

My Crown 681

Chapter 681: Treat Xiao Mo Better!

The surrounding crowd were mystified by the development, unable to make any sense of the matter.

Seeing how slow-witted they were, Shaoyao couldn't resist laughing from anger, and she put one hand on her hip while holding the boy's hand with the other. "Look at how foolish you people are. Did you people think from the start that our family's miss would recklessly hit people in the middle of the street? This little boy had clearly been kidnapped! Have you ever seen a mother using her own son as a cushion when falling to the ground?"

"This child was fed a poison that induces mental confusion, and it's our miss who gave him an antidote pill." Shaoyao snapped at the passersby.

The peanut gallery was unable to refute her dressing-down, and they apologized one by one with awkward smiles.

Shaoyao kicked the swindling couple, closely questioning where they nabbed the child from, before leaving with the boy.

On the other hand, the crown prince and Qiao Mu intended to first return to the Hidden Night Pavilion and check the condition of Ao'ye's injury.

"Keep an eye on them. It will suffice to leave them with only one last breath." Before departing, the crown prince instructed this with an imposing expression.

Huifeng immediately hung his head slightly in acknowledgement.

After the two people exited the north city gate, the crown prince promptly summoned out Little Seven.

The instant that child appeared, Qiao Mu immediately discovered that he had grown much older. At present, he already looked like a 14 to 15-year-old youth.

After his pair of gold and red heterochromatic eyes swept a glance over at her, he immediately gave a snort.

Qiao Mu also promptly responded with a snort!

It's not as if he looked as adorable as her Qingluan!

Witnessing their interaction, Mo Lian was baffled. *Why were these two little fellows like agitated roosters whenever they met, finding each other unpleasing to the eye?*

"Little Seven." Mo Lian stroked Little Seven's small head to pacify him. "We're heading for Martial Mountain."

Seventh Yan proudly turned his small face aside before abruptly turning his head back, glaring directly back at Qiao Mu in response to her gaze.

"You, treat Xiao Mo better!" Seventh Yan couldn't resist growling at Qiao Mu.

He didn't even know how Master endured through those years!

So plaintively and pitifully missing someone, thinking about someone, longing for someone to appear!

This kind of Master made people who saw him too heartbroken.

Our dear Qiao Mu pattered in a jog towards Seventh Yan before abruptly reaching out to pat his head. "Such a rude fellow! Call me Sister!"

"How do I not treat him well? Why are you, this child, so disagreeable? Every time you see me, if it's not rolling your eyes at me, it's still rolling your eyes at me." Qiao Mu exerted strength into pinching Seventh Yan's cheeks with her small hand, pinching his originally handsome face into the shape of a bun.

Our dear Seventh Yan was so livid that he kept huffing and puffing through his nose.

Mo Lian quickly pulled the two little fellows apart and incessantly tried to soothe his darling. "Qiaoqiao, you be careful! You can't defeat Little Seven. Little Seven, you're prohibited from touching her, okay."

"Let go!" Our dear Little Seven was about to be angered to death.

This d*mned woman was so annoyingly vicious, immediately pinching his face so hard that it hurt so badly.

Qiao Mu cuffed his small skull. "Call me Sister!"

"D*mn woman!"

Thud! Thud thud! Several small but violent cuffs in succession!

Little Seven shielded his skull with his hands, and he was so furious that he wanted to transform into his beast form that instant and thrash her to the other end of the horizon in a flash.

But when he met Xiao Mo's admonishing gaze, he felt a bit cowed.

Ah, this little dragon was so aggravated!

*"Sis, Sister!" Don't hit anymore! This d*mned woman! There were already two small bumps on his head from the beating!*

"If you had called me 'Sister' earlier, then everything would've been fine." Qiao Mu finally let go of this prideful little dragon in satisfaction.

*Vicious woman! He must've suffered interminable sh*tty luck for eight lifetimes to end up as her little brother!*

Chapter 682: Ghost Claw Vine

Seventh Yan transformed into his dragon form in a huff and headed for Martial Mountain with the two people on his back.

The Hidden Night Pavilion's capital branch was built deep within Martial Mountain, whose steep, natural barrier prevented most people from coming here.

Only small groups of adventurers would trek up the mountain; however, they wouldn't venture deep into the heart of Martial Mountain. Most of the time, they would just go hunting in the outskirts.

Hence, it had been rather tranquil in the many years that the Hidden Night Pavilion had stationed itself on Martial Mountain.

Qiao Mu followed the crown prince to the side of a cliff, watching as he imprinted his palm into a rock block nearby, which caused a stone door to open up in the originally dead end cliffside.

The two people then walked in while holding hands, leaving our dear little Seventh Yan trailing behind them in a huff.

It was extremely spacious inside the rock cliffside, with wall lamps lighting up the space beneath the high vaulted ceiling. It was an altogether different world.

As they walked inside, they saw Hidden Flower walking over to give them a salute. "Your Highness, Ao'ye's injury is quite serious."

As he spoke, he also led the two people towards one of the small stone rooms.

Yet upon entering, Qiao Mu could faintly smell the scent of blood.

Ao'ye was currently lying on a stone bed with his eyes shut, his body covered with a thin blanket.

"Be careful, Crown Prince Consort." Seeing Qiao Mu walking up to Ao'ye and reaching for his blanket without consulting them, Hidden Flower hastily gave a warning in his shock.

Nevertheless, Qiao Mu very smoothly and swiftly threw off half of the blanket covering Ao'ye's body.

Subsequently, a pitch-black wizened branch, which had become something that looked like a ghost claw, directly shot out of his chest and targeted Qiao Mu.

Qiao Mu gave a snort, and then a jade-green tree branch abruptly shot out of her sleeve, ruthlessly giving the five-fingered ghost claw a good whipping.

The ghost claw contorted with every lash, and the pitch-black wizened branch spouted rising black smoke. Before long, it started to break up due the jade-green tree branch's whipping and began dropping to the floor piece by piece.

"Qiuqiu, what the hell is this." Qiao Mu was actually unclear on what the thing that shot out of Ao'ye's chest was.

Thus, she mentally communicated with Qiuqiu.

Qiuqiu said with great contempt, "Masta, this is a type of evil plant, the ghost claw vine. It looks like a ghost claw and is speedy in its attacks. However, humph! Once it encounters Qiuqiu, it's just asking to be subdued."

Qiao Mu had long gotten accustomed to the biggity Qiuqiu, who would boast every few sentences.

At this time, the crown prince had also walked over and lowered his head to examine Ao'ye's chest injury. "Qiaoqiao, how is he."

"He'll be fine. I'll be administering acupuncture on him. The ghost claw vine that had remained inside his body earlier has already been expunged, so he'll get better."

Upon hearing this, Hidden Flower gave a slight sigh of relief.

The crown prince crushed a section of broken vine with his foot. "I didn't imagine that the Qin Estate was still hiding a demonic cultivator. I really have underestimated them."

As Qiao Mu pulled out her needle pouch, her hands paused for a bit. "The Qin Estate? Ao'ye was injured by someone from the Qin Estate?"

"That's right." The crown prince said with a sneer, "I was careless this time around, which allowed the Qin Estate's people to wipe out all traces of its collusion with the Shuntian Prefecture in advance. It really is disappointing to be unable to convict them."

Moreover, even Ao'ye was heavily wounded by the Qin Estate's people.

The crown prince got the short end of the stick in this time's confrontation, while the Qin Estate only lost a batch of negligible pills.

When put this way, he was the one who lost a round.

Those two people from the Qin Estate were indeed very clever. They truly were two tough nuts to crack.

After earnestly administering acupuncture on Ao'ye, Qiao Mu fed him two healing medicinal pills as well. "Send people to properly take care of him these two days. He needs to recuperate for around seven days."

Giving a nod, Hidden Flower then sent the two people out of the stone room and respectfully bid them farewell.

Chapter 683: Imprisonment

The Wu Family.

"Eldest Master, Eldest Madam, it's awful, it's awful." The boy servant guarding the door ran inside frantically while shouting, "The Highest Judiciary has come to arrest Eldest Miss."

"What?" Master Wu suddenly lost his grip on his teacup, and it crashed to the floor.

He then jumped up from his seat and glowered. "What bullsh*t are you spouting? When did Xiaosu commit a crime, and one that even required the Highest Judiciary's people to come make an arrest?"

As he spoke, two of the Highest Judiciary's officers had already stepped through the door, and they cupped their hands towards Master Wu. "This humble official greets Sir Wu."

Eldest Master Wu was precisely the older full brother of Wu Hongmo, the Vassal King Consort of An'nan, and he had been an ignorant and incompetent character since young. If he hadn't begged his brother-in-law, Vassal King of An'nan, to secure a seventh-rank sinecure, he would probably still be without office at this time.

The Wu Family had gotten used to passing untroubled days. Even though the master didn't hold a high official post, there was still the Vassal King of An'nan, this brother-in-law, to back them up, so no one dared to disrespect the Wu Family. Hence, this was the first time they were encountering the Highest Judiciary's "challenge" at their doorstep.

“Pardon us, Sir Wu. We humble officers are acting under orders to detain Eldest Miss Wu. Would Sir please cooperate.” The two officers said with artificial smiles.

“Insolence!” Eldest Madam Wu assumed a mighty air and berated, “On what basis are you making an arrest? Our family’s Xiaosu is a pure and innocent maiden, how can she go with you to the Highest Judiciary?”

“We have an arrest warrant. Someone has provided evidence to show that your family’s eldest miss has committed attempted swindling. We have both witnesses and physical evidence, so Eldest Miss won’t be able to talk herself out of this. This humble officer has to trouble Madam to not wantonly obstruct the Highest Judiciary from handling this case, or else, it’ll be difficult to answer to the king!”

Eldest Madam Wu was so livid that her knees gave in and she plopped down onto her stool. She glared at the two officers with bloodshot eyes before hastily turning to Eldest Master Wu and crying, “Master.”

Master Wu was also trembling his lips, unable to say anything. Those two officers shook the arrest warrant in their hands and sniggered, “If Eldest Master refuses to hand her over, us humble officers will be unable to answer to our superior, so this would only leave us with the choice of conducting a search ourselves.”

After a short while, the pale-faced Wu Xiaosu was summoned to the main hall, and without another word, one of the officers stepped forward and handcuffed both of her wrists with a “kacha.”

Seeing this, Eldest Madam Wu screeched, “What are you doing, what are you doing? What did my daughter do? Why do you have to handcuff her!”

“Pardon, Eldest Madam Wu. Eldest Miss Wu’s attempted swindling is an entirely confirmed fact! She’ll definitely be imprisoned! If you don’t believe us, you can come along with us to the Highest Judiciary! As evidence, the inside corner of the rice sack was imprinted with your Wu Family’s seal!” The officer impatiently pushed aside Eldest Madam Wu, who had pounced over, and continued speaking. “Eldest Miss is a mystic cultivator, so to guard against the possibility of her running away, sorry, she has to wear these special handcuffs that target mystic cultivators.”

“Bring her away!”

“Mom!! Dad!!” Wu Xiaosu frantically screamed in fright as the two officers brusquely dragged her away.

Eldest Madam Wu nearly fainted, and she quickly clutched onto a maidservant’s hand, sputtering, “R-Ready the carriage, immediately ready the carriage! I’m going to Vassal King of An’nan’s Estate.”

When it was dusk, Vassal King Consort of An’nan, Wu Hongmo, brought Eldest Madam Wu into the palace to meet Her Majesty the Queen. The news that they tearfully complained to Her Majesty, accusing the crown prince consort of abusing her power to bully others, soon circulated wildly in the palace.

When the queen sent for the little lady at the Qiao Estate, the little lady had only been back for around five minutes. After hearing the summons, she didn’t even bat an eyelid and merely instructed Shaoyao, “Call the general manager here.”

Chapter 684: Betrayal

After Chang Zai rushed over, he paid his respects to the eldest miss with fear and trepidation.

This Eldest Miss may be young, but she had a formidable presence. Every time Chang Zai stood before Eldest Miss, he didn't even dare take a deep breath.

"Assemble all the servants in the entire estate within five minutes." Qiao Mu coldly commanded, "Bring me all their indenture contracts. Also, send for the middleman."

Chang Zai sank with a thump. He didn't dare hesitate any longer and rapidly notified all the servants, as well as sent someone to invite the middleman over.

Inside the quiet courtyard, Qiao Mu had people bring over a chair, where she sat down front and center. Meanwhile, on top of the small table set up in front of her was a personnel register.

Chunying and Xiayun were the earliest to arrive, and they had even sweated a bit from jogging over. When they saw their eldest miss flipping through the personnel register while sitting there, the two didn't dare say anything and submissively stood still.

Soon, five minutes had passed, and other than Chunying and Xiayun, only the gardener Old Bai, the cleaning nanny Mother Xu, two outer yard maidservants, and two boy servants had come.

The eight people, who had lined up in two rows, looked at each other in dismay.

Qiao Mu didn't speak either and only ordered Shaoyao to light a stick of incense on the table. She thumbed through the register lightly and only occasionally raised her head to look at the people who were present.

It wasn't until two sticks of incense had finished burning did the last two late maidservants rush over while yawning. Yet upon seeing that there were a lot of people standing in the courtyard, those two maidservants hastily squeezed into the back of the crowd.

Compared to other estates, there were indeed not many servants in the Qiao Estate. However, the estate also had few masters. The eldest branch's family of five plus the second branch's mere two people only added up to seven masters. Moreover, Qiao Mu hadn't been home for years on end. When put this way, it was more than sufficient for 15 to 16 servants to wait upon six masters.

Dad Qiao, Mom Qiao, and Second Uncle Qiao were all amiable people, and there weren't many chores for them to do normally either. Look at how undisciplined these people had become.

Qiao Mu sneered. She first had the eight people who had arrived on time to step out to the side before gazing coldly at the remaining seven to eight servants.

"Steward Chang, you didn't notify them to come see me within five minutes?" Qiao Mu questioned coldly.

"T-They were notified." Chang Zai responded with fear and trepidation.

"They were notified, yet they still dared to disobey. That means they totally disregarded me, their master." Qiao Mu gave another sneer. "First, each person gets 10 planks as punishment."

Those seven to eight boy servants and manservants immediately panicked, but they were promptly pressed down by several black-clothed youths who abruptly jumped out from behind Qiao Mu. Without room for objection, those black-clothed youths brandished their clubs.

Among them was a boy servant who made the biggest fuss and shouted the most ruthlessly. Qiao Mu recognized him as precisely her younger brother Qiao Sen's lapdog.

After beating each person exactly 10 times, the several black-clothed youths retreated behind Qiao Mu in a disciplined fashion.

Qiao Mu coldly swept her gaze over the people present. "If you still dare to howl, you'll get hit another 20 times."

In the blink of an eye, the front courtyard was absolutely silent.

"The reason I assembled everyone here is to have you all honestly answer a question." Qiao Mu's gaze turned abnormally bone-chilling as she scanned her gaze across each of the servants standing before her.

"Before today, someone had sold out my court's information to the Wu Family's eldest miss. That person said I was unsympathetic, with a crafty and detached nature, and didn't like being waited upon in close proximity. And had thus dismissed all of Nanzhu Garden's servants."

As soon as Qiao Mu finished speaking, the last two little maidservants that had mingled into the crowd hung their heads as low as possible, but their bodies had already started trembling uncontrollably.

Chapter 685: Reorganization

"I'm giving you all a chance to live. I'll let off whoever steps out right now and admits their crime sincerely." Qiao Mu shouted coldly, "Don't wait until I ferret you out! At that time, even the Heavenly King won't be able to save you!"

The last bellow resounded inside the courtyard, and everyone felt their chests constricting as their bodies shuddered uncontrollably.

This bunch of servants were simply idle most of the time but were still fed and clothed by her Qiao Estate. Ultimately, they even sold her out.

They were loose-lipped and told Wu Xiaosu that her Nanzhu Garden didn't have any servants.

Wu Xiaosu was even cocksure that she would stick her nose into other people's business and end up rescuing that woman. Thus, Wu Xiaosu had that shrew beg her in front of everyone so that she would "definitely" take her in, in consideration of her prestige.

Tsk, so delusional. You want to entrap her? Then she'll just let these repulsive people first have a taste of their own medicine!

"Not speaking, is that right?" Seven to eight dictum talismans abruptly floated before her eyes.

Qiao Mu coldly shouted, "I'm telling you all, wait until I personally find out who sold me out! You all, will completely have no living way out."

“Eldest Miss, spare our lives!”

“Eldest Miss, spare our lives.” The two little lasses that were hiding in the very back finally couldn’t withstand the pressure anymore and frantically scrambled to the front, bawling their eyes out as they repeatedly kowtowed.

On the side, Chang Zai was drenched in cold sweat from fright. His legs had turned as limp as noodles, and his calves kept trembling. *These two insolent little lasses actually dared to beard the lion in its den!*

Qiao Mu’s eyes shot out a cold glint. In her entire life, she hated betrayal the most. Even though these two little lasses’ betrayal didn’t result in any physical loss, this didn’t mean that she would easily forgive them either.

She didn’t get caught in someone else’s scheme precisely because she had a meticulous thought process and was attentive in observing people. It could be said that this was the experience she had accumulated after suffering so much in her previous life. It wasn’t because they were merciful!

These people who originally had no grudges against her completely cast aside their bottom line as human beings merely for a piddling benefit.

“Since you’re so loose-lipped, don’t speak anymore in the future. Feed them this!” Qiao Mu tossed out two medicinal pills. Two black-clothed youths immediately understood her intention and caught the pills. They stepped forward and restrained the two maidservants that were quivering in terror, forcing them to swallow the pills.

The two people became mutes on the spot, and try as they might, they couldn’t utter a word. The two’s horrified gazes fixated on Qiao Mu with a trace of unwillingness and resentment.

“You’re refusing to accept this, is that it? Then I change my mind.” Qiao Mu coldly looked at the two lasses that were glaring at her acrimoniously. “Kill them.”

The two lasses’ pupils abruptly contracted, and they opened their mouths before realizing that they couldn’t utter a sound at all. The next second, two cold gleams swept past their necks, and two patches of red spurted out.

The scene was completely silent. Every person only felt as if their hearts had been squeezed tightly by something, and they didn’t even dare take a deep breath.

“In the future, whoever dares to divulge any of my Nanzhu Garden’s trifling matters to irrelevant people will meet with this end. If you can’t keep your mouth shut, then you won’t need a mouth in the future.”

“Chunying.”

Chunying knelt on the ground with a flump and said with fear and trepidation, “Eldest Miss. This servant will definitely abide by my role and not dare be loose-lipped nor speak nonsense.”

Qiao Mu shook her head and looked at her as she said, “From now onwards, I will hand over the steward’s authority to you. Xiayun, you take Chunying’s place and wait upon my mother.”

“Starting from this month, you eight people’s monthly stipends will all double.” Qiao Mu’s words caused the eight people who had arrived first to all be taken aback.

“As for you people.” Qiao Mu gazed icily at the servants who had come late. “The airs you put on are so lofty that they’re even more arrogant than your masters’. My Qiao Estate isn’t able to provide for such people! Sell them all off.”

Chapter 686: Justice Tempered with Mercy

When those servants heard her verdict, they felt as if the sky was about to collapse.

They had gotten used to enjoying the good days, eating well and living well during these two years in the Qiao Estate.

At this time, the Qiao Estate had gloriously risen to the rank of a marquis’s estate and was becoming more prosperous with each passing day. Compared to other destitute families’ children, they each lived as comfortably as young masters and misses.

Yet Eldest Miss wanted to drive them out now?

This time, everyone was in a panic and could only resent themselves for offending Eldest Miss, this ancestor.

This ancestor was not as open to persuasion as the other people in the Qiao Family. She meant what she said, whether it was poisoning someone into a mute or killing someone. Her swift and decisive disposition was totally unlike the mild and tepid temperaments of the remaining people in the Qiao Estate.

The servants each bawled to the high heavens as they repeatedly begged for forgiveness.

But would Qiao Mu care about them?

She had already given them a chance. It was a pity that only half the people grabbed on to it.

Since that was the case, she didn’t need to hold back with them anymore.

“Such a ruckus, annoying! Kick them all out.” Qiao Mu threw the register onto the table and beckoned towards Chunying.

Chunying quickly jogged over, bowing respectfully before taking up the register.

“Cross out the names of the people that got kicked out today. Additionally, see if there are enough people to maintain the estate. If there aren’t enough, pick two to three well-behaved and dutiful people from the middleman. It doesn’t matter whether they’re male or female; they just have to be willing to properly do their job.”

“Yes, Miss.” Chunying was literate; furthermore, during these two years, she had always accompanied Madam and helped her manage the household duties, so she naturally had some ability to serve as a steward.

Qiao Mu nodded, satisfied. “It’ll be the new year in 10 days. Tomorrow, call over several dressmakers to sew two sets of winter clothing for each person for the new year. Calculate how much cloth will be needed and inform me later. It’s fine if there’s extra, but don’t cut back on anyone’s share.”

Chunying gaped her mouth slightly, and even the servants next to her were all gazing, dumbstruck, at their little master.

Their master, who was in a thunderous rage just earlier, was right now speaking softly, saying that she wanted to increase their monthly stipends and give them new clothes so that they could celebrate the new year gaily.

“Yes, Miss.” Chunying was all smiles as she bent her knees in a curtsy.

On the side, Shaoyao was smiling with compressed lips.

In fact, her miss was the easiest to get along with. As long as everyone dutifully did their job properly and didn’t cause any inconveniences nor stir up trouble, her miss wouldn’t care about what you did in the meantime.

Standing to the side, Chang Zai, whose thighs were still trembling, suddenly knelt to the ground with a flump and weakly called out, “Eldest Miss.”

By this time, Qiao Mu’s anger had already subsided by half, and when she turned to look at Chang Zai, her complexion had also improved a bit. “You weren’t strict in managing the household, which caused incidents to occur time and again. Do you know your mistake?”

“Eldest Miss, this old servant is to blame. This old servant earnestly requests Eldest Miss to not drive this old servant out.” Chang Zai said quaveringly.

The gardener Old Bai, who was close friends with Chang Zai, also knelt to the ground with a flump, kowtowing as he stuttered, “E-Eldest Miss, it’s o-okay if I-I d-don’t get that doubled monthly stipend. I-I b-beg Miss, don’t drive out, Big Brother Chang.”

They were both normal people, and Chang Zai was already more than 50 years old. If he were to be driven out, he would definitely be unable to find work. At that time, he truly wouldn’t be able to survive.

Mother Xu and the two of them were the earliest to enter the estate, so their friendship was naturally unlike others’. Mother Xu also hastily knelt down and pled for leniency together.

Qiao Mu looked at them expressionlessly, up until the point that the three people were on tenterhooks, with butterflies in their stomachs.

Chapter 687: Reward

Chang Zai was deeply afraid of implicating his two old coworkers and hastily cried out, “E-Eldest Miss, don’t be angry at Old Bai and Mother Xu. This matter has nothing to do with them. I-I, I’ll just go.”

As soon as he finished speaking, he stooped his back, turning around to leave.

Yet Qiao Mu called out indifferently, “Hold on right there.”

Chang Zai’s stride immediately froze.

Qiao Mu cast the three people a glance. “So that means, you two, are willing to give up your doubled stipend for Chang Zai?”

“Yes yes yes. Eldest Miss, we are willing.” The two people nodded together without any hesitation.

“You are also willing to leave the Qiao Estate yourself and won’t harbor a grudge against me?” Qiao Mu turned to Chang Zai again as she raised an eyebrow.

Chang Zai hastily turned around and knelt to the ground with a flump again. “This old servant doesn’t dare. These years, this old servant has received the Qiao Estate’s grace and has been in Master and Madam’s care. Even if this old servant leaves the estate, this old servant doesn’t dare do such things as betraying his masters.”

“Rise, all of you.” Qiao Mu looked at the three people exasperatedly. “When did I say that I was going to drive you out of the estate?”

Chang Zai, Old Bai, and Mother Xu were all stupefied, and then they started to carefully recall what had happened. Oh yeah, from the moment Miss started her tirade, she had never said anything about driving Chang Zai away. At most, she merely ignored Steward Chang.

“I retracted your position as the steward only because I felt that you’re not too suitable for the job.” Qiao Mu sighed and continued, “Although you’re irresolute in handling matters, you are a loyal and righteous person. In the many years that you’ve accompanied my parents, you’ve worked hard even if you didn’t produce results, so how could I drive you away? Could it be that in your eyes, your miss, me, is such an unsympathetic person?”

Chang Zai hastily said that he didn’t dare. Old Bai and Mother Xu were also clumsy of speech, so they copied Chang Zai in saying that they didn’t dare, they didn’t dare.

“Alright, all of you get up.” With a motion of her finger, Qiao Mu took out two small bags.

Completely understanding Qiao Mu’s intention, Shaoyao compressed her lips in a smile. She took the two small bags and walked to Old Bai and Mother Xu, handing them over. “Here, Miss’s reward to you. Take them and calm your nerves.”

The two people got up from the ground in a daze, and they each dumbly took over a small bag. Once they took a sneak peek inside, they saw two pieces of ham.

These years, the price of meat was much more expensive than that of rice.

This was a generous reward from out of the blue!

Old Bai and Mother Xu both dumbly looked towards their little master.

“Chang Zai, you have two very good friends.”

By this time, after knowing that Miss wouldn’t drive him out of the estate, Chang Zai’s nerves were already not as tense as before. Hearing her remark, he laughed from the bottom of his heart, nodding his head repeatedly.

“In the future, go serve my parents in their Beautiful Vista Court.” Qiao Mu said faintly, “You’re already getting on in years, so just instruct the younger ones to handle trivial matters.”

“Thank you, Miss. Thank you, Miss.” Chang Zai secretly wiped his old tears, and he felt even more guilty in his heart.

Miss not only didn't blame him for not managing the household properly, she even kept him in the estate. He couldn't be as careless anymore when taking care of Master and Madam's small courtyard in the future. He definitely couldn't betray Miss's trust in him.

Qiao Mu gave a nod before dismissing them all.

Chunying also led the remaining two maidservants and two boy servants in excusing themselves. She then went with the procuress to pick new servants.

Very soon, a black-clothed youth flashed to Qiao Mu's side and whispered into her ear.

Qiao Mu slightly raised an eyebrow, and a cold glint flashed past her eyes. “Let me go out and take a look.”

“Master, Nanny Qing, who serves the queen, has already been waiting for a long time.”

Qiao Mu's footsteps paused before nodding at the youth. “Go call her over.”

Chapter 688: Punishment

Qiao Mu waved her hand, motioning for the other hidden guards to leave, before bringing a hidden guard called Lightning towards the front door.

This Lightning, along with Huifeng, had come out of the Hidden Guard Barracks, whose purpose was a bit different from the nature of the Hidden Night Pavilion's work.

By now, Qiao Mu had finally figured it out completely.

People whose names had the character 'hidden' in them, such as Hidden Flower, Hidden Current, and the like, were all members of the Hidden Pavilion. They specialized in assassinations, but when those clowns were free, they liked to drop in at the Night Pavilion and stir up trouble.

On the other hand, people whose names had the character 'ye'[1] in them, such as Mei'ye, Ao'ye, Xiao'ye, and the like, were all members of the Night Pavilion. Their main job was to shuttle between the various large cities and towns to gather intelligence. Sometimes, they might even have to make a distant journey to another kingdom to gather various kinds of intelligence.

While the hidden guards that came out of the Hidden Guard Barracks were normally the crown prince's bodyguards.

Of course, sometimes, when the Hidden Night Pavilion was busy, the hidden guards might also need to lend a hand or whatnot...

The crown prince's Hidden Night Pavilion and Hidden Guard Barracks had been established for who knows how many years already. Since it had already grown to an extremely grand scale, our dear Qiao Mu felt quite satisfied and untroubled when she directly made use of it.

In particular, the Hidden Guard Barracks had a lengthy history. Reportedly, the king's old man, the late king, had directly passed it on to the crown prince when he was still alive. Inside, there were still some extraordinary talents and queer existences that Qiao Mu had never seen before.

Just as Qiao Mu brought Lightning to the front door, she saw a boy servant latching onto her younger brother, refusing to let go no matter what. Presently, that boy servant was bawling his eyes out, as if he wanted to vent out all his grievances.

The procuress could only awkwardly watch on as she stood to the side.

Other than this fired up boy servant who couldn't be extricated from Qiao Sen however they tried, the other maidservants and boy servants shrunk behind the procuress listlessly, not daring to resist one bit.

With a point of Qiao Mu's finger, Lightning's figure flashed, and he lifted up that endlessly blubbering boy servant.

Qiao Mu beckoned her younger brother over. "You've returned?"

"Sister." Just as he returned home from the academy, Qiao Sen was immediately rendered at a loss by his boy servant's bawls.

At this time, when he saw Qiao Mu standing at the door, he hastily ran over and held his sister's hand, asking, "Sister, what happened? Why is Ah-Dong sobbing like this?"

Qiao Mu didn't hide it from him and narrated the events. Afterwards, she questioned, "Do you want to still keep such an overweening servant that bullies his master?"

The boy servant hastily crawled forwards and knelt at Qiao Sen's feet, persistently shouting, "Young Master, Young Master, you can't abandon this servant!"

Qiao Sen's tiny face flushed red, and he gave that boy servant a good stomp. "You dare to disrespect my sister so! You deserve to be sold! This young master doesn't have such a wicked servant, go away this instant."

Let me tell you, even Crown Prince Big Bro had to listen to my sis, I, of course... can't be an exception.

Even this young master had been ruthlessly beaten by Sister, let alone you, a mere boy servant. You really are blind, actually dim-wittedly going against the rules. Such a ridiculously hilarious joke, attempting to challenge my sis? How capable did you think you were!

Our dear little Qiao Sen was one tractable cookie. He had long discovered that his Eldest Sis was the one who made the decisions in the family. Even his Big Bro, who was such an amazing person, had to listen to his Eldest Sis. *What did you, a boy servant, amount to? You even dared to climb all over his Eldest Sis, so didn't it serve you right to be berated!*

Our dear little Qiao Sen hurriedly drew a clear dividing line between him and the boy servant, indicating that they weren't of the same kind. He then pulled his sister towards the inside.

Chapter 689: A Tease

Elderly Lady had kept this child by her side from when he was young, spoiling him to the high heavens. Luckily, in the present, he was a bit terrified of his sister, which curbed his out-of-control behavior. Otherwise, it would be even harder to discipline him later on.

Qiao Mu cast a glance at this hobgoblin child, both annoyed and amused, before shaking her head and following him inside.

Nanny Qing just so happened to be led inside, and when she saw Qiao Mu, her expression slightly sunk. She walked forward and curtsied sloppily. "Eldest Miss Qiao, are you ready to leave now?"

"Oh, wait a bit." Qiao Mu said absentmindedly.

Yet Nanny Qing's expression turned even more unsightly. "Still need to wait a bit? This old servant is only afraid that this old servant can wait, but Her Majesty the Queen won't be able to!"

"You know whether or not Royal Mother can wait?" Mo Lian's voice suddenly travelled inside from the doorway.

Hearing his voice, Nanny Qing's heart jolted slightly in fright. She quickly turned around, and together with two junior royal maids, curtsied impeccably towards the crown prince. "Greetings to Your Highness."

Qiao Mu pattered to the crown prince and tugged his sleeves, saying, "Bring me to where Wu Xiaosu got locked up."

The crown prince nodded before turning to look at Nanny Qing and company. "You go back to Royal Mother and tell her that we'll come over in an hour."

Nanny Qing's pupils contracted slightly, and she hastily prompted, "But Your Highness..."

Nevertheless, the crown prince's cold and severe gaze shot over, landing on Nanny Qing. "You didn't hear me?"

Nanny Qing broke out into a cold sweat from fright on the spot, and she quickly knelt onto the ground with a flump, firmly keeping her head down as she said repeatedly, "Yes, yes, this old servant understands."

The crown prince held Qiao Mu's small hand and walked outside.

Before leaving, Qiao Mu curved her mouth into a cold sneer as she cast a glance at Nanny Qing, who was furtively peeping at her from the corner of her eye.

Wu Xiaosu was locked up inside the Highest Judiciary's prison, and she had already been in custody for almost four hours.

The two people's carriage headed straight for the Highest Judiciary. When they arrived, the assistant minister had already been informed and had come out early to welcome them, leading them to the prison.

The prison gate opened, and a long staircase appeared beneath their feet.

Qiao Mu glanced at the crown prince and gripped his sleeve.

The crown prince gazed at her amusedly and asked softly, "Going down by yourself?"

Qiao Mu nodded.

The crown prince looked at her helplessly. "What is it, private gossip between young ladies?"

As he said this, he turned to say to the Assistant Minister of the Highest Judiciary, "We'll wait here. Have the jailer help the crown prince consort open the door."

"Yes, yes." The assistant minister nodded repeatedly and motioned for a jailer to bring Qiao Mu downstairs.

Qiao Mu was just about to go down when she turned around again, suddenly raising a small hand and pinching the crown prince's face. She murmured, "I don't like her acting pitifully while looking at you."

When she remembered how Wu Xiaosu, that white daisy, targeted the crown prince with her sobs, Qiao Mu felt displeased inside.

When she finished speaking, she followed the jailer downstairs and left behind the petrified crown prince, assistant minister, and company.

Huifeng: "..."

He suddenly discovered that his master had been flirted with. *What to do?*

The Assistant Minister of the Highest Judiciary was almost forty years old. Nonetheless, he felt that he had kept up with the times quite well.

At this moment, his soul had returned to his petrified body, and he stealthily peered at the crown prince. Seeing that the latter was smiling in a joyous mood, he instantly felt that his own mentality had gone through the vicissitudes of life. The young'uns nowadays really knew how to tease their partners!

"Cough, Your Highness, how about, we first go upstairs. This humble official will order someone to prepare tea." Who knew how long the crown prince consort was going to chat with Miss Wu? In any case, he couldn't allow the crown prince to keep standing at the head of the stairs the entire time!

Chapter 690: Delusional

"..." *Crown Prince the Great?*

After calling him three times, the crown prince still didn't react much and just kept smiling...

On the side, Huifeng twitched his mouth before coughing lightly. "Uh, Assistant Minister, you go prepare first. Our Highness will head over in a bit."

"Yes, yes." The Assistant Minister of the Highest Judiciary hastily excused himself.

Huifeng couldn't resist facepalming.

It was over, his master had turned silly from the crown prince consort's flirting. The Assistant Minister of the Highest Judiciary didn't see it, but from his angle, he could see that the tips of his master's ears had turned red...

Sigh, life really was full of hardship. The crown prince consort's casual tease was enough to make my crown prince's soul leave his body!

"Your Highness." *Cough, don't stand at the head of the stairs and laugh yourself silly.*

"The assistant minister invites you over to drink tea." Huifeng had no other choice but to poke the crown prince.

Mo Lian gradually recovered his wits, blinking his phoenix eyes. "Where's Qiaoqiao."

Huifeng almost missed his footing and nearly rolled down the stairs.

The crown prince consort that had left after flirting simply didn't know that her one sentence had teased the man silly.

Under the jailer's lead, she arrived at the door of a single prison cell.

This kind of prison cell that was designed to lock up mystic cultivators was comparatively advanced. The door was even secured with an additional confinement talisman matrix.

It was simply impossible for normal mystic cultivators, cuffed with the specially-made fetters and manacles, to escape from this prison that was filled with confinement talisman matrices.

However, it was reportedly par for course for Ding Tingding to escape from prison. Even if you set up 17 to 18 talisman matrices, it was merely a matter of minutes for him to escape.

The two adjacent prison cells were empty, while the person locked up inside this center cell was precisely Wu Xiaosu.

The jailer brought Qiao Mu to the door, and after she gestured to him with her eyes, he opened the door for her and tactfully retreated far away outside.

Qiao Mu stepped through the doorway, and her gaze landed on Wu Xiaosu, who was huddling in the corner.

Wu Xiaosu raised her head upon hearing the sound of footsteps. Upon discerning that the person standing against the light was precisely Qiao Mu, she immediately glowered and pounced at Qiao Mu like a starving tiger.

Yet just as she was only a few steps away from Qiao Mu, her body halted, abruptly pulled back by two chains.

Both her arms had been firmly bound by iron shackles secured to the wall, so she could only bare her teeth and brandish her claws at Qiao Mu from a distance away.

"I had originally been unable to understand why you had to approach our Qiao Family time and again." Qiao Mu stood before Wu Xiaosu and gazed indifferently at her.

Later on, the crown prince had secretly told her that the royal maid who attempted to poison her during the small banquet had a brief contact with the Vassal King Consort of An'nan.

Her objective was already very clear.

The Vassal King Consort of An'nan wanted to avenge her good daughter, Commandery Princess Hui'an, and wipe out her humiliation.

"The Vassal King Consort of An'nan, Wu Hongmo, is your aunt, right." Qiao Mu declared coldly.

Wu Hongmo had designs on her starting from the day of the small banquet.

She truly was a delusional woman.

She wanted to feed her a slow-acting poison, letting her die unwittingly, without making a splash, so that it wouldn't draw the crown prince's suspicion.

This kind of poisoning tactic was crude and simple. Truthfully speaking, if she were successful, it could be considered a good plan.

It was only unfortunate for her that even after making meticulous calculations, she left out the possibility that Qiao Mu would also be versed in poison, having read through countless poison classics. For other people, this kind of slow-acting poison might be fairly covert and undetectable, but to Qiao Mu, it truly was too commonly seen.

As for Wu Xiaosu, she was under Wu Hongmo's orders to fake her sincerity and get close to the Qiao Family. This was so that she could gain their trust and find an opportunity to continue feeding Qiao Mu the slow-acting poison.

It was only unfortunate that Second Miss Qiao had disliked her from the beginning, let alone her sister, who was as cold as frost. Eldest Miss Qiao was so difficult to approach that she didn't have a chance at all.