

Venomous 451

Chapter 451 Prince Rui (1)

Early the next morning, Shen Xin and Luo Xueyan entered the palace with Shen Qiu. They only returned in the afternoon. Emperor Wen Hui reinstated a few of their official positions and returned the Shen army to Shen Xin, but Shen Xin didn't seem to be very happy.

Pain was the thing that could train one's will the most. After training the Luo army for two years in a harsh environment like Spring City, Shen Xin became more composed. After taking back what was originally his, he didn't even express his gratitude.

Not long after Shen Xin and Luo Xueyan entered the palace, the Shen mansion actually sent people to Shen Miao's place to invite her back. Shen Miao couldn't be bothered with those people and asked the servants to say that they had all gone out. The people from the Shen family didn't believe it. First, they shouted at the door that it was all a misunderstanding back then. Later, they scolded Shen Xin and his wife for being heartless and unfilial. When Luo Ling heard that, he frowned. Luo Tan was an impulsive person and immediately rushed out to quarrel with the people. When it came to quarreling, Luo Tan had never been at a disadvantage. Her words were harsh and to the point, causing the people from the Shen mansion to blush and scurry away in embarrassment.

When Shen Xin and the others returned, Shen Miao told them about this. Shen Xin was silent for a moment before instructing Mo Qing to arrange more guards at the entrance of the mansion in the future.

At the dining table, Luo Xueyan said, "Three days later is the day of tribute. We're all going to the palace. In the afternoon, get the tailor to come and make some new clothes, especially for Tan and Jiaojiao. We have been away for two years. I wonder what kind of fabric is more popular now. We must catch up." At the end of her sentence, she looked at Shen Miao with a satisfied gaze. Two years ago, everyone was still calling Shen Miao an idiot, but now, two years later, Shen Miao had already become a different person. She was so beautiful and elegant.

"Yay! We're going to the palace!" Luo Tan was a little excited. "Then we can see the people in the palace. Can we also see the people of the State of Qin and the Daliang Dynasty? I heard that the people of the State of Qin are all tall, and the people of the Daliang Dynasty Royal Family are extremely handsome. I wonder how many of them we can see this time?"

Luo Xueyan laughed. "Tan, if you take a liking to any young master at the banquet, Aunt and Uncle will help you matchmake."

When her marriage was mentioned, Luo Tan did not blush or feel shy at all. Instead, she said, "I'm not in a hurry. Instead, Cousin Miao needs to seriously consider it. Those men in Spring City are too rough for you. There are many noble young masters in the capital. If you like them, you have to choose for yourself first." She looked at Shen Miao and smiled mischievously.

Shen Miao glanced at her and did not speak. On the other hand, Luo Ling, who was holding her chopsticks, paused and looked a little hesitant.

In the afternoon, a tailor came to make clothes for them. In order to rope in Shen Xin, Emperor Wen Hui rewarded Shen Xin quite a lot when he first returned to the palace. Among them, there were a few pieces of fabric of excellent quality that could be used to make clothes. Luo Xueyan also picked a lot of jewelry to dress the two girls up. It was as if she wanted to make the two girls stand out the most among the crowd.

In fact, Luo Xueyan did not do this on purpose. The tribute was a big deal. Ming Qi had to show the most powerful side in front of the State of Qin and the Daliang Dynasty. All the civil and military officials had to dress luxuriously and not embarrass Ming Qi

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Luo Ling would also go with them. This time, Shen Xin planned to find a job for Luo Ling in the Ministry of War to train his ability. Before that, he naturally had to introduce Luo Ling to some of his colleagues so that they could help him in the future.

During the three days of waiting, Shen Miao listened to Jingzhe and Gu Yu as they told her what had happened in the past two years. However, what surprised her was that the Exiled Immortal Pawnshop in the capital closed not long after Shen Xin went to Spring City. For some reason, it only reopened a few days ago. It was said the owner of the shop went on a long trip and just came back.

Knowing that Shen Miao was back, Feng Anning got someone to send her a letter. She said that she wanted to look for Shen Miao personally, but since they would meet at the banquet, there was no need to make this trip. In addition to Feng Anning, Su Minglang also sent her a letter. The handwriting was very bad. Reading the letter, Shen Miao couldn't help but laugh.

In the blink of an eye, three days passed, and it was time for the tribute.

The Ming Qi tribute was a big matter for the entire dynasty. Early in the morning, the bell and drum of the south mountain rang.

The peddlers on the street were all talking about this matter. However, the commoners could not enter the palace. They could only listen to the sounds and movements outside the palace wall. Most of them were envious of the officials. The families of the officials could enter the palace. If the officials were more powerful, they could even attend the banquet.

The grandness of the banquet gave people the illusion that it was a prosperous era. The common people were always very simple. They could only see what was in front of them and felt that Ming Qi could really last for generations. Only a few smart people could understand that Ming Qi was far from being stable as it was faced with both internal and external conflicts.

Shen Xin's carriage stopped at the entrance of the palace. A eunuch, who had been waiting outside, led them in. Luo Tan looked around curiously, her head pressed down by Shen Qiu to prevent her from bumping into the nobles in the palace. Luo Ling, on the other hand, looked very calm, although this was his first time in the palace. He behaved in a way befitting a future general.

When it was time for the ceremony, most of the civil and military officials had arrived. The sound of drums, music, and cannons shot into the sky.

The emperor and empress sat high in the main seat. Shen Miao looked up. Emperor Wen Hui was wearing a dragon robe, and his expression was dignified. He looked no different from two years ago. However, if one looked carefully, they would find that he was walking with the help of his personal eunuch. His footsteps were not as steady as before.

Fu Xiuyi stood at the side with the princes. Being the youngest and most outstanding among the nine princes, he attracted the attention of many high-ranking officials and women present. Fu Xiuyi had finally reached the point where he could not even hide his brilliance. Probably the other princes would no longer dare to take him lightly.

Shen Miao also looked at Fu Xiuyi, but her gaze landed on the green-robed man behind Fu Xiuyi. That person had a different aura and looked nothing like the other officials. He was Pei Lang.

Pei Lang was standing not far behind Fu Xiuyi. On such an occasion, the fact that Fu Xiuyi was willing to bring Pei Lang along meant that he trusted him very much. As if sensing her gaze, Fu Xiuyi suddenly turned his head to look at her. Shen Miao's gaze lingered on him for a moment before turning around.

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Sitting on the guest seat was a man and a woman. The two of them were very young. It was late autumn, and the weather was actually a little cold. Even the daughters of officials who were dressed gorgeously would put on cloaks to avoid catching a cold. This woman was wearing a thin golden dress with complicated patterns embroidered on it. Such an exquisite embroidery would probably take a year or so to complete. This woman's eyebrows were also exquisite, but her behavior was not respectful. When the official in charge of the banquet started to read the congratulatory speech, she glanced at everyone with disdain.

This woman was Princess Ming An. Beside Princess Ming An was the Crown Prince of the State of Qin, Huangfu Hao. Huangfu Hao was better than Princess Ming An. At least, he was not as impertinent as Princess Ming An. He was still smiling as he listened to the speech, as if he sincerely wished Ming Qi prosperity. However, there was a danger hidden under that smile that made people feel a chill run down their spines.

This was the first time Luo Tan had come to such an occasion and found it novel. She was also looking at the seats arranged for honored guests. She thought for a moment and tugged at the sleeve of an official's daughter beside her. When no one was looking, she asked in a low voice, "Why are there only the crown prince and princess of the State of Qin? Where's Prince Rui?"

The young lady was almost shocked by Luo Tan's tug. Although she was a little displeased, she still answered Luo Tan's question politely. "Prince Rui is not feeling well and did not come today."

Luo Tan was enlightened. She looked at Shen Miao, who was standing beside her, and said, "Prince Rui is really arrogant. He's deliberately embarrassing the emperor."

The people from the State of Qin and the Daliang Dynasty came to congratulate Ming Qi, but in the end, Prince Rui was absent at the ceremony. Wouldn't that be a slap to the face of the Ming Qi royal family in front of the world? However, the people of the Ming Qi royal family did not dare to flare up. Not only that, but they also had to treat him well. In this world, the strong had the say. Ming Qi did not dare to go against the Daliang Dynasty.

The tribute ceremony took a full six hours from beginning to end. When it ended, it was almost evening. All the civil and military officials and their families could not leave. This was a long period of torture, and it was the same for the emperor. The higher the status, the more attention they received, and the less they could show signs of impatience and fatigue.

Even a girl like Luo Tan, who was trained since she was young, felt tired. When she turned around, she saw Shen Miao standing upright with her hands folded in front of her, looking dignified. Luo Tan couldn't help but be slightly stunned. She asked quietly, "Little cousin, aren't you tired?"

Shen Miao said, "I'm not tired."

Luo Tan was amazed. The surrounding women were all slouching. It was rare to see someone standing as straight as Shen Miao. Luo Tan wanted to persuade Shen Miao to relax a bit, but for some reason, she couldn't bring herself to say it.

Luo Tan had always known that Shen Miao's bearing was rare. It was just that she was not well-educated and could exactly find a word to describe it. Her intuition told her that Shen Miao was different from the other girls in Spring City. Even the empress on the throne was not as graceful as Shen Miao at this moment.

Luo Tan was not the only one who noticed this. It seemed that some young masters of noble families were also gradually attracted by Shen Miao. Among the group of dispirited noble ladies, Shen Miao was really too eye-catching. Seeing this, Luo Ling frowned slightly and quietly turned around, hiding Shen Miao from the impudent gazes.

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Seeing this, Luo Xueyan smiled in relief. Shen Miao was completely clueless. Luo Tan winked at Luo Ling. Luo Ling blushed and turned his head away as if nothing had happened.

After the six-hour ceremony was completed, the banquet would begin. The banquet for the tribute would naturally have to be grand, filled with singing and dancing. They wanted to show the people of the State of Qin and the Daliang Dynasty how rich Ming Qi was.

Shen Miao and Luo Tan had just taken a few steps into the hall when someone patted her shoulder from behind. Shen Miao turned around and saw a familiar face.

"Hey, I saw you earlier, but we were too far away, so I couldn't come over. Shen Miao, long time no see!" Feng Anning hugged Shen Miao passionately.

Compared to two years ago, Feng Anning grew more beautiful, looking more like a girl. She had her hair combed into a bun and was wearing a pomegranate-red dress. She let go and looked at Shen Miao unhappily. "Why aren't you surprised to see me?" Without waiting for Shen Miao to answer, she continued, "Forget it, you've always been like this. I forgive you. However," She sized up Shen Miao from head to toe, "I haven't seen you for two years. How did you become so good-looking? Is the soil in Spring City so nourishing? Why do you look like a different person from before?"

Shen Miao was also instructed by Luo Xueyan to dress up well today. She was wearing a purple crescent dress with a phoenix tail. Her dress was embroidered with large lilacs, and her hair was combed into a bun. There was a jade begonia hairpin on it, and her earrings were made of small pearls. Her facial

features were small and delicate, but her aura was oppressive. Standing there quietly, she exuded a natural dignified aura. Her eyes were as clear and dark as a newborn deer, making many young men turn around to look at her.

Luo Tan had been standing beside Shen Miao and looking at Feng Anning curiously. Feng Anning finally noticed her and asked, "Who is this?"

"My cousin, Luo Tan," Shen Miao said. "This is Feng Anning."

Luo Tan greeted Feng Anning. Feng Anning was outgoing, and Luo Tan was straightforward and lively. The two of them hit it off at first sight and began chatting noisily, making Shen Miao's ears hurt. When it was time to take seats, Feng Anning went to tell Mrs. Feng before taking a seat next to Shen Miao so that she could talk to her.

Because Shen Xin had just returned to the capital, he did not have any particularly good friends, so he casually found a seat. However, now that he was "invited" back by Emperor Wen Hui, his surrounding colleagues naturally did not dare to slight him and spoke respectfully.

Feng Anning whispered into Shen Miao's ear, "Tsk, these fence-sitters. When General Shen set off, none of them went to see him off. Why are they being so enthusiastic now? A bunch of hypocrites."

Shen Miao smiled and did not comment. Feng Anning continued, "Look, your sister is here too."

Shen Miao was stunned. She looked up at the place Feng Anning was pointing at and met her gaze.

After two years, she finally saw Shen Yue again.

After Shen Yuan was beheaded, the court officials treated Shen Gui like a plague and could not wait to stay away from him. Shen Gui was not very capable and was getting worse by the day. He wasn't invited to attend such an occasion. However, Shen Wan's family came.

Shen Wan's official career was probably smooth sailing now. At this moment, he was clinking his glass with someone with a smile. Chen Ruoqiu sat beside him and was speaking to a noble lady with a smile on her face, looking just as two years ago. However... she was no longer as radiant as before. It seemed that Old Madam Shen had been putting pressure on the third branch to have more children since the second branch had no children.

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The person looking at Shen Miao was Shen Yue. Shen Yue sat with Yi Peilan, Bai Wei, and Jiang Xiaoxuan, staring at her. From afar, Shen Miao could feel the hatred in Shen Yue's eyes.

Shen Yue was wearing a smoky-pink pleated dress and a corolla. She was now 18 years old. Born with a gentle temperament, she was considered good-looking. However, Shen Miao's gaze landed on the bracelet on her wrist and then glanced at the agate silver hairpin on her head. The corners of her lips curled up.

With how much Shen Yue liked to be in the limelight and show off, the fact that she still used jewelry from two years ago meant that the third branch wasn't doing well now. Old Madam Shen was spendthrift, and after splitting up, she did not have Shen Xin's support. Chen Ruoqiu must be having a

hard time managing the mansion. In addition, Shen Wan still needed money to socialize, so the money that Shen Yue could use was probably much less.

With Shen Yue's background and appearance, it was not difficult for her to marry a young master from an official family of equal social status. This way, she could more or less help Shen Wan. However, Shen Yue remained single. In her previous life, Shen Miao did not understand why. However, later on, she realized that Shen Yue was ambitious and wanted to marry Fu Xiuyi.

Shen Yue stared straight at Shen Miao, her heart filled with endless jealousy. She could clearly see that the clothes Shen Miao was wearing were made of materials that only the palace had. Previously, Shen Wan was lucky enough to get one. She originally wanted to keep it to make clothes, but she did not expect that Shen Wan would give it away to please his superior. Over the past two years, Shen Wan was climbing the official ladder higher and higher, but Shen Yue was getting less and less pocket money. Shen Yue blamed Shen Xin for taking most of the money and making her so poor. She thought that after going to a desolate place like Spring City, Shen Miao would never have a chance to come back. Unexpectedly, not only did Shen Miao come back, but she also came back so gloriously. Those young masters kept looking at Shen Miao. Shen Yue was indignant and jealous, wishing that Shen Miao was dead.

Shen Miao smiled faintly and turned to talk with Luo Tan and Feng Anning, ignoring Shen Yue.

At this moment, the emperor and empress began to take seats. The crowd gradually quieted down. Emperor Wen Hui smiled and instructed everyone to enjoy themselves.

Immediately after that, Crown Prince of the State of Qin, Huangfu Hao, and Princess Mingan sat down. Princess Mingan ignored the palace rules and etiquette. She did not even greet Emperor Wen Hui. Emperor Wen Hui's smile was a little stiff, but Huangfu Hao acted very respectfully.

Luo Tan looked around. Seeing this, Feng Anning asked, "What are you looking at?"

"I wonder why Prince Rui isn't here yet." Luo Tan said, "Isn't it said that everyone in the royal family of the Daliang Dynasty is extremely handsome? I can't wait to see him."

When Feng Anning heard that, she said, "Forget it. Ever since Prince Rui came to the capital, other than His Majesty, no one has seen him. Besides, even if he shows up today, you won't be able to see his handsome face."

"Why?" Luo Tan was puzzled. "Is he very ugly?"

Before she could finish her sentence, she heard a eunuch shout from outside, "The Daliang Dynasty—Prince Rui is here—"

Everyone looked at the door.

A slender figure walked over from outside, followed by the guards. He was extremely tall and straight, wearing a purple robe with golden threads. As he walked, his purple and golden robe fluttered with a hint of magnificence. There was a rhinoceros horn belt on his waist, a white jade pendant on his neck, and deer boots on his feet. However, his outfit was not the most eye-catching.

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What was most eye-catching was that half of his face was covered by a silver mask.

The mask started from his forehead and stopped at the tip of his nose. However, because it fit his facial features perfectly, it revealed extremely smooth lines. One could see that his nose was high and his eyes seemed to be straight out of a painting. With a casual glance, he could infatuate all the women present. The jaw that was revealed was beautifully curved, and his lips were thin and red.

Everyone was silent.

They stared at that face without blinking. The silver mask was emitting a cold light, making people feel a chill run down their spines. His eyes were dark and bright, as if they were filled with a playful smile.

He was a young man who was as dazzling as the sun.

He sat down in the seat arranged for the honored guests, his every move elegant and noble.

Emperor Wen Hui laughed and looked at Prince Rui. "Prince Rui, aren't you feeling unwell today? Why did you come to the banquet? You surprised us."

Prince Rui nodded at Emperor Wen Hui and said casually and lazily, "I'm suddenly in the mood to attend the banquet, so I came."

His voice was very pleasant to the ear, low and magnetic, making all the young girls present blush slightly. However, his words were extremely rude and impudent. The tribute banquet in Ming Qi was a big deal, but in Prince Rui's mouth, it was like a banquet for ordinary people where he could come and go as he wished.

The officials of Ming Qi were angry but did not dare to say anything. If Emperor Wen Hui did not dare to say anything, what could they say? While being impudent, he also gave off an oppressive pressure that made people not dare to challenge him.

Emperor Wen Hui did not pursue the matter and let the officials continue to eat and drink. Clearly, he planned to let this matter rest.

While eating the pastries, Luo Tan whispered to Shen Miao, "Prince Rui is really bold. He actually dares to speak to the emperor like that. Isn't he afraid that the emperor will punish him?"

"What punishment?" When Feng Anning heard that, she said, "He is Prince Rui of the Daliang Dynasty and an honored guest of Ming Qi."

"I've never heard of this Prince Rui before." Luo Tan held her chin and said, "He looks like a handsome man. I really want to see what he looks like under the mask." Luo Tan liked handsome men the most. When she saw this Prince Rui, her eyes were almost glued to him.

"Maybe there's an ugly monster under the mask." Feng Anning poured cold water on her. "Otherwise, why would he wear a mask?"

"I bet he's a rare handsome man in the world." Luo Tan nudged Shen Miao. "Cousin Miao, what kind of person do you think Prince Rui is?"

Shen Miao did not even look up. "I don't know."

“Tell me.” Luo Tan did not give up. “Do you think Prince Rui is more beautiful than the Young Marquis of the Xie family?”

Shen Miao did not expect Luo Tan to use the word “beautiful” to describe Xie Jingxing. She was drinking tea and choked on it. She suddenly coughed, scaring Luo Tan and Feng Anning so much that they quickly covered Shen Miao’s mouth to prevent her from spitting on others.

Shen Miao wiped the corners of her mouth and looked up to see a pair of eyes staring at her.

The masked man lingered his gaze on her for a moment before moving away.

His gaze was very playful.

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The banquet was naturally filled with wine. Everyone drank and chatted. In the high seats, when Emperor Wen Hui was talking to the Crown Prince of the State of Qin, there was some fear in his eyes. The smart ones could naturally tell what was going on.

Among the State of Qin, the Daliang Dynasty, and Ming Qi, Ming Qi was the weakest, followed by the State of Qin, and the Daliang Dynasty was the strongest. Emperor Yong Le was known for being merciless, which made both the State of Qin and Ming Qi afraid, so they were very respectful to this Prince Rui. As for Huangfu Hao, when he spoke to Prince Rui, he was also trying to sound him out.

Most of the women’s eyes were glued to Prince Rui. Every move he made was pleasing to the eye. In fact, there were many men in Ming Qi who were outstanding, such as Fu Xiuyi. However, in front of Prince Rui, they lacked the natural elegance and nobility.

Luo Ling was also sitting close to Shen Miao. Seeing that Shen Miao was not eating, he handed a piece of snowflake cake to Shen Miao and said gently, “Cousin, eat something too. Otherwise, you won’t have the strength to go back.”

Shen Qiu wanted to give Shen Miao a piece, but Luo Ling had already beaten him to it. He did not know where to put the snowflake cake in his chopsticks. His bowl was already full. Moreover, why would a man eat snowflake cake? After thinking for a moment, he placed it on Feng Anning’s plate, who was closest to Shen Miao.

Feng Anning was flattered and took it. After thanking him, she did not eat it and just looked at the snowflake cake in a daze.

At this moment, Huangfu Hao suddenly said, “I heard that the mighty general, General Shen, returned to the capital a few days ago. I’ve always heard of his name. I wonder if I have the honor to see him today?”

As soon as he said that, the noisy banquet fell silent again.

The Crown Prince of the State of Qin wanted to see Shen Xin? What did he mean?

Shen Xin and Huangfu Hao had nothing to do with each other. One of them was the general who had just been summoned back to the capital by Emperor Wen Hui, and the other was the crown prince of

the State of Qin. Their identities were very sensitive. Everyone couldn't help but look at Emperor Wen Hui's expression.

Emperor Wen Hui's expression was very calm, as if Huangfu Hao was just making a very small request. He looked at Shen Xin and said, "General Shen."

Shen Xin quickly stood up and bowed to Huangfu Hao. "Greetings, Your Highness."

Huangfu Hao smiled and said, "I've long heard that General Shen is brave and invincible. You can even rebuild the scattered soldiers at the border into a powerful army. When you returned to the capital that day, the people cheered for you. Sigh." He sighed and said, "How I wish my country had such a talent like you."

Emperor Wen Hui's eyes narrowed, and the expressions of the officials at the banquet changed. They looked at Shen Xin with complicated gazes.

On the surface, Huangfu Hao was praising Shen Xin for being talented, but in fact, he was pointing out how dangerous Shen Xin was. The tallest tree would be destroyed by the wind was a never-changing axiom. The fact that the people cheered for a general who had been forced out of the capital by the emperor meant that they stood with Shen Xin. No royal family would tolerate officials who were more respected than them.

As for the last sentence, it really pushed Shen Xin to the center of attention. Huangfu Hao wanted to poach Shen Xin in front of Emperor Wen Hui. The officials present were all looking at Shen Xin as if they were judging a traitor.

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Shen Miao's eyes darkened as she stared coldly at Huangfu Hao.

Huangfu Hao took a strange delight in making things difficult for people the most, as if everyone in the royal family of the State of Qin had a vicious nature. Shen Xin was not at odds with the State of Qin and didn't offend Huangfu hao, but Huangfu Hao still refused to let him off. This might be a destined grudge.

Before Emperor Wen Hui could speak, he heard a chuckle. Everyone looked over. Prince Rui put down the wine cup in his hand and looked at Huangfu Hao.

His voice was low and pleasant to the ear, carrying a hint of drunkenness, but his words were not polite.

He said, "Brother Huangfu, since you like General Shen so much, you can ask the emperor to give him to you. The emperor is generous and will definitely agree."

When everyone heard these words, they felt like Prince Rui was suggesting something.

Why would Huangfu Hao really want Shen Xin? He was only trying to push Shen Xin into trouble to see him struggling. If Emperor Wen Hui really gave Shen Xin to him, the State of Qin would have no choice but to provide for Shen Xin. However, who knew if Shen Xin was a spy of Emperor Wen Hui? The State of Qin and Ming Qi were still testing each other. Who would keep a person they did not trust by their side all day long?

Emperor Wen Hui also thought of this. He smiled and said, "The world cherishes talent. If Crown Prince Huangfu insists on wanting General Shen, I can only fulfill your wish."

This time, Huangfu Hao was placed in an awkward situation. Instead of pushing Shen Xin into trouble, he was the one who ended up in a disadvantageous situation. It was impossible for him to take Shen Xin back to the State of Qin, but if he went back on his words, he would appear to be dishonest. All of this was because of what Prince Rui said. Huangfu Hao glared at the masked man.

Princess Ming An was on the same side as Huangfu Hao. Seeing that Huangfu Hao was in a difficult situation, she naturally wanted to help him out. However, firstly, she did not want to become enemies with Prince Rui whom she had taken a liking to, and secondly, she could not afford to offend the Daliang Dynasty. She took it all out on the Shen family and suddenly smiled at Shen Xin.

Her voice was soft and sweet, but at this moment, it sounded sarcastic. She said, "My country is too small to accommodate such a mighty general like General Shen. How about we take Miss Shen back instead. I heard that Miss Shen is the apple of General Shen's eye and a beauty. I wonder if the State of Qin will have the honor to have her."

Luo Tan and Feng Anning immediately grabbed Shen Miao's hand, their gazes vigilant. Luo Ling and Shen Qing's expressions changed slightly, and Shen Qiu and Luo Xueyan's faces darkened. Shen Xin suddenly looked at Princess Ming An.

Shen Miao lowered her head and looked at the teacup in front of her, as if she did not hear Princess Ming An. She only watched as the tea leaves in the teacup floated and slowly sank to the bottom.

A general of a country could not leave easily, but his daughter could. If Emperor Wen Hui wanted to build a good relationship with the State of Qin, it was common for him to marry a princess or a daughter of an official to the State of Qin. However, no one was willing to marry to a foreign country, because that meant they would have no one to rely on.

Shen Xin smiled and said, "My daughter is mischievous and doesn't deserve such good treatment." His words clearly intended as rejection.

Emperor Wen Hui had a pensive look on his face, but he did not intend to help Shen Miao out. Shen Xin was always straightforward, and when it came to Shen Miao, his attitude was extremely unyielding.

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When Shen Yue saw this, a trace of schadenfreude flashed across her eyes. She really wanted Shen Miao to be sent to the State of Qin. It would be best if Shen Miao could marry an old man and be tortured to death in a foreign country.

Princess Ming An did not expect Shen Xin to reject her so bluntly. A trace of displeasure immediately appeared on her face.

She said, "How can you put it that way? Everyone knows that Miss Shen is talented and virtuous. Why? Miss Shen, are you looking down on me and unwilling to greet me?"

With the accusation of being rude thrown at her, Shen Miao couldn't avoid it anymore even if she wanted to. She stood up and bowed to Princess Ming An. "Greetings, Your Highness."

As she stood up, everyone in the hall fixed their gazes at Shen Miao.

Two years was enough to change too many things, including the impression of Shen Miao being a fool in people's minds. Because she had been away for too long, she was gradually forgotten. Looking at the girl in front of them, everyone felt that she was like a different person from the person in their memory. The light purple dress made her skin look translucent. After staying in a place like Spring City for two years, the sand and wind did not roughen her up at all. Instead, she gave off a noble aura that was even more obvious. Her facial features were as delicate as a painting, making people want to linger their eyes on her. Her every move was dignified, gentle, and graceful.

Even the empress beside the emperor did not seem to have such a unique aura.

Princess Ming An frowned. She did not expect Shen Miao to be so good-looking and elegant. She had long heard that Shen Miao was an idiot, so she wanted to use Shen Miao to embarrass the Shen family, but she ended up shooting herself in the foot.

However, the reason why Princess Ming An could afford to always be arrogant was because she was Princess Ming An. She immediately raised her eyebrows and sized up Shen Miao like she was an item. She said, "Miss Shen is indeed an outstanding beauty. No wonder General Shen wants to hide you like you are a treasure. I wonder which family will be lucky enough to marry you in the future."

Shen Xin glared at Prince Ming An. Although he had to consider her identity, he could not tolerate his daughter being spoken to like this in public. Just as he was about to speak, Princess Ming An changed the topic. "Miss Shen, I think you're also talented, right?"

As soon as she said that, everyone in the hall looked excited. Yi Peilan and the others covered their mouths to fight back the urge to laugh.

Everyone knew very well what talent Shen Miao had. In the past two years, she had stayed in Spring City, a place in the middle of nowhere. What talents could she learn over there?

Shen Miao lowered her eyes slightly. "Princess, you flatter me. I'm not as talented as you."

"Miss Shen, there's no need to be humble." Princess Ming An smiled innocently. "Speaking of which, when I was in the State of Qin, I heard that a few years ago, Miss Shen competed with someone and got first place in archery. When I heard that, I was extremely curious. Now that I see Miss Shen again, I remember this old story."

Shen Miao lowered her head and did not speak. Luo Xueyan and Shen Qiu were anxious. They could tell that Princess Ming An was deliberately picking a fight with Shen Miao.

With Princess Ming An mentioning it, everyone in the hall recalled the competition between Shen Miao and Cai Lin in the archery test. Shen Miao was able to render Cai Lin speechless and convinced with three arrows. It was also from that time onward that people started to see Shen Miao through different lenses.

Chapter 460 Forced to Compete (4)

At the banquet, Lord Cai and Cai Lin happened to be there too. Cai Lin was immediately embarrassed. Cai Lin was two years older than Shen Miao, and he was much more mature than before. As time

passed, he had long forgotten about his grudge with Shen Miao. He did not expect this matter to be brought up again in front of so many people.

Cai Lin was not the only one who called the past. In the corner of the banquet, the Marquis of Lin'an, Xie Ding, and his two sons were seated there. The current Marquis of Lin'an was old and no longer as high-spirited as before. Even on such an occasion, he only wanted to hide in an inconspicuous corner. Unexpectedly, when people mentioned the test, he remembered that Xie Jingxing was also there that time. He even went on stage and challenged Xie Changwu and Xie Changchao. At that time, after returning to the mansion, he scolded Xie Jingxing angrily, but inside, he was proud of him.

At the thought of the past, his heart ached even more. Xie Ding looked dejected. Xie Changwu and Xie Changchao saw it. A trace of gloom flashed across their eyes.

Princess Ming An continued, "Why don't we compete in archery to make this occasion more lively? Just take it as an unharmed game."

Emperor Wen Hui was the first to find it amusing and laugh. He said, "Miss Shen is a delicate girl. How can she know something like archery?"

"Your Majesty, you probably are not aware of Miss Shen's talent." Princess Ming An smiled and said, "Back then, even people from the State of Qin were amazed by Miss Shen's brilliance. Like father, like daughter, General Shen is a hero, so Miss Shen must be a heroine. Moreover, Miss Shen is a delicate girl. Am I not a delicate girl too? Or does Your Majesty think that the State of Qin is not worthy of being compared to Ming Qi?"

Princess Ming An looked beautiful, but her words were very vicious. If Shen Miao refused to compete, it would send a message to everyone present that Ming Qi looked down upon the State of Qin. At this moment, how could Emperor Wen Hui let the State of Qin fall out with Ming Qi? He immediately looked at Shen Miao and said gently, "Miss Shen, what do you think?"

Shen Xin clenched his fists. He wanted to reject this rude request on Shen Miao's behalf, but even if he rejected it, it would only give Princess Ming An a more legitimate excuse to kick up a bigger fuss.

On the other hand, Shen Miao glanced at Princess Ming An and lowered her head. "I don't dare to disobey Your Highness."

"I don't dare to disobey" implied that Shen Miao was unwilling, as if Princess Ming An was forcing her.

Princess Ming An also understood what Shen Miao meant. Her expression darkened, and then she thought of something and giggled. She said, "I heard that during the test, Miss Shen and that opponent betted their lives. Today, we'll bet our lives on it too, okay?"

"No!" Shen Xin refused without waiting for Shen Miao to answer. His face was cold, and he did not care about Emperor Wen Hui's expression at all. He looked at Princess Ming An and said word by word, "Since Your Highness said it's a game, just treat it as a game. Why do you have to bet your life on it? Moreover, the banquet is a joyous occasion. It's better not to see blood."

When Luo Xueyan saw Shen Xin speak, she couldn't help but tighten her grip on the teacup in front of her. Back then, they didn't know that Shen Miao was betting her life with Cai Lin during the test. Later, when they returned to the capital and found out, their hearts skipped a beat. If they were present, they

definitely wouldn't let Shen Miao bet her life. Now that Princess Ming An was clearly up to no good, why would they let Shen Miao take the risk?

Unexpectedly, as soon as Shen Xin said that, Huangfu Hao spoke. He smiled and said, "Although that's the case, taking the game seriously will show how serious the State of Qin is towards Ming Qi. General Shen, are you afraid? Or is Ming Qi a bunch of cowards?" His words were sarcastic as he looked at Emperor Wen Hui. "If Ming Qi is afraid of losing, it's fine. We'll pretend nothing happened."