.”

“Hm? Did you say Chu First Miss?” asked a curious voice from the side.

The two gave each other a look, and saw that a pretty young man was looking at them. Next to him was a tan-skinned young beauty.

“So it was the Chu clan’s young master! We just visited Sir Zu earlier, and we met your sister inside,” Sang Qien replied with a smile. There was no need to hide it. Because of their relationship with Zu An, their friendly relations naturally extended toward the Chu clan.

“My big sis came to the capital?” Chu Youzhao’s eyes lit up. She couldn’t be bothered to chat with the two of them anymore and rushed into the house.

Zu An held onto Zheng Dan’s hand while saying, “Dan’er, your father-in-law already gave you to me in public. You don’t have to worry about anything else anymore.”

Zheng Dan harrumphed. “What are you saying? He only asked you to look after me. Stop thinking about such random things.” Despite those words, her heart was pounding.

“Right, something’s really strange. Why didn’t they get upset at all when they saw me? It was almost as if... I really was Chu First Miss.” Zheng Dan was confused. This matter was just way too strange.

Zu An was about to reply when an energetic voice suddenly came from the distance. “Big sis? Big sis?”

Chapter 903, Part 1: The Fiend Races’ Invasion

“So it’s Chu Chuyan’s little brother!” Zheng Dan no longer felt as nervous as before. They were all from Brightmoon City, and Chu Chuyan had been her classmate. She viewed Chu Youzhao just like her own little brother, so she wasn’t anywhere near as nervous as when she had met the Sang clan.

However, Zu An shivered and quickly tugged on Zheng Dan’s clothes. Zheng Dan’s face immediately went red as she exclaimed, “What are you doing? Chu Youzhao is about to come in!”

Her meaning was apparent. I wouldn’t mind at all if you tried to take off my clothes at a different time, but your little brother-in-law is about to come in! This is completely inappropriate!

Zu An knew that she had misunderstood him when he saw her strange expression. He quickly exclaimed, “Your clothes!”

She looked like Chu Chuyan in the eyes of others right now. It was enough to fool the Sang clan, but there was no way her own little sister wouldn’t be able to tell. Chu Youzhao was always in contact with her older sister too, and obviously knew that she wasn’t in the capital right now.

Zheng Dan also reacted to what was happening. She didn’t know why her appearance had changed and just thought that others might question things if she wore Chu Chuyan’s clothes.

She said with a charming smile, “Let’s do this again next time when no one is watching.” She then darted behind the screen to change into her own clothes.

Zu An felt his heart pound. Zheng Dan really knew how to turn him on! She really knew what men wanted. But he wasn’t in the mood to think about such things right now. He quickly moved over to the entrance to buy Zheng Dan time.

“Big sis...” Chu Youzhao had been running too quickly and rammed right into Zu An. She blushed and quickly took a step back, exclaiming, “Stupid brother-in-law, did you do that on purpose?!”

Zu An rubbed her head and said, "It's your fault for being so impatient." Then, he nodded toward the bright, tanned-skinned young lady next to her. "It looks like Qinghe came as well."

That was actually already a no-brainer, because the two of them always stuck together. It would be stranger if she hadn't come with Chu Youzhao.

"Greetings, big bro Zu." Murong Qinghe smiled bashfully. She was actually a tough little girl in the military, but she couldn't help but become a bit reserved when she was in front of her big brother Chu's family.

"Huh? Where is my big sis?" Chu Youzhao got on her tiptoes and looked over Zu An's shoulders.

Zu An asked, sounding confused, "What do you mean?"

Chu Youzhao tried to squeeze through beneath his armpits. "I saw the Sang clan's people outside. They said big sis was here!"

Murong Qinghe had been about to subconsciously follow her, but she was too embarrassed to go past another man's body. She stood in place with a distressed expression.

Fortunately, Zu An quickly opened the door. "What big sister, little brother? How could your big sister possibly be here?"

"I guess you're right." Chu Youzhao had actually also been confused. After all, she knew that her big sister should still be in Brightmoon City, hard-pressed from all the work. Why would she be here? But Sang Hong wasn't so easily fooled.

Her eyes suddenly moved toward the screen next to her. There was a light blue dress there. She asked with a smile. "Big sis, is it really you?" However, when she ran over and saw who it was, she jumped in alarm. "Why are you here?" she asked.

Zheng Dan walked out with a smile, replying, "Who else did young master Chu think it was?" She snuck Zu An a look. Hmph, you didn't even think to stop him? What if I didn't finish changing yet and was seen by another man? Aren't you the one who would be suffering a loss then?

Chu Youzhao's crossdressing was the Chu clan's greatest secret. Zheng Dan obviously didn't know about it.

Chu Youzhao was puzzled. Then, she suddenly realized something. She turned around and looked at the two of them with suspicion, asking, "Why are you here? And why were you hiding all secretly behind the screen like that?"

Zheng Dan said calmly, "I accidentally spilled some tea on my clothes, which made them wet. That's why I went behind the screen to sort it out."

Chu Youzhao's eyes moved across her body. Her clothes don't seem to be wet at all... But maybe she already wiped it dry...

She snickered and said, "Miss Zheng... Ah, I mean Madam Sang, you're already a married woman, but you're sorting out your clothes in another man's room. Won't that create rumors?"

Zheng Dan's eyes twitched when she heard the words 'Madam Sang'. This little brother was just as sharp-tongued as a girl! He really knew how to prick one where it hurt.

She replied without batting an eyelid, "Who said I was alone? I... came with my father-in-law and sister-in-law. It was only because I had to clean this up that I stayed for a bit longer. As for those other things, your big sis and I were fellow students, and your brother-in-law was my teacher, a well-known upright gentleman. Why would I have to worry about such things?"

Chu Youzhao's breathing briefly stopped. She had actually been happy when she heard Zheng Dan praise her brother-in-law, but then she had called him an upright gentleman... This girl is quite pretty, but it seems she might be a bit blind.

Zu An coughed and said, "Enough already. Miss Zheng is an old acquaintance from Brightmoon City after all, but you're coming at her like she's some criminal. Isn't that a bit rude?"

Even though everything did make sense, Chu Youzhao just felt that something was off. She suddenly pointed at the dress behind the screen, asking, "Then why is my big sis' dress there?"

Zheng Dan's expression changed. She really had no explanation for that.

But fortunately, Zu An's mind moved quickly. He quickly said seriously, "Your big sis and I have been apart for too long. It was so hard in the dungeon too, and the only thing that kept me going was your older sister. When I came back out, I could only bring out some of her old clothes to reminisce, so it would feel as if she were still at my side."

"Brother-in-law..." Chu Youzhao's eyes turned red. She thought to herself, So brother-in-law actually loved big sis so deeply... I even suspected him, what's wrong with me?

Murong Qinghe had a strange look on her face. She had grown up among soldiers, so she often heard about things they did. She knew that such men were often full of energy, and when they were forced to hold it in for too long, they would have no choice but to settle it themselves. They especially loved to use women's clothing...

Is that what big brother Zu was doing? Her tanned skin began to turn a bit red when she thought of that.

When Zu An saw the two little girls blush, one from envy, the other from embarrassment, he felt grateful that his reactions were fast enough.

You have successfully trolled Zheng Dan for +55 +55 +55...

However, those Rage points woke Zu An up. His devotion toward Chu Chuyan had ended up offending another woman. He immediately explained quietly, "I only did that to get us out of this sticky situation; I missed you a lot when I was in the dungeon too!"

But Zheng Dan wasn't so easily fooled. She replied through ki transmission, "Hah, what did you miss about me?"

"Um..." Zu An immediately replied, "I missed your passionate lips, your soft hands, and..."

"Stop, stop, stop!" Zheng Dan finally couldn't take it anymore. Even though she was passionate in private, she still couldn't help but feel embarrassed when she was in front of others. "Since there's nothing else, then I'll leave first. I won't get in the way of your reunion."

Zheng Dan quickly left, but she was so awkward it looked as if she were running away.

Chu Youzhao couldn't help but mumble when she left, "The Sang clan's people are all so ridiculous. They not only brought their daughter over, they even left their widowed daughter-in-law here! What the heck are they trying to do?" She was clearly still brooding over Sang Hong fooling her.

Zu An said with a cough, "Talking about others behind their backs isn't too fitting for a noble."

Chu Youzhao harrumphed. "What, are you worried about those vixens just because I said a few things?" She felt as if once her big sis had left, the pretty girls had all suddenly come out to dance around Zu An. She had a mission to be the gatekeeper in her big sis' place.

Zu An's breathing momentarily stopped. He knew that it was useless to reason with her at that point, so he could only use ignorance to defeat ignorance. He cried, "Oh my, it's been so long! Did you miss your brother-in-law to death? Come and give me a hug; let's see if you've grown a bit chubbier since the last time we met!"

Chu Youzhao screamed. Sure enough, her attention was diverted and she hid behind Murong Qinghe, exclaiming. "Bad brother-in-law!"

Zu An had been about to hug her, but he quickly pulled his arms back when he saw Murong Qinghe. He chuckled in embarrassment and remarked, "We're all men anyway; what's the big deal with just a hug?"

Murong Qinghe also found it strange, but what she was more worried about was that her big brother Chu had actually put her on the spot! What if his brother-in-law ended up hugging me? Whose fault would that be?

Chu Youzhao's expression was a bit strange. Stupid brother-in-law already knows I'm... But she obviously couldn't say anything in front of Murong Qinghe. She quickly changed the topic. "Brother-in-law, hurry and tell me about what happened in the dungeon!"

Even Murong Qinghe was now staring at him with interest. After all, only the few survivors knew what had really happened in the dungeon! Maybe the clan leaders might have picked up some rumors, but juniors like them had absolutely no idea.

"Ah, about that, it's a really long story..." Zu An pulled over a seat and sat down. He slowly told them about his encounters since the trial.

Of course, he left out the crucial details about King Qi Manor's deathsworn soldiers and the emperor's split soul. But the more it became that way, the more twists and turns appeared in the story, the more thrilling it became. The two young ladies were excited and shocked.

"Brother-in-law, I didn't expect you to have encountered so much danger!"

"The Shi clan are really despicable."

"Those two Gu clan brothers are even more hateful."

...

Murong Qinghe's expression was a bit more conflicted. To a certain extent, they were under King Qi's faction. That was why, whether it was the Shi clan or the Gu clan, what those clans had done was actually beneficial to them. If not for Zu An, King Qi might have already risen to the throne.

Her big brother Chu had really forgotten about everything now that her brother-in-law was here! Sigh, forget it, I'm going to follow big brother Chu wherever he goes.

Then, Chu Youzhao grabbed Zu An's arm and pulled him toward the door. "Brother-in-law, let's go! I'm going to treat you to a feast at the Moon Restaurant to congratulate you on your safe return!"

Chapter 903, Part 2: Fiend Races' Invasion

Moon Restaurant was one of the most famous restaurants in the capital. It was rumored that in the past, when the emperor mingled with the people incognito, he would even be pleased when he dined there. It was easy to imagine how high the level of the food inside was.

Of course, the price was similarly high. But for the heir of the Chu clan, the grandson the Qin clan doted on, it wasn't a big deal at all.

Such an event was something that should have been celebrated at home, but there was no female host there. That made the atmosphere a bit too cheerless, and there weren't enough preparations. As for the Qin clan, they couldn't even think of that. If they brought Zu An over, the Qin clan might just chase him straight out.

Zu An had no objections at all to dining with two young beauties. He was even wondering if they'd run into ignorant young master villains who would tease the two young ladies, upon which he'd come out to save them as their hero.

Unfortunately, nothing unexpected happened at all. He saw the two back home after they finished their meal.

"Those web novels are all bullsh*t after all," Zu An cursed as he sat down back home. But after thinking for a bit, he chuckled and felt that he was probably just not as much of an eyesore as those protagonists, not that much of an enmity magnet.

Out of boredom, he took out the Tiger Talismans he had pulled previously. Together with the ones he hadn't used yet, there were six in total.

"Who am I going for this time? Xi Shi[1] or Diaochan[2]? Hm, I wouldn't complain if I got someone like Xiaoqiao[3] either..." Zu An let his fantasies run wild as he began to pull.

He felt his soul fly out into the cosmos. Then, he saw flickering lights in the distant starry skies. He released his spirit and focused on communicating with them.

There was soon a response, and a speck of light quickly flew over.

"Xi Shi please, Xi Shi..." Zu An clenched his fists.

But when the light appeared in front of him, he was stunned. It was a freaking green hat!

Damn it! Zu An cursed. Then, he continued to pull. He didn't dare to put on airs or go for someone on the level of Xi Shi. All he hoped for was that he might get something useful.

...

After pulling six times, Zu An's eyes twitched. He was about to go insane from the six green hats in front of him.

Can you not play with me like this, please? The emperor gave me the title Green Hat Viscount, and now I pulled all green hats?! And they're all so ordinary, without any special functions...

F*ck, I have to get rid of this title as soon as possible, or else people will start introducing me as the Lord of Green Hats Zu An or something! I'd rather die than have that happen!

Zu An decided to just use his phoenix fire and burn the glaring green hats to ashes.

I'm going to make everyone else wear these goddamn green hats! Zu An got more and more angry the more he thought about it. Unfortunately, it was already the dead of night and there was no one for him to talk to.

Helpless to do anything else, he could only summon Daji and talk to her about his woes. Unfortunately, Daji only stared at him with her large, beautiful eyes during the entire process. She didn't show even the slightest response.

"I forgot you didn't have a soul." Zu An sighed. He thought of something and took out the Ki Fruits he had gotten earlier, feeding them to her.

She was already at the sixth rank. To reach the seventh rank from the sixth, she needed 800 Ki Fruits. She had already eaten 360 of them, so she was already close to the fifth step of the sixth rank. Her 'Fox Charm' skill scaled proportionately with her cultivation, so the higher rank she became, the higher the rank of the target she could control.

For the sake of controlling the imperial physician, Zu An had tried all sorts of different methods to raise the 'Fox Charm' skill. He had used a special pill furnace and prepared all sorts of precious materials just to improve the skill's rank, allowing it to control someone of the same cultivation rank.

Raising the skill rank really hadn't helped much, however. It was a much better deal to just raise her cultivation.

Zu An did a rough calculation. Raising Daji's cultivation was easier at first, but would become much harder later on. After all, judging from the looks of things, Daji's cultivation seemed as if it could only reach the ninth rank at most. Raising 'Fox Charm' might be more valuable at that point.

"Another 440 Ki fruits and you can reach the seventh rank, hm?" Zu An was looking over the description of her cultivation when he suddenly noticed something else. As her cultivation rose, more information became available.

Once Valkyries reached the sixth rank, Ki Fruits alone wouldn't be enough for them to break through to the next major rank. They also needed some special materials to help them break through.

For example, for Daji to rise from sixth to seventh rank, she needed five pieces of Wuyang Jade, ten Grey Wolf King Fangs, thirty Blue Earthflowers, and twenty Nine-Headed Pheasant Feathers.

Those were all names that Zu An had never heard of before. He quickly looked up their corresponding information. Daji was part of the Bluefield Nine-tailed Fox Race, and her hometown was Bluefield Mountain. That was a place that had both the jade and the earthflowers.

Wuyang Jade was likely a type of fire element jade, while Blue Earthflowers were probably a type of cold yin plant.

The greatest enemy of the Bluefield Nine-Tailed Fox clan was the Grey Wolf clan. When the nine-tailed foxes were still young, they would often be hunted and devoured by the Grey Wolves. That was why, if the nine-tailed foxes wanted to grow up, they had to hunt down the Grey Wolf Kings to prove themselves to their clansmen.

As the name implied, the Grey Wolf Kings' fangs were their teeth. Furthermore, it had to be their two sharpest canines. A single pack of wolves would only have a single wolf king, and only two of the fangs could be obtained from that wolf king.

Zu An was full of regrets. He had encountered a pack of Grey Wolves in the dungeon. If he had known about this earlier, he would have thrown a bunch into his spatial storage!

He continued reading. The Nine-Headed Pheasant Feathers referred to the single unique feather under the pheasants' wings. Once the feather was lost, a Nine-Headed Pheasant would lose its ability to fly.

As for why Daji needed those feathers for her breakthrough, the introduction said that the Nine-Tailed Fox clan loved to eat chickens, and that the Nine-Headed Pheasants were one of the most delicious birds.

Zu An looked at the ridiculously beautiful white-clothed woman in front of him after reading the introduction. He wondered if he should just roast some chickens and put them in front of her, to see if she would eat them.

But he soon realized that raising her cultivation might not be as easy as he imagined. The special materials were a huge restriction.

The Grey Wolf Kings' fangs were still doable; he would pull out a few the next time he had a chance. There were Nine-Tailed Pheasants in the Shop feature he had unlocked earlier. Even though the Rage points needed to purchase them were a bit ridiculous, at least there was hope.

As for Wuyang Jade and Blue Earthflower, he had never even heard of them before. Even the Shop system didn't have them.

"I'll ask the Imperial Hospital about them tomorrow." Zu An unknowingly fell asleep after thinking about the problem for a while. Meanwhile, the white-clothed Daji continued to look at him silently.

...

The next morning, when Zu An got up, there was someone next to him. He jumped in fright. Then, when he saw that it was Daji, he couldn't help but exclaim with a smile, "So it was you! Sorry, I forgot to put you away. You must've been really bored staying out here all night."

Daji only continued to stare blankly at him.

Zu An became a little sad, musing, "How can we bring back your soul? Otherwise, this is just too great of a pity..."

Daji blinked as if she had sensed something. But she seemed stunned when she heard what Zu An said. "Once you get your soul back, the first thing I'm going to do is hold you while I sleep."

Daji was at a loss.

Zu An went to the imperial palace after washing up. He wanted to ask the Imperial Hospital about Wuyang Jade and Blue Earthflower, and he also wanted to meet Bi Linglong to exchange some affection.

But when he arrived at the imperial palace, he suddenly sensed a heavy atmosphere. He quickly pulled over some guards to ask about what had happened. They knew that he was a rising star and didn't hide anything from him, quickly explaining.

"There was an emergency situation last night from the north. The fiend races that have remained dormant for many years suddenly sent their troops south and took out our defensive perimeter. They slaughtered and plundered everything in their path, and they even took a city!"

"Those damned fiend races, I just knew that all non-humans were evil! If we knew this was going to happen, his majesty should've just wiped them all out."

"Do you think it's that easy? The fiend races are still strong. They hid in the extreme north after they were defeated, and we couldn't do anything to them."

"Do you think his majesty will personally lead troops into battle?"

"No way; it's probably the State Duke of Triumph who will lead the army."

"I think so too. With his prestige in the military, I don't think anyone else is better for this role."

...

Zu An was surprised when he heard their discussion. The State Duke of Triumph was Qin Zheng. Sang Qien had told him earlier that the emperor's first target would definitely be the Qin clan, and now, Qin Zheng was about to be transferred to the border. Was all of this deliberate, or was it purely a coincidence?

He continued to the hospital. Unfortunately, no one knew about the two materials he needed even after he asked several physicians.

But one of the physicians suggested, "I don't know about Blue Earthflowers, but I know someone who might know about Wuyang Jade. The Yu clan works with all kinds of jade around the world, and Madam Yu Yanluo is even more so an expert on the jade business. If anyone in this world knows about this Wuyang Jade, it'll be her."

Zu An was moved. That devastatingly beautiful figure appeared in his head, and he couldn't help but smile. This woman and I are tied together by fate after all!

Now that there had been some progress, Zu An felt much more at ease. He continued toward the Eastern Palace.

Bi Linglong's eyes lit up when she saw Zu An, but she quickly calmed down and said indifferently, "Sir Zu has been injured so badly and should be resting. Why did you come to the Eastern Palace so soon?"

Zu An said with a smile, "My skin is thick; those wounds aren't a big deal at all. On the contrary, when I think about how the crown princess has suffered damage to her vitality because of my inadequacy, my wish for the crown princess to be treated properly keeps me up at night."

Bi Linglong blushed. She obviously knew what kind of 'treatment' he was talking about. This rascal is teasing me in front of so many people!

Chapter 904: New Mission

Bi Linglong couldn't show any of her thoughts and could only say with a smile, "Thank you, Sir Zu, for your concern. I'm fine and I'll recover after a bit of rest..."

Her maid, Rong Mo, was confused as well. "Huh? Crown princess, your hair is becoming even whiter. If Sir Zu has a cure, you should hurry and let him treat you..."

Bi Linglong shot her a look before she could even finish. "Shut up!"

Rong Mo's expression immediately became downcast, but she didn't dare to talk back to the crown princess. She could only glare at Zu An while pouting and muttering, "It's all his fault! He only knows how to say some pretty things... He's making me look bad."

"How is the crown prince's body?" Zu An asked, pretending to care. He was in front of everyone else, after all, so it would be strange if he were only concerned about the crown princess.

"Thanks to all of Sir Zu's efforts, even though the crown prince has suffered some injuries, his life is in no danger. It is just that he was scared quite badly in the dungeon, so he might have nightmares sometimes. The imperial physician has already prescribed some Calm Focus Pills, so he should recover soon too," Bi Linglong replied in a formal manner. At the same time, she took the chance to praise Zu An's contribution. Sure enough, the others looked at Zu An with eyes filled with admiration when they heard those words, which obviously made him feel amazing.

"That's good to hear." Zu An obviously didn't really care. He recalled what he had heard from the guards on the way and remarked, "I heard that the fiend races have invaded us?"

"Correct." Bi Linglong's expression became more serious as well. "We just received this news last night. The fiend races have broken through our northern defensive line, and they've even slaughtered everyone in our strategic Mobei City."

"They massacred everyone and captured the city?" Zu An's expression became strange. He had seen this kind of situation before in history books. He hadn't expected it to happen so close to him one day.

"Indeed. They didn't even spare a single living thing! The fiend races are too hateful!" Hatred flickered in Bi Linglong's eyes.

"What does the court plan to do?" Zu An asked.

Bi Linglong replied, "During the morning court session, there was a huge debate, but the general consensus is that we should declare war. Our Great Zhou Dynasty has never suffered such a huge loss since our founding. Submitting to humiliation isn't our Great Zhou people's nature. It's to the extent where even the students of the Royal Academy came up to our palace gates to petition, stating that they're willing to fight the fiend races in the front lines. But of course, the court obviously didn't agree to that. The Royal Academy's talents are the foundation of our nation; how can we let them die prematurely in battle?"

"I heard that the one chosen to lead the battle this time might be the State Duke of Triumph, right?" Zu An asked.

Bi Linglong's expression changed. She waved her hands, gesturing for the others to leave. But she had to keep Rong Mo at her side for the sake of declaring her innocence. Afterward, she explained, "Indeed. If nothing unexpected happens, then it should be the State Duke of Triumph. There are no candidates more suitable than him in the entire court in terms of qualifications and prestige."

Zu An tried to find out more information and said, "Having the State Duke of Triumph go might not be the worst situation for the Eastern Palace."

Bi Linglong shook her head. She gave him a deep look. "It might have been a good thing in the past, but now, it actually might not be."

Zu An was stunned. He quickly realized what she was hinting at. They had actually fought against the emperor in the dungeon, so it was actually now in their best interest for the emperor and King Qi to continue fighting.

Rong Mo looked back and forth between Zu An and Bi Linglong. She thought to herself, Are they speaking in riddles with each other? Why can't I understand what they're saying?

The three of them all had their own thoughts. The room became strangely quiet.

A while later, a maid suddenly entered and reported, "Crown princess, a messenger from the imperial study instructed me to tell you that his majesty has summoned Sir Zu."

Rong Mo couldn't help but mutter, "Sir Zu really is appreciated by his majesty, huh? His majesty keeps summoning you again and again." She had served the crown princess diligently for so many years, and yet the emperor almost never summoned her alone.

Zu An replied, "What can I say? The more capable one is, the greater their responsibility."

Rong Mo was speechless. She felt as if she were being offended somehow.

Bi Linglong was worried. Only she alone knew that it might not actually be appreciation. She spoke to Zu An secretly through ki transmission. "Be careful."

Zu An smiled toward her. "Don't worry, I still need to help you with your treatment. How can I let anything happen to me before that?"

Bi Linglong harrumphed inwardly. A bad man!

Rong Mo had a strange expression on her face. She had also seen Zu An's strange smile. She obviously wouldn't think that Zu An was brazen enough to tease the crown princess, so she subconsciously mistook it for Zu An taunting her. Is this guy trying to hit on me? Hmph, even a toad like you thinks you have a chance?

...

Zu An proceeded to the imperial study. He nodded toward Eunuch Wen when he saw him, and Eunuch Wen also smiled in return. However, when he was about to go inside, Eunuch Wen shook his head slightly.

If even Zhuxie Chixin could sense the emperor's change in attitude, as the emperor's trusted aide, how could he not sense the change in his majesty's attitude toward Zu An?

"I greet the emperor!" When he entered the study, Zu An noticed that the emperor's complexion was absolutely cold. His mood was definitely not good.

"Sit!" The emperor commanded while pointing to a chair off to the side.

Zu An was quite 'overwhelmed' by the sudden favor. He had come to this study so many times, but this was probably the first time he had been invited to sit down, right?

But he quickly realized that the situation was actually quite strange. He had served as an emperor for many years when he was in Yin Xu's ruins. He quickly realized that this was a tactic a ruler would often use. The emperor might actually want one dead, but they would instead treat one well to lower one's guard.

Zu An didn't really understand. Could it be that the truth of what happened inside the dungeon had been exposed? But that shouldn't have been the case, because the emperor would have killed him on the spot the moment he found out. Why would he even bother playing these games?

Thus, his annoyance was most likely due to his instincts as an emperor. He was worried that his split soul would be exposed, so he didn't want any of the survivors of the dungeon to live. But he needs me right now, so that's why he's pretending to be nice.

"Have you recovered yet?" the emperor asked with an amiable tone.

Zu An replied, "I was fortunate enough to receive the care of many physicians. Even though I haven't made a full recovery, I can at least move around now." I feel more creeped out from this emperor trying to be nice; I'd rather he just act all imposing and intimidating... Wait, what the heck am I saying?

"That's good then." The emperor nodded. "There just happens to be something I need you to take care of."

Zu An thought, As expected. But he didn't reveal his thoughts on the surface at all. "I wonder what kind of task it is?"

The emperor said, "Something happened in King Qi Manor a few days ago. King Qi's concubine drowned in a pond in the middle of the night. There are many points of suspicion in this matter, so investigate this matter to help King Qi uphold justice."

Zu An had a strange look on his face. What the heck do you mean 'help him uphold justice'? When did you two suddenly become caring brothers?

If she had died in King Qi Manor, if it really wasn't an accident, it would definitely be related to King Qi. Investigating this matter would mean clearly opposing King Qi!

He said in a troubled manner, "Shouldn't the nine ministers handle this kind of matter? King Qi's concubine has a special identity, so it isn't too convenient for us Embroidered Envoys to look into..."

He wanted the emperor and King Qi to keep each other in check. Why would he suddenly run into the middle of their conflict?

The emperor shook his head. "You won't use your Golden Token Eleven status to investigate this matter, but rather your original identity."

Zu An was stunned.

What the hell? I just went through that entire dungeon escapade! Others might not know what happened inside, but King Qi definitely knows that all of his men died inside! Besides, I'm the strongest subject who survived! King Qi's sword might come straight for my throat as soon as he sees me... And you want me to investigate King Qi Manor? Do I look like I'm that tired of living?

The emperor said indifferently, "I asked you to hand King Qi the fake Phoenix Nirvana Sutra. How is your progress?"

Zu An said in a distressed manner, "I haven't found a good chance to give him the fake manual yet."

The emperor gave him a look. "That's why I'm giving you this chance. There'll be many chances for you to meet King Qi when you work on this case. You have to quickly hand him the fake manual at the proper time."

Zu An fell silent. He knew why the emperor was becoming so worried. The emperor hadn't been in such a rush to handle that matter before, but that was because he had been confident in being able to completely overwhelm King Qi. But now, he had lost a split soul in the dungeon. Even though Zu An didn't know just how badly it had wounded the emperor, it had definitely had a significant impact on his strength. He might not even be a hundred percent certain of defeating King Qi anymore, so that was why he needed the assistance of the fake manual.

No wonder the emperor hadn't exposed King Qi Manor's deeds in the dungeon. So that was one of the reasons.

The emperor's brows rose when he saw that Zu An remained silent. "What, is there an issue?"

Zu An raised his head and smiled. "There's no problem. I'll do my best to complete this task!"

This is fine as well. I'll have a chance to approach King Qi. If I want the two sides to keep each other in check, I don't have enough bargaining chips invested on King Qi's side. I might even be able to change my relationship with King Qi this time.

The emperor frowned. For some reason, he felt that Zu An's smile was strange. For the first time, he felt as if he couldn't figure out what Zu An was thinking.

He shook his head. It's probably just a misconception. This brat's entire fate is within my grasp; how can there be that many intricacies? He said, "Alright, you can leave now. Complete the task as soon as possible."

Chapter 905: Cold Shoulder

Eunuch Wen greeted Zu An with a big smile as soon as he walked out. "Sir Zu, I've already prepared all of the relevant personnel by the palace entrance. I wonder when you plan to investigate the case of King Qi's concubine?"

"I'm going right now, of course." Zu An cursed inwardly. Can you stop with the act already? You even prepared all of the relevant people already, and yet you're putting on this pretense and asking me when I'm going?

"Then I wish Sir Zu the best of luck." There was a kind smile on Eunuch Wen's chubby face.

Zu An cupped his hands, then headed toward the Eastern Palace to tell Bi Linglong about his new mission. After all, she was probably worried, feeling that something might have happened to him.

Bi Linglong was also confused when she heard Zu An's explanation. "You're going to investigate the case of King Qi's concubine?"

She couldn't be bothered with arousing suspicion at that point, even chasing out her personal maid. Then, she said worriedly, "King Qi's greatest plan was destroyed by your very hands. The first thing on his mind right now will probably be to kill you. Won't you just be throwing your life away if you investigate this case now?"

"Sigh, but if I don't head over now, the emperor might just kill me on the spot!" Zu An exclaimed. He said with a smile, "Don't worry, I'm a proper subject assigned by the emperor himself, so King Qi wouldn't dare to become hostile in public. Even though this assignment is full of dangers, it might also be an opportunity for me. If I use it well, I might even be able to infiltrate King Qi's side."

"Infiltrate his side?" Bi Linglong immediately became vigilant. As a key figure from the crown prince's faction, she had already opposed King Qi's faction for many years. Her first reaction when she heard that was rejection.

Zu An laughed involuntarily. "Don't worry, it's just to keep some of his majesty's methods in check. Of course I'm not going to completely go over to his side. With our relationship, of course I'll help you."

Bi Linglong's caution eased up a bit when she heard his explanation. But she wouldn't admit to it on the surface. "Hmph, who wants to have any relationship with you?"

When Zu An saw her arrogant appearance, he really wanted to give her a good spanking. Unfortunately, they were in the imperial palace right now, so that idea could only remain a thought.

...

When he came out of the imperial palace, several guards and eunuchs were already waiting outside. They immediately greeted him when they saw him. "We pay our respects to Sir Zu! Eunuch Wen has asked us to serve you."

Zu An was already famous in the capital. All of the imperial guards knew who he was. When he saw the guards fervently trying to curry favor, he responded courteously while sighing inwardly. These guys were too low in status and didn't have access to any higher level information. They all thought they were getting closer to a rising star, but in reality, Zu An was in an incredibly dangerous situation.

The group arrived at King Qi Manor. Zu An had a pensive expression. For some reason, compared to the last time he had come, King Qi Manor seemed a bit less extravagant... There were clearly not many changes on the surface, however. He wondered if it was just a figment of his imagination.

King Qi Manor's servant had been about to greet them politely when he saw that someone had come to visit. But when he heard that the group was there to investigate the drowning of King Qi's concubine, his expression immediately changed. "All of you, wait here. I'll send in a report first." He slammed the door shut loudly without even waiting for their response, leaving Zu An's party in dismay.

"King Qi Manor's people are really rude. Shouldn't they at least let us wait inside?" the guards complained.

Zu An chuckled and said, "We'll just wait here." Then, he sat down by a nearby gazebo and closed his eyes, as if he had just come out for a small outing.

After Zu An said that, the others naturally couldn't say anything more. They all waited patiently. But an hour quickly passed and King Qi Manor's servant still didn't come back out. They clearly planned to refuse the group entrance.

"These King Qi Manor dogs are going too far!" The guards finally couldn't take it anymore. They were all filled with indignation. After all, they were part of the emperor's forces, so they felt a natural enmity toward King Qi Manor.

Zu An frowned. This investigation was just nitpicking to begin with, so it was natural that King Qi Manor's people weren't willing to meet with them. But if they didn't open the door even after such a long time, his group still couldn't help but feel like fools for waiting outside.

As such, he had his subordinates knock again. However, that subordinate came back angrily and said, "Sir Zu, they said that King Qi is busy with public affairs, and that the messenger who went to contact him hasn't been able to meet with him yet. Hmph, they're clearly playing with us!"

Zu An chuckled. This was actually all within his expectations. He had to perform his due diplomacy before resorting to violence, but he had now already done everything he could. He started to give out orders.

The guards jumped in fright when they heard Zu An's commands. Their expressions changed. "That's... not too good, is it?"

Zu An rolled his eyes. These guys had been shooting their mouths off as if they were going to tear the manor apart, but now that he was telling them to be a bit more aggressive, they were suddenly scared? He said, "Don't worry, I'll take responsibility if something happens."

When they heard that, together with the fact that they had been enraged to begin with, the guards finally made their decision and picked up their equipment. They ran up to King Qi Manor's gate, and

inserted two long strips of yellow paper between the two doors. There was a large 'seal' character on them that was especially eye-grabbing.

Their activity quickly drew the attention of nearby people. The residences near King Qi Manor were obviously not owned by ordinary civilians. They were practically all owned by court officials. The residences' servants, and even the officials themselves, came to watch. They whispered among themselves.

"What is going on?"

"Why has King Qi Manor been sealed up?"

"Heavens, has his majesty finally decided to act against King Qi?"

...

The onlookers became more and more worked up as they discussed the situation among themselves. After all, many of them were aware of the emperor's conflict with King Qi.

King Qi Manor's people finally couldn't sit still. The door slammed open, and a group of guards came out in single file. The one in front tore off the paper. He was furious when he saw the character written on it. "You damn slaves are impudent! You actually dare to cause trouble at our King Qi Manor?!"

He slammed the paper toward the faces of the two nearest guards as he spoke. The guards wanted to move out of the way, but their bodies seemed to have frozen up in front of his tremendous power. They couldn't move in the slightest.

The people watching could feel the threatening energy even from far away. Those with sharp eyes already recognized the person to be one of King Qi's guardians, the ninth ranked Han Fengqiu. If one were slapped by someone like him, even if one's head didn't explode like a melon somehow, one's mouth would definitely be permanently damaged.

But they all felt that these visitors deserved it. They were the ones who had foolishly decided to cause trouble outside King Qi Manor.

However, the terrible situation they imagined didn't happen. A hand blocked the attack heading toward the two guards, grabbing Han Fengqiu's hand. It couldn't continue forward at all.

"Hm?" Han Fengqiu was confused. His other hand moved as well. Both sides exchanged two palms, then separated.

Afterward, the onlookers finally recognized the owner of that other hand.

"Isn't that the newly risen Green Hat Viscount Zu An?"

"I heard that he fought on equal footing with Han Fengqiu before, but I just thought of it as some crazy rumor. But today, I've seen it for myself!"

"Did Han Fengqiu cultivate all those years for shit? That young kid has already caught up to him!"

...

Han Fengqiu's face twitched. The comments of the surrounding people cut into him like blades. At the same time, he was confused. Zu An had clearly been far inferior to him last time, so why did they suddenly seem to be on the same level now?

Zu An's eyes twitched as well. The way the surrounding people had addressed him stabbed straight at a nerve.

Han Fengqiu finally snapped out of his gaze and said with an unkind expression, "I was wondering who it was. So it was Sir Zu! Even though Sir Zu has brought back tremendous contributions and has become a popular figure in the Eastern Palace, coming all the way here to our King Manor and starting trouble bears the crime of rudeness, no?"

This was a kind of offense that could be major or minor. If it were a situation that didn't matter, it could just be easily brushed off. But if they wanted to, they could make a huge deal out of it.

The guards who had come with Zu An immediately felt gloomy and dismayed. If King Qi wanted to pursue the matter, according to the rules, they might just be banished as punishment.

Zu An chuckled and replied, "What is Sir Han saying? We're carrying out an investigation on his majesty's orders right now. How is this starting trouble?"

Han Fengqiu threw the seal paper to the ground. "You already sealed up the entirety of King Qi Manor, and yet you're saying you didn't start trouble? Where in the world do you get your courage from? I don't think his majesty would give you this kind of order."

Zu An's expression became serious. He replied in a clear voice, "This official came on his majesty's orders to investigate the case of King Qi's concubine. Unfortunately, even after we attempted to communicate several times, King Qi Manor has shirked responsibility and refused to even open the gate. This official suspects that there might be some bad people involved, people who privately wish to obstruct this case. As such, we continued the case according to the law. Since King Qi Manor is where the crime happened, according to the rules, it should be temporarily sealed up, and casual entrance and exit must be prohibited to prevent tampering with evidence."

Han Fengqiu was speechless. He had wanted to give them the cold shoulder then back off when things looked hairy, but he hadn't expected Zu An to be so vicious! Furthermore, every single action was in accordance with the law, so they couldn't even say anything in return.

And yet, if he really let Zu An seal up King Qi Manor, King Qi would really lose all dignity. As such, he quickly squeezed out a smile and said, "Sir Zu has misunderstood. King Qi was just busy dealing with public affairs. King Qi has just received news of Sir Zu's arrival, so he sent me over to bring you over to the pond where his concubine perished. That is the real scene of the crime."

Chapter 906: The Living Can Lie, but the Dead Will Not

Zu An looked hesitant. "Wouldn't that be troubling you all? It's no problem at all; it'll be the same if I start my investigation from the outside."

"It's not troubling us, it's not troubling us at all! Sir Zu, please come in!" Han Fengqiu had a smile on his face, but he was swearing profusely inwardly. Won't you seal up the whole freaking manor if you investigate the outside?

Han Fengqiu kept on inviting Zu An inside generously, but Zu An continued to turn him down. He was really about to cry. The gatekeeper could've offended anyone else; why did he have to offend this damn little devil?!

"Fine. I mean, if you guys insist. I wouldn't be giving brother Han here face if I don't come inside now." Zu An finally agreed.

Han Fengqiu forced out a smile with great difficulty. "Sir Zu, please come in, please!"

You have successfully trolled Han Fengqiu for +233 +233 +233...

Zu An strutted in only after feeling he had gotten a sizable amount of Rage points from the ordeal.

His subordinates exchanged looks and saw the admiration in each other's eyes. They had been left helpless just a moment ago by King Qi Manor, and yet now, Sir Zu had easily dealt with the problem! No wonder this man had been able to accumulate so many contributions so quickly.

The group was brought to the rear garden. Han Fengqiu pointed toward a certain spot and said, "This is where her highness drowned."

Zu An noticed that the pond was actually pretty large. It was actually a small lake! It wasn't all that shocking that someone had drowned there. He pointed at the railing by the shore and said, "There are so many railings here. Why did King Qi's concubine drown here?"

Han Fengqiu said, "These railings were newly constructed after the matter as a preventative measure for the future. If Sir Zu looks more closely, you'll find that the paint on them hasn't even dried yet."

Zu An was speechless. "Then doesn't that mean that the scene of the crime was already completely destroyed by all of you?"

If craftsmen had come and gone to install the railing, even if there were any clues, they would have long been erased.

"I don't really understand what Sir Zu is saying," Han Fengqiu replied. "Her highness' case was clearly an accident. What clues could there possibly be?"

Zu An harrumphed. "Whether it was an accident or not isn't for you to decide. We'll only know after the investigation."

Han Fengqiu wanted to say some things to knock Zu An down a few pegs. What, are you questioning King Qi Manor's decision about our own matters? Are we supposed to listen to your opinion instead? But he had just been through a horrible experience, so he held it in. Forget it, I won't argue with this kind of petty person.

Zu An had his subordinates look around and check to see if there were any clues that had been missed. They had all been specially assigned to this task, so they were experts. If there really were any clues, they wouldn't escape their eyes.

But unfortunately, they all shook their heads toward Zu An after searching several times. King Qi Manor had clearly prepared properly in advance. The scene of the crime had already been thoroughly destroyed.

Zu An didn't bother with that matter anymore and asked, "Where is the concubine's palace?" Han Fengqiu was a bit hesitant. Zu An asked with a smile, "What's wrong? Is it inconvenient for us to go there?"

Han Fengqiu shivered. He didn't know what kind of nonsense this kid was going to start next and quickly said, "There's no real inconvenience."

...

Soon afterward, they arrived at a courtyard. It was quite sizable, and the details were also elaborate and exquisite. This was definitely a concubine that had received quite a bit of favor. But many dried leaves had now fallen onto the floor. The large courtyard now had a strange aura of neglect.

Furthermore, there wasn't even a single person there. As if guessing Zu An's thoughts, Han Fengqiu explained, "This courtyard was abandoned after what happened to her highness. The servants didn't dare to come anymore, for fear that it had become haunted."

Zu An remarked with a smile, "Perhaps haunted by a vengeful spirit?"

Han Fengqiu's expression changed. "Sir Zu, please don't say such things! Those ignorant maids are just instinctively scared of things like ghosts; there's nothing more to it."

Zu An chuckled and didn't continue. He went inside and began to look around. Han Fengqiu became expressionless. There was nothing shameful inside, so Zu An could just look all he wanted.

Zu An gave orders to his subordinates, then entered the concubine's chambers alone. There was still a faint fragrance in the room. As King Qi's concubine, the perfumes she wore were all quite extravagant. The scent was deep and refreshing, but unfortunately, the beauty was already deceased.

He opened up the wardrobe to the side and saw all kinds of pretty dresses. He couldn't help but say in amazement, "She had so many clothes."

"She was King Qi's concubine after all, so he wouldn't treat her poorly," Han Fengqiu replied.

Zu An nodded, then asked nonchalantly, "What did she wear the night she went out? Did she wear her own clothes or civilian clothes?"

Han Fengqiu replied, "Her own clothes. But I believe they were comparatively plainer than usual."

Zu An gave him a look and remarked, "From the sound of it, she seems to have worn clothing that wasn't that eye-catching to attend some meeting in the middle of the night...?"

Han Fengqiu exclaimed in alarm, "I didn't say that! Please don't put words in my mouth! This matter is related to her highness' reputation, so Sir Zu must watch what you say!"

"It was just a joke. You don't have to be so nervous, Sir Han." Zu An patted his shoulder, then escorted him out like that.

Han Fengqiu's entire body went rigid. He wasn't used to having another man's arm around him like that. He was also worried that he might suddenly be ambushed, as he wouldn't have any chance of fighting

back then. And yet, if he pushed Zu An away, wouldn't the two of them become completely hostile? It would be very annoying if Zu An used that as a pretext to make a fuss again.

After thinking about it for a bit, he decided that there was no reason for Zu An to do something like that in their manor. He thus gradually calmed down. While he was carrying out his internal struggle, however, he didn't notice that Zu An had picked up a set of King Qi's concubine's clothes and stored it into his Brilliant Glass Bead.

When they left the courtyard, Zu An asked, "What about the maids and servants who personally served the concubine?"

Han Fengqiu said with a smile, "I've already prepared all of them for Sir Zu." He gestured toward the outside. A group of maids and nurses walked in. This was a king's concubine, so there was obviously no need for any men to be present.

Zu An had a pensive expression as he thought, It looks like these guys were already fully prepared. He had his other subordinates talk to the servant girls. Meanwhile, he called the maid whose uniform clearly indicated a higher level into the room to question her alone. Han Fengqiu waited outside, seemingly to avoid suspicion.

"What's your name?" Zu An asked.

"Qiu Yue," the girl said with her head lowered.

"You were the head maid of King Qi's concubine?"

"Yes."

"Since you're the head maid, why didn't you follow her that night? She ended up drowning without anyone being there to help her." Zu An's voice became cold.

The maid replied in alarm, "My mistress snuck out in the middle of the night! She didn't call for us..."

Zu An retorted with a sneer, "As her personal maid, you didn't even know anything when your mistress got up in the middle of the night?"

The maid quickly replied, "I don't know why either, but I was in a very deep sleep that night. Normally, I'd wake up from even a bit of activity."

"Oh?" Zu An raised his eyebrows. "Then were you perhaps drugged that night, or did someone strike your sleep acupoint?"

The maid said, puzzled, "I'm not sure, but how could there be a bad person who'd do something like that in a place like King Qi Manor?"

Zu An thought to himself for a moment, then suddenly asked, "Who was your mistress normally close to? That is, apart from King Qi."

The maid turned pale with fright. "Sir, you really shouldn't speak so carelessly about such things... My mistress was fully devoted to the king; why would she get close to anyone else?"

Zu An said with a sneer, "I only asked you who she was close to. I didn't even say whether it was a man or a woman, but your first reaction was to assume it was a man. Aren't you basically confessing willingly?"

The maid quickly explained, "Sir, even though this king manor can't compare to the imperial palace, the concubines often struggle for the king's favor, so maybe... Maybe..."

"Are you saying there might be some internal competition?" Zu An was getting annoyed with the way she kept speaking and trailing off.

The maid's expression changed. "This servant doesn't dare to speak rashly about the other concubines... But in this kind of situation, my mistress would never get too close to the other women."

Zu An then asked, "Who did she not get along with? Who hates her the most in this manor?"

The maid shook her head. "There might be some conflict between the concubines, but it wouldn't go so far as for them to go after each other's lives. Even though the king is tolerant, he's also wise and brilliant. He would never tolerate anyone doing this. That's why the other concubines wouldn't take such a risk. Furthermore, my mistress rarely left the residence all these years, and her nature was gentle and kind. Rarely did others dislike her. It's hard for me to believe that someone wanted to kill her."

"Then do you also think that her death was an accident?" Zu An stared into her eyes.

"Our king looked into this matter before as well, and he determined that it was an accident. Could it be that there were other ulterior motives?" the maid asked in confusion.

Zu An began to think quietly to himself. A while later, he gestured for her to leave. When she reached the doorstep, however, he suddenly stopped her. "By the way, did your mistress treat you well?"

"The mistress was gentle and kind in nature, and she always treated her subordinates extremely kindly. She was even more like a sister to me. But... but..." The maid's expression was full of grief. She began to sob quietly.

When he saw that he wouldn't be able to get anything else out of her, Zu An indicated that she could leave. Then, he walked out. The other guards finished their interrogations shortly afterward. They shook their heads slightly toward him when they saw him. They hadn't obtained any useful information either. It looked entirely as if the concubine had accidentally drowned.

Zu An thought to himself for a while, then left the courtyard. He said to Han Fengqiu, "I'll have to trouble Sir Han to lead us to her grave. We need to examine her remains."

The living could lie, but the dead would not.

Han Fengqiu's expression instantly changed. "No, absolutely not! Even though she isn't King Qi's main wife, she's still the king's woman. How can we let others defile her?!"

Chapter 907: I Am a Rough Man

Zu An said with a smile, "I'm investigating this case on his majesty's orders. Of course, I believe King Qi as well... The people in this manor wouldn't harm the concubine, but there's no such guarantee for the ordinary people outside. You know how quickly gossip travels, so there might be rumors that King Qi

killed his own concubine in just a few days, or that King Qi's concubine had a lover behind his back, and that was why she was killed. If we can investigate the concubine's corpse and confirm that she did die from an accident, this case will be enough to convince the masses. I'm considering things from the perspective of King Qi's reputation and prestige here!"

Han Fengqiu was speechless. King Qi's reputation among the people was excellent. He was always praised as a sage among kings. Why would anyone criticize him that way? If there were any vile rumors like this, they would probably be started deliberately by a brat like you!

He knew that Zu An was unpredictable. If he didn't allow this investigation, Zu An might really start something like that. But how could he agree to something like examining her highness' remains?

Both sides quickly began to argue again. Neither side was willing to back off in the slightest.

Just then, a voice asked in confusion, "What are you all arguing about over here?"

Zu An turned around, and his eyes lit up. He saw that there were several pairs of men and women nearby. Some were dressed in fancy clothing and had excellent features. But the most eye-catching was the beautiful man at the very front... It wasn't that he swung that way, but that he was just too handsome.

His skin was like jade, his bearing graceful. Even though he appeared to already be middle-aged, it didn't decrease his charm at all. On the contrary, it made him look more steadfast. Together with his luxurious, and yet not tacky outfit, he would become the spotlight of any group.

There was actually someone this handsome in the world? Zu An was incredibly shocked. This man is almost as handsome as me!

"I greet Princess Changshan, Sir Yu, Sir Lian, and Madam Lian!" Han Fengqiu greeted those people.

Zu An was surprised, but he had already guessed who those people were.

Princess Changshan was the emperor's little sister. She had been married off to the Yu clan's young master when she was young. Zu An gave her a look. Her appearance was only ordinary, but the noble aura she gave off added a few points. However, because her cheekbones were a bit too high, it made her look a bit too harsh and fierce. Together with the fact that she resembled the emperor a bit, it was really hard for Zu An to have any good impression of her.

The ridiculously handsome man was her husband, the Secretariat Assistant Director Yu Nan. The honest-looking man, on the other hand, was probably the Secretariat Director Lian Yu.

It really was quite strange when Zu An thought about it. Lian Yu was clearly the Secretariat Director, and Yu Nan was supposed to be his subordinate, and yet he allowed Yu Nan to walk in front when they moved together. Apart from Yu Nan's temperament standing out, it probably had something to do with their family background too.

Yu Nan was the celebrated eldest son of the Great Zhou Dynasty's Yu Clan. His father was the current Imperial Secretariat's Left Confidential Assistant, Yu Xuanchong. The Yu clan even operated the largest stone business, making them incredibly rich. Together with the clan's members occupying high positions, it made them one of the Zhou Dynasty's greatest clans.

As for Lian Yu, even though his background was also distinguished, the Lian clan couldn't compare to the Yu clan at all. Furthermore, Lian Yu's wife was Yu Nan's younger sister, so he could be considered the Yu clan's son-in-law. When he walked together with the eldest son of the Yu clan, Yu Nan, he couldn't help but pale in comparison.

Zu An gave the woman next to Lian Yu a look. So this must be his wife. She looks much more beautiful than Princess Changshan. As expected of a girl from the Yu clan. Yu Yanluo's gorgeous appearance appeared in his mind. The Yu clan's genes are truly amazing... The men are handsome and the women are pretty.

"Sir Han, what are you all arguing about?" Yu Nan took the initiative to ask him. Even though his tone was polite, he had a naturally arrogant bearing.

But Han Fengqiu didn't feel that was excessive. Yu Nan's status gave him the right to act arrogantly. As such, he told them about what happened.

"So you're Zu An?" Yu Nan asked. The others also turned to look at Zu An when they heard his question. After all, Zu An had been quite the hot character for some time.

Zu An frowned when he heard the other man speak his name so casually, his tone full of arrogance. "And who are you?" he replied. Even though he could guess who they were, they had never met before. It wasn't surprising for him to not know who Yu Nan was.

Yu Nan's breathing stopped. He wanted to tell Zu An who he was, but he felt that would be too low for his status. He was momentarily at a loss for what to do.

Lian Yu grinned. He'd had to suffer quite a bit because of this brother-in-law of his, and seeing him like this now felt pretty good. Of course, he would only think that on the inside; he would never show it on the surface.

Fortunately, Han Fengqiu was tactful enough to quickly introduce them. Along the way, he even praised them quite a bit. Only then did Yu Nan's expression ease a bit.

But Princess Changsan wasn't too happy when she saw her husband suffer a loss. She remarked, "I heard that the Eastern Palace got quite an uncouth newcomer, that he was most glib in speech. I can see today that that reputation was fully deserved."

Zu An said with a smile, "If I'm not mistaken, Princess Changsan is his majesty's younger sister, no? You should be quite close to the Eastern Palace. Why is it that not only have you not helped the Eastern Palace, you're instead criticizing the one who has been helping the Eastern Palace?"

Princess Changsan's expression immediately changed. Those words really stabbed right at her. She couldn't just say that she was also King Qi's younger sister, right? But there was no need for her to speak reasonably with Zu An. She exclaimed, "Brazen! You dare talk disrespectfully to me?!"

You have successfully trolled Princess Changsan for +444 Rage points!

The guards under Zu An looked at each other in dismay. We messed up now... We ended up offending someone like Princess Changshan! Are our petty lives going to end here?

Zu An sneered inwardly. Looks like the imperial family and I really are destined to clash!

“As the princess states, I am indeed just a rough man. That’s true in every way.” He paused for a moment and said, “I’m acting under the emperor’s orders, and everything is going through proper procedures. I hope the princess doesn’t take offense, if there’s any way I’ve offended you.”

The guards looked at each other in dismay. They hadn’t expected Sir Zu to be so bullheaded. Was he going to just fight back directly? Just where does he get his confidence from? He clearly doesn’t have any clan power backing him. Is he really not scared?

They obviously had no idea that Zu An had already faced the emperor himself in the dungeon, and that he had chatted happily with the celebrated ancestors inside. This was just a trifling little sister of the emperor; why would he treat her as a big deal?

It would be one thing for him to just suck it up when he faced the emperor, since he couldn’t win against him, but who did this little sister think she was? Either way, since she was closer to King Qi, the emperor wouldn’t side with her either.

“You dare use my brother, the emperor’s name against me?!” Princess Changshan erupted into rage.

You have successfully trolled Zhao Xiao for +999 Rage points!

“What’s going on?” called a familiar voice in the distance. King Qi walked over with a group of escorts.

Han Fengqiu sighed in relief when he saw King Qi. He quickly ran over and whispered some details. King Qi quickly became aware of what had just happened.

“Second brother, this person...” Princess Changshan was cut off by King Qi before she could even finish.

“I came out to take a look when I saw that all of you still hadn’t arrived. I didn’t expect all of you to be here.” King Qi smiled toward Yu Nan and the others, then looked at Zu An. “Sir Zu, it’s been a while. Your cultivation has advanced greatly. Your talent is unmatched since ancient times.”

Princess Changshan and the others felt something heavy drop inside of them. Only now did they realize that Zu An’s cultivation seemed to have already reached the ninth rank at his young age. If nothing unexpected happened, someone like him would surely have endless prospects. Even an ordinary ninth ranked cultivator couldn’t be rashly provoked, let alone someone like him.

Zu An chuckled ‘bashfully’ and replied, “My aptitude is just ordinary. I was even placed in the lowest class in Brightmoon City. It’s mainly because my luck has been good. Perhaps it’s a reward for being a good person.”

The others almost vomited blood when they heard him call himself a good person. This guy is utterly shameless!

But King Qi was thinking on a deeper level. His cultivation aptitude is ordinary, but his cultivation advanced so quickly. Looks like it’s because of the Phoenix Nirvana Sutra. That technique really is as wondrous as the legends state!

His eyes began to burn with passion when he thought of that. “Sir Zu, you came at a perfect time. I’ve prepared some wine over here, so why don’t you join us?”

Chapter 908: Waste of Saliva

Yu Nan and the others frowned. As core members of King Qi's faction, even though they didn't necessarily know exactly what had happened in the dungeon, they knew that King Qi had definitely invested quite a bit. Yet in the end, everything had failed because of a final lack of effort. It was probably all because of Zu An.

They thought, This kid already made it clear that he was the emperor and the crown prince's dog, so why the hell are you inviting him?

But King Qi's prestige was great. Even though they didn't understand it, they wouldn't actually go against his decision.

Zu An was overjoyed. The fish took the bait! But he pretended to be troubled on the surface. "A meal might be a bit inappropriate. After all, I still have a case to investigate over here."

King Qi smiled. "You can just ask me directly about your questions regarding the case. After all, there's no one more familiar with this case in the entire manor. We can talk about it slowly inside."

He had been absolutely confident in the cultivators he placed in the dungeon. After all, he had even sent in four of his powerful guardians as a failsafe! Despite that, it had still resulted in failure. He just couldn't figure out what had happened, but Zu An definitely knew.

Furthermore, his defeat was just way too bitter. Previously, they had been evenly matched against the emperor, but now, they had already been forced into a passive position with their strategy. No matter how capable those under him were, they still couldn't think of any ways of turning the situation around. Meanwhile, Zu An was a variable. If he could somehow obtain the Phoenix Nirvana Sutra and raise his strength greatly, he would be able to turn things around.

Zu An finally reluctantly agreed when he heard those words from King Qi. "Since King Qi has asked with such sincerity, I'll stay for a meal."

Those guards under him had originally been shaking in fear. But now, when they blinked, they seemed to have weathered this storm? And King Qi was even acting so politely?

Yu Yan and the others almost vomited blood. Why the hell does this kid even look reluctant to accept this? Is he trying to step all over us?

You have successfully trolled Yu Nan for +333 Rage points!

You have successfully trolled Lian Yu for +333 Rage points!

You have successfully trolled Zhao Xiao for +333 Rage points!

...

King Qi was a bit more shrewd in his thoughts. He wasn't too affected and gestured for those present to come in. Soon afterward, Zu An and Yu Nan's party followed King Qi into the manor. As for Zu An's subordinates, Han Fengqiu took care of them.

Zu An asked many questions regarding King Qi's concubine along the way, and King Qi patiently responded to all of them. Even Zu An was amazed at how good his attitude was. Only after sitting down

did Zu An realize that even though King Qi had answered his questions, he hadn't provided any useful information. His ability to dodge questions left even Zu An impressed.

Just then, Madam Qi also arrived under the escort of a maid. She smiled when she saw Princess Chanshan and Lian Yu's wife. But when she saw Zu An, her smile instantly froze.

You have successfully trolled Bi Fanghua for +458 Rage points!

She clearly still carried resentment after Zu An beat up her son.

She quickly looked toward King Qi. King Qi's lips moved slightly, and he was clearly conversing with her in private through ki. Only then did her expression ease a bit. She sat down in her position and didn't even give Zu An a single look.

Yu Nan said with a smile, "Madam, it's almost your birthday. I wonder how you plan to celebrate it?" This matter was the reason his group had come over to begin with.

Madam Qi shook her head. "We're in troubled times, and there's just been a death in our manor. It's not a good time to be arranging festivities."

Yu Nan and the others fell silent. On the surface, she appeared to be talking about the concubine who had just died, but in reality, she was referring to their troops who had died in the dungeon. It was indeed unsuitable to hold a celebration after King Qi Manor had just suffered such a crushing defeat.

"The madam is kindhearted after all." Those present flattered Madam Qi, before the topic unknowingly drifted to the dungeon trip.

Lian Yu raised his head to look in Zu An's direction, remarking, "Sir Zu has earned tremendous contributions from the dungeon test. Can you tell us a bit about what happened in the dungeon?"

King Qi nodded inwardly. Lian Yu is clever as expected. He said it so I don't have to.

"I merely killed some fools with impure motives; it's not deserving of such praise. It's really not worth mentioning," Zu An said. Despite those words, he couldn't stop himself from smiling.

This presumptuous brat! Those present cursed inwardly.

You have successfully trolled everyone for +444 +444 +444...

Lian Yu forced a smile and said, "Sir Zu must be joking. How can someone who earned the title of Green Hat Viscount, personally conferred by his majesty, not have tremendous achievements?"

Zu An's face twitched when he heard the words 'green hat'. He felt that it would probably be better if he didn't work so hard, if things were going to end up like this. He replied, "All of you are important subjects of the court. I believe you already know about what happened in the dungeon. Why is there a need for you to ask me any more?"

Just then, King Qi spoke up. "How can some reports compare to hearing from someone directly involved? I hope Sir Zu can clear our confusion regarding some details in that report."

“Unfortunately, I’ve been too busy with this case recently, and the matter of inspecting the distinguished concubine’s corpse has been a headache in itself. It’s caused me to forget about many of the details from the dungeon,” Zu An said while holding his head, as if he were in pain.

Yu Nan’s expression changed on the spot. “Ridiculous! You actually dare to threaten King Qi?”

King Qi quickly reached out a hand to stop him. “Brother-in-law, you’re speaking too seriously. Sir Zu currently bears the burden of his majesty’s orders, and all of us know what my brother the emperor is like. Sir Zu must have his frustrations with this assignment, with his life probably on the line, so his worry is completely understandable. Why don’t we do this? If Sir Zu tells us the details of what happened in the dungeon, I can consider agreeing to your corpse inspection.”

The others’ expressions changed. They were going to say something else, but King Qi raised his hand and stopped them.

Zu An gave Yu Nan a disdainful look. These young masters who had been pampered from birth really are quite lacking in temperament. Comparatively speaking, King Qi was much more shrewd. Zu An had just ruined his plan that had been prepared for many years, and yet he didn’t let his emotions affect his decisions at all. On the contrary, he had not only sown conflict between Zu An and the emperor, but also tried to rope Zu An in. No wonder he had been able to face the emperor for so long!

“Since the king wishes to listen, how could I dare not to comply?” Zu An immediately changed his attitude and slowly told them about what had happened in the dungeon.

King Qi had a strange expression on his face. Zu An spoke about many details that hadn’t been included in the report, but he still hadn’t said a word about Lu Xiao’s group. He basically received nothing after listening to Zu An talk all day. It was almost as if he had taught Zu An a lesson about doing such things on the way, and the kid really learned quickly.

After Zu An finished his story, he asked, “May I ask when I can examine her highness the concubine’s remains?”

King Qi chuckled. “I said I would consider it, but after thinking about it, I feel like such a thing isn’t in accordance with the royal clan’s etiquette. I’ll have to wait upon his majesty’s decision. If he issues a decree, Sir Zu can come and inspect it.”

Zu An wanted to roll his eyes when he heard those words. The other party’s words were completely meaningless. Why would the emperor ever write such a decree? Wouldn’t the elders of the royal family all start criticizing him? Furthermore, the emperor didn’t want to become completely hostile with King Qi at the moment, so he wouldn’t break off relations with King Qi over this.

Now that the atmosphere had become a bit stiff, Madam Qi stepped up to fulfill her duty. She decided to change to a lighter topic. “Everyone, let’s not end up so busy chatting that we forget about the food. This roast pork over here won’t taste good once it gets cold. Hm? Yu Nan, why did you stop after just trying a piece? Is the food not good? I can tell the cook to change it next time.”

Yu Nan shook his head. “The manor’s chefs are excellent; the problem is with the ingredients.”

“Hm? But the meat is from a carefully chosen month-old pig, so there shouldn’t be any issues...” Madam Qi replied in confusion.

Yu Nan prodded the roast pork in front of him. "This kind of little pig isn't a real young roast pig. True suckling pigs are fed by human milk after they're born, and are then butchered once they turn a month old. That produces the most tender flesh, and only then can this dish truly justify its name."

Zu An frowned and asked, "Who in the world would feed pigs with human milk?"

Yu Nan said with an indifferent tone, "Sir Zu comes from a small place like Brightmoon City, so it's understandable if you've never experienced this before. There are a dozen suckling nannies who specialize in feeding the pigs in the lower mansion. I'll send Sir Zu one another day."

Zu An's expression changed. There are people who live so extravagantly in this world? He isn't treating those suckling nannies as humans at all!

Forget about him, even King Qi and the others frowned.

Lian Yu found it even harder to accept and remarked, "Aren't you going too far? You'd better be careful, or else there might be people in the court who'll come after you for going too far with extravagance and waste."

Yu Nan didn't seem bothered at all. "What's wrong with me spending my own money? I definitely can't live as miserly a life as you. Don't think I didn't know that back then, when the king heard that your peach trees' peaches were especially sweet and wanted to try some, you secretly poked holes in them for fear that he might plant some of your peaches in his own garden... Hmph, you might not care about dignity, but my Yu clan does! You could even do something like that?!"

Zu An couldn't help but shoot Lian Yu a look. He then noticed that even though the latter's clothing was appropriate, there were some areas that seemed to have lost color from overwashing. Even his wife's jewelry was clearly inferior to Princess Changshan and Madam Qi's. His wife came from the Yu clan, so how could she lack jewelry? Wow, I really didn't expect this honest looking guy to be someone like that...

Lian Yu's face reddened. He exclaimed angrily, "What the king wanted from me were peaches, and he didn't say that he was going to plant them! What's wrong with me giving him just the peach flesh?"

Yu Nan chuckled. "Your stinginess has nothing to do with me, but please don't make my little sister suffer with you."

Zu An had found it a bit strange earlier. The two of them were arguing right in front of him because the older brother felt sorry for his little sister and looked down on her husband. But Lian Yu had never approved of this spoiled in-law of his, so they naturally didn't get along.

Madam Qi and Madam Lian both tried to ease the situation when they saw the two fighting. But because of the conversation, the mood of the meal had already been soured. On the other hand, Zu An was having a great time. It didn't seem that King Qi's faction was all that unified either.

In the end, Zu An wasn't able to examine Concubine Qi's remains. When he left King Qi Manor, he first sent the guards under him back. Even though they were his subordinates, who knew how many of them were actually acting as the emperor's eyes? He just didn't feel too comfortable with them around.

He kept walking along the main road. While he was thinking about what he should do next, he suddenly felt something and turned to look. He saw a handsome young man standing in front of him. His build was rather slender. Clearly, he was a crossdressing woman.

She held up something and brought it in front of Zu An. "Excuse me, fellow brother, did you drop this pendant?"

When Zu An saw the black object, no matter what angle one looked at it from, it was just a completely ordinary rock. He couldn't help but remark mockingly, "You're using just a rock? Why don't you pick up a brick next time and ask me if I dropped that?"

The young lady's eyes lit up. "That's a great idea. I now have another way to start a conversation."

Zu An rolled his eyes and asked, "What are you doing here?"

Chapter 909: Night Exploration

"What, can I not seek you out by myself? Are you disappointed that it isn't my sister-in-law?" the young lady replied with a big grin.

Zu An's breathing almost stopped. He answered in an embarrassed manner, "Come on, how can you say that? Even if you don't care about your sister-in-law's pure reputation, you have to consider mine!"

The crossdressing young lady was naturally the Sang clan's young miss, Sang Qien. He really hadn't expected her to be around King Qi Manor. It was almost as if she had been waiting for him.

Sang Qien stared blankly for a while. You're a freaking man; why the hell do you care about purity?

Zu An laughed and patted her shoulder. "What did you come to visit me for?"

Sang Qien's entire body stiffened when she sensed his movements. She vigilantly dodged off to the side. "What are you doing? Men and women shouldn't touch each other so easily!"

Zu An chuckled and said, "You're dressed as a man right now, so you're a man in everyone's eyes. Isn't it normal for guys to have their arms around each other? If you avoid me like that, it'll only draw suspicion to yourself. There're a lot of people who have their eyes on me in the capital, you know?"

Sang Qien knew that what Zu An said was the truth. After all, he was a key survivor of the dungeon. To a certain extent, he had become the focal point of the crown prince and King Qi's struggle. There were eyes from both sides watching him, and even third parties would watch his actions carefully.

That was why Sang Qien had to disguise herself when she met Zu An. She didn't want to expose the Sang clan so quickly. It was also why she stopped struggling. Fortunately, Zu An didn't go further than touching her shoulder and didn't disrespect her. She sighed in relief.

"My father said that you might need help, so he sent me over to take a look." Sang Qien blushed. She had never interacted so closely with another man before.

Zu An couldn't help but laugh. "It seems like Sir Sang really cares about me! I've indeed been in quite a tough spot recently."

He told her about the assignment the emperor had given him. "I don't understand what this kind of investigation can possibly do. There's no way King Qi Manor will cooperate, and even if there is an investigation, can't he just assign anyone else to investigate it? Why did he just have to choose me? I already ruined King Qi's plans in the dungeon, so I already have a target on my back. They're itching to get rid of me."

Sang Qien frowned and thought to herself for a while. Zu An looked at her with curiosity. This girl was pretty, and she was attractive even when she was frowning.

"I know what's going on. His majesty must have sent you on this task on purpose..." Sang Qien's eyes suddenly lit up. She was just about to say something excitedly, but she came to a sudden stop when she saw Zu An's scorching gaze.

Zu An laughed and replied, "When did you pick up the bad habit of stating the obvious? Of course the emperor sent me here on purpose."

Sang Qien gave him an annoyed look, but she still explained, "What I'm trying to say is that his majesty never intended for you to find out anything. The reason he sent you was just to... annoy King Qi."

She snuck Zu An a look as she spoke. When she saw that he wasn't showing much of a reaction, she then continued, "This task is also meant to divert King Qi's attention. If my suspicions are correct, his majesty is actually planning something against King Qi."

Zu An raised his eyebrows. He thought that the reason the emperor had sent him was to get closer to King Qi and give him the fake manual. He hadn't expected the emperor to be hiding more plans.

"Little sis Qien'er, I have a completely new opinion of you!" Zu An's hand on her shoulder tightened a bit.

Sang Qien gave him an annoyed look. "Just worry about your case! Even though the emperor isn't hoping for you to find anything, loitering around King Qi Manor will only put you in great danger. You're the reason why King Qi is now at a huge disadvantage. If you keep dancing in front of them, even if King Qi can tolerate it, his subordinates won't."

Zu An nodded inside. He had already seen that King Qi's attitude was passable, but the others from King Qi Manor, as well as Yu Nan and the others, all hated him. If he had met them in private, they might've already attacked him.

"Then what else could I do? I can't investigate the concubine's corpse, and there's no trail to go off of." Zu An was quite vexed.

Sang Qien was actually happy to see Zu An be the frustrated one for once. "I think it's best if you give up on that thought. Even though she was just a concubine, she was King Qi's woman. There's no way he would let you examine her corpse. His majesty would never demand it either."

Zu An asked, "Are there female coroners in the capital?"

Sang Qien shook her head. "Coroners usually work with heavily decomposed corpses, so their job is usually done by men. I've never heard of a woman being willing to do something like that."

Zu An scoffed. "I believe in gender equality. Why the heck are you guys discriminating based on sex in this world?"

"Gender equality?" Sang Qien's eyes lit up. "You normally speak a bunch of nonsense, but this is something nice for once. Just because you said that, I guess I can reluctantly help you out this time."

"You know a female coroner?" Zu An asked, confused.

"I already told you that no woman would want to do something like that. But..." Sang Qien's voice changed when she said, "I know a thing or two."

Zu An was stunned. "Why do you know something like that?"

"There was a time when I was bored, so I learned a bit about every profession," Sang Qien said out of embarrassment. After all, playing around with things like corpses wasn't something a girl was supposed to be proud of. "But even if I know some things, it's useless. There's no way King Qi Manor will let us examine her corpse."

Zu An smiled. "I have a way!"

...

When it was late at night, he brought Sang Qien near King Qi Manor. She looked at the tall walls and asked while rolling her eyes, "So this is your solution?"

Zu An prepared the tools they would need while saying, "Since there's no way they'll agree to the inspection, we'll just do it ourselves. Don't worry, I have some masks here that'll change your appearance. They won't give away your real identity even if we get caught."

Sang Qien couldn't help but correct him. "They'll obviously find out that we're wearing masks if they catch us! What's the point of that then?!"

"Then just don't get caught, duh." Zu An helped her put on the mask as he spoke. These were masks he had gotten from the Blackwind Stockade's Chen Xuan. They really were absolutely essential when doing anything bad.

Sang Qien was really starting to panic when she saw how nonchalant he was. "King Qi Manor's security is tight, and there are experts everywhere. We'll definitely be caught if we go in like this."

She had already made the decision that she'd immediately back out if he insisted on this. After all, she had the Sang clan to worry about.

But Zu An said seriously, "There were many more King Qi Manor experts in the dungeon."

Sang Qien was momentarily stunned when she saw the firmness and confidence in the other party's eyes. Even though she had wanted to back out a second ago, she now chose to trust him.

"Don't worry, even if we run into any danger, I'll save you even if I have to sacrifice my manhood," Zu An said in consolation.

Sang Qien harrumphed. This fellow really couldn't be serious for more than three seconds.

“Let’s go.” Zu An grabbed Sang Qien’s hand, then jumped over the wall.

Even though King Qi Manor had a defensive formation around it, the ki stone consumption would be astronomical if such a large area were protected all time. That was why normally speaking, it would only be focused on some important rooms. The other places relied more on patrolling guards. That also gave Zu An an opportunity.

Sang Qien was very nervous. After all, a place like King Qi Manor had always been like a tiger’s den. Even though her cultivation was top-notch among her peers, she’d be discovered and captured within ten seconds after breaking in.

And yet, when she entered with Zu An, it was smooth sailing. They would always somehow avoid the guards at the last moment, as if he could foresee the future. It was almost as if they were just going on a stroll through the place.

She was just about to ask him how he did it, but she suddenly saw that a troop of guards were coming straight at them. There were also guards behind them whose patrol path intersected with the troops ahead. Their patrol had no blind spots.

Sang Qien’s face paled, because they had nowhere else to run. They were going to be found out in moments! Then, countless King Qi Manor experts would follow, rushing over after hearing the alarm.

Chapter 910: Trapped Inside

I can’t believe I let this guy trick me into doing this! Sang Qien was panicking so much that she almost stomped her feet. At the same time, she quickly thought about how they were going to deal with the aftermath.

With her identity, King Qi probably wouldn’t kill her, but breaking in and conspiring against him was a huge matter that could end really badly. Her father had finally made a bit of a comeback, but he might lose his post because of this. After all, her father was definitely someone on the emperor’s side. King Qi could even use this to threaten the Sang clan and bring them over to his side. If that happened, the Sang clan would be at King Qi’s mercy.

She even thought about making sure she had the same confession as Zu An, to tell him what to say so they wouldn’t get punished as much. But who could have thought that he would grab her, then jump straight into the pond off to the side?!

Sang Qien thought to herself, What’s the point? The manor’s security were all experienced personnel. They’d definitely notice if they jumped straight into the water and caused a huge scene.

But she was completely surprised. They didn’t make a single sound when they jumped into the water! The water’s surface seemed as if it had been parted by an invisible pair of hands. Then, after they went inside, the water closed up again on its own. There wasn’t even a single ripple.

What was even more shocking was that she had planned to hold her breath. She had even wondered what she’d do later if Zu An wanted to feed her oxygen... Should she refuse him or not? Such plots always happened in those romantic novels!

“Why are you staring at my mouth?” Zu An asked, confused.

“Who... Who’s staring at your mouth?!” Sang Qien blushed and she quickly looked away.

But what was shocking was that she didn’t feel as if she were underwater at all. The surroundings were empty, and there was fresh air. It was as if the two of them were in a transparent bubble.

“What... is going on?” Sang Qien was shocked. The patrolling guards were already close by, and she was scared of exposing herself with her voice. She could only move closer to Zu An and whisper into his ear.

Meanwhile, Zu An was enjoying the whole process. He also moved closer to her and whispered, “Is little sis Qien’er trying to tease me by coming so close? I’m a married man, you know?”

Sang Qien was speechless. She pushed him back like a startled rabbit. This idiot can go to hell!

Only when those guards left did Zu An grab Sang Qien and reappear on the surface.

Sang Qien couldn’t even be bothered to be angry when she saw that there wasn’t a drop of water on her. She asked quietly, “How did you do that?”

“A secret.” Zu An chuckled. It was obviously because of the Blue Mallard’s elemental affinity effects, but the intricate use of the element was something Mi Li had taught him. Mi Li had fallen asleep again toward the end of the dungeon test. He wondered how her recovery was going.

Sang Qien pouted. This guy really made her want to bite him. However, her mood was quickly replaced by admiration. Zu An sometimes led her through a casual walk, and sometimes brought her quickly through an area. There were times when they had to sometimes proceed and sometimes go backward... But because of all that, they weren’t noticed by a single guard.

They quickly arrived at a secluded courtyard. There were white lanterns hanging everywhere, and paper money and dried branches were scattered across the ground. The giant Chinese character at the very center looked especially eerie under the dim lighting.

Zu An had already had his subordinates look around the area during the day. It was where the concubine’s coffin was.

According to this world’s traditional beliefs, departed souls would remain in the world for a period of time and couldn’t be buried immediately. Only on the seventh day after their death would the spirit then return to take a look. Then, it would enter the cycle of reincarnation.

That meant at least seven days had to pass before they could be buried. Today just happened to be the seventh day after King Qi’s concubine had passed away.

“Why is there no one in the courtyard?” Sang Qien was careful at first, but when she looked around, she saw that there wasn’t a single person present.

“It’s because today is the seventh day since her death.” Zu An used the jade badge to control several little creatures and look around. When he confirmed that there was no one around them, he then sighed in relief.

Sang Qian immediately understood. Ancient customs said that the departed soul would return home on the seventh day, so they had to prepare a meal in advance for the soul before it returned. Then, they

had to stay away from the place. If the departed soul saw some family or people they knew, it might influence their future reincarnation.

She couldn't help but give Zu An a look. Even though this man always seemed so nonchalant and carefree, he had actually thought things through. No wonder he had chosen today to examine the concubine's remains.

Zu An walked up to the funeral hall. There was a massive coffin in the center. This was the concubine of a king after all, so they wouldn't skimp on such details for her. He placed his hand on the coffin and felt the surface. Then, ki rippled out, sending the sealed coffin's nails flying. The coffin opened up as he said, "Little sis Qien'er, I'll leave the rest to you."

A chill swept through the place when the lid opened up, as if what was inside were an ice cupboard. King Qi's concubine lay inside calmly. Her features were beautiful, and she looked as if she were still alive.

Zu An immediately understood that the cold was because of a formation's refrigeration effect, preventing the body from decaying. He had to admit that these nobles' lives were all quite extravagant.

Sang Qien gave him a look, clearly criticizing his crudeness. She walked up to the coffin and joined her hands together, saying "Please do not take offense, your highness. We only wish to uncover the truth about your death so you can rest peacefully."

After apologizing, she then moved next to the coffin and took a look. She sighed the moment she saw the body inside. "This concubine is still so young and beautiful... Beautiful women truly suffer unhappy fates."

Zu An chuckled and remarked, "But I don't think she's as pretty as little sis Qien'er."

"Hmph, you're just a smooth talker." Sang Qien harrumphed, but she didn't get angry at all. Instead, she had a grin on her face. Girls all liked to hear words of praise. Sigh, how could my big brother's stupid chauvinism win against him? No wonder sister-in-law...

She raised the concubine's arm and began to examine her. "Normally, if someone were to drown, their mind would be extremely tense before death. They would struggle frantically and flail their arms. There would be water plants, silt, and other such things trapped in their fingernails. However, there's nothing in her fingernails. Of course, there's a chance that the manor's staff already helped to wash these areas. But I also checked her oral and nasal cavities, and I didn't find any red suds there. That would be one of the biggest signs of someone who died from drowning."

She began to undo the concubine's clothing as she spoke. Halfway through the process, she turned around and gave Zu An a look.

Zu An quickly turned around. He had no interest in necrophilia and didn't want to look at a dead person's body, even if she was still as beautiful as when she was still alive.

Sang Qien spoke again a while later. "Even though her palms and soles are a bit wrinkled and pale, it's not too severe. I don't think she stayed underwater for that long. Also, I could barely find any dirt in her mouth or nose. That's why my overall conclusion is that she was just thrown into a pond to fake her drowning."

“Not surprising at all.” Zu An nodded. “Then what’s her real cause of death?”

Sang Qien replied, “I checked her entire body, but there weren’t any external injuries. There aren’t any signs of poisoning either. However, there seemed to be bleeding from her eyes. If I’m not wrong, she suffered damage to her head. But how could a glorious concubine be killed like this in this heavily guarded King Qi Manor?”

Zu An said with a sigh, “The only one who could do something like this is that person.” Sang Qien was about to say something when Zu An’s expression suddenly changed and he said, “There are guards coming.”

“Were we discovered?” Sang Qien exclaimed in horror.

“I don’t think so.” Zu An shook his head. He saw that Sang Qien was about to jump through a side window. He quickly grabbed her and said, “There’s no time.”

Immediately afterward, he pulled her into the coffin. Those outside came into the room just as the coffin lid closed back up.