

Immortal 941

Chapter 941: Most Blessed and Most Unfortunate Man

Zu An sought out Bi Linglong as usual, but she still refused to meet him. There were so many people in the Eastern Palace present, so he couldn't really cause a commotion. He could only leave while feeling dejected.

Just then, a eunuch came to inform Zu An that his majesty wanted to meet him. The people from the Eastern Palace had been envious of him when they first saw that, but now, they were already used to it. This man was indeed quite favored by his majesty.

Zu An was startled. Did the emperor realize something from my visits to Bi Linglong these past few days? He saw the emperor as someone he had to defeat, so he would always feel as if he were facing a great enemy whenever he was summoned to the palace.

After Zu An left, inside the room, Rong Mo gave the absent-minded Bi Linglong a look and asked, "Crown princess, is there something wrong?"

Bi Linglong snapped out of her daze and said, "It's nothing." Hmph, like I care if that guy dies or not.

...

Meanwhile, Zu An arrived at the imperial study. When he saw the smiling Eunuch Wen, he sighed in relief. Even though using Eunuch Wen's expression to determine the emperor's mood wasn't that reliable of a method, it still helped.

"I greet your majesty." He quickly gave the emperor a look when he entered. Sure enough, it was still the same dead horse face.

The emperor lowered his memorial[1], asking, "Did Yu Nan trouble you in any way these past few days?"

Zu An said, "Replying to your majesty, the Yu clan and the Bi clan have had some small disputes, but they didn't seek me out."

The emperor chuckled. "That's only natural. The entire capital has been filled with rumors and slander over the past few days. Not even the Yu clan could suppress them by using their political influence. You're still not important enough for them to pay attention to."

"It's thanks to your majesty being heroic and brilliant, or else this subject would've been in trouble..." Zu An showered the emperor in praise.

The emperor's expression eased up more and more. He asked, "Do you find it strange why this emperor didn't choose to remove Yu Xuanchong from his post?"

"Forgive this subject for being slow-witted. I really can't understand why," Zu An said calmly. At the same time, he was curious. Why was the emperor telling him about these things now? There was no reason for the emperor to explain these things to his subjects, right?

The emperor stood up and walked over to the bookshelf. He looked at the large map hanging from the wall and calmly said, "The Yu clan controls the world's ki stone business; they have followers in all levels

of society. Even though the position of Left Confidential Assistant is a high rank, whether or not Yu Xuanchong occupies that position won't make a huge difference."

Zu An nodded inwardly. The Yu clan's wealth was equivalent to that of an entire nation. If Yu Xuanchong resigned, he would rise up again soon afterward. The matter this time was mainly regarding Yu Nan. Even if they made it a big deal, Yu Nan would still be fine, never mind taking down Yu Xuanchong.

The emperor continued, "The Yu clan has always walked closely with King Qi. What this emperor is concerned about isn't just a trifling Left Confidential Assistant, but rather the Yu clan."

Zu An shivered. The emperor was already starting to gradually remove King Qi's allies one by one. Once King Qi was all alone, that was when the emperor would strike.

Judging from the emperor's intentions, it didn't seem as if he was satisfied with just removing the Yu clan from their official positions, but rather, he was trying to take down the entire Yu clan? He shivered all over when he thought of that. The emperor in front of him really was vicious and merciless...

Sure enough, the emperor's eyes shifted to a piece of land to the north. "Cloudcenter's Yu clan. As the name implies, their main headquarters is in Cloudcenter Commandery. That is also where the court's greatest ki stone mine is. They've already occupied it for so many years; that should already be enough."

Zu An observed a moment of silence for the Yu clan. Now that they were being targeted by the emperor, their ending was already set in stone. He suddenly recalled a certain person's exceptional appearance in their carriage. He couldn't help but mention, "Your majesty, from what I know, Madam Yu seems to be your distinguished self's good friend."

Even though he knew mentioning that wouldn't do anything, Yu Yanluo had helped him out before, so he couldn't just sit there and not do anything.

The emperor turned around and gave him an ambiguous smile, saying, "Your relationship with her doesn't seem to be bad. She even sought me out for your sake back then."

Zu An shivered inwardly. He quickly said, "It's because I acted without thinking back in Brightmoon City and saved her life. I believe she was just returning the favor." He had no idea what the emperor was thinking. He obviously couldn't make it seem as if they were that close.

The emperor thus nodded in relief. After all, Yu Yanluo had been a past flame of his. There were so many outstanding men, and yet she hadn't chosen a single one of them. Why would she take interest in an ordinary brat like Zu An? He said, "Don't worry. Madam Yu is this emperor's good friend. I will naturally find a suitable place for her."

Zu An cursed inwardly, thinking, Isn't that suitable place just your own harem? Even though the emperor pretty much never touched women to extend his life, a beauty like Yu Yanluo was an exception.

Zu An had thought that he was already complete trash, that he already had enough pretty girls around him. However, these big shots in the capital could have twenty to thirty wives, but still retain a clean image. Compared to them, he was as clean as a little white flower!

He suddenly became nervous. Why was the emperor telling him these things? Did he have another stupid mission to assign?

Sure enough, the emperor said, "You should get ready. You're making a trip to Cloudcenter Commandery in a few days."

Zu An was speechless. However, the emperor didn't care about how he felt at all and continued, "The local officials of Cloudcenter Commandery have jointly written up a letter stating that Cloudcenter Commandery's duke has already been missing for a long time. They're asking the court to reconsider the dukedom position."

"Hah." He sneered. "Looks like there's already someone impatient to rise up in this spot."

Zu An was alarmed. Isn't Cloudcenter Duke Yu Yanluo's husband? That man might very well have been the world's most blessed man alive, but now, he had become the most unfortunate man.

He asked to test the waters, "What exactly is going on with Cloudcenter Duke's disappearance?"

The emperor replied, "It was about a year ago, I reckon. Cloudcenter Duke suddenly disappeared from the manor. No one knows where he went. At first, no one found it strange, because with his cultivation, it wasn't too difficult to come and go from the Duke Manor. But he didn't return even after a long time, so that was how they knew something happened."

"Did he go somewhere, or was this a plot?" Zu An quickly asked.

The emperor shook his head. "After the event, when the local government office investigated the situation, they found that everything seemed normal. They couldn't find any traces of harm. The court was still unconvinced and sent more officials to investigate. However, they still didn't find anything."

The emperor was completely calm while speaking, without a trace of grief. Zu An thought to himself, Now that Yu Yanluo doesn't have a husband anymore, the emperor is probably doing his best not to laugh out loud. But through the emperor's reply, he guessed that the disappearance of the Cloudcenter Duke wasn't something the emperor had done himself.

The emperor then continued, "You're to go to Cloudcenter Duke's territory and find out the truth regarding the duke's disappearance. Furthermore, don't shield the Yu clan just because of Yu Yanluo, or else I won't let you off. Do you understand?"

Zu An immediately understood what the emperor was saying. Regardless of what the reason for the mysterious disappearance was, the Yu clan had to take the blame. The emperor was going to use this chance to deal with the entire Yu clan in one go.

As such, he said respectfully, "This subject is naturally willing to share in your majesty's burdens, but my injuries from the dungeon last time aren't light. I haven't been able to fully recover. Furthermore, I solved the case of King Qi concubine's murder and even took down Yu Nan. For the sake of completing your majesty's mission as quickly as possible, I had to use up a lot of thought. Now, my mental state is quite weak, and my head hurts whenever I try to think. My body is too weak, and it might affect your majesty's great plans. That's why I ask your majesty to find someone more qualified than me."

Are you kidding me? Who the hell does the emperor think I am? Even if you're going to employ someone to work from nine to nine, six days a week, you still need to pay them, right? But look at me! You use every chance to intimidate and bully me. I'm not some masochist; why would I resign myself to this?

Of course, now wasn't the time to completely break off relations with the emperor. He brought up his recent contributions, which not only described his toils, but also proved his worth. As long as the emperor still had some use for him, then he couldn't throw Zu An away yet.

These were all things he had learned from that old fox Sang Hong from his visits to the Sang clan over the past few days. They were essential skills if one wanted to survive among the political circles.

The emperor's eyes narrowed when he heard those words. He felt a bit of anger. It hadn't been long since this little rascal had come to the capital, yet he had already learned how to negotiate with him like those other old foxes in the court!

He hadn't liked Zu An to begin with, so he felt angrier and angrier. He felt as if he were being provoked somehow.

You have successfully trolled Zhao Han for +444 +444 +444...

Zu An was also nervous when he saw the incoming Rage points. He had confidence that the emperor wouldn't become hostile right then and there, because he was a mature ruler, but that wasn't guaranteed. What if the emperor really went crazy?

A while later, the emperor calmly said, "My subject has indeed worked hard during this period. I'll order Eunuch Wen to get some spirit-recovering medicines from the imperial hospital for you. You can slowly recover on your way to Cloudcenter Commandery. Furthermore, I've noticed that you don't seem to be too fond of your current viscount title, so once you complete the Cloudcenter Commandery task, I'll raise your noble rank by another level."

"Thank you, your majesty. This subject will do my utmost," Zu An replied. In this age, rising in noble rank was harder than even rising in official rank. Since the emperor had already said that, Zu An knew when to stop while he was ahead. If he continued to push the issue, he might not be able to leave this place alive today.

Furthermore, he really did want to get rid of that damn Green Hat Viscount title...

Chapter 942: Something Happened

The emperor felt a bit more at ease when he saw Zu An's respectful appearance. He thought for a bit and said, "Use these next few days to make some preparations. Once you're ready, this emperor will send an imperial envoy to Cloudcenter Commandery so you can make full use of your investigative abilities."

Zu An didn't actually mind that there was going to be another envoy. After all, his current status and qualifications weren't enough to convince the masses. He had to investigate the duke's case as well, so the officials he would come into contact with would all be of high status. It would actually be more convenient to hide behind the scenes.

The emperor continued, "Furthermore, this emperor will inform the world that a golden token envoy will accompany this group in secret. Thus, on the surface, you can use the identity of the crown prince's chamberlain, as well as the Armed Escort Division Commander title, to ensure the safety of the imperial envoy; but in reality, you will also be that golden token envoy. Do you understand?"

Zu An became dejected. The one protecting the imperial envoy out in the open is me, and the one protecting it from the shadows is also me? Then shouldn't I get paid two salaries?

He quickly said, "Your majesty, how about we send another golden token envoy to move with us? Or maybe some strong general as a bodyguard? I was seriously injured in the dungeon before, so my strength alone might not be..." For better or for worse, he had the court behind him right now, so he had to use all of his resources. I'd really be stupid if I kept charging into enemy territory alone.

The emperor's eyes twitched when he heard Zu An's complaints. This brat is becoming slicker and slicker... He harrumphed and handed something over.

Zu An received it and gave it a look. It was an imperial edict! The emperor sent him a voice transmission. "If you encounter any cultivators or situations you can't deal with, you can open this edict to take care of it. As for how this process works, someone from the Embroidery House will teach you."

"Thank you, your majesty!" Zu An was overjoyed. He had witnessed the power of the imperial edict back when he was in Brightmoon City. When this thing revealed its power, everyone had been left helpless! If he had such a powerful weapon in hand, wouldn't this trip to Cloudcenter Commandery be a breeze?

Of course, he still had his misgivings, because there was a pretty long chant before the edict activated. It was easy to interrupt. Back then, Huang Huihong and the others who had escorted him to the capital suffered precisely because of that, so it definitely had its limitations.

He suddenly thought of something and asked probingly, "Has your majesty already chosen the candidate for the imperial envoy yet?"

"I haven't..." The emperor revealed a hint of fatigue. This matter was extremely important, so he had to consider it from several different directions. The first was that he obviously couldn't use anyone from King Qi's faction. Furthermore, not even those from his own side were guaranteed to be loyal. After all, the great clans were all connected in complex ways. Two clans might be enemies in terms of political views, but there might be some individuals within them who were close friends, and even some who were married. That was why it wasn't easy to choose the right candidate at all.

He suddenly gave Zu An a vigilant look and asked, "Why are you asking about this? What, do you have someone to nominate?"

"This subject indeed has someone I wish to nominate," Zu An said.

"Speak," the emperor said indifferently.

Zu An said, "Vice Minister of Finance Sir Sang Hong isn't involved in politics and remains devoted to your majesty. He's also a capable subject. I believe he's a suitable candidate."

The emperor's eyes narrowed. Sang Hong was also one of the candidates he had considered. However, there was a huge difference between his own choice and someone his subject had recommended.

He replied coldly, "What, so you've learned how to make allies now? I heard you and the Sang clan's people are quite close."

"Your subject is in fear! I had absolutely no selfish intentions when I nominated Sir Sang!" Zu An exclaimed. However, he continued, "No, strictly speaking, I do have some selfish motives. This mission in

Cloudcenter Commandery is too important, and the duke's disappearance is full of suspicion. If things go as I expect, there will definitely be a huge conspiracy involved. The mastermind behind the scenes will be worried and troubled, and perhaps even attack out of desperation. If I had a pig of an ally as the imperial envoy, it would just put me in danger. That's why I obviously hope that the one who will come with me is someone capable.

"There are many who are capable in the capital, but I've offended quite a few people while carrying out my cases in the capital... In the end, the only one I can think of is Sir Sang. Even though there used to be a grudge between us back then, I trust his character. He would never let his personal feelings get mixed up with the greater situation."

"Pig of an ally..." The emperor smiled knowingly. The words this kid came up with were quite interesting. When he heard Zu An admit that he had some selfish intentions, and that he had even had some old grudges with Sang Hong in the past, his serious expression eased a bit. However, he didn't express any of his feelings and said, "There's no need for you to worry about the imperial envoy matter. This emperor will make my decision."

"Understood." Zu An sighed in relief. When he heard the reply, he realized that Sang Hong was probably already the one who would be chosen. His nomination hadn't been in vain.

When he left the imperial study, Eunuch Wen brought him to the imperial hospital. He had the staff bring out some spirit-boosting medicinal ingredients while saying with admiration, "Sir Zu, I've never seen anyone who has received so much favor from the emperor in all these years I've served his majesty!"

"The emperor's kindness is vast and mighty..." Zu An replied with a smile, but he was extremely calm inside. Weren't all of these benefits only present because the emperor still needed him to take care of more things? Furthermore, he had to figure out all of the details himself every time.

But he was still extremely happy, because he saw that there was actually a Sky Crane Root among the medicines the hospital had given him. It was one of the main ingredients needed to refine Ki Condensation Pills.

...

After bidding Eunuch Wen goodbye, Zu An returned to the Eastern Palace. Bi Linglong still refused to see him, so it was obvious that she was still upset about that day.

After some hesitation, he decided not to tell her that he was going to Cloudcenter Commandery. It might be more effective if he told her a few days later. Making a trip back there was just to let her know that he had made it out of the imperial study safely. He then found a chance to leave the palace.

He didn't return to his own manor, but rather chose to go to the Sang clan.

...

Sang Hong sighed in amazement when he heard about everything that had happened in the imperial study, saying, "You really made a risky move back there."

Zu An remained completely calm as he replied, "Respected uncle won't continue to resign from leading posts, right? This Cloudcenter Commandery trip is a good opportunity."

Even though Sang Hong had an official position again as the Vice Minister of Finance and was nominally in charge of managing the country's finances, the actual authority was held by those big shots in the Imperial Secretariat. He was nothing more than the one who executed their intentions. In other words, he took care of all the tiresome and trifling things, while the contributions went to others.

"My worthy junior has gifted me with a great present." Sang Hong was quite moved. Even though he did favor Zu An, he hadn't expected to get something back in return so soon. "But you've really had to take a great risk this time."

Sang Qien was also in a daze as she looked at Zu An. Back then, when the Sang clan had the emperor's favor, there had been people flattering them everywhere. And yet, when something had ended up happening to the Sang clan, she had then witnessed what hypocrisy really was. She finally understood why her father had made the choice to ally with Zu An. It was indeed a wise decision.

Zu An said with a chuckle, "Respected uncle is too courteous. Even though I did have to take some risks, his majesty cares more about the Yu clan's situation right now, so of course he'd choose the truly capable for this task. That's why it only looks dangerous."

Sang Qien felt great admiration as she listened from off to the side. Zu An had still been a bit inexperienced with the political circles not too long before, and yet after receiving a few pointers from her father, Zu An had already learned to become like those old foxes who had been in those circles for several decades. Such talent really was enviable.

"But this Cloudcenter Commandery matter doesn't seem to be simple at all..." They came to a unanimous conclusion after chatting for a bit.

Of course, it was precisely because it wasn't an easy task that they had something to work toward. They believed that with their ability, they should be able to take care of the matter. That was why they weren't too worried either.

As Sang Hong chatted with Zu An for a while longer, he noticed that Zu An was looking from side to side during their conversation. He thus said to Sang Qien, "Qien'er, take Ah Zu to see your sister-in-law. She's experienced and knowledgeable, so she might have a solution."

Sang Qien was no longer as conflicted about the matter as before. She happily agreed.

...

On the way there, Zu An asked urgently, "Qienqien, did something happen to your sister-in-law?"

Sang Qien blushed. Even though she had already known Zu An for a while, she wasn't used to such a familiar form of address. "We don't know why, but sister-in-law keeps having nightmares. Her mind is growing more and more dispirited, and her body has grown thinner. We've invited many doctors to examine her, but none of them could find the reason for her symptoms."

Zu An jumped in fright. After all, the bodies of cultivators were far better than ordinary people's! They normally never got sick, so if they did get sick, it was a big deal. Furthermore, if not even those doctors

could figure out what was going on, heaven knew what kind of disaster it was. He sped up, eventually walking even faster than Sang Qien. He rushed in and pushed open Zheng Dan's door.

Sang Qien's expression went rigid. Judging from how familiar Zu An was with the path there, he probably went that way pretty often.

When Zu An pushed open the door, he saw that Zheng Dan was sitting in a chair in a daze. She had always been charming and beautiful before, but now, she was a bit weak and pale. Even her rosy cheeks now seemed a bit sallow.

Zheng Dan subconsciously turned around. Her originally expressionless eyes erupted with joy. "Ah Zu!"

Chapter 943: Nightmares

Zheng Dan instinctively tried to stand up, but she suddenly felt dizzy. Her body rocked back and forth, as if she were going to fall down.

Zu An quickly moved over to support her and asked "What's wrong?" She was a sixth rank cultivator, as well as a former female gang boss. When had he ever seen her act so weak before?

"I'm okay, I just got up a bit too quickly." Zheng Dan leaned against him and forced a smile.

Sang Qien's expression was strange. The two of them were so intimate and natural with each other. Are you two completely ignoring my existence right now? But she was also worried about Zheng Dan's body, so she couldn't be bothered with those other things.

"Why is your body so weak?" Zu An frowned. At the same time, he pressed his hand against her pulse point. Even though he wasn't a doctor, cultivators were all extremely familiar with the human body. He sent in a strand of aura to examine Zheng Dan's body. Zheng Dan felt something as well, but due to their relationship, she didn't resist it, allowing his energy to enter her.

"I don't know either. It might be because I haven't been able to sleep well recently." Zheng Dan retained her forced smile, but her complexion was extremely pale.

"You can't sleep?" Zu An frowned. The bodies of cultivators were much tougher than those of ordinary people. It wouldn't matter much even if they didn't sleep for too long, so why had she ended up so weak?

His rough checkup told him that apart from her body being a bit weak, there was nothing wrong. It was a pity that Ji Dengtu and Xiaoxi weren't here; otherwise, they would be able to accurately discern what was wrong.

He even wondered if he could invite some imperial physicians to come and take a look. The imperial physicians didn't always reside in the palace; they were swapped out as well. While at home, nobles and ministers would often pay them hefty sums to have them treat their people. With his current status, it shouldn't be too difficult to invite an imperial physician.

Sang Qien spoke up and said, "We've already invited the well-known doctors of the capital to examine her, and we even invited someone from the imperial hospital, but all of them said that there was nothing wrong with sister-in-law's body, and she just needs some rest. They prescribed some relaxing medicines, but none of those things helped."

Zu An was even more shocked when he heard that they had already invited imperial physicians over. Not even the imperial physicians had been able to diagnose what was wrong with Zheng Dan's body?

After some hesitation, Sang Qien said, "There were some doctors who suggested that sister-in-law's physical condition is fine, but perhaps she has something preoccupying her mind." She spoke extremely tactfully. In truth, they had said that Zheng Dan wasn't sick, and that if she wasn't faking it, she had some mental issues.

She immediately recalled Zheng Dan and Zu An's relationship. After all, her father had rejected her suggestion to let Zheng Dan leave the Sang clan. She and her father were both worried that that was the reason for Zheng Dan's illness.

"Nonsense! Those doctors didn't have the ability to find the root of the illness and are just muddling through with this absurd reasoning." Zu An was furious and criticized the doctors.

A smile appeared on Zheng Dan's face. After all, she was no stranger to the arts herself. She naturally sensed the Sang clan's suspicions toward her. It's Ah Zu who understands me best after all.

Sang Qien also became a bit embarrassed. She could only explain, "We personally watched as sister-in-law's condition grew worse and worse, her body becoming weaker and weaker. We were worried too. That's why we wanted to see if you had any ways to help her."

Zu An quickly looked at Zheng Dan and asked, "Is there anything else wrong apart from your body being weak?"

"I don't think so. I just can't sleep at night, and if I try to, I have nightmares," Zheng Dan replied.

"What kind of nightmares?" Zu An asked.

"Nightmares are nightmares, alright? All I know is that they're scary." Zheng Dan's pale cheeks flushed red. She often dreamed about being locked in passion with Zu An, but then Sang Hong and Sang Qien would barge in. Then, she and Zu An would be dragged through the streets to be criticized and ostracized in public. But how could she say that in front of Sang Qien?

Zu An asked in a different way, "How long has this problem persisted?"

"I think it started about half a month ago." Zheng Dan tried to remember, but she yawned several times in a row, clearly feeling extremely fatigued.

"Half a month ago? I remember the last time..." Zu An gave Sang Qien a look. After a pause, he said, "I don't remember this being a problem the last time I visited."

Zheng Dan replied, "There were already times when I woke up in the middle of the night then, but it wasn't that serious yet. But recently, it's gotten worse and worse." She sounded extremely worried. After all, she was still young, and there were so many beautiful things left to experience in this world. She didn't want to die early just like that.

"Then did anything special happen half a month ago? Did you encounter anyone special? Or maybe you came into contact with something different?" Zu An even began to wonder if she had come into contact with anything radioactive.

"There wasn't anything different..." Zheng Dan was confused. "I was in the manor most of the time, and I would check on the Zheng clan's business in the capital from time to time. There were a few times when I went for a stroll in the capital with Little Qien."

"Where did you two go?" Zu An looked at Sang Qien. She was more familiar with the capital, so asking her would be better.

"Just some of the more famous scenic spots..." Sang Qien listed several places in a row. They were indeed just some of the most commonly seen places in the capital. There were many people who passed through those places every day, so it wasn't too likely for anything suspicious to have happened there.

Zu An thought for a bit, then asked, "Then do you have any problems?"

Sang Qien was confused and replied, "I don't. I feel great."

Zu An began to think to himself. His first reaction was that the Sang clan had discovered his relationship with Zheng Dan, and so they had harmed Zheng Dan to help their deceased heir vent his anger.

But he immediately rejected that thought as unlikely. They were in the honeymoon phase of their alliance right now, so how could the Sang clan possibly do something so dangerous? If they were exposed, wouldn't the two parties be completely hostile? Judging from our meetings, I think the odds of Sang Hong taking the initiative to give me Zheng Dan are much higher than the odds of him hurting her. That meant the issue was with Zheng Dan alone. She spent most of the time in Sang Manor, while there was nothing wrong with the others...

He suddenly thought of something. He looked at Zheng Dan and asked, "What kind of business does your Zheng clan have in the capital? Did they get into conflict with anyone?"

"It's the silk cloth business, of course," Zheng Dan replied. They obviously couldn't continue the salt trade in the capital like back in Brightmoon City. "As for conflict, we're fighting for a market share with the local merchants as newcomers, so conflict is unavoidable. But even so, it's only limited to some of the usual methods in the marketplace. We dealt with many similar situations back in Brightmoon City."

Zu An was also perplexed when he heard her say that. He really couldn't figure out where the problem lay. He could only say, "I'll stay here with you today to see if you can fall asleep or not."

Sang Qien had an awkward expression as she remarked, "Big brother Zu, that's a bit inappropriate, right?"

Even though her father already tacitly approved, she still had to cover it up on the surface. After all, the Sang clan had servants. If they learned that Zu An had openly stayed behind in the room of a young lady and started rumors, that would be a huge blow to the Sang clan's reputation. It wouldn't be good for Zu An's image either.

Zu An said impatiently, "I didn't say I was going to stay the night. Can't she still sleep during the day?" Sang Qien sighed in relief when she heard that he was talking about the daytime. The daytime was much better in comparison.

Zu An said to Sang Qien, "Little Qien, you should leave first. I'll just watch this place alone." He had many things to tell Zheng Dan in private. It wasn't too convenient to talk with a third wheel here.

Sang Qien was speechless. This is my house! And she's my sister-in-law; aren't you being a bit too much... She could only say, "I can't leave right now, or else others would easily gossip if they saw this." If a single man and a single woman were left in the same room, it was easy for gossip to start, even if it was during the daytime. Hmph, if not because I was worried about Zheng Dan's condition, I would already be fighting you right now!

Zu An figured that made sense as well. He thus said to Zheng Dan, "You should go to bed first, I'll be right here. Let's see if this helps."

"Okay," Zheng Dan said with a sweet smile. She felt a mysterious sense of peace with Zu An at her side. As for Sang Qien, she already couldn't be bothered, considering how things were.

Zheng Dan lay down on the bed. She could feel Zu An pulling the covers over her. Her smile became increasingly gentle, and she rested on her side, calmly looking at him.

Zu An looked back at her. He gently patted her shoulder and said, "Don't worry and sleep. I'll be right here."

"Mmm." Zheng Dan thus closed her eyes.

Sang Qien's expression changed several times. These two adulterers really were getting more and more out of hand! Am I invisible or something? But she could also sense the feelings in their gazes. She sighed. Just what kind of wedding did dad arrange for my big brother? The two of them are already a perfect pair.

Perhaps it was because she was really tired, or maybe it was because Zu An was right there, but Zheng Dan's breathing quickly calmed down. She had clearly already entered the land of dreams.

Sang Qien sighed in relief. She thought to herself, This guy still has some use after all. After some hesitation, she decided that there were still some things she should make clear with Zu An. She was just about to speak when she saw Zu An make a 'shush' motion, however.

Is he looking down on me for annoying him or something? Sang Qien was about to get a bit upset, but she quickly followed his line of sight. The quietly resting Zheng Dan suddenly frowned, as if she were experiencing something terrifying.

Chapter 944: Hatred Arts

Sang Qien was startled. She quickly called out, "Sister-in-law, what's wrong?" But Zheng Dan only continued to twist and turn no matter how Sang Qien called out to her, with no signs of waking.

Zu An quickly stopped her. Then, he took Zheng Dan's hand, slowly sending warm ki into her body. Sang Qien couldn't be bothered with the two's skinship at the moment, however. She watched Zheng Dan nervously to see if her condition improved.

Zu An continued to pour his ki into Zheng Dan, but she didn't get better at all. His brows furrowed tightly. While he was at a loss for what to do, however, he suddenly sensed a chill run through the other party's body.

He was extremely familiar with the ice element because of Chu Chuyan. He quickly discerned that the chill wasn't the kind associated with the ice element, but rather something familiar; it was something like a departed spirit's yin energy.

He'd had encounters with departed spirits several times in his previous dungeon experiences already, even having faced something crazy like Xu Fu who had existed for over ten thousand years. This feeling was almost identical. Of course, compared to those big shots, the yin energy in Zheng Dan's body was much weaker.

After he realized that, Zu An quickly used the Primordial Origin Sutra, sending primordial ki into Zheng Dan's body. Primordial ki was the bane of such sinister existences.

Sure enough, when it sensed the primordial ki, that sinister energy seemed as if it had encountered something extremely terrifying. It immediately withdrew deeper into Zheng Dan.

Zu An obviously wouldn't let it go so easily, however. He seemed to hear a miserable cry as that sinister energy completely disappeared. But he didn't feel happy about that; he could sense that he couldn't completely erase it, and it had instead gotten away.

That wasn't his fault either. When he had encountered such sinister things in the past, they had practically all developed bodies. But this thing was extremely weak and intangible, so he couldn't capture it at all.

Suddenly, Zheng Dan groaned. She slowly opened her eyes, her forehead covered in fine sweat. Even her back was soaked through with sweat. It was easy to see just how weak her condition was.

Sang Qien helped her wipe her sweat worriedly, asking, "Sister-in-law, do you feel better?" Zheng Dan voiced her confirmation. However, she still looked as if she had lingering fears.

Zu An quickly asked, "What exactly happened just now?"

"I'm not sure either." Zheng Dan was in a bit of a daze. "I was able to fall asleep easily with you at my side, but then I suddenly had a scary nightmare... I wanted to open my eyes, but I couldn't. It was almost as if endless hands were trying to drag me into an abyss."

"What did you dream about?" Zu An didn't let the details go this time.

"I dreamt about..." Zheng Dan's face turned red. She gave Sang Qien a look. She wanted to say something, but then hesitated.

Sang Qien almost laughed out of frustration. You can't even tell your own sister-in-law, and yet you can tell a complete outsider? She stood there expressionlessly and said, "I'll let father know. I'll have to trouble big brother Zu to take care of my sister-in-law here."

"Alright." Zu An had to admire this girl's ability to understand others.

...

When Sang Qien left, Zheng Dan had a worried expression as she said, "Little Qien seems to already know about our relationship."

“Don’t think about those things. It’s alright,” Zu An patted her hand and said in consolation. He had actually already guessed certain things too, but there were many things that would be ruined if one actually talked about them. He asked, “Hurry and tell me, what was that nightmare about?”

Zheng Dan’s face blushed red. She pouted and said, “Of course, it was about our relationship being found out... Then, we were put into a cage and brought out in public to be berated. Even the Zheng clan ended up suffering because of it...”

Zu An was speechless. He eventually asked, “Were there malicious spirits of some sort in your nightmare?”

“How did you know?” Zheng Dan cried out in alarm. “There were times when we finally managed to break out of the cage, but everyone around us turned into ghosts and chased us down.”

Zu An thought, No wonder. “Then why didn’t you tell us before?”

Zheng Dan said in embarrassment, “How could I say these things to Little Qien? Also, I’ve always thought that things like ghosts were ridiculous, so there’s not really much to even talk about.”

“But that’s most likely where the issue lies,” Zu An said with a serious expression.

Just then, the sound of footsteps came from outside. Sang Hong had also come over. As such, Zheng Dan quickly separated herself from Zu An’s arms. After all, she was the Sang clan’s daughter-in-law at the moment, so she had to at least keep up basic appearances.

“Ah Zu, what’s going on?” Sang Hong didn’t come inside to avoid suspicion, instead remaining outside.

Zu An was a bit embarrassed too at that point. He gestured for Zheng Dan to come out, then gave them a rough summary of what had just happened.

Sang Hong was alarmed when he heard what Zu An said. “It sounds like the work of hatred arts.”

“Hatred arts?” Zu An had never heard of the term before.

Sang Hong explained, “They’re a kind of corrupt practice that can inhibit a person or object through curses.” Zu An suddenly understood. It was similar to the witchcraft he knew from his past world.

“These techniques are incredibly sinister. They used to appear often in the harem chambers’ struggle for favor. The concubines committed all manner of crimes. Later on, the techniques were strictly prohibited by the court. All the people and things related to these hatred arts were destroyed without exception. That’s why these hatred arts haven’t been seen in the capital for a long time. Why would they appear again now?” Sang Hong continued, looking serious.

“Then is there a cure?” Zu An asked urgently.

Sang Hong shook his head after some hesitation. “They’ve already been gone for so long, so the number of those who know about them are few, let alone those who know how to treat them. The capital is a place filled with hidden talents, so there might be someone who knows the cure, but it’s a forbidden skill. For fear of the court’s punishment, they wouldn’t dare to admit it even if they did know the cure.”

After hearing what Sang Hong said, Zu An thought the situation might really be a bit hard then. He wondered if there was anyone in the Royal Academy who knew about such things. Based on his friendship with them, he believed that they would help him with this favor.

“By the way, what kinds of principles are these hatred arts founded on? Does the caster need a part of the target’s body or some personal object?” Zu An asked. The curses from his previous world all needed things such as eyelashes, fingernails, astrological information, or personal items that they had kept with them for a long time. If these hatred arts worked similarly, it would become much easier to find the culprit.

“There’s no need for those things. Normally speaking, those who practice hatred arts keep some small ghost-like things to use to harm others.” Sang Hong’s knowledge was extensive. He quickly explained, “It’s rumored that the hatred arts came from the fiend races. The fiend races have powerful beings who can even kill through dreams.”

“Fiend races?” Zu An thought of something. He suddenly remembered that woman from Scarlet Invitation and said, “I have an idea on how to solve this problem.”

Sang Hong and his daughter looked at him in shock. They didn’t understand what kind of solution he had.

Zu An said, “Danda... Ahem, Miss Zheng should use this chance to rest. I’ve scared that sinister creature quite badly, so I don’t believe it will return for some time. I’m going out for a bit.”

Zheng Dan bit her lip and nodded. If not because the Sang clan’s father and daughter were here, she would have tugged on Zu An’s sleeves. After what she just experienced, she really wasn’t willing to remain alone.

Zu An felt a bit of a headache too. When he saw that, he asked, “Then, why don’t you come with me?” Out of respect for the Sang clan, he couldn’t just bring her out alone, so he said to Sang Qien, “Little Qien should come along too.”

“Sure!” Sure enough, Sang Hong and Sang Qien’s expressions improved when they heard Zu An’s suggestion.

Sang Hong asked, “Worthy junior, do you need this old one’s help in any way?”

Zu An said with an embarrassed chuckle, “There’s no need for that. I’ll seek out respected uncle’s help when the time comes.” He really couldn’t bring Sang Hong to a place like that.

Sang Hong didn’t suspect him either and instead said with a sigh, “Junior has always been reliable when you do things. This old one feels at ease.” At the same time, he felt a bit aggrieved. If his son Qian’er had had even half of Zu An’s ability, they wouldn’t have fallen into such a state...

His mood sank. He turned around to leave after exchanging a few more words.

...

Only the other three remained. Sang Qien asked curiously, “Where are we going? Let’s leave right now!”

Zu An was instead completely calm. “I fear that you two might need to change clothes first.”

Sang Qien was confused when she heard that they had to cross-dress. However, her brain began to move quickly. It's probably to hide our traces! We can't let the mastermind find out, and there'll be all sorts of rumors flying about if my sister-in-law is seen with another man.

Even though I'm not as pretty as my sister-in-law, I'm still pretty cute. I'd also draw a lot of attention outside.

That was why she agreed without much resistance. As for Zheng Dan, all she wanted just then was to stay at Zu An's side, so she didn't care if she had to cross-dress at all.

Sang Qien was about to look for men's clothes when Zheng Dan said, "I have clothes here." For better or for worse, she had been a gang boss who ruled over a large business. These were all preparations she'd made.

Sang Qien chased Zu An out. Then, the two girls began to change clothes. When they came out, Zu An's eyes lit up. He couldn't help but say with praise, "Your features are so pretty, I'm sure you'll catch the eyes of many girls on the street. They'll wonder who these stunning young masters are."

Sang Qien blushed. She was embarrassed after being praised by Zu An. She quickly said, "Let's set out then."

"Alright." Zu An had a strange smile on his face, one that gave Sang Qien a strange feeling. However, she soon understood why he was acting so strangely.

...

Sang Qien's entire body trembled as she looked at the Scarlet Invitation signboard overhead. "You brought us to this kind of place?"

Chapter 945: People From the Capital Really Know How to Play

Sang Qien was so angry she was shaking all over. She had been curious where Zu An was taking them the entire time. She would never have thought that he would take them to a brothel!

For girls from distinguished clans like them, if news of this got out, their reputations would be completely destroyed! No one would ever propose marriage to them after something like this.

After all, why would any proper girl ever go to that kind of place? There was no lack of people who loved to gossip. Once they got their hands on such information, one might be known as a brothel regular soon afterward.

You have successfully trolled Sang Qien for +233 +233 +233...

Zu An was rather surprised when he saw the string of Rage points that came in through the backend. He asked, "There's no need to be that upset, is there?"

"How can I not be angry!? Why would you bring us to this kind of place?" Sang Qien didn't know how this man could be so shameless and ask something like that.

"That's why I told you two to dress up as men." Zu An had a smile on his face when he saw her so angry.

"But we still might be recognized..." Sang Qien was nervous. Their cross-dressing wouldn't escape the eyes of those who were deliberately looking for trouble.

Zu An gave her chest a look and said, "Don't worry, your sister-in-law might have a chance of being recognized, but you don't."

Sang Qien was completely dumbstruck. What does he mean?

When she noticed where Zu An's gaze was pointed, she subconsciously lowered her head to look at her ordinary and flat chest. Then, she gave her sister-in-law a look and saw that that area was completely full. She realized what he was suggesting.

She had actually been confused back when they were getting dressed. They were clearly roughly the same height, but why were her clothes so much looser? She had felt that her chest area was a bit too spacious.

"But sister-in-law isn't fat," she blurted out without thinking. Then, she finally realized what he was talking about. She felt as if she had been struck by thunder.

"You bastard!" When she saw the teasing smirk on Zu An's face, Sang Qien was beyond embarrassed.

When he saw how she was about to bite his head off, Zu An decided to give them an explanation. "The reason we're coming here is because I have a friend from this place who might be able to help your sister-in-law with her problem. If you still have some misgivings, you can wait outside."

"No way. I have to protect my sister-in-law!" Sang Qien was full of suspicion. Who knows what this guy will do!?

Zheng Dan couldn't help but smile. This girl was quite interesting.

...

Zu An didn't really mind, and he took the two of them inside Scarlet Invitation.

"Why do you have friends in Scarlet Invitation?" Sang Qien asked in confusion. Even Zheng Dan was now curious.

"They're just some friends I just happened to have met." Zu An gave an ambiguous reply.

Sang Qien harrumphed. They're definitely not just good friends.

A staff member greeted them right when they entered. "Young masters, are you here to drink, listen to music, or...?"

Zu An said, "I came to meet someone."

The staff member smiled and said, "Everyone who comes here is looking for someone, but I fear that the young master will be disappointed. All of the girls are resting right now."

Sang Qien harrumphed. This is a filthy place after all!

"It doesn't matter. I'm looking for Lady Nan Xun," Zu An said.

Zheng Dan's ears pricked up. She wondered who this Lady Nan Xun was. She had been tormented by nightmares for some time, so she hadn't been in any frame of mind to pay attention to outside information.

However, Sang Qien instead frowned. She seemed to have heard the name before, but she couldn't remember where.

The staff member chuckled. "Everyone who comes here wants to meet Lady Nan Xun. She's the pillar of our Scarlet Invitation! But unfortunately, she is not someone you can meet just because you want to."

Sang Qien finally remembered who Nan Xun was. The capital had recently been filled with a commotion precisely because Yu Nan and Zu An had been rivals in love over a brothel madam, and Yu Nan had even lost his post because of it. As the target of their rivalry, Nan Xun's reputation had naturally grown even greater.

Zheng Dan was a bit unhappy. This guy, he's always getting into situations with courtesans wherever he goes! If I remember correctly, wasn't there a Qiu Honglei in Brightmoon City?

Zu An obviously knew what the staff member was trying to say. He tossed over a few silvers and said, "Pass on a message to Lady Nan Xun for me. Tell her that Ah Zu is looking for her."

A flattering smile immediately appeared on the staff member's face when he saw the silvers. "Young masters, please wait inside here. This humble one will send the message over for your respected selves right now! However, Lady Nan Xun's status is special, so I cannot guarantee that she will agree to meet you." He had to make things clear, or else these young masters might ask for the silvers back if Lady Nan Xun refused to meet them.

"That's fine. She'll definitely agree to meet with me." Zu An spoke as if it were completely normal.

The staff member thought to himself, This man really is full of himself. Who knew how many princes and dukes were lined up just for a chance to meet with Nan Xun? Of course, he would obviously never say something like that to offend a guest. He guided them into a private room with a smile and said, "Please have some tea here. I will be back soon." He quickly rushed to Nan Xun's courtyard afterward.

At the same time, he was a bit confused. The two guests next to that guest were a bit too handsome. As someone who worked in these kinds of places, his eyes were sharp. He wasn't too sure about the skinnier one, but the other one was definitely a woman.

Tsk tsk, these young masters from the capital really know how to have fun. They even brought their own women over to play together. This staff member had a look of envy on his face. This wasn't the first time he was seeing something of the sort, so he naturally didn't find it all that strange.

He arrived at a small courtyard soon afterward. With Nan Xun's status, she naturally had the qualifications to have her own courtyard. The maid at the courtyard immediately refused when she heard his report, however. "Go go go, get out of here. Who do you think our young miss is? Do you think she'll meet with just anyone?"

The staff member didn't find the response surprising at all. He was just about to turn around and leave when he suddenly remembered what his guest had told him. Out of respect for the silver he had gotten,

he added, "That person said he was Lady Nan Xun's friend, and he seems to be called Ah Zu or something."

"Ah Zu?" The maid was stunned. She thought to herself, Why have I never heard that name before? But she didn't dare to treat the matter lightly anymore. Everyone in the capital had wealthy and respected statuses, and it would be bad if the young miss ended up on bad terms with someone because of her. "Wait for a bit, I'll go and ask." She raised her dress and rushed back inside.

...

In the centermost room, the capital's most popular courtesan was massaging the shoulders of a beautiful woman. She said with a sigh of amazement, "Master, your figure really is enviable."

The beautiful woman said with a smile, "Yours isn't bad either."

"It's still far inferior to master's," Nan Xun said quietly. Her eyes moved across her master's body. She actually had a lot of confidence in her own figure and appearance, but compared to this beautiful woman, she was still lacking. Were the figures of the fiend races all this insanely good?

The beautiful woman was naturally Kong Nanwu. She wasn't in the mood to talk about such things right now. "Has that Zu An never sought you out after that event? Looks like you didn't work hard enough that night."

Nan Xun complained, "Of course I did! My mouth was sore for a long time after that night. It's just that that man is too ungrateful and fickle. Why would he care about people like us?"

As soon as she said that, however, the maid called from outside, "Young miss, young miss! There's a guest outside who says he's your friend and wants to meet you."

"I'm not meeting him! Stop bringing every random person to me." Nan Xun had been feeling annoyed to begin with. There were many young masters who flaunted themselves as her friends. Could they not tell that all she had done was show them a polite smile?

"Oh, that stupid servant boy must've taken silver from the guest. He lied to me and said that some 'Ah Zu' is the young miss' friend. I'm going to make sure he gets it later," the maid mumbled and left.

"Who did you say that person's name was again?" The door suddenly opened. Nan Xun was already by the entrance and looking at the maid nervously.

The maid looked at Nan Xun's fair, bare feet in shock. Why didn't the young miss even put her shoes on? She replied, "I think it was Ah Zu."

"Hurry and bring him in!" Nan Xun's breathing quickened. She then changed her mind and said, "No, I'll meet him personally."

She sorted out her hair and head ornament after saying that. The maid quickly reminded her, "Young miss, your shoes..."

Nan Xun secretly stuck out her tongue. With how she was feeling at the moment, it didn't make a difference if she wore shoes or not at all, but it would draw unnecessary attention if other people saw

that dirt didn't stick to her feet the way it would to a normal person. She quickly put on her shoes and ran while raising her dress.

The male staff member who had been about to go back with the news of Nan Xun's rejection was stupefied. That guest actually does know the courtesan! Furthermore, judging from how she's acting, what do you mean 'close friends'? They're clearly lovers!

Meanwhile, Zu An was leisurely drinking tea. Zheng Dan's condition wasn't the best, so she was currently leaning against the chair and resting.

Sang Qien looked around her. Even though she had sounded as if she really looked down on this place, she was still quite curious about such places. After all, Scarlet Invitation's reputation in the capital was quite high.

She gradually recovered her composure from seeing the dazzling decorations around her. When she smelled the perfume and cosmetics in the air, she asked disdainfully, "Why is there still no news? It'll be really embarrassing if no one comes."

Zu An said with a smile, "Don't worry, she's my friend."

Sang Qien said in a sincere and heartfelt manner, "You're pretty sharp normally, but why do you seem a bit slow today? Did you really think a woman from this place really liked you just because they told you some nice things?" She wasn't trying to be sarcastic on purpose, but due to her upbringing ever since she was young, she had a subconscious dislike for such places.

Before Zu An could even reply, a sweet aroma wafted over. A beautiful figure was standing by the door, saying, "Talking behind someone's back isn't something a noble person would do. Could it be that... the young lady here is jealous?"

Chapter 946: Specter Race

The one standing at the entrance was naturally Nan Xun. When she heard Zu An had come to look for her, she was so happy that she almost forgot to even put on shoes. Only now did she notice that he had brought two other guests with him.

Her first reaction was that he had brought over his friends to show off. After all, that was something that was much too commonly seen among men. She had been quite influenced by the kind of place she was in after all.

However, she immediately realized that something wasn't quite right, because one of his friends' chests seemed to be a bit too big... Upon closer inspection, she saw that that person's waist was the tiniest of them all, and their skin was fine. What else could they be but a cross-dressing woman?

She was shocked. Why would Zu An bring two women to a place like Scarlet Invitation? However, before she had the time to even think more about it, she heard the other, more flat-chested person speak ill of her behind her back. She obviously wouldn't just take it lying down and immediately fired back.

Sang Qien was shocked. She hadn't expected to be found out by the person involved so quickly! She was about to say something, but she took notice of the other woman's beauty. At first, she had thought that the courtesans of brothels would definitely use a ton of cosmetics and behave coquettishly, but this

woman was entirely different. She seemed to be even more elegant than most upper-class women! She really found it hard to associate Nan Xun with a woman from this kind of place.

What dealt an even greater mental blow was, why were these girls' chests all so big?! Just what the heck did they eat for them to get so massive?!

She was pretty good at talking normally, and she had quite a few things to say to Nan Xun. However, upon seeing her voluptuous figure, she immediately lost confidence and didn't want to argue anymore. She harrumphed and looked away to show her displeasure.

Zheng Dan woke up with a start too. She looked at the woman in front of her. This woman really was stunning, and furthermore, there was a kind of aloof and indifferent expression in her eyes that made her seem completely free from the vulgarity of the world.

She's almost comparable to Qiu Honglei. Zheng Dan subconsciously straightened her posture. She felt a bit of regret inwardly. Her mental state really was too poor, and she hadn't even put on any makeup before leaving today. Of course she couldn't compare to this woman at the moment... But she soon remembered that she was here as a man. She sighed in relief.

"Nan Xun, meeting with you really isn't easy at all." Zu An quickly changed the topic when he sensed that the atmosphere had become a bit too serious.

Nan Xun's previously cold expression shifted to a smile when Zu An spoke. She replied, "It cannot be helped; there are so many guests who wish to meet me. If I had to meet every one of them, I really would be tired to death. However, young master, please do not worry. I already told those from Scarlet Invitation that if you come back in the future, you can just come right in. You don't need to let anyone know."

Sang Qien harrumphed. Is this woman flaunting her popularity right now? She had previously thought that her own sister-in-law was a bit too frivolous, but compared to this woman, her sister-in-law was as pure as a little white flower!

"Do you really need to meet with that many guests?" Zu An's brow subconsciously furrowed.

"Is the young master jealous?" Nan Xun's smile became bigger. She grabbed Zu An's arm and said, "I am really happy to hear that, you know?"

"Hmph, just putting on airs," Sang Qien rolled her eyes and murmured quietly.

Zheng Dan frowned. This woman is a formidable opponent! Hmph, if only Chu Chuyan were here...

Sang Qien and Zheng Dan normally had their differences and looked down on each other in certain ways. But today, they were actually united against a common enemy.

Nan Xun moved over to Zu An and said quietly by his ear, "Young master, do not worry. I only chat a bit with those other young masters. I have never even taken off my mask around them. I will make sure to preserve my chastity for you." She intentionally blew against Zu An's ear as she spoke, her voice full of a provocative air.

Zu An sighed. This woman really knew how to tease him! No wonder even someone like King Qi had been completely enchanted by her and couldn't completely free himself from her.

This woman had been a concubine of King Qi, but she was still a virgin? Did it even count as being a virgin anymore or not, if she had the body of a young woman but the mind of a mature woman?

He finally snapped out of his daze when he sensed the killing intent of the two women behind him and said, "By the way, I came because I had something I needed your help with. I have something to ask Miss Kong."

"Why is there another woman?" Zheng Dan's ears pricked up.

Sang Qien was confused too. And who is this Miss Kong? Is there even anyone famous surnamed Kong in the capital?

Even though there were many things about Zu An she found questionable, she still trusted his judgment in women for the most part. There was no way any random pretty girl could catch his eye. All those who could gain his praise were all ridiculously beautiful. If her surname was Kong, this woman should have been quite famous in the capital.

Nan Xun pouted and replied, "Young master really is heartless. You never came to see me after that night, and you only came to find me today to meet with another woman."

"You're even getting jealous of her? Don't worry, I really have some proper business with her," Zu An said with a smile.

Nan Xun knew that acting a bit spoiled would gain more favor at certain times, but it was easy for such things to go too far. As such, she sensibly stopped herself and said, "Okay, I'll bring you to see her. She just mentioned you not too long ago."

"What did she talk about?" Zu An was curious. Being talked about by a respected individual from the fiend races wasn't anything to feel that happy about.

"About how heartless you are, of course!" Nan Xun harrumphed. Her beautiful figure swayed as she began to walk ahead of the group to lead the way. The way she walked made the inexperienced Sang Qien feel scorn and envy.

Meanwhile, Zheng Dan was also staring at Zu An with an ambiguous expression. Even though she knew that he was a womanizer, she had never expected him to be fickle to this extent. Judging from their tone, it sounded as if this Lady Kong was also one of his close female friends.

They quickly arrived in a courtyard out in the back. Nan Xun stopped in front of the entrance and said, "Young master, I have to ask for instructions first. You know that her status is a bit..." She gave Zheng Dan and Sang Qien a look. She didn't say the following words. Zu An knew about her misgivings, so he didn't make things too hard on her.

As Nan Xun went inside, Sang Qien couldn't help but ask, "Who is that Lady Kong? Why is she acting all mysterious?"

"Her status is indeed a bit special. We're here to ask for help after all, so we should follow their rules." Zu An didn't tell them Kong Nanwu's identity. After all, the words 'fiend races' were too sensitive, especially when the fiend races had just slaughtered an entire frontier city not too long ago.

Sang Qien and Zheng Dan exchanged a look. They both saw curiosity in each other's eyes.

Nan Xun returned quickly. "Young master, she invites you inside, but I fear that it is not too appropriate for the other two."

Sang Qien frowned. Where do these courtesans get their confidence from? She was just about to flip out when Zu An stopped her, saying, "Little Qien, wait here for a bit. I'll bring your sister-in-law in to ask about her illness."

Sang Qien wasn't too happy at first, but when she heard that it had to do with her sister-in-law's condition, she endured her discontent and replied, "Forget it, this place is pretty nice anyway, so I won't go inside. Otherwise, I might just end up getting all of this foxy frivolousness on me." She wanted to say 'foul smell', but she decided not to in the end.

Zu An thought to himself, You're actually right, there really is a fox in there. Then, he brought Zheng Dan inside.

Nan Xun looked hesitant as she said, "Young master, she..."

"It's fine," Zu An said, "Have Miss Kong speak through a curtain. My consultation involves her, so I have to bring her in." He had stayed the night before, so he knew the layout inside. After hearing that, Nan Xun didn't press the issue further. She went in first to let Kong Nanwu know.

When Zu An and Zheng Dan went in, they could only vaguely make out an elegant figure behind the layers of curtains. They couldn't really make out her real appearance.

"Young master, please forgive me. We can only meet in this manner," said a gentle voice from inside. Zheng Dan's eyes widened. There was actually a voice this nice in this world? She immediately thought of orioles singing and pearls dropping onto a jade plate. However, neither of those beautiful sounds could accurately portray just how incredible this woman's voice was!

Zu An sat down while holding Zheng Dan's hand and said, "Lady Kong is too polite. I understand your worries, so I'm already thankful that you're willing to meet with me this way."

Kong Nanwu replied with a smile, "I wonder what the young master has come here for today?"

"So this is what happened..." Zu An explained Zheng Dan's condition to her. "I heard that hatred arts came from the fiend races. Do you know any solutions to this issue?"

Kong Nanwu finally knew why he had sought her out. She replied, "Hatred arts indeed came from the fiend races. The fiend races are numerous. Apart from the races that are better known, there are some more remote and neglected races, like the blood race and specter race. The hatred arts originate from the specter race, but they've been modified by humans."

Zheng Dan thought to herself, This woman really is well-learned! She actually knew so much about the fiend races... No wonder Zu An sought her out.

Zu An exclaimed in shock, "There's actually a specter race in this world?"

If there were really things like departed spirits, why the hell would the emperor even pursue immortality? Wouldn't it be great to just exist in a ghost form?

"It's not what you're thinking." Kong Nanwu explained, "They're just freaks who are neither dead or alive with some corpse and soul refining abilities. However, those ghosts don't have any intelligence and only mechanically obey orders."

"Then is there a way to cure my companion?" Zu An asked while gesturing toward Zheng Dan. He had actually wondered if Kong Nanwu was the one who had done it. After all, she had soul refinement skills too. Who knew if she had ended up having some kind of a grudge against him? But after he got to talk to her, he realized it didn't have anything to do with her.

A momentary silence filled the room. A while later, Kong Nanwu said, "That might be difficult."

Zu An was alarmed and asked, "Is there no cure?"

"That is not it..." Kong Nanwu changed to ki transmission. "The young master probably knows that since the other party used this kind of technique, they might have some kind of connection to the fiend races. You know that our fiend races have been discriminated against quite severely by humans recently. We're all in human territory right now; it's one thing if we don't combine our forces, but if we were to interfere with each other, then..."

Zu An's expression turned cold as he replied, "Is the lady planning to threaten me? Speak, what do you want?" This matter was related to Zheng Dan, so he couldn't be bothered to put up with much anymore. He wouldn't hold back from doing what he had to for her.

"The young master misunderstands. That's not what I'm saying. What I said just now were my sincere thoughts." Kong Nanwu's voice was full of hesitation as she continued, "I guess it's fine. Since she's the young master's friend, I'll meddle and help her this time."

Chapter 947: Heart Rending

Zu An sighed in relief when he saw that she had agreed. "Then I'll have to trouble the lady this time."

Nan Xun smiled and said, "Young master, Lady Kong normally does not interfere with matters at all. She really has treated the young master with special favor this time."

"Nan Xun!" Kong Nanwu reprimanded her. Nan Xun stuck out her tongue and said nothing else.

Zheng Dan was surprised. Why does this courtesan queen instead sound like a servant when those two women talk? But this Nan Xun has an incredible reputation... And with her temperament, how could she be willing to serve another? But she quickly tossed that thought to the back of her mind.

Zu An chuckled and said, "I'm afraid that there's no way for me to repay this gratitude properly. If you don't find it beneath you, I can offer you my body." With how he was now, there was no way he would be swayed so easily by a few words. After all, this master and servant might just be working together to throw him off.

Zheng Dan smiled. After having known Zu An for so long, she already understood him well. Despite the words he had said, she could hear the mockery in his tone. That was why she wouldn't feel jealous over such a thing.

The woman behind the curtains harrumphed when she heard those lowly words, completely ignoring Zu An. She raised her head to look at Zheng Dan and said, Unfortunately, I only have a smattering of knowledge. If the user's cultivation is too profound, I might not be able to do much about it either."

"Lady Kong is too humble. It's enough as long as you do what you can; I'm not someone who doesn't know when to stop," Zu An said.

Kong Nanwu felt relieved. "Then please have this young lady sleep here. Once that evil spirit comes to bother her, I'll see if I can catch it for you."

"That might be rather difficult..." Zu An gave her a rough recount of his encounter with that sinister thing. "It might be too scared to come out again for quite some time."

That was also what had given him the biggest headache. After all, one could be a bandit for a thousand days, but who would be vigilant against bandits for a thousand days?

Furthermore, he was going to Cloudcenter Commandery soon, so he couldn't stay at Zheng Dan's side to protect her at all. It would be really troublesome if that evil thing came out while he was gone.

"The young master is actually proficient in exorcism methods?" Kong Nanwu was shocked. After all, this kind of malicious spirit was something sinister and unconventional. Rarely would human cultivators come into contact with it, let alone be able to deal with it.

"It was just a coincidence. Furthermore, I wasn't able to capture it and instead let it get away." Zu An didn't expose the fact that he knew the Primordial Origin Sutra.

"That is indeed a bit tricky..." Kong Nanwu began to think to herself. She also began to consider how to deal with the situation.

Zheng Dan felt a headache when she heard those words. A look of disappointment appeared on her face. Zu An gently held her hand to console her. Nan Xun bit her lip when she saw him do so, but she didn't say anything.

"I have a solution." Kong Nanwu didn't continue to speak. Instead, she brought over a sheet of talisman paper. Her hands moved quickly, folding it into a small and exquisite paper crane. Then, she blew against the crane, and it seemed to come alive. It fluttered around, then moved through the curtain and arrived in front of Zheng Dan.

"This is..." Zheng Dan was shocked. When had she ever seen such a magical technique?

"It's but a small trick." Kong Nanwu said. She didn't want others to know that she was from the fiend races. "It can sense the aura left behind by the malicious spirit, and it was able to sense that the user isn't anyone too formidable. It should be able to take you all to the mastermind. However, I fear that I can't get involved further, so I must apologize to the young master for that."

Zu An knew about her struggles and said, "Thank you. I'll remember this favor."

Kong Nanwu gently chuckled from the other side of the curtain and said, "This sounds much more reliable than the devotion you promised earlier."

Zu An's face heated up. Not even someone as thick skinned as him knew what to say at that moment. Fortunately, the crane began to move again. After circling Zheng Dan a few times, it spread its wings and flew in a certain direction out the window.

"Hurry and follow it; don't lose sight of it. This aura is faint, so we might not be able to track it a second time," Kong Nanwu reminded him from behind the curtains.

"Thanks!" Zu An cupped his hands toward her, then he and Zheng Dan jumped out of the window.

Sang Qien heard the activity inside and rushed over. When she saw the two jump out, she couldn't even be bothered that they were holding hands. She asked, "Did something happen?"

"I'll explain along the way. Follow that paper crane!" Zu An pointed at the paper crane. He actually noticed that it wasn't a paper crane, but rather a paper peacock. He hadn't expected Kong Nanwu to be so skilled with her hands, that she could weave such fine origami so quickly.

When she saw the flying paper peacock, Sang Qien's beautiful eyes opened wide. Her red lips were so wide open that she might be able to fit an egg inside her mouth.

"Why are you standing there looking all stupid?" Zu An grabbed her hand and chased the paper peacock.

"You can let go of me now." Sang Qien finally snapped out of her daze a while later. She felt very uncomfortable when she sensed the warmth on her wrist. Just what would others think if they saw him holding her and Zheng Dan's hands in public?

Zu An obviously wouldn't do something like take advantage of her. He took the chance to tell her about what happened just now.

"What kind of background does this young miss Kong have to be so skilled?" Sang Qien was incredibly shocked. Zheng Dan also looked at him curiously.

"She doesn't wish for others to know where she's from, so you two will have to forgive me for not telling you," Zu An said frankly.

"Just don't say it then." Sang Qien harrumphed. "But the two of you seem pretty close... She doesn't want others to know, but she doesn't mind telling you? Tsk tsk tsk..." She sneaked a look at Zheng Dan while speaking. She really didn't mind stirring the drama between them a bit. After all, Zheng Dan is my sister-in-law! Even though I know my father has his plans, it hasn't even been that long since my big brother died, but sister-in-law is already following someone else?

Zheng Dan smiled. "I really am grateful to Miss Kong today. Once this is over, I'll owe her a life-saving favor. I have to properly thank her later."

Sang Qien became gloomy when she saw that she had failed to drive a wedge between them. She lost all interest in saying anything else.

...

The three quickly followed the paper peacock outside of the city. That was still expected, because the inner city was a place filled with high officials and nobles. Something sinister like this obviously had to lay a bit lower.

The paper peacock continued to fly through the air. It arrived by a remote street, then stopped near a tattered courtyard after circling it a few times. It landed on the ground, and the power supporting it ran out.

"This house seems to be unoccupied," Sang Qien said while staring at the tattered entrance.

A passing older woman saw the three of them walking around the house. She quickly came over and warned them quietly, "Did you all come here to buy this house? I advise you to choose a different one. This house is haunted."

Sang Qien quickly asked her for more information. She learned that the previous owner's family had died one after another in quick succession. It had been inherited by a distant nephew, but he didn't dare to continue living there. As such, he tried to sell the place through a middleman. But after it had passed through the hands of several owners, all kinds of strange things had happened. They all sold off the property one after another. Eventually, rumors that the house was haunted began to circulate.

Zu An couldn't help but smile. It seemed that regardless of which world it was, there were always these warmhearted and gossipy older women.

Sang Qien wanted to ask more questions, but the older woman was worried that she might catch something from staying for too long and quickly left.

Zu An smiled and said, "If it's haunted, then we came to the right place."

"Is there really a ghost?" Sang Qien's complexion paled. She had used to hate having physical contact with Zu An, but now, she unconsciously moved a bit closer to him.

"You're a cultivator yourself. For better or for worse, you're pretty strong. Why are you scared of these things?" Zu An found it rather funny.

"It's different, okay?" Sang Qien gave him a glare. This guy is so annoying! He's still teasing me even now...

"You'll know if you go in and take a look yourself," Zu An said. The main entrance was locked, so Zu An brought Zheng Dan around the wall.

Sang Qien stomped her feet. She followed along after some hesitation.

The inside was extremely run-down, with dried leaves and branches everywhere, as well as some rotting furniture. There was only a single main room and a few empty rooms. The owner of the place was clearly not that well off either.

"I don't see any trace of people living here." Sang Qien didn't dare to look around herself. Instead, she scanned the place with her ki. After all, she was at the fifth rank. Unless their cultivation was much higher than hers, it was hard for anyone to escape her detection.

That immediately gave her much more courage. She ran out and opened several doors in succession to regain a bit of dignity after how scared she had been acting a moment before. Sure enough, there was nothing inside.

"That friend of yours isn't reliable at all! There's clearly nothing here," Sang Qien said.

“Did you check that well yet?” Zu An pointed to a dried-up well nearby.

“What can a well have? Don’t tell me there’s someone living at the bottom of the well?” As if to prove her words, Sang Qien walked closer to the well as she said that. Unfortunately, the bottom was pitch black, so she couldn’t see anything.

She felt a bit scared. Just as she was about to pull back, however, long and seemingly endless strands of hair flew out from inside the well! They wrapped around her face to pull her down.

“Ahhhh!” A shrill scream tore through the courtyard.

Chapter 948: Might of the Celestial Drake

Sang Qien was dragged down shortly afterward.

Zu An was shocked. He had just been making a joke at first. After all, in the films of his previous world, old wells were always associated with ghosts and monsters, so it had already become almost an instinct. But how could he have expected that something like this would happen? He would feel regret for the rest of his life if something really ended up happening to Sang Qien here!

Zu An rushed over. Just then, a blast of flames erupted from the bottom of the well. Then, a petite figure rushed out of it with a ‘whoosh’. Who else could it be but Sang Qien?

Sang Qien had an expression of alarm. When she saw Zu An walk over, she immediately felt as if she had seen her family. She ran over and hid behind him, clinging onto his arm while shaking all over.

Only now did Zu An remember that the other party was a fire element cultivator. He couldn’t help but chuckle, saying, “Since you can use the fire element, all of that hair would have been burned to ashes on contact. Why are you getting so scared?”

“Stop talking about that already...” Sang Qien blocked her ears with her hands. Her legs buckled the moment she thought of that scene. I’m finished, I’m finished! I’m probably going to have nightmares every night from now on too...

“Ah Zu, what was that thing earlier?” Zheng Dan also subconsciously moved closer to Zu An. As a woman, she was naturally more scared of such things.

“It’s probably the main culprit we’re looking for,” Zu An replied while staring at this well.

Zheng Dan and Sang Qien both followed his gaze. They moved even closer to him. The pitch-black hair was starting to reach out from the well like vines, and it continued to grow longer and longer, as if it would never stop.

When she saw the hair surrounding the three of them, Sang Qien’s face turned incredibly pale. Even though she was scared, however, she wasn’t like other girls. She gathered her courage and used her fire element to burn the hair away.

But what made her widen her eyes in shock was that the hair didn’t catch fire the way it had before, and instead, the fire she released quickly disappeared. She quickly tugged on Zu An’s sleeves and said, “This hair is a bit strange; there’s some strange sinister energy protecting it. My flames can’t burn it away!

Does this thing have the ice element?" She had felt a wave of bone-chilling cold from the rebound of her previous attack. Her entire body couldn't help but break out into a shiver.

Immediately afterward, she felt a warm feeling spread from the palm of her hand. The chill disappeared and she felt much better. She lowered her hand and saw that Zu An was holding her hand. She blushed, but she didn't say anything about the skinship this time.

"What the other party cultivates is something similar to evil yin energy, and not the ice element." Zu An released her hand, then looked at the well. He coldly asked, "What kind of monster are you? Show yourself!"

Jiek jiek jiek~!

An extremely unpleasant and ear-piercing voice exclaimed, "Who dares to disturb my slumber?!"

When they sensed a mysterious wave of power sweep over them, Zheng Dan and Sang Qien's expressions changed. They exclaimed, "We need to hurry and get away! This thing is too strong!"

However, they didn't expect Zu An to be completely unfazed as he said, "Don't worry." His voice had a mysterious calming ability. The two girls gradually calmed down.

"Hmph, you want to escape? Not a single one of you will leave this place today." An individual dressed entirely in black robes slowly rose from the well. His entire body was surrounded by wisps of black mist.

"Doesn't this count as black silk to a certain extent?" Zu An remarked. Even he was a bit impressed at his own ability to think up nonsense.[1]

He was actually a bit annoyed. When he saw the long black hair, he had thought that he was going to see some beautiful female ghost. At least that was how it was in those television shows. But who could have thought that he would be jebaited like this?

But unlike Zu An, Zheng Dan and Sang Qien gulped nervously. The pressure this person gave them was really great. That was especially the case when only half of the person's deathly pale face was exposed. His face was so thin it was more like a skeleton, just skin wrapped around bones. His eye sockets were deeply sunken, and his eyes were completely different from a normal person's, glowing with red light. In that instant, it was hard to tell if he was a man or a ghost.

"Oh my... So it was actually two little beauties. Your blood will definitely be even more delicious and nourishing." The half-man, half-ghost looked at the two girls. Excitement flickered through his eyes.

He practiced evil arts, so he was extremely sensitive toward yin and yang energies. He immediately recognized that the two of them were cross-dressing women.[2]

The two girls both broke out into goosebumps when they heard his words.

Zu An sighed. "There are two great beauties here, but your only desire is to drink their blood? Cultivating these evil arts ended up turning you into something that's not fully a man or a ghost, and you even lost your basic ability to be a man. Tell me honestly, is there even any meaning left in living?"

Sang Qien and Zheng Dan's faces heated up. Even though he was praising them for being beautiful, why did it sound so strange?

“You’re courting death!”

You have successfully trolled Chi Tu for +444 +444 +444...

The black-clad man erupted into a rage. The black hair on the ground was pulled taut, then shot out like a rain of arrows. A normal person would be stabbed full of holes by such an attack.

Zheng Dan and Sang Qien tried to join the battle, but Zu An gestured that they didn’t need to do anything. He stood in front of them and a faintly visible wall of ki took form in front of him.

The black-clad man named Chi Tu sneered. His attack specialized in destroying the ki barriers of cultivators. Not even someone whose cultivation was a level higher than his might be able to stop this attack!

This kid is so young, so how high can his cultivation be? He even wants to face me head on? He won’t even know how he died. He was even considering whether he should hold back a bit to spare the kid’s life, then slowly suck out the blood of his female companions. He would slowly enjoy watching him suffer.

But his smile quickly froze. When his sharp hair struck the other party’s ki barrier, it was as if it had hit a steel wall, and his hair broke apart into inch-sized chunks. He himself was struck by a powerful recoil that made all of his ki and blood surge chaotically. This feeling was absolutely awful.

“How?!” He stared at the man in front of him in horror. This person was still so young, so why was his cultivation so high? It made absolutely no sense!

Forget about him, even Sang Qien was completely shocked. She knew that Zu An’s cultivation was high, but compared to the last time they had met, she really hadn’t expected him to have already grown to this level! After all, the pressure the black-robed man gave her was at least that of a seventh rank expert! Zu An didn’t even have to move a finger to break down his opponent’s attack?

Zheng Dan was much more composed. After all, she had watched Zu An take down that powerful red dragon when Zu An was still extremely weak, so what did this scene count as?

Chi Tu’s expression warped more and more. I practically gave up on my physical form to obtain all of this power, and yet he didn’t give up a thing. How is his cultivation so far above mine, while he was even born more handsome than me and even has two beauties at his side?! He’s a complete winner! What was all of my hard work even for then?

His expression became cold. Your cultivation might be higher than mine, but that doesn’t mean you can defend against my unique secret arts. He didn’t hesitate at all and immediately used his secret techniques. A black thing resembling an evil spirit appeared out of thin air. It looked like a malicious soul summoned straight from hell itself! It threw itself at Zu An.

Even before it made contact, just that sinister and insidious feeling was already able to affect other parties’ souls. Even though Sang Qien and Zheng Dan were both on guard, they felt fear from within their souls. This was a fear toward an unknown power that they were completely helpless against.

We’re finished! The two girls were both the best among their peers. They quickly deduced that it was a soul targeting attack. As long as one hadn’t reached the master rank and properly refined one’s soul,

there was a good chance that it was all over for them if they faced such an attack. No matter how high Zu An's cultivation was, there was no way he was at the master rank!

The two girls looked at Zu An. However, he was still extremely calm as he said, "Hmph! You think you can show off your insignificant talents in front of a real expert like me? Take this! Might of the Celestial Drake!"

A seal appeared in his hand, and he threw it straight into the terrifying monster's head. Then, that evil spirit screamed miserably. It instantly vanished like snow before a blistering hot sun.

"Pfft!" Chi Tu vomited a mouthful of greenish blood. Then, he collapsed to the ground, paralyzed.

The ghost was something he had cultivated with his very life. Now that it had been destroyed, even if he managed to prevent himself from dying, his cultivation would immediately drop to less than half of its former peak.

"It's you!" Chi Tu finally realized what had happened. When he sensed that terrifying power again, he recalled that it was precisely the same power that had wounded one of his ghost puppets earlier.

"If you want to live, then tell me properly, why did you cast your disgusting skill on my friend?" Zu An took a step forward and instantly appeared in front of Chi Tu, speaking while looking down at him.

Chapter 949: Huge Secret

"Great one, spare me, spare me!" The black-clad Chi Tu immediately begged for mercy. In their line of work, strength was everything.

Sang Qien's jaw dropped. She looked at Zu An as if she were staring at a legend. Everything had happened way too quickly! The mysterious black-clad man had been incredibly intimidating just a moment ago, yet this enemy they had felt absolute despair toward had been instantly defeated by Zu An?

Also, what was that move, Might of the Celestial Drake? It looked really majestic, how handsome... She suddenly felt like she understood her sister-in-law a bit more now. No wonder Zheng Dan couldn't stop herself from liking this man! He really was incredibly attractive at certain times.

Zu An didn't know that Sang Qien's impression of him was actually changing. He only continued to stare at Chi Tu and asked, "What's your name?"

"This humble one is called Gui Li," the black clad man replied obsequiously, doing his best to smile, but it only looked even uglier than if he were crying. He didn't look anything like someone capable and powerful.

"Hm?" Zu An's expression turned cold. Then, the other party screamed miserably as his arm was snapped in half. Furthermore, Zu An instantly sealed all of his acupoints, preventing him from retaliating in the slightest.

"Chi Tu, if you dare lie to me again, what I break next won't just be your hand." Zu An suddenly looked at him.

Chi Tu was absolutely horrified. There aren't many people who know my name; how does he know that? He had been scared of the other party's purification abilities to begin with. Now that his real identity had been exposed, the pressure Zu An gave him became even more profound and mysterious. He didn't dare to hide a single thing anymore. "Great one, please forgive me, please forgive me! I've used Gui Li as an alias for so long that I almost forgot my own name! I didn't intend to fool you!"

Zu An didn't comment on that and said, "You still haven't answered my question."

Chi Tu quickly replied, "This is what happened. A silk merchant sought me out and paid me a hefty sum to target a certain person..."

"Ah!" Zheng Dan cried out in alarm and quickly asked, "Was that merchant surnamed Hu?"

"I don't know his surname; he didn't want anyone to know his true identity either." Chi Tu noticed that Zu An's expression had changed, and he quickly added, "But I have seen what he looks like...!" Then, he gave them a rough description of what the man looked like.

Zheng Dan's face fell as she exclaimed, "It was him after all!"

"What's the situation?" Zu An asked.

Zheng Dan explained the situation, and together with Chi Tu's confession, it wasn't difficult to determine the truth. Zheng Dan had brought the Zheng clan's business to the capital, which was naturally bad news for the capital's local silk merchants.

The other party had used all kinds of methods to try and push out the Zheng clan's merchants, but Zheng Dan was experienced in that field. She had managed the Zheng clan's businesses back in Brightmoon City, and she had even secretly grasped the city's most powerful gang. It wasn't anything difficult to solve at all. In the end, she had countered every move they made. Not only were those competitors forced to return without achieving anything, she had grown their market share larger and larger.

The other side had the capital's local tyrants backing them, so for better or for worse, they had someone to rely on. As such, some strings had been pulled in court to suppress and restrict Zheng Dan. But no matter how low the Sang clan had fallen, they were still powerful officials in court. Sang Qien had felt apologetic toward this sister-in-law of hers, as she had been widowed while still so young. That was why they obviously had to help the Zheng clan in this business matter.

Seeing that not even political methods worked, the rival merchants had turned their attention toward nefarious methods and sought out Chi Tu. Such things were a walk in the park for someone like Chi Tu, so he naturally played along. With his cultivation and methods being mysterious, even if something happened, he thought, it would just be that ghost puppet dying at worst. He himself wouldn't be caught. How could he have expected that he would be found out so quickly?

"I've already spoken about everything I know! I hope the great one can be generous and let this humble one go, since nothing really happened to this young miss... This humble one will immediately leave the city, and I'll never harm another person ever again!" Chi Tu pleaded. He actually found it truly strange. How did the other party find him so quickly? But unfortunately, everything had changed too quickly, and the pressure Zu An gave off right now was too much. He didn't dare to say a single protest.

As for what he said about how he'd never harm anyone ever again, those were empty words. Those who cultivated these kinds of techniques needed blood and corpses. How could they not harm people?

Zu An obviously knew that as well. He said to Sang Qien, "Little Qien, bring this guy back to the manor. I'll leave the rest to your Sang clan. There should be no issues with that, right?" He was going to leave the capital soon, and Zheng Dan was the Sang clan's daughter-in-law in name. It was better for them to deal with it.

"Don't worry, our Sang clan isn't so easily bullied!" Sang Qien gave Chi Tu a hateful look. She was clearly still upset about being scared before.

Zu An nodded. There were many who had become destitute and homeless from Sang Hong's methods under the emperor's instigation. They were more than skilled in this field of work. Furthermore, the authentic proof was right there. If they couldn't even deal with something like this, Sang Hong and Sang Qien really wouldn't deserve their reputation. He intended to bring Zheng Dan away so she could get some proper rest. She had been tormented quite badly for some time and really needed to recover.

However, Chi Tu screamed, "Don't send me to the manor! I... I have a huge secret to tell you all!" He knew that the court suppressed evil arts. Once discovered, he would immediately suffer the most severe punishment. If he was handed to the government, death would be a better ending.

"A huge secret?" Zu An sneered. He didn't give it much attention at all. What kind of secret could somebody like this know?

When he saw that Zu An didn't believe him, Chi Tu immediately cried out, "It has something to do with Cloudcenter Commandery's duke!"

Zu An had already started walking away, but his footsteps stopped when he heard Chi Tu's plea. He wouldn't care that much if it were anyone else, but his mission this time was precisely to investigate the disappearance of Cloudcenter Duke. How could he let this clue go? He turned around and asked, "Oh? Do tell. What happened to the Cloudcenter Duke?"

"You have to agree to let me go first." Chi Tu immediately knew that the other party was interested in his bargaining chip.

Zu An didn't yield and sneered. "What kind of person is the Cloudcenter Duke? You only know your evil arts that you can't even show in public, so how could you have anything to do with him? Little Qien, make sure you deliver him to the officials properly."

Sang Qien immediately agreed. "Alright." Then, she walked forward to bring him away.

Chi Tu panicked and exclaimed, "I really do know! I encountered a seriously injured and dying person, and I learned that he was Cloudcenter Duke's trusted aide! He came to the capital to issue an accusation, but he ended up being attacked midway!"

Zu An was already seventy to eighty percent convinced when he heard those words. "And where is that guard?"

"His injuries were too serious and he already died," Chi Tu said, his expression a bit strange.

"You probably refined his soul, I reckon." Zu An sneered.

Chi Tu quickly explained, "Cultivators in my field indeed need human souls, but that guard was already fatally injured and beyond saving. I merely helped free him from his struggles a bit earlier. I only learned about this tremendous secret from his soul."

Sang Qien and Zheng Dan both shivered. Even your soul would be enslaved after you died? That really was a life worse than death...

"Speak, what kind of secret is that? If it is important enough, I'll let you live," Zu An said indifferently.

"No way, you have to make a vow! Otherwise, what if you go back on your word afterward? I won't be able to do a thing about that!" This matter was related to his very life, so Chi Tu had no choice but to remain unyielding.

Zu An fell silent. Sang Qien and Zheng Dan quickly advised him not to make the vow, because this was no joking matter.

But Zu An had his own plans. He said, "Fine. I, Zhao Zhi, vow that as long as your secret has value, I will spare your life. Otherwise, Zhao Zhi will suffer the wrath of the heavens."

Sang Qien and Zheng Dan were about to stop him, but their eyes immediately widened when they heard the vow. Zheng Dan bit her lip to prevent herself from laughing. Sang Qien instead scoffed inwardly. This man was always up to no good after all.

Chi Tu was shocked and exclaimed, "So you were King Qi's heir!" King Qi's reputation was well known throughout the world. The name of his son was no secret.

Zu An sneered. "What, do you think anyone would dare try to impersonate this young master?"

"Not at all! This humble one has no such intention..." Chi Tu immediately said with an apologetic smile. He thought to himself, No wonder this guy is so powerful even though he's still so young! He was raised with a sea of resources ever since he was little, so of course it's not something my petty cultivation can compare to. The two beauties who willingly followed the other man only further convinced him. What man other than King Qi's heir could have such charm?

When he saw that Zu An had made such a serious vow, Chi Tu didn't hesitate any longer. "That guard came to the capital to inform the court that the Cloudcenter Duke didn't go missing back then, but rather had his life conspired against."

"By whom?" Zu An quickly asked.

Chi Tu hesitated, but he still answered, "He was harmed by his own younger brother, Jian Taiding."

Zu An was shocked. Even though everyone had suspected that Cloudcenter Duke's disappearance was fishy, they would never have expected it to involve his own blood-related brother. This matter would definitely cause a huge uproar once it was released. He didn't dare to treat it carelessly and asked, "Do you have proof?"

"That guard seemed to have carried some evidence on him, but it was taken by the assassin," Chi Tu replied.

Zu An asked for a few more details. Unfortunately, the refined soul had suffered damage to its memory. A lot of the information was fragmented and there wasn't much that remained useful.

"Can I leave?" Chi Tu gave him a hopeful look.

Zu An didn't pay him any attention and instead said to Sang Qien, "Bring him back to the Sang clan and lock him up. Don't send him to the court yet."

Chi Tu's expression suddenly changed. "Zhao Zhi, you dare to go back on your word? Are you not scared of the wrath of heaven?!"

Zu An replied with a smile, "What does a vow Zhao Zhi made have to do with me?"

Chapter 950: Rigorous Schemes

"What... the hell?" Chi Tu was someone who roamed the underworld scene too, so he quickly realized that the one in front of him wasn't Zhao Zhi. He was shocked and furious, exclaiming, "You dare to impersonate King Qi's heir? King Qi would never let you go if he found out!"

You have successfully trolled Chi Tu for +666 +666 +666...

Zu An chuckled. "I've already offended King Qi in more ways that you can imagine anyway, so this won't make much of a difference."

Chi Tu was stunned when he heard that Zu An didn't even fear King Qi. He quickly added, "But you made a vow! Heavenly dao isn't something you can disrespect. You'll suffer retribution for going back on your word!"

You have successfully trolled Chu Tu for +888 +888 +888...

Zu An sighed and said, "I'm seriously amazed. How can someone like you who lives in this kind of world not know that there are loopholes to vows?" After collecting a good amount of Rage points, Zu An knocked him out.

Fuck you! Which one of us is really the evil one here?! Chi Tu thought before he fainted.

Sang Qien was about to drag Chi Tu back, but she hesitated and stopped midway. Zu An couldn't help but chuckle when he noticed that, asking, "Little Qien, is there something you want to say?"

Sang Qien then said, "What Chi Tu said was actually true. You can't mess with heavenly dao. Making a vow to the heavens is something extremely serious. Deliberately making loopholes in your vows like that might incur the rejection of heavenly dao. It'll be really bad if you end up suffering from retribution as a result."

Zu An laughed and said, "Little Qien, I didn't expect you to worry so much about me."

"Hmph, do whatever you want. I don't care." Sang Qien harrumphed and left, blushing.

Zu An then replied, "Perhaps you might see this heavenly dao as a selfless and omniscient existence, but I don't share that notion. The heavens aren't kind; they merely view all things as the same. In the eyes of the world, good and evil don't exist; the heavens are only interested in maintaining the proper operation

of the world. They won't favor someone a bit more just because they followed the rules well, and they likewise won't punish someone just because they tricked someone evil."

"The heavens aren't kind..." Sang Qien and Zheng Dan were shocked. They both began to think those words over. They felt as if they seemed to have gained something, but that feeling quickly vanished.

"What you just said seems to be quite profound, but there is one point where I beg to differ on." Sang Qien was a smart girl. She soon thought of something and said, "The virtuous who do good works will often be repaid well in return, while on the contrary, the evil almost always suffer bad endings."

Zu An explained with a smile, "That's nothing more than a result of some of society's customary conventions and rules. It doesn't say anything about the will of the world itself."

Sang Qien was stunned. She was just about to say something in return, but she suddenly realized that Zu An's answer did make some sense.

Zu An said, "Even though the natural law of the world is sacred, it will only punish those who clearly violate their vows. I believe that you've all had a misunderstanding because you worship and fear the heavenly dao too much, so you haven't thought about how there's actually a lot of room for manipulation in between. For example, I've already encountered many bad people, and this kind of thing has happened all the time. Over time, I've picked it up as well."

When he first picked up on that fact, he even felt as if making a vow in this world was pretty much useless. But when he really thought about it, he figured that if someone who was proficient in law transmigrated, these vows might really become extremely important.

His previous world was also a society that operated on contracts, but many people would already be thinking about how to break the contract as soon as it was made. Those lawyers' jobs were precisely to think of ways to plug up all kinds of holes.

Zu An thought to himself that if he encountered a true professional, he would never dare to falsify a vow.

Zheng Dan spoke up and said, "Ah Zu, even though what you said makes a bit of sense, no one knows what's really going on with heavenly dao. If you always walk along the river bank, your shoes will probably get wet. It would be way too late if you slipped up one day and incurred heavenly punishment! After all, there are many people in this world who care about your safety."

Zu An was stunned. Only now did he realize that his attitude might have become a bit extreme. After all, nothing in the world was a hundred percent guaranteed. He broke out into cold sweat when he thought of that. He quickly thanked Zheng Dan. "Thank you for reminding me... Or else I might really screw myself over one day."

Zheng Dan had thought that Zu An would persist with his previous attitude at first, but when she heard his agreement, she immediately had a big smile on her face.

Sang Qien rolled her eyes. These adulterers really are too much! Wasn't I saying the same thing not too long ago? And yet that idiot didn't treat it as a big deal at all. But my sister-in-law repeats those words and he immediately agrees? Do you really have to go that far to annoy me...

...

After they returned to the Sang manor, Sang Hong rushed over after hearing the news. When he saw the unconscious black robed man, he was shocked and asked, "What's going on?"

Sang Qien gave him a rough summary of what happened. Sang Hong's expression became ashen and he said, "The Hu clan has gone too far. Do they think our Sang clan is so easily bullied?!"

Zu An knew that half of Sang Hong's feelings at the moment were true anger, while the other half was for Zheng Dan and her Zheng clan to see. Of course, he wouldn't expose Sang Hong at this point. He said, "Respected uncle, I fear I'll have to trouble you with the Hu clan's matters after this."

"But of course. This humble one has bided my time for so long that many people seem to have already forgotten what I'm capable of," Sang Hong said coldly.

Zu An had personally seen how easily Sang Hong had manipulated and suppressed the Chu clan's strength. He obviously didn't have to worry about a trifling Hu clan. He added, "But there is something else that's troublesome right now, which is that there's someone claiming that Cloudcenter Duke's younger brother plotted against his older brother. How should we report this to the emperor to get the most out of it?"

Sang Hong remained quiet for some time and said, "In my opinion, it might be better to not report it."

"Why is that?" That was actually what Zu An had been thinking as well, but he hadn't made his decision yet.

Sang Hong said seriously, "Do you think that by sending us to investigate Cloudcenter Duke's case, his majesty is actually interested in knowing the truth?"

Zu An shook his head and replied, "He only wants to borrow this as a pretense to fully bring down the Yu clan."

Sang Qien's expression changed slightly, but she wasn't too surprised when she heard Zu An's analysis. After all, her father and Zu An had mentioned the emperor several times, and yet neither of them were particularly respectful. However, if these words were to be heard by a third party, they would immediately be accused of being utterly disgraceful. Looks like father has already decided for the Sang clan to fully side with Zu An.

Sang Hong spoke up and said, "Indeed. So in that case, his majesty will instead be unhappy if we deliver this man's testimony, and he'll even get annoyed that we're being busybodies. Regardless of how he reacts, we'll be putting ourselves in a bad situation."

"Then respected uncle's intention is...?" Zu An asked.

"Cripple any abilities he has and break his limbs. Lock him up in the manor, and both Qien'er and Dan'er will watch over him. Once we return from Cloudcenter Commandery, we'll make our decision whether to use him or not depending on how the situation plays out," Sang Hong said coldly.

Zu An inwardly clicked his tongue. Sang Hong was a ruthless man after all! If it were me, I would probably have just decided to give Chi Tu an easy death.

“Little sister Qien is going to remain in the capital? I was hoping that she’d come with us and help us with our work.” Zu An was actually a bit disappointed.

Sang Hong had an ambiguous smile on his face. Does this fella want Little Qien too? But he didn’t expose Zu An and said, “Worthy junior might not know about the court’s rules, but to prevent important subjects from having disloyal hearts, family members must remain in the capital.”

“So that’s why.” Zu An looked disappointed.

Off to the side, Zheng Dan’s face heated up a bit. Even she could tell that Zu An was up to no good.

Sang Qien rolled her eyes.

...

After locking up Chi Tu, Zu An saw that the sky was already getting dark, so he got up to say his goodbyes. However, Sang Hong held him back instead and said that he wanted to share a few drinks.

A while later, everyone in the group was starting to become a little buzzed. They somehow ended up talking about Sang Qian, and Sang Hong couldn’t help but weep. After a long time had passed, he said, “I don’t know how long it’ll be before we’ll return from this trip... If Zheng Dan gives birth to Qian’er’s posthumous child, our Sang clan will have hope.”

Zu An scoffed inwardly. Did you go crazy? The two of them didn’t even properly complete their wedding ceremony, so how could they have a child? But he suddenly realized something. This old man was implying something else!

He was about to ask Sang Hong what he meant, but the other party had already collapsed from drinking too much. Sang Hong lay on the table, mumbling nonsense.

“Big brother Zu, pardon my father. He drank too much.” Sang Qien’s complexion wasn’t so good either, but she still got up to help her father. “I’ll bring him back to his room. Sister-in-law, I’ll have to trouble you to accompany him for a while,” she said, and left with her father afterward.

Because of the alcohol, Zheng Dan’s cheeks were red. She harrumphed under her breath, “Who makes their sister-in-law accompany another man? What the heck am I even doing...”

The maids had already been chased off by Sang Hong a while before, so it was only the two of them left in the room. Zu An no longer had so many misgivings and moved over, wrapping his arm around her waist. He remarked, “When did I become an outsider?”

Zheng Dan harrumphed and quickly pushed him away. “We’re still in the Sang clan! Behave yourself.”

...

Meanwhile, in another room, Sang Qien tossed her father onto a chair in annoyance, asking, “Are you really that impatient, father?”

Sang Hong opened his eyes, but there wasn’t even a trace of drunkenness in his expression. He said, “I have no choice. This trip to Cloudcenter Commandery will take at least half a year. If she got pregnant after that, not even a fool would believe that it was Qian’er’s posthumous child.”

"I just can't help but feel as if we're letting my brother down, though." Sang Qien bit her red lips, her expression extremely conflicted.

Sang Hong harrumphed. "Having no sons is the worst situation. Continuing the Sang clan's legacy is what's most important."

Sang Qien began to panic as well. She finally voiced her misgivings. "But even if sister-in-law got pregnant, the child would have no blood relation to the Sang clan! In that case, why don't we adopt a child? It's better than doing something humiliating like this."

Sang Hong gave her a calm look. After a momentary pause, he said, "There is a way to make the child have something to do with the Sang clan..."