Farmhouse 1201

Chapter 1201: Can’t Keep a Low Profile

"What is she? She used to bow her head so low in front of us, like a quail. Now look at her, reveling in her petty victory."

"Alas! Don’t be envious. Who can blame us for not being alert, we’ve all been poisoned. Haven’t you heard? It’s the quiet dogs that bite, and I think that Madam Zuo is just that kind of... dog!"

Lin Qianqing heard their words, her brows furrowed.

"Cough cough!"

She coughed twice, and the gossiping ladies immediately stopped.

"Your Highness!" They bowed their heads, their faces flushed with embarrassment.

Lin Qianqing lifted her chin and said indifferently, "You have nothing better to do? Why aren’t you fetching your medicine? Do you not want to live anymore?"

Upon hearing this, everyone scattered like birds and beasts.

To think, who doesn’t want to have children? No matter how bitter the medicine, it must be taken.

Such is fate; while others drink ginseng soup, they have to swallow bitter medicine.

Lin Qianqing, following Maid Long Liu who served Madam Zuo earlier, headed towards Madam Zuo’s courtyard. They turned through several corridors and crossed Shuixie, winding their way before finally arriving at Madam Zuo’s place.

She thought to herself: It’s too secluded here. When they initially entered the Prince Residence, she had let them choose their own courtyards, never expecting Madam Zuo to pick the most secluded and farthest one.

Since she rarely went out, no wonder her presence in the residence was so low.

In the courtyard, Madam Zuo was speaking with her maid. After venting her feelings, the maid became invigorated, animatedly describing how popular she had become among the servants in the courtyard since her mistress had gained favor.

But her mistress, Madam Zuo, seemed hardly bothered by it, whispering, "The first to suffer is always the one who stands out. I’ve warned you, be it in actions or social conduct, one mustn’t be too ostentatious. Look at you, you’ve already dismissed my words as if they were only wind past your ears."

"Madam!" Long Liu pouted, "Back in Zuo Residence, we had to act low-key just to protect ourselves. But now, things are different. If you continue to be so modest, the Prince will slip away."

Madam Zuo paused, recalling the sweet nights, a smile slowly gracing her face.

Besides the unbearable pain of the first night, his tenderness had since seeped into her bones every night thereafter.

The only quirk was that the Prince came only at midnight, not allowing lights nor speaking, only talking with her as morning came.

"Madam, see, you smiled, didn’t you?"

Long Liu’s words brought a series of blushes to Madam Zuo’s face; the mistress and maid laughed and joked in the courtyard – secluded, it was more joyous than any other courtyard in Prince Jin Residence.

Lin Qianqing paused in her steps, lingered for a moment, and then turned to leave.

She had originally intended to find a better courtyard for Madam Zuo, but seeing this made her realize that the quality of a courtyard never lies in the courtyard itself.

They were just fine this way - a bit secluded, it seemed as if they were removed from the mundane world, a peaceful paradise.

But amidst the laughter, Madam Zuo suddenly clutched her chest and began to vomit.

Long Liu was shocked, exclaiming, "Madam, what's wrong with you?"

Recalling the ginseng soup that had just been consumed, Long Liu turned pale with fright and shouted, "Was it the ginseng soup? Madam, please don't scare me."

Lin Qianqing, who was about to leave, halted, turned back, and looked towards the maid and her mistress in the courtyard.

Long Liu supported Madam Zuo, anxiety written all over her face, as Madam Zuo continued to clutch her chest and retch unabatedly.

Startled, Qianqing quickly approached to check on Madam Zuo's condition.

Chapter 1202: Pregnant

Long Liu was both shocked and fearful, her voice trembling slightly.

"Madam, what are you doing here? Could it be that..." She thought about how the Madam had not yet conceived and how not tolerating other concubines to conceive first could mean she actually intended to harm their Madam.

She was so frightened that her legs went weak, and she hurriedly said, "Madam, please spare our Madam, she has no intention of vying for favor."

Lin Qianqing glanced at Long Liu indifferently and ordered the other maids who had hurried over.

"Go call the Imperial Physician, Madam Zuo is unwell!"

Everyone who had just arrived did not know what had happened. But they dared not disobey the Madam's words, so someone quickly went to call the doctor.

As for Long Liu the maid... just as those Madams had said earlier, it was the petty triumphing.

With such a personality, she would only bring troubles for her master.

"Madam, this servant...we..." Long Liu stuttered, trying to say something, but Lin Qianqing simply said indifferently, "If I wanted to harm your Madam, I have plenty of ways. I wouldn't need to do it personally."

The Imperial Physician arrived soon. Since the poisoning incident at Prince Jin Residence, there had been an Imperial Physician stationed here permanently.

Madam Zuo had already recovered somewhat, having drunk some water, and was already feeling much better.

After taking her pulse, the Imperial Physician's face lit up with a smile and he said to Lin Qianqing, "Congratulations to the Madam, congratulations to Madam Zuo, Madam Zuo is indeed pregnant. His Highness Prince Jin is going to have an heir."

Madam Zuo and her maids were naturally very happy. She had initially thought to live inconspicuously in this corner for a lifetime, but she had not expected such an opportunity from heaven!

Indeed, heaven has eyes, and it finally noticed her.

"Imperial Physician, really... really?" Madam Zuo asked excitedly.

The Imperial Physician smiled and said, "It's true indeed, I can still ascertain a joyful pulse very accurately."

Long Liu discreetly glanced over at Lin Qianqing to see her reaction.

Unexpectedly, Lin Qianqing was as happy as Madam Zuo, saying, "Quick, go and inform the Prince about this great news, let him rejoice as well. Ah, right, if you feel this courtyard is too remote, I could actually find a better one for you."

Madam Zuo, overwhelmed by the favor, waved her hands and said, "No...not necessary, I'm already used to living here, it's quite good."

She laid a hand on her stomach, feeling truly at ease for the first time.

It had been a long time since she had last felt this peaceful. With this child, she would always have her own place within this grand residence.

The news quickly reached Prince Jin's ears. Everyone thought he would joyfully leap up and then immediately visit Madam Zuo.

Contrary to expectations, he merely responded indifferently and then ordered his best wine from the cellar to be brought up, and drank himself into a stupor.

Everyone thought he was mad with joy, as everybody has their own way of expressing happiness, so they didn't think much of it.

That night, Jin Wei came to Madam Zuo's courtyard as usual. Tonight's Madam Zuo was different from usual. He reached the bed in the dark as usual, then gently seduced her, and once she was moved, he started his intense advances.

But tonight, Madam Zuo refused him. Knowing he didn't like talking at such times, she didn't speak, but tonight she made an exception.

"Prince, be careful with our child, let's not tonight..."

Jin Wei was taken aback, stunned for a long moment without reacting.

A child? There's already a child?

His task was to sow seeds. Now that she was pregnant, did it mean he was no longer needed?

Chapter 1203: Going Home

He suddenly felt some reluctance, this body in the pitch-black night was like a shivering poppy, possessing fatal poison yet irresistibly drawing him in.

He opened his mouth, wanting to say something, but in the end, he said nothing at all.

All he did tonight was to gently embrace her from behind, his broad palm resting on her belly.

Tonight, he didn't stop her from talking, and listened to her endlessly recounting childhood fun, back when she was little, before the Zuo Family had scorned her.

Back then, she was happy, a happiness that she would cherish for a lifetime, and she hoped her child could be just as happy.

When she finally fell into a deep sleep, it was already the latter part of the night.

Jin Wei, as usual, got up, dressed, and gently kissed her forehead.

As dawn approached, King Jin, supported by a servant, entered Madam Zuo's courtyard, still senseless from the excess drink he had indulged in the night before.

Having to raise someone else's child was something worth drinking to.

No, it wasn't just about raising someone else's child, he was also tasked with caring for someone else's woman – a woman in that courtyard he had never touched. How could she be considered his own?

Daylight came, and Madam Zuo opened her eyes, turned her head, and saw King Jin sleeping by her side.

She sniffed and furrowed her brows.

Why was there such a strong smell of alcohol?

Wasn't everything fine last night? Did he get up in the middle of the night to drink?

...

Miss Du had already stayed with Gu Youyou for a long time. Upon hearing the news of Jie Zhonglin's death, she fell ill again. After getting through her confinement, she rested at Gu Youyou's place for another month before she began to recover and regain her spirits gradually.

It was time for her to leave.

With her child in her arms, Miss Du finally showed a smile.

"Don't worry, even if not for myself, for Jie Yi I will live well. There's no one in this world who can't live without someone else; there will always be countless reasons to carry on living."

Her child ultimately couldn't take the Du surname; since Lord Jie had resolved her predicament and recognized her child, then his child had to bear the Jie surname.

However, to Miss Du, what the child was called was no longer important; what mattered was that this was the only thing he had left her.

"I am at ease; you surely can’t be so heartless as to throw your son to Lord Jie to raise," Gu Youyou said with a light smile.

Miss Du laughed bitterly and said, "Yes, lacking a father is pitiful enough; I cannot let him be without a mother too. I know all too well how tough life can be without both."

She herself had grown up in someone else’s care, orphaned and without parents.

Gu Youyou tugged at the corner of her mouth, jokingly saying, "But you can’t just focus on raising a child and forget to do the real work; it’s been a long time since you’ve done any."

Cuiya rolled her eyes and pouted, "Boss Gu, you truly are relentless. My mistress has been ill; look how thin she’s become."

"My purse has also become thinner," retorted Gu Youyou righteously.

Miss Du, watching them, suddenly burst out laughing and said, "Alright then, I will pick myself up as soon as possible and ensure that your deflated purse fattens up."

"Sure, I’m at ease with Miss Du handling it!"

Miss Du returned to the Manxiu Building with her entourage, settled her son Jie Yi, changed her clothes, and went out to the back courtyard.

As soon as she entered the backyard, a woman leaning on a crutch rushed toward her.

She grabbed Miss Du frantically, shouting loudly, "Where is my husband? You’re back, but where is my husband?"

Chapter 1204: Du Wanqing is Dead

Miss Du was momentarily stunned, and seeing Du Wanqing’s manner, it seemed she must already know everything.

She sighed and said, "He’s dead. You must have heard, haven’t you?"

"No..." Du Wanqing suddenly let out a piercing scream, tossing aside her crutch, she instantly fell to the ground, weeping and clutching her head as she wailed, "You’re lying to me, you all are. I’m still alive, how could he be dead? He must be well and truly alive, you’re just hiding him. You cannot stand to see him treat me well, you’re deceiving me..."

"I’m not, I didn’t!" Miss Du squatted down, supporting Du Wanqing’s shoulders, tears moistening her eyes.

"Forget him, you have no husband, only a sister. I will take good care of you from now on."

"I don’t want that... I don’t..." Du Wanqing pushed Miss Du away, shouting fiercely, "It’s all your fault, all because of you, making me wish for death, you killed my husband. You’re not my sister, I have no sister. Leave me be, I don’t want you to care for me, I don’t want to see you..."

She pushed Miss Du away and crawled on the ground reaching for her crutch.

She had become very skilled at using the crutch, but this time, she couldn’t manage to stand up with it no matter how hard she tried.

Crawling on the ground, Du Wanqing repeated like someone possessed, "Liars, you are all liars, I don’t need you to care for me, I’m going to find my husband..."

Miss Du watched, wanting to cry but holding it back by covering her mouth tightly.

In this game, there were no winners, they were all losers.

A maid came to help Miss Du up from the ground. Miss Du took a deep breath, gathering herself together again.

"Take the second Miss back to her room, watch over her, try to console her."

The affair with Jie Zhonglin had left her utterly exhausted; she feared if she also fell, who would care for them then.

Cuiya, holding Jie Yi in her arms, waited in the room for Miss Du and seeing her swollen red eyes, she couldn't help complaining, "Miss, why do you keep on caring for her, look, she's got you heartbroken again. You've cried so much during your confinement, I really worry about your eyes. The doctor also said you must not become distressed again, it's damaging to your health!"

Miss Du cracked a difficult smile and said, "I know. You truly sound like a butler's wife. Give me Yiyi, it's time for his feeding."

Miss Du took her son in her arms, and just after having finished feeding him, a maid stumbled in, her face a picture of panic.

She yelled, "Miss, something terrible has happened, the second Miss has committed suicide."

There was a loud crash, something shattered; it turned out that Jie Yi had accidentally knocked the bracelet off Miss Du's wrist, falling to the ground and breaking into pieces.

In the room, was the child's heart-wrenching cry; he was abruptly pushed away from the **, the child deprived of food cried as if he had lost the entire world, his mouth wide open in tears.

The maid followed behind Miss Du as she went downstairs, constantly sobbing.

Miss Du ran into the courtyard where Du Wanqing was kept, and what she saw was a motionless body lying on the ground.

It was just a brief hour ago when she last saw her; she was still able to cry and curse people, but in the blink of an eye, she became a cold, lifeless body.

"Miss, the second Miss said she wanted some water, so I took the kettle and went to the kitchen to pour her some. But I never imagined that upon my return, I would find her hanging by the bedstead."

Chapter 1205: Funeral Procession

She did not hang herself like most people do, suspended from the beam in the middle of the room. With her broken legs, she couldn't climb onto a stool. Instead, she used a strip of white cloth to strangle herself by looping it around her neck and fastening it to a bedpost, suffocating to death.

What determination it must take to strangle oneself to death.

Miss Du stared blankly at the cold corpse, unable to utter a word for a long time.

She said she wanted to find him; this was the method she chose in the end.

If something isn't yours, it never will be. Even if you resort to such measures to find him, it's still not meant to be—why couldn't she understand?

After a long while, Miss Du started blankly and said faintly, "Arrange a funeral procession, bury her generously!"

...

In the end, Wanqing was indeed the daughter of the Du Family. Cast out from the Jie Family, Miss Du had taken her back in, so upon her death, it was fitting that she be laid to rest in the ancestral grave of the Du Family.

Miss Du ordered a tomb to be built beside Wanqing's biological mother and erected a gravestone for her according to the standards of the Du Family daughters.

The ritual prayers lasted three days, and many prominent friends, out of respect for Miss Du, attended the funeral. All in all, it was a dignified affair.

Youyou persuaded her, "I didn't expect you to encounter such an event upon your return. Don't be too saddened; in death, she is, after all, liberated."

Miss Du clung tightly to Jie Yi, "Now, she truly is the only family I have left. While she was alive, even though I didn’t like her, we at least shared the same surname."

Youyou sighed, "I understand what you’re thinking. Don’t dwell on it too much; let’s bury her first!"

Miss Du hated Wanqing so much, yet still took her back to care for her after the Jie Family kicked her out, if for nothing else but the fact that she was her kin.

Youyou suddenly recalled her grandfather’s words: In this world, with the death of each relative, one less remains.

There are so many people in the world, and to become relatives is a valuable connection indeed.

That’s why Youyou treated the Gu Family members kindly. Fortunately, they weren’t all that bad. Even though they had done many wrong things in the past, they had now reformed.

Burying someone must be carried out by their own kin. Only Miss Du could perform the burial rites for Wanqing.

The funeral procession carried the coffin, blowing and beating drums all the way to the ancestral hill of the Du Family.

Clad in white mourner’s cloth, Miss Du stood out starkly within the crowd.

Ragged beggars, hobbling unevenly with crutches, followed behind a group of beggars, watching them from a distance.

After the burial rites were completed, four hours had passed. The beggar felt somewhat tired from standing so long and leaned against a nearby tree.

Seeing that the funeral attendees were starting to pack up their things to leave, the nearby beggars showed excited grins.

"Hey, lame man, don’t just stand there. When they’re gone, we can go and grab some offerings to eat."

"Mhm, okay!" The lame beggar by the tree smiled and gripped his crutch tightly.

The old beggar beside him frowned and said, "Your leg is injured, and you only have one arm, and even that needs a crutch. How will you manage to grab any offerings later? Sigh, I think you should just rest here, lest you injure your other leg."

The other beggars laughed, showing no regard for the cripple.

They thought: By the time he hobbles over there with his crutches, we’ll have eaten everything.

The lame beggar smiled faintly without speaking and leaned back against the tree.

"At least you know your limits, haha. If I manage to get hold of a lot, I might just treat you to a bun," said the man leading the beggars.

Chapter 1206: Assisting the Beggar

The mourners had left, and the beggars immediately swarmed in.

In front of Du Wanqing’s grave were many offerings laid out—pork head meat, whole chickens and ducks, as well as countless melons, fruits, and pastries, delicacies these beggars normally couldn’t afford.

Now, they were grabbing them crazily.

The cripple didn’t join in the scramble for food, perhaps not out of any self-awareness.

His gaze followed the funeral procession, or rather, fixed on a certain individual within that procession.

Miss Du took Jie Yi from Cuiya’s hands, gently kissed his little face, and finally showed a hint of a smile on her usually somber expression.

"Grow up fast, for you are the only kin I have left," she said.

The cripple was suddenly startled and his crutch, held unsteadily, dropped to the ground.

He lost his balance and fell to the ground.

Miss Du turned her head and saw the beggar sprawling inelegantly on the ground.

Her heart ached, she sighed, and said to Cuiya: "Check if we have any food left in our carriage, and bring some to him."

Cuiya glanced toward the beggar too and, seeing that he had only one arm and bad legs, her heart softened.

In these times, there were indeed a lot of pitiable people, and this disabled individual couldn’t even beg properly.

She returned to the carriage and brought out an exquisite food box with pastries from the Ten Miles Fragrant Sweet Shop that couldn’t be found just anywhere.

What a kind heart her young lady had.

Walking over to the beggar with the food box, she crouched down and placed it in front of him.

The crippled beggar turned away, bowing his head deeply, with his dirty and disheveled hair covering his entire face.

Cuiya snorted with a laugh, "Are you too ashamed? You're a beggar; what's there to be embarrassed about? Here, take this. My lady is kind-hearted; seeing you couldn't snatch up food like the others, she got this for you specifically."

"Thank... thank you, Miss!" His voice was extremely hoarse, stirring compassion in Cuiya.

She said, "Wait here for me, I'll go get you some water. You'll find swallowing these pastries tough without it."

Cuiya stood up and ran toward the carriage. Miss Du was already seated inside with the child, and she asked, "Did you give it to him?"

Cuiya replied, "I did, and I'll fetch him some water now. Poor thing."

Miss Du said, "How rare for you to show sympathy, give him these fruits as well."

Miss Du always had a benevolent heart, but seeing this disabled beggar filled her with an incomparable sense of distress.

She had the strong desire to help him.

But then she thought, how many of the world's pitiable could she help?

Soon, Cuiya returned, but still holding the water and fruits, a look of perplexity on her face.

"What happened? Didn't you give it to him?" Miss Du felt inexplicably anxious and lifted the carriage curtain to look in the direction of the beggar.

Cuiya set down what she was holding and sighed, "I told him to wait, but when I came back with these, he had disappeared."

Miss Du got out of the carriage, handed Jie Yi to Cuiya, and then ran to the spot where the beggar had been to search for him, to no avail.

Disappointed, she heaved a sigh and returned to the carriage.

Miss Du's carriage soon left the cemetery, and the beggars, having had their fill, had dispersed.

Some went to find a place to sleep, while others started to look for the next place that could fill their stomachs.

Chapter 1207: Lin Qianqing Must Get Pregnant

The lame beggar held a brocade box in his arms and hid behind the big tree, tightly closing his eyes.

Tears blurred his face, and it took a long time before he had the energy to stand up again.

He ate most of the food in the brocade box, tore some rags from his clothes, and tied the box to his body, hiding it under his tattered garments.

He knew very well that if other beggars saw such a box, they would definitely snatch it away and exchange it for small change at a pawnshop.

This was given by her, the only thing on him that still carried her scent.

Having done all this, he leaned on his crutch and made his way to Du Wanqing's grave.

The bouquets at the grave had been torn apart by the beggars, some of whom had plucked the leaves and stuck them on their heads, laughing cheerfully.

The lame beggar picked up the broken flower stems from the ground, barely managed to arrange them, and placed them back in front of the grave.

He spoke to the tombstone in a husky voice: "Promises, indeed, are easy to make, but hard to take back. You see, you lost a leg, broke an arm, and I too, am missing a leg and an arm. You are now freed, go well, live well. In the next life, be a better person, and never meet me again!"

...

A lady in Prince Jin Residence has been rumored to be pregnant, with the Imperial Physician as proof, and Madam Zuo's belly is growing day by day, silencing the rumors about King Jin's infertility.

Meanwhile, the poisoned women have been cured of their poison, personally verified by Gu Youyou, and they are now able to conceive.

But here arises the issue, with the status of King Jin, having only one child is certainly not sufficient, their status naturally calls for more, the more beneficial.

Especially since the pregnant Madam Zuo is of low status, if it weren't for a lack of options, the eldest son definitely could not be born from her.

Now that everyone can get pregnant, naturally competition arises.

Everyone rushed to flaunt themselves to Prince Jin, but for some reason, Prince Jin has been spending every night in the study, not going anywhere else.

Lin Qianqing stepped forward and sent those women back, thinking: Seeing them annoy her enough, let alone a man.

Too noisy.

"Everyone go back and wait, when it's your turn, you won't be neglected."

Lin Qianqing scolded the women and turned to look at King Jin in the study.

He has been acting unusually recently, and Lin Qianqing sensed something might have happened.

She opened her mouth to ask, but seeing him not even turning his head, she swallowed her words back.

She left the room, closing the door of the study.

"Order that the master is in a bad mood these days, doesn't want to see anyone, and no one is allowed to disturb him, especially the women from the back court."

She assigned more guards to stand watch, seeing Prince Jin's appearance, it seemed like something really had happened.

Soon a visitor arrived from the palace, it was the Empress's most trusted Lady Li.

She requested to see King Jin, and naturally, no one dared to stop her.

"Your Highness Prince Jin, do you understand what the Empress means?"

Her visit today was mainly to convey to King Jin that he still had to wear the cuckold, having only Madam Zuo pregnant was definitely not acceptable, the ladies in the court needed to conceive more, especially Lin Qianqing, he is the chief wife, and Madam Lin is also a young lady from the Ducal Residence, she also carries the bloodline of the Ducal Residence.

Only the child born from her and Jin Wei can legitimately become the Emperor of Zhuzhao Country.

King Jin remained silent all along, forcing Lady Li to emphasize repeatedly.

Chapter 1208: Let Her Go

"Other concubines having fewer children doesn't matter, but the Prince's wife must give birth to a legitimate heir. Without a legitimate son, we can't compete with the Great Prince."

King Jin sneered, "Then let Madam Zuo become the principal wife, and her son will be the legitimate heir, even the eldest legitimate son."

"That can’t be done!" Nurse Li exclaimed: "Madam Zuo’s status is too low to be compared with the Prince’s wife. The Duke has said that the future Emperor must be born of the Prince’s wife."

"The Duke has said?"

Nurse Li blinked unnaturally and hastened to say: "Of course, it is also the Empress’s wish. She doesn’t want another Zhang Family incident."

King Jin stood despondently in front of the window, overwhelmed with bitter sorrow in his heart.

He said, "Alright, I understand, give me three days, I will make arrangements."

Nurse Li was taken aback, wanting to say something more, but seeing King Jin’s pitiable state, she eventually said nothing and withdrew.

After a long while, the sound of King Jin’s hoarse monologue echoed in the study.

"It was promised to me, that she would not be harmed, why is it still..."

In recent months, to outsiders, he was still the glorious King Jin, even more esteemed than before, but only he himself could feel what it meant to fall from heaven into hell.

...

After suffering consecutive blows, King Jin had become much wiser than before.

In the past, whenever something happened, he could discuss it with someone at the Ducal Residence or with his mother in the Imperial Palace.

But now, with the matters at hand, he had no one to discuss them with; his only support was himself.

Within these three days, he must accomplish one thing.

After Nurse Li left, he walked out of the study, even left the house, and nobody knew what he was up to.

Not until the evening of the next day.

A shadow entered Lin Qianqing's room where the maid guarding the night had been acupunctured into a deep sleep.

"Who's there?" Sensing the moving shadow in the room, Lin Qianqing immediately sat up.

"Shh!" King Jin gestured to her to be silent.

"Ah... Prince?" Lin Qianqing was both shocked and frightened, wondering why he would come to her room in the middle of the night.

The King Jin of today seemed different; no, he had been off for a while now, not the same as before.

In the moonlight, one could see the desolate brightness flickering in his vast eyes, revealing a deep sadness in his pupils.

The recent events had nearly driven him mad.

He could tolerate his consorts relaying seed and bearing children of others, but Lin Qianqing was an exception.

Regardless of whether he loved her or not, she was his legitimate wife. To protect his wife from being defiled by others was his last shred of dignity as a man.

The world was too unfair to him; why bestow upon him the noblest status, only to make him endure such torment?

Once he thought he was omnipotent, but it turns out... he was incapable of everything.

No, at least he could spare her from one disaster.

He knew what she loved the most: freedom, just like the beautiful star map hanging in her room. It wasn't that he couldn't understand it, but such things were too remote for people like them—he didn't want to understand.

She loved it, and now, all he could do was to try his best to fulfill it.

Let her transform into a tiny particle of dust among them, drifting freely in the endless expanse of the starry sky.

"Prince, why have you come?" Lin Qianqing steadied her mind and asked blankly.

"I'll go and wake up Long Luo!" Saying so, Lin Qianqing got up to put on her shoes.

Chapter 1209: Never Come Back

"No, don't go." King Jin held her back, a torrent of endless sorrow surged towards his heart, which he forcefully suppressed.

"What's wrong?" Lin Qianqing noticed something was amiss with him.

Tears flowed from King Jin's eyes, shining like a bright star under the moonlight.

Lin Qianqing was stunned, reaching out to gently wipe them away for him.

"What’s really the matter, cousin?"

Usually, when she was willing to trust him, she would call him cousin.

Just as when he wanted to please her, he would call her by the affectionate terms, Cousin Lin or Miss Lin.

Lin Qianqing felt that this might be related to his unusual behavior these days.

"Cousin!" King Jin felt a sense of powerlessness sweeping through his body, he removed her hand and gently stroked her hair, whispering, "Don’t ask anything, don’t think about anything, just listen to me."

"Okay, you speak." Lin Qianqing nodded softly, waves of emotion stirring in her heart.

King Jin sniffed, pulling back the tears that were about to spill from his eyes, and said softly to her, "From now on, you must listen carefully to every word I say and remember them well. Do not ask why."

Being entangled with the Ducal Residence and those dirty power struggles was the greatest misfortune of their lives.

Although Lin Qianqing did not quite understand, she still nodded gently, watching his eyes, quiet without making a sound.

He said, "I have prepared a carriage for you outside the city; inside, you’ll find everything you need for the journey. Your first stop will be Rucheng. There’s a sesame cake shop on East Street of Rucheng. They have a mute daughter about your age. Go to their house, they know what to do. After you leave, the farther you go, the better; never come back."

"What in the world is going on?" Lin Qianqing asked with a shocked and agitated tone, "Why suddenly ask me to leave? Has something happened?"

She had thought about leaving, many times over the years, but these past few years she had resigned herself to her fate and decided to stay forever.

"Shh!" King Jin made a silencing gesture and said to her, "Don’t ask why, those ’whys’ would tarnish Cousin’s ears. I know you love freedom; once you leave Beijing, you’ll be free."

"Cousin!" Lin Qianqing felt a sudden chill at her heart.

With bitterness in his heart, King Jin forced a smile, whispered, "Forget it, don’t talk now, there’s no time left. Hurry up, put on your clothes and follow me."

Despite her full heart of doubts, Lin Qianqing did not ask any more. With a touch of excitement, worry, and even reluctance, she quickly got dressed and followed King Jin.

King Jin led her through a small side gate of the Prince Jin Residence, where two men in black were waiting.

He handed Lin Qianqing to the two men in black, saying, "Escort her out of the city; you must ensure her safety."

"Rest assured, Your Highness; I will see it done," one of them replied.

"Good, go," King Jin urged Lin Qianqing with a push.

Lin Qianqing gave King Jin a deep look, put on a black hood, and walked towards the two men in black.

"Cousin." Just as she turned away, King Jin suddenly called out to her again.

Lin Qianqing turned around and immediately found herself in a broad embrace.

She could feel King Jin’s trembling body, as if he was desperately hiding something, desperately controlling his emotions.

In the silence of the night, Lin Qianqing heard him sobbing quietly.

"Promise me, live well and happily. And do not come back."

Chapter 1210: Accountability

Lin Qianqing knew something had gone wrong, something serious. She never concerned herself with anything beyond her own meals each day, but now she was feeling some regret, wishing she had paid more attention to other matters.

For instance, she had sensed that King Jin had been different these days, but due to a lack of love, a lack of interest, she did not know what troubled him, nor had she thought to ask.

What she had not anticipated was that on the eve of a significant crisis, he would choose to send her away.

Knowing she yearned for freedom, was he trying to grant her that wish?

"Cousin, I..." Lin Qianqing couldn’t help but attempt to ask.

"Don’t ask," King Jin interjected. "Remember what I told you: once you leave, don’t trust anyone, especially those connected to the Ducal Residence."

Lin Qianqing had many questions, but just as she was about to voice them, King Jin pushed her away forcefully.

"Go, just go. Never come back," King Jin said, turning away, no longer facing her.

Lin Qianqing’s heart ached, as if something were lodged in her throat, unable to swallow or spit out, nearly suffocating her.

King Jin’s silhouette disappeared into the night; unbeknownst to her, Lin Qianqing found tears streaming uncontrollably down her face.

"My lady, we must hurry, or we’ll miss our chance."

A man in black stood before Lin Qianqing.

"What exactly happened?" Lin Qianqing’s voice, still choked with tears, was very soft.

"Since His Majesty King Jin has told you not to ask, then don’t. He is doing this for your own good," said the man in black.

Lin Qianqing wiped away her tears and looked into the pitch dark, following the footsteps of the man in black.

Outside of the city, there was a horse-drawn carriage with her luggage inside and a coachman wearing a cap.

They told her nothing, just took her on the carriage, driving further and further away from the direction of Beijing.

The road ahead was unknown, as was the reason for King Jin suddenly sending her away, and she wasn’t even sure if she should trust King Jin.

And so, she left Beijing in confusion, leaving her homeland behind to live the life she longed for.

...

The news of Lin Qianqing’s escape quickly spread, enraging the Empress, who summoned King Jin to the palace.

"Don’t tell me she escaped on her own. What on earth were you thinking?"

Burdened with a soul-crushing sense of futility, King Jin responded with a wry smile, "You promised me you wouldn’t touch Qianqing. How do you explain this?"

"That..." The Empress’s voice trembled, "I did promise you, it is my mistake, I didn’t think it through."

King Jin replied indifferently, "You may not have thought it through, but I have. Do whatever you please, but Lin Qianqing is off-limits. She is my wife. I would rather she died out there than bear someone else’s child. Mother, I am already in this state, are you still going to trample on my last shred of dignity?"

The Empress felt waves of acidity in her heart; at this point, so much had gone beyond her control. She couldn’t manage it, she didn’t want it this way, but what could be done?

Turning her head, she quietly wiped away the tears that had slipped out, took a deep breath, and then said to King Jin, "You may be honest in front of me, that’s fine, but when your maternal grandfather asks, you must deny sending her away. Just say... say she found out about that matter and rather than submitting to it, she fled in the middle of the night."

Thinking it over, she felt that no one would believe such a lie. Lin Qianqing, a dainty lady who’s never shouldered a burden or lifted a finger, how could she possibly escape on her own?