

Venomous 481

Chapter 481 Guessed It (6)

"What I could've done wrong? Miss Shen didn't ask about me. Instead, she asked about you. Could it be that she likes you, but Miss Shen just said that she admires Third Brother's beauty?" Ji Yushu thought of something and smiled mischievously. "Hehehe, apparently, Miss Shen is also infatuated by Third Brother."

"Only a fool like you can believe such nonsense." Gao Yang looked at him coldly. "Do you think everyone is a lovefool just like you?"

Ji Yushu patted his chest. "I don't want to argue with you. I'm not talking to you anymore. Third Brother, what should we do now? Do you want me to help her? Or do you want me to create fake information to lie to her?"

"Since Shen Miao came to ask about these three things deliberately, she must know something. She can probably tell if you are lying or not. What is Miss Shen up to? Now, we are not even certain about what Shen Xin is going to do. And that Pei Lang, who was roped in by Shen Miao, has now become Fu Xiuyi's trusted aide. Why is a little girl so complicated?" Gao Yang rambled on. When he realized that Xie Jingxing was not listening to him at all and was looking at the teapot on the table, he reminded him, "Xie... Your Highness, how should we deal with it this time?"

Xie Jingxing came back to his senses and thought for a moment. "Do nothing."

"Why?" Without waiting for Gao Yang to ask, Ji Yushu was the first to speak. "Are we going to refuse doing business with her? Moreover, Miss Shen is very smart. If we really reject her like this, she will definitely suspect something. What if she finds out that there's something wrong with our Exiled Immortal Pawnshop?"

Xie Jingxing smiled faintly. "It's precisely because she's smart that we must do nothing."

"You mean..." Gao Yang frowned.

"She was just here to test the water." Xie Jingxing narrowed his eyes and smiled. "What she said out there wasn't directed to you, but to me."

"Including the praise about your peerless beauty?" Ji Yushu's focus was always on something else.

Xie Jingxing glanced at him coldly and said, "To me as well."

In the carriage outside, Jingzhe and Gu Yu carefully looked at Shen Miao's expression. Gu Yu said softly, "Miss, did Shopkeeper Ji say something wrong... Miss, you look a little angry."

She was indeed very angry. Although Shen Miao looked calm on the surface, the coldness around her made the two maids feel unable to ignore it. She seemed to be sulking, but also angry. Jingzhe and Gu Yu were both very puzzled. They heard Shen Miao and Ji Yushu talking in the room just now. Although Ji Yushu's words were not pleasant to the ear, Shen Miao was fine just now. Moreover, she was not someone who would be angered simply by words.

Jingzhe and Gu Yu did not understand. Shen Miao replied indifferently, "Nothing." Her tone became even colder.

She clenched her fists in her sleeves, but she couldn't help but feel frustrated. The Exiled Immortal Pawnshop closed down immediately after she left, and it reopened not long before she returned to the capital. How could there be such a coincidence in the world? Shen Miao thought carefully. When the Exiled Immortal Pawnshop closed, other than Shen Xin going to Spring City, something else happened at the same time. Xie Jingxing led the Xie army to war. As for the reopening of the Exiled Immortal Pawnshop... Other than her returning to the capital, it also happened at the time of the Ming Qi tribute and the arrival of Prince Rui.

The Shen family had nothing to do with the Exiled Immortal Pawnshop. No matter how Shen Miao thought about it, the closing and reopening of the shop were undoubtedly related to Xie Jingxing. She came to the Exiled Immortal Pawnshop today to test the water.

The result of the test was as she had expected. Ji Yushu and Xie Jingxing were probably old friends, and Gao Yang was the same. After connecting the dots, Shen Miao was certain that Ji Yushu and Gao Yang were both people from the Daliang Dynasty who hid their identities in the capital. What was more infuriating was that when she did business with Ji Yushu back then, she told him her entire plan about bringing down Prince Yu. Xie Jingxing probably already knew everything. She thought that she had the upper hand and had Ji Yushu under her control, but in the end, Xie Jingxing was still far ahead of her. At the thought of Xie Jingxing playing with her like a fool, Shen Miao wanted to tear him apart.

Seeing Shen Miao's uncomfortable expression, Jingzhe thought that it was too stuffy in the carriage and lifted the curtain to bring in some air. Shen Miao glanced outside and saw a familiar face in the crowd on the street.

Jingzhe lowered the curtain, but Shen Miao stopped her. She lifted the curtain and looked at the place, but the person in the crowd was no longer there.

"Miss?" Jingzhe and Gu Yu were shocked by Shen Miao's unusual behavior today. Shen Miao looked outside the carriage carefully for a while before lowering the curtain and saying, "Nothing. Let's continue."

However, her brows were tightly furrowed, and her expression was even more solemn than before.

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With Shen Xin and his family returning to the capital with such fanfare and Shen Miao stealing the show at the royal banquet, while everyone was discussing, they also paid attention to the original mighty General's Mansion.

The mighty general was no longer around, so naturally the plaque with Mighty General written on it was taken off and replaced with the Shen family. Back then, when Shen Xin was demoted and left the capital, not only did the Shen family not provide him with help, but they also proposed to split up at the critical moment to make things harder for Shen Xin. Now that Shen Xin was invited back by the Emperor Wen Hui, no matter what Emperor Wen Hui was up to, outsiders looked at the Shen family with schadenfreude. As for the Shen family, they couldn't only swallow the bitter fruit.

In Rongjing Hall, Old Madam Shen sat on the couch decorated by the fur Shen Xin brought up from the northwest long ago. Because it had been too long, it looked a little worn off. Every year when Shen Xin returned to the capital, he would bring Old Madam Shen some animal skins he hunted from the northwest. Those were good things that could not even be bought with money in the capital. Now that Shen Xin no longer gave her animal skins, Old Madam Shen could only use old ones.

Rongjing Hall was no longer as exquisite and luxurious as before. Even the decorations were much fewer. Back then, because Shen Xin was constantly rewarded by the emperor, the entire Shen family lived a comfortable life. Now that Shen Xin was gone, their life was a little difficult.

“The third branch is getting more and more unreasonable recently.” Old Madam Shen took a sip of ginseng tea and said with a frown, “It’s almost winter. Yesterday, I asked Chen Ruoqiu to find a tailor to make a fur cloak for me. She hesitated and wouldn’t agree. I guess she pocketed all the money.”

The maid behind her carefully rubbed Old Madam Shen’s shoulders and lowered her head without saying a word. Now, Old Madam Shen was getting more and more temperamental. Ever since Shen Yuanbai died of smallpox a year ago, Old Madam Shen had often lost her temper.

Shen Yuanbai’s sudden death was a pain the entire Shen family could not get over until now. A year ago, many people were infected with smallpox. Although they managed to control it in the end and stopped the spread of the epidemic, some people still died in the end. Unfortunately, Shen Yuanbai was one of them.

In the second branch of the Shen family, Shen Gui originally had two sons. Shen Yuan died under the executioner’s knife. Originally, they still had Shen Yuanbai to pass down the bloodline. After Shen Yuanbai died, Shen Gui went crazy and Ren Wanyun hung herself in the courtyard with a belt. After Ren Wanyun died, Shen Gui began to take in concubines. However, there was no news of anyone getting pregnant for a year and a half. Later, Old Madam Shen finally felt that something was wrong and asked a doctor to take a look at Shen Gui. The doctor said that Shen Gui had taken an infertility pill. It was impossible for him to have any children in this life.

Old Madam Shen fainted after hearing that, and Shen Gui was also dumbfounded. He investigated and found that the deceased Ren Wanyun was the one who drugged him just so she could make sure Shen Yuanbai could remain to be the legitimate child and the rightful heir. However, no one expected that Shen Yuanbai would die of smallpox. Since Ren Wanyun was already dead, Shen Gui naturally couldn’t do anything to her. In the second branch, Shen Dongling became the only child Shen Gui had.

Ever since Shen Gui found out that he would die without an heir, he did not have the spirit to climb up the official ladder anymore. There was no one to inherit his position. What was the point of getting more power?

It was impossible for the second branch to have another son, so Old Madam Shen could only pin her hope on the third branch, Shen Wan. Shen Wan didn’t take an infertility pill, but he was only loyal to Chen Ruoqiu. Even the two concubines that Old Madam Shen gave to Shen Wan in the early years were all neglected.

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Old Madam Shen said, "Not only is she a failure in managing the household, but she's also a jealous woman! She said that she's a decent lady raised by a scholarly family. I wonder where she learned all these nasty tricks to make Shen Wan so enchanted by her. Is she just going to sit back and watch as Shen Gui dies without a heir too?"

Mrs. Zhang smiled and said, "Old Madam, why are you angry? Third Master still doesn't know how good other girls are. Third Master is a very devoted man. When the new girls arrive in a few days, you can send them to Third Master. They're all young and beautiful like jade. Third Master will naturally want to favor them."

Old Madam Shen asked someone to buy some talented women from Yangzhou. For a person like Shen Wan, beauty was probably not enough to win his heart. Didn't Chen Ruoqiu make Shen Wan love her so much because she knew poetry and painting? Those women from Yangzhou had been trained with these talents since they were young. They were good at the Guqin, chess, calligraphy, and painting. They were also good-looking. Old Madam Shen did not believe that Shen Wan wouldn't be attempted because he was a man after all. No matter how good Chen Ruoqiu was, she was getting old.

"All of them make me angry." Old Madam Shen said unhappily, "Even Shen Yue is like her mother. She's very arrogant. I've introduced a lot of young and rich men to her, but she doesn't like any of them. Could it be that she still wants to marry a prince?"

Mrs. Zhang smiled and said, "I'm afraid Third Master already has a suitable son-in-law in his mind and wants to marry Second Miss to him."

Old Madam Shen snorted. "Let's wait and see. I want to see what kind of marriage he can find for Shen Yue.

In the Autumn Water Garden, Chen Ruoqiu rubbed her forehead.

Her personal maid, Shi Qing, said, "Madam, I went to Rongjing Hall to ask around. Old Madam really found a few women from Yangzhou for Third Master. They will arrive in the mansion in a few days. Madam, Old Madam obviously wants to replace you."

Chen Ruoqiu closed her eyes and suddenly brushed all the books on the table to the ground, causing the maid to shudder.

Even though Chen Ruoqiu was still as gentle and considerate as before in front of Shen Wan, the servants could clearly feel that Chen Ruoqiu had become more and more fierce in the past two years. It was probably because she was in charge of managing the household and Old Madam Shen liked to be extravagant, so Chen Ruoqiu had to fork out a lot of her own money. In the past, she did not care about money. Now that she was burdened with worldly affairs, she felt that her life was in a mess everyday.

Of course, the most important thing was that she couldn't give birth to a son.

She said coldly, "This old fart is really shameless to buy women for his son!"

If Shen Wan was present, his jaw would probably drop, not believing that such unpleasant words would come out of his gentle and graceful wife.

Hua Yi said, "Madam, you are just being too kind. At this rate, Old Madam will sooner or later shove women into Master's bedroom."

Chen Ruoqiu took a deep breath and turned to look at the two maids, Shi Qing and Hua Yi. These were the personal maids she had for many years. They were at the right age, 18 or 19 years old, like blooming flowers, and their entire bodies were filled with a honey-like aura. Such a beauty... She curled her lips and said, "Old Madam is really stupid. If she really wants to thrust women upon my husband, why go to such lengths to find these women from far away? We don't know their backgrounds at all, and they might ruin the family's reputation. Why doesn't... she just use these clean and obedient maids by her side? I think the two of you are not bad. With you serving my husband, I can be relieved."

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Although her tone was gentle, her gaze was very sharp. The two maids freaked out and quickly knelt down. "We don't dare. We just want to serve Madam wholeheartedly. We don't dare to have any other thoughts."

Chen Ruoqiu lowered her head and looked at them for a while. The two maids were so frightened that their legs were trembling. Only then did she say indifferently, "Get up. Since you don't want to, I have no reason to force you."

"Thank you, Madam." The two maids stood up shakily and heaved a sigh of relief in their hearts. Chen Ruoqiu looked gentle on the surface and was kind to people, but as Chen Ruoqiu's personal maids, they had seen Chen Ruoqiu's methods. In fact, there were a few maids who looked good and attempted to get close to Shen Wan. Although Shen Wan did not show much interest, he did not explicitly reject them. These maids were later sold by Chen Ruoqiu. Shi Qing and Hua Yi knew very well that Chen Ruoqiu was an extremely jealous person and was ruthless. If they really got involved with Shen Wan, they would probably end up the same.

Chen Ruoqiu sighed. "I can only blame myself for not being capable enough to give birth to a son for my husband. If I could give birth to a son, things wouldn't be like this now."

Chen Ruoqiu did not dare to comment casually. After all, not having a son was a sore point for Chen Ruoqiu. Chen Ruoqiu muttered, "Now that the Shen family is in such a state, we actually don't have a son among the younger generation. Even if the second branch used to have two, they're all dead now... Now, I'm envious of Luo Xueyan. She has a son and a daughter and has no in-laws. Shen Xin treats her like a jewel and never takes in a concubine. I'm really jealous."

At the banquet yesterday, Shen Miao stole the show and was in the limelight. However, as for Shen Yue, she was clearly much more talented and beautiful than Shen Miao, but because of the Shen family's declining status, she couldn't even find a good husband, let alone marry Prince Ding.

Chen Ruoqiu felt a little indignant that her daughter was inferior to the daughter of a vulgar general she looked down on.

At this moment, a servant suddenly came in from outside and said, "Madam, someone is looking for Old Madam outside the mansion, but she was stopped by the servant. She said that she's here to seek refuge with the Shen family."

When Chen Ruoqiu heard that, she frowned, thinking that it must be one of Old Madam Shen's relatives who came to ask for money. She immediately said with a cold expression, "Since they're here to ask for money, give them some and send them away. We have no space for freeloaders. Don't let any Tom, Dick, or Harry in."

"No." The servant scratched his head. "Madam, that person doesn't look like she's here to ask for money. She said that she's the daughter of the old general's friend. Something happened to her family, so she came to ask for help."

Old General Shen?

Chen Ruoqiu thought for a moment and stood up. "Bring her to the side room. I'll go and see her."

...

After Shen Miao returned from the Exiled Immortal Pawnshop, it was still early. As soon as she entered the house, she locked herself in the room, thinking about something. When it was almost evening, Luo Tan returned. Luo Tan bought some jewelry and generously gave some to Shen Miao. She said, "Cousin, we went to a jewelry shop today. The jewelry shop in the capital is huge. Miss Feng and I also picked some for you. I don't know if you like it or not. Take it first. When you want to go out, we'll go shopping."

She looked like she hadn't had enough.

Shen Miao turned around and nodded. After Luo Tan left, she looked at the half box of jewelry and thought about how much money she could pawn.

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Not long after Luo Tan returned, Shen Xin and the others also came back. They all had dinner together. Things were probably going smoothly in the bureaucracy, and Shen Xin and Luo Xueyan looked like they were in a good mood. Only Shen Miao looked a little tired. Luo Ling noticed and said, "Cousin Miao, you look a little unwell. What happened?"

Shen Qiu stopped eating. "Sister, what's wrong?"

Shen Miao was stunned. Seeing that everyone at the table was staring at her, she smiled and said, "It's nothing. I just came back from Spring City and am not accustomed to it. I'll be better after a few days."

Shen Qiu smiled and said, "What's there to be unaccustomed to? I'll bring you around from the east to the west of the city in a few days. You'll get accustomed to it in no time."

"Cousin Qiu, bring me too!" Luo Tan hurriedly added, "I can also protect my little cousin."

"Nonsense." Luo Xueyan said, "The capital is so big. What if she gets lost?" She glared at Shen Xin, wanting him to say something.

Shen Xin chuckled and said, "As long as the children are happy. It's fine. Brat, if you bring your sisters out to have fun, take your guards with you. If anyone dares to cause trouble, beat them up. Don't be afraid!"

Luo Xueyan pinched him angrily.

The couple's relationship was very good. Shen Xin was fierce outside, but when he returned home, he listened to Luo Xueyan. Shen Miao was originally looking at him with a smile. As she looked at him, she seemed to have thought of something and her expression gradually darkened. She quickly lowered her head to prevent the people around her from noticing that something was wrong with her expression. Luo Ling, who was paying attention to her every move, paused for a moment and lowered his head thoughtfully.

After dinner, they chatted in the hall for a while before returning to their rooms. Shen Miao was about to return to her courtyard when she was stopped by Luo Ling.

"Cousin, wait a minute."

Shen Miao turned around and looked at him. "Cousin Ling, what's the matter?"

Luo Ling hesitated for a moment before taking out something that was folded into a square from his sleeve. He said gently, "When I went out with Cousin Qiu today, I happened to see a shop selling this outside. I saw that a lot of people were buying it, so I bought one. I heard that you have a lot of dreams at night. This thing is soaked in spices and can help you calm down. If you don't mind, please take it."

Shen Miao was slightly stunned and looked up at the young man in front of her.

Luo Ling was good-looking. Although he was not as brave as Shen Qiu and was not as handsome as Xie Jingxing, the natural gentleness he exuded made people feel comfortable being around him. Among the younger generation of the Luo family, he was the most outstanding, not only because he was the most reliable, but also because he had the ability to take on the responsibility of inheriting the Luo family.

In the night, Shen Miao seemed to be able to see Luo Ling's slightly red face. He said with clumsiness, "If you don't like it..."

Shen Miao took the thing from Luo Ling's hand and smiled. "Cousin, how can I refuse your kindness? Thank you."

Luo Ling smiled and said, "It's good that you like it."

His eyes were filled with gentleness, and his tone was filled with concern. If it were any other woman, she would have a very good impression of the person in front of her. However, Shen Miao took a step back and looked at him. "If there's nothing else, I'll go back to my room first."

A trace of disappointment flashed across Luo Ling's eyes, but he quickly hid it and said, "Then, I won't disturb you." He turned around and left.

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Shen Miao looked at Luo Ling's back as he left and watched quietly for a while. She was not a young girl who was ignorant of the world. Even if she had never experienced the intimacy and love between a man and a woman with Fu Xiuyi, she had been an empress for many decades after all. Luo Ling was a good person. It would be too selfish of her to drag such a good person into her life. The Luo family had treated her well. She could not bring herself to harm Luo Ling.

She turned around and returned to her room. After washing up, Jingzhe and Gu Yu left. Shen Miao sat at the table and spread out the item Luo Ling had given her.

It was a handkerchief. Coincidentally, it was actually a double-sided embroidery that was the most difficult to get now. Luo Ling must have spent a lot of money to buy this handkerchief. There was a white crane embroidered on it. It emitted a faint fragrance that was indeed a little soothing.

Shen Miao looked at it for a long time. The patterns on the handkerchief were obviously made by Liu Ying. Liu Ying's craftsmanship was one of the best in the capital, and this was a rare double-sided embroidery. It seemed that Liu Ying was doing well. As Shen Miao looked at it, her mood improved.

She felt a little tired, so she took off her outer robe and only wore her inner clothes. She walked to the couch and sat down. Just as she was about to take off her inner clothes to rest, she heard a chuckle. "Wait."

Shen Miao's hand froze. When she turned around, her eyes were filled with anger. She looked at the person who had come uninvited outside the window and said word by word, "Xie, Jing, Xing."

Xie Jingxing entered the house and closed the window like he was at home. This time, he was not wearing a mask. His handsome and beautiful face was exposed under the light, but Shen Miao only wanted to drag him out and kill him.

"In the entire world, you're the only one who can call me by my pet name now." Xie Jingxing pulled a chair over and sat down not far from Shen Miao's bed. He smiled casually. "You're the only one in the world who has this honor."

Even while seated, he was still much taller than Shen Miao.

Shen Miao looked at him coldly. "Prince Rui, you seem to be free every day and have familiarized yourself with the road from Yanqing Alley to my house."

"Simple." Xie Jingxing rested his chin on his hand. "I've bought all the houses here in Yanqing Alley. The house next to yours is also my house. We're neighbors, so it's only right for me to come and say hello."

Shen Miao gasped. Although Yanqing Alley was also close to Shen Miao's house, there was still some distance. Xie Jingxing had bought all the mansions from Yanqing Alley to Shen Miao's house... Didn't that mean that more than half of the south of the city was his playground? The house next to Shen Miao's house also belonged to Xie Jingxing. Even if Xie Jingxing was rich, he shouldn't spend money like this. Did he bring the treasury of the Daliang Dynasty with him? Did Emperor Yong Le know that he was squandering money like dirt?

When she saw the lazy smile on Xie Jingxing's face, Shen Miao was furious. Xie Jingxing was so shameless. Who would visit their neighbor in the middle of the night just to say hello? Why did he come uninvited? Was the royal family of the Daliang Dynasty so unruly?

"You don't look very happy." Xie Jingxing looked at her with interest. "If you have any difficulties, you can tell me. My identity as Prince Rui can do much more than you can imagine. For the sake of us being old friends, I don't mind offering you some help."

Shen Miao rolled her eyes at him. She was getting more and more confused about what Xie Jingxing was up to. Xie Jingxing's words reminded her of what she said to Ji Yushu at the Exiled Immortal Pawnshop today. Shen Miao's interest was suddenly aroused and she deliberately asked, "Xie Jingxing, what do you think of Concubine Fang of the Marquis of Lin'an?"

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Concubine Fang of the Marquis of Lin'an was the biological mother of Xie Changwu and Xie Changchao. Back then, Princess Yuqing's death was more or less related to Concubine Fang. Everyone knew that Princess Yuqing was a sore point for Xie Jingxing, but Shen Miao deliberately brought it up.

Xie Jingxing looked at her with a faint smile. "Are you trying to get information out of me?"

"Will you tell me?"

"There's no harm in telling you." Xie Jingxing said lazily, "In my eyes, she's more insignificant than nothing."

Shen Miao looked at him. "Why don't you kill her and take revenge then?"

Xie Jingxing narrowed his eyes. He stared at Shen Miao for a while and suddenly smiled. His voice was as pleasant as the spring breeze, but also as cold as the winter. He said, "Shen Miao, are you worried that Shen Xin will become the second Xie Ding?"

Shen Miao lowered her eyes. "That's right." After a pause, she said, "If I were in your position, I would do everything I can to take revenge. I'll kill Concubine Fang and her two sons. Only then will the revenge be complete."

When Xie Jingxing heard this, he was not surprised. He only smiled, as if he was laughing at her naivety. Xie Jingxing said, "I didn't kill Concubine Fang because I couldn't be bothered and I don't like trouble. Xie Ding and Princess Yuqing have nothing to do with me. Why should I take revenge?"

Shen Miao was stunned.

Shen Miao had heard from Xie Jingxing saying that he wasn't related to Xie Ding before and was not surprised. However, why was it that even Princess Yuqing had nothing to do with Xie Jingxing? If he was not the son of Xie Ding and Princess Yuqing, how did he become the son of the Xie family?

Shen Miao thought of something and asked Xie Jingxing, "Then Princess Yuqing's son..."

"Died," Xie Jingxing said indifferently. "He died at birth."

"If Xie Ding's son was still alive, he would die before he reached the age of three." Xie Jingxing said indifferently, "Because it was me, Concubine Fang didn't dare to do anything. Because..." He smiled evilly. "The people sent by her to kill me would all disappear mysteriously for no reason."

Shen Miao was enlightened. She knew it. Since Concubine Fang could force Princess Yuqing to a dead end and cause her to die in grief, she must be someone with schemes and ambitions. How could such a person be willing to let Xie Jingxing grow up safely? It turned out that the people she sent would always disappear for no reason, so she probably felt scared and decided to restrain her ambition. As for why those people disappeared, since Xie Jingxing was the Prince Rui of the Daliang Dynasty and had some capable people around him, it should be more than enough to deal with Concubine Fang.

The confusion Shen Miao had was all cleared. Xie Jingxing looked down at her and said, "You don't have to worry. Shen Xin is different from Xie Ding."

Shen Miao said, "I'm also different from you."

Xie Jingxing was slightly stunned. Shen Miao said, "You couldn't be bothered to deal with her because there is no need. I'm different. If someone has designs on my family like Concubine Fang, I'll do everything I can to make her the victim of her own evil doing. If someone with ulterior motives like Concubine Fang tries to ruin my family, I'll tear her into pieces and drag her corpse to feed the dogs." At the end of her sentence, she lowered her head, but there were other emotions in her eyes.

Xie Jingxing placed a hand on her head and said, "If there's such a person, just tell me. I'll kill them for you since, you know, we are neighbors."

Shen Miao shook off his hand and Xie Jingxing looked at her with a smile. His expression was relaxed and his words were joking, but his eyes were serious.

For Xie Jingxing to kill someone like Concubine Fang, it was indeed easy.

Shen Miao said, "I can kill people myself."

"It's not a good move to make until the last moment." Xie Jingxing said, "If you feel bad about it, you can give me something as a reward for helping you kill."

Shen Miao said sarcastically, "Prince Rui, you are noble. I can't afford to hire you to kill someone."

Xie Jingxing smiled. "I'll give you a 20% discount." He stood up and walked to the table. The handkerchief given by Luo Ling was lying there. Xie Jingxing picked it up and sniffed it. He raised his eyebrows and said, "Although the fragrance is bad, my dog hasn't been sleeping well recently. This might help it sleep better." Without waiting for Shen Miao to speak, Xie Jingxing put the handkerchief into his pocket. "I'll take it as my reward."

Chapter 488 My Jiaojiao (1)

After the tribute banquet, the capital was still lively. In order to entertain the nobles from the Daliang Dynasty and the State of Qin, the streets looked much more prosperous than before. The royal family of Ming Qi wanted to paint a picture of prosperity for others to see.

In the Shen family, the servants in the Autumn Water Garden were talking about something new.

"Who exactly is that new girl in the mansion? Why is Third Madam treating her so nicely?"

"Could she be someone noble?"

An old woman in a green robe said in a low voice, "I heard that this girl's father used to be especially close to the old general. Back then, he even took a knife for the old general and almost died..."

A young maid quickly covered her mouth and said in surprise, "No wonder this girl is treated as a distinguished guest."

"She said she's here to seek refuge because something unfortunate happened to her family. From the looks of it, Third Madam wants to take good care of this girl."

"Taking care of her? Now that the Shen family itself is struggling to make ends meet, why do they want a freeloader? It's better to send her away as soon as possible."

As soon as she said that, the surroundings fell silent. Now, on the surface, the Shen family looked good, but the servants knew very well that ever since Shen Xin split up from the family, the money had become much scarcer. Even the monthly salary of the servants had decreased a lot.

"I wonder why Third Madam is so generous to that girl this time," someone said in confusion.

In the Autumn Water Garden, Ren Wanyun was sitting in the room. She pushed the teacup in front of her to the girl opposite her and smiled. "It's a new tea. Miss Chang, try it."

The girl sitting opposite her was wearing an emerald green dress. There was no top-grade embroidery on the dress. This dress was very simple and the color was very loud. If this dress was worn by someone else, they might look like a country girl. However, when it was worn by the girl, it actually made her look very pleasing to the eye.

This girl looked to be in her early twenties. Her clothes and hair accessories were very simple, and she was very gentle. Most importantly, she had a strong scholarly aura. One look and one could tell that she was raised by a scholarly family and had a good upbringing.

Seeing that Chen Ruoqiu was enthusiastic, the girl did not refuse. She picked up the teacup and took a sip. She smiled and said, "The tea is extremely light, but it's fragrant and rich. Madam, you're also outstanding at making tea."

"Miss Qing, do you also know about tea-making?" Chen Ruoqiu smiled even wider. "Tea-making is the best form of art, but very few young girls like you know it these days."

The girl smiled. "Madam, you're right. Tea-making is the best form of art. But Madam, don't make fun of me. I'm 26 years old now. How can I be considered a young girl?"

"You are 26 years old?" Chen Ruoqiu exclaimed, "Looking at you, I thought you were in your early 20s. However, that's good. You have the face of a girl in her early 20s and the temperament of a girl in her late 20s. It's really rare."

The girl in green in front of Chen Ruoqiu was the person who came to seek refuge yesterday. Her name was Chang Zaiqing. Her father, Chang Hu, was once a subordinate of Old General Shen. Back then, he took a knife for Old General Shen on the battlefield and got injured. From then on, he could no longer go to the battlefield. Chang Hu's family was supported by Chang Hu alone. Old General Shen felt guilty, so he had been using money to help them in private. At that time, Chang Zaiqing was still young, but Shen Xin was already old enough to start a family. Old General Shen even joked that he wanted Chang Ziqing to be his daughter-in-law. However, before he could see Shen Xin marry, Old General Shen passed away. Because no one knew that Old General Shen was secretly helping Chang Hu's family, the Chang family and the Shen family stopped contacting each other after that.

Chapter 489 My Jiaojiao (2)

Unexpectedly, someone from the Chang family came knocking at the door all of a sudden.

A trace of worry flashed across Chang Zaiqing's eyes. "I really feel bad for suddenly dropping in on you this time and causing such trouble for the Shen family..." She looked at Chen Ruoqiu. "If Madam feels that it's inconvenient, I'll leave now. I won't cause trouble for the Shen family." Even so, the moment she lowered her eyes, she couldn't help but bite her lip.

Chen Ruoqiu held her hand affectionately. "Miss Chang, what are you talking about? Since your father saved my father-in-law's life, your family is our Shen family's benefactor. Moreover, the old general and your father were sworn brothers back then. We're all family. Since you're in trouble, we can't just stand by and do nothing." She patted Chang Zaiqing's hand. "Miss Qing, just stay here. I'll bring you to see Old Madam tomorrow. However, Old Madam is not feeling well these days and is quite temperamental. I'm afraid you have to bear with her."

Chang Zaiqing nodded repeatedly. Her attitude was natural and polite. She was not shy, but she didn't make herself at home immediately either. It was easy for people to have a good impression of her. Even someone like Chen Ruoqiu, who was cautious, treated Chang Zaiqing well.

Chang Zaiqing's family lived in Liuzhou. The reason why she suddenly came to the Shen family was that she had indeed encountered a problem. Chang Hu had passed away a few years ago, and only Chang Zaiqing and her mother were left in the Chang family. Mrs. Chang was bedridden all year round and fell seriously ill a while back. After Mrs. Chang was buried, a young man from an official family in Liuzhou wanted to snatch Chang Zaiqing away to be his concubine. Chang Zaiqing was forced into a corner and almost committed suicide with a white handkerchief, but she was saved by her nanny. The nanny told Chang Zaiqing that perhaps Old General Shen, Chang Hu's old friend, could help her out.

Chang Zaiqing had seen Old General Shen when she was young. She vaguely remembered that he was a very forthright and magnanimous general. She really could not think of anyone else who could help her out, so she gathered the money and came to the capital. As soon as she came to the Shen family, she happened to meet Chen Ruoqiu. After Chen Ruoqiu found out what happened, she brought her in.

Chen Ruoqiu smiled and looked at Chang Zaiqing. "Miss Chang, the capital is not like Liuzhou. I wonder if the food is to your liking. Do you like the west courtyard?"

"Madam, you're too kind." Chang Zaiqing smiled and replied, "Madam, you've taken very good care of me. The place where I live in the west courtyard is also very comfortable. However..." She was a little puzzled. "Is such a big courtyard usually empty?" After saying that, she felt that she was a little rude and smiled. "I hope Madam won't mind me asking."

"I treat you as one of us, so of course I don't mind." Chen Ruoqiu smiled and said, "I won't hide it from you. You know that there are actually three branches in the Shen family. I think you've heard of the mighty general, the first branch. It's just that two years ago, there was a misunderstanding between us, so the first branch moved out. My husband and I wanted to explain, but they went to Spring City and just came back not long ago. This misunderstanding is too deep." As Chen Ruoqiu spoke, she looked helpless and shook her head. "I don't know what to do."

Chang Zaiqing was stunned. "If that's the case, then the west courtyard..."

"The west courtyard used to be where the first branch lived," Chen Ruoqiu said.

Chang Zaiqing was enlightened. Seeing that Chen Ruoqiu was a little sad, she comforted, "Madam, don't worry too much. Blood is thicker than water in the world. Since it's a misunderstanding, it will eventually be resolved. As time passes, I think General Shen will get over it and come back to reunite with the family."

Chen Ruoqiu smiled and said, "After hearing you say that, I feel much better." She looked at Chang Zaiqing. "If only everyone in the Shen family is as considerate as you. If you have time, please teach Yue in the future. My husband and I usually dote on her. I'm afraid she's been spoiled. It's good to have a smart person like you to teach her."

"Madam, you flattered me." Chang Zaiqing smiled and said, "Yue is knowledgeable and smart. I've never seen such a smart girl in Liuzhou. I think she's one of the best in the capital. Women should be like her, knowledgeable and talented."

Chen Ruoqiu felt extremely satisfied with this undisguised compliment. She chatted more and more enthusiastically with Chang Zaiqing until it was almost noon.

After Chang Zaiqing left, Shi Qing wiped the table and asked carefully, "Madam, are you really going to keep Miss Chang?" She hesitated for a moment before reminding, "Now that the expenses in the mansion are getting bigger, I'm afraid Old Madam will be unhappy if she finds out there is a freeloader."

Old Madam Shen was getting more and more stingy. If she really found out that Chang Zaiqing was living in the Shen mansion for free, she would naturally be dissatisfied. Therefore, Chen Ruoqiu had told Chang Zaiqing in advance that Old Madam had been quite temperamental these days and hoped she could understand it.

"What does that short-sighted old woman know?" Chen Ruoqiu looked disdainful. "She can't do anything right and has no vision for the future."

"Madam, do you think this Miss Chang is still useful?" Hua Yi asked. If it were two years ago, Chen Ruoqiu would also be willing to pretend to be kind to gain a good reputation. However, now that she did not have money, she could not even take care of herself. It was a little strange for her to go and help others.

"She's not like ordinary women who are short-sighted. She's good-looking and smart. It's fine if she's not ambitious, but once she is, she'll definitely make a name for herself in less than five years." Chen Ruoqiu smiled. The place where she was born was filled with women's schemes every day. Chen Ruoqiu's mother had plenty tricks up her sleeve and was able to suppress all the other women. Chen Ruoqiu was reminded of her mother when she saw Chang Zaiqing. Chang Zaiqing was still so young now. She would probably have more outstanding achievements in the future.

"But what can she bring to the table?" Hua Yi was puzzled. "Madam, could it be that you want to befriend her and wait until Miss Chang becomes successful and climbs up the social ladder before repaying you?"

When Chen Ruoqiu heard that, she smiled. "My observation of her tells me that she only looks docile on the surface, but she's actually proud and arrogant. How can she be willing to submit to others? If she really climbs up the social ladder, don't expect anything in return from her. She looks down on people who are inferior to her."

"Then..."

Chen Ruoqiu looked out of the window. "She will be a good knife to use. I don't think I can defeat such a smart girl. I wonder... if that girl can."

On the other side, Chang Zaiqing returned to the west courtyard. The west courtyard, where Shen Xin's family used to live, was now much empty. Originally, there were many servants in the west courtyard. Later, after Shen Xin's family moved out, the servants in the west courtyard were fired by Chen Ruoqiu one after another.