

Noble Wife 101

Chapter 101 The Drama in the Altar Room

“Sister Ming, His Royal Highness may have already known that you were punished. Moreover, you can’t possibly reach him right now.” The maid looked anxious.

“It’s okay. His Royal Highness must be in the altar room currently. Let’s go there,” said Ming Xian’er while gnashing her teeth. She wouldn’t allow Ji Youran to get all the benefits – getting rid of her and earning a good name at the same time. “Do we still have the mourning clothes they gave me yesterday?”

“Yes, I put it in a cabinet yesterday,” the maid said hurriedly.

“Have you washed them?”

“Not yet. I was too worried about you and didn’t have time to do any laundry,” said the maid. She had been wandering around the woodshed for the whole night, thinking about how to rescue Ming Xian’er. After she woke up this morning, she was called away to do some work. Then she finally had a chance to sneak out.

“Go clean the stain on the mourning clothes immediately and bring them to me. It doesn’t matter if the stained part is still wet,” said Ming Xian’er.

“Sister Ming, leave it to me!” The maid quickly wiped her tears off and ran outside. She didn’t understand Ming Xian’er’s intention, but she trusted her unconditionally. In her eyes, Ming Xian’er was a brilliant woman, and any solution she came up with must be a good one.

Meanwhile, both Pei Luo’an and Ji Youran were in the altar room.

The longer Pei Luo’an stayed in the altar room, the more profound people would think his love for Ji Hanyue was, which would only bring him more benefits. Ji Hanyue’s father was Ji Yongming, Earl Ling’an, the Suppressor General, who was as influential as Liu Xiangshan, the Guardian General, in the military field.

The affection Pei Luo'an showed to Ji Hanyue would make those military men have good impressions of him.

It also could prevent people from suspecting him of murdering Ji Hanyue and Ji Yongming.

Regardless of what Qu Qiuyan had done before, he had to stay with Ji Hanyue's coffin anyway. More than that, he planned to remain in the altar room two days in a row and then pretend to pass out due to exhaustion on the second day. In this way, he would secure his image of a loving husband.

Ji Youran was here with him too, wearing a veil to cover her swollen face. After what Qu Qiuyan did, she had to keep an eye on the Crown Prince, even though her face was temporarily disfigured.

To show her grief for Ji Hanyue's death, Ji Youran knelt on the same spot where Qu Moying knelt before and burned the paper money while sobbing. Many guests had already heard the rumors that Vice Minister Qu's wife designed a scheme to set up her step-daughter, and Princess Ji was unluckily involved. Those madams immediately noticed the veil on Ji Youran's face upon entering the altar room, which helped them confirm the rumors. Seeing her still staying with her cousin's coffin after her face was injured, they naturally grew more respect for her. People all inwardly praised her for being a kind woman and a loving cousin.

Right now, the funeral came to its later stage. People who were not high-level officials or related to the Crown Prince or the Crown Princess could enter the altar room to mourn. So, the formalities were not as complex as before.

The guests only needed to make their greatest obeisance to the Crown Princess's coffin and leave immediately to make room for the next group.

Meanwhile, a herd of people was waiting outside of the altar room.

Although the whole space was crowded, the atmosphere was still very solemn and deadly silent as no one was making any noise.

As funeral music spread in the air, people in white mourning clothes all wore sorrowful looks on their faces, quietly going in and coming out.

Suddenly, a woman ran in and broke the silence with a desperate look on her face. Her mourning clothes were in a mess, even with a large water stain on them. People were startled by the abrupt noise and raised their heads to stare at her in shock.

Two guards rushed out from the porch and blocked Ming Xian'er, who was about to break into the altar room. They pulled out their swords and pointed them at her face.

Ming Xian'er knelt on the ground in front of the stairs leading to the altar room and started to yell, "Your Royal Highness, help! Your Royal Highness, please help me! Princess Ji wants to kill me!"

Knowing the Crown Prince wouldn't show up, she still directly accused Ji Youran without any hesitation.

People all looked at each other in shock, but no one dared to utter a word. What on earth was going on? Who was this woman? The Crown Prince's concubine?

How was it possible that a concubine showed up here?

Why did she say that Princess Ji wanted to kill her? It was known that Princess Ji was a virtuous woman who moved into the Eastern Palace only to care for her sick cousin, which was requested by the Crown Princess.

And Princess Ji didn't want to marry the Crown Prince initially, but Old Lady Ji insisted. When she moved into the Eastern Palace, she even cried, feeling reluctant. After Ji Youran married the Crown Prince, she devoted herself to nursing the Crown Princess and managing family affairs. In people's eyes, she was a perfect example of a good wife for all noble ladies. Even she was unluckily involved in the Qu Family's drama just now, she still chose to accompany the Crown Prince in the altar room.

People couldn't help but wonder what on earth did Princess Ji do to make this woman interrupt the funeral and yell at the Crown Prince for help so desperately.

“Your Royal Highness, Princess Ji is going to kill me! Please save me!” Ming Xian’er continued to scream. As an opera performer, her voice was very piercing when she used all her strength.

“What?” Pei Luo’an couldn’t ignore such a noise. He frowned, “Someone, go take a look at what is happening.”

Surprised by Ming Xian’er’s sudden appearance, Ji Youran raised her head and answered with a hoarse voice, “I’ll go, Your Royal Highness.”

Before Pei Luo’an said anything, the guard he sent out had already returned. “Your Royal Highness, Miss Ming is wailing outside, saying that Her Royal Highness...wants to kill her. She is asking for your help, Your Royal Highness,” the guard cautiously picked his words, feeling cold sweat on his back.

“What’s going on?” Pei Luo’an asked Ji Youran coldly.

He had been in a bad mood already. He didn’t do anything with Qu Qiuyan, but the look Ji Youran gave him before was so sad and aggrieved. Although she didn’t say anything, he could tell the distrust in her eyes, which meant she was suspecting him. Ji Youran really believed that he did something shameless with Qu Qiuyan in front of Ji Hanyue’s coffin, which annoyed him a lot.

He had held the exasperation for a while and couldn’t vent it out.

Even though Ji Youran came to accompany him later, he still stayed in silence. He didn’t want to talk to her at all, not even for defending himself.

Unfortunately, trouble found him again.

“I have no idea why she said that, Your Royal Highness. I’ll go take a look,” Ji Youran said softly while standing up with a maid’s help.

“No need. I’ll go by myself.” Pei Luo’an waved his hand impatiently.

Ji Youran's face looked stern and irritated behind the veil. She didn't expect Ming Xian'er to make a big scene here. After she found out which bitch released her from the woodshed, she would make sure to beat that person to death.

"Your Royal Highness, I've already informed you about what Ming Xian'er did. She walked around in the Eastern Palace without wearing the mourning clothes sent to her, showing no respect for the Crown Princess. I've asked someone to give her ten strokes with a heavy stick as punishment," Ji Youran hurriedly explained. She feared that Pei Luo'an would believe what Ming Xian'er would say later.

Clearly, Ming Xian'er didn't hold any good intentions, interrupting the funeral rudely and saying things like that.

Fortunately, Ji Youran had informed the Crown Prince about Ming Xian'er's misbehavior yesterday. After the Crown Princess's death was announced, Pei Luo'an had been in a bad mood and didn't have time to think about Ming Xian'er, which was a perfect chance for Ji Youran to get rid of her. Although the Crown Prince treated Ming Xian'er pretty well, he didn't have any reaction after hearing what Ming Xian'er did and agreed to let Ji Youran deal with her.

Ji Youran's plan was to starve Ming Xian'er for two days after beating her. Then she would let someone get her out of the Eastern Palace and secretly kill her. Ji Youran could just say Ming Xian'er ran away by herself to easily distance herself from this trouble.

In her eyes, a low-life opera performer like Ming Xian'er would never have the qualification to become the Crown Prince's official concubine. But in the next second, Ji Youran heard Pei Luo'an scolding her sternly, "Can you even not tolerate a low-life concubine like her?!"

"Your Royal Highness, I...I don't know what you are talking about," said Ji Youran in anger and annoyance.

"Do you really not know? I understand that you didn't want someone hold a better position than you. But not even Ming Xian'er?" Pei Luo'an's voice was cold. After finishing his words, he immediately strode outside, not even bothering to cast a glance at Ji Youran, who was trembling.

Tears formed in her eyes and almost dropped down.

The implication in his words was too much for her to take right now. In shock, she wobbled and almost fell to the ground. A maid next to her hurriedly walked up to steady her, "Your Royal Highness."

Ji Youran took a deep breath to suppress the boiling emotions in her heart and then said slowly, "Help me. I want to go outside."

She couldn't back up and soften her attitude facing a low-life woman right now, letting people gossip about her life. Her goal was to become the Crown Princess, a position that the Crown Prince had promised her already. She was only one step away from it and would never allow her name to be ruined at this critical moment.

Kneeling next to the stairs, Ming Xian'er was sobbing pitifully. She raised her head and stared at the Crown Prince with her watery eyes while begging him, "Your Royal Highness! Your Royal Highness, please save me!"

"What's the matter?" Pei Luo'an's face still looked fatigued. Right now, it was showing some displeasure as his eyes fell on Ming Xian'er.

"Your Royal Highness, someone sent me a smudged set of mourning clothes yesterday that I couldn't wear. On my way to the embroidery workshop to change them, I ran into Her Royal Highness. Her Royal Highness blamed me for disrespecting the Crown Princess and asked someone to beat me up. Then she locked me in the woodshed, not giving me any medicine or food. I would've died earlier if I didn't overhear the two guarding maids' conversation by accident. Your Royal Highness, please help me!"

After hearing her words, people noticed the bloodstains on her white mourning clothes and put a meaningful look on their faces. Still, no one dared to make a sound, but they all subconsciously moved in shock. The whole solemn scene suddenly became a bit messy.

Was this woman the Crown Prince's concubine? Did Princess Ji really want to kill her?

Was it what this woman meant?

If it was the truth, that would be so strange. In people's eyes, Princess Ji was the most virtuous, graceful lady who dedicated herself to nursing the Crown Princess. She hadn't even slept with the Crown Prince

like a real married couple. People all thought she only wanted to take care of her cousin and didn't care about being the Crown Prince's wife.

Nor did she love the Crown Prince.

However, things didn't seem as simple as they heard.

She punished a concubine that the Crown Prince liked and even designed a scheme to kill her? Regardless of other people, the Crown Prince himself wouldn't allow a concubine to show any disrespect for the Crown Princess. Unless...unless he actually didn't love the Crown Princess as profoundly as he looked.

People all stared at each other in shock. They were still in silence, but many guesses had crossed their minds.

Almost everyone believed what Ming Xian'er said since no one would risk her life just for telling a lie here.

Then it meant either Princess Ji wanted to set up this concubine favored by the Crown Prince, or the Crown Prince had been pretending to be the Crown Princess's loving husband. Either one of the possibilities was shocking enough.

"What did the two guarding maids say?" Pei Luo'an asked sternly.

"No medicine, no food? How is that even possible? I've told the guarding maids to give them to you. I even ordered them to release you around dinner time."

Ji Youran's voice came from the altar room. She slowly walked out with her maid's help, looking feeble.

Chapter 102 Princess Ji's Compromise

“The two maids said they would let me escape on purpose and then kill me outside. Then they can just blame my death on me...since I...I run away first!” Ming Xian’er bent over while wailing and trembling. Seeing Ji Youran walking outside, she moved closer to her on her knees. She then touched the ground with her forehead heavily several times.

Ming Xian’er looked so pitiful with tears on her face and messy hair clinging to her forehead as she knelt on the ground. While the two women both acted feebly, Ji Youran surely couldn’t compete against a performer like her.

Ming Xian’er hadn’t had any food since yesterday and wore the just-washed mourning clothes that were still wet. Purposefully, she made herself seem as messy as possible and knocked her forehead heavily on the ground so that everyone around her could hear it. She was sure her forehead must look red and swollen right now, and people would believe her sincerity in asking for forgiveness at once.

They would be profoundly convinced that she took such a risk only because she was truly desperate.

This Crown Prince’s concubine was really pitiful!

Ji Youran was also trembling but in rage. Her plan of acting feebly to earn people’s pity was totally ruined. Moreover, all their sympathy was drawn to Ming Xian’er, who was even better at acting than her.

She was not convinced by Ming Xian’er’s words at all, knowing everything Ming Xian’er did was on purpose – this performer must’ve noticed something suspicious.

Ji Hanyue took a glance at Pei Luo’an and noticed his annoyance. He would never allow anyone to make such a big scene at Ji Hanyue’s funeral.

“I will never forgive anyone who did this when His Royal Highness and I were staying in the altar room. You can go back and have some rest first. I will call the two maids over later and let you confront them directly,” Ji Youran said in a soft voice, trying her best to suppress the anger.

Ming Xian’er was aware that she was risking her life to make a big scene here. Noticing the Crown Prince’s impatience as well, she didn’t dare to continue this drama. She wiped her tears, turned her

body to face the altar room, and heavily bent her head on the ground for another few times. “Thank you, Princess Ji. Your Royal Highness, Princess Ji, the deceased Crown Princess was a kind lady, and she once saved my life. I beg you, please allow me to stay with her coffin to mourn for her death.”

“You want to stay with her coffin?” Pei Luo’an lowered his head and looked at Ming Xian’er meaningfully.

“Yes, please allow me to do so, Your Royal Highness, Princess Ji.” Ming Xian’er bent over and touched the ground with her forehead again. When she straightened up, her forehead was bleeding. The red color of blood stood out even more on her fair skin. “If it weren’t for the Crown Princess, I would’ve been dead long ago. I’m willing to stay with the Crown Princess’s coffin and mourn for her death for three years.”

“You are willing to stay with her coffin for three years?” the expression on Pei Luo’an’s face softened as he asked gently.

“Yes, with my whole heart. Since the Crown Princess’s two private maids are not here, I’m willing to do their job.” Ming Xian’er nodded again.

The Crown Princess’s two private maids? Many people quietly frowned, finding her words weird. What did she mean by they were not here? Did they kill themselves after their beloved master’s death?

But no one had ever heard things like that before. If those two maids really sacrificed their lives to show their loyalty, the Crown Prince would definitely praise their virtues in public. People would know about it immediately.

“I appreciate your gratitude and virtues. But since you are not the Crown Princess’s servant, a half year will be good enough.” Ji Youran had no choice but to agree.

She knew the whereabouts of the two maids better than anyone – one was dead, and the other one was working for her right now. Of course, Ji Hanyue didn’t have private maids to stay with her coffin. The outsiders didn’t know the truth, but everyone in the Eastern Palace should be aware of it.

Did Ming Xian'er purposefully mention it now because she knew the truth? Ming Xian'er's action sent Ji Youran in a panic.

Originally, she wouldn't possibly forgive Ming Xian'er for making a big scene in front of the Crown Princess's altar room. Even her disrespect for the Crown Princess should be sinful enough to let her die one hundred times. Moreover, the Crown Prince didn't have any reason to intervene.

But right now, Ji Youran had to make a compromise. It wouldn't do her any good if Ming Xian'er spread the rumors that one of Ji Hanyue's maids worked for her now.

Suppressing the rage in her heart, Ji Youran slowly walked down the stairs and reached out to hold Ming Xian'er's hand. "Sister Ming, please stand up and get changed first. If you want to stay with the Crown Princess's coffin, you can't look so messy. She had always been a kind person and would feel bad for you if seeing you like this."

Holding Ji Youran's hand, Ming Xian'er stood up slowly and sobbed, "Thank you, Princess Ji. Thank you for being so kind to me, and I'm sorry for misunderstanding you before. After my half-year mourning, I will come to ask for your forgiveness in person."

Since Ji Youran took a step back, Ming Xian'er wouldn't push her too hard.

The two both acted very feebly. Their eyes met each other's in the air as they communicated quietly. Then Ji Youran nodded at Ming Xian'er and didn't say anything else. The latter left to get changed so that she could come back to the altar room later.

"Your Royal Highness, it's fine now. It was just a misunderstanding," Ji Youran came back to Pei Luo'an and said softly.

Pei Luo'an cast a glance at her, nodded without saying anything, and turned back into the altar room.

After a while of silence, the mourning process was restored. After people came out of the altar room, they looked at each other in shock, thinking about what they had heard just now. As they guessed, that woman was the Crown Prince's concubine. Even Princess Ji called her Sister Ming!

That was pretty outrageous.

Even in an ordinary noble family, a concubine who didn't have an official rank like Ming Xian'er couldn't possibly be allowed to show up in public at a wife's funeral. It was unbelievable that in the Eastern Palace, a concubine almost broke into the altar room. Although she claimed that she was here to stay with the Crown Princess's coffin, she was still a low-life concubine. It didn't obey the etiquette!

Why didn't they let the Crown Princess's private maids stay with her coffin?

What did that concubine say just now? The Crown Princess's private maids were gone? Why were they gone? Two private maids disappeared after their master had just died. Was there any kind of secret behind it?

Was it about the Crown Princess's death? Otherwise, why did the Crown Princess's private maids not even show up around her coffin?

Before, people didn't dare to say anything, but right now, they couldn't help but start to discuss with each other.

Standing on the porch, Yue Wenhan also witnessed the drama. He pulled a long face as his cold eyes fell on the altar room. As the vice minister of the Dali Temple, who was experienced in all kinds of cases, he smelt something fishy here.

He had been to the altar room several times already but overlooked this detail. Since he barely met Ji Hanyue before, he didn't know none of the maids staying in the altar room was Ji Hanyue's, which seemed very weird.

Was there really a secret behind the Crown Princess's death?

"Mr. Yue," a woman's voice came from behind.

Yue Wenhan calmed himself down quickly. Then he turned around and recognized the maid, who he saw with Qu Moying in the altar room before. "You are my cousin's maid, right?" asked Yue Wenhan.

“Yes, Mr. Yue. I’m Fourth Lady Qu’s maid, Yu Dong. The lady wants to meet you. Would you please come with me?” Yu Dong curtsied to him politely.

“Show me the way.” Yue Wenhan nodded.

He walked a few steps but turned around to take another look at the altar room and had a deep breath. He had never been an impulsive person. Even though he found the Crown Princess’s death suspicious, he knew it was impossible to find the truth and make it public now. He didn’t have any direct evidence, only some ambiguous word said by a concubine.

Right now, the only thing he could do was take his time to make a thorough investigation. If there was really something behind the Crown Princess’s death, he would definitely find clues. As for Princess Ji, who seemed to be a gentle and weak lady on the surface, his instinct told him that she was not as simple as she looked.

Thinking about her, a thought flashed across his mind. Was that woman involved in the Crown Princess’s death?

But somehow, he felt something inconsistent between the scene before and what he saw right now. He just couldn’t figure out what it was.

When he arrived at the guest yard where Qu Moying stayed, she washed up and already waited for him in the main room. Seeing him walking in, Qu Moying curtsied to him politely.

“Don’t care too much about those formalities, Cousin.” Yue Wenhan had returned to his usual self. He waved his hand to greet her and sat down on a guest seat aside. “How do you feel now? If you need herbs for your treatment or anything else, just let me know. You don’t need to bother them for everything here.”

He knew Qu Moying would understand his implication. If Ji Hanyue was still alive, they were counted as the Crown Prince’s close relatives. But now that Ji Hanyue passed away, their connection with the Crown Prince became less deep than before.

After all, the person who managed the internal affairs of the Eastern Palace was Ji Youran, who was totally unrelated to the two, although her family name was Ji too.

“Thank you, Cousin,” said Qu Moying in a soft voice. Then she led the subject to the drama before, “I heard something happened again in front of the Crown Princess’s altar room. Something about a concubine and Princess Ji fighting for the Crown Prince’s favor. What happened? Did they affect the funeral?”

Fighting for the Crown Prince’s favor? The expression on Yue Wenhan’s face suddenly changed as he realized where his weird feeling came from. Didn’t people all say that Princess Ji and the Crown Prince’s marriage wasn’t consummated yet since both of them were dedicated to caring for the Crown Princess? Moreover, everyone knew that Princess Ji didn’t even want to move into the Eastern Palace initially, and the Crown Prince wasn’t in love with her either. Then why did she fight with a concubine for his favor?

“Cousin, I’m sorry.” Seemingly noticing her inappropriate words, Qu Moying lowered her head in embarrassment. “I’m just too angry about it. The Crown Princess just passed away. How...how could they make such a big scene here? I can’t help but keep doubting if they had done the same thing in front of the Crown Princess when she was sick. If they really did so, how could the Crown Princess possibly recover?”

Qu Moying stopped talking, but her words were clear enough for Yue Wenhan to understand. If Ji Youran had been jealous of the Crown Prince’s concubines and let the Crown Princess know about it, even though the Crown Princess was healthy before, she could get sick due to anger.

That meant what Ji Youran had said, including moving into the Eastern Palace to care for her cousin, was just a lie?

Abruptly, Yue Wenhan stood up.

“Cousin, what’s wrong?” Startled by his sudden move, Qu Moying stood up with him.

“I... Nothing. I just want to take a look around again,” Yue Wenhan said coldly as he quickly strode out. He had to take a close look again at how Ji Youran and that concubine interacted with each other.

Chapter 103 A Big Gift for Old Lady Ji

“Cousin, don’t go now. Even if you do, you can’t find out anything or may even be framed by someone. When I was in the altar room before, I found that Princess Ji may not be as simple as she looks,”

Qu Moying hurriedly stopped Yue Wenhan. The reason why she had this conversation with him was to prevent him from doing something impulsive!

“Framed by someone?” Yue Wenhan stopped. For the first time, he found something was different about this cousin, who had always been weak and soft in his eyes.

“Cousin, if Princess Ji is truly involved in the Crown Princess’s death, do you really think you can find the truth so easily? If there is a secret behind the Crown Princess’s death, then what about the Crown Prince? Has he been really in love with her deeply? Shouldn’t he know everything that has happened in the Eastern Palace? So, if he knew but still watched the Crown Princess die, what does this mean?”

Qu Moying took two steps up. Her trembling voice sounded so low that she was almost like whispering, with an inexplicable trace of fear or anger. But no matter what, it was very bold of her to say such things in the Eastern Palace.

The recklessness and the rounded thoughts of this weak-looking girl shocked Yue Wenhan.

However, he quickly calmed himself down and sat back down on the guest chair. For the first time, he started to take it seriously.

“Cousin, you also feel something’s wrong with the Crown Princess’s situation?”

Qu Moying sat down with him and nodded. “Yes, I do, but we can’t make any reckless move. If there’s really something fishy behind it, Princess Ji shouldn’t be the only one involved. I noticed that none of the Crown Princess’s private maids stayed with her coffin. Cousin, this should be a good start point of your investigation if you want to find the truth. In terms of...”

Qu Moying suddenly paused and showed a hesitant look on her face.

"Please, just say it. I'm your cousin and also the Crown Princess's cousin!" Yue Wenhan straightened up and said.

"Cousin, since you are here to accompany the Crown Prince today, you can use the opportunity to investigate the whereabouts of the two private maids. Also, I heard that the Ji Family has been here for the funeral, and the person who came is Old Lady Ji. Can you let me meet her later? Since I'm a female, it will be more appropriate for me to deal with other females," Qu Moying proposed.

"But...are you feeling alright?" instead of approving her request, Yue Wenhan frowned at her and asked with concern.

In his eyes, Qu Moying was just a weak girl who didn't have any power. That was why Yu dared to frame her like that. When he heard that Qu Moying wanted to visit Old Lady Ji and investigate independently, he couldn't feel more worried.

"Cousin, don't worry about me. I feel much better than before. I've been taking medicine. After a few days of rest, I will be totally fine," knowing Yue Wenhan didn't trust her competence, Qu Moying comforted him softly.

She really wanted to meet Old Lady Ji, who used to be her grandmother in her past life. However, she couldn't ask Ji Youran for it since Ji Youran wouldn't want Qu Moying to meet the Old Lady.

The only person who had the freedom and power to help her was Yue Wenhan. Moreover, both Yue Wenhan and Qu Moying were the Crown Princess's cousins related to the Ji Family. Therefore, it was expected that Yue Wenhan would take her to visit Old Lady Ji to show the youngsters' respect to the elders.

As for the Crown Princess's two private maids, Wei Yu and Xie Feng, Yue Wenhan had his reason to ask about them, so even the Crown Prince couldn't have any objection.

"Are you really okay?" Yue Wenhan still sounded worried, "How about calling an Imperial Doctor over to check on you again?"

"There's no need. I'm really fine now," Qu Moying shook her head smilingly.

"If you have any trouble in the future, just send someone to tell me. Just now, I caught up with your father and your family's carriages, and then..." Yue Wenhan didn't know how to continue his story. No matter how much he hated Qu Zhizhen as a person, he was still Qu Moying's father. He felt so wrong to speak ill of Qu Zhizhen in front of her!

"Cousin, did you have an argument with my father? Did you get hurt?" Qu Moying never expected that Yue Wenhan would directly confront her father, and her voice sounded worried. She straightened up after hearing the news for fear that this would cause Yue Wenhan trouble. If Qu Zhizhen was an easy person to deal with, he would never climb up to the position of Vice Minister of Works at his current age.

"Well, when we were pulling each other, I accidentally made him fall off his horse and twist his ankle," said Yue Wenhan carelessly.

Hearing his words, Qu Moying curled up her lips into a faint smile. She was not familiar with Yue Wenhan before, but now she realized her cousin was also an intelligent person. The way he talked about the conflict between him and Qu Zhizhen was so careless as if it was no big deal at all. Because he knew that Qu Zhizhen couldn't do anything about it.

Moreover, with how Yu mistreated Qu Moying before, Qu Zhizhen was totally disadvantaged in the whole situation. He not only couldn't argue back but also might be reported by Imperial Censors. Although it was just a family issue, everything started at the Crown Princess's funeral, after all. If anyone wanted to take it seriously, they could just say Qu Zhizhen and his family disrespected the deceased Crown Princess.

No wonder Yu suddenly fainted, couldn't get off her bed, and asked many doctors to check on her.

If she didn't do so, not only she would be punished, Qu Zhizhen also would be involved.

"Thank you, Cousin." Qu Moying stood up and curtsied to Yue Wenhan to show her sincere gratitude.

“This is what I should do as your cousin. Even if I didn’t do it, Vice Minister Qu couldn’t get around with the blame anyway,” said Yue Wenhan carelessly.

“But if you didn’t confront him directly in public, the scene wouldn’t be as big as right now,” Qu Moying said politely.

Those officials who attended the funeral here were not just ordinary people on the street. They knew what they should say and what they shouldn’t.

However, making a scene on the street was a totally different story. Yue Wenhan definitely talked about what Yu did again in public. With so many people witnessing it, no one could easily cover the whole thing up.

Qu Moying’s words convinced Yue Wenhan that his cousin looked soft and weak, but she was actually a brilliant girl.

He didn’t tell her the whole process, but she understood his intention immediately. Subconsciously, a pleased smile showed up on his face.

He did everything with his own will, and he didn’t need to explain it to others, yet having Qu Moying’s understanding was indeed a delightful thing.

Now, he didn’t hold as much worry as before about Qu Moying’s meeting with Old Lady Ji. He took a few seconds to think and then said, “Okay. I’ll ask around about the two private maids and then ask if Old Lady Ji has time to meet us.”

“Thank you, Cousin!” Qu Moying nodded at him.

Yue Wenhan was the only person who could help her in the Eastern Palace now. Besides, meeting Old Lady Ji was her main purpose of staying in the Eastern Palace due to her sickness.

After she was reborn, she hadn’t made any contact with the Ji Family yet.

The Ji Family and the Qu Family were related, but their connection was cut off after Qu Moying's mother passed away. The Ji Family stopped contacting the Qu Family since then. Only Ji Hanyue had secretly sent gifts to Qu Moying sometimes when Qu Moying was still in the village. Right now, Qu Moying didn't have a proper reason to contact the Ji Family unless she rebuilt the connection between the two families by herself.

It was necessary for her revenge plan. As the perfect chance presented itself now, she couldn't miss it.

"My lady, I also can help you investigate the whereabouts of the two maids," watching Yue Wenhan leaving, Yu Dong said in confusion. In his opinion, it was just about two maids in the Eastern Palace, no big deal. Qu Moying didn't need to ask the vice minister of the Dali Temple to do it.

"How will you do it?" Qu Moying lifted her teacup from the table and took a sip slowly.

"I can just find some old servants here and give them some money. It shouldn't be that hard," Yu Dong said carelessly. It was just the whereabouts of two maids, nothing else.

"What if they refuse to accept your money?" Qu Moying said as she stared at Yu Dong coldly.

"No way. It's such a small thing..." Yu Dong blinked his eyes in confusion.

"A small thing? Anything related to the Crown Princess's death won't be a small thing," Qu Moying's voice sounded indifferent.

Yu Dong subconsciously trembled, feeling a cold shiver through his spine. Of course, working for Pei Yuanjun, he knew that anything related to the Crown Princess's death was not a small thing. However, didn't the Crown Princess die of sickness?

Was there any secret behind it?

Yu Dong didn't dare to answer her. He had never thought of this possibility before. But once hinted by Qu Moying, the more Yu Dong thought about it, the more suspicious he found it. Yu Dong started to feel

scared – if it was true, another bloody storm would whip the whole city. Whoever murdered the Crown Princess must be planning something perilous and risky!

“My lady, will they tell Mr. Yue the truth?” Yu Dong still didn’t fully understand. If those people couldn’t tell others the truth, there should be no difference between him asking and Yue Wenhan asking.

“My cousin is a different case. He is a man and the vice minister of the Dali Temple. It will be normal if he finds anything suspicious and asks about it. If offering a bribe doesn’t work, he has every right to use violence. Before, he argued with my father for me. Now, it will be nothing strange if he asks about the whereabouts of two private maids for the Crown Princess. Even if...”

Qu Moying took a short break and then continued, “Even if someone notices him, their first priority should be making a proper explanation, not doubting if he finds out something.”

As a man, Yue Wenhan would naturally act more decisively. People would only find it normal if he asked about the two maids after witnessing the drama between Ming Xian’er and Ji Youran. It would even be weirder if he stayed quiet.

However, if Qu Moying asked about it, it wouldn’t fit her personality and would cause people’s suspicions. It was inappropriate for her to meddle with things about the deceased Crown Princess when she was severely injured.

Fortunately, Yu Dong was smart enough to understand Qu Moying’s intention. Otherwise, he wouldn’t be sent to her by Lord Yun in the first place. After he figured it out, more respect grew in his mind for Qu Moying. He fell into silence for a few seconds and then asked, “My lady, then...what should we do now?”

“Let’s prepare a big gift for the meeting with Old Lady Ji later,” Qu Moying said in a flat tone.

“My lady, we are staying here because of an accident. We didn’t bring any big gift with us.” Yu Dong shrugged awkwardly. What happened to Qu Moying was an “accident” because of Yu’s scheme, so they couldn’t bring anything luxury with them. Moreover, everything had to be simplified since they were here for a funeral. The only thing they had was the set of white mourning clothes they wore.

“There is a big gift prepared by me long ago,” Qu Moying said meaningfully.

The two maids looked at each other blankly. After a little while, Yu Dong’s eyes suddenly lit up. “My lady, do you mean that thing?”

Chapter 104 The Whereabouts of the Two Private Maids

Soon after, Yue Wenhan came back. He came in and sat down on a chair quietly with a sullen face.

“Cousin, did you find out anything?” Qu Moying raised her eyes to look at him and asked, feeling a bit nervous. The two maids they were investigating were Wei Yu and Xie Feng, and Xie Feng was the one who took her to the Linyuan Pavilion on the night she died.

“The Crown Princess brought two private maids with her when she married into the Eastern Palace. One of them went missing on the wedding night when assassins sneaked into the Eastern Palace and caused chaos. No one knows if she is still alive. The other one had been helping Princess Ji take care of the Crown Princess. After the Crown Princess passed away, she said she was willing to work for Princess Ji,” Yue Wenhan said in a flat voice.

“Which one went missing?” His words made Qu Moying feel unsettled. She didn’t even notice her voice was trembling.

“The one called Wei Yu. The Crown Prince’s wedding was very chaotic since assassins sneaked into the Eastern Palace and hurt the Crown Prince. The Crown Princess was even severely injured for protecting the Crown Prince. No one could notice a maid on a night like that. However, some other people said that she fell into the lake and got drowned that night.”

Yue Wenhan nodded.

“Fell into the lake and got drowned?” Qu Moying had to clench her fists to suppress the shock and anger in her heart. The one who fell into the lake and got drowned was actually her. But, did that mean Wei Yu also died on that night?

“Yes, that’s what I was told just now. But someone also said Wei Yu was killed by an assassin, and some said she died outside the Eastern Palace. Anyway, no one has a certain answer,” said Yue Wenhan. At first, he talked to several servants, but no one dared to answer his questions. After he told them he was the Crown Princess’s cousin, they finally started to say something.

However, everyone has a different answer. Yue Wenhan couldn’t tell if they were telling the truth or a lie.

But at least one thing was confirmed – something bad happened to that maid. Since these servants dared to tell him that, it was surely approved by the Crown Prince.

“Then the other maid called Xie Feng now is working for Princess Ji?” Qu Moying sneered inwardly. No wonder when Xie Feng took her to the Linyuan Pavilion, she so happened to run into Ji Youran. Because they had set up everything to kill her there.

She had suspected it before but still found it not very possible. Now, everything was connected together.

This was the truth!

When she was still a child, she met Wei Yu one day, who was an orphan, and took her back home. They had grown up together, and Wei Yu had always been very loyal to her. Xie Feng was born in the Ji’s Mansion, and her whole family had served the Ji Family loyally for many years. This was why Xie Feng was assigned to serve Ji Hanyue.

But she never expected Xie Feng to be someone else’s pawn. No wonder every time when she started to suspect Ji Youran, Ji Youran would behave better to clear her doubt. She had been kept away from the truth all the time while Pei Luo’an and Ji Youran had hooked up since long ago. It was all thanks to this maid.

A trace of coldness showed up in Qu Moying’s eyes.

“Cousin, what’s wrong?” noticing Qu Moying’s strange reaction, Yue Wenhan hurriedly asked.

"I...I just feel it was so unfair for our cousin. I can't believe one of her private maids immediately showed her loyalty to someone else right after she passed away. Does it really make sense?" Qu Moying gnashed her teeth, tasting blood in her throat.

Yue Wenhan frowned, hearing her words. Indeed, it didn't make too much sense.

"Cousin, what about Old Lady Ji?" Qu Moying tried hard to hold back the boiling hatred in her heart, taking a deep breath to calm herself down. Since the whereabouts of the two maids were clarified, her primary focus should be on Ji Youran now.

Her current status was too low to confront Ji Youran directly, so she had to do everything discreetly.

"Old Lady Ji agreed to meet us," said Yue Wenhan.

"Let's go now!" Qu Moying stood up.

"Cousin, you don't need to bring anything. I've sent a gift over already under our name." Yue Wenhan knew Qu Moying stayed in the Eastern Palace because of an accident and probably didn't have anything proper to give Old Lady Ji as a gift.

"Thank you, Cousin!" Qu Moying said softly, "I only took one thing with me, which was a gift given by our cousin. I wanted to keep it as a memento before, but since I brought it here, I can give it to Old Lady Ji as a gift!"

The Crown Princess? She didn't want to address Ji Hanyue as the Crown Princess anymore. When she revealed the truth to the world one day, she would make people remember her as Ji Hanyue, not the Crown Princess.

After finishing her words, Qu Moying took out an item wrapped by a hanky from her sleeve. She unfolded the wrap to show Yue Wenhan the exquisite accessory box lying inside. In the box was a pair of earrings.

The design was simple but very elegant. The base of the earrings was made of jade, inlaid with some delicately carved plum flowers.

“The Crown Princess gave them to you before?” asked Yue Wenhan.

“Yes, she sent someone to give them to me before. I’ve kept them well restored and didn’t want to wear them. I brought them here, thinking that I could offer them as a sacrifice on her altar. Then I forgot it because of what had happened before. I heard our cousin loved wearing them when she was alive. I think it can be an appropriate gift for Old Lady Ji to show my mourning,” Qu Moying said softly.

Since Qu Moying insisted on giving Old Lady Ji another gift, Yue Wenhan didn’t say anything else. The two of them then headed to another yard with their servants. The Ji Family didn’t stay at a guest yard but a side yard, showing that the Crown Prince treated them differently than normal guests.

That meant the Ji Family had a close relationship with the Crown Prince.

The side yard was spacious, even comparable to the main yard of the Eastern Palace. As they walked closer, Qu Moying recognized this place. A trace of anger flashed across her eyes – she knew this yard better than anyone. When she came to the Eastern Palace before, she always stayed here to have some rest.

She had only been to the maid yard a few times, but with this side yard, she couldn’t be more familiar.

She didn’t expect they would let Old Lady Ji temporarily stay here. No wonder Ji Youran was Old Lady Ji’s favorite granddaughter, offering her the best she had.

Upon entry, they saw an old maid waiting there. Seeing them walking in, she hurriedly welcomed them with a beam, curtsied, and said, “You are Fourth Lady Qu, right? What a pretty lady! You remind me a bit of the Crown Princess. I bet you are a kind girl like her. Please come in, Mr. Yue, Fourth Lady Qu. The Old Lady has been waiting for you!”

This sophisticated maid was the most competent servant Old Lady Ji had, also her most-trusted subordinate, Granny Wu.

It had been a long time since Qu Moying met her last time. Yet, she was no longer Second Lady Ji.

"It's very nice of you, Granny," holding back the coldness in her eyes, Qu Moying said in a flat tone.

They followed Granny Wu into a room where many young and old maids stood on the two sides. An old woman sat in the center, looking pretty chubby and amiable. It was her grandmother in her past life. But Old Lady Ji actually didn't have a good temper at all. Moreover, she never used her brain and always trusted other people blindly.

Next to her sat an elegant middle-aged woman named Xiao, who was Ji Youran's mother, the Second Madam of the Ji Family. Now Xiao's face only looked annoying and cunning in Qu Moying's eyes. As Ji Hanyue, she treated her aunt genuinely as her mother after her own mother passed away. But who would've known they were just a nest of evil snakes who took advantage of her and her father's kindness!

Qu Moying stood next to Yue Wenhan, curtsying to them calmly as if she met them for the first time.

Old Lady Ji looked a bit haggard. After Qu Moying and Yue Wenhan sat down, her eyes first fell on Qu Moying and sized her up. Then slowly, she said, "You are the Fourth Lady of Vice Minister Qu's family?"

"Yes, madam," Qu Moying said softly.

"Your eyes...haven't recovered?" Old Lady Ji stared at the long, wide veil covering Qu Moying's eyes.

"Almost. It's just better not to use my eyes too much now since I still feel a bit uncomfortable when the light is too strong," Qu Moying explained.

Old Lady Ji's eyes fell on her face again. She had heard about Fourth Lady Qu before but never paid too much attention. All she knew was that Fourth Lady Qu had returned to her family's mansion and almost died once. Moreover, the cause of the accident was the same as the one that happened in the Eastern Palace, which was Yu, her step-mother who used to be her father's concubine.

Old Lady Ji had met Yu a few times before and thought she looked like a tender woman. No one expected that she couldn't even tolerate such a weak girl.

In Old Lady Ji's opinion, Qu Moying was just a powerless girl who could be easily dealt with. All Yu needed to do was prepare a dowry for her, and Qu Moying would soon leave the family forever after she got married. It was so unnecessary to make such a big scene because of a girl like her. Now, everyone in the capital was talking about the Qu Family's scandal. People all thought Yu's life was doomed this time.

Although the wide veil covered more than half of Qu Moying's face, Old Lady Ji believed in her own judgment – Fourth Lady Qu should be a good-looking girl. At least, she was far away from the ugly image in the rumors.

Maybe she was indeed not a smart and well-educated one since she grew up in a village. In her condition, learning a few words should be good enough. Still, there was no way she could be comparable with those noble ladies who were carefully raised in the capital.

This was probably the main reason why the Marquis Yongning's Family broke off the engagement between her and Young Master Yongning.

"How long it will take for your eyes to fully recover?" Old Lady Ji asked.

"Probably around a couple of months!" Qu Moying gave her an ambiguous answer. Then she turned back to cast a glance at Yu Dong, standing behind her. Receiving her signal, Yu Dong walked up and presented a small accessory box to Old Lady Ji. He said politely, "Madam, this once was a gift given by the Crown Princess to the Fourth Lady. Now, she wants to return it to you so that you can keep it as a memento."

Then he lowered his head and moved the box forward.

The Crown Princess's memento?

Old Lady Ji's face turned a bit pale, same as Xiao's. Everyone was staring at the little box in Yu Dong's hands, but no one dared to take it without Old Lady Ji's approval.

The whole room suddenly fell into an awkward silence.

“Fourth Lady Qu, since the Crown Princess gave it to you as a gift, you don’t need to return it to us. You can keep it as a memento. We still have a lot of the Crown Princess’s personal belongings remaining in our mansion.” Xiao reacted quickly. She pressed the corner of her lips with her hanky, stood up, and helped Old Lady Ji refuse Qu Moying with a polite smile.

“I heard the Crown Princess loved to wear it before. She even brought it to a temple to make it have the Buddha’s blessing. She gave it to me before to wish me good luck. I think she would be happier to let Old Lady Ji have the good luck now!” Qu Moying said softly.

Xiao’s hands trembled for a second when she held her hanky. Then she smiled at Qu Moying, “Since the Crown Princess gave it to you, it should be yours now, Fourth Lady Qu. How can we ask it back? Please, just keep it.”

Old Lady Ji remained quiet, looking down on the ground.

Qu Moying was observing their expressions during the whole time, and her eyes turned colder and colder. Xiao must stand on the same side as Ji Youran, which meant she knew the truth of her death. Also, judging by Old Lady Ji’s expression, she seemed to know about it as well. The pain in Qu Moying’s heart was so much that she even started to feel numb. The only feeling left was a bloodthirsty rage that she brought back with her from hell.

They all felt guilty, and that was why they didn’t dare to keep Ji Hanyue’s personal item, let alone one that was blessed by the Buddha.

Qu Moying’s eyes were bulging in rage, but luckily, they were covered by the veil. She looked at these people from the Ji Family coldly and then suddenly chuckled, “Madam, since you don’t want it back, I will keep it. However, would you please let me meet with my other cousin Ji Yanyue?”

“Emm...” Xiao was stunned by Qu Moying’s sudden change of the topic.

“The Crown Princess has deceased. Earl Ling’an and Cousin Yanyue are the only two people left in her family. Please allow us to meet her, Madam,” said Yue Wenhan as his eyes fell on Old Lady Ji’s face. He started to feel weird about their attitude, so he supported Qu Moying.

“Please, Madam,” Qu Moying immediately followed.

Behind the veil, her eyes were cold and sharp. She knew her father and younger sister probably had passed away already. Still, she wanted to see the Ji Family’s reaction. Now, she was sure that Xiao and even Old Lady Ji both knew what had happened to her father and younger sister. She couldn’t believe why Old Lady Ji could be so cruel to let her own son get killed!

Old Lady Ji fell into silence for a few seconds. “Yanyue passed away.” Then she lowered her head and wiped her tears with a hanky.

“What?” Yue Wenhan was truly shocked by this answer that he didn’t expect at all. He pulled a long face. “Why did I never hear of it? How did she die? Why didn’t you even hold a funeral for her?”

Ji Yanyue was also Earl Ling’an’s daughter given birth by his wife, but no one knew she was dead. There was no funeral, no death announcement. If Qu Moying didn’t ask today, Yue Wenhan would only think Ji Yanyue didn’t feel well. It would not be strange for a little girl like her if she had a mental breakdown after what happened to her older sister and father.

Ji Yanyue didn’t show up, maybe just because she was taking care of Earl Ling’an at home, who was heavily sick, or she wasn’t feeling well. However, Yue Wenhan never considered the possibility that she was dead.

Qu Moying had known about her younger sister’s death long ago, but the pain of hearing it again could still tell her heart apart. Suppressing the grief, she stood up with Yue Wenhan and asked Old Lady Ji sternly, “Madam, how did Cousin Yanyue die? Why have we never heard of it before? Did someone murder her?”

Startled by her questioning, Old Lady Ji's hand trembled as tears formed in her eyes. "Yanyue had been feeling unwell for a while. She died of sickness on the day before the Crown Prince's wedding. The whole empire was ready to celebrate the big day. How could we let her death affect the Crown Prince's wedding? We had to decide to cover up her death and bury her quickly, which was approved by the Crown Princess too."

"Yeah, we were all in a panic after it. Both Earl Ling'an and the Crown Princess thought it would be better to not announce it. So, we held a private funeral in our family for Yanyue and didn't even dare to wear mourning clothes. Earl Ling'an took some people to bury Yanyue in the end. However, no one knew bad things would've happened to the Crown Princess at the wedding. Suffering from sudden anxiety and worry, Earl Ling'an himself broke down too," Xiao explained while wiping her tears.

So, Earl Ling'an's sudden sickness was not only because of the heavily injured and dying Crown Princess but also his little daughter Ji Yanyue's death. This seemed to explain well why Earl Ling'an, who had always been a robust man, suddenly fell sick. It would be weird if it was only because the Crown Princess was heavily injured in the assassination.

But actually, it was because of his two daughters.

"We didn't expect something would happen to the Crown Princess too. Our initial plan was to announce Yanyue's death after the wedding. But then the assassination in the Eastern Palace took place, and the Crown Princess had been at death's door. We had to delay the announcement, fearing that it would bring bad luck to the Crown Princess's recovery... So, it ended up like this..."

Old Lady Ji couldn't stop sobbing as tears kept dripping down from her eyes.

"Mother, you can't cry anymore. Otherwise, you will hurt your eyes. Everything has happened already. If the Crown Princess sees you like this in the underworld, she will feel sad too," Xiao hurriedly comforted Old Lady Ji and didn't even have time to wipe her own tears. Anyone who saw it would think of her as a filial daughter-in-law.

Watching their acting, Qu Moying slightly curled up her lips. She had seen this kind of scene in the Earl Ling'an's Mansion many times before.

Her mother passed away very early, and Old Lady Ji had been not in good health condition for a long time. Consequently, the responsibility of managing family affairs fell on Xiao's shoulder. Although the Second Master of the Ji Family was not an earl like his older brother, his family was quite influential in the entire Ji Family.

Ji Youran was right. After Ji Hanyue and her father's deaths, everything in the Earl Ling'an's Mansion fell into Second Master Ji and his family's hands.

Of course, if they didn't have Pei Luo'an's support, they would never dare to do so.

"Let me meet Earl Ling'an," Yue Wenhan said in a cold voice.

He felt more and more suspicious. Since they couldn't see Ji Yanyue anymore, they had to meet Earl Ling'an, who was said to be heavily sick and lie on his bed.

"I'm afraid he can't see anyone now. After hearing the Crown Princess's death, Earl Ling'an threw out blood and is still in a coma now," Xiao sighed deeply and said.

"Is everyone from the Earl Ling'an's Mansion here for the Crown Princess's funeral?" Qu Moying tried hard to hold back the boiling hatred in her heart, looked around, and asked.

"Yes, everyone is here. The Crown Princess's death is such a big matter. No one dares not to come!" said Xiao.

Occupied herself with crying, Old Lady Ji couldn't even talk but also avoided answering Qu Moying's question.

"While Earl Ling'an is still in a coma, lying on his bed, everyone in your family came for the funeral, leaving him alone at home. Do you not care about his life at all, or do you think he will recover soon, so it's okay to leave him alone?" Qu Moying's voice was icy.

Xiao didn't expect Fourth Lady Qu, the useless, ugly girl in the rumors, to dare to say such sharp words in front of the Ji Family. For a second, she felt very flustered since she knew better than anyone the situation of the Ji Family.

Xiao had discussed every detail with her daughter. But Qu Moying just came out of nowhere and kept poking them by questioning things Xiao had to lie about.

If Qu Moying was alone here, Xiao could just scold her to make her shut up. But with Yue Wenhan here, she didn't dare to do so. Ji Youran had reminded her many times that Yue Wenhan was not easy to deal with.

No matter how scared Xiao felt, she was still a sophisticated person. She raised her head and stared at Qu Moying with her red eyes, "How can you talk like that, Fourth Lady Qu? The Crown Princess's funeral is more important than anything else, so our whole family must be present. But it's just today, and we will go back soon after. We won't just leave Earl Ling'an alone at home."

She didn't directly tell them Earl Ling'an's health condition, only saying that the Crown Princess's funeral was the most important right now. They had to drop everything on hand to attend the funeral and would go home after a little while.

Hearing Xiao's explanation that couldn't be more discreet, Yue Wenhan twisted his brows into a frown.

He was not an innocent lady like Qu Moying. His years of experience in interrogating criminals told him something was wrong. Xiao's answer was too perfect as if she had prepared it in advance in case people would question her.

Usually, this type of perfect answer was designed to cover up the truth.

However, he still couldn't understand some things, so he decided to stay quiet and observe the Ji Family's reaction.

Qu Moying looked around the whole room. This yard maintained the same layout and decoration as when she stayed here before. Every corner had been cleaned up. Then her eyes fell on the young and old maids standing aside, and she recognized some items that Old Lady Ji would use in her daily life. Qu

Moying couldn't help but sneer inwardly. Apparently, the Ji Family planned to stay in the Eastern Palace initially. But they were alerted by her questions, so Xiao changed her mind on the spot.

"Since then, I will go to visit Earl Ling'an with my father tomorrow," Qu Moying continued. It was better to use Qu Zhizhen's name now since the Ji Family had no idea whether he would really agree or not.

The Crown Prince delayed the announcement of her death till he found the best timing. Then what about her father? Would they announce her father's death at the best timing too?

Her intention was to force them to announce her father's death as soon as possible. Then people would find Earl Ling'an and his family literally died one by one, which didn't look like accidents but a man-made incident. People's suspicious would put a lot of pressure on them.

"Yeah, I will go with you tomorrow." Yue Wenhan had seen everyone's reaction, and he chose to stand on Qu Moying's side.

"But...Earl Ling'an is really sick now. I'm afraid he can't see anyone," Xiao refused with a sorrowful look on her face.

"I just want to let my father see him once. Moreover...even if...we have to see him for the last time, right?" The look on Qu Moying's face was grieved, but her words showed her insistence. Even if Earl Ling'an was really at death's door, he had to meet his relatives for the last time.

The way she said it successfully prevented the Ji Family from rejecting her again. Xiao gnashed her teeth secretly, thinking she could never believe rumors again. Who said Fourth Lady Qu was just a poor orphan who lost her mother and got abandoned by her family? She was obviously a tough one to deal with!

"Alright, allow us to go back home and ask Earl Ling'an about it first. We will reply to you later," said Xiao.

Old Lady Ji was still wailing, and her crying sounded very sorrowful.

Qu Moying stared at Old Lady Ji for a while, and then she turned to look at Xiao again. "Since then, we will take our leave first."

She curtsied to them as Yue Wenhan bowed. Then the two of them turned around and left together.

After they left, Xiao waved her hand, signaling all the servants in the room to go. The one staying behind was Granny Wu, who sighed faintly and closed the door for them. Then she stayed outside to guard the door.

In the room, Xiao was convincing Old Lady Ji, "Mother, stop crying. No one wanted this. But...but who would've known... If we didn't do it, the whole family would be killed..." Xiao's voice was choked.

Old Lady Ji looked up at Xiao with her red, swollen eyes. "This is all my fault! I owe them! This...this is all my fault!"

Her wailing made Xiao feel more anxious. But immediately, she started to wipe her eyes hard, making them look as red and swollen as Old Lady Ji's eyes. "Mother, we had no other choice. You don't owe them. They chose to do the wrong thing on their own. We tried to convince them, but they didn't listen to us. They got themselves killed and even...even made you so worried and frightened."

With a thud, Xiao knelt in front of Old Lady Ji. "Mother, it's my fault. I didn't handle it well enough and caused Fourth Lady Qu's suspicion. Mother..."

Xiao started to sob again.

"Then...then what should we do?" Old Lady Ji started to tremble in fear.

"Don't be afraid, Mother. Her sharp tongue won't be powerful enough to affect us. Maybe she just wants to get some benefits from us. When the Crown Princess was alive, she never visited us. Why does she show up now?" said Xiao while clenching her jaw.

She had never heard that Ji Hanyue had such a close relationship with this cousin.

"But...but what's your plan?" Old Lady Ji didn't know anything else to say. She didn't dare to take Ji Hanyue's personal belonging just now, nor did she want Qu Moying to keep investigating.

"Mother, don't worry. We still have ways to deal with her." A trace of ruthlessness flashed across Xiao's eyes. Indeed, it seemed that Qu Moying was suspecting them, but so what? She had her way to make this young lady stay quiet permanently...

Chapter 106 What's Lord Yun's Intention?

"Cousin, did you notice anything wrong?" After Yue Wenhan left the side yard with Qu Moying, he immediately asked, feeling suspicious.

It was not only about Qu Moying's attitude but also everyone from the Ji Family's reaction.

He once visited the Earl Ling'an's Mansion before. At that time, the Second Master of the Ji Family received him, saying that Earl Ling'an was severely sick and couldn't get off the bed to meet guests. He didn't find anything weird by then.

At this moment, Yue Wenhan still had no idea that Ji Yongming, Earl Ling'an, had lost his life long ago.

"I don't know. I just have this weird feeling. Even if Cousin Yanyue really died of sickness, they at least had to announce it. If they didn't want to affect the Crown Prince's wedding, they could just keep a low profile about it. But instead, they chose to hide a person's death from everyone like this. Moreover, it is a noble lady's death. What if it was a maid? Does that mean they can do anything they want to her without anyone knowing?"

Qu Moying twisted her brows into a frown.

Yue Wenhan nodded and put on a long face. He suddenly stopped at the corner of the porch. "Cousin, you'd better not go tomorrow. I will go check what's going on there."

Yue Wenhan knew what kind of person Qu Zhizhen was. If he cared about his daughter Qu Moying even a little more, Qu Moying wouldn't end up in her current position. He didn't think Qu Zhizhen would agree to visit the Earl Ling'an's Mansion with Qu Moying.

"It's okay. I really want to go take a look there. I just feel...something bad has happened." Qu Moying lowered her head and sighed faintly.

"I doubt Vice Minister Qu's ankle will recover tomorrow. I don't think he can leave the mansion yet," Yue Wenhan used a different way to convince Qu Moying politely.

His words made Qu Moying fall into silence for a while. Then she curtsied respectfully to Yue Wenhan, "Thank you, Cousin."

Then she straightened up, stared at Yue Wenhan with a stern look, and added, "Cousin, if you notice anything suspicious, don't urge to tell other people about it. We don't have a clear grasp of the situation, so please act discreetly."

Yue Wenhan was indeed in a perfect position to help her carry out her plan since he was related to both Qu Moying and Ji Hanyue. Fearing that he would act impulsively, Qu Moying had to keep reminding him.

Her meaningful words confused Yue Wenhan, but he still nodded at her. "Don't worry. I won't do anything reckless."

"Alright, Cousin. If you have any news, please tell me at once. No matter what, I will pay a visit to the Earl Ling'an's Mansion," Qu Moying said firmly.

Feeling her persistence, Yue Wenhan didn't try to stop her anymore. After a few words, he left first, leaving Qu Moying standing quietly on her spot alone!

She would go to the Earl Ling'an's Mansion no matter what. If she couldn't go this time, she would create a chance for herself next time.

Qu Moying noticed the abrupt change in Xiao's expression when she said she would go visit them with Qu Zhizhen tomorrow. But knowing Xiao's and Ji Youran's personalities, they would try every means to stop her.

They would definitely come up with a way to deal with Qu Moying. As the Fourth Lady of the Qu Family, she was initially barely related to the Ji Family. But if they wanted to get rid of her, they must build a closer connection with her first.

Which was precisely what she wanted!

Ji Youran would be busy handling things in the Eastern Palace and the Earl Ling'an's Mansion simultaneously. She wondered if Ji Youran was really capable of hiding each of her dirty secrets well...

"I heard you went to meet the Ji Family?" a tender voice came from behind. Qu Moying pulled herself out of her thoughts and turned around. Pei Yuanjun was strolling in her direction, followed by his chief eunuch Ji Hai, who hurriedly walked up to bow to her with a beam. Lord Yun looked as handsome and graceful as usual in the bright sunlight.

Qu Moying took a step back and curtsied to him, "Lord Yun, a pleasure to meet you."

"I heard the Qu Family and the Ji Family cut off their connection a long time ago. Fourth Lady Qu, are you going to rebuild the connection?" Pei Yuanjun sized Qu Moying up with an amused look on his face. He seemed in a good mood with his lips curling up.

He didn't look as indifferent and cold as usual, but even so, Qu Moying still couldn't forget the true colors behind his charming smile. No matter what, he was Lord Yun, known for being ruthless and cold-hearted.

"My grandmother told me that the Ji Family and the Qu Family stopped contacting each other after my mother passed away," Qu Moying lowered her head and explained honestly.

Since Pei Yuanjun came to ask her, he must've heard the conversation between her and Yue Wenhan. The best way to deal with a person like Lord Yun was always telling him the truth.

Moreover, her interest in the situation coincided with his.

Knowing Pei Luo'an's personality, he would never tolerate Pei Luo'an's existence if he ascended the throne. Qu Moying believed that Pei Luo'an was very aware of it.

In the beginning, she once considered working with Lord Jing, Pei Yusheng, for the same reason.

"Now that the Crown Princess died, you want to restore the connection with the Ji Family?" Pei Yuanjun raised his brow and asked. The look on his face was not the one when a man talked to a woman, but more like interrogating.

It was very judgmental.

Qu Moying knew she acted too far away from her image in the rumors. She was almost like a different person. She took a deep breath to calm herself down. Her rebirth was the biggest bargaining chip she had, and no one would ever consider its possibility. If it didn't happen to her, she would never believe this kind of thing.

So, there was no way Pei Yuanjun could make the right guess.

Her action was strange, but it was still explainable.

She cast a glance at Pei Yuanjun and then looked around. Even though they wouldn't get watched everywhere in the Eastern Palace, it was not a good place to have a talk.

"Don't worry. Just say it. Nobody can hear us," said Pei Yuanjun carelessly.

Qu Moying took a deep breath and then lowered her head. She talked very lowly in a faint and low voice, "I had...a dream one night... I saw my cousin, and she...she said someone killed her."

She didn't say which night, just one night.

"The Crown Princess appeared in your dream?" Pei Yuanjun looked at Qu Moying with a faint smile on his face. Her figure was more petite than ladies at her age. With her head lowered, she looked even more like a young girl who hadn't grown up yet. Suddenly, Pei Yuanjun reached out, gently patted her head, and chuckled.

"It's true." Qu Moying felt speechless, stepping back a little more to avoid his hand. Then she gracefully curtsied to him. "My lord, I still have things to do. Please allow me to leave first!"

He didn't stop her this time, waving his hand and letting her leave.

Then he turned around and walked towards the outside. He had just said goodbye to Pei Luo'an before, and now he was heading to the royal palace.

After he left, a guard rushed into the altar room and secretly reported to Pei Luo'an about what he saw from a distance.

Pei Luo'an stood up immediately and took the guard to the side room.

Ji Youran noticed them and wanted to follow him but got stopped by another guard. She had to return in embarrassment and then saw the sarcastic smile on Ming Xian'er's face, who was kneeling on the ground and burning paper money. She flew into a rage immediately, but she knew she couldn't cause any trouble again.

She had no other choice but to hold her temper.

Surprisingly, a maid from the Earl Ling'an's Mansion rushed inside. Seeing Ji Youran, the maid walked up to curtsy and whispered something in her ear. The expression on Ji Youran's face suddenly changed. She cast a glance at Ming Xian'er, who was staying still on the ground, and then left with the maid.

Ming Xian'er knelt on the ground, watching Ji Youran leaving as all kinds of thoughts came across her mind. But then she lowered her head again. At this moment, she had to act more thoughtfully and sweetly than Ji Youran to earn the Crown Prince's pity. This was her only way out of trouble. She risked her life to break into the funeral and earn herself temporary safety, but her dilemma was not over yet.

Right now, she could stay with the Crown Princess's coffin and mourn for her to make up for her misbehavior of breaking into the funeral. But what about things in the future? Ji Youran would probably grab every chance to remind the Crown Prince of her fault. Even though she was an official concubine, it would still be easy for the Crown Prince's second wife to take her life.

Ji Youran must hate her a lot. But with Ming Xian'er background, she couldn't possibly climb up to the same position as Ji Youran. Right now, the only person who could help her was Fourth Lady Qu...

"Uncle talked to Fourth Lady Qu for a while? And he even smiled at her?" Pei Luo'an asked, frowning.

"Yes, they indeed had a talk. But I didn't dare to walk any closer, so I couldn't hear them," the guard reported.

Pei Luo'an paced back and forth, having a headache. The person he minded the most was his uncle Pei Yuanjun. If it weren't for him, Pei Luo'an would've started a rebellion long ago to force his father to pass him the throne.

No matter how he looked at it, Qu Moying and Pei Yuanjun looked like people from two totally different worlds. What could they talk about?

"Did they meet purposefully or just run into each other?" Pei Luo'an had an explicable feeling of annoyance.

"They should just run into each other. Fourth Lady Qu was talking to Mr. Yue before. After Mr. Yue left, Lord Yun went up to talk to her for a little while," The guard took a second to think and then said. He had been following Lord Yun all the way. First, he saw Lord Yun stand somewhere for some time as if he was enjoying the view or something interesting. Then Lord Yun encountered Fourth Lady Qu on the way.

Of course, he wouldn't consider the possibility that Lord Yun was waiting for Yue Wenhan to leave.

Lord Yun always let other people wait for him, never waiting for someone else. Even the Crown Prince didn't dare to put on airs in front of Lord Yun, let alone a vice minister's daughter.

Pei Luo'an nodded at him, so his guess was correct. They just ran into each other. Fourth Lady Qu didn't get scared talking to his uncle since she was blind and couldn't see him. Otherwise, she wouldn't have the courage to talk to him and even say something funny to make him smile. It was just her ignorance that made her fearless.

Maybe she didn't even know who she had met.

"Your Royal Highness, I think I saw Lord Yun patting Fourth Lady Qu's head," the guard added.

"Uncle patted Fourth Lady Qu's head?" stunned by his words, Pei Luo'an repeated them blankly.

"Yes, I'm pretty sure that Lord Yun touched Fourth Lady Qu's hair. Then she got startled and left immediately," the guard said firmly but also found it understandable. Every noble lady would panic if a strange man touched their head.

"What does Uncle mean by this? Don't tell me he's interested in that blind girl!" The Crown Prince mumbled to himself. How was that...even possible?

Chapter 107 Who's Behind the Screen?

Before, Pei Luo'an was told that Pei Yuanjun wanted to marry Liu Xiangshan, the Guardian General Liu Xiangshan's daughter. That lady had an eye problem too. The Crown Prince heard that Pei Yuanjun had brought Lady Liu to Old Lady Qu's banquet. Lord Jing, his younger brother, was interested in her and wanted to marry her as well.

Not only Pei Yusheng, but he also wanted to marry Lady Liu too.

He failed to get military support from Ji Yongming before. If he could get it from Liu Xiangshan, it would benefit him. But he didn't dare to pursue Lady Liu yet.

After all, his image in people's eyes was the Crown Princess's loving husband. If he showed his interest in Liu Lanxin now, it wouldn't do him any good.

He couldn't marry her, so Pei Yusheng couldn't marry her either, let alone Pei Yuanjun.

Maybe he could use Fourth Lady Qu for his plan, who so happened to stay in the Eastern Palace now. It seemed that he needed to meet Fourth Lady Qu in private, giving her some support or making her family background better...

Qu Moying had no idea that a short talk with Pei Yuanjun made the Crown Prince notice her immediately. Luckily, she was just a weak lady who was not pretty or intelligent in other people's eyes. She literally had no value to use. The only good thing she had was the engagement with Young Master Yongning, but it was broken off already.

The same evening, she was taken to meet Ji Youran.

The yard Ji Youran lived in was next to the Crown Princess's yard with a smaller size, showing her status in the Eastern Palace.

From the location of her yard, it could be told that she was not as simple as she looked. She lived next to the Crown Princess to care for her. Moreover, she kept showing her respect for her cousin through her behaviors. In this way, people were more convinced that she moved into the Eastern Palace purely for her sick cousin.

But who would've known that Ji Hanyue died a long time ago under Ji Youran and Pei Luo'an's calculation?

Meanwhile, they still pretended to treat Ji Hanyue better than anyone. Qu Moying's eyes were filled with hatred now, but luckily, the veil hid all her emotions from others. Otherwise, Ji Youran would for sure notice her strange reaction!

She was led into the spacious main room. Seeing her enter, every maid quickly left, except for Ji Youran's private maid named Shui Ning, who Qu Moying had met before.

She then recognized the wide screen consisting of eight boards. The screen was a painting about four seasons, looking elegant and exquisite but also familiar – it was from Ji Hanyue's dowry. However, it ended up in her enemy's room.

Not only the screen, but she also recognized some other delicate articles. They all reminded Qu Moying of the bracelet on Ji Youran's hand that day, the one she took from her younger sister Yanyue, along with her life. Someday, she would let them pay back everything they owed her.

The blood must be paid by the blood.

"Good to see you, Your Royal Highness." Suppressing the anger in her heart, Qu Moying walked up politely and curtsied to Ji Youran, who was sitting in the middle seat.

"Cousin, forget about the formalities. The Crown Princess's cousin is my cousin. Please just call me cousin," Ji Youran said softly while sizing Qu Moying up. Her mother told her that Fourth Lady Qu was difficult to deal with, but she didn't think so.

If she was really a tough one, why her step-mother could easily frame her at the Crown Princess's funeral?

Yue Wenhan probably acted too harshly, so her mother thought the person with him, Qu Moying, was tough too.

"Thank you for your kindness, Your Royal Highness. It's too inappropriate for my identity. I think it's better to obey the etiquette," Qu Moying rejected her in a gentle voice. She was not surprised that Ji Youran wanted to meet her.

She stayed in the Eastern Palace specifically to give Ji Youran a chance to meet her.

The more Ji Youran wanted to make friends with her, the more conveniently she could carry out her plan.

After meeting her and Yue Wenhan, Xiao must've panicked and asked Ji Youran for help.

Qu Moying's eyes glanced over the screen. Suddenly, she found that this screen looked a bit too large and didn't fit the room size as if it was put there on purpose. A guess came across her mind – was someone hiding behind the screen?

If so, who would it be?

Judging by Ji Youran's personality, the only possible person should be Pei Luo'an since people from the Ji Family had already left. Qu Moying's heart started to pound in her chest. Why was Pei Luo'an here? Was he suspecting her?

But in the next second, she denied this thought immediately. No one could guess she was another soul reborn in Qu Moying's body. There must be some other reason that she didn't know.

It seemed that she had to be more careful when dealing with Ji Youran.

Ji Youran didn't expect Qu Moying to reject her politely, feeling annoyed. However, she remained the amiable smile on her face, let Qu Moying sit down, and asked her maid to serve tea.

Then, Ji Youran slowly took a sip and said, "Cousin, the Crown Princess passed away, but our families can't lose contact because of this. The Crown Princess's cousin is my cousin."

She pretended that she didn't notice Qu Moying's objection.

"Thank you, Your Royal Highness." Qu Moying still didn't change the way she addressed Ji Youran. Her tone was perfectly polite but sounded indifferent.

"I heard that you want to visit my uncle tomorrow?" Ji Youran asked softly. Then she continued, "Your body hasn't recovered yet. It's better not to move too much. I will go back to the Earl Ling'an's Mansion a few days later. How about we go there together?"

"No problem, Your Royal Highness." Qu Moying's voice was calm and obedient.

Ji Youran twisted her brows into a frown. Qu Moying's attitude was totally different than what her mother said. As she expected, it was just her mother's misunderstanding. Qu Moying must've just followed Yue Wenhan's orders. Since it was inappropriate for Yue Wenhan to talk too much in front of females, he asked Qu Moying to speak for him, making her look tough.

It must be because of this.

"I heard that your engagement with the Marquis Yongning's Family has been broken off. Is it true?" Ji Youran asked, showing concern in her eyes.

Qu Moying nodded at her.

"Your engagement was confirmed a long time ago. How can they just break it off like that? The way the Marquis Yongning's Family handled it was so inappropriate. Don't worry, Cousin. I will show them what's justice," Ji Youran sounded aggrieved, with a furious look on her face.

"Thank you, Your Royal Highness, but the past is the past now," Qu Moying shook her head, not showing any emotions.

"How can you just let them go easily? Reputation is critical for a lady! Don't worry. Even though the Crown Princess is gone, I won't let anyone take advantage of you." Ji Youran patted the table in rage. "I thought Young Master Yongning was a good man. It turned out he's not what people thought."

"Your Royal Highness, it's all in the past now. My grandmother said our families used to have a good relationship, and it's unnecessary to make a big scene. Otherwise, it will affect both families' names. Young Master Yongning got engaged again already. We can't ask him to break it off. It won't do us any good," Qu Moying said softly.

Her engagement with Xu Lipeng had been broken off, and her situation was gradually getting better now. If they made a big scene at this moment, it would be harmful to Qu Moying's name and her family. As she expected, Ji Youran was an expert in this kind of thing – pretending to treat people nicely but harming them in actuality.

First, she encouraged Qu Moying to make trouble. Then, she would lend a hand when the problem became impossible to resolve to show her “kindness.”

By then, she would rightfully become Qu Moying’s lifesaver and could ask Qu Moying to do whatever she wanted. Even Old Lady Qu might be put under her control.

This kind of thing was very easy for Ji Youran. All she needed to do was ruin Qu Moying’s name and then find a decent husband for her. As the Crown Prince’s second wife, Ji Youran could just use her influence to make any family accept a lady who had a bad reputation.

In terms of Qu Moying’s life after she got married, Ji Youran would have nothing to do with it.

“How can you just let them have all the benefits? Cousin, don’t worry. I won’t let them take advantage of you like this anymore,” she pretended that she didn’t notice Qu Moying’s objection and said furiously.

Before meeting Qu Moying, she had made up her mind already. Although she felt bad letting her younger brother marry Qu Moying, it was still a good choice. She could just ask him to take her in as his second wife for the most. As her mother said, letting Qu Moying marry into the Ji Family would also pressure Yue Wenhan. Even if Qu Moying found anything suspicious, she wouldn’t tell anyone about it.

After all, Qu Moying had to share weal or woe with her husband’s family. It was a good idea!

“Your Royal Highness, after our cousin passed away, there must be many things for you to handle in the Eastern Palace. We are bound together because of our cousin. If you interfere with Young Master Yongning’s marriage, people would probably think you act a bit too aggressively. I’m afraid...your reputation will be affected by then!”

Since Ji Youran pretended she didn’t understand her objection, Qu Moying didn’t mind talking more straightforwardly.

Ji Youran clenched the hanky in her hand, almost losing her temper. How dare a vice minister’s daughter talk to her like that? She kept showing indifference while Ji Youran tried to make friends with her. Moreover, she even implied that Ji Youran didn’t have a rightful reason to interfere with her engagement.

On the one hand, she said Ji Youran was not her real cousin; on the other hand, she implied that Ji Youran was not the real Crown Prince in the Eastern Palace, which was the least thing Ji Youran wanted to mention. If the Crown Prince weren't here, she would definitely give this blind girl a good lesson!

What a rude girl! How dare she say that in front of her?

Where did her courage come from?

Then Ji Youran remembered the Crown Prince's cold face when he asked her not to make trouble again before Qu Moying came here. She suddenly felt afraid and gnashed her teeth.

What did the Crown Prince mean? Was he interested in that blind girl? With Qu Moying's family background and identity as Ji Hanyue's cousin, she was qualified enough to be the Crown Prince's second wife.

If so, Ji Youran couldn't show any hostility to her right now, especially when the Crown Prince was sitting behind the screen, listening to their conversation the whole time.

Chapter 108 About the Next Crown Princess

Since Qu Moying didn't seem to agree, Ji Youran had to hold back her rage and stop forcing her. With that faked smile, she asked more about daily life in the Qu's Mansion, especially expressing her anger toward Second Madam Qu while saying that she would help Qu Moying show them justice.

When it came to Yu, Ji Youran indeed was irritated by her.

She didn't care if Yu wanted to scheme her step-daughter or not, but when Ji Youran herself was involved, that became a different story.

Her old wound almost healed before, but now it worsened and kept hurting. The Imperial Doctor said it wouldn't recover soon and could fester. Consequently, the scar would get bigger and harder to entirely remove.

Thinking of her wound, Ji Youran wished she could kill everyone in the Qu Family.

However, with the Crown Prince sitting behind, she needed to hold her temper and patiently build a good relationship with Fourth Lady Qu. Suppressing the anxiety, she squeezed out a more gentle smile.

While she kept trying to show her kindness, Qu Moying had been frigid the whole time. Till the end, their relationship hadn't improved at all.

Ji Youran asked her servants to walk Qu Moying back. After Qu Moying left, Ji Youran walked behind the screen while Pei Luo'an was still sitting there, with a sullen face. He threw a displeased glare at her when she walked in, obviously blaming her for being useless.

"Your Royal Highness, I don't think Fourth Lady Qu likes me." Holding a grievance, Ji Youran curtsied to him and looked at him with those pitiful watery eyes.

Qu Moying became the one to be blamed for the frigid scene within a few words.

"Have a seat first," Pei Luo'an said coldly.

She sat down obediently and then cast a glance at him again, who was deep in thoughts with his head lowered. A guess came across her mind. She said in a soft voice, "Your Royal Highness, do you have any...interest in Fourth Lady Qu? If you do, I won't be opposed."

She said it while totally standing in Pei Luo'an's shoes, not showing any jealousy, anger, or desire to compete for her husband against another woman. Her calmness and elegance perfectly fit the role of a big family's hostess.

"It's not like that. Don't overthink about it." Pei Luo'an shook his head. Since it was about Pei Yuanjun, he didn't want to talk too much about it, even with Ji Youran.

He then stood up and walked outside. After a few steps, he suddenly stopped and turned around, "The matter about Xian'er is over. She will stay in the Crown Princess's alter room for the next half year to guard her coffin. Don't meddle in it again and cause any other trouble."

Ji Youran was obediently following behind to walk him out. Hearing his words, she immediately answered in a low voice, "Yes, Your Royal Highness."

Meanwhile, hatred was boiling in her heart. If she knew that low-life woman would do things like this, she would've gotten rid of her long ago. She couldn't believe the trap she set for Ming Xian'er became a blessing for her. The Crown Prince's little toy doll somehow managed to climb up and became his real concubine.

Ji Youran wondered who gave her this idea to help her get out of trouble this time.

The Crown Prince's words were a warning but also an insult. For Ji Youran, who whole-heartedly saw herself as the Crown Princess, she couldn't accept this failure. Watching Pei Luo'an leaving, her eyes were filled with maliciousness.

"Your Royal Highness, what should we do now?" standing next to her, Shui Ning asked with caution.

"Send a message to Mother and tell her that we will carry out her plan," Ji Youran's voice was ice cold. Then she turned around to walk inside...

In the main hall of the royal palace, the Imperial Censors stood out of line and made their speech one by one, all complaining about Qu Zhizhen, the Vice Minister of Works.

Qu Zhizhen took his day off, so Qu Zhilin came to the royal palace alone today. But right now, he didn't even dare to raise his head to look at his fellow Imperial Censors. He knew better than anyone about his younger brother's family issue. Qu Zhizhen pampering his concubine over his wife was indeed the truth.

After showing no respect for the Crown Princess and the royal family, Yu really had her lesson this time.

When the emperor hit the ceiling and was about to order a thorough investigation, Qu Zhilin finally stood out and passed his younger brother's report to the emperor. A eunuch took the report from Qu Zhilin and handed it to the emperor, who glanced over it and uttered a snort. "Yu has been in a coma, heavily sick. This woman surely chooses the best time to fall ill."

In his report, Qu Zhizhen described the scene how Yu's poor son and daughter wailed in front of their unconscious mother's bed and begged the emperor for his mercy. He claimed that even after Yu recovered from her illness, she would stay in the family temple and spend the rest of her life with Buddha. All the family affairs she managed before had been handed over to other people. The only reason why he didn't deprive her of her position as his wife was for his children.

Yu's matter wouldn't cause such a big scene if it didn't occur at the Crown Princess's funeral. After all, it was the Qu Family's internal affair, not as serious as murder. Satisfied enough with Qu Zhizhen's solution, the emperor put an end to it. He sent his eunuch to the Qu's Mansion to give Qu Zhizhen a lecture and imposed a one-year-salary fine on him.

After the brief drama of his minister's family issue, the emperor quickly moved on to other subjects and ended the morning meeting. Then he brought some crucial officials to the imperial study for a further discussion.

When Pei Yuanjun arrived at the royal palace, he directly headed to the imperial study.

Seeing Pei Yuanjun entering the room, those dignitaries stood up to bow to him and sat back down.

The emperor was wearing a long face. His subordinates mentioned an argument between the Crown Prince's women that disturbed the Crown Princess's altar room.

It was clearly a dishonored matter, but the officials didn't dare tell the emperor about the details. All his questions thrown at them only got some ambiguous answers.

Seeing Pei Yuanjun walking in, the emperor asked directly, "A Crown Prince's concubine made a scene in front of the Crown Princess's altar room yesterday?"

"Yeah, I heard it was pretty chaotic. Even Princess Ji was forced to show up to make clarifications," Pei Yuanjun said carelessly. He leaned back on his chair like a lazybones. "Princess Ji and the Crown Prince's marriage hasn't been consummated yet, but they can't keep delaying it. Otherwise, people won't think of Princess Ji as the Crown Prince's rightful second wife. On the other hand, although the Crown Prince's love for the Crown Princess is respectable, he still has the responsibility to continue the bloodline."

The Crown Prince had shown the wish of mourning for the Crown Princess for a few years, during which he wouldn't marry any other women. The emperor was the first one to disapprove.

"This is outrageous! He's the Crown Prince, not just a woman's loving husband!" A trace of rage showed up on the emperor's haggard face. He slammed the table with irritation while all the dignitaries fell into silence, staring at the ground. They didn't dare to express any opinion about the emperor's own son.

"Your Majesty, you don't need to be too worried about this. Some beauties can easily solve the problem. When the Crown Princess was sick before, it was inappropriate to do so, but right now, the limitation is gone. After the Crown Princess is buried, you can give the Crown Prince some beauties and then pick the next Crown Princess. The vacancy won't do any good to the Crown Prince," said Pei Yuanjun carelessly.

"Yes, that sounds about right," the emperor kept nodding at him.

"Your Majesty, for nursing her cousin, Princess Ji married into the Eastern Palace and kept her marriage unconsummated. Her effort is respectable too. As for her identity, she is the Ji Family's daughter, the same as the deceased Crown Princess. The Ji Family has just suffered a great loss because of the Crown Princess's death. We can't let General Ji down."

He Siqun, Minister of Rites, lifted his head and discreetly picked his words. Choosing candidates for the next Crown Princess was part of Ministry of Rites' work, so he had to express his opinion.

Noble Consort He was his younger sister, favored by the emperor, and he was the Minister of Rites. His words indeed fit his identity.

"Your Majesty, I heard when the Crown Princess asked Princess Ji to marry into the Eastern Palace, she knew Princess Ji's objection. So, she promised Princess Ji her position of the Crown Princess after she passed away," another minister looked around and made his statement.

Although it was merely a rumor, it came from the Eastern Palace and was confirmed by the Crown Prince. It was just the Crown Prince didn't clarify his opinion on it.

Prime Minister Zuo and Prime Minister Xu looked at each other and nodded. They also heard about the rumor before.

"So, does it mean the empire's Crown Princess has to be a daughter from the Ji Family?" Hearing their words, Pei Yuanjun chuckled. He had a pleasant voice, but it carried a trace of cold sarcasm right now. "Does it mean if the Crown Princess isn't from the Ji Family, no one else will dare to take the position?"

His words were as sharp as a well-honed blade that could pierce people's throats any second, sending a cold shiver down everyone's spine.

He talked as if the Ji Family tried to keep the monopoly on the position of the Crown Princess, which was the biggest scruple for the emperor. But as Ji Yongming's bloodline was almost cut off, only the other lineage of the Ji Family could possibly have a dangerous ambition.

By the looks of the situation, the remained bloodline of the Ji Family indeed gained many benefits, which seemed quite suspicious.

The ministers all fell into silence. Pei Yuanjun shook his loose sleeves and widely opened his charming but cold downturned eyes. "I heard General Ji is dying because of his two daughters' deaths. I'm afraid letting his niece take his daughter's place will truly kill him."

After all, a niece was not the same as his own daughter. What's more, it was said that General Ji loved his daughters over anything else. His daughters' deaths were a tremendous shock for him. Even though the Crown Prince had sent doctors to treat Ji Yongming, there was no cure for mental illness. His situation has been worsening every day.

A while ago, the Crown Prince already told the emperor that Ji Yongming was at the brink of death. After the Crown Princess passed away, his date of death would probably be soon.

Ji Yongming, Earl Ling'an, was one of the only two Level-One Generals in the entire empire, trusted a lot by the emperor.

"We will discuss the candidate for the Crown Princess next time. Since Princess Ji made a scene with a concubine in front of the Crown Princess's altar room, I don't think she has the competence to be the next Crown Princess." The emperor put a conclusion to it with a stern face.

The Minister of Rites still wanted to say something, but hearing the emperor's words, he had to hold his tongue and lower his head.

Although he hoped the Crown Prince could choose the Ji Family's daughter as his next Crown Princess, he didn't want to cause any of the emperor's suspicion.

Without Ji Yongming, the Ji Family had lost half of its power and influence. Ji Yongming's niece was not even comparable with his own daughter. If the Crown Prince promoted his second wife to be his first wife, it would benefit Lord Jing greatly. Because Lord Jing wanted to marry Lady Liu, whose father was also a Level-One General but still healthy and had a stable career.

Yet, it was not the time for the Minister of Rites to say anything more.

The discussion was finally over, and the remained issues would be decided after the Crown Princess was buried.

The officials bowed to the emperor and left the room one by one, leaving Pei Yuanjun alone with the emperor. After they all left, the emperor's stern expression softened as he glanced at Pei Yuanjun. "The Crown Prince will soon marry another wife, but what about you?"

"Your Majesty, I'm not in a hurry," Pei Yuanjun made a lame excuse, bored by this repeated question. After he returned to the capital, no matter what they were talking about, the emperor would always find a way to mention his marriage, making him feel reluctant.

"You are not young anymore. How come you are not in a hurry? I heard you have a pretty close relationship with Liu Xiangshan's daughter. How about I grant a marriage for you and her?" amused by the topic, the emperor suggested.

Chapter 109 Rejecting the Emperor's Suggestion

The emperor had never met Guardian General Liu Xiangshan's daughter before, but he heard she was a peerless lady. He didn't understand why Pei Yuanjun didn't want to marry her.

As for her eye problem, it was just a minor issue since she could still see things. What's more, Pei Yuanjun seemed to have something to do with it, which made their engagement more reasonable. If Pei Yuanjun was not satisfied with a lady with an eye problem, the emperor could just let him marry some other second wives.

Liu Xiangshan's daughter had equal status with the Crown Princess, Ji Hanyue, since they were both ladies from aristocratic families. Liu Xiangshan was Pei Yuanjun's deputy when he was at the border, which should create many chances for Pei Yuanjun and Lady Liu to meet each other. Facing such a well-educated and stunning young woman, the emperor didn't believe that Pei Yuanjun had no feelings for her.

The emperor looked at Pei Yuanjun, expecting him to show some hesitation.

"Your Majesty, I'm really not in a rush on my marriage. Moreover, I have no interest in Lady Liu at all," Pei Yuanjun said in a lazy tone, not taking the emperor's words seriously.

"Haven't you grown up together at the border? You even brought her to the capital this time. I thought you intended to let me grant a marriage for you!" The emperor was a bit displeased. He actually meant it when he jokingly pushed Pei Yuanjun to get married since Pei Yuanjun was no longer at a very young age.

When the emperor was at the same age, Empress Yuan and he had been married for years. Thinking about his deceased empress, the emperor felt a sting from his heart. He then took a deep breath to suppress all his thoughts.

"I brought her here because I want to help her choose a decent husband. We didn't actually grow up together. I'm several years older than her, and we rarely met at the border. It was just a groundless rumor," Pei Yuanjun quickly distanced himself from Lady Liu without any hesitation.

He indeed seemed to have no interest in her.

"You are really not interested in her?" the emperor asked him with a suspicious look on his face. His eyes fell on Pei Yuanjun, trying to find every change in the latter's expression.

"I'm truly not interested in her." Pei Yuanjun squinted his downturned eyes. Even his laziness carried a natural trace of elegance.

"Since then, you must have someone you like already. Tell me, who is this lucky girl? How about I grant a marriage for you and her?" the emperor chuckled.

"Your Majesty, you know I don't like being around women. Moreover, I'm not the oldest among the youngsters," Pei Yuanjun showed him a faint smile and rejected him again, carelessly.

Pei Yuanjun was indeed not the youngest but not the oldest who hadn't gotten married yet. The Crown Prince got engaged with Ji Hanyue long ago, but he waited for Ji Hanyue since she mourned for her mother for three years. The emperor's oldest son didn't marry a wife yet, so the rest of his sons couldn't settle their marriage before their oldest brother.

Lord Jing, Lord Wei, and Lord Yan all hadn't got married yet, not even picked their wife candidates.

"There are three forms of unfilial conduct, of which the worst is to have no descendants. Since you are not in a hurry, I won't rush you for now. But after my other sons' marriages are settled, you have to get married too." The emperor finally took a step back.

In actuality, he had never used his power to push Pei Yuanjun on his marriage.

He had expected to grant a marriage for Pei Yuanjun since long ago since Pei Yuanjun was his cousin, not in the same generation as his sons.

However, Pei Yuanjun kept using his age as an excuse, leaving him no reason to argue back. When it came to age, all of his sons were indeed older than Pei Yuanjun.

“Your Majesty, don’t worry. I will find the lady I like for myself,” Pei Yuanjun’s voice was pretty reluctant, making his words sound more like an excuse.

The eunuchs in the room all lowered their heads and stood still as if a slightly louder breath would even disturb the two. Only Lord Yun dared to say such words to the emperor. If it were someone else, even the Crown Prince, the emperor would hit the ceiling immediately. He only had such patience facing Lord Yun.

Even when Lord Yun said something offensive, the emperor would just laugh it off.

“You’ve said this to me for many years, and I’ve been waiting for many years already. When you lived at the border, I always thought you liked Liu Xiangshan’s daughter. Since it’s not the case, just stay in the capital and take your pick. After all, there are many noble ladies here. I don’t believe you can’t find one you like. I’ll ask the empress to list out some suitable candidates first,” the emperor said as he waved his hand.

“Your Majesty, but I want to marry a person I like,” Pei Yuanjun didn’t want to take a step back.

“That’s for sure. You can take a look at the empress’ list and then make your pick if you see anyone you are interested in. You’ve been single all these years. It’s time to let someone take care of you. We got to confirm your first wife and two second-wife candidates this time,” the emperor seemed even more excited.

“Lord Jing and Lord Wei haven’t settled their marriages, let alone the Crown Prince. I have to give them all the choices first, right? Since I’m the youngest, I should be the last one to pick.” Pei Yuanjun stood up directly, feeling a headache.

He quickly said goodbye to the emperor, “Your Majesty, I remembered I still have some work to do back home. Please allow me to leave first.”

Then he stepped back toward the door and turned around to leave.

In the imperial study, the emperor sighed while shaking his head. Suddenly, he thought about something, and the look on his face became cold. Then he turned his head aside and started to cough quietly.

“Your Majesty, please have some water.” Li Quan, his chief eunuch, hurriedly walked up to the emperor.

The emperor took the teacup from Li Quan’s hands and patted his chest, looking a bit exhausted. Then he looked in the direction where Pei Yuanjun left as his eyes darkened.

“It’s time for Lord Yun to get married, right?” after a while, the emperor’s low voice rang in the room as if he was talking to himself.

“Lord Yun is not young. Naturally, he should get married at this age,” knowing the emperor was asking him, Li Quan lowered his head and answered respectfully.

“Since he should get married, why he is always unwilling to do so?” asked the emperor again.

Tiny beads of sweat started to show up on Li Quan’s forehead, but he had to answer, “Maybe Lord Yun wants to find a lady he really likes.”

“That’s why I even let him pick for himself, but why did he still reject me?” The emperor seemed determined to dig out an answer from Li Quan.

Now, even Li Quan’s back clothes were soaked in sweat. No one dared to talk about Lord Yun’s personal affairs. The empress’ chief eunuch was the best example, who had the same position as Li Quan. He expressed his opinions about Lord Yun’s marriage, and somehow, it was known by Lord Yun. Lord Yun then scolded the eunuch and stabbed his sword into the eunuch’s heart in front of the empress.

The empress fainted in shock as the guards all rushed to the spot to protect her, which caused a big scene and even disturbed the emperor. But did Lord Yun get any punishment in the end? Not at all. As usual, he freely left the royal palace, leaving all the mess behind. The empress was so scared that she

didn't even dare to meet Lord Yun for a while. This onerous question was now thrown at Li Quan, putting his life at risk.

If his answer was not appropriate, Li Quan felt like he would be the next one killed by a sword.

"Your Majesty, His Royal Highness hadn't many chances to meet noble ladies at the border. He just returned to the capital. I think you should give him some more time." Li Quan's answer couldn't be more cautious, for fear that he said anything opposed to Lord Yun's intention.

Li Quan couldn't afford to offend the man who dared to pull out his sword in front of the empress and was still favored by the emperor. He was just a chief eunuch, after all.

"Since then, I'll let him take his time as long as he finds one he likes!"

The emperor didn't talk for a while. He just let out a deep sigh as the whole room fell into silence. No more questions needed to be answered for now...

Qu Moying didn't expect to meet Yu Qingmeng and Xu Lipeng in the Eastern Palace. She noticed them from a distance and wanted to take another route to avoid them. After a second thought, she decided to still head forward. She didn't need to avoid them deliberately since they were the ones who made mistakes.

However, when she walked closer, she only saw Yu Qingmeng alone and a corner of Xu Lipeng's clothes disappearing on another path aside.

Surprisingly, Xu Lipeng chose to avoid her.

It was the second day of the Crown Princess's funeral. There were still many guests in the Eastern Palace who had a relatively lower status than yesterday's visitors and were not related to the Crown Prince. Since the Crown Prince had stayed in the altar room for a whole day yesterday, which he didn't really need to but insisted on doing, he was exhausted. Therefore, he didn't show up in public today.

After all, the Crown Prince was still nobler than the Crown Princess.

A whole day of hard work was enough for Pei Luo'an to keep up his image as the Crown Princess's loving husband. Everyone knew that the Crown Princess was the only woman the Crown Prince loved. If it weren't for the Crown Princess could be taken better care of, the Crown Prince wouldn't agree to let Princess Ji marry into the Eastern Palace. Moreover, Princess Ji was truly a perfect example of a well-educated lady. Not interested in the Crown Prince's power, she moved into the Eastern Palace only to nurse her cousin.

She even kept showing her unwillingness before, but a letter from the Crown Princess changed her mind. After that, she insisted the only reason she married the Crown Prince was for taking care of her sick cousin.

The past rumors earned a good reputation for both the Crown Prince and Ji Youran.

After the Crown Princess passed away, many people expressed their opinions in private, saying that Princess Ji's personality and identity made her qualified enough to become the next Crown Princess.

Usually, a second wife couldn't be promoted to the first wife, even though the latter passed away. The husband should marry another noble lady. However, Ji Youran's situation was different. Invited by the Crown Princess herself, she moved into the Eastern Palace only to nurse her sick cousin. Her identity as Princess Ji was given to her for her convenience, but the marriage between the Crown Prince and her was not consummated.

By the looks of the situation, people all thought the virtuous lady Princess Ji deserved a promotion.

But yesterday's drama had planted a seed of suspicion in many people's hearts. Princess Ji didn't seem as virtuous and aloof as she was in the rumors. No matter how they looked at it, what happened yesterday just seemed to be a fight between a wife and a concubine. They even made a scene in front of the Crown Princess's altar room, which was such a dishonor. If they acted like this in front of the sick Crown Princess before, the Crown Princess probably died of anger!

All these rumors were still fresh, totally different than the old ones about Ji Youran. Some people found them convincing; some felt suspicious; some even thought the rumors were deliberately spread to stain Princess Ji's name.

No matter what people thought, Qu Moying didn't have time to care about it. Her biggest concern right now was Yu Qingmeng, who stood in front of her with tears forming in her eyes. Noticing Yu Qingmeng's unusual behavior, Qu Moying hurriedly pulled Yu Dong's sleeve.

She stopped far away from Yu Qingmeng on the corridor to the Crown Princess's altar room. Since this place was not in the inner yard, many people passed by, including male guests.

However, her stopping didn't mean Yu Qingmeng wouldn't come. Seeing her stop moving, Yu Qingmeng rushed over to her while sobbing. When she got close enough to Qu Moying, she suddenly lost all the strength in her legs and was about to kneel on the ground. Pitifully, she called Qu Moying, staring at her with two watery eyes, "Fourth Lady Qu..."

Yu Dong was startled by her sudden movement, walked up immediately, and reached out his hand to protect Qu Moying. Staring at Yu Qingmeng warily, Yu Dong grabbed her hand and interrupted her. His voice was stern and cold, "Concubine Yu, what do you want to do again to the Fourth Lady? This is the Eastern Palace. You can't do whatever you want here. You can't afford to disturb the Crown Prince."

He talked loudly and quickly, not giving Yu Qingmeng any chance to utter a word.

Meanwhile, he clenched Yu Qingmeng's hand and didn't let her go at all.

Grabbed by him, Yu Qingmeng lost her balance and fell on Yu Dong's body. As Yu Dong moved backward, he accidentally stepped on Qu Moying's dress and made her trip. Qu Moying let out a scream and fell back as Yu Chun behind her fell on the ground with her.

The two of them made a big scene on the corridor as if they were suddenly pushed by Yu Qingmeng. All the passers-by witnessed it, stopped moving, and looked at them in shock...

Chapter 110 The Bargaining Chip in Ming Xian'er's Hand

"Concubine Yu, why do you always want to give the Fourth Lady trouble? The Fourth Lady has nothing to do with you becoming Young Master Yongning's concubine. You made her lose her engagement already.

Why can't you just give her a break? What on earth do you want from the Fourth Lady?" Yu Dong let go of Yu Qingmeng's hand and stood before Qu Moying, showing his loyalty as a maid.

"I...I didn't mean to..." Yu Qingmeng panicked as she didn't expect things to become like this. Her plan was totally ruined because Yu Dong grabbed her hand tightly to stop her from kneeling.

"Concubine Yu, I know you and Young Master Yongning love each other. As you wished, you finally married the person you like. The position of a concubine may not be satisfying for you. Still, it has nothing to do with the Fourth Lady anymore. Even if you want to vent your displeasure on someone, you should go to Second Lady Duan's place. Why do you have to target the Fourth Lady?"

Yu Dong questioned in a loud voice, gazing sternly at tearful Yu Qingmeng.

Since Yu Dong was not restrained by female virtues and the Qu Family's rules, he felt free to say things that people didn't dare to say.

His words directly implied that Yu Qingmeng and Xu Lipeng hooked up with each other long ago, which was why the Marquis Yongning's Family broke off the engagement with the Qu Family. People all guessed that Fourth Lady Qu must have had some complaints since her fiancé was suddenly taken away by someone else. Yu Dong's words caused a great shock. Yet, they were also a hard confirmation of the seeming gentleman Young Master Yongning and Yu Qingmeng's dirty relationship. The rumors were all true.

It turned out that Young Master Yongning was just pretending that he didn't mind marrying Fourth Lady Qu.

Among the onlookers, some young masters couldn't help but chuckle sarcastically.

The elders in their families loved to use Young Master Yongning as their role model when scolding them for their misbehaviors. Although Fourth Lady Qu was far away from qualified to be his wife, Young Master Yongning still remained this improper engagement and kept the promise made by his parents. His loyalty and honor made him stand out among his peers. Thus, those elders always asked the youngsters to learn from Young Master Yongning, a real young gentleman in their eyes.

Now that Xu Lipeng's disguise was thoroughly peeled off, he seemed nothing different than his peers.

"No wonder she used to be a decent noble lady but got married as a concubine. She had no other choice!"

"She is indeed a pretty woman, probably better than Fourth Lady Qu. That's why they all say men always marry concubines for their appearances..."

"Xu Lipeng is more cunning than I thought..."

...

Some young masters passing by talked in complacency. When the elders scolded them for being a playboy in the future, they finally had a solid reason to argue back.

The perfect gentleman, Young Master Yongning, did something even more shameless than what they did. At least they dared to admit they were playboys while Young Master Yongning pretended to be perfect on the surface but did dirty things behind everyone's back.

At the same time, Xu Lipeng was hiding behind a tree with his face turning pale in anger. He gnashed his teeth and turned around to leave as quickly as possible. He couldn't show up right now.

Everything Yu Qingmeng did gained nothing but ruined his name. He thought he could use Yu Qingmeng's hand to teach Qu Moying a good lesson this time. All Yu Qingmeng needed to do was kneel in front of Qu Moying in public and let everyone see Qu Moying's indifferent and cruel attitude. He even hinted Yu Qingmeng to use the baby in her womb if it was necessary.

She could still bear more babies after losing this one. But if his name was ruined, it would be a bad start to his career, and there would be no way back.

The good reputation he had built for years kept being affected by Yu Qingmeng. At this critical moment when he was about to start his career, this was the recovery plan he came up with, agreed by Yu Qingmeng.

However, things totally went in a different direction. It was not Qu Moying but Yu Qingmeng who was put under pressure and became speechless in panic. Moreover, because Qu Moying's maid grabbed her hand, she couldn't even carry out her kneeling-and-egging plan.

Yu Qingmeng was indeed a useless woman.

He shook his sleeves in rage and strode away...

"Concubine Yu, the engagement between Young Master Xu and me was broken off. As his concubine, I'm not even a threat to you anymore. Why are you still trying to find me trouble?" holding Yu Chun's hand, Qu Moying stood up and questioned Yu Qingmeng coldly. Her face was still pale due to her illness, but she acted calmly.

Yu Qingmeng wanted to step closer but was blocked by Yu Dong.

"Concubine Yu, don't come any closer. If you really have something to tell me, say it right there. You don't look well today. If you approach me and anything bad happens to you, I can't afford it." Qu Moying gazed at Yu Qingmeng, whose haggard face told her that the owner had some tough days.

A trace of coldness flashed across Qu Moying's eyes. She didn't want to get involved with Xu Lipeng and Yu Qingmeng at all, but they still wanted to frame her to gain back what they had lost, which was the same in Yu's case.

Qu Moying curtsied to Yu and turned to walk down another path as Yu Dong stayed behind, still blocking Yu Qingmeng from approaching his master. After Qu Moying and Yu Chun left for a while, Yu Dong suddenly turned around to catch up with them. The way he ran away looked so flustered, as if Yu Qingmeng was some monster that he didn't want to be touched by.

"So, that's the truth! I'm impressed by Young Master Xu. His concubine doesn't seem like a decent lady either," those playboys smirked. People were not stupid, and they soon figured out Yu Qingmeng's evil intention after she suddenly showed up here to stand in Fourth Lady Qu's way.

Through watching their interaction, many people even concluded that Yu Qingmeng hooked up with Xu Lipeng long ago and might even get pregnant. Otherwise, why did Fourth Lady Qu avoid her as if she was untouchable?

Hearing people's discussion, Yu Qingmeng wished she could find a crack on the ground and hide inside. She turned around and ran away while covering her face and crying, making the rumors even more convincing.

It seemed that every woman in the Yu Family was malicious. Both the Second Madam of the Qu Family and the young woman who just ran away were the proofs of it. If a man married a woman from the Yu Family, she would probably bring trouble or even ruin the whole family just like her family did. People were determined to warn their family not to marry a woman from the Yu Family as a wife, let alone a concubine.

No one dared to cause any trouble in the Eastern Palace. After Yu Qingmeng left, the crowd scattered.

Qu Moying made a detour with her two maids and finally arrived at the Crown Princess's altar room.

The altar room was pretty quiet right now. Qu Moying didn't see the Crown Prince Pei Luo'an and Ji Youran, only Ming Xian'er, kneeling on the ground and burning paper money in a brazier.

Hearing the noise from the door, Ming Xian'er lifted her head and looked at the visitor with her red, swollen eyes. After recognizing Qu Moying, a trace of excitement showed up on her blank face but soon was hidden behind her sorrowful expression.

Holding a maid's hand, she stood up and moved her ankles. Then she walked to a desk, ignited some incense sticks, and passed them to Qu Moying.

Qu Moying took the incense sticks from her hands, bowed to the coffin, and walked up to the altar to insert the sticks into the burner.

Then she cast another gaze at the large, solemn coffin, only feeling ironic. Everyone was here to mourn for the deceased Crown Princess, but who knew there was nothing inside the coffin. It had been months

since she fell from the Linyuan Pavilion and died. Her body probably disappeared in the deep lake long ago, but Pei Luo'an didn't announce her death until now. What a loving husband he was!

Now, she was standing here, mourning for herself in the past life.

Looking at the empty coffin made her feel like everything was a joke where everyone was so pretentiously sorrowful. Even Ming Xian'er, who had never met Ji Hanyue before, looked so sad as if someone important to her had just died.

Everything was so fake but also felt so real.

"Fourth Lady Qu, don't be too sad. The Crown Princess in heaven won't be happy seeing you so upset," Ming Xian'er comforted her softly. Her voice was hoarse, clearly because of too much crying.

Qu Moying's cold eyes fell on the coffin in the center. If she had enough power, she would destroy this fake altar room long ago and not even need to stand here to mourn for herself. The honored title of the Crown Princess was such a burden to her family and even cost their lives. She was determined to take her revenge, even at the cost of her life again.

However, her life still has some value to her right now. Before everything was ready, she would not give it up yet.

With her current identity, her death wouldn't even make a tiny difference for Pei Luo'an. If she died right now, the world would just have one more poor person who died of injustice.

Her eyes slowly moved onto Ming Xian'er.

Feeling her sharp gaze, Ming Xian'er subconsciously took a step back, somehow having a sense of fear. She swallowed nervously to make up her mind and whispered to Qu Moying, "Fourth Lady Qu, do you want to take a look at thing left by the Crown Princess?"

She didn't have any method to contact this Fourth Lady Qu, who would go back home tomorrow. As a concubine in the Eastern Palace, it was almost impossible for Ming Xian'er to meet her again after she left. She knew this was her last chance.

Ming Xian'er was sure that after this chance, Ji Youran would keep a close eye on her, and any of her strange behavior would be reported to Ji Youran. In the end, she still didn't have a way out. Soon, there would be many other beauties marrying into the Eastern Palace. Who knew if the Crown Prince would still remember her after half a year? She couldn't just wait and do nothing.

She had to break in the funeral before to let the Crown Prince see her, or she would lose her life. To make up for her disrespect for the deceased Crown Princess, she volunteered to guard the coffin. But right now, she had to grab every chance to find herself a backer, and Fourth Lady Qu was the ideal one.

"Who are you? What do you want to show me?" Qu Moying said frigidly.

"Fourth Lady Qu, I'm His Royal Highness's concubine. Please follow me," said Ming Xian'er. She was no longer just a servant anymore since Ji Youran acknowledged her identity yesterday. It was reasonable for her to introduce herself as the Crown Prince's concubine in public.

Qu Moying turned around to look at her and then glanced over other maids present. One of them lifted her head and stared at Ming Xian'er in shock, clearly not expecting her to address herself this way.

This maid should be Ji Youran's pawn, but she didn't dare to say anything right now. After all, making any noise in front of the Crown Princess's coffin would be a severe crime.

Qu Moying followed Ming Xian'er to a side room. She would go back home tomorrow, so she deliberately came here to meet Ming Xian'er today. She believed Ming Xian'er would have some surprise for her.

Ming Xian'er had the nerve to break into the Crown Princess's funeral and accuse Ji Youran in public, which meant she was not a stupid girl. The first step was done, and it was time for Qu Moying to make the next move. There were not many people in the Eastern Palace who could help her. Since Ming Xian'er started it this time, she must have a bargaining chip in hand. Qu Moying wanted to see if it had some value to her...