

Indulgence 991

Chapter 991: Comparison and Competition

After sending Nalan Jinlian to Qinglian Garden, they exchanged some pleasantries for a while. Then, they all consciously left, allowing Nalan Jinlian to settle in and rest.

Nalan Mingzhu looked at her own room, at the furnishings inside. Her initially calm heart suddenly tensed up, and her expression changed repeatedly.

What is heaven, what is earth.

Truly, they are different.

The items in Nalan Jinlian's room, down to the smallest ornament, were exquisitely crafted and extremely valuable.

And in her room, although it was not unattractive, it was merely pleasant to look at and not worth much.

The sum of everything in the room might not even be as valuable as the blood-red coral statue in Nalan Jinlian's room.

"Haha, haha!" Nalan Mingzhu laughed out loud.

Entering the bedroom, it was even more incomparable.

In Nalan Jinlian's room, there were high beds with soft pillows, and the room was warm, obviously heated strongly by the floor dragon, while her room was chilly with no warmth to speak of.

Such biased hearts indeed.

"Miss, the hot water is ready!"

Nalan Mingzhu replied indifferently and went to bathe.

But she always felt something was wrong here and uncomfortable there, yet she didn't dare to speak up and just bottle up her grievances.

Nalan Jinlian soaked in a fragrant wooden tub, comfortably sighing, "Chunqiu!"

"This servant is here!"

"Is everyone arranged?"

"Everything is arranged. There were originally eight maids and old women in this Qinglian Garden. After a brief inquiry, I found that two maids were excellent with needlework, two old women could make pastries, and the small kitchen had four maids and old women specifically for heating water, making twelve people in total!" Chunqiu reported one by one.

Chong Ling was organizing the items brought back, preparing to give them to siblings.

The elders naturally would receive gifts too, and more valuable ones at that.

"Understood. Just tell them it was hard work and reward each with twenty taels of silver and a bolt of fabric we brought back from the border town!"

"Yes!"

Those maids and old women, even the first-class head maid only earned fifteen taels of silver a month, and the little maid only eight taels a month. But don't underestimate these eight taels, for a poor family, saving it up could cover a year's expenses.

Chunqiu served Nalan Jinlian until she was bathed and her hair dry, only then went out to distribute the rewards.

She couldn't help but give them a warning, "The miss is kind-hearted and knows how hard you worked to tidy up the courtyard. Each of you gets rewarded with twenty taels of silver and a bolt of fabric from the border town!"

The maids and old women were overjoyed.

After all, they weren't head maids and didn't usually have any advantages.

This miss was truly generous.

"Thank you, miss, for the reward!"

"Good that you all know. Remember, what's in Qinglian Garden must not be leaked outside. If anyone dares to be disloyal, being sold off is the least of their worries. Do you understand?"

"We understand!"

"Off you go, and don't make any noise lest you disturb the miss's rest!"

"Yes!"

Chunqiu waited outside the bedroom, Chong Ling and Nurse Qin quietly organizing things.

Nalan Jinlian had few clothes, but plenty of fabric.

Jewelry and silver notes were also numerous, as Nurse Qin and the others told Nalan Jinlian that they were given by Nalan Bo.

They thought it was flawless, but little did they know Nalan Jinlian had already begun to have suspicions!

At the same time, on the street outside the Marquis Residence.

A carriage was slowly blocked by a line of carriages, preventing it from moving forward.

"What's going on?" asked Chu Yu in a deep voice inside the carriage.

"Replying to the master, it's the third master of Fuwei Marquis Residence returning to the capital with his family to report for duty. They have quite a lot of goods, which is blocking the road!" replied Anyi.

Since the disappearance of Princess Yijia, the master's temper had grown stranger by the day.

Though once a young man, his temples already bore white hair!

Chapter 992: Kindness and Love

Chu Yu heard the words and remained silent.

After a while, he said, "Wait!"

"Yes!"

Anyi let out a breath.

Wait for the things ahead to be cleared, the carriage to be moved, then the road will be clear.

Chu Yu returned to the residence he bought in the Imperial Capital.

He went directly into the study.

Han Tianci immediately walked out, "Brother Chu!"

"Hmm!"

Chu Yu sat down, lifted the teacup, pinching the lid between his fingers, gently stirring the tea leaves, but did not drink.

Han Tianci watched, lowered his eyes.

In his heart, he still felt for Chu Yu.

Although he didn't verbally express his anxiety, the conspicuous gray hairs at his temples revealed all his emotions.

Han Tianci never thought that Chu Yu valued his sister so much.

"There is no news of my sister for now, but I believe once Zhou Yunshen's wedding takes place, my sister will surely appear!"

Chu Yu said nothing, put down the teacup, and played with the jade ring on his finger.

Han Tianci saw that Chu Yu remained silent.

He took a deep breath, "Brother Chu, I'll be off!"

"Tianci!"

"Hmm?"

"Be cautious in your actions and take care of yourself!"

Jinnian is missing without any news; Tianci cannot go astray.

Han Tianci paused, nodded, and flew away without a sound, unnoticed by those hiding in the shadows to monitor Chu Yu.

Imperial Palace

The Empress looked at Zhou Yunshen and saw the joy radiating from the corners of his eyes and his brows. She sighed, "Feeling happy?"

"Replying to Mother, yes!"

"You're not hiding it at all!"

He exhausted all efforts to bring the person to the Imperial Capital, ignoring all her advice.

Really...

The Empress sighed.

Fortunately, she was a modern person, more open-minded, and willing to fulfill him; otherwise, with the stubborn thinking of ancient people.

This son of hers would probably face hardship.

Zhou Yunshen stood up, saluted the Empress, "Thank you, Mother, for allowing it!"

"You're my son, if I don't fulfill you, then who will? All right, now that the person is in the Imperial Capital, the wise prince of Tianchu Country also chased after. Remember, do not rush!"

"Yes, I understand, Mother!"

"It's good that you understand, go on with your work!"

"Yes!"

When a son grows up, has his own thoughts, and likes someone, it's a good thing.

The Empress watched Zhou Yunshen leave, pursing her lips and smiling.

She shook her head helplessly, her heart full of affection.

Marquis Residence of Fuwei

Because the third house's Nalan Bo returned with family and was to serve in the Capital City, the old Marquess especially favored Nalan Jinlian, this granddaughter, and the welcoming banquet was quite lavish.

A table full of dishes, the whole family sitting together, the large round table could seat thirty people.

Except for the concubines who couldn't sit at the table, the illegitimate daughters could.

Nalan Jinlian sat beside the old Marquess, "Jinlian, tell the maid to pick the dishes you like for you, eat more. This is your home, no need to follow the rules!"

"Yes!"

Nalan Jinlian responded.

Though the dishes were indeed lavish, Nalan Jinlian didn't particularly like them, feeling the taste was somehow off.

After a few bites, she didn't want to continue eating.

"What's wrong? Not to your taste?" the old Marquess asked.

"Perhaps I'm used to the border town, and not quite adapted!" Nalan Jinlian smiled, using serving chopsticks to pick dishes for the old Marquess, "Grandmother, you eat more!"

"Good child, slowly drink some soup, and instruct the kitchen to make some dishes for you, how about that?"

"Thank you, Grandmother, the chicken soup today is very good, I'll just drink more soup and eat the meat, besides, living in the Imperial Capital from now on, I need to adapt eventually!"

The old Marquess agreed, "Mm, what Jinlian says is right, eat a little less each time, eat a few more meals daily, slowly get used to it. Do you have a small kitchen on your side?"

"Replying to Grandfather, there is!"

"Having a small kitchen is convenient. Every day let the big kitchen send some dishes over, eating whenever you want, it's fresh!"

Benevolent, kind.

Nalan Mingzhu tightly gripped her chopsticks...

Chapter 993: Mrs. Xu's Reminder

Just because she is an illegitimate granddaughter, she is ignored completely.

But Nalan Jinlian is legitimate, so she receives such attention.

Nalan Huanhuan glanced at Nalan Mingzhu, smiled slightly, and continued eating her meal.

Her appetite suddenly improved.

Nalan Mingyi sat beside Nalan Mingzhu, picked up some food and placed it on the plate in front of Nalan Mingzhu, "Sister, are you used to the food?"

"Yes!" Nalan Mingzhu nodded.

If she's not used to it, then so what? Who would specially prepare it for her?

No one would.

The old Marquess looked at Nalan Mingzhu, knowing she is the third son's illegitimate daughter, he smiled and said, "If you need anything later, tell your eldest aunt!"

Although she is an illegitimate daughter, she is also the daughter of the Marquis Residence and should be pampered.

"Yes, thank you, Grandfather!"

Nalan Mingzhu understood in her heart that even if she spoke up, her eldest aunt could decline, or deal with it slowly.

Completely different from her legitimate sister.

A meal where some are happy and others worried.

Mrs. Xu asked Nalan Jinlian to go to her courtyard and took some fabrics for Nalan Jinlian, "These were part of my dowry from your maternal grandmother when I got married. I planned to keep them for your dowry, but you're about to come of age, so you must dress beautifully!"

"Thank you, Mother!"

Mrs. Xu smiled.

"Tomorrow, spend quality time with your grandmother. The day after, we'll return to your maternal grandmother's house, stay there for two days, then return to the Marquis Residence. Take these fabrics back and have the maids measure you, and quickly make an outfit. As for the style, the two seamstress maids ought to know!"

Mrs. Xu said, her eyes smiling, "But my Lianlian is good-looking, she looks good in anything she wears!"

Nalan Jinlian laughed.

"Alright, go back now, your father will come over later!"

Nalan Jinlian stood up.

Mrs. Xu carefully tied Nalan Jinlian's cape straps and placed the hat on her, "Lianlian, having a kind heart is good, but sometimes, remember it's necessary to be cautious of others. The people in this residence aren't as nice or as purely kind as you imagine. Keep good track of your stuff, don't just give it away when others ask. Especially with Liao Mistress and her three children, be extra careful with them. What kind of life did they have before? Even though they were outsiders, your father gave them plenty of money, so they lived carefree and at ease. But now in the Marquis Residence, everything must follow the rules. As the saying goes, the human heart is never satisfied, and those whose pride is higher than the sky are the most likely to harbor malicious intentions!"

Just like Nalan Mingzhu.

The more carefree she lived before, the more stifled she feels now.

Nalan Jinlian nodded, "Mother, rest assured, I will remember!"

"It's good that you remember, go on!"

After Nalan Jinlian left, Mrs. Xu then instructed Mama Zhao briefly and finally sighed, "Though she's not my legitimate daughter, she's always respectful to me, calls me mother, and I must protect her thoroughly, so those good-for-nothings don't make her sad!"

"Madam, don't worry, the young lady is perceptive!"

"She's a good one, I know!"

While wanting to protect her, there's also the desire to know her past.

Yet she can't bear to let her go.

Such a contradiction indeed.

Nalan Bo came over, and after being intimate with Mrs. Xu, he got up, dressed, and left.

As a father, he deeply cares for Nalan Mingzhu, but for the sake of his future, he can't do anything.

Nor does he dare to show favoritism towards a concubine over his wife.

Mrs. Xu lay on the bed, staring at the ceiling.

Mama Zhao personally attended to Mrs. Xu, "Mama?"

"I'm here!"

"When can I escape such a life?"

Chapter 994: Jealousy Intensifies

"Madam, rest assured, it will happen soon, you will definitely be with child in a few days!"

Mrs. Xu nodded.

Nalan Bo did not like her, and she didn't like Nalan Bo either.

They disgusted each other.

But there was no other choice, she needed a son, and if Lianlian were to truly become someone of status, she would need a legitimate younger brother.

Nalan Jinlian returned to Qinglian Garden.

The room was warm; as soon as she entered, it was full of warmth, very comfortable.

She took off her thick silk coat, spun around the room a few times, made a few movements, and quickly felt coherent.

After finishing the dance, Nalan Jinlian was drenched in sweat.

Chunqiu had already prepared hot water, and after a hot bath, she ate the pomelo Chunqiu had brought up.

"Where did this come from?"

"It was sent by someone from the Old Lady's residence!"

"Oh!" Nalan Jinlian, eating, gave further orders, "Are all the gifts prepared? They need to be sent out first thing tomorrow!"

"Everything is ready!"

Nalan Jinlian got a whole pomelo, while Nalan Mingzhu only got half.

Nalan Mingzhu was furious, not wanting to eat yet unable to resist, eventually ate it in a huff.

Little did she know that except for Nalan Jinlian, everyone else, regardless of legitimacy, only got half.

Nalan Mingzhu also did not know that she hadn't tipped the maids in her courtyard, causing them and the old maids to have some resentment.

They ended up spreading everything she did.

Early the next morning, Nalan Jinlian went to the Old Lady's courtyard to pay respects, and when she arrived, Nalan Huanhuan was already there.

"Sister Lian is here!" Nalan Huanhuan stepped forward, took Nalan Jinlian's hand, and said with a smile, "Grandmother was just talking about you, everyone is here!"

"Am I late?"

"No, we are just early!" Nalan Huanhuan said, laughing.

Today, the Marquis Residence is reordering the positions of the young ladies, and the Old Lady asked the butler's wife to come, intending to have them announce it to everyone after the reordering.

Nalan Jinlian entered the warm room to salute the Old Lady.

"Greetings to Grandmother, I hope you are well!"

"Good child, get up!" The Old Lady smiled, her eyes full of warmth.

This child, the more she looked, the more she liked.

She looked excellent yesterday, and today, she looks even better than yesterday.

It must be because she rested well and is in good health.

"Come sit beside Grandmother!"

Nalan Jinlian smiled, presenting the gift she brought back from the border town for the Old Lady,
"Grandmother, here is a Jade Guanyin I brought back for you. See if you like it!"

The Old Lady took it and examined it carefully, "This jade is Hetian jade, already very rare, and the craftsmanship is delicate and exquisite. Truly excellent, place it beside my great Buddha statue, give it a space, and every day I shall honor it!"

Nalan Jinlian pursed her lips.

The item was indeed good, but not large enough.

But then, what good things could a child gift?

She also gave gifts to Mrs. Xuan and the other aunties.

As for the sisters, Nalan Jinlian planned to invite them to Qinglian Garden to let them choose for themselves.

Nalan Mingzhu also presented her own gift, not as valuable as Nalan Jinlian's, and she hadn't put much thought into it.

Seeing that no one praised her, she felt a bitter sadness, very upset.

Three legitimate daughters had married out from the Marquis Residence, and now in the residence, Nalan Huanhuan was the eldest, ranked fourth.

Below her were Nalan Mingyi, Nalan Jinlian, Nalan Mingzhu, Nalan Zile, Nalan Mingyue, Nalan Mingxin, Nalan Mingfang, Nalan Mingyu, and Nalan Mingxi.

Nalan Jinlian was ranked sixth.

"Sixth sister!"

Chapter 995: Start Acting Mischievous

After a round of conversation, regardless of what was in their hearts, everyone was addressing each other as sisters, creating a particularly harmonious and pleasant atmosphere.

The old Madame of the Marquis Residence smiled upon learning that Mrs. Xu intended to take Nalan Jinlian back to her parental home the next day, and immediately objected.

"Since Sister Lian has just returned, I, the old lady, have yet to dote on her enough. Let her stay for a few more days at the Marquis Residence before visiting your uncle. You go back first by yourself!"

Mrs. Xu wanted to say something, but in the end, she agreed.

Thus, Nalan Jinlian didn't end up going out after all.

Instead, she delivered the gifts, wandered around Qinglian Garden a few times, and flipped through all the books she had brought back from the border town, only to find none that she liked.

This made Nalan Jinlian even more suspicious in her heart.

The days at the Marquis Residence were actually quite leisurely, and Nalan Mingyi's coming-of-age ceremony quickly arrived.

Sisters all had to present gifts.

Nalan Jinlian gifted Nalan Mingyi a pair of gold hairpins with substantial weight and good quality, considered the best among the sisters' gifts.

"The sixth sister is so generous when she gives gifts. Unfortunately, I came of age too early!" Nalan Huanhuan remarked with a smile.

"When the fourth sister gets married, I will add to the bridal gifts then and make it up to you!"

Upon hearing this, Huanhuan's face immediately turned red. She reached out to tickle Nalan Jinlian, who quickly dodged, and the room burst into chaos.

Nalan Mingyi's coming-of-age ceremony went very smoothly, and she received quite a few gifts.

Nalan Mingyi introduced Nalan Jinlian and Nalan Mingzhu to her good friends.

Nalan Mingzhu once again felt the disdain directed at her.

She bit her lip.

She excused herself, claiming she was feeling unwell, and went to the restroom.

Upon exiting, she noticed a group of Oleander in the corner. Seeing no one around, she picked a few leaves and hid them in her sleeve.

Nalan Mingzhu felt a bit scared, constantly worrying that someone would notice her. She didn't realize that as an illegitimate daughter, no one would pay her much attention.

Moreover, the current Empress was an illegitimate daughter, but the Empress's mother was a legitimate wife. It was only because her father disposed of his wife for a concubine that the Empress became illegitimate. As a result, the Empress strictly forbade favoring concubines over wives, and any official who blatantly disobeyed this decree would be stripped of their office without question.

Because of this, officials truly didn't dare to openly break the rule.

"Mingzhu sister, what are you doing?" Nalan Zile asked with a smile.

Her father was born of a concubine, and she was a legitimate daughter among the illegitimate, putting her in a very awkward position.

Especially since the old Madame was very partial, Nalan Zile harbored resentment in her heart, always wanting to stir trouble but never having the support to do so.

"Nothing, what about you?"

"I'm quite bored. Why don't we go look at the fish? Grandmother specially raised some beautiful koi!"

"Isn't the pond frozen over by now?"

"Not at all. Below the pond is a warm spring, keeping it warm all year round. That's why Grandmother uses it to raise koi!"

"Oh, that's quite fascinating!"

"Let's go take a look!"

"Alright!"

The two walked away, unnoticed by anyone.

At the pond's edge, there were indeed koi swimming back and forth. Nalan Mingzhu tightly clenched the Oleander in her sleeve, hesitating for a long time but ultimately not daring to throw it in.

The koi were indeed beautiful, but Nalan Mingzhu's mind was not on them.

She seemed to hear Nalan Jinlian's laughter coming from the backyard, and her heart became increasingly uneasy.

"Zile sister, would you like to visit my courtyard?"

"Sure, I've never been to Mingzhu sister's courtyard. I wonder how it compares to the sixth sister's courtyard!"

"The sixth sister is a legitimate daughter, while I am an illegitimate one. Naturally, my courtyard can't compare to the sixth sister's!"

Chapter 996: Resentment Arises

Nalan Zile laughed.

She just couldn't compare, that's why she said so.

If she could compare, she wouldn't have said it.

The things in Nalan Jinlian's courtyard, not only those given by the storeroom, but also those given by her grandmother, truly luxurious and exquisite, the best in this residence.

It's said that Third Aunt had a very rich dowry back in the day, but the storeroom has been locked over the years, and no one knows what's good inside.

The two agreed to leave.

Over there, Mrs. Xu and Nanny Zhao walked out from behind the rockery, looking at the departing two, Mrs. Xu's brow slightly furrowed, "I really didn't expect such a person to appear in the fourth house!"

Quite a sharp tongue.

Always sowing discord with Nalan Mingzhu.

It is a good thing. She was worried about not having the chance to deal with Nalan Mingzhu, but if Nalan Mingzhu made a mistake herself, she couldn't be blamed.

Nanny Zhao smiled, "Madam, why worry? Just a concubine's child remains a concubine's child. Even if she turns into a legitimate child, what difference does it make?"

"What Nanny says is true. Keep an eye on Aunt Liao; this woman, seemingly gentle, is actually the most hateful. Back then, even though she made me..."

"Madam!"

Nanny Zhao interrupted Mrs. Xu.

Mrs. Xu suddenly realized, her eyes reddened.

"Nanny..."

She hated deeply.

She truly hated.

That wretched Mrs. Liao, who knows what kind of charm she cast on Nalan Bo, making his heart solely for her, completely forgetting the vows made back then.

Even pushing her Lianlian into the Lotus Pond to drown, yet Nalan Bo still believed.

"Madam, don't rush, don't rush, you have Miss now, as long as Miss is here, your position in this residence remains unshakeable!"

"Nanny is right!"

Mrs. Xu is increasingly curious, wondering where exactly did Nalan Jinlian come from?

Yet her poetry, song, demeanor are gentle and graceful, every gesture as if from a painting.

Speaking softly, smiling likewise.

Walking upright, elegant without peer.

"Nanny, let's go back!"

"Alright!"

Nanny Zhao knew, Mrs. Xu was conflicted.

Wanting to find real family for Nalan Jinlian, or let Nalan Jinlian remember past matters, but also hesitant, unwilling.

So it was truly difficult.

To her, when the boat reaches the bridge, it naturally goes straight. These things should not be forced.

If Nalan Jinlian's past family truly cares, they will definitely come for her.

"Did you know? The Tianchu Country's Ruin Prince is truly handsome!"

"You saw him?"

"Yes, I saw him, but he's a bit cold. I didn't dare to look directly when I brought him tea!"

"Why did Ruin Prince come to our Marquis Residence?"

"Reportedly, he knows our Eldest Young Master and will stay at our Marquis Residence for a few days!"

"Really? That's wonderful, do you think Ruin Prince might choose one of our young ladies to marry?"

"Who knows!"

A few young maids chatted animatedly.

Mrs. Xu glanced at Nanny Zhao, "Ruin Prince?"

"I'll send someone to inquire!" Nanny Zhao spoke.

"Mm, don't inquire too much, lest you violate a taboo!"

"Yes!"

Main hall.

Eldest Young Master Nalan Changlin poured tea for Chu Yu. "Ruin Prince, have a taste, see if you like this tea!"

Who knows what the Ruin Prince was thinking, actually wanting to stay for a few days.

Simply inconceivable.

Yet he couldn't refuse.

Not only couldn't refuse, but had to warmly entertain.

Chapter 997: Madly in Love

Chu Yu stayed at the Marquis Residence, and when Zhou Yunshen heard this, he was shocked, almost falling from his chair.

"Your Highness!" Teng Fei called out urgently.

Zhou Yunshen waved his hand.

Indicating that he was fine.

But was it really fine?

How could it be fine?

Yun Jinnian was right at the Marquis Residence, with Chu Yu staying there, at any moment they might run into each other.

No way, Chu Yu absolutely cannot meet Nalan Jinlian.

Thinking of this, Zhou Yunshen immediately rose and hurried to the palace to seek the Empress.

The Empress was slightly stunned, "Let him in!"

Zhou Yunshen entered the Empress's palace, "This son greets mother Empress!"

"Between us, there's no need for such formalities, sit down!"

Zhou Yunshen sat down, looking at the Empress, said, "Mother Empress, Chu Yu has moved into the Marquis Residence!"

"..."

The Empress was astonished, pondering for a moment before asking, "Does he know?"

"Currently, it's still uncertain. Mother Empress, could you invite Nalan Jinlian to the palace?"

"Invite them to the palace..."

The Empress murmured softly, thought for a moment and said, "How about this, I'll ask the old Nalan lord to bring a few girls to the palace, I'll take a good look. What kind of girl could enchant my son like this!"

"Thank you, Mother Empress!"

The Empress looked at Zhou Yunshen.

Her only son, she took a deep breath, "Yunshen, have you really thought it through?"

To take another's love, although the girl might not remember now, what if she remembers one day in the future?

Between husband and wife, honesty is crucial.

She always felt Yunshen's behavior wasn't right, but this was her son, the only close blood relative in this foreign world, her beloved born after ten months of pregnancy, how could she let him be sad?

"Mother Empress, this son has thought through!"

Yun Jinnian, he must have her.

Otherwise, he wouldn't have gone to such lengths, feeding her medicine when she was injured, and giving her a fabricated identity.

Not very high, but not low either.

"As long as you've thought it through, it's good. Go back and shortly, Mother Empress will send someone to the Marquis Residence, summon the old Nalan lord to bring the girls to the palace tomorrow to meet, then leave them in the palace for a few days, you'll have a chance to meet them!"

"Thank you, Mother Empress!"

Zhou Yunshen got up and deeply bowed to the Empress.

Then he left the palace, heading directly to the Marquis Residence.

Nalan Changlin was very cautious of Chu Yu, when he learned the Crown Prince had come, he immediately welcomed him.

"There's no need to be so formal, I am here to visit King Rui!" Zhou Yunshen said, asking Teng Fei to hand the gift to Nalan Changlin, "I heard you have a sister who came of age today, this is my gift!"

"Thank you, Your Highness!" Nalan Changlin accepted it, instructed the servant to send it to Nalan Mingyi.

Receiving the coming-of-age gift from the Crown Prince was a massive fortune for Nalan Mingyi.

In the future, her marriage would be much smoother.

"Let's go, visit King Rui!"

"Yes!"

Chu Yu stood in the courtyard, watching as Zhou Yunshen approached, a faint cold smile appeared.

It seemed that Tianci's information was correct.

Indeed, the person was within this Marquis Residence.

But who exactly, what identity...

Chu Yu lowered his gaze.

No rush, one must not rush.

It can't be rushed.

"King Rui, why did you choose to stay at this Marquis Residence? How about staying at the palace or the Crown Prince Residence instead?" Zhou Yunshen probed.

"Just happened to be acquainted with Nalan's eldest son, he invited me as a guest, so I came!"

Nalan Changlin was moved to tears.

He was merely being polite, who knew Chu Yu would take it seriously?

He couldn't refuse.

Zhou Yunshen smiled warmly, "Nalan's eldest son is indeed hospitable, since King Rui is here, do stay for a few days!"

Chapter 998: Coming Up with a Bad Idea

Chu Yu remained silent and cold.

Zhou Yunshen turned his head to Nalan Changlin and said, "Prepare a courtyard next to Prince Rui's for me, I shall also stay at the Marquis Residence for a few days!"

"..."

Nalan Changlin was taken aback.

This indeed...

Was too unbelievable.

Although it was a great honor for the Crown Prince to stay at the Marquis Residence, it was also fraught with danger.

Who could tell if the other princes might send assassins, and if the Crown Prince gets injured...

But since the Crown Prince has spoken, they couldn't just drive him away, and had to happily leave him there.

"Yes!"

Nalan Changlin then ordered the courtyard to be prepared and also went to inform the old Marquess.

Having the Crown Prince stay at his home was no small matter and required utmost diligence.

Zhou Yunshen noticed Chu Yu remained silent, strands of white hair appearing at his temples. Although still tall and upright, he was noticeably thinner, quite different from his once spirited and arrogant self.

He had become increasingly deep and unreadable.

Zhou Yunshen marveled at Chu Yu's deep affection for Yun Jinnian but had no intentions to let go.

There was only one Yun Jinnian in the world, and he would not let him go.

"Prince Rui, how about a game of chess?" Zhou Yunshen suggested.

Chu Yu raised his brow, "I have no desire!"

He turned and retreated to his room, completely ignoring Zhou Yunshen.

Zhou Yunshen stood there, chuckling softly.

Still as gentle as jade, calm and composed.

He turned and left the courtyard, heading to the adjacent one.

Backyard

Nalan Mingyi received the gift sent by Zhou Yunshen and instantly blushed.

Nalan Huanhuan's eyes dimmed. Seeing everyone congratulating Nalan Mingyi, she also stepped forward and smiled, "Fifth sister, tell me, the Crown Prince sending a gift at this time, isn't it suggestive?"

"Ah..."

Nalan Mingyi exclaimed, her face reddening further.

Her heart was pounding.

The Crown Prince, gentle and elegant, was the most remarkable of all the young gentlemen she had met.

She naturally felt drawn to him.

Nalan Huanhuan observed, "Fifth sister, could it be that we guessed correctly?"

"Don't talk nonsense, I've only met the Crown Prince twice!" Nalan Mingyi said, her voice growing softer.

"Sixth sister, what does the Crown Prince look like?"

"Yes, is he handsome?"

"Is he tall or short, thin or fat?"

The girls surrounded Nalan Mingyi, even the visiting ladies were both envious and jealous.

Nalan Mingyi, flustered by the questions, quietly described him.

Nalan Jinlian sat aside, nibbling on some pastries, which tasted especially good today.

She couldn't help but eat more.

"Sixth sister, aren't you curious?" Nalan Huanhuan sat beside Nalan Mingzhu and softly asked.

"Curious about what?" Nalan Jinlian asked.

"The Crown Prince!"

"Oh, the Crown Prince, not really curious, there will be chances to meet in the future. Besides, the Crown Prince is now at the Marquis Residence, if the sisters are curious, they can send someone to invite him over. Then we'll know what the Crown Prince looks like!"

"..."

"..."

Everyone fell silent.

What she said made sense, but how should he be invited?

"Then sixth sister, tell us, under what pretext would it be best to invite him?"

And more appropriately.

"That's simple, just invite a few brothers over, and quietly let them know to ask the Crown Prince if he would like to come. If he doesn't, there's no harm!"

"But, men and women should maintain their distance!"

Nalan Jinlian chuckled, "With the brothers around and so many of us, there's no talk of impropriety. Besides, today is fifth sister's coming-of-age ceremony, and the Crown Prince sent a gift. Inviting him over for some pastries and tea wouldn't be inappropriate!"

Chapter 999: Overt and Covert Struggles

"That makes a lot of sense!"

"Indeed!"

"Who is that?"

"The legitimate daughter from the Third Branch of the Marquis Residence!"

"No wonder!"

When Nalan Mingzhu returned, she heard people discussing Nalan Jinlian, all saying she was truly bold, yet also very intelligent.

Nalan Mingzhu wanted to ask what had happened, but she saw several young ladies approaching and talking to Nalan Jinlian.

They were polite and courteous.

Some of them she had greeted before, but they didn't really pay her any attention.

Now, however, they were all smiles for Nalan Jinlian.

Nalan Mingyi eventually sent a maid to invite Nalan Changlin, and even went to invite Zhou Yunshen.

Once the maid left, the young ladies immediately quieted down, constantly tidying up their appearances. Some even left to redo their makeup, or even changed their clothes.

Nalan Jinlian watched, a bit puzzled.

Is the Crown Prince really that deserving of such concern from these young ladies?

Or are they more concerned about his identity as Crown Prince, the future sovereign?

Nalan Changlin didn't expect Nalan Mingyi to send a maid to invite him, and even more, to invite the Crown Prince.

After some thought, he said, "You head back first, I'll go invite the Crown Prince!"

However, now that Prince Rui, Chu Yu, was also in the Marquis Residence, he couldn't invite the Crown Prince without also inviting Prince Rui.

So he first went to Chu Yu's courtyard, "Your Highness Prince Rui, today is my family's fifth younger sister's coming-of-age ceremony. The Crown Prince has already sent a gift, and my fifth younger sister sent someone to invite you for a small drink, would you like to join?"

Chu Yu, having been worried about how to legitimately enter the rear courtyard of the Marquis Residence, couldn't possibly refuse now that the opportunity was brought to him.

"Alright!"

He instructed Anyi to prepare a gift and also changed into a different outfit.

"Then I'll wait for you outside, Your Highness; I'll go over to the Crown Prince now!"

"Alright!"

Chu Yu responded coolly.

Nalan Changlin breathed a sigh of relief.

Dealing with someone so hard to get along with, it's hard to withstand the pressure.

When Nalan Changlin arrived, Zhou Yunshen was talking with Teng Fei, "Your Highness the Crown Prince!"

"Why have you come?" Zhou Yunshen asked indifferently.

"Replying to Your Highness, it's because the fifth younger sister sent someone to invite you over for a small drink, and I thought that since Prince Rui is also at the Marquis Residence, I invited Prince Rui as well!"

Zhou Yunshen's expression changed immediately upon hearing this, "What did you say? Who else did you invite?"

"Prince Rui!" Nalan Changlin whispered, not understanding what he did wrong.

What could have made the Crown Prince so angry?

Zhou Yunshen pointed at Nalan Changlin, "You, you fool, quickly send someone over and lead your sixth younger sister away. Make sure Prince Rui doesn't see her!"

"..."

Though Nalan Changlin didn't understand, he didn't dare delay. He immediately told the servant beside him, "Go right away and say mother invites the sixth younger sister over to talk, and quickly go give mother a heads up!"

"Yes!"

The servant took the order and ran off immediately.

Zhou Yunshen looked at Nalan Changlin, not knowing what to say.

Teng Fei's expression was also somewhat unpleasant. He followed Zhou Yunshen out of the courtyard and saw Nalan Changlin still standing there, pale. He went up and gave him a pull, "These matters are difficult to explain now, but remember, under no circumstances can Prince Rui meet your sixth younger sister!"

That's all that could be said; whether Nalan Changlin could figure it out wasn't something he could elaborate on further.

Though Nalan Changlin didn't fully understand why, he didn't dare risk being seen by Prince Rui in this state.

He took a few deep breaths, patted his face a few times, and hurriedly followed after them.

Chapter 1000: Distracting Jinlian

Chu Yu was already waiting at the door, dressed in a sapphire blue brocade, truly elegant and regal.

Standing there with a somber face, making people dare not look directly, yet impossible to ignore.

"Prince Rui!"

"Crown Prince!"

Chu Yu and Zhou Yunshen greeted each other, both with a forced smile.

Each harbored their own thoughts, but at this moment, no one would express them.

Together they headed to the back courtyard.

The atmosphere was very strange.

Nalan Changlin became increasingly puzzled.

Could it be that the Crown Prince has seen the sixth sister? Knowing her beauty is extraordinary, and is worried about Prince Rui noticing her?

But, it doesn't make sense.

Yet the Crown Prince's demeanor seemed to fear the sixth sister being seen by Prince Rui, why?

Soon they heard laughter and cheerful voices coming from ahead, charming, alluring, gentle and affectionate.

Zhou Yunshen suddenly asked Chu Yu, "Prince Rui today indeed surprises me!"

"The Crown Prince also surprises me!"

"Heh!" Zhou Yunshen chuckled warmly.

"Heh!" Chu Yu chuckled coldly.

Both smiling, both laughing, but the tone was different, and the implications were entirely different.

Nalan Changlin walked behind, only then realizing the vastness of the world, that he truly was narrow-sighted.

Nalan Jinlian, after eating some pastries, felt a bit thirsty and drank more tea, eventually feeling bloated, got up and went to the lavatory.

She wasn't interested in the Crown Prince anyway.

Just as she left the lavatory, she saw the Head Maid beside the Crown Princess Mrs. Xuan.

"Sixth Miss, you are here, the Crown Princess asks you to come over, she has something to say!"

"Me?"

"Yes!"

Nalan Jinlian didn't understand what they wanted with her.

But thinking that the Crown Prince would soon appear before the young ladies, and she being beautiful, her aunt might be afraid she'd overshadow her two sisters!

Thinking this, Nalan Jinlian smiled, "Alright!"

Nalan Changlin led Chu Yu and Zhou Yunshen into the backyard.

Nalan Mingyi, Nalan Huanhuan, and others immediately approached to greet them, Zhou Yunshen smiled gently, "No need for formalities, today is the coming-of-age ceremony of the fifth Miss, everyone just relax!"

Chu Yu had Anyi present a token of parting, "This is the gift from my master, Prince Rui of Tianchu Country, to the fifth Miss!"

"Thank you, Prince Rui!" Nalan Mingyi quickly bowed.

Chu Yu waved his hand lightly, "No need for formalities!"

His eyes swept around, unable to find the figure he felt familiar to the core of his soul, the anticipation instantly deflated.

Too lazy to remain, he turned and left.

Zhou Yunshen smiled slightly.

It's good that the person is not there.

Nalan Mingzhu watched the departing Chu Yu, secretly astonished.

So the man riding wildly in the snow that day was Prince Rui of Tianchu Country, unexpectedly, she could see him again.

While she remembered him, he completely did not remember her.

Thinking this, Nalan Mingzhu sighed and lowered her head.

Feeling somewhat unwilling and a bit uncomfortable.

Zhou Yunshen did not stay to drink, just spoke a few words, suggesting Nalan Mingyi should visit the Empress when she has time, and said nothing else.

But these few words led to endless speculation.

Could the Crown Prince be considering the fifth Miss of Marquis Residence as his concubine? Or perhaps as his primary wife?

Regardless of which, either position would be exceedingly privileged.

Mrs. Xuan didn't know what her eldest son was up to, asking her to meet Nalan Jinlian, but when Nalan Jinlian arrived, she smiled kindly, "Lian, come sit, look at these few fabrics, do you like them?"

Was she called over to choose fabric?

Nalan Jinlian smiled, "What Aunt gives is certainly excellent, it must have cost you a lot!"