Nobel Ruler 21

Chapter 21: Do You have the Title Deed?

With Rong Jin's command, Song Yuan behind him immediately clapped his hands to instruct the subordinates to inform the hunting ground.

The crowd revealed excited expressions.

It was rumored that the Crown Prince had spent a lot of effort over the years to take care of the hunting ground painstakingly. The types and levels of the fiends in the hunting ground could definitely not be compared to an ordinary hunting ground.

If they were lucky, they could make a vow with a rare fiend!

Chu Xianmin's hands were placed on top of her stomach, looking extremely elegant. However, her eyes were already sparkling with unconcealable emotions. She did not expect the Crown Prince to do so much for her.

He actually prepared such a big present for her on his birthday. Even though she had not gone in to take a look, she knew that the Crown Prince prioritized the hunting ground; the fiends inside would definitely not disappoint people.

Though the Chu family had their own hunting ground, they did not produce any good fiends, and she did not like any of them. It would undoubtedly be perfect if she could make a vow with a strong fiend as she was originally very talented.

Rong Jin leaned in and laughed. “Minmin, it’s all up to you to snatch that top prize.”

Chu Xianmin nodded shyly. “I know your kind intentions, Brother Jin. I’ll do my best!”

Rong Jin laughed out loud. He liked Chu Xianmin’s intelligence; she knew what to say and do at the right times.

An idea flashed across Chu Xianmin’s mind upon seeing him in a good mood. Afterward, she reduced the smile on her face and revealed an upset expression. She whispered, “It’s a pity Sister could not come.”

Rong Jin’s expression turned stiff and slightly cold.

The surrounding crowd naturally heard her words and immediately turned around to look.

How interesting! The sister that Chu Liuyue brought up was none other than the Big Missy of the Chu family—Chu Liuyue.

Everyone knew about her marriage agreement with the Crown Prince, but since she was born an invalid, the Crown Prince did not even care about her.

The Crown Prince had not invited her to his birthday parties for quite a few years already. If Chu Xianmin did not bring her up, who would still remember that person?

Rong Jin said coldly, “She’s naturally stupid. Her presence will only ruin everyone’s mood.”

Chu Xianmin then seemed to realize that she had said something inappropriate and hurriedly apologized like she was in a difficult position. “Brother Jin, don’t get mad. I just remembered that Sister has nothing to do at home usually. Thus, I thought it would be a good thing for her to come out and play…”

Nothing to do? What could a good-for-nothing possibly do?

The crowd secretly exchanged looks with mocking expressions.

The Crown Prince was also very unlucky. There were so many girls from distinguished families, but he unluckily picked an invalid as his fiance. How embarrassing!

“I’m thinking too much. Brother Jin and Sister’s engagement is coming soon. Sister is very busy and has no time to care about this…” Chu Xianmin’s voice became softer and softer and was filled with grievances and sourness, while her head gradually hung lower. “I’m the one that doesn’t have the right to say all of this…”

Rong Jin sneered in his heart. When Song Yuan came back previously, he had already explained that day’s incident to him in detail. Chu Liuyue still dared to hallucinate about their engagement. *Dream on!*

That night, a feast would be prepared for him in the palace. He would naturally tell his father that he wanted a clean break with that good-for-nothing.

Thinking of this, he said nonchalantly, “What’s the point of talking about someone irrelevant? Nobody can predict the future for sure. Just take care of yourself and fulfill your own tasks.”

Chu Xianmin was elated. The Crown Prince meant that he would not have anything to do with Chu Liuyue.

When she first heard Chu Liuyue nonchalantly mentioning the marriage agreement, she thought that the Crown Prince was really thinking of continuing with it. Now, it seemed like Chu Liuyue was just puffing herself up at her own cost.

Chu Xianmin nodded her head obediently and looked down to hide the pleasure in her eyes when she noticed that quite a few people looked at her with envy.

The smarter ones amongst the crowd immediately continued when they saw the situation.

“Haha! The prince is so generous today. We can’t let go of this chance!”

“That’s right! I won’t give in later!”

“Bring it on! I haven’t dueled in a while. I’ll practice with you later.”

The crowd kept bantering with each other, and the atmosphere was very lively.

Rong Jin laughed. “Okay, okay. Judging by the time, they should’ve brought the fellows over. It’s a good time to enter the mountain now.” He led the way forward as he talked.

Chu Xianmin followed right behind him.

The crowd fought to follow behind him, very afraid of being left behind.

The crowd was delightfully surprised by what they saw after passing through a forest.

The lush forest made the entire mountain look as clear as jade as it stood securely in its spot. A light breeze came by and made the leaves whistle.

There was someone guarding the tall, circular, black metal fence at the bottom of the mountain every few meters.

These guards were muscular and looked very strong.

The crowd could not help but be astonished. It must have cost an enormous amount just to protect the hunting ground. Nobody would be as wealthy in the entire Imperial City.

With such emphasis on the hunting ground, there must be fiends of high levels there.

Song Yuan, who was following behind Rong Jin, had his heart skip a beat. Previously, when he was in charge of the hunting ground, there were not so many people.

The pageboy, who was sent over, was currently standing in front of the hunting ground and having a fierce argument with the guard in charge of protecting the place.

“Who exactly are you? How dare you trespass the Crown Prince’s hunting ground? Have you lost your minds? How many lives can you afford to lose when you offend the Crown Prince?”

The guards remained nonchalant. “Do you have evidence that the hunting ground belongs to the Crown Prince?”

The pageboy was so frustrated until he laughed. “Everyone in the Imperial City knows that this is the Crown Prince’s territory. Why are you acting ignorant? Let me tell you; the Crown Prince will soon be here. If you still…”

“What’s the matter? What are you arguing about?” Song Yuan’s voice boomed as he rushed over when he noticed that something was amiss.

The pageboy immediately turned around and saw that Song Yuan was already behind him. Further behind was the Crown Prince and many others. He instantly started to panic. He might just lose his life for failing to complete the task the Crown Prince had assigned him.

The others might not know, but the servants in charge of Eastern Palace knew his temper the best.

He hurriedly knelt on the ground. “Sir, I don’t know where these people came from, but they’ve occupied the hunting ground. Now, they’re not allowing anyone to enter it.”

Song Yuan was stunned. How dare they mess with the Crown Prince’s territory? Were they tired of living? He looked at the duo and yelled angrily, “Are you guys crazy? No, who are you?”

These people were clearly not theirs. He suddenly thought of something and quickly looked at the other guards far away. They were all unfamiliar faces.

Song Yuan took a deep breath of cold air. Someone actually dared to snatch away their hunting ground right in front of their eyes? Why did he not receive any news before?

“Who are you? How dare you occupy the Crown Prince’s hunting ground?” His angered shout was very loud, and everyone with Rong Jin heard it crystal clear.

Instantly, the atmosphere turned dead silent.

Rong Jin’s smile gradually stiffened. “What is going on?”

When the two guards saw him, they greeted him but were not polite in their words. “Greetings, Crown Prince. My master told me to thank the Crown Prince for your painstaking efforts spent on taking care of this hunting ground. In the future, he’ll definitely pay you back for your kind deeds.”

Rong Jin thought that he had misheard him. “This is my hunting ground. When did the owner change? Why do I not know about this?”

A guard raised his head and asked, “Crown Prince, if this is your hunting ground, then… do you have the title deed to prove it?”

Chapter 22: Start of the Conflict

Rong Jin was stunned. He only recovered his senses after some time and understood the person's words. The face that was usually emotionless actually revealed an unimaginable expression.

I-is… this person asking me for the title deed? Just as he was about to holler, a blurry memory flashed in his brain. *That's not right? I really don't have the title deed to this hunting ground. Even though it was gifted by Father back then, it… was actually a gift for Chu Liuyue. The title deed… is with Chu Liuyue!*

"Crown Prince, the hunting ground belongs to whoever's name is written on the title deed, right? If I'm not wrong, it seems like this hunting ground was never yours." Even though the guard looked ordinary, he did not mince his words in front of the prince and even had a harsh tone.

Rong Jin instantly felt his stomach flip around; his chest felt like it was blocked by a ball of cotton, suffocating him and making it hard to breathe. This was because he had no way of refuting the other party's words.

The crowd following behind Rong Jin was also dazed upon seeing the situation.

What kind of situation was this?

Why did the Crown Prince's hunting ground suddenly become someone else's?

What kind of people are they, to be so daring enough to ask the Crown Prince for the title deed?

One of them suddenly remembered an incident long ago. If he did not remember wrongly, the title deed should be with Chu Liuyue. However, how can a good-for-nothing like her have the ability to go head-on with the Crown Prince?

Some people silently looked at Chu Xianmin.

Chu Xianmin was also in a daze for quite some time. She only remembered Chu Liuyue when she noticed that many people were looking at her intentionally and subconsciously.

Rong Jin tightly clenched his hands into fists in his sleeves to contain the anger raging in his heart. He asked coldly, “Did Chu Liuyue send you over?”

The guards shook their heads. “We have nothing to do with Big Chu Missy.”

Rong Jin sneered in his heart. *Nothing to do with her? They are even calling her ‘Big Chu Missy.’*

In the entire Imperial City, close to nobody would call that good-for-nothing in that manner.

He would never believe that Chu Liuyue had nothing to do with this.

“Do you mean that the hunting ground is currently yours?”

The guard said politely, “It belongs to our master.”

“How dare you?” hollered Song Yuan as he stepped forward. “The Emperor was the one who gifted the hunting ground to the Crown Prince. He has taken care of it diligently all these years. How did it suddenly become your master’s? I think you’re just looking for a fight!”

As he was talking, he circulated the force in his body as he turned his palm into a fist and punched one of them harshly. “Dragon Tiger Punch!”

Song Yuan was around 27 or 28 years old, but he had already surpassed a stage four warrior. This punch used his manly force and enormous strength. One could seemingly hear the punch cut through the air like a tiger’s whistle.

At this time, one of the guards put on a stance and threw a punch calmly. He actually chose to fight with him head-on!

Bang!

The boring impact noise started sounding in the quiet forest.

The immense force made the leaves gathered on the ground fly up.

Song Yuan did not even think of the other party as an opponent, but once he met with the other party’s fist, he could feel immense strength surging toward him. He could even seemingly feel that the other party was much stronger than him.

As expected, his body uncontrollably staggered backward in the next moment.

Deng! Deng! Deng!

He actually moved back three steps from the impact.

Stabilizing his body with much difficulty, he wanted to curse at them at the top of his lungs, but he felt something coming up his throat; his mouth was suddenly filled with the taste of blood.

Song Yuan pressed this breath down forcefully and swallowed the blood with much difficulty.

In no time, the atmosphere became stiff.

The duo attacked again, and Song Yuan staggered backward once again, while the guards were still standing stably.

Judging from Song Yuan's face that was as white as a sheet, anyone could tell that he was no match for the other opponent. He was a stage four warrior, but was actually beaten so easily.

Rong Jin's face was as dark as coal. He had completely lost his reputation in front of so many people; first, he was robbed of his hunting ground. His personal guard was then taught a lesson.

The guard took a step back and bowed toward Rong Jin. "Crown Prince, my master has ordered me to guard the hunting ground closely. I don't dare to defy his orders. I seek your understanding in this matter."

It sounded like he was seeking forgiveness, but in actual fact, he had just ripped off the Crown Prince's face and stepped on it mercilessly.

In the entire Country Yao Chen, the Crown Prince had the highest status, other than the Emperor himself.

Only a few people dared to do this, even if he did not have the title deed.

Rong Jin asked solemnly, “Who on earth is your master?”

The guards lowered their heads. “We’re from Zhen Bao Pavilion.”

…

In the Chu family estate…

Chu Liuyue took a look at the sky and finally stopped her training, as she took off the sandbags tied to her limbs. She muttered to herself, “It’s almost time…”

As expected, hurried footsteps were heard in no time. It was the First Elder’s pageboy. His face was filled with happiness as he watched her misery without any attempt to hide it.

“Chu Liuyue, First Elder is looking for you.” When he came, he saw how terrible First Elder looked. This time, Chu Liuyue was doomed.

Chu Liuyue looked at him lightly. “Who were you calling previously?”

A chill went down the pageboy's spine as he inevitably thought of Chu Liansheng. He heard that Chu Liansheng was cut by Chu Liuyue because he said the wrong things. He actually forgot that the current Chu Liuyue was different from the past.

The pageboy's voice became guilty and his arrogance from before disappeared. "Y-you… Big Missy, First Elder is looking for you."

Chu Liuyue then walked over at a normal pace. "If you don't know how to call people properly, there would be no use for your tongue. Do you understand?"

Chu Liuyue said her words nonchalantly, but it made the pageboy shiver in horror as he hurriedly nodded.

Chu Liuyue then followed him to the living room calmly.

The place she was living in was very isolated, so it took some time to walk over.

The pageboy started to become anxious, but he did not dare to rush her and could only hold it in.

After some time, Chu Liuyue then asked casually, "Who's here?"

"It's the Cro…" The pageboy answered subconsciously, only realizing that something was not right when he opened his mouth. However, the invisible pressure given off by Chu Liuyue made him explain himself obediently. "It's the Crown Prince's people."

Chu Liuyue did not say anything but sneered in her heart. At this point in time, Rong Jin was still not willing to show himself. It was clear that he did not lose much.

…

In the living room of the Chu family…

First Elder was sitting opposite a middle-aged man. Chu Xianmin sat beside First Elder.

The middle-aged man had a square face and looked ordinary, but the half-inch long scar on his face made him look ferocious. He held his broadsword and sat there without saying a word, but it made First Elder very uneasy.

This person was the Crown Prince's capable assistant. His presence was already worrying, and in addition to his words previously…

This Chu Liuyue is too daring!

"Big Missy is here…"

The few people in the living room raised their heads and saw Chu Liuyue walking in.

First Elder could not take her behavior lying down; he slammed the table and hollered, "Chu Liuyue! Are you crazy? Kneel immediately. Kowtow to admit your wrongs in front of Officer Zhao!"

Chapter 23: He Goes If She Goes

Chu Liuyue looked at him lightly and smiled seemingly. “First Elder, why do you like telling people to kneel so much? Do you really think that everyone else’s knees are as soft as yours?”

“You! You!” First Elder was so angry until his chest felt tight as his face reddened with anger. *This Chu Liuyue is really too arrogant! She dares to use that tone to talk to me like this repeatedly!*

Chu Xianmin at the side immediately went up to help the First Elder and comforted him. “First Elder, don’t be angry. It’s not good for your body. Sister, s-she might have done it on impulse… Sister, hurry up and apologize to First Elder and Officer Zhao.” She looked at Chu Liuyue anxiously as if she was really thinking for her sake.

“Minmin! Don’t stand up for her. This evil, unfilial creature is heartless! If not, she wouldn’t do such a thing,” hollered First Elder as his blood boiled even more.

Chu Liuyue’s eyes turned slightly cold as she raised her brows and asked, “First Elder, if I’m an evil, unfilial creature, then what is everyone in the Chu family? Don’t forget that I’m the Chu family’s eldest daughter. Besides, I would like to know what exactly I did to infuriate First Elder.

The same blood was flowing in their bodies. This kind of humiliation would implicate the entire Chu family. First Elder was instantly at a loss for words; he was so furious that his body started shaking. “How dare you have the cheek to say that? You actually sold the Crown Prince’s hunting ground to Zhen Bao Pavilion privately; half of Imperial City knows about it now!”

The hunting ground that the Crown Prince took meticulous care of became someone else's overnight. He was even rejected at the door on the day of his birthday party.

This was way too humiliating!

On the surface, everyone did not dare to talk about this incident that concerned the Crown Prince's reputation. However, it had already spread like wildfire in private. All the distinguished families in the Imperial City knew about it.

One just had to think carefully and would remember that the hunting ground was initially gifted to Chu Liuyue by the Emperor.

It was naturally related to Chu Liuyue, now that the hunting ground had become part of Zhen Bao Pavilion's possessions.

The Chu family had now become the laughingstock of the Imperial City.

Chu Liuyue was instead thinking about how strong Zhen Bao Pavilion's backing must be to embarrass the Crown Prince.

An average person would not even be able to withstand the Crown Prince's authority. Even if they had the title deed, they would not be able to take advantage of the Crown Prince right in front of him.

It was clear that Rong Jin did not dare to offend Zhen Bao Pavilion.

If she had a chance, she could check up on it secretly… As Chu Liuyue thought of this in her heart, her facial expression did not change. “That hunting ground was originally mine. Do I still need to care about others when I decide what to do with it?”

She said it righteously as if she did not think that this incident was wrong in any way.

First Elder was also taken aback.

Zhao Cheng knitted his brows at the side. “Big Chu Missy, do you mean that you took the initiative to sell the title deed?” At first, he thought that Chu Liuyue had no brains and was tricked into giving the title deed away. However, it now seemed that she had clearly done it on purpose.

Chu Liuyue nodded honestly. “So what?”

Zhao Cheng suddenly stood up, and he glared at Chu Liuyue ferociously with his sharp gaze. An invisible pressure immediately filled up the entire room. “The title deed is indeed written with Big Chu Missy’s name, but don’t forget that this hunting ground is a present the Emperor gifted to you for your marriage. Logically speaking, this hunting ground is only truly yours when you become the Crown Princess. Currently, you have no right to handle this on your own.”

Chu Liuyue tilted her head. “Officer Zhao, you’ve seemed to have forgotten that it’s my 14th birthday in a few days, which is also my engagement day with the Crown Prince. I’ll be the Crown Princess real soon. What’s wrong with selling a hunting ground? Could it be… that the Crown Prince has no intentions of being engaged to me?”

She looked naive; her eyes were confused as if everything was logical and right.

Zhao Cheng was instantly stumped, but his blood continued to boil. Was this Chu Liuyue really mental? How can a good-for-nothing like her dream about becoming the Crown Princess?

When Chu Xianmin heard the two words 'Crown Princess,' she was furious.

Chu Liuyue really will not stop until she sees the coffin. The Crown Prince has not even made any moves until now, yet she is still dreaming.

An idea flashed in her head, and she took a look at the solemn Zhao Cheng. She comforted him softly, "Officer Zhao, Sister is indeed in the wrong for this, but…"

"What right do you have to judge if I did the right thing or not?" interrupted Chu Liuyue.

Chu Xianmin revealed a wronged expression, and her tears rapidly welled up. She said pitifully, "It looks like… Sister is still angry at me. However, Sister, Brother Jin and I are really not like what you think… If Sister was angry and sold the hunting ground on impulse because of this misunderstanding, then it would really be my fault!"

This one sentence seemed as if she was standing up for Chu Liuyue, but it would only make other people hate Chu Liuyue even more. They would feel that she was a very petty and self-centered person.

Chu Liuyue smiled casually. "What misunderstanding? I'm the one with a marriage agreement with the Crown Prince. What is there to misunderstand? If not, can you really snatch my marriage agreement away?"

Chu Xianmin's face turned white. Now, it looked like she really did not have any right.

Chu Liuyue became increasingly arrogant just because of the marriage agreement.

She lowered her head in grievance and did not utter a word.

Zhao Cheng sneered. “I didn’t expect Big Chu Missy to be so amazing.”

Everyone knew that the Crown Prince liked Chu Xianmin, but Chu Liuyue still dared to talk about the marriage agreement.

We’ll see what pride she will be left with after the Crown Prince gives up on the marriage agreement. “Since Big Chu Missy doesn’t want to get the title deed back, then may I trouble you to explain it to the Emperor and the Crown Prince yourself?”

As he said, he looked at First Elder and bowed. “I would like to invite First Elder and Big Chu Missy to enter the palace and meet the Emperor for tonight’s feast. You can also talk to the Crown Prince about the engagement.”

The last sentence was filled with unconcealable mockery.

First Elder hurriedly said, “Don’t worry, Officer Zhao.”

Zhao Cheng turned around and walked away after he finished his sentence. When he walked by Chu Liuyue, he purposely stopped for a while. “Big Chu Missy, I… wish you the best of luck.”

His aggression went straight towards Chu Liuyue. However, Chu Liuyue still smiled lightly without a change in expression. “I’ll return this wish back to the Crown Prince.”

When Zhao Cheng met with her gaze, he instantly felt an icy cold suppression. His heart unconsciously skipped a beat, and he unknowingly reduced the aggression he was giving off.

He sneered, clenched his fists tightly, and turned around to walk away.

First Elder glared at Chu Liuyue harshly. “Let’s see if you’ll still dare to be this arrogant after tonight’s feast.”

Chu Liuyue shrugged her shoulders. “No one knows who will have the last laugh.” After she finished her sentence, she turned and walked away.

First Elder cursed. “Evil creature!”

A smile darted across Chu Xianmin’s eyes. *After tonight, both the Chu family and the Crown Prince will not care about Chu Liuyue anymore.*

…

Prince Li Mansion…

The officer handing over the invitation letter was waiting outside politely with his back bent. He did not dare to move casually, which would show his disrespect, even under the sweltering heat that caused his body to be drenched in sweat.

Even though the person inside had just returned to the capital, the title 'Prince Li' was enough to reveal his status in the Emperor's heart.

Screech!

The door opened.

A young guard wearing a light green gown came in.

He knew that this person was Prince Li's personal guard—Yan Qing—and immediately greeted him. "Greetings, Officer Yan Qing. May I know if Prince Li will be attending the Crown Prince's feast at night?"

Prince Li had come back for nearly one month, but he had not stepped out before. It seemed like he would not…

"Of course, I will." A young man's low voice, with a hint of pleasure, sounded clearly from the study as if precious stones had hit each other.

She was going, so he would naturally go as well.

Chapter 24: She was Chu Liuyue!

Ming Cui Palace…

All the distinguished people from the Imperial City were gathered at this place where the lights shone brightly and elegantly.

This was the Crown Prince—Rong Jin's birthday party.

Rong Jin was the Emperor's eldest son and was made Crown Prince when he was born. He was well-loved by the Emperor. With the addition of his outstanding talent and extraordinary capabilities, the Emperor favored him even more over the years.

Many people would then naturally lick the boots of someone with such high status.

Power and status would naturally come their way if they got into the Crown Prince's good books.

The crowd entered gradually, making the palace increasingly lively.

The crowd was not as restricted yet since the Emperor, Empress, and the Crown Prince had yet to arrive. In between the chuckles, there was a seemingly odd atmosphere. Quite a few people kept looking at the entrance as if they were waiting for someone to arrive.

“Hey, did you hear? The Crown Prince was humiliated today.”

“What? When did this happen? Why don’t I know about it?”

“Brother Yan, you still don’t know about this? It has been spreading like wildfire. Today, the Crown Prince said that he wanted to go to the hunting ground…”

Everyone started chiming in with excited and nosy expressions. They were clearly talking about the incident.

It was impossible to stop the news from spreading as Rong Jin had indeed invited quite a number of people with extraordinary statuses.

One spread to two, two to three, and in no time, everyone knew about it.

“Isn’t that person from the Chu family an invalid? Why does she have so much guts to sell the hunting ground? Everyone knows that the Crown Prince loves that hunting ground and has spent a lot of effort on it. How dare she just sell it?”

“Hah, what does an invalid know? She most likely wanted to attract the Crown Prince’s attention.”

“Haha! That’s too stupid. If she took the initiative to return the title deed to the Crown Prince, perhaps he would pity her. But now, she has really offended the Crown Prince thoroughly.”

“The Crown Prince has long given up on this marriage agreement. There will definitely be a good show to watch today.”

Just when the crowd was talking about this excitedly, the notification command rang outside the palace.

“Chu family’s First Elder—Chu Xiao—is here!”

The palace instantly quietened down, and everyone looked over.

They saw a line of people walking in.

The first person was Chu family’s First Elder—Chu Xiao.

Behind him was Chu Yan, Lu Yao, and Chu Xianmin.

Chu Xianmin was wearing a long snow-white dress with flower embroidery. Her dress made her originally pretty face even more attractive. Her looks could be considered one of the top few in the entire Imperial City. In addition to her outstanding talent, she was also known as ‘Imperial City’s Most Beautiful Girl.’

Her presence immediately made the crowd’s eyes light up. However, nobody dared to look charmed by her looks. After all, this was someone the Crown Prince had set his eyes on. Who would dare to fight with the Crown Prince?

The crowd looked behind them and saw a handsome yet familiar face.

“Chu Ning is here?”

Some people gasped.

Chu Ning was very famous in the Imperial City earlier on, but ever since he got injured and was crippled, he did not appear in front of a crowd. His sudden appearance then made everyone remember that there was such a person.

“He’s Chu Liuyue’s biological father. Of course, he had to come here and bear the responsibility…”

Some guessed in secret.

Everyone’s gaze landed on Chu Ning, but he still looked calm and collected as if he did not notice the crowd.

A young girl followed beside him. She looked younger than 13 or 14 years old, and she was decked in red. She was very skinny, but her back was straight.

One look and the crowd confirmed that the young girl was Chu Liuyue.

Almost everyone’s eyes landed on her.

She was never outstanding over the years, being an invalid. Yet, she secretly sold the hunting ground, humiliating the Crown Prince. How could this not attract the crowd's curiosity?

In the crowd, the atmosphere became increasingly silent and stiff.

The lights shone down brightly.

She took a step forward, and the clear lights landed on her face.

Everyone was shocked.

Her innocent white face was in full view. Her brows looked as far as the mountains; her nose was high, and her lips were red without any makeup. It was an extremely clear and pretty face. Her pair of dark but shiny eyes attracted the crowd's attention the most. Her eyes were clear, clean, and pure.

One look at her, and the crowd talked amongst themselves subconsciously.

Her face still looked quite young; it was not hard to imagine how pretty she would look in a few years.

The palace's atmosphere suddenly became special.

Nobody expected the invalid from the Chu family to have such a mesmerizing face.

Chu Xianmin noticed this, and her blood boiled. The hands in her sleeves clenched into fists; her delicately manicured nails dug into her skin, causing her to hurt. *Chu Liuyue probably saw a ghost this month. Not only did her temperament change completely, but she even looks different.*

Chu Liuyue's original yellow and sickly face turned clear and pearly white. An indescribable composure also replaced her fearful eyes. Her five features clearly did not change much, but she looked way prettier than before.

Before Chu Xianmin came, she was kind of worried that her limelight would be stolen away, and it indeed happened.

Upon seeing her daughter's weird expression, Lu Yao silently pulled Chu Xianmin back.

So what if Chu Liuyue became a little prettier? An invalid doesn't even have the right to become the Crown Princess. Chu Xianmin took a deep breath and suppressed her jealousy with much difficulty. *I must destroy Chu Liuyue today.*

The crowd only recovered their senses and started muttering when the Chu family sat down.

The palace regained its previous liveliness.

Everyone looked happy and excited. However, their eyes were still on Chu Liuyue.

"I didn't expect the Chu family's invalid to be so pretty… Why didn't I hear about her before?"

“Oh, do you have any thoughts about her…?”

“Haha! The Crown Prince won’t marry her for real. What’s wrong with thinking about it? After all, it’s hard to find such a beauty.”

The young, aristocratic children bellowed with laughter.

Chu Ning’s face was ice-cold. Just as he was about to stand up, Chu Liuyue lightly pressed his hands down. He turned back and saw her shaking her head.

The main star of the show today was Rong Jin. As for these people… she really did not need to spend any effort on them.

Looking at her calm composure, Chu Ning did not insist any longer. He knew that his daughter was different from the past and that she definitely had her own ideas.

Chu Ning did not realize that he already treated Chu Liuyue as his pillar of support subconsciously.

“The Crown Prince is here!”

When the command sounded, the entire palace was silent once again.

Chu Liuyue looked over and saw a dark purple figure appear in front of her.

The figure had a considerably handsome face, but his gaze was cunning, which incurred people's wrath.

She squinted her eyes. *Crown Prince Rong Jin!*

The other party seemed to have noticed her looking at him and quickly glanced over.

The two people's eyes met.

Surprise flashed across Rong Jin's eyes. He had clearly not seen a girl of such beauty before. Even Chu Xianmin seemed ugly when compared to her.

The next moment, he noticed that the young girl was actually sitting at the Chu family's seat.

He instantly understood. *She is Chu Liuyue!*

Chapter 25: A Gift for the First Meeting

The charming and gentle thoughts in Rong Jin's mind dissipated instantly.

Chu Liuyue is the one who has affected my reputation for years because of her status as a loser. She even sold the hunting ground without consulting me, causing me to lose face in front of the imperial families' sons.

If he didn’t take his revenge by ten times or more, he would have been the Crown Prince for nothing!

Rong Jin forced himself to suppress his anger and walked straight forward.

The crowd was shocked to discover that he was actually heading towards Chu Liuyue.

He looked condescendingly at Chu Liuyue while maintaining a calm demeanor, but anyone could see the turbulent waves beneath his seemingly calm disposition.

Countless pairs of eyes stared intently at the two.

First Elder and the others immediately stood up and bowed. “Pleased to meet Your Highness.”

However, Rong Jin ignored them. His eyes were trained on Chu Liuyue as he asked pointedly, “Are you Chu Liuyue?”

Chu Liuyue met his eyes and answered frankly. “Exactly.”

Rong Jin slowly clenched his hands in his sleeves. He thought Chu Liuyue would panic, but the young girl before him was calm. He couldn’t see any uneasiness in her at all! *Where did she get her courage from?*

“You’re not very old, but you have a lot of guts. I thought you wouldn’t dare to come today.”

Chu Liuyue blinked her eyes. “What made you think that I wouldn’t dare to come? Your Highness, didn’t you send word to the Chu family and demand that I come today?”

Rong Jin choked at once. Then, he sneered. “You really have a sharp tongue.”

Chu Liuyue smiled and responded, “Thank you for your compliments, Your Highness.”

Rong Jin glared at her before he turned around and headed towards his seat.

First Elder turned and gave her a disgusted look. “You don’t know…”

“First Elder, if you wish to embarrass yourself in public, feel free to scold me,” said Chu Liuyue lightly and sat down again calmly.

It suddenly dawned on First Elder that they were in Mingcui Palace, not the Chu family estate.

Everyone was waiting to see them make a fool of themselves. It would be bad if they made a scene now.

After much self-restraint on his part, First Elder finally waved his sleeve violently and kept quiet.

The Crown Prince obviously hated Chu Liuyue and was bound to throw a fit later. He would simply have to kick her out when the time came.

…

The palace quickly resumed its bustle, but many people were still secretly checking out Chu Liuyue.

She didn’t seem to mind as she sat peacefully in her seat. In reality, she had already swiftly checked them out.

Apart from the topmost position in the middle where His Majesty and the Empress were seated, the main hall was divided into two parts from the left and right.

The ones sitting at the very front were the princes and princesses of noble status.

As she had already inquired earlier, His Majesty had given birth to a total of nine princes and three princesses. Among whom three princes and one princess had died prematurely.

Currently, there were only six princes and two princesses alive.

Seated across from the Crown Prince was a man dressed in a black powerful suit. He looked about the same age as the Third Prince, but his features were rigid yet handsome. Even his temperament was completely different. He had a murderous aura. It could only be honed on the battlefield.

He was the Third Prince, Rong Jiu.

He joined the Northwest Army at the age of 15. As a young general, he had a prestigious reputation in the army. For this precise reason, he could stand up against the Crown Prince even though his birth mother was only a noble lady.

The court had long been secretly divided into two factions. The Crown Prince might have the advantage, but Rong Jiu was also not to be underestimated.

On Rong Jin's side was naturally the Fifth Prince, Rong Qi, who was born from the same mother. He was also one of the only two princes with a title other than the Crown Prince.

The Eighth Princess and the Ninth Prince, Rong Shu and Rong Feng, were seated next to Rong Jiu. However, there were a few empty seats.

Further back were the four great family clans—Si, Gu, Chu, and Lu—on both sides.

The Chu family was seated behind the Gu family. The Lu family was seated opposite them, behind the Si family.

Among the four families, the Si family was the most powerful while the Chu family was the weakest.

Originally, the Chu family had enjoyed a higher status than the Lu family. But over the years, they had fallen out of favor while the Lu family surpassed them with their wealth and sat in the third position.

Shortly after Rong Jin sat down, a burst of laughter suddenly came from outside the palace. At the same time, a loud and majestic summon could be heard.

“His Majesty has arrived. The Empress has arrived.”

Here they come!

Everyone rose quickly and bowed in unison towards the direction of the Emperor and his Empress.

“Long live His Majesty!”

Chu Liuyue did the same as everyone else.

“Hahaha. Everyone, rise. Today is the Prince’s birthday banquet. There’s no need to be so formal.” A middle-aged man’s powerful laughter rang throughout the palace. “Alright. Zhen Zhen, go look for your brother too.”

Only then did everyone see the Fourth Princess, Rong Zhen, who was behind the Empress. She was also born to the current Empress—a true First Princess. She looked about 16 to 17 years old. Her gorgeous palace attire set off her face with increasing beauty.

“Then Father Emperor has promised Zhen Zhen?”

Emperor Jiawen smiled in favor. “Of course! You’re the most mischievous of all. Look at the rest of them. None can rival your trouble-making ability. If I don’t agree, I’m afraid you’re going to create a mess today.”

Rong Zhen wrinkled her nose, but there was a coquettish smile on her face as she happily made her way to sit beside Rong Jin.

Any fool could see how much Emperor Jiawen doted on her.

Everyone sat only after the Empress had settled down.

Chu Liuyue quickly looked up and stole a glance at the Emperor.

Emperor Jiawen, Rong Xiao.

The last time she saw him was during the Grand Court Meeting.

All of Tianling Dynasty's affiliated countries would come to seek an audience during the Grand Court Meeting, which was held once every three years.

Those of Rong Xiao's status, however, could only stand at the very end. They basically didn't even have the right to speak to her. But she had an excellent memory. She was already preparing to take over her father's position at that time, so she was very careful to remember everyone's appearance and their relationship with each other.

Compared to that time, Rong Xiao seemed to have aged. His face and aura were very different. Yes, at that time, he was humble and could only stand among the crowd, looking up to her from afar.

Now, however, his and her position had been completely flipped!

She quickly withdrew her gaze after only one glance.

Emperor Jiawen was aware of the strange gaze falling on him. But when he tried to look, he didn't find anything unusual.

As soon as Rong Zhen sat down, she saw the gloomy look on Rong Jin's face. She suddenly recalled something and looked toward the Chu family.

She only managed to see a slender frame because Chu Liuyue was seated in the second row.

She leaned close to Rong Jin and asked softly, "Is that her?"

Rong Jin muttered a 'hmm.'

"Hmph! Who does she think she is? Don't worry, Brother. I'll help you out."

Rong Jin moved his eyebrows but made no attempt to stop her. This was a tacit acceptance.

Rong Zhen was rude and arrogant, and she always did things out of the ordinary. However, because her parents doted on her, nothing would happen to her even if she made a mess of things.

As the Crown Prince, he would be at a disadvantage if he got himself into trouble with a woman because of a hunting ground. It would be perfect for Rong Zhen to step in.

In the middle of the conversation, Rong Zhen opened her mouth and asked loudly, “I’m sure this is the ‘famous’ Miss Chu, right?”

Everyone quiet down. Then, they immediately realized that Rong Zhen was going to find fault with Chu Liuyue.

Chu Liuyue raised her eyes.

Rong Zhen smiled unkindly and said, “I haven’t seen you much throughout all these years. Today, I feel like I’ve seen you for the first time. I plan to give you a gift for our first meeting.” With that, she clapped her hands.

“Someone, come and present the treasure that I won the day before yesterday.”

Chapter 26: I’m Willing to Try!

A huge cage covered with black cloth was moved over. The crowd couldn’t guess what was inside. However, Chu Liuyue could smell the light fishy scent, and she narrowed her eyes.

Rong Zhen stepped forward and pulled the cloth away.

Shua!

A golden-yellow python was coiled up inside the cage. Its body was as thick as a human thigh. Its layers of pale golden scales reflected the cold lighting. Its blood-red vertical pupils were more like two sharp daggers, cruel and indifferent. It was a Golden Python, a third-grade beast.

The sudden sight of light caused it to be alert. It raised its huge head, showed its fangs, and made hissing sounds which sounded creepy.

The crowd in the palace were taken aback by the sudden revelation of this huge creature. Even Emperor Jiawen, who was seated up there, appeared to be surprised.

He then followed Rong Zhen's line of sight and looked over. A young girl's unfamiliar face appeared before him.

In his heart, he already knew that it was the Big Missy of the Chu family, Chu Ning's daughter—Chu Liuyue—who had a marriage agreement with Rong Jin.

"Zhen Zhen, what are you doing?" asked Emperor Jiawen. "This is your brother's birthday banquet, not the place for you to fool around." He remembered that Chu Liuyue was born with a lacking Yuan meridian and that she was unable to cultivate for her entire life.

How was she going to handle this third-grade Golden Python? He wasn't concerned about Chu Liuyue, but she had an existing marriage agreement with Rong Jin. It wouldn't be good if things got ugly. Besides, if he indulged Rong Zhen with so many pairs of eyes on them, people would think that the royal family was ruthless. They would think that they treated Chu Liuyue so shabbily because she was a loser.

Instead, Rong Zhen laughed. "Father, this is my first time meeting Big Missy Chu. I like her so much that I want to give her the Golden Python that I tried extremely hard to obtain. I caught it myself. I initially wanted to keep it as a pet, but my meeting with Miss Chu is fated. I am willing to part with it, no matter how painful it is for me."

She looked at Chu Liuyue and said, “I’m guessing that Big Chu Missy hasn’t obtained a contracted fiend yet, right?”

A few snickers came from the crowd.

What kind of contracted fiend could a good-for-nothing have?

Quite a number of eyes sarcastically landed on Chu Liuyue as they waited for a good show to start.

Rong Zhen pulled a face as though she was displeased. “What? Is it possible that Big Chu Missy doesn’t care for the Golden Python that I’m giving her?” She was the most favored true-born princess of the country. Who would dare to say they didn’t like what she was giving them?

Chu Liuyue stood up. “The Fourth Princess is so kind. I am very grateful from the bottom of my heart. Why wouldn’t I like it?”

Only then did Rong Zhen smile again. She crooked a finger at Chu Liuyue as though she was summoning a lowly servant. “Since you are so grateful to me, why don’t you come here and accept your gift?”

Chu Liuyue paused for a moment before moving forward. She first bowed to Emperor Jiawen, then she looked at Rong Zhen and bowed again. Her movements were very standardized, but they were even better executed than any of the palace’s training sisters.

All her movements were as smooth as a flowing river; it was pleasing to the eyes. Most importantly, she was carrying herself like royalty. Her disposition was more distinguished than that of the true-born princess, Rong Zhen, herself.

Despite the fact that she was wearing old clothes with frayed edges, and her small face was unpainted, she stood out more strikingly than the gorgeous Princess Rong Zhen—who had dressed with care for the occasion.

Like a pearl, she would be the first to attract everyone's attention in any location.

Some people couldn't help but whisper among themselves.

"Isn't Chu Liuyue a born good-for-nothing and was thrown into the pile of inferiors since she was a child? How is it that she is so well-mannered?"

"It's kind of strange! No one in the Chu family even took her seriously, so how can they be teaching her this? Was she taught specifically before entering the palace?" The voice of the person who said this gradually diminished.

All of them came from great families, so they naturally knew very well that these rules could not be learned in a matter of a day. That noble and elegant temperament simply couldn't be cultivated overnight.

"… How is that possible? Even Chu Xianmin didn't have such nobility and elegance."

"Not to mention Chu Xianmin, don't you see that even the Fourth Princess can't be compared to her?"

The crowd didn't dare to say this openly. But with one look exchanged after another, they knew what everyone else was thinking.

Rong Zhen definitely sensed this too. A surge of anger arose from within her. *What is Chu Liuyue pretending to be?* She didn't believe that this loser could stir any waves. "Miss Chu, although this python is my gift to you, there is a condition."

Rong Zhen's scarlet lips curved into a smile as she pointed at the Golden Python. "This is a newly-captured Golden Python. It is wild and untamed. If you want to be its master, you will have to defeat it. So, how about you fight it instead?"

The atmosphere froze instantly. Nobody expected Rong Zhen to make such a request.

Chu Liuyue is a loser. She will only die if she fights the third-grade Golden Python. Emperor Jiawen frowned without waiting for Chu Liuyue to speak. "Zhen Zhen, stop your nonsense!"

The smile on Rong Zhen's face disappeared, and she said coldly, "Father, I am not messing around. I'm doing this for a reason! Do you know that she sold the hunting ground belonging to my brother, the Crown Prince, for private use?"

Emperor Jiawen was stunned. "What?"

"Brother put in a lot of effort into that hunting ground. In the end, it was all for naught! He had been generous enough to leave her alone, but as his sister, I can't stand it. This Golden Python might be a third-grade fiend. However, it can't compare to what Brother has lost!"

She raised her voice as she looked at Chu Liuyue. "Are you going to admit it or not?"

Emperor Jiawen finally recalled that he had indeed given a hunting ground to Chu Liuyue. *She actually sold it? In any case, it was something I personally bestowed to her. How could she sell it away so casually?*

This caused Emperor Jiawen to harbor some dissatisfaction toward Chu Liuyue. But if he were to agree with Rong Zhen's proposition, it was possible that Chu Liuyue might not live until the end of the day.

"Your Majesty, Chu Ning is willing to atone for my daughter's sins." At this moment, Chu Ning suddenly stepped forward and knelt on one knee.

Emperor Jiawen's attitude somewhat relented slightly when he saw Chu Ning. After pondering for a while, he finally nodded. "This is possible." Although Chu Ning was no longer the same, it shouldn't be too dangerous for him to deal with a third-grade Golden Python. Moreover, he was Chu Liuyue's father. It would be most appropriate for him to step in.

On the one hand, it saved the Crown Prince and the royal family from embarrassment; on the other hand, the father-daughter duo's lives wouldn't be in real danger.

In that instant, Chu Liuyue suddenly stepped forward. "I am willing to try."

Rong Zhen had been annoyed about losing an opportunity to teach Chu Liuyue a lesson, but she didn't expect her to take the initiative to come forward on her own!

"What did you say? Say that again."

Chu Liuyue raised her chin. Her black and pure eyes were as brilliant as the stars. "I said that I am willing to try. I will fight the Golden Python."

Chapter 27: A Gift in Return

Everyone's jaw dropped.

What did she say?

She really dared to fight that Golden Python?

She's not being bold; she must be crazy!

Even a stage-three martial artist could not subdue a third-grade Golden Python on their own, much less her. She must be courting her own death.

"Yue'er!" Chu Ning was also taken aback, and he tugged at Chu Liuyue's sleeve. "This Golden Python is fierce and much more powerful than any ordinary third-grade fiend. You…"

Chu Liuyue merely looked at him and smiled. "Father, don't worry."

Miraculously, these words soothed Chu Ning's troubled and worried heart. It was as if she had a magical power within her. Subconsciously, it made people believe in her. If she said not to worry, then all would be fine.

Chu Ning moved his lips. He had already guessed that her Yuan meridian was fully repaired, and she had most likely started cultivating. However, how could she be a match for a third-grade fiend within such a short period of time?

After repeatedly struggling with himself, Chu Ning finally swallowed his words and nodded gravely. “I believe in you.”

This warmed Chu Liuyue’s heart. This feeling of being trusted unconditionally was most reassuring.

Rong Zhen naturally wouldn’t let go of this opportunity. She immediately declared, “You agreed on your own accord. I have nothing to do with this, regardless of the outcome.”

Chu Liuyue mocked Rong Zhen in her heart. *No ordinary person can display such shameless behavior in public.*

Emperor Jiawen hesitated as he exchanged a look with his empress.

The Empress nodded her head and whispered, “Your Majesty, this concerns the royal family after all. Wouldn’t it be enough to teach her a lesson in person and have her protected?”

Emperor Jiawen was deeply impressed, so he specially sent a few guards to rescue Chu Liuyue immediately if something did go wrong.

Nevertheless, the crowd wasn’t as optimistic.

They all thought Chu Liuyue was courting death.

Rong Zhen smiled proudly as she turned to reclaim her seat. However, Chu Liuyue stopped her.

“Fourth Princess, please wait.”

Rong Zhen turned back impatiently. “What else?”

“The Fourth Princess has given me such a great gift. I am deeply touched, so I have also prepared a gift in return for your kindness. It will be sent to you later. Please kindly accept it.”

Rong Zhen sneered contemptuously. “You’re only a… Fine. Just deliver it later.” *A loser who has been disregarded by her waning aristocratic family. What good can she do? It’s ridiculous!*

She walked over to Rong Jin and winked complacently.

The corners of Rong Jin’s lips curled ever so slightly. He gave her an affirmative look and quickly restrained himself.

In the center of the palace, there was only Chu Liuyue and the Golden Python that was trapped in the huge black cage.

Chu Liuyue slowly walked toward the Golden Python until she was in front of it.

A woman and a beast faced off.

“Audacious fool.” Chu Xianmin was relieved by what she saw.

There were plenty of people that would deal with Chu Liuyue without her having to do anything!

Everyone quieted down unconsciously.

…

The Golden Python was inherently fierce. On top of that, Rong Zhen hadn’t subdued the beast on her own. Instead, she rounded it up and used every trick in her sleeve to capture it. Moreover, Rong Zhen had deliberately starved it for the past few days. The python was on the verge of extreme violence, waiting to explode. This was even more dangerous than an ordinary python!

Initially, Rong Zhen wanted to tame this Golden Python and have some fun with it. However, today she heard about what happened with Rong Jin, and she knew Chu Liuyue would be present. Thus, she ordered the python to be brought here specifically for this occasion to teach Chu Liuyue a lesson.

Chu Liuyue took one glance and surmised that they were trying to give her a hard time.

Hiss!

The Golden Python, with its hostile eyes, turned more manic once it sensed Chu Liuyue's scent.

She headed straight for the guard beside her and cupped her hands together. "May I borrow your sword?"

The stunned guard subconsciously looked towards Emperor Jiawen.

Emperor Jiawen nodded. "Give it to her."

Only then did the guard remove the sword at his waist and hand it to Chu Liuyue.

"Thank you." She took the sword and waved it around with fluid motions. *The blade is too heavy and not sharp enough; the materials used for forging the sword are also not good enough. Nevertheless, the sword is sufficient.*

"Seems like she has some skills."

"It's just a charade! Her Yuan meridian is crippled, and she can't even absorb force. What can she do?"

"True. Maybe she asked for a sword to give herself some courage."

Chu Liuyue ignored them. She took half a step back with one foot, gripped the hilt of her sword with both hands, and raised it over her head.

She whirled it and struck down hard.

Clang!

A spark ignited. The chain to the cage actually snapped in response!

Everyone was horrified!

What… is she trying to do?

Without waiting for anyone to understand, Chu Liuyue had already tipped the sword. The cage opened wide instantly.

The Golden Python realized that the cage imprisoning it had been unlocked. It dashed out immediately.

Its gigantic head lunged at Chu Liuyue without hesitation. It opened its mouth, revealing the sharp fangs.

A mouth like that could kill, if not inflict some serious damage.

In contrast to its huge size, Chu Liuyue looked extraordinarily small and delicate, as if the python could swallow her whole in a second.

Right at this moment, Chu Liuyue advanced instead of retreating. She pointed her toes and leaped forward using that momentum.

At the same time, the sword stabbed quickly. It went straight at the python's belly.

The python's scales were extremely tough and couldn't be pierced by an ordinary sword. The only entry point of attack would be its abdomen, a softer area.

The Golden Python also sensed Chu Liuyue's intentions; it immediately flicked its tail and slapped Chu Liuyue hard!

It was too strong physically. If it smacked Chu Liuyue, she would die on the spot. However, Chu Liuyue was so swift on her feet that she somehow narrowly avoided the blow and circled to the side of the Golden Python.

She stabbed at it without hesitation.

Zing…

The longsword sliced along the hard scales, making a piercing sound. Yet, there was only a light, white scratch. There wasn't even a trace of blood!

Rong Zhen sneered. "Brother, Chu Liuyue is really stupid to think… What?"

Before she had even finished her taunting words, the situation changed dramatically.

That attack from Chu Liuyue had completely enraged the Golden Python. It flicked its tail frantically in an attempt to entangle Chu Liuyue.

But she suddenly released the sword's hilt and leaped onto it. By using this leverage, Chu Liuyue actually went straight for the python's head!

She wrapped one arm around the python's neck and swiftly removed the hairpin in her hair with the other and thrust it into the snake's eye.

Its eyes were its greatest weakness!

Fizz!

Blood splattered everywhere.

The Golden Python let out an angry and painful shriek, but Chu Liuyue plucked out its eyeball without hesitation.

The python shifted its body violently. There was nothing it could do to Chu Liuyue.

In the blink of an eye, the second eyeball was picked out too!

The python gradually went limp.

Finally, Chu Liuyue jumped down, picked up her sword, and thrust it straight into the bloody hole.

One harsh stroke!

Just like that, she cut the snake open and beheaded it.

“Ah!” Some of the dainty noble ladies screamed at this bloody scene.

Chu Liuyue, however, didn’t even flinch. She reached in and probed with her hand before pulling out a turquoise pearl—the Golden Python’s essence! Chu Liuyue then walked towards Rong Zhen—who had already stiffened—stretched out her bloodied hand, and presented the pearl.

“Fourth Princess, this is my gift in return. Take a look. Do you like it?

Chapter 28: Prince Li

Rong Zhen stiffened her neck and looked up at Chu Liuyue.

Chu Liuyue’s face and hands were covered in blood, but she looked calm and relaxed with the Golden Python’s corpse right behind her. She could actually smile! She looked like a demon from hell.

Rong Zhen suddenly felt a chill. At this moment, a thought occurred to her: *Chu Liuyue is not an easy target to bully like she appears to be.*

Chu Liuyue held something out. “Fourth Princess, the Golden Python’s essence is very nourishing to the body. Please…”

It was still sticky and stained with blood. The fishy smell made one nauseous.

Rong Zhen’s face went pale. Nevertheless, so many pairs of eyes were looking at them, so she had to accept the ‘gift in return.’

Just when she was in a dilemma, Rong Jin—who was sitting beside her—suddenly spoke. “Someone come and take this gift from Miss Chu.”

As soon as he finished speaking, a guard beside him immediately stepped forward with the intention of receiving the pearl on behalf of the princess. However, Chu Liuyue avoided the guard’s hand and continued to stare intently at Rong Zhen.

“Initially, I thought it belonged to me because my name was on it, and I could do whatever I pleased with it since it was my belonging. However, I didn’t expect my actions would provoke the Fourth Princess, enraging her. If so, please allow me to apologize to Your Majesty and Your Highness. It’s a pity that the Fourth Princess doesn’t seem to care for my gift, or is it not good enough for you?”

Rong Zhen’s heart skipped a beat. She might be wilful and petulant, but she wasn’t a fool. Chu Liuyue was asking her to accept the gift personally. If she didn’t, her earlier demands on Chu Liuyue would seem mean.

So many people, including her father and mother, were watching her every move.

It was no big deal if she tarnished her own reputation. After all, she had always had such a temper. However, she couldn't afford to have the royal family be criticized because of her. She was able to please the Empress in large part because she knew the limits, even though she always messed around.

"Of course, your Princess is satisfied with your gift." Rong Zhen gritted her teeth, stood up, and got the guard to stand down while she accepted the Golden Python's essence.

It was so sticky and disgusting that she almost threw it away!

Rong Zhen thought she would be able to teach Chu Liuyue a well-deserved lesson, but in the end, the latter managed to turn the table around.

She stared at Chu Liuyue with a deadly glare and said through gritted teeth, "Chu. Liu. Yue. You are good! Your Princess will remember you!"

Chu Liuyue smiled faintly and bowed. "Thank you for remembering me, Princess."

Rong Zhen was so choked up with anger that she almost exploded.

"Okay," reminded Rong Jin.

Rong Zhen could only suppress her anger.

Rong Jin gave her a look as if he was unhappy. “Shouldn’t you go and clean up? You look so dirty. What impression are you trying to make?”

The moment he finished, there was silence in the palace.

The Crown Prince seemed to be talking about the Fourth Princess, but in reality, he was indirectly targeting Chu Liuyue.

The Fourth Princess merely had a little blood staining her hands. Chu Liuyue, on the other hand, was covered in blood from her earlier fight with the Golden Python.

‘Dirty’ was the exact description for the current Chu Liuyue.

Soft snickering could be heard throughout the palace.

All eyes, filled with mockery and ridicule, were on her.

Everyone was well-dressed and clean in the brightly lit Ming Cui Palace.

She was the only one covered in blood. Her hair was down and scattered because she had removed her hairpin. She was a mess.

This was the sight that greeted Rong Xiu when he entered the palace.

A skinny young girl stood in the center of the palace. Beside her were a huge, broken black cage and the Golden Python's bloodied corpse.

The floor was covered in bloodstains.

The girl's side profile and hands were also covered in blood. She might be thin, but her back was straight like the cypress tree on a mountain cliff. It never bent, no matter how hard the wind blew.

His warm, clear eyes instantly turned dark and cold. He regained his usual gentle look in the next second.

"Prince Li has arrived!" The announcement broke the atmosphere in the palace. Everyone's eyes widened in shock.

Prince Li?

The Seventh Prince?

What is he doing here?

He returned to the Imperial City a month ago but had not attended any banquets because he had been sick. Why today…

Chu Liuyue felt her heart stir, and she looked back unconsciously.

A familiar silhouette appeared at the palace door.

The octagonal glazed palace lamp hanging outside the palace door cast a soft, warm light, reflecting his tall and long figure.

Chu Liuyue was stunned. He was actually wearing a white fox cloak in the middle of summer.

His features became clearer as he walked into the palace.

Although this wasn't her first time seeing his face, she couldn't stop herself from falling into a daze.

Rong Xiu had eyebrows that slanted towards his temples—which resembled two swords—profound phoenix eyes that were like the brilliant stars in the Milky Way, and a high nose.

One look from him was enough to make a person melt willingly.

Within the cloak, he was dressed in a snow-white brocade coat with dark-gold patterns embroidered on the cuffs and hem. He seemed to be gliding on the moonlight.

Only one thought occurred in everyone's mind with his appearance: like a well-cut and polished rogue gentleman.

He looked really noble, regal, and as warm as a piece of jade.

Some noble ladies were flushing and stared at him with adoring eyes.

“So… this is Prince Li. I never thought he was so handsome!”

“The last time he returned to the Imperial City was three years ago. I didn’t expect to see him back again with such a demeanor. Nobody in the city can compare to him in terms of looks.”

“Humph! What is there to see? He’s just a sick kid. At the end of the day, he’s nothing more than an idle prince.”

There were whispers in the palace.

Chu Liuyue looked closer, and her eyebrows rose.

It wasn’t surprising that those people had said all this. Rong Xiu’s lips were pale, and he did look weak.

At this moment, Rong Xiu’s attention shifted, and he looked at Chu Liuyue.

Their eyes met.

Chu Liuyue squinted her eyes.

In the next moment, Rong Xiu was actually making his way toward her until he stood before her.

Everyone was looking at her strangely.

Chu Liuyue froze. *What is he planning to do? Is he here to settle the score because I trespassed into Bibo Lake last time?*

While she was thinking about this, she saw Rong Xiu suddenly extend his hand and hand her a handkerchief that was white as snow.

Chu Liuyue immediately understood his intentions.

He wanted her to wipe the bloodstains on her face.

The circumstances of when she first met him resurfaced in her mind.

That time, he had reached out, wiped the bloodstains on her face with his fingertip, and said, “Lady Chu, you can’t go home in such a mess with blood on your face.”

The situation this time was so similar.

Chu Liuyue accepted his handkerchief and bowed with gratitude. “Thank you, Your Highness.”

Rong Xiu looked at the young girl's curls of hair and her well-mannered demeanor that was a stark difference from her earlier wariness. His mood improved instantly.

Chapter 29: Dissolution of the Marriage Agreement

Everyone had a different expression.

Prince Li was…

Rong Xiu had already looked at Emperor Jiawen and bowed. "Father, please forgive me for being late." He couldn't stop himself from coughing twice after he said that. It seemed like he had been sick for a long time.

Emperor Jiawen shook his head with some disapproval. "You've had a weak constitution ever since you were a child. You must take good care of yourself now that you've just returned to the Imperial City. Why are you pushing yourself by coming?"

Rong Xiu looked smilingly at Rong Jin. "It is Brother's birthday banquet. As his brother and his subject, how can I not come?"

Rong Jin sneered inwardly, but he wore a smile on his face. "Seventh Brother, you're being too polite. It's only a birthday. I'll feel bad if your sickness gets worse. Quickly, sit!"

Rong Xiu followed his advice and took his seat beside the Third Prince, Rong Jiu.

He coughed a few times after removing his cloak. It seemed that he was suffering on this trip.

The crowd exchanged looks among themselves.

Indeed, Prince Li looked like he was in bad shape.

Some noble ladies were disappointed. He might have the looks, but there wouldn't be much of a future with his weak body. A pity. He was so handsome and exuded such a magnificent presence.

Rong Xiu didn't seem to care. He sat, greeted a few people around him, and quieted down.

What a gentle and humble gentleman.

Rong Zhen had no impression of her seventh brother. However, she was disgusted by him after he offered his handkerchief to Chu Liuyue. She sneered and turned her attention from Chu Liuyue to him. "Brother, you seem to care greatly for Big Chu Missy. Is it possible that you already know each other?"

Rong Xiu simply smiled. "I've only been back to the Imperial City for a month. This is my first outing. How can I know anyone?"

Rong Zhen remained skeptical. "Then why did you help her?"

Rong Xiu's smile slightly faltered. "I just feel that it's really not good to see blood as today is my brother's birthday banquet. Besides… I'm late. I don't know what happened earlier, and this place is actually in such a mess?"

He poured himself a cup of tea and casually said, "If I remember correctly, Miss Chu is engaged to my brother. I wonder who is bold enough to treat the Crown Prince's wife-to-be in such a manner on his birthday banquet."

Rong Zhen choked.

Rong Jin looked even more embarrassed.

Wasn't he being accused of letting others bully Chu Liuyue under his nose?

The Empress sensed that things had taken a wrong turn. She said warmly, "Prince Li must be mistaken. Rong Zhen felt close to her even though it was their first meeting, and she wanted to give the Golden Python to Miss Chu. They were merely taming the python earlier."

Rong Xiu was a little surprised. "Tame the Golden Python? Big Chu Missy is born with a crippled Yuan meridian, and she can't cultivate. How can she possibly tame it?" His perplexed question made the Empress and the others suddenly feel extremely embarrassed.

Rong Jin frowned. He felt that Rong Xiu had set the trap on purpose. However, judging from his shocked expression, he seemed to be asking the question out of genuine concern. Besides, Rong Xiu shouldn't know about what happened to the hunting ground. Rong Jin couldn't tell what Rong Xiu was thinking for a while, so he didn't say anything.

Rong Zhen, however, couldn't stop herself from arguing. "She obviously made the mistake of selling the deed for Brother's hunting ground to others! She has gone too far by doing that."

After a moment's silence, Rong Xiu asked as he fondled his teacup, "How did she do that if the deed belongs to the Crown Prince?"

There was dead silence in the palace.

Everyone naturally knew her name was on the deed, but anyone with a brain could tell that the Crown Prince highly valued the hunting ground.

The fact that she sold it meant she was screwing the Crown Prince over big time!

The Crown Prince was furious. He obviously wanted to deal with her today. Otherwise, why would a loser from the Chu family have the right to be present at a palace banquet?

Everyone was well-aware of this. Even the Empress had acquiesced to it.

When a man of Prince Li's status had pointed this out, it made the Crown Prince look exceptionally bad.

Chu Liuyue wiped the bloodstains off with the white handkerchief as she hid a smile. Since Rong Xiu had the intention to help her, she would seize this opportunity. "Your Highness, there is something you might be unaware of. Although my name is on the deed, it is still my fault for selling it away just like that because the Crown Prince and I have not been officially engaged. Earlier, the Fourth Princess also promised to let the matter rest if I can tame the Golden Python. Am I right, Princess?"

Rong Zhen glared at her with bulging eyes. “When did I say that? Don’t put words in my mouth!”

Chu Liuyue looked at Emperor Jiawen in confusion. “Is that not what you meant, Your Majesty?”

Emperor Jiawen didn’t expect Chu Liuyue to be so direct, and he felt embarrassed. He coughed and waved his hand. “It is just a hunting ground. Since Liuyue has already tamed the Golden Python as agreed, let’s leave it at that. Zhen Zhen, you’re not to talk about this again.”

This wasn’t just a warning for Rong Zhen alone, but also for everyone present.

Rong Zhen was annoyed, but when she saw the seriousness in Emperor Jiawen’s eyes, she could only agree reluctantly. “Yes.”

“Thank you, Your Majesty.” Chu Liuyue had no intention of letting it go so lightly. She sighed softly and wore an aggrieved expression. “Your Majesty, I know in my heart that you personally granted the title deed to me all those years ago, and I naturally treasure it very much. However, I would have never sold the deed if I had not been forced to do so.”

Emperor Jiawen was stunned. “What is it? Is there something else?”

Chu Liuyue breathed deeply. “Your Majesty, life hasn’t been easy because I was born with a crippled Yuan meridian, and my father had been seriously injured many years ago. If I had a choice, I wouldn’t have to sell the deed away to raise some taels to sustain our living…”

First Elder stood up immediately and shouted out in anger. “Chu Liuyue! What nonsense are you babbling?” *Is she trying to implicate the entire Chu family?*

Emperor Jiawen looked displeased as he glanced at First Elder. “Let her speak!”

First Elder was furious, but he didn’t dare to interject anymore.

“There was a time when my father and I sought help from the Crown Prince, but we couldn’t even meet him. Before I sold the deed, I tried to talk to the Crown Prince about it. Alas, I was turned away. So…”

Rong Jin turned blue as he listened. *This is some story from Chu Liuyue!*

“Out of desperation, I was forced to do what I did. Your Majesty, I seek your wise judgment.” Chu Liuyue’s words were half-true, but the people in the palace were inclined to believe her.

Almost everyone in the Imperial City knew what kind of lives Chu Liuyue and her father were living. It was entirely possible that the Crown Prince had shut her out.

Wasn’t it normal for the Crown Prince to do this when he loathed her so much?

If that was what happened, then Chu Liuyue wasn’t to blame.

Emperor Jiawen looked more dignified when he looked at Rong Jin. “Crown Prince, I’m sure you have put in a lot of effort into that hunting ground. However, if you hadn’t neglected Liuyue all these years, she also wouldn’t have done this. If my memory serves me well, her birthday is in two days. You will be formally…”

Rong Jin's heart skipped a beat. *Is it possible that Emperor Jiawen wants me to fulfill my marriage agreement with Chu Liuyue? Absolutely no way!*

Rong Jin jumped out of his seat at this thought. "Father, I have a request." He pointed at Chu Liuyue. "I wish to dissolve my marriage agreement with Chu Liuyue!"

Chapter 30: Compensation

Chu Liuyue had sold the hunting ground without consulting him. Rong Jin had initially planned to use this incident to sow discord between Emperor Jiawen and her. Thus, bringing about the dissolution of their marriage agreement.

He didn't expect things to turn out like this. Chu Liuyue had a valid reason to sell the deed, and it was the result of her being bullied by the Chu family and him. He had no way of pulling himself out of this mess. It was a waste of time to dwell on this. Besides, the situation had become worse. This evening's events had put the royal family at a disadvantage.

He knew this was something his father wouldn't want. He had to cut the Gordian knot and propose to dissolve their marriage agreement immediately to make a clean break. Even if it resulted in him being criticized, it was better than his father having dissatisfaction with him.

Emperor Jiawen was silent; his expression solemn.

It was so quiet in the palace that one could hear a pin drop.

A penny for a pound. Rong Jin stated bluntly, “Father, I have no feelings for Big Chu Missy. Even if we marry, we wouldn’t be happy. It would be better for us all if we dissolve the marriage agreement.”

Chu Liuyue’s lowered her eyes to hide her contempt.

This man was not only irresponsible; he was also cunning and sinister. He gave such a grand presentation because he felt that she was a loser and unworthy of his status as Crown Prince. Throughout their years of having this marriage agreement, he had never said he wanted to dissolve the agreement. Instead, he chose this moment to bring it up.

Naturally, Chu Liuyue could guess his reason. He was a noble prince, whereas she was a born loser. If he had brought this matter up sooner, he would be ridiculed for being a snob.

He lived an indulgent life without any care while Chu Liuyue suffered in the Chu family. Perhaps, he knew that she wouldn’t live past the age of 14. If she had died sooner, he would have resolved a major problem without breaking a sweat. Never did he expect her to retaliate against him!

With what happened today, he must propose the dissolution of their marriage agreement.

Emperor Jiawen narrowed his eyes. Nobody could read his thoughts.

“Have you considered this?” Emperor Jiawen spoke in a deep voice a while later.

Rong Xiu suddenly advised warmly. “Crown Prince, Miss Chu is actually quite nice. Didn’t she tame the Golden Python earlier? Even though she doesn’t have force in her body, it seems she may have the strength after what happened.”

Rong Jin's face fell. In fact, he was quite shocked when Chu Liuyue killed that Golden Python just now. But after careful observation, he had not sensed any force fluctuating within her.

The main reason Chu Liuyue won was that she was ingenious enough to find the Golden Python's weakness and attacked it with all her might.

This kind of strategy was fine when used once or twice. It would be ineffective when overused.

The bottom line was strength.

After more than ten years of having a crippled Yuan meridian, could Chu Liuyue have recovered? At this thought, Rong Jin replied with certainty. "Yes, I have."

He was going to inherit the throne in the future. Someone like Chu Liuyue would be a stain to his status. "Of course, in order to compensate for the harm caused, I am willing to make amends to Miss Chu." As he said that, he looked at Chu Liuyue. "Feel free to state your terms. I will do my best to satisfy them."

Is he attempting to put me down further, or is he trying to erect a benevolent plaque for himself? How in the world could anything be so good? Chu Liuyue lifted her chin, looked at Rong Jin, and pursed her lips. "Your Highness, you… Actually, I once admired you…"

Rong Xiu, who had just lifted his teacup, froze. He then set the teacup down as though nothing was amiss. His eyes scanned the girl before him.

Chu Liuyue felt a chill at the back of her head suddenly and inexplicably.

As Rong Jin listened, he frowned. *Is Chu Liuyue unwilling to break off the engagement? Maybe. Even if she is stupid, she knows how precious the position of Crown Princess is. A moment ago, she deliberately accused me of neglecting her and her father. Now, she says she admires me? She is indeed a greedy girl!*

The thoughts that Rong Jin had when he saw Chu Liuyue's face earlier had completely vanished. He cut her off impatiently. "I told you. State your terms. There's no need to say anything else."

Chu Liuyue's lips were pale. Her eyelashes quivered, followed by a bitter smile. "Your Highness, please don't worry. I know I'm unworthy of you, so I've never deluded myself. I know there is another person in your heart." As she said that, her eyes drifted toward Chu Xianmin. "In the past, I never had the chance to attend any of your birthday banquets. Third Sister would always describe the parties to me vividly whenever she came back. I didn't get to see you much throughout all these years. Third Sister would tell me everything about you. That's the only way I could get to know you."

She paused and lowered her head. Her voice was calm and clear. It made her audience's hearts ache for her.

"She knows what tea you like to drink, what books you like to read, and what incense to burn to make you sleep more soundly… I, on the other hand, know nothing."

Chu Xianmin's heart skipped a beat. *This is not right! Why does this sound so wrong?*

As the crowd in the palace listened, they began to work out what was going on. Eyes began to fall on Chu Xianmin.

It didn't sound like she had good intentions; she was clearly showing off on purpose! How dare she say all that when she knew for a fact that Chu Liuyue and the Crown Prince had a marriage agreement?

Besides…

To know his preferred tea and books was one thing, but she even knew the incense he burnt when he sleeps. This was…

“Tsk tsk. I thought Third Missy was extremely talented, gentle, and virtuous. I didn’t expect her to be so bold.”

“There are countless noble ladies in the Imperial City. Why is the Crown Prince partial to her? So that’s what it’s all about.”

“Even if Chu Liuyue is useless, she’s still her sister. But treating her like this, heh! What kind of woman gets together with a man who is engaged to their sister?”

“She looks quiet and virtuous. Who knows what is underneath that facade?”

Chu Xianmin’s face reddened as if a fire wildly burned in her chest!

Chu Liuyue’s words had directly ruined her reputation!

She stood up without a thought and snapped with a shriek. “B*tch! What nonsense are you talking about? I’ll rip your mouth off!”

Everyone heard the insult clearly.

Chu Xianmin panicked as soon as the words came out of her mouth. Her shrewish actions were bound to displease the Empress and the Crown Prince!

She looked toward Rong Jin and saw that his expression had indeed turned from shock to disgust.

Chu Xianmin's heart sank all the way to the abyss, but Chu Liuyue sighed as if she was relieved of a great burden.

"Your Highness and Third Sister are a perfect match. I'm willing to withdraw and break off my engagement with you. I don't need any compensation."

Emperor Jiawen finally opened his mouth. "Liuyue, you are a good child. This is the Prince's fault. How about this? I will give you and your father 100,000 taels of gold. In addition, I can see that your martial arts are quite good. Why don't I find you a master from Tianlu Academy to teach you properly?"

Many people dreamed of the opportunity to be taught by Tian Lu Academy's teachers.

Chu Liuyue muttered to herself for a moment. "Your Majesty, I want to enter Tian Lu Academy for cultivation on my own."