

Noble Wife 41

Chapter 41 A Tiny Spark Can Start a Great Fire

Seeing the chaos inside the room, Yue Wenhan pulled a long face. He took a glance at the situation and immediately recognized the people here. He rushed to stand in front of Qu Moying, blocked Qu Zhizhen's hand that was about to fall on her face, and sneered, "Mr. Qu, why do you treat your ex-wife's daughter so harshly after you just came back? I wonder if it's because my family mistreated you when you stayed in the Yue's Mansion during your trip to the South."

Qu Moying's mother Yue was born in a scholarly family in the South. The Yue's Family was not powerful but had a decent reputation, respected by many civil officials.

Yue Wenhan was a previous principal graduate of the Imperial Examination. With his family background and great competence, he had already become the vice minister of the Dali Temple, a level-four official, at a young age. His rank was still lower than Qu Zhizhen's, but he climbed up the ladder with his own abilities and had a promising future. No one dared to underestimate him.

Yue Wenhan was the nephew of Yue, which meant Qu Moying and him were cousins.

During Qu Zhizhen's trip to the South, he stayed at the Yue's Mansion. Yue Wenhan knew his private and official agenda, which even made Qu Zhizhen suspect that the Yue's Family sent people to stalk him. Of course, he didn't dare to investigate such a sensitive matter.

As the emperor thought highly of this young vice minister of the Dali Temple, Qu Zhizhen was not sure if this was an order from the emperor himself.

Moreover, the emperor himself suggested Qu Zhizhen stay at the Yue's Mansion, leaving him no choice. Otherwise, he would rather stay at an inn.

It had been a long time since Yue passed away. He almost forgot about his ex-wife. Seeing her family would only make him recall the shame he bore because of her death. This was the memory he felt unwilling to think of, and he didn't want to meet people related to her either.

"You stayed at the Yue's Mansion before?" Yu pulled a long face and asked her husband immediately after hearing Yue Wenhan's words. She didn't know this young man since they never met before.

Same as her husband, she didn't like mentioning things about this ex-wife, Yue, and prohibited any talks about her in the mansion.

Qu Zhizhen ignored Yu's questioning, took back his hand, and pretended to dust himself off with a casual look on his face. "Mr. Yue, what brings you here?"

"If I were not here, I'm afraid your slap would be already on your poor ex-wife's daughter," Yue Wenhan said sharply with a cold look on his face.

Yu Dong was still sobbing on the ground, covering his face. Qu Moying was quiet aside, with her head lowered. Yue Wenhan had never met her before. Right now, he could only see the veil covering her eyes, but he knew that this girl was his cousin.

After moving to the capital, he once tried to visit Qu Moying, who was staying in the village at that time. But she refused his request to meet, saying it was inappropriate to meet a man in private. They lost in touch after that. But even so, Yue Wenhan dropped his work at hand and rushed over after receiving a letter from her.

"It must be a misunderstanding, Mr. Yue. I was just punishing a misbehaved servant," Qu Zhizhen cleared his throat and said awkwardly. Then he pointed at another room, "Is there anything you want to talk about with me, Mr. Yue? Shall we have the conversation in my study?"

He just arrived home from a long trip a few hours ago. The unexpected visit from the vice minister of the Dali Temple unsettled him.

"There's no need. I just want to ask you why you treat your ex-wife's daughter this way. Mr. Qu, if you are not willing to raise my cousin, I'm sure my family can give her a good life," Yue Wenhan said in a stern voice. He didn't move an inch, with his hands behind his back.

“Mr. Yue, this is our family affair. It’s better that you stay out of it!” The look on Qu Zhizhen’s face became more displeased after Yue Wenhan kept questioning him in front of his own mother, wife, and children.

“Mr. Qu, did you forget that the Fourth Lady is also my cousin? I will not allow her to be mistreated by her family. May I ask why you are so angry with her?” Yue Wenhan didn’t show any intention to back off.

He always knew that Qu Zhizhen had been harsh on his cousin, but he didn’t have a reason to defend her because neither they were close nor did she say something about it herself.

“The Second Master tries to force the lady to marry Young Master Yongning. He says it’s great that Lady Yu, the Second Madam’s niece, has a relationship with the young master. Then the lady can be the first wife, and Lady Yu can be the second wife. He thinks Fourth Lady is useless, and she needs Lady Yu to capture Young Master Yongning’s heart.”

Covering his face, Yu Dong started to cry louder.

An ordinary maid wouldn’t dare to say anything at this moment, but this one was a different kind. Obviously, he would grab any chance to add more fuel to the fire.

Qu Zhizhen was so angry that he wished he could slap this rude maid again right now. He had never met a servant like her, who had no sense of the situation and dared to say such things at an intense moment. No wonder she came from the village. It seemed she urgently needed a lesson.

“Mr. Qu, you want her to be another first wife in name only? Are you trying to make her relive my aunt’s tragedy so that the lady of the Yu’s family can rise to the position after she dies?” Hearing Yu Dong’s words, Yue Wenhan flew into a rage.

The Yue’s Family still couldn’t let go of what happened to Yue before.

At that time, Qu Zhizhen made up a whole story about Yue’s death. He even paid a visit to the South and knelt down in front of the Old Master Yue to confess himself. He kept explaining that Yue insisted on

moving into the convent when she's pregnant, which triggered a premature delivery. No one knew about it, and he didn't want it to happen either.

Qu Zhizhen stayed at the mourning hall for three whole days and fainted several times while wailing in front of his wife's coffin to show his sincerity. Then the Yue's Family reluctantly accepted his explanation.

The death of Yue had always been a wound of the heart for the Yue's Family. Yue Wenhan couldn't forget about this aunt who treated people gently and her miserable death.

The straight interrogation from a youngster made Qu Zhizhen lose face in front of his family. His eyes darkened, and he said with exasperation, "Mr. Yue, you only heard it from a maid. Don't tell me you will trust one person's words like this in your work too."

"Father, I'm not going to marry him!" A cold voice came from the side as Qu Moying raised her head. Her sharp gaze fell on Qu Zhizhen's face, and she repeated herself firmly, "Lady Yu and Young Master Yongning have had an affair since long ago. She can marry him if she wants, but I'm not going to."

"I see. So, Young Master Yongning and Lady Yu started a relationship long ago. Now, you are trying to use my cousin as a cover for their scandal. Good. Great plan!" Yue Wenhan understood the situation immediately and glanced at Yu with a cold look. "The two generations of the Yu's family surely know how to make good plans. It seems to be shared in your bloodline."

Yu was startled by his sharp gaze and stepped back hurriedly. But then she thought she couldn't act too weak, so she swallowed hard to calm herself down and faked a smile. "I'm sorry I can't understand you, Mr. Yue. The Fourth Lady's guessing can't be taken seriously. Is this the way how you work on the trials?"

She already had figured out his identity.

"Madam Yu, do you mean you have nothing to do with my aunt's death? Weren't you using her to cover something?" Yue Wenhan's tone was still sharp. He didn't trust Qu Zhizhen's words the most among all the Yues. But when he became an official in the capital, Yue had already passed away for over ten years.

He never got the chance to meet Yu before, and since now she offended him first, he apparently wouldn't go easy on her. Yue Wenhan was known for his sharp interrogation, and his words left Yu nowhere to escape.

"How dare you!" Qu Zhizhen yelled with rage.

"Mr. Qu, I know my cousin is a daughter of the Qu's Family, but a Yue's lady gave her birth at the cost of her own life. Since my cousin doesn't want to accept the marriage arrangement, please don't force it. Otherwise, I'd love to make some investigation about how Young Master Yongning started a relationship with Lady Yu while being engaged with my cousin."

Yue Wenhan sneered and rolled up his sleeves.

As the vice minister of the Dali Temple, he had a whole investigation team made up of competent people. It would be a piece of cake for them to find out the truth about a love affair. Moreover, those two had had a relationship for a long time. They never tried to hide it from other people in the Qu's Mansion, not to mention Qu Moying.

Yu started to panic. She pulled Qu Zhizhen's sleeve, trying to stop him. If Yue Wenhan really confirmed the relationship between Yu Qingmeng and Xu Lipeng, all the women's names from the Yu's Family would be affected, including hers. Not only her name as a madam would be ruined but also her unmarried daughter's.

"I will take care of it as her father. I now ask you to stop your interference in our family affair!" Qu Zhizhen said with annoyance and anger. He couldn't accept being scolded by a youngster in public anymore. He shook Yu's hand off him as his eyes darkened, inwardly blaming his useless wife for acting so weak.

Noticing the couple's petty actions, Qu Moying curled up her lips. None of them had any good intentions. Yu could climb up to her current position only because she knew well about managing family affairs, building intimacy with her husband, and never causing him any trouble.

But what about right now? All Qu Moying did was just throwing a tiny spark in a haystack.

If the investigation about Yu Qingmeng went deeper, it might cause bigger trouble. However, Qu Zhizhen would not be happy to see anyone mention his ex-wife's death again.

Yu was determined to let Yu Qingmeng and Qu Moying marry Young Master Yongning, but she didn't notice how similar the situation was to what happened among Qu Moying's mother, Qu Zhizhen, and herself. She forgot that her husband only wanted to take it to his grave. Otherwise, his reputation as an official would be significantly affected.

Right now, it was the vice minister of the Dali Temple questioning him, whose job was making investigations. He surely knew how to interrogate people. Also, Qu Zhizhen cared a lot about his reputation since it was crucial to an official. That's why he seemed to be at a disadvantage against this young man.

A tiny spark could be insignificant, but it could also start a great fire!

"How come a father will use his own daughter as a cover for someone else's love affair? Mr. Qu, is it because there's a secret connection between you and Lady Yu?" After all the interrogations he had done, Yue Wenhan's good at picking the best words to say.

Qu Zhizhen's face turned red due to rage. He was annoyed but couldn't come up with a good explanation. He turned his head and glared at Yu, who was still trying to pull his sleeve. No one could still keep a good mood facing this situation right after coming back home.

"A father will never allow anything bad to happen to his daughter. Mr. Yue, please stop talking nonsense. You are ruining the ladies' names!" Qu Zhizhen cleared his throat and said in a righteous and stern tone, but his words exposed his intention to back off.

A trace of sarcasm appeared in Qu Moying's eyes...

Chapter 42 Young Master Xu, Please Break off the Engagement!

"Since Mr. Yue is already here to discuss the matter, please take a seat first. I do want to hear your opinion on this," the Old Lady finally uttered something. She smiled at the young man as Granny Wu sent someone to serve him tea.

“Thank you, Mrs. Qu!” Yue Wenhan still had much respect for the Old Lady. Her words softened the stern look on his face, and he bowed to her politely, “I was too worried about my cousin. Please forgive me for my rudeness, Mrs. Qu!”

The young man turned back to his usual gracious look, leaving a good impression on the Old Lady. She smiled back again, saying that he didn’t need to worry about it.

Everyone sat down on their seats in order. Yu Chun helped Yu Dong up, and both of them stood back behind Qu Moying.

Yu still tried to say something, but then she noticed Yue Wenhan’s cold gaze falling on her. She held Qu Qiuyan’s hand and shook her head quietly, signaling her to stay silent.

However, Qu Qiuyan didn’t even think about defending her family after Yue Wenhan entered their mansion. She was in silence the whole time, lowering her head. Compared to everyone else, a good reputation was even more important to her. If Yu Qingmeng became the wife of Young Master Yongning, it could be beneficial for her; if she became a concubine, Qu Qiuyan thought that Lady Yu had no value to her anymore.

She’d rather not have a cousin who was a concubine.

“Young Master Yongning wants to marry Lady Yu as his concubine?” After sitting down, Yue Wenhan adjusted his clothes, took a sip of the tea, and asked.

Qu Zhizhen couldn’t be more exasperated. He frowned, “I will ask Young Master Yongning to give me a proper explanation.”

“That would be perfect. If Mr. Qu doesn’t have time for it, I can ask him as well.” Yue Wenhan kept adding the pressure.

“You don’t need to be bothered for this, Mr. Yue! I can handle it myself,” Qu Zhizhen said coldly.

"I appreciate it, Mr. Qu!" The young man curled up his lips, the look on his face softened. Then he turned around and look at the Old Lady, "I apologize for my sudden visit, Mrs. Qu. I heard that my cousin moved back to the mansion from the village. I'm worried about her, and this is why I'm here. Please forgive me if I've bothered you."

"We should've invited you earlier, Mr. Yue. Since Ying just came back to the mansion, she needs some time to get accustomed first. We didn't expect that you would visit us so soon, and I appreciate your concern for her," said the Old Lady smilingly.

The two's casual conversation brought some relief to everyone in the room.

After they chatted for a while, Yue Wenhan stood up and excused himself. He was here to support his cousin, and it was about time for him to leave.

After getting permission from the Old Lady, Qu Moying stood up as well to walk him out.

"Cousin, you don't like Xu Lipeng?" After they walked out of the Old Lady's yard, Yue Wenhan asked Qu Moying, who was walking beside him. His initial impression of Xu Lipeng was pretty good since the young master neither broke off the engagement agreed by his aunt nor did he show any disrespect to his cousin.

It turned out things were not as simple as they looked!

"Young Master Xu liked Lady Yu, and the person he wants to marry is Lady Yu. She once even asked me to break off the engagement or be his first wife in name only. I don't want any of it, but Father forces me to marry him. He said Lady Yu can help me stabilize the relationship between the two families, and I should be grateful that Lady Yu is willing to be the second wife after me."

Qu Moying explained the whole situation to him calmly.

The young girl's face was expressionless when she talked about the engagement, showing she didn't have any expectations. The only daughter of his aunt almost relived the same tragedy as her mother, and Yue Wenhan felt very sorry for her.

“Don’t worry. I will never allow them to force you. Since Xu Lipeng has an affair with the lady from the Yu’s Family, I’m sure evidence can be found. If they still hold onto the engagement by then, I won’t go easy on the young master,” Yue Wenhan said coldly, with a stern look on his face.

His words sent some warmth to Qu Moying’s heart. Yue Wenhan was also her cousin when she used to be Ji Hanyue in her past life and treated her well. However, they were not close either because they had to obey the rules of etiquette, and the Crown Prince was never fond of him.

She didn’t expect they could be cousins again after she had reborn. They were only remotely related this time, but he still spared no effort to support her!

She invited Yue Wenhan here today to show him the scene when she was scolded by Qu Zhizhen because she knew it would give her father some pressure.

“I really appreciate it, cousin!” Qu Moying thanked him faithfully.

The engagement was almost confirmed to be broken off since Yue Wenhan already pushed Qu Zhizhen to step back. It was only a matter of time now.

When Xu Lipeng arrived at the Qu’s Mansion, Qu Zhizhen was already waiting for him in the study. The look on his face was stern as the young master entered.

Xu Lipeng stepped closer and bowed to him, “I’m glad to see you, Mr. Qu. I heard that you came back, and please forgive me for the disturbance. I want to talk to you about something.”

He also prepared some gifts for Qu Zhizhen to welcome him back.

Qu Zhizhen’s cold gaze fell on him. He used to regard Xu Lipeng as a promising young man, but he completely changed his mind right now. The unexpected visit of Yue Wenhan was all thanks to him and Yu Qingmeng.

For this matter, Qu Zhizhen immediately sent the butler to ask around after coming back from the Old Lady’s yard. It turned out that everything Qu Moying said was true.

Moreover, those two had acted intimately in front of all his servants, never trying to hide from anyone. Qu Zhizhen couldn't be angrier after hearing it. It was not that he was worried about Qu Moying, but Xu Lipeng made him lose face in front of all the servants!

He used to trust Xu Lipeng so much, taking him as his son-in-law. He even felt a bit guilty for the young man marrying his terrible daughter. After their wedding, if Xu Lipeng wanted to marry other women, he wouldn't say anything about it. He'd even be happy for him if the young man really found someone he liked later.

But Qu Zhizhen never thought that Xu Lipeng would betray his trust, and he even did it in his own mansion, making all the servants take him as a foolish master.

"Young Master, are you here to break off the engagement?" Losing all his patience, Qu Zhizhen asked directly.

"What makes you say that, Mr. Qu? I thought you're always aware of my feelings for the Fourth Lady." Xu Lipeng was surprised. Before, Yu Qingmeng told him that Qu Moying wouldn't make any trouble after her father returned home. After the wedding date was confirmed, he could start to arrange the marriage between Yu Qingmeng and him.

Anything could be delayed, but the baby in her womb couldn't.

"Young Master Xu, since you want to marry the daughter of the Yu's Family, you don't need to lie about my daughter anymore. The engagement will be broken off, and we will return all the betrothal gifts given by the Xu's Family. Everything will go back to where it came," said Qu Zhizhen with a displeased look on his face. After being threatened by Yue Wenhan, a flame of rage had been burning in him. No one could sit tight in this situation.

"Mr. Qu, who told you that? My first wife is meant to be Fourth Lady Qu, and there's nothing to be worried about," Xu Lipeng said in a righteous tone, thinking that Qu Zhizhen was just trying to sound him out.

Qu Zhizhen's face twitched with rage, and he said more firmly, "Our family can't afford this engagement with the Xu's Family anymore. Since you have affection for Lady Yu, and you two apparently have

developed a close relationship in my mansion, you can just marry her. My family doesn't want to be involved in this. I know my daughter might not be a good choice for you, but I don't want her to be the cover of someone else's love affair."

Xu Lipeng was stunned with his mouth open. He didn't know what to say, and his face turned red because of embarrassment. He never thought Qu Zhizhen would point it out so straightforward and break the friendship between the two families.

"Young Master, I've known everything between you and Yu Qingmeng. It's over. The engagement has to be broken off!" Qu Zhizhen rubbed his forehead and said clearly.

"Mr. Qu, isn't it normal that a man has a confidante that is not his wife? Why do we have to break off the engagement? It will be bad for both families' reputation," Xu Lipeng defended himself hurriedly as his face turned redder.

He didn't think there was anything wrong with Yu Qingmeng and his relationship. Both of them accepted it by their own free will, not to mention he hinted Yu Qingmeng many times that he would marry Qu Moying, and Yu Qingmeng could be his second wife. Both of them would be his wives, and there wouldn't be any differences. But why was everyone displeased about it? Well, maybe once or twice, he indeed promised Yu Qingmeng that he would only marry her. But wouldn't every man say something like that in some specific situation?!

Who would take it seriously?!

Even if the engagement would really be broken off, it had to be because of Qu Moying's bad reputation. He definitely could not be the reason for it.

"Young Master Xu, please break off the engagement!" Qu Zhizhen said firmly.

It was not his fault that he changed his mind. The Old Lady disagreed; Qu Moying disagreed; more importantly, Yue Wenhan threatened to interfere. It would be too late if they didn't break off the engagement early and waited until Yue Wenhan found the evidence. Then not only Xu Lipeng's name would be ruined but also his. Xu Lipeng should be the one to blame because it was Yu Qingmeng and him who disobeyed the rules of etiquette, and they even let it happen in the Qu's Mansion, which could be easily confirmed.

“Mr. Qu...”

“Someone, show Young Master Xu the door!” Qu Zhizhen waved his hand, losing all his patience. He didn’t want to waste one more second on this young man. He used to regard him as a promising son-in-law, but actuality, Xu Lipeng was just a useless playboy blinded by his own desire.

A young servant walked up and smirked at Xu Lipeng, “Young Master, this way!”

Xu Lipeng was furious about being driven out by Qu Zhizhen. His face turned red and then pale, and it became even redder later. He had never been cold-shouldered like this before, and he couldn’t bear the embarrassment of standing in this place for one more second.

He hurriedly strode outside, but Qu Zhizhen’s voice rang again behind him when he was at the door, “Young Master Xu, please send the engagement card back immediately once you’re home. Yue Wenhan said if the engagement is not broken off, he will conduct a thorough investigation. You are a smart man. I’m sure you can understand what he means!”

With a dull, heavy sound, Xu Lipeng’s forehead hit the door frame hard, and it got red and swollen at once.

Feeling the pain, Xu Lipeng touched his forehead subconsciously, but then his face turned pale all of a sudden as something crossed his mind. Yue Wenhan was involved as well?

As the young vice minister of the Dali Temple, Yue Wenhan’s status was always something that Xu Lipeng aimed for. No matter in the Imperial Examination years ago or in terms of the current power level, there had been a huge gap between them.

As Young Master Yongning, Xu Lipeng indeed had a powerful family. However, Marquis Yongning was not a competent person, and he didn’t have any actual power in his position. Xu Lipeng was the only hope to make the Xu’s Family prosper, but even so, Xu Lipeng still thought his family background was better than Yue Wenhan’s.

Yue Wenhan was born in a scholarly family in the South. His family was wealthy, but the Yues only chased after the peace of life. They were well-reputed in the literary world, but not many chose the political path. Some of them ended up being officials, but those positions were just in name only. They knew well how to enjoy life but didn't have the competence to climb up.

However, Yue Wenhan was an outlier in this bloodline. He was a student with top performance and then became a competent official in the political field. He climbed up smoothly, winning recognition from the emperor. Everyone considered him a young man with a bright future. His intervention meant Yu Qingmeng and Xu Lipeng's affair could be easily revealed. For the first time in a long period, the young master of the Xu's Family panicked.

He gritted his teeth with annoyance. It seemed that he had to break off the engagement with Qu Moying, but he still couldn't accept that he was rejected by an ugly, blind woman. Where did she get the courage to do that?

Xu Lipeng covered his forehead with his hand, standing in the yard with a pale face.

At the same time, an old maid sneaked close to him, looking around to see if anyone noticed her. She hurriedly handed a letter to Xu Lipeng and then left with caution...

Chapter 43 A Necessary Reason

"My lord, what about Qingmeng? What about Qingmeng now? If we break off the engagement, they will never allow Qingmeng to marry into the Xu's Family. Marchioness Yongning won't agree." Tears flowed down Yu's cheeks. She stared at Qu Zhizhen with a pitiful look on her face, sobbing. If it were before, Qu Zhizhen would soon soften and agree to her request.

However, he was still annoyed by Yue Wenhan since he made him lose face in public. At the same time, hearing Yu talking about Qingmeng this whole time instead of Qu Moying became even more irritating. He flew into a rage and reached out to push Yu away rudely.

That was not what Yu expected. She stepped back and almost fell to the ground. Fortunately, Auntie Hai reacted quickly and stepped forward to keep her from falling.

"My lord..." Yu whined and pouted as her tears fell down.

"Stop, stop, stop! All you know is crying. Can you do something useful? Look at you, letting your own niece have a love affair with Xu Lipeng in front of all my servants. Have you ever thought about my reputation? Who on earth is your daughter, Yu Qingmeng or Qu Moying?"

Qu Zhizhen glared at her and scolded, venting his anger.

"M-My lord... H-How could you say that to me...? It's... It's not my fault! I have no clue about it." Yu started to cry even louder. She definitely would not admit her role in this.

"Yu, I don't know what you are planning, but you have to know that Ying is my daughter. You ruining her name for an outsider is no different from ruining my name." Qu Zhizhen didn't want to listen to her explanation. He was already exhausted because of the traveling. After this long, exasperating day, he had lost all his patience.

"When Ying was a kid, it was you who made her half-blind because you didn't let the servants take good care of her. And look at what you are doing right now. Yu, don't you really think I'm an idiot?!" He turned around and left immediately.

No matter how loud and sorrowful her cry sounded, it couldn't pull him back. Qu Zhizhen left her behind, feeling irritated. He used to think of Yu as a good wife who was gentle and considerate. It seemed like he overestimated her. He couldn't believe that his own wife ruined the engagement approved by him and made him lose his face in front of the youngsters.

No one could keep a good mood in this situation.

"My lord... where are we going?" A young servant trotted to catch up with Qu Zhizhen and asked cautiously.

"The study!" Qu Zhizhen's voice was cold.

He didn't want to see Yu's face at all for the next few days because it would remind him of Yue Wenhan's irritating words. His implicit comparison between Yu Qingmeng, Xu Lipeng, and Ying's situation and Qu Zhizhen's own situation years ago upset him.

Were they really the same? Of course, it was not. His marriage, when to marry, whom to marry – every step was calculated by him in advance.

And he had always been firm about his own feelings. How could he be the same as that playboy, Xu Lipeng?

"Hai Lan, Hai Lan, what should I do? H-He insists on breaking off the engagement. What should I do? What will happen to Qingmeng?!" Seeing Qu Zhizhen walking away without any hesitation, Yu started to wail with grief.

Auntie Hai helped her sit on a chair and reassured her, "Second Madam, take it easy. Things have already happened, and since the master already made up his mind, just let it be!"

If this continued, it wouldn't do any good to both families' reputation.

"No, I can't let Qingmeng lead a miserable life. The only person she can marry is Xu Lipeng right now, but Marchioness Yongning has never liked her. If she becomes his concubine, and the wife Xu Lipeng marries later is an aggressive one, her life will be ruined!" Yu wiped her tears as a vicious look appeared on her face. She pulled Auntie Hai closer and whispered, "Tomorrow, I will let someone trick Qu Moying into going out while you go find someone that can drag her name through the mud. Let's see if she wants to marry Xu Lipeng or not after this."

"Madam... Th-This is too obvious. The Old Lady won't go easy on you." Hearing her plan, Auntie Hai was frightened, with her hands trembling.

"For Qingmeng, I will take whatever punishment from that old woman. She can't make my husband divorce me since I still have Yan and Mingcheng. It will be fine," Yu gritted her teeth, determined to ruin Qu Moying's life.

“Madam, if you do so, you will irritate Mr. Yue. Think about what he’s capable of. Lady Yu... Not only Lady Yu’s name but also the Third Lady’s will be in tatters. I’m afraid the Third Lady’s marriage will be even affected since Lord Jing will never marry a lady without a good reputation.”

Auntie Hai knelt down in front of Yu with fear.

Even if Yu dared to do so, she didn’t. If they really tried to frame the Fourth Lady in such an obvious way, things were likely to go wrong. The Second Madam would be fine, but she was just an ordinary servant. She was even aware that the madam would surely blame everything on her afterward. Then she remembered Granny Wang, who was still lying on the bed with her face swollen and red, and felt flustered.

Auntie Hai knew that Yu wouldn’t listen to her, and Yue Wenhan was the only hope she had. Even the master was afraid of him, so the Second Madam should fear him as well.

“They had a fight?” asked Qu Moying. Under the dim light, Yu Chun helped her take off the veil and started to gently massage the acupoints around her eyes. This was a special treatment that was good for the recovery of her eyes.

“Yeah, I heard it was a big one. The master even moved to the study!” Granny Miao said smilingly, not hiding her delight at all. “They said the Second Madam was wailing like hell in the yard. Good for her!”

Wail? Qu Moying smiled grimly. Her eyes were closed, but they were still moving slightly as she was thinking. This was just the beginning, and Yu already wailed like hell? That woman was determined to ruin her life, and she was just returning what Yu deserved. Qu Moying would make her cry harder later!

She smiled when she thought about it. Her beautiful long eyelashes lay on her ivory skin, but the smile on this delicate face showed a trace of cattiness.

“My lady, I also heard that the Third Lady sent a letter to Young Master Yongning today!” Granny Miao continued. She actually found it out by accident today.

During these days, Granny Miao spent many efforts on getting along with other servants in the mansion by giving medicines around and helping treat some sick people. She told them that because of the Fourth Lady's health situation, she had met many doctors and learned some knowledge and skills.

They completely believed her, and she did help a lot with her knowledge. With all the good relationships Granny Miao built in the mansion, it was now very convenient for her to dig for information.

Some clever servants even noticed that the Fourth Lady seemed to be different from what people said. She was capable of teaching a good lesson to the Second Madam and the Third Lady, let alone others. They realized that although they were not close to the Fourth Lady, it was better not to offend her.

They would do things for her convenience as long as it was within their power since she was under the protection of the Old Lady. As for the Second Master, she was not the true master of this mansion anyway.

"Why did the Third Lady give Young Master Yongning a letter? Is she offering some evil ideas to them?" Yu Chun stopped her movement and asked with alert.

"No!" Qu Moying shook her head after thinking about it. "She's probably trying to convince Xu Lipeng to stop the drama and marry Yu Qingmeng as his wife. It's beneficial for both families, especially for her!"

A cousin who's a concubine and a cousin who's Young Master Yongning's wife were two totally different things. But with Qu Moying involved, Qu Qiuyan was destined to be disappointed.

Many people in the mansion were aware of her feelings for Pei Yusheng, Lord Jing. For the Old Lady's birthday banquet this time, Yu had sent an invitation to Lord Jing, but he didn't even bother to reply. After Qu Qiuyan sent her servant to go with Yu's servant again and gave him her own invitation, he finally agreed to attend.

There were rumors that Pei Yusheng's biological mother, Noble Consort He, didn't choose Qu Qiuyan but the granddaughter of Prime Minister Xu, Xu Haitang, as her daughter-in-law candidate. However, because this Lady Xu could only be considered good-looking but not stunning, Lord Jing was not satisfied with this arrangement. Qu Moying wondered if this was the reason that he started to hook up with Qu Qiuyan.

Qu Qiuyan indeed had a beautiful face, better than Xu Haitang's.

But according to what she knew from her past life, the candidate that Noble Consort He chose was actually the minister of Works, Mr. Liu's daughter, honored with the title "County Lady Jingyu" by the emperor. This lady had secretly competed for the position of Crown Princess against her before. But of course, people barely knew about it.

"Lady Yu is so determined to marry Young Master Yongning. Normally with her background, she can definitely marry into a decent family as a wife. But she's even willing to lower herself and marry him as a noble concubine." Granny Miao said with disdain as she pressed her lips. Then something else crossed her mind. She hurriedly said to Qu Moying, "my lady, will Young Master Yongning use her as the reason to break off your engagement?"

Engagement couldn't be easily broken off. The Xu's Family must give a proper reason that could be accepted by the outsiders.

"No, he won't!" Qu Moying shook her head. Xu Lipeng was obviously the person to blame for the matter about Yu Qingmeng. Meanwhile, he didn't want to marry Yu Qingmeng as his wife. But if he broke off the engagement for a concubine, it would only bring shame to the Xu's Family.

"Then... what will they use as the reason?" Granny Miao mumbled, feeling lost.

Qu Moying slowly opened her eyes and gazed at herself in the mirror. The look on her face was icy. She didn't care about who ended up marrying Xu Lipeng. No matter what, this engagement had to be broken off!

The Old Lady told her that the Xu's Family finally decided to break off the engagement the next morning. Although she was already pretty sure about it, hearing the news was still a relief to her.

Since the Xu's Family took a stand, the engagement was officially broken off. The Old Lady sent Granny Wu to take out all the things gifted by the Xus before. They would return everything untouched. If any gift was already used, they would send back items with the same value. The Qu's Family didn't want to owe them anything or get involved with them again.

After this, the Old Lady finally saw Xu Lipeng's true colors.

"But the Xus hope to announce it after my birthday, which is coming soon. They said since the two families have been in a good relationship for years, treating each other as family, they still want to attend the banquet and take it as the last farewell. Otherwise, the breaking-off will be too abrupt." The Old Lady didn't want to wait, but what they said was indeed reasonable in terms of etiquette.

After Xu Lipeng was not related to Ying anymore, whatever he did would have nothing to do with the Qu's Family. Since their agreement to break off the engagement was quick, the Old Lady was satisfied enough, so she agreed to their suggestion.

Somehow, Qu Moying felt her heart skipped a beat, and her eyelid twitched for a second after hearing it. She asked, "Do they mean Young Master Xu will attend your birthday banquet still in the name of my fiancé?"

"Yes, this is their request. But don't worry, the breaking-off is already confirmed. Even though the Xu's Family tries to delay it, they can't do anything about it," the Old Lady reassured her as she reached out to pat the girl's soft hands.

"Alright, then he will be welcomed!" A mocking smile showed up on Qu Moying's face. Before, she even felt sorry for the next weak, gentle girl who would be chosen to marry that douchebag. She saved herself from it but couldn't help this other girl. But now, it seemed that they didn't let it go yet, and they were still plotting some scheme.

These people were truly heartless...

"Your father told me today that he invited one of the most famous opera performers in the capital for the banquet. Her name is... What's her name again? Anyway, she's excellent at female roles and singing," the Old Lady rubbed her temples and started to chit chat with Qu Moying.

Hearing her words, Qu Moying's eyes lit up. She had to squeeze the handkerchief hard to suppress her excitement.

Chapter 44 Actually, I Just Don't Like You!

“Ming Xian’er?”

“Right, her name’s Ming Xian’er. The group she belongs to, the Xifu Opera Group, is quite difficult to book for private performances. Since the Crown Prince is fond of one male-role performer in that group, they usually stay at his mansion and rarely take performance invitations from outside. I didn’t expect that they would agree to come this time. It’s truly surprising...”

The Old Lady was still talking. Since the matter about Qu Moying was settled, the Old Lady finally had some spare time to consider her birthday banquet. She was in a good mood and started to share this pleasant thing with her granddaughter.

Qu Moying listened to the Old Lady’s prattle smilingly. Gradually, the sound faded away as she lost in her own thoughts. This was not the first time she heard the name “Ming Xian’er,” and she could even be considered acquaintance in her past life.

Ming Xian’er was known as the star of the Xifu Opera Group, but few people knew that she was the real owner behind it. A female opera performer could become the owner of an opera group, which was because, of course, she was the Crown Prince’s mistress.

Qu Moying only suspected it in her past life, but now, she felt assertive.

Because the Crown Prince enjoyed the Xifu Opera Group’s performance, he arranged a yard for them in his mansion so that he could watch their performance anytime. The outsiders were told that the Crown Prince liked another famous male-role performer, but in fact, the one liked by the Crown Prince was Ming Xian’er.

Ming Xian’er had a coquettish appearance, which was even more stunning after she dressed up.

Ji Hanyue ran into them twice, seeing Pei Luo’an and Ming Xian’er standing together, talking and laughing intimately. But except for this kind of intimate behavior, she didn’t see anything else. When Ming Xian’er noticed her, she didn’t act flustered at all. All she did was bowing at her politely and leaving. Her manner was graceful, almost perfect.

However, Ji Hanyue's instinct told her that something was wrong between the two. She argued with Pei Luo'an about it, and he promised he would send the Xifu Opera Group away and never see Ming Xian'er again.

In her past life, she trusted the Crown Prince deeply and never doubted his words. But now she knew the true colors of this man, and the mist that once blinded her was gone.

"Ying? Ying...?" Seeing her staring at the air, the Old Lady called her worriedly.

She didn't realize it until Yu Dong gently pulled her sleeve. Qu Moying blushed and lowered her head, "Grandma, I was thinking about Lady Yu..."

The Old Lady thought she was still upset and felt more sorry for her. "It's already over. I will find you a better man in the future. A person like Young Master Yongning doesn't deserve to marry my granddaughter!"

"Don't worry, Grandma. I'm alright. I don't care about that man." Qu Moying shook her head, "I'm only worried that the Xu's Family will find a reason to blame it all on me!"

"I won't allow it!" The Old Lady glared with rage. Even though it was the man's fault to cause the engagement to be broken off, the outsiders still tended to speak ill of the woman. Moreover, Qu Moying's eyes hadn't recovered yet, and there were already rumors about her. If the Xu's Family dared to shift the responsibility to her, the Old Lady would bring the affair between Yu Qingmeng and Xu Lipeng to light.

"Grandma, that's what I think as well. It shouldn't happen, but it's still better to be careful during your birthday banquet," Qu Moying said softly.

"Don't worry. I will." The Old Lady didn't think about it before, but after Qu Moying's reminder, the alarm was sounded in her mind.

They had chatted for a while. When Qu Moying noticed her grandmother started to get tired, she stood up and took her leave.

She didn't hurry back after getting out of the yard. With Yu Chun and Yu Dong, she rambled towards the garden. As the weather got warmer these days, many flowers bloomed there. It was a good time to enjoy the view.

However, she didn't expect to meet Xu Lipeng. From a distance, she could already see the gloomy look on his face. Qu Moying stepped back and gently bowed to him.

At this moment, they were no longer connected by the engagement.

Xu Lipeng was invited here by Yu today to take back some valuable items that were part of his betrothal presents to the Qu's Family. After he saw Qu Moying, he stopped as his eyes darkened.

Qu Moying kept the same position for a while but didn't hear anything from Xu Lipeng. Wasting time with him was never her intention. She stood up and turned around, wanting to leave.

"Are you satisfied now, Fourth Lady Qu?" He asked with his teeth gritted, glaring at her resentfully.

Qu Moying raised her head, gave an indifferent glance at him, and curled up her lips, "I'm sorry I don't understand what you said, Young Master Xu. Since our families are no longer connected by the engagement, we should keep a proper distance from each other. Please allow me to take my leave first!"

As she turned around, Xu Lipeng flew into a rage and quickly stepped forward, trying to grab her hand. Yu Dong rushed in between them and protected Qu Moying from his grip.

"What do you mean by this, Young Master?" She pulled a long face and stopped.

"You framed Qingmeng, and now you want to get around it?" Xu Lipeng had nowhere to vent his anger. Last night when he went back home, he was scolded by his mother and almost got punished. She let him go inside at last but blamed everything on Yu Qingmeng. She said if Xu Lipeng still wanted to marry her, she could only be an ordinary concubine, not even a decent concubine!

"I framed her? Didn't Yu and Yu Qingmeng try to frame me at first, and then Yu Qingmeng accidentally got involved with Mr. He when she came to watch me suffer?" Qu Moying directly looked into Xu Lipeng's eyes as she pressed her lips into a straight line. Then under his gaze, her lips slowly curled up.

Even though most of her face was covered by the veil, her pink, delicate lips somehow gave him the impression that she was a beautiful woman.

It felt like she was born with an aura of grace, as elegant as a blooming flower.

For the first time, Xu Lipeng seemed to see the real her clearly. He knew her eyes behind the veil were staring at him. His heart missed a beat as an awkward look showed up on his face. "Qingmeng wouldn't do that!"

"I don't care if she would do it or not. That has nothing to do with me anymore. Young Master Yongning, I just want to tell you – when you try to frame a person, don't ever think of him as some kind of plant that doesn't think, like a flower or a grass. A person is a living creature that has his own thoughts and preferences. Also, to be honest with you, I just don't like you!"

Qu Moying finished her words coldly and left with no hesitation.

If he didn't maintain his sanity at the moment, he would rush over and hit her immediately. Was this girl still the Qu Moying he heard of? Wasn't she supposed to be a gloomy but weak, timid girl who didn't have any strong opinion? She felt like a completely different person from the rumors. Had she known everything about him and Yu Qingmeng ever since she came back to the mansion while he was trying hard to keep the engagement like an idiot?

"Qu Moying, you will regret it!" Xu Lipeng clenched his fists and said resentfully, with his eyes filled with rage.

Qu Moying didn't turn around, walking at the same pace, as if she didn't hear Xu Lipeng's words or she didn't care about them at all. She just strolled away under his furious gaze.

Xu Lipeng couldn't believe that she treated him like this. Did she really think she was some kind of goddess who was high above everyone?

Watching her leaving, his face blushed with anger, but he couldn't utter another word.

The young servant standing next to him lowered his head and didn't dare to say anything. It was the first time he saw his gentle young master being pissed off by someone like this. He didn't know what Xu Lipeng would do in the next second. The young master was so furious that it seemed like he would hit the Fourth Lady at any time. He surely hoped his master wouldn't do that because they were still in the Qu's Mansion right now!

"Let's go!" After a while, Xu Lipeng said to the young servant coldly and strode away. It took him some time to regain his sanity, but fortunately, he made the right decision.

It was a big relief for the servant. He hurriedly caught up with his master as his heart was still pounding in his chest.

He remembered the last time when they met the Fourth Lady in the garden. His young master was having a walk with the Third Lady and Lady Yu at that time. When Xu Lipeng passed by the Fourth Lady who was bowing at him, he ignored her directly and didn't say anything as if he just saw a maid of the mansion instead of his own fiancée.

Every dog had its day. Now it was the Fourth Lady's turn to treat the young master as a servant...

"The Qu's Family is going to hold a birthday banquet for the Old Lady. Why haven't we received an invitation from them?" Pei Yuanjun was lying on the couch at the back of a room while a woman was playing a stringed instrument in front of him. He wore a loose white robe with his long, black hair untied, looking like those free and easy gentlemen in the Wei and Jin dynasties.

However, the sharp and insidious look in his eyes had nothing to do with freedom and ease.

"My lord, Vice Minister Qu won't dare to do so!" Ji Hai said smilingly.

"Why? They think I will do something bad to them?" Pei Yuanjun raised his brow.

“Of course, they won’t dare to think like that. It’s just people from the Mansion of Vice Minister Qu never interacted with you before, so they won’t send you an invitation abruptly. My lord, if you want to attend the banquet, I can ask Vice Minister Qu to send one here.” As a servant, Ji Hai was always clever and tactful.

“No need. I’ll just go if I want to. How’s the preparation going?” The young lord curled up his lips. The smile lit up his eyes, making the insidious look fade away.

“My Lord, do you mean you want ‘Lady Liu’ to accompany you on that day? But the Fourth Lady will be very busy.” Ji Hai understood his master’s intention and asked cautiously.

“So what? She will be useless if she can’t even deal with this kind of thing!” Pei Yuanjun said in an indifferent voice. He chose her because she’s a special girl. This would be his true test for her to see if she really deserved his support.

“Yes, my lord. I will let Haizi inform the Fourth Lady,” Ji Hai said hurriedly.

Pei Yuanjun waved his hand at him, and Ji Hai left in a hurry.

Graceful music flew under the woman’s finger and echoed in the room. This was her first day at Lord Yun’s mansion, so she’s working very hard. When she was sent here by the Crown Prince, he told her repeatedly that she would be killed if she got returned by Lord Yun. She had to please the lord to make herself stay at his mansion.

She was a beautiful woman, picked by the Crown Prince himself. She noticed that even the Crown Prince was attracted by her. If Lord Yun didn’t return to the capital all of a sudden, she would have already become the Crown Prince’s mistress. But right now, she had no choice but to come to Lord Yun’s mansion.

“Clang!” – a string suddenly broke.

The woman’s face turned pale immediately with fear. Shivering, she knelt on the ground and begged him, “Please forgive me, my lord! Please forgive me!”

She dared to ask for the Crown Prince's love, but for Lord Yun, she didn't even expect him to have a pity for her. When he looked at her, she noticed that his eyes were so cold, as if he came from hell. In his eyes, she was not a living person but a dead object...

Chapter 45 Another Noble Lady with Eye Disease

"Send her back to the Crown Prince. Tell him she's my gift!" Pei Yuanjun said lazily.

"Yes, my lord!" A guard came over and dragged the woman out.

"Thank you, my lord! Thank you!" The woman was staring at the air blankly before. Hearing Pei Yuanjun's words, a trace of shock flashed across her eyes, and then she felt overjoyed.

She was not going to be killed!

She not only survived but also was sent back to the Crown Prince. Didn't it mean that she became Lord Yun's gift for the Crown Prince?

She used to be a music performer that served in the Crown Prince's Mansion. When she was there, she heard that the Crown Prince valued Lord Yun's opinions a lot. Now since she became a gift from the lord, the Crown Prince had to treat her well.

Compared to Lord Yun, she preferred the Crown Prince much more...

The room fell into silence after the woman was dragged out. Pei Yuanjun stood up and walked to the window. Those rare peonies planted outside came into sweet bloom, bringing a sparkle to the warm air. Looking at the beautiful flowers, his long eyes squinted slightly, showing inconspicuous pleasure. It was time for spring to return.

Compared with the flowers in other places, the ones here bloomed more adorably.

"If the Crown Prince accepts my gift, spare her life!" all of a sudden, he said slowly.

A man wearing a dark green guard uniform immediately showed up at the door and nodded at him with respect, "Yes, my lord!"

If the Crown Prince took her in, he would spare her life; if he didn't, her life became meaningless, and there's no need to keep her alive.

Suddenly, Pei Yuanjun chuckled as if he thought about something funny. The smile, the long, black hair lying on his chest, and those red lips matched well with his long, downturned eyes. At this moment, he looked so stunning, more beautiful than some pretty women. "I bet the Crown Prince will like the beauty I sent to him. After all, I'm his uncle. The prince's uncle? Sounds not bad!"

Hearing Lord Yun's laughter coming from upstairs, all the guards, including the hidden ones, felt a cold shiver down their spines. They wondered who the unlucky guy was this time that made the lord so pleased.

"Lord Yun will attend my grandmother's birthday banquet, and he wants me to impersonate a lady with eye disease and accompany him?" After Yu Dong told her the news, Qu Moying took a deep breath with shock.

The Qu Family was the host that day, and everyone would be very busy.

"My lady, that's indeed his order." Yu Dong also felt sorry for the Fourth Lady, but he had to deliver this message from the lord without any mistake.

"H-How will that be possible? On the Old Lady's birthday, Fourth Lady has to keep her grandmother company. Even though she can take a break, it's still too difficult to accompany Lord Yun. Someone will definitely recognize her!" Granny Miao also took a deep breath with shock as her face turned pale.

"Yu Dong, is it possible to negotiate with the lord? The lady will be occupied at that day," Yu Chun asked worriedly.

“That’s not possible. The lord never broke his words before, and no one dares to disobey him. People who went against his orders before...” Yu Dong paused for a few seconds as he took some quick peeks at Qu Moying’s expression and then continued hesitantly, “...are all dead!”

Yu Dong only had spent a few days with Qu Moying, but she already earned his respect. He wholeheartedly treated her as his master and didn’t want her to irritate the lord because he knew the consequence would be dreadful.

“Yu Dong, tell me about the lady I’m going to act as. Is she the Guardian General’s daughter?” Qu Moying fell into silence for a while, took a deep breath, and asked calmly. She had already prepared herself for it when Pei Yuanjun mentioned her mission before. It sounded a bit difficult in the current situation, but it was still feasible.

Lord Yun had the power to help her and destroy her – this was the warning hidden behind his words last time.

His condition was letting her impersonate that lady, but it was also a test for her.

If she proved to be useless for him, Qu Moying believed that her death had no value to him either. Even if she died in front of him, he would only think her blood would stain his shoes.

In her past life, her father repeatedly warned her that Lord Yun was the most dangerous person in the entire empire. His power forced all the princes to lower their royal heads and bow to him. His existence was the best example of gaining such a high status only second to the emperor!

If the Crown Prince wanted to ascend the throne successfully, he needed either Pei Yuanjun’s support or death. However, both seemed difficult to achieve.

Ji Hanyue’s father told her about it in private, concerned about the Crown Prince’s situation. Now since she’s looking at it from a different perspective, she only felt lucky that a person like Pei Yuanjun existed as the prince’s uncle.

She wanted to choose Pei Yusheng, Lord Jing, as her revenge partner initially, but it was apparent there was no better choice than Pei Yuanjun. Since this was the path she had to walk down and a test for her, she must overcome any hardship.

“My lady, your guess is correct. It’s Lady Liu from the Level-One Guardian General’s Mansion. Since she was born, Lady Liu had been staying at the border with the Guardian General. She was a good warrior and fought beside her father sometimes. But after her eyes were injured once, she never went out to the battlefield again.”

Yu Dong was ordered by Lord Yun that he needed to answer Qu Moying’s every question.

Qu Moying knew about everything Yu Dong told her. When she was still Ji Hanyue in her past life, she was already aware of it. Who could be more suitable for her to impersonate other than this Lady Liu, Liu Lanxin?

They were both the daughter of a level-one general, but Ji Hanyue was born and raised in the capital. Lady Liu was born in the capital and also suffered from the early death of her mother. But then the Guardian General, Liu Xiangshan, took her to the border, and they stayed there for more than ten years. If Qu Moying counted it correctly, this Lady Liu should be seventeen or eighteen years old now. At this age, she couldn’t be considered a young girl anymore.

Among the noble ladies in the capital, there was always a rumor about Lady Liu. Since she was not very young but still hadn’t got married or engaged, people said the one she was waiting for was Lord Yun, Pei Yuanjun. But according to the news from the royal palace, the emperor tried to arrange a marriage for Lord Yun many times and was rejected by him every time.

It made sense that Lady Liu and Lord Yun knew each other since the latter spent most of his time patrolling around the border. Maybe they were even childhood sweethearts.

This was people’s guess, and everyone believed that Lord Yun would marry Lady Liu. However, before they heard anything about their marriage, the lady’s eyes were injured. It was said that she got the injury because she tried to protect him from an assassination attempt.

If it was true, Lord Yun should absolutely take the responsibility to marry her!

“Why did Lady Liu come to the capital with her eyes injured?” asked Qu Moying.

The capital didn’t seem to be a good place for her to stay with those terrible rumors around.

“Asking the emperor to arrange a marriage for her, of course,” Yu Dong answered, grinning.

“Arrange a marriage? For her and Lord Yun?” Qu Moying raised her brow and asked. It was already nighttime, and her veil was taken off. The skin around her eyes looked delicate with a pink-red color, making her appearance softer.

“I’m sorry I don’t know about that, my lady,” Yu Dong shook his head and shrugged.

As a low-level eunuch, this was not the information he could access.

“Have they prepared things for me to disguise myself?” After thinking about it, Qu Moying asked. She supposed that Pei Yuanjun wouldn’t expect her to impersonate Lady Liu with her usual outfits.

Although she had the veil to cover her face, it would be taken off by then.

She and Lady Liu both had an eye problem, but that lady was different than her. Since Qu Moying was a child, she had got eye disease and was accustomed to using the veil in public. But Lady Liu’s injury was recent, and she definitely couldn’t accept people’s curious look at her. For Lady Liu, a simple veil was far from enough.

“Don’t worry, my lady. Everything is ready. You will wear a veiled hat. After Lady Liu got the injury, she rarely goes outside. Whenever she does, she wears a veiled hat to cover her entire face,” Yu Dong explained.

“How’s her injury exactly?” Since everything was pretty much settled, Granny Miao started to care about another thing. She couldn’t help but ask, “Did she see a doctor? How’s it going?”

"I don't really know about her physical situation. She's not fully blinded, probably... Perhaps her situation was similar to the lady's!" Yu Dong stuttered. He didn't have a clear answer about it either, so he gave them an ambiguous conclusion.

Actually, Yu Dong couldn't understand the situation between Lady Liu and Lord Yun the whole time. Before, he even tried to ask Ji Hai about it out of curiosity but was told that this was not something he should ask about. Ji Hai said only quiet observation without any questions or unnecessary talks could help him survive longer.

"Since then, I'll do as Lord Yun wishes!" Qu Moying lowered her eyes and made up her mind. She shouldn't go any further right now.

"My lady, what about Young Master Xu?" Granny Miao reminded her.

Qu Moying asked her to pay attention to anything related to Young Master Xu before. After listening to the lady's analysis, Granny Miao agreed that it was very likely to happen. Still, she was concerned since they had no clue about his target yet.

"Granny, don't worry. Everything stays the same until my grandmother's birthday. On that day, keep a close eye on the young master Xu. Tell me about it once you see him approach or pay attention to anyone," Qu Moying answered her after taking a brief consideration. There were too many unknown things, and she was not sure either. At this moment, only one name came across her mind. "You can pay more attention to Duan Yuxiang, Minister of Food and Beverage's eldest daughter. Her personality is the most similar one as I had before."

Duan Yuxiang was the most suitable candidate she could think of. Xu Lipeng would likely use her to replace Qu Moying.

Duan Yuxiang was Duan Qiyan, Minister of Food and Beverage's first daughter. After his ex-wife died, he married his current wife, who gave birth to his second daughter. This wife of his was a tough one, putting his first daughter under her control. With her stepmother's suppression, First Lady Duan became very timid and weak.

In her past life, Ji Hanyue had met First Lady Duan. She always hid in a corner nervously and never talked to anyone with her head lowered every time they met. However, her young sister was a totally different character than her, spoiled and arrogant.

Ji Hanyue once ran into them while they were arguing in private. Second Lady Duan directly used violence on her older sister at that time. She pushed her to the ground, scolded her, and then left. But First Lady Duan didn't dare to argue back at all, only sobbing sorrowfully.

This kind of girl should be the most suitable candidate from Xu Lipeng's perspective since Yu Qingmeng's matter would come to light soon. If he married an aggressive wife, she would have a really tough time...

Before, Xu Lipeng's insistence on marrying her was for the same reason. He needed someone to cover up for the dirty affair between him and Yu Qingmeng, and he had to make sure that this person wouldn't stand in Lady Yu's way in the future.

"My lady, I can't believe that Young Master Yongning and Lady Yu are such malicious people!" Granny Miao understood why Qu Moying mentioned First Lady Duan immediately and felt aggrieved.

"My lady, what's the birthday gift you prepared for the Old Lady?" In the meanwhile, Yu Chun was worried about another thing.

"An embroidery!" Qu Moying said in a flat tone.

"What? An embroidery?" The look on Qu Moying's face was calm, but people around her were all stunned due to shock.

Chapter 46 Sneak Out on the Old Lady's Birthday!

In her past life, Ji Hanyue loved reading. For that, her loving father had built an exclusive study in her yard to store many books he collected, including some casual reading ones.

Once in a while, she would put on some neat clothes instead of a dress and practice sword dance as an exercise when no one was there.

As for embroidery, she was not good at it at all. She could, at the most, do some simple embroidery, not letting the thread ends come out of the pattern. But her embroidery could definitely not be considered a decent gift for the Old Lady.

Since Qu Moying had an eye problem in her current life, making embroidery was really harmful to her eyes. People around her didn't let her spend too much time on it, so the embroidery she made was just average, far from being outstanding.

The Old Lady's banquet would be the first time for Qu Moying to show up in public as her granddaughter. Many people would attend the event and see every gift the Old Lady received. On such an occasion, Qu Moying couldn't be the one who caught people's attention by showing off her brilliance or being laughed at by others.

"My lady, it's better to change it!" Granny Miao was worried.

"No need. I'll give my grandmother the embroidered forehead band I made before." Qu Moying shook her head and explained patiently, "I don't have any other good choices. Since my eyes will finally recover under grandmother's care and love, the embroidery represents my gratefulness for her. Everyone knows I have an eye problem, and people shouldn't expect me to do it well."

This would be the first time for her to show up in public. For executing Pei Yuanjun's order successfully, she needed to keep a low profile and caught no attention. But meanwhile, she wanted people to know that her eyes were almost healed.

Then it wouldn't be too surprising for others when she started to live without the veil.

Besides, it could also prevent Xu Lipeng from using her eye disease as an excuse for breaking off the engagement. Being able to make embroideries meant that her eyes would recover soon.

"My lady, the hand-made forehead band is indeed a good choice!" Yu Dong was a smart man. He understood Qu Moying's intention immediately and complimented her decision.

Granny Miao couldn't fully get rid of her concern, but she still nodded since it did sound reasonable...

On the morning of the Old Lady's birthday, Qu Moying got up very early. After Yu Chun helped her get washed, she put on a light blue jacket with a delicate yellow embroidery pattern, matching her peacock blue swing maxiskirt as a belt outstood her slender waist. The bright colors gave her a slightly childish look but perfectly set off her beauty.

"My lady, you will be the most stunning girl without the veil," Yu Chun grinned at Qu Moying's reflection in the mirror, feeling proud.

The Third Lady always considered herself a beauty, but in Yu Chun's opinion, the Fourth Lady was much more gorgeous than her.

"My lady, how about you take off the veil today?" Yu Chun proposed. She wanted those who spoke ill of the lady to see what they were looking at right now. She bet they wouldn't dare to say the Fourth Lady was an ugly, blind girl again!

Qu Moying's eyes had almost recovered under the care of the doctor sent by the Crown Princess. But Yu Chun couldn't understand why her master kept wearing the veil when she didn't need it anymore.

"There's no need to hurry!" Qu Moying shook her head.

Yu Chun pressed her lips into a straight line and helped the lady tie the veil. Then her eyes fell on Qu Moying's lips, and she suddenly said, "My lady, since it's the Old Lady's birthday, do you want to use a brighter color for your lip makeup?"

"There's no need!" Qu Moying shook her head again.

"Why? A brighter color matches today's auspicious occasion," Yu Chun asked, being confused. Qu Moying's health had been in a relatively bad condition, so her lips tended to look paler. Meanwhile, she was not a fan of lip makeup either. Before, she seldom went out when they stayed in the village, so people never noticed such a tiny detail.

But since they were back in the Qu's Mansion, Yu Chun believed that it was more appropriate to put on some lip makeup on an auspicious day like this. Otherwise, the Fourth Lady's pale lips would look weird among all the girls'.

"Judging by Lady Liu's personality, she will definitely put on some lip makeup!" Qu Moying smiled with an implication in her words. She checked herself through the mirror for the last time, turned around, and walked out of the room. Yu Dong was waiting for her outside already. He and Yu Chun would be the lady's two companions today.

For the big day, Yu and Qu Qiuyan got up early as well. When Qu Moying arrived, several people were already there, including these two and people from the East Mansion, which were the Old Lady's first son, Qu Zhilin's family. Qu Zhilin was an Imperial Censor. He married a woman as his wife named Luo and had one son and two daughters.

His son was named Qu Minghui. The first girl was named Qu Xuexin, and the second was Qu Caiyue. The young master Qu Minghui and the First Lady Qu Xuexin were both given birth by Luo; only the Second Lady's mother was Qu Zhilin's concubine, Madam Mei.

Luo was in bad health, and people rarely saw her coming over to the main yard. The Old Lady freed her from visiting her mother-in-law and didn't hold high expectations for her first son's children.

It's been a few days since Qu Moying came back to the mansion, but only till today she got to meet people from Qu Zhilin's family for the first time.

The Old Lady was in a good mood, chatting with her family while beaming. Soon, people familiar with her started to show up.

The ones who came early were usually the people closest to her.

Qu Moying accompanied the Old Lady to the garden. The view was terrific as all kinds of flowers were blooming, and this was why they chose this place to hold the banquet. The celebration was also easy to operate in such an open space.

The opera group built their stage here as well. A long screen was set up in the middle to separate the seats for males and females.

But the seats set in the pavilions at two sides would be the best spot to watch the opera performance.

The Old Lady and Qu Moying took their seats aside, and the young girl caught everyone's attention. Seeing her outfit, people could tell that she was the Fourth Lady with an eye problem. Although the veil covered her face, her expression and behavior were still graceful without any timidity, which impressed many people. To some degree, she seemed to deserve more the title "lady" than other girls living in the city.

It was a big shock, especially for the young ladies who once spoke ill of her secretly.

They couldn't see her entire face, but she didn't seem ugly. Her soft, ivory skin and light-colored lips gave her a clean aura of grace. The pearl hairpin she wore was simple, but it matched perfectly with her long, black hair. It felt like she was born to be a noble, well-educated lady, making people dare not to look down on her!

A well-educated lady? How come a girl growing up in a village looked well-educated? Qu Moying was out of many people's expectations.

Didn't everyone say that she was an ugly, blind girl with a gloomy, weird personality and rarely talked to people because she grew up in a village?

A few madams who came early saw the gift Qu Moying gave to her grandmother. It was a simple forehead band. She obviously put a lot of effort into making it, but it was just a simple one. If the Fourth Lady really made it by herself, then it meant her eye problem was not serious.

The Old Lady also mentioned it implicitly that the Fourth Lady's eyes would soon recover.

The girl was beyond people's expectation. They felt it was almost as lucky as winning a lottery for Marquis Yongning's family.

Many guests were discussing about Qu Moying secretly, but the lady was just sitting there, smiling. Soon, people's attention was attracted by Lord Jing's arrival.

For one moment, every single female stared at the pavilion on the other side.

Lord Jing hadn't been engaged yet. Except for the mild Crown Prince, he could also be considered a suitable heir candidate. His mother had a strong family background related to Empress Yuan, favored by the emperor. Maybe he would be the one who ascended the throne in the future.

The emperor had four princes who had reached an adult age now – the Crown Prince given birth by the empress, the Second Prince Pei Yusheng, Lord Jing, the Third Prince who had been in poor health, and the Fourth Prince who was a bit impetuous. Generally speaking, Lord Jing was not comparable with the Crown Prince but still had a bright future.

Also, he was known for his excellent martial arts skills and handsome appearance among these princes, so he was admired by many noble ladies.

People's eyes were drawn from Qu Moying to Lord Jing.

Qu Moying grabbed this chance, excused herself to the Old Lady, and left quietly.

The Old Lady had already been worried about her granddaughter's well-being. She told Qu Moying long ago that she could take a break if she didn't feel well. Once Qu Moying said it, her grandmother let her leave immediately.

Qu Moying got down from the pavilion quietly and rushed to the back door with her two maids. Right after they passed the first turn, Yu Dong whispered to her, "My lady, someone is following us."

"Who?" she asked in a low voice, still striding.

"A maid. I kind of remember that she's from the Third Lady's yard," said Yu Dong. With his excellent memory, he had already known lots of people in the mansion. Even though he met some of them only

once, he still remembered their faces. “Yu Chun, take the lady to the back door first. Someone will be waiting for you there. Let me get rid of this maid.”

Qu Moying nodded and continued to walk ahead with Yu Chun. When they arrived at the back door, Yu Dong already caught up with them. He took out a key from a pocket near his chest and opened the door. No one was here. The woman in charge was called away by the kitchen staff to help them since there were too many guests today.

Yu Dong got this key from the woman in charge earlier today.

As he said, a typical wooden carriage stopped by the door. Yu Dong helped Qu Moying climb inside as Yu Chun wanted to follow her master, feeling anxious and worried.

“You don’t need to go. The lord has arranged everything well. Nothing will happen to the lady.” Yu Dong pulled Yu Chun back and told the lady inside, “My lady, just go. Mr. Ji Hai will be waiting for you there and help you with the preparation. After you enter the mansion, I will find a chance to pick you up.”

Qu Moying nodded, knowing it was the best solution. Yu Chun and Yu Dong were both her maids. It didn’t make sense to let them accompany “Lady Liu.” Moreover, they still needed to cover up for her in case someone came to look for the Fourth Lady.

After Qu Moying put down the curtain, the carriage made a turn swiftly and headed toward the exit of the alley. Watching her leaving, Yu Chun couldn’t stop worrying.

“Let’s go back first. We must not forget the things that the lady asked us to do!” Yu Dong said to her in a low voice.

Yu Chun had no choice but to go. The two maids were back in the mansion now. They locked the door carefully and headed to the Qianyue House. When they passed a crossing, Yu Dong pointed at the left side, signaling Yu Chun to take a look. Yu Chun bent forward and was startled by the scene – a maid fainted in the bush on the left side. “Will someone notice it?”

“Who cares? We only need to tell people that the Fourth Lady feels unwell. She first took a walk in the garden and then went back to the Qianyue House. As for who attacked this maid, no one would figure it out since so many guests are present today!”

Yu Dong said casually.

Yu Chun nodded at him, and they went to an abandoned, empty house. When they were back outside again, Yu Chun had put on a cape while Yu Dong was leading her and helping her walk. They went back to the Qianyue House according to Qu Moying’s plan, in which Yu Chun disguised as her. As for Yu Chun, no one would care about a maid’s whereabouts on such a big day like this...

Chapter 47 The Unexpected Visitor Who Took Lord Jing’s Seat

The Fourth Lady didn’t feel well and almost fainted when she was taking a walk in the garden. When Qu Qiuyan heard the news, she pressed her lips into a straight line – this was nothing new for her. Disdainfully, she said to Yu Qingmeng, who was showing a long face, “Don’t be so upset. Didn’t Xu Lipeng promise you that he will marry an incompetent wife? You can just get rid of her later when everything is settled.”

Yu Qingmeng covered her belly with her hands, lowering her head. She clearly knew that she was not pregnant, and sooner or later, Xu Lipeng would be aware of it as well. “Father is furious...that I will become a concubine.”

“So what? Are you going to give up because of this? I heard Marchioness Yongning is a tough one. You should worry about yourself more!” Qu Qiuyan’s tone was arrogant, “You don’t have a good reputation right now. But after you become Young Master Yongning’s wife, who will still care about all of this?”

“I’m afraid that Marchioness Yongning won’t approve it.” Yu Qingmeng was still sitting listlessly. She hadn’t solved the matter with Xu Lipeng, and now, Marchioness Yongning even blamed everything on her. Although she could finally marry the one she loved, Yu Qingmeng didn’t feel delighted as she expected, confronted with this dilemma.

Moreover, her instinct was alerted by something else.

“Marchioness Yongning will approve. As long as you give birth to Xu Lipeng’s first son, everything else will work out immediately. Besides, if it weren’t for that accident, you would definitely be qualified to marry him as his first wife with your status and family background.” Qu Qiuyan mocked, despising Yu Qingmeng in the heart. As she thought that Master Yongning’s Mansion was inferior, but Yu Qingmeng was still willing to marry into the family as a concubine.

“My lady, Lord Jing was asking about you just now.” A maid rushed in.

“What did he ask? How did he ask?” Hearing this, Qu Qiuyan put on a smile and straightened up. This was why she left quietly on purpose when she saw Lord Jing coming over from a distance.

She wanted to be Lord Jing’s wife, but she couldn’t let him think that she was an easy girl whom he could meet whenever he wanted. So, she avoided Lord Jing deliberately.

“Lord Jing sent you a gift,” the maid presented her a delicately wrapped box.

Qu Qiuyan’s eyes lit up. She took the box and opened it immediately. It was a pair of jade earrings handcrafted artistically as the raw material was extraordinary with naturally-formed patterns hidden inside.

“It’s gorgeous!” After Yu Qingmeng moved closer to take a look, she exclaimed with admiration.

“Tell Lord Jing that I’m happy to see it, and I will join them to watch the opera performance after my guest leaves.” Feeling overjoyed inside, Qu Qiuyan still kept the calm look on her face.

Her mother always told her that she shouldn’t treat a man too well, or he would think she was just an easy girl to get. Yu Qingmeng was the best example since she never hid her feelings and showed up whenever Xu Lipeng came to the mansion. Look at how much respect she got right now. No wonder she ended up being just a concubine!

Qu Qiuyan allowed her to come over today only because it was still possible that Yu Qingmeng would become Young Master Yongning’s wife. Otherwise, she couldn’t find any proper reason to meet Lady Yu at all.

“Yes, my lady!” The maid turned around to leave.

“Wait. Send the lord this box of desserts and tell him I made them by myself. If Lord Jing asks where am I meeting my guest, then you can tell him my whereabouts.” Qu Qiuyan pointed at a delicate food box next to her. The desserts on the plate looked exquisite, which were made by a pastry chef hired by Yu.

Playing hard-to-get would have a better effect!

“Yes, my lady!” The maid took the box with her and left.

“Qingmeng, it’s time for you to leave. It will be inconvenient if Lord Jing sees you here when he comes!” Qu Qiuyan’s tone was nearly rude.

Yu Qingmeng was planning to say something, but hearing her cousin’s words, her face turned red. She wanted to vent her rage but didn’t dare to, only faking a flattery smile. “I am about to talk to my aunt about something. I’ll take my leave first.”

No matter how much Yu liked Yu Qingmeng, Yu Qingmeng was her niece, after all. If it were Yu’s daughter Qu Qiuyan, Yu wouldn’t even think about Yu Qingmeng.

Qu Qiuyan was a spoiled lady with an aggressive personality. She rudely asked Lady Yu to leave because she didn’t care if they were cousins or not and felt free to do so.

Previously in the mansion, Yu Qingmeng was Qu Qiuyan’s follower, helping her bully others. She never found it embarrassing until it was her turn to get bullied.

“I suggest you not go to talk to my mother. She should be occupied right now and has no time for chitchat. You’d better check on Xu Lipeng. If he marries a shrew, your life will be hopeless.”

Qu Qiuyan mocked her.

Yu Qingmeng's fake smile froze on her face as she felt even angrier. She tried hard to force another smile, "Alright, then I'll take a walk somewhere..."

Qu Qiuyan's mind was fully occupied by Lord Jing right now, and she ignored Yu Qingmeng directly. Before Lady Yu finished her words, Qu Qiuyan already waved at her, urging her to leave.

Yu guaranteed her that Lord Jing would show up after she sent the dessert. Her going to meet him and him coming to meet her were two totally different situations.

Now she only needed to take her time and wait for Lord Jing to come.

Among all the guests today, Lord Jing had the highest position in terms of nobility. If he left for a walk, no one would dare to stop him.

Qu Qiuyan couldn't hide the joy in her heart. She hurriedly drove away Yu Qingmeng, waiting for Lord Jing's arrival.

However, she was meant to miss him today.

Because Lord Yun was here...

"What? Who were you talking about?" Qu Zhizhen hurriedly put down his teacup and asked. He couldn't believe the words he heard and almost dropped the cup on the ground due to both shock and fear.

"I-It's Lord Yun. He already entered the mansion," the servant sounded flustered since Lord Yun was notorious in the capital.

"Hurry...! I need to go there!" Qu Zhizhen yelled out loud. He lifted his long rope and rushed toward the entrance.

"Mr. Qu, let me go with you!" Lord Jing, who just got the desserts from Qu Qiuyan, stood up as well.

Qu Zhizhen had no time to wait for him, nodding while rushing outside. After a few turns, he finally met Lord Yun's group.

Pei Yuanjun was walking at the front. The bright smile on his noble, handsome face somehow made him even look scarier. Feeling a chill down his spine, Qu Zhizhen hurriedly walked over and bowed, "It's a great honor to see you, Lord Yun."

"Mr. Qu, I heard you are holding a celebration today. Having a drink sounds good to me right now, so I came without an invitation. Hope I didn't bother you, Mr. Qu," Pei Yuanjun said lazily, with his hands behind his back.

He was wearing a blue brocade robe with a pattern of blooming irises on the waist. The blue color brought out an aura of purity that weakened his aggression. Those downturned, long eyes were the most memorable part of his face, and the smile he wore almost looked warm and genuine, totally different than his usual expression.

However, no matter how warm his smile was, Qu Zhizhen found it frightening anyway. He lowered his head, quickly calmed himself down, and managed to force a smile, "My lord, your presence is a great honor for me. I'm sorry that I didn't know you would come before. Otherwise, I would wait for you at the entrance long ago. Please forgive me, my lord."

It was hard to tell Lord Yun's mood from his face, which was very unsettling for Qu Zhizhen. He couldn't understand why Lord Yun lowered himself to attend a celebration held by a vice minister.

"Uncle Yun!" Lord Jing arrived, bowed to him, and greeted.

"Good to see you here, Lord Jing. What a rare coincidence! Let's go inside and get a drink from Mr. Qu," Pei Yuanjun raised his brow and said in a flat tone.

"Sure, Uncle Yun!" Pei Yusheng stepped back, and his eyes fell on the young lady next to Lord Yun.

She was wearing a dress of the most trendy palace style, popular among all the ladies in the capital. When Lord Jing noticed Qu Qiuyan for the first time, her dress was similar to this one.

The lady had a slim figure, and the dress made her slender waist stand out more. As she walked, the long layers on her dress moved with her walking pace smoothly, showing the noble education she received. The veil on the hat hung down to her chest, covering her face. She stood not far from Pei Yuanjun quietly, with two maids following behind, looking obedient.

It was unbelievable that a woman showed up together with Pei Yuanjun, and it was a young lady. Lord Jing couldn't be more surprised. Who was this lady? Why did she come together with Lord Yun?

Pei Yuanjun's group started to move forward. The first one who passed by Lord Jing was Pei Yuanjun himself, and then it was the young lady. She bowed to him politely, turned back to the front, and continued to follow Lord Yun under Pei Yusheng's shocked gaze. From her behavior, he only felt proper respect for a lord but no fear or even shyness. She was completely different than those young ladies who looked at him with a blushed face, being too shy to talk to him.

But apparently, she had the same hairstyle as those ladies.

Who on earth was she?

Which lady in this city did dare to approach Pei Yuanjun, or to be more precise, could get close to Pei Yuanjun in the first place?

When Lord Jing's eyes met Qu Zhizhen's, who was too shocked to talk as well, the two men both realized it was not a good time to think about it right now. They hurriedly followed Pei Yuanjun and headed to the garden.

The opera performance had already started, and the part they were singing right now was requested by the Old Lady herself. However, her attention was far drawn to the pavilion on the other side, same for the other madams and young ladies.

They were all sitting on the flat floor of the pavilion, high above the ground. Previously, everyone noticed that Qu Zhizhen left in a hurry, followed by Lord Jing, the most popular young man among all the attendees. Now they came back with a large group of people. At the very front was a young man who looked around the same age as Lord Jing.

But he seemed even more handsome.

Especially when his affectionate eyes ran over the young ladies, many of them blushed immediately. They couldn't help but exclaim inwardly that such a handsome man existed in the world. His appearance could be described as beautiful. It was not exaggerated to say he was even more beautiful than many women. Who was he? Who was the man looking more dignified and charming than the well-reputed Lord Jing?

He had an aura of extraordinary dignity as if he was born like this!

What was his identity? Why did Mr. Qu and Lord Jing go together to welcome him?

A small turmoil was caused among the female guests. They started to ask around, but no one knew him or heard of an attractive man like him in the capital. All the young ladies whispered to each other, peeking at the handsome man with their faces blushed.

The Old Lady didn't recognize him either, feeling surprised. Although Pei Yuanjun came to the capital before, he only stayed for a few days before returning to the border and never attended this kind of event. Even the Old Lady hadn't met him.

Pei Yuanjun sat down on the top seat in the middle of the front line, and at the same time, the expression on the Old Lady's face changed suddenly. She grabbed the corner of the table hard and almost stood up in shock. That seat belonged to Lord Jing before, specially prepared for him. It was unbelievable that Lord Jing gave his seat to the strange man and sat down next to him without hesitation.

Except for the Crown Prince, only one man in the capital could make Lord Jing act this respectfully.

"Hurry, call the Second Master over! I need to talk to him!" the Old Lady whispered to Granny Wu behind her, with a stern look on her face. Her hand holding a handkerchief was trembling.

Was he that jinx in the rumors? What was he doing here? Was he here to punish them and kill them all? Maybe her son did something wrong in his job...

The Old Lady's heart was filled with fear. Meanwhile, Qu Zhizhen literally couldn't sit tight on the opposite pavilion, feeling cold sweat on his back...

Chapter 48 A General's Daughter With Military Power

"Uncle Yun, you haven't introduced this lady..." Lord Jing asked with a smile as he sat down and glanced at Qu Moying sitting next to Pei Yuanjun.

Her face couldn't be seen clearly with the veiled hat on, but he could still tell that this woman was beautiful. When she passed by Pei Yusheng just now, a breeze lifted the end of the veil, exposing her chin and lips. She was wearing bright-colored lip makeup, making her ivory skin more conspicuous. At a glance, Pei Yusheng was already amazed.

He didn't suspect Qu Moying's identity at all. Judging by her graceful behavior and elegant movement, he knew that she was born in a noble family that had strict discipline. There's no way she was one of the low-lived and poorly educated girls.

"She's the daughter of the Guardian General, coming back here to handle some work left about their old mansion. The Guardian General asked me to take care of her while she's in the capital," Pei Yuanjun said lazily. He glanced over all the noble young ladies on the opposite side, who were peeking at him with a shy look. Those sophisticated eyes of his seemed charming, but somehow, the expression on his face became colder.

The Level-One Guardian General, Liu Xiangshan, and the Level-One Suppressor General, Ji Yongming, Ji Hanyue's father, were two big wigs in the army. Of course, these two generals' positions were still lower than Pei Yuanjun's. But even so, they also owned part of the military force. Whoever won their support would have a considerable amount of military power.

The Crown Prince married Ji Yongming's first daughter, but people all said that she was about to die after she moved into the palace. Something happened to her father as well, which meant the Crown Prince's efforts all ended up in vain.

Then the daughter of the Guardian General became crucial in the game.

Pei Yusheng quietly sized Qu Moying up again. Naturally, he had kept a close eye on everything related to his future throne. So, he was aware that Liu Lanxin, Liu Xiangshan's daughter, suffered an eye injury before. That was probably why she was wearing a veiled hat today. He also heard that it had something to do with Pei Yuanjun, but he couldn't understand the current situation. Was Lord Yun going to ask the emperor to arrange a marriage for them?

According to his intelligence, Lady Liu was a proud girl, different from those raised in the city and well-protected by their families. She was a good warrior and a heroic woman who fought beside her father. But surprisingly, he couldn't feel her experiences on the battlefields at all judging from her slim figure and delicate appearance. She just seemed to be a weak, noble lady.

Well, rumors might not be totally accurate. People probably imagined her as a female general since she had stayed at the border with her father. She just looked a bit tough to get close to.

Pei Yuanjun seemed to ignore his nephew's excited look and continued, "the Guardian General asked me to show her around, to see if there's any outstanding young man from the noble families that suits her. Since there're many guests here for the celebration, I think it may be a good chance for her to look around."

Did he mean that he wanted to help Lady Liu look for a husband instead of asking the emperor for a marriage arrangement?

That was quite straightforward from them, coming without even noticing the host family. She was truly an extraordinary lady, growing up at the border and living in a military camp. No wonder she didn't show any embarrassment or timidity so far.

After the shock, a feeling of delight arose in Lord Jing.

If he could marry the Guardian General's daughter, he would own part of the military power. Although the Crown Prince married Ji Hanyue, she was about to die, so did her father, Ji Yongming. It was unfortunate for the Crown prince, but it meant that Lord Jing stood a chance to fairly compete against him in the future!

With Lady Liu's background, her eye problem wouldn't even matter. It was beneficial for Lord Jing to marry her anyway.

“Uncle Yun, do you have a candidate in your mind?” Pei Yusheng leaned over and asked in a low voice, feeling excited.

He was sitting on the left side of Pei Yuanjun while Qu Moying sat on the right. She had always had a good hearing, and she heard Pei Yusheng’s every word. She lowered her head and curled up her lips with a trace of coldness in her eyes.

She was such a stupid, naive girl in her past life. The Crown Prince treated her well only because of the military power in her father’s hand, just like what Lord Jing did right now. After he heard of Lady Liu’s family background, Lord Jing’s attitude immediately softened. His gaze on her became gentle, almost affectionate!

Military power! It was all about military power again!

As memories seeped from her veins, breathing even started to feel painful. This Lady Liu she’s disguising as shared a very similar situation with her in the past life.

She gave herself a hard pinch on the hand, raised her eyes, and looked at Lord Yun, who’s wearing an amiable smile. What did he want? Of course, she didn’t believe he really meant to choose a suitable husband for Lady Liu. Did he want to bring chaos to the political world in the capital? Was it the reason he asked Qu Moying to impersonate Lady Liu?

It seemed the rumors were still reliable to some degree. Perhaps Lord Yun was indeed close to Lady Liu, and this was why she got this job.

It was not hard to guess that disguising as Lady Liu, she wouldn’t be safe after the job started.

But with Qu Moying as the substitute, the real Lady Liu’s safety would be guaranteed!

Under the veiled hat, Qu Moying’s eyes squinted as she took a deep breath. She was fully aware that her current relationship with Pei Yuanjun was the best protection she could have under this circumstance!

Because Pei Yuanjun needed her to do this job, he wouldn't let anything bad happen to her. Her impersonation got the real Lady Liu out of danger but provided herself with more safety at the same time, which was what she needed for her revenge!

With Lord Yun's protection, nothing would happen to her in the mansion for the time being, but she really needed to make a faster move...

"Not yet. I'll take my time since I'm not in a hurry to go back. I've asked for the emperor's permission to stay in the capital for a longer period," said Pei Yuanjun lazily.

"General Liu was the Level-One Guardian General, always devoting himself to the country, and Lady Liu was the only daughter he has. Uncle Yun, you have to find an excellent young man who can match her. I can tell Lady Liu has inherited a lot of her father's spirit from her elegant behavior. She will definitely become a demure and graceful wife after she gets married."

Pei Yusheng spoke highly of Lady Liu and implied that she should find a husband that could match her family background.

Obviously, Lord Jin was one candidate who met the condition.

Ji Hanyue married the Crown Prince as a Level-One General's daughter, which meant Liu Lanxin was also qualified to be Lord Jing's wife.

"We don't need to rush. Lord Jing, if you think of any suitable young man, you can tell me," Pei Yuanjun said casually as his glance fell to the opposite pavilion.

Some of the young ladies had been peeking at him during the whole time. Feeling his gaze, they raised their handkerchiefs to cover half of their blushed faces in a shy but flirtish manner.

Pei Yuanjun pulled a long face as he raised his eyebrow. His sophisticated eyes looked a little wider and even darker than usual as if they contained infinite blackness. The cold, ruthless expression on his face instantly turned him into the bloodthirsty, heartless Lord Yun from a handsome, gentle, noble young man.

Those young ladies were so frightened after their eyes met his. They quickly turned their heads away to avoid his thrilling gaze and didn't dare to peek at his handsome face again.

Now, the Old Lady was sure that the strange young man was Lord Yun, Pei Yuanjun.

When Granny Wu came to the male seats, Qu Zhizhen was sitting behind Pei Yuanjun nervously, tightening all his muscles. He had never been so close to Lord Yun before.

"Second Master, the Old Lady wants to talk with you," Granny Wu whispered to him.

"Tell Mother that Lord Yun is here. Let Yu prepare one more dinner table, only for him," Qu Zhizhen answered in a low voice. It took him a few seconds to calm himself down, and then he realized that his mother didn't really mean to call him over. She sent Granny Wu only to ask about the stranger.

"Yes, my lord!" Granny Wu's face turned pale after knowing the stranger's identity. But as an experienced servant, she understood the situation immediately and got ready to leave.

"Mr. Qu, there's no need for unnecessary formalities. I have an appointment with the emperor later and will leave soon!" Pei Yuanjun's voice came from the front without his head turning back.

Qu Moying let out a deep breath of relief quietly. It should mean that she passed Pei Yuanjun's test this time.

"Yes, yes, my lord. I understand," Qu Zhizhen kept nodding, signaling Granny Wu to leave. The old maid stepped back hurriedly and went to report back to the Old Lady.

It was a big relief for the Old Lady after Granny Wu told her that nothing was really going on, and Lord Yun would leave soon. Then she realized that she broke out in a cold sweat. She took out her handkerchief and wiped her forehead, but her face was pale, feeling exhausted after the shock.

"My lady, do you want to leave for a rest?" Granny Wu noticed the Old Lady's expression and asked with worry.

“No need. I’m just too old to keep up my energy!” The Old Lady shook her head, smiling bitterly, “How’s Ying doing now? Have you sent someone to check on her?”

“Yes. I heard that the Fourth Lady almost fainted while taking a walk outside. But she’s having some rest and feeling alright now!” Granny Wu reported.

“That kid was born with poor health...” the Old Lady let out a sigh but didn’t continue her words. No matter how much she disliked Yu, it was inappropriate to say something with all the female guests around. If the rumors spread out, it would be bad for their family name.

The Old Lady wanted to protect the twins given birth by Yu, but she didn’t expect that Yu’s name was already ruined outside. Yu also overheard some people talking about her, and she was so furious that she almost tore the handkerchief apart. However, she had no choice but to serve the guests, pretending that she didn’t hear anything.

Yu kept in mind all the people’s names who spoke ill of her today. After her daughter became Lord Jing’s wife and then became the empress, she would take her revenge on them one by one. But right now, she could only stay quiet.

“Why has Lord Jing not left yet?” Seeing Lord Jing still sit tight in the opposite pavilion, Yu started to get anxious. She clearly had settled everything with Qu Qiuyan. Did her daughter not do as she was told?

The part of her plan related to Xu Lipeng would take place first, then it would be about Lord Jing. The timeline was tight, but they had to prove Qu Qiuyan’s innocence. They needed to make people think Third Lady Qu had nothing to do with Xu Lipeng and Yu Qingmeng, and it was unlucky for her to get involved.

Yu saw the strange man among the male guests, but with all her attention to Lord Jing, she didn’t notice it was Pei Yuanjun, Lord Yun, at all. All she cared about right now was when Lord Jing would leave for her daughter, or her whole plan would be ruined.

Yu took a glance at a pair of sisters sitting nearby as she got more and more exasperated. The time was running out. If Lord Jing didn’t leave soon, part of her plan wouldn’t be implemented on time.

"Go ask the Third Lady what's going on?" Yu hurriedly whispered to Auntie Hai next to her. She couldn't sit tight anymore.

Auntie Hai understood her words immediately and left. As she walked down the pavilion, she saw an old maid rushing over. Auntie Hai recognized her at once, stopped in the shadow of a tree, and waved at the other maid.

The old maid looked around to confirm no one noticed her and strode over, "Auntie Hai."

"Are you here to look for them?" Auntie Hai asked her in a low voice.

"Yes, that one is too anxious to wait anymore and sent me here," the old maid whispered.

"Wait for a bit longer." Auntie Hai sounded hesitant.

"He can't wait, and he has urged me many times already," the old maid didn't have much patience left.

"Only a little bit longer! Everything will be ready soon!" Auntie Hai gritted her teeth with exasperation. The Third Lady wasn't ready since Lord Jing hadn't left yet. If they started the plan right now, it would be possibly a failure...

Chapter 49 An Argument Between Two Sisters!

"Mr. Qu, the opera group today seems decent. Let them make a performance in my mansion a few days later," Pei Yuanjun said lazily, pointing at the coquettish female performer with delicate makeup.

Qu Zhizhen hurriedly bowed to him, "My lord, I'm afraid I can't decide for them. This opera group has been staying in the Crown Prince's Mansion... It's not up to me if they agree to arrange the performance or not."

"Do you mean I'm less important than you?" Pei Yuanjun sneered, "Just deliver the message to the group owner. I don't care if they agree or not!"

Qu Zhizhen kept nodding in a cold sweat, "Yes... Yes. The message will be well delivered to them, my lord."

He realized that even the Crown Prince would agree to any request from Lord Yun. Whether the opera group belonged to the Crown Prince or even the emperor, as long as Lord Yun wanted to watch their performance, they had to agree anyway.

Pei Yuanjun had done his job of showing up in public, so he didn't stay any longer. After he had a brief talk with Qu Zhizhen, he stood up and got ready to leave.

Qu Moying stood up with him, same as Qu Zhizhen, who was prepared to walk them out.

Lord Jing wanted to leave with them but was rejected by Pei Yuanjun. Then, accompanied by Qu Zhizhen, Pei Yuanjun swaggered out of the mansion with Qu Moying.

After they left, Lord Jing followed an old maid and left as well...

However, Pei Yuanjun stopped halfway and rested in a vacant yard as Qu Zhizhen waited for him outside nervously. After he finished a cup of tea, Lord Yun finally left with his men. Qu Zhizhen wasn't relieved until he walked Lord Yun to the entrance and watched his carriage leave.

Qu Moying waited until Qu Zhizhen accompanied Pei Yuanjun to leave, then she took off the veiled hat, removed her lip makeup, and returned to the mansion with Yu Dong, who had been waiting for her in the yard.

It was quiet since all the guests were gathering in the garden to watch the opera performance. Standing outside, Qu Moying overlooked the high stage built far away as she curled up her lips. They made a detour to this place which was quite far from the garden, but the noises of the celebration could still be heard here.

The melodic, affectionate singing from the female role echoed in the space.

"They are somewhere nearby in front?" Qu Moying asked while observing the path that Yu Dong led her to.

"Yes, they are right in front," Yu Dong nodded at her.

"Let's go take a look!" said Qu Moying as her eyes under the veil darkened...

"My older sister left with an old maid?" Duan Jinxiang asked in surprise. "I never heard of anyone from the Qu's Family who gets alone with her. Let's go. I want to check on her."

"Second Lady, this is the Mansion of Vice Minister Qu. You'd better not go." Her maid tried to persuade her not to make any trouble.

"This place is so boring. I might as well go have a look. Who knows what my dear sister will do behind our back?" Duan Jinxiang said with sarcasm. "Mother asked her to marry my cousin, but she seems unwilling to do so. Does she even know her position? How dare she has any expectation as a degraded person!"

The maid next to her lowered her head. She had met the Second Lady's cousin before, who's a lecherous man. He was notorious for harassing women. Even though he knew she was his cousin's private maid, he would still try to flirt with her every time they met. People would all agree that he was a terrible man. If the First Lady really married him, her life would be ruined.

The maid was aware that she should stand by her master's side, but she could totally understand why the First Lady was unwilling to marry him.

"Second Lady, it's not appropriate..." the maid muttered.

"Slap!" The young lady hit her face hard. The maid covered her face and knelt down immediately as tears were rolling in her eyes. "Please, Second Lady."

"Are you my maid or Duan Yuxiang's maid? You disloyal rat! If you let me hear these words again, I will ask people to beat you to death," Duan Jinxiang yelled with rage.

Fortunately, they had already left the pavilion, standing in the shadow of a tree. Only a few people noticed them from a distance, but every witness couldn't help but frown at the scene. Rumors about this Second Lady Duan had existed since long ago, saying that she was a total shrew. It was unbelievable that she didn't even watch her manner in another family's mansion. People started to feel bad for her future husband, imagining how much trouble she would bring to her own family.

They couldn't hear what they said, but even if it was the maid's fault, she could just wait to punish her after they went back home. It was really unnecessary to make such a scene here.

After being scolded in public, the maid didn't dare to disobey the lady again. The poor teary-eyed maid stood up silently and led her to the path where the First Lady headed. She saw clearly in which direction Duan Yuxiang went.

At the same time, Duan Yuxiang was striding since she noticed one of her handkerchieves was missing. It was very inappropriate that an unmarried lady lost her private staff. If her stepmother used it to take advantage of her after being informed, she couldn't imagine how nasty the rumors would be. There were many guests in the Qu's Mansion today, and anyone could get her handkerchief. If things turned out bad, there would be no way for her to explain it.

She had implicitly asked the servants in the Qu's Mansion about her missing handkerchief, and they agreed to help her ask around.

The old maid who was showing her the way right now was one of them. She got back to her with the information about someone finding a handkerchief, but she was not sure if it belonged to Lady Duan. The old maid didn't have the hanky with her since Fourth Lady Qu was the one who found it. Usually, a noble guest like Lady Duan didn't need to ask about such a small matter by herself, but the old maid only witnessed it from a distance. As a servant, she didn't dare to bother a lady with such a personal issue. It would be better for First Lady Duan to pay a visit to Fourth Lady Qu in person.

All the female guests knew that Fourth Lady Qu was in poor health and went somewhere to rest.

So, Duan Yuxiang didn't suspect what the old maid said and followed her all the way to a small pavilion.

The old maid stopped and turned around with a smile, "My lady, since the Fourth Lady is taking a rest now, I'm afraid we can't bother her. But I'll call Yu Chun over, who's the Fourth Lady's private maid. You can ask her about it."

"No problem. Thank you, Granny," Duan Yuxiang agreed politely.

"My lady, please stay here and don't leave!" said the old maid.

Duan Yuxiang nodded and walked into the pavilion. The pavilion was built next to a lake as over half of it was surrounded by water. It was not the time for lotus leaves to grow yet, but the view was still beautiful with all the willow branches waving in the wind. Compared to the showy lotus blossom in hot summer, the lake in spring revealed a different aura of charm and elegance.

"You, come with me." The old maid waved her hand at the young maid standing behind Duan Yuxiang, who came with the lady from her family's mansion.

"What's the matter?" the young maid froze in confusion.

"Do you see the yard over there? That's the place where desserts and beverages are prepared. You can go there and bring some tea and snacks back to First Lady Duan. She's our guest today and should be treated well, or the madam will scold me." The old maid pointed at one place. "It's not far away and only takes a few minutes to get there."

The young maid took a look at that place, making sure it wouldn't take too long for her to go, and it should be safe for the lady to stay here temporarily. Then she nodded, ready to go.

After the old maid showed the way to the young girl, she bowed to Duan Yuxiang and left.

Lady Duan sat down in the pavilion, leaning on the rail and facing the lake view. This place was quiet, far away from the buzzing crowd. With the gentle breeze touching her face, her mind was finally in peace.

Duan Yuxiang was never good at socializing with other people. Staying alone here made her think about her family affairs and feel upset.

She'd rather die than marry her stepmother's nephew. Suddenly, her heart was filled with sorrow. She forgot that she was not at her own home and started to wail, burying her face in her arms.

"Tsk, I can't believe you are crying here. Do you think this place is your own home?" A familiar sarcastic voice came from behind, making Duan Yuxiang startle. She hurriedly wiped her tears and turned back. As expected, she saw her younger sister's disdainful face.

"Jinxiang, why are you here?" Duan Yuxiang stood up nervously.

"Oh? My dear sister, since you are here, why can't I be here as well?" Duan Jinxiang looked around arrogantly, "Such a nice place, and it's far away from people. Sis, are you here for a secret date?"

"Jinxiang, don't talk nonsense!" Duan Yuxiang's face turned red with irritation. Her voice was louder than usual.

"Shouldn't you be more aware than me whether I'm telling the truth or not? You don't want to show your own sister the husband you found for yourself?" Duan Jinxiang sneered, "Since you think my cousin is not worthy of you, it makes me more curious about your secret dirty paramour!"

The second wife that the Minister of Food and Beverage married didn't have a decent family background. But after she gave birth to Duan Jinxiang, she absolutely spoiled her daughter. The young girl had been arrogant and pampered at home. Right now, she flew into a rage, and everything in her mind was how to insult her older sister. She totally ignored that they were in someone else's mansion and just said whatever she wanted, showing her rude nature.

Duan Yuxiang was so furious that she even forgot to fear. She said while trembling, "Jinxiang, this is not what a well-educated lady should say!"

"Sis, you've done it already. Why don't you allow me to say it?" With her mother's support, Duan Jinxiang could always have the upper hand while arguing with Duan Yuxiang, never showing any respect for her older sister.

"First Lady Duan, the Fourth Lady invites you over!" A voice suddenly came from behind and broke the tension between the two sisters.

Both of them turned around and saw a maid standing outside of the pavilion, wearing the same light red coat as all the other maids in the Qu's Mansion.

"Okay, I'll be right there!" Duan Yuxiang said hurriedly. The maid's arrival was a lifesaver for her since all she wanted right now was to get as far as she could from her younger sister.

"Huh, why didn't the Fourth Lady invite me?" Duan Jinxiang asked rudely and pulled a long face. She didn't think she needed to show any respect for that useless lady.

"My lady, who are you? Why does the Fourth Lady have to invite you? Which family are you from? Where's your manner?" Yu Dong questioned her with a stern look on his face.

Apparently, Second Lady Duan said such discourteous words because she looked down on the Fourth Lady.

When Yu Dong served Pei Yuanjun before, even generals who fought on the battlefields would show him some respect, let alone noble ladies who grew up in boudoirs. For him, a shrew-like young lady like Duan Jinxiang was nothing. His sharp glance frightened Duan Jinxiang, and she couldn't help but take a few steps back.

She had no choice but to watch them leave. When she recovered from the shock, she flew into a rage immediately. She seated herself where Duan Yuxiang sat before and said resentfully, "She's just an ugly, blind girl given birth by an ex-wife. Does she really think she's someone important?"

She hated people like Duan Yuxiang the most, those ex-wife's children. She just felt disgusted seeing their hypocritical, graceful manner.

Duan Jinxiang slapped the rail with anger. She had never been shamed like this before, frightened by a blind girl's maid. She regretted that she didn't follow them just now since she doubted Qu Moying would reject her and leave her outside.

She was just a useless one like Duan Yuxiang...

The more she thought about it, the more regretful she felt. She gave a hard slap to the rail again as her body leaned on it. Suddenly, her body lost control, falling forward, and she heard a scream from her maid. With a splash, she fell into the lake...

Chapter 50 An Accident With an Unexpected Outcome

After Duan Jinxiang fell into the water, she thrashed around wildly as her maid screamed, "Help! Help!"

The rail broke because Duan Jinxiang hit it too hard. Her maid tried to pull her up, but she got further away from the shore while struggling in the water. Meanwhile, another two maids from the Qu's Mansion passed by. Hearing the noise, they dropped everything in their hands with fear and started to yell for help together.

By the lake, a few young masters passed by with some young servants. They were stunned by the desperate cry for help from the maids. One of the young men in the front realized what happened first, then he jumped into the water immediately, and swam toward Duan Jinxiang, who was still struggling. The rest of the young masters looked at each other with embarrassment, but no one followed the first one and jumped down again.

"Is there someone calling for help?" Yu asked hurriedly. She had kept an ear out for unusual noises for the whole time and noticed the screams immediately.

A few madams and ladies noticed the sound as well and got flustered.

"I'll go take a look!" Yu went down with some servants as the madams' eyes met across the table, and they decided to follow her.

As they went down, the noise got louder. It was not far away from the pavilion where the female guests stayed. Yu headed toward the small pavilion in the front, followed by a group of madams and ladies.

The path Yu walked down led straight to the lake, hidden in between some trees and buildings. Through this path, it would only take them a few minutes to get there.

In a yard nearby, Qu Qiuyan was gazing at Lord Jing affectionately while he was talking. Suddenly, she heard the scream for help and stood up, “Your royal highness, shall we go take a look? Did something happen? Someone’s calling for help?”

Qu Qiuyan asked anxiously.

“Let’s go!” Lord Jing heard the noise as well. He stood up, put on a serious look, and walked out first. Qu Qiuyan followed him closely behind, and the two almost walked side by side.

When Yu arrived with other people at the small pavilion, the three maids were still screaming for help. The two maids from the Qu’s Mansion noticed Yu and rushed over.

“What’s going on?” Yu asked them coldly.

“We... We are not very sure what exactly happened. When we got here, we saw a lady in the lake, and her maid was crying for help. We don’t want anything bad to happen to the lady, so we scream with the maid together for help. A young master already jumped into the water to rescue her!” The two maids pointed at the lake as everyone’s eyes fell on the waving water.

A young man was swimming toward the shore while holding a lady in his arms. The two in the water looked a bit too intimate, making the madams and ladies stare at each other with embarrassment.

They couldn’t see the two people’s faces clearly right now. If they both were not engaged, it could be a romantic story. But the situation would be very awkward if any one of them was engaged.

When they got ashore, a large group of young servants and maids had already gathered there. They hurried to help the two people up. Now people recognized the young man’s face – he was Young Master Yongning, Xu Lipeng. Instantly, everyone put on an awkward look.

They all knew that Young Master Yongning was Fourth Lady Qu's fiancé. Even though his fiancée was an ugly girl with an eye problem, he didn't choose to break off the engagement and acted like a gentleman for years. His background story earned him a good reputation and much respect from people in the city. Moreover, his friendly personality made people like him more.

But what was going on right now?

After Xu Lipeng got up from the lake, he took out his coat and threw it on Duan Jinxiang, who was rescued by him. He was wearing a simple suit inside, so it wouldn't be considered a discourtesy to take off his coat.

He was still acting like a gentleman, considering the lady's reputation and helping cover her body with his coat. However, being a gentleman couldn't stop the rumors from spreading.

Everyone fell into silence, having no idea how to handle the situation.

A sharp-eyed lady recognized the young girl rescued, "Is it Second Lady Duan?"

"It's Second Lady Duan."

"It's her!" ...

A buzz of whispers filled the space. Second Lady Duan was notorious for being a shrew who didn't get along with people and had a bad reputation.

"Jinxiang, h-how did you fall into the lake?" Someone exclaimed in shock behind the crowd. People turned around and saw First Lady Duan, who was said to be obedient, and Fourth Lady Qu standing beside her. They recognized Qu Moying through the long veil covering her eyes, and the expression on people's faces became more awkward.

Some sharp-eyed people also noticed two people standing at the crossing behind the two ladies – Lord Jing and Third Lady Qu, Qu Qiuyan. Although they were standing one behind the other, their posture still

seemed quite intimate, almost side by side. No one else was with them except for their own servants, who stood a few steps away behind them.

Did it mean that...Lord Jing was going to marry Third Lady Qu as his wife?

If so, it would be big news!

The madams present were surprised to see the scene as some of the young ladies interested in Lord Jing lowered their heads and felt upset while tears rolling in their eyes.

Lord Jing didn't expect so many people to be here. Since they all saw Qu Qiuyan and him together, rumors would spread out soon. He hesitated, thinking about Lady Liu, who came with Pei Yuanjun before. It would be better to keep a proper distance from Qu Qiuyan because he didn't want Lady Liu to be misled by the rumors.

However, then he remembered Qu Qiuyan's family background. With the current conditions, she could at the most be his second wife. Since the position of his first wife was still vacant, he didn't need to care about the rumors too much.

Feeling people's gaze, he strolled over to the crowd, which made Qu Qiuyan overjoyed. In her opinion, the lord's willingness to appear in public with her revealed his intention of marrying her as his first wife. She quickly caught up with him with a shy look on her face. Her mother was right – Lord Jing had already decided to marry her!

People stepped back to make way for Lord Jing as he walked closer. He saw Xu Lipeng, whose clothes were soaked in water, and frowned, "Young Master Xu, you rescued the lady?"

Xu Lipeng was wearing an irritated look on his face. Ever since he was told the lady he rescued was Second Lady Duan, his expression had been like this. When he noticed Qu Moying and First Lady Duan, the wife candidate in his mind, standing behind the crowd, his whole face turned as white as a sheet. He glared at Qu Moying, gnashing his teeth resentfully.

Since it was Lord Jing asking, he had to answer him properly. He tried hard to suppress his rage and said slowly, "I heard the maids' screaming and jumped into the water. Fortunately, the lady was alright."

His voice sounded righteous, and his wet clothes didn't affect his gentle temperament. At this moment, Duan Jinxiang was held by maids and wrapped Xu Lipeng's coat around herself. She gazed at this young gentleman with a noticeable trace of admiration in her eyes. Young Master Xu... He was the young master everyone praised. She couldn't help but feel delighted, with her heart pounding in her chest.

She took a complacent look at Qu Moying, who was standing aside. She bet the Fourth Lady regretted so much that she didn't invite Duan Jinxiang over. Now, she had to suffer from the consequence of losing her fiancé to her! Second Lady Duan couldn't be happier about it!

She felt lucky that she fell into the lake by accident, or there was no way she could get such a good marriage. She had been proposed by other young men before, but none of them was as excellent as Young Master Yongning. Her whole heart was filled with happiness, and even Duan Yuxiang looked less annoying than before. She leaned on a maid to show a fragile look, but in fact, she needed to grab the maid hard to suppress her excitement.

"Please take Second Lady Duan and Young Master Xu somewhere to get changed first. Although the weather is warm now, they still can't stay outside for too long in wet clothes," Yu urged the servants, showing her courtesy as the host.

But deep down inside, she was flustered as well. She thought the person who fell into the lake was First Lady Duan, but why did it turn out to be Second Lady Duan? At the same time, she noticed Qu Qiuyan standing next to Lord Jing like his little girlfriend and was pleased by the scene. At least the plan about her daughter didn't go wrong. Now it was guaranteed that her daughter would marry Lord Jing as his first wife.

Since Lord Jing showed up in public with Qiuyan, he must've decided to marry her already.

Yu knew it was the right decision to let her daughter play hard-to-get with Lord Jing, who had never shown his intention this clear before. And today, they were witnessed by many guests here, which meant their marriage was pretty much confirmed.

As for Yu Qingmeng, she couldn't do anything to help her right now. Yu's primary purpose today was to make Lord Jing and her daughter show up together in public, and everything went smoothly as she planned!

No matter how much she liked her niece, a niece was just a niece.

It was no big deal since she had many chances to offer help to Yu Qingmeng later. With her daughter, the future Madam Jing's support, she doubted that Duan Jinxiang, a daughter given birth by a second wife, could cause any real trouble, no matter how aggressive she was.

Since everything was settled, the crowd dismissed. Duan Yuxiang followed her younger sister to help her change clothes as Qu Moying still stayed at the end and fell into deep thoughts while watching people leaving.

Lord Jing hadn't left yet as well, and Qu Moying caught his attention. Before, the female guests sat too far away from him, and he couldn't see Qu Moying's appearance clearly. Now that he could see it, he felt that her face looked a bit familiar. His eyes fell on her light-colored lips and ivory skin with a confused look on his face.

But then he found himself ridiculous. He heard this lady had grown up in a village outside of the city. They couldn't possibly meet each other before!

"Your royal highness, let's head back!" Seeing no outsiders around, Qu Qiuyan softened her voice, which was much more affectingly sweet than usual. She stood in between Qu Moying and Pei Yusheng to block his sight.

Pei Yusheng wasn't really paying attention to her now. He turned around, took Qu Qiuyan to leave, and asked casually, "Is that Fourth Lady Qu? Her eye problem doesn't seem to be very serious since she could walk here by herself. Didn't people all say she's blind?"

"Her eyes are better now after Mother sent some doctors to treat her. Her eyes could function better, but they still looked pretty bad, and her face... That's why she keeps wearing the veil," Qu Qiuyan explained softly, implying that Qu Moying's sick eyes looked terrible and her appearance was totally ruined.

Hearing her words, Pei Yusheng thought that Qu Moying's eye disease left her many scars, or maybe it was because the medicine she was using had a strong side-effect on her appearance. It reminded him of

Lady Liu, and he started to feel a bit upset. He wondered how Lady Liu's face looked. Should he send an Imperial Doctor to the Liu's Mansion to check on her?

The Guardian General dedicated himself to the country, and it was unfortunate that his only daughter suffered from such pain. Lord Jing doubted people would find it strange if he sent an Imperial Doctor to their mansion. Making up his mind, Pei Yusheng nodded quietly.

Watching these two walk away, Qu Moying curled up her lips into a smirk. Yu and her daughter had no idea about Lord Jing's plan, but she did. This lord had already decided to marry Qu Qiuyan as his second wife while Yu and Qu Qiuyan were still daydreaming about their bright future. Things were getting more and more interesting.

Qu Moying chose to ruin Xu Lipeng's plan, but she didn't do anything about Yu today. Instead, she even lent a hand by standing in front of Lord Jing and Qu Qiuyan so that people's attention could be easily drawn to them. Her purpose was to let everyone find out that Lord Jing and Qu Qiuyan had been secretly dating...

For the next step, Qu Moying would add more fuel to the fire...