

I. Dynasty 191

Chapter 191: The Maiden Yue'er

"Hehe, I'm not making this up—it's what the master said!" Xiao Huan dodged Fei Yue'er's pinching fingers.

"You wretched girl! Stop it!"

Fei Yue'er's face turned even redder, burning with embarrassment. Matters between men and women had always been too shameful for her to discuss.

Xiao Huan teased, "Miss, I'm not joking. You and Prince Qi are the same age—you should have been married long ago. It's only because the master pampers you and worries about your health that he hasn't arranged anything. But now that the Emperor himself is proposing the match, how can the master refuse? Besides, all of Chang'an is praising Prince Qi's achievements. Dreamy young girls call him a hero, and since he's still unmarried, many ministers' wives are rushing to visit Consort Zhen, hoping to marry their daughters to him!"

News of Cangzhou's victory had spread widely in Chang'an, and Fei Yue'er was well aware of it.

Then she remembered the poem Prince Qi had once written. Now, with Cangzhou's triumph and the Emperor's marriage proposal, her heart began to pound uncontrollably.

Her eyes drifted to the newspaper on the table. Ignoring Xiao Huan, she picked it up and started reading.

The entire front page was dedicated to the battle of Cangzhou—how they defended the city on the first day, how the barbarians attacked on the second, and how the city gates were breached on the final day.

The vivid descriptions played out before her eyes like scenes from a play. When she read about Prince Qi personally leading his soldiers in a bloody battle at the broken gates, forcing the barbarians into retreat, her emotions surged along with the words.

What young maiden doesn't dream of love? Though Fei Yue'er had lived a sheltered life, she had often lost herself in romantic tales, secretly weaving fantasies of her own.

Now, faced with this reality, she couldn't help but freeze in thought.

"Miss! Miss!" Xiao Huan waved a hand in front of her face, giggling. "Are you wondering if Prince Qi is ugly or handsome? Tall or short? Flat or round?"

"Nonsense! What do you mean 'flat or round'?" Fei Yue'er shot her a glare.

"Who knows? Maybe he's flat—how else could he block the barbarians so well?" Xiao Huan mused.

"You silly girl, stop this! Prince Qi is a celebrated hero now. If you mock him, you might get beaten!" Fei Yue'er pinched Xiao Huan's cheek.

Xiao Huan's eyes sparkled mischievously. "Oh? Defending him already, Miss? If you really marry him, I won't survive!"

“You little—!” Fei Yue’er raised her hand to swat her.

Xiao Huan darted away, laughing.

“Ahem!”

A cough interrupted their play.

Xiao Huan turned and immediately bowed. “Young Master.”

Fei Yue’er looked up to see an elegant young man in white robes watching them—her cousin, Pan Yu.

“Cousin, what brings you here?”

Pan Yu’s heart ached. He had overheard everything. His gaze lingered on Fei Yue’er, full of longing.

Since childhood, Fei Yue’er had been frail and rarely seen in public. Yet despite her seclusion, her beauty was legendary in Chang’an, making her the dream bride of noble sons.

The Fei family's prestige played a part, but more importantly, every noble who had glimpsed her fell instantly under her spell. Once, a smitten admirer even painted her portrait from memory. When it leaked, it drove countless poets and scholars wild with admiration.

Skilled in music, poetry, and calligraphy, Fei Yue'er's talents only added to her fame, ranking her as Chang'an's second-greatest beauty.

(The first was Princess Pingyang—though everyone knew that was just flattery from her sycophants.)

To Pan Yu, Fei Yue'er's peerless grace could never be matched by a painted doll like Pingyang.

"I... I..." His mind spun, fixated on the name Prince Qi.

Staring at Fei Yue'er's flawless jade-like face, he suddenly spat, "Cousin, don't be fooled by this newspaper's lies! You know what Prince Qi was like before—a tyrant who bullied men and harassed women, arrogant and shameless! Three years ago, he fled back to Chang'an in fear. How could he change into a noble gentleman in less than a year? If you marry him, not only will Uncle worry—so will I! Who knows if he's still a beast in disguise? Look, the paper credits Luo Xin with the victory. Clearly, it was Luo Xin's doing, not his!"

His twisted expression made Fei Yue'er step back, her face paling. She had never seen Pan Yu look so vicious.

Xiao Huan quickly steadied her. She had never liked this cousin—he visited too often under the pretense of seeing Fei Ji, though his real target was Fei Yue'er.

Sheltered and naive, Fei Yue'er didn't notice, but Xiao Huan saw right through him. Pan Yu was all looks and no substance.

"Cousin," Fei Yue'er said softly, though her voice carried quiet anger, "Prince Qi's character is judged by the court and the people. Even a rogue can turn over a new leaf. The entire court acknowledges his role in Cangzhou's victory. How can you slander him so? Even if he was once wicked, saving countless lives surely redeems his past. And if he were truly vile, would the people have welcomed him with cheers?"

Pan Yu's heart twisted in agony. "Cousin... do you want this marriage? Do you think he is worthy of you?"

Fei Yue'er lowered her eyes. "Marriage is decided by parents and matchmakers. Whoever Father chooses, I will obey. That is a daughter's fate. As for Prince Qi... if Father accepts the Emperor's proposal, even if he were a monster, he would still be my husband."

Pan Yu felt as if a boulder had lodged in his chest. He let out a cold laugh. "If only my father were the Emperor! But don't worry—Xiao Ming won't always be a prince!"

"Cousin! What do you mean?" Fei Yue'er gasped. "Such words are treasonous if overheard!"

Pan Yu opened his mouth, then hesitated. Finally, he muttered, "Cousin... I only want what's best for you. Prince Qi's path won't be smooth!"