

Indulgence 611

Chapter 611: Outmaneuver the Enemy

...

Mrs. He was shocked.

Lady Wang was also utterly astonished.

Even Wang Yanran and Yun MUYOU, who had been waiting to enjoy the drama, were utterly astonished; Yun Musi and Yun Mulan, though young and not understanding much, still knew a little.

How dare Yun Jinnian accept the jade bracelet that Lady Wang had worn for so many years?

"One must not decline a gift from an elder, thank you, Lady Wang!" Yun Jinnian said indifferently, taking the jade bracelet in her hand and bowing to Lady Wang.

Wang Yanran suddenly stood up, "Mother, that jade bracelet..."

That jade bracelet was given by her great-grandmother to her grandmother, and from her grandmother to her mother, intended as her dowry.

Yet her mother had given it to Yun Jinnian as a meeting gift.

"Yanran!"

Lady Wang spoke sternly.

Once a gift was given, how could the Wang family save face if they took it back now?

Her husband would not forgive her, nor would the Noble Consort in the Imperial Palace.

She thought Yun Jinnian would realize the bracelet's significant value and decline it at first, allowing her to graciously take it back and give something else in its place. Yet she hadn't expected Yun Jinnian to accept the bracelet so smoothly.

Mrs. He was also anxious, "Jinnian, that jade bracelet..."

"Aunt, could it be that you want me to thank Lady Wang for giving me such a valuable meeting gift?" Yun Jinnian raised an eyebrow and asked.

"This..."

Mrs. He was inwardly irate.

She couldn't straightforwardly say that the jade bracelet was too valuable and that Yun Jinnian should return it to Lady Wang.

If her guess was correct, the bracelet would later be part of Princess Yanran's dowry.

What's called being between a rock and a hard place, with a bitterness she couldn't voice.

Mrs. He truly couldn't say much at this moment; regardless of the bracelet's immeasurable value, it could only be accepted by Yun Jinnian.

"Aunt is right; I should thank Lady Wang indeed!" Yun Jinnian said, and bowed to Lady Wang once more.

Watching Lady Wang's face contort with anger.

Yun Jinnian suddenly felt a sense of satisfaction.

That day in the Imperial Palace, the Noble Consort's people had spread rumors with a single word, tarnishing her reputation, although the Noble Consort subsequently suppressed the rumors, Yun Jinnian was indeed aware of them.

Today, Lady Wang invited her over for a meeting, presumably also with the intention of avenging the Noble Consort and humiliating her.

It was just that she had made the first move.

"Aunt, Lady Wang, I shall take my leave now, please continue your conversation!" said Yun Jinnian, before turning and leaving briskly with Hemei and Henuan.

"..."

Yun MUYOU's eyes widened in disbelief.

Wang Yanran bit her lip and asked Yun MUYOU, "Didn't you say she was soft and gentle?"

Is this what soft and gentle looks like?

This articulate and sharp-tongued manner, how is it any different than when she confronted Head Pan in the Imperial Palace?

Now, it couldn't be said to be Head Pan anymore; the emperor hadn't demanded Head Pan hand over the family's Medical Books, but instead discovered evidence of his corruption and bullying, eventually dismissing him from his post, seizing his assets, and decreeing that his descendants could not enter government service.

Pan Kai's family was now preparing to return to their hometown, and the whole world knew of the Pan family's hereditary Medical Books. Whether they could keep them was uncertain, and a difficult future loomed.

"Lady Wang..."

Mrs. He called out softly, her voice trembling.

Lady Wang let out a cold laugh, "No matter, Yanran and I will head back first!"

After so many years navigating the complicated waters of the household, she hadn't expected to be capsized in the gutter by this young girl, Yun Jinnian.

She couldn't possibly ask for the bracelet back now, and thinking about it truly pained her.

Mrs. He also knew that today's event had made a scene, "Lady Wang, I truly apologize for today. Jinnian is really too thoughtless, how could she..."

Lady Wang glanced at Mrs. He and suddenly laughed, "The jade bracelet was my gift to her, perhaps it was meant to be!"

Chapter 612: The Conspiracy Emerges

"What does Mrs. Wang mean by this?" Mrs. He asked, puzzled.

Mrs. Wang leaned close to Mrs. He's ear and whispered a few sentences.

Mrs. He's eyes widened as she shook her head, "Won't this plan fail to come to fruition?"

"Whether it can succeed depends on how much you help me. If you can find out their hiking route for tomorrow, as well as the time of departure, I believe there's a ninety percent chance of success," Mrs. Wang stated.

With the matter of the jade bracelet, her mood had improved significantly.

She had given it away today, but as long as things went well tomorrow, Yun Jinnian would eventually have to return it!

Mrs. He was somewhat hesitant.

Again, Mrs. Wang said, "Mrs. Yun, I certainly do not wish for my Yanran to marry into your family and still have to contend with a little sister-in-law. Although we have exchanged the marital appointment letter, whether this plan will be successful..."

At this moment, the last thing Mrs. He wanted was for the marriage arrangement with the Wang family to fall through. Wang Yanran was a titled noblewoman, a county princess—even without her own fief, she was not someone other noblewomen could easily compare with.

In haste, she said, "Mrs. Wang, rest assured, I will send someone to inquire right away and will definitely give you an update before tomorrow!"

Mrs. Wang smiled, "That's settled then, I await your good news!"

Yun MUYOU and Wang Yanran exchanged looks, understanding what was happening, yet both lowered their eyes, pretending to be unaware of anything.

While Yun Musi and Yun Mulan were too young to fully comprehend this time.

Seeing Xu Xinmo hadn't come over yet, Wang Yanran hurried forward and said to Mrs. Wang, "Mother, please wait a moment. Miss Xu said she wants to go back to the Xu Family, and asked me to escort her!"

Mrs. Wang smiled, "You're such a considerate child. Well then, let's wait for her!"

Seeing this, Mrs. He hurriedly sent Tianmi to urge Xu Xinmo.

She had long since wished for Xu Xinmo to return to the Xu Family—better not to stay in the Yun Residence competing with the children for the old lady's affection or dividing her belongings.

Tianmi acknowledged the command and quickly left.

Returning to Niannian Garden with Hemei and Henuan, Yun Jinnian had Hemei relay the situation to Mrs. Yuan, who was astounded for quite some time, "That jade bracelet must be worth a lot!"

"No matter its value, I won't wear it. Nurse, please keep it. Who knows, maybe Mrs. Wang will find an excuse to ask for it back someday, and even if she doesn't, someone else surely will!" said Yun Jinnian, recalling the scowling expressions of Mrs. Wang and Mrs. He, feeling suddenly delighted.

Mrs. Yuan, thinking it through, agreed and promptly wrapped the bracelet in a handkerchief and secured it in a brocade box.

Xu Xinmo lingered in Yicai Garden for a long while, with her nurse Mrs. Hu persuading her, and decided to take gifts back to the Xu Family. However, she didn't take the Wang Family's carriage but instead had Mrs. He arrange a special one for her.

Wang Yanran found this amusing and left directly with Mrs. Wang.

Mrs. He also quickly prepared a carriage to send Xu Xinmo back.

Aboard the Wang Family's carriage

Wang Yanran lay in Mrs. Wang's arms, "Mother, have you really decided to matchmake cousin brother with the fourth Miss Yun?"

Her cousin had become a prodigal son early on, had lost his virtue, and now no longer favored women but men instead.

However, few knew of this, and his uncle and aunt were never going to speak openly about such matters.

"Don't ask so many questions!" Mrs. Wang said.

If this plan succeeded, her brother and sister-in-law would be grateful to her for the rest of their lives.

Yun Jinnian was beautiful, and her good-for-nothing nephew had a penchant for beauties.

Whether or not the plan would work, everything hinged on tomorrow.

"Mother, I am afraid..." Wang Yanran expressed her concern.

Yun Jinnian didn't seem like she would be easily intimidated.

"Afraid of what? She's just a frail girl, and so what if her maid knows martial arts? As long as our arrangements are secure, she won't be able to escape!" Mrs. Wang said, touching Wang Yanran's face, "Yanran, don't worry. Mother will definitely clear the obstacles for you, ensuring you can have a peaceful life as the grand mistress of the Yun Family."

Chapter 613: Malicious Intent

"Mother!"

Wang Yanran called out in a sweet and delicate voice.

Feeling utterly delighted inside.

Privately, she had met Yun Zhen and was very satisfied with him.

Although Yun Zhen's current official position was not high, the eldest prince's cousin had said that Yun Zhen was a learned and talented man, whose path to the imperial examinations had been cut short by others' sabotage.

In the future, with the eldest prince's cousin's help, his prospects would be boundless.

After considering various aspects, she agreed to this marriage.

"You!"

Mrs. Wang smiled indulgently.

Instead of returning directly to the Wang Residence, she went to her maiden home, the She Family.

She Hong's grandmother was originally a merchant's daughter and later caught the eye of the old Master She, who married her as his second wife, and she bore him two sons and one daughter.

Old Master She's first wife didn't leave any children, and Old Master She had passed away a few years before, so the grandmother held a very high status in the She Family.

She was also very affectionate towards Mrs. Wang.

Mrs. Wang took Wang Yanran to the She Family, paid respects to the old grandmother, then went to talk with Lady She.

Lady She had only one son, the sole male child among the younger generation of the She Family, so he was spoiled from an early age and grew up to be frivolous and without scholarly achievements.

Yet he lacked the means to afford such a dissolute lifestyle as that of Prince Rui and his ilk.

After exchanging a few words with Mrs. Wang, Lady She's eyes lit up, "Is it possible?"

"We'll know if it's possible if we call Hong back and ask him!"

She Hong, while liking men, was also fond of beauties.

To put it bluntly, he was attracted to both genders.

When they finally called him back and Mrs. Wang mentioned it, She Hong agreed at once.

Calling Mrs. Wang 'dear auntie' repeatedly, his enthusiasm made her heart bloom with joy.

After discussing it for a while longer, Mrs. Wang took Wang Yanran back to the Wang Residence.

All of this was unknown to Yun Jinnian, who was sitting by the window, gazing at her "poisonous" Medical Books and wondering whether she ought to visit the elder lady at the Zhuangyong Marquis Residence before returning to the palace the next day?

Had the Duan Residence prepared all the medicinal ingredients?

And her mother? Tomorrow was the Double Ninth Festival, would she come back to go mountain climbing with her and pick cornel fruits?

And Tianci? Where was he at the moment? Did he miss her?

If she had known, she wouldn't have let him go to Nanjiang. The road was so long, when would they meet again?

Yun Jinnian held the Medical Books, but didn't absorb a single word.

"Miss, the Lady has come!"

At this, Yun Jinnian frowned and stood up to walk to the door; Mrs. He entered the parlor with a beaming smile.

Not understanding why she had come, Yun Jinnian still curtsied respectfully, "Greetings, Auntie!"

"Jinnian my dear, Auntie has brought you some chrysanthemum cakes, and oh, also Chrysanthemum Wine from Huiquan Tower. They say it's exquisitely delicious!" Mrs. He smiled broadly.

Not wanting to strike a smiling face, Yun Jinnian responded with a gentle smile, "Thank you, Auntie. Please take a seat!"

"Very well, I'll rest a bit here in your Niannian Garden," Mrs. He said, sitting down on the Arhat bed before asking, "Jinnian, your mother has gone to Huguo Temple. Where do you plan to go for the mountain climbing tomorrow? When will you set out? Why don't you come with us? It would be more lively with more people!"

"Thank you for your kind offer, Auntie, but I've decided to go to Mount Xiao tomorrow. I've heard there are fewer visitors there and plenty of wild chrysanthemums. I plan to gather some to dry and brew tea with!"

As Yun Jinnian spoke, her mind was racing.

Why had Mrs. He made this trip?

Logically, Mrs. He was unlikely to be fond of her, yet here she was, which surely meant there was a catch.

"Mount Xiao, huh? That's some distance from the Capital City. You'll need to start early to make it back before lunch!"

"Thank you for the reminder, Auntie!" Yun Jinnian responded, growing even more suspicious of Mrs. He's visit to Niannian Garden, suspecting she was up to no good.

Chapter 614: Ulterior Motives

"If you don't mind the elder madam's noise, that's good," Mrs. He said, just as Ru Yue came in with tea.

"Elder madam, please have some tea," Yun Jinnian said very politely.

Mrs. He took the teacup and sipped.

The tea was fragrant, mellow, and sweet, a cut above what the master would serve to guests in his study.

Where did Yun Jinnian get this tea?

Did she buy it herself, or was it a gift from someone?

"This tea is indeed good!"

Yun Jinnian smiled and didn't pursue the conversation.

Mrs. He couldn't continue either.

Actually, Mrs. He had contributed to Yun Jinnian's difficulties over these years.

She knew that if Yun Jinnian had any spirit left, she wouldn't be getting close to her.

"By the way, Auntie Cui has been unwell recently; would you like to visit her later?" Mrs. He asked, testing the waters.

"Sure," Yun Jinnian replied indifferently.

This response was beyond Mrs. He's expectations.

"Then I'll go back first. You should visit her soon, too. We have to climb the high view tomorrow, so rest early!"

"Thank you for your concern, elder madam!"

After sending Mrs. He off, Yun Jinnian asked Hemei and Henuan, "What do you think was her reason for coming?"

"Don't know, but the lady rarely visits Niannian Garden!"

No visits without a motive; no courtesy without a plan; either treachery or thievery.

Yun Jinnian thought for a moment, "Nanny, personally take a trip to Nuanxin Academy, bring the jade bracelet there, and let the elder lady find an opportunity to return it to the lady of the Wang Residence!"

"Yes!"

Mrs. Yuan didn't ask why and took the brocade box with Ru Yue to Nuanxin Academy.

As for whether Mrs. He would return the jade bracelet to the lady of the Wang Residence, that was no longer her concern.

After some thought, Yun Jinnian, accompanied by Hemei and Henuan, went to visit Auntie Cui.

Mrs. He returned to Nuanxin Academy and immediately sent a message to the Wang Residence.

Reclining on the chaise longue, she smiled sinisterly.

"Madam, the fourth young lady's mother, Mrs. Yuan, is here!"

Mrs. Yuan rarely left Niannian Garden, and it was her first time visiting Nuanxin Academy like this.

Mrs. He frowned but still said, "Let her in!"

Now, Yun Jinnian was not the same as before; Mrs. Yuan was Yun Jinnian's nanny, and she had to be shown respect.

After all, you have to look at the master when beating a dog.

"Yes!"

Tianmi went out, and soon Mrs. Yuan came into Nuanxin Academy with the brocade box.

"Madam, Mrs. Yuan greets you," she said respectfully with a bow and a light smile on her face.

"You may dispense with the formalities!" Mrs. He said, looking at the brocade box in Mrs. Yuan's hands, realizing something.

"Lady," Mrs. Yuan said, "the young lady instructed me to return this. Inside is the jade bracelet of the lady of the Wang Residence. Please help return it!"

No sooner had Mrs. Yuan finished than Mrs. He, as if fearing she would change her mind, said, "Tianmi, put the jade bracelet away!"

"Yes!"

Tianmi came forward and took the brocade box.

Upon opening it, the jade bracelet lay quietly inside, its luster delighting to the beholder.

"Lady, then I will take my leave!"

"Go ahead!"

Mrs. Yuan turned around and left the parlor, leaving Nuanxin Academy and returning to Niannian Garden with Ru Yue.

Inside Nuanxin Academy

Mrs. He held the jade bracelet in her hand.

The bracelet was indeed made of fine jade; no wonder the lady of the Wang Residence was reluctant to part with it.

But now, should she return it?

To return it meant letting go; not to return it...

If she doesn't return it, probably only a few people would know the bracelet was in her possession, right?

"Tianmi, put it away for now!"

Tianmi was surprised but thought Mrs. He wanted to keep it for a few days to return it to the lady of the Wang Residence at the right time.

So without asking further, she carefully placed it in the cabinet.

Yun Jinnian was strolling slowly in the garden, not expecting to encounter Auntie Lian.

Behind Auntie Lian, two nannies carried two children.

"The concubine greets the fourth young lady," Auntie Lian bowed respectfully and politely.

Yun Jinnian, who intended to ignore her, had to stop and gave Auntie Lian a slight nod, "Auntie Lian!"

Chapter 615: Aunt Cui's Illness

Now that the children were nearly ten months old, plump and tenderly rosy, they were so adorable. Yun Jinnian looked at them and hooked his lips into a slight smile.

He asked gently, "Are these Xiaoliu and Xiaoqi?"

"Answering Fourth Miss, indeed they are Xiaoliu and Xiaoqi!" Aunt Lian could hardly hide her excitement.

In the past, she didn't think being a concubine was bad, but only now did she realize, what's good about it?

She had no idea what the outside world was like, confined as she was; not allowed out of the main gate nor the second gate. How good could life be for the children she raised?

One day, when she moved to the outer court, if she had no one to rely on, it wouldn't be just her future at stake, but even her life might be in danger.

Therefore, learning that Yun Jinnian had returned, she mustered the courage to bring the children to the garden. She was indeed in luck to have encountered Yun Jinnian.

She said to the children with a smile, "Xiaoliu, Xiaoqi, this is your fourth sister. Say 'fourth sister' quickly!"

The two children, only ten months old, could not yet say 'sister' and simply blew bubbles at Yun Jinnian.

Yun Jinnian found this rather charming and stepped forward to take one of the children's little hands, "Is this Xiaoliu or Xiaoqi? Do they have names yet?"

"Fourth Miss, this is Xiaoqi. Second Master has named him Yun Mu, 'Mu' as in harmony, and Xiaoliu is called Yun He!"

"The names are very nice!"

Harmony, the meaning is nice.

Yun Jinnian played with them for a while and wanted to hold them, but knowing they were Aunt Lian's treasured babies, she refrained; if she happened to drop them, she couldn't clear her name even by jumping into the Yellow River, so she dismissed the thought.

"Aunt Lian, the sun is scorching now, and the children's skin is delicate. Take Xiaoliu and Xiaoqi back to avoid sunburn!" Yun Jinnian spoke tenderly and withdrew her hand.

Aunt Lian hurriedly agreed, relieved, and just as she came to her senses, Yun Jinnian had walked far away with Hemei and Henuan.

Aunt Lian pursed her lips, "Let's go back!"

Looking at her two plump, fair sons, Aunt Lian used to hate the idea of them leaving her side. Now, if Mrs. Han was willing to take the children to raise them, no matter how reluctant she was, Aunt Lian was willing.

As Yun Jinnian walked away, she looked at her own hand.

"Miss, do you like children?" Hemei asked.

"I do!"

Hemei smiled foolishly.

Thinking that in a few years Yun Jinnian would have her own children, she was filled with anticipation.

Yet Yun Jinnian turned to ask Hemei, "What do you think about me adopting a child from outside to raise?"

"..."

Hemei and Henuan were taken aback.

That idea was not good at all

No matter how well you raise someone else's child, they won't be as close to you as your own; better not to raise one at all.

Seeing that Hemei and Henuan's expressions had changed, Yun Jinnian said, "I was just saying."

She really was just speaking hypothetically.

Having reached Aunt Cui's courtyard and after reporting in, Yun Jinnian entered the room. Aunt Cui's complexion looked very poor, as if gravely ill, her pale face with eyes closed.

"Aunt Cui?"

How had Aunt Cui become like this after only a few days?

Yun Jinnian sat by the bed, took Aunt Cui's hand to feel her pulse and was extremely astonished.

Poisoned...

Aunt Cui, sensing someone calling her, slowly opened her eyes and looked at Yun Jinnian, "Is that you, Fourth Miss?"

"Aunt Cui, it's me!"

Upon hearing this, Aunt Cui slowly and gently smiled, "Fourth Miss, may I ask a favor of you?"

"Aunt Cui, please feel free to tell me!"

Yun Jinnian felt a bit heartbroken.

Her memory of Aunt Cui was not profound, the only thing she distinctly remembered was that winter when Aunt Cui had stayed with her all night, changing the cloth on her forehead and wiping her body repeatedly, calling her 'Fourth Miss'.

She beseeched her to hold on.

Chapter 616: Jinnian's Suspicion

But now, that vibrant person had been poisoned, her vital organs injured.

Even if saved, she would be bedridden with illness, without a single day of peace.

"Fourth Miss, please beg the master to let me stay at the manor to recuperate, would that be alright?" Aunt Cui said softly.

But it seemed as if she had used all her strength and was panting heavily.

"But the manor lacks medical resources and doesn't have the facilities of the residence..." Yun Jinnian began, then suddenly understood why Aunt Cui had made this request.

She wanted to leave this family, to be far away so that Yun Zihan and the Yun Family would gradually cut ties, and from then on, she could live her carefree life.

She didn't want the Yun Family to drag Yun Zihan down.

With her at the Yun Family, Yun Zihan would never truly be at ease about her.

Aunt Cui pursed her lips and remained silent.

Yun Jinnian sighed, "Aunt Cui, you doing this will not make Second Sister happy!"

"I, I..." Aunt Cui started to speak but then began to cough.

Yun Jinnian quickly took a porcelain bottle from her sleeve, ready to pour out a pill to feed her, but Aunt Cui shook her head slightly, "Fourth Miss, don't waste such precious elixir on a servant like me. I know my days are numbered. Please promise me, after I'm gone, to look after Second Miss for me, will you?"

Aunt Cui looked at Yun Jinnian with hope.

Yun Jinnian, looking at her, ultimately nodded her head.

In fact, Yun Zihan didn't need her care now; Liao Shijie was capable and would surely have a boundless future.

Aunt Cui smiled, reached out to grasp Yun Jinnian's hand, and with difficulty, her dim eyes scanned the room before she wrote the character '康' in Yun Jinnian's palm.

"..."

Yun Jinnian didn't know what it meant, and thought in her heart that Aunt Cui wished for her well-being.

She nodded slightly.

To show she understood.

Aunt Cui smiled faintly, "Fourth Miss, I'm tired. You can go back now!"

"Alright!"

Yun Jinnian left Aunt Cui's courtyard and immediately sent someone to the Liao Residence to call for Yun Zihan.

Aunt Cui had no will to live and was deeply poisoned, her vital organs already injured. Had she ingested the poison herself, or had someone else poisoned her? Yun Jinnian didn't know, so she wanted Yun Zihan to come back to see Aunt Cui, to persuade her to try to counteract the poison.

Death is like the snuffing of a lamp; only while alive is there hope.

Hemei personally made this trip.

Yun Jinnian, accompanied by Henuan, prepared to return to Niannian Garden. Aunt Cui's poison was very potent, unavailable at common pharmacies. Being an aunt who didn't step outside the main gate nor the second, where had she obtained this poisonous medicine?

A frail figure ran over, knelt in front of Yun Jinnian, her voice hoarse and helpless, "Fourth Sister, I beg you, please save my aunt, will you? I will kowtow to you, I will kowtow, please save my aunt!"

Yun Jinnian took a few steps back and looked carefully before recognizing her; it was Yun Zuomo.

The daughter of Aunt Su.

Her half-sister by the concubine, who was twelve years old this year.

Looking at Yun Zuomo, Yun Jinnian went from initial shock to quickly settling down.

"If you have any requests, go find Great Aunt, or go to Father, Great Uncle, or Grandmother. I can't help you!" Yun Jinnian said, and turned to leave.

Because of Aunt Su and Aunt Hua, there had been a rift between her mother and father, causing a wound that would never heal.

And she was the most direct victim.

In earlier years, her father and mother ignored her, but Aunt Su, Aunt Hua, Yun Zuomo, Yun Qingzhi, and Yun Qingqing lived much better lives than her, the legitimate daughter. The Old Madam favored Xu Xinmo and treated all the Yun girls equally.

Now that the Old Madam was alive, Yun Zuomo did not seek her help but came to her instead...

Chapter 617: Regretting the Past

Putting the cart before the horse, their hearts are punishable by death.

Yun Zuomo never expected Yun Jinnian to refuse even the pretence of effort and simply walked away.

Feeling a surge of panic, she cried out loudly, "If you don't help me today, you will definitely regret it!"

That piece of news held no value to her, but to Yun Jinnian, it was lethal.

She had thought that Yun Jinnian, for the sake of sisterly affection and close blood ties, would plead with their father to release their stepmother, or would take her with him wherever he went in the future, allowing her to slowly elevate her status from that of a weak concubine-born daughter, to one day, like her elder sister, marry a desirable husband and become a legitimate wife!

But to her dismay, Yun Jinnian completely ignored her.

Hearing Yun Zuomo's screams, Yun Jinnian did not even pause his steps and decisively walked away.

Yun Zuomo watched, and began to cry.

The tears she had shed before might have contained some pretense, but at this moment, they were truly real.

At the age of twelve, she knew only a few characters and had learned too little. She previously had the guidance of her stepmother and a governess in the house, but now with her stepmother confined, she was not allowed to leave through the main gate, nor could she step beyond the secondary gate, let alone go outside to see the world or study at the academy.

"Wuu wuu..."

Yun Zuomo, out of options, quietly went to see Mrs. Su.

In just a few days, Mrs. Su had become considerably thinner; she sat by the window on a chair, idly gazing at the sky, reminiscing about her days serving by Mrs. Han's side.

How carefree, how unrestrained.

Whenever she went out, everyone would greet her respectfully as "Sister Su," just like Bai Que of today.

But she had secretly fallen for Yun Qi, enamored by the affection Yun Qi showed Mrs. Han, selfishly thinking that with a different person, Yun Qi would treat her the same.

Therefore, when the old lady approached her with a proposal, she agreed without hesitation!

But she forgot that from beginning to end, Yun Qi loved only Mrs. Han Shu.

Mrs. Su would never forget the look in Yun Qi's eyes when he awoke after ***'s enjoyment; it was as if he were gazing at the most disgusting thing in the world, full of hate and disdain.

Many a time she would wake from her dreams, heart pounding with cold dread.

She was pregnant, and Yun Qi showed not the slightest concern; she gave birth to a daughter, and Yun Qi never held her, never comforted her, nor even gave her a name.

She had betrayed her master, and this was the outcome she received...

If she could do it all over again, she would surely remain a loyal and devoted servant, never daring to hold any other aspirations.

"Stepmother!"

Yun Zuomo called softly.

Mrs. Su snapped back to reality, looking at Yun Zuomo with great surprise, "How did you get here?"

Yun Zuomo let out a whimper and ran to Mrs. Su, crouching at her side, and began to cry.

"Stepmother..."

One's own child, their own heartache; Mrs. Su embraced Yun Zuomo, gently wiping away her tears.

"What on earth happened?"

"Stepmother, I learned some news and wanted to find Fourth Sister to make a deal with her in exchange for her to plead with father to release you. But, but she completely ignored me!"

Mrs. Su's heart skipped a beat.

"Zimo, if you have news, you can tell your fourth sister. However, you can't play tricks with her, nor can you demand anything in return. That way, you'll receive more than you could imagine!"

What they were asking for was insignificant in the eyes of Yun Jinnian and Mrs. Han.

"Stepmother, I know I was wrong. I just wanted to rescue you, but father won't see me, grandmother won't see me, I have no other choice!" Yun Zuomo cried sorrowfully.

In this residence, she saw no hope and didn't know whom to rely on.

It just so happened that she knew this piece of news, thinking that Yun Jinnian would surely want to know, but despite all her calculations, she never imagined Yun Jinnian would not even care to acknowledge her!

Chapter 618: Aunt Cui passes away

Lady Su felt as if her heart was shattering as she listened.

"What exactly happened?"

Yun Zuomo sniffled and recounted the events to her in a soft voice.

Lady Su closed her eyes and took a deep breath.

If Yun Zuomo had told Yun Jinnian directly about this, Yun Jinnian would most definitely have rewarded her for the information after investigating. Yet, she chose the worst possible path.

"Auntie, what should I do?" asked Yun Zuomo in a low voice.

Although her food and attire were the same as before, she knew that was all she had; nobody truly taught her anything else.

The maids, elderly servants, and nurses from her past had all been sold off by her father. The current maids by her side were younger than her and utterly unable to help her in any way.

Her sixth and seventh little sisters were also not having an easy time. Confronted with situations like this, they were completely at a loss as well.

Lady Su pondered for a long time before speaking, "After you go out later, make a trip to Niannian Garden yourself, regardless if you could see your fourth sister or not..." Lady Su paused mid-sentence and then shook her head, "Never mind, later you should go nowhere and just stay in your own courtyard. Zuomo, Auntie won't be by your side, you must protect yourself, do you understand?"

Lady Su originally wanted to have Yun Zuomo tell Yun Jinnian, thinking that Yun Jinnian might appreciate the favor. However, if he didn't, and totally ignored Zuomo's safety, Zuomo would have indeed offended Lady, the current head of the Yun Family. If she wanted to harm Zuomo or even take her life, it would be effortless.

Contemplating this, Lady Su's courage waned.

She dared not let Yun Zuomo take the risk any longer.

"Auntie, are we not going to seek out Fourth Sister anymore?" Yun Zuomo asked, puzzled.

"No more!" Lady Su caressed Yun Zuomo's face, "Don't worry, Auntie will surely find a way out for you, to leave this Yun Family far behind and live a comfortable life!"

Yun Zuomo nodded fervently.

She came stealthily and left quietly.

Only after her departure did Lady Su vomit a mouthful of blood.

The consequences of betrayal were so tragically severe.

Unable to save herself, unable to protect her own daughter, Second Master's heart was indeed cruel; in his hatred for her, he even extended it to his own flesh and blood.

When she thought of how even Yun Qi hated Yun Jinnian—his most beloved daughter born to the woman he loved—if he could hate her, then what was she, Bai Su, and what significance did her own daughter, Zuomo, hold!

"Heh heh..."

With self-deprecatory laughter, tears streamed down Lady Su's face.

One misstep led to a cascade of errors.

When Yun Jinnian returned to Niannian Garden, Yun Zuomo had already faded from his mind.

Soon, Liao Shijie brought Yun Zihan back, who went straight to Auntie Cui's courtyard.

By the time Yun Jinnian received the news and went there, Auntie Cui was already dead.

At the archway, he could hear the heart-rending cries of Yun Zihan. Yun Jinnian felt a momentary daze, "How could this be..."

By all reasoning, she should've been able to hold on for a few more days! Her death was far too sudden.

Hemei and Henuan were also at a loss, exchanging glances.

Liao Shijie walked out from inside and bowed to Yun Jinnian with a cupped fist, "Fourth Sister!"

"Brother-in-law, my second sister, she..." Yun Jinnian started to speak but hesitated.

Liao Shijie took a deep breath, "Your second sister came back several times, but Auntie Cui never agreed to see her. I did not expect that today she would, and it turned out to be the very last time!"

As he spoke, Liao Shijie's heart ached for Yun Zihan.

Especially after hearing Auntie Cui's final words, Liao Shijie realized she had not taken poison herself; someone had poisoned her.

And the person who poisoned her was none other than the head of this household, Auntie Cui's bedmate for many years.

Yun Jinnian opened his mouth, wanting to say something, but then he saw Yun Chen approaching.

"Great Uncle!"

Chapter 619: Father-Daughter Rift

Yun Chen glanced at Yun Jinnian and then strode inside.

Yun Jinnian wanted to follow, but Liao Shijie extended his hand to stop him and slightly shook his head.

Yun Jinnian pursed his lips and stayed where he was.

In the room

Yun Zihan held the body of Auntie Cui, and after her initial sorrow, she became exceptionally alert and rational. Although Auntie Cui's final words were disjointed, she understood them clearly.

The poison wasn't self-administered by Auntie Cui, and the decision to keep it a secret wasn't hers either.

Without control over her body or fate!

Hearing footsteps, Yun Zihan looked up to see Yun Chen entering, and suddenly laughed coldly, "You're back!"

Yun Chen frowned slightly.

Yun Zihan scoffed with a cold laugh and gazed at Yun Chen, asking chillily, "Father, let me ask you, where did the poison that struck down my aunt come from? Did she take it willingly? Or did you threaten her to take it? What exactly did my aunt know about you? You're so ruthless that you took her life with a mere flick of your wrist!"

"I don't know what you're talking about!" Yun Chen said sternly.

He was very uncomfortable, feeling the embarrassment of being seen through.

"Since father claims to not understand what I'm talking about, then let it be so. However, I intend to take my aunt with me today. Do you consent or not?" Yun Zihan spoke lightly.

Her poor aunt plotted for her whole life, and yet, departed without enjoying a single blessing.

"In life, she belonged to the Yun Family, and in death, she will be the Yun Family's spirit. You, a daughter who is married off, what right do you have to take her away?" Yun Chen retorted.

He was somewhat angry.

The once absolutely obedient daughter now dared to outright defy him.

"Hearing the tone of father, it seems you don't consent. Very well, then I will go to Jingzhao Prefecture's main gate and beat the grievance drum. My aunt would never poison herself intentionally; she was murdered because she learned a huge secret—a secret you surely know, father!"

As Yun Zihan spoke, her tears flowed fiercely.

"You, you, you..." Yun Chen pointed at Yun Zihan, unable to utter a complete sentence.

Would this commotion look good?

Or sound right?

"Father, I remember, last year a thief entered my younger sister's Niannian Garden, and that thief was later..."

"Shut up!" Yun Chen shouted furiously, trembling with rage, "Have you set your heart on taking your aunt's body out of here?"

"Yes, if father does not grant my wish, I am willing to perish alongside!"

While living, my aunt couldn't leave the Yun Residence; in death, she must be taken out.

"Fine, very well. I, Yun Chen, have actually raised such a rebellious daughter. Since you've set your heart on taking away your aunt's body, from the moment you step out of the Yun Residence with her, the Yun Family will no longer have a daughter like you. And from then on, you'd better keep your mouth shut. If I can let you take the body out, I have ways to unearth her from her grave and expose her corpse to the wilderness!"

Hearing this, Yun Zihan slowly stood up.

She knelt before Yun Chen, and with utmost solemnity, she kowtowed three times, "Thank you, Lord Yun, for granting my wish. Once I step out of this door, I will never speak another word of the Yun Family."

Yun Chen watched her and stumbled several steps backward, staring at Yun Zihan for a long while, as if he no longer recognized her.

"You're not allowed to leave through the front door of Yun Residence!"

He turned around and left brusquely.

After stepping outside, Yun Chen looked at Liao Shijie and snorted coldly, "Don't come to the Yun Residence anymore. From this moment on, there's no Second Miss in the Yun Residence, nor will there be a son-in-law like you. I want to see just what you, Liao Shijie, amount to without the backing of the Yun Family!"

Chapter 620: Heartbroken

Yun Chen's words were incredibly rude.

Yet, as Liao Shijie listened, he felt no excess emotion but his eyes shone fiercely. He clasped his hands in a salute toward Yun Chen, "Thank you for the guidance, Lord Yun!"

From then on, Zihan had nothing to do with the Yun Family anymore. It was just a pity that Aunt Cui was gone. If Aunt Cui had still been alive, it would have been wonderful for her to play with Zihan's children once they were born.

"..."

Watching Liao Shijie's unyielding demeanor, Yun Chen snorted coldly and strode away.

Yun Jinnian watched from the side, remaining silent for a long time.

This Yun Family, rotten at the core, was beyond redemption.

Zihan still took Aunt Cui with her, leaving through the back door, with Liao Shijie by her side the entire time. As she got onto the carriage, Zihan bowed slightly to Yun Jinnian, "Sister number four, I will invite you over to play after some time!"

"Sister number two, take care of yourself!"

Zihan nodded slightly, "Hmm!"

Yun Jinnian stood at the back door, watching the carriage drive away.

"Aunt Cui was a good person!"

What a pity that good people do not live long lives.

The death of a concubine barely caused a ripple in the Yun Residence; the celebration for the Double Ninth Festival the next day went on as boisterously as usual.

Even the matriarch didn't say a word.

Not to mention Mrs. He!

Yun Jinnian reclined on the chaise longue, flipping through a book carelessly, but she didn't actually take in a single page.

"What's troubling you, miss?" Mrs. Yuan asked while altering Yun Jinnian's dress.

The one made earlier was a bit too large, especially at the waist, which needed to be taken in.

"Nanny!"

"Hmm?"

"Sister number two must be devastated!"

Without Aunt Cui and abandoned by the Yun Family.

Mrs. Yuan stopped her work, thought for a moment, then said, "Miss, Aunt Cui must have been willing!"

"?"

Yun Jinnian was puzzled.

Was she willing to die?

"As long as Aunt Cui was alive, Miss number two could never completely break away from the Yun Family. Now that Aunt Cui is gone, Miss number two is no longer considered the second miss of the Yun Family. From now on, whatever she does, the Yun Family can't interfere. If brother-in-law attains great success one day, the Yun Family can't come asking for favors. Aunt Cui endured a lifetime of grievances in the Yun Family, how could she bear to see Miss number two continue to be manipulated by them? Therefore, even knowing it was a road of no return, she still chose it willingly!"

Yun Jinnian looked at Mrs. Yuan in astonishment, "You noticed all that?"

"How could I notice? It was Nanny Rong who told me!" Mrs. Yuan said, her cheeks flushing.

Yun Jinnian suddenly understood.

Thinking of the 'kang' character Aunt Cui wrote in her palm, she initially thought it was a wish for her well-being. But now it seemed that it might not be the case.

And Aunt Cui knew better; she would definitely have sent a message to Yun Zihan, urging her to come back, and that's why she consumed the poison.

But where did that poison come from?

It wouldn't have been for sale at the Poison Shop, and even if it were, it would be exorbitantly expensive. Aunt Cui would have given all her money to Yun Zihan as a dowry; where would she get the silver to buy the poison?

Mrs. He?

Mrs. He was stingy and miserly; she would never spend a large sum of silver to poison a concubine to death.

That left only one person...

"How could that be?" Yun Jinnian muttered to herself.

Mrs. Yuan quickly asked, "What's the matter, miss?"

"Nanny, I might have thought too far!"

How could my uncle possibly have purchased the poison to give to Aunt Cui to ingest? Aunt Cui had served him for many years; they must have shared some affection, and he could not have been so heartless.

Yet, everything seemed to make sense.

For instance, Aunt Cui knew Yun Chen's secret. Yun Chen wanted to silence her, but was afraid her death would seem too suspicious, so he threatened Aunt Cui using Yun Zihan. For the sake of Yun Zihan, not to mention poison, even if she had to climb a mountain of swords or plunge into a sea of flames, Aunt Cui would have been willing, wouldn't she!