

E Monarch 281

Chapter 281: The Arrival of the Talented Scholars

Several people had been involved in that fight in front of the main hall. The law of the Empire couldn't hold such a large number of people accountable for anything. There was no other option; the matter was concluded without any action against anyone.

Everyone returned to their original places. The big-shots watched Jun Mo Xie stood up and dusted his backside. They suddenly realized the reason why this commotion had been stirred. To make matters worse... Jun Mo Xie had faced this rain of curses while sitting down...

Everyone was left speechless. There was no bench or stool to sit on, but Jun Mo Xie had seemingly refused to ill-treat his buttocks. Shockingly, there as an individual lying under the buttocks. There was a pig-headed like expression on the youngster's face, and it seemed as if he was breathing his last breaths. That youngster was the Meng Family's Young Master, Meng Fei... Young Master Jun had taken seat on the youngster's fallen body. This had instigated the crowd's anger and had incited the eventual curses.

[No wonder he was cursed like that; the crowd's sentiments must've been instigated by the manner in which he's swaying his butts...]

[So that's what happened...]

It was evident from the Young Master Meng's condition that he would be missing the feast...

"He doesn't look good; take him to the Imperial Physician!" the patriarch of the Meng Family, Meng Xue Sheng shouted with anger and anxiety. He then turned to face the smiling and unmoving Jun Zhan Tian. "General Jun, your grandson is indeed very 'promising'..."

"He He... Elder Brother Meng flatters too much. Ha ha, Mo Xie is very young and inexperienced. You shouldn't spoil him like this!" Grandpa Jun stroked his beard and narrowed his eyes as he expressed his thanks.

Meng Xue Sheng staggered as he heard this; he nearly fell down. The other patriarchs staggered as well. [It is evident that this shamelessness is hereditary...!]

The Jun debauchee had deliberately created a farce in front of the main hall. His compulsion had been very fierce. The sounds that were made were very loud. He had hoodwinked several people into joining that farce that the sounds of their noise had reached inside the main hall. The main hall was hosting serious discussions on military and civil affairs at the time, and this noise had fell upon the ears of the ministers and the Emperor since they certainly weren't deaf. The intensity of the sounds continued to increase with the passage of time. Soon everyone's self-restraint gave-way and they were unable to help themselves. Hence, they quickly finished the discussion. These discussions usually lasted for at least two hours. However, today's discussion concluded in less than an hour.

The discussion had ended prematurely because the mind of every man was focused on the ruckus outside. The youngsters bickering outside were the apple of their eyes. Hence, each man was worried about the well-being of their respective loved ones...

Jun Mo Xie sniggered inside his mind since he felt quite mischievous. [He He, no one in either of my lives could ever surpass me; besides those who are dead... You made me wait in front of the main hall; wouldn't it be 'letting you off too easy' if I didn't do something?]

There were many hours left for the Golden Scholarly Talent Feast[1] to begin. However, several court eunuchs and palace maids had bustled into greet the guests.

"This, Young Master... What do you think is inside those halls? Do you know?" Tang Yuan asked Jun Mo Xie as his tiny eyes scanned the place. "I just see a bunch of book worms, and some more book worms; they don't even qualify to be men. Where are those beautiful ladies they talked about? I'm yet to lay my eyes on an eye-candy..."

"There's no use in asking me. It's better if you consult the Emperor about this problem," Jun Mo Xie picked-up a shaggy straw of dried grass from the jade railings and put it in his mouth. He moved it back-and-forth and flipped it over. He continued to churn that grass straw in his mouth like it was chewing-gum, and looked extremely smart while doing it.

Tang Yuan looked at his face with envy. His own lips were too fat and his tongue was shorter than a regular person's. Jun Mo Xie's mouth was very flexible on the other hand. He snorted and asked, "I reckon that my grandfather will peel-off my skin if I dare to ask this of His Majesty. You said you don't know, yet you tell me to ask His Majesty when it can do me serious harm. ...You're my big brother..."

“Bullsh*t! I’ve come to the Imperial Palace for the first time. I’m following your steps since you’ve come here before. So, how would I know if you don’t? And don’t call me your ‘elder brother’ in front of so many people. Having such a fat younger brother will make me dizzy.”

Jun Mo Xie rolled his eyes. Then, a meaningful look emerged in his eyes after he glanced at something. He chuckled, “Fatty, look, another batch has arrived; they don’t like men either. They must be your intimate friends! Aren’t those the gifted scholars from the ‘Wenxing Heavenly literature Institute’? Their neat style of walking could make for a military parade. Da*n. What a bunch of hypocrites!”

A group of white-clothed youngsters arrived on the smooth jade steps in front of the main hall. Each one of them was upright, looked refined and moved in an unrestrained manner. Each had delicate features; their mannerism seemed to have transcended the vulgarities of the common man. There weren’t many of them — just around twenty. Two white-bearded old men led them at a leisurely pace as they entered.

The two men leading the procession had thin faces, and their white hair was tied by a headband in a scholarly fashion. Their wide sleeves were the epitome of the great scholars’ style. These two teachers of the ‘Wenxing Heavenly literature Institute’ were scholars who were admired unilaterally by the entire country; Mei Gao Jie and Kong Ling Yang.

Fatty’s nostrils flared as he screamed in an undertone, “Those two old bastards, their disciples, their descendants; their entire families are a bunch of hypocrites. See! I feel like vomiting at the sight of them! They would make me wash undergarments whenever I would fall short of my task. I used to regard them highly back in the day. But I regret it now that I see things more clearly.”

Jun Mo Xie slightly raised his chin to look at that group of people. He looked at their sardonic expressions and then snorted in agreement with Tang Yuan. He knew about Fatty’s villainous misdemeanor. Yet, he agreed with Fatty.

Coincidentally, an ‘unnoticed’ person sighed behind them, “They are truly worthy of the ‘Wenxing Heavenly literature Institute’s’ name. It is a repository of beautiful people. It has so many books on literature. The students of the ‘Wenxing Heavenly literature Institute’ are like giants among men in my Tian Xiang City. They’re so very proud!”

“You’re a laundry bat!” Jun Mo Xie and Tang Yuan scoffed in unison as they looked back with disdain. Then they simultaneously raised their heads and tilted them.

The scene was similar to an individual 'latching on to a person's smelly feet'. The hall was full of promising youngsters from every powerful family. Moreover, there was no shortage of youngsters who had already been named as 'successors' by the patriarchs of their families. Shockingly, some of the disciples from the 'Wenxing Heavenly literature Institute' had already fallen from their grace by flattering these 'promising' youngsters. Their intention to solicit potential backers was rather disgusting to witness.

The two of them retreated quickly, but the main hall had silenced by now. The two of them had commented in a very loud tone. Hence, the attention of every individual had suddenly shifted towards them.

The two men leading that group of scholars from the 'Wenxing Heavenly literature Institute' looked at Jun Mo Xie and Tang Yuan as if they were looking at excrement. Their stare was one of extreme disgust.

Fatty Tang jumped with fear since several gifted scholars and young masters had suddenly started to gaze at them in disdain. The color of his face changed as he trembled. He secretly wanted to destroy a couple of those gifted scholars. However, the contemptible individual couldn't raise himself to such a status when confronted by the elegant demeanor of these scholars. The towering gazes from the scholars and the other people-present were a demonstration of their fearlessness. Suddenly, Fatty Tang started to lack in self-confidence.

Fatty Tang was a bit scared, but the Jun debauchee hardly seemed affected. He raised his head, tilted it, slanted his gaze and shot a look at the onlookers...

Jun Mo Xie faced the disdainful looks of nearly hundreds of people with condescending toughness. He looked at them arrogantly. His bearing was proud since he wasn't cowed; [I am a rogue; whose rogue manners can scare me...]

[However strong he may be; I am stronger than him!]

This was Hit-man Jun's life' motto!

"Rotten wood cannot be carved!" Mei Gao Jie stared at the two debauchees in a cold manner. He then raised one end of his goat-like mustache and brushed it away as he scolded them. His gaze was that of heartfelt disdain. He was a well-known and veteran scholar. He had a list of more contemptible words,

but he didn't use them. He only spoke that single line. But it was a very severe line of abuse; yet, very graceful.

The word "graceful" was a bit too much. The Old Man's gaze remained sharply fixed on the two individuals as he led his procession to pass besides them. They reached the end of the stairs soon. There, they welcomed and presented gifts to the ministers. They then introduced their admirable student to everyone.

Jun Mo Xie had noticed the sidelong glances those two men had given them as they led the procession pass them. Their hate-stricken gazes were meant for Tang Yuan.

The despicable, vile and corrupt Jun Mo Xie wasn't the person these talented scholars from the 'Wenxing Heavenly literature Institute' despised the most. The person they hated the most in the entire Tian Xiang Kingdom was — Tang Yuan.

However, this wasn't unexpected. Tang Yuan had used his despicable means to attempt a graduation from their institute. Later, he had used his family's power to frame relentless charges against the Institute's scholars. Moreover, he used his family to force the Institute into a tight corner. In fact, he had even tried to use his financial power to gain control over them.

If it were only this much... it would've been tolerable. However, the all-evil Fatty Tang didn't stop here. He forced an unwilling disciple of the Institute into working for him. Then, he made that scholar wash women's undergarments of the household... How could the Institute bear this shame?

[Why would you insult the 'Wenxing Heavenly literature Institute' in this way? Why would you insult the place that nurtures the talented scholars of the country?]

Fatty Tang didn't keep 'that' matter a secret; he passed-it-on as news. Mei Gao Jie and Kong Ling Yang spat blood when they heard of one of their disciples being treated with such humiliation. Tang Yuan widely came to be recognized as a 'debauchee' inside the Institute ever since... in fact, all over the Tian Xiang City ...

As for that scholar who had submitted to that act of humiliation in order to climb the social ladders blinded by his greed... no one had cared to spare him a thought. [We are fine as long as our Institute is brimming with talented scholars. It is natural that there will a small proportion of lowlives; but they are

only a small blemish. Which person isn't like that nowadays? Such people will eventually have to face the heaven's punishment!]

[But Fatty Tang was wrong to insult and harm a cultured scholar!]

It was a common consensus in the 'Wenxing Heavenly literature Institute' that their two old Masters would die with a huge unaddressed grievance if they weren't able to dishonor Tang Yuan in return. And since they had been given the opportunity today — they wouldn't give it up easily.

A black-clothed youth stood calmly in another corner. His face was covered with a veil. He seemed indifferent to the proceedings taking place in front of him. It seemed as if this scene was like mist to his eyes; it wasn't worth caring about.

His gaze was clear and indifferent; yet, it was warm and genial. Although his face was covered with a veil, but anyone could tell that this youngster was quite exceptional.

He was the Grand Preceptor Li's grandson, the Young Master Li You Ran!

He had come out this time.

Notes:

The feast could be alternately mentioned as 'Gifted Scholar's Autumn Festival Feast'.

Chapter 282: You don't have the Money? Use your Granddaughter to Repay the Debt!

A chubby eunuch carrying a horsetail whisk arrived at the top of the stairs at the gate of the main hall. His cheeks drooped like that of a depressed transvestite as his strange, and undulating voice rang out, "It is time... I request the respected seniors, the scholars and the numerous Young Masters to please enter the main hall for an audience with the Emperor!"

"Bergh!" Jun Mo Xie retched. [This voice is just too much!]

[This is even more unpleasant to hear than those which come on the TV...]

It seemed like this eunuch was imitating a TV soap opera. [How many times has this eunuch given this performance?] But he wasn't imitating in reality... The 'thing' below this person's crotch was genuinely missing...

The veteran individuals looked at each other with a tacit understanding. The capacity of the main hall — the Tian Hall — was the greatest in the entire palace. It could house a thousand people for dinner... and then some. It was apparent that the preparation for the feast had reached a great scale. [So why did they not notify several days earlier? Several Young Masters couldn't be informed in-time to return to the city.]

The Young Master Jun and the others were about to leave when they heard the sharp voice of the court eunuch, "His Majesty wishes the brave and loyal Tang Wan Li to bring his grandson along... so that the Emperor may have an audience with him."

Tang Yuan was scared. He jumped startled as he bitterly looked at Jun Mo Xie, "Damn! What's this about?"

The Young Master Jun rolled his eyes and faced the other way in refusal to acknowledge Tang Yuan. [You think I'm a divine entity or what? Why would you ask me such questions?!] Debauchee Jun tilted his head and shrugged his shoulders. He turned his buttocks and started to walk towards the hall; as nimbly as a cat... everyone couldn't help but cast sidelong glances to each other...

Jun Zhan Tian looked at his grandson's flashy and coquettish behavior amidst the large crowd and felt his head ache. [Didn't this old man tell you to avoid doing something like that so you don't stand out in such a manner? This surpasses the saying 'the crane among a flock of roosters'. No, it should be called a 'rooster among a flock of cranes'! My lifetime's worth of reputation is finished. You brat! You've destroyed it by twisting your butt like that...]

Dugu Zhong Heng turned his head and his eyes fell on Jun Mo Xie by-chance. He watched as the young man twisted his butt and swayed it as he walked away. The General clicked his tongue and said, "Elder Jun, this is the first time this Old Man has seen your grandkid after he has grown-up right? Indeed, knowing a person by their reputation cannot compare to seeing them in person. And after seeing him

today... I know he surpasses his renown! Absolutely amazing! He is indeed very unique and outstanding. He He..." he was smiling slightly, but his tone was quite queer.

Jun Zhan Tian snorted, wore a deep frown and stopped in his footsteps, "Elder Dugu, I seem to recall that your Dugu Family owes my Jun Family around ninety million silver taels. You seem to act like someone who doesn't give it much importance... when will it be returned? I just wish to enquire for the benefit of my heart!"

Grandpa Jun was usually quite resolute. However, Grandpa Dugu was being too unreasonable. He had taunted Jun Zhan Tian merely for fun. [How could that ignorant man come and tease the patriarch of the Jun Family like this?] Therefore, the moment he opened his mouth — he was pressed for repayment.

Dugu Zhong Heng was taken aback. His eyes opened wide into a circle and he remained speechless for a while. Then he ferociously spat and spoke, "Bullshit! You're killing me here! Ninety million in silver? Do you think of my Dugu Family as the National Treasury? Even the National Treasury won't be able to cope with such an amount!"

"You brat, are you planning to renege on the debt?" Grandpa Jun glared, "In the words of your own family — you had acknowledged to compensate in accordance with the price of the auction. So why're you thinking of reneging on your debt now? Even adding a small amount into this into this sum unfairly is against the Jun Family's honor. I doubt that your Dugu Family will be lacking the funds if we take this dispute in front of the Emperor! 'Justice' may only be a seven letter word in this world of mortals! But it must be kept in mind, Dugu Zhong Heng... that the heavens are looking at this matter today!"

Dugu Zhong Heng was angered by this remark. He felt as if he had been sandwiched between honor and anger.

He was rude and unreasonable, but he wasn't the master of repudiating a debt. And to make matter worse... the entire Tian Xiang Empire knew about this matter. Therefore, he couldn't even think about go back on this debt.

[But... what do I say now...? How does this trivial Jun Family find the courage to say something this bold?] His breath was clearly panting, and it was obvious that he had cursed the Jun Family a hundred times in his heart. [Take a good look; you shameless spendthrifts are provoking this Old Man now!]

He was straining his mind hard when a strategy suddenly changed direction of his eyes; a carefully crafted plan came to his mind, "Correct, my Dugu Family does owe your Jun Family a lot in silver. Old Man, your grievances are reasonable! The murderer shall pay with his life and a debtor must return the money; that is fair! Don't tell me, has the Old Man made-up his mind? Will this trivial ninety million silver be enough? That's so miserly! If everyone were like you... they'd take whatever little money they had very seriously! Jun Zhan Tian, how much money could you take to your coffin? I genuinely despise this miserly behavior of your Jun Family!"

Jun Zhan Tian was nearly infuriated; this individual was taking things too lightly. [Ninety million in silver is trivial? This can finance three years of military expenditure for the entire Tian Xiang Empire! Stop it dam*it], "Since you don't care about it much... hurry up and return me my 'trivial amount' of money. Why are you dragging this matter? Let me tell you... my Jun Family has been waiting for this 'small amount' of money. Oh, and you're calling us misers? It's certainly better to be a 'miser' than someone who reneges on their debts!"

"When did I say that I won't pay it back?" Dugu Zhong Heng turned his face and rolled his eyes, "We acknowledge our debt. It's just that this Old Man doesn't have enough money with him at the moment. Still... you needn't worry. Anyway, it wasn't settled when to pay the debt off... you tell me, was this not the basis? If not this year... then the next one... or the one after that? And if not in this life time... maybe in the next one? Remember, a certain public-figure once said; 'Any debt can be repaid if one has an endless posterity...?'"

"Ha ha ha..." the people beside him broke into a frantic bout of laughter.

Some people had taken notice when the two old men had come together and had started muttering to each other. And every white-haired head had gathered around when the two men had started to talk about that huge debt. The mouths of the various families' leaders were gossipy when they heard Dugu Zhong Heng's joke.

And they heard Dugu Zhong Heng come-up with such a shameless classic line; the whole room burst into laughter in his support. This person was exceptionally talented. It was just a debt and nothing more. He had merely pushed it onto the next generation... and the one after that; and unto his entire posterity. He was extremely shameless. In fact, he had attained the peak of shamelessness...

[The tree must've cultivated a leather bark; this person is the most shameless in all the lands under heaven! Today I've learned at last...]

“Fart!” Grandpa Jun retorted impatiently, “Who knows how shameless your next generation will turn out?” Then he turned his gaze and said, “Elder Dugu, if you’re unable to repay the debt with money — then your granddaughter can help you repay it. We’ll become relatives by marriage if you marry your granddaughter to my grandson...”

“Do you expect that this Old Man will haggle about the ninety million with his relatives? Your family’s debt will obviously be exempted; how about it? I’ll let your debt off in such prime time. Then you can use that money to carve out figurines of your own. How about it?”

“Nonsense! You damned devil Jun!” Dugu Zhong Heng got angry and started to rain curses in an unrestrained manner. “My granddaughter is like a fairy! And just take a look at your grandson, just take a look...”

He pointed an accusatory finger at the back of the debauchee Jun as he said this. He was filled with anger as he continued, “Can that brat ever be joined to my granddaughter? You find me one person in this world who says that he is a good match for my granddaughter!”

“Your words are reasonable. Your granddaughter isn’t a worthy match for my grandson. But it seems that my grandson cares for your granddaughter. So, you’re in luck.”

Grandpa Jun then narrowed his eyes and said, “Elder Dugu, you will regret it if you don’t agree to this. There will come a day when you’ll have nothing more than rice for dinner. You will have lost everything by the time that day comes. Then don’t wonder why this Old Man did not warn you!”

“You dare! This Old Man will castrate you!”

Dugu Zhong Heng panted with anger and took a step forward. Would Grandpa Jun back off? His posture was sharp and his arrogance rose. The other old men realized that the situation had become dire since those two individuals were about to ‘have at each other’. Three groups of five people each promptly started to calm the two individuals down. This was to avoid a frightening farce incident inside the palace.

The result would be a bit too lively to see if these two old and powerful patriarchs of military families decided to clash inside the Imperial Palace...

The two old men desperately tried to free themselves. It seemed as if they wanted to maul each other. In fact, they were kicking and punching anyone in the vicinity...

“Jun Zhan Tian, if that ‘precious’ grandson of yours dares to provoke and annoy me... this old man will spank his ass and feed his junk to the birds! Your family will disappear, and you’ll spend your last days being a subordinate to bandits!” Dugu Zhong Heng spat everywhere as he roared.

“Bah! You think that you have that capability?! You think I’ve never thrown a punch in these past years of cultivation? You think I’m scared of you?! I forgot that I hadn’t taught you a lesson in all these years! And now this old bastard has grown wings and wishes to ascend to the heavens! But this Old Man will make an exception and straighten-you-up today! You ignorant fool! You refuse to accept the kindness that’s being shown to you!”

Grandpa Jun was quite furious. [I took pity on your granddaughter’s infatuation. Otherwise, on the basis of my grandson’s real situation... even the Emperor’s daughter is not fit enough to be joined to him! Let alone your granddaughter! You’re despicable to defame such an amazing young boy. You’re the most shameless person under the heavens!]

Several officials were hastily passing by this commotion as a few people tried to hold the doom at bay...

[Who’d have the courage to provoke these two old bastards...?]

[Dugu Zhong Heng is better. He is very unreasonable, but your life won’t be in danger with him. That Jun Family’s old bastard is another case altogether; he usually stays calm and appears to be harmless. In fact, he even flaunts his ‘moral cultivation’... but last time someone provoked him... he killed nearly one-third of the Imperial Council without batting an eye. This guy is very cold-blooded. He won’t even frown when doing the deed. He is a silent executioner!]

[There’s bound to trouble now that those two are arguing here. One shouldn’t stay here for long...]

“Tang Yuan?” the Emperor stared at the fat man in front of him inside the Imperial Hall. His temperament was extremely calm, but his brows shot-up at the sight of him.

The Emperor was shocked to see Tang Wan Li's grandson so stressed-out. [His personality is very different from that day at the Aristocratic Hall.] However, the Emperor somewhat derived a sense of security from the Fatty's flesh since Tang Yuan's body amply reflected the Empire's economical superiority.

It was obvious from one look at his body that the common people didn't have a dearth of food or clothing, and lived lives of plenty...

"Yes! I Tang Yuan pay my respects to Your Majesty!" He found it difficult to kneel. His belly brushed against the floor and his body spread-out like a carpet. He had attempted to touch his head on the ground, but his belly settled on it first.

Chapter 283: Fatty Passes the Test

Tang Yuan was terrified. His grandfather had brought him to the entrance and gone back. He had left him to face the great Emperor on his own. So, the Fatty was extremely nervous.

"Stand up. Come; have a seat," The Emperor could not help but chuckle a smile after he saw Fatty cut such a sorry figure. His voice was affable as he waved his hand.

"Many thanks, Your Majesty." Tang Yuan used his plump hands to support himself as he crawled and stood up. He carefully wiped-away the sweat and cautiously moved to take a seat.

He didn't know whether it was intentional or not... but the court eunuch had moved a circular chair for him. Fatty found that the chair wasn't very big. A regular-sized person would've easily fit into the chair and would've sat in a relaxed manner. In fact, he would've had plenty of space left to spare. In case of Fatty on the other hand... fitting into that chair had become a very difficult task.

Tang Yuan recalled his grandfather's instructions, "When facing the Emperor — don't sit arrogantly if he asks you to take a seat. Always sit with only half of your butt on the chair. Remember this by heart!" However, that chair would become a problem if he were to sit with half of his butt on it. [I doubt that even the half-of-my butt can fit into this. This chair is too small. No wonder people can only place half of their butts in it.]

He huffed and puffed until half of his butt went in. But that part was large enough to fill the entire chair. A circle of fat hung all-around the chair. His fat had overflowed the chair's dimensions and had come out.

"Ha Ha..." the Emperor couldn't bear it anymore, and started to laugh. Tang Yuan felt his sweat seeping out as he accompanied that laugh.

"Tang Yuan, I've heard that you were the head auctioneer of the Aristocratic Hall?" The Emperor, intentionally or otherwise, stopped laughing and asked the question. A cold light flashed from the depths of his eyes.

"Yes Your Majesty... young official... common person... I..." Fatty Tang stammered before he became speechless. He wanted to call himself 'young official', but that was improper since he didn't have an official position. Then, he tried calling himself 'common' but that wasn't true. He then tried to refer to himself as 'I'... but then talking like that would be very disrespectful in this situation...

He unexpectedly started to choke...

"Never mind the courtesy; speak your mind," the Emperor spoke in a mild manner. "Tang Yuan, can you tell me whose idea it was to conduct this auction at the Aristocratic Hall in such a manner?"

"This... that... Your Majesty... he he... that is, this way..." Tang Yuan's mind raced. [Crap! No wonder Elder Brother solemnly exhorted me again and again. It seems that this old man knows that there's high-end person behind this entire arrangement...!]

"Your Majesty, I was ahem, ahem, very young at that time... and not quite sensible... I had made a huge mistake. My grandfather evicted me from the house for it. So... I decided to do something which would make the old man wonder that expelling me from the house wasn't the right thing to do." Tang Yuan embarrassingly scratched his head. "But what can I do? I'm only interested in making money..."

"You... are you telling me that this idea was yours?" The Emperor's expression sank. Then, some kind of an invisible power came down to put pressure on Tang Yuan.

This was not the Qi from a Xuan Qi expert... it was in fact the pure force of the Emperor's personality.

This was something that even the Young Master Jun or even the 'Eight Great Masters' could not imitate.

"Yes! Your Majesty... it was nothing; just a small business transaction... and nothing else!" Tang Yuan's clothes were seeped in sweat within seconds. He could feel sweat-rashes over his entire body. His mouth was somewhat parched, his red mouth and ivory teeth managed to utter these words still.

"It's nothing? Just a small business transaction? Tang Yuan, do you know the sin you've committed?" The Emperor narrowed his eyes to a small crack as he keenly observed Fatty Tang's expression.

"Insignificant, this insignificant... guilty... I... was unaware... made a mistake... I invited, invited my grandfather to make..." Tang Yuan became even more nervous. In fact, he still didn't know how to address himself. Then, he recalled what that small boy at the brothel had called himself when he had visited. He pondered on it for a while, and decided that it was appropriate for use.

He only remembered the boy's words since he has panicking in this moment. He hadn't taken the boy's tone into account. He couldn't figure that the boy would use this tone with the brothel's customers since he only wished to avoid provoking their arrogance in case he unknowingly made a mistake.

Suddenly, it seemed like Fatty was a street-seller who held two teapots, while the Emperor was a careless patron...

"Are you guilty of it? Your auction resulted in widespread disorder in the city, and everything has been drawn into turmoil. It's a hideous mess!" His Majesty the Emperor snorted as he continued to exert his power. The Emperor was a learned man. He had understood that this unfathomable mystery was done for since this guy had caught up.

"I didn't think that much at the time. I just wanted to stand on my own two feet. I had planned to earn some money from the guests in order to scrape a living. That was it. I didn't think on such matters. I didn't force anyone to buy those jars; they did it by their free will, Sir." Tang Yuan's sweat flowed down in a single stream.

Sir...

This sentence made the Emperor feel like a patron. Moreover, Tang Yuan didn't know that the Emperor and his sons... the relationship between those four was just a step away travel buddies.

"To speak nothing of earlier... you first put forward those characters depicting 'Aristocratic.' You provoked the rich and powerful of the Capital to make comparisons with this. And the situation became critical every passing day. Then, the prices of every commodity in the city rose rapidly because you sent just one invitation card per industry. And the fact that those invitations were sent to the 'true aristocrats' caused fierce internal disputes in the industries. The entire salt and cloth business of the Tian Xiang City are openly fighting and secretly plotting against each other as we speak! The situation is such that there've even been incidents of bloodshed due to it! Moreover, the entire political situation is unstable..." The Emperor couldn't talk about this final part openly. However, the matters he had raised weren't trivial. In fact, they were enough to intimidate Tang Yuan.

[Elder brother came-up with this plan in secret, and then controlled everything from behind! He is... amazing! And I thought this was just about the money. I was so stupid! I don't have enough face to break through the enemy lines... yet the boss sits far behind as he does it. This was genuinely 'calling the shots of the operations from thousands of miles away'!]

His Majesty, the Emperor was certain after looking at Tang Yuan's perplexed expression that he hadn't planned any of it. Or at least... he wasn't the instigator of that plan. He slowly got up from the Imperial Throne. He then took two leisurely steps and stationed himself thirty meters from Fatty Tang. "Tang Yuan, you're the grandson of a brave and loyal Marquis! You may be a debauchee... but you shall receive rank and wealth in the future even if you're ignorant and incompetent. So why're you bothering to suffer like this on behalf of someone else? Would you ruin yours and your Tang Family's future because of it? Do you think it is worth it?"

This was a psychological attack! This was clearly a psychological attack!

No person of the younger generations would remain calm after such a threat was made towards their family. The Emperor was certain of this. Therefore, he spoke these words and then stared 'nails' at Tang Yuan's face as he observed him carefully.

However, the Emperor was entirely unaware that Jun Mo Xie had discovered such rhetorics, and had exposed them a long time ago. In fact, he had grilled Fatty Tang in that manner many times for practice. The Young Master Jun didn't have the power like that of the Emperor's, but his killing intention surpassed such a trivial power. However, how would Fatty cope?

In fact, the Emperor would trick Fatty Tang if were to continue to talk about his family like this... such was that old fox's trick? The young man would give away some of what he was trying to hide sooner or later. Then, the dots could be connected from that information. No matter Fatty's training — he wouldn't be able to resist sustained efforts such as these.

However, there were thousands of people waiting outside. So, the Emperor was seeking a quick method to achieve his aim. However, the fact was that Jun Mo Xie had predicted this exact situation in his plans.

Tang Yuan's situation could be compared with... it was like... learning wasn't helping the student's grades. Therefore, the student had decided to memorize the previous years' test papers on the eve of the exams... but had discovered that those questions had comprised the entire set of test papers of the next day's exam...

[Elder brother is a divine strategist! Tang Yuan worships you!]

[Take this!]

"Your Majesty... you do not understand. This insignificant person has told you. I was expelled from the house by my grandfather. In any case... I deserved that punishment. My grandfather gave me a thorough beating that day, and I left my family home covered in cuts and bruises. I was left alone and helpless. I moved around the Capital without any money. But the Gods refused to abandon me. My good brother Jun Mo Xie from the Jun Family appeared! He didn't abandon me and brought me back to his home. He rescued me from my situation and saved my exhausted body. He took care of me and nursed me back to health with the utmost care..." The emotions seemed to be appearing on Fatty's face.

"So that plan was the Jun Family's Young Master's idea?" The Emperor felt a little frustrated since the Fatty seemed to be rambling incoherently. It was extremely loathsome.

"Your Majesty, you've misunderstood what I've said. Please allow me to properly finish what I was going to say. I received a warm welcome at the Jun Family's residence by my good brother. The Jun Family provided me with food, clothing and a roof over my head. And even though I am a debauchee... I could recognize their kindness... and the fact that I was a guest under someone else's roof. I started to ponder on how to repay such kindness. Business is a bit of a forte for me... so I struck upon an inspiration! I thought that I and my good brother Jun have something in common..."

[What would be common between you two? That you both are debauchees? You both are failures? Both of you fail to live up to the expectations? What else could it be?]

“Your Majesty must know of the marketplace rumors that I and my good brother Jun are the city’s number one and two debauchees. This insignificant person sought inspiration in this fact. I recall that in the past — I didn’t value money! This insignificant person used to wantonly and randomly squander money... often on things which were of little value. I continued to throw away money recklessly. And now as I looked around — I found that I and the Young Master Jun weren’t a minority in our generation. It seemed that the term ‘debauchee’ could be a substitute for the term ‘aristocrat.’ However, how come no ‘aristocrat’ was ever considered a ‘debauchee’? But this could be considered as a way to make money since these people didn’t take money seriously either!

“Coincidentally, I had come to know the greatest wine maker under heaven a few days back — senior Song Sheng. And he agreed to ferment his unique and exquisite wine for the Aristocratic Hall. We’ve come to today’s situation due to various situations and incidences of good fortune. If Your Majesty still has some questions — Tang Yuan is more than willing to answer them all!” Fatty’s ‘air duct’ didn’t know whether it should obey or not. Nevertheless, Jun Mo Xie had accurately predicted the Emperor’s reactions. Fatty hadn’t done so yet... and was thus terrified.

He could easily answer any number of questions that the Emperor would ask; in detail.

The Fatty wouldn’t have been this flustered if he realized this. He would’ve easily answered each and every question with impregnable logic... and on reasonable grounds. When it came to being expelled from his house... the fat man went according to the great director Jun’s wonderful script. He passionately brought tears into his eyes as he bawled.

A pile of tears and sweat splattered around from the Fatty’s face. The scene was rather difficult to imagine...

Chapter 284: The First Open-Contest!

The Emperor sighed. He knew he wasn’t going to get any answers from Fatty today... [Isn’t he too fluent? It seems as if he’s singing a song?] His majesty was bored and exhausted by now. He went back to the Imperial Throne, sat down and frowned.

He had previously risen from his seat, clasped his hands behind his back and stood in front of Tang Yuan. He had aimed to show his overwhelming majesty to Fatty with help of his huge hall and put some psychological pressure on him. This ploy had started on a successful note when he had gotten up. However, it stopped working after he got up and asked the question since he had gone exactly according to Jun Mo Xie's predicted sequence of moves.

Fatty Tang's heart was awash with admiration for the Young Master Jun. That feeling counteracted the Emperor's efforts. Therefore, pressurizing the Fatty turned out to be useless.

"I got it; you can leave now," The emperor was tired. He used one hand to massage his head, and the other to lightly wave outwards.

It was a dream-like pardon to Fatty Tang. His body relaxed considerably; [Heaven and earth! This fire has passed at last!] He was on the verge of standing up to express his gratitude. Suddenly, the Emperor raised his eyes. His arrow-like sharp gaze shot straight at Tang Yuan as he got straight to the point, and put forth a conjecture, "Was this Jun Wu Yi's idea?"

Tang Yuan had barely gotten up on his legs; his mind was relaxed, and he had lost his strength. Therefore, he started to panic after he heard the word 'Jun' when the Emperor asked him that question. He hadn't properly heard everything else the Emperor had spoken. He had lost his mind out of fear, and stood there dumbfounded. His big mouth turned into a large circle as he subconsciously exclaimed, "What?!"

His Majesty, the Emperor looked at Tang Yuan and smiled slightly, "Could that be the case?"

At the same time; on the other side... Jun Mo Xie took two steps and called-out as he waved, "Hello face-covering-shameful-youngster!" he had called-out to Li You Ran.

Li You Ran halted. He remained in his place as he waited for Jun Mo Xie to arrive. There were many other youngsters who wanted to accompany him and waited, but he lightly waved at them. He didn't speak a single word, but his gesture had clearly indicated his desire.

He had conveyed his intentions; like a cloud in the weak wind. However, his companions didn't mind and continued to walk. This was an incorporeal majesty. He saw the same look in Jun Mo Xie's eyes as

well. The fact was that he had always been adorned in this manner. In fact, he thought that such adornment was the norm.

Every movement of Li You Ran's was skillful and full of grace. It seemed as if they were made by the heavens themselves. He moved in a manner which belied his freedom from vulgarity.

His eyes flashed with an unusual color as he looked at Jun Mo Xie unenthusiastically. It had dullness... it had aggression and it had fear... but it passed in a flash.

"I don't know that the Third Young Master Jun would have some rare advice for me?" Li You Ran sounded neither too intimate, nor too estrange. His voice neither sounded too loud, nor too faint. But he had spoken this in discomfort.

"Your mannerism is good; it requires a little family education. And since this Young Master has arrived... he'll give you some advice," Jun Mo Xie talked drivel.

"Kindly tell." Li You Ran's eyes had a joyful expression, and his tone was sonorous. "I shall listen to the Young Master's words attentively. You Ran, is honored to listen to you."

"I wanted to ask you something; you wear that veil the entire day... don't you feel tired? Doesn't it get too hot? Isn't it very shameful? Or do you plan to harass innocent women?" Jun Mo Xie slanted his eyes and opened his mouth provocatively, "Or has your face been disfigured?"

Li You Ran never appeared in public. He was a bit older than Jun Mo Xie, and his reputation was more profound as well. He intimidated several people, but this Young Master was a very curious case. In some respects, the Young Master Li even feared of the consequences when it came to the Young Master Jun.

[This Li You Ran guy is too phony. His thoughts are too profound and shrewd; they are enough to scare people. It's like he's always planning inside his head. However, he always maintains the same calm, modest and a decent image on the surface.] The Hit-man Jun was always wary of a man who carried a big smile and dubious intentions.

Heavens knew when he would start to plan against him...?

The Hit-man Jun had never feared an evildoer, a madman, a gentleman, a strong hero or even a down-right villain. But what he feared the most, and was most disgusted by was — a hypocrite.

Li You Ran was a hypocrite; a high-level one at that. His hypocrisy was such that he seemed genuine and honest. His level of hypocrisy was so high that he had developed proficiency in it.

Jun Mo Xie had just chided Meng Fei, and had abused everyone else who was considered Li You Ran's younger brother. However, Li You Ran hadn't responded in any manner. He had intentionally or otherwise observed himself. He had examined himself closely! He had felt a faint sense of fear.

[Is Li You Ran is on-guard against me? Or has he discovered something else?]

Therefore, Jun Mo Xie made a prompt decision to show initiative, and decided to probe him a bit. He would observe Li You Ran's behavior from then-on, and see how he conducted himself while responding to questions that were asked with a good intention.

"The Third Young Master has guessed it right! My face has been disfigured!" Li You Ran's eyes flashed with sadness. He didn't think that Jun Mo Xie was causing trouble for him. His voice was dull as he answered. It seemed that he was on-guard, but didn't think that Jun Mo Xie was worth getting mad at.

"Take that rag-off and let me have a look!" Jun Mo Xie carefully scrutinized the veil before he gave a frivolous command, "I haven't seen how elder brother looks after his face's disfiguration. I had heard you were quite handsome before. What a pity!"

Jun Mo Xie had another reason behind these actions. He recalled that Li You Ran had spared no efforts to pursue Princess Ling Meng. He had observed the way Li You Ran had looked at Princess Ling Meng at the Aristocratic Hall, and it was obvious that Li You Ran was deeply devoted to her.

This at least... wasn't false.

[However, when it came to his own interest... he didn't hesitate to put the woman he loved so dearly to death, and then he moved on! So much so that he hasn't even gone in seclusion post it!]

The Young Master Jun could never forget that Lei Jian Hong and the others were Li You Ran's senior disciples. They were involved in that matter with Princess Ling Meng, but it was surely on his instigation.

This was one of his aims behind going to that hideout while being disguised as the 'Sky Xuan Peak Throwing Knife Expert'. He had a vague feeling that Li You Ran would sacrifice the woman he loved so dearly for the sake of procuring some information about the mysterious man he considered a threat to his plans.

[It was merely to gather some intelligence!]

[His feelings aren't fake. However, he discarded them like an old shoe!]

Jun Mo Xie believed that such a person wasn't fit to be called a 'man'. He could only be called a 'scum'; an anomaly. Yet, his bearing was honorable and graceful on the surface. It was perfect and aloof. This fact made Jun Mo Xie even angrier.

[Can't you act like a vile creature openly like I do? You like to play tricks to deceive people like that?]

[Therefore, I will tear down your mask!]

[I will expose your true colors!]

The two young men were immensely talented and smart. They were about to confront each other. One was a pure hoodlum, while the other had unsurpassed grace. And both of them were hidden behind masks of pretenses. However, neither knew who'd unmask whom first.

This had become a contest.

"My disfigured face is an eyesore." Li You Ran looked at him in a tranquil manner and smiled, "The Young Master Jun would know if he'd slash his flower-petals-like cheeks with two blades and then go home to look in the mirror."

“Really?” Jun Mo Xie drew that out on his face as he gave Li You Ran a sidelong look. “Young Master Li; your thoughts and knowledge are indeed very profound. However, even though this young master wanted to see it... he wanted to know one thing first — you used to be very handsome, but you can’t appear in public now. How does it feel? Exciting?”

Li You Ran’s self-restraint was repeatedly being tested by the Third Young Master Jun. This was slowly inciting anger within his heart. His smile and expression became cold as he replied, “Yes; very exciting. It’s a very pleasurable feeling. In fact, I can lend a hand and make you feel like you’re in seventh heaven if the Young Master loathes missing out on the opportunity...”

“Ha Ha Ha...!” Jun Mo Xie laughed loudly as he patted Li You Ran’s shoulder. He then exclaimed, “Young Master Li is a kindred spirit! I wasn’t aware of it. I’ve indeed missed so many deeds; Elder Brother You Ran is exceptional! You’ve just reminded this little brother of the time he spent at the Night Willow in the Spirit Fog Lake. Ha Ha! We both are intimate with the red light district; this little brother doesn’t know when the Elder Brother You Ran will show him his many unique skills?”

People who had walked away turned their heads to look at them. Some people had recognized the Tian Xiang City’s ‘number one publicly recognized gifted scholar’ — the Li Household’s Young Master Li You Ran. The shocking fact that he was discussing a prostitute openly was big news to everyone. Moreover, he seemed to be experienced in such matters. What was more... the Capital’s ‘number one debauchee’ was bowing to him. This was genuinely unexpected.

A look of anger flashed in Li You Ran’s eyes. He looked at Jun Mo Xie and said, “I’m quite young in this regard despite being the elder brother. How could I even compare to the Third Young Master Jun? I must gracefully admit defeat in this regard. The Young Master Jun is exceptional in this matter. In fact, he is quite... outstanding!”

“Oh? Am I really that awesome? You’re truthfully saying that? I like it when others praise me,” Jun Mo Xie shrugged his shoulders with excitement and laughed with genuine happiness.

“For example, the Third Young Master helped Tang Yuan win his fiancée back with his unparalleled gambling streak. That was truly amazing!” Li You Ran lowered his head and looked at his own shoes; it seemed as if he was pondering about something. But it seemed that he had understood something very clearly by the time he had finished that sentence.

“Oh? Yes, that’s true! The God of fortune was with me; there was nothing that could’ve been done to stop me!” Jun Mo Xie looked at him in an interested manner.

“Again for example... the Young Master Jun and Tang Yuan had beaten Qin Xiao Bao one afternoon. The Northern City Gang was annihilated the next night,” There was a faint smile on Li You Ran’s Face as he wandered forward. It seemed like he wasn’t looking at Jun Mo Xie. But the Hitman’s sixth sense told him that Li You Ran was looking at his own reflection in Jun Mo Xie’s eyes; as if in a mirror.

“The Northern City Gang had done a lot of evil things. So, the heavens would act. That and the other trivial things... I didn’t hold them very important. However, I observe that they seem to be worthy of repeated mentions by Young Master Li,” Jun Mo Xie puckered his eyebrows. “It seems that the Young Master’s and the Northern City Gang’s relations weren’t that shallow.”

Li You Ran gave a long smile before he spoke, “For example... the Third Young Master Jun had passed his judgment in the Magnificent Jewel Hall, and had made Li Zhen spend a huge amount of money to buy that extremely precious jade coral...”

Li You Ran smiled and looked at Jun Mo Xie gently. Then, he spoke in a deep voice, “However, I didn’t expect that it would accidentally explode post its purchase...”

Chapter 285: There’s No Harm in Having Fun

“And for example, the Dugu Family’s seven ‘Heroes and legends bravely rushing forward’ came to see the Third Young Master Jun when he was recuperating at his home. I seem to recall that the Young Master Jun would usually avoid those seven. However, you went-on to make a bet with them and set up the Aristocratic Hall. You were able to make the Dugu Family owe you ninety million in silver taels because of this matter. That was amazing...

“I’ve heard that one of the ‘Great Eight Masters’, Solitary Falcon, is currently residing at the Jun Family’s residence for some reason... he he he... Third Young Master, do you want me to go on?” Li You Ran gazed gently at him and spoke softly, “I fail to understand... Why are you involved in each one of these matters...? You’re indeed a very talented person. This entire affair is very mysterious!”

Jun Mo Xie’s eyes flashed coldly as he let-out a mischievous laughter. He replied in a sloppy manner, “Actually, I too find it very strange that Young Master Li’s presence is everywhere. You’re outstanding; ...from the underworld to the Imperial Palace... Young Master Li, you show your disfigured face everywhere. I doubt it would bother you; but don’t you think you’d scare the children? And even if you’re not scaring the children... it’s not good to scare the faint hearted.”

Li You Ran's eyes flashed with a cold and sharp light. But he regained his usual calm and gentle manner again. He pretended to look as if he was embarrassed and then replied softly, "Third Young Master, are you sure that your surname is Jun?"

"Nonsense! I'm a member of the Jun Family! However, could it be that your surname isn't Li?" Jun Mo Xie snorted.

"We're both on the same boat!" Li You Ran looked distant as he took a long breath. Then, he stated in one go, "Third Young Master, I've looked down on you several times in the past. But ever since the explosion of the Jade Coral... he he he..."

Li You Ran raised his head and looked straight into Jun Mo Xie's eyes, "Third Young Master, you must treat everyone as fools. But there are many intelligent people in the world. You're certainly one of them, but it doesn't mean that others may not be."

"Really? And you might be one of those 'other' people?" Jun Mo Xie laughed savagely. He then slanted his gaze, "Seems like sitting at home after the disfiguration of your face has given you a lot of time to think; isn't that true?"

Li You Ran's eyes were momentarily brimmed with anguish since the other party had mentioned his disfigured face again. However, he smiled in an unrestrained manner and his eyes became gentle soon after. They flashed with many rare emotions as he smilingly said, "Indeed, I've been thinking a lot after the Jade Coral's explosion. There were many things which had evaded my eyes in the past. However, I see them clearly now."

"Therefore, I'm very grateful to that explosion; yes." Li You Ran took a step and slowly moved forward as he continued, "Third Master Jun, you agree with that... right?"

Jun Mo Xie laughed, "So... this was like 'turning a misfortune into a fortune'. Or perhaps 'gaining profit from loss'?"

"Indeed! It was exactly like that!" Li You Ran nodded seriously and looked at Jun Mo Xie, "I never suspected you and I didn't think that I could be mistaken. A pure debauchee couldn't figure in my plans."

However, I know that Young Master Jun cannot be underestimated after I saw him at the Aristocratic Hall...”

“Is it possible that the auction may have had a loophole?” Jun Mo Xie had anticipated that this might become a problem. This was the reason he had decided to probe Li You Ran.

“Naturally; there’s a loophole! Moreover, the loophole isn’t small,” Li You ran halted; they had reached the main door. The others had gone in, but Li You Ran obviously wanted to finish what he was speaking; and he wanted to finish it outside. “Tang Yuan... a man who could lose his own fiancée could come up with such a brilliant plan... he didn’t bat an eyelid as his plan caused a huge storm in the Capital and induced such confusion. Third Young Master... don’t you think it’s strange? Is Tang Yuan qualified-enough? Do you think he deserves that credit?”

“So, that’s the case!” Jun Mo Xie finally understood. The plan didn’t have a flaw; it was the person who did. Li Yu Ran couldn’t help but gravely underestimate everyone in the world. There was no doubt that Fatty Tang was unbearable. The auction was Jun Mo Xie’s idea, but every arrangement had been made by the Fatty. His business skills were exceptional. However, Jun Mo Xie wasn’t going to relay that information to Li You Ran.

“No matter how chaotic the Capital becomes; the more chaotic it is... the better. Due to the chaos... our Li Family, the Jun Family, the Dugu Family... all other powerful families will be relatively safer. We can secure these families — no matter what happens to the others. This would help us in acquiring time for some respite.” Li You Ran smiled, “Our Li family has benefited from the auction; although the benefit isn’t that massive.”

“Do you wish to thank me?” Jun Mo Xie assumed the bearing of a benefactor, and looked at Li You Ran.

“If the Third Young Master decides to kill me — I’m afraid I won’t be able to escape.” Li You Ran ignored him, and continued to talk. It seemed as if he was minding his own business, “But it’s important that I kill the Third Young Master... though I don’t think I’ll be successful. He he, you have the Solitary Falcon living at your residence — like I have my master at mine.”

Li You Ran had a faint smile as he gently sighed, “There’s presently a balance between us.

“Our Li Family controls the politics, and the Jun and the Dugu Family jointly control the military. That’s a balance as well. However, I’m temporarily unwilling to ruin that balance, and I believe that you aren’t either, Young Master Jun. But if either of us dies... the balance will cease to exist. Would you agree with me Third Young Master?” Li You Ran smiled in a very relaxed manner.

“Young Master Li is right! The situation is very balanced and harmonious,” Jun Mo Xie smiled. But his inner thoughts were fierce; [I know that the balance cannot be disturbed for the time-being. However, that won’t remain the case forever. And I won’t mind taking your head in the dark of the night when the time comes. It will be fairly easy for me to do that!]

“I cannot imagine how the Third Young master will act. But I, Li You Ran, will do nothing excessive for a short while.” Li You Ran smiled, “I wouldn’t dare to act too rashly for the time-being. However, when the conditions are right — the first rival I must urgently eliminate is the Third Young Master.”

Li You Ran said this quite seriously. It was more like an earnest commitment than a few pleasantries. Li You Ran’s conduct was very magnanimous in this case.

“I believe you,” The corners of Jun Mo Xie’s mouth rose crookedly as a seven-lettered word came into his mind; [Strange!] If Li You Ran had the opportunity to eliminate him without being suspected for it... then, Jun Mo Xie was sure that Li You Ran would take the task on without the slightest hesitation.

The reverse situation was the same as well. However, the situation was exactly as Li You Ran had described it to be. Hence, the Li Family and the Jun Family would wish the balance to remain undisturbed. Otherwise, Jun Mo Xie would’ve killed Li You Ran by now.

Jun Mo Xie wasn’t very interested in sitting and chatting with him at present.

“Therefore, there’s no harm if we have some fun; right?” Li You Ran didn’t know whether he had convinced Jun Mo Xie. The corners of his mouth rose crookedly. His face revelled in a happy expression as he said, “Third Young Master, you’ve become quite capable. You wouldn’t have been anywhere near me a few years ago. But it seems that we’re the same now. We both had a poor childhood... and never had any fun.

“So, there’s no harm in making-up for it and giving it a go. Is it possible that you have another playmate?” Li You Ran seemed very interested as he asked that question.

Jun Mo Xie coughed, [I didn't have a childhood... just like you... But Jun Mo Xie's childhood was much more colourful than yours!]

"Have fun while killing people? Or have fun while creating havoc?" Jun Mo Xie laughed mischievously.

"Killing and creating havoc... can be considered a game of sorts," Li You Ran tilted his head and pondered. However, the look on his face was seemingly akin to that of a longing. "And we have played it..."

The two men stepped inside the hall. Li You Ran gently spoke the moment they passed through the door, "There are very few in the younger generation who can play with me, and then defeat me; repeatedly. You're a very fascinating playmate... we might as well continue to play."

His eyes had been on the ground, and his voice had been low as he had spoken those words. In fact, it had seemed as if he had merely thought these words out-aloud.

"Continue to play?" Jun Mo Xie laughed heartily. He saw that hundreds of people had assembled inside the hall. He laughed in a wretched manner as he saw the setting of the hall, "Then let's continue with our fun games. Ha ha! Then, you and I shall start to play this game properly..."

Everyone scoffed in unison. The orioles and the sparrows pouted and mutter in their respective voices. Thought, they kept it low. Every individual of notice in the Tian Xiang City had gathered inside the Imperial Palace's main hall at the moment. Jun Mo Xie could distinctly feel that every eyeball was fixatedly gazing at him.

Li You Ran couldn't help but smile as he heard Jun Mo Xie end their conversation in his usual hoodlum style. There were several hundred people inside the hall, but he knew that Jun Mo Xie had aimed those words at him.

The two men then parted without looking at each other.

The two of them had some hidden-aces up their sleeves. In fact, they could see some of the cards the opposite party held as well. However, both of them had become more serious... as if by prior agreement.

[A worthy opponent!]

These words emerged inside the minds of those two individuals as they parted.

Young Master Jun regained his train of thought; [that hypocrite Li You Ran is my only rival at the moment. But I can't always focus my thoughts on him. There are other matters of importance in this feast.] He looked-up and instantly recognized something strange about the setting of the feast.

[It is quite elaborate and... very unique!]

The seat high-above the banquet was where the Tian Xiang Empire's Emperor would sit. [Does he wish to personally participate in tonight's feast?]

There were a few more seats around the Emperor's. They were presumably set to seat the three Princes, and the other members of the Royal Family. The other members of the Royal Family would refer to the Prince Equivalent; Yang Huai Nong. However, the seat which seemed reserved for the Prince Equivalent and his son seemed to be less that luxurious in comparison. However, one seat seemed to have been designed for the comfort of its guest. It seemed rather obvious that this seat was reserved for Princess Ling Meng.

Another set of tables had been placed in the fair vicinity. Those were undoubtedly reserved for the Patriarchs of the powerful families. However, why was one table placed separately, and slightly higher than this set? It seemed reserved for someone senior. But who was it for? This was a confusing mystery.