

Chapter 51: assassination (5)

"The Great Elder turned out to be quite formidable. He has managed to escape this time, but no worries Miss Ye. We'll camp here tonight and deal with him once he returns." The leader spoke up.

Ye Qingtang looked at the bleak aftermath sprawled across the entire courtyard, before she shook her head at him, "That won't be necessary. You guys have already helped a great deal. Well done!" With that said, she handed over the remaining twenty thousand gold to the men.

"It's getting late. We'll take it from here. Before you guys leave, thank you all again. We'll never forget this favor you guys did us."

It would be great if those men were able to get rid of the Great Elder. However, now that he had escaped, if the men were to remain here any longer, they could become a liability instead.

Besides, there's no telling if the Great Elder would return at all with the men around.

And things tend to go awry when one plays a waiting game.

The men had their gold and Ye Qingtang's seal of approval. Obviously, they would not plan to stay around for long. After thanking her in return, they were gone like the wind.

With the men gone, Ye Qingtang looked down at the guards' corpses littered around with a cold-eyed stare.

Those guards, who were formerly attendants of the Ye Household, should have owed their allegiance to Ye Ling, the head of the household. But they turned their coats and joined the ranks of the Great Elder instead. Under the Great Elder's orders, those guards had deliberately left their posts in her father's courtyard, in order for his assassination to succeed.

Thus, the guards could be considered a bunch of miscreants who had betrayed her father's trust and Ye Qingtang would never bat an eyelid over their deaths.

"Father, it's late. We'll have to fetch second uncle home first thing in the morning. Let's call it a day." Ye Qingtang chuckled as she spoke. Since the beginning, she had expected the Great Elder to be able to escape those assassins, given his capabilities.

But she was certain he would no longer pose a threat to Ye Ling in his current situation, and with the Second Elder's imminent return, she doubted he had the time and capacity to commit further misdeeds.

It was not until it was almost daybreak, did the Great Elder finally return to the residence in a miserable state, only after he was certain the assassins were no longer around.

Till now, he was still unable to comprehend why the assassins he hired turned against him instead. If he was not capable, he would have died at their hands.

The Great Elder could neither come up with a plausible reason nor answer to that predicament. For the moment, all he could do was to defer the case for further investigations in the future.

Now that the assassins had violated their agreement, and with Ye Ling still alive, his plan to frame the Second Elder for his murder was thwarted.

The Great Elder knit his brow at this realization, but as he stood before the aftermath of that scuffle in his courtyard, a sudden thought struck him.

An attempt to assassinate the head of the household or the Great Elder, in either case, they entailed the same death penalty!

Ye Ling would succumb to the poison sooner or later, the thorn in his side was definitely the Second Elder.

He would never allow those two to join forces against him.

He would reign as head of the household soon enough!

On the following morning, Ye Qingtang awoke from her dreams and once she donned her outing garments, she left her room promptly to meet up with Ye Ling.

But when she reached his quarters, Ye Ling was nowhere to be seen. She questioned the attendants on his whereabouts immediately.

And only then she found out....

The Great Elder had went ahead to fetch the Second Elder before the agreed schedule. Ye Ling, who learned about this later, reacted indifferently and not wanting to disturb her sleep, he left in advance to catch up with them and should be reaching the training grounds by now.

Chapter 52: The Second Elder (1)

Ye Qingtang was at a loss for a brief moment when she learned the news. Nonetheless, she rushed over to the stables the next instant and galloped headlong towards the training grounds on horseback.

In her past, Ye Ling lost his life on the night before the Second Elder's return and while Ye Qingtang was still mourning her father's death, the Great Elder took her to the training grounds against her will. Though she was still hopeful then, that the kind Second Elder would help her in tracking down her father's murderer....

Once the Second Elder set foot outside his training chamber, the Great Elder had him arrested and executed for the murder of the head of the household.

Why....

The past Ye Qingtang was still wet behind the ears and totally oblivious to the situation. In her feebleness, the Great Elder's ironclad verdict stupefied her. Even if she had intended to speak up for the Second Elder, the Great Elder would turn a blind eye. In the end, while being restrained at a side, the Second Elder was executed before her very eyes....

To this day, Ye Qingtang could still vividly remember the moment the Second Elder was killed.

After heaving a deep breath, Ye Qingtang cast away this recollection, whilst she galloped the horse at full speed.

She did not expect the Great Elder to bring his plans forward instead.

If memory serves, the Great Elder not only offered to receive the Second Elder personally, Ye Xun had even invited a few elders from the Duan household along at his behest. All that fanfare for the purpose of exterminating the Second Elder!

Ye Qingtang remained steadfast as she galloped away like the wind.

Quite a number of people had gathered at the training grounds of the Ye household, located beyond the City of Lin.

With hands behind his back and a cold glint in his eyes, the Great Elder kept his gaze on the stone door of the training chamber which remained firmly shut.

“Great Elder, the Second Elder should be coming out soon.” Ye Xun, who stood beside him, smiled as she spoke.

With a slight nod, the Great Elder turned his gaze towards Duan Tianrao, standing next to Ye Xun. As her fiancé, he and a few other Elders from the Duan household were invited to the trial where he would impeach the Second Elder for treachery against the Ye household.

The Second Elder was so formidable that even the Great Elder lacked the confidence to restrain him on his own. The presence of the other Elders from the Duan household served as a deterrent to reign him in and also, as an official jury to witness his indictment and subsequent execution, in order to appear righteous in the public eye.

However, the truth behind the crime was not important at all to the Duan household.

Ye You, after becoming a disciple of the Cloud-breakers’ sovereign, elevated the Great Elder’s status amongst the nobles and being on friendly terms with Ye Xun, their future First Lady, they were all willing to do him a favor.

“My apologies for having to impose upon you all and thank you again for accepting my invitation.” The Great Elder pronounced his gratitude to the Elders from the Duan household.

The Elders’ faces lit up with glee and one of them replied: “No worries. We stand by the same honor as one of City of Lin’s noble families. It’s our pleasure and obligation to extend a helping hand in times of need. Especially over matters like this for it’s for our own good as well. Hopefully, our actions today can help to deter any treachery amongst our families.”

The Great Elder broke into a smile as he lamented: “To think such a thing could happen in our household. Guess this is the price I’ve to pay for being complacent in my duties as the Great Elder.”

“Pardon me, but you’re too harsh on yourself, I reckon. Even as Great Elder, there are limits on the things you can control. You’re one of the victims who’ve nearly lost a life, thus clearly, you’re not in the wrong. Though you’re not in a rough shape, but those injuries are pretty apparent. I hope its not too serious?” One of the Elders asked out of concern.

“No worries, it’s just a scratch.” The Great Elder answered nonchalantly while he threw a glance at a carriage parked at the side. When he saw Ye Ling alighting from the carriage, he fixed his gaze on the stone door again without another word.

Chapter 53: The Second Elder (2)

Ye Ling alighted from his carriage, and when he noticed those Elders from the Duan household standing around, he furrowed his brow slightly.

Today marks the completion of their Second Elder's sequestered training, what are those people from another household doing here?

"Great Elder, why're these Elders from the Duan household...." Ye Ling knitted his brow as he voiced his query.

The Great Elder responded indifferently: "Our Second Elder wanted to achieve ascension and undertook this cultivation regime. Our friends here are all his equals in strength previously. Their purpose here today is to witness his achievement and maybe, learn a thing or two from him as well."

"Sorry for disturbing." The Elders from the Duan household put on a smile as they exchanged formal greetings, though their attitudes lacked the appropriate respect for a head of the household.

They were well aware of the current hierarchy of power in the Ye household. It was only a matter of time before Ye Ling relinquish his position as head of the household.

So instead of getting on Ye Ling's good side, siding with the Great Elder would be the wiser choice.

Moreover

The Great Elder even had backing from Ye You, a member of the Cloud-breakers!

Ye Ling felt something was amiss, but after those desultory conversations with the Elders, them being perfunctory towards him was pretty obvious and getting them to be honest with him would be inconceivable.

Especially...

After Duan Tianrao renounced the engagement, Ye Ling was still upset with the Duan household. And now, after he saw Ye Xun and Duan Tianrao standing around blatantly as a couple, he was all the more unwilling to say anything to them.

From this moment, Ye Ling felt relieved instead, that Ye Qingtang was not around for having to put up with this debacle.

While silence ensued amongst them, the stone door to the chamber rumbled and from the slowly-widening gap, an air which brought a chill to the bones was released.

When the door became wide open, a tall and stout figure emerged gradually from within. That was an older adult seemingly in his fifties, with a stalwart build that betrayed men of his age. If it was not for those wrinkles that was apparent on his chiseled face, one could hardly tell his actual age.

The Second Elder paced gradually into the open, though donned in a drab garb, he exuded an air of confidence.

When he raised his eyes to his surroundings, he noticed that besides the people from his own household, those from the Duan household were present as well. His eyes flashed a glint of bewilderment, but he did not read too much into it.

Before he secluded himself for training, Ye Qingtang and Duan Tianrao were already engaged. Therefore, though he was puzzled, he was not too concerned over their presence.

Ye Ling had long-awaited for the Second Elder's return. After seeing him making it back in one piece, he could finally put his mind at ease. When he was about to approach him to have a word, a figure cut-in before him.

The Great Elder had appeared in front of the Second Elder suddenly. At that moment, though he had an impassive face, his gaze prowled over the Second Elder briefly before he knitted his brow and narrowed his eyes. Finally, with a piercing glare, he asserted: "Men! Seize him!"

When the Great Elder's words were spoken, Ye Ling and the Second Elder were stunned.

While they were caught off guard, the accompanying guardsmen surrounded the Second Elder and seized him by the arms.

"What's the meaning of this?!" The Second Elder scowled instantly, what had transpired were totally beyond him.

"What do you think you're doing?!" Ye Ling's face clouded over as he turned to face the Great Elder.

*Thought you could escape cliffhangers?

Chapter 54: The Second Elder (3)

The Great Elder maintained an impassive countenance while squinting slightly. His gaze roved over Ye Ling's face, before he focused on the Second Elder and asked, "Last night, a group of assassins invaded our residence with the intention to murder me and the family head. Are you aware of this matter?"

Ye Ling was completely stupefied when the Great Elder brought up the issue.

The Second Elder, who was oblivious to the incident, furrowed his brow as his worried gaze sought any injuries on Ye Ling, before he stated solemnly, "I concentrated solely on my training and was unaware of all this. To think someone in the city would dare attack us?!"

"You are unaware?" The Great Elder scoffed at his claim. "Looking at our current family situation, should the family head and I suffer from any mishaps while our young lady is still a minor, who do you think...will reign over our household then?"

The Great Elder's statement was presented in the form of a query, but everyone present was well aware of what it implied.

The Second Elder would be the one holding the reins if the Great Elder and Ye Ling had perished from the assassination.

"What are you getting at?" The Second Elder's face clouded over.

“Sir, the Great Elder was pretty clear in his implication. I’m sure you’ve caught the drift given your smarts, no?” mocked Ye Xun, as she regarded the Second Elder with disdain from the side. “Or are you pretending to be senile? Our family has always treated you well. Father respected you, despite your position as a mere Elder. To think you’re still unsatisfied with all that and sought to topple his authority using such unscrupulous means!”

The next instant, the Second Elder shot a piercing glare at the slanderous Ye Xun.

“My conscience has always been clear. I would never have done anything against our household! Ye Xun, how dare you sully my honor!”

Ye Xun faltered under the Second Elder’s scowling eyes. Feigning being wronged, she hid behind Duan Tianrao, while clinging to his sleeves and pleading with tearful eyes, “Duan-lang, I’m scared...”

Duan Tianrao patted her dainty hand to console her. Raising his head, he looked the Second Elder in the eye and said, “Sir, I’ve always respected your position and admired your strength, but you should admit your wrongdoings. The news of the assassination attempt on Uncle Ye and the Great Elder has already spread across the city. Who in their right mind would plot such a crime without any reason? Other than you, who would stand to gain from this assassination?”

The Second Elder’s expression turned grave. He had just completed his training and was out of touch with matters beyond the training chamber. To be accused of a crime he had just heard of was inconceivable.

And the sight of the intimacy between Ye Xun and Duan Tianrao only served to make matters worse.

Duan Tianrao was supposed to be Ye Qingtang’s fiancé, how dare he flirt with another lady, especially Ye Xun, who was Ye Ling’s adopted daughter!

The Second Elder had been obsessed with martial prowess since his youth and had neither considered marriage nor raised any children of his own. Thus, he had long regarded Ye Qingtang as his own granddaughter. Duan Tianrao’s betrayal and the tarnishing of his name eventually pushed his capricious temper to its limits.

A surge of aura, amplified by his rage, exploded suddenly into his surroundings, throwing the guards who were apprehending him off their feet.

“Impertinent brat! I’ll teach you a lesson for besmirching my name!” The Second Elder bellowed.

Chapter 55: Conspiracy (1)

Sensing that the Second Elder’s immense surge of power had turned destructive, Duan Tianrao instinctively protected Ye Xun.

The Elders from the Duan household hurriedly moved to shield the couple after realizing the impending danger.

“No one here is besmirching your name. You know what you did.” An Elder warned gravely.

“What did I do?” The Second Elder gave a contemptuous laugh. “I’ve trained in seclusion for far too long, giving people like you the time to make up false accusations during my absence!”

The frenzied Second Elder prompted the Elders to raise their guard.

“It’s clear you’re capable of committing the crime without being there in person, perhaps by making hidden arrangements with one of your confidants or attendants?” one of the Elders coldly retorted.

By now, Ye Ling had realized the purpose of this fiasco. He had been pondering over the motives of the people from the Duan household, but now he could clearly tell that they were part of the Great Elder’s conspiracy to frame the Second Elder for the failed assassination!

Ye Ling knew very well why the Great Elder wanted to eliminate the Second Elder. In terms of strength, the Second Elder was the only one on par with the Great Elder in the Ye household. If he was gone, the Great Elder would be able to deal with Ye Ling and Ye Qingtang without restraint.

“Wait! Yesterday’s matter is still under investigation! Accusing the Second Elder will be jumping to conclusions. It isn’t fair!” Ye Ling came forward. Looking coldly at the Great Elder, he added, “I can vouch for his loyalty. The mastermind is definitely not him.”

The Great Elder glanced at Ye Ling. “Sir, I know you’re on good terms with the Second Elder. But as the old saying goes, you can’t judge a book by its cover. Such a thing only happened during his absence. Our deaths will mean the household falling into his hands. Him being in seclusion at the same time is too perfect a cover-up. Don’t you think this situation favors him too much to be a mere coincidence? Believing he is innocent will be playing into his hands,” he stated indifferently.

Ye Ling’s face clouded over. He would never believe those allegations. Moreover, he knew that the mastermind behind the assassination attempt was the Great Elder himself. What shocked him was the Great Elder’s audacity and ruthlessness in making such a claim to frame the Second Elder.

However...

Even if he possessed all this information, the cold, hard truth before him made him realize...

Even if he revealed what he knew, it would still be meaningless...

Everyone present, including Ye Xun, was on the Great Elder’s side. If he acted rashly and divulged the truth, the Great Elder would make use of the opportunity to eliminate him as well!

“Father, the Great Elder is merely concerned for your and our household’s well-being. Denying the Second Elder’s crime for old time’s sake will not do. It’s better to be safe than sorry. Be firm on this. Even if it’s not for yourself, think of it as assurance for Tang Tang’s safety,” Ye Xun voiced her concerns, though it was merely a facade. Her advice appeared sincere but mentioning Ye Qingtang served as a veiled warning to Ye Ling that his daughter’s safety would not be guaranteed if he refused to cooperate.

Chapter 56: Conspiracy (2)

Ye Ling stared, wide-eyed, at the seemingly demure Ye Xun.

Never in his wildest dreams did he expect that the daughter whom he had adopted and raised would turn out to be a heartless fiend.

“Sir, what Xun-er said is not without merit. As head of the household, the family’s safety is the primary concern. Being soft on such a crime is an act of complacency that will be detrimental to the household’s

interest and reputation. In such cases, a head of the household should err on the side of caution..." An Elder from the Duan household voiced his advice as his gaze swept over the grim Ye Ling.

"I'm the family head and the Second Elder is a member of my household. I'm able to make a judgment without others interfering." Ye Ling coldly replied.

"Uncle Ye, you shouldn't have said that. We're all part of the noble families in the same city. Thus, your judgment in this case will affect us as well." Duan Tianrao warned.

"Shut up. You're in no position to talk." Ye Ling retorted.

Duan Tianrao furrowed his brow, obviously displeased over the curt remark.

The Great Elder came forward and said: "Sir, I'm afraid you're still traumatized over yesterday's incident, clouding your judgment. I reckon you should get an early rest. I'll take things over from here. No worries, if we cooperate, I'm sure we can work things out."

With that said, he exchanged glances with the Elders from the Duan household. They were assembled at the Great Elder's behest and had intended to deal with the Second Elder since the beginning. Now that the signal was given, they attacked straight away!

The Second Elder bore a solemn and fearless countenance as he engaged those Elders head-on.

Though Ye Ling did not expect the Great Elder to start a fight so blatantly, he was prepared to fight alongside the Second Elder.

"Father, you shouldn't exert yourself when you're not feeling well recently. With the Great Elder's assistance, I'm sure this matter will be in good hands." Ye Xun cut-in and stopped Ye Ling in his tracks before he could interfere.

"Get lost. You're no daughter of mine." Ye Ling bellowed and wanted to shove her out of his way.

Duan Tianrao stepped in at this moment and while protecting Ye Xun with one arm around her, he blocked Ye Ling with the other and said: "Uncle Ye, Xun-er's doing this for your own good. Its dangerous to be involved in that scuffle. No one wants to see you getting hurt."

"Get lost! This is none of your business!" Ye Ling warned.

Duan Tianrao remained adamant without budging an inch, "Uncle Ye, you're far too soft for a head of the household. The Great Elder had thus volunteered to act on your behalf. Why're you so uncompromising? For your own safety, you've left me no choice but to keep you in check."

Ye Ling contorted his face in frustration and attacked Duan Tianrao instantly!

Duan Tianrao sneered at Ye Ling in his mind.

If Ye Ling was still in his prime, he might be a worthy opponent. However, his health and strength had deteriorated in these recent years and was no longer a challenge. What's there to be wary of?

Duan Tianrao began engaging Ye Ling one on one.

Ye Xun had a worried look on her face as she watched their duel from a side, "Father, Duan-lang! Please stop fighting!" She voiced her anxiety while she tried to stop their duel, though discreetly, she had been interjecting between Ye Ling's blows, putting him at a further disadvantage.

On the other hand, the fight between the Elders from the Duan household and the Second Elder had remained at a stalemate. Although the Second Elder was formidable, his victory was impeded by the higher number of opponents. When he noticed Duan Tianrao and Ye Xun joining hands against Ye Ling, he became distracted in the heat of the moment. The cunning Great Elder caught onto his momentary weakness, and with a single leap, he managed to get behind the Second Elder and land a fatal blow on his back.

Chapter 57: Conspiracy (3)

Upon receiving the full impact of that fatal blow, blood spewed from the Second Elder's mouth and in the next instant, he was pinned down by his opponents as he became disoriented from the damage.

"Second Elder of the Ye household. You've committed a heinous crime against humanity and in accordance to the decree of the noble Houses, I hereby sentence you to death." The Great Elder approached the Second Elder whilst he remained pinned to the ground, and with hardened eyes that exuded scorn and ruthlessness, he delivered his judgment.

"You're the treacherous one trying to usurp the authority of our House! Your persecutions against your Family Head and fellow Elders will not go unpunished! Our ancestors will never forgive you!" The Second Elder had realized, by now, that what transpired today was all part of the Great Elder's atrocious scheme.

He had long caught on to the Great Elder's treachery, but unfortunately, he could not be indicted without evidence.

And the Great Elder managed to find the chance to exploit his negligence.

Alas, it was all too late!

"That's none of your concern because from now on, you're no longer a member of our House. Repent on your sins in front of our ancestors!" A cold and vicious gleam flashed from his eyes as the Great Elder brandished a blade and with one powerful thrust, he drove it towards the Second Elder's head!

While being hindered by Duan Tianrao and Ye Xun, Ye Ling could only watch in despair at the cruel scene that had unfolded before him!

However...

Just before the blade could reach, a streak of light flashed before everyone's eyes.

A sudden force, which accompanied the light, knocked the blade directly out of the Great Elder's hands!

"Stop right there!"

A female voice rang distinctly in everyone's ears.

The voice attracted everyone's attention, including Ye Xun and Duan Tianrao who were still embroiled in a grapple against Ye Ling.

But before the couple could catch a glimpse of the owner of that voice, a shadow fled among them, sweeping them off their feet via a single boot to their ankles!

"Who dares ambush the noble houses of Ye and Duans! Show yourself!" The Great Elder bellowed his warning.

The shadow stopped beside Ye Ling, and it was only till then that everyone could finally determine its appearance.

"So? Serves them right for being impertinent towards the Head of our household. Sparring their lives is already showing them mercy." Ye Qingtang revealed her presence as she stood beside Ye Ling, glaring down on the others with a cold-eyed stare.

Everyone was stunned for a moment when they realized the intruder was Ye Qingtang.

Duan Tianrao remained stupefied even after getting back up on his feet. But his cause was more of being dazzled by Ye Qingtang's mesmerizing beauty.

While donned in a scarlet dress, her voluminous ebony curls cascaded over her shoulders and flowed along with the winds, accentuating her already impeccable facial features, and this feast for the eyes enthralled Duan Tianrao in an instant.

In her race against time, Ye Qingtang had forgotten to wear her usual face veil.

And while rushing all the way to her destination, her flustered face actually served as a lustrous makeup that enhanced her appearance when compared to her debut on the stage for the rites.

"Tang Tang!" Ye Ling was astounded for a moment when she made her sudden appearance.

Ye Qingtang reined her anger in, only after ensuring Ye Ling was unharmed.

Never would she expect Duan Tianrao and Ye Xun to raise their hands against her father.

"Ye Qingtang! How dare you raise your hand against us!" The Elders from the Duan household were obviously displeased. Since Ye Qingtang was no longer Duan Tianrao's fiancé, injuring him in the presence of those Elders was akin to belittling their family name

Chapter 58: Retaliation (1)

"Like I said, I've already shown mercy." Ye Qingtang sneered. But when she saw the Second Elder remained pinned to the ground by those Elders from the Duan household, she gave rein to her anger again.

The Great Elder and the Duan Household are all the same!

"The Duan Household are really getting out of hand. Not only did you people dare interfere in our affairs, you've even allowed your young master to raise a hand against the Head of our Household!" Ye Qingtang coldly berated them.

One of the Elders from the Duan household furrowed his brow as he asserted: "That's our young master's goodwill, to prevent your father from getting hurt in the scuffle. Your Second Elder had committed a heinous crime by plotting an assassination against your father and Great Elder. Our families share a conjugal bond and Xun-er has been on good terms with your Great Elder. So, it's only appropriate for us to lend a hand."

"Appropriate?" Ye Qingtang snickered, as a smirk played on her lips. "Ye Xun's merely an adopted child and was never in a position to meddle in our family affairs. So, what gives you people the right to interfere just by being related to her?"

Ye Qingtang did not spare a thought for Ye Xun's dignity and divulged her diminutive role in the Ye Household, despite she being recognized as one of the young ladies.

The color drained from Ye Xun's face in an instant, before she clenched her fists discreetly.

"Or is the Duan Household trying to expand its influence? Interfering in our affairs as an attempt to exert your dominance over the other noble houses?" Ye Qingtang gave those Elders a cold-eyed glare as she voiced her allegation with a tone that could chill others to the marrow.

The Elders' faces clouded over when they heard her statement.

They were invited at the Great Elder's behest to deal with the Second Elder and had no ulterior motive. But Ye Qingtang's instigation might spark off a clash between them and the other noble houses if that rumor was to spread around.

Speaking of rumors, those Elders knitted their brows when they recalled...

Just a few days ago, they heard a rumor of this young lady being in an intimate relationship with the young master from the Si Household. Presuming she had been frequenting the Si residence, if she was to embellish her story about what transpired today...

The Duan Household would, no doubt, find themselves in a tight spot.

With that in mind, the Elders from the Duan Household faltered in their decision to back the Great Elder.

Ye Qingtang gave a condescending laugh before saying: "Dear Elders, if you haven't had such an intention, shouldn't you let go of our Second Elder this instant?"

Those Elders had an aggrieved look on their faces before they finally released their grips, after thorough contemplation.

Ye Qingtang was a nobody, and nothing about her demanded their discretion, aside from her relationship with the Si Household.

They had no skirmishes with the Si Household in these recent years. To risk starting a feud with them over a favor for the Great Elder was definitely not worth the trouble.

When the Second Elder regained his freedom, he sprang back to his feet and tried to recover his inner composure, though he could not help but to peer at Ye Qingtang with a glint of bewilderment.

Is that the same timorous girl, who had been known to hide behind him and her father's back all the time?

"Miss, that's not the proper way to address Elders." The Great Elder berated Ye Qingtang but he could never imagine she would actually foil his plans.

Chapter 59: Retaliation (2)

Ye Qingtang swept her eyes over the Great Elder and stated with a sneer: "I'm the heir to the Head of the Household. I believe you're not in the position to dictate how I address others."

The Great Elder's face turned grim in an instant.

"Tang Tang... Please don't misunderstand. We're just helping father to deal with the traitor in our household." Ye Xun tried her best at putting on a kind and sympathetic look.

Ye Qingtang regarded Ye Xun's obnoxious front with disdain: "Ye Xun, I'm surprised you've yet to understand your own place. Allow me to enlighten you. Who're you to address the Head of the Household as father? Furthermore, our household affairs have nothing to do with you."

"..." Ye Qingtang's words were like daggers that pierced deeply into Ye Xun's esteem, exposing her duplicitous nature as even with her prudent temperament, she failed to maintain her sweet facade.

"Qingtang, you've gone overboard with your remarks. Xun-er grew up in your household. So naturally, she'd want the best for your family. You've misconstrued her gesture of goodwill." Duan Tianrao spoke up for Ye Xun once he came to his senses.

"For your information, she didn't 'grow up' in our household, but was raised out of pity, as merely an adopted orphan. Should you feel we've mistreated her in any sense, feel free to bring her home. We don't require her goodwill." Ye Qingtang disregarded all courtesy when she addressed Duan Tianrao.

Even without her disgust for the man, Ye Qingtang hated him down to the marrow of her bones, just from the fact that he had raised a hand against her father.

Her mocking but critical rebukes had rendered Duan Tianrao and Ye Xun speechless, totally damaging their esteem, including those Elders from the Duan Household whose faces had turned sour.

"What goes on here is solely the internal affairs of our Ye Household. Members of the Duan Household, should you have no further business with us, please leave our premises now." Ye Qingtang spared no reservations in chasing her unwanted guests away.

With her blatant condemnation of their presence, no one in the right mind would wish to remain around. Moreover, since the Second Elder was already wounded, the Great Elder should not face any more difficulties in dealing with him. Thus, leaving immediately would be the best course of action to prevent further complications.

"Great Elder, we'll take our leave then." One of the Elders represented the Duan Household in bidding their valediction.

The Great Elder nodded at the gesture, though his expression remained grim. He did not object to them leaving as he too had anticipated that he could deal with the Second Elder by himself, given the current conditions.

While the other members of the Duan household made a quick exit, Duan Tianrao feasted his eyes on Ye Qingtang's pretty face again, before voicing his concern: "Qingtang, regardless of what you think, all we've done today was for your family's best interest. Your Second Elder's treason should not go unpunished or he would remain a plague on your family's life."

Ye Qingtang ignored him completely, without giving him a single glance and Duan Tianrao could only turn around and walk away.

When they were finally gone, Ye Qingtang then approached the Second Elder, while breaking into a smile: "Welcome back."

After watching his niece's daring feats to overturn the situation, the Second Elder was pleased and relieved to see her character matured beyond his expectations.

But the Great Elder who stood at a side warned: "The Second Elder had plotted an assassination on us. His crime's too grave to be pardoned and he should be executed in accordance to our rules."

Ye Qingtang turned to face the Great Elder and asked: "Is there any evidence?"

"Evidence?" The Great Elder sneered: "With our demise, he'll be the sole beneficiary. Is there a need for further evidence?"

Ye Qingtang snickered and stated matter-of-factly: "That's just speculation and not evidence. Yesterday night when those assassins intruded my father's quarters, I happened to be around and crossed swords with them. Though their prowess was certainly beyond my capabilities, I managed to catch a glimpse of the word 'Qin' embroidered under the collar of their sleeves. If memory serves, would that be the insignia belonging to that infamous assassins' guild in our city, the Qin Luo Pavilion?"

Chapter 60: Retaliation (3)

Once Ye Qingtang had spoken those words, the Great Elder was shocked stiff for a moment.

"If you're intent on investigating, you ought to start with Qin Luo's Pavilion then. Most likely, you can uncover the mastermind there, you reckon?" Ye Qingtang looked straight at the Great Elder with a smirk on her face.

At the moment, the Great Elder's face was stricken grim.

Never did he expect Ye Qingtang to discover a clue about those assassins. Even if they had turned against him out of the blue, the Great Elder could not confront them directly.

After all....

He was the one who had hired their services to begin with.

Though the assassination was a failure, if a rumor of him hiring assassins was to spread around, his reputation would plummet and all his machinations would easily raise suspicions from the public.

The Great Elder's face became contorted with anxiety when he realized the risk. To dwell on the case would be most unwise and therefore, though he was still disturbed by Ye Qingtang's findings, he could only put on a composed front, saying: "Since you've witnessed that, I'll send the men to investigate. If it's really their doing, I'll make sure they cough up the mastermind."

The Great Elder heaved a deep breath before he committed to follow up on the investigations personally.

Since he could never allow Ye Ling or the Second Elder to make the investigations otherwise.

"In that case, before you discern the truth, the Second Elder will be innocent." Ye Qingtang had a beaming smile on her face as she thwarted the Great Elder's plan directly to his face.

The Great Elder now looked like someone who had eaten dirt.

Failing to get rid of Ye Ling yesterday was already a blunder. Allowing Ye Qingtang to discover the identity of those assassins; inadvertently thwarting his plan to frame the Second Elder today, was akin to rubbing salt into his wound....

The Great Elder no longer wished to debate on the matter and just nodded slightly to her statement.

"Since you've no objections, let's return for now." Ye Qingtang maintained her smile as she indulged in the Great Elder's anguish with a mischievous gleam in her eyes.

The Great Elder snorted in return and without another word, he turned around to board his carriage.

With the Great Elder's departure, the Second Elder whom had remained silent all this while finally spoke up.

"Tang Tang, long time no see. You've completely changed, and for the better. Now, your father and I can finally stop worrying about you." The Second Elder regarded Ye Qingtang amicably. He and Ye Ling had always been concerned over Ye Qingtang's timorous nature, as it would certainly hinder her duties as the future head of the household.

But now, it seemed they had been overprotective instead.

"Father had arranged the finest liquors, prepared to celebrate your return. Let's go home and we can drink and chat on our way back." Ye Qingtang suggested as she looked upon the Second Elder with warmth in her eyes.

In her past, regardless of her meek and timid nature, the Second Elder had always stood by and protected her. He could be considered a close relative, and now that his life was saved, Ye Qingtang could finally absolve one of her deepest regrets.

"Good. It's been too long. I can finally drink to my heart's content." The Second Elder laughed merrily as he voiced his enthusiasm.

With that decided, Ye Qingtang, Ye Ling and the Second Elder boarded the same carriage and returned home.

While the carriage rolled swiftly along the roads, they shared the recent happenings in the household and though the Second Elder was injured, his wound did not stop him from indulging in his drinks.

But when he learned that Duan Tianrao had called off his engagement with Ye Qingtang to be with Ye Xun, his face clouded over in an instant.