

## **Noble Wife 441**

### Chapter 441 Prepare the Gift, and I'll Go with You

Liu Jingyu entered with a maid by her side, clearly displaying her excitement.

Her entire body trembled with anxiety, her beautiful complexion turned pale, and her eyes were slightly reddened with faint tear streaks.

It evoked a sense of pity in those who witnessed it.

"Grandfather, I disagree!" After entering, she faced Duke Qi and bit her lip forcefully, suppressing the anguish in her eyes. She paid her respects to Pei Yusheng and then to Duke Qi, "Grandfather, why must it be like this? This matter clearly concerns Third Lady Qu, why should it be pushed onto me?"

Qu Qiuyan was escorted out, and many people witnessed it, sparking discussions. The previous events hadn't been fully explained, and now new incidents arose. If, at this moment, Liu Jingyu went to show any hint of remorse, everyone would link her to all the unfavorable incidents, reinforcing some of the rumors about her.

Qu Qiuyan went out safely and then fainted inexplicably. She was carried back to the Qu Mansion. Although no one dared to talk about the sachet in public, there were many people who suspected her in private. If she showed weakness now, she would look even more guilty.

Even without direct accusations, her reputation would suffer greatly.

Liu Jingyu couldn't understand what had come over her grandfather. Although he didn't dote on her as much as her grandmother did, he had always treated her well in the past. He always had her best interests at heart, and she was sincerely grateful that he had entrusted her with the title of county lady. She had silently vowed to treat her grandfather well in return.

But what was happening now? How could her grandfather act this way?

Was it all because of that blind woman from the Qu Mansion? How could her grandfather push her aside, especially at such a crucial moment? Didn't he realize it?

"County Lady, does this matter truly have nothing to do with you?" Pei Yusheng looked at her and coldly retorted.

Although Liu Jingyu's appearance was striking, and she was quite beautiful, Qu Qiuyan was no less attractive. Moreover, Qu Qiuyan was not Pei Yusheng's type, or else they would have established their relationship years ago.

The pitiful woman before him wasn't the one he held in his heart. Moreover, Pei Yusheng had come here out of anger, and he felt little sympathy for Liu Jingyu.

His anger wasn't directed at defending Qu Qiuyan, but rather to protect his own interests. By trampling on him, they were giving face to the crown prince, which greatly infuriated him.

"This matter originally had nothing to do with me. I merely learned about certain things but, at that time, I was in a rush to return home and deliver medicinal herbs to my mother. I didn't pay much attention to it. When I came back, I heard about the incident and recalled Third Lady Qu's matter. I intentionally sent someone to summon her for questioning. Then, my grandmother and Fourth Lady Qu arrived. As Third Lady Qu listened, she suddenly fainted."

Liu Jingyu's eyes grew increasingly red. After finishing her words, she bit her lip forcefully, causing her cherry lips to lose color and reveal white teeth marks.

With innocent eyes, she looked at Pei Yusheng, her thoughts unspoken.

Although Pei Yusheng didn't care about Liu Jinyu, seeing such a beautiful woman looking at him in this pitiful way, he had never seen Liu Jinyu like this before. In the past, Liu Jinyu always carried an air of superiority in front of others, which he neither disliked nor liked very much.

But now, she had a resemblance to Qu Qiuyan's demeanor, which gave her a touch of elegance.

Her eyes filled with sorrow as she looked at Pei Yusheng, waiting for him to speak.

“Let’s consider this matter settled, please excuse me, my lord.” Pei Yusheng said, finally remaining firm. He bowed to Duke Qi and turned to leave.

“Your Highness...” Liu Jinyu wanted to call him back, but he had already walked away, leaving her with no choice but to turn to Duke Qi. “Grandfather...”

“Let it be, I will prepare a gift for you. We’ll say you’re going to visit the sick. The third Lady Qu still hasn’t woken up, and we don’t know if there’s anything wrong. I’ve heard that even two imperial physicians have gone there, but to no avail. It’s a good opportunity for you to go and see.”

Duke Qi waved his hand, cutting off her words, his expression indifferent.

“Grandfather, you... you can’t treat me like this.” Liu Jinyu couldn’t hold back her tears any longer. They streamed down her face as she sobbed.

Even if they claimed she was going to visit the sick, it was just a cover-up. The Qu family would surely spread the truth of this matter.

“Enough, let’s end this matter here! Jinyu, your status is different from ordinary people. You need to act more appropriately at this time. As for what happened before...” Duke Qi’s face grew even darker as he spoke. He looked at her with a tinge of disappointment. “Regarding today’s incident, whether you were involved or not, you know it yourself. The paper in the study is also missing a few sheets. I heard you wrote something today.”

Having said that, Duke Qi shook his head, as if trying to shake off his negative thoughts. He sighed heavily. “Jinyu, tell your grandfather, did you do it intentionally?”

“Grandfather, I... I didn’t!” Liu Jinyu couldn’t dare to tell the truth at this moment. She stubbornly insisted while crying.

Duke Qi stopped asking further questions. He took a deep look at her and turned around to leave with long strides.

Maybe he was overthinking it. Although his granddaughter was involved, it was likely for dealing with the Third Lady Qu. After all, she had no connection with the Forth Lady Qu. Given her temperament, she didn't seem like someone who would bully a weak young lady like that.

This was the most reasonable explanation; otherwise, today's events couldn't be explained.

However, despite that, Duke Qi still insisted that his granddaughter make amends to the Qu family.

No matter what she had to apologize for, she just had to apologize!

Debts always needed to be repaid, right?

Some things seemed destined to happen. Otherwise, how could his granddaughter end up involved with Forth Lady Qu?

Liu Jinyu glared angrily at the retreating figure of Duke Qi, her eyes filled with resentment, her teeth clenched tightly.

Before this, she genuinely regarded her grandfather as her closest person. But now, that was no longer the case. This grandfather had become possessed and was no longer the same person he used to be.

"County Lady." the maid timidly called out.

"Let's go home." Liu Jinyu said coldly, tightly gripping her fist. Even without her grandfather, she still had her mother. Her mother would surely help her.

Compared to her grandfather and grandmother, her mother was the only person she truly felt close to. Everyone else wasn't good, including her father...

“Father, this matter really has little to do with me. But now, Grandfather has placed the blame on me. What should I do?” In Minister Liu’s study, Liu Jinyu cried, her tears falling like pearls, her voice choked with sobs.

She had just come out of her mother’s courtyard and went straight to Minister Liu’s residence.

“Your grandfather asked you to go to the Qu Mansion to apologize?” Minister Liu put down the pen in his hand and asked his daughter.

He was an extraordinary middle-aged man, even in his older age, his youthful charm and elegance were still apparent. His handsome features exuded a refined and scholarly demeanor. At first glance, he left a favorable impression on people.

Having held the position of Minister for many years, his stature was remarkable. Among the six ministers, he was the youngest, and the court officials believed that he had the greatest potential to be promoted to a higher position. His future was limitless.

“Yes, grandfather said so. Father... I... what should I do? If the Crown Prince misunderstands, what will happen?” Liu Jinyu sobbed, speaking clearly.

Mother had advised her to steer the conversation towards the Crown Prince’s favor.

Minister Liu frowned, realizing the complexity of the situation. While her grandfather’s words seemed unreasonable, their relationship over the years made him believe that there must be a different interpretation to his daughter’s words. If one considered fairness, her own father-in-law was the epitome of impartiality, to the point of being obsessively just, even at the cost of sacrificing loved ones.

Was it truly her fault in this matter?

“Are you sure this matter has nothing to do with you?” Minister Liu asked again.

“Father, I truly got unintentionally involved. I only found out that Lady Qu intended to harm someone with a sachet. I threw the sachet into the neighboring flower hall and didn’t have time to explain further

before returning home. Don't you also know about my return?" Liu Jingyu wiped her tears, her words pleading.

This incident couldn't remain hidden. Her mother had advised her to address it delicately, knowing her father's uncompromising nature. He might indeed seek information from her grandfather.

Minister Liu fell silent for a moment. He was already aware of the situation. Coincidentally, when he returned home, he saw Liu Jingyu entering right after him, and they had a conversation together.

Upon closer examination, Liu Jingyu's account seemed plausible.

However, her father-in-law's words couldn't be dismissed as false. Jingyu must have made a mistake. If she had informed her mother-in-law about the incident at that time, it would have prevented further consequences.

This matter had become significant, involving the Crown Prince's Mansion and the Lord Jing Mansion. It was not a trivial issue. Moreover, he heard that Third Lady Qu remained unconscious, and it was Lord Jing who intervened. After all, she had already been designated as Lord Jing's concubine. The decree had been issued.

His intervention in this matter was now justified.

When news reached Minister Liu from the palace, he didn't pay much attention. Qu Zhizhen was his subordinate, and he was well aware that Third Lady Qu had hopes of becoming Lord Jing's consort. But now, she had become a low-ranking concubine whose position was unclear. The term "concubine" was merely an external label, and her status was far inferior to that of a consort.

In the royal household, only the first and second wife held true authority. The concubines had a place, but they were usually daughters of concubine-born mothers or daughters of fifth or sixth-ranked officials. Compared to the legitimate daughters of ministers, their status was lower. Minister Liu couldn't fathom Qu Zhizhen's reasoning when he agreed to this arrangement.

Now, he realized that this matter was related to his own daughter.

"Father ..." Liu Jingyu was still begging. Her mother had said that as long as she begged successfully, her father would definitely help her. However, in the next moment, her face stiffened.

Minister Liu stood up and said, "Prepare the gifts. I will go with you."

## Chapter 442 Sincerity

"Forth Lady, the Second Master requests your presence outside. County Lady Jingyu has arrived and wishes for you to accompany her to visit Third Lady." Yu Chun reported as she entered the room.

"Already here?" Qu Moying asked, unsurprised by the news.

Considering how Qu Zhizhen instigated Lord Jing's intervention and made Qu Qiuyan a concubine, it was inevitable that Liu Jingyu would be involved.

Pei Yusheng could take action because Qu Qiuyan was already his concubine, but Pei Luo'an couldn't intervene yet, as their relationship wasn't clearly defined.

Selecting the crown prince's consort wasn't a decision to be made lightly. Even choosing Lord Jing's second wife required careful consideration. Only the position of a concubine allowed for fewer discussions, enabling Lord Jing to have more authority and issue an immediate decree.

"They have already arrived, with Minister Liu." Yu Chun responded.

Minister Liu actually came with Liu Jingyu? Qu Moying chuckled after a brief moment of surprise. She had heard that Minister Liu treated his wife and daughter exceptionally well, but she had never considered it before.

Her own father would never do such a thing, so she hadn't considered that possibility.

She stood up, tidied herself a bit, and went to the main hall with Yu Dong.

Upon seeing her approaching, the lad servant at the door hurried inside to report and soon led her in.

Qu Moying walked into the room and saw an elegant middle-aged man sitting at the center of the hall, exuding an air of dignity and grace. He appeared older than Qu Zhizhen. She had heard that they were of the same generation, but this man's temperament was completely different from Qu Zhizhen's.

Qu Moying cast a curious glance at him and then lowered her head to bow to Qu Zhizhen. "Father."

"This is Minister Liu." Qu Zhizhen introduced.

Qu Moying approached Minister Liu and paid her respects. Then, she turned to the person sitting beside him, Liu Jingyu, and also greeted her. Finally, she took a seat on the chair next to Liu Jingyu.

Feeling someone silently observing her from above, Qu Moying kept her head down and remained motionless. That person must be Minister Liu.

He seemed genuinely virtuous, but she couldn't be certain if it was authentic.

Liu Jingyu and herself were at odds with each other!

"Is Forth Lady Qu's eyesight still not recovered?" Minister Liu examined Qu Moying and kindly inquired.

Liu Jingyu glanced back at her father in astonishment. Her father was usually indifferent, even towards family matters. He rarely asked questions.

"It has mostly recovered, but she still has some sensitivity to bright light. She usually keeps it protected, but she should be able to remove it in some time."

Qu Zhizhen casually explained.

"Has she consulted a physician?" Minister Liu continued.



"No, when she returned home, her eyes were already much better. However, it takes time to fully recover after such a prolonged injury." Qu Zhizhen replied with a smile.

"Ah, it's best when eyesight is restored. A young girl like her should not have her whole life affected by an eye ailment." Minister Liu's voice sounded gentle, reflecting genuine concern.

Qu Moying couldn't help stealing another glance at him, meeting Minister Liu's smiling gaze. No matter how she looked at it, he didn't seem to harbor any ill intentions towards her.

"Ying, please take County Lady Jingyu to see your third sister." Qu Zhizhen nodded and smiled, instructing Qu Moying.

Qu Moying stood up. "County Lady, please follow me."

Although Liu Jingyu was filled with resentment, she managed to maintain a smile on her face. She stood up as well and followed Qu Moying, leaving the reception room one after the other.

"Forth Lady Qu, has Third Lady still not awakened?" Once they were outside, Liu Jingyu inquired.

"She is still unconscious." Qu Moying nodded.

"Have you summoned imperial physicians to come and examine her?" Liu Jingyu asked once more.

"Of course." Qu Moying nodded in response.

"I have also invited a physician this time I came. Why not have him take a look?" Liu Jingyu suggested.

Qu Moying readily agreed, "That would be the best!"

Observing how quickly she agreed, Liu Jingyu glanced at her with suspicion. Qu Moying's expression remained calm, revealing no signs of guilt or unease.

Qu Qiuyan had fainted and had not regained consciousness all this time. Liu Jingyu couldn't believe it and had purposely asked her father to bring a physician, hoping to verify the situation.

Now, seeing Qu Moying's composed demeanor, Liu Jingyu wondered if it could actually be true.

However, she couldn't bring herself to believe it. She called for the physician waiting in the adjacent room and accompanied them as they went towards the Furong House.

Upon entering the courtyard, proceeding to the room, and entering the inner chamber, they saw Qu Qiuyan lying motionless on the bed. It had only been a day, but Qu Qiuyan appeared extremely frail, pale, and worn out.

Qing Ju stood beside the bed and upon hearing their voices, she quickly stood up and bowed to both of them.

"How is third sister?" Qu Moying inquired.

"Her ladyship still hasn't awakened. It has been quite some time, and she hasn't shown any signs of waking up. I... I am afraid..." Qing Ju cried, her appearance displaying both anxiety and confusion. Her eyes were still swollen and reddened, indicating she had been crying for a while.

Liu Jingyu looked suspiciously at Qu Qiuyan, who was lying motionless on the bed. She waved his hand and an imperial physician came forward to take her pulse.

Qing Ju lowered the curtain and placed Qu Qiuyan's hand on the pulse pillow. The doctor sat on the chair in front of the bed, placing his hand on hers, his brows furrowed tightly.

It seemed like nothing was amiss.

He changed hands and reexamined, yet still found nothing.

But the person was lying there, clearly unconscious and unresponsive.

After carefully assessing, it seemed like her pulse had accelerated slightly, and her hand felt warm. Could it be the reason behind her unconsciousness? However, this reason didn't seem like it could render someone unconscious.

"What's the matter?" Liu Jingyu stepped forward and asked.

The doctor found himself at a loss for words. If there was nothing wrong, then the pulse and skin would be somewhat different. If there was something wrong, it didn't seem to be anything out of the ordinary. Nevertheless, the fact remained that the person was unconscious. He had heard that several colleagues had examined her before and all had claimed that something was wrong. They had tried awakening her, but she still remained unresponsive.

If there was truly nothing wrong, how could she be in this state?

"Sir..." Liu Jingyu pressed for an answer.

"It's possible that Lady Qu's health was not originally robust. Coupled with recent events... she might have been unable to bear it all at once, leading to her sudden fainting." the doctor finally found a suitable explanation. He stood up and addressed Liu Jingyu.

"When will she awaken?" Qu Moying took two steps forward and placed Qu Qiuyan's hand back under the quilt, all the while asking.

As her fingers touched Qu Qiuyan's skin, it felt slightly warm, and her pulse quickened.

While examining Qu Qiuyan in the tent, she appeared pale beneath the thin blanket. However, there was a slight dampness on her forehead. As her gaze fell upon her shoulder, which Qing Ju had been shielding the entire time, it became apparent that there was a slight bump.

Qu Moying had already understood Qu Zhizhen's scheme and her lips curled into a silent smile. Qu Qiuyan was indeed a resilient person to endure all this.

She had underestimated Qu Qiuyan.

"It's... uncertain. It depends on Lady Qu's own recovery ability. If she continues to remain unconscious, there may be a risk to her life. It's best to find a way to awaken her as soon as possible," the physician vaguely responded.

Continued unconsciousness was the most dangerous scenario. Therefore, the priority was to find a way to wake her up quickly.

Liu Jingyu's face turned grim. She hadn't expected Qu Qiuyan's situation to be true. Glancing at the faint figure of Qu Qiuyan behind the curtain, she desperately wanted to go and check for herself, but her current status made it inconvenient.

"Please prepare a prescription." Qu Moying said softly.

The physician nodded and followed the maid to the chamber. Since he was here, he might as well prescribe the medicine.

"Forth Lady Qu, I came here to apologize to you. I should have intervened earlier when Third Lady Qu acted recklessly at the Duke Qi's Mansion. In the end, it inexplicably brought harm upon me as well." Liu Jingyu looked at Qu Moying, and her expression miraculously returned to normal. It even seemed genuine. "If I offended you in any way with my words before, I ask for your forgiveness."

She finished speaking and gave a slight bow to Qu Moying.

Her words were flawless, connecting the dots of the situation. They seemed to be the truth.

Even Qu Moying couldn't help but admire Liu Jingyu's cunning. It appeared to be an apology, but it also expressed her grievances and helplessness. It displayed her magnanimity. Of course, her apology was

not directed at Qu Qiuyan. Everyone knew Qu Qiuyan was not innocent; she was merely unconscious, temporarily shielded from further accusations.

Liu Jingyu was not an easy opponent.

She managed to conceal her emotions instantly, displaying a genuine expression of guilt and embarrassment. It seemed as if it truly was just an accidental mistake, as she claimed.

Qu Qiuyan on the bed clenched her teeth, nearly biting her lip.

The hot water-filled hand warmer on her arm caused excruciating pain throughout her body. She had to endure it, and that area on her arm was likely already burned.

But why did Qu Moying benefit in the end, not her?

“Since it was a misunderstanding, I won’t hold it against you, County Lady.” Qu Moying smiled faintly, moving aside slightly. Her tone was casual.

Such a casual reprimand was too shallow. Between her and Liu Jingyu, blame couldn’t explain their complex relationship. After Liu Jingyu maliciously targeted her reputation and even attempted to ruin her for reasons unknown to her, their relationship went beyond a simple apology and acceptance.

“Thank you, Forth Lady Qu, for your generosity.” Liu Jingyu smiled brightly. “I’ve also brought a gift as compensation. Please accept it later, Forth Lady Qu.”

“Don’t mention it, County Lady!” Qu Moying’s lips curled slightly, but she didn’t leave immediately. “Would you like to sit down and take a look at my sister?”

Qu Qiuyan’s face contorted with anger on the bed. The pain was becoming unbearable. She had arranged it when she learned that Qu Moying was bringing Liu Jingyu along, and now time was running out.

"There's no need. Please take me out, Forth Lady Qu." Liu Jingyu said, glancing at Qu Qiuyan's curtain. She discreetly dug her long nails into her palm, the pain sharp, but her smile became even more genuine.

Liu Jingyu harbored intense hatred deep within. Although she had explained her apology with her father's words, she had swallowed the humiliation. In truth, this matter was not yet over. The Crown Prince's reaction and the Empress's response remained to be seen...

She preferred to handle the Qu Mansion's affairs as her mother suggested. She didn't need to take matters into her own hands!

After glancing at the maid beside her and signaling her discreetly, Liu Jingyu turned and walked out, with Qu Moying and Yu Dong following closely behind.

Chapter 443 A Note from a Decade ago

"Lady Qu, may I join you there?" Liu Jingyu stood firmly at the door, not in a rush to leave, and pointed to the stone table under the tree in the courtyard.

Qu Moying glanced behind her and didn't see her maid following closely. She nodded thoughtfully.

The two of them approached and settled on the stone bench in front of the stone table. Yu Dong called the Granny from Furong House, and asked her to prepare tea and snacks.

The Granny was recently promoted, so she was eager to please and quickly sent the maid to prepare the refreshments.

"Lady Qu, may I ask if anything like this has happened to Third Lady Qu in the past?" Liu Jingyu asked as soon as she sat down.

"I am not certain. You should know that I don't live here before." Qu Moying calmly replied, watching Yu Dong busily attending to the maidservants and hastening the tea service. She subtly curved her lips.

Liu Jingyu fell silent for a moment, then looked up at Qu Moying with sincerity in her eyes. "Lady Qu, I haven't met you before, and what I know about you is only from hearsay. Perhaps I didn't quite like what I heard, but that's all. This recent incident was indeed subjective on my part, but it truly turned out to be an accident. There was no malicious intent."

She was explaining the previous incident, not completely shirking responsibility. In fact, she vaguely admitted that she had some knowledge about Qu Qiuyan, but didn't take any action. On the one hand, she believed it wasn't a significant matter, and on the other hand, she wanted to see what Qu Qiuyan intended. However, she couldn't have anticipated the final outcome.

Of course, she also vaguely expressed her dislike for Qu Moying, influenced by the rumors she had heard.

But she couldn't reveal who had spread those rumors.

While Liu Jingyu's words were carefully chosen and explained clearly, upon closer inspection, they lacked substantial evidence. Liu Jingyu was truly cunning.

Moments ago, she was almost losing control due to anger, but now she had calmed down and could speak such words. Despite suffering a significant loss, she was able to maintain composure.

However, Qu Moying knew more than Liu Jingyu realized.

"I wonder what kind of rumors you have heard that would make you think less of me?" Qu Moying didn't inquire about the source of the rumors, only asking this question. "I don't think there is anything wrong with the rumors circulating outside!"

If Qu Moying had asked about the source of the rumors, her identity wouldn't require an explanation. But Qu Moying's response now came naturally from a different angle. If she didn't explain, it would seem that her previous words were too perfunctory.

After a brief pause, Liu Jingyu replied, "I heard that the annulment of the engagement between you and Young Master Yongning seemed to be your own idea."

“And what if it was?” Qu Moying smiled faintly, without a hint of animosity. “County Lady, even if a man is disloyal and harms you by being involved with another woman, would you still willingly marry him?”

“Of course not, but Young Master Yongning doesn’t seem to be that kind of person.” Liu Jingyu could only respond in that manner at this point.

“You are quite familiar with him? Did he say something?” Qu Moying smiled.

Liu Jingyu was taken aback, and her expression immediately darkened. “What do you mean, Fourth Lady Qu?”

If it hadn’t been for Xu Lipeng finding the sachet, Liu Jingyu could have said that she thought Young Master Yongning was good based on what she had seen and heard. But now, she couldn’t say anything, not even matters related to Xu Lipeng in the future.

“I heard that Marquis Yongning’s Mansion and the Duke Qi’s Mansion are close friends. I assumed that the two families had a good relationship, which led to my understanding of certain matters.” Qu Moying said openly.

It seemed as if her earlier question was really intended in that way.

Liu Jingyu’s expression turned grim. The matter wasn’t resolved yet, and even if it was related to the Qu family, it wasn’t the main concern.

With this realization, everything became tasteless, and she no longer had the inclination to speak with Qu Moying. She stood up and said, “Fourth Lady Qu, my father is waiting for me outside. I won’t bother you any longer.”

Qu Moying also stood up and smiled. “County Lady Jing Yu, please!”

Liu Jinyu nodded and walked away with the maid who had just come out behind her. Qu Moying accompanied her to the courtyard gate, watching her depart before turning back with Yu Dong.



Inside the room, Qu Qiuyan had already sat up, her face pale and unpleasant. The curtains were hung up, revealing a red and swollen garment on her arm.

Observing Qu Qiuyan gritting her teeth in pain, it was evident that she had suffered a severe burn. Liu Jingyu intentionally took her time, prolonging the situation.

“Go and fetch a doctor for our third sister.” Qu Moying instructed Qing Ju after glancing at Qu Qiuyan.

Qing Ju hesitated, looking at Qu Qiuyan, and didn’t dare to respond.

“No need!” Qu Qiuyan shook her head. “Father has given me medication for the burn.”

This was all premeditated. Knowing this, Qu Moying no longer wanted to interfere. Qu Qiuyan had brought this upon herself.

After a brief glance at the two, Qu Moying turned and left.

Yu Dong followed closely behind. Once they were outside the courtyard gate, Yu Dong spoke up, “Lady, while I was in the corridor instructing the maids to prepare tea, I overheard a conversation between the maid from Liu Jingyu and Qing Ju. It didn’t sound like they were discussing the condition of the third young lady. Qing Ju’s voice was unintentionally loud, indicating her panic.”

Yu Dong had deliberately gone to the corridor to hasten the other maids because Liu Jingyu’s maid had not come out.

Qu Moying paused for a moment, her gaze slightly lowered, and a cold smile played on her lips. Liu Jingyu’s plans were not without backup; she had a second plan. The previous conversation was intended to divert her attention.

“You keep a close watch on the Furong House. If there’s any movement, it will be swift. Third sister won’t be able to endure it.” Qu Moying said coldly.

Qu Qiuyan had suffered another setback this time, and the situation had become chaotic. She was enraged and had no outlet for her anger. Liu Jingyu had calculated the timing quite well.

Qu Qiuyan wouldn't be able to bear it any longer.

The note was old, yellowed with age, but the quality of the paper was excellent—it was Chengxin Paper, not something just any household could afford.

It bore the words, "Meet me at the Yue's Clothing Pavilion. I have something important to tell you!"

Below that, there was a signature. If it hadn't been mentioned, Qu Qiuyan would never have known that it was the handwriting of Minister Liu. The note was talking about Second Madam Qu.

Looking at the date of the signature, this Second Madam Qu was not her mother Yu, but Qu Moying's biological mother, Little Yue.

Qu Moying's birth mother, Little Yue, unexpectedly knew this Minister Liu, and their relationship seemed to be more than ordinary, even somewhat ambiguous.

Qu Qiuyan tightly clenched the note, her face contorted in the dimly lit room. She had never been able to find Qu Moying's weak point, but now, did she finally have one?

And it was delivered into her hands by Liu Jinyu.

But was it genuine or fake?

Qing Ju stood by the bed, her heart in turmoil. Even now, she couldn't calm herself down. That maid from Liu Jingyu had brought her the note.

All she had said was, "Investigate the relationship between our lord and your former second madam. Our county lady heard that there are some doubts about the birth of the fourth young lady in your household."

Qing Ju was so frightened that she almost dropped the items in her hands. It was this maid who took the tray from her and placed it on the table.

Qing Ju couldn't even recall what else she had said at that time. Then, the note was thrust into her hands, and she watched the maid walk away.

As soon as she left, the lady on the bed abruptly sat up, urging herself to hand over the note. However, just as the lady picked it up, the fourth lady entered the room, prompting the lady to hurriedly conceal it.

Now the note lay flat on the small table in front of the lady. Qing Ju could also read and understand the words written on it. She felt a tremor throughout her body and broke into a cold sweat.

"Lady..." Qing Ju called out anxiously as Qu Qiuyan remained silent.

"I want to see my mother." Qu Qiuyan suddenly spoke, interrupting Qing Ju's words. She raised her head, casting a slightly chilling gaze at Qing Ju. "Find a way for me to meet my mother."

"Do you want to inquire with Madam?" Qing Ju made an effort to remain composed, or at least appear so. Only she knew the icy sensation in her chest, and she couldn't shake off the sense of foreboding.

Qing Ju had witnessed her young lady plotting against the fourth lady on multiple occasions, but it was always the third lady who suffered the consequences. Now, the third lady had become the concubine of Lord Jing, bearing the burns on her arms.

Qing Ju was genuinely afraid. She feared that this time things would turn out even worse than before.

"Lady, perhaps we should think of a solution after we enter the Lord Jing's Mansion!" Qing Ju advised in a hushed voice. She genuinely feared Qu Moying and couldn't bear to assist her young lady in plotting against the fourth lady any longer.

"We'll deal with future matters in the future. I can't wait any longer. I must see my mother tonight." Qu Qiuyan impatiently waved her hand, cutting off Qing Ju's words.

Observing her determination, Qing Ju dared not argue further. She knew that if she continued, the third lady would explode in anger. Qing Ju simply nodded in response.

"Prepare the medicine for me!" Qu Qiuyan said, her face growing dark.

This time, she had narrowly escaped complete disaster. Thankfully, her father had devised a plan to save her. Her hands throbbed with a searing pain, but more than that, she felt an overwhelming sense of frustration. How could Qu Moying remain unscathed while she suffered?

The note appeared genuine. As long as it was authentic, everything would be fine. Even if Qu Moying was her father's daughter, Qu Qiuyan would ensure she became nothing more than a bastard.

The true mistress of the Qu Mansion could only be herself. She and only she!

Qing Ju efficiently handled the matter. By dinner time, everything had been arranged. After finishing their meal, Qu Qiuyan wrapped herself in a large cloak. Stealthily, accompanied by Qing Ju, she slipped into the backyard of the Yu residence, and then made their way to the main building at the front.

A faint oil lamp illuminated the main house. Yu was half-reclined on the bed, her appearance gloomy and dismal. She exuded an aura of decay that disgusted Qu Qiuyan, accompanied by a faint, silent stench. Qu Qiuyan couldn't develop any affection for her.

When Yu saw Qu Qiuyan, she became visibly excited. "Yan, you've come to see me!"

Chapter 444 Suicide by Hitting the Wall?

She seemed to be about to stand up, but helplessly weak, and fell heavily. Hai Lan hurriedly assisted her, saying, "Madam, be careful!"

Qu Qiuyan glanced at Yu, lying on the bed, and took a step back with disgust. "What's going on?"

"Madam can't walk!" Hai Lan helped Yu up and wiped away a tear.

"What do you mean she can't walk?" Qu Qiuyan asked casually.

"I don't know. Her lower body feels weak, she can only manage a few steps with support. Right now, she can only lie down like this. I informed the second master, who said he would call a doctor, but we haven't seen the doctor yet. It's fortunate that you are here. You can talk to the second master. If things continue like this, what will happen to Madam's legs!"

Tears welled up in Hai Lan's eyes. She reached out to wipe her reddened eyes and wanted to say something, but Qu Qiuyan interrupted her directly. "I will discuss this with Father. Mother, I came here today for something more important. Do you know about the connection between Qu Moying's mother and Minister Liu?"

"You mean the matter concerning Yue?" Yu didn't hear clearly and asked in response.

"Yes, it's about her, her connection with Minister Liu. Do you know about it?" Qu Qiuyan asked again, reaching into her bosom and pulling out a slip of paper. She handed it over and took a couple of steps, disgustedly passing the paper to Qing Ju, instructing her to give it to Yu.

Yu took the paper, glanced at it, and suddenly burst into laughter.

"Mother, do you know about it or not?" Qu Qiuyan asked impatiently.

Yu finally stopped, her laughter perhaps too intense, her face showing a tinge of unusual paleness, and then she started coughing forcefully.

Qu Qiuyan furrowed her brow, took a step back, and wiped her nose with a handkerchief. She truly disliked the current state of Yu.

Not only did she appear dirty and disheveled, but she also exuded a sense of desolation, lacking any vigor. Even her voice carried an unpleasant musty smell.

If it weren't for Yu, there would be no one else who could speak so clearly about the past. Qu Qiuyan would never have come here.

Auntie Hai Lan hurriedly stepped forward to pat Yu's back, helping her calm down.

"Yue... I had always suspected something between them, but the master didn't believe me... He even said I was imagining things." Yu tightly clutched the slip of paper in her hand, her voice hoarse from coughing, with a hint of a moldy smell.

"Mother, is this true?" Qu Qiuyan let go of her hand covering her nose and asked again.

"Of course, it's true. I always felt that this newly appointed Minister Liu was overly concerned about our household affairs. It turns out... he knew that wretched woman Yue early on and had secret meetings with her. That wretched Qu Moying must not be your father's daughter; she must be a bastard child."

Yu smiled smugly, forcefully clutching her bony chest, her eyes filled with chaotic hatred.

"Mother, do you... believe it's true? Is Qu Moying really not father's daughter?" Qu Qiuyan became excited. "Can you prove it?"

"That wretched woman has been involved with Minister Liu for a long time. Minister Liu married the daughter of Duke Qi, and despite their claims of being a harmonious couple, they were nothing of the sort. I once witnessed their interaction. It was far from what a harmonious couple should be. So it turns out that Yue..."

Yu chuckled like a plucked chicken, struggling in its last moments.

"Mother, can you prove it to father?" Qu Qiuyan took another step back, as if there was something repulsive about Yu. The farther she was, the better.

The most important thing now was to make father believe.

"This is the evidence... with this, your father will believe it." Yu said proudly. "I want to see your father, I want him to come and see me."

She said it as if it were obvious, but Qu Qiuyan responded with a mocking smile. "Mother, I can't bring father to you. You have to find him yourself, otherwise he will ask me where this note came from."

"Where did you get this note?" Yu suddenly realized that there was something suspicious about the origin of the note. She stopped laughing and asked.

"I found it. I found it in Minister Liu's residence. When you mention it, please don't mention me. Otherwise, father will think that I'm the one causing trouble again. Lately, father has been favoring that wretched girl Qu Moying the most." Qu Qiuyan clenched her teeth and raised her arm. "Mother, look, this is Qu Moying's doing. She caused this to happen to me!"

Her arm had been treated with medication, but the red and swollen blisters were still visible. The burn was quite severe.

Yu's heart ached, trembling with sorrow. From a young age, she had cherished Qu Qiuyan, nurturing her in the palm of her hand. She had never witnessed such a severe harm inflicted upon Qu Qiuyan. She forcefully pounded the edge of the bed, teeth gnashing with hatred. "She truly is a wretched girl, a bastard. Where does she find the audacity to trouble you so much?"

"Mother, as long as you pull her down from the position of the legitimate daughter, father won't listen to her anymore. He won't keep you locked up and torment me." Qu Qiuyan said, partially genuine and partially deceptive.

Upon hearing this, Yu's spirits lifted, nodding repeatedly. "You go back for now. I will discuss this matter with your father, and it won't harm you."

"It's best if mother thinks that way. I fear if father finds out I came here, so I'll return for now. After this matter is resolved, I will come to fetch you, and perhaps by then, father will be willing to let you go." Qu Qiuyan spoke with a sweet tone, causing Yu to nod in agreement.

Yu's face, thin and gaunt, revealed a smile that made her resemble a ghost even more.

Once Qu Qiuyan felt the situation was under control, she left without looking back, taking Qing Ju with her. She was afraid that if she stayed any longer, she would be unable to suppress her urge to vomit.

After exiting through the back gate, they stood by the courtyard entrance. Qu Qiuyan coughed a few times, holding her chest in discomfort, and stood there for a while until she calmed down.

Qing Ju stood behind her, gently rubbing her back.

Once Qu Qiuyan had settled down, the two hurriedly left Yu's residence and returned to the Furong House.

Yu Dong appeared in the dark night, glancing at the direction they had departed. She didn't pursue them, instead, she pushed open the half-closed door. After entering, she followed a small path that led to the back of the main house.

The windows of the main house were shut, but the movements of people inside were visible. Yu was there. Yu Dong pressed her ear against the window, listening attentively.

Inside the main house, Yu was still holding the note in her hand, reading it. As she read, a trace of madness could be seen in her smiling face.

"Madam, think about how to meet with the Second Master!" Hai Lan, with several white hairs, worriedly spoke. During this period, the madam had tried to meet with the Second Master, but he hadn't visited even once.

The Madam had assumed responsibility for this matter, but what could she do?

"Why are you afraid? Yue's evidence is right here. If he comes, he'll believe it. I just read... the day Yue and Minister Liu met, it's almost nine months from the day this wretched girl was born. It's highly likely that it was during that time. Yue has been concealing it in front of me. Look at her appearance... no wonder it ended up like this..."



Yu's voice was sharp, tinged with madness.

"Madam, please refrain from speaking!" Hai Lan, in a hurry, stepped forward to cover Yu's mouth.

Yu pushed her away, glaring at her fiercely. "What? Do you think I would blabber nonsense? Rest assured, I know what to say. Now go find the Second Master and bring him here. I'll show him what kind of despicable person his gentle and virtuous wife truly is."

"Madam, at this time, I cannot leave." Hai Lan hesitated to say.

In truth, it wasn't just during the darkness; even in broad daylight, she couldn't leave.

"You go... and find someone. Just tell them that I want to smash my head against the wall and commit suicide." Yu said with a hateful tone.

"Madam, you..." Hai Lan exclaimed.

"Go! What are you afraid of? It's just a single blow. It won't kill anyone." Yu giggled and thrust her head toward the wall behind the bed.

Caught off guard, Hai Lan failed to hold her back, and she witnessed Yu's head collide with the wall. Blood instantly trickled down her forehead.

"Madam..."

"Don't just stand there! Go!" Yu weakly commanded, closing her eyes. Blood dripped down, giving her a ghastly appearance.

Hai Lan didn't hesitate this time. She turned around and ran outside, screaming at the top of her lungs, "Someone, anyone! The Madam has hit the wall! She has attempted suicide!"

The courtyard gate was locked, and the two elderly women who served as gatekeepers had already left. They were now in an empty cottage outside the courtyard. This cottage had been designated by Qu Zhizhen for the two women to live in and oversee Yu's confinement.

It seemed they intended to keep Yu under strict surveillance until her death, never giving her a chance to escape.

When they heard Hai Lan's loud cry from the courtyard, they didn't understand at first. But once they comprehended her words, they were filled with fear.

Yu's days of recovery were over, but she still had her second son and third daughter. Rumor had it that the third daughter was about to enter the Lord Jing's Mansion as a concubine. The situation after that was uncertain. If Yu were to die here, neither the third daughter nor the second son would spare them.

The two women hurriedly came out of the cottage. One of them approached the locked gate, and Hai Lan burst out from within, disheveled. She reached out and grabbed one of the women, shouting hoarsely, "Hurry... hurry and fetch the Second Master. The Second Madam... The Second Madam has hit her head on the wall!"

"The second... Second Madam..." the woman stammered, trembling all over.

The other woman, seemingly more composed, turned around and ran toward the outer courtyard. The Second Master should be in his study there.

If what they had heard was true, the two women would not dare to defy their orders.

The one left still stood there, but Hai Lan pulled her towards the inside, urging, "Quick... quickly come with me and save the Second Madam. Hurry and save the Second Madam."

Inside, the situation was chaotic. Yu Dong, who was in the backyard, quietly left and returned to the Qianyue House. She went to report the incident to Qu Moying.

## Chapter 445 Is She the One Who was in Your Heart

“Lady, it appears that Madam Yu has obtained some evidence. She intentionally hit the wall and went to find the Second Master.” Yu Dong entered and reported, but she arrived late, so the information she received was not detailed.

A lamp illuminated the room where Qu Moying was reading a book, still awake. Upon hearing Yu Dong’s arrival, her watery eyes lifted, exuding an elegance and tranquility that matched the ambiance of the room. Yet, there was a hint of inscrutable depth in her gaze.

“Do you know what evidence it is?”

“I do not know, but when the Second Master arrives, we may find out. Madam Yu intends to show it to him. She mentioned... she mentioned you, Lady...” Yu Dong paused for a moment, glancing at Qu Moying, hesitant to continue.

The authenticity of Madam Yu’s words had shaken her, and she wasn’t sure if this matter could be true.

“What about me?” Qu Moying responded, picking up a pair of small scissors from her nearby table. With a graceful and unhurried motion, she snipped at the flickering lamp flame.

Her actions were elegant and natural, showing no signs of anxiety.

Observing Qu Moying’s composed demeanor, Yu Dong’s heart also settled. Just moments ago, she was truly unsettled, as this matter seemed too perplexing to comprehend.

“Lady, according to Madam Yu’s implications, it seems that she claims Madam Yue and Minister Liu were acquainted in the past. Madam Yu even has evidence suggesting that she and Minister Liu met each other during that time. Furthermore, she asserts that the timing of your birth coincides with their meeting. It appears that Madam Yu is insinuating that you are... Minister Liu’s daughter.”

Yu Dong collected her thoughts and disclosed everything that had been weighing on her mind.

“Minister Liu?” Qu Moying arched an eyebrow. Today marked her first encounter with Minister Liu, who had indeed shown some curiosity toward her. He had glanced at her a few times with a gentle expression, but that was the extent of it. There was no other excitement or intense emotions involved. Therefore, the so-called evidence provided by Madam Yu was simply impossible.

If her own background was truly related to Minister Liu, he didn’t seem like a clueless person. But looking at Liu Jingyu’s actions today, it’s evident that she had been guided by him. Being able to maintain decorum in such a situation, denying any misunderstanding and even accepting her apology could be seen as an attempt to calm the situation.

This Minister Liu was certainly not ordinary.

Considering how he has suppressed figures like Qu Zhizhen, it’s clear that he possesses genuine power.

To become one of the Six Ministers at such a young age implied more than just having influential connections.

If such a person indeed had a connection with her mother, he wouldn’t remain inactive like this.

However, she had no favorable opinion of Qu Zhizhen, her so-called father. In fact, she would be delighted if she didn’t have to recognize him as her father.

But that was impossible!

“Yudong, go and listen again, find out how my father actually resolved this matter.” Qu Moying put down the scissors, walked to the window, opened it, gazed at the night sky, and calmly spoke.

She remained unperturbed by Yu’s evidence. Liu Jingyu left her maid inside the house today, indicating that something was amiss. Now, it appeared that this evidence, supposedly given by Liu Jingyu to Qu Qiuyan, needed to be examined to ascertain its significance and observe Qu Zhizhen’s reaction...

Qu Zhizhen was indeed attending to official matters. Upon hearing that Yu had hit a wall, he wasn’t inclined to come. To him, Yu was already a dead person, causing no ripples in his emotions.

However, upon further consideration, Qu Zhizhen decided to bring his two servants and a lamp to investigate.

After all, his son and daughter were still present. Especially his daughter, who was now engaged to Lord Jing and would soon be taken to Lord Jing's residence during the New Year's celebrations.

Although she wouldn't hold the title of a consort or a side consort, having a few tables set for the banquet would grant Qu Qiuyan a sense of dignity. At this moment, Yu must not die.

If this spoiled Lord Jing's mood, he would be furious.

The courtyard gate stood wide open as Qu Zhizhen furrowed his brow and entered. Just as he reached the inside, Hai Lan rushed out, wailing when she saw him, "Second Master, please come and see quickly, Second Madam... she couldn't bear it... she hit the wall..."

She continued sobbing.

Qu Zhizhen coldly reprimanded, "Silence."

With his servants in tow, he walked further inside. Upon entering, a musty and decaying atmosphere, accompanied by a hint of blood, permeated the air, casting a more gloomy and nauseating feeling.

Qu Zhizhen wasn't as fragile as Qu Qiuyan. As he turned into the main room, he saw Yu leaning on the bed, radiating both disgust and resentment towards Qu Qiuyan.

Yu's head had been bandaged, and now she weakly half-lay on the bed. When she saw someone enter, she faintly opened her eyes. The flickering figure turned out to be Qu Zhizhen, which instantly filled her with joy. She reached out and tapped the bed's hollow, calling out in surprise, "Second Master."

Qu Zhizhen's face darkened, and he waved his hand, gesturing for the maid to retreat.

Hai Lan had also entered by this point and, after observing Yu on the bed and Qu Zhizhen's gloomy and angry expression, she didn't dare linger any longer. She withdrew as well.

However, Qu Zhizhen's two servants remained, standing obediently behind him, their heads lowered respectfully.

"Second Master!" Yu cried out again.

"What's the matter? Why all this commotion? Do you want to disrupt Qiuyan's marriage? Are you unsatisfied with her position as a concubine?" Qu Zhizhen sneered, his gaze unkindly fixed on Yu.

Yu raised her head blankly, unable to comprehend Qu Zhizhen's words. "What... concubine? Who... who... is a concubine?"

"Who else could it be other than Qiuyan? His Highness Lord Jing wants her to enter the Mansion during the New Year. Right now, there's no official mistress in the his mansion, so she will be the official mistress." Qu Zhizhen said impatiently, "You're causing a scene now, are you not planning to let her marry into the mansion?"

"She is going to the Lord Jing's Mansion? Is she... the consort, not a concubine?" Yu didn't understand clearly, and after a moment of confusion, she suddenly realized that it was as the consort. Her heart was filled with immense joy, and her smile beamed from the corners of her eyes and eyebrows.

In the past, Yu herself was a beautiful woman who naturally made people feel delighted by her smile. But in the current situation, under the dim lighting, Qu Zhizhen couldn't help but feel that the Yu before him resembled more of a vengeful spirit. He frowned with disgust, growing even more disdainful towards Yu.

"You don't need to worry about this matter. I will handle it. Tell me, what exactly is causing all this commotion?" Since Yu didn't know about this matter, it must not be the reason for the scene. Qu Zhizhen changed the subject and asked.

"Qiuyan..." Yu was still having trouble snapping out of her ecstatic emotions for a while.

"If there's nothing else, I will leave. Don't create any additional troubles for her during this time." Qu Zhizhen turned to leave.

"Second Master, wait! Let me show you something. After you see it, you won't think I'm talking nonsense!" Yu reached out and retrieved a piece of paper from under the pillow. She smiled and handed it to Qu Zhizhen.

This statement was quite abrupt, and Qu Zhizhen couldn't immediately grasp its meaning. However, he gestured for the servant to approach and receive the note.

Qu Zhizhen didn't take the note himself but signaled the servant to open it. After glancing at its contents, his expression drastically changed.

"Second Master, I previously mentioned that Minister Liu seemed overly interested in prying into the affairs of our household. Occasionally, he would come to the residence with you, but there was no connection between the two households. One time, he even encountered Yue in the backyard. The two of them had a conversation. At that time, I told you about it, but you didn't believe me. Now, take a look at this. It's the proof!"

Yu smiled triumphantly. This incident happened a long time ago.

When Yu had just entered the mansion, she intentionally deceived Yue and brought her to the backyard, where she coincidentally met Minister Liu, who had come to find Qu Zhizhen. When the two met face to face, she, along with a few servants, witnessed their encounter and overheard their conversation. Afterward, she went back and embellished the story to Qu Zhizhen, adding fuel to the fire.

But Qu Zhizhen scolded her for making baseless claims since there were so many witnesses. Yu became increasingly dissatisfied and even mocked Yue in her words.

Yue had a good temperament and didn't say anything. However, Qu Zhizhen found out about it later somehow. He specially called her over and reprimanded her severely, even losing his temper. Since then, Yu didn't dare to bring up this matter again.

“Second Master, you see, I wasn’t wrong, there is something between them. Look at the dates on this paper. Second Master, do you remember? At that time, she wasn’t pregnant with the fourth Lady. But after a month, she suddenly discovered she was carrying a child. How coincidental, don’t you think?”

Seeing Qu Zhizhen momentarily speechless, Yu became even more smug. Her thin eyebrows arched up, exuding an eerie and malevolent air, although she was oblivious to it.

“What are you trying to imply?” Qu Zhizhen finally raised his head, his expression cold but composed.

Seeing him so composed, Yu froze for a moment, but then gritted her teeth and said in a resentful voice, “Second Master, don’t you understand yet? That girl isn’t yours; she was the child of Yue and...”

“Shut up!” Qu Zhizhen grabbed a cup from the edge of the table and fiercely threw it at Yu.

Yu instinctively leaned to the side, causing the cup to fall onto the quilt in front of her. It rolled down slowly, eventually landing on the floor and shattering into several pieces.

Yu’s eyes widened in shock as she looked at Qu Zhizhen, unable to believe what had just happened. Her voice trembled as she said, “Second Master... you...”

“Moying is my child, I’m well aware of that. In the future, there’s no need to bring up baseless things like this. Yu, you better stay here and avoid causing trouble for your children.” Qu Zhizhen laughed coldly, snatched the note from the servant’s hand, tore it into pieces with a few swift movements, and then turned and left with large strides.

From behind, cries of despair and anguish came from Yu, “Qu Zhizhen, are you still yearning for her? Is she the one you truly love? I and Yue... I and Yue...”

The voice then choked up and couldn’t continue, as if someone had covered her mouth.

“Keep a close eye on her. Don’t let her talk nonsense!” Qu Zhizhen’s voice echoed from the entrance, carrying a chilling hostility.



Behind the concealed window, Yu Dong cautiously huddled up, not daring to reveal the slightest trace...

#### Chapter 446 I Can't Mess with that Woman

"He... How could he... How could he..." Yu pushed Hai Lan away, bursting into tears and uncontrollably scratching her face with her hands. The delicate brocade on the quilt was torn in the process, and threads hung chaotically from Yu's nails, giving her a crazed appearance.

"Madam... Please, calm down. Second Master hasn't gone far... He might hear you..." Hai Lan pleaded in a trembling voice.

"You know what I'm going to say, don't you? About that woman, right? I thought I had his heart, but it turns out, neither I nor Yue are the ones in his heart... We are just substitutes for that woman..." Yu screamed uncontrollably.

Once again, Hai Lan covered Yu's mouth, her face pale with fear. "Madam, even if not for your sake, please think of Second Young Master and Third Lady. They shouldn't be dragged into this mess."

This remark calmed Yu down. Her face turned ashen, and she tightly grasped Hai Lan's hand. The room fell eerily silent under the dim light.

After a while, Yu nodded absently, "Yes, I can't bring trouble to Yan and the others. That woman, I can't afford to mess with her."

"Madam, you..." Hai Lan looked at Yu cautiously, afraid she might lose control again. Lately, Yu's emotions have been unstable, sometimes erupting uncontrollably, resembling a person who had truly lost their sanity.

"Hai Lan, don't worry, I won't seek trouble. I won't confront... her directly. But we can't let Qu Moying, that despicable girl, stay either. She is a disaster waiting to happen." Yu gritted her teeth.

Hai Lan wisely refrained from commenting. The current Fourth Lady was no longer the easily manipulated girl she once was.

"Hai Lan, pass a message to my brother. Tell him to find a way to spread the news that the blind girl is the daughter of Minister Liu."

Yu let out a deep breath, her voice echoing eerily in the empty room.

"Madam, are you suggesting..." Hai Lan glanced behind her instinctively. The door was open, but the silence suggested that the Second Master had already left.

"That blind girl cannot stay. Although the master claims not to believe me, I don't believe he truly trusts Yue. Yue and Minister Liu meeting in secret with a note as evidence is most likely true. Who can clear this matter up? Minister Liu, a person like him, wouldn't have taken the initiative to send a note unless he truly had intentions towards Yue."

Yu regained her clarity for a rare moment, and Hai Lan nodded in agreement.

"That blind girl must go." Yu reiterated.

"Yes, I understand. I will find a way to convey the message to Uncle. However, now that the note is gone, it may be difficult to convince people." Hai Lan hesitated.

"It doesn't matter. Just deliver the message as instructed." Yu's eyes revealed a chilling intensity under the dim light. Suddenly, she burst into an eerie laugh. "Leaving the roots when cutting the grass will always bring trouble. When I spared that blind girl's life, I thought it wouldn't lead to anything significant. But I never expected her life to be so resilient, and now it has pushed me to this extent."

Retrieving something from under the pillow, she placed it into Auntie Hai Lan's hand, "Take this to my big brother; he'll know what to do!"

"Madam..." Hai Lan's voice trembled.

"Go now, while everything is in chaos." Yu closed her eyes and fell back, "Find someone to spread the message and deliver the item."

“At a time like this, only those close to Third Lady can relay messages to Master Uncle.” Hai Lan hesitated.

“Then let Third Lady spread the word and deliver the item.” Yu smiled, her teeth glinting coldly under the lamp’s light.

Seeing her determination, Hai Lan knew she couldn’t dissuade her. She carefully placed the item in her arms, then retreated and stood at the door for a moment before turning to the back entrance.

Today, Qu Qiuyan had left the back door open, and Hai Lan gently pushed it, causing it to swing open.

She cautiously peeked outside but found no one around. The night was pitch-black, and only the faint silhouette of trees could be seen.

She didn’t dare to use a lamp to avoid detection. Luckily, Hai Lan was familiar with this path and managed to discern the direction. She stumbled on, but after a few steps, at a corner, she either tripped or kicked something and fell heavily to the ground.

As she fell, Hai Lan couldn’t grasp anything, and it seemed like she collided with something again, causing her body to roll to the side.

Angrily, she cursed as she got back on her feet.

Dusting herself off, she looked around, but nothing caught her eye. Feeling pressed for time, she couldn’t afford to waste any longer and hurried towards Furong Pavilion.

Since Third Lady had just returned, she probably hadn’t gone to sleep yet.

Upon reaching Furong Pavilion, Hai Lan noticed that the door was already closed. After glancing around, she approached the door and knocked.

She knocked for a while before an impatient voice of a servant woman came from inside, "What time is it? Who's still knocking on the door without checking the time?"

Soon, the sound of shuffling footsteps approached the door.

The side door opened, and a servant woman tying her clothes and yawning appeared. She saw Auntie Hai Lan under the faint light and was momentarily surprised, failing to recognize her immediately.

Normally, Auntie Hai Lan would arrive with several maids and servants. Her presence was commanding and unmatched by other servants in the mansion. How could she look so disheveled today? Her hair was a mess, and her clothes were dirty, as if she had rolled on the ground.

Moreover, Auntie Hai Lan seemed to be going through a tough time recently, appearing thin and pale, lacking her usual vitality. She spent her days accompanying a sometimes unwell Yu, without other attendants. Her current spirited demeanor was rather unexpected.

"Hai... Hai Lan?" The servant woman took a few more looks before finally recognizing her and exclaimed in surprise.

"Has Third Lady gone to sleep?" Auntie Hai Lan glared at the servant woman, not in the best mood.

"No, she just returned, and the main house's lights are still on." The servant woman hastily smiled, stepping back and gesturing forward, "Auntie Hai Lan, please come in. Let me inform Third Lady for you."

"What are you waiting for? Hurry up!" Auntie Hai Lan glared at her, urging her to move quickly.

The doorkeeper servant didn't dare to waste any more time and hurried inside to inform. As she reached the entrance of the main house, she suddenly realized that the current Auntie Hai Lan was no longer the same as before, making her feel apprehensive about what Auntie Hai Lan might do.

Despite her thoughts, she didn't dare to neglect her duties. She addressed the curtains inside the main house, "Laay, Auntie Hai Lan has arrived, claiming that there's an urgent matter to discuss with you."

Qu Qiuyan had not gone to sleep yet, sitting under the lamp lost in thought. When she heard the commotion outside, she furrowed her brows and nodded at Qing Ju.

Qing Ju stepped outside and asked, "Where is she?"

"Right behind me." the servant woman replied with a smile, pointing backward.

Only then did Qing Ju notice Auntie Hai Lan in the shadows. Seeing her disheveled appearance, Qing Ju's heart skipped a beat. The young lady had just returned from Yu's place, and now Auntie Hai Lan from there had arrived in such a wretched state. Could something have happened?

"Auntie Hai Lan, please come in with me." Qing Ju hastily invited her inside and gestured for the servant woman to leave.

Auntie Hai Lan stepped out of the shadows and entered the room.

When Qu Qiuyan saw her appearance, her brows furrowed even tighter. Auntie Hai Lan had once taught her many rules, but her current appearance showed no sign of any propriety.

"Third Lady." Auntie Hai Lan approached and performed a formal salute. Not having a mirror, she was unaware of her current wretched state and assumed that she had cleaned herself up after the fall earlier.

"What brings you here?" Qu Qiuyan asked, lifting her gaze.

"Madam has a message to pass on to Master Uncle and asked Third Lady to relay it. She also wants me to convey..." Auntie Hai Lan began, reaching into her sleeve to retrieve what Yu had given her. However, to her horror, her hand emerged empty-handed, leaving her unable to continue speaking.

"What's in your hand?" Qu Qiuyan's eyes were fixed on Auntie Hai Lan's hand as she asked coldly.

Aunty Hai Lan fumbled inside her sleeve a few times before slowly extending her hand, "Earlier, Madam also gave me a handkerchief, claiming it belonged to the former Madam. But when I hurriedly left, I forgot to take it with me. I will bring it to you next time I go out."

"A handkerchief?" Qu Qiuyan asked, skeptical.

"Yes, just a handkerchief. It's not really important. Madam only wanted to increase the credibility of her previous words. She wanted Third Lady to tell Master Uncle that Fourth Lady is the daughter of Minister Liu, not the Master's biological daughter. Just now, the Master came and tore up your note."

Aunty Hai Lan didn't dare to reveal that she had lost something vital, so she kept the topic vague.

"Tore it up?" Qu Qiuyan sat up straight, concerned.

"Yes, he was angry and tore it up, but the Second Master didn't say anything and only affirmed that Fourth Lady is his biological daughter." Aunty Hai Lan replied.

"Even in this situation, Father still recognizes Qu Moying as his daughter. He's truly open-minded. But even if he accepts her, I refuse to acknowledge her." Qu Qiuyan sneered.

If Qu Moying's identity remained suspicious, Qu Qiuyan's status would be secure. Even though she entered Lord Jing's mansion as a concubine, there were endless opportunities in the future, given Lord Jing's affection for her.

However, it was all because of Qu Moying that she was forced into the role of a concubine. Nevertheless, Lord Jing's heart belonged to her. Previously, he had wanted to elevate her status, but Qu Moying's actions led her to enter the residence as a concubine.

She was certain that Lord Jing wouldn't be dissatisfied. She would have numerous chances to raise her rank in the future.

But Qu Moying! She wished to tear her to pieces!

If it weren't for Qu Moying, would she be in this situation? Even if she couldn't be the main consort, being a formal side consort would have been easy.

A malevolence flashed in her eyes, and she asked, "What else did Mother say?"

#### Chapter 447 Returning the Pearls with Tears

"Lady, this is the item, please take a look." Yu Dong handed over the object in her hand.

To her surprise, it was a small box wrapped in a handkerchief. Qu Moying took it and carefully unraveled the handkerchief, revealing inscriptions that read, "Returning the pearls with tears!"

Upon opening the box, she discovered a genuine pair of precious pearls, exquisite and lustrous.

At first glance, their size and quality indicated their exceptional value. Qu Moying had seen many pearls before, but it was evident that this pair was of extraordinary worth.

"Lady, allow me to share what I've heard. It seems that the second master has other women, and this particular woman is not someone Yu can easily handle. It's as if... as if the madam and Yu pale in comparison to her..." Yu Dong had already reported everything she had heard to Qu Moying, and now, while observing her attentively examine the pearls, she continued.

A formidable woman, someone who truly captured Qu Zhizhen's heart, and Yu seemed to be aware of this woman's presence.

Qu Moying smirked, genuinely unaware of this mysterious woman associated with her father. However, she was certain that her father was not as simple as he appeared to be.

The question remained what kind of woman was this, who could make Yu so envious? During her time in the mansion, she had never heard of such a person.

Could Qu Zhizhen, a man like him, genuinely harbor deep feelings for a woman?

His past experiences were relatively straightforward. After passing the imperial examinations and obtaining a position, he married the daughter of Yue family in the South. He rose rapidly in the official ranks, once rivaling even Minister Liu, who held a prominent position in the court.

But somehow, his fortunes changed, and he eventually fell behind Minister Liu, his former contemporary, becoming subordinate to him.

Nevertheless, this demonstrated that her father possessed considerable abilities.

With his background, it seemed unlikely for him to encounter a powerful woman. If he was truly interested in someone, why hadn't he married her? Did that woman reject him, or had he already married Qu Moying's mother at that time?

Regarding Yu's current statement, Qu Moying found it believable; at a time like this, Yu was likely speaking the truth. It appeared that she needed to pay more attention to her father.

The handkerchief was old, and the writing on it appeared ancient too. At a glance, Qu Moying could tell that it was an antiquated item. However, she wasn't certain whether it was a keepsake from Minister Liu.

Previously, she had investigated and found that Minister Liu had some prior involvement with her mother. It could be possible that this was the betrothal token left in her mother's hands before Minister Liu journeyed to the capital. But why had it ended up in Yu's possession?

The handwriting on the handkerchief was in a unique style, the same style as Ji Hanyue's birth mother. This similarity suggested a familial connection.

If her assumptions were correct, this writing should be from her mother. Perhaps it was to signify the end of the previously planned engagement with Minister Liu?

However, she hadn't expected that this item would end up with Yu, and given Yu's words, it seemed like she was trying to implicate Qu Moying in a scandal.



Her mother's reputation?

Qu Moying coldly smiled and said, "Yu Chun, put this away!"

Since her mother didn't want this item, Qu Moying decided to give it away, severing the last bit of association between her mother and Minister Liu.

If Minister Liu had indeed married the Duke Qi's eldest daughter, it would be a betrayal of their relationship, making him unworthy of her mother's sincerity.

Even if the emperor had issued a decree, it could be argued that the engagement had been broken off. After all, when the decree was issued, the emperor would personally summon the minister and inquire, as no one wanted the Lady from the Duke Qi's residence to become a concubine.

Since this Minister Liu remained silent at the beginning, it was evident that he had already abandoned any feelings he had. Keeping these pearls would be a disrespect to mother!

Yu Chun stepped out from behind Qu Moying and carefully wrapped the jewelry box with the handkerchief again.

"Lady, what should I do?" Yu Dong asked.

"Don't do anything, just wait!" Qu Moying shook her head, her eyes gazing out the window, deep in thought. "If Yu wants to create a storm, my father surely won't want that. Let's see what unfolds!"

Qu Zhizhen's attitude was too suspicious, and Qu Moying couldn't help feeling that this matter wasn't as straightforward as it seemed.

Moreover, she had her doubts about her birth mother's death at the time.

Yu's own actions were questionable. She had entered the Qu Mansion while pregnant, and after some time, her mother discovered she was also pregnant. Yu gave birth to a pair of children, but her mother was forced to leave the Qu Mansion and live in seclusion at a nunnery. During that time, her mother was still pregnant, and later, she gave birth outside the mansion.

In the end, her mother died after giving birth to her.

Putting all these pieces together, Qu Moying didn't believe in so many coincidences. She wanted to see how this old story was being brought up again.

In the past, she knew too little about these old events, so she hoped those who knew more would take the initiative to reveal them.

For Liu Jingyu, receiving a summons from the empress was both expected and unexpected.

After changing into the clothes she had prepared earlier, Liu Jingyu first went to bid farewell to her mother.

Upon seeing her daughter approaching, Madam Qi smiled faintly, and after observing her for a moment, she felt satisfied. Her recovery was not complete yet, and her complexion still appeared somewhat pale.

"After you enter the palace today, be cautious in serving the empress. If she asks about your past, follow what I told you before."

"Don't worry, Mother. I'll handle it. But I'm afraid... afraid the empress won't let it go." Liu Jingyu expressed her concerns, feeling anxious about facing the empress's questioning.

"No need to worry. The empress is benevolent and won't press you if you can't answer. Just handle it with care. As for the Crown Prince..." Madam Qi sighed, "If the Crown Prince brings up the issue, you must be careful in your response. After all, the Crown Prince is still young."

Her words had an underlying implication, which Liu Jingyu understood. She nodded earnestly, "Mother, rest assured, I know how to handle it."

“When it comes to his wife, maintain a humble posture. She’s a deceased person, and there’s no point in contending with her.” Madam Qi noticed her daughter’s reluctance and offered more advice.

“Mother, I understand. Ji Hanyue is already dead, and regardless of anything, she’s just a deceased person. There’s truly nothing to fight for.” Liu Jingyu nodded again, her face no longer as tense as before.

Seeing her daughter’s demeanor, Madam Qi smiled and allowed her to enter the palace. As Liu Jingyu slowly departed, the smile on Madam Qi’s face gradually faded.

“Madam, will the county lady be alright?” A maid standing behind Madam Qi asked in a low voice.

“Of course, she’ll be fine. She’s my daughter; how could anything happen to her?” Madam Qi smiled faintly and coldly, gracefully turning around and entering the inner room.

Her demeanor was as smooth as flowing water, and she displayed great poise. A closer look revealed her elegance and grace, surpassing even Liu Jingyu’s demeanor. After all, she was the eldest daughter of the Duke Qi’s family, and her upbringing far surpassed that of an ordinary young lady.

With her mother’s words in mind, Liu Jingyu felt more at ease. Following the palace maids, she entered the palace. Outside the empress’s palace, she didn’t have to wait long before a palace maid came out to usher her in.

Upon entering, she respectfully approached the high and mighty empress and greeted her, “Your Grace.”

“Please rise!” Empress Wang looked at her and nodded.

Liu Jingyu stood up but didn’t immediately sit down. She maintained a respectful posture on the side, keeping her head lowered in a deferential manner.

Empress Wang seemed somewhat satisfied with her demeanor. Compared to Ji Hanyue, Empress Wang found Liu Jingyu more pleasing. When Liu Jingyu looked at her, her respectfulness seemed to emanate from within her very bones.

“Has your mother’s health improved?” Empress Wang inquired.

“Your Grace, my mother’s health has slightly improved. She mentioned that once she gets even better, she wishes to come to the palace and express her gratitude to you. Many thanks for the previous gifts, Your Grace.”

Liu Jingyu replied softly, her gaze fixed on the ground in front of her shoes, avoiding any hint of impertinence.

“Your mother and I became friends when we were young. There’s no need for such formalities.” Empress Wang said, a hint of a smile forming on her face. “Please, sit down, and let’s talk. The Crown Prince will join us shortly.”

“Yes!” Liu Jingyu lowered herself to sit on the chair at the side, but she only lightly touched the seat without fully sitting down. Her demeanor conveyed that she was ready to stand up at any moment to serve the Empress.

This posture was no more comfortable than standing.

“Tell me about yesterday. Why are people saying you did something wrong and went to the Qu Mansion to apologize? I heard that the Third Lady Qu didn’t wake up until midnight last night. What’s the connection with you and the sachet incident?” Empress Wang asked with a nonchalant tone.

Though Empress Wang’s words sounded casual, they made Liu Jingyu’s heart race.

Indeed, the Empress seemed to know everything. And it was safe to assume the Crown Prince was also aware of the situation. Remembering the unpredictable Crown Prince, Liu Jingyu felt uneasy. She composed herself, lifted her head, and adopted a soft and gentle demeanor. Her eyes were slightly red, but she didn’t let tears fall. Despite appearing somewhat aggrieved, she handled the situation with grace, as befitting a well-bred young lady.

The elegance of a noblewoman was evident in her demeanor.

"Your Grace, this matter was an unexpected accident. Please allow me to explain it to you in detail." Liu Jingyu requested politely.

Empress Wang leaned back slightly, her eyes deep and mysterious as she nodded.

Liu Jingyu recounted the events in detail and, when she finished, added, "My father thought Grandmother's words were reasonable. It was indeed appropriate to apologize to the Qu Mansion. Regardless, the Third Lady Qu had already awakened, and the Qi Mansion bears some responsibility. I noticed the unusual situation but failed to report it promptly to my grandmother. I acknowledge that it was my fault."

Her words didn't absolve her of responsibility. On the contrary, she fully supported the decisions made by the Duke and Duchess Qi. Her expression revealed a mix of regret and guilt, though she managed to appear composed even as she conveyed a sense of grievance. While Liu Jingyu didn't delve into Lord Jing's remarks, the underlying meaning was clear.

She was clearly considering the relationship between the Crown Prince and Lord Jing. Empress Wang nodded, her gaze becoming more sympathetic as she looked at Liu Jingyu.

Chapter 448 "Innocent" Liu Jingyu

"I heard that there were words from you in the scented back then?" Empress Wang continued to inquire.

Liu Jingyu stood up and knelt in front of Empress Wang with a thud. "Your Grace, I am not familiar with Young Master Yongning. Though our families have had some interactions, I have only met Young Master Yongning once or twice. As for the words found in his scented , it's possible that someone else tampered with it. At that time, I was going to deliver medicine to my mother, and I am not aware of what happened afterward."

Liu Jingyu hinted that someone might be trying to harm her, but she couldn't explain what happened as she had left the Duke Qi's residence by then.

"Could it be that Third Lady Qu's scented was originally meant to harm you?" Empress Wang asked after some thought.

Liu Jingyu looked up in disbelief, her voice trembling, "How is that possible? I had no prior interaction with her, and we had no enmity or grudges."

"In the past, there might have been no enmity, but now it seems there is. I heard that she is now a concubine in Lord Jing's Mansion, considering herself the mistress of the house." Empress Wang sneered. Her face was thin, and her high cheekbones gave her a somewhat cold appearance.

Liu Jingyu blinked, quickly understanding the implications. She was shocked, "How dare she..."

"Why wouldn't she dare? None of the daughters from the Qu family have much potential; they can only become concubines, both the legitimate and illegitimate daughters." Empress Wang hinted, her posture straightening. "Being a concubine is one thing, but being ambitious while at it makes it even more challenging for the future Lord Jing's wife."

Empress Wang's words were meaningful, and although Liu Jingyu couldn't fully answer them, she could only lower her head.

"Rise!" Empress Wang motioned for Liu Jingyu to stand, and a palace maid helped her sit on a nearby chair. Just as she sat down, Pei Luo'an entered the room, followed by a chamberlain.

"Mother!" Pei Luo'an greeted Empress Wang.

Liu Jingyu quickly stood up and bowed to Pei Luo'an. Only after Pei Luo'an waved his hand did she sit down again.

"Son, take a seat. How is your health?" Empress Wang asked, concerned about her son's appearance. Since Ji Hanyue's death, his health had not been great.

Pei Luo'an sat beside Empress Wang, glanced at Liu Jingyu, and coughed softly twice, "Mother, I'm fine. Just a minor cough."

"A minor cough? You are the crown prince of a country; nothing should be taken lightly. If the servants around you can't take care of such a small matter, what use are they?" Prince Wang's expression darkened, and his gaze turned stern as he looked at the chamberlain beside the crown prince.

The chamberlain turned pale with fear, too frightened to move.

"Mother, there's really nothing to worry about. The imperial physician also said it's nothing serious; I just stayed up late last night and caught a slight cold. It was almost fine, but now I need to take medicine again." Pei Luo'an gently explained with a smile.

"Staying up late again last night? What are you doing exactly? Every time you claim it's an accidental oversight or something came up, what's more important, those things or your health?" Empress Wang said with some annoyance, "Your wife is gone, so there's no use organizing her things anymore. As for the shrine in your mansion, remove it. After all, you still have to marry another wife. What will the new wife think of this matter?"

As Empress Wang spoke, she looked at Liu Jingyu, who was sitting there with discipline, giving the impression of a well-behaved person. Empress Wang secretly nodded in approval.

Though she didn't fully believe Liu Jingyu's words, at least Liu Jingyu's extreme respectfulness was satisfactory.

"Mother, it's not about my late wife." Pei Luo'an coughed softly again.

"How is it not about her..." Empress Wang wanted to say more, but seeing her son's gaze, she knew she couldn't discuss it further in front of Liu Jingyu. "Alright, I won't talk about this matter anymore. You should take good care of your health; don't let yourself be troubled by such trivial matters."

"Yes, I apologize for making you worry, Mother." Pei Luo'an nodded gracefully and looked towards Liu Jingyu. "County Lady Jingyu is also here because of yesterday's incident?"

This direct question made Liu Jingyu's heart skip a beat. Was it because the crown prince was dissatisfied?

She quickly stood up again, "Your Highness, indeed, it's because of yesterday's incident. I came to explain to Her Grace to avoid any misunderstandings."

Liu Jingyu didn't mention that it was Empress Wang who summoned her to the palace. Instead, she made it appear as though she came on her own initiative to appear innocent and to show that Empress Wang trusted and treated her kindly.

This display pleased Empress Wang, and her face showed a much more sincere smile. Looking at the two of them, she found them much more satisfactory than when she observed Ji Hanyue and her son.

In truth, she had also taken an interest in Liu Jingyu. Her background and status were not inferior to Ji Hanyue's, and she might even be of a higher standing. However, her son was fixated on Ji Hanyue, and after some consideration, Empress Wang concluded that both sides had their strengths and weaknesses, making it hard to determine who was better. Thus, she decided to heed her son's wishes.

"Is the sachet in Young Master Yongning's possession yours?" Pei Luo'an asked directly.

This question made Liu Jingyu unable to remain standing. She knelt down again, her eyes turning red once more. "Your Highness, this has nothing to do with me. The sachet does not belong to me. Your Highness, you know what kind of person I am. How could there be any connection with Young Master Yongning?"

She refrained from mentioning that she couldn't possibly be interested in someone like Xu Lipeng.

Despite him being considered a good husband by many young ladies from prominent families in the capital, Liu Jingyu had never regarded him as a suitable match for herself. Her goals were crystal clear: to marry into the royal family, attain boundless wealth and occupy a position above all others.

A mere Mrs. Yongning Marquis held no value in her eyes.



Furthermore, Xu Lipeng's reputation had deteriorated even further, making it inconceivable for her to be associated with him.

Observing her expression, Pei Luo'an paused for a moment and then stood up. "Mother, may I talk to County Lady Jingyu privately?"

"Very well!" Empress Wang knew her son had something to discuss with Liu Jingyu in private and didn't object. She nodded her approval.

Pei Luo'an turned and headed to a side hall, with Liu Jingyu following nervously behind, supported by a palace maid.

Inside the side hall, Pei Luo'an took a seat while Liu Jingyu followed like a demure young woman, her hands folded in front of her, and her head lowered with a sense of grievance, biting her cherry lips. Even though Pei Luo'an couldn't see her face directly, he sensed her distress and sorrow, making him see her even more as a beautiful and pitiable woman.

"Tell me what happened yesterday." Pei Luo'an said gently.

Liu Jingyu struggled to hold back her tears and recounted the events she had told Empress Wang earlier. When she finished, her tears couldn't be suppressed any longer, and she reached for a handkerchief to wipe her eyes.

The hall fell silent, with only the faint sound of Liu Jingyu's sobbing, which sounded truly pitiful.

"Third Lady Qu tried to harm Fourth Lady Qu. You found out about this from a maid's report, but didn't have time to verify it before being sent back to your house by Duke Qi to deliver medicine to your mother. When you returned, the incident had occurred, and any attempt to salvage the situation was too late. Yesterday, my younger brother even went to the Duke Qi's mansion to demand an explanation. The Duke Qi ordered you to go to the Qu Mansion to apologize because Third Lady Qu had not woken up?"

Pei Luo'an quickly grasped the situation and restated it.

“Yes, Your Highness, that’s correct. His Highness Lord Jing intervened, and Jingyu was afraid of causing more trouble. Both my grandfather and father thought the best course of action was to settle the matter peacefully, so I went to apologize at the Qu Mansion. I heard that Third Lady Qu has now woken up, and I’m relieved she did; otherwise, I would feel a heavy sense of guilt.”

Liu Jingyu replied, tears flowing once again as she lowered her head to wipe them away.

As she narrated, she portrayed herself as the most innocent party. The decision to make amends was also out of concern that the incident could implicate the crown prince. After all, Lord Jing had directly intervened.

“Third Lady Qu is going to become my Second Brother’s concubine?” Pei Luo’an asked again.

“Yes, that’s the reason Lord Jing intervened directly. I heard that Lord Jing requested a decree yesterday, and the chamberlain went to the Qu Mansion to deliver it.” Liu Jingyu nodded in confirmation.

The incident had become the talk of the town in the capital. Some felt that the position of Minister Qu’s daughter was a bit low, while others believed that Third Lady Qu’s low status was due to her own behavior. Rumors of the matter involving the Duke Qi’s mansion had already spread to the outside world, and combined with Qu Qiuyan’s evidently lower status, it contributed to her current situation.

People are speculating about Third Lady Qu, suggesting that she must have some negative traits; otherwise, with her background, she would have become a side consort.

However, there was also a rumor that it was Liu Jingyu’s matter. Although the Qu Mansion was not bad, it was still not enough when compared to the Qi Mansion and Minister Liu’s Mansion. Therefore, Minister Qu hastily agreed to send his daughter to the Jing Mansion as a concubine. He wanted the Jing Mansion to uphold justice for his daughter.

There’s another rumor that implicates Liu Jingyu. Some say that Liu Jingyu was involved in the matter and that she pressured Third Lady Qu to lower her status, seeking Lord Jing’s assistance under the guise of apology.

These rumors have negatively impacted Liu Jingyu's reputation. Some even claim that the sachet found in the hands of the young master Yongning bore Liu Jingyu's name.

Though the subsequent events haven't spread throughout the entire capital, there are whispers circulating among prominent families.

Pei Luo'an remained silent, observing Liu Jingyu for a moment before speaking with a gentle tone, "Since this matter doesn't seem to have much to do with you, it would be best to limit your interactions with the Qu family in the future. The Qu family still has a Forth Lady Qu remaining, who has an eye ailment and is a cousin of my late wife."

#### Chapter 449 Lord Yun Would Return to the Capital

"Your Highness, this Forth Lady Qu..." Liu Jingyu bit her lip and glanced sneakily at Pei Luo'an, their eyes meeting briefly before she shyly lowered her head.

"How is Forth Lady Qu?" Pei Luo'an inquired.

"Forth Lady Qu doesn't seem ordinary either. I have conversed with both of these young ladies and couldn't help but notice that Forth Lady Qu appears much more formidable than Third Lady Qu. Although she appears delicate, she actually possesses considerable cunning."

Liu Jingyu spoke helplessly, "When I arrived at the Qu Mansion... I noticed that Forth Lady Qu didn't seem to show much respect towards Third Lady Qu. However, it's possible I misunderstood, as it was my first time visiting the Qu Mansion."

Liu Jingyu's words were tactful, skillfully circling back and leaving no indication of any criticism towards Qu Moying. She even maintained a compassionate attitude towards Third Lady Qu, who was clearly in the wrong.

Her behavior was graceful, dignified, and befitting of a future crown princess.

Pei Luo'an observed Liu Jingyu for a moment with an inscrutable expression but remained silent.

Likewise, Liu Jingyu refrained from speaking further, and a hushed silence settled in the hall. After a while, Pei Luo'an finally said, "Forth Lady Qu is the Crown Princess's cousin and one of the few close relatives she has in this world."

"Yes, Your Highness, I understand. I will pay attention to Forth Lady Qu from now on." Liu Jingyu responded softly.

Pei Luo'an's eyes glimmered with a faint smile, and his demeanor grew even more gentle. "Regarding the matter at Duke Qi's mansion, it's not your fault. I've inquired and found that it was Third Lady Qu who instigated it. Bringing such a woman into his mansion isn't a blessing, but I cannot intervene in this matter. Let it be."

A mere concubine with a low status didn't concern Pei Luo'an. He had heard that Third Lady Qu wasn't a virtuous person, so he wouldn't mind having a few more capable individuals in Pei Yusheng's household.

The more chaotic things were in Pei Yusheng's household, the more beneficial it would be for him.

"Thank you, Your Highness, for your understanding." tears welled up in Liu Jingyu's eyes as she forcefully bit her lip. Her voice wavered with gratitude for Pei Luo'an's magnanimity. "I'm truly not acquainted with young master Yongning. He used to be engaged to Forth Lady Qu, but they later broke off the engagement. It's suspicious no matter how you look at it."

Liu Jingyu decided to bring up the matter of Xu Li Peng's sachet, realizing it couldn't be hidden from the Crown Prince.

"I used to think Xu Li Peng was a good person, but now it seems I was mistaken, so was my late wife." Pei Luo'an sighed, his gaze falling on outside the window, lost in thought. The last part of his sentence almost melded into a sigh, nearly indistinguishable if one wasn't paying close attention.

Liu Jingyu tightly clenched the handkerchief, her facial expression still delicate and gentle, but beneath her lowered gaze, there was a hint of mockery. So what if Ji Hanyue had died? The Crown Princess position was now rightfully hers.

Ji Hanyue was just a dead ghost. Now, there were even some cousins and relatives coming forward, expecting the Crown Prince to look after them. Did they not consider their own shame?

As she raised her head again, she presented a soft and tender demeanor, speaking in a gentle voice, "Since the late Crown Princess finds him admirable, there must be something worthy in him. I have always admired the late Crown Princess. Amongst all the young ladies from prominent families in the capital, only she truly possesses both talent and beauty."

Pei Luo'an remained silent, and an air of heaviness hung in the atmosphere. But Liu Jingyu was not in a hurry; she simply looked at the Crown Prince, her face shy yet filled with admiration.

Finally, Pei Luo'an regained his composure and glanced at Liu Jingyu. "Are you sure the sachet in Xu Lipeng's hand was placed there by Third Lady Qu?"

"I'm not sure about that. I don't know if it was Third Lady Qu or someone else who tampered with it after I left." Liu Jingyu lowered her head and bit her lip, maintaining a pitiful and aggrieved smile, just as she did before.

"From now on, be cautious of people like Third Lady Qu. If you witness such actions again, stop them immediately, and you won't be involved in such matters anymore." Pei Luo'an furrowed his brows slightly. "Since things have come this far, let's put an end to it."

"Yes, Your Highness." Liu Jingyu nodded gently and complied.

Her demeanor was incredibly endearing to men, despite facing great grievances, she refrained from blaming others and even expressed that she didn't mind being wronged as long as the bigger picture was taken into consideration. As long as the Crown Prince remained unscathed, she didn't care about anything else.

Elegant, considerate, devoted to Pei Luo'an, and expressing admiration, combined with her own striking appearance, Liu Jingyu was indeed a talented and beautiful lady.

How could the Crown Prince not be impressed by her, especially compared to the already deceased Ji Hanyue?

Liu Jingyu's attitude far surpassed Ji Hanyue's in every aspect.

Liu Jingyu was certain that the Crown Prince would value her greatly.

Pei Luo'an waved his hand, "Go and accompany my mother for a while. I need some time alone."

"Your Highness..." Liu Jingyu spoke softly, looking up with surprise. Shouldn't the Crown Prince be comforting her at this moment with gentle words?

"You may leave!" Pei Luo'an's brows furrowed.

Seeing that he truly seemed preoccupied, Liu Jingyu didn't dare to stay any longer and quickly bowed to Pei Luo'an before gently leading her maids back to the main hall.

Pei Luo'an watched her graceful departure, then pressed his hand to his forehead. For some reason, thoughts of Ji Youran crossed his mind. Everything Liu Jingyu was doing now, Ji Youran had done in the past.

But Liu Jingyu's status was far superior to Ji Youran's, and the benefits of marrying her were much greater.

However, the similarities between the two, engaging in similar actions, reminded him of some unpleasant events, making him too preoccupied to console Liu Jingyu.

He understood what the Empress had intended – to ask him to clarify matters and offer some reassurance to Liu Jingyu. But at this moment, he felt a bit restless.

Liu Jingyu had a good background, and marrying her did indeed offer many benefits. However, did Liu Jingyu really have nothing to do with Xu Lipeng?

The inscription on the sachet was clear: it bore Liu Jingyu's name, "Jingyu." This sachet had appeared on his desk just now.

This was something that would typically make Pei Luo'an very angry; he detested betrayal the most. Although someone originally belonging to him had become involved with another man, he remained surprisingly calm this time.

In his calmness, he felt that it was unlikely for Liu Jingyu to be interested in Xu Lipeng. He thought there must be a reason behind the situation and listened calmly as Liu Jingyu explained. He found her explanation somewhat reasonable, even though there were some discrepancies in the small details, which he attributed to female jealousy.

However, Liu Jingyu's jealousy towards the fourth lady of the Qu Mansion surprised him.

Whether it was Liu Jingyu or the fourth lady Qu, they both reminded him of Ji Hanyue, causing him to feel somewhat restless.

Regarding Liu Jingyu's actions this time, he wasn't entirely satisfied. She seemed to require some proper guidance from the Empress. His future Crown Princess needed to be magnanimous and avoid unnecessary conflicts with the fourth lady of the Qu Mansion. He heard that Uncle Wang was on his way to the capital, and he was known for being protective.

Upon learning about this matter, Uncle Wang might be angered!

Meanwhile, a convoy of carriages was headed towards the capital. These were large, black carriages with iron plates lining the inside to protect the occupants from potential harm.

Pei Yuanjun was inside the last carriage. The three carriages traveled together to create confusion; no one could determine in which carriage the Lord Yun was riding. On their journey, they encountered two sets of assassins, but all of them were swiftly dealt with by Pei Yuanjun's guards.

Inside the carriage, thick blankets were laid out, and Pei Yuanjun leaned against the couch, his sleepy eyes appearing as if he were half asleep. His handsome face wore a faint smile, exuding an air of noble laziness that immediately conveyed his regal status.

"Your Highness, this is the news." Ji Hai said.

"Since she's willing to follow us into the capital, then let her follow. I am very busy and don't have time to help Liu Xiangshan take care of his daughter again and again." Pei Yuanjun said lazily as he narrowed his sleepy eyes. It was impossible to tell whether he was happy or angry.

"But His Majesty's meaning ..." Ji Hai said carefully as he stole a glance at his master.

It was the Emperor's order for Eldest Miss Liu to enter the capital. He said that the Empress did not see her when she came to the capital before, so this time she must go to the capital to see her.

The meaning of these words was to invite Lady Liu to the capital. However, Ji Hai believed that she also understood the purpose of this visit. It was clear that she had taken a fancy to the master and wanted him to marry her.

"His Majesty's wishes are his Majesty's wishes. However, His Majesty also agreed to let me make the decision when I marry." Pei Yuanjun said with a smile that was not a smile. The corners of his handsome lips hooked up, "Tell me, what's the matter in the capital?"

Ji Hai immediately understood. "I heard that something has happened in the capital. It's Fourth Lady Qu. It seems to be related to the daughter of Minister Liu's estate, the future Crown Prince, the County Lady Jingyu."

"How is the future Crown Princess?" Pei Yuanjun asked in a good mood.

"It seems that this County Lady Jingyu and the Third Lady Qu worked together to harm the Fourth Lady, but in the end, something unexpected happened. Then, the Third Lady Qu became Lord Jing's concubine." Ji Hai picked out some simple facts.

"County Lady Jingyu?" Pei Yuanjun repeated lazily.



“That’s right, it’s her. I heard that this person was even summoned into the palace by Her Grace and His Highness the Crown Prince to ask about this matter.” In the palace, they also had people. “Previously, she went to apologize to Qu Mansion. Someone in the capital said that this County Lady is very generous and appropriate. She is the most dignified and well-mannered. It was clearly Qu Mansion’s fault, but she still went to apologize.

“The most dignified and well-mannered?” Pei Yuanjun’s laughter filled the carriage, his eyes exuding a touch of dark mystery, which did not diminish his regal aura but instead added an alluring charm to his almost translucent, fair skin and colorful lips.

Ji Hai was taken aback, hastily stepping back and bowing his head, not daring to disturb the atmosphere.

#### Chapter 450 Ji Youran Came to Stir up Trouble

Qu Moying was taken aback when Ji Youran unexpectedly showed up at her doorstep!

However, as she looked at Ji Youran’s radiant smile, Qu Moying quickly grasped the situation. This matter involved Liu Jingyu, and for Ji Youran, it presented an opportunity.

So, Ji Youran was here!

Ji Youran was as skillful as ever at capturing people’s hearts, and she was essential in such circumstances. How could she be absent?

“Your Highness.” Qu Moying approached and bowed, then paid her respects to the old lady seated above.

“Cousin Qu, please take a seat.” Ji Youran said gently, smiling warmly as she looked at Qu Moying.

Qu Moying sat down on a nearby chair.

“Princess Ji heard about the incident at our mansion and came specially to check on you and inquire if you were alright!” The old lady spoke vaguely, hoping to defuse the situation at this point.

“Thank you for your concern.” Qu Moying responded respectfully, her head slightly lowered and her face concealed behind her veil.

Ji Youran was not entirely satisfied, being highly perceptive, she realized she couldn’t read Qu Moying’s expression or determine her intentions. However, observing Qu Moying’s cold and indifferent demeanor, Ji Youran thought she might not be interested in pursuing this matter.

“I heard about the incident at Duke Qi’s mansion. His Highness was quite concerned, so I came to see for myself. If there’s anything you need help with, cousin, don’t hesitate to ask. Even though the late Crown Princess is no longer with us, the Crown Prince is still your cousin by marriage, and I can also be considered the cousin of you.” Ji Youran emphasized her relation to Qu Moying.

She seemed delighted with this assertion!

Her words were appropriate too; with Ji Hanyue gone, the Crown Prince’s identity still tied him to Qu Moying as her “cousin by marriage.” It was as simple as that for Pei Luo’an to have some connection with Qu Moying. And naturally, Ji Youran could also leverage her relation to Ji Hanyue.

This was an outcome Qu Moying didn’t want to see. One day, she would remove Ji Hanyue from her position as the Crown Princess, a position highly valued by Ji Youran and Liu Jingyu. But Qu Moying had no interest in it. Even if she had to die, Ji Hanyue would die with a clear conscience, completely severing ties with Pei Luo’an.

Expose the truth to the world, and seek the justice.

However, for the time being, since Ji Youran insisted on getting involved with her, it could be advantageous for her too. At least she could have some say in matters related to the Eastern Palace. It was reasonable to do so.

Until the truth was verified and disclosed, she needed this identity.

Yet, even if she required this identity again, Qu Moying wouldn't fawn over Ji Youran. Every time she saw Ji Youran, she suppressed the hostility in her heart, reminding herself not to rush and to be patient.

"Thank you, Your Highness." Qu Moying said, her eyes beneath the veil revealing a hint of bloodthirsty mockery. She was certain that Ji Youran was trying to give her some face, as there was no way Pei Luo'an would inquire about Liu Jingyu's situation through her. At this point, he must have already met with Liu Jingyu to get a clear understanding.

"How are things now? I heard it's related to County Lady Jingyu? Did Jingyu County Jun come to apologize?" Ji Youran inquired with genuine concern, and after a few glances at Qu Moying, her face was full of worry. One who didn't know better would think she considered Qu Moying a close cousin.

"For now, everything has settled, and County Lady Jingyu was polite." the old lady interjected, coughing softly to shift the conversation. She was afraid Qu Moying might say something impulsively, causing new troubles.

She hadn't expected such an incident to occur at the Duke Qi's mansion. Now she regretted that she had assumed the goodwill towards the Yue family's daughter and how wrong she might have been, considering Liu Jingyu's malicious intent towards the girl.

The cause and effect of the matter had been inquired by her from Qu Moying and her son. The conclusion they reached was quite worrisome, leaving her deeply concerned.

If Liu Jingyu were merely a county lady, she wouldn't be as anxious. However, as Liu Jingyu is soon to be in charge of the Eastern Palace, becoming the Crown Princess and eventually the future Empress, the old lady worried about any bias she might have towards her own granddaughter.

The old lady couldn't be sure if the Lord Yun would genuinely safeguard her granddaughter's interests. With these thoughts in mind, she hesitated to pursue the matter further.

"The news I heard, is that Third Lady Qu was severely injured. Despite consulting numerous physicians, none could revive her. Only when several physicians worked together and prescribed a remedy did she regain consciousness in the middle of the night. How could she have experienced such a distressing incident after enjoying her time at Duke Qi's mansion, admiring chrysanthemums? It is puzzling."

She tried a different approach after realizing that discussing the matter with Qu Moying might not yield any useful information.

Although Qu Moying's matter might not be of great concern, Ji Youran sensed that Qu Qiuyan's situation was different. Qu Qiuyan had genuinely been carried back to Duke Qi's mansion and had caused quite a stir afterward. Rumors suggested that Third Lady Qu remained unconscious after returning, indicating potential trouble ahead.

Furthermore, with Lord Jing's support, Third Lady Qu had become the concubine forcing the County Lady Jingyu to apologize to the Qu family.

This was the surface of the matter.

Ji Youran couldn't believe it at face value. She had an intuition that something more significant was at play, and her target was now Liu Jingyu. The worse Liu Jingyu's reputation, the better for Lady Ji Youran.

She saw this as a rare opportunity and wouldn't let it go, hence her early visit.

"There's nothing to worry about now regarding Qiuyan." The Old Lady sighed, making it evident that she didn't want to delve into Qu Qiuyan's matter. She felt deeply disappointed in Qu Qiuyan.

Most of the incidents at Duke Qi's mansion were caused by her. The old lady felt infuriated and wished to keep Qu Qiuyan locked away for life, or at least to have her quietly reflect and repent.

"The Old Lady, I am the cousin of the fourth Lady Qu. I heard about the incident at Duke Qi's mansion, where the Fourth Lady was almost harmed. The Crown Prince was furious, which led to my presence here. Though the late Crown Princess is no longer with us, she remains in the Crown Prince's heart, and what concerns her is what our Crown Prince cares about."

Ji Youran stated sincerely.

Qu Moying cast a cold, resentful glance at Ji Youran, seeing her as she was when she was pushed off by the guards.

Smirking inwardly, she recognized Ji Youran's pretense, acting as if she genuinely wanted to stand up for her. Moreover, Ji Youran used Prince Pei Luo'an to pressure the Old Lady, making it difficult for her to hold her ground.

"There's actually not much going on." The Old Lady replied vaguely.

"How could there be nothing? Things have become like this. If Old Madam doesn't want to say it, then I'll go back first. His Highness will naturally send someone else to ask." Ji Youran pretended to stand up.

The old lady panicked and hurriedly said, "Your Highness, please wait. It's not that I don't want to say it, it's really ..."

Ji Youran sat down and asked with concern, "What's wrong? Please tell me. If I can help, I will try my best to help my cousin."

"Actually, it's nothing. It's just a misunderstanding. Jingyu County Lady misunderstood that Third Lady wanted to harm Fourth Lady. Later, she fainted from fright and Jingyu County Lady came over to apologize!" Old Madam had to admit that. Although her words were vague, in front of outsiders, she was very cautious and did not say that Qu Qiuyan really wanted to harm Qu Moying.

It was even less likely that County Lady Jingyu had intentionally interfered in the matter to harm his granddaughter.

"County Lady Jingyu misunderstood? But even if she did, she couldn't have deliberately caused Third Lady to faint, right?"

Ji Youran said, looking surprised.

"This... it was actually an accident." She had to admit.

“Even if it was an accident... Is Third Lady Qu’s health alright now? Should we call the imperial physician to check on her again?” Ji Youran grew even more concerned. Her gentle and caring tone reminded Qu Moying of the same “caring” Ji Youran had shown before.

Her hand beneath her sleeve felt icy cold!

“She is fine now, thank you for your concern, Your Highness” The old lady really didn’t want this person to get involved in the matter.

Seeing her interfere in this matter, it seemed there were ulterior motives. The old lady was older and had seen many people and things, and she couldn’t believe that this Eastern Palace Side Consort genuinely cared about their household.

Liu Jingyu was the future Crown Princess. No matter how one looked at it, these two would not get along.

The Old Lady didn’t want the Qu Mansion caught in the middle.

“It’s not just my concern; His Highness is worried about his cousin. Third Lady is cousin’s elder sister, so of course, I must pay more attention. I wonder if you would allow me to meet Third Lady. Now, she is not just the Third Lady; she shares a special connection with His Highness.”

Ji Youran said, covering her lips with a handkerchief and smiling.

The Old Lady’s expression stiffened. She didn’t want Ji Youran to see Qu Qiuyan, but Ji Youran mentioned Qu Qiuyan’s current identity, that of Lord Jing’s concubine. Given this identity, she couldn’t outright refuse, especially since she had just mentioned that Qu Qiuyan had already woken up.

She was torn.

“Would it be inconvenient?” Ji Youran continued to smile, seemingly unaware of her dilemma.

"This..." the Old Lady hesitated, wanting to refuse. Qu Qiuyan was a troublemaker, and it seemed like Ji Youran was here to stir up trouble as well.

At that moment, Qu Moying raised her head and interrupted the Old Lady's hesitation. With a faint smile, she stepped in, "Grandmother, since Her Highness wants to see my sister, I'll take her to see her!"