

The Doctor 361

Chapter 361: You Can't Leave

Rong Jin immediately put the telepathic bell away.

He then turned around and saw Situ Xingchen.

"Your Highness, I didn't expect you to come," he said with a forced smile.

The princess smiled graciously, not noticing his anxiety. "I was feeling tipsy after drinking some wine, so I came out for some air. I didn't expect to run into you."

Rong Jin gave her a half-hearted nod as he was still thinking about what happened to Rong Zhen.

Situ Xingchen was watching him, and she asked with uncertainty, "Something seems to be bothering you. What is it?"

Rong Jin hid his troubles behind a wide beaming smile. "I'm fine, Your Highness. Don't worry."

A smile crept onto her cheeks, and she blushed coyly. "Don't stand on ceremony. Call me by my name, please. We are betrothed to be married, so you don't have to be so formal around me."

Her words surprised Rong Jin; her beauty and innocence moved him. "Xingchen."

Her gentle murmur of acknowledgment caressed Rong Jin's ears like a breeze.

"If there is something bothering you, you can also talk about it with Xingchen. It's definitely not good to keep it inside all the time." Situ Xingchen's words seemed to have some kind of magical power, which made Rong Jin drop his heart's defenses involuntarily.

"It's actually nothing; it's just some small things." He was slightly relieved.

Fortunately, the marriage agreement between them was set. Otherwise, he really didn't know what kind of situation he would face when he returned.

Situ Xingchen quietly looked at Rong Jin and put on the appearance of a patient listener.

Rong Jin was feeling tipsy after he drank the wine. As Situ Xingchen stared at him intently, he was overwhelmed with an impulse to speak.

"My sister actually met with some trouble," he blurted.

Situ Xingchen blinked. "The Fourth Princess?"

Rong Jin nodded solemnly.

"She seemed to be doing well when I saw her with Chu Liuyue. What trouble could she be in?" she asked curiously.

Rong Jin was flabbergasted. "What? You saw Rong Zhen and Chu Liuyue together?"

Situ Xingchen nodded. "That's right! It was a couple of days after my return."

Rong Jin quickly recalled the time period and was shocked upon realizing that it was when Rong Zhen went missing!

He took a step forward and anxiously grabbed Situ Xingchen by her shoulders. "Where did you see them? What were they doing?"

Panic flashed in Situ Xingchen's eyes. She lowered her gaze to hide the immense hatred from him. "Your Highness, you're hurting me."

Rong Jin loosened his grip instantly. "My apologies; I was upset. Were you telling me the truth?"

Astonished, she looked at him as though she couldn't understand his huge reaction. "I did. I was on my way to the inn to pack up my belongings when I saw the Fourth Princess and Chu Liuyue with an elderly man behind them. However, I was too far away to see who that man was and where they went afterward. Is that important?"

Rong Jin was shaking, and he didn't speak for a long time. The elderly man behind them was probably Si Meng. Chu Liuyue really had something to do with Rong Zhen's disappearance!

Previously, Rong Jin didn't take it seriously when his mother said that. At the time, he thought his mother mentioned it because she loathed Chu Liuyue. Perhaps, she was right all along! The two had some altercations earlier.

But with Si Meng around, Rong Jin was sure that Rong Zhen had gone out of the palace on her own accord. The first person she went to was likely Chu Liuyue.

His sister was fully capable of doing something like this.

Unexpectedly, Chu Liuyue returned unscathed while the princess was nowhere to be found.

A fire began to burn inside him.

"Y-your Highness? Your Highness?" Concern was written all over Situ Xingchen's face as she called him.

Rong Jin jolted out of his thoughts. "Isn't Chu Liuyue at Tai Yan Academy now?"

"She is. Why are you suddenly looking for her?"

There was a brief moment of silence.

"Xingchen, can you do me a favor?"

A smile broke out on the princess's face. "Of course, Your Highness."

...

Elder Mo Cang arrived at the library in no time.

His heart skipped a beat when he saw Chu Liuyue standing there, and he believed that she was truly planning to leave.

He couldn't believe it when he first heard the news. All the winners of the Qing Jiao Competition relished the opportunity. Each one utilized the one-month grace period to the greatest extent.

It was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, but Chu Liuyue merely stayed for ten days.

The elder was both ecstatic and surprised. His mood was crushed when he saw the mountains of books that Chu Liuyue had read during the past ten days.

She has read so many books that others couldn't finish in months! Elder Mo Cang could only hope that those books were the only ones that she had read during her time here.

"Chu Liuyue, are you serious about leaving? Elder Mo Cang asked seriously.

Chu Liuyue smiled brightly. "Haven't you been waiting for this day for a long time?"

The elder snorted. "Don't be so full of yourself. Beware of your own greed!"

Chu Liuyue wasn't offended. "Elder Mo Cang, please don't worry yourself. I know what I'm doing."

He scrutinized her. For some reason, she seems to be in a good mood. On second thought, anyone who got such an opportunity to borrow so many books for free and even read an Earth-grade warrior technique book would be very happy.

On his way here after that day, Elder Mo Cang had already confirmed that Chu Liuyue hadn't found any other Earth-grade warrior technique books.

It was also considered a blessing among misfortunes.

"Since you've thought about it, I'll take you to the academy entrance, and you can leave on your own! "

The Tai Yan Academy had a strict barrier. If Chu Liuyue wanted to leave, she still had to have Elder Mo Cang's consent.

She nodded. "I'll have to trouble you then."

The elder wasn't buying her antics. He sneered inwardly and turned to lead the way. "Let's go!"

Chu Liuyue followed suit, not minding his callousness.

The two headed for the academy entrance.

Elder Mo Cang wore a stern face throughout, and he didn't speak.

Chu Liuyue also had the good sense to not say anything. She had already gotten what she wanted most anyway. These cold faces and sarcastic remarks were really nothing.

Elder Mo Cang extended his hands, ready to open the barrier while she patiently waited by the side.

Suddenly, a voice called out hostilely, "Stop!"

Chapter 362: Interrogation

A cold gleam flashed across Chu Liuyue's eyes when she heard the voice. She immediately gathered herself and turned back calmly.

It was Cheng Han.

"Director, why are you here?" Elder Mo Cang was shocked.

Lately, Cheng Han had been busy with the investigation into Yang Jianqing and Heng Jingchuo. Nobody had seen him for a few days; his appearance was unexpected.

“Are you telling Chu Liuyue to stop?”

Cheng Han strode purposely with an extremely serious look. “That’s right!”

Didn’t the director want to see Chu Liuyue leave as soon as possible? Now that she is leaving, why is he stopping her? The elder was stunned, confused by what was happening. “Director, what...”

“Chu Liuyue, you know very well why.” Cheng Han sternly stared at Chu Liuyue from where he stood a few steps away.

Chu Liuyue’s heart skipped a beat. Does he know about Ultimate Jingshen? It can’t be. With his ability, there’s no way Cheng Han could know.

She plastered a calm and polite smile onto her face. “Director, I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“You don’t?” Cheng Han’s lips curled into a sneer. “You know very well what you’ve done! Rong Jin will be here soon; save your arguments for him!”

Rong Jin? Chu Liuyue breathed a sigh of relief. It isn’t about Ultimate Jingshen. What is Rong Jin doing here then?

She frowned.

In Cheng Han’s opinion, Chu Liuyue’s expression was clearly a sign of guilt for her deeds.

Seeing his gloating look, she suddenly remembered something. If my memory serves me right, Rong Jin should be here in Country Xing Luo for his marriage alliance with their princess.

The sound of approaching footsteps jolted Chu Liuyue out of her thoughts.

Cheng Han turned around, and a long-awaited smile appeared on his stern face.

Chu Liuyue followed suit. She saw a group of men, led by Rong Jin, coming through the main entrance.

The prince looked anxious as though he had rushed to the academy.

The two locked eyes with each other.

Rong Jin stopped abruptly. Along the way, all he could think of was how he was going to interrogate Chu Liuyue. Now that she stood before him, he was suddenly at a loss for words.

Deep down, he wished he didn’t have to face her under such circumstances.

Chu Liuyue saw the struggle in his eyes for a moment. Then, she saw Situ Xingchen behind him.

The princess was one step behind Rong Jin as though she were accompanying him for the trip.

When the former saw Chu Liuyue, she was dumbfounded. Obviously, she didn’t expect to bump into her here. Nevertheless, the princess collected herself quickly.

Situ Xingchen shifted her gaze away as though nothing had happened and walked to Rong Jin's side. "Your Highness, please talk things through calmly. There's no need to agitate yourself."

Chu Liuyue raised an eyebrow at Situ Xingchen's words. When did their relationship become so good? They've only met a few times.

Rong Jin looked at Situ Xingchen and nodded. "Don't worry. I know what to do."

Chu Liuyue crossed her arms in deep thought. A lot seemed to have gone on outside while I've been in the library reading for the past ten days.

"Director, thank you for keeping her here." Rong Jin cupped his hands together and bowed toward Cheng Han.

The latter waved his hand. "It's nothing; don't mention it. Xingchen said that I must help Your Highness with this favor no matter what. Naturally, I can't refuse."

Rong Jin gave Situ Xingchen a grateful look. "Thank you."

"I only wish to prevent unnecessary delays for Your Highness," Situ Xingchen said gently.

Chu Liuyue couldn't help herself from laughing out loud. If she hadn't seen the cloud pattern on Situ Xingchen's clothes or the look on the latter's face when she was talking to Rong Jin, Chu Liuyue would've really thought that the princess was in love with him. Her acting skills are superb!

Rong Jin heard Chu Liuyue's laugh, and he thought she was mocking him. His expression darkened. "Chu Liuyue, what's so funny?"

Chu Liuyue shrugged. "Oh, nothing. Your Highness, why are you here for me? You can just tell me without putting on such a big show."

Rong Jin paused; then, he asked seriously, "Do you have anything to do with Rong Zhen's disappearance?"

Puzzled, Chu Liuyue asked, "What?"

When Rong Jin saw her reaction, he wavered. She really doesn't seem to know. Situ Xingchen clearly said she saw Chu Liuyue and Rong Zhen together.

"I'm asking if you have done anything to Rong Zhen."

A thought popped up in Chu Liuyue's head. I settled the matter discreetly. By right, nobody should've noticed, not even the Empress. However, she is probably aware of Rong Zhen's doings. It is only normal for the Empress to tell Rong Jin her suspicions, but... Judging from his expression, Rong Jin seems certain about the matter.

Chu Liuyue shook her head. "Your Highness, I really don't know what you are talking about. Shouldn't the Fourth Princess be in Country Yao Chen, at the palace? Why have you come to pick on me?"

Finally, Rong Jin couldn't hold himself back any further. He stepped forward and hissed, "Quit acting! You must be behind Rong Zeng's disappearance. Someone saw the two of you together before my sister went missing!"

Chu Liuyue blinked. There was nothing except confusion in her crystal-clear eyes. "Her Highness is missing? When did this happen?"

Chu Liuyue's reaction caused Rong Jin to hesitate. Does Chu Liuyue really not know?

Chu Liuyue shifted her gaze toward Situ Xingchen with interest; she thought she knew the cause for Rong Jin's behavior. "Your Highness, if I may ask: Did you tell the Crown Prince that you saw me with his sister?"

Situ Xingchen bit her lip and frowned, looking pitiful. "I-I... Yes, I did. I'm sorry; I didn't know the Fourth Princess was missing. His Highness asked me about it, and I told him. I... It wasn't intentional."

A smile gradually appeared on Chu Liuyue's lips. Great! Her words turned his doubts into certainty.

Chu Liuyue really played a part in Rong Zhen's disappearance. However, she couldn't remember when she was with Rong Zhen since she never showed herself before they left the Imperial City. Situ Xingchen is lying!

"Chu Liuyue, what have you got to say for yourself?" Rong Jin noticed that Chu Liuyue was silent for a long time. He thought she was feeling guilty.

After a brief silence, he said, "I know Rong Zhen is still alive. I promise I won't kill you if you hand her over."

Chu Liuyue gave him a nonchalant look. "Does Your Highness wish to convict me based on her one-sided words?"

Chapter 363: A Search

"Of course not! Nobody will make things difficult for you if you can prove your innocence," Rong Jin said.

Chu Liuyue curled her lips slightly. "So, others slandered me and threw dirty water on me, so I have to find a way to prove my innocence in order to clear this wrongdoing? How am I supposed to prove something that I didn't do?"

Rong Jin was dumbfounded. If he weren't worried about his mother and his future, he wouldn't have driven Chu Liuyue to the edge. After all, the matter of Rong Zhen's disappearance had been exposed, so his father definitely knew about Si Meng's existence as well.

He knew his father well. The Emperor would see Si Meng's existence as a more pressing issue compared to his daughter's disappearance.

The only way to salvage the situation now was to find Rong Zhen.

"Can I believe your side of the story? I can't. If you're not guilty, come back with me to the Imperial City now. We will seek an audience with Father and Mother and let them decide." As he said that, he reached out and tried to pull Chu Liuyue with him.

Chu Liuyue stepped aside and avoided him easily.

Rong Jin was flabbergasted. His cultivation might be higher than Chu Liuyue, but she was clearly stronger than he was ability-wise.

Indescribable frustration welled inside him. When I was with Situ Xingchen, I didn't feel like this.

At this thought, Rong Jin became impatient. "Why? Are you feeling guilty?"

Cheng Han chimed in before Chu Liuyue could reply. "Since you have already left the library, you might as well go with Rong Jin."

The prince was surprised. Chu Liuyue only stayed here for such a short time. If that's the case, it's even better.

All eyes were on Chu Liuyue. Clearly, they wanted her to agree to the director's proposal.

The look in Chu Liuyue's eyes was cold. She hated it when she was forced to do things, especially when it was someone she loathed. "What if I refuse?"

The atmosphere instantly became tense.

...

At the Imperial Study in Country Yao Chen.

Rong Qi stood outside the door anxiously. "Eunuch Min, can you please go to my father again? I really have an urgent matter to report to him!"

The eunuch looked torn. "Your Highness, I wish I could, but... but there's simply no way! His Majesty is still furious. If you go in now, you might make things worse for the Empress instead of helping her. Listen to me; please go back for the time being. You can come again when His Majesty is in a better mood. You can plead for his mercy then!"

Rong Qi's brows were knitted tightly together. "Eunuch Min, why won't you believe me? I really didn't come to plead for mercy for my mother! I have something urgent to inform my father of. The consequences will be dire if we delay any further."

The eunuch refused to relent no matter what the prince said.

With the Empress under house arrest, the disappearance of his sister, and the Crown Prince being far away in Country Xing Luo, only Rong Qi was left.

As the Fifth Prince and the Empress's biological son, how could he not come for her?

Eunuch Min's refusal sent Rong Qi into a state of panic. He threw all caution aside and yelled at the top of his lungs, "Father, I have an urgent matter to inform you of! Please, let me in!"

Eunuch Min was scared out of his wits, and he rushed forward to stop the prince. "My goodness! Your Highness, what are you doing? What should we do if you disturb His Majesty? Please, I beg you. Stop."

Instead of listening, Rong Qi shouted even louder.

The eunuch was on the verge of a mental breakdown. The seemingly useless prince can really stir up waves of trouble if he sets his mind to it.

"What are you still standing there for? Help me persuade Prince Ping!" Eunuch Min hurriedly urged the palace staff around him to stop the prince.

It was one thing to offend Rong Qi, but they would be courting death if they antagonize their emperor.

Soon, Rong Qi was forcibly removed from the Imperial Study by the staff.

Panicked, he screamed with all his might, "Father! Father, I know where Rong Zhen is!"

The eunuch froze.

The next second, Emperor Jiawen's voice could be heard from within the study. "Let him in!"

The staff quickly let Rong Qi go.

Rong Qi tidied his attire and glared at the staff before he entered the study.

As soon as he stepped in, he saw his father authoritatively staring at him as the latter sat in his chair.

The prince shuddered. His high and mighty aura from a minute ago dissipated. "F-father."

"Where is Rong Zhen?" Emperor Jiawen cut to the chase.

Rong Qi quickly explained, "F-father, I'm not sure yet. Please don't be upset with me. I-I know who hid her. As long as that person is arrested, we will definitely find her."

He stammered, covered in a cold sweat. Fortunately, he said everything according to the Empress's instructions.

Emperor Jiawen leaned forward. "Who is it?"

Rong Qi pursed his lips and replied without hesitation, "Chu Liuyue!"

...

Chu Ning had just finished settling the matter. He closed his eyes and massaged his forehead. He was exhausted, but he couldn't help himself from smiling. Yue'er should be home any time now. I should head home soon.

"Lord Chu Ning, something happened!" A subordinate ran in as he shouted in a panic.

Chu Ning opened his eyes with furrowed brows. "What's the matter?"

"His Majesty has ordered a search of your residence! They are arriving as we speak!"

Chu Ning jumped from his chair. "What?!"

Chapter 364: Proof

"Get in! Search the whole place! We must leave no corner untouched!"

"Yes!" At Lu Yun's order, countless guards immediately gathered forward to combine their efforts to break through the Chu family's door.

Chu Ning came in the nick of time and witnessed the scene.

"Lu Yun!" He called out sternly, "How dare you!"

Lu Yun turned around. When he saw Chu Ning approaching with his men, the former revealed a gleeful smile instead of panicking. "Oh, isn't it Lord Chu Ning? You must be busy with official matters. Why have you returned so early?"

A hostile Chu Ning stepped forward. "This is my house. You dare to trespass my home?" As he spoke, he exuded a powerful aura befitting a stage-five warrior, instantly causing Lu Yun to gasp for air.

The guards at the entrance stopped and exchanged looks of fear among each other.

Lu Yun was annoyed, and the smile on his face vanished. "Lord Chu Ning, what are you doing? I'm here today by His Majesty's decree. If you obstruct me, you will be going against His Majesty!"

Chu Ning shot him a deadly glare. "Naturally, I don't dare to disobey His Majesty's decree. Nevertheless, I have the right to know why. At the very least, I am still the imperial guards' Commander-in-Chief."

"I'm sorry, my lord. We are only following orders. If you want to know why, you should seek an audience with His Majesty."

Lu Yun snorted and waved his hand. "Continue!"

"Yes!"

Chu Ning was about to step forward when Zhao Ming whispered from behind, "My lord, please calm down. They are here because of His Majesty's decree. It won't do you any good to worsen the situation."

Doing so might even create the impression that Chu Ning was disrespecting the Emperor's decree.

Chu Ning took a deep breath in and suppressed his anger. "Very well, I shall see what you are searching for!"

He had never done anything against his conscience, so he had nothing to fear. Why did His Majesty suddenly do this?

When Chu Ning bowed down, Lu Yun was immensely pleased with himself.

All this time, Lu Yao had been victimized by the Chus. The most outrageous of them all were Chu Ning and Chu Liuyue.

If they hadn't provoked things deliberately, Lu Yao would still be in control of the Chu family. Because of the father-daughter duo, she was subjected to all kinds of humiliation on a daily basis!

His relationship with Lu Yao wasn't great, but she was still a Lu. Now that her reputation was in tatters, it would also implicate the entire Lu family.

More importantly, she had to turn to her maiden family for help to top-up the money she had embezzled from the Chus.

Lu Yun was unhappy with her predicament, but he resented Chu Ning and his daughter. He now had the opportunity to return the favor, and he certainly wouldn't miss it.

Dong!

The main door slammed open, and numerous guards swarmed in.

Lu Yun flashed a taunting smile at Chu Ning before he entered the Chu residence.

The latter followed with furrowed brows.

The guards dispersed quickly and searched the rooms and courtyard without a care.

Lu Yun stood in the yard with folded arms, constantly issuing orders to his men. "That room—go in and search it quickly! The one next to it as well; search carefully. Has anyone searched the backyard? If you find anything unusual, report to me immediately!"

Chu Ning stood from a distance and watched as the men tossed his belongings out from his room.

Mattresses, bookshelves, clothes, etc. Even tea sets, pens, and ink—among other things—were callously thrown on the ground.

Many things were broken; it was a mess.

Lu Yun turned and looked at Chu Ning. He saw the commander's anger, and he couldn't help himself from advising the latter smugly. "Lord Chu Ning, don't be angry. We are acting according to His Majesty's orders. Why don't you try to recall what your baby daughter has done to incur his wrath?"

Chu Ning's eyes were stern and deadly. "What are you talking about?"

Lu Yun shrugged his shoulders aloofly.

Chu Ning's frown deepened. How did I not expect that this involved my daughter? What exactly did she do to make His Majesty give such an order?

As he was thinking, he could vaguely see the guards planning to enter Chu Liuyue's room.

"Don't you dare!" In a flash, Chu Ning stood in front of the guards to stop them.

Lu Yun raised his eyebrows. "Oh my. My lord, are you planning to go against His Majesty?"

Chu Ning swept his gaze over the group of men. "You can search all you want, but if you break anything in here... Don't blame me for not showing you any mercy!"

His domineering aura, coupled with his stern warning, shocked everyone.

Even Lu Yun shuddered as he said reluctantly, "Didn't you hear? Be careful!"

Chu Ning finally stepped aside after he said that.

Having lost their excitement, the men trod carefully.

Chu Ning stood by the door and watched them like a hawk.

Lu Yun had nowhere to vent his frustration. He knew nothing good would come out of it if he offended Chu Ning. He just had to swallow his pride.

Once they found something, he would ask the Emperor to punish Chu Ning severely.

The commander watched the men while he kept thinking of the reason for His Majesty's reaction. Chu Liuyue went to Tai Yan Academy ten days ago and hasn't been home during this period of time. What exactly are they looking for?

Just as he was mulling over it, a guard suddenly shouted from outside. "Lord Lu, we found something!"

Stunned, Chu Ning immediately turned around.

He saw one guard running to Lu Yun from the backyard and presented the object in his hand. "My lord, please look!"

Lu Yun took the hairpin and inspected it. His expression changed drastically, and he sneered at Chu Ning. "Lord Chu Ning, we have concrete evidence. What do you have to say for yourself?"

Chu Ning walked over quickly. "What are you talking about?"

"My lord, there's no point in playing dumb." Lu Yun held the hairpin up and laughed. "This belongs to Her Highness, the Fourth Princess. We found it in your backyard. What is your defense?"

Chu Ning froze for a moment, and he suddenly understood.

The Fourth Princess, Rong Zhen, was missing. For this reason, the Emperor had placed the Empress under house arrest. Few knew about this, but as the imperial guards' Commander-in-Chief, Chu Ning knew the full picture. Now, the missing Princess's jewelry was found in the Chu residence.

"Are you suspecting that Yue'er hid the Fourth Princess?" Chu Ning blurted.

"It's not a suspicion. Now that there's evidence, it's a fact." Lu Yun put away the hairpin with mocking eyes. "Lord Chu Ning, would you please come with us?"

...

Prince Li Mansion.

Rong Xiu was taking a nap in his wicker chair when Yu Mo barged in. "Your Highness, Lord Chu Ning has been arrested!"

Chapter 365: Detained

When Rong Xiu opened his deep, profound eyes, they were filled with emotions. "When did it happen?"

"An hour ago. Lu Yun led some guards to search the Chu residence. They found a hairpin belonging to the Fourth Princess and decided that Ms. Liuyue is hiding Her Highness. Because Ms. Liuyue has yet to return, they took Lord Chu Ning away. They should be arriving at the palace any minute now."

Yu Mo gave a quick account regarding what happened. He glanced at his master's expression and asked tentatively, "Master, what should we do?"

Rong Xiu's scarlet lips lazily rose into a perfect arc; the hostility on his face resembled the chilly spring. "They sure know how to pick the time."

Yu Mo froze, but he reacted quickly.

The royal family would interrogate Chu Ning severely in Chu Liuyue's absence. To justify the so-called evidence, they might make Chu Ning suffer more.

As Mu Qinghe was still in the city, they wouldn't dare to act rashly even if Chu Liuyue returned. Thus, they took her father to make her suffer.

"You mean they plan to take advantage of this opportunity to retaliate?"

"With Rong Zhen missing and Si Meng exposed, the Empress is in danger. Naturally, she won't give up this golden opportunity."

For the Empress, it was no longer important if they could find Rong Zhen. However, it was crucial that they find the person who hid the princess. Obviously, they intended to pin all the blame on Chu Liuyue.

This way, Emperor Jiawen would direct his anger at Chu Liuyue.

The Emperor wouldn't dare to act rashly on account of Chu Liuyue's relationship with Mu Qinghe. Nevertheless, it would get the Empress off the hook and become her advantage.

Yu Mo asked worriedly, "They are hell-bent on killing Ms. Liuyue and Lord Chu Ning then?"

A smirk appeared on Rong Xiu's lips. "That's why they have the hairpin."

Yu Mo drew a sharp breath. "You're saying..."

Roar!

Suddenly, they heard a low and furious roar.

Yu Mo looked up and saw a sturdy white lion appear before them—it was none other than Xue Xue.

Flames seemed to be burning in Xue Xue's ice-blue eyes.

With a look from Rong Xiu, Xue Xue went to him and lay down at his feet.

"Since the Empress wants to make a scene, let her. The Fourth Princess must be feeling lonely and scared lately. Make sure you keep her entertained." Rong Xiu's voice was as cold and low as ever, yet it sounded lazy.

However, Yu Mo was terrified. Master has the princess? No, from the looks of it, Xue Xue has her under its paws!

The white lion licked its paw reluctantly.

Xue Xue found Rong Zhen annoying. Not only was she dirty and smelly, but she also squealed. Regardless, it didn't dare to disobey its master.

How I yearn for that person's return. At this thought, Xue Xue looked up and stared at Rong Xiu, who barely spared it a glance.

"No."

Xue Xue's enormous head shook, and it went closer coyly.

Rong Xiu's voice was distant. "She spent a long time playing with you, right? I think it was too much."

Xue Xue stiffened instantly. Master knows!

All it did was spend a longer time in the forest with Chu Liuyue. After all, it had been a while since Xue Xue last saw her.

The lion got up sadly and left.

Yu Mo glanced at its enormous silhouette; he could feel its sadness.

The man coughed and withdrew his eyes. "Master, regarding Lord Chu Ning..."

"The Third Prince seems idle lately," Rong Xiu suddenly said.

A stunned Yu Mo nodded. "Yes, Master. His Majesty refused to let him leave the Imperial City. Everyone feels that he has been stripped of his military power. Only a handful of people are in contact with him."

Rong Xiu picked up a book next to him and flipped it casually. "That's good. Have you made contact with the man from the Northwest Army?"

"Yes, everything went smoothly according to your instructions. His Highness is unaware." Yu Mo was confused. "Master, aren't you worrying about helping the Third Prince?"

Rong Jiu held the power to control the army. If things continued like this, nobody could predict what Rong Jiu would do.

"The ones who should be worried are the Empress and the Crown Prince." Rong Xiu flipped a page nonchalantly. "Go. Inform my brother about the Fourth Princess."

"Yes!"

...

At the royal palace.

Emperor Jiawen sat on his throne with the Empress beside him. The latter was holding their daughter's hairpin, weeping. "T-this belongs to Zhen Zhen. I gave it to her on her thirteenth birthday. Her nickname was engraved on it. My poor Zhen Zhen... I'm so sorry..."

Emperor Jiawen stared at Chu Ning sternly. "Chu Ning, what do you have to say for yourself?"

The commander lifted the hem of his robe and knelt on the floor. "Your Majesty, I don't know where this hairpin came from, nor do I know where the Fourth Princess is now. However, I can guarantee with my life that this has absolutely nothing to do with Yue'er!"

Emperor Jiawen was in a dilemma. He knew Chu Ning well. The man's willingness to lay down his life proved that he truly believed his daughter had nothing to do with this.

How would he explain the hairpin then?

"Lord Chu Ning, I beg you. Please tell us where Zhen Zhen is now."

The Empress was grief-stricken as she looked at Chu Ning with a tear-stained face. "I'm willing to forgo everything as long as she's well."

Chu Ning tensed. "Your Majesties, I can't confess to something I have not done."

The Empress rolled her eyes and wiped her tears as she asked tentatively, "Then... then, is it possible that Chu Liuyue did this?"

Chu Ning glanced at her coldly. "Is this Your Majesty's way of asking me to identify my daughter as the mastermind behind Her Highness's disappearance?"

"I-I... That wasn't what I meant. Zhen Zhen has been missing for days, so we are worried about her. I don't want to push you, but can you explain why you have this hairpin?"

Emperor Jiawen finally spoke up after a long time. "In that case, we shall wait for Chu Liuyue to return from Tai Yan Academy and interrogate them together."

The Empress quickly winked at Rong Qi as a hint for him to speak up.

Rong Qi immediately said, "Father, you can't. Lord Chu Ning will definitely try to cover up for her. We should lock him up and interrogate him first. Then, Chu Liuyue will have no choice but to tell the truth when she returns."

Emperor Jiawen frowned.

The Empress chided, "Rong Qi, the verdict is not out. This isn't the way to treat Lord Chu Ning!"

He replied aggrievedly, "I'm doing it for Zhen."

Emperor Jiawen was deep in thought. Finally, he said, "Take Chu Ning into custody!"

Chapter 366: Personally Witness

"Your Majesty, the Third Prince requests to see you!" The announcement suddenly sounded.

Everyone in the palace was shocked.

Emperor Jiawen knitted his brows. "Tell him that I'm busy and get him to wait in the Imperial Study."

Eunuch Min wiped the sweat from his forehead. "Your Majesty, the Third Prince said that the matter was urgent and that he must immediately see you!"

Emperor Jiawen looked even worse, and he suddenly slammed the table. "He's becoming so outrageous!"

The matters in the past two days had already frustrated him, and he didn't expect Rong Jiu to join in the commotion. During the period when he was in the Imperial City, he has always stayed in his place. Why did he suddenly become like this?

Eunuch Min shuddered and was on the brink of tears. "Your Majesty, the Third Prince said that he's here today because... because of the Fourth Princess..."

“Oh?” Emperor Jiawen was surprised, and he knitted his brows. “He never interacted much with Zhen Zhen before... What’s with him today?”

However, the Empress’s heart skipped a beat, and she looked uneasy. Rong Jin was previously grounded because Rong Jiu complained about him in front of His Majesty. I don’t know what he’s up to this time!

She advised worriedly, “Your Majesty, we shouldn’t air out our dirty linen in public. Let’s not blow up the matter of Zhen Zhen going missing, alright? No matter if it’s for the royal family or for Zhen Zhen, we should handle this discreetly... If we drag in the Third Prince, it might not be easy to handle...”

Emperor Jiawen thought for a while and shook his head. “Rong Jiu has always been mature. Since he dared to come, he must really know something.”

As he spoke, he raised his hand toward Eunuch Min. “Let him in.”

“Yes!” Eunuch Min hurriedly went out of the palace to invite Rong Jiu in.

The Empress secretly bit her lip, and she became even more nervous for some reason.

Very quickly, Rong Jiu strode in. He had been in war for many years, so even though he was only 20 this year and younger than Rong Jin, he was very fit. His surrounding aura was also formidable.

Even though he was wearing a cotton robe, he couldn’t hide his warrior aggression. This was an aura that one would only have if they had undergone intense battles on the battlefield.

Rong Jiu’s gaze quickly swept across the palace and stopped at the Empress for a while longer.

The Empress’s heart started beating wildly under his gaze, and she hurriedly averted her eyes.

“Greetings, Father, Mother.” Rong Jiu stood still in the palace with his fists cupped together as he greeted Emperor Jiawen and the Empress.

Emperor Jiawen didn’t beat around the bush and openly asked, “Let’s not focus on these greetings. Do you really know something about Rong Zhen?”

Rong Jiu nodded. “I came here to talk to you about this today, Father.”

Emperor Jiawen sat up straight. “Quickly, speak!”

Rong Jiu’s gaze landed on Chu Ning. “When I was outside, I heard that you wanted to lock Lord Chu Ning up?”

Emperor Jiawen was confused, but he didn’t deny it. “That’s right.”

Rong Jiu shook his head. “Father, you mustn’t do it! If you do, you would’ve wronged Lord Chu Ning! I can confirm that Lord Chu Ning has nothing to do with this!”

Once he said this, even Chu Ning was shocked, let alone Emperor Jiawen and the Empress.

This... Rong Jiu came to put in a good word for me? Chu Ning quickly thought about it in his mind, and he didn’t recall interacting with this Third Prince much.

In this type of perilous situation, anyone would get into trouble if they came in. Therefore, others would definitely shun me. So why would he—

“Rong Jiu, do you know what you’re saying?” Emperor Jiawen’s gaze instantly turned serious, and his voice was grave.

Rong Jiu’s expression did not change. “I know. In actual fact, not only Lord Chu Ning, but even Chu Liuyue has nothing to do with this.”

The Empress finally couldn’t hold it in. “Third Prince, do you know that Lu Yun has already found Zhen Zhen’s hairpin in Chu Ning’s house? The evidence is concrete! Why are you speaking up for that father-daughter duo?”

Rong Jiu revealed a smile with deep meaning as he looked at the Empress and slowly said, “Her Majesty, did Rong Zhen really drop that hairpin in Lord Chu Ning’s house?”

The Empress’s heart instantly skipped a beat. “W-what are you saying?”

“I heard that Lord Lu Yun was the one who brought people over to search Lord Chu Ning’s house... Everyone knows that Lord Chu Ning and Chu Liuyue have been living in the new mansion after they cut ties with the Chu family and that they didn’t even hire servants. When they were searching the house, only Lord Chu Ning was there. Who would know if someone purposely brought the hairpin over and lied about finding it there? Even if Lord Chu Ning has multiple limbs, he can’t supervise every single one of them, right?”

Emperor Jiawen’s expression changed. Rong Jiu makes sense.

The Empress secretly held the chair’s handle tightly. “Third Prince, this hairpin was found in the backyard. Back then, all the guards were witnesses. Did all of them lie about this?”

Rong Jiu paused for a while and suddenly asked, “Her Majesty, may I know if the hairpin beside your hand is the one they found at Lord Chu Ning’s house?”

The Empress was anxious because of his words. Once she heard him ask this, she couldn’t help but nod. “That’s right; it is this one.”

“That’s it then.” Rong Jiu’s expression became interesting. “This hairpin is intricate and very eye-catching. Just by standing here, I can still see it with one glance at such a great distance away. I wonder if Lord Chu Ning and Chu Liuyue are blind. Maybe that’s why they can’t see the hairpin and why they purposely left it in the backyard.”

The Empress retorted anxiously, “P-perhaps Chu Liuyue was too nervous then, so she didn’t notice it? Besides, the backyard is very big. It’s impossible for her to check every nook and cranny—”

“Her Majesty, didn’t you say that this hairpin was found in the backyard and that many guards saw it personally? Why did it suddenly become hidden in a nook and cranny?”

Rong Jiu’s simple sentence stumped the Empress.

The entire palace fell into dead silence.

Chu Ning looked serious. "Your Majesty, I was at the front yard at that time, and the guards were in the backyard, so I indeed didn't see them finding the hairpin."

Emperor Jiawen stared at the Empress, and his gaze turned cold. "Empress, is there anything else you want to say?"

"I-I just made a mistake when I was talking!" The Empress hurriedly knelt down. "Your Majesty, I've always been in the palace, and I didn't go out or see the scene then. So naturally, I don't know what happened. I-I just made a mistake with my words just now!"

Rong Jiu nonchalantly glanced at her in a seemingly smiling manner. "Her Majesty, it seems like this matter really has nothing to do with you at all?"

"Of course not! Zhen Zhen is my daughter. Now that she's missing, I'm the most anxious one!" Vengeance flashed across the Empress's eyes. Now, she had finally realized that Rong Jiu came over today to drag her down.

She looked up and anxiously looked at Emperor Jiawen. "Your Majesty, everything I said is true! Situ Xingchen personally saw Zhen Zhen with Chu Liuyue before Zhen Zhen went missing! She can prove it!"

Chapter 367: Return

This sentence was like thunder that struck one's ears!

Everyone in the palace was stunned.

Even Rong Jiu undetectably furrowed his brows.

Emperor Jiawen boomed, "Are you speaking the truth? Did Situ Xingchen really say that?"

The Empress hurriedly nodded. "If you don't believe me, you can ask Situ Xingchen!"

Chu Ning suddenly asked, "Her Majesty, may I know where you heard this from?"

"Of course, I personally heard it from Situ Xingchen!" At this point, the Empress couldn't care anymore and honestly admitted that she had always been keeping in contact with Rong Jin.

Situ Xingchen told Rong Jin about this matter, who later told her.

"...I know this isn't right, but... Rong Jin is only doing it for Rong Zhen, your Majesty!"

Emperor Jiawen felt his head ache.

The matter seemed to be increasingly complicated. Everyone said their own piece, and their contents were also different.

Someone was definitely lying, but he couldn't immediately find out who it was.

Seeing that Emperor Jiawen had faltered, the Empress immediately said, "Your Majesty, Situ Xingchen already knows about Rong Zhen going missing and plans to come back with Rong Jin this time to help look for Rong Zhen. Why don't we wait until all of them to come back before we ask them in person?"

Emperor Jiawen disagreed. “Chu Liuyue wants to go to Tai Yan Academy for a month. Only a third of that time has passed. If we continue waiting for her, Rong Zhen...”

“Your Majesty, Yue’er will be back really soon. She previously said that she’d only go for ten days,” said Chu Ning.

This made the others surprised. It’s such a rare opportunity, yet Chu Liuyue is only staying for ten days?

Emperor Jiawen stayed silent for a while before he hit the board. “Since this is so, we’ll wait for all of them to come back and ask them.”

The Empress finally heaved a sigh of relief in her heart as her body went weak; she almost collapsed onto the floor. With Situ Xingchen’s testimony, Chu Liuyue definitely won’t be able to escape! I’ll make sure to skin her at that point, even if I can’t kill her!

“Father, you’re wise. This way, we definitely can find Rong Zhen as soon as possible, and we won’t frame Lord Chu Ning for no reason. Lord Chu Ning had always been loyal to you, and it’ll be bad if this misunderstanding breaks Lord Chu Ning’s heart,” said Rong Jiu with cupped fists.

The palace was instantly silenced. Everyone knew that this so-called ‘misunderstanding’ was started by the Empress.

Emperor Jiawen’s gaze darkened. “Everyone, you’re dismissed. Empress, please stay.”

...

Walking out of the palace, Chu Ning solemnly thanked Rong Jiu. “Thank you so much for your help, Third Prince.”

If not, he really would’ve been locked up.

Rong Jiu looked nonchalant. “Lord Chu Ning, don’t stand on ceremony. I helped you just to help myself.”

Chu Ning was dazed as he didn’t expect Rong Jiu to be so honest. Of course, he could guess Rong Jiu’s motive for coming. From start to end, Rong Jiu only targeted one person—the Empress! Especially the moment before he left the palace, his sentence had directly pushed the Empress!

And the reason for Rong Jiu doing so... was most likely due to his birth mother, Noble Lady Yin, being harmed by the Empress back then.

Even though this matter wasn’t concluded with solid evidence, Chu Ning was in his prime back then, and Emperor Jiawen trusted him a lot, so he roughly knew about this.

Seeing Rong Jiu’s appearance, he clearly came prepared.

“No matter what, I still have to thank you, Third Prince. I’ll definitely repay you for this favor.”

Rong Jiu seemed not to care about it.

The two of them briefly talked again before leaving respectively.

Chu Ning hesitated for a while and decided to go back first.

Lu Yun previously brought so many people over and made a mess at his house. He had to hurriedly go back and tidy things up. If Yue'er saw it, she would definitely be worried.

...

In the end, Chu Liuyue didn't go back with Rong Jin and the rest.

She just used one sentence to stop Rong Jin's intentions of stopping her. "I've already settled a time to go back with Lieutenant Mu. Whoever delays me needs to take responsibility."

Rong Jin had just settled his marriage agreement with Situ Xingchen, and he was in his prime. Originally, he wanted to show off his Crown Prince authority in front of Chu Liuyue, but he wasn't too full of himself. He still knew who he could offend and who he could not, so he could only let Chu Liuyue have her way.

As for Situ Xingchen, she didn't say much from start to end and stayed out of the matter. It was as if she had forgotten that Rong Jin only caused trouble for Chu Liuyue after he heard her words.

Chu Liuyue quickly returned to the Imperial City smoothly.

The moment Chu Liuyue reached home, the door was opened from the inside before she could even knock on it.

Chu Ning was standing within.

"Father, why are you at home?" Chu Liuyue saw him and was delighted and surprised. It's not his off-day today.

Chu Ning first sized her up and heaved a sigh of relief after confirming that she was unharmed. "It's great that you're back safe, Yue'er. I have something to ask you."

The father and daughter returned to the house together.

Chu Ning told Chu Liuyue about everything that had happened previously.

"...Yue'er, do you have anything to do with the Fourth Princess going missing?" asked Chu Ning uncertainly.

Chu Liuyue smiled, and her eyes curved. "Father, didn't you already say it in front of His Majesty? You said that you believe that I didn't do it. Since you've already said that, of course, it has nothing to do with me."

Chu Ning heaved a sigh of relief. "That's good; that's good. Previously, I was still worried when the Empress said that Situ Xingchen had seen you and Rong Zhen together..."

What kind of status did Situ Xingchen have? Her words had some weight to them.

Chu Ning believed his own daughter, but the matter's development seemed to be out of his control.

Chu Liuyue nonchalantly smiled. "I know about this. Before I came back, Rong Jin demanded that I take responsibility for Rong Zhen going missing just because he heard this from Situ Xingchen."

Chu Ning knitted his brows. "Situ Xingchen has no grudges against us. Why must she say this?"

Chu Liuyue's eyes sparkled. "Perhaps... she saw wrongly."

Chu Ning didn't quite believe it. What kind of person is Situ Xingchen? She definitely knows what kind of impact her words have! They would most definitely harm Yue'er! If she had really seen wrongly, she shouldn't announce it to everyone when she isn't certain. This really doesn't fit Situ Xingchen's rumored image.

"This Situ Xingchen... is weird..." muttered Chu Ning.

Chu Liuyue didn't want him to worry, so she hit his arm and delightedly said, "Father, don't worry. I know what I'm doing, and I won't let other people bully me!"

Chu Ning's worry didn't dissipate because of this. "But... His Majesty said that he wants all of you to confront each other in person when you've returned. What should we do?"

If Situ Xingchen insists that Yue'er did it...

Chu Liuyue curled her lips slightly. "It will be my pleasure."

Chapter 368: Meeting

Chu Liuyue then went to visit Mu Qinghe, but she realized that he wasn't around.

She waited outside the barrier for a while, but there was still no one around. Hence, she turned around to leave.

She found it a little strange. If Hong Yao is around, it would've long rushed out. Since there isn't any noise after so long, Hong Yao and Mu Qinghe are definitely not inside. What kind of place in Country Yao Chen's Imperial City would attract them?

Chu Liuyue wondered as she walked toward Prince Li Mansion.

Prince Li Mansion looked the same as usual without any changes, but Chu Liuyue sharply felt that the guards were even sterner.

Seeing that she had arrived, Prince Li Mansion's servants immediately welcomed her with enthusiasm.

When Yu Mo heard this commotion, he hurried out to show her in. "Ms. Liuyue, you're finally back!"

Upon seeing his emotional face, Chu Liuyue couldn't help but laugh. "This isn't my first time here. Is there a need to be so emotional?"

"Of course! You don't know, but we've been waiting for you to come back all these days!" Tears almost filled Yu Mo's eyes. If this person didn't come back any earlier, our days would've been filled with suffering!

"Master is in the study! I'll bring you there!" As Yu Mo spoke, he brought Chu Liuyue to the study.

Chu Liuyue followed behind him and silently judged the mansion's interior. She realized that it was indeed different from before.

She noticed all the changes, but she didn't express them on the surface, and she didn't say anything.

Very quickly, the two of them arrived outside the study.

Yu Mo stopped in his tracks. "Master is inside; go ahead."

Chu Liuyue nodded lightly. The moment she walked to the door, a white figure flashed past her eyes.

Chu Liuyue was very surprised. "Xue Xue?!"

Ever since she left the Imperial City, she hadn't seen Xue Xue, and she did miss it quite a bit.

Xue Xue saw her and waved its tail in excitement. It was obviously elated by her return.

It jumped on the spot twice and ran two rounds around Chu Liuyue.

Chu Liuyue laughed out loud. "Enough, enough. I know what you want."

As she spoke, she stretched out her hand to pat Xue Xue's head.

Xue Xue obediently leaned its gigantic head in.

Shua!

The moment Chu Liuyue's hand stretched out, a red figure flashed past her eyes, and she immediately felt something extra on the back of her hand.

She focused on it and realized it was Tuan Zi.

At this point, Tuan Zi was hugging her wrist as its round eyes looked at her innocently and sadly. It seemed as though it was complaining about something.

Chu Liuyue glanced at her hand. Mm, great. It's completely occupied by Tuan Zi, and I can't touch Xue Xue anymore.

Xue Xue growled lowly and was about to rush over when it suddenly heard a cough come from the room.

Xue Xue immediately went to the side obediently and didn't look to the side, acting as if everything before didn't happen.

Tuan Zi looked back and gave it a look of contempt.

Chu Liuyue was speechless.

She looked at the study and walked in.

Creek!

The study door was opened.

Chu Liuyue glanced at Rong Xiu, who was behind the desk.

He had a black cloak on, and he looked a little pale. There was a warm cup of tea beside his hand while he held a book.

He just sat there quietly, and there was an indescribable aura around him—gentlemanly and composed.

Upon hearing the sound of the door opening, he looked up.

The moment he looked up, his pair of clear eyes looked like they contained galaxies of stars.

This glance was vastly different from before. This pair of eyes seemed capable of containing everything in the world, but he was high, mighty, and irreplaceable.

He was distinguished, and he looked over the rest of the world.

The moment the two of them exchanged glances, Chu Liuyue could clearly hear her heart beating rapidly. The blood flowing through the veins in her ears seemed to be rumbling.

Rong Xiu's lips curved. "You're back?"

Chu Liuyue nodded. "En."

Rong Xiu raised his saber-like eyebrows.

The door behind Chu Liuyue suddenly closed, and the bright sunlight was blocked outside the door.

Rong Xiu suddenly opened his mouth, and his clear and cold voice sounded like pieces of jade crashing against each other. "I thought you would only have time to come over tomorrow."

Chu Liuyue was dazed; then, an incredulous thought surfaced in her mind. Is Rong Xiu... jealous? Based on his skills and capabilities, I would've been under his control the moment I entered the Imperial City. However, I went to see my father first and Mu Qinghe later before coming to Prince Li Mansion. Rong Xiu seems to be upset because of this.

Chu Liuyue couldn't help but laugh. "How can I bear to?"

Rong Xiu's eyes flickered, but he didn't say anything.

Chu Liuyue walked forward. Until there was only a table between them, she leaned down, used her hands as support on the table, and inched toward Rong Xiu.

The two of them were extremely near each other, and they could almost breathe in each other's breaths.

Chu Liuyue could even smell the familiar cold fragrance on him.

Her heart beat even faster, and her eyes were filled with stars. "The reason why I came to see you last is..."

Before she finished her sentence, she suddenly leaned forward and kissed Rong Xiu's lips. It was lukewarm yet scorching, slow yet urgent.

Rong Xiu didn't seem to expect that Chu Liuyue would do this, and he was stunned.

Chu Liuyue softly muttered, and her voice sounded in between their teeth and lips. "This is the answer."

Of course, she missed him and wanted to see him right away. However, she had to settle some things first. If not, they would only meet for a while before she would have to rush off to do other things.

Hence, she swiftly settled all the messy things she had to do before coming over.

Without a burden, clear and relaxed.

However, she didn't expect herself to miss Rong Xiu more than she had imagined.

It wasn't obvious when she was at Tai Yan Academy, nor was it obvious when she was on the way back. She even felt that it was nothing when she first arrived at Prince Li Mansion, but the moment she saw Rong Xiu, feelings of reminiscence suddenly overwhelmed her heart.

All the feelings she had intentionally and unknowingly suppressed enveloped her. Her mind seemed to be completely blank except for one thought: Kiss him!

She finally felt secure when she touched his soft and slightly cold lips.

After a moment, she saw that Rong Xiu didn't move, and she angrily bit him.

Rong Xiu raised his hands to pull her in and retaliate. However, Chu Liuyue lightly licked his lips and quickly retreated.

She leaned in toward his ear with one hand on his cloak and said softly, "Rong Xiu, are you not hot? Oh... I almost forgot that Prince Li is heavily ill and that he should rest. He can't—Wu!"

Rong Xiu's gaze suddenly darkened. The next moment, he captured Chu Liuyue's chin, leaned in toward her lips, and harshly kissed her.

If he could endure such a situation, he would really be sick in the mind!

Chapter 369: Summon

After Rong Xiu was satisfied, he slowly let go of Chu Liuyue.

He looked down and saw the young girl's slightly plump lips. Gently caressing them with his fingers, he lazily spoke with a hoarse voice. "Mm, it seems like your strategy is correct."

Chu Liuyue recovered her senses and immediately glared at him. However, her eyes were watery, and she looked even more charming instead of angry.

Rong Xiu chuckled, kissed her, and finally let go. "Come over."

Chu Liuyue walked around the table and stood beside him to see the book that he had just placed aside. "What are you looking at?"

Every time she came, Rong Xiu seemed to be reading a book.

She glanced at the book, and it seemed to be a biography.

Rong Xiu grabbed her thin waist and hugged her.

Chu Liuyue leaned against his chest.

Rong Xiu's hand gently caressed her waist, and his other hand brought that book over. "Do you want to see it?"

Chu Liuyue felt that Rong Xiu's hands had magical powers. He just pressed her waist a few times, and a gush of warmth came toward her. She felt as if her entire body became soft and relaxed.

She let loose and felt that her recent tiredness had been dispelled by quite a bit. She then brought the book over and looked up in shock when she saw the name on it. "You moved it from the academy?"

Chu Liuyue remembered that she had previously seen this book in Yi Feng Courtyard.

Rong Xiu didn't find it strange that she remembered as he nonchalantly nodded. "I've basically packed most of Mother's items, so there isn't any need for me to stay there."

Of course, another important reason was that the person in his arms wouldn't be staying there for long.

Chu Liuyue recalled what he had taken out from Jiuyou Tower previously and nodded in understanding as she unintentionally flipped open the book and glanced at it.

Rong Xiu had always been acting ill ever since he came back from Tian Lu Academy, so he rarely stepped out of Prince Li Mansion. He spent most of his time here.

Thus, Chu Liuyue was actually very curious about what Rong Xiu read normally. However, she was stunned when she glanced at it.

It was actually a map. Moreover... it was a map of the Imperial City!

After she was reborn, she had specifically gone to find out about the Imperial City—including its overall structure. Hence, she immediately recognized that the map was the Imperial City's outline when she saw it.

The more shocking thing was that the map had detailed military allocation! The entire Imperial City's attack and defense system could be seen from this.

Chu Liuyue's heart suddenly beat wildly. It turns out that Rong Xiu wasn't reading books every day, but—

She instinctively looked up at Rong Xiu. "This..."

Rong Xiu looked calm as if he didn't think that it was a big deal.

Chu Liuyue thought that he didn't expect her to understand it, so she couldn't help but poke his chest. "Rong Xiu... you've been looking at this every day?"

Rong Xiu glanced at her expression, and his lips curved up. He then said lightly, "Not every day. I just look at it to dispel my boredom sometimes."

Chu Liuyue was speechless. Dispel your boredom? What kind of person would look at this to dispel their boredom? With this map, Rong Xiu could easily control the entire Imperial City! If he had military power, attacking the Imperial City is just a matter of time!

Chu Liuyue's lips moved, and she finally couldn't resist asking, "Why... are you looking at the Imperial City's map?"

Originally, she thought that Rong Xiu would look shocked, but a smile appeared on his face as he kissed Chu Liuyue's glabella. "You indeed can understand it."

Chu Liuyue instantly felt conflicted. It turns out that Rong Xiu already knew I could tell what it was, but he didn't want to hide it.

"Are... you not worried that I would expose you?"

If Emperor Jiawen knew that he, as a prince, had such a thing with him, it would spell trouble.

Rong Xiu raised his brows and said righteously, "You're my fiancée. If anything happens to me, you can't escape either."

Chu Liuyue was speechless. Why does it sound like he's saying, 'you live as my woman and die as my ghost?'

Rong Xiu raised his chin. "You can continue looking."

Chu Liuyue hesitated for a while before flipping to the back. After looking at it, she realized it was a similar map.

Even though all the maps were slightly different, they were equally detailed.

Chu Liuyue looked at the maps and was increasingly shocked. These maps... seem to be the entire Country Yao Chen! I'm afraid that even the military won't have such detailed maps!

Chu Liuyue was genuinely stunned. "Rong Xiu, what's the point of you reading this...?"

If it weren't because Rong Xiu didn't hold any military power, she would really think that Rong Xiu was planning a revolt.

"It's just something to pass my time." Rong Xiu really didn't seem to care. Upon seeing her look of shock, he couldn't help but chuckle and hug her tighter. She looks really charming when she's worried for me.

Chu Liuyue instinctively turned her gaze and glanced at the bookshelves behind him.

The shelves were filled.

A terrifying thought surfaced in her mind. Are these also—

She long knew that Rong Xiu was much stronger than he appeared to be, but seeing all of this still exceeded her imagination!

"What are you thinking about?" asked Rong Xiu.

Chu Liuyue revealed a sympathetic expression. "I'm thinking about how unlucky Rong Jin must be to have met you."

Rong Jin originally thought that his status as the Crown Prince would be secured once he settled his marriage agreement with Situ Xingchen and that even the throne would be in his hands. However, he didn't know...

Rong Xiu raised his brows. He had no interest in comparing with Rong Jin, but since it was still praise from her, he decided to accept it heartily.

Chu Liuyue put that book back and continued to hide in Rong Xiu's arms.

Rong Xiu used his chin to touch her soft hair. "Let's not talk about this. How about we discuss our wedding date?"

Chu Liuyue was dazed before she looked like she was in a difficult position. We do need to discuss this. Mu Qinghe is still in the Imperial City now, and I don't know when he will go back to the Tianling Dynasty. If he is going to leave soon, then we won't have time to hold a grand wedding. If he waits for a while, we can hold a grand wedding. However, I wouldn't know when I would be able to follow him back to the Tianling Dynasty.

The road in front was also very dangerous, and Chu Liuyue didn't know what she had to face if she went back. Besides, it would be even harder to handle if there was Rong Xiu...

Of course, she couldn't bear to leave Rong Xiu, but she had to go back to the Tianling Dynasty.

She knitted her brows and thought for a long time. Suddenly, she left Rong Xiu's embrace, sat opposite him, and looked very serious. "Rong Xiu, I have something to tell you."

Rong Xiu looked at her with deep meaning. "I'm listening."

...

The next day, Rong Jin and Situ Xingchen finally reached the Imperial City.

Chu Liuyue was currently at home with her legs crossed. Her hands were on her knees as she absorbed the surrounding Heaven and Earth Force.

Suddenly, Eunuch Min's voice could be heard from outside the door. "Lord Chu Ning, Ms. Liuyue, His Majesty and Her Majesty are waiting in the palace. Please head there!"

Chapter 370: Suspect

Palace.

When Chu Liuyue followed Chu Ning over, Emperor Jiawen and the Empress were already waiting in the palace.

Rong Jin and Situ Xingchen were also seated there.

There was still another person on the other side—Rong Jiu.

Chu Liuyue had already heard about what previously happened from Chu Ning, so she wasn't surprised by Rong Jiu's presence.

Her eyes quickly darted across the few people in the palace.

Emperor Jiawen had no expression on his face, but his gaze was grave.

Compared to the previous time she saw the Empress, the Empress looked much frailer. It was as though she had aged a lot in a moment. It was clear that the recent happenings had tortured her.

When Rong Jin saw Chu Liuyue, a complicated look flashed across his face.

He held a hairpin in his hands.

Chu Liuyue guessed that it was Rong Zhen's hairpin, which they had claimed to have found in her backyard.

Situ Xingchen and Rong Jiu both looked calm, and nobody could tell anything from them.

Chu Ning and Chu Liuyue bowed as per normal.

Emperor Jiawen told the two of them to sit.

"Okay, since we're all here, then... let's start!" Emperor Jiawen had already lost his patience, so he decided to be straightforward. He looked at Situ Xingchen and boomed, "Xingchen, you previously said that you saw Liuyue and Zhen Zhen together. Is that true?"

Situ Xingchen stood up and bowed. "Your Majesty, I don't dare to lie, and all I said was the truth. As Jiuyou Tower was on fire that day, I remember it very clearly. After Jiuyou Tower collapsed, Tai Yan Academy was going to depart the next day, so I quickly went back to pack my things. I didn't expect to coincidentally see Rong Zhen and Chu Liuyue on the way."

Emperor Jiawen asked, "Was anyone else there?"

"An elder in a black robe, but I didn't see his face properly."

"Did you hear what they said?"

"I was a distance away, so I couldn't hear them. However, I saw the two of them walking very closely together, so I thought that they were close. I didn't expect..."

Emperor Jiawen's face turned increasingly cold. The elder in the black robe was definitely Si Meng. If Situ Xingchen were telling a lie, how would she know about Si Meng's presence?

"Actually, I felt it was quite strange after I saw that." Situ Xingchen looked up at Emperor Jiawen and said hesitantly, "This was because His Majesty had just granted a marriage between Prince Li and Chu Liuyue. Hence, I was confused as to why I saw her with Rong Zhen."

The crowd understood.

The timing was really too special. Even if Chu Liuyue and Rong Zhen were on very good terms, they shouldn't be together on the day that her marriage was granted.

Besides, everyone knew that the two of them had conflicts before. It was suspicious for the both of them to be together.

Emperor Jiawen asked again, "What happened afterward? Did you see where they went?"

Situ Xingchen shook her head. "I was only looking from afar then. As I was rushing back, I left, and I don't know where they went."

Emperor Jiawen nodded. "Sit down."

Then, he turned to Chu Liuyue. "Liuyue, you've heard her words. What do you have to say?"

Chu Liuyue lightly knocked against the chair's armrest and looked at Situ Xingchen while in deep thought. Situ Xingchen's previous words are actually very ambiguous, but Si Meng's presence has

increased her credibility greatly. After all, even Emperor Jiawen didn't know of Si Meng's existence before, so it's very easy to make people believe her once she talked about him. This also means that Situ Xingchen had long known of Si Meng's existence.

Perhaps she even knows about what happened that day. However, she can't fully state it because of some reason, so she has to use a tactful manner. After all, she can still push the responsibility for Rong Zhen's incident to me even if this is so.

Chu Liuyue replied calmly. "I didn't see Rong Zhen that day. That day, Prince Li sent someone to send Father and me home; the Chu family then sent us an invitation. Father went over while I stayed at home and didn't leave. The Chu family can vouch for this."

Quite a few people knew about Chu Ning going over to the Chu Residence, and they had even talked about it in private for a period of time.

Everyone knew that the Chu family regretted chasing Chu Ning and his daughter out and that they were thinking of ways to convince them to come back.

Chu Ning said, "That's right. Yue'er planned to go with me that day, but I stopped her. Hence, she stayed at home."

"Even if that's the case, who can prove that she didn't go out after you left, Lord Chu Ning?" Rong Jin retorted, "Besides, the two of you are father and daughter, so we can't fully trust your testimony."

Chu Ning looked serious.

They had no ways of retorting if the other party said that. This was because he and Yue'er really couldn't prove that Yue'er was home the entire time.

Chu Liuyue suddenly said, "I heard that the hairpin's appearance was pretty ambiguous and that even the Empress couldn't say where it came from. Then, how will everyone know what you said was the truth?"

"You!" The Empress was very angered. Chu Liuyue really knows how to touch a sore spot!

His Majesty was already very upset with her because of the hairpin the day before. By mentioning it again, Chu Liuyue was just pushing the Empress into hot water.

Rong Jin knitted his brows and hid the hairpin. He originally thought that this hairpin was solid evidence, but judging from his mother's reaction, it wasn't easy to say that it truly was...

The two parties had their own testimonies, and the situation reached a stalemate.

Rong Jiu suddenly said, "Actually, the crux of the matter is to find Rong Zhen. Her Majesty, Rong Zhen's pearl of essence is broken, and it's impossible for her to leave the palace quietly with her abilities. This also means that she left with Si Meng's help. Even though Si Meng is already dead, did he really not leave behind any clues...?"

The Empress was even more frustrated. She knew that every time they mentioned Si Meng, it would fill His Majesty's heart with even more dissatisfaction and hatred. But in order to push the blame to Chu Liuyue fully, Si Meng was a very important character.

She rubbed her temples and said, "No, Si Meng died very suddenly."

Speaking of this, she suddenly paused and looked at Chu Liuyue suspiciously. "Oh, right. Coming to think of it, Si Meng is a stage-five warrior, and an average person is not his match. The person must be formidable for them to kill him in such a short amount of time. In the entire Imperial City, there aren't many people of such standards."

Chu Liuyue raised her brows and asked delightfully, "What? Her Majesty, are you suspecting that I killed him? Aren't you overestimating me, a stage-two warrior?"