

## Little Girl 221

Chapter 221: The Bottom-Ranked Siblings?

Jin Chen was feeling smug, casting a contemptuous glance at Xin Lin and Murong Ziyue, among others.

"Master Jin, do you take me for blind?"

Who would have known, Captain Yang snorted coldly and gave Jin Chen and the rest a stern look.

Jin Chen's face changed; he hadn't expected this Imperial Guard Captain to be impervious to both flattery and bullying, showing no regard for his father's status.

"The Emperor decrees that in this Zixiao Palace Exam, everyone is equal. Master Jin, even if you were the son of the Grandmaster or even the Third Prince himself, you would still have to follow the rules during this exam. Either get in line or get lost."

Captain Yang barked.

This Jin Chen was well-known as a member of the Crown Prince's Party in Purple Cloud City, and since childhood, he grew up alongside the Crown Prince and the Third Prince.

After the Crown Prince left Longteng to study abroad, he and the Third Prince remained as close as brothers.

The Third Prince was already enrolled at Qingtian Academy, and Jin Chen also desired to enter Qingtian Academy. With his father's status, he could easily be recommended for admission, yet for reasons unknown, he insisted on entering the academy as the top scorer of the Zixiao Palace Exam.

Before the Zixiao Palace Exam even started, he had already declared that he would be this year's top scholar.

Captain Yang's words were a blow to Jin Chen's pride.

"You dare speak to me like this, do you believe I would report you to the Thi..."

Jin Chen wanted to burst out but was pulled away by a few companions.

"Master Jin, please calm down. This Captain Yang is aligned with General Zuo's faction. Why bother clashing with them and giving General Zuo another reason to trouble your father? With your abilities, why stoop to the level of these low-grade individuals?"

Persuaded by his companions, Jin Chen finally swallowed his anger.

"Low-life, just you wait."

Jin Chen spat at Xin Lin and the others, seething, before stomping off to join another queue.

"Ziyue, thank you."

Xin Lin smiled warmly at Murong Ziyue, expressing his friendliness.

Murong Ziyue, however, stayed quiet and continued to line up. She was somewhat reserved by nature. Although she took a liking to Xin Lin, she had no immediate intention of becoming friends.

The siblings' abilities weren't strong, and in this Zixiao Palace Exam, they were likely doomed.

If they couldn't pass the exam, this might be their last time seeing each other.

Murong Ziyue thought there was no need to establish unnecessary bonds with someone she would only meet once.

Little did Murong Ziyue know, this encounter with the siblings would lead to a lifelong friendship.

"Big sister, do you like Miss Murong?"

Little Xinzhuo found it strange; his sister wasn't usually one to seek out company, yet here she was, initiating a friendship.

"Ah Zhuo, in this world, affection doesn't come without reason. To you and me, Murong Ziyue will become a very important friend."

Xin Lin's principle for making friends was simple: mutual connection and worthiness.

Murong Ziyue was taciturn, but she was immensely talented and a decent person, so she was worth befriending.

Another reason was that due to "the siblings," she had offended Jin Chen. Since Jin Chen was part of the Crown Prince's faction, which in turn was like the claws of the Empress.

The enemy of an enemy is a friend.

"Gentlemen, Captain Yang and Ma Jingtian are sworn brothers, and he asked me to take good care of you. Having offended the Third Prince before even taking the Imperial Examination is quite problematic."

Captain Yang came over to the sibling duo, whispering.

Little Xinzhuo looked visibly guilty.

Yet, Xin Lin merely raised her eyebrows, surprised. It seemed Ma Jingtian really did have some influence to have a brother holding a significant position in the Imperial Palace.

Xin Lin quickly put on a smiling face, amiably addressing Captain Yang as 'uncle.' After a few words of warning, Captain Yang let them register and proceed to North Square.

## Chapter 222: Empress Feng's Conspiracy

Xin Lin and Little Xinzhuo finished their registration and, one after the other, lined up to enter the North Square.

While queuing, Xin Lin became alert; she turned her head and noticed not far from the entrance to the North Square, General Zuo was coming along with several military generals.

General Zuo looked in the direction of Xin Lin and Little Xinzhuo as if in passing, merely glancing over them as if he did not recognize the siblings.

Xin Lin did not say more, and together with Little Xinzhuo, they entered the North Square.

"General Zuo, this year's Zixiao Palace Exam is indeed bustling with activity. By the looks of it, no fewer than ten thousand people have registered."

"It seems that our Longteng Country is thriving and teeming with talent."

General Zuo stood among several military generals, and a deputy general at his side remarked.

These generals' arrival might be not without the purpose of selecting talents.

Apart from the very few geniuses picked by Qingtian Academy, many young men and women with extraordinary physiques here may be chosen to join the Dragon Ascending Army.

General Zuo withdrew his gaze.

Earlier, General Zuo had also witnessed the scene of the conflict between Murong Ziyue, Xin Lin, and others with Jin Chen.

That girl called Murong Ziyue left a strong impression on General Zuo.

However, the performance of that haughty girl and the Seventh Prince who had been in front of him before disappointed General Zuo greatly.

He had thought that the Seventh Prince and Noble Lady Shi taking the risk to return to the city would indicate substantial growth on the Seventh Prince's part, but it seems he is still the same as before.

A sheep will always be a sheep and can never become a lion.

General Zuo shook his head.

"Foolish thoughts. In these past decades, Longteng may seem prosperous, but in reality, it remains a vassal country. With just a word from the Jun Kingdom, we must cede territory and pay tribute. After General Shi's death, Longteng no longer has a commanding talent. A hundred years since Qingtian Academy was established, not a single person has entered the Heavenly Pride List. Yet you speak of Longteng being full of talents, it's simply like burying one's head in the sand, a ridiculous joke."

General Zuo scolded the deputy generals and left with a flick of his sleeves.

The deputy generals looked at each other, none daring to speak any further.

In the blink of an eye, it was around noon, and the preliminary registration for the Zixiao Palace Exam had been completed.

"Reporting to Empress, the registration for the Zixiao Palace Exam has been completed, with over thirteen thousand young talents participating."

Volumes of the register were also sent to the Empress' palace.

Thirteen thousand people?

Empress Feng, dressed in a phoenix robe, her beautiful eyes slightly narrowed.

Among so many people, it would indeed not be easy to find the illegitimate child of Noble Lady Shi.

"Empress, among these people, there are over six hundred boys aged seven. Three of them have the surname Shi and two the surname Long. These five have already been apprehended by my men, but they don't seem to be the son of Noble Lady Shi."

Just as Xin Lin had previously guessed, although Empress Feng seemed to have withdrawn the manhunt for Noble Lady Shi and her son, in reality, her murderous intent had not lessened.

"To have evaded my pursuit for so long, Noble Lady Shi has indeed improved over the years. Surely she will not let her bastard participate in the Imperial Examination under his real name. However, does she really believe she can meet the Emperor through the Imperial Examination?"

Empress Feng contemptuously curled her lips.

"Summon someone, grind the ink, send over the examination questions."

Empress Feng rose to her feet, and as she lifted her snowy wrist to write, a line of text materialized on the paper.

With this line, she would be able to find that bastard.

That bastard should not even think about meeting Emperor Longteng in this lifetime.

Inside North Square, the young men and women who completed their registration for the Imperial Examination had already begun entering one after another; Xin Lin and Little Xinzhuo also entered the North Square, and to their surprise, the preliminary test turned out to be an examination paper.

Chapter 223: Difficulties and Obstacles

Surprise was not the sole preserve of Xin Lin; the faces of all the others who came to participate in the Zixiao Palace Exam were filled with astonishment.

"Silence, the examiners have arrived."

Captain Yang gave Xin Lin and Little Xinzhuo a meaningful glance, and as the Imperial Guards lined up in a row, two figures resembling court officials made their way over.

"These two are Mr. Wei and Mr. Huang, Assistant Ministers of the Ministry of Personnel. They will explain the relevant assessments of this Zixiao Palace Exam to everyone."

Captain Yang's voice boomed, echoing to every corner of the square.

Due to the unprecedented number of participants in this Zixiao Palace Exam, even North Square could not accommodate everyone all at once, therefore, it was said the assessments were to be held in three separate batches of people.

Xin Lin and Little Xinzhuo had arrived early and were grouped in the first batch, along with the son of the Grand Tutor, Jin Chen, and others.

Mr. Wei and Mr. Huang stepped forward.

"Presumably, all of you have heard that this year's Zixiao Palace Exam differs from previous years. Longteng Country is thriving, and the Emperor is broadly recruiting talents. All present are the most gifted individuals of our nation. Since this examination round concerns the exemption of Qingtian Academy students from the tests, this year's examination format will also vary from the norm."

Mr. Wei of the Ministry of Personnel spoke first, and as soon as he finished, Mr. Huang beside him took out the examination papers.

"This year's Imperial Exam consists of both Written and Martial Arts Examinations. The Written Exam questions are personally set by Empress Feng, and they are on the examination paper in front of each participant. Each of you has a quarter of an hour to answer, and the results of the Written Exam count for half. Those who do not pass the Written Exam will be directly disqualified from the second round Martial Arts Examination."

A Written Examination as well?

Xin Lin and Little Xinzhuo were both stunned.

Especially Xin Lin, she sensed something amiss.

That Empress Feng, a femme fatale, had always been inactive, and it was strange to suddenly concoct a set of questions—there must be a catch.

Xin Lin pondered briefly before communicating with Little Xinzhuo.

Little Xinzhuo nodded obediently.

In contrast to Xin Lin and Little Xinzhuo, many of the children present showed signs of difficulty.

Murong Ziyue glanced around and sighed softly.

Empress Feng's move was clearly aimed at suppressing the descendants of poor families.

Ever since General Shi's battle several years ago and the subsequent veneration of Taichang Temple by the populace, Longteng Country had been peaceful and the people secure, yet due to the early years of war, many civilians were still very impoverished.

Many poor family descendants eagerly practiced martial arts to earn some money to support their families.

But among these people, how many had the knowledge of writing and the art of letters?

Indeed, as soon as the examination papers were unfolded, many were dumbstruck.

On the paper, there was only one sentence.

"Between two clashing countries, which is stronger, the army of Martial Artists or the army of Spiritual Practitioners?"

Those who were illiterate from poor families could not even recognize the words; they could only stare blankly at the white paper with black text, some even bursting into tears on the spot. One had only one opportunity in a lifetime to participate in the Zixiao Palace Exam; missing this chance meant they would never be able to leap over the dragon's gate, so how could they be reconciled?

"A bunch of lowlifes, not even knowing their letters, yet dreaming of joining Qingtian Academy, dream on."

Jin Chen among the scions of privileged families glanced around with a smug expression.

Empress Feng had always emphasized etiquette, and the Emperor Longteng had, for some unknown reason, been fervent on broad talent recruitment, treating poor and official families without distinction, which Empress Feng and the faction led by the Grandmaster had strongly opposed.

But at the last moment, a voice from Taichang Temple spoke up, stating that Emperor's talent selection should not discriminate against the poor, and thus this Zixiao Palace Exam came to be.

#### Chapter 224: The Best Answer

Compared to the plight of the children from poor families, those born into official households are different.

From a young age, they are born into official families, and their parents and clans start nurturing them early, having already compared the differences between Martial Artists and Spiritual Practitioners with their tutors and teachers.

As soon as they see the examination paper, they start writing as if inspired by divine force, swiftly filling an entire page with just a few strokes.

Xin Lin and Little Xinzhuo whispered a few words to each other and then glanced again at the examination paper.

Unlike others, Xin Lin didn't start answering immediately.

The Written Examination accounts for half of the total Zixiao Palace Exam, and thanks to her superpowers, Xin Lin already knew that Murong Ziyue was ranked first. She had warned Murong Ziyue, expecting no surprise, Murong Ziyue was bound to be first.

The rest included the second and third ranks.

To control the Water Wraith Gang, Xin Lin needed to secure either the second or third place.

"Gui Hu, who do you think is more formidable, Martial Artists or Spiritual Practitioners?"

Xin Lin silently inquired Gui Hu in the Sealing Spirit Talisman.

"Either way, none are as formidable as me."

Gui Hu's response left Xin Lin speechless.

Act as if she never asked, fine then.

But then again, should Gui Hu be considered a Martial Artist or a Spiritual Practitioner?

Xin Lin looked around, noticing that some people had already submitted their papers.

Mostly, they were disheartened children from poor families, illiterate and clueless about how to answer, with no choice but to give up.

Jin Chen had also submitted his paper, looking very pleased with his own answers.

Xin Lin looked up and saw several stacks of papers on the examiner's desk.

With Fu Xi's Energy gathering in her eyes, Xin Lin could clearly see the answers written on the papers.

Most of the students had vague responses, nothing more than generic answers like depending on the number of soldiers in the armies, or favorable weather and terrain—nothing more than mediocre performances that surely would not stand out.

At this moment, a familiar figure caught her eye.

Murong Ziyue had also submitted her paper.

As the top scorer in the Zixiao Palace Exam, her Written Examination score must be outstanding as well.

Xin Lin was quite interested in her answers.

"It's actually..."

After taking a few glances, Xin Lin smiled slightly.

As expected of the first rank, her way of answering was indeed very special.

Xin Lin withdrew her gaze.

Little Xinzhuo had also turned in his paper. When he did so, he sneakily glanced at Sister's paper and saw not a single word written—could Sister possibly not know how to respond?

Worry filled Little Xinzhuo's face.

Sister hadn't been at Longteng for long, her time spent learning Martial Arts and Spirit Cultivation was short. This question might seem simple but actually tested theoretical knowledge deeply.

With a heavy heart, Little Xinzhuo submitted his paper.

In the plaza, fewer than a hundred people remained.

Xin Lin was still deep in thought over the examination paper.

"Who is more formidable, Spiritual Practitioners or Martial Artists? No matter how you answer, it's a paradox. To say Spiritual Practitioners are formidable, would that mean Martial Artists aren't?"

Xin Lin had been at Longteng for only a short time, her knowledge of Spiritual Practitioners and Martial Artists wasn't extensive.

She herself was an intermediate Spiritual Practitioner and a beginner Martial Artist, but in her view, both had their strengths.

Such simple logic, even an outsider like her knew, not to mention that cunning woman, Empress Feng.

What kind of answer was Empress Feng actually looking for?

Xin Lin glanced at the increasingly thick stack of papers in front of the examiner, her eyes thoughtful.

"The last quarter of an hour."

The examiner reminded.

Only then did Xin Lin pick up her pen and wrote down a few words; the time had just passed as Xin Lin finished her last character.

#### Chapter 225: The Bet

Xin Lin and Little Xinzhuo left the North Square, and a new batch of candidates were just entering.

Behind them came the voices of Jin Chen and others.

"A blockhead is a blockhead, handing in a blank paper. If I were you, I would just go home and cry."

The person Jin Chen was talking about was naturally Xin Lin.

His position was not far from Xin Lin's.

When he handed in his paper, there was already less than fifteen minutes left. He clearly saw that the examination paper of that low-class person had nothing written on it.

Even if she wrote as fast as she could, she wouldn't be able to produce anything meaningful.

"Who are you calling a blockhead?"

Little Xinzhuo glared at Jin Chen upon hearing this.

This person was really annoying, opposing them siblings all the way.

"Whoever hands in a blank paper is a blockhead. You can't even recognize the letters and still dream of attending Qingtian Academy."

Jin Chen said with a peculiar tone.

"It's still better than some people, writing like an old woman's foot-binding cloth, both stinky and long. Believe it or not, your so-called 'foot-binding cloth' will not score as well as my 'blank paper.'"

Xin Lin said with a smile.

She admitted that she might not match up to Murong Ziyue's paper, but it was absolutely going to be much better than Jin Chen's "foot-binding cloth."

"Blockhead, who are you calling foot-binding cloth?"

Earlier, when Jin Chen saw that Xin Lin and her brother were silent, he thought they were weak and easily bullied. But after they completed the Written Examination, they became defiant and aggressive.

"In one word, will you compete or not?"

Xin Lin glanced at Jin Chen.

This guy dared to bully her and Ah Zhuo earlier, so she might as well teach him a lesson, a sort of welcoming gift.

"Compete then, compete. As if Young Master Jin would be scared of you. If your score is lower than Young Master Jin's, you will become my foot-washing maid!"

Jin Chen impetuously agreed without thinking.

Although this low-grade blockhead was of humble origin, she was pretty, and surely she would grow into a great beauty in a few years. Without spending a cent, he would have a pretty foot-washing maid; Jin Chen deemed it worthwhile.

"But what if your score is lower than mine?"

Xin Lin countered.

"How could Young Master Jin's score be lower than yours? If that happens, you can pick anything you want from me."

Jin Chen was full of carelessness.

Xin Lin glanced over Jin Chen's possessions as Fu Xi's Energy gathered.

There really were quite a few items on this dandy: one thousand silver notes, a jade pendant at the waist that seemed valuable, and a secret book. However, all of these were not very appealing to Xin Lin.

"If I lose, I want that robe you're wearing."

Xin Lin's gaze turned, looking towards the Golden Silk Robe on Jin Chen.

"Golden Silk Robe?"

Upon hearing that, Jin Chen frowned.

This blockhead really had some insight.

This Golden Silk Robe was gifted by his father, Grandmaster Jin, when he was born.

The garment was crafted using a special technique, could adjust its size according to the wearer's body, and provided protection against blades and spears. Even common evil creatures would find it difficult to get close. Its value was certainly no less than tens of thousands of taels.

If he really lost, his father would surely kill him.

Jin Chen hesitated.

"Young Master Jin, you're not scared of losing to a little girl, are you?"

Just as Jin Chen hesitated, a bell-like voice was heard.

A gust of fragrant breeze hit, and several young girls approached.

The girls were all around thirteen or fourteen years old. The leading girl was charming and cute with sparkling almond-shaped eyes. She was none other than Chu Miaoyun of the Imperial Doctor Mansion, who had broken through not long ago.

Chapter 226: The Peacock Girl Appears

Chu Miaoyun's appearance instantly caused a stir among those present.

The Imperial Doctor Mansion has been highly favored by the Emperor in recent years, especially since Grand Doctor Chu cured Emperor Longteng's chronic headache, and Emperor Longteng showed great affection for everyone in the Imperial Doctor Mansion.

Chu Miaoyun is Grand Doctor Chu's beloved daughter, and with her remarkable beauty, her earlier acts of distributing porridge have earned her a good reputation in Purple Cloud City.

Many officials' offspring couldn't help but take a few more glances at her, barely concealing their admiration.

"Miaoyun, my sister, I wondered why I didn't see you; turns out you're in the second group."

Jin Chen was also acquainted with Chu Miaoyun. Chu Miaoyun has always been a popular candidate for the Third Prince's Princess Consort, and Jin Chen was quite respectful towards her.

While Chu Miaoyun was still queuing outside North Square, she heard the chatter about Jin Chen getting into a dispute with a few commoners.

Jin Chen, being the son of the Grandmaster, was found to have True Qi in his body at the age of eight and broke through to become a Xuanwu Practitioner at ten. He has reached the Third Rank of Xuanwu Practitioner now, and there had been rumors that Jin Chen would be the leader of this year's Zixiao Palace Exam.

In fact, even if Jin Chen didn't participate in the Zixiao Palace Exam, his status and power were enough to get him recruited by Qingtian Academy; his participation was purely to grab the spotlight.

Upon seeing Chu Miaoyun, Jin Chen put on a smile.

Little Xinzhuo became nervous when he saw Chu Miaoyun, tugging at Xin Lin.

Xin Lin understood what Little Xinzhuo meant; Chu Miaoyun looked fine, and it seemed like taking the Ultimate Marrow Cleansing Powder had no effect on her.

Chu Miaoyun's Written Examination was about to start. She didn't even glance at Xin Lin and the others, exchanging a few polite words with Jin Chen before entering North Square with a proud and haughty demeanor.

She is already a Dark Martial Artist First Rank, and even if she doesn't become the leader of the Zixiao Palace Exam, she should still make it into the top ten. In her eyes, low-grade people like Xin Lin were not even worthy to carry her shoes.

"Peacock girl."

Little Xinzhuo stuck out his tongue at Chu Miaoyun's retreating figure.

"Ah Zhuo, remember that there's a saying; 'A phoenix that has fallen to the ground is no better than a chicken.' Let's just wait and see."

Xin Lin had personally experienced the effects of the Ultimate Marrow Cleansing Powder; there could be no mistake about its effectiveness.

As for why it hadn't shown effects on Chu Miaoyun yet, there had to be a reason for it.

But it was thanks to Chu Miaoyun's interruption that Jin Chen, who had been indecisive about the Golden Silk Robe matter earlier, was provoked by her and gritted his teeth in agreement to the bet.

"Let's compete, and you'll wait to be my foot washing maid."

Jin Chen's face was full of arrogance.

Xin Lin simply smiled without a word, pulling Little Xinzhuo to wait outside North Square.

Another two hours passed, and all remaining batches of candidates had finished their exams, and the examination papers had been sent to the palace.

With 10,300 exam papers, the amount to be graded was substantial, and the results of the Written Examination had to be announced before evening, so nearly a hundred examiners were mobilized to mark the papers this time.

Of the students who had signed up for the Zixiao Palace Exam, nearly 40% had been eliminated even before the marking began, including those who were illiterate.

Officials responsible for marking the Written Examination couldn't help but talk among themselves.

"Empress has indeed shown great wisdom. If we really had to screen over ten thousand candidates one by one, it would have taken more than ten days. Her question truly spared us a lot of trouble."

"The Empress has decreed that if we see any papers with the mentioned handwriting, they should be presented immediately for Her Majesty to review personally."

Li Kuai, from Empress Feng's side, came quickly, bringing a few pages of paper to be distributed among the examiners grading the papers.

## Chapter 227: The Conspiracy Behind the Written Examination

What does Empress Feng mean by this?

The examiners were perplexed by the few sheets of paper, but they dared not ask further questions; they could only memorize the handwriting on the papers and continue grading.

In the palace, Empress Feng leaned on the noble concubine's couch, resting with her eyes closed.

Before long, Eunuch Li returned to report.

"Reporting to the Empress, all papers have been reviewed, and none with handwriting resembling that of the Seventh Prince have been found."

Upon hearing this, Empress Feng's beautiful eyes widened in shock, and she sat up abruptly.

"Not found? Impossible!"

Empress Feng had been unable to locate Noble Lady Shi and her son; she decided to retreat as a way to advance, lying in wait for the fish to bite, especially since her spies reported that someone had met with General Zuo in secret a few days ago.

That person must be one of Noble Lady Shi's.

Empress Feng had not found the object of her search and suspected it might still be in Noble Lady Shi's possession.

Inside and outside the Imperial Palace, she had laid defenses layer upon layer; it was impossible for Noble Lady Shi and her son to grow wings and meet with the Emperor.

The only opportunity was today's Zixiao Palace Exam.

Years ago, the Seventh Prince was deemed illegitimate and sent out of the Imperial Palace, without even a name; his appearance was unclear to Empress Feng's spies.

This is why Empress Feng thought to use handwriting as a means to find the person.

After all, appearances can be changed, and names can be fabricated, but handwriting is impossible to disguise.

For this reason, Empress Feng had pestered insistently, managing to convince Emperor Longteng to change this year's format of the Zixiao Palace Exam, ingeniously proposing a three-round examination system, yet she still could not find the Seventh Prince.

"Empress, please calm your anger. Your servant believes that Noble Lady Shi and her son do not have the courage to participate in the Zixiao Palace Exam. Besides, the Seventh Prince, just like Noble Lady Shi, is nothing more than a waste. To participate in the Zixiao Palace Exam would be to bring humiliation upon themselves. Only a match made in heaven like you and the Emperor could produce talents such as the Crown Prince and the Third Prince."

Eunuch Li was an expert in flattering, sweet-talking Empress Feng into a better mood with just a few words.

"Even so, we cannot let our guard down. Have the results of the written examination come out yet? How did the son of Grandmaster Jin perform?"

Empress Feng had put much effort into this year's written examination questions.

The Emperor, swayed by someone from Taichang Temple, desired to recruit a wide array of talents, which undoubtedly threatened the interests of the powerful, led by the Empress herself.

Using the written examination as cover, Empress Feng aimed to suppress those from poor families.

"Forty percent of commoners' children couldn't answer the questions and have been eliminated. When your servant left, the examiners had finished the initial grading, there was some contention left, and they were in the final discussion. The son of Grandmaster Jin you were concerned about is said to have performed quite well and should be able to be rated as upper-class."

Eunuch Li replied truthfully.

The written examination results were classified as upper-class, middle, or low-grade according to performance.

"Grandmaster Jin is both literate and martially skilled; having studied and practiced martial arts with the Third Prince from a young age, Jin Chen is naturally not too bad. The Third Prince himself was sent to Qingtian Academy as the top Imperial Examination scholar. Come, I also wish to see what kind of talents this year's Imperial Examination has attracted."

Empress Feng stood up, dressed in full regalia, and, surrounded by a host of palace maids and attendants, walked towards North Square.

As the evening approached, North Square was still bustling with activity.

Even though forty percent of the candidates had been eliminated, the results of the written examination had not been published, and all the examinees were on tiptoes, eagerly anticipating the results.

"Why haven't the results come out yet? The hour has already passed."

Little Xinzhuo squeezed in and out of the crowd several times; the Imperial List with the written examination results had still not been posted at the entrance to the square.

"The delay in announcing the results indicates that there is controversy."

Murong Ziyue had unknowingly appeared beside the siblings.

## Chapter 228: Worse Than Pigs and Dogs

Little Xinzhuo asked curiously.

"Ziyue, what does it mean to have a controversy?"

Little Xinzhuo's round little face was very cute, and Murong Ziyue couldn't help but rub his head.

"The results of the written examination are divided into three grades: upper, middle, and lower. Although there are only three outcomes, within the upper grade, there will be the first three ranks. It seems that the examiners are having trouble deciding the ranking for these top three."

Murong Ziyue was fourteen years old, just like Xin Lin, but she had a tall figure and a calm personality, appearing much more mature than her peers.

With more than ten thousand exam papers, even after eliminating forty percent, there are still over six thousand left. With one hundred examiners marking papers, it's hard to reach a consensus, and selecting the top three is not easy.

After hearing this, Little Xinzhuo's face showed a hint of worry.

He was worried about the competition between Sister and Jin Chen.

If she really lost, wouldn't Sister become that bad boy Jin Chen's foot washing maid?

"You're too reckless."

Ziyue looked at Xin Lin, who seemed quite content.

She had previously had a good impression of Xin Lin, but seeing her act so recklessly now lessened her opinion of her.

"The results aren't out yet, so who is being reckless is still unknown."

Xin Lin smiled, not worried.

"No need to wait for the outcomes anymore; my answer paper has already been rated as upper-class. Now you just wait to become my foot washing maid."

Jin Chen and his group walked over.

With him was Chu Miaoyun and several other sons and daughters of officials.

Jin Chen was the Grandmaster Jin's son. Although the results of the written examination had not yet been announced, Grandmaster Jin had already received news that Jin Chen's answer paper was not bad and had been graded.

Once the news was out, Jin Chen was overjoyed and immediately came over to embarrass and ridicule Xin Lin.

"Young Master Jin, you really don't know how to be tender towards the fairer sex, do you? Although this young girl is small, she has delicate and tender skin. To have her carry washbasin water and do such rough work would be too much of a humiliation for her. How about I give you five silver taels to buy her from you, and she can serve me by pouring tea and water?"

Chu Miaoyun said, covering her mouth with a laugh.

"Miao Yun, are you implying that this young girl is only worth five silver taels? Five silver taels can't even buy a pig or a dog; isn't she worse than them?"

Jin Chen and his group couldn't help but burst into laughter.

Xin Lin stood by, not getting angry but just smilingly looked at Jin Chen.

"What are you waiting for? Take her down, sign and seal the deal. I want her to wash my feet tonight!"

Jin Chen said hatefully, not knowing what was coming to him, thinking that with the support of the Imperial Guard Captain, he could offend him.

"Wait!"

Murong Ziyue frowned; this group of people was really going too far.

"Murong Ziyue, you don't plan on interfering again, do you? Don't think that just because you have some abilities that I'll be scared of you. I'll take care of this foot washing maid first and deal with you later!"

Jin Chen warned.

As the crowd was making a fuss, suddenly they heard Captain Yang come out.

"Silence, what's all this commotion about? The results of the written examination have come out, everyone, quiet down."

Captain Yang, holding the results of the written examination, walked towards the crowd.

Everyone fell silent for a moment, all holding their breaths as they looked towards the list in Captain Yang's hands.

Xin Lin glanced at Captain Yang, looking straight past him.

The results of the written examination were divided into three grades, and Captain Yang only announced the names of those who were evaluated as "upper-class". The names of the middle and lower-class candidates would be posted for public display.

On the list of "upper-class" names, roughly two hundred names were listed. Xin Lin's eyes immediately caught the last few names at the bottom of the list, and upon seeing the outcome, she was momentarily stunned.

This result was something she had not expected.

#### Chapter 229: The Battle for the Top Three

In North Square, more than a hundred examiners had not yet dispersed.

Having reviewed the exam papers for over two hours, they engaged in heated discussions for another full hour regarding the final results.

Particularly regarding the ranking of the top three, the examiners had already split into factions, engaging in fervent verbal spats.

Such a scene was beyond even what Empress Feng, who set the questions, had anticipated.

"Her Majesty, the Empress, arrives."

The eunuch shrieked, and the hundred plus examiners hurriedly knelt down to pay their respects.

"My honorable examiners, I've heard that you have been incessantly debating the top three results of today's Written Examination. I, too, am quite interested and wish to see the kind of talent that has sparked such a controversy."

Empress Feng said with a smile.

Her beautiful eyes gleamed as she looked towards a few answer sheets not far away.

Which is stronger, the Spiritual Practitioners' or Martial Artists' forces? Even Empress Feng herself had never considered an answer.

Her original intention in setting the question was twofold.

Firstly, to flush out the Seventh Prince, and secondly, to weed out the illiterate scholars from poor families. She had not expected that it would cause such a large outcry.

"Reporting to Your Majesty, the top three places are indeed difficult to determine. The distinguished officials present have divided into three factions, each asserting the superiority of the Martial Artists, the Spiritual Practitioners, and..."

Vice Minister Cheng of the Ministry of Personnel, responsible for overseeing the examination affairs, wiped the cold sweat from his forehead and stepped forward to report.

Among the Civil and Military Officials of Longteng, there are individuals from both spiritual and martial backgrounds.

Of course, in terms of numbers, there are more officials of martial background.

Hence, these officials tended to favor answer sheets suggesting that the Martial Artists' forces were stronger in the Written Examination.

However, some officials of spiritual background, such as the staff members of Grandmaster Jin, were convinced of the Spiritual Practitioners' superiority.

The appearance of the third category was somewhat unexpected to Empress Feng.

Could there be other arguments besides the victory of Spiritual Practitioners or Martial Artists?

Empress Feng was also quite curious. She walked forward and picked up one of the answer sheets.

"Spiritual Practitioners and Martial Artists meet, the Martial Artists prevail. The reason is none other than that I am also a Martial Artist..."

The first sheet Empress Feng saw was from a candidate named "Murong Ziyue."

This candidate was quite interesting; being a Martial Artist herself, she was steadfast in her belief in the inevitable victory of the Martial Artists' army.

Her answer sheet overflowed with self-confidence and a conviction of victory, and not only that, her literary grace and handwriting were unlike typical women – they bore the strong demeanor of a man.

"Well answered."

As a woman herself, Empress Feng could tell from the answer sheet that this person was bound to be extraordinary.

As a Martial Artist, one must have a firm martial heart. Murong Ziyue's answer sheet truly deserved to be rated as upper-class.

The handwriting of this second answer sheet, however, was much uglier than the first, looking rather childish, signed by "Xin Zhuo."

Unlike Murong Ziyue's answer sheet, Xin Zhuo believed that in a battle between Spiritual Practitioners and Martial Artists, the Spiritual Practitioners would win.

He did not base his judgment on self-perspective, but rather on the records of numerous battles between Martial Artists and Spiritual Practitioners since ancient times, concluding that Spiritual Practitioners held a combat advantage.

"At such a young age, he can analyze advantages and disadvantages, and he is aware of many battles from ancient to present times. This child is also quite exceptional."

The examiners who recommended Xin Zhuo's answer sheet also considered it a rare find.

Xin Zhuo... Empress Feng glanced at the sheet and her elegant brows furrowed.

"Is that last answer sheet the son of Grandmaster Jin?"

Empress Feng did not comment on Little Xinzhuo's answer sheet, but her gaze moved to the final sheet, only to find that the name on it was not Jin Chen's.

Chapter 230: Nonsense Disguised as Sage Advice?

Xin Lin, this is yet another completely unfamiliar name.

The Xin Family, there's no royal or noble lineage bearing this surname in Purple Cloud City.

Seeing the answer script of the last of the top three, Empress Feng's beautiful eyes slightly condense.

It's not Jin Chen, which means the son of Grandmaster Jin did not make the top three?

Empress Feng is somewhat displeased.

These examiners as well, Jin Chen and the Third Prince have been studying together since they were young. Before the Written Examination began, the Third Prince had been persistently entangling Empress Feng, insisting that Jin Chen must take the top ranking.

When Empress Feng set the questions, she had already hinted at it. Could these pedantic civil servants not understand her implication?

Jin Chen must rank first in both the Martial Arts Examination and the Written Examination to seize the top position.

She glanced at the third answer script, only to find that compared to the first two, the answers in this script were extremely short, merely a line of words.

A single line to clarify who is stronger or weaker between Spirit and Martial Artists?

"What's so special about this script?"

Empress Feng pointed at the script.

"Reporting to Empress, although the words in this script are brief, they are reasonable. We request that Empress review it herself."

Several examiners, with a pained expression, presented the answer script.

The handwriting on the script was rather neat, looking like it was written by a woman, but it was not as elaborate as Murong Ziyue's.

"When paths converge, the brave emerge victorious, irrespective of Spirit Practitioner or Martial Artist."

On the paper, there was only this sentence.

"How preposterous, the brave prevail, what kind of answer is this? Are all of you blind? In my view, this script should be graded as Low-grade, how is it any different from submitting a blank script?"

Empress Feng flew into a rage.

She had thought the opposite party would produce some magnificently written essay, but to her surprise, it contained such nonsensical words, and the opponent couldn't even make clear who won or lost between Spirit and Martial Artists.

This person named Xin Lin is clearly scorning her question.

"Your Majesty, please calm your anger. The words are reasonable... they are... the very words penned personally by Longteng's First Emperor, indeed precious and valuable."

The group of examiners exchanged looks, confused.

They of course knew that strictly speaking, this answer script was not the correct answer.

But the artful part lay in the source of the sentence – Longteng's First Emperor.

Could words spoken by the ancestral Emperor be wrong?

Upon hearing this, Empress Feng was immediately speechless.

She is not a Longteng person and not familiar with Longteng's history, naturally not knowing the origin of this sentence.

Words spoken by the First Emperor, not to mention her as an Empress in the harem, even Emperor Longteng cannot refute.

"This answer script must be rated as Upper-class, and moreover, must be within the top three. But if it's the first place, it would seem somewhat unjust, so we are still discussing it. As for who will be the top scholar, that's still being debated."

After discussing, the examiners felt that Murong Ziyue's literary grace and martial heart made her deserving of the title of top scholar, but there was also Xin Lin. As for Xin Zhuo, he also made wide-ranging references, yet due to his slightly inferior handwriting, he should also be placed among the top three.

"Jin Chen's answer script is also remarkable. I believe he should be ranked toward the front."

Empress Feng ordered someone to bring out Jin Chen's answer script.

Xin Lin's script is related to the First Emperor, thus untouchable.

As for Empress Murong Ziyue, Empress had earlier personally praised her script, so she couldn't very well contradict herself, but Jin Chen, as the son of the Grandmaster, not even making the top three would be a disgrace to the Jin Family.

Empress Feng clenched her teeth and directly ordered someone to take out Jin Chen's script, replacing Xin Zhuo's script.

"This..."

A group of examiners exchanged glances, but who would dare to disobey the Empress's command?

And so the results of the Written Examination were settled.