

SOVEREIGN OF THE THREE REALMS

Chapter 6: Steward Jiang Zheng's worries

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The Jiang duke's household was in dire straits in the face of such brutal competition.

There was only half a year left until the Hidden Dragon Trials, and the previous Jiang Chen's performance could only be summed up with one word, "disastrous". There were numerous examinations that needed to be completed prior to the trials, but quite a few hadn't even been started.

Even without the incident at the Rites of Heavenly Worship, Jiang Chen only had a thirty to forty percent chance of passing the trials. He was one of the hot contenders for family demotion.

However, the Jiang Chen now was not disheartened at all. In fact, he was rather excited.

"The strong reign supreme. It seems that this rule of survival applies from those in higher positions to the common masses down below with no exception. I could not train in my past life and thus did not have the opportunity to experience this, but now that I'm living in the most glorious years of life, I cannot miss this!"

In his past life, he held the exalted position of the son of the Celestial Emperor. No one dared offend him. However, his yin constitution prevented him from training. It was impossible to even consider concealing his identity and engaging others in combat incognito.

In this life, he could finally train to his heart's content and relish in the glories of ascending to the peak of the martial way. This was the stage he enjoyed!

“Since I’ve promised Eastern Lu that I will enter the palace in three days to diagnose the princess, I need to make good use of these three days, not to mention my current identity as one of the candidates for the Hidden Dragon Trials. There’s still six months until the final examinations for the Trials. As the heir to Jiang Han dukedom, even though the position of duke doesn’t mean much, I should at least gain some face for that ‘cute’ old dad of mine, shouldn’t I? I can’t let old dad lose something like the dukedom.”

As he organized his thoughts, Jiang Chen realized that time was of the essence.

One had to give it to them, the people who had carried out the caning sure knew their stuff. Forget about the past Jiang Chen, even practitioners who were twice as strong would be hard pressed to survive that ordeal.

His misfortune was this Jiang Chen’s good fortune and new body, but this body was quite severely injured. If he didn’t get a grip on his injuries, forget about entering the palace in three days to cure the princess, he would miss even the Trials’ small test at the end of the month.

The Hidden Dragon Trials held a small test every month and all the scores were cumulative. A lot of homework would descend if one missed the test in one month.

The prior Jiang Chen already owed a ton of homework. If this continued, he would probably be failed out of the Trials before the final examinations.

This was exactly what Jiang Chen didn’t want to happen.

In his past life, as the son of the Celestial Emperor, he had spent millions of years researching and refining dao of alchemy. Although he was utterly worthless for martial cultivation, he was a renowned alchemy master in the world of alchemy. Many alchemy masters had solicited his teachings in the

dao of alchemy. If this was his past life, any random pill would enable him to fully recover and be roaring with vitality.

But that was his past life, there was no way that this life could measure up to that.

It was a good thing that Jiang Chen had been in charge of the Tianlang Library for millions of years and read countless scrolls and books. His knowledge knew no bounds, spanning from common sense to the ways of the gods themselves.

Handling these types of injuries was a small thing.

After a night of rest, Jiang Chen thought briefly the next morning, took out his brush and ink, and wrote out a list.

“Jiang Zheng!” He yelled towards the door.

The duke of Jiang Hang had appointed Jiang Zheng to be Jiang Chen’s personal steward, in charge of taking care of Jiang Chen’s day to day life and fulfilling his daily needs. Jiang Zheng had received his due share of tongue lashings for the incident at the Autumn Crane.

He had been on tenterhooks all night long. They said that a servant would rather die than see his master humiliated, so by all accounts, Jiang Zheng should have died for neglecting his duties.

But he just couldn’t bring himself to accept that fact. He had been quite diligent in serving this young master, but the young duke just really wouldn’t shape up.

The servants and butlers of other dukedoms lived a good life whilst serving their masters, eating and drinking only the best and being feted wherever they went. But Jiang Zheng’s master was an odd one, alternating between whiling the time away one day and throwing out crazy ideas the next.

To top it off, this young master always told Jiang Zheng to take the blame if anything went south.

Therefore, he had put out his fair share of fires and taken quite a bit of blame in the days that he had served Jiang Chen. Not only did Jiang Zheng feel a decided lack of increased status with his awarded position, but he rather felt that he was being worked to death.

Say for instance, money. This young master spent money as easily as breathing. If a friend were to get into a sticky situation today, he'd make it right with money. If another brother stirred up trouble tomorrow, he would again put it to rest with money.

Although the duke of Jiang Han was generous with his money, he could not keep up with the pace of the young master's spending. It was only mid month, yet the entire month's allowance had already been spent!

Thus, Jiang Zheng now only wanted to be left alone and count his blessings if it was peaceful and quiet. His head started to hurt as soon as he heard Jiang Chen's voice.

But he couldn't refuse his master's call.

"Young duke, your servant is incompetent and did not take care of you. Please punish your servant severely. Even if you withdrew your servant's job, your servant would not breathe a single ill word." Jiang Zheng immediately fell to the floor in a bow as soon as he entered.

The fluff of "incompetence" and "please punish severely" were just empty words. The duke of Jiang Han was not pursuing the matter further, which meant Jiang Zheng had successfully absolved all responsibility.

Even though this young duke was a good-for-naught and had no desire to advance in life, he didn't have the bad habit of being cruel towards his underlings.

If it was the previous Jiang Chen, he most likely would not have discerned the true meaning behind Jiang Zheng's words. But the Jiang Chen of today had experienced millions of years, had a good grasp of most matters, and was well versed in social dynamics.

A song's meaning could be gleaned from its melody. One could tell that steward Jiang Zheng had suffered too much at the hands of the previous Jiang Chen, and wanted to throw it all down and quit.

Jiang Chen didn't reveal the steward's intention and chuckled, "Jiang Zheng ah, my father had meant to award you riches and honor when he appointed you to me. Alas, you enjoyed no riches and honor during this time and have toiled ceaselessly to clean up after me and put out fires. I have noted your loyal service."

Jiang Zheng stared dazedly, what direction was the wind blowing in from today? Where did the young duke learn these words of comfort and warmth?

"Jiang Zheng, we've already run out of this month's allowance, right?" Jiang Chen did not wait for Jiang Zheng to respond and asked with a smile that, at the same time didn't seem to be a smile.

"Eh... um..." Jiang Zheng had never enjoyed such a thoughtful conversation and didn't know how to respond. He almost wanted to beat his chest and promise, don't worry about this young duke! I, Jiang Zheng, will find a way.

But a thought struck him, wait a second! If I make this promise, where on earth am I going to find money to fill this hole? The young duke's mouth is as sweet as sugar today, is this a new prank he's playing on me?

Jiang Zheng's guard came up in the span of a second and his wariness increased tenfold.

Jiang Chen gave a loud laugh upon seeing Jiang Zheng hesitate with lingering fear, "Jiang Zheng, this is the situation. I have a list here with some medicinal

ingredients on it. Go obtain a dosage for me from the Hall of Healing according to the amounts listed.”

Jiang Zheng dumbly accepted the list but didn't move. He had the list alright, but what about the money? The ingredients at the Hall of Healing weren't free now, were they?

It's not like your family owned the Hall of Healing.

“Jiang Zheng, pretend that we aren't master and servant, but just two friends casually chatting. As a steward yourself, at what level of experience and accomplishment would you say makes for an ideal steward? Or how about, what makes someone the best steward to you?”

Best steward?

Forget about being the best, Jiang Zheng wanted to cry. Out of all the body servants to the 108 dukes, Jiang Zheng would be enormously happy if he wasn't ranked last.

“Why the long face, tell me what you're thinking,” Jiang Chen encouraged.

Jiang Zheng paused, swallowed and gathered his courage. “Do you really want me to say?”

“Speak. You will be rewarded if you speak well!”

Having been rewarded with too many bounced checks before, Jiang Zheng didn't dare put any stock in the thought of a reward. Jiang Chen actually handed out rewards quite often, but even more frequently did something like rewarding you with a thousand silver one second, but borrowing two thousand off you the next.

But the mention of the best, the most admired and the most ideal stewards caused Jiang Zheng's thoughts to race.

Frankly speaking, even though followers of the noble and powerful were not themselves noble or powerful, they still had dreams and career aspirations.

Some had even written it into a limerick...

Jiang Zheng drew courage from who knew where upon seeing Jiang Chen's serious expression and said, "Young duke, some limericks are quite popular in the capital. They describe people in jobs like mine."

"Oh? Tell me about it." Jiang Chen grew curious.

"The limerick goes -- Delicacies from land and sea, dressed in fine attire and riding well groomed horses, a manor and surrounding lands, home filled with gold and silver.

Conversing with the powerful, befriending the noble, wives coexisting in harmony, doting on sons and grandchildren.

Regulars at the Autumn Crane, financier of the Garden of Returning Spring, whoring with dukes and princes, drinking at the same table with esteemed officials..."

Jiang Chen applauded in hearty laughter as Jiang Zheng recited around four stanzas in one go. "Not bad, not bad. Quite interesting. Garden of the Returning Spring, that must be a land of temptation?"

Jiang Zheng joined his master in laughter but was secretly full of disdain. It's not like you haven't been to those places, what are you acting all innocent for!

"Jiang Zheng, I have observed you for a period of time and have confidence in your abilities. Now, if you can complete this mission, and it won't take long, I will fulfill the dreams of wealth and honor you've had during this time. At that time, you will surely feel you are the most successful, most successful steward!"

“Mission? What mission?” Jiang Zheng gave a start. His first thought was that he had to be on his guard as this young master had something up his sleeve again.

“Why, the list in your hand of course. Take good care of it, it’s a treasure that money can’t buy. Take it to the Hall of Healing and ask to speak to the person in charge.”

“What do I want with the person in charge? I can ask anyone in the Hall to grab these ingredients for me. The person in charge of the Hall of Healing is an arrogant, stuck up type. It’s not easy to get a meeting with him.” Jiang Zheng growled in a low, muffled voice.

“Heh heh, just do as I say. If the person in charge won’t see you, just tell them that they’ll surely regret it later. Even if they cling to your legs and beg you in the future, they will only taste the bitterness of regret.”

Jiang Zheng almost wanted to feel the young duke’s forehead. Was the young duke burning up with a fever of idiocy because of his caning? Was he sleep talking?

Jiang Zheng was well acquainted with how high the minimum requirements were and how arrogant those at the Hall of Healing were. He was reminded every time he went to obtain medicine for his master. The people there simply didn’t have the time to waste in idle chatter.

“Jiang Zheng, you must be inwardly cursing my name, thinking that I’m talking nonsense. You must think that I’m sending you on a fool’s errand by telling you to fetch medicine ingredients without giving you the silver to do so. Let me tell you something, the list you hold in your hands is no ordinary list. It’s a pill recipe that has been lost since ancient times. Even ten million silver would not be enough to purchase this recipe at an auction house.”

“Pill recipe?” Jiang Zheng’s face morphed into a smile that was uglier than crying. “Young duke, please don’t laugh at your humble servant’s expense. Since when did our Jiang family possess an ancient pill remedy? Do you feel that your humble servant has not yet reached the limits of his emotional capacity and wish for him to know how it feels to be driven into a corner?”

Jiang Zheng laughed until his eyes were red. He really was about to cry.