

Medical Princess 831

Chapter 831 Second Sister Did Something Wrong?

On lighting the curtain, Shao Jie'er kept setting fire on the stuff around, all of which were inflammable, so they were very easy to light up.

Liuxiang was so stunned by the rising temperature in the room that she let go of her master's hand. In astonishment, she watched Shao Jie'er setting the fire. This time, she was so scared that both her hands and feet trembled. She, in a daze, just watched what her master was doing.

The fire in the room burned fiercely, and with its high temperature, it had expelled Shao Jie'er's previous fear. Hearing the sound from behind, she turned to Liuxiang, who was staring at her with eyes like dead fish's, and said, "Come and help me. Push the combustible furniture here."

"Miss, Miss!" Liuxiang jumped up and pounced onto Shao Jie'er with inexplicable power, knocking the latter directly down to a cabinet. The oil lamp in Shao Jie'er's hand fell to the ground and unfortunately lit her dress, which scared her to scream.

"Hurry and put out the fire!"

Liuxiang tried to put out the fire on Shao Jie'er's dress and asked anxiously, "Miss... what should we do now?"

She was so scared and nervous that she had forgotten the white shadow out of the window.

"Let's move!" As the house had burnt up, Shao Jie'er covered her nose and rushed out of it as soon as she finally stamped out the fire on her dress. In a daze for a moment, Liuxiang fled with Shao Jie'er at an extremely fast speed.

When they got out to the yard, the wing room had been on fire. Though standing in the yard, they could still feel the fire and warmth radiating in all directions.

"Miss..." Liuxiang wanted to ask something again.

"Shut up! First make yourself look like you just escaped from the fire, and then find a place to hide!" Shao Jie'er ordered.

She took a few steps forward to the window, intending to get herself on fire. Unexpectedly, as soon as reaching the window, she suddenly heard Liuxiang's scream coming from behind. When she was about to turn around, she was hit by a heavy blow on her head. Without consciousness, she slowly fainted.

A man wrapped in white cloth showed up. Taking off the white cloth, he turned out to be a black-clad masked person. He held the master and the servant one in each hand and then disappeared into the darkness.

"Excellent! I have met Fifth Miss's requirements without spending too much of my efforts..."

The house was on fire. The raging firelight shone far away in the night, which immediately alarmed some people who were still awake. The light told them there was a fire somewhere. They shouted loudly and even hit the gong and drum, which woke the whole Duke Xing's Mansion up.

On knowing the fire, the servants got up at once and helped put out the fire with buckets of water.

The burning chamber was a little remote, but close to the Mansion of the Prime Minister, the people of which had also been alarmed. When the last fire broke out in Duke Xing's Mansion, Wen Xichi was only an exam candidate, who had nothing to do with things like that. Now he had to go there for he was the Prime Minister.

Moreover, it was his obligation as an official of the Ministry of Justice to handle this kind of public security problem.

When he arrived, Duke Xing's Mansion was already in a mess, and no one noticed that he brought a few people to help.

When they arrived at the site of the fire, Duke Xing had been there directing people to fight the fire, together with First Young Master Shao Hua'an and Third Master of Duke Xing's Mansion.

They saw Wen Xichi, knowing that he was here to offer a helping hand. They thanked him and then arranged his people to join the "firefighters".

"How did it happen?" Wen Xichi frowned and asked as a routine.

"It is still unknown. The fire broke out all of a sudden. All the furniture is inside!" Shao Hua'an answered with an unhappy look.

No one would look good if their bridal chamber was on a fire.

"Who lives here? Are they safe?" Wen Xichi looked at the fire in front of him and asked. He paid attention to people instead of the furniture.

"This is supposed to be my wedding house. No one is living here now, but just now grandma sent a message saying that Second Sister is copying Woman Precepts in it. But she hasn't been found yet!" Shao Hua'an answered, a little angry and annoyed.

"Still hasn't been found?" Wen Xichi was stunned and asked at once.

"No, but... there is no one inside... and no one knows where my Second Sister is!" Shao Hua'an also looked anxious.

"I'll go and have a look!" Wen Xichi said. As he was about to go forward and take a look, he was stopped by Shao Hua'an. "Everything inside has been burned down, and even the beams may collapse. You can't go in!"

At the moment, a loud voice confirmed Shao Hua'an's words. The room in the middle just collapsed and splashed some sparks. Many people around jumped and hit the sparks splashed on their bodies.

"It's too dangerous here. All of you, step back!" Shao Jing said loudly and ordered someone to pull back the people who were close to the house.

The other rooms were not safe anymore. they were about to collapse after the beam of the main room fell off.

No sooner had the servants just retreated far away than the rooms collapsed one after another, with sparks splashing. Fortunately, everyone followed Duke Xing's order just now and retreated a lot early, so no one was hurt.

Once sure that no other collapses would happen again, Duke Xing ordered his people to get forward to put out the fire again.

"Is this your wedding room? Why did you choose such a place?" Looking at the location and size of the chamber, Wen Xichi asked in confusion.

It was obvious that the size and location of it did not match Shao Hua'an's identity. In no way did it look like the place where he, the eldest legitimate son, should live.

It was much more appropriate for an ordinary Miss in the mansion. Even a Miss of lineal descent would not live in such a chamber. He, the eldest son of lineal descent, would probably become the heir of the Duke. How could he live in such a place?

"Currently there is no other more suitable place!" Shao Hua'an's attention was all focused on the fire. So he answered Wen Xichi casually.

"How could there be not? Aren't there a few big empty houses in your mansion? Aren't they more decent and suitable than this one?" Wen Xichi was more and more puzzled. He knew a little about Duke Xing's Mansion. There were not that many masters in the mansion, and many chambers were available. It was strange that he should pick this one.

Shao Hua'an was annoyed, touching his forehead, and said, "Grandma told me to pick one at will, then I just did as told."

His words made Wen Xichi fall silent. After a long while, he said, "It was too casual!"

"It's indeed too casual that I picked one like it. I should have paid more attention and chosen a better one at that time. It's too late to regret it now. There was not only my own furniture but also those given by Minister Zhao's Mansion. It's troublesome!" Shao Hua'an said regretfully.

When newlyweds got married, their bridal chamber would be decorated by the groom's side. But some of the brides' parents, who loved their daughters dearly, would offer some furniture the brides liked. That was what Minister Zhao's Mansion had done.

"It is indeed a bit troublesome!" Wen Xichi nodded and said. He also felt that it was not easy to deal with it. It didn't matter that the bridegroom's own stuff had been burned in his own home. But he would have to give a formal explanation and apology to his fiancée's parents since the bride's furniture was destroyed.

For this reason, Duke Xing's Family was in a vulnerable situation. Even if the bride's family raised some other conditions, they had to agree.

After all, Duke Xing's family had not kept all the furniture from the bride's side safe!

An aristocratic family like Miss Zhao's would always prepare the dowries early for their daughters' marriage, and some of them even had been ready since their daughters were born. Now Miss Zhao's parents' painstaking efforts for so many years got burnt, which was hardly acceptable.

"Minister Zhao is a nice man," Wen Xichi comforted Shao Hua'an and said. The two had been friends for years, so they never beat around the bush and always went straight to the point.

"I can only hope so!" Shao Hua'an said with a wry and hopeless smile, shrugging his shoulders.

In such a big fire, even the furniture left would probably be unusable. The first batch of items that were sent to decorate the bridal chamber had been burned out.

Wen Xichi turned his eyes to the fire again. It had been nearly put out as buckets of water were poured on it one by one. There were only a few flames left. It would not be a big problem anymore.

"Is it possible that someone intends to destroy your newly marital chamber?" Wen Xichi asked as a thought flashed inexplicably through his mind.

Three years ago, the fire in Duke Xing's Mansion was an arson case, and now it was probably the same.

At that time, it was Shao Wanru trapped in the fire, who had just been admitted back to Duke Xing's Mansion as the Fifth Miss. And now it was the Second Miss. Was there any connection?

Wen Xichi inexplicably felt that there was a connection between the two fire cases.

"My chamber is not a good one, so I don't understand why someone wants to destroy it. Besides, there was no one else but my Second Sister, who, according to grandmother, has done something wrong and was punished by grandma to transcribe Woman Precepts in the wing room tonight."

Shao Hua'an shook his head and said without hiding anything from Wen Xichi.

"Has your Second Sister done something bad?" Wen Xichi repeated his words and looked sideways at Shao Hua'an, believing that there must be something hidden.

"It's not a big deal. It's just that Second Sister and Third Sister quarreled with each other here today, and the people of Minister Zhao's Mansion were also involved. Grandmother was bothered by it, so she was very angry and punished Second Sister!" Shao Hua'an tried to make it vague. It was not that he didn't believe Wen Xichi, but that it was not polite to tell him the details that were related to the reputation of the girls in the mansion, even though Wen Xichi was his good friend.

Wen Xichi was clear in his mind. He had known what kind of person Shao Jie'er was since he was young. Every time they played together, Shao Jie'er never behaved as an agreeable person. She would spare no efforts to flatter people of her higher position. She acted as if she were a humble servant girl serving them, and did whatever they asked without any disobedience.

On the other hand, to those who were inferior to her, she was very harsh and mean. She would ruthlessly trample them with lots of enjoyment.

"Hasn't the Third Miss been punished?" Wen Xichi keenly grasped the point and asked. As a friend, he shouldn't ask too much but just took the hint. However, as an official of the Ministry of Justice present, he must continue the inquest.

"In fact, not only Third Sister, but also Fifth Sister was..." Shao Hua'an seemed to be in a dilemma. He stopped as soon as realizing that he had nearly made an indiscreet remark. He pursed his lips and said,

“Yuanqing, no more questions, please. I saw no link between the matter of the sisters and the current situation. There is no need to investigate it!”

Chapter 832 The Unconscious Master and Servant

“Since I have known the case, I have to investigate it. Otherwise, it will embarrass me that I, who lives next to you, have nothing to give when being questioned by the Ministry of Justice.” Wen Xichi said in a moderate tone, “You’d better tell me what on earth was going on. It’s better to talk about it ourselves than to go and ask your sisters. Now the Second Miss of your mansion is still missing. If something has happened to her, it will probably be a life-and-death lawsuit!”

As long as the case involved people’s life, it was necessary for an official of the Ministry of Justice on the spot to investigate it, even if there was still no report from a victim.

There were both seriousness and forgiveness in Wen Xichi’s words. It seemed that there were connotations inside.

Shao Hua’an looked at him with a wry smile and said reluctantly, “Okay, I will tell you what you want. Everything I know is all from my grandma. I am not sure whether they are true or not. Some statements may be her prejudice, so don’t take them seriously!”

“Go ahead. I can tell!” Wen Xichi nodded and comforted him to dispel his worries.

Wen Xichi’s solemnity made Shao Hua’an very helpless, then he described what had happened before in Old Madam’s words.

Based on Old Madam’s description, when Shao Jie’er was decorating Shao Hua’an’s bridal chamber, Shao Caihuan and Shao Wanru got there together to find fault with her. The former two argued that the chamber was too small, and ordered Shao Jie’er to choose another. But once a bridal chamber was chosen, it could not be changed at will. However, the two of them did not give up after being refused by Shao Jie’er and even mentioned the First Miss of Minister Zhao’s Mansion in an unfriendly manner.

When the argument was at its peak, people from Minister Zhao’s Mansion arrived there and heard the ill words about their First Miss in the quarrel, which inflamed their anger and caused them to complain it to Old Madam...

“This is the whole thing. Second Sister was punished, because of this, to copy Woman Precepts in this chamber of mine!” Shao Hua’an sighed and said with vexation.

Indeed, it was really a headache.

After hearing Shao Hua’an’s description, Wen Xichi thought for a moment and doubted, “It seems that Second Miss hasn’t done anything wrong, but it is Third Miss and Fifth Miss who have. Why was Second Miss, instead of the other two Misses, punished?”

“You know that my mother is not home now, and so is my eldest sister. So we left the duty of choosing the bridal chamber to Second Sister. It was she who chose this house. Grandma also thought that she had picked a bad one. Although Third Sister and Fifth Sister were also wrong, they just did it for my good, intending to choose a big chamber for me. Grandma punished Second Sister, for she not only chose a bad house but also refused to correct the mistake she had made!”

“What should she do?” Wen Xichi asked.

“I don’t know. Maybe she was once asked to pick another one. But she refused and then was punished to stay here. No one expected that such a thing would happen. It’s really...” Shao Hua’an shook his hand and said helplessly.

The quarrel was started due to his bridal chamber, and an accident happened to his bridal chamber too. But he knew nothing clear. Shao Hua’an was very frustrated that he had lost a house to live in, for it was almost burned out, not to mention that Shao Jie’er was still missing.

More frustratingly, his fiancée’s family would definitely be furious. Shao Hua’an was totally deep in a dilemma now.

“So you’re going to choose another bridal chamber?” Wen Xichi looked at Shao Hua’an, who looked extremely worried.

“It seems so!” Shao Hua’an nodded and said.

“How about offering the choice to Miss Zhao’s family? Give them the right to choose a suitable house as the bridal chamber, as long as it was a vacant one. That might appease their anger,” Wen Xichi comforted Shao Hua’an and said.

“That might be all I can do now!” Shao Hua’an nodded and said.

During their discussion in a low voice, many people were seeking Shao Jie’er. But no one had ever seen her yet, even if they moved the beams in the ruin. Shao Jie’er seemed to have disappeared into the air.

Duke Xing was very anxious and asked someone to rummage through the whole collapsed house, but there was nothing. Shao Jie’er was not there.

Then many people started to shout, “Second Miss! Second Miss!”

That no one was under that ruin meant that Shao Jie’er might be still alive. However, there were still some places that had not been searched. No one could be sure whether she was alive or not.

Shao Jie’er was wakened up by the shouting of her name. She stood up with her hands covering her head, confused, and not knowing where she was. Hearing the sudden cry of “Second Miss” not far away, Shao Jie’er answered subconsciously.

She closed her eyes, and when she opened them again, she saw Shao Jing’s excited face. She had never got such attention from her father before.

“Second Miss, it’s really you. Why... why are you here?” An old maid said excitedly. Everyone had thought that Shao Jie’er was dead. Unexpectedly, she was not only alive but also uninjured. Except for some burnt marks on her clothes, other parts of her were well and clean.

Shao Jie’er was in a pavilion, which was behind a big tree outside the burnt chamber.

The tree was huge enough to block half of the pavilion from the wind and rain.

Earlier, everyone rushed over to the chamber to put out the fire, but none of them had ever noticed the pavilion, which was right beside them. No one had seen it because their minds were totally occupied with the fire.

So the truth was Second Miss had fallen asleep here instead of being in the burnt house?

"Miss, Miss!" A servant girl suddenly rushed into the crowd and hugged Shao Jie'er. Everyone looked at her and found that it was Liuxiang, Shao Jie'er's private servant girl.

The servant girl was also unscathed, but there was a trace of black stain at the corner of her dress. It should have something to do with the burning.

"Father? And Brother?" Shao Jie'er was still dizzy. She didn't understand why the two were here in front of her. She closed her eyes again, wondering whether she was in a dream.

"Why are you here?" Shao Jing looked Shao Jie'er up and down and asked coldly.

"I just went out for a walk!" Shao Jie'er lost some of her memories. She smiled awkwardly and tried hard to recall what had happened before.

"Went for a walk? Why didn't I see you just now?" Shao Jing said coldly.

"I... I didn't see you either. Maybe I have left before you came!" Shao Jie'er laughed and felt embarrassed, and her laughter became more and more reluctant.

At this time, she finally remembered how she got out of that burnt house.

When the chamber was on fire, as Shao Jie'er had plotted ahead of time, she left on purpose and then came back later with an excuse. Now that the house had been burnt out, she should claim her innocence right now.

"Why did you leave?" Shao Jing asked, still in a cold voice.

"I... I... Fifth Sister..." Shao Jie'er looked around. It seemed that she was looking for Shao Wanru.

"What's wrong with your Fifth Sister?" Shao Jing asked.

"Fifth Sister's servant girl... Fifth Sister's servant girl came over and passed her master's message to me saying that what Fifth Sister has said today was not her idea. So I wanted to go to her. But on the way, I changed my mind because I thought it was not good to disturb Fifth Sister so late!" Shao Jie'er became sober and answered in an orderly way.

"Why did Wanru's servant girl come to a place which is far away from her master's!" Shao Jing didn't believe her.

"Father, it's true. It's truly the servant girl of Fifth Sister. I've seen her before. Although I couldn't remember her at first, I could do it as soon as she showed her identity!" Shao Jie'er said anxiously with fear on her face.

She reached out her hand to pull Liuxiang close to her. "Father, if you don't believe me, you can listen to Liuxiang. Liuxiang saw her as well!"

Liuxiang was sharply pained by Shao Jie'er, who was pinching a piece of her flesh with great force. When she saw Shao Jing looking at her, she nodded repeatedly and said, "Yes, I saw her. Both my master and I saw her!"

The intense pain in the hand was a clue of her master's order. How could she not understand her master's hint?

In fact, Liuxiang was also in great confusion. She had just woken up before long, left alone in the corner of the pavilion, without anyone besides her. Hearing some sounds, she turned around in a hurry and saw her master in the crowd, who for her was the last hope, so she immediately rushed to her.

But until now, she was still puzzled and didn't know what had happened. But she knew that she couldn't tell the truth. She followed Shao Jie'er's words as suggested, and lowered her eyes subconsciously to hide the panic in them. Actually, she really didn't know why her master mentioned Fifth Miss's servant girl!

The truth was she didn't see the Fifth Miss's servant girl just now. She felt a hit on her head and then fainted after getting out of the room.

"Call Fifth Miss!" Shao Jing, who was with a gloomy face, ordered an old maid and said.

The old maid nodded and ran out in a hurry, but soon she came back without anyone.

"Duke Xing, it was said that when the fire broke out, Fifth Miss was too afraid so that she went to Old Madam's and has been there until now. So, do you still want her to come?"

"Let's go to Old Madam's!" Since the fire had been put out, Shao Jing asked the servants to go back. After all, no one was hurt in the fire; hence, other matters could be settled tomorrow. Then Shao Jing headed towards Old Madam's house with Shao Jie'er and Shao Hua'an.

Wen Xichi, following beside Shao Hua'an, observed Shao Jie'er's dress. He raised the corners of his mouth and smiled with an idea in his head. Then he watched Shao Jie'er's hair, which was messy and stained with dust...

When they arrived at Old Madam's Chuntang Courtyard, Shao Wanru was calmly sitting with Old Madam. On seeing them, she hastened to stand up and bowed to Shao Jing who was walking in front, and then to Shao Hua'an. After her beautiful eyes met a pair of clear ones, she was slightly stunned, but immediately bowed once more.

Then she stood aside and waited for Old Madam to speak.

Old Madam didn't look well. Her eyesight didn't fall directly on Shao Jing in the front, but on Shao Jie'er, who was hiding behind.

She gave a glance and turned away at once as if she had not seen Shao Jie'er just now.

Shao Wanru had been observing Old Madam's expression. She saw Old Madam's rapid glance at Shao Jie'er and found that there was no worry, no happiness, or other fluctuations in her eyes. It was obvious that Old Madam was not surprised with Shao Jie'er appearance. She couldn't help sneering in her mind and assured that everything was indeed Old Madam's plot...

Chapter 833 You Dare to Do That, Second Sister?

"Fifth Sister, what did you want to tell me through your servant girl?" Shao Jie'er stepped close to Shao Wanru and said. No one else in the room was talking at this moment. Although her voice was very low, it immediately attracted everyone's attention.

Shao Wanru looked at Shao Jie'er in astonishment and said, "Second Sister, did I send someone to you?"

"You didn't send anyone to me?" Shao Jie'er's expression turned dreadful, and she said anxiously, "Impossible! That servant girl is indeed a servant girl of yours."

"My servant girl?" Shao Wanru raised her eyebrows and repeated.

"Yes, she is the servant girl of your chamber. I don't know her name, but I will definitely recognize her when I see her face," Shao Jie'er said anxiously.

Shao Wanru pursed her lips, and an impassive smile appeared on her face after a long while. Shao Jie'er had full confidence in her promise as if she was going to go and point out such a servant girl in Shao Wanru's chamber. It was without question that there was indeed a "someone" who had been secretly arranged in her house as a mole.

"Are you sure, Second Sister?" Shao Wanru asked.

"Of course. Fifth Sister, no sooner had I been led out by your girl to another place, than the house where I stayed was burned. Did you really know nothing about it, Fifth Sister?"

Seeing Shao Wanru's expression, Shao Jie'er calmed down a little. It seemed that she could remedy the matter.

"Wanru, Jie'er, what are you talking about?" Old Madam, who was sitting in the main seat, coughed heavily. Except for the two girls, everyone else in the room had been seated properly.

Wen Xichi glanced at Shao Wanru, who was at a loss. He suddenly had the sense that Shao Wanru, standing in the room at the time, looked aggrieved and sad. His heart pounded several times. He, frowning, didn't like this kind of feeling at all.

Inside his heart, there was a wave of uncontrollable anger, which was provoked by Shao Wanru, against other people in the room.

He looked down, took a deep breath, and suppressed the anxiety in his heart. When looking up again, he was clear-headed. As an official of the Ministry of Justice, he should calmly listen to everyone's confessions at this moment.

Moreover, the thing happened in Duke Xing's Mansion. Before the truth was dug out, it was inappropriate that he said anything about it. It was what he should do to maintain a detached attitude.

"Grandmother, I was copying books in eldest brother's bridal chamber. But later, Fifth Sister sent a servant girl to talk to me about what happened in the day. I thought that something in detail couldn't be clearly passed by a servant, so I went out to find Fifth Sister. But I didn't expect that the room was on fire soon after I left." Shao Jie'er looked at Old Madam and said. She was frightened.

Shao Wanru suddenly raised her head and threw an aggressive look at Shao Jie'er. What a crafty calumny that instantly blamed the fire on her.

Shao Jie'er was suggesting that Shao Wanru had sent someone to lead her out on purpose so that her people could get the chance to set the fire.

"Nonsense! It should be that your Fifth Sister indeed had something to tell you!" Old Madam's face darkened as she scolded Shao Jie'er. She glanced at Wen Xichi, who was sitting on the side.

Shao Jie'er was about to cry and lowered her head with grievance, pinching the handkerchief in her hand. She didn't dare to say anything to defend herself, though she was eager to do so.

"How is the bridal chamber? Does anyone get hurt?" Old Madam turned to ask Shao Jing after she scolded Shao Jie'er.

"No one got injured, but the house was not usable anymore!" Shao Jing frowned and said with a headache. "Nothing is a problem, but the furniture sent from the Minister's Mansion, which has been burned out. It's hard for us to explain it to Minister Zhao!"

"They're all burned out?" Old Madam straightened her body, feeling that was a very difficult problem to deal with.

"Almost all. Even if they were saved from the fire, they would have been half damaged and can't be used anymore," Shao Jing said helplessly, "I'm afraid that Minister and his family will..."

Everyone in the room had understood before Duke Xing finished his words that it was indeed an undeniable fault of Duke Xing's Mansion. So it was inevitable for Miss Zhao's family to get angry. Now Duke Xing and his family had to try their best to suppress their anger.

"We will meet any demand they ask!" Old Madam said wearily. Truly it was difficult for an old woman to bear being abruptly wakened in the middle of the night, especially on such a cold one. Even though her room was warm inside, the warmth had been diluted by so many people's arrival.

Nanny Yu brought another hand-warmer and handed it to Old Madam. She hugged it tightly and rolled her eyes slightly. She became a bit more energetic, which, however, was quite on the edge.

"That's all we can do. No matter what they say, it's always our Duke Xing's Mansion's fault!" Shao Jing also nodded. He glanced at the people present, stood up with his hand on the armrest, and was about to leave. Since that the matter couldn't be tacked unless they had a negotiation with the Minister first, and that Old Madam was not energetic at this time, Duke Xing had to leave it to tomorrow.

As soon as he put his hand on the armrest, he heard Shao Wanru asking Shao Jie'er in a low voice, "Second Sister, did you really see a servant girl sent by me? Is she really the servant from my house? But I didn't send a servant girl!"

Shao Wanru blinked her innocent eyes and looked at Shao Jie'er.

Unnoticed, she had approached Shao Jie'er. The two of them stood together. Shao Wanru's voice was not loud, but it took a good opportunity to break in and start another discussion the moment Shao Jing stopped talking and was about to say goodbye to Old Madam.

Wen Xichi picked up the teacup, took a sip, and slowly put it down. He knew the servant girl thing wouldn't be let go like that.

"Second Sister, are you going to shirk your responsibility?" As Shao Jie'er didn't reply to her just now, Shao Wanru asked her again. With her face right opposite to Shao Jie'er's, she didn't notice that everyone in the room had turned their eyes on them.

But Shao Jie'er did. She also saw Old Madam's cold eyes, which caused her trembling and her instant defense for herself. "Fifth Sister, don't deny it. It's really a servant girl of yours. If you don't believe me, you can call all your servant girls over here. I will definitely pick her out."

After saying that, she tried her best to show her confidence in it.

Because she could really recognize that servant girl. Old Madam had told her who she was, and she had seen her before.

"Second Sister, have you made up your mind to point her out?" Shao Wanru asked with a slight smile.

"Of course, I have. I can definitely find her out. I just don't understand why you ask her to come to me at that time. You just said that I was going to shirk the responsibility. I deny it and I think it was you who did something ill, wasn't it?" Sensing her confidence, Shao Jie'er straightened her back with a complacent face.

There was indeed such a person. So Shao Jie'er was really not afraid of Shao Wanru's questions. Even if Shao Wanru asked her to point out the servant she mentioned, she could do it. Such prearranged evidence made Shao Jie'er become arrogant again.

"What are you talking about? Get out of here!" Old Madam rebuked them. But with a gloomy loser-look, she seemed to not want everybody to take it too seriously.

Whenever Shao Jie'er was about to testify, Old Madam said things like that. It sounded like that she was protecting Shao Wanru wholeheartedly. Shao Wanru sneered in her heart, understanding that she was the last person for whom Old Madam would ever have preference. She believed that actually, Old Madam was pushing the blame on her with a vague attitude.

No investigation didn't mean no wrongdoing. Old Madam's pretended "protection" led everyone to think that Shao Wanru had indeed done something evil and she was here to ask for Old Madam's cover.

It was reasonable if she did so. First, although Shao Caihuan was the one quarreling with Shao Jie'er during the day, Shao Wanru was also present there with them, after she had followed Shao Caihuan. Second, she might bear a grudge against Shao Jie'er after the quarrel. Moreover, she was scolded by Old Madam at last.

"Grandma..." Shao Jie'er was apparently not in the wrong, but now she was scolded by Old Madam. She felt so wronged that she wanted to cry again.

According to Old Madam's words, Shao Jie'er should not mention it again. But when she thought of Shao Wanru's accusation on her of shirking the responsibility, she was unwilling to let Shao Wanru go just like that.

It was not easy to catch Shao Wanru's weakness, so by no means, Shao Jie'er would be willing to let her go this time when she had held Shao Wanru's Achilles' heel. However, she didn't dare to disobey Old Madam.

"Grandma, since Second Sister has seen my servant girl, can you allow her to point the girl out? When the fire broke out just now, the people in my chamber were also alarmed. At that time, they should have all been awakened!" Shao Wanru turned to Old Madam calmly and answered Old Madam.

Old Madam looked at Shao Wanru, with her eyes full of gloom, anger, and disappointment.

"Wanru, let's talk about your affair tomorrow. Your grandma can not be further shocked and scared tonight!" Shao Jing coughed in a low voice and said to help his mother.

Shao Wanru shook her head and said, "Uncle Jing, I think it's better to make it clear tonight. Lord Wen happens to be here, so I want him to be a spectator. And I'm afraid that something bad might happen to the so-called servant girl from my house after tonight. At that time, there will be no evidence for my innocence, where I can no longer defend myself!"

Shao Jing was slightly embarrassed by the refusal from a junior, and also became increasingly unhappy with her words, and his face darken. "Your servant girl is just fine. How could anything happen to her? Stop your nonsense. Go back and have a rest!"

After saying that, he was about to stand up and leave, not willing to talk to Shao Wanru again. It was too late, and everyone was exhausted now. Since the fire had been put out, they wanted to deal with other things tomorrow!

Wen Xichi gently touched the delicate pattern on the teacup and lowered his head slightly with a faint smile, waiting for the next conversation...

"Uncle Jing, please wait for a moment. I suspect that someone wants to frame me by making use of the servant girl from my house. Please uphold justice for me!" Shao Wanru blinked her watery eyes and said, "Second Sister, why don't you identify the servant girl tonight and let her tell the truth?"

"Fifth girl, it's too late now. Tomorrow!" Old Madam finally said coldly.

Shao Wanru focused her eyes on Old Madam and said softly, "Grandma, It won't take too much time to finish what happened today tonight. Or please pick the servant girl out and bring her under your protection, will you?"

"How dare you!" Old Madam rebuked. What kind of rule was it for the Old Madam of the Duke's Mansion to protect a servant girl?

"Grandma, I won't take up too much of your time. I just want you to bear witness to prove my innocence." Shao Wanru continued her pleading as if she hadn't heard Old Madam's reprimand. Then she raised her head to look at Shao Jie'er and said provocatively, "Second Sister, didn't you dare to do that, did you?"

Chapter 834 A Vision of Eternity

After being provoked by Shao Wanru, Shao Jie'er immediately raised her head and refuted, "Why would I not dare? Let's go and find her out! What will you do if I find her?" She had always been unwilling to let

off Shao Wanru, and she was in full confidence, so she was completely not afraid of Shao Wanru's verification.

"If you point her out, I'll consider believing that you have no intention of framing me!" Shao Wanru said with a slight smile. She seemed to be smiling, and seemed to be not.

"That I point your servant girl out means that I don't intend to set you up? Fifth Sister, you really take advantage of such a statement." Shao Jie'er said with a sneer. She had decided to listen to Old Madam and tried to avoid arguing with Shao Wanru about this matter. But the more Shao Wanru said, the more Shao Jie'er became annoyed with her.

Holding a strong conviction that she would be sure to win, Shao Jie'er finally decided not to make any compromise anymore.

"What do you mean, Second Sister?" Shao Wanru asked.

"I mean if I cannot find her, I will admit that it's my fault and then in person kowtow and apologize to you. If I can, Fifth Sister will have to kowtow and apologize to me in front of grandma!" Shao Jie'er said with a sneer.

Shao Jie'er thought in her mind that she would definitely win!

Old Madam showed no intention of stopping her, just sitting high on the main seat with a gloomy face, which abetted Shao Jie'er to be more conceited. She looked at Shao Wanru with an increasingly complacent face.

In a bet where she must be the winner, she wouldn't let Shao Wanru go so easily. Of course, she didn't intend to do anything evil to Shao Wanru. All she wanted was to prove that Shao Wanru had sent someone to her, but not to say that she had seen Shao Wanru's servant set the fire. No one else than Shao Jie'er knew better how the fire broke out.

"Second Sister's condition sounds fair, but it is not. Can your apology be the same as mine?" Shao Wanru said with a faint smile.

In aristocratic families, the lineal system always had its hierarchy and order. The identity of a daughter of the legal wife always overwhelmed that of a concubine's daughter. Shao Jie'er, as the daughter of a concubine, was inferior to Shao Wanru. If a concubine's daughter did something wrong to a daughter of the legal wife, the former must apologize to the latter. However, when the opposite happened, the latter did not have to apologize to the former in public.

From this point of view, Shao Jie'er's conditions were indeed not fair.

Shao Jie'er's face turned red due to her vexation. As a concubine's daughter, she was inferior to others in the entire Duke Xing's Mansion. And Shao Wanru had just emphasized it again in front of so many people, which made Shao Jie'er feel deeply ashamed and her blood rush up to her face. She glared at Shao Wanru with hatred as if Shao Wanru had done something heinous.

"Fifth Sister, what do you mean?" Shao Jie'er gritted her teeth but could not suppress the anger in her heart.

Shao Wanru glanced at Shao Jie'er with a calm attitude, which formed a sharp contrast with Shao Jie'er's anger and hatred. "I don't mean anything else but that your method is unfair. If I am wrong, I will apologize to you. But I won't kowtow to you! If you are wrong, I don't need your kowtowing to me either."

Though Shao Jie'er was a concubine's daughter, she was the elder sister. So only her apology was enough for her mistakes. If she was required to kowtow to Shao Wanru, other people would gossip about it. Moreover, Shao Wanru did not mean to suppress Shao Jie'er. On the contrary, she even intended to create opportunities for Shao Jie'er to promote her status.

"Co-wife? If Uncle Jing had a co-wife, many problems could be separated to deal with." Shao Wanru thought of Shao Jie'er's mother as the "co-wife" she needed.

In fact, Shao Jing had several concubines, among whom only Concubine Lu had given birth to a child, Shao Jie'er. It was said that she was once a servant girl of Jiang family, and later she became a concubine of Shao Jing because of her master's positive recommendation. She had always kept a low profile in the mansion.

She was very respectful to Jiang family and also got along well with other concubines. Although she was very inconspicuous, at least she could safely give birth to Shao Jie'er, who was Shao Jing's only daughter of a concubine.

It was not bad for an inconspicuous person like her to live such a life in Duke Xing's Mansion. The fact that she could give birth to a child under the pressure from Jiang family and Shao Jing indicated that she was a scheming person.

Recently, Concubine Lu had been helping the Third Madam manage the household. Shao Wanru had inquired that she was excellent at keeping everything well in order. It was said that she had got the experience from observing Jiang family manage the mansion before when she was still a servant girl of Jiang family.

She had followed Jiang family for a long time and then became a concubine, who was the one giving birth to a child, though the kid was a daughter. That showed Concubine Lu was not a naive woman.

Now it was the right time and there were two right people. But someone's ambition was needed. Judging from Concubine Lu's daily behaviors, she cannot be a reckless person, but someone else can be. Shao Jie'er was reckless enough to expose her ambition. However, it was hard to tell if her ambition could convince Concubine Lu.

Of course, she would not let go of such a good opportunity to humiliate Shao Jie'er.

Only by provoking Shao Jie'er could she provoke Concubine Lu.

After hearing Shao Wanru, Shao Jie'er gnashed her teeth secretly, but she had to agree on it. It was just fine to have no Kowtow. As long as Shao Wanru apologized to her, at least in the mansion, from then on Shao Wanru would avoid her whenever they met, which, as she believed, could help her to get the goods on Shao Wanru.

“Okay! Let’s do it!” Shao Jie’er nodded hard, turned to Old Madam and said, “Grandma, since Fifth Sister doesn’t believe what I said, I’ll go to Fifth Sister’s to point that servant girl out! At that time, the result will prove that I am not telling a lie!”

When she was proved to be right, Shao Wanru would be confirmed to be guilty. With her long eyelashes fluttering, Shao Wanru raised her head and looked at Old Madam who was with a gloomy face.

Old Madam did not say a word to stop her, which meant that she had agreed. Wanru’s eyes were full of coldness, without a trace of warmth.

“Wanru, have you really decided to allow Jie’er to identify that person?” Old Madam finally spoke and glanced at Shao Wanru with an unpleasant look.

“Yes, I have. Grandma. Let Second Sister send someone to find the servant. Anyway, I didn’t really ask anyone to talk to Second Sister.” Shao Wanru looked at Old Madam calmly and said.

Then she half closed her eyes with the long eyelashes fluttering down. She seemed to be a little tired and helpless. The uneven shadow cast down from the lamplight made her gorgeous face look as pale as snow, which inexplicably gave out an aura of delicacy. Standing in a corner, she seemed to be an outsider, totally different from the people around her. She was lonely, even many people were standing around.

Wen Xichi’s sight fell on the teacup in front of him. It looked like that he was focusing on the patterns on the teacup. but only he knew that after a glance at that delicate girl, he suffered severe and painful twitches on his heart, as if it was heavily pressed by something. He felt very sad and uncomfortable.

He tried his best to ignore that feeling by staring at the teacup. However, he still saw the delicate young face, the smile and the anger shown on it. They were just like a painting and seemed to have been deeply engraved in his memory. No matter how he looked at the teacup, everything in his mind was still about her.

However, Shao Wanru looked rather sorrowful. Even her smile revealed loneliness, sadness and helplessness. It seemed that she couldn’t rely on anyone even if she wanted to, which was always the sadness shared by women. Everything around her was filled with liveliness and happiness, but they belonged to others. She was alone to enjoy the loneliness...

An uncontrollable feeling for her was quietly coming into being in his deep heart. The glance just now seemed to have taken him to travel through the past a thousand years, and slowly gathered all his previous emotions. First came the indifference, later the suspicion, and finally the antipathy, all of which were mixed up together. That was a vision of eternity.

He had always been smart. He had never thought about things like that before, because he felt it impossible and had never considered developing a relationship with her. Now, all his dormant thoughts and feelings were aroused and became complicated because of that glimpse. His feeling for her became clearer and clearer, and he also started to realize it.

His heart, which had always been calm, lost its usual rhythm and beat at an abnormal pace.

Wen Xichi slowly reached out his hand to hold the teacup and took a sip. With his serene eyes, he raised his head and quietly listened to the conversations in the room. He didn’t look at Shao Wanru anymore.

"If it is so, go and find her out!" Old Madam, who was a little impatient, waved her hand and said.

"Yes, grandma, I'll go and do it right away!" Shao Jie'er nodded and was about to turn around and leave. But she was stopped by Shao Wanru. "Second Sister, you don't have to go to my chamber. It's late. It's not appropriate for you to go there like this!"

Shao Jie'er stood still and looked at Shao Wanru with a sarcastic smile on her face. "Fifth Sister, are you afraid? It's fine. You will just need to apologize to me later. I can't let you kowtow to me, can I?"

She thought that Shao Wanru stopped her because of guilty.

Shao Wanru shook her head with a smile and said, "Second Sister, why do you think I'm afraid? How can it be possible that I am? It's neither my servant girl nor my calling for her. I'm just worried that you will be tired of going and coming everywhere at night. Why not ask one of your servant girls to do that for you?"

Shao Jie'er didn't keep up with Shao Wanru's thoughts. After being stunned for a while, she asked subconsciously, "Whom should I send?"

Shao Wanru glanced at Shao Jie'er and said with a smile, "I recommend your private servant girl Liuxiang. She can go there to find the servant girl out so that you don't have to do that in person. Liuxiang was also that one always staying with you, so she should have seen her before!"

"..." Shao Jie'er opened her mouth, intending to say something. Her complacent look immediately turned nervous. First, she planned to tell Liuxiang about it, but she hadn't got a chance to do that, for it happened so suddenly that she and Liuxiang fainted, and they were accompanied by others as soon as they woke up. There was no chance for them to have a secret conversation. How could Liuxiang know which servant girl she should point out?

Shao Jie'er had been flurried in her heart. They both passed out before she told Liuxiang.

However, she had an inspiration and hastened to say, "When your servant girl came to me, Liuxiang had not come back yet. Liuxiang happened to not see her!"

"What about the moment you went out of that house? Did you go out alone before Liuxiang came back?" Shao Wanru continued to ask.

Seeing that Shao Jie'er was aggressively questioned by Shao Wanru and was frightened in a cold sweat, Old Madam heavily put down the teacup in her hand. When she was about to speak, she was cut in by another clear voice, "Second Miss Shao, when you were in the pavilion, you said that your servant girl also saw her, and she also testified for you. Are you going to withdraw your confession?"

Chapter 835 Confessions Full of Flaws

Shao Wanru saw Old Madam's impatience, realizing that she was going to butt in, so she just waited for her to get herself involved.

But she didn't expect that Wen Xichi should speak first at this time. She thought that he wouldn't say anything until the truth came out in the end!

Shao Wanru, surprised, turned her eyes on him. Her eyes were dewy and vivid like ripples on a lake. They shone beautiful gentleness, which was mixed up with slight indifferent alertness. Wen Xichi looked down a little, but immediately raised his eyes with an amiable and elegant smile on his face.

Compared with Chu Liuchen, who pretended to be harmless and gentle, Wen Xichi showed his sincere kindness to others with all his heart. That was very agreeable.

“Second Miss, many people, including Duke Xing and First Young Master, heard your words beside the fire scene just now. How do you explain it now, Second Miss?” Wen Xichi turned to look at Shao Jie’er with a smile, but his question was sharp enough as if he was interrogating Shao Jie’er as a suspect at the court.

Even the words he used were special languages of trial questions.

Shao Jie’er had never experienced such a scene before, so she sank into panic as soon as she was questioned like that. She didn’t remember until now that she once asked Liuxiang to lie about her confession to make her words sound more credible. Now it was quite unreasonable to insist that Liuxiang was not there to see that so-called servant girl.

She was tongue-tied and cast a “help” look at Old Madam, hoping to get a hint of instruction from her.

Old Madam was angered to curse Shao Jie’er as a fool in her heart. She had known that Shao Jie’er was not clever, but it was beyond her expectation that she should be that stupid. It seemed to be very difficult for Shao Jie’er to patch up her lie.

Old Madam coughed in a low voice and rebuked, “Why did you talk nonsense before?”

Old Madam took Shao Jie’er’s confession in the pavilion as unbelievable nonsense, which meanwhile implied that what she said now was true.

“Sorry. I said so because I was too scared when seeing so many people surrounding me at that time. It was not true!” After being reminded by Old Madam, Shao Jie’er immediately came to her senses and hastened to wave her hands and deny her previous words.

The situation at that time was indeed like this. Shao Jie’er did not dare to tell others what had happened to her before she was found. The Misses of aristocratic families were most concerned about their reputation. And her reputation would be ruined if it was known to everyone that she had been deserted in the corner after being knocked out by someone. So she would definitely not tell others about it, let alone so many people were surrounding her at that time.

“Second Miss, do you mean that you were so afraid that you asked your servant girl to testify you at that time?” Wen Xichi asked again with a smile.

“Yes, I was afraid at that time, so I did that in a panic.” Shao Jie’er insisted.

“Well, Second Miss, even if you made a mistake on your servant girl’s thing because you were in a panic, what about the fire? Can you tell us what happened when you left the house? Had the fire started yet at that time?” Wen Xichi continued to say.

At the moment, Shao Wanru noticed the burnt mark on the hem of Shao Jie’er’s dress. However, there were burn marks not only on her, but also on Shao Jing and Shao Hua’an. It was quite normal for them

to carry one or two burn marks on their clothes for they just now came here from the fire scene. She smiled slightly, knowing what Wen Xichi was going to ask.

Other people might get burnt marks in the burning fire by accident. But the fire should be about to, or have faded away when Shao Jie'er appeared at the fire scene. Therefore, it was hard to explain why she would get burned!

"Of course, there was no fire when I left. I just wanted to go to Fifth Sister's. But when I was about to arrive, I turned back because I suddenly realized that she might have fallen asleep." Shao Jie'er could only say so now. She was secretly flustered. Since she was a child, she had been afraid of Wen Xichi and of course, she never dared to play with him. He, a child of the Mansion of the Prime Minister, was too smart for her.

Every time she tried to hide something from him, she failed all the time.

"Second Miss, now that you left before the fire and didn't come back until the fire died out, I wonder where the burn marks on your clothes came from." Wen Xichi's eyes fell on the burn marks on Shao Jie'er's clothes.

With Old Madam's countenance changed, she stared at the burnt marks on Shao Jie'er with hatred. Of course, she also saw them. However, she didn't pay attention to them after seeing the marks on her second son and eldest grandson, and thought that Shao Jie'er got them in the fire.

She didn't expect that the fire should have been out when Shao Jie'er went back there!

The dress was burned after the fire went out? Where did the dress-burning fire come from? Old Madam was so angry that she almost burst into flames. She wanted to knock Shao Jie'er's head open and see what kind of brain such a fool would have.

"I... I..." Shao Jie'er was flurried, with her eyes flickering, and with not only cold sweat on her forehead but also all over her body. She suddenly said, "I... I went there with that servant girl of Fifth Sister, but I came back alone with a lantern. I tripped on the way and the lantern rolled over, the fire inside which burned my dress. Fortunately, I reacted quickly and put it out!"

Shao Jie'er became more and more proficient in telling lies. She even felt that they were flawless after she finished. Anyway, she fell over as she said and no one could deny it.

"Second Miss, how did you fall?" Wen Xichi still didn't let her go. He stared at her tightly and asked with calmness and seriousness in his eyes, which held a panoramic view of Shao Jie'er's anxiety.

When Shao Jie'er was about to reply, there seemed to be a white light flashing in her mind and some things deep in her memory occurred to her, which drove her into extreme panic with her face immediately turning pale.

Even her lips were trembling, but she failed to make any sound.

Shao Wanru was stunned when seeing the converted expression of Shao Jie'er. She then took a look at Wen Xichi, whose smile had been replaced by a solemn face that was pointing at Shao Jie'er like a sheathed sword.

"However, Shao Jie'er's reaction was also very odd. Wen Xichi's questions were aggressive enough to make her nervous, but not enough to make her scared like that—she trembled, and expression on her face made a tremendous change." Shao Wanru frowned and thought, "Is there anything else that I don't know?"

"Jie'er, just tell us how you fell down. Then Minister Wen can record it. It's cold, and he has been waiting for a long time!" Old Madam said impatiently. It was obvious that she was showing the door to Wen Xichi. If it weren't for him, it would have been much smoother.

Old Madam was inexplicably annoyed. "Finally came the moment without Great Elder Princess, but here came Wen Xichi to spoil our plan." She just wanted Shao Jie'er to answer Wen Xichi's questions so that he could leave.

"I... I just fell on my knees, so my dress was burned..." Scolded by Old Madam, Shao Jie'er came to her senses from her memory and hastily explained in a panic.

However, the dress wouldn't get burnt unless it reached the fire.

"Second Miss, are you sure that you fell down just as you said, but not in any other way? Don't tell me then you again made a mistake because you were scared." Wen Xichi said with his face showing another smile, which was mixed up with a little calmness.

"Just...just as I said. I'm sure, I'm very sure," Shao Jie'er said hurriedly.

"Well, it will be the best if you're sure!" Wen Xichi turned to look at Old Madam calmly and said with saluting hands, "Old Madam, I've done with asking questions. Now I have a conclusion that Second Miss Shao was lying!"

His conclusion shocked everyone in the room. They all stared at Shao Jie'er in surprise.

"I... I'm not lying. I indeed fell down in that way!" Shao Jie'er, who felt guilty, immediately shook her head in a panic after being stared at by everyone.

"Yuanqing, why did you say that?" Shao Hua'an looked at Wen Xichi and asked.

While Old Madam was looking at Wen Xichi, full of coldness and displeasure.

Wen Xichi ignored the unpleasant gaze of Old Madam, reached out to point at the top of Shao Jie'er's head, and said, "Old Madam, First Young Master, look! Second Miss Shao said that she just knelt on the ground and got her dress burnt. But her hair was in a mess and even covered with some dust. How could her hair become like this if she just knelt down? But she insisted on the truthfulness of the kneeling-down statement no matter how many times I questioned her. She was just telling a lie."

Wen Xichi was comparatively tall, so he could see the top of Shao Jie'er's head clear from where he stood. Shao Jing and Shao Hua'an were also tall enough to see her top. However, no one had ever noticed it on the way here. At this time, when they looked carefully, they found that there was indeed some mud in the messy hair and even a small stone sticking on the hair bun.

It was obvious that her head once hit on the ground.

“Second Miss Shao, is there any reason why you can’t tell us?” Wen Xichi turned to question her again after he presented his opinion.

Shao Jie’er was deeply flustered at this time. She wanted to cover her head with her panicked hands but knew at once that doing so could not help. Old Madam was the one to whom she could turn. She said, “Grandma...”

“Grandma!” Another crisp voice cut her off. Shao Wanru took a step forward to Old Madam, bowed sideways respectfully and then got up, and said with her watery eyes fixing on Old Madam’s, “Grandma, please uphold justice for me!”

Shao Jie’er’s words were almost confirmed to be lies. Everything she had said before might be lies too! Then there was the possibility that the fire might have been set before she left the house. Shao Jie’er was most likely to be the one who set on fire.

Although Shao Wanru didn’t directly criticize Shao Jie’er, the meaning of her words was obvious enough. Moreover, Wen Xichi was helping her. She didn’t know why Wen Xichi did so, but his unexpected help was just right for her. She immediately seized the opportunity.

Old Madam was so angry that she almost wanted to eat Shao Jie’er alive. Along the way here from the fire scene, none of her words were convincing. They were all nonsense one after another. And now everything would be blamed on her.

But it was of no use that Shao Jie’er took on everything. What Old Madam wanted was to put the blame on Shao Wanru. Of course, she didn’t mean to put the latter into prison. As long as Shao Wanru took the blame, it would be much easier for Old Madam to go on her plot. Old Madam first expected it to be an easy duty and Shao Jie’er would do it well, though she was not smart.

But it turned out that Shao Jie’er made mistakes again and again. And the current situation was even more difficult to deal with.

Wen Xichi perfectly pointed out every flaw in Shao Jie’er’s lies. Even if Old Madam wanted to defend Shao Jie’er, she could not.

“Jie’er, does the fire really have anything to do with you?” Shao Jing said coldly.

“No, Father. It’s not me. It has nothing to do with me. I really went to find Fifth Sister. I’m really...” Shao Jie’er burst into tears, not knowing what else she could say.

Chapter 836 Unwilling to Act Like Sisterhood

“Second Miss, you said that you broke a lantern, but where is it now? It can’t be that someone happened to pass by and took your broken lantern away. What is more coincident is that you didn’t know the servant who took your broken lantern away?” Wen Xichi asked more, as if he didn’t see Shao Jie’er pitifully crying in a panic.

The moment he finished his words, the outcome was definitely settled. Even if Shao Jie’er had lied a thousand times, it was impossible for her to show real evidence. However, what Ministry of Justice needed most was the real evidence to prove instead of a witness like her, who kept saying that she had said something wrong before.

Shao Jie'er could only cry and tried to muddle through this now.

Wen Xichi took a step back and cupped his hands to salute Shao Jing and Shao Hua'an, "Duke Xing, First Young Master, it's obvious that this matter has something to do with Second Miss. I have to leave now for something else. If you need me tomorrow, just ask someone to send words to me!"

He didn't address himself in the same way before. Instead, he used "Your Subject", which meant that he was now an official of Ministry of Justice, and his latter words also guaranteed that he could testify for this matter. Shao Wanru didn't know if it was good for Shao Jing's group, but she knew that this was only good for her!

These words from Wen Xichi were equivalent to a guarantee for her. A guarantee from an official of Ministry of Justice was much more useful than any witness. Old Madam had asked Shao Jie'er to plot against Shao Wanru in order to get some evidence, which could be used against her in the future.

So far, Shao Wanru had basically understood Old Madam's intention, showing a trace of sneer in her eyes. Although Wen Xichi's behavior was too strange, it was only good for her. So she would just wait to see what Old Madam would say to her next.

For the time being, she had no need to use those defensive plans that she had prepared!

After finishing his words, Wen Xichi saluted Old Madam in the high seat, and turned around to stride away.

Seeing that he left elegantly without hesitation, Old Madam felt suffocated with anger. At this time, no one would believe that Shao Jie'er had nothing to do with this matter.

"Mother, it's getting late. Let's talk about this tomorrow!" Shao Jing looked around with his hands crossed in front of him and said.

This was a matter of the inner courtyard, so he and Shao Hua'an could indeed leave now. As long as the mansion had no intention to expose this matter, it could be regarded as a matter of the inner courtyard.

Shao Wanru sneered. Even this matter was in such condition now, he still wanted to avoid it.

Shao Wanru took a step forward, bowed deeply to Shao Jing, raised her eyes, and said, "Second Uncle, now we know that Second Sister has something to do with the fire. Second Uncle, don't you want to know why Second Sister did this?"

Her words were extremely sharp, almost pointing straightly out that Shao Jie'er was the one who had set on fire.

"I didn't, I didn't set the fire. I really didn't set the fire. I... I really left with a servant girl at that time..." Shao Jie'er was in panic, and she argued without caring about her face wet with tears.

"Second Sister, do you mean that I sent someone to call you over here?" Shao Wanru looked at Shao Jie'er coldly and asked, and then continued asking before Shao Jie'er could answer, "In this case, Second Sister, how about going to the court of Ministry of Justice tomorrow? Let's see whether the officials of Ministry of Justice believe in you or me."

"Ok... Let's go there." Shao Jie'er said fiercely, but cowardly in her heart.

"Ok, it's settled. Second Sister, please point out the person at that time." Shao Wanru said meaningfully.

Old Madam pounded the table heavily with her hand and said harshly, "You two are Misses from a respectable family. What nonsense are you talking about going to the court of Ministry of Justice?"

"Second Son, you and Hua'an can leave now. I'll deal with this matter!" After saying that, Old Madam waved her hand to Shao Jing.

Shao Jing nodded, took a few steps and looked back at Shao Wanru. He couldn't see through this niece. He couldn't tell whether she was lucky or something else at this moment.

Shao Wanru lowered her head and stood there with a little anger on her face. Anyone who was framed would not feel happy. Her current reaction should be the most direct one.

She directly showed her anger instead of restraining herself. This was much simpler than a niece who knew how to restrain herself. Shao Jing had not gotten angry even when Shao Wanru had stopped him just now. If Shao Wanru was really calm and thoughtful, she should restrain herself at this time and wait to lose her temper until Rui'an Great Elder Princess came here tomorrow.

However, she couldn't suppress it, which meant that she was probably not so scheming. It seemed that Wen Xichi really ruined things today. Shao Jing had known Wen Xichi well, who had always been indifferent to human relationships. His son had known him for a long time, but he was just an acquaintance to do a favor. Shao Jing had not expected that Wen Xichi would suddenly take real action.

What did this mean? Could it be possible that there was a prince standing behind Wen Xichi? Thinking of this, Shao Jing immediately became restless and shifted his attention from Shao Wanru to Wen Xichi. Turning around and striding out of the Chuntang Courtyard, he went straight back to the study and asked someone to investigate Wen Xichi's affairs.

What had happened today had nothing to do with Wen Xichi, but he meddled in and took charge of it. This was so strange!

After Shao Jing left with Shao Hua'an, the atmosphere in the room became dull again. Old Madam, who was sitting above, stared at Shao Jie'er coldly, which made Shao Jie'er tremble and even dare not to cry.

It was so quiet in the room that Shao Jie'er's increasingly panicked and rapid sound of breathing could almost be heard.

"Grandma..." Shao Jie'er couldn't bear it and wailed.

"Kneel down to your Fifth Sister and serve tea to apologize!" Old Madam squeezed the words out, which made Shao Jie'er tremble a few times. She turned to look at Shao Wanru and wailed, "Fifth Sister!"

She didn't want to kneel. There were other servants here. If she, as the elder sister, knelt down, she would lose her face in the future.

Shao Wanru looked at Shao Jie'er with an extremely cold and calm gaze. Shao Jie'er could not understand the meaning and coldness in her eyes. With just a glance, Shao Jie'er's heart trembled. At this time, Shao Jie'er also regretted very much. She had known that Shao Wanru was not easy to deal with, but she listened to Old Madam. Now she not only got no benefit but also was pushed out as the scapegoat by Old Madam.

However, she didn't dare to push Old Madam out and only hoped that Shao Wanru could let her go.

"Fifth Sister, Fifth Sister, I really didn't do it on purpose. I... I did it carelessly. I was afraid... that's why... I wanted to ask you to help me share some of the burdens... Grandmother has always doted on you. With your help, she will definitely not punish me severely." Shao Jie'er pleaded with Shao Wanru with tears in her eyes.

Her words sounded very sincere and she also confessed that she did lie just now. But she meant that this lie was made because she was afraid.

Seeing that Shao Wanru's expression remained unchanged, Shao Jie'er continued saying, "Fifth Sister, I really didn't mean to do that. I just accidentally swept the light when I was writing. Later, I couldn't put it out, so I wanted to run out to call for help. When I saw that it was burning, I was so afraid... that... that I did this!"

At this moment, Shao Jie'er had to shoulder all the responsibilities and blames. It was impossible to say that she started the fire, but she could say that she was careless.

Seeing that Shao Jie'er talked more and more smoothly and regretfully, Shao Wanru sneered in her heart. At this moment, Shao Jie'er showed her rare cleverness. She knew that she couldn't argue anymore, so she had to take the blame and said that she did it carelessly. In this way, she could take all the responsibilities.

As long as the mansion did not investigate the matter, it was nothing no matter what other people said.

Old Madam, who was sitting there, looked better. This was the best result. Now Shao Jie'er's words explained the reason why she had been lying before. Since she said that she did it carelessly, it was easier to deal with than her arson.

She turned to look at Shao Wanru, only to see that Shao Wanru was very angry and annoyed with a straight face. At present, no matter what Shao Jie'er said, she only looked at Shao Jie'er angrily without saying anything.

"Fifth girl, you see..." Old Madam softened her voice.

"Grandma, I don't want to forgive Second Sister. She set fire this time. If she kills someone next time, will Second Sister blame it on me? There are so many people in the mansion, and I'm not very familiar with Second Sister. I don't understand why she doesn't blame it on others but insists on blaming me!" Shao Wanru interrupted Old Madam's words in a cold voice.

She knew that Old Madam meant to minimize the big trouble. It would be better for her to accept the loss, but she didn't want to.

She did not intend to use the sisterhood to show her generosity.

"Fifth Girl, it's indeed the Second Girl's fault. Don't worry. I'll punish her severely. I can't let you suffer such a loss in vain." Old Madam comforted Shao Wanru.

Shao Wanru shook her head firmly, and there were crystal tears in her watery eyes. When she looked at Old Madam, her eyes were full of tears. "Grandma, I know that I have exiled out since I was a child. I am not close to my family members in the mansion, but it is just on the surface. I am getting closer to my

family members step by step, but they are thinking about how to destroy me. Grandma, I will not forgive my Second Sister!”

After saying that, Shao Wanru turned around and left. She left with tears falling down and left Shao Jie’er on the spot.

An appropriate show of weakness meant a tough attitude of refusing reconciliation, so this could avoid Old Madam saying some empty words about sisterhood.

Old Madam wanted to stop Shao Wanru, but seeing that Shao Wanru had arrived at the door, she could only watch her leave. After that, her eyes fell on Shao Jie’er. It was this girl who had ruined the plan and lied again and again, so that no one believed her now.

“Kneel down!” Old Madam rebuked harshly.

Seeing Shao Wanru leave in such a tough attitude, Shao Jie’er had already panicked and didn’t know what to do. Since Old Madam scolded her, she hurriedly knelt down. She cried and said, “Grandma, I... I really don’t know... why did this happen... I really did it according to ... according to what you said...”

When she spoke of this, a teacup was thrown over heavily to her feet side, which scared her so much that she immediately stopped talking and looked at Old Madam, who was sitting high above.

“Go! You don’t need to sleep tonight. Go to the Buddha Hall in the back to calm down and cool down yourself. If you don’t keep your mouth shut, I’m afraid that you won’t be able to keep your life in the end!”

Old Madam scolded her gloomily and cruelly.

Two old maids came over and took Shao Jie’er out. Shao Jie’er didn’t dare to struggle out. She just turned around and wailed, “Grandma, grandma...”

Chapter 837 Good Cop and Bad Cop

After all the people of Minister Zhao’s Mansion got the news the next morning, their Old Madam was so angry that she came to Duke Xing’s Mansion in person.

Old Madam met Old Madam Zhao in the flower hall. The former was accompanied by Shao Caihuan and Shao Wanru while the latter by Zhao Xiran.

After everyone got seated, Old Madam Zhao, instead of drinking tea first, looked at Old Madam coldly and asked, “Please tell me why did you do that. If you don’t like Ran’er, we two families can choose not to get married. You don’t have to do such a thing! It is said that it used to be a small courtyard, but now there is even no courtyard at all?”

Everyone could easily tell that Old Madam Zhao came to denounce the fire. Old Madam lowered her head and said with a smile, “How could we be dissatisfied with Miss Zhao? She is such a beautiful girl, whom I have known since she was a child. How could I not like her? But that fire is really an accident!”

“An accident? How can you let an accident burn all the furniture in Ran’er’s dowry? That is the furniture we have prepared for more than a decade! We have prepared it since Ran’er was a child. I didn’t expect them to be destroyed before being used. You... you...” Old Madam Zhao suddenly coughed loudly.

Zhao Xiran rushed to stand behind Old Madam Zhao and patted her gently on the back, after which Old Madam Zhao recovered from the cough. Seeing that Miss Zhao was calm and peaceful, Shao Wanru narrowed her watery eyes slightly. Then she slowly lowered her head and looked at the ground in front of her, quietly listening to the argument between the two old madams.

Shao Caihuan was a little anxious. She knew what had happened last night early in the morning and even knew that Shao Wanru was involved again, but she was not clear about the details. Noticing that Shao Wanru was silent, she got close and asked with concern, "Fifth Sister, are you uncomfortable?"

Shao Wanru shook her head but said nothing.

"Fifth Sister, if you feel unwell, you can go back and have a rest. I'll stay here with grandma!" Shao Caihuan became more and more concerned as she felt that Shao Wanru did not look well all day.

Shao Wanru indeed didn't feel good. Last night, she could not fall asleep immediately after going back because she was first bothered by her deliberation of everything, and then the analysis of Wen Xichi's character. It was hard for her to believe that Wen Xichi should help her. "Shouldn't he be indifferent with things like that?"

It seemed that it had little to do with Wen Xichi. According to his personality, he was far from being the kind of person who would take the initiative to put in others' domestic problems. However, he did put in and even stood on her side, which was most beyond Shao Wanru's belief. She fell asleep later during thinking of these, but she kept dreaming all night.

Some dreams were about her previous life, and some this life. They all ended up with nightmares. The last scene was still the bloody scene, where so many women died. Was she crazy? Why did this happen? She couldn't believe the answer in her heart. "Despair and darkness?"

Had she been dead at that time? Were her eyes blinded by the despair and darkness? How could a person like him care about others when he did not even care about his own life?

Shao Wanru was shocked and woke up from her nightmares. But later she could not fall asleep again. She stopped thinking about Wen Xichi and tried hard to remember her last life in the palace. What had happened to her after she entered the palace? How did she make her acquaintance with Chu Liuchen? Did she know him or had they known each other before?

These scenes in her memory were all blank. She couldn't remember anything and suffered a headache along the night, which made her face as pale as snow today. It was apparent that she was not in good spirits.

Shao Wanru slightly shook her head and refused in a polite tone, "I'm well. Thank you, Third Sister!"

On the other hand, Old Madam Zhao had calmed herself down when the two were talking. She picked up the teacup beside and took a sip. "Now, tell me! How will you deal with this matter?"

"Of course I'll choose another good chamber for the marriage. Don't worry, I promise that First Miss Zhao won't be slighted. The furniture to be prepared by us will be the best. As for those burned things, I'll compensate you according to the cost. Everything will cater to your satisfaction!" Old Madam promised again and again.

Old Madam Zhao put down the teacup and said sarcastically, "Pick a good courtyard? I heard that the burning one was a 'masterwork' by one of the Misses in your mansion and that it was the Second Miss who casually picked that courtyard."

It was not easy to inquire about what had happened last night, but it was not a secret that Shao Jie'er was the one choosing that burnt courtyard.

"Please, Old Madam Zhao. Since you're here, do help to choose a chamber this time. As long as your choice is your favorite, we will have no objection!" Old Madam of Duke Xing's Mansion patted her chest and promised again.

Shao Wanru's heart skipped a beat and her eyes were full of coldness. As she expected, they came for her father's courtyard. All of these resulted from the coalition between Minister Zhao's Mansion and Duke Xing's Mansion to occupy the Quhuan Courtyard, where her father lived as the Heir of Duke Xing. The current scene was just to shut up her grandma's mouth.

If it had been confirmed yesterday by Shao Jie'er that she once sent someone to talk to Shao Jie'er, she must be got involved in the fire case. Moreover, Old Madam Zhao just said the fire was a mistake of a Miss in the mansion, then everyone might blame it on her. At that time, even Shao Wanru's grandma was unable to defend her though she wanted.

After all, it was easy for people to be misled to believe that the fire set on the bridal chamber might have been caused by Shao Wanru. Otherwise, the fire wouldn't have broken out after Shao Jie'er had just left it.

Moreover, if it was proved that her servant girl had once been involved, Old Madam would never make any investigation in it because she wanted to pretend to protect her, which in fact would get her into the trouble of bearing all the blame dumbly. The evasive attitude like that was the deadliest, leaving her no chance to defend herself.

More ridiculously, she even had to express her gratitude to Old Madam for her sham favors.

She pressed her lips gently, waiting to see what they would do today to take Quhuan Courtyard for themselves.

She looked up in the direction from which she had sensed something and then her watery eyes just met Zhao Xiran's gentle ones. Zhao Xiran smiled back lightly as Shao Wanru looked back at her, which made the former more agreeable.

Shao Wanru lowered her head and continued to be a silent audience enjoying their performances. As for First Miss Zhao, she seemed to be not a plain character.

"We have the right to decide the bridal chamber? I'm afraid that there will be all kinds of disapproval from your family after we pick an unexpected one!" Old Madam Zhao sneered.

"No, there won't. You can choose any courtyard as long as it is a vacant one you like!" Old Madam promised with a smile. She became more and more humble.

"Well, that's what you have promised me. Don't regret it!" Old Madam Zhao looked at Old Madam with satisfaction and said.

"Of course!" Old Madam said with relief. Then she pointed at Shao Wanru and Shao Caihuan and said, "These are my two granddaughters from the main branch and the third branch respectively. Both of them agree with this."

"Third Miss Shao and Fifth Miss Shao?" Old Madam Zhao knew a little about them. She glanced at them up and down, especially more at Shao Wanru, and then nodded with approbation. "The two Misses of your mansion are as graceful and elegant as fairies."

She waved to them. Shao Caihuan and Shao Wanru stood up together. Old Madam Zhao took off a pair of bracelets from her hands and put one of them on Shao Caihuan's hand. "It's the first time we have met. Please accept the bracelets as the presents under the situation where I didn't prepare something better!" Old Madam Zhao said, about to put the other on Shao Wanru's hand.

Her attitude was very gentle, completely different from that in which she treated Old Madam just now. She looked like an amiable elder.

At a glance, Shao Wanru had known that the bracelets were of great value. Took a look at other clothes on Old Madam, which were precious but not ostentatious. Only the bracelets were unusually gorgeous so that it was easy to tell that they were specially prepared for young ladies. The three rubies inlaid on each of them were glittering enough to catch everyone's eyes.

It made Shao Wanru feel herself in the wrong to disagree after a pretty advantage. What's more, Old Madam had arbitrarily made a promise on behalf of her just now. If she accepted the bracelet, later she would not be able to speak out her disapproval anymore. By the time, even her grandmother could not disagree with it.

One played the good cop and the other the bad cop. "They want to deal with not only me but also grandmother!"

Taking a step back to avoid Old Madam Zhao, Shao Wanru respectfully bowed sideways to her and said, "I don't deserve such a precious gift from you, Old Madam Zhao!"

Shao Caihuan, who was happy and enjoying the bracelet in her hand, was suddenly stunned. She took the bracelet off and respectfully returned it to Old Madam Zhao. "Old Madam Zhao, they are indeed too precious. We dare not accept them!"

Shao Caihuan tried hard to stay the same as Shao Wanru. What happened yesterday had already made Shao Wanru unhappy. Today, she could not break up with Shao Wanru again.

Though Shao Caihuan was very tempted with the bracelet and Old Madam seemed to be very satisfied with her behavior of accepting it, she still felt that it was better to keep consistent with Shao Wanru at this time.

Old Madam Zhao's smile froze. Holding the bracelet in her hand, she turned to look at Old Madam, whose face was also expressing embarrassment. She was smiling, but it wasn't a real smile. The hypocritical smile was exactly what she was having now.

"Third Girl, Fifth Girl, never refuse a gift from an elder. Take them and thank Old Madam Zhao!" Old Madam took a deep breath and suppressed the anger and annoyance in her heart. That was totally a

heavy slap in her face. Was it obvious that to refuse the goodwill of Old Madam of the Zhao's Mansion in front of her meant that her previous promise was invalid, wasn't it?

Shao Caihuan hesitated, looked at the bracelet in her hand, and then looked at her grandma. She didn't know if she should obey her grandma this time.

But she was afraid that Shao Wanru would be angry. She turned back to peek at her.

Shao Wanru raised her head and looked at Old Madam with hateful eyes, which were with a little coldness and anger.

Old Madam inexplicably felt something injudicious, so she hastened to darken her face and said, "Fifth Girl, are you going to disobey me?"

Chapter 838 Unexpected Protection from Prince Chen

Shao Wanru looked up slightly with her eyes carrying a trace of determination. She said, "Grandma, except for the one where my parents lived, Old Madam Zhao can choose any other vacant courtyard in the mansion, but not the one belonging to Father!"

Shao Wanru didn't hide her attitude from Old Madam for she couldn't do it anymore. That chamber belonged to her father and mother, and her younger brother, the future Heir of the Duke. Old Madam plotted to create an illusion that Shao Hua'an had been recognized as the Heir of Duke Xing's Mansion, intending to win the position of the heir of a duke. Shao Wanru would never allow it to happen.

In the last life, they killed all her family to seize the position. How could the hatred be swept by the position of the heir of a duke?

"You..." Old Madam Zhao was stunned, fixing her eyes on the girl in front of her, who was just a gentle girl with an aura of charm in her eye. She could not believe how a girl with no parents could have the courage to say such words. However, how could a girl from an aristocratic family be judged by her appearance?

"Did she mean to humiliate me in front of so many people?"

Thinking of this, Old Madam Zhao was terribly annoyed. She pointed at Shao Wanru and said to Old Madam in a sharp voice, "Old Madam, is this the well-educated Miss in your mansion? Did... did she realize what she was talking about? You promised to compensate us just now. Is this how you do it?"

"Wanru, kneel down and apologize to Old Madam Zhao!" Old Madam scolded harshly, her face darkening and her eyes expressing coldness.

"Grandma, I have no idea for what I have to apologize like that?" Shao Wanru said in a calm voice. She glanced at Zhao Xiran next to her and saw the shock in her eyes. Obviously, she also didn't expect that Shao Wanru would dare to say such words in front of Old Madam. Her eyes gave out her surprise for a moment.

"How... how can you be so arrogant to your elders? You..." Old Madam was extremely furious, but she couldn't slap Shao Wanru. She would never escape away from Great Elder Princess's interrogation if she did. She was caught by Great Elder Princess in the last plot, which was the reason why she united with Old Madam Zhao this time.

“Grandma, I’m just telling the truth. I was worried that Old Madam Zhao didn’t know about it, so I told her in advance in case they pick one which is unavailable for them. That will also embarrass you,” Shao Wanru said indifferently.

Old Madam was nearly infuriated to death by such words.

Old Madam Zhao looked at Shao Wanru up and down with a trace of disdain in her eyes. “Shao Wanru is indeed a country-bred girl, knowing nothing about basic etiquette. How dare she speak to elders like that? Did she have the confidence from Great Elder Princess?

“However, it is unreasonable that Great Elder Princess intervenes in the affairs of Duke Xing’s Mansion all the time, even though she is a princess.”

“Fifth Miss Shao? You don’t make any sense. Your parents have been gone for so long. Are you going to keep that courtyard vacant forever?” Old Madam Zhao said in a cold voice.

“Why not? No one else can live in it!” Shao Wanru raised her eyebrows and said. She didn’t feel so much pressure when facing Old Madam Zhao. After all, Old Madam Zhao was not her formal elder on the surface.

“I heard that Fifth Miss Shao comes from an ordinary family. Is this the manner taught to you by your original family?” Old Madam Zhao said sarcastically, “You are behaving like such a stingy girl. But now you are the Fifth Miss of Duke Xing’s Mansion, so don’t keep your bad old habits in Duke Xing’s Mansion anymore. Don’t forget your current identity!”

“Thank you for reminding me, madam! I am well aware of my identity and that’s why I guard the chamber for my parents. There are many available courtyards in the mansion. If First Miss Zhao is content with mine, you can pick it. I can move out and live in any other courtyard for the time being!” Shao Wanru said with a smile. It seemed that she had made a concession.

It was a sorrow that in order to guard the last hope of her parents, she was even willing to give up her courtyard.

Old Madam Zhao was again infuriated and her hands trembled. Everyone knew that Shao Wanru was going to marry Prince Chen in two months. If she moved out from the courtyard where she was living and Shao Hua’an made it into his wedding room, not only Duke Xing’s Mansion but also Minister Zhao’s Mansion would be scolded.

Shao Wanru was the future Princess Chen. Although Old Madam Zhao did not think that Prince Chen really loved Fifth Miss Shao so much, she understood that Shao Wanru would have a high status. After Shao Wanru got married, she would be the princess of the first-class family. Even Old Madam Zhao would have to salute her when they met.

No one could bear the charge of forcing her to give up her courtyard.

However, Shao Wanru was not married yet. A married woman took the interests of her husband’s family first, while an unmarried woman took that of her father’s family. She had no reason to resist now.

Unwilling to talk to Shao Wanru, Old Madam Zhao turned to look at Old Madam of Duke Xing’s Mansion and said angrily, “If this is Fifth Miss Shao’s attitude, it would be better that we don’t get married. My

girl dare not become a sister-in-law of Fifth Miss Shao, who has put on airs like a princess before she marries into the royal family!"

These words were not only full of sarcasm but also a slap in the face.

No matter what was said, Shao Wanru was not married yet, let alone marrying into the royal family.

"Grandma!" Zhao Xiran gently shook Old Madam Zhao's arm and said in a soft voice. It seemed that she did not want Old Madam Zhao to criticize Shao Wanru like that.

After saying that, angry Old Madam Zhao stood up and held Zhao Xiran's hand, about to leave.

"Please wait a minute, Old Madam Zhao!" Old Madam hastened to stand up and stopped her. If Old Madam Zhao left now, the marriage between the two families would be doomed to fail. After all, Old Madam was very satisfied with this marriage.

"Fifth Girl, hurry up and apologize to Old Madam Zhao!" She turned to look at Shao Wanru and scolded her.

Shao Wanru stood aside indifferently as if she didn't realize the severity of the problem caused by her.

Seeing this, Old Madam Zhao was so angry with a livid face. "Well... this is the Fifth Miss of Duke Xing's Mansion. She is dissatisfied with our Ran'er. Well, since Ran'er is not approved by the future Princess Chen, we'd better leave now to end the embarrassment like this!"

"Fifth Girl, kneel down!" As the problem became worse and worse, Old Madam was so angry that she raised her hand and intended to slap Shao Wanru.

Shao Wanru took a step back and avoided the slap. When she was about to say something, a leisured voice came from the door. "Did I show up at the wrong time?"

Everyone in the flower hall was stunned by the clear voice of a man. They looked back together and saw Chu Liuchen standing at the door. The gentle smile on his face made it seem that his unexpected appearance was an accident. He raised his beautiful eyebrows slightly, looked at the stiff faces in the hall, and then walked in at a slow pace.

He was dressed in a dark blue Mang Pao, a robe with python patterns, which made him extraordinarily noble but with a trace of sickly handsomeness. As soon as he showed up, everyone in the flower hall was amazed.

Standing behind him was the butler of Duke Xing's Mansion, who looked very anxious. He didn't mean to show Prince Chen in without informing his master. He couldn't stop him. As soon as Prince Chen entered the mansion, the butler was asked the position of the flower hall where Old Madam Zhao was, and he was ordered to lead the prince there. He didn't even have the chance to inform his master.

"Did something happen?" Chu Liuchen blinked his charming eyes, gave a glance at the people in the flower hall and walked in.

The two Old Madams reacted quite quickly and hurriedly bowed to him. Although Chu Liuchen rarely showed up in public, they recognized him at a glance. Anyway, the two Old Madams had seen him several times when they went to the palace to accompany the Empress Dowager from time to time.

It was the first time that Zhao Xiran had met Chu Liuchen. She looked at him in surprise. This was Prince Chen, who was said to be dying soon. But right at the moment in her eyes, he had no difference from a normal man except for his pale face and pallid lips.

Glanced by Chu Liuchen, she blushed at once and bowed sideways to him in a hurry. She could feel her rapid heartbeat with the shyness of a maiden.

Zhao Xiran was the First Miss of Minister Zhao's Mansion, followed by several younger sisters and brothers. It was rare for her to lose her composure like this. She couldn't help thinking of the gossip among the Misses of aristocratic families. It was said that Prince Chen was incomparably handsome and the most outstanding man in the whole capital city. Unfortunately, he was born with congenital defects and was in extremely bad health. Otherwise, how many women wouldn't want to marry such a noble and handsome man?

Even she herself almost lost her mind just now.

If Zhao Xiran almost lost her mind, then Shao Caihuan was completely lost. The veil was still on her face, so no one could see her expression. But she looked at Chu Liuchen with obsession like an idiot. She was fancying that under the situation where she could only be a consort, she would rather be the one of Chu Liuchen than Commandery Prince Qing.

Shao Wanru also bowed sideways and greeted, "Your Highness!"

"Forgo formalities!" Chu Liuchen said casually and then stood still beside Shao Wanru. He reached out to help up her and asked with an increasingly gentle look, "What's wrong? What happened just now?"

Old Madam Zhao stood up straight, and her heart was heavily pounding. She would rather be shocked than be excited like Zhao Xiran. Everyone in the palace knew that Prince Chen seemed to be gentle, but he was actually very ruthless. Anyone who offended him would be cruelly retaliated. What's more, he enjoyed a preference from both the Emperor and the Empress Dowager. Even the masters in the palace were afraid of Prince Chen when they saw him, let alone them as the liegemen.

Old Madam Zhao was afraid that she had provoked such a malignant royalty by accident.

"What is the situation now? Does Prince Chen really love Fifth Miss Shao?" Old Madam Zhao frowned and thought that it was better to have another discussion with Old Madam in a long term.

"Nothing special. We were just talking about the courtyard where my parents used to live!" Shao Wanru stood up straight and answered softly.

"What's wrong with their courtyard? Has Uncle the Emperor already decreed the heir?" Chu Liuchen said slowly and then looked at Old Madam with a faint smile. "Congratulations, Old Madam. With so many years past, the Heir of Duke Xing has finally been decided! Your aspiration is achieved!"

"You must be joking, Your Highness. How can it be decided so easily!" Old Madam answered with a grievance. She was bold to suppress Shao Wanru just now, but she didn't dare to be arrogant in front of Prince Chen!

"It hasn't decided yet? Well, it must be my misunderstanding!" Chu Liuchen said in a casual tone. He rolled his watery eyes and then said, "I heard that there are some original handwritings of the former

Heir of Duke Xing's Mansion left in that courtyard. I wonder if Old Madam could allow me to appreciate them?"

Chapter 839 An Inopportune Infatuation

Xiao Xuanzi quietly took a few steps backward, thinking that he'd better stay far from his master. Needless to say, his master was in a fury!

The moment when they walked into the flower hall, Xiao Xuanzi and his master had realized that Fifth Miss Shao was being bullied by everyone else there. Xiao Xuanzi cast a secret glance at the two Old Madams sitting on the main seats, and thought inwardly that how daring they were to oppress Fifth Miss Shao, who was going to be his master's wife!

"Your Highness, there is nothing worth seeing in that courtyard. But you can visit it as long as you want!" Old Madam didn't look well. She was clever enough to tell the unfriendly attitude in Chu Liuchen's words. She just thought that it was unlikely to happen, "What does he mean? Does he really care about Shao Wanru?"

"Then can I have the honor to have both Old Madam and Fifth Miss Shao as the guides to show me around it?" Chu Liuchen said with an elegant smile, "And I just heard that Old Madam Zhao and Miss Zhao also wanted to visit that courtyard. Why don't we go together?"

Old Madam Zhao was astonished and showed an embarrassed face. She hastened to wave her hand and denied, "I am not eligible, Your Highness! Please never mind!"

"If it was not Old Madam's idea, then it was Miss Zhao's?" Chu Liuchen turned to look at Zhao Xiran who was standing aside, with his eyes becoming more and more bright and watery.

Zhao Xiran instantly lowered her head, her heart beating wildly, half frightened and half shy. Then she bowed and replied, "I'm not eligible either, Your Highness!"

"Old Madam Zhao, are you sure that you are not coming with us? I happen to have time today to go for a visit with Old Madam and you!" Chu Liuchen's vivid eyes were gently cast on the two Old Madams, who were in great tense.

"You are all politeness, Your Highness!" Old Madam said with a reluctant and stiff smile.

Old Madam Zhao said to Chu Liuchen respectfully, "Your Highness, we Zhao Family never intend to take up the courtyard of the former Heir of Duke Xing. We just want to choose a new house as the bridal chamber in Duke Xing's Mansion, because the last chosen one was burned."

Then she turned to speak to Old Madam of Duke Xing's Mansion, "We understand that no one expects an accident like that. Since it has been burned down, please prepare another chamber for Ran'er's wedding. We are nearly running out of time. If we don't do it well, Fifth Miss Shao's wedding will be delayed."

Her words were sincere, reasonable, and extremely comfortable, especially those at the end that flattered Chu Liuchen.

Old Madam Zhao could only hide the grievance in her heart. She didn't know that Prince Chen cared about his marriage with Shao Wanru. When Old Madam was telling the plan to her, she was only told to have a cooperation to force Rui'an Great Elder Princess to give up the vacant Quhuan Courtyard.

She didn't expect that Prince Chen would get involved.

As the minister of the Ministry of Works, Minister Zhao would occasionally talk about Prince Chen at home. So Old Madam Zhao was well aware that the Emperor and the Empress Dowager thought highly of Prince Chen, who was much higher than the other princes. Sometimes Minister Zhao even implied that if Prince Chen recovered from illness, it was hard to say who would inherit the throne in the future.

At first, Old Madam Zhao didn't take it seriously. She even doubted whether Prince Chen would be still alive a few years later after hearing about his poor health. Now she saw that his health was little influenced, though he looked slightly weaker than healthy people. Moreover, he was devoted to protecting the Fifth Miss Shao. Thinking of these, Old Madam Zhao was very annoyed.

She was eager to rebuild the relationship with Duke Xing's Mansion.

Old Madam Zhao would want to cancel the marriage if it weren't for the fact that it had been well decided and arranged before the marriage of Prince Chen and Shao Wanru. She was afraid that Prince Chen's wedding would be affected if something wrong happened to her granddaughter's wedding.

Would Shao Hua'an get the position of the Heir of Duke Xing? At first, an important factor for the engagement between the two families was that Shao Hua'an would become the Heir of Duke Xing and then the Duke Xing in the future.

At the very beginning, Madam of Duke Xing had been very confident and promised more than once about it. Because at that time, there were no other opponents for the position in Duke Xing's Mansion. As for Shao Yuanhao, no one cared much about him, though he was the son of the former Heir of Duke Xing. On the one hand, he was still young. On the other hand, he was worthless compared with Shao Hua'an, who was brilliant.

However, the marriage was postponed for three years because of Shao Wanru. In the end, they found that nothing of principle had even changed even though she was involved, so the two families settled the marriage. Later, they had to hold the wedding ahead of time, because Shao Wanru and Chu Liuchen's marriage was decided and arranged in a hurry.

Even so, Old Madam Zhao didn't take Shao Wanru seriously. She still believed that in Duke Xing's Mansion, Fifth Miss Shao was just an unmarried daughter without any power and authority. She would marry Prince Chen in the future and devote herself to serving her seriously ill husband. How could she have time to care for Duke Xing's Mansion?

What's more, when she was married, she would not have the right to butt in the inheritance of her parents' family. She could make no decision, but only stood aside and expressed some useless ideas.

But Old Madam Zhao had never thought of the current situation. She really wanted to break off the engagement.

"Don't worry, Old Madam Zhao. We will deal with it as soon as possible. A good chamber will be well prepared as a wedding room before tomorrow and our people will spare no efforts to decorate it. As for

the furniture sent by you before, we will make up for it. Everything will be to your satisfaction!" Aware that nothing more could be robbed from Shao Wanru, Old Madam turned to try her best to deal with every problem, with a stiff smile.

"That's good. Then we are leaving!" Old Madam Zhao was unable to stay there any longer. She said goodbye to Old Madam, and then bowed to Chu Liuchen and walked out with Zhao Xiran.

Chu Liuchen didn't stop them and watched them leave with a smile. After they left, he turned to ask Old Madam, "Old Madam, can we go now?"

"Your highness, this way please!" Old Madam said with a reluctant smile. Under the situation that Prince Chen was interested in that courtyard and asked for her guidance, she could only follow his words to accompany him.

Of course, Shao Wanru and Shao Caihuan would have to follow Old Madam. They went to Quhuan Courtyard together.

When they arrived at Quhuan Courtyard, they could still see the characters on the huge screen wall. Shao Wanru stood in front of the wall and raised her head to read the characters from top to down one by one, during which her eyes started to get wet with tears.

Those were her father's writings, just in front of her. But his figure and appearance in the memory were too remote for her to remember clearly. After all, it was the memory of her childhood. In addition, she was reborn once, so the memory about him became much farther away. Now another sight of his characters made it clear in her mind.

Though she bit her lip, trying hard to suppress the sadness in her heart, an irrepressible trace of grief could be captured in her eyes. In her last life, she didn't have a chance to meet her father or know about his life even when she died. Everything was entirely covered by Duke Xing's Mansion, including the fact of their murdering her and her relatives.

"Old Madam, what a good building, the courtyard of the former Heir of Duke Xing!" Chu Liuchen's voice came in her ear. Shao Wanru could tell from the voice that he was smiling when he said that. She glanced sideways and saw that he was talking to Old Madam, so she did not respond.

She was in a bad mood now and not in the mood to talk. It was best for her that Chu Liuchen did not try to speak to her.

"This is the best courtyard in Duke Xing's Mansion and it was given to my eldest son in the past. I thought... I didn't expect that he would end up like that... throwing a tantrum, running away from home, and even losing his life outside in the end!"

The screen wall also reminded her of her eldest son. In a moment, sadness came through her mind like an unforeseen storm and suddenly she choked with sobs.

"Is the house better than the one where Duke Xing lives now?" Chu Liuchen continued to ask Old Madam with his head up as if he did not notice her abnormality.

Old Madam had to suppress the sorrow and answered Prince Chen, "My second son also lives in a good courtyard!" She wiped off the tears at the corners of her eyes with a handkerchief.

Shao Jing now lived where generations of Duke Xing had lived. How could it not be good? Old Madam did not dare to ramble on it.

“That sounds brilliant! Old Madam, can you show it to me? There are several vacant courtyards in my mansion, one of which will be set for the heir of the duke and one as my private courtyard in the future. The layout of Duke Xing’s Mansion looks great and I think I can take it as a reference!”

Chu Liuchen asked Old Madam with a smile and in a friendly and calm attitude after he walked around the screen wall twice. On the other side, Shao Caihuan kept gazing at him, enjoying him both behaving and looking like a handsome child existing in an ink painting. Her heart was pounding wildly!

She had been attracted by Chu Liuchen for long, and her passion was doubled at this time. She always thought it much better to marry such a man even as a concubine or a consort than marrying Commandery Prince Qing. With this dream in her mind, she could feel her heart heat up and beat fast and a burning blush showed up on her face.

She had been wanting to talk with Prince Chen, but she hadn’t got a chance. When she heard Chu Liuchen’s words to Old Madam, she immediately cut in, “Grandma, I happen to be free of time, so I can show His Highness to see Second Uncle’s courtyard!”

After saying that, she felt very shy so that she lowered her head. The blush in her face was as brightly red as sunset. Fortunately, her face was still covered with a light veil, so no one could see it.

Old Madam became angrier on hearing Shao Caihuan’s initiative and even wanted to give her a sober slap on the face when seeing her affected shyness. How could an unmarried Miss from an aristocratic family say things like that? What’s more, it was obvious that Shao Wanru next to her was a more suitable person to do it. It was Shao Wanru who should accompany Chu Liuchen there. They would get married in two months, so it didn’t matter even if that was a little misconducted.

What did Shao Caihuan mean? Did she fall in love with Prince Chen? Old Madam thought it ridiculous!

“What do you think of it, Old Madam?” Chu Liuchen said gently, giving a glance at Shao Wanru who was still immersed in sadness. The smile on his face slowly disappeared, his beautiful eyes were narrowed slightly and his handsome face expressed a trace of coldness with unignorable aggressiveness.

He was facing Old Madam, and Shao Caihuan was behind him. She couldn’t see his changed face, so she was still immersed in the wonderful wish. After all, she was intensely willing to show Chu Liuchen to Duke Xing’s courtyard!

Old Madam, however, saw Chu Liuchen’s cold face and knew that something bad might happen—Shao Caihuan might have pissed Prince Chen off. But, a wonderfully tempting evil idea suddenly flashed through her mind...

Chapter 840 Where’s the Original Craftsman?

“As long as you want to see it, I will lead you and be in your company, Your Highness.” Old Madam nodded and agreed. She didn’t directly uncover Shao Caihuan’s crush on Prince Chen, nor did she take notice of what Shao Caihuan had said before.

Old Madam turned to ask Shao Wanru, "Wanru, are you going to stay here to enjoy the screen wall or accompany Prince Chen to visit your Second Uncle's courtyard?"

Shao Wanru was still immersed in the sadness of the past. Quhuan Courtyard was not always accessible. Even it was she who wanted to enter it, she would have to get Old Madam's permission. She was certainly unwilling to leave it now when she had such a precious chance to stay and pay a visit to her father's courtyard.

Shao Wanru shook her head gently, hid the sadness in her eyes, and replied, "Grandma, I want to go on watching Father's writings."

"Well, then you stay here, and Caihuan and I will show Your Highness to your Second Uncle's courtyard!" Old Madam said.

Shao Wanru nodded, meanwhile stealing a glance at Chu Liuchen beside her and noticing his slightly frowned eyebrows. Prince Chen seemed not to be happy.

On perceiving Shao Wanru's look, Chu Liuchen suddenly smiled and said to her in a gentle tone, "Well, you stay here first. I have something to talk about with you later!"

"Yes, Your Highness!" Shao Wanru bowed and replied more respectfully in front of others. Of course, she did not refuse him with an excuse.

Chu Liuchen was slightly pleased by her attitude. He turned around and walked out. Old Madam winked at Shao Caihuan and immediately followed up.

At first, Shao Caihuan had fallen into a state of self-hatred after her words were totally ignored by Old Madam and Chu Liuchen. After the moment she received Old Madam's hint, she immediately turned to be delighted in her heart and speeded up her pace to catch up with Chu Liuchen.

"Grandma leaves Shao Wanru alone there and chooses me to follow them. Does grandma intend to help me?" Shao Caihuan felt shy and excited, and her heart almost jumped out of her chest.

But on second thoughts, she suddenly felt aggrieved and started to complain in her mind. Why was it not Shao Wanru but her who was infectious in the palace at that time? If Shao Wanru had been infected and had scars on her face, she would have been kicked out of the palace. And she herself would have been the legal Princess Chen. Thinking of this, Shao Caihuan felt pretty excited.

She cast an obsessive look at Chu Liuchen's straight back. What else would she ask for in this life if such a man married her?

Shao Caihuan was not daring to get too close to Chu Liuchen, nor was she reluctant to stay too far from him. She trotted behind him with a two-step distance and peeked at him with affection from time to time. All her mind was entirely occupied with Chu Liuchen so that she had no notice of Old Madam's observation on her.

When seeing Shao Caihuan's excessive infatuated expressions, Old Madam couldn't help frowning, worrying that it might be not a good idea!

They arrived at the gate of Duke Xing's courtyard which was called the Luofeng Courtyard. It was an independent courtyard in the outer court. There was no separate courtyard only for him in the inner

court. If Duke Xing would like to live in the inner court, he would have to go to Madam of Duke Xing or other concubines' courtyard.

When stepping in, they first saw an attic remote at a corner of the courtyard. If it weren't for its prominent position, it would be very inconspicuous.

"What a tall building it is!" Chu Liuchen stood still and said with an exclamation.

"That is a place built for Second Uncle to do reading or take breaks, but he doesn't often use it because it is a little too high. Second Uncle has another study!" Shao Caihuan quickly stepped forward and explained.

"Is it vacant?" Chu Liuchen raised his eyebrows and asked.

"Yes, it is. There must be some trashes in it now. I heard that very few people will go there and it's basically a disused room. But anyway, it's a room in Second Uncle's courtyard, so it is still regularly cleaned by the servants." Shao Caihuan tried her best to explain to Prince Chen in a flattering attitude. Receiving a question from Prince Chen, she was terribly delighted and excited.

Chu Liuchen gave an indifferent glimpse at Shao Caihuan. In his eyes, there was a trace of coldness, which seemed to be with the air of autumn and winter so that his remote attitude towards Shao Caihuan could be easily told from a merely short glimpse of him.

However, Shao Caihuan didn't notice that Chu Liuchen's expression had changed because her mind was busied with Chu Liuchen's gentle appearance and voice.

Old Madam coughed in a low tone and then scolded Shao Caihuan, "Third Girl, come here! You don't know about the truth, so don't take your nonsenses as proper explanations and tell them to Prince Chen."

Shao Caihuan was confused by the inexplicable blame and felt very aggrieved. But she had to step back and stay close to Old Madam. She lowered her head and played the handkerchief in her hand, feeling helpless and aggrieved.

"Old Madam, do you mean that this attic is used for some else activities?"

Chu Liuchen ignored Shao Caihuan again. He could never perceive other women's shyness. He looked up at the tall building with a thoughtful look, "This building is really strange."

"This is the building first established in our mansion as the main house of Duke's courtyard, where the master once dealt with official affairs and received guests. That attic is also a good place to enjoy the scenery. But later, it was considered to be improper, so another study was built to replace it!" Old Madam explained.

"Why was it considered improper? You can receive guests, have a rest and even enjoy the scenery there. Isn't it a good room?" Chu Liuchen raised his eyebrows and asked in a casual tone.

"Yes, it was. But later..." Old Madam was about to say something but hesitated. She had no idea what to say.

"Oh? Any particular reasons?" Chu Liuchen was interested. He fixed his eyes on that attic again, which appeared to be a bit deserted.

Since he asked so, Old Madam had to go on. "Nothing particular! This courtyard was at first prepared for my eldest son. Even some of his furniture had been moved here at that time for it was convenient for him to move in later. However, he was, unexpectedly... in the end..."

Old Madam said in a bitter voice, which was followed by a sad sigh and a helpless shake of her head. When it came to her eldest son, she could not help feeling mournful. "Later than that, my second son moved in. It was against my wish that my eldest son's belongings were thrown away, so I advised my second son to remove them into the attic of this tall building. Then, this attic was vacant. There was nothing wrong with such an arrangement, and my second son also didn't like this attic, which was located at a remote corner of the whole courtyard. He preferred to build a new one as the study!"

"The stuff of the former Heir of Duke Xing?" Chu Liuchen was quite surprised by such an explanation. "Can't they be kept in his Quhuan Courtyard?"

"Quhuan Courtyard was the common courtyard shared with his wife Infanta Qinghua. She had lived there since she married in. And she had brought a lot of her belongings from her home. So my eldest son moved some of his things here. After that, Quhuan Courtyard was mainly taken up by Infanta Qinghua's stuff!" Old Madam explained.

That was a reasonable statement. At that time, the former Duke Xing, as a father, often taught lessons to the former Heir of Duke Xing. So it was normal that the former Heir of Duke Xing moved some things to where his father was living and left them there. In such a case he didn't have to go back to the inner court to fetch what he needed every time.

Chu Liuchen nodded to respond to Old Madam and stopped asking more questions. Satisfied with the explanation, he walked into the courtyard.

Two servants were guarding the gate. After seeing Old Madam and Chu Liuchen, they knew that the man was not an ordinary guest, so they hurried forward to salute both of them.

"Is the Duke here?" Old Madam asked.

"No, he isn't. Duke Xing is not in the courtyard. We haven't seen him since today!" one of the servants answered immediately.

Old Madam frowned. "Why did Shao Jing not come back after such a fire happened last night?" But she wasn't able to ask them directly in front of Chu Liuchen. She could only say, "Open the door. Prince Chen wants to go in to have a visit!"

The servants dare not refuse Old Madam's request and did what she asked. As Chu Liuchen walked in at a slow pace, he found that there was also a huge screen wall facing the door, and it was similar to the one in Quhuan Courtyard, which was quite surprising.

Could it be a convention of each heir of Duke Xing's Mansion?

Chu Liuchen went close to the screen wall and took a glance, and he found it the same as any other screen wall. Nothing else but a painting was drawn on it. He went to the backside and saw another painting.

Chu Liuchen stood still and started to appreciate the painting, during which he kept a faint smile on his face. With the belief that he was in a good mood, Old Madam let out her breath. She was so afraid that Prince Chen was angry and she couldn't tell it. At this time, Prince Chen looked pleased, so Old Madam thought that there was nothing to be worried about.

Old Madam was clear that Prince Chen should have noticed how she bullied Shao Wanru in the flower hall before. But he smiled for a painting, she began to think that maybe Shao Wanru was not so important for him.

She was unable to leave because Chu Liuchen had not left yet. She could only stand still and wait for Chu Liuchen to finish his appreciation.

Shao Caihuan stood on the side of Chu Liuchen. Catching the sight of the conspicuous smile on his face, she smiled. She kept fiddling the handkerchief in her hands, with a little shyness and a wish of talking to him in her heart. However, she was afraid of being scolded by her grandma. She racked her brains on how to get a chance to stay alone with Prince Chen!

"Old Madam, whose work is this painting?" Chu Liuchen asked after he watched it for a while. His attention was all gathered on the painting.

"I have no idea, Your Highness. When this courtyard was rebuilt, it was the former Duke who customized the screen wall. It was not in my charge!" Old Madam shook her head. Indeed, she didn't know about it and couldn't give an answer even she wanted to.

Duke Xing's Mansion had existed for a long time, and it was one of their ancestral estates. But later some places of it were destroyed in a war, and this courtyard happened to be one of them. So this courtyard was a rebuilt place. Old Madam only knew that it was rebuilt, but she didn't know how it was rebuilt!

However, Chu Liuchen didn't take much notice of Old Madam's words. After carefully watching the drawing style, he asked again, "Do you know where are the craftsmen who built this courtyard?"

"Those craftsmen..." Old Madam hesitated for a moment and answered, "Your Highness, I don't know who they are, but the old housekeeper may know something. If you wish, I can ask someone to call the old housekeeper over!"