

Immortal 931

Chapter 931: A Large Net in the Darkness

Nan Xun said, "I was his majesty's highest level spy. I was able to meet with Zhao Jing before, and he chose me to become his concubine. I was thus able to successfully infiltrate King Qi Manor.

"Usually, as King Qi's concubine, I would secretly send back any information I obtained. Of course, it was to the extent that it would not expose my real identity. Everything was fine at first, that is until after your group came out of the dungeon." She looked at Zu An with a conflicted expression.

"It was related to us?" Zu An frowned. He had actually already connected a lot of the dots. No wonder Nan Xun had been able to transition from being King Qi's concubine to becoming a courtesan so seamlessly! As a top-level spy, she was naturally skilled at using music and dance to seduce men.

"Indeed. Back then, the elements in the dungeon became chaotic, and something major seemingly happened. His majesty was fine in the beginning, but one day, he suddenly ordered me to find out if Zhao Jing was still in the manor, regardless of the price." Nan Xun's voice carried great resentment. "Zhao Jing was cultivating in seclusion, so he did not allow anyone to visit him. But for the sake of the mission, I could only take the risk. With Zhao Jing's shrewdness, how could I hide the truth from him? In the end, even though I was able to get the information out, I was also killed by Zhao Jing."

Zu An thought to himself that the reason why the emperor had been so panicked and even insisted on checking if King Qi was still in the manor was probably because he had sensed that his split soul had been eradicated. He probably suspected Zhao Jing to be the perpetrator in the dungeon.

It wasn't too big of a deal if it had just been Zhao Jing who messed with the dungeon trip. But if the libationer had actually worked together with King Qi, then how could the emperor not feel alarmed? He would obviously want more information so he could plan ahead going forward.

They're all a bunch of old foxes! Zu An sighed. The emperor hadn't even given him the slightest hint that the concubine was actually his spy when he put him in charge of the investigation! It was to the extent that the case itself wasn't even for the sake of bringing justice for Nan Xun, but rather just to distract King Qi and somehow deliver that fake manual.

He couldn't help but give Nan Xun a look and said, "I sympathize with your situation, but... Did you really decide to defect to the fiend races just like that?"

"I apologize. Right now, the human race and the fiend races are enemies, after all." It was Kong Nanwu who spoke up. She remained expressionless, however, and Zu An couldn't see what she was thinking about.

Nan Xun said with a distressed smile, "I went through cruel training to become a spy ever since I was little; when have I ever made a decision for myself? I already acknowledged my fate, thinking that if I could obtain some vital intelligence and bring down King Qi, that would be the purpose of this life of mine. However, I never expected his majesty to use me for such a trifling purpose, to the extent that he did not even care about my life at all! As a spy, I am not scared of self-sacrifice, but I cannot accept such a meaningless sacrifice. All those years of hard work, all those years of bitterness, they now seem like a complete joke."

Zu An thought to himself, This is what happens when you're not on the same page... After all, for the emperor back then, knowing whether King Qi was inside the dungeon was extremely important information. But as a ruler, there was no way he would tell his subordinates why he had done that. He couldn't really tell her the truth just then either, because it was related to the emperor's split soul secret. He couldn't show even a bit of negligence.

Nan Xun continued, "After I was rescued by Miss Kong, my first thought was that I wanted to save my parents and siblings. For spies like us, our families are always used as hostages. But I never expected that by the time we hurried over, they would already be dead.

"Hah, I risked my life for that dog emperor, and I even sacrificed myself; and yet, not only did he not take good care of my family, he instead killed them all to silence them! I want revenge. So what if I defected to the fiend races?!"

She had been killed by King Qi, so there was no way she would side with King Qi. The only ones who stood a chance against the emperor and King Qi at that moment were the fiend races. As if sensing her anger and resentment, chilly winds blew through the entire room. Even the candle flames began to flicker, as if they might go out at any time.

Kong Nan frowned. She felt that Nan Xun had said too much. After all, Zu An was a court official, so complaining and cursing the emperor wouldn't lead to any good results.

Sure enough, Zu An's brows furrowed. He said, "You're cursing his majesty in front of my face. Are you treating me as empty air?!"

He had actually felt amazing when he heard her curse the emperor and almost blurted out his approval. But unfortunately, he didn't know where these individuals stood yet. He couldn't reveal what he really thought.

The girl named Huhu immediately exclaimed angrily, "You humans are all bad after all! All of you have hearts of stone..."

"Silence!" Kong Nanwu barked sharply. Then, she gave Zu An an apologetic look. "I apologize, young master Zu. Nan Xun spoke some disrespectful words because her family was killed, and she lost her own life as well. I hope the young master won't take those words to heart."

Nan Xun also felt some regret. If this man reported what she said to the emperor, forget about her disappearing from this world, not even Kong Nanwu and the others would be able to escape. This was the capital, after all.

Zu An sighed. "Lady Nan Xun has toiled for another, but received nothing in return. Out of consideration for her experience, it's hard for me to speak any words of criticism. I'll just pretend that I heard nothing out of favor for Snow. However, there won't be a second time."

Nan Xun was stunned. When she looked at Zu An, her expression became somewhat strange. She bowed gracefully and said, "Thank you, young master, for your generosity."

"I'm Baijie-ing right now." Zu An answered with a word there was no way they would know the meaning of. Meanwhile, he began to think over what he should do now.[1]

Kong Nanwu had a smile on her face, saying, "Young master is different from other humans after all. You have an empathetic heart that transcends race."

"Don't try to give me such a lofty title," Zu An said coldly. "I don't wish to be accused as a traitor who colluded with the enemy. What were you all doing in the capital undercover? Are you paving the way for your fiend races' southern army?!"

"Young master has misunderstood." Kong Nanwu explained, "The reason we came to the south was firstly out of our curiosity toward the human race's local customs. We don't need to hide the second reason from young master either; we came to get information, but it was definitely not for the sake of the southern invasion, but rather for defensive preparations. You need to understand that the humans have sent many spies into our fiend races as well. This is merely a normal exchange."

"You've put it quite nicely," Zu An sneered, "but your fiend races have just slaughtered an entire city, not sparing a single person, regardless of whether they were soldiers or civilians. That doesn't sound as pleasant as you're making it out to be."

Kong Nanwu's expression changed. "The slaughter of an entire city definitely wasn't done by our fiend races!"

"Who else could it be but your fiend races?" Zu An obviously wouldn't believe her just like that.

"That I'm not sure about, but there are many suspicious details about the city's slaughter." Kong Nanwu quickly explained, "After all, the fiend races were seriously injured by the humans back then, and we didn't even have enough time to recover. Why would we start something again so rashly, let alone something that crosses the line as far as slaughtering an entire city? Even though I'm not someone of extremely high status in the fiend races, I know a bit about what the higher-ups are thinking. They would never choose to do something so unwise."

"But it still happened. It doesn't matter what you say," Zu An said indifferently. "Furthermore, according to what you just said, the city slaughter happened after you arrived at the capital. You weren't by your clansmen's side, so how could you know what they were thinking?"

Kong Nanwu's expression changed. That was indeed what she was worried about. There were many members of the pro-war faction among the fiend races who carried a lot of animosity toward the human race. Furthermore, they were often people with all brawn but no brains. They really might do something of that sort impulsively.

She took a deep breath and said, "I know that it's pointless no matter what I say right now, but I'll definitely do my best to find out the truth as soon as possible, and give you a proper explanation."

Zu An shook his head. "It's already meaningless to say these things right now. The court's army is already headed north. This war can't be stopped."

Kong Nanwu fell silent. She knew that what he said was the truth. Zu An didn't want to continue debating the matter, however. Instead, he asked curiously, "Is Scarlet Invitation owned by your fiend races?"

If that really was the case, wasn't the fiend races' influence a bit frightening? They had actually been able to infiltrate so deeply into the court without being discovered!

Kong Nanwu shook her head. "It isn't. We have our own channels, but as for what they are, I apologize for not being able to tell you. I hope young master can excuse this."

Zu An frowned. Could it be that there were powers in the capital who were colluding with the fiend races? He had a feeling that there was a large net cast over the entire capital. It was hidden in the darkness, hidden so well that even he wasn't sure if it even existed. After all, not even the Embroidered Envoy had any information on it.

And yet, he had always had such a feeling. When Yun Jianyue was still in the palace, she sensed that someone was following him. But even now, they had no idea who it was.

Kong Nanwu spoke up again. "I wonder how the young master plans on dealing with us?"

Zu An almost laughed out loud. This woman really was cunning. After all, her cultivation was profound too. Together with that green feather, it wouldn't be easy for him to capture them even if he wanted to. But now, she made it seem as if her fate was in his hands. If it were another man, they might have already felt elated.

But the question of how he should deal with them was indeed a bit troublesome.

Chapter 932: Relationship Between Life and Death

He actually didn't want to do anything bad to them either, because he was going to turn against the emperor eventually. The enemy of his enemy was his friend. With them present, he would have another source of assistance. But he didn't want to reveal that fact too soon, or else they might use it to threaten him. Things would become really troublesome then.

Kong Nanwu said, "Young master Zu actually doesn't need to feel too worried. It isn't just one or two officials we're in contact with in the capital. We all take what we need, and having more friends is always better than having more enemies."

Zu An asked seriously, "I wonder which officials these are?"

Kong Nanwu shook her head. "This is where young master's questions become a bit improper. How can I possibly tell you about them? Similarly, if someone asked me to give them information about you, I wouldn't tell them. Even if you don't trust me, you trust our little sister Snow, right?"

Zu An thus took the chance to say, "Fine. Out of favor for little sis Snow, I won't bicker over today's matters. I won't report you all. However, from today on, let's not associate with each other anymore." He got up to leave afterward.

Kong Nanwu got up and stood in front of him, saying, "Young master Zu, it's a bit unsuitable for you to leave now."

"Hm? Are you not going to let me leave?" Zu An asked emotionlessly.

"That's not it," Kong Nanwu said with a faint smile. "Everyone outside knows that you were chosen as Nan Xun's private guest. If you leave so soon, there might be all kinds of strange rumors going around. Those who are sharp will quickly pick up on something. After all, Nan Xun's charm is something everyone knows about."

Zu An was a bit shaken. He knew that what she said was the truth. The young masters might not have even left yet. If he left so early, there would definitely be all sorts of suspicions.

Seeing that he was being swayed, Kong Nanwu said with a smile, "Young master has passed several trials, so you deserve to have a beauty accompany you. Nan Xun can just properly serve you. It won't be too late if you leave after a good night of rest."

Zu An gave Nan Xun a look. He was speechless. Eventually, he said, "You have to at least use a real person if you're going to use a honey trap, right?"

Kong Nanwu explained with a smile, "Don't worry, young master. A tiger-devoured ghost is different from the ghosts you're familiar with. Apart from being of the extreme yin attribute, preventing her from giving birth, she isn't too different from a normal girl."

Zu An was speechless. He had to admit that he was quite tempted now, though. After all, he had always been curious about Ning Caichen and Nie Xiaoqian's relationship.[1] But he quickly threw away that thought and exclaimed, "What kind of person are you treating me as?!"

Kong Nanwu continued, "Nan Xun used to be a concubine of King Qi, and she's practically no different from when she was still alive. Furthermore, she's still a virgin. It will be just like King Qi's concubine serving you. I don't believe that's a temptation many men can resist."

Zu An was alarmed. This woman really was a master at playing with one's heart! She knew how to stir up a man's most primitive desires. But he still calmly said, "There's no need. I'll just rest here for a night; I don't need anyone to accompany me. You don't need to use those charming tactics anymore."

Kong Nanwu sighed, asking, "Does the young master think I'm only saying all of this to entice you?"

"Is that not it?" Zu An replied, completely unfazed.

Kong Nanwu sighed. "Perhaps the young master doesn't know, but Nan Xun can't continue to exist in this world in her state. She needs to absorb the energies of men from time to time. The courtesan meeting was also held for this purpose, in the hopes that she could at least choose someone she admired. In the end, after careful selection, she chose you. If the young master isn't willing, in order to prevent her from disappearing, I can only make her serve other men."

Zu An was speechless. This woman is way too freaking good at this! She's attacking both instincts and reason! Now it almost seems as if I'm being a bad guy by not sleeping with Nan Xun!

Kong Nanwu said, "A normal man's body would deteriorate if she absorbs their essence, and there might even be danger to their life. However, young master's cultivation technique is special. You don't fear the energies of yin, so I hope young master can help Nan Xu here. After all, she was a good person when she was still alive, and she doesn't truly wish to fall into prostitution and be forced to live a life sleeping with all sorts of different men either."

Zu An frowned, exclaiming, "Isn't it all because your fiend race's technique is too sinister?!"

Nan Xun said, "I do not blame the miss and am instead grateful to her. If not because she saved me, I would have already disappeared completely."

Sigh... Even the victim is grateful, so what else can I even say? Zu An thought.

Kong Nanwu bowed and said, "We won't disturb the young master's rest anymore." Then, she didn't wait for Zu An to say anything and walked away with her maids. She even closed the door behind her.

Zu An was at a loss. Who do you think I am? Do you think I'll become a pig just because she's pretty?

Nan Xun said quietly, "Young master, I will help you massage your head."

Zu An was stunned. Which head are you going to massage? he thought. But a pair of soft hands soon rested on his forehead. It was cool, but it also felt really good. Nan Xun's hands were soft, as if she knew massaging techniques. Zu An's tense body unknowingly relaxed.

"Hm? You seem to be really good at this," Zu An couldn't help but say.

"I used to be a spy, so I had to learn how to service someone well." Nan Xun sounded a bit lonely and dejected.

Zu An fell silent as well. Anything he said at this point would be pointless. At the same time, he also became a bit jealous of King Qi. He'd had such a great beauty at his side, with such an amazing pair of hands. He wondered just how many times Nan Xun had comforted King Qi before.

When he thought of that, he couldn't help but say, "This actually isn't our first meeting."

"Huh?" Nan Xun was surprised. "The young master has met me before? But that should not be. I was training in secret before and rarely met people. Once I entered King Qi Manor, I always lived inside the manor. There are few people who have seen my complete appearance."

After some hesitation, Zu An told her a rough summary of his investigation of her death, as well as how he was almost discovered, so he had no choice but to hide in her coffin.

"No wonder the young master recognized me so quickly!" Nan Xun was surprised. Then, she bowed toward him, saying, "Thank you, young master, for bringing my injustice to light."

Zu An couldn't help but say, "Even though I did find out the truth, I might not be able to bring your case to justice."

"I know." Nan Xun had a sorrowful smile on her face. "His majesty will likely not announce this matter publicly." She was a well trained spy, so she naturally understood how these things worked.

"But I still wish to thank the young master." Her smile was as beautiful as a flower. She continued, "To a certain extent, we shared a bed when you hid in the coffin."

Zu An was speechless. He felt his entire body become tense. Nan Xun giggled and said, "Young master, do not worry. I am completely willing to serve you; it is not because I was forced to at all."

Zu An carried out his last struggle, saying, "But I can't help but feel a bit weird about all of this."

"Young master, there is no need to move. Let me take care of everything." Nan Xun smiled toward him. Then, she moved all of her hair to one side and slowly squatted down, revealing a neck that was fine like jade.

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By the time Zu An left the next morning, Gao Ying and Pei You had already waited outside for a long time. When they saw him, they quickly cornered him. The outwardly cold but inwardly passionate Pei You moved over and asked while winking at him, "So how was it?" Even the usually steadfast Gao Ying pricked up his ears. His eyes were full of gossipy intentions.

"Um... Would you believe me if I said that nothing happened?" Zu An had a strange expression on his face. Nothing really had happened the previous night; he wasn't perverted to that extent. He had merely given Nan Xun a bit of his essence out of good intentions. The only thing was that he hadn't been able to resist her enthusiasm as she insisted on sucking it out.

"Only if you're not a man." The two of them obviously didn't believe him. They had seen Nan Xun's charm for themselves. How could anyone possibly resist her charm?

Zu An thought to himself, I'm actually a man, but your goddess isn't really human anymore. "Forget it then, if you don't believe me." He clearly didn't want to continue talking about that.

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After separating from the two of them, Zu An chose to head into the palace to report what happened the previous night to the emperor. It wasn't that he was particularly excited about his job, but rather that the information wouldn't be as effective once the opportunity passed.

He unexpectedly ran into King Qi, who was about to join the morning court session. The other party said in surprise, "What a coincidence. I heard that Sir Zu was blessed by the spring winds yesterday, so why are you up so early? Did that courtesan not take proper care of you?"

The story of the previous night at Scarlet Invitation had already spread throughout the capital. Even though they both had their own ulterior motives, they were now allies, so their relationship had become a bit closer. They still had to exchange some conventional greetings.

Zu An's expression immediately became strange. After all, Nan Xun had been King Qi's concubine. She said, "No, she was amazing and great at what she does."

Chapter 933: Feel My Bottomless Longing

King Qi felt that Zu An's smile was a bit strange, but he couldn't exactly say how. But at that moment, several other important statesmen walked past. He didn't want too many people to know about their new relationship, so he took the chance to leave.

Zu An continued to the imperial study and waited outside. He hadn't expected to actually be called in before the morning court session. However, the emperor summoned him as soon as he heard about Zu An's arrival.

"I heard you had some luck last night in the pleasure quarters. Why are you here so early? Do you have something important to report?" the emperor asked after sitting down.

Zu An shivered. The palace gates never opened at night, and yet the emperor already knew exactly what had happened. "I was forced to sacrifice my purity for the sake of completing this mission!" he exclaimed with an 'upset' expression.

The emperor was speechless. This kid really is shameless! Who in this entire court dares to speak to me like that, apart from him?

"It sounds like you've completed your mission," he said, even though he didn't think it was too likely. After all, how could Zu An complete his mission after just a single day? He was already prepared to take the chance to harshly criticize Zu An as a warning to treat the matter more seriously.

"Indeed, I've already completed it," Zu An replied.

The emperor instinctively nodded and said, "As expected, you need to make sure to..." He was stunned midway through his sentence. He exclaimed, "What? You already completed it?"

Zu An felt incredible when he saw the emperor look as if he had just eaten a pile of shit. His recording lens was something he had applied for from the Embroidery House. It was able to record a scene, but it wasn't like the Chu clan's mirror that could actually hold a video call at any time.

The emperor's eyelids twitched when he saw Yu Nan sitting on Bi Ziang's lap, acting all coquettish and cute. He felt his stomach churn. Then, he gave Zu An a complicated look. This brat... Where the hell do you come up with this nonsense? But he had to admit that even though it was disgusting, it was quite useful.

"Alright, with this, Yu Nan is finished." The emperor turned off the recording; otherwise, he might really throw up his tea from the previous night.

Zu An asked probingly, "May I ask what your highness plans to use this recording for?"

The emperor frowned slightly. He subconsciously disliked the feeling of a subject questioning his thoughts. But since Zu An completed this mission so well, he couldn't really berate him at the moment. As such, he held his annoyance in and said, "The contents of this recording are too... Too inelegant. It can't be released through normal means."

"Then was it all for nothing?" Zu An felt a bit disappointed. He wouldn't be able to see those two's complete social death.

"Of course not," the emperor said. "The rivalry between you and Yu Nan last night is already enough. However, even though quite a few people know of it, it's still within a limited circle of people. That's why we need someone to fan the flames hotter."

Zu An went on guard. Are you going to throw that job to me too?

As if he had seen through Zu An's thoughts, the emperor continued, "Bi Ziang's eighteen garden friends or whatever have many connections. They're always talking about useless romantic things. This group seems to have a high reputation among the people, so we'll just call Bi Ziang over and show him this recording's contents. He'll naturally know what to do once he sees it."

If Bi Ziang didn't want to become a complete social outcast, he would definitely do everything he could to prevent the recording from getting out. He was a smart person too, so he'd figure out that as long as Yu Nan experienced social death first, the recording would lose all meaning. That was why he had no choice but to act with everything he had.

Zu An was stupefied. As expected, no one is better at playing dirty than the emperor...

The worst part was that the Bi clan even supported the crown prince, and yet the emperor was so quick to use Bi Ziang like this! It was easy to imagine the big fuss that would be caused between the two clans.

Sure enough, no amount of loyalty was worth anything to the emperor. He was much more interested in keeping others in check. As long as his subjects were fighting among themselves, then he would be free of worries.

“Your majesty is wise and brilliant!” Zu An exclaimed. This was fine as well, because he had been a bit worried about the Yu clan’s retaliation. After all, Yu Yanluo had treated him quite well, so it might get ugly if he personally got into conflict with them.

The emperor had his morning court session afterward, so Zu An chose to tactfully withdraw.

As Zu An left, the emperor watched his departing figure with a frown. Rationally speaking, this brat was a subordinate who devoted himself to his work. These missions were so tricky, and yet he completed his tasks beautifully each time. He should have appreciated such a talented individual. Yet for some reason, he felt a subconscious dislike of Zu An.

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After he left the imperial study, Zu An headed straight for the Eastern Palace. His current post didn’t require him to attend the morning court session, so he had a bit of free time on his hands.

He suddenly thought of something when he was about to reach the Eastern Palace. He asked a passing maid to bring him some green oranges. Then, he peeled off their skins and rubbed them on his body.

When he sniffed himself and only smelled oranges, he finally felt at ease. The smells of other women had screwed him over way too many times. He had finally learned his lesson this time, and felt that he really was resourceful.

When they saw him enter the Eastern Palace, Piao Duandiao and Jiao Sigun greeted him enthusiastically. Their relationship had already been good to begin with, and after Zu An had saved their lives in the dungeon, they were just a hair away from being sworn brothers.

Zu An asked, sounding them out, “You guys don’t have anything you want to ask me, right?”

The two of them were stunned and replied, “Why would we?”

“It’s nothing.” Zu An sighed in relief. With how these two were, especially with Piao Duandiao’s gossipy nature, he would definitely have been winking at him and asking how things had gone last night. He might demand even more details than that guy Pei You.

He could tell that they didn’t know what had happened from their expressions. That meant the news hadn’t reached the Eastern Palace yet. Alright, things won’t be too bad when I see Bi Linglong later.

Zu An then paid the crown prince a visit. However, it hadn’t been long since the crown prince got out of bed, and he was still drowsy. He wasn’t interested no matter what Zu An said.

After Zu An finished the trip, he went to see Bi Linglong. Unlike the crown prince, she was already dressed up meticulously in an elegant and beautiful outfit. He exclaimed, “I greet the crown princess!” He had to show her proper etiquette in front of other people, after all.

“Sir Zu, be at ease,” Bi Linglong replied casually. Then, she turned her attention back to the document on the table.

In order to train the crown prince, the emperor would send some government affairs documents to the Eastern Palace. Of course, they wouldn't be anything highly urgent. The crown prince didn't do any work, so it was normally Bi Linglong who took care of all of these things.

“It hasn't been long since we came out of the dungeon. Crown princess, you haven't fully recovered yet, so please don't work too hard,” Zu An said out of concern. Her hair was still completely white, serving as a constant reminder of her lost life force.

Bi Linglong replied with an 'oh', but then didn't pay him any attention.

Zu An was stunned. Her attitude seems to be really off. He quietly asked through ki, “Linglong, what's wrong?” But she still didn't reply.

He called out a few more times, but she only continued to remain completely indifferent. On the contrary, a string of Rage points came in from the back end. Zu An was a bit puzzled. His eyes flickered with a new idea, however, and he said, “If you keep this up, I'm going to come over and hug you!”

“You dare?!” Sure enough, Bi Linglong suddenly shot him a glare when she heard that. Of course, the entire exchange was done through ki.

“Why don't you see for yourself if I dare or not?” Zu An retorted without backing down at all.

Bi Linglong knew that Zu An had always been bold. She was worried that he might start a huge commotion in the Eastern Palace. She harrumphed and asked, “Why didn't you rest with that courtesan a bit longer? Why did you run all the way here so early in the morning?”

Zu An couldn't help but smile. So she was doing this out of jealousy! It seemed the crown princess had her own intelligence network. Damn it, I got those oranges for nothing.

But he reacted quickly and said, “You've misunderstood. I went to the brothel to carry out a mission.” Then, he gave her a summary of the emperor's mission to bring down Yu Nan.

But Bi Linglong wasn't as easily fooled as someone like Chu Youzhao. She retorted with a sneer, “Was there a need to stay overnight if it was just to investigate a case?”

“I couldn't just leave and draw everyone's suspicion, right?” Zu An quickly explained. “I vow that I didn't have a physical relationship with that courtesan last night the way I did with you. Otherwise, the heavens can strike me down where I stand!” He thought, Bi Linglong didn't help me out in that way before...

Bi Linglong jumped in fright when she saw him make a vow. “Are you mad? You can't recklessly make those kinds of vows!”

“I have a clear conscience, so it's not a problem at all,” Zu An said with an upright expression.

Bi Linglong had already been fully convinced a while before, but she couldn't bring herself to just change her attitude so quickly. She still said coldly, “Then what about that poem you wrote for that courtesan? You wrote all about romance and dreams. Just listening to it makes me sick.”

Zu An thought, So that was the problem! He said with a chuckle, "That was just for the sake of the mission! Right, I have a piece of secret information to give the crown princess." He had the maid bring over some pen and paper.

Bi Linglong had some idea of what he was thinking. Hmph, do you think I'm that easy to win over? I'm not that courtesan. Do you think you can fool me that easily?

Zu An finished soon afterward. He handed the paper over, saying, "This is an urgent report. I hope the crown princess can comment on it as soon as possible."

Bi Linglong harrumphed. She quietly unfolded the scroll. However, her face immediately turned red, and her breathing became rushed too.

There was a poem written on the scroll.

"I hope my words reach you deeply like a candle lit at the bottom of a well, a rendezvous of two as we share a game of go.

Like the red beans embedded within exquisite dice, can you feel my bottomless longing?"[1]

Chapter 934, Part 1: Lying Through One's Teeth

In this world, Go was a game of chess. The first two lines talked about lighting a candle and playing a game of chess with one's husband. The word 'well' would make Bi Linglong think about the secret tunnel to her bedroom. Then, she would imagine a scene where the two of them lit a candle in the secret passage.

With her literary background, Bi Linglong would naturally be able to pick up on Zu An's play on words. She would feel as if he was warning her not to miss such a day. Even though she didn't know what day he was talking about, it was definitely a rendezvous between lovers.

Is he hinting for me to wait for him in that tunnel tonight? Her heart began to pound when she thought of that. But what left her even more stirred were the last two lines. Red beans in this world were also called yearning beans. Her own name had even been used in this poem, so she felt as if it had been made just for her.

Bi Linglong thought, This guy really has no shame! Who's yearning for you?! But she was starting to lose confidence. In the past few days, she had kept tossing and turning in bed, unable to sleep, her head filled with what had happened in the dungeon.

Don't tell me I made it too obvious and he noticed? Ahh... that's so embarrassing...

"Crown princess, is something wrong?" Rong Mo saw that Bi Linglong's expression kept changing after she looked at that piece of paper, looking like she was embarrassed, but also annoyed. She had never seen the crown princess with such an expression in all the years she had served her. She subconsciously got on her toes in an attempt to see what was written on the paper.

However, Bi Linglong reacted quickly and folded the piece of paper, saying, "I've received Sir Zu's report. I'll make the proper arrangements." She didn't even dare to look him in the eyes after speaking.

Her thoughts were a complete mess. Where in the world does that guy get his boldness from? He gave me this love letter in front of so many people in the Eastern Palace? After all, if it were exposed, it would be a clan-eradicating crime!

She subconsciously thought about burning the piece of paper in the incense burner, but this thought was rejected as soon as it emerged. How could she throw away a poem that had been written just for her? She decided to find a secret place to hide it.

Zu An knew that Bi Linglong was no longer upset, but rather happy, when he saw her response. He sighed in relief. At the same time, he was quite baffled. What did I report to you about?

However, he just treated it as something she had said to appease the people around them and ignored it, saying, "Then I'll have to trouble the crown princess."

Bi Linglong saw the smirk on his face and thought, You must be so pleased with yourself right now, huh? After messing around with me like this...

As such, she harrumphed to express her own dissatisfaction. "But Sir Zu's handwriting really is ugly. It looks like ants crawling across the paper."

Rong Mo couldn't help but laugh. She couldn't help but feel that the crown princess didn't dote on her as much as before Zu An had arrived. She was obviously happy to see the crown princess scold Zu An.

"The crown princess' scolding is deserved." Zu An was also sweating. He was aware of his handwriting skills too.

Bi Linglong said calmly, "You are the crown prince's chamberlain, after all, and so you carry the duty of teaching the crown prince by example. It's rather unacceptable for your handwriting to be that ugly. I'll have the lesser tutor teach you, so learn how to write properly."

Zu An felt a huge headache. He hadn't expected to still be forced to study even after crossing worlds... He cursed inwardly. My chamberlain job is just a freaking title, what the hell can I even teach the crown prince? Does teaching him what to do in the inner room count?

Bi Linglong couldn't help but bite her lip when she saw his irritated expression. Why don't you look happy at all? Don't you realize I gave you this responsibility so you can stay in the Eastern Palace and keep me company a bit longer?

Of course, she would never say such words out loud. She could only hold them in unhappily.

...

Meanwhile, the court session had already wrapped up most important matters. Eunuch Wen shouted, "Present your cases to the emperor if there are more matters; if not, withdraw from the court."

A bronze-skinned elder stepped forward and said, "This subject has a matter to submit to the king."

The emperor gave him a look. He didn't know what Murong Tong had to say to him, but he still nodded and said, "Permitted."

Murong Tong thus said, “This subject received a new poem before the court session, and I feel that it can be made into a war song. I hope your majesty can approve of it.”

Those present in the court whispered among themselves when they heard Murong Tong’s words. They really couldn’t understand why he would propose something of that sort.

Don’t tell me one of his kids wrote a poem, and he wants to use this as an opportunity for their promotion?

But the Murong clan was a clan that focused on martial talent. Their clan was full of thick-skulled muscleheads; even the Murong clan’s young miss was a tough tomboy. They had never heard of anyone in that clan having any talent in such a field.

Furthermore, back then, the court had suffered badly because of the fiend races’ war songs. That was why when they came back, they began to research their own war songs. Unfortunately, the results were mediocre at best. This was a world that prioritized cultivation, so the truly talented invested all of their attention into cultivation. There weren’t many who would study something trivial like poetry too extensively, so there had never been any suitable war songs.

Even so, there were many well-informed people. Many people were able to guess what Murong Tong was going to say.

Secretariat Assistant Director Yu Nan’s expression darkened. The previous night had been the most humiliating time of his life. He hadn’t wanted to ever recall it, and yet it had been brought up again.

“What kind of poem?” The emperor’s expression remained calm. It was impossible to tell what he was thinking.

“This poem is called ‘The Sword and the Song—Spirited Ode Dedicated to the State Duke of Triumph’,” Murong Tong replied. At the same time, he read out in a loud voice, “Intoxicated, I turn up the light to inspect my sword; war horns resound when I wake...”

All of the civil and martial officials in the court felt that the song was extraordinary just from the title. The State Duke of Triumph was going off to war, so such a song would definitely be a great omen.

When they heard all of the lyrics, they all became impassioned. That was especially true for the old subjects who held civilian posts. They all overflowed with tears.

“What an amazing poem!”

“It’s been so many years. We now finally have a war song comparable to the fiend races’ war songs!”

“This is a blessing for our Zhou Dynasty, a blessing for the entire human race!”

...

Murong Tong nodded in satisfaction when he saw the others’ impassioned reactions. The Qin clan brothers had delivered the poem early in the morning. He had felt his entire body break out into goosebumps when he read it. He really wanted to raise his spear and return to the battlefield!

Even though he hadn't written the poem, he still felt incredibly honored when he saw the others' expressions of admiration.

"Sir Murong, were you the one who wrote this poem?" a great subject couldn't help but ask.

Murong Tong's face heated up. He coughed lightly to hide his awkwardness and said, "This old one is a crude man; how could I write something like this?"

"Then may I ask which great master wrote it? Could it be that it was a teacher from the Royal Academy? Perhaps the libationer himself?"

"These incredible lyrics can greatly increase our army's fighting strength! Just this contribution alone is enough to grant a title of nobility!"

Various subjects began to discuss the poem among themselves. The entire court became as noisy as a marketplace.

Yu Nan's face twitched when he heard those words. Even though no one saw it, he felt as if he were being publicly condemned again.

On the other hand, Bi Ziang's expression also changed. Things had always gone his way ever since he was little. The previous night was practically the first time he had failed. His arrogance made him feel extremely awful.

"Sir Murong, don't keep us in suspense anymore. Who was it?" the other important ministers all asked with impatient expressions.

Murong Tong said, "It was the new Green Hat Viscount, Zu An." He deliberately avoided the other title of the crown prince's chamberlain, because he didn't want to give the Eastern Palace any more support.

The smiles of everyone present froze when they heard Zu An's name. The clamoring court immediately became dead silent.

Chapter 934, Part 2: Lying Through One's Teeth

Even though Zu An's rank wasn't high, and it hadn't been long since he had arrived in the capital, there was almost no one who didn't know who he was.

After all, there were too many people who had been ruined because of him! They were all important figures too. The Murong clan, Cheng clan, Shi clan... Even King Qi had been screwed over by this man. They had all discussed him in private, feeling that he was like a disease, that whoever he touched would be done for.

Everyone from King Qi's faction hated him. There were even many from the crown prince's faction who didn't like him. Many subjects from King Qi's faction looked at Murong Tong resentfully. Why did you have to give that Zu An another push?

The crown prince's faction was also confused. Don't tell me that Zu An ended up defecting to King Qi's side? Why would Murong Tong speak up for his sake?

An important minister stepped forward and said, "Zu An has just been promoted within the nobility, and he's still young. Increasing his noble rank again in quick succession within such a short amount of time will easily instill arrogance. It might not actually help him."

That person was naturally someone from King Qi's faction. Several voices of support immediately followed when those words were spoken.

The crown prince's faction immediately felt much better when they heard that, thinking that it was how King Qi's faction should act after all. They instinctively jumped out to express a different opinion. "We disagree. If there are crimes, punishment must be given, but if there is merit, it deserves reward. This is our policy for those who render service to the court. Furthermore, such an incredible song will greatly improve our army's strength, which is an extraordinary achievement. He naturally deserves to be rewarded."

The two sides had already fought each other for so many years. King Qi's faction immediately retorted, "Zu An has already been rewarded more than enough for his contributions. As a member of the court, serving our nation is his duty. If we gave out rewards that easily, then with so many members of the court, wouldn't everyone deserve promotions?"

"That's absolute nonsense!" Murong Tong listened to the back-and-forth from off to the side. He finally couldn't take it anymore and exclaimed, "Is this kind of legendary work something an ordinary official can randomly make? Everyone here knows that Zu An and I share some grudges, and yet I still stepped forward to recommend him here because I recognize the help his poem can bring to our court's soldiers! A war song with these lyrics can greatly reduce the number of soldiers that will be sacrificed, saving us a huge amount of resources... If you don't reward this type of contribution, it will make the hearts of our army's soldiers go cold, and all of the subjects under the sky will criticize us!"

"Sir Murong speaks too seriously. It is just a song; how can you praise it that much?" Those people from King Qi's faction were rather unhappy. Are you on our side or not?

"If you have the skill to write a song of this level, this old one is willing to fight for your reward too." Murong Tong harrumphed. He was so angry his beard was shaking.

The court was a place full of old foxes. Soon, others quoted the classics to argue against Murong Tong.

The emperor smiled inwardly when he saw the people below fight among themselves. He hadn't expected Zu An to be of some use even here, to actually stir up internal conflict in King Qi's side.

Just then, Bi Ziang, who had just been listening from the side the entire time, stepped forward and said, "Sir Zu's lyrics are undoubtedly great, but we still don't know how well they suit a war song. Why don't we wait until the practical results of this song return from the front lines, and then reward Sir Zu based on the results? What does everyone think about this?"

King Qi's faction felt that they would at least be delaying things when they heard what he said. That was something they could accept.

The crown prince's faction felt as if Bi Ziang was speaking out in support of Zu An. After all, if they continued to argue, there wouldn't be any benefits if King Qi faction's people continued to oppose rewarding Zu An to the end.

Even Murong Tong felt that was an acceptable plan. After all, as someone born in a military clan, he had absolute confidence in these war lyrics.

The emperor on the dragon throne spoke in a dignified voice. "In that case, we'll take some time to decide this matter."

Bi Ziang's thoughts might be able to fool others, but not him. Judging from how he suggested a delaying of Zu An's reward, it seemed he didn't really like Zu An.

The emperor didn't feel unhappy about the situation at all, instead feeling a sort of ease. As an emperor, seeing his subjects mutually scheme against each other was the most important thing. If they were all kind and loving toward each other, was there even a need for him to sit on this throne anymore?

Bi Ziang also smirked inwardly. He keenly sensed that the emperor didn't seem to like Zu An that much either, or else he definitely wouldn't have let this matter rest so easily. When he realized that, his gloominess from the previous day finally received some relief.

Then, he secretly gestured toward a minister nearby. The minister immediately stepped forward and said, "This subject also has something to present to the emperor!"

All of the ministers present shivered inwardly when they saw him step forward. He was someone from the Imperial Censor Bureau. These people were in charge of supervising officials. What they had to present were normally all accusations of misconduct carried out by different subjects. They all wondered who the unlucky one was today.

"Permitted!" Eunuch Wen cleared his throat and shouted again after receiving the approval.

"This subject has just heard Sir Murong bring up this poem. Does everyone know what kind of place this poem was created in?" the imperial censor said.

The expressions of many people who were in the know changed. They were able to roughly guess what he was about to say.

The imperial censor felt a bit uncomfortable when he saw that nobody answered. However, he knew that the civil and military officials of the court didn't like to have dealings with people like him. As such, he answered his own question. "This poem was created last night in the capital's largest brothel, Scarlet Invitation. It was something created in a rivalry between certain officials to please a courtesan."

He took a deep breath afterward before continuing, "This subject accuses the Secretariat Assistant Director Yu Nan of misconduct. As the emperor's son-in-law, he chose to linger in the pleasure quarters and even carry out a love rivalry with another. He has brought shame to the royal family." He spoke each word in an impassioned manner. Every word he said left those present shocked.

After all, the Censor-in-Chief was none other than Yi Chong. Meanwhile, Yi Chong was the older brother of the Capital Magistrate Yi Chun. Yi Chun was someone under King Qi's faction and had a great relationship with the Yu clan. After all, the previous day, Yi Chun's son Yi Zhibing had gone to Scarlet Invitation together with Yu Nan. And yet, someone from the Imperial Censor Bureau had actually stepped forward to impeach Yu Nan?

Many people began to wonder if the Yi clan was also divided. But those of higher status frowned, because they knew that it wasn't easy for the crown prince's faction to place their people in the Imperial Censor Bureau. If they were exposed for being biased, they would definitely pay the price later.

For them to use up such an important chess piece here, didn't it prove how much they wanted this matter to succeed?

Sure enough, Yu Nan realized that as well. His expression changed several times. He quickly stepped forward and got on his knees, exclaiming, "This subject is guilty!"

As someone who had been mixed into political circles for so long, he knew that it would be over as long as he humbly apologized. He only needed to express a certain attitude. As for everything else, there would naturally be people to speak out for him.

Sure enough, ministers from King Qi's faction quickly spoke up. "Our court has never expressly stipulated in writing that the visiting of pleasure quarters is prohibited for officials. That is an elegant matter to begin with, so why is there a need for such criticism?"

"As officials of the court, we naturally need to be model examples for the citizens. Furthermore, Yu Nan is the emperor's son-in-law, and he married the royal family's princess. Lingering in a place like that shames the royal family's reputation. Your majesty, please dismiss Yu Nan from his Secretariat Assistant Director position and let the Royal Family Court handle this matter," the imperial censor said again.

It was an old trick of imperial censors to start with the most severe punishment. People were going to argue back and forth about it afterward anyway. If they were lucky and his majesty ended up disliking that person, it might end up going through! It was not as if such things had never happened before.

King Qi's faction became angry as well. They all said, "It's not only Sir Yu who went to Scarlet Invitation. Sir Bi Ziang, Qin Guangyuan, Qin Yongde, Gao Ying, Pei You... These people all went as well. Why aren't you punishing all of them too?"

Several people were mentioned in succession; they were all either influential figures in the court or well-known individuals from major clans. Those who had been accused all stepped forward to defend themselves. Those who didn't have the qualifications to attend the court session had their seniors step forward to speak up in their place.

Nearly half of the court was now involved. Both sides argued against each other viciously until their faces were red. In the end, they began to bring in each other's clan ancestors and women, falling just short of curses.

The emperor frowned. Eunuch Wen picked up on his change in attitude. He picked up the horsetail whisk and hit the small bell next to him, exclaiming, "Quiet!"

The officials of the court finally snapped out of their frenzy when they heard the cold bell sound. They all bowed towards the emperor with lowered heads.

"All of you are out of control..." The emperor pointed at those present and berated them angrily. In the end, he ordered, "All those involved with Scarlet Invitation last night will forfeit their salary for one year. Return and ponder over your mistakes! This court session has concluded." He stormed off angrily after his proclamation.

It wasn't that he didn't want to punish Yu Nan, but rather that the Yu clan's influence was too great. Furthermore, together with King Qi faction's support, both sides were equally matched. There wasn't enough firepower to strip Yu Nan of his position yet. However, today was just a bit of the backdrop. The interesting show was yet to come.

Eunuch Wen already knew about the emperor's intentions. He sent his trusted eunuchs to secretly deliver the recording to Bi Ziang.

How could the emperor personally do something like threatening a subject? It was to the extent that it wasn't even convenient for Eunuch Wen to do it himself. To a certain degree, he represented the emperor, so he had to send some trustworthy lesser eunuchs to do the deed.

Bi Ziang was a smart man too. He would know what to do once he saw the recording.

...

Meanwhile, in the Qin manor, Chu Youzhao was throwing a tantrum. She grumbled, "Stupid brother-in-law, stupid brother in law! You said that you were only going to investigate a case, but you ended up investigating a courtesan's bed!"

News of Scarlet Invitation's events from the previous night had gradually spread. She had already been paying attention to that matter to begin with, so she obviously knew that Zu An was the one who had obtained the courtesan in the end. He had even stayed the night there!

The maids inside all kept quiet out of fear. They didn't know why the young master was so unhappy. An unlucky person earlier had ended up being scolded because he went inside at the wrong time.

A maid came out with a letter, saying, "Young master, the first master had this servant deliver these lyrics. It is an extraordinary work. He wishes for you to spend some time reflecting on it."

Chu Youzhao was feeling restless. She gave the letter a random look and said, "What kind of stupid words are these?" Then, she crumpled it up and threw it to the side.

The maid jumped in fright. She stood there off to the side, not knowing what to do.

Chu Youzhao frowned and asked, "Why did big brother suddenly decide to send me these lyrics? Did he write them?" What's up with big brother? Doesn't he know that I don't like reading? Why are you sending me this stuff?

That maid replied, "It wasn't the first master who wrote it. It seems someone named Zu An wrote it."

Chu Youzhao ran over and grabbed the crumpled paper as soon as she heard those words. "Why didn't you say so earlier! Didn't you know I love poetry?!"

All of the maids were speechless.

Chapter 935, Part 1: A Day in the Life of a Playboy

The maids had all served Chu Youzhao for so many years already. Who didn't know what their young master was really like? When had he ever liked poetry? But they knew that exposing him now was just asking for trouble. They all held back their urge to laugh.

Chu Youzhao unfolded the crumpled paper. The words on the surface were already all messed up. She felt a wave of regret and exclaimed angrily to the maid, "Stupid maid, why didn't you tell me earlier?"

"But I did..." The maid felt extremely wronged. Didn't I tell you from the very start that it was from the first young master?

Chu Youzhao didn't know what to say either, which drove her crazy. She harrumphed and said, "Hurry up and bring me a paperweight."

The maid quickly handed it over. Chu Youzhao flattened the paper under the paperweight, trying to smooth it out. Meanwhile, she carefully read the poem. She nodded while speaking. "Yes, this poem was really written well!"

The surrounding maids waited for her to praise the poem a few times, upon which they would give her some praise. After all, the happier their master was, the better their days would be here. And yet, after waiting for a long time, that was it. As for how the poem was good, Chu Youzhao couldn't say a single thing. The maids really were left in a tough spot. They didn't even know where to begin even if they wanted to praise her.

Chu Youzhao still couldn't return the wrinkled paper to its original state even after trying for a long time. She got up in anger and seemed about to hit the maid. "It's all your fault that I ended up messing up my brother-in-law's authentic work like this!"

The maid dodged while crying out, "This isn't Sir Zu's original work! The original is in the first young master's hands! This is just a copy the first young master had someone make!"

Chu Youzhao's eyes lit up and she exclaimed, "Say that earlier!" Then, she pushed the maid away and ran over to the main hall to find Qin Guangyuan.

...

When Chu Youzhao arrived, she saw Qin Guangyuan admiring the poem with a few others from the clan and discussing how great it was. Her eyes became bigger the more she heard. Wow, big bro is really awesome, I couldn't even say so many good adjectives. But the best one is still my brother-in-law! Who would've thought that he would be able to write such amazing lyrics?

She didn't disturb Qin Guangyuan. She sat down quietly off to the side, her eyes sparkling as she listened to him praising Zu An's poem. Listening to him praise Zu An felt as if he were praising her.

"With Zu An's poem, grandfather's expedition north will definitely be twice as effective!" Qin Guangyuan was becoming more and more excited. The more formidable Zu An was, the more he would benefit as his 'talent scout'! That was why he subconsciously realized that the more help this war song was to the army, and the greater the boost to their morale, the more benefits it would bring Zu An and himself by association!

Sure enough, many people realized the same thing as well. They all began to praise Qin Guangyuan for being someone with great insight.

Chu Youzhao felt as if she had been tricked when she first heard that Zu An stayed the night with a courtesan, but when she heard that he had written this poem for her grandfather, to help him in his

expedition north, her resentment immediately vanished. Brother-in-law didn't go to the brothel for girls after all! Isn't that what I was saying? How could someone like brother-in-law have such low-level preferences?

She suddenly remembered that the Qin clan clearly didn't like her brother-in-law, and yet he had still done such a thing. Don't tell me that it's for... my sister?" She couldn't help but smile foolishly when she had that thought.

As Qin Guangyuan's throat was getting a bit dry from talking too much, he sipped on some tea. Suddenly, Chu Youzhao ran over and rolled up the paper the poem was written on, saying, "Big brother, this poem is mine."

"Pfft!" Qin Guangyuan sprayed the tea he had just sipped out of his mouth. He couldn't be bothered with the tea anymore and quickly took it back, exclaiming, "Stop causing trouble and give it back! This is a gift for grandfather."

Chu Youzhao pouted. "This is my brother-in-law's, so isn't it natural for me to have it? Can't you just have someone else make a copy?"

"Nonsense, the copy given to grandfather naturally has to be the original." Qin Guangyuan tried several times, but he failed each time, mainly because he was scared that he might damage the poem. He said urgently, "Furthermore, it wasn't even Zu An who wrote it himself."

"Nonsense, this is his poem! I've already heard that he created it." Chu Youzhao refused to take the bait. She thought to herself, How could someone as smart as I be tricked so easily?

"It really wasn't him who wrote it! If you don't believe me, you can look at the inscription at the bottom," Qin Guangyuan reminded her.

Chu Youzhao was stunned. She subsequently opened it, and became angry when she saw the words 'written by friend Gao Ying in place of Zu An'. She exclaimed, "Gao Ying, that bastard, why is he leaving his name behind on brother-in-law's poem? How shameless!"

Qin Guangyuan took the chance to seize it back from her hands. When he saw that it was still in good condition, he sighed in relief, saying, "That Gao guy is indeed shameless..."

After they both complained for a while, Chu Youzhao tried to get the poem back from him. Qin Guangyuan asked in surprise, "Wait, didn't I already have someone make a copy for you?"

Chu Youzhao's face heated up. She said, "That careless maid accidentally ruined it."

Qin Guangyuan said, "Fine, I'll have someone make another copy for you. Don't ruin it this time. Everyone in the clan is still waiting in line for a copy."

"I know that already..." Chu Youzhao watched excitedly as his subordinate properly made a copy of the poem. Then, she brought it back with her happily. She ordered the maids to hang it in the bedroom. She was going to take good care of it and look at it every day. Either way, everyone thought she was a man. Furthermore, with the Qin clan's military background, no one would find it unsuitable.

Chu Youzhao looked at the words on the wall while thinking to herself, I have to get brother-in-law to write me a poem in the future. I'm so jealous of those other guys.

...

Meanwhile, in the Eastern Palace, Zu An rubbed his nose. "Achoo!"

Bi Linglong asked in confusion, "Sir Zu, what's wrong? Are you not feeling well?"

"It's probably because I've been practicing calligraphy for too long," Zu An took the chance to say. He had been forced to stay in the Eastern Palace by Bi Linglong. Time felt as if it crawled on way too slowly...

A look of worry flashed across Bi Linglong's face. "I was too careless. Sir Zu's injuries haven't healed yet after all, so you should be using this chance to rest. Sir Zu doesn't need to stay in the Eastern Palace any longer; you should go back and rest well."

Rong Mo wrinkled her nose as she stood off to the side. Does he look injured at all? He probably played around with that courtesan too much last night. The crown princess is normally so smart. Why can't she tell that this bastard Zu An is just trying to slack off?

Zu An felt a bit embarrassed when he sensed Bi Linglong's concern. He took out something and said, "I've noticed that the crown princess has been a bit distracted recently. I have a Calming Talisman here. If you carry it at your side, it'll help you be at peace, regardless of whether it's during cultivation or when you're sleeping."

"Thank you, Sir Zu." Bi Linglong was happy. It wasn't that she cared too much about the gift, but rather, she was moved by his sincerity. The gift meant that he did care about her, and that was why he had noticed that her mental state hadn't been the best recently. He was trying to help her solve her problem.

Rong Mo rushed over to receive the Calming Talisman. She was also a cultivator, and her cultivation wasn't low. When it entered her hands, she immediately felt a calming sensation. She ran over to hand it to Bi Linglong and said, "Crown princess, this thing really works."

Her attitude toward Zu An improved as well. After all, she had seen that Bi Linglong was a bit out of it recently too, and knew that she indeed needed such an item.

Bi Linglong received the talisman with a smile. Suddenly, her pretty brow furrowed and she asked, "Hm? Why does this talisman have a smell?"

Zu An immediately began to sweat. He had once again experienced that women were indeed extremely sensitive to the smells of other women. This Calming Talisman was something Xie Daoyun had personally drawn up for him, so it probably had her smell. With his current cultivation and cultivation techniques, the talisman didn't have too much use. That was why he might as well give it to someone who needed it more.

Fortunately, he reacted quickly and explained, "That's the talisman's unique smell. It adds to the calming effect." I couldn't smell anything even after keeping it on me for so long, and yet she noticed it immediately. The noses of women really are terrifying, as expected.

Chapter 936: Leaves of a Willow Lifted by the Wind

It was obviously the same lamp Bi Linglong had given him, but Zu An gave it away to another girl, completely unfazed.

After all, there was no way he would continue to practice handwriting at night. He didn't think it was too likely for Bi Linglong to notice either. She didn't really know Xie Daoyun, and with Bi Linglong's status, there was no reason for her to come into his own room to check if it was still there.

Even in terms of the distant future, if she really did end up in his room and didn't see the lamp for some reason, he could just say that he accidentally dropped it and broke it, or make up some other random excuse. Sigh, why am I so smart?

Xie Daoyun was happy and excited when she saw the lamp. She blushed and exclaimed, "Thank you, big brother Zu!"

This kind of gift was just too useful for her! He probably got it while thinking about me. The usually calm and reserved Xie Daoyun felt her heart rate speed up when she had that thought.

Xie Xiu's eyes widened. As someone who had mastered the arts of the playboy himself, how could he not understand the destructive power the gift had on his sister? Damn you, Zu An, are you trying to become my brother-in-law?

As he watched the two of them exchanging ambiguous looks, Xie Xiu walked right in between them to block their line of sight. Then, he looked at Zu An with a big smile, asking, "Brother-in... Ahem, Brother Zu, what about my gift?"

Zu An replied indifferently, "Isn't saving you from He Baizi the best gift?"

Xie Xiu choked. He wanted to argue back, but he suddenly felt that what Zu An had said really was true. He could only say, "Alright, alright. You're done now, right? We should go out and have some fun." Of course, having some fun was just a pretense. He wanted to go to the capital's pleasure quarters and have some lovely girls in his arms.

Zu An obviously knew what he was thinking, but he didn't know what Kong Nanwu and the others' purpose for coming to the capital was. He didn't want to get too involved with them. As such, he said with a smile, "Alright, how about taking Daoyun with us? It's been so long since we came to the capital, and yet I've never treated you guys to a meal. Today's a good chance for us to go out and relax."

Xie Xiu looked dejected when he heard that his big sister was coming too. There was no way they could go to the pleasure quarters if she was coming along! Wait, why is he calling her Daoyun as if they're close?

Xie Daoyun also noticed the way Zu An addressed her and said, blushing, "Teacher told me to watch his home for him. I can't just leave like this."

Xie Xiu was overjoyed to hear that and said, "Right, right, right, we should just go by ourselves."

However, Xie Daoyun said, "But if you don't mind, we can hold a small gathering here. I'll have some servants prepare some food and drink."

Zu An said with a smile, "That's perfect. It's too noisy outside; Daoyun's place here is much more elegant. Huh? Xiu'er, what kind of expression is that? Why do you look as if you're about to cry? Isn't having a meal with your big sister a great thing?"

Xie Xiu was speechless. Screw you! You still want to become my brother-in-law with the way you're acting? If I don't mess up your relationship, my surname isn't Xie!

Xie Daoyun was really happy when she heard Zu An's response. Picking up the hems of her dress, she then hurried out to tell the servants to prepare some food.

Zu An took the chance to wrap his arm around Xie Xiu's shoulder, asking, "Xiu'er, what's wrong? Are you upset?"

Xie Xiu harrumphed and pushed Zu An's arm away, replying, "Don't touch me. I don't have a friend like you who's so disloyal." You can flirt with my big sister, but what about me?

Zu An sighed and said, "Xiu'er, it seems you had no idea what I was trying to do."

Xie Xiu thought, What else could you possibly be thinking by doing this? But he hesitated when he heard Zu An's tone, asking, "What do you mean?"

Zu An asked, "Do you know why your master keeps making you memorize Go games day in and day out?"

"It's to strengthen my soul, of course," Xie Xiu subconsciously replied.

"Indeed. Normal cultivators need to reach the peak of the ninth rank before they can start using their soul power. However, your master's chess dao can take a different approach..." Zu An first praised Xie Xiu's master Hei Baizi, then shifted his attitude. "But there are many fundamentals of cultivation that can't be ignored. Your cultivation is still too low, and your body isn't strong enough. Your soul isn't as sturdy as that of someone truly strong.

"You haven't slept for so long, so your internal energies are deficient. If you go to a brothel now, you'll be wasting your energy on girls. That will only end up ruining all of the effort you put into cultivating your soul. Your body won't be able to take it anymore and you'll end up seriously injured. You might even lose your life!"

Zu An's cultivation was now much higher. Together with Mi Li's constant influence, he sounded truly convincing. Xie Xiu was quickly befuddled. His expression changed several times, but then he quickly cupped his hands and said, "I would've made a huge mistake if it weren't for Brother Zu's warning. I won't forget this life-saving grace."

"You're being too serious! We're all one family," Zu An patted his shoulder and said with a smile.

Xie Xiu's expression was strange. When did we become one family? He couldn't help but reply, "Right, Brother Zu, can you not call me Xiu'er? It sounds weird."

"Sure, Xiu'er," Zu An replied.

“What are you two talking about?” Xie Daoyun asked when she returned, having already finished her preparations. A smile appeared on her face when she saw them hooking their arms around each other; she thought the two seemed to be very close.

Zu An said with a smile, “I was just feeling bad for how Xiu’er has had it recently. Meanwhile, you’re quite relaxed here, and you can call over the servants in this courtyard whenever you need them for something. He has to suffer day in and day out with Hei Baizi. The difference is just a bit too much.”

Xie Xiu gave him a grateful look. Zu An hadn’t exposed his intention to go to a brothel.

Xie Daoyun couldn't help but grab Xie Xiu’s ear, saying, “It’s this brat’s fault for becoming ignorant and incompetent by playing around with girls all day. Look at how formidable your big brother Zu is. He was able to help the crown prince defeat an eighth ranked Moon Jade Serpent while still being so young.”

That was what the court had told everyone. She had always paid close attention to news from that end, so she obviously knew about that. Unfortunately, she had no idea that the enemies Zu An had faced were far above the eighth rank.

Xie Xiu became a bit gloomy. He thought to himself, Zu An went to the brothels way more than me! He even ended up bringing home the courtesan queen herself from Immortal Abode! Even if we put aside the courtesans, just the beauties at his side alone are more numerous, so why am I suddenly the bad example...

He was about to retort when he suddenly realized that he would only be making himself look worse if he said anything. He could only try his best to calm his sister down so she would let go of his ear.

...

Soon afterward, servants brought in a charcoal stove and an assortment of vegetable and meat dishes.

Xie Daoyun said gently, “A normal meal would take some time to prepare. Since the weather’s quite cold, why don’t we enjoy some hot pot tonight?”

“Sounds good!” Xie Xiu’s eyes lit up. “I’ve really been starving recently.”

Only then did Zu An realize that it was already wintertime. Ever since he had begun to cultivate, he stopped having to fear the cold. That was why he hadn’t even noticed the change in seasons.

They cooked the lamb meat while chatting with each other. To a certain degree, they were from the same hometown, so the gathering felt especially nice.

A cold wind blew past. Xie Daoyun’s eyes suddenly lit up. She looked outside past the railing excitedly and exclaimed, “It’s snowing!” Brightmoon City was down south, so it was rare to see snow there even during winter. That was why she was particularly excited.

Zu An was stirred by her gentle and refined complexion, which was even more beautiful amid the contrast of the fluttering snow and the stove’s fire. He blurted out, “Of what does the fluttering of snow resemble?”

“I didn’t expect Brother Zu to suddenly have some literary elegance,” Xie Xiu said with a smile. He looked at the falling snow, then after muttering to himself for a bit, said, “In my opinion, it’s like salt scattered through the air.”

Xie Daoyun gave her little brother an annoyed look. Her little brother really was a bit ignorant sometimes. This brat was a master at everything related to girls, but he was dumb as a donkey about anything unrelated to girls. For fear of Zu An seeing through their family’s situation, she thought for a bit, then said, “It resembles the leaves of a willow lifted by the wind.”

Zu An felt goosebumps across his entire body. He was momentarily distracted as he looked at her stunning countenance.

Chapter 937: Zu An’s Gift to Daoyun

Never could Zu An have imagined that Xie Daoyun would come up with the exact same poem as a certain talented woman from his previous world’s history. He suddenly felt as if he were trapped in a dream.

Just how was this world related to his previous world? What kind of relationship did the Xie Daoyun of this world have with that other Xie Daoyun?[/ref]The original creator of Xie Daoyun’s reply was someone with the same name from Zu An’s previous world. This interaction was where Zu An got the first half ‘Of what does the fluttering of snow resemble’ from.[/ref]

Even after thinking for a bit, he just couldn’t figure it out, so he decided to stop thinking. After all, one had to live in the moment. At the very least, these people in front of him were still alive, so what was the point in thinking about all of that?

“Sir Zu, was my poem not good?” Xie Daoyun asked carefully when she noticed that he had been silent for a long time.

Xie Xiu became a bit unhappy. His big sister was normally quite proud of her achievements in the literary field, and yet she ended up doubting her own ability in front of Zu An first. As such, he said, “Big sister’s verse was many, many times better than mine.”

Xie Daoyun harrumphed. “Who wants to compare with you?”

Xie Xiu was speechless. He felt attacked. After all, this was his big sister...

Zu An snapped out of his daze and said, “Daoyun is too humble. Your verse was exceptional. I just happen to have a poem to present to you as a gift.”

“A gift for me?” Xie Daoyun blushed. Her heart was pounding, but she was also expectant as she said, “I’m listening carefully.”

Zu An looked at her beautiful and gentle features, then slowly said, “Breathtaking flowers cast their elegant reflections upon the waters. A pure heart, where can one find amid a world of fluttering snow?”

Xie Daoyun’s face immediately turned red. They were sitting by the lake right now, so the water surface reflected their faces. Is he praising me for being beautiful? And what’s going on with the latter half? Is he asking me where my affection belongs?

“Thank you, big brother Zu. I’ll find some paper and a pen to write it down right now.” She had no idea how to respond, so she decided to flee the scene first. Her heart was still pounding by the time she entered her room.

She fetched some pen and ink. Calligraphy was something she had been good at to begin with. Now, she was practicing how to draw talismans, so her skills had grown even further. Forget about a poem, she could even write out an entire essay quickly.

“How can he be like this? He already has a wife...” Xie Daoyun bit her lip. Her rising and falling chest showed that just then, she wasn’t calm at all.

Wait, Chu First Miss and Zu An seem to have already divorced each other. Doesn’t that mean that to a certain degree, he’s single? But the Chu clan’s relationship with him still appears to be extremely close...

The ink on the brush finally couldn’t take it anymore and dripped onto the paper.

Ahhhh! This is so annoying! Xie Xiu stared at Zu An in a stupor. If not for the fact that it was his own older sister, he would have given Zu An a huge thumbs up. As a veteran playboy, how could he not see the destructive power of this poem? Judging from his big sister’s hurried footsteps, he could tell she was really panicked. He asked in annoyance, “Brother Zu, do you really not have any older or younger sisters?”

Zu An shook his head and said, “Nope, I’m a single child.”

Xie Xiu could only complain about his misfortune. He really was losing out badly here... Hm? Wait, even though he doesn’t have a little sister, he has a wife! Doesn’t Chu First Miss have a little sister? But he immediately shivered when he remembered Chu Huanzhao’s Wailing Whip. He quickly threw away that thought.

“What are you two talking about?” Xie Daoyun asked, having just returned. Her expression was back to normal, with just a trace of redness remaining.

“It’s nothing,” Zu An said with a smile. Then, his attention shifted to the scroll in her hands. He asked, “Did you finish writing it? Let me take a look.” He took the white scroll from her hands and unfolded it. Then, he said with a sigh of admiration, “Daoyun, your calligraphy really is too beautiful.”

Xie Daoyun’s writing was graceful. Anyone who saw the characters would know that they were written by a sweet-tempered and refined beauty. Gao Ying’s calligraphy from before wasn’t bad, but it was quite lacking compared to hers.

“But of course! My big sister was really famous back when we were in Brightmoon City, you know? There were many people willing to pay good money for her to write something for them!” Xie Xiu bragged smugly. But he immediately felt regret after saying that. What the hell was he showing off for? The more he praised his big sister, the more it would make that guy like her!

“It’s not that exaggerated... Many of those people were only doing that to curry favor with our father.” Xie Daoyun said bashfully.

“Daoyun is too humble. All of us can see just how talented you are.” Zu An chuckled. “Right, didn’t I owe you a song? I thought of a suitable song just now.”

“Really?” Xie Daoyun was surprised and excited. She liked such things a lot. Furthermore, she could see that Zu An’s style was completely different from his previous songs... It made her even more curious.

“Why would I lie to you?” Zu An had been extremely curious about the song ‘Guangling San’ from ‘The Smiling Proud Wanderer’, so he had looked it up online. But unfortunately, he had only listened to it as a keyboard warrior; there was no way he could play it.[1]

There would have been no way he could remember the song score after all this time, but as his cultivation climbed, his memory grew stronger as well. He gradually remembered more things he had seen before.

Thus, he could give Xie Daoyun the song through the way music was recorded in this world. Xie Daoyun was itching to try it out, so she invited the two of them inside. After all, playing the zither was a graceful thing, so it wasn’t too proper to eat while playing it.

Xie Xiu had a gloomy look on his face. He gave the copper pot a reluctant look. I didn’t even finish eating yet... But he didn’t want to put a damper on his big sister’s mood, so he could only leave sulkily.

Xie Daoyun washed her hands first. Then, after drying them with a white cloth, she lit a bit of sandalwood incense before carefully taking out a zither. Her movements throughout the entire process were extremely graceful.

Zu An was really impressed. This is how you should do stuff like this!

Zither music filled the air. At first, it was still a bit underripe, but Xie Daoyun’s zither skills were quite excellent. She quickly immersed herself into the song. Xie Xiu wasn’t too into it at first, but his expression quickly changed. His mouth soon hung open wide.

Xie Daoyun’s chest rose and fell deeply. Her feelings were being completely swept away by the zither. She was completely focused.

Zu An was the calmest of them all. After all, he had heard the song before. Furthermore, he hadn’t heard too many zither songs, so he couldn’t really tell if it was good or bad. All of his attention was on Xie Daoyun’s chest. He wondered if her chest rested on the table when she was focused on drawing those talismans... Otherwise, wouldn’t it be a bit tiring?

The song finished, leaving the entire room completely silent. Xie Daoyun sat in place, in a stupor. She didn’t get up for a long time.

Zu An saw that the bit of hair on the back of her neck was standing up, and there were some teardrops in her eyes. He had to admit that she really was someone who loved the zither. She had actually been able to sympathize so much with the song.

A while later, Xie Daoyun finally looked at him and asked, “Big brother Zu, does this song have a name?”

“The song’s name is ‘Guangling San’.” Zu An felt a bit of regret after saying that. He should have changed the name, perhaps to ‘Zu An’s Present to Daoyun’, which would have earned him even more points with her.

“Guangling San...” Xie Daoyun silently stored the song’s name in her memory. “By the way, why do I sense grief and killing intent from this song?”

Zu An was stunned. Holy shit, you can even sense that?

He thought for a bit and explained, "This song actually tells a story. There was a warrior in ancient times whose cultivation was profound. He had a friend who showed him great favor. That friend was framed by a political enemy, and so he called for the warrior several times. Even though he didn't say why, the warrior knew what his friend needed him for. Yet he never responded, and continued to remain at home to take care of his aged mother. Three years later, when his mother passed away, he then sought out that friend and agreed to help him with his revenge.

"As a result, he charged into that political opponent's territory with only his sword to accompany him, and then killed that enemy despite the protection of endless guards. Unfortunately, by the time he completed his task, he was already surrounded by the soldiers who had come rushing to the scene. The warrior knew that there was no way for him to make it out alive, so he ended his own life. For fear that he would be recognized after he died and involve his older sister back home, he cut up his own face before he committed suicide.

"But then, later on, his older sister went on her own to receive his corpse. She wept because she knew why he had done what he did, yet how could she allow his name to be erased forever..."

Xie Daoyun's eyes were brimming with tears when she heard the story. Xie Xiu's eyes were red as well, but in order to stop himself from crying, he quickly said, "That man is a true hero! He was filial to his mother, waiting until she passed away before carrying out this task. He gave up his life for the sake of his friend, upholding justice."

"I was more moved by his relationship with his sister." Xie Daoyun said with a sigh. "That warrior cut up his own face so he wouldn't drag down his older sister, and yet his older sister chose to give up her own life for the sake of his reputation. I'm filled with endless admiration just thinking about it."

Xie Xiu slammed the table and exclaimed, "This kind of heroic figure really lived a glorious life! I wonder when I could..."

Xie Daoyun cut him off before he even finished his sentence. "I would rather you continue living like a playboy than be like him."

Xie Xiu said with an awkward smile, "I was just saying stuff; I didn't really mean it. Am I that kind of person?" Of course the waists of those young ladies are much more my style.

These stories were what they were. He wouldn't do something like that even if he went mad.

Chapter 938: Horrifying Information

Xie Daoyun sighed in relief. Then, her attention returned to the music score as she muttered endless praises.

Zu An nodded while listening. A talented girl really was a talented girl after all. Where did she come up with all these descriptive words anyway? If it were him, he would have just shouted 'amazing', 'awesome', and the like.

...

The group returned to the lakefront gazebo. Xie Xiu said curiously, "Big sis, you're usually so gentle and refined. Why do you like a song like this, so full of killing intent, today?"

Zu An said with a smile, "Even though Daoyun is sweet-tempered and gentle, it's still mostly because she had no choice but to act that way. As the daughter of a city lord, she was raised carefully in etiquette. That's why she obviously seems a bit more reserved. But even though I haven't spent much time with Daoyun, I can sense a strong passion and longing toward life. I felt she would enjoy a story like this, one of heroes and warriors. That's why I thought of this song. Sure enough, Daoyun liked it as expected."

Xie Daoyun's beautiful figure trembled. She looked at him in disbelief. Even she herself hadn't realized that completely. Only now that Zu An had reminded her did she think, So that was it! She suddenly felt as if she had met an intimate friend who really understood her. But how did he understand her that well? They clearly hadn't met that many times before!

Don't tell me we're really destined to be soulmates? Big brother Zu really understands me! When she recalled the stories she had read before, her heart began to beat even faster.

Xie Xiu was about to mock Zu An, thinking, How could my big sister be like that? But when he saw her expression, he instantly realized what had happened. He looked at Zu An in shock. Does this guy know mind-reading or something?

Meanwhile, Zu An was actually sighing in relief inside. He had just taken a shot in the dark by comparing her to the Xie Daoyun in his previous world's history. He hadn't actually expected to be right! He became a bit flustered. Eventually, he snapped out of his daze and said, "There's actually another story associated with this song."

The Xie clan siblings immediately looked toward him. Xie Xiu urged him, "Brother Zu, don't keep us in suspense like that!"

Zu An said, "During ancient times, there was a group of hermits known as the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove... Among them, one of them was named Ji Kang, who believed in following nature. He usually spent his time playing the zither and reciting poetry in a bamboo grove... Unfortunately, the wife he had taken in his earlier years was a princess of the royal family. Later on, the throne was seized by powerful officials. For fear of his prestige, they continuously tried to enlist him into the court to serve as an official, hoping they could use him to restrain the previous dynasty's imperial clan's chances of rebellion and bring the world under the control of the new regime.

"Ji Kang obviously refused. The new high officials hated him, and yet they couldn't find a way to immediately deal with him due to his prestige. One day, the older brother of one of Ji Kang's friends acted on his lust. He got his sister-in-law drunk and raped her. In order to prevent the matter from being exposed, the older brother seized the initiative to accuse his younger brother of being unfilial. Because the older brother was a cohort official, he used his connections to throw his younger brother into prison.

"Ji Kang was furious over this matter, and he immediately cried out for his friend to receive justice. Since the matter now involved court officials, the high officials thought Ji Kang had ulterior motives, so they used the case to condemn both him and that younger brother to execution.

“When they heard about the matter, three thousand students gathered to petition for justice. However, that only made those high officials feel as if Ji Kang had way too much influence, so their intent to kill him was only strengthened further.

“Before he was going to pass on, he asked for a guqin zither, then calmly played this song, Guangling San. Those present couldn't help but acknowledge his elegance. From that day forth, Guangling San became a song that was passed down through history.”

...

After hearing the story, Xie Xiu exclaimed angrily, “What an elegant and heroic man! What a pity it is that he died under the hands of those high officials. That despicable bastard who raped his little brother's wife is even more hateful. If I ever meet someone like that, I'll definitely cut off their goddamn head!”

Xie Daoyun was even more moved. “I believe that Ji Kang's mood was likely very similar to that of the warrior in the poem. It's just like the warrior when he infiltrated the enemy's manor to assassinate that political enemy.”

“Daoyun really is a zither master after all. You were able to surmise his mood just from the song alone.” Zu An clicked his tongue in wonder. There were many people who knew Ji Kang's story in his previous world, but there weren't many who knew why he had insisted on playing 'Guangling San' at that moment. However, Xie Daoyun had been able to sense that just from the zither song! It really was admirable.

Xie Daoyun suddenly thought of something. Her expression changed. She lowered her voice and asked, “Big brother Zu, where did you hear this story from?”

Zu An was alarmed. He didn't know why she would suddenly ask that question and said, “I read it in an ancient book. What's wrong?”

Xie Daoyun didn't reply, and instead first gestured with her hands to have the servants withdraw. Then she said, “I suddenly thought of something. When this Zhou Dynasty was first founded, those of high status did some dirty things. They were quite similar to the high officials in your story.”

Zu An was bewildered.

“Also, that Ji Kang you spoke of made me think of someone.” Xie Daoyun's expression was grave.

“Who?” Zu An asked.

Xie Daoyun opened her mouth, but she didn't say anything. Instead, she dipped her finger into her tea, then wrote on the table.

Zu An's eyes narrowed when he saw the word she had written, because what it said was 'libationer'!

Xie Xiu's mouth also widened. He wanted to say something, but he felt as if his brain just couldn't keep up.

Xie Daoyun wiped away the mark and said, “This is only something I heard when my teacher was randomly talking about the academy's history. That person seemed to have had a deep relationship with

the royal family of the previous dynasty. That's why for the sake of not arousing suspicion, he almost never paid attention to the affairs of the world. He even maintained a neutral attitude toward the academy's teachers and students."

Xie Xiu felt his throat become dry. "This dynasty's ancestral lineage was built through usurping the previous dynasty's foundation? Why have I never heard about this before?"

Xie Daoyun rolled her eyes. "Your attention is focused on girls day in and day out; of course you wouldn't know about this if you didn't study properly. But actually, this is something you might not have known even if you studied history. After all, it's not something too glamorous, and the court has always kept it a secret. They destroyed a large amount of books that were unfavorable to their image, and those who did know were told to forget about this piece of history.

"Furthermore, afterward, our emperor brought back a huge victory against the fiend races, so his prestige increased dramatically. Eventually, no one brought this up again."

...

While the two siblings were discussing the matter, Zu An felt all of his fine hairs stand up. At that instant, he seemed to have understood many things. Many of the things he had been confused about before now led to new trails to pursue. But there was still some distance from the final truth.

"Big brother Zu, what's wrong?" Even though Xie Daoyun was chatting with her little brother, she still glanced at Zu An from time to time. She couldn't help but ask that when she saw he was acting strange.

"It's nothing. I was just a bit shocked." Zu An snapped out of his daze.

Xie Daoyun said in consolation, "Don't worry, as long as we're careful when talking about these things, nothing bad should happen. It's already been a long time since this happened, after all."

Zu An nodded. "Thank you, Daoyun, for your reminder."

...

Zu An got up to bid farewell soon after finishing the meal. Xie Daoyun noticed that he was a bit out of sorts, so she didn't try to keep him. She only warned him to be careful on the way home.

When he left the academy, Zu An hurried toward the imperial palace. He had some important things to verify. It was already getting dark, so the palace gates were already closed. However, now that he had his Armed Escort Division Commander identity, he had much more freedom in entering and exiting the palace.

He changed into his Golden Token Eleven uniform when he entered the palace, then headed straight for the Embroidery House. When he arrived, he just happened to run into Xiao Jianren reading under dim light. Zu An thought, Is this guy trying to ruin his eyes?

"Sir Eleven!" Xiao Jianren quickly got up to greet Zu An when he saw him. At the same time, he was confused as to why he would show up at such a time.

"Where is the archive room?" Zu An asked.

Xiao Jianren said with a smile, "What does sir wish to investigate? You can just ask me." Even though he didn't dare to claim that he had read through everything in the archives, he could easily answer most questions.

Zu An shook his head. "It's okay. I'll take a look myself."

Xiao Jianren shivered. As an Embroidered Envoy, he keenly sensed that the other party didn't want him to know about whatever he was investigating. He obviously wouldn't invite trouble onto himself and led the way. "Sir just needs to continue down this way. With your respected self's golden token identity, you can view most of the archives. There are only some top secret cases that need the chief commander's personal clearance."

Zu An thought that the things that he wanted to know were probably not at that level. He nodded toward Xiao Jianren, then walked toward the archive room.

Chapter 939: Past Secrets

There were guards in the archive room, but when they saw the golden token in Zu An's hands, they immediately showed great respect and no longer troubled him. After all, golden token envoys were second only in status to the chief commander. There were even some who offered to help him search for what he needed, but Zu An refused.

He entered the archives room on his own. Worrying that someone might notice something, he checked records from several different sections, and only read up on some of the things he really wanted to know in between them.

After staying for four hours, he finally found out some things.

What he had wanted information about was naturally the previous dynasty. He wanted to know about what had happened during the transitional period too. As he read through the records, he learned that the previous dynasty had been named Meng. The emperor who had established that dynasty was also a powerful ruler with outstanding sons.

Unfortunately, having sons who were too outstanding wasn't always a good thing. The more outstanding they were, the more unwilling they were to just remain as citizens. All of them had wanted to fight for the throne.

In the end, the crown prince had won, but the fight over the throne had left him with a deep psychological shadow. He had always been on guard against his brothers, continuing to reduce their authority and influence until they eventually all perished in dejection.

Unfortunately, perhaps because of genes, all of his descendants died young for some reason. It hadn't even been long since he won the throne when authority and power began to gradually shift into the hands of a high official. That high official was the great ancestor of the current Zhou Dynasty.

It was easy to imagine what had happened afterward. The Meng Dynasty's downfall was inevitable, so the throne was tactfully abdicated in favor of the great ancestor of the current Zhou Dynasty.

"Abdicated..." Zu An sneered. That was how it was often written in historical records, but almost none of those previous rulers had given up their position willingly. He wanted to know more details about that

abdication, but there didn't seem to be any records on it. Even the abdication itself was only mentioned by a few records. Even so, he still managed to find something related to it eventually.

After the last emperor of the Meng Dynasty abdicated, he had been conferred the title of Linzhang King and a population of ten thousand to manage. His palace had been located in Linzhang Commandary's Highsun City. He had been allowed to use his 'son of heaven' banner and have five auxiliary carriages to follow him wherever he went. His territory would follow the Meng State's calendar, and all of the past rituals and ceremonies from the previous Meng Dynasty would be permitted. He wouldn't be referred to as a subject in letters to the authorities, and he could choose not to bow down to imperial orders.

Even though these were clearly methods Great Ancestor Zhou had used to bribe the hearts of the people, it had indeed been extremely effective. In the past, even though there had been a lot of criticism toward the great ancestor seizing the throne, people had still commended their treatment of the previous Meng Dynasty's royal family.

That was why the information hadn't been covered up; it sung the praises of the Zhou Dynasty.

Zu An also noticed that the Meng State's last emperor, or the Linzhang King, had still suffered from a lack of descendants even after that. His children had all died at a young age. He wanted to find out more information, but he didn't find anything useful even after searching the entire archive room.

As for the most secretive room, Zu An couldn't go inside. He didn't want to alert Zhuxie Chixin at the moment, since after all, he was a loyal dog to the emperor. A sudden request to enter would definitely draw the emperor's suspicion, and things would become troublesome then.

He returned all of the cases. His mind moved quickly. When he had first transmigrated into this world, there had been something wrong with his body. He had learned from Old Mi that his body had been sealed from a young age by some sinister methods.

Old Mi had been surprised back then, because such methods were normally only used in the palace. After all, the concubines in the palace committed all manner of crimes for the sake of receiving more favor.

Bearing children for the emperor was the publicly accepted proof of status in the harem. All of them wanted to give birth to princes, and they didn't want their competitors to give birth to any.

That meant all of them used all sorts of methods, from poison to scaring the other concubines so they had a miscarriage, to achieve that. There were too many tragic instances of children from the royal family dying young.

The royal family naturally prohibited such actions. Once discovered, the punishment would also become extremely severe. But it was human nature. Even if there were policies from above, there would be countermeasures below. Later on, the harem came up with some new methods. Nothing wrong could be seen on the surface, but later on, their treacherous plots would come to fruition.

The seal placed on the original owner of Zu An's body was precisely one of those methods.

Zu An finally realized what was going on. He had always found it strange why someone would place a seal on him rather than simply crippling him. Wouldn't that be much easier?

But now he knew that it wasn't that they hadn't wanted to, but rather that they couldn't. Crippling him would have made the symptoms too obvious, and others would eventually find out. They could only use such treacherous methods.

Something else that had always left him puzzled was why the libationer would help him. Back then, he had been involved in a scandal with the crown princess, and yet the libationer who usually didn't get involved in worldly affairs had actually come out to declare his innocence.

He had still been extremely apprehensive back then, because the libationer's reputation was quite great. He had been worried that his skills might not be enough to deceive him. And yet, he had never expected that he wouldn't even have to use any skills. The other party had actually just decided that what Zu An said was the truth.

Everyone else had believed what he said firmly without a doubt, but Zu An knew that the libationer had actually intentionally helped him. But he couldn't understand why the libationer would help him. After all, the two of them had had absolutely nothing to do with each other before!

At first, he had thought that the libationer did it on purpose to hinder the emperor a bit, but that explanation hadn't seemed too realistic. Only now that Xie Daoyun had mentioned that particular piece of history in the academy had he learned that the libationer had something to do with the previous dynasty's royal family.

There weren't many people in the entire capital who knew about that fact. For some reason, everyone seemed to have forgotten about that segment of history. Xie Daoyun had only ended up knowing about it because she was the disciple of one of the libationer's great disciples. But even then, she didn't know exactly what kind of relationship the libationer had with the previous dynasty's royal family.

Zu An's mind moved quickly. He suddenly thought of something. There's no way I'm the previous dynasty's prince, right?

He had seen so many dramas in his previous world. Similar stories were a common occurrence. He had already thought of many plot lines. For example, after the previous dynasty's emperor had abdicated, the Zhou Dynasty's great ancestor looked magnanimous on the surface, but had actually been worried in private. As such, he had secretly arranged for some things to be done to the previous emperor's heirs, thus cutting off his lineage.

Or perhaps it had been the other way around. The Meng Dynasty's royal family had known that a high official was plotting something and that their nation was in danger, so they made preparations ahead of time. The first was to have a trusted aide bring away some of the royal family's bloodline and go into hiding. Then, when something did happen, they would expose themselves and rise up. After that, with the Meng Dynasty's banners, they would seize back the country. But perhaps that high official's influence was too great and the Meng Dynasty's schemes were all seen through, causing them to be chased down, and even though he managed to escape, a seal was still placed on his body...

The libationer had a close relationship to the previous royal family, so he would obviously know about any such thing. He might have even helped in the escape back then.

Now that I've returned to the capital, he recognized me, and that's why he chose to help me. The reason why we never came into contact with each other before was probably because it wasn't the right time yet, or maybe the other party has an even greater plan.

Zu An shivered when he thought of all of that. It turned out he had already become someone else's chess piece without even knowing it.

"The only types of mooching I want to do are as a pretty boy with a woman, or living as a wealthy family's good-for-nothing! There's no way I would want to bear an entire dynasty's grudge or something..." Zu An grumbled. His usually optimistic mood was suddenly overcome with dejection.

He didn't really care all that much that the emperor would never let him go once he found out. After all, the two of them were already doomed to become enemies. The worst part was that the entire royal family, all of the nobles, and even the civilian court officials wouldn't let him go! After all, it had already been many years since the collapse of the Meng Dynasty, and Zhao Han's prestige had skyrocketed after his victory against the fiend races. Who would still cherish the previous dynasty at this point?

...

When he came out of the Embroidery House, Zu An continued to tell himself to not worry about it anymore, that none of that imperial heir stuff had anything to do with him. But his mood became worse and worse. Even if he wanted to discard the past, other people wouldn't let him! For example, the libationer, or even those hidden forces who were still loyal to the past Meng Dynasty...

Then, he couldn't help but think about the transitional period between the dynasties. He suddenly felt a bit of anger when he thought about how an orphan like him had had his future stolen by that high official. When he thought about Zhao Han, new grudges were added to old hatred.

He suddenly stopped. He realized that he had unknowingly walked past an old well. Moreover, it was the one that had a secret path connecting to the Eastern Palace.

After making sure that there was no one around him, he jumped straight in. Then, he activated the mechanisms the way he remembered. When he entered the secret passage, he changed out of his Embroidered Envoy uniform, then walked into the depths.

After a long time, suddenly, a beautiful figure appeared before his eyes. Perhaps because it was already evening, Bi Linglong was dressed in relaxed clothes, but they were still beautifully designed. She looked extremely charming and elegant under the luminescent stones' light.

She was pacing about by the entrance, her expression suggesting she was conflicted about something. When she heard some activity, though, she raised her head. A bit of happiness appeared in her eyes when she saw it was Zu An. Then, she suddenly realized something. Her face immediately turned red and she quickly said, "Don't misunderstand! I was just checking if this secret passage was still in good condition; I wasn't waiting for you or anything..."

But what she received in response was a big hug. She wanted to say something else, but her lips were forcefully plugged up. At the same time, she could hear the sound of clothes ripping.

Chapter 940: Vicious and Merciless

Bi Linglong felt wronged and confused, and at the same time, she also felt somewhat angry. She finally seized a moment to breathe and exclaimed, "What are you doing?!"

But Zu An didn't reply to her. He looked at her with burning eyes and heavy breathing. The pretty dress Bi Linglong had carefully chosen was quickly ripped to shreds, fluttering around them like butterflies.

Bi Linglong was alarmed. She even wondered if someone else was impersonating Zu An. But she soon realized that he was indeed the one next to her. After all, the two of them had already had a physical relationship in the dungeon. She was already extremely familiar with him.

But she felt even more wronged when she realized it was him. I was waiting for him here, and yet this is how he treats me?

Zu An was full of negative emotions at that moment. His mind was filled with the information he had just investigated. Even though he had told himself that those events of the past had nothing to do with him, he still couldn't help but think about how Zhao Han and his father had mistreated the Meng Dynasty's family members.

As such, he couldn't help but be filled with resentment. When he thought about how the woman before him was the Zhou Dynasty's crown princess, he subconsciously felt the urge to make her cry. That was why he was so rough.

Bi Linglong felt like a small boat that was tossing and turning in a huge sea. She was battered and pounded again and again.

...

After a long time had passed, Zu An suddenly felt something cold on his face. Only when he raised his head did he notice that two streaks of tears were falling from Bi Linglong's eyes.

Zu An was alarmed. What the hell am I doing? Even if there were any enmity, it would be toward Zhao Han and his father. What did it have to do with her? Furthermore, all of that was just speculation. Whether or not he was even a descendant of the Meng Dynasty was still uncertain. Why in the world did he suddenly feel as if he had been possessed?

He gently helped Bi Linglong wipe away the tears from her face. He then said apologetically, "I'm sorry!"

"Are you done venting?" Bi Linglong gave him a cold look. She could obviously tell that he had only shown lust for her, and not love.

Zu An didn't know how to reply to that question. Bi Linglong pushed him away and reached for some clothing to cover herself. But who would have thought that the largest piece was only the size of a palm, so it couldn't cover up anything?

Bi Linglong felt her body suddenly become warm as a set of clothes was draped around her shoulders. Zu An helped her put on the clothes, then said apologetically, "I was in the wrong state of mind just now, and I'm sorry for hurting you..."

Bi Linglong coldly interrupted him before he even finished his sentence. "I don't want to hear any of that right now. Leave. I don't want to see you again."

Zu An's mouth opened. He wanted to say something, but Bi Linglong's cool and elegant brow was already furrowed. "If you still don't leave, I'm going to holler for help!"

Zu An knew that nothing he could say just then would help. He could only silently turn around to leave. When he was about to turn the corner, however, he suddenly thought of something and quickly said, "I didn't have time to help you recover your life force yet. You should properly refine what I left inside of you, or else if you leave it untreated for a long time, it might leave some lasting problems."

Bi Linglong was already by the entrance to the passage. Her entire body trembled when she heard that, and a look of embarrassment flashed across her face. She exclaimed, "Get lost!"

When she returned to her room, she suddenly stopped after taking a few steps. Her pretty brow furrowed. She became angrier and angrier. That scoundrel! She only recovered her composure after some time passed. Then, she called in some maids, saying, "Prepare some hot water for me. I want to take a bath and change clothes."

"Understood." The maid was about to leave when she suddenly voiced her surprise. "Crown princess, why is your hair in such a mess?"

Bi Linglong said indifferently, "It might have gotten messy while I was sleeping just now."

"To be honest, the crown princess looks even more beautiful after resting than usual..." the maid said in praise. Suddenly, her eyes shifted to Bi Linglong's clothes. She was stunned.

As one of Bi Linglong's personal maids, she obviously knew that the crown princess was clearly wearing another set of clothes! More importantly, she was familiar with every single set of clothing the crown princess owned, and these didn't belong to the crown princess.

As someone who had grown in the palace, she immediately thought of many possibilities. Her eyes narrowed, but she quickly covered it up. She said with a smile, "This servant will prepare a bath for the crown princess now."

She turned around to leave, but a gust of wind suddenly brushed past her ears. She instinctively tried to dodge, but she was still too late. She slowly fell to the ground with no trace of life force left.

"Crown princess, what's wrong?" Rong Mo rushed over when she heard the activity. What she saw first was the maid's corpse. She was stunned. She quickly looked up at Bi Linglong, who was now in bed, and asked, "Are you okay?"

Bi Linglong was lying down in her bed, holding the covers tightly over her body to hide the clothes she was wearing. She said indifferently, "She was plotting something, so I killed her. Clean up the corpse, then investigate her background to see which faction sent her."

"This servant has neglected my duty and didn't notice ahead of time." Rong Mo broke out in a cold sweat. If something ended up happening to the crown princess, the consequences really would be too horrible to imagine! She quickly apologized.

"You can leave. I'm tired." Bi Linglong waved her hand.

"Understood!" Rong Mo quickly brought the corpse away and cleaned up the area.

Bi Linglong's expression remained cold. That maid had been acting too calm, and only that moment of hesitation was out of character.

There was no way an ordinary maid could remain so calm in that kind of situation, and only a well-trained spy could. That was why she hadn't hesitated to kill her. She couldn't let anyone know about her current state.

Of course, even if the maid hadn't been a spy for someone, she had seen something she shouldn't have, so she still had to die. As someone from the royal family, there was no way Bi Linglong would show mercy for something like that.

She wanted to call over someone else to prepare a bath, but she remembered Zu An's warning. After some hesitation, she sat up on her bed and began to cultivate.

...

Soon afterward, she opened her eyes in shock. She sensed that life force was spreading through her entire body. The feeling of weakness she had experienced previously gradually disappeared, instead replaced with youthful vitality.

She reached out her hand and separated a lock of hair. She saw that her snow-white long hair had already begun to recover some of its previous color. Her cheeks gradually became rosy. "That rascal..."

Even though she was scolding him, her tone was no longer as angry as it had been before.

...

Zu An paid the Eastern Palace several visits in the following days, but each time, Bi Linglong refused to meet with him, citing various reasons. As the crown princess, it was completely natural for her to refuse to meet with normal subjects.

Zu An knew that she was upset, but he didn't know what else he could do either. He could only play five-in-a-row with the crown prince out of boredom, defeating him so miserably he didn't want to play anymore.

However, many things had happened in the capital in those few days.

The biggest thing was that news of Yu Nan frequenting brothels began to circulate among the capital's civilians. The stories were vivid and lifelike, making one feel as if they were there in person. They spoke not only about how he had tried to gain Nan Xun's favor, but also how he had been defeated several times by Zu An.

The commoners had loved such gossip about those of higher status to begin with. As such, those things soon became known to all.

After they had their fun with the stories, some people began to call the details into question. Wasn't Yu Nan the Secretariat Assistant Director? Why had he been fighting with another man for a courtesan in a place like the pleasure quarters? He had even been completely embarrassed in that affair. How did Princess Changshan feel about this?

At first, Princess Changshan held back to protect her husband's dignity. She couldn't really say anything either, for the sake of both of their mutual interests. But at that point, the rumors were getting more and more out of hand. There were some that began to criticize the princess for turning a blind eye.

There were all sorts of rumors. Some said that the princess was very ugly and couldn't keep her husband's interest; others said that she had silently agreed to her husband's affairs. There were even some who said that the princess couldn't have children... It really was getting more and more ridiculous.

Even though the Yu clan used all sorts of connections to try to keep the rumors down, and they had even caught some of the rumor-spreaders as an example to others, for some reason, not only did it not help, it instead only added oil to the fire.

Princess Changshan finally couldn't take it anymore. She stormed into the palace while crying, asking the emperor to bring justice to the matter.

The emperor then took advantage of the situation to discuss it in court. A group of officials that had already been prepared ahead of time denounced Yu Nan for offending public morals, saying that he had shamed the royal family's reputation...

In the end, Yu Nan was dismissed from his post, and he was ordered to divorce the princess.

After the event, the Yu clan's master, Imperial Secretariat's Left Confidential Assistant Yu Xuanchong, took the initiative to resign as an apology for the offense, and yet he was stopped by the emperor. The emperor indicated that Yu Nan's offense had nothing to do with him, and that the court still needed someone who could bear responsibility for the nation like him. The emperor did not agree with his resignation, and even punished a few people who accused Yu Xuanchong of misconduct.

...

Zu An found it rather strange. The emperor clearly wanted to deal with the Yu clan, so why had he let such a good chance go?

Was it for the sake of distracting and numbing them? Even so, it still didn't make any sense. One would only go that far when dealing with high officials. But with the emperor's current strength and prestige, as well as the timing, it shouldn't have been difficult to bring down Yu Xuanchong at all. There was no need to go through such trouble at all.

But his puzzlement was quickly resolved.