

## Nobel Ruler 41

### Chapter 41: All-Kill!

Chu Liuyue's eyes twitched.

Little Liuyue?

Previously his face was still filled with frustration, yet his attitude completely changed in the blink of an eye. His face change came faster than flipping a book page.

"Um... Teacher Bai Chen, you don't have to be so polite..."

"What do you mean polite? Since you're a student of Tian Lu Academy, I should take care of you as a teacher," said Bai Chen hurriedly. As he talked, he carefully observed Chu Liuyue's expression and secretly regretted it in his heart.

*How could I treat her in that way previously? Little Liuyue must have had a bad impression of me. If I knew that she had such formidable talent as a Xuan Master, I would have treated her nicely. Upon thinking this, he could not help but ask about the Chu family's 18 generations in his heart.*

*Invalid? How useless the Chu family is! They do not have the eyes to recognize true talent and even implicated me.*

If he did not trust the rumors he heard, he definitely wouldn't have treated her that way.

“Little Liuyue... I had a bad attitude towards you previously. Please, don’t take it to heart,” said Bai Chen embarrassingly as he scratched his head.

Chu Liuyue looked at him in shock but saw that, although Bai Chen looked awkward, his gaze was sincere and honest. He was genuinely apologizing.

Chu Liuyue blinked. *This person is quite interesting.*

It was true that he looked down on her before, and also true that he wanted to get close to her.

Was this change because she showed off her Xuan Master talent earlier? However, she had already tried her best to restrain her talent.

This endgame was too simple. She had started learning array formations when she was four, and she could create Xuan arrays when she was five. She did not even care about such array formations. However, it seemed like she had to lie even lower now.

“I know that capabilities are the most important thing. Teacher Bai Chen, you don’t have to take it to heart.”

Bai Chen was rather sincere when he dared to apologize to her in front of everyone as he had a relatively high status. This gave Chu Liuyue a better impression of him.

This type of person was very straightforward. One only had to show their true abilities to change their attitudes.

Bai Chen finally heaved a sigh of relief after hearing her say that and hurriedly asked her. "Then, do you still want to continue with the heavenly doctor assessment?"

The heavenly doctor assessment was even harder than the Xuan Master assessment. Previously, he thought that Chu Liuyue was just acting strong, but now he was slightly expectant.

Perhaps... she was also talented as a heavenly doctor?

Chu Liuyue looked down.

She originally thought that the Xuan Master assessment was a piece of cake, but she did not expect to shock these people. Based on Bai Chen's reaction alone, this incident was bound to spread like wildfire.

The winds howl around the highest peaks. She had to be more careful about the heavenly doctor assessment.

Chu Liuyue nodded. "Continue." As she spoke, she opened the third box and took out the question paper from inside.

"Produce a drug formula with the ten herbs given."

Chu Liuyue took a look inside the wooden box and saw that the herbs were split into ten different compartments, with different herbs in each of them.

Her eyes darted quickly, and she recognized the different herbs.

Most of them were very common herbs, but their natures were different. Some were cold, and others were hot.

Amongst these different herbs was a Silver Ice Cicada, which was also known as cold herb; it was extremely poisonous.

Examinees needed to have thorough knowledge of all these herbs and neutralize their effects in order to create a good drug formula.

One would fail if they weren't careful. One might even produce a poisonous drug instead of a useful one.

The handling of the cold herb was the most important aspect.

Of course, Chu Liuyue knew how to handle the cold herb and remove the poison in it, but she obviously could not show it now.

After thinking deeply, she took out the herbs one by one, ground some into powder, and juiced the others. Then, she combined them in different ratios.

Chu Liuyue's movements were slightly hesitant in the entire process, and she would sometimes make a small mistake.

Bai Chen shook his head silently while watching at the side. Even though he was not a heavenly doctor, he had some understanding of medicine.

Chu Liuyue was talented in this area, but her talent was very limited.

An hour passed very quickly. Chu Liuyue finally finished her drug and passed it to Bai Chen.

Bai Chen took a look at it and shook his head. "This... You barely passed, but..." It's nothing much. This talent could only help her become a doctor, but not a true heavenly doctor.

Actually, it was already rare to find doctors. If others could pass this assessment, they would definitely be over the moon, but Bai Chen had previously seen Chu Liuyue's outstanding performance as a Xuan Master. This was just a let down in comparison to that.

Chu Liuyue asked, "Teacher Bai Chen, do I pass this assessment?"

Bai Chen quickly erased his other thoughts and looked at Chu Liuyue emotionally before laughing. "Of course, you pass! Little Liuyue, you've passed all three assessments and have been admitted to Tian Lu Academy! Not many people in Country Yao Chen can do this."

His deep voice boomed, and it clearly echoed throughout the court.

Everyone was in a daze.

What?

What just happened?

Not only did Chu Liuyue enter Tian Lu Academy, but she also passed the assessments with an all-kill?

Was the world crazy?

#### **Chapter 42: Pit of Heavenly Origins**

“Come on! I’ll show you around the academy!” Bai Chen was very emotional and excited since he could not wait to accept Chu Liuyue as his disciple. It would be the biggest regret in his life if he missed such a talented Xuan Master.

He was upset about being sent to host the assessment at first, but now he was just very grateful for the chance. He could enjoy the benefits of this favorable position and win Chu Liuyue over before the other fellows found out about her talent.

Looking at his excited expression, Chu Liuyue could not help but laugh. “Teacher Bai Chen, isn’t this too soon?”

“No! Not soon at all! You didn’t make it for the admission in January, so you’re very late when compared to the other students. More than half of the semester is now over. You must hurry up and catch up with them. It’s better if you follow me around to familiarize yourself with the environment first at the very least.”

When he said that, he suddenly thought of something and slapped his thigh. "Oh, right. After you start school, will you be living in the Chu family estate or in the academy? If you're living in the academy, I'll get someone to arrange your lodging."

Tian Lu Academy's students were normally free to choose. Students with homes in the Imperial City would normally choose to stay at home. Whereas the other students who came from other parts of the country would choose to stay in the academy.

Tian Lu Academy was the top academy in Country Yao Chen, so it definitely had decent facilities. However, when compared to the various distinguished families' estates in the Imperial City, it was still considered simple and basic. Thus, many aristocratic children would spend more time at home, apart from their cultivation training.

Speaking of which, Chu Liuyue was also the Chu family's legitimate eldest daughter. However, Bai Chen knew very clearly that Chu Liuyue did not have a good life after being called an invalid for more than a decade.

Besides, the news of her dissolving her marriage agreement with the Crown Prince was still spreading like wildfire amongst the public. There were probably only very few people in the Chu family who treated her genuinely.

Seeing Bai Chen's enthusiasm, Chu Liuyue's heart tingled slightly since she knew that he was thinking for her. She bowed. "I'll have to trouble you then, Teacher Bai Chen."

Bai Chen was slightly shocked and waved his hand. "In the future, I'm also considered your teacher. What's there to thank when it's such a small matter? If you don't have anything else to do, why don't you follow me around the academy?"

Chu Liuyue nodded. "Okay."

As they talked, the duo walked towards Tian Lu Academy one after another.

The crowd then finally comprehended what had happened thoroughly. Looking at the thin, young girl, they could not even utter a single word in a short amount of time.

Who would have thought that she could make it this far?

Bai Chen also clearly looked very impressed by her.

Chu Liuyue would no longer be the Chu family's invalid that could be bullied by anyone and everyone in the future.

Chu Liuyue walked towards the entrance, step by step, and suddenly paused for a while as her gaze slowly swept past the three words 'Tian Lu Academy.'

She was finally admitted to the top academy in Country Yao Chen. However, this was just the beginning.

After Chu Liuyue followed Bai Chen into Tian Lu Academy, the happenings of that day spread across the entire Imperial City rapidly as if the news had wings.

...



Finally, Chu Liuyue formally entered Tian Lu Academy after passing through the boundary at the entrance.

The moment she walked in, she immediately felt that the surrounding Heaven and Earth Force was much stronger than outside.

When she was outside, she could already see that a gigantic boundary covered Tian Lu Academy. The boundary was clearly built using a Xuan formation, which merged with the entire academy perfectly.

One look across and Chu Liuyue had already noticed quite a few Xuan formation focal points.

She raised her brows and was quite surprised.

Tian Lu Academy's Xuan formation was much stronger than what she had imagined. It was indeed surprising to see such quality in the small Country Yao Chen. It seemed like it was a wise decision to come to Tian Lu Academy.

Bai Chen had been secretly observing Chu Liuyue the entire time. When he saw the changes in her expression, his heart tingled. "Little Liuyue, did you feel something?"

Chu Liuyue naturally knew that he was testing her and smiled. "The academy... seems to be different from the outside world. It seems like there's... the power from a Xuan formation."

"You really noticed it!" Bai Chen was very excited, and he sighed in his heart. *Chu Liuyue is really the most talented person I have seen in so many years when it comes to Xuan Masters.* When he thought of this, he could not help but ask, "Little Liuyue, you are very gifted as a Xuan Master, why didn't you..."

Even Bai Chen did not have the face to continue with his sentence. Everyone knew that Chu Liuyue was labeled as a 'good-for-nothing' for more than a decade. Even he thought the same way before the assessment today.

Logically speaking, a family like the Chu family would definitely not miss such a talent...

Chu Liuyue smiled nonchalantly. "It's all matters of the past. I've also just coincidentally discovered that I have a little talent."

Bai Chen muttered to himself, "If that's 'little,' then there won't be many talented people in the entire Country Yao Chen."

*It's a pity that Chu Liuyue discovered her potential so late. Her capabilities would be much greater if her talent was discovered a few years earlier. The Chu family basically delayed her development.*

Bai Chen thought about this in his heart, but he did not continue talking when he saw that Chu Liuyue seemed reluctant to talk about this topic. Then, he started to introduce the academy to her in detail.

"Enough of that! Since you're a Tian Lu Academy student from now on, you'll be very different from the past. I believe you can also feel that the force inside the academy is much stronger than the outside world. This is because there's a Pit of Heavenly Origins in the academy. That Pit of Heavenly Origins can produce vast amounts of Heaven and Earth Force on its own. Back then, our first director created this Xuan formation to suppress the Pit of Heavenly Origins so that training in the academy would be much faster than training outside."

Chu Liuyue's eyes sparkled. This was her real motive for coming to Tian Lu Academy.

**Chapter 43: Why are you here**

"I see." Chu Liuyue nodded and asked confusedly, "That so-called Pit of Heavenly Origins is that formidable?"

"But of course!" Bai Chen raised his hand and pointed at a specific direction. "Do you see Jiuyou Tower over there? That's the closest place to the Pit of Heavenly Origins. The Heaven and Earth force is even more concentrated there! It's a few times stronger! It takes half the amount of effort to cultivate in there!"

Chu Liuyue pointedly looked at it before she smiled. "If that's the case, won't spending a year in there be the equivalent of cultivating for years outside?"

"Haha! That may be true, but no one has been able to spend that much time in there to date! The force is really concentrated in Jiuyou Tower, but it's precisely because of this that it puts a lot of pressure on the cultivators! Even a stage-three warrior can only last a maximum of three days in there! If you remain in there forcibly, not only will it not be beneficial to your cultivation, but it will also cause a great deal of harm to your body, even to your life!"

At this point, Bai Chen's expression was much more serious. "You should know the idea of being unable to digest too much food."

Chu Liuyue nodded.

"But you can't just randomly enter Jiuyou Tower either. You just need a basic understanding of these places for now." Bai Chen looked like he wanted to say something as he looked at Chu Liuyue. "It'll be better for you to look at this Xuan formation if you have time."

Chu Liuyue smiled and did not say a word. She knew what Bai Chen was trying to say: It would be futile for someone with a damaged Yuan meridian to enter that place.

Only Xuan Masters did not have a requirement for the Yuan meridian. All they had to do was to feel the inner workings of the force.

What Bai Chen said was in consideration for her.

Chu Liuyue did not explain much either. It was not necessarily a bad thing to enter as a Xuan Master. It would make a lot of things easier in the future while leaving her with a backup plan. It killed many birds with one stone.

“That’s the academy’s martial arts center. Students will usually spar there. To the side is the fighting ring. Students usually use it to challenge one another.” As Bai Chen led her towards the academy, he explained many things to her. “Today can be considered your admission day. As you know, the academy only takes the most talented prodigies to develop them to their greatest potential. The academy is also rather particular about the way it teaches.”

Bai Chen raised three fingers “Warriors, Xuan Masters and heavenly doctors! The academy is divided into three main sections, but the number of Xuan Masters is only one-tenth that of the warriors. As for heavenly doctors... there are even fewer of them. There’s only about a dozen of them.” And only less than a third of them will become true heavenly doctors.

“Students will be assigned to different teachers based on their results after they enter the academy. People with different talents will naturally have different teachers. But... if the student is extremely talented, sometimes a few teachers will fight over a student. We always let the student make the choice in cases like this,” said Bai Chen as he coughed.

“Take me for example. Even though I’m a stage-five warrior, I’m also a Xuan Master. I usually teach Xuan Masters as well.

Chu Liuyue nodded in understanding.

Warriors were not rare. In comparison, Xuan Masters had a more prestigious status. It was normal that he would choose to teach Xuan Masters.

At the same time, Chu Liuyue finally understood why his attitude shifted when she exhibited her Xuan Master talent.

He clearly wanted to take her as his student! However, Chu Liuyue did not want to rush into a decision too early, so she did not say anything. She just maintained a smile on her face.

Bai Chen was a little disappointed by her reaction, but he knew that he did not have any grounds to ask Chu Liuyue to choose him as her teacher because of his earlier attitude toward her.

Chu Liuyue changed the topic. "Teacher Bai Chen, why is the academy so quiet? We've been walking around here for a while, but I haven't seen anyone?"

Bai Chen paused, then laughed out loud. "Haha! That's because the academy's three-day-long mid-term exams have begun. Today is the first day. All the students and teachers are in the back mountain!"

*Mid-term exams? That sounds a little familiar... If I recall correctly, Chu Xianmin aimed to place first in this exam earlier?*

At this point, there were a few female voices.

“Minmin, let’s walk faster. The exam is about to start!”

“Why are you so anxious, Peipei? Don’t we still have time? Besides, Minmin has always been well-liked by our teachers. They won’t reprimand us even if we’re late. Right, Minmin?”

“Even so, it’s not good to be late. We better hurry up. It’s all my fault. If I hadn’t been delayed by a family matter, we wouldn’t have been this late.”

Chu Liuyue looked towards the voice and saw a few girls walking further up. Chu Xianmin was the one at the front.

“Minmin, you’re just too kind. I heard that you got punished by your father because of that Chu Liuyue! That loser is clearly just taking revenge on you because you’re better than her!”

At the mention of Chu Liuyue, Chu Xianmin’s expression froze for an instant but quickly reverted to the way it was earlier. “No matter what, she’s still my older sister...”

“Hmph, her? I remember today is the day she’s taking the entrance exam, right? She really isn’t afraid of embarrassing herself. If I were her, I would have killed myself out of shame already! Minmin, you’re capable of placing first in our academy, and she’s just a loser who can’t even get into our school. What can she use to compete with you?”

Chu Xianmin pursed her lips and kept her glee to herself. She suddenly felt that something was wrong at this point. She turned her head and saw a familiar face. *Chu Liuyue?!*

“You... why are you here?!”

#### **Chapter 44: Picking a present for Madam**

Chu Liuyue replied with a question when she heard that. “Why can’t I be here?”

“You...” After everything that happened at the Crown Prince’s birthday banquet, Chu Xianmin hated Chu Liuyue to the core! When she saw her now, she wanted to rush up and teach Chu Liuyue a lesson! But when the words were in her mouth, she suddenly noticed someone standing next to Chu Liuyue.

It was Teacher Bai Chen from the academy!

She forcibly swallowed her words and retracted her vicious gaze. When she looked up and glanced at Bai Chen, she had her usual warm smile plastered on her face. “Greetings, Teacher Bai Chen.”

The others around her only came to their senses then and began greeting him too. “Greetings, Teacher Bai Chen!”

Bai Chen frowned without saying a word. He had clearly heard the entire conversation from earlier!

Setting the enmity between Chu Liuyue and Chu Xianmin aside, Chu Liuyue had never provoked the others. He never expected them to be so harsh with their words while conversing!

Although Chu Liuyue was not his treasure, he could not bear to hear anyone insult or defame her!

Bai Chen had an explosive temper, and his heart was burning with rage from everything he had heard.

Chu Xianmin worriedly exchanged glances with the others when she felt Bai Chen's anger. *Did he hear everything that we said earlier? Even if he did, we were talking about Chu Liuyue, so why is he getting upset?*

"The academy recruited you here to cultivate and become stronger, not for you to gossip. If your heart is not focused on cultivating, you should leave as soon as you can!" Bai Chen's harsh words were to the point.

The girls turned pale.

This was a little harsh! They had never been reprimanded like this before, and they felt their faces begin to burn. But given Bai Chen's status, they dared not talk back. The few of them furtively glanced at Chu Xianmin for help.

Only Chu Xianmin, the teachers' favorite, could save them now.

Chu Xianmin was also shocked by Bai Chen. *We just said a few things about Chu Liuyue. Did he have to act out like this?* "Teacher Bai Chen, you might be a little mistaken. It was just a passing comment. We don't have any ill will..."

However, Bai Chen clearly did not feel like letting them off today. "Oh? So you're saying that I misheard?"

Chu Xianmin was stunned. The academy's teachers usually did not treat her like this, but today...



“Minmin did not mean it that way. She was just asking because she was surprised to see her sister here.”

They changed the topic, attempting to shift the attention away from their insults toward Chu Liuyue.

At the same time, Chu Xianmin promptly recalled something. *Bai Chen is the one sent to assess Chu Liuyue today! Looking at the time, the assessment should have ended by now. But why is Chu Liuyue here, instead of going home?*

Chu Liuyue narrowed her eyes. With a half-smile, she said, “I’m taking Tian Lu Academy’s entrance examination today. Didn’t you know, Third Sister? Weren’t you just talking about this earlier?”

Chu Xianmin gritted her teeth silently, but could barely keep her smile on her face. “Yes... that was why I’m curious. Teacher Bai Chen, the academy rules state that ordinary people can’t come in, right?”

The others behind her began grumbling as well.

“Yeah, how can Chu Liuyue the outsider come in?”

“That’s a violation of the rules...”

Bai Chen laughed coldly. “Against the rules? Am I the teacher, or are you? I’m telling you that Chu Liuyue is a student of Tian Lu Academy from today onward! What’s wrong with her coming in here?”

“What?!” Chu Xianmin cried out in surprise and looked at Chu Liuyue in disbelief. “How can that be?” *How could Chu Liuyue possibly get admitted to Tian Lu Academy?*

Bai Chen usually did not deal with Chu Xianmin, but now he was getting impatient. *When compared with a Xuan Master, what is Chu Xianmin’s so-called talent? The Chu family is a family of fools!*

“Why, are you questioning me?” asked Bai Chen coldly.

Chu Xianmin returned to her senses and hurriedly said, “No, no! I just...”

“Teacher Bai Chen, are you sure you didn’t make a mistake? Chu Liuyue has a defective Yuan meridian! She was born a good-for-nothing! How does she have the ability to enter the academy?” The girl called Peipei could not stop herself from voicing her suspicions as she looked at Chu Liuyue with doubt and hatred.

Bai Chen was so upset that he started laughing. “I’m telling you that not only did she make the cut, but she also passed all three assessments!”

Chu Xianmin and the others were stunned. When they realized the meaning of Bai Chen’s words, they had very colorful expressions on their face!

Caught between laughter and tears, Chu Liuyue looked at Bai Chen. He came to her defense before she could say anything.

Chu Xianmin’s face turned green then white, unable to believe what she had heard.

But how could it be fake? Bai Chen was standing next to Chu Liuyue!

*What means did Chu Liuyue use!* It was like a fire was burning in her chest, and she could barely stand!

“Minmin, Peipei, why aren’t you all here yet? The exam is starting now! All the teachers are looking for you all! You’ll be late if you don’t leave now!” Someone appeared in the distance at this time.

An idea flashed across Chu Xiamin’s mind, and she looked at Chu Liuyue. “Sister, you came at the perfect time. The mid-term exam period is the academy’s most exciting time. Why don’t you go take a look? If you’re interested, you can take part as well. This is a chance for you to familiarize yourself with more people in the academy. What do you think?”

*Is she trying to get a feel of my abilities?* Chu Liuyue smiled. “Sure.”

...

Zhen Bao Pavilion was especially lively today. It was not noon yet, but quite a number of people had gathered on the first floor, and they were all people of status.

They were all here for the same reason—Zhen Bao Pavilion had recently received a fresh batch of treasures, and they were holding an auction for them today!

The pamphlet had been sent to the various families a few days ago. There were a few rare items, so several people showed up.

Zhen Bao Pavilion’s second-in-charge, Yan Ge, was making small talk with various people.

“Second Master Yan, we have waited so long for today’s auction!”

“Yeah! I wonder who those few items will end up with!”

“Hehe, you’ll know when the auction starts! You’ve worked hard, Second Master Yan!”

Yan Ge was full of smiles. “It’s nothing. I have to thank you all for gracing me with your presence today...”

At this point, an attendant hurried over to Yan Ge, whispered into his ear, and handed him a letter.

Yan Ge smiled. “I’m sorry. Everyone, please excuse me.” With that, he retreated into the small room behind the main hall and carefully opened the letter. “Why would Master suddenly send a letter now...”

Yan Ge’s words were cut short by what he read, and he widened his eyes in shock! His expression changed rapidly, and it took him a while to calm himself down.

After a while, he walked out and stood in the middle of the hall. “I’m sorry, everyone. Today’s auction is canceled.”

Everyone seated was stunned.

“What?! Canceled?!”

“What is going on? We’ve been waiting all morning, and you just decide to cancel it?”

Yan Ge shrugged apologetically, but his tone was firm. “I’m sorry, everyone. However, there’s a good reason for this cancellation. Our master said that everything in Zhen Bao Pavilion, including the new batch of treasures, is temporarily not available for transaction. He would like to pick a gift for Madam from them personally.”

#### **Chapter 45: Taking Part in the Exams**

The noisy crowd was instantly silenced when they heard Yan Ge mention his master.

The people eyed one another, not expecting the mysterious master of Zhen Bao Pavilion to be behind this. They could make an appeal if it were another reason, but it was him...

He was not someone to be trifled with!

Yan Ge chuckled. “Don’t worry, everyone. To make up for everyone’s loss, Zhen Bao Pavilion will send a little gift to you all after this; we also seek your forgiveness.”

The crowd only relaxed when they heard that. This gave them some leeway; thus, they took it.

“Second Master Yan, you’re too kind! Since it’s the master’s request, we can only oblige!”

“Of course! Zhen Bao Pavilion has been in business in the Imperial City for years. How can we make things difficult for them? We’ll just wait!”

“A gift is not necessary. Second Master Yan is too kind!”

Everyone present was the elites of Imperial City. What mattered the most to them was not wealth but their status and image. They would not let things slide so easily if this were a different place, but the place in question was Zhen Bao Pavilion.

They still had their reservations.

Yan Ge chuckled and continued speaking. “Thank you, everyone! We’ll gift everyone a Pobi Elixir later as an apology.”

The crowd was shocked by what they heard.

Pobi Elixir? That was a rare, top-tier elixir!

Advancing from a third-stage warrior to a fourth-stage warrior was a huge challenge for all cultivators. Many never made the leap, forever remaining in the third stage. However, one’s chances of succeeding in the breakthrough would double with a Pobi Elixir!

Although it might not sound like an impressive effect, it could help some people break through successfully and advance to the next stage.

Pobi Elixirs were extremely precious! Regular families could never get their hands on one! Even an existence like the four big clans could only produce a few! But Zhen Bao Pavilion... was giving one to each person present!

There were at least 20 to 30 people here. One for each person, that was... Also, the Pobi Elixirs were just as an apology!

Zhen Bao Pavilion was really generous!

Some people's expressions changed as they began to reassess Zhen Bao Pavilion's standing. Such a number of Pobi Elixirs simply could not be obtained through wealth...

What exactly was this place's background? And who exactly was their secretive Master who never showed his face?

The Pobi Elixir managed to quell all the people's discontent. Even if they were still unhappy, they could not say anything more.

After a while, someone began to joke around. "Second Master Yan, Zhen Bao Pavilion is losing a lot of money over this! Your Master can really bear to part with his money, huh!"

Yan Ge stood up straight and laughed graciously. "Nah, our Master and Madam love one another. What is all this if it can make Madam happy?"

Everyone present laughed out loud and soon began leaving one after another.

Soon, the hall was empty, leaving Yan Ge and a few pageboys behind.

When everyone had left, and the door was closed, Yan Ge heaved a sigh of relief. He rubbed his face that was stiff from smiling forcefully before he turned and entered the small room behind the main hall.

“When did Master get a wife?!” he asked anxiously. Only he knew how stunned he was when he saw the letter from Master.

The pageboy coughed. “I also only found out today. It should be... a recent development...”

“You follow Master around every day. Shouldn’t you know this?” Yan Ge did not buy it. He immediately stepped forward and took the letter out again. He read it a few more times, and was still upset.

“I’ve been following Master for so many years, yet I wasn’t aware of this at all! It’s fine that Master didn’t tell me, but he also didn’t tell you? Things almost got out of control by springing this on me!” The pageboy felt wronged. “I wasn’t aware of this either! If you really want to know, go ask Master yourself!”

Yan Ge was shut down immediately. He did not have the guts to do that! After pondering for a moment, he could not help but ask questions. “Hey, who exactly is Madam? You’ve got to know that at least, right? Tell me? At least I won’t offend her in the future!”

The pageboy sighed. “You’ll find out soon.”

Yan Ge was more curious when he heard that. Their Master had not been interested in women before. How did he suddenly get a wife? What kind of fairy was able to conquer their Master?



“I’ve delivered the letter, so I’ll be heading off first. Settle whatever you need to get done here. Master will be here soon.” The pageboy left in a hurry after that.

“Sigh...” Yan Ge rubbed his throbbing head as he watched the pageboy leave. *Master risked offending all the elites of Imperial City just to choose a present for Madam... It looks like it’s true love this time!*

...

Tian Lu Academy, back mountain.

Many students were gathered here. There was chatter all around, and it was lively.

Excitement and nervousness were clear on their young faces.

“I wonder what this year’s exam format is! I heard that the prizes are especially good!”

“The academy has always been generous, so what’s so special about that? The important question is if we can place in the top few!”

“That’s true! The higher one’s rank, the better the reward! The three sections’ students are examined and will produce three top scholars. The top scholar for our section has to be Chu Xianmin, right?”

“Sigh, speaking of her, why isn’t she here yet? Teacher Bai Chen isn’t back yet either.”

As the crowd chattered, Bai Chen and the others finally arrived.

A teacher wearing a green robe, who was preparing for the exam, waved at Bai Chen when he saw the latter. "Bai Chen, you're finally back! Why did you take so long with administering one exam? You still have to deal with the Xuan formation..."

Bai Chen laughed and cut him off. "Ling Zhu, I was not wasting time. I found a treasure for our academy!" His voice was loud, plus he had his mind set on backing Chu Liuyue up, so his words spread and rang clear in everyone's ears!

Everyone looked over.

Ling Zhu looked at him confusedly. "What do you mean?"

Bai Chen laughed out loud as he stepped aside and motioned for Chu Liuyue to step forward.

Chu Liuyue bowed graciously. "Liuyue greets Teacher Ling Zhu."

*Liuyue? Chu Liuyue?!* Ling Zhu eyed her from top to bottom and looked at Bai Chen with a frown. "Bai Chen, you..."

"Little Liuyue has passed all three exams and is officially a part of our academy! I just brought her here to check things out!" His words silenced the lively back mountain.

Seeing that Chu Liuyue had stood out again, Chu Xianmin stepped forward with a smile. "Teacher Ling Zhu, my sister wants to take part in the exam as well."

#### **Chapter 46: Taunts**

The quiet back mountain burst into commotion when they heard Chu Xianmin's words.

There was a stunned expression on everyone's faces, and they all looked at Chu Liuyue like she was insane.

*Chu Liuyue is taking part in their exam?*

Ling Zhu frowned and looked at Bai Chen disapprovingly. "Bai Chen, what is going on? The academy's exam is beginning soon. You can't joke around like this."

Bai Chen chuckled. "Am I the kind of person to joke about this? Since Little Liuyue is part of our academy, what's wrong with her taking part in the exam?"

Ling Zhu was still doubtful, and he took another close look at Chu Liuyue.

Everyone in the Imperial City knew that Chu Liuyue was born a good-for-nothing. Otherwise, she would not have been bullied by everyone as the Chu family's Big Chu Missy. But Bai Chen was now saying that not only did Chu Liuyue make the cut for the academy, but she also passed all three assessments?

How could that be? There was only a handful who managed that in the history of the academy. However, he knew Bai Chen well. The guy had a straightforward personality; he would not have been that kind to anyone without any ability. But he clearly really liked Chu Liuyue!

Seeing that Ling Zhu had not spoken in a while, Bai Chen waved his hand impatiently. "That's enough. I know none of you will believe me. You can just see her ability for yourself later when the exam begins!"

Ling Zhu could only go along with it since Bai Chen had brought up the idea. "That works too. Which exam is she taking?"

Chu Xianmin also paid close attention to the conversation. She really wanted to know what Chu Liuyue relied on, to be able to take the exam so boldly!

Bai Chen popped up in front of Chu Liuyue, his face full of smiles. "Little Liuyue, which exam do you want to take? Actually, the Xuan Master examination is a little easier. It also won't take too long. How about you pick this one?"

Ling Zhu shook his head to himself. He really did not know what was up with Bai Chen. The shortest exam was clearly the warrior one. The other two, no matter whether it was the Xuan Master examination or heavenly doctor examination, was time and energy-consuming.

Bai Chen clearly wanted Chu Liuyue to take the Xuan Master examination, but why...?

Chu Liuyue knew what Bai Chen was thinking, so she smiled right back at him. "Thanks for the tip, Teacher Bai Chen. I'll take the Xuan Master examination then!"

The students in the crowd began whispering to one another when they heard that.

“Che, she’s good at acting. I refuse to believe that she really can pass all three exams. She has a defective Yuan meridian. How can she possibly pass the warrior exam?”

“Who knows what means she used to pass the assessment? If she were really capable, she should just take the warrior exam and prove herself!”

“However, Teacher Bai Chen clearly seems to care about her a lot... Doesn’t he usually dislike mediocre but ambitious students?”

“... Who knows! We’ll find out in a bit!”

Bai Chen’s expression turned cold when he heard that, and was about to explode. “These kids! I’ve got to...”

However, Chu Liuyue shook her head with a smile. “Teacher Bai Chen, it’s normal for people to have doubts. I’ll make sure that they’re silenced by the end of the exam.”

Bai Chen felt much better when he saw how calm and confident she was. “Okay, we’ll silence them with your prowess!”

Bai Chen explained things to her as he looked around. “Little Liuyue, there are three batches of students, and that’s the way in which the exams are administered. Even though all the students are in the back mountain, they’re separate. You’re a new student, so you’re in the lowest level. They’re all over there. You just need to head there.”

Chu Liuyue followed his gaze, then nodded.

Chu Xianmin suddenly spoke up. "Teacher Bai Chen, why don't I show Sister the way? It's more convenient that way."

Bai Chen narrowed his eyes at her and laughed coldly. "You?"

He still remembered the things that Chu Xianmin and her friends had said earlier! She clearly didn't harbor any kind thoughts toward Chu Liuyue! He did not feel comfortable with that!

The surrounding students looked at Chu Xianmin strangely. *Why is Teacher Bai Chen treating her that way? She has always been quite popular with the teachers...*

Chu Xianmin's face turned red as she stood awkwardly.

Ling Zhu could not bear to watch it and gently said, "Minmin, since she's your sister, I think it's best that you show her the way. Head over now. The exam is about to start."

Chu Liuyue walked over with a smile. "Thank you then, Third Sister."

Bai Chen did not say anything on account of Chu Liuyue's actions. *Little Liuyue is clearly not a pushover.*

Chu Xianmin spaced out for an instant as she looked at Chu Liuyue, who was standing before her.

It had only been a while, but Chu Liuyue seemed to look better than she did before. Her skin was fair; her eyes were kind, and her smile seemed to tug at one's heartstrings. Chu Liuyue was just standing

there, but it seemed like she exuded a powerful aura that made her seem more respectable. Her eyes were like the stars in the dark night, able to illuminate everything!

The discomfort in Chu Xianmin's heart grew because she already knew that Chu Liuyue looked much better than she did. She gritted her teeth, repressed all her anger and jealousy, smiled, and led Chu Liuyue forward.

A lot of gazes were concentrated on them.

Chu Liuyue ignored them all, gathering with the crowd.

The students standing there were clearly the youngest ones.

They all had silver, circular name tags on the left of their chest. There was a sword engraved on the tag, and there were words in very small font underneath the sword.

Chu Liuyue glanced at it, and the words were 'four-hundred-and-fifty-three.'

The sword was clearly Tian Lu Academy's logo, and the number was the student's class.

The same tag was on Chu Xianmin's left chest.

Chu Xianmin pointed in a particular direction. "Sister, everyone here is taking the warrior exam. That's the Xuan Master students over there. You can head over now."

Chu Liuyue glanced over and saw a dozen or so students standing there, emanating a different aura.

They were looking at Chu Liuyue with hostile and judging expressions.

Chu Liuyue headed over.

When she was three steps away, a young man stepped out and stood in Chu Liuyue's way. A cold voice rang by her ears. "Not everyone can be a Xuan Master. This is not where you should be, understand?"

Chu Liuyue curled her lips and looked up. The young man had a black-and-white name tag instead of a silver one.

*This is the logo of Xuan Masters? Chu Liuyue was a little worried. Why are kids nowadays so eager to be thrown down?*

#### **Chapter 47: Si Ting**

She looked at the young man in front of her.

He looked like he was 15 or 16 years old; he was slim, handsome, and looked tidy, but his entire person exuded an arrogance that made people feel uncomfortable.

"Teacher Bai Chen told me to come here. Are you saying that it's Teacher Bai Chen's mistake?" asked Chu Liuyue lightly.



The young man's expression changed slightly, and he knitted his brows.

Bai Chen was one of the top Xuan Master teachers in the academy. He also held a very prominent status. Even he did not dare to offend Bai Chen. If he insisted that it was Bai Chen's fault, it would not be of any advantage to him.

After a while, he sneered. "Do you only know how to use Teacher Bai Chen as your shield? If you have the capability, show it. If not, no one will look up to you, even if you were admitted into the academy."

Chu Liuyue replied with a simple 'oh' before saying, "Isn't that why I'm here for the examination? Brother, you're blocking my way."

The young man choked on his words until his face turned red. He wanted to lash out at Chu Liuyue, but he did not know what to say.

"Si Yang, come back." A crisp voice sounded at this moment. Even though the tone was calm, it had a tinge of undeniable authority.

Chu Liuyue looked up and realized that the voice was from another young man standing in the crowd.

Chu Liuyue raised her brows when she saw that young man's face clearly. This was because that young man was very good looking.

His features were intricate as if a knife had carved them, and he looked extremely handsome. He stood in the middle of the crowd, but all the surrounding people added up were still not as attractive as him.

The sun shone brightly, and the trees waved gently. He stood with his hands behind his back like a sword that was about to be unsheathed. He exuded a sharp, fear-inducing aura.

The badge on his front was also black and white. He was clearly a Xuan Master.

*This person... isn't simple*, thought Chu Liuyue to herself.

When she came over previously, she did not notice this person at all. Logically speaking, she definitely wouldn't have overlooked the obvious aura coming from his body. Thus, there was only one explanation left—this young man had completely hidden his aura previously.

This was sufficient proof that he was definitely not weak.

As if he had noticed Chu Liuyue's gaze, that young man turned around and looked at her.

Shock flashed across his eyes.

He had seen the Chu family's Big Missy before, and he remembered that she was a cowardly weakling. Why did she seem to have changed into another person?

Once the young man named Si Yang heard this voice, he tightly pressed his lips against each other and said to Chu Liuyue with a lowered voice, "I'll see your true abilities in the examination later."

Chu Liuyue shrugged her shoulders and did not say anything. She was not certain if he was capable enough. However, the name 'Si Yang...' It seemed like he was someone from the Si family, which was one of the top four family clans.

"Big Brother." Si Yang walked over to that person and became much more obedient.

Chu Liuyue instantly understood. *It's him. The Si family's younger generation is filled with talented individuals. The most famous amongst them is the Si family's Eldest Young Master—Si Ting.*

He was admitted into Tian Lu Academy more than half a year ago since he was the top scholar of the Xuan Master assessment.

Back then, Tian Lu Academy's teachers had complimented him and said that his potential in this area was extraordinary. They said that he would definitely be one of the best Xuan Masters in the entire Country Yao Chen in a few years' time.

This had caused a big uproar back then. The praises and compliments earned by Si Ting back then were way more than Chu Xianmin, who was the top scholar in the warrior assessment. However, after more than half a year, Chu Xianmin kept improving and became more and more famous. On the other hand, Si Ting's fame seemed to have died down completely.

The crowd then gradually only remembered how outstanding Chu Xianmin was.

"Did you study the Eight Water Formation I told you about a few days ago?" asked Si Ting.

Si Yang hurriedly nodded. "Of course! You said that as long as I understand this array formation, I'd have hopes of becoming a stage-two Xuan Master from stage one. Thus, I have been studying it with all my heart these few days."

The people around him could not help but say, "Si Ting, when you were in seclusion, Si Yang has already successfully become a stage-two Xuan Master."

Si Yang's face broke into a smile of happiness. "Big Brother, even though I can't compare to you, I didn't give up. I have also been training hard."

Si Ting then forced out a smile; it was like a bright moon amidst the clouds. "That's great."

Si Yang suddenly thought of something and inched closer to ask, "Big Brother, did you hear? I think the rewards for this examination are pretty substantial. Especially for the top scholar, it seems—"

"Everyone, take your places!" The examiner's voice boomed before Si Yang could finish his sentence.

All the students immediately quietened down at the same time.

"Warrior examination in the first zone! Xuan Master in the second! Heavenly doctor in the third! All examinations will proceed at the same time." As he was speaking, some teachers started leading the students into the various examination zones.

Chu Liuyue and the rest were quickly brought to the second zone.

Some teachers were already waiting there.

Chu Liuyue saw that everyone here were all Xuan Masters, no matter whether it was the teachers or the students.

She turned around to look and noticed that the three assessment zones were pretty close to each other. She could even see the other zones. However, the zones were still separated, with a gap in between.

“Welcome to the Xuan Master examination,” announced a teacher standing at the front. “Actually, this examination is very simple. Do you see the forest in front of you? You’ll succeed if you enter from here, make it through the forest, and claim the flag opposite it.”

Not only did the students not relax after he finished his sentence, but they all became nervous.

Everyone knew that it was not so simple to pass through the forest. There had to be Xuan formations set inside.

“However, you must know this. You all need to complete the task individually after you enter the forest. Your results will be made invalid if there’s any alliance.” When that teacher said this, his expression suddenly became stern. “The teachers will monitor the entire examination. You better hide all the tricks that you’re thinking of. Do you understand?”

“Yes!” The students were all very serious.

Actually, these types of rules were very normal. After all, the Xuan Master examination was targeted at an individual’s capabilities.

What meaning would there be if they formed an alliance?

“Okay, I’ll announce that the Xuan Master examination... starts now!”

The teacher threw something out from his hands once he finished his sentence.

*Peng!*

Bright fireworks exploded in mid-air.

“Run!”

Once the fireworks sounded, people ran inside without hesitation.

In the blink of an eye, their figures disappeared within the thick forest.

“Why are they rushing? The fastest runner won’t even win in a Xuan Master assessment,” grumbled Si Yang as he looked at Si Ting. “Big Brother, I’ll go first!”

It was better for them to go their separate ways since they could not work together.

Si Ting nodded.

Very quickly, people left one by one.

Only Chu Liuyue and Si Ting were left.

Si Ting was about to start walking, but he discovered that Chu Liuyue was faster than him, so he moved three steps to the right and back.

He instantly squinted his eyes.

#### **Chapter 48: Cannot be Compared to Si Ting**

The Xuan formations were already set up in the woods. The assessment started the moment they entered the woods.

Before this, Si Ting had already noticed that the Xuan formation was special and that it would be troublesome to enter from this position.

The academy teachers had clearly done this on purpose. Only Xuan Masters with true talent and capabilities could recognize the Xuan formation and choose to enter it from another position.

This was also the reason why he did not follow those people in the first instance and chose to stay at the back. He never intended to enter from that entrance. However, he did not expect that someone else noticed this apart from him.

This person was precisely Chu Liuyue, who was just admitted into the academy. Thoughts flashed across Si Ting's mind as he looked at Chu Liuyue calmly again. *Is this a coincidence, or... is she really capable?*

Chu Liuyue naturally noticed Si Ting's gaze, but she continued moving back a few steps without hesitation and opened the correct entrance to the forest. She then chose to move forward in another direction.

"If you wait any longer, I'll be first instead." Chu Liuyue turned around and smiled at Si Ting.

Si Ting was taken aback and momentarily felt that the view surrounding them had lost its color.

The young girl in red seemed to have gathered all the light, becoming so dazzling that his eyes hurt. However, her pair of charming, black eyes—which were as shiny as a gem—was even brighter than all of those.

Everything around her seemed to blur, and this young girl was the only one in color.

Si Ting's heart tingled as if something had glided past it. When he recovered his senses, Chu Liuyue's figure had already disappeared into the thick woods; he could only see the leaves waving in the breeze.

Si Ting closed his eyes and calmed his beating heart. After hesitating for a while, he moved back a few steps and entered from another direction.

The teachers in charge of the examination only recovered from their shock after all the students entered the forest. They looked at each other in complete disbelief.



“How did... Chu Liuyue go inside just now? Only stage-three Xuan Masters can identify this array formation. Logically speaking, only Si Ting can find the correct way to enter. How did Chu Liuyue do it?”

Even though Si Ting had been very quiet the past half a year, a few teachers at the academy knew that he had already become a stage-three Xuan Master a few days ago. He was not even 15 years old this year, but his talent and capabilities were unmatched in the entire Country Yao Chen.

He would not even lose to his seniors. It was more than normal for him to spot the trick in the Xuan formation. However... how did Chu Liuyue do it?

“Hah, I said that Little Liuyue is a genius, yet you didn’t believe me. When the results come out, remember to glue your eyeballs to your sockets, lest they drop out.” Bai Chen had already walked over. He was not the teacher in charge of the examination, so he could only watch by the side and not participate personally. However, this did not stop him from coming over to watch a good show.

“Let me warn you first; I’m first in line if Little Liuyue wants to choose a teacher. None of you can fight with me,” said Bai Chen animatedly. When he saw Chu Liuyue choose to enter from the correct direction, he could not help but exclaim in his heart. *After the results come out, these people will definitely not treat Little Liuyue the same way.*

A teacher nodded. “It seems like Chu Liuyue does have talent in this area. Even if she can’t compare to Si Ting, she’s still pretty decent.”

They were all Xuan Masters, so they obviously could see her abilities. This was not something they could deny.

“Can’t be compared to Si Ting?” retorted Bai Chen as he laughed heartily, “That might not be the case.”

#### **Chapter 49: Eye for Formation**

When Chu Liuyue entered the woods, she immediately noticed the slight change in the entire Xuan formation.

It was obvious that the academy's teachers completely controlled the Xuan formation; they would be the first to know about anything that happened inside.

Chu Liuyue squinted her eyes and paused at her original spot for a while. She then chose to progress in a certain direction after some hesitation.

This Xuan formation was too simple for her. If she thought hard about it, she could use the most accurate and shortest way to get out. However, she roughly understood what kind of standards she should show to be suitable after what she went through before. Hence, she started walking through the woods slowly.

Since she had already entered the academy, the rest did not really matter. As for being the top scholar... Actually, she really wasn't very interested in that. She only agreed to join the examination since she wanted to let other people know that she was not easily bullied in order to save some trouble in the future.

Her words before were just an act.

Chu Liuyue walked in this manner for more than 25 minutes and reached a three-way path.

The three paths extended into the forest in different directions.

Staring ahead, she could not see anything other than thick greenery.

It was time for her to make a choice.

Chu Liuyue stood at the three-way path and chose the middle one after some silence.

Howling winds could be heard after she stepped on this path. The trees shook intensely while the leaves shook frighteningly as they flew towards Chu Liuyue.

*Chuo! Chuo!*

The leaves cut through the wind mercilessly.

Cold, murderous intent was enveloping her from all directions. However, Chu Liuyue was still calm and not shocked at all.

The next moment, she went on her tiptoes and flew out rapidly, barely avoiding the leaves' attack.

At the same time, two middle-aged men and an elder were sitting around at the other end of the forest. The three of them closed their eyes and meditated, looking as if they had fallen asleep.

A silver Xuan formation was shining brightly in the middle of the trio.

The different silver lines intersected and overlapped to form a complicated drawing.

Suddenly, one of the lines vibrated intensely.

One man opened his eyes and shockingly said, "She already made it this far in such a short amount of time. This Chu Liuyue is really a Xuan Master talent."

The elder also opened his eyes and smiled as he stroked his beard. "Not bad. Out of so many people, only Si Ting and she went the correct way from the very start. Even though her choices weren't as good as Si Ting's, they were still quite outstanding."

The last person hesitated for a while and shook his head. "It's a pity that the girl isn't walking with much pattern. I don't think she learned about Xuan formations. She's probably just walking based on her instincts. Look, she walked the wrong way."

The elder squinted his eyes and suddenly asked, "I remember that this Chu Liuyue didn't have a good time at the Chu family, right? The Chu family wouldn't have hired a teacher for her."

"Elder Sun, are you saying...?"

Sun Zhongyan looked down at the Xuan formation and saw that the previously intensely-moving line had calmed down.

He laughed with deep meaning. "Even though that girl walked the wrong way, she's not injured at all. Hah, the Chu family really destroyed her talent."

At this time, a star lit up in the Xuan formation.

Both the middle-aged men were shocked.

“Elder Sun, Si Ting actually found the formation eye.”

### **Chapter 50: Pity**

“Si Ting is extremely talented and seemed to have improved by quite a bit in this period. It’s not a surprise that he can find the formation eye.” Sun Zhongyan was not shocked and waved his hands. “However, I’m surprised because he always kept a low profile after he entered the academy. Why did he...?”

Showing off his abilities was not Si Ting’s style.

“Perhaps he already noticed that a worthy opponent had appeared...” muttered Sun Zhongyan.

The other two looked at each other in confusion.

“Worthy opponent? Elder Sun, are you being serious? Out of all the students at the academy, who can pose a threat to Si Ting?”

Outsiders might not know, but as Xuan Masters, they knew how strong Si Ting's capabilities and talents were. It was not an exaggeration to say that the seniors from two cohorts before him might not even be his match.

"Didn't you say that Si Ting's talent as a Xuan Master was a rare sight that would only appear once in 100 years?"

Sun Zhongyan extended his finger and pointed towards the Xuan formation in the middle of the trio. "Take a closer look. Even though Chu Liuyue is walking messily, she has been walking towards a certain direction."

The two of them lowered their heads in confusion upon hearing his words.

From the position she entered the woods, she was walking all the way to...

"Formation eye?"

Although her process was kind of messy, Chu Liuyue was indeed walking towards the formation eye in general.

"How is this possible? She's not even a stage-one Xuan Master. How can she find the formation eye? She's probably just walking around based on her intuition."

Disbelief filled the two men's faces.

Sun Zhongyan laughed. "If she didn't take the wrong path at the three-way path, she would've already reached the formation eye. Perhaps... she might even be faster than Si Ting."

This sentence made the two men fall into deep silence.

"No wonder Bai Chen was so emotional just now. It looks like he really did discover a rare talent."

Sun Zhongyan looked at the Xuan formation excitedly, filled with curiosity about Chu Liuyue. *Either she is doing this because she's unfamiliar with Xuan formations, or she's doing it on purpose to hide herself.*

...

Chu Liuyue navigated her way through the woods. At some point, she suddenly stopped and closed her eyes to feel the Xuan formation's changes.

"I'm finally here..." Chu Liuyue muttered and opened her eyes. *Si Ting should have already reached the formation eye. I can now proceed on.*

Firstly, she had no interest and did not plan to reveal all her skills today. However, her results could not be too bad. If not, other people would still label her as a good-for-nothing. She took a deep breath, changed her direction, and walked forward.

...

Si Ting heaved a sigh of relief in his heart after he arrived at the formation eye and realized that nobody was there. It seemed like no one was ahead of him. Thereafter, he immediately knitted his brows. *Why*

*am I afraid that someone will be ahead of me? I'm absolutely confident in myself and have never felt this way before. What is wrong with me today? Is it because of what Chu Liuyue said?*

Si Ting clenched his fists tighter.

In actual fact, he did feel a dangerous aura from Chu Liuyue. He did not know where this feeling came from, but his gut feeling was that Chu Liuyue was not simple.

Luckily, he had reached the formation eye first. Since he reached the formation eye, the competition was close to being over.

Si Ting waved his palm, and a silver line flew out, forming a weird pattern in mid-air.

In the next moment, the silver line vibrated intensely and disappeared.

Si Ting looked at the direction the line was at and was about to go forward.

Once he moved, he heard footsteps coming from behind.

He instinctively turned around to look.

A thin, young girl's figure entered his vision.



Chu Liuyue looked up and met with his eyes. She smiled and shrugged her shoulders. "What a pity, I'm behind you."