

Indulgence 981

Chapter 981: A Chance Encounter

Nalan Jinlian bought everything in one go.

As she was preparing to leave, she saw Nalan Mingzhu beside a lady, seemingly also shopping for things.

"Sister!" Nalan Mingzhu softly called out, bowing slightly.

Nalan Mingzhu bowed, and the Liao Lady followed suit, "Greetings, First Miss!"

She discreetly sized up Nalan Jinlian.

She couldn't help being astonished; such striking beauty, no wonder there's a proper identity arranged for her. It seems they intend for her to be the main wife.

If she was to be a concubine, why go through such trouble?

Thinking of this, the Liao Lady felt a pang of sourness.

"There's no need for such formalities!" Nalan Jinlian said blandly, looking at the Liao Lady.

She didn't feel like or dislike, just a very indifferent feeling.

The Liao Lady pressed her lips into a gentle smile.

Mustering the courage, she said, "Is the First Miss going back? If not, would you perhaps like to come to my place for a cup of hot tea?"

"I'm heading back!"

Faced with the Liao Lady's goodwill, Nalan Jinlian still felt nothing.

It was truly indifferent.

She always felt that she didn't seem detestable.

But previously Chunqiu said she heard about a mistress outside and children, which led to falling down the stairs and injuring her head.

But, the emotions don't seem right.

Thinking of this, Nalan Jinlian continued, "Why don't we go to the tea house? We're about to return to the Imperial Capital, and the tea and snacks here will be gone after once more!"

"Following the First Miss's suggestion!"

The group went to the tea house and ordered the finest tea and snacks, but Nalan Mingzhu insisted on brewing the tea herself, so the tea house provided the utensils and leaves.

Nalan Mingzhu poured the tea in person, her movements graceful and pleasing to the eyes.

"Mingzhu knows the tea ceremony?" Nalan Jinlian asked.

Nalan Mingzhu nodded, "I've learned a bit, would my sister like to taste it?"

A bit cautious, obviously trying to please.

Nalan Jinlian had things on her mind, but she reached out, took a sip, and praised, "It's very good, do call me whenever you brew tea in the future!"

Nalan Mingzhu looked surprised, then broke into a smile.

Actually, she genuinely wanted to please Nalan Jinlian.

Not just because of her parents' advice, but also for the care of her legitimate sister after they go to the Imperial Capital, which would be much better than going it alone.

Feeling joyful inside, Nalan Mingzhu became a bit more lively, her eyes crinkling with a smile, "Sister, I can also make tea cakes. Next time, I'll make them for you personally!"

Her voice sweet, filled with joy and hope.

Nalan Jinlian nodded, "Alright!"

The Liao Lady watched and sighed in relief.

But she dared not relax completely.

After all, Nalan Jinlian initially didn't like Mingzhu, so why did she change her mind...

The Liao Lady feared Nalan Jinlian might be two-faced, sweet on the surface but different underneath.

Lest Nalan Mingzhu suffer in secret.

After having tea, everyone went their separate ways home.

In the evening, Nalan Jinlian received tea cakes sent by Nalan Mingzhu's people. Tiny and dainty, they looked very appetizing.

Nalan Jinlian tasted a bit, finding them quite good.

"Unexpectedly considerate!"

"Does Miss like Miss Mingzhu?" Chunqiu asked.

"Can't say for liking much, but I don't dislike her!"

This was the truth.

Logically, she should not like her.

At least not that day, but the more she saw, the more confusing her thoughts became, yet she didn't want to discuss it with Chunqiu or Chong Ling, which felt very strange indeed.

"Has Father returned?"

"Yes, he has!"

"Let's go, I will talk to Father to see if he can get Mother a new courtyard. We're soon heading back to the Imperial Capital, and Mother needs to tidy up first!"

Chapter 982: The Beginning of Suspicion (Part 1)

Chong Ling and Chunqiu immediately accompanied Nalan Jinlian out of the Lotus Garden.

She felt unfamiliar with this residence, having no sense of direction whatsoever.

Because of this, although Nalan Jinlian didn't express it, she began to have suspicions in her heart.

Logically speaking, even with memory loss, one's own home should still feel familiar; knowing whether to turn left or right at a particular spot should be instinctive. Yet, she didn't have that awareness.

There was too much confusion.

Chong Ling and Chunqiu seemed to be quite familiar with this mansion.

The maids and old women in the residence would call them "sister" when they saw them, and were even more respectful towards Nalan Jinlian.

"Greetings, Miss!"

Nalan Jinlian nodded to indicate that formalities were unnecessary.

Soon they reached Nalan Bo's courtyard, where a young woman in blue clothing came out, "Maid Hanxiao greets the Miss. Earlier, the master was thinking about Miss, and now she's come, truly showing the profound connection between father and daughter!"

Nalan Jinlian lightly nodded.

Though Hanxiao spoke quite a bit, she didn't feel much.

Firstly, Hanxiao's words were excessive, and secondly, she didn't feel any deep connection or tacit understanding with her father.

Although Nalan Jinlian's expression was calm, Hanxiao's smile did not fade, "Miss, this way please, the master is in the study!"

Upon entering Nalan Bo's study, she found rows of bookshelves already empty, with many items missing, clearly packed into boxes.

"Jinlian's here, come and see how your father's painting is!" Nalan Bo looked up and smiled.

Nalan Jinlian stepped forward and looked at Nalan Bo's Snow Plum Blossom Painting.

"It has significant character and is quite commendable!"

Nalan Bo paused slightly.

He hadn't expected Nalan Jinlian to say it had character; he thought she wouldn't understand.

"I just feel somehow dissatisfied, yet can't tell where it's wrong!" Nalan Bo paused with the brush, unable to proceed.

"Why not let me try, Father?"

Upon hearing this, Nalan Bo handed the brush to Nalan Jinlian, who quickly sketched a few strokes, turning the once-spirited plum blossoms in the snow into ones with resolute, iron-like qualities.

"Marvelous, marvelous indeed!" Nalan Bo involuntarily praised, "How about Jinlian contributing a poem?"

Nalan Jinlian pondered for a moment before writing, "Shuofeng understands deeply, never easily damaged!"

"What a fine 'Shuofeng understands deeply, never easily damaged,' truly matching the sentiment, and the handwriting is extremely good!" Nalan Bo praised.

His heart suddenly tightened.

Such an alluring appearance, with an insightful and sophisticated mind—whose family's daughter is she?

Yet the prince went to great lengths to send her here, making her his daughter, just to give her a legitimate identity.

For an identity, it must be a principal wife. If it were for a concubine or a lady, they wouldn't go to such lengths.

Nalan Jinlian smiled lightly.

Thinking that although Lotus Garden had the Four Treasures of the Study, it didn't have a single painting or word she left behind.

Even if they were returning to the Imperial Capital, they wouldn't clear everything so cleanly and neatly.

Nalan Jinlian found it increasingly strange.

Once the seed of doubt is planted, she would closely observe and think deeply.

Nalan Jinlian herself hadn't realized that she didn't trust anyone in this Nalan Residence.

"You've come at a good time; I have something to tell you!"

"Listening respectfully to Father's teachings!"

Nalan Bo laughed, "It's not any kind of instruction, but about your mother!"

"Mother?"

"Indeed..." Nalan Bo said, taking a deep breath, his gaze slightly adrift, speaking softly, "Back then, because of Mingzhu's mother, your mother resided in the rear courtyard wing as an act of anger

towards me, ignoring all the matters of the residence. Now that we're about to return to the Imperial Capital, you should persuade her to move back to the main courtyard!"

Despite being deeply unwilling and reluctant.

At this moment, there was no choice but for Nalan Bo to compromise.

He even had to portray deep affection between husband and wife in front of Nalan Jinlian, displaying an immensely noble demeanor.

Chapter 983: Understanding Tianchu

Nalan Jinlian was quite surprised, because she intended to discuss the same matter.

She had thought of the phrasing all along the way.

"Father...!"

Nalan Bo sighed, "In this small border town, even if she doesn't act, no one dares to trouble you. But once you return to the Imperial Capital, it will be different; your mother must be present for everything, and your father is likely to be promoted to the third rank upon returning. Your mother will also be granted a title, and soon after, it will be time for your coming-of-age ceremony!"

Coming-of-age...

Nalan Jinlian fell silent.

Coming-of-age, how old am I now?

Her mind went blank, unable to recall anything.

She did not like this feeling.

Nalan Bo looked at Nalan Jinlian, sighed, "Don't overthink it. Once we return, your grandmother will surely hold a grand coming-of-age ceremony for you!"

"Mm!"

Nalan Jinlian nodded.

This was not what she was worried about.

Once Nalan Bo spoke, Nalan Jinlian personally went to invite Mrs. Xu. Mrs. Xu did not put on airs at all and returned to the main courtyard after freshening up and changing clothes, where she summoned her butler in this small town.

She gave a few instructions.

The shopkeeper seemed to have a slight limp, walking with one foot deep and the other shallow.

Nalan Jinlian watched him depart, wondering how he injured his foot and if it could be fully restored if re-injured and mended again.

And for this, medical skills were required.

Medical skills...

Nalan Jinlian remembered that there were no medical books in the Lotus Garden.

Not a single one.

Even miscellaneous notes were very superficial, yet she could paint well and had excellent calligraphy.

Logically, the Lotus Garden should have had some of her calligraphy or paintings stored, things she found exceptionally good and wanted to keep for the long term.

But there was nothing.

Mrs. Xu started managing affairs and took Nalan Jinlian out the next day to buy gifts to bring back.

Mrs. Xu was very generous with her spending, and it was only then that Nalan Jinlian realized her mother was very wealthy.

Truly wealthy.

Reportedly, they had four or five shops in this small town, and while returning home, they didn't sell them but left them to the original shopkeepers.

They only took the profits from these years.

"Mother..."

"Mm?"

"Selling those shops would also fetch a lot of silver!"

Mrs. Xu laughed, "Indeed they would bring a lot of silver, but they are not comparable to human sentiment. Over these years, I haven't managed the shops, yet they haven't embezzled a single tael of silver. This integrity is worth ten times more than those shops, and what about the people in the shops if I sell them? Don't even think about bringing them back to the Imperial Capital; it is not as good as imagined. Leaving them here might bring unexpected rewards someday!"

Nalan Jinlian nodded, indicating her understanding.

These shopkeepers probably already had families, which would eventually lead to children.

While the children might not have achieved much before, the future would be different; with a stable income-giving shop, they would cultivate their children.

Even if the children's generation doesn't have much achievement, what about the grandchildren's generation?

Mrs. Xu had not only left a backup path for herself but also paved the way for future generations.

Mrs. Xu not only bought things for herself but for Nalan Jinlian as well.

She would purchase anything beautiful, luxurious, and exquisite, willing to spend the money and even bought precious gold items for the people at the Marquis Residence, with novel and beautiful designs.

These reportedly were goods imported from Tianchu Country.

Nalan Jinlian toyed with the gold hairpin in her hand.

Tianchu Country, what kind of place is it?

"Lianlian, what do you think of this jade pendant?" Mrs. Xu's voice interrupted Nalan Jinlian's pondering.

"Mother's taste is naturally excellent!"

"Hehe, you child, this is for your coming-of-age ceremony!"

Chapter 984: Mrs. Xu's Threat

Another coming-of-age.

Nalan Jinlian always felt that she had already come of age.

What a strange thought.

"Thank you, Mother, for taking the trouble for me!"

"Silly child, you're my daughter. If I don't do it for you, for whom?" Mrs. Xu said, all the while picking out many more items.

After buying the things, they went to a restaurant for a meal.

Mrs. Xu not only knew how to shop, she knew how to eat, too. Gently and lovingly, she taught Nalan Jinlian how to savor the flavors, giving her another lesson.

After the meal, the mother and daughter took a carriage back home.

Back to the Nalan Residence.

Mrs. Xu asked Nalan Jinlian to return to Lotus Garden to change her clothes. As they parted, she held Nalan Jinlian's hand, "Lianlian, how about I give you a little brother?"

"Yes!"

Without thinking, Nalan Jinlian agreed.

A brother, she should have a brother.

Fair-skinned and plump, very adorable.

A bit mischievous, but very nice to her and listens to her.

She would love him dearly, willing to give him all good things, because he would be her brother.

Mrs. Xu smiled, raised her hand to touch Nalan Jinlian's head, and praised, "Lianlian is such a good girl!"

"Go back now. Come to have dinner with me later, and bring your father along. Let's have a nice family meal together!"

"Okay!"

Nalan Jinlian returned to Lotus Garden.

The corners of her eyes and brows were filled with joy.

"Why is Miss smiling?" Chunqiu asked softly.

"I'm going to have a little brother; it's something to be happy about!"

Chunqiu also smiled, following suit, "The Miss is very right!"

That night

In Mrs. Xu's courtyard

The round table was filled with dishes, very exquisite.

Mrs. Xu personally poured wine for Nalan Bo, holding the wine cup and handing it to him, speaking softly, "Lord, in the past, I was foolish. From now on, I won't be that way again. For Lianlian's sake, I'll be a good mother, a good wife, a good matron. I hope you can forgive my past wrongs."

Nalan Bo was taken aback.

Mrs. Xu had always been proud, yet now she was lowering herself. What was she planning?

But under Nalan Jinlian's hopeful, smiling gaze, he still took the wine cup, "It's all in the past. We are a family, no need for divisions." With that, he drank the wine.

Nalan Jinlian also toasted Nalan Bo.

The three of them as a family seemed somewhat harmonious, with a hint of happiness.

After the meal, Nalan Jinlian didn't dare to linger, leaving with a gentle smile, giving space to Nalan Bo and Mrs. Xu.

She thought it would be affectionate, yet she didn't know that in Mrs. Xu's room, the atmosphere was tense.

"Mrs. Xu, what do you mean by this?" Nalan Bo asked angrily.

In just a few days, she had already won Nalan Jinlian's heart.

"I mean nothing. I just want a child. A son would be best, but if it's a daughter, it's fine too. You're still young, I can always have a son!"

And if Nalan Bo wasn't willing, it didn't matter; she wouldn't mind finding a man outside and putting a green hat on Nalan Bo.

Mrs. Xu was unwilling to raise children from concubines or lesser wives.

Putting in effort without guaranteed results.

If there really was no way, she'd still live well on her own.

But first, she needed to avenge her daughter and get everything owed to her.

As for the current state of the Marquis Residence, she could guess without going back. It was likely all show with nothing behind it, lacking resources.

Otherwise, Nalan Bo wouldn't seek alternatives.

"You..."

Nalan Bo's face turned livid with anger.

What kind of woman says such things, treating him as what?

"There's no need for anger, Lord. We all know what's at play here. Today, I asked Lianlian if she wanted a brother, and she does!" Mrs. Xu said, raising her eyebrows to threaten Nalan Bo, "Lord, you'd better fulfill my wish, or who knows what I might do!"

Chapter 985: Acting in Defense (Part 1)

Listening to Mrs. Xu, Nalan Bo felt disgusted.

But there was no other way. For the sake of his future, no matter how disgusting, he had to endure it.

Initially, he thought it would be tasteless, but unexpectedly, Mrs. Xu, who hadn't enjoyed intimacy for a long time,

was quite tight.

And quite wet.

He found some pleasure in it.

After the affair, Nalan Bo lay on the bed panting, while Mrs. Xu rested for a moment and then had someone bring water for bathing.

After changing into clean clothes, Mrs. Xu didn't sleep on the bed but instead laid on the heated brick bed on the side.

Nalan Bo was disgusted by her, and she was disgusted by Nalan Bo.

So it was, each minding their own business.

As Nalan Bo watched, he got up, dressed, and returned to his own courtyard.

Mrs. Xu let out a cold chuckle.

Can't take it already? What about what's coming next?

Having reconciled with Mrs. Xu, Nalan Jinlian was free of worries, so she contentedly ate and laughed, then packed her things to return to the Capital City.

This trip included a lot of things, altogether requiring dozens of carriages.

The night before departure, Nalan Bo brought Mrs. Liao and her children back, and Mrs. Xu looked at Mrs. Liao with a sinister smile.

"It's been a long time indeed!"

"Greetings, Madam!" Mrs. Liao bowed slightly.

Her belly was protruding.

Mrs. Xu glanced at Nalan Mingzhu and Nalan Mingcong standing to the side, and then saw Nalan Jinlian gracefully approaching, speaking coolly, "Rise, please!"

"Thank you, Madam!" Mrs. Liao thanked cautiously.

As if entering the dust.

Mrs. Xu ignored her, instead smiling warmly at Nalan Jinlian, "Lianlian, come to your mother!"

"Okay!"

Nalan Jinlian smiled softly and greeted Nalan Mingzhu.

"Sister!" Nalan Mingzhu bowed, and Nalan Mingcong followed with a salute, awkwardly calling out, "Sister!"

"Okay!" Nalan Jinlian nodded slightly, then nodded to Mrs. Liao before bowing to Mrs. Xu and Nalan Bo, "Greetings, father and mother!"

Mrs. Xu helped Nalan Jinlian up, then said, "This is your father's concubine, Mrs. Liao, and that's Mrs. Liao's daughter, Mingzhu, and that is Mingcong!"

With the title Mrs. Liao, their status was set, as was the stature of Nalan Mingzhu and Nalan Mingcong.

From now on, they were considered illegitimate.

Whether it was Nalan Mingzhu or Nalan Mingcong, their faces turned somewhat pale.

Nalan Bo felt sympathy, but there was no solution now, "Rushi, serve tea to the Madam!"

Mrs. Liao's name was Rushi.

Mrs. Liao's face paled slightly as she responded respectfully, "Yes!"

Mrs. Xu had Nalan Jinlian sit to the side while the maid prepared tea, and Mrs. Liao respectfully served the tea.

Mrs. Xu took a sip from the teacup and rewarded Mrs. Liao with a gold hairpin, "In the future, serve the master well and help expand his lineage!" As she spoke, Mrs. Xu looked at Mrs. Liao's belly, "Since you are pregnant, take good care of yourself. There's no need to come to me for greetings, as we will return to the Imperial Capital in a couple of days. Pack up and prepare some things for your children at home, to avoid any embarrassment later!"

"Yes!"

Mrs. Liao replied quietly.

She had prepared some things, but none were particularly expensive.

The silver money she had was given by Nalan Bo, and it was barely enough to buy necessities.

"Alright, go rest now!"

Nalan Bo remembered and turned to give Mrs. Liao some silver, suggesting she buy more things.

The family planned to take whatever they could back to the Imperial Capital. Nalan Bo intended to sell the estate and use some of the silver to buy a place in Capital City once they returned; although it couldn't compare with the Marquis Residence, at least it was something.

If possible, Nalan Bo wanted to arrange for Mrs. Liao to live outside, to prevent Mrs. Xu from secretly harming her.

In short, Nalan Bo was cautious about Mrs. Xu in every way.

Chapter 986: Knowing Too Much

Mrs. Xu seemed unaware of Nalan Bo's thoughts, busy with daily purchases. At night, she would call Nalan Bo to her courtyard. Afterward, he could choose to stay or leave, while she would sleep elsewhere.

Their relationship as husband and wife was rather peculiar.

Nalan Jinlian increasingly doubted her identity, but she said not a word and didn't ask.

"Ha..."

She yawned.

Reaching out to touch her neck, she questioned in confusion, "Chunqiu!"

"I'm here, my lady!"

"Did I wear anything before?"

"Yes, my lady used to wear a Jade Pendant. But a few days ago, you asked me to put it away. Would you like it now?"

"Bring it to me!"

"Yes!"

Chunqiu immediately went to fetch the Jade Pendant.

Nalan Jinlian held it in her hand; it was a piece of blood-red Warm Jade.

Warm Jade is valuable, and even more so when it's pure blood-red.

Nalan Jinlian glanced at it a few times, at first intending to wear it, but then decided against it. She handed it to Chunqiu, saying, "It's too precious; take good care of it for me, don't lose it!"

"Yes!"

Soon, the day to return to the Imperial Capital arrived. Many things from the mansion were packed into boxes and loaded onto horse carriages, totaling more than thirty. Nalan Bo even hired people from the Escort Agency to protect them; the group headed back to the Imperial Capital in a leisurely manner.

Yet, Nalan Jinlian had an impression that the Escort Agency people seemed to have exceptional martial skills.

Nalan Jinlian sat in Mrs. Xu's carriage, where the mother and daughter played chess.

Nalan Jinlian's chess skills were outstanding, and Mrs. Xu wasn't weak either; they won and lost in turn.

"Lianlian's chess skills are impressive!"

"Perhaps they are inherited from mother!"

Mrs. Xu nodded with a smile.

When alone, Nalan Jinlian would stare blankly outside the carriage.

"Xuanqiu, what month is it now?"

"It's November, we'll definitely reach the Imperial Capital before December!"

"Hmm!"

Nalan Mingzhu also came to talk with Nalan Jinlian, even preparing tea for her to drink.

Mrs. Xu never praised nor criticized Nalan Mingzhu's tea skills, mostly ignoring them.

She didn't restrict the sisters from getting along, but remained indifferent towards Nalan Mingzhu.

"Auntie!"

Nalan Mingzhu called softly.

"Hmm?" Aunt Liao gently stroked her belly.

She took a deep breath.

Auntie...

From being a mother to an aunt, it was truly hard to adapt, yet it was unavoidable and had to be adapted to.

"Do you think sister really likes me?" Nalan Mingzhu asked faintly.

"Of course she does!" Aunt Liao replied with a smile.

She didn't want Nalan Mingzhu to be too anxious, suspecting this and that all day long.

And she showed sincere kindness towards Nalan Jinlian.

She could see that Nalan Jinlian had a very good temperament, gentle and courteous, neither arrogant nor impetuous; though she wasn't particularly fond of Nalan Mingzhu, there was some goodwill.

She hoped Mingzhu and Nalan Jinlian would bond well.

"Auntie, I don't know why, but sister always feels unreal to me. I always feel that she..."

"Don't overthink it!" Aunt Liao interrupted Nalan Mingzhu's words.

There were some things she knew well, but Mingzhu and Mingcong should absolutely not know.

The more they knew, the more dangerous it became; knowing nothing was safer.

"Oh!"

Nalan Mingzhu replied faintly, lifting the carriage curtain to gaze at the snow-covered scene outside.

She saw several young men riding horses swiftly past.

The leading man wore a black silk robe, with a Purple Jade Crown upon his head, his eyebrows and eyes were cold and stern. Noticing her spying on him, he turned and glanced at her, his eyes so cold and ailing that Nalan Mingzhu's heart skipped a beat, her hand trembled, and she hurriedly let down the curtain.

"What's wrong?" Lady Liao asked, puzzled.

"Someone just passed by, so frightening!"

Chapter 987: Missed and Missed

Mrs. Liao raised her hand to touch Nalan Mingzhu's head, "When we arrive at the Imperial Capital, there will be many more rules. You mustn't lift the carriage curtains so recklessly, nor make such a fuss, or you'll become a laughing stock!"

"..."

Nalan Mingzhu remained silent.

She nodded, indicating that she understood.

She didn't know how her legitimate mother taught her sister, but it surely wasn't like how her aunt was instructing her.

Aunt...

Nalan Mingzhu felt her heart sink.

Over there, Nalan Jinlian also heard the sound of horse hooves and initially wanted to lift the curtain, but finally decided against it.

She leaned on the soft pillow, remaining silent.

"Is the young lady unhappy?" Chunqiu asked.

"I wouldn't say that, it's just that we're returning to the Imperial Capital. Naturally, I feel a bit uneasy!"

"The master will be promoted once we return, and so many people in the Imperial Capital will want to flatter him. You are the master's legitimate eldest daughter, everyone will be doting on you; there's no need to feel uneasy!"

Nalan Jinlian smiled lightly, "There's some truth to what you say!"

Living in this world, your reputation is something you earn for yourself.

Moreover, Father is indeed getting a promotion, and surely many people will try to win him over.

"So, once you return to the Marquis Residence, you should first win over the old Marchioness. With her favoring you, no one in the inner residence would dare to bully you. Madam's family is also the Count Residence, not the highest of nobility, but not low either!"

"Hmm!" Nalan Jinlian nodded.

When she could no longer hear the horse hooves, she finally lifted the curtain of the carriage.

She wondered who was in such a hurry to be on the road.

It was snowing!

Nalan Jinlian reached out her hand, catching a falling snowflake, watching it melt in her palm; it felt cool and very pleasant.

Chu Yu and his group were in a rush to reach the Imperial Capital to meet Tianci, so they traveled day and night despite the wind and snow.

It had been several months.

Yun Jinnian had disappeared just like that, with no news at all.

When the Spiritual Poisonous Insect was retrieved by Tianci, the mother insect was nowhere to be found, and the larvae were too small to help in searching for someone. So Tianci decided to sneak into the Imperial Capital of the Great Zhou Kingdom to secretly surveil Zhou Yunshen.

Meanwhile, he acted openly as an envoy to the Great Zhou Kingdom.

Chu Xiao was eager for him to leave but later regretted it. Now that Chu Xiao was poisoned and couldn't find Yun Jinnian to cure him, he could only suppress it with daily medication and wrote to Zhou Yunshen for help, receiving only the words, "Don't bring it up again!"

Chu Xiao was so angered that he almost spat blood.

Just as Chunqiu said, they arrived at the Imperial Capital of the Great Zhou Kingdom on November 30th. The people from the Fuwei Marquis Residence were waiting at the city gates. When they saw Nalan Bo's group, one person stayed behind while another hurried back to the Marquis Residence to report.

Upon hearing the news, the old Marchioness of the Marquis Residence had tears well up in her eyes and exclaimed, "We're finally back. Help me to the main entrance!"

The eldest daughter-in-law, Mrs. Xuan, the second daughter-in-law, Mrs. Mu, the fourth concubine daughter-in-law, Mrs. Kang, the fifth concubine daughter-in-law, Mrs. Wu, along with the legitimate and concubine granddaughters, went to the main entrance to greet them.

This was her youngest legitimate son, who had to go to the border due to offending someone years ago, staying there for over a decade. Now he could finally return, supposedly due to the Empress's personal

request, which was indeed a great blessing. At last, they endured through the storms to see the moonlight.

All the daughters-in-law and grandchildren were smiling.

The old Marchioness of the Nalan family glanced around and joined in the laughs.

She couldn't help but ask her eldest daughter-in-law, Mrs. Xuan, "Is the courtyard for the third family all prepared?"

"It's all prepared. The third uncle's courtyard, Haoyue Pavilion, has been arranged according to the third brother's instructions. Since he brought an aunt, the courtyard behind Haoyue Pavilion has also been set up. Jinlian's Qinglian Garden is also ready, though I'm not sure of her personal preferences. We put some festive decorations in there and will have Huanzhi ask her what she likes later, then take them from the storeroom!"

Chapter 988: Marquis Residence in the Imperial Capital

"Well, that's good, this child grew up in the border town, and now she's finally back!" said the old Madame Nalan, her eyes reddening again.

Mrs. Xuan and Mrs. Mu hurriedly consoled her, "Now that she's back, mother can pamper her well!"

"Yes, Grandmother, Sister Lian is younger than me, I will also love her dearly!" Nalan Huanhuan said with a grin.

"Good, our Huan girl is really a good child!" The old Madame Nalan smiled, taking her hand from Mrs. Xuan and letting Nalan Huanhuan come forward to support her.

Mrs. Xuan chuckled and moved aside.

Her daughter being liked by the old Madame was much more gratifying than being liked herself.

The group reached the main gate, and the men of the Marquis Residence also came to greet them, all bowing in respect.

The old Marquess looked at his old wife, feeling sentimental.

It's said the Emperor loves his eldest son, and the common people love their youngest; he too greatly loved this third legitimate son.

Though not the youngest, he was the youngest legitimate child, incomparable to those illegitimate ones.

With that thought, he extended his hand to his old wife.

The old Madame Nalan hesitated, placing her hand in the old Marquess's large hand, as they stepped out together, seeing carriages slowly approaching.

"They're here, Grandfather, Grandmother, Third Uncle and Sister Lian are here!" Nalan Huanhuan exclaimed with a smile.

The old Marquess took a deep breath.

Once the carriage stopped, Nalan Bo was the first to step down, helping Mrs. Xu out, and then assisting Nalan Jinlian down.

After Mrs. Liao and her two children got off, he walked toward the old Marquess and the old Madame Nalan, immediately kneeling down, "Father, Mother, your unfilial son has returned!"

The old Marquess merely gave a faint "hmm."

The old Madame Nalan, however, burst into tears, hitting Nalan Bo several times, "You rascal, you rascal!"

"Mother!" Nalan Bo's eyes also reddened.

The old Madame Nalan laughed at this, "Quickly get up and step aside, I must see my dear granddaughter!"

Nalan Bo laughed, standing up and saying to Nalan Jinlian, "Jinlian, come and meet your grandmother!"

Nalan Jinlian stepped forward and curtsied slightly, "Greetings, Grandmother, Grandfather!"

She also bowed to the others, "Greetings to the uncles, aunts, and cousins!"

The old Madame Nalan laughed, and the old Marquess nodded slightly.

They just couldn't help but feel this child was truly beautiful.

With skin as fair and tender as if it could be pinched and water would come out.

The elders looked on with loving smiles, peers immediately clasped their hands in response, and sisters followed with curtsies, each smiling brightly, very amicable.

The old Madame Nalan quickly pulled Nalan Jinlian up, "Oh my, we're all family, no need for such formalities, let Grandmother have a good look at you!"

Nalan Jinlian sweetly called out, "Grandmother!"

"What a good child!" The old Madame Nalan looked at the breathtakingly beautiful Nalan Jinlian, unable to stop smiling.

Initially, she had intended for Nalan Huanhuan to enter the Crown Prince Residence as a concubine, but now she dismissed that idea.

With Nalan Jinlian's looks, if the Crown Prince saw her, he would surely be pleased; she couldn't possibly be just a concubine, she must be the main wife.

Mrs. Xu stepped forward and slightly bowed, "Daughter-in-law greets Father, Mother!"

The old Marquess gave a faint nod.

The old Madame Nalan, however, laughed, "You are good, having given the Marquis Residence a good daughter, it's a great merit!"

Mrs. Xu smiled and stood aside.

Everyone naturally noticed Mrs. Liao, Nalan Mingzhu, and Nalan Mingcong.

Mother and children stepped forward, "Greetings to the Marquess, old Madame (Grandfather, Grandmother)!"

Nalan Mingzhu was also quite beautiful, but with Nalan Jinlian's jewel-like presence, she suddenly seemed colorless...

Chapter 989: Sowing Discord

The old Marquess and Old Madam Nalan have always emphasized the distinctions between legitimate and illegitimate heirs. The old Marquess still nodded slightly.

Old Madam Nalan looked at Nalan Mingzhu and said with a smile, "You are also good, no need for formalities!" Then she turned to Nalan Mingcong, "You must be Mingcong!"

"Yes, Grandmother!" Nalan Mingcong replied respectfully.

"You're a sensible one, you will go to the academy with your brothers in the future!"

" Old Madam Nalan seemed to want to say more.

Nalan Huanhuan laughed, "Grandmother, it's so cold outside, your health is not well, should we head back first?"

Everyone immediately came to their senses.

Old Madam Nalan laughed, "Our Huan is so considerate, let's go inside!"

She held Nalan Jinlian's hand as they walked towards the Marquis Residence.

Nalan Huanhuan also took Nalan Jinlian's other hand, "Lian, I'm your sister Huan, our courtyards are next to each other, I'll take you around later to see what's missing, and you can take from mine to use first!"

"Exactly, your sister Huan has many good things. She's usually very strict, but today she's generously offering. You should take as much as you can later, and if you can't carry it all, Grandmother will send some maids and women to help you!" Old Madam Nalan teased with a laugh.

"Ah..."

Nalan Huanhuan widened her eyes.

In disbelief, she exclaimed, "Grandmother, I was only telling Lian to take it, how can you help? No, no!"

Nalan Huanhuan shook her head, pouting her cheeks, looking adorably flush with embarrassment. Nalan Jinlian laughed out loud.

Considering how much the old Madam and old Marquess value their father, the courtyard they've prepared must be decent enough. With the things brought back from the small town, it would be well-furnished, leaving no need to take from her cousin sister's room.

"Why not? You said it yourself, we all heard it, Lian, don't be polite with your sister Huan, take as much as you can later!"

Nalan Huanhuan widened her beautiful eyes again, "I only said Lian could take, I didn't say Grandmother would send someone to help take it!"

"Look at this stubborn one!" Old Madam Nalan laughed heartily, telling Nalan Jinlian, "Your sister Huan loves her possessions dearly, if she doesn't let you take freely, Grandmother will let you have anything from the storeroom, take and pick as you wish!"

Receiving gifts from an elder should not be declined, Nalan Jinlian slightly nodded.

"Grandmother, and what about me?" Nalan Huanhuan quickly asked.

"Nothing for you, not giving!"

"Oh dear, Grandmother, now that you have Lian, you don't love me anymore, how heartbreaking!" she said, feigning a dramatic heartache.

"You cheeky monkey!" Old Madam Nalan scolded with a smile.

Nalan Jinlian had to admit, this Nalan Huanhuan is clever, her teasing amused Old Madam Nalan greatly.

Logically speaking, they should have been the center of attention today upon returning, but Nalan Huanhuan was the most lively.

Nalan Mingzhu walked behind, her eyes slightly red.

Indeed, there was no difference in the small town, but upon arriving at the Imperial Capital, the distinctions between legitimate and illegitimate become apparent.

Seeing how Grandmother favors her legitimate sister, seeing her mother surrounded by aunts, seeing her aunty being led away by maids, seeing her brother silent by their father's side.

Nalan Mingzhu clenched the handkerchief in her hand.

A girl approached Nalan Mingzhu, saying in a low voice, "My name is Zile, I'm eleven this year, from the fourth house, and you, what is your name and how old are you?"

"My name is Mingzhu, I'm thirteen!"

"Oh, it's Sister Mingzhu!" Nalan Zile smiled, leaning a bit closer to Nalan Mingzhu, "Sister Mingzhu, Grandmother is really good to Sister Lian, even better than to Sister Huan!"

Chapter 990: The Distinction Between Legitimate and Illegitimate

Nalan Zile's attempt to sow discord was something Nalan Mingzhu naturally understood.

However, she would never be incited to contend with Nalan Jinlian.

Nalan Mingzhu remained silent.

Nalan Zile was about to say something, but Mrs. Xu glanced back at her. Though the look was subtle, it frightened Nalan Zile.

Mrs. Xu gave a faint smile, turning to continue speaking with Mrs. Xuan and Mrs. Mu.

Mrs. Kang also glanced back at her daughter, sighing inwardly.

This foolish girl, stirring up trouble in such a public setting, if the old Marquis finds out, she will definitely be punished.

The group arrived at the warm hall; Nalan Jinlian sat beside the old Marquis, where the maids had already prepared snacks and hot soup.

Nalan Mingzhu glanced over, indeed not seeing Liao Auntie.

She took a deep breath and sat beside Nalan Zile.

"You eat!" A plate of pastries was placed in front of her.

Nalan Mingzhu looked up to see a woman in a blue embroidered jacket, with bright eyes and white teeth, looking at her with a gentle smile.

"Have a taste, it's quite good!" Nalan Mingyi said gently.

Jinlian was well cared for sitting beside her grandmother, while Mingzhu sat there in solitude.

Even though she was a concubine-born daughter, she was still a child of the Nalan family, a sister, deserving of some care.

"Thank you!"

"I'm soon coming of age, a bit older than you, you may call me Sister Yi!"

"Thank you, Sister Yi!" Nalan Mingzhu sincerely expressed her gratitude.

In this vast Marquis Residence, when everyone surrounded Nalan Jinlian, it was nice to have someone care for her.

"Do eat quickly, I quite like these pastries!" Nalan Mingyi said, also taking a piece to eat slowly.

"Okay!"

Nalan Mingzhu responded, feeling much better inside.

The old Marquis personally fed Nalan Jinlian the pastries before laughingly asking, "Do they taste good?"

"Responding to Grandmother, the taste is excellent!"

"If you like them, have the cook make more in the future. It's deep winter now, and there's not much good food to eat; make more pastries to relieve cravings. Next year when the weather is better, and fruits are plentiful, Grandmother will take you to the estate to live for a while, eating fresh picked ones which are both fresh and delicious!"

"Alright!"

After chatting for a bit and having some snacks, the old Marquis finally said, "You must be tired from the journey, go freshen up and rest a while. Tonight we'll host a banquet to properly welcome you. If there's anything you want to eat, tell the maids; if the kitchen doesn't have it, we can substitute with something else!"

"Thank you, Grandmother!"

"Off you go!"

Nalan Huanhuan held Nalan Jinlian's hand, "Lian sister, I'll take you to Qinglian Garden!"

"Alright!"

Mrs. Xu was about to return to Haoyue Pavilion and spoke with Nalan Jinlian for a bit.

She trusted that the maids and matrons around Nalan Jinlian could serve her well but still reminded them, "Serve the young lady well; as we've returned from the border town, it might take time to adjust, be careful not to catch a chill, and pay extra attention to the food!"

"Yes, I understand!" Chunqiu promptly responded.

"Alright, off you go, be careful on the road, don't trip or stumble!" Mrs. Xu said, arranging Nalan Jinlian's cloak and placing her hat on.

"Farewell, Mother!" Nalan Jinlian bowed.

Mother was indeed kind to her.

Meticulously attentive.

"Hmm!"

Mrs. Xu led the maid Lian Qiao away first.

Nalan Jinlian, Nalan Huanhuan, Nalan Mingzhu, Nalan Mingyi, Nalan Zile, and several other sisters headed towards Nalan Jinlian's Qinglian Garden.

The Marquis Residence had always emphasized the distinction between legitimate and concubine-born children.

The legitimate daughters' courtyards were at the front, named with a part of their names followed by 'Garden'. The concubine-born daughters' were a bit further back, not as large or ornate as those of the legitimate daughters.