

Immortal 1301

Chapter 1301: Harsh Interrogation

When Xu Yu voiced those words, not only the expressions of the people in the room, but also the expressions of the officials in the court changed. None of them had expected him to have such powerful proof.

Many people even felt a bit jealous. After all, according to what Xu Yu was saying, Yu Yanluo and Zu An had been extremely close, and the way they referred to each other was consequently extremely intimate. They couldn't have expected the number one beauty, whom countless individuals pursued and yet had only been shown disdain, would ultimately end up in the arms of another man.

Just what kind of ridiculous skill does this Zu An brat have? He doesn't have any family background, nor is his cultivation that outstanding. His looks can only be considered passable. How did he obtain Yu Yanluo's favor?

Bi Linglong was also jealous. After all, Yu Yanluo was way too famous, and all of this was happening because Zu An had saved her. At that moment, in some absurd way, she felt as if she had caught her own man having an affair, and yet she was helping him clean up...

Pei Mianman also shot Zu An an unhappy look, thinking, This guy disappeared suddenly without saying a thing, and sure enough, he was having fun with another girl. Hmph, I shouldn't have waited for you all worried day after day.

When he saw the continuous Rage points coming in, Zu An felt a headache. He quickly said, "I don't understand what Sir Xu is saying. The Snake race territory is so far away, and even the forbidden Great Snowy Mountain stands between them. If there really was some information from that side, how would you be able to receive the message so quickly?"

He had the Wind Fire Wheels, and even then, he'd had to rely on a fortuitous encounter to return. How could a spy be faster than him?

"Perhaps Sir Zu might not know, since you are an official who came from the borderlands," Xu Yu said with a chuckle. He hadn't expected to be able to return the favor so quickly after being mocked. He continued, "Our spies in the fiend races obviously know that the distance is great. If some urgent matter arises, the trip there and back takes far too long, which can delay military affairs. That is why the researchers at the Royal Academy came up with a simplified version of the recording mirror. It can directly send written characters, and we can immediately receive it on our side.

"That way, activating the recording mirror does not require such a tremendous amount of ki stones, and it does not create the spatial ripples that will catch others' attention when activated, which ensures the safety of those spies.

"The identities of those spies are all recorded in the Embroidery House's top secret archives, so their loyalty is unquestionable. His majesty and Commander Zhuxie Chixin can personally confirm that."

A commotion broke out when the courtiers heard the answer. Those who weren't high enough in rank quickly asked what was going on, and the big shots began to explain the relevant systems.

Zu An's expression changed as well. He knew there was a top secret archive in the Embroidery House, a place only Zhuxie Chixin alone could enter. Not even Golden Token Envoys had the authority to go there. He hadn't expected that place to actually be hiding information on their spies.

After he heard what Xu Yu said about the simplified recording mirror, he thought to himself that it seemed similar to a telegram from his world. This world had actually used a different method to achieve the same result! He sighed, thinking that it was all because he didn't truly belong to this world. He didn't know many of the common things the people of this world knew, so sometimes, he had to suffer like this.

"If this kind of proof exists, why did you not bring it out sooner?" Bi Linglong asked. She had noticed that Zu An fell silent and thought he had been disturbed, so she spoke up to help him out of the situation while also buying him some time to think of countermeasures.

Xu Yu replied, "Reporting to the crown princess. The reason why it was not brought out was out of consideration for the spy's safety. These spies have taken great risk to live in a foreign land, doing things that could easily result in execution. If they are exposed, they often meet incredibly cruel ends."

He had initially thought that the other evidence was already enough to condemn Zu An, but he hadn't expected that Golden Token Eleven to suddenly appear. Then, Zu An himself had actually appeared. Helpless to do anything else, he could only bring out his trump card.

At the same time, however, he had his own worries. Even though he was loyal to the emperor, if he offended the crown princess, once the crown prince rose to the throne, his prospects might not be that great. He secretly snuck King Qi a look. Should I maybe put some of my eggs in different baskets...

The others immediately began to discuss excitedly among each other. They felt great respect for the spies who had infiltrated the fiend races.

Zu An frowned. He said unenthusiastically, "Aren't Sir Xu's claims rather unrealistic? From what I know, the fiend races were defeated back then, and thus strongly reject humans now. There might be some races where human spies might be able to hide, but a fiend race like the Snake race has quite distinctive traits. How could there be a human spy who could hide there without being discovered?"

He had been thinking about the Snake race territory the entire time. He was sure that there were no humans there. After all, those who could hear what Yu Yanluo called him would have had to be quite close.

With Zu An taking the lead, the Eastern Palace's officials all spoke up for him. After all, the question was completely reasonable and fair.

Xu Yu looked at Zu An with an ambiguous expression, and said, "Sir Zu seems to understand the Snake race quite well. Could it be that you visited them not too long ago?"

Zu An cursed him inwardly for being an old fox. This guy was ready to accuse him at every turn. He retorted, "Has Sir Xu never heard of the phrase, 'I've eaten pork, but have never seen a pig run'? I am the crown prince's chamberlain, after all. In order to not let down his majesty's expectations or the crown prince's studies, I've needed to learn all kinds of knowledge. After all, the fiend races are

humanity's worst enemy. The crown prince will definitely have to deal with these matters in the future, so I've studied them extensively."

Based on Zu An's tone, it was almost as if the crown prince had already been decided on as the one to take the throne. King Qi's face twitched a bit when he heard that. He thought, Sometimes I want to work with this kid, but sometimes I really do want to just kill him already.

On the contrary, the Eastern Palace's officials all nodded in agreement. The Imperial Secretariat's Right Confidential Assistant Bi Qi, who had always been watching from the sidelines, thought to himself, No wonder my daughter was so determined to protect him. This fellow is indeed a talent.

Xu Yu choked. Faced with the criticism of the Eastern Palace's officials, he could only explain, "Truth be told, this spy in the Snake race is not actually a human, but rather a Snake race individual that we have spent a large amount of resources to bring over to our side. This is something that the Chief Commander can find out if you investigate the archives."

Zu An's expression changed. He hadn't expected that, just as there were traitors from the human race, there were also traitors from the Snake race. Who could it be then? It couldn't be Elders White and Blue, could it?

Zhuxie Chixin nodded and said, "Indeed, that is the case. The reason why Sir Xu spoke ambiguously earlier was to protect the identity of that spy. This matter is top secret, so I hope everyone can keep it so. If news of it gets out, and something happens to that spy, our Embroidery House will have to invite all of you to the Embroidery House for a cup of tea."

Those present shivered when they heard that. Being invited to the Embroidery House to drink some tea was definitely not a good thing. Many of their colleagues had never come back out after being invited over.

Thornsun Duke Zhao Shu said, "The proof is now conclusive. It is proven that Zu An has been bewitched by lust and betrayed the imperial court. Is there anything else that needs to be said?"

Sang Hong felt incredible regret. If he had known about that before, he wouldn't have told Zu An to come back. He had thought that Zu An's return would be able to clear him of suspicion, but who would have thought that Xu Yu had that kind of proof?! That meant Zu An's return had just brought him right into a trap.

Just then, Pei Mianman spoke up. "Sir Xu's report mentioned that Sir Zu was being intimate with Yu Yanluo in the Snake Race, right?"

Xu Yu frowned slightly, not understanding why she was asking such a thing. However, he still replied, "That is correct."

"May I ask when Sir Xu received this piece of information?" Pei Mianman asked.

"Roughly a few days ago," Xu Yu said. His expression changed, because he knew what she was trying to say.

Sure enough, Pei Mianman said with a sneer, "Then Sir Xu's evidence is a bit contradictory. You claim Sir Zu was with Yu Yanluo in the Snake race territory, but as everyone knows, their territory is extremely far

from Cloudcenter Commandery. There's even the forbidden area, the Great Snowy Mountain, in between. Wouldn't a trip from the Snake race territory to Cloudcenter Commandery take at least half a year to complete? How could Zu An possibly appear here then?"

Bi Linglong nodded inwardly, giving her a look of praise. She thought to herself, Zu An being perverted is one thing, but the girl he picked is another. She had been so flustered because of her concern that she actually hadn't noticed that gap in logic.

Another round of chaos took hold of the court when those words were spoken. Even King Qi's officials were confused. After all, traveling from the Snake race territory back to Cloudcenter Commandery within a few days really wasn't possible.

Xu Yu was also at a loss for an explanation. However, he still braced himself and said, "Even though coming and going is impossible in just a few days, there might be some unknown hidden passage in Great Snowy Mountain."

To be honest, even he didn't even have any confidence in himself when he said that. After all, the Great Snowy Mountain was a place that was extremely famous. If there were any hidden passages, it would already have created a huge commotion.

He reacted quickly and thought of a suitable explanation. "The reason why Yu Yanluo was able to return to the Snake race so quickly was probably because she built some kind of transport formation in secret while staying in Cloudcenter Commandery. Zu An must have returned through a similar method.

"As this matter poses a risk to the safety of our entire country, this subject proposes for Zu An to be locked up and interrogated harshly in order to find out where exactly that transport formation might be. Firstly, this is to guard against a sudden attack from the fiend races, and secondly, we might be able to use that very formation to attack the fiend races."

Bi Linglong immediately said, "Your majesty, please reconsider. The fiend races are not all unified. Marshal Qin is currently at war against the fiend races, while the Snake race has historically not carried many grudges against the human race. If we act rashly and pressure the fiend races into unifying, that will not be a good thing for our dynasty."

The emperor nodded slightly. Then, he looked toward King Qi and asked, "What does King Qi think about this matter?"

Chapter 1302: Never Spoken a Lie

King Qi cursed the emperor for being an old fox. He clearly already has an idea, but he still wants me to say it.

Still, even though he couldn't figure out what kind of scheme the emperor was cooking up, Zu An had already destroyed his major plans again and again. The worst part was that the two of them had clearly formed an alliance recently, and yet his many years of preparation in Cloudcenter Commandery had still been ruined. King Qi was incredibly annoyed.

Because of that, a huge series of consequences had followed. Many of the core powers under him had needed to personally help their subordinates in maintaining cohesion. That was why, even though he knew the emperor definitely had ulterior motives, he still played along and said, "What the crown

princess said is not entirely without reason. Using a transport formation to reach the Snake race involves too much risk, making it highly unlikely.

“However, there is an absolutely vital need for us to gain control over any such transport formation. Otherwise, there will always be a risk of the fiend races invading our world.”

Bi Linglong panicked when she heard that. She replied, “But there is no conclusive proof stating the existence of a transport formation, let alone anything proving that Zu An really did come here through one!”

King Qi said with a smile, “What the crown princess says is true, but this matter is related to the future of the human race. This is a case where we would rather wrong the innocent than allow even a chance of the alternative to occur. Otherwise, untold numbers of common people might end up suffering. However, the crown princess needs not worry too much. As long as Zu An is innocent, those managing the case will naturally release him.”

Bi Linglong was now really, really scared. She wasn't a three-year-old child. They all knew that if Ah Zu got captured, he would be tortured cruelly. Even if he turned out to have been wrongly accused, he would probably still just rot to death in that cell. Who would let him out? Now that Zu An was being accused under the pretext of righteousness, though, anything she said at this point would sound selfish and narrow-minded.

However, she had no choice. She was about to defend herself when the emperor immediately said, “As expected, King Qi is aged and wise. In that case, Sir Xu, you will be the one to find out the truth.”

Sang Hong's heart hit rock bottom when he heard that. It's all over... The emperor himself already spoke, which means he doesn't want this to go on any further. The matter has already been decided. Ah Zu is finished! The Sang clan is also done for.

Suddenly, a cold and clear voice rang out. “Why is there a need to interrogate Sir Zu?”

Then, a beautiful figure dressed in white slowly walked in. She gave off a unique presence, as if she were a goddess from the nine firmaments above. And yet, there seemed to be a hint of secular anger in her eyes.

“Goddess Yan!”

“Sect Master Yan!”

Many people cried out. Those who had the qualifications to attend the meeting were all high-ranking officials. Many of them had witnessed Yan Xuehen's elegance before, and a lot of them were her fans. Even the emperor had consulted her on healthy lifestyle habits in the past.

Even if one were to say that the reason why people all chased after Yu Yanluo was because she was too beautiful, so they couldn't help but have some base motives, their attitude toward Yan Xuehen was entirely different. Her status was special, and she was too strong. Between that and her aloof and transcendent temperament, they all worshiped her like a goddess. They didn't dare to have the slightest evil thought about her.

Zu An clicked his tongue in disdain when he saw how even through a recording mirror, those officials couldn't even hide their expressions.

So Wifey Xuehen was actually this popular?

If I went over to hug her and give her a kiss, wouldn't the Rage points I could collect be astronomical?!

Of course, he gave up on that thought in the end. Forget about how inappropriate it was, Yan Xuehen could end up directly drawing a sword to cut him down.

After his initial excitement, King Qi couldn't help but ask, "Goddess Yan, why do you say that?"

Zu An was a bit surprised. He hadn't expected even someone like King Qi to be so polite to Yan Xuehen. It seemed he really had underestimated her popularity.

Yan Xuehen's red lips opened gently. She said, "I have managed to get a rough idea of what is happening from the conversations. However, Zu An was indeed wrongly accused."

Xu Yu's expression changed. He replied, "Has Sect Leader Yan perhaps made a mistake? We have conclusive evidence here!"

He understood just what kind of status and reputation this woman had. If such a person spoke out for Zu An, things would really get tricky. That was why he had to warn her not to make a mistake.

"I am not making a mistake. Sir Zu was with me this entire time," Yan Xuehen said. She spoke casually, but it was as if a huge bomb had been dropped into the middle of a calm lake.

"What?!" those present exclaimed in shock.

Forget about the ordinary subjects, even King Qi was stupefied. Furthermore, even the emperor subconsciously shifted his body forward.

Eunuch Wen was shocked. His majesty is always composed, so this kind of behavior is already tantamount to losing self-control! This Sect Master Yan must be really special to him!

Bi Linglong was also stupefied. Earlier, she had been cursing Zu An for even flirting with the capital's number one beauty, and yet now, the world's number one goddess also seemed to have been won over by him?

However, when she looked at Yan Xuehen's cold and clear expression, she quickly shook her head, concluding that she was definitely overthinking things. How could Goddess Yan possibly like this perverted guy?

Pei Mianman didn't really doubt Zu An's charm, but when she thought about how Yan Xuehen was Chu Chuyan's master, she also felt that it was impossible.

The others began to react too, one after another. They didn't get the impression that what Yan Xuehen said was intended in a romantic way, so they began to ask about what was going on.

Sang Hong cursed all of them for being old perverts. These old bastards had remained completely calm even when the discussion over Zu An's case reached its climax, and yet now, they were all worked up trying to gain Yan Xuehen's favor.

Yan Xuehen then said, "Sir Xu asked me to help catch Yu Yanluo, as well as the mysterious person who broke her out."

The others looked at Xu Yu. Xu Yu nodded slightly, indicating that it had indeed happened. At the same time, he began to feel regret. If he had known that it would end like this, he wouldn't have asked that of her before.

Yan Xuehen continued, "Later, I ended up in the Yu clan's mines, and then I ran into Zu An."

"He was the one who saved Yu Yanluo after all! Otherwise, why would he be there?!" Xu Yu screamed. He wasn't someone who easily lost his composure like that normally, but today, he felt as if he had been riding the most violent wave of his life up and down.

Zu An replied, "Didn't we already make it clear that I was investigating a case? What's the big deal with running into Sect Master Yan?"

King Qi frowned and said, "Sect Master Yan said that the two of you have been together all this time. What exactly happened?"

"There was something wrong with the Yu clan's mines. A spatial rift had opened inside, and some terrifying creatures came out..." Yan Xuehen gave the assembly an account of the Scaled Deathworms and the black fog.

Many officials nodded in agreement. One said, "Indeed. The guards in the mines also noticed a mysterious black fog. Those who came into contact with it either felt their bodies immediately decay or lost their minds."

Sang Hong's face darkened. He had received reports about that before too, but no one had treated it as a big deal. And yet, now that Sect Master Yan brought it up, those present were all kissing up to her.

Yan Xuehen then talked about how she had worked together with Zu An to defeat the terrifying Scaled Deathworm, as well as how they had completely destroyed the spatial crack. She said, "I was seriously injured then. If not for Sir Zu saving me, I might have died. Furthermore, if that spatial crack opened fully, countless terrifying creatures would have invaded our world. At that time, the common people would have been in a truly terrible situation. As such, not only has Zu An not committed any crimes, he has earned tremendous contributions. The court should be rewarding him greatly."

All the courtiers were powerful cultivators. Even through the recording mirror, they could sense that Yan Xuehen was much weaker than usual, and that she was injured. They all sighed in amazement at how strong that Scaled Deathworm was, considering the way even someone like her had been injured to that extent.

Xu Yu's entire body turned ice-cold. He hadn't expected there to be such a variable! He could only give one last push. "How long was Sect Master Yan with him for? According to the report of my spy, he was clearly together with Yu Yanluo..."

Yan Xuehen gave him a cold look and said, "I already said that I was with him all this time. As a consequence of destroying that spatial crack, the entire mine collapsed. We were also trapped inside... and we only managed to return just now. Everything I have spoken is the truth. If you do not believe me, I can swear a vow to the heavens. You can also invite the libationer to question my heart if you so wish."

Zu An chuckled inwardly. This woman looked as pure and innocent as a little white flower, but she was actually full of tricks inside. Everything she had said was indeed true, but some key components were missing. Furthermore, because she had emphasized a specific perspective, it had achieved an entirely different result.

Sure enough, those present in the court cried out in support.

“There is no need for that at all!”

“Exactly! Everyone knows how noble and lofty the goddess is. She has never spoken a lie.”

“Of course we trust Goddess Yan!”

“Zu An is a hero of the human race; he ought to be conferred another noble title!”

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Bi Linglong now had a big smile on her face. She hadn't expected that Ah Zu would not only make it through this situation alive, but also benefit greatly! I should find a chance to properly express my thanks to Sect Master Yan in the future.

I guess we really have neglected the hidden sects in recent years. I'll prepare some generous gifts and bring them to White Jade Sect.

Pei Mianman sighed in relief. She thought to herself, As expected of Chuyan's master, she acted out of consideration for her disciple's husband after all.

Wait, then she absolutely can't know about me and Ah Zu! Otherwise, if she gets upset and tries to bring justice for her disciple, there's no one in Cloudcenter Commandery who can stop a grandmaster!

There were some clans that were delighted, and others that were worried. Xu Yu knew that it was all over from the sound of discussions around him. He felt his throat fill up, and a mouthful of blood emerged from his mouth. Then, his vision darkened and he fainted out of anger.

Chapter 1303: New Noble Title

“Sir Xu, what's wrong? Sir Xu?”

Xu Yu's colleagues in Cloudcenter's officialdom were all greatly alarmed. They quickly moved over to support him. Compared to before, however, when they all seemed to be of the same opinion, there were far fewer of them. That was just how hypocritical the world of bureaucracy was. People could already tell that his accusation of misconduct had failed, which meant there was nothing good awaiting him.

The most important part was that Zu An now had such a powerful backer, Yan Xuehen. Paired with his other identity as the crown princess' pet, he was already practically unstoppable. There didn't seem to be any hope for Xu Yu to make a comeback.

Zu An, of course, didn't feel a shred of sympathy. If he had lost instead, his end would only have been more miserable.

In the mirror, the emperor acted as if he were showing concern for his subordinate, saying, "Have someone support Sir Xu and bring him to a physician."

Xu Yu's henchmen brought him away in a flurry of motion.

Then, the emperor asked seriously, "Since you all feel that Sir Zu has earned great contributions, what kind of reward is appropriate?"

Sang Hong felt a chill when he heard that. The emperor was acting as if none of this had anything to do with him! It was as if the shocking interrogation were completely unrelated to him. However, all the court's insiders knew that if not for his tacit approval, the trial would never have happened.

Considering Sang Hong's understanding of the emperor, if he really wanted to reward his subordinate, he wouldn't need to speak such ambiguous words. Instead, he would at least provide the subjects with a direction to discuss the details.

Sure enough, the people present were all sly and cunning, noticing the emperor's attitude. They all looked at each other, yet none of them spoke a word.

Bi Linglong's voice was loud and clear as she broke the silence. "Sir Zu has saved the lives of countless people, putting an end to a potential huge disaster. In my opinion, even granting him the title of duke would not be going too far."

According to the court's unwritten rules, only the children of the royal family could be granted the title of king. The title of duke was already the highest noble title possible for those without the imperial surname.

Of course, Bi Linglong knew that suggestion wasn't too realistic, but only starting boldly would leave room for negotiation.

Sure enough, some officials quickly said, "In these past few months, Sir Zu has already risen from a civilian to a baron, and then quickly rose up to viscount. If we raise him to the rank of duke, will that rate of promotion not be a bit too shocking?"

Bi Linglong said coldly, "The reason why our Zhou Dynasty has been able to triumph in every battle is because when there is merit, there is inevitably reward. Thus, if the speed of promotion is cited as the issue, will that not make those who serve our country feel cold?"

Many ministers rolled their eyes. There have been so many people who have brought back more achievements, and yet which one of them has risen up as quickly as Zu An?

Bi Qi was worried that his daughter might end up drawing excessive enmity. He cleared his throat and said, "Sir Zu's contributions should be rewarded, but he is still too young. Rising up immediately is not always a blessing. This subject proposes that we promote him to a count."

Sang Hong was left in admiration. As expected of these old foxes... The things they say don't offend anyone, and even Zu An himself might feel as if he's trying to pass on some wisdom.

The emperor nodded. That suggestion was close to what he had in mind. Not rewarding Zu An for his contributions was going too far, but he wouldn't feel too happy about it if he had to give too much.

Granting Zu An a countship was perfect. He said, "Then he will be promoted to count. Those present may now discuss the title he is to be given."

When they heard that the emperor was promoting Zu An to the rank of count, those present in Cloudcenter Commandery looked at Zu An enviously.

Some might have had higher official positions than him, but their noble ranks were now lower. Zu An was so young, and yet he had already become a count. There hadn't been many examples of that in all of history, right?

Nobility rank and official position were different. Not only did counts have the ability to collect taxes; their title was something that could be passed down to their children! Of course, unless every single generation was outstanding, such noble ranks would usually fall with each successive generation. However, the rank of count was already high enough to be passed down several times! It symbolized the utmost glory and wealth, and was a huge advantage in marriages within the true circles of aristocracy.

Zu An was also quite happy. However, that wasn't because he was now a count; rather, it was that he could finally get rid of that damn title of 'Green Hat'. Even though there was no 'green hat' slang in this world, he still felt a chill whenever he thought about it.

After the court's subjects discussed among themselves for a bit, they quickly reached a conclusion.

Pei Shao suggested, "A recent report says that many people have recently migrated to Great Lady City, so perhaps we could designate that as Sir Zu's territory?"[1]

The emperor nodded and said, "Good; we can give Zu An the title of Great Lady Count. This emperor is tired, so let us end the court session here."

Bi Linglong naturally knew that Great Lady City was extremely poor. It was a rather empty territory, owing to its poor environment and its problem with bandits. The so-called people who had migrated there were nothing more than refugees.

The reason why the Pei clan had suggested that territory was purely to get back at Zu An as much as they could. Unfortunately, the emperor had already decided before she even had time to complain. There was no way of changing the decision anymore.

Even though Great Lady City is a bit poor, at least Zu An is a count now, for better or for worse. It's not too bad, she thought to console herself.

Meanwhile, Zu An rolled his eyes. Great Lady Count? First it was Phoenix Man, then it was Green Hat. Now he was a Great Lady Count?

Why can't I have a normal name for once? Damn it all!

...

As the emperor left, the courtiers all saw him off respectfully.

Zhuxie Chixin gave Pei Mianman a long look. In the end, however, he didn't expose her identity. Zu An himself was present, so it really wasn't too appropriate to do anything. His majesty hadn't even given him any instructions, so he obviously wouldn't dare to make any such decisions on his own.

When the courtiers all left, Bi Linglong appeared in the recording mirror. When she saw Zu An, she wanted to say something, but hesitated. In the end, she said, "Sir Zu, you should not fail to live up to his majesty's kindness."

Zu An knew she had many things she wanted to say to him, but they couldn't say any personal things in such a public setting.

"Thank you for your advice, crown princess. This subject will definitely devote every breath in my body, unto my dying day," Zu An said in a loud and clear voice.

The people around him widened their eyes when they heard him, mouthing what he had just said inwardly. This guy looks rather uncouth, but he actually spoke quite the cultured phrase just now. His praises are pretty elegant! It seems we really looked down on him too much before.

Bi Linglong's face instead heated up. This guy clearly isn't saying that to the emperor, but to me... Her heart began to race. She was scared that the onlookers would notice something, so she quickly turned around and left after a slight nod.

Then, a group of officials rushed forward to congratulate Zu An on his promotion. Zu An responded to all of them quickly. Then, he told them that he was tired and would be returning to his room to rest.

Many among them had participated in the impeachment earlier. They naturally felt a bit embarrassed, and thus took the chance to be excused too.

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Sang Hong found a chance to come to Zu An's room. He said, "Ah Zu, this old man has already been a part of the political circles for several decades, but my heart has never tossed and turned as much as it did today."

"I was the one who was too rash. I've made respected uncle worry," Zu An apologized. He had left a huge mess behind after leaving, and it was Sang Hong who had taken care of everything in his place.

Sang Hong opened his mouth, but he still gave up in the end. Instead, he said, "Forget it. At least the end result was good. However, there's something else I'm more worried about. Why did his majesty give up on you?"

Zu An knew why he would say that. Judging from the events of the day, the emperor was clearly trying to get rid of him. He was also curious. Don't tell me what happened in the dungeon was exposed? But that doesn't make any sense...

"It might be that he's angered King Qi quite badly, so he plans to use me as a sacrifice to appease King Qi's anger. Furthermore, there's the matter of the Phoenix Nirvana Sutra, which has always made him unhappy," Zu An said. He couldn't explain what had happened in the dungeon to Sang Hong, so he could only explain things that way.

"That's probably it," Sang Hong said with a nod. However, his expression suddenly became extremely strange as he asked, "Right, why would Sect Master Yan speak up for you? The two of you... don't have a thing going on, do you?"

Pfft!

Zu An had been drinking tea. When he heard that, he spat out his tea. He protested, “Respected uncle, please don’t make random guesses like that! Sect Master Yan cares a lot about her reputation, you know?”

Sang Hong was about to say something, but then his expression changed. He hurriedly said, “Ahem, you must be tired from your trip. Rest up well; I’ll be leaving first.” Then, he left as if he were running away.

Zu An was curious about his behavior, but when he saw a completely cold-faced Yan Xuehen at the entrance, he immediately understood. He said with a laugh, “Haha, what a coincidence.”

1. ‘Great Lady’ here sounds like ‘Daji’. 妃

Chapter 1304: I’m Not That Kind of Person

Yan Xuehen didn’t reply. Only when Sang Hong left did her sleeve brush out and close the door.

When he saw her stare at him coldly, Zu An said with an embarrassed laugh, “I was just joking around, you know... No one would really suspect that kind of thing.”

Yan Xuehen snapped angrily, “Coming back with you was a mistake in itself! Now...” Her face turned red as she spoke. She paused for a moment before continuing, “Now even my reputation has been ruined by you.”

Zu An suddenly got up and exclaimed, “Who dares to harm your reputation? I’ll go and beat him up right now! There aren’t many who can beat me in all of Cloudcenter Commandery now!”

“Look at you, getting all cocky because you just reached the master rank,” Yan Xuehen remarked. She instinctively wanted to prod his head with her finger. However, she quickly realized that such an action would be too intimate, so she secretly pulled her finger back. She continued, “Anyway, if you were the one who went out there, wouldn’t it only make matters worse?”

“Then should we just let these rumors spread?” Zu An asked, sounding as if he were actually looking forward to doing something like that.

Yan Xuehen harrumphed. “With my usual way of doing things, these rumors won’t have any soil to grow on. However, that’s based on the premise that you don’t get close to me anymore.”

Zu An could only reply helplessly, “Fine, fine, fine. I’ll just pretend that I don’t know you if we run into each other in the future, alright?”

“Of course that won’t work. I just helped you out so much. If you pretended we didn’t know each other, it would just seem a bit suspicious. Furthermore, I’m Chuyan’s master...” Yan Xuehen trailed off, feeling incredibly conflicted inside.

A strange silence fell over the room. Zu An frowned. Having Chuyan between the two of them really was quite annoying.

Just then, two loud and carefree voices called out from outside. “Brother Zu~”

Yan Xuehen’s expression changed. Because of the topic they had just been talking about, she instinctively felt a bit of guilt and hid behind a screen, saying, “Don’t let them know I’m here.”

She immediately felt regret as soon as she hid there, however. She could have just left confidently, and yet if she hid there and was discovered, it would really be hard to explain herself.

However, it was already too late to leave. The two people outside had already pushed open the door and entered. Yan Xuehen snuck a look through the gaps in the screen and recognized them to be people from the Imperial Envoy. Their status in that group wasn't too low, either. Of course, for her, that still didn't mean anything at all.

If Pei You and Gao Ying found out their names weren't even worth remembering by the Goddess Yan they worshiped, they would probably feel incredibly broken-hearted.

"Brother Zu, you finally came back! I really was scared to death this time..."

"Right? I thought you were done for after things got so out of hand!"

Zu An felt warm inside when he sensed the strong concern in the two's voices. He replied, "Thank you for helping me take care of things while I was gone."

"Come on, aren't you treating us like outsiders here?" Pei You replied with a laugh. However, he suddenly wrinkled his nose and exclaimed, "Huh? Why do I smell a woman here?"

Behind the screen, Yan Xuehen was alarmed. She really was scared of them finding out that she was there.

Zu An's forehead was also covered in dark lines. This Pei You was a composed, indifferent, and handsome man in front of others, but in front of the people he was close to, he would reveal his extremely frank and straightforward nature.

He had to give this guy's nose some respect, though. He can even sense Yan Xuehen's extremely faint smell! This guy might have Tian Boguang's[1] talent.

"Is that so? It might be because I switched the incense in the room." Zu An laughed and tried to bluff his way out of it.

However, Pei You shook his head and said, "It's not incense, it's a woman's smell. I seem to have smelled it somewhere. Why can't I remember though..."

Yan Xuehen was embarrassed and furious. She hissed through ki, "You're dead if he finds out it's me!"

Zu An was sweating like crazy. He was about to say something to draw Pei You's attention, but instead, he suddenly clapped his hands and said, "I remember! I smelled it not too long ago. It was White Jade Sect Goddess Yan's scent!"

Yan Xuehen felt a loud explosion go off in her head. At that instant, she even had the urge to kill Zu An.

Zu An had a helpless smile on his face when he saw the Rage points roll in. I'm really being hated unfairly here... He could only explain, "Sect Master Yan did come here just now, but she left after we talked a bit."

Yan Xuehen thus nodded in satisfaction when she heard that. I guess this guy isn't that stupid.

Pei You had a regretful look as he said, "Sect Master Yan really is beautiful. I'm really jealous of you..."

Zu An had a strange expression as he thought, If I told you I could even go in and out of her, you might just faint on the spot.

Just then, Gao Ying spoke up. "Sect Master Yan is indeed a fairy. Unfortunately, there isn't a shred of worldliness in her. How could a woman like that accommodate us like the girls from a brothel? Brother Zu, in order to help you cleanse yourself of bad luck, I already reserved some courtesan queens in Jasper Lane for you. Let's go; I guarantee you'll be satisfied today."

Yan Xuehen's expression turned cold. This guy actually frequents places like brothels with his colleagues behind others' backs? Looks like stopping him and Chuyan from being together was the right choice.

Zu An was shocked. He quickly said with an earnest expression, "Brother Gao, please don't speak such nonsense! I have a wife, so how can I let her down and go to those kinds of places?"

Yan Xuehen nodded to herself behind the screen. This brat at least has a bit of a conscience.

Gao Ying was stunned, replying, "Brother Zu, isn't this kind of thing completely normal among the noble circles?"

Zu An said in an upright tone, "Other people are other people, but I am myself. Such a thing makes me angry just thinking about it! Thus, you shouldn't call me for these things again in the future. I've already received your good intentions, but I was injured quite badly in the mines. I'm going to rest and recover, so I won't be going with the two of you."

They were all cultivators, so they understood how important it was for injuries to heal as quickly as possible. Gao Ying quickly said, "Of course your recovery is more important. We'll invite you again once you've recovered."

Zu An staggered. Bro, you're killing me here! He said, "Ahem, Brother Gao, didn't I just tell you I wasn't that kind of person?"

...

As they were escorted out of the room, Gao Ying and Pei You had stupefied expressions on their faces. On the way back, they chatted with each other.

"Don't you think brother Zu was acting a bit strange today?"

"You're right. Why did he keep speaking out of righteousness or something? It's almost as if he was saying these words for someone else to hear. Could it be that someone else was impersonating him?"

"I don't think that's the case. If he were a fake, how could all of those people not be able to see through his disguise? In my opinion, it's probably because he now depend on Goddess Yan, so he wants to leave her with a good impression."

"That makes sense. We'll have to invite him after Goddess Yan leaves Cloudcenter City."

...

When the two of them left, Yan Xuehen walked over with a completely cold expression. Zu An exclaimed, "Big Sis Yan, please don't misunderstand! I'm not that close to the two of them, and I've never gone to those kinds of places."

Yan Xuehen snorted. She asked, "What are you explaining all of this to me for? It's not as if we have any kind of relationship."

Zu An almost blurted out 'Aren't you Chuyan's master?' Fortunately, he reacted quickly and swallowed those words back down. Otherwise, he might have died a miserable death on the spot. Instead, he replied, "We've gone through many life and death experiences together, right? Of course I need to explain things to you clearly."

Yan Xuehen's complexion improved a bit when she heard what he said. She was about to say something when she heard more footsteps. After learning her previous lesson, she didn't hide behind the screen guiltily, instead putting on an act and saying to Zu An, "When it comes to many things, it's not what you say, but rather how you act."

Just then, the door opened. Pei Mianman saw Yan Xuehen inside, and her smile instantly froze. Yan Xuehen was Chuyan's master, while to some extent, she had stolen her best friend's husband. When she finally met Chuyan's master, the atmosphere turned strange.

"I didn't expect to meet Senior Yan here!" Pei Mianman exclaimed, instinctively showing Yan Xuehen the bow of a junior.

Inwardly, Yan Xuehen's thoughts were also a mess. This girl's relationship with Zu An seems to be special, and she's even Chuyan's best friend. I'm done for if she notices anything is off. As such, she nodded slightly and said, "You two should chat; I'll leave first."

She quickly left afterward, leaving Pei Mianman stunned. She felt that something was strange. Why does this feel like a wife coming home to a girlfriend somehow...

1. This is a character from The Smiling, Proud Wanderer. 📖

Chapter 1305: A Gentleman Uses His Mouth, Not His Fists

Pei Mianman ran up to the door to confirm that Yan Xuehen had already left, then closed it. Then, she asked Zu An with a guilty conscience, "Sect Master Yan doesn't know about us, right?"

"Uh... I don't think so," Zu An said, although he wasn't too certain either. If Yan Xuehen knew, whether it was for Chuyan's sake or her own, she would probably shave a layer of skin off him.

"I was just going to say, she didn't scold me at all," Pei Mianman said. She patted her chest in relief, making that area ripple. "Sigh. I have to find a chance to clear things up with Chuyan. I don't want to be all secretive like this anymore."

However, she felt a bit strange after saying that. Chuyan already divorced him, so why do I have to explain anything?

Zu An felt as if his head might explode. He could already foresee just how terrible the situation would become. Eventually, he said, "It's been a long time since I last saw Chuyan too."

After some hesitation, Pei Mianman asked, "Should I write a letter for Sect Master Yan to bring to Chuyan? I'll write out everything clearly in the letter."

Zu An jumped in fright. "No way!"

What kind of a joke is this? The past Yan Xuehen definitely wouldn't peep on a letter meant for her disciple.

But things are completely different now! She's still a woman. Even though she said we had to pretend nothing happened between the two of us, things will definitely still be different.

Yan Xuehen might suspect my relationship with Pei Mianman and be unable to hold back her curiosity, and thus peep at the letter.

Their relationship wasn't that stable at the moment. There was a chance of everything sliding into a bottomless abyss at any time. If she found out the truth, that would be game over!

"What's wrong?" Pei Mianman asked, looking at him in confusion. She felt that Zu An's reaction was a bit too dramatic.

Zu An's quick wit kicked in. He said, "Uh, it's just that I think this kind of thing is better dealt with in person. It'll seem more sincere, and there'll be fewer misunderstandings."

Pei Mianman nodded and said, "You're right. I asked to write a letter because I felt guilty and didn't want to face Chuyan directly. Still, it's better to speak to her face to face."

Zu An sighed in relief when he saw that she didn't press the issue.

"Ah Zu, what exactly has happened since the last time? Do you know just how worried I was?" Pei Mianman asked, giving him a resentful look with tears glistening in her eyes.

Zu An took her into his arms and said, "Manman, I've really been worried about you all this time. Don't try to impersonate an Embroidered Envoy again; it's just way too dangerous."

"I couldn't just watch as you were convicted as a traitor without doing anything, right?" Pei Mianman replied with a pout.

"Don't worry. Good guys don't live that long, but bad guys always survive for thousands of years. A scoundrel like me won't be done in so easily," Zu An replied. When he saw her lovable and charming appearance, he couldn't help but move in for a kiss.

"You're so annoying~" Pei Mianman replied, hitting his chest playfully. "Who talks about themselves like that?"

"Don't you always call me a bad guy..." Zu An began, but Pei Mianman covered his mouth out of embarrassment.

...

After they fought playfully for a bit, Zu An then began to tell her about everything that had happened since the last time they met.

When she heard about just how great a danger they had suffered in the underground mines, even though Pei Mianman knew that Zu An was already back safe and sound, she was still scared and on edge. She said, "You were clearly fighting bitterly for the human race and almost threw your very life away, and yet these court officials were only trying to think of ways to deal with you. It really is annoying!"

Zu An chuckled and said, "If you consider it from other perspectives, that kind of behavior is still understandable." Then, he told her about what had happened afterward.

Pei Mianman clicked her tongue and said, "I didn't expect the completely incompatible Sect Master Yan and Sect Master Yun to actually get along. Aren't you a bit too charming?"

Zu An began to sweat. A woman's intuition really was sharp! He could only say, "It was mainly because we had a common enemy back then. After fighting alongside each other, they were too embarrassed to fight each other after that."

Pei Mianman nodded and said, "It's also thanks to that terrifying Scaled Deathworm that Sect Master Yan abandoned the difference between human and fiend. I really don't know whether to call your luck good or bad."

Zu An could feel the strong resentment in her voice. He knew she was unhappy about the risk he had taken to save Yu Yanluo. He could only explain, "Madam Yu showed me tremendous kindness in the past. Back then, I was almost killed by his majesty over the Phoenix Nirvana Sutra, but she helped me plead for mercy... She also helped me with many other things. I couldn't just watch without doing anything as she perished."

"I know you're a loyal and true person," Pei Mianman said with a bit of envy. However, she continued, "Are you still going to call her Madam Yu in front of me? Their spy said you were together with her in the fiend race territories all the time, and that you were really close."

Zu An chuckled in embarrassment. He initially planned to defend himself a bit, but Yu Yanluo's relationship with him would be found out sooner or later. Lying to Pei Mianman now would instead only hurt her more later.

When she saw his expression, Pei Mianman's suspicions were confirmed. She sighed. This guy got a new girl every time he went out; who could tolerate such a thing? The worst part was that she had fallen for him the same way back then too! That was why she didn't have the confidence to blame him. She really felt incredibly annoyed when she thought of that.

In order to divert her attention, Zu An quickly asked, "Manman, have you gone to the fiend race territories before? The scenery over there is completely different from this side..." Then, he told her about the local features and customs of the Snake race territory and Bluefield Country.

Sure enough, Pei Mianman was interested. However, she also knew he was trying to distract her, so she kept an unhappy expression on her face. Still, when she heard about his battle against the Golden Crow Crown Prince, she began to feel nervous. She asked, "Why are you so good at pissing people off wherever you go? You actually dared to even offend the Golden Crow Crown Prince in the fiend race territories? That's the next Fiend Emperor, you know?!"

“He wasn’t even that amazing. I almost plucked him naked,” Zu An said with a chuckle.

“You still have the nerve to act all cocky?!” Pei Mianman exclaimed, stomping her feet nervously. “The main problem is his identity! The Fiend Emperor is someone on the same level as his majesty. Now that you’ve bullied his successor, will he let you go?”

“There is indeed some risk, so I always tried to maintain a low profile in the fiend race territories afterward, almost never revealing my real identity,” Zu An said in consolation.

However, Pei Mianman was incredibly sharp and quickly reacted. “Then, judging from what you’re saying, are you still going back there?”

Zu An nodded and said, “That’s right. I obtained a treasure map from an old tomb there. Recorded on it was a map to an Unknown Region. It’s in the Fiend King Court. Sect Master Yan and Sect Master Yun are going as well.”

Pei Mianman harrumphed unhappily. She asked, “You’re saying all of this just to tell me you’re not doing it for Yu Yanluo, right?” Of course, she knew that Unknown Regions were just too alluring for cultivators. No one could refuse such a tremendous opportunity.

Zu An felt a bit apologetic. He said, “That’s also part of the reason. The Fiend Emperor is gathering the leaders of the various clans in the Fiend King Court. I don’t know what he plans to do.”

“Enough, enough. Just go and take good care of big sis Yu. Of course, you have to take care of yourself too. You’d better not die in the fiend race territories,” Pei Mianman said.

In truth, she felt rather strange. Normally, since Yu Yanluo had joined the harem after her, she would be the little sister. But she was someone who had already been famous for many years, and could even be called a major figure from the previous generation. Pei Mianman really couldn't bring herself to call her ‘little sister’.

Zu An sighed in relief and said, “Don’t worry. I still have such a great Manman waiting for me back home, so I have to hurry back no matter what.”

“Hmph! Can you say some nicer things, please?” Pei Mianman harrumphed. “Right, how did you come back from that side so quickly?”

Zu An took out the Wind Fire Wheels and explained, “These are the Wind Fire Wheels. Ms. Shang took them from her nephew as an apology to me...”

Pei Mianman sighed in amazement when she heard his summary. She exclaimed, “I didn’t expect Ms. Shang to be from the Ocean races, and for her strength to have been hidden so well!”

Zu An also sighed in amazement, saying, “Indeed. I’ve discovered that there are actually quite a few fiends hidden in human society, and those people might not necessarily have any bad thoughts. On the contrary, they’re quite friendly.”

“There are good and bad humans, so there are obviously good and bad fiends too.” Pei Mianman copied Zu An’s usual attitude and asked teasingly, “But why is your affinity with girls so good? Ms. Shang was even willing to empty out her nephew’s pockets for you.”

“Haha, it might be because I’m just a likable person,” Zu An said with an embarrassed smile.

Pei Mianman had a very deep impression of Ms. Shang from Brightmoon Academy. She didn’t think too much of it and instead focused on something else. She said, “The Wind Fire Wheels are a pair. How did you and Sect Master Yan come back? Don’t tell me you each stepped on one?”

Zu An was speechless. If anyone else found out, wouldn’t Yan Xuehen directly silence them? Still, he reacted quickly and said, “Of course I just supported her with my arm. She’s a grandmaster. Even though she’s injured, she can still barely fly.”

Pei Mianman thought to herself that, as Yan Xuehen’s normal aura was indeed powerful, flying likely wasn’t too big of an issue. She said, “You’d better not do anything to that Sect Master Yan. If you offend her, you’re dead for sure.”

“Don’t worry! How could a nobleman like me do anything disrespectful to her?” Zu An replied without batting an eyelid. A gentleman uses his mouth, not his fists, right?

He continued, “Later, though, we encountered some danger in the Great Snowy Mountain, so we couldn’t use the Wind Fire Wheels anymore...”

When she heard about the terrifying storm they had encountered and the earth immortal rank snow lady they had run into, Pei Mianman felt as if her heart had encountered tumultuous waves. She said, “The Great Snowy Mountain is too terrifying after all... Right, what did you two end up encountering in those hot springs?”

Zu An’s expression became extremely strange as he said, “I met the emperor.”

Chapter 1306: Secret Within the Hot Springs

Previously, Sang Hong had never asked about that subject because he really did believe that Yu Yanluo had built some secret transport formation between Cloudcenter Commandery and the Snake race territory. Such topics were rather sensitive, so he couldn’t really ask about them.

However, Pei Mianman naturally didn’t have such misgivings and directly asked the question. How could she have possibly anticipated the answer?

“You met the emperor?” Pei Mianman exclaimed, stunned. Then why did the emperor still hold this impeachment to judge Zu An? Are the two of them just putting on an act?

When he saw her expression, Zu An knew she was thinking something different. He quickly explained, “What I encountered wasn’t the emperor’s real body, but rather a strand of aura he left behind...”

...

Back then, in the cave, a terrifying aura had erupted from the cavern depths. Yan Xuehen had been so scared that she quickly grabbed Zu An and ran. She had sensed that the aura was even stronger than hers when she was at her peak. Both of them were injured and wouldn’t be a match for it at all.

The terrifying legends of the Great Snowy Mountain had already left too deep of an impact on her. Furthermore, they had just encountered that earth immortal snow lady not too long before, so the two of them were already on edge.

After running for a few steps, however, Zu An stopped. Yan Xuehen was badly frightened when she saw him pause. With their speed, they could still have a chance of survival if they ran with everything they had; now that Zu An had hesitated, however, that possibility was thrown into doubt.

Of course, if Zu An stayed behind to buy her time, Yan Xuehen would have a much bigger chance of escaping. Still, even though the two of them hadn't reached a truly intimate level yet, her nature prevented her from doing such a thing. As such, she stayed behind, exclaiming in annoyance, "What's wrong with you?"

"Don't worry. It might not be dangerous at all this time," Zu An said, patting her hand in consolation. "This aura feels a bit familiar."

Yan Xuehen instinctively pulled her hand back, but his words drew her attention. She asked, "Familiar?"

The terrifying aura was something only an earth immortal could release, and yet Zu An was familiar with it? Just who was the grandmaster here? Yan Xuehen was supposed to be knowledgeable and experienced, and yet it seemed almost as if she couldn't keep up.

Zu An didn't reply, and simply walked into the cavern depths. Yan Xuehen bit her lips, but she still followed him in the end. The deeper in they went, the stronger the aura felt. Yan Xuehen even felt her very soul trembling. She sighed, thinking, It's all over, it's all over... We're probably going to die here.

However, Zu An appeared to be completely fine as he walked deeper in.

In the end, Yan Xuehen was still a grandmaster with a steadfast will. The way things were, she wanted to see just what kind of cultivator was ahead of them. That way, at least she would understand why she died.

To her surprise, however, she didn't see any exceptional cultivators within the cave. Rather, there was a simple and crude structure that resembled a sacrificial altar. She felt a strange premonition.

The structure wasn't actually a sacrificial altar, but rather a formation that seemed to have been roughly assembled by a single person. However, the details were full of dao marks and natural laws. There were many complex runes carved on its surface, to the point that even she found it hard to see through the principles. For even such casual actions to represent heavenly dao, just what insane level had the structure reached?

As Zu An stopped in front of the formation, the runes around it lit up. A vague image appeared in its center.

At such a short distance, the terrifying pressure was almost enough to make Yan Xuehen bow down. However, she knew that if she really did kneel, her own dao would be affected by the figure's. In the future, she would forever live in the other cultivator's shadow, unable to truly forge her own path.

Even so, she was too close to the formation. Not only was she injured, she had also just done the most unforgettable thing of her life and was still worried about her gains and losses. In that condition, her mind was at its most frail! She felt like a skiff in a roaring sea, ready to capsize under a great wave at any time.

Just then, Zu An took her hand, infusing a warm stream into her body. Yan Xuehen immediately felt her mind clear up. The dark clouds were replaced with clear skies, revealing a gentle sun that provided her with its warm rays.

"I actually let him become my sun..." Yan Xuehen murmured with a blush.

What had happened just then wasn't real; rather, it was a kind of illusion. Clearly, she felt a subconscious sense of closeness to Zu An. She quickly focused, thinking, I can't let Zu An affect my dao after I managed to stop this terrifying expert's dao from affecting me.

She really was curious. Why was it that even though she couldn't stand the pressure at her level, Zu An seemed to be completely fine? Normally, there should have been no reason for him to have even greater resistance than her at his cultivation rank, right?

She looked at the resplendent golden figure on the formation. She gradually discerned a sense of familiarity from it, and her expression changed. She began, "Don't tell me..."

Zu An nodded and said, "This is precisely the emperor's aura."

Even though Yan Xuehen had met the emperor, the two had never fought against each other before. She wasn't that familiar with his real aura. In contrast, Zu An had fought to the death against the emperor's soul fragment in the Westhound Tomb secret dungeon. The sensation was one he couldn't be more familiar with. That was why he had immediately made the connection as soon as the formation's power erupted.

The emperor was suffering from heaven and man deterioration, and constantly hid in the palace to rest. There was no way he could be outside. Thus, Zu An had remembered the story Yan Xuehen mentioned and realized something. That was why he had boldly entered to confirm his suspicions.

Yan Xuehen realized that a powerful cultivator had indeed been present, but only a shadow remained. She didn't know why, however.

Zu An asked, "Big sis Yan, do you still remember what you told me about the emperor's visit to the Great Snowy Mountain, and how he left while seriously injured?"

"Are you saying this was where he left from?" Yan Xuehen asked. She had been struggling to see through the formation's principles, but she suddenly understood. Wasn't it nothing more than an exquisite and outstanding transport formation?

Zu An looked at the hot springs rich with ki, saying, "There's no way an incredible place like this wouldn't have an owner. The emperor was probably injured somewhere in the Great Snowy Mountains, before coming here to treat himself. He chased away the original owner of this place."

"It could be that he was injured by the original owner here," Yan Xuehen added.

"That is a possibility too," Zu An said. His gaze shifted to the formation as he continued, "The emperor must have made this transport formation and left through it. However, because he was injured, some of his aura leaked out and remained here."

“Because of this formation’s profundity, as well as the richness of this cave’s ki, that strand of aura never disappeared. That powerful pressure prevented all the nearby creatures from approaching. That’s why this amazing place was preserved.”

Yan Xuehen wondered, “With the emperor’s cultivation, why didn’t he leave from the outside? Why did he have to carve out a transport formation?”

Zu An said gravely, “There’s a chance that there was something he feared outside. That was why he had to make a secret escape here.”

“Something even the emperor fears...” Yan Xuehen clicked her tongue. It really was hard for her to imagine something like that in this world.

“There’s no way we would be able to make it to Cloudcenter Commandery normally. Why don’t we give this formation a try?” Zu An suggested, although he was a bit hesitant even as he spoke. “Although, we’ll have really gambled poorly if we end up in the emperor’s place of seclusion.”

“That won’t happen. I can more or less tell that the formation will take us to the northwest of the empire. As for the exact coordinates, though, I can’t say for sure,” Yan Xuehen said after observing the formation for a while.

Zu An’s eyes lit up. He exclaimed, “Cloudcenter Commandery is also to the northwest! Then we can give it a shot.”

After that, he took out a pile of ki stones to power the formation. Yan Xuehen’s eyes narrowed when she saw that. How does this guy have so many heaven-grade ki stones? Did Yu Yanluo really take care of him that well?

Her heart skipped a beat when she thought of that. She quickly warned herself, Zu An and Yu Yanluo are lovers; what does it have to do with me? It almost sounds as if I’m jealous or something.

She noticed that her hand was still in Zu An’s and her cheeks heated up. She was about to let go, but Zu An pulled her over to the formation and said, “Don’t let go. Otherwise, it’ll be annoying if we end up getting sent to two different places.”

Yan Xuehen obviously knew about that possibility. Normally, in order to prevent being separated, those moving through a formation would stick close to each other. Even then, however, it wasn’t a guarantee.

As soon as she got on, however, she felt a warm hug wrap around her. Yan Xuehen was embarrassed and nervous, but Zu An said in her ear, “It’s just to prevent us from being separated.”

Yan Xuehen understood the principles well enough to understand that Zu An was just taking the chance to hug her as he wished. She gritted her teeth, but she was helpless. She could only let him do what he wanted for the time being.

...

When he remembered how Yan Xuehen’s face had been completely red, and she had been at a loss for what to do, Zu An couldn’t help but grin.

“What are you smiling for?” Pei Mianman noticed his expression and harrumphed. “I feel that your smile is a bit dirty for some reason.”

Chapter 1307: Breaking Apart Lovebirds

“Nonsense!” Zu An wiped his face and reacted quickly. “I’m smiling because I was able to see you after finally coming back!”

Pei Mianman harrumphed. “Hmph, knowing you, it was definitely another girl!” Despite saying those words, however, she still felt happy. His honeyed words were extremely effective.

“I didn’t expect you to have gone through so much. Sigh, it’s a pity that I wasn’t able to stay by your side,” she said regretfully.

Zu An had told her pretty much everything that happened in the Great Snowy Mountain, but of course, he hadn’t breathed a word about his intimate experience with Yan Xuehen. Even so, his experience had still made Pei Mianman cry out in alarm several times.

“Still, not even all of this can compare to what we went through in Yinxu,” Zu An said with a smile as he pulled her into his embrace.

Pei Mianman was also moved. They had been husband and wife for several generations in Yinxu. She replied, “Hmph, I thought that you might’ve gotten bored of me after staying in Yinxu with me for all that time.”

Zu An gave her charming face a kiss and replied, “How could that be? All of that was just an illusion; time flew much faster. It wasn’t actually several lifetimes.”

Pei Mianman scowled and shot back, “Then are you saying you’re already tired of me after just a few decades?”

Zu An was speechless. Can you not word it like that?

He reacted quickly, immediately pouring out a huge pile of flowery praises. “Of course not. Mianman, you don’t understand how great your charm is. Other men want nothing more than to devour you...”

Still, Pei Mianman didn’t take the bait at all, asking, “Then what about you?”

“I’m going to devour you right now!” Zu An exclaimed, reaching out with both hands.

Pei Mianman was ticklish, so she quickly moved out of the way. Still, how could she move faster than Zu An? She quickly ended up laughing so hard that her body rocked back and forth.

Suddenly, the door opened from the outside. A voice began, “Sir Zu, I have something to say to you...”

The voice came to a screeching halt halfway through the sentence.

“Father...” Pei Mianman murmured, jumping in fright when she saw who it was. Even though there wasn’t much of a father-daughter relationship between them, they had lived under that pretext for so many years. There was no way she wouldn’t feel any guilt at all.

The one who had arrived was, of course, City Lord Pei Shao. He was normally rather good-natured; or, at the very least, there was often a smile on his face. At the moment, though, his expression was completely dark.

Zu An moved his hand back from Pei Mianman's neck and asked, "So... How's it been, Sir City Lord?"

He had been too invested in his fun with Pei Mianman, and Yan Xuehen hadn't closed the door properly when she left. That was why Pei Shao had ended up running into them. Being caught in action by a woman's father... No matter how thick one's skin was, they'd still feel embarrassed, right?

"Sir Zu is now the Great Lady Count; I am not worthy of you calling me sir." Pei Shao harrumphed. He was furious. The precious daughter he had raised all this time had already been ruined by a pig without his notice! Anyone would be furious in such a situation, right?

You have successfully trolled Pei Shao for +311 +311 +311...

Zu An's eyes twitched when he heard the name 'Great Lady Count'. He replied, "What is City Lord Pei saying? I have always held Sir Pei's character in high prestige..."

What followed was a mountain of cringe-inducing flattery. Even Pei Mianman frowned, so how could Pei Shao's reaction be any better? He couldn't stand it anymore and said, "Enough, enough. I came to ask what your relationship with my daughter was like, and why she would take such a huge risk to impersonate a Golden Token Envoy. Now, it seems there is no need for that."

Zu An said with a sigh of amazement, "City Lord Pei really has incredible insight after all! My admiration for you flows endlessly like a relentless river..."

Pei Shao was speechless. I'm so pissed, but what can I even say?

Pei Mianman took a deep breath. She grabbed Zu An's arm and said, "Ah Zu and I have already pledged ourselves to each other."

Pei Shao's eyes twitched. In the end, he still couldn't help but slam the table and yell, "Nonsense! Do you know what a pledge like that, without the parents' approval, means? Such a thing is laughable even among normal families, let alone in our Pei clan!"

Pei Mianman said with her head raised, "We are happy to be with each other, and love will prevail. There is nothing to laugh at at all!"

"You...!" Pei Shao was so angry that even his facial hair was starting to stand on end. He retorted, "You are the future wife of King Qi's heir, and possibly even a future empress. How can you have such little self-respect?"

Zu An took a step in front of Pei Mianman and replied, "City Lord Pei, let me correct you on something. The wife of King Qi's heir will never become the empress."

"Hmph! Even the major clans are not sure who will come out on top between King Qi and the crown prince; who do you think you are to say something like that?" Pei Shao snapped. He had been annoyed to begin with. When he heard Zu An make a bold statement like that, he became even more blunt.

You have successfully trolled Pei Shao for +444 +444 +444....

“So what if I said it?” Zu An replied indifferently. “I was able to crush the legs of King Qi’s heir back then, and I wouldn’t mind crushing his third leg too. Let’s see how he’ll get himself a wife then.”

“You!” Pei Shao exclaimed. He was so angry his entire body was shaking. “You crude, coarse man! As expected of someone who used to be a commoner, you don’t have the upbringing of a true noble at all!”

You have successfully trolled Pei Shao for +599 +599 +599...

“A true noble?” Zu An sneered. “Does City Lord Pei feel no shame when you say that? Which among these so-called top noble clans isn’t made up of thieves and whores? The only things that might be clean are the stone lions by their front gates.”

Pei Shao choked. He knew what Zu An said was true. Such things really were common occurrences in the great clans. As long as it wasn’t something that violated a basic principle, it wouldn’t damage their noble reputation at all.

What was important to the nobility? Naturally, it was their etiquette, their long history, and acknowledgement from other clans. The rich would marry the rich, while the poor would marry the poor. That was a societal rule.

For example, even though he was already a count, the way someone like Zu An did things didn’t match the etiquette of the nobility at all. He was still someone who would be mocked by the inner circles in private.

Pei Mianman didn’t want the two to fight over such a thing, so she said, “I’ve already rejected the marriage with King Qi’s heir. If you want a marriage so badly, you can marry him yourself.”

“Good, good, very good!” Pei Shao spat, shooting Zu An a glare. “So it turns out that last time, when you advised me not to agree to King Qi’s marriage that early, it was because you had these wicked thoughts!”

He felt worse and worse when he thought of that. He had been completely played!

You have successfully trolled Pei Shao for +555 +555 +555...

Pei Mianman said, “That matter is unrelated. We already pledged to be married when we were in Brightmoon City. If you insist on this marriage with King Qi’s heir, I don’t mind making this public. Let’s see if he’ll still dare to marry me then!”

“You!” Pei Shao shouted. He was now really angered beyond belief. As expected, daughters are all raised for others!

However, he suddenly thought of something. He gradually calmed down and said, “There’s been progress in the matter we talked about last time. That side has already agreed; are you still going to go or not?”

“Really?” Pei Mianman replied, sounding shocked and happy.

“Of course it is.” Pei Shao harrumphed. “Follow me back for now.”

Pei Mianman hesitated for a moment, but eventually said, "Alright."

Zu An was stunned. What is going on?

Pei Mianman approached him and said, "Ah Zu, I might have to be apart from you for a while."

Zu An expected it to be like the plot of a TV drama, but to his surprise, Pei Mianman explained excitedly, "I'm going to meet a master! I'll join a top-level sect similar to the White Jade Sect!"

Chapter 1308: Bad News

"Which sect?" Zu An asked, stunned. Why did Pei Mianman suddenly want to join a sect?

"Jadefall Palace, a hidden sect that's on par with the White Jade Sect. Because the court has been too oppressive in recent years, they sealed up the entire sect and shunned the world. Recently, there's been news that it's opening up again and is about to take in a new group of students. The quota is limited, but I managed to get a slot through the Pei clan," Pei Mianman explained.

"Jadefall Palace?" Zu An repeated. He thought to himself for a while, but he had no impression of that place at all. He reminded himself to look into it in the Embroidery House's archives once he had a chance. He asked, "Why didn't you go to the Royal Academy? No matter how great Jadefall Palace's people are, they can't compare to the libationer, right?"

"I wanted to go to the Royal Academy too, but the libationer already took in his final disciple many years ago, and then never took another. Being a third generation disciple seems meaningless," Pei Mianman said with a pout, clearly feeling regretful.

Zu An remembered the little girl Qi Yaoguang. She was the libationer's last disciple. Pei Mianman's aptitude wasn't any worse than Qi Yaoguang's, but unfortunately, she just hadn't gotten that opportunity. He asked, "Then this time, is Jadefall Sect not just taking in ordinary disciples?[1]"

"Jadefall Palace's monarch is personally taking in a disciple, which is why there was such a huge commotion. There are countless people fighting for this opportunity," Pei Mianman said, her voice full of pride. Proving herself among many outstanding candidates would be an indirect way of confirming her own ability.

Zu An jumped in fright, asking, "Is this monarch male or female?" If the sect master were a man and he ended up taking in such a lovely disciple, how could he stand it?

"Of course it's a woman!" Pei Mianman replied. She had known him for so long that she naturally knew what he was thinking.

"How old is she? Is she pretty?" Zu An asked, sighing in relief. For some reason, Yan Xuehen's bashful expression when she had been struggling to hold on appeared in his mind.

"Hmph, you always pay attention to the wrong things." Pei Mianman harrumphed, but she still replied, "Either way, she's definitely not young. As for whether she's pretty or not, from what I know, her appearance isn't her distinctive feature."

“Oh...” Zu An couldn't help but chuckle. What in the world am I even thinking? Still, he felt a bit unwilling. He asked, “Can you not go to Jedefall Palace? I'll just teach you what I know. It definitely won't be any worse than what you can learn from those hidden sects!”

Pei Mianman shook her head and said, “I know you're very strong, but I don't want to become completely dependent on you.”

“We are one to begin with; what difference is there?” Zu An replied reassuringly.

Pei Mianman laughed, but she had a helpless expression as she said, “If it were just between the two of us, of course it wouldn't matter. But... Forget it. Don't try to convince me otherwise. I've already made my decision.”

“But once you go to Jedefall Palace, we'll be completely apart! We might not be able to see each other again for many years...” Zu An protested. He still remembered how after Chu Chuyan had returned to the White Jade Sect, they had pretty much been completely separated. It had already been so long since he last saw her!

Pei Mianman looked at him quietly. Her peach blossom eyes were full of deep emotion as she said, “Ah Zu, when I first met you, you were still really weak. I was the one who taught you some skills. And yet now, even though not long has passed, you've already reached your current level. If I don't try to catch up, I'll only get further and further away from you. I can still look up to you now, but in the future, I might not even have the right to do that anymore. Besides, apart from that, I'm also a cultivator and I have my own pride. So, please don't stop me.”

There was another reason she didn't want to say out loud, which was that she didn't want to lose to Chu Chuyan.

No matter how much confidence she had, though, Chuyan's master Yan Xuehen was a world-renowned grandmaster. Chuyan had all of the White Jade Sect's resources to help her cultivate, which had only made the difference between the two of them grow greater and greater. The next time they met, would she even have the confidence to talk about her relationship with Zu An in front of Chuyan?

Zu An wanted to point out that she had already broken through into the seventh rank recently, and that she was already extremely outstanding among her peers, but after thinking about it, he decided not to say anything in the end.

When he first met her, Pei Mianman had been a publicly acknowledged genius in Brightmoon Academy. There had been so many people praising her. But now, someone who had been weaker than her ended up surpassing her by so much. Even though Zu An was a man, that kind of thing was hard to accept for her. After all, she had the pride of a genius, and all cultivators sought strength.

“You're right. I shouldn't be stopping you,” Zu An said, taking her into his arms. “With your talent and aptitude, you'll definitely be chosen as Jedefall Empress' direct disciple. Your cultivation will surely advance by leaps and bounds.”

Pei Mianman's talent wasn't inferior to anyone else's. Furthermore, she had received the Heaven's Wisdom Jade from Yinxu, making her cultivation speed even greater. If she received the guidance of a master, her future achievements would be limitless.

“Ah Zu...” Pei Mianman said reluctantly. The two of them embraced each other closely.

“Ahem, did you forget that there was still someone else here?!” Pei Shao exclaimed furiously as his eyebrows continued twitching.

You have successfully trolled Pei Shao for +666 +666 +666...

Pei Mianman jumped in fright, jumping away as if she had been burned by Zu An. She stuck out her tongue secretly and said, “I’m leaving. I won’t lose to you the next time we meet again.”

Zu An chuckled and replied, “That might be a bit difficult.”

Pei Mianman smiled sweetly, radiant as a flower in full bloom. She waved at Zu An and left with steady steps. When he saw her departing, Zu An couldn't help but feel a bit dejected. He wasn't in the mood to stay in Cloudcenter City any longer.

Soon afterward, a letter from the Zhenyuan Merchant Group arrived. Zu An opened it and saw graceful writing within. It turned out to have been sent by Tang Tian'er, telling him that she had already secured many channels, successfully procuring the Blue Earthflowers he was looking for from the fiend races. They would be there by next spring, so he could feel at ease in that regard.

At the same time, she told him that she had been worried about him during the crisis, wondering where exactly he was. Tang Tian'er had tried to find him in the nearby commanderies, but she hadn't found anything out.

She then talked about how she had important affairs to deal with that would take her out of Cloudcenter Commandery, so she could only leave a letter with a subordinate to pass onto him whenever he returned.

...

Zu An thought with a strange expression, Why does this seem to be describing the batch from the Fox Merchant Group in Bluefield Country that was already pre-ordered?

However, he felt warm inside when he felt the implied concern. His relationship with Tang Tian'er had gotten off to a rocky start, but now they were good friends. He wondered what had made her leave in such a hurry. It must have been quite a thorny problem.

He wrote his reply and gave it to the one who had delivered the letter. The merchant group had their way of getting the letter to Tang Tian'er. At the same time, he took out a set of the makeup products he had purchased from Rouge Spice and had it sent over as well. He had bought ten sets of them, and yet he hadn't even been able to give away a single set. It really was a bit embarrassing.

The messenger had a strange expression, but he still wrapped up the items. Zu An knew what he was thinking, though. Even though Rouge Spice's cosmetics were precious, with Tang Tian'er's identity, she definitely didn't lack them.

But are the products that are purchased with money the same as the ones from me?

As long as a girl had a favorable impression of a person, she would be happy even if that person gave them something really ordinary. On the contrary, no matter how precious the item was, if she didn't like the person, she wouldn't care about it at all.

...

After seeing the Zhenyuan Merchant Group's messenger out, Zu An visited Sang Hong to talk about what had happened after he left.

When he heard that Zu An was going to return to the fiend race's side, Sang Hong frowned. He said, "We've finally calmed this recent disturbance. What if something unexpected happens again once you leave?"

"I have a reason for having to go back. Once I finish, I'll immediately hurry back," Zu An said. "As for everything else, after today's morning court session and Sect Master Yan testifying for me, no one will try to start anything for some time."

Sang Hong knew that Zu An had already made his decision. He could only sigh and say, "There might be people waiting for you over on that side, but don't forget that there are people waiting for you in the capital too."

Zu An knew he was talking about Zheng Dan and Sang Qien. His face heated up as he replied, "Of course I won't forget about the people back at the capital."

The two of them were both intelligent, so they left that subject behind. Then, Sang Hong began to fill Zu An in on several other events. With their experience, things became much easier.

As soon as they finished, a guard came to report, "Bad news! Something has happened over in the Duke Manor!"

1. This refers to the sect taking in disciples who study under the regular experts, as opposed to being personal disciples of the sect master. 📖

Chapter 1309: Chaos

"What are you making such a huge fuss for? What happened?" Sang Hong asked with a frown.

"A large group of smaller clans banded together, demanding to see the duke. There are also some merchant groups who have merchant slips that they wish to convert ahead of time. The Duke Manor's guards explained that the duke was currently in seclusion, but they did not listen at all. Just who is leading this mess? They barged straight in, and for some reason, those guards did not stop them," his subordinate quickly replied.

Sang Hong said seriously, "That is normal. Such a major event happened in the Duke Manor, and yet the duke never appeared. He never showed himself even after so many people asked to see him, so they all suspect that he is already dead. Now, the loyalty of the entire Duke Manor is divided. It is to be expected that those guards are not putting up much effort."

Zu An was alarmed. Looks like I left for too long, I've already caused many people to become suspicious.

After his subordinate left, Sang Hong said to Zu An, "Either way, no matter how out of control things are on the duke's end, it has nothing to do with us. Cloudcenter Commandery's stability is Xu Yu's responsibility, so he can deal with that headache. You don't have to bother with this matter."

Zu An smiled bitterly. He couldn't ignore the situation, because he was Cloudcenter Duke at the moment. Yu Yanluo had no intention to completely give up on Cloudcenter Commandery's industries, and neither did he. Thus, he still needed to use the identity of Cloudcenter Duke to get things done.

Thus, he quickly excused himself and said, "Respected uncle, I'll be heading back to get some rest."

"You should take some time to properly recover. Let me know when you're about to leave, and don't vanish again without a sound like last time," Sang Hong said.

Zu An was a bit embarrassed as he replied, "Alright. I've made respected uncle worry."

Sang Hong nodded inwardly when he saw that even though Zu An was now a count with higher cultivation than his own, he still treated him with respect.

It seems I didn't choose the wrong person after all. Qien'er won't be wronged by following him. Apart from that, there's Zheng Dan as well. Sigh, I wonder if they've become pregnant or not.

After Zu An returned to the room, he initially tried to head over to Pei You to activate his Kawaii Waifu Voice Changer, but that guy was gone. He had likely gone to Jasper Lane with Gao Ying. Zu An thought, Sigh, hoes before bros, huh? Didn't you say you were going to help me wash away my bad luck?

As such, Zu An could only look for Xiao Jianren. He decided to change back into his Golden Token Eleven outfit to meet him.

Xiao Jianren was startled and happy to see him, exclaiming, "Sir Eleven, you've finally returned! I thought that something might have happened to you."

Zu An replied indifferently, "What could possibly happen to me?"

Xiao Jianren thought to himself that it made sense. Every Golden Token Envoy had extraordinary abilities. I really was fretting for nothing. However, he soon remembered something else and quickly said, "Sir Eleven, someone was impersonating you before, and she was a woman, no less. Should I try to find out who dared to impersonate a Golden Token Envoy?"

Zu An replied, "That was one of my people. I sent her over. Otherwise, where do you think she would have gotten her uniform and waist token from?"

Xiao Jianren had felt that those details were strange to begin with. Apart from being the wrong person, the other pieces had all been in order, leaving him puzzled as to where the woman had gotten the outfit. When he heard Zu An's explanation, he released a long sigh of relief and said, "That's good then."

At the same time, he wondered what kind of a relationship that woman had with Sir Eleven, for him to even entrust his Golden Token Envoy uniform to her. Furthermore, Chief Commander Zhuxie hadn't even looked into the situation, which meant he must have known about it. Xiao Jianren's inner gossipy soul began to burn passionately.

Zu An thought to himself, This is a good opportunity. He didn't even change and circled back, but as he returned, he used the Kawaii Waifu Voice Changer.

Xiao Jianren just assumed it was Golden Token Eleven's female body double. After carefully waiting upon him, he made inquiries about her relationship with Zu An.

Zu An said, "After one becomes a Golden Token Envoy, the organization will assign a female double. Apart from helping with professional matters, they can also take care of everyday life, and even warm your bed."

"What?!" Xiao Jianren exclaimed, his tired eyes almost seeming to radiate rays of hope. He had already been quite satisfied with being a Silver Token Envoy. Golden Token Envoys had too many responsibilities, and they even encountered a lot of danger. He had thought there was no way that could be better than just staying in the archives and reading to his heart's content.

But the organization actually assigns Golden Token Envoys their own women?!

She wouldn't be an ordinary woman, but an Embroidered Envoy woman! They would naturally have all kinds of skills. Not only would they be comrades in battle, they would also be one's most intimate companion. Xiao Jianren began breathing heavily when he thought of the possibilities. Motivation seemed to enter his monotonous lifestyle once more.

When he saw that, Zu An thought to himself, Old Xiao really is an honest person. He even believed this kind of thing?

If Xiao Jianren finally worked his way up to a Golden Token Envoy and asked Zhuxie Chixin for a female companion... That would definitely be an interesting scene.

Now that he had successfully activated the voice changer, Zu An found a random excuse to leave. Then, he used 'Face of a Thousand Identities' to change into Jian Yanyou. After that, he quickly hurried to the Duke Manor.

...

The entire Duke Manor was a mess. Many disciples from different clans and representatives of merchant groups were busy grabbing rare and valuable furniture from the Duke Manor as repayment for debts or compensation for their losses. There were even some guards and servants who were moving things away.

After Jian Taiding and the butler had died, only the women—Liu Ji, Chu Ji, and Zhang Ji— were left. Even though they tried to stop it, who would listen to them in such a situation? There were even some who coveted their beauty. As the duke's concubines, the three women had previously been untouchable. However, their identity was extremely stimulating to many men, who wanted to take advantage of the crisis.

The three women were embarrassed and furious. While they were trying to avoid such situations, they had even less opportunity to deal with the chaos. Helpless to do anything else, they could only head to the place where the duke was supposed to be resting in seclusion.

However, the looters eventually entered deeper into the manor. When they saw what the women were doing, they roared with laughter.

“Back then, Jian Yanyou didn’t do a thing even when something happened to Yu Yanluo, the main wife. Do you think he’ll care about you concubines at all?”

“So many things have happened since then. If that bastard Jian still hadn’t died, he would have come out a long time ago. Now, things are already so chaotic, and yet he still hasn’t shown himself. That means he really has died already!”

“If you all know what’s good for you, just remarry. We big brothers won’t turn our backs on you just because you aren’t virgins anymore.”

“What do you know? It’s these married women who know how to best serve others.”

...

They roared with laughter, their conversation growing coarser over time as they continued to eye the three women.

The women’s faces grew redder as they heard the lewd comments. However, the other side had greater numbers, and there were quite a few cultivators. The manor’s guard system was a complete mess and would be of no help at all. They had no other choice left.

Zhang Ji was different from the others because she didn’t know the truth, and thought that the duke was still in seclusion. Chu Ji and Liu Ji, however, felt ice-cold inside. They knew that the duke had really died, and that the replacement had left with Madam Yu as well. They really had been left behind.

A few months prior, they had lived wonderful and impressive lives; now, however, they had fallen from the sky down into the dust, simply because they had lost their backer. In this world where the strong ruled, beautiful women were like duckweeds. If they lost their backers, they would inevitably meet miserable ends.

Meanwhile, the men grew unsatisfied with just teasing the women. They all stepped forward to seize the one they liked. After all, there were only three women, and the situation was completely stacked against them. The one who moved first would get them first. The three women screamed in fear when they saw the men’s grasping claws approaching them.

Suddenly, the stone door exploded, sending countless shards of rubble outward. Those men with weaker cultivations were immediately blasted full of holes, while the stronger ones barely managed to keep their lives.

Afterward, a human figure quickly emerged. The cultivators in front didn’t have time to react at all before a palm that seemed as light as a feather smashed into their bodies. However, they felt as if their strength had been completely sucked out of their bodies, and they died on the spot.

“Master rank!”

The ones in the back withdrew in horror when they sensed the figure’s powerful pressure. As the smoke and dust scattered, they finally saw who it was. Who else could it be but Cloudcenter Duke, Jian Yanyou?!

“You are all truly bold. You dare to cause trouble in this duke’s manor?!”

Of course, the one who had appeared was Zu An. However, he hadn’t expected such great chaos to have unfolded. It seemed that, whether it was Sang Hong or Xu Yu’s faction, they had been hoping for something big to happen in the Duke Manor. That was why they had tacitly allowed such a thing.

“Sir Duke, please spare us! We don’t know anything! We were just acting on orders!”

The looters were immediately scared witless. Not only had Jian Yanyou not died, he even seemed to have fully recovered from his injuries. Who in Cloudcenter Commandery could be his match? Thus, they all began to push the responsibility onto the dead.

“Sir Duke!”

Many scattered guards rushed over when they heard the news. When they saw the duke, they were all extremely moved. Those who could bear to remain for so long were clearly the truly loyal guards.

Zu An was about to say something when Zhang Ji quickly jumped into his arms, sobbing miserably and calling out, “Duke...”

Chu Yi and Liu Ji were both moved and excited. However, they knew this person wasn’t the real duke, so they didn’t act as naturally as Zhang Ji. They only moved a bit closer to him.

Even though he had beauties at his side, Zu An just felt a bit awkward. He hadn’t come back because he wanted to have fun with someone else’s women, but how could he have expected how passionate Zhang Ji would be?

Just then, a flurry of footsteps rang out, and Xu Yu arrived with a group of subordinates. His complexion was pale; he clearly still hadn’t recovered from his previous anger.

“Sir Xu came at the perfect time. These people have barged into the Duke Manor. As for what kind of crime this is, I will leave the details to Sir Xu,” Zu An said coldly. He didn’t have the patience to deal with the mess, so he’d just leave it to Xu Yu to deal with.

Sure enough, Xu Yu’s eyelids twitched. He clearly knew that in order to properly deal with things according to the law, he would likely have to offend a bunch of Cloudcenter City’s local powers.

He was about to do something when he saw that many cultivators from the great clans had been killed. He also felt the aura of the master rank ‘Jian Yanyou’. His expression immediately changed and he said, “The disturbance of the duke was due to my negligence. Just leave the follow-up to this official; I will definitely provide the duke with a satisfactory result.”

“I hope that will be the case,” Zu An said.

He didn’t feel like sparing Xu Yu another word, however, so he took the women with him and left. The event had drawn his attention to the fact that the women’s cultivation wasn’t that high, so they couldn’t really keep things under control. Thus, he had to help them raise their cultivation.

Chapter 1310: Passing On Cultivation

Of course, before then, there was something else Zu An had to do. He summoned all of the loyal guards to deal with the ones who hadn't done anything when the enemy approached, or had even colluded with outsiders. At the same time, he generously rewarded those who had fought heroically, promoting them to higher positions.

Even though he was only a single person, this was a world where the strong reigned. No one dared to go against master rank pressure. Aided by the prestige the duke had and the three women who understood the situation better, a great purge quickly took place in the Duke Manor.

However, after the chaotic day, the Duke Manor had taken a huge blow. The security was already struggling. Thus, after thinking about it, Zu An called over all of the Yu clan's guards. Following Yu Yanluo's departure, the Yu clan had been left without a leader, and were also in a difficult position. Meanwhile, Zu An had assumed the identity of Yu Yanluo's official husband. Sure enough, the Yu clan's guards didn't feel much mental rejection, and they were actually extremely grateful for being taken in.

Zu An saw that Gong Pan was also present. Through all the turmoil that had happened, Gong Pan had led his subordinates in protecting the Yu clan. He had experienced several serious conflicts, and had been injured quite badly himself. Based on their interactions, Zu An knew that Gong Pan was loyal.

However, Zu An didn't promote Gong Pan to the rank of captain, because the other man was someone from the 'previous dynasty'. Meanwhile, his identity would be exposed sooner or later, so he had to raise his own trusted aides. Once the truth was completely revealed, those people would have no choice but to stay with him in consideration of their own interests.

As such, he promoted a mid-level guard named Guan Wu, who had shown bravery and loyalty during the chaos, to the rank of captain. The guard was permitted to practice any of the rare manuals that were in the manor to increase his own strength.

Guan Wu had never expected to be given such heavy responsibility by the duke. He was so moved that even his voice shook as he vowed his unwavering loyalty to the duke, pledging his life to defend the Duke Manor.

Even though many others were jealous, Guan Wu was the one who had charged in at the very forefront of the chaos, and he had also been seriously injured. They all felt admiration for him. Furthermore, considering the power the duke had just displayed, who would dare utter a single word of protest?

After making arrangements for security, Zu An left it to his subordinates to clean up the manor. He brought the three women back to their rooms. Even though he had assigned them guards, in this world, being weak meant one would be powerless in many situations.

However, because they hadn't wanted Cloudcenter Duke to feel any suspicion, when Yu Yanluo had sent Liu Ji and Chu Ji, and Jian Taiding had sent Zhang Ji, they had chosen women with low cultivations. That was why Zu An wanted to help the women increase their cultivation. After what had just happened, they understood just how important it was to be strong themselves.

Zhang Ji sensed the implied meaning of Zu An's explanation and asked, "Duke, are you leaving?"

"There is something I need to take care of, so I will be gone for a period of time. Of course, what I will say to the public is that I am once again entering seclusion. It is enough for the three of you to know," Zu

An replied. These were the duke's spouses, after all. Saying that he was going into seclusion again might not be able to fully convince them.

"Ah... So you are still going to go..." Zhang Ji trailed off. Let alone her, even Chu Ji and Liu Ji were reluctant. Even though they knew he was an imposter, they felt exceptionally at peace with him at their side.

"That is why we need to seize the moment and increase your cultivation as quickly as possible," Zu An said to comfort them.

"But how can cultivation be that easy..." Zhang Ji said as she sat off to the side, crossing her beautiful long legs in an extremely graceful manner. She looked extremely distressed.

"Precisely! We might not be able to match up to your expectations..." Chu Ji added as she stood by the window. The sun shone on her clothes, highlighting her extremely soft and graceful curves.

"Sigh, if we knew things were going to be like this, we would have started cultivating earlier," Liu Ji said, putting her arms on her waist. Her movement caused a great ripple to course through her chest.

Zu An said, "Under normal circumstances, it would require many years of bitter cultivation. However, I have a way of quickly increasing your cultivation within a short amount of time. Still, it might stop you three from pursuing the peak of dao that you could have reached without it in the long run."

Zhang Ji smiled and replied, "The duke must be joking. Do people like us need to seek the peak of dao? It would already be a blessing for us to be able to protect ourselves. Furthermore, is it not all the same if the duke reaches the absolute peak?"

Liu Ji and Chu Ji voiced their agreement. They knew that with their talent, even though they were a bit better than ordinary people, they weren't talented geniuses. They obviously didn't have many extravagant hopes for their cultivation.

Zu An nodded and said, "In that case, then, let's start. Sit up next to me."

Then, he taught them the basics of breathing. Afterward, his fingers struck against their major acupoints as he used his own cultivation to open up the meridians they would need to transport ki. With his master rank cultivation, it wasn't too difficult to do those things.

Then, he infused ki into their bodies. Such a method of increasing cultivation was simple and crude, and normally, no cultivators were willing to perform it. It was too taxing on the one using the technique, and no one was willing to use the ki they had bitterly accumulated to benefit another. Furthermore, releasing a certain amount of ki didn't automatically mean the recipient would absorb the same amount. Often, they wouldn't absorb anything at all. That was why such a thankless task wasn't particularly common.

However, Zu An was different. He had the Heaven Devouring Art. He had instantly sucked the cultivators he killed dry when he dealt with them. At his current cultivation realm, their cultivation wasn't that useful to him. However, the ki he had absorbed was perfect for passing on to the three women.

After many hours passed, steam was emanating from the women's heads. They were completely soaked in sweat, and even their clothes were drenched. The process of having one's meridians cleansed was

extremely painful at times, but also extremely comfortable at other times. They had gritted their teeth and tried to endure for fear of disturbing Zu An, but after some time, one of them gave up, and they began to moan and scream.

Zu An's inner energies raged within him as a result of the process. Additionally, the three women's delicate fragrance had been stimulated by the heat. Between that and the moans that had begun to emerge from their mouths, he was even starting to feel tempted.

When he finally finished the process, he quickly said, "You are all around the initial stage of the sixth rank now. Of course, your strength cannot compare to that of a true sixth rank cultivator, but you will have the strength to protect yourself now. Furthermore, I will prepare many fighting skills for you to cultivate. All three of you are smart, so you should be able to grasp them soon. Now, I am going back to rest."

Chu Ji and Liu Ji exchanged a look when they saw him bow slightly before leaving in a somewhat haggard state. Their expressions were a bit red.

Zhang Ji was confused, asking, "Big sis, why does it feel as if the duke is intentionally avoiding us?"

In the past, they had been jealous love rivals and hadn't gotten along. Only now, after all that had happened, did they realize that they shared honor and disgrace together. They had to face all kinds of difficulties together. As such, their old conflicted feelings had already disappeared, and their relationship thus became quite close.

"It might be because he is being a gentleman," Chu Ji and Liu Ji replied. They naturally knew what was going on, but they couldn't tell her the truth.

"A gentleman?" Zhang Ji replied, finding it really strange. Why would they use that description to describe their husband? She thought for a bit, then moved over to their side to ask quietly, "Big sisters, don't you two feel that the duke is a bit different from before?"

Chu Ji and Liu Ji were alarmed. They wondered whether she had already seen through the duke and asked with puzzled expressions, "What's different?"

"It's just that..." Zhang Ji's face was a bit red as she looked around with a guilty conscience. When she was sure that there was no one around them, she said, "The duke seems a bit... bolder and more powerful than before."

Some memories appeared in Chu Ji and Liu Ji's head when they heard those words. Their hearts began to quicken. They replied, "Maybe... Maybe it's because the duke's cultivation has increased a bit recently."

"Is that so? But I don't remember the duke being like this even when his cultivation was this high," Zhang Ji said in confusion.

"We're all soaked in sweat. Let's return and take a bath for now. Let's not waste the duke's hard work," Chu Ji and Liu Ji said. They were worried that she would continue to ask, so they left guiltily.

"So strange..." Zhang Ji grumbled. The others didn't know what she was thinking, but her expression suddenly turned blank.

...

Meanwhile, Zu An returned to his room to rest. He eventually calmed down his raging ki, continuing to tell himself that gentlemen didn't take advantage of others' difficulties. In the past, he had needed to investigate the truth, so he had done those things to better imitate the duke. Now he couldn't continue to do things that would let the duke down, though.

Just then, someone knocked lightly on his door. Then, a figure pushed the door open and came in.

"Liu Ji?" Zu An called out. He couldn't help but remember Big Manman when he saw Liu Ji's chest rock back and forth. Unfortunately, it would be a long time before he could see her again.

"The duke has worked so hard for us just now. This is a soup of scallop, fungus, and pigeon I had prepared specially. It should be really good for your recovery," Liu Ji said. She placed a bowl of savory hot soup in front of him.

Zu An's expression was strange. He had already gotten so worked up from earlier, and yet she wanted him to eat such testosterone-boosting things? Still, he didn't want to let down the woman's kindness, so he picked it up to give it a try. It really was quite tasty. He had been running around so much that he really was a bit hungry.

I wonder if Yan Xuehen had anything to eat yet...

As Zu An's mind wandered, Liu Ji's voice pulled him back to reality. She asked, "Duke, has the madam already successfully returned to the Snake race territory?"

Zu An nodded and said, "Indeed. Everything is peaceful on that side..." Then, he told her about what had happened on the other side.

When she saw that he was yawning from time to time, Liu Ji walked behind him and said, "How about I give you a massage?"

"Um... That's not too appropriate, is it?"

"What isn't too appropriate? I used to do this for the duke, but..."

There wasn't much Zu An could say when he saw how Liu Ji seemed on the verge of tears. He had been running around for so long and he really was a bit tired, so he didn't refuse her anymore.

Liu Ji's fingers were really soft, and her movements were extremely considerate. Zu An slowly closed his eyes. Eventually, Liu Ji noticed how tense his neck was. She smiled and said gently, "Please relax~"

Under the guidance of her hands, Zu An's head sank into something soft and warm. He opened his eyes and wanted to say something, but then stopped.

Liu Ji said softly, "Duke, this is your home. Please don't consider yourself an outsider."

Zu An was a bit alarmed. Was she hinting at something?