

Indulgence 341

Chapter 341: Hope

Yuwen Ya frowned.

"My lord, which lord?"

"Little uncle couldn't speak at all, and my uncle had just left."

Tongge didn't care and pulled Yuwen Ya along with her.

"Hey, young master, young master..." Hao Zhenzhu called out softly, but Yuwen Ya had already been pulled away.

She stamped her foot in frustration.

Yuwen Ya was pulled back to his room and saw Chu Yu watching him with a smile that wasn't quite a smile, "Why did you call me back?"

"What, you think the girl is pretty and want to flirt?" Chu Yu asked with a smile.

"What flirt? Don't speak so unpleasantly. 'A fair lady, a gentleman's good match!'"

"And then after a 'good match'? Will you stay behind, or will you take her with you? If you take her back, what will you do then? Marry her as your wife or run off with her as a concubine? She's a decent girl; do you truly have the heart to bring her to the Capital City to be a concubine?" Chu Yu asked several questions in a row.

"I..."

Yuwen Ya stammered.

It took him a while before he said with a flushed face, "I hadn't thought that much!"

"Since you haven't thought that much, don't disturb her heart. Now, since you haven't met someone you like, you shouldn't casually flirt around. Otherwise, if you meet someone you like in the future, you'll regret today's indulgence!"

"It's as if you're one for fidelity!" Yuwen Ya retorted.

But upon careful thought, these years, although Chu Yu was mischievous, he really hadn't shown warm interest in any lady or given them much attention.

It was only Yun Jinnian who he protected like the apple of his eye.

A year ago, he caused such a disaster for the Yun Family and even seized their silver, all just to give vent for Yun Jinnian.

Yuwen Ya moved closer to Chu Yu, "Ambiguous, let me ask you, does unrequited love hurt your heart?"

"Hurt what?" Chu Yu asked with a laugh, pouring a drink and offering it to Yuwen Ya, "Having someone in your heart, everything you do has a purpose. Even when you feel like not living anymore, the thought of her allows you to persevere, it's quite nice!"

"I don't know what that feels like, but it seems not bad!"

Chu Yu chuckled.

It was more than just not bad.

In this life, finding someone who truly loves you is so difficult.

Especially for them with their statuses, who hasn't been sacrificed for power and benefit? And how many have really gotten happiness, how many spouses show mutual respect and affection?

"Wait until the day you meet someone, and if she happens to like you too, you'll understand the beauty of it," Chu Yu said, drinking the wine in his cup in one go.

Wash up, and go to bed.

Lying in bed, Chu Yu thought how wonderful it would be if Yun Jinnian reciprocated his feelings...

Yuwen Ya, however, was deep in thought over Chu Yu's words.

As dawn broke, the inn bustled with activity as the guards busily replaced the water in the buckets, filled them up, and prepared food for the road.

Yun Jinnian sat up, gradually waking up. After getting out of bed and tidying up, he headed to the dining room.

Han Tianci called out cheerfully, "Brother!"

Upon seeing Han Tianci, Yun Jinnian's eyes brimmed with tender indulgence, "Tianci!"

After Han Tianci ran over, Yun Jinnian carefully tidied him up before asking, "Did you sleep well last night?"

"Yes, and you, Brother?"

"Well too!"

Yun Jinnian ruffled Han Tianci's hair, "Let's go, time for breakfast!"

"Hmm, there's a delicious crispy meat dish at the inn, I wonder if they have it this morning!"

"They do. I arranged last night for the shopkeeper to tell the cook to especially prepare a portion for you this morning!"

Yun Jinnian genuinely adored Tianci without being overindulgent.

He seriously taught him medical skills, teaching him everything he thought was right.

The siblings had a laugh and a chat when they saw Chu Yu and Yuwen Ya approaching with dark circles under their eyes.

"What happened to you two?" Yun Jinnian asked in surprise.

Chapter 342: Full of Sincerity

Yuwen Ya chuckled and quickly walked away, leading Han Tianci by the hand.

Chu Yu smiled, "I didn't sleep well last night!"

"Are you ill? Do you need me to take a look at you?" Yun Jinnian was slightly worried.

"No worries, we're fine. Let's go have breakfast!"

Seeing Chu Yu say so, Yun Jinnian could only nod.

They had just sat down when the shopkeeper came forward, "Gentlemen, Miss Shi Jiayu from the Shi Family Estate has arrived!"

Yuwen Ya didn't care, busying himself with grabbing crispy meat pieces with Han Tianci.

Prince Yanjun was gentle and quiet, quietly eating breakfast.

Chu Yu raised an eyebrow, looking at Yun Jinnian, "It's your decision whether to see her or not!"

Yun Jinnian took a deep breath, "Please show her in!"

While they all did not care, she could not do the same.

The shopkeeper ushered Shi Jiayu in. Yun Jinnian was stunned to see her carrying a bundle.

Shi Jiayu knelt heavily before Yun Jinnian, "This servant pays respects to the young miss!"

Yun Jinnian was startled, "Miss Shi, what are you doing?"

"Young miss, this servant is honoring her promise. From now on, I shall serve by your side as a maid for all my life to repay your great kindness!"

This time, Yun Jinnian was truly shocked.

She reached out to help Shi Jiayu up but found that Shi Jiayu knelt steadfast, refusing to rise, "Young miss, if you do not agree, I shall not stand up!"

"Why put yourself through this? Isn't it good at home? What's good about following me? Besides, I'm not the only one who helped you!"

Shi Jiayu, however, smiled, "Young miss, though I am but a woman, I know that once a word is spoken, it cannot be taken back, and besides, my family is gone, and I have given away the Shi Family Estate. If the young miss does not shelter me, I will have nowhere to go. You are known for your kindness, please keep this servant!"

Yun Jinnian sighed.

Shi Jiayu spoke of serving as a servant, yet her manner of speaking and behaving was with such grace, not at all like a mere servant's.

And her way of speaking, one moment 'I' and the next 'this servant', made Yun Jinnian feel embarrassed for her.

"But..."

Shi Jiayu's mind made a quick turn, "Young miss, we are about to enter Nanjiang, and it happens that my maternal grandmother is from there, a prominent Nanjiang family. I also speak the Nanjiang language. Perhaps I could be of help to you then!"

Yun Jinnian was not moved by anything else, but Shi Jiayu's mention of speaking the Nanjiang language and her grandmother being from there stirred her interest.

Chu Yu and Yuwen Ya also looked towards Shi Jiayu.

Shi Jiayu straightened her back because she knew she had guessed correctly, "Young miss, please take me in!"

"You may stand up first!"

"Has the young miss agreed?" Shi Jiayu asked, unsure.

Yun Jinnian nodded slightly, "You know why I've agreed!"

"It doesn't matter, as long as the young miss has agreed!" Shi Jiayu said, standing up and positioning herself to the side.

After a pause, she added, "Since the young miss is going to Nanjiang, there are some things at home that will definitely be of use to you. However, I must go back to fetch them. Might the young miss send that uncle with me?"

Shi Jiayu pointed at Han Zhong.

She feared that once she left, Yun Jinnian and the others would leave as well, and she would have achieved nothing.

Yun Jinnian couldn't help but smile, "Then, let Uncle Zhong accompany you on the trip. By the way, have you had breakfast?"

"No, I've been waiting outside the inn all night!"

Yun Jinnian was astonished upon hearing this, quickly saying, "Then eat something first before you go back to fetch your things. There's no rush!"

"Yes, this servant will follow the young miss's orders!" Shi Jiayu said crisply, shouldering her bundle and walking over to Hemei and Henuan, "I'll be counting on you two younger sisters to look after me from now on!"

Chapter 343: Trouble Arises

Hemei and Henuan quickly got up and greeted Shi Jiayu with a bow, "Sister Shi!"

Shi Jiayu smiled and sat down, and an attendant immediately added a set of bowls and chopsticks for her.

After breakfast, Shi Jiayu took Han Zhong back to the Shi estate to get some things. Shi Jiamo was both startled and overjoyed to see Shi Jiayu return, "Sister!"

"Big brother, I've come back to take some things!"

"Alright!"

Shi Jiayu went straight to the ancestral hall and pulled out a box from under the altar table. Then she opened it to show Shi Jiamo, "Big brother, these are all things left by Grandmother. I will take them away today. They are not worth much; take a look!"

Shi Jiamo sighed, "Sister, this is your home, and it will always be your home. You trust me enough to have me adopted into the family, so we are now one family. Whatever you need from this house, feel free to take it!"

It was originally Shi Jiayu's property anyway.

He would not covet it for himself.

Shi Jiayu laughed, "Then, big brother, I'm leaving!"

"Sister!" Shi Jiamo called out softly.

Shi Jiayu looked up at Shi Jiamo.

"Sister, when you are out there, take good care of yourself. If you miss home, come back!"

Shi Jiayu nodded.

But she also knew that once she left this time, she probably would never come back again.

If Shi Jiamo did well in the future, she would give him all the gold and silver their father had hidden away. If he did not do well, she would leave it buried.

After Yun Jinnian had finished packing, Han Zhong had already brought Shi Jiayu back.

The box was not very big, but it was covered in Nanjiang script, which was very peculiar.

"Carry it onto my carriage!"

As for what was actually inside, Yun Jinnian intended to examine it once she was on the carriage.

After the box was loaded onto the carriage, Yun Jinnian also boarded, while Han Tianci and Chu Yu ran ahead.

Hemei and Henuan also entered the carriage.

Although they wanted Shi Jiayu to accompany them, they were still wary of Shi Jiayu and wouldn't let Yun Jinnian be alone with her.

In the carriage, Shi Jiayu opened the box and laid out the items one by one on a small table, "These are all things preserved by my grandmother. I don't understand if anything is important. Miss, see if there is anything here that can help you!"

Shi Jiayu was a clever girl.

She did not ask Yun Jinnian what the group was doing in Nanjiang, even more aware that Hemei and Henuan were guarding against her. But what did that matter?

Time reveals a person's heart.

Whether she was good or bad, it would become clear over time.

Yun Jinnian nodded, took a book and flipped it open. The obscure Nanjiang characters were mostly unfamiliar to her.

After flipping through several pages, it was all the same.

"I don't recognize these characters!"

Shi Jiayu took a look and smiled awkwardly, "Neither do I!"

Yun Jinnian picked up a few more books, which upon opening still showed the enigmatic Nanjiang script. Shi Jiayu then opened a brocade box, inside was a small, pitch-black pot, totally empty.

Shi Jiayu turned it over and over, "What is this?"

"Let me look!" Yun Jinnian took the small pot, turning it over but could not discern its purpose.

Something pricked her, and Yun Jinnian hissed with pain. Blood flowed from her fingertip and dripped onto the small pot, which sucked it up completely.

"Ah..."

Shi Jiayu cried out in surprise.

Yun Jinnian was utterly astonished, and not quite believing what just occurred, she squeezed a few more drops of blood onto the small pot, which were instantly absorbed.

Henuan quickly bit her finger and dripped blood onto the small pot, but it swiftly slid off, not being absorbed.

"How could this be?" Shi Jiayu exclaimed.

Chapter 344: No Result

Hemei and Henuan looked at each other, also not daring to be careless, watching Shi Jiayu vigilantly.

"Uncle Zhong!" Yun Jinnian called out in a deep voice.

Despite the shock in her heart, she quickly calmed herself down.

Since she could be reborn, what was a little cauldron that absorbed her blood?

"Little Miss?"

"Uncle Zhong, have the carriage stopped, and please ask His Highness and Commandery Prince to come over for a moment," Yun Jinnian said calmly.

The carriage stopped,

Chu Yu, Prince Yanjun, Yuwen Ya, and Han Tianci also climbed into the carriage one after another. Although the carriage was spacious, it still felt crowded and stuffy with several more people inside.

Hemei and Henuan shrank into a corner. They were originally going to get out, but Yun Jinnian asked them to stay, suggesting it would be good for them to watch and listen more and gain some experience.

Since the object belonged to Shi Jiayu, naturally, they could not let her get down.

"What's the matter?" Chu Yu asked.

Shi Jiayu glanced at Chu Yu and thought he was very handsome, but next to the ethereal Prince Yanjun in white, he did not seem inferior.

Shi Jiayu dared not look for long and lowered her gaze.

"This little cauldron absorbs my blood!" said Yun Jinnian, and she squeezed a drop of blood onto the cauldron, which quickly absorbed it cleanly.

Hemei and Henuan hurriedly dropped their blood onto it, but the cauldron did not absorb their blood.

Shi Jiayu also dropped her blood on it, still with no absorption.

"This..."

Chu Yu and Yuwen Ya looked at each other and took the silver needle prepared by Yun Jinnian to prick their fingers and dropped their blood onto it.

The cauldron still did not absorb the blood.

Prince Yanjun looked astonished for a moment and tried it himself but to no avail.

"Sister, let me try as well!" Han Tianci said softly.

Yun Jinnian was silent for a moment, "Alright!"

But Han Tianci's blood still was not absorbed. Chu Yu then summoned everyone to try, and none but Yun Jinnian's blood was absorbed.

Shi Jiayu had no idea what to say.

After all, it was just an item from her grandmother, and she knew nothing about it.

"Miss, I'm sorry, I..."

"It's okay!" Yun Jinnian said lightly, not blaming Shi Jiayu but picking up the cauldron for a closer look.

"Did you see anything?" Chu Yu asked.

Yun Jinnian shook her head, "I can't see anything!"

Chu Yu also took it for a closer look; it was dark and unremarkable, and he handed it to Prince Yanjun, "Cousin, take a look!"

Prince Yanjun, who was also widely read, had never seen nor heard of such a cauldron.

After examining it carefully, he still could not figure it out.

He placed the cauldron on the table.

"Jinnian, put the cauldron away for now. When we get to Nanjiang, we'll find someone to ask what exactly this is," he said.

Yun Jinnian nodded and put the cauldron into a brocade box, handing it to Shi Jiayu.

Shi Jiayu shook her head, "Miss, since this object can absorb your blood, it shows a connection with you; I give it to you along with everything else in this box!"

"This..."

Yun Jinnian was taken aback.

"Miss, these things are just inanimate objects to me and of no use; for you, they may be useful, please accept them!"

Shi Jiayu said sincerely, and Yun Jinnian smiled faintly and shook her head, "Let's leave the originals, but for these books, if you agree, I will copy them!"

This was her greatest compromise.

"Alright!"

That settled the matter.

But since they were going to copy, the best rice paper was needed. Yun Jinnian, however, was not in a hurry. She first copied them onto ordinary rice paper, planning to copy them again upon returning to Capital City and then to preserve them.

Chapter 345: Regret

On the only road leading to Nanjiang.

Madame Qian and her entourage had waited so long that the flowers had all withered.

Especially Madame Qian, who was so irritated, her mouth was full of ulcers.

No one else was faring much better, truly unable to eat or sleep, and they started to feel resentment towards Madame Qian.

If only they had known not to follow Madame Qian's plan to put Yun Jinnian in a difficult position, they wouldn't be in this situation now.

It was already mid-July, but they saw no one.

"Madame, do you really think Miss Yun the Fourth will pass by here?"

Madame Qian swallowed, "She should, I guess!"

Madame Qian wasn't the only one uncertain; everyone was.

And they regretted it deeply.

That night, it finally rained, bringing a slight coolness. Yun Jinnian leaned against the carriage wall, reading by the light of an oil lamp.

Shi Jiayu was sewing clothes on the side.

Hemei and Henuan were learning from her.

After spending time together, Hemei and Henuan had grown quite fond of Shi Jiayu, their smart, generous, and stable elder sister.

Yan Ruihe was truly impressed.

It shouldn't be said that the men of Shi County were blind, for not taking such a fine girl back home as their bride.

"Jiayu!"

"Miss!"

Yun Jinnian slightly curved her lips, "Sleep early, don't overwork yourself!"

"Just a few more stitches to go!" Jiayu murmured tenderly.

She enjoyed her days like these, being able to see many things she had never come across before. Most importantly, she was free to be herself, without constraints.

No one was there to remind her of etiquette, telling her not to laugh showing her teeth or to walk without showing her feet.

She could laugh heartily, as freely as she wished.

Yun Jinnian closed her book and placed it in a small drawer, "Then I'll go to sleep first. Hemei, Henuan, you should sleep early too!"

Because they were afraid of not reaching Nanjiang in time for the blooming of the Snow Lotus, they had been traveling by night these days, though much slower than during the day.

Having just rained and the weather being cool, Yun Jinnian, who had not had a proper sleep for days, soon drifted off.

Jiayu watched her, lips slightly pursed.

She admired Yun Jinnian greatly. Despite her young age, her medical skills were extraordinary, and she was steady, gentle, kind, and she had a good heart.

"Hemei, Henuan, let's sleep too!"

As maids, they were not supposed to sleep lying down, but Yun Jinnian, concerned for them, had allowed them to lie down. The spacious carriage was quite roomy even for four people.

In the latter half of the night, the carriage finally stopped to set up tents for a rest.

Most importantly, Chu Yu was concerned for Yun Jinnian, worrying she might need a bathroom break and, out of a desire to keep traveling, wouldn't speak up. It wouldn't be good if she suffered for it.

So when the carriage stopped, the men all walked far away.

Only then did Yun Jinnian and the other women get off the carriage to relieve themselves.

Yun Jinnian was moved by Chu Yu's thoughtfulness. After taking care of her needs and the carriage no longer jostling, she slept even more peacefully.

The other trivial matters were handled by Hemei, Henuan, and Jiayu.

Yun Jinnian's task was to read more books and then find other ways to cure the poison in Prince Yanjun's body.

What she feared most was still not being able to cultivate the Blood Lotus of Tian Mountain.

Because of this, Yun Jinnian was also under great pressure.

Sometimes, even as she read to the point of befuddlement, she persisted.

At dawn, Yun Jinnian, yawning, sat up, "Miss!"

Hemei and Henuan had already brought hot water into the carriage, attending to Yun Jinnian as she washed up, "Miss, did you sleep well last night?"

"Quite well. How about you?"

"We slept well too!"

Yun Jinnian smiled gently, "In a few more days, we'll arrive in Nanjiang, and then you can all get a good sleep!"

Hemei nodded.

After breakfast, they would continue their journey. Han Tianci and Chu Yu continued to run ahead, while Hemei, Henuan, and Jiayu stayed inside the carriage, learning needlework.

Yun Jinnian read a book.

Suddenly, the caravan came to a halt.

Chapter 346: Knocking

Yun Jinnian lifted the curtain of the carriage and saw Nanny Qian leading a dozen people towards him, bowing to the ground before the carriage, "Fourth Miss, this servant (subordinate) has made a mistake. I beg Fourth Miss to forgive and spare this servant (subordinate) this one time!"

Yun Jinnian looked at Nanny Qian and the others. They had lost a lot of weight and looked much more haggard than they had in the past few days.

"Nanny Qian, get up. Today I will give you another chance, hoping you will keep your word, truly recognize your mistake, and not force me to do anything I am unwilling to do again. Let's continue the journey!" Yun Jinnian said, then let the carriage curtain fall.

This old devout woman, finally she had sorted herself out.

She had indeed been too meddlesome some days ago.

Hemei and Henuan were holding back laughter, and Yun Jinnian glanced at them and smiled lightly.

Shi Jiayu was not aware of what had happened, "What's going on with them?"

Hemei recounted the whole event accurately, and Shi Jiayu angrily said, "These crafty servants really should be taught a good lesson!"

Yun Jinnian smiled and said nothing.

Actually, Nanny Qian and the others were doing their duty to their master; they were just acting out of loyalty to different masters and had no choice.

Nanny Qian and the others, while sighing in relief, dared not take anything lightly anymore and showed utmost respect to Yun Jinnian, following her orders obediently.

After all, this was their only chance.

Before even getting to Nanjiang, the man arranged by Chu Yu had already come over, a middle-aged man in his forties or fifties, with eyes that were sharp and full of light, clearly someone formidable.

"Your Highness!"

"Are you Hu Lao San?" Chu Yu asked.

Hu Lao San was someone he had found through his connections to help deal with matters in Nanjiang, costing a significant amount of silver. As to whether he would be worth it, that would only be known after reaching Nanjiang.

"Indeed I am, Your Highness. You honor me with your presence!" Hu Lao San said, bowing to Chu Yu.

"There's no need for such formality. From now on, dealing with affairs in Nanjiang is all up to your wits!"

"Being trusted by Your Highness is my fortune!"

Chu Yu smiled, aware that Hu Lao San's words were merely polite.

"Do well, and you will be handsomely rewarded once the matter is concluded!"

Hu Lao San's eyes narrowed into a smile, "I thank Your Highness in advance!"

Hu Lao San had brought with him five men, all young and appearing quite steady. They also listened to Hu Lao San very well.

Hu Lao San first explained the rules of Nanjiang.

It's said that even a mighty dragon cannot suppress the local snakes, so Chu Yu had asked Hu Lao San for help through his connections, which would save a great deal of unnecessary trouble.

"Your Highness, the residence has been prepared, and in accordance with your instructions, two thousand strong men have been recruited to serve at your command. However, about the silver..."

"Five taels of silver for those not yet employed, and twenty taels for each of those who are. This prince will not be short of a single penny!"

"That is very good, very good indeed!"

Chu Yu nodded, and the group officially entered the territory of Nanjiang.

Chu Yu told Hu Lao San that he wanted to enter Tian Mountain to seek the Snow Lotus and use blood to nourish the lotus. Hu Lao San paused for a moment, "Your Highness, do I need to prepare the men for the mountain expedition?"

"If you can arrange the manpower and find the Snow Lotus, that would be excellent!"

"Your Highness, finding men for the expedition is not difficult, but entering Tian Mountain is, after all, risking their lives. If they do not return from the mountain, their families would be left without their main support, and life will be hard!"

It all came down to silver in the end.

"Before entering the mountain, provide two hundred taels for settling the family for each man; fifty taels for finding the Snow Lotus. For those who perish, give another two hundred taels; and for those who come back alive, fifty taels!"

Hu Lao San thought the prices were quite fair.

If they found the Snow Lotus and returned alive, they would receive three hundred taels of silver; and if they died, their families would get four hundred and fifty taels, enough for ten to twenty years of their needs.

"Then it is settled!"

Chapter 347: Inquiry

Chu Yu nodded.

Nanjiang was just a small tribe, depending on Tianchu Country, Great Zhou Kingdom, and Lisang Nation, and just happened to be between the three countries, which has always been a highly contested area for strategists. However, none of the countries dared to swallow it whole, so Nanjiang became a zone managed by all three and yet by none, where various forces intermingled.

In Nanjiang, the highest authority was the Moonwatching Sect, with the leader known as the Saintess, who held supreme power, and could marry and have children. Then came the five elders of Gold, Wood, Water, Fire, and Earth under the Saintess, followed by the four Hall Masters of Azure Dragon, White Tiger, Vermilion Bird, Black Tortoise, and the four Divine Envoys of East, South, West, North, one management level after another.

But it was said that the Saintess of Nanjiang had been missing for many years, and the Sacred Relic of Nanjiang had disappeared along with her.

Without the Sacred Relic, without the Saintess, there emerged two factions—the reclusive sect and the worldly sect.

The worldly sect sought the descendants of the Saintess and the Sacred Relic, insisting on making Nanjiang flourish. Most importantly, without the Saintess and the Sacred Relic, it was impossible to cultivate the Poisonous Insect King. Sometimes, the poisonous insects they reared would backfire, and without the blood of the Saintess or the Sacred Relic, there was only a dead end.

So it was paramount in Nanjiang not to stir trouble, as no one knew when they might encounter a member of the Moonwatching Sect.

And one feared even more that the other party would use poison or cast poisonous insects.

Hearing Hu Lao San say all this, the expressions of Chu Yu and his companions changed slightly.

They were even more careful to instruct their people not to go out unless necessary.

Hu Lao San quickly brought the men to Yun Jinnian, allowing Yun Jinnian to check and question them one by one.

A thousand people were reduced to eight hundred sixty-three.

These men also knew they would be entering the snowy mountains. Relatively speaking, it wasn't very dangerous, so they were content to wait to complete the task and bring the twenty taels of silver home to live on.

The weather in Nanjiang was warm and spring-like all year round, which Yun Jinnian particularly enjoyed.

In the bustle, August arrived.

Capital City, Yun Residence

The third day of August was Yun Qi's birthday.

Yun Qi had thought Mrs. Han would show some recognition, but there was nothing. Instead, it was his concubine Rou who was more than eight months pregnant and her belly was unusually large. They called for a doctor to come, who said she might be carrying twin sons.

Yun Qi didn't show it on his face, but deep down, he felt joy.

Even his concubine Lian was five months pregnant and had become considerably plumper.

On August eleventh, Yun Zihan turned fourteen, but there was no progress regarding her marriage. Mrs. Han also received a letter sent by Yun Jinnian through carrier pigeon.

"Bai Que!"

"Madam?"

"Make arrangements quietly to invite Concubine Cui and the second young lady over. I have some things to ask them!"

Marriage was a serious affair, and Mrs. Han felt it was necessary to consult Concubine Cui and Yun Zihan's wishes.

After all, the suitor was just a minor son from the Marquis Residence, brought up by his legitimate mother, a scholar no less, but still without any official rank. If Yun Zihan disapproved, it wouldn't be good for Mrs. Han to be the only one eagerly pursuing the match.

Soon, Concubine Cui and Yun Zihan were brought to Qiyue Academy.

"This servant pays respects to the second wife!"

"Zihan pays respects to Aunt!"

Mrs. Han had the mother and daughter sit down before handing Yun Jinnian's letter to Concubine Cui, "Take a look!"

Concubine Cui burst into tears as soon as she read the letter and knelt before Mrs. Han, "Second wife!"

"Don't cry; whether you're willing or not, just give me a word, and I will handle the rest and make sure things are arranged properly for you!"

Such trivial matters wouldn't usually concern Mrs. Han.

But since Yun Jinnian had been sick in the past, Concubine Cui had taken care of him day and night, and Yun Zihan had shown genuine concern for Yun Jinnian, Mrs. Han was moved to help make arrangements for Yun Zihan.

Seeing how Mrs. He was acting, she was afraid that she had intended to sell Yun Zihan to obtain silver for Yun Muiyou's dowry.

The Marquess Yuanshen Residence had long fallen into decline; no amount of dowry would fill the gaps, and Mrs. He was foolish indeed, pushing Yun Muiyou into a pit of fire.

Chapter 348: Intimidation

"Second Madam, I'm willing!"

Although Madam Cui from the merchant family didn't know the actual situation, if she were to come to the Capital City to buy a daughter from an official family, it would still leak some rumors.

She certainly didn't want Yun Zihan to marry into a merchant family.

For this reason, Liao Shijie indeed was the best choice.

Although he was born of a concubine, he had academic honors to his name. Once he placed high in the exams, with the help from Prince Rui, he would surely stay in the Capital City to serve as an official. Even if he were sent elsewhere, at the very least he would be a Magistrate.

If Yun Zihan were to marry him, at worst she would still be an official's wife.

Yun Zihan also knelt before Mrs. Han, "It's all up to Aunt to decide!"

Mrs. Han helped the mother and daughter up, "This matter is not urgent, we need to plan carefully!"

Madam Cui and Yun Zihan each returned to their own courtyards.

Yun Zihan lay on her bed and started crying.

At the General Weiyuan's Residence

General Weiyuan poured wine for Yun Chen, "Master Yun, I invited you over today because there is something I would like to consult you about!"

"Say it without reservation, General!" Yun Chen said, feeling somewhat agitated in his heart.

He didn't have any particular relationship with General Weiyuan.

"Some days ago, thieves struck the General Residence. I apprehended three people in the Yun Residence. After interrogation, only one turned out to be a thief. The other two..." General Weiyuan paused before continuing, "Guess who the other two were, Master Yun!"

"This..."

Yun Chen didn't dare to guess.

"The two confessed, saying they had been bribed by someone specifically to ruin the reputation of Miss Yun, the fourth daughter of your family. Master Yun, guess who bribed them!"

Yun Chen felt his mind in disarray.

He jumped to his feet abruptly and asked in shock, "Who?"

"Your mother, the Old Madam Yun!"

Yun Chen felt as if he had been struck by lightning. He collapsed dispiritedly onto the stool, and because his body went limp, he knocked the stool over and tumbled onto the floor.

General Weiyuan looked at the disheveled Yun Qi with disdain and snorted coldly.

These literary officials scorned military men, yet they were the filthiest.

"No, how could..." Yun Chen murmured in disbelief.

Although his mother didn't like Jinnian, she was still her flesh and blood granddaughter. How could she heartlessly harm Jinnian like that?

Did his second brother and sister-in-law know about it?

If they did know, with his sister-in-law's temperament, could the Yun Family stay peaceful? It would be a wonder if it didn't cause a scandal known by all.

Moreover, the Han Family had a deeper foundation than he had thought. That day, when Yun Jinnian entered the palace, it was to diagnose the Emperor, and this time she left for the sake of the Emperor as well, hence those gossipmongers, even when executed by tongue-ripping, didn't stir up any trouble at all.

"General!" Yun Chen said gravely.

General Weiyuan laughed coldly, "Master Yun need not be nervous. Since I invited you today, I am willing to cover up a thing or two for you. Otherwise, if I publicize this matter, and if Divine Doctor Han reports it to the Emperor with conclusive evidence, not to mention the Old Madam's life or death, Master Yun and the entire Yun Family likely won't be able to escape unscathed!"

Yun Chen was terrified by these words.

The recent affair with the former Minister of War was still vivid in his mind. His grandmother harming her own legitimate granddaughter—if this got out, how could he face anyone? How could the children of the Yun Family get married?

"Could the General give some guidance?"

"I have a distant relative who has come to the Capital City to participate in the examinations. He intends to settle down here and has also reached the age to marry. I heard Master Yun has a daughter who is both beautiful and intelligent. I wonder if Master Yun would be willing to grant this match?"

"The elder daughter?"

Yun Chen inquired.

Given that the General had come to talk about this in such a roundabout way, it seemed likely that the young man was not decent.

Chapter 349: Harsh Words

Since it was not preferable to marry off Yun Muyou, the eldest legitimate daughter, Yun Chen truly felt reluctant.

Only if the eldest legitimate daughter marries well can the younger daughters marry well, and the sons can also marry well.

Yun Chen was clear about this.

"No, the second daughter!"

Yun Chen, puzzled, asked, "Zihan?"

"That's a question this general hadn't thought about. I only seek to marry a suitable maiden from the Yun Family. As for who, this general doesn't really mind!"

Yun Chen immediately breathed a sigh of relief.

The second daughter, Yun Zihan, was a concubine-born daughter; it didn't matter whom she married. Moreover, now that General Weiyuan was holding such a big advantage over him, there was nothing he could do but agree to the marriage of Yun Zihan.

"Good!"

General Weiyuan took out a Jade Pendant, "This is the token from the groom's side!"

Yun Qi looked on and could only unfasten his Jade Pendant from around his waist and hand it to General Weiyuan, "This is the token from the bride's side!"

Yun Chen returned to the Yun Family and headed straight for Cixin Academy.

He looked at the Old Madam Yun without a word, just staring. After a long while, he let out a mocking laugh and turned to leave.

"Chenchen?" Old Madam Yun called out quietly as she chased after him from the small hall.

Upon hearing her, Yun Chen stiffened, and only after a long time did he speak, "Mother, from now on, don't involve yourself in the family's affairs. I will arrange for the Xu Family to fetch Xinmo soon!"

The moment Old Madam Yun heard this, she was so shocked she became petrified. It took her a while to shriek sharply, "If you dare send Xinmo to the Xu Family, I will die for you to see!"

Yun Chen, upon hearing this, felt extremely cold, "Suit yourself then. If you die, I'll mourn for three years!"

Maybe without the perspective-lacking mother, perhaps the Emperor would value his merit of following the dragon and promote his position.

Having said that, Yun Chen left with a sweep of his sleeve.

Old Madam Yun's legs gave out, and she collapsed to the floor. Only after a long time did she start to cry out, "Such sinfulness!"

Ming Liu, Nanny Tian, as well as the maids and grannies, dared not come forward to console her.

Who would have thought the Master would utter such cruel words? He used to be the most filial.

For him to say such things today, they all speculated what the Master might have learned to treat the Old Madam this way.

Old Madam Yun was so frightened she felt her soul shatter to pieces. With both the second and youngest son unreliable, if the eldest son was also unreliable, who else could she depend on?

Yun Chen, feeling depressed, returned to Nuanxin Garden where Mrs. He immediately greeted him, "The master is back!"

"Hmm!"

Yun Chen responded indifferently. After a maid served tea and he took a light sip, he spoke to Mrs. He, "There's something I need to discuss with you!"

"Please speak, Master. I'm listening!"

The merchant's marriage proposal had made some progress; as long as Yun Zihan was brought over for a look and was favored, marrying her off would fetch five hundred thousand taels of silver, with the dowry fully provided by the merchant's side without her having to contribute a thing.

Fifty thousand taels of silver, just like that—Mrs. He almost woke up laughing from joy.

"Today someone came to propose marriage, and I gave Zihan away!" Yun Chen said indifferently.

Mrs. He exclaimed in surprise, "What?"

Yun Chen looked at Mrs. He, puzzled, "I have promised Zihan away. In a few days, someone will bring the token to propose. The token is the Jade Pendant I've worn for many years."

Mrs. He felt as though her soul was shattering.

The duck that was almost in her grasp had flown away; how could her soul not shatter.

Inside she was filled with both hate and anger, yet she couldn't object or even say no. She had to muster her spirit and asked weakly, "But Youyou's marriage hasn't been settled yet, how can you promise Zihan away first? That doesn't seem proper, Master!"

Chapter 350: Plotting Marriage

Yun Chen looked at Mrs. He, "Since you think it's improper for Zihan to marry over there, then let Mui marry instead!"

Upon hearing this, Mrs. He felt like a sharp thorn was stuck in her throat, the pain making her feel as if her heart was being torn apart.

"Why would my lord say such things? Where did I say I disagreed? I only..."

"Enough with the buts. Seriously prepare a dowry for Zihan, and marry her off gloriously before we discuss Muyou's marriage!"

After saying this, Yun Chen stood up and went directly to the outer courtyard.

Mrs. He was so anxious she started crying out loud; she just wanted to fight for her daughter, wishing for her to have a better marriage. Why was everything so hard?

And now they wanted her to seriously prepare a dowry? In her dreams.

Yet, she didn't want to lose the opportunity with the wealthy merchant, so she immediately sent someone to her maiden home, asking her sister-in-law to come to Yun Residence to discuss for a long time before deciding to replace He Xiulan, the He Family's concubine-born younger miss, in the marriage.

To earn those five hundred thousand taels of silver.

The sister-in-law from He Family immediately gave Mrs. He a hundred thousand taels, which made Mrs. He feel somewhat better.

Meanwhile, Liao Shijie arrived in Capital City, bought a residence with three courtyards in the inner city, as well as maids, old maids, and servants, and even purchased a shop with two storefronts and a farm of a thousand acres in the suburbs. Money was being spent like water, leaving only the three hundred thousand taels his stepmother had given him. Liao Shijie knew well that Capital City was a place to spend money, but he had not expected the expenses to be so severe.

He did not dare to spend these three hundred thousand taels, thinking to hand them over to his wife after their marriage. Originally planning to take exams this time, he decided to enter Songshan Academy and study hard for another three years before taking the exams again.

The odds of success would be greater.

When the butler and butler's wife arrived, Liao Shijie sought an audience with General Weiyuan.

"You wish to see Yun Family's Second Miss?"

"Yes!"

General Weiyuan thought for a moment before saying, "On the twentieth of August, the Yun Family will return to Huguo Temple to offer incense. Pay close attention, and be careful not to mistake someone else for her!"

"Thank you, Great General!"

On the nineteenth of August, Liao Shijie arrived at Huguo Temple, took care of everything, and just waited for the Yun Family's procession to arrive.

Mrs. He knew well why there was the trip today, for she still hoped to meet the Marquess Yuanshen old lady, and to let Yun Muyou meet Marquess Weng as well. Regarding Yun Muyou's appearance, Mrs. He was very confident.

With a richer dowry, she would find a way to manage.

Therefore, she brought along Yun Muyou and Yun Zihan to Huguo Temple to offer incense.

The sisters each had their own concerns and were well aware of the purpose of their visit today. Yun Muyou had also seen Weng Jianrui's portrait, and by the time they arrived at Huguo Temple, it was afternoon, and there were not many pilgrims left. Yun Muyou was still looking around for Weng Jianrui.

Yun Zihan, on the other hand, looked straight ahead, making Yun Muyou's lack of manners stand out even more.

"Youyou!" Mrs. He said sternly.

Yun Muyou then reigned herself in.

The monk immediately came forward to guide Mrs. He and her party to the Zen Abbey for rest, as they were going to stay there for one night.

Mrs. He donated extra money for the oil in the temple lamps and remembered Yun Jinnian had stayed here for eighty-one days, "I wonder if the Little Monk remembers the Yun Residence's Fourth Miss?"

"The Fourth Miss? I remember her!" the monk replied.

"We're the Fourth Miss's family. I'm her aunt, and these two are her elder sisters," Mrs. He explained.

The monk quickly said, "Amitabha, I will surely inform the abbot that the Fourth Miss's family has come!"

"Thank you, Little Monk!"

The monk waved his hand and stepped back.

Yun Muyou then remarked, "It seems the Fourth Sister is quite liked by others?"

Mrs. He glanced at Yun Muyou and said nothing, then turned to Yun Zihan, "You go take a walk outside, but don't go too far."

"Yes, Mother!"

After bowing, Yun Zihan left the Zen Abbey.

Wandering aimlessly, inhaling the sandalwood scent.

She didn't know where she might encounter Liao Shijie. Although her aunt had shown her Liao Shijie's portrait, she still harbored some hope of seeing him in person.

Wondering what kind of man he truly was.