

MO XIANG TONG XIU



Heaven Official's Blessing

TIAN GUAN CI FU

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Heaven Official's Blessings

TIAN GUAN CI FU

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墨香铜臭





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Chapter 28:

Fishing for Offerings, the Boor Meets the Crown Prince

“**U**_{NVEIL}—!”

With that booming announcement, an enormous, bright red brocade dropped to the ground. Roaring cheers erupted from the crowd of thousands, shooting straight to the heavens.

This was a divine statue of the crown prince, crafted in gold. It held a sword in one hand and a flower in the other, symbolizing the virtues of the prince himself: “The power to end the world, but with a heart as gentle as a flower.” The face of that statue was soft and beautiful, with long, elegant brows and thin, clean lips that curved slightly with a ghost of a smile. One could describe it as affectionate but not frivolous, neutral but not indifferent—it was a compassionate and handsome face.

This was the eight-thousandth Temple of the Crown Prince within the Kingdom of Xianle.

Three years after ascension, there were already eight thousand temples raised in his name. Such a passionate following was unheard of in all of history and likely would never be rivaled in the future. Truly, he was the one and only.

However, this eight-thousandth temple couldn’t boast the most glamorous divine statue of the crown prince. The first Palace of Xianle was

built on the summit of Mount Taicang where the crown prince lived and trained in his youth, which had been renamed to

Crown Prince Summit. It was also there that the first divine statue of the crown prince was sculpted, which the king himself personally unveiled. That divine statue of the crown prince was over fifteen meters high, its craftsmanship legendary. Rather than simply settling for gilding its surface, it was built entirely of pure, solid gold—truly worthy to be called “golden.”

The crowds of devotees were endless within the Palace of Xianle, and so dense that they even spilled over the building’s threshold. The incense vessel stationed before the palace was stuffed to bursting with incense sticks both long and short. Out of necessity alone, the palace’s donation box was built much bigger and stockier than average—if it hadn’t been built so large, it would have been filled with offerings before the day was over and those who came later wouldn’t be able to donate. In the courtyard of the temple, there was a clear pond which was swimming with thrown coins that shimmered brightly in the water. Because of all the coins being thrown by devotees, many of the old turtles residing in the pond didn’t dare to peep their heads out anymore with those projectiles constantly bouncing off their shells. No matter how the temple’s resident cultivators asked people not to do it, their efforts were fruitless. Plum trees bloomed in abundance within the massive red walls of the temple, their branches tied with countless bright-red prayer ribbons. They painted a vibrant scene; waves of flowing crimson amongst a sea of blossoms.

And in the interior of the temple, Xie Lian sat with upright poise just below his own divine statue. He watched over the milling crowd. No one could see him, but he could see and hear their chatter.

“How come the Temple of the Crown Prince doesn’t have any cushions for us to prostrate?”

“Yeah, even the Temple Master said we can’t prostrate. The temple’s already unveiled, so what’s goin’ on?”

“This must be your first time at a Palace of Xianle. All Palaces of Xianle are like this. I heard that after His Highness ascended, he sent dreams to many temple donors—and to this very temple’s master—telling them not to have devotees prostrate. So none of the Crown Prince Temples have places to do so.”

Although no one could see him, Xie Lian nodded. However, a few of the visitors laughed.

“Where’s the logic in that? Aren’t we meant to prostrate before gods? That must just be a rumor.”

Xie Lian made a confused noise.

“That’s right! We must kneel!” another visitor agreed. “Only by kneeling can we show our sincerity, right?”

Thus, one took the lead and knelt down. Soon after, many others followed suit and knelt on the ground. The hundreds and thousands of people squished inside and outside of the great hall all started kowtowing before the divine statue, their forms rising and falling, muttering as they silently prayed for blessings.

Xie Lian wordlessly slunk away. *Never mind, we’ll take it slowly*, he thought.

The next moment, a great cacophony of voices came crashing down on him from all around like a massive wave.

“Achieve a high score! A high score! This year I must achieve a high score! If I get it, I will fulfill the vow I swore to you!”¹

“I pray for safe travels!”

“The girl I like fancies my shixiong! Please make him uglier, please, I beg you.”

“Fuck! I refuse to believe that I can’t give birth to a big, chubby brat!”

There were all kinds of prayers. Xie Lian was getting a massive headache just listening and hurriedly cast a spell with a hand seal, blocking out the voices entirely.

Silence had only just fallen when there was a sudden shout, and a man clad in black came dashing out from the back of the palace, his hands covering his ears.

“What the hell are these prayers?!” he roared.

The worshippers didn’t notice the man and continued their kowtowing. Xie Lian sighed and patted his shoulder.

“Thanks for your hard work, Feng Xin,” he said with a smile.

Such an exuberant Palace of Xianle! Every day, Xie Lian heard prayers that numbered in the thousands. At first, he charged forth with a vigor born from the novelty of this new position—he didn’t care whether the matters were big or small, he worked through each one personally. But after a while, there really were way too many prayers coming in, so he divided the work and tossed some into the laps of Feng Xin and Mu Qing. After reviewing the

prayers to determine which were within their purview and which could be ignored, they would pass the important matters back to him.

Once Mu Qing finished his review, he would report back without ever voicing a complaint. Feng Xin, on the other hand, just couldn't understand why there were so many who'd blindly submit prayers for petty business—they would even bring entreaties for harmonious bedchamber matters to the Palace of Xianle. Xie Lian was a martial god, not a marital one, and certainly couldn't manage such things. And with prayers like these coming nonstop, the other heavenly officials eventually began taking offense. They secretly accused Xie Lian and his coterie of hogging the outhouse without taking a dump—that is, for taking on matters they had no jurisdiction over and roping in devotees they had no business taking. To those accusations, Xie Lian had no rebuttal.

Feng Xin still covered his ears with his hands, even though the gesture wasn't helping one bit. “Your Highness, why do you have so many female devotees?!”

Still seated, Xie Lian crossed his arms in his sleeves as clouds of incense lingered around him. He replied with a smile, “What's wrong with that? Beauties abundant like clouds are pleasing to the eyes.”

Feng Xin's face dropped. “It's not ‘pleasing’ at all. It's like these female devotees' only prayers are wishing to look nicer, marry nicer, give birth to a nice son. Nothing of importance; even the sight of them gives me a headache!”

Xie Lian grinned and was about to respond, when suddenly there was a commotion among the crowd. The two looked out and heard someone speak in a hushed voice.

“Prince Xiao Jing has come, let’s get outta here! Prince Xiao Jing is here!”

When the people heard the name “Prince Xiao Jing,” it was as if they heard “The Devil Himself.” Everyone’s faces drained of color, and the crowd dispersed like birds. In but an instant, like a tornado had blown past, most of the worshippers who were paying respects in the hall had fled.

Soon after, a young man crossed the threshold. He had a decadent sort of appearance, lavishly dressed in brocade and a cape, and he swaggered forward with a glazed offering lamp in his hands. His face resembled Xie Lian’s, as long as you didn’t look at his eyes—but upon seeing that arrogant, conceited gaze, one could easily discern between the two. It was none other than Qi Rong.

Qi Rong had reached the age of seventeen or eighteen by now and had matured in both his appearance and bearing. He had finally managed to put on an air of nobility, at least somewhat. He stepped through the doors but forbade the entry of any member of his retinue. Holding the lamp with both hands, he crossed into the great hall and swept aside his cape before kneeling on the clean floors. He raised the lamp to his forehead and prostrated solemnly. The two on top of the altar shared a look. Feng Xin smacked his lips, and Xie Lian understood the annoyance in his eyes.

Three years ago, when Xie Lian first left the imperial capital to travel the world, Qi Rong was still in detention. Upon his return, he hadn’t yet had a chance to see his little cousin before he suddenly and rumblingly ascended in his sleep that very night. Over the last three years, Xie Lian sent a number of dreams to his parents, the state preceptor, and others. He also sent one to Qi Rong, admonishing him to be kind to others from then on, to keep his behavior in check and avoid causing trouble. Thus, Qi Rong had been

actively commissioning the construction of temples everywhere and offering donations and lamps for good merits.

Although he worked hard, sincere to the bone, he would still stir up trouble every now and then—and Feng Xin was the one who'd have to clean up after him. Because of this, Xie Lian could understand Feng Xin's irritation.

On the floor, Qi Rong finished paying his respects and started talking (or rather, *whining*) aloud. "Cousin Crown Prince, this is the five-hundredth light I've offered. I'm such a loyal little brother, so when will you come see me? Even a dream would be fine. Yifu and Yimu both miss you dearly, but you ignore us. Truly high and mighty—and cold."

He did not notice that Feng Xin was standing right there, reminding Xie Lian of the rules about such things. "Ignore him. The Heavenly Emperor told you that unless it's a matter of great import, heavenly officials are not allowed to show themselves before mortals without permission. Families especially must be avoided."

"Don't worry, I know," Xie Lian said.

Qi Rong rose to his feet holding the lamp, reached for a brush, and started writing on the lamp with his head lowered. Since both Xie Lian and Feng Xin could both distinctively recall all their past traumas with Qi Rong, they couldn't help approaching him to check what he was writing. When they saw that it was something normal like "I pray for the country's prosperity and good weather," and not a prayer for some family to be beheaded before the whole marketplace or something similar, the two breathed a sigh of relief.

Watching Qi Rong write stroke after stroke so carefully and properly, Xie Lian was reminded of something.

When Qi Rong first returned to the palace with his mother, there was an incident. A group of royals and nobles were traveling to Mount Taicang to pray for blessings. Qi Rong's mother had only just escaped back to the palace in shame after eloping with a vulgar peasant, and since then she hadn't dared to show her face. Nonetheless, she still wanted blessings for her son and to have him experience the outside world, rather than being shut inside with her and turning into an ignorant nobody. And so she begged the queen to take Qi Rong along.

Although attempts were made to keep things under wraps, royal scandals always shot out faster than an arrow. There wasn't anyone in the imperial capital who didn't know what had happened to that mother and her son. Thus, many of the noble children on the trip deliberately left Qi Rong out, not playing with him or talking to him. Xie Lian saw a swing set and ran over to play, and all the children of the same age ran after him; they took turns pushing the crown prince on the swings and considered it an honorable task. When Xie Lian swung to the highest point, he inadvertently looked down and saw Qi Rong hiding in the queen's shadow, head peeking out and eyes watching him with envy.

Once they reached the Palace of Divine Might and offered their lights, the grown-ups went to beg the state preceptor for fortunes or for the deciphering thereof, or conversed amongst themselves. This left the children alone in the hall to offer up small lamps in play.

It was Qi Rong's first time meeting the queen, and he didn't know she had already offered a light in his and his mother's name. He saw how beautiful the lamps were and wanted to offer one up for blessings too. He was young and didn't understand much, so he asked those around him how