

Immortal 921

Chapter 921, Part 1: Born to Be a Protagonist

Qin Yongde replied with a chuckle, "You're right. The Chu clan already ended their relationship with him, so Chuyan has nothing to do with him anymore. Indeed, there's no reason to help him."

"Even though he looks frivolous, he actually has some skill." Qin Guangyuan sipped his tea. "I heard grandfather and father mention that he seemed to have done a number on King Qi's great plan. It'll be best if we keep our distance from him for now."

"It's really hard to imagine how King Qi and our grandfathers' plans were ruined because of that youngster." Qin Yongde was surprised. What kind of an existence was King Qi? Also, those from their grandfather's generation were people whom they didn't even dare to speak too loudly in front of. They could only bow their heads and listen. However, they actually viewed this brat as a threat, and he had even made them suffer quite dearly? Just how had he done it?

"It was probably because of his majesty's other arrangements. He was just the one chosen to carry out the task." Qin Guangyuan was suspicious about the entire situation. That was the conclusion that made the most sense.

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While the two brothers were watching things play out without lifting a finger, another private room was quite lively as well. A group of people were talking to a youngster in the main seat. "Young master Bi, the one below is the newly appointed Green Hat Viscount. I don't know why, but he seems to have provoked Yi Zhibing. There's some fun drama to watch now!"

They were surrounding a handsome young man. His nose was tall and straight, but the tip had a bit of a hook to it. Together with his thin lips and narrow eyes, it gave him a somewhat sinister feeling.

The young man got up and said, "Let's go and take a look."

The others were shocked. "Young master Bi, why are we suddenly getting involved?"

The youngster said with a smile, "This Zu An is probably my little sister's loyal dog. Even if he is a dog, only his master is allowed to beat him, right? Isn't this Yi Zhibing being too arrogant?"

The others all said with big smiles, "Young master Bi is someone who treats his subordinates well after all! Alright, let's go and teach that Yi Zhibing a lesson."

The others were just there as spectators, so they obviously weren't afraid of things getting out of hand. They got up and drew closer to join in on the fun.

This young man was Bi Linglong's older brother, the oldest son of the Bi clan, Bi Ziang.

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Meanwhile, on the other hand, Gao Ying and Pei You were standing in the bailiffs' way. Conflict seemed about to break out at any moment.

What kind of joke was this? They had invited Zu An here, and yet they had ended up only getting inside because of him. They had already been embarrassed enough today, but they were going to be chased out in front of everyone's eyes now? Their social lives in the capital might really be done for after this!

Yi Zhibing's expression grew overcast. "What's wrong? Are you all opposing the bailiffs in public? That is a huge crime, you know?"

Gao Ying and Pei You were incredibly conflicted. They knew just how big of a crime that was too. But with how things were, they couldn't be bothered by all of that anymore.

Zu An was about to step forward and say something when he suddenly heard laughter nearby. A voice asked, "What's happening over here? Why is it so lively?"

Yu Nan, who had been watching the scene with pleasure from the second floor, immediately felt his smile freeze.

Qin Yongde snorted as well. "That Zu An has completely sided with the crown prince after all. He isn't allowed through our Qin clan's doors ever again in the future!"

Zu An sized up the other person out of curiosity. This person was quite handsome, but he gave off a rather uncomfortable aura. He suddenly thought of the phrase 'when a wolf looks over its shoulder'. It was precisely that kind of feeling, a look that would put one immediately on guard.

Yi Zhibing had originally been quite happy with how things were going. After all, he had driven the Liu and Pei clan's two little brats crazy, and yet they were still helpless to do anything. It was as if he had become the focal and main character of this place.

But when he saw the one who had arrived, his expression changed. His presence immediately became weaker even as he exclaimed, "So it was young master Bi! Which wind brought you here today?"

Bi Ziang said with a smile, "You're troubling my men, so how can I not step forward?"

Zu An raised his eyebrows. When did I become one of your men?

Yi Zhibing felt a huge headache. If it had been any other time, he would definitely show this young master respect and stop troubling Zu An's group, but he had already buttered up Yu Nan tonight! How could he just back down like that?

As such, he could only brace himself and said, "Young master Bi has misunderstood. I'm not deliberately troubling anyone, but rather doing this for the sake of this event's peace; that's why I'm asking to have their invitations examined again. We'll check everyone's invitation cards, so we aren't just dealing with them."

Bi Ziang's smile instantly vanished when he heard those words. "I still wanted to let you keep your dignity, but since you don't want it, don't blame this young master. Since you want to reason through the law, I'm going to interrogate you in detail. What is your distinguished self's rank and post? Were you the one who gave the order to transfer the capital's bailiffs and maintain order here?"

Yi Zhibing immediately broke out into a cold sweat. "It... It was my father who sent over the bailiffs out of a concern that there would be too many civilians here." He himself didn't have any power, but by

relying on his father's authority, he could obviously transfer over some bailiffs. But strictly speaking, he was doing things illegally.

"Oh, so it was Sir Yi! Then may I wonder if what Sir Yi has done today is actually as a result of a report from the court? Do you have the official approval in writing from the court? After all, this is a place of romance, so if you use bailiffs to maintain order in a brothel, that's an abuse of government resources for personal reasons." One after another, Bi Ziang fired off questions that hacked straight at Yi Zhibing's sore spots again and again.

"I... Um..." Yi Zhibing wiped at his cold sweat. He had no idea how to respond. He had acted completely on his own initiative for today's matters. Even though his father knew about it, he hadn't paid it too much attention. If someone really looked into it, his actions might even cause his father to lose his job.

He was full of regret. Why the hell did he have to try and show off today? This Zu An really was a freaking demon after all; anyone who got involved with him ended up in deep trouble!

While Yi Zhibing was trapped in an impossible situation, Yu Nan said indifferently, "Since even young master Bi has stepped forward to act as his guarantor, there's naturally nothing wrong with their party. You can come back up."

Yi Zhibing felt as if he had just received a huge pardon. He quickly gave Bi Ziang an apologetic smile, and left as if he were running away.

Zu An gave the upper floors a look. Even though he had only gotten a glance, he already recognized who that person was. So everything that had happened today was because of him. The two of them had clearly only met once before, only having shared a meal in King Qi Manor. Is there a need for you to target me like this?

Human beings were just that strange. Sometimes, even though people had clearly only met once, they might fall in love, or on the flipside, subconsciously loathe the other party. Yu Nan definitely belonged to the latter category.

The pearl curtains to the private room had already been lowered. It looked as if Yu Nan didn't even want to give him a second glance.

Zu An shifted his gaze. He cupped his hands toward Bi Ziang, saying, "Thank you, young master Bi."

"There's no need for thanks. You're one of my little sister's men, so of course I'd shelter you." Bi Ziang gave him a look. "I've only heard of your reputation and haven't seen you in person before. Now that we've met, I see that you're neither servile nor overbearing. Not bad."

"Young master Bi is too kind with your praise," Zu An replied calmly. There was always a condescending tone in the other party's voice, but he didn't really mind it either. That was probably just a common problem among people like them.

Bi Ziang said with a smile, "Now that we're on the topic, there are a few friends of mine who were done in by you."

Zu An was stunned. "Is that so?" He had offended way too many people as of late. He couldn't figure out who the other party was talking about.

“Shi Kun, then Gu Heng, as well as Gu Xing. I was actually quite close to them.” Bi Ziang quickly changed the topic. “But these people bit the hand that fed them, so you did well in getting rid of them.”

Zu An shivered inwardly. He couldn't help but feel that this young master was a bit unruly.

The two sides exchanged some more greetings, and Bi Ziang offered an invitation. “I have a private room above. Why don't you join us?”

Zu An said with a smile, “Another time, perhaps. We've already chosen our position today.”

Judging from how this young master was surrounded by bootlickers, Zu An could easily imagine that he would have to listen to endless flattery if he went up there. He would much rather drink happily with Gao Ying and Pei You.

Furthermore, Bi Ziang's tone and expression always made him feel as if he were being looked down on like a servant. Screw that; I've even messed around with raid bosses like Zhao Han and the first emperor. Who the hell does this kid think he is?

Bi Ziang frowned slightly when he saw that Zu An had refused, but he quickly hid it. “That's fine.” He didn't say anything else, and his group quickly left.

Once they left, his companions muttered, “That guy really doesn't know how to appreciate favors. He actually refused young master Bi's invitation!”

Bi Ziang remained expressionless. “Capable people always have a bit of pride. It's just like raising an eagle; it'll become obedient if you raise it for a while.”

Chapter 921, Part 2: Born to Be a Protagonist

Meanwhile, Zu An's party of three got situated. A maid quickly came with food and drink. They weren't in one of the private rooms, but it was still a fine spot. It was easy to see that Gao Ying had put a lot of care into this matter.

But that only made Yi Zhibing seem even more hateful. Scarlet Invitation had clearly prepared all of the spots according to the invitation, and yet he had sent people to stop them outside.

“Brother Zu, I'll drink this toast to you first! What happened today was really embarrassing,” Gao Ying said, ashamed.

“Don't worry about it. It happened because someone was causing trouble behind the scenes.” Zu An drained his alcohol in one gulp.

As they chatted, the atmosphere unwittingly became more carefree and passionate. They talked about all kinds of things. Eventually, they talked about Bi Ziang from before.

“That guy? He was born to be a protagonist.” Gao Ying and Pei You both sighed at the same time.

Zu An was stunned. What the hell? This was the first time he had ever heard anyone described that way. If Bi Ziang is the protagonist, then what am I?

Gao Ying seemed to have guessed at what Zu An was thinking when he saw his shocked expression. He explained with a smile, “In the past, the Bi clan's madam dreamed about a Qilin, and she subsequently

got pregnant. Everyone in the capital knew that the Bi clan had produced a Qilin-like son before he was even born.”

Zu An asked, “Then what if his dad was cucked by a Qilin?”

Gao Ying was speechless. Even though such a phrase didn’t exist in this world, it didn’t stop him from knowing what Zu An was talking about.

Pei You resisted the urge to laugh and said, “Brother Zu, it’s alright if you say these things in private with us, but it would cause a huge uproar if it spread outside! Bi Ziang has always been rather prideful. He might fall out with you if he hears that.”

Zu An nodded and asked, “Is that the only reason why he’s known as someone born to be a protagonist?”

“Of course not,” Gao Ying continued. “The day he was born, multicolored brilliance filled the skies, and a sweet scent filled the air. According to what the servants of the Bi clan said, the entire Bi clan was filled with a different aroma.”

Zu An cursed inwardly. Why does it sound like the appearance of a freaking succubus? But out of consideration for the pair’s delicate hearts, he decided not to say that out loud.

Pei You couldn't help but add, “Sir Bi had to enter the wilderness to quell beasts when he was still young. He was brought along on a trip. During that trip, he wandered off due to a subordinate’s carelessness. The Bi clan entered a frenzy as they searched for him, but they never found him, so they thought that he had died. After all, the wilderness is filled with all sorts of beasts. Even a sixth ranked expert would be in great danger in such a place.

“But who could have thought that after three days, Bi Ziang would return on his own? He was even riding on a Zouyu[1].”

“Zouyu?” Zu An asked, stunned.

Pei You explained, “It’s a legendary auspicious beast. It has a tiger body and a lion’s head, and white fur with black stripes. Its tail is as long as its body, and it can travel ten thousand li in a single day. It’s rumored to be benevolent in nature, a creature who isn’t even willing to trample on grass. It doesn’t eat anything that didn’t die of natural causes. That’s why those of the world mark it as the symbol of benevolence and righteousness.”

Zu An recalled similar descriptions of the Zouyu from his past world. But the description made it sound like a white tiger!

“Then, that Zouyu became his mount, the auspicious beast recognizing Bi Ziang as its master. That actually created quite the disturbance.” Pei You was full of envy as he described the matter. He really wished that the main character could be him.

“He is indeed a bit different from everyone else,” Zu An thought to himself. Did the Bi clan prepare this entire story? But aren’t they scared of the emperor’s interference if they go that far with their campaign?

"That's not all," Gao Ying said. "One time, he went out on a trip, but then he unintentionally fell off a cliff. Not only did he not die, he even obtained an ancient inheritance, the 'World Creation Sword'. It's a technique that even the libationer has praised in the past."

Zu An thought to himself, This kid really does seem like a light novel's protagonist! Other people would perish completely after falling off of a cliff, but if the main character fell off, not only would they encounter treasures and secret techniques, they might even run into beauties.

When he was still a middle school brat, he had believed all of those light novels' nonsense, that cliffs meant opportunities. But of course, as an intellectually sound person, he would never jump off a cliff. Of course, he could still make a detour around the cliff to check if there were any secret manuals.

The heavens didn't disappoint. One time, he had found a booklet beneath a cliff, and he had vaguely made out the words 'Nine Yang' on the cover. He had been overjoyed at the time! He had thought that he found the legendary 'Nine Yang Divine Art', but only when he picked it up did he see the words 'Nine Yang Soymilk Machine Manufacturer Manual'.

He never trusted those stupid cliff opportunity stories again after that experience. And yet today, there was actually a lucky bastard who had gotten him all worked up and jealous again.

"Also, also! I heard that whenever he leaves, he always finds money on the ground." Pei You was feeling more and more aggrieved the more he spoke. Finding money on the ground was every person's dream, right? One could go to the brothels every day without worrying about money!

"What the hell? Screw that guy! How much money has he found then, after all these years?" Even Zu An was getting jealous.

"The most ridiculous part is that everyone he doesn't get along with suffers all sorts of accidents. Some end up stepping into shit, some on banana peels; some get hit on the head by a flower pot. Some of them even choke halfway to death while drinking water..." Gao Ying spoke about all sorts of absurd events one after another. In the end, he said with a sigh, "Eventually, people got scared. They all felt that he was someone blessed by the world, and no one dared to offend him anymore."

Pei You said worriedly, "You treated him a bit rudely just now, so who knows if something unlucky will happen."

Gao Ying said, "But you didn't offend him too badly. Even if there is a bit of misfortune, it shouldn't be a danger to your life."

Zu An wanted to curse out loud when he saw how worried these two were. This is absolutely ridiculous! How can Zhao Han allow such an absurd existence to continue existing in the capital? Of course, he didn't believe those things. He decided to change the topic. "By the way, he mentioned Shi Kun, Gu Xing, and those others earlier. Was his relationship with them good?"

Gao Ying explained, "It was because of the rumors around his luck that more and more people gradually gathered around him. Among them, there were eighteen individuals whose backgrounds and abilities were the most prominent. They would often gather in Bi Ziang's private garden, so they were known as the Eighteen Garden Friends. Shi Kun and the Gu clan's brothers were among those members."

"Of course, Shi Kun was near the front of the ranking, while the Gu clan brothers were close to the bottom."

Zu An thought to himself, No wonder that Shi Kun was so crazily arrogant in Brightmoon City. So he learned it from Bi Ziang! The two of them did share a lot of similarities, so it was no wonder they had become such good friends. As for Gu Heng and Gu Xing, heh. It was obvious just what kind of people were in Bi Ziang's circle of friends.

Suddenly, a zither melody filled the air. The clamoring hall immediately quieted down. Those present all looked toward the pavilion at the center of the second floor. However, there were layers of curtains and pearl beads in the way. They could vaguely make out a silhouette, but they couldn't see the person's face at all.

"Lady Nan Xun is playing her zither!" Pei You was so excited that he stood up.

"This is truly a melody from the heavens." Gao Ying also craned his neck toward the second floor.

Zu An was the only one who remained indifferent. He had so many stunning beauties at his side, and all of them were courtesan queens too. The Devil Sect's Saintess Qiu Honglei had also pulled off this 'sell arts, not body' appeal. Wasn't she much better than the other courtesan queens who tried to do the same thing?

As for the zither music, it really wasn't anything special. He had heard all types of Chinese, Japanese, and Western music before. With so many outstanding classics, the bar had already been raised high. Just the zither alone seemed a bit too bland and didn't do much for him.

The reason he had come here was to look for a way to bring down Yu Nan. But he still hadn't thought of any good plans.

Meanwhile, another beautiful figure carefully examined the situation from a second floor room. When she saw how worked up all of the men present were, her red lips curved into a mocking smirk. "Hmph, men!"

But she quickly noticed the unfazed Zu An. The other men were all raising their heads and looking around, but he just continued to sit in place while drinking leisurely. Judging from his expression, it almost seemed as if he found the zither music somewhat boring.

"Interesting." The girl giggled. She pointed toward him and asked, "Who is that?"

"Replying to master, that's Green Hat Viscount Zu An, a rising star from the Eastern Palace. He currently holds the post of the crown prince's chamberlain, as well as the Armed Escort Division Commander," a maid replied after taking a look.

"Green Hat Viscount?" The girl frowned. "Why are the noble titles of humans so strange-sounding?"

She gave Zu An a look. There was a strange expression on her face as she mused, "Zu An? Why does this name sound familiar? Who was little sister Snow talking about the other day again?"

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As the song ended, enthusiastic applause echoed through the room. All of them strived to be the first to praise Nan Xun's performance and stand out.

"Lady Nan Xun's zither skills are exceptional! Her music truly is resoundingly beautiful!" came a more reserved comment. The others' words only grew more and more passionate.

"After listening to Lady Nan Xun's music, my entire soul feels as if it has been purified and elevated!"

"Lady Nan Xun's dao must have been focused on the zither! If your focus were cultivation, your achievements might have been even higher. As long as Lady Nan Xun is willing, this young master is willing to personally teach you, and I'll give you everything I have!"

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Zu An sneered. Your soul was cleansed by just a song from a brothel? Then just how dirty was your soul?

Also, that kid who said you'd teach her cultivation personally, it's embarrassing for me to even talk about you. Would it even be cultivation, or did you just want to touch her?

And the one who said you'd give her everything, what would you even give her? Other people pass on their teachings, but you probably just want to pass on your sauce...

Pei You also hollered out a few sentences before turning around with a look of excitement. "Brother Zu, what do you think?"

"Nothing special. A brothel should be like a brothel, right?" Zu An said. Afterward, he shouted loudly, "We came to look for pleasure, not to listen to music. Lady Nan Xun, turn up the excitement here a bit!"

Chapter 922, Part 1: Avoid the Moon

Those present were shocked when they heard Zu An's words. All of their attention was drawn to him.

From his private room above, Yu Nan frowned and exclaimed coldly, "Vulgar!"

"How humiliating!" The Qin clan's brothers were stunned. Even though they had already decided that Zu An had nothing to do with the Qin clan anymore, such foolish behavior made them feel incredibly embarrassed as well.

Bi Ziang remained seated with an ambiguous smile on his face, remarking, "He is surprisingly bold. Interesting..."

Meanwhile, in the special room occupied by a woman and her maid, the maid said, "That person really is shameless."

On the contrary, the beautiful woman laughed. "He's merely speaking what everyone else is thinking, but isn't willing to say out loud. He's surprisingly honest. People with courage and insight like him are destined to become great."

The maid muttered, "He's not as special as you're making him out to be. Look, everyone below is cursing him."

Sure enough, when the others heard someone with Yu Nan's status speak up, they didn't feel any more misgivings. They all cursed him.

"How can there be someone this perverted?!"

"We've offended the beauty! We sincerely apologize!"

"Lady Nan Xun, please don't let such a vulgar person's foolery affect you!"

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Zu An rolled his eyes. These people really knew how to be fake. They had come all the way to a brothel to visit prostitutes, yet they actually had the nerve to curse another person for being a pervert? All of them were filled with such indignation, but it was only because they wanted to look better in front of the courtesan queen. Alas, simsps had never met good ends throughout all of history.

But Zu An immediately felt rejuvenated when he saw the flood of Rage points that rushed in. He didn't even care that they were cursing him.

Gao Ying and Pei You were also embarrassed. But they had already fought together in such a desperate situation, so they could still tolerate such a level of embarrassment. They stood by Zu An's side and stared right back at everyone else.

The woman above them had been paying attention to Zu An the entire time. When she saw how nonchalant he was amid the commotion, as if he had turned a deaf ear to all of the incoming curses, she couldn't help but smile. "That person is quite thick-skinned." After thinking to herself for a moment, she quietly asked, "Nan Xun, why don't you show them something?"

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A sweet-sounding voice came from the second floor. "Many fellow young masters have rushed here from all sorts of different paths. Nan Xun is truly grateful toward everyone, so I am willing to perform a dance to express my intentions." She didn't respond to Zu An's words; otherwise, it would seem as if Zu An had forced her to dance. That would tarnish her reputation.

However, all of the guests present were incredibly arrogant young masters. Even though they still appeared to be patient, most of them were hiding a bit of dissatisfaction. But when they heard what Nan Xun said, the rooms immediately erupted into cheers. Some of the more enthusiastic ones even blew whistles.

Zu An was full of disdain toward those present. Don't forget the one who dug the well when you're drinking water! These idiots were cursing me so enthusiastically, but aren't they enjoying themselves all the same?

Pei You said excitedly, "Back then when Lady Nan Xun danced for the first time, her skill already shocked the entire audience. Unfortunately, she doesn't dance very often, and I haven't even seen her dance in all the times I've been here. I'm really sharing brother Zu's fortune today!"

Zu An chuckled and said, "Today is such a special event, so this dance is something she has to do. It doesn't have anything to do with me."

“Brother Zu is too humble,” Pei You replied. But he soon lost any interest in talking, because the curtains above slowly parted, revealing an exquisite figure behind them.

Nan Xun was dressed in a pink dress. It was somewhat more frivolous than the clothes of a wealthy family’s daughter. Her mature curves were faintly discernible; but even if one thought one could see something, one could stare until one’s eyes turned sore, yet one still wouldn’t see anything.

What was even more eye-catching was her veil made of glistening tassels, covering half of her face. Only her elegant nose and beautiful eyes could be seen through it, making her look mysterious and charming.

Her gaze wasn’t as charming and affectionate as that of a normal courtesan, and instead bore an indifference and apathy toward all things in the world. Together with the gorgeous decorations in her hair, she looked less like a courtesan from a brothel than a noble empress.

Those present became more and more worked up. They shouted the corniest of praises.

“Huh?” Unlike the others who were going crazy, Zu An felt rather strange. For some reason, he felt that the courtesan was a bit familiar. With his current cultivation and mental prowess, how could he forget about someone he had met before?

He carefully examined the person, trying to make out her appearance through the tassels. Unfortunately, the tassels were specially designed. Under the candle flame’s illumination, they flickered with dazzling brilliance. It was virtually impossible to make out her true appearance.

The maid in the special room said in disdain, “That man has finally shown his true colors! He’s staring so hard at Lady Nan Xun that he’s not even willing to blink! What he did earlier was just a cheap trick to try and get Lady Nan Xun’s attention. He’s the same as all of those other stinky men.”

The beauty next to her said with a smile, “Look at you. You’re still so young, and yet you’re acting as if you already know everything.” Despite having said those words, she was also a bit disappointed when she saw Zu An’s behavior. She decided to shift her gaze away from him.

Zu An asked Pei You, “What does this Nan Xun really look like?”

Pei You shook his head. “I don’t know.”

“Aren’t you a huge fan of hers? How can you not even know what she looks like after following her all this time?” It was Zu An’s turn to be shocked.

“You can tell she’s beautiful even if you can only see half of her face, right? It only makes her seem even more mysterious. I heard you could only see her full appearance if you were invited as a guest. I wonder if I’ll ever have that chance...” Pei You’s expression was full of longing.

Zu An was speechless for a long time. You’re really taking simping to a whole new level...

Cheers erupted around them just then. When Zu An looked up, he saw that Nan Xun had already begun to dance. He had been prepared for disappointment at first, because he had once been able to flip through TikToks to choose girls as if he were choosing concubines. What hadn’t he seen before?

But he knew that he was wrong the moment he first saw her dance. Even though the cute girls on TikTok had performed dances, it was still just some simple swaying of their waists and bottoms; it wasn't true dancing. Only now did he realize that dancing could actually be this beautiful.

It had nothing to do with her appearance; it was a charm that originated from her posture and movement. It carried not only the style of a classical beauty, but also the special passion of the pleasure quarters.

Between the tension between her movements and the visual shock, everything left Zu An utterly amazed. He sighed. No wonder those capital's young masters had been so infatuated. It turned out this woman really did have some skill.

The mood of the place was starting to reach a climax. Even the quiet Gao Ying couldn't help but clap and cheer.

As it happened, Nan Xun had reached a part where was going to perform some highly difficult movements. She fully displayed her body's shocking flexibility. But the key part was that her expression remained aloof and proud the entire time. It was indeed not feigned, but rather her true nature.

The enchanting and lovely dance made the young masters present feel a strong urge to conquer her. Judging from the reddened faces and quickened breathing of the men around him, Zu An could tell that their minds were already creating all sorts of fantasies.

Nan Xun bowed after completing her dance. The entire hall was dead silent save for the sound of heavy breathing, and the young masters' eyes had reddened. Only after some time passed did someone clap and cheer. Then, those present screamed at the top of their lungs.

Nan Xun showed them a smile, and the clamor eventually quieted down. She said, "Nan Xun cannot thank everyone enough for coming today. I will drink this glass in a toast to everyone." A maid walked over, bringing her a cup of wine.

"Lady Nan Xun is too polite!" the young masters responded as they also drained their cups. Their eyes were wide as they watched, because they wanted to see her true appearance under her mask. Unfortunately, she covered her mouth as she drank. It was elegant, but protected her mysteriousness. They could only sigh in regret.

The atmosphere became lively again. It was now time for the drinking game. The young masters all became alert. They knew that the key moment had come.

Even though it hadn't been stated explicitly, they knew. This wasn't something the courtesan could say openly, because everyone present had special status in the capital. How could a courtesan be the one to pick between all of them?

But there was only one courtesan, and she couldn't serve many men. Only one person was going to be able to meet with her in private. There were so many of them present, however. How was she going to pick one?

Although it was a world where the strong reigned, in a place like this, knowledge of the arts still prevailed. After all, visiting brothels was something done by refined and elegant people. Fighting in one was definitely unacceptable.

That was why a drinking game was the best solution. As for what game would be played, there were many options: The finger guessing game, 'fill in the phrase', poetic verses, songs, and all sorts of other things.

Yu Nan spoke up from his room. "Since Lady Nan Xun's beauty hides the moon and shames the flowers, how about 'Avoid the Moon'?" His companions all voiced their agreement. The people he was on good terms with also took the chance to chime in.

Even those who didn't get along with Yu Nan had to admit that he was truly good at flattery. Not even the words of praise the others had screamed out added together could compare to what he had just said.

The others felt great regret, thinking, Why didn't we think of that? They had ended up letting that Yu bastard seize the initiative. Lady Nan Xun smiled toward him when she heard his words, so she was definitely happy to hear them

Yu Nan, with his exceptional appearance and talent, together with the excellent move he had just made, immediately made himself the others' greatest enemy that night.

Zu An nudged Pei You with his elbow, asking, "What's 'Avoid the Moon'?"

Chapter 922, Part 2: Avoid the Moon

"You don't even know what 'Avoid the Moon' is?" Pei You was stunned.

"Is it that weird?" Zu An's expression didn't change. "Then, do you know TikTok and Youtube?"

"Uh..." Pei You thought to himself for a bit, but he really didn't know those things. He said with an apologetic smile, "The so-called 'Avoid the Moon' game is one where everyone takes turns reciting lines of poetry without the word 'moon' in them, but the verse has to describe the moon."

"So that's what it was." Zu An was happy to hear that. That's right up my alley! I didn't memorize all those damn classical verses and poems for nothing! But if my literature teacher knew I was using what he taught me to chase after a prostitute, he might just faint from anger... Wait, no, maybe he'd cry from envy, because that was his field of expertise to begin with.

Lady Nan Xun suggested with a smile, "Since it was young master Yu's suggestion, how about we start with young master Yu?"

The others all wanted to stamp their feet when they heard those words. Who among them didn't want to be the first? Was Lady Nan Xun hinting that she already had her heart set on him by asking him to go first?

Yu Nan didn't decline the invitation. His usual proud expression remained, as if he considered himself obviously the most suitable choice. He said immediately without needing time to think, "A jade mirror; a silver hook above the evening mountains."

"Young master Yu is creative and brilliant, as expected. This verse meets the topic well..." As the one overseeing the drinking game, Lady Nan Xun naturally needed to give some commentary. Her voice was pleasant to listen to, and her words carried great praise for Yu Nan. Her eyes seemed to be sparkling. In

the others' eyes, it seemed as if she were staring at Yu Nan with deep affection, as if she were ready to rush into his embrace.

Like hell is he creative and brilliant! He was the one who suggested this, so of course he already prepared beforehand! They cursed inwardly. All of them were incredibly jealous.

"Lady Nan is too kind with your praise." Yu Nan didn't speak with his usual prideful attitude when he was talking to Nan Xun, and instead had a warm smile. He had already been well-known for his looks in the capital to begin with. Now that he had also shown a well-polished smile, he became even more charming. Many of the maids present were overwhelmed.

"He's so handsome!" The maid in that special room clasped her cheeks. She was completely smitten.

The exceptional beauty rolled her eyes. "Is there a need to go that far? The elf race doesn't lack beautiful men, and many of them aren't any worse than him."

"The young miss doesn't understand," the maid exclaimed excitedly. "The men from the elf race are too weak looking! They're handsome, but they're a bit too feminine. They don't have any manliness."

"And handsomeness is something that has to stand out. There are so many handsome men in the elf race, which makes them all seem ordinary instead. But if you look at this man, he's like a crane in a flock of chickens. That makes him seem so much more handsome."

The exceptional beauty laughed involuntarily. "What you said makes a bit of sense, but there are others who aren't bad looking here. For example, there's that young master Bi, and the one surnamed Zu isn't too bad..." She had been to say that Zu An was also quite handsome, but she quickly changed her wording when she recalled his previous behavior.

"Rather than appearance, I'm more impressed by the human race's extensive literature and culture. They're clearly already dominant in battle, so if they excel in this field, will our race ever be able to stand out?" A hint of grief appeared on her face.

The maid quickly exclaimed, "Young miss, there's no need to feel so worried! The human race only uses these literary skills in places of romance; they aren't used on the greater stage. Isn't that great news for our race?"

The exceptional beauty was stunned. She gave the maid a surprised look and remarked, "Not bad; I didn't expect to hear something so deep from you."

The maid pouted and stomped her feet. "Young miss!"

...

The 'Avoid the Moon' game continued, but those who went after Yu Nan weren't so outstanding. After all, no one had known that this was the drinking game they were going to play. They weren't as prepared as Yu Nan.

It would already be decent if they could come up with something that matched the topic. The elegance of what they said naturally couldn't compare to Yu Nan's at all. What was even more frustrating was that they had no choice but to drink, since they couldn't think of any poetry.

Nan Xun spoke her gentle commentary throughout the entire process. Even if what the guest said wasn't anything special, they could still hear her praise. Even those guests who weren't able to come up with anything received her smile and encouragement.

It was to the extent that, since no one had been made to look bad, their eyes only burned with more and more passion when they looked at Nan Xun. They all wanted her so badly.

Zu An found the situation utterly hilarious. Courtesans were just courtesans. No matter how aloof and proud they acted, their skills were well trained. They knew how to make people feel great. The best hunters often knew how to appear like prey, after all.

Eventually, Bi Ziang's turn arrived. People's attention shifted toward him. After all, he was the only one whose family background and presence could compare to Yu Nan's. After a moment of silence, he said brightly, "Golden waters ripple beneath the willow, its beauty offset by a fine jade building."

Just like Yu Nan, Bi Ziang had his henchmen as well. Their voices might have been even louder as they cheered, "Excellent!"

The exceptional beauty in the special room nodded. "This Bi Ziang's reputation wasn't in vain after all." Worry soon filled her face. If the human race's young masters were already so skilled, that wasn't a good sign for her clansmen at all.

...

Outside, Nan Xun had a smile on her face. She expressed great praise for the verse. Compared to the basic courtesy she had shown the others, her praise was much more sincere.

Pei You felt incredibly dejected. "If I knew that it would come to this today, I would have studied harder and learned some poetry!" He didn't have any confidence in winning against Yu Nan and Bi Ziang in this field.

Gao Ying said with a firm expression, "Poetry is nothing special; cultivation is what's most important. Brother Pei, don't let a brothel woman sway your dao heart." Even though he was quite fond of this courtesan himself, he had always been someone who clearly separated what was important and what wasn't. He wouldn't lose his way over something like this.

Pei You looked at him in surprise. "Thank you for the reminder, brother Gao!"

Zu An gave the two of them a look of surprise. Gao Ying was mature and earnest, while Pei You had quickly received advice and corrected his attitude. These two were definitely outstanding individuals from their clans, and their future prospects were limitless. But of course, they're still lacking compared to me, haha!

Then, the others continued the drinking game. Their level of literary skill was naturally inferior to Bi Ziang's.

Even though Nan Xun was outstanding and skilled in reception, she was starting to run out of words of praise. It wasn't easy to even offer words of encouragement to some people's answers anymore. She could only shift more and more toward basic courtesy for her replies.

But these people had already lost their minds with lust, and the only thing in their minds was how Lady Nan Xun had smiled toward them just then.

Then, the Qin clan brothers got their turn. Their family background wasn't any weaker than those of the Yu clan and Bi clan. They were viewed as major contenders for the single private meeting with Nan Xun. But the two of them weren't as skilled in literary talent as Yu Nan and Bi Ziang. Even though they did give their answers, it wasn't anything special.

The others were overjoyed to see the result, and even Yu Nan and Bi Ziang sighed in relief.

Only the exceptional beauty in the special room sighed. She had hoped that these young masters from military backgrounds might have abandoned their cultivation for the literary arts, but it now seemed that wasn't the case.

The game finally circled around to Zu An's table. Pei You and Gao Ying gave their answers to the prompt. They'd had so much time to prepare, so they had at least come up with something.

But going later had its own shortcomings. Many well-known verses had already been recited by the people before them. The verses they provided only barely met the criteria.

Zu An grinned. Judging from what he had heard, even though this world's martial prowess was well developed, people's literary skills left him less than impressed. Even Yu Nan and Bi Ziang's verses were enough to be praised so heavily by everyone.

After Nan Xun gave her praise to Pei You and Gao Ying, her wonderful eyes shifted to Zu An. What this man had said earlier put her in quite the difficult situation, so she remembered him clearly. She said, "Young master Yu was able to provide us with an excellent beginning. If this young master can bring this game to a great conclusion, it might be a great story in itself."

The others heckled and jeered. These spectators weren't scared of things getting out of hand. Only Pei You and Gao Ying looked worried. At this point, even just providing a passable reply wasn't good enough. As long as it wasn't as good as Yu Nan's verse, Zu An would easily become a laughingstock.

Zu An cursed inwardly. You guys really know how to hold a grudge, huh? But sorry, you're doomed to be disappointed here. I have countless great poems from the Tang and Song writers in my arsenal!

Chapter 923, Part 1: This Humble Zu Occupies Eight Parts

"The main character obviously needs to show up at the final decisive moment," Zu An said. His words immediately drew the irritation of those present, and they immediately cursed him for being shameless and cocky. Zu An was on cloud nine when he saw the incoming Rage points, so he taunted them a bit more.

The smile on Lady Nan Xun's face also stiffened. She couldn't help but remind him, "May I ask if you have an answer to this prompt?"

Zu An pretended to think for a moment, then said with a clear voice, "The receding sunset clouds overflow with crisp coolness; silently, the starry streams surround a ring of jade."

The clamoring audience fell silent. They all began to mutter to themselves. The more they repeated the words, the more profound they seemed.

The exceptional beauty in the special room exclaimed in surprise, "That fellow actually possessed such literary talents? I've really underestimated him."

The maid who had been looking down on Zu An all this time asked, confused, "Is this verse really amazing?" She couldn't sense the intricacies behind the words with just her knowledge and experience.

The exceptional beauty nodded. "It is." Then, she fell silent, clearly not intending to explain herself.

The maid could only pout and sulk. Is the young miss looking down on me? She's not even going to explain it to me!

Bi Ziang revealed an expression of surprise, remarking, "This guy is quite interesting. He's worth a second look from this young master."

Those around him immediately said in praise, "He's still far from young master Bi."

Bi Ziang said indifferently, "The fact that he can even be compared to me is already something for him to be proud of." Those around him merely laughed and voiced their agreement.

In the Qin brothers' room, Qin Yongde couldn't help but say, "I didn't expect this man to have some literary talent in him. I was wondering why sister Chuyan chose him back then. It was probably this part of him."

Qin Guangyuan harrumphed. "Literary skills are just tricks; they aren't useful for anything. They're only good for tricking girls."

Nan Xun also revealed an expression of surprise. Her beautiful eyes swirled with wonder as she spoke. "There are no words like 'moonlight' or 'like water'; rather, it uses the words 'overflow' and 'crisp coolness'. And yet, they still imply that the moonlight is similar to water. The verse gives off a clear and refreshing feeling. The stars pale in comparison to the moon; the words 'starry streams' create an indistinct and distant feeling. 'Silently, the starry streams' seems to convey that the starry streams ought to make sound, yet they become silent because of how distant and remote they are. This gives off a powerful feeling of the vastness of the cosmos. 'Ring of jade' speaks of the moon's pure and incorruptible beauty; these words not only describe its moving wonder, they also suggest its round shape. Nowhere in the verse does it state that it was the full moon that is being admired, and yet it is clear how pleasing and delightful it is to the writer. Furthermore, as someone..."

She had only given courteous comments on the other people's verses, and she'd had to rack her brains to barely enumerate some good points. She had actually been getting quite frustrated. But this was now sincere praise, and the more she spoke about the verse, the more excited she became.

Zu An was quite shocked. This courtesan really was good at this sort of thing! After all, it wasn't so easy for scholars to praise each other. Not only did one have to speak words of substance, one also had to make sure to 'scratch' their particular itch. No wonder she's a courtesan queen! Her level can almost compare to me when I was studying for those literature reading comprehension tests!

The others felt incredibly jealous when they heard Lady Nan Xun's enthusiastic praise. That Zu An doesn't look like anything special, but he actually has some skills here...

Then, they looked toward Yu Nan to watch him suffer. Lady Nan Xun had used him as a comparison to teach the man with no filter a lesson, but now, Yu Nan had instead been put on the spot. How awkward was that?

Yu Nan had started off so strong, and considering how handsome he was, they had all thought that he was the one most likely to be invited as Nan Xun's guest. So now, they were obviously looking forward to seeing his reaction.

Their opinions of Zu An eased up when they thought of that. They found him more and more likable!

Sensing the fiery looks all around him, Yu Nan coldly asked, "Who wrote this verse of yours? What's the title? I've studied extensively for many years. Even though I can't claim to know all poetry throughout history by heart, I can still be considered proficient. And yet, I've never heard of these verses of yours."

The others quickly realized the same thing when they heard those words. They whispered to each other, "That's right! These two lines sounded excellent, but we've never heard of them before!" Then, they all looked toward Lady Nan Xun. Judging from her analysis, they all knew that she might be the one who possessed the highest literary accomplishments in the room.

Even Nan Xun froze up for a moment. Then, she said, "It might be that I am still ignorant and inexperienced, but I have never heard of them either. However, how vast is literature? It might just be that I have not read it all yet."

Her response was carefully given and didn't offend either side. But the more she spoke that way, the more certain people became that the poem didn't exist. Their attention shifted toward Zu An. At first, their gazes had been full of praise, but now, it had been replaced by more ridicule. They wondered just how he had put together the two verses to pretend they came from some famous poet.

Zu An was about to say that it was from Su Dongpo[1], but he suddenly stopped. After all, that person didn't exist in this world, so no one would believe him if he said that name. But that didn't matter; it wasn't a problem for him at all.

"You see, those famous verses were practically all used up by the rest of you, so the leftover verses weren't particularly great. I'd only be defiling Lady Nan Xun's ears by reciting them, so I brought out a verse I wrote in the past. I hope Lady Nan Xun doesn't find it uncomfortable," Zu An said calmly.

What was a so-called plagiarist? What was plagiarizing? If it didn't exist here in the first place, it was purely an output of culture! Zu An thought, I'm sure Mister Dongpo would be happy to see his poetry spread into a different world.

Nan Xun's eyes lit up. "This is a poem that young master Zu created yourself?" Her attitude changed quickly. She even began to use the title 'young master'.

"I've shown Lady Nan Xun a poor side of me," Zu An replied.

He suddenly recalled that many of the Tang and Song dynasties' greatest poems had often been circulated among the pleasure quarters. When a group of scholars lingered around brothels, the ones who could create the most outstanding poems would receive the women's favor.

After all, all of these poems could be recited with music. The most famous courtesans needed high quality poems to improve their reputation and get their names out. In return, those women would serve such men even more carefully. Not only would they not take money, they would instead choose to lose money.

The most famous of them all had been Liu Yong. He had been hated so much by the emperor that he was never allowed an official career, so he could only drink his life away in the pleasure quarters. He had never spent a cent, and it was instead the brothels' women who had raised him.

Liu Yong had lived a destitute and frustrating life, and he hadn't even had money for a burial when he died. In the end, the prostitutes of the city had pooled their money together for his burial...

Pah pah pah! I'll never let myself end up like that! Zu An thought.

"Young master really is a genius!" Nan Xun's eyes flickered brilliantly. She appeared to be full of tender feelings when she looked at him.

The onlookers immediately became overwhelmed with jealousy. Even Bi Ziang, who had been reclining leisurely, couldn't help but sit up. He was about to say something, but he suddenly thought of something else. His attention shifted to Yu Nan, and a smile appeared on his face. With that fellow here, this young master doesn't even have to step out here.

Sure enough, Yu Nan said, "You said you were the one who wrote this poem? It wasn't something plagiarized from someone else as your own?"

That was what everyone else had been thinking as well. After all, Zu An's previous performance really had been a bit...

Zu An's claim really was too hard for them to accept, so they subconsciously chose not to believe it.

Zu An raised his eyebrows. This guy is pretty sharp! But he would never admit to it. Instead, he retorted "If I wasn't the one who made it, were you the one who wrote it then? If someone else had really written this poem, how could it possibly have been hidden for so long? I'm sure it would already have spread throughout the world a long time ago."

Those listening felt his explanation made sense as well. If anyone could write something like this, they would have already been famous a long time ago. There was no way they would wait to let someone else plagiarize them.

Even Yu Nan became uncertain. But when he saw Zu An's smug expression, he felt annoyed. He had to obtain Lady Nan Xun today; he was going to get rid of anyone who stood in his way.

As such, he said coldly, "That's hard to say. Perhaps some down and out scholar gained enlightenment before they passed on, and you just happened to have heard it and took it for yourself."

Yi Zhibing and the others immediately spoke up to support Yu Nan. They all said his claim was reasonable. The others present also nodded, finding the explanation plausible.

Zu An didn't bother arguing and said with a smile, "In my opinion, you're just jealous. As expected, jealousy really changes a person."

Yu Nan's handsome face became somewhat red. He replied, "This young master is jealous of you? Hmph, since you said the poem is yours, where's the rest of it? You should know that, no?"

This world's literary culture hadn't fully matured yet. In his opinion, these two verses would already have used up all of a scholar's talent. Even if it were the original writer, they probably couldn't write anything better, let alone a plagiarist like Zu An.

A smile returned to his face when Yu Nan saw the strange expression on Zu An's face. "What's wrong? Are you going to tell me you didn't have time to write the other verses?"

The maid in the special room remarked excitedly, "Young miss, I was just going to say, how could that Zu guy have any ability? Young master Yu is definitely right."

"You just think he's handsome." The exceptional beauty rolled her eyes and directly exposed the maid. However, her attention was also focused on Zu An; she was curious as to how he'd respond.

Zu An said with a smile, "I did indeed only think of only two verses back then, but since young master Yu is putting me on the spot, I just happened to think up the following verses."

1. Su Shi, courtesy name Zizhan, art name Dongpo, was a Chinese scholar-official who was active as a poet, essayist, calligrapher and painter during the Song dynasty. Su Shi is widely regarded as one of the most accomplished figures in classical Chinese literature, having produced some of the most well-known poems, lyrics, prose, and essays in history. 📖

Chapter 923, Part 2: This Humble Zu Occupies Eight Parts

Yu Nan's expression changed. Bi Ziang rejoiced in Yu Nan's misfortune and added, "Oh? Please, do tell."

"This night's beauty I have only admired once in this life; yet next year, where will I go to appreciate such moonlight?" Zu An recited while looking at Lady Nan Xun.

Nan Xun blushed. She thought to herself, Is he saying that he might not be able to meet with me like this next year? Oh my...

The entire room fell silent when those verses were spoken. The more proficient one was in literary arts, the greater the impact of those words would be.

Even Yu Nan shivered inwardly. He had never treated Zu An as a big deal, but now, he had discovered that Zu An was a formidable opponent.

"This night's beauty I have only admired once in this life; yet next year, where will I go to appreciate such moonlight..." The exceptional beauty in that special room repeated quietly. She suddenly felt as if she were in a different place. Where would she be next year? Would she even be able to appreciate the moonlight then...? She said with a deep sigh, "Ying'er, I miss our home."

The maid named Ying'er replied with reddened eyes, "Young miss, I do too."

...

"Young master has truly written an excellent poem. In just a few words, you have fully portrayed the joys and sorrows of life. I wonder what you will title this verse?" Lady Nan Xun asked curiously

Zu An thought to himself, I'm better at making people wet with my hands. As for the name, hell if I know.[1]

It was already impressive that he had remembered the poem. The exams back then hadn't tested one's knowledge of the title, so of course he wouldn't have bothered memorizing it.

Just as he was about to reply, when he saw Nan Xun's sparkling and expectant eyes, he felt a burst of inspiration and said with a smile, "This poem will be titled Autumn Moon, a present to Nan Xun."

Nan Xun was left in disbelief. She then exclaimed, overjoyed, "Thank you, young master, for your present!"

As a brothel's famous courtesan, she naturally understood the value of an excellent poem. Not only would it make her even more popular in the capital, her reputation would also quickly spread throughout the entire world. More importantly, after centuries and perhaps even a millennium later, if this poem still existed, everyone would remember her name.

How many outstanding figures had there been throughout history? And yet, how many of them could actually leave behind their names? People like Yu Nan might be insufferably arrogant, yet his name might not even be known after a few centuries passed. As for girls who worked in pleasure quarters, that was even more of an impossible dream. And yet, Zu An's poem had accomplished such a thing so easily!

Not only would other girls from the brothels be jealous, the entire world would feel envy, so how could she not feel happy? Her gaze no longer carried its previous indifference when they looked at Zu An; instead, it was filled with tender sentiment.

The woman in the special room above harrumphed. "Hmph, he seems to be pretty good at picking up girls." Despite that, her tone was playful.

The others present were much more emotional when they saw what had happened. All of them glared at Zu An with envy and hatred. None of them had expected Zu An to take this completely different approach. He had actually won the affection of the courtesan queen through a poem! A sour feeling of jealousy immediately spread throughout the place.

Even Zu An's companion Pei You was envious. He was thinking to himself, Why don't I have talent in this field? Otherwise, I could've been the one to embrace the beauty...

Of course, Zu An had saved his life, so not only did he not feel any intense jealousy, he instead felt happy for Zu An. After all, he had no chance of obtaining her, so rather than letting the courtesan go to someone like Yu Nan, he would much rather have her go to Zu An. In a sense, they were keeping the goodies among their own people.

He decided that he was going to walk with his arm around Zu An's shoulders later. That way, even if he could only smell his goddess' fragrance, that would be enough.

Bi Ziang frowned slightly, feeling as if he had messed around a bit too much this time. He had actually ended up helping Zu An get the girl he wanted. He had also wanted Nan Xun no matter what, to the extent that he didn't even care if Yu Nan stood in his way. And yet now, someone he subconsciously viewed as an underling had suddenly risen up and made him feel threatened.

How could he let an underling have a woman he wanted? Hmph, if it's something I want, unless I give it to you, you aren't allowed to go after it, he thought with an indifferent expression. He gave the nearby Yu Nan a smile and said, "Brother Yu, it's been quite some time. I didn't expect you to have suddenly gotten so good at filling a supporting role."

Yu Nan's face darkened. How could he not sense the ridicule in Bi Ziang's words? It now seemed as if everything he had done only made Zu An look even better. He had built up all of that suspense just so Zu An's reputation could rise even further.

That fellow clearly has bad intentions. He's not happy himself, but instead of doing anything, he wants to use me as cannon fodder. Yu Nan wasn't stupid and quickly realized what Bi Ziang was doing. He decided to calm down and be patient for the time being, to wait and see how long Bi Ziang could endure.

But who would have thought that Yi Zhibing would notice Yu Nan's ashen expression and catch onto the fact that he was incredibly displeased from looking bad?

Earlier, Yi Zhibing had volunteered to chase out Zu An's group in a confident and smug manner, and yet he had been forced to return all dejected. Even though no one had said anything when he went back to the private room, there had been a bit of ridicule in their expressions.

He decided to take the chance to help Yu Nan vent his resentment, as well as earn back some dignity for himself. He shouted, "Young master Yu already said that you might have accidentally stumbled upon this poem from someone else. Who knows if they already finished that poem before they died?!"

Yu Nan cursed Yi Zhibing for being an idiot when he heard those words. This buffoon had no idea what was going on right now!

But suddenly, the others all had eyes on Yu Nan. In their eyes, everything Yi Zhibing said represented his intentions. If he refuted those words, it would seem as if he were backing down here, which might become unfavorable in his pursuit of Nan Xun. Not even the glorious young master Yu could afford such a loss, so he could only brace himself and tacitly approve.

He turned around to give Yi Zhibing a look. He wanted to curse this fool to death. If he and Zu An took each other out, the one who would benefit the most would be that Bi clan brat!

But Yi Zhibing misunderstood Yu Nan's look. He thought that Yu Nan was encouraging him and was giving him a look of praise, so he became even more enthusiastic. He made Zu An sound like a despicable and shameless person who had taken advantage of someone else's toil for his own.

Zu An was actually quite amused. Even though this fellow was attacking him without much thought, it was actually pretty much all true. But he felt that the original author probably wouldn't really mind.

Lady Nan Xun became somewhat unhappy before Yi Zhibing could even finish speaking and said, "Young master Yi, those are serious accusations. May I ask if you have any proof?" What kind of joke was this? This was a chance for her name to be left behind in history! How could she let these people ruin such a chance?

Gao Ying and Pei You immediately chimed in, both denouncing Yi Zhibing. They brought up his grudge with Zu An, and how he was only saying such things to get revenge.

“Um... Proof... Of course we have proof...” Yi Zhibing was at a loss for words. He had no idea how to prove what he had said.

Yu Nan frowned. He knew he was already losing. It would be really bad if they continued and he had to suffer another blow to his reputation.

Bi Ziang cursed Yu Nan for being a good-for-nothing when he saw him remain silent. As such, he gestured toward one of his followers. That person quickly picked up his hints and said loudly, “This is easy to prove. Why don’t we just have young master Zu compose a poem right here? As long as it reaches the same level as the previous one, it will prove that young master Zu really is talented.”

Gao Ying couldn't hold in his anger anymore and exclaimed, “How is that fair?! These creative works are usually made through a burst of inspiration. Only when the timing and talent line up can an outstanding work be made; how can you make someone come up with something on the spot?!”

He dabbled in the arts as well, and knew that there weren’t many poems throughout all of history that could compare to what Zu An had come up with. It would already be incredible if one could come up with a single piece of that level; how could one ask for a second one on demand?

Above, Qin Yongde said in confusion, “The one who asked the question was someone from Bi Ziang’s side. Isn’t Zu An someone from the Eastern Palace? Why...”

Qin Guangyuan said with a sneer, “This really is a great example of a femme fatale. Bi Ziang has always been viewed as a protagonist throughout his life. How could he let someone else touch anything he wants? This is the best situation. They can just fight it out and create friction among themselves.”

Nan Xun said quietly, “Young master Zu, you can refuse...”

But before she even finished her sentence, the exceptional beauty in the special room spoke in her head. “Don’t stop him. Let’s see if he’s cheated his way here, or if he really has the skills.”

Nan Xun was surprised. It took all of her willpower to stop herself from looking in the special room’s direction. Why does master care so much about this human?

Zu An replied with a laugh, “But what if I come up with another poem, and you all still continue to bother me like moths? Won’t I get annoyed to death then?”

Seeing that Zu An seemed to have taken the bait, Yi Zhibing was overjoyed and quickly said, “As long as you can come up with a poem of equal level, we’ll all accept it wholeheartedly! We won’t say another word!”

Yu Nan’s expression changed. He could no longer sit still and added, “But it has to be about a prompt of our choosing.”

He was worried that Zu An had picked up more than one poem from who knew what deceased scholar. That was why he made it clear that it had to match the subject. That way, even if Zu An had somehow managed to be so lucky as to pick up two excellent poems, there was no way it would just happen to be of the same topic. It would still be useless then.

Pei You began to panic, exclaiming, “You’re all deliberately making things hard for him!”

Zu An raised his hand and stopped Pei You, saying nonchalantly, "It's fine. Pick whatever topic you want."

He had always been so jealous of those protagonists who showed off their poetry skills. He had never had such a chance himself. He couldn't just grab some guy off the street and ask them to compete in poetry reciting, right? And yet today, someone was eager to play along with him. Why wouldn't he seize the opportunity?

But those words created a huge uproar when the others present heard them. Many people cursed Zu An under their breath for being cocky.

After all, every poet had their own field of expertise. They might be able to write good poems in a certain field, but they would be much more lacking in another. Now that Zu An had said they could choose any topic, didn't that mean he was good at all of them? He had the confidence to write something on any topic that would continue to circulate throughout the ages?

The mysterious woman in the special room above smiled. "This man's boldness and pride are almost on par with our race."

The maid next to her wrinkled her nose. "I think he's just shooting his mouth off. I want to see just how he deals with this situation!"

...

Nan Xun looked worried. She quietly said, "The young master seems to be quite confident."

"Of course." Zu An leisurely reclined into his chair. He raised his wine cup while saying proudly, "If the literary talent of the world is made up of ten parts, this humble Zu occupies eight parts, while everyone else divides the remaining two among themselves."

Since he was going to show off anyway, he might as well go big or go home.

Chapter 924, Part 1: War Song and Killing Intent

The entire place erupted into a commotion when Zu An spoke those words. Only a few people had felt he was being arrogant before, but after hearing his boast, they all thought he was crazy!

You occupy eighty percent of the world's literary talent by yourself? The rest of the world throughout history shares the remaining twenty percent?

Who the hell do you think you are? Not even an emperor would dare speak so arrogantly, right?

Even Gao Ying and Pei You raised their eyebrows. This guy really needs a good beating! Even we kind of want to beat him up!

On the second floor, Bi Ziang's eyes narrowed. Not even all the showing off he had done in his entire life added up together could compare to what Zu An had just done. How could the capital tolerate someone like this?

But he had to admit that what Zu An had said sounded quite imposing. I'm sure it would sound even better if I were the one who said it. Hmph, I'll need to find a chance to steal him from my sister. I'll put him in charge of writing up things for me to say everyday.

The Qin clan brothers looked at each other in dismay. Only after some time did Qin Guangyuan sigh and say, "Isn't Chuyan a clever girl? How did she end up picking up someone like him..."

Qin Yongde said with a chuckle, "Chuyan should come and see just what her man is doing for herself. She might just die from embarrassment."

Yu Nan wasn't surprised to hear Zu An's boast, and felt better instead. After all, what happened so far had really made him look bad, and only made Zu An look even better. And yet, this brat had the nerve to say such crazy words! It was equivalent to throwing everything he had just accumulated away.

As expected, give a poor person sudden wealth and they'll let it get to their heads, he thought. However, it gave him a chance to redeem himself.

"Those are truly bold words!" Yu Nan harrumphed. "I want to see just what kind of incredible poem you can compose for myself..."

Just as Yu Nan was about to provide the topic, Zu An cut him off and said, "Since this is a gathering held by Lady Nan Xun, let's have Lady Nan Xun choose the topic."

"Huh? Me?" Nan Xun was surprised, but also happy. She hadn't expected him to give this task to her. Regardless of how the situation ended, it would greatly raise her reputation.

Zu An looked around with a smile, asking, "Does anyone have any objections?"

"Of course not."

"Lady Nan Xun is talented and gorgeous; I'm sure she can provide an excellent topic."

"Lady Nan Xun is obviously the best choice for suggesting a topic."

The others present struggled to force out a smile. They had come for Lady Nan Xun, so how could they not yield to her here? At the same time, they cursed Zu An for his crafty ways of gaining a girl's favor.

Zu An then gave Yu Nan a look, asking, "What's wrong? Why isn't young master Yu saying anything? Could it be that you're worried, feeling that Lady Nan Xun will help me cheat?"

Yu Nan's eyes twitched. This bastard didn't even let go of this chance to provoke me. "You must be joking. Lady Nan Xun is beautiful and pure like the moon in clear skies; why would she help you practice fraud? Lady Nan Xun, please provide us with the topic."

He had already looked into her background beforehand. She was a courtesan who had risen to fame when Zu An was inside the dungeon. There wasn't much of a chance that the two sides had any relationship. He obviously didn't have to worry about the two of them colluding against him.

"Then I will reluctantly accept," Nan Xun said with a bow. She thought to herself for a moment, wondering what kind of topic was suitable for the occasion. It had to be a topic that wouldn't trouble Zu An too much, but which would also display her own literary talents.

The lips of the mysterious woman in the special room moved. Nan Xun's eyes lit up, then she said, "The State Duke of Triumph is leading our great army north to fight the fiend races, so let's use his expedition as the topic."

Qin Guangyuan revealed an expression of surprise. He nodded inwardly, muttering, "Not bad. I didn't expect a prostitute to still harbor patriotic thoughts."

The others all voiced their approval. They felt that the topic was excellent and perfect for the situation. Once news got out, it would make for a great story too.

Yu Nan also nodded. The topic wasn't too difficult, but handling it well was far from easy. There had been similar poems made throughout successive generations of history, but none of them referred to the current dynasty. He refused to believe that Zu An could surpass the scholars from past dynasties. No matter what kind of poem Zu An came up with, all he had to do was devalue it.

"So it's this kind of topic..." Zu An began to think to himself.

"Is it a bit too difficult?" Nan Xun asked with concern when she saw his change in expression.

"Of course not. It's way too easy." Zu An chuckled. He was actually trying to decide which one he should pick.

After all this time, he shouldn't have remembered too many of his old world's poems. But now that he had reached the peak of the ninth rank, even though he hadn't fully condensed his soul, his mind had become much more powerful than before. He gradually recalled many things he had almost forgotten.

"Nothing more than a shameless boast!" Yu Nan sneered. He didn't say anything else and just waited for Zu An to make a fool of himself.

Zu An gave Gao Ying and Pei You a look, asking, "Which one of you is better at calligraphy?"

Of course, it would have been even better if he drew gorgeous calligraphy himself. Unfortunately, he... understood the limitations of his own handwriting.

The two exchanged a look. Gao Ying said, "Let me do it." He had already guessed Zu An's thoughts. Even though there was a chance that all of them might experience social death together, this man had saved his life. What did any of that matter?

Nan Xun gave a maid by her side a look. The maid left and returned with paper and ink.

The entire place fell silent as those present looked toward Zu An. Some of them had high expectations, while some of them were merely waiting for him to make a fool of himself.

"Let's write the title first." Zu An remained silent for a moment. "Its title will be 'The Sword and the Song—Spirited Ode Dedicated to the State Duke of Triumph'."

The Qin clan brothers were shocked and subconsciously stood up. This poem was actually a gift to their grandfather!

The two of them had been about to make fun of him, but now that they had heard the title, their attitudes suddenly changed. Their expressions turned serious, and they began to hope that Zu An would write something amazing.

Gao Ying had been getting ready to become a social outcast forever, but when he heard the title, he also regained his focus. Just the title alone sounded extraordinary, so the work itself would probably not be far off.

Similar thoughts echoed throughout the minds of the others present. Bi Ziang, who had been leaning leisurely in his seat, subconsciously sat up. He even leaned forward slightly so he could hear Zu An's work better.

Yu Nan also swallowed with difficulty. He suddenly realized that he might be faced with another miserable failure.

Zu An's steady and rhythmic voice resounded through the hall.

"Intoxicated, I turn up the light to inspect my sword; war horns resound when I wake.

Roasted meat enjoyed among the soldiers; morale high as powerful instruments echo.

In autumn, the soldiers prepare for war.

Warhorses gallop at speeds of top steeds; bows twang like thunder as arrows let fly.

With whole-hearted devotion toward the monarch's mission, they aim to reclaim lost land; wills set to leave behind a glorious legacy once they pass on.

Yet sadly, white hair already emerges therefrom."^[1]

At first, there were still some private whispers, but soon, the room fell dead silent as those present looked at the one reciting the poem.

A stern and serious mood filled the place. The onlookers' mouths were open, as if they had many things to say, and yet it was as if there were hands gripping their throats. They didn't know what to say.

Those who were cultivators felt the ki within them surge restlessly, while even those who weren't cultivators felt their blood boil. All of them were ready to go to battle, and didn't want anyone to stop them from making such a choice!

Zu An wasn't surprised to see their reaction. Xin Qiji^[2] was one of history's greatest writers, and 'The Sword and the Song' was known as one of the poems with the greatest warring intent throughout history. It had been considered groundbreaking during the Southern Song Dynasty.

Even though this world's martial skills flourished, its literature was lacking. Xin Qiji's poem would definitely leave a world-shaking impact in the field of poetry.

"Ah Zu, have you been to the battlefield before?" Qin Guangyuan gripped the railing as he asked excitedly. After hearing the poem, the way he addressed Zu An even became more intimate.

Zu An shook his head. "I haven't."

“You haven’t?” Qin Guangyuan was excited. “Then how can you portray the journey of a general so vividly? It’s almost as if I’ve returned to the days when I followed my father and grandfather on the battlefield!”

Zu An thought to himself, The writer Xin Qiji indeed spent some time on the battlefield, but I definitely can’t pretend to have done so! It’s way too easy to fact check that.

Qi Yongde exclaimed in shock, “Then you must be completely self-taught! Ah Zu, you’re an incredible genius!”

The two couldn't be blamed for feeling so excited. When they had heard those words, they felt as if they could hear war horns by their ears, recalling the times they had drawn their swords to cut down their enemies! They had felt as if they were back on the military drill ground, accompanying their father and grandfather amid the glorious scene of inspecting their magnificent army! They also seemed to have returned to the tense and fierce battlefield, sounds of arrows screaming and blades cutting into flesh all around them.

Completing the monarch’s mission and earning a glorious reputation that followed one’s death was the ideal of every soldier, but how many could accomplish that throughout history?

What stirred them up even further was the last line ‘yet sadly, white hair already emerges therefrom’. They recalled how their grandfather was a famous general, and yet because of the battle over the heir, the emperor kept him in the capital to keep an eye on him.

Their grandfather’s dream had always been to fight on the battlefield! And yet, more than half of his life had been wasted in the capital. Now, he was finally able to fight again, but his hair was already white.

A somewhat unusual expression appeared in Lady Nan Xun’s cold eyes. She stared at Zu An in a daze. She blinked intensely and even shivered a bit.

Chapter 924, Part 2: War Song and Killing Intent

Yu Nan was dumbstruck. He had planned to nitpick the poem no matter what Zu An said. After all, literary works were often subjective and didn’t have standard criteria. As long as what he said was logical, he could even make quite a good poem seem worthless.

But that didn’t include absolutely divine works like this! As long as one weren’t a literary idiot, anyone would be able to see the worth of Zu An’s poem. Forget about the scholars of the current age; none of the famous scholars throughout the ages could compare.

If he still insisted on stepping forward, he would only be treated like an utter fool. Someone as proud and arrogant as he would never dare to do such a thing.

Meanwhile, Bi Ziang’s expression darkened. He could tell from the grandeur of the poem that Zu An was definitely not someone who would be content with serving anyone! He might not be able to subdue this vicious tiger. He had to warn his little sister properly so she wouldn’t end up raising a wild tiger.

Gao Ying was so moved that his entire body was shaking. He had already planned to go down with Zu An, but instead, he had been able to personally participate in the creation of such an epoch-marking work!

Even after hundreds of years passed, as long as this poem continued to exist, his name would be mentioned... Wait, they might just say that there was someone who wrote the words on Zu An's behalf. It might not mention my name, he thought. He lowered his head and wrote with tremendous speed.

Pei You also shared in Zu An's spotlight. When he saw the others' looks of awe, he subconsciously stuck out his chest and really wanted to say 'Zu An is my big bro!'. But he was never able to find a suitable time.

Suddenly, he noticed Gao Ying's movements. He was confused at first. Isn't the poem already finished? Why is he still writing? He snuck over and took a look. He saw that Gao Ying had added an annotation stating the date, and that he was the one who had written it in Zu An's place!

"Screw you!" Pei You immediately wanted to blow up. This guy is going that far?

He wanted to scream out of regret. After all, he should have volunteered to be the one who wrote out the poem! Even though his writing wasn't that pretty, as long as he could leave behind his name in history, it wouldn't matter! And yet, who could have thought that Gao Ying, this honest looking fellow, would actually be so cunning?!

The maid in the special room above still wasn't fully convinced. She muttered, "Young miss, even though this poem isn't bad, it's not as great as they're making it out to be, is it?"

The mysterious woman shook her head. "You don't understand. The meaning of this poem isn't only in... Sigh, with how many geniuses the human race produces, when will our race ever be able to revive?"

The maid wanted to ask more, but someone else quickly answered her question. Qin Guangyuan's gaze scanned over those present as he said, "Even though my humble self doesn't understand poetry, I understand life in the army. Ah Zu has made me feel as if I were back on the battlefield with just a few words, and reignited my passion. Just this alone already makes this poem extraordinary. If anyone has any objections to this poem, please speak up now."

Now that he had already spoken up like this, no one else was willing to speak out and make the Qin clan look bad. They all offered their praise toward the poem.

Zu An gave Qin Guangyuan a look of surprise. Wasn't this relative's attitude changing a bit too quickly? Even he was getting thrown off.

Qin Guangyuan said, "That's not all. These impassioned lyrics can be turned into a song by a military specialist and greatly raise our soldiers' morale. One of the most frustrating things to deal with when we fought against the fiend races in the past was their war music. They would make the enemy soldiers enter a frenzy-like state, which sharply raised both their combat prowess and regenerative ability. We suffered bitterly because of that.

"Afterward, the court continued to research war songs. Even though the Royal Academy has already obtained a general idea of how they operate, we still lack suitable lyrics, which makes our songs far inferior to those of the fiend races. But now, with Ah Zu's song, our soldiers' war songs will match the fiend races', and perhaps even rise above them! Our army will be able to experience far fewer sacrifices!"

Qin Guangyuan's eyes were already brimming with tears of excitement. As someone born into a militaristic family, he had a natural sense of empathy for that field.

Only then did everyone realize that Zu An had actually written a revolutionary masterpiece! Their empire didn't excel in literary skills, but rather cultivation. That was why, even if anyone had some accomplishments in the field, their reputation wouldn't be that great. But if his poem could be turned into a war song, then this meant something completely different! His importance in the court would skyrocket, and he might even be sheltered as a strategic talent!

The maid upstairs cried out, "Ah! That guy was this hateful? Should we look for a chance to kill him then? Otherwise, it'll be really bad if we go to war again!"

"He's already created the poem. Unless you kill everyone here, this war song will inevitably be created. Let's keep watching for now." The mysterious woman's eyes flickered with light. To be honest, even she was a bit shaken. After all, who knew if this fellow would continue to create war songs of this level?

Zu An was actually quite surprised as well. Even though he had heard of the military having war songs before, that they had effects similar to formations, he didn't know how the process worked. But now, it seemed quite simple. I know three hundred Tang dynasty poems and so many Song poems. Am I really going to be someone who brings his own BGM wherever he goes?

"This poem was meant as a gift to the State Duke of Triumph. If it can help the imperial court save our soldiers' lives, that's even better." He took the chance to speak up. There was no way he would give up such an amazing opportunity! If his prestige and importance in the military rose, even the emperor and King Qi would feel some hesitation before touching him.

Qin Guangyuan exclaimed with a loud laugh, "Then I'll thank you in advance, in place of my grandfather and the soldiers!"

Gao Ying handed over the written poem upon hearing Qin Guangyuan speak. However, Zu An noticed that Nan Xun's expression was somewhat unnatural. He asked, "Lady Nan Xun, what's wrong? Are you alright?"

"It's nothing. Perhaps young master's lyrics were so fierce that it was a bit difficult for me to adapt to as a girl," Lady Nan Xun said through a forced smile.

Just then, an ear-piercing voice shrieked, "Didn't we tell you to make a poem? Why did you end up making lyrics then?"

Those present raised their heads. The one who had spoken was Yi Zhibing. They subconsciously looked toward Yu Nan, assuming that he was the one who had incited it.

Yu Nan's expression was ashen, and he didn't say anything. Even though Yi Zhibing's intelligence was a bit low, he seemed to have provided an interesting turn of events.

Qin Guangyuan was furious. He exclaimed, "Mister Yi, where did you suddenly get the courage to challenge our Qin clan?!"

Those present scoffed. This Qin Guangyuan really was shameless! You seemed to be looking down on Zu An just a moment ago, but just because he gave you some good lyrics, he's suddenly become a member of your Qin clan?

Yi Zhibing cowered when he saw Qin Guangyuan's intimidating gaze. He gave Yu Nan a look.

Yu Nan cursed the idiot inwardly, but he could only brace himself and reply, "When did Zu An become a member of your Qin clan? According to what I know, the Chu clan's young miss has already severed all relations with him. Furthermore, even if they were still married, Madam Chu's relationship with the State Duke of Triumph was also cut off. As such Zu An can't be considered a member of your Qin clan at all."

Qin Guangyuan frowned. "Yu Nan, even though you have some annoying defects in your personality, I still considered you an open and candid person who would acknowledge your losses. Isn't twisting your words and logic like this going a bit too far?"

Yu Nan smiled and said, "I'll step down gracefully in the field of reciting poetry. Young master Zu is indeed exceptional."

The others nodded inwardly, thinking, Indeed, Yu Nan still has some integrity.

But Yu Nan's attitude quickly changed as he continued, "But he just claimed to possess eighty percent of the world's talent, so our requirement for him obviously has to be different. We agreed for him to make a poem, and yet it became a song. I feel this is a bit disappointing, no?"

Those who were friendly with Yu Nan voiced their agreement. The others didn't care if the drama got out of hand, as they didn't want to see Zu An bring the beauty back. They also chimed in.

Qin Guangyuan frowned. But Zu An had indeed boasted a bit too much just now, so he couldn't even really do much about it. He could only give Zu An a troubled look.

Zu An laughed and retorted, "Didn't we already agree that once I created something else, you wouldn't continue to push the issue? And yet now, there are all these annoying moths flying around. If I make another one, you'll continue to be picky. When will it ever be over?"

Yu Nan said, "I vow on my family name that as long as you can make another poem of similar level to appease everyone, I won't dare say another word. Otherwise, I'll write my surname backward from then on!"

The onlookers' expressions turned serious when they heard Yu Nan's vow. Using one's family name in a vow was no laughing matter. If he really did go back on his word afterward, the entire world would turn against him.

Zu An was also quite startled, but he reacted quickly. The character for Yu in this world was special. Isn't it the same even if you write it backward?!

Bi Ziang roared with laughter. "Brother Yu, aren't you troubling him too much? It would already be quite amazing if someone produced just a single work on that level in their lifetime. Isn't asking him to make another poem of the same level purely causing trouble?"

He sounded as if he were speaking out for Zu An, but in reality, he had ulterior motives. If Zu An really did reject Yu Nan, his claim to possess eighty percent of all literary talent in the world would become blasphemous speech.

Zu An sighed, thinking, These future relatives of mine are all tricky to deal with! Wait, why are there so many of these future in-laws around me?

He said with a smile, "I didn't really want to pay certain people any more attention, but the earlier song's killing intent was a bit too strong and I ended up frightening Lady Nan Xun. In that case, I'll create another one for Lady Nan Xun."

The mysterious woman's expression darkened. She picked up a certain item, and her eyes flashed with killing intent. If he made another similar song, her clansmen would really be done for. Even if she had to risk exposing herself here, she had to eliminate this great disaster for her clan.

Chapter 925, Part 1: Goosebumps

Pei You rushed over excitedly and reached toward the ink and paper in Gao Ying's hands. "Let me write it this time!"

He had missed out on a chance to leave his name behind in history, so there was no way he'd let the opportunity slip past again. He and Gao Ying were the ones with the most confidence in Zu An. When he heard Zu An speaking so confidently, he knew Zu An would create something great again.

Gao Ying quickly pulled back the pen and paper, saying vigilantly, "Your writing isn't anything special, so just let me take care of it. Otherwise, we might end up ruining brother Zu's extraordinary poem."

"I..." Pei You's face turned red. He wanted to retort, but he didn't know where to even start. As such, he could only remain helpless and annoyed. Suddenly, however, he thought of something. He grabbed the ink slab and exclaimed, "Let me make the ink then!"

Gao Ying was speechless. You really are something else!

The others were also stupefied. These two aristocrat kids really are buffoons! They're actually going that far in their bootlicking!

However, they knew that if they had been in that position, they might also fight for the chance to leave behind their names in history. But unfortunately, they didn't know Zu An too well, so they couldn't even offer up their assistance themselves.

The mysterious woman upstairs frowned. The two men were moving about and standing in her way. There were many powerful cultivators present too, so if she failed on the first attempt, there might not be a second chance.

After some hesitation, she decided to give up on taking action immediately. It hadn't been easy for her to get to where she was in the capital. It would obviously be good if she could eliminate this calamity for her race, but if she failed and ended up exposing herself, the gains wouldn't make up for the losses.

If push came to shove, she'd just leave the task to Nan Xun.

Zu An began in a loud and clear voice.

"The braves who face the fiend barbarians are undaunted by perils; five thousand elites in brocaded robes have perished.

Their pitiful remains scatter endlessly across the northern lake, even as wives dream and await their return."

He obviously couldn't use the word 'Huns' from the original poem, so he substituted it with fiend barbarians. As for the lake part, there just happened to be a similarly named lake to the north near the fiend race's borders, so he just used the line as is.

"Their pitiful remains scatter endlessly across the northern lake, even as wives dream and await their return..." The mysterious woman upstairs mouthed the two verses. She slowly lowered her hand, and the killing intent in her eyes gradually faded.

The maid next to her was surprised, asking, "Huh? Are you not going to kill him anymore?"

"I won't. He isn't like ordinary humans," the mysterious woman said slowly. Her eyes were filled with a different expression as she looked at Zu An.

The entire place fell dead silent as those present all pondered the poetry verses. A solemn and stirring battlefield appeared before their eyes, in which many of the court's soldiers pledged their lives to cut down their enemy. In the end, many of them were sacrificed.

The north was cold, and most soldiers only wore cotton-padded clothes. Only the elites would be dressed in brocaded robes, and yet even they lost five thousand of their men. It was easy to imagine the intensity and bitterness of such a battle.

What was most shocking were the last two sentences. 'Their pitiful remains scatter endlessly across the northern lake, even as wives dream and await their return'; the stark contrast was just too intense.

Those present had previously thought that there could be nothing worse than receiving news that one's loved ones had died. But now, it seemed that even though receiving news of one's loved one dying was sorrowful, at least one could hold a memorial service.

However, the scene Zu An portrayed was one of no news for families back home, all year round. The soldiers' wives would long for their husbands' early return in their dreams, and yet they would have no idea that those men had already become withered bones across the northern lake. That stark contrast of hope and despair was the true feeling of tragedy.

Those present felt a powerful feeling surge within them. They wanted to say something, and yet they discovered that anything they could say would seem lackluster in comparison.

Lady Nan Xun's eyes turned red, tears streaming down her face as she looked at Zu An. She said, "Young master, you are too heartless."

If it had been any other time, Pei You would have been overwhelmed with jealousy after seeing the goddess of his dreams look at another man in that way. But now, he instead accepted it wholeheartedly. Big bro Zu is formidable after all!

But he was more concerned about another thing. He quickly moved over to Gao Ying's side. Sure enough, Gao Ying had added his own name! Pei You's eyes widened as he asked, "What about me?"

Gao Ying felt a bit guilty, so he added another line saying, "Ink grinded by Pei You."

Pei You's annoyance changed to happiness. He had finally made it onto that paper!

Bi Ziang's expression changed several times. That kid was actually this frightening! Thank goodness it's only in the field of literature. I should still be able to control him... Right? However, he no longer had the same amount of confidence as before.

On the other hand, Yu Nan's expression paled. His entire body shook uncontrollably. He had never expected that this kid, whom he had just considered a rascal off the streets, would have such literary prowess! Forget about himself, not even the successive generations of scholars could compare to Zu An!

When he recalled everything he had done today, all of it now seemed as if it had only served to set the stage for Zu An. In the end, he had just become a stepping stone for Zu An's rise to fame. He closed his eyes bitterly. He could already imagine that after today, he would become the capital's greatest laughingstock. His name might even be left behind in history... but it wasn't going to be for something good.

What kind of blasted luck was this? He had actually ended up running into a little demon like this?! He was experiencing extreme internal conflict at the moment. Even though he still paid close attention to his etiquette, he still couldn't help but curse at Zu An inwardly.

Yi Zhibing suddenly spoke up again. "How brazen! The court's army has just left for war, and yet you're cursing them to suffer heavy losses? This is a crime punishable by death!"

Yu Nan gave him a blank look. Even though he knew that Yi Zhibing was deliberately causing trouble, he was like a drowning person who wasn't even willing to let go of the last straw.

When they heard Yi Zhibing's words, many people who were close to him echoed their agreement. Several others felt that the poem was a bit inauspicious.

Qin Guangyuan harrumphed and said, "What do any of you understand?! What Ah Zu has described is the great battle from thirty years ago! For various reasons, the court's army suffered severe losses, and there were corpses strewn all across the riverside. Ah Zu is warning us to not repeat that tragedy, that it's actually something that must be given careful thought!"

Zu An was shocked. He hadn't expected the poem to match up with history. It seemed his luck wasn't that bad! The reason he had chosen it was merely to express that he didn't want war anymore. After all, as an ordinary person, he related more to the ordinary soldiers.

Lady Nan Xun's lips parted slightly as she said softly, "This humble one has gained some understanding from this work. I am not sure if I should voice my thoughts."

Those present immediately focused their attention on her. "Lady Nan Xun, please speak your mind!"

Look at all these simps! Zu An thought.

Nan Xun gave Zu An a look and slowly said, "Everyone present is capable and influential, but I am of common birth. As such, I sympathize with the common people's suffering. In war, regardless of who wins or loses, many soldiers lose their lives. They have family and loved ones back home, and yet all this time, no one has spoken of their sorrows. Young master Zu's poem greatly illustrates their bitter lives. I

personally believe that young master Zu is a kindhearted and gentle person, and that apart from the warning that young master Qin has spoken of, the poem should also describe a peaceful and anti-war attitude.” As she spoke, she looked at Zu An with an expectant gaze.

Zu An was quite shocked. This courtesan really did know some stuff! He nodded and said, “Indeed, there was such a message.”

Someone like Zu An who came from a peaceful era really had no interest in war. For flesh and blood to fly, for countless people to lose their lives, all for the sake of the prestige and honor of a few people—what meaning was there in something like that?

The mysterious woman grinned. “As expected!” She thought, This man is quite interesting.

But many others didn’t think the same way. They said with a smile, “He is a scholar through and through after all.”

“Lady Nan Xun is too kind. The fiend races are savages. If you don’t kill them, they’ll only kill more of us!”

“Indeed, this battle only began because the fiend races slaughtered our city. Speaking of peace with them is just being inflexible in one’s thinking!”

...

The others present pretty much had similar thoughts. After all, the Zhou Dynasty had been founded on martial might. They had waged war in all directions and defeated enemies from all sides. These men came from prestigious clans, so they would always prioritize gaining achievements. They naturally didn’t sympathize much with ordinary people.

The mysterious woman harrumphed. “All of them are truly hateful!”

The maid next to her also huffed and exclaimed, “Exactly! How about we just kill them all?!”

The mysterious woman gave her a look and said, “Sure, I’ll give you a sword. Why don’t you go and do it?”

The maid pouted and said, “There’s no way I could do that...”

The mysterious woman chuckled and replied, “So you knew that, hm? Then stop blabbering about such unrealistic nonsense.”

...

Even though the onlookers felt that Zu An was a bit too meek and weak-willed, they had to admit that his poems were excellent.

Now, they didn’t even feel as if his prior boasting about having eighty percent of the world’s literary talent had been too much. Forget about the entire world in the present, there was no one from past generations who had talent comparable to Zu An.

With the Qin clan brothers stepping forward to defend Zu An, and Lady Nan Xun's praise on top of that, Yu Nan could only stop Yi Zhibing from continuing. With how things were, it would be useless even if they said anything else. It would only serve to tarnish their reputation further.

Lady Nan Xun's ears moved slightly, as if she had heard something. She was shocked inwardly, but she didn't show it on the surface.

Chapter 925, Part 2: Goosebumps

Instead, Nan Xun looked at Zu An with her mystical eyes. Her usually cold and arrogant expression now contained a somewhat mysterious intent. She said, "Young master Zu, I like this poem a lot. Can you give it to me?"

Zu An chuckled and asked, "Then what will the lady give me in return?" Agreeing immediately to what a woman asked for wasn't something a true king of the ladies would do.

The others present cursed inwardly and berated Zu An inwardly for being shameless. Even though they all admired his literary talent, none of them were willing to give up that easily when it involved 'their' woman.

Nan Xun blushed and replied, "Then... I wonder what the young master wants?"

As someone who worked in the pleasure quarters, she also excelled in song and dance. As such, her response was brilliant. It sounded like an agreement, and yet she didn't actually agree to anything, putting her in a comfortable spot to either advance or retreat.

Zu An looked her in the eyes. There was a mischievous expression on his face as he began, "I want you..."

Even Gao Ying and Pei You shot him a sidelong glance when they heard those words. Why does this guy have to be such an asshole?!

The others found it even harder to accept. They all denounced Zu An for being rude, and they would have thrown eggs at him already if they had any.

The mysterious woman harrumphed. "He really is a pervert!"

Zu An accepted all of their Rage points with a big smile on his face. This was a win-win situation!

Lady Nan Xun blushed even more, saying, "This humble girl also wishes to agree to young master's request, but so many guests have come to visit me today. We still have the rest of the evening, so I do not dare make a choice too early..."

Zu An praised her for her skills inwardly. This woman was quite formidable at keeping men on the edge. She was just like those girls who had backup guys lined up. They would lead one on with all sorts of excuses and make one think that one had gotten close, but upon trying to take that step one would merely discover that there was actually a huge chasm in the way.

But he had already come prepared, and finished, "I only wanted you to remove the mask covering your face. What was the lady thinking?"

Nan Xun was stunned. Only then did she realize that she had been played. She shot Zu An an annoyed look. A woman might not remember a man who made her laugh, but she would definitely remember a man who made her experience a storm of emotions.

The others who had been cursing Zu An immediately changed their tune. They began to voice their support toward Zu An, because they wanted to see her without her mask too.

Nan Xun looked stricken, but she reacted quickly as well. She replied, sounding aggrieved,, “I only planned to show my face to one person alone.”

Zu An said with a smile, “I won’t mind if you let the others see.”

Nan Xun was speechless.

The others thought to themselves, This Zu An really is shameless! Lady Nan Xun was clearly saying that she was going to show herself to the chosen one tonight, and yet you’ve actually put yourself in that spot already?

Nan Xun seemed to have heard something. A hint of bitterness flashed through her eyes, but then she said, “I suppose I have to agree to the young master’s request, then.”

The entire place erupted into a commotion. Many people even whistled at Nan Xun. They had thought that Nan Xun might refuse, and yet she actually agreed! They had really wanted to see her full face, and yet they were worried that she might have really already chosen Zu An to be her personal guest. How could they even describe what they were feeling just then?

Zu An thought, One time, I saw the username, ‘want to date but scared to go all the way’. That’s a pretty good description of their current state.

“But I am only going to show young master alone,” Nan Xun said quietly. Then, she undid her veil, revealing the expression of displeasure on her lovable face. Her snow-white skin was spotless, paired with a fine nose and beautiful red lips. Together with her gorgeous face, her entire appearance really was a work of art.

Gao Ying and Pei You, who had been standing near Zu An, began breathing heavily. Their eyes widened. It wasn’t that they had never met beauties of her level, as the crown princess wasn’t inferior to her at all. However, this courtesan had had so much hype built around her, and the two of them had already dreamed about her for so long. When they saw her, they could only perceive her as even more beautiful than she really was. It was to the extent where she had practically become the most beautiful person they had ever seen.

They sighed. Unfortunately, she favored big bro Zu. Otherwise, they would be racking their brains on how to take this woman home, even if they had to use their family backgrounds to achieve it.

Both of them woke up a bit when they thought of that, feeling as if they had bitten down on sour lemons. They couldn’t help but look at Zu An. But they quickly saw that Zu An’s mouth was open even wider than theirs; he looked stupefied. They immediately felt much calmer when they saw him.

Big bro Zu, you need to work on your willpower, man. How can you end up like that just because you saw someone beautiful?

Isn't Chu First Miss, your wife, also an exceptional beauty? Why are you like this right now?

...

While the two of them were criticizing Zu An, Zu An was overwhelmed with shock. He finally knew why this woman looked a bit familiar! It was because he had just seen her face two days ago! Moreover, it was a face he had almost been in reach of!

However, it had been in King Qi Manor, inside King Qi concubine's coffin! This courtesan looked almost exactly the same as King Qi's concubine! The biggest difference was that the complexion of the woman in the coffin was pale, while this woman's face was rosy.

No wonder I thought she was familiar! Who would associate a popular courtesan in the capital with a dead person? No wonder everyone felt as if she had a noble air to her, and that it wasn't fake. Of course King Qi's freaking concubine would seem refined!

At that moment, countless possibilities flew through Zu An's brain. He couldn't believe that two people with such similar faces had absolutely nothing to do with each other. Is this woman that concubine's twin sister? Or maybe she's the concubine's ghost?

When he thought of that possibility, even though there were bright lights all around him, Zu An felt a chill run down his back. He had been a cultivator for some time, but he had never experienced something so bizarre before.

He had met ghosts before in dungeons, but they were all monstrous existences. To a certain extent, this woman in front of him was an acquaintance, so it made him feel as if he were going through the plot of one of those horror films.

The other men also rushed over in his direction. Zu An's group was seated in an isolated corner, and Nan Xun had deliberately turned her back to the rest when she undid her mask, so only their group saw her appearance. The others couldn't hold back their curiosity and couldn't be bothered with etiquette. After all, most of them were already bound to fail, so they would be satisfied if they could even get a glimpse of Lady Nan Xun's face. As such, they all left their seats and rushed over toward Zu An's table. However, Nan Xun reacted quickly as well and swiftly replaced her veil.

But Zu An's reaction left her surprised. She asked, "Did my humble appearance frighten the young master?" Her voice carried a bit of resentment.

If it were any other man, they would have immediately felt their bodies go weak and frantically apologized. But Zu An just felt all the hairs on his body stand up. However, he had experienced his fair share of daunting experiences, so he was able to quickly calm himself down. He said with a smile, "The lady must be joking. If even such beauty qualifies as a humble appearance, can there be any beautiful people left in this world?"

Nan Xun said with a smile, "Young master is too kind with your praise."

The others weren't able to see Nan Xun's true appearance even after rushing over, and they instead saw her giggling at Zu An's words. It was as if they had been forced to watch a couple engage in PDA. Their gazes were full of jealousy as they glared at Zu An.

But Zu An wasn't in the mood to pay attention to the incoming Rage points. Instead, his thoughts were moving quickly. Was the concubine's death faked then? But who was the woman in the coffin?

After all, he hadn't examined the corpse's face out of respect for the dead. There was a chance that it wasn't really her. But no matter how they changed the face, there was no way they could change it so well or so easily! After all, Sang Qien had even examined the body. If there had been something wrong with the corpse's face, she would have noticed something.

Zu An was stumped. If the concubine isn't dead, things really are interesting now. She was a concubine, and yet she's also a courtesan in this brothel. King Qi really is getting cucked from all kinds of different angles...

He suddenly recalled a piece of news from his past world. There had been a male celebrity who was arrested for sleeping with a prostitute, after which all manner of information about that prostitute suddenly appeared on the internet. Everyone wanted to know just how pretty that prostitute had to be, that even a celebrity wouldn't be able to hold himself back! The various sources proved that the girl really was pretty, but charged more than a thousand dollars a night.

Then, another scoop from the victim's side revealed that the girl was actually his friend's girlfriend! It had originally been a tragic story, but someone had suggested something else. Didn't that mean the friend who was dating that girl had been making a thousand dollars every night?

With Nan Xun's reputation in the capital, just how much did King Qi make every night?

...

While Zu An was lost in his own thoughts, Lady Nan Xun returned to her stage on the second floor. Then, she played another round of drinking games.

But after Zu An's ridiculous performance, the others' spirits couldn't help but wane. After all, if they recited the poetry of others now, not only would they not seem all that special, it would only make Zu An look even better.

Soon afterward, Nan Xun found an excuse to leave.

Those present immediately straightened up. They knew that she might have already chosen her special guest. Even though the odds of them being chosen weren't high, they could still dream. What if Lady Nan Xun decided to make an unexpected choice?

Chapter 926, Part 1: Bag of Evil

A while later, a maid came out and declared, "Young master Zu, young master Bi, and young master Yu, please come inside for a chat. As for all of the other young masters, we have prepared some people to take care of you..."

A commotion broke out as soon as the result was announced. Those present had known that there would be several rounds of selections this time. For example, the invitation card in the beginning was a test of background and wealth, and then the drinking games were the second round of evaluation. After all, no courtesan wanted to choose a crass man; it had to be someone who was a bit more refined. Then, there would be a third round, but none of them knew what was going to be tested.

Bi Ziang and Zu An being chosen was within the crowd's expectations. Bi Ziang's reputation in recent years was just too great. Zu An's performance earlier had also just been too outstanding. Their selection made sense.

But why had Yu Nan been chosen? He had practically been slapped across the face by Zu An, yet he still had the qualifications to head on inside? Was it just because of his background? Just because he was handsome?

The maid seemed to have predicted that the announcement would rouse the crowd. She explained with a smile, "Everyone, please calm down. The evaluation criterion was the performance during the drinking game. Young master Yu's literary skills were remarkable, which was why he was chosen."

But the implication behind her statement was also clear. Even though Yu Nan had been completely humiliated in his contest against Zu An afterward, that hadn't been taken into consideration for the evaluation.

Yu Nan also had a group of fans, such as Yi Zhibing and the others. They immediately voiced their support when they heard the announcement. Afterward, Yu Nan got up and patted down his clothes, following the maid into the inner hall expressionlessly.

But in truth, he was burning with shame inside. Being chosen was originally supposed to be something natural and expected for him; how could he have anticipated all of these annoyances? Now it almost seemed as if his acceptance had been out of charity! It's all Zu An's fault!

You have successfully trolled Yu Nan for +444 +444 +444...

But in his position, there was no need to be rash and storm off out of pride. Since he had made it to the next round, as long as this woman became his in the end, that would fully wash away all of the humiliation he had experienced so far. Rather, he would be a bigger laughingstock if he left out of anger.

On the other hand, Bi Ziang had a broad smile as he walked in confidently. He was actually fully enjoying himself. Yu Nan had been an old adversary of his, yet he had ended up being embarrassed so badly today! Once they were inside, Bi Ziang planned to knock him down another peg.

Meanwhile, Gao Ying and Pei You saw Zu An off. They both voiced their encouragement.

Pei You said gravely, "Big bro Zu, I'll leave my Lady Nan Xun to you. You have to bring her back! Otherwise, I'll feel terrible if another man gets her."

Zu An was speechless. When did Nan Xun become yours? Also, this grief and indignation... Don't tell me you're one of those rumored self-cucks?

Gao Ying controlled himself much better. Even though he admired Lady Nan Xun, it wasn't to the point that he was completely infatuated. Furthermore, he had known that he wouldn't have much of a chance today anyway. He patted Zu An's shoulder and said, "Brother Zu, do it well later, for our share too."

Zu An was speechless. What the hell do you mean, do it for your share? Who could've thought this straight-faced bastard had this passionate side to him too...

The Qin clan brothers walked over, smiling.

“Ah Zu, we have high expectations for you.”

“I feel the same way. The Yu and Bi bastards are usually so arrogant, so I really want to see the two of them losing to you.”

The two brothers didn't have much literary talent. They already knew their limitations after the first round of drinking games. Furthermore, as heirs to a military clan, they didn't have any obsessive infatuation toward Nan Xun either.

“Haha, I'll do it with everything I have,” Zu An replied with a smile.

The three of them had been chatting happily, but their smiles suddenly froze. They suddenly recalled Zu An and Chu Chuyan's relationship. Were there any big brothers who encouraged their brothers-in-law to seek out courtesans? They both looked away when they realized that and made an excuse to leave. They didn't give Zu An any more encouragement.

Zu An followed the maid into the inner hall. The inner hall's layout was elegant, and a sweet scent filled the air. The sweet smell wasn't cloying at all, and was instead a fine fragrance.

Bi Ziang and Yu Nan had arrived in the room before him. They stood in the room, admiring the calligraphy on the wall and the interior decorations. The two of them subconsciously sighed with praise. Lady Nan Xun has quite expensive tastes.

After all, they came from the best clans in the Zhou Dynasty, so they had rather rich tastes. They could immediately distinguish between fake and real class. Nan Xun seemed less like a courtesan from a brothel than a concubine in the imperial palace! A strange expression appeared in both of their gazes when that thought emerged. Their desire grew stronger and stronger.

The maid said with a smile, “Young masters, please take your seats first. My lady will come out once she changes her outfit.”

There was a small table at the center, with some fine dishes that had been prepared in advance. However, the two definitely hadn't come all the way here to drink and eat. Furthermore, with their status, they were also worried that someone might have messed with the food.

Zu An was the only one without such misgivings. He sat down comfortably and picked up a pair of chopsticks, commenting on which dishes were good and which dishes were bad as he went through them.

Is he not scared of being poisoned? Bi Ziang was surprised. He naturally didn't know that Zu An had poison immunity, but he also admired this fellow's boldness. He felt even he was lacking a bit in that aspect compared to Zu An.

Just a nobody without any class. Yu Nan sneered inwardly. Lady Nan Xun might just be observing them right now. Zu An's behavior would definitely do a number on his image.

A while later, Zu An couldn't help but grumble, “Why does it take that long to change clothes?” He cursed inwardly. Don't tell me Lady Nan Xun will come out in a see-through dress?

“I've made the young masters wait.” Accompanied by the light clinking of numerous waist decorations, Lady Nan Xun slowly walked out.

The men's eyes lit up. She was no longer dressed in the gorgeous, glistening dress she had worn outside, and had instead chosen a simple yet elegant indoor dress. She didn't carry any of a prostitute's frivolousness, but rather gave off a distinguished and noble aura.

"Lady Nan Xun is too hard on herself. Observing your room's decorations was interesting in itself, and time quickly passed. It wasn't a difficult wait at all," Yu Nan said calmly, trying to redeem some of the poor impressions Nan Xun might have had about him from before. At the same time, there was a clear unspoken implication that he was different from a boorish man like Zu An.

Zu An wasn't someone who would let such a thing slide. He laughed and retorted, "Why are you so interested in the layout of a girl's personal room? It makes you look like an inexperienced fool."

"I... You're talking nonsense!" Yu Nan's face immediately reddened. He hadn't expected Zu An's retaliation to be so fierce and ruthless, immediately making him out to be a pervert.

You have successfully trolled Yu Nan for +666 Rage points!

A big smile emerged on Bi Ziang's face. At the same time, he thanked the heavens that he hadn't spoken first. He had actually wanted to say something similar to Yu Nan, and if he had, he would have been the one labeled a pervert.

Nan Xun quickly spoke up to help resolve the dispute. "It is all my fault for taking too long to change my clothes. Everyone, please be seated. I will drink three glasses as an apology." Then, she sat down by Zu An's side. When Bi Ziang saw that, he immediately sat down on her other side.

Yu Nan was stunned. Lady Nan Xun's left and right were already taken, so only one spot was left for him. You bastards!

Zu An didn't feel like paying him any attention and instead looked at Nan Xun with a curious expression. The veil continued to hide her face. Is that because she's scared that Yu Nan and Bi Ziang might recognize her as King Qi's concubine?

However, based on his investigation, he knew that King Qi's concubine rarely appeared in public. Almost no one had seen her real appearance before. The one who had received guests was always King Qi's main wife. The concubine didn't even have the qualifications to make an appearance.

Wait, even if they never saw her before, they're in close contact with King Qi. It would still be safer to wear a mask.

Now that they were so close to each other, Zu An had to admit that she was an incredible beauty. Her long and fair neck, her thin and slim waist, her voluptuous curves... Bigger is justice!

Lady Nan Xun said with a smile, "Even though my humble self only has a background from the pleasure quarters, I am still a lady. Being stared at by young masters like this still makes me feel a bit embarrassed..."

Bi Ziang said with a laugh, "Ah Zu, you've been rude to the beauty. How about you drink a glass as punishment?"

He was worried that it might be awkward if he called Zu An by his full name, so he used the more intimate address. He had already heard the Qin clan brothers call him that, and he believed they had a

certain relationship because of his younger sister. As such, he used the nickname to pull their relationship closer.

Sure enough, Zu An didn't lash out the way he had with Yu Nan and instead said with a smile, "Young master Bi is right. I'll drink a glass then."

Bi Ziang sighed in relief inwardly. He's my little sister's loyal dog after all. I guess I don't have to worry.

However, Zu An thought, I have to give this relative some respect here, right? Otherwise, Linglong might start throwing a tantrum... I'll be getting myself into a huge mess otherwise...

Yu Nan frowned. It'll be bad for me if these two team up here.

Bi Ziang asked, "Lady Nan Xun, we aren't just going to be drinking here, right?"

Chapter 926, Part 2: Bag of Evil

As Zu An had shown him some courtesy, Bi Ziang became more and more confident. He gradually began to take control of the situation. This time, even Yu Nan's ears pricked up. They all knew that there was another round of selections, but they didn't know what was going to be evaluated.

Lady Nan Xun clapped her hands. Two maids came out, each with a tray in hand. She removed a large crystal ball-like object from one of the trays and placed it on the table. Then she said, "Just drinking wouldn't be much fun, so how about we play a game? This game's name is 'truth or dare'."

Zu An had a strange look as he remarked, "Every other variable changed, but this remains a constant?"

Nan Xun was completely confused. The other two individuals also looked at him in confusion. "What is young master Zu talking about?" Nan Xun asked, puzzled.

"Nothing." Zu An chuckled. He almost thought he had somehow managed to cross spacetime to return to his hometown, so he had just thrown that out there to get a reaction. Unfortunately, he got all excited for nothing.

Nan Xun then explained, "For women like us who have had to experience the harsher sides of life, the rarest thing to find is a sincere heart. That is why I hope I can find someone sincere through this game..."

Then, she explained the game's rules. It was pretty much the same as truth or dare in Zu An's original world. She pointed at a chest that had been brought over by a maid and said, "Young masters, please take a slip of paper from this chest. There are all kinds of questions written on the slips of paper."

Then, she pointed at the crystal ball on the table. "This is a magical artifact we purchased from the Royal Academy for a high price. Please place your hand on the ball when you reply. If you tell a lie, it will shine with red light. If that happens, please drink three glasses as punishment."

Zu An knew that there was something sketchy about her true identity. His first reaction when he heard about the game was that she was taking the chance to get information.

Sure enough, Yu Nan and Bi Ziang both frowned. Their identities were sensitive, so they subconsciously felt some rejection toward such a game.

Perhaps Nan Xun sensed their misgivings, as she said with a smile, "Please do not feel too worried. If there are any questions you do not wish to answer, you can just choose to skip them. You can drink, or you can do a dare. As for what the dare is, we will have the one who goes before you decide.

Yu Nan and Bi Ziang both sighed in relief. They said with a smile, "This game seems quite interesting."

They both took the chance to shower Nan Xun in praise. Zu An had an ambiguous smile, however. These two probably had no idea what was waiting for them with this game. When Zu An saw that Yu Nan was going after him based on their order, a warm and friendly smile appeared on his face.

Then, the game quickly began. Bi Ziang was the first to choose a slip. He had always been someone who preferred to be number one in everything to begin with.

'What are the three things you are most scared of?'

Bi Ziang laughed out loud when he read the slip. He placed his hand on the crystal ball and said, "I have never feared anything."

The others' eyes shifted toward the crystal ball, as an alarming red light appeared in it.

Bi Ziang's expression changed. Don't tell me there really is something I'm scared of that I'm not even aware of?

Nan Xun said with a smile, "Young master Bi, you need to drink as punishment." She personally poured out three cups for him.

"I guess I do need this punishment." Bi Ziang laughed. With his nature, he wouldn't act shamelessly and refuse to acknowledge his failure. He picked up the first glass and drained it in one gulp.

However, he coughed intensely, his entire face turning red. He looked at the wine glass in shock, exclaiming, "What kind of alcohol is this?"

Nan Xun said with a smile, "This alcohol is a bit stronger than normal alcohol."

Meanwhile, Yu Nan said with a big smile, "Brother Bi usually holds your alcohol well, but it seems you're having some trouble with three cups today?"

"Brother Yu must be joking." Bi Ziang was angry inside, but he didn't let it show on the surface. He picked up the other two cups and finished each of them in one gulp too. He immediately transferred his ki to get rid of the churning feeling inside his stomach.

He finally realized that the game might not be so easy. If he continued to drink this kind of alcohol, he really would get drunk quickly. And in order to drink less, he had to speak the truth. He suddenly thought of something, and decided not to tell the other two the true strength of the drink. He wanted to see them suffer too.

He took a moment to calm down, then gave the courtesan a look. "Lady Nan Xun, how about you join us too? Otherwise, it's a bit too dull for just men to be playing this together."

The three men present reached a rare agreement upon hearing Bi Ziang's suggestion.

Nan Xun didn't refuse the suggestion. She took out a slip of paper from the trunk as well.

‘Do you have a hidden premonition regarding how you might die in the future?’

Her expression changed when she saw the question.

Yu Nan and Bi Ziang smiled and asked, “Why did Lady Nan Xun prepare a question like this?” Only Zu An had an inkling toward the real reason, however.

Nan Xun quickly sorted out her thoughts and placed her fair hand on the crystal ball, saying, “I have a feeling that I will be killed by a heartless man.” The crystal ball didn’t show any reaction during the entire process. That meant what she said was the truth.

Why does she have such a weird premonition? Bi Ziang and Yu Nan both frowned. The atmosphere had suddenly become a bit serious.

Nan Xun looked toward Zu An, who was next to her. “Young master Zu, it is your turn now.”

Sure enough, Bi Ziang and Yu Nan’s attention was diverted. They both looked at Zu An to see how he was going to deal with the situation.

Zu An reached into the chest, not worried at all. He pulled out a strip of paper.

‘How would you describe yourself if you had to use three words?’

“Tall, rich, and handsome!” he blurted out without even thinking. The word limit was too low. If he could use five words, he would have used an idiom that also talked about his gentleness and how he had the stamina of a donkey.

Bi Ziang and Yu Nan almost burst out laughing. Even though it was the first time they had heard of the phrase, they were smart people and picked up on the meaning. Even someone like you dares to claim to be such a Mr. Perfect in front of us?

The two of them looked at the crystal ball with mocking expressions on their faces, ready to see red light. But in the end, the ball didn’t react at all. That meant what Zu An said was the truth! The two of them began to question life. Is this crystal ball broken?

It was Yu Nan’s turn next. He figured that the two people before him hadn’t gotten hard questions, so he pulled out a paper slip in a relaxed manner.

‘What kinds of ‘unique’ addictions do you have in your day-to-day life?’

He almost cursed out loud when he saw the question. Why are everyone else’s questions so easy, but mine is so hard?

Bi Ziang and Zu An were having a great time watching him suffer. You pulled that prompt, so the fault is completely yours.

Yu Nan thought for a bit, then said, “I’ll drink.” How could he tell them something so humiliating? Rather than coming up with something and still having to drink anyway, he might as well just drink now.

Nan Xun poured three cups for him with a smile. Yu Nan picked up the first cup and drained it in one gulp. Then, his eyes widened. With a ‘Pu!’, he sprayed the alcohol all over the ground, exclaiming, “What kind of alcohol is this? Why is it so strong?!”

Nan Xun replied, "This is a famous wine that was brought back from the northern fiend races. It is called Heaven's Burn. It is known for its strength."

Bi Ziang laughed out loud. "Young master Yu must be feeling weak lately! You couldn't even drink such a small cup?" Yu Nan had just mocked him moments before, so he could now return the favor several times over.

Yu Nan shot him a look. He suddenly knew why the other party hadn't said anything on purpose. Bi Ziang had been waiting to see him make a fool of himself! He forced himself to endure the awful feeling, and drank all three cups. A flame burned fiercely inside him, and his mouth felt as if he could breathe fire.

Afterward, it was Bi Ziang's turn to pull a paper slip again.

'If there were a crystal ball that could tell you everything about yourself, life, or the future, what would you want to know?'

He thought for a bit and said, "Whether immortality really exists."

The others were quiet when they heard his answer. Even after all these years, there were still so many incredible geniuses who had sought after immortality, yet none of them had ever succeeded.

Nan Xun pulled another slip.

'Do you have a sweetheart? Who is it?'

It was now Bi Ziang and Yu Nan's turn to be interested. Only Zu An seemed to have already realized something.

"I still do not have one," Nan Xun answered with a smile.

The two young masters sighed in relief when they saw no response from the crystal ball. She still doesn't have anyone, so our performance from now on is going to be extremely important.

Zu An picked another question.

'What is your most memorable experience?'

He thought for a bit and answered, "The dungeon trip."

The others subconsciously thought of his answer as being about his experience in the academy's dungeon. Bi Ziang frowned. Why does he treasure that so much? Don't tell me that something happened between him and my little sister?

But he immediately rejected this thought as soon as it appeared. Who was his little sister? Furthermore, she had always been a proud and arrogant person. How could she possibly like someone like Zu An?

Yu Nan took the chance to ask, "May I ask what kind of wonderful experience you went through inside for you to cherish it so much?"

Zu An smiled and refused to comment, saying, "Young master Yu, that's another question."

Yu Nan harrumphed when he saw he wouldn't get an answer. He chose his own question.

‘What is your worst memory?’

Yu Nan didn’t hesitate to say, “What happened here earlier.”

The others knew that he was talking about what had happened outside. They couldn’t help but smile. Zu An was smiling even more happily than the rest. You’re still too young! Don’t worry, this worst memory will soon be replaced.

With the brief interlude, the mood became more exciting again.

After a few more rounds, Zu An suggested, “These topics are too vague. How about we stop picking strips and instead ask each other questions?”

Nan Xun’s eyes lit up. She was the first one to agree. “That sounds like a great idea. It will definitely be interesting.” She had wanted to take the chance to find out some secrets about the three men. The new version of the game would definitely be even better.

Bi Ziang and Yu Nan hesitated. If they had started with that, they definitely wouldn’t have agreed. But now that they were a bit tipsy and the atmosphere was intense, neither one of them wanted to look bad in front of their Lady Nan Xun, so they tacitly agreed.

The mysterious woman, who had been listening in on everything from next door, grinned and remarked, “That guy is probably plotting something, but I want to see what he plans to do too.”

Chapter 927, Part 1: Winner Takes All

This time, Yu Nan was the first one to ask a question. He looked at Bi Ziang and asked after a brief pause, “What is Ziang’s cultivation rank now?”

Bi Ziang had all kinds of dazzling stories surrounding him. After a certain point, no one actually knew what his true cultivation was.

As someone from the other faction, Yu Nan naturally wanted to take the chance to scout out more information. Even Lady Nan Xun’s eyes lit up. She was also curious about that. Only Zu An alone didn’t really care. Bi Ziang’s cultivation level didn’t matter, since it wouldn’t be higher than his own.

Bi Ziang’s eyes narrowed. He said with a smile, “Why doesn’t Brother Yu visit me and test it out another day?” He clearly didn’t intend to reveal his own trump cards yet.

Naturally, Yu Nan wasn’t happy with the reply and immediately urged him to drink. Bi Ziang knew that his answer was lackluster, so he didn’t refuse and drank. After he finished the three cups, his fair complexion became somewhat rosier. The alcohol was so strong that even though their cultivation ranks weren’t low, the participants were starting to break down.

It was Bi Ziang’s turn to ask a question. He looked at the beautiful courtesan while feeling tipsy, saying, “Lady Nan Xun, it’s my turn now...”

Nan Xun smiled and said, “Please ask, young master Bi. I will speak without holding anything back.”

Bi Ziang’s gaze swept over her body and he asked, “Which part of your body is Lady Nan Xun most satisfied with?”

The mood was getting more and more intense. Between that and the alcohol, his question had also become more aggressive.

Of course, if the other party had been a girl from a distinguished house, he would never ask such a question. But Nan Xun was a prostitute, so not only was the question not going too far, it would even stir her up a bit. After all, the way he usually carried himself made him a bit aloof and remote, so she might otherwise consider him unapproachable.

The other men also started to check out Nan Xun's curves and came up with their own answers.

Ass!

Big chests are justice!

A light blush appeared on Nan Xun's face. After thinking for a moment, she said, "It is probably my disposition."

This answer was clearly not what the men wanted to hear. They immediately voiced their complaints.

But Zu An sighed inwardly. These courtesans were good at singing and dancing, so such an answer was completely suitable. However, his true feelings were beside the point; he still had to urge her to drink. He wanted to see if the alcohol would make Nan Xun accidentally reveal any openings.

After having downed three cups of alcohol, a blush emerged on Nan Xun's face, making her look even more tender and beautiful. It became Zu An's turn to be confused. Were his suspicions wrong?

Nan Xun looked at Zu An with a pensive expression and said, "Young master Zu, it's my turn to ask you a question now." Hmph, you were the one who urged me to drink the most! The tide has now turned.

"Please ask away, my lady." Zu An didn't seem worried at all. He was probably the one who had played the game the most out of all of them. He refused to believe that with the imagination of the people in this world, they could possibly ask him anything too difficult.

Nan Xun stared at him with her beautiful eyes and asked, "When was the last time you last kissed a girl, and who did you kiss?"

Zu An's expression changed. I shouldn't be setting damn flags for myself! He calmly picked up his cup and said, "I'll drink."

He finished the three cups one after another. He finally knew why Bi Ziang and Yu Nan had reacted the way they did. This alcohol was indeed strong, stronger than any vodka he had ever drunk in his previous world. It was like pouring straight alcohol down his throat!

There were too many cultivators in this world, and their constitutions were better than those of ordinary people. The alcohol they brewed would thus naturally be different from his previous world too. This was a drink catered to cultivators.

The others were confused. This wasn't a hard question to answer, so why had he refused? After all, it was natural for men in this world to have three wives and four concubines. No one would think of one as trash just for having kissed a girl, and people would instead think of one a charming person.

The only reason he would choose to drink would be because he couldn't reveal that woman's identity. As such, the others began to guess who that woman could possibly be.

Bi Ziang frowned. It's not my little sister, is it? But he immediately shook his head and threw away that absurd thought.

Zu An looked at Yu Nan and said with a chuckle, "You seemed to be smiling a bit too happily just a moment ago..."

Yu Nan's expression changed. "Am I not allowed to smile? I'm only following the rules of the game. You also..."

Zu An cut him off. "Don't worry, I'll play the game by its rules too. For example, it's now my turn to ask you something..." He deliberately dragged out his words, his eyes roaming across Yu Nan's body. Yu Nan was absolutely horrified. He felt as if he were lying on a chopping board, about to be killed.

"Do you have any birthmarks? If so, where are they, and what kind of shape are they?" Zu An asked.

Yu Nan's expression immediately changed. He did have a birthmark, but for someone of high status like him, that was something personal and an absolute secret. He couldn't let anyone know so they could pretend to be him. Even if no one tried to impersonate him, letting someone else know about it was embarrassing on its own.

Out of helplessness, he could only drink. Three cups of Heaven's Burn went into his stomach. He felt his line of sight blur. The alcohol was just way too strong.

Damn you, Zu An! I'm way too unlucky to be sitting right after him! Helpless to do anything about it, he could only direct his anger toward Bi Ziang, asking, "What's the most embarrassing thing you've done in your life?"

Bi Ziang's expression changed as well. For people like him who cared a lot about their reputation, how could they tell such things to other people? Let alone the fact that after all these years, he had finally created such an amazing story for himself. He couldn't just let all of that fall apart because of something like this! He could only drink out of helplessness.

The questions unceasingly rose in intensity, crossing more and more boundaries. The participants also drank more and more.

They already had to use their cultivations to suppress the alcohol. Unfortunately, the alcohol of this world was made through a special method and was even effective against cultivators. Even though they could suppress a portion of the effects, if they passed the threshold, they would still collapse.

After a few more rounds, it was once again Zu An's turn.

Yu Nan's expression changed when he saw Zu An's malicious expression. He knew that Zu An was going to ask a question he couldn't answer at all. But he had already drunk too much. If he drank any more, he might just vomit on the spot! As a handsome young master who had always paid close attention to his image, how could he allow such a thing to happen?

He suddenly thought of something and said, "Right, I remember that this game is called truth or dare! I won't choose truth, but rather dare."

Zu An almost burst out laughing. You finally took the bait! He had been trying to lead Yu Nan in that direction, but if he said it out loud, Yu Nan would have been on guard and wouldn't agree. But it would be completely different if he chose a dare of his own accord!

Zu An said with a smile, "Since young master Yu has chosen a dare, what if I say something and you refuse to do it?"

Even though Yu Nan knew that Zu An was inciting him, how could he just back down when Nan Xun and Bi Ziang were right there? He said, "Hmph, you can go outside and ask anyone about this. I, Yu Nan, have always been a man of my word."

"That's good then." Zu An gave him a look. "The dare I'm giving you is 'go home right now'."

Yu Nan was speechless. Bi Ziang was stunned for a few seconds, but then he couldn't help but roar with laughter. "Incredible! Absolutely brilliant!" Nan Xun couldn't help but smile as well.

"You're going too far!" Yu Nan exclaimed.

You have successfully trolled Yu Nan for +333 +333 +333...

The dare seemed easy, but it was extremely humiliating.

Put another way, the other party was willing to even give up on a chance to make things difficult for one person just to make them go home. Wouldn't that mean one was completely unwelcome? Or that others merely considered one an extra?

The mysterious woman who had been listening in also laughed out loud. If not for the special formation set up, she might have exposed her existence right there and then. But she really couldn't hold it in! That Zu An was just way too treacherous... She could imagine just how furious Yu Nan was.

Chapter 927, Part 2: Winner Takes All

Nan Xun quickly interfered to resolve the dispute when she saw that a fight was about to break out. She said, "Young master Zu, this request is rather difficult. How about we change it to something else?"

Zu An looked troubled and replied, "But what if we change it, but young master Yu still refuses to do it out of a bad mood?"

Yu Nan harrumphed. "Do you take me for a three-year-old child? I'll do it as long as it's not an unreasonable request!"

Zu An said with a smile, "But that's what you just said earlier."

Yu Nan choked. "You merely said what you said to try and eliminate me. That's not something a noble man would do. Of course I wouldn't choose to agree."

If he really left and went home, that would spell the end of this competition over Nan Xun for him. Obtaining the courtesan was already secondary. Now, the most important thing was winning. If he could bring the beauty back, he would recover all the dignity he had lost because of Zu An. The only thing others would say about the event would be good things about him. If he lost, especially to Zu An and Bi Ziang, his reputation would be utterly crushed.

"Fine, then as a favor to Lady Nan Xun, I'll change the dare. But this time, I have nothing left to say if you still refuse to do it," Zu An said while asking Nan Xun to fetch a paper and pen. Nan Xun thought that he was going to write another poem. Her eyes lit up and she quickly brought them over.

Zu An wrote something on the paper with long strokes as Nan Xun watched from the side. She couldn't help but sigh, thinking that even though he was good at writing poems, his handwriting wasn't anything special. But as she saw what he was writing, her expression grew stranger and stranger. It was as if she were doing her best to hold herself back.

Yu Nan and Bi Ziang were both curious as to what Zu An had written. However, they both had sensitive statuses, so they couldn't move over like Nan Xun. They both pretended to be calm.

"Alright. Young master Yu, please follow these instructions." Zu An handed the paper over once he finished writing.

Yu Nan pretended to receive it calmly, but once he got it, he impatiently looked at the contents. His entire body began to shake. "You... You..."

You have successfully trolled Yu Nan for +666 +666 +666...

The instructions were for him to sit on Bi Xiang's lap, and then say the following words:

"Hmph! It's all your fault! You don't care about me I'm really going to cry, you know? I'm going to hit you, you bad guy!!! Hmph! I'm hitting your chest, take that! You're so annoying I want a hug I'm going to hit you with my little fists!!! I hate you, I'm going to hit you to deathBi Ziang moved over out of curiosity. Yu Nan's expression changed and he quickly crumpled up the paper. Wouldn't he die from embarrassment if Bi Ziang saw it?

Zu An remarked with an ambiguous smile, "Didn't young master Yu make a solemn vow that you would definitely do it if you could? What's wrong?"

Yu Nan's expression changed several times. "How can I do something as absurd as this?!"

Zu An's smile faded as he said, "I'm quite speechless. Would it still be called a dare if it were easy? We might as well just play house then. If young master Yu doesn't want to participate, you can choose not to."

Bi Ziang didn't know what was going on, so he also chimed in and said, "You're right. Even though brother Yu is normally a nobleman, why do you keep embarrassing yourself today?"

Yu Nan was so angry he almost erupted into curses. Why the hell are you helping him? You'd want to kill him too if you saw that he wanted me to sit on your lap! He shuddered when he imagined that nauseating scene.

"I'll drink!" Yu Nan's face was overcast. Even though he was about to pass out, he still chose to drink in the end. He felt his stomach churning after three more cups went down. He felt as if he were going to throw up at any time.

The game continued. After the previous lesson, no one chose a dare again.

After a few more rounds, however, Yu Nan finally couldn't take it anymore. He had no choice but to choose a dare again.

Zu An picked up the crumpled paper that had been thrown aside with a big smile. It was the same prompt.

Yu Nan would definitely have refused if it had been earlier, but he really couldn't keep drinking now. Furthermore, the alcohol was messing with his mind. He was so drunk that he didn't have much rationality left. Bi Ziang was kicking him while he was down too, so he felt something surge within him. As such, he went for broke.

"I'll just do it then! There is nothing that I, Yu Nan, don't dare to do!" As such, he stood up and sat down on Bi Ziang's lap under his shocked gaze. He hit his chest while saying, "Hmph! It's all your fault! You don't care about me I'm really going to cry, you know? I'm going to hit you, you bad guy!!! I'm hitting your chest, take that! You're so annoying I want a hug~~~... I'm going to hit you with my little fists I hate you, I'm going to hit you to death

Zu An carefully put away the recording stone he had prepared beforehand. At the same time, he was actually impressed. Does this Yu Nan really have such an orientation? This kind of tantrum throwing 'aegyo' really was performed too well.

Bi Ziang was stunned and speechless. How could he have expected such a thing to happen? It was to the extent that he didn't even react at first.

Then, he finally realized what was going on and quickly pushed Yu Nan away. He wanted to curse the other party, but a wave of nausea filled him when he recalled how the two of them had been in each other's arms a moment ago. He crawled off to the side and began to retch. Yu Nan found it even harder to hold himself back when he saw that. He rushed off to the side and began to vomit too.

With how close they were to each other, Bi Ziang could smell the vomit. He couldn't hold himself back anymore and also threw up as the alcohol stirred inside of him.

Even though the mysterious woman on the other side couldn't smell anything, she subconsciously fanned herself with her hand. The maid next to her said, "That Zu guy really is disgusting."

The mysterious woman was curious and amused. She had never expected two of the capital's most popular ladykillers to be in such a sorry state today.

...

Suddenly, there was a large 'thud'. It turned out Yu Nan had drunk way too much. Due to how angry he was, there were too many emotions running through him. His body's defense mechanisms made him faint.

Nan Xun quickly found some maids to bring Yu Nan away to get some rest. She also arranged for some women from the brothel to tend to him.

No one had expected someone to wash out this way! And yet, Bi Ziang couldn't bring himself to feel happy at all. His expression was extremely strange as he looked at Zu An. He actually now felt a bit of

regret... Now that Yu Nan had been eliminated, that meant he had to face Zu An alone! Who knew what kind of nefarious plots he would have to face?

They couldn't keep playing the game now that one person was missing. Nan Xun ordered some people to wrap up the feast and clean up the mess.

If this had been Zu An's previous world, it would be really hard for them to clean things up quickly. However, this was a world of cultivators, some of whom had the wind and water elements.. Everything was quickly tidied up.

Nan Xun said to Zu An and Bi Ziang, "Thank you, young masters, for your great kindness. Normally with my status, I would not have the right to evaluate you, but one girl cannot have two husbands, so I have no choice. I ask for your understanding."

Bi Ziang said indifferently, "It's no bother."

Zu An pointed toward the window and said with a smile, "It would be best if we speed things up. Otherwise, if we use up this much time for each round, the sky will already brighten. Then, we won't have the time to do anything anymore."

Bi Ziang cursed Zu An inwardly for being vulgar, but he shared similar thoughts. Now that the selection process had gone on for so long, his patience was wearing thin too.

Nan Xun blushed and said, "It won't be long. There will be a result soon." She clapped her hands. A new maid came in with a flower basket. There were many beautiful flower petals in the basket.

Nan Xun received the flower basket and said gently, "In order to thank the two of you for your love, this humble one will dance for the two young masters. These flower petals will be scattered through the air during the process. Whomever states the correct amount of flower petals will win. If neither of you gets the answer correct, the one who is closest will win.

"Furthermore, in order to prevent the second person who speaks from using the first person's answer to their advantage, if the answer is the same, the one who said it first will win. Do the two young masters have any objections?"

Bi Ziang said with a smile, "Lady Nan Xun's test is truly elegant. I naturally have no objections."

He now knew that the first test was about background and wealth, the second was about literary skills, and the third was about cultivation, which was naturally the most important. That was something he had great confidence in.

Zu An chuckled and said, "I don't have any either."

"That's good. Young masters, please get ready." After speaking, Nan Xun began to dance while carrying the basket.

They had witnessed her exceptional and stunning dancing before in the main hall. Now that they were watching her closely, they were able to appreciate her gentle and exquisite beauty even further. Her curves were elegant and lithe.

But Bi Ziang wasn't in the mood to admire her body. Instead, he stared at the flower basket in her hands.

Sure enough, Nan Xun used a dance movement to raise the flower basket into the air. Flower petals rained down from above, bathing her figure within. She was as stunning and gorgeous as a flower goddess.

Bi Ziang's eyes swirled with light. Then, he was the first to give an answer. "There are a total of 2047 petals!"

He didn't even seek confirmation from Nan Xun and instead looked at Zu An confidently. "Brother Zu, I must apologize. The World Creation Sword stresses the competence of sight. One of its training exercises is to penetrate all of the descending petals with a single sword thrust. I'm afraid I've had an unfair advantage in this bout."

There was nothing wrong with his attitude, and he instead seemed even more refined and courteous, as expected of the young master of one of the capital's greatest clans. But the fact that he hadn't said that before the bout and instead waited until afterward made him seem a bit insincere.

Zu An chuckled and said, "But my answer is different from yours. There are a total of 2048 petals."

Nan Xun nodded. "Indeed. The correct answer is 2048 petals."

Bi Ziang's smile immediately froze. He cried out, "That's impossible! There's no way I counted incorrectly!" He had absolute confidence in his own sight. He had counted all the petals that landed on the ground!

Zu An walked over to Nan Xun's side and removed a flower petal from inside her beautiful hair, saying, "There's one more over here. Lady Nan Xun asked us to count all of the flower petals, not the number of petals on the ground."

Nan Xun was stunned and said, "That is indeed the case. I did my best to avoid the flower petals, but I did not expect one of the petals to have landed on me."

Zu An smiled. He had actually used a strand of ki to send a petal into her hair. He had only done that just in case, but it had ended up being the deciding factor.

Bi Ziang's expression changed. He hadn't expected to actually be defeated because of this!

Chapter 928: The One Behind the Scenes

Bi Ziang's expression changed several times, but it quickly returned to normal. He said with a smile, "I didn't expect brother Zu to have this kind of skill. I'll accept this loss."

But inside, he was upset. When had he ever failed to get something he wanted in his life? And yet today, he had actually ended up being defeated by this brat? He even began to wonder if Zu An never had the ability to count all of the petals, and thus hid one petal so he could add one on top of whatever answer he gave.

After all, the cultivation needed to count all of those petals was definitely quite high. Even though Zu An had an outstanding reputation, in terms of cultivation, how could he possibly compare to someone like

himself who had grown up in a distinguished clan and was blessed with endless opportunities and resources?

Even with all of that, he had to rely on his World Creation Sword to barely count the number of flower petals. What did Zu An have?

You have successfully trolled Bi Ziang for +745 +745 +745...

But being upset was being upset; he didn't show it on the surface. Even Nan Xun was amazed at his courtesy, saying, "Young master Bi truly is a nobleman. There is already a room prepared in the pleasure quarters for you. There are courtesans for the young master to choose from as well."

Zu An simply smiled without saying anything. Even though Bi Ziang looked calm on the surface, the large amounts of Rage points coming in through the back end gave him away.

Bi Ziang normally didn't care about other courtesans, but if he just stormed off in a huff, that would tarnish his reputation. As such, he smiled and said with a nod, "Then I'll have to thank Lady Nan Xun for that." He was brought away by a maid soon afterward.

Nan Xun turned around and looked at Zu An, saying, "Young master, my humble self is all yours tonight. I hope that you can treat me tenderly."

Zu An had to admit that these courtesans were too good at what they did. Speaking such gentle words with that aloof and cool elegance of hers was enough to make any man go crazy. Unfortunately, he already knew that there was something odd about her identity. He was just waiting to see what she was going to do.

"Ten minutes during a spring night is worth a thousand jin in gold. Let's not waste any time," Zu An said as he pretended to move in to embrace her.

"Ten minutes during a spring night is worth a thousand jin in gold?" The mysterious woman next door mouthed the words. She had to recognize Zu An's literary talent. Unfortunately, he didn't use it for more honorable purposes and instead only used it for perverted intentions.

Nan Xun turned around and avoided his hug. She said with a smile, "Young master, please don't be in such a rush! I had a maid prepare some hot water. I'll help the young master bathe first."

Zu An waved his hands and said, "There's no need. I took a shower before I came precisely to save time."

Nan Xun's smile froze on her face. His reply left even her at a loss for what to do. There was nothing else she could do now that he had rejected the offer to take a bath. She pretended to lie down on the bed, then gave Zu An a weak and pitiful look. "Young master, someone like me doesn't hope to be able to get married in this life, but I've always admired the scene of when a newly wed bride has her veil undone by her husband. Today, this is my first night, so can the young master treat my mask as a veil and remove it for me?"

The request was completely reasonable. Together with her tender expression and sweet voice, no man could resist. Zu An was naturally no exception. He said, "I'll be happy to," before bending down and

slowly removing her mask. Even though this wasn't the first time he had seen her face, he was still amazed. She really was an incredible beauty!

Suddenly, Nan Xun's red lips parted and a blast of white smoke came out and sprayed across Zu An's face. Zu An's entire body went rigid, and he fell over on his side on the bed.

Nan Xun stood up from the bed. After sorting out her somewhat messy clothes, her usual aloof and cold expression returned. She harrumphed mockingly, "Hmph, you foul man. You didn't expect this, did you?!"

Zu An had always been on guard, so he naturally hadn't been poisoned. But he didn't know what the white smoke did, so he was unsure as to whether he should pretend to faint or if he should just pretend to be completely powerless. When he heard that, he guessed it was probably the latter. He pretended to exclaim in alarm, "What's going on? Who are you?!"

"It's my turn to ask the questions now. You have no right to ask me anything," Nan Xun said as she looked down on him from above. "You only have your bad luck to blame. My original targets were Yu Nan and Bi Ziang, but you just had to join in."

Zu An quickly asked, "Aren't they still here? You can still go after them right now!"

"Hmph, I almost thought that you were an outstanding hero from our previous interactions, but I didn't expect you to be such a craven coward," Nan Xun said with disdain when she saw his reaction. "I won't be able to visit the two of them tonight, but I have some questions for you to answer."

Nan Xun was extremely confident. It sounded as if she were doing this to break through Zu An's will as quickly as possible. She said, "Don't try to resist it. The substance you just inhaled will make you answer all of my questions."

Zu An almost laughed out loud. He had been wondering how he should pretend to be poisoned, but now, she had spilled all the beans without him doing a thing. As such, his expression slackened, and he began to mumble, "What do you want to ask about?"

"How disappointing!" Nan Xun hadn't expected him to surrender so quickly. She thought to herself, This pervert's willpower was weak as expected. "What happened when you entered the Royal Academy's secret dungeon that time?"

Zu An shivered inwardly. Don't tell me she's actually someone from King Qi's side? Was her 'death' just an act she coordinated with King Qi? However, he didn't dare to show any carelessness. He gave a rough recount of what had happened in the dungeon.

Nan Xun frowned. She was clearly dissatisfied with his answer and said, "What I want to ask is what really happened, and not what the court told the world."

"That's really what happened! Don't tell me King Qi didn't tell you yet, miss concubine?" Zu An replied, suddenly smiling.

Nan Xun was stunned, and her entire body trembled. She quickly flew backward. Unfortunately, she was too slow. With Zu An's current cultivation, how could she possibly escape?

Zu An grabbed her shoulder in an instant. However, just as he was about to strike her major acupoint, he unexpectedly discovered that his hand passed straight through her body. It was almost as if this woman didn't have a tangible body.

Nan Xun sneered and said, "Hmph, it's still far too early for you to try to catch me." Then, she slipped through the door crack. Soon, only the ends of her dress and her feet remained in the room.

Someone else might have cried out in horror if they saw such a scene. But Zu An was already used to such things. He remarked with a chuckle, "Aren't you just a ghost? It's not as if I haven't encountered any before." He used his true primordial ki, then he reached out and grabbed her ankle. Even though Nan Xun's body was still incorporeal, he actually grabbed her.

Nan Xun screamed as she was pulled right back. There was a pitch-black scorch mark around her ankle, as if she had been burned. She was no longer as arrogant and complacent as before. Instead, her eyes were filled with terror. She continued to cower toward the corner of the room, as if there were some terrifying aura around Zu An's body and she wanted to stay as far away from him as possible.

Zu An looked at her with an indifferent expression, saying, "I'm sure you also understand that I can turn you into nothing at any time. That's why now, I'll ask the questions, and you'll answer me!"

Just then, the window slammed open. A figure rushed in and attacked Zu An.

"You've finally appeared!" Zu An had been able to sense that there was someone secretly watching him even when he was still outside. In that instant, he was even able to keenly sense the killing intent she erupted into.

He had known that with Nan Xun's current condition, there definitely had to be someone else controlling her. Now, that person finally showed themselves. He didn't show any signs of fear or happiness. With his current cultivation and combat experience, he didn't have to be scared of anyone apart from those old freaks.

Zu An still had to capture them for interrogation, so there was no technique more suitable than the 'Feathersilk Entangling Art'.

As Zu An's cultivation climbed, his strength had also increased several fold. The newcomer wanted to escape with Nan Xun at first, but she discovered that Zu An's cultivation was even more profound than she had expected. She couldn't avoid his palm strike. Even her own safety was hard to guarantee. She dodged from side to side, but on several occasions, she was almost trapped in his arms.

She panicked and shouted angrily, "You scoundrel!"

Chapter 929: Green Feather

When he heard the other party's tender and delicate voice, sounding as if she were both pouting playfully and truly angry, Zu An was stunned. He had never heard a more beautiful voice in his entire life!

It had already been quite some time since he arrived in this world. The girls he met were all incredibly pretty, and their voices were also pretty. But this woman's voice was melodious and moving. It was

bright and beautiful like the song of an oriole! Just her voice alone made him feel as if his ears had just been massaged.

Even though he knew that she was a woman from their exchange, he hadn't had the time to pay close attention to her appearance. Now that he looked at her, he saw that she had a tall and slender build. Her pretty face was snow-white, and her expression was as cold as snow. She stared back with clear eyes full of embarrassment and annoyance.

Nan Xun was already an incredible beauty herself, but when they stood side by side, she was completely overshadowed by this woman's beauty. It was a feeling that was hard to describe. Perhaps the newcomer just carried a kind of aura that made her stand out from everyone else.

"I'm the scoundrel?" Zu An sneered. "You came up with this honey trap to plot and harm others, but I'm the scoundrel here?" He didn't stop attacking while speaking, and grabbed at her body. He wouldn't hold back just because she was a woman.

The mysterious woman's expression changed. She quickly made a profound hand seal, and green light flashed in front of her.

Zu An sensed a dangerous energy, and quickly backed up to avoid the strange attack. He finally saw that the green light was actually a feather. It was green mixed with a little black. It flickered with a jade-like radiance and was quite pretty.

Zu An was speechless. What the hell is my luck with green? But this feather really is pretty.

The mysterious woman tried to take Nan Xun with her after that strike. However, even though she had evaded Zu An, his ki still firmly locked onto the two of them. She knew that things weren't going to go as she wished, so she said, "Young master Zu has misunderstood. We didn't have any intention of harming you."

"You didn't have any intention to harm me?" Zu An sneered. "Do you take me for a fool? If not because I was still on guard, I might've already become a living corpse."

That mysterious woman said apologetically, "Young master, please don't be upset. We were only trying to scout out some information. We didn't plan to harm you. Once we asked you some questions, you would only treat it as a dream. We wouldn't have actually done anything to your body."

Zu An laughed. The only reason she was talking this way right now was because he had his cultivation. Forget about their vicious battle, just that final move of hers would have already ended his life if he hadn't been careful. There was no way she would have had the patience to talk to him otherwise.

"Who are you?" Zu An asked as he looked at Nan Xun. "Also, are you human or are you a ghost?"

Nan Xun had a look of alarm on her face. She instinctively looked toward the mysterious woman, who frowned and asked, "You're able to see through her?"

Zu An's expression turned cold. He said, "I'm asking the questions right now, and not the other way around."

The mysterious woman fell silent. A while later, she said apologetically, "I'm sorry, our statuses are too sensitive, so we can't tell you."

“Hah!” Zu An laughed out loud. He said, “Sure, no problem. Right now, I’m going to go tell King Qi that his little concubine was actually serving other men here in the brothel.”

He had suspected that she was from King Qi’s faction from the very start, but now that he had some time to think about it, even if King Qi wanted to do something, he wouldn’t have sent his concubine all the way to a brothel. Was he really not scared at all that someone might make him wear a green hat?

Furthermore, once news of such a thing got out, his reputation would be destroyed. With Zu An’s understanding of King Qi, he knew there was no way the latter would take such a huge risk.

The two women’s expressions changed greatly when they heard him expose Nan Xun’s identity. A flash of killing intent passed through the mysterious woman’s eyes.

Zu An keenly sensed it and sneered. “What, you still want to kill me? Perhaps I should just detain you two and bring you to the Embroidered Envoy for interrogation.” He immediately used the Sunflower Phantasm and vanished, instantly reappearing behind the mysterious woman. His palm clamped down on her shoulder.

The mysterious woman was horrified. Her entire body twisted at an inconceivable angle and she forcibly pulled her arm back. Her clothes couldn’t bear the strong force and were torn apart with an audible rip, exposing her fair arm.

You have successfully trolled Kong Nanwu for +444 Rage points!

There was strong killing intent in the mysterious woman’s eyes. She lashed out toward Zu An with her other hand that was holding the green feather.

Green light filled Zu An’s field of view. Countless pairs of eyes appeared in the light, seemingly staring at him. In that instant, he felt a wave of dizziness, seemingly losing his sight. There was only green left in his view, and nothing else.

Even though he was startled, he didn’t panic. He summoned Hundredwarble, and its cry tore through the air. The mysterious woman groaned, and Zu An’s dizziness disappeared. Most of his sight returned. He didn’t hesitate and grabbed the arm holding the feather. He could feel the threat coming from the green feather, so he decided to seize it first.

The mysterious woman harrumphed. She snapped her fingers, and the feather turned into a streak of light. A split second later, it reappeared behind Zu An’s back.

In that instant, the soft feather had turned into a sharp flying sword. But right before it was about to stab through Zu An’s back, the mysterious woman showed a moment of hesitation. The feather then shifted three inches to the side, avoiding his vitals.

Even so, if the attack landed, it would make Zu An lose his fighting strength for some time. But Zu An didn’t avoid it at all. Instead, he relied completely on his body’s toughness. The sharp flying sword only entered an inch into his body, and couldn’t penetrate any further.

The mysterious woman was horrified. Even though she had shown mercy, she knew just how terrifying her weapon was. Just how hard did this man’s body have to be for it to have only made it that far in?

But she didn't have the time to think about that right now, because she knew that she was in danger. She quickly retaliated, wishing to take the chance to break free, but Zu An's hands were like clamps. He quickly jerked her arm behind her back, then put pressure on her neck with his other hand.

In that instant, the woman felt goosebumps run through her entire body. She knew that she had been restrained. As soon as Zu An twisted his hand, then her life would be forfeit. In a moment of crisis, she quickly shouted out a word. "Snow!"

Sure enough, Zu An's hand froze when he heard that word, and he stopped.

Just like that, the two of them were holding onto each other. The mysterious woman's breathing was rushed. Her chest rose and fell intensely. The experience had clearly scared her badly.

"Let my young miss go!" A pretty maid bared her fangs at Zu An from the entrance, standing on all fours. Her sharp teeth told him that she wasn't human, and a patch of white fur gradually appeared around her ears and neck.

Zu An's expression darkened and he exclaimed, "Fiend race?"

That mysterious woman took a deep breath and said, "Huhu, don't expose yourself, or else we'll end up drawing the eyes of the capital's human experts."

"But..." The maid looked at Zu An's hand on the mysterious woman's neck.

"I'm fine. He's little sister Snow's good friend. He won't harm me." After her initial alarm, the mysterious woman had already calmed down.

"Oh..." the maid named Huhu muttered. Then, she stood up, once more looking like a little servant girl. However, she still looked at Zu An with a rather unpleasant expression.

"Who is this Snow you speak of?" Zu An was actually half-convinced. However, for his own safety, he still had to ask for confirmation.

The mysterious woman said calmly, "There have always been rumors that human men are the most heartless and fickle. I didn't really believe those rumors, and yet I didn't expect to meet someone who had already forgotten their past lover so quickly. Snow, Snow, you really are foolish..."

There weren't many people who knew about Zu An's relationship with Snow. Only those Snow had told herself would know about this. Zu An loosened his grip when he came to that conclusion. He asked coldly, "Who are you all?"

Chapter 930: Accomplice to the Tiger

The reason why Zu An let go of her so easily, apart from the fact that he trusted Snow, was that he also noticed that she had held back earlier. It was clear that she carried no malice toward him

The maid quickly stood in front of the mysterious woman when she saw Zu An let go. She stared vigilantly at Zu An while asking her, "Miss, are you alright?"

"I'm fine." The mysterious woman massaged her neck. It was obvious that the area was sore from being grabbed.

Nan Xun also ran over to hide by her side. She looked at Zu An fearfully, still scared after what had just happened.

The mysterious woman gently pushed the maid aside, then said while looking at Zu An's back, "I'll help you treat that wound first." She reached out her hand, and the flying sword-like feather turned into a streak of green light, returning to her hand. It transformed back into a soft feather.

Zu An was surprised, saying, "That thing of yours is pretty high level. It can change between soft and hard."

The mysterious woman said with a sigh, "Your body is what's surprisingly hard." She had thought that the sword could seriously injure him, but it had only penetrated a bit. Nan Xun couldn't help but let out a laugh, and her expression was extremely strange.

The mysterious woman was stunned. Only then did she realize that there was another meaning to what she said. Her face heated up, and she quickly changed the topic. "Nan Xun, help young master Zu wrap up his wound." This lass dares to laugh at me? You deserve to be punished, hmph.

"Ah!" Nan Xun looked conflicted. Her ankle had been burned badly when Zu An grabbed her. She subconsciously felt a little scared. But she couldn't go against her master's orders and could only bashfully move over to Zu An's side. However, the closer she got, the more she felt as if he burned like a sun. Being close to him felt extremely uncomfortable.

The mysterious woman was slightly shocked and said, "Young master's cultivation method is a bit special. You were actually able to restrain someone like Nan Xun."

Zu An stopped using the Primordial Origin Sutra. Nan Xun immediately felt the uncomfortable heat disappear. She sighed in relief, and began to help him with his wound.

This level of injury wasn't a big deal for Zu An at all. With his body's strength and regeneration ability, he would completely recover soon anyway. However, he didn't want to expose that in front of others.

"You still haven't answered my question," he said.

"I'm Kong Nanwu." After some hesitation, the mysterious woman continued, "I believe the young master has also guessed that I'm also, using human terms, part of the fiend race."

Zu An wasn't surprised to hear that. He looked at the maid and asked, "What species is she?"

"She's a young lady from the fox clan." Kong Nanwu stroked the maid's head in a doting manner. She was very satisfied with the loyalty the maid showed toward her master.

Zu An was surprised. He hadn't expected this maid to be related to Daji! He wondered how the maid would react if he let Daji out. He obviously wouldn't do something so rash, though. He looked at Kong Nanwu and asked, "Is Miss Kong also from the fox clan?"

Kong Nanwu shook her head and said, "No, I'm from the feather clan."

"Feather clan?" Zu An was feeling dizzy. She had brought up the fiend races and the fox clan, and now she was saying she's from the feather clan. He suddenly remembered her surname and realized something, exclaiming, "So you were a peacock!"[1]

Kong Nanwu was speechless. She took a deep breath and calmed herself down, eventually saying, "Even though what you said was correct to a certain extent, it sounds strange for some reason."

Zu An chuckled awkwardly and said, "I didn't mean any offense. How do you know Snow?" The two women's relationship seemed to be pretty good.

Kong Nanwu replied, "We became close because we're all affiliated with the feather clan."

Zu An felt a headache and asked, "Just how do you guys divide up the clans? Why does it seem so complicated?"

After a bit of hesitation, Kong Nanwu explained, "This isn't a secret, so we can tell you. Your human race calls the feather clan, beast clan, demon clan, sea clan, dragon clan, and others fiend races. Within our classification, the fiend races are, in a stricter sense, only the feather clan, beast clan, and a few other similar clans. Calling the demon clan, sea clan, and dragon clan fiend races isn't actually too suitable. Of course, the human race is so strong that we were forced to unite together. As such, it isn't too big of a problem to be called that.

"The feather clan and beast clans also respectively branch out into many races..."

Zu An nodded in understanding. The cat girl and rabbit girl were both from the beast clan, but they were definitely separated into separate races under that bigger classification.

Kong Nanwu continued, "The feather race has three great king races; the golden-winged peng, peacock, and elf races. Little sis Snow is from the elf race, which is how we knew each other."

Zu An exclaimed, "A peacock! Then was that feather plucked from your tail?"

No wonder it had made him so dizzy! When the green colors had unfolded, he felt as if he were being watched by countless pairs of eyes. Weren't those precisely a peacock's tail feathers? But didn't only male peacocks have pretty tail feathers? Was Kong Nanwu... a guy?

The little fox race maid glared at Zu An and shouted angrily, "Pervert!"

You have successfully trolled Huhu for +215 +215 +215...

Kong Nanwu said calmly, "Please forgive me, young master, for not being able to answer such a personal question."

Zu An thought to himself, Aren't you also implying some things with your response anyway... But in order to prevent the mood from becoming awkward, he changed the topic. "Is Nan Xun also part of your fiend races? I didn't expect you all to be that amazing, that you could even send her into King Qi Manor as a concubine."

After all, King Qi was basically the human race's number two figure. Meanwhile, he had actually shared a bed with someone from the fiend race! Just how much intelligence had she been able to siphon?

Nan Xun's expression changed. Zu An knew her real identity after all. However, Kong Nanwu shook her head and said, "No, she isn't part of the fiend race. She's a human, but she now exists as a ghost."

"A ghost?" Zu An frowned. He sized up Nan Xun, who was next to him. Powerful human cultivators could keep their souls alive for a period of time, but it wouldn't be for too long. If they didn't encounter any extraordinary opportunities, the soul would only be able to exist for a few hours at the shortest, and a few months at the longest. Then, the laws of the world would completely erase them.

That was also why Zhao Han desired immortality so much. Otherwise, if his soul could continue existing forever, why would he be worried about such things at all?

Even though Nan Xun had some cultivation, it clearly wasn't high. In theory, her soul should have scattered soon after her body perished, never mind showing herself in public and becoming a courtesan.

As if she saw through Zu An's puzzlement, Kong Nanwu explained, "To be more precise, she's the ghost of someone devoured by a tiger. The tiger race has a secret method that can enthrall someone they devour or kill as a ghost, and use them as a servant. These special ghosts are different from normal souls. As long as they're supplied with energy from time to time, they can continue to exist in this world for a long time."

Zu An suddenly understood. This was where the idiom 'acting as an accomplice to the tiger' came from. In his previous world, the idiom originated from a legend, but this was a world filled with all kinds of monstrous oddities. The idiom had actually become a reality!

"I just happened to know that secret technique as well," Kong Nanwu said. "When I passed by King Qi Manor previously, I sensed the resentment inside. Her soul was wandering nearby and was about to scatter. I used the secret technique to refine her soul into a tiger-devoured ghost, which was how she was able to survive."

Nan Xun bowed toward her and said, "Thank you, young miss, for saving me."

Zu An asked, "Your name is a different one now, right?"

Otherwise, if she used her real name, King Qi would have already known that she was here even if he didn't come to the pleasure quarters.

"Indeed. In order to completely sever her relationship with the past, her name was changed after she turned into a special soul," Kong Nanwu replied.

Zu An looked at Nan Xun and asked, "You really were killed by King Qi?" Even though he had already come to that conclusion, he obviously had to confirm things with her.

"Indeed, I was killed by Zhao Jing." Nan Xun's expression remained calm, as if she were talking about something that was completely unrelated to her.

"Why did he kill you?" Zu An asked.

"Because I was a spy planted at his side by his majesty," Nan Xun replied.

Zu An was stunned.