

## Indulgence 1001

### Chapter 1001: Almost Meeting

Mrs. Xuan laughed upon hearing this, "Since Jinlian likes it, I'll have someone send it directly to Qinglian Garden later!"

It's often said that accepting favors binds hands and mouths. So much fabric should be enough to silence Nalan Jinlian, Mrs. Xuan thought to herself.

"Thank you, Aunt!"

Mrs. Xuan initially wanted to chat with Nalan Jinlian for a while longer, but Nalan Jinlian made an excuse to return to Qinglian Garden after a brief stay.

Mrs. Xuan could convince others to stay, but Nalan Jinlian was now favored by the old noble lady, and Mrs. Xuan dared not force her to stay.

"Very well!"

Nalan Jinlian stood up and walked towards Qinglian Garden with Chunqiu.

"Miss, aren't you angry?"

"Angry at what?"

Chunqiu glanced around and whispered, "The Crown Princess clearly doesn't want you to see the Crown Prince!"

"Yes, if even you noticed, naturally, I know too. But for just one Crown Prince, Aunt reacted. I always thought the Fourth Sister was truly good!"

So it turns out that's all it is.

For just one Crown Prince, even her mother intervened.

"Hehe!"

Nalan Jinlian smiled faintly.

She felt even less anticipation for the so-called Crown Prince.

Between the front and back courtyards was a wall, more than two people high. To distinguish the back courtyard from the front courtyard, there was a small path on each side of the wall. The front courtyard was planted with slender bamboo, and the back courtyard with Xiangfei Bamboo.

At this moment, Nalan Jinlian walked along the small path and stopped as she looked at the Xiangfei Bamboo.

"Miss, what's wrong?" Chunqiu asked softly.

Nalan Jinlian shook her head.

She didn't know why, but she just wanted to stop.

At this very moment, Chu Yu also walked to this place, and seeing that clump of slender bamboo, he couldn't help but think of Yun Jinnian.

Yun Jinnian loved eating bamboo shoots, especially tender ones.

Now there were winter bamboo shoots; in the spring, there would be spring bamboo shoots. But where was the beautiful person now?

Thinking of this, Chu Yu felt an acute pain in his heart.

He raised his hand to cover his chest.

Anyi wanted to step forward.

Chu Yu raised his hand to stop Anyi, took a deep breath, and continued walking forward.

Inner courtyard

Nalan Jinlian felt a bit sour at heart and very flustered, always feeling that something was very, very close to her.

"Miss, what's wrong with you?" Chunqiu asked urgently.

Nalan Jinlian shook her head and turned towards a small door on the side.

She wanted to see if there was anyone on the other side of the wall.

Chunqiu quickly caught up with her.

She had high martial skills, so she naturally knew someone was on the other side of the wall.

But she didn't stop Nalan Jinlian because, with Nalan Jinlian's speed, the person would have already left by the time she got there.

Besides, they were headed in completely different directions.

When Nalan Jinlian reached the small door, the gatekeeper woman hurriedly saluted, "Greetings, Sixth Miss!"

Nalan Jinlian ignored her, exited the small door, and walked along the wall, but saw no one.

"Miss, what's going on with you? You don't look well; let's go back to Qinglian Garden!" Chunqiu gently advised.

Nalan Jinlian frowned, looking at the empty path, and nodded slightly, "Let's go back!"

"Yes!"

Chunqiu supported Nalan Jinlian as they returned to Qinglian Garden, and Nalan Jinlian looked quite unwell.

Nanny Qin hurriedly asked, "What happened?"

She quickly helped Nalan Jinlian into the bedroom, got hot water to wash her face and hands, and let her rest well.

"Miss, should I call the Mansion Physician for you?"

Nalan Jinlian shook her head, "Today is Sixth Sister's big day; I can't do anything inauspicious. Let's talk about it tomorrow!"

"But..."

Nalan Jinlian said no more, turned around, and pulled the quilt over herself.

What on earth happened earlier?

Why did her heart suddenly feel painful?

Was there someone on the other side of the wall?

Chapter 1002: Mrs. Xu Files a Complaint

If there is?

Who is it?

No answer, and no way to find an answer.

And she couldn't ask.

She always felt that the maids and women in this room, though very good to her and respectful, lacked sincerity.

There were many things she couldn't say, nor did she know whom to tell?

Afternoon.

Someone from the palace came with the Empress's command, asking the Nalan family matron to bring the girls above ten years old from the residence to the palace to meet the Empress.

The Nalan family matron was very happy about this.

Because it had been a long time since the Empress had summoned anyone from Fuwei Marquis Residence to the palace.

Even if they entered the palace during the festivals, they could only sit far away, and the Empress would not specifically speak to the women of Fuwei Marquis Residence, at most asking a couple of bland questions, nothing more.

Because of this, the Nalan family matron was beaming with joy and immediately opened her private treasury, selected a few accessories, and sent them to the courtyards of Nalan Huanhuan, Nalan Mingyi, Nalan Jinlian, Nalan Mingzhu, and Nalan Zile.

She also instructed that they must dress properly the next day, without the slightest negligence.

There were indeed people who were happy about this.

Except for Nalan Jinlian, everyone was very happy.

If they caught the Empress's eye, maybe they could marry the Crown Prince in the future. Even if they couldn't marry the Crown Prince, the family they married into would certainly not be bad.

"Miss doesn't seem happy?" Chunqiu asked quietly.

"What's there to be happy about? So many people eyeing the Crown Prince, if the Crown Prince speaks to me a few more words, wouldn't I become a target?"

She didn't like it and didn't want it.

For this, Chunqiu fell silent.

Nalan Jinlian didn't want to enter the palace, but she had no choice but to go.

Mrs. Xu also came personally, bringing a box of jewelry.

"Mother also wants me to enter the palace?" Nalan Jinlian asked in a deep voice.

"Why? Lianlian doesn't want to enter the palace?"

Nalan Jinlian shook her head.

How could she want to enter the palace?

She guessed a bit about the significance of the Empress summoning them at this time.

But Nalan Huanhuan and Nalan Mingyi secretly admired the Crown Prince.

She didn't want to get involved and be resented by them.

Even if she had no such inclination.

"But with the Empress's command, you must go!" Mrs. Xu said, with an unavoidable pang of heartache.

Nalan Jinlian remained silent.

"Lianlian!"

"Hmm?"

"You don't want to marry the Crown Prince?" Mrs. Xu asked.

Nalan Jinlian smiled, "I haven't even seen what the Crown Prince looks like, how could I want to marry him? Moreover, yesterday to send me away, Aunty specifically invited me over and gave me some fabrics. Not to mention, when Fifth Sister talks about the Crown Prince, her face blushes red. Mother, tell me, do I dare have any thoughts?"

Of course, she didn't dare.

And naturally, she didn't want to either.

Over a man, it's not worth sisters turning against each other.

Moreover, she'd never even seen this man, who knows what he looks like or what his temperament is like?

"..."

Mrs. Xu hadn't expected there to be so many twists and turns.

"Since Lianlian has no such thoughts, less talk and less action upon entering the palace tomorrow won't be wrong!"

"Hmm!"

Mrs. Xu sat in Qinglian Garden for a while, then went to find the Nalan family matron to talk about Mrs. Xuan's mother and daughter sending away Nalan Jinlian.

The Nalan family matron was taken aback for a moment, then calmly said, "I know about this matter, you can leave now!"

She didn't show it on her face, but she was furious inside.

Honestly, she really hadn't expected Mrs. Xuan to be such a person.

Nalan Huanhuan was usually lively and likable, yet her scheming was so deep, fearing to be upstaged by her younger sister, she sent her away.

"Come, go invite the Crown Princess over!"

Chapter 1003: Rising Suspicion

Mrs. Xuan hurriedly entered the courtyard of the old Lady Nalan, "Mother!"

The old Lady Nalan nodded slightly, pointing to a seat below, "Sit!"

"Yes!"

Mrs. Xuan's heart was uneasy.

Looking at the expression of the old Lady Nalan, she seemed not very happy.

Did she do something wrong?

"Do you know why I called you over?" the old Lady Nalan asked in a deep voice.

Mrs. Xuan shook her head in confusion, "Mother, if there's anything you need, just tell me!"

"Good, since you said that, I won't beat around the bush. Let me ask you, why did you send Jinlian away today?"

Hearing this, Mrs. Xuan.

Was stunned.

After thinking it over, she explained, "Mother, about today, I really don't know why? First, Changlin sent someone over, asking me to invite Sister Lian to my courtyard for a short visit. I was afraid others would gossip, so I used the excuse of delivering cloth. But why exactly? I am not sure, mother why don't you call Changlin over to ask?"

"Wasn't it for Huanhuan?" the old Lady Nalan asked.

She wondered how much of Mrs. Xuan's words were credible?

"What does this have to do with Huanhuan? Huanhuan knows nothing!" Mrs. Xuan said, a bit annoyed.

Has someone come to complain?

But why?

The old Lady Nalan said nothing and instructed the maid beside her, "Go invite the eldest young master to come by for a conversation!"

"Yes!"

Soon, Nalan Changlin was invited over.

The old Lady straightforwardly asked, "Tell me, why did you send away your sixth sister today?"

"..."

Nalan Changlin's expression slightly changed, looking at his mother sitting to the side, knowing he couldn't hide it, he told the truth.

Without the slightest embellishment.

After listening, old Lady Nalan quickly asked, "You're telling me, it was the Crown Prince's idea?"

"Yes, Grandmother, I dare not deceive you!"

The old Lady Nalan fell silent.

After thinking for a moment, she said, "Then why does the Crown Prince not want Duke Rui to see Sister Lian?"

"Mother, Sister Lian is so beautiful, if Duke Rui were to see her and take a fancy to her, wanting to marry her back to Tianchu Country, what would we do? Based on my guess, the Crown Prince must have already seen our Sister Lian and probably has some interest in her!" said Mrs. Xuan.

Otherwise, why would he be in such a hurry to send her away?

She absolutely didn't believe that the Crown Prince had no interest.

Nalan Changlin didn't believe it either.

Even the old Lady Nalan didn't believe it.

"Are you suggesting that the Crown Prince has feelings for our Sister Lian..."

Mrs. Xuan nodded.

Nalan Changlin also nodded.

The old Lady Nalan felt this was a serious matter, "Go call the third son over, and have the old Marquess come too, how did I get so confused about this!"

Confused?

The old Lady Nalan was quite clear-headed, there was no sign of confusion.

Moreover, she always felt that Nalan Jinlian did not quite resemble a daughter of the Nalan family, she was too beautiful.

Her demeanor and actions did not quite match a girl from the Great Zhou Kingdom either.

Even having grown up in a border town, she shouldn't be like this.

Too calm, too uncompetitive.

Mrs. Xuan wanted to stay and listen to find out what was happening, but she didn't quite dare, so she had to leave first.

However, Nalan Changlin stayed.

When the old Marquess and Nalan Bo came over, the old Lady Nalan also asked Nalan Changlin to leave first.

"Yes, Grandmother!"

Though Nalan Changlin was reluctant, he had no choice but to leave.

Yet he felt a faint dissatisfaction in his heart.

Originally, Nalan Huanhuan was the most cherished in this family, but ever since Nalan Jinlian returned, everything changed.

Inside the room.

The maids and elderly women all stepped out, leaving only the old Lady Nalan, Nalan Bo, and the old Marquess.

"Bobo, tell us, what exactly is going on with Sister Lian?"

Chapter 1004: Truthfully Reported

Nalan Bo's complexion slightly changed, but at this moment, he knew he couldn't hide it from his family. After thinking it over, he said, "Father, Mother, I have been unfilial!"

With that, he knelt down and knocked his head three times.

The old Marquess and lady of the Nalan family remained very calm.

They didn't ask anything, nor did they blame him.

They waited for Nalan Bo's next words.

Nalan Bo stood up, sat down on a chair, and continued, "My daughter, thirteen years ago, was already gone!"

"Ah..."

"..."

The old Marquess and lady of the Nalan family were extremely shocked.

How could it be like this?

"Then what about Jinlian?" the old Marquess inquired.

"What is Jinlian's background? Whose daughter is she? I don't know. I only know that someone brought her to the border town back then. That person held the Crown Prince's jade pendant and told me from then on, she is Nalan Jinlian, my legitimate daughter!"

"At that time, I was unwilling, but that person said, as long as I agreed, I could return to the Imperial Capital, get a promotion, and Jinlian would become someone above others, perhaps even occupy the highest position in the Great Zhou Kingdom!"

The highest position, that would be the Empress, the Empress Dowager.

At that time, Nalan Bo was tempted.

"What did you say?" the old Marquess asked.

Thinking it over.

Could it be that this child was arranged by the Crown Prince? An identity that wasn't quite fitting, needing a good identity?

But it doesn't make sense.

"I agreed, so she became the daughter of me and Mrs. Xu, and her maid and the old woman had always been by her side, I couldn't interfere at all. That person only required me to treat her well, not to be harsh, and even to show more closeness, though she seemed more attached to Mrs. Xu!" Nalan Bo said with some resentment.

"Could it be..."

"Say what?" the old lady asked.

The old Marquess pondered for a moment, "Is there a possibility that this child came from Tianchu Country?"

"..."

"..."

Nalan Bo fell silent.

The old lady of the Nalan family calmly spoke, "Nonsense, she is the legitimate daughter of the third household of the Marquis Residence, what relation does she have with Tianchu Country, you are confused!"

"Mother," Nalan Bo whispered.

"Have you wondered, what did the Crown Prince go through all this effort for? For her to have a legitimate identity, since the intention was to provide her an identity and support, it could not have been to be a concubine, or a side concubine, since it's neither, then it must be only one thing, a principal wife, the Crown Princess Consort!"

Nalan Bo and the old Marquess immediately became red-eyed.

"Could it be this way?" the old Marquess asked.

The Marquis Residence has been this way for many years, next would be the Count Residence, and after the Count Residence, they would only be commoners.

If at this time, a Crown Princess Consort, an Empress came from the Marquis Residence, then it would become the Duke Residence.

If the Crown Prince bestows favor, it could be hereditary and perpetual.

The old Marquess swallowed, looking at his aged wife, "Could it be that we've understood wrongly?"

"Wrong or not, we'll know after entering the palace to see the Empress tomorrow!" said the old lady of the Nalan family calmly.

Looking at her husband and son, she sighed, "You too, making such a stir over this small matter, without even thinking of asking the Crown Prince's intention. No matter what, we need to know the Crown Prince's intention to act accordingly!"

If the Crown Prince indeed wishes to make Nalan Jinlian the principal wife.

They naturally have to support her marriage.

In the residence, two young ladies also need to quickly settle their engagements, then it can be Nalan Jinlian's turn. Otherwise, if the elder sister isn't married, it wouldn't be beneficial for Nalan Jinlian's reputation for the younger sister to be married first.

Undoubtedly, the old lady of the Nalan family is very calm and thoughtful.

The father and son nodded in agreement at these words.

#### Chapter 1005: Knowing the Truth

No matter what the truth is, as the elder Lady Nalan said, we should ask for the Crown Prince's opinion.

Another thing, what exactly is the purpose of entering the palace this time?

Is it that the Empress wants to see Nalan Jinlian?

Nalan Bo nodded in agreement, "Mother, I will go and seek an audience with the Crown Prince in a while, to ask for his opinion!"

"Hmm, that's good!"

The three discussed a bit more before Nalan Bo left.

In the room, only the old Marquess and the elder Lady Nalan remained.

"What do you think of this matter?" the old Marquess asked.

"What can I think? Naturally, we should handle it well. Our Marquis Residence is also time to advance to another level!"

The old Marquess nodded but sighed, "That's what you say, but I still feel a bit uneasy!"

"Why are you uneasy? Have we wronged her since she came to our Marquis Residence? Even before knowing her identity, we treated her with love and care. Is there anything poor about what she eats or wears? Is there anything in her room setup that isn't exquisite? Old man, don't overthink it. What we need to do now is to clarify the Crown Prince's intention and then decide what to do next!"

"Hmm, what you say makes sense!"

The old Marquess had great trust and regard for his wife's opinion.

The two talked for a while longer, waiting for Nalan Bo to return with the news.

Nalan Bo, after some hesitation, sought an audience with Zhou Yunshen.

Zhou Yunshen smiled, "Let him in then!"

There were some things that needed to be instructed to Nalan Bo to prevent him from mistreating Jinlian.

"Your Highness, I've come to see you!"

"Hmm!"

Zhou Yunshen responded lightly.

"Your Highness, I, I..." Nalan Bo hesitated.

Zhou Yunshen looked at him nonchalantly, "If you have something to say, just say it. Why are you hesitating!"

"Your Highness, it's about my daughter, Jinlian, she, she..." Nalan Bo licked his lips, not knowing how to continue for a moment.

"I sent someone to bring her there, so remember, do not mistreat her or wrong her. I painstakingly arranged this identity for her because I don't want her to blindly marry me. If you wish to become a Duke in the future, carefully consider what I've told you today!"

After speaking, Zhou Yunshen waved his hand, "Leave now!"

"Yes!"

Nalan Bo backed out, his entire body trembling slightly.

So excited that he lost his sense of direction.

A Duke, a true figure above all others.

Even the Emperor would have to show him some respect.

Unlike how it is now, where he is nothing wherever he goes.

Thinking of this, Nalan Bo took a deep breath and went to the elder Lady Nalan's courtyard.

"Mother, Father, we were not wrong!"

"..."

"..."

The old Marquess and the elder Lady Nalan exchanged glances, with the elder Lady Nalan bursting into laughter, "Good, good, she's truly our family's girl!"

The old Marquess also laughed aloud.

Whether she is really a Marquis Residence girl or not doesn't matter, as long as she can bring great benefits to the Marquis Residence, it is excellent!

"Bobo, since the Crown Prince has given instructions, you must not be vague. Although Mingzhu is your biological daughter, you must also remember that our family's honor and disgrace now rest on Jinlian, so do not let her be saddened!"

Nalan Bo nodded, "Yes, Mother!"

Father and Mother mean well for him, so he naturally must listen.

However, it is indeed Mingzhu who is being wronged.

As if seeing through Nalan Bo's thoughts, the elder Lady Nalan added, "Don't worry, since we now know that Mingzhu is your only daughter, I will naturally cherish her even more!"

Chapter 1006: Explaining the Truth

No one can dictate that she cannot fall ill, right!

Upon thinking this, Nalan Jinlian nodded with a smile, "Hmm, I will rest well!"

After seeing off Nalan Mingyi and Nalan Huanhuan, Nalan Jinlian spoke to Chunqiu, "Tell me, how can one appear particularly wan and unable to get out of bed?"

"Miss, you..."

Chunqiu immediately understood what Nalan Jinlian intended to do.

But entering the palace tomorrow was by the Empress's decree, with an implication of choosing for His Highness.

Yet Nalan Jinlian adamantly refused to enter the palace.

"I don't want to enter the palace, nor do I wish to compete with my sisters, so find a way to feign illness!" Nalan Jinlian said, reclining on the bed, playing with the tassel in her hand.

Chunqiu wanted to persuade her.

But Nanny Qin smiled, "Since the lady does not wish to enter the palace, then we shall not go. As for pretending to be sick, Miss need not go through the trouble, just rest well in bed!"

"Is this feasible?" Nalan Jinlian asked.

"Certainly it is!"

"Very well then, go and inform Grandmother that I shall not be going tomorrow morning!"

"Yes!"

Nanny Qin responded, donned her heavy garments, wrapped herself in a cloak, and left Qinglian Garden.

She headed to the courtyard of the old Lady Nalan.

The old Lady Nalan, due to her age, had separated her quarters from the old Marquess five or six years ago. The old Marquess resided in the front courtyard, while Lady Nalan stayed in the rear courtyard. The old Marquess held Lady Nalan in great respect but also had a certain fear of her.

When Nanny Qin arrived, Lady Nalan was just preparing to rest. Learning that Nanny Qin from Nalan Jinlian's side had come, she quickly said, "Please come in!"

Were it the butler of another courtyard, the old Lady Nalan would certainly not be so courteous and eager.

This was someone sent by the Crown Prince, someone close to the future emperor, perhaps even specially prepared by the Empress for the future Crown Princess Consort.

She dared not show negligence.

Nanny Qin greeted Lady Nalan with respect, "Greetings, old Lady Nalan!"

"No need for such courtesy!"

Lady Nalan invited Nanny Qin to sit. Nanny Qin smiled and, after taking a seat, said, "Old Lady Nalan, my young lady will not be entering the palace tomorrow. Regarding the Empress, just say that the young lady is unwell!"

"Is she ill? How did she fall ill out of the blue?" old Lady Nalan asked.

She felt a bit annoyed at heart.

Are all the maids and servants in this courtyard dead?

Nalan Jinlian fell ill, and no one had informed her.

They didn't realize that news from Qinglian Garden was impossible to obtain, and even when it was, it was mere trivial gossip.

"The young lady is just a little fatigued, and perhaps she just doesn't want to enter the palace!" Nanny Qin stated bluntly.

She was a senior maid by the Empress's side and had served since the Empress was still a concubine. Over the years, she had developed a keen insight.

Yet she never expected that the Crown Prince would implore the Empress to let her serve a girl.

A girl brought back by the Crown Prince from Tianchu Country through great effort, with unmatched beauty and elegance.

Nanny Qin knew what Nalan Jinlian was previously named and who she was, so facing her in her current naive state, Nanny Qin felt a pang of pity and fondness.

"As long as she's not truly ill, it's fine. But isn't it unwise for her not to enter the palace?" old Lady Nalan asked tentatively.

"No, the Empress is most kind. She merely wishes to meet the young lady. Lady Nalan can still take the other young ladies into the palace tomorrow and need not concern with other matters!"

"All right!"

After sending off Qin nanny, Nalan, the Old Madam, finally breathed a sigh of relief.

And then she chuckled out loud.

The head maid Lizi asked with a smile, "Why is the Old Madam so happy?"

"You don't understand, girl. Go to the storeroom, fetch some medicinal herbs, and make a trip to Qinglian Garden!"

Lizi responded and went to the storeroom to take the herbs, then headed to Qinglian Garden.

When Qin nanny returned, Nalan Jinlian was already asleep, truly asleep, listening to the steady breathing coming from inside the bed, Qin nanny checked the room thoroughly, extinguished the incense in the burner, didn't allow any charcoal braziers, instructed the granny responsible for the heater dragon to be careful, and prepared hot and warm water, letting Chunqiu have a sound sleep on the soft bed in the adjoining room.

"Be alert during the night. If the young mistress wakes and wants to drink water, mix some warm water and send it over!"

"Yes!"

Having instructed Chunqiu, she then called Chong Ling over, gave some instructions, Chong Ling nodded, and quietly left Qinglian Garden.

Lizi brought the medicinal herbs over but did not see Nalan Jinlian; Qin nanny received the herbs and informed Lizi.

"Please trouble Miss Lizi to go back and inform Old Madam that the young mistress is resting. Once her health is better, she will go to pay respects to Old Madam!"

"Yes!"

Compared to the tranquility and serenity of the rear courtyard, Zhou Yunshen's yard in the front was in deep water and scorching fire, where twenty-five men in black infiltrated the yard where Zhou Yunshen lived, twenty matching against the Hidden Guards Zhou Yunshen brought, four against Teng Fei, with one thrusting straight at Zhou Yunshen.

Their leader possessed extremely high martial arts abilities and was as light as a swallow, wielding a sword that was both swift and fierce, with a faint gleam.

The sword was poisoned.

Not only did their leader have a poisoned sword, but all the swords of the men he brought were poisoned, and they worked quite well in pairs.

They could even form teams of four, six, eight, or ten.

They seemed to have undergone training, forming formations, a pair doubling their power, a group of four would be even stronger, while groups of six, eight, or ten meant life-threatening strikes.

The person who was stabbed barely managed to utter a couple of groans before collapsing on the ground, their body festering, then turning into a pool of blood.

Teng Fei was overwhelmed and shouted loudly, "Everyone, everyone, protect the Crown Prince!"

Zhou Yunshen, facing the leader, was somewhat caught off guard.

Who was this? Such incredible martial arts skill?

Yet at this moment, he had no time to think.

Trying to retreat to the yard only to be intercepted, unable to get out, while the people he brought, whether in the light or hidden, dwindled one by one, and finally, only Teng Fei remained.

The leader of the men in black raised his hand, "Withdraw!"

A group of men in black swiftly evacuated.

Zhou Yunshen left the room, looked towards the neighboring yard, and saw Chu Yu sitting on the rooftop, holding a jar of wine, drinking while watching the drama.

"Prince Rui is indeed indifferent!"

Chu Yu sneered, "I used to be passionate, at least not as cold as now, watching a life not saving. The Crown Prince should know why I turned out like this, so don't complain, because you, Zhou Yunshen, don't have the right!"

"You..." Teng Fei was furious, but didn't know how to refute Chu Yu.

Because the one at fault wasn't Chu Yu.

But his master.

Zhou Yunshen said nothing, seeing the old Marquess and his people coming with injuries and stumbling, knowing they had been attacked too.

Just not fatally.

"Crown Prince, I am late to save you!" said the old Marquess, and knelt down.

Zhou Yunshen gestured, "Stand up!"

Their target was him, but why did they withdraw at the end?

This puzzled him greatly!

"Thank you, Crown Prince!" said the old Marquess, standing up, and continued, "Crown Prince, please take a rest, the guest yard will be tidied up soon!"

"Hmm!"

Zhou Yunshen nodded lightly, gesturing to Teng Fei to summon more people.

At least three times more than the dead.

Teng Fei took the orders and went.

Zhou Yunshen headed to the tidied guest yard.

But unexpectedly, when Teng Fei brought the people out, they were intercepted and killed again.

Still those men in black as before, but the number grew from twenty-five to a hundred, ten people per group, that leader stood not far, with the sword planted on the ground, hands clasped around its hilt, a cold and indifferent gaze overlooking the battlefield.

For those attempting to flee and report, he didn't have to make a move, someone from the darkness would directly dispose of them.

Until only Teng Fei was left, then calmly said, "Withdraw..."

Chapter 1008: Empress's Thoughts

Teng Fei looked at the corpses scattered on the ground, took a deep breath, and closed his eyes.

He could roughly guess who had sent these people.

These people were from the Moonlight Cult, and the leader should be Han Tianci, Yun Jinnian's younger brother.

Without the Saintess, the Moonlight Cult would certainly send everyone to search.

Even if they only suspected that the person who abducted Yun Jinnian was the Crown Prince, it would be enough of a reason for them to come and assassinate.

No, it's not assassination; it's a demonstration, a warning.

If the Crown Prince doesn't hand over Yun Jinnian, the consequences would be more severe than just some dead Hidden Guards.

Teng Fei did not know why he had such thoughts, absurd yet laughable.

But, he did know the importance of the Saintess to the Moonlight Cult.

Taking a deep breath, Teng Fei planned to enter the palace to seek an audience with the Empress. For just one woman, such heavy losses—was it really worth it?

Empress Mei Wanqing had a dream, in which all those who loved her no longer loved her, and those she loved had departed from her, leaving her utterly alone.

Thinking of this, Empress Wu took a deep breath and ordered her attendants to help her rise.

It was almost thirty years since she crossed into this place, transforming from a legitimate daughter to a concubine's daughter, from a concubine's daughter to a Concubine, and then step by step becoming the Noble Consort, before ultimately an Empress. How much trials and tribulations had she gone through, how much effort had she exerted?

Originally, she thought she could become an Empress like Wu Zetian, but after several setbacks, she understood that her highest position could only be Empress, the future Empress Dowager.

To sit in Wu Zetian's position, her skills were not yet sufficient.

"Your Majesty, Guard Teng requests an audience!"

The Empress was slightly surprised, "Let him come in!"

Teng Fei entered the inner chamber, carrying a heavy scent of blood.

The Empress frowned, "Are you injured?"

"Reporting to Your Majesty, it is not I who am injured, but someone attempted to assassinate His Highness. However, they only killed those around him and did not harm His Highness. I returned to deploy personnel to protect His Highness, but on the way, we encountered another assassination, leaving only me surviving out of eighty!"

"What?" The Empress exclaimed.

Someone attempted to assassinate Yunshen?

Who could be so daring?

"Reporting to Your Majesty, I suspect it might be the brother of Miss Yun. Those assassins possess exceptional martial arts, seemingly especially cultivated, and some of them do not seem young!"

The Empress contemplated.

After pondering for a moment, she asked, "Can you be certain?"

"I am merely speculating!"

Although it was just speculation, the Empress understood that Teng Fei would not say such things without being eighty percent sure.

"Then what is your purpose in coming to the palace?"

"I earnestly request Your Majesty to persuade the Crown Prince not to delay important matters because of one woman!" Teng Fei said and knelt down on one knee.

The Empress looked at Teng Fei and could not help but laugh in anger.

As far as she knew, Teng Fei had always opposed abducting Yun Jinnian.

Firstly, Yun Jinnian had saved Zhou Yunshen's life, and Zhou Yunshen doing so was undoubtedly repaying kindness with enmity.

Talk of love—who would covet such love?

Secondly, Yun Jinnian's identity; she was the Commandery Princess Yijia of Tianchu Country, unmatched in medical skills, having saved many people, opened several pharmacies that were accessible to the poor, tore down several big residences to plant medicinal herbs that were used to aid impoverished patients, she had an excellent reputation.

Thirdly, she was also the Saintess of the Moonlight Cult.

The Moonlight Cult lacked a Saintess for many years, and now suddenly having one, they would undoubtedly protect her like the apple of their eye.

And the traitor had already been found by the Moonlight Cult, but no one knew what confessions had been extracted.

Once the Moonlight Cult found out Zhou Yunshen had abducted Yun Jinnian, they would definitely not let it go easily, and surely send their most elite forces to infiltrate the Great Zhou Kingdom, firstly to find Yun Jinnian, and secondly, to take revenge.

The Empress, understanding this, took a deep breath before saying, "You may go back now, I will persuade Yunshen!"

#### Chapter 1009: Suspicions Arise

But whether it's useful or not, that's really hard to say.

Teng Fei responded, "Yes!"

He got up and left. This time, he didn't take anyone to the Fuwei Marquis Residence and didn't encounter any assassination on the way.

Zhou Yunshen saw Teng Fei return alone and looked behind him, "Where is she?"

"Master!" Teng Fei said, kneeling on one knee before Zhou Yunshen.

Zhou Yunshen remained silent.

"Master, I beg of you, please let..."

Before Teng Fei could finish his words, Zhou Yunshen already hurled a cup at him, hitting him on the forehead, and yelled angrily, "Teng Fei, how dare you!"

The pain on his forehead wasn't intense, but Teng Fei's heart ached.

His master, such a dignified and graceful person, was muddled for the sake of a woman.

Even if he married her, so what?

Given Yun Jinnian's personality, she wouldn't like it.

Look at Prince Rui, how cold and indifferent he is to everyone, but he acts playfully and desperately tries to entertain Yun Jinnian.

"Leave now. You don't need to serve me in the future. Let Teng Mu do that instead!"

Teng Fei clenched his fist tightly, and after a while, he softly replied, "Yes!"

He got up and left, heading outside.

After walking a few steps, Teng Fei stopped. He wanted to say something to persuade, but in the end, said nothing and walked away.

Zhou Yunshen watched, his expression gradually darkening.

Early in the morning, the old Nalan Lady brought a few granddaughters into the palace to see the Empress.

The Marquis Residence became much quieter instantly.

Nalan Jinlian had a good sleep and woke up feeling refreshed. She walked around the courtyard and noticed a faint fragrance, "Chunqiu, did you smell that?"

"What?" Chunqiu asked, puzzled.

Chong Ling was afraid of being suspected or Nalan Jinlian might remember something, hence she seldom approached Nalan Jinlian.

"The fragrance, it seems the plum flowers are blooming!" Nalan Jinlian said and called over a maid who was cleaning, "Are there plum blossoms in this Marquis Residence?"

"Sixth Miss, there is a Plum Forest behind the Marquis Residence, and the plum blossoms are in full bloom now!" The little maid Cuicui responded.

She secretly glanced at Nalan Jinlian, only feeling that the lady was truly beautiful.

More beautiful than any lady in the residence, if she could serve such a beautiful miss, it would be worth dying for.

Nalan Jinlian laughed upon hearing this, "Do you know the way?"

"I do know!"

"Alright, after breakfast, take me there. Also, find a few clay pots and a sieve, we'll go to collect plum snow and pick plum flowers!"

"Miss, this isn't proper, you've claimed to be ill and aren't going into the palace. If someone finds out you're ill but went to pick plum flowers, and if Her Majesty blames you..."

"Let her blame away then, it's actually better. If the Empress doesn't like me, she won't summon me to the palace. Anyway, I have no intention towards her!" Nalan Jinlian responded, displeased with Chunqiu's advice.

She looked at the little maid, "What is your name?"

"I, I..." Juan Ye was too excited to speak properly.

"Don't rush, say it slowly!"

"I'm Juan Ye, Juan as in curl, Ye as in leaf!" Juan Ye said, her voice trembling.

"Hmm, Juan Ye, right? You can serve me from now on!" Nalan Jinlian said, turning and entering the room.

Juan Ye knelt on the ground with a thud, "Thank you, Miss, for your grace, thank you, Miss, for your grace!"

She was promoted from a common maid to a Head Maid by the Miss's side in an instant.

It's Head Maid, right? Juan Ye thought excitedly.

Chunqiu looked at Juan Ye kneeling on the ground and then at Nalan Jinlian who had entered the room, pursed her lips.

She seemingly did something wrong today.

#### Chapter 1010: Maid's Ventriloquism

Nalan Jinlian was in a good mood and even had half a bowl more of bird's nest porridge for breakfast. Seeing Juan Ye hesitating at the door, she smiled and said, "You are now the Head Maid by my side. Being timid won't do. If you think you can't stand up straight, I can replace you with someone else!"

Upon hearing this, Juan Ye was immediately terrified out of her wits.

For a moment, she stammered, not knowing what to say.

Nalan Jinlian watched and exhaled.

This maid was selected by herself.

But since she chose the maid herself, even if she cried, she had to continue using her.

Nalan Jinlian stepped forward and gently pressed Juan Ye's waist, straightening Juan Ye's back at once, "You should always stand tall like this. You are the Head Maid beside the legitimate sixth young lady of the Marquis Residence, no longer a lowly servant in Qinglian Garden whom anyone can bully. When you walk out, you should be formidable and mighty, making others dare not to bully you. All maids and grannies must respectfully call you Sister Juan Ye!"

Juan Ye's eyes immediately turned red.

"Miss..."

"Remember, I don't keep timid maids by my side. As I said, if you can't handle it, I'll find someone else!" Nalan Jinlian withdrew her hand and continued, "Go wash up. I'll have Chunqiu bring you some clothes. After breakfast, take me to Plum Blossom Garden!"

"Yes, this servant remembered!" Juan Ye said, bowing to Nalan Jinlian.

She actually looked a bit decent.

In this Marquis Residence, as long as a maid has a bit of ambition, she would always observe the actions of the Head Maids. Even if she doesn't learn everything, she'll get seven or eight tenths of it.

Nalan Jinlian returned to her room and leaned on the Chaise Longue.

She had no interest in seeing any plum blossoms. What she wanted most was to go out and see the outside world, visit the Bookstore, and pick out some good books.

None of the books in this study were to her liking.

It was really quite peculiar.

"Miss!" Chunqiu called softly from the side.

"Did you send the clothes to Juan Ye?"

"I did!"

After hearing this, Nalan Jinlian didn't say anything, tapping idly on the armrest of the Chaise Longue, eyes closed, lost in thought.

Nalan Jinlian herself didn't even know what she ought to think.

She couldn't recall any past events at all, and the people around her felt so unfamiliar, offering no sense of familiarity, making her feel powerless.

She always felt that Chunqiu, Chong Ling, and Nanny Qin were the ones truly in cahoots, while she was an outsider.

This was also why she wanted to promote Juan Ye.

Chunqiu pursed her lips, just as Nanny Qin came in, smiling, "Miss, I heard you promoted a maidservant to Head Maid?"

"Mm!" Nalan Jinlian responded indifferently.

She didn't even lift her eyelids.

Nanny Qin, having spent decades in the palace, naturally understood that Nalan Jinlian was displeased.

As for the source of her displeasure, she didn't know, but it was evident that Nalan Jinlian was in a bad mood today.

Nanny Qin quietly left the room. Seeing this, Chunqiu also left the room.

"Nanny!"

Nanny Qin looked at Chunqiu and asked solemnly, "What's going on?"

Chunqiu recounted her earlier advice to Nalan Jinlian, and Nanny Qin sighed. "Your advice to the master wasn't wrong, but don't forget your own position. If your choice of words and tone aren't appropriate, the master will feel differently. Remember, do not instruct the master on what to do in the future!"

The Prince had gone through so much trouble to bring her back for a long and lasting relationship; it must not be compromised by the issues with a few maids.

"Yes, Nanny!" Chunqiu responded, glancing back into the room where she saw Nalan Jinlian still leaning as she was, and sighed lightly.

Truly, comparing people to others can be maddening.

All the same women, just because of a beautiful lotus-like face, she earned the master's favor, cherished and spoiled from then on.

But, one who serves with beauty, how can it last long?