

## Noble Wife 121

### Chapter 121 A Couple Looking for Their Daughter

Qu Zhizhen's ankle was not severely injured. He recovered pretty quickly and could walk already. As long as he didn't walk too fast, he wouldn't even feel pain.

"My lady, one day I saw a strange couple waiting at the back door of our mansion. Then Fourth Lady's private maid named Yu Dong came out and talked to them. They seemed to have an argument. Then Yu Dong handed them a small bag and urged them to leave."

"I found the whole thing very weird. I heard only a wet nurse was staying with Fourth Lady to take care of her. It should be people like a couple who served her. After Yu Dong left, I went to ask the old maid who guards the back door. She told me that this couple came several times these two days. And...and..."

"And what?" Qu Qiuyan asked in shock.

Behind the wall, Qu Zhizhen's attention was caught by the maid's words too.

"And the old maid told me that Yu Dong has been giving things to that couple. It started from a small bag and then became bigger. It sounded like Yu Dong tried to let the couple go away and never come back again. Yu Dong even threatened them that she would report them to the officials if they came again. Yu Dong was just saying it but never did it. Since the old maid stood a bit far away from them, she only heard a few things..."

"It sounded like this couple was here to look for their daughter."

Qu Qiuyan was so shocked by Qing Ju's last few words that she even fell into silence for a while. Then she said, "Does that mean they are Yu Dong's parents?"

No one would care about a maid's family background, especially Qu Moying's maid. It was said that all her maids were recruited by herself.

One of them was even picked up by her on the street.

“If they are Yu Dong’s parents, there should be nothing to hide about. Moreover, a maid like Yu Dong shouldn’t have so many things to give to other people.” Qing Ju shook her head, looking confused. “I don’t know what was happening either. But the old maid was sure about one thing – that couple kept mentioning the Fourth Lady.”

“Don’t...don’t tell me...” Qu Qiuyan seemed to have a guess in mind and took a deep breath in shock.

“My lady, don’t tell me you never find the Fourth Lady weird. She never gets close to anyone in the mansion after coming back and even tries to frame you and the Second Madam. She doesn’t even act like the Second Master’s daughter. Maybe...maybe...” Qing Ju stopped talking and looked around with a flustered expression.

“That’s enough. This is nonsense. Father should know the truth better than anyone. Let’s leave here,” Qu Qiuyan pulled a long face and said.

“Yes, my lady. I’m only saying it in front of you. I will never tell outsiders about it.” Qing Ju nodded and left the parking lot with Qu Qiuyan.

Behind the wall, Qu Zhizhen had stayed silent, frowning. The young servants behind him lowered their heads to hide their expression from Qu Zhizhen.

The Fourth Lady might be a fake one? Was it what they meant? But after a second thought, the servants all found this theory acceptable since no one had ever seen the Fourth Lady’s face since she grew up in the village. Someone else might have pretended to be her since the Qu Family was still considered a noble family in the capital.

But this was too shocking!

How did the fake Fourth Lady sneak into the village and replace the real one?

“My lady, someone was at the side door connecting the parking lot and the outer yard! I heard many footsteps approaching, but they all stopped once you and the Third Lady started talking. When you left,

they were still staying there,” once Qu Moying and Yu Dong got on the carriage, Yu Dong immediately reported to Qu Moying. He had a good hearing and noticed Qu Zhizhen’s footsteps at once.

“I know. It should be my father.” Qu Moying nodded. Her bad eyesight made her sense of hearing keener than ordinary people’s. When Yu Dong reminded her, she immediately felt some people were at the door and heard a cracking sound of a branch. Someone probably stepped on a branch on the ground and broke it by accident at that moment.

“My lady, then why did you not treat the Third Lady better just now?” Yu Dong asked in confusion. Since the Fourth Lady knew her father was behind the wall, why she didn’t collaborate with the Third Lady and pretend they had a close relationship?

“Qu Qiuyan is so dedicated to showing everyone that I’m a fake. I’m giving her a chance to do so!” Qu Moying’s lips curled into a sarcastic smile. After she knew the conversation between Qu Qiuyan and Pei Yusheng that day, she had already expected Qu Qiuyan to lead things in this direction. She might as well add some fuel to the fire.

Qu Moying didn’t respect Qu Zhizhen as her father anyway.

He never asked about her all the years when Yu left her in the village and even let Yu frame her. Father was merely a title for Qu Zhizhen. Qu Zhizhen never cared about Qu Moying, nor did she care about him.

“My lady, if the Second Master believes you are fake, will he do anything to you?” Yu Dong hesitated for a second and asked.

“Even if he doesn’t believe it, he won’t defend me anyway. What’s more, he will even watch Yu and her daughter insulting me and framing me. But if I still have value for him, he doesn’t care if I’m his real daughter or not,” Qu Moying said ironically.

These days, the more she thought about Qu Zhizhen, the more she felt he was just a cold-hearted person. His indifferent attitude was not only toward Qu Moying’s mother Yue but also toward his own daughter. No matter what, Qu Moying was just a powerless girl who only needed the Qu Family to pay for her dowry when getting married. It was so unnecessary to make his ex-wife’s daughter suffer so much.

She was just a blind and dumb daughter who didn't have any value for him. The only useful engagement she had had long become Yu Qingmeng's because of Yu's effort. Or to say, even if she married Xu Lipeng, she was still an abandoned blind girl who had no value for him.

In Qu Zhizhen's mind, even his niece Yu Qingmeng was probably more useful than Qu Moying. After all, Yu Qingmeng grew up in the Qu's Mansion and was close to the Qu Family. If Yu Qingmeng could become Young Master Yongning's wife, she would be much more valuable than Qu Moying in the same position. Moreover, Xu Lipeng liked Yu Qingmeng instead of Qu Moying.

For this reason alone, his niece Yu Qingmeng had much more value than his own daughter Qu Moying.

Qu Zhizhen treated his ex-wife so coldly, probably for the same reason. Maybe, in the beginning, he wanted to like her as his daughter. However, Yu made Qu Moying blind and sent her away from the Qu's Mansion. Even the tutor said Qu Moying was just an ugly and dumb girl who couldn't learn anything. In Qu Zhizhen's eyes, Qu Moying had lost her last bit of value, and this was probably the real reason why he gave up on her!

It was just his reason was too cold-hearted and selfish.

Meanwhile, Qu Qiuyan's biggest value for Qu Zhizhen was Lord Jing's affection for her. Qu Qiuyan marrying Lord Jing meant more power for the Qu Family.

For Qu Zhizhen, everything was about one thing – benefit.

Since then, why would he care if his daughter was close to him and respected him as her father?

"My lady, will the Second Master investigate you?" Yu Dong felt pity for his master, thinking Vice Minister Qu was really selfish.

"It's okay. Let them take their time to do whatever they want. I'm looking forward to the fake identity they make up for me," Qu Moying said carelessly. There was no need to be flustered about the situation. She was sure about one thing – there was never a fake Qu Moying. She had always been the real one.

She would see how Yu and her daughter made her become a fake.

“My lady, I’ve been giving money to that couple as you said. But that couple clearly doesn’t hold a good intention. They are even unwilling to leave.” Yu Dong nodded and started to mention the thing Qu Moying asked him to deal with at the back door. Once he talked about it, he immediately felt irritated.

He found the whole thing just absurd. That couple lived in the village. They somehow got the address and came to look for Qu Moying, asking for her help to find them jobs. Qu Moying indeed recognized them and agreed to help them ask around. She asked them to wait for some time, but they kept coming to look for her, saying that they lived outside and didn’t have clothes to wear.

Qu Moying then asked Yu Dong to hand them some clothes, but they came again shamelessly. So, Yu Dong had to give them what they wanted again.

Qu Moying only thought this was just a small accident, but now everything was clear.

They came twice these two days. Apparently, this was prepared for her.

“Ignore them if they come again. Send people to investigate them and see if they once had a daughter who went missing,” said Qu Moying as her eyes darkened. Yu and her daughter surely did some hard work to prepare such an annoying couple for her.

If she didn’t hear Qu Qiuyan and Lord Jing’s conversation, she wouldn’t figure it out so quickly.

This was a trap set exclusively for her, and they probably started to make the preparations when she was still in the Eastern Palace.

Naturally, Qu Qiuyan must’ve mentioned it when Qu Zhizhen hid behind the wall before.

“My lady, you mean...” Hearing Qu Moying’s words, Yu Dong understood it immediately. His face grew solemn as he nodded at her. “Don’t worry, my lady, leave it to me. I will gather all the information about this couple as soon as possible.”

As they talked, the carriage gradually slowed down. Yue Wenhan's voice came from the front, "Cousin, here we are! Let's wait here for a second."

"Thank you, Cousin!" Qu Moying nodded and said to the window.

Yue Wenhan jumped off his horse outside the carriage and passed the reins to a young servant. Then he asked another one to give his name card to the person guarding the gate. The gateman had already recognized Yue Wenhan since he came several times these days. Every time Yue Wenhan came to see the earl but ended up not meeting him. The order the gateman received from the Ji Family was telling the First Master immediately when Mr. Yue arrived.

The gateman rushed inside. Soon, the First Master of the Ji Family, Ji Yong'an, strode out from inside. He hurriedly walked up to Yue Wenhan and bowed to him, "Mr. Yue!"

At this moment, white cloth was hung everywhere in the Earl Ling'an's Mansion while Ji Yong'an had put on mourning clothes. His eyes looked red, and his voice sounded hoarse like he had suffered from a great shock.

But everything in Qu Moying's eyes was just an ironic joke, stained by blood...

## Chapter 122 Looking for a Past, Loyal Servant

"Good to see you, First Master Ji!" Yue Wenhan bowed back and said frigidly, "I received a message from your family saying that my uncle suddenly passed away. So, I came here to see if you need any help. Please don't mind me if I've done anything inappropriate!"

"That's very kind of you, Mr. Yue. Please follow me inside." Ji Yong'an cast a glance at the carriage next to Yue Wenhan, wondering who was inside. Yue Wenhan hadn't married yet, so he had no idea who it could be. But it was not the right time to ask now.

Ji Yong'an led Yue Wenhan into the gate in person and accompanied him to the place where the carriages parked. Then he saw Qu Moying getting off the carriage and was stunned for a moment.

Qu Moying's outfit was different than ordinary people's. The long veil on her face could let people immediately figure out her identity. Even for people who had never seen her before, they could tell who she was right away.

Qu Moying got off the carriage, walked up to Ji Yong'an, and curtsied elegantly. Ji Yong'an was counted as her elder, so she couldn't neglect the formality.

But no one could see those eyes behind the veil filled with cold hatred!

"My cousin wants to come and help too, so I brought her here. We both wanted to visit our uncle but couldn't even see him for the last time when he was still alive. Can we go see him right now?" Yue Wenhan crossed his hands behind his back and asked Ji Yong'an while staring at him coldly.

Qu Moying quietly stepped back. With Yue Wenhan here, she didn't need to be the talking one.

Yue Wenhan's words made Ji Yong'an's heart pound in his chest. See him? How? They had nothing to let Yue Wenhan see!

"It's not the time to see him now because we are still cleaning him up. He had been sick for too long. He even said himself that if he passed away, he didn't want people to see him. He had been a brave and robust man for his entire life. It will be really saddening to see him...like that..." Ji Yong'an started to sob. He quickly turned aside to wipe his tears, looking sorrowful.

"Do you mean you won't let people see his body?" Yue Wenhan frowned at him and asked.

Usually, close relatives and friends ought to be able to see the body for the last time before it was buried. Yue Wenhan's relationship with the Ji Family was not too close but not too strange either. If he wanted to see his uncle's dead body, they should let him see it.

But it would also make sense that he was rejected since he didn't contact the Ji Family very often. Moreover, he was just a youngster for them.

However, Yue Wenhan still found it strange. Because they had prevented him from meeting Earl Ling'an many times before, and now they even rejected him again after the earl passed away.

He worked in the Dali Temple and was an investigation expert. For this kind of thing, he also could react quickly. Apparently, the Ji Family just didn't want him to see Earl Ling'an. But he couldn't figure out the reason.

It would be so absurd if Earl Ling'an died because Yue Wenhan wanted to see him for the last time.

This didn't make any sense, and it was impossible! Yue Wenhan dropped this idea immediately. He would never consider that Ji Yongming was actually killed by the Crown Prince long ago. Nor would he think that the Crown Prince covered Ji Yongming and Ji Hanyue's deaths up to hide his own crimes.

"My brother had been a great hero for his entire life, and he was so unwilling to end up like this. He often told us that he didn't want other people to see him so sick and haggard if he passed away. Mr. Yue, I hope you can respect the wish of the deceased. This is his last wish!" Ji Yongming said while wiping his tears.

The grief he showed left Yue Wenhan no space to argue back. If Yue Wenhan insisted, that would be a disrespect for the dead, let alone it was his uncle.

Yue Wenhan fell into silence for a few seconds and said, "Since then, my cousin and I will stay here to help you with the preparation today. We also brought some candles with us. You can directly use them if you need."

"Thank you, Mr. Yue. I really appreciate it," Ji Yong'an stopped wiping tears and said gratefully. "Fourth Lady Qu, please head to the inner yard to have some rest first."

Qu Moying glanced over Ji Yong'an and curtsied to him again. Then she followed an old maid to the inner yard.

The familiar environment and plants on the way reminded Qu Moying of the painful past and filled her eyes with resentment. The only family who treated her whole-heartedly turned out only to be her father and her younger sister.



But they were both gone, and this place was no longer her home!

Coming back again, she had already become Fourth Lady Qu, not Second Lady Ji, the prideful Crown Princess.

She suddenly stopped behind some blooming peony flowers.

The old maid didn't dare to urge her, only standing still and waiting.

"The earth here looks new to me. Were there any other flowers planted here before?" Qu Moying stared at the peony flowers in front of her and asked softly, only her smile cold. There used to be orchids here, and she loved to play an instrument and watch the beautiful blossom of orchids when she had free time. Not far away should be a pavilion, but it was gone too.

They really cleaned up every trace of her family.

"There used to be orchids here, but the plants all died somehow. Then the Second Madam ordered to plant peony flowers, which were the First Lady's favorite," the old maid gave her a perfectly polite answer with a smile. If Qu Moying didn't know the truth, she would never know that the old maid lied.

"What is there?" Qu Moying lifted her hand and pointed at where the pavilion used to be. "That place seems to be just renovated. What was there?"

As Qu Moying talked, she walked in that direction curiously. The old maid tried to block her, but scared by Yu Dong's sharp glare, she immediately gave up on her attempt.

The old maid had never seen a maid so aggressive as Yu Dong.

Qu Moying walked in front of the place and only saw a few big floor tiles left. The pavilion that used to be on top was long gone. This was the place where she killed her time by playing an instrument and looking at the flowers. Those orchids would still be blooming even in autumn or early winter.

She would let people surround the pavilion with some heaters and enjoy some cups of tea when the weather was cold.

The past unfolded as she heard her younger sister's voice in her mind.

"Sis, I love this pavilion. We should come here more often."

"Sis, these flowers are so pretty. I want to pick some and take them back."

"Sis..."

Her cute voice was still lingering in the air, but that little figure was long gone. She thought about the cruel and bloody scene Ji Youran described to her the next moment. She could feel all the blood freezing in her body because of the pain and the hatred that almost tore her heart apart.

Then, the blood started to flow in her body again, with bloodthirsty will and anger crawling through her veins.

"What was here?" Qu Moying looked up at the old maid and said frigidly.

"There...used to be an old pavilion here...but it was broken. So they plan to build another one," the old maid stuttered. She didn't expect Fourth Lady Qu to wander around here instead of heading to the inner yard. As she couldn't figure out Qu Moying's intention, her answers became more discreet.

"The Ji Family seems to have changed everything here!" said Qu Moying as she strode forward. The end of this path was not the inner yard.

"Fourth Lady Qu, we can't get to the inner yard through this path." The old maid didn't have time to worry about Yu Dong and hurriedly stopped Qu Moying.

"You don't want me to go there? Can I just go there and come back later?" Qu Moying asked coldly. Of course, she knew where this path led to, and actually, that place was her real destination today.

"No, it's not like that. Fourth Lady Qu, you haven't greeted the Old Lady and the First Madam yet..." the old maid explained disjointedly, feeling inexplicable aggression from the young lady in front of her. Somehow, she got the same feeling when she faced Second Lady Ji before. However, since Second Lady Ji was a dignified lady, the future Crown Princess at that time, Fourth Lady Qu should be incomparable with her.

Even so, the old maid couldn't help but feel nervous.

"I'll go greet them later. I want to take a walk around first," Qu Moying's voice was cold.

Yu Dong walked up and grabbed the old maid to pull her aside. The old maid tried to struggle, but once her eyes met Yu Dong's cold ones, she started to shiver immediately. Did those eyes really belong to a lady's private maid? Why did she grow fear as if she would be killed by this maid? She even lost some strength in her hands and legs for some odd reason.

Qu Moying continued to pace ahead, with the old maid following behind. She walked along the path and arrived at a yard door. The yard looked old and shabby, locked up tightly with grass growing wildly around, but the words carved on the door could still be seen clearly. It was apparently an abandoned yard.

Only three months had passed. It used to be an old and empty yard but taken good care of because this place belonged to Ji Hanyue's mother. After her mother passed away, Ji Hanyue still asked people to maintain the yard and clean it up regularly as if someone still lived inside. However, right now, the yard looked like being abandoned for years.

"Fourth Lady Qu, this is the yard that used to...belong to our deceased First Madam," the old maid told her reluctantly. She could tell Fourth Lady Qu wanted to walk inside and take a look. But if the Old Lady and the First Madam knew about it, they would definitely kill her.

"So, this is my aunt's yard. How come it becomes like this? Is there anyone staying inside? I heard from my cousin before that people have been taking care of my aunt's yard," Qu Moying slightly squinted her eyes and asked, staring at the yard door.

"There's someone taking care of this yard, but she is a bit too old. Maybe the work is too much for her to finish," the old maid explained with a forced smile.

"But I heard from my cousin that a group of people should be taking care of this yard. How come there is only one now? What about the others?" Qu Moying asked frigidly as her eyes glanced over a small side door. The door was slightly opened as if someone had just passed through, which was a relief for her. That person should still be here. Nothing seemed to have happened to her.

"Other people...will help too, but Granny Zhou is in charge. She said she could handle it by herself, so everything was left to her... If she can't finish her work, the First Madam will send other people to help her," the old maid said nervously. Even though Fourth Lady Qu was wearing a veil, the old maid could still feel her cold gaze falling on her face and sending a shiver down her spine.

"Granny Zhou? Then where is she?" Qu Moying asked slowly.

"I...I don't know." Questioned by Qu Moying, the old maid became more flustered.

"Let's go inside and take a look," said Qu Moying as she stepped forward. Since she was already back here, she had to take a look at her mother's yard. Because she knew something that other people didn't know...

## Chapter 123 Persuasion

"Fourth Lady Qu, you can't just go inside like that. You need the First Madam's permission first," the old maid said with an awkward face, but she had to try everything to stop Qu Moying.

"I just want to take a look. Or you can go back to report to the First Madam right now?" Qu Moying said carelessly.

The old maid hesitated.

If she went back for the report now, no one could keep an eye here. Even if Fourth Lady Qu went inside, she wouldn't know about it and would probably be scolded by the First Madam. When the people sent by the First Madam got here, Fourth Lady Qu would probably have seen whatever she wanted to see.

"I...I..." The old maid was a clever one, but even she was confused by Qu Moying's unpredictable behavior

"Alright, the lady just wants to take a look. Nothing will happen. If you report to the First Madam and come back, the lady will probably be done already. Even if the First Madam gives her permission later, the lady won't be willing to take a look again," Yu Dong chimed in impatiently.

Yu Dong suggested that they wouldn't be waiting for the old maid to get permission first and then go inside.

Once the old maid reported it, she would be scolded anyway. But if she didn't say anything about it, Fourth Lady Qu and her maid wouldn't tell others either. After all, they just wanted to take a look.

After a second thought, the maid immediately stepped aside and made space for Qu Moying.

Qu Moying walked toward the small side door that was slightly open. She bit her lip to calm herself down and pushed the door open. The door squeaked and made a dull sound as the hinge joint had rusted. Only a few months had passed, but everything inside looked bleak, as if they were covered by thick dust.

The yard was spacious as one of the main yards in the Earl Ling'an's Mansion, but it was a bit far away from the center since Ji Hanyue's mother was not favored by Old Lady Ji.

Qu Moying pressed her lips into a straight line to suppress the sore feeling from her eyes. Her eyes fell on the peach trees that were blooming beautifully now on the right side of the yard. This kind of peach tree didn't grow in the capital. Her father found them at the border and took them back as a gift for her mother. They were still taken good care of.

At this time of every year, she would come here to watch those pretty flowers with her younger sister. Those flowers were still as stunning as usual, but everyone around her was gone.

She paced under the peach trees and looked at the flowers. Somehow, her younger sister's laughter rang in the pink cloud. The happy memories gave her a hard strike on the heart, like a sharp blade stabbing her again and again.

"You..." The side door was pushed open as an old maid in her forties came inside. The hesitant look on her face showed that she didn't recognize them.

Qu Moying's eyes fell on the old maid in a plain outfit as a trace of excitement crossed her face. She knew this old maid called Granny Zhou because she used to serve her mother. Ever since her mother passed away, Granny Zhou lived in this yard and cared for everything here. Today, she came specifically for Granny Zhou.

After becoming Qu Moying, she got to know the other side of some things.

Qu Moying turned around and looked at Granny Zhou. "This is?" she sized the old maid up and asked.

The old maid following her hurriedly walked up and introduced with a smile, "Fourth Lady Qu, this is the maid who used to serve the Second Madam. Since the Second Madam passed away, she stayed here as a doorkeeper."

Then the old maid threw a glare at Granny Zhou, "This is the Fourth Lady from Vice Minister Qu's family. Hurry and greet her!"

Granny Zhou used to be the chief granny working for Ji Hanyue's mother, but now she had become a doorkeeper in other people's mouths. Even an ordinary old maid working for Xiao dared to glare at her, which saddened Qu Moying more. She would never believe this scene if she didn't witness it after the rebirth.

On her wedding day, Xiao kept promising her that she would take care of her younger sister and her mother's yards for her. She said she would keep them clean and neat as usual. If Ji Hanyue felt homesick, she could come back to take a look. Xiao would be willing to take any punishment if she didn't keep her promise.

She felt like she heard these words yesterday, but now she had already become Qu Moying.

After Ji Hanyue died and Ji Youran climbed up, it was meaningless for Xiao to keep her promise and take good care of Granny Zhou and her mother's yard.

"Fourth Lady Qu?" Granny Zhou was caught in a daze. Then she looked up at Qu Moying excitedly as tears formed in her eyes. "Is this Second Madam Qu's daughter, Fourth Lady Qu?"

"Yes, this is Fourth Lady Qu, given birth by Vice Minister Qu's ex-wife." Yu Dong didn't know the reason for Granny Zhou's excitement, but he still answered her question for Qu Moying.

"It's...It's really Fourth Lady Qu. I...I..." Granny Zhou shivered in shock and joy while gazing at Qu Moying. "I used to be Second Madam Qu's granny and moved into the Qu's Mansion with her."

"You are...my mother's granny from the Yue Family?" Qu Moying asked, looking surprised.

The old maid aside was confused too and chimed in to scold Granny Zhou, "what nonsense are you talking about? This is Fourth Lady Qu from Vice Minister Qu's family. She is not a lady from our family."

"I'm really Second Madam Qu's granny from her family. She passed away after giving birth to Fourth Lady Qu. Then Second Madam Ji visited the Qu Family, had an argument with them, and took me with her," Granny Zhou started to wipe her tears.

"Why did Second Madam Ji take you away with her?" Qu Moying thought for a second and asked doubtfully.

"The Qu Family said I didn't take good care of Second Madam Qu and made her have a difficult birth that took her life. They wanted me to pay them back with my life. Second Madam Ji was too angry with them and took me away," Granny Zhou told them the whole thing in tears.

Technically, she indeed didn't belong to the Ji Family. She was just an old servant from the Yue Family who temporarily stayed in the Earl Ling'an's Mansion.

Yu Dong and the old maid looked at each other in shock.

“Since Second Madam Ji had passed away and you are my mother’s old servant, how about you come to serve me?” Qu Moying calmed herself down, sized Granny Zhou up, and suggested.

Her words alerted the old maid aside, making her realize the severity of the situation. She hurriedly walked up and said, “Fourth Lady Qu, I can’t make the decision on her things. I have to ask the First Madam about it.”

This was supposed to be a casual walk that no one would know about. But right now, the old maid had no choice but to tell the First Madam about it. She felt flustered and regretful since the First Madam would surely blame it on her.

“I...I want to guard this yard for Second Madam Ji. Second Madam Ji is gone; the Crown Princess is gone. Even...even the Third Lady and Earl Ling’an are gone...” Granny Zhou choked in her tears and couldn’t even finish her words. What she wanted to say was simple – Earl Ling’an’s whole family was gone.

“Since everyone in my uncle’s family passed away, what’s the point of guarding this place, Granny Zhou? Will they care about this place because you stay here?” Qu Moying pointed at the yard. Anyone could tell that this yard was shabby and abandoned. Granny Zhou was the only one trying to take care of this place.

But she was just a servant, and no one would listen to her.

A chief granny ended up being a doorkeeper.

Granny Zhou started to hesitate because Qu Moying was right. She being here or not wouldn’t make a difference, but she was so reluctant to leave this place. After all, she had spent years here, even more than the time she spent in the Qu’s Mansion.

But she had no reason to reject Fourth Lady Qu’s offer. Moreover, she always wanted to return the things left by Second Madam Qu to Fourth Lady Qu. She didn’t do it before because she wanted to wait for good timing and wait for Fourth Lady Qu to grow older. It seemed that she had to return them now, or she might lose them.



Her demotion and her masters' deaths caused disrespect from other servants in the Earl Ling'an's Mansion. Some people with evil intentions even wandered around this yard and tried to frame her. If she lost Second Madam Qu's belongings by accident, she couldn't pay back to Second Madam Qu and Fourth Lady Qu.

These things were crucial. Thus she had been trying to find a good chance to give them to Fourth Lady Qu. Now the opportunity presented itself.

Seeing Granny Zhou's hesitant behavior, Qu Moying persuaded her softly, "Granny Zhou, since my uncle and his family members are all dead, people left here are all from Second Master Ji's family. What's the point of staying here? My mother used to be your master, and it makes sense for you to serve me. Even the Ji Family won't have a rightful reason to reject my request. Don't worry about the Qu Family. I will protect you."

It was not hard to guess Qu Zhizhen's intention of killing Granny Zhou. He just wanted to pass the buck to someone else and cover up his guilt. Otherwise, all the rumors would target Yu, who gave birth to a daughter and a son even earlier than Qu Moying's mother.

Now, the situation had changed. Qu Zhizhen wouldn't dig into the past again because it would cause people's suspicion. With Qu Moying's current power, it would be easy for her to protect Granny Zhou in the Qu's Mansion.

However, this was truly the end for Earl Ling'an and his family.

Understanding Qu Moying's meaning, Granny Zhou couldn't help but start to cry again. The gentle, elegant Second Lady and the cute, clever Third Lady were both dead. Even if she continued to stay here, she didn't have the power to protect this yard. A few days ago, some old maids had visited here and said the Ji Family would renovate this place soon. They would change this place into the First Young Master's yard because it was perfectly distanced from the outer yard.

But it was Second Madam Ji's yard, and everyone agreed to keep it before.

Granny Zhou had no power to fight against their renovation plan since she was just a servant. Without Earl Ling'an, the Crown Princess, and the Third Lady, no one could protect this place.

After Second Madam Ji's yard was gone, it was indeed meaningless for her to stay here.

After a second thought, Granny Zhou nodded hard in grief, "Okay. I will do as you say, Fourth Lady."

"Then go pack your things up!" Qu Moying squinted her eyes and nodded.

Granny Zhou wiped her last tears and nodded. Then she turned around and headed to her room to pack her things.

The old maid following Qu Moying became very anxious. Clearly, she would become the one who took the blame. "Fourth Lady Qu, Granny Zhou used to be the chief granny serving Second Madam Ji. How can she leave like this?"

Qu Moying cast a cold glance at her and curled up her lips, "I will talk about it with First Madam Ji."

"Fourth Lady Qu, this is..." The old maid still tried to convince Qu Moying but was directly interrupted by Yu Dong. "It's not your place, but First Madam Ji's to make the decision. This thing is over for now. I heard the Crown Princess's yard was not far ahead. How about we go take a look there?"

Hearing Yu Dong's words, the old maid was so scared that even her lips were trembling...

## Chapter 124 An Old Piece Played Once Again

The only place in the Earl Ling'an's Mansion that nobody was allowed to visit today was the Crown Princess's old yard. The Second Madam had warned every servant that they couldn't take anyone around that place since the Crown Prince would be there. If anyone disturbed the Crown Prince, the whole Ji Family would be blamed for it.

Moreover, the Crown Prince's presence in the Earl Ling'an's Mansion could not be known by any outsiders. Because he shouldn't show up here. Knowing the severity of the situation, the old maid

started to sweat as her lips kept trembling. She was so scared by Fourth Lady Qu's intention and didn't even know how to stop her at the moment.

She finally realized that weak as Fourth Lady Qu looked, she was not as obedient to the rules of etiquette as other noble ladies.

An ordinary servant like her was not able to stop this determined lady, let alone under the glare of another maid who looked fierce. The old maid even had a feeling that if she said something wrong, Fourth Lady Qu's maid would rush over and beat her up directly. She couldn't believe an official's family hired a maid like this who acted aggressively, more like people working for Earl Ling'an.

"Fourth Lady Qu, you really can't go to the Crown Princess's old yard. This is the Second Madam's order... Actually, this is also His Royal Highness and Her Royal Highness's order. They don't want anyone to disturb the Crown Princess's peace. If...if...then it will become a serious problem," the old maid said while shivering with fear.

"The Crown Princess is my cousin. What's wrong with me visiting my cousin's old yard? Do you mean His Royal Highness doesn't allow me to take a look at the things left here by my cousin?" Qu Moying raised her eyes as she pulled a cold face. "So many things have happened in the Earl Ling'an's Mansion, and each of them is about my uncle's family. Why do they still not allow it at this moment? Is there any secret in her yard?" asked Qu Moying.

Some things wouldn't be suspected before someone pointed them out.

Ji Hanyue's father "died" today; Ji Hanyue "died" a few days ago; her younger sister "died" a few months ago. Their deaths all seemed to be accidents and unrelated. Moreover, Ji Hanyue's death looked so natural and flawless due to the Crown Prince's build-up, so did Earl Ling'an's death. The only surprising thing was Ji Hanyue's younger sister's death.

But among the three dead people, Ji Hanyue's younger sister was the most insignificant one. Even though she died, no one would pay much attention to it, while Ji Hanyue and her father's death both seemed natural for other people.

But the fact was the three of them died on the same night.

Qu Moying would reveal the truth little by little. Now, her plan was to mention the coincidence of Earl Ling'an's family's death to catch some people's attention.

After all, it was impossible that the Crown Prince didn't have any enemies in the capital!

Qu Moying's tone was stern, making the old maid scared. The old maid was anxiously sweating but still didn't dare to let Qu Moying go.

Qu Moying didn't want to spend time negotiating with her anymore. She looked at Yu Dong to signal him.

Yu Dong walked up and pulled the old maid aside by grabbing her sleeve. His ruthless gaze fell on the old maid's face like a venomous snake crawling across. The cold and creepy feeling sent down a chill through the old maid's spine, stopping her from moving an inch.

After a few seconds, the old maid came back to her senses and realized Qu Moying had already headed to the Crown Princess's old yard with her maid. She turned around and ran toward the Second Madam's place as quickly as possible. This matter was too serious for her to cover up.

Qu Moying walked on the path that she couldn't be more familiar with, from the First Madam's yard to Ji Hanyue's yard. She had been to this path many times as Ji Hanyue, especially during the three years after her mother passed away. Whenever she had free time, she loved to wander in her mother's yard or sit in the study for a little while.

Her mother was a reader, so she had a study next to her embroidery room. It was one of Ji Hanyue's favorite places in the mansion.

Even since her mother passed away, she still maintained the habit of visiting her mother's study until she married into the Eastern Palace.

She stood outside her old yard and looked inside. It seemed under much better care than her mother's yard, still clean and neat as if she never left. Apparently, someone had still taken care of it.

The yard door was slightly open. It was quiet inside, with no one around.

She opened the door and walked into the quiet yard. Everything had stayed the same as they were before her wedding. The only things missing were those red ribbons hung all over the place. The whole yard was deadly silent.

It was more like a yard where the person living here just died!

Qu Moying bit her lip hard to suppress the pain in her heart, but her eyes still turned red as tears wetted them.

She had spent so many happy years here in her past life. Yet, she ended up dying below the Linyuan Pavilion in the Eastern Palace. Her death was announced months later. What an absurd ending!

Pei Luo'an truly spent so much effort to make her death look like the most surprising accident.

"Stay outside. I want to spend some time alone," Qu Moying said to Yu Dong.

Yu Dong wanted to stay with her, but he still nodded at her after a second thought and walked behind a tree outside the yard. He could tell that the Fourth Lady was sorrowful. Yu Dong didn't feel strange since the Crown Princess was the only few people who treated the Fourth Lady kindly. It was natural for the lady to feel sad when seeing the Crown Princess's old yard.

Qu Moying pushed open the heavy door of her old main room. Everything was the same as before.

She picked up a book that was casually put on the coach. It was the one she had read before. In this room, time had been frozen on the day she left.

She then saw a guqin on a table aside and walked over. She knelt down, put her hands on it, and started to pluck it gently. The strings vibrated, still sounding clean and crispy like a flowing stream.

Qu Moying calmed herself down and slid her fingers once again on the strings as her favorite piece rang in the room.

Beautiful music bloomed under her fingers' movement as she ticked, rubbed, and plucked the strings. For a moment, the past unfolded...

"Who...Who are you?" A trembling voice suddenly came from behind. She pressed hard on the guqin to stop playing while feeling the numbness and pain caused by the strings' vibration. She would never forget this voice that belonged to Pei Luo'an!

Pei Luo'an walked out of the inner room and looked at the girl in front of him in shock. She was wearing light-colored clothes, kneeling beside the guqin. Although there was no butterfly pattern on her outfit, he still found this slender back and the piece she played familiar. Something was screaming in his heart.

Unconsciously, his voice started to tremble.

Qu Moying didn't expect to meet Pei Luo'an here. Cold, bloodthirsty rage gushed out of her heart, but she soon suppressed it. She asked coldly without turning around, "This is my cousin's main room. Who are you?"

Cousin?

Pei Luo'an returned to his senses as he finally noticed the long veil lying on Qu Moying's body. It turned out to be his illusion that this person looked like Ji Hanyue. Then he smiled bitterly at himself. What was he thinking? A dead person would never come back to life again.

"Fourth Lady Qu?"

"Yes, I am. I don't know who you are and why you are here. I'm told by a servant of the Ji Family that this is not a place where visitors can come casually," Qu Moying said, still showing her back to him.

"Fourth Lady Qu, why do you know how to play this piece called Love of Butterfly?" Pei Luo'an's eyes fell on her back as he ignored her question and continued to ask.

"Is it supposed to be a difficult piece?" Qu Moying plucked the strings again carefreely. It was still the melody from the same piece.

"It is, and it was composed by Hanyue herself. She was the only one who knew how to play this piece in the mansion." Pei Luo'an's face turned cold.

"Cousin was the only one who knew how to play this piece here, but it doesn't mean that no one knows how to play it outside this mansion. I've read my cousin's score before and didn't find it too hard to play," Qu Moying said in a flat tone. Since Pei Luo'an didn't clarify his identity, she would pretend she didn't know him.

It was not the first time she saw Pei Luo'an after her rebirth. She no longer thought of herself as Ji Hanyue.

She learned how to handle her emotions and calm down quickly in this life. Her thoughts could only be read through the coldness in her eyes, which were luckily covered by the veil. Gradually, she would learn how to hide the mood shown in her eyes.

Pei Luo'an fell into silence for a few seconds as he found her reasoning a bit weird, but he couldn't tell why.

"You don't want to see who I am?"

"I don't care who you are since I don't know you anyway. I only know a few people in the capital, but I don't think you are one of them. This is my cousin's old yard, so you must be her relative like me. But you are a man, after all, Young Master. Please respect the etiquette and leave first," Qu Moying's tone was straightforward.

Pei Luo'an's presence here only made her feel nauseous.

He was no longer the man who promised her that he would wait to marry her after she finished the three-year mourning for her mother and that she was the only girl he wanted.

The touching love was just a dream he weaved, a scheme he designed. Once his plan failed, he killed Ji Hanyue and her family immediately. If there was a pill of regret in the world, she would rather take it and die before meeting him to save her father and younger sister's lives.

"I..."

"Young Master, please. You leave first, and I will leave afterward. If someone sees you, it doesn't really matter to you, but my cousin's name will be ruined, which I will never allow," Qu Moying interrupted him.

Since she pretended not to know him, she didn't need to show much respect for him. For her, he should just be an ordinary young master who broke into this place by accident.

Pei Luo'an let out a deep sigh and didn't say anything else. When he passed by Qu Moying, she started to pluck the strings again with her head lowered. After a little adjustment, Love of Butterfly rang again, with an added trace of fierce aggression.

Pei Luo'an suddenly chuckled to himself in the yard and turned around to leave while loneliness and disappointment crossed his eyes. He found it absurd that he felt that girl had a similar aura to Ji Hanyue's. When Ji Hanyue played this piece, the music always carried distance and freedom, a feeling of flying high above the sky. It was just like her personality, a bit too peaceful and naive.

But the only thing everyone born in the royal family cared about was their own benefit.

Ji Hanyue was not the only naive one, but also Ji Yongming, who caused the current situation in the first place. If Ji Yongming could choose his side wisely, none of these would've happened. A hint of maliciousness flashed across his slightly red eyes but was soon replaced by desperate sorrow, making his face look more haggard.

He lifted his eyes and noticed a small group of people walking over. He cast a cold glance at the leading person and turned to another direction!



## Chapter 125 Seizing the Opportunity to Reclaim a Gift

The leading person who rushed over was the current hostess of the Ji Family, Xiao. She noticed Pei Luo'an and hurriedly lowered her head to greet him. After she couldn't hear Pei Luo'an's footsteps, she lifted her head and looked at the yard whose door was slightly open. A maid standing at the door was curtsying to her obediently.

"Where's your master?" Xiao asked coldly with an irritated look on her face.

"The lady is inside," Yu Dong said. He was standing in front of the door, but he pretended that he didn't realize he blocked Xiao's way.

"This is the Crown Princess's old yard. No one can enter this place without permission," Xiao said angrily. She didn't expect Fourth Lady Qu to be so bold and find the Crown Princess's yard by herself.

Once she heard the bad news from the old maid, she immediately rushed over but still came late. She couldn't see the Crown Prince's expression from a distance, but she could tell he was not in a good mood.

"Second Madam Ji, I can't take a look at my cousin's old yard?" Qu Moying showed up behind Yu Dong and asked calmly.

"Fourth Lady Qu, is this the first time you are at another family's mansion? Do you know as a guest, you should obey the host family's rules? How can you do whatever you like without any permission here?" With the rage in Xiao's heart, neither her expression nor her tone was friendly. She purposefully laughed at Qu Moying, indicating that she was an abandoned child who had never visited other families before and didn't know the rules of being a guest.

"Are you blaming me for it, Second Madam Ji?" Qu Moying said in a flat tone.

"I didn't mean it!" Xiao said coldly.

“Good! My cousin had always treated me kindly, and she promised to give me some things as a gift before her wedding because she didn’t need them anyway. After the accident, this matter has been delayed till now. Can I take those things back this time?” said Qu Moying as she took out a letter from her sleeve and handed it to Xiao.

“What’s this?” Xiao was stunned for a second and then pulled a long face.

“It’s a letter from my cousin, of course. Please take a look at it, Second Madam Ji.” Qu Moying curtsied to her and moved the letter closer to Xiao.

Flustered, Xiao took a step back and almost stepped on a maid’s foot. Her hands were still in her sleeves while she looked at Qu Moying in shock. At the same time, her face turned pale.

After a while, her hoarse voice rang, “When...When did you receive this letter?”

“Before the Crown Princess married into the Eastern Palace.” Qu Moying smiled at her.

The stern look on Xiao’s face softened when she heard Qu Moying received the letter before the Crown Princess’s wedding. Then she reached out to take the letter and opened the envelope. There were just some trifles in Ji Hanyue’s letter. She told Qu Moying to take good care of her eyes and promised a few things to Qu Moying since she wouldn’t need them anymore after she married into the Eastern Palace.

There were only a few things, but all of them had been used by Ji Hanyue very often.

Xiao quickly calmed herself down. She had no other choice but to agree. Although these things were valuable, they were just some old personal belongings of Ji Hanyue’s. It was not her place to break the Crown Princess’s promise. “Since the Crown Princess promised them to you before she passed away, you can take them back with you, Fourth Lady Qu.”

After a short talk, Xiao had already found that Fourth Lady Qu was a tough one to deal with.

Qu Moying could still act calmly after she entered the Crown Princess's old yard without permission and met the Crown Prince, which was an obvious sign of threat for Xiao. Was this really the useless Fourth Lady Qu everyone talked about?

Xiao thought about her planning of letting her son marry her and started to feel it was a bad idea.

As for the shops, Xiao couldn't understand what was Ji Hanyue thinking when she promised two shops to Qu Moying. In the letter, Ji Hanyue said the two shops could be Qu Moying's financial foundation to protect herself in the future.

"Thank you, Second Madam. Can I go inside and pick them up?" Qu Moying took back the letter from Xiao's hand and asked.

Anyone who had seen Ji Hanyue's handwriting could tell she indeed wrote the letter. Of course, Pei Luo'an was most familiar with it since he knew how to imitate her handwriting. Qu Moying didn't worry about his potential investigation at all.

"Fourth Lady Qu, even though the Crown Princess promised those, don't forget you are still a guest here," Xiao reminded Qu Moying coldly.

Qu Moying didn't push her again. She ignored the hostility in Xiao's words, gave her a smile, and curtsied to her again. "Then thank you for giving them to me in advance, Second Madam Ji."

She had taken a look at inside anyway. It didn't matter if the one who fetched the stuff was herself or Xiao since everything was still at their place as before.

Soon, Qu Moying got what she asked for – a guqin, a scent burner, a decorative table screen, a few scrolls of Ji Hanyue's painting and calligraphy, and at last, a set of emerald jewelry left in the mansion by Ji Hanyue.

"Second Madam Ji, is everything here?" Qu Moying asked, looking at the things in the maids' hands.

“The shops’ accounts haven’t been cleared yet. These all belong to the Eastern Palace now after the Crown Princess got married. It’s inappropriate for us to ask them back,” Xiao rejected with displeasure.

She had no problem giving Ji Hanyue’s personal belongings to Qu Moying, but not the shops under her name. Those shops were not part of Ji Hanyue’s dowry because Ji Hanyue wanted to give them to her younger sister, Ji Yanyue. After Ji Yanyue died, those shops naturally became the Ji Family’s property. Xiao wouldn’t allow Qu Moying to take a piece from them.

“My cousin, unfortunately, passed away right after she married into the Eastern Palace. Also, she didn’t bear any children for the Crown Prince. Does the Crown Prince want to keep her dowry?” Qu Moying asked with a seemingly careless smile.

If a married woman died and didn’t bear any children, her family could reclaim her dowry. This was a common rule in the capital.

Of course, Ji Hanyue didn’t have any children since she died soon after marrying into the Eastern Palace. It couldn’t be more reasonable for her family to reclaim her dowry. As long as they mentioned it, Pei Luo’an had to return everything at once.

He was the Crown Prince of this empire, who couldn’t possibly do things such as keeping his dead wife’s dowry. Moreover, many people knew that the Crown Princess died because she was hit by an assassin to protect the Crown Prince. In this situation, the Crown Prince would be too shameless if he shamelessly kept her property.

A future heir of the empire could never do such a thing.

But since the Ji Family didn’t mention it, Pei Luo’an just pretended that he didn’t remember it. The Ji Family didn’t reclaim Ji Hanyue’s dowry because Ji Youran could take it as her own dowry now. When she became the next Crown Princess in the future, Ji Hanyue’s dowry could help show Ji Youran’s dignity. Qu Moying was absolutely aware of the Ji Family’s intention, so she wrote this letter on purpose.

She wrote about the two shops because she knew Xiao wouldn’t be willing to give them to her and would pass the buck to Pei Luo’an. After all, Qu Moying was just a weak lady. Xiao didn’t expect her to have the guts to confront the Crown Prince.

After hearing Qu Moying's words of asking for Ji Hanyue's dowry from the Crown Prince, Xiao became more irritated. She scolded, "Fourth Lady Qu, this is the Ji Family's private business. I don't think you have anything to do with it."

"I had nothing to do with it before, but not when two of the shops are mine now." Qu Moying gave her a bright smile and then suddenly changed the topic, "I have another thing to tell you, Second Madam Ji. I will take a former servant with me this time."

Qu Moying was not in a hurry to reclaim the two shops right now. As long as Xiao admitted that the shops were still in the Crown Prince's hand, she was not worried about them at all. Xiao's excuse would become a perfect reason for her to intervene in some situations in the future.

Otherwise, it would still be inconvenient for her to do it only under the name of the Crown Princess's cousin.

"Who is it?" Xiao suddenly had a bad feeling about it. She cast a glance at the old maid who came to report before.

Immediately, the old maid lowered her head in fear. She just realized she was too flustered to mention the matter about Granny Zhou before.

"Granny Zhou," Qu Moying said smilingly.

"No way!" Xiao refused with no hesitation. She said firmly, "Granny Zhou is the Ji Family's servant who used to work for my sister-in-law. After my sister-in-law passed away, it has become our responsibility to take care of her servant. I can't give her to someone else."

"You are wrong, Second Madam Ji. I'm taking back a former servant with me. Granny Zhou used to be the Qu Family's servant and a private maid who my mother brought from her family. Because my aunt had an argument with my father before, my aunt took Granny Zhou here to protect her. But still, she should be the Qu Family's servant," Qu Moying explained calmly.

The logic in her words was so perfect that Xiao didn't even know how to argue back with her jaw dropped.

Xiao then remembered what Qu Moying said was true. When Granny Zhou was taken to the Earl Ling'an's Mansion, Xiao has married Second Master Ji already. She knew the whole thing and even recalled that she comforted her sister-in-law. After all these years, she long forgot about it and thought of Granny Zhou as her sister-in-law's servant. She never expected Qu Moying to mention the history and ask for Granny Zhou.

Technically, Granny Zhou was indeed the Qu Family's servant. Xiao didn't have any reason to stop Qu Moying from taking her away.

"Since Granny Zhou is the Qu Family's former servant, you can take her with you, Fourth Lady Qu. But we need to check her luggage before she leaves just in case she takes things away that belong to our family!" Xiao said in rage.

Qu Moying was not afraid of Xiao's accusation at all and threw another sharp question to her. She curled up her lips and said in a soft voice, "Things that belong to your family? Do you mean things inside my aunt's yard? That yard is incredibly shabby and messy. I know my uncle didn't have the energy to care about it since he had been sick for a long time, but what about you, Second Madam Ji? I heard from my cousin that my aunt's yard should be as clean and neat as when my aunt was still alive. But how come it ended up like this? What do you mean by it?"

Xiao almost hit the ceiling and threw a stern glare at the old maid next to her. The old maid didn't tell her about this matter either, but clearly, Qu Moying had visited First Madam Ji's old yard too.

It made sense since First Madam Ji's old yard was the only place where Qu Moying could meet Granny Zhou. Otherwise, Qu Moying wouldn't remember Granny Zhou's background and mention it.

The more Xiao thought about it, the angrier she felt. If she was not occupied by other things today, she wouldn't be in such a passive position and let a low-life girl take whatever she wanted. Qu Moying indeed picked a good time to take advantage of the Ji Family.

“Fourth Lady Qu, I suggest you pay more attention to your family affairs. I heard that Second Madam Qu is heavily sick. Why are you interfering with other family’s business instead of serving your stepmother in front of her bed?” Xiao couldn’t help but say sarcastically.

Everyone knew that Yu framed Qu Moying in front of the Crown Princess’s coffin. She mentioned Yu purposefully to provoke Qu Moying and reminded her of her position in her own family. Qu Moying meant nothing for the Qu Family, let alone the Ji Family.

Suddenly, a snort came from aside as the smile on Xiao’s face faded away...

## Chapter 126 A Venomous Couple Blaming Each Other

Yue Wenhan and Ji Yong’an showed up nearby. Yue Wenhan was walking in front, and his cold gaze fell on Xiao’s face, sending a cold shiver down her spine. This one was not a weak girl like Qu Moying but the real vice minister of the Dali Temple, who had solved many cases and sentenced many people to death. Thinking about Yue Wenhan’s background, Xiao couldn’t suppress the fear in her heart.

No matter how tough Xiao was in front of Qu Moying, she was still a female and didn’t have the guts to confront a person like Yue Wenhan.

She threw a stern glare at Ji Yong’an, following behind Yue Wenhan, and cursed him inwardly for bringing Yue Wenhan here. How could Ji Yong’an bring a male to the inner yard?

Ji Yong’an had his own difficulty. Since Yue Wenhan tried every means to meet Ji Yongming for the last time after he entered the mansion, Ji Yong’an had no other choice but to bring him here. Ji Yongming’s body was not even here. How could they let Yue Wenhan see him for the last time?

Yue Wenhan’s continuous questions made Ji Yong’an more and more flustered. Then they mentioned Ji Hanyue during the talk, so Ji Yong’an offered to bring Yue Wenhan over to look at the Crown Princess’ old yard.

Since Ji Yong’an couldn’t show Yue Wenhan his older brother’s place, he could only show him his niece’s place. He couldn’t let Yue Wenhan go back empty-handed again this time. But Ji Yong’an didn’t expect

his wife and Fourth Lady Qu to have a conversation here. The atmosphere seemed weird between them, and Xiao even provoked Fourth Lady Qu rudely.

More unfortunately, Yue Wenhan heard Xiao's sarcasm. Hearing Yue Wenhan's snort, Ji Yong'an realized the severity of the situation, but he had to bring Yue Wenhan over.

Seeing Xiao's glare, Ji Yong'an threw a glare back at her, thinking Xiao was a useless woman who couldn't even deal with an unmarried girl.

Could Fourth Lady Qu be comparable with Yue Wenhan? Not at all.

The married couple separately took care of one person, and both of them thought the one they were dealing with was tougher. Still, they were an old couple, after all. After they ran into each other and threw a glare, they realized the best solution was to separate Qu Moying and Yue Wenhan.

"Fourth Lady Qu, please follow me. We can continue our talk inside!" Xiao put on a gentle smile as if the sharp sarcasm came from someone else's mouth. The fast change of her attitude was indeed astonishing.

But Qu Moying was not surprised at all. Sophisticated as Xiao, she could say anything needed in the situation. When she took care of Ji Hanyue before, she even treated her better than her own daughter. She faked a warm environment for Ji Hanyue and made Ji Hanyue deeply trust her and Ji Youran.

"Thank you, Second Madam Ji. But are you really unwilling to give me the shops my cousin promised before?" asked Qu Moying. Before, she planned to look for Yue Wenhan first and mentioned the shops again when he was with her. Now that Yue Wenhan so happened to be here, she might as well solve the problem right now.

In Yue Wenhan's position, his words were much more influential than hers.

"What shops?" Yue Wenhan frowned, confused by Qu Moying's words.

"They are..." Xiao didn't expect Qu Moying to cause her trouble again and stuttered in shock.



“My cousin promised to give me two shops and some other stuff before her wedding. Second Madam Ji agreed to give me my cousin’s personal belongings, but she refused to give me the two shops. She said the shops were part of my cousin’s dowry and belong to the Crown Prince now,” Qu Moying chimed in to explain.

“Since it was the Crown Princess’s promise, the Ji Family should give them to you. They were part of the Crown Princess’s dowry, but she passed away already. Aren’t your family going to take the dowry back?” Yue Wenhan turned to ask Ji Yong’an in confusion. As a male, it was better for him to ask Ji Yong’an about it directly.

As long as the Ji Family asked for the dowry, the Crown Prince must return it.

All the noble families in the capital would do the same thing, let alone the future heir of the empire.

Ji Yong’an didn’t know about the letter yet, so he froze for a moment as his face turned red in embarrassment. Both Xiao and he didn’t intend to reclaim Ji Hanyue’s dowry because they wanted their own daughter to take it as her dowry. It could be a great help for their daughter to gain a foothold in the Eastern Palace.

Only after the Crown Prince was pleased, their daughter could have the chance to become the next Crown Princess.

So, they always thought of Ji Hanyue’s dowry as a gift for the Crown Prince and didn’t mean to mention it at all. But now, they had to answer Yue Wenhan’s question.

“We will...figure this out later. Right now...there are too many things to deal with in the mansion. And my big brother...my big brother...” Ji Yong’an started to sob again while wiping his tears with his sleeve.

It was indeed inappropriate to discuss property right after Earl Ling’an died. Even though Qu Moying had Ji Hanyue’s letter, she shouldn’t dig into it right now.

Of course, Qu Moying was aware of it and didn’t intend to take the shops back right now. All she wanted was a topic related to the Ji Family that she could mention whenever she wanted.

She would never allow Ji Youran to possess that dowry.

All of Ji Hanyue's dowry was prepared by her parents, and Ji Youran's was not even comparable with it. Qu Moying was determined to take back everything that Ji Youran stole.

"Cousin, let's discuss it later," said Qu Moying, "We can mention it after Uncle's funeral ends."

Yue Wenhan nodded at her and looked around the yard. "So, this is the Crown Princess's old yard. Can I take a look inside?"

This was the purpose of Ji Yong'an when he brought Yue Wenhan over anyway. Hearing his words, Ji Yong'an immediately nodded. "Of course, you can take a look inside, Mr. Yue. But please don't touch anything. His Royal Highness wants everything to remain the same as before. Whenever he comes here for business, he always stays here for a little while."

"His Royal Highness is indeed an affectionate person," Yue Wenhan sighed.

"The Crown Prince and the Crown Princess's engagement had been confirmed since long ago. They are brilliant human beings and a perfect match. The Crown Prince also respected the Crown Princess a lot. But who would've known...their marriage would end like this. His Royal Highness has been in grief and always comes to stay here when he needs some time alone. After all, this was the place where the Crown Princess lived for many years," Xiao finally came back to her senses and explained why Pei Luo'an showed up here just now with a smile.

Qu Moying stayed quiet. She planned to leave before. But now that Yue Wenhan was here, she was not in a hurry anymore. Therefore, she followed behind Yue Wenhan and stepped into the yard again.

Xiao wanted to stop her instantly. But she looked at Yue Wenhan in front of Qu Moying, decided to shut her mouth, and followed behind them with a sullen face.

The group only walked around the yard and didn't step into the main room. As it was getting late, Yue Wenhan excused himself to leave.

Xiao and Ji Yong'an had been waiting for this moment and kept nodding.

Xiao called Granny Zhou over, prepared everything Qu Moying asked before, and asked servants to walk them out. After they left, the smile on Xiao's face faded away. She waved her hand to signal the servants to leave and stood in the distance.

"Why did Yue Wenhan come today?" without the servants around, Xiao asked in exasperation. Yue Wenhan had visited their mansion many times recently, but Xiao couldn't figure out his intention.

"He asked to see my big brother. I had no other choice but to take him here," Ji Yong'an explained.

"Did you really not know His Royal Highness was here? It would be bad if he ran into His Royal Highness," Xiao frowned at him and said in displeasure.

They just announced Earl Ling'an's death today, but the Crown Princess's funeral hadn't finished yet in the Eastern Palace. The Crown Prince always had been a loving husband to the Crown Princess in people's eyes. It would cause him trouble if anyone else saw him in the Earl Ling'an's Mansion instead of the Eastern Palace.

There was no way the Crown Prince cared more about Earl Ling'an than the Crown Princess.

Both the timing and location were wrong!

"His Royal Highness only stays here for a little while every time. He usually goes to Youran's yard," Ji Yong'an said carelessly.

He was forced to come up with this solution to stop Yue Wenhan's questioning.

After finishing his explanation, he lost his patience and asked back, "Why did you bring Fourth Lady Qu here? Don't tell me you couldn't deal with a weak, unmarried lady like her and had to bring her here too."

"I didn't! She found this place by herself and even ran into His Royal Highness. Then she showed me a letter and asked for some things from Ji Hanyue," Xiao was anxious.

"Couldn't you just not admit it? What were you thinking?" Ji Yong'an said sarcastically.

"You think I didn't want to? Many people know the Crown Princess's handwriting. If that girl really spreads it out, will it do any good to us?" Xiao's whole body was trembling in rage. Her lips shivered for a moment before she scolded, "We have to keep a low-key right now. Have you already forgotten what Youran said to us repeatedly?"

The look on Ji Yong'an's face softened when he heard about his proud, brilliant daughter, who meant everything for him. They had spent so much effort and time for her, and their plan would finally succeed soon.

"Okay, okay. Since Youran said it, you have to be careful too." Ji Yong'an waved his wide sleeve impatiently and left. He tolerated Xiao for so long only because of his dear daughter. Otherwise, he didn't want to talk to her at all. Anyone among his concubines was so much better than Xiao.

However, he had to keep taking new concubines in because Xiao got rid of them maliciously one by one. Thinking about some beautiful concubines he really liked who died on Xiao, Ji Yong'an couldn't be more irritated.

Behind his back, Xiao felt the same. She stomped hard on the ground to vent her anger and then left with her servants. She had to tell the Old Lady about Fourth Lady Qu as soon as possible, who was clearly a troublemaker instead of a good partner for her son.

Yue Wenhan's carriage drove away from the Earl Ling'an's Mansion, took a few turns, and stopped at a teahouse. Yue Wenhan got off his horse and threw the reins to a young servant while Qu Moying got out of the carriage with Yu Dong's help. She looked at the quite crowded teahouse in shock and then turned to stare at Yue Wenhan.

"Let's take a seat inside," said Yue Wenhan.

Qu Moying nodded at him, knowing he had things to talk about.

The two of them entered the teahouse and found a private room to sit. Yu Dong ordered the tea, let the waiter serve them, and stayed behind Qu Moying.

"Cousin, do you have any questions for me?" Qu Moying took a sip from her teacup, slowly put it down, and asked while lifting her head.

She knew Yue Wenhan was a brilliant young man...

## Chapter 127 Another Secret Meeting

"What did you find out in the Earl Ling'an's Mansion, Cousin?" Yue Wenhan directly asked her.

Qu Moying shook her head, "Nothing really. But I ran into His Royal Highness."

"His Royal Highness was in the Earl Ling'an's Mansion?" Yue Wenhan was surprised, feeling something was strange.

"Yes, he was there, staying in our cousin's room," Qu Moying nodded.

"Why was the Crown Prince in the Earl Ling'an's Mansion instead of hosting the Crown Princess's funeral in the Eastern Palace? Also..." Yue Wenhan paused, feeling weird about it. Even though the Crown Prince came for Earl Ling'an, why he was in the Crown Princess's yard instead of Earl Ling'an's yard?

Was His Royal Highness really deeply in love with the Crown Princess? Yue Wenhan smelled something fishy but couldn't figure out the reason.

"Our cousin married into the Eastern Palace with a grand dowry. Shouldn't the Crown Prince return her dowry to the Ji Family now? I heard Princess Ji moved into the Eastern Palace without anything. Will she

take our cousin's dowry as hers?" Qu Moying let out a sigh and threw out the question that she had considered for a long time.

"I showed the letter to them just because I wanted to see the Ji Family's reaction. It seemed that they really don't intend to reclaim our cousin's dowry since another daughter of the Ji Family is still in the Eastern Palace."

The truth was so close to them, but people wouldn't notice its presence if no one mentioned it. This was so-called the darkness under the lamp.

Yue Wenhan immediately understood her as he pulled a long face. "Princess Ji is Second Master Ji's daughter, but the Crown Princess was First Master Ji's daughter. They had nothing to do with each other. How could the older sister marry the Crown Prince with her younger sister's dowry?"

"But if the Ji Family doesn't mention it, no one can say anything about it," Qu Moying reminded him.

Yue Wenhan nodded with a sullen face. It was indeed the truth. Then he suddenly stared at Qu Moying, "You mentioned two shops before. Was it for the same reason?"

"Yeah. I actually didn't care about them before, but then Second Madam Ji said the Crown Prince was involved in this matter and used this reason to reject me. She told me that the shops were part of our cousin's dowry, and it was inappropriate for the Ji Family to ask them back now. But since our cousin promised me before her wedding, they must belong to the Ji Family instead of the Crown Prince. Second Madam Ji just was unwilling to give them to me," Qu Moying explained carelessly.

Since Ji Hanyue had written about them in a letter to Qu Moying, she definitely wouldn't take them with her to the Eastern Palace. Otherwise, she wouldn't promise Qu Moying in the first place.

So, the two shops must've been left by Ji Hanyue in the Ji Family.

Actually, no one knew the truth better than Qu Moying, but she couldn't say it directly.

She also couldn't say that Ji Hanyue knew she would die soon, so she left the shops in her dowry to Qu Moying.

"How dare they?!" Yue Wenhan smacked the table with irritation.

"Cousin, I think they have the Crown Prince's acknowledgment too," Qu Moying reminded Yue Wenhan again.

Yue Wenhan's eyes darkened as he nodded. This matter was not a loss for the Crown Prince at all. Moreover, he might even make a big fortune out of it. There must be many valuable items in the Crown Prince's dowry. Maybe the Crown Prince didn't even think about returning it. As Yue Wenhan considered all kinds of possibilities, a thought jumped into his mind. People all praised the Crown Prince for his love for the Crown Princess, but what if the Crown Prince wasn't the same as he looked like?

At this moment, the seed of suspicion was officially planted in Yue Wenhan's mind...

"Cousin, since our uncle passed away, the position of Earl Ling'an will naturally fall onto Second Master Ji's shoulder. Without our two cousins, Second Master Ji and his family will be in charge of the whole Ji Family. It actually doesn't matter that much if our cousin's dowry is returned or not!" Qu Moying let out a soft sigh, said in sorrow, and lowered her head.

The reality was so cold and cruel that even Yue Wenhan's firm belief was shaken by it.

Experienced in solving many cases, he knew some things didn't look related at all on the surface but were actually connected. With the decline of his uncle's family, the main beneficiary in the situation was definitely Second Master Ji and his family.

Second Master Ji would inherit the position of Earl Ling'an. The hostess in the Eastern Palace had become Second Master Ji's daughter, and even the Crown Princess's dowry fell in her hand. After being a brave soldier and the empire's hero for his entire life, Earl Ling'an didn't get anything in the end and couldn't even protect his precious two daughters.

Were these really just accidents?

The thought blew a gust of chill wind into Yue Wenhan's heart. He quickly calmed himself down and comforted Qu Moying first, "Cousin, you don't need to think about it too much. Leave this to me."

"But, our cousin and the others were so pitiful." Qu Moying shook her head as the bracelets on her wrist bumped into each other and made crispy clangs.

The private room fell into silence. After a while, Yue Wenhan's voice rang, "Cousin Qu, remember, you are just a lady, and you don't have the power to control many things. I will take my time and investigate it carefully."

"I understand. Don't worry about me, Cousin." Qu Moying nodded at him. Still feeling concerned, she added, "Cousin, don't be reckless, or you may cause big trouble to yourself."

She didn't say anything more, but she believed that her hint was enough for Yue Wenhan. Intelligent as Yue Wenhan, he had never acted too boldly so far, or she wouldn't tell him so much information in the first place.

What Yue Wenhan found out was not important for her since she knew the truth anyway. The only thing she worried about was that Yue Wenhan stepped on the trap set by Pei Luo'an or the Ji Family and was forced to become their helper.

No matter what, she would finish her revenge!

But she didn't want to drag Yue Wenhan down into this dirty swamp with her.

Yue Wenhan left first, but Qu Moying was not in a hurry. She asked Granny Zhou to go outside and buy everything that needed to be sent to the Earl Ling'an's Mansion tomorrow. Tomorrow was the first day of the official funeral. But after the drama she caused today, Xiao would keep a close eye on her from now on.

After Granny Zhou left, Qu Moying stayed in the private room and carefully reviewed everything that had happened today in her mind. As she thought about Pei Luo'an, who was in her old room before, she couldn't help but sneer inwardly, impressed by his acting skill. Till this point, he was still spending so much effort maintaining his image as a loving husband.



The Earl Ling's death was announced when Pei Luo'an was with the Ji Family today, which meant this was his order. He probably decided to stop keeping up with the lie and spread Earl Ling'an's death out.

But as the Crown Prince who just lost his dear wife, shouldn't he stay with the Crown Princess's coffin in the Eastern Palace instead of sitting in Ji Hanyue's old yard? What's more, the Crown Princess had her own yard in the Eastern Palace. Why did he come all the way to the Earl Ling'an's Mansion to mourn his dead wife? The more Qu Moying thought about it, the more ridiculous she found it was.

"My lady, the lord invited you to go to the last room down the hallway," Yu Dong suddenly came inside and reported to Qu Moying in a low voice.

When he was standing outside, he suddenly saw Ji Hai walking over. Both of them were surprised to see each other here. Ji Hai glanced at him but didn't say anything, and then he entered the last room down the hallway. After a while, Ji Hai came out and whispered the lord's order to him. So, he hurriedly came inside to tell Qu Moying about it.

"Right now?" Qu Moying asked in shock. What a coincidence to meet Pei Yuanjun again! It seemed that Lord Yun was having an idle life in the capital recently. Qu Moying felt she could run into him everywhere.

When she was Ji Hanyue before, she had attended some banquets held by noble families but never met him. She knew Pei Yuanjun seldomly showed up in the capital. But even if he was, he would stay at his own place and rarely attend any banquets or similar events, including the royal banquets.

"Yes, right now. The lord will arrive soon," Yu Dong said with a smile.

"Do you mean the lord is not here yet?" Qu Moying stood up but didn't move forward.

"I heard he went out before and will be back soon. He told you to wait for him, my lady." Yu Dong nodded. Lord Yun must be in the room before, or Ji Hai wouldn't go inside the room and come out with his order. But he was not here now, so he might have left through another exit of the room.

"Let's go now!" Qu Moying nodded at her and started to walk outside.

Yu Dong hurriedly followed behind and led her all the way to the last room down the hallway. Before he lifted his hand to knock on the door, the door opened first. Inside the room stood Ji Hai with the usual beam on his face. He bowed, "Fourth Lady, please come in first. The lord will be back very soon!"

Qu Moying nodded at him, walked in, and sat down on a chair. Then she noticed that this room was much bigger than the one she stayed in just now, with more than twice the size and a curtain hung at one side. This room looked more like a place where a female received her guests.

Seeing Qu Moying seated herself on a chair near the door, Ji Hai pointed at the curtain with a smile, "Fourth Lady, please sit down behind the curtain."

Qu Moying stood up and walked behind the curtain. The decoration style was softer there, with a more artistic color match, more like a female's place. She sat down on the only chair behind the table in the center.

There were some plates of nuts and snacks on the table, looking fresh and neat. It seemed that they were just served, and no one had touched them yet.

"Fourth Lady, please help yourself. The lord will be here soon. But before he arrives, you need to meet someone first," Ji Hai said beamingly.

Qu Moying had figured out Lord Yun's intention the moment she saw the decoration here. She raised her brow, "Lord Jing?"

"Yes, yes, Lord Jing. Lord Jing has been asking to meet with Lady Liu but kept being rejected. It is rare to see Fourth Lady come outside, and Lord Jing so happens to be nearby. So, the lord asked you to meet him here," Ji Hai said with a smile.

"Where's Chun Xiu?" Qu Moying asked and looked at Yu Dong, who was not appropriate to stay here anymore.

"Chun Xiu will be here soon. Please wait for a few minutes, Fourth Lady," said Ji Hai.

"Yu Dong, you back to our room and stay with Granny Zhou. I will be back later," Qu Moying ordered.

"Yes, my lady," Yu Dong answered and left immediately, heading to the room they had stayed in before.

Qu Moying took off her veil and put on the veiled hat handed by Ji Hai on her head. During the quite long waiting, she remained silent and closed her eyes to have a little break while leaning her head on her hand.

After a while, she heard some gentle footsteps coming from outside. After she opened her eyes, the beautiful maid called Chun Xiu was already standing in front of her while Ji Hai was long gone.

"My lady, Lord Jing heard that you are here and asks for a meeting," Chun Xiu reported to her.

Chun Xiu's expression and the slightly opened door told Qu Moying that Lord Jing had already arrived. She straightened up and said slowly, "Since fate let us meet here, I have no reason to reject it. Please ask His Royal Highness to come in!"

"Yes, my lady. I will go take His Royal Highness in."

## Chapter 128 That Third Lady Might Not Be Dead!

Pei Yusheng walked in through the door.

He noticed the curtain splitting the room into two parts and politely stopped in front of it. Through the curtain, he could see a female's ambiguous figure curtsying to him. Then his gaze fell on Chun Xiu, standing aside, and realized Lady Liu was behind the curtain. A faint smile showed up on his face.

"A pleasure to meet you, Your Royal Highness," the female voice sounded soft but a bit low.

"Same for me, Lady Liu. I heard you are here and came in a hurry. Please forgive me for any inconvenience I may cause you," Pei Yusheng said politely.

"Not at all, Your Royal Highness," Qu Moying said softly.

Pei Yusheng sat down on a chair aside naturally and looked at the curtain. It was not thick, but the light behind it didn't seem to be enough. He could only see a vague female figure with a veiled hat. Of course, he couldn't see her face at all.

"I've been to your mansion several times but always left empty-handed in the end," Pei Yusheng said jokingly.

"I'm all alone in the capital without my father. I have to obey the rules of etiquette carefully. Please forgive me for the inconvenience caused, Your Royal Highness," answered Qu Moying.

She distanced herself from Lord Jing with a few words, indicating that it was inappropriate for Lord Jing to request to meet an unmarried lady alone.

"It's actually not a big deal at all. I just wanted to ask you something about the Guardian General," Pei Yusheng said smilingly, giving a perfect reason for their meeting.

"What...do you want to ask about, Your Royal Highness?" Qu Moying hesitated for a second, sounding a bit surprised.

"The Guardian General is no longer a young man. Does he have any intention to return to the capital?" Pei Yusheng asked with a smile with a naturally polite attitude. He then let out an exclamation, "I've heard about those incredible stories about the Guardian General since I was a kid. If I were not the emperor's son, I would leave the capital and fight alongside the army at the border as a real soldier. It has been my biggest regret that I can't go to the battlefield and fight for the empire."

"Thank you for your compliment, Your Royal Highness. But I actually don't really know...my father's thoughts on this." Qu Moying raised her watery eyes, starting to understand Pei Yusheng's little plan.

After Earl Ling'an passed away, the capital needed another military man with actual power to take the vacancy. This would be the best timing for the Guardian General if he decided to return to the capital right now.

Of course, the best timing was for Pei Yusheng. Pei Yuanjun probably wouldn't like this idea at all.

"Can I bother you to ask your father for me?" Pei Yusheng added, "Once the Guardian General returns, I want to learn military knowledge from him to make up for my many-year regret."

"This..." Qu Moying hesitated for a moment and rejected, "I don't really know about this kind of thing. My father doesn't let me intervene either."

If she agreed to his request now, more requests from Pei Yusheng would be waiting for her in the future. Moreover, it could create a perfect reason for Pei Yusheng to visit her at the mansion, which was the last thing she wanted to see.

"I heard Lady Liu is a heroic lady and the only daughter the Guardian General has. You even saved my uncle at the border before. How come you step back now? Do you think I'm not sincere enough?" Pei Yusheng chuckled gently. His tone was not sharp and even sounded like he was just telling a joke.

However, Qu Moying noticed something different from his words. She smiled and said, "These are all just rumors, Your Royal Highness. Please don't take them seriously!"

"Lady Liu, since you don't want to talk about this, could you please ask the Guardian General for me which military books he reads the most? I would like to know the Guardian General's favorite military books. It would be best if I can have one with his notes," Pei Yusheng continued as if he didn't notice Qu Moying's rejection in her words.

After being refused, he still tried to reduce the distance between Lady Liu and him. But the thing he mentioned was just a trifle that was not worth rejecting. Impressed by Lord Jing's talking skills, Qu Moying had no other choice but to agree.

"Alright, I will ask my father for you, Your Royal Highness," Qu Moying said.

Since Pei Yuanjun started it, she would leave this to him.

“You have my gratitude, Lady Liu.” Pei Yusheng stood up and bowed deeply to the curtain as Qu Moying hurriedly stood up and curtsied back.

“Since then, I will wait for the good news from you, Lady Liu.” Pei Yusheng straightened up and smiled. Then he turned around and nodded at a young eunuch behind him, who walked up and handed him a scroll that looked like a painting. “I heard the Guardian General is fond of calligraphy, so I have a gift for him. It’s a calligraphy piece. Please help me give it to the Guardian General, Lady Liu.”

Since Qu Moying had already agreed to his request before, she had to accept his gift now.

He managed every step carefully and didn’t leave her any space to reject him again.

“On behalf of my father, you have my gratitude, Lord Jing,” Qu Moying smiled as Chun Xiu walked up, took the scroll from the young eunuch, and stayed aside again.

“Lady Liu, then I will stop disturbing you and take my leave first,” Lord Jing said politely with a gentle and not aggressive attitude.

“Goodbye, Your Royal Highness.” Qu Moying curtsied to him again respectfully. After Pei Yusheng left, she sat down, and the curtain had already been curled up.

Chun Xiu put the scroll on the table in front of Qu Moying and asked, “My lady, do you want to take a look?”

“No need.” Qu Moying shook her head. Since she was not the real Liu Lanxin, she didn’t want to do anything unnecessary and just left the rest to Pei Yuanjun.

“Open it, and let’s have a look!” Pei Yuanjun’s voice suddenly came from behind as Qu Moying turned around in shock. Behind the chair she sat on before was a movable board, a secret door! Pei Yuanjun came out with the usual cold look on his stunning face. Many people didn’t dare to look into his ruthless eyes, frightened by his gruesome aura.

In those scared people's eyes, no matter how peerless his face was, Pei Yuanjun represented an absolute horror like an endless hell filled with skeletons.

Qu Moying stepped back and let him sit on the main seat.

Chun Xiu answered and unfolded the scroll in front of them. It was a calligraphy piece with a vigorous and powerful style. Clearly, it was written by a calligraphy master.

"It is a good gift from Lord Jing. He knows that the Guardian General likes this kind of style. But I didn't expect him to bring a gift like this with him in his carriage," Pei Yuanjun rubbed his hands and chuckled. The smile faded the coldness in his eyes.

Noticing his gaze, Qu Moying nodded indifferently. She didn't need to know what he wanted to do for the next step, nor did she care about it.

As for Pei Yusheng's interest, she had nothing to do with it either since she was only impersonating Liu Lanxin for Pei Yuanjun temporarily. She didn't know why Lady Liu chose to let someone else pose as her instead of coming to the capital herself.

Of course, it was not Qu Moying's place to ask about it.

"You just came back from the Earl Ling'an's Mansion?" Pei Yuanjun sat down on the main seat lazily. He stared at Qu Moying and suddenly chuckled.

"Yes, my lord!" Qu Moying's heart was stung by a sharp pain as she lowered her head.

"Did Earl Ling'an pass away?" Pei Yuanjun asked casually while knocking his finger on the table.

"Yes!" Qu Moying bit her lips hard as tears started to form in her eyes. The feeling of sorrow gushed out of her heart again, carrying the intention of suffocating her.

Stabbed by the cold reality, her heart kept bleeding.

“What’s your plan?” Pei Yuanjun suddenly chuckled and threw a weird question at her.

Qu Moying paused for a second and lifted her head abruptly, “What’s your plan, my lord?”

“It doesn’t matter to me. But, as for you...” Pei Yuanjun smiled, seemingly amused by Qu Moying’s reaction. His eyes fell on her slightly clenched fists. “You seem to be in a bad mood!”

After a few seconds of silence, Qu Moying nodded and admitted to him, “Yes, I’m...in a bad mood!”

She couldn’t hide her boiling emotions anyway, so she didn’t need to try to hide them. Pei Yuanjun must have been aware of her hostility to the Crown Prince and the Ji Family. There was no point of hiding it away.

“What do you want?” Pei Yuanjun smiled again, for her honesty, and asked with curiosity. His raised downturned eyes added a trace of tenderness and charm into his temperament, making him far away from his horrifying image like a monster.

Ji Hai peeked at Fourth Lady Qu with a smile, pleased by the scene he saw. Then he quietly lowered his head again.

“I found my cousin’s and my uncle’s death very suspicious.” Qu Moying quickly calmed herself down. Her identity was the Crown Princess’s cousin now, so she had a reason to suspect these things.

“The Crown Princess was injured when protecting the Crown Prince and died of sickness. As for Earl Ling’an, I heard he was injured that night. After hearing the Crown Princess’s situation, he fell sick, threw out blood, and passed out. Then he finally broke down because of the Crown Princess’s death and passed away too. There’s nothing unusual about it,” said Pei Yuanjun carelessly.

So, this was another version of the explanation. The one Qu Moying heard was for ordinary people, while this one was the real version that explained why Earl Ling’an, a robust general, suddenly became so fragile.



Her heart shrank in pain. Pei Luo'an had prepared everything and even made up two versions of the explanation. With this, no one from noble families who knew the situation better would suspect the entire thing.

"Then...then what about my younger cousin? Why did she suddenly die...and so quietly...? They...they didn't even hold a funeral for her...because it would affect my cousin's wedding? Really?" Qu Moying's heart started to pound in her chest as her eyes darkened.

"The Third Lady of the Ji Family?" Pei Yuanjun seemed to be more interested, raised his brow, and asked.

"Yes!" answered Qu Moying.

"That Third Lady might not be dead!" Pei Yuanjun gazed at her with a faint smile on his face and said meaningfully.

Every single one of his words stung her heart and made her heartbeat increase more. Qu Moying lifted her head in shock, almost losing control of herself. She opened her mouth several times, and finally, her weak, slightly hoarse voice rang in the room, "My younger...c-cousin? She...she is still alive? Nothing...nothing happened to her? Where is she right now?"

Was it a rumor made up by Pei Luo'an to protect himself again? Qu Moying still couldn't help but look at Pei Yuanjun hopefully, with her fingers trembling.

Did he mean that her younger sister was still alive? She wished so much she could hear it from Lord Yun but still found it impossible. Ji Youran's words and the bracelet on her wrist were enough to prove the authenticity of her story. For Ji Youran, she didn't need to lie to a dying person at that time...

But she still hoped that Ji Youran was telling her a lie, even though the chance was very little...

Chapter 129 How About Marrying Lord Jing?

“The youngest daughter of the Ji Family, Third Lady Ji, didn’t die of sickness. They didn’t hold a funeral for her, not because it would affect the wedding. That Third Lady is a misbehaved one who eloped with a man. To stop this scandal from spreading out, the Ji Family covered it up and only said Third Lady Ji died, and there’s no Third Lady Ji in the world. Having his two daughters ending up like that and his injury, Earl Ling’an surely couldn’t survive,” said Pei Yuanjun carelessly.

His words smashed hard on Qu Moying’s heart. So, this was the “truth” behind her younger sister’s death!

She grabbed a corner of the table and held back her tears. “But she...she is only ten years old!”

“So what? She is not the first little girl who elopes with a man at this age. Well, many of them got deceived, of course,” Pei Yuanjun gazed at Qu Moying and said in a flat tone.

So, her younger sister died while being accused of such shameless guilt?

Pei Yuanjun’s words cut her last bit of soft hope like a cold, sharp blade. As she expected, her younger sister was still dead. Pei Luo’an and Ji Youran not only killed her but also smudged her name with such a shameless crime...

Only this kind of reason was convincing enough because compared to such a scandal, her younger sister’s death was nothing.

Once a noble family found a thing like that, it was expected that they killed the people involved directly.

What an evil plan!

“It’s impossible! I don’t believe it!” Qu Moying shook her head hard with resentment in her eyes.

“It doesn’t matter how you feel about it. Everyone says so and believes so,” Pei Yuanjun said indifferently.

"I will find out the truth!" Qu Moying bit her lip and swallowed hard. She could taste the smell of blood around her throat. She was reborn. This was the chance, her only chance. She would not miss it.

"You really are not bad!" Pei Yuanjun suddenly smiled. His curled, downturned eyes made his stunning face even more peerless and added a trace of affection. Without his cold, gruesome aura, he was an attractive young man who could easily make every young lady blush and give him their hearts.

However, Qu Moying only saw the untouchable darkness deep in his eyes. After a few seconds of silence, she curtsied to him respectfully, "Thank you, my lord!"

In this transaction, Lord Yun's position was much higher than hers. She should be aware of it and accept it!

"How's Lord Jing?" With the usual lazy tone, Pei Yuanjun suddenly changed the topic. Qu Moying was caught in a daze for a second and then asked calmly, "My lord, what do you mean?"

Of course, he was not asking for her opinion on Pei Yusheng.

"How about letting you marry Pei Yusheng?" Pei Yuanjun raised his brow.

Qu Moying's heartbeat increased as all her attention was caught by his suggestion. She stared at Pei Yuanjun and said firmly, "I don't want to!"

"Why not? Maybe you can be his first wife and have a bright future!" Pei Yuanjun asked, sounding a bit surprised. Every one of his nephews had a good appearance and was powerful. It was the first time he heard a lady refuse to marry Pei Yusheng so decisively.

"That has nothing to do with me!" Qu Moying looked up into Pei Yuanjun's eyes and said word by word. There was no shyness on her face as if she was talking about someone else. Her reaction was totally different than ordinary noble ladies'.

"If you want to become the real Lady Liu, I can make it happen," Pei Yuanjun's voice suddenly became meaningful. He reached out to take off the veiled hat on her head and exposed her attractive face. He looked into Qu Moying's watery eyes and sized her up.

Qu Moying looked back at him calmly, shook her head, and said with no hesitation, "I'm not Lady Liu. I'm the Fourth Lady from Vice Minister Qu's family."

She was Qu Moying in this life, not Liu Lanxin. She didn't want to become Liu Lanxin either.

Maybe Pei Yuanjun really had his way to make her the real Liu Lanxin and marry Lord Jing. As Lady Liu, she indeed had the chance to become Madam Jing. Since Lord Jing had brought the scroll of calligraphy with him in case he ran into her and left her no space to reject him, she could tell Lord Jing meant it to marry Lady Liu.

But this was not what she wanted!

"It's okay if you don't want it!" Pei Yuanjun didn't force her. He curled up his thin lips, fetched Qu Moying's long veil put aside, and walked behind Qu Moying. He carefully put the veil on her face and tied a pretty bow behind her head.

Then he checked her again in front of her, pleased by his own work. With a clean smile, he gently brushed the veil around Qu Moying's eye corner to smooth the last wrinkle.

Then he waved his hand.

Qu Moying knew it was time for her to leave. She curtsied to him again and turned around to walk outside. Yu Dong had been waiting for her at the door. The two of them returned to the private room they had stayed in before. Granny Zhou was waiting inside, looking a bit flustered. Seeing Qu Moying back was a big relief for her.

Granny Zhou hurried up and said with concern, "My lady..."

"Is everything ready?" Qu Moying shook her head quietly as she talked.

“Yes.” Granny Zhou nodded.

“Let’s go!” Qu Moying left the room as Yu Dong and Granny Zhou hurriedly followed behind. They walked downstairs and got into the carriage, heading back to the Qu’s Mansion.

Next to a window on the upper floor stood Pei Yuanjun, who crossed his hands behind his back. Watching the Qu Family’s carriage leaving, he asked meaningfully, “Is it not good for Fourth Lady Qu to marry Lord Jing?”

Ji Hai said discreetly, “My lord, I don’t think Fourth Lady Qu likes Lord Jing.”

“Like? That’s not the right perspective to judge a royal member’s marriage,” said Pei Yuanjun carelessly. His long eyelashes fluttered as his eyes darkened. With a faint smile, he said, “it will be quite amusing if I let Fourth Lady Qu marry Lord Jing, won’t it?”

But Ji Hai didn’t dare to answer him this time, scared by the cunning smile on his master’s face. He didn’t like his master’s horrifying expression as if he thought of an interesting toy.

But Fourth Lady Qu was not a toy. She was a living human being.

Most importantly, Ji Hai felt Fourth Lady Qu was different, different from anyone before. But he didn’t think the lord realized it.

When Qu Moying returned to the mansion, she visited the Old Lady with Granny Zhou since the Old Lady still remembered this servant. When Qu Zhizhen was determined to blame everything on Granny Zhou and beat her to death, the Old Lady was opposed to her son.

Unfortunately, Qu Zhizhen was never an obedient son. Because of First Madam Ji’s interruption, Granny Zhou got the chance to leave and survived.

Now that everything had changed, the Old Lady was happy to see Granny Zhou back to take care of Qu Moying. She still remembered Granny Zhou was the most competent servant working for Yue.

The Old Lady let the person in charge write down Granny Zhou's name and register her information again. Then she asked Qu Moying to pick a new set of mourning clothes, newly sent by the embroidery workshop. This time, all the clothes were sent to the Old Lady's place, and she would hand them to everyone else. Since Qu Moying was back first, the Old Lady let Qu Moying pick first.

The Old Lady managed the mourning clothes in person in case similar things happened again, like the one in front of the Crown Princess's coffin.

Qu Moying casually picked one set, made Yu Dong hold it, and walked back to the Qianyue House.

Granny Miao had been waiting for her for a while. Seeing Qu Moying returning, she hurriedly walked up and curtsied to her with a flustered look. Qu Moying noticed her unusual expression and walked in.

Qu Moying first introduced Granny Zhou to everyone else and let Granny Zhou and Granny Miao share the responsibility of managing the yard. Then she let Yu Dong take Granny Zhou to have some rest first.

After Granny Zhou left, Granny Miao said, "My lady, the Second Master went out today."

With his injured ankle, Qu Zhizhen had taken days off and didn't go out at all. Qu Moying asked Granny Miao to keep a close eye on him in the mansion.

"When?" He finally made a move.

"Around the same time when you left, my lady. Did you see the Second Master leaving?" Granny Miao thought for a little while and said. She heard it from other servants.

"I didn't!" Qu Moying shook her head and had figured it out already. The one who eavesdropped on Qu Qiuyan and her conversation outside was Qu Zhizhen.

"Do you know why he went out? I thought his ankle hadn't recovered yet."

"I don't know the exact reason, but it seems related to the Third Lady. Third Lady walked the Second Master out at that time!" Granny Miao said worriedly, "My lady, you didn't even see Third Lady?"

"I did see her!" Qu Moying nodded. Not to her surprise, this was related to Qu Qiuyan. That was why Qu Qiuyan made the entire performance of loving sisters in front of her.

They were suspecting she was not Qu Zhizhen's real daughter? If she could, she would rather not be his daughter at all. This father not only had favoritism but also would use any means to achieve his goal. If he started to suspect Qu Moying's real identity and thought she was a trap set by his enemies, he would show no mercy to her.

"My lady, what should we do now?" Granny Miao asked, feeling unsettled, "My lady, you have to be more careful."

"Granny, don't worry about me. I know what to do," Qu Moying comforted Granny Miao and pressed a spot behind her own ear where lied a mole.

"My lady, then what about now...?"

"We don't need to do anything right now. If that couple comes to look for me again, just drive them away and threaten them that we will report them to the officials," Qu Moying said carelessly.

"Yes, my lady," Granny Miao understood the indications in Qu Moying's words and answered her. On the way out, Granny Miao was suddenly called back by Qu Moying. "Granny Miao, come back first."

"My lady, anything else?" Granny Miao returned to the room.

Qu Moying fell into thoughts for a few minutes, walked to her desk, and wrote down a letter. After the ink dried, she ripped the paper under Granny Miao's shocked gaze. She threw some pieces away, then used a hanky to wrap the rest of the letter and tied a bow. Then she passed it to Granny Miao, "Go bury it secretly!"

## Chapter 130 Another Funeral

Qu Moying got up in the early morning the next day. After washing up and eating some congee, she headed to the Old Lady's yard with Yu Dong and Yu Chun.

People from the East Mansion had already arrived. Qu Moying saw Luo sitting aside with Qu Xuexin and Qu Caiyue.

Qu Moying curtsied to the Old Lady and seated herself. Then she looked up at Qu Caiyue, who so happened to sit opposite to her. They hadn't seen each other for a while, and surprisingly, Qu Caiyue seemed like a different person. She acted more discreetly, sitting there in silence with her head lowered.

Feeling Qu Moying's gaze, Qu Caiyue lifted her head, threw her a stern glare, and lowered her head again.

Confused by her reaction, Qu Moying moved her eyes away.

Today they would go to mourn for Earl Ling'an. The only one missing was Qu Qiuyan now.

After the Old Lady sent people to urge Qu Qiuyan several times, she finally showed up in the room. People noticed that her eyes looked red as if she had just cried. The Old Lady was irritated by her misbehavior and wanted to give her a lecture when she came. But after seeing her face, the Old Lady dropped her idea.

The group of people left the mansion. Compared to the last time they went to the Eastern Palace, Yu was the only one missing this time.

The rest of them were still here.

Carriages had been ready for leaving as Qu Zhizhen, Qu Zhilin, and their two sons stayed aside, waiting for the females as usual.



Qu Zhizhen's ankle hadn't recovered yet, so he would take the carriage too.

The Old Lady got into the carriage first, followed by Luo, who hesitated for a few seconds. Qu Moying continued to walk down. What a coincidence. She took the same carriage with Qu Caiyue again.

Meanwhile, Qu Xuexin and Qu Qiuyan had gotten into another carriage,

Before Qu Moying climbed up the carriage, a gentle voice came aside. She turned around and recognized its owner – Qu Mingcheng, Qu Qiuyan's twin brother.

"Moying!" Qu Mingcheng was a good-looking, well-educated young man who had a gentle aura that could easily leave a good impression on people. This was the first time Qu Mingcheng proactively greeted Qu Moying.

"Second Brother!" Qu Moying stopped and curtsied to him.

The youngsters of the two mansions were ranked together. As Qu Zhizhen's only son, Qu Mingcheng was the Second Young Master in the Qu Family.

"Moying, can we talk in private for a second?" Qu Mingcheng said gently.

Qu Moying hesitated for a few seconds and nodded at him. The two of them moved a bit away from the crowd.

The curtain of a carriage seemed to move a little bit. It appeared that someone noticed their movement and was peeking at them.

"Moying, my mother is a narrow-minded woman and made a mistake. I apologize to you!" After they stopped walking, Qu Mingcheng immediately bowed deeply to Qu Moying.

Qu Moying hurriedly moved aside to avoid his obeisance.

"Second Brother, it has passed already. You don't need to mention it again," said Qu Moying. Was this Second Brother the same kind as he looked like? She still felt skeptical about it. She had stayed in the mansion for a while since she came back. But this Second Brother didn't show any attitude to her yet, always maintaining a proper distance.

They only nodded to each other and gave a simple greeting when encountering before.

But right now, he acted so kindly in front of her. His behavior was gentle and polite without any trace of resentment. Yet, Qu Moying was still the root reason why Yu fell sick and had her name ruined. But he acted as if he didn't care about it at all.

He called Moying with no hesitation, as if it was coming from the bottom of his heart.

If Qu Moying had just returned to the mansion and met him for the first time, she would have found his attitude much more convincing. But right now, the more reliable he looked, the more suspicious she felt.

But no matter how skeptical she was, Qu Mingcheng at least behaved like a real, honest gentleman.

"Thank you, Moying." Qu Mingcheng bowed to her again with a smile. "Mother is still sick right now. After she recovers, I will definitely ask her to apologize to you in person. Family members shouldn't be so distant. I know my mother took many things for granted. It's actually my fault. I should tell her more about the importance of a family's harmony."

"Second Brother, you have nothing to do with it. Even if Second Madam really did it, you can't blame yourself for it," Qu Moying said softly.

A trace of wariness crossed her eyes. A few words already made her feel like this Second Young Master Qu was not a simple person to deal with.

He didn't ask for her forgiveness but properly apologized on Yu's behalf. He even said he would ask Yu to apologize to Qu Moying in person. But no matter what, Yu was still an elder in the family for Qu Moying. If she really visited Qu Moying and apologized to her in person, rumors would spread out that Qu Moying was a rude stepdaughter who forced Yu to apologize in person.

Yu's crime was investigated, but the one who found out the truth and told it to the Qu Family was Ji Youran. Technically, the Qu Family had never confirmed it, and Yu didn't admit she did it in public. So, Qu Moying couldn't identify Yu as the culprit who framed her. She used an ambiguous way to say it.

She had to be ambiguous about it.

"It's...Father's and my fault anyway. No matter my mother...did it or not, she was involved. After she recovers, she will give you a clear answer to it, Moying," Qu Mingcheng said with a firm look.

His reasoning was perfectly rounded and flawless. Anyone who heard it would think of Qu Mingcheng as a kind person, totally different from his mother, Yu.

Everything he said made sense.

"Thank you, Second Brother!" answered Qu Moying.

Qu Mingcheng didn't say anything more but bowed to Qu Moying again. Then he straightened up and reached out to show Qu Moying the way. "Moying, please get into the carriage!"

Qu Moying nodded and didn't reject him. When she got to the carriage and was about to climb up with Yu Dong's help, Qu Mingcheng reached out and lent her a hand. Holding Qu Mingcheng's hand, Qu Moying climbed up the carriage with a smile on her face. Then Yu Dong and Yu Chun followed her as Qu Mingcheng stepped aside.

He took the reins from a young servant after the carriages all started to move, got on the horse, and slowly followed behind.

"Mingcheng seems to treat you really nice, even better than his own sister." Qu Caiyue put down the curtain and said to Qu Moying sarcastically. She had a tough time holding herself back in front of the Old Lady. Seeing Qu Moying reminded her of the hardships she had been through before. She couldn't help but start to provoke Qu Moying immediately.

Because of what happened in the Dabei Temple, Qu Caiyue listened to many lectures after returning to the mansion. She even heard from her mother that the First Madam wanted to find her a random husband and let her get married as soon as possible. Of course, Qu Caiyue was unwilling to accept it, but she didn't dare oppose the First Madam. She could only vent her anger on Qu Moying.

"Second Sister, you want another argument, or you want to frame me again?" Qu Moying squinted her eyes and asked calmly.

Qu Caiyue's face flushed immediately. She pointed at Qu Moying in rage and wanted to curse her.

"Second Sister, Grandmother and Aunt Luo are in the carriage ahead. First Brother and Second Brother are riding horses next to us. Oh, right, and Uncle. Second Sister, if you are not afraid of getting scolded later, say it louder," staring at Qu Caiyue, Qu Moying leaned back and said lazily.

Hearing her words, Qu Caiyue shut her mouth immediately, only glaring at Qu Moying with annoyance.

She had listened to enough lectures from Luo these days, and even her mother was involved. This happened all because she framed Qu Moying before.

If she started another argument with Qu Moying, she would definitely be the one who got blamed.

Qu Moying never had a good impression of Qu Caiyue, who only knew flattering Qu Qiuyan and trampling on Qu Moying's ego. She cast a glance at Qu Caiyue, with a blushed face in rage, leaned back, and closed her eyes.

"You...Don't be so complacent yet..." Qu Caiyue's lowered voice rang near her ear.

Qu Moying ignored her.

"You...You... You will have your turn soon," Qu Caiyue said in exasperation, unwilling to be ignored.

“Second Sister, if you keep talking bullshit, I will stop the carriage right now and exchange my seat with Third Sister. I believe you will enjoy her companionship more, right?” Qu Moying suddenly said.

Qu Caiyue was so scared that she immediately pressed her into a straight line, feeling aggrieved and irritated.

Although she knew it was not really possible to happen because Qu Moying would get scolded for asking to change her seat, Qu Caiyue didn’t dare to take any risk right now. Before leaving the mansion this time, the Old Lady had warned her many times to behave well. If she misbehaved again, they would find a random husband for her and let luck decide her fate.

Qu Moying’s threat was very effective since Qu Caiyue didn’t have the nerve to risk her own marriage. Luo was the one who had the right to make the call, so Qu Caiyue didn’t dare to cause any trouble again.

The carriage fell into silence as it headed to the Earl Ling’an’s Mansion. The two masters were quiet, let alone the maids. On the first day of Earl Ling’an’s funeral, there were few guests. The people present were all family friends and close relatives. The Qu Family’s carriages entered the Ji Family quickly and stopped at the parking lot under an old maid’s guidance.

After the carriages stopped, the Qu Family got off and followed behind the Ji Family’s servants to the altar room.

Qu Moying saw white ribbons hung everywhere in the Earl Ling’an’s Mansion along the way, totally different than what it looked like yesterday. Because they just announced it when she visited yesterday and didn’t have time to change the decoration in the mansion yet. Everything was ready today.

The Qu Family went to mourn Earl Ling’an in the altar room. They looked at the coffin in the center and let out some sighs. They just saw the Crown Princess’s coffin a few days ago, and now it was her father’s turn. This father and daughter were indeed pitiful.

After finishing the mourning session, the group was divided into two teams. Qu Moying followed the Old Lady to the inner yard where females stayed while Qu Zhilin and Qu Zhizhen took their sons to the outer yard.

They came pretty early today, so not many people were inside the living room when they followed an old maid there.

Old Lady Qu and Old Lady Ji had known each other for a long time. When they saw each other, Old Lady Qu comforted Old Lady Ji, whose eyes were red because of too much crying. Old Lady Ji's voice was so hoarse that she couldn't even talk, and she looked haggard in grief.

Xiao had been comforting her aside in a low voice too.

Xiao looked feeble and pale today, different from her aggressive look yesterday. Not only Xiao, everyone in the Earl Ling'an's Mansion, including all the servants, had red, swollen eyes. The entire Ji Family was immersed in sorrow.

Qu Moying sneered inwardly, impressed by their excellent performance. If she didn't know the truth behind her father's death, she would be totally convinced that her father had just died yesterday...