

E Monarch 251

Chapter 251: The Prince's Shamelessness

No one saw the unwillingness in Princess Ling Meng's eyes. Though the eyes of the black robed people behind her shined as they looked at those bottles of wine.

"Since the Princess is bidding, I will make no further bids. I will bid later. It's unlikely that someone will bid against me the next time; am I right?" Hai Chen Feng's demeanor was elegant. He smiled to show his benevolence as he moved out of the way.

"Princess Ling Meng bids one million and five hundred thousand silver taels for the second batch of fifty wine bottles. Is there no higher bid for them? ...still no higher bid? One million and five hundred thousand going once... One million and five hundred thousand going twice... One million and five hundred thousand going for the third time... sold to the Princess's bid!"

"Bang!" The hammer struck the table. Fatty Tang was extremely excited. He loved that 'bang' sound when the final call was made.

Upstairs, Jun Mo Xie laughed so hard that his eyes turned to slits, "This Fatty really leaves me speechless. He just shouted that Princess Ling Meng is getting married!" (1)

"Pfft" Jun Wu Yi spit out a mouthful of tea and coughed. The Third Master of the Jun Family had learned one thing — no matter what, Jun Mo Xie's mouth was capable of altering the meaning of anything. ...Tang Yuan had obviously shouted "bid!", but the Young Master Jun had altered it to "getting married"(1). [Pah! How did I get into this ditch with this guy?]

The First Prince spoke up as soon as the third batch was introduced for auction, "This Prince has taken a fancy to this commodity. I bid six hundred thousand for this fine wine!"

Atop the stage, Tang Yuan rolled his eyes as he thought, [Bah! I think you're full of shit! The first batch was auctioned for over five million, and the second batch was auctioned for one million and five hundred thousand. Yet you unexpectedly bid a price which is only a little higher than the base price?! Moreover, this tone of yours is not one of competition. 'I bid six hundred thousand for this fine wine!' ...this is obviously a warning; 'don't mess with me, I am the First Prince!' Such shamelessness ah!]

The First Prince smiled as he made his bid. He then turned his body to face the rest of guests and said, "Would anyone like to bid? This auction must go to a very high price. So be at ease ladies and gentlemen. This First Prince will not mind if you bid."

Everyone's face twitched as they cursed him in secrecy; [did you say that you won't 'mind'? You could also have meant — 'I will slaughter the person who bids'? Will you really mind or not?]

Tang Yuan hadn't had the time to speak when "guest" Hai Chen Feng's voice resounded. He coughed and cleared his throat before he said, "Your Majesty the First Prince has spoken the truth. The price must go high. Therefore, I bid one million silver taels; as I had done earlier."

"Oh?" The First Prince smiled as he looked at him, "Gang Leader Hai has a very good outlook on things. If that is the case, this Prince will bid one million and five hundred thousand!"

Hai Chen Feng hesitated for a moment. It seemed that he wanted to increase the price again. However, he quietly sat down.

This continued for the next sixteen batches of wine. Hai Chen Feng made a bid for each batch. And each time he was unable to make the purchase. One million and five hundred had apparently become the fixed rate for the auction. These sixteen batches were auctioned off to the major families of the city. They got to walk away with the wine once they bid one million and five hundred thousand.

The stock of three thousand bottles of wine was already short of nine hundred by now.

The people sitting in the rows behind made no attempts to bid. They obviously didn't dare to.

However, they couldn't help but scratch their cheeks in anxiety.

[Not much is left now!]

General Dugu Wudi's face had already become as dark as charcoal.

This time... he was truly done for. The first nine hundred bottles had been auctioned for an astronomical price of thirty million silver taels. And now he would have to compensate more than twenty five million in silver since Jun Mo Xie's base price of ten thousand taels per bottle had been bettered. Moreover, further two-thousand-plus bottles of this wine still remained.

[I estimate that this auction will end-up making a crazy seventy million by the time it comes to an end! ...Conservatively...]

[And this figure is what I would owe him... this debt could crush me to death!](2)

Though the Dugu Family was very powerful, where would they get that seventy million silver from? It could be said that selling everything they owned wouldn't be enough to settle this debt.

[Would I have to use my daughter to repay the debt?]

[How can this be any good? Would I really have to use my daughter to settle this loan? This bears down on my heart. Won't the Dugu Family become the biggest joke in the Tian Xiang Empire? People will say that we couldn't even afford our wine... that we had to send our daughter to someone's family in order to clear our debts...]

"Oh dear!" Dugu Wudi sighed deeply. His anxiety was weighing him down. [I should not have made that bet! I should've never added that line in particular... that I would compensate according to the price his wine was auctioned at! Isn't this like burying myself in a grave that I dug?]

[Originally, I would've had no option but to pay the twenty five million. However, the price is now at one million and five hundred thousand per batch. That's around thirty thousand per bottles. This would mean that my family would have to pay at least seventy five million. And this is the most conservative figure! Forget about doing this alone... even the entire Dugu Family would not be able to cough up so much silver. What a horrible fate!]

On the stage, Tang Yuan was pushing his throat by shouting-it-hoarse in excitement. Yet he still was unable to make enough of a din. Right now, the princes, the nobility and the merchants — all the rich and powerful were opening their mouths to yell out their bids. Every individual's voice was loud since they feared that they would lose out.

Tang Yuan was also teasing them. He would still bring out batches of fifty bottles. But when the time came to remove them off the table... he'd do it one-by-one-by-one...

Everyone was afraid of not being able to buy a wine bottle, and losing their hard earned aristocratic identity. The more anxious they'd get, the more aggressively and openly they'd participate for fear of being outdone. And the price seemed to increase because of this.

Even "customer" Hai Chen Feng did not get an opportunity to bid. It seemed that everyone present had become Jun Mo Xie's "customers". As long as one shouted; 'I bid one million', there would be several others who would shout — 'I bid one million and five hundred thousand'.

It seemed that the heartfelt desire of the Jin Yang Gang's new leader would not be fulfilled. However, this matter would become clear later on.

Jun Mo Xie had initially intended to sell the wine at a base price of ten thousand taels per bottle. However, it seemed that base price had now been established at thirty thousand instead. Moreover, the upper limit of the bids was still shooting.

It seemed as if the supply was unable to meet the demand. In fact, the price of the wine would've shot even higher if the guests not been limited with regard to the number of purchases they could make.

This auction was finally reaching its conclusion after witnessing several crazy tussles during the biddings. Two thousand and seven hundred of the three thousand bottles had already been sold off. Merely three hundred bottles of wine remained. However, there was still a small section of the audience which had not presented its bids yet.

However, the most noteworthy of all was Hai Chen Feng. The leader of the Jin Yang Gang still hadn't been able to obtain his long-cherished desire. He once again cleared his throat and said, "I bid one million!"

“Wait a moment! Let the Imperial Prince speak!” Someone shouted loudly. Everyone turned to look at the source, only to see the Third Prince climb the auction platform. Then, he hurriedly snatched the hammer from Tang Yuan’s hand and exerted himself as ‘banged’ that hammer thrice on the small table.

Everyone was preparing for the final leg of this extraordinary wine’s auction. Hence, they were alarmed to see the Third Prince suddenly make his way to the platform, and couldn’t help but find it strange. However, they calmed down. [What is the Third Prince trying to do... That guy was auctioning the wine... Could it be that you wish to make a guest appearance and act as an auctioneer?]

“Ladies and gentlemen! Listen to what I have to say!” The Third Prince crossed his hands behind his back as he looked at everyone. His mannerism was arrogant enough to disgust most people.

“Today we were fortunate enough to taste this ‘Heavenly Wine’; it is indeed a great blessing. I would like to convey my sincere thanks to all the stakeholders of the Aristocratic Hall. In this regard, this Prince extends his sincere gratitude.” The Third Prince nodded towards Tang Yuan. Then, he turned to speak, “This wine is indeed exceptional and very valuable. However, we must not forget basic etiquette!

“This Prince is ashamed!” The Third Princes let out a fake sigh, “I just remembered a moment ago... that there someone within our Tian Xiang City who is more qualified than anyone else when it comes to tasting such excellent wine. And yet, unfortunately that person is not here. He works his heart out. He exhausts himself mentally for this country... and the common people!”

All who were qualified to be called “aristocrats” had been able to enter. They clearly understood ‘who’ this man was referring to. However, they still couldn’t understand what the Third Prince was attempting.

He seemed nothing more than an intimidating character who was trying bullying the weak by using his powerful connections.

“That person is naturally this Prince’s father, the Emperor — our Tian Xiang Empire’s King, His Majesty! My father, the Emperor, is busy with the nation’s affairs and does not have time to attend such an event. Tell me, can’t we show even a little reverence towards him? Are we incapable of sacrificing a little from our personal desires for the sake of the nation?”

The Third Prince’s voice sounded strict, “Not showing any respect towards one’s elders is equal to committing a reprehensible crime! The auction has already entered its closing stages! And only three

hundred bottles of this extraordinary wine remain. This Prince suggests that we present these bottles to the Emperor, and show him our love and respect. Tell me; is it not a good idea?"

The Third Prince's voluminous speech ended; it was greeted by complete silence.

Everyone had thought that the Third Prince acted up because he wished to obtain the remaining bottles. However, no one had expected that the Third Prince would take this road. It was clear that he wanted to stop the auction, and then make the Aristocratic Hall offer the remaining bottles to him; free of cost!

In fact, it seemed as if he asking the Aristocratic Hall for a favor.

Everyone cursed him in the secrecy of their hearts!

[You want to show respect to your father? Then you should send him what you've bought! Didn't you win a bid for fifty bottles earlier? You didn't seem to be bothering about respecting your father then. And now you wish to take other people's things to ingratiate yourself in your father's eyes? And on top of that, you even managed to speak of it in such a self-righteous manner! We cannot help but call this a 'skill of sorts'! You have a great talent which can distort the truth, and mix the right with the wrong...!]

Everyone was discontent, but no one made a single noise. The people who hadn't been able to buy anything were obviously the most disappointed ones. It could be assumed that such people were mostly seated in the back since they weren't the richest or the most influential ones. Therefore, how could they dare to offend the Emperor's son? Moreover, raising an objection might just lead to a criminal charge for disrespecting the Royal Family! Hence, no one said a word. They simply looked at Young Master Tang since it would now depend on the Aristocratic Hall's chief auctioneer.

"Young Master Tang, what do you think?" The Third Prince asked in a low and calm voice.

Chapter 252: Brother Mo Xie Playing a Handsome Hoodlum!

“The Tang stock in the Aristocratic Hall is mine; it’s Tang Yuan’s personal money! The Tang Family has nothing to do with it. I have no opinion about your desire to present this wine to His Majesty, the Emperor. However, I cannot sustain a loss on the one hundred remaining bottles that I own. Therefore, Third Prince can purchase them by paying the base price if he really desires. However, I have no comment on how he plans to obtain the remaining two hundred bottles.” Tang Yuan repeated the lines he had learnt by heart.

The Third Prince’s voice and appearance was stern, but Fatty Tang didn’t care much for him from the start. Fatty didn’t shout-back even though the Prince had dropped to a lowly status by trying to force others. In reality, Tang Yuan would’ve already exploded if he had not received instructions by Young Master Jun’s “sound”!

As for these words spoken by Fatty just now — it was Jun Mo Xie who had used his secret technique to transmit these lines to Tang Yuan’s ears. Fatty Tang had listened to these words, and had repeated them slowly.

However, did the Third Prince really wish to pay the base price for these hundred bottles? The base price for a hundred of these bottles would be around three million in silver, and the Third Prince did not have that kind of spare cash. This Fatty was a big dandy. However, he had the Tang Family behind him. His grandfather and the Prince’s father had really good relations. Therefore, the Third Prince wouldn’t be able to obtain those hundred bottles for cheap if this Fatty was truly being earnest. Hence, he decided to let it be, even though the price wasn’t low. The Prince didn’t wish to spur trouble with the Fatty, even though the Fatty wasn’t exactly being kind to him.

The Third Prince pondered on this for a while and then suddenly burst into loud and clear laughter. He then said, “Very good! This Prince will get the remaining two hundred bottles of this extraordinary wine stored in his carriage if chief auctioneer Tang has no objections regarding them. It is important that this Prince presents his father with this huge gift. And I will surely give credit to the Aristocratic Hall for such a contribution!”

“Did you finish your play’s dialogue, Third Majesty?” a lazy voice resounded from upstairs. Everyone looked up only to see the Young Master Jun dressed in his gown. His pretty face belied his somewhat angry mood. He took one large step on to the railing. His legs were almost fully upright as he looked down and sneered at the Third Prince.

“What do you mean Young Master Jun? How on earth am I performing in a play?” The Third Prince’s expression sank.

“What do I mean? I think I should inform the Third Prince that your performance is not pleasant to hear.”

Jun Mo Xie gave a rogue smile, “Fatty Tang is merely the chief auctioneer of the Aristocratic Hall. This boy is the actual boss of the Aristocratic Hall! Moreover, this Young Master owns a hundred bottles out of those three hundred! All this man can see is someone who’s trying to take away my share without willing to pay for it. You want to take these away? That’s fine. However, I, your father demand the highest price which has been bid up till now. I suppose this is required even if the grandson is daring to give away his grandfather’s belongings!”

Jun Mo Xie had wickedly and skillfully changed his own designation around five times in his accusation. He had gone from ‘boy’, to this ‘this Young Master’ to ‘man’ to ‘father’ before finally settling on ‘grandfather’.

Shockingly, he hadn’t set aside even a little bit of respect for the Emperor’s own son.

“This kid is mad!” Dugu Wudi’s spirits rose as he exclaimed to his daughter, “This is new to me. But is this boy really that bold? Damn! His words make me comfortable! It’s been a while since I’ve seen something this rare! He is truly worthy of being called Elder Brother Jun’s son! His father was a hero, but this guy’s got guts too!”

Dugu Wudi was somewhat touched in his heart. [Jun Mo Xie is staring blankly right now. It seems as if his brain hasn’t yet processed his own words. However, this requires a lot of courage! He is standing-in for the youthful vigor of his family. My sons wouldn’t dare to speak like this — even if they were beaten to death. But Jun Mo Xie has! This one incident has proven that he far exceeds my sons and nephews; regardless of the fact whether he has brain or not!]

[This boy must be drunk. But still, how could he say such a thing so causally?]

[Leaving aside the fact that he’s just a boy — even a great general wouldn’t have been able to say something like this in this manner!]

“Daddy, can’t you speak without cursing for even once? Can’t you speak a little gracefully? At least appear a little bit like nobility!”

Dugu Xiao Yi snorted as she playfully protested her father's vulgar language. She felt that his vulgarity was somehow too much for this environment. Then, she stretched out her finger and continued in a shy manner, "Daddy, I really like looking at brother Mo Xie playing the hoodlum. And just look how handsome he is! Even his bearing is extremely graceful. The magnanimity spoken of in legends and lore cannot surpass his chivalry."

"...What?..."

The Great General Dugu Wudi was completely dumbfounded. [Is there no justice? I used profane words, and she was discontent. But, now that this youngster is shamelessly playing a hoodlum — he is graceful and handsome?! What kind of magnanimity has he displayed to leave her so mesmerized?] Although he hadn't read a lot of books, he had a rough idea what the meaning behind these words was.

[What is this? Even the lover of the poet Pan Yue wouldn't describe this in such an outrageous manner! The difference in the way she's treating us is too great, right? She's simply favoring him too much, isn't she?]

"What is the meaning of this Young Master Jun? Are you are disagreeing to gift these bottles to my father, the Emperor? The Emperor only concerns himself with the welfare of the nation, and exhausts himself both physically and mentally over it. Is my father not worthy enough in Young Master Jun's eyes? Not even for you to offer him your wine? Hmm?"

The Third Prince coldly looked up at Jun Mo Xie. He seemed to be looking at Jun Mo Xie humbly. However, he only saw viciousness in the Hitman's eyes.

"It doesn't matter to me! I am running a business here. And this place isn't called the 'Benevolent Hall'! One simply can't come in here and bully us!"

An ominous light returned to Hitman Jun's eyes as he snorted in a cold manner, "I must question the Third Prince's intentions. When Fatty Tang said that he would not offer you his stock, and that you would have to buy it — you did not do anything. However, now that the stock of this fine wine is under this Young Master's name — you think you can handle it as you wish? I didn't know that the Third Prince looked at me as someone who will be fun to bully! Perhaps he looks at my entire Jun Family as someone who is easy to bully? I believe that everyone here can see through the ridiculousness you disguise as the

so-called 'right and wrong', 'the fair and equitable justice' and 'the will of the people'...Third Prince, Your Majesty...this Young Master must question in this regard!"

Young Master Jun's voice was full of righteousness as he raised his head, "My Jun Family prefers to break over bending! We are ready to suffer a hundred calamities and still remain unyielding! The Third Prince has insulted my Jun family in front of so many people today! He has insulted us without reason, and all these people are a witness to it! How can I control these emotions under such circumstances?"

Jun Mo Xie sounded sad and indignant as he continued, "I feel sorry for my Jun Family, for we have sacrificed so much for this country. My old grandfather has valiantly fought in the country's service his whole life! My father and second uncle gave up their lives for the nation; even their remains don't exist anymore! My third uncle was disabled for life in that carnage! My two elder brothers also made the ultimate sacrifice, and died an untimely death! My entire family has bathed in blood in an unyielding effort to safeguard this nation until their death. They spend their entire life on a saddle. They gave their all. And then they died! Now, the Jun Family is in its decline and has become very desolate. However, you still come over and flagrantly dishonor us?! Where is the heaven's justice?"

"May I ask the Third Prince — what is the reason behind all this? Are you just taking advantage of our situation? Or are you targeting us in secrecy? Third Majesty, how can the most faithful servants of the crown not be disappointed and disillusioned when you act like this? You act oppressive, and disgrace this whole family of loyal soldiers over a trivial matter of a few wine bottles! Moreover, you strike you father's banners, and use your powerful position to suppress others as you please. You! You! You! You!... What are you trying to do!? What have the Jun's done to deserve this?"

The Young Master Jun had just added a completely different flavor to the frying pan. He had clearly added an emotional and political layer to this whole matter. He had cleverly twisted this situation, and had then brought that frying pan right above the Prince's head. The Third Prince had never faced this kind of an opponent. He was left panting, while his complexion turned deep reddish-purple. He had realized that his reply was somehow wrong. Hence, he did not dare to say anything for a moment.

"My Jun Family...has been wrongly accused." The Young Master Jun's voice became shrill as he choked with emotions. He held the railing to support himself while he trembled. Then, with a long sigh he looked up; his face resembled a beautiful lotus which had been abandoned. Eventually, he stationed himself upright once again...

Those who had heard the desolation in his voice... soon turned mournful in their hearts. It was like the winter snow had rained-in on the summer night — the injustice of it couldn't be borne.

The Third Prince had been completely outplayed. He had almost spit dozens of units of blood on his opponent in anger.

Everyone was dumbstruck.

They all stared at Jun Mo Xie. [How did he do that? He just publicly criticized the Third Prince, and too in such a terrifying manner!] They had witnessed the Third Prince distorting the truth and acting tyrannical just moments ago. And they had thought that he was being outrageous. However, now they had seen the Young Master Jun do the same, but not a wisp of that earlier feeling prevailed. These two men were simply beyond comparison!

This youngster had truly distorted the facts; he had confused the right from the wrong, and had actually created something where there was nothing to begin with. He was a true master of the art.

Dugu Wudi had just burst out in laughter. However, Dugu Xiao Yi covered his mouth with her hand before his laugh could even properly escape it. Her eyes were full of anger. The entire matter would go down the drain if he were to laugh. Dugu Xiao Yi's heart thumped madly. She had only aimed to shut his mouth, but hadn't paid attention and was actually preventing her father from breathing. She was choking him; so much so that it could've easily led to an unfortunate event.

Dugu Wudi forcefully removed his daughter's hand from his mouth. His breath whistled as he deeply sucked in air before coughing violently. He then scolded her in a low voice, "You, girl...do you wish to murder your own father?!"

The two black clad people sitting behind Princess Ling Meng were men of exceedingly high skill. It was a pity that commoners didn't have the wisdom they did. However, even they were completely flabbergasted. They saw the snot and the tears on Jun Mo Xie's face, and felt a sense of inferiority. [That face of his has surpassed all the legends, and has shaken the heavens! I am truly not as good as him!]

The Third Prince panted since he found it difficult to breathe. Then, he finally controlled after a while. However, it seemed as if his eyes would shoot flames. He gnashed his teeth as he looked towards Jun Mo Xie and said, "Since this is the case, this Prince will leave your hundred bottles alone! But, you should have no problems regarding the remaining hundred, right?"

“That matter does not concern me. I am not the person you should be asking regarding the last hundred bottles!” Jun Mo Xie suddenly changed; it was obvious from his face that it was no longer his concern, “That stock is the Prince Equivalent’s son — Yang Mo’s share. What does that have anything to do with me?” [Humph...add to the fire...bully him...]

“Yang Mo! You leave him to me!” The Third Prince was very flustered. Moreover, he wanted to retrieve some honor. Therefore, he shouted loudly. Everyone shook their heads. Unexpectedly, he wasn’t demonstrating the graceful demeanor an Imperial Prince should in such situations; in fact, he his behavior had started to disgust many people...

“What... what do you want?” Yang Mo trembled as he raised his head to expose himself.

“Will you give the hundred bottles under your name to your uncle, the Emperor? Will you be willing to do it?” the Third Prince asked in an oppressive manner as he looked coldly at Yang Mo.

Chapter 253: No Relations for the Tian Family

A trace of anger flashed in Yang Mo’s eyes. [You’re a prince. Yet you are being so unfair to a boy who is linked to your own family? You wish to bully a boy to save your own reputation? Is that all you can do? You disgust me!]

There was only one Equality Prince in this Imperial generation.

This situation had become very embarrassing. Jun Mo Xie and Tang Yuan could decline the Third Prince. However, it could cause a lot of trouble if Yang Mo did the same. In fact, it could even lead to an internal dispute in the royal family.

“I allow the Third... Majesty,” Yang Mo bit his lips as he whispered.

A cold look flashed in the eyes of the black robed man sitting behind Princess Ling Meng. He looked at the Third Prince, and then shifted his gaze to look at the Second and the First prince in quick succession. Then he closed his eyes and heaved a long sigh. However, he felt an endless sparse of sorrow.

[These are my sons!]

[I've always worked hard to nurture my successor and the future Emperor of the Tian Xiang Empire amongst my three sons.]

[I've always wanted them to understand that the title of the Emperor is a matter of competition; a position which demands sacrifice... victory and defeat is only natural in such matter. However, one's own flesh... is one's own flesh. All three of you would win — no matter which of you three brothers would get the title after this bitter struggle....Because one of you would become the Emperor, and the other two... his helping hands.]

[That's why; I let you compete without objecting to it.]

[However, I had hoped that you would keep this rivalry within wraps, and wouldn't involve others into it. I had hoped that you would at least stand together in front of outsiders since you were born to the same parents! The bond between brothers should always be stronger than social relations!]

[However, my third son had bullied a young child outside the auction house despite being a Prince. In fact, the kid happens to be his little brother and a member of the royal family. Yet he humiliated his own blood in public view. However, the other two were simply indifferent as their younger brother was making a mockery out of himself!]

[In fact, it was the same when my second son was insulted earlier at the entry gate. His brothers had just watched and mocked along.]

[My first born was up against Gang Leader Hai Chen Feng earlier in the auction. However, my second and my third sons only wanted to create more trouble for their eldest brother.]

[And now, my third-born is exhibiting such shamelessness in public view. However, his elder brothers are just sitting and watching from the sides. They are making no attempts to impart some wisdom to him. They are clearly waiting to use this against him later... What kind of brotherhood is this?]

His Majesty was certain that his three sons would place detailed records of their brothers' actions on his table later at night. They will each impeach the other two. As for the contents of these records... the Emperor wouldn't bother to look at them.

[... I still remember my own days... Huai Nong and I was competing for Emperor's position. Huai Nong and I always maintained the relation of siblings even though things weren't easy between us. Why don't the three of you follow Huai Nong's example?]

[At least Little Yang Mo is acting as his father used to.]

Yang Mo's pitiful face flashed in the Emperor's eyes. He clearly knew that the boy was being wronged. However, he didn't raise any objections. He sighed with sorrow as he thought, [Is there no respect between the elder and younger brother? Would the bond between Huai Nong and me have turned sour in case he hadn't backed away from the contest? Is there no relation in Tian Family?]

The Emperor sighed with exhaustion. Suddenly, he started feeling bored. He had spent the entire day scheming and plotting. Hence, he really couldn't take this dumb façade now.

[This is boring! This is very boring!]

He felt wronged. He had arrived here in the hope of finding out more about the mysterious person behind this auction house's set-up. However, he had never expected that his three sons would turn the situation to this.

The Emperor knew that the relations between his three sons were a bit strained at the moment. However, he had still assumed it to be harmonious. He had always considered that the three brothers shared a peaceful and fraternal bond. He had considered his eldest son to be a staid man, his second son to be quick-witted, and his third son to be simple and honest. He had always considered his three sons to be the three crowning jewels of his family-tree. He was aware that it's impossible to avoid a few flaws in character — a tiny blemish in any beautiful tree. However, he had never anticipated that the blemish would be this huge.

[Is this the condition of their temperament? Is this how one behaves in the public eye? In fact, they are even willing to use their name to obtain their desires; shamelessly at that.]

[This is naked robbery! In fact, it seems that they want the destitute to feel grateful while they pillage them.]

[I am convinced that even a county magistrate would properly consider the fallout of this! And this is an Imperial Prince? This is so unbearable!]

[Is this what I've taught you?]

The Emperor's face had turned pale, and his finger started to tremble. It seemed that he was unable to control his rage.

Mr. Wen extended his hand and held the Emperor's to give him support.

"I am very disappointed!" He supported his head with his hand. He had never once hung his proud head in all these decades. However, he had hung his head low in sadness after watching all of this. Wave-after-wave of sadness hit him as he continued, "Indeed, very disappointed."

"I understand... what you are feeling." They were within the earshot of many people. Therefore, Mr. Wen couldn't call the Emperor by his proper title. Moreover, the Tian Family's Emperor did not care much about it. The position of an Emperor was a very lonely one. It needed him to be cut-off from the world. One or two slightly unworthy descendants could hardly be avoided...

Mr. Wen had realized that the Emperor had laid his heart bare, and could sense that his Majesty must've been feeling very sad. The Emperor had always been an outstanding crown prince his entire life. His brother, the Prince Equivalent was never competitive from the very beginning and had always retreated in front of him. And although the Emperor was very wise, he was still lacking when compared to the very fierce Sovereigns of the past. He had never experienced the fierce struggles for a harem, or the meetings for political marriages. Everyone had simply given up in front of him.

Though receiving the Emperor's title in this manner would be considered quite fortunate... it was also his greatest misfortune.

The Emperor was certainly the most important person in the Kingdom. And that was the reason why all the great families pledged their allegiance to him. However, this was also one of the greatest flaws at

play here. An Emperor is also a man, and has to choose the next successor to the throne. He will naturally choose the one who is most-suited for it. Fortune may favor a man, but may not do the same with his son. Such was the case here... therefore, a dispute for the title of Emperor was sure to arise.

“It is strange; all three show promise... and there’s hope in each of them. Then why are they handling matters in such an unwise manner? Especially the youngest one; why does he have to speak in such a way in front of everyone? Is he not worried about the ensuing ridicule? Or is he possibly unaware of it?” the Emperor frowned as he said this in a low voice.

“I believe that the Prince has considered this. The Emperor’s three sons are no fools. However, what he considers the most at this point — is you.” The shrewd and far-sighted Mr. Wen smiled.

“He wants you to know how much he respects you. His position would remain solid as long as you get to know. And as for everyone else’s ridicule... he does not care about it. It doesn’t matter to him as long as you don’t have to see it!

“If this wine went to the palace... and if you were there instead of here...would you not be surprised? Would you not be happy? This was the Third Prince’s real intention! As for the rest of the matter, it’s irrelevant to him for now.” Mr. Wen said in a somewhat grim and sharp manner, “The Third Prince simply wished to demonstrate his admiration by gifting you this delicious wine. As for the scene ensuing post that... what effect would that have on you?”

“Yes! Yes! This is exactly what it is!” The Emperor finally came to himself. [Apparently, it seems that my third son is not to be blamed entirely. It’s just that his method of handling things is a bit reckless. That’s all.]

[Is this what they call, ‘what man proposes, God disposes?’]

“So according to you...my sons wouldn’t... ” The Emperor grinded his teeth, “...destroy each other in the future?”

Mr. Wen was stumped for words. He reined-in his desire to speak. [My close friend is a man of wisdom. How on earth is he asking such naïve questions today? Enemies cannot live under the same sky!]

[Once in power, the elder brother would certainly eliminate the younger one. Was it too hard to imagine? But how can I say such things?]

“You need not say it. I understand!” The Emperor strenuously covered his face with his hand, and hung his head again. He did not know what to think. He massaged his temple with his fingers.

He would do this when he had an important decision to make; it was a force-of-habit action.

“Mr. Wen, the Aristocratic hall is being supported by the Jin Yang Gang. Moreover, they also have a very talented person who is controlling things from behind-the-scenes. I do not believe that three children can be responsible for this hall’s operations. It is impossible for Jun Zhan Tian and Tang Wan Li. My younger brother is completely out of question. We set out today on this journey in order to find who this man is! This man managed to assemble all the rich and powerful. And many of these people will fall-out with each other after today’s matter. Moreover, he gave the three princes a chance to interact with all the powerhouses of the city.”

The Emperor lifted his head with sudden understanding. His eyes flashed coldly, “I reckon that he not only managed to glimpse through the wisdom of the three princes, but may now be able to protect himself by forming connections with the rich and powerful – this was a very ordinary method to arrange meetings with the masters of the powerful families.

“Regardless of whatever this person’s intentions are, he has used the sale of these bottles to his advantage. However, this person must not succeed! And it is important that we find him!

“And as for the matter concerning the Three Princes...I must give it...careful consideration!” His Majesty’s facial muscles convulsed painfully. “I will look at that matter once again to make a decision!”

Princess Ling Meng, who was sitting ahead of them, suddenly felt her fragile body becoming stiff. She could not believe what she had heard. [That can’t be what I heard... am I blowing things out of proportion in my head?]

The final transaction had already been made by this time. The Prince Equivalent’s heir, Yang Mo, had glumly retreated. The Third Prince had finally gotten his hands on the hundred bottles of extraordinary wine... without spending anything. He was now impatient to return to the palace and show his “affection.”

A calm and composed silhouette appeared in front of Princess Ling Meng. “May I have the honour, Princess?”

The Princess looked up to see the Grand Preceptor Li’s grandson — the Young Master Li You Ran!

Chapter 254: Unintentional Leak of Secrets

“It’s Young Master Li.” Princess Ling Meng’s face was still pale, while her mind was still somewhat in doubt, “The Young Master Li had visited the palace earlier?”

“I had arrived at the palace yesterday to meet the Princess in particular. However, the Princess was busy with something important, and we were unable to meet. The Princess looks even beautiful than ever today; she really wins the admiration of everyone.”

Li You Ran spoke softly and his flattery didn’t sound vulgar. His voice was so clear and sophisticated that a person wouldn’t feel his to be comments ill-willed... even if they didn’t exactly make one happy.

“Young Master Li talks very pleasant.” Princess Ling Meng had gotten accustomed to flattery growing-up. Hence, she didn’t take his words seriously. “Young Master Li must’ve had a reason to come looking for Ling Meng? I request Young Master Li to be straightforward since the Princess is exhausted and wishes to return to the Palace.”

“I heard that a mysterious Sky Xuan expert cast-out a throwing knife to rescue the Princess when she was attacked by assassins. I’ve heard that the Princess keeps that knife in her private collection.” Li You Ran casually chuckled as he leisurely spoke about the matter as if it were trivia, “Would You Ran be lucky enough to see that knife?”

“But I don’t understand why the Young Master Li would wish to take a look at that knife... Please explicitly state the reason why you came to the Palace, and why you wish to examine the knife!”

Princess Ling Meng immediately became conscious. [Why does this guy wish to see that knife? What's his intention?]

“The Princess may be unaware of this... however, You Ran had gone out a few days ago, and was unexpectedly ambushed by an assassin. Things had started to look bad, and You Ran thought that he might find himself in hell. However, an azure light flashed and threw a knife at the assassin in the nick of time. The assassin instantly retreated and You Ran's life was saved.” Li You Ran's face reveled in sincere admiration and gratitude. In fact, it seemed as if he was deeply fascinated.

“His favor has given me a new lease on life; and this has been engraved into my mind ever since. You Ran has been making enquiries about this person over the past few days since I wish to know more about him. It is a shame that You Ran hasn't been able to obtain any news of him. It was only a couple of days ago that You Ran remembered that the Princess had also been saved by a mysterious man once. Moreover, both men had used a concealed knife from secrecy to rescue us. Therefore, it might be possible that our benefactor is the same person?” Li You Ran sighed, “He's benevolent. He saved my life without asking for anything return; he's so noble. You Ran is fascinated with this person.”

“Oh,” Princess Ling Meng pursed her eyebrows. She could faintly sense that someone was amiss. However, she couldn't exactly tell what.

“That person left after that. However, he left a few small throwing knives lying on the ground; they glistened so beautifully...” Li You Ran didn't seem afraid to share his personal memories.

Li You Ran's right hand went inside his bosom pocket. He fished for a while, and brought out three small and delicate throwing knives.

These throwing knives were very different from the usual ones found around the world; their blades were as delicate as a cicada's wings. The Princess could tell that these blades were manufactured by someone with exquisite skills. She could tell that there wouldn't be many people in the entire Tian Xiang Empire who were capable of producing such weapons.

They were impeccably delicate. They were so adorable that one couldn't refrain from caressing them. However, the cold light flickering off their surface resembled an infernal demon that was blinking in the dark of the night sky. They were quite sharp. And although they weren't big in size, they were enough to send chills down one's spine.

One could tell that these tender and exquisite throwing knives were weapons that could easily take anyone's life.

"The shape of these knives look very similar. In fact, they look identical to the one I have." Princess Ling Meng heaved a sigh of relief. She then smiled and said, "But, the material used in these two variants is very different even if they look similar. I can confirm that there is a massive difference in the art used to craft these two blade sets."

Li You Ran's eyes hadn't left the Princess's beautiful face ever since he had brought out that knife. However, he finally looked away and smiled, "The make of the weapons is very similar? But how could I know which one is better unless I get to compare the Princess's blade with mine?"

"Young Master Li's blades look cold and sharp enough to terrify anyone. However, their texture is no match for mine. In fact, your blades are no match for mine in terms of texture and make. However, your blades are much tougher than mine. My blade is merely made of iron, while Young Master Li's are made of an excellent metal. Your weapons are indeed worthy of being called divine weapons." Princess Ling Meng affectionately compared the weapons.

[These weapons must belong to the man who saved me!] The Princess had been able to figure this out at one glance. [Only that unrivaled genius is capable of making something so delicate and graceful. Only he is capable of making something so beautiful, yet sharp enough to be used for self-defense.]

[These weapons are elegant, yet callous; bloody yet beautiful. If such is the style of the weapon... then such must be the style of the owner... How could ordinary people like that scoundrel Jun Mo Xie ever possess such elegance and grace? Ordinary people would never be able to commission such peerless weapons!]

Princess Ling Meng had fantasized about her savior ever since the day of her attempted assassination. [If such is the elegance and divinity of his weapons, then just how smart and unruffled must that man be?]

[Perhaps he's a man of peerless elegance and style!]

[It's disgraceful to watch that Jun Mo Xie pretend as if he's a man of indomitable spirit! He's such a shameless guy! Humph...]

A man of indomitable spirit... well, these words were indeed appropriate to comment on the hitman's personality.

"I really wouldn't be able to tell the difference between the blades unless I see the one in the Princess's collection, isn't that right? I really wish to know if we were saved by the same person or not?" Li You Ran's eyes seemed fervent with anxiety. It was almost as if he had suddenly received information about his savior, and couldn't contain his excitement anymore.

"Heavens have taken pity on me. You Ran may finally be able to see another weapon made by his savior. His grace cannot be expressed in words. Hence, I wait to see it with my own eyes. May I look at it?" Li You Ran's righteous demeanor was indeed inspiring, "How will I be any different from an animal if I can't thank him for his kindness!"

"That is true. Though, my knife isn't as good as Young Master Li's. However, I cherish it as a valuable item still. It never leaves me, and I never show it to anyone. However, I will make an exception since Young Master Li's words are honest and pure." Princess Ling Meng looked at him appreciatively. [I didn't think that he would be so cultured and refined. However, he is truly an honest and a gifted man!] The Princess muttered to herself as she drew out a small wrapped-package. She slowly opened it and revealed a small and delicate knife. The cold light reflecting off its surface had been mingled with the Princess's sweet and fragrant bodily scent.

"It's exactly the same!" Li You Ran seemed very excited. He placed the four blades in his palms. The blades indeed looked identical. One could tell that the material used to cast them was different. But the size and shape were exactly the same. Moreover, it was evident that these blades had been cast out using the same method.

"Heavens indeed are watching! I've finally found you!" Li You Ran seemed rather emotional. A trace of a cold expression flashed in his eyes as he looked at Princess Ling Meng. His eyes begrudgingly revealed a trace of frustration.

[Now I'm certain. That vile murderer and Princess Ling Meng's savior are related; they are probably the same person. No other person in this world is capable of producing creating these weapons!]

Princess Ling Meng was only a tempted woman in Li You Ran's eyes.

[If there needs to be a sacrifice... so be it.] Li You Ran sighed.

“It seems that Young Master Li and I have been brought together by our benefactor’s grace,” Princess Ling Meng’s face revealed in a joyous expression. In fact, she seemed a bit bashful. This unique and strange expression only added another layer to the beauty of her tender face.

“Please look after yourself Princess.” Li You Ran’s soul was a slight phased by the look in the Princess’s eyes, and her peerless beauty for a split second. However, he immediately regained his composure, and returned to his usual-cold mentality. “You Ran must leave now. I will come to palace later in order to meet the Princess.”

Li You Ran bowed after he finished speaking, and then turned around to leave. He didn’t even bother to recover the knives, and left them with the Princess.

The murderer had been determined. Hence, the throwing knives were completely useless to him now. Even the fact that they were impeccable weapons was of no value to him.

The Princess was a bit puzzled by the manner in which Li You Ran left. [Young Master Li had himself said that he really cherish his savior’s weapons. And he carried-on about how grateful he is to the man. However, he simply left these blades with me after he thanked me... it seems as if...]

Mr. Wen was still standing behind her. He whispered, “The words of Young Master Li were strange and roundabout. Something seems amiss... they were almost contradictory. Moreover, his eyes revealed a hint of malice as he looked at the Princess even though there was no provocation. He’s definitely thinking of something vile. And it seems that he may have the Princess on his mind. I can’t think of anything else... other than that. Your Majesty, we must put one or two guards on the Princess for her safety’s sake.”

The Emperor narrowed his eyes, and whispered, “But I also wish to see who this mysterious expert is.” The Emperor noticed that trace of fear in Mr. Wen’s eyes, and laughed, “Don’t forget that Ling Meng has a bodyguard by her side. And that bodyguard is a Sky Xuan expert; her safety shouldn’t be of concern.”

“Ye Gu Han? What if he proves to be insufficient? Or isn’t always there by her side?” Mr. Wen shook his head in disagreement; again and again, “It’s been a while since the last assassination attempt on her

life. Wouldn't it be pure idiocy to neglect taking Ye Gu Han into account while planning her assassination again?"

Chapter 255: Jun Mo Xie's prepares for the troubles ahead; Tang Yuan's lofty Ideals.

"It's not a problem," His Majesty's eyes were deep in contemplation. He smiled and said, "Little Ling is my daughter. I would destroy the entire Family of anyone who tries to harm her. Anyone who has the guts can try!"

Mr. Wen sighed with gloom. [Some people have already shown that they aren't afraid. And you were incapable of destroying their families. Would it save your daughter if you exterminated the culprit's entire family after they kill the Princess?]

[It seems that His Majesty is determined to walk this path.]

The auction had come to an end. The Princes had already done their best to ruin it. A few people weren't happy because of it; Yang Mo was one of them. However, most people were happy and satisfied, and had started to leave.

The Young Master Jun almost laughed as he watched General Dugu flee from the scene with ghostly agility; his son followed after him like a wisp of smoke. Dugu Xiao Yi had stayed behind, and was making her way upstairs.

"Tang Yuan and Song Shang are to come here once things are done. I've something that needs to be arranged." Jun Mo Xie seemed very serious. This was only an auction. However, Jun Mo Xie was secretly thinking, [What's wrong? This can't be a trivial matter?]

One tiny butterfly is capable of causing a ripple. So what if something was to go wrong with the Aristocratic Hall's arrangements at such a crucial time? It could easily turn the entire world upside down.

“Third Uncle, you must go outside in order to make some arrangements. We need our staff to pay attention to every family departing from here. They must take special note of who these families come in contact with. Then, our staff must retreat. They mustn’t leave any clues behind. Everyone should quickly gather all the information they can. I believe that every powerful family in the Tian Xiang City is here. And this is a great chance to determine their real strength and connections. This will make their influence very clear. You will need to make the arrangements properly Uncle. There can be no mistake.”

“I understand. I will act very carefully.” Jun Wu Yi’s face was somewhat serious as he nodded.

“At present only four people know that I’m behind all this – Tang Yuan, Third Uncle, Song Shang and the Prince Equivalent. Uncle is not a problem. Tang Yuan and Song Shang will be fine once I give them their instructions. Solitary Falcon may have a rough idea, but he won’t be an issue...” Jun Mo Xie’s mind was busy making his calculations, but he wasn’t exactly speaking his thoughts out loud. He looked around and his eyes finally settled on Yang Mo. An idea came to him. “Yang Mo, I’m going to write something down. I want you to give this to your father once you return home. You cannot let anyone else see it.”

Yang Mo dejectedly promised in response.

“Oh, and there’s Hai Chen Feng. But then he’s a Sky Xuan expert...” Jun Mo Xie didn’t have the time to pay attention to Yang Mo’s saddened state since he was busy contemplating the loop holes in his plan.

One needs to prepare for the troubles ahead if one wishes to maintain a position of invincibility.

There were many people at the scene. And Jun Mo Xie could constant feel as if someone was looking at him. Suddenly, his eyes fell on the two black robed men standing behind Princess Ling Meng, and a sense of great crisis arose in his heart.

The auction had already come to an end, and the guests were beginning to leave. The Three Princes had already left. In fact, the Third Prince was the first to leave since he was impatient to show his father what a dutiful son he was. However, the Princess was still quietly sitting her chair. The Princess had never liked the way in which her three elder brothers were fighting for the title of the Emperor. In fact, she would’ve never come to witness this event if it hadn’t been for her father’s idea.

[These men are my Elder Brother, and he is my Father. Why aren't they close to each other? Why... why...]

Princess Ling Meng suddenly felt that she was very lonely and helpless. She would usually look to Dugu Xiao Yi or her other friends for support. However, she really needed a strong and unyielding shoulder to rely on... [When will I find such a person?]

Princess Ling Meng had always been a cheerful beauty. However, she couldn't help but feel miserable at this moment. She couldn't help but reach out to those four throwing knives. It seemed as if the knives belonging to that mysterious man were the only things that could console her. She felt as if these cold blades harbored the warmth of that man's body...

The two black-robed men had left a while ago. In fact, Mr. Wen and the Emperor had left long before the rest of the crowd. Naturally, the Princess had no right to intervene in their whereabouts.

The Princess's maid knew that she hadn't left the palace in a very long time. However, the Princess had finally gotten a chance to step outside the palace. Hence, the maid stood beside her and patiently watched the crowd disperse. The hall started to empty gradually; in fact, it became unusually empty. Soon, the mesmerizing fragrance of the flowers started to replace the intoxicating smell of the wine. The hall started to seem elegant once again as the scent of the other people also started to whiff away from it.

The Illumination of the hall seemed to be unlocking one's secrets.

Music was still playing. Its suave tune seemed to be recounting the sorrows of the previous generations; millenniums of desolation...

Princess Ling Meng sat quietly as she calmly listened to it. The music seemed to have made her figure even more fragile and desolate...

The Young Master Jun had already arranged for some people to escort Yang Mo back to his mansion. The young boy had gone through a lot today, and had suffered some very heavy blows. He had come here in high spirits in the hope of enjoying himself. However, he had returned with a plethora of mental scars. For a boy of ten — this was undoubtedly a very cruel thing.

However, the Young Master Jun hadn't tried to coax him; let alone figure out ways to make him happy again.

A sword needs to be sharpened. Plum blossoms need the winter to flourish. No one can reach the top unless they "steel" themselves.

A child's growth is always relied on his own effort. This humiliation had sown a seed in his naïve and delicate mind. He had obviously suffered a great deal today. However, this humiliation would inevitably lead to his real growth. Enduring this matter would be his greatest wealth in the time to come... no matter what the future held for him.

It would take many such experiences before the boy would turn into a real man.

It's only a thought... the world hasn't fallen from the grace of feelings. However, only those who don't willfully abandon are worthy of playing the game of life. People are never really ambitious. One rises above the others when he is unable to bear the suppression. A person only tries to climb when he feels a sense of loss upon being trampled.

Everything has a reason; and every reason can produce its own fruit.

One can't always rely on others for support in order to bear their pains.

Moreover, the hitman Jun was unlikely to intervene in the ways of the Gods.

[Admiration is one thing; assistance is another. I won't help you if you cannot endure your own pains. If you die, then you die. I won't pity you on your death if you can't stand up on your own. Even a good man is no exception!]

[After all, many good men die around the world every day.]

The Young Master Jun thought to himself, [I won't help him; I'm not a savior. Even if I could save him... he will find no help from me.]

Tang Yuan was in high spirits as he came upstairs. His fat face reddened with excitement. He shouted, "Huge profits. Insanely huge profits... wow... haha... I expected to make some money. But I never expected to make so much! I'm so happy!" Tang Yuan suddenly jumped up as he roared at Jun Mo Xie, "Ninety million; a full ninety million! Ha ha ha..."

It looked as if Fatty was in a state of hysteria. The Young Master Jun had always considered this trait of Fatty's to be immoral.

[Money... is the original sin!]

Song Shang's face was somewhat gloomy; in fact, there was no trace of happiness on it. Song Shang's thoughts were poles apart from Fatty's; [It's near impossible to find such divine wine! Selling it off to these so-called "Aristocrats" is a complete waste. How can one measure the value of such heavenly wine with mere money? Quantifying its value with money is nothing short of blasphemy!]

However, he wouldn't disobey since the Young Master had ordered this.

Dugu Xiao Yi was practically jumping with joy. It seemed as if the success of the auction organized by Jun Mo Xie was bringing her more joy than any success she could've achieved on her own.

"What?" Jun Mo Xie smiled at the Fatty, "Your share in the profits is in tens of millions. So what do you wish to do with it?"

"What will I do with it?" Tang Yuan's eyes narrowed in contemplation. Then he magnanimously said, "Yes, ah. Why not that! I've always had one dream growing up. But I never had enough money to realize it. My Family would never give me so much money, and so I wasn't able to live this dream until now."

Fatty sighed as a look of fascination flashed in his eyes. However, it was accompanied by a look of resentment as well. Perhaps there was a look of relief as well, along with the joy of reaching closer to his long-cherished dream... and some nervousness as well...

"What's this grand idea? Tell me," Jun Mo Xie couldn't help but show interest. Even though he asked casually, he really wanted to know what Fatty's dream was. Fatty Tang was as well-known as Jun Mo Xie

when it came to certain socially-unacceptable activities. Though Jun Mo Xie wasn't particular interested in knowing the Fatty's long-cherished dream, he still couldn't prevent himself from getting intrigued by the dirty dream this Fatty had kept buried in his heart for so long.

These conflicting thoughts were indeed very strange.

"I've been thinking that... now that I have some money... and that money really belongs to me... lots of it actually... enough for me to..." Tang Yuan suddenly looked a bit sad. It seemed as if he was finding the room's atmosphere a bit oppressive. Dugu Xiao Yi was awfully fond of teasing Fatty. However, even she kept her mouth shut in anticipation while waiting for Fatty to get a bit more comfortable.

"...I visit the Spirit Fog Lake often, and each establishment has women who sell their bodies. However, the ones who sell their bodies are never concentrated at one place. Most women just sing and dance. They will keep throwing flirtatious glances towards me, and would indicate that they would be interested in doing the deed. However, they often decline even when I'm offering lots of money in return." Tang Yuan smacked his lips. It seemed as if his mind was reveling in the aftertaste of a magnificent scene.

Everyone remained silent. Their faces were strangely contorted.

He was really worthy of being called a great debauchee. What else could expect of this Fatty's most cherished desire...

"I cannot bear the women who act in this manner and incite every man." Tang Yuan seemed angry, "They are prostitutes, and shall be ready to sell their body. However, some of them just hang a signboard and say that they are entertainers... and not prostitutes. I wouldn't have to hop from one establishment to the other if money isn't an issue, right? ...Do these women really think of themselves as saints?"

Everyone still remained silent, but... the Fatty's words still seemed somewhat... reasonable.

"If it's not about the money, and they care so much about looking bad in front of the public... then they should just find a man and get married. Wouldn't that make their life more comfortable and secure? It absolutely would! These entertainers are prostitutes as well. I will bury them in silver, and see if they are willing to sell their bodies or not!" Tang Yuan's voice seemed to brimming with grief and indignation.