

Indulgence 471

Chapter 471: The Emperor's Calculations

But where did they, mere servants, have the right to be so presumptuous about their master's affairs?

They also thought about waiting for the Prince to return, to persuade the Princess.

And Leng Bingham had a slightly different expectation for Yun Jinnian; he too hoped that Yun Jinnian would persuade Leng Bingham.

Outside the Capital City

No one expected that just as they were about to reach the Capital City, they would encounter an assassination attempt.

Chu Yu's face was cold as he looked down at the bodies strewn on the ground, remaining silent.

These men were dead soldiers, with nothing on them that could reveal their identities or the identity of their master, but their target had been him.

Now, the only person so eager for his death, other than the Emperor, was no one else.

Inside the carriage

"Sister?"

"It's nothing!" Yun Jinnian shook her head slightly.

She was not very afraid of such slaughter.

An enemy out in the open was far less terrifying than one lurking in the shadows.

"As long as sister is alright!" Han Tianci's little face turned pale.

It really was his first time facing such bloodshed.

Even though he was terribly scared, he still busied himself with comforting Yun Jinnian.

Yun Jinnian embraced him from behind, "Don't be afraid, your sister is here. Uncle Zhong and the others will protect you too!"

"Yes, Tianci is not afraid!"

Chu Yu, mounted on his horse, called out firmly, "Let's set out!"

Imperial Palace

The Emperor took a deep breath.

Yet another failure.

"Your Majesty, the Great Zhou Kingdom has sent a secret missive!" Eunuch Hai presented the letter.

The Emperor gestured for him to open it.

Eunuch Hai hurriedly tore open the envelope, unfolded the letter, glanced at it briefly, and then presented it to the Emperor.

The Emperor took it and read carefully before saying, "The Crown Prince of Great Zhou intends to come to the Capital City for treatment and he also seeks a marriage alliance..."

Eunuch Hai hesitated for a moment before asking, "Do you know with whom the Zhou Crown Prince wishes to form a marriage alliance?"

"Great Zhou is sending a Princess over, and the Zhou Crown Prince also wishes for a girl from Tianchu Country..."

The Emperor paused mid-sentence. For some reason, he thought of Yun Jinnian.

The Zhou Crown Prince's health was poor. Coming to the Capital City for treatment inevitably involved Yun Jinnian's intervention. When the request came to him, should he agree or not?

Yun Jinnian was skilled in medicine; her marriage to Great Zhou would be only beneficial, without any harm.

And which Princess should he marry off to the incoming Great Zhou Princess?

Certainly, an ordinary person would do...

He would wait and see what benefits the Zhou Crown Prince offered before making a final decision.

August 13

The Yun Residence was bustling early in the morning, with several capable maids waiting at the door, and Mrs. He was personally welcoming guests at the main entrance. The Old Madam Yun wore her mandate attire, seated in the main hall waiting for guests. Yun Muyou had returned by noon, sitting beside Old Madam Yun and chatting. Xu Xinmo, Yun Musi, and Yun Mulan each had their tasks—attending to the young ladies from various households visiting today.

Yun Zhen was already twenty and had yet to take a wife, which worried Mrs. He greatly. She had considered several families, but none were quite suitable. However, now there seemed to be a suitable match.

Though not the eldest daughter of the Marquis Residence's main line, she was the legitimate eldest daughter from the second room. Her aunt was a Noble Consort in the palace, the Crown Prince was her first cousin, and she had been conferred the title of Princess Yanran. She had come of age, fifteen years old, a beauty with blossoming features; her father was the Assistant Minister of Rites, and although her mother was born a merchant, her dowry was said to be extremely generous.

Today, she was also visiting.

Yun Muyou, having learned of Mrs. He's intentions, naturally welcomed Princess Yanran upon her arrival, accompanied by Yun Musi, Yun Mulan, and Xu Xinmo.

"The Princess has arrived!"

Wang Yanran, seeing Yun Muyou, smiled, "So it's the Marchioness. Yanran greets you!"

Wang Yanran was aware of the Yun Family's intentions. Having seen and taken a liking to Yun Zhen, she willingly showed a pleasant demeanor to Yun Muyou and others, suppressing her pride to leave a good impression. Should her mother inquire, she would readily agree, just waiting for the Yun Family to officially propose.

"Princess, there is no need for such formalities!" Yun Muyou said with a smile, leading Wang Yanran to the back garden.

Chapter 472: Safe Return

As for the others, Yun Muyou really looked down upon them.

Mrs. He and the second Wang madam were chatting cordially, inevitably discussing their children's marriage prospects. Both were interested, quickly understanding each other's intentions, and Mrs. He became increasingly enthusiastic towards the second Wang madam.

Yun Zihan watched, slipped away quietly, and went to see Aunty Cui.

The procession stopped at the entrance of Capital City, and upon seeing Chu Yu, the guards hurriedly stepped forward to salute, "This one greets Your Highness Prince Rui!"

Chu Yu glanced at him indifferently and rode into the city.

After entering the city, they went their separate ways.

Prince Yanjun naturally returned to Prince Yanjun Residence, Yun Jinnian to the Yun Residence, and Chu Yu to Prince Rui Residence. Qian Momma and her group were to escort Yun Jinnian back to Yun Residence first, then return to the palace to report, while Elder Mu and Elder Tu had intended to follow Yun Jinnian back to the Yun Family. Yun Jinnian denied their company, instructing them to go with Han Tianci to the Han Family instead.

Prince Yanjun Residence

The princess had been waiting in the hall early on, with several marquesses sitting to the side, and their wives were so nervous that they hardly dared to breathe, let alone those of the younger generation.

The children were still young, and the princess did not want to frighten them, so she had the nannies take them away.

Princess Yanjun held the Buddha Beads, incessantly twirling and reciting prayers, with Song Momma standing by her side, also with a composed expression.

"Report!"

A voice rang out, and someone rushed in, "Your Highness, Prince Rui and his party have entered the city!"

Princess Yanjun took a deep breath, "How many carriages?"

"More than ten!"

"Go and check again..." the princess started to say but then waved her hand, "Never mind, don't go. I will go to the gate myself and wait!"

"Mother..."

Princess Yanjun's stern gaze silenced the marquesses immediately, and they had no choice but to follow the princess.

To the gate to wait together.

Until two carriages came clattering along, Princess Yanjun tightly grasped Song Momma's hand.

The carriage stopped, and Yuwen Ya alighted, standing by it, waiting for Prince Yanjun to disembark.

Watching him in white, floating down ethereally like a celestial being.

The princess's eyes instantly reddened.

She stumbled forward a few steps, and Prince Yanjun quickly descended from the carriage and ran to Princess Yanjun, kneeling heavily, "Your son pays his respects to you, Mother. I have returned late!"

"Not late, not late, it's good you've come back, it's good you've come back!" Princess Yanjun said, already in tears.

She knelt down and embraced her youngest son, crying profusely.

Prince Yanjun's eyes were also red.

At the end of his journey, it was only his mother, powerful and esteemed, who truly wished for his well-being.

The marchionesses immediately rushed to comfort her.

"Mother, our fifth brother has returned, it is a time for joy. Shall we go inside and talk?"

Upon hearing this, Prince Yanjun also hurriedly comforted her, "Mother, the sun is strong outside, let us talk inside. Your son has many things he wants to discuss with you!"

"Good, good, good, let's go inside and talk at leisure!"

Princess Yanjun allowed Prince Yanjun to help her into the Princess Residence, not heading to the inner yard but sitting directly in the hall.

In a gentle voice, she asked, "Has the poison been cured?"

"All cured, your son is now as healthy as a normal person. Mother, please be at ease!"

"That's good, that's good!" Princess Yanjun said and finally broke into a smile, "Jinnian's merits are indelible, I must reward her handsomely!"

Turning to her eldest son Marquess Zhongyi, "Is the residence you were tasked to prepare ready?"

"Replying to Mother, it has been well-prepared. However, we may need the Emperor's consent for the mountain behind it!" Marquess Zhongyi spoke, pausing slightly.

Chapter 473: Asking for a Favor

Princess Zhen Guo fell into thought for a moment, "I shall speak of this matter myself, after many years, I've not asked the Emperor for anything!"

When the previous Emperor was alive, there was no need for her to ask for anything. He genuinely respected and prioritized his imperial sister in all matters.

As for the current Emperor...

It's best left unsaid.

Princess Zhen Guo shook her head, thinking of her beloved son's return today, healthy and safe, which was a matter of great joy, "Issue a command that all servants in the residence be rewarded with three months' allowance and new clothes made for each one!"

"Grandmother, what about me?" Yuwen Ya asked with a grin.

Princess Zhen Guo smiled, "You too are a great hero, tell me, what would you like?"

"Hehe, Grandmother, then I shall really make a request!"

"I allow you to make a grand request!"

As Princess Zhen Guo finished speaking, everyone burst into laughter.

Yuwen Ya thought for a moment, "Then, may your grandson decide on his own marriage matters?"

Princess Zhen Guo paused.

Considering that Yuwen Ya was not the eldest legitimate son of the main branch, and had significant responsibilities, she laughed, "This I grant you. Even if you were to bring home a beggar, we would accept her. But there is one condition, her family must have a clean background. None from a dubious origin, I won't acknowledge such!"

"A farmer's daughter, a peddler, or a foot soldier would do?"

"Yes, as long as she's not from a place of ill repute, whoever you like is fine!"

Yuwen Ya was overjoyed and hugged Princess Zhen Guo's arm, "Grandmother is the best!"

"Such a grown person, and still acting spoiled!"

The teasing was there, yet so was the barely concealed doting.

All the children were her treasures, despite the levels of affection, they were all dearly loved.

With Prince Yanjun's safe return, the whole family was overjoyed.

The thank-you gift for Yun Jinnian was already prepared, a large residence with five courtyards abutting a mountain, just including that mountain along with the property was enough.

Prince Rui Residence

Princess Jinfeng learned of Chu Yu's return and was also overjoyed, pulling Chu Yu to look at him over and over again, "You've grown taller, and darker, and sturdier!"

"You've had a good look? Off you go now!" Chu Yu said disdainfully, striding toward the main courtyard.

Princess Jinfeng followed behind, "Brother, Jinnian has returned, hasn't he? When can I invite him over to play?"

"Whenever it pleases you!"

"Hehe, then I shall invite her over tomorrow!"

"Not tomorrow, she is tired from the journey. She needs to rest at least until after the Mid-Autumn Festival!"

Princess Jinfeng pouted.

Saying anytime was fine, but even before marrying her, he was already so concerned. Once she was married in...

Yun Residence

Nurse Qian and the others escorted Yun Jinnian to the front gate, watching as Yun Jinnian, along with Hemei, Henuan, and Shi Jiayu, disembarked from the carriage.

The gate-keeping page was momentarily stunned before realizing who it was, "This servant pays respects to Fourth Miss!"

Yun Jinnian nodded slightly.

She took fewer belongings with her when she left, and didn't bring back much either, just three bundles and a medicine chest.

As for valuable items, she had Han Tianci take them back to the Han Family.

After seeing Yun Jinnian enter the gates of the Yun Residence, Nurse Qian and the others drove the carriage back to the palace to report.

Although the mission was deemed successful, Yun Jinnian's disappearance for several months in Nanjiang was still troublesome to report.

Regarding the matters between Yun Jinnian and Chu Yu, Nurse Qian decided to tell the truth.

Such affairs could not be concealed anyway.

Yun Jinnian entered the Yun Residence, and Shi Jiayu couldn't help but exclaim, "It's truly opulent, far superior to any place I've seen before!"

"If you like it, you can stay for a few more days!" Yun Jinnian said indifferently, without any additional emotion.

"Hehe, wherever Miss is, that's where I'll be!" Jiayu said, laughing cheerfully.

No matter how nice it was, she wouldn't want to stay without her Miss. In any case, she was determined to follow her Miss for life.

Chapter 474: Head-to-Head

Yun Jinnian smiled silently, leading Shi Jiayu to Qiyue Academy.

"The Fourth Miss has returned!"

Mrs. Han, hearing this, hurried out to welcome them, and when she saw Yun Jinnian, she smiled through her tears, "Jinnian..."

"Mother, I'm back!" said Yun Jinnian.

She let Mrs. Han embrace her tightly.

"It's good that you're back, it's good that you're back. And Tianci?"

"Tianci went back to the Han Family first!"

"Going back to the Han Family is good. You've had a hard journey, come drink some water and have something to eat at my place first, all right?"

"All right!"

Yun Jinnian willingly agreed.

On this trip back, Yun Jinnian had indeed changed.

The corners of her eyes and brows now lacked desolation and showed more conformity and gentleness, making her already stunning beauty even more exquisite and peerless.

Mrs. Han sent Bai Que to inform the old Madam Yun.

"Though we despise each other, you are the younger generation, and we still ought to inform her of your return. Freshen up before going over to pay your respects. If she doesn't let you go, then it has nothing to do with you!" Mrs. Han explained.

"Yes, Mother, I'll do as you say!"

It didn't matter to her whether she went or not. After everything she had experienced, the old Madam Yun simply did not matter to her anymore.

She could overlook past incidents, but if she were provoked in the future, she would not hold back.

In the garden,

Upon learning of Yun Jinnian's return, old Madam Yun's brow furrowed, her eyes and brows unable to hide her disdain, yet she said, "She must be tired from the journey. Tell her there's no need to come over and pay her respects; let her freshen up and rest well!"

"The old Madam truly is benevolent!"

"Indeed, indeed!"

Old Madam Yun was pleased with the flattery, unaware of the severe mockery and disdain from everyone else.

The ones who knew what kind of person she was just smiled, while those who came today held lower official positions than Yun Qi and Yun Chen. The higher-ups and prestigious families were hardly present, with one exception—the Wang family.

And as for the motives of the Wang family, everyone was well aware, and thus left unspoken.

Upon hearing of Yun Jinnian's return, Yun Qi was overjoyed and hurried to Qiyue Academy. Yun Jinnian was eating, while Hemei, Henuan, and Shi Jiayu had also gone down to eat.

"Jinnian..."

As Yun Qi entered Qiyue Academy, he called out softly but then looked towards Mrs. Han.

It had been over three months since he last saw Mrs. Han. He wanted to visit Qiyue Academy, but Mrs. Han was not willing to see him and did not allow it. Even when he did visit, she never treated him kindly.

Even though his concubines were accomplished in music, chess, calligraphy, painting, and literary arts, capable of adding fragrance to his red sleeves, gradually, he stopped coming.

Today was an excuse to see Yun Jinnian to enter Qiyue Academy.

Mrs. Han, as serene as water like always, now looked at Yun Jinnian with a touch of warmth and kindness.

Yun Jinnian put down her chopsticks, stood up, and curtsied towards Yun Qi, "I've seen Father, congratulations on gaining a unicorn child!"

And all at once, he had gained three.

The concubine Rou had given birth to one, while concubine Lian had given birth to twins; indeed, it was a cause for congratulations.

Yun Qi's smile froze on his face. He staggered back several steps, his smile slowly fading to a pale grimace, "Good, good, you've indeed sided with your mother, heartless and unfeeling, truly starting to hate me!"

"Father worries too much. I do not hate Father!"

Why hate an insignificant person?

Besides, even if she did hate him, it would be justified.

The years of neglect and indifference had made her life worse than death, suffering agonies from heaven to hell—all because of him.

Perhaps, he hated her too. If not for her birth, there wouldn't have been the concubines Su and Hua. So it was a clean slate—neither should harbor hate towards the other, nor bother with one another. Living separately was for the best.

"You say you don't hate me, but I do hate you!" Yun Qi suddenly spoke, his face twisted.

"Yun Qi!" Mrs. Han shouted in rebuke.

Chapter 475: Hysterically Depleted

Filled with resentment, she pulled Yun Jinnian behind her, "Yun Qi, enough is enough. What right do you have to speak of hatred? What reason do you have to speak of hate? You hate Jinnian, but what right do you have?"

Mrs. Han, feeling that her next words should not be heard by Yun Jinnian, turned her head and said, "Jinnian, you go back to Niannian Garden now, and come back for dinner tonight!"

"Mother..." Yun Jinnian whispered softly.

"Go back!" Mrs. Han said, gently stroking Yun Jinnian's hair.

Yun Jinnian nodded, "Then I will go back first!"

After Yun Jinnian left, Mrs. Han watched her depart and walked out of Qiyue Academy before stepping forward and slapping Yun Qi across the face.

"This slap is for being unworthy of being a father!"

As Yun Qi was stunned, Mrs. Han slapped him again.

"This slap is for being unworthy of being a husband!"

Mrs. Han said, then backhanded herself with a slap, "This slap is for my blindness in marrying you!"

While Yun Qi was shocked, tears streamed down Mrs. Han's face, "Yun Qi, if you have any conscience, let your mother and daughter go. A letter of divorce, for you, is but a simple task!"

"Mrs. Han Shuniang, do not even think about it!"

The thought of divorce was out of the question unless he was dead.

Yun Qi bellowed loudly.

In this lifetime, he would absolutely not divorce, preferring to share a grave with Mrs. Han in death.

"..."

Mrs. Han glared at Yun Qi with seething anger, "Just leave, leave right now. Do not ever step foot in Qiyue Academy again, and do not disturb my life!"

Yun Qi looked at Mrs. Han; over the years, he could never stand to see her cry.

Once, he could console her, but now he didn't even have the right to utter a single word.

Gradually turning away, he began to walk outside. After a few steps, Yun Qi suddenly stopped, his back towards Mrs. Han, "Shuniang, it was my fault before, and I admit it. I have tried to change, but you never give me a chance. No matter what I do, you always remember only my past mistakes!"

"Your greatest mistake was to fail as a father, to leave Jinnian alone in this den of wolves. You hate her, but what right do you have to hate her? You should hate the true cause of all this, your very own mother, you coward, afraid to seek out the truth and only daring to hate the innocent Jinnian. What's the use of saying so much now? You might deceive yourself, but you will never fool me. Leave, just leave..."

In the end, Mrs. Han was hysterical, her hand pointing to the door shaking.

She had completely lost all hope in Yun Qi, and was utterly disappointed.

Yun Qi walked away stiffly, step by step.

He shouldn't have come today.

Had he not come, those filthy secrets would have remained hidden.

Were those suspicions actually true?

Yun Jinnian stood outside Qiyue Academy, listening to her parents' quarrel, her beautiful face indifferent, silently gazing at the blue sky and white clouds, her eyes somewhat dry, yet unable to shed a single tear.

Yun Jinnian raised her hand to her eyes and wiped them, dry.

When had she become unable to cry?

These were her parents, who had abandoned her so resolutely. Now, one hated her while the other protected her.

She should be distressed or possibly overjoyed, but she felt no additional thoughts or emotions.

The joy of returning home seemed to fade instantaneously.

She wasn't as carefree as she had been in Nanjiang, nor as spontaneous as she had been in Yangxi City.

When Yun Qi came out, seeing Yun Jinnian still standing outside of Qiyue Academy made him feel somewhat awkward.

He opened his mouth wanting to say something, but couldn't utter a word.

"You hate me, that's just great!"

Yun Jinnian spoke faintly, her voice husky.

It hurt her heart.

Chapter 476: Jinnian's Injury

Is all of this really her fault?

In her previous life until her death, she could count the number of times she saw her parents on one hand. The only thing that made her feel warmth was Tianci, who several times came to the palace to save her, and her maternal grandfather, who occasionally taught her medical skills at the residence of the fifth Prince.

As for her father, Yun Jinnian thought hard and realized that his image was so vague.

"Haha!" Yun Qi sneered.

Yun Jinnian looked at Yun Qi, "I once hoped that one day father would come back, take me away from this hellhole, and build a happy home where our family of three, perhaps with more brothers and sisters in the future..."

"But, that winter was so cold, so bitterly cold, and I was kneeling in the snow, watching father draw nearer. I thought that seeing my pale face, he would rush over without a second thought, pick me up, and hurriedly seek out a doctor. But he just stood there, quietly watching as if looking at someone who had nothing to do with him. That was when I no longer had any expectations of father!"

As Yun Jinnian spoke, her throat felt painfully hoarse.

It was like a thousand-pound boulder was pressing on her chest.

Even breathing became difficult.

She raised her hand to wipe her eyes, which remained dry, unable to shed tears.

"..."

Yun Qi opened his mouth but could not utter a single word.

"You hate me because my birth caused a rift between you and mother, and then Aunt Su and Aunt Hua came along, followed by three illegitimate daughters. You placed all the blame on me. You hate me, and you should!" Yun Jinnian said as she slowly walked forward, "It's better this way, much better!"

This family was in disarray.

Those older did not act their age, and those younger did not follow the rules set for them.

If possible, leaving early would be for the best.

In that moment, she even envied Zihan for escaping this quagmire.

Yun Qi watched Yun Jinnian's retreating back, opened his mouth, but didn't know what to say.

This was his daughter, the one he once held dear above all else.

Today, even he had been bewitched into uttering such words...

He had alienated his wife and daughter, and now there was no chance to mend the relationship!

But he remembered what Mrs. Han had said.

Mrs. Han claimed that all the calamity was brought on by his mother, so...

Furious, Yun Qi stormed into Aunt Su's courtyard, startling her into screaming, "Se, Second Master..."

"Tell me, what exactly happened back then? How did I end up in your bed!" Yun Qi bellowed.

Aunt Su turned pale with fear.

"Se, Second Master, so many years have passed, your servant, your servant..." Aunt Su knew very well.

She couldn't tell him; if she did, Yun Qi would kill her.

"Speak, if you don't today, I will sell Zimo far away, and you'll never see her again for the rest of your life!"

Aunt Su collapsed to the ground, terrified.

Back then, how gentle Yun Qi was, completely obedient to Mrs. Han, loving her so truly, so deeply.

She thought that by switching places, she would be treated the same, so she heeded the old grandmother's advice and set up the drunken ruse to end up in Yun Qi's bed.

She thought it would be the same, only to realize over the years that aside from a daughter, she had gained nothing.

"Speak!"

Yun Qi growled fiercely.

Aunt Su shook her head frantically.

She couldn't speak; to do so would truly mean the end.

If she remained silent, with the old grandmother still there, Yun Qi wouldn't really sell her child.

"I don't know, I don't know, that night you were the one who got drunk, you came into my room, it wasn't me, it wasn't me..." Aunt Su stammered,

Scared out of her wits.

Chapter 477: Yun Qi Gets Tough

"Good, very good, you don't have to speak, no problem, don't say anything, from now on you will stay in this yard, not allowed to take a single step outside, nor are you allowed to see your daughter, daring to secretly meet once, and you will never see her again!"

After Yun Qi finished speaking, he turned around and left Aunt Su's room.

It was only then that Aunt Su began to sob.

She had betrayed her mistress, thinking she had gained everything, but she did not expect to lose it all.

There was no more genuine care.

She could only be an aunt, confined to the back yard, unseen by the sun, unable to leave, no longer the respected Sister Bai Su by the lady's side.

"Wuu wuu..."

Aunt Su cried out in pain.

Even her daughter, she could no longer see.

Surviving on rough tea and simple food, the thought of anything better was out of the question.

"Wuu wuu..."

"Auntie?"

Aunt Su shook her head through her sobs, "It was my fault, all my fault!"

If the lady still had a shred of concern for her, she would dare to speak the truth, but knowing the lady's temperament, she did not dare.

Once spoken, it would truly be a dead end.

Having not obtained what he wanted from Aunt Su, Yun Qi went to Aunt Hua's place, coincidentally as Yun Qingqing and Yun Qingzhi were also there.

Seeing Yun Qi coming, Aunt Hua quickly became overjoyed, "Second Master!"

"Smack!"

A slap, both fierce and precise, struck Aunt Hua's face.

"Ah..." Yun Qingzhi and Yun Qingqing screamed.

They covered their lips tightly, not daring to make a sound.

"Second Master?" Aunt Hua covered her face, tears streaming down as she looked at Yun Qi.

She was like Aunt Su, with Yun Qi, there was only *** delight.

It was also that one night that gave her two daughters.

"Speak, what exactly happened back then, how did I end up sleeping with you!"

Yun Qi asked the question without a care that his two daughters were still by his side.

Yun Qingqing and Yun Qingzhi might have been children, but at twelve years old, they understood something.

"I, I..."

Aunt Hua stammered, not daring to say more.

Yun Qi clenched Aunt Hua's neck, "Speak!"

"I don't know, I don't know!" Aunt Hua struggled to breathe, but she also dared not reveal the truth.

Once spoken, it would truly mean death.

Yun Qi let go of Aunt Hua, "Fine, very fine, all of you claim ignorance, fantastic, starting today, I will show you what ignorance is, what it means to wish for death instead of living!"

Yun Qi released Aunt Hua, and stepping forward, he dragged Yun Qingqing by one hand, and Yun Qingzhi by the other, pulling them out of the room.

"Auntie, save us, Auntie..."

The sisters immediately began to scream.

"Second Master, Second Master...!" Aunt Hua screamed in terror, trying to crawl forward to embrace her two daughters, but catching one meant letting go of the other.

Yun Qi kicked her, sending her tumbling to the ground, dragging the two daughters, crying tears, out of the yard.

"Close the yard gate, henceforth, only allow one meal a day!"

As to what the meal would be, Yun Qi did not care to know, nor would he bother.

"Father, father..."

Yun Qingqing and Yun Qingzhi could only cry in fear, their cries echoing loudly.

Today was supposed to be the old lady's banquet, which they had wanted to attend, but Aunt Hua, claiming to feel unwell, had not allowed them to go, leading to the current situation.

Father had gone mad.

No, not mad, but possessed by demons.

Without a word, Yun Qi dragged his two daughters away quickly.

Aunt Lian, having received the news, rushed over, "Second Master, Second Master..."

Aunt Lian's voice was very gentle, also warm.

"Second Master, please let go, look, you're frightening the Sixth Miss and the Seventh Miss!" said Aunt Lian gently, taking hold of Yun Qi's hand.

Upon hearing her, Yun Qi slowly let go of his grip.

Yun Qingzhi and Yun Qingqing fell to the ground, weeping softly.

Aunt Lian immediately signaled for someone to take the two sisters away before speaking gently, "Second Master, let's go back first. If there's anything amiss, can we discuss it back home?"

Chapter 478: Very Uncomfortable

Yun Qi looked at Aunt Lian.

It wasn't until a long time later that he nodded faintly and followed Aunt Lian.

Falseness was still falseness, no matter how gentle or understanding. None of it compared to the person who, with just a cold look or a stern face, had entered his heart and etched into the marrow of his soul.

She wasn't his Shuniang.

He had been wrong, truly wrong.

Upon arriving at Aunt Lian's courtyard, she asked Yun Qi to sit down and poured him a cup of cool tea.

"Master, please have some cool tea!"

Yun Qi took it and sipped lightly once before setting down the teacup, declining to drink more as he sat up straight.

Aunt Lian watched from the side, instructing the nanny to take the two children away, and sat quietly beside Yun Qi.

The commotion here had reached the garden.

The Old Madame Yun's face turned very ugly. The thought that Yun Jinnian had caused such a scene upon his return just made her hate him even more.

"It's fine, it's fine, the children were just playing. Let's continue, carry on!" said the Old Madame Yun, signaling to Mrs. He, who immediately got up and left.

Inside, she was very upset.

Once back in the backyard, Mrs. He quickly learned everything that had happened.

She didn't know what Yun Qi had said to Mrs. Han, but she inwardly cursed, "Troublemaker!"

Then she turned and went back to the garden.

She didn't tell the Old Madame Yun about what had occurred, merely smiling as she ushered the guests to the dining hall for lunch.

Everyone had actually heard the loud voices, but no one openly commented.

After all, it was the Old Madame Yun's banquet today. Making a scene wouldn't look good.

But after they returned home, they could say whatever they wanted!

Lady Wang's expression was not too pleasant. The Yun Family seemed somewhat chaotic; was it really good for Yanran to marry into it?

But thinking of her daughter's skills and abilities, she smiled faintly again.

Niannian Garden

Mrs. Yuan greeted Yun Jinnian with mixed feelings of joy and sorrow, "Miss, you've finally returned!"

"Nurse!"

Yun Jinnian called softly, allowing the nurse to embrace her. Feeling the nurse's tenderness and excitement, Yun Jinnian's heart gradually settled.

"It's good that you're back, it's good that you're back!" Mrs. Yuan said, carefully looking Yun Jinnian over before suddenly realizing, "Look at how confused I've become. In such hot weather, you mustn't get overheated. Hurry inside; Yaniang has prepared some food for you, including cool jelly!"

Mrs. Yuan babbled on, and Yun Jinnian found it comforting.

Seated on the Arhat bed and watching Mrs. Yuan bustle in and out, warmth slowly filled her eyes.

Hemei came in and whispered something in Yun Jinnian's ear.

It took Yun Jinnian quite a while to respond, "Let them be!"

Her feelings were complex; under the guise of love, they were causing a senseless commotion.

Making a fuss like this could make the Old Madame think all sorts of ill thoughts about her.

Before her return, everything had been peaceful; now that she was back, she had caused such a scene. She feared everyone must have begun to hate her.

She lowered her gaze, just as Mrs. Yuan brought out the cool jelly. Yun Jinnian took it and ate quietly with small bites, her expression calm and still.

Seeing this, Mrs. Yuan felt an immense ache in her heart, yet she didn't know what to say.

After a few bites, Yun Jinnian set the bowl aside.

Mrs. Yuan quickly said, "The hot water is ready; do you want to have a bath, Miss?"

"Yes!"

"Then you should hurry and wash up. I'll have someone bring over some ice. The weather is so hot this year!" Mrs. Yuan rattled on, as though she had to get out all the words she hadn't said in over a year.

Yun Jinnian listened without interrupting, relaxing in the bathtub, letting herself slowly submerge her head under water, holding her breath.

She really should start making plans for herself...

Chapter 479: The Third Sister Visits

Mother had love in her heart for her, yet because she interacted less with others, she actually had a sense of lonely pride.

In truth, today she was sincerely congratulating her father on the joy of having a son.

For a man in his thirties to suddenly have three sons, shouldn't congratulations be in order?

Who knew that this would strike a painful chord with him.

Perhaps, she too was not skilled at interacting with others.

But what exactly happened back then? Why were her parents so deeply avoidant of the subject, and why did no one at home ever mention it?

What about her nanny? Could she know? It seemed it was time to ask the nanny.

Imperial Palace

Nanny Qian methodically recounted everything that had happened on the journey to Nanjiang without daring to omit a single detail, then she waited with bated breath for the Emperor's orders.

The Emperor sat on the Dragon Throne.

He had originally planned to wait for Yun Jinnian's return, clear up the matters in Nanjiang, and then make his move against Nanjiang, but now that Yun Jinnian was entangled with Nanjiang, he found it difficult to take action.

However, seeing the uselessly extreme demeanor of Nanny Qian and others, he was also exceedingly irritated.

"Go receive your punishments!"

"Thank you, Your Majesty, for your grace!"

Nanny Qian and the others knelt down to express their thanks, but their hearts were anything but willing.

They had risked their lives on this journey and returned in constant fear, only to find that punishment still awaited them, which certainly gave rise to feelings of desolation.

Ineffectiveness in their tasks indeed warranted punishment.

But...

It was truly a complicated matter; as Nanny Qian and the others withdrew, resentment took root in their hearts, and their once sworn loyalty diminished.

The Emperor sat on the Dragon Throne, very much enjoying the sensation of being high above all, holding everything within his grasp, deciding who would live and who would die, and who would be raised to enjoy wealth and honor.

His face, rather handsome under other circumstances, now bore a trace of ferocity.

For more than a year, he dared not touch a woman, especially after having sworn off indulging in such pleasures.

And Yun Jinnian was likely seeking an antidote in name only, but in the dark, she was probably doing it for Chu Yu and Prince Yanjun.

"Very well, so be it; do not blame me for being heartless and unjust!"

Eunuch Hai stood to the side, silent.

He waited until the Emperor calmed down before speaking softly, "Your Majesty, when will you summon the Fourth Miss Yun into the palace?"

"We have waited so many days, what are one or two more? Let her rest for a few days, we will talk after the Mid-Autumn Festival!"

"Yes!"

Although he said this, the Emperor felt dissatisfied at heart, particularly when he thought of the graceful concubine with her entrancing figure, his thoughts involuntarily overlaying her face with that of Yun Jinnian...

The lecherous expression on his face caused Eunuch Hai to frown slightly.

Perhaps, he should send a message to his master as a warning to be wary of the Emperor!

Yun Residence

After bathing, Yun Jinnian sat by the window with a book, looking through it absentmindedly, when she overheard a soft voice outside, "Second Aunt has arrived!"

Women who were married off would be referred to as 'Aunt' upon returning to their maternal homes.

This Second Aunt was Yun Zihan.

Yun Zihan entered the courtyard with a smile, "Where is your Miss?"

"Miss Four is reading!" Hemei said, leading Yun Zihan into the parlor.

Yun Zihan looked towards the study and indeed saw Yun Jinnian daydreaming.

With tearful eyes and a smile, she asked, "What book is Fourth Sister so engrossed in reading?"

Yun Jinnian, hearing her voice, came back to her senses and looked at Yun Zihan with a gentle smile, noticing her rosy complexion, delicate lavender-gold long gown swaying elegantly, lips red and teeth white, her face as beautiful as a lotus, skin soft and fair, with two glittering hairpins on her sleek black hair.

Truly a striking beauty, just looking at her brought joy.

"It's been over a year, is Second Sister well?" Yun Jinnian rose to her feet and walked toward Yun Zihan.

"Thanks to Fourth Sister's blessings, I am doing exceedingly well!" Yun Zihan spoke, grasping Yun Jinnian's hand, which was cold as ice.

In astonishment, she said, "Heavens, on such a hot day, why are Fourth Sister's hands still so chillingly cold?"

Chapter 480: Self-righteous

"It has been this way since early on, it's nothing to worry about!" Yun Jinnian said, leading Yun Zihan to sit down on the Arhat bed.

"Seeing Second Sister living well, I can rest assured!"

"Listen to you, I don't even know how to thank you!" Yun Zihan remarked, unable to suppress a sigh.

"If Second Sister could live a good life, flourishing and harmonious with your husband, that would be the best thanks to me!"

"That's easy to say, but Jinnian, in my heart..." Yun Zihan shook her head, "I'm not good with words, but today I have only one thing to say, if you ever need anything, just command, and your sister-in-law and I will do our utmost to help you!"

"Thank you, Second Sister, I will!"

Yun Jinnian only verbally agreed, but in reality, she wouldn't let Yun Zihan do anything.

"Remember this, your sister-in-law and I are serious. Later on, when your brother-in-law comes to pick me up, you should meet him. And when you're not busy, I'll come to take you to stay at our place for a few days, alright?"

"Alright!"

"Then it's settled!"

The sisters then changed the subject, avoiding sharing any worries. Yun Jinnian was not talkative, but after Yun Zihan got married she became chattier, and Yun Jinnian mainly listened.

Shi Jiayu brought in some tea, and Yun Jinnian pushed the teacup in front of Yun Zihan. Yun Zihan took a sip and said, "This tea is really good!"

"I'll have someone send some over another day!"

Yun Zihan wanted to decline, but thinking of how Liao Shijie enjoyed tea and often entertained classmates and friends, using this tea for hospitality would grant great face, "Then I'll thank you in advance, Fourth Sister!"

Yun Jinnian smiled.

This tea was brought from Nanjiang, with its crushed leaves being Snow Lotus and finely flowered with Snow Lotus. In all, only ten jin were brought back, but not to the Yun Family — instead, it was directly sent to the Han Residence.

The Yun Family did not treat her as one of their own, and she would not consider it her home either.

While they were talking, a piercing laugh was heard from outside, "So it turns out Second Sister came earlier. No wonder I couldn't find you anywhere!"

Yun Muyou said, entering with Yun Musi and Yun Mulan, followed by Xu Xinmo, who was laughing in a very fake manner.

Yun Jinnian was sick of these kinds of family members, yet she had to stand up and greet them.

"Fourth Sister need not be so formal. Although I am now a marchioness, you and I are still sisters. There's no need for you to be so courteous, haha!" Yun Muyou said, proudly puffing out her chest.

Yun Jinnian didn't bother to say much, merely replying coolly, "Congratulations, Eldest Sister!"

"..."

Yun Muyou was somewhat baffled by Yun Jinnian's calm demeanor.

She wanted Yun Jinnian to be envious, mad with jealousy.

"Haha, I'll invite you to visit the Marquis Residence another day!"

"We'll see!" Yun Jinnian declined indifferently, not intending to visit the Marquess Yuanshen's residence.

In her previous life, she did not know whom Yun Muyou had married or what had happened afterward.

Yun Jinnian couldn't help but reflect on how oblivious she had been.

This time, she could not be so clueless; she needed to understand the goings-on in the Capital City, and the entangled relationships. Otherwise, she might unwittingly offend someone, which could bring unwarranted disasters. That would not be good.

"Let's not talk about that. When the time comes, Second Sister can also join us. I'll invite a few young ladies over, and we can chat. It'll be nice. By the way, Fourth Sister, where have you been this past year? No news at all. There has been some unsavory gossip in the Capital City, saying you eloped with someone, and even..., don't take it to heart, you know I believe in you!"