

All Hail 561

Chapter 561: Heartbroken!

But now, Song Mingzhao looked at the faint smile on Zhou Linghuai's lips, as if he was showing off.

It was really dazzling!

Zhou Linghuai nodded. "Cousin is meticulous. Ever since she entered the Yu Residence, she has been taking good care of me. It's all thanks to her meticulously nourishing my body that my health is getting better day by day." These words sounded a little harsh.

Just as he finished glaring at him, Song Mingzhao felt a little hurt and couldn't stand it anymore. "We're already at the door. Young Master Zhou, you're not feeling well, so there's no need to send me off. I'll take my leave first and visit another day."

Zhou Linghuai smiled. "In that case, Heir Song, do as you please."

Zhou Linghuai only returned to An Shou Hall after watching Song Mingzhao leave. He instructed Old Madam Yu and went to the Jade Courtyard without returning to The Green House.

Although the school was located in the Second Mansion, Song Mingzhao entered and left the Second Mansion every day. He came over often to greet his grandmother.

At the thought that she might see Song Mingzhao often in the next month, Yu Youyao felt terrible.

She kept a respectful distance from Song Mingzhao not out of disgust or prejudice. A large part of it was because that nightmare was too strange and even involved reality.

Sometimes, she even had the illusion that reality would be like a nightmare.

Perhaps it was because the dream was too real) and everything that the older

Yao Yao had experienced in the nightmare was too painful. Every time she saw Song Mingzhao, she couldn't help but think of the scene in the nightmare. She kept feeling suffocated and uncomfortable.

"Sigh—" Yu Youyao rested her chin on her hand and sighed softly.

"Why are you sighing at such a young age?" Seeing her daze, Zhou Linghuai couldn't help but chuckle. He knew very well why the little girl was sighing.

Yu Youyao looked up and pouted. "Cousin, if I use the excuse of planting sweet potatoes in the manor to suggest to Grandmother that I want to stay in the manor for a while, will Grandmother agree?"

Actually, she was quite envious of Yu Jianjia.

In the past two years, Yu Jianjia would only return to the residence for a while during the holidays. Most of the time, she was recuperating in the manor and did not have any elders keeping an eye on her. Her days were peaceful and comfortable.

The last time she had seen Yu Jianjia was during the Qingming Festival.

Yu Jianjia was clearly a few months behind her in terms of growth. Her figure had grown, but she was on par with her.

She was still slender and weak. When she spoke, she spoke gently, but she no longer looked sick. She looked pure and beautiful. Anyone who saw her would pity her.

It was said that if she used her brain too much, she wouldn't grow taller. She wasn't as tall as Yu Jianjia, and she was about to surpass her in terms of height!

Just thinking about it made her feel vexed!

Zhou Linghuai couldn't help but laugh. "How can this residence lack you?"

Although Concubine Jiang was in charge of the family now, Yu Youyao's status as the head of the family could not be shaken. Yu Youyao did not care about the trivial matters at home, but the power of the household manager was in her hands.

Yu Youyao's face fell and she sighed. "I also know that it's unlikely. I was just saying."

Actually, Yu Youyao couldn't figure it out.

The Yu Residence did not have many people to begin with. Only Yu Zongzheng and Second Uncle often said that since their parents were not separated, the Yu Residence should not be divided.

Why had Grandmother immediately divided the family after Yu Zongzheng and Second Uncle got married?

Was it really because Yu Zongzheng and Second Uncle were both officials in the court?

This reason was not enough. It was a little inconsistent with her grandmother's style.

As long as one looked at the messy matters of the first branch in the past two to three years and the various drawbacks of the family because there were fewer people, they could tell that there were many problems.

This was a good family, but it was managed by a half-grown child. Now, the task of appearing outside actually fell on a concubine.

Although according to the rules, this was not impossible as etiquette was ultimately not the law.

Her grandmother had always been smart, so it was impossible for her not to have thought of many things.

Yu Youyao felt that the separation of the family was not that simple. Previously, she had also asked her grandmother, and her grandmother had only said calmly, "Children don't have to listen to their mothers when they grow up."

It was as if Yu Zongzheng and Second Uncle had asked to split up.

However, Yu Youyao still felt that it was inappropriate. The separation of the family depended on her grandmother. As long as her grandmother did not agree to the separation, Yu Zongzheng and Second Uncle would not say anything out of filial piety!

Look at the Zhenguo Marquis Residence The four families lived together.

Was it because the families did not want to split up?

How could that be? Who wouldn't want to live their lives behind closed doors on their own?

It was the Marquis of Zhenguo, Old Madam Song, who had suppressed the separation of the family.

As long as he said that he would only split the family up after he died, no one would dare to say anything. Otherwise, it would be disrespectful.

At the thought of this, Yu Youyao sighed softly. "If only the Yu Residence hadn't split up. Second Aunt is in charge of the family. Even if the sky falls, it won't be my turn. There are elders at home. Even if I want to go to the manor to stay for a few days, as long as I have someone by my side, Grandmother will agree."

Other young misses would be brought out for a walk by the elders in the family from time to time. Occasionally, when they patrolled the manor, they would also bring them along. As they taught them how to do things, they would be brought out to relax. It was usually during the holidays. With the family members making appropriate arrangements, they could even be brought out to have fun.

For Yu Jianjia to be able to go to the manor, it was one thing for her health to be poor. Most importantly, she had a grandmother at home to make sure everything was run well.

However, when it came to her turn, she could forget about it.

In the past two years, she could occasionally go out because she was the household manager. However, as there were no elders following her, it was not appropriate for her to stay outside for long.

After finishing her business, she returned to the residence.

Zhou Linghuai's gaze darkened. "I suddenly thought of the small residence in the manor. Is it because Song Mingzhao is coming to the residence to learn from Mr. Hu Shan?"

Yu Youyao's heart skipped a beat. She hesitated for a moment and nodded.

"Yes."

Although she had never mentioned the nightmare to her cousin, she had kept a respectful distance from Song Mingzhao and did not deliberately hide it from him. Her cousin could guess that something was wrong, but he had never asked her.

Zhou Linghuai frowned.

Yu Youyao felt guilty and lowered her head, not daring to look at him.

Her evasive attitude was obvious that she did not want to mention Song Mingzhao anymore. Zhou Linghuai's gaze darkened. "Did Song Mingzhao go overboard with his words and actions towards you previously?"

He recalled that when he went to Shandong to quell the rebellion previously, Yin San had heard that Song Mingzhao and Yu Youyao had once parted on bad terms for some reason.

Could it be related to this?

However, with Song Mingzhao's personality, he did not seem like a rude person.

Every time he came to the Yu Residence and saw Yu Youyao, be it openly or using tea to hide his expression, his eyes revealed a deep and restrained gaze.

He was most familiar with such gazes.

Chapter 562: Slowly

If he looked at her lovingly, there was no need to suspect anything.

It was also because of this that Zhou Linghuai felt that Song Mingzhao was like a fishbone was stuck in his throat.

Yu Youyao thought for a moment and shook her head. "That's not the case. I just don't know why, but every time I see Song Mingzhao, I feel a little uncomfortable and want to stay away from him."

Previously, Song Mingzhao had suddenly mentioned her courtesy name. Although it was a little abrupt, it was not appropriate to say this.

It was also because of this that she suspected that Song Mingzhao knew her courtesy name because he had a dream similar to hers. However, after interacting with him for the past two years, Song Mingzhao did not seem to treat her differently.

Moreover, Song Mingzhao did not seem to be sure that "Zhiyao" was her courtesy name.

For a moment, she was not sure if Song Mingzhao had any dreams related to her.

However, she couldn't help but feel more wary.

It wasn't that she didn't want to tell her cousin about the nightmare, but this matter was too ridiculous and bizarre. It was even a little related to reality.

She had a strange intuition!

She felt that she couldn't tell anyone.

"As far as I know, you rarely interact with Song Mingzhao. Why do you feel this way?" Zhou Linghuai did not think that Yu Youyao was patronizing him or lying to him.

On careful thought, other than keeping a respectful distance from Song Mingzhao, Yu Youyao did not seem to have any special emotions.

These words should be true, but there were still some things he hadn't said.

Yu Youyao lowered her head and gently pulled out the blood beeswax prayer beads in her hand. She said casually, "Who knows? He probably did something to let me down in his previous life."

She was just saying it casually, but Zhou Linghuai looked at her deeply. "If you just don't want to have many unnecessary interactions with Song Mingzhao, you don't have to worry. He won't be able to enter the Yu Residence." Yu Youyao even had access to spiritual dewdrop. He was not surprised if anything strange happened.

Regardless of whether she had just said it casually or had other intentions regarding her bringing up her previous life, it was obvious that she did not plan to mention it again.

This "little cousin" seemed to be hiding many secrets?

However, there was no hurry. There were many things that still had to be done slowly.

Zhou Linghuai did not plan to pursue the matter further.

His words were so certain that Yu Youyao couldn't help but be stunned. "He won't be able to enter the Yu Residence? Grandmother has already agreed. Mr. Hu Shan and Mr. Xian Yun are old friends. Song Mingzhao is Mr. Xian Yun's disciple. Mr. Hu Shan has no reason to refuse." Zhou Linghuai chuckled. "You'll know in a few days."

Yu Youyao tied her hair into Feixian buns today.

However, the hairband was tied behind her head. On both sides of the hairband and behind it, there were tassels and beads. The beads trembled at her temples. Zhou Linghuai immediately felt an itch on his fingertips. He reached out and gently brushed the green and warm tourmaline tassels hanging by her temples. The beads swayed slowly, making her look delicate and generous.

Yu Youyao did not think that there was anything wrong. She pouted slightly. "If Song Mingzhao really won't be able to enter the residence, I'll give Cousin something as a reward."

Now it was Zhou Linghuai's turn to be curious. "What is it?"

Yu Youyao smiled and blinked at her cousin. "You'll know in a few days!" The phoenix-shaped eyes all had a common characteristic, which was that they were slender and not easy to see through.

The same eye shape would also be very different from different people. Yu Youyao's sleeping phoenix eyes were especially beautiful. They were different from slightly cold phoenix eyes or charming eyes.

Her eyes were long and slender, but not narrow. The corners of her eyes were slightly raised, and her black eyes were slightly hidden. Her eyes were clear and filled with spiritual energy. As her gaze wandered, she looked clear, innocent, weak, and delicate.

When she blinked, there was a hint of playfulness.

Zhou Linghuai felt as if he had been struck by something. Even his heart went numb. "Okay, I'll wait."

In a few days, Yu Youyao knew why her cousin had said that Song Mingzhao couldn't come to the Yu Residence.

This spring, there was a drought. Other than the moderate rain earlier, which barely watered the crops fields that became bigger and bigger, there were no signs of rain.

The Yu Residence and the rice shops under Yu Youyao's own name were both controlling the price of rice. The price of rice was still rising day by day.

Yu Youyao sighed softly, closed the Summer Collection booklet that the Jinxiu Manor had sent over this morning, and went to An Shou Hall.

Old Madam Yu was drinking tea. Seeing her serious expression, she asked, "What happened?"

Yu Youyao shook her head. "There's a drought this spring, and it hasn't rained all this time. The weather is also very hot. The Jinxiu Manor sent over a booklet of summer clothes early in the morning. I took a closer look. This year, light gauze is popular. The material is thin and soft, and it's cool and breathable. Make five sets of clothes for Grandmother. The other people in the residence

will each only get two sets. Concubine Jiang and Concubine Qiu will each have a set. The saved money will be used to build a porridge shed in the rice shop.”

This would make it easier for the commoners to live. They could more or less save some rations after eating the porridge shed. When there was no harvest, they could also eat a few more mouthfuls.

She couldn’t save the lives of everyone in the world.

She would save as many as he could.

Old Madam Yu also sighed. “In the past few years, the court hasn’t been stable, and even to this day, it hasn’t been peaceful. The weather has also worsened year by year. When the first few years were still good, the families of the commoners more or less accumulated some food. Only then could they live peacefully for two years. Now, the food they saved is almost exhausted. Many people will probably starve to death this autumn and winter.”

Yu Youyao also felt sad.

Old Madam Yu shook her head and said, “High-quality lightweight veils are very expensive. Each one costs 35 taels of silver, and each piece of cloth can only be used to make a set of clothes. In my opinion, let’s each make a set of lightweight veils and a set of silk veils. The silk veils are thin and soft, bright and beautiful. Each one only costs 20 taels of silver. The lightweight veils are a little cheaper.”

Since she was going to do a good deed, she couldn’t do it half-heartedly. She had to do it very well. Otherwise, she would be criticized.

Yu Youyao had the same intention. However, the new clothes in the residence were made according to the rules every quarter. They had already reduced two sets of clothes. If the material of the clothes was too low, it was inevitable that the family members would be dissatisfied.

Old Madam Yu continued, “Since we have to reduce our expenditure to set up a porridge stall, everyone in our residence has to have fewer clothes. There are still some clothes that I haven’t worn in the past. This year, I’ll make two sets of clothes like you. I’m old, and I’m not used to wearing light gauze. It’s not as comfortable as silk gauze, so I won’t make light gauze clothes. In addition, all the expenses in the residence will be reduced by 30% from the previous years.

I’ll set up the porridge stall with the savings.”

Yu Youyao nodded. “We’ll do as Grandmother says.”

The light veil was as thin as a cicada’s wings, as light as nothing. It was thin, impenetrable, cold, smooth, and soft. It was very exquisite. In her opinion, the silk veil was not inferior.

The silk material was more comfortable and suitable for old people.

The reason why the silk veil was not as expensive as the light veil was because of the craftsmanship of the silk. The light veil was more cumbersome to make. Yu Youyao, who was used to seeing good things, did not think that the light veil was inferior to the silk veil..

Chapter 563: Cheating In The Examination

Old Madam Yu also thought that the others in the residence might be dissatisfied with the reduction of the expenses, so she said, "Pick a few decent jewelry pieces from my collection and send them to the courtyards in the residence as compensation."

Yu Youyao nodded. "That's appropriate."

The things she would take from her grandmother's hands were definitely not bad. After wearing them a few times, they would be kept.

It was jewelry of not bad quality. It could be passed down for generations.

After that, Yu Youyao asked if the salary of the farmers and workers in the manor could be changed to be distributed every ten days. Seeing that the price of rice was rising day by day, she thought about distributing the money to the workers early. With money, they could hoard more rations.

However, in this way, the stewards of the manor would have to work much harder.

Yu Youyao suggested that the stewards in the manor be given ten kilograms of rice every month as a reward.

Since the year wasn't good, there was no better reward than rice and food.

Old Madam Yu thought for a moment and felt that this matter was feasible. The two of them discussed many details together.

At this moment, Nanny Liu entered the house with a solemn expression. "Matriarch, bad news. Young Master Shan Fang of the clan was captured by a team of soldiers just now."

Yu Youyao held her breath. Yu Shanzheng was a tribute student who had passed the examination.

She recalled that her cousin had previously vowed that Song Mingzhao wouldn't be able to come to the Yu Residence. At that time, she was still clueless, but now, an idea suddenly popped into her mind.

Before Old Madam Yu could ask, Yu Youyao had already opened her mouth and asked anxiously, "Hurry up and go out and ask what's going on. Is Brother Fang the only one who's been captured, or have all the candidates in this examination been captured? Then, send someone to the Zhenguo Marquis Residence to ask about Heir Song."

Nanny Liu did not realize what she meant. Seeing Eldest Miss's anxious expression, she immediately ran out.

However, as soon as Yu Youyao opened her mouth, Old Madam Yu realized something. Her mind buzzed, and she almost couldn't sit still anymore. "Yao Yao, you mean..."

Her mouth trembled, and she couldn't even speak properly.

Yu Youyao nodded with a solemn expression. "Grandmother, do you still remember what Brother Shande and another brother in the clan said behind the rockery three years ago?"

How could she not remember? It was also because of that matter that the rankings of the imperial examination had been delayed for a long time.

She hadn't eaten or slept well for a long time, afraid that a disaster would happen. It wasn't until the second examination in front of the hall that her tense heart slowly calmed down.

Old Madam Yu's expression turned very ugly. "An appointment with a disciple. Cheating in the examination."

Yu Youyao nodded with a solemn expression. "There's nothing in the world that can be kept secret. The matter of making an appointment with the disciples first spread from the Golden Jade Pavilion under the name of Ning Yuanbo's residence. In the past, the Weining Marquis Residence was powerful and Imperial Consort Lu was doted on. They were fearless. Even if they were exposed, as long as there wasn't enough evidence, it wasn't enough for the Weining Marquis Residence to bear the crime."

The news came from the Golden Jade Pavilion, but it was a restaurant. There were all kinds of people in it to begin with. Without concrete evidence, no one dared to implicate the Weining Marquis Residence.

Therefore, even if they knew about the fraud, they mostly covered it up.

This was the Yu Residence's reaction at that time.

Old Madam Yu understood the crux of the matter. "Now, the Marquis of Weining has repeatedly lost his power and been demoted to Ning Yuanbo, and Imperial Consort Lu has also been demoted. Someone has caught hold of this incident and made a big fuss. This..." Towards the end, even her voice changed. "The imperial examination involves the future of thousands of students in the world. If this matter is exposed, it won't just be chaos in the court. I'm afraid the world will be in chaos..."

Wasn't the Great Zhou Dynasty chaotic enough now?

How many people had been disappointed by King You's case? How deep was the resentment of the people?

The King of Dongning seemed to be stable in Shandong, but he had already angered many scholars by destroying the old classics of his ancestors and burning the ancestral code.

The capital of Zhejiang and Qingliu fought to the death. The pirates often disturbed the border, burned, killed, and plundered. Countless commoners died and were already infuriated.

In addition, there was fraud in the examination. The Confucian students were dissatisfied with the court rules, and the people of the Great Zhou Dynasty lost all their trust for the authorities.

This country was probably also...

Yu Youyao also had mixed feelings.

Old Madam Yu closed her eyes and kept twirling her prayer beads. The room fell silent.

Such news was easy to find out.

The time it took for Nanny Liu to burn an incense stick was all it took before someone rushed back into the house. "Matriarch, the main examiner is suspected of leaking the questions. The candidates for this examination are suspected of cheating. All the candidates who participated in this examination have been arrested, even Heir Song."

Whether he was Mr. Xian Yun's disciple or the heir of the Zhenguo Marquis Residence, as long as it involved cheating in the examination, no one could escape.

This news undoubtedly confirmed Yu Youyao's previous guess.

After being mentally prepared, Old Madam Yu calmed down a little. “Our family only had one student succeed this time, and our ranking isn’t high. We’ve also read his writing. It’s standard. Even if we take out the papers for review, it won’t affect him.”

This was already a blessing in disguise.

Yu Youyao nodded. “After the few of them entered the capital, they followed Grandmother’s instructions. Most of them stayed in the courtyard to study in peace. They rarely went out to get involved in the disputes between the candidates and rarely gathered together with them. These are traces that can be tracked. This matter most likely won’t implicate our family.”

Her grandmother had nurtured two important ministers of the Imperial Court and was regarded very highly in the clan.

After the brothers in the clan entered the capital, they listened to their grandmother’s words. The Yu Residence also took good care of them, and their food and clothes were appropriately given to them.

Since they were so comfortable at home, they did not go out all the time.

Old Madam Yu felt a little more at ease and thought of Song Mingzhao. “It’s a pity for Mingzhao. As Mr. Xian Yun’s disciple, he’s already talented to begin with, but he’s suffered an undeserved calamity. The three exams were originally his great achievements in the imperial examination, but now, he’s become the target of public criticism. As long as it involves fraud, the lower the ranking, the safer he will be. Those in the front will be interrogated strictly. I’m afraid he’ll suffer a lot this time.”

As long as it involved cheating in the examination, no matter how good his family background was, it was useless.

Once it was confirmed) they had to be evaluated strictly to give an explanation to the scholars in the world. After all, once these people caused a commotion, the Imperial Court would not be able to take it anymore.

Not to mention that the main and co-examinations would be punished severely, many candidates who were involved in fraud had also died in prison.

Even if he was lucky enough to survive the torture and was finally released, unless the Imperial Court was especially kind, he would never be able to participate in the imperial examination again. If he studied hard for ten years, his future would be ruined. In more serious cases, even the next three generations would be implicated.

He couldn’t even do anything. He could only watch helplessly.

Yu Youyao lowered her head and said nothing.

The more Old Madam Yu thought about it, the more upset she felt. “With Mingzhao’s talent, I’m not worried that he’ll really be implicated. However, once he’s in jail, he’ll suffer even if he’s not guilty.. How can ordinary people take it!”

Chapter 564: Unlucky

Yu Youyao said, “Heir Song is just unlucky.”

Song Mingzhao was indeed unlucky. Originally, he had a bright future, but now that he was implicated in the examination fraud, even if he participated in the examination again, this matter would become a stain that he would never be able to wash away in his life. It would have a huge impact on his future.

Originally, after the palace examination, as long as his results were not bad, he would be placed in an important position.

However, because of this matter, there was no need to think about rising through the ranks.

At the thought of this, Yu Youyao changed the topic. "Brother Fang is in jail. What should we do now?"

Old Madam Yu waved her hand and looked helpless. "What else can we do? We have to find out more information. No one dares to get involved in the matter of cheating in the examination. Think about it. If the Imperial Court becomes a method for the powerful ministers to nurture their henchmen and strengthen their power, this will shake the country. Anything can be tolerated. If we anger the emperor, it'll be a light punishment to confiscate the family and exterminate the entire family."

Fraud in the examination was a serious crime no matter which dynasty it was.

Yu Youyao returned to the Jade Courtyard and instructed Chun Xiao, "Bring me the striped box from my room."

Chun Xiao immediately went over and quickly brought out a box that was three to four feet long.

Yu Youyao took the box and went straight to The Green House.

Her cousin was holding onto the wooden railing in the corridor and practicing walking.

After the fifth treatment, the acupuncture process was no longer as painful as before. Her cousin would spend some time practicing walking every morning and night.

Her cousin walked slowly and steadily.

In just half a month, he could stand up with difficulty. Now, he had already taken a stable path of recovery. Before long, he would be able to walk on his own without holding anything.

In that case, the gift she had prepared for a long time should come in handy.

Yu Youyao's eyes welled up with tears as she recalled the day her cousin had just entered the residence.

At that time, he was a fourteen or fifteen-year-old young man sitting in a wheelchair. He was scrawny, like an isolated rock. His face was pale, and he looked sickly.

She subconsciously felt pity for her cousin and wanted to treat him well.

Now that her cousin's leg was about to recover, Yu Youyao was both happy and disappointed.

Her cousin had used the identity of "Zhou Linghuai" to move into the Yu Residence. It was impossible for him to stay in the Yu Residence forever. Once his leg completely recovered, he would be free to do whatever he wanted.

At this moment, Zhou Linghuai stopped.

Chang An immediately pushed the wheelchair over and helped him into it.

Zhou Linghuai was so tired that he panted. Although he had walked steadily on this path just now, his legs had just begun to recover, and it was still very strenuous.

Yu Youyao quickly handed her a cup of warm water. "Have a glass of water first to calm down."

There was also spiritual dew in the water. Ever since she found out about the origins of the spiritual dew, Yu Youyao had become much bolder in using it and used it more every day.

Most of it was still used on him.

While her cousin was drinking water, Yu Youyao instructed Chang An, "Go and arrange for Cousin to take a bath. Recently, the weather has been getting hotter and hotter day by day. Every time he practises walking, his body will be drenched. He'll feel more comfortable after taking a bath."

"By the way, remember to put medicinal dew in the water he will be bathing in. Previously, Cousin only practiced for the time it takes to burn an incense stick every morning and night. Now, it's clearly more strenuous and tiring to practice for the time it takes to burn two incense sticks. Every time he practices walking, taking a medicinal dew bath will not only relieve his fatigue, but also strengthen his body."

She was also worried that her cousin would be too anxious and overpractice and hurt his body.

The medicinal dew was soothing to the body. It was good to soak in it for a while longer.

Chang An quickly went down to make arrangements.

Yu Youyao brought over the box that had been placed on the wooden railing and handed it to her cousin. "I promised Cousin previously that if Song

Mingzhao doesn't come to the Yu Residence to study, I'll give him a gift."

It was rare to see such a long box. Zhou Linghuai had already guessed what was in it.

He took the box and carefully opened it.

There was indeed a three-foot-long wooden staff lying inside. It was black and shiny. There were coiled dragon patterns carved on it, revealing a golden color with patterns floating.

On closer look, it was as if there was a golden coiling dragon wrapped around the pitch-black wooden staff. It looked like a dragon and was very ancient.

It was ebony wood.

The ebony wood was hard, did not fade, decay, and did not have insects. It was best used as a cane.

Yu Youyao smiled and said, "I heard that ebony is the essence of the world and the sun and moon. It's the most suitable for making a cane. I prepared this long ago. Cousin's health is recovering very well. I don't think he needs to support himself against the wall or the wooden railing in a few days. He can walk on his own. With this ebony cane, Cousin won't fall."

Ebony wood was rare and precious. The escort business had gotten a few from Shuchuan.

The dark wood had golden threads. It was considered an expensive wood. This cane had the shape of a dragon. Yu Youyao was overjoyed when she saw it. She hired a master who was good at carving and to refine it a little. She changed the dragon pattern into Panlong and made this cane.

Her cousin was codifying in the Teng library and had a job. This wooden cane with golden silk was not an overstatement.

“This cane came at the right time.” Zhou Linghuai stroked the carvings on the cane. The dragon shape on it looked natural. The carver only carved it a little according to the situation, but it did not destroy its beauty.

The dark wood was definitely buried underground. After tens of millions of years, it had all kinds of strange shapes. Naturally, Heaven was its most ingenious carver.

Just this staff alone had taken a lot of effort.

The little girl was meticulous and could always prepare what he needed in advance.

Yu Youyao’s lips curled up. “Since I’ve given you a gift, shouldn’t you tell me what’s going on with the imperial examination fraud?”

She did not know much about the cheating in the examination.

Zhou Linghuai held the cane. The handle was carved with a dragon head. There were natural dragon scale patterns on the dragon head, so it did not slip when held in his hand. The top was polished with wax, so it would not hurt his hand. There was nothing that was not meticulous.

Zhou Linghuai liked it very much. “In the past, the Weining Marquis Residence was a new noble in the court. They were favored by the emperor. In order to nurture his henchmen and strengthen his own power, the Marquis of Weining’s family intercepted talents from the imperial examination and paid a high price to sell the main examiner’s questions. They secretly interacted with students with no background and gave them a chance to soar into the sky.”

Yu Youyao’s expression was very complicated. “It’s very easy to endure ten years of hard work. The rare thing is that the imperial examination is like a thousand troops crossing a single bridge. There are tens of millions of students in the Great Zhou Dynasty, but in the end, only more than 300 people can get on the rankings. Those who don’t pass can only brace themselves and continue taking the examination.”

However, be it continuing to take the examination or donating to an official, this was not a good way out for many ordinary students. If they wanted to stand out, they had to take an unorthodox path and find a good way out for themselves..

Chapter 565: Torture

Zhou Linghuai agreed deeply. “Continuing to take the examination will take more time and money. We don’t know if he’ll be able to pass next time, and there are many people who have taken the examination from young to old.

They will only be left with grief and indignation. On the other hand, donating to an official requires a lot of money. Not to mention whether they can afford it, even if they can, taking the path of donating to an official will basically cut off their future path.”

It was already enough for an official to reach the seventh-grade.

Officials who were seventh-grade and above had to be evaluated every three years. This was the key to promotion.

The first round of the evaluation was birth.

Similarly, first-class scholars, second-class scholars and so on were all key to the examination. Those who had donated to the officials were not qualified to be on the examination list, so it was impossible for them to take another step forward.

After studying hard for ten years, everyone had ambitions to succeed in the imperial examination. How many people were willing to be stepped on for the rest of their lives?

Yu Youyao sighed softly. “The cruelest thing isn’t the imperial examination, but after passing it. You don’t have a background, connections, or channels. What other way out can you have after entering the court? If a noble takes the initiative to offer an olive branch at this time, not only will it guarantee that you’ll pass the examination, but you’ll also be able to obtain a place after passing it. Everyone understands the principle of having another party’s support.”

It was really not easy for ordinary families to produce an official.

Just like Concubine Jiang’s family that had many farming families. It was only their ancestors who had nurtured a scholar like Official Jiang.

However, after taking the examination and successfully becoming an official in the court, would everything really be fine?

Look at Official Jiang. After wasting so many years working as a sixth-grade official registrar, he should know that passing the examination was only the first step. After entering the court, he still needed more money and connections.

Didn’t a large family like the Yu Residence also need the Xie Residence’s money, connections, and channels?

The strength of one’s family background would be revealed.

Zhou Linghuai nodded. “There was fraud in the examination and the restrictions were not strict. No dynasty or generation could avoid it. The main examiner of this examination, Huang Zhiyuan, is currently a scholar of the Hanlin Academy and has studied politics. He was the main examiner of the countryside examination.”

Yu Youyao quickly asked, “I heard that the President of this examination is the Chancellor of the Hanlin Academy, Lord Tang. Will he be implicated?”

The Tang and Yu families were family friends. It was said that when her grandfather was around, the two families were close, even closer than the Zhenguo Marquis Residence.

It was also after her grandfather passed away that her grandmother became a widow and rarely went out. Many of their families’ relationships slowly faded.

Later on, Yu Zongzheng and Second Uncle entered the court one after another to become officials, and the two families interacted again.

However, her grandmother did not think much of it. The Chancellor's scholar, Lord Tang, who was also Fifth Miss Tang and Tang Yunxi's father, doted on his concubines more than his wife. He did not like Matriarch Tang's personality.

The two families were still very distant.

However, there were many benefits of befriending a family. As long as one did not deliberately sabotage the other, they would not fall out.

Zhou Linghuai said calmly, "He can't help but be implicated. However, Madam Tang's father is the administrative official of the Zhan Residence. His official position isn't high, but it's very important for him to be in charge of the government workshops, and bureaus to guide and teach the princes. Just based on this, many people in the court will plead for Lord Tang. In addition, the Hanlin Courtyard is an important place for the Imperial Court to choose talents. If there's a mistake in the Hanlin Courtyard, it'll still shake the country. The court officials don't want this matter to be too serious. Lord Tang will most likely be able to escape unscathed, but he'll definitely be removed from his position."

Yu Youyao's gaze flickered. "It's just that the family won't be implicated. Madam Tang's maiden family has a lot of people. Lord Tang still has a chance to rise again."

Whether Lord Tang could recover depended on Eldest Madam Tang's maiden family. This way, Eldest Madam Tang's status in the Tang family would rise.

Eldest Madam Tang was someone who could fight in silence. She would definitely not let go of this opportunity. Then, it was time for him to give an explanation for doting on his concubines more than her.

No matter how much a concubine was doted on, could she be more important than Lord Tang's future?

It was really good karma.

Zhou Linghuai smiled. "That's right."

When Yu Youyao heard this, she knew that the Yu Residence wouldn't be implicated in the fraud. "When can Brother Fang be released from prison? If the fraud is confirmed, it has nothing to do with him. Will it still affect his future?"

Zhou Linghuai shook his head. "His ranking isn't high, and his scriptures and strategies are all above average. After an examinee like him enters the prison, as long as they investigate his interpersonal relationships after entering the capital and confirm that he's not suspicious, he basically won't suffer too much. There will definitely be forced confessions. There won't be torture. When this matter is settled, the Imperial Court will definitely reopen the examination."

Yu Youyao heaved a sigh of relief and understood what he meant. Her eyes widened. "You mean, almost everyone in the top ranks has to be tortured? Then wouldn't Heir Song..."

Zhou Linghuai raised his eyebrows and swallowed the rest of Yu Youyao's words.

She had only mentioned Song Mingzhao casually and did not mean anything else. However, her cousin clearly did not like her mentioning Song Mingzhao. She would just not mention him.

Zhou Linghuai's gaze darkened. "Yao Yao

"Huh?" Yu Youyao looked at her cousin suspiciously.

The little girl's eyes were innocent and bright, like a lake, sparkling. Zhou Linghuai's expression subconsciously softened a little, but his tone darkened. "I'm not a magnanimous person."

Song Mingzhao had an ulterior motive. His desire for Yu Youyao was like a fishbone was stuck in his throat.

Yu Youyao was stunned. What did her cousin mean?

What did Mingzhao have to do with her cousin's magnanimity?

The little girl blinked and looked at him in confusion. Zhou Linghuai couldn't help but laugh. "It's good that you don't understand. It's not an important matter after all."

This time, Yu Youyao understood and nodded repeatedly. "He's an unrelated person. There's no need to care about him."

Zhou Linghuai smiled again and looked up at the little girl. The tassel hairpins she was wearing today had been carved by him when he was free a while ago.

He was proficient in carving, so carving a jade hairpin was not a problem. However, the craftsmanship of the tassel jewelry was very complicated. He felt that Yu Youyao looked good in it, so he specially found a book to learn how to make it. It took a lot of effort.

Now, it seemed that it was worth it for the little girl to wear the jewelry he had personally made.

The entire body of the jade was carved into a few jade hairpins. The hairpins were at the side of the little girl's temples. They were of different lengths and had beautiful tassels. They fell from the stamens and reached her ears. Small jade hairpin flowers fell under the tassels and swayed lightly, making the little girl look delicate and elegant.

Yu Youyao rested her chin on her hand. "Cousin, is this the dead end you arranged for Ning Yuanbo's residence?

Even the emperor couldn't protect him if it involved cheating in the examination.

Zhou Linghuai smiled faintly. "It's just a sword dance."

Yu Youyao's eyes widened.. Cousin meant that although he was pointing his sword at Ning Yuanbo, he actually had other motives?

Chapter 566: When the Qin Dynasty Fell

It was very likely that her cousin had not touched Ning Yuanbo previously because he was waiting for this opportunity.

Thinking of how important King You's case was, Yu Youyao's heart turned cold. She realized that it was time for her cousin to subvert the court. Yu Youyao had mixed feelings.

In order to gain the emperor's trust, he did not hesitate to destroy the old books of his ancestors and burn the ancestral code. He ignored the rumors of the world and only wanted the King of Dongning to reveal his true colors.

He did not hesitate to send his heir into the capital to be a hostage. His ambition was obvious.

There was also the King of the West who did not reveal his true strength.

Which of them didn't have ulterior motives?

In the Biography of the Marquis of Huaiyin, there was a quote that said, "When the Qin dynasty fell, all the heroes in the world wanted to conquer it."

The Great Zhou Dynasty had lost the hearts of the people. All the heroes competed to conquer it. Naturally, there were treason and rebellions and there will be losers and winners.

These people were willing to risk it all.

After two years, Yu Youyao had figured out many things. Back then, at the Precious Peace Temple, she had accidentally seen through her cousin's tracks and had already made her choice.

Since she had made her choice, there was nothing to escape.

She only needed to do her own thing so that her cousin would have no worries. As for other matters, they were not something she, a woman from the inner residence, could interfere in.

Yu Youyao pouted. "Cousin schemes so much every day. He's clearly still in a wheelchair. Why is he still so tall?"

She was not short, but when she thought about how Yu Jianjia, who was half a year younger than her and had always been sick, had caught up to her, she felt that she should actually grow faster.

Zhou Linghuai had an indescribable expression.

He had been training his muscles and bones since he was young and practicing martial arts, so he was much taller than ordinary people. Even though he later grew slower in a wheelchair, he was still a little taller than older people.

He was only 17 years old now, which was the age of growth. When his legs completely recovered, he should grow faster.

NO!

Why should he care about height?

Forget it, he seemed to have been led astray by the little girl again?!

At first, the little girl had been very worried that he wouldn't grow tall in a wheelchair. She had even specially spent some effort to find out about a medicinal rooster recipe that would help grow taller.

Yu Youyao seemed to be possessed. She burned, stewed, roasted, steamed...

In short, she used all kinds of methods.

Zhou Linghuai had never been an emotional person. Even when he schemed against someone, he did not even blink. When he rejected someone, he naturally did not feel any psychological burden.

Only in front of Yu Youyao, he seemed to be possessed!

As long as she looked at him innocently and blinked, he wished he could pluck the stars in the sky and give them to her. How could he bear to let her down?

It was obvious that she was the one suffering.

Yu Youyao tortured him for a full three months until his nose bled. Only then did her “crazy” actions completely stop.

For a long time, he would be conflicted about whether he would really grow taller. When his legs recovered, he would stand side by side with the little girl...

It was very awkward!

Fortunately, the problem he was worried about did not exist.

The next day, Yu Youyao arrived at An Shou Hall early in the morning.

Something big had happened in the court, and even the family had been implicated. Old Madam Yu did not sleep well the entire night. Early in the morning, she called Yu Zongzheng over for questioning.

Yu Zongzheng said, “I’m not in the Imperial Court now, so it’s not appropriate for me to interfere in this matter. It’s better to wait and see first.”

Old Madam Yu had the same intention. However, “The fraud in the examination is very important. You can’t make a mistake now that you’re in the Ministry of Official Personnel Affairs. It’s just that our family and the Zhenguo Marquis Residence are family friends. Heir Song is involved in the fraud case, so our family can’t watch coldly.”

Yu Zongzheng frowned and could only say, “How about this? After leaving the government office today, I’ll ask my colleagues who used to have a good relationship with the Imperial Court for some information. The imperial examination fraud involves the rules of the Imperial Court. No matter what, this matter can’t be avoided by the Imperial Court. If there’s any news, the

Imperial Court will know best.”

This was how family ties were. They couldn’t be careless when they could help.

Old Madam Yu nodded. “That’s it for now. No matter if it’s good or bad, it’s better to have news than no news.”

Yu Zongzheng hurriedly went to the government office.

In the past two years, the court had not been peaceful either. There was endless trouble in the government office. After he was transferred to the Ministry of Official Personnel Affairs, there was no time to be idle.

Old Madam Yu held her granddaughter’s hand and sighed slightly. “Women and children from the inner residence can’t get involved in such matters. Just wait in the house to hear the news!”

Yu Youyao nodded and asked Nanny Liu to prepare dinner.

Old Madam Yu was thinking about something, and her appetite was not good. Yu Youyao persuaded her from the side. After all, she had a bowl of porridge and some soup, so she couldn’t eat anymore.

Yu Youyao was not affected. She ate and drank as she should.

‘Go in—’ The servant pushed Song Mingzhao, who was covered in blood, into the prison.

With a clang, he locked the prison door and glanced at Song Huiyuan, who was crawling on the ground like a dead dog. He spat a mouthful of thick yellow and white phlegm out and said angrily, ‘Pfft, what bullsh*t three exams? He’s the best pick for the top scholar today. Yet, he’s involved in cheating in the examination, and he still wants to escape unscathed? Hmph, no way!’

With that, he left arrogantly.

Song Mingzhao had just experienced a flogging and was a little dazed. ‘I-I didn’t cheat...

He had passed the Huiyuan examination and the examiner who had leaked the question this time was Scholar Huang of the Hanlin Academy. Even the Tang Residence of the Hanlin Academy’s Chancellor was implicated.

The Zhenguo Marquis Residence had some relationship with the Tang Residence, so he became the focus of interrogation.

After being in prison for three days, he had already experienced two rounds of torture.

Song Mingzhao refused to confess, and the officials in charge of the trial punished him severely.

Song Mingzhao was not a fool. He acutely sensed that the officials in charge of his trial seemed to be hostile to him and were deliberately punishing him severely.

Not to mention his status as the heir of the Marquis of Zhenguo. As long as there was no suspicion that he had cheated) ordinary officials would not make things too difficult for him.

In addition, he was also Mr. Xian Yun’s disciple. He was extremely talented to begin with. Even if he was implicated and sent to jail, others would think twice.

He was part of the first batch to have his examination papers reviewed by the Imperial Court. The interactions between people during the examination were also investigated. It would take at most two to three days. It was more or less clear if he had cheated, so they wouldn’t use heavy punishment on him.

However, the other party had done it too obscurely, so he couldn’t catch him red-handed.

Song Mingzhao forced his injured body to stand up and staggered. After barely taking a few steps, he fell to the ground and leaned against the wall.

The wall was wet and cold. As soon as he leaned against it, a chill rushed into his bones, making him shiver and feel a chill from the bottom of his heart.

The prison was very dirty and had a rotten smell.

At night, there were even dung beetles and rats crawling around.

He also ate rotten food every day.

It was even difficult to get a sip of water..

Chapter 567: Outstanding

All of this was something that the pampered Song Mingzhao had never experienced before.

Song Mingzhao recalled that before he was imprisoned, he had been tidying up the study. He had taken the Duan inkstone that Yu Youyao had given him and instructed Kong Qing carefully, "I'll be going to the Yu Residence to study tomorrow. Bring it to the Yu Residence."

Unexpectedly, in the blink of an eye, the soldiers entered the house. Without any explanation, they took shackles and cuffed his hands and feet, bringing him out of the Zhenguo Marquis Residence.

His grandmother was so shocked that she fainted on the spot.

Her mother kept asking bitterly, "What mistake did Mingzhao make? Why did you arrest him? Even if you want to arrest him, you have to make things clear first."

The house was in chaos.

In the past two years, he had been tortured by his heart disease. His body was no longer as strong as before, and he couldn't take it anymore.

Song Mingzhao leaned against the wall and couldn't help but think of Yu Youyao. "Zhiyao. Does it mean a courteous and beautiful flower?"

The most regretful thing he had ever done in his life was about two years ago. Due to some blurry memories from his nightmare, he had called out her courtesy name in front of Yu Youyao on impulse and rudely.

He had caused Yu Youyao to misunderstand him and distance herself from him for the past two years.

He had originally thought that after he went to the Yu Residence to study with Mr. Hu Shan, he would go to the main house often to greet Old Madam Yu. In addition, the two families of the Yu Residence had a good relationship and his siblings often interacted with them. He would be on good terms with the brothers of the Yu Residence and have a chance to interact with Yu Youyao.

After interacting with him for so long, Yu Youyao naturally knew that he was not such an ill-mannered person. She would definitely change her opinion of him.

When he became the top scholar, his future would be bright. Then, he would have enough chips to beg his grandmother to come to the Yu Residence and suggest a proposal to Old Madam Yu.

At that time, Yu Youyao would already be 13 years old. She was at the age to be engaged. The Song and Yu families were family friends, and her grandmother and Old Madam Yu were close. Furthermore, he was on the Golden Ranking

Such sincerity was enough to move Grandmother Yu.

However, all of this was ruined by this prison sentence.

After this prison sentence, even if he was acquitted, this matter would still become a stain in his life.

Even if the Imperial Court reinstated his position and he obtained good results again, his future would be much more difficult unless the emperor was especially kind.

Yu Youyao was such an outstanding girl. Countless families in the capital were watching her.

He was originally 70 to 80% confident, but now, he was only 20 to 30% confident.

Song Mingzhao was already a little delirious. In a daze, he could no longer distinguish between dream and reality. In front of him was the scene of the young girl being thin and covered in blood. The young girl in the dream was cursing in his ears.

“Y-Yu Youyao, is that you?” Song Mingzhao clutched his chest and fell to the ground, suddenly coughing up a ball of blood.

Strangely, everything in front of him had become ethereal and blurry.

But!

In the past, he had always tried his best to see things clearly, but he was always shrouded in fog. At this moment, he had never seen someone so clearly.

It was Yu Youyao!

She was also in a sorry state he had never seen before.

Had he harmed Yu Youyao?

No

This was impossible!

He watched as this young girl grew and changed day by day. His admiration for her increased day by day, and he couldn't help but have the urge to get close to her.

How could he hurt her? That wasn't true.

Song Mingzhao muttered, “It's not true...”

“In the nightmare, I did something to hurt you. You...” His pupils dilated, and his hands tightened on the straw under him. “That wasn't me. It definitely wasn't me...”

“I-I won't hurt you...”

“Don't believe it...”

A few days later, there were rumors in the capital that some candidates couldn't take the torture and died in the prison, causing everyone to panic.

The Yu Residence couldn't interfere, but they had also heard about the investigation by the Imperial Court. When the Zhenguo Marquis Residence found out that Song Mingzhao had been tortured, it was simply like a bolt from the blue. They didn't even dare to tell Old Madam Song.

Yu Zongzheng put down his teacup. “Mingzhao is Mr. Xian Yun's disciple and has a reputation for being talented. Logically speaking, the officials in charge of the trial have investigated his case and interactions with people. The matter of cheating won't fall on him, nor should he be tortured. However, he's not to be envied. If he gets first place in this examination, he'll become the target of public criticism. Someone from the Imperial Court has suggested that Song

Mingzhao be interrogated strictly.”

Yu Youyao held her teacup and said nothing.

In the past, when Song Mingzhao's name first appeared, it was because he was low-key and indifferent. Since the Zhenguo Marquis Residence was not ostentatious, others paid more attention to him.

In this examination, Song Mingzhao had shocked the world. It was said that his scripture theory and strategy questions made the examiners slap the table and praise him.

There were even examiners who dug out some very representative examination papers from the previous generations of the Great Zhou Dynasty.

When they compared them, the differences were obvious. There were even rumors that Song Mingzhao had the literary skills of Minister Yu of the previous dynasty.

The rumors about Song Mingzhao's crimes were definitely not groundless.

But!

The tallest tree would be destroyed by the wind.

The royalists under the Zhenguo Marquis Residence had many political enemies in the court. Now that Song Mingzhao had gained power, others naturally had to avoid him.

However, when Song Mingzhao was unlucky, others wished they could torture him to death. Since he couldn't be charged with cheating, it was still a light punishment to skin him alive in prison.

No matter how many connections the Zhenguo Marquis Residence had and how powerful their methods were, it was impossible for Song Mingzhao to not suffer at all.

From the looks of it, Song Mingzhao was not just unlucky.

He was extremely unlucky!

Old Madam Yu's eyes widened. "This... Isn't this a disguised confession of torture? Wouldn't Mingzhao be in trouble..."

Yu Zongzheng nodded. "I've already informed my colleagues who have a good relationship with the Imperial Court and asked them to keep an eye on them.

At the very least, they have to be careful. The Zhenguo Marquis Residence has also been making arrangements these few days."

Old Madam Yu did not look too good. "The fraud in the examination has to be investigated strictly. I'm afraid that someone will use the fraud case to wantonly eliminate some henchmen. It will be hard on those innocent candidates."

Wasn't Song Mingzhao's encounter also because of partisanship?

It was really disgusting.

Yu Zongzheng also sighed. "There's nothing we can do about it. Mingzhao is also an upright person. Until now, he hasn't confessed to cheating. In the past few days, there were a total of seven students who couldn't take the torture and died in the prison. Almost all of them were innocently implicated. As for the candidates who really cheated, their bones had already softened before the whip hit them. They confessed."

A person who had abandoned the moral character that a scholar should have and wanted to take a shortcut wouldn't have any backbone.

At this point, Yu Zongzheng's face did not look too good either. "These dead students are not ranked low. They would rather die than submit. It's obvious that not only are they talented, but they also have morals. If they can enter the royal court, it'll be a blessing for the country. I didn't expect them to be implicated and die tragically in prison.."

Chapter 568: End of Life

This was also a loss for the Imperial Court. Old Madam Yu looked sad. "They've studied hard for ten years, but they actually suffered such horrible consequences. How can their families bear it?!"

After the case was over, the Imperial Court would at most give them the title of a scholar and reward their families with some things. However, the dead could not be resurrected.

Just thinking about it made her teeth turn cold.

Yu Youyao finally put down her teacup. "The imperial examination fraud has been known for four to five days, and the case has basically become clear. Tomorrow morning, Father can discuss it with the civil officials he's on good terms with and speak up for these students. There are still a few who cheated, but most of them are truly talented and knowledgeable. It's difficult to find talents that are the pillars of the country. The Imperial Court can't close the case rashly, but it can't torture the students."

If Yu Zongzheng was still in the Imperial Court, he would definitely accept this suggestion happily.

However, now that he was in the Ministry of Official Personnel Affairs, his words and actions were very important. Without the death exemption card, he would definitely have to be cautious.

For a moment, Yu Zongzheng hesitated.

The emperor was very secretive about the fraud. As too many people were implicated, the case lasted for four to five days, and no one in the court dared to speak much.

That was why after Song Mingzhao was imprisoned, he had suffered miserably and was punished severely.

Otherwise, with the power of the Zhenguo Marquis Residence, they could comfortably wait for the Imperial Court to release them.

Old Madam Yu had originally wanted to say something for these poor candidates and persuade Yu Zongzheng—

Yu Youyao continued, "The Imperial Court will strictly investigate the root cause of the fraud and eliminate partisanship. On the surface, we have to purge the imperial examination and choose more outstanding talents for the Imperial Court. We have to build the country and give an explanation to the thousands of students in the world."

After the matter of cheating in the examination was exposed, all the scholars in the world were furious. They joined forces to report to the Imperial Court and asked for a strict investigation.

There were even many students who held Sun Sheng's position and paraded on Chang An Street, sitting quietly at the entrance of the palace. Not only that, but scholars from all over the world also rushed to the capital. A large number of students gathered to offer sacrifices to the Confucius Temple and preach.

In particular, in the government office of the Imperial Court, there were many scholars making a fuss almost every day.

At this point, she changed the topic. "If nothing goes wrong, the students who can withstand the torture should all have achievements in the future. Father, speaking up for them is also to accumulate connections for yourself. As long as one or two of these students can benefit from Father's words, it will also help you in the future. Father, don't miss this opportunity."

After arriving at the Ministry of Official Personnel Affairs, Yu Zongzheng also had the characteristics of most officials. If he spoke up for the candidates, he might not anger the emperor.

However, the benefits of speaking were obvious.

When Yu Zongzheng heard this, he was immediately tempted. "When I return to the front courtyard later, I'll discuss it with my aides before making a decision."

After arriving at the Ministry of Official Personnel Affairs, the connections he had accumulated in the past were a little lacking. He also completely realized the importance of accumulating connections. Only then did Yu Youyao's words undoubtedly tickle him.

Yu Youyao nodded and did not say anything else.

She had suggested that Yu Zongzheng speak up for the candidates not because she wanted him to take the opportunity to accumulate connections, but because she did not want more innocent candidates to die in prison.

Many families in the court were implicated in the case of fraud.

For Song Mingzhao, the Zhenguo Marquis Residence was trying their best to help him. As for whether it would work, it still lacked someone who could speak in front of the emperor.

This time, there was only one person in the imperial examination family who was involved, and his ranking was not high. In the past, he had stayed in the Imperial Court for ten years. Now that he had entered the Ministry of Official Personnel Affairs, he was undoubtedly the best candidate.

Yu Zongzheng opened his mouth. Some people in the Imperial Court who had a good relationship with him would probably follow suit.

The emperor would definitely be willing to listen to the Imperial Court.

Yu Zongzheng returned to the study and called his aides for a discussion.

As Yu Youyao had expected, the outcome of the negotiation was naturally feasible.

Yu Zongzheng quickly sent someone to send a letter to his close colleagues.

The next day, Yu Zongzheng was in the royal court and said generously,

"There are still very few people who cheated, and most of them are truly talented. It's difficult to find talents that are the pillars of the country. The case of fraud has

already been investigated for a few days, and the case is basically clear. The Imperial Court doesn't want to close the case rashly, but it can't torture the students. In the future, when the case is completely investigated, the Imperial Court will also have to reopen the examination and take office. Those innocent students who were implicated will also take the examination again and enter the court as officials in the future?'

Even Yu Zongzheng did not expect that after he opened his mouth, there would be many people in the court who supported him.

After that, the fraud case continued.

However, there were no more candidates who had died in prison due to torture. However, there were still more than ten candidates who had died in prison because of the hardships in prison. Their bodies were weak and they had some illnesses. Some of them had died in prison.

Everyone hoped that the fraud case would be investigated as soon as possible.

In the blink of an eye, it was late March.

After seven treatment sessions, Zhou Linghuai could already walk on his own with his cane. The speed of his recovery stunned Uncle Sun.

Further treatment was needed. With Uncle Sun's medicine, Yu Youyao's spiritual dew, and the enhancement of all kinds of incense and medicinal cuisine, he believed that it wouldn't be long before Zhou Linghuai could completely walk on his own.

At this moment, Ning Yuanbo's involvement in the examination fraud was uncovered.

The emperor was furious and directly sent Ning Yuanbo to jail for investigation. Concubine Lu was also sent to the cold palace and there was no room for her comeback.

At this point, Ning Yuanbo's residence was at its end.

Right on the heels of that, the Imperial Court sent out another official document: The results of this Spring Quarter Examination are invalid, and the examination will be repeated three months later. Therefore, innocent candidates who were implicated in the sub-examination can participate in the examination again.

The case of the imperial examination fraud had already been settled.

Was the dust really settled?

All of this was probably just the beginning!

Yu Youyao still remembered that in history, Xiang Zhuang's sword dance had happened at the ambush before the treacherous plot started. It was also the matter of Xiang Zhuang's sword dance that had completely opened the prelude to the war between Chu and Han to compete for world dominance.

Before this, Xiang and Liu had joined forces with Qin.

What did the Xiang Zhuang dance sword that her cousin was talking about mean? Before things developed to that point, even Yu Youyao wouldn't be able to guess the truth.

If she took the initiative to ask her cousin, he would be happy to answer her.

However, she also knew that even if she knew about some things in advance, it would be useless. Since her cousin did not take the initiative to mention it, it proved that this was not something she could get involved in, so there was no need to ask.

The next day, Old Madam Yu heard the news again and said worriedly,

“Mingzhao survived the torture, but he also fell sick in prison. When the Zhenguo Marquis Residence received the news, they were as anxious as a cat on a hot tin roof. They made arrangements and sent medicine and life-saving medicine to prison. I wonder when he will be released..”

Chapter 569: Boiled Duck

Nanny Liu was also vexed. “At the very least, we have to wait until Ning Yuanbo’s interrogation is over and the charges are settled before he can be released. It’ll take half a month.”

When Old Madam Yu heard this, she panicked. “How can that be? I heard that the prison is cold and humid. Most people who enter the prison will more or less fall sick. Mingzhao was previously tortured. If he falls sick and it drags on for half a month, how will he recover from his illness in the future?

Nanny Liu couldn’t say anything else. Matriarch was worried about Heir Song. Although the relationship between the two families was sincere, the fundamental reason was still..

After Old Madam Yu was done being anxious, she leaned against the couch dejectedly. “I originally thought that Mingzhao liked our Yao Yao. In the past two years, I wasn’t in a hurry to help Yao Yao arrange this matter, but if...”

Nanny Liu was stunned. “Matriarch, how... how can you tell? Heir Song has been in and out of the Yu Residence often in the past two years, but he hasn’t shown...” He hasn’t shown any interest in Eldest Miss!

Was she seeing things?

Didn’t Heir Song come to the Yu Residence every time to pay respects to Matriarch Song?

“You’ve lived for most of your life, how can you not even have this much discernment. Then, you would really be old and muddle-headed.” Old Madam Yu sat up straight. Song Mingzhao’s thoughts were too deep. Previously, he hadn’t seen through him, but as time passed) there would always be some clues. “Go and look through the gift list he brings over every time.”

Heir Song’s gift list had to go through Nanny Liu. It wasn’t that Nanny Liu had a good memory, but she had to remember important people.

Upon hearing Matriarch Song mention it) Nanny Liu’s eyes widened in surprise. “I remember that every time Heir Song shows filial piety to

Matriarch, there seem to be one or two expensive spices and medicinal herbs. Matriarch always asked me to sort them out and send them to Eldest Miss's residence, but she didn't let me mention they were given by Heir Song. I only thought that Eldest Miss liked incense medicine, so Matriarch asked me to give it to her. Could it be...

Large families reciprocated etiquette, so it was normal for them to send some spices and medicinal herbs.

Women liked spices. Old people were old and needed to nourish their bodies, so medicinal herbs were more practical.

She did not think too much about it.

Old Madam Yu glanced at her. "It's understandable if it happens twice, but it's abnormal every time. You can't even tell this. You're so old. I wonder if you've learnt anything."

Nanny Liu was stunned for a long time before sighing. "It's just that in my eyes, Eldest Miss is still a child. I didn't expect that in the blink of an eye, she's already at the age where we have to see her as a woman. How can I think about

She had long known that Matriarch Song had taken a fancy to Heir Song. She had even found it strange. Which family didn't compare their statuses with other families before making a judgment?

Family background, character, and talent were all considered.

You looked at others, and others looked at you. As long as there was something you were dissatisfied with, you wouldn't make do. This was a big matter that concerned the entire life of someone. Once that happened, there would definitely be a resentful couple. How could they have a good life in the future?

Therefore, if this marriage happened, there would be repudiation, mourning, and all kinds of unexpected situations.

Large families would have already helped their young misses take care of the situation when they were 11 or 12 years old. It would take at least a year and a half, or at most two to three years.

They were only afraid that there would be too many variables.

Every family had options, and would not just stick to one family. However, Matriarch Yu looked like she was sitting steadily on the fishing platform. She wasn't worried about the marriage with the Zhenguo Marquis Residence at all. She had thought that the Matriarch's heart ached for Eldest Miss and she wanted to wait and see for her.

Who would have known that Heir Song would become a cooked duck that couldn't fly away?

Nanny Liu thought about it carefully and understood. "The Song and Yu families are family friends to begin with, so it's normal for them to be married. However, with the orders of their parents and the words of the matchmaker, they can even be matched with resentful partners. Heir Song likes Eldest Miss and has been a 'filial grandson' in front of Matriarch for two years for Eldest Miss. This sincerity can be seen."

How could she find such a person?

But!

If there was an unforeseen storm in the sky, the arrangement might not happen.

Old Madam Yu let out a long sigh. "That's right. Other than Linghuai, there's really no one else in the entire capital who's more outstanding than Song Mingzhao. If he didn't like Yao Yao, I would have thought that he was too scheming and not suitable for Yao Yao. In that case, I would still have some complaints about him, but he's thoughtful."

Compared to the most outstanding and suitable candidates, the trolls were naturally looked down on.

Nanny Liu agreed deeply. "That's not the only reason why Matriarch likes Heir Song!"

As long as Eldest Miss was involved, Matriarch Lu would be scheming.

In addition to a person's character, temperament, and talent, the most important thing in a marriage was a family background that was well-matched.

Indeed!

Old Madam Yu nodded. "It's not peaceful in the court now. Only by hugging family friends tightly can we be more stable. In the future, if anything happens, the relationship between family friends will continue to be involved.

With the Yu Residence's help, Yao Yao's safety will be more guaranteed." Among the family friends, Song Mingzhao was the most outstanding.

At this point, Old Madam Yu continued, "The Zhenguo Marquis Residence is still a royalist party. As long as they don't court death, no matter who becomes the emperor in the future, they will be stable. Moreover, Yao Yao has a lot of good karma with the Zhenguo Marquis Residence. It's a good place to go."

Look at Ning Yuanbo's residence. He had committed so many crimes previously, but wasn't he fine?

Although the emperor wanted to protect them, there were also reasons why noble families were intertwined and it was not appropriate to make a fuss. The troubles of the Marquis of Weining and Ning Yuanbo had not directly affected their residence yet. As long as they were not beaten to death, noble families were usually unkillable cockroaches.

Ning Yuanbo's residence was at a disadvantage. He was a new noble with an unstable foundation.

It was his bad luck that he had completely broken his promise to the emperor.

He was courting death. He was too anxious for quick success and had actually tampered with the examination. He had lied about nurturing his henchmen and formed cliques for personal gain. Such a matter had always been a taboo for kings.

The Zhenguo Marquis Residence was the oldest meritorious family in the capital. As a royalist, the first thing they protected was the emperor's interests. Even if the emperor was afraid of these old noble forces being intertwined, he would not give up easily.

Song Xiuwen was a direct descendant of the Song family and his family had been implicated in Li Qiguang's rebellion. If it were anyone else, they would have long been implicated.

However, the Zhenguo Marquis Residence was not affected.

At this point, Old Madam Yu said, "Other than the Zhenguo Marquis Residence, the other families that the Yu Residence is familiar with are also civil officials. However, look at the Tang Residence. They're also a reputable literary family in the Great Zhou Dynasty. As soon as the fraud case is exposed, Lord Tang will be involved. Although it won't be a crime, if it's a matter of incompetence, I'm afraid Lord Tang won't be able to hold his position as a scholar of the Hanlin Academy."

Now that Ning Yuanbo was still in jail, it was Lord Tang's turn to be affected..

Chapter 570: What to Do?

This was what a civil official was like. If he couldn't sit in the cabinet, any commotion in the Imperial Court might implicate him. Who knew when trouble would come?

How could there be a meritorious family that could take responsibility even if there was a disaster in the family?

Civil servants were peaceful in prosperous times but became generals in troubled times.

Nanny Liu understood. "It's not unreasonable for Matriarch to take a fancy to a noble family. At the very least, in the chaos, if she has military power, there will be a guarantee."

Old Madam Yu had the same thought. "But if Mingzhao really falls sick from prison... Do you think it's time for me to make plans for Yao Yao again?"

Marriage was a lifetime thing. If the husband's health was not good, the wife would be the one suffering.

She and her master were also a young couple and were very loving. However,

Old Master had passed away early and she had become a widow. The bitterness of this was really not something that outsiders could tell.

She did not want her precious granddaughter to suffer like this.

No matter what kind of family it was, at the very least, her husband had to be healthy.

Nanny Liu did not dare to say anything else, but she could not help but say, "Of course we have to make plans. The princes in the palace are all at the age of marriage. The palace might take action at any time. Eldest Miss will be 13 years old in April, which is the age to be selected."

There was also a reason why Matriarch was anxious.

Old Madam Yu frowned. "Yao Yao has already caught the attention of the nobles in the palace after receiving the Empress Dowager's praise two years ago. In the past two years, she has also gained quite a reputation for being virtuous in the capital and has even obtained the title of the number one beauty in the capital. There must be nobles in the palace who want to target her. I am worried..."

Other families had racked their brains to get their daughter, who had been raised well in the family, into the royal family.

However, she did not want her precious granddaughter to enter the palace.

As soon as she entered the palace, it would be a deep sea. How could it be as comfortable as the outside world?

Nanny Liu thought about it carefully and understood what Matriarch Yu was trying to say.

With the Yu family's family background, if Eldest Miss really caught the eye of a noble, she would probably only be worthy of being a secondary concubine, although secondary concubines could also be on the imperial jade plate.

But!

Once a concubine, she would always be a concubine.

After a concubine entered the family, not only would she have to live according to the first wife's wishes, but her child would also have to be the daughter of a concubine when she gave birth in the future. Her child would be inferior to a legitimate child in every way.

Eldest Miss was such a good girl. How could she suffer like this?

If there were really nobles who had their eyes on Eldest Miss, ordinary people with poor family backgrounds would probably not be able to prevent this marriage. Only a deeply rooted noble family like the Zhenguo Marquis Residence could protect Eldest Miss.

The Matriarch was keeping an eye on the Zhenguo Marquis Residence to prevent any changes in the palace.

The more Old Madam Yu thought about it, the more uneasy she felt.

"Normally, when choosing a match, character is the most important, followed by reputation. However, when the imperial family judges people, they look at their interests first."

Eldest Son was deeply trusted by the emperor in the Ministry of Official

Personnel Affairs. Second Son was the second-in-charge in the Ministry of

Revenue. His family background was not the highest, but the emperor wanted to put the Yu Clan in an important position, so the Yu Clan immediately stood out.

On the other hand, Yao Yao's status as the eldest daughter of the first wife was already highly valued. With a rich external family, she gained the interests of the nobles. In addition, Yao Yao has a good reputation and is well known for her talents...

Nanny Liu also thought of this and her scalp went numb. "This..."

Old Madam Yu did not look too good. "Yao Yao is about to turn 13. Even if the marriage can't be arranged immediately, there should be progress. If anything happens in the palace, at the very least, the two families have already exchanged tokens in private or agreed to deal with it."

She had originally wanted to settle Yao Yao's marriage as soon as she turned 13.

However, Song Mingzhao was not the best candidate.

What should she do!

Nanny Liu's heart was solemn, and she also knew the Matriarch's scruples. "There's no conclusion to this matter. The Zhenguo Marquis Residence is a military family. I heard that Heir Song has been practicing martial arts since he was young. How can he not be able to withstand such a small prison sentence? Why don't we wait and see for a while?"

Right now, there was indeed no family more suitable than the Zhenguo Marquis Residence.

For a moment, Old Madam Yu couldn't think of a good solution. "That's the only way."

Song Mingzhao's illness in prison had completely angered the royalists led by the Zhenguo Marquis Residence. "The Imperial Court's inspection was not good, causing some people to use fraud to wantonly eliminate dissidents, causing more than ten innocent candidates to lose their lives and fall sick in prison."

"The strict investigation of the fraud case is to purge the rules of the imperial examination. However, the case has just been investigated not long ago, and so many innocent lives have already been lost. Is this an investigation or persecution? The Imperial Court has to give an explanation!"

"All the scholars in the world hope that the Imperial Court can supervise the case of fraud in the examination fairly and strictly, instead of watching helplessly as innocent candidates who were implicated die tragically."

"The teachers and classmates of those innocent students who died tragically know very well what their morals are and if they cheated. How can their families, teachers, and classmates accept their deaths?"

"If this continues, the scholars will support Heavenly Venerate Kong and march to Chang An Street. They will sit quietly at the entrance of the palace and cause a commotion in the Imperial Court. They won't shout that there's a strict investigation of fraud, but that the Imperial Court treats human lives with disregard. At that time, the scholars will be verbally criticized and executed. The commoners will gossip and this will ruin the benevolence of the emperor and the benevolence of the Imperial Court..."

With just one sentence, the emperor and the Imperial Court's benevolence were ruined. It will cause the right censor, Lord Wu, and the others in charge of supervising this case to fall into a disloyal and unrighteous situation.

It also affected the high-ranking emperor.

The emperor reprimanded Lord Wu in court for not doing his job well. He handed the case of fraud to the censor of the left capital, Lord Qi, and ordered him to help supervise the Ministry of Justice and the Court of Justice.

On the same day, Lord Qi brought the imperial physician to the prison of the Court of Justice to treat the candidates who had never confessed to cheating and they did not have clear evidence to prove that they had cheated.

The case of fraud was completely cleared.

When the news reached the Yu Residence, Yu Youyao heaved a sigh of relief.

She sat under the porch with her chin in her hand and watched her cousin hold his cane. After walking for a while, he could already walk easily on flat ground. It was not as strenuous as before.

Yu Youyao was overjoyed. When her cousin was sitting, he looked rugged and majestic. When he stood up, he looked tall and comparable to Song Mingzhao.

However, Song Mingzhao was a noble gentleman who lived like a prince.

On the other hand, after her cousin had experienced the pain of his family's change and illness, he was still a graceful young master.

His bearing, cultivation, demeanor, and temperament were like jade that had been cut and polished. His foundation was as firm as a rock and could not be easily disrupted.

The two of them were not on the same level..