

## Immortal 911

### Chapter 911: Night of the Seventh Day

Sang Qien was caught off guard and pulled into the coffin, her heart pounding. She was even more shocked when she felt Zu An holding her hand. Is he going to use this as a chance to take advantage of me?

This was such a narrow space that they had been forced to stay close together to begin with. King Qi Manor's people were outside, so she couldn't even make a single noise. That was why she couldn't do a thing if he wanted to do something to her now.

Just then, she heard him tell her through ki, "Your heart is beating too fast; I'll help you calm down."

Sang Qien was stunned. Then, she sensed a wave of warm energy spreading throughout her entire body through his palm. After that, her panicked breathing unknowingly calmed down. She finally realized that Zu An had done so because her heart was beating too fast, for fear that those outside might notice.

She thought, What the heck was I thinking about just now? Ahhh, this is so embarrassing...

Zu An asked in confusion, "What's wrong? Your heart rate is rising again."

Sang Qien blushed and quickly shook her head. She turned to look away, but then saw the concubine's face and almost jumped in fright.

The coffin was specially made and had cooling properties. Its dark blue formation lines glowed a faint blue. That was why she could still see the concubine inside.

Even though she knew the skills of a coroner and wasn't scared of corpses, she had never been in a coffin together with a corpse before. Furthermore, the situation she was in made the icy blue face especially terrifying. She subconsciously leaned closer to Zu An. His body's warmth mysteriously made her feel more at ease.

A familiar voice spoke outside the coffin. "Everyone, please move swiftly. Make sure to check the surroundings carefully. That Zu An demanded the inspection of the concubine's body; we absolutely can't give him any chances."

"Understood!" came several orderly replies. Then, the guards dispersed to search the area.

Sang Qien's expression changed. She whispered toward Zu An, "Han Fengqiu?"

As someone who also resided in the capital, she was aware of King Qi Manor's guardian. Her cultivation wasn't high enough, so she was worried that her existence might be detected by Han Fengqiu's ninth ranked cultivation. That was why she didn't dare to communicate through ki and instead whispered her words. She was worried that Zu An might not know what she was saying, so she drew the words on his chest.

Zu An subconsciously raised his hand to draw his response on her impressive chest, but he then realized that would be weird. He laughed awkwardly and said through ki, "Yes. He was probably worried that I might break in, so he came here to make sure that absolutely wouldn't happen."

Sang Qien blushed, clearly noticing what had happened. But there was nothing she could do about it, so she continued to write her response. "Then what do we do now? Are we going to be discovered?"

"Don't worry, these King Qi Manor personnel won't examine the concubine's coffin," Zu An replied.

The two of them were so close to each other. Zu An was also worried that they might be discovered by Han Fengqiu, so he subconsciously moved closer to Sang Qien's ear.

Sang Qien's ears had been sensitive to begin with. She felt a numb sensation ripple through her entire body when she felt the heat from his breath. Her heart rate began to quicken again.

Suddenly, a guard cried out in alarm. "Sir... Sir... Sir Han!"

"What is it?" Han Fengqiu was unhappy to be called by a guard that way.

The guard stuttered, "The coffin... Over here... Part of the concubine's clothing is sticking out here!"

The two people inside were alarmed. Zu An raised his head and saw that a corner of the concubine's clothing was sandwiched in the coffin lid. Sang Qien had probably forgotten to fix that area after her inspection. Afterward, they were in too much of a rush when they jumped inside, which was why that spot hadn't completely been restored to its usual state.

Zu An quickly pulled the cloth back in. Han Fengqiu spoke again, but he was clearly closer. "Where? Why don't I see anything?"

"It was just... just here." The guard pointed at a part of the coffin lid. He sounded more and more scared. "Sir Han, today is the seventh day... Do you think this place is haunted?"

"Stop saying nonsense! How can there be any ghosts?" Han Fengqiu harrumphed. Then, with the sound of footsteps, he instantly appeared next to the coffin. He placed his hand on its lid.

Sang Qien's heart was about to jump out of her chest. Her eyes were filled with alarm. What do we do? What do we do now?!

But she was completely stupefied a moment after. Zu An pulled her right into his arms! Sang Qien's head went completely blank. Do you know what's happening right now? And yet you're going to take advantage of me here?

But she quickly threw out that thought. She already knew that even though Zu An might not be the most upright gentleman, he wasn't someone who didn't think before he acted. There was definitely a reason for him to do such a thing.

Zu An was quite surprised. He had expected her to struggle, but her cooperation saved him quite a bit of effort. As such, he used 'Mirror Mirage' and neutralized their presence into nothing.

Han Fengqiu remained silent for a while, inspecting the coffin. A while later, he tried to open up the coffin and said, "No living person can escape my detection. Furthermore, this coffin lid..." He pushed the lid while speaking, but it didn't budge. He continued, "See? Isn't it closed properly? Stop thinking nonsense."

"But I clearly just..." The guard was cut off by the other guards' laughter before he even finished his sentence.

"I know you've always been a coward. I think you were just seeing things!"

"Exactly. You were muttering about how it was the seventh day or something, that you were scared of her highness' soul coming back."

"Did you read too many ghost stories?"

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The guard's face turned red when he heard everyone else's laughter. As such, he concluded that he had been mistaken.

"Enough, enough already. Do you guys not know where we are?! Stop being disrespectful!" Han Fengqiu cut off the guards' laughter with a shout. "Go back to your posts outside. Has that Qiu Yue arrived yet?"

Zu An was surprised. Qiu Yue was the concubine's personal maid.

"She's here!" Several guards quickly brought in some servant girls.

Han Fengqiu nodded. He said to Qiu Yue and the others, "Guard this place for the next few days; don't let anyone approach, especially that Zu An. Call me if anything happens."

This was where King Qi's concubine's corpse was, after all, and a cold formation had even been used to preserve her appearance. That was why it wasn't proper for guards like them to stay there. The most qualified people for the job were naturally the maids.

Qiu Yue gave the largest coffin in the middle of the funeral hall a look. Her face was completely pale. "Sir Han, today is the seventh day, the day that the soul returns. People she knows shouldn't be here! Otherwise, she might be reluctant to leave this world peacefully!"

Han Fengqiu said with a frown, "All of that is absolute nonsense. Don't believe that stuff. There are so many people guarding this place with you, and there are people patrolling outside. What are you scared of?"

Qiu Yue felt wronged when she heard him berate her that way. But her status was low and she couldn't really retort. She could only agree reluctantly.

Han Fengqiu looked around. When he confirmed that there was nothing else strange, he brought the rest of the men with him. It wasn't that he hadn't been careful enough, but rather that no one expected the heavily-guarded King Qi Manor to be so easily infiltrated. Their visit was only to guard against anything unexpected.

When she heard the activity outside, Sang Qien quietly asked, "What do we do now?"

Zu An said, "We'll stay here tonight."

Sang Qien was confused. She was about to ask something else, but she saw that Zu An had already closed his eyes and fallen asleep. She had been a sharp person to begin with. She quickly understood

what he meant. There were guards everywhere at that moment. Furthermore, after the incident with the concubine's clothing, it was the most dangerous time.

But knowing that was one thing. She was going to sleep in a coffin, and furthermore right next to a corpse? That was way too terrifying!

She turned around and gave the concubine's remains a look, but in the end, she chose to move a bit closer into Zu An's arms. The coffin had been a cramped space to begin with. She was now so close to a young man, and she could feel his masculine energy. It was hard for her thoughts to not wander crazily.

Objectively speaking, Zu An was quite an outstanding man. But he was the Chu clan's young master, and he even seemed to have something going on with her sister-in-law. How could the two of them have anything between them? Otherwise, wouldn't she be letting her big brother down...

But as she thought about such things, she unknowingly fell asleep while nestled up against Zu An.

### **Chapter 912, (1): Coincidence**

After a long time had passed, the drowsy Sang Qien was suddenly roused awake. She felt dizzy, and her entire body was drenched in cold sweat from fright. She had actually fallen asleep in the coffin! But the coffin was airtight, so it would be easy to suffocate to death inside!

Sang Qien quickly turned around to check on Zu An. However, she saw him looking at her with a smile as soon as she raised her head. She blushed and asked quietly, "When did you wake up?"

Zu An replied, "I've been awake for a bit already."

Sang Qien gave him an accusatory look. "Then why didn't you wake me up?"

Zu An said with a smile, "I couldn't bear to do it from how soundly you were sleeping."

Sang Qien panicked when she heard him say he 'couldn't bear to'. A storm of thoughts rushed through her mind in that instant. She quickly changed the topic to hide her embarrassment. "You really are something. Aren't you scared that we might just suffocate to death inside the coffin?"

"Don't worry, I already opened up a crack." Zu An pointed above himself. Sure enough, there was a sliver of light coming through from above. Even though it wasn't that obvious, it was enough for ventilation.

Then didn't he wake up a long time ago, and just kept looking at me all night?

Sang Qien felt a bit light-headed. She didn't dare think about that subject any more. Instead, she asked, "What's the situation outside?"

Zu An put away his playful smile. "The guards have already pretty much pulled back. The ones that are left are dozing off as well. There are only a few maids left here, and the other maids have all fallen asleep. Only the concubine's personal maid Qiu Yue is still burning paper offerings in front of the coffin."

Sang Qien was alarmed. Wouldn't she hear what they were saying if she was right in front of the coffin?

Zu An seemed to have seen through her worries and reassured her, "Don't worry, she isn't a cultivator."

Sang Qien sighed in relief. Then, she finally realized that she was still leaning against his chest. They were pressed up against each other so closely she could feel his breath when he spoke.

Even though she had studied a bit of everything for the sake of more comprehensive knowledge, even knowing a bit about autopsies, she knew absolutely nothing about romance. She had absolutely zero experience. She felt her entire body become a bit weak when she felt the powerful masculine energy around her. It was even a bit hard for her to think normally.

Fortunately, the maid Qiu Yue spoke outside. "Your highness, please be at ease. You can't blame me for what happened that day; I didn't know that this would happen either..."

Qiu Yue had deliberately lowered her voice. If not because Zu An and Sang Qien were so close, and that they were both cultivators, they wouldn't be able to hear those words at all.

Sang Qien was shocked. She quickly looked at Zu An and said, "Looks like there was some ulterior motive behind the concubine's death after all. This maid is one of the insiders."

Zu An nodded. He had already known that much.

He had noticed that Qiu Yue was way too calm when he interrogated her before. After all, the concubine was her master, so their lives were practically tied together. And yet, after the concubine died, she actually didn't look all that bereaved. When he had asked if the concubine might have been killed, she didn't directly refute it either.

Normally speaking, shouldn't a servant's first reaction have been to call for help and investigate the truth? He had wanted to make sure that he hadn't misunderstood her, so he'd asked how the concubine treated the maid normally. She'd said that the concubine treated her like a sister, so her response made even less sense. That was why he had known that there was something wrong with the maid, but he just hadn't voiced his suspicions yet.

Zu An listened to the servant mumble for a long time, but she didn't say anything really useful. He became a bit impatient and pushed open the coffin.

Qiu Yue raised her head in puzzlement when she heard a noise coming from the coffin. When she saw the coffin's cover move, she felt her soul leave her body. She was about to scream when a black figure darted out. Then, she blacked out.

Zu An didn't stop there. His figure turned into a streak of lightning, instantly tapping the sleeping maids and making sure they were completely asleep.

Sang Qien crawled out from the coffin and asked with a bit of hesitation, "How are we going to deal with the aftermath now that we've created this huge fuss here?"

Zu An patted her shoulder. "Don't be in such a rush to come out yet."

Sang Qien was confused. Zu An seemed to have noticed her bewilderment and said with a nod, "Stay in the coffin." He tossed her a set of clothes afterward, saying "Change into these clothes inside the coffin."

Sang Qien had been wondering why she was going to stay in the coffin, but those clothes drew her attention. The material was soft and sleek, clearly made of precious material. The style was also noble and elegant. It was a beautiful dress.

But that's not important right now! She quickly reacted, and asked, "What kind of dress is this? Why should I change into it?"

If not because they had already spent some time together, she would have suspected that he was using this chance to mess with her.

Zu An replied, "Those are King Qi's concubine's clothes."

Sang Qien was speechless. Even though she wasn't scared of corpses, this guy had made her sleep in the coffin, and then made her change into the corpse's clothes? Wasn't that way too weird?

"I need you to pretend to be the concubine to get some confessions out of this maid," Zu An explained. That was something Daji could take care of too, but he didn't want to reveal his trump cards to too many people. Furthermore, King Qi Manor was on high alert at the moment. It would be troublesome if the ki fluctuations caused by Daji's skill ended up alerting King Qi Manor's people.

"Why do you have the concubine's clothes?" Sang Qien's eyes widened. She looked at him in confusion.

"I snagged a set during my investigation during the day." Zu An gave the nearby 'Pin Ru's Wardrobe' a look. He had left that wardrobe in a corner after taking out the clothes.

"Qiu Yue is the concubine's personal maid, so she couldn't be more familiar with her master. Will this really be enough to fool her?" Sang Qien was skeptical. Did this guy just want to see her change clothes?

"She feels guilty to begin with, and it's the seventh night. If she sees you come out from the coffin, she'll be absolutely frightened. How could she be bothered with trying to tell you apart?" Zu An didn't tell her about Pin Ru's Wardrobe and instead explained it in a different way.

Sang Qien nodded. There would be a good chance if they did that. However, she exclaimed, "Then you have to turn around! You better not peep!" She was a bit distressed. She really was completely going along with this man's pace today! He had probably already planned this from the very start!

While she finished her preparations, Zu An hid in a corner, then unsealed Qiu Yue's acupoint.

When she slowly woke up again, Qiu Yue felt that her surroundings were incredibly sinister. A cold chill blew past, and the candle flames in the funeral hall flickered. She wrapped her arms around herself and rubbed them together to create a bit of warmth.

"Qiu Yue..." came a faint voice from inside the funeral hall.

Qiu Yue's eyes widened in confusion. She looked all around her, but didn't see anything. She pushed her nearby companions and asked, "Did you all hear anything?"

But those companions were completely knocked out. They didn't wake up even when she pushed them.

"Qiu Yue..." The cold and eerie voice spoke again.

Qiu Yue felt more and more scared. She quickly kowtowed to the surroundings. "Is that your highness? You must have returned tonight. I hope you've enjoyed your meal and drink, and that you can pass on peacefully..."

It was a woman's voice. Even though it wasn't too similar to the concubine's voice, she was utterly terrified and couldn't tell the difference. Furthermore, the concubine was now a ghost, so it was normal for her voice to have changed.

Creeeeak!

Suddenly, a loud creak came from the coffin. Qiu Yue jumped in fright and looked up in alarm. She saw that the center coffin's lid was slowly being pushed open.

"Your highness..." Qiu Yue felt her scalp turn numb. She wanted to call out, but it was hard for her to even speak loudly. She wanted to run, but she suddenly went limp. She couldn't even crawl back up to her feet.

Zu An, who was watching from the shadows, smirked. This woman has been scared so badly I don't even have to do a thing.

The coffin lid suddenly stopped. Qiu Yue looked upward in alarm. Then, she saw a woman slowly sit up from the coffin.

The woman wore the concubine's favorite dress from when she was still alive. Even though Qiu Yue couldn't see her face from the disheveled hair, how could she not recognize who it was, as her personal maid?

"I've died such a miserable death..." The woman slowly crawled out of the coffin, then walked toward Qiu Yue step by step.

## **Chapter 912, (2): Coincidence**

Zu An almost burst out laughing. This Sang Qien brat's acting is actually pretty good! I didn't even teach her what to do, and yet she actually taught herself! She even moved her hair in front of her face! Who wouldn't want a partner as reliable as this?

However, Sang Qien didn't actually have to hide her face, because she was under the effects of Pin Ru's Wardrobe. To Qiu Yue, she looked just like the concubine.

"Your highness, it has nothing to do with me! It has nothing to do with me!" Qiu Yue frantically moved backward, but her body was so weak that she only managed to shuffle a few feet away. She could only repeatedly kowtow as tears streamed down her face.

Sang Qien was quite shocked. Why is this woman so scared? Is my acting that good? But she reacted quickly as well. She quickly took the chance to say, "It was you who caused my death."

Qiu Yue sobbed as she explained, "It wasn't me! When I told King Qi about it, I didn't know he would kill you! Spare me, your highness! Spare me!"

Zu An and Sang Qien were both shocked. They had never expected the killer to be King Qi!

Sang Qien didn't need Zu An to tell her anything. She immediately asked about why King Qi would kill her.

Through Qiu Yue's stuttering explanation, the two of them finally found out what had happened. It turned out that during that day, King Qi's concubine had dressed up meticulously. Perhaps because it had been too long since she had met with King Qi, she had ended up meeting him without bringing anyone with her.

The maid had just happened to run into King Qi in the courtyard, and happily told him that her master was heading over to visit him. King Qi's expression instantly turned a bit strange. When he heard that, he quickly left.

Then, something happened to the concubine that very night. Qiu Yue was terrified, but as someone who had spent a long time in this king manor, she knew what she had to do to survive. She didn't dare to say a thing no matter who asked her, and she pretended to not know anything. That was how she had been able to live until now.

What she was most worried about at that point, apart from her highness coming back and demanding her life, was that King Qi would choose to silence her. However, King Qi had never done anything, which made her calm down a bit.

Zu An knocked out Qiu Yue, then said gravely, "A concubine already died. If her personal maid died so soon, anyone would be suspicious. That's why King Qi probably decided to take the risk of keeping her alive."

Sang Qien nodded in agreement. "But according to what she said, we still can't tell why King Qi would kill her. From what I know, this concubine was beautiful ever since she was young. Ever since she entered the manor a few years ago, she always received King Qi's favor. Why would he kill her for no reason?"

Zu An recalled the appearance of the woman inside the coffin. She could be called beautiful, or at the very least prettier than King Qi's other concubines. She was also younger. His expression became strange as he mused, "Did the concubine actually commit adultery?" This was the only reason he could think of as to why a man would kill the woman he adored.

"That is indeed the most likely possibility." Sang Qien blushed. "But who the hell would be so brave as to mess with King Qi's woman?"

Zu An also had a strange look on his face. I even slept with the emperor's women, so is this even that big of a deal? However, he raised his head and looked outside, saying, "The sky is about to brighten again. Let's leave for now."

Sang Qien nodded. This was definitely not a place they wanted to be in for a long time. She was stunned when she saw Zu An pick up Qiu Yue and hoist her up on his shoulders.

Zu An replied, "This is a key witness. King Qi might kill her at any time if we leave her here. That's why it's better for us to bring her away."



Sang Qien was hesitant. "But a witness alone might not be enough..." She gave the coffin a look. "I think you should take the concubine's corpse with you. Only then will you have a chance of convicting King Qi."

Zu An shook his head. "Kidnapping a maid isn't a big deal, but taking away a concubine's corpse is a huge offense. If we fail to convict King Qi, we won't be able to shoulder the consequences of King Qi's blame. We're just investigating a case; there's no need to throw our very lives away."

Sang Qien was still hesitant. "Why do I feel more as if you don't want to convict King Qi of a crime?"

"You're overthinking it. Let's just get out of here." Zu An smiled, but he was shocked inwardly. This woman was just too sharp! He indeed didn't want the case to get out of hand. If that happened, no one would be able to keep the emperor in check anymore! That would only make things even more difficult for him.

Of course, there was no way he would share those thoughts with the Sang clan. Even though they kept stating that they wanted to form an alliance with him, they had clearly been on the emperor's side beforehand. Who knew what they were really thinking?

After what they had already experienced, combined with the fact that at that hour most people were resting, they were able to smoothly leave King Qi Manor.

Sang Qien looked at Qiu Yue, who was slumped over Zu An's shoulders, and asked curiously, "Do you have a place to keep her?"

Zu An didn't reply. He only looked at her with a smile. Sang Qien's expression changed. "You wanted to leave her with us? No way; absolutely not!"

Zu An said, "You know that there are many eyes watching my manor. If I bring her back, she'll be easily discovered. I don't have anywhere else to put her! You're the only one who can help me. Aren't we allies?"

Sang Qien refused. "Our clan has many people watching us too!"

Zu An said with a smile, "That was before. The emperor already used your father's contributions to pardon his crimes, giving him a position in the Imperial Secretariat Ministry of Transactions. The people monitoring him have already been pulled back. Little sis Qien'er, come on, help me out. Big brother will give you a lollipop next time."

The Ministry of Transactions was in charge of government revenue statistics and management. It was now one of the five high ministries of the Imperial Secretariat, together with the Ministry of Appointments, Ministry of Receptions, Ministry of Travel, and Ministry of Agriculture, which worked in tandem with the Three Dukes.

The Zhou Dynasty's five ministries functioned similarly to the six government ministries of Ancient China, but their authority was much weaker. They were in charge of the Imperial Secretariat's trivial busy work, underneath the Imperial Secretariat and the Left and Right Confidential Assistants.

For example, the Yu clan's Yu Xuanchong and Bi Linglong's father Bi Qi were the ministries' immediate supervisors.

“Don’t try to bribe me with a lollipop!” Sang Qien’s expression was full of strong emotions. But in the end, she still gave in under his coaxing and pestering. “I’m making it clear right now that this will be the only time; there’s no next time! I’ve really been tricked by you today...”

Zu An chuckled and patted her shoulder. “Thanks, little sis Qien’er.”

The two of them had already been so close inside that coffin that Sang Qien had already gotten used to his touch. Furthermore, she was so busy thinking about how to deal with the maid that she didn’t notice that there was anything off.

The two of them were extremely careful not to alert anyone for fear of exposing their secret as they snuck into the rear courtyard. But they could never have expected that there would suddenly be a soft cough as soon as they went inside.

“Who is it?” came a voice. Then, a shining sword thrust out toward them, but Zu An managed to grab the sword tip with his fingers at the last moment.

“Ah Zu?” exclaimed a pleasantly surprised female voice. The two turned around. Who else could the beauty in front of them be, if not Zheng Dan?

“You haven’t slept yet?” Zu An asked. He had almost thought that they were screwed. They had been fine even when they were in the heavily guarded King Qi Manor, so if they had ended up being discovered now, that would be absolutely tragic! The two of them had really ended up dropping their guard after they returned to the Sang clan.

“I woke up in the middle of the night and couldn’t sleep. I suddenly heard some activity outside, so I thought that some people had broken in.” Zheng Dan put away her weapon and laughed shyly. She had once been a gang boss, so she was much more vigilant than an ordinary person. Furthermore, she still had some of her gadgets in the surroundings, so she had noticed them when they passed by.

She was really happy when she saw Zu An again. She thought that he had come over to look for her, but she noticed Sang Qien next to him. Then, her eyes shifted to the woman on Zu An’s shoulders. Her expression became strange. “You guys...”

Sang Qien finally snapped out of her daze. She pushed Zu An away from her and said, “We just came back from investigating a case.”

“Just investigating a case? Your investigation even made you change clothes?” Zheng Dan asked with a smile.

Sang Qien was horrified. The two of them were clearly innocent, and yet what Zheng Dan said made it sound as if something had happened between her and Zu An! She was usually pretty fast and clever in her speech, but she was completely stumped at that moment. She shoved Zu An and hissed, “Hurry up and say something!”

Zu An thus said, “We were indeed investigating a case in King Qi Manor. This is a girl we brought back from the manor.”

Zheng Dan jumped in fright. “Hurry and go inside! Don’t let anyone see her!”

As they went inside, a light scent of tea wafted through the air. Sang Qien had to admit that her sister-in-law was an elegant beauty. She was quite jealous of that side of her.

Zu An gave her a rough recount of what had happened. Zheng Dan was extremely shocked. "You two really are brave! Both of you would be in huge trouble if King Qi Manor's people discovered you!"

"Don't worry. She only needs to stay here for a single night. I'll bring her back tomorrow," Zu An replied.

Sang Qien immediately put up her guard. "Are you saying that you're staying the night here?"

Zu An got up and bid them farewell, saying, "Of course not. I won't disturb you all any longer. I'll return tomorrow."

Sang Qien's vigilance was justifiable. There weren't many men in the Sang clan at the moment, so it wouldn't be too good for Zu An to stay there. She sighed in relief, feeling a bit embarrassed instead. "Be careful on the way back. I'm going to find a place for this maid first."

Only after Zu An left did she bid her beautiful sister-in-law farewell. She hid the maid well inside their residence. Afterward, she quickly asked a servant to prepare some hot water. She had stayed in a coffin for so long and worn the clothes of a dead person, so she really wanted to take a bath and get changed.

That older woman said with a chuckle, "What a coincidence; both the young miss and the young master's wife have decided to take a bath in the middle of the night."

Sang Qien was stunned. "My sister-in-law is also planning to take a bath?" It's not as if she stayed with a dead person all night. Why would she take a bath?

"Indeed. She asked me to prepare a tub of hot water not too long ago," the older woman replied. Then, she quickly left.

Sang Qien's expression changed. She suddenly remembered that her sister-in-law had only been dressed in pajamas. But even though they had chatted for a while, Zheng Dan hadn't had the slightest expression of discomfort, as if she had already gotten used to being in her night wear in front of Zu An. Sang Qien felt a strange feeling of vexation.

"Don't tell me..." Sang Qien gripped the sword in her hand tightly as she looked in the direction of Zheng Dan's room. She walked over with an overcast expression. That rascal, do you think our Sang clan is empty or something?!

### **Chapter 913: Rare Confusion**

Just as Sang Qien was about to charge over with her sword in hand, a figure suddenly appeared in front of her. She was shocked and quickly put her sword away, exclaiming, "Dad!"

The elder in front of her was, of course, Sang Hong. In his hands was a teacup that was still hot. He asked, "Where are you going?"

"It's nothing; I was just feeling a bit stuffy and wanted to get some air. Also, I can check to see if anyone breaks in along the way." After a bit of hesitation, Sang Qien decided not to say what she was really thinking. After what had happened to her older brother, her father had already felt incredibly hurt. If he found out what was happening with her sister-in-law, he might be even more broken-hearted and angry.

She felt as if her father had become much older, and that he had already lost much of his former mettle. There seemed to be some issues with his health too. That was why, after considering everything, she chose to keep it a secret.

Sang Hong chuckled. Although his eyes were already a little unclear, his gaze was completely indifferent, as if he had seen through everything. He said, "I heard something outside too, so I'll come and take a look with you. Did you bring someone back with you?"

Sang Qien knew that her father was an eighth ranked cultivator. He definitely noticed that she had brought in that maid and hidden her. As such, she told him what had just happened in King Qi Manor.

Sang Hong nodded. "That Zu An is quite a talent. On top of that, considering that he can enter and leave King Qi Manor freely, you can see just how incredible his cultivation is. His growth really is way too fast."

This kid had just been an ant a year before, and yet now, Zu An had already grown to this level! His cultivation was even higher than Sang Hong's own.

Sang Qien had a strange expression when she saw the praise in her father's tone. Would you still praise him if you knew about his relationship with sister-in-law?

Sang Hong asked about some more details regarding their trip inside King Qi Manor. He was extremely thorough, as if he didn't want to miss a single thing.

Sang Qien felt rather stressed as she answered her father. If she kept wasting time here, she might not be able to catch that scoundrel in action! When she finally told her father everything that had happened in King Qi Manor, she tried to find a chance to send her father back inside. She didn't want the matter to get out of hand after all.

But Sang Hong didn't seem to have any intention of moving and said, "Qien'er, it's been a long time since you and I had a heart-to-heart chat, right?"

Sang Qien was confused. She was starting to feel a bit overwhelmed. Dad, why do we have to do this heart-to-heart talk in the middle of the night? But when she saw how serious he was, she couldn't really put a damper on his spirits. She could only respond while eyeing Zheng Dan's residence from time to time.

Sang Hong seemed to have noticed something as well. He turned around and said, "Qien'er, you keep looking toward your sister-in-law's side. Is there something wrong?"

Sang Qien's expression was a little unnatural as she replied hurriedly, "It's nothing! I just feel like after big brother passed away, sister-in-law has been rather pitiful. Even though they didn't truly become husband and wife, I think we should find a chance to return her to the Zheng clan."

Those were her sincere thoughts. As a woman, she really sympathized with Zheng Dan's fate. There had even been an incident during their ritual kneeling, and then her brother had died not long afterward. She hadn't even had a proper marriage, and yet she had ended up becoming a widow.

But as the younger sister of the groom, she also felt that Zheng Dan was going way too far by doing such things with another man while using the Sang clan's name. She would have already flipped out long

beforehand if it were any other man, but it was Zu An, who had helped her and her father a lot. As such, she was left in a predicament.

However, if Zheng Dan recovered her freedom after leaving the Sang clan, she wouldn't have to worry about it anymore. Sang Qien thought that her father would agree, but Sang Hong shook his head and replied, "Absolutely not!"

Sang Qien was stunned. She hadn't expected her father to refuse her so directly. She asked, "Why?"

Sang Hong said, "Your older brother has already died, so our Sang clan is already finished. She's your older brother's widow, so she's the clan's last hope."

Sang Qian was stupefied. "But they never consummated their marriage! There's no chance for her to give birth to his child!"

Sang Hong said indifferently, "But outsiders don't know that."

Sang Qien was stunned.

"Enough; don't worry about it anymore. You should return and get some rest." Sang Hong got up and patted her shoulder. "By the way, your father was recently carried away by a whim, and drew this work. I'll just give it to you as a gift." After he finished speaking, he handed Sang Qien an unfurled scroll marked with ink that hadn't even dried yet. Then, he left in a relaxed manner.

Sang Qien gave the scroll a look. She only saw the two words 'rare confusion' on it. She was stunned at first, but then she had a pensive expression as she thought about things.

She was a smart person. She had already been suspicious when her father suddenly appeared and stalled her for a long time. When she saw the scroll, paired with what he had just said, she immediately knew what he was saying.

So father already knew about everything... But even if you're paying back a debt, you can't use your daughter-in-law, can you?! Isn't the Sang clan stooping a bit too low here...?

Furthermore, even if my sister-in-law gets pregnant, everyone will think the child is my big brother's! But we'll know that the child has nothing to do with the Sang clan. What meaning is there in that?

Sang Qien's expression was conflicted. She gave Zheng Dan's room a look. Several times, she began to move in that direction, but she decided otherwise in the end. She released a deep sigh, then withdrew to her room in defeat.

Sang Hong watched from a distance without revealing the slightest ripple of emotion. His daughter was indeed intelligent, but she was still too young and lacked maturity. She hadn't understood what he really meant.

...

The next morning, Zu An snuck out of the Sang clan, reminiscing about the wonderful time he'd had last night. That girl Zheng Dan really was a charming little witch. But the feeling of being chased out of bed before the sky even brightens again really isn't the best... It'll be much better once Zheng Dan regains her freedom.

As he daydreamed about his beautiful future, he didn't return to the palace, and instead went to King Qi Manor. He didn't go in from the main entrance, but rather sneakily jumped over a wall. But unlike the previous night, he deliberately refrained from concealing himself. Sure enough, he was discovered by the guards soon afterward.

Under their furious gazes, Zu An said calmly, "Bring me to King Qi."

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Inside King Qi's study, an emotionless King Qi looked at Zu An. He calmly asked, "Do you know what kind of crime breaking into this manor is?"

This world didn't have electricity, so there wasn't much of a night life. People typically went to sleep a little earlier, and so they naturally woke up earlier as well.

King Qi had just finished his shower. He was surprised when he received his subordinates' report, but he still had them bring Zu An inside in the end.

Zu An chuckled. "I just didn't want to go in through the front door and draw unnecessary attention to our meeting."

"What did you want to talk to me about so early in the morning?" King Qi was extremely curious.

Zu An put away his smile and coldly exclaimed, "King Qi, you've gone too far!"

King Qi was stunned at first, then furious. He exclaimed, "You scoundrel, did you come here just to waste my time?!"

You have successfully trolled Zhao Jing for +444 Rage points!

Zu An was completely unfazed under the incoming pressure. He replied, "I've already completely investigated the concubine's case. She didn't drown, but was rather hit in the head and then thrown into the lake to make it look as if she drowned. As for the killer, I believe you know fully well who it was."

King Qi fell silent when he heard such a detailed recount. He didn't argue against it and instead gave Zu An a deep look. "Are you not afraid that you won't be able to leave after storming into the manor like this?"

Zu An chuckled and said, "I believe the king is a smart person and won't do something so unwise. I'm only here to give you a heads up before I report this matter to his majesty."

King Qi stirred, asking, "You haven't reported this to his majesty yet?"

Zu An replied, "Didn't I say I was just about to?"

King Qi's eyes narrowed as he gave Zu An a look, and he immediately realized that this kid had come to inform him on purpose, to give him a bit of time to prepare countermeasures. But why was Zu An doing this? He asked without batting an eyelid, "Why would you tell me beforehand?"

Zu An replied, "Since ancient times, the bow is put away when the birds are all gone; a worthy person is discharged when he has served his purpose. Only if your respected self remains alive will I have the most value."

King Qi sneered. "You actually dare to speak such disgraceful words. Men, drag this man out to be executed!"

#### **Chapter 914: Screwed**

Zu An didn't panic in the slightest. He looked at King Qi with a smile on his face even as a group of vicious guards stormed in to arrest him.

King Qi frowned. In the end, he gestured for his guards to withdraw, remarking, "You don't seem to be scared at all."

Zu An chuckled and replied, "What is there to be scared of? I'm investigating this case on imperial orders. If the king has me executed, you'll be publicly going against the emperor. If that happens, even the officials who support your respected self will have no choice but to cut ties with you."

King Qi harrumphed, saying, "I have more than enough ways to kill you if I want to. If I told my brother emperor what you just said, if I said that you were trying to incite disharmony between us brothers, he would kill you."

Zu An sighed as he said, "I'll definitely refute it if we aren't in this room. I'll tell his majesty that it was because I found out the truth about the concubine case that you framed me; who do you think his majesty will believe? Are your brotherly feelings reliable?"

King Qi was stunned, but then he roared with laughter. "Hahaha! You are shameless enough after all! I'm actually in awe."

Zu An also sighed in relief. Even though he had been confident that King Qi wouldn't become hostile, who knew if King Qi might do something crazy out of a moment of rashness. He said, "The king is someone intelligent as well, so I won't beat around the bush. I don't want to follow in Sang Hong's footsteps, so that's why I came to form an alliance with your respected self. We'll each take what we need, and we'll both benefit."

"If you really want to form an alliance, why are you still going back to report on the case to his majesty?" King Qi sneered.

Zu An sighed and said, "I'm sure your respected self knows just how paranoid his majesty is. He has also already issued the ultimatum that if I don't figure out the truth, I'll be banished. I really have no choice. But by letting your respected self know, with your knowledge and resources, I believe you'll naturally have a way of dealing with it."

"You are a smart person after all. No wonder you were able to live for so long." King Qi sighed in amazement and said, "Fine, I approve of this alliance!"

Zu An smiled and said, "I hope we'll work well together!"

"Likewise!" King Qi's eyes flickered with light, not revealing his true thoughts.

After Zu An left, Madam Qi walked out of a secret room behind a bookshelf and asked, "My king, why did you trust him so easily?"

King Qi's smile was already nowhere to be seen. He replied, "Trust? How can it be that easy?"

"Did his majesty send him here to approach us on purpose?" Madam Qi frowned and asked, "Should we send someone to leak the information to his majesty to see his reaction?"

"No." King Qi shook his head. "If he really is a double-crosser, then I'll instead lose a useful chess piece by letting the emperor know."

"But what if he harbors ulterior motives?" Madam Qi asked, concerned.

King Qi said with a smile, "He'll have to convince me with more than just words. I'll eventually make him clearly express his intent. Once there's a beginning, he'll slowly fall into the trap bit by bit, until he can't screw... Ahem, can't get off that boat anymore."

Madam Qi sighed in relief, but replied, "But I don't like him! Just the thought that he might become one of your important ministers in the future gives me an uncomfortable feeling. Zhi'er's legs still haven't healed fully after being smashed by him!"

King Qi coldly said, "Don't worry, I'm merely using him. Once he loses his value, I'll make him understand the price of his arrogance toward Zhi'er."

Madam Qi finally smiled and said, "My king is wise and farsighted after all."

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Zu An continued all the way to the imperial palace. His mood was especially good. He had finished the case, and spent a great night with Zheng Dan. He had even officially formed an alliance with King Qi in the morning. Everything was looking good!

As for whether or not King Qi would really tell the emperor, he wasn't worried at all. On the contrary, he had a mission to hand King Qi the fake manual. What could the emperor say if he said that he was only getting close to King Qi to give him the manual?

Zu An didn't choose to completely trust King Qi either. They were only using each other. The fake manual the emperor had given him was the greatest gift he was going to prepare.

The emperor had already begun the court session by the time he arrived at the palace. Zu An wouldn't be so stupid as to wait outside the study, so he went straight to the Eastern Palace. He paid the crown prince a visit first. The crown prince wanted to have some fun with Zu An, and only with great difficulty did Zu An appease him before visiting the crown princess.

"So it was Sir Zu! It's been so long, and yet this is the first time you're visiting our Eastern Palace in some time. It looks like you've become incredibly busy after you were promoted to the viscount rank." Bi Linglong sat upright in front of her desk, kneading her sleeves with one hand and writing something on the desk with her other hand. She appeared to be drawing something, and she was so focused that she didn't even raise her head.



The maid Rong Mo gave her a look of shock. After all, the crown princess always conducted herself properly, and she spoke to her subordinates with power and grace. She had never publicly acted like this in front of another! Hmph, it must be that this Zu An was too annoying after all.

Sensing the strong resentment in her voice, Zu An thought to himself, Is she blaming me for not being around here these past few days? But he couldn't really voice those thoughts out loud with so many people watching. He could only explain, "His majesty ordered me to investigate the drowning of King Qi's concubine..."

Bi Linglong cut him off and said, "Oh, I almost forgot. In the emperor's eyes, Sir Zu is now a rising star."

Rong Mo also stared at Zu An with wide eyes. This man is actually using his majesty against the crown princess? You really are despicable!

Zu An was speechless. Come on, they may not know anything, but what are you doing? How could I possibly be in cahoots with the emperor?

He coughed and said, "Ahem, I wasn't around because I wanted to be able to help the crown princess again as quickly as possible. I devoted myself to work and didn't dare to delay it, and in the end, I actually found out some information."

Bi Linglong finally raised her head. Her beautiful eyes carried a hint of curiosity as she asked, "You actually found out something?"

Zu An was about to say something, but then he hesitated. He looked around and said, "This has to do with King Qi, and this matter is confidential..." His intentions were clear; no one else could listen in on this.

Bi Linglong waved her hand and said, "Momo, you can all leave for now." She really couldn't talk with Zu An too much in private normally, but she had a sufficient reason now. It didn't matter even if the emperor learned of this.

Rong Mo left while pouting. The crown princess really has changed. Even I, her personal maid, can't listen to this, and she seems to be a bit closer to Zu An now...

She was suddenly horrified. This bootlicking bastard was actually fighting me for the crown princess' attention this entire time? She didn't suspect anything else. After all, just the thought of the crown princess developing romantic feelings for anyone was just too absurd.

Only when the door closed did Bi Linglong ask, "What exactly hap... Ah..." Then, she let out a loud and clear noise. Her face was completely red, and she had to forcefully suppress her cry of alarm. She turned around and glared at Zu An angrily, exclaiming "What are you doing?!"

Zu An pulled back his hand. "It's your fault for making it so hard on me. You knew there was no way the emperor and I..." They were still in the imperial palace after all, so there were many things he didn't have to say too explicitly.

Bi Linglong frowned. "I already said things would go back to normal once we return to the dungeon. You can't disrespect me like..." She was pulled into Zu An's arms before she even finished speaking. Then, her red lips were plugged up. "Mmm... Mmm..."

Bi Linglong hadn't thought he would be so daring! She subconsciously pushed him away, but his hands were like clamps. She couldn't get away even after pushing several times. In the end, she could only give up. He's too forceful!

Someone like her who had been born in and molded by all types of etiquette now had a completely new kind of experience. Different memories from the dungeon appeared in her mind. She felt overcome with bliss. She slowly closed her eyes, and gently received him.

Suddenly, she sniffed. Her eyes opened wide, and she pushed him away. Her expression became completely cold as she exclaimed, "Sir Zu, you came to make fun of me right after you came out of someone else's bed? Who do you treat me as?!"

You have successfully trolled Bi Linglong for +444 +444 +444...

### **Chapter 915: Shark-Raising Lord of the Sea**

Zu An knew that Bi Linglong was really angry from the Rage points that were coming in. He quickly realized that she had smelled Zheng Dan's scent on him. He immediately screamed 'Damn it!' inwardly. Just how many times had he made this stupid mistake already?

His brain moved at lightning speed, trying to find a solution to the issue. Taking a shower and changing into a new set of clothes was the safest way, but there were many times where it just wasn't convenient for him to do those things! Hm... I think I remember a true master of the craft who used mandarin skins to hide these kinds of smells. I'll have to give that a try next time for sure.

But he still had this hellish battlefield to deal with. Zu An didn't panic at all and instead said with a sigh, "I didn't expect you to still not trust me even after all the things we went through."

Bi Linglong felt a bit sorry when she heard his long sigh. After all, he had protected her the entire time by risking his life. She unknowingly felt a bit of a guilty conscience. But she was smart as well, and not so easily fooled. She quickly responded, "Hah, are you going to tell me that the smell on you isn't from another girl?"

"This is indeed that kind of smell..." Zu An began, but Bi Linglong's eyebrows already rose before he even finished his sentence. He quickly changed the topic. "But this is the smell of King Qi's concubine."

Bi Linglong was stupefied. Wasn't King Qi's concubine dead? Why would he smell like her?

"When I infiltrated King Qi Manor last night, I snuck into the concubine's burial site at a crucial moment..." Zu An thus told her about what had happened the previous night. Of course, he left out Sang Qien to avoid pissing off Bi Linglong even more.

"You really have guts... King Qi Manor is like a tiger's den. Were you hurt at all?" Bi Linglong's attention was diverted in the end. She quickly checked his body to see if there were any wounds.

"There were several times when I was almost discovered. I really did dance around the entrance of hell..." Zu An said, as if he still felt lingering fear. It hadn't actually been that dangerous, but he needed to create that kind of atmosphere.

Sure enough, Bi Linglong couldn't help but feel conflicted and said, "Sorry, I wasn't trying to cause trouble out of nothing. I just... just..."

Zu An said with great remorse, "I thought that after we experienced all of that in the dungeon, there wouldn't be any of these kinds of misunderstandings anymore, but I guess it was just my own wishful thinking. You were even doubting me on such a small matter; wouldn't our enemies be able to break us apart using any random tricks in the future...?"

Bi Linglong felt hurt when she saw that there were tears in his eyes. She quickly said, "I'm sorry; I won't doubt you for no reason in the future! I was just waiting for you day after day, and yet I didn't see you at all, so that's why I got angry and... treated you like that."

With how pridefully she normally acted, she would never talk about these things normally. However, Zu An's acting was too good, leaving even her flustered. When she saw how sad he was, she felt even more pain. She felt as if she were about to lose something and blurted those words out.

Zu An looked at her with an ambiguous smile and said, "So, you were waiting for me every night."

Bi Linglong blushed profusely. "I was talking about daytime, not nighttime!"

"Isn't it all the same?" Zu An chuckled. He picked up a strand of her hair with a look of pity, saying, "It looks like the medicines in the palace weren't too useful."

Bi Linglong finally couldn't sit still anymore. The two of them had already taken off before they even got to know each other properly. She was still shy like a young girl, so how could she handle all of this? She said, "Stop saying nonsense. I keep that door locked at night anyway, so don't come."

Zu An pulled her into his arms with a smile and said, "I didn't even say that I was going to treat you or anything. Why are you thinking about that?" Bi Linglong was really embarrassed. She hit his chest with her fists.

Suddenly, Rong Mo said from outside, "Crown princess, his majesty is about to finish the court session. Eunuch Wen has already sent over some men to escort Sir Zu to meet with him."

An emperor never waited for a subject. It was one thing if the emperor thought of something and needed to bring him in. Today, it was Zu An who had requested the meeting, so why would the emperor wait for him?

Bi Linglong quickly pushed Zu An away. She sorted out her clothes while warning him, "You have to be careful." After what had happened in the dungeon, every meeting with the emperor placed Zu An's life on the line.

"Don't worry, I still need to stay alive to treat you." Zu An kissed her on the cheek, then left with a smile.

Bi Linglong held her cheek and harrumphed, thinking, This guy is just way too shameless! She had wanted to keep some distance between them, but she couldn't stop his aggression at all. She had already ended up letting him do whatever he wanted. But she thought of the treatment he was talking about and felt conflicted again. Should I just unlock that passage...

...

Meanwhile, Zu An arrived at the imperial study. The emperor returned soon afterward and summoned him inside.

“Why were you in such a rush to meet with me?” The emperor picked up his teacup and took a sip. His throat was already a bit dry from the morning court session, so he took the chance to soothe it. There was naturally no subliminal message that he didn’t want to see anyone, even if he sipped on his tea then.

“Responding to your majesty, I’ve already found out the truth regarding the death of King Qi’s concubine.” Zu An maintained some distance between them. I was just hugging the crown princess and even kissed her, but there’s none of her smell on me, is there?

But men weren’t as sharp in such areas. Combined with the way he and the crown princess didn’t really interact much in private, the emperor was unlikely to be able to differentiate between those smells.

Zu An thought, Hmph, I have both Zheng Dan and King Qi’s concubine’s smells on me. If he can distinguish Bi Linglong’s from among those, then just kill me already; I don’t care anymore.

“Your investigation has finished so quickly?” The emperor frowned. “Tell me, what happened?”

Zu An shivered inwardly. The other party’s first reaction wasn’t happiness, and he didn’t care about who the killer was at all. Did this mean that he had already known who it was a long time ago? As such, he spoke about his discovery while paying close attention to the emperor’s reactions. Sure enough, there wasn’t the slightest bit of surprise when he heard that the killer was King Qi.

“How did you discover this so quickly?” the emperor asked with a frown.

Zu An was stunned. “Is it a bad thing that I found out the truth too quickly?”

“Of course it’s bad,” the emperor said unhappily. “The reason I assigned you to this case, apart from finding out the truth, was for you to use this chance to get closer to King Qi, then hand him that fake secret manual. What are you going to do about that manual now that you’ve solved the case so quickly?”

Zu An thought, Sure enough, for the emperor, the life and death of a woman really doesn’t matter. What he cares more about are people who threaten his authority. However, he explained, “Please don’t worry, your highness. I’ve already started to gain King Qi’s trust.”

“Oh?” The emperor was now interested. “What do you mean?”

“I paid King Qi Manor a visit before I entered the palace, pretending to rely on King Qi for help...” Zu An told him half-truths about what had happened that morning. He left out the part about how he had offered to ally with King Qi, while talking about everything else. He even included what King Qi had said.

That had been his plan from the very start. If he was going to wander between both of these big shots, he couldn’t treat them as fools, as they’d notice any tricks he played eventually. Rather than that, he might as well take the initiative to talk about it.

Normally speaking, King Qi would definitely think that Zu An would hide things from the emperor, while the emperor would think that he was hiding things from King Qi. Meanwhile, they would have no idea at all that Zu An was thinking the exact opposite. Zu An was the lord of the sea, but while the kingdoms of other sea lords had pretty fish to look at, his fish pond had these two monstrous and vicious sharks.

Sure enough, the emperor was happy to hear what he said. “You really are quite something, kid!”

He was actually a bit excited and began to pace back and forth in the study. He was clearly digesting the information he had just received. A while later, he stopped and said, "King Qi won't trust someone so easily. He'll definitely arrange some difficult tasks for you to complete."

Zu An said with a smile, "That's why I might need your majesty to help me when the time comes."

The emperor also smiled. "Kid, you're as crafty as expected. Zhao Jing probably has no idea that he's about to be ruined by your hand."

## **Chapter 916: Scarlet Invitation**

Zu An looked meek and docile on the surface, but he was laughing inwardly. You have no idea just how hard I'm playing you.

The emperor suddenly noticed that something was off with Zu An's expression, which made him subconsciously feel a bit unhappy. He always found this kid annoying. One day, he had to make sure to get rid of him.

But on the surface, the emperor didn't show anything. He continued, "During the morning court session, we decided that Qin Zheng will lead an expedition north to deal with the invading fiend races."

Zu An was stunned. He didn't know why the emperor would tell him that right now, but he still replied respectfully, "The State Duke of Triumph is renowned for his achievements, and he is respected in the army. Our troops will definitely return victorious."

"Respected in the army?" The emperor sneered, but he didn't continue the discussion and changed the subject. "Once Qin Zheng leaves, King Qi will lose one of his arms. That's why we must make full use of this opportunity."

Zu An shivered. The emperor was going to start his offense against King Qi after all! It was just as Sang Hong and Sang Qien had anticipated: The emperor wanted to clip King Qi's wings, then finish him.

"I heard that you've done quite well for yourself in those areas of pleasure," the emperor said, suddenly smiling at Zu An.

Zu An was stunned. Bro, can you not change topics so quickly like that? He quickly replied with a serious expression, "This subject is an upright person; I don't frequent those dirty places."

Even though visiting brothels wasn't anything bad in this world, he couldn't really talk about it in public. He wasn't sure what the emperor was trying to say and was worried that he might involve Qiu Honglei and the others. That was why he obviously had to refute the statement.

"Hmph, lying to the ruler is a capital offense." The emperor's expression sank. "This emperor has heard that there are courtesan queens from both Brightmoon City and the capital's government brothel that are completely devoted to you."

Zu An was stunned. He replied, "Perhaps this subject is just a likable person." He felt more and more suspicion. Why was the emperor talking about this right now? Did he know about his relationship with the Devil Sect?

The emperor gave him a look, then asked in a seemingly careless manner, "Do you know Secretariat Assistant Director Yu Nan?"

"I have heard a bit about him." Zu An was going to go crazy. This man had just been talking about brothels and courtesans a moment ago, and now he was going to talk about Yu Nan?

"What's your impression of him?" the emperor asked.

Zu An almost blurted out that Yu Nan was almost as handsome as him, but his mouth quickly hit the brakes. Instead, he said, "He comes from a prestigious family, and is well-known for his temperament and..." He thought to himself, For better or for worse, he is the emperor's brother-in-law. I still have to be courteous.

"Speak honestly!" The emperor shot him a look.

"Um... He indulges a bit too much in luxury." Zu An quickly snapped out of his daze. The Yu clan was part of King Qi's faction. How could the emperor possibly like this person? When he recalled his experiences in King Qi Manor, Yu Nan wanted human-fed pigs for even more tender pork. It really was absurd.

"It's not just indulging a bit." The emperor harrumphed, clearly highly dissatisfied with Yu Nan. "I'll put you in charge of him. Chase him out of the court within a month's time."

Zu An was stunned. He replied, "Even though I'm quite competent, isn't your majesty's evaluation of me a bit too high? How can I possibly do something like that?"

The Secretariat Assistant Director was already an important position in the court. Furthermore, this was related to the Yu clan. He was the oldest son of such a huge clan, and his wife was the emperor's own sister. With that kind of background, how could he dismiss such a person just because he wanted to?

"That's something for you to figure out. Bring King Qi Manor's maid into the palace, then focus on the Yu Nan task." The emperor picked up his teacup again. His intent to end the meeting there was clear this time.

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Zu An was still dazed when he left the imperial study. If there was a way to go back in time, he definitely wouldn't have reported about King Qi's concubine so quickly. Sigh, he is heartless after all. Even slaves need time off...

"Why are you sighing, Sir Zu?" asked a gentle voice from beside him.

Zu An turned around and saw that Concubine Bai was standing near him with a smile on her face. She was dressed in a white palace dress with a fiery red cloak draped over her. Compared to her usual weak and gentle nature, there seemed to be a bit more of a charming side to her today.

"I greet her highness Concubine Bai!" Zu An replied in greeting. There were many maids and eunuchs watching, so he had to show her proper respect.

"There's no need for excessive formalities. You've saved the crown prince and princess, and yet I haven't had a chance to express my gratitude for that yet," Concubine Bai said with a sweet smile.

That beautiful smile made Zu An momentarily distracted. Was this really a woman who had already given birth to a child? He answered, "Your highness is far too kind! That was merely our duty as subjects. I don't dare to take credit for that."

Concubine Bai gestured for her subordinates to stay put. Meanwhile, she herself took the lead to walk toward the gazebo at the center of the lake. Zu An followed behind her.

"Sir Zu still hasn't told me why you were feeling distressed," Concubine Bai said with a gentle smile, as if she were welcoming someone home.

"It's just some work-related matters. It's not really worth mentioning." Zu An wasn't sure what kind of relationship this woman had with the emperor yet, so he obviously didn't dare to tell her everything.

"With Sir Zu's ability, I trust that you'll be able to resolve it quickly." Concubine Bai's voice was fair and beautiful. Those who heard it would feel as if their ears were being caressed gently. She continued, "Sir Zu hasn't sought me out even once after you came out of the dungeon. Were you avoiding me?"

Zu An had a strange look on his face as he replied, "I fear that these words might cause some misunderstandings in the palace."

Zu An would have definitely teased her a bit if it were any other time, but before he entered the dungeon, he had learned that her relationship with the emperor was actually extremely close. That was why he didn't dare to make any rash moves.

"What is Sir Zu thinking? All I meant was that Sir Zu borrowed something that belonged to me, but you haven't visited me all this time. That's why I could only come here personally to ask for it back." Concubine Bai reached out her hand, exposing her fair and beautiful wrist.

Zu An finally realized what was happening. He took out a spice bag and handed it over, replying, "What's wrong with my memory? Please don't take offense, your highness." This thing really was pretty useful. It could completely conceal his real cultivation. He almost didn't want to return it.

Concubine Bai took the spice bag, then gave Zu An a look of surprise, saying, "Sir Zu's cultivation is increasing quite fast."

"Thank you, your highness," Zu An replied stiffly.

Concubine Bai couldn't help but laugh, remarking, "Why do I feel as if you've changed after you came out of the dungeon? You were never such a stickler for rules before."

Zu An couldn't help but fire back, "Then does your highness want me to treat you the way I did before?"

The two of them both thought about what had happened back then. The gazebo suddenly became strangely quiet.

Eventually, Concubine Bai blushed and got up, saying, "Sir Zu must be busy with your work, so I won't disturb you any longer." Then, she walked leisurely toward the imperial garden, leaving behind a faint fragrance.

Zu An had a pensive look on his face as he looked at her departing figure.

...

After separating from Concubine Bai, Zu An first went into his Embroidered Envoy courtyard to change into his Golden Token Eleven clothes. Then, he headed toward the Embroidery House. He saw the balding Dai Seventh and 'Mediterranean Sea' Chen Eighth sitting in the courtyard, bored to death.

When they saw him arrive, they quickly stood up, their eyes filled with joy. "Boss!"

Ever since their previous case, they had already been placed under Golden Token Eleven as his subordinates, and yet their leader had disappeared for a long period of time. The office had become completely forgotten, and there was nothing to do there at all.

Zu An nodded toward the two of them with a smile. Then, he told them why he had come. "I need all of the materials we have on the Secretariat Assistant Director, Yu Nan."

The two of them were shocked. They exchanged a look. Then, they said hesitantly, "I'm not sure if Sir Yu is someone we want to offend. He has Princess Chang backing him, and also the Yu clan..."

"When has the Embroidered Envoy ever feared a clan's background during our investigations?" said a long and drawn-out voice. The silver token envoy Xiao Jianren was sitting inside with all sorts of cases and documents strewn out on the table in front of him. He quickly got up to greet Zu An when he saw him walk in.

Zu An said in praise, "What Jianren said is correct." Wait, why do I feel like I'm cursing him...[1]

"Understood!" Dai Seventh and Chen Eighth immediately understood the importance of the case. They didn't try to dissuade Zu An any further and ran over to bring over all the relevant information on Yu Nan.

Zu An saw the files upon files on the table. His brows rose as he asked, "There were actually that many?"

Xiao Jianren replied, "The Yu clan is the greatest clan in the Zhou Dynasty. Yu Nan is the oldest son of the Yu clan as well. Furthermore, he married the princess and assumed the post of Secretariat Assistant Director. It can't be helped that there are a lot of files about him."

Zu An flipped through a few of them with a frown. There were many records of various things, but none of it was what he was looking for.

"What kind of information does sir want? Perhaps I can offer some suggestions," Xiao Jianren said quietly.

Zu An then remembered that this person was basically the human-shaped library of the Embroidery House archives. As such, he didn't hide anything and said, "Anything that can take him down."

Xiao Jianren was shocked. Sir Eleven was actually going to bring down a giant like Yu Nan? But he was intelligent and quickly knew that it was probably due to orders from above. As such, after thinking for a bit, he said, "According to what I know, the capital's Scarlet Invitation recently took in a new courtesan queen. Her beauty and arts are both stunning, and yet she refuses to sell her body. This has riled up quite a few of the capital's heirs, and Yu Nan seems to be precisely one of them."



Zu An's eyes widened. He finally understood why the emperor had been asking him about the flower courtesans.

### **Chapter 917: Prompt Assistance**

Damn that old bastard... He already thought of a way to take Yu Nan down, yet he didn't tell me! He just had to tell me in this roundabout way! Zu An thought. But he also understood that the emperor had his dignity to uphold. If news got out that he had to explain everything himself, that would tarnish his reputation.

Screw you, what about my dignity? Zu An cursed inwardly.

Scarlet Invitation was the capital's most famous brothel, on par with the government brothel. The difference was that one was state-run, while the other was privately owned. However, in a place like the capital where there were important statesmen around every corner, to be on par with the government brothel went to show just how powerful the boss behind this business was.

Many people had tried to investigate the boss of Scarlet Invitation for a long time, but unfortunately, none of them had been able to find out anything. Not even the Embroidered Envoy had that piece of information.

Zu An patted Xiao Jianren's shoulder. "Not bad, Old Xiao. I didn't expect you to be interested in this field too, that you even know the things that are going on around there that well."

Xiao Jianren's face heated up. He replied, "Sir, I have no interest in this field. It's just that I enjoy sifting through all types of information in the Embroidery House, so I just happened to see this."

Zu An was momentarily stunned. He recalled how this man had been buried in a huge pile of reading when he just walked in. He thought, This person is a true bookworm! He reminded Xiao Jianren, "You should go out once in a while. You'll become nearsighted if you stay inside and read books all day."

"Nearsighted?" Xiao Jianren was confused.

"It means that you can't see things far away clearly, and only if you come up close can you see things clearly." Zu An wondered if he could get someone to make some glasses to sell. The valkyries he was raising were all money-sucking vacuums. Every single upgrade needed money.

Xiao Jianren nodded. "I might really suffer a bit from that. I have had to move up closer many times to read."

Zu An smiled. No wonder Xiao Jianren's eyes were always a bit expressionless. So it was because he was nearsighted. "By the way, what is the name of that courtesan queen?" he asked. He'd deal with the glasses problem later. The most important thing right now was to deal with this annoying task first.

"Wait..." Xiao Jianren closed his eyes and thought to himself for a while. "I think her name is Nan... Xun. Yes, Nan Xun."

Zu An was stunned. "You're not going to even check the records? You can even remember the name of a courtesan?"

Xiao Jianren pointed at his head and said with an embarrassed chuckle, "I store all of the things I've read in my head, as if there were a library inside. When needed, I can take out what I need. It isn't much different from a real archive library."

Zu An was really impressed. This person had actually learned the mental library method! He would definitely be considered an incredible genius in Zu An's old world!

"Not bad!" Zu An patted his shoulder in encouragement. I should prioritize the production of those glasses. I definitely need to rope in a genius like this.

...

When he came out of the Embroidery House, Zu An went to pay the Eastern Palace a visit. After all, Bi Linglong was still waiting nervously for him. He went back into his Embroidered Envoy courtyard and changed back into his own clothes. When he was sure that no one was watching, he made a little detour and returned to the Eastern Palace.

Sigh, changing identities all the time really is a bit tiring... Zu An sighed as he went to Bi Linglong to report about everything that had happened.

"You have to take down Yu Nan?" At first, Bi Linglong was excited to see him return safely. After what had happened in the dungeon, she worried that Zu An might never return again whenever he met the emperor. But when she heard about his newest assignment, she frowned. "Yu Nan is the successor of the Yu clan, and he even married the princess. There's no way he'll be easy to take down!"

"We have to take him down even if it seems impossible... His majesty has given me a time limit." After some hesitation, he decided to tell her about the courtesan matter. He was scared that she might become upset again after he had just appeased her with great difficulty beforehand.

"I'll try to help you think of something too. I'll just plead with his majesty myself if I have to. How can we possibly take down someone like Yu Nan in just a month's time?" Bi Linglong was quite agitated.

Zu An immediately said, "You can't! You're the only one who absolutely can't speak out for me! The emperor is already suspecting our relationship after what happened in the dungeon. Doing that will just be pouring oil on the flames."

"Then what do I do?" Bi Linglong thought for a bit and said, "I'll try and see if I can take him down through the Bi clan."

Zu An felt warm inside when he saw how much concern she felt for him. He said, "Don't worry, I've already found a way."

"What kind of way?" Bi Linglong was curious.

"It's still just a hypothesis. I still need to test some things out," Zu An replied without speaking in detail.

Bi Linglong replied with an 'oh'. She didn't keep asking either. Instead, the two of them chatted about some other things. Unfortunately, they were in the palace and didn't have much time for leisurely chatting. Every single second was precious.

Even though it wasn't easy for them to talk in private, however, Bi Linglong still found an excuse to keep Zu An present. After all, he was now the Eastern Palace's chamberlain, so he should have been working there. Of course, the real reason why she kept him for a bit longer was because they had already had 'that' type of relationship in the dungeon. She wanted to be with him a bit longer.

...

It was already almost dusk when Zu An left the palace. He went home to change into a new set of clothes. After all, going to a brothel in his official clothes was just asking for trouble. However, he didn't expect to see Chu Youzhao and Murong Qinghe waiting for him inside.

"Brother-in-law, brother-in-law, my grandfather is going out to war soon!" Chu Youzhao exclaimed excitedly.

Zu An couldn't help but reply, "It would be one thing if you weren't worried about him going to war, but why do you look happy about it?"

"Tsk, my grandpa is so amazing anyway. He'll definitely win quickly, so why do I have to worry about him?" Chu Youzhao remarked with a chuckle. "But I guess I'm happy that I don't have to always be restricted by his rules. I can't even go out whenever I want to! I can come and play with brother-in-law all the time now that he's gone."

Zu An felt a huge headache. How was he supposed to do anything if he had these kids following him everywhere?

Murong Qinghe was also confused. Weren't her big brother Chu and her brother-in-law getting along a bit too well? Was it because Chu Youzhao didn't have many male playmates growing up?

"Don't think about playing around all day. If you neglect your cultivation, your big sis will be unhappy with me," Zu An said with a serious expression. Being the senior really was great... It was clearly just that he didn't want to have these two as hangers-on, and yet he could use that high-sounding reason to fulfill the same objective.

"You're so annoying... You sound like an old man." Chu Youzhao pouted unhappily.

Suddenly, a quiet voice came from the entrance. "Is Sir Zu here?"

Zu An turned around and saw two people standing at the entrance. The older one had a serious looking face, while the other was a gloomy looking youth.

"So it was brother Gao and brother Pei! Please come in, come in." Zu An recognized the two to be the Liu clan's Gao Ying and the Pei clan's Pei You. These two's lives really were quite tenacious. The entire dungeon had broken apart, and yet they were still able to survive somehow.

"We don't deserve such treatment! Sir Zu saved our lives. Just calling us by our names is enough!" the two of them quickly replied. Their previous arrogance was already nowhere to be seen.

"Hey, aren't you two always cocky and smug normally? Why are you two like this all of a sudden?" They were both well-known heirs from their clans. Chu Youzhao and Murong Qinghe instantly recognized them. The two parties belonged to different camps, so they obviously didn't get along.

Gao Ying calmly replied, "Sir Zu saved our lives, so we naturally have to treat him respectfully. We came today to invite Sir Zu for a drink and to express our gratitude."

Chu Youzhao's eyes lit up. "We're going drinking? I want to go!"

Pei You frowned. Obviously, he normally didn't like people from King Qi's faction. But when he considered that Chu Youzhao's big sister was Zu An's wife, he didn't refuse. He said, "You can come, but I fear that it won't be appropriate for Miss Murong to come."

"Why?" Murong Qinghe raised her eyebrows. She was a famous little hot pepper in the army. She was only nice and tame around her big brother Chu.

Pei You harrumphed and didn't bother explaining. It was instead Gao Ying who was more accommodating, saying, "It's because we're going to Scarlet Invitation. It's not too appropriate for a girl to go there."

### **Chapter 918: A Unique Courtesan Queen**

Zu An thought to himself, Is this really just a coincidence? I was wondering what kind of excuse to come up with to visit Scarlet Invitation, because why would an honest person go there for no reason? But these guys came over to invite me; what amazing timing.

Chu Youzhao was stunned and asked, "What kind of place is Scarlet Invitation?"

She had always been pure and simple in nature, with her parents and older sister being quite protective of her. She had her grandfather sheltering her in the Qin clan as well, so she normally didn't come into contact with these things.

Murong Qinghe moved over and told her what it was. Chu Youzhao's face immediately turned red as she exclaimed, "No! You can't go to a place like that!"

"Why not?" Pei You was confused. "Visiting places of romance is an activity of intellectuals; you should go as well. Otherwise, you won't be able to mingle well in your circles."

Chu Youzhao's breathing stopped. I'm a girl; how can I go to some place like that?! She was about to go crazy from internal conflict. "But I won't allow it! You two can go, but don't lead my brother-in-law astray!"

"How is this leading anyone astray?" Pei You was starting to panic. "Even if your big sister were here, she shouldn't be interfering with something like this, right? Otherwise, if news of that got out, everyone would think that your big sister was a jealous woman. It wouldn't be good for her reputation at all! Furthermore, according to what I know, Sir Zu has already divorced your big sister, so they aren't even related anymore. Why are you still stopping him?"

"You..." Chu Youzhao's face turned entirely red. This matter had always been a thorn in the Chu clan's hearts. Unfortunately, she didn't know how to argue against that point. She could only look at Zu An and asked, "Brother-in-law, what about you? Are you going or not going?"

"Um..." Zu An felt a huge headache as well. He obviously had to go, but that little sister-in-law of his might just blow up if he insisted on it now. Making her upset wasn't a big deal, but he was worried that

bad rumors might reach the Chu clan. After all, Pei You had just brought up his divorce with Chu Chuyan again.

As if seeing through his conflicted feelings, the more steadfast Gao Ying said, "We're just going to drink and listen to the music, nothing else. Young master Chu, please don't worry. Furthermore, the reason we're gathering today is to thank Sir Zu for saving us in the dungeon. Young master Chu won't prevent us from having such a chance, right?"

Chu Youzhao was still young and rather thin-skinned. When she heard him say those words, she felt that rejecting them again was a bit too much, so she said, "Fine, but I'm going with you guys!"

She thought to herself, You guys are saying you are only going to listen to music, but who knows what else you'll do afterwards? I'll be monitoring all of you so you don't lead my brother-in-law astray!

Gao Ying and Pei You looked at each other in dismay. After considering how even though he was young, he was still the Chu clan's young master, they realized his relationship with Zu An was also special. That was why they didn't refuse Chu Youzhao.

It was now Murong Qinghe's turn to panic. She grabbed Chu Youzhao's arm and said, "Big brother Chu, you can't go!"

Just the thought of someone spotless and pure like her big brother Chu being defiled in a place like a brothel... Ugh, big brother Chu is so handsome that those girls will definitely seduce him! Just the thought alone was enough to make her head explode.

Chu Youzhao also felt a bit guilty. But for the sake of expressing her manly side, she stuck out her chest and said, "Don't worry, it's just normal social interaction! I'll be there to make sure they don't lead my brother-in-law astray!"

Murong Qinghe thought for a bit, then said, "Then I'm going too." If big brother Chu is going to keep an eye on her brother-in-law, then I'm going to keep an eye on big brother Chu!

Gao Ying and Pei You couldn't sit still anymore and both waved their hands. "No way, no way! That won't do, that won't do."

It was one thing to bring the Chu clan's young master; what the heck would they be bringing a girl to a brothel for? They'd become the biggest laughingstocks of the entire capital the next day! With her grandfather, Murong Tong's temper, he might just storm in and tear them apart on the spot!

"Why not? It wasn't even that big of a deal when I ate and lived with the other guys in the army, so I'm going to go with you guys!" Murong Qinghe exclaimed, unhappily with raised eyebrows. But she lowered her voice the next second and explained to Chu Youzhao, "Big brother Chu, I stayed in a tent by myself when I was in the army; I didn't live together with those stinky men."

Zu An almost burst out laughing. This girl's personality really was completely different depending on the person she talked to. Everyone already knew even if she didn't say anything that there was no way the Murong clan would let her live together with other soldiers.

When he saw how frustrated Gao Ying and the others were, he realized that it was now time for him to speak up. He pulled Chu Youzhao aside and asked, "What are you getting all worked up for? Just be good and go home."

"No! I want to go!" Chu Youzhao raised her head and looked straight into his eyes without backing down. Stinky brother-in-law wants to send me away because he wants to do bad things!

"Come on, don't cause trouble now," Zu An said quietly. "Did you forget what happened at the government brothel last time?"

Chu Youzhao's face turned red. The last time she had been dragged to a brothel, she had become so drunk her real gender was almost revealed. If not because her brother-in-law appeared, she might have even had her purity defiled. She still felt lingering fear even now.

Sure enough, her tone became a lot weaker when she recalled what had happened back then. She replied, "Fine, I won't go, but you're not allowed to do anything that'll make big sister sad! Otherwise, I'll definitely find out since news travels fast in the capital."

"Alright, alright. I'll definitely have a clear conscience." Zu An patted his chest and gave a guarantee.

Chu Youzhao smiled. She didn't notice that Zu An had played with his words a bit. Murong Qinghe was obviously happy to hear that her big brother Chu wasn't going. She didn't insist on going anymore either.

Gao Ying and Pei You sighed when they saw that those two had finally left. "Brother Zu, your little brother-in-law seems protective of you. It's almost as if he's a woman."

"He is trying to help his sister, after all." Zu An was worried that the two might really start to suspect Chu Youzhao's gender, so he quickly changed the topic. "How are your injuries?"

"The clan brought out all sorts of medicines for me. Even though I haven't recovered completely yet, it doesn't affect my daily life anymore," Gao Ying replied. "If not for the fact that Sir Zu upheld justice and didn't act on hatred, we would've already lost our petty lives."

Zu An chuckled and said, "That was just a bit of misunderstanding from the start. Later on, we fought together, and the two of you bravely fought the enemy too. The two of you would've definitely saved me too."

The two of them found Zu An more and more likable when they saw that he didn't act arrogantly.

"Haha, Sir Zu is open-minded after all. We brothers will definitely thank you properly today for your kindness. We will help you experience the capital's liveliness."

They were children of the capital's noble clans, locally born and bred. They obviously wanted to serve as the hosts since it hadn't been long since Zu An had arrived at the capital.

Zu An hadn't expected the two of them to get along so well! But their party had fought together, and together with their similar backgrounds, they had easily become close.

Zu An pretended to be confused and asked, "Why aren't we going to the government brothel? Isn't that kind of place a bit more relaxing?"

After all, most of those girls were from noble clans that had committed sins. Those girls obviously seemed higher-class in comparison.

Gao Ying explained, "Something happened with the Left Guard General in the government brothel last time, and it even ended up involving the Devil Sect. The mood around that place is a bit inauspicious now, so who would want to go there?"

Zu An had a strange look on his face. He hadn't expected to be the reason.

Pei You also added, "Brother Zu, there's no need to worry about the quality. Scarlet Invitation's reputation is on par with the government brothel. Furthermore, recently, there has been a new courtesan queen. All those who have seen her claim that she is absolutely incredible, that her personality is extraordinary. I heard that she would pick someone brought together by fate to meet with her in private. That was why we came to call you over and come with us."

Zu An said with a sigh, "It's just some marketing tactic... She's clearly a prostitute, and yet she keeps up a noble and virtuous appearance just to inflate her value."

Gao Ying and Pei You laughed. "Sir Zu really draws blood on the first prick[1]."

"No, I only know how to draw blood with my rod," Zu An corrected them. Gao Ying and Pei You were stunned.

"Right, could you guys tell me some more about that courtesan?" Zu An figured that getting some more information wouldn't hurt. Even though Xiao Jianren knew a bit about her, it was official information. It was probably different from what guests like these two knew.

Gao Ying and Pei You exchanged a look. Both of them chuckled inwardly. This fella looks like he doesn't care at all on the surface, but isn't he still interested now all the same?

"Her name is Nan Xun, and she's proficient in all four arts. Her dancing skills are exceptional as well, and it's at a level where other dancers can't pick any faults with her. Heh, we all know..." Pei You's previous gloomy nature was now completely gone, and he instead began to talk non-stop.

Gao Ying added with a smile, "If it were just that, there wouldn't be so much excitement. After all, these are skills most courtesan queens have. The most important part is that this person carries a mysterious noble quality, and in her eyes, there's a... How do I explain this? It's an aloofness, almost as if she's looking at trash or ants. That's formed an itch that's hard to get rid of in all of the capital's young masters."

Zu An burst out laughing. "You guys really are something else. You don't want those gentle girls who welcome you with a smile, and instead go for this type?"

The two of them laughed as well. "Maybe that's just human nature! The more unobtainable something is, the more enticing it is."

"That attitude she has is probably fake. She's just a prostitute, how refined can she even be?" Zu An couldn't help but remark mockingly.

"That's what's so strange about it. You can say what you want, but these young masters from distinguished clans are all veterans in these pleasure quarters. What kinds of seduction methods haven't

they seen before? But that Nan Xun's expression doesn't seem fake. That's why everyone is going crazy over her," Gao Ying explained.

Zu An thought to himself, No wonder even someone like Yu Nan couldn't control himself and often visited Scarlet Invitation. This courtesan is a piece of work. He was growing more and more curious about her.

### **Chapter 919, Part 1: Entry Denied**

Even though they had fought side by side in the dungeon, they hadn't known each other for that long. They couldn't help but still be a bit unfamiliar with each other. But now that they were talking about courtesans, they naturally grew closer.

They quickly set out toward Scarlet Invitation. Gao Ying and Pei You had been planning to head over in a lavish palanquin, but Zu An was already used to spacious modes of transport like buses and subways, so he really couldn't get used to the cramped and bumpy palanquins. As such, he suggested going by horse. Gao Ying and Pei You were both cultivators, so they had no objections. There were many others who rode horses, but since they were young masters from distinguished clans, and Zu An was even a rising star in the capital, no one would trouble them.

As they urged their horses along, Pei You said with a smile, "I wonder who will have the chance to ride the beautiful Nan Xun today? The feeling of that would definitely be much better than these horses."

Zu An raised his eyebrows when he heard Pei You speak such coarse words. This guy seemed like a gloomy and unsocial youngster, but now, he had immediately become a social butterfly! I guess pretty girls really are the greatest motivation for changing a man. He replied, returning the smile, "Scarlet Invitation will definitely be crowded today. We might not even be able to find a spot later."

Gao Ying said, "Since the courtesan queen Nan Xun is taking a guest today, the capital's men will obviously storm over. Even those from the commanderies surrounding the capital might come over. However, most of them will only be able to watch from afar. Scarlet Invitation has only sent out a hundred cards to prevent things from getting too chaotic. Only those with the cards can enter tonight."

"Only a hundred?" Zu An was shocked. Even though that number seemed large, how many wealthy people were there in the capital? Furthermore, each clan often had hundreds to over a thousand people. If one added in the nearby commanderies, then this number wasn't enough at all!

"Then doesn't that mean Scarlet Invitation would only invite high officials from the court?" Zu An recalled something similar from his past world. Half of these hundred cards would already have been handed out secretly beforehand, and only a few would actually enter the marketplace.

"That's actually not the case." Gao Ying chuckled. "After all, this is a place of romance, and the court's officials are scared of being accused of misconduct by the imperial censors. Out of consideration for their prestige, the elders typically won't go. Only juniors like us will go and join the liveliness. Perhaps it won't be appropriate for Sir Zu to go to this kind of place soon either."

After all, at first, Zu An hadn't even been a normal citizen in the capital, but rather a prisoner. And yet, afterward, his career had skyrocketed; he had since become a viscount and a popular person in the Eastern Palace. Most importantly, he was now an existence most powers couldn't overlook. His rank



might shoot up a few more levels in mere days. At that time, it really wouldn't be too appropriate for him to go to such a place.

Zu An thought to himself, So that's how it is... Those officials' positions are so high that they can't even play around with courtesans? How sad is that? But when he thought about it, once one reached that level, one could just take in whatever girl one wanted. One didn't have to frequent such places.

"It's all thanks to brother Gao's luck and social connections that he ended up getting an invitation card. I wanted to get one too, but I couldn't obtain one no matter how hard I tried." Pei You promptly brought up Gao Ying's contribution, saying that it was because of him that they could all come today.

"I only found someone who was willing to sell it to me by chance. After all, this courtesan became famous while we were in the dungeon, so we didn't have any chance to obtain a card normally." Gao Ying returned the favor, explaining that it wasn't because Pei You didn't have the resources, but rather that their group had been fighting in the dungeon while these tickets were being circulated. They hadn't had a chance to seize any for themselves.

Zu An thought, No wonder I've never heard of this courtesan before. Turns out she only became popular while we were in the dungeon! Just then, however, he thought of something and suddenly laughed.

"We guests are always the one who choose the courtesans in the brothels, yet now, it almost looks like the courtesan is choosing us."

It was like the hostess clubs of his past world; if he didn't like the girl, he could just ask for another one. Yet now, their roles seemed to have been swapped with this courtesan queen Nan Xun. It was almost as if she were the one choosing her guests!

Gao Ying and Pei You both couldn't help but chuckle. "Now that you mention it, that really is the case. But you'll know once you see her later. She is worth it."

Pei You continued, "Brother Zu, we already share a bond of life and death, so I'll be a bit more straightforward. We wanted to give you the courtesan queen as gratitude for saving our lives, but this courtesan queen is a bit special. We can't even win her over with our clan backgrounds, and can only rely on our own skill. If we can't obtain Nan Xun's invitation, we'll give you another courtesan queen. Scarlet Invitation has twenty-four stunning beauties who are known as the twenty-four bridges to the moon. You can play with them to your heart's satisfaction."

Zu An thought to himself, Like hell I'll have a bond of life and death with you men. He waved his hands and said, "Don't worry, I might not have other good points, but I am pretty good with the ladies. I feel like this courtesan will definitely choose me later."

Pei You was speechless. He gave Zu An a look. If it weren't because Zu An had saved his life, with his usual personality, he probably would have mocked Zu An for being a cocky nobody.

After all, this Lady Nan Xun was different from the other courtesan queens. Rumors spread quickly among the capital's social circles. Not a single person was confident in receiving her invitation.

Gao Ying was a bit more sophisticated. He laughed out loud to mediate the atmosphere. "Chu First Miss also chose brother Zu out of so many candidates, so brother Zu's skill is easy to see. Perhaps Lady Nan Xun really will choose you today."

...

The group had already unwittingly arrived at Scarlet Invitation while talking and laughing.

Even though Zu An had already made his mental preparations, he was still a bit stunned when he saw the splendid lights and pavilions. The scene before him was like one straight out of 'Spirited Away'. It was as if he had returned to his past world's Chongqing Hongyadong[1].

The place was even more magnificent than Immortal Abode in Brightmoon City! The government brothel's style was lower profile. It couldn't compare to Scarlet Invitation in that aspect.

It was equivalent in size to Brightmoon City's entire red light district! No wonder no one could figure out the boss behind it. How could a place that could occupy so much land in the capital have an ordinary background?

Scarlet Invitation was already extremely lively. Zu An constantly bumped and brushed against other people. He felt as if he had returned to his past world's train stations during the new year.

There were some people who were shouting Lady Nan Xun's name so passionately they passed out. There were even more people who, because they knew they couldn't get in, screamed out their love for her while waving banners in the air, hoping that Lady Nan Xun could see their literary talent and invite them inside.

Zu An gave them a look. These people had written all sorts of poetry, but for someone like him who had read through Tang and Song poetry, the level of their writing couldn't help but seem a bit clumsy. It looked awkward and cringeworthy in comparison.

"Make way; excuse us!" Gao Ying and Pei You were sixth ranked experts, so they could make their way across the ground through the release of ki without hurting anyone. The three of them quickly arrived at the entrance.

Zu An noticed that there was security by the gates to maintain order. There were also many bailiffs standing watch. This really was quite the big deal. A brothel actually had so many people present to maintain public order!

While he was sighing in admiration, a teasing voice suddenly remarked, "Oh? Isn't it Little You? Why are you here with someone from the Liu clan?"

Zu An turned around. He saw a young master who was escorted by a group of people looking at the three of them with a mocking expression. The young master was decent looking, but there were black rings under his eyes and his complexion was extremely pale. He looked like someone who had let women and alcohol completely destroy his body. He looked to be around twenty-seven or twenty-eight, but there wasn't the slightest bit of steadiness in his demeanor. There was only an air of frivolousness.

"Is that any of your business?" Pei You sneered. At the same time, he explained quietly to Zu An, "This is my great grandfather's third branch clan's Pei Xingyan."

Zu An quickly realized that this was the Waterfront Duke Pei Zheng's grandson. Even though Waterfront Duke Pei Zheng and Pei You's grandfather were brothers, their relationship wasn't all that good. Pei You

and his father's branch in particular were close to the Bi clan, and were closer to the crown prince's faction. That only made Pei Zheng even more unhappy with them.

"What a textbook example of a villain." Zu An sighed when he saw the other party's provocative behavior. He suddenly remembered that Big Manman's father was Pei Zheng's fifth son. This guy in front of him was actually her cousin! He decided to just avoid conflict out of consideration for Big Manman.

But Zu An couldn't have expected that Pei Xingyan wouldn't even give him a look, and instead looked toward Gao Ying and acted as if he only recognized him at that moment. "Aren't you that Liu clan's little cousin? I heard that you were a pretty steady guy, so why did you come to a place of romance like this? Shouldn't it be that wastrel Liu Xian from your clan who comes here instead? Why isn't he here?" He looked from side to side while speaking, as if he were looking for Liu Xian.

### **Chapter 919, Part 2: Entry Denied**

Gao Ying's face sank. Stating that he was a little cousin was already implying that he wasn't a true heir of the Liu clan, which was already irritating. Then, Pei Xingyan had even deliberately brought up Liu Xian.

He swallowed his anger and said, "Liu Xian has already given up his life in the dungeon to protect the crown prince and princess. This fact has been announced publicly in court. Why are you asking why he didn't come here?"

"Oh my, so he's dead! I am so, so sorry. I really haven't been paying much attention to these kinds of news." Pei Xingyan said that he was sorry, but there wasn't even a trace of embarrassment to be seen from him. "Right, what did you just say just now? How did he die again?"

Gao Ying said coldly, "He took the initiative to hold up the rear, sacrificing himself to protect the crown prince and princess!"

"Liu Xian sacrificed himself to protect another person? He even took the initiative in making that choice? Hahaha!" Pei Xingyan seemed as if he had heard the funniest joke in the world. His companions roared with laughter too. "I wouldn't have been surprised at all if you told me that Liu Xian died while lying on the belly of a woman. A playboy like him actually sacrificed himself to bring up the rear?"

Gao Ying's expression became colder and colder. He wasn't a pushover either and immediately retaliated. "This is what the court has pronounced. Are you questioning his majesty's decision?"

Pei Xingyan obviously understood the trap. He said with a smile, "His majesty is powerful and brilliant, so of course he wouldn't make the wrong decision. But what his majesty is worried about is the greater situation. A nobody like Liu Xian might not even get a glance from his majesty. I'm not the only one in the capital who is familiar with Liu Xian. If you don't believe me, then go and ask them if they believe that Liu Xian stayed behind to hold up the rear."

His companions all roared with laughter.

"How could that be? That Liu Xian was the definition of a coward!"

"What else was he good at apart from playing with women? He probably just lost his life in the dungeon because his cultivation was too low. As for how he died, there were only a few people who made it out alive anyway. They could just say whatever they wanted."

"That may not be the case. I think it's just that Liu Xian's cultivation was too low, so he couldn't even outrun the others. That's why he was left behind and forced to cut off the rear."

"Hahaha, what young master Pei says makes a lot of sense! That's probably what happened."

...

Zu An sighed. Big Manman's older cousin really needs a good beating. Even I'm on the verge of beating the crap out of him.

"Absolutely disgraceful!" Gao Ying couldn't hold it in anymore and threw a fist out. Pei Xingyan had already prepared, however. He waved his palm to block the strike.

After the exchange, Gao Ying remained in place, while Pei Xingyan was forced back several steps. However, his companions quickly surrounded him, exclaiming, "What are you doing? Are you trying to restrict our freedom of speech?"

Pei You and Zu An both walked up to Gao Ying's side. They didn't want their comrade to lose in this situation.

There was an unnatural redness in Pei Xingyan's face. He had clearly suffered a bit from that exchange. He glared at Pei You and exclaimed angrily, "Little You, you dare to help an outsider fight against your own family?"

There were many people in the surroundings who didn't know what was happening. When they heard that, their expressions immediately turned into looks of disdain when they looked at Pei You. This was a world structured around clans. Pei Xingyan's accusation was actually extremely serious.

Pei You's expression changed several times, and he had no idea how to retort. It was clear that if they weren't talking about matters of the pleasure quarters, he would return to being that isolated youngster again.

Zu An helped him out of his awkwardness and said, "Pei You will help a comrade who has fought at his side, and not a petty person who gossips and humiliates a warrior who sacrificed his life for our nation."

What did clan affection matter in the face of national duty? Sure enough, the onlookers' expressions toward Pei You immediately eased up. Pei You gave Zu An a grateful look.

"And who are you?" Pei Xingyan gave Zu An a look that seemed as if he were looking at a toad.

Pei You was grateful to Zu An, so he obviously took the initiative to brag about him. "This is the greatest contributor to the dungeon mission this time, the one whom his majesty personally granted the title of Green Hat Viscount! He is the crown prince's chamberlain, the Armed Escort Division Commander, Sir Zu An!"

Zu An's eyes twitched when he heard the words 'Green Hat Viscount'. But he knew that Pei You had spoken with good intentions, so he couldn't act out at all.

"Pah!" Pei Xingyan scoffed in disdain. "The two of you really have lost it! Even though your statuses aren't high in your clans, you're still young masters from distinguished clans. And yet today, the two of you are flattering a nobody that much? You really are a disgrace to everyone in the capital!"

Pei You and Gao Ying's expressions changed. But before they could say anything, Zu An said with a sneer, "This young master Xingyan here, did you eat shit before you left your house today?"

Pei Xingyan was stunned. He thought that he had heard incorrectly, but when he saw the others' expressions, he knew that wasn't the case. He erupted into rage and exclaimed, "What did you say?!"

You have successfully trolled Pei Xingyan for +588 +588 +588...

"If you haven't eaten shit, why is that the only thing coming out of your mouth?" Zu An asked, feigning confusion. "Or maybe your respected self is a poop manufacturing machine?"

He had been a professional troll on the internet forums back in his previous world, so he obviously knew the best ways to break someone's defenses.

The civilians, who had been watching to join in the liveliness, roared with laughter. They might not know the jokes nobles made, but they all quickly understood poop jokes.

Pei Xingyan almost fainted from anger, yelling, "I'm going to rip out your filthy mouth!"

You have successfully trolled Pei Xingyan for +723 +723 +723...

His palm flew right as he spoke. But just as Pei You and Gao Ying were about to block it, a miserable scream tore through the air. Pei Xingyan was already flying through the sky.

Zu An said coldly, "I can kill eighth ranked beasts like slaughtering chickens. Even someone like you dares to face me? I'll spare your life out of consideration for an old friend. Get lost." This kid really is a good-for-nothing. You're already that angry, and yet you can only produce this small amount of Rage point soul fluctuations?

Gao Ying and Pei You shivered inwardly. They didn't even see how Zu An had attacked even while being so close. It looks like Zu An's cultivation improved a lot during this brief period. Of course, they both felt incredibly refreshed when they saw Pei Xingyan's bitter end. Big bro Zu is formidable after all; he helped us vent out our resentment.

Pei Xingyan's comrades had been about to help, but when they heard those words, they immediately shivered. Only then did they remember the rumors about Zu An. The Jade Moon Serpent was only at the seventh rank. This bastard really knows how to boast!

They all cursed inwardly, but they knew that they were definitely not his match. They gave up on those thoughts and began to use words. "Preposterous! The capital is a place that upholds virtue, and yet you're bullying the weak with your strength? Will no one uphold public justice?"

If they knew that he hadn't only killed eighth ranked beasts, but even experts at the peak of the ninth rank, they wouldn't dare to speak such words.

But the surrounding crowd immediately berated them. "Utterly shameless!" They thought, These young masters love to bully the weak, and yet today, they have the shame to say this to someone else?

But they were just spectators at the moment and weren't scared of the drama growing bigger. These officials were all terrible people anyway, so it would be the best situation if they killed each other.

The disturbance drew the attention of the nearby bailiffs who were assigned to keep order. They walked over with blades in their hands, asking, "Who's causing trouble here?"

Pei Xingyan held in the blood he had just vomited from his mouth. He wanted to complain to these bailiffs, but his insides were stirring so badly that he couldn't even speak. Fortunately, he had his comrades. They complained about Zu An to the bailiffs one after another.

There was no lack of experts among the bailiffs in a place like the capital. Even though none of them could compare to Zu An, if Zu An dared to use violence against them, that would be like poking a hornet's nest. The court would never let him go.

Gao Ying and Pei You also stepped forward to reveal their identities. At the same time, they spoke about what had happened just then. Of course, what they spoke about was how overbearing the other party was.

The leader of the bailiffs felt a huge headache. They couldn't afford to offend these young masters either, but they were already experienced in such matters. They shirked responsibility and said, "We're only in charge of maintaining order outside Scarlet Invitation's entrance. Please go to the governmental office for any other matter. They have their ways of dealing with these matters."

Pei Xingyan's group was speechless.

Gao Ying and Pei You chuckled and said to Zu An, "Brother Zu, please!"

Pei Xingyan wanted to stop them, but he hesitated when he recalled how he had been sent flying mysteriously just a moment before.

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Zu An's group walked up to the entrance. Gao Ying brought out his invitation card to be verified. One card could bring in two guests.

The guard looked it over, then frowned, saying, "The names do not match, so you cannot enter. Next!"

Zu An was stunned. He hadn't expected to encounter this kind of obstacle.

Gao Ying exclaimed, "What is the meaning of this? You aren't letting in guests you invited yourself?"

Just then, the bailiff from before said, "We received a report from the higher ups that all sorts of reselling occurred and ended up inflating the price. Many of the tickets ended up in the hands of people with ill will, so for the safety of the gathering and the capital's order, only those whose surnames were recorded can pass."

"This ticket was something my clan's relative gave me. Is even that unacceptable?" Gao Ying was starting to worry. He had never heard of names being checked after all these years.

With their respective clans' statuses, obtaining an invitation card wasn't too difficult of a task. However, they had been in the dungeon, so they obviously couldn't get the invitation card themselves.

“No. It must match the name designated in the beginning.” The bailiff knew who they were, so for fear of offending them, he added, “These are orders from above. We are also only acting according to procedures.”

“And the name of that superior is?” Pei You asked unhappily. The two of them had invited Zu An over in high spirits, and yet such a thing had ended up happening. Didn’t this make them look really bad?

“No comment!” the bailiff replied. “Please do not hold up the line. Next!”

“Haha... cough... haha!” Pei Xingyan managed to stand back up under the support of his comrades. He coughed while laughing. “Absolutely hilarious! You ran all the way here to show off, and yet you can’t even go inside...”

Zu An gave him an indifferent look. Pei Xingyan immediately swallowed his other words of mockery back down. He could only borrow the bailiff nearby for support. “Ahem, if you don’t have an invitation card, then move out of the way. We have one.”

### **Chapter 920, Part 1: Big Manman’s Crisis**

Gao Ying was ashamed and embarrassed. He tried to negotiate with the bailiff leader, but the other party only expressed his powerlessness as well. That was the order he had received from above. Pei You also spoke up, bringing out his clan background several times. However, the bailiff leader only expressed his apologies, but couldn’t let him pass.

The two of them looked toward Zu An in shame and awkwardness. “Brother Zu, we really didn’t expect this to happen...”

After all, the entire purpose of this trip had been to thank Zu An for saving their lives. And yet today, they couldn’t even go inside! They felt utterly humiliated and really wanted to hide somewhere in shame.

Zu An chuckled when he saw their poverty-stricken expressions. He patted their shoulders in consolation and said, “It’s fine; let me give it a try.”

Gao Ying and Pei You felt grateful when they saw that he didn’t blame them, but they also became even more ashamed. They were respectable figures in the capital themselves, and yet they ended up messing up their role of being hosts so badly! They’d probably become the joke of the entire city by tomorrow.

As for what Zu An said about giving it a try himself, they didn’t think too much about it. After all, the two of them had already tried everything they could, and not even bringing up the Liu and Pei clan had done anything. What else could he do at that point?

“Excuse me, sir bailiff, may I speak to you for a moment?” Zu An gestured for the bailiff to step aside.

“What? Don’t even think about bribing me!” the bailiff warned. But he knew that Zu An was currently a popular individual, so he had to at least allow him the chance to talk.

Zu An pulled him aside and asked, “May I ask what sir bailiff’s name is?”

“Are you going to use my name to get revenge on me? Well, there’s no harm in me telling you. My name is Bao Ce. Do whatever you want, because I’m carrying out my duty in accordance with the law!” the bailiff said fiercely. His expression became a little colder.

“That’s an excellent name.” Zu An thought to himself, So it was actually a decent bailiff who upholds justice! That makes things much easier to deal with. “Bailiff Bao has misunderstood. I have no thoughts of revenge. I only wish to inform you of something...”

He used the skill ‘I have a friend’ while talking. “I have a friend who received a personal invitation from Lady Nan Xun a few days ago, but my invitation was stolen by that person. Then, he found a skilled craftsman to change it into his own name. No one could tell the difference.”

Pei Xingyan saw that the two of them were chatting while gesturing toward him. He was about to act out when he remembered how he had been beaten badly by Zu An not too long ago. He felt a chill run through his body and didn’t dare to offend him anymore.

“What? How could something like that happen?!” The bailiff was furious. His expression became unpleasant when he looked at Pei Xingyan. He hated people who did such things the most.

He subconsciously thought of Zu An as the friend he had spoken of under the effects of the skill. Furthermore, he subconsciously trusted the claim to be true. But he didn’t completely lose his rationality. He said with a frown, “Even though I sympathize with your situation, I’ve received orders from above today. They say that those without invitation cards can’t come in. At most, I can stop Pei Xingyan from going in too.”

When he saw that the other party had loosened up a bit, Zu An said, “That friend of mine is sworn brothers with your master Sir Yi. He’s allowed my friend to go inside and wait for him.”

It wasn’t hard to figure out who the bailiff’s superior was. As the head bailiff in the capital, only the capital’s Magistrate Yi Chun could order them about.

“Are you and Sir Yi sworn brothers?” Bailiff Bao asked, shocked.

“Shh, it’s my friend, not me,” Zu An reminded him quietly.

“I understand, I understand.” Many thoughts passed through Bailiff Bao’s head. Sir Yi usually got along with those from King Qi’s faction, while Zu An was someone from the Eastern Palace. The fact that they were close wasn’t something they should let too many people know about.

After some hesitation, he said, “Then you guys should enter.”

Even though he was upright, he wasn’t someone completely oblivious to the ways of the world. Sir Yi treated him extremely well, and he was the one who had given the orders today for Scarlet Invitation. How could he stop Sir Yi’s good friend from entering?

“Thank you, Sir Bao. My friend will definitely let Sir Yi know about this matter,” Zu An said with a smile.

Bailiff Bao said with a firm expression, “There’s no need. It’s not a big deal.”

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Zu An returned to Gao Ying and Pei You's side. He gestured, indicating that he had already settled the situation. "Let's go."

Gao Ying and Pei You thought that they were going somewhere else, but Zu An pulled them inside.

Oh no, there's going to be conflict with the bailiff soon! Ah... whatever! If we're barging in, then so be it! We'll just ask our clans to help us clean up the aftermath. Both of them thought the same thing. With their backgrounds, this matter wouldn't be punished too severely anyway. But going against the capital's police in public was still quite a crime. Even so, now that they were already in this situation, they were already pretty upset, so there was no reason to back down.

But they didn't expect that the bailiffs would move aside. The two of them were stunned. What was going on?

Forget about them, even the others who had been watching their group as if they were seeing a joke were stunned. They all grumbled, "How can they enter without an invitation card?"

Bailiff Bao raised the invitation they had presented earlier and said indifferently, "They have an invitation card; there was just a bit of misunderstanding."

Those who didn't know the truth half believed it, but Pei Xingyan definitely wouldn't. "No way! Open up that invitation and look inside! It's definitely not their names that are inside!"

The three of them had been inside the dungeon when the invitations were released. How could they possibly have legitimate invitations?

Pei Xingyan moved forward with his companions to examine the invitation card, but Bailiff Bao's expression became unkind. He exclaimed, "Do the capital's bailiffs need to explain our actions to you? I just received a report that makes me suspect that you stole another's invitation card, falsifying it. Men, arrest him!"

Pei Xingyan was stunned, shouting, "You dare touch me? Do you know who my father is?!"

Bailiff Bao had been a strict person to begin with. He became even unhappier when he heard Pei Xingyan's words. "Save your words for the government office. Men, bring him back."

The others wanted to stop them, but when they saw the ferocity of the bailiffs, they all cowered back. After all, clashing against these officials bore terrifying consequences.

If Pei Xingyan hadn't been injured, they might have stood a chance. However, Pei Xingyan didn't even have any strength to retaliate, so why would the rest of them be willing to get in trouble for nothing? They were only fair-weather friends, after all.

Gao Ying and Pei You were both stunned when they saw Pei Xingyan curse profusely as he was being captured. They asked, "Brother Zu, just how did you accomplish this?"

Zu An smiled. "Bailiff Bao is a reasonable person. All I needed to do was tell him things clearly."

Gao Ying and Pei You thought to themselves, Like hell that guy speaks reason! The two of us already talked our throats dry, but we didn't manage to convince him! But they didn't continue to press the issue when they saw that Zu An wasn't going to say anything more. Everyone had their own secrets.

“By the way, since you guys are relatives, why is your relationship with each other so bad?” Zu An asked out of curiosity.

Pei You replied, “When a clan gets big, you get all kinds of people. Forget about our branches not getting along, even those under the same branch don’t agree with each other.”

Gao Ying said, “Waterfront Duke Pei Zheng’s second son married my uncle’s daughter. Even though both sides are in-laws, Waterfront Duke has always looked down on my uncle. It might be that Pei Xingyan has sensed Waterfront Duke’s attitude, and that’s why his attitude is so poor. It’s common for the clans of the capital to intermarry and be related to each other, but those who don’t get along will still have conflicts.”

Zu An nodded in deep understanding. “So that really was the case.” Sometimes, relatives weren’t even as good as some like-minded friends.

“By the way, did something happen to Waterfront Duke’s fifth branch?” Zu An took the chance to ask about that. Ever since Pei Mianman had left, he had never received any news about her. He was really worried.

“Fifth branch?” Pei You was confused. “I’ve never heard of something happening to them. Why are you suddenly asking about them?”

Zu An hesitated before asking, “Do you remember when I mentioned Pei Mianman in the dungeon?”

Pei You replied with a smile, “Of course I do! She’s our Pei clan’s prettiest girl, you know? Wait, brother Zu has mentioned her several times now. Could it be that you want to become my brother-in-law?”

Zu An didn’t confirm or deny it and said, “The two of us were fellow students in Brightmoon City, and she helped me a lot. For better or worse, we’re friends. But a few months ago, she received a secret message that hinted something had happened by her mother’s side. She had to rush back, and I never heard from her again. As a friend, I can’t help but feel worried.”

After a bit of hesitation, Pei You said in a hushed voice, “I don’t think anything has happened to the fifth branch, but I think I can guess what’s happening.”

## **Chapter 920, Part 2: Big Manman’s Crisis**

“Their clan always wanted Pei Mianman to marry King Qi’s heir, so they might have used her mother as a pretense to trick her and get her to come back. This is something only a few people in our clan know about, so please don’t go telling everyone.”

“What?!” Zu An was alarmed. Like hell he could let that happen!

“I don’t think Pei Mianman is willing, and that’s why she went all the way to Brightmoon City for a clan mission. But it looks like the clan’s patience has hit its limit over the past few days, so they summoned her back. But they knew she would evade it, so they tricked her by using her mother,” Pei You continued.

Zu An’s expression changed several times. It would be weirder if Big Manman agreed! The two of us already truly became husband and wife a long time ago!

Gao Ying asked in confusion, "But Pei Mianman's status shouldn't be enough for her to become the wife of King Qi's heir, right?"

Zu An was annoyed. "What's wrong with her? With her beauty and talent, it's enough for Zhao Zhi and more to spare..." Pah pah pah, what do you mean 'enough for him'? Like hell Zhao Zhi is good enough for her!

Gao Ying said with a bitter smile, "Brother Zu has misunderstood. Who in the capital isn't aware of Miss Pei's beauty? She's even a cultivation genius. But marriages within the royal clan aren't so simple. Many times, there's a requirement for the woman's clan background.

"Miss Pei comes from the Pei clan. She isn't from the main branch of the clan, but the fifth branch is close enough. However, her mother..."

"What about her mother?" Zu An frowned.

Gao Ying explained, "Her mother isn't an official wife of the fifth branch, so Pei Mianman was born under a concubine."

Pei You added, "Her mother used to be the main wife, but later on, some things I'm unclear about happened. All I know is that her father took in another young lady from a prestigious house, so Pei Mianman's mother was then abandoned."

Zu An felt pity for her. Big Manman was always smiling in front of him, but he hadn't expected her to have such a tragic background. This was a world different from his past one. The difference between the first wife and other wives was worlds apart. He could imagine just how much hardship Big Manman had gone through.

Pei You then said, "It's because her background isn't good enough that the Pei clan only wishes for her to become a concubine for King Qi's heir."

There were things that weren't talked about, but all of them knew that Pei Zheng wanted to see King Qi become the emperor. This was a political investment. King Qi's son would become the crown prince, so once he rose to become the emperor, Pei Mianman would then become an imperial concubine. The Pei clan's status would then rise another level.

But Zu An couldn't be bothered with so much. When he heard that Big Manman was going to be forced to become someone's concubine, flames raged within him. He even felt the urge to cripple Zhao Zhi.

"Brother Zu, what's wrong?" Pei You and Gao Ying both sensed that there was something wrong with Zu An's emotional state.

"It's nothing." Zu An forced a smile. After taking a deep breath to calm himself down, he continued, "Then do you know how far this process has reached? Or perhaps when the wedding day will be?"

He had already decided that no matter what, he wouldn't let Big Manman's marriage go through. He wouldn't even allow a marriage that was only in name.

Pei You said with a smile, "Both sides only have that intention right now; they haven't reached an agreement. But actually, this has something to do with you too."

"It has something to do with me?" Zu An was alarmed. Doesn't that mean other people know about my relationship with Big Manman?

Pei You explained, "You broke Zhao Zhi's legs a while ago, so how can King Qi Manor be bothered about wedding matters? The Pei clan is waiting for Zhao Zhi to make a full recovery as well."

Zu An couldn't help but smile. Who could have thought it? If he had known that things would turn out like this, he would have broken Zhao Zhi's third leg back then too. Big Manman, we're destined to be together after all! His mood suddenly improved greatly. He asked Pei You about a few more things. When he heard that Pei Mianman should be fine in the short term, he felt relieved.

The group walked up a stairway decorated with lanterns and banners. They arrived at the main building with splendid lights all the way at the top.

There was a scent of cosmetics and fragrances that wafted through the air. Their conversation returned to that of romance.

In the second floor's private room, a beautiful man listened to the flattery of people around him with a smile. Suddenly, he heard unruly laughter coming from below. He frowned and turned to glance in that direction, and his complexion immediately fell.

"Young master Yu, is something wrong?" a young master with triangular eyes asked.

The handsome man was naturally the Secretariat Assistant Director Yu Nan. The reason why he had come to Scarlet Invitation before wasn't because he wanted to hear his official title. He liked being called young master by others, and those around him obviously knew about that preference too.

"It's just that an annoying person has shown up," Yu Nan sipped on his tea and said indifferently. For some reason, even the best wine would become vile and bitter whenever he saw Zu An.

"That seems to be the new upstart, Green Hat Viscount Zu An." Someone recognized Zu An's party. They knew about Gao Ying and Pei You, and they had never heard of them having any grudge with Yu Nan. That meant the one he was talking about could only be Zu An. They also felt that Zu An's frivolous and unruly style was quite annoying to look at.

The man with the triangular eyes realized something and asked, "Does young master Yu have any conflict with that Zu fellow?"

Those who could share a table with Yu Nan wouldn't be of low status. He was the son of the capital's Magistrate Yi Chun, Yi Zhibing. The reason why there were so many bailiffs outside was because he had brought them over through his father's connections. He had wanted to take the chance to curry favor with Yu Nan. He knew that Yu Nan was interested in the courtesan Nan Xun, but couldn't really dirty his hands with such things because of his reputation.

That was why he had used his father's subordinates to sweep the competitors clean. Of course, what everyone else had heard was that they were trying to create a safe environment for the courtesan's performance. Even though Yu Nan didn't say anything, he would remember the favor.

"A grudge?" Yu Nan sneered. "Why would I go that far for someone like him?"

Yi Zhibing sneered. This guy really knows how to show off. He clearly doesn't like Zu An, and yet he still makes himself sound so high and mighty.

But he had to admit that this man was just way too handsome. He had the qualifications to speak such words. If Yi Zhibing had been the one to say those words, it would only make him look like an idiot.

He said with a smile, "Since young master Yu doesn't like him, please just wait for me to send him out."

Yu Nan was tempted, but he still had to be courteous on the surface. He replied, "There's no need. It is just a trifling little clown."

Yi Zhibing naturally didn't treat his courtesy as the real deal. He said with a smile, "Please warm up my drink for me. I'm going to deal with it quickly." He walked out of the private room after speaking, and summoned some subordinates to follow him.

The others in the private room laughed and said, "Brother Yi carries the style of ancient heroes; perhaps the wine will still be warm when he returns. The tale of chasing out Zu An before his wine even cools off might serve as a great tale on its own."

Yu Nan smiled. Even though he had never cared much about wealth, he cared a lot about his reputation. If news of Zu An being chased out so quickly spread, his reputation would only soar even higher. After all, Yi Zhibing was so formidable, and yet he was only doing all of this to curry a bit of favor with him.

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Meanwhile, Zu An, Gao Ying, and Pei You were chatting happily. They were about to find a place to take a seat when a vulgar looking young master... No, calling him young master would be discrediting the term. He looked just like a rat.

"Who let you all in?" The one who had arrived was naturally Yi Zhibing. He was all smiles around Yu Nan, but his father was the capital's magistrate, making him a first-rate second generation heir. He had the qualifications to remain prideful in front of others.

"Yi Zhibing, do we need your approval to come in?" Pei You was extremely dissatisfied with the other party's tone. They were all in the same circles in the capital, so he wasn't scared at all.

Gao Ying quietly introduced the person to Zu An. Zu An's eyes widened when he heard what he said. Just the man's name alone was quite something.[1]

Yi Zhibing naturally carried some reservations toward the Liu clan and Pei clan, but one was just a relative of the Liu clan, while the other wasn't even a young master from the Pei clan's main branches. That was why he didn't take them too seriously. "I was wondering who it was. So it was just young master Pei and young master Gao."

He then changed the topic. He said to the bailiffs next to him, "Double-check their invitations." He then looked at the three of them with a big smile and said, "Everyone, please forgive me. Lady Nan Xun has attracted too much attention tonight, so some crooks might be mixed in with honest folk. That's why we have to ensure order. Those who don't have invitation cards must leave."

"You! What is the meaning of this?" Gao Ying and Pei You were furious. His words were courteous, but the meaning was entirely different!

“There’s no special meaning; we’re treating everyone the same way. Please don’t take offense,” Yi Zhibing said with a smile. “Hm? Why are you all acting this way? Don’t tell me you don’t have an invitation card? That can’t be. There’s no way, right?”

The disturbance quickly drew the attention of everyone in the place. Many guests had already been seated. They looked over with curiosity.

In a private room on the second floor, a young master with pretty features said to his companion with thick brows and big eyes, “Big bro, that Zu An came as well. It seems like Yi Zhibing is deliberately causing trouble for him. Should we step forward to help him out?”

These two were the Qin clan’s young masters. The one with delicate features was Qin Se’s grandson, Qin Yongde, while the one with stronger features was Qin Zheng’s grandson, Qin Guangyuan.

Qin Guangyuan frowned and replied, “Hmph! He already has Chuyan, and yet he still comes to this kind of place? Why should we help him? This is perfect for teaching him a lesson.”