

All Hail 491

Chapter 491: The Player

Everyone knew that Yu Youyao and Cousin had a good relationship. It had been a long time since they last met, so it was only human nature for her to catch up with Cousin personally. They smiled kindly and did not stop her.

The “cousins” returned to Qing Qu Residence.

Zhou Linghuai asked Chang An to send over the gifts he had prepared for everyone in the residence.

Although the Northern Territory was poor, there were many special things, such as Lantian jade, Tang sancai ceramics, wine, and many precious medicinal herbs and spices.

Zhou Linghuai used the excuse of going to “You Prefecture”, and naturally should put on a complete show.

“Cousin, are you hungry? I’ve prepared some food for you to eat first.” Yu Youyao got someone to go to the Jade Courtyard and brought over the medicinal cuisine that had been brewed early in the morning, the newly made Eight Treasures Cake, and a few light and simple snacks.

They were all Zhou Linghuai’s favorites.

Zhou Linghuai did not have a strong appetite and usually ate light food.

After entering the Yu Residence, Yu Youyao was very meticulous. The two of them often ate together. Whenever she saw a dish that he ate more, she would arrange for someone to make it for him in different ways next time. As time passed, she had more or less figured out his preferences.

He could also prepare food that suited his taste every time.

Yu Youyao took a pair of silver chopsticks and picked up a golden ball. She placed it in her cousin’s bowl. “This is a rose pear ball, with filling made from rose jam. Cousin, try it.”

Zhou Linghuai had stayed in Shandong for four months. In order to please him, the clan had offered many treasures and delicacies. The rose pear balls were a specialty of Pingyin County, so naturally, he had tasted them before.

The rose pear balls were made of sweet rose filling. They were fragrant and sweet, but he didn’t like them very much.

However, since Yu Youyao had personally made it for him, he naturally could not let her down.

Hence, Zhou Linghuai picked up the ball and took a bite. “It’s golden in color. The outer skin is crispy, and the inside is soft and tender. The texture is salty and fragrant. It’s much better than the rose pear balls I ate in Shandong.”

Yu Youyao was overjoyed. “I know that Cousin doesn’t like sweet things. I made salty and sweet flavors with flower sauce. As long as you like it.”

There were a total of six or seven dishes on the table. Slowly, they finished all the dishes without realising.

Yu Youyao scooped another bowl of white jade ginseng soup and handed it over. "Cousin, you must have worked hard in Shandong those few months. You have to drink more soup to nourish yourself."

Zhou Linghuai took the white jade ginseng soup and said with a smile, "With the various herbal dishes that Cousin has constantly prepared to nurture my health, this trip to Shandong was very smooth. It wasn't too tiring, and my health is much better. Rather, it's been hard on you."

He was the one in battle, but the person who was most nervous and worried was Yu Youyao.

Every time she sent a letter to him, she would always ask Yin San to bring some herbs and medicine over. She was afraid that he would not have enough, and she was even more afraid that something would happen to him. A good herbal dish was not easy to make. It must have consumed a lot of mental energy.

At the mention of Shandong, Yu Youyao couldn't help but pout. "Cousin, it's been more than ten days since the army returned to the court. Why are you only back now?!"

Initially, she thought that she would be able to see her cousin in seven or eight days at most.

Who knew that this ordeal would take so long?

Every day, she would send someone to inquire about Yin Huaixi's whereabouts, and every day, she would look forward to his return.

Zhou Linghuai smiled. "After Li Qiguang and the remaining members of the clan are escorted into the capital, they still have to be jointly tried by the Ministry of Justice and the Court of Judicial Review. Naturally, I have to cooperate with the trial process. Li Qiguang is guilty of treason. It's very important and involves a lot of people. It won't be easy for him to be tried from the bottom to the top. Be it the Ministry of Justice or the Court of Judicial

Review, they don't dare to be negligent at all. Hence, it took those 10 days." This was after he had arrested the person and had gone through an interrogation. The personnel that needed to be investigated and the evidence that needed to be found were all very comprehensive. Only then could he explain it clearly in front of the Ministry of Justice and the Court of Judicial Review. For the time being, he had nothing to do.

Next, the Court of Judicial Review and the Ministry of Justice needed to verify the evidence he had gathered, fill in the gaps, interrogate, and so on.

Ten days was still a short period of time. With the progress of the Court of Judicial Review and the Ministry of Justice, it could last for a month.

When Yu Youyao heard this, she knew that she had thought too simply. She had thought that after Li Qiguang and the remaining members of the clan were escorted into the capital, the matter in Shandong had pretty much been resolved.

Unexpectedly, Li Qiguang started a rebellion. This was the crime of treason.

The Emperor would definitely order a strict investigation. Everyone who was involved with Li Qiguang and the others must be investigated one by one. They would rather kill a hundred people by mistake than let anyone off.

Yu Youyao frowned. "When can we finish dealing with Li Qiguang's case?"

Zhou Linghuai said lightly, "At the earliest, it will take more than a month. As long as it's a crime of treason, the Imperial Court would rather kill a thousand people by mistake than let anyone off. Shandong is rich in resources, Li Qiguang is the leader of the clans. The Li family has controlled Shandong for many years and has connections all over the country. Moreover, Li Qiguang was heading a rebellious faction. Many people will be implicated."

Especially in the Jiangnan area!

Yu Youyao sighed slightly. "As long as Li Qiguang's case is not closed, Cousin will be involved. Will it affect Cousin's status as Zhou Linghuai?"

Only when Li Qiguang's case was closed could his cousin's job as the general of the east be officially relieved.

Zhou Linghuai shook his head. "Don't worry. There's no need for me to personally handle some trivial matters."

His goal was huge. If everything required him to personally appear, he would have long exhausted himself to death. The game had already been set up. He was now the chess player.

Only then did Yu Youyao feel a little relieved. With a thought, she hurriedly asked, "Cousin, will Li Qiguang's case implicate the Jiangnan area?"

Zhou Linghuai smiled and asked, "Why do you ask that?"

Yu Youyao knew her cousin well. His attitude had already made everything clear. "I remember that Song Xiuwen was originally in the coastal area of

Shandong. He was in charge of the battle along the coastal area of Shandong.

Later, because of the Wokou pirates in Zhejiang, he was transferred to Zhejiang."

Song Xiuwen had a large number of troops in his hands. If the Court of Judicial Review and the Ministry of Justice wanted to interrogate Li Qiguang, it was impossible for them not to investigate Song Xiuwen.

Zhou Linghuai smiled faintly. "Song Xiuwen has been transferred to Zhejiang for three years."

He had just said that Li Qiguang's case would implicate all parts of the country. Yu Youyao immediately reacted and thought of Jiangnan first.

The three divisions had already completed the case of the King of You.

Li Qiguang's rebellion was urgent and needed to be dealt with urgently, so the follow-up to the King of You's case was postponed. At this critical juncture, the Marquis of Ningyuan reported to Song Xiuwen.

Yu Youyao had always been very sharp in politics. She immediately thought of Song Xiuwen. Then, she thought of Song Xiuwen's involvement with

Shandong and naturally guessed all of this.

Yu Youyao took a deep breath. "Li Qiguang must have been plotting a rebellion since a long time ago. Song Xiuwen has only been transferred to Zhejiang for three years. During his time in Shandong, the two of them are more or less linked.."

Chapter 492: Heart of the Royal Seal

Zhou Linghuai took a piece of Eight Treasures Cake and ate it.

Yu Youyao looked at her cousin and knew that she had guessed correctly. "Marquis of Ningyuan participated in Song Xiuwen's memorial. Although he didn't mention Shandong, Song Xiuwen is involved with Shandong. The Imperial Court has always had zero tolerance for rebellion. All the officials will be investigated thoroughly. Song Xiuwen will definitely be implicated. Since Song Xiuwen is a feudal official and has a pivotal role in Zhejiang, Zhejiang will be implicated as well."

King of You's case, Li Qiguang's case, and Song Xiuwen's case had a myriad of complications that were deeply interlinked.

Everyone's eyes were focused on Li Qiguang's case. Song Xiuwen's case was still under investigation and hadn't spread, so she didn't think too much about it.

Only when her cousin mentioned the complexity behind Li Qiguang's case did she think of this connection.

For a moment, she shuddered.

The courtiers were probably also a little suspicious about Song Xiuwen, so the Zhenguo Marquis Residence showed that they put righteousness before family from the beginning.

Fortunately, she suggested that her father bring Song Mingzhao south.

Regardless of whether Song Mingzhao was really talented or not, at least as the heir of the Zhenguo Marquis Residence, Song Xiuwen's case was much easier to handle with his help.

As long as her father did as she said, he would start with the Zhejiang navy, get the dirty money, and escort Song Xiuwen to the capital. The rest would have nothing to do with her father.

However, she was worried that if her father did not listen to her advice...

Zhou Linghuai nodded. "I've arranged for someone in Zhejiang to assist Lord Yu in investigating Song Xiuwen's case. Lord Yu is investigating the crimes that Marquis of Ningyuan participated in. As for what you're guessing, it will all be after Song Xiuwen has been escorted to the capital."

As long as Yu Zongzheng obtained the dirty money and investigated the crime that Marquis of Ningyuan had reported to Song Xiuwen, once he entered the capital, the matter in Zhejiang would have nothing to do with him.

Her cousin's words undoubtedly reassured Yu Youyao. "Cousin, did you plan Song Xiuwen's case from the beginning?"

No matter how scheming her cousin was, it was all interconnected. If she didn't know her cousin well, she wouldn't have guessed this even if he had never deliberately hidden it from her.

Zhou Linghuai smiled. "Before I take over You Prefecture, I have to resolve the worries of You Prefecture first."

More than half of the officials and nobles in the Northern Territory were dealt with. The ones who stayed were his people. The resources in the Northern Territory were in his hands, but it was not enough.

Only with more chips could he support his greater ambition.

Yu Youyao was stunned and looked at her cousin in a daze.

The person in front of her seemed to split into two in front of her eyes.

One was the heir of Yin Huaixi, who was very unfamiliar to her, but was graceful and noble like the sun god of the east.

One was the cousin she was familiar with. He hid his abilities well and was peerless in the world. He spent time with her day and night) and the two of them were very close.

For a moment) she couldn't tell which one was her real cousin.

Seeing her strange expression, Zhou Linghuai asked, "What's wrong?"

Yu Youyao subconsciously lowered her head and replied, "No, nothing. I just feel that the Jiangnan area is rich in resources. Tea leaves, salt, porcelain, silk, minerals, maritime trade, and so on are all the most commonly used expensive items in the Great Zhou Dynasty. It would naturally be best if Cousin can gain a foothold in the Jiangnan area."

Although the north was not barren, it was located in the bitter cold. It was also a fact that there were not many resources.

Even if her cousin completely controlled the north, supplies were still a problem.

Zhou Linghuai vaguely sensed that something was amiss with her emotions. He said calmly, "Previously, you said that you wanted to start an escort business. It's been almost half a year since you've started preparing. How's the preparation for the escort business?"

At the mention of this, Yu Youyao had a lot to say. "The escort business has already been prepared. We've cleared the checkpoints at the government office and the water and land routes. We'll start escorting in September..."

She had handed over all the matters in the escort business to Zhou Yonghe. It had been difficult for him for half a year. Although there were no results, fortunately, the escort business had been established and her cousin's name had been released.

Although the initial investment was huge, Yu Youyao did not lack money now. Her prospects were definitely not bad.

After she spoke for a long time, Zhou Linghuai only listened with a smile. It wasn't until she was done that he handed her a cup of tea.

Yu Youyao held her tea and suddenly felt that she had been dizzy just now.

Her cousin was her cousin. Why would there be a split in identities?

After figuring this out, she suddenly felt enlightened. "Cousin, previously, Zhou Yonghe asked me what name I would be giving the escort agency. After thinking about it, I felt that 'Happy Heart' was not bad. Zhou Yonghe refused no matter what, saying that other people's escort agencies are either Dragon Gate or Tiger Might. We should give it a mighty and domineering name, but I still think that 'Happy Heart' is very good."

Zhou Linghuai had an ominous feeling. "Why did you come up with the name?"

Yu Youyao smiled. "It represents joy." Before Zhou Linghuai could heave a sigh of relief, the little girl added mischievously, "It's also what I hope you will be."

So that was why~

Since the matter was settled, Yin Huaixi did not say anything else.

With that, the little girl giggled. Her eyes were bright and her smile was bright.

"Cousin, Cousin, doesn't this name sound good?!"

Zhou Linghuai felt that Zhou Yonghe's suggestion was better.

The escort business definitely needed a more mighty and domineering name so it would be more imposing. Although all of this was superficial, the underworld really liked it.

However, if the little girl felt that it was better to be "Happy Heart", so be it!

The words that were about to come out of his mouth rolled on the tip of his tongue before he stuffed them back into his mind. After thinking about it,

Zhou Linghuai said, "The escort business depends on strength. As for what name to give it, well, as long as you like it!"

After saying that, Zhou Linghuai couldn't help but think

Wasn't this answer a little suspicious?

Hence, Zhou Linghuai racked his brains and added, "'Happy' sounds quite festive. It's very dangerous for the escort agency to escort people to begin with, so it's more auspicious to give it a festive name. The greatest goal of the escort business is also to benefit others and make them happy. From the looks of it, this name is not bad."

As soon as she finished speaking, Yu Youyao couldn't help but chuckle. "Cousin, I just wanted the name to have a positive meaning. That's why I named it 'Happy'. It's really awesome that you could explain the word 'Happy' so well. I didn't think about it this way!"

Zhou Linghuai's face darkened.

How could she foolishly think of such a cousin as two different people?

Was there something wrong with her brain?

Yu Youyao smiled, her eyes sparkling. "However, after Cousin's words, I suddenly feel that this name is really good.."

Chapter 493: Little Money-grubber

Zhou Linghuai tapped her forehead lightly. “Naughty~”

Yu Youyao stuck out her tongue. “The Happy Heart Escort Company currently mainly escorts those heading to the west, Huguang, Liangguang, and the five prefectures of the Central Plains. It covers more than ten prefectures in the country.”

Zhou Linghuai was a little surprised. He did not expect that when the escort business was first established, it would already be so big. “I’ve underestimated you.”

Yu Youyao tilted her head. “Cousin, you’re too well known. Zhou Yonghe took the document you prepared and easily cleared the layers of barriers between the various prefectures.”

“The guards of the Wang Residence are all experienced soldiers who have fought against the Di people. In terms of skills, they definitely can’t compare to martial artists with profound martial arts. In terms of actual combat, even martial artists with profound martial arts don’t dare to fight them head-on.”

“Look, I have all the channels and strength. I don’t lack money. It’s not like I can’t afford to set up a stall. I’ll definitely make this big. Moreover, I have a lot of businesses under my name. I won’t lose money escorting my own supplies.”

They were transporting goods from the south to the north, and from the north to the south. This was a deal that they felt was not a loss.

She had many businesses under her name, so she did not have to worry about selling them.

If there were too many goods on hand, the Xie family was also on board to share the risk.

With the Xie family’s channels, what could they not sell?!

Since she was running an escort business, she included dividends for the Xie family. In business, it wasn’t like she was taking advantage of them for nothing. She wouldn’t feel any pressure even if she used the Xie family to earn money together.

Her ambition was much greater than he had thought. Zhou Linghuai smiled.

“You’re right. Then, I still have a good business in my hands. I wonder if Eldest Miss Yu, who doesn’t lack money, is interested in working with me?”

It had been a few months since they last met. Her greed for money was even greater than before. At the mention of business, her eyes lit up.

Since she liked to earn money so much, he would fulfill her wish.

Yu Youyao thought for a moment and an idea flashed through her mind.

“Cousin has attacked Song Xiuwen. Clearly, he has taken a fancy to Song Xiuwen’s job. After Song Xiuwen falls, the person who fills Song Xiuwen’s position will definitely be Cousin’s own people. Maritime trade has to go through the coastal navy. It can

also be convenient to have our own people. So Cousin, do you want to interfere in maritime trade?"

Her suggestion was definitely not groundless.

Instead, it was because she knew her cousin well. Since he had entered Jiangnan, it was impossible for him to give away the fat meat in his hands.

Zhou Linghuai smiled but said nothing.

Yu Youyao glanced at her cousin and continued to analyze. "Even if Cousin's plan is flawless, maritime trade isn't easy to do. After all, the risks at sea are unpredictable. The Imperial Court has its own merchant ship, and you can probably get your hands on the most important maritime map. You can also resolve the construction of the merchant ship yourself. However, the most important thing when traveling on the sea is still your seafaring experience. With rich experience, you can avoid many calamities and deal with many sudden situations at sea. You can also avoid losing everything and taking many detours."

Zhou Linghuai ate another piece of Eight Treasures Cake. "So?"

Yu Youyao pursed her lips. "I have two merchant ships in the Xie Residence.

The people on the merchant ships are all carefully selected by the Xie Residence. They have the most seafaring experience. These people are all under my name. Any one of them can be relied on independently."

"Of course, the Xie family isn't the only one in the Great Zhou Dynasty that does maritime trade. However, Cousin is very ambitious, so he's naturally unwilling to fight on a small scale. Only the Xie family that has a strong foundation can support Cousin's ambition."

She would either not do it or do her best. In some ways, she and her cousin were still very similar.

The merchant ships under her name were temporarily under the control of the Xie family.

It was true that her cousin was working with her, but it was best to obtain the support of the Xie family through her.

Zhou Linghuai smiled. "I wonder if Cousin is interested?"

Yu Youyao said, "Of course I'm interested. Who would complain about having too much money? However, even brothers have to settle accounts clearly.

Cousin will contribute the most to the profits of maritime trade and will take 50% of the profits. I'll take 30% and the Xie family will get 20%. What do you think?"

Her merchant ship was also using the Xie family's connections. With the Xie family's contributions, 20% of the profits was not bad.

Zhou Linghuai had no objections. "We'll do as Cousin says."

It wasn't impossible to give her more benefits, but Yu Youyao was always especially persistent when it came to benefits, and she wouldn't accept them easily.

Yu Youyao's method was also the best.

If too many personal feelings were mixed in with benefits, it was easy to not differentiate between public and private matters. It was also easier to cause conflict and estrangement. Of course, it was also easier to cause losses. To him, it was not a big deal to give all the benefits of maritime trade to Yu Youyao.

The two of them chatted for a while more. The specific details of maritime trade had already been finalized. When the contract was confirmed, they could start preparing.

Although Song Xiuwen's case was still under investigation, Yu Youyao was not worried that there would be any changes in the maritime trade.

There were too many things that needed to be prepared for maritime trade. The earlier they prepared) the earlier they would be able to execute.

After chatting about work, Yu Youyao asked, "By the way, since Cousin has accepted the job related to the 'Documentary Scriptures', does that mean that you still have to stay in the capital for a few more years?"

Although she had some guesses, she was still a little uncertain without hearing her cousin say it himself.

Zhou Linghuai could tell that although the little girl tried her best to pretend that she was just asking casually when she asked this, her eyes subconsciously revealed an expectant expression.

His smile deepened as he said, "I still have many things to deal with in the capital. I'll have to trouble you for a long time in the future. Cousin, please don't mind."

Yu Youyao's eyes lit up, and she smiled until her eyes curved. She quickly said, "It's not troublesome at all. I can't wait for Cousin to stay in the Yu Residence forever. Why would I despise you?"

The little girl's eyes were bright, and her smile was sincere. How could anyone bear to abandon her?

He had already achieved his goal of entering the capital this time. After accepting the title of King of the North, he would be able to return to Youzhou. The rest of the matter had been planned, so there was no need for him to stay in the capital personally.

However, he was not in a hurry to leave.

Yu Youyao thought of something else and felt a little uneasy. "Cousin, you're going to inherit the title soon, right? If you stay in the capital, what will happen to the war in the north?"

Every autumn, the Di people would go to the border city of the north to burn, kill, and plunder.

Zhou Linghuai smiled. "Don't worry. The current general guarding Youzhou is originally a general under me. He's quite talented. Not long after, the emperor will send Chang Ningbo to Youzhou to assist in the battle. There are still 3,000 of my elite troops in the north. If the Di people dare to advance, they won't be able to retreat."

It was impossible to invade on a large scale.

Although the Northern Barbarians were a large tribe, their population was inferior to the Great Zhou. In the battle four years ago, the Di people had also suffered heavy losses and urgently needed to recuperate after the battle. That was why the Marquis of Changxing could safely guard Youzhou for three years..

Chapter 494: Cousin, You're So Kind

During the battle in Shandong, the Northern Barbarians had probably received the news.

Now that his reputation had soared, even the vassal lords had to avoid him.

The Northern Barbarians had suffered greatly under him and his father. Before figuring out the truth, they definitely did not dare to act rashly.

Chang Ningbo had rushed to the north to help in the war a few years ago and was quite experienced in fighting the Northern Barbarians.

Yu Youyao was finally relieved.

Yu Youyao's eyes darted around as if she had thought of something. She quickly said, "Cousin, you said that you had brought me a gift. Where's the gift? Quick, show it to me."

He knew that no matter what she had forgotten, she would never forget a gift. Zhou Linghuai's smile deepened. "It's in the reception pavilion. I'll bring you over to take a look."

Yu Youyao happily followed her cousin to the reception pavilion. At a glance, she saw a table full of gift boxes. She said in surprise, "These are all prepared for me?"

Zhou Linghuai nodded. "Some of them are specialties from the north. Most of them were brought back from Shandong. There were also medicinal herbs and spices that were banned, so I asked Chang An to send them to the Jade Courtyard."

The others in the residence only had one gift from Youzhou, but she had two.

Yu Youyao was overjoyed. "Thank you, Cousin!"

The gifts that her cousin had prepared were all very exquisite. Clearly, they had been carefully prepared. Yu Youyao couldn't wait to take out a gift box and untie the silk around it. It was a rosewood box with pine and cypress cloud patterns carved on it.

As soon as the box was opened, she saw an inkstone inside. It was green and pure, like a parasol leaf. The stone patterns looked like pine branches and cypress leaves, strong and bright.

Yu Youyao's fondness was almost overflowing. She quickly took the inkstone.

The inkstone was cool to the touch, as if she was holding an ice stone in her hand. After holding it for a long time, she couldn't bear to part with it. "Cousin, what's the story of this inkstone?"

Zhou Linghuai smiled. "This is a Wutai inkstone. It's produced on Wutai Mountain, also known as the Dragon Resting Stone. It's as cold as ice and good for fine ink. It's also a rare good inkstone. I carved it myself." At this point, he recalled that he had given her a red silk inkstone previously, so he explained, "I heard from Yin San that you liked the red silk inkstone I gave you previously very much. I think you also like these strange stones and inkstones, so I specially found one for you."

The Great Zhou Dynasty especially valued stone carvings. High-quality stone materials could all be carved into inkstones, so stone inkstones were also very popular in the Great Zhou Dynasty.

On the other hand, the famous inkstones of the previous dynasty were not as popular as stone inkstones because they needed to be burned.

In the past, Yu Youyao had never shown a special interest in inkstones. However, after giving her the red silk inkstone, he realized that Yu Youyao had an extraordinary liking for inkstones. She probably liked to collect these rare and good inkstones.

Indeed!

Yu Youyao was overjoyed as she held the Wutai Mountain inkstone. "Wutai Mountain is a holy land of the Buddhist Sect. Could the Dragon Resting Stone produced on Wutai Mountain also be related to Buddhism?"

She indeed liked the inkstone very much, but only because it was given to her by her cousin.

The purple gold inkstone that Song Mingzhao had given her was also a rare strange stone inkstone. She did not even touch it and did not think that she liked it much.

He did not believe in Buddhism, but Yu Youyao seemed to have some Buddhist affinity, so Zhou Linghuai smiled. "If you think it's related, it's related. It depends on the person."

Yu Youyao smiled.

Zhou Linghuai changed the topic. "I obtained a few high-quality Dragon Resting Stones. As the stone is relatively large, it will take a while to be transported into the capital. The Dragon Resting Stones are as cold as ice. When the time comes, I'll carve them for you. In summer, they'll be placed in the study, bedroom, and hall. They'll be as cold as ice. It's a beautiful and cooling way to relieve the heat. When it's summer next year, it won't be too difficult to deal with the heat."

Yu Youyao had a bitter summer. Ever since May, she had been complaining about the heat.

Although there was an ice cellar at home, Nanny Xu did not allow her to use too much ice. Ice melted when it was hot. Although it could relieve the heat for a while, it could not continue to reduce the heat. Yu Youyao had also suffered a lot.

After thinking about it, Zhou Linghuai thought of the Dragon Resting Stone.

The stone was naturally cold, so it naturally cooled down and relieved the heat. It was not like ice, which had cold air. If used too much) it was easy for coldness to enter the body, and this was not good for the body.

However, the best Dragon Resting Stones were rare, and it took him a few days to find a few.

When the time came, he would give one to Matriarch. It was rare for the others in the residence to give her small gifts.

Yu Youyao smiled. "Cousin, you're the best."

It had been too long since he had heard the little girl say this. Zhou Linghuai's lips curled up slightly. "As long as you like it."

As the first gift was a huge surprise, Yu Youyao looked forward to every time she could open a gift.

Her cousin did not disappoint her. The gifts he gave her were all exquisite and unique items that were rare in the capital. Just based on their rarity, Yu Youyao's horizons were broadened.

When the little girl opened her gift, her joy pleased Zhou Linghuai. It was not in vain that he had spent a lot of manpower and resources.

Towards the end, when Yu Youyao unwrapped a purple-gold inkstone from Langya Mountain, she couldn't help but be stunned.

Zhou Linghuai was so sharp. How could her subtle changes in emotions escape him? He asked calmly, "What's wrong? The purple gold inkstone is as famous as the red silk inkstone in Shandong. Do you not like it?"

Yu Youyao reacted and held the purple gold stone lovingly. "Of course I like what Cousin gave me. A while ago, Heir Song came to thank me and gave me a purple gold stone from Langya Mountain. I was just a little surprised."

Zhou Linghuai's gaze darkened slightly as he said calmly, "Oh, is that so? Purple gold stones produced in Langya, Shandong, are very rare. This piece of mine is also an old item that the Leng Residence has kept for many years. It took some time to carve it into an inkstone. I think the item he gave you is also an ancient item with a strong historical background. I want to see it."

Yu Youyao pursed her lips. "I took a look at the purple-gold inkstone that Heir Song gave me. It's indeed a rare antique. As for its background, I'm not sure. I asked Nanny Xu to put it in the storeroom. If Cousin wants to see it, I'll get someone to find it."

They were both purple-gold inkstones, but when Yu Youyao mentioned Song Mingzhao's piece, she seemed to lack interest. Instead, she held the purple-gold inkstone in her hand and admired it seriously.

The love in her eyes was as if this was the first time she had seen such a rare thing.

This purple-gold inkstone was engraved with the words, "The purple qi will come out from the east." There was a hint of purple in the gold, making it look rich and noble. The piece that Song Mingzhao had given her seemed to be mostly purple with gold.

At first glance, there did not seem to be any difference.

However, on closer inspection, she realized that the texture of her cousin's inkstone was a little better than Song Mingzhao's, making it look extremely elegant.

This should be the best quality among the purple gold stones.

Zhou Linghuai shook his head. "Since it's in the storeroom, forget it. I'll look at it again when I have the chance in the future. Although my purple-gold inkstone isn't an antique, its quality is top-notch and very rare.."

Chapter 495: Unity

When Song Mingzhao was mentioned, the little girl's attitude was completely different from that of an aristocratic family. It was obvious that she was distant from Song Mingzhao and did not have a good impression of him.

At the mention of the purple-gold inkstone, she did not care at all. It was a rare thing, but when it was handed to her, she only “carelessly looked at it”. She did not even pick it up and take a good look before putting it into the storeroom.

Ordinary people would usually keep such good things in the study and use them regularly.

He was happy to see Yu Youyao’s indifferent attitude towards Song Mingzhao.

However, he also vaguely sensed that something was amiss.

However, Yu Youyao disdained the purple-gold ancient inkstone that Song Mingzhao had given her, but she couldn’t bear to part with the one he had given her. He had already experienced the difference between heaven and earth, so there was no need to make things difficult for himself.

Yu Youyao smiled. “What Cousin personally carved isn’t an antique in my heart. It’s better than an antique. Nothing else can compare to it. Naturally, it has to be placed in the study and often used.”

Zhou Linghuai smiled.

As Yu Youyao played with the purple-gold inkstone, she asked, “Cousin, quickly tell me what happened while you were in Shandong.”

Zhou Linghuai put down his teacup. “Didn’t Yin San tell you everything?”

Otherwise, how could those books about him have circulated in such a short period of time?

Yu Youyao pursed her lips and said in disdain, “Yin San is a fart that can’t be hit with three sticks. You only reply to me when I ask. As for the process and details, there’s nothing at all. I have to rely on my own imagination. It must be very different from the real situation. I want to hear it from Cousin himself.”

It was also because her cousin had analyzed the situation in Shandong early in the morning and even explained the tactical strategy that she could guess many details.

But!

She wanted to know how her cousin had used his glib tongue to defeat a million soldiers and instigated the clans that were almost impossible to cooperate with the Imperial Court to resist Li Qiguang.

She also wanted to know how her cousin had beaten them at their own game, causing internal strife in the clan and catching them all in one fell swoop.

Zhou Linghuai’s smile deepened. “Just based on Yin San’s words and analysis, he has already pieced together the complicated situation in Shandong and many details of this battle. It’s not much different from the real situation. Cousin, you’re really impressive!”

Yu Youyao’s eyes widened. “Cousin, you’ve already seen the books about you on the market?”

Zhou Linghuai nodded. “I roughly saw it.”

Yu Youyao’s face turned red and she felt a little embarrassed. “I know that Cousin must have made arrangements too, but the opportunity was right in front of me. Even if it’s just an insignificant matter, I want to help Cousin. I-I didn’t want to disrupt your plan, so...”

The little girl looked up at him. Her fair neck, which was half hidden in her clothes, was as slender as jade, as if he could completely hold it with just a palm...

For no reason, he felt a sense of greed and wanted to get closer.

Zhou Linghuai leaned forward and reached out to pull the collar of her shirt around her neck.

"There's nothing wrong. You've always done very well."

Her lapel was pulled up to block his heart-wrenching weakness, the beauty of the delicate jade neck. He felt his fingertips tremble.

Yu Youyao was stunned. "Cousin?"

She tilted her head and saw her cousin's hand. His joints were clearly like jade, and his fingers were long and smooth. It was very beautiful.

His well-proportioned joints were part of a hand that controlled the world. It was calm and noble, but it contained the power of a jade mountain.

Perhaps it was because he did carving often, but his fingertips were a little calloused. When he was tidying her clothes, he gently scraped the thin flesh on her neck, making her tremble a little. She resisted the urge to dodge.

Zhou Linghuai seemed to have woken up from a dream and suddenly retracted his hand.

He clearly only felt that the little girl's collar was a little low. At a glance, her fair neck was long and fair. When she looked up at him, she said, "A woman's fair neck is so beautiful that she doesn't need makeup."

Suddenly, he wanted to pull up her lapel and block his wild thoughts.

Yu Youyao was a little suspicious. "Is there something wrong with my clothes?"

Zhou Linghuai suddenly felt embarrassed. He lowered his eyes and picked up his teacup as if nothing had happened, but he only looked at it without any intention of drinking.

He avoided the main point and said, "The key to the so-called strategy is not the 'plan', but the 'chance' and 'change.'"

Yu Youyao only thought that there was something wrong with her clothes. Her cousin had helped her tidy it up. When she heard her cousin mention the measures to change the situation, she unknowingly composed herself and listened carefully.

Only then did Zhou Linghuai put down his teacup. "It's guided by the situation into a chance. If you take advantage of the situation, it'll cause a change."

"Change is related to time. What's the right timing?"

"The time, the place, and the people are part of the right timing."

"Change is change. The world is divided into yin and yang. Only when yin and yang change can the five elements be changed. Only when the five elements change can there be changes in everything in the world."

Yu Youyao came to a realization. "Cousin, you've said before that you scheme on people in the underworld, scheme on situations in the middle, and plan for a change in the underworld. The changes in this world happen when fate allows it. It's just a change in time."

Zhou Linghuai nodded. "Your previous actions were also guided by the situation. You planned to change the situation from small to big. You've indeed helped me a lot and saved me a lot of trouble."

The original plan was to use Mr. Xian Yun.

However, his little cousin's "campaign" had already used the public opinion of the world to achieve his goal.

After taking a big detour, they were actually praising her. It was clearly just some small tricks to gain favor, but why did it become so grand when it came from his cousin?

Yu Youyao smiled and deliberately asked, "Cousin, you don't blame me for making the decision on my own?"

The lipstick that was made from roses was fragrant. At a glance, he felt his heart skip a beat. Zhou Linghuai looked down at the teacup. "You know your limits and know when to advance and when to retreat. I should be happy."

He was happy that she was always paying attention to the royal court and was on his side.

He was also happy that she had painstakingly planned for him.

He was even happier that her heart was like glass, pure and flawless. Her heart was pure and flawless, and it would not be changed by the world or her identity.

Yu Youyao was curious. "Cousin, I have a question for you!"

Zhou Linghuai nodded. "Ask away!"

Yu Youyao asked the question that she had been suppressing for a long time. "Back then, at the Precious Peace Temple, I accidentally broke through

Cousin's tracks. I felt that Cousin wanted to kill me. Why didn't he kill me later?"

At that time, her cousin was dressed in black and looked at her with hostility, as if he was looking at a dead person.

She had a problem since she was young. The more nervous and afraid she was, the more she spoke. In the face of someone who wanted to kill her, she actually spoke incoherently.

After that, even she did not know how she had survived?!

Chapter 496: Wronged

The other piece was about the same size. It was flat and jade-like. It was more detailed. It was green and white, and the stone patterns were like lotuses. It was very elegant.

The most strange thing was the last piece. It was a little smaller and was about a meter. However, it was green in color and looked like an emerald leaf.

Matriarch Yu couldn't help but praise, "It's really an eye-opener."

The Dragon Resting Stone had the word "dragon" in it and was produced on Mount Wutai. It was also related to Buddha and was considered a type of precious stone in the Great Zhou Dynasty.

Due to the cold nature of the stone, the royal family valued it.

In the imperial mausoleum and palace, there was no lack of Dragon Resting Stones. High-quality Dragon Resting Stones were rare, and the royal family did not have any regulations regarding it.

Yu Zongshen also said, "Mount Tai has magnificent rock formations. It's not elegant, but a Dragon Resting Stone is elegant. The two have their own charms. It's strange and wonderful."

There were many landscape stones in the Yu Residence. These stones were gathered from all over the Five Mountains and were mostly used for Feng Shui landscapes.

The Dragon Resting Stones were generally used to build houses. The best ones were more suitable to be placed indoors as decorations.

Matriarch Yu tilted her head to look at Yu Youyao. "Your cousin returned from a trip to Youzhou and found a few Dragon Resting Stones. I'm afraid it's because of you?"

After interacting with him for a long time, she knew that Zhou Linghuai had a cold personality. Such a big gift was definitely not something he could do himself.

Yu Youyao glared at her. "No, I didn't. Grandmother, you can't accuse me wrongly. Cousin wanted to give me the Dragon Resting Stones. I didn't know about it before. How did it become my doing? Am I that kind of person?"

Matriarch Yu did not wrong her. "That's not it!"

Before Yu Youyao could be happy, she heard her grandmother add, "However, once you say to your cousin, that might not be the case."

Zhou Linghuai doted on Yu Youyao and agreed to everything she asked. Everyone in the family knew this.

"I didn't." Yu Youyao puffed up her cheeks. In order not to continue being wronged by her grandmother, she hurriedly explained, "It was in May that the weather was abnormally hot. I just complained that the weather was hot and Nanny Xu said I wasn't allowed to use ice. Cousin probably took it to heart. When I returned to Youzhou, I found my old friend and went to Mount Wutai to find a few Dragon Resting Stones. I didn't make it up."

She did not ask her cousin to work hard and transport the Dragon Resting Stones into the capital.

Matriarch Yu glanced at her from the corner of her eye with an expression that said, "I knew it. You're making a fuss about using ice in May. If this isn't pretense, what is? I'm afraid your cousin saw that you were suffering in summer and was worried that you would use too much ice in the summer. You might catch a cold, so he went to look for the Dragon Resting Stones."

Forget it, she should just shut up. This was making things worse. Yu Youyao pouted, feeling that she had been wronged.

Madam Yao pinched her handkerchief and laughed. "The two of them are as close as biological siblings."

However, she felt that even her biological siblings could not compare to them.

When Matriarch Yu heard this, she was delighted. "Our Yao Yao has been blessed since she was young."

Yu Zongshen's smile faded, but it remained on the corner of his mouth.

Probably no one would say that a eldest daughter who lost her mother was blessed. The so-called "blessing" was just because she had nothing to rely on and was forced to grow up.

Zhou Linghuai transported a lot of Dragon Resting Stones into the residence. In addition to the three best pieces, there were also some smaller ones.

Zhou Linghuai was quite thorough in his dealings, and no one could find fault with his methods. However, his words and actions inevitably revealed that he put himself first.

When it came to the best things in other families, he was expected to be filial to their elders first. The remaining things that the elders chose were for the younger generation.

When it came to him, the rest that Yu Youyao chose belonged to her elders.

It was obvious without thinking that the best of these Dragon Resting Stones would definitely be given to Yu Youyao. The inferior ones would be given to the various courtyards in the residence.

He openly favored Yu Youyao and was not afraid of comments.

Such people often did as they pleased. It was enviable.

He had always wanted to treat someone like this.

He had thought of all the obstacles that the world had placed on him and was prepared to eliminate them one by one. However, he had forgotten that the greatest obstacle had never been the so-called outsiders.

Instead, it was the betrayal and schemes of his closest family!

Matriarch Yu turned to look at Yu Zongshen and said, "It's the Laba Festival today. Since you're all here, why don't you stay in the main house for a table of Laba dishes before leaving?"

During King Li's funeral, the banquet was not allowed, so there was no harm in having a meal at home.

Previously, she had also thought that Second Brother had been very busy in the previous court recently. It wasn't easy for the family to celebrate the Laba Festival together so she didn't call him over.

Yu Zongshen's smile did not change. "No, I still have something to do in my study, so I'll leave first."

Without waiting for Madam Yao, he left first.

Madam Yao looked at Yu Zongshen, who was wearing a large cloak and walking in the wind and snow. He was getting further and further away. He was clearly someone close to her, but he felt like a distant stranger.

On such a cold day, even her eyes felt a little hot.

Matriarch Yu couldn't help but feel a little disappointed. The smile on her face disappeared. No matter how rare the Dragon Resting Stones were, she couldn't look at them anymore. She only felt that the coldness had seeped into her heart.

Nanny Liu helped Old Madam back to An Shou Hall.

There were more than ten stones of various sizes in the residence.

An escort was also polite and specially asked, "These stones are very heavy. Do you need to move them to the residence?"

The escorts were all people from all walks of life, so Yu Youyao shook her head. "Thank you for your hard work. It's cold, so go back and rest early. There's no need to trouble you anymore."

With that, she asked Xia Tao to give them the silver.

After the escorts left, Yu Youyao found the guards in the residence and gave each of them two taels of silver, asking them to help carry the Dragon Resting Stones back to the Green House.

Although the Dragon Resting Stones were for her, she still had to make some carvings.

After settling this matter, Yu Youyao returned to the Jade Courtyard.

Zhou Linghuai was sitting in the hall and reading. When he saw that Yu Youyao had returned, he closed the book. "You're back. Is it cold outside?"

Xia Tao helped Yu Youyao take off her cloak.

Yu Youyao quickly went to her cousin's side to warm herself by the fire. "I only went out for a walk. My nose is about to freeze off! Not long after the snow fell, it became heavier and heavier, and there was a layer of white on the ground. Looking at the weather, it will definitely snow for a few more days."

Zhou Linghuai handed her a cup of red date ginger tea. "Drink it while it's hot.

It'll warm your body and make you feel less cold."

Yu Youyao was a little reluctant, but she still took it.

After finishing the cup of red date ginger tea, Yu Youyao's body quickly warmed up a little. "By the way, I almost forgot. I have something for Cousin too. Cousin, wait for me. I'll get it immediately."

Before Zhou Linghuai could react, Yu Youyao had already run out of the house with her dress..

Chapter 497: Endless Troubles

At that time, not long after her cousin had first entered the Yu Residence, she interacted with him for a period of time. Although their relationship was not bad, it was far from close.

There was no need for her cousin to show mercy to her.

But her cousin didn't kill her.

Was this settling the score after autumn? Zhou Linghuai's back straightened a little. Unknowingly, he tightened his grip on the armrest of the wheelchair, and his mind raced. "Probably because he felt that Cousin was very cute, so he couldn't bear to kill her?"

As soon as he said it, he had the feeling that it was going to be bad.

How did he say something that even he wasn't sure about?

Was it because her desire to live was too strong?

However, at that time, there was indeed a moment when he saw the little girl looking delicate and timid, but she tried her best to put on an innocent expression—

Yes, it was very cute!

Yu Youyao glared at her cousin. "Do you think I'm stupid? Do you think I will believe such words?"

He was Yin Huaixi!

After returning from hell, her heart was in purgatory. She could even feel the hostility in her body clearly through a rockery. Why would he let her off for such a reason?

Zhou Linghuai tightened his grip on the armrest of the wheelchair again. His mind was filled with a thousand thoughts as he analyzed the most reasonable explanation. "On the day I first entered the residence, the bowl of blood swallows you gave me with spiritual dewdrop accidentally saved my life."

In fact, he had indeed thought about the topic deeply at that time, but he had never thought of this point.

Yu Youyao said blankly, "What was going on?"

It was because she had overestimated herself and almost caused her cousin to fall out of the wheelchair. She felt a little guilty, so when they were eating, the maidservant brought over the blood swallows. Only then did she think of sending it over to apologize. Thinking that the spiritual dewdrop was good for health, she secretly put a drop in.

Why was it related to her cousin's life?

Zhou Linghuai explained, "When I first entered the Yu Residence, my body was weak and I had traveled a long way. I was already at the end of my rope and was seriously ill. The spiritual dewdrop happened to nourish my internal organs, causing the terminal illness accumulated in my body to disappear. That was why I narrowly escaped this calamity. Otherwise, with my body, I probably wouldn't have lasted for more than three years."

Upon hearing this, Yu Youyao couldn't care less about what had happened back then. "Cousin, why didn't you tell me? If I had known earlier, I would definitely have used more spiritual dewdrop to nourish your body."

At that time, she had asked Uncle Sun about her cousin's illness. Uncle Sun always avoided the main point, so she thought that her cousin's health was not that serious.

How could she have known that without her knowing, her cousin had already walked through the gates of hell?

For a moment, Yu Youyao was shocked and afraid. She held her cousin's hand tightly and did not let go.

"Cousin, are you really getting better by the day after taking the Heaven

Protection Pill every day? Did you collude with Uncle Sun to deliberately lie to me?"

Zhou Linghuai held her hand instead. "I said I would protect you. I will keep this promise for the rest of my life."

Her cousin's eyes were deep and distant. She could see the vast and dazzling stars. Yu Youyao's chaotic heart suddenly calmed down.

She looked into her cousin's eyes. "I trust my cousin."

Zhou Linghuai smiled.

He did not tell her that there were many reasons why he had finally let her off at the Precious Peace Temple

Perhaps it was because she was too cute.

Perhaps it was because she had expressed her kindness to him when he first entered the Yu Residence.

Perhaps it was because of her bowl of blood swallows with spiritual dewdrop that he had indeed escaped illness.

Perhaps it was because she was clearly so afraid that she shrank her neck, but she tried her best to straighten it and pretend to be innocent. When she stretched her neck, it was so thin that he could grab it easily with a stretch of his hand. A life that was too easy to control was no threat to him, so there was no need to kill her.

There was only one reason to kill her.

However, there were many reasons not to kill her. He had always been good at weighing the pros and cons, so he naturally wouldn't harm others without reason.

He had never expected that one day, he would make a lifelong promise to this girl. "I will protect her from the wind and rain with my flesh and blood. I will [protect her clothes from dust and her temples from frost. I will protect her for a lifetime and give her a lifetime of peace."

He personally made a promise to this girl. "I said I would protect you. This promise is for the rest of my life."

Zhou Linghuai's heart skipped a beat.

Perhaps it was because they had not seen each other for a long time, but after seeing each other, ripples appeared in his heart. He always found it difficult to control himself, and it was not as "peaceful" as when they separated.

Yu Youyao suddenly thought of something. "Cousin, don't tell me you think I asked about the Precious Peace Temple just now to settle the score after autumn!"

Her cousin's reaction just now was really good. For a moment, she almost thought that he had exchanged identities in the Precious Peace Temple.

Didn't she want to settle the score after autumn? Why was she suddenly asking about this?

Zhou Linghuai was puzzled, but he did not show it on his face. "It's been so long, but I didn't expect Cousin to suddenly ask."

Yu Youyao pursed her lips and almost laughed out loud. "I just wanted to tell Cousin. At that time, I was thinking that I had seen through Cousin's secret and he hadn't hurt me. Cousin is so good. I have to treat him well in the future."

Zhou Linghuai couldn't help but laugh.

It was also because Yu Youyao's heart was like glass, pure and flawless. She saw through problems thoroughly. She was not afraid of him because of this. This was also the reason why he had always thought highly of Yu Youyao and was willing to get close to her.

If it were anyone else, even if he did not kill them, they would probably be in fear and trepidation and avoid him.

After the two of them exchanged glances, even their gazes revealed a tacit understanding.

Warm times were always very short.

Yu Youyao stayed in the Qingqu Courtyard for the entire day. She chatted with her cousin about the war in Shandong and what had happened in the residence recently, as if she had endless things to say.

Unknowingly, the sun was setting.

Xia Tao came over. "Matriarch said that Young Master is back. There's a banquet at home. Everyone will all go to Matriarch's house for dinner tonight." She was so focused on talking to her cousin that she had forgotten about this.

Yu Youyao slapped her head. "Why didn't you come over earlier to call me? Has the family banquet been prepared?"

Xia Tao pursed her lips and smiled. "Matriarch didn't allow me to call you over. She even said that you were waiting for Young Master and staring at the stars and the moon. Since Young Master is back, she wanted you two to talk more. The family can gather and have fun. There's no need to go through so much trouble. Nanny Liu can manage it herself, so you don't have to do anything." Zhou Linghuai's lips curled up.

Yu Youyao glared at him. "What do you mean by staring at the stars and the moon? I didn't do that! Don't spout nonsense." After saying that, she tried to explain herself as if she was worried about her, "I'm just worried that Cousin's health will be weak. It was a long journey, and his body might not be able to take it."

As she spoke, she subconsciously sat up straight and looked serious and obedient. She was just short of putting a note on her face saying, "I'm revealing what I intended to hide."

Chapter 498: Meeting on a Narrow Path

Zhou Linghuai clenched his fists and smiled.

Xia Tao pursed her lips and smiled. "After Young Master went to Youzhou, Young Miss even improved in poetry. On the day of the Mid-Autumn Festival, there was a poem about the moon being round from a thousand miles away. 'The moonlight shone brightly on my heart. I wanted to hold the moon and give it to you from afar. Meeting you was only in my dream.' It received praise from Matriarch and Eldest Master."

Yu Youyao was embarrassed and angry. She stomped her feet. "You talkative girl, you don't want your monthly allowance anymore!"

Xia Tao quickly covered her mouth and stopped talking.

Zhou Linghuai chuckled. "The poem isn't much, but the artistic conception is not bad. It seems that Cousin has some talent in poetry..."

She wasn't just saying that she stared at the stars and moon casually.

"No, no, no." Before she could finish speaking, Yu Youyao was shocked. She waved her hand repeatedly and interrupted him, afraid that he would suddenly say that it was good for her to learn poetry from him. "I'm just saying it casually. I don't have any talent. It's just that it's not elegant..."

Zhou Linghuai's smile deepened. "Cousin, you're indeed amazing. It takes seven steps for Cao Zhi to compose a poem. You can immediately come up with poetry using your mouth."

Yu Youyao's eyes widened. "Cousin, let me make it clear in advance. I'm not good at poetry. I usually read it. It's not good for me to recite poems myself."

If he continued teasing her, she would run away uncontrollably. Zhou

Linghuai knew when to stop. "I'm just praising Cousin for being smart."

Yu Youyao heaved a sigh of relief and quickly changed the topic. "By the way, I remember that Cousin said that he had brought some wine back." She turned around and instructed Xia Tao, "Go to Chang An and get a few bottles. Have some grapes at night to liven things up."

Shanxi was rich in all kinds of fine wine. This time, her cousin brought a lot back.

It was most famous for wine, but the production of wine was not high. Other than paying tribute to the Imperial Court every year, there was not much left, and it was rarely tasted.

Xia Tao received her orders and left.

Not long after midnight, Yu Zongshen left the government office and came to An Shou Hall.

When he found out that Zhou Linghuai had received a job regarding Law and Order, Yu Zongshen's hand that was playing with walnuts paused slightly.

"Emperor Gaozu restored the old books and encouraged people to collect and donate books. He established the Teng library and invited all the nobles in the world to enter the Teng library to read all the ancient books of the old dynasty. The Teng literature library is also a place for scholars in the world to visit as part of their pilgrimage. It has always been known as a small cabinet. It's as difficult to enter the Teng library as it is to enter Hanlin."

The cabinet was a place of power, while the Teng library was a place of fame and fortune.

One was related to power, and the other was related to reputation.

Zhou Linghuai could enter the Teng Wen Pavilion not only because of the emperor's grace, but also because of his talent. Most importantly, he had connections.

This was interesting!

Yu Zongshen smiled and said elegantly, "At the court meeting today, there's news from the north. When the Great General of the Cavalry was patrolling the border with 10,000 troops, a spy reported that ever since autumn, Harmon has led his troops to wander around the narrow Yu Pass many times. His actions are very suspicious. In the past few months since autumn, there has been no movement from the Di army. It's very abnormal. Since you returned to Youzhou this time, I think you want to know the situation in Youzhou better. Do you have any thoughts on this?"

Anything that happened in the north was definitely related to Yin Huaixi. It was definitely not wrong to ask Zhou Linghuai.

Indeed!

Zhou Linghuai did not let him down. "Four years ago, the Di people invaded the north wantonly. At that time, the north was in danger. The heir, Yin Huaixi, led the 3,000 elite cavalry of the residence to help, but on the way, he met the 8,000 elite cavalry led by Harmon."

Yu Zongshen held his breath.

Back then, the report submitted by the Marquis of Weining and the Marquis of Changxing did not mention this battle. It seemed that this battle must have played a key role in the later battlefield in the north, so it was hidden by the Marquis of Weining's faction.

3,000 against 8,000. That was almost three times the difference in military strength. Yin Huaixi had survived.

It was no longer obvious how this battle would end.

An Shou Hall was so quiet that one could hear a pin drop.

Matriarch Yu stopped twirling her prayer beads. Madam Yao had just picked up the tea and placed it on the table again. Yu Shanyan and the others couldn't help but gasp. Yu Youyao also rested her chin on her hand and looked at her cousin eagerly.

Even she had never heard her cousin mention this battle.

Under Yu Youyao's resentful and longing gaze, Zhou Linghuai continued,

"When we meet on a narrow path, the brave will win. The Di tribe, led by Harmon, is feeling smug about their prey. Yin Huaixi did not stop at all. He directly led 3,000 elite guards and charged forward, cutting off the Di people's warhorses."

"Harmon was caught off guard. For a moment, he was in a mess. He couldn't even take care of himself, so how could he have the chance to shoot? Yin Huaixi led his troops and charged forward, annihilating more than 6,000 enemies and killing

several Di generals. Harmon fled in defeat. Yin Huaixi led his army until they were 500 kilometers away from the narrow Yu Pass.

Harmon only had a few hundred remaining soldiers.”

There was a series of sighs in An Shou Hall.

Yu Zongshen praised, “A newborn calf is really unafraid of a tiger. Cavalrymen are most afraid of lightning battles. Yin Huaixi grasped the lightning battle and swiftly intercepted, disrupting the formation of the Di army first. The morale of the army was as strong as a thousand-mile dike, and it collapsed in an instant. It’s obvious that Yin Huaixi is a god general of soldiers.”

Compared to this, Li Qiguang was not enough.

It was no wonder that Li Qiguang did not even have the chance to fight Yin Huaixi head-on.

Zhou Linghuai smiled faintly. “There are more than ten leaders of the

Northern Barbarians, big and small. The leaders often fight with each other. In this battle, they killed a few very famous generals of the Northern Barbarians, causing the morale of the Di army to be unstable at that time. Harmon’s reputation in the Northern Barbarians was damaged, creating an opportunity for the battlefield in the north.”

This was why Harmon was forced to retreat step by step by the You army.

However, at that time, the situation of the battle was urgent, and the report had yet to reach the capital. Perhaps it had already reached the capital, but it had been deliberately stopped by some people. The reinforcements of the

Marquis of Ning had already arrived.

Yu Shanxin looked shocked. “As the leader of a division, he was beaten badly by a twelve-year-old youth. He was like a stray dog and fled. It’s simply a great humiliation.”

It seemed that the various deeds related to Yin Huaixi were not exaggerated.

Yin Huaixi was simply too strong.

Yu Youyao was also overwhelmed with emotions, and her tone subconsciously carried pride. “Yin Huaixi and King You fought the Di troops several times on the battlefield in the north, causing Harmon to retreat step by step and recover the lost land and cities in the north. Harmon has never been able to avenge his previous humiliation. He even broke down. I reckon that compared to King You, Harmon is more afraid of this twelve-year-old Prince Yin.”

Yu Zongshen agreed deeply. “Yin Huaixi narrowly survived, but he still had to return to the court and lead troops to Shandong to quell the rebellion. Harmon was afraid that Yin Huaixi was close by, so he personally went to the narrow Yuguan to gather information. He was anxious to know if Yin Huaixi would take over the throne of the north and guard Youzhou, so he didn’t dare to act rashly.”

From the looks of it, the north was still stable for the time being..

Chapter 499: Immediate

Zhou Linghuai nodded. "That should be the case!"

Yu Zongshen took a deep look at Zhou Linghuai. "Recently, Li Qiguang's case has also been overwrought. After the Great General of the Cavalry reported to the Imperial Court, in order to stabilize the Northern Region, the emperor will quickly get the cabinet to discuss the follow-up problems of King of You's case. It's imperative to restore his title, ancestral temple, achievements, and so on. Only then can Yin Huaixi inherit the title of King and head to You

Prefecture to prevent Ha Meng from causing trouble."

After the battle in Shandong, everyone in the world knew that the emperor wanted Yin Huaixi to guard You Prefecture. Now that everything was set in stone, there was nothing the cabinet can do.

Zhou Linghuai chuckled. "The situation in the Northern Territory is very unstable after the King of You's case. The war is secondary. Stabilizing the Northern Territory is the most important thing."

The meaning was clear. No matter how difficult Li Qiguang's case was, the King of You's case has to be settled first.

The north was not stable, and the people's hearts were not calm either.

Zhou Linghuai was not in the imperial court, but he could firmly control the situation.

The banquet at night was very sumptuous.

The entire family gathered around a large round table. Concubine Qiu and the other concubines, who had birthed many children for the Yu family, also had another small table set up for them.

Yu Zongzheng was not around. Zhou Linghuai sat in the seat that originally belonged to him, on Matriarch Yu's left.

Madam Yang was also locked up in the Tranquil Heart Residence. The seat beside Yu Zongzheng was given to Yu Youyao.

This way, Yu Youyao naturally sat beside her cousin.

As people get older, they liked to be lively. Matriarch Yu said happily, "Linghuai brought back some wine from the north. Coincidentally, I have a set of luminous glasses in my storeroom. They complement each other."

Yu Youyao picked up the small cup in front of her. It was dark green and as thin as an eggshell. It was thin and smooth to the touch. She raised it to take a look. The cup was smooth and transparent. "It looks very much like serpentine jade!"

Zhou Linghuai turned to look at her. "The luminous cup looks like Bi jade, so it's often mistaken for serpentine jade. Actually, it's made of a kind of jade called Jiuquan Jade. It's a tribute from the Western Region. The Great Zhou

Dynasty doesn't have it."

Yu Youyao nodded. "Then will the luminous cup really glow at night?"

Zhou Linghuai shook his head. "The luminous cup doesn't glow either. It's filled with wine. Under the moonlight, it reflects a bright ray of light that reflects the wine. That's how it got its name. Moreover, the luminous cup has a strange texture. If you use this cup to hold wine, the fragrance of the wine will be extremely delicious."

At this moment, a maidservant came over to pour wine.

As soon as the bright red wine entered the luminous glass, it was filled with the color of wine. Candlelight seemed to shine from it, and the wine colour was intoxicating.

Yu Youyao sniffed and smelled the fragrance of the wine.

“It smells so good!” Her eyes lit up, and she eagerly picked up the wine and brought it to her lips. She did not dare to drink it directly, but stuck out her little tongue and licked it gently like a cat.

Yu Youyao’s eyes widened. “It’s sweet and strong. It’s better than plum wine.”

Wine is beautiful because it tastes mellow and sweet. When it enters the mouth, it is sweet and fragrant, and when it enters the throat, it is soft. When it is savored, it feels sweet and cool, and the aftertaste is endless.

Even when women drink it, they feel that it is sweet and delicious.

Zhou Linghuai was amused by her gluttonous appearance. “This is the best wine. It’s also very rare in Shanxi.”

Tribute wines, with leaven added to the wine, taste more like fruit wine than natural fermented grape juice, which is locally known as “real wine.”

This kind of wine relied on skills. The product was rarer and more expensive. Not only was it not available on the market, but even the wine offered as tribute was inferior.

Yu Youyao held the small cup and narrowed her eyes like a cat stealing fish. From time to time, she would stick out her little tongue and gently lick the wine before smacking her lips, intoxicating her.

The wine was sweet and delicious, and everyone loved it.

Even Matriarch Yu couldn’t help but drink a few more glasses. After the banquet ended, she was a little tipsy.

The next day, the palace sent someone over. They delivered the relevant documents for Teng library’s Documentary Scriptures that Zhou Linghuai is participating in.

Zhou Linghuai’s legs were disabled.

Matriarch Yu brought her entire family to thank them, and this matter was settled.

Yu Youyao was very happy. She picked out some cloth, silk, and other things that she could not use from her private stash and rewarded the servants in the residence.

Matriarch Yu looked for Zhou Linghuai. “To be able to enter the Teng library is also because of the emperor’s kindness. Do you want to enter the palace to thank the emperor?”

When Yu Youyao heard this, she became nervous. It was only with the emperor’s approval that ‘Yin Huaixi’ dared to show her his mask.

In addition, “Yin Huaixi”’s face was severely damaged. If the truth was revealed, it would be an eyesore and would be disrespectful to the royal family.

No one in the court had ever seen “Yin Huaixi” in person, but the emperor had definitely seen him before.

Although his cousin had used the identity of “Zhou Linghuai”, he still used his own face. Although he had slightly modified it, he definitely could not hide it from the emperor.

To thank the emperor, wouldn’t this expose his double identity?

Zhou Linghuai looked at her comfortingly and said, “His Majesty knows that my legs are disabled and that there are many rules and etiquette in the palace. He’s afraid of offending the dignity of the royal family, so he specially allowed me not to enter the palace to thank him. I’ll write a poem another day to express my gratitude.”

Matriarch Yu was originally worried about this, but she was relieved now.

Li Qiguang’s case was under intense trial, and many people were implicated in it.

The situation in the north was unstable. Ha Meng was secretly spying on the Narrow Yu Pass. The emperor was worried and sent Chang Ningbo to the north to stabilize the situation. He summoned the Cabinet Grand Secretary, Xia Yansheng, to the palace for a meeting.

He asked Xia Yansheng to speed up the follow-up of the case of King of You.

Chang Ningbo seemed to have conveyed a certain message when he went to You Prefecture. The cabinet did not dare to be negligent. After another three days of discussion, they had already drafted the relevant draft.

Xia Yansheng didn’t report the matter to the emperor immediately. “Send it to the Yin Residence first and show it to Yin Huaixi before making a decision.”

There was an old minister in the cabinet who was a little displeased. “The emperor is waiting for the cabinet to discuss a decision. Why aren’t you in a hurry at all? Why are you sending the draft to the Yin residence? Yin Huaixi shouldn’t have been involved in this matter.”

Xia Yansheng didn’t even open his eyes as he mumbled, “If Yin Huaixi isn’t satisfied, then this case isn’t over.”

The cabinet needed to satisfy Yin Huaixi first.

Three days later, the Yin Residence sent the revised draft to the Xia Residence.

Xia Yansheng didn’t say anything for a long time.

The few old officials in the Cabinet couldn’t sit still anymore...

“Bang!” Someone couldn’t hold it in any longer and slammed the table. ‘Yin Huaixi is too arrogant. He wants to hold a funeral for His Highness King of You again. Not only does he not want to inter King of You into the imperial mausoleum, but he also wants to bring his spirit back to You Prefecture for funeral rites...

“The Emperor mentioned before that he wanted King of You to be interred in the imperial mausoleum...”

“What should we do about returning the coffin to You Prefecture? We can’t just carelessly bury it, right?”

“Should we discuss it with General Yin again?”

In the blink of an eye, the cabinet started arguing again..

Chapter 500: At the side of the King

The treasury had been empty for a long time.

A new funeral required a lot of silver. The more they gave to King of You, the less they would use. They even had to pay for it out of their own pocket. Other matters could still be discussed.

When it came to money, no one was willing to harm their own interests.

Redoing the funeral was also a laborious effort. Logically speaking, it should be done according to the rules of the imperial prince.

But!

First of all, King of You was a good general who had contributed greatly. There had always been a precedent of the Great Zhou Dynasty conferring titles to heroes.

His Highness King of You was already a imperial prince. If he were to be conferred the title of nobility, it would be equivalent to the title of regent. All funerals had to be arranged according to the title of nobility after the conferment.

Secondly, King of You had been wronged. On the basis of the Regent Prince’s rituals, the Imperial Court need to provide an extra burial.

This way, King of You’s funeral was probably going to be on par with a national funeral.

Who would be willing to do this? It was exhausting and not beneficial at all.

Furthermore, Yin Huaixi was an exceptional talent.

The old ministers of the Cabinet had been in high positions for a long time, so they had begun to take advantage of their seniority. They more or less looked down on Yin Huaixi, who was still young and sickly.

However, no one was stupid enough to say these thoughts out loud.

There was no end to this ruckus.

Even though Xia Yansheng was old, mentally weak, and physically weak) he had already worn out his temper. He opened his eyes and said, “All of you argue no matter what the outcome is. Other than arguing, can’t you use your brains?”

The cabinet fell silent.

Xia Yansheng looked at Yu Zongshen, who was sitting beside him. “What do you think?”

Yu Zongshen’s hand that was playing with walnuts paused slightly. “You also have to take a look at the timing. You know very well what the situation in the Northern Territory is like. It is very

unstable now, and it is imperative to resolve that. The follow-up to King of You's case cannot be delayed. If the situation in the Northern Territory is disrupted, no one can bear the consequences."

The courtiers remained silent.

It wasn't that they didn't understand this logic. It was just that it involved their own interests, so it was inevitable that they had a lot to say.

Yu Zongshen continued, "The Emperor has long proposed to move King of You's tomb into the imperial mausoleum. Do you really think that this tomb just has to be interred there? Don't you need to prepare a funeral ceremony? His Highness King You died an unsightly death. If the funeral rites are not performed magnificently, it will be dishonorable for the royal family. It will damage the Emperors reputation and dignity."

The old ministers had nothing to say. Usually, no matter how much they fought in the cabinet, no one dared to jump out and object when it involved the emperor's interests.

Yu Zongshen lowered his eyes. "Yin Huaixi didn't want King of You to enter the Imperial Mausoleum, so he suggested a new funeral. The funeral would be glorious. It would give the royal family dignity and the emperor's reputation. It doesn't matter if he enters the Imperial Mausoleum or not."

Entering the Imperial Mausoleum was a great honor for the descendants of the royal family.

However, Yin Huaixi only wanted King of You to be buried in You Prefecture.

Xia Yansheng slammed the table. "We'll do as Yin Huaixi says."

"Reburials are also in line with the etiquette system. Let the Ministry of Rites prepare sacrificial essays to record the merits of King of You. It's a good thing to worship the world) inform the people, and decree the descendants to encourage the ministers to assist the country. That's how it should be."

"During the mourning period, we will suspend the court for three days to show that King of You was virtuous and contributed to the dynasty. Virtue is worthy of his position. The king, the court officials, and the people will mourn with the entire country."

"King You and the queen consort have a deep relationship. It's a good story that the two of them have gone through thick and thin together. It's only natural that the queen consort is buried in You Prefecture, and King of You returns to be buried with her. I think the emperor can understand and won't be adamant."

"After the mourning period, I'll be the envoy of the imperial tomb, and lead officials in the capital to prepare for the funeral. Then, the etiquette envoy, the weaponry envoy, the messenger of the bridge, and so on will return to You Prefecture with the tomb of the King of You. They will be in charge of the mausoleum, writing the name of the mausoleum, mourning books, and other burial matters. This matter must be completed."

The room was so quiet that one could hear a pin drop—

Xia Yansheng continued, "Double the honor he deserves. There's no need to get into a fight with Yin Huaixi over a dead man. You'll be making a fool of yourself in front of the emperor."

Yu Zongshen also expressed his stance. "It's been half a year since King of You's case in June. It's already November. If we don't settle this matter as soon as possible, are we going to keep it for the new year?"

Li Qiguang's case was still under trial. It was still unknown how many people would be involved later.

Song Xiuwen's case would have to go through a lot of trouble.

At that time, the imperial court would be in chaos again.

The Cabinet sped up the time. After a new discussion, the next day, the court meeting was presented to the Emperor.

After the emperor took a look, he showed it to Yin Huaixi.

Yin Huaixi had no objections, and he expressed his gratitude in front of the court.

The matter was settled just like that.

Three days later, the emperor personally issued an edict, announcing to the world, "I, the emperor, have been in the dynasty for more than thirty years. I have inherited the merits of my ancestors and the teachings of Gaozong. I respect the rules of the dynasty and rule the Great Zhou."

"Cultivate armor, subjugate foreign races, contribute to the country;"

"Recruiting talented people to manage the resurgence of Great Zhou, contributing to the people."

"Establish the country and strictly abide by the strict authority of the sect's relatives and contribute to the sect's ancestors."

"Punish by suspended sentencing, strictly govern the officials, and pardon the world, so that the grievances can be cleared. The grievances have to be investigated and governed by meritorious officials;"

"Lower taxes, encouragement for farming, reorganization of conscription, relief for disasters and desolation, compassion for the people, meritorious service for a thousand years;

"I don't care about lust. I've been in power for more than 30 years. I've left the harem empty, reduced the silver of the Central Palace, and ruled the world. My merit is in virtue."

It was a long decree that stated that after the emperor ascended the throne, he was benevolent and virtuous. Only then did it mention the case of King of You.

"However, the use of the country's resources is vast but insufficient. There were mistakes in my investigation."

“The ministers in the court formed cliques and protected each other layer by layer. They determined that the King of Dingbei was persecuted by traitors and was wronged. There were lapses in my governance, investigation, and virtues.”

“King of Dingbei, Yin Lixing, was well-versed in virtues, literary arts, martial arts...”

The last chapter was long and detailed, describing the merits of King Dingbei, Yin Lixing, as well as the many large-scale victories he had won in his life. Every word was filled with beauty and righteousness.

“... thereupon, restore Yin Lixing’s ancestral temple and confer Yin Lixing the title of King of Zhouli. He could not share the value of the heavens with me in life. But he can share the country with me in death and stand shoulder to shoulder with me.”

“I hereby announce this to the world to comfort the heroic spirit of King of Zhouli, to exemplify his virtues, to encourage the ministers, to be loyal to the king and rule the country, and to follow the suffering of the people!”

After the decree, which was six feet long (about two meters), was read, it arrived at the Chang’an Gate.

The relevant documents were also distributed through the Imperial Court to the various prefectures and county offices in the country. They ordered the officials of the prefectures and prefectures to announce them to the people of the world.

The emperor immediately issued a decree. “The former Marquis of Wei Ning, the current Marquis of Ningyuan, is in the same boat as the Marquis of Changxing. They deceived everyone above and beneath them, stole the military achievements of King of Zhouli and the heir, Yin Huaixi, and hid the military intelligence. The criminals deceived the emperor.”

Ning Yuanbo knelt on the ground, his body trembling like a leaf, but he did not even dare to breathe loudly..