

The Doctor 371

Chapter 371: Seen Before

The Empress smiled coldly. "You are a stage-two warrior, but who in the Imperial City doesn't know that you can win against a stage-four warrior? Perhaps you didn't even exhibit your full potential during the Qing Jiao Competition. Other than yourself, who else would know about this? Besides, you have a weird fiend."

She was referring to Tuan Zi. When Tuan Zi directly swallowed Heng Jingchuo's force, it left a deep impression on many people.

The Empress had always felt that Chu Liuyue was mysterious and that her limits were unknown. Previously, Rong Zhen mentioned that Chu Liuyue had met with some fortune, which caused her to transform into the current enviable talent from her previous good-for-nothing status.

Perhaps Si Meng was really killed by her or the person behind her.

"Also, you've previously gone up to Jiuyou Tower's sixth floor! How do you explain that?" The more the Empress said, the more certain she sounded.

The expression of Emperor Jiawen and the rest gradually had a strange change. Just listening to whatever the Empress said sounded ridiculous, but upon deeper thought, there was such a possibility.

There had been too many strange things happening to Chu Liuyue within these few months. Things that seemed impossible to other people somehow made sense when it came to her.

Si Meng's death might really perhaps be...

Chu Liuyue was caught between laughter and tears. "Thank you for your high praise, Her Majesty. But if I really killed Si Meng like you said, why don't I directly kill the Fourth Princess as well? Wouldn't everything end easier this way?"

The Empress was stumped.

Rong Jin angrily hollered, "It's naturally because you're afraid that you'd be exposed! As the princess, Rong Zhen has a device that allows her to call for help. Once you push her to a dead end, she'll definitely expose your identity and your location."

Chu Liuyue looked at Rong Jin as if she were looking at a fool. "Your Highness, allow me to say something. Previously, the Empress said that I could kill a stage-five warrior in a moment. Do you think that the Fourth Princess's abilities and reaction speed would be stronger and faster than a stage-five warrior?"

Rong Jin was stumped, and his face flashed white and red.

Si Meng definitely accompanied Rong Zhen by her side. If Chu Liuyue could kill Si Meng, it would be easier to kill Rong Zhen.

Before Rong Zhen could send out the help signal, Chu Liuyue would definitely kill her to settle all the problems.

The Empress looked even worse. This was because only she knew that Rong Zhen's signal device wasn't with her but with Si Meng.

Ever since Rong Zhen's pearl of essence broke, Si Meng had always been by her side; he never left.

For safety reasons, they had long prepared this.

But to say this now, other than proving that the person who killed Si Meng was even stronger than they thought, it posed no advantage whatsoever. It might even upset His Majesty further.

Rong Jin looked at Situ Xingchen with much difficulty and whispered, "Xingchen, what should we do now?"

Situ Xingchen sneered in her heart and hated Rong Jin even more. Rong Jin is even more stupid than I had thought. I wonder how he stayed as the Crown Prince for so long.

Situ Xingchen looked down. Her lashes trembled, and she innocently and genuinely said, "Your Highness, I only saw those things that day, and I've said everything there is to be said. However, I can't do anything more."

Rong Jin was a bit anxious. "According to you, Chu Liuyue must've hidden Rong Zhen. However, she doesn't want to admit it now. This—"

"Your Highness, I did not say that, but you previously said that the Fourth Princess met with trouble. Hence, I unintentionally told you about this. Is this... elder's status rather troublesome?" Situ Xingchen silently extracted herself from the situation.

However, Rong Jin didn't notice this at all. On the contrary, Situ Xingchen's words reminded him of something.

"Chu Liuyue, you said so much, but you still haven't proven your innocence! On the other hand, Xingchen had never come to Country Yao Chen before, and she didn't know about Si Meng's presence. If she's lying, how would she know Si Meng? Besides, she has no grudge against anyone involved in this incident. Why would she set you up? However, you... Rong Zhen had previously offended you, so you're trying to use this opportunity to take revenge, right?"

Chu Liuyue's gaze landed on Situ Xingchen, and she smiled with deep meaning. "The Crown Prince is right, and I really don't understand. Eldest Princess Situ and I have never interacted, and we don't have grudges at all. Thus, I really don't know why Eldest Princess Situ wants to set me up."

Situ Xingchen looked at Chu Liuyue calmly, and she appeared as gracious and kind as usual. "Ms. Chu, I didn't set you up. From start to end, I was just saying what I saw and heard."

Chu Liuyue's eyes turned, and her gaze landed on Situ Xingchen's sleeves.

When she saw Situ Xingchen again in Tai Yan Academy, she realized that Situ Xingchen had changed clothes and that her sleeves didn't have that embroidery any longer.

Looking at her again, it was still the same.

Chu Liuyue didn't believe Situ Xingchen when she said that she didn't know about Rong Xiu burning more than half of his clothes. She wouldn't be like this if she didn't suffer great humiliation. Obviously, this Eldest Princess Situ has shifted all her anger to me.

The Empress took the opportunity to say, "Your Majesty, Xingchen's words are more credible. On the other hand, from start to end, Chu Liuyue hasn't produced any evidence regarding where she was that day. I think we won't be able to get anything out of her if this continues. Why don't we lock her up and get someone to properly interrogate her... Perhaps we'll get a different conclusion."

The entire palace fell into dead silence.

The Empress meant that she was going to severely torture and interrogate Chu Liuyue.

Chu Ning first stood up. "Impossible!"

It was impossible for him to watch Yue'er get locked up without doing anything.

What kind of place is jail? How can Yue'er go to such a place? Besides, there might be the Empress's people inside! Once Yue'er goes in, god knows what she will suffer!

"Lieutenant Mu is still in the Imperial City, and he might bring Yue'er to the Tianling Dynasty at any time. If we lock Yue'er up now, may I know how you will explain to Lieutenant Mu, Her Majesty?"

Bringing up Mu Qinghe had indeed made the Empress falter. "T-then, what should we do? Are we just going to let it pass?"

At this point, Rong Jiu—who hadn't said anything at all for a long time—suddenly said, "Actually, it's very simple. As long as we find Rong Zhen, the truth will prevail."

The Empress sneered. "That's easy to say! We still need to ask Chu Liuyue if she's willing to hand Zhen Zhen over!"

Rong Jiu's gaze turned strange. He then stood up and solemnly bowed to Emperor Jiawen. "I'm guilty. Father, please punish me."

Emperor Jiawen knitted his brows. "Rong Jiu, what are you playing at?"

Rong Jin pronounced every word clearly as he said, "I've seen the Fourth Princess the day before."

Chapter 372: Heptagon Alley

His sentence struck other people's ears as loud as thunder.

The Empress and the rest were so shocked that their mouths were agape.

Even Emperor Jiawen—who had always been composed—couldn't help standing up. "What are you talking about?! You saw Rong Zhen previously? When was it and where?!"

Rong Jiu paused for a while before saying, "It might be more suitable if you ask Her Majesty about this."

Once he said this, all the people present were stunned.

The Empress was at a loss. "Rong Jiu, what does this mean?"

Rong Jiu slowly said, "I believe the Empress clearly knows what I mean. You know where Rong Zhen is, but I don't know why you act ignorant and put up such a show!"

The Empress was about to faint from Rong Jiu's words. Her well-drawn brows were raised as she stared at Rong Jiu. Then, she finally realized that Rong Jiu came to go against her.

Her voice instantly became cold, and it contained a normal sternness from the palace. "Rong Jiu, do you know what you're talking about? Ever since Rong Jiu went missing, I've been very restless and unable to sleep. Up to this point, I'm still worried and scared for her. How can you just say this out of nowhere?"

The Empress then turned around to look at Emperor Jiawen angrily and sadly. "Your Majesty, please make a judgment correctly! I really don't know where Zhen Zhen is now! I also don't know where the Third Prince's words came from!"

Emperor Jiawen coldly stared at Rong Jiu. "What exactly did you mean by those words just now?"

Rong Jiu's eyes scanned the Empress, and he slowly said, "I mean that from start to end, this is a show that the Empress directed herself! She was the one who hid Rong Zhen, and she even planned to frame Lord Chu Ning and his daughter!"

Rong Jiu's low and powerful voice reverberated throughout the palace; it was clear and captivating.

Chu Liuyue couldn't help but look at Rong Jiu. She didn't expect that Rong Jiu would say such a thing...

"Outrageous!" After the shock, the Empress finally recovered her senses. She couldn't help but scold loudly as all her anger had no outlet. "What nonsense are you saying? Rong Jiu, what kind of place do you think this is?! What kind of person do you think I am? How dare you spout such nonsense?"

As she said all this, she hurriedly rushed toward Rong Jiu and raised her hand to give him a harsh slap. "I must teach you a lesson today!"

"Empress!" Emperor Jiawen's scolding immediately nailed the Empress to the ground.

Si Huijing suddenly recovered her senses and looked back in panic, only to see Emperor Jiawen glaring at her with fire in his eyes.

"As the Empress, what kind of behavior is this?"

The Empress then recovered her senses. I did lose my mannerism as the Empress with my previous actions.

Emperor Jiawen was utterly disappointed in the Empress. Rong Jiu just said a few sentences, yet the Empress was so agitated. She yelled shrilly, scolded him, and insulted him crazily. She had no elegant behavior whatsoever and even wanted to directly hit him in front of everyone else. This behavior was as good as those hags shouting at the markets.

She had completely tarnished the royal family's reputation.

Noticing Emperor Jiawen's anger, the Empress was petrified and indignant. "Your Majesty, I know I'm wrong, but I didn't purposely do that! Did you hear what Rong Jiu said just now? Even though I'm not his birth mother, I'm still his mother. Yet, he framed me! I—" The Empress talked on as tears streamed

down her face. She clutched a handkerchief with one hand and pressed it against her chest as though she were very heartbroken.

Once Rong Jiu heard 'birth mother,' murderous intent flashed across his eyes. It's fine if she didn't mention this, but... That bitch Empress actually has the guts to say this!

Rong Jiu lifted his sleeves.

Bang!

He directly knelt on the floor! "Every word I said is true! If I have lied about it, I'll be struck by lightning!"

This was a vicious oath!

Once he said this, even the Empress—who was busy crying—couldn't help but pause.

Chu Liuyue squinted her eyes and shot Chu Ning a questioning gaze.

Chu Ning lightly shook his head, indicating that he didn't know what the situation was.

Chu Liuyue retracted her gaze and sized Rong Jiu up again. That's strange... Rong Jiu didn't interact with us much, so why does he keep speaking up for us this time? He has even placed his life on the line!

As the prince, Rong Jiu's words were of some weight!

As expected, Emperor Jiawen's expression changed. If Rong Jiu dares to make such a vicious oath... It means that his words are most likely true!

"Empress, what exactly is going on?!" hollered Emperor Jiawen as he had already lost his patience.

A chill was sent down the Empress's spine, and she cried even more intensely. "I really don't..."

"Since the Empress doesn't want to admit it, then I'll remind you. Do you remember Heptagon Alley?" said Rong Jiu lightly.

The Empress suddenly paused, and she looked at Rong Jiu in shock. How does he know about that place?

Emperor Jiawen boomed, "If I didn't remember wrongly, Heptagon Alley was one of the busiest places in the Imperial City in the past. Afterward, a murder case happened there, and the place slowly got abandoned."

"Father, you're very wise. The current Heptagon Alley is as good as dead, and it's very quiet. But for some reason, Her Majesty really likes that place. After I returned to the Imperial City, I sometimes walked around the Imperial City since I didn't have much to do. Unknowingly, I walked past Heptagon Alley and saw Her Majesty there twice."

The Empress's heart sank.

Emperor Jiawen glanced at the Empress. "Go on."

"The first time was half a month ago. I saw the Empress from far away, and I thought I was hallucinating. After all, Heptagon Alley was very isolated, and not many people would go there normally. But I was

curious, so I waited around in the area. After another hour, I saw the Empress leaving. I hurriedly followed her, wanting to see what was going on, yet I shockingly discovered that there was a very strong barrier in Heptagon Alley!”

The Empress’s face was as white as a sheet.

Rong Jin suddenly seemed to remember something as his nostrils expanded.

“...I left because I was worried about being discovered. Another month later—which was ten days ago—I was very curious and couldn’t take it any longer, so I went to Heptagon Alley. I didn’t expect to see Her Majesty walking out coincidentally.”

When Chu Liuyue heard this, she also looked at the Empress and saw her ghastly face. The Empress appeared as though she had lost all her senses.

“...I couldn’t help being suspicious as I had seen her twice consecutively, but I didn’t have many clues, so I didn’t say it aloud. However, I coincidentally met Rong Zhen on the streets the day before and realized that she was heading for Heptagon Alley.”

Chapter 373: Go Forward

“Impossible! You’re lying!” The Empress finally couldn’t hold it in and shrieked. Her hands shook as she pointed at Rong Jiu. Due to anger and anxiety, her originally well-maintained face contorted. “Zhen Zhen is missing!”

I have already lost contact with Rong Zhen for many days. How can I not know about it if Rong Zhen is really in Heptagon Alley?

Previously, she had already asked the Si family to help search the entire Imperial City secretly, but she didn’t receive any news back.

After the matter was exposed, Emperor Jiawen had also sent people to look for Rong Zhen everywhere, but he didn’t get any clues either.

Si Huijing almost suspected that Rong Zhen was brought out of the Imperial City. In the end, Rong Jiu suddenly jumped out and said that Rong Zhen is at Heptagon Alley. That’s crazy talk!

Rong Jiu stared at her finger that almost poked his face and the sharp and glamorous nail as he tugged at his lips without much smiling intent. “Her Majesty, why are you so agitated? We just need to send someone to check and see if it’s true or false. Anyway, Heptagon Alley is in the Imperial City. It won’t waste too much time if we send someone to check.”

“No!” retorted the Empress reflexively, but the moment she said that, she instinctively noticed that something was wrong.

Behind her, Emperor Jiawen sounded cold. “I think this is a great idea. Since Rong Jiu said that Rong Zhen is there, we just have to send someone there to look for her. If we find her, it’ll prove that Rong Jiu is speaking the truth. If we don’t... Rong Jiu, do you know what kind of consequences you’ll have to face?”

Rong Jiu looked calm. "I know. If Rong Zhen isn't in Heptagon Alley, I'll never leave the Imperial City ever again!"

Emperor Jiawen was shocked because he didn't expect Rong Jiu to make such a promise willingly.

Actually, he had been thinking about how to arrange Rong Jiu during this period. Send him back to the Northwest Army? Impossible; that was akin to letting the tiger go back to the mountains.

Let him stay in the Imperial City? Unsuitable. Rong Jiu had many military accolades, and he was in his prime. It was too obvious if he suddenly stripped him of his military duties.

In actual fact, Emperor Jiawen had received many petitions before this—which requested for him to let Rong Jiu go back to the Northwest Army. However, he had many considerations and placed this matter aside.

This time, Rong Jiu suggested it himself. As long as they didn't find Rong Zhen in Heptagon Alley, he would have to stay in the Imperial City forever.

On the one hand, Emperor Jiawen wanted to find Rong Zhen. On the other hand, he wanted to use this opportunity to make Rong Jiu stay.

No matter how he looked at it, it was beneficial for him. Hence, he agreed to this suggestion almost without hesitation.

"I'll go there myself! Eunuch Min, let's prepare to leave!"

The Empress's legs gave way, and she almost knelt on the floor. "Your Majesty, you mustn't!"

Anyone could tell how guilty the Empress was at this moment, and Emperor Jiawen was naturally not an exception.

The more it was so, the more he wanted to go.

"Empress, I just want to go over and find Rong Zhen, yet you're stopping me so vehemently. What are you thinking? Do you not want me to find Rong Zhen, or..." Emperor Jiawen didn't speak loudly, but his fierce aura and his words were like sharp knives that harshly stabbed into the Empress's heart.

She wanted to stop Emperor Jiawen from going, but saying anything in this situation would make her seem guilty and weak.

Rong Jin finally recovered his senses and went up to help the Empress up. "Mother, why must you do this?! Isn't it just an alley? If Father wants to go, why are you stopping him?"

Going against Father like this isn't advantageous at all!

The Empress weakly glanced at Rong Jin, and her tears fell. What does he know...

Chu Liuyue suddenly stood up and lightly said, "Your Majesty, we'll go with you too."

The Empress suddenly looked up and stared at Chu Liuyue with uncertainty. "Chu Liuyue, why are you joining in on the commotion?!"

Chu Liuyue smiled. “Her Majesty, how can this be considered as joining in on the commotion? As long as the Fourth Princess is not found, I’ll forever be framed. I want to find the Fourth Princess as much as you and His Majesty do. Weren’t you very worried about the Fourth Princess previously? Why are you reluctant to go now that the Third Prince said that the Fourth Princess is at Heptagon Alley?”

The Empress couldn’t express her troubles, and she felt very burdened. She wanted to go up and rip Chu Liuyue’s lips apart—Rong Jiu’s as well!

Emperor Jiawen glanced at the Empress coldly. “Empress, if you want to go, you can go with us. If you don’t want to, you can just wait in the palace.”

Anyway, the truth will soon prevail!

Emperor Jiawen then whipped his sleeves and walked out of the palace with big strides.

Chu Liuyue and Chu Ning hurriedly followed.

Even Rong Jiu—who was kneeling on the floor—stood up. He glanced at the Empress hopelessly and said lightly, “Her Majesty, I think you’re not in good condition, but I’ll still advise you to come along. The Fourth Princess is very lonely outside the palace, so she would definitely be happy to see you.”

Rong Jin angrily hollered, “Get lost!”

Rong Jiu didn’t care for his scolding as he tidied his robe and turned around to leave.

The moment he stepped out, he paused and turned around. “Brother, you must take good care of Her Majesty. After all, you might not have the chance to do so in the future.”

Rong Jin was enraged as he hurled a punch toward Rong Jiu. “You’re tired of living!”

Rong Jiu easily avoided the punch and stretched out a hand at the same time to lock Rong Jin’s wrist directly.

Rong Jin immediately felt excruciating pain.

Rong Jiu’s hands were like metal. Also, his cultivation and abilities didn’t seem to be weaker than those of Rong Jin.

Faint murderous intent exuded from Rong Jiu’s body. He had been through ruthless battles, and every move was a killer one. How could Rong Jin be his match?

Rong Jiu finally let go when Rong Jin’s face was turning white. He shot Rong Jin a warning look before turning around to leave.

Rong Jin’s lungs were about to explode, but he didn’t dare to say anything.

The Empress already struggled to get up. I must go! I definitely must go!

Upon seeing this, Rong Jin immediately went forward to help her up. He also looked at Situ Xingchen at the same time. “Xingchen, why are you in a daze? Hurry over and help Mother up!”

He had never seen his mother in such a desolated state.

Since just now, Situ Xingchen had already realized that something was amiss. She felt even more annoyed when she heard Rong Jin's words. What's wrong with him? He should see how unkempt the Empress is! How can I help her up?

"Xingchen?" Upon seeing that Situ Xingchen didn't react for a long time, Rong Jin thought that she didn't hear him properly. Hence, he called for her again.

Situ Xingchen suppressed her disgust, walked forward, and silently used her sleeves to cover her hands as she used her arm to help the Empress up. It was as though she were afraid that she would contract some disease after touching the Empress.

Rong Jin didn't notice her movements as he only wanted to catch up to his father, who was in front.

Chu Liuyue wasn't far behind Emperor Jiawen, and she was thinking about something when she suddenly heard some commotion. She turned back and saw Rong Jin and Situ Xingchen helping the Empress along as they rushed over.

Her lips curved up, and she smiled delightfully. "Oh, yes. I haven't congratulated Your Highness and Eldest Princess Situ for your marriage! I wish the both of you to grow old together and live in peace and harmony!"

Chapter 374: Appear!

Situ Xingchen just felt that Chu Liuyue's words pierced her ears. Her gaze changed, and she forced a smile, which she rapidly kept.

Rong Jin saw Chu Liuyue's bright smile and felt very conflicted.

It was the best choice for him to be engaged to Situ Xingchen. When everything went smoothly, he was once secretly thankful that everything would be easier with Situ Xingchen.

Originally, he thought that he didn't care much about Chu Liuyue anymore. After all, Situ Xingchen didn't lose to Chu Liuyue in any area. But at this point, he realized that it wasn't the case.

As for the Empress, she had no mood to hear what Chu Liuyue was saying. She looked ghastly, and her eyes were unfocused as she stared at Emperor Jiawen's decisive and cold back—her heart was void of hope.

If it weren't for Rong Jin and Situ Xingchen helping her along, she would've long collapsed onto the floor.

Chu Liuyue looked at the Empress while in deep thought before she turned around and caught up to Chu Ning.

...

At the palace entrance, Eunuch Min had already arranged for ordinary horse carriages to wait for them.

Chu Liuyue couldn't help but be impressed. Eunuch Min was indeed very witty to be able to serve Emperor Jiawen for so many years.

Emperor Jiawen was still wearing his imperial robe. If he went out just like this, he would definitely cause a commotion.

As for the Empress, her unkempt appearance wasn't suitable to be seen by others.

Using ordinary horse carriages could minimize the trouble caused to the greatest extent.

The few of them left for Heptagon Alley in a discreet manner.

Emperor Jiawen rode alone in his horse carriage, and only Eunuch Min followed him.

The rest shared a horse carriage.

Inside the horse carriage, everyone sat opposite each other, and nobody spoke. The atmosphere was tense, and the air seemed to be frozen.

Finally, Rong Jin couldn't help but whisper, "Mother, you don't have to worry. Someone wants to set us up, but they might not have that ability! Father has always been wise. He'll definitely be able to differentiate between what's true and what's false and return you your innocence!"

This 'someone' was naturally referring to Rong Jiu.

In Rong Jin's eyes, this matter wouldn't have escalated if Rong Jiu didn't interfere. Thinking of this, he couldn't help but look at Rong Jiu—who sat opposite him—as hatred flashed across his eyes.

Previously, I was grounded by Father and had some of my power taken away because of Rong Jiu. This time, it is still because of him!

But Rong Jiu leaned against the wall of the carriage and closed his eyes. He looked very peaceful as if he didn't care about this at all.

"Rong Jiu, we have no grudges against you. Why do you want to set us up? Aren't you afraid of retribution?" questioned Rong Jin softly as he could no longer hold it in.

Rong Jiu opened his eyes and glanced at him expressionlessly. "Brother, why do you say that? I just wanted to help Father find Rong Zhen. Whatever I previously said was the truth. What do you mean by 'set up?'"

Upon seeing that Rong Jiu still refused to admit it at this point, Rong Jin was enraged.

If he didn't take into account that this was a horse carriage and that there were still many other people around, he would've gone forward and harshly punched Rong Jiu.

Chu Liuyue stood at the side and started talking to Chu Ning. "Father, my trip to Tai Yan Academy was actually pretty interesting..."

Chu Ning was originally quite worried, but he felt much more assured when he saw that his daughter was as calm as ever.

Hearing her talk about Tai Yan Academy, he couldn't help but be curious. "Oh, really? I heard that their library is very big. What did you read?"

With a smile on her face, Chu Liuyue said, "I didn't actually read much, but I found quite a few books that I liked."

Situ Xingchen's eyelids twitched harshly. Didn't read much? How does Chu Liuyue have the cheek to say that?

Situ Xingchen clearly remembered that the booklets—which recorded the books Chu Liuyue had read—had piled up into a mountain not long after she had gone in.

The most irritating thing is that Mentor said that Chu Liuyue found an Earth-grade warrior technique book. Even though Situ Xingchen specialized as a heavenly doctor and didn't have much interest in warrior techniques, she still felt very jealous when she heard that Chu Liuyue had obtained such a treasure.

Every single word of hers is just flaunting. Situ Xingchen couldn't maintain the smile on her face, so she looked down and pretended to be quiet.

When the Empress gradually recovered her senses and saw Chu Liuyue and Chu Ning talking happily, her blood boiled. All of this is clearly Chu Liuyue's fault! She must've hidden Rong Zhen and colluded with Rong Jiu to frame me!

Her heart was now in turmoil, and she was very restless, yet Chu Liuyue had the cheek to laugh so relaxingly.

"It's you... It's you!" After hearing the sound of the marble floor being crushed, the Empress knew that they were getting nearer to Heptagon Alley. The Empress became very frustrated. Finally, she couldn't hold herself back and scolded Chu Liuyue as she lunged toward her.

From the corner of her eye, Chu Liuyue had already seen the Empress's movements, so she lightly moved away and dodged her actions.

Dong!

A low sound was heard.

The Empress's forehead directly collided with the wall of the horse carriage.

"Mother!" Both Rong Jin and Situ Xingchen couldn't hold the Empress back in time, and it was too late when they heard the sound.

The Empress's head hurt severely, and she saw pitch black.

"Mother, are you okay?" Rong Jin was very anxious as he hurriedly helped the Empress up.

Situ Xingchen knitted her brows even more. "Ms. Chu, even if you're upset with Her Majesty, you shouldn't do this! The Empress has been very worried about the Fourth Princess being missing during this period, and she hasn't been sleeping well. How can she sustain such a hit?"

Upon hearing this, Rong Jin looked at Chu Liuyue with much more hatred and anger.

Chu Liuyue blinked. "Eldest Princess Situ, your words are too interesting. Everyone clearly saw what happened. Her Majesty charged over here herself. If I didn't move away, should I have waited for her to slam against me?"

Situ Xingchen seemed to hesitate for a while before saying, "But... you're very strong, and it's convenient for you to stop Her Majesty."

She implied that Chu Liuyue did it on purpose.

Chu Liuyue smiled. "Eldest Princess Situ, His Highness isn't weak either. Are you trying to say that he's useless since he couldn't hold his mother back?"

Situ Xingchen was stumped. She didn't expect Chu Liuyue to have such a sharp tongue.

Knock, knock...

"Masters, we're here. Kindly get down." Eunuch Min knocked on the door from outside.

Rong Jiu stepped out first.

Chu Liuyue and Chu Ning followed closely behind.

The horse carriage stopped in a narrow alley, and Emperor Jiawen was standing at the entrance of a nearby mansion.

Chu Liuyue quickly scanned her surroundings and furrowed her brows. This Heptagon Alley looks very normal, but it vaguely has a strong suppression. If one discerned it carefully, they would feel that the aura is coming from that mansion.

Emperor Jiawen looked at Chu Ning. "Open this door!"

Chu Ning immediately said, "Yes!"

However, the door was opened from the inside before he could do anything.

The skinny Rong Zhen appeared in front of everyone!

"Mother, you're here—"

Chapter 375: Truth

Rong Zhen paused in her sentence upon seeing that the person in front was Emperor Jiawen, and anxiety flashed across her eyes. "Father?!"

When Emperor Jiawen saw Rong Zhen, he first heaved a sigh of relief before his blood boiled. He suppressed the anger in his heart and boomed, "Zhen Zhen, what are you doing here?"

"I-I..." Facing Emperor Jiawen's interrogation, Rong Zhen stuttered for quite some time and couldn't say anything.

Chu Liuyue squinted her eyes and turned around to look at the Empress, whom Situ Xingchen and Rong Jin had just helped down from the horse carriage. "Her Majesty, Your Highness, isn't the Fourth Princess here?"

Rong Jin looked up and saw Rong Zhen standing at the entrance. The words in his throat were suddenly stuck, and his face flushed green and white.

Situ Xingchen's expression also changed. Why is Rong Zhen here? Didn't Elder Lian Ning say that he personally witnessed Si Meng bringing Chu Liuyue out of the Imperial City and into the forest? Since Si Meng died in Chu Liuyue's hands, Rong Zhen should also be hidden by her! What is this situation?

Rong Jin instinctively looked at the Empress. "Mother, this—"

"Impossible!" Upon seeing Rong Zhen, the Empress's reaction was much more intense than that of anyone else. She actually pushed Rong Jin away and staggered forward toward Rong Zhen. "Impossible! Zhen Zhen isn't here; you must be fake!"

Her voice was shrill and hoarse, which made people uncomfortable. Coupled with her face that had contorted due to shock and panic, she looked even worse.

Emperor Jiawen's eyes were filled with unconcealable disgust. "Empress, not only are you filled with lies toward me, but you don't even want to acknowledge your own daughter now! You have utterly disappointed me!"

No matter what, he also doted on Rong Zhen for more than a decade. Thus, he was certain that the person in front was Rong Zhen. In order to prove her innocence, the Empress lied with her eyes wide open. She's heartless!

Rong Zhen seemed to be shocked by the Empress and nervously moved back. "Mother, what do you mean? I am Zhen Zhen!"

"You're not Zhen Zhen! You're not..." The Empress stared straight at Rong Zhen. Even though she denied it on the surface, her voice became softer and softer. This person is indeed Rong Zhen!

Hopelessness filled her heart. "Quickly, speak! Did Chu Liuyue send you here? It must be her, right?"

At this point, the Empress was on the brink of breaking down as her entire person looked insane.

Emperor Jiawen glared at her coldly. "Rong Zhen, explain yourself! What exactly is going on?"

Rong Zhen was frightened by the commotion and recovered her senses after some time. "I-I... It was Chu Liuyue that brought me over!"

Emperor Jiawen continued questioning her. "When?"

Rong Zhen quickly glanced at the Empress, and she guiltily looked down. "B-before Chu Liuyue went to Tai Yan Academy..."

"Fourth Princess, you must be joking. Why don't I know about this? Besides, why would I choose this place if I really wanted to lock you up?" Chu Liuyue scanned her surroundings. "Honestly, this is my first time here. However, Her Majesty... I heard from the Third Prince that he comes here frequently, right? Why would I be so stupid to hide the Fourth Princess here?"

Rong Zhen immediately became anxious. "It's you! Y-you hate me, so—"

"Fourth Princess, I think you're the one that hates me, right? After all... Honestly, I've never been bullied by you, so why would I hate you?" Chu Liuyue said nonchalantly.

Even though her words sounded terrible, everyone knew that this was the truth. Previously, Rong Zhen had tried to make life difficult for Chu Liuyue at the banquet, but she landed herself in an embarrassing state.

When Rong Zhen's pearl of essence broke, and she became a good-for-nothing, Chu Liuyue turned her life around and became an enviable genius in the end. She was even chosen by Mu Qinghe and had a chance to go to the Tianling Dynasty.

Speaking of jealousy, it should be Rong Zhen who hated Chu Liuyue.

Rong Zhen was even more embarrassed.

Rong Jiu lightly said, "Father, you can now believe what I said, right?"

"Rong Zhen, move aside. I want to see what other secrets are hidden inside!" Emperor Jiawen's face was terribly dark. If the Empress truly comes here frequently in secret, I might be able to find something!

Rong Zhen bit her lips and refused to move after she felt conflicted for a while. "Father, there's nothing here. You shouldn't come in."

"I said move aside!" hollered Emperor Jiawen, which made Rong Zhen shudder in fear and her face turn pale.

Eunuch Min said nicely, "Fourth Princess, you should just make way. Do you really think you can single-handedly stop His Majesty?"

Things have already reached this stage, yet Rong Zhen is still acting like this. Isn't she just causing trouble for herself?

Rong Zhen's eyes turned red, and she looked at the Empress fearfully.

Emperor Jiawen sneered. "Why are you looking at her? Do my words not count as much as the Empress's?"

Rong Jin immediately went forward and anxiously said, "Father, don't misunderstand! Rong Zhen didn't mean it that way!"

Emperor Jiawen couldn't be bothered to deal with him as he gazed at the Empress meaningfully.

"Empress, things have ended up in this state. Are you going with me, or are you going to act ignorant here?"

The Empress whined, and her tears kept falling, looking very pitiful.

But when Emperor Jiawen saw it, he felt even more disgusted.

He raised his leg and walked in front.

Chu Ning immediately followed and said, "Your Majesty, this barrier is quite special. It's not good if we just barge in. Why don't I solve this barrier first?"

Emperor Jiawen stood still. "That's true."

Force gathered in Chu Ning's palms as a formidable aura gradually spread. He then raised his hand, and a thick force hurled out.

Hong!

That transparent barrier was hit by the strong force, and it caused a ripple.

A horrifying wave started spreading in all directions.

Rong Zhen—who was standing within the barrier—was careless and was hit by this force, causing her to stumble backward and almost fall to the ground.

Finding her balance with much difficulty, she anxiously turned around as if she were scared of something.

Just when Chu Ning was about to strike again, Rong Zhen finally said, "Don't strike! I'll just open the barrier!"

"Rong Zhen!" When the Empress heard this, she immediately screamed as if she had been impacted by something.

Rong Zhen was frightened and cowered in fear. "Mother, Father is already here, and he'll know about it sooner or later..."

As she spoke, her hand trembled as it touched the barrier.

Chu Liuyue's gaze darkened. Something seems to be hidden in Rong Zhen's hands.

Buzz!

A buzzing sound was heard, and the barrier was suddenly opened from the middle.

Emperor Jiawen walked forward first.

"Mother!" shouted Rong Jin in shock.

The crowd turned around and saw that the Empress had suddenly fainted.

Chu Liuyue sneered at her. Isn't it too late to pretend to faint now?

Emperor Jiawen seemed to ignore her as he walked straight in.

Chu Liuyue and Chu Ning followed closely behind.

When they saw the courtyard's scene, even Chu Liuyue couldn't help gasping in shock.

Chapter 376: For You

This courtyard was very empty, and it had a corpse hanging in the middle.

Judging from the torn and tattered clothes, it was a young man, but his body had already rotted. One couldn't even see his original appearance.

The most injured part of his entire body was his face. It was as if someone used an axe and hacked his face. His face was badly mangled, and even his five organs were hard to differentiate, let alone recognize who the person was.

There was a copper vat underneath the body.; the rims of the copper vat had dried bloodstains. The strong and sharp bloody scent exuded from within, and it made one gag.

But this wasn't the scariest thing. This was because there were a few sets of skeletons near the corpse.

One just had to glance at them to tell that they were also human skeletons. The difference between the skeletons and the corpse was that only the white bones were left on the ground. They looked like they had been dead for a very long time.

This scene stunned the people who just came in.

The entire venue fell into dead silence, and the air seemed to freeze.

After some time, Emperor Jiawen recovered his senses and shouted, "Bring the Empress over!"

With the Son of Heaven angry, even Rong Jin—who was initially protecting the Empress—couldn't hold him back. Rong Jin could only stiffly bring the Empress over.

The Empress's eyes were tightly shut as if she had completely fainted.

Emperor Jiawen shot a deadly stare at those skeletons, and his veins popped. "Beat her! If the Empress still doesn't wake up, continue hitting her!"

The crowd was shocked. Is Emperor Jiawen commanding people to beat the Empress up? He must've been driven to his grave.

How could Rong Jin dare to do this? He also couldn't watch on as people hit his mother, so he hurriedly blocked her and knelt down. "Father, we haven't gotten to the bottom of this yet! If you treat Mother like this, she'll definitely be heartbroken!"

Emperor Jiawen stepped up and harshly kicked Rong Jin's shoulders. "Get lost!"

Rong Jin didn't dare to block, and he was kicked to the side.

Emperor Jiawen raised his hand and was about to slap the Empress.

Situ Xingchen was standing at the side. Even though she didn't want to step into this, she couldn't extract herself from the situation any longer. Upon seeing Emperor Jiawen lifting the Empress up with one hand, Situ Xingchen finally said, "Your Majesty, do think carefully! His Highness is right. Everything is still unclear now; why don't we wait until everything is unveiled? By then, if Her Majesty is truly guilty, it won't be too late for you to punish her."

Emperor Jiawen stopped in his actions.

At this point, the unconscious Empress suddenly recovered her senses. Si Huijing slowly opened her eyes, and she looked dazed when she saw Emperor Jiawen's face close to hers. "Your Majesty..."

A look of horror then filled her face as if she had just discovered that Emperor Jiawen was lifting her up by her collar. "Your Majesty, what are you doing?"

Emperor Jiawen sneered as he directly threw her to the floor. "Don't you clearly know what good things you've done? You better give me a good explanation for this!"

The Empress knelt on the floor and kept weeping, saying that she didn't know anything. "I don't know... I really don't know..."

Emperor Jiawen looked at Rong Zhen. "Rong Zhen, you say it!"

Rong Zhen moved backward fearfully, and her lips trembled.

"Your Majesty, this copper vat is a little weird." When Chu Ning walked near the copper vat and thoroughly checked it, he looked solemn. "This thing seems capable of... sucking one's force."

Hearing this, Chu Liuyue couldn't help but walk over.

Once she got close to it, she felt a bone-chilling aura exude from the copper vat. The next moment, the aura enveloped her.

"Yue'er, it's dangerous!" Upon seeing this, Chu Ning immediately wanted to pull Chu Liuyue away.

But Chu Liuyue shook her head and indicated for him to wait. Then, she felt the force within her body start to stir under this aura.

She looked toward the copper vat.

Black and red mixed together, and the aura suddenly became stronger.

Chu Liuyue knitted her brows. This aura seems to forcefully steal my force from my body!

She moved back without hesitation.

When she was far away from the copper vat, the aura quickly disappeared as if it had never appeared. However, Chu Liuyue felt a chill in her heart. I was only standing there just now, yet I felt such a humongous impact, let alone the person who is hanging right above the copper vat!

Besides... That person is filled with injuries, and he has bloodstains everywhere. It's obvious that he had been cut multiple times when he was alive. When the fresh blood dripped into the vat, the force collected would naturally be cleaner.

Chu Liuyue could almost confirm that this person's force had been continuously sucked away, and he eventually dehydrated and died. No, not only that person! The surrounding white bones should be the same too!

Chu Ning pulled Chu Liuyue over and heaved a sigh of relief when he confirmed that she was okay. "This copper vat is a very menacing item. Don't ever go near it again."

Emperor Jiawen knitted his brows and asked, "Chu Ning, what's with that copper vat?"

Chu Ning explained again. "...Therefore, someone should've purposely left this copper vat here to suck the force from other cultivators."

"I see..." After listening, Emperor Jiawen didn't look shocked at all. Instead, he looked like he had confirmed something. "I've once read about this in the royal family's biography. As long as one collects enough force, the copper vat can be elevated to become a better Yuan instrument. Whoever becomes its owner can absorb all the force within and increase their cultivation level.

Emperor Jiawen's words made everyone's hair stand on end. This kind of method was very sinister and cunning.

"And other than me, only the Empress knows about this!"

Emperor Jiawen's sentence struck everybody like lightning, and everyone looked at the Empress!

Chu Liuyue understood something. It's no wonder Emperor Jiawen became even more hostile toward the Empress once he came in and saw the copper vat. It turns out that he had already determined that the Empress had done all of this at that time.

"Si Huijing, I didn't expect you to do such a thing secretly! You really have a devil's heart!" Emperor Jiawen was so disgusted that he wanted to vomit, and all his hair stood on end when he thought about how he had slept beside such a woman for so many years.

The Empress looked defeated, and she didn't even say anything in defense.

Rong Jin also panicked as he could not help but argue. "Father, even if Mother knows about it, you can't prove that she did it! Mother is already the Empress. Doing this won't benefit her at all."

"That's right. Her Majesty is already the country's mother; why isn't she satisfied?"

Rong Jiu suddenly spoke, and he looked down on the mother and son from above with contempt in his eyes. "Of course, she didn't do this for herself. It was for the distinguished Crown Prince—you, my brother!"

Rong Jin was taken aback!

Chapter 377: Mastermind

"Rong Jiu, Don't spout nonsense!" retorted Rong Jin instinctively. I am the Crown Prince and am also considered a strong player with my cultivation level. Why would I have to resort to such methods?

"All these years, I've been cultivating and improving based on my own abilities. I've never taken any shortcuts or even used such sinister methods! I can bet my life on the line!" Rong Jin swore a vicious oath. He was very clear that he would be in big trouble if he didn't draw a line between him and his mother.

However, this sentence seemed very weak when placed next to the Empress's reaction.

"Si Huijing, why did you do this?" Emperor Jiawen didn't even hear Rong Jin's words. He already confirmed that the Empress did all of this.

The tears on the Empress's face had already dried, leaving behind an expression void of hope.

Emperor Jiawen looked at Rong Zhen and Rong Jin, and he sneered. "You're not willing to speak? Rong Jiu and Rong Zhen, you can't escape from this! Rong Qi as well! I was really blinded at the start to have

chosen you as my Empress and Rong Jin as the Crown Prince! Chu Ning, Rong Jiu, search this entire place immediately!”

“Yes!” The two of them agreed in unison without any hesitation. They then split up and started searching from different places.

Rong Zhen was very hesitant as if she wanted to stop them, but she just dazedly stood there in the end.

Eunuch Min stood behind Emperor Jiawen, and his forehead broke out into a cold sweat.

As this implicated the Empress and the rest, this journey was completed discreetly—they didn’t even bring guards. However, they didn’t expect to discover such an earth-shattering secret!

Chu Liuyue looked at the mess in front of her and raised her brows slightly as she looked up at the sky. Country Yao Chen’s sky is finally changing...

When the Empress heard Emperor Jiawen’s words, she finally realized something. Emperor Jiawen is planning to punish my sons and me! It doesn’t matter if I’m in trouble, but Rong Jin’s position as the Crown Prince cannot be taken away!

A chill ran down her spine after seeing that Chu Ning and Rong Jiu had already started checking inside, and she immediately kowtowed toward Emperor Jiawen. “Your Majesty! Your Majesty, please forgive me! I know I’m wrong! You can punish me however you like, but please leave my children alone! They’re innocent; they don’t know about this at all!”

Si Huijing used all her strength and knocked her head against the floor, which was followed by a low sound. Very quickly, her forehead was covered in blood.

Her makeup had long been ruined by her tears. She looked even more distraught when accompanied by the fresh, sticky blood slowly flowing down her forehead.

Emperor Jiawen was unmoved; it was as though he had heard some joke. “They don’t know? Rong Zhen is right here, yet you’re telling me that she doesn’t know?”

The Empress was stumped. In actual fact, she also didn’t know why Rong Zhen was here. I did this thing very discreetly, and Rong Jin and the rest had no idea, including Rong Zhen! Even if I were crazy, I wouldn’t send Rong Zhen over! However, Rong Zhen is indeed standing there, and I can’t deny it!

Thinking of this, her hatred toward Rong Zhen grew. If it weren’t for her, why would Emperor Jiawen find this place and see everything here? He also won’t suspect Rong Jin and the rest because of her presence!

She looked at Rong Zhen and miserably begged. “Zhen Zhen, tell your father yourself how exactly you came here, okay? Take it as me begging you! You don’t want your two elder brothers to be punished with you, right? You can’t drag them down!”

Rong Zhen’s eyes widened, and she suddenly recalled many images. This scene is so familiar! Since I was young, Mother would say similar words every time something happened, right?

It was as if her eyes were covered by a layer of mist.

Then, Rong Zhen slightly lowered her head and said every word and sentence clearly. "...Father, Mother was the one who sent me here..."

The Empress's voice trailed off as she looked at Rong Zhen in disbelief.

"... Mother said that this was the only way I could take revenge against Chu Liuyue... Besides, we can pin Elder Si Meng's death on them..."

With every word that Rong Zhen said, the Empress's eyes widened by an inch. Her entire person froze when she heard the entire sentence.

Immediately after, the Empress suddenly realized something and yelled at the top of her lungs, "Your Majesty, she's lying! She's not speaking the truth! You mustn't believe her!"

Emperor Jiawen glanced at her and nonchalantly said, "You're saying that your own biological daughter is setting you up?"

The Empress was very indignant, but she didn't know what to say. She also didn't know why Rong Zhen would say that.

"Rong Zhen, did you mean that Si Meng died in your mother's hands?" asked Emperor Jiawen as he stepped forward.

Rong Zhen shuddered, and she raised her hands to lightly knock against the copper vat before she quickly retracted them as if she were afraid of something.

However, her actions were enough—She was clearly saying that Si Meng had died in the copper vat.

"I almost forgot. He's a stage-five warrior... Taking away the force from such a strong warrior would help you save some effort and lead to better results."

Chu Liuyue silently sized Rong Zhen up. I just left for ten days. Why did so many things happen in the Imperial City? With Rong Zhen's previous words, I would really believe her if I didn't clearly remember that I had killed Si Meng myself.

The Empress's face flushed red and white, and she wanted to argue.

"Your Majesty!"

"Father!"

Chu Ning and Rong Jiu came back one after another; the two of them looked strange.

Emperor Jiawen's heart sank. "What's the matter?"

Chu Ning and Rong Jiu exchanged glances, and they looked rather hesitant.

Then, Chu Ning cupped his fists. "Your Majesty, there are many bones hidden in the backyard."

Rong Jiu quickly added, "Within the many rooms in this area, there are many broken pieces of bones lying everywhere... With a rough estimate, there seem to be over 100 people."

Dead silence.

Even Chu Liuyue couldn't help but knit her brows.

When she saw the copper vat, she was certain that there were more than that number of bones here. However, she didn't expect there to be so many.

"Most of those people are cultivators. There aren't many missing people cases in the Imperial City all these years, so... These people should be from outside the Imperial City," boomed Chu Ning.

Emperor Jiawen took a deep breath in and glared at the Empress. "Si Huijing, you definitely couldn't do this on your own. Speak, who else is helping you? The Si family?"

The Empress immediately shook her head reflexively when she heard Emperor Jiawen mention the Si family. "No, I did all of this on my own! I was just entranced! I'm willing to use death to punish myself, but I hope you'll let Rong Jin, Rong Qi, and the Si family off!"

Rong Jin couldn't help but say, "Mother, what are you doing? You didn't do this, right? Who exactly is setting you up? You just need to say—"

Pak!

The Empress actually gave Rong Jin a tight slap.

Chapter 378: Suffer a Double Loss

Rong Jin was dazed from the slap.

The Empress didn't hold back on the slap, and she directly caused half of Rong Jin's face to swell up.

Her palm turned slightly numb. When she saw Rong Jin's dazed and hurt expression, her heart also shuddered.

If she wasn't forced to the corner, how would she bear to hit the son she doted on the most? But...

"You have no right to speak!" hollered the Empress angrily as she struggled out of Rong Jin's reach and knelt on the floor while moving forward. She begged miserably, "Your Majesty, you can punish me however you want, but... I really did this on my own..."

"Didn't you keep denying it before? Why are you admitting to it so decisively now?" Emperor Jiawen's eyes were filled with mockery. She just doesn't want to cry unless she sees the coffin and is stubbornly insisting on her own ideas! Upon seeing all the evidence laid out in front of her and that she can't refute it anymore, she finally chose to admit to it. Moreover, she even wants to cover up for the rest and take all the blame.

"Your cultivation talent is just average. This copper vat definitely isn't prepared for you, right? How many people in the world can make you spend so much effort...?" As Emperor Jiawen spoke, his gaze landed on Rong Jin.

A chill was sent down Rong Jin's spine. For some reason, he unknowingly became guilty.

He wasn't stupid; when he knew of the copper vat's use, he noticed something. And with the Empress's later reaction, it would be a joke if he couldn't guess who it was prepared for.

Even if he didn't know anything beforehand, he still trembled with fear, thinking of the hundreds of cultivators' skeletons hidden in this yard.

The Empress was stumped.

Emperor Jiawen closed his eyes. "Bring the Empress and Rong Zhen back to the palace! Without my permission, they can't leave their rooms! As for Rong Jin... you better go back to Crown Prince Mansion! Oh, yes! As for Rong Qi, make sure he stays in his Prince Ping Mansion! When the truth regarding this matter prevails, I'll punish them one by one."

Then, Emperor Jiawen angrily whipped his sleeves and turned around to leave.

Eunuch Min hurriedly followed him and didn't dare to say another word.

Chu Ning heaved a sigh of relief and patted Chu Liuyue's arm. "Yue'er, you should go back and rest."

This incident had completely zero relation to them now, but as the imperial guards' Commander-in-Chief, he still had to follow His Majesty and follow up on this matter.

Chu Liuyue nodded lightly. "Don't worry, Father. I can take care of myself."

Chu Ning was then assured as he turned to Rong Zhen. "Fourth Princess, please."

Rong Zhen glanced at the Empress hesitantly. "Mother—"

"Get lost! I don't have a daughter like you!" screamed the Empress loudly!

Rong Zhen's colorless face turned even paler. Her lips moved, but she didn't say anything in the end as she turned around to leave.

When she passed by Chu Liuyue, she still lowered her head as if she didn't notice Chu Liuyue's presence.

"Fourth Princess," said Chu Liuyue suddenly.

Rong Zhen then stopped and looked up at her.

When Rong Zhen saw Chu Liuyue, she instinctively knitted her brows and revealed a look of disgust. But when she was about to speak, she suddenly felt terrified for some reason.

Mysteriously, she swallowed all the words at the tip of her tongue.

Facing her series of strange reactions, Chu Liuyue's eyes sparkled, and she had a guess in her heart. She didn't say anything else and gave Chu Ning a reassuring smile.

However, Rong Zhen was scared by it as she walked off hurriedly.

On the other end, Rong Jiu stood in front of the Empress and Rong Jin, quietly waiting for them. He seemed to have a lot of patience as he didn't say anything and waited at the side.

From time to time, he even glanced at the two of them with some interest.

Nobody knew how long he had waited for this day. Now, he could finally see the Empress's unkempt appearance, so he naturally had to grab this opportunity.

Rong Jin noticed his gaze and instantly felt like the fire in his heart was ignited. “Rong Jiu! You did this on purpose, right? You just want to make my mother and me a laughingstock! Are you satisfied now?”

Rong Jiu lightly said, “Brother, what are you saying? I’m just waiting to send the two of you back. Father has already given his command, so I naturally have to follow it.”

Rong Jin clenched his fists tightly. “Don’t think that I don’t know what you’re thinking! It’s just because of your lowly birth mother, right? It’s not the first day you’ve hated us! One day, I’ll repay this by a hundred-fold!”

Rong Jiu’s gaze turned cold as intense murderous intent exuded from him. “Crown Prince, if you’re so free, you should properly think about how to get out of this stalemate.”

The Empress definitely couldn’t keep her position, and Rong Jin was no better. This time, the Si family might even be implicated.

Rong Jin couldn’t even save himself, yet he was thinking about revenge. What a joke.

Rong Jin almost crushed his molar teeth as he finally suppressed his vengeance. “Mother, let’s go!”

We must think of another way!

Rong Jiu helped his mother along and walked in front. Rong Jiu paused for a while and looked at Situ Xingchen. “Eldest Princess Situ, are you going with them or...”

Situ Xingchen’s expression was like a frozen mask—awkward and ashamed. She didn’t imagine things would end up like this. Wasn’t it going very well previously? Why did the Crown Prince and the Empress end up in such perilous situations after leaving the palace? What should I do?

“I... I won’t follow them then...” said Situ Xingchen forcefully as she was filled with regret.

If she knew of this earlier, she definitely wouldn’t have a marriage agreement with Rong Jin! She couldn’t even salvage this situation now!

“That’s not very nice, right? Eldest Princess Situ, you just got engaged to the Crown Prince. Now that he’s in trouble, you’re just walking away like that? Isn’t that akin to escaping in the face of trouble? Not only the Crown Prince, but I believe many people would be very disappointed in you, right?” said Chu Liuyue lazily as she hugged her arms.

Situ Xingchen glanced at her, and a look of vengeance quickly flashed past her eyes. Chu Liuyue is clearly doing it on purpose!

“I think I had better not. This incident has a huge impact. Even though I’m engaged to the Crown Prince, I’m still an outsider currently. As the eldest princess of Country Xing Luo, I shouldn’t get involved in this.” At this point, Situ Xingchen was still speaking very tactfully, and she easily extracted herself from the situation.

It was as if she had forgotten that this was because she had said that she saw Chu Liuyue and Rong Zhen together, which instigated the Empress and Rong Jin into accusing Chu Liuyue in front of Emperor Jiawen.

Chu Liuyue nodded with a smile. “Eldest Princess Situ, that makes sense. However, I originally thought that you must love and admire the Crown Prince very much since you got engaged to him very quickly. I thought you’d definitely stand up for him when you saw him in trouble. It seems like I’ve been thinking too much.”

Situ Xingchen looked even more awkward.

Rong Jin—who was walking in front—suddenly reacted and quickly rushed to Situ Xingchen. He clutched her hands in one fell swoop. “Right! Xingchen, only you can help me now! You can go and beg your father to put in a good word for us! Father will definitely let this slide!”

Chapter 379: Summon

Situ Xingchen flung Rong Jin’s hand away without even thinking.

“Xingchen?” Rong Jin was shocked. Wasn’t she smiling very happily and gently toward me previously? Why did she suddenly become so cold in the blink of an eye? I could even... see a flash of disgust in her eyes.

Situ Xingchen smiled in disguise and said softly, “Your Highness, don’t misunderstand. It’s not that I don’t want to help, but this matter implicates a lot of people. His Majesty might not be willing to let other people know about it... If I suddenly ask my father to put in a word for you, it might even anger His Majesty even more and make matters worse.”

Upon hearing this, Rong Jin started to hesitate.

Situ Xingchen makes sense. Currently, Father already thinks that Mother did it. He might even pursue the matter in the future, and... even the Si family might not be let off. This isn’t as simple as ‘dirty linen.’ If word gets out, the entire Country Yao Chen royal family’s reputation will be tarnished.

But other than this, he really couldn’t think of another way.

“T-then, what should we do?” Rong Jin had never seen Emperor Jiawen throw such a big tantrum. “Xingchen, you must think of a way to help me! Now that we’re already engaged, if Mother and I get into trouble...”

At this point, Situ Xingchen’s intestines almost turned green. If I knew that things would progress to this state, I would’ve never replied to Rong Jin’s letter.

She thought for a while before saying, “Your Highness, you mustn’t be anxious. There isn’t a definite conclusion to this yet, so there will be a way to turn things around. Why don’t... I return to Xing Luo first and discuss with my father about how to solve this?”

I must leave this problematic place as soon as possible! Once I go back, I’ll immediately tell Father that I want to dissolve the marriage agreement with Rong Jin!

However, Rong Jin didn’t know what Situ Xingchen was thinking, and he thought that she had agreed to ask her father to help. He was beyond grateful, and the displeasure and doubts—which came about due to her flinging his hand away—had completely disappeared.

“Great! Great! Then, you must hurry up! I’ll wait for your good news!” said Rong Jin as he looked touched. “Xingchen, only you are willing to help me...”

Situ Xingchen suppressed her disgust as she smiled and rushed him. “Your Highness, don’t worry. Her Majesty is still waiting for you; go ahead! Everything that happened today must’ve impacted her greatly. You need to take care of her properly!”

Rong Jin’s heart warmed up as he looked at Situ Xingchen with much gratitude. He had never found her so attractive before.

He couldn’t suppress the urge in his heart, and he suddenly pulled Situ Xingchen into his arms.

Situ Xingchen was shocked by his actions and almost took action.

“Xingchen... I promise you; we’ll hold a grand wedding once this thing ends.” Rong Jin enunciated every word properly.

Situ Xingchen’s entire body froze. If it weren’t for other people watching her, she would’ve long pushed Rong Jin away.

She closed her eyes and suppressed her anger. “Your Highness, it’s not the time to talk about this. We should first settle Her Majesty’s trouble.”

When Rong Jin heard this, he finally let go of her and gave her a meaningful look. “Then... I’m counting on you.”

Rong Jin then turned around to leave.

Situ Xingchen felt that ants were crawling all over her body, and she almost screamed out loud.

After waiting for those people to leave, she hurriedly said to Rong Jiu, “Third Highness, I don’t want to disturb His Majesty anymore since things have ended like this. Therefore, I’ll take my leave first.”

Then, she walked out.

Rong Jiu yelled, “Eldest Princess Situ, this is too rude on our part. Why don’t I send someone to bring you home?”

Situ Xingchen hurriedly left as if she didn’t hear what he said.

Very quickly, only Chu Liuyue and Rong Jiu were left in the yard.

Chu Liuyue bowed toward Rong Jiu. “Thank you, Third Highness.”

If it weren’t for Rong Jiu’s intervention, Chu Ning would definitely be brutally punished, and the Heptagon Alley incident wouldn’t happen.

However, Rong Jiu glanced at Chu Liuyue with deep meaning. “No need to thank me. We’re just achieving our own goals.”

Rong Jiu then turned around to leave.

Chu Liuyue raised her brows. I didn't realize this before, but Rong Jiu is pretty interesting. At the very least, he's honest enough. But... Seeing his previous reaction, he didn't seem to know what happened here at first.

Her eyes sparkled. I didn't hide Rong Zhen here previously, but she mysteriously appeared here and was even discovered by Rong Jiu coincidentally... The key is that Rong Zhen's memory has clearly been disrupted. She is obviously unable to remember everything that happened in the forest outside the Imperial City. Instead, she remembers that the Empress had sent her over.

As for Si Meng... He clearly died in front of Rong Zhen, but she remembered everything wrongly. If it weren't for Rong Zhen's words, Emperor Jiawen wouldn't have swiftly convicted the Empress of her crime. In the Imperial City, there should only be one person who can do this—Rong Xiu!

Chu Liuyue lightly pouted.

She had stayed at Rong Xiu's place for a really long time the day before, but Rong Xiu didn't mention it at all. Who would've thought that all of this was controlled by Rong Xiu—who didn't even show up at all—from start to end?

Even she felt astonished when she thought about the series of developments. Rong Xiu's thoughts and methods are even more scheming than I had imagined... However, it feels pretty good to have someone cleaning up after me every time and smoothly running everything else.

Chu Liuyue's lips curved up, and she looked back at the copper vat as she fell into deep thought. What exactly did the Empress want to achieve by doing this? Did she really want to help Rong Jin increase his cultivation level? However, there isn't much of a problem if Rong Jin just used his own abilities. If more than a hundred people died here, it means that the Empress had started doing this a very long time ago.

What exactly did she do this for? Suddenly, a thought flashed across Chu Liuyue's mind. Previously, Rong Zhen mentioned a secret related to Rong Jin... Could it have something to do with that?

...

Si family.

In the training arena, all the Si family's youngsters were practicing hard.

Si Ye stood below the arena and pointed out their mistakes from time to time.

The reason why the Si family could become the leader of the top four families was mainly due to the Si family's younger generation being very passionate.

All the young girls and boys in their teens were very outstanding. Compared to the other families, the Si family greatly exceeded them in this area.

Even though these youths couldn't be compared to Si Ting, Si Ye was already very satisfied.

Suddenly, a guard rushed over, looking anxious. "Master, His Majesty urgently summons you!"

Si Ye was dazed. Why would His Majesty summon me to the palace at this time?

"May I know what it's about?"

The guard shook his head, but he looked very nervous. "Eunuch Min is waiting outside! He looks very anxious."

Si Ye knitted his brows. After seeing the guard's reaction, it probably isn't as simple as being anxious.

He boomed, "I got it. I'm going now."

Chapter 380: Let Off

Si Ye walked outside and coincidentally saw Si Ting coming back.

"Hello, Master." Si Ting cupped his fists, and his intricate face looked rather tense.

Si Ye looked at his appearance and was curious. "Si Ting, shouldn't you be at school today? Why did you come back?"

Si Ting hesitated for a while and said, "I heard something happened in the palace."

"What happened? Why don't I know?" Si Ye was even more confused. I have been staying in close contact with the people inside the palace, so I should be the first to know if anything happened. Si Ting was at Tian Lu Academy, so how did he know? Besides, it seems like something is wrong...

Si Ting looked at him and tightly cupped his fists. "Chu Liuyue didn't go to the academy today and was summoned to the palace."

"What has this—" Si Ye realized something the moment he said this, and his expression changed.

"You're saying that... It has something to do with the Fourth Princess?"

Si Ting nodded. "I just felt that something was wrong, so I came back earlier to take a look and saw Eunuch Min standing at the door."

Si Ting pressed his lips against each other. Eunuch Min's expression didn't look very good... At the very least, I have never seen Eunuch Min reveal such an expression in the many times I have seen him. Moreover, he clearly came for the Si family.

Si Ye's heart sank. If it is related to the Fourth Princess, and His Majesty has urgently summoned us, he must've found out about us secretly investigating Rong Zhen's matter beforehand. To make matters worse, maybe even Si Meng was exposed.

He hurriedly patted Si Ting's shoulders. "I'll go to the palace and take a look first. You can stay at home. If anything happens... You can take charge of anything that happens in the Si family."

As he spoke, he took out a badge from his arms and shoved it to Si Ting.

Si Ting knitted his brows. What exactly happened that caused Master to be so uptight? He even directly gave me the badge that represents his status as the Si family's head.

"Master, I can't take this. You—"

"Take it!" Si Ye looked stern and didn't allow for any rejection.

Si Ting met with his eyes and suddenly realized that the current situation might be even more troublesome and dangerous than he had imagined.

He finally held the badge tightly and nodded. “Master, don’t worry. I’ll definitely take good care of the Si family!”

Si Ye was then reassured as he gave Si Ting a look of deep meaning before turning around to leave.

Si Ting looked at his back view and started becoming uneasy for some reason.

...

On the other hand, Si Ye followed Eunuch Min all the way into the palace.

On the way, he had tried to find out what was going on a few times. However, Eunuch Min’s lips were very tight, and he didn’t reveal anything at all.

This further confirmed Si Ye’s conjecture—Something must have happened to the Empress! If not, Eunuch Min wouldn’t have such an attitude.

The two of them walked the entire way without talking. When they reached the Imperial Study, countless thoughts had already flashed across Si Ye’s mind.

Si Ye silently surveyed the surroundings. He immediately realized that the guards in the Imperial Study were stricter than before and that the entire atmosphere was much more solemn.

His heart seemed to be hanging in mid-air, and he was very uncomfortable.

Eunuch Min went up himself and respectfully said, “Your Majesty, the Si family head is already here.”

Emperor Jiawen’s cold and low voice boomed from within the Imperial Study. “Let him in!”

Eunuch Min looked at Si Ye and took a step back. “Si Family Head, please go ahead—”

Si Ye took a deep breath in, tidied his clothes, pushed open the door, and walked in.

The moment he stepped in, Si Ye’s heart immediately started beating rapidly when he saw the scene inside.

He saw Emperor Jiawen sitting behind the desk in the spacious and quiet Imperial Study as the booklets, ink, and brushes were thrown all over the floor messily.

Meanwhile, the Empress—Si Huijing—was kneeling in front of him.

Her entire glamorous palace outfit was filled with dirt, and her usually tidy hair was very messy. Her face had tear stains, and her eyes were swollen.

She knelt there as her entire body was filled with a hopeless and painful aura.

Si Ye had never seen her in such an unkempt state before.

“Empress?!” He couldn’t help but yell as he hurriedly walked forward.

Very quickly, he realized that Emperor Jiawen was still in the study.

Si Ye hurriedly stopped in his tracks, turned around to look at Emperor Jiawen, and suppressed the ripple in his heart. He bowed and greeted, “Greetings, Your Majesty.”

Upon seeing his arrival, the Empress's eyes turned, and her expression was very strange. It appeared as though she wanted to cry, but she could no longer do so.

Today, she had used up more than half of the tears in her life. However, this couldn't make Emperor Jiawen soften his heart a single bit.

Emperor Jiawen looked at Si Ye with a deep gaze. "Si Ye, do you know why I called you over?"

Si Ye felt a strong suppression overwhelming him as he knelt down without hesitation. "I don't know. Your Majesty, please enlighten me!"

"You don't know? Don't you know that the Si family was secretly tracking Rong Zhen's whereabouts?" Emperor Jiawen's words were like a strong hammer that smashed down harshly.

Si Ye cupped his fists. As expected! His Majesty already knows!

He immediately put his hands on the ground and kowtowed with much force. "I know my mistake! Your Majesty, please punish me!"

"You know your mistake? To think that I thought you were very loyal to me. I didn't expect you to collaborate with the Empress behind my back and lie to me for so many years! You long knew about Si Meng's incident, right? Si Ye, you have a lot of guts!"

The more Emperor Jiawen said, the angrier he got. He picked up the teacup beside him and suddenly threw it toward Si Ye.

Bang!

The teacup harshly landed in front of Si Ye.

The shattered pieces flew everywhere; two of them even flew over and cut Si Ye's face.

But Si Ye didn't dare to move at all as he bowed even more respectfully. "Your Majesty, I know that I'm wrong, but this has nothing to do with Her Majesty! Back then, I was worried that the Empress couldn't protect herself in the palace, so I specifically arranged for Si Meng to be with her. Also, as for the Fourth Princess going missing... the Empress was afraid that you'd be too worried, so she wanted me to help. She didn't hide it from you on purpose! No matter what, I'm willing to bear all of the consequences!"

Upon hearing this, Emperor Jiawen laughed coldly. "Bear all the consequences? Do you have the right to? Si Ye, you don't have to act in front of me. Rong Zhen didn't even go missing! She was simply hidden by the Empress since the start!"

Si Ye was shocked as he suddenly turned around. "What?"

Upon seeing his reaction, Emperor Jiawen squinted his eyes. "What, didn't your good sister tell you about this?"

Si Ye's heart was in turmoil as he instinctively glanced at the Empress beside him. "Her Majesty, w-what's going on?"

The Empress hung her head low. She knew that there was no point in saying anything.

When Rong Zhen coincidentally appeared at Heptagon Alley and with the words she said herself, Emperor Jiawen had already confirmed everything!

She said with a hoarse voice, “Your Majesty, my brother truly doesn’t know anything! Please, let the Si family off!”