

Venomous 41

Chapter 41: Win

While the examiners on the stage were evaluating the results, the students below the stage were also discussing.

Today, Shen Miao did not make a fool of herself. Not only did she make the test a little boring, but she also made her fellow students, who usually looked down at her, pay attention to her. People were strange. As long as someone who was usually terrible performed well, they would attract more attention than those who always performed well.

Feng Anning was a little nervous and looked at the examiners on the stage from time to time. For some reason, the examiners seemed to be arguing.

"It seems like it's going to be very intense today." Fu Xiuan smiled and said, "But they are just girls. Why do they have to take the test so seriously? They won't be able to become an official anyway." He had always been a little conceited, and he was not afraid that the officials around him would be unhappy upon hearing that. After all, some people's daughters were the students who had just performed on stage.

"The test is a rare opportunity." Fu Xiuyi said, "Of course they have to seize it."

"Ninth Brother is right." Fu Xiuyuan picked up the teacup on the table and took a sip. He said, "If there are especially outstanding women, Ninth Brother can get to know them in private." Although Fu Xiuyuan looked calm, he was not easy to deal with. He was secretly testing if Fu Xiuyi would find him a wife with a strong background.

"Fifth Brother, you must be joking." Fu Xiuyi shook his head. "Father will make the decision for my marriage. It's not up to me to decide."

That was true. Fu Xiuyi usually did whatever his father told him to do. He rarely had the chance to decide for himself. In the eyes of outsiders, such a prince was simply too docile and not ambitious, just like Consort Dong. However, Prince Jing, Fu Xiuyuan, had a different opinion.

"In life, we have to take a gamble. Isn't it the same when it comes to choosing a wife?" Prince Jing said meaningfully, "Until the end, no one will know what the end looks like."

Prince Zhou could tell that his brother was testing Fu Xiuyi. He rolled his eyes and stopped talking.

Not long after, the examiner on the stage stood up and announced the results.

As expected, Feng Anning got the first place in the Guqin category. There was nothing particularly impressive in that group to begin with, and Feng Anning was considered very outstanding. She was naturally happy. She went up to get the certificate for the test and happily got off the stage to show it to Mrs. Feng. Mrs. Feng was happy to see this. Although such glory was not something to be proud of for a woman, it was like icing on the cake. The children of noble families naturally did not lack wealth. What separated one from another was their talent and beauty.

After the test, Feng Anning became a more desirable wife for many young men.

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In chess, Bai Wei was the winner. An examiner who specialized in recording chess moves showed the chess match to everyone. Shen Miao glanced at the chess match. In the first few moves, Bai Wei did very well, but as the match proceeded to the end, she became too careful and made a lot of unnecessary moves.

In terms of literature, Shen Qing was only ranked second. The first was Yi Peilan. Her poem was written elegantly. Although it was a little too much for an unmarried girl to write such a poem, Guangwen Hall was never known for cultivating talents who followed the social norms..

Shen Qing did not look pleased, but after all, literature wasn't her strong point. There was nothing she could do.

Finally, it was time to announce the winner in the painting category.

The examiners on the stage had different expressions on their faces. It seemed like they had argued a lot over who should win. The women all guessed that the winner should either be Shen Yue or Qin Qing. After all, the two of them were often asked to paint for prestigious officials. Qin Qing sat in her seat with an arrogant expression, as if she did not care about the outcome at all.

In comparison, Shen Yue looked much more calm. She sat beside Chen Ruoqiu obediently. Chen Ruoqiu looked at her daughter with a gentle gaze. Her daughter was smart and sensitive, and her talent was as outstanding as hers. She was proficient in the Guqin, chess, calligraphy, and painting. Every year, she would be in the limelight during the test. Looking at her, Chen Ruoqiu was satisfied.

Shen Yue was naturally confident. Her painting was to the point and lifelike. It was as if she had long figured out what these examiners wanted. She could always produce the best work. Although Qin Qing looked pretty, she was useless. At the thought of that, she looked at Shen Miao on the other side. She thought that Shen Miao would make a fool of herself on the test stage, but Shen Miao managed to sit through the test. However, Shen Yue was positive that when the paintings were shown, Shen Miao would instantly be the laughing stock.

She was going to make a fool of herself anyway.

The examiner in charge of reading the results said loudly on the stage, "Painting Group—Shen Miao—"

Shen Miao?

Upon hearing the name, the audience burst into an uproar.

Shen Yue's smile froze on her face. She looked at Chen Ruoqiu in disbelief and said with a trembling voice, "Mother, who did the examiner just say? Did I hear it correctly?"

Chen Ruoqiu pinched Shen Yue's arm. Although she was angry, she knew that under such circumstances, there would definitely be many people who wanted to see Shen Yue's reaction. If Shen Yue reacted too strongly, she would attract unnecessary attention.

The women's section was abuzz with discussion, and the men's section was naturally in an uproar.

“What’s going on? Why isn’t it Shen Yue?” Cai Lin stood up and looked at his fellow students. “Did I hear it wrong or did that old man read it wrong?”

There was naturally more than one person who thought that way, especially the young men who were Shen Miao’s classmates. They were all discussing in surprise.

“Look, Brother, I knew she would win.” Su Minglang tugged Su Mingfeng. Among this group of people, he was probably the happiest, beaming with smiles.

Su Mingfeng didn’t expect the winner to be Shen Miao either. Every time before the test, people would gamble in secret. He had betted a thousand taels of silver on Shen Yue!

If his father knew about it, he would definitely tear him apart. Looking at his younger brother who was overjoyed, Su Mingfeng didn’t know whether to laugh or cry.

Pei Lang frowned, but he did not look at the examiner on the stage. Instead, he looked at the purple-clothed girl in the women’s section.

Her face was unusually calm as she gave the surprised crowd a sweeping glance.

She knew she would win.

Chapter 42: Came to Understand (1)

As the discussion continued, the examiner on the stage had already shown the painting to everyone to show the fairness of the outcome.

Fan Liu’er and Zhao Yan’s paintings were the same kind. They were both scenes of autumn chrysanthemums blooming in the garden. To be honest, they were quite beautiful. It was just that they were too mediocre, so they naturally couldn’t get first place.

Qin Qing, on the other hand, drew a large rose arey. This was probably a kind of chrysanthemum that she was most familiar with. In the painting, there was only this chrysanthemum flower, and it was vivid and lifelike. However, the test was not only about painting skills, but also about the message the painting conveyed. Therefore, no matter how beautiful this chrysanthemum was, it was only ranked third.

Soon, it was Shen Yue’s turn. Shen Yue bit her lip and sat beside Chen Ruoqiu. She barely maintained a smile on her face, but her fists were clenched tightly. Normally, she would be smiling, accepting everyone’s sincere praise. But now, with a second place, she felt like the looks people threw at her were filled with mockery.

Shen Yue painted a withered chrysanthemum. In the wind and rain, many of the chrysanthemum petals had fallen, but the remaining ones were still firmly attached to the branches. They were upright, like a king who refused to surrender to the army.

This message the painting was trying to convey was high and lofty. Generally speaking, from the painting, one could tell that the painter had a similar quality. The examiners liked such a talented and noble student the most. If Shen Yue couldn’t even get first place in this painting, it was really impossible to imagine what Shen Miao had drawn.

“Why did such a beautiful painting only get second place?” Bai Wei exclaimed. “I really don’t understand.”

Chen Ruoqiu was also puzzled. At first, she thought that Shen Yue was a little nervous today and didn’t paint well. Unexpectedly, as soon as the painting was shown, she knew that her daughter had given her best shot. Just like the tests in the past, she was indeed a top-tier painter.

The examiner on the stage ordered the two assistants to open Shen Miao’s painting, and the commotion stopped.

The paper was very big, and Shen Miao left a lot of it untouched. Her painting skills were not outstanding, so she only drew a distant scene, but it looked very grand.

In the painting, there was sand and a blood-colored sun. A broken sword was standing in the yellow soil, and under the sword was a white chrysanthemum.

In this painting, the chrysanthemum seemed to be just a decoration. It was so small that even the petals could not be seen.

Everyone present was silent for a moment. Through the pen and paper, they seemed to be able to feel the desolation and misery as well as an useless struggle the painter tried to convey through the single chrysanthemum.

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That was war.

Chen Ruoqiu and Shen Yue trembled at the same time. After seeing what was drawn on the painting, they knew that there was no way to turn the situation around.

Shen Yue’s painting was indeed interesting and elegant, unlike the mediocre ones. However, Shen Miao’s painting was completely different in that it was associated with something much grander than a chrysanthemum. It was associated with war and a nation.

Chapter 43: Came to Understand (2)

No wonder the examiners hesitated for so long before coming to the conclusion. They probably didn’t expect such a majestic painting to be made by an idiot, Shen Miao.

Zhong Ziqi, the Grand Secretary of the Cabinet, said, “Student Shen Miao, come up and tell us why you made this painting.”

Every student who got first place had to make a speech of some sort. However, today, Shen Miao was asked to tell them the reason she made this painting because no one believed that it came from her.

Shen Qing smiled and whispered to Yi Peilan, “She’s going to get exposed.”

“But wasn’t she the one who drew it?” Yi Peilan was a little puzzled. “We all saw it just now. She drew it herself.”

"Her painting skills are not all that outstanding. Who knows if she was taught what to paint by someone?" Shen Qing looked at Shen Miao, who was walking up the stage, in disdain. "I've lived with her for so many years. How can I not know what she's capable of? I think she won't be able to tell us the reason she came up with that painting idea."

When Yi Peilan heard that, she smiled. "I knew it. How can she become a talented woman so quickly? I think she did it to attract that—" She glanced at Prince Ding in the male section. "She must have spent a lot of money to hire an expert to give her an idea to paint."

Shen Qing suppressed the displeasure in her heart and said, "Let's wait and see."

On the stage, Shen Miao looked at her painting quietly. She slowly reached out and stroked the painting under everyone's surprised gazes.

"The reason why I made this painting is because I heard from my father that every year on the battlefield, countless soldiers will die. The journey is long, so they can't bring the dead ones back and can only bury them on the battlefield. At that time, the northwest desert and the northern plain didn't have chrysanthemums. Chrysanthemums bloom in the warm south and in the prosperous capital. Here, people enjoy music, dance, peace, food, and clothes at the cost of the lives of the border soldiers."

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The discussion gradually stopped, and everyone's eyes were focused on the girl in purple.

Her gaze was calm as she spoke like she was telling a story. "My father once said that the soldiers who died in the war couldn't even receive a handful of white chrysanthemums after they died. On the battlefield, flowers wouldn't bloom, and the soldiers wouldn't even have a chance to have a proper funeral."

"I think the reason why everyone is able to enjoy the chrysanthemums here in peace is because the border is guarded by brave men. I can't do anything for them. I can only paint a white chrysanthemums on the painting to comfort their souls."

The girl stood in the wind, her eyes clear, but her words were powerful and resonating, as if her words were the only clear and pleasant thing in the world.

Shen Miao lowered her eyes.

Didn't the people of the royal family in Ming Qi want to deal with the big families and the Shen family? Shen Miao took the opportunity to show the world that it was the soldiers who brought them peace but the emperor.

Would the royal family still dare to crack down the Shen family now?

If they dare, everyone in the world would point a finger at them accusingly.

Chapter 44: The Young Man in Purple

The royal family had the most power. But what was more powerful than them were the people.

The royal family of Ming Qi had done many dirty things in the dark, but they still pretended to be concerned about the country. They enjoyed the offerings and protection of the big families with a clear conscience, but in the end, they wanted to get rid of the big families when they became a threat.

Shen Miao's words made everyone fall silent.

The girls thought about their ancestors who sacrificed their lives for the nation. The boys were at the age where they were hot-blooded. They naturally admired heroes who fought bravely on the battlefield.

But some people were not so happy.

The three princes of Ming Qi frowned at the same time. Others didn't know, but they knew what the royal family was up to now. The Shen family was too powerful, and sooner or later, they would be eliminated by the emperor with another excuse. However, the Shen family had a good reputation among the people for so many years, and it wouldn't be easy to get rid of them. Shen Miao looked like she was mourning the soldiers, but in fact, she was praising them for their contributions and putting them in a respectful position so that the royal family couldn't do anything to harm the soldiers and generals.

Did she do it on purpose?

Everyone looked up at the stage. After the girl finished speaking, she fell silent. Her robe was slightly loose, fluttering in the cold wind, making her look even more delicate.

Prince Yu followed the purple-clothed girl with his eyes. After a while, he suddenly smiled meaningfully. "This Miss Shen is very interesting."

For some reason, when Prince Yu said that, Pei Lang and Fu Xiuyi frowned at the same time and had a bad feeling.

When Prince Zhou heard that, he asked meaningfully, "Uncle, do you like her? I heard she is stupid and ignorant, but that's not necessarily the case. She's sharp-tongued and pretty. If she becomes..." He smiled evilly. "It will be very interesting."

Prince Yu was already in his forties. He was cruel and fierce, causing many women to die. If Shen Miao fell into his hands, she would probably die soon.

However, Prince Jing thought further than his brother. Although the royal family wanted to suppress the Shen family, the Shen family had military power. No matter which prince obtained the help of the Shen family in private, he would gain a lot of power. However, Prince Yu no longer had the right to compete for the throne. If Shen Miao married him, it was equivalent to placing the military power in the royal family. That way, none of the princes could use the Shen family to compete for the throne.

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At the thought of this, Prince Jing, Fu Xiuyuan, nodded and said, "Miss Shen is indeed smart. I think she suits Uncle very well."

Pei Lang looked worriedly at Shen Miao, who was walking down the stage. Her footsteps were steady and her expression was calm. She probably did not know that her fate was already in the hands of this

group of royal princes. He sighed in his heart. However, he was just a small scholar and could not change anything. He could only feel sorry for Shen Miao.

Prince Yu waved his hand impatiently, not looking very happy. The smile on his lips was indeed a little sinister. "Nephews, I don't know what you are up to, but the Shen family is too big for me." His gaze landed on his broken leg. "However, Miss Shen is interesting. It's not a bad idea to have some fun with her."

Su Mingfeng glanced over. He was not close to Fu Xiuyi and the others, so he only focused on the stage. However, he was a little angry. If she was targeted by Prince Yu, she would probably die. If Shen Xin was in the capital, it would be fine. Unfortunately, Shen Xin was away at the border most of the time. Without his father and brother protecting her, how could a little girl fight against these wolves?

As if he had expected Shen Miao's tragic ending, Su Mingfeng sighed and brought Su Minglang to his father.

Shen Miao didn't know about the conversation in the male section. Jingzhe was very happy for Shen Miao, while Shen Yue left her seat in a huff.

After the women's test, it was time for the men's test. The girls who had already been tested left their seats to rest. Feng Anning followed beside Shen Miao, saying in awe, "What you say just now was really impressive."

Shen Miao replied indifferently, "You're not bad either."

Thinking that she had gotten first place in the Guqin category, Feng Anning smiled and said, "I'll go get something from the carriage. Wait for me here."

After Feng Anning left, Shen Miao walked to the plum forest in Yanbei Hall to wait for her. The plum hadn't blossomed yet, but the trees were lush.

Gu Yu walked out. She looked around and whispered, "Miss, it's already been sent to the young master of the Shi family."

"Very good," Shen Miao said.

Gu Yu was still a little confused, not understanding why her miss would do that. After all, it was impossible for her Miss to know the young master of the Shi family.

At this moment, they heard a chuckle above their heads. The three of them looked up and saw someone in purple jumping down from the branches. In the blink of an eye, he landed in front of them.

The young man in purple was so handsome that he did not look like a mortal. He crossed his arms and leaned lazily against the tree trunk with a faint smile on his lips. His eyes were as deep as the winter night in the capital, cold.

It was Xie Jingxing.

Chapter 45: His Questioning

"Miss." Gu Yu and Jingzhe stood in front of Shen Miao warily. This young man was dressed in luxurious clothes and was extremely noble and beautiful, making people wonder who he was. However, he was a stranger after all. Gu Yu and Jingzhe were afraid that something would happen.

"Gu Yu, Jingzhe, guard the forest entrance," Shen Miao said.

"But Miss..." The two of them were a little hesitant.

"Go." Shen Miao frowned slightly. For some reason, she was very good at giving orders. Every time she ordered her maid to do something, she would carry a powerful aura that made people not dare to refute.

Jingzhe and Gu Yu could only retreat to the entrance of the forest.

"You're interesting." Xie Jingxing leaned against the tree trunk and looked at her playfully. He was a noble young master, but his gaze was as sharp as a blood blade on the battlefield, and his calm tone was cold. As expected of someone who had been to the battlefield.

"Marquis Xie, what do you want to say?" Shen Miao asked. She didn't think Xie Jingxing came for an idle chat. Although he was young, he was very smart. Since the Old Marquis couldn't discipline him, he was even more wild.

"That cripple, Prince Yu, seems to have taken a liking to you, so I wanted to say a word of congratulations to you," he said flatly. However, calling Prince Yu a cripple was considered extremely offensive. However, when Xie Jingxing said it, there was a trace of disdain and mockery, as if Prince Yu was just a dirty thing.

He was indeed very haughty.

Shen Miao was deep in thought, but she did not show it on her face. Xie Jingxing suddenly took a step forward. He was extremely tall, and Shen Miao was covered in his shadow. The purple-clothed youth leaned over slightly and whispered into her ear, "You really knew long ago."

The fragrance of bamboo came from the young man's body. His voice was deliberately lowered, and it sounded magnetic. Shen Miao looked up. That handsome face was in front of her, and the corners of his lips were slightly curled, adding a hint of evilness to his smile.

However, she was not really a young girl anymore. She lowered her eyes slightly and said, "So what if I know and what if I don't?"

When Xie Jing Xing saw that she remained nonchalance, he did not bother to continue to put on an appearance of a rich playboy and did not have even a trace of protective feelings for a female as he pushed her away. There was a piece of paper in his hands as he smiled a bit frivolously, "Knowing but not being anxious about your own matter but worry for the Second Young Master of the Shi family?"

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Shen Miao abruptly moved her line of sight and stared at him fixedly as she could not help but be a bit brutal with her tone, "Is Marquis Xie being too meddlesome?"

"It's just a piece of paper, but you're so nervous." Xie Jingxing returned to his usual frivolous self. "What kind of relationship do you have with the second young master of the Shi family? Why are you helping him? Or... are you up to something?"

Shen Miao's face was as calm as water as she stared quietly at the paper in Xie Jingxing's hand. The paper was thin, but it was a heavy stone in her heart.

She spent a lot of time writing this 'Circulation of Law' from her memory. In her previous life, Pei Lang was discovered by Fu Xiuyi because of this essay. From then on, he was accepted by Fu Xiuyi as an aide to help Fu Xiuyi build his empire.

Now, before he could show his talent, Shen Miao had to cut off all possibilities. She had to make sure Pei Lang never worked for the royal family.

The second son of the Shi family, Gao Yan, was a new noble family that came from a large family with an ancient inheritance in the capital. If the Royal Family wanted to suppress the old families, they naturally had to support the new families. The Shi family was the most prominent among the new ones. The eldest son of the Shi family, Gao Jin, was really talented. Later, when Fu Xiuyi ascended the throne, he was greatly supported. Because of this, the Shi family became more and more domineering, and this Gao Yan... even coveted her daughter, Wanyu.

If not for the fact that she was still the head of the imperial harem at that time and Fu Xiuyi had not started to deal with the Shen family, Wanyu would probably have been killed too. This Gao Yan was not as talented as his brother and was extremely vain. He always liked to speak of his elder brother's achievements like it was his own. He was petty and vengeful. In her previous life, Gao Yan had never entered the imperial court. In this life, the Shi family had not reached its peak yet, and Gao Jin had just entered the imperial court. Shen Miao thought she might as well help Gao Yan enter the imperial court too.

She gave Pei Lang's "Circulation of Law" to Gao Yan because she knew that every year, Gao Yan would ask the servant to spend money to buy an exam paper from outside. Today, she asked Gu Yu to sell this essay to Gao Yan. With Fu Xiuyi's personality, he would definitely do anything to recruit Gao Yan. And Gao Yan was a vain person, so he would definitely not tell him that he didn't write this essay.

Replacing a talent with a fool for Fu Xiuyi was Shen Miao's idea. Unexpectedly, Xie Jingxing came out of nowhere and ruined her plan.

Xie Jingxing finally smiled and said lazily, "You don't have to look like you hate me so much. This one was copied by my servant. The real one is still in the hands of Gao Yan."

Shen Miao was slightly stunned. She did not expect this to happen. She looked at Xie Jingxing and was silent for a moment before asking, "Young Marquis, you're too kind."

"It's not that I'm kind, but I've always been praised for being not meddlesome." Xie Jingxing's eyes turned cold.

Just as Shen Miao was about to speak, she heard Xie Jingxing's voice again. "Now, can you tell me why you gave this essay to Gao Yan?"

Shen Miao sighed in her heart. Although she wanted to tie the Shen family and the Xie family to the same boat, it was not the right time now. Shen and Xie had been at odds with each other for a long time and could not be resolved overnight.

She did not trust anyone. She had her own path to walk. Be it Xie Jingxing or the Xie family, they were just a chess piece in the world. No one would explain the reason to a chess piece.

"I thought that you must have an affair with him. That's why you helped him." Xie Jingxing smiled mischievously and sized up Shen Miao. Her eyebrows were extremely beautiful, but they were as sharp as the wind and frost in the Northwest Desert.

"Also, if you want to help Gao Yan, you have to help the Shi family. However, instead of helping Gao Jin, you helped the good-for-nothing, Gao Yan. It's obvious that you have evil intentions." He smiled maliciously, but his words hit the nail on the head.

"Shen girl, do you have a grudge against the Shi family?"

Chapter 46: Sending Flowers (1)

"Shen girl, do you have a grudge against the Shi family?"

Shen Miao looked at the young man in front of her quietly.

He was beautiful, but in a terrifying way. Although he had a cynical expression, he had a calmness unsuitable for his age. It was not shown on his appearance, but it was in him.

It was a pity that such a talented person died young in her previous life.

A look of pity flashed across her eyes. When she spoke again, her tone was calm. "Yes."

"The game of chess is interesting." Xie Jingxing looked at her appraisingly. "You took such a big detour just to help Gao Yan take on his official career. Are you trying to mess up Ming Qi's imperial court?"

Even though Shen Miao had lived for two lifetimes, she couldn't help but be slightly shocked.

Ordinary people would take one step at a time, but smart people would take ten steps at a time. She suddenly didn't know how to answer his question.

A moment later, she replied, "What does this have to do with the Young Marquis?"

"I don't care about Ming Qi, but I won't allow anyone to touch my family." There was a warning in his tone. "If you have any ideas about my family, don't blame me for being rude."

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Shen Miao glanced at him. Xie Jingxing seemed to have always hated his family and loved to go against his father. Now, it seemed that he didn't completely hate it. He probably still cared about his family. Otherwise, in her previous life, he wouldn't have ended up dying for his family.

It was understandable that Xie Jingxing suspected that she would attack the Xie family. The Shen family and the Xie family had never seen eye to eye. Moreover, what she did now was incomprehensible. In the eyes of outsiders, it was indeed possible that the Shen family would cause trouble for the Xie family.

"Marquis Xie, don't worry," she said indifferently, her tone as if she was talking about the weather today. "The Xie and Shen families have nothing to do with each other, so naturally, nothing will happen. What Marquis Xie is worried about won't happen. In the short span of a few decades, the tide will be turned around many times. The Xie family now sees the Shen family as their enemy, but one day, we will be in the same boat and face the same enemy."

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"Are you trying to show your friendship for me?" Xie Jingxing raised his eyebrows.

"Yes," Shen Miao said calmly.

Xie Jingxing sized up the girl in front of him. Ever since he was born, he had seen countless women. When he was young, those women wanted to get close to his father, but later on, those women started to get close to him. Among these women, some were delicate, some were drop-dead gorgeous, some were good with swords, and some were good at strategy.

Xie Jingxing had seen thousands of smart people, but none of them surprised him as much as the person in front of him.

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Perhaps it was because of the intuition of people who had been on the battlefield, Xie Jingxing could smell blood from this girl. It was like a pool of stagnant water, but there was a huge ferocious beast lurking at the bottom. Now that the surface was calm, it was just waiting for an opportunity to attack. When the day came, there would definitely be a bloodbath.

Although this sounded a little ridiculous. How could a young girl set off a storm? However, Xie Jingxing would never underestimate his intuition.

Under the lotus-green embroidered cloak in the plum forest, the girl looked dignified, lonely, decisive, and indecipherable.

Chapter 47: Sending Flowers (2)

"There's actually a smart person in the Shen family." His words were sarcastic, but he said seriously, "In that case, do whatever you want. I'll just sit back and wait for a good show. Don't disappoint me." He stood up and was about to leave.

"Thank you, Marquis." Shen Miao stopped him.

"Is there anything else?" He stood still and asked without looking back.

"The two younger masters of the Xie family will be tested on stage today," Shen Miao said indifferently. "Isn't Marquis Xie going to do anything?"

Xie Jingxing was also a third-year student of Guangwen Hall, but he was carefree. Guangwen Hall could not restrain him, so they let him be. Otherwise, Xie Jingxing would have done a test with his two second-year cousins today.

In his previous life, Xie Jingxing did not participate in the test, so his two younger brothers stole the limelight. To be honest, Xie Changwu and Xie Changchao were very capable and were ranked at the top of the martial arts class. Because of this, they were favored by the emperor. Later, they were praised by Fu Xiuyi and worked for him.

Shen Miao had always felt that the father and son of the Marquis of Lin'an were both smart people. How could they have ended up like that in their previous life? In fact, after thinking about it carefully, she realized that there were many questions. For example, when the Shen family collapsed, the second and third branches contributed a lot to it. In this way, it seemed that something must be going on internally in the Xie family.

"Don't tell me you want me to go up and compete with them?" Xie Jingxing turned around and said in surprise, "Just like how you competed with your sister?"

"Isn't Marquis Xie in the same situation as me?" Shen Miao ignored the mockery in his words and said, "The person who stabbed you the deepest is the person closest to you. I naturally understand that a person of noble status like Marquis Xie doesn't care about sons born to a concubine. However, what looks like an inconspicuous thing is like a poisonous snake lurking in the dark." Her tone was warning, but her eyes were as clear as a child's. "You have to nip them in the bud so that they won't be a threat."

"Compared to letting them steal the thunder and get praised, wouldn't it be more satisfying to take them down one by one and make a fool of themselves in front of everyone?"

Xie Jingxing's heart skipped a beat.

His mother was Princess Yuqing. He didn't want to have too much to do with a concubine's sons. If he did, people would say that he wasn't magnanimous enough.

At home, the concubine and her sons acted respectfully and lovingly, making him feel disgusted. He only wanted to watch the three of them put on a show like an outsider, but now Shen Miao's words made him feel tempted to do something.

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If he extinguished their hope, would it be more satisfying?

Shen Miao continued, "You've tolerated it for too long. Now is the time."

Don't put up with it.

He lowered his head and looked at the person in front of him. A faint fragrance came from the girl.

He smiled and plucked up a begonia next to him. "You're interesting. This flower is for you. It's a good suggestion. Thank you."

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Chapter 48: Provocation

After Shen Miao left the forest, Gu Yu and Jingzhe, who were guarding the place, heaved a sigh of relief. Jingzhe looked inside and was puzzled when she didn't see anyone. "Where is he?"

Shen Miao also looked back. The plum tree was lush and green, swaying gently with the wind. Xie Jingxing probably left from another entrance.

She said, "Let's go."

When they returned to the banquet, Feng Anning rushed over and complained, "Didn't I tell you to wait for me? When I turned around, you were gone. When I came back, I didn't see you here either. Where did you go?"

"People say the chrysanthemum in the garden is pretty, so I went to see it." Shen Miao looked up at the stage. "Has it started?"

"You've been gone for too long. The male team has already drawn lots." Feng Anning curled her lips. "Now, it's the male team's turn."

The young men on the stage were competing. The first round of "drawing" had passed, but Shen Miao did not care about the results. The second round was "choosing", choosing a subject they were good at.

Shen Miao's gaze landed on the young man in green clothes on the left.

This young man was dark and strong. His facial features were not bad, but because of his overly strong body, he looked very solid. Moreover, with green clothes, his skin looked even darker. Not only that, he also had a high bun and a jade hairpin. He probably wanted to imitate the style of the ancient gentlemen, but because he could not bear to part with his rich clothes, he looked a little out of place. In short, although he tried his best to look noble and gentlemanly, he actually looked like a country bumpkin.

This was Gao Yan from the Shi family of the capital. Gao Yan was still young, only 16 years old. After Fu Xiuyi ascended the throne, Gao Yan's status rose because he took advantage of Gao Jin. He bullied people in the capital and even dared to covet Wanyu. He was simply a badass.

At the thought of how Wanyu had been molested by Gao Yan in the palace, Shen Miao was furious. She stared at Gao Yan from afar, as if she was looking at a prey walking into a trap.

Gao Yan was talking to Gao Jin happily at this moment.

He was naturally happy. After receiving such an excellent essay, as long as he showed it later, he would definitely shock everyone.

...

Shen Miao sneered in her heart. Go, show everyone this essay and get recruited by Fu Xiuyi! Gao Yan will surely bring disaster to the entire Shi family.

As for Pei Lang, she turned to look at the green-robed man sitting not far from Fu Xiuyi. From now on, you will slowly repay the debt you owe in the past!

"Shen Miao, after men finish choosing. It will be women's turn to choose. Will you choose?"

"No," Shen Miao replied.

In the test, “choosing” was something that every student had to do. Contestants could choose what they were good at. If they were unwilling to choose, they could choose not to do so. Therefore, instead of saying that “choosing” was a part of the test, it was better to say that it was the part where contestants could showcase their skills easier. If there was something that they were best at, they could naturally show it in the “choosing” segment. Therefore, compared to “drawing lots”, everyone was more enthusiastic about “choosing”.

“Why?” Feng Anning was a little disappointed. She said, “Aren’t you very good at painting now? You should be good at other subjects too. Why don’t you show them?”

“There’s no need.” Shen Miao started to play chess on the table again. Without looking up, she said to Feng Anning, “Let those who want the limelight get the limelight. What’s more, I got first place in painting just because I was lucky.”

“You...” Feng Anning didn’t know what to say.

“Fifth Sister.” A voice interrupted their conversation. Shen Yue stood in front of them and said worriedly, “Fifth Sister, are you really not going to participate in the next round?”

“Second Sister, do you want me to participate?” Shen Miao asked.

Shen Yue was stunned by her words. For some reason, Shen Miao seemed to have made up her mind to fall out with her. Shen Yue was puzzled. Could it be that she was angry at the second and third branches because she fell into the water last time. Shen Yue bit her lip and looked a little aggrieved. She said softly, “I naturally hope that Fifth Sister will participate. That painting just now was very good. Since Fifth Sister is so talented, why don’t you continue to choose to paint?”

What Shen Yue said was heard by all the young ladies and madams nearby. Although Shen Miao got first place, none of them were convinced since she had always been a bad student.

Shen Yue thought so too. Therefore, she thought that as long as Shen Miao painted again, she would definitely make a fool of herself.

Feng Anning understood what she meant and immediately sneered. “Second Miss Shen, you make it sound so easy. One has to spend time thinking of an idea before one can paint. You can’t paint two paintings in a row, can you?”

“I asked because I think Fifth Sister has improved a lot.” Shen Yue smiled gently. “Her painting was terrific just now. What’s so difficult about painting another one?”

Shen Miao did not look up from the beginning to the end. She only picked up a chess piece and placed it on the chessboard. “I’m not interested. Don’t worry about me.”

Shen Yue did not expect Shen Miao to answer so indifferently in front of so many people. For a moment, her expression was a little ugly. The most infuriating thing in the world was that Shen Miao refused to take the bait.

Shen Miao wasn’t provoked even when she was challenged in front of so many people. This made Shen Yue even more certain that someone helped Shen Miao with the painting idea. She paused for a

moment and suddenly continued with a smile. "Since Fifth Sister insists, I won't say anything else." She turned around and returned to her seat.

In the men's section, Cai Lin had been secretly looking at Shen Yue. He saw Shen Yue suddenly look over from afar and smile at him gently.

Cai Lin was stunned for a moment before feeling a little excited. However, Shen Yue lowered her head again, looking a little sad.

He suddenly became nervous.

Chapter 49: Circulation of Law (1)

On the stage, the men's group was still choosing.

Confucian classics was chosen the most as it was a compulsory subject at school. As long as one had a good memory, performing well in this round wasn't a big issue. In contrast, there were very few people who chose strategy.

Strategy was the most practical. Students were required to remark on the current state affairs. The people present were all young students. Apart from some who had already been receiving related knowledge from their parents who worked in the imperial court, most of them were still ignorant about the state affairs, let alone suggest any good strategies. Therefore, strategy was the most difficult one. However, if one was really outstanding at strategy, they would more likely become an official.

Shen Miao looked at the chessboard in front of her.

Back then, Pei Lang's Circulation of Law was made in the third round, which was Challenge. Men could challenge women, women could challenge men, and students could pick their challenge as well.

One of the male students challenged Pei Lang. Pei Lang was also very talented. In just a few minutes on the stage, he finished a strategy essay. It was eloquently written and right to the point.

At that time, the princes all saw highly of him. Pei Lang was a smart person. He said he wanted to be a scholar in Guangwen Hall and did not think too much about anything else. His attitude was firm. If not for the fact that Fu Xiuyi treated him well and Shen Miao gave him advice, Pei Lang might never become an official.

The chessboard was crisscrossed, just like the life in her previous life. She brushed past the chessboard, pushing off the pieces.

Shen Miao said, "Let's start again."

Gao Yan adjusted his clothes and tidied his hair. He asked the servant beside him, "How do I look?"

"Young Master, you're strikingly handsome and charismatic..." The servant blurted out praise.

Gao Yan curled his lips smugly and was about to get up and walk to the stage when Gao Jin grabbed him and asked, "What are you doing?"

"Go to choose," Gao Yan said.

...

Gao Jin frowned. He knew his brother very well. Not only was he not capable, but he also liked to be in the limelight. Now that their family was prospering, he could not allow anyone to ruin it. Gao Jin asked, "What do you know?"

These words made Gao Yan uncomfortable. He and Gao Jin were biological brothers from the same mother, but when people mentioned their family, the first thing they praised was Gao Jin. Gao Jin was born with delicate features, but Gao Yan was rough and black. Gao Jin could work for his father at a young age, but every time Gao Yan wanted to talk to his father about court affairs, his father would shake his head and say no. They were brothers, but because of the remarks of outsiders, they became estranged. Gao Yan was already inferior when compared to his brother. Now that he heard what Gao Jin said, he flared up. At first, he was a little worried that he would attract too much attention with the essay. Now, he no longer cared.

He said in an unfriendly tone, "Brother, although I'm not as smart as you, I'm not completely stupid. You don't have to stop me. After all, I can't steal your thunder."

Gao Jin could tell that there was something else in Gao Yan's words. He paused for a moment. Before he could speak, Gao Yan pushed him away and walked up the stage. He shouted from afar, "I choose 'strategy'!"

Strategy?

People in Guangwen Hall who knew Gao Yan instantly looked over. Gao Yan was not known for being talented, but he was not bad either. This was because his homework and essays were always written by others.

Chapter 50: Circulation of Law (2)

Therefore, no one was surprised that he would go on stage. In the Choose session, students would display the subject they were best at. However, because Strategy was ubiquitously considered hard, the noisy crowd instantly quieted down, all looking at the man dressed in green on the stage.

The first few students who chose "Strategy" had already read out their strategies in front of everyone. However, they were not very good. As soon as Gao Yan went up, Gao Jin frowned.

"I didn't expect Gao Yan to dare to pick Strategy." Feng Anning said curiously, "If it were Gao Jin, I think it would be better."

Shen Miao stopped playing and looked at the stage.

After preparing everything, Gao Yan took out a page and slowly read it.

"The law is the foundation of the country, especially when it comes to supporting the empire..." He read it quite rhythmically, and the crowd gradually stopped chattering, especially the old officials at the table. They looked at the young man on the stage seriously.

"Gao Jin's younger brother is indeed not bad." A trace of surprise flashed across Prince Zhou's eyes. "Even the officials in the court don't have such an insightful opinion."

"He's indeed not bad." Prince Jing nodded and praised, "Besides, this child is quite young. In time, he will definitely be extraordinary."

Fu Xiuyi looked at the person on the stage quietly. Although his expression did not change, his fingers subconsciously crossed together. Every time he was deep in thought, he would subconsciously do this.

Pei Lang, on the other hand, had been stiff since the first sentence was recited by Gao Yan. For some reason, he felt a sense of familiarity with Gao Yan's strategic essay. He had a good memory but he couldn't figure out where he read it. This sense of familiarity made him, who had always been calm, a little anxious. It was as if he could follow up with every sentence that Gao Yan recited. It was extremely familiar, as if it was his own.

Shen Miao smiled and stopped looking at the young man on the stage. Instead, she continued to look at the chess pieces on the chessboard.

"What kind of chess game are you playing?" Feng Anning asked, "You must be playing randomly. How can you put a chess piece so far away?"

"Far?" Shen Miao shook her head.

...

Every chess piece had its own uses. How far could this seemingly useless chess piece go? Even if it looked like it was still thousands of moves away from the end of the game, this useless piece would turn out to be a change changer.

But now, no one could tell.

In a distant attic, one could see the scene on the stage from afar. Su Mingfeng waved his fan and said, "I wonder where Gao Yan found this strategic essay. It's written very elegantly. I want to know the person who wrote this."

"Why do you want to know the person?" Opposite him, the purple-robed youth spoke lazily. He was sitting in front of the window, leaning against it.

"He should be an experienced official." Su Mingfeng continued. "If we can make friends with him, we will definitely benefit a lot."

Xie Jingxing sneered and turned to look at the stage. There was a begonia in his hand.

The begonia was still fresh, as if it had just been plucked. It carried a faint fragrance and a murderous intent as well.

"That's not necessarily the case."