

Three-Time 101

Chapter 101: 101. You Take Over

Ever since the Government Office intervened, everyone in the Wan family was worried because they knew that Zhengzheng was conceived by Wan Hui and her ex-husband.

But Zhengzheng was also a member of the Wan family by blood, born after ten months of pregnancy and suffering by Wan Hui. Why should they give him to the Li family? Was the Wan family unable to raise a child with their great wealth?

If it hadn't been for Old Lady Li and Li Chen's mistreatment of Wan Hui for several years, things wouldn't have come to this. When they married Wan Hui, they promised to treat her well, but instead, she suffered countless grievances.

When Wan Hui's brothers found out about her plight, they wished they could just scatter Li Chen's ashes like Ning Jing did!

And who knows what kind of person a child would become if they grew up in that kind of corrupt family.

"I've made my father worry again." Wan Hui looked at Wan Qiang apologetically.

Wan Qiang glared at her, "What nonsense are you talking about? That's my grandson!" He laughed heartily, "Ning Jing and Miss Su Liang are truly our family's blessings! Make sure you treat our honored guests well!"

Wan Hui smiled, "When Zhengzheng came back earlier, he missed Ning Jing and Su Liang a lot, and said that Ning Jing promised to come back and see him soon. At that time, both my husband and I thought Ning Jing was just trying to appease the child, but we never expected them to actually come so quickly! The guesthouse for them has been prepared!"

"Zhengzheng is bound to have great fortune in the future if he can make such good connections." Wan Qiang said happily, "Later, you can ask if there's anything the Ning Family needs our help with."

Wan Hui agreed and went to find Zhengzheng with her husband Lu Yu.

At this moment, Su Liang had already been chased into the Wan family's back garden by Ning Jing. Zhengzheng was thrilled and kept cheering Ning Jing on, "Uncle Ning, hurry up! You're almost there!"

In fact, it was easy for Ning Jing to catch up with Su Liang, and neither of them were using their full strength. They simply had an unspoken understanding, playing along for Zhengzheng's sake.

However, all games must come to an end, otherwise the child would only be endlessly excited and never give up.

So, Su Liang went into the Bajiao Pavilion by the lake, and Ning Jing soon followed with Zhengzheng in his arms.

Leaning against a pillar, Su Liang pretended to be trapped with nowhere to escape.

Ning Jing walked over with Zhengzheng in his arms, whose face was flushed and eyes sparkling as he grabbed Su Liang's arm, "I caught Auntie!" He was thrilled.

The little guy did not forget what he wanted to do: He held Su Liang with one hand and tried to touch her face with the other hand that Ning Jing was holding, smiling happily.

But in the next moment, Ning Jing handed Zhengzheng to Su Liang.

She took him in her arms smoothly.

Little Zhengzheng looked at Ning Jing, then at Su Liang, momentarily baffled by the sudden change in the game's rules. He quickly sorted out his thoughts and happily grabbed Su Liang's hand to touch Ning Jing's face, "Uncle Ning, don't run away!"

A nice role reversal, the tacit understanding between the three of them was extraordinary.

Ning Jing had no intention of running away at all, and stood still, allowing Zhengzheng to use Su Liang's hand to touch the side of his face.

Originally, this outcome was agreed upon with a glance between Ning Jing and Su Liang. He didn't mind, and she didn't care.

However, to their surprise, when Zhengzheng saw Ning Jing not running, he thought that touching the face was not enough and, holding Su Liang's hand, asked her to touch Ning Jing's nose instead.

This was a fun way adults often expressed their affection to Zhengzheng.

With a smile spreading in her eyes, Su Liang, under Zhengzheng's command, gently touched Ning Jing's nose. Seeing his slightly furrowed brows, she knew he was feeling awkward.

Making the Great God feel awkward wasn't easy, and Su Liang thought Zhengzheng was amazing!

When the game ended and Wan Hui and Lu Yu arrived, Zhengzheng was being held by Ning Jing as they played with Su Liang in a game of leaf stem tug-of-war.

With two against one, Ning Jing held Zhengzheng's hand and won.

Zhengzheng whooped with joy, while Su Liang pretended to be heartbroken.

With that, Zhengzheng climbed from Ning Jing onto the table and approached Su Liang, raising his small hand to wipe away her non-existent tears, "Auntie, don't cry..."

Su Liang pointed to her cheek.

Immediately understanding, Zhengzheng leaned over and gave her a loud kiss.

Ning Jing gave a cough.

Zhengzheng then turned around, climbed back to Ning Jing, and kissed him as well.

Afterwards, the little guy sat on the table, clapping his hands and giggling, "Now it's Uncle Ning's turn to kiss Auntie! Daddy and Mommy do this too!"

Ning Jing looked at a nearby tree.

Su Liang looked at the bleak lake.

Both Wan Hui and Lu Yu couldn't help but smile, thinking their son was so clever. They also thought that Ning Jing and Su Liang were a perfect match but, after all, they were officially brother and sister, not a couple.

"Master Ning, Miss Su Liang," Wan Hui called out.

"Mom! Dad!" Zhengzheng stood up, eager to run forward but forgetting that he was still on the table.

Seeing Ning Jing swiftly reached out to catch him, Wan Hui breathed a sigh of relief, "He's getting naughtier by the day."

Wan Hui and her husband Lu Yu thanked Su Liang and Ning Jing again, telling them that their guesthouse was all set up and they should rest before the banquet to be held in their honor that night.

Exhausted from playing, Zhengzheng was carried away by Lu Yu for his afternoon nap, while Wan Hui accompanied Ning Jing and Su Liang to the guesthouse.

"If you two don't mind, please stay at the Wan family's house. Don't be reserved. After the New Year, Ning Jing's capital city exam won't be too late." Wan Hui looked sincere, adding, "When Zhengzheng returned, he always talked about both of you and never forgot!"

"Sister Wan, our trip here was just to see Zhengzheng. In a few days, we have to go back to Bei'an County, as there are still some matters to deal with there," Su Liang smiled, "Otherwise, I'd really want to stay and play with Zhengzheng."

Wan Hui looked a little disappointed, "Take care of your business first. Next year, when Ning Jing goes to the capital city for the exam, he'll surely achieve great success. I don't know if you two plan to stay in the capital city for a long time. My father wants to send one of us siblings to manage the business in the capital. After the New Year, my husband and I plan to go there with Zhengzheng. In the capital, we don't have to worry about the Li family's schemes. If you two are in the capital city, Zhengzheng will be able to see you more often. "

This was actually a decision made just today by Wan Qiang. He believed that Ning Jing and Su Liang were extraordinary and they must maintain this relationship which would benefit both Zhengzheng and the Wan family.

Su Liang nodded, "After the New Year, we'll go to the capital city and stay for some time, though we're not sure for how long. If Zhengzheng is going too, that would be even better."

Wan Hui smiled and nodded, "Then it's settled."

After making the arrangements, Wan Hui left them to rest, before going to tell Wan Qiang about Su Liang's thoughts.

"At first, I thought Ms. Su Liang was just following Ning Jing's lead, but now it seems that's not the case," Wan Qiang pondered, "After the New Year, you guys should take

Zhengzheng to the capital. We can't afford any disturbances in the business there. Now that you're going to manage it, I can rest assured."

The room that Wan Hui prepared for Su Liang and Ning Jing exuded a low-key luxury, with antique vases and precious calligraphy and paintings, showing their appreciation and respect for their guests.

After washing up, Su Liang took a nap. When she woke up, she heard people talking in the courtyard.

Upon stepping out, she saw Zhengzheng sitting in a large box with a gold ingot in his hand, smilingly handed it to Ning Jing.

"What's this?" Su Liang walked over and asked with a smile.

Zhengzheng immediately took back the gold ingot he had handed to Ning Jing, held his hand up high, and passed it to Su Liang, "For Auntie, a gift!" Ning Jing spoke with a faint smile, "Just now, he said they were all for me."

"Uncle's is Auntie's!" , Zhengzheng waved his little head, finding the phrase a bit confusing, he corrected himself again, "Uncle, it's Auntie's!"

Su Liang shook her head, "Wrong."

Zhengzheng blinked his big, black eyes and said with a giggling laugh, "Auntie, it's Uncle's!" Then he looked like he was saying, "Look, am I right this time? Praise me for being the smartest baby."

Su Liang chuckled, "As long as you're happy. Anyway, these are gifts for me." Ning Jing picked up a piece of fine agarwood from the box and walked away.

Zhengzheng then pulled Su Liang over to show her all sorts of treasures.

That evening, Wan Qiang hosted a banquet for Ning Jing and Su Liang, treating them as distinguished guests.

At first glance, Ning Jing seemed cold and aloof, but he did not refuse the toasts. Su Liang only drank a small cup, saying she had a poor alcohol tolerance.

Host and guest had a great time.

When the banquet was over, Zhengzheng had fallen asleep in Ning Jing's arms.

Wan Hui had originally planned for Zhengzheng to sleep with Ning Jing tonight, but instead, Ning Jing handed the child back to Lu Yu.

After returning to the guesthouse, Ning Jing said to Su Liang, "Don't forget about that matter."

Su Liang shook her head, "I haven't forgotten."

Late at night, Su Liang and Ning Jing secretly left the Wan Family and went to the inn where the Li family was staying in Qingyang City.

Li Chen had arrived the day before and had arranged with Wang Zhifu yesterday to visit the Wan family today.

His goal had not yet been achieved, so he had not left yet.

Su Liang and Ning Jing walked around the area near the inn and stopped at a certain place. Ning Jing said to Su Liang, "Wait here for me."

Su Liang took out a bamboo tube and handed it to Ning Jing, "Try the sedatives I made."

Ning Jing took it and quickly disappeared.

About half an hour later, Ning Jing came back carrying a person. He and Su Liang returned to the Wan family together.

The night was quiet.

The light in Ning Jing's room in the guesthouse was still on, and Su Liang was there too.

Someone was lying on the floor, it was Li Chen.

Initially, Ning Jing had told Su Liang to "arrange" for Li Chen to practice acupuncture on him, but since Li Chen was afraid of dying and had someone nearby to protect him, Ning Jing decided to take matters into his own hands for safety's sake.

Ning Jing took out a pack of silver needles, which had been specially prepared for his practice.

One needle pierced, Li Chen didn't move a muscle.

"The sedative works well," Ning Jing said.

"Good. You can practice your touch now," Su Liang replied.

So, on Li Chen's body, Ning Jing practiced almost all the acupuncture techniques Su Liang had taught him, except for two that were too stimulating and might wake him up.

To become proficient, he went through it all once, then started again.

Before dawn, Ning Jing sent Li Chen back, without anyone's knowing.

The next day, when Li Chen got up, his whole body ached. He had dreamed of being stabbed with needles all night, it was like seeing a ghost.

Su Liang and Ning Jing didn't kill Li Chen because if he died in Qingyang City, the Wan family would undoubtedly be suspected of being behind it.

On that day, Old Lady Li came to visit again, saying she wanted to have a good talk with Wan Hui, who didn't even let her in.

Su Liang gave Wan Qiang a prescription for a medicinal diet and also wrote two medicinal diet recipes that were beneficial for coughs, asking him to try them out.

As for the plan to cooperate against the Li family, Wan Qiang expressed great interest. When he learned that Su Liang was close friends with the young family head of the Yang Family, Yang Yu, he was overjoyed. He said that he had a good relationship with Yang Yu's late father, and the two had many business dealings in the past.

If they wanted to deal with the Li family, they needed to start with their largest ceramics business to shake their foundation.

Although the Wan, Ning, and Yang families were not experts in the business, neither was Li Chen. What mattered were the artisans employed by the Li family.

The artisans could be tempted away if offered enough money.

And what the three great businesses had most was silver.

Therefore, Su Liang's proposal was in line with Wan Qiang's intention. It was something he wanted to do but couldn't achieve on his own as the Wan family.

But he also voiced his concerns, "The wealth of the Wan, Ning, and Yang families is already enough to attract the attention of the court. If the three of us openly unite to devour the Li family, it wouldn't be a good thing. Some people don't like to see close relations between our families."

Su Liang understood Wan Qiang's meaning, "I didn't think enough about it.

Uncle Wan is right."

Wan Qiang shook his head, "Miss Su, don't misunderstand. I'm not against your proposal; it's just that the three families can't openly cooperate. The idea of taking the Li family's property and giving it to Zhengzheng is also not appropriate. I understand that you have no ulterior motives, and you are doing it for the Wan family and for Zhengzheng's sake. But for this matter, I think it would be most appropriate for you to take over the Li family."

Su Liang was stunned, "Me?"

Wan Qiang nodded, "Since Miss Su and Ning Jing haven't gotten married yet, you're not considered a member of the Ning family. Even if someone finds out about your relationship with the Wan and Yang families, it won't be a problem. You can act as a fourth party; our three families will fully support you in replacing the Li family, becoming one of the four major merchants. Miss Su, you don't have to worry, and I will handle this matter with the Ning family head and the Yang family head. Originally, you were the link between our three families. Just think of it as a thank you gift from the Wan family, and don't refuse."

Seeing Su Liang frown, Wan Qiang joked, "In this way, when Miss Su gets married to Ning Jing, they will be a perfect match, on equal footing!"

Chapter 102: 102. Barely

After a night of "nightmares" where he felt as if he were being pricked by needles, Li Chen woke up initially feeling a dull headache and aching all over his body. However, he had no difficulty moving around and seemed no different besides looking a bit worn out.

Old Lady Li wanted to use her seniority to force her way into the Wan Family, but she didn't even make it past the door before stomping back to the inn in anger. Upon seeing Li Chen, she asked, "Why do you look so pale?"

Li Chen suddenly fainted in front of her, blood spilling from the corner of his mouth.

Old Lady Li cried out in shock, "Chen'er!"

They invited the best doctor in Qingyang City, who diagnosed Li Chen with some unknown cause of qi and blood disorder. It was necessary for him to rest and avoid physical labor for a period of time.

Old Lady Li was relieved to hear that her son's life was not in danger. Resentful, she said "It's all that bitch Wan Hui's fault! She refuses to give up my Li family's bloodline, driving Chen'er to this state!"

Li Chen didn't seem to be waking up any time soon, and Old Lady Li, after weighing her options, decided that staying in Qingyang City was not a long-term solution. Since the route to the Government Office had already been blocked, they had no choice but to return home and make new plans.

After all, their grandson was still there and couldn't escape.

In truth, Zhengzheng's appearance did bear some resemblance to Li Chen when he was a child.

But due to Li Chen's indulgence in sensual pleasures and his weakened physical state, it was now impossible to see any resemblance between Zhengzheng's features and his.

Others might not see it, but Old Lady Li was well aware of this and firmly believed that Zhengzheng was her real grandson. That's why she had come all this way to argue her case.

She didn't expect Ning Jing and Su Liang to interfere, ruining their chance for success.

Moreover, their previous attempt to snatch Zhengzheng away had also been thwarted by Ning Jing and Su Liang.

Liang, we'll see who has the last laugh!"

With that, she ordered the servants to prepare for departure in order to avoid more trouble from the Wan Family. Li Chen, still unconscious, was carried straight into the carriage.

Just as the Li Family left the inn, Wan Qiang received the news.

He had not planned to retaliate against Li Chen and his mother, as taking any action at this time would only invite criticism.

After discussing the matter with Su Liang, Wan Qiang decided that the best way to seek revenge on the Li family would be to crush their business first.

After the Li family's departure, Wan Hui and Lu Yu accompanied Ning Jing and Su Liang on another day of sightseeing in Qingyang City. Most excited of all was Zhengzheng.

But happy times never last, and early the following day, Ning Jing and Su Liang bid farewell to their hosts and left Qingyang City.

Zhengzheng was still asleep, and not wanting to disturb him, Wan Hui didn't wake him up. She thought that after the new year, they could all meet again in the capital city.

"For Zhengzheng." Ning Jing handed over an agarwood bracelet, small and intricate, with each tiny bead etched with a meticulously engraved Buddhist scripture for safety.

Wan Hui took it, recognizing the agarwood as one of the treasures Zhengzheng “took” from Wan Qiang to give to his Ning Uncle and Aunt. It was extremely rare and had taken Wan Qiang a lot of effort to find.

Such intricate craftsmanship amazed Wan Hui, who was touched by Ning Jing’s skillful work. She knew Ning Jing and Su Liang were well-off and had no need for the Wan Family’s help or resources.

Even Su Liang’s proposal to unite the three families against the Li Family was ultimately for the benefit of the Wan Family, as the Li family had been causing trouble for them in various ways over the years.

Wan Hui understood this, and as a mother, she vowed to repay Ning Jing’s kindness and help whenever an opportunity arose.

“Sister Wan, you can go back now, no need to see us off. We’re going to Bei’an County for the New Year, and after that we will go to the capital city,” Su Liang said, waving from the carriage.

Watching Ning Jing driving the carriage with a straw hat on, Wan Qiang couldn’t help but marvel, “Master Ning, you are truly unconventional!”

As the carriage slowly pulled away from the gates of the Wan Family mansion, Wan Li sighed, “Compared to them, I seem so useless.”

Wan Qiang gave his son a kick, “You’re right, you are useless. I’ve decided, the Wan Family needs a scholar, and that will be you!”

Wan Li stared in disbelief. “Father, I’m already seventeen!”

“There are people who become scholars at sixty! What’s your excuse?” Wan Qiang snorted. “Our family business has peaked. If one of you had gotten a title and a government post earlier, would the Li family have dared to bully Huihui like they have?”

Wan Qiang’s second son said solemnly, “Father speaks the truth.”

The third and fourth sons immediately agreed, vowing that they would wholeheartedly support and oversee their youngest brother’s studies.

As a young child, Wan Li had been tutored by a scholar and had studied diligently, only to become frivolous and lose interest in pursuing academic honors in the last couple of years. However, he did have a solid foundation to build on.

He thought Wan Qiang was acting on a whim and would forget about it soon, but to his surprise, Wan Qiang spent a fortune that day to hire an elder scholar to tutor Wan Li separately.

Wan Qiang said he didn’t expect Wan Li to be as excellent as Ning Jing; he couldn’t do it either. All he wanted was for Wan Li to achieve the title of a scholar.

Wan Li wanted to cry but couldn’t, “Father, Ning Family’s master is a genius; I’m not. Becoming a scholar isn’t that easy...”

When Zhengzheng woke up, he was wearing a bracelet Ning Jing personally made for him.

Wan Hui thought Zhengzheng wouldn't find Ning Jing and Su Liang and would cry, but when she told him, he merely pouted and didn't cry, "Uncle Ning said that if I eat well and grow taller, I'll be able to see him and Aunt again."

Wan Hui smiled warmly, "Yes. Your aunt made you some delicious food."

Before leaving, Su Liang made breakfast for Zhengzheng: little bean buns shaped like rabbits and fried eggs shaped like bears, looking very cute.

On the other side, after leaving Qingyang City, Su Liang and Ning Jing sped up their journey northwards.

They took a big box full of gifts from Zhengzheng, as well as the silver fox cloak gifted by Wan Hui, the medical books Wan Qiang had collected hastily, and many valuable medicinal materials treasured by the Wan Family.

Just like when they came, the two took turns driving the carriage.

Three days later, Ning Jing gave Su Liang a bracelet, carved from the same piece of agarwood as the one he made for Zhengzheng, only slightly bigger.

"Do I have one too?" Su Liang was surprised.

"I used up that piece of wood and honed my carving skills." Ning Jing said.

Su Liang gratefully accepted it and put it on. It was just the right size, and its antique color had a nice texture. The faint fragrance was soothing, "Thank you."

After a while, Su Liang asked, "I have to give you a gift in return. What do you want?"

Ning Jing handed her his carving knife and the remaining wood.

Su Liang stared blankly. "You want me to make you one? I can't."

Ning Jing stretched out his hand with no intention of taking it back. "I want one too, but making it myself and wearing it is weird."

Helpless, Su Liang said, "Alright. You divide it into small pieces first, and I'll try. But if it's too ugly, don't complain."

So, that night, Su Liang got the carving knife and a bunch of small blocks of wood.

As they approached Bei'an County, the weather was overcast and chilly in the early morning.

As Su Liang was fiddling with the bracelet she made for Ning Jing, the carriage curtain was suddenly lifted, and a cold wind blew in.

Instinctively, Su Liang looked outside, her expression brightening, "It is snowing!"

Large flakes of snow fell like goose feathers, covering the ground with a white blanket. They could see the walls of Bei'an County in the distance.

Su Liang put on the cloak, sat beside Ning Jing, and let the snowflakes fall onto her face, the coldness disappearing in an instant.

Ning Jing took the finished bracelet from Su Liang's hand and slightly furrowed his brows.

Each bead of the bracelet was a different shape.

There were small stars, crescent moons, squares, spheres, flowers...

“Childish,” Ning Jing commented.

Su Liang cleared her throat, “I did my best. Or do you want to exchange it with Zhengzheng’s later?”

Ning Jing raised his hand, revealing his jade-like wrist. The bracelet slid down and clung to it.

Su Liang looked and felt that her craftsmanship was too poor and affected the aesthetic somewhat.

“Nevermind.” Ning Jing lowered his sleeve, indicating he would grudgingly accept it for now..

Chapter 103:103. I won ‘t let you get your way

Bei’an County government.

Mu Fei had not left yet; his identity as the Fourth Prince had not been made public in the local area. Therefore, besides investigating the iron mine smuggling case, he still had to deal with the county government affairs.

Most of the work could be done by Chang’an, but in order to preside over court trials, Mu Fei had to appear in person.

Today was freezing cold, and Mu Fei had just finished a trivial case in his opinion. He returned to the back hall with a dark face, while Chang’an quickly handed him a cup of hot tea.

“Cases of no importance all day long.” Mu Fei snorted softly.

Chang’an weakly said, “Today, the Master’s judgment helped the plaintiff to get back the money taken for a stolen pig, which is not a trivial matter. In the north, it’s cold, and the fields in winter have no harvest. People are relying on the pig to make it through!”

Mu Fei frowned. He wasn’t completely ignorant of the common people’s hardships. However, he felt that it wasn’t his responsibility, so he changed the subject, “Su Liang and Ning Jing haven’t returned yet?”

Chang’an shook his head, “No, according to previous news, Ning Jing has returned to Xunyang City to clean up his family affairs. Su Liang should be with him, and if they come over, her arrangements would have to be settled first.”

Mu Fei’s eyes narrowed slightly, “Why did Ning Jing choose this timing to return home for revenge? Could it be Ning Jing’s idea to let Su Liang kill those bastards and grind them into ashes?”

After pondering for a moment, Chang’an answered, “I also think that Ning Jing chose to return to the Ning Family for revenge and seize the family property after getting Su Liang’s help. I didn’t expect Ning Jing, who looks weak, to have such a ruthless side.”

Mu Fei sneered coldly, “Isn’t this appropriate? Those bastards have been living happily for so many years, which gave them a big advantage.”

“The master is reasonable. Ning Jing’s approach is beyond reproach according to his identity. In fact, it should have been done long ago.” Chang’an nodded in agreement.

“Would it be possible that they won’t return and just stay in Xunyang City?” Mu Fei snorted.

“Su Liang specifically wrote a letter saying she would return late, so she does plan to come back, right? Or is it that Ning Jing will stay in Xunyang City, while Su Liang returns here after handling his family’s trouble?” Chang’an guessed.

Mu Fei faintly smiled, “That would be best. I would love for Su Liang to leave Ning Jing; just seeing Ning Jing irritates me.”

As soon as the words fell, a report came from outside, ‘My Lord, a Miss Su Liang is requesting to see you.’”

Mu Fei’s face lit up with joy, and he quickly walked out.

Chang’an saw how hurried their Master looked and couldn’t help but wonder. Ever since Su Liang sent a letter saying she would return late, Mu Fei had been daydreaming about it. Could it be that he truly had his heart set on Su Liang?

“Su...” As soon as Mu Fei saw Su Liang, she was blocked by Ning Jing behind her.

Mu Fei’s eyes flickered, and he chuckled, “The two of you have finally returned!”

Su Liang stepped out from behind Ning Jing, standing in the snow, wrapped in a silver fox fur cloak, wearing a hood, which made her dainty and delicate face even more exquisite and fair.

“Lord Mu, how have you been?” Su Liang smiled.

Mu Fei greeted, “First, congratulations to Ning on achieving high academic honors and cleaning up his family affairs. Miss Su has put in so much effort, so Ning’s family property should at least be divided in half for her, right?”

Su Liang thought Mu Fei probably assumed she had gone to Xunyang City to help Ning Jing kill people, but she did not deny it, “We haven’t discussed this yet, but has Lord Mu prepared what was in the contract we signed?”

Mu Fei wanted to say that now that Su Liang was rich, shouldn’t she reduce by half the treasures she “extorted” from him earlier? Although he was a prince, his life was not easy either.

But before he could say anything, Su Liang had rebutted him first.

Chang’an hastily said, “My Lord, it’s so cold outside; how about inviting Ning Jing and Miss Su in for some hot tea?”

Mu Fei nodded, not yet speaking, when Su Liang said, “No need. We just entered the city and passed by the county government. We just wanted to pay our respects to Lord Mu before going home.”

Mu Fei looked unhappy, “Don’t you care about the progress of the case I am investigating?”

Su Liang looked serious, "You have results?"

"It's top secret and can't be disclosed for now." Mu Fei teased.

Su Liang immediately turned around, "Congratulations to Lord Mu. I won't bother you any longer."

As she spoke, she stepped into the snow with Ning Jing.

Mai Fei frowned, watching their retreating figures until they disappeared. Suddenly, he turned to Chang'an, "Weren't you going to invite them in for tea?"

How did you let them leave?"

Chang'an's face was confused. Su Liang had said that she just came to say hello. What could he do as a servant?

Chang'an was also somewhat speechless. Since the mastermind behind the iron mine smuggling case couldn't be mentioned, why had he asked Su Liang if she wanted to know, only to tell her afterwards that he couldn't tell her? Chang'an felt that if it weren't for Mai Fei's status as a prince, Su Liang would have definitely been upset by this kind of play.

"How annoying! That girl has never taken me seriously!" Mai Fei angrily exclaimed, "I'm too nice to her. Who does she think she is?"

Chang'an looked at his nose, focusing inwardly.

"Since Ning Jing is now the head of the Ning Family, why doesn't he stay in Xunyang City and have a good time? Why come back to this broken place?" Mai Fei continued to grumble sarcastically.

Chang'an weakly replied, "I think Miss Su wanted to come back, and Young Master Ning followed her here..."

Mai Fei's face darkened, and he stood under the eaves for a while before walking back without a word.

Chang'an silently followed. Before Mai Fei closed the door, he said, "Get ready. We're returning to the capital in three days!" With that, he slammed the door shut.

Chang'an replied, then sighed in his heart. The truth is, the mastermind of the iron mine smuggling case had been uncovered and reported to the emperor. Mai Fei could have left already, but he wasn't used to the cold in the north and insisted on staying to wait for Su Liang. Just yesterday, he had said that he wanted to hire Su Liang to escort him back to the capital. But today, he seemed to have forgotten about it after being perfunctorily greeted by Su Liang.

"Master, should I inform General Nian?" Chang'an asked for instructions. "General Nian was the one you asked the emperor to send to assist in the investigation. It's only right to escort you back to the capital." Continuing, "The emperor has already dispatched General Sun, who is to be stationed at the mine permanently, and he will arrive soon."

“Hmm.” Mai Fei’s voice came from behind the door, “Then I’ll leave after General Sun arrives. Send someone to inform Nian Jincheng.”

Chang’an hesitated. It was cold and snowy, and General Sun probably wouldn’t be able to arrive in Bei’an County within three days. Mai Fei should know this, but he had just pushed back the date of returning to the capital again.

On snowy days, the shops in the county town were open, but most of the original vendors didn’t set up their stalls.

Su Liang and Ning Jing went to Mingxiang Building and bought two boxes of freshly baked Osmanthus Cake, as well as four kinds of other desserts.

They passed by the meat shop and bought a rack of ribs, two pig’s feet, and a piece of tenderloin.

At this time of the year, only radishes and cabbage were available, so they bought some of those too.

After finishing their shopping on the way, the two returned to Feiyan Town before noon and ordered two hot dishes at Feiyan Restaurant. After eating, they set off for the village.

The snow was getting heavier, and there were few people on the road. Going against the wind, the horse was walking slowly.

Su Liang wanted to switch with Ning Jing and drive the carriage herself. Ning Jing refused, ‘You said it yourself, women can’t be exposed to the cold.’ Su Liang coughed lightly, “Who said that you never treated me like a woman?”

“That’s a different matter.” Ning Jing said.

Su Liang didn’t insist, “If I had known the snow would be so heavy, I would have stayed in the county town overnight.”

“How do you know the snow would stop tomorrow?” Ning Jing countered.

Su Liang thought for a moment, “Let’s go home early. I wonder if Yan Shiba has left yet.”

After an unknown amount of time, with only the creaking sound of the carriage wheels rolling over the snow, Su Liang, sitting inside the carriage, was a bit drowsy when the carriage came to a stop.

She lifted the carriage curtain, and right in front of her was the home where she had lived for several months after coming through time.

The main gate and the surrounding walls had reportedly been covered in snow, giving the whole village a quiet and beautiful appearance.

A lock hung on the door. Ning Jing took out the key to open it but found that the lock had been changed.

“Big Brother Ning! Sister Su Liang!”

Bai Xiaohu and Zhuzi rushed over, their voices filled with surprise and joy.

Bai Xiaohu accidentally fell and plunged headfirst into the snow.

Zhuzi looked back and continued running towards Su Liang, “Sister Su Liang! You’re finally back!”

Bai Xiaohu got up with his face full of snow, grinning from ear to ear, "I told you, Sister Su Liang said she would come back for the New Year, I knew she would!"

Su Liang rubbed the heads of the two little ones and asked them who had changed the lock on her house.

"Sister Jiujiu had it changed, saying the key was lost and afraid that someone might pick it up to steal things!" Zhuzi blurted out.

Su Liang thought that this must have been a deliberate attempt by Yan Shiba to make them return to a closed door, only to find it locked.

"Where is she?" Su Liang smiled.

"She's at my house!" said Bai Xiaohu, "Big Brother Ning and Sister Su Liang, come to my house to warm up by the fire! My grandpa is roasting sweet potatoes!"

Su Liang expressed great interest upon hearing this.

"Sister Su Liang hasn't boarded yet!" Bai Xiaohu, realizing that Ning Jing had forgotten Su Liang, quickly reminded her.

"She doesn't want to ride." As soon as Ning Jing uttered these words, Su Liang excitedly made a snowball and ran up, hitting him squarely on the head.

Bai Xiaohu and Zhuzi both stared in shock.

Ning Jing sat calmly in the driver's seat as if nothing had happened.

"Let's see who gets there first." Having said this, Su Liang raced through the snow.

The carriage was left behind.

Zhuzi had a sudden realization, "So Sister Su Liang wanted to walk on her own."

Bai Xiaohu shook his head, "Sister Su Liang just thinks the carriage is too slow and wants to eat my grandpa's roasted sweet potatoes earlier."

Ning Jing nodded slightly, "Little Tiger is right."

When Su Liang entered the Bai Family's home, Mrs. Bai stuck her head out of the kitchen with a delighted expression and shouted, "Little Liang is back!"

The very next moment, Yan Shiba's furious roar echoed from the hall,

"Bastard! She actually knows how to come back?"

Su Liang walked over calmly, greeted Mrs. Bai first, stomped the snow off her shoes, lifted the curtain, and entered the hall.

A wave of warmth enveloped her.

The premium silver-threaded charcoal was beyond the Bai Family's means; it was a gift to Su Liang's sister from Hu Er.

Because Yan Shiba was having meals here, most of it had been moved over.

At this moment, Yan Shiba nested in a bamboo recliner, covered with a silk quilt, looking rosy-cheeked, with a pot of hot water nearby.

Old Bai was using tongs to remove baked sweet potatoes from the charcoal.

Yan Shiba glared at Su Liang, “Weren’t you supposed to run off with that wild man? What are you doing back here?”

To Ning Jing, the “wild man” who heard Yan Shiba’s voice, he parked the carriage outside, let Bai Xiaohu jump down by himself, and helped Zhuzi down to the ground. Both of them rushed into the house.

Su Liang glanced at Yan Shiba without saying a word, diverted her gaze, grabbed a small stool, and sat by the charcoal stove to warm her hands.

Old Bai happily handed Su Liang a roasted sweet potato in a bowl, “Here, eat something warm.”

Su Liang peeled the soft outer skin, and the sweet aroma wafted through the air. She took a bite and felt the icy chill that had seeped in from the snowy weather being instantly banished.

Warmth and sweetness, these were the flavors that could heal a person’s heart.

Ning Jing entered through the curtain with a bag of snacks for the Bai Family in hand and placed it on the table.

Old Bai hurriedly greeted him and handed him a sweet potato as well.

Yan Shiba, who had been ignored from the beginning, watched Su Liang and Ning Jing sitting on either side of the charcoal stove, comfortably eating roasted sweet potatoes, grinding her teeth in anger, “Liang! Sister!”

Su Liang still paid her no mind, only telling Old Bai, “I’m sorry for all the trouble I’ve caused you lately.”

Old Bai waved her off, “Not at all. Your sister’s been good, and her health is improving.”

Mrs. Bai brought them steaming bowls of bone soup.

After eating the sweet potatoes and drinking a bowl of soup, the two of them got up to leave.

With a stomach full of grievances, Yan Shiba tried to ignore Su Liang, but it was like punching cotton. She could only close her eyes and pretend to be asleep.

Su Liang walked over and picked her up, quilt and all, “Mrs. Bai, I’ll take her back now. As for the expenses during this time, we’ll sort it out later.” A slight curve appeared at the corner of Yan Shiba’s lips, only to disappear in an instant.

Su Liang placed her in the carriage and sat down herself as Ning Jing drove them home.

Feigning ignorance of Yan Shiba’s pretense, Su Liang deliberately spoke in a low voice through the curtain, “If you give Yan Shiqi the MO Yu thumb ring, Yan Shiba will definitely make a scene. To prevent creating more trouble, why not... ‘

Ning Jing replied, “Slaughter.”

“Then I’d have to pay Mrs. Bai for the food she’s eaten these days, which would mean a loss.”

“Sell her to the mine.”

“That’s a good idea. Anyway, she’s almost healed and can work.”

Suddenly, Yan Shiba opened her eyes angrily, “Su Liang!”

With an innocent face, Su Liang replied, “You’re awake? When are you going to leave? Pay the money before you go.”

“You actually gave the MO Yu thumb ring to that treacherous Yan Shiqi?” Yan Shiba stared at Su Liang with wide eyes.

“If he’s a treacherous man, then what are you? A righteous gentleman?” Su Liang scoffed.

“You...” Yan Shiba choked, her eyes flashing as she suddenly adopted a pitiful look, “Little sister Liang, do you really hate your sister that much?”

“Don’t pull that on me!” Su Liang said impatiently, “If you haven’t forgotten, we had a falling out before I left. The fact that I didn’t throw you out is just me being too kind-hearted. You don’t have to believe me, but you can leave now.”

Yan Shiba instantly put away her pretentious expression, glared at Su Liang, and suddenly clenched her teeth and shook her head in a frenzy, “I’m going to be mad because of you, this damn girl! Mad! Mad! It’s all my fault, okay?” Su Liang smirked, “Oh? So tell me, what did you do wrong?”

Yan Shiba banged her head against the carriage wall, “My mistake was actually wanting to be sisters with you! The more I think about it, the more I want to be one! Ahhh, I’m going crazy! Just give me a straight answer! If you say yes, I’ll trust you from now on! If not, I’ll jump out of the carriage right away!” Ning Jing lifted the curtain and said a single word, “Please.”

“What does our sisterly relationship have to do with you, you wild man? Shut up! I’ve said it before, my sister likes Gu Ling!” Yan Shiba roared, then turned to Su Liang, “You! You say it!”

Su Liang thought seriously for a moment, “To be honest, I really want to see you jump off.”

Yan Shiba stared at Su Liang fixedly, then suddenly gave a cold laugh, “Is that so? Well, I won’t let you have your way! From now on, you’re my sister! Even the Heavenly King can’t change it!”

Chapter 104: 104. You escort me back to the capital

The gate opened, the carriage went straight in, and stopped close to the eaves.

Su Liang got off first, while Yan Shiba lazed, waiting to be carried out, with a smug expression.

Su Liang carried Yan Shiba horizontally and took her back to the room.

Su Liang didn't look back, "Ning Jing, boil water, I want to wash my face." Yan Shiba: ...

Ning Jing drove the carriage to the backyard, tied the horses under the shed, and went to the kitchen to boil water.

Su Liang put Yan Shiba on the bed, pulled back the quilt, and checked her leg.

"There's feeling, but yesterday I tried to stand up, it hurt like needles jabbing."

Yan Shiba looked somewhat annoyed, "Like a cripple!"

Su Liang calmly corrected, "Not like, it actually is crippled."

Yan Shiba grabbed a pillow and threw it at Su Liang, "Is that how you talk to your sister?"

Su Liang didn't get angry or annoyed, she grabbed the pillow, propped up Yan Shiba, put it behind her waist, and let her sit on the bed.

"That's more like it." Yan Shiba was grudgingly satisfied with Su Liang's attitude, "From now on, you have to listen to me and be good to me, got it?"

Su Liang pinched Yan Shiba's injured arm, and she gasped, "You're trying to kill your sister!"

"Not very optimistic, it seems you have to wait at least until the end of this winter." Su Liang put down her arm.

"Did you listen to the rules I mentioned just now?" Yan Shiba patted the bed with her healthy hand, insisting on a reply.

Su Liang sat down by the bed, "First of all, you taking me as your sister is your own wishful thinking, I didn't agree to it."

Yan Shiba's face changed instantly.

But then Su Liang continued, "Secondly, I can agree to that. The only reason you're my sister is that you're older than me. Becoming sisters is something you begged me for, and you need to admit that."

Yan Shiba gritted her teeth, "I have to beg you to be your sister?"

Su Liang nodded, "Don't try to get something for nothing with me. You want me as a sister, yet you want me to spoil you, why don't you just go to heaven? Which eye of yours saw me as a foolish woman? Stop playing games. Even if you don't beg me, I won't throw you out. I'll continue to treat you, and I'll give you the bill for the diagnosis fee when you leave. If you don't pay, I'll close the door and let Ning Jing go. If you beg me, we can be sisters, but you have to listen to me and be good to me."

"I knew you were a little bastard!" Yan Shiba stared at Su Liang.

Su Liang shrugged, "Your choice. If you don't like it, find someone else."

Yan Shiba quickly changed her mind, "Fine, let me suffer a little and become your younger sister, calling you sister, you should listen to me and be good to me, right?"

“Stop with the nonsense.” Su Liang got up and walked away, reaching the doorway in the blink of an eye.

Yan Shiba hit the bed again, “Alright, I won’t argue with you! Let’s do it your way!”

“Which way did I say?” Su Liang looked back and asked.

“I’ll be the older sister, listen to you, and be good to you! Is that okay?” Yan Shiba huffed.

Su Liang shook her head, “No, it’s not. You have to beg me.”

“Xiaoliang, know when to quit!” Yan Shiba snorted, “In my life, I’ve never begged anyone!”

“Suit yourself.” Su Liang was about to turn back.

She heard Yan Shiba’s voice from behind, “I beg you! I beg you! I beg you! Are you satisfied now?”

“It’s alright. Depending on your performance.” Su Liang left the room after speaking.

Yan Shiba slapped her forehead, feeling as if she had lost her mind.

In an instant, Yan Shiba muttered, “Just you wait, when you have feelings for me, I’ll teach you a lesson, you little bastard!”

Su Liang returned to her room, which was still as it was when she left.

While Su Liang was chatting with Yan Shiba, Ning Jing had brought a charcoal basin in, but it hadn’t warmed up yet.

Su Liang changed her clothes and went to the kitchen.

Ning Jing scooped up the hot water, “Wash your face.”

“She begged to be my sister, what do you think?” Su Liang asked Ning Jing’s opinion as she washed.

“Don’t easily trust her.” Ning Jing said.

“I think so too.” Su Liang nodded, “She’s a bit moody. Maybe she’s just interested in me for now. If she loses interest one day, who knows what she’ll do. Let’s keep it that way for now, and wait until she’s recovered to decide.”

Bai Xiaohu and Zhuzi carried a basket of sweet potatoes over, which Old Bai gave them, knowing they liked to eat them.

Su Liang told Ning Jing to cut half of the ribs they bought, put them in the basket, and let the little brothers take them back.

The room was cold, so Su Liang and Ning Jing stayed in the kitchen, one lighting the fire and the other preparing the ingredients, getting ready to stew the rib soup first.

The snow outside grew heavier, and with the kitchen door closed, the fire in the stove was blazing and warm.

“The iron smuggling case, Mai Fei said to keep it a secret, there must be results by now. It couldn’t be Bei Jingwang, right? If you’re not in trouble then Xing Yusheng will be in danger.” Su Liang said.

Ning Jing shook his head, “I don’t know. Even if it’s Bei Jingwang, Xing Yusheng won’t die.”

Su Liang was puzzled, “Why? If the emperor wants to cut vassal ties and catches Bei Jingwang in such a big scandal, he will surely eradicate them.”

“Qin Family’s ancestor was a founding hero and has a life-saving golden medal that hasn’t been used yet.” Ning Jing said.

Su Liang nodded, “So that’s why. If the Xing family is in trouble, it’s only human for the Qin family’s old man to save the sickly grandson. But in this case, isn’t Xing Yusheng’s grandmother doomed? What can he do about it?”

Ning Jing frowned slightly, “He can give the life-saving golden medal to his grandmother, the emperor won’t object.”

“I believe when it comes to that point, Xing Yusheng would be willing to do that, but how could his grandmother agree? She might leave first, so he wouldn’t be embarrassed.” Su Liang sighed.

“It may not be Bei Jingwang.” Ning Jing said.

“I hope not. After all, Xing Yusheng is our friend, even if he doesn’t have a good relationship with his father, he must care about his grandmother.” Su Liang said.

At this time, snow was also falling in the capital city of Qian Country, which was located in the middle. Although the snow was much lighter than in Bei’an County, the sudden drop in temperature still made people unable to adapt.

Before entering the capital, Xing Yusheng was treated by Su Liang, which had improved his health a lot. He had been pretending to be weak while sitting in a wheelchair since then.

The sudden drop in temperature caused him to cough again.

Recently, there were many rumors in the capital about the iron mining smuggling case, and most of them pointed to Bei Jingwang as the mastermind.

After all, there was only one vassal king in the north. From a positional point of view, Bei Jingwang was indeed the biggest suspect.

Duanmu Chen, the fourth son of the emperor who was in charge of the investigation, had not yet returned to the capital, and nothing had happened in the palace yet.

As Su Liang said, Xing Yusheng was very anxious, and what he worried about was not his estranged father, nor would he care about his hypocritical stepmother and siblings whom he had

hardly any affection for. He was just afraid that something would happen to his elderly grandmother.

Yesterday, Xing Yusheng mentioned to Qin Kang that he wanted to send someone to pick up his grandmother to the capital city.

But at that time, Qin Kang only said, "It is true that your grandmother loves you, but she also cares about her other grandchildren and wouldn't be willing to come."

Qi Jun had gone to make a herbal concoction for Xing Yusheng, who sat by the window, watching the snowflakes falling outside with a pale face.

"Master!"

Suddenly, hearing a familiar voice, Xing Yusheng looked over and saw Qi Yan enter the courtyard door, braving the snowstorm.

Previously, Xing Yusheng had sent him to protect the Lin family, and he only returned today.

Qi Yan brushed off the snow on his body, standing outside the window, reported to Xing Yusheng.

"All four people of the Lin family have arrived in the capital city safe and sound. Master, please don't worry."

After Qi Yan finished recounting what happened, Xing Yusheng asked, "Do they recognize Ning Jing and Su Liang?"

"They say they do. I didn't ask too much. I suppose it's just because Ning met them in Pingbei City during that time. At the time I went, Ning and Miss Su had already returned to Bei'an County," Qi Yan said.

Xing Yusheng shook his head, "They didn't return to Bei'an County, but went to Xunyang City first."

Qi Yan was stunned, "How did Master know that?"

"The news has reached the capital city. Ning Jing, slaying his father and brother, has ground the Ning family's people to dust," Xing Yusheng said.

Qi Yan looked shocked, "So ruthless?"

"Those people were even more ruthless towards Ning Jing before, just didn't succeed," Xing Yusheng said.

He then instructed Qi Yan to inform Qin Yujin of the safe arrival of the Lin family in the capital city.

Qi Jun brought over the prepared herbal concoction, urging Xing Yusheng to drink it while it was still hot, "Master, how about I make a trip to Bei'an County to investigate the situation? In case it's really the prince... we should make early preparations for saving the old lady."

Xing Yusheng shook his head, "No need. Tomorrow I will enter the palace to request an audience with the emperor, asking for permission to return home for the new year. It depends on the emperor's wishes."

"If the emperor allows it, then Master..." Qi Jun frowned.

"My grandmother is old and can't come to the capital city. If the emperor allows it, I will go back to see her," Xing Yusheng's voice was low.

Qi Jun wanted to say more but stopped, leaving only a sigh.

The news that Qi Yan brought made Qin Yujin very happy, and she ran to find Xing Yusheng.

"Cousin, the emperor has sent General Sun to guard the mine, so that General Nian can return to the capital city with the fourth prince in a few days, right?" Qin Yujin looked hopeful.

Xing Yusheng nodded, "Perhaps."

He had no interest in Qin Yujin's girlish affairs at the moment, and she left after sitting for a while.

Unexpectedly, the next day, Mai Fei sent someone early in the morning to find Nian Jincheng, asking him to rush to Su Village before noon.

Nian Jincheng didn't know what Mai Fei was up to, but now he could openly go to find Ning Jing.

When Nian Jincheng arrived alone at Su Village on horseback, he happened to meet Mai Fei, who was coming in a carriage, so they went to Su Liang's doorstep together.

The snow had just stopped this morning, and the accumulated snow was thick.

Su Liang took Bai Xiaohu, while Ning Jing took Zhuzi, and they were respectively piling snowmen in the courtyard on both sides.

The two little ones took the initiative to run over and propose to make snowmen together. However, Bai Xiaohu wanted to make a wild boar snowman, while Zhuzi said he wanted a horse. Since they couldn't agree, they simply worked separately.

Yan Shiba was lying in his room, listening to the laughter and joy outside, pounding the bed, wishing he could immediately recover and kick Ning Jing and Su Liang's snowmen.

Chang'an knocked on the door, and as it opened, Ning Jing's line of sight passed by Mai Fei and met with Nian Jincheng's behind, then immediately separated.

Seeing that the other was safe was enough.

"It's so lively?" Mai Fei asked with a smile as he entered.

Ning Jing was waiting to close the door, and Nian Jincheng was the last to enter, stepped forward beside him and said with a salute, "Congratulations to Ning for obtaining the highest score in the examination." "What brings Lord Mai here?" Su Liang asked.

"Can't I come if there's nothing going on?" Mai Fei counter-questioned.

"Please feel free," Su Liang said.

But there were no places to sit in the courtyard, and the doors of the rooms were closed. Mai Fei stood there, snorted lightly, "I won't bicker with you about your hospitality. There are important matters."

Su Liang stood up, "Please tell."

"I can tell you the result of the case, which I believe you care about. But there are conditions," Mai Fei said.

"Tell me the conditions first. Then I'll consider whether I care about the outcome of the case," Su Liang said.

Chang'an's mouth twitched slightly, and indeed saw that the face of his master was a bit dark.

"It's not convenient to talk here, " Mai Fei snorted.

"Please," Su Liang led the way toward Ning Jing's room.

Mai Fei ordered that no one else was allowed in, and he wanted to have a private talk with Su Liang.

With the door closed, Ning Jing asked Nian Jincheng, "When will General Nian return to the capital city?"

"At the arrangement, it should be soon," Nian Jincheng said.

Ning Jing didn't ask any more questions, pointing to Su Liang's half-finished snowman and gesturing for Nian Jincheng to continue building it.

Nian Jincheng squatted down beside Bai Xiaohu and asked him, "What's this?"

Full of grins, Bai Xiaohu replied, "Wild boar!"

Nian Jincheng nodded, "Good." But his strength was too great. He accidentally collapsed the half-finished snowman with the swipe of his hand.

Just when Nian Jincheng was embarrassed, he heard Bai Xiaohu exclaim, "Uncle, you are so strong! Let's build this quickly before Sister Su Liang finds out!"

A trace of a smile crossed Nian Jincheng's eyes, his tone softened a lot,

"Alright."

In the room, Mai Fei began, "I know you and Xing Yusheng are good friends. Knowing the outcome of the case earlier is very important to him, so I think you care about it too."

"Conditions," Su Liang said concisely.

It was apparent that this was a secret, even Nian Jincheng didn't know about it, and Mai Fei wanted to negotiate a deal with her.

"Someone will try to assassinate me next. The condition is that you escort me back to the capital city," Mai Fei's eyes shone..

Chapter 105: 105. Hope he becomes more sober

The atmosphere fell silent.

Before coming, Mai Fei had envisioned that given Su Liang's temperament, she might immediately refuse or even resort to her most effective tactic of nonsensical wordplay upon hearing his request.

Unexpectedly, it turned out differently.

Su Liang slightly furrowed her brows, directing her gaze at Ning Jing's pen holder on the table, remaining silent as though she was seriously considering it.

A faint smile appeared on the corner of Mai Fei's lips, hoping that Su Liang would agree since he personally requested.

After a moment, Mai Fei reached for the pen holder and asked, "Where did you buy this? It's quite unique."

Su Liang's hand moved faster, taking the pen holder before him and said, "Ning

Jing doesn't like others touching his things." Mai Fei's face darkened slightly, "Are you not one of the others?"

"We are sworn siblings," Su Liang replied seriously.

Mai Fei scoffed, "Who cares about a broken pen holder? Let's talk business. Have you made a decision?"

Hands resting on the pen holder atop the table, Su Liang looked at Mai Fei and said, "I don't quite understand His Highness the Fourth Prince's intentions." "I thought I made myself very clear," Mai Fei said.

Su Liang shook her head, "I understand what His Highness the Fourth Prince wants me to do, but I don't understand why it has to be me? Under normal circumstances, General Nian will escort His Highness the Fourth Prince back to the capital, and I'm just a weak woman who only knows a few flashy moves."

Upon hearing the last sentence, Mai Fei glared at Su Liang vehemently, "You expect me to believe that? Isn't the destruction of the Ning Family your doing?"

Su Liang shook her head, "I swear by the heavens and earth, it was not." "So, Ning Jing had hidden abilities?" Mai Fei's eyes suddenly deepened.

Su Liang sighed softly, "Has His Highness the Fourth Prince ever heard of a saying that 'money talks'?"

"What do you mean?" Mai Fei frowned.

"If I said that Ning Jing spent a lot of money to hire an assassin, would His Highness the Fourth Prince believe me?" Su Liang asked.

Mai Fei was stunned for a moment, "I believe you. But I can't possibly hire an assassin to escort me, what if the one I hire is employed by others to kill me?"

"There is indeed such a possibility," Su Liang said, "I am just clarifying that the matter of Ning Family had nothing to do with me, I am not suggesting His Highness the Fourth Prince should hire an assassin, it's inappropriate and

unnecessary.”

“Stop beating around the bush. If you ask why I chose you, I can only say I believe you have hidden capabilities,” Mai Fei said, wearing a nonchalant smile.

Su Liang put on a serious face, “I appreciate the compliments from His Highness the Fourth Prince. But if your guesses are true and I have hidden my strengths, then I have my reasons to do so. If I could easily reveal it, why would I hide it in the first place?”

Mai Fei snorted, “Are you refusing me?”

“What I actually want to say is, although I happened to assist His Highness the Fourth Prince previously and will be cooperating in the future, there is no need for His Highness to be overly courteous to me. Business is business. I won’t let a single copper coin that I’m entitled to out of my sight,” Su Liang said half-jokingly, “I have heard a saying that if a person in the royal family lets their emotions get the best of them, their future will be bleak.”

The expression on Mai Fei’s face stiffened. He abruptly stood up and looked intently at Su Liang. He soon sat back down with pursed lips, remaining silent.

Under Su Liang’s clear and penetrating eyes, Mai Fei felt a tinge of embarrassment...

Because Su Liang’s words served as a harsh reminder, bashing onto Mai Fei’s heart, waking him from his recent state of fluctuating between rationality and emotions!

Obviously, as an individual born into the royal family who has had his struggles till now, Mai Fei understands these principles far better than Su Liang, and he’s been reminding himself of the very same thing – never let emotions get in the way, and at best, don’t have any emotions at all.

However, he now belatedly realized that the reason he was here was because his feelings seemed to have been stirred by Su Liang.

In simple terms, he was developing feelings for Su Liang, albeit slight ones.

Previously, a man like Duanmu Chen who prioritized personal gains would never entrust his safety to a young girl, regardless of how clever and seemingly deep the girl may be.

As Su Liang mentioned earlier, it’s not that it’s impossible, it’s just unnecessary.

If he couldn’t even manage to safely return to the capital despite having the ability to uncover the iron smuggling case, he might as well forget about taking the highest position.

For a person of Mai Fei’s stature, it’s best to avoid undertaking unnecessary matters.

Looking back, from the time they met till now, Su Liang has treated Mai Fei completely in a transactional manner, without ever hinting at wanting to befriend him.

Because Su Liang knows that as a prince desiring power, he has no true friends, only interests.

Indeed, this is so.

Mai Fei never expected that he, who started off as a completely rational strategist, would be the first to lose in this game.

“If His Highness the Fourth Prince doesn’t have any other orders, may I go build a snowman? Since you’re here, please stay for lunch, this meal is free of charge, it’s in honor of Your Highness’s visit.” After these words, Su Liang stood up and left.

Mai Fei watched her slender figure as she walked away, letting out a long sigh.

For the first time, he felt a sense of suppression from a woman, even though she didn’t intend so.

For a fleeting moment, Mai Fei wondered if he could have a smoother path in the future with such a smart and insightful woman by his side?

However, the rational side of him quickly dismissed this thought.

Because he wasn’t sure if he could control Su Liang, to be precise, he had absolutely no confidence. Su Liang showed no interest in him, it had been evident from the start till now.

A coerced melon is not only not sweet, it even result in turning a friend into an enemy.

Even if they are not friends now and won’t be in the future, maintaining a friendly and cooperative relationship to prevent talent from being siphoned off by the enemy is already an advantage.

A clear-minded Mai Fei stepped out of the room, quickly approached by Chang’an. He discreetly studied Mai Fei’s expression and sensing that his mood was good, couldn’t help but asked with a smile, “It seems that Miss Su has agreed?”

Mai Fei snorted disdainfully, “Why would she go with me when she has that pretty boy Ning Jing?”

After saying those words, Mai Fei rolled up his sleeves, ready to join the group building a snowman.

Chang’an was utterly perplexed. If Su Liang had indeed turned down the proposal, why was his master still so cheerful? Even joining the snowman-building? What on earth was happening in the world? Why does it seem like there were question marks floating all around his head every day since they met Su Liang...

“Lord Mai?” Little Tiger looked surprised. He knew this was the county magistrate, how terrifying it was to have him join in the snowman-building! When he told his friends about it, they would definitely think he was bragging!

Mai Fei smiled amicably, “What’s your name?”

“Bai Xiaohu (Little Tiger).” Little Tiger tightened his face nervously.

“Oh, this is a tiger.” Mai Fei looked at the snowman that Nian Jincheng and Little Tiger were building, appearing quite knowledgeable.

Little Tiger was a bit torn about whether he should correct the county magistrate. What if he didn’t take it well?

Meanwhile, Little Pillar teased from the other side, “That uncle is so silly, he can’t even recognize a wild boar!”

Mai Fei:

Chang'an turned his head trying hard not to burst into laughter...

In order to break the awkward atmosphere, Nian Jincheng asked, "Has the Lord ever seen a wild boar?"

Mai Fei glanced at Nian Jincheng impassively, "No. Go hunt one now."

Bai Xiaohu mustered up some courage to speak, "It's too cold, wild boars are hiding, we can't catch any! Sister Su Liang and I caught a big wild boar before on the mountain, we sold it and made quite some money!"

Just as Mai Fei was about to ask about the details of their boar hunt, Yan Shiba shouted out loudly, "Xiaoliang, come here!"

Mai Fei knew about Su Jiujiu, but did not know about her background.

Su Liang rose to walk over, and Yan Shiba said, "Carry me out, I need some fresh air."

Su Liang didn't move, "You have a chance, say it again."

Yan Shiba rolled her eyes while saying in a coy voice, "Little Liang, your sister feels so stuffy, I really want to go out and get some fresh air, but my legs are injured and I am unable to walk, could you carry me, please..."

Su Liang felt goosebumps all over, "Forget it, just speak normally."

She first moved the recliner Su Dakuan had given to Yan Shiba under the eaves, then she carried Yan Shiba, quilt included, outside.

Turning back, Mai Fei caught Yan Shiba casting a flirtatious look towards him.

Mai Fei felt weird, thinking to himself that it was quite speechless that Su Liang's sister turned out to be such an easy-going woman.

The future proved Mai Fei wrong about Yan Shiba. Once he saw her true abilities and learnt of her true identity, he felt as if he had been slapped hard across the face. But that's another story.

Su Liang went to prepare lunch, Ning Jing stoked the fire, and the main forces on both teams ended up being Mai Fei and Chang'an against Nian Jincheng.

As soon as Su Liang finished preparing the food, their snowman was also completed.

A large wild boar.

A spirited horse.

Bai Xiaohu and Zhuzi were very satisfied and ran cheerfully around their snowmen, extremely excited.

Mai Fei chuckled, "I suppose I have seen a wild boar now."

Chang'an was relieved. His master was in a good mood that day, so he probably wouldn't whimsically order him to go hunt a wild boar in the mountains.

Nian Jincheng, who had started off the pig-snowman, ended up finishing off Ning Jing's horse-snowman.

This was a pleasure he had never enjoyed before in his life, making the icy snow feel warm, filling his heart with warmth.

In the kitchen, Ning asked quietly, "Why invite someone for dinner?"

With a light humph, Su Liang answered, "Isn't it for the sake of keeping your friend here?"

Meanwhile, in the yard, Chang'an, thinking they should leave, was surprised when Mai Fei said, beaming, "Miss Su invited me for lunch today."

Chang'an thought to himself that miracles did happen; the robber Su who specifically targeted his master had changed her nature?

"General Nian should also stay and join us," Mai Fei added, making it sound as if Nian Jincheng had benefited from his benevolence. "I will mention this to Miss Su."

Nian Jincheng nodded, "Thank you very much, Mr. Mai. I guess it's easier to comply than to resist." In actuality, he had no idea why Mai Fei invited him.

Mai Fei abandoned his initial plan and didn't bother explaining to Nian Jincheng; he just let the matter pass, only mentioning they should be ready to set out for the capital two days later.

Madam Bai came to fetch her grandson home for dinner, but discovered Bai Xiaohu and Zhuzi already eating at Su Liang's dinner table, with the County Magistrate sitting right next to them.

Su Liang, knowing that Madam Bai would come, had specially saved a large bowl of pork ribs for her to take home.

Madam Bai, knowing Su Liang's character, thought to herself that she needed to tell Old Bai to bake some dried sweet potatoes for Su Liang and Ning Jing; although they were delicious, they required a lot of effort, so they rarely made them at home.

After they finished eating, Ning Jing cleaned up the dishes and brought them to the kitchen while the two kids, having gotten Su Liang's approval, went to invite their friends in the village to come and see their snowmen.

Upon hearing that Su Liang and Ning Jing were back in town, Lei Zheng hadn't been able to visit due to the heavy snow the previous day. After dinner, Lei Zheng saw a carriage parked outside and some guests at Su Liang's place. Just as he planned to head to Bai's family first, he was spotted by Su Liang through the window and was invited in.

"We'll be going then." Mai Fei stood up.

"You can leave without me sending you off." Su Ling said.

When they reached the door, Mai Fei suddenly stopped and looked at Chang'an and Nian Jincheng.

The two understood and left first.

Mai Fei turned to Su Liang and gave her a slight smile, "I did overlook something today. I really shouldn't have mentioned that matter as Father hasn't decided what to do yet. But considering our partnership, the one thing I can tell you is, the mastermind is not Bei Jingwang."

Su Liang nodded, "Thank you."

“However, the final outcome is still uncertain.” Mai Fei added another ambiguous suggestion.

Su Liang understood. The result of the Iron Mine smuggling case couldn’t be revealed yet because the actual result might not align with the Emperor’s desired outcome.

Mai Fei left with Chang’an, mentioning the contract he had signed with Su Linag before. As long as he safely reached the capital he would prepare for it promptly, looking forward to meeting her there next year.

Nian Jincheng followed silently. Despite having many things to say to Ning Jing and Su Liang, he unfortunately didn’t get the chance.

“Uncle Su, please sit down. Let me wash my hands.” Su Liang smiled and beckoned Su Bai to come in, pouring him a cup of hot tea.

Su Bai promptly replied, “Ah, you go ahead, don’t mind me!” Su Liang went into the kitchen where Ning Jing was washing dishes.

“Mai Fei said it wasn’t Bei Jingwang.” Su Liang had come to share this news with Ning Jing.

“Good news.” Ning Jing said. Considering Su Liang’s perspective of treating Xing Yusheng as a friend.

Su Liang nodded, “Indeed, at least there is still a chance for Bei Jingwang Mansion to survive.” If Bei Jingwang had indeed been the mastermind behind Iron Mine smuggling, they would be doomed.

“Survival requires sacrifice.” Ning Jing remarked.

It took Su Liang aback, “Are you suggesting Bei Jingwang should request the removal of his princely status, return the allotted land, and demonstrate loyalty to the court?”

“The Emperor also doesn’t wish for others to criticize him for treating the descendants of meritorious officials harshly. The rumor before was just a probe.” Ning Jing replied.

Presently, there were three princely houses – all descended from meritorious officials of the country’s founding days and having been granted land separately in the north, west, and south.

Although being reduced from royalty may not necessarily be a bad thing, rushing this step could lead to internal rebellion.

Originally, there were supposed to be four royal houses, but the Qin family voluntarily stayed in the capital, giving up their royal status and instead accepting the title of Duke.

“Whether Bei Jingwang can figure this out or not, now that is up to him.” Su Liang sighed softly, “I need to send a letter to Xing Yusheng as he must be quite anxious now. Even if Bei Jingwang has chosen the wrong path, if the Emperor’s objective is to

merely take out the Xing family, Xing Yusheng might have a chance to save his grandmother.”

“Mai Fei has taken a liking to you?” Ning Jing suddenly changed the topic without any warning, framing it as a question, but meaning it as a statement.

Su Liang shrugged, “He’s merely lost his senses for a moment. Afterall, he and the second prince are at odds, so we can temporarily cooperate. I don’t like incompetent teammates, so I hope he stays clear-headed..”

Chapter 106: 106. I will collect your corpse

Su Bai saw Su Liang enter and instinctively wanted to stand up.

Su Liang smiled, “Uncle Bai, there’s no need to be so polite.”

“Ah!” Su Bai sat back down, looking at Su Liang with relief, “When we first heard that Young Master Ning got into the imperial examination, we thought you might not come back.”

Su Liang shook her head, “He likes living here, and so do I.”

“Going to the capital city for the exam. after the New Year?” Su Bai asked.

“Mhm.” Su Liang nodded.

“That’s good. Young Master Ning will surely pass the exam, and when he becomes an official, coming back won’t be easy.” Su Bai hesitated for a moment and asked, “Are you going to follow Young Master Ning then?”

“I also want to go back to the capital city to pay my respects to my grandfather.” Su Liang said. At that time, the entire Su Yuanzhou family was not convicted yet and had all “committed suicide”. Their remains were not brought back to their hometown, but were buried near the capital city.

Su Bai let out a deep sigh, “You should. You have great abilities, and this small village can’t contain you. Go ahead, and when you have time, come back and visit your fellow villagers.”

“I will.” Su Liang said, “By the way, I was planning to ask Uncle Bai today, now that Ning Jing has gotten into the imperial examination, should we hold another banquet?”

Su Bai laughed and shook his head, “No need to spend money on that again; we already did it last time. In this cold weather, with snow everywhere, it’s not easy to organize.”

“Let’s wait until the weather clears.” Su Liang said, “Ning Jing now has access to his share of the Ning family’s wealth, and what he has the most now is money. We should throw a proper banquet.”

Listening to Su Liang's words, Su Bai was even happier. "Alright, when the weather clears up, we'll choose an auspicious day. After all, this is our village's first-ever imperial examination candidate. With such a low-key arrival, hardly anyone knows that the candidate has returned!"

"We'll provide the funds, and Uncle Bai, we'll still need you to help with organizing the banquet." Su Liang said.

"It's not tiring at all; it's a happy occasion!" Su Bai smiled from ear to ear.

"There's also another matter I'd like to discuss with Uncle Bai." Su Liang said.

She and Ning Jing felt that many children in the village were quite clever, but they couldn't afford to study due to poverty, including Bai Xiaohu and Zhuzi.

Initially, Ning Jing planned to fund Bai Xiaohu's and Zhuzi's education, as they had formed a bond with each other during this time. Both boys were good kids, as well as Ning Jing's woodworking master, Su Dakuan's grandson, Erniu.

But after discussing it with Su Liang, they felt it was not a good approach, as there were issues like whether or not these children wanted to study, how much money to give, until when, and whether it would lead to jealousy from others in the village.

As a result, the two decided to donate money to set up a private school in the village so that all children of suitable age could go there if they wanted to, mainly with the aim of eliminating illiteracy.

As for whether they would take the imperial exams or become accountants in the future, it would be up to individual choice.

"Right now, it's just an initial idea. Setting up a private school might face many challenges. Does Uncle Bai think it's feasible?" Su Liang asked.

Su Bai stared at Su Liang for a moment before suddenly clapping his hands, raising his voice, and exclaiming, "Excellent!"

Su Liang was slightly startled.

Ning Jing came in to refill the tea, and Su Bai, looking excited, said to them,

"This is a great deed that brings immeasurable merit!"

Su Bai had always been a man with many ideas, but no matter what he wanted to do for the village, the biggest problem was always poverty.

"Since Uncle Bai thinks it's a good idea, let's go with it," Su Liang said solemnly. "How much money it will take to build a private school, how many children of the right age are in the village, how many teachers we need, what will be the annual cost of hiring teachers, whether food and lodging should be provided, and many other details.

Uncle Bai, please make some inquiries and prepare a budget plan."

Still excited, Su Bai nodded repeatedly upon hearing Su Liang's words. 'Yes, you've thought things through carefully. We need to be clear on every single expenditure so as not to waste your money. I'll discuss the matter with the clan

eweus m dUvance CUIU llnu suneune LU we cncuge une dCCUUHLS. After a brief conversation, Su Bai left in high spirits, forgetting his hat. Su Liang chased after him to hand it over.

For now, the establishment of the school was not announced.

With each of the clan elders having their own descendants, there naturally wouldn't be any objections. Su Bai asked them to keep the matter confidential for the time being, and they all agreed.

As a cautious man, Su Bai planned to wait until everything was prepared before announcing it. He also needed to carefully consider any potential issues to ensure that such a good project would not encounter any problems.

After Su Bai left, Su Liang picked up a brush and began writing a letter to Xing Yusheng.

This letter was intended to be delivered to Xing Yusheng with Nian Jincheng's help, and the likelihood of it being lost was small. Still, Su Liang remained cautious.

In the letter, there was no mention of Mai Fei or the words "iron mine smuggling". Instead, Su Liang wrote, "I heard that a certain matter may have nothing to do with your father."

She also wrote, "It's pretty clear what the higher-ups are thinking. It's better to prepare early, like with your maternal family."

Considering Lin Bojun wished for Su Liang to be his matchmaker, she also mentioned Qin Yujin in the letter and thanked her for the sachet she had sent before.

After finishing, Su Liang thought she should give Xing Yusheng and Qin Yujin something in return.

However, looking around, she realized that even though they were rich now, they didn't have anything valuable to give.

"Ning Jing, can you help me make two more pen holders? I want to give them to Xing Yusheng and his cousin." Su Liang said in her room, asking Ning Jing in the next room.

Ning Jing's voice came right away, "No."

Since Su Liang's embroidery skills were average now, she didn't want to waste time doing it. After thinking about it, she wrote a few medicinal diet recipes that would be beneficial to Xing Yusheng's health, and two recipes for nourishing looks, to give to Qin Yujin.

Then she put the letter and medicinal diet recipes together and came to find Ning Jing.

"When are you going to see Nian Jincheng?" Su Liang asked.

"I didn't say I was going to see him." Ning Jing said.

Su Liang snorted lightly, "If you don't go, then I will." She was about to leave when she finished this sentence.

"Come back, put the letter down." Ning Jing said.

Su Liang put the letter on the table in front of Ning Jing, "No peeking."

After waiting for Su Liang to leave, Ning Jing picked up the letter, opened it, read it, and then put it back as it was.

"Oh right, I have to write a letter to Xueqing as well!" Su Liang suddenly remembered.

When she finished writing and gave it to Ning Jing, Ning Jing didn't open it this time.

That night, Nian Jincheng was about to rest when he walked into the inner room to see a familiar figure.

"Aling!" Nian Jincheng blurted out.

Ning Jing frowned, "Are you out of your mind?"

Nian Jincheng looked embarrassed, "I was just too surprised. I'll be more careful next time."

Ning Jing took out two letters and handed them to Nian Jincheng.

"The thick one is from Su Liang to Xing Yusheng. You can tell Duanmu Chen and show it to him." Ning Jing said.

It was inevitable in Duanmu Chen's character.

Letting Duanmu Chen see the letter was intentional. The parts about the Bei Jingwang Mansion might provide Duanmu Chen with a new perspective, such as keeping the Xing family and winning them over as allies.

"What if he finds out you privately contacted me..." Nian Jincheng frowned.

"It's not me, it's Su Liang. Xing Yusheng sent the gift that you brought to her, so it's reasonable to ask you to take the letter back to him." Ning Jing replied.

"Alright. What about this other letter..." Nian Jincheng asked. There was nothing written on the envelope.

"It's for Lin Shuzhi's daughter, Lin Xueqing." Ning Jing said.

Nian Jincheng was taken aback. He knew Lin Shuzhi, but he was hearing Lin Xueqing's name for the first time.

"Her older brother is under my command." Nian Jincheng said, "I will make sure she gets it."

"Don't have any illusions about the Nian family." Ning Jing said indifferently, "No one in that family cares about you."

Nian Jincheng sighed, "Actually, my fourth sister has always been good to me."

"Don't be naive. She's just laughing at you for being foolish, and using you." Ning Jing said.

Nian Jincheng's face darkened slightly, "I know you don't like her and you're biased against her, but since you don't have a relationship anymore, there's no need to talk about her like this!"

"You might as well find a chance to listen to what she says about you in front of Nian Jinxing." Ning Jing said.

Nian Jincheng's face showed disbelief, "Even if she speaks ill of me in front of

Big Brother, it's just an act. Otherwise, how would Big Brother look up to her? She has been wronged a lot by my grandmother and my birth mother just because she's close to me. She's an unmarried girl, even though she's the legitimate daughter, she still has to please everyone. Do you think she has an easy time in the family?"

Ning Jing frowned at Nian Jincheng, "She hired the assassin from Yanyun

Building to kill me before. If I wanted her to die, would you turn against me?"

Nian Jincheng frowned, "I explained this to you as soon as I came here this time. She likes you and cares about you. She was confused for a moment but never intended to harm you. Knowing your strength, she used a foolish method to apologize to you, and I scolded her. Then she immediately changed."

"Knowing my strength? Did she ever consider that I might have been injured and lost much of my strength?" Ning Jing countered.

Nian Jincheng shook his head, "Your hypothesis is invalid. She admires you and believes that you would never get hurt. There was no ill intention. If she was wrong, it was only because she liked you too much."

"Nian Jincheng, after all these years, as I've said many times, you are still so naive," Ning Jing's voice also grew cold, "Would you hire an assassin to kill me to find me?"

Nian Jincheng's face stiffened, but he still said, "You know, Xuexue (Nian Ruxue) never intended to kill you."

"Take care of yourself." Ning Jing turned and left, "We're like brothers. If you're ever killed by Nian Ruxue, I will retrieve your body.."

Chapter 107: 107. She's Not a Kind-hearted Person

It was deep in the night.

The small mountain village was quiet and peaceful.

Su Liang was still reading late at night, waiting for Ning Jing to return.

It wasn't that she was worried about Ning Jing's safety; she was actually more concerned about her own. After all, she had been kidnapped when Ning Jing wasn't home before.

As for Yan Shiba, Su Liang had added a bit of calming ingredient to the medicine he drank after dinner, so he had fallen asleep long ago.

Finally, she heard some noise from next door. Su Liang yawned, closed her book, and went outside.

As soon as Ning Jing lit the lamp, Su Liang's voice sounded at the door, "I thought you would have a long talk with your good brother all night!"

"There's nothing to talk about." Ning Jing's expression was indifferent. "He's mentally ill."

Su Liang was quite surprised, "Did you have a fight?"

"I told him that his sister didn't care about him at all, and she was just using him. But he insisted on not believing me." Ning Jing said.

Su Liang sighed softly. As for the Nian Family's matters, she had asked Ning Jing before. Ning Jing only said that Nian Jincheng was ignored by everyone in his family.

The sister that Ning Jing was talking about was Nian Ruxue, Gu Ling's former fiancée and the one who returned the hairpin. Su Liang knew about that.

Su Liang also knew one more thing: Nian Ruxue had once hired an assassin from Yanyun Building to kill Gu Ling.

Regarding this matter, Nian Jincheng explained that his sister only wanted to find Gu Ling using this method.

As for this, Su Liang had only one feeling: it was insane!

What kind of love is that? Knowing that Gu Ling was a wanted criminal by the court, and since he didn't show up, it meant that he didn't want to see her. If Nian Ruxue really cared about Gu Ling, she should have prioritized his safety and not use such an extreme and inexplicable method. She called it missing him and looking for him, but hadn't she thought about the consequences? If he got hurt, or his martial arts got crippled, wouldn't he be directly killed by the assassin she had hired for a large sum of money? Or would his whereabouts be exposed and captured by the court? Are assassins trustworthy? It was absurd!

Therefore, Su Liang had a very poor impression of Miss Nian Ruxue, whom she had never met. That person was clearly not a good person.

A normal, kind-hearted person could not do such a thing.

Su Liang did not expect that Nian Jincheng would trust Nian Ruxue so much that he wouldn't even listen to Ning Jing's advice.

"The one inside the game is always confused." Su Liang analyzed, "There is one more reason: he is starved of love."

Ning Jing frowned slightly, "What?"

"Aren't the two of you known to be each other's only friends?" Su Liang said, "After you disappeared and couldn't recognize each other when meeting, with your nature, you wouldn't care, but Nian Jincheng is not as detached as you. He longs for someone to care about him, to pay attention to him. After you left, there was only Nian Ruxue by his side. Even if she was only good to him on the surface, compared to the people

in his family who didn't even bother pretending to care, she was the most special existence in his eyes."

"What's wrong with being alone? There are no strings attached, and it's peaceful." Ning Jing said.

"Not to mention that you're not alone, but the point is, he's not you." Su Liang said.

"Are you advising me to understand him?" Ning Jing asked back.

Su Liang shook her head, "I'm just advising you to think more openly. Some things are useless to say too much, and he needs to see it clearly and understand it by himself. If you really want to break off your friendship with mm, you won't be angry anymore." "I'm not angry." Ning Jing said.

"Can you smile then?" Su Liang snorted.

Ning Jing looked at Su Liang, "You first."

Su Liang thought it was quite difficult, but she pulled the corners of her mouth and showed a smile to Ning Jing.

The next moment, Ning Jing said, "It's very late, go back to sleep."

Su Liang:...

One day passed, and it was the day for Duanmu Chen to return to the capital. The real County Magistrate of Bei'an County would officially take office the next day.

Ning Jing and Su Liang did not go to the county town to see them off.

When Nian Jincheng arrived to bid them farewell, Duanmu Chen said annoyed, "That girl really didn't come! She doesn't have a heart or lungs!"

Chang'an weakly said, "Miss Su does have a heart, but it's all on Ning Jing's side."

Duanmu Chen glared at him, "If you don't know how to speak, shut up!"

When he saw Nian Jincheng appear, Duanmu Chen waved him to get into the carriage.

Nian Jincheng handed the horse to Chang'an, brought his luggage, and sat with Duanmu Chen. Soon the procession set off.

"Su Liang's letter to Xing Yusheng is with you, right?" Duanmu Chen asked directly.

Nian Jincheng nodded, "Yes. Miss Su asked me to bring it to Crown Prince Xing when I return to the capital."

"I knew it. When Xing Yusheng asked you to bring a gift to Su Liang, Su Liang must have also asked you." Duanmu Chen said, and then reached out, "Where's the letter?"

Nian Jincheng frowned, "Your Highness, this is not appropriate, is it?"

Duanmu Chen snorted, "What's not appropriate? Hand it over!"

Nian Jincheng reluctantly took out the letter and handed it to Duanmu Chen.

Duanmu Chen opened it, initially thinking that those medicinal diet recipes were the letter, even complaining about why there were so many. But then he found that the actual letter was just half a sheet of paper with only a few words.

But he read it for a long time, without skipping a single word.

After reading it, the corners of his lips curved slightly, and he said, "Indeed, she is smart as ice and snow."

He then handed the medicinal diet recipes out of the carriage, "Chang'an, take these and make a copy."

Seeing Nian Jincheng frown, Duanmu Chen laughed, "Su Liang won't mind." The two sat opposite each other in silence, each lost in their own thoughts.

After a long time, Nian Jincheng suddenly spoke, asking Duanmu Chen a question, "Your Highness the Fourth Prince, if I ask to be stationed at the mine and not return to the capital, will His Majesty approve?"

Duanmu Chen was very surprised. Firstly, he didn't expect Nian Jincheng to have such thoughts, and secondly, he didn't expect Nian Jincheng, who had always followed the rules, to actually bring up this issue with him.

"Why?" Duanmu Chen asked.

"The waters in the capital are too deep, and my mind is simple, so I find it hard to live." Nian Jincheng said solemnly.

"Don't belittle yourself. You have a sincere heart, not a simple mind. Is it because of the issues in your family? I've heard something about it." Duanmu Chen said with a knowing tone, "You are very outstanding. If you abandon the unrealistic illusions about the other members of the Nian Family, your future will be even more open. Believe me, people's nature does not change. Those who dislike you now will still dislike you no matter how outstanding you are or how well you treat them, and they may even dislike you more."

Seeing Nian Jincheng frown, Duanmu Chen laughed, "I heard that your relationship with your fourth sister is the best, right? She's the one who was once engaged to Gu Ling."

Nian Jincheng nodded, and this was true.

Duanmu Chen said with a mysterious tone, "I can responsibly tell you that your seemingly gentle and lovely sister is not a good person.."

Chapter 108: 108. What's so funny?

Nian Jincheng's face slightly tensed, "Your Highness, what do you mean?"

Duanmu Chen chuckled, "I don't know about other things, but let me mention one. Wasn't it rumored some time ago that your fourth sister was to enter the crown prince's mansion as his imperial concubine?"

Nian Jincheng nodded, "Yes, that's true."

At that time, Nian Ruxue was very troubled and confided in Nian Jincheng on numerous occasions. It was unclear why the matter eventually fell through.

Later, when she mentioned her desire to take the Military Exam and become the Top Scholar to gain control over her own marriage, she alluded to that incident, stating that she didn't want to be manipulated by others anymore.

Perhaps other members of the Nian Family knew the inside story, but Nian

Jincheng did not, nor did Nian Ruxue, who claimed to be in the dark as well. She even speculated that the crown prince might have taken a fancy to someone else.

"Do you know why it didn't work out?" Duanmu Chen asked.

Nian Jincheng shook his head.

"It's because the emperor took a fancy to her." Duanmu Chen said with a faint smile.

Nian Jincheng looked at Duanmu Chen in disbelief, "How is that possible?"

"I believe you don't know because you're not the kind of person who lies. This matter is indeed a secret, but your fourth sister should be the most aware of it. Why do you think she didn't tell you?" Duanmu Chen countered.

Nian Jincheng's face darkened, "Your Highness, please be cautious about making such claims without evidence."

Duanmu Chen snorted lightly, "We've worked together, and I've come to appreciate you, so I felt compelled to inform you so you wouldn't be sold out behind your back. Although I'm not sure what's going on between the emperor and your sister, I can confirm that a few days before the matter of your sister becoming the crown prince's imperial concubine was canceled, she met with the emperor alone at Changchun Garden."

Changchun Garden was the most famous opera house in the capital city, frequented not only by nobles but also by the royal family. The Empress Dowager enjoyed listening to opera and found the stage and scenery at Changchun Garden to be the best, so she'd occasionally visit.

"It must have been a chance encounter." Nian Jincheng said gravely.

"The emperor's outings outside the palace are never by chance." Duanmu Chen snorted.

Nian Jincheng furrowed his brows, "Then why didn't the emperor..."

"Take her into the palace?" Duanmu Chen's smile didn't reach his eyes. "Of course, he had to wait for the rumors to die down and then wait for the right moment. Your sister's ambitions are sky-high! I think, if she had initially been promised the position of crown princess, she would have happily accepted. But being a crown Prince's imperial concubine didn't interest her. Why not be an emperor's concubine when it's more prestigious? If I were her, I'd choose the same."

Duanmu Chen, having grown up immersed in the royal family, had seen all manner of treacherous figures. He couldn't have been clearer about Nian Ruxue's schemes.

Essentially, Duanmu Chen and Nian Ruxue were birds of a feather—both ambitious and prioritizing their own interests.

Duanmu Chen's face bore a mocking expression, "You can pretend to be ignorant, but when the time comes for her to enter the palace, I wonder if she'll put on an act, playing the role of a self-sacrificing daughter for the sake of the family, making you feel like you haven't protected her well enough. In the future, you'll become her unwavering guardian, paving the way for her and even becoming a stepping stone for her future sons! From this perspective, you're indeed very useful to her. Which prince wouldn't want a military commander for an uncle? It's a pity I'm not so fortunate."

Nian Jincheng's face darkened to its utmost, and after a long silence, he said, "What if it was just a chance encounter the emperor took a liking to her during, and instead of letting her marry the crown prince, he intended to find a suitable moment to bring her into the Imperial Harem, but she's completely unaware of it?"

Duanmu Chen rubbed his forehead, "It seems like all my explanations just now were in vain! The emperor has seen many beauties, and in my eyes, your fourth sister is no different from the common and vulgar beauties in the capital apart from being your sister and Gu Ling's former fiancée. I don't think the emperor would fall for her at first sight. Who knows what methods she used? I didn't have to tell you any of this; you're free to disbelieve it and continue to regard her as pure and flawless, as someone with unparalleled talent. She'd be overjoyed if you do!"

Nian Jincheng's face was as still as water, "Why do you want to tell me all this, Your Highness?"

Duanmu Chen had no reason to deceive Nian Jincheng about this matter, nor was he interested in Nian Ruxue. Even though he was leaving the capital, he'd undoubtedly have informants constantly monitoring the movements of people within the royal family. As such, he knew many things that Nian Jincheng didn't and couldn't possibly know.

"Of course, I want to win you over. I've mentioned this to you before." Duanmu Chen scoffed, "Don't be naive and think that staying out of the matter means you won't be affected. If you don't make a choice now, by the time your dear sister picks her spouse and the Nian Family's future intentions are clear, you won't even have the chance to choose!"

Nian Jincheng's mind flashed back to Ning Jing's final words to him; his eyes dimmed even more. After a long silence, he said to Duanmu Chen, "Thank you for your appreciation, Your Highness. I will give this matter serious consideration."

Su Family Village.

After the first sunny day following the snowfall, the village bustled with the celebration of Ning Jing's prestigious academic achievement, the Top Scholar of the Imperial Exam.

The next day, Su Bai brought a detailed budget to Ning Jing and Su Liang to discuss the establishment of a school.

Su Liang was treating an old man from a neighboring village and wasn't available. Ning Jing reviewed the budget plan that Su Bai brought over, and there were no issues. There were many details that Ning Jing and Su Liang had not considered because they didn't understand, showing that Su Bai had put in effort.

"Can we start the construction now?" Ning Jing asked.

Su Bai shook his head, "The ground is frozen, we'll have to wait until next spring to start."

"Yes. By then, we will already be gone, and we will leave the money behind." Ning Jing said.

Su Bai let out a sigh of relief, "Since you think it's feasible, I can be at ease.

Thank you on behalf of the entire village!"

"There's no need. Just thank Su Liang." Ning Jing said.

Su Bai glanced towards the door, making sure Su Liang wasn't around, and lowered his voice consciously, "What are your plans in the future?"

Back then, because of Yan Shiba's meddling, Su Bai had asked Ning Jing and Su Liang about this matter.

That time, their fake marriage was exposed and they became sworn siblings instead.

Now, although Su Bai was asking the same question, the meaning was completely different, as was his mindset.

"We'll take it step by step." Ning Jing said.

Su Bai frowned, "Do you really not like our Liang girl?"

This was a question asked in the tone of a family member of Su Liang's maternal family.

Ning Jing was silent for a moment before saying, "I do like her. But it's not the love between a man and a woman."

Su Bai didn't understand, "You're a man, and she's a woman. If it's not love between a man and a woman, then what is it?"

Ning Jing uttered four words, "Brotherly friendship."

He initially wanted to say brother and sister, but he thought that wasn't right.

If she was his sister, he would have to pamper and protect her. But ever since they met, they had collaborated on basically everything, even taking turns driving the carriage every other day.

Su Liang believed that division of labor was entirely reasonable, and she was willing to do so. She never asked Ning Jing to take it easy on her just because she was a woman.

Ning Jing also thought that this pattern was good. At the beginning, he found out that Su Liang had been a soldier in her previous life, and he believed that accepting her division of labor was the best way to respect her character and abilities.

So much time had passed, and because of Su Bai's question, Ning Jing, for the first time, thought earnestly about his attitude towards Su Liang.

Leaving aside the division of labor they had agreed upon, and no matter what Su Liang thought.

From his perspective, he didn't want to shield her from all difficulties and troubles.

He hoped that Su Liang would grow and become strong on her own, without relying on anyone, and be able to control her own life.

In doing so, his attitude towards her was the same as it had been initially towards Nian Jincheng.

Su Bai had no response. He was about to leave when he saw Su Liang coming over, so he said earnestly, "Liang Girl, when you meet a good man in the future, you should consider your lifelong matters."

With that, he left.

Su Liang was somewhat confused. Standing at the door, she asked Ning Jing,

"What did you talk about with Uncle Bai?"

"He asked if I liked you, I said it was just brotherly affection, and he left." Ning Jing told the truth.

Su Liang laughed instantly, "Elders always hope that the younger generation will get married and settle down sooner. You have a successful career, a lot of wealth, you're very beautiful, and kind-hearted. Now that Uncle Bai sees you like this, he must feel that there's no one better for his daughter-in-law, and he would want the fat water to not flow into the fields of outsiders. But if he were to ask me, I would say the same thing as you. Who would want to marry a man who doesn't know how to laugh? Haha!"

Su Liang went back to her room, and her laughter still lingered in Ning Jing's ears.

Through the window, Ning Jing looked at the two snowmen in the courtyard that hadn't melted yet and frowned slightly, "What's so funny...."

Chapter 109: 109. You didn't say this before

As soon as La month arrived, three consecutive days of heavy snow collapsed some houses in the village.

Bai Xiaohu said that his father and uncle had gone to help repair the houses, and Ning Jing also brought tools to lend a hand.

Su Liang wanted to take a look, but a patient arrived just then.

Recently, there were many elderly people and children infected with cold, so Su Liang prepared a special, inexpensive, and effective medicine that even attracted buyers from neighboring villages.

After sending the patient away, Yan Shiba said that she wanted to move around a bit.

Since Su Liang's return, Yan Shiba's complexion had been visibly improving day by day. Su Liang carefully arranged everything from her diet to her medication and daily appropriate massages and exercises.

Yan Shiba felt this herself above anyone else.

Su Liang didn't boast or ask for gratitude, but some things didn't need to be said when they were already done.

The snow had just stopped this morning, and though the sun was out, the cold was still bone-chilling.

Su Liang let Yan Shiba lean on a crutch, and she supported her on the other side as they slowly walked from the bed to the window.

They opened half the window, and a cold wind mixed with bits of snow blew in.

The light outside was too bright, and Yan Shiba subconsciously squinted her eyes, but the corner of her mouth curved up into a smile, "I've been so comfortable lately that I sometimes feel like my past as an assassin was just a dream."

With a profound tone, Su Liang said, "Put down the butcher knife, and become a Buddha on the spot."

Yan Shiba raised her eyebrows slightly, suddenly energized, "Little Liang, you asked before who saved me and sent me here, right?"

Su Liang countered, "So what?"

"I miss that beautiful young man so much," Yan Shiba sighed, "I want to see him right away!"

Su Liang: .

Yan Shiba didn't mention that the person who saved her was a monk at first.

It was Su Liang and Ning Jing who happened to meet Cheng Yun later, and Cheng Yun asked about Yan Shiba. But Yan Shiba didn't know about this.

Of course, Cheng Yun was just kind-hearted and had no indecent thoughts about Yan Shiba.

But Yan Shiba, an assassin, had wicked intentions for the innocent little monk.

Su Liang thought it was not suitable, very unsuitable!

"Little Liang, I'm talking to you! Aren't you going to ask me his name?" Yan Shiba's voice was tender.

"You can say it or not." Su Liang was calm.

"Well, I'm going to say it anyway. His name is Cheng Yun. Doesn't it sound nice?" Yan Shiba resembled a lovesick teenager.

"What's his surname?" Su Liang asked.

Yan Shiba snorted, “Who says everyone has to have a surname?”

Su Liang sensed that although Yan Shiba had voluntarily brought up Cheng Yun, she didn’t want to tell Su Liang that he was a monk.

“Do you plan to find him after your injury is healed?” Su Liang asked.

Yan Shiba nodded, “Of course. He saved me, and now that I have nothing, I can only offer myself.”

Su Liang frowned, “Would he even want that?”

Yan Shiba glared at Su Liang, “Do you think I’m not beautiful enough or my personality is not lovely enough?”

Su Liang coughed lightly, “Miss 29, I need to remind you that love has nothing to do with looks or personality. What if he doesn’t like women at all?”

“Then he can consider me not a woman, but...” Yan Shiba leaned her head on Su Liang’s body and acted coquettishly, “a captivating fairy.”

Su Liang: ... This woman is terrifying. Cheng Yun is in danger!

However, she had no intention to interfere with Yan Shiba’s and Cheng Yun’s matters, as helping others in need was only human nature.

She was about to have Yan Shiba go back and lie down when she suddenly heard a noise in the courtyard. Su Liang thought it was impossible for Ning Jing to return so soon, as Bai Xiaohu said that several houses needed urgent repairs.

She looked outside through the window and saw a tall white figure standing in the courtyard, almost blending with the vast snowy landscape. At first glance, it seemed like a snowman.

As Su Liang’s guard went up, she heard Yan Shiba grinding her teeth, “Yan Shiqi!”

The person was wearing a mask, and Yan Shiba recognized him at a glance. She must have been very familiar with him.

“Yan Shiba?” Yan Shiqi’s gaze penetrated the window, fell on the person Su Liang was supporting, and his eyes narrowed sharply!

Su Liang thought she should find Ning Jing.

Although Yan Shiqi had an agreement with Ning Jing and should have come to collect the “reward” after completing the mission, he might kill and seize the finger guard if Ning Jing was not home.

Then she heard Yan Shiba say, “Little Sister Liang, go back to your room.” Su Liang lowered her voice, “Are you sure? You can’t beat him.”

“I’m sure.” Yan Shiba nodded, keeping her eyes on Yan Shiqi.

Yan Shiqi did not move either.

So Su Liang helped Yan Shiba sit on the bed, walked out, and said to Yan Shiqi, “Please come in.”

Yan Shiqi glanced at Su Liang, “Are you... Ning Jing’s woman?”

Su Liang didn’t answer, and returned to her room.

Yan Shiqi waited for a moment before entering Yan Shiba's room, and the doors and windows were quickly closed.

After reading three pages of a book, Su Liang heard Yan Shiba calling for her.

When she arrived at Yan Shiba's room, there was no trace of Yan Shiqi, only a few shallow footprints in the courtyard, proving that someone had been there.

"You're not his enemy?" Su Liang asked.

"I am." Yan Shiba coldly snorted.

"Then why are you still alive?" Su Liang couldn't understand.

"He's Yan Suits confidant." Yan Shiba said, then suddenly sneered, "It's a shame, we were equals in strength, but he has a fatal weakness."

Su Liang wanted to hear more about it.

Then she saw Yan Shiba with a smug expression on her face, "He likes me."

Su Liang was taken aback, "If I remember correctly, you previously referred to him as a treacherous villain?"

Yan Shiba nodded, "That's right. But he won't do anything to me."

"You, towards him..." Su Liang heard that Yan Shiba obviously has no interest in Yan Shiqi. It's Monk Cheng Yun that she likes.

"I like the pretty and tender ones, he's old and ugly." Yan Shiba was quite disgusted.

"But you gave him the MO Yu thumb ring." Su Liang asked. The thumb ring used to hang by Yan Shiba's bed, but now it's gone.

Yan Shiba nodded. "I don't have the convenience right now, so I let him manage the Yanyun Building for the time being, waiting for my return!" "So is the owner of the building you, or him?" Su Liang asked.

"Of course, it's him. I just need to control him, so why bother managing the trivial matters of Yanyun Building? It's a waste of my heart and mind." Yan Shiba smiled, "Isn't my sister very smart?"

Su Liang didn't agree, "If there's no possibility with you and Yan Shiqi, don't deceive him anymore, be careful of retribution."

Yan Shiba wholeheartedly didn't care, "Xiao Liang, I'll be good to you, but listening to your words depends on the situation. It's nothing to do with you, there's no need to lecture me. He's more than happy to be!"

Su Liang shook her head, "Forget it, I'm being nosy. Don't take the sistership seriously. Leave once your injury heals."

They were destined not to walk the same path. Yan Shiba took the initiative, but she obviously hadn't really changed anything because of Su Liang.

As Su Liang walked to the door, Yan Shiba wanted to stop her, but when the words were about to come out, she took them back.

She craves the warmth Su Liang gave her, which is undoubtedly true.

However, not long ago, Yan Shiba, who was talking about the past of an assassin like a dream, didn't want to give up what she considered to be her

Yanyun Building.

"My injury won't heal anyway, I won't leave!" Yan Shiba thought.

Ning Jing went out in the afternoon and came back in the evening with a hard pancake in his hand, which was forced upon him by the woman from the last family whose house was repaired.

Ning Jing ate the pancake for dinner.

Only after Yan Shiba went to sleep did Su Liang mention to Ning Jing that Yan Shiqi had come and gone.

Ning Jing didn't care and just said, "Let Yan Shiba get out as soon as possible."

"You were the one who asked me to save her back then." Su Liang sighed softly, then changed the subject, "Was the pancake delicious?"

Ning Jing nodded, "Delicious."

The last family's house hadn't collapsed. Ning Jing was helping another family repair their house when he saw a middle-aged man with black fog appearing in the center of his eyebrows. He quietly followed him and saw him go home. After looking around the house, he felt that it wasn't very sturdy and wouldn't last long. If it suddenly collapsed in the middle of the night, it could likely kill someone.

However, he couldn't go to their doorstep and tell them that their house would collapse soon; doing so would get him beaten up.

So Ning Jing figured out the right position, kicked the wall most likely to collapse, and didn't hurt anyone.

Later, it was only natural to help fix and reinforce the house.

Su Liang didn't know the reasons behind it, and Ning Jing didn't mention it anymore. She suddenly asked, "Nian Jincheng and Duanmu Chen should have arrived in the capital city, right?"

Ning Jing nodded, "If they're still alive."

Su Liang snorted lightly, "You obviously care about someone very much, but your words don't match the truth."

"Caring doesn't mean I have a responsibility to him. If he makes the wrong choice and pays the price for it, I can only say, 'What a pity.'" Ning Jing's expression was indifferent.

But often, this simple wish is not easy to achieve.

"If one day we go our separate ways, you'll be the same with me, right?" Su Liang said with a light smile.

Ning Jing glanced at Su Liang. "You're much smarter than Nian Jincheng. You won't choose the wrong path, but you might run into trouble because of your lack of strength. Let's continue practicing tomorrow morning."

Su Liang silently got up and went back to her room to sleep, as she had to get up early the next day.

Capital City.

Late at night, after Nian Jincheng sent Duanmu Chen back to the Fourth Prince's Mansion, he returned to the Nian Family's residence.

After bathing and changing clothes, he was hungry. He was about to ask his servant to find some food when he heard Nian Ruxue's voice, "Second brother?"

Due to Ning Jing and Duanmu Chen's warning, Nian Jincheng's brow furrowed instinctively. He got up, opened the door, and saw Nian Ruxue wearing a cape and a hood, holding a food box, and smiling brightly at the doorway.

Nian Jincheng felt a warm feeling in his heart and quickly let her in. "Why isn't sister Ruxue asleep so late?"

Nian Ruxue entered, put down the food box, took off her cape, and smiled sweetly, "I told my servant to let me know when my second brother comes back, no matter how late. When I see that he's safe and sound, I'm relieved! Are you hungry, second brother? I made your favorite dishes."

"I am indeed hungry." Nian Jincheng nodded, "Sister Ruxue, sit down and eat together."

"I'm not hungry, eat more, second brother." Nian Ruxue served Nian Jincheng rice and vegetables.

As Nian Jincheng ate, he listened to Nian Ruxue asking about the Fourth Prince.

"Everyone is safe." Nian Jincheng said.

"Thank goodness." Nian Ruxue clasped her hands together and curiously asked, "Recently there has been a lot of rumors in the capital about the mastermind behind the iron mine smuggling case, but there's no conclusion yet. Second brother must know, tell me, is it Nanping Prince or Bei Jingwang? It can't be the one from the west, right?"

Nian Jincheng shook his head, "This is a secret, Fourth Prince did not let me know."

Nian Ruxue frowned, "That's impossible. You're with the Fourth Prince, how can you not know? Or you can't tell me? I won't tell anyone."

"I really don't know." Nian Jincheng shook his head, "The Fourth Prince doesn't trust me."

Nian Ruxue was somewhat disappointed, "Alright."

Nian Jincheng closed his eyes and suddenly said, "I have news about Gu Ling."

Nian Ruxue looked surprised and then overjoyed, "Where is he? He's really alive!"

"I've been thinking, if you stay in the capital, you'll definitely be arranged to marry someone you don't like. In that case, you might as well go find Gu Ling. You said that even if he doesn't accept you, you'd be willing to be his slave or servant, doing laundry and cooking for him. I think when he sees you, he won't drive you away for my sake." Nian Jincheng looked up and said earnestly to Nian Ruxue, "I, your second brother, don't ask for anything else, I just hope you can be happy."

When Nian Ruxue heard this, her expression became unnatural, "This... is too sudden. Are you sure he's really in the place you know? What if I go there and he's gone?"

"No need to worry." Nian Jincheng shook his head, "I've sent him a message, made an appointment, and he'll definitely be waiting there. You don't need to pack anything. I'll send you away tonight to avoid any trouble."

"But... I can't bear to leave my grandmother and second brother..." Nian Ruxue fiddled with her handkerchief.

Since Nian Jincheng mentioned Gu Ling's name, he didn't see any hesitation or real joy on Nian Ruxue's face, only eagerness to find excuses to avoid his arrangement.

Nian Jincheng's eyes were slightly cold, "Xue'er, you didn't say that before, you even got angry with me because I didn't support you. It hasn't been that long, so has your heart changed, or did I misunderstand you?"

"Second brother, let him come to pick me up. As long as he comes, I'll follow!" Nian Ruxue suddenly grabbed Nian Jincheng's arm.

Nian Jincheng slowly pushed her away, his tone icy, "Let him come to the capital? You hired the assassin from Yanyun Building with a lot of money to find him, not because of love and longing, but to lure him out, right? I was so stupid to believe your explanation for such an absurd act. Do you think I'm easy to deceive? As long as he appears, you'll inform the emperor, he'll be captured, and you'd make a great achievement.. Am I right, Miss Nian?"

Chapter 110: 110. Limited to Siblings

The cold night wind blew outside the window.

Inside the room, candlelight flickered.

Nian Ruxue stared blankly at Nian Jincheng, watery light filling her eyes. "Second Brother, what are you talking about?"

Nian Jincheng's face was serious. "You insisted on finding Aling earlier, and now that I want to send you to her, you're unwilling. I don't understand."

“Second Brother, did someone say something to you?” Nian Ruxue’s voice choked, “I thought I would never see him again in this life, and suddenly you said there was news of him. I wasn’t mentally prepared. I couldn’t believe it, and I didn’t want to leave home. So... Second Brother, have you really found him? Or did you believe some rumors and are testing me?”

Nian Jincheng was silent, looking at Nian Ruxue’s injured expression as tears fell like broken beads from her eyes. His heart clenched in pain.

“Second Brother, I thought in this family, at least you understood me. I didn’t expect you to change after going out this time.” Nian Ruxue’s face was bitter. “I’ve said many times about his matter and my feelings. I don’t want to explain anymore. If Second Brother trusts me, you wouldn’t doubt me in the first place.

If there’s no trust, what’s the use of saying more?”

As she finished, Nian Ruxue slowly stood up, wiped the tears from her face, and looked bitterly at herself. “I don’t have a high birth like Qin Yujin, and I’m not as loved by the family as she is. Even my marriage is just a bargaining chip for my father and elder brother to plan the future of the Nian Family. I’ve never dared to be willful. No, it’s only in front of Second Brother that I dared to be a little willful because I once thought that Second Brother would protect me and spoil me for my whole life, and I would worship and trust Second Brother for my whole life...”

Nian Jincheng’s brows furrowed, and Nian Ruxue sighed. “Let it be. I was naive. If the news about him is false, Second Brother, please don’t mention this again.

Don’t even mention that name, it will only hurt you. If it’s true...”

Nian Ruxue’s barely stopped tears rolled down her cheeks again as she covered her face and sobbed. “We are doomed to have fate without a future!” “Why?” Nian Jincheng asked.

Nian Ruxue cried uncontrollably, “There’s something I’ve never told Second Brother, for fear that you’ll do something impulsive after learning about it. Now that it’s come to this, there’s nothing I can’t say.”

Nian Jincheng’s face darkened slightly, “What is it?”

“Second Brother. do you know why I don’t have to be a concubine in the Crown

Prince’s Mansion?” Nian Ruxue looked at Nian Jincheng with tearful eyes. Nian Jincheng’s heart tightened, “Why?”

“Because Father and Elder Brother think that being a concubine for the Crown Prince doesn’t help the Nian Family enough, so they have made a new arrangement for me.” Nian Ruxue closed her eyes as a tear fell onto the table.

Upon hearing this, Nian Jincheng’s face immediately changed, “What arrangement?”

“Father wants me to enter the palace to serve the Emperor,” Nian Ruxue said softly.

Nian Jincheng’s face became incredibly ugly, “What happened exactly?”

"I was carefully arranged by Father to meet the Emperor by chance in Changchun Garden." Nian Ruxue choked, "Father somehow found a kind of incense that the emperor's favorite consort used to wear. That day, I already belonged to the emperor..."

Nian Jincheng looked at Nian Ruxue in disbelief, "Why didn't you tell me earlier?"

"At that time, Second Brother wasn't at home. It was only when I met the Emperor that I realized that I had been set up, but there was no way for me to refuse him... I didn't want to cause trouble for Second Brother and the Nian Family because of myself." Nian Ruxue whispered, "It was only later that I found out that everything was planned by Father and Elder Brother, including the new clothes my grandmother gave me. I was just a pawn in their hands."

Nian Jincheng's anger could hardly be contained, "What exactly do they take you for?"

"In their eyes, there's only interest. I, Second Brother, are nothing but pawns." Nian Ruxue stared blankly as if she had lost her soul, then turned to look at the window. "Of course, I want to find that person. I dream of it. But now, what face do I have left to see him? I feel so filthy... After the new year, the Emperor will arrange for me to enter the palace. If I go missing, what will happen to the Nian Family, to Second Brother..."

"At this point, what does the Nian Family matter? You don't even have to worry about me!" Nian Jincheng's eyes were fixed. "I'll arrange for you to leave the capital!"

Nian Ruxue's eyes were full of sorrow, "Leave? Second Brother, you're as naive as I used to be, thinking that there is freedom in our kind of family. But it's strange, both Father and Elder Brother want to use me, and even my grandmother doesn't really like me. However, the more it is so, the more I want to do something to make them see me and know that I have value. Second Brother, do you think I'm silly?"

Nian Jincheng shook his head immediately, "I've thought the same before."

Nian Ruxue took a deep breath, "The matter of entering the palace cannot be changed. I have already accepted my fate, but I have always been afraid to tell Second Brother. Just now, when I said I asked that person to come to the capital to see me, it's because I know he won't come, so that is how I said it to refuse. How could I possibly harm him? The incident at Yanyun Building was actually forced by my father. As an unmarried lady, how could I afford to hire assassins from Yanyun Building?"

Nian Jincheng's expression changed as Nian Ruxue continued, "Father said that as long as that man doesn't die, the Nian Family will always be suspected by the Emperor. If I could catch him myself, it would be best for the Nian Family. I know that Second Brother has always wanted Father's approval, so I never told the truth. At that time, I also genuinely hoped he would come to find me. Actually, the Gu Family's rebellion is true, and Father had his reasons for acting this way, although I don't agree. Now Father doesn't know, but I have already canceled the assassination mission, and

I deeply regret what I did back then. The freedom that neither of us could achieve, at least he has achieved it. I

hope he has a good life, no matter where he is or who is by his side, it's all good..."

"Xue'er! I'll take you out of the capital, as far away as possible!" Nian Jincheng tried to pull Nian Ruxue.

But Nian Ruxue suddenly turned cold.

No matter how difficult the road ahead is, I will live well! Once I leave, Second

Brother, you just need to do what you want, not worry about me, and stop pleasing others in this family!"

With those words, Nian Ruxue ran out crying without even putting on her cloak.

Nian Jincheng hurriedly grabbed Nian Ruxue's cloak and chased after her.

When Nian Jincheng sent Nian Ruxue back and returned to his residence, the meal had long since gone cold.

He sat listlessly until dawn. After washing up and changing clothes, he went to the palace to report.

Upon leaving the palace, Nian Jincheng did not return home but went to Duke Qin's Mansion instead.

Qi Jun had just informed Xing Yusheng that Duanmu Chen and Nian Jincheng returned to the capital last night. Then Qi Yan reported that Nian Jincheng had come to visit.

"Please come in quickly!" Xing Yusheng guessed that it must be regarding Su Liang's reply or return gift. Otherwise, Nian Jincheng wouldn't have come to see him.

As Nian Jincheng entered, he ran into Qin Yujin, who had dressed up and greeted him with a shallow smile.

Nian Jincheng nodded in response.

As Qin Yujin prepared to go in with him, her maid ran over and informed her that a Miss Lin had come to visit.

"Lin..." Qin Yujin realized it must be Lin Bojun's sister and instructed the servant to quickly show Lin Xueqing to her room before turning to leave.

After the Lin Family arrived in the capital, Qin Yujin wanted to visit them to express her gratitude, but Qin Kang did not let her go.

Xing Yusheng, who was staying with the Qin Family, had a sensitive identity. Although the Qin Family was prepared to use his death exemption token, it was impossible for them not to be affected by it.

Recently, the nobles in the capital began to alienate the Qin Family, fearing to get involved in trouble.

Qin Kang wouldn't allow Qin Yujin to visit the Lin Family openly for fear of bringing them trouble.

Qin Yujin arranged for someone to send many gifts to Lin Xueqing, but she never expected that she would come today.

Nian Jincheng didn't sit down and directly handed Su Liang's letter to Xing Yusheng instead.

"If Crown Prince Xing has no other matters to discuss, I will take my leave first." Nian Jincheng was in a bad mood and didn't feel like chatting with Xing Yusheng.

Xing Yusheng was opening the letter and nodded his head while saying, "Thank you for your trouble, General Nian. Take care, I won't see you out." He didn't bother being polite either.

The tea hadn't been brewed yet when the guest left.

Qi Jun entered the room and saw Xing Yusheng, who was reading a letter, suddenly show a delighted expression on his face, which quickly disappeared.

"Master, is everything all right with Miss Su?" Qi Jun asked quietly.

Xing Yusheng shook his head, "She's fine, so is Ning Jing. I'm going to write a letter, and you will personally deliver it to the Prince's Mansion for my grandmother."

Qi Jun's expression became serious, "Yes, sir!"

With the Medicinal Diet Recipe sent by Su Liang in hand, a smile finally appeared on Xing Yusheng's face. "There's also a return gift for my cousin. Speaking of which, I saw her just now, why did she leave already?"

Qi Jun then said that it was Miss Lin who had come.

Xing Yusheng didn't pay much attention to that and began to write the letter.

Lin Xueqing and Qin Yujin met for the first time today, but they had already formed a good impression of each other through their correspondence.

Because Lin Bojun liked Qin Yujin, Lin Xueqing saw her as a potential sister-in-law, so she naturally liked and drew closer to her.

The two hit it off immediately and had a very enjoyable conversation. They agreed to visit Qin Family's other residence together to admire the plum blossoms another day.

After Lin Xueqing left, Qin Yujin received the Medicinal Diet Recipe sent by Su Liang and was very happy, saying that she would try making it herself.

Three days later, the Imperial Court suddenly issued an Imperial Decree, commanding Nian Jincheng to immediately head south to lead the troops.

Enemy forces were invading, and war was imminent.

Lin Bojun was assigned to be Nian Jincheng's Deputy General and left the capital city with him on the same day.

Nian Jincheng didn't know that it was Duanmu Chen who had recommended him wholeheartedly, saying that young generals needed the opportunity to fight in the battle to become experienced and grow.

Although the war was dangerous, it was often a good opportunity to make great achievements.

Chang'an asked Duanmu Chen, "The opportunity Master got for General Nian, what if he doesn't want to help Master in the future?"

Duanmu Chen laughed, "He didn't come within the two-day deadline for his response, which means he rejected me."

Chang'an was puzzled, "In that case, Master is still helping him?"

Duanmu Chen shook his head, "His rejection doesn't mean he's chosen the crown prince, or that he doesn't want to take sides. The only possibility is that he listened to my advice, but in the end, he was deceived by Nian Ruxue. I underestimated that Fourth Miss Nian."

Chang'an was still confused.

Duanmu Chen continued, "Nian Jincheng is a rare talent. It's not a big problem if he can't adapt to changes right away. Just separate him from Nian Ruxue. When he's young, he should make achievements and contributions, being involved with the Nian Family will only ruin him. I can give him an opportunity now, and if he doesn't remain loyal to me in future, I can also undo his powers."

Chang'an nodded, "Master is wise. However, in the subordinate's opinion, if we could win over Miss Su to be of use to Master, it would definitely be of great help! "

Duanmu Chen smiled, "Let's wait until she comes."

Su Family Village.

On the eighth day of the twelfth lunar month, Su Liang went to visit a disabled elderly villager for a medical check-up, and Ning Jing didn't follow.

By the time Su Liang returned, it was almost noon, and smoke was wafting from the kitchen.

She went back to her room to change her clothes first. When she opened the door, she saw a long wooden box on the table that hadn't been there when she left.

She walked over, opened it, and found a purple jade hairpin inside.

The jade was given to Su Liang and Ning Jing by Zhengzheng, and was kept in Ning Jing's room.

The wooden hairpin Su Liang wore on her head was a gift from Ning Jing. He had bought an ordinary wooden hairpin in town for a few coins and had it re-carved. It was not considered a gift, but rather part of their daily necessities.

Having changed her clothes, Su Liang picked up the purple jade hairpin and went to the kitchen door, "Your carving skills have improved, it looks very nice.

Next time, just give it to me directly, no need to put it in a box."

She thought it was like the Fragrant Wood Hand String, just because Ning Jing happened to have a piece of jade at hand, he wanted to use it up and practiced his carving skills, so he made her a hairpin.

After all, half of that jade originally belonged to her.

Ning Jing, who was cutting vegetables, turned around and looked at her with a knife in his hand, "This is your coming-of-age ceremony gift."

Su Liang was stunned, “Me? My coming-of-age ceremony today?” She didn’t have the original master’s memory, and Su Yuanzhou’s family was gone, so she didn’t know about her birthdate.

Ning Jing shook his head, “I only know it’s around this time, but I don’t know which day. How about today?”

He had asked before, Su Liang’s previous life birthday was on the eighth day of the twelfth lunar month, and it was not a random choice.

Su Liang inserted the purple jade hairpin casually into her hair, “Alright, if you say so. Thanks. What are you making?”

Ning Jing turned back to continue cutting vegetables, “Longevity noodles.”

Su Liang raised her eyebrows, “Do you cook longevity noodles in person for your brothers’ birthdays, too?”

This was a response to their previous discussion about “brotherly bonds.”

Su Liang felt that Ning Jing treating her so well today was a bit unusual. Although he was usually not bad to her, it was the first time he had given her a gift in a box.

Ning Jing heard this and paused with the knife in his hand, without turning his head, he said, “Today, we aren’t brothers. Today, we are brother and sister.

Only for today. ”

As a big brother pampering little sister, it made perfect sense.

Su Liang held her forehead, wondering how flexible the God’s mind could be and how his thinking could change so quickly in various situations.

“You don’t like it?” Ning Jing asked.

Su Liang hurriedly nodded, “How could I? When it’s your birthday, we can be brother and sister for a day, and I’ll cook longevity noodles for you. I’m suddenly looking forward to it. Will you call me elder sister then?”

Ning Jing, with the knife in his hand, looked back at Su Liang and said coldly, “What do you think?”