

MO XIANG TONG XIU



Heaven Official's Blessings

TIAN GUAN CI FU

2

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墨香铜臭





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Chapter 12: In the Palace of Divine Might, Crown Prince Meets Crown Prince

XIE LIAN KNEW this ring must have been left behind by Hua Cheng. He held it in his hand and wondered for a moment, *What could this be?*

When Xie Lian was still an esteemed crown prince, he grew up in the Palace of Xianle. The Kingdom of Xianle had always reveled in beautiful, precious objects. Collectors who held aesthetics above all else were abundant, and the palace itself was of course glorious and dazzling. Golden columns, jaded steps, innumerable treasures, and precious jewels—the noble children even played with colored gems as if they were toys. Xie Lian was thus familiar with the sight of riches, and from the look of this ring, it appeared to be made of diamond. But its shape was exquisite—even the most skilled jeweler likely couldn't craft an equal to the ethereal natural beauty it emanated. Moreover, of all the diamonds he had ever seen, this stone was extraordinarily clear, shimmering like a crystal, fascinating and sublime. That scintillating luster made it difficult for him to determine exactly what kind of stone it could be.

Still, even if he couldn't tell what the ring was made of, it was certainly an item of extreme significance. If it was found around his neck, then it had clearly not been accidentally dropped. It was most likely a gift from Hua Cheng, a keepsake.

Xie Lian was a little surprised to receive a memento like this, and he smiled softly. He resolved to take good care of it and to ask the youth what the gift meant the next time they met. All he owned was this broken-down shrine, and in it there was nowhere appropriate for him to hide treasure. After giving it some thought, he decided the best place to keep it was on his person after all. And thus, Xie Lian fastened the silver chain around his neck once more.

After running around Mount Yujun and Banyue Pass back-to-back, Xie Lian lay paralyzed in Puqi Shrine for a few days. If it wasn't for the kindness

of some overly passionate villagers who came with offerings of buns and congee, he would've probably stayed incapacitated for many days more. He spent his time thus, until one day, a sudden message arrived from Ling Wen: Return to the heavens at once.

Judging by her tone, something bad was about to go down. Xie Lian could guess more or less what it was and was already mentally prepared.

“Is this about Banyue Pass?”

“That’s right,” Ling Wen replied. “When you’ve returned to the heavens, come directly to the Palace of Divine Might.”

Upon hearing “Palace of Divine Might,” Xie Lian froze. Jun Wu was back.

Since his third ascension, he hadn’t yet seen Jun Wu. As the number one martial god, Jun Wu spent his days deep in secluded cultivation or out patrolling the realms and keeping the world at peace. With his return, it looked as though Xie Lian wouldn’t be able to get out of making this trip. And so, after only a few days of rest, he hiked up to the Heavenly Capital once more.

The divine palaces of all manner of gods and immortals had been built in the Heavenly Capital, each with their own history and style. Together, they formed the great city. There were sculpted pillars and muraled buildings here, little bridges and streams there. There was a transcendent ambience in the air, and clouds diffused beneath one’s feet.

The Heavenly Court had a single main road: the Grand Avenue of Divine Might. Although there were many such roads built in honor of Jun Wu in the Mortal Realm, such mortal monuments were but a hollow mimicry of their true form in the heavens. Only this road in the Heavenly Court was the true Grand Avenue of Divine Might. Xie Lian walked on down the expansive road and headed toward the Palace of Divine Might. En route, there were many heavenly officials hurrying along, but not a single one dared acknowledge him.

Truthfully, there were not many to begin with who would acknowledge him when he visited the Heavenly Court. However, “not acknowledge” meant no fellow officials would approach and walk with him or initiate any

conversation, but they would still nod in greeting and give him basic due courtesy. But now they were pretending he wasn't there at all, as if a single glance at him would get them in trouble. If they were in front of him, they would hurry away. If they were behind him, they would slow their pace, leaving him a wide berth, desperately hoping his feet would carry him meters away from them.

Xie Lian had gotten used to this sort of treatment long ago, so he didn't think anything of it. After all, he did just drag down the mighty, newly ascended General Pei Junior. It would be stranger if no one stayed away. Yet unexpectedly, as he walked, a voice suddenly called out from behind him.

“Your Highness!”

Xie Lian was amazed at the call and thought whoever had dared address him truly had commendable courage. But when he turned his head to look, the junior official that called for That Highness rushed past him and ran toward someone farther ahead.

He called as he ran, “Honestly, Your Highness! How could you forget your identity medallion when heading to the Palace of Divine Might? How would you even get in?”

Only then did it dawn on Xie Lian—of course the address “Your Highness” wasn't directed at him. There were quite a few crown princes in the heavens, so some confusion on this matter wasn't anything unusual.

Yet when he glanced over and his eyes landed on the other crown prince, he paused.

That young man had strong brows, bright eyes, and a wide smile. This smile was vastly different from those of many other heavenly officials: it was pure and sincere, and added an air of childlike innocence to his handsome face. Although, if a less charitable official like Mu Qing provided comment, they would probably call it an air of foolishness.

The young man was dressed in armor and looked exceptionally heroic. However, it didn't give him the air of a warrior, of blood and battle. Rather, it gave him an air of royal nobility, candid and radiant.

Xie Lian froze mid-step and stared at the young man. The two in front

sensed his gaze and turned back to face him. When the junior official saw who it was, his face dropped immediately. Xie Lian lightly inclined his head and smiled at him.

“Greetings, Your Highness.”

The other crown prince was obviously the type who didn’t mind the everyday details and didn’t recognize his face, so when he saw someone greeting him, he immediately returned the sentiment with a brilliant smile. He shouted back, “Greetings!”

The junior official beside him gave him a subtle push. “Come on, Your Highness, let’s go. We still need to get to the Palace of Divine Might.”

The young man, completely oblivious, could not understand why his subordinate would shove him so suddenly. He wondered aloud, “Why are you pushing me?”

Xie Lian puffed out a laugh and that junior official pushed even harder, urging, “The Emperor is probably already waiting for us. Please, let’s go, Your Highness!”

The other crown prince could only give Xie Lian a confused look before turning to leave.

Xie Lian stayed where he was as they walked away, and soon, distant whispers from lower-ranking officials floated to his ears.

“...Well, that was awkward. The world is such a small place.”

“They’re both officials in the heavens, it was only a matter of time that they met. If you ask me, General Nan Yang bumping into General Xuan Zhen is a more exciting affair.”

“Ha ha, what’s the rush? They’ll all be coming face-to-face soon! Everyone’s gathering at the Palace of Divine Might, aren’t they?”

Suddenly, someone commented, “It’s not just a small world—take a look at those two. I don’t like to make the comparison, but even though they’re both crown princes, His Highness Tai Hua is truly noble. He would never do anything shameful like *that*, even if he fell from grace.”

“The Kingdom of Yong’an was more prosperous than the Kingdom of

Xianle, so of course the Crown Prince of Yong'an is stronger than that of Xianle. How the grass grows depends on the land it grew on. Simple logic."

The martial god who watched over the north was Pei Ming of the Palace of Ming Guang. The Martial God of the West was Quan Yizhen of the Palace of Qi Ying. The Martial God of the Southeast was Feng Xin of the Palace of Nan Yang, and the Martial God of the Southwest was Mu Qing of the Palace of Xuan Zhen.

And the martial god watching over the east was Lang Qianqiu of the Palace of Tai Hua.

When Lang Qianqiu was still mortal, he was a crown prince like Xie Lian. Not just that—he was the Crown Prince of Yong'an. The Kingdom of Yong'an was the country that overtook Xianle after its fall, and the founder of Yong'an was the rebel general who successfully overthrew the imperial capital of Xianle.

While Xie Lian drifted in the Mortal Realm, he had also visited the east, so naturally he knew that the Crown Prince of Yong'an had ascended. As heavenly officials, it was inevitable that they would run into each other, so he didn't think much of it. Those gossiping junior officials, while they were supposedly whispering, weren't particularly quiet. If their prattling had been about anyone else, they might have been more wary of being overheard, but since this was Xie Lian, they spoke without fear of him hearing. Perhaps they even found the prospect exciting. So Xie Lian pretended to have heard nothing and casually walked away.

Just then, another voice came from behind and called out, "Your Highness!"

Not again, Xie Lian thought. But this time when he turned his head, it was someone who really was addressing him.

Ling Wen, with dark-circled eyes and arms full of scrolls, approached him. "Everyone has gone to the Palace of Divine Might for the meeting. Be mindful once you reach the hall."

Of course Xie Lian was aware of the situation. "What do you think General Pei Junior's sentence will be?"

“Exile, probably,” Ling Wen replied.

That’s actually not too bad. Not too severe, Xie Lian thought.

Exile was considered a temporary banishment for officials who had committed crimes, meaning the length of punishment was negotiable, and there might still be the opportunity to resume their duty. If they were found to be on their best behavior, they might one day get fished back up; maybe in thirty to fifty years, maybe in a hundred or two hundred years. But to Xie Lian, this “not too bad” was of course based on his own standards. To General Pei, it would be a completely different story.

Xie Lian remembered another thing. “Oh yeah. Ling Wen, how goes the search for the boy with the Human Face Disease from Mount Yujun, the one I told you about last time? Do you have any news?”

“I’m very sorry, Your Highness. I don’t have anything at the moment. We’ll work harder on it,” Ling Wen replied.

Even for a heavenly official, finding a single person in such a vast world was not an easy task. Although the heavens might make faster work of it than mortals, it was still more like ten years for the Mortal Realm versus one year for the heavens.

Xie Lian thus said, “Thank you for your hard work.”

By this point, they reached the end of the avenue, and a majestic palace came into view before them.

The palace had stood through the ages, yet it showed only enduring excellence and none of its antiquity. Interwoven glazed tiles adorned the golden roof, layer upon layer, blinding in their scintillation. Xie Lian looked up and glanced at where “Palace of Divine Might” was written beneath the golden roof. The characters, written with power and with vigor, were exactly the same as they were centuries ago, unchanged. He lowered his head and stepped into the hall. Within, numerous heavenly officials had already gathered, either in groups of two or three, or by their lonesome, standing in silence.

The only ones permitted to enter this hall were heavenly officials who had officially ascended—all imperial sons of heavens or indomitable

overlords, each bursting with spiritual might. They eyed each other in silent pride and judgment, their splendor overwhelming. Gathered here, at this time and place, everyone held their breaths and did not dare utter a sound.

Upon the throne at the very end of the hall, there sat a martial god clad in white armor.

This martial god had a handsome face, and with his eyes closed and his lips unspeaking, he appeared extremely poised and solemn. Behind him stood the expanse of the magnificent Palace of Divine Might, and beneath his feet there were pure-white snowy peaks.

As if sensing that Xie Lian had entered the hall, he opened his eyes.

Those eyes were obsidian-black, but bright and clear, as if formed by the melted snow of a lake that had been frozen for millions of years. As he blinked them open, the martial god smiled softly.

“Xianle, you have come.”

Xie Lian inclined his head in a respectful bow and said nothing.

When Jun Wu spoke, he was not loud, but his deep voice echoed through the entire Palace of Divine Might. All the eyes of the gathered officials focused on Xie Lian, and he understood immediately.

It appeared that this meeting wasn't for discussing General Pei Junior and the Banyue Pass scandal.

The spotlight, it seemed, was on him.

Ling Wen approached the throne, dressed all in black and not sparing a word or smile. She drew a line through an item in the book she was holding.

“My Lord, there are a few heavenly officials still on patrol in the Mortal Realm, unable to return.”

Jun Wu nodded. “They have given their notice ahead of time.”

Ling Wen acknowledged the response, and Jun Wu turned to Xie Lian once more.

“Xianle, I am sure you are aware as to why you have been summoned here today.”

Xie Lian still had his head bowed. “I can guess. However, I had actually assumed that a decision had been made on the matter with General Pei Junior.”

Just then, a lyrical male voice called out from behind.

“How that matter will be decided is still hard to say.”

When Xie Lian turned his head to look, a martial god stepped into the great hall. His hand resting on the hilt of his sword, he walked toward the front. When he passed by Xie Lian, he stopped in his step, and the corners of his lips lifted.

“Your Highness. I’ve heard so much about you.”

This martial god looked to be about twenty-six or twenty-seven years old, graceful in his demeanor but resolute in his actions. Looking at his face, Xie Lian thought he was even more attractive than that statue he’d seen at Mount Yujun. It was the kind of handsomeness that could steal hearts, very much the charming type. Xie Lian didn’t respond.

He continued, “Our Little Pei has certainly been in your care.”

I’ve definitely offended him, Xie Lian thought. He returned the greeting.

“You flatter me. I’ve heard more about *you*, General Pei.”

The words “I’ve heard more about you” were certainly not a lie. In the past few days, Xie Lian had skimmed through his scroll and briefly read the legends of some of the more famous heavenly officials. Among them was General Ming Guang, Pei Ming.

This Martial God of the North was skilled in battle, but the subject the mortals talked of with the most relish was his many amorous intrigues: the beautiful and the ugly, the stories left behind in wanton alleys. “Beautiful” stories had Pei Ming spend extravagant amounts of gold to save a famed yet pitiful escort from the brothels, prompting her to fall in love with him and henceforth remain pure and true to await his return. “Ugly” stories had Pei Ming travel a thousand miles for a one-night stand with a married woman, etcetera, and so on. On some level, Pei Ming was an awe-inspiring man. After reading through his stories, Xie Lian thought it was quite unbelievable

that after so many years, only one Xuan Ji had been created from this way of life.

Because Pei Ming was accomplished in both battle and in love, his rivals and peers alike took great pleasure in cursing him to die, even better if he'd die from syphilis. But his fate was tough and relentless, and he never caught anything from the many flowers he'd plucked. He wouldn't die, and he'd even live longer than most of his peers. Until finally, one day, he lost a battle. Everyone laughed, thinking, *At last, he's met his end!* But then lightning crashed and thunder roared, and in that moment of imminent peril, he ascended to the heavens.

Those who hadn't already died by his hand probably all died of outrage.

After ascension, Pei Ming didn't change his way of life, and the scale of his tales of promiscuity only grew. From fairies and lady heavenly officials to female ghosts and demons: as long as they were beautiful, he would not hold back. Nonetheless, the charming ladies of the Mortal Realm still remained his favorite type. Many indecent love stories had him starring as the main male lead, and if it wasn't for Xie Lian's method of cultivation that demanded purity of body and of mind, he probably would have read a few of those books just out of curiosity.

Thus, in addition to his role as the martial god that ruled the north, the Mortal Realm also worshipped him as the God of Love. Even a number of heavenly officials would turn around and secretly pray to him should they bump into him in the heavens, hoping for some fortune in love. It had to be said that, although similar in sentiment, such a title was definitely more fortunate than Feng Xin's unwarranted title of "Tremendous Masculinity."

All the heavenly officials present in the hall were well aware of what both of those "I've heard so much about you" comments meant, and many roared with laughter in their heads.

After such pleasantries, Xie Lian said, "What does General Pei mean by 'hard to say'?"

Pei Ming snapped his fingers, and a corpse suddenly appeared in the middle of the great hall, floating in midair.

Strictly speaking, this floating body was just a shell. It had no primordial spirit, completely empty on the inside. But it was covered in blood from head to toe, so by any practical measure, it was no different from a corpse. It had a handsome face, but its eyes were firmly shut. It was indeed A-Zhao...or rather, General Pei Junior's clone.

To have such a thing appear so suddenly before an elegant crowd of heavenly officials inside the Palace of Divine Might was startling. A moment later, Pei Xiu was also brought in, but he still looked indifferent and apathetic even with shackles binding him. His head was bowed low, and he was silent.

"General Pei, what's the meaning of this?" Xie Lian asked.

Pei Xiu knelt down within the Palace of Divine Might, and Pei Ming replied, "During Little Pei's interrogation, he mentioned something I found quite curious."

Pei Ming paced halfway around Xie Lian and smiled. "I'm quite familiar with Little Pei's ability. Even if his clone's powers are reduced and nowhere near the level of his true self, it's still quite competent and capable of fighting evenly with a wrath ghost. However, he told me that he was surprised to meet a mortal who was so strong that Little Pei was unable to even withstand his attacks. Now, isn't that curious?"

Pei Ming continued, "And so I pressed for answers. It turns out, at the time, there was a red-clothed young man beside Your Highness while you were at Banyue Pass."

Hearing the words "red-clothed" made all the officials present shift expressions, and they all appeared uncomfortable. But Pei Ming's next statement made them completely agitated.

"And this young man, in the dark, was able to eradicate every Banyue-soldier-turned-wrath in a flash.

"Now, Your Highness, might you enlighten us as to who this red-clothed young man might be?"

If it wasn't a wrath, then it must be a supreme! A supreme that could kill hundreds of wraths in a flash. A supreme dressed all in red.

Anyone could guess who that young man probably was, yet no one