

Indulgence 541

Chapter 541: Caring Leads to Chaos

Mrs. Han thought of this and suddenly asked Bai Que, "Bai Que, what do you think of the Third Young Master Dai?"

Though in matters of marriage, one is to follow the orders of their parents and the words of the matchmaker, she couldn't comply.

She had to ask for Jinnian's opinion.

Bai Que thought carefully, "The Third Young Master, I have only seen him a few times, and haven't spoken to him. He seems refined and gentle, and looks to be decent!"

But as for the actual situation, Bai Que felt that one still needed to inquire carefully.

"He does look quite good indeed, mainly because the Marchioness mentioned him a few times today with some intention, I can't help but think about it!" Mrs. Han said, her gaze somewhat drifting.

In the blink of an eye, her daughter was already thirteen.

A young lady now.

But in her memory, she was still that four or five-year-old girl.

Mrs. Han took a deep breath and closed her eyes.

"My lady, we should still ask for the young miss's opinion on this matter!" Bai Que advised.

Originally, there wasn't much affection between mother and daughter, and if things were pushed too far, it could easily hurt both parties.

"Hmm, there's no hurry for now!"

She's only fourteen now, and it will be another two years before she comes of age. There's no issue discussing marriage after reaching adulthood.

Of course, if Third Young Master Dai really is a good match, they could also set the engagement now and hold the wedding after Jinnian comes of age.

They could even marry first and wait until she comes of age for the nuptial chamber.

Mrs. Han still did not approve of breaking one's body too early or conceiving children at a young age.

It was too damaging to one's health.

Feng Wushuang returned home and locked herself in the study.

She took out a scroll from a large vase, unrolled it, and hung it up on a rack. The woman in the painting stood delicately, dressed in pink, with a fine face, a faint smile, and clear, cold eyes devoid of emotion.

Feng Wushuang reached out and gently touched her face.

"How I wish I could wipe away that severe coldness from you and paint a touch of warmth, making your smile truer and more profound!"

As she spoke, Feng Wushuang's heart was filled with bitterness.

She had thought she would meet her today, but unexpectedly, she didn't even see her at all.

"Fourth Miss, would you give me a chance?"

Love is unknowable in its beginning and deep in its continuity.

But the lady in the painting still smiled faintly and shallowly, never responding...

Chu Yu's return brought some activity to the once quiet Capital City; those with hidden thoughts became more active as well.

Mrs. Han returned to Yun Residence and went straight to Niannian Garden. After learning that Yun Jinnian had gone to bed, she asked Mrs. Yuan some questions and then went back to Qingjue Academy.

Qingjue, to cut off affections.

Perhaps this was for the best!

When the Emperor learned that Yun Jinnian hadn't entered the palace because she had gone to Auspicious Water, he remained silent for a moment and did not blame her.

It's important to pay extra attention to matters of continuing the family lineage in a woman's role.

Yun Jinnian missed the Mid-Autumn Festival dinner at Yun Residence, which Mrs. Han attended. The residence also sent over some plain mooncakes, but Yun Jinnian didn't eat any and let Mrs. Yuan hand them out. Mrs. Yuan then ordered Hemei to discreetly take them out of the residence and distribute them to the little beggars.

Along with some steamed buns.

Mrs. Yuan herself did not like eating things from Yun Residence and was already thinking about moving out with Yun Jinnian as soon as possible.

Yun Jinnian's visit to Auspicious Water, originally a trivial matter, unexpectedly led to the Zhuangyong Marquis Residence, the Princess Residence, Duan Residence, and Chen Residence all sending over a considerable amount of medicinal herbs.

Mrs. He felt distressed looking at them, but her face did not show it.

She also sent some medicinal herbs to Niannian Garden as a gesture, through Tianmi.

"Nanny, please thank my aunt for me!" Yun Jinnian didn't see Tianmi, just spoke faintly and went back to sleep.

Mrs. Yuan acknowledged and saw Tianmi out of Niannian Garden.

The first menstrual cycle usually cleared up in four or five days, but it had been seven days and Yun Jinnian still wasn't clean.

This frightened her nanny terribly.

Chapter 542: Mother-Daughter Affection

Mrs. Han was hastily summoned, "Madam, given the young miss's condition, we should call an Imperial Physician who specializes in women's diseases."

Mrs. Han hesitated for a moment, originally intending to ask Han Xuzi, but in such a situation...

"Fine, I will go to the Han Family and let father find a way!"

Mrs. Yuan originally wanted to suggest that requesting with the second master's visiting card could also bring a physician.

But since Mrs. Han did not use it, she could say nothing.

Mrs. Han left Niannian Garden and went back to the Han Family, where she relayed Yun Jinnian's situation to Han Xuzi.

After a moment of silence, Han Xuzi finally said, "Inviting the Imperial Physician is fine. Nowadays, Imperial Physician Zhang specializes in this area, and I have some affectionate ties with him. I will write a request now. You go back first!"

That day, when Yun Qi came to pick up Mrs. Shu, he could already sense the change in Yun Qi.

He did not want Mrs. Shu to feel awkward in the Yun Family, nor did he want Jinnian to get hurt again.

"Mm, then father, I will take my leave first!"

Mrs. Han said, standing up to leave.

Her complexion was somewhat poor.

She knew what her father was worried about, yet she could not speak more.

She was, after all, an unfilial daughter.

Upon returning to Yun Residence and learning that Yun Muyou had returned, Mrs. Han did not say much and headed towards Niannian Garden.

"This servant pays respects to the madam!" Ru Yue greeted Mrs. Han with a respectful curtsy.

Mrs. Han nodded slightly, "Hmm, is the young miss any better?"

"Yes, she is awake now, madam, please!" Ru Yue invited Mrs. Han into the house.

In the room were Shi Jiayu, Hemei, Henuan, and also Mrs. Yuan; she could not get too close.

It provoked disdain.

Though the world is vast, in this Niannian Garden, she found peace and joy.

With less work and fewer disputes, the monthly allowance was sufficient, with plenty of clothing for all seasons and good food.

She was unwilling to leave.

Mrs. Han walked towards the house and saw Yun Jinnian coming out, weakly calling "Mother!"

"Why are you up, is your body feeling better?"

"Can't really say if it's better or not, the same as the previous days," said Yun Jinnian, stepping forward to grasp Mrs. Han's hand, "Mother, please, come sit inside!"

"Alright!"

Mother and daughter sat down.

Shi Jiayu brought in tea, Mrs. Han drank tea while Yun Jinnian had sweet soup.

It was warm,

Yun Jinnian took a sip.

"Mother, have you been to grandfather's house?"

"Yes, your grandfather has already written a request for Imperial Physician Zhang. He will come to examine you within the next few days!

A doctor cannot heal themselves.

Yun Jinnian understood.

She was reluctant but appreciated Mrs. Han's painstaking effort and nodded slightly, "Alright!"

They had a conversation.

"Mother, how is Tianci?"

In these days without seeing Tianci, Yun Jinnian missed him terribly.

Regrettably, Tianci did not come to visit her.

"He seems to have been practicing maritime arts strenuously these past few days, I went several times but missed him!"

Mrs. Han missed him too.

But there was no way if she couldn't see him.

Thinking of Law Master, Yun Jinnian acknowledged his strictness and silently nodded.

"Mother..."

"Hmm?"

Yun Jinnian hesitated a moment before saying, "I would like to buy a residence outside!"

Mrs. Han, puzzled, asked, "How big of one do you want to buy? I can provide you with silver!"

"I have silver. I haven't decided how big yet; I'll have to see what catches my eye!"

If she comes across something she likes, it doesn't matter if it's big or small.

If she encounters something she doesn't like, size is irrelevant.

"Alright, when the time comes I'll accompany you to take a look!"

"Okay!"

Mother and daughter talked, and once they stopped, a certain silence followed.

Yun Jinnian wanted to talk more with Mrs. Han but didn't know what to say.

She didn't know what her mother liked or disliked.

Just as her mother didn't know what she liked or disliked.

But it never hindered the respect and admiration she felt for her mother, and her mother's genuine love for her.

Chapter 543: Unfavorable to Offspring

"Mother, let's go shopping in a few days, I want to see what new accessories the Capital City has recently!"

"Sure, we will also stop by Xufuji to buy some pastries. I heard Xufuji has come up with several tasty new cakes!"

Yun Jinnian wasn't very fond of pastries, accessories, or dresses, nor was she particularly interested, but seeing Mrs. Han happy, she was willing to accompany her.

They then spoke about embroidery patterns.

"How about I draw a couple of designs for Mother?"

"Sure, you draw them, and I'll do the embroidery!"

Feeling a rare surge of enthusiasm, Yun Jinnian quickly said, "Mother, wait for me just a moment. I will go and soon be back to draw for you!"

"Alright!"

Mrs. Han was in an excellent mood.

She watched Yun Jinnian go to the lavatory with tenderness, then stood up to lay out the paper, grind the inkstick, and mix the colors.

Mrs. Han possessed artistic talent and, feeling inspired, she took the initiative to paint a picture of proud snow and cold plum blossoms herself.

By the time Yun Jinnian came out, she did not disturb her mother but quietly stood aside and watched.

The mother and daughter rarely shared such a refined pastime.

They painted one picture after another.

The next day, Imperial Physician Zhang came to take Yun Jinnian's pulse, his brows knitted tightly.

"Imperial Physician Zhang, how is it?" Mrs. Han asked anxiously.

"Miss Fourth has suffered greatly in her early years, and although she has carefully recuperated these past years, a damaged body is a damaged body. Since this is the first time, it has taken longer. I will prescribe a few doses of medicine for Miss Fourth to take, and then I shall come back for a follow-up consultation next time," Imperial Physician Zhang spoke kindly.

However, there were things he did not say.

Yun Jinnian's body was burdened with an excessive chill, which seemed adverse for bearing offspring.

Mrs. Han nodded quickly, "Thank you, Imperial Physician Zhang!"

"Hmm!"

After writing the prescription, Imperial Physician Zhang left.

Having returned to the Zhang Residence, he then went to report back to the court.

"Adverse for offspring?" the Emperor uttered in astonishment.

"Your Majesty, Miss Fourth of the Yun family has a serious chill in her body, which indeed is adverse for bearing offspring," Imperial Physician Zhang confirmed.

"Is there a remedy?" the Emperor asked somberly.

"This humble servant is incapable," replied Imperial Physician Zhang as he knelt down.

The Emperor thought for a moment, then smiled, "Enough, you may leave. In the future, report to Us truthfully about matters concerning Miss Fourth!"

"Yes!"

The Emperor gestured for Imperial Physician Zhang to leave.

"Summon someone!"

"Your Majesty?" called Eunuch Hai softly.

"I hear that Uncle Wang is celebrating the full month of his eldest grandson today. I shall also go to enjoy a cup of joyous wine!" said the Emperor.

Upon hearing this, Eunuch Hai's eyes slightly narrowed, and he promptly responded, "Yes!"

Since the Emperor was leaving the palace, a few Hidden Guards would inevitably have to accompany him.

The entourage set out merrily from the palace toward the Wang Residence.

Today was the eldest grandson's full moon celebration at the Wang Residence, and being the legitimate eldest grandson meant many came to offer their congratulations, including Chu Yu, Chu Zhaowei, and Chu Renzhi.

The three of them exchanged looks and smiled mischievously.

They rallied a group of dandies to drink, issue drinking orders, and made merry without end.

"His Majesty has arrived!"

The crowd was startled but also envious of the Wang Residence's favored position with the Emperor.

To think the Emperor had actually come for the full moon celebration.

Prince Wang led the way in wanting to kneel and pay his respects, but the Emperor quickly helped him up, "Uncle Wang, no need for formalities today. I come as your junior!" He then smiled at everyone, "There is no need for formalities from anyone, today the star is Uncle Wang's little nephew!"

"Thank you, Your Majesty!"

The Emperor was very pleased with everyone's deference and his gaze softened.

The Princess holding the baby approached, "Your Majesty, a thousand blessings!"

"Princess, no need for formalities. This must be the little nephew, right?" said the Emperor as he stepped forward and gently tapped the child's fair and tender cheek, which was truly adorable. He then took out the prepared jade pendant from his bosom, "Here, this is for you from your Imperial Uncle. Grow up healthy and safe, and in the future make your mark and achieve great things!"

Chapter 544: The Emperor's Thoughts

The Emperor's first gift was an exquisite piece of Blood Jade.

Although valuable, what people envied the most was the Emperor's deep favor.

With the Emperor's deep favor, what treasures couldn't one acquire?

"This concubine thanks His Majesty on behalf of the children for the reward!" The Princess Consort of the Loyal Prince laughed heartily.

She felt extremely proud inside.

Now her grandson had won the Emperor's favor, and his future was bound to be bright.

Heh heh!

The Princess Consort of the Loyal Prince wanted to laugh out loud, to laugh wildly even.

Her regard for Mrs. Dai, who had given birth to the eldest grandson, grew even more.

Although Mrs. Dai had also given birth to a daughter, the one presented had to be the legitimate eldest grandson.

"I heard there is also a little niece?"

"Replying to His Majesty, they are boy and girl twins, this is the brother, the sister is not well, so she wasn't brought out!" said the Princess Consort of the Loyal Prince, beaming with joy.

The main concern was fear that the child would be hurt if disturbed.

"No matter!" the Emperor said, and drew out a jade pendant, "Aunt Wang, give this jade pendant to the niece on my behalf!"

A daughter, whether presented or not, didn't really matter.

In the case of twins, it's normal for the brother to be strong and the sister to be weak.

"Thank you, Your Majesty!"

The Emperor smiled and was then greeted by the Loyal Prince to the outer court. He scanned around and did not see Chu Yu, his brows slightly furrowing before he asked, "I heard the nineteenth brother also came?"

Chu Yu ranks nineteenth, and now there are few who call him by that number.

The late Emperor's favorite was little nineteen; calling him the beloved nineteen made many feel hesitant.

"He's here, must have gone to play!" said the Loyal Prince, unable to suppress a chuckle.

A bunch of spoilt nobles can be quite a headache when they cause a ruckus, especially since each one comes from a powerful family, and one can't easily offend them.

Even the Emperor himself must hesitate multiple times before taking them to task.

"Nineteenth brother seems to be the same as always!"

Upon hearing this, the Loyal Prince thought the statement required consideration.

If there were no changes, then on returning from Nanjiang this time, the poison in his body had been resolved, and he looked much healthier.

Although he still mixed with a bunch of rakes, which one of these rakes did not come from a family with complicated and extensive connections?

Not to mention the two sons, Prince Cheng and Prince Kang.

He always felt that these people together could stir up major trouble.

But today was not the day to say it, who knows if someone was hiding behind and eavesdropping, he chuckled and said, "Little nineteen is still young, it will be better after he gets married in a couple of years!"

The Emperor's smile briefly stiffened, a faint glint flashing in his eyes.

Without changing his expression, he said, "Yes, as his elder brother, I wanted to choose a good marital match for him. But father left an Imperial Decree, allowing him to decide for himself, to see which girl he takes a liking to, and I will grant the marriage!"

Everywhere guarding against him, everywhere looking out for Chu Yu and Jinfeng.

For a father to be this biased was indeed unprecedented and unmatched.

"..."

The Loyal Prince fell silent.

The late Emperor's extreme favoritism towards Chu Yu was well known.

If it hadn't been for the other Princes being older and Chu Yu only being seven or eight, unable to secure the throne firmly, the late Emperor might have passed the throne to Chu Yu.

With the current Emperor's ascension, it was merely about seniority.

There was no Imperial Decree or the like.

He had heard that the Princess Jinfeng held several last wills, but what exactly was contained within them, no one knew.

For the Emperor, the wills in Princess Jinfeng's hands were like thorns, but with Princess Jinfeng still alive, the Emperor did not dare to act openly.

Success was fine, but failure meant the throne might not be secure.

"Uncle Wang!" the Emperor called softly, his voice somewhat vague.

The Loyal Prince, taken aback, quickly responded, "Your servant is here!"

"Do you think being an Emperor to the extent that I have is quite suffocating?"

Chapter 545: Show Off

Prince Jinnian remained silent.

How should he start this conversation, and how should he respond?

"Your Majesty, no matter what happened in the past, it has all dissipated like fleeting clouds. Now you are the Emperor, the ruler of this world, and no one can surpass you," Prince Jinnian said gravely.

He never understood why the Emperor always felt insecure.

Why the insecurity?

This was something that Prince Jinnian couldn't fathom.

"Uncle, what you said is indeed sensible!"

He was already the Emperor. As long as the events of the past weren't brought to light, anyone who caused trouble would be rebelling.

He didn't really need to unsettle himself.

"Your Majesty, I recently acquired several fine pieces of jade, which were carved into a set of tables and stools and placed in the garden. Would you like to take a look?"

"Let's take a look!"

Prince Jinnian was delighted inside and led the Emperor to the garden.

From afar, the laughter of young girls could be heard. Prince Jinnian was slightly taken aback.

"I didn't expect someone to beat us there, Your Majesty..."

"Let's take a look!"

He had been abstaining for over a year, and he had long lost interest in his former concubines, always feeling that it was because of their uncleanliness that he had been poisoned.

Now that Yun Jinnian had returned, and Chu Yu's poisoning had been cured, he himself would soon be rid of the poison too. It was about time the harem saw some new faces.

Prince Jinnian naturally understood the Emperor's thoughts and did not expose them, but nodded his head and led the Emperor over.

The scenery of Prince Jinnian's residence was quite pleasant, but the Emperor's mind was not on the scenery at the moment.

Listening to those sweet, charming laughs, the Emperor felt a heat stirring within him.

He took a deep breath to calm himself down, as he could not afford to make a fool of himself.

In the garden.

Prince Jinnian's eldest daughter, Chu Lilan, was teasing a coquettish and seductive girl while laughing merrily, addressing her affectionately as cousin.

Chu Lilan, who was sixteen this year, was the legitimate eldest daughter of the Prince Jinnian's residence. Although her mother was a stepmother, she was listed in the royal pedigree as the main wife and had been conferred the title of Commandery Princess, so she had reason to be proud.

The girl being teased didn't seem annoyed, her smile radiating alluring beauty. As she turned her head, she caught sight of Prince Jinnian and the Emperor, who was dressed in exquisite clothes and had an extraordinary aura.

Although she had never seen the Emperor before, she had seen his portrait.

She also knew her mission and purpose.

Blushing shyly, she quickly lowered her head.

Yet in her heart, she wondered if everything about her was proper today. She knew the Prince's wife wanted to use her, but she was also using the Prince's wife.

As long as she got everything she wanted, she had nothing to fear from the Prince's wife.

"Cousin Le Xun, what's wrong?" Chu Lilan called out sweetly.

She knew of Le Xun's background and also what lay ahead for her. Although she was a Commandery Princess, eventually she would have to marry someone, while Le Xun would enter the palace. If she gained favor, now there were already two Noble Consorts, and the four Princess Consort positions were well occupied, yet there was still a position for the Noble Consort.

Le Xun, with her coquettish charm, was so enticing that even she, as a woman, wanted to pinch her. Not to mention how men would react on seeing her.

This was why her mother had brought the girl into the Wang Residence yet kept her hidden, not allowing her brothers or father to see her.

Such a woman, if she were to become part of the inner court of the Wang Residence, could cause trouble. But if she were to serve the Emperor in the palace, that would be excellent.

"It's nothing!" Le Xun spoke in a soft voice.

Her sultry voice caused a tantalizing tingle to run down the spine.

The two men, Prince Jinnian and the Emperor, felt this even more acutely.

Prince Jinnian, too, had several young concubines and numerous illegitimate children, but never had someone's mere voice made him feel this way.

He couldn't help but take a closer look at Le Xun.

Just one glimpse of her profile was enough to arouse overwhelming desires, a strong urge to pin her down on a large bed, doing as he pleased, listening to her softly moan "Prince."

Lightly, forcefully, "I like it," she would say.

Chapter 546: Pondering and Observing

But this time, bringing the Emperor here meant that this woman would have no chance with him.

Yet...

In his mind, Prince Zhuangyong thought wickedly, it's true that she must be sent to the Imperial Palace, but she won't go for a few days, during which time he could have a taste!

The Emperor naturally saw her as well.

Among the group of young ladies, she was the most outstanding, wearing a lake blue off-shoulder long dress, appearing ethereal like a fairy. That fleeting glance, seductive as silk, and considering her figure, with a full chest, slim waist, and curved hips, one look was enough to make one's heart race with the urge to possess her immediately.

Thinking about the feeling of her long legs wrapped around his waist...

The Emperor coughed twice, suppressing the desire in his heart.

"Your servants pay respects to Your Majesty and have seen our (father) Prince!"

The Emperor waved his hand grandly, "All rise, to speak the truth, it is I who have disturbed your refined pleasures!"

Although a bit older, he was still in his prime of life. In his forties, he remained handsome and graceful. His clothes, embroidered with subtle dragon patterns, revealed his supreme status and position.

He had a tall and stately figure, showing no sign of age.

This made the young ladies sneak peeks at him, blushing and lowering their heads, saying, "We dare not!"

As they got up, Le Xun's thoughts shifted slightly. "Oh dear!" she cried out softly as she leaned to one side.

She was prepared to fall to the ground but was caught by a pair of strong hands supporting her arm and waist.

Blushing, she looked up and said, "Thank You!"

Utterly bashful.

"Are you alright?" the Emperor asked, his tone warm and concerned.

The skin beneath his hands was soft – a sensation he had never felt before.

"I'm fine, thank You, Your Majesty!" Le Xun said, hastily standing up, but she found she wasn't very steady on her feet.

The Emperor was somewhat reluctant to let go, but under the watchful eyes of everyone, it wouldn't be appropriate to be too bold.

Chu Lilan immediately stepped forward to support Le Xun, "Cousin, are you alright?"

Others might not know, but she clearly saw that Le Xun had purposely fallen.

Such deep scheming.

"I'm fine, thanks to you, cousin!"

"You're welcome!"

The two of them indeed seemed like sisters with a deep affection for one another.

After saying a few more words, the Emperor took a look at Le Xun before he left, a look whose meaning was self-evident.

Therefore, after the Emperor departed, he became even more cordial toward Le Xun.

Dai Hanmi and Chen Danyan stood to one side, exchanging glances without saying much.

Dai Hanmi was related to Prince Zhuangyong's wife's distant family, and her mother's side was the main branch of the Zhuangyong Marquis Residence. Before the hottest days of summer, her mother stayed home to take care of her grandmother and second sister-in-law, while her elder sister-in-law had brought her here.

"Le Xun may be beautiful, but she exudes an aura of seductiveness that doesn't seem like it comes from a respectable person," Chen Danyan spoke softly.

Such a woman would only be welcomed by lechers into their homes, while families who value propriety would never consider accepting her, let alone marrying her.

Hearing this, Dai Hanmi took another look at Le Xun.

She held Chen Danyan's hand and said, "Why bother with these concerns? No matter what her future holds, it has nothing to do with us!"

As Dai Hanmi spoke, though, she couldn't help but worry about the Empress.

But then, considering the Empress's character, she was unlikely to pay attention to such a bewitching creature.

Gradually, she felt reassured.

Chen Danyan nodded, gripping Dai Hanmi's hand tightly.

Suddenly, she thought of Yun Jinnian, the woman of peerless beauty and unassailable dignity.

And Le Xun, in contrast, appeared as someone who could be easily played with, lowly and cheap.

One was exalted, the other lowly as dust – they were incomparable.

Chen Danyan chuckled to herself, cursing for thinking too much.

"What are you thinking?"

Chen Danyan shook her head; this was not the time to speak of such things.

Dai Hanmi did not press further.

Watching Le Xun being surrounded by everyone, she was curious to see what fortune this woman could encounter, and as for the Emperor...

Dai Hanmi thought of her aunt, the Empress in the Imperial Palace, and felt it was necessary to investigate this Le Xun.

A distant relative of Prince Zhuangyong's wife? She didn't believe it.

Just looking at this woman, she did not appear to come from a decent place...

Chapter 547: Good Fortune Knocks at the Door

She always seemed to carry an air of seductiveness and vulgarity, completely different from the ladies of the upper class.

Even the innocent young girls of modest families couldn't compare.

But she indeed had an attractive appearance, and a figure that was second to none, no wonder the Emperor took a fancy to her.

Dai Hanmi felt she shouldn't dwell on it, but at this moment, she believed the Emperor was unworthy of her aunt, who was peerlessly cultured and sophisticated.

"Mimi?" Chen Danyan called out softly.

Dai Hanmi smiled, "It's nothing. Sister Ruan is coming today as well. Let's go find her, it's been a few days. Why don't we gather at Huiquan Tower another day and invite Sister Jinnian!"

"Yes!"

Both of them remembered that Yun Jinnian had not yet recovered from her childbirth in Auspicious Water and couldn't help worrying.

But it was not appropriate to visit rashly.

If Yun Jinnian's mother was in charge, their visit wouldn't matter, but now that Mrs. He was in control, they didn't want to deal with her.

They disdained Mrs. He's innate mercenary instincts and her cruel and unreasonable nature.

When they went to find Ruan Wanrong, they unexpectedly encountered the Countess Xuanping.

The Countess Xuanping pulled them aside and whispered, "Lingling has sent word back that she's five months pregnant!"

Dai Hanmi gasped in surprise and then burst into joy, "Really? That's wonderful! Countess, when I go back, I'll make some baby clothes and prepare some nourishing gifts. Can I send them with you to Sister Hu?"

"I will do the same!" Chen Danyan eagerly added.

Seeing the girls' delight, the Countess Xuanping felt even more affection for them.

After all, they were her daughter's close friends and with her daughter's eventual return to Capital City, she would undoubtedly need their support.

"That would be wonderful. I'll thank you on Lingling's behalf."

"No trouble at all, no trouble at all, it's the least we can do!"

They waved their hands dismissively, feeling happy for Hu Shuiling, yet concerned for Ruan Wanrong.

Ruan Wanrong had been married months earlier than Hu Shuiling, and now Hu Shuiling was already pregnant...

Fortunately, Yun Jinnian had returned, and everything would pass; this thought comforted them somewhat.

The Countess Xuanping had several sons but only one daughter, Hu Shuiling. Although Count Xuanping had other daughters, they were not born to her, so genuine affection was unlikely. Keeping up appearances sufficed—bringing them out for social events like today's banquet, seeking a somewhat decent match, providing a respectable dowry was enough.

For affection, she probably cared less for them than she did for Dai Hanmi, Ruan Wanrong, and Chen Danyan. For her, their feeling was deeper and more genuine.

The three of them chatted on the side about what gifts to send, Dai Hanmi even spoke of first-month and full-month celebrations, as well as the first birthday.

"If only we could take a trip to Su Hang!" Dai Hanmi sighed.

This separation had lasted over a year. In earlier years, a simple note could bring a meeting, but now, who knows when that might be...

Upon hearing this, the Countess Xuanping's eyes immediately reddened.

Although her sons were married and she had grandchildren, none of them could compare to her dearly beloved daughter.

Dai Hanmi quickly said, "Countess, perhaps once Sister Hu gives birth and the child gets a bit older, Brother-in-law will bring her to Capital City for the examinations!"

Upon hearing this, the Countess Xuanping smiled again, "Yes, that's exactly what Lingling said in her letter. Once she gives birth next year and the baby is three or four months old, they will come to Capital City. By then, it will probably be around this time of year. They can familiarize themselves with Capital City, and by the next year, there will be the major examination. When the time comes, you must all keep her company!"

Chapter 548: Reluctant Heart

"Oh, oh, I love children the most!" Dai Hanmi said with a giggling smile.

This made the Countess Xuanping very happy.

When Ruan Wanrong arrived, seeing the three of them so cheerful, she first paid her respects to the Countess Xuanping before asking, "What are you discussing that has made you all so joyful? Tell me, I want to hear as well!"

"It's a letter from Sister Hu, she's pregnant!" Dai Hanmi said, carefully observing Ruan Wanrong's expression.

Ruan Wanrong's face stiffened upon hearing this, but she quickly smiled and said, "That is wonderful news indeed. Marchioness, whenever you send gifts to Sister Hu, remember to let me know. I'd like to prepare something for her as well!"

"Sure, sure!"

The four of them talked happily among themselves, inevitably bringing up Yun Jinnian.

All they knew was that Yun Jinnian could never cleanse himself of the Auspicious Water stigma, and not much else, so they didn't gossip further.

Yun Muyou, now the Marchioness, attended such a formal and grand banquet for the first time. She felt both excited and somewhat nervous, looking around in all directions. She tried to strike up conversations several times, but the others were polite yet distant, showing reluctance to become friendly with her.

This made her feel very embarrassed, but she dared not make a scene.

Seeing Dai Hanmi and the others, she hurried over with a smile.

Upon seeing Yun Muyou, Dai Hanmi's face changed slightly. Many knew about Mrs. He replacing Yun Zihan's dowry. Although they did not say it openly, behind her back, they looked down on Mrs. He.

As a stepmother, keeping a portion of the dowry was not improper, but to brazenly switch it for her own biological daughter was a clear message.

Who would want to be close with such a woman?

To speak frankly, it was Mrs. He who dragged Yun Muyou down, but the reputation of Marquis Yuanshen's residence wasn't much better.

Yun Muyou had merely fallen from one dirty ditch into another.

Notorious indeed.

"Countess Xuanping, Mrs. Duan, Miss Dai, Miss Chen, you're all here!" Yun Muyou said with a smile.

She felt a bit shaky inside.

Fearing that Dai Hanmi and the others would outright ignore her.

That would be truly humiliating.

"We weren't discussing anything much, did the Marchioness come alone?" the Countess Xuanping asked.

Although by the rank of title Marquis Yuanshen's residence was higher, when it came to the official rank of their husbands, Weng Jianrui was somewhat inferior, not to mention the degree to which he was favored by the emperor.

Moreover, in private, Yun Muyou had a semblance of an acquaintance with Hu Shuiling. It was surprising for the Countess that Yun Muyou did not pay her respects upon seeing her.

"No, I came with others!" Yun Muyou said, her face slightly reddening.

In reality, she had come alone; it was impossible for her mother-in-law to accompany her. Her young brother-in-law did come, but as a man, it was inappropriate for him to come to the women's quarters. Her sister-in-law was unwell and did not come, still not having recovered from the cold shoulder she received at the Mid-Autumn Palace banquet a few days earlier.

"Well, if the Marchioness came with others, then please wait for them. We will go over there to talk, so as to not disturb the Marchioness anymore!" The Countess Xuanping said, nodding towards Yun Muyou before turning to leave.

Dai Hanmi and the others felt amused inside, struggling not to look at Yun Muyou's face which suddenly turned pale then bluish.

They followed the Countess Xuanping and left.

Yun Muyou stood in the same spot for a long time before snapping back to reality.

She realized her face was burning hot, and when she touched it, she found tears.

Startled, she quickly took out a handkerchief to wipe them away.

In today's setting, she couldn't afford to cry.

If anyone saw her in tears, the Princess would hold a grudge against her for life.

She took a deep breath.

If she couldn't join the lofty circles, she could always mingle with the lower ones.

There were plenty of people from lesser households who would be eager to ingratiate themselves with her!

Chapter 549: No Respect for Seniors

But Yun Muyou had forgotten one thing: this was the Prince's residence. Could any of the guests possibly come from modest backgrounds?

Had she not been the wife of Marquess Yuanshen, she wouldn't have even been allowed past the threshold.

So there she waited in place for a long time, yet no one approached her to say hello, nor would they speak to her as they walked past—whereas after passing by, they engaged in hushed conversations.

She knew that those people were gossiping about her, mocking her, and there was nothing she could do about it.

At the moment, there wasn't even anyone to talk to.

During lunch, her humiliation was complete: seated before a table of Marchionesses, not a soul spoke to her, as if she didn't exist.

Through the meal, she felt as if she were chewing wax.

At another table, however, a woman was being fawned over by everyone; they kept offering her food, urging her to eat more.

The woman wore a smile full of warmth and grace.

The ladies at her table praised her in every aspect—her temperament, her nature, and her kindness.

It was said that she was the youngest sister of the Noble Consort—and she was born of a concubine.

In that moment, she realized that poverty and low status were not to be feared; rather, reputation was of utmost importance to a person.

And the reputation of the Yun Family had long been ruined by her grandmother, with her mother likely playing a significant role as well.

No one cared how much or how well Yun Muyou ate; they were all too busy flattering the Princess.

Among the male guests, the Emperor sat in the place of honor, flanked by the Prince and Chu Yu.

Following them were members of the royal family and nobility - to be seated at the main table signified an extremely high status.

"Nineteen, I toast to you!"

Upon hearing this, Chu Yu smirked playfully, "Brother Emperor, the first toast today should be to our uncle, the Prince—it's his happy day after all," he said, not acquiescing to the Emperor.

Caught off guard, the Emperor laughed and replied, "Indeed, today is a joyous day for our uncle!" He turned with his cup towards the Prince, "Uncle, I toast to you!"

"Thank you, Your Majesty, thank you!"

The Prince could hardly contain his joy.

After having drunk his cup, Chu Yu then raised his own and said, "Uncle, I also toast to you. May you be blessed next year with another set of twins, a boy and a girl!"

"Ahahaha, good, good!"

Having twins was not uncommon, but boy and girl twins were indeed a rarity.

Consider the Yun Residence, Yun Qi had a pair of twin daughters and a pair of twin sons, but no twins of different genders.

Overjoyed, the Prince could not help but drink a few more cups.

Chu Yu, always the instigator, as well as Chu Zhaowei and Chu Renzhi, rushed forward to encourage more drinking, much to the chagrin of the Prince's son, Chu Xinhuan.

Today, he should have been the main character, but instead, his father was being plied with drinks by his cousin, the Astute Prince.

Before he had time to be relieved at his narrow escape, Chu Yu was already approaching with a cup and a bottle, grinning, "Xinhuan, my dear cousin!"

For a moment, Chu Xinhuan wondered whether it was still possible to run away.

But Chu Yu was already too close, giving him no chance to flee.

Chu Zhaowei and Chu Renzhi, as well as Chu Yu's entourage of fearless, devil-may-care young nobles, followed suit.

With Tuantuan surrounding him.

"Xinhuan, my dear cousin, you won't be able to escape today!" Chu Yu declared with a wicked grin.

Chu Xinhuan could only laugh in resignation, "Today, I will not flee!"

"You truly mean it?"

"Truly!"

And once he confirmed his intent, Chu Xinhuan found himself bombarded with drinks, each glass more bitter than the last.

His chest felt ablaze, searing hot.

He vowed never to drink again.

The discomfort was simply too much.

As the drinking continued, he couldn't manage another drop and began to stumble, unable to stand straight.

He had to be helped back to his quarters.

Chu Yu, Chu Zhaowei, and Chu Renzhi laughed heartily as they watched, "Come on, let's go drink some more!"

Chapter 550: Watching the Fun

Chu Yu greeted, and Chu Zhaowei and a few others followed suit, making their way towards the front courtyard's floral hall.

The Emperor watched the boisterous group, suddenly feeling a sense of sorrow. How wonderful it would be if Chu Yu could always remain carefree, not involved in state affairs, living as an idle Prince!

But he knew it was impossible.

If those matters remained undiscovered, perhaps the calm could last. But once found out...

"The first to act has the advantage, the latecomer suffers the misfortune."

"Self-preservation is the law of nature."

He had done nothing wrong, the only mistake being that both he and Chu Yu were born into the royal family.

And there was only one throne!

The Emperor wouldn't linger outside the palace for long, but upon leaving, he called the loyal Prince to his side, "Uncle, that woman, have Aunt bring her into the palace at some time!"

The loyal Prince paused, pondered for a moment, then smiled and said, "Yes!"

There are plenty of beauties in the world; why hang oneself on a single branch.

After the Emperor left, the loyal Prince laughed helplessly, his other thoughts now vanished.

Slightly inebriated, he stumbled towards the main courtyard with a servant assisting him. The loyal Prince's mind was clearer, yet still blurred.

But unexpectedly, a wave of fragrance wafted by, tantalizing his senses.

The loyal Prince paused, followed the scent, and waved the servant away, indicating he should leave. He staggered forward on his own.

The servant frowned, standing still for a moment before turning to inform the loyal Prince's wife of the incident.

As the loyal Prince stumbled forward, he never expected to crash into somebody full on.

"Ah..."

A familiar flirtatious voice came through, and the loyal Prince's eyes narrowed, but his large hand still encircled the waist of the beauty in his arms.

Though his vision was foggy, he knew that she was Le Xun, the beauty glimpsed in the garden earlier.

Those provocative thoughts surged forth; any potential misconduct could merely be blamed on drunken impulses.

Alcohol emboldens the hero's daring, and the loyal Prince no longer cared about the Emperor. He swept Le Xun into his arms, and with misty eyes, spotted a room. Without much thought, he carried her toward it.

Le Xun was almost scared to death.

She was out of options. Someone had sent her a letter detailing her background clearly, demanding that she have an affair with the loyal Prince, or else her secrets would be revealed.

Illicit relations with her father, or with her father's subordinates—any one of those accusations could kill her multiple times.

Her dream of glory and wealth had not even begun; how could it end?

She quickly had her maid leave and went out to find the loyal Prince. As luck would have it, the inebriated loyal Prince was on his way.

Initially hesitant, upon seeing the loyal Prince, who appeared to be in his forties or fifties, exuding noble and scholarly charm, ruggedly handsome with broad shoulders and a narrow waist, his presence exuding the stability of a middle-aged man, her heart fluttered.

What was once reluctance now turned into willing complicity.

She called out, allowing the loyal Prince to carry her into the room, but then began to struggle for fear of being discovered seducing him.

"No, don't, Prince, please don't!"

Her urgent voice carried a hint of coquettishness.

Her little hands frantically pushed against him, yet her gestures were inviting.

Her body twisted, sparking fire.

The loyal Prince was beyond caring at that point, tossing her onto the soft couch and quickly pinning her underneath him.

He then kissed her deeply.

The strong smell of alcohol and the heat of his kisses nearly stripped them both of their clothing, making it seem inevitable.

Le Xun was also expectant.

The loyal Prince was more than ready to act, but then he heard laughter at the door, along with a shuffling sound.

"Gently, gently!"

Chu Zhaowei said while pushing Chu Renzhi beside him.