

A True Performance

The sun had already long set in Ionia and yet, darkness was not. At the town square of a small village, illuminated by lanterns and basked in the moon's glow, rose a stage. Nearly the whole village was gathered there to witness the infamous *Hana* troupe in action. *Hana* was a traveling troupe of actors, who would travel from village to village, from city to city, to spread the beauty of theatrics to the ensemble of Ionia. When news arrived that they would be traveling to this village, everyone was shaking in anticipation.

Performing the classic *Tale of Reina*, one could argue that none would ever possess the grace and fluid movement of the actors on stage. Captivated by their play, the whole crowd stood aghast, as if in a state of stupor. Expressions of contentment could be read from every spectator's face, a feat that would no less fill every performer with a sense of pride. However, if one examined the crowd closely, one could notice a singular expression on a singular person. The man stood, hunchback, in the middle of the audience. A white robe of excellent quality covered the near entirety of his upper body. His face was that of an ordinary man, but if one looked closely into his eyes, one would swiftly realize that he was no ordinary man. His mind was that of a virtuoso, that of a true poet, that of a maestro whose work would stand the test of time. And this man could not help but frown when he inspected the mediocre performance of the so-called renown actors. Could a man's action be so stiff? Could a woman's voice be so dull? Could one perform such a tawdry performance and not cover their face in shame? Having such critiques in his head, Jhin knew, however, that it was not the actors' fault for being so uninspiring; people simply lacked the sense of aesthetic that he possessed. The world was a crude diamond and only he knew how to properly cut it as to give it the splendor that it was due.

The play was at its finale. The crowd held its breath. It was over. A thunderous round of applause roared from the audience as the curtain call came. Soon, the crowd started to disperse as people were headed home for a good night's rest. The actors themselves were already backstage, taking off make-up and costume, preparing for an early departure on the coming morrow. Their work was done. For Jhin, however, work was only beginning. After all, the stage had already been set. With a grim smile, he murmured, "I will make you beautiful..."