

Heavenly Star 61

Chapter 61: Literary Competitor - Clear Water Lakeside

A quarter hour!? Seeing the square, meter long painting board left the audience completely amazed. For someone to complete such a large painting, moreover Ye Wuchen, who had no knowledge on painting. But even Lin Xiao, who was blessed with such talent in painting required great effort to accomplish one.

Both of them didn't even make any objection, but instead responded respectfully. When each stood in front of their respective painting boards, which were supported by large wooden frames, their faces were equally calm. The serene expression on Ye Wuchen caused Lin Xiao to be more vigilant. Yet he believes that even if Ye Wuchen truly had such exquisite painting skills, he still could not be matched.

"Then, you may now begin. After a quarter of an hour, the winner will be decided by those present here. Elder Li, please begin the countdown."

"Yes!"

When Long Yin lowered his voice, the whole audience went silent. Many pairs of eyes quietly watched the center of the stage which had been destroyed by the flames. None of them dared to make a sound, fearing they would startle the two men.

Lin Xiao gently closed his eyes, hand grasping the brush over the paper, hovering inches above. He seemed to be visualizing the picture inside his mind beforehand. But Ye Wuchen inclined his body, fixing his gaze on Lin Xiao, looking at him with interest. Not having any intention to start himself, he appeared to be observing how Lin Xiao would paint.

Everyone could see clearly, some with disappointment, that the Young Master of Ye decided to give up. This competition will solely focus on the performance of Young Master Lin.

Finally, after approximately a minute, Lin Xiao opened his eyes. His brush connecting with the paper, his right hand moving rapidly across the paper. It was almost impossible to keep track of the movement of his hands due to its incredible speed, and one could only see moving shadows.

This time Lin Xiao had a concentrated facial expression, eyes not glancing sideways but directly fixed onto the painting board. Ignoring the stares from audience and the abnormal gaze of Ye Wuchen, he entered a state wherein his eyes only saw the painting scroll and nothing else.

Another half a minute passed, he suddenly closed his eyes again. Still moving his hand, swapping out brushes and ink midway, never a moment of mistake nor pause.

"Daddy, he even closed his eyes while painting! How is he doing it?" Hua Shuirou asked in a low voice.

"How am I to know? Even in my free time I wouldn't even dream of doing something this bothersome."

Hua Shuirou regretted the moment she spoke, because painting notwithstanding, her daddy was not the most literate or cultured.

The green bird on her shoulder let out a soft cry of resentment. Hua Shuirou cupped it in her hands, soothing it while saying: "Ching-er please behave, after a few while, we can go home. I'll give you whatever you want to eat."

To paint with eyes closed...Ye Wuchen furrowed his brows. Apparently this “Tian Long Number One Gifted Scholar” is a well deserved title.

He remembered in the beginning of his world, there were few people who could paint while closing their eyes, but for someone to reach this extent, was unheard of --- of course, himself being the exception. To attain this level of skill, one had to blend his heart into a subtle painting place, achieving the picture in his central point. This way, even if one’s eyes were closed, one’s hands could freely paint the picture in their heart. But to be able to reach this phase, no ordinary person could even hope to attain such an unimaginably difficult level.

Everyone had been dumbstruck. Closing his eyes in spite of everything, his current state was enough to make people exclaim in astonishment. What more amazement would the outcome provide .

Time passed by little by little, Ye Wuchen had yet to move his brush and was still staring blankly at Lin Xiao’s hand movements. That originally clear white paper already has some portrayal of sky and white clouds, willow tree in riverside, and also the place where Long Yin had long been wishing to visit.

Based on his speed, a quarter hour wasn’t really necessary, even ten minutes would suffice, Ye Wuchen thought.

Seems like this young master of Ye had really given up. The audience has this same thought once more. It’s really not surprising that, while facing this extremely brilliant painting talent of Lin Xiao, the opponent would lose all their courage to move their brushes. He might as well concede in a neat and tidy manner.

Sure enough as Ye Wuchen had expected, just as the clock struck ten minutes, Lin Xiao made one final stroke, opened his eyes, and laid down his brush. He didn’t even look at his painting, instead looking at the direction of Ye Wuchen who was still gazing at him, the corner of his mouth turned up in a smile.

Judging by his blank paper, he realized his win; moreover, it was a complete victory.

“Your Majesty, Lin Xiao is already done, please have a look.” Lin Xiao said as he stepped aside to present his recently accomplished painting for the audience to view.

Immediately, exclams of admiration sounded from the audience.

Azure sky, sprinkled with a few white clouds. Beneath the sky situated a clear lake, the light emitting from the lake water was clear and crystalline. Fish puffed out bubbles. A boat sailing. On the lakeside, a willow tree hung low, on one of its branches a cicada cried joyously. Below the tree showed a young woman leaning against it, her face showing the happiness of being enchanted by the beauty of the lakeside scenery. On the ground, was a mess of willow branches and leaves, some dried up and yellow.

A very ordinary kind of painting, its image did not contain any special meaning, but the incomparably exquisite painting skills caused the people to be delighted without exception, some exclaimed with great admiration.

“Your Majesty, doesn’t Mr. Lin’s painting look exactly the same as the place Your Majesty has intended to go? It’s practically an exact copy.” an attendant behind Long Yin exclaimed.

“That’s right! Lin Xiao knows my thoughts very well. Great! Great painting! It’s indeed a great painting!” Long Yin exclaimed loudly, not the least bit stingy at all in his words of praise.

Lin Xiao personally rotated the frame that held up his painting slowly, enabling the people in the audience to get a clear view, the surprised voices sounded along with the movement of the painting scroll. The exclamations said it all.

Even Ye Wei and Wang Wenshu could not help but admit that the painting skills of Lin Xiao has really reached great heights.

“This painting will be called Clear Water Lakeside, it is an ordinary scenery painting. A moment ago Lin Xiao had heard Your Majesty wish to visit the Clear Water Lake to preserve the memory in his thoughts. It inspired me to do this. Lin Xiao’s humble talent and shallow learning might receive ridicule from his poor performance.” Lin Xiao said, greeting his surroundings with courtesy.

“What do you all feel about this painting?” Long Yin asked. His heavy, dignified voice penetrated through the whole area.

“Great! This painting makes a person feel as if he is actually in that place, with absolutely no flaws. I have been painting for many decades, believing that there’s always a limit in a person’s capability, but for today there’s something I really need to say, and that is ‘I’m convinced’!”

“To be able to make such unique painting in a very short time, is really quite a feat.”

“This painting is multiple times better than the one that Master Lin made few days ago in another competition. Apparently Master Lin still had restrained some of his talents at that time.”

“To portray a painting to this extent by just using a simple scenery image, he is deserving of his title of “Tian Long Number One Gifted Scholar”, What an eye opener.”

“For Lin Xiao to have such high level of painting skills, truly it’s rare.”

Chapter 62: Literary Competition - The Peak of Painting Skills

Voices exclaiming their admiration across the hall continued on. Even though Lin Xiao’s facial expression was calm, his eyebrows revealed how pleased he was. For this painting, he did not hold back the slightest bit of his skill. Bare in mind that the simpler the painting, the more it is able to reflect a person’s painting skills.

Long Yin nodded his head contentedly, then voiced out and asked, “Wuchen of Ye, what do you think about this painting?”

The crowd quieted down, all the gazes were fixed on him, waiting for his “step down gracefully” speech..

Ye Wuchen’s eyes flatly swept across Clear Water Lakeside at once, then said: “Not bad...but if master Lin only had this level of talent, then he cannot even compare to me.”

Putting forth this kind of extremely arrogant words stupefied all who were present, even the expression on Long Yin’s face appeared to be astonished for quite a long time. Sounds of confusion erupted from the crowd, some criticizing, some reacted with disdain, some sneering. None of them showed any signs of expectation. Based on their thoughts, Ye Wuchen’s arrogant and pretentious words were only to

safeguard his reputation. A man dressed up like a high scholar even step forward and yelled, "How dare you insult such astonishing work, how shameful!!"

Ye Wuchen glanced at that person and said, "If this painting is the so-called astonishing work in your point of view, then that shows that you've never seen a genuinely great painting. This painting, in my opinion, regardless of painting skills or scenery, only deserves to be called a rough and excessive piece of art!"

These words are no doubt was even more arrogant than the previous comment, even more ruthlessly mocking Lin Xiao. Lin Xiao's face turned green, then momentarily restored his tranquility and calmly said, "My painting certainly does not look pleasing to your magical eye, I'm requesting young master Ye to please give advice and counsel."

"I'm flattered, since Master Lin sincerely asked for guidance, then I'll provide some."

Lin Xiao's facial muscle twitched a little bit. The people's eyes grew wide, observing how this arrogant young master Ye will give his advice and comments.

Ye Wuchen approached in front of the Clear Water Lakeside painting board, inclined his eyes and asked, "I dare to ask if master Lin has been to Clear Water Lake before?"

"Of course I have."

"Then this painting depicts the scenery of the Clear Water Lakeside from which season?"

"Autumn"

"Is that so? Then...where is the autumn wind?"

"...Autumn wind?"

Ye Wuchen shook his head disappointedly: "Did you consider this in your painting? It seems that the picture is lifeless and dull with no trace of lively movement. The place in the painting is worn out to a pitiful condition. It must be borne in mind that for the lakeside willow tree, a lake without wind is stagnant, and a willow without wind is a dead willow. The wonderful lakeside cool breeze is not even present in this painting, even just a tiny bit of its reflection. In the end, it is just rough and excessive work."

Before Lin Xiao could answer, the previous scholar yelled again, "You say it so simply! The graceful autumn wind cannot be seen, and also cannot be touched. How could you paint it. If you have the ability to do so, why don't you show us!"

Lin Xiao also nodded smiling, "That being said, master Ye, please show us how to do your lakeside cool breeze."

Ye Wuchen smiled indifferently, saying, "Then watch carefully!"

Ye Wuchen scooped up a painting brush, lightly dipped it in the ink, then traced some strips of the inclined willow branch. Deliberately decorating them with fluttering willow leaves.

“The so-called ‘Willow leaves on the willow branch sprouts on the west but faces the east’, this is not a painting style for a true willow. While unable to depict actual wind on paper, one relies on the willow branches to demonstrate, this is using the willow to describe the wind, the wind simply cannot be seen, but the wind blowing on the willow tree is clear!”

(Author’s Note: This seven character quatrain comes from Jiang Ti’s Accomplished Dash Painting Willow and Swallow)

Grinding the brush once more, the focus point of the paint brush shifted to portray the surface of the lake, showing several faint traces of moving water ripples.

“This is using the water to depict the wind. Without wind there are no ripples. Using the ripples to show the cool breeze’s direction and intensity, master Lin does not even know this common fact?”

“.....”

Lastly, Ye Wuchen’s paint brush aimed at the woman below the tree. Lightly swaying the brush, he stoked some strands of fluttering hair. He then stopped the paint brush and turned around.

“Traces of hair are similar to the traces of willow leaves, both can be used to describe the cool breeze. Clearly there are many things that can be used to describe the wind, but Master Lin painted such a lifeless picture, what an affront.” He lightly shook his head, with a sighing face.

The scene momentarily went totally silent, shocked into speechlessness. Ye Wuchen’s brush moved rapidly with no less skill than Lin Xiao. Furthermore, with just a few strokes, lasting only a few seconds, a huge difference occurred in an instant that changed the mood of the painting. This time by looking at that painting, people could clearly have the feeling that they were present in that image. Seemingly watching the wind brush through the willow tree, water rippling, even imagining the feeling of a cool breeze brushing through their face, bringing waves of refreshing wind.

Shock, incomparable shock. With just a very few strokes, a unique painting transformed into one of higher level. Through this painting Clear Water Lakeside, the audience began to realize what Ye Wuchen meant by the “painting condition” before.

The middle aged scholar faced the painting blankly. Feeling ashamed, he cupped his fist in the other hand to salute and said respectfully, “I’m ashamed. I offer my respect!”

“Great! Although the strokes were few, it is truly a brush that brings life to the painting. What I am really convinced of is that your artistic attainments have already reached this far. I am reassured!!” Long Yin exclaimed emotionally.

Not only other people, but the entirety of the Ye family, except Ye Shuiyao, Ye Nu, Ye Wei, Wang Wenshu all had identical astonished looks. No one expected Ye Wuchen to give them such a big surprise without prior indication. Ye Wei whispered to himself, “Don’t tell me that this God of Sword not only reached perfection on sword skills, but also on painting skills?”

Long Yin continued. “This Clear Water Lakeside painting completed by these two outstanding talents; I will surely treasure it personally. Although due to Lin Xiao’s negligence he wasn’t able to portray the cool breeze, his painting skills can be regarded as almost reaching perfection, everybody can clearly see

it. On the other hand, Wuchen through sketching in light shades, can greatly raise the condition of the painting, truly a wonder!”

“Your Majesty!” Ye Wuchen turned around, then glanced at the complicated expression of Lin Xiao, said, “I couldn’t agree blindly at a statement made by Your Majesty. Although Master Lin’s painting skill are exquisite, there’s still a big difference between our skills.”

“This...” Long Yin wrinkled his brows, somewhat speechless.

“I dare to ask Master Lin, what is the peak of one’s painting skills?” Ye Wuchen asked.

“The peak of painting skills, naturally, is to be able to have exactly the same portrayal of the real thing, not possessing the slightest difference!” Lin Xiao answered.

“Oh...” Ye Wuchen walked in front of the painting, observed for a while, then using the tip of the brush pointed to the green worm on a branch of the willow tree: “Then may I ask, does this little worm feel satisfied about his image on the painting?”

Lin Xiao swept his gaze, then said with an air of arrogance, “Although I have but humble talents, regarding painting skills I have unquestionable qualification. Though this green worm was used as a decoration, it’s as realistic as a real worm could possibly be.”

“Oh, really?” Ye Wuchen smiled disapprovingly, then dipped the brush in the green ink. He moved the tip of the brush to painted a similar size green worm on another willow branch, then he moved aside, the corners of his mouth revealed a smile. He did not comment further.

Since the green worm was newly painted, the ink had yet to dry. It slightly reflected light under the sunlight and from a distance it appeared to wiggle. Before anyone could react, a warbling sound echoed, followed by the sweet voice of a young lady. “Xiao Qing!”

A green shadow quickly flew across until it reached the center. It dove down from the sky, long sharp beak pecking heavily on the surface of the Clear Water Lakeside painting.

A small voice sounded and the painting board swayed for a moment, then the green feathered bird fell to the ground from its violent impulse, struggling to flap its wings. Ye Wuchen picked it up, quietly infusing some of his powers, easily restoring its minor injury.

The Clear Water Lakeside painting now had a small hole pecked into it. The location of that hole was exactly the spot where Ye Wuchen drew his green worm. While he was gently caressing this docile green bird, he said unhurriedly, “If Master Lin’s painting skills had already reached a realistic level, then what would we call mine?”

Chapter 63: Literary Competition - Twin Lotus Flower on One Stalk Part 1

“This... this....is really unbelievable!”

“My God, I simply don’t believe my eyes.”

“It’s really unimaginable! Up until now, I finally realized what genuine painting skills are.”

“To be able to make a bird believe that it is the real thing, that’s what we call genuine painting skills!”

“I want to be an apprentice, I want to be his apprentice!”

“That’s enough, he is the young master of the Ye family. How can you, the head of a small academy, be his apprentice; moreover, you are too old.”

.....

Various exclamations and inconceivable shouting voices could be heard. The enthusiasm at this moment far exceeded the praise Lin Xiao received beforehand. This kind of painting skill is truly brilliant. They have neither seen nor heard anything of this calibre before.

Looking at the hole, Lin Xiao realised he had been defeated...Ye Wuchen had only made use of a few seconds to effortlessly draw a green worm. And yet his all-out effort, which consumed more than ten minutes worth of work was defeated so thoroughly. His previous self-confidence and arrogance had been smashed into pieces. What he said a while ago about his “domineering qualifications in painting skills”, has now come back to hit him ruthlessly like a slap on the face.

But since the green bird had pecked out a hole, it was now equivalent to a completely destroyed painting. He couldn’t help but secretly sigh while thinking: if this was planned by Ye Wuchen beforehand, then his shrewdness was really formidable.

What he couldn’t believe was that his thoughts actually had much truth in it. Ye Wuchen had such a meticulous mind. Paying attention to Hua Shuirou, how could he not notice the green feathered bird or detected its hungry state. As a result, during the time Lin Xiao finished painting Clear Water Lakeside, Ye Wuchen had already sentenced this painting to its death penalty.

Completed by two people? Did it even qualify!? Ruined! How could the emperor include it to his collection? Collection my ass! With a hole pecked through it, let’s see if you still want to keep it.

“Respect, respect to highest point. Whether on painting skills or painting condition, I, Lin Xiao, concede my defeat!” Lin Xiao said letting out a sigh.

Ye Wuchen nodded, peacefully accepting it. Then he commented in a serious tone. “Okay. If that’s the case your foundation is not bad, just put some more effort to it, perhaps you might reach master level painting in the future.”

Lin Xiao: “.....”

“Great! Great! Your painting prowess even surpasses that of Tian Long’s Number One Gifted Scholar and causing him to step down gracefully, it seems that I had underestimated you. But...” He glanced at the blank painting board at Ye Wuchen’s side. “Based on the rules that I’ve set, a quarter hour to determine winner, you didn’t even make anything. As a result, for the first stage, you still lose.”

Anyone could see that Lin Xiao had been defeated, even he admitted defeat. Ye Wuchen had been defeated Lin Xiao by using the green worm he drew in the painting of Lin Xiao. But what the emperor said was the truth, if he were to judge the participant based on their own individual painting on the board, who dared contradict him?

So whoever the emperor wants to win will take the victory. Judging by this situation, the emperor still favored the Lin family. Ye Wuchen’s defeat was official even though the results were contradictory.

“Wait a moment.” Ye Wuchen waved his hand, saying: “Based on Your Majesty’s rules, the time limit is a quarter hour, and upon my calculation, it has yet to pass.”

Behind Long Yin a yellow clothed attendant said, “Your Majesty, young master Ye is correct. Right now, there is still a minute remaining before it reaches a quarter hour mark.”

“Oh? So what are you saying? You would like to use the remaining minute to complete it?” Long Yin questioned.

“Yes!”

“Good! Now let me be enlightened once again, let’s see how you can complete this size of a painting in just within a minute.” Long Yin who had been distracted, his face now full of expectation.

Ye Wuchen turned around, raised both hands. “Go find your owner.”

The green feathered bird circled around him for two rounds, then reluctantly parted with him and returned to Hua Shuirou. Although it was a base animal, it still had some intelligence, able to remember kindness and hatred. A moment ago when it incurred a slight injury from the impact, but got healed by Ye Wuchen in an instant, and this kindness was immediately engraved within its memory.

His gaze followed the movement of the green feathered bird, seemingly ignorant to the passing of time. Seeing Hua Shuirou cupping the bird in both her hands, he faintly smiled towards her, causing the girl to immediately lower her head in a rush, refusing to lift her head for quite a while.

Ye Wuchen stepped in front of the painting board, picking up a brush dipped with ink, then closed his eyes and, clearing his mind, directly brandished the brush to spread the ink. Brushes were switched, inks were dipped into, brushes swept, flowing smoothly. The movements of his hands obviously surpassed that of Lin Xiao’s. It was impossible to make out the white moving streaks that were his arms, which dazzled the crowd. Although they already knew his artistic attainment greatly surpassed that of Lin Xiao’s, the audience still couldn’t help but feel amazed by this spectacle. This kind of hand movement not only belonged to one with extremely high painting skills, but also required a very high cultivation of the martial art skills.

Ye Wuchen stepped to the front, his stance was flawless, and the unconstrained movement of his hands were like traces of the wind making people unable to see clearly what he was painting at the moment. The only exception was Lin Xiao who was standing right beside him, but his vision wasn’t focused on the painting, but was rather at the hands of Ye Wuchen. The content of the painting was not that important to him anymore, judging by the technique and the speed, he already knew he had been hopelessly defeated.

Generally a person who practiced martial skills only focused on the martial aspect, the same applied to a literary person. If one held both skills, one tended to focus on one thing and lose sight of the other, then fail on both. But Lin Xiao had relied on his extremely high gifted martial and literary skills to reach the peak level among his peers, both skills complementing each other. The speed of his painting made people speechless. If it wasn’t for his powers and martial skills, it would have been impossible for him to become someone who had reached the peak level of painting skills. And because of this, Lin Xiao was under the impression that his painting capacity were incomparable.

Why did he take the initiative and suggest a competition with Ye Wuchen? During the martial skills competition, he won two times in a row after all. While at first he had the popular opinion of the people backing his number one rank, in the end he was sorely defeated by Ye Wuchen. Up to this moment, he still couldn't swallow the fact that he had been defeated, even as he bore the scar on his own face. Succeeding him, Hu Zhentian who tried to help him win back his reputation was also defeated. Finally, with the exclusion of the God of Sword, his unparalleled second grandpa Lin Yan also lost his bet to him, battered and exhausted.. Losing with unfathomable mystery, yet was not only defeated but also lost his reputation - being laughed at as a joke and even suffering an extraordinary shame and humiliation that could not be refuted.

The Lin family had never sunk so low. In just a very short duration and in front of the emperor and the aristocrats, they were defeated under the hands of a single opponent: the only son of the Ye family.

So, in order to regain their reputation, he was made to voluntarily suggest a literary competition against someone who was younger than he was. Originally, he wanted to break his spirits and regain his family's reputation, but he hadn't expected to add another layer of glory for his opponent, nor become the means with which his opponent achieved it.

He regretted it. Before, he had full confidence and high ambitions - now these were smashed without a trace. He even lost his confidence for the next stage of competition.

How could Ye Wuchen have such great power...he is even younger than me! And more than ten years ago, there had been a rumor that he was a monotonous "incurable sickly young master". Could it be that Ye family deliberately concealed the truth? Then what was their purpose in doing so? Why would they suddenly exposed it all today. If there was any truth to the rumors, having disappeared for a year only to resurface... then within that year, what mysteriously shocking adventures must he have experienced? Could it be that he was perhaps someone else altogether?

Glancing at the distant expressions of the Ye family, he secretly denied the extremely outrageous notion.

Chapter 64: Literary Competition - Twin Lotus Flower on One Stalk Part 2

Time passed second by second, and the scene was unusually silent. No one dared to make noise for fear of interrupting. The whole crowd grew expectant for an exceptional piece of work.

In a minute's time, what could he achieve? At first, people secretly jeered at him for being arrogant, but after several surprises, they realized little by little that he had the skill to back up his own arrogance. And this time he even so boldly declared being able to complete within one minute --- perhaps he really could!

The once dazzling Lin Xiao was now being cast out of the limelight, and hardly anybody was paying attention to him right now.

Ye Wuchen had calculated his maneuvers in silence. Before coming to this world, his painting skills were not inferior to that of the Lin Xiao's. At that time he was only on the cusp of what could be called the first level of his power, but as of then it was still lacking. Right now, Wuchen was at the second level of his power but he didn't reveal the limits of his speed. Just this would be enough to shock the world and cause people to be stupefied.

Finally, as everybody expected, when the time came to an end, he ended the motion of his brush and it lay still on his hand. At exactly the same time, the yellow clothed attendant who had been holding a weird looking timer yelled. "The quarter hour is up."

Finishing exactly at the right moment revealed the amazing precision of his sense of time. Only a few people in the world had the same capability.

Ye Wuchen threw away all the painting tools in his hands, and then stepped aside to put up his completed work and present it to the audience. What he was met with were not sounds of surprise but that of total silence. People at the scene mostly looks at each other with faces filled with confusion.

Anyone would have been able to identify the painting as one that depicted a lotus. A twin blossomed pinkish white lotus - one facing obliquely to the left, the other to the right. The twin buds were not yet in bloom, but the twin lotus did not bring out an aesthetic feeling, but instead reflected the coarseness of its heavy color. Below the flower, the green stem and leaves were painted with exquisite delicacy, brimming with lifelike realism. Between traces of the strokes, one could almost vaguely smell the fresh fragrance. Below the lotus stem was water, but the water was painted very oddly. Because there was no outline on the water's surface, it depicted either an impossibly deep or vaguely shallow pool. Light green colored speckles dotted the water surface along with a slanted reflect of the same twin buds - all painted in the same manner as one would see in real life.

At a quick glance, this painting had nothing special about it. Examining carefully, one could notice that it was just an extremely ordinary piece that contained many faulty strokes.

No words came out of Lin Xiao, his gaze was affixed at the twin lotus flower painting. He believed that prior to this, Ye Wuchen already had an attitude full of self-confidence. It was unlikely of him to use this kind of painting as a joke, certainly he will have his own mysterious principles applied to this painting. But no matter how he observed the painting down to the smallest details, he still couldn't find anything magical about it. No matter how he looked and from every possible angle, this painting still could be considered as a masterpiece compared to Lin Xiao's Clear Water Lakeside, the difference was more than a hundred and eight thousand miles.

"This painting is called Twin Lotus Flower on One Stalk, an improvised work. Other works with the same suber are certainly innumerable. But I humbly consider it sufficient enough to be included among the well-known pieces." Ye Wuchen said smiling.

Long Yin knitted his brows and looked for quite a long time and turned. "My beloved officer Wen, what do you think about this painting?"

"This..." a white haired old man, exceeding sixty years of age, dressed formally as a government official said respectfully, "I'm an old man who has a pair of dull eyes and cannot point out any marvelous points on this work. Based on my perception, this is just an inelegant piece of work."

His evaluation caused majority of the people to simultaneously nod their heads. The remaining group of people still attempted to search for the marvelous principles behind it. Based on Ye Wuchen's previously excellent performance, it was impossible for him to make such inferior work. Moreover, judging by his fresh and unstressed facial expression, it does not seem like he was disappointed with himself.

"Beloved Officer He, how about your opinion?"

“My opinion is exactly the same as that of Officer Wen’s.”

“How is compared to Lin Xiao’s painting?”

“Unable to compare.”

Long Yin nodded his head and looked at Ye Wuchen. “This is also what I think. Wuchen, although your painting skill is highly perfected, this time you painted such a trifling matter, so for this stage of competition it’s...”

“Wait a moment, Your Majesty. Wuchen has something to say.” Ye Wuchen said with a gesture.

“Oh? You have something to say? Might it be that there’s really a mysterious principle behind it?” Long Yin asked with a face full of expectation, but seemingly unsurprised.

“If there’s no mysterious principle, how could I present it.” Ye Wuchen smiled faintly, then turned around and said in a clear voice, “I would like to ask you elders, brothers and sisters if any one of you have brought wine?”

People looked at each other, one by one they shook their heads. Who would bring wine to this kind of occasion? But suddenly, thunder-like voice echoed. “I brought some. Catch it, young fellow!”

As though afraid of Ye Wuchen’s failure, Hua Zhentian removed the wine sack hanging from his waist and directly threw it at Ye Wuchen’s direction. Hua Zhentian loves wine as though it were his life. In his lifetime he valued two things — First was his daughter, and second was wine. This wine sack made by Hua Shuirou was indispensable. Once emptied it is refilled itself again immediately.

Ye Wuchen extended his hands to catch it, and said smiling, “Thanks for the wine, Elder Hua, some other day I’ll invite you to drink to your heart’s content.

Originally, this was just an answer out of courtesy, but Hua Zhentian took it seriously and shouted. “Great! Young fellow, you better keep your word! If you dare not drink with me to our heart’s content, then you are not a man! Also, elder or not, it is awkward hearing it, you must call me Old Hua!”

“Then... that’s a deal!” Ye Wuchen answered, ignoring the latter part of his statement. He already noticed before that there was something hanging from his waist and believed that it was contained wine.

For those who don’t know the character of Hua Zhentian would have been stunned upon hearing the conversation between them two. This Hua Zhentian previously wanted to teach Ye Wuchen a lesson for hurting Lin Xiao, but in turn he had been tricked using “despicable” methods into agreeing to three conditions. Not only did he not get angry, but was laughing upon his defeat. This time he was too enthusiastic, based on his tone. It’s almost as though he wanted Ye Wuchen to become one of his sworn brothers that very second.

Maybe Hua Zhentian just had a very odd personality of enjoying getting deceived?

“Everybody, please have a look.”

Ye Wuchen removed the lid, the fragrance of wine spread all over the place. He lifted his head and took one long gulp before facing the painting and spurring out a mouthful. Liquid mist evenly sprinkled all

over, dampening the entire painting. He lifted his head and swallowed another gulp, doing the same thing three times after which he finally stepped aside, his face was adorned with a smile.

Nobody had been able to understand his extremely strange actions. One by one they shifted their attention to the painting. Then, several people opened their mouths wide, their jaws almost falling to the ground from surprise. Many people unwittingly dropped what they were holding. An old scholar's glasses fell to the ground with a loud "bang".

Not only was the crowd surprised, but the once calm and composed Lin Xiao opened his eyes so wide his eyeballs almost bulged out. As for Long Yin, his face revealed a rare unresponsiveness that hadn't been seen in many years.

Chapter 65: Literary Competition - Twin Lotus Flower on One Stalk Part 3

On the painting, the buds of the twin lotus flower slowly began to unfold their petals - blooming like a rare miracle and gradually revealing the small yellow buds within. The "reflection" beneath also bloomed, both sides altering in coordination. The people could not help but think that it was a real reflection. The lotus flower was the only magical element of the piece - the formerly coarse water surface and its light green dots spread out through the watermarks becoming evenly distributed and transforming into a perfect light green water surface. The watermarks faintly reflected the sunlight and from a distance the water surface looked clear and crystalline, as though one were facing a clear pond in real life.

What caused people the most awe was truly the reflection of the lotus. Since the water surface was the last to be painted and through the reflection of sunlight, it became intensely similar to the a real reflection. Inverted images in the water was one of the most difficult scopes in painting because the creative concept was really difficult to grasp, but in this case, the painting was really made to perfection.

When the twin lotus buds bloomed to its full, they burst open into two cupped pinkish white lotus flowers frozen in time. Had it been early or late by just a bit, it would not have achieved such perfection. Everybody was still caught up by such a mesmerizing image and have yet to come back from their trance.

Could this really be just a painting? No... They preferred to believe that this was a real twin lotus flower, and that the under it was the actual reflective lighting of light green pond water. Before all this, who could have witnessed the entirety of a lotus flower transforming in its bloom? No one.... But today they have clearly witnessed this incredible wonder within this painting.

This cannot really be called a painting.

Looking at their reactions, Ye Wuchen smiled his soft smile. The principle behind the blooming flower and water surface display was actually all very simple. Using water to cause the ink to spread before adding alcohol could turn a painting volatile in order to accomplish this process. Although the principle was obvious, the actual execution of this at this quality was close to impossible. Whether on the amount of ink used, the places that needed to be touched by the ink, the well-proportioned distribution of liquid wine, and the timing... a tiny mistake at any one of these points would cause severe damage to the end image.

Ye Wuchen stepped in front of the painting board, blocking his magical Twin Lotus Flowers on One Stalk, snapping the people back into reality after their witnessing the spectacular miracle.

“Wonderful! Wonderful!” This time, Long Yin’s voice, within just two words, expressed his clear and decided amazement.

“After all these years of my existence, only now do I truly know what a real painting is...”

“This... This indeed is a magical work! If I did not witness it first hand, I wouldn’t really have believed that this kind of wonderful art really exists.”

“Hubby! We came to Tian Long City at just the right time. In this world, such spectacles are quite rare. I fear no one would ever believe us when we tell of it though.”

“Unexpected, really unexpected. I already had one foot in the grave. I’m really lucky to be able to even witness this before I close my eyes for my final breath. God really treats me right... Even though I could die at any time, I really have no more regrets!”

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Lin Xiao swore that he had never heard this much praise and such copious amounts of exaggerated surprise in his entire lifetime. Even the sum of the praises he received in his life thus far could not compare to the praises Ye Wuchen received at this very moment. No matter how good his painting was, it was still man-made. But this Twin Lotus Flowers on One Stalk, he must admit, it was truly a piece of art made by a God. No mortal could manage to create such a tremendous work of art.

The difference, in spite of everything, was huge. No one could possibly surpass it. Lin Xiao took a deep breath; he could hardly calm down his thoughts. Being accustomed to popularity and praise - his position had been at its very peak. For the first time, he now had the perspective of a person looking up, but the person he looked up towards was positioned as high as the highest peaks, which were enshrouded in heavenly clouds, while he, stood at the foot of the mountain, not even able to see its shadow even with his head lifted upwards.

This time, a very old voice sounded. “Everybody please listen to what I’m going to say.”

The owner of this voice had great influence. Just a few spoken words could cause the noisy atmosphere to gradually calm down. It was from an old man who was quietly seated at the back row. His age appeared to be beyond sixty, and he wore a green suit stretching from head to toe. He had kind brows and pleasant eyes with a body that seemed immortal. Every person who gazed at him had a very distinct look of respect, even Long Yin’s expression reflected his deep and proper respect.

Ye Wuchen immediately guessed the identity of this old man.

“Hoho, young man. This old man takes responsibility for lacking scholarly knowledge. I never reached this path in my own painting techniques, but today I have really witness a work of art that could have only been made by a god. This kind of art ought to be possessed only by the heavens, and does not belong to this mortal world...”

People who knew this old man would know that for someone to have received such praise from him truly rare, and that Ye Wuchen might have been the first. And yet... he was truly fully deserving of such praise.

But the way he addressed Ye Wuchen was...

"...Please excuse this old man's presumptuous manner, but I would like to boldly ask. Which God was your teacher?" The Old Man slowly asked, his mouth slowly turning into a gentle smile.

This question attracted the curiosity of all the people, including the Ye family. All their gazes fixed onto Ye Wuchen.

Ye Wuchen let out a mysterious smile. "Old gentleman, you are correct. My teacher is indeed a God. My teacher has no intention of hiding his identity, so there's no harm in telling you."

The people lifted their brows. They originally thought that this kind of skilled disciple could only have learned from a God-like teacher, yet such abled masters always hid their identity, even refusing to let people know of their existence, so they did not have high hopes. However, unexpectedly, Ye Wuchen had no intention of hiding this, even going so far as revealing this to the entire audience.

"My teacher is...the owner of this ring." Ye Wuchen took out the God of Sword's ring then put it on the finger of his left hand lifting it high for everybody to clearly see. While the corners of his mouth secretly pulled into a smile while thinking: Grandpa Chu, let me use your fame once more. This ring you gave me has really made everything easy for me in my road to Tian Long Nation.

He was greatly indebted to Chu Jingtian. The old man had unconsciously made Wuchen owe him on purpose.

That cunning old fox.

The people barely managed to react when the two servant beside Long Yin yelled. "The God of Sword's Ring!!"

These words spread across this entire public square like a thunderclap, triggering a flare of loud reactions.

"The God of Sword's Ring! It's the ring he wore back in the days!"

"That's right. That's really the Ring of the God of Sword... the heavens have taken pity on me for allowing me to witness the God of Sword's Ring."

"The young master of Ye... he really is the descendant of the God of Sword! No wonder he has such amazing martial skills and talent at such a young age. As it turns out, this was the reason!"

"God of Sword is from the God Generation, to have such disciples is not impossible."

"God of Sword's Ring... he's indeed his disciple! He was rumored to have disappeared for more than a year. As it turns out, he was being sheltered by the legendary God of Sword; the Ye family is truly blessed by the heavens."

Chapter 66: Literary Competition - Emperor Teacher Wang Bo

Great exclamations of surprise, admiration and excitement... majority of the old men and middle aged men stood up from their own seats to excitedly look upon the God of Sword's Ring within Ye Wuchen's hand. Their faces were filled with respect and enthusiasm. For most of the younger people, the existence of gods were but a mere legend, an imaginary entity, and for them, the name "God of Sword" was an integral component of the belief. This was previously one of the core pillars of belief of the the entire Tian Long nation.

At this moment, Long Yin stood up, his facial expressions ecstatic and filled with respect. He then said in a loud voice, "I didn't expect that Wuchen really was the disciple of the God of Sword. For someone to obtain this ring means that he is the one and only descendant of the God of Sword. This descendant has now finally appeared before us; he who is the son of the Ye family of Tian Long City! This means that the God of Sword has not forgotten us. This is truly worthy of a celebration, worthy of a celebration! Hahahaha!"

Long Yin laughed loudly, spreading his infectious laughter across the entire area. Yes, the God of Sword did not forget them at all, moreover he had selected the son of the Ye family as his disciple. This signifies that the next God of Sword would be just like Feng Chao Yan of the Gale Nation, who provide his lifelong loyalty and services to the Tian Long Nation and who became the guardian deity of the Tian Long Nation. At this moment, their view of Ye Wuchen completely changed. Since he was the descendant of the God of Sword, then he will surely be the next God of Sword!

"Wuchen, I believe that your achievements in the future will surely surpass those of your teacher's!" Long Yin said seriously.

Surpassing the God of Sword, is there any other higher praise than this!? Judging by his prior performance, no one would dare say that the evaluation was excessive. Even the people of the Lin family, whose faces turned greener and greener each time, subconsciously held the same thoughts in their minds.

"Your Majesty has unfairly praised me" Ye Wuchen said smiling.

"Hoho, so that's how it is. Your teacher has already taken you to the path to be a God. Apparently, not only with his sword, but also with the four arts have you already entered the same path. We couldn't have imagined, no wonder!" The old man stroked his white beard and continued on. "Young man, I would like to shamelessly make a request. Can you give this Twin Lotus Flower on One Stalk to me? I might remove all the other ordinary and unworthy arts from my wall in order to leave this one alone, and I will certainly observe it daily with three sittings to comprehend the real concept of painting."

Ye Wuchen was with not much choice. This painting didn't really have any so-called "God-like" features, it clearly depended heavily upon the extremely clever support from the theory of physics. Furthermore, the watermarks had already dried up and it could now be considered a good painting. There couldn't be a repeat of the breathtaking performance he had just displayed a few moments back. Also, this painting had its own purpose.

He said respectfully, "Old mister, this painting already has an owner. In fact, it doesn't suit you. If you do not mind, I will personally visit you at your home some other day and paint three paintings. So please do not take any offense, old mister."

“Are you serious? Good, good!” the old man nodded gladly, then he had second thoughts for a moment before laughing loudly. “Hahahaha, so that’s it. I was carried away by my excitement seeing this marvellous work that I forgot the underlying meaning of twin lotus flowers. I almost made myself a laughing stock.”

These words sparked a moment of realization for the people. Merged stem twin lotus flowers is a metaphor for a mutually devoted couple. He had also said that this painting already had its owner...Could it be that his heart already belongs to another person? Thinking this, many single women frowned with sadness. Appearance, personality traits, past history, martial skills, talent, a great teacher, none of them were inaccessible for him, he is without any flaws. This kind of a wonderful man, one wouldn’t be able to meet a second one in within one’s entire lifetime. What kind of woman would be able to fortunately capture him.

“Chen-er, don’t call him old mister, he is your maternal grandfather!”

This loud voice belonged to none other than Wang Wen Shu. This time she was grinning from ear to ear. In the eyes of a mother, her own son was always the best. Because her son had previously failed to live up to expectations, every time people mentioned her son, her facial expression never light up, and instead she felt a deep sense of failure. But today, after the astonishing performance of Ye Wuchen, her heart had felt the joy and pride that no words could describe. This time, she could really feel proud of being a mother because her son was truly this excellent, as though he were a bright pearl becoming the dazzling focus of one’s eyes, pressing down the brilliant rays of all other persons of the same age.

This old man was actually her father - Emperor Teacher Wang Bo. Seeing them addressing each other as “young man” and “old mister”, she hardly knew whether she should laugh or cry. In the end, she could not help but yell out.

“Eh?” Ye Wuchen’s expression went stiff, then his face full of surprise.

“Hahahaha!” Wang Bo comfortably laughed out loud, caressing his long beard as he said, “Chen-er, grandpa had heard that when you were rescued by the God of Sword, you had lost your memory and even now you are still not be able to sincerely recognize your close relatives. This is behaviour is natural, and I won’t force you to call me grandpa, but you already agreed to make three paintings for me, so you must not back out on this!”

“Uhm, I won’t break my promise!” Ye Wuchen answered with a smile.

For all these years, Wang Bo rarely met Ye Wuchen. He occasionally visits the Ye family only to be able to have short chats. He could only shake his head in disappointment upon leaving. But now, he saw a legendary dragon soaring high in the sky. Not everything in this world was permanent. These words especially applied to his grandson.

People in the crowd who felt confused had a sudden realisation: they felt strange witnessing them address each other this way because of their relationship with each other.

“Okay! This time grandpa is relieved. Chen-er, I’m curious as to which young woman you are going to give this Twin Lotus Flower on One Stalk to.” Wang Bo said smiling, boldly asking the question in public since Ye Wuchen had made this painting in public as well, even revealing that this painting already had

an owner. That meant that he had plans to publicly give this painting to someone, and Wang Bo was taking the advantage of the situation to ask this question.

With these words, he caused some of the young ladies to be agitated. Whether sitting or standing, they nervously grabbed the corner or their clothes, both eyes looking around like some flickering lights, anxiously waiting, as if hoping for a huge surprise to drop from the sky.

Ye Wuchen didn't answer. Instead, he stepped in front of the painting board and carefully rolled up Twin Lotus Flower on One Stalk into a thin roll, covering this magnificent piece of work which caused a lot of exaggerated surprise. Then, picking up the wine sack that Hua Zhentian gave him, he said in a clear voice. "Today if it wasn't for the Elder Hua's wine, this kind of painting would be impossible. So, this painting could be considered as our collaborative work. Therefore, it is only proper for Elder Hua to have this painting..."

The people were stunned at once, some even almost threw up blood...The owner of this twin lotus flower painting is actually this rough old aged man. This can't be...

Chapter 67: Literary Competition - A Slap on One's Own Face

"I do believe that Elder Hua is a person who loves wine more than paintings. So," his gaze switched from the wide-eyed Hua Zhentian to Hua Shuirou beside him. With a gentle gaze and a light smile, distracting her, "I present this painting to young miss Hua Shuirou."

Hua Shuirou's whole body trembled, clenching her hands, forgetting to move. Her gaze met with Wuchen's, and they were now face to face.

All of a sudden the scene went silent. People looked at one another in dismay, not expecting such an outcome. They started to covertly observe Lin Xiao. Everybody from the Tian Long Nation already knew that Hua Shuirou had been promised to Lin Xiao. Their wedding day would be on her sixteenth birthday. The man with such brilliant talent and the woman with such gorgeous beauty, this was what everybody regarded as the perfect couple. That was also what cowed other handsome and talented men who admired Hua Shuirou from having any improper intentions.

But now, the young master of Ye family even dared to give the Twin Lotus Flower on One Stalk painting to the young lady of Hua in front of everybody. Was this not a clear indication that he is digging Lin Xiao into a deeper pit? What kind of man would tolerate this offense?

Two things incited the most hatred in a person. One is for killing one's father, the other is for taking away one's wife...What will be the reaction of the young master of the Lin family!?

Although Lin Xiao had yet to say anything, his eyes emitted an innumerable level of anger. No matter how self-restrained or gentle the temperament, if it tarnished a man's dignity, he will find it difficult to be at peace with himself.

"Young child of Ye, what's the meaning of this!" Lin Zhan stood up, shouting. Using a painting to secretly express love to his future daughter-in-law in the presence of Lin family and this number of people no less. Does he not have a shred of respect for the Lin family? This cannot be tolerated. If the members of the Lin family do not stand up for themselves after being ridiculed, then they would surely lose face. Only a fool would fail to grasp underlying meaning of the painting.

“Oh?” Ye Wuchen looked puzzled, then asked in return. “What is the meaning of your words?”

“Hmph!” Lin Kuang exclaimed heavily, wishing violence upon this man. “We Lin and Hua family have made our marriage arrangements. Young miss of Hua family was betrothed to my son Xiao-er six years ago. What is the meaning of you giving this painting as a gift?”

The audience nodded simultaneously, thinking Ye Wuchen should not have committed this act.

“Oh!” Ye Wuchen suddenly realized, but did not deign to look at him, still fixing his gaze on Hua Shuirou, causing her to turn away and hang her head low. He turned around. “I dare to ask if young miss Hua is already a part of Lin family.”

“Of course not right this moment, but in a week’s time she will become part of our Lin family.”

“Since she is still not part of your Lin family, then my giving her this painting is still none of your business.” Ye Wuchen give him a disgusted look.

Lin Zhan become speechless, for a period of time he couldn’t think of anything to retort back.

“I would like to give this Twin Lotus Flower on One Stalk to young miss Hua and not to any person of the Lin family. You have no right to hinder it! How mighty is your Lin family that young miss Hua, who has yet to be married into your family, is subject to your irrational and tyrannical behavior. Even going so far as interfering with her personal affairs. If she is really marries into your family...” Ye Wuchen did not continue further. Instead he exhaled, giving a pitying gaze at Hua Shuirou —purposely in view of Hua Zhentian.

Hua Zhentian disapproved at first, but upon hearing Ye Wuchen’s final remarks he suddenly became angry and stood up to shout. “Old man Lin! As the father, I didn’t even utter any words. What kind of people are you of the Lin family, meddling in my daughter’s affairs! You listen carefully. I, Hua Zhentian, have only this one daughter. Anyone who does not treat her properly will be torn to your bones! If my daughter really likes this painting, even the emperor or gods should get lost!”

To curse both the emperor and the gods in front of the man himself, Hua Zhentian might be the only man who would not lose his life in that process. If any other person were to do so, then Long Yin would surely be mad, but for this instance he just smiled, paying it no mind. He was well aware of the Hua Zhentian’s personality. He is very loyal to the imperial family, but his temperament is fierce; he is outspoken and straightforward. Never being restricted by rules, his actions were open and candid, he kept to his word, he loved wine as much as his life, and he was extremely protective.

Lin Zhan couldn’t help but to swear profusely...I only care about the reputation of my Lin family, not your goddamn daughter, you brainless impertinent man seems easily moved by a few words!

Hua Zhentian was unaware that the words he used to protect his daughter implied him siding with Ye Wuchen, which only served to give the Lin family a big resounding slap to their face.

Lin Xiao observed the situation. Deciding that this might bring harm to both Hua and Lin family, he promptly broke the silence. “General Hua, father, please don’t be angry. A sweet, fair, graceful, and wise lady is always being chased by men. Young miss Hua’s beauty is captivating to even the birds and beasts, her admirers are countless. Young master Ye’s actions are a commonplace. Even if young miss Hua and I are engaged, she is still not yet a part of Lin family, so everyone still has the right to seek after her. We

of the Lin family have absolutely no rights to interfere. In fact, young master Ye just came back after losing his memory, so he might not be aware that young miss Hua was already engaged. There is no need to blame him.

Many people nodded surreptitiously. Lin Xiao's statement not only used Ye Wuchen's memory to cover the embarrassment of the Lin family, but also showed off his broad-minded attitude which was highly respected by others, making them remark that this son will surely have a bright future.

"Good! Good! You said it right!" Ye Wuchen clapped his hand in approval, then he said beaming at Lin Xiao. "Indeed very remarkable words from a gentleman. Like being born from a successful court academician. Young master Lin deserves to be called a brilliant and capable individual, such wise opinion and high tolerance has earned my utmost respect. Speaking of tolerance, compared to me, the difference is quite huge."

He then used a voice that can only be heard by Lin Xiao alone. "Such a high degree of forbearance. If I were you, I would really give two big slaps to any person who has real intentions towards the woman that I love."

Lin Xiao gritted his teeth tensely, whole body slightly shaking.

Even without that remark, any sane person would be able to determine that these words were meant to mock him. If they only heard what Lin Xiao had said, they would feel that Lin Xiao has a very distinctive moral character and certainly bright future. If they had heard Ye Wuchen's remark... they would think him a coward!

Still showing good will even though his future wife had been treated like this, if not because of cowardice, then what?

However, young master Ye had mentioned "court academician" what was that? One by one the audience asked each other the same question, but nobody knew the answer.

Chapter 68: Literary Competition - Spiritual Hin

Ye Wuchen grasped the painting, and then asked in a gentle voice. "Young miss Hua, pardon me for asking but would this Twin Lotus Flower on One Stall painting obtain your good graces? A good painting should be in the hands of a beautiful woman. If young miss Hua doesn't mind my inelegant painting skills, please accept it to spare my feelings. If this painting is not able to garner young miss Hua's appreciation, then it has lost its meaning of existence, and it would be fine to burn it.

The people fixed their gaze simultaneously at young miss Hua. Some men even seized the opportunity to unabashedly admire her. The more they looked, the more they saw that she was gentle and beautiful beyond compare. Thinking about Lin Xiao and then Ye Wuchen, their hearts dropped. Whether by appearance, family background, or talent...they would never be able to reach these two. Perhaps only this kind of extraordinary intellectuals can match with such beautiful women. Even those young women seemed to admire her, and some were even jealous. To be admired wholeheartedly by men from Lin and Ye, even to the point of fighting openly and maneuvering covertly just for her.... how could the other females not envy her? For those who loved painting as much as their own lives, their hearts alarmed and trembling with fear. Who cares about the engagement between Lin and Hua family, they only fear that Hua Shuirou would not be agreeable. They would be helpless to do anything if she wished

to destroy the one of a kind painting. The feeling was so hard to bear that it was almost felt as if they were getting killed.

“Chen-er, has he fallen for the daughter of Hua family?” Wang Wenshu said softly.

“I think so. The daughter of Hua family is an outstanding beauty, Chen-er falling for her is absolutely normal. Not to mention, Chen-er is not a child anymore.” Ye Wei said smiling, having no intention to blame Ye Wuchen for his actions. But rather...if he can win over the future daughter-in-law of the Lin family and create a bond with Hua family, he could only imagine the livid expressions the Lin family would have. He would surely enjoy it. Besides, Hua Zhentian only has one daughter, and spoils her very much. If anyone married his daughter, it would also mean that they will inherit the entirety of the Hua family. In those days, the Ye family had tried their best efforts to convince Hua Zhentian to let his daughter be betrothed to Wuchen, but was repeatedly rejected. At the time Ye Wuchen had been a good-for-nothing. He was repeatedly mentioned to the Hua family, but when Ye Wuchen had reached the age of sixteen, he still had no marriage proposals from their family. Wang Wenshu had shamelessly taken the initiative to mention the marriage proposal to other aristocrat families, but they had always found an excuse to change the topic or even escape from her presence.

Based on Hua Zhentian’s nature of keeping his word, making him cancel the engagement with Lin family was next to impossible. Ye Wei had the same thoughts in his mind.

“The young lady of Hua family is really attractive. If Chen-er really likes her, we should help him with it.”

“...” Ye Wei was terrified by his wife’s statement, cold sweat started to appear in his forehead.

Ye Shuiyao listened to their conversation in silence. Her gaze fixed at Hua Shuirou, but she could not understand what her heart felt, as though she felt suddenly uncomfortable. For some reason... she did not know.

Hua Shuirou felt her heart beating very fast. This can be considered the first time she was being stared at by so many people all at once, she wished she could escape then and there. After a long while, Hua Zhentian finally said, “Daughter, do you really like this painting? Please say something.”

“I...:”

Even though Hua Shuirou had a very delicate nature, her thoughts were not as simple as white paper. She knew that she should be loyal to her future husband, since they were already engaged. Even if she really liked the painting—quite a lot actually—based on this situation she really needed to say no.

In the end she lifted her head, about to speak, but suddenly met Ye Wuchen’s eyes. The smile on his face was so gentle, it slowly wiped the nervousness in her heart. His meaningful glance was gentle and deep, as if containing a deadly attractive force pulling her heart and all her attention - it was positively addicting.

On the verge of saying “no” she was suddenly unable to let her voice out. No matter how hard she tried she was not able to say it. And her heart started beating faster and faster...

“Do you want this painting?” He asked one more time, soft and gentle as the wind.

“I... want it.”

Ye Wuchen broke into a smile from the corner of his mouth and nodded with satisfaction. A sharp cry broke the silence, the bird on Hua Shuirou's shoulder spread its wings to rise high into the air and flew towards Ye Wuchen. It landed atop his raised left arm, chirping cheerfully. Ye Wuchen rolled up the painting and placed it in its claws. The bird grasped it firmly with both claws, and then with another sharp cry, spread its wings and flew back towards Hua Shuirou, placing it atop her hands.

All eyes widened...Gasps of surprise, envy, denial...it was as if they had rehearsed this scene beforehand. For the green feathered bird to show its emotions and thoughts, this incredible scene played out so naturally, as if it were planned by God. It was as if this bird truly understood their wishes and used itself as a means to link it all together.

Holding the painting in her hands, Hua Shuirou had yet to awaken from her baffled state. Today's events would stay with her for the rest of her lifetime. Up to this moment, she still couldn't believe why she had agreed, perhaps it was the demons and gods at work. She was aware that she was going to say what she meant to say, any hesitation and worry had disappeared without a trace for that specific moment.

The whole Lin family's facial complexions became ashen, their gazes on Hua Shuirou were full of resentment, but Hua Zhentian burst into a loud laughter saying, "I knew my clever daughter would love this painting. Not to mention, even I, a person who doesn't know anything about painting, thought this painting was pretty good. It would be strange if she didn't like it. But what happened to this bird? Could it be that it likes this painting too and couldn't wait to grab it?"

He still wasn't aware that the three words from Hua Shuirou was exactly like giving the Lin family a violent whip using a rod. Hitting them to the point of choking and spitting out blood. In the middle of this situation it was compulsory to restrain oneself in order to help regain the reputation of Lin family. Just as Lin Xiao had mentioned before in a relaxed manner, "... after all she is still not yet a part of the Lin family, so everyone still has the right to seek after her!"

To be slapped straight at his face... he had yet to witness such a resounding slap like this. Lin Xiao originally thought that based on the character of Hua Shuirou, she would most certainly decline it, but to his surprise she accepted it. His heart felt like it was being scooped out by a lot of blades and twitched in pain.

No one had noticed, although Ye Wuchen's face was smiling, his eyes were closed.

When he finally opened his eyes, the sense of dizziness from a few moments ago had disappeared without a trace.

This was one type of the power of the "spirit", categorized as the first element of the ten major orders.

(The ten major orders include seven natural major elements and three major elements of fate. The seven natural elements were: water, fire, wind, thunder, earth, light and darkness. The three major elements of fate are: life, death and spirit.)

Spiritual power is miraculous and very difficult to manifest. It is a kind of the power element which was very difficult to apply and manipulate. Since he had a faint power of "premonition", it would suggest that his spiritual powers were inborn, and he tried to use it a few times before. However, today was the first formal application, causing Hua Shuirou to shout out what her heart desired, and giving the green feathered bird a spiritual hint.

Applying this power to Hua Shuirou and the green feathered bird who both had no powers had already caused him dizziness, and he almost fainted on the spot. He thought of this with a sigh. Apparently, I must sparingly use this kind of power in the future. If I used it on a person with a little power, it might not only bear no results, but instead bring great harm to myself.

Chapter 69: Literary Competition - A Dream of Worldly Affairs

The atmosphere suddenly turned incomparably awkward. Long Yin's booming voice broke the silence, shifting everyone's attention. "Lin Xiao, for this stage of the competition, the winner is Wuchen, do you concede?"

Lin Xiao bow his head and said. "I'm already convinced in heart and by word. I prostrate myself in admiration."

Long Yin nodded. "In that case, let us start the second stage of this competition!" pausing in thought, "Lin Xiao, I heard you always keep a flute by your side since you were a child and that your attainments on the flute have reached perfection. Is this rumour true?"

"Reporting to Your Majesty, this rumour is actually true. My name 'Lin Xiao' has the word 'Xiao', which is the same as 'Xiao' (flute). Since I was born, my fate has already been tied to the flute. When I was a child I loved the flute as I do my life. Everyday I would set my own rules to practice the flute. Anywhere I go, the flute will be by my side, not only to relax my mind, but also serving as my sword in times of crisis. Among all the things I've learned, the flute is what I am best at." as Lin Xiao said this, he pulled out a white jade flute from his sleeves. During this occasion and even prior to the previous competitions he had the flute on his person, proving that the flute indeed did not leave his side.

"Very well. Rumour has it that no one is better at the flute than you. That every time you play, even the birds in the sky or the crawling insects in the ground will gather around and listen. But excluding your family, no one has ever had the opportunity to enjoy your playing. Since you have your flute with you, the second stage will be a flute playing competition! And at the same time, let me also enjoy the so-called real sound of the flute. Are you certain that you can win this?" Long Yin asked.

Long Yin's words were not wrong. Tian Long Nation had an ongoing rumour that Lin Xiao of Lin family has an attainment in the flute that has reached a supreme realm transcending worldliness and had attained holiness. Its sound is like something from the heavens. If the flute was played on the riverside it shall attract the geese and lure out the fishes. If played from the forest it shall attract different beasts to gather around by his side to linger. People talk about such incredible myth-like rumours, but none of them have actually heard it. Among the people present, excluding the people from the Lin family, nobody else has heard him play. That being the case, people were not only quite expectant, but were also very excited about it. As Lin Xiao had mentioned, among all the things that he had learned, this is where he excelled, and he is unlikely to be a man who is full of empty promises.

Lin Xiao held the flute lightly, gently stroking it as if it were his devoted lover. He said absently, "This flute is called A Dream of Worldly Affairs. It was a memento from my mother, and she loved it dearly. When I was three she had given it to me in her last moments before dying of an illness...This is the only thing she left me. After her death, I had cried for three days and three nights and swore never to abandon this flute."

He relaxed a bit, then held up the white jade flute. "Every time I remember mother, I would play this flute. For seventeen years, I have never missed a day. As the time goes by, my emotions got involved, my thoughts got involved, and two years ago even my heart got involved. It knows my heart, and I also know its heart. For this lifetime...I will never leave it. I haven't challenged anyone to a flute competition before because no one can match me. Bleak sounds from this world could not compare to the sound of my flute nor even deign to play alongside it.

The expression on Lin Xiao's face was of nostalgia and pride. The people did not think that he was exaggerating. His affection to this flute as well as his manipulation of it are known to be far beyond the realm of ordinary people.

"Today, for the sake of my Lin family's reputation, I, Lin Xiao will use this flute to compete." As he began to play, his surroundings began to shift. The sound of the flute flowed into the air of the cold spring, suddenly like the sea waves pushing forward layer by layer, then like snowflakes swirling wave by wave, to a whirlwind bursting through the canyon, everything changing quickly before dripping through the quiet night sky of the Milky Way...

The sound once again changed its course, turning into a mournful yet touching sound, as if they were hearing the beautiful singing of a young lady. Their hearts slowly reflected a distinct figure. She seemed to be only seven or eight years of age, approaching slowly with graceful steps, but no matter how many steps she took, she did not move from her place.

A warm wind blew and sunlight shone. The sky suddenly erupted flower petals dancing through the wind, the grass under the feet of the young lady began to sprout wildflowers. From the earth, a dark green colour spread throughout the area, dotted with thousands of purples and reds. This is the beauty of the spring.

A cool wind blew as the young lady suddenly transforms into a twenty year old woman. The corners of her mouth curl up into a smile and she starts dancing lightly and gracefully. A scorching sun was up in the sky, all living things prospered, heaven and earth flourished. This is the breath of summer.

A bleak wind blows, the young lady transformed into a middle aged woman, losing her grace as she slowly drifted. She did not sing or dance, only walking forward silently, footsteps calm and unhurried. The earth had dried up, all living things started to ignore the heaven and earth's urge to retain its state, and slowly weakened. This is the depression of the autumn.

Cold winds blow, she is an old woman with temples covered in grizzled hair, she staggered with every step, eyes that were once beautiful now cloudy. The earth had lost its vitality, blanketed by pure white snow, covering what was once full of beauty and hope. Finally, the figure collapsed in the middle of the cold wind covering the body with snow. Her figure can no longer distinguishable. This is the conclusion of the winter.

The sound of flute stopped, freezing the people's thoughts to that last snowy world. That is the final destination of every person. No one can escape the final stage of life.

Chapter 70: Literary Competition - A Dream Remembering the Past Part 1

As the song ended, Lin Xiao slowly lowered the white jade flute, eyes still sealed shut. His expression was depressed and lonely, like he was painfully recalling something from the past. But the audience was

still immersed in the lingering sounds of the flute rising in spirals having yet to come to their senses...The sound of the flute, indeed appeared like an illusion emerged in front of their eyes showing the miracles of all living things, and also enabling them to witness the different stages of a human life, from young and immature, to beauty, to maturity, until life's end.

It was as if they were having a dream. From there, they watched themselves pass by each stage of life. That which brought them to dreamland is the boundless magical power of the flute's song.

The people were shocked. If it wasn't for today, they would have carried on thinking that the sound of flute only brought out pleasure to the sense of hearing and would not think that this sound would stir up their heartstrings. Deep in their hearts, it depicted scenes of touching images. Such sound is both magical and incredible, what an extraordinary kind of person to be able to play this kind of sound.

Besides total shock, they could not think of anything else.

A number of people still do not know that it was just a dream, and until this very moment have yet to wake up.

"The name of this tune is similar to the name of the flute, called A Dream of Worldly Affairs, this is the tune that I play everyday. Every time I play it, it reminds me of my deceased mother. The sound of the flute is like her gentle call, making me feel as if she has not left me, but is always here by my side, witnessing every stage of my life." Lin Xiao said softly, the corner of his eyes were wet with tears. This is the first time he played A Dream of Worldly Affairs in front of a large number of people. He did not pay any mind to their exclamations, not even the least bit of arrogance, as if reactions like these were normal.

His voice was very low, but not enough to wake the people up from their stupor until Long Yin exclaimed his admiration word by word. "Great! What a nice tune A Dream of Worldly Affairs. How great Lin Xiao of Lin family is. I realized only now the true and real sound of a flute, and when man and flute unite as one we receive something that belongs to the heavens rather than the ordinary human world. I have listened to numerous types of wonderful music, but now comparing to A Dream of Worldly Affairs, the music I have heard before were intolerably bland. As you have mentioned before, these worldly sounds are nothing compared to your flute playing. I couldn't accept it before, but now I am fully convinced. The sound of your flute and Wuchen's painting skills are indeed not the skills that can be compared side by side with the skills from the secular world. For the Tian Long Nation to have these two is really a blessing from God; may the heavens protect my Tian Long!"

Long Yin's voice was generous and fierce, hardly concealing his excitement, surprise, appreciation, and gratification. His words had woken up the people and also mirrored their thoughts. For a moment, an uproar resounded throughout the entire stage. The high officials and noble persons who normally don't talk and smile and are normally very stingy when it comes to words of praise one by one started to praise the sound of the flute with every magnificent and flowery word that they could think of, admiring Lin Xiao. Some felt that their words of praise was still not sufficient, that their flowery words from this world were still not qualified enough to decorate the sound of the flute that belonged to the heavenly world.

Today, they had recognized Ye family's Wuchen and now, also Lin family's Lin Xiao — an outstanding talent who can play such heavenly music.

Everybody is convinced that for this stage, Lin Xiao was the winner. They could not think of anything else that can surpass his A Dream of Worldly Affairs, a fine tune that brought everybody to a strange illusion-like place, and that described the stages of life in a dream like manner. His portrayal of the sorrowful memories of his mother and confused stage of depression in life were fully appreciated by all the people, showing empathy for him.

Among these people, surely including Ye Wuchen himself did not expect that Lin Xiao's artistic attainment on the flute had reached this shocking level.

"It's indeed astonishing!" Ye Wuchen said facing Lin Xiao.

"Flute...is the other half of my life." Lin Xiao answered, his face emotionless.

"Oh? Huh... for me, flute is just a musical instrument, that's all. Does it mean that if you are not able to use the flute, you have lost half of your life?" Ye Wuchen pondered.

"Yes!"

"You must have absolute self-confidence else you wouldn't make light of your life and bet it on this irrelevant competition, more so on a bet that has no payback. Only a fool can do such things or perhaps you think you have an absolute assurance. But I believe..."

Ye Wuchen did not continue. The noises beside his ears still did not break up for a very long time, he heaved a sigh of relief then yelled with a clear voice, "Everybody please listen to me first."

The clear and loud voice had caused them to shake and gradually, calmed themselves down. Their gazes once again focused on Ye Wuchen, awaiting his performance.

Ye Wuchen said smiling. "Master Lin's playing has surely lived up to its reputation and is greatly appreciated by the people. Even I don't have a hundred percent certainty to win over master Lin. But we from Ye family never back out from a fight, so please excuse my shameful acts."

He glanced at the flute in Lin Xiao's hand, then continued. "This flute of Lin Xiao is a remnant of his mother, being treated as his life and never leaving his side. Naturally he won't allow any person to touch it, so this flute I am certainly not allowed to touch. Not to mention, is there any elder or friend here who have brought a flute? Please lend it to me for a short moment, and it will be greatly appreciated."

When his voice dropped, he didn't sweep his gaze across the whole area and instead looked immediately towards Hua Shuirou. With a smiling face, his gentle gaze fixed on her, unmoving for quite a while.

People in the area looked at each other, but nobody was able to pull out a flute. Their purpose of attending this occasion was to witness the competition between young talents. Who would have brought their flute to this place? Moreover, a flute is not like zither which is a stringed musical instrument, it needed to be played using the lips, whether male or female. Who would agree to share his or her flute with someone? It is almost like sharing your chopsticks with some other person; these two acts are essentially not very different. Even if someone brought their flute, it was unlikely for them to present it—of course, except maybe those young ladies who took a liking to him and couldn't wait to get close to him. If a lady gifted a flute to a man, it would have an underlying meaning that they are

willing to entrust their future to the man. Those ladies would have agreed a thousand times, but too bad none of them have brought a flute.

Hua Shuirou's heart was beating very fast. Little by little she tried to lift her head, but then she tried to lower her head in the same manner because every time she secretly lifted her head, she was met by a gaze that made her heart suddenly beat faster. She covered her blushing face, whispering to herself, "Did he... discover it?"

For a long while, nobody had been able to provide a flute and the situation became awkward. Then Long Yin knitted his brows. "Does anybody have a flute?"

If there was no flute, then this stage of competition could not continue on. If one had to return to the palace to get a flute, then it would be very time consuming.

Hua Shuirou slowly lifted her head, meeting the gaze of Ye Wuchen. His gaze contained some hidden expectation, and that expression in his eyes spoke to her: Even if some other person lends me theirs, I still wouldn't accept it. I only want yours.