

Noble Ruler 861

Chapter 861: I Want to Marry You

Shangguan Wan's heartbeat quickened as her heart pumped loudly. She alertly glanced at her surroundings before meticulously taking out the wooden box.

Even Jiang Yucheng didn't know that Shangguan Wan had roughly known about all the mechanisms in his study. It was just that she had never done such a thing before. This was because she knew that Jiang Yucheng would definitely fly into a rage once he found out.

But this time, she was really too curious!

Shangguan Wan carefully looked at the wooden box in her hands.

The wooden box was made of agarwood, and it gave off a light fragrance. The surface was smooth and had intricate patterns, looking very detailed and elegant.

For some reason, the lock on it wasn't closed properly.

Shangguan Wan thought that he had put away the item too hurriedly that day, so he forgot to lock it.

She held her breath in and opened the wooden box—there indeed was a scroll of a painting within!

For some reason, Shangguan Wan was so nervous that her palms were sweating. She had a feeling that this scroll might really contain Jiang Yucheng's secret...

Then, she took out the painting.

This item seemed rather old. No matter if it were the scroll itself or the paper, they both looked a little yellow. But this painting had been stored very well, and one could tell how precious the owner thought of it.

Without blinking, Shangguan Wan gradually unfurled the painting scroll.

When she saw the contents on it, Shangguan Wan suddenly widened her eyes.

A woman wearing a palace outfit was in the painting. She stood by the lake and turned around to smile happily when she heard something.

She had skin as white as snow and cherry lips. Her eyes looked kind, and her entire appearance complemented her elegant nature well, but her smile added some hints of wittiness to her eyes, which charmed one to no end.

If one said that she was originally as bright as the moon, cold and elegant, which one could not touch, with her smile, she became much friendlier, making one feel that they could just reach out and touch her to get the moon in the sky.

She was breathtakingly beautiful and mesmerizing.

This was probably it.

However, what shocked Shangguan Wan wasn't that Jiang Yucheng kept a painting of such a woman, but that... The woman in the painting was Shangguan Yue!

That Shangguan Yue who was once high and mighty as if nobody could ever reach her but decided to burn herself to death and fell into the abyss of death!

Kada!

The painting scroll dropped down from Shangguan Wan's hands, but the woman in the painting still smiled in such a mesmerizing manner.

It was as if all the good looks in the world were gathered in that one person—she was incomparable.

At that moment, it was like thunder striking as Shangguan Wan's mind turned completely blank.

Her hands kept trembling, and her entire person dropped into an icy hole as the coldness chilled her to the bones. This chill spread from the inside to the outside and from her head to her toe.

She staggered backward, hit the chair, and almost fell to the floor.

"I-impossible! This is definitely impossible!" muttered Shangguan Wan, but nobody knew who she was explaining to or trying to convince. *That's Shangguan Yue...*

That's Shangguan Yue! I knew Jiang Yucheng had once liked Shangguan Yue, but wasn't that all in the past?! He personally poisoned and kidnapped her to the ancestral hall! It was even him who personally attacked Shangguan Yue and drove her to the road of death! But if he had any form of reminiscence of love toward Shangguan Yue, why would he do that?

It was coincidentally because of all of this that Shangguan Wan believed that Jiang Yucheng had lost all feelings for Shangguan Yue. But it was only now that she suddenly discovered that everything she thought was wrong!

Shangguan Wan's face was as white as a ghost. Her eyes were soulless, and her heart felt like it was tightly clutched—it was so painful that she almost suffocated.

As if she suddenly recovered her senses, she hurriedly picked up that painting, bit her lips, and looked at it closely.

The Shangguan Yue in this painting looked rather young as if she was only 13 or 14 years old.

At that moment, Shangguan Wan's heart shook. I remember! This palace outfit was indeed the one that Shangguan Yue wore when she was 14 and became of marriageable age! She was born to be the precious Princess, so her turning-of-marriageable-age ceremony was very important.

Shangguan Wan still clearly remembered that many people came to the palace that day. Everyone was smiling, and everyone was praising Shangguan Yue.

Shangguan Yue—who had just become of marriageable age—was still a young woman, but she had already attracted countless people's admiration.

Some people were naturally born to be at the top of the mountain and under the spotlight! Shangguan Yue was this kind of existence!

Why would Jiang Yucheng have such a painting? Shangguan Wan's gaze turned, and she saw the footer below.

It was a line of words: "Yuan Zhen Year 31, Tenth of August. Seeing Yue elates me, and she is where my heart lies."

Jiang Yucheng personally wrote this on that day in that year! It has already been ten years since that day! Shangguan Wan stared at that line of words with a deadly gaze as if she was going to burn a hole in it.

She clutched the scroll so tightly that her knuckles turned white. If it weren't because she still had her last bit of rationality, she would directly tear this painting apart!

I see... I see! After so many years, Jiang Yucheng has liked only Shangguan Yue from start to end! If he didn't miss her, why would he keep such a painting so dearly?! And I—Shangguan Wan—am just a joke to fill in the space!

"Hah!

For the past few years, he planned for me and listened to my every word. All along, I thought that I was different to Jiang Yucheng. But now, I finally know that I'm worth nothing to him. She threw the painting onto the floor and covered her face as she cried and laughed, her entire person deranged.

Earlier, she was still thinking about how to take the initiative to repair their relationship. Even if she had to lower her head willingly, she wanted to do so.

As long as they could make up, as long as the wedding the next day could be held successfully, as long as everything in the future could go on blissfully...

Something seemed to be crazily churning in Shangguan Wan's chest as her face suddenly flashed white. Then, she directly spat blood out.

Her aura rapidly declined, and she fell onto the chair.

When the guards outside heard the commotion, they knocked on the door worriedly and lowered their voice to ask, "Your Highness, are you alright?"

Shangguan Wan's mind was in a mess.

She was dazed for a moment before she stiffly put away the painting, placed the box back, and walked outside. Then, she enunciated every word clearly as she asked, "Where exactly is he now?"

...

Zither room, Xin Li Garden.

When Chu Liuyue arrived, she saw Jiang Yucheng standing by the lake.

He was wearing a light-green robe, and he stood with his hands behind his back. He stared at the lake as if in a daze, thinking of something.

Upon hearing the footsteps, he turned back.

When he saw Chu Liuyue, his gaze turned much gentler.

Chu Liuyue's gaze changed slightly, and she walked over. "Eldest Young Master, why are you looking for me?"

Jiang Yucheng looked at her, and there seemed to be waves crashing in his eyes. After a moment, he suddenly said, "I want to marry you."

Chapter 862: The Person I Like

Chu Liuyue thought she misheard. "What?"

Jiang Yucheng repeated, "I said that I want to marry you."

Not 'would like' and not 'hope,' but want!

He seemed to be commanding and not discussing with whoever. How righteous and insistent!

Chu Liuyue widened her eyes slightly and looked at Jiang Yucheng.

The latter's expression seemed serious, and his gaze was clear. He didn't look like he was joking.

This incident was too ridiculous, to the point that Chu Liuyue thought Jiang Yucheng was crazy for a moment.

"Eldest Young Master Jiang, do you know what you're talking about?" Chu Liuyue found it incredulous. *What's wrong with Jiang Yucheng? Why would he invite me here and say that he wants to marry me? The day before his wedding with Shangguan Wan no less!*

"Of course, I know what I'm doing," said Jiang Yucheng adeptly as if he had already expected Chu Liuyue's reaction. "I've been thinking a lot the past two days and have finally made up my mind."

It wasn't easy for him to make this decision. Jiang Yucheng knew more clearly than anyone else what he should and shouldn't do now.

But he knew that he had already liked Chu Liuyue ever since he saw the girl's smile for the first time at the Wan Zheng Competition. From that day on, he restrained himself and wanted to eliminate all these ideas he had toward Chu Liuyue.

Originally, he thought that he could gradually forget about all of this by not seeing and speaking. However, it was too hard.

When she helped him in the Mystic Forest, he faltered once again.

Finally, the trigger point was when they met again a few days ago. At that moment, he almost couldn't differentiate if the person in front was Shangguan Yue or Chu Liuyue.

Chu Liuyue was very similar to her, but they were different in many ways as well.

He knew all of this all the while, but he suddenly had a crazy idea after that look. *If I can't differentiate between them, then I won't! No matter if she is Shangguan Yue or Chu Liuyue, it's enough as long as the person is in front of me. That person is already dead. Her soul has dispersed, and she will never return.*

He had once decided to bury the entire past and not bring it up again. But after Chu Liuyue appeared, he suddenly felt that a certain part of his heart seemed to be filled.

He had seen countless beautiful women. But after so many years, only two people could make him feel this way.

One was Shangguan Yue, and the other was Chu Liuyue.

The lucky thing was that Chu Liuyue had a lowly background, not like that person who was high and mighty like the sun and nobody could reach her.

"You just need to stay by my side obediently. I can give you whatever you want," said Jiang Yucheng seriously.

This wasn't a heaven-defying oath but an actual promise.

According to his status and identity, he did have the confidence to say such things.

Looking at Jiang Yucheng's seemingly very determined appearance, Chu Liuyue was so angry that she laughed. "Eldest Young Master Jiang, I'm afraid there are some things you don't quite remember, so let me remind you. Firstly, you'll be getting married to the Third Princess tomorrow. What will happen to her if you do this? Secondly, your status will change from tomorrow onward. In the future, you'll be the Third Princess's husband and her officer. I think I don't need to tell you how to write the word 'loyalty,' right? Thirdly, you haven't asked for my opinion from start to end. Aren't you being too rash right now?"

Chu Liuyue raised her chin slightly, and an extremely cold, slight smile was plastered on her red lips. "Also, you really can't give me what I want."

...

It was already evening, and the sun was setting in the west. The remaining glow of the setting sun dyed the sky a warm orange color.

The night breeze at the start of summer had a hint of warmth to it, but Shangguan Wan—who hurriedly rushed to Xin Li Garden—was completely ice-cold.

Her mind kept replaying various scenes continuously.

At one moment, it would be the interactions between Jiang Yucheng and Shangguan Yue from the earlier years. The next moment, it would be Shangguan Yue's face of hopelessness in the royal family's ancestral hall. Then, it would be the painting that had been treasured and safely kept in the study for ten years.

Her blood boiled, but she didn't know where to vent her anger. It just coursed through her veins, causing her entire person to be on the verge of exploding.

At this moment, only one thought flashed across her mind—find Jiang Yucheng and ask him clearly!

When the guards saw Shangguan Wan coming, they were shocked and hurriedly bowed. “Greetings, Third Princess!”

Why would she come here at this point?

“Where's Jiang Yucheng?” questioned Shangguan Wan coldly.

The guards saw that her expression was terrible and didn't dare to hide it from her, so one immediately said, “Eldest Young Master is in Thousand View Garden's zither room. I'll immediately send someone to inform—”

Before the guard could even finish his sentence, Shangguan Wan already went forward in a fury.

“Third Princess—” The two guards wanted to stop her, but they didn't dare to.

Even though Jiang Yucheng had always been managing this Xin Li Garden, it was still the Tianling royal family's territory. If Shangguan Wan wanted to enter, who could stop her?

The duo exchanged glances and saw the confusion and anxiety in each other's eyes. *Is the Third Princess going to cause trouble for Eldest Young Master? From the looks of it.. Is she going to cause a scene?!*

...

Shangguan Wan didn't stop in her tracks and advanced all the way.

Thinking that he was actually still at that place at this moment, the hatred in her heart deepened. *He can go anywhere, but why must he come to the zither room?! In the past, I still thought that Jiang Yucheng guarded this area very strictly because he had harmed Shangguan Yue here. Now that I think about it, it's the place where he doted on her in the past!*

She hurriedly walked over and saw the lake glistening from afar.

Just as she was about to go forward, she suddenly saw two people standing by the lake.

One of them was wearing a light-green robe, and he had his hands behind his back. It was Jiang Yucheng!

But that person in front of him was wearing a red dress, and the loose strands of her hair dropped down. She looked extremely pretty.

Who else could it be other than Chu Liuyue?!

Why is she also here?! Shangguan Wan was dazed for a moment, and her instincts told her that something seemed to be amiss between the two of them, so she instinctively stopped and hid her figure.

Coincidentally, she heard Jiang Yucheng's voice at this moment. "Tomorrow's wedding is between Shangguan Wan and me. You don't have to care if I betray her or not. Also, even after she's the lord and I'm her subordinate tomorrow, it doesn't mean that I have to act according to her wishes for everything. Lastly, I thought marrying me would only be beneficial to you and not disadvantageous at all. Countless women in the Tianling Dynasty want to suck up to me, but they're not as good as you—they're not you. Therefore, I only told you my previous words. If you insist, then I can ask again. I want to marry you. Will you marry me?"

Shangguan Wan suddenly covered her mouth.

Chu Liuyue squinted her eyes and suddenly laughed. Her original expression was slightly cold as if there was a layer of thin ice, but her smile looked like millions of flowers blossoming.

When the remaining glow of the setting sun reflected on her ice-cold face, her looks were outstanding as her eyes sparkled like the stars.

"I don't want to." She smiled and said, "I have someone that I like."

Chapter 863: Return One Hundred Fold of What She Suffered

Jiang Yucheng was suddenly stunned. *How familiar is this scene!? Some time ago, that person also stood here smiling and said that her heart was already taken! The same place, the same words, the same smile. The only thing different is that I never had the chance to express what I felt when that person said those words.*

He had put himself down and sincerely invited Chu Liuyue to go with him, but he got rejected!

At one moment, these two scenes seemed to mix in front of Jiang Yucheng's eyes. He couldn't differentiate if the person in front was Chu Liuyue or Shangguan Yue!

Something tumbled in his heart, and he clutched Chu Liuyue's wrist! "That won't do!"

Chu Liuyue easily avoided it. Even though Jiang Yucheng's cultivation level was higher than hers, her movement techniques were now much better after the intense training at the Red Moon Desert.

It wasn't hard for her to deal with Jiang Yucheng.

Chu Liuyue moved a step back and raised her brows slightly, the smile on her face fading. "Eldest Young Master Jiang, please respect yourself."

Hatred and contempt flashed across her eyes, forming a steel needle that deeply stabbed into Jiang Yucheng's heart!

The vengeance Jiang Yucheng had suppressed for many years suddenly rushed up and overwhelmed his head!

As if he had blurted it out, he angrily said, "I don't allow it! Other than me, you can't like anyone else!"

Jiang Yucheng suddenly erupted and frightened Chu Liuyue. *In my memory, no matter the situation, Jiang Yucheng rarely showed such enraged moments. Even when he harmed others, his expression was always calm. Why... does he seem to be so agitated?*

Chu Liuyue was alerted and moved a step back. Then, she raised her brows slightly and coldly said, “You originally can’t force someone to like you. Jiang Yucheng, please wake up!”

When he saw her angry, Jiang Yucheng’s heart trembled for some reason.

Looking into those furious and black gem-like eyes, his expression changed as he opened his mouth and lowered his voice. “A’Yue, don’t be angry...”

As if he was begging, he softly muttered and wanted to reach out to pull her back.

Chu Liuyue felt that Jiang Yucheng was indeed crazy. *What is he doing?! A’Yue? Who is he calling?*

The deep hatred emerged from her heart, and she was about to turn around to leave.

But at this moment, an enraged voice filled with hatred sounded by the side. “Jiang Yucheng!”

Chu Liuyue looked up. *Hah, what a coincidence. The incoming person is actually Shangguan Wan. When I was tangled with Jiang Yucheng just now, I didn’t notice that someone had come. From the looks of it, she should’ve heard quite a bit, right? But no matter how much she has heard, Jiang Yucheng’s every single word and sentence are like sharp knives stabbing into her heart.*

The Third Princess’s sharp shrill finally made Jiang Yucheng recover his senses, and he looked at his empty hands.

Chu Liuyue stood at the side, far away from him. Her entire body exuded her hatred for him—it was as if another glance would dirty her eyes.

His heart suddenly ached. *It was like this in the past, and it's the same even now!*

Emotions rapidly gathered in his eyes coldly as he looked at Shangguan Wan and coldly asked, “Why are you here?”

Shangguan Wan sneered. “I’m the Third Princess, and this Xin Li Garden is the royal family’s garden. Why can’t I be here?! But you, Jiang Yucheng—we’re already getting married tomorrow, yet what are you doing? You’re actually proposing to another woman?! Jiang Yucheng, do you have a heart!”

Only she knew how much her heart hurt when she heard those words just now! She originally thought that her heart was already numb after she saw the painting. But when she came here and saw how her husband-to-be treated Chu Liuyue, she then realized that it could hurt even more!

It was like someone had gripped her heart tightly, yanked it out, threw it onto the ice-cold floor, and stepped on it harshly!

Ridiculous! How laughable!

Seeing Shangguan Wan yelling at the top of her lungs, Jiang Yucheng knitted his brows tightly.

The nearby guards had already been deployed away by him earlier since he originally wanted to talk to Chu Liuyue properly, but he didn’t expect Shangguan Wan to barge in and cause such a scene.

“Calm down! As the princess, how are you different from a crazy b*tch by screaming like this?!” scolded Jiang Yucheng coldly.

This sentence completely ignited the fire in Shangguan Wan's heart! "Hahahaha! Crazy b*tch? You think I'm a crazy b*tch?"

Shangguan Wan pointed at her own nose and shrilly scolded as if she had heard the biggest joke in the world. "Jiang Yucheng, you betrayed me first!"

Then, she harshly pointed toward Chu Liuyue at the side. "What's so good about this b*tch that you can do this?! She's just a lowly thing. You're actually treating me like this because of her?!"

Chu Liuyue squinted dangerously.

But before she could act up, Jiang Yucheng already coldly spoke. "Shangguan Wan, watch what you say! Don't forget your status!"

Shangguan Wan suddenly laughed, and her five features contorted. Her gaze turned crazy as she slowly said, "Jiang Yucheng, don't think I don't know why you like her. Isn't it because she looks very similar to Shangguan Yue!?"

Jiang Yucheng's heart skipped a beat, and his expression turned sharp. "What nonsense are you saying?!"

However, Shangguan Wan ignored his anger and turned to look at Chu Liuyue with a mocking gaze. "Chu Liuyue, do you really think he's genuine to you? You're just a substitute! Your eyes look exactly the same as those of my short-lived elder sister, Shangguan Yue! He misses that person so much, and now that he's looking for you, you're just her substitute!"

“Shangguan Wan!” Jiang Yucheng cried out. He instinctively felt that something was wrong as he hurriedly went forward and wanted to pull Shangguan Wan away. “Your brain is messed up. I’ll bring you away to wake you up!”

Shangguan Wan flung his hand away. “Don’t touch me! I’m very sober!”

Her eyes turned red as she stared at Jiang Yucheng while laughing coldly. Then, she lightly asked, “Jiang Yucheng, what are you afraid of? Are you afraid that she will know that you just treat her as Shangguan Yue’s substitute, or are you afraid of people knowing that you still miss Shangguan Yue even though you’re marrying me tomorrow? Or... You’re most afraid of people knowing that you’ve liked Shangguan Yue for ten years, yet you personally—”

Smack!

A resounding slap sounded!

Shangguan Wan was thrown back and immediately collapsed onto the floor as half her face rapidly swelled up. Blood then flowed out from the corner of her mouth.

One could tell how harsh this slap was!

Jiang Yucheng looked down at her from above, and his eyes had murderous intent. “Shangguan Wan, you’re crazy!”

Chu Liuyue stood at the side and coldly watched this scene as if it had nothing to do with her.

Staring at the duo going for each other's throats, her lips suddenly curled up as her gaze was cold and nonchalant. *What a joke. The scene from two years ago actually happened again, but this time, everyone has changed their positions. All the pain and suffering I previously went through will slowly be repaid to them now.*

Chapter 864: Don't Ask

I haven't even done anything yet, but these people have begun to fight. Now, they can finally have a taste of the heart-wrenching betrayal I suffered back then.

Chu Liuyue pushed the loose strands of hair by her cheek to the back of her ear, looking like she wanted to watch a good show.

If it were someone else, they would definitely want to leave immediately when they saw this scene. After all, the two people going at each other's throats were the distinguished Third Princess and the person in power, Jiang Yucheng.

It would be troublesome if one got involved with either party. The more one knew, the more dangerous it would be.

Chu Liuyue was different. These two were her mortal enemies, so she would be more than happy to see them in such a commotion!

What was there to be scared of? These two people should be afraid!

Jiang Yucheng's slap made Shangguan Wan's see stars as an intense bloody aura surged into her mouth.

But at this moment, she finally recovered some of her senses. *Chu Liuyue is still standing at the side! If I had really exposed everything just now... The consequences would be unimaginable!*

Scared, Shangguan Wan held her face as deep regret overwhelmed her.

Jiang Yucheng looked down at her from above and even wanted to kill her! *Shangguan Wan has always been impulsive and unreasonable, but her temper has become even worse in the past two years. I have always been tolerating her, but I didn't expect that she could be so brainless to this extent! If I hadn't stopped her in time earlier, was she going to loudly tell everyone about what we did?!*

Even though Jiang Yucheng liked Chu Liuyue, he had never thought of telling her about these matters!

If more people knew about such secretive matters, they would die if they were careless for a moment! However, Shangguan Wan almost blurted everything out directly!

"Anyone there!?" Jiang Yucheng questioned in a commanding tone.

Two people immediately came out from the dark and went down on one knee. "Greetings, Eldest Young Master!"

"Third Princess isn't very sane and needs to rest in bed. You two, immediately prepare a horse carriage and follow me to send the Third Princess back to the palace."

"Yes!" The two guards didn't dare to speak further as they acted according to Jiang Yucheng's wishes.

Shangguan Wan originally wanted to say something, but Jiang Yucheng grabbed her wrist and dragged her up from the floor.

She hid behind with lingering fear. *Jiang Yucheng's previous gaze... was indeed too frightening!*

Not to mention that she felt like she had swallowed a fly once she thought of Jiang Yucheng liking Shangguan Yue for ten years and that he still couldn't even forget her at this point. She felt very disgusted.

"Wan'er." Jiang Yucheng exerted force with his hands and tightly clutched the hand that wanted to break free. He glanced at her with much warning, but his tone was much gentler. "Wan'er, you seem to be sick. I'll bring you back to the palace for some proper rest."

Shangguan Wan felt hatred and fear since her wrist was gripped so tightly that it hurt, but she didn't dare to be unreasonable anymore and didn't say a word.

Jiang Yucheng was then a little more satisfied as he turned around to glance at Chu Liuyue. "Sorry for letting you see such a joke. Just... Take it as nothing has happened today."

He didn't want to kill Chu Liuyue. Besides, the current Chu Liuyue had a legendary fiend and a Dancing Lotus, so her status was different from before. They couldn't easily touch her.

Chu Liuyue secretly felt that it was a pity, but she nodded in understanding and didn't say anything else as she directly lifted her leg and left without even casting a side-glance.

Even when she walked far away, she didn't even turn back to take a look.

When Chu Liuyue's figure finally disappeared, Jiang Yucheng then looked at Shangguan Wan coldly. "What do you know?"

His voice was ice-cold and heartless as if he were interrogating a criminal.

Shangguan Wan shuddered and tilted her head. "I-I don't know anything... Ah!"

Jiang Yucheng squeezed her wrist, and her bones cracked. Shangguan Wan was in so much pain that her face turned white!

"Answer me!"

"It hurts! It hurts! I'll just say it!" Shangguan Wan couldn't endure it in the end as she mustered up her courage and stiffly yelled, "I went to your study!"

Jiang Yucheng instantly understood, and his expression became extremely dangerous. "You touched my painting?"

Shangguan Wan had never heard him use such a tone to talk to her and felt very aggrieved and enraged, but she felt deep horror as well.

Her tears dropped down. "Yes, I touched it! I saw your painting! So what? Jiang Yucheng, you've only loved Shangguan Yue from start to end! You admired her for ten years, and where does that put me?"

Jiang Yucheng looked at her expressionlessly. “There’s no use in saying all of this. Taking tomorrow’s wedding into account, I’ll let you off this time. However, don’t let me know that you’re doing such things. I’ll send you back later, and you should prepare for it properly. Nothing is allowed to go wrong tomorrow! As for everything today... You better not mention it any more!”

Shangguan Wan laughed bitterly. “Jiang Yucheng, what am I in your eyes? If you really treat her so well, why would you ask me to go against her? Don’t forget that you were the one who pushed her to her death!”

Jiang Yucheng suddenly went close, pinched her chin, and said properly, “Yes, I did do all those things. You don’t have to keep reminding me! If you really want an answer, then I’ll tell you this: I have never compared her to you. I can kill her, and I can kill you even more. Do you understand?”

Then, he flung Shangguan Wan’s hand away.

Shangguan Wan looked down, and the hatred in her heart boiled. But in the end, she still said, “I understand. Everything tomorrow will go according to your plan.”

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Yuan Zhen Year 41, Sixth of July, Tianling Dynasty.

Third Princess Shangguan Wan was going to marry the eldest son of Grand Tutor Jiang Lizuo—Jiang Yucheng!

Chapter 865: The Big Day

Shangguan Wan's wedding day—which was also the day she succeeded the throne—was naturally celebrated by the entire Tianling Dynasty. In fact, things had become bustling in Xi Ling City since three days ago, and people became even more excited on the very day itself. From the time Shangguan Yue passed away two years ago, there hadn't been such a grand celebration since.

Red satin fluttered on the streets, and almost every household had hung up festive red lanterns. People flocked to the streets, and laughter could be heard everywhere. Everyone's faces were filled with excitement and anticipation as they wanted to see how grand this wedding would be as well as join in this celebration.

Black Guards were lined up on both sides of the street outside the Jiang Residence leading to the palace, and each of them guarded their posts seriously. The pavement—which stretched on for miles—was also lined with red brocade embroidered with golden clouds, making it look luxurious and vivid as it glistened under the sunlight.

Normally, the scale of a mere princess's wedding wouldn't be so large and grand, but it was Shangguan Wan's coronation today. As the empress-to-be, she naturally could afford and had the right for such grandeur.

At the Jiang Residence's entrance, 108 firecrackers set off continuously, with sparks landing everywhere and forming a thick layer of dust on the ground.

A Black Kicking-Snow Colt stopped at the entrance of the Jiang Residence. It was an eighth-grade fiend with a robust body and sturdy limbs. It was pure black except for its hooves—which were snow-white in color as if it had been treading on snowy grounds. Its eyes, on the other hand, were like clean and pure turquoise.

Amidst everyone's expectations, Jiang Yucheng finally stepped out of the residence dressed in red, with his hair pulled back by a white jade crown atop his head. Known for his good looks in Xi Ling City, he appeared even taller and dashing in this attire.

His appearance immediately drew whispers from the crowd, and the eyes of many women lit up as they looked at him blushing with undisguised admiration. In terms of background, appearance, and talent, Jiang Yucheng was indubitably ranked top in Xi Ling City. "Only he is worthy of marrying the princess..."

Soft murmurs could be heard coming from the crowd. "Marrying a member of the royal family may not be that good, especially since he's marrying the Third Princess... He'll have even less freedom in the future since he's her subject first and foremost. Being her husband comes second..."

"That said, the entire Jiang family's status will rise after today! Even Eldest Young Master Jiang will have more speaking rights at court... This is something that many people want but don't have!"

"Exactly! Although he has the power in his hands, it's only inevitable that he gets criticized because he didn't have a suitable identity... Now that they're married, this will no longer be a problem."

"Hah, it's only because of the late Crown Princess's sudden death that he gets to enjoy his current status. He was tasked to deal with the urgent matters, but once he took over, he refused to return the power and held onto it until now. And now, it's just going to be official... Nobody will be able to stop him from doing whatever he wants in the future..."

"Shh—quiet! Do you want your head to roll?!"

Things wouldn't end well for these people should they be heard by Jiang Yucheng. But other than the people around them, their conversation fortunately couldn't be heard by others in this crowded and bustling street.

Jiang Yucheng walked to the Black Kicking-Snow Colt and mounted it with ease. Behind him were gift-bearers carrying mahogany boxes that contained various treasures. They formed such a long line one could hardly see the end of it.

Other than the Jiang Residence members themselves who had prepared these bridal gifts, nobody knew what precious gifts these boxes contained.

Jiang Yucheng kicked the colt's belly lightly, and the colt started moving forward.

...

On the streets filled with ceremonial music and the sounds of gongs and drums, Jiang Yucheng and his entourage began heading toward the palace. From afar, it was an impressive sight with countless people moving along with them.

The wedding was special this time as it would be held in the palace's Lang Kun Hall, so all the guests had already entered the palace to await Jiang Yucheng's arrival.

Sitting on his colt, Jiang Yucheng could see the majestic palace when he looked up. He appeared calm as his eyes gleamed darkly. He had imagined this scene countless times, and it finally came true after so many years. Although the person waiting for him on the other side of the door and street was another person, it didn't matter to him. *All I need to do is step into that place. It doesn't matter who is behind that door!*

...

Even before the crack of dawn, things had been busy at the palace. As the wedding ceremony was a complicated and tedious process with a lot of preparations to be made, Chan Yi repeatedly checked with the wedding planners to ensure that nothing would go wrong.

Inside Huayang Palace.

Shangguan Wan had also gotten up early on this day to allow two experienced nannies to help her get dressed up. Of course, she had put on her mask before allowing them to enter the room.

Although the injuries on her face had improved a lot and were no longer festering, she still had scars of varying depths on her face. It would take them a month to heal and disappear completely. Besides, one side of her face was still red and swollen from Jiang Yucheng's slap.

The two nannies were old veterans who had served in the palace for many years and had helped out in the weddings of a few princesses. Still, they couldn't help but feel nervous when they came to Huayang Palace to help Shangguan Wan get dressed because today was also the latter's coronation day.

While they had indeed waited on several princesses before, it was the first time they were waiting on someone of this status and helping out in a wedding of this scale. Everyone knew that not even the slightest mistake was allowed to be made in this ceremony.

There had been women ruling the Tianling Dynasty before, but it was far and few between in history. Everyone thought that Shangguan Yue would be the one succeeding the throne, but with her sudden demise and the Emperor in an unconscious state, the throne eventually ended up in the hands of Shangguan Wan, who used to be the insignificant Third Princess.

Aside from this, the two nannies soon realized another problem—Shangguan Wan didn't seem to be in a good mood. Considering that today was her big day, they found it strange that she was sitting still with a blank expression and that her vibe was so frosty that it seemed capable of freezing the entire room.

Not only was the Third Princess having her wedding, but she would also be holding her coronation ceremony. Either of the events was a dream come true to others, let alone both. Hence, they couldn't figure out what there was to be upset about when she would become the most esteemed person and the Tianling Dynasty's owner from today onward.

Not to mention that Jiang Yucheng was the dream lover of countless women. All the women in the Tianling Dynasty were envious of her marriage with him.

That said, the nannies would never dare to say such things to Shangguan Wan. They warily helped her with her dressing and makeup and put the phoenix coronet and cape on her.

Finally, they heard Chan Yi make an announcement from outside: "The Prince Consort has entered the palace!"

Chapter 866: Much Grander

It was only then that Shangguan Wan's icy expression showed a hint of emotion. *He's finally here...*

"Your Highness, the Prince Consort looks especially handsome today!" The palace maid that came to announce Jiang Yucheng's arrival said this cheerfully but was met with silence instead.

"I got it. You may leave," answered Shangguan Wan blandly a moment later.

W-what's going on... Why doesn't Her Highness seem happy at the news? Shouldn't she feel shy and happy that her groom has come to fetch her? But why does it seem like... she doesn't care at all? The

palace maid was taken aback by Shangguan Wan's unenthusiastic response. She had planned to get a reward for saying some nice things to the latter, but the unexpected situation left her at a loss.

"Why are you still standing there? Run along and go do what you need to do! You'll be punished if you fail to do your duties well!" Chan Yi—who was waiting at the door—scolded the palace maid softly.

"Y-yes!" The frightened palace maid immediately responded to her and left after that. She still had a look of confusion on her face when she was outside though. *That's strange. Her Highness and Eldest Young Master Jiang are usually a loving couple, so it doesn't make sense that she'd behave this way on the day of their wedding... Don't tell me that she was upset because I praised Eldest Young Master Jiang?*

At the thought of that possibility, the palace maid cursed herself for having a blabbermouth.

Inside the palace, Shangguan Wan looked at her reflection in the bronze mirror. Her scars and injuries had been completely covered up, and the exquisite makeup made her look even more beautiful than usual.

Needless to say, she was also considered a top beauty in Xi Ling City, but her outfit added allure to her. The only thing was that the slight resentment in her eyes spoiled her overall aesthetic beauty as it made her look somewhat cruel.

Seeing this, one of the nannies smiled and said ingratiatingly, "You're as beautiful as a fairy, Your Highness! Out of the many mistresses I've served over the years, you're the most beautiful one of all!"

"Yeah! The Prince Consort will be amazed by your beauty!" added the other nanny.

Shangguan Wan scoffed inside her heart. As she slowly touched the phoenix hairpin on her head, she quietly asked, “Oh? Then... How do I compare to my elder sister in terms of looks?”

The elder sister Shangguan Wan referred to was naturally the late Crown Princess—Shangguan Yue. Thus, the two nannies—who were taken aback by the question—felt awkward answering it.

Although Shangguan Wan was indeed beautiful, she paled in comparison to her half-sister. Just their demeanors alone spoke volumes about their differences, much less their appearances. The former was conventionally pretty, while the latter’s otherworldly beauty made people feel that it was blasphemous to even take a second look at her and that they could only admire her from afar.

Truly, there was no comparison between them.

A quick-witted nanny smiled. “It’s your big day, so you’re naturally the most beautiful woman, Your Highness!”

Shangguan Wan said nothing in response, although mockery was evident in her eyes. Even without them saying it, she knew full well that she wasn’t on par with Shangguan Yue in terms of the appearance department. As shown in the painting, the fourteen-year-old Shangguan Yue was already a stunning beauty, which was no wonder why Jiang Yucheng was mesmerized with her for a whole decade.

Just then, loud ceremonial music could be heard coming from outside, which meant that Jiang Yucheng had arrived at their palace.

The palace maid that was scolded earlier hastily took two steps back and said eagerly, “Your Highness, the Prince Consort dismounted from the horse and came here right away on foot after entering the palace! He can’t wait to marry you!”

Actually, there was quite a distance from the palace gate to Huayang Palace, but the palace maid said it this way to emphasize how fond Jiang Yucheng was of Shangguan Wan.

Sure enough, the two nannies chimed in. "Looks like the Prince Consort is deeply in love with you, Your Highness! He's really eager to take you as his wife!"

Deeply in love with me? I wonder if they would still say that if they knew that he had given me a tight slap across the face, got his men to escort me back here, and given me a harsh warning. Shangguan Wan scoffed internally before putting the red veil over her head, which covered her mocking expression.

Chan Yi walked over and helped Shangguan Wan out of Huayang Palace, where Jiang Yucheng and his entourage were already waiting outside.

Under countless watchful eyes, Jiang Yucheng walked up, stretched out his hand toward her, and gently said, "I'm here to marry you, Wan'er."

...

Meanwhile, everyone was gathered in the huge square in front of Lang Kun Hall, which was paved with white jade stone. The court officials stood neatly on the left, while the big shots from the various major clans stood on the right. Their surroundings were naturally heavily guarded by the Black Guards.

In the middle of the square was a red carpet, which extended up the nine flights of stairs and all the way to Lang Kun Hall's entrance.

The reason why the wedding and the coronation ceremony were held here was that Lang Kun Hall was where the Tianling Power Staff was enshrined. It was a well-known fact that the Tianling Power Staff was the true symbol of the Tianling Dynasty's power and authority.

To everyone here, the wedding wasn't the highlight of the day, for they were more interested in whether Shangguan Wan would be able to successfully go up the nine flights of stairs and enter Lang Kull Hall to take the Tianling Power Staff.

The stairs—which were carved with dragons—looked majestic, solemn, and ancient. Standing atop the stairs, one could already vaguely sense the power they contained, what more of the Tianling Power Staff.

Dragon Teeth Mountain and Chong Xu Cabinet were standing next to each other. Mu Hongyu—who went up to Chu Liuyue and the others—couldn't help murmuring when she saw the scale of the ceremony. "As expected of a grand ceremony—this is really impressive..."

Ye Ranran, however, blinked. "This is nothing. You ain't seen nothing yet, Hongyu!"

"This is nothing?" asked Mu Hongyu in surprise. *But this is Shangguan Wan's wedding-cum-coronation ceremony. Both are very important events, so it doesn't make sense that there's anything grander than this.*

"Yeah! Back then—" Ye Ranran paused and carefully looked around before lowering her voice to a whisper. "The late Crown Princess's fifteenth birthday celebration was even grander than this, and so was the Grand Court Meeting! It was also really grand when she came back from inspecting the frontiers!"

"All that for the late Crown Princess?" Mu Hongyu widened her eyes in surprise. *Even her birthday celebration was grander than Shangguan Wan's wedding and ascension ceremony... I wonder how important that person was?*

“Of course! The Third Princess is only a princess. She can’t be compared to the late Crown Princess.”

As Chu Liuyue listened from the side, she smiled and said nothing.

Just then, a melodious trumpet sound filled the air.

“The Third Princess and her Prince Consort are here!”

Chapter 867: Meng Jingzhi

A robust voice rang instantly rang across the entire Lang Kun Hall, and everyone in the square turned their heads in the direction of the voice to see two people standing in front of the majestic palace gate hand-in-hand.

On the left was Jiang Yucheng dressed in a red outfit that had dragons embroidered on the collar and cuffs and a jade belt that was one finger thick. At a glance, he looked very handsome indeed. Just his looks alone were top-notch.

“The Prince Consort sure is dashing. It’s no wonder that the Third Princess is so smitten by him that she wants to marry him...”

“Hey, don’t forget that the late Crown Princess used to like Jiang Yucheng too! Ordinary men naturally can’t be compared to him!”

“That’s true. Even across the entire Xi Ling, he ranks top in all aspects among the younger generation.”

Just as everyone was gossiping about Jiang Yucheng, someone suddenly snorted and said, “Hmph! He’s nothing but a scoundrel who’s hungry for fame and fortune! No matter how good-looking he is, he’s ugly on the inside!”

That person didn’t bother to lower his voice, so almost everyone in the square heard what he said loud and clear since everyone present wasn’t weak in cultivation.

The noise instantly died down as everyone turned to see who was so bold to say such things at this time and place. Chu Liuyue also looked up slightly and was mildly surprised by who she saw.

The speaker was a middle-aged man with a huge and sturdy build and tanned skin. He totally looked like a mountain just standing there alone, but what attracted the people’s attention wasn’t his appearance—it was his black armor and longsword.

Clearly, he was a general.

In the Tianling Dynasty, very few people could openly enter the palace while carrying a sword. Of course, the very fact that he was standing in front of the officials showed his noble status.

When everyone saw who the speaker was, some who intended to watch the fun retracted their gazes hurriedly. *Tsk, I can’t believe I forgot about this God of Death! He’s Meng Jingzhi, the Black Guard’s Commander-in-Chief!*

Almost everyone in the Tianling Dynasty knew about Meng Jingzhi and his great battle achievements. Although he was stationed at western frontiers for decades and rarely returned to Xi Ling, his name alone was enough to strike fear in people.

If it weren't for the Third Princess's coronation ceremony, he wouldn't have bothered to come back either. Given that Jiang Yucheng was currently governing the Tianling Dynasty, the only person who would dare to openly insult him like this was probably Meng Jingzhi, who held military power in his hands.

"Commander Meng, what do you mean by this?" Jiang Lizuo—who was the Grand Tutor as well as one of the three highest-ranking civil officials—was also standing in front of the officials and was only a few steps away from Meng Jingzhi. His face instantly darkened when he heard what the latter said.

Meng Jingzhi snorted and added, "What, did I say anything wrong? If he really had feelings for the late Crown Princess, he wouldn't have ended up together with the Third Princess of all people. She treated them so well when she was still alive, but they're so eager to marry each other when it hasn't even been three years since her demise. How ridiculous! If anyone dares do such a thing in the western frontier, the barbarians will surely behead them!"

As a commander who had fought on battlefields for years, Meng Jingzhi himself exuded a thick and cold murderous aura. When he spoke even more harshly because he felt indignant on Shangguan Yue's behalf, he appeared even more frightening.

The officials standing right behind him couldn't help retreating out of fear of being implicated.

Jiang Lizuo didn't expect Meng Jingzhi to speak so bluntly and crudely. His face turned white out of anger. "Y-you! Meng Jingzhi, you're being insolent! You're insulting the Third Princess!"

Standing next to him, Yuwen Wei stepped forward and got between the two while smiling gently. "Alright, alright. The Third Princess and the Prince Consort will be here soon. Things will get ugly if this matter blows up. Let's just calm down!"

Jiang Lizuo's hands trembled with anger. *Meng Jingzhi started it first! He happily said his piece, yet I can't refute him? Everyone here heard what he said loud and clear!*

Meng Jingzhi gave him a condescending look. "Hah. How can you say that I'm insulting Her Highness when I'm just stating the facts? It seems like... you know how unpleasant this matter sounds too, Jiang Lizuo?"

"Meng Jingzhi, don't be cocky!" Jiang Lizuo was so angry that he wanted to charge right up and punch Meng Jingzhi. Unfortunately for him, the latter was one of the top elites in the Tianling Dynasty. He would just be seeking his own death if he really did that.

While trying to stop Jiang Lizuo, Yuwen Wei turned to Meng Jingzhi and said, "Commander Meng, today is Her Highness's big day after all. Please show me some face and keep your comments to yourself."

Only then did Meng Jingzhi cease talking.

The countless eyes on them made Jiang Lizuo feel embarrassed. He held himself back for a while before saying with much difficulty, "I dare you to say that in front of the Third Princess! Let's see if you can continue to act arrogantly after that! As a subject, don't you know how you should behave in front of your ruler?!"

"I'm only loyal to Tianling!" Meng Jingzhi scoffed indifferently. *Subject? Ruler? Putting aside the fact that His Majesty is still alive, even if he isn't, whether or not Shangguan Wan can lift the Tianling Power Staff remains unknown!*

Although the farce finally ended, the people around them had different reactions to it. Some were envious and happy, while others felt disdain and mockery. Meng Jingzhi might've sounded a little cocky earlier, but what he said wasn't completely wrong.

Jiang Yucheng was first engaged to Shangguan Yue and would've wedded her if not for what happened to her. Everything changed with her demise, however. The fact that he and Shangguan Wan were holding such a grand wedding when it was barely two years since Shangguan Yue's death made people uncomfortable, but nobody dared to say a word about it.

An awkward atmosphere set in, and the surrounding air seemed to be frozen.

Chu Liuyue looked at Meng Jingzhi with mixed feelings, having never expected him to speak up on her behalf. She had only met him a few times, and her impression of him was that he was a fierce and serious man. Moreover, she had promoted Mu Qinghe to be the Black Guard's lieutenant, which was as good as dividing up Meng Jingzhi's power. She had always thought that the latter wasn't a fan of hers. *This is unexpected...*

"The newlyweds are here! Please ascend the nine flights of heavenly stairs to pay your bows!"

Chapter 868: Bows

Jiang Yucheng and Shangguan Wan had already walked over and were standing right in the middle of the square. All chatter ceased as everyone focused on them.

Shangguan Wan was exquisitely dressed today. A long red phoenix tail trailed behind her for miles, and the gold thread woven into the material glistened when she moved. As she was still wearing a veil over her head, nobody could see her face. Still, this set of attire looked very luxurious on her.

What the couple needed to do next was walk up the nine flights of stairs and pay their bows in front of Lang Kun Hall. By right, the Emperor should be waiting in front of Lang Kun Hall, but this procedure was omitted because he was currently still in an unconscious state.

Standing side by side with their hands tightly clasped together, Jiang Yucheng and Shangguan Wan looked like a match made in heaven.

“Wan’er, let’s go.” Jiang Yucheng turned his head slightly, speaking gently with a smile on his face as if the woman standing next to him was the love of his life.

Shangguan Wan nodded, but nobody could see the expression she was currently wearing.

The two walked forward hand in hand, with Shangguan Wan taking the lead to step onto the first step. Jiang Yucheng deliberately slowed down a little in a show of respect to her.

In terms of the way he spoke and acted, nobody could find any fault with him.

Shangguan Wan continued to walk up to the second flight of stairs. Here, they could feel the faint pressure that was coming from Lang Kun Hall, but this was nothing to them.

As they progressed on though, the pressure on them became heavier and heavier. Each time they took a step, they would need to use more force to withstand the increasingly heavier pressure.

Thus, Shangguan Wan felt a little drained by the time they reached the seventh flight of stairs. She wasn’t as strong as the beginner stage-seven warrior she should be since she just healed her Yuan meridian, so her body felt as heavy as lead.

Jiang Yucheng soon sensed that something was wrong with Shangguan Wan. As he had previously resorted to using tricks to recover his cultivation level to the peak of the seventh stage, he was faring slightly better than her. Still, the pressure coming out from Lang Kun Hall couldn’t be underestimated, so he secretly channeled his force to push her up the eighth flight of stairs.

Shangguan Wan's legs shook, and her body swayed a little.

Frowning slightly, Jiang Yucheng quickly supported her and went up the stairs with gritted determination.

Standing here, they got a clear view of Lang Kun Hall's open doors, which were usually closed and only opened at times like this with the joint efforts of the royal family elders. Once the barrier was opened, the Tianling Power Staff's aura spread everywhere.

This was the reason why they felt the terrifying pressure. In fact, the closer they got, the heavier the pressure was.

Everyone in the square was currently staring closely at them. Some of the people's expressions changed slightly when they saw Shangguan Wan's unsteady step.

Someone from the crowd asked, "Did Her Highness lose her footing just now?"

Despite being covered by the phoenix coronet, scarf, and her long skirt, many people saw her swaying just now. Hence, someone refuted it uncertainly. "Surely not... If she can't even make it up the stairs, how is she even going to lift the Tianling Power Staff?"

There had been people who were unable to lift the Tianling Power Staff in the past. Four of them, in fact. Without exception, those four people were stripped of their right to inherit the throne and no longer had the chance to try again.

Even though they were still members of the royalty and could still enjoy the same privileges they had before, this was a great shame and humiliation that followed them for life. Among the four people, two couldn't withstand the pressure of the failure and chose to commit suicide, while one went berserk from cultivating too much and eventually died from slitting his vein. The last one, on the other hand, never set foot outside the palace again and died of depression in less than three years.

This showed how important it was for the successors to lift the Tianling Power Staff. Thus, the emperors would exercise extra caution when selecting their heir and would tend to start assessing their talents from a very young age. Those who were found to be talented would be groomed, and once they were grown up, the most outstanding one out of them would be selected to be the heir.

Shangguan Wan was never the chosen one though. Firstly, her mother was of low status, so she grew up being neglected. Secondly, she was overlooked as she had never once displayed remarkable talent.

Most importantly, the Emperor decided right on the spot that Shangguan Yue would be the heir when the latter was found to possess a Tianjing Yuan meridian upon birth. He never considered anyone else for the position, which was only normal given how rare it was for a Tianjing Yuan meridian to come by.

Alas, nobody foresaw Shangguan Yue dying before her wedding.

During the past two years, Jiang Yucheng and Shangguan Wan joined forces and slowly took control of the court. And now, nobody was more suitable than Shangguan Wan to succeed to the throne.

...

The countless eyes staring at Shangguan Wan were akin to knives stabbing at her back. Knowing that any mistake she made at this critical moment would be magnified exponentially, she clenched her teeth and started channeling even more of her internal force to try and make it through the last flight of stairs.

However, her lead-laden legs just refused to cooperate. This made her panic as burning anxiety coursed through her. *If I can't even get through this stage, how am I going to handle the subsequent—*

Right at this moment, Jiang Yucheng injected force into her body through her palm.

Feeling much more relaxed, Shangguan Wan hastily took another step with Jiang Yucheng following closely behind her. With their hands tightly clasped together, the two finally conquered the last flight of stairs, arriving one after another.

Shangguan Wan heaved a sigh of relief when her feet touched solid ground.

Standing in a line in front of Lang Kun Hall, six elders of the royal family patiently waited for the newlywed's arrival. There should've been eight of them standing there, but only six of them were left because both Elder Qiu Xi and Elder Duanmu Chun had died in Dahuang Swamp.

The elder standing on one end took a step forward, allowing his qi to sink into his dantian as his voice echoed. "The first bow to heaven and earth!"

Shangguan Wan and Jiang Yucheng turned around and bent at the waist.

"The second bow to Tianling!"

The two turned around once more and bowed toward Lang Kun Hall.

"The third bow to each other!"

As they stood facing each other, Shangguan Wan's mind suddenly blanked.

Chapter 869: Third Princess, Please Hold the Staff!

She had waited for this day for a long time, thinking that her love had finally come to fruition. But in reality, the man in front of her didn't have the slightest bit of fond feelings toward her.

Melodious ceremonial music reached her ears, and she was currently in the spotlight, high above the masses. She had thought that she would feel proud and be on cloud nine on this day, but she ended up feeling empty instead. As the memory of Jiang Yucheng's painting surfaced in her mind, her hands started trembling with uncontrollable anger.

Jiang Yucheng was just about to bow to Shangguan Wan when he noticed that she wasn't doing the same. His eyes gleamed coldly before he called out to her in a gentle and soft manner. "Wan'er."

From his smiling face and gentle tone, it seemed as if he was afraid of startling her, but the look in his eyes was ever so cold.

As Shangguan Wan currently had a veil over her head, she couldn't see his appearance clearly, and all she saw was a vague outline. However, she couldn't help but shiver internally in fear when she heard his voice as the memory of his fear and callous treatment toward her was still fresh in her mind. While trying her best to suppress those emotions, she closed her eyes and bowed toward him, finishing the last of the marriage rites.

Her compliance made Jiang Yucheng feel slightly relieved, and he bowed toward her at the same time.

The elder cheerfully announced, "The rites are completed!"

The crowd erupted into cheers, and firecrackers were set off. However, the bustling activity in the square only sounded jarring in Shangguan Wan's ears. Every word of congratulations and blessing seemed to have become a curse on her. *Feelings? Sincerity? Deep conjugal love? It's all just a joke! I worked so hard and waited for this day for so long, only to end up marrying a man who doesn't even like me! This very man even proposed to another woman on the eve of our wedding just because she bears a resemblance to Shangguan Yue—the woman he has liked for a whole decade!*

"Wan'er, we're finally together." An indulgent smile bloomed on Jiang Yucheng's handsome face as he walked forward to lift the veil on Shangguan Wan's head.

Shangguan Wan was dressed to the nines today, wearing exquisite makeup and a phoenix hairpin on her head. She looked stunning and elegant, and when she stood next to Jiang Yucheng, both of them looked like a perfect match.

"Her Highness and the Prince Consort are truly a well-matched couple!"

"Yes! In terms of family background, appearance, and other aspects, there's no better match than this!"

It seemed as if everyone was rejoicing over their marriage.

"So they're considered married now?" Mu Hongyu couldn't help but frown when she took a look at the newlyweds. She leaned closer to Chu Liuyue and whispered to her, "Don't you think that something is odd about them?"

"Hm? In what ways?"

“U-uh... I don’t know how to explain it either! In any case, both of them don’t look too happy... They also seem a little distant even though they’re standing together... I just find it strange. I don’t think they’re all that compatible with each other.” Mu Hongyu had seen her fair share of weddings, and although they weren’t as grand as this one, the brides and grooms were mostly deeply in love. All it took was just one look—they didn’t even need to say anything—and one could tell that they were a lovey-dovey couple. However, she didn’t get such feelings from Shangguan Wan and Jiang Yucheng.

“How is that so? In my opinion, they’re a match made in heaven!” Chu Liuyue curled her lips slightly. As she watched the two perform the marriage rituals on stage, she felt thankful that she didn’t marry Jiang Yucheng back then, or she would’ve been disgusted for life. *This cad is best matched with Shangguan Wan!*

...

Shangguan Wan was also smiling on stage. But despite their joyful appearances, only she and Jiang Yucheng knew what each other was truly thinking. When the latter stretched out his hands to grab hers, she felt sick and cold at his touch but didn’t dare to pull away from him. She could only endure it with a smile.

The two’s superb acting fooled a good number of people who didn’t know the inside story. From what most people saw, everything was progressing smoothly with the bride and groom looking to be in perfect harmony.

Just then, one of the elders announced, “Please bring out the Tianling Power Staff!”

The shout reverberated throughout Lang Kun Hall for a long time and reached everyone’s ears, loud and clear. Everyone instantly snapped to attention as they focused on Lang Kun Hall.

The other five royal elders nodded and turned to enter Lang Kun Hall.

Countless pairs of eager and excited eyes stared at the door, for they knew that the next event was the true highlight of the day.

An ear-splitting rumbling sound was heard coming from within Lang Kun Hall. Many people were slightly shocked as they hurriedly channeled their force to cast a barrier around themselves.

Whoosh!

With a light wave of his arm, the elder who made the announcements cast a silver barrier below the steps to block the terrifying energy fluctuation.

Just as he did so, the five elders finally emerged from Lang Kun Hall while jointly carrying a huge squarish black crystal. It landed with a dull *boom* that made the ground tremble.

The black crystal was half the height of a man, and there was a staff hovering above it. Although one couldn't see its appearance clearly due to the glow enveloping it, one could still feel its tremendous power. Everyone found it a little hard to breathe even from behind their barriers, but they weren't concerned about that as their eyes were all focused on one spot—the Tianling Power Staff, which was the symbol of the Tianling Dynasty's power and authority.

The elder dropped to a knee. "Third Princess, please hold the staff!"

Chapter 870: Did She Fail?

The remaining five royal family elders kneeled down together and said in unison, "Third Princess, please hold the staff!"

Shangguan Wan looked at the Tianling Power Staff floating above the black crystal, took a deep breath in, and gradually walked forward. Finally, she stopped about one step in front of the Tianling Power Staff.

Everyone fell silent and watched this scene.

As long as Shangguan Wan successfully held up the Tianling Power Staff, she could successfully ascend the throne and become the Empress! From then on, she would hold the Tianling Dynasty's power!

Bang bang!

Bang bang!

Shangguan Wan's heart beat wildly, and it almost burst her eardrums. All the blood in her body seemed to course through her limbs.

As she was nervous, her palms were sweating. Both her hands were sticky due to the wetness.

The Tianling Power Staff was as heavy as one ton, and the suppression it contained was even more tremendous! After all, this was left behind by Shangguan Jing personally!

Let alone raising it, Shangguan Wan almost kneeled on the ground and felt that her chest was stuffy just by standing there.

And if she wanted to raise it up, it wasn't enough to have only strength. She must also have the Tianling royal family's bloodline.

The most important thing was that she had to obtain the Tianling Power Staff's recognition! This was a requirement that every person ascending the Tianling Dynasty's throne had to meet!

If one succeeded, they would become the most distinguished existence among millions of people from then on. If one failed... They would become a joke to everyone and would never make a comeback in their entire life!

Shangguan Wan kept convincing herself in her heart. *I can... I must do it! I've made so many preparations for today. I mustn't fail!*

It was already in the middle of the afternoon now, and the sky was clear. There wasn't a single cloud in the skies as the scorching sun shone down.

And at this moment, Shangguan Wan was in the spotlight of everyone's gazes!

Finally, she slowly stretched out her hand toward the Tianling Power Staff—

Whir!

When she was about half an arm's length away from the Tianling Power Staff, a whirring sound was suddenly heard.

The faint glow surrounding the Tianling Power Staff suddenly exerted its suppression.

Shangguan Wan was right in front of it and immediately moved a step back due to the rushing impact.

She was greatly alarmed and hurriedly stabilized her body as her feet stayed tightly glued to the ground. Luckily, she reacted in time, so this impact didn't affect her greatly.

However, she still moved a step back under everyone's stares.

At that moment, the vast square became increasingly silent! One had to know that Shangguan Wan's every move and action was seen by countless people at this point!

The announcement elder, Elder Chen Ke, also knitted his brows undetectably. He was the most experienced one out of all the royal family elders, and he was a true elder that had witnessed three eras.

He had seen such a scene three times, and this was already the fourth. In his impression, the first three ascension ceremonies were all conducted very smoothly.

As the symbol of royal power, the Tianling Power Staff was a holy object in the entire Tianling Dynasty, and it had spiritual power.

When rulers-to-be held up the Tianling Power Staff, it would naturally exert its suppression. However, this was usually so when the descendant tried to pick it up from the black crystal.

Just now, Shangguan Wan's hand didn't even touch the Tianling Power Staff, but she had already incurred such a commotion.

Elder Chen Ke felt slightly uneasy and thought that it was abnormal.

Shangguan Wan felt that it was close as she almost directly fell down!

This Tianling Power Staff is even harder to control than I imagined. It's already so hard for me to get close to it. I wonder what it'll be like if I try to lift it... She pressed her lips against each other and moved the force within her body, which rushed toward her right hand. Then, she moved forward again.

This time, she was even more meticulous than before as she used her force to wrap her hand before reaching toward the Tianling Power Staff.

Buzz... buzz!

The Tianling Power Staff trembled slightly, and it caused an even bigger commotion!

The good thing was that Shangguan Wan had suffered earlier, so she clenched her teeth and planned to make it through this time.

The closer she got, the heavier the suppression.

Her entire right hand felt like it was about to be crushed!

Shangguan Wan's face turned pale, and her palm trembled slightly, but she still went forward with determination. *Today, I must succeed no matter what!*

Elder Chen Ke looked on from the side, and the feeling of something being amiss became even stronger. *That's weird... Why does the Tianling Power Staff seem so resistant toward Shangguan Wan? I've never seen such a scene before.*

He anxiously knitted his brows. *It's bad if things continue like this. It'll be an uphill task if Shangguan Wan wants to raise it up!*

The other royal family elders standing nearby also detected something as they looked at each other in unison and exchanged glances. *Shangguan Wan was part of the royal family, and her talent and capabilities were decent. So logically speaking, she should be able to succeed smoothly... But from the current situation, it seems like...*

Jiang Yucheng stood about ten steps behind Shangguan Wan. Even though he couldn't see the latter's expression, he could discern a lot of things from her reaction.

His heart hung high.

...

The crowd beneath the stage was watching the scene nervously.

Chu Liuyue looked up. From here, she could perfectly see half of Shangguan Wan's face. *Her expression can't be considered to be good. It seems like it's not easy for her to lift the Tianling Power Staff.*

...

Finally, after experiencing a painful and long torture, Shangguan Wan's hand finally reached into that layer of light as she grasped the Tianling Power Staff in one go.

At that moment, a bone-chilling aura surged out from within!

Shangguan Wan clearly saw that her entire right hand was instantly covered in frost, and that layer of frost seemed to be spreading toward the outside!

She was frightened as she hurriedly circulated her force and blocked the ice-cold aura outside! But at this moment, her right hand was so frozen that it swelled up and turned completely numb!

The Tianling Power Staff was made from the thousand-year icy wood that Shangguan Jing had retrieved from the coldest place in Bei Jiang.

This thousand-year icy wood wasn't actual wood. It formed by gathering the Heaven and Earth Force and condensing it into a wood-shaped stalactite.

Rumors had it that it would only grow an inch in a hundred years, and one could just imagine how much force it contained.

Shangguan Wan felt that the cold intent seemed to spread silently from her palm to her entire body. She almost thought that she was becoming an ice statue for a moment!

Shangguan Wan knew that she had to raise it up quickly! *If I continue to be tortured like this, my entire body is going to become useless!*

Thinking of this, Shangguan Wan clenched her teeth, gathered all the force in her body, held the Tianling Power Staff tightly, and suddenly used her force!

“Rise!” Shangguan Wan hollered! However, she shockingly discovered that the Tianling Power Staff didn’t move at all!

It still quietly floated above the black crystal, allowing her to control the rich force that kept attacking, but it didn’t move a single bit.

The crowd watching from in front of Lang Kun Hall was stunned.

Someone quietly asked, “D-did she fail?”