

Immortal 91

Chapter 91: The Textbook Example of a Honey Trap

Erosion of rationality... Zheng Dan was rendered speechless.

Why doesn't this fellow go with the flow? Other men would surely try their best to showcase their gentlemanly side, but this guy is acting as if he was afraid that others might somehow miss his perversion!

Despite the unexpected hiccup, Zheng Dan reacted fairly quickly. She put on a natural smile and replied, "Teacher Zu is a gentleman; you aren't like other men. You've saved my life, so there's no way I would think of you in such a light."

She felt queasy just saying those words. There was no way one could ever associate the word 'gentleman' with Zu An.

"Oh? I never knew I had such a noble side to me." Zu An touched his face in delight, pleased with Zheng Dan's words.

"Allow me to propose a toast to Teacher Zu for saving my life." Zheng Dan raised her wine cup as she looked at him with a gentle smile.

Zu An hesitated. Based on what Chu Huanzhao had said, the Sang clan wasn't on good terms with the Chu clan. Since the Zheng clan were going to be in-laws with the Sang clan, it should be safe to assume that they were on the same page.

If so, Zheng Dan's purpose for approaching him was suspicious at best. As narcissistic as Zu An was, he wasn't utterly blind.

"You didn't poison this wine, did you?" The multiple assassination attempts he had faced since arriving in this world made him wary of everything. He decided to simply ask outright, since it was in line with his character anyway.

Zheng Dan replied with a smile, "Teacher Zu, you're jesting with me. You're a teacher of the academy, as well as my benefactor. How could I possibly dare to poison your wine? If you're still worried, I can take a sip first."

With that, she lifted his cup and took a sip before handing it back to him.

Her lips left a slight imprint on the edge of the cup. Zu An narrowed his eyes.

She really is dropping a lot of hints here. This is obviously a honey trap. But what is her goal? Does she want intelligence on the Chu clan from me? Or does she simply want to snatch me away from Chu Chuyan to satisfy her sense of superiority?

He pondered this for an age, and concluded that he was simply too good-looking. There could be no doubt that Zheng Dan was simply lusting after his body. Yup, that must be the case.

So, Zu An raised his wine cup with a smile and said, “Miss Zheng, surely you’re jesting. How could I possibly suspect you of drugging the wine? Here, let’s have a drink.”

Zheng Dan rolled her eyes. You just said it out loud earlier. You sure are refreshingly shameless, huh?

In order to be safe, Zu An decided only to eat the dishes which Zheng Dan herself had partaken of. With his first mouthful, his eyes widened in wonder. “Miss Zheng, your culinary skills are really top-notch! I’ve never eaten anything as delicious as this before!”

He had never eaten food as good as this before in his entire two lives. His previous world had indeed been filled with delicacies, but as a keyboard warrior, how could he possibly have had the time or the money to grab anything good?

“Teacher Zu, you’re too humble. How could my culinary skills be a match for Chu First Miss?” replied Zheng Dan.

Zheng Dan’s attempt to stir up conflict between his wife and himself was blatantly obvious, but he played along. “My wife? Hah, does she even know how to cook?”

He grabbed his wine cup and downed the alcohol.

The edges of Zheng Dan’s mouth curved upwards with a hint of glee. Her plan was working! Hmph, it’s only because she’s the First Miss of a ducal estate that she’s able to one-up me in everything. How could she possibly be a match for me otherwise?

“With Miss Zheng’s culinary skills, anyone who marries you will truly be blessed for life,” remarked Zu An.

Zheng Dan replied with a smile, “If Teacher Zu is fond of my cooking, I’ll be more than happy to cook for you every day.”

Zu An was a little taken aback by that remark. Aren’t you getting a little too straightforward? It looks like you’re quite the expert at playing romance, huh? Such words could easily stir the hearts of any man.

“You can’t possibly do it for a lifetime. Commander Sang is going to get jealous,” replied Zu An.

Zheng Dan nodded. “It would indeed be inconvenient for me to continue cooking for you after my marriage. However, you can always drop by our estate whenever you’re having a craving. With your knowledge, I’m sure that you’ll become good friends with Sang Qian.”

Zu An was impressed. This woman has been dropping hints and trying to seduce me, but so far, she has been making sure to toe the line and not go overboard. By bringing up her engagement with the Sang clan, she makes herself look like a gentle and virtuous wife. This further stirs a man’s desire to conquer.

Zheng Dan understood that the key to romance was not to charge ahead blindly; it was about keeping an appropriate distance and slowly reeling the other party in. So, she changed the topic. “Teacher Zu, I have some doubts about one of the questions you came up with during your competition with Teacher Yang. May I ask you to explain it to me once more?”

"You want me to explain it to you?" Zu An couldn't keep his bizarre expression off his face. A female student having one-to-one remedial lessons at her teacher's house... I feel like I've seen this plotline in adult films before.

"I know that it's a little brash of me to make a request of you all of a sudden, but I'm quite interested in arithmetic as well. Whenever there's a question that I'm unable to make sense of, it continues to linger in my mind for days. So, I beg your help to set my mind at ease." She summoned her most innocent expression and slowly blinked her large eyes at him.

Interested in arithmetic? Wow, I've never heard anything more bullshit than that. I'd really feel bad exposing you if you're taking this to such an extent.

Despite his mental retorts, Zu An maintained an amiable expression. "Which question are you having difficulties with?"

"It's the one about the red eyes and blue eyes. Why would all of the five islanders with red eyes commit suicide on the fifth day?" asked Zheng Dan.

Zu began to explain the question. "This question can be solved using inductive reasoning. Assuming that there's only one red-eyed islander, he would see that everyone else around him has blue eyes, and through that, he would be able to confirm that the person with red eyes is him. As a result, he would commit suicide on the first night. That's straightforward enough.

"Moving on. Assuming that there are 2 red-eyed prisoners...

"On the very first day, the red-eyed islanders will see 1 red-eyed islander and 98 blue-eyed islanders, whereas the blue-eyed islanders will see 2 red-eyed islanders and 97 blue-eyed islanders. At this point, no one can confirm whether they have red eyes or not, so no one commits suicide on the first night.

"However, this, in turn, tells everyone that there's more than 1 red-eyed islander amongst them. So, on the second day, the red-eyed islanders, who see 1 red-eyed islander and 98 blue-eyed islanders from their perspective, would know that they have red eyes too and commit suicide. On the other hand, the blue-eyed islanders who see 2 red-eyed islanders and 97 blue-eyed islanders are still unable to confirm whether they have red eyes or not, so they don't make a move. As a result, the 2 red-eyed islanders commit suicide on the second day.

"The same logic applies when there are 3 red-eyed islanders too.

"On the first day, the red-eyed islanders see 2 red-eyed islanders and 97 blue-eyed islanders, whereas the blue-eyed islanders see 3 red-eyed islanders and 96 blue-eyed islanders. No one is able to confirm if they have red eyes, so no one dies the first night.

"On the second day, everyone knows that there is more than 1 red-eyed islander. The red-eyed islanders see 2 red-eyed islanders and are unable to confirm if they have red eyes, and the same goes for the blue-eyed islanders too. So, no one dies on the second night.

"On the third day, everyone knows that there are more than 2 red-eyed islanders. The red-eyed islanders, who only see 2 red-eyed islanders, realize that they themselves have red eyes too whereas the blue-eyed islanders, who see 3 red-eyed islanders, are still unable to confirm if they have red eyes. As a result, the 3 red-eyed islanders commit suicide on the third day.

“Building on this reasoning we have developed, if there are 5 red-eyed islanders, all five of them would realize that they have red eyes on the fifth day and commit suicide together.”

“I see!” Zheng Dan clapped her hands, beaming with delight. “I thought that the question was really tough, but now that you’ve explained it, it all makes sense now. You’re truly amazing!”

“You’re flattering me~” Zu An waved his hands humbly. Your compliment is quite fake, but I’ll take it.

The conversation branched out and flowed smoothly from this common point of interest. The slight awkwardness in the air gradually dissipated as the two of them became more comfortable with one another. In the midst of their conversation, Zheng Dan stood up to refill Zu An’s wine cup, and accidentally knocked his chopsticks onto the floor.

“Ah!” exclaimed Zheng Dan.

She quickly bent down to pick the chopsticks up.

Zu An was about to reach out to pick it up for her when his eyes grew large. In the act of bending over, the fabric around her collar loosened slightly, vaguely revealing a pair of enticing snowy ridges.

At the same time, her robe slipped downward slightly, partially exposing her fair shoulders.

This woman must be doing it on purpose! Zu An swallowed quickly.

You want to use your beauty against me? Hah! You must know that I’m very vulnerable to people like you!

Zheng Dan’s cheeks reddened slightly. Although such nifty tricks came naturally to her, this was still the first time she was using them on a man. A little embarrassment was inevitable.

After this brief incident, the two of them continued their conversation a while longer, before Zheng Dan finally stood up to take her leave.

Zu An stood up as well. “I’ll walk you out,” he offered.

“Thank you, Teacher Zu.” Zheng Dan nodded in response. She flicked her wrist lightly, and her skirt slipped right underneath Zu An’s feet. She lurched forward.

Tza~

The crisp sound of fabric tearing echoed loudly in the air as Zheng Dan crashed to the ground. Half of her skirt was torn off, revealing her smooth legs. Suddenly flustered, she desperately tried to cover herself, but how could a delicate pair of hands be enough to cover such long legs?

Her sudden shyness made her even more alluring. Any man standing in her presence would surely feel duty-bound to protect her.

However, Zu An simply blinked his eyes silently at the beautiful pair of legs before him.

Does this woman really think that I would miss her flicking her own skirt under my feet? I don’t know what she’s up to, but she really is going all out.

Chapter 92: Her Fragrance

"My apologies, Miss Zheng. I didn't do it on purpose." Zu An belatedly rushed forward to help her up, feigning panic. He decided to go along with her act to see what she was up to. Since you want to put on a show, it would be rude of me not to play my part, right?

Zheng Dan bit her lips in distress and accused him, "Teacher Zu, you sure are mean. You tore my skirt."

Her coy tone was fatal. Zu An's heart thumped furiously, despite knowing that she was putting on an act. He finally understood that the most formidable person in Journey to the West wasn't Sun Wukong, but Tripitaka. He was able to stay true to himself in the face of the many temptresses that attempted to seduce him along the way. He was truly a formidable man.

"I apologize for my misstep. Come, allow me to help you up." Zu An reached out to support her.

"Ouch!" Zheng Dan yelped in pain. Tears brimmed in her reddened eyes. "I-I think I sprained my ankle."

Zu An was impressed. What a waste that she isn't an actress. She would have surely won an Oscar by now. It's one thing to perform a tripping scene, but to sprain her leg as well?

"Teacher Zu, can you help me take a look?" Zheng Dan stared at Zu An, her eyes glistening with tears. It was hard not to feel pity for her.

Zu An squatted down beside her and gently wrapped his hands around her legs. Her skin was smooth as the finest silk. "Is it here?"

"No, it's a bit higher." Zheng Dan bit her lips tightly. Her cheeks were tinted with a light blush, giving her a seductive vibe yet still retaining the innocence and shyness a young girl should have.

"Is the pain here?" Zu An slowly moved his hands up her ankles. Her legs were really small, and his hands wrapped around them nicely. The sensation of them under his hands, so warm and so smooth, was enough to send any men bonkers.

"No, not there... A little higher, a little higher." Zheng Dan's face reddened. All of a sudden, she found herself regretting her decision. It was a terrible idea to let him take advantage of her in such a manner. Forget it. I'll teach this fellow a lesson once I obtain the promissory note!

Zu An was amused. Since you're going to such lengths to ensnare me, it'd be too rude of me to turn you down, right? His hands slowly crept up her ankles and toward her smooth calves.

Zheng Dan's heart drummed out a frenzied beat as she felt Zu An's rough, hot palms on her. It was not a sensation that she had ever experienced before, and it made her realize that she was playing with fire. She quickly grabbed his hand to stop him from moving any higher. Then, she wrapped her arms around him, saying, "Big brother Zu, I suddenly feel really cold."

Zu An swallowed as he replied, "That's odd. I'm feeling terribly hot."

A victorious smile crept onto Zheng Dan's lips. Even with a wife as beautiful as Chu Chuyan, he's still unable to resist my charms.

“Big brother Zu, can you hug me tight? I’m feeling really cold,” said Zheng Dan pitifully as her hands quickly fumbled around his robe.

She took care to make it seem as if she were teasing him with her hands, concealing the fact that she was actually searching for something.

Hm? Why is it not here?

She had done a quick search of his body earlier this morning, but hadn’t found the promissory note. She had intentionally planned this scheme to get more intimate with him this time, yet it seemed she would come up empty-handed again.

Where in the world is this fellow hiding the note?

Zheng Dan belatedly glanced between Zu An’s legs. Could he be hiding it in his pants?

Zu An, on the other hand, felt his mouth turning dry. This woman’s powers of seduction sure are incredible. Even a slight touch from her is enough to stoke such intense desire.

However, as she slowly moved her hand downward, Zu An immediately snapped out of it. He was reminded of a pitiful reality—‘little Zu An’ was still sealed off!

Even now, when such a beauty had leaped willingly into his embrace, he could be no more than a mere spectator.

Who in the world planted such a seal on me? Goddamnit! Zu An was on the verge of tears. He dared not let her continue touching him. If she were to notice that he wasn’t reacting at all, his dysfunction would be exposed right away!

He dared not imagine what it would be like with everyone in the city looking at him with eyes filled with aversion.

As a man, he couldn’t allow that to happen!

He shoved the woman out of his embrace and hurriedly backed off. “That... Miss Zheng, you should rest here for a while. I’ll bring a physician over to check on you!”

Watching as Zu An fled in a fluster, Zheng Dan was stunned for a moment, then burst out in sudden laughter. At the same time, her eyes betrayed the conflicting thoughts in her mind. Everyone said that Zu An was a perverted good-for-nothing, and yet he had ended up behaving in such a gentlemanly way. On top of that, he also won seven-and-a-half million silver taels from the casino, and defeated a teacher in a duel.

Just which one is the real you?

The more Zheng Dan thought about it, the more curious she became. However, she hadn’t forgotten her objective. She picked herself up off the floor. Making sure that Zu An was really gone, she closed the door and began searching the room.

However, no matter how hard she looked, the promissory note was nowhere to be found. Her forehead creased in dismay as she murmured, “Just where did that fellow hide the promissory note?”

Since the note wasn't in the residence, she decided it was past time to leave. She couldn't possibly wait for Zu An to return with the physician—if so, her lies about being injured would be exposed. On top of that, if rumors were to spread that she had visited another man's residence alone, her reputation would surely suffer.

She didn't mind seducing Zu An privately, but no one else needed to know what went on between them.

Zu An, on the other hand, ran all the way into the forest and hid himself. He knew that Zheng Dan was faking her injury, and he wasn't foolish enough to really find a physician. He waited until she was gone before heaving a sigh of relief.

It looks like I need to find the Evanescent Lotus as soon as possible. I can't allow something like this to happen a third time!

Just thinking about that incident between him and Snow made him look up into the sky wistfully, his eyes slowly tearing up.

He returned to his residence and double-checked that nothing was missing before locking his door and trudging listlessly back to the classroom.

His mood remained low for the rest of the day, and soon, classes were dismissed.

"Brother-in-law, brother-in-law~"

As Zu An dragged himself out of the classroom, he suddenly heard an energetic voice calling for him. When he turned around to take a look, he saw Chu Huanzhao waving at him happily.

A warm glow spread out from his heart. My sister-in-law is still the best of all. However, he swiftly remembered the seal on his body, and his mood darkened again.

"What's wrong with you? Why do you look so downcast?" Chu Huanzhao had skipped her way over to him when she noticed his strange mood.

"Nothing much. I just want some quiet time to myself. Life has been too hard recently." Zu An sighed deeply. The gloom around him was almost tangible.

"What's wrong? You defeated Yang Wei, and Principal Jiang even appointed you as the new arithmetic teacher. Shouldn't you be happy about it?" Chu Huanzhao found his mood incomprehensible.

"I'm just a relief teacher. It's not as if I've been officially hired," remarked Zu An disconsolately.

"A relief teacher is still a teacher. If my father were to learn about it, he'd surely see you in a new light!" Just imagining the sight made Chu Huanzhao tingle in excitement. "Also, if my older sister learns that you became her teacher, her face is sure to take on all manner of interesting expressions. In the future, when you hold lessons in the Sky class, you should make sure to pick her to answer your questions. She always acts as if she's the best! I really want to see her getting embarrassed at least once."

The scenarios painted by Chu Huanzhao did much to lift Zu An's gloomy mind. He especially savored the thought of having Chu Chuyan call him 'Teacher Zu' in public. That would surely be an interesting sight.

“Speaking of which, where did you go earlier in the afternoon? I came over to ask you to join me for lunch, but I couldn’t find you anywhere.” Chu Huanzhao sounded a little sullen. “Confess! Were you hooking up with some girl?”

Zu An was shocked by how sharp Chu Huanzhao’s sixth sense was. “How is that even possible? One of the academy’s staff members brought me to take a look at the teacher’s housing.”

“Teacher’s housing?” Chu Huanzhao’s eyes lit up. “Ooooooh! Give me the key!”

“What are you going to do?” Zu An had intended to show off his residence in the first place, so he didn’t hesitate to hand her the key.

“Waaaa, it really is the key to the academy’s residences!” Chu Huanzhao fondly examined the key in her hands. A moment later, she explained, “To be frank with you, I have always wanted a residence in the academy. However, my father and mother are very strict with me, and they say that it’s a waste of money. Hmph! Even Zheng Dan has a residence, so why don’t I, a daughter of a ducal clan, have one as well?”

Zu An’s heart skipped a beat upon hearing Zheng Dan’s name. He quickly tried to divert the conversation away from her. “If you want, you can drop by whenever you want to.”

“That sounds great!” Chu Huanzhao slipped the key into her pocket. “That’ll be my new afternoon nap spot then. Ahhhh, it sure is great to have my own residence. I can lie down however I want to. I don’t have to lie awkwardly on the classroom desk like the other brats in my class anymore, heh.”

“You’re intending to have afternoon naps over at my place?” Zu An nearly spurted blood. “I don’t think that’s convenient.”

“What’s inconvenient about that?” Chu Huanzhao eyed Zu An in suspicion. “You can’t be hiding a vixen there, can you?”

“No no, of course not!” Zu An’s heart skipped another beat. He quickly clarified, “I mean, we are of the opposite gender after all. I think there’s a need to keep some distance between us...”

Chu Huanzhao’s face immediately turned red. “Brother-in-law, what’s going on in that mind of yours! It’s not like I’m planning to share a room with you in the residence!”

Zu An belatedly realized that he hadn’t checked out the layout of the residence, due to Zheng Dan’s sudden arrival. Now that he thought about it, there were indeed several bedrooms. The residence was probably spacious enough to house a whole family, let alone two people!

To disperse the sudden awkwardness, he quickly continued, “Come by if you want to, but at least return me my key. How am I supposed to enter my residence without it?”

“No can do!” replied Chu Huanzhao firmly. “Isn’t it weird for me to have to look for you in order to have my afternoon nap? If I have a key with me, I can head over whenever I want to. You can just apply for a spare key with the academy’s quartermaster later on.”

“Ah? The key can be duplicated?” Zu An was surprised to hear that. From the novels he had read in his previous life, he had imagined the key to be one-of-a-kind.

“Of course it can be duplicated!” exclaimed Chu Huanzhao. “You keep trying to turn me down for some reason. You can’t really be intending to hide a vixen in your residence, are you?”

She leaned toward him and began sniffing his body. Then, her face immediately warped in shock.

“Woah, woah, woah, I smell the scent of another woman on you! Wait a minute, why does this fragrance seem so familiar? Isn’t this the one Zheng Dan uses?”

Chapter 93: The Tournament Has Been Brought Forward!

Zu An was utterly stunned. Is she a dog? How in the world is she able to sniff people out through their smell?

Unable to believe it, he lifted his sleeves and smelled himself, but he only detected a faint fragrance. Don’t all women pretty much use the same fragrances? I can’t tell the difference at all.

Chu Huanzhao’s hand flashed out to grab his ear. “Speak! What did you and Zheng Dan do? Did you do something that let me... I mean, my older sister down?!”

“Let go, let go!” Her grip was so painful that it nearly squeezed tears out of Zu An’s eyes. He thought that his sister-in-law was slowly becoming gentler and more amicable, but she was still a Tyrannosaurus Rex at heart. “I didn’t do anything at all! This smell is probably from this morning, when she fell from the carriage and into my arms.”

Their interaction caught the attention of the students passing by, who swiftly began gossiping amongst themselves.

“I thought that Zu An would at least fare a bit better now that he’s a teacher, but it looks like he is still considered the lowest in the family.”

“Yeah, look at how he whimpers before Chu Second Miss, not daring to fight back at all.”

“Well, that’s the life of a drafted-son-in-law. Mooching is tough, y’know.”

“It doesn’t look too bad. It must be quite pleasurable to be held like that by such a beautiful sister-in-law.”

“Shoo, get away from me! What if your fetish is contagious?”

...

The students’ whisperings reached Zu An’s ears, and he almost wept as he felt his reputation falling into tatters.

“Are you sure?” Chu Huanzhao hesitantly released his ear, but she leaned forward to sniff him again. The doubt in her eyes refused to go away. “Is there a fragrance in the world that lasts that long?”

Zu An replied sheepishly, “That’s not something I’d know.”

Chu Huanzhao brooded for a while before finally backing off with a cold sniff. “Hmph, I guess the stench of vixens tends to linger!”

Zu An was silent for a while, frowning at her choice of vocabulary. "Honestly, where did you learn such crude words? You're ruining your reputation like that."

"Why? Does your heart hurt when I insult Zheng Dan?" Chu Huanzhao morphed from the kind sister-in-law into the little demon who had used her whip to lash him. "My older sister rarely has time to come to the academy, so it goes without saying that I have to keep an eye on you in her place, lest you do something to let her down!"

"I really didn't do anything at all! Can you stop slandering me?" Zu An's tears were on the brink of flowing out. Even if I wanted to do something, my current plight doesn't allow me to. Ahhhh, I really must get my hands on the Evanescent Lotus by hook or by crook, no matter what price I have to pay!

"That better be the case!" Chu Huanzhao gave one last sniff before her temper mellowed. "Brother-in-law, I'm really not making a big fuss out of this. You should know that many men view my older sister as their dream lover, so it's inevitable that other women would become envious of her. Zheng Dan is one of them. Don't be fooled by her appearance; she's approaching you because she wants to prove her superiority by stealing my older sister's man."

Zu An wasn't too happy with that. "Hey! Isn't it possible that she's simply approaching me because of my charm?"

Chu Huanzhao eyed Zu An from head to toe before finally shaking her head. With a perfectly earnest look on her face, she replied, "That's absolutely impossible."

Zu An's pride suffered a critical hit. I really want to beat this lass up. Can't she at least lie to make me feel better?

"Hey, brother-in-law, there's no need to get so angry. At least you've got my older sister. Isn't that enough?" Chu Huanzhao noticed the awful look on Zu An's face and quickly placated him with a smile. "You don't know how many people in the academy are envious of you. They would willingly trade twenty years of their life just to marry my older sister in their lifetime!"

Zu An rolled his eyes. "Others might not know better, but you, of all people, should be aware of just what kind of relationship your older sister and I have."

Chu Huanzhao smiled sheepishly. She had indeed heard about their peculiar relationship. "You have to give my older sister some time. You should also know that she's a proud person. It's inevitable that she's unable to accept you right away."

Zu An's face darkened further. "Is that how you console a person? Am I really as bad as you say?"

Chu Huanzhao replied with a sharp nod. "In the past, even I wouldn't have bothered to spare you a second glance. However, after getting to know you, I realized that you are different from what the rumors make you out to be. You do have a lot of strengths. I believe that my older sister will slowly come to like you once she knows what kind of person you are."

"Hopefully." In truth, Zu An wasn't too bothered about that. What was foremost in his mind was the Evanescent Lotus. Without that, even if Chu Chuyan really fell for him, it would still be for naught.

Zu An's downcast tone and crestfallen silhouette weighed on Chu Huanzhao's heart. My brother-in-law sure is pitiful. My older sister doesn't like him; my parents scorn him; even the servants don't show him respect. He must be having a tough time in the Chu Estate. I must treat him better so that he can feel the warmth of a family.

With that, she ran up to him and called out sweetly, "Brother-in-law~"

Taken aback by her sudden sugary tone, Zu An gave a little start. "What?"

"Nothing much. I just wanted to call you." Chu Huanzhao's eyes domed into beautiful crescents.

Zu An eyed her sideways. Chu Huanzhao was acting weirdly, but he was so absorbed in his own affairs that he decided to let it slip.

By the time they walked out of the academy, Cheng Shouping and the servants of the Chu clan were already waiting for them at the entrance. When Cheng Shouping saw Chu Huanzhao fluttering around Zu An like a butterfly, he was astonished.

The young master is truly amazing. Not only did he manage to marry the First Miss, but he managed to win over the unruly Second Miss too. I really need to get the young master to teach me a thing or two. If I could just pick up a sliver of what he knows, it'd be more than enough for me to get a beautiful wife!

It was a silent trip home. Shortly after they returned to the estate, Chu Zhongtian called the two of them over for dinner. Surprisingly, Chu Chuyan was present as well.

Zu An was slightly perplexed. As a student of Brightmoon Academy, Chu Chuyan should have been attending classes. Weirdly enough, however, the two of them had never encountered each other in the academy. From what Chu Huanzhao had said, it appeared that she really hadn't been to the academy these few days.

He wondered what she was so busy with. She seemed to be constantly traveling to all sorts of places. Cheng Shouping once mentioned that she personally managed many of the Chu clan's businesses. That could explain why she was constantly busy.

When Chu Huanzhao saw Chu Chuyan and her parents at the dining table, she rushed up to them joyfully. "Father, mother, big sister, you won't believe what happened in the academy today. Zu An was..."

Qin Wanru cut her short. "We can talk about that later. For now, there's something more important we need to discuss."

Chu Huanzhao turned to Zu An and shrugged helplessly. Her cheeky gestures were really adorable.

Zu An felt a surge of warmth in his heart. His sister-in-law did treat him well, although the same couldn't be said about his mother-in-law. Qin Wanru had quite a domineering personality, and she had never bothered to hide her contempt for him. It was fortunate that her two daughters weren't like her.

I really wonder what's wrong with Ji Dengtu to make him lust after such a woman. Does he have some sort of weird fetish?

If Qin Wanru could have read Zu An's thoughts at that moment, she would surely have erupted like a volcano.

"Chuyan, due to the premature opening of the Ursae Dungeon, the tournament against the Yuan clan will be brought forward to two days later. How are your preparations coming along?" asked Qin Wanru.

"The tournament?" Zu An's heart leapt into his mouth.

This had been brought up some time back. The Chu clan and the Yuan clan were both active in the arms trade, which created an intense rivalry between the two clans. However, as nobles, it was beneath them to resort to underhanded methods like common merchants—such acts would severely tarnish their reputations. To divide the market, the clans agreed to let their juniors duel with one another in a tournament.

This was intended to be a friendly duel, so as to avoid acrimony between the two clans. At the same time, the tournament would spur the juniors of the two clans to work harder on their cultivation.

Zu An hadn't expected the Clans Tournament to come so quickly.

"This should not be a problem," replied Chu Chuyan. "I've been monitoring the training of the juniors of our Chu clan, and they have been working diligently. From our past experiences, they should be able to hold their own."

Chu Zhongtian frowned. "We can't use our previous experiences as a gauge. The Yuan clan has the backing of the Wu clan now, so the cultivators they dispatch are bound to be far stronger than in previous years."

Chu Huanzhao piped up, "Since the Yuan clan is seeking external help, why don't we do the same too? Aren't we disadvantaged like that?"

"What do you know?" Chu Zhongtian sniffed in response. "If I were to ask for external help like them, wouldn't that demonstrate that our Chu clan is really afraid of their Wu clan? Besides, I've lived my life proudly. I won't lower myself to resort to such tricks!"

Zu An scoffed at his words. Isn't this the perfect example of someone who would suffer just to uphold his pride? It's really hard to associate the word 'proud' with this henpecked husband.

"Even if they engaged the help of the Wu clan, there's no way they would stand a chance against me," Chu Chuyan replied.

Zu An was left slightly shaken. He hadn't expected his wife to utter such intimidating words. On top of that, not a single person—not Chu Zhongtian, Qin Wanru, or Chu Huanzhao—questioned her words. Her prowess was deemed a self-evident truth.

She was a renowned prodigy of Brightmoon City, rumored to be at the fifth rank.

Zu An had fought with two fifth rank cultivators thus far, and had nearly lost his life on both accounts. That being said, there were likely to be significant differences between fifth rank cultivators. Pei Mianman had easily defeated Yuan Wendong in a duel, even though they were both fifth rank cultivators. That bizarre black flame she summoned was a truly frightening entity.

He wondered whether Chu Chuyan or Pei Mianman was more formidable.

With Pei Mianman on his mind, his thoughts subconsciously drifted to the brawl they'd had in Chu Chuyan's bedroom the other night. That woman's figure is truly incredible...

"You might be able to win a match, but there are a total of ten matches, and one of them is a sure loss. Honestly, I don't have much confidence going into the Clans Tournament this time around." Qin Wanru glanced at Zu An as she shook her head.

It was a rule that the juniors in the main family branch had to participate in one of the ten matches. There were fewer rules governing the participation of the other juniors. Those who were strong enough could be fielded, regardless of whether they were from another branch of the family, or a servant of the clan.

The Chu clan's greatest disadvantage was none other than Zu An. The rules dictated that he had to participate in the tournament, and his match was considered a sure loss.

Tsk, you really look down on me. As displeased as Zu An was, he maintained a composed expression. "Don't worry, I'll surely win my round."

Unfortunately, there wasn't anyone who took his words to heart. Even Chu Huanzhao, who usually supported him, didn't think that he could win.

"Don't harbor such unrealistic fantasies. Let's go with our previous plan to pit you against Yuan Wendong. Even if you lose the match, you'll still be contributing significantly to the Chu clan. I'll accompany you to the academy tomorrow to ensure that Yuan Wendong would choose to face you. Try to find a way to rile him up," said Chu Chuyan.

Chapter 94: Whatcha Starin' At?

Zu An blinked in surprise. "You want me to rile Yuan Wendong up once more?" He'd never expected such a suggestion out of his wife.

Chu Chuyan thought that Zu An might be feeling intimidated, so she added, "Don't worry, I'll accompany you tomorrow. No matter how you rile him up, I'll be there to ensure your safety."

Woah, what's with this sudden declaration that almost sounds like a confession? Why does it feel like our positions have been reversed... Well, I guess it's fine. Mooching off others is pretty cool after all.

Zu An nodded affirmatively. "Rest assured, honey. Since you've decreed it, I'll make sure to blow him up with rage!"

The way Zu An referred to Chu Chuyan as 'honey' brought frowns to Chu Chuyan and Qin Wanru's faces, but neither made any further comment.

"Big sister, you'll be heading to the academy tomorrow?" asked Chu Huanzhao.

"I am. What's with your expression?" asked Chu Chuyan with a smile. "Could it be that you've stirred trouble in the academy, and you're worried that the teachers will complain to me?"

"Of course not! It's just that you haven't been to the academy for quite some time now. I'm just delighted," Chu Huanzhao replied indignantly, directing a secret wink at Zu An. "Speaking of which, doesn't the Sky class have an arithmetic class tomorrow?"

"That's right," replied Chu Chuyan. "Actually, most of the cultivation classes in the academy don't serve much purpose to me anymore. These arithmetic classes are far more useful. After all, the Chu clan has many finance-related matters that need dealing with."

Chu Huanzhao tried her best to suppress her smile, her face straining with the effort. "It just so happens that the academy brought in a new arithmetic teacher. He might be more to your liking."

"They've changed the arithmetic teacher? What happened to Yang Wei?" Chu Chuyan was surprised to hear that news. She had been so busy dealing with the affairs in the Chu clan that she hadn't paid any attention to the recent happenings in the academy.

"It seems like Yang Wei has been fired for oppressing his students," replied Chu Huanzhao vaguely.

Chu Chuyan took her time to reply. "I can't deny that Yang Wei has some serious character flaws. However, his skills in arithmetic are the real deal. I'm not sure if the new teacher will be able to fill his shoes."

"Oh, he definitely will!" Chu Huanzhao shot a glance at Zu An as she replied. "Yang Wei had a competition with the new teacher earlier today, but he suffered a complete loss."

"Huanzhao, why do you keep looking at your brother-in-law while talking?" Qin Wanru asked in displeasure. She felt like her second daughter was getting excessively close to Zu An. Then again, Huanzhao has always been a candid child. Am I thinking too much into it?

Chu Huanzhao stuck out her tongue in response. She had planned to brag about Zu An before her parents, but changed her mind upon confirming that her older sister was going to have an arithmetic class in the academy the following day.

I would love to see her reaction when she enters the classroom and sees that the teacher is Zu An.

Just imagining it was enough to pump her full of excitement.

"A complete loss? Are you certain? It's hard to imagine that someone of Yang Wei's caliber would be thoroughly defeated." Chu Chuyan was astonished. "How was the competition held?"

Chu Huanzhao launched into her telling of the story with unbridled excitement. "It started with Yang Wei setting twenty questions for the new teacher. Unexpectedly, the new teacher swiftly answered them all, and got all of them correct. After that, the new teacher set twenty questions for Yang Wei, but after trying his best, Yang Wei didn't manage to get even a single question correct."

"He didn't get a single question correct?" Chu Chuyan widened her eyes. "How could that be possible? What kind of questions did the new teacher set?"

Chu Huanzhao shot a glance at Zu An, clearly seeing the mirth in his eyes. He must be secretly delighted right now. Heh, look at how hard I'm working to brag for him. I'll be expecting something good from him for this.

"The questions set by the new teacher were a little peculiar..." She began to roughly explain the twenty questions. For those that she wasn't too sure about, she naturally turned to Zu An for help.

No one questioned how he was involved. It was an open competition after all, and Zu An was a student of the academy. It wasn't much for him to know the details of the competition.

After hearing the twenty questions, Chu Chuyan gasped in amazement. "That new teacher seems truly formidable. I'm starting to get a bit curious about him."

"You should be." A gleeful gleam shone in Chu Huanzhao's eyes from having succeeded in setting up her prank. It had been a long time since she was this happy.

"Hmph, it's nothing more than small tricks." Qin Wanru sniffed. "Ultimately, one's cultivation is still the most important thing in this world. Don't hold up the advancement of your cultivation over such trivialities."

"Chuyan, it's good that you've helped us manage the family business over the years, but these things are all of minor importance. You mustn't get too caught up in them," said Chu Zhongtian.

Chu Chuyan replied with a smile, "Rest assured, I know my priorities."

Chu Zhongtian nodded in relief. "That's good. You have always been mature even at a young age, and your mother and I have never needed to worry about you before."

Qin Wanru glared at her second daughter. "Huanzhao, take a look at your older sister. She already has her priorities set straight, whereas you are still spending your days idly and getting into trouble."

The smile on Chu Huanzhao's face immediately froze. I know that you want to compliment my big sister, but surely you don't have to come around and berate me!

Zu An, meanwhile, was beginning to understand why Chu Huanzhao had been so rebellious the first time they'd met. Ever since she was young, she had been constantly compared to her outstanding big sister, and she was unable to catch up to her no matter what she tried. Anyone in her position would inevitably feel horrible about it.

On top of that, Chu Chuyan had quite a cold personality as well. All in all, it seemed that there was not a single ordinary human in this family. In a sense, Chu Zhongtian and Qin Wanru weren't really good at raising kids.

Oh well. Since she has an unhappy childhood, I guess I should try to take care of her a little more.

"You too, Zu An!" Qin Wanru had been in the middle of berating her daughter when she noticed Zu An watching in a relaxed manner from the sidelines. She thought about all of the trouble that had occurred ever since Zu An joined the family, and her rage was whipped up. Why are you acting so carefree? You're worse than Huanzhao!

Zu An was astonished. He hadn't expected to suddenly be implicated in this.

Chu Huanzhao was glad to see that Zu An was there to tank the damage. It looks like my life can only get better now that my brother-in-law has joined the family.

“Yes, I’ll heed your teachings, mother-in-law,” replied Zu An obediently. He had a firm grasp as to who was the one truly in charge here. In any case, there was no reason for him to provoke Qin Wanru unnecessarily.

“Forget it!” Qin Wanru was about to lecture Zu An to work harder, and that even if he couldn’t cultivate, he could at least help with the family business and alleviate Chu Chuyan’s stress. In that way, Chu Chuyan’s talents wouldn’t go to waste.

However, she suddenly remembered Chu Chuyan’s intentions for bringing him in, and her words could not leave her mouth.

Given Zu An’s nature, it was a better use of her time to tutor Huanzhao instead. She was more likely to be of help in the future. With that, she directed her sharp eyes back to her second daughter and began nagging her.

Chu Huanzhao was stunned. Why are you nagging me?! Just let me have my meal in peace, all right?

After dinner was over, Zu An returned to his room and checked the Rage points he had earned. With the upcoming Clans Tournament and the imminent opening of the Ursae Dungeon containing the Evanescent Lotus, he would need great power to back him up.

God knows what Yuan Wendong is planning for the Clans Tournament coming up in two days.

Even though Yuan Wendong had been crushed by Pei Mianman, there was no denying he was a fifth rank cultivator. If he were to pull some kind of despicable move and kill him in the dueling ring...

That seems a small possibility. I do have the Chu clan backing me, after all.

However, it was still possible for Yuan Wendong to feign carelessness and take off one of his limbs, or something like that. He had read plenty of novels in his previous life, and it was usually the offspring of noble clans that were the most despicable of all.

While Chu Chuyan had promised to ensure his safety, it wasn’t like Zu An to put all of his eggs in one basket. Becoming strong in his own right was the real way to go.

Including the points he had saved up from the last draw, he had 88,018 Rage points at the moment. Most of them had come from the crowd, right after Jiang Luofu’s announcement that he was going to take over from Yang Wei as Brightmoon Academy’s arithmetic teacher.

Hehe, I sure was sharp-witted to immediately capitalize on the situation and trigger them.

Just thinking about it filled him with glee. The incident also reinforced how inefficient it was for him to try squeezing Rage points out of an individual. It was much better to juice a whole crowd at once. To be honest, the academy still wasn’t a large enough stage for him to truly shine. A day would eventually come when he would stand before thousands and squeeze out every single Rage point from each of them.

Just thinking about it makes me a little excited.

Mindful of tradition, he started off by washing his hands and face before beginning to draw the lottery.

As expected, he received a series of 'Thanks for playing!' messages.

However, Zu An had already gotten used to it. He simply continued drawing the lottery, watching as the light marker flew across the various keys on the keyboard.

Thanks for playing... Ki Fruit... Thanks for playing... Thanks for playing... Ki Fruit... Whatcha Starin' At... Thanks for playing... Ki Fruit...

Zu An was starting to find drawing the lottery a chore. If the day came when he managed to amass several million Rage points, he would probably be drawing until his fingers broke.

Hm? Wait a moment. Did I just get something weird?

Zu An took a look at his notification logs and realized that he had managed to draw a new skill.

He had been feeling somewhat lethargic, but he bolted upright when he realized that he had drawn something new. The last few skills he'd obtained were all pretty useful, and he was excited at what the new skill could be.

He saw that the 'N' key was lit. He tapped it, and saw three words: Whatcha Starin' At.

Zu An was stunned. Is the Keyboard mocking me?

He pressed the 'N' key once more, but the same three words lingered on the screen, as if mocking his foolishness.

"What the hell? I'm staring at you, shithead!" Zu An roared angrily.

Ding~

As if some sort of condition had been fulfilled, several more lines appeared on the screen.

Congratulations on obtaining the skill: Whatcha Starin' At!

Skill Effect: It's said that this is a taboo phrase in a certain region. Once used, it will undoubtedly result in a calamity of bloodshed. Whenever you use this skill, your target will reply with "I'm staring at you, shithead!"

Zu An blinked his eyes in confusion. Is that all? Nothing else?

Unwilling to give up, he squinted to see if there was any fine print or some such hidden away, but he could find nothing else.

What's with this shitty skill?! What's the use of making my target say a few words?!

Chapter 95: Sunflower Phantasm

While the Heiress' Ball of Delights or the Knock-You-Up Eyes had names and descriptions that sounded utterly horrendous, they were items that could bring forth incredible effects in desperate moments if used well.

However, Zu An couldn't think of even a single practical use for this skill.

All it did was make the other party reply 'I'm staring at you, shithead'. Could there be anything more useless than this?

A sudden thought surfaced in Zu An's mind. Could it be a taunt skill to earn the enemy's Rage points?

However, he soon dismissed that line of thought. Even if it hadn't been turned into an official skill, just saying the words 'Whatcha starin' at?' was more than enough to provoke most people.

One thing that surprised him was that this skill didn't have a limit to its use, unlike the other artifacts and skills he had received.

Although this assuaged Zu An's heart a little, it didn't change the fact that this skill was much less useful than the previous few. He didn't know whether to celebrate or weep in sorrow.

With a deep sigh, he continued to draw the lottery. He didn't get anything else new after that—they were all either 'Thanks for playing' or Ki Fruits. This outcome was well within his expectations. After all, it was nearly impossible for him to be lucky enough to draw two skills or artifacts in a single sitting.

So far, his third formation was one-third full, and devouring all of the Ki Fruits he had drawn was enough to fill it up fully. Based on the amount of ki he had currently, he was confident that he could summon Grandgale twice now. Previously, summoning it just once would sap him dry.

It looks like my ki capacity is indeed increasing along with my growth.

Zu An wondered if he would really unlock a new skill once the nine formations in his muscles were fully filled. Grandgale was a truly formidable skill, yet it was only the first one. Surely the skills that came after it would be even more powerful.

However, just thinking about the astronomical amount of Rage points he would require to raise his cultivation level was enough to leave him shaking his head helplessly. Forget it, I shouldn't think about all this now. For the time being, I should focus on preparing for the battle two days from now!

With his current ability, he was pretty confident that he would be able to protect himself against Yuan Wendong in the dueling ring. However, from what Jiang Luofu had said, cultivators would grow exponentially stronger the higher their rank. Since strong cultivators had the ability to secure cultivation resources for themselves, this let them grow faster than the others below them. Therefore, it was unwise for him to simply keep hiding his abilities.

Zu An also belatedly realized the significance of being a member of the Chu clan. He was sitting on such a huge ship right now; it would be a huge waste if he didn't take full advantage. At the very least, he was determined to make the other members of the Chu clan acknowledge him.

While he did grumble about his wife's and in-laws' cold attitude towards him, deep down, he was aware that their prejudice toward him was justified. He had indeed been a good-for-nothing before. Had he been in their position, he would have surely scorned himself too.

In fact, putting aside Chu Huanzhao, both Chu Chuyan and Chu Zhongtian actually treated him fairly well despite harboring the notion that he was a good-for-nothing. It was only Qin Wanru who berated him constantly, even punishing him by making him copy the family rules.

Hmph, I should have given your dudou to that pervert Ji Dengtu...

Jiang Luofu's advice made him realize that it was time for him to demonstrate his capability before the Chu clan. At the very least, he had to let them know that he was an asset to the Chu clan. When that happened, perhaps even Chu Chuyan would willingly fawn all over him...

Just thinking about it made Zu An giggle under his breath. Saliva dribbled out of the corner of his lips.

Unfortunately, he didn't think he was strong enough to defeat Yuan Wendong yet. After all, Yuan Wendong was a fifth rank cultivator, and his ability to control multiple weapons simultaneously in battle made him seem almost like those swordmasters in fantasy novels. Pei Mianman was able to melt his weapons with ease, but if he were to be placed in her position, the most likely outcome was him ending up being punctured full of holes.

Also, he didn't want to showcase all of his trump cards in a public dueling ring. He did want to prove his worth, but giving away all of his techniques was nothing short of foolishness. It would give his enemies the vital intelligence required to deal with him.

That's why people in my previous life preach about the importance of humility, and keeping a low profile. A wise man would rather silently strike it rich than parade his wealth around. Those who stick out too much would only incur the envy of others and eventually be destroyed.

He spent a long time deep in thought, and decided to turn his attention toward the Thirteen Forms of Elementary Swordplay Bai Susu had imparted to them earlier in the day. This swordplay might be of limited use to ordinary folk, but its nature fitted him like a glove. If he could defeat Yuan Wendong with this swordplay, he would be able to prove his own worth without giving away his trump cards.

This thought made him quiver with excitement. He picked up the sword he received from the academy and began practicing the moves. Somehow, he was able to clearly remember the movements Bai Susu had demonstrated. He could almost see himself back in the classroom, with the moves playing out in front of him. Perhaps this was an effect of his transcendent-class aptitude.

His movements started off a little awkward, but after several repetitions, they began to flow much more smoothly.

An eerie voice cut through the silence of the night. "Oh? I didn't expect your talent to be so high. You were actually able to grasp the academy's Elementary Swordplay so quickly. All you're lacking now is practice."

Zu An recoiled in shock. He spun around, only to see a scrawny, hunched-over figure standing in the garden not too far away. Who else could it be if not Old Mi?

"When did you arrive?" asked Zu An with an innocent smile. On the inside, however, he warned himself to be more careful. If Old Mi were to discover the trump cards he had, he might just get screwed over.

"I've been here for some time now," replied Old Mi. "I heard that you're likely going to be up against Yuan Wendong in the Clans Tournament?"

"Yeah, it seems so," replied Zu An helplessly. What could he do when the Chu clan wanted to use him as the 'inferior horse' to tie down the 'superior horse'?

Old Mi stroked his beard as he stared at Zu An intently. "You're intending to use the Elementary Swordplay to deal with Yuan Wendong?"

Zu An felt his goosebumps rising up under Old Mi's sinister gaze. "Yeah, I don't know any combat skills other than this."

"The Elementary Swordplay is the basic swordplay imparted to everyone in the academy. No doubt Yuan Wendong has learned it as well. I heard that he's a fifth rank cultivator. Aren't you courting death by attempting to challenge him with the Elementary Swordplay?" Old Mi scoffed.

"But the teachers of the academy said that this swordplay isn't as bad as its name makes it out to be. It's the foundation of all swordplay, and even true swordmasters who have reached a certain point eventually return to it..." Zu An's weak protest buckled under Old Mi's glare.

"You actually believe the nonsense the teachers of the academy spout in order to spur their students' motivation?" Old Mi looked at Zu An as if he was an idiot. "You're not wrong to say that cultivators, upon reaching a certain level, would return to the basics, but it only works because they have developed the overwhelming speed and strength needed to crush their enemies. A newbie like you using this swordplay to deal with an expert... you're really asking for a good wallop!"

Zu An offered up a sheepish smile. "Well, my match is scheduled at the very end. I probably wouldn't have to get into the dueling ring in the first place."

Old Mi fell silent for a while, then said suddenly, "I heard that you have a grudge against Yuan Wendong?"

Zu An was surprised. The old gardener was always puttering about the Chu clan estate, yet he seemed to know everything that was going on outside. "Ah... We did get into a small scuffle in the academy."

"A small scuffle?" Old Mi snorted. "I heard that Yuan Wendong declared that he'd cripple you."

"Well, he had some strong grievances against me. He might have just been spouting empty threats in a fit of anger," replied Zu An.

"You had someone there to fish you out the last time, but who would be able to save you in the dueling ring two days from now?" Old Mi rolled his eyes, which gave his already-terrifying face an even more frightening aspect. "I heard that the First Miss wanted you to provoke Yuan Wendong again tomorrow?"

"Y-yeah..." Zu An felt a shiver run down his spine. This matter had only been shared among the few of them at the dining table earlier. How in the world did Old Mi learn about it too? Could he possibly know about the Keyboard as well?

Old Mi stomped his feet in anger. "Preposterous! Even if the First Miss doesn't like you, she shouldn't toss you into the fiery pit just like that!"

His outburst heartened Zu An. "Elder, please don't worry. My wife is just resorting to the strategy of using the weakest horse to tie down the strongest one. I'm the one going up last, so there's a good chance that I won't need to fight at all."

Old Mi shook his head. "It's different this time. The Yuan clan came prepared. There's a high probability that you would have to fight as well. I'll impart a movement skill to you. Hopefully, you'll at least be able to protect yourself in the dueling ring."

Zu An was shocked into a moment of silence, before he suddenly cried out, "Elder, you treat me too well!" To think that he had actually doubted Old Mi's kind intentions all this while!

Old Mi replied with a smile, "I don't hope for much in this life; I just hope that you can fulfill my regrets. I can't have you losing an arm or a leg."

You must be joking. It wasn't easy for me to find someone suitable. How could I let that brat, Yuan Wendong, leave any scars on your body?!

Zu An had no inkling of Old Mi's sinister intentions, so he was utterly moved by the old gardener's gesture. So few people had treated him kindly ever since he came to this world, and Old Mi was, without a doubt, one of them.

Old Mi cleared his throat and said, "This movement skill is called 'Sunflower Phantasm'. It doesn't require much ki to activate, but its effects are top-notch. Those who are talented only need half a year in order to reach a level of minor accomplishment. We're short of time, but considering that your opponent is Yuan Wendong, it should be enough."

Zu An was a little perplexed. "That doesn't make sense. If the movement skill is top-notch, shouldn't its activation require a large amount of ki?"

Old Mi chuckled. "Don't worry, I'm not trying to trick you. While this movement skill requires very little ki to execute, most people face a huge hurdle that they are unable to overcome. But as for you..."

At this point, Old Mi glanced meaningfully at Zu An's crotch and continued, "The hurdle is nonexistent for you!"

Zu An blinked his eyes in bewilderment. What does that mean?

Old Mi coughed lightly and said, "Gather your focus. I'm going to impart to you Sunflower Phantasm's formula, ki pathways, and crux to you. Listen carefully..."

Roughly two hours later, Zu An began moving, flitting from left to right, again and again, leaving Old Mi utterly giddy. It took him a while to find his voice. "Did you actually know the Sunflower Phantasm beforehand?"

Zu An shook his head and replied, "Of course not."

"Then how did you manage to grasp it so quickly? You're already at the level of minor accomplishment!" Old Mi exclaimed.

"I guess I'm just talented?" Zu An offered shyly.

Chapter 96: Young Master Shi

Old Mi simply disregarded those words. A notorious wastrel of Brightmoon City possessing good talent? Is that even possible? Everyone else must have been blind all these years!

He could only think of one explanation. "Perhaps your body is well-suited for this movement skill. Quickly familiarize yourself with it. It should be enough for you to at least survive against Yuan Wendong. Also, don't tell anyone about this martial skill, and never speak its name 'Sunflower Phantasm' either. It might get you in trouble."

Zu An nodded quickly in response. "Yes, I understand."

Looks like Old Mi is quite a low-profile person too. If that wasn't the case, how could he have remained a humble gardener in the Chu clan for so many years?

Hearing Zu An's assurances, Old Mi finally left the garden in peace.

Zu An continued practicing the Sunflower Phantasm, but a thought soon surfaced in his mind. This movement skill is quick and unpredictable. It's too much of a waste to use it just for defense. What if I were to use it for offense?

Zu An recalled Bai Susu's explanation that the Elementary Swordplay was focused on dealing the greatest damage against one's opponent at the fastest possible speed and within the shortest distance. It had many openings in the eyes of a true swordmaster, but these openings became practically nonexistent if one could move fast enough, preventing them from being exploited.

Just thinking about it made Zu An's heart beat faster. He started practicing the Thirteen Forms of Elementary Swordplay and the Sunflower Phantasm in unison. Before, the Elementary Swordplay had looked quite monotonous and straightforward. However, once combined together with Sunflower Phantasm, it left brilliant gleams of light flashing around the garden in unpredictable trajectories.

Someone walking into the garden at that moment would see only a shadow flitting around amidst flashes of light. The sight would have been more than enough to frighten them.

All of a sudden, Zu An sensed a disturbance, and hurriedly retracted his sword. As he did so, a couple of guards rushed over, yelling, "Young master, is something wrong?"

These were the guards that Chu Zhongtian had assigned to protect him after the incident with Snow. You guys sure are useful. I didn't see you rushing in when Old Mi strutted right in earlier.

"I'm fine. I'm just practicing my swordsmanship." Zu An wiped the sweat off his forehead as he beamed a smile at them.

"All right, we shan't disturb you."

Seeing that there was nothing amiss, the guards quickly resumed their posts.

"Our young master's body sure is weak. Just practicing the Elementary Swordplay is enough to make him sweat so profusely."

"I sure pity our young miss."

"I'm certain I sensed quite a huge commotion coming from there, though. Am I hearing things?"

“Tsk, your nerves must be too strung up during this period. Do you think that it’s possible for our young master to have caused a huge commotion by himself?”

“I guess not.”

...

Zu An’s face darkened at their whispering. There was a truly pressing need to enhance his reputation.

He had been worried about the Clans Tournament earlier, but he was more confident now that he had the Sunflower Phantasm. This movement skill and the Elementary Swordplay were the perfect combination, reminiscent of the Bixie Swordplay Manual from right out of the novel.

All of a sudden, his face stiffened. He noticed that there was the word ‘Sunflower’ in its name. Old Mi had also mentioned a huge hurdle that most people were unable to overcome, which prevented them from learning the movement skill. On top of that, there was that lingering gaze on his crotch...

What the hell!

This can’t be the Sunflower Manual, can it?![1]

This terrifying thought made him toss his sword away in fright.

Why am I constantly haunted by this?!

Zu An could feel the malice the world bore towards him. It was one thing for ‘little Zu An’ to be sealed, but now, he was even paired with the Sunflower Manual and the Bixie Swordplay Manual?!

With a dreadful look on his face, Zu An stomped his way back to his residence and went to sleep. He had lost all motivation to continue practicing.

...

Meanwhile, there was another person who was in a worse mood. In the headquarters of the Plum Blossom Sect, an expensive porcelain cup was smashed to the floor, shattering into countless pieces.

Kneeling on the floor, Mei Chaofeng’s eyelids twitched in horror. That was his favorite teacup! A great deal of effort had gone into acquiring it, and he was so fond of it that he always kept it by his side. If anyone else had dared touch the teacup, he would have had the person held down, diced into pieces, and fed to the dogs. However, he dared not direct his anger towards the person who had just smashed it into pieces. He could only tremble fearfully on the ground.

Another person knelt next to him. She was dressed in a green robe, and her hair was tied into a beautiful ponytail. It was none other than Snow.

Mei Chaofeng had always had a bad impression of the lass. Right now, however, he felt a strange sense of camaraderie with her.

A young man sat majestically on the chair in front of them. He was dressed in a purple silk robe, fastened by a white belt around his waist. He had long, lustrous black hair and a beautiful face.

Unfortunately, his graceful appearance was somewhat marred by his livid expression. He glared at the two kneeling before him, unfettered rage burning in his eyes.

“You incompetent fools! Snow, it wasn’t so long ago that you sent me a message telling me that everything was under control. You told me that you would make that piece of trash, Zu An, disappear from the face of the world soon enough. Yet now you’re telling me that you were exposed, and had to flee from the Chu clan?”

The young man had a smile on his face, but it did nothing to warm his cold and biting tone.

“Young master, please pardon me! Some minor accidents occurred along the way!” Snow lowered her head in utter shame as she gritted her teeth tightly. She had wanted to share the young master’s burden, but who knew that she would end up messing things up?

Not only that, but her failure was all because of that notorious wastrel of all people!

“Minor accidents?” the young master sneered coldly. “Do you know how many resources and connections I had to tap into in order to have you infiltrate the Chu clan? You had lain in wait for so many years, and it was just about time to reap the fruits of your efforts. And yet, you managed to mess it all up just like that!”

“I’ll surely make up for my mistakes! Young master, please spare me!” Snow kowtowed deeply, her body trembling uncontrollably.

The young master sniffed as he turned his head aside, not wanting even to look at her anymore. He turned to Mei Chaofeng and bellowed, “You too! Snow is still young, so it’s understandable that she’s inexperienced when it comes to such worldly matters. However, you’re the veteran here, a powerhouse of the underworld. How did you manage to get done in by that piece of trash too? You actually lost seven-and-a-half million silver taels to him! Did you even earn me that much money in total over the years?”

Cold sweat dripped down Mei Chaofeng’s back. Is the young master intending to make an example out of me so as to warn others? He berated Snow harshly earlier, but let her go softly. Now that it’s my head on the chopping block, he’s starting to assign responsibility.

He anxiously defended himself. “I apologize for my mistake. It was already too late by the time I received the news. I never thought that someone would be able to win seven-and-a-half million silver taels in just two short rounds. I wasn’t planning to acknowledge the debt, but Miss Qiao insisted that I write out the promissory note, so I had no choice but to go along.”

His nervousness was well-founded. The young man before him was the Sixth Young Master of the Shi clan, Shi Kun, whose father served as the Minister of War. There was no question that the Shi clan was one of the most prominent clans in the capital. Shi Kun was a dashing young man, and a renowned prodigy on top of that. He held the hearts of everyone in the Shi clan, and he was often entrusted with great responsibilities.

He was the one who managed most of the Shi clan’s ‘underground affairs’ as well. Based on what Mei Chaofeng knew, the Plum Blossom Sect had many equivalents that operated in the other prefectures all over the country.

Despite how intimidating the Plum Blossom Sect seemed, the reality was that most of its earnings had to be submitted upward, to the Shi clan. This was why Shi Kun had been furious to learn that they actually owed Zu An so much money.

“Oh? Snow ordered you to write it?” Shi Kun turned to look at Snow. “Are you the spy of our Shi clan, or are the spy of the Chu clan?”

Snow hurriedly explained herself. “Young master, there was no way to defuse the situation back then. I didn’t want to cause any further complications, and I thought that it would be easy to get the note back, so I didn’t consider all the possible ramifications.”

Shi Kun cleared his throat angrily. “The Shi clan has groomed you for so many years, yet you still remain so incompetently ignorant! Did you think that the Chu clan would really dare to mobilize their Red Cloak Army for that? As long as they made a move, the royal court would surely have cracked down on them the following day!”

Snow lowered her head. “It was my mistake.”

Shi Kun continued his interrogation. “I can let that matter slip, but how did your assassination of Zu An fail so spectacularly?”

“That fellow looks like a good-for-nothing on the surface, but he’s actually a cultivator,” replied Snow.

“He’s a cultivator? What rank is he at?!” Shi Kun immediately rose to his feet in agitation.

“Around the third rank, but there’s something weird about his fighting prowess...” Snow was a little uncertain about this. In terms of ki pulsations, it wasn’t wrong to say that Zu An was at the third rank. However, the force he’d exerted during their fight had far surpassed that.

“A fifth rank cultivator like you couldn’t even kill a third rank cultivator?” Shi Kun found the situation so ludicrous that he began laughing like a maniac. “Have all your training gone to waste?”

Snow’s face reddened. “I don’t really know what happened either. My stomach suddenly started hurting...”

She had gotten a physician to check on her condition afterwards, and he had assured her that there was nothing wrong with her body. When she probed further about the sensations she’d felt, all of the physicians she consulted told her that they were the symptoms that a mother would experience during childbirth.

However, Snow was still a maiden. How could she have possibly been pregnant? On top of that, the symptoms had simply vanished all of a sudden, leaving her utterly confused at her physical state.

“Your stomach started aching during a critical moment? Utterly incompetent!” Shi Kun roared with an awful look on his face. “Since Zu An isn’t truly a wastrel, it would appear that he has been intentionally concealing his capabilities. His efforts did pay off, since he managed to get the Chu clan to lower their guard and allow him to become their drafted son-in-law. If only he was a wastrel, I would have nothing to worry about. However, if he’s just putting on an act, there’s a good chance that he might just win over the heart and body of Chu First Miss!”

Just thinking about someone as beautiful as Chu Chuyan laying in Zu An's embrace was enough to fill Shi Kun with a burning envy.

Snow knew what Shi Kun was worried about, and quickly sought to allay his fears. "Young master, there's no need to worry. The two of them are sleeping in different rooms, and the young miss isn't fond of Zu An at all. She won't let him have his way with her."

"That might be true for the time being, but how can we be certain of this in the future?" Shi Kun began to pace nervously. "This won't do. We need to deal with the problem as soon as possible. What's the progress with the plan that you're working on at the moment?"

Mei Chaofeng shot a glance at Snow before explaining the situation almost mockingly. "Miss Qiao arranged for an insider to get Zu An expelled from Brightmoon Academy so that I could find an opportunity to get rid of him outside. However, the person she engaged failed to chase Zu An out; on the contrary, he himself was expelled from the academy instead."

Shi Kun could hardly believe his ears. "If I hadn't rushed here due to the opening of the Ursae Dungeon, I would never have known that there were so many issues cropping up! Hurry up and tell me what happened!"

Snow had an awkward look on her face. "I tapped your connection in Brightmoon City, who got Yang Wei to assist me in my scheme to have Zu An expelled from the academy. No one could have predicted that Zu An would be more skilled than Yang Wei in the field of arithmetic. In the end, Yang Wei had his own position as teacher terminated instead."

"What? Why is this fellow able to do everything?" Shi Kun was astonished. The reports he had received thus far all suggested Zu An was a good-for-nothing, but it seemed that the reality was totally different.

Well, I can think of one thing that that fellow is inept in. Snow's face reddened, but she had no intention of informing Shi Kun about it.

Chapter 97: Realization

"I'm starting to get interested in this fellow now that I've heard what you said. I'll be heading to the academy tomorrow to check him out myself." Shi Kun gazed in the direction of the academy as he spoke. His tone was confident and composed, as if speaking of a trivial matter.

Snow hung her head in shame. It's due to my incompetence that the young master has to make a move personally.

"Young master Sang is still waiting for me outside. I'll speak with him now." Shi Kun stood up to take his leave, but halted just as he reached the doorway. He turned to Mei Chaofeng. "What's the name of your subordinate who lost seven-and-a-half million silver taels?"

"Plum Blossom Seven," replied Mei Chaofeng fearfully.

Shi Kun nodded silently, then said calmly, "There's no use keeping useless things by your side. Dice him up and feed him to the dogs."

“Y-yes!” Mei Chaofeng’s heart chilled a few degrees.

He knew that this was Shi Kun’s way of sending him an indirect warning, and it left him rather indignant. He was supposed to be the king of Brightmoon City’s underworld, a powerhouse possessing unquestionable authority. When had a youngster ever dared to threaten him like this before?

However, his immense displeasure dissipated as he saw the old man who followed Shi Kun out. Shi Kun was no threat to him—the youngster was unlikely to even be a match for him—but the old man, on the other hand, was far stronger than him.

It looks like the Shi clan is a force to be reckoned with. Even a guard of theirs possesses this much strength.

A sliver of despair seeped into Mei Chaofeng’s mood. It was the sad fate of those in the pugilistic world like him to be led around by the nose by these prominent clans.

In the lounge outside, Sang Qian was getting impatient from all the waiting. However, as soon as he saw Shi Kun walking over, a welcoming smile spread across his face. “Young master Shi, it has been a long while. You still look as handsome as before.”

Shi Kun’s angry visage was replaced by a similarly warm smile. “It has indeed been a while since we parted ways at the capital, but you still look as awe-inspiring as ever.”

The two of them were acquainted with each other. After trading some pleasantries, Shi Kun finally got around to the topic at hand. “May I ask what your father’s intentions are? He has yet to make a move despite having been assigned to the Linchuan Commandery. I’m unsure of the nature of his plans.”

Sang Qian smiled in response. “My father has been taking the time to make the necessary preparations. He says that if young master Shi wishes to make a move, you may proceed. Your plans will not interfere with ours.”

“I’ve heard that Governor Sang Hong is a man who believes in meticulous preparation before taking action. It looks like this is truly the case.”

In his mind, however, Shi Kun sneered coldly. He’s just trying to push me to the front so that I can take the brunt of the impact. Are you going to make it look as if I can’t deal with the Chu clan, so that you can step out at the last moment to ‘clean up the mess’?

“Brother Shi is too polite. My father is just worried that your plans to conquer Chu First Miss may be disrupted if he makes the first move. If you can successfully bring Chu First Miss over to your side, that would save us a lot of trouble.”

Sang Hong’s words were polite, but his heart was filled with envy. No man could be uninterested in Chu Chuyan having seen her ravishing looks firsthand. Unfortunately, while his father had been rising through the ranks, the foundations of the Sang clan were still unstable, and they lacked the dignity of the other well-established clans that had centuries of history behind them.

Not only was his clan on a lower footing than the Chu clan, but others like Shi Kun were also pursuing Chu Chuyan. Because of these reasons, Sang Hong knew that he stood no chance at all. Thus, he had to make do with the Zheng clan.

It was fortunate that Zheng Dan was also beautiful, although her cultivation and standing were slightly lacking. Despite that, he was still satisfied with having such a woman as his wife.

Thinking about Zheng Dan reminded him of the honey trap he had entrusted her to set a while back. He had checked in with her to see how it was going, but she had yet to report success. However, according to her own words, 'everything is going according to plan'.

Hmph, I just hope that she doesn't get taken advantage of by that Zu An.

He thought about how Zheng Dan wouldn't even allow him to hold her hand, and that went a long way in assuaging his worries. There's no way she would allow that piece of trash to get close to her.

Meanwhile, Shi Kun was clearly pleased by Sang Hong's flattery. "Hahaha, I'm sure things would go well with Brother Sang's words of blessing. Once I manage to capture Chu First Miss' heart, I'll make sure to send you a wedding invitation, and we'll have a good drink together!"

Hah, you just want to rub it in my face, huh? Sang Qian maintained an amiable expression, mindfully hiding his mental sneer. "We're all working for the royal family. Allow me to propose a toast to Brother Shi with this cup of tea in place of wine. To our success!"

"Of course, of course. To our success!" Shi Kun lifted his teacup as well, and touched it to Sang Qian's with a clink. He, too, had other thoughts in mind. You sure know how to phrase your words well. For the royal family, huh?

In truth, the Sang clan worked as aides for the emperor, whereas the Shi clan was part of the empress' faction. On the surface, the royal couple seemed on good terms, but that was only because they had a common enemy at the moment—King Qi.

Who could know what would happen in the future? Naturally, each clan was wary of being too trusting of the other.

His thoughts were perfectly mirrored in Sang Qian's mind.

...

The following morning found Zu An in a much calmer state of mind. He'd had some time to cool down and think things through. In this world of cultivation, where strength determined almost everything, he had to prioritize his strength over his dignity.

This world hadn't been very kind to him. Having already been through several dangerous situations, there was no way he could cling stubbornly to his pride and refuse to practice this new technique just because it was something a eunuch trained in. It was much better to obtain another means to ensure his safety. I mean, while it does sound bad that I'm learning the Sunflower Manual, it's not as if people in this world have watched The Proud, Smiling Wanderer. What do I have to fear?[1]

He would definitely need the Sunflower Phantasm, be it for tomorrow's Clans Tournament, or for entering the dungeon to unseal 'little Zu An'.

With that, he turned his focus to studying the Sunflower Phantasm once more, making sure to take careful note of every ki pathway.

After breakfast, Chu Huanzhao knocked on his door to invite him to accompany her to the academy. Zu An had been quite resistant to the idea of going to the academy, but he was less put off by it, now that he had such a beautiful sister-in-law escorting him.

However, today was a little different. Chu Chuyan, for the first time in forever, was going to the academy too.

Zu An felt that it was unfair how vastly different Chu Chuyan was perceived, compared to him. Although she hadn't been to the academy in ages, everyone still treated her like a model student. On the other hand, if he simply skipped school for one day, others would condemn him as a hopeless delinquent.

Due to Chu Chuyan's bewitching appearance, she usually traveled around in a carriage. This helped to prevent any unnecessary congestion on the streets.

The soft cushions of the carriage and the faint fragrance lingering in the air reminded Zu An of the first time he had ridden in this carriage, when he had just arrived in this world. So much had happened since then.

"Honey, do you have any news about Snow?" asked Zu An.

As usual, his way of addressing her left Chu Chuyan with a resigned look on her face. She had tried to correct him several times now, but he simply refused to budge on this. Admittedly though, she was starting to get used to it too, so she ended up letting him have his way.

"I haven't found her yet. It's as if she has disappeared into thin air. Why? Do you miss her?"

"Me? Miss her?" Zu An nearly leaped to his feet in sheer disbelief. "That woman tried to kill me multiple times! Do I look like a masochist to you? Why would I miss her?!"

"Speaking of which, you mentioned that this wasn't the first time she tried to kill you. Why didn't you tell me about that earlier?" asked Chu Chuyan.

Zu An rolled his eyes. "How could I be sure who was the one trying to kill me? She was your personal maidservant, after all. What if you had some boy toy outside, and wanted to kill me so that you could get together with him?"

Chu Chuyan's cheeks flushed red. "What do you mean by 'boy toy'? You really should , learn to keep your mouth in check!"

"Brother-in-law, your situation sure is pitiful. You must have been incredibly worried all this while," Chu Huanzhao chimed in.

Zu An felt warmth surge through his heart. He glared at Chu Chuyan. "Look! It's my sister-in-law who cares the most about me in the end. You should learn more from her example!"

Chu Huanzhao was oddly amused by that remark. Back at home, her parents were always telling her to learn from her big sister. For the first time, someone was actually telling her big sister to learn from her instead. It felt awfully good to have the tables turned, for once.

Chu Chuyan, on the other hand, disregarded his words entirely. "Feel free to tell me anything from now onward. We're a family now, though..."

She gave her little sister a hesitant look, then changed what she was about to say. "... In any case, I'll make sure to protect you well, so don't worry."

Zu An's eyes lit up. "That's perfect! If anyone dares to bully me from now onward, I'll make sure to summon you so that you can plant their heads in the ground!"

Chu Chuyan gave him a level look.

"I'm not saying this just so that you can mess around."

"I know, I know~" Zu An laughed. "I must say though, your Chu clan isn't as formidable as I thought it would be. Despite being a ducal clan, you can't even deal with a single underworld sect. Heck, you can't even find a mere maidservant, either. I really think you all should work on that."

Chu Chuyan was unfazed by his accusations. "Now that you're a member of the Chu clan as well, there are some things that I ought to tell you. While we are a ducal clan, our situation isn't as rosy as it looks from the outside. To put it bluntly, we're currently caught in the middle of a battle over the throne.

"According to the promise made by the preceding emperor, the crown should be passed on to King Qi. However, His Majesty instead wishes to pass the position on to his own son, the current crown prince. Under normal circumstances, the officials would be more inclined to respect His Majesty's decision—albeit grudgingly—since he's the only Earth Immortal stage cultivator at the moment. However, the crown prince is far lacking in aptitude, and is nowhere close to matching King Qi.

"Many officials and clans were already displeased with His Majesty for reneging on his promise earlier, and the crown prince's insufficiency has further deepened their disapproval. King Qi made use of this opportunity to rally these officials over to his side, resulting in two major factions in the royal court.

"As powerful as His Majesty is, he's already very old, and the crown prince is incompetent and incapable of holding his own. This has left the two factions equally matched with one another. In order to gain the upper hand, both factions are trying their best to win over all the notable clans throughout the country. Our Chu clan controls the salt and arms trade in Brightmoon City, which makes us a key target for both factions.

"However, our Chu clan doesn't wish to get involved in this struggle, which is why we have refused to side with either of the factions. This has frustrated both factions simultaneously. His Majesty is worried that we would choose to side with King Qi, so he has appointed the Vice Minister of Finance, Sang Hong, as the governor of the Linchuan Commandery. As the Vice Minister of Finance, Sang Hong regulates the salt and arms trade, and this appointment was surely a direct move against our Chu clan.

"Currently, King Qi seems content to watch from the sidelines. It's likely that he's waiting for Sang Hong and the others to wear us down, before riding in to offer a helping hand, to coax us into joining his faction. Speaking of which, the city lord of Brightmoon City is a member of King Qi's faction. You should have sensed it back at the casino too."

Zu An finally understood how complex the situation was. That explains why I've been the target of such ire ever since I became the drafted son-in-law of the Chu clan, and why there are people openly coming after my life. I had put it down to them coveting Chu Chuyan's beauty, but it seems like it's the entire Chu clan they're after.

Chapter 98: Promise

"Thanks to all this, our Chu clan has to tread carefully at the moment. We mustn't show any openings for our enemies to strike." Chu Chuyan's voice betrayed more than a hint of worry.

She knew deep down that there was no way to continuously fend off the schemes directed against them. It was only a matter of time before they got careless and succumbed. However, there was no other choice but to persevere.

Zu An had his own doubts. "I don't get it. Why do you insist on taking a neutral position? Wouldn't it be better to choose a faction to side with? At the very least, you wouldn't end up in this difficult position you're currently in."

Chu Chuyan shook her head and said, "The main issue here is that both factions are equally matched, and there's no way to know which side would emerge the victor. If we pick the wrong faction to work with, our Chu clan would be left in dire straits. Maintaining our neutrality might put us in a difficult position for now, but it would work out better in the long run as long as we can hold on until the fight has been decided. The winning faction would need some time to recover, and would willingly embrace any non-hostile powers. At the very least, this would ensure the survival of our Chu clan."

Zu An was amazed. Those who dabbled in politics were definitely on a whole different level. Even someone as honest as Chu Zhongtian was thinking several steps ahead.

Yup, I should be more careful. They're all cunning old foxes! Hmmm, didn't Pei Mianman sneak into the Chu clan to steal some accounting records a while back? I wonder which faction she's from...

Their carriage came to a sudden halt. And the sounds of a commotion came from further ahead. With a frown, Chu Chuyan knocked on the side of the carriage and asked, "What's happening outside?"

A guard of the Chu clan quickly answered, "First Miss, it seems like the Sixth Young Master of the Shi clan is here. Many people have filled the streets, and are throwing flowers and fruits into his carriage. So, the road is a little congested now."

Zu An was perplexed. "Does he look like an ape or something? Why would so many people gather here to look at him, and even throw fruits into his carriage?"

Chu Chuyan smiled in amusement. Chu Huanzhao stepped in to explain the situation to him. "Silly brother-in-law. Haven't you heard of Shi Kun from the Shi clan?"

"Is he very famous?" Zu An asked. "No one has ever gathered around to give me flowers even though I'm a famous figure in Brightmoon City too."

Even Chu Huanzhao found that statement hard to swallow. She rolled her eyes and said, "In your case, it's more notoriety than fame. His reputation is far better than yours. The Sixth Young Master of the Shi clan is known for his good looks. Have you ever heard of the story of 'welcoming a carriage with fruits and flowers'?"

"Nope." Zu An was confused. What the hell is that?

So, Chu Huanzhao launched into a rambling story. "It's said that the Sixth Young Master of the Shi clan has a beautiful appearance and a graceful demeanor. In his earlier years, whenever he toured the streets of the capital, even old ladies would become infatuated with him and toss fruits into his carriage, filling it up. Upon hearing the story, another young master emulated Shi Kun's example and drove his carriage around too, only to have the women of the capital fill his carriage up with spit.

"That should give an idea of how good-looking Shi Kun is. I thought that the story was just a rumor, but it seems like it's real."

"It sounds like an exaggeration to me." Zu An was displeased by the excited look on Chu Huanzhao's face.

"I shouldn't miss this opportunity. I should head out to see how dashing that man is!" Chu Huanzhao got to her feet and prepared to dive out of the carriage, but her older sister forestalled her.

"The Shi clan belongs to the empress' faction. It's best for you not to come into contact with him," Chu Chuyan remarked calmly.

Zu An nodded vehemently in agreement. He glared at Chu Huanzhao and said, "It looks like your parents are right to constantly nag at you. When will you learn to become more mature like your older sister?"

Disappointed, Chu Huanzhao sank back into her seat, her mouth shaped in an indignant pout. "Brother-in-law, you're just jealous."

Zu An sat up straight. "No matter how handsome he is, how could he possibly be more handsome than me? It should be enough for you to admire me!"

A tinge of red graced Chu Huanzhao's cheeks. She turned her head away and murmured, "Shameless~"

A gentle voice came unexpectedly from outside the carriage. "Is Miss Chu inside? Shi Kun from the capital wishes to meet you."

Dreamy exclamations immediately sounded outside.

"Waaaaa~ If only young master Shi would ask me out on a date like this!"

"Tsk, you should take a look at the mirror. Do you think you're worthy?"

"It's not as if you're at all pretty."

"Stop arguing. None of you can possibly compete with Chu First Miss when it comes to looks!"

"Tsk. No matter how pretty she is, it doesn't change the fact that she's already married. I've been protecting my chastity for young master Shi's sake!"

...

The surrounding discussions stoked Zu An's curiosity. He parted the carriage's curtains a little and caught sight of a few women swooning. Huh? I expected to see some beautiful women out there, but they're just a bunch of old hags. They don't even come close to matching my wife!

Looks like that young master Shi isn't as suave as the rumors put him out to be.

Zu An turned his gaze to the front, and what he saw was so bedazzling, it almost blinded him. Standing in front was a refined man who was so dashing, all who saw him would sing his praises for an hour straight!

Too freaking handsome!

Even Zu An had no choice but to acknowledge this. In terms of appearance, this man was nearly a match for him. However, it was known that women lacked the ability to accurately gauge how handsome a man was, so he turned away from the view outside and looked worriedly at Chu Chuyan.

Unexpectedly, Chu Chuyan was as calm as the surface of a lake in winter. She replied in a neutral voice, "My apologies, but it's inconvenient for a married woman like me to meet with another man privately. I beg your pardon, young master Shi."

After saying her piece, she gestured for the coach to set off.

Zu An was so delighted to hear those words, he was tempted to rush forward and embrace his wife tightly. All along, he had thought that his wife treated him so coldly because she looked down on him. However, it seemed she was impartial to everyone!

In fact, it could be said that she treats me fairly well.

...

Out on the street, Shi Kun watched the departing carriage with a hint of anger on his otherwise-beautiful face. The hands hidden within his sleeves were clenched tightly. Chu Chuyan, just you wait. You'll be mine soon!

His awful complexion didn't escape the notice of his surrounding fans, who broke into whispered gossip once more.

"That Chu woman sure is insolent. How dare she snub our young master Shi like this?"

"You could do that if you're pretty enough too."

"Hmph! I wouldn't snub our young master Shi no matter how pretty I was!"

"Indeed! Why is she putting on airs? In the end, she still married a wastrel for a husband. I might not be able to best her in anything else, but at the very least, I'll find a husband superior to hers!"

Of course, there were some who meekly pointed out, "Young master Shi had a frightening look in his eyes for a moment there..."

Such words of dissent were swiftly drowned out by the other fans. "What do you know? That's what we call 'devilish charms'! That's a unique manner that only our young master Shi possesses!"

...

In the carriage, Chu Chuyan shifted uncomfortably under Zu An's intent stare. "What are you looking at?" she finally asked.

Zu An replied with a smile, "I'm looking at you, honey. I think I'm growing fonder and fonder of you."

Chu Huanzhao couldn't stand this atmosphere. "Hey, hey, hey, there's a child in here. Please control yourselves, alright?"

Zu An was left speechless. I mean, it's true that you're young, but to call yourself a child seems to be going too far, no?

"Don't misunderstand. I didn't turn down the young master of the Shi clan for you. I simply didn't want to get involved with the Shi clan," replied Chu Chuyan.

That did nothing to dampen Zu An's joy. "Regardless of the reason, I'm quite happy that you rejected him."

Chu Chuyan felt her frustration grow. She felt like her point wasn't getting across to Zu An properly. After a moment's thought, she decided to state it bluntly. "While I do identify myself as your wife while we're outside, we're both aware of what's going on in our marriage. It's impossible for me to fulfill my responsibilities as your wife. Therefore, I advise you not to become too involved in this relationship, lest you get hurt in the future."

Chu Huanzhao felt deep pity for Zu An when she heard those words. While the Chu Estate was rife with such speculations, it was completely different hearing it right out of her big sister's mouth. My brother-in-law must be really devastated to hear those words.

Unexpectedly, Zu An still maintained his jovial mood. "I know. However, whether I like you or not is my own business. It has nothing to do with whether you like me or not. Besides, who knows? You might just fall for me in the future."

Chu Chuyan shook her head without a shred of hesitation. "That's impossible."

Zu An shrugged casually, thinking nothing of it. "Since you've already put it out like that, I have something to clarify with you as well. Since you don't intend to fulfill your responsibilities as my wife, would you mind if I look for other women?"

Chu Huanzhao, who had been privately grieving for Zu An a moment ago, almost fell over in shock. Her eyes went wide. You horrible brother-in-law! My big sister will teach you a lesson for daring to cheat on her!

Chu Chuyan shared her surprise. She hadn't expected such a question out of Zu An, but she still answered calmly, "I don't mind. It's just that you..."

She let her gaze drop downward to Zu An's crotch. Since her little sister was in the carriage too, she chose not to say it out loud.

"You don't have to worry about that. I should be able to recover in due time!" Zu An patted his chest proudly. He wasn't fully confident in his ability to find the Evanescent Lotus, but his lack of certainty didn't hinder him from putting on a strong front before Chu Chuyan.

Chu Chuyan let the matter rest. She thought that he was trying to turn his eyes away from the cruel reality.

Chu Huanzhao's jaw fell open. What in the world is going on here? Not only was it ridiculous for my brother-in-law to ask my big sister if he could cheat on her, but my big sister didn't get angry at all, and even said that she was fine with it?

Big sister, you must be unaware that my brother-in-law is far more outstanding than you know! If you release your grip on him, all those vixens out there would surely snatch him from your grasp!

No, this won't do. I need to help my big sister keep him in check!

With the three of them harboring very different thoughts, they soon arrived at the academy. As a rule, students weren't allowed to ride their carriages into the academy, so they alighted at the entrance.

Chu Chuyan's appearance immediately stirred up a commotion amongst those gathered there, with many thanking the heavens above for allowing them to catch a glimpse of this elusive beauty at the top of the Sweetheart Ranking.

However, as they saw Zu An alighting from the same carriage, there was a huge outburst of envy. The unpleasant reminder that their goddess was already married to a good-for-nothing immediately soured their mood.

"What a coincidence. I didn't expect to meet Chu First Miss here too," a familiar voice drifted over toward them.

Zu An turned to take a look, and saw the magnificent Shi Kun standing not too far away. He had a dashing smile on his face, but, in Zu An's opinion, it only looked irritating.

Chapter 99: Furious

"Waaa, how handsome!"

"Isn't he the renowned Sixth Young Master of the Shi clan?"

"It's no wonder why women like to give him food. Just look at his dashing appearance! Even I can't help but want to dote on him!"

"Is that so? He doesn't look as handsome as the rumors put him out to be. I mean, even young master Xie of our academy seems more than a match for him."

"Hmph, don't talk about that trash of a man. How can that bastard be put on the same pedestal as young master Shi?"

...

A group of passing female students began swooning over Shi Kun.

"Heh, women," remarked Zu An scornfully.

There were quite a few people around Shi Kun at the moment. Most of the faces were unfamiliar to Zu An, but some of them were recognizable. He had no trouble picking out Yuan Wendong and Ye Chenliang.

Yuan Wendong had always carried himself as if he were the king of the world or some such. However, his usual arrogance was nowhere to be seen. He followed Shi Kun with an obsequious smile on his face, looking desperately for opportunities to fawn all over him.

Ye Chenliang was even worse. His attitude was the textbook definition of 'bootlicking'.

The world is such a pragmatic place, huh?

Having seen plenty of this in his previous world, Zu An couldn't help but sigh deeply.

Chu Huanzhao glanced over at Shi Kun before murmuring softly, "I thought that he would be really handsome, but he doesn't look so different from my brother-in-law."

Zu An's face darkened. Is she trying to compliment me or insult me?

Shi Kun began walking toward them with a disarming smile, which—ironically—only made Chu Chuyan frown. Just as she opened her mouth to speak, he quickly interrupted, "It's one thing for Chu First Miss to call me 'another man' on the street, but now that we're in the academy, I should be considered as your classmate too, right? I shouldn't just be 'another man' anymore."

Shi Kun's polite attitude left Chu Chuyan with no room to reject him. She nodded her head slightly and said, "Yes, I understand."

Looking at the white-robed fairy before him, Shi Kun was mesmerized. Many beauties had actively offered themselves to him, some even coming from prominent backgrounds, but none of them could match Chu Chuyan. Her ravishing looks and her regal manner gave her an ethereal air, as if she were a goddess from heaven.

I must have her!

Shi Kun's desire was growing stronger with each passing moment.

He put on an impeccable smile that tingled the hearts of all the female students around them and said, "Miss Chu, this is not actually our first meeting."

"Oh?" Chu Chuyan was surprised. "Pardon my ignorance, but I don't recall having met you anywhere."

"Around seven years ago, during a gathering in the capital, I had the honor of catching a glimpse of you across a pond. Words couldn't even begin to describe how enchanted I was. It was a pity that you had already left by the time I reached that spot. Ever since that day, my heart has been heavy with a lingering regret. I tried so hard to find the whereabouts of that beautiful fairy I saw over the years, but to no avail. It looks like heaven has finally taken pity on me, to bestow upon me the fate to encounter you once more."

"Waaa! I never thought that young master Shi would be such a devoted man!"

"If those words had been meant for me, I would surely have fainted from bliss."

"Yeah~ I thought that men with good looks were all philanderers, just like Xie Xiu! Who could have known that he would stay true to his feelings!"

...

Zu An felt burning flames of rage consuming his heart. These lovestruck bimbos! Why are they getting so excited over a couple of words? At this rate, even if he shits in front of you all, you'd still find a way to compliment him!

Throughout this entire duration, Shi Kun had been disregarding his presence to devote words of affection toward his wife. Surely no man in the world could tolerate this!

Zu An walked right in front of Chu Chuyan and said, "Brother Shit Kun, I believe that there's something very wrong with what you've said."

"Shit Kun?" Shi Kun's face immediately darkened in fury. "Who are you calling Shit Kun? It's Shi Kun!"

You have successfully trolled Shi Kun for 315 Rage points!

"All right, all right, Brother Shit Kun." Zu An shrugged off Shi Kun's words nonchalantly. "If I could summarize what I just heard from you: basically, after catching a glimpse of her a few years ago, you decided to hunt her down like a stalker. How could you then call this meeting the work of fate?"

"Who are you? Why should I answer your question?" Shi Kun sniffed coldly.

There was no way he wouldn't know who Zu An was. However, given his standing, the best way to deal with Zu An was to simply disregard his presence.

"Ah, you don't know who I am? I guess there's a need for a formal introduction then." Zu An reached out to grab Chu Chuyan's hand. "I am the husband of the goddess you dream day and night of. You spend all your time fantasizing about her, but I'm spared the effort of having to rely on my imagination. The two of us share a bed, after all. Is that enough for an introduction?"

Chu Chuyan felt a jolt run through her body as her hand was suddenly grabbed. Her instinct was to pull her hand out from Zu An's grasp, but she knew that doing so would embarrass him in front of the crowd.

Besides, her very purpose of marrying Zu An was to forestall both the royal family and King Qi from pursuing a political marriage with the Chu clan. If she let slip any indication that the relationship between two of them was a distant one, all of her efforts would have been in vain.

With these considerations in mind, she held herself back, and silently permitted him to hold her hand. Zu An had seemingly predicted this as well, which was why he had dared to do it in the first place.

What Chu Chuyan hadn't expected was how venomous Zu An's words could be. The crude terms he used made her ears heat up despite her cold personality. Is he taking advantage of me just because he knows that I wouldn't go against him?

Understandably, the crowd erupted in a frenzy. They knew that Chu Chuyan and Zu An were wedded, but they had consoled themselves that she probably had other intentions in mind for marrying a good-for-nothing, and that she would never let him take advantage of her. In fact, it wasn't a stretch to think that the two of them had not consummated their marriage on their wedding night at all.

However, Zu An's declaration had shattered all of their fantasies. To make things worse, Chu First Miss did nothing to deny his claims, merely coloring in embarrassment. My gosh, I'm going insane!

Just thinking about how the number one beauty of Brightmoon City was pinned under a man like Zu An... Countless people immediately went bonkers with envy.

You have successfully trolled Gao Ren for 444 Rage points!

You have successfully trolled He Buyu for 444 Rage points!

You have successfully trolled Wu Zhenjian for 444 Rage points!

...

The massive influx of Rage points soothed Zu An's heart, leaving him greatly heartened. Just like in the novels he had read in his previous life, it was easy to incur the ire of anyone, as long as a beauty was involved!

It looks like this is worth working hard for. I need to get more beautiful women... Ah, it's not that I'm a pervert, but I simply want to earn more Rage points.

Shi Kun glanced at their tightly-clasped hands, and his cheeks began twitching. He had always viewed Chu Chuyan as his own personal possession, but she had now been touched by another man! Even though it was just her hand, it was more than enough to stoke his rage.

You have successfully trolled Shi Kun for 520 Rage points!

"Zu An, based on what I know, you and Chu First Miss sleep in separate rooms. She doesn't even allow you to enter her room, let alone share the same bed. How laughable it is that I'm hearing such words from you." Shi Kun sniffed in disdain.

Zu An, on the other hand, was appalled. How does he know that we're sleeping in separate rooms? A sudden thought came to his mind, and he said, "I don't recall mentioning my name at any point while introducing myself as Chuyan's husband. How did you know that my name was Zu An then? Could it be that you have sent spies into our Chu clan? It just so happens that we uncovered a traitor by the name of Snow recently. Is it possible that you're the mastermind behind her?"

Chu Chuyan immediately eyed Shi Kun suspiciously. If the Chu clan was unable to find the mastermind behind Snow despite the influence it possessed, the mastermind was likely to be of high standing. Shi Kun definitely fulfilled that criteria.

"Rubbish! Snow? Winter? What do I know about such things? Stop slandering me!" Shi Kun vehemently refuted his accusation. He hadn't expected Zu An to be so sharp. "As for your name, it's public knowledge that Chu First Miss is married. It shouldn't come as a surprise that I know your name."

Zu An scoffed in response. "Since you do know me, why did you feign ignorance earlier? It looks like beneath your pretty face lies a hypocritical heart."

Shi Kun had no answer to that.

You have successfully trolled Shi Kun for 300 Rage points!

Zu An carried on, “Also, given your ‘lofty’ personality, shouldn’t you choose to simply brush off my accusations and ignore me? It’s such a surprise to see you desperately trying to refute the words of a nobody like me. Could that be a sign of a guilty conscience?”

Many of the spectators nodded in agreement. As hateful as Zu An was, there was logic in his words. This behavior was indeed at odds with young master Shi’s personality. Could he really be carrying a guilty conscience?

It was clear to Shi Kun now that Zu An had set a trap for him to leap into. He finally understood how Mei Chaofeng and Snow felt while dealing with this guy. He mentally cursed Snow. Why didn’t you kill this disgustingly reprehensible man earlier?!

He took a deep breath to calm himself down, and proceeded to ignore Zu An. “Chu First Miss, please don’t allow his words to affect the good ties between the Chu clan and Shi clan. I’m honestly unaware of the affairs that have transpired in your estate, and rest assure, they have nothing to do with the Shi clan.”

Chu Chuyan had already made up her mind regarding this, and she replied calmly, “I hope so. Our Chu clan might not be a prominent clan, but we would never allow anyone to take advantage of us.”

Shi Kun gave an awkward laugh. “Chu First Miss, you’re jesting with me. A ducal clan like yours is clearly a prominent clan. Besides, I’ve admired you for a long time now. I wouldn’t do anything that would harm you.”

Before Chu Chuyan could respond, Zu An cut in, “Ah, that reminds me. You mentioned that you met my wife a few years ago, and she has been lingering in your dreams since then. You didn’t expect to meet her in Brightmoon Academy, and you feel that it’s the work of fate, right?”

“Indeed.” Shi Kun gave him a cold stare. “Back then, Chu First Miss hadn’t married you yet, so what’s wrong with me admiring her? I’ve admired her for so many years that these feelings have become deeply rooted in my heart. I know that she’s married now, but I can’t control how I feel about you. Chu First Miss, I beg your pardon for that.”

Playing the sentimental man here, huh? Zu An sneered coldly. There were plenty of PUA lessons on the internet in his previous life. As a proud keyboard warrior, how could he be unaware of them?[1]

“Oh? That’s quite weird. I recall hearing that the Shi clan is a prominent clan in the capital, and it has many connections at its disposal. Chuyan isn’t some nobody either; she’s the First Miss of the Chu clan! Even if you had just asked the people who were in the area back then, there would surely have been some who knew of her identity. Yet, you claim that you couldn’t find her all this while, and even put on a ‘it’s fate that brought us together’ act. At this point, I honestly can’t tell whether you have malicious intentions in mind, or if you’re just plain incompetent.”

Chapter 100: What Do You Mean By That?

Shi Kun choked. Despite his careful maneuvers, he had still fallen into Zu An’s trap.

If he said that he'd failed to find Chu Chuyan, he would be admitting to being incompetent. If he said that he did, that would mean that he had indeed concocted a deliberate ploy to feign a coincidental meeting with her. Neither outcome was acceptable to him.

Fortunately, someone stepped forward to cover his awkwardness—Yuan Wendong. "Zu An, it looks like the time you spent loitering in the streets has taught you how to bandy words with others. Who do you think young master Shi is? A gentleman like him doesn't get into arguments with others, so it's only natural that he's at a disadvantage in your sort of exchange. In any case, how could young master Shi possibly be incompetent?"

"Not one person hasn't heard of young master Shi's talents. He's a prodigy in cultivation, and it's said that he's already on the verge of reaching the sixth rank, despite his young age. On the other hand, what are you good at? Mooching off women? Bickering like a common street urchin?"

Shi Kun's entourage immediately burst into laughter. They were making use of this opportunity to help him vent his anger.

Zu An tilted his head to observe Yuan Wendong. He asked him, "You must be very fond of bones, yes?"

Yuan Wendong had expected Zu An to fly into an ugly state of rage, and was caught off-guard by such a nonchalant response. Without thinking, he said, "No, I'm not."

A young master of a wealthy clan like him had no lack of delicacies on his table. Why would he bother chewing bones?

"If that's the case, why do you keep wagging your tail before Shi Kun as if you're begging him for a reward?" replied Zu An contemptuously. "We had our differences the last time we met, but your guts were still respectable. Where did your pride and your honor go? Even I am starting to feel embarrassed on your behalf!"

"You are really..." Yuan Wendong's face reddened in anger. Zu An had unexpectedly laid a trap for him, and he had foolishly jumped into it on his own accord!

You have successfully trolled Yuan Wendong for 888 Rage points!

Most importantly, what Zu An said wasn't wrong. He used to be the star of the academy, and had countless followers fawning in his wake. He wasn't used to his new role, but there was no helping it, since the Shi clan was simply too important. He had no choice but to set his discomfort aside, and do his best to please Shi Kun.

Having Zu An point it out in public was like a tight slap in his face. It left him feeling so humiliated, he would have dived right into a hole if there had been one in front of him.

"Brother Yuan, please do not mind him. This fellow knows nothing but how to engage in meaningless bickering. You mustn't lower yourself to his level," Shi Kun consoled him.

Yuan Wendong gave Shi Kun a grateful glance for giving him a way out. He gritted his teeth tightly to snap him out of his daze, and glared angrily at Zu An. "Young master Shi is right! You only know how to engage in meaningless squabbling! This is the world of cultivation. If you're that capable, why don't you duel with me? I'll beat you up so badly, even your mother wouldn't be able to recognize you anymore!"

Zu An immediately retreated behind Chu Chuyan. "Honey, that fellow dared to threaten me. Beat him up!"

Chu Chuyan felt a headache setting in. I really chose the wrong husband. This fellow sure knows how to stir up trouble.

However, with the purpose of the confrontation firmly in mind, she played along. "Yuan Wendong, no matter what, Zu An is still the son-in-law of our Chu clan. I can't allow outsiders to take advantage of him. If you want to challenge him, you have to get past me first."

As Chu Chuyan took a step forward, Yuan Wendong subconsciously took a step back. If I had the ability to defeat you, do you think I would bother to bend over backwards for Shi Kun?

Of course, there was no way he dared to vent his rage at Chu Chuyan, so he kept his eyes fixed firmly on Zu An and said, "Zu wastrel, how can you call yourself a man, when you hide behind a woman's back every time something happens?"

Just thinking of how comprehensively he had been defeated by Pei Mianman the previous time was enough to make his face turn ominously dark.

Zu An shrugged in response. "If I, who managed to get so many beautiful and powerful women on my side, cannot be considered a man, what does that make someone who couldn't even find a single woman like you?"

"I..." Yuan Wendong was at a loss for words. Why the hell am I feeling so cornered?!

You have successfully trolled Yuan Wendong for 642 Rage points!

Just then, Shi Kun muttered something, and Yuan Wendong's eyes lit up. A gleeful smile crept into his eyes as he replied, "Gloat all you want now. You might be able to hide behind a woman for now, but let's see what you can do at tomorrow's Clans Tournament!"

Zu An sighed deeply. "It looks like you're a sucker for pain, huh? You really want to have the living daylights beaten out of you. Oh well, forget it, it's time to drop the act. I'll show you my true prowess at tomorrow's Clans Tournament. Just try to hold back your tears then, all right?"

"Your true prowess?" Yuan Wendong cackled wildly, his spine arching backward. "Very well, I'd love to see young master Zu's incredible strength tomorrow! Hahahahaha!"

Shi Kun wore a satisfied smile as well. According to Snow's testimony, Zu An was only a third rank cultivator. No matter how powerful he was, there was no way he could defeat a fifth rank cultivator like Yuan Wendong.

Of course, in order to prevent any mishaps, he would make sure to inform Yuan Wendong about Zu An's true strength.

"I can even tell you right now that I'll be the last one up as the Chu clan's secret weapon. I hope that you won't back out at the last moment!" said Zu An.

Yuan Wendong laughed. "Rest assured, I'll show you the true meaning of despair!"

The Chu clan's intentions were clear as day. They were most likely putting Zu An's match at the very end in order to protect him. By then, if victory had already been decided, there would be no need for him to fight anymore. Hmph, did you think that our Yuan clan is still the same as before? Be prepared for the shock of your life!

Zu An was really making a big show of everything right now. Yuan Wendong could scarcely contain his excitement as he imagined just how ridiculous that wastrel would look when he was forced into the dueling ring the next day.

This idiot!

This was Yuan Wendong's evaluation of Zu An.

Seeing that their goal had been achieved, Chu Chuyan quickly pulled Zu An away from the scene. Shi Kun stiffened as he witnessed that.

The relationship between Chu Chuyan and Zu An doesn't seem as stale as Snow put it out to be. Could they have gotten closer to one another during this period of time?

Feeling as if he had been cuckolded, Shi Kun felt rage boiling in his blood.

You have successfully trolled Shi Kun for 222 Rage points!

Zu An was in no mood to care about the Rage points he was receiving. He was focused on Chu Chuyan's hand, which was cool, soft, and smooth to the touch. He was pleased that the latter had taken the initiative to grab his hand this time around.

However, as soon as they were away from the crowd, Chu Chuyan released her grip and said, "You did well earlier. You managed to stir up his rage. It's very likely that he would choose you tomorrow."

Zu An was also pleased with his performance. "I'm pretty confident in my ability to infuriate others, after all."

"Yes, I can tell." Thinking about how Snow was often left fuming in his wake, a smile slowly spread across Chu Chuyan's face.

Chu Huanzhao did not share their confidence. "Big sister, what if Zu An really finds himself in a position where he needs to fight Yuan Wendong? Yuan Wendong is a fifth rank cultivator, and he hates Zu An with a passion now. It's almost certain that he would take advantage of the duel to hurt Zu An!"

Chu Chuyan tried to allay her fears. "Based on our arrangements, the tournament should be decided in the first few rounds. Rest assured, Zu An wouldn't have to fight at all."

"But what if things go wrong?" Chu Huanzhao insisted anxiously.

"If things don't go according to plan, Zu An should just admit defeat right away. Besides, my father and I will be there to observe. We won't allow anything to happen to him," replied Chu Chuyan.

Chu Huanzhao frowned. "Still, Zu An has already challenged Yuan Wendong publicly. If he admits defeat right away on the dueling ring, how could he face anyone else in the future?"

"Is his dignity or his life more important?" asked Chu Chuyan.

After saying those words, she turned to Zu An and said, "I must give you fair warning. I recognize that you have a tendency to provoke others. You have been able to remain safe thus far mostly due to luck, but your luck will eventually run out. You really should try to change your behavior. You might end up regretting it if you offend someone you shouldn't."

"Rest assured, I only offend the people I can afford to offend," replied Zu An. If I don't offend others, how do I get my Rage points? Besides, it's not like I indiscriminately anger everyone around me. I'd never offend someone I know I can't afford to.

To date, Zu An had never tried to earn Old Mi or Ji Dengtu's Rage points, and for good reason. While it looked like he had been living recklessly so far, in truth, it was all a calculated risk.

Of course, once my little Zu An is released, I'll find an opportunity to get even with Ji Dengtu. Hmph!

Chu Chuyan misunderstood his meaning. She thought that he was disregarding her kind advice, and she let out a resigned sigh. It seems like there's no persuading him.

"I'll head to my classroom. We'll meet after school." With that, Chu Chuyan walked away with a heavy heart.

Once she was gone, Chu Huanzhao heaved a deep sigh of relief. "Oof, I feel so stifled I'm about to burst! There were so many times that I nearly succumbed and told her about it!"

Zu An looked at Chu Huanzhao curiously. "Is it really a good idea for you to team up with me to fool your big sister?"

"It's more interesting this way, isn't it? Mwahahaha!" Chu Huanzhao let out a villainous cackle. "She even said that she'd meet you after school. I wonder how she would react when she sees you in the classroom."

"Now I'm quite curious to know too." Zu An was hyped up by Chu Huanzhao's remarks. "What do you think I should say when I meet her in the classroom later on, to make the scene even more dramatic?"

"Isn't speech and drama your specialty? Why are you asking me instead?" Chu Huanzhao scoffed. "Just look at what happened with Yuan Wendong and Ye Chenliang! I reckon that there's no one better than you at teasing others!"

"Awww, you're flattering me. I'm usually quite honest, y'know." Zu An was starting to feel a bit embarrassed by her compliments.

"Honest?" Chu Huanzhao looked at him with an enigmatic smile on her lips. "Did you think that I've never caught you eyeing my legs from time to time? Confess! You've actually thought of taking both of us sisters to be your wives before, haven't you?"

"No no, definitely not!" Zu An was shocked by the thought. Isn't Chu Huanzhao being a little too forward, asking such a question directly?

"Tsk! You think I don't know what you men are always thinking about?" Chu Huanzhao sniffed disdainfully at him. "You'd better not let my mother or my big sister know that you're harboring such thoughts. They'll take turns to skin you alive!"

After saying those words, she skipped off toward her classroom, leaving a dumbfounded Zu An in her wake.

Wait a moment, what does she even mean by those words?