

## The Blind Concubine

*Summary: A blind concubine lives in the cold palace. The blind concubine has a snow white cat. Day after day, year after year, he lives quietly in the courtyard of the cold palace. It is as if he has already been forgotten by the entire imperial palace. Until one day, the young emperor accidentally chances upon him... Translation of Xini's Chinese novel. Slash. \*Chapter 1\*:*

Disclaimer: This is a translation of the Chinese novel 瞎娘娘 by 洗泥 and not my own work.

Warnings: Slash themes. This is rated T for now but may change to rated M later on as I update so please keep that in mind.

### Synopsis:

A blind concubine lives in the cold palace(1). The blind concubine has a snow white snow white cat. Day after day, year after year, he lives quietly in the courtyard of the cold palace. It is as if he has already been forgotten by the entire imperial palace. Until one day, the young emperor accidentally chances upon him...

### 1.

The end of spring and beginning of summer is a time loved by many. The sun is not scorching yet warm, the tree leaves suffused with a tender green. In this kind of good weather, even the cat will sprawl lazily, softly mewling, tuck in its paws, and doze away in slumber, becoming a snow white mound. At least, the cat of the blind concubine's is like this.

The blind concubine hears the small sound of cat paws treading the ground, the tiny meowing sound of the cat's cries, hears the rustle of the breeze across its fur, and he can not help but smile.

He makes his way down the stairs, one small step after another small step to the middle of the courtyard. He carefully sits down in his rattan chair to enjoy this serene afternoon. The whole time he is smiling.

No one knows when the blind concubine entered the palace, nor does anyone know for what reason he is confined within the cold palace. No one even knows the cause of his blindness.

In the palace some will say that the blind concubine had a high fever as an infant to which he nearly lost his life. Afterwards, despite overcoming the sickness, his eyes could not see again. Other people will say that when the concubine first entered the palace, his eyes were beautiful and full of life but who knows what happened afterwards for his eyes to end

up like this.

In the palace, servants and palace maids alike will bicker about the blind concubine's eyes but not one person can persuade the other. As time passes, not many people remember the blind concubine's name, because he is blind so they call him the blind concubine. Now, even the imperial wives call him thus and not one person can remember his name.

But all the people in the palace know that in the cold palace, there lives a blind concubine who has a snowy white cat. That cat is called Yu Li and Yu Li is the blind concubine's dearest treasure.

Yu Li's entire body is snowy white, not a single colored hair. Upon touch, it is the softest, most satiny thing to feel, even better than touching the most expensive silk cloth. Let's not mention its round penetrating cat eyes, almost as if they could suck in the very souls of people.

The blind concubine treats this cat as his most beloved to the extent of tucking into sleep with his cat in his arms. But Yu Li is a very mischievous cat, often escaping out of the cold palace. Once it decides to go, neither hide nor hair will be seen of it.

If Yu Li does not return by nightfall, the blind concubine will begin to fret, worriedly sending Xiao Bao out into the night to search for it.

However, the palace is big. Trying to find a person in the palace is already a very difficult task, let alone trying to find a cat. Xiao Bao will often leave with a frown on his face and return with the same expression.

"Master, we are barely able to feed ourselves yet you still have the patience to care for a cat."

At this time, the blind concubine will always close his eyes and beam, saying: "Yu Li is nice to have around. How cold and cheerless a place this cold palace is? With it as a companion, I am not as lonely."

As for food, the blind concubine, unable to bring himself to eat it, will save the best for Yu Li, much preferring that he himself starve.

Not many people in the palace have seen the blind concubine but the same cannot be said of Xiao Bao. Let us not underestimate him because of his small stature, but he is indeed a clever child. He will think of many ways to bring food back to the cold palace. When the weather turns cold, he will kneel outside of the house of the old administrator of palace interior(2) begging for the addition of a warm stove for the blind concubine, no matter if it is a used one nobody else wants.

Only thanks to Xiao Bao's warm stove were they able to endure the coldest days of the winter season.

The blind concubine fears the cold weather. Yu Li is fears it even more. One person and one cat will curl together, shivering in cold.

How can Xiao Bao not feel tenderness for these two? How can Xiao Bao not try his best, even when his own hands freeze from the cold and form blisters, when his blisters tear open and blood drips down his fingertips into the snow.

The other imperial concubines who like Yu Li want to raise it as their own so they prepare warm beds and dried fish sticks. Yu Li do not even bat them an eye and ignore the fish sticks, willing to live in the blind concubine's cold palace even in the coldest, harshest of winters faithfully by the blind concubine's side.

The palace people are astonished by this, saying that Yu Li isn't just an ordinary cat. Xiao Bao thinks that the blind concubine does not cherish Yu Li in vain.

The blind concubine himself however knows nothing of all that goes around him. He cannot see and walking is difficult for him so he rarely goes outside. Xiao Bao tells him all that happens in the palace.

Whatever Xiao Bao talks, he listens. Everyday from morning to dark, he smiles. Xiao Bao likes it like this.

When the blind concubine is happy, he is happy. He has neither family nor acquaintance so he can only care for the blind concubine.

The blind concubine likes Yu Li so he cannot help but dote on the cat as well. When Yu Li disappears, Xiao Bao runs the risk of being scolded and punished to go searching for it outside the cold palace, in the imperial gardens, in the imperial kitchen.

If he does not go, the blind concubine will stagger outside himself to look. He would much rather be the one to endure punishment than the blind concubine.

Winter is a faraway notion now that spring has ended and summer has come and how happy the blind concubine is.

In this kind of good weather, this sort of afternoon, the warm breeze coaxes people to sleep. The blind concubine lounges on the rattan chair, Yu Li content by his feet. No other afternoon can compare to this one. It is as if all the wonderful things have melted into this warm sunlight that pours down onto this tiny patch of earth.

The blind concubine does not know this but at this time, standing in the courtyard entrance, is a man watching him. That person's expression is very concentrated like he has been enraptured by someone, someone's sleeping contented face. And he involuntarily smiles, becoming a part of the warmth given from the sunlight.

The blind concubine also does not know that the person wears a robe of bright yellow. An exquisite pendant hangs from his waist, his face an appearance of calm. Behind him stands a long train of deferential and bowing servants and palace maids.

The blind concubine cannot see so how is he to know?

Xiao Bao on the other hand has seen and in an instant has fallen to kneel prostrate on the ground.

A wave of the man's hand stops him in midmotion.

Xiao Bao holds his breath in fear, secretly peering at the blind concubine as if this

way he would sense the presence of the stranger.

The blind concubine lies suspended between sleep and wakefulness, basking under the sun.

Xiao Bao feels like crying. No one ever steps into the cold palace. Why, on today of all days, does someone come, someone like him?

Why does he come here? This is the cold palace.

How long has he been here? Why does he not speak? Why is he watching the blind concubine?

Xiao Bao has nearly fallen to hysterics.

The blind concubine, however, remains unconscious, unfeeling, a sweet, slightly lost expression on his face. Yu Li can feel the unusual shift in the atmosphere and opens its eyes.

Its clear penetrating eyes sweeps about the courtyard. It meows, arches its back, nimbly leaps past the crowd of people and is gone in a blink of an eye. Hearing Yu Li, the blind concubine begins to stir awake dazedly and rubs his eyes. Subconsciously, he claps his hands, crying "Yu Li." No response.

How can that be? Yu Li was there just earlier.

"Yu Li," he cries again, louder this time.

Like before, he receives no response.

He can sense that Yu Li is no longer there.

Why did Yu Li suddenly run off? The blind concubine cannot help but feel a tendril of worry.

He cannot sit still any longer. He cautiously stands up from the rattan chair and begins to grope about the courtyard, softly crying "Yu Li, Yu Li..."

As if this would call his precious Yu Li back to his side.

Xiao Bao kneels off to the side, seeing his master fumble steadily in the direction of the yellow robed man. However he can only watch in silent trepidation.

Please let nothing happen to him, Xiao Bao prays. That is not someone who can be offended lightly.

If by any chance, master displeases him, even if Xiao Bao kneels until both legs break off, he cannot save him.

The blind concubine can think of nothing else but his cat, oblivious to all else around him. His steps quicken, stumbling forward. The flagstones of the cold palace are paved unevenly and the blind concubine cannot see. His toe catches in a crack in the rocks and he is suddenly falling headfirst towards the hard, unyielding ground.

Xiao Bao cries out in fear. The yellow robed man takes a large stride forward, sleeves fluttering. The surrounding servants haven't even had time to make sense of what happened and the blind concubine is lying securely in his embrace.

The blind concubine's heart flutters like a bird, and he has broken out a thin film of sweat. How careless of him to nearly have fallen flat on his face! It's a good thing Xiao Bao caught him in time.

He leans against that broad chest. The ankle he twisted in his fall throbs painfully. It

takes a while for him to come back to his senses. Something's not right.

This is not Xiao Bao.

Xiao Bao is small and thin and is not even as tall as himself.

Then who is this person?

Heedless of the pain in his foot, the blind concubine hurriedly pushes himself away from the other man's arms, "So-sorry.."

"No worries, just be more careful next time." The man's voice is soft, carrying no trace of anger.

The blind concubine relaxes.

"Who are you?"

"Me?" The voice pauses, as if thinking how to respond in a better way, "I am a bodyguard in the imperial palace."

"A bodyguard," the blind concubine nods, "Then how come you have come here?"

The voice pauses again, "I was sent somewhere on a mission but lost my way coming back."

"Oh, I see." The blind concubine nods again.

The man asks: "Does your foot still hurt?"

"A bit..."

"Let me take a look."

"Alright..."

This is the first meeting between the blind concubine and that man.

Afterwards, a very long time afterwards, when the blind concubine reminisces upon these memories, he will ask: "Why did you lie to me and say you were a guard?"

The man teasingly says: "Because you looked easy to trick."

The blind concubine will say indignantly: "I do not!"

The man raises his eyebrows in disbelief, opens his mouth, thinks for a moment, but then swallows the words that he was originally saying, "Oh alright, I concede."

Like their first meeting, the man's soft gaze concentrates on his lover. Never has it wavered in the slightest despite the endless passing of time. Regardless, regardless of the fact that he knows the blind concubine will never be able to see it.

cold palace- called the "leng gong" in Chinese which translates literally into "cold palace." This is a place where concubines or wives who have fallen out of the emperor's favor or have committed some transgression are sent to live out the rest of their lives in isolation.

administrator of palace interior- This is my own translation, or what I think the English equivalent would be, of the title in Chinese. It is the eunuch in charge of handling all the interior affairs inside the imperial palace(forbidden kingdom) as the name suggests.

## **\*Chapter 2\*:**

2.

The young emperor stands in front of the window and teases the bird in its cage, a thoughtful expression on his face.

Lost in his own thoughts, his hands pause in their motion as the oriental greenfinch hops in its cage as lively as could be.

The elderly administrator of palace interior stands behind the emperor, clueless as to why he was summoned before the benevolent ruler of the country. Having served for many years in the palace, he was deeply aware of the meaning to 'the will of the divine is hard to

fathom,' so he bows his head and waits in silence for the emperor to speak.

The young emperor turns around and pursing his lips, says "The person who resides in the cold palace who has yet to come of age, slight of frame and sightless. Who is he?"

The administrator of palace interior mutters to himself for a moment, then bows and says "Though this humble servant(1) does not handle the affairs of the cold palace, one does from time to time hear rumors. The person master speaks of has resided within the cold palace for a long time. His blindness may have been caused by some sickness. He is a person of little significance thereupon his birth name is known by none. The people of the castle think it fitting to call him the blind concubine for his blindness and as over time, this is what he has come to be known as."

The young emperor says "Why do I(2) have no memory of neither his arrival into the imperial palace nor the reason for his banishment to the cold palace?"

The administrator hesitates and replies "This humble servant is not knowledgeable on this, and also the past affairs of the palace are many. If deeper investigation were to be undertaken into this matter, it may prove a heavy challenge. Your majesty must attend to many affairs of government each day. Several years ago, the supervision of all affairs of the imperial harem were assumed by the Emperor Dowager so it is not surprising that your majesty does not know of this.

The young emperor nods, turns around and continues to tease the bird. The chirping of the greenfinch is gentle and pleasant to the ear.

His lips curl up faintly as he recalls unintentionally meeting the young man yesterday in the cold palace.

The afternoon sunlight was intoxicating and the scent of flowers permeated the air. While taking an idle stroll in the imperial gardens, the sun of late spring and early summer clouding his senses, unbeknownst to him, he had long ventured far from the imperial gardens into a more secluded area of the palace-the cold palace.

The wild grasses and plants of the cold palace were left untended and flourished over a vast expanse of land as if it were to join with the horizon. A brush of wind swept up the flower blossoms from the ground. In the very moment he raised his sleeve, past the flower blossoms dancing in the sky, he saw him.

His gaze was immediately drawn to his pale face, his slender figure clothed in a simple white robe.

His content expression.

Smiling.

As if no one existed but him, but the shadow of the trees, the scattering of the flower blossoms, the splendor of the sunlight.

His feet had moved on their own and entered the courtyard and he looked for a long time. He had even dismissed the greeting(3) of the servant.

What had attracted him?

He had no outstanding beauty to speak of, and furthermore, he was sightless.

A countless number of beautiful women reside in the palace, each of them possessing

a pair of pretty eyes, whereas this one had none.

The young emperor sighs and summons for a servant.

The blind concubine basks under the sun in the small courtyard.

How can anyone pass up the good weather?

A light breeze carries with it the scent of green grass.

Yu Li dozes on his feet. Its warmth penetrates the thin material of the cloth and soothes his heart.

Xiao Bao also leans against the rattan chair dozing in light slumber.

A parade of footsteps from faraway seems to be headed this way.

Xiao Bao stands up in bewilderment, dusts off his clothes, and sees the administrator of palace interior standing in the entrance of the small courtyard leading a crowd of manservants and palace maids. Indeed, this gave him quite a scare.

What has become of the cold palace? Why does everyone suddenly see fit to pay us a visit?

The administrator makes a shushing motion with his hands and beckons him forward with his eyes.

Xiao Bao lowers his head to see that the blind concubine has already fallen asleep, so he carefully makes his way to the courtyard entrance and kneels.

He has never encountered this administrator before but remembering the beatings and punishments administered by the others, upon seeing this uniform attire and this badge, his calves begin to quiver and his palms break out into cold sweat.

But this administrator surprisingly allows him to rise to accept his orders.

A long unending procession of manservants and palace maids hold embroidered silk fabric quilts, glazed porcelain chinaware, exquisitely crafted fabric fans...so that he cannot help but take a quick peek.

The administrator whispers a few words to the person standing beside him. The person nods his head and as silently as they can, leads the manservants and palace maids into moving the many gifts of different sizes into the courtyard, arranging them in their proper positions.

Xiao Bao's jaws drop in astonishment.

The administrator says to Xiao Bao " These gifts, speak not of their existence to your master. Understand?"

Xiao Bao starts, hurriedly nods his head, "Yes, I understand."

"Nor will you mention one word of the gift giver."

Xiao Bao again nods vigorously, "Rest assured, even if Xiao Bao possesses the guts of a hundred men, Xiao Bao dares not speak a word."

"From this day on, I fear there will be many esteemed persons passing through the cold palace. You must go about your duties as in the past. Do not let your master sense any change. Beware of what comes from your mouth, you should know this."

Xiao Bao makes a gesture of agreement.

After a while, a servant comes forward to report, "Everything has been properly arranged."

The administrator nods and waves his hand to dismiss the servant. Then leaving behind a few last closing instructions, he leads the crowd of manservants and palace maids

away.

Struck by a moment of pure stupefaction, Xiao Bao finally comes back to his senses. What, what is this?

How many years has master lived in the cold palace? Never has anyone questioned this. Ordinarily it would take half a day for Xiao Bao to beg for some food to bring back. Why is this changing now?

He ran into the main house to take a look and his eyeballs nearly popped out of their sockets.

The furnishings inside the house dazzled his eyes: sandalwood engravings, FuHai pattern flower vases, golden lotus candlesticks, peach patterned vessels...Heavens, is this still the cold palace?

As Xiao Bao gawked about in delighted astonishment, the blind concubine remained completely oblivious, holding his precious Yu Li to his breast as he lay on the old rattan chair.

However, Yu Li has just woken up, blinking its round penetrating cat eyes in silence, stilly.

Only after a long while does the blind concubine wake.

The afternoon rays spill on him through the breaks in the tree leaves like a blanket embroidered with gold thread, so soft and comfortable so that no sleep is enough.

With difficulty, Xiao Bao manages to move the new divan into the courtyard. Possessing neither a strong body nor strength, he can only move the object a little bit for each step he takes. The wooden base slides over the uneven ground, emitting a sharp noise.

The blind concubine stands up with Yu Li in his arms, hands smoothing over its soft cat hairs. "What's that noise?"

Xiao Bao has shed a film of sweat under the bright sun, but his voice is ecstatic as he says, "Master, come sit on this chair."

He supports the blind concubine to the soft divan, sits him down and slips off his shoes.

"How does it feel?"

" Oh my! How soft!" exclaims the blind concubine.

"It is! Master has said it." Xiao Bao cannot help but smile.

Yu Li slips out of the blind concubine's arms and somersaults comfortably on the divan, mewing in pleasure, tail swishing back and forth.

The blind concubine happily says, "Yu Li isn't willing to move!"

When Yu Li is happy, he feels even more happiness.

He has never used something like this.

Curiously, he asks, "Where did you find this?"

Xiao Bao remembers the administrator's instructions, thinks, then says, "I found it on my way back. Maybe one of the harem's concubines require it no longer and has discarded it near the cold palace."

The blind concubine seems to believe this and smiles.

What a treasure!

And even Yu Li likes it.

"Sorry to have troubled you to move it back here."

"If it pleases you, master."

The blind concubine gropes about for Yu Li's paws, then tugs him forward, "You must sit too. It's very comfortable."

Xiao Bao makes a sound of surprise. "No, that would be improper!"

"Nonsense. Come sit! It is really very comfortable."

Xiao Bao shuffles backwards. He dares not sit on the soft divan the emperor himself

bestowed on the blind concubine!

Oblivious to Xiao Bao's thoughts, he presses down on his shoulders and pushes him to sit on the soft divan. "Isn't it soft?"

The split second Xiao Bao's bottom made contact with the material of the couch, he springs back up and cries, "Yes, very soft. But a servant does not have the good fortune to enjoy these comforts. As long as you find it comfortable, I am pleased."

The blind concubine is thrown off by Xiao Bao's actions.

YuLi, on the other hand, has no patience to acknowledge this pair of master and servant. Legs extended comfortably, he sinks deep into the divan.

The blind concubine sits back onto the divan, mindful of Yu Li, "but it really is very comfortable..."

"You really won't sit?"

Xiao Bao shakes his head like a rattle-drum, "No."

"Oh..."

The blind concubine is very confused.

This is very soft, indeed.

Why not sit?

Sighing, he thinks, this strange child...

This humble servant- Anyone who serves the emperor must refer to themselves in the third person using the title of whatever position they are in, for respect. For example servants actually refer to themselves as "slaves" if directly translated from Chinese but it means about the same as "this humble servant" in English.

I- In Chinese, the emperor would refer to himself as "zhen" and not "I" because it actually signifies his status as the emperor. However, for the purposes of translation, I'm just going to leave it as "I."

Greeting- This is equivalent to bowing to a king in Medieval European societies when you see them and then when you leave his presence as a gesture of respect and recognition of status called "gui an" but I wasn't sure how to translate this well so I just left it at that. Basically, you kneel and then bend your forehead to the ground with your hands on both sides next to your head and say, announce yourself, and wish the emperor a long life or something along those lines. And the bowing is not just done in the presence of nobility but to esteemed elders or parents too but don't take me for an expert on the subject.

### **\*Chapter 3\*:**

3.

The blind concubine has been very confused recently.

When eating, the bowl he holds in his hands, he suddenly discovers, does not feel crude to the touch but fine and delicate.

"Ah Xiao Bao, have we gotten new bowls?"

Xiao Bao hastily denies, "No, of course not."

The blind concubine furrows his eyebrows doubtfully, fingers skimming along the rim of the bowl and cries out as if he has discovered something interesting, "Ah!"

Xiao Bao jumps out of his skin, "What? What is it?"

"The bowl I use has a crack in it but this one doesn't have one!"

"Maybe master has remembered wrong." Xiao Bao says after a pause, his voice lacking in confidence.

"How could I have remembered wrong," the blind concubine cries, "last year, I cut my lip on it when I was drinking soup and you even scolded me for it."

Xiao Bao's eyes shift away uncomfortably. "Is that true..."

The blind concubine continues to skim his fingers along the rim of the bowl as if touching it more would make the crack magically appear.

In desperation, Xiao Bao says, "The cooks in the imperial kitchen gave me some fruits, allow this humble servant to fetch them for your ladyship (1)."

The blind concubine agrees and sets down his bowl, sitting straight up in wait.

Xiao Bao sets the fruits on the table, peels away the skin, and places them into the blind concubine's hands.

After taking a bite, the blind concubine says, "So sweet!"

Xiao Bao parrots his agreement, "Mmm."

The blind concubine takes another bite, saying, "This is the sweetest fruit I've ever tasted."

In his heart, Xiao Bao thinks, how can it not be sweet if given by the emperor?

Bowing his head, he peels off the skin of a grape and passes it to the blind concubine.

He puts the grape in his mouth and exclaims, "It's very juicy!"

Xiao Bao smiles, "Is there?"

The blind concubine swallows the grape and stares blankly for a few seconds, "Xiao Bao, We've not had grapes for some time, is that right?"

"I received some grapes for us last year in the hottest months of summer," Xiao Bao thinks.

The blind concubine shakes his head, "Those grapes were tiny and sour, and most of them had rotten. You took one bite and spit it right back out and then wouldn't even let me take a bite. Then you cursed the administrator of goods distribution."

Xiao Bao rolls his eyes. Those condescending bastards deserved it.

The blind concubine says, "You try some too. It's very good."

Xiao Bao says, "It's enough that your ladyship likes them. Xiao Bao doesn't like grapes."

Lowering his head, he cuts the skinned mangos into slices, puts them in a small bowl, and pushes them towards the blind concubine.

The blind concubine does not move.

"Then what does Xiao Bao like to eat?"

"This humble servant does not like anything particularly."

"How can that be," the blind concubine says, "there must be something you like, tell me."

"...there really isn't."

Persistent in his questioning, he says, "If it's a secret, you can tell me. I won't tell anyone."

Xiao Bao purses his lips and stops talking.

After a while, he lightly says, "...tangerines."

"Ah, tangerines."

Feeling slightly embarrassed, Xiao Bao's head dips lower, "Mmm."

Near the door a cat meows. The blind concubine happily says, "Yu Li is back."

Yu Li swiftly runs to the table, making a beeline for the blind concubine's feet. His tail swishes. His stomach grumbles.

The blind concubine caresses the cat's smooth body. A smile appears on his face, "Want some grapes?"

Yu Li meows.

"Yu Li wants to eat grapes too," the blind concubine smiles.

Xiao Bao says, "Cats cannot eat fruit on an empty stomach or they get diarrhea. I'll go get some cat food for Yu Li to eat with the fruit."

"You're right, Xiao Bao," says the blind concubine.

He lifts Yu Li up by his armpits and rubs his nose against the cat's soft pink one,  
"Let's eat the grapes after we eat our cat food."

Yu Li meows again.

Taking Yu Li's meowing for agreement, the blind concubine says, "Yu Li is such a good cat."

As Xiao Bao watches them, he suddenly really wants to laugh.

Especially this blind concubine.

Shaking his head, he leaves to get the cat food.

A cool breeze blows gently on a summer's night. The bright moonlight sprinkles onto the small courtyard.

The blind concubine sits on the soft divan, hugging Yu Li, and feeding him grapes one by one.

"Now I don't have to worry about pricking my hands on the vines from the rattan chair," says the blind concubine, "with this divan."

Xiao Bao tilts his head to look at the night sky, "Yes."

A bright moon hangs in the night sky scattered with stars.

"It's pretty," he can't help but say.

"Is it?" the blind concubine asks.

Xiao Bao's head is still raised as he replies, "Mmm-hmm. The moon is big and round. It's very pretty."

The blind concubine lies down with Yu Li and strokes his soft head. "Yu Li, look. Is it really as pretty as Xiao Bao says?"

Yu Li softly cries out.

The blind concubine feels a little happy.

The night wind has grown stronger.

The stars reflect in Yu Li's round and penetrating pupils as if the wind has blown all the stars off of their perches in the night sky into Yu Li's eyes.

The blind concubine lies under the silver sheen of moonlight, face like fine porcelain, but his eyes are a dull lackluster gray.

"Look for me through your eyes, Yu Li."

The breeze scatters his words into the night so it is not clear if Yu Li heard.

The grass in the cold palace rustles. The flowers and leaves on the ground intertwine and cast a tangled shadow. The blind concubine suddenly says, "If only it could be like this forever."

Xiao Bao says, "Like how?"

The blind concubine says, "You, and me, and Yu Li. If we could be together always, if we could smell the flowers, listen to the birds and insects, bask in the sun in the day, sit under the stars at night, talk about anything, and be like this for a long long time to come, to be together, that would be nice."

Xiao Bao says, "Alright."

"Huh?" the blind concubine says, "You're agreeing?"

Xiao Bao shrugs, "How could I not agree?"

The blind concubine strokes the soft ball in his arms, "How about you, Yu Li?"

Yu Li meows and butts the blind concubine's neck.

The blind concubine smiles cheerfully.

When it comes the time to retire to bed, the blind concubine climbs onto the bed and Xiao Bao tucks him in.

The second the blind concubine lays down, he jumps up in surprise, "Ah!"

"What is it, master?" Xiao Bao asks.

The blind concubine says, "Did we get new sheets, and pillows, and blankets?"

Xiao Bao pats his chest to calm his racing heart.  
He shakes his head in denial, "No."  
The blind concubine asks doubtfully, "No?"  
Xiao Bao's expression doesn't change, "No."  
The blind concubine whispers, "No?"  
Xiao Bao crosses his arms on his chest and raises his eyebrow, "Is your ladyship going to sleep or not?"  
The blind concubine quickly placates, "Yes, I'm sleeping."  
He doesn't want to upset Xiao Bao.  
Finally, he crawls under the covers and goes to sleep as told.  
But the sheets underneath are too comfortable to imagine, the blanket too soft and silky as if woven with the finest silks.  
Even when Xiao Bao has left for a while, the blind concubine's pale slender hand continues to stroke the fiber, whispering quietly to himself.  
At dawn the next day, the courtyard is deathly quiet.  
The blind concubine has already woken and lies on the bed, eyes open wide.  
Usually, at this time, Xiao Bao has long woken up and is drawing water from the well, washing the clothes, and feeding Yu Li. If Yu Li decides to be picky, he will chase after him and pull on his tail.  
But today, there is nothing at all.  
The blind concubine is puzzled.  
He gropes about for his clothes on the dresser, puts them on, and exits the main house into the small courtyard.  
"Xiao Bao, Yu Li." He calls out like he has always done before.  
He hears Xiao Bao answer after a long while, "Master."  
The blind concubine says, "Oh, you're here, Xiao Bao. I thought you had left."  
After a very long while, he still hasn't heard a reply.  
The blind concubine says, "What is it?"  
"Your ladyship, we have... a guest."  
The blind concubine is startled, "A guest? Who is it?"  
"The guard, from last time."  
Your ladyship- This is the title for the imperial concubines in the palace and the title itself is feminine in nature.

#### **\*Chapter 4\*:**

4.  
The blind concubine says, "Oh my, why didn't you say so earlier!"  
He cannot see that Xiao Bao is still kneeling, "Quick, go steep a pot of tea."  
Xiao Bao looks at his master, then turns to look at the emperor, afraid to move.  
Unawares, the blind concubine says to the man, "How come you are here? Don't you have to be at your post?"  
The emperor says, "I've just finished so on my way back, I come to visit you."  
The blind concubine feels exceptionally happy, "Ordinarily I do not receive many guests. Having one person who just wants to come over and talk is rare."  
The emperor says, "If you'd like, I can visit often."  
The blind concubine's eyes curve into a pleasant arc, "Now that's a promise."  
He tugs the emperor's sleeve over to the soft divan, "Sit over here where it's soft."  
The emperor lifts up the hems of his robe and sits down, then acts astonished, "I didn't see this the last time I came by here. Who gave it to you?"

The blind concubine smiles cheerfully, "Who would give me such a gift. Xiao Bao found it. No one wanted it anyways so it's a waste to throw it away."

As if in realization, the emperor says, "So that's how it is. You've really picked up a gem here."

Xiao Bao has finished steeping the tea in the main house and carries it outside to serve. The blind concubine asks, "Which tea set did you use?"

Xiao Bao says, "The set with the plum blossoms, master."

The blind concubine nods.

The emperor thoughtlessly teases, "What does it matter? Why would you use a plum blossom tea set in summer?"

The blind concubine giggles, "It does matter. I only have two tea sets, one with green bamboo and the other with plum blossoms. Yu Li broke the set with the green bamboo so it has cracks in it. The plum blossom set is new so we only take it out during the New Year's or other festivities."

The emperor takes the teacup the blind concubine hands him, secretly planning to send over a new tea set the next day.

They sip tea for a while until the blind concubine asks, "Where is your guard post?"

The emperor thinks, then says, "I guard the emperor's residence."

"The emperor's residence?" exclaims the blind concubine. "Is it alright for you to leave your post like this?"

"It's fine," the emperor says.

The blind concubine still feels worried, "What if you are found out and get punished?"

The emperor ponders this for a moment and replies in a serious manner, "I do not think the emperor will punish me for this."

He sounds confident.

"That's good," the blind concubine nods, absorbing the lie.

Xiao Bao stands off to the side, a sandalwood tray in his hands, having broken out in cold sweat.

From his sleeve, the emperor fishes out an item wrapped in a handkerchief and hands it to the blind concubine, "This is good. Try it."

The blind concubine undoes the knot on the handkerchief and feels. Pine nuts.

He puts a couple into his mouth to taste. The fragrance assails his senses. They do taste good.

The emperor thinks that when the blind concubine eats pine nuts, he looks like some breed of small animal grasping the food in its two paws and nibbling meticulously at it.

The blind concubine says, "Can you leave the imperial palace often?"

The emperor laughs, "Why do you suddenly ask? Of course I can."

Hearing this, the blind concubine is envious, "Really? I haven't left the palace for several years."

The emperor says, "Really?"

"Mm-hmm," the blind concubine answers, "Actually from the time I entered the palace, I haven't left at all. Later when I was moved to the cold palace, I had even less of a chance to leave."

The emperor thinks and says, "According to the rules of the palace, that is right."

The blind concubine lowers his head, eating his pine nuts in silence.

His face has a slight expression of loneliness.

"Do you really want to go outside?"

The blind concubine makes a sound of agreement, "I want to go outside so much that I can't stand it."

His voice dips lower noticeably, "but I can't leave...also, it's not convenient."

His grey eyes dim.

Since entering the imperial palace, he hasn't once left.

Afterwards, he couldn't even take one step out of the cold palace.

Ordinarily, he tries not to think about this because once he does, he will feel sad.

The emperor asks, "If you went outside, what would you do?"

"Take a stroll on the busy streets. Listen to the children running about. Smell the scent of sweet pastries drifting in the air. Then, I'll buy a stick of candied hawthorn. That would be nice."

The emperor asks, "That's all?"

"Of course," the blind concubine nods, "that's all."

He carelessly let slip what he hid at the bottom of his heart and feels somewhat nervous. He gropes around for Yu Li to pull him into his arms.

If he is holding Yu Li, no one will notice his hands trembling violently.

The emperor's line of sight sweeps over the blind concubine, "It's getting late. I should be heading back."

"Oh, yes." The blind concubine raises his head. "It wouldn't do to be found out."

The emperor smiles, "You remember that." His folding fan taps the blind concubine's eyebrows.

"Of course I would," the blind concubine says, "I just hope you don't get into any trouble, otherwise, I wouldn't be able to see you anymore."

In reply, the emperor says, "That is true."

The blind concubine smiles cheerfully, "Thank you for your company."

The emperor says, "What is there to thank?"

The blind concubine says, "Because no one has ever come here before. You are the first."

After hesitating, he continues, "Sometimes Xiao Bao leaves and Yu Li isn't here. It gets very quiet and there's no wind. So I wonder whether I'm still alive or if I've already died."

When the wind grows stronger at night, the emperor has already left for a long time so the blind concubine carries Yu Li into the house.

Xiao Bao carries the food over to the table, along with Yu Li's dinner which he puts over to one side.

The blind concubine scratches Yu Li's soft mane, carries him over to his food dish, and lets him down on the ground.

Xiao Bao places chopsticks in the blind concubine's hands, "Master is very happy today."

After eating one bite, the blind concubine nods his head elatedly, "Someone's come to visit."

Xiao Bao asks, "Does master want him to come often?"

The blind concubine laughs, "Naturally."

Then asks, "Does Xiao Bao want him to come too?"

Xiao Bao moodily swallows a mouthful of rice and after a long while, says, "...mm."

The blind concubine eats a couple mouthfuls of food, then suddenly thinks and quickly asks, "I didn't say anything wrong today, did I?"

Xiao Bao bites his chopsticks, hesitating, "Why would master say that?"

The blind concubine is a little embarrassed. "I haven't talked to anyone else for such a long time so earlier I was so happy that I said things like wanting to leave the palace and buy candied hawthorn. Was I ridiculous? I hope he doesn't laugh at me, or he won't come again next time."

Xiao Bao sandwiches a piece of vegetable between his chopsticks and puts it in the blind concubine's bowl. "Master didn't say anything wrong at all. That person wasn't laughing at you."

"He wasn't?"

"Not at all," Xiao Bao says firmly. "I was watching the entire time. Don't worry. That person didn't find you the least bit laughable."

The blind concubine says, "That's good," and lowers his head to eat.

Xiao Bao says, "Master, don't just eat rice. Eat more meat too. There's pork today."

The blind concubine's eyes go round, "Really?"

Xiao Bao says, "Really." He thinks, then adds, "It might be because the weather's turned warm so we've been allotted more meat. Eat more, master. Don't leave any. There'll be more tomorrow."

The blind concubine is happy, "That's fantastic."

Then he says, "Give some to Yu Li too. He never gets to eat anything good staying with us."

Xiao Bao says, "I know. Don't worry."

After the two finish supper, it is already late.

The blind concubine cannot see so he sleeps early.

Xiao Bao lights the candles and covers them with lampshades. He waits upon the blind concubine as he washes up, then leads him to bed.

The blind concubine says, "How many times have I said this. I can do this myself."

Xiao Bao cannot help but say, "Who was it who just had to pour the water to wash up but burned their hand doing so."

The blind concubine lowers his eyes guiltily, "I was careless."

Xiao Bao has put on a blank expression, "We will not discuss this."

The blind concubine whispers quietly, "I can't see but I'm not crippled."

Xiao Bao's face remains shuttered.

Last winter the blind concubine said the exact same words. Xiao Bao felt his heart thud painfully in his chest so in the end, he unwillingly allowed the blind concubine to wash up by himself. As a result, the blind concubine burned his hand the second day.

Now even thinking of the blind concubine's hands covered in blisters makes him worry.

Xiao Bao looks at the blind concubine's sightless grey pupils and leaves, closing the door behind him.

The blind concubine lays his head down on the pillow.

Even though he cannot see, he still likes to have the candles lighted.

Because the light from the flames are warm.

He can tell where the window is or where the table is when they are lighted, and thus he feels safe.

When he thinks back to this afternoon, his face still burns.

Why did he say those things. At least he only said them to a guard. If he had said them to the emperor, he would have lost his head.

But whatever happens, he still wants to go outside once.

Before he dies, just once.

He wants to breathe the air outside, and walk beyond the palace walls uninhibited.

Just like a long time ago before when he was still free.

The blind concubine thinks of the time before he entered the palace and smiles.

How happy he had been when he had both mother and father.

They lived together as a family, sat together for dinner at the table, as if they would be together forever.

The blind concubine sinks deeper into memory. The gentle candlelight reflects in his pupils. It seems as if his eyes have suddenly come alive.  
A pair of bright eyes on a pale porcelain face.  
The palace servants were right. They really are beautiful.

## **\*Chapter 5\*:**

5.

The young emperor sits before the table as his eyes sweep over the people kneeling on the ground. "Even this you could not find out?"

The head administrator is terrified, "Your imperial majesty, your servants have been scouring the records of the palace's past years and have found no information on the blind concubine's history; therefore we know not of when he has come to the palace nor how he was banished to the cold palace."

The young emperor's face falls, "How can you run affairs when a live person has been living in the palace all these years, yet you do not even know his name?"

The administrator dares not lift his head and trembling with trepidation, he says, "Please calm your anger your majesty. Even though your servant has not found out the relevant records, there is one thing that can be confirmed. N-no sightless person has ever entered the palace in the past decade, including the lowest of the slaves."

The young emperor wrinkles his brows.

The administrator continues, "so the blind concubine's eyes must have been blinded after entering the palace."

The emperor silently grips the hilt of his fan, the tips of his fingers lightly stroking it. The administrator maintains his posture on the ground, afraid to breathe loudly. The atmosphere seems to have frozen.

The emperor rubs between his brow and leans back against his seat to gather his thoughts.

The image that comes to his mind is the lonely person who has dwelled in the cold palace all this time and those hands that tremble despite their owner's reluctance.

After another moment of silence, he opens his mouth to say, "Spread the order."

Xiao Bao is giving YuLi a bath in the courtyard.

Yu Li struggles violently as he meows shrilly and his four legs tread the water as if his life depended on it, splashing Xiao Bao all over.

In anger, Xiao Bao wants to strike out at Yu Li, "You beast. I am trying to bathe you but you won't stay still!"

The blind concubine comes to YuLi's defense, "Oh no, don't hit YuLi. Here, I'll hold him down for you."

Yu Li's cries become more mournful. The blind concubine can't bear to hurt him and several times, he almost let Yu Li escape from the tub.

An angered Xiao Bao says, "Stay filthy then, you dirty animal. See that no one wants you anymore."

The blind concubine anxiously says, "Who said no one wants Yu Li? I want him!"

Xiao Bao helplessly says, "Your ladyship, I'm just trying to scare him."

The blind concubine is unhappy, "You can't scare him like that. Cats get scared easily."

Xiao Bao rolls his eyes and throws the towel to the ground, "I am done with you two."  
"Xiao Bao..." the blind concubine pleads, the expression on his face sadder than Yu Li's.

Footsteps sound by the courtyard entrance and someone announces in a high pitched voice, "Blind concubine, I have come to pass the message from administrator Li."

The blind concubine stands up in surprise, "Huh, what is it?"

The person says, "In ten days, the emperor will hold a feast for his court. A great deal of goods must be bought but the servants are all busy and we cannot spare anyone extra. Administrator Li has some tasks he would like to entrust to your ladyship. If you would leave the palace for a day and return by dusk."

Xiao Bao runs in front of the blind concubine and puts his hands on his waist, "Do you all have no legs yourselves? However you say it, the lady is still a master. You servants dare to give orders to anyone?"

"Wait a minute..." the blind concubine pulls Xiao Bao back, his expression nervous. "What did you just say?"

The person says, "Administrator Li has given this servant a list. If your ladyship could purchase all the items on the list and return to the palace by dusk, this is the money and badge to exit the palace. Please keep it safe and do not lose it."

The blind concubine's lips tremble lightly in disbelief, "This-This is to say, I can leave?"

"Yes," the person says. "It would be best if your ladyship prepares immediately. Although dusk falls later in summertime but these are still orders from the emperor so this task should not be held lightly."

The blind concubine replies hurriedly, "You are right. I will leave right away."

He takes the list in a rush, hands shaking violently. The tips of his fingers become red.

The sunlight of early summer makes everyone dizzy so it takes the blind concubine a moment to come back to his senses, so ecstatic that he nearly cries, "Xiao Bao, we can leave the palace!"

He hands over the paper, "Help me see what is on the paper."

Xiao Bao lowers his head to see a piece of blank paper with nothing written on it and he begins to understand. He says, "There are no few items on this. I'm afraid we'll be out for awhile."

The blind concubine says solemnly, "Good," and grips the list even tighter.

"It has been awhile since master has left the palace. Let me help you change into a new outfit."

The blind concubine quickly nods his head, "Xiao Bao thinks things through. There is an green outfit inlaid with golden thread in the cabinet."

Xiao Bao says, "Wait while I get it."

The blind concubine carefully folds up the piece of paper and touches it again and again, his heart full of joy. Xiao Bao retrieves the outfit and helps him change into it, tying the badge to exit the palace to his waist.

The blind concubine touches the badge. He still feels like this is not real. On the path leading from the cold palace, he keeps asking, "Are we really leaving the palace?"

Xiao Bao turns his head, "Yes, we are."

The blind concubine will lower his head shyly and smile.

As they approach the doors to the palace gates, the blind concubine becomes increasingly nervous, his steps grow short and hurried. "Xiao Bao, we can really leave?"

Xiao Bao says, "Don't worry. It's true."

The blind concubine's face turns pale red and his hands start to sweat.

The two reach the gates. As the guards inspect their badge, footsteps head their way from afar and a voice calls, "What a coincidence to meet you here."

Despite the blind concubine's blindness, he is much familiar with voices and replies, "Oh. It's you."

The voice says, "You are leaving the palace?"

A little embarrassed, the blind concubine makes a noise of agreement.

"How coincidental, I must also leave the palace for an errand."

"Really?" the blind concubine is elated. "Let us go together."

The man folds his paper fan with a swish and amicably agrees.

The three leaves the palace. The blind concubine holds on to Xiao Bao's hand, his steps light and quick, leading Xiao Bao to cry, "Master, don't walk so fast. You'll fall."

The blind concubine is all smiles, "Of course I won't. I'm much familiar with the roads outside the palace."

Xiao Bao lifts an eyebrow, "No matter how familiar, you haven't been here for many years."

The man beside them says, "He won't. You have me."

The blind concubine asks, "What business do you have outside the palace?"

The person says, "Actually, it's nothing."

"But no matter how you say it, you are still an imperial guard. How can you be so free?" the blind concubine asks in surprise.

The emperor waves his fan self satisfyingly, "I'm just a carefree imperial guard. Is that not allowed?"

With a serious face, the blind concubine says, "We are here on the orders of the emperor."

The emperor purposely teases him, "Now that is a different story. What important task were you given?"

The blind concubine carefully takes out the list folded in his sleeve, unfolds it and smooths it out. "To buy all these items before dusk."

The emperor takes the list and says, "I'll come buy them with you."

"Alright. What are the items listed?"

"Mm..." the emperor pretends to seriously sweep his eyes over the list, "You need different civilian delicacies and playthings-lily leaf cakes, plum blossom crisps and such. Let's go take a look at the market."

The blind concubine cannot hold down his curiosity, "Why would the emperor need these for his feast?"

The emperor waves his fan and pretends to think deeply, "It is impossible to know the mind of a ruler."

At the side, Xiao Bao rolls his eyes.

The blind concubine solemnly nods in belief. "Then let us go to the market."

How unusually easy to trick.

## **\*Chapter 6\*:**

6.

The three entered the marketplace. The blind concubine doesn't know which way to go, stumbling forwards in his joy and excitement and scaring Xiao Bao out of his wits.

"Master, there are many horse carriages on this road, be careful!"

"Don't worry; I can hear the horse hooves as they draw near."

The blind concubine walks along the storefronts sniffing here and smelling there, as lively as a puppy.

"Crab meat buns!"

"San Xian noodles!"

"Bai wei soup!"

"Ice peaches!"

His footsteps are light and quick, almost as if he will float into the sky. His pale face blushes red, his cheeks tender and delicate.

The emperor trails behind the blind concubine, silently watching him as he makes a big fuss, as energetic as a child. His pale face is very beautiful.

He looks completely different than when he was in the palace.

Why couldn't he have met him earlier?

He has suffered so much.

The emperor sighs.

Fortunately, he has met him at last.

The blind concubine turns around, "Xiao Bao, do they have the foods written on the list?"

Xiao Bao replies, "Yes yes, once we pass it, I will buy it right after."

The blind concubine nods, "That's good." Then warns, "Don't miss any item."

Xiao Bao smiles, "Don't worry, master."

The three circle the market. As noon approaches, the blind concubine says, "I'm a little hungry."

Xiao Bao stares, "You were running and yelling all over the place. It would be strange if you did not feel hungry."

The emperor says, "Let's find a place to eat."

The blind concubine hurriedly says, "I know somewhere called the Bamboo Pavilion that I've been to many times before in the past. Their foods are fresh but I do not know if this place still exists."

Xiao Bao says, "Let me make some inquiries."

After a while he returns, "Master, they are still open. It is just a little ways in front."

The blind concubine is happy, "Good. Let us go there."

They reach the doors of the Bamboo Pavilion. The front of the shop was not small, the decorations having an imposing style. Customers walk in and out of the bustling restaurant. The emperor was just about to step inside when the blind concubine suddenly quietly cries, "Ah..."

The emperor pauses in mid-step, "What is it?"

The blind concubine quietly says, "We don't have money."

The emperor is curious, "Doesn't Xiao Bao have money in his pocket?"

"We must not use that money!" The blind concubine shakes his head like a rattle drum, "that is the money the palace uses on errands for the king. You'll be punished if you use it and at worst, you'll lose your head!"

The emperor feigns surprise, "It is that serious?"

"Mm." the blind concubine nods, "Do you dare to use the emperor's money?"

The emperor thinks, "...no."

The blind concubine lowers his head at a lost.

The emperor shakes his fan and feigns nonchalance, "I'll treat you to lunch."

"Huh?" the blind concubine raises his head, "No, that is too courteous of you."

The emperor smiles, "If you cannot accept it, you can treat me next time."

The blind concubine thinks hard for a moment, "Alright."

Xiao Bao leads the blind concubine into the restaurant by his hand, up the stairs, and sits down at a table facing the street. Immediately serving boys come to fill their tea, their faces full of smiles, "What would these customers like to try?"

The blind concubine says, "Crisp fried shrimp balls, Xi Hu vinegar fish, Ru Yi Rolls, Cashew Pear and White Fish Jade Soup."

The serving boy is astonished, "This customer, you certainly know how to choose. These are our store's best dishes. No one but a familiar customer could name these dishes."

The blind concubine smiles, "I used to come here often in the past and I knew everyone in the store. The Bamboo Pavilion only had one floor then and business was so good that the entire place was full. You would have to move the tables and chairs outside."

"Isn't that right?" the serving boy says, "Three years ago our store renovated. Now it's bigger than before. I was hired at that time to help, no wonder why I have not seen you before."

In the while it took to drink half a cup of tea, the dishes were carried out onto the table, fragrance spreading all around.

The blind concubine says, "You must eat more. It's delicious."

Xiao Bao says, "Master should eat more. Who knows when will be the next time you leave the palace."

The blind concubine pauses, then sighs, "Yes, there might not even be a next time."

His hand holding his chopsticks fall down.

The emperor rushes to reassure him, "Do not be so pessimistic. Maybe you'll have another opportunity soon."

Hearing this, the blind concubine laughs, "You say that as if it's true. You are not the emperor, how would you know?"

The emperor sputters, and then embarrassingly says, "I don't know."

Xiao Bao laughs to himself and places shrimp balls into the blind concubine's bowl.

The blind concubine picks up one. The shrimp balls are fried to a golden yellow color. As he bites down, he can taste a mouthful of shrimp flavor, tender and crisp, delicious.

The blind concubine is happy, "So good, the flavor hasn't changed at all!"

Then continues, "You eat too, don't just worry about putting food in my bowl."

The emperor says, "You eat more. Look at you. You're barely skin and bones."

Xiao Bao adds, "Even Yu Li has more meat on him."

The blind concubine has his mouth full of shrimp ball and mumbles unintelligibly, "That's not true."

After a while, the Xi Hu vinegar fish is carried onto the table. The emperor picks up a piece of fish belly, picks out the bones and puts it in the blind concubine's bowl.

The blind concubine tries a bite. That sour flavored and sweet scented fish was tender and juicy, melting as he held it in his mouth.

Cheerfully, he takes small bite after small bite, looking adorably sweet.

The blind concubine asks Xiao Bao, "Xiao Bao, have you eaten?"

Xiao Bao answers, "Yes."

The blind concubine asks the emperor, "Have you eaten too?"

The emperor answers, "Yes."

The blind concubine relaxes, "That is good."

After eating the rest of the dishes, they leave the restaurant.

The afternoon sun is soft and warm like leaves brushing against the face. The blind concubine's face is full of smiles, "I almost forget the taste. I didn't think that after all these years, the taste would still be so familiar."

Xiao Bao says, "The things you enjoy are not as easy to forget."

The blind concubine contemplates this, "Yes."

Then asks, "What else is on the list? Let us go buy them."

Xiao Bao agrees.

They return to the bustling street. The blind concubine walks on the uneven ground, but he feels at peace. Here are the smells he is familiar with, the familiar clamor and hustle and bustle of people, the laughter of running children. All of this calms his heart.

The emperor suddenly snaps his fan together, "I see where they sell candied hawthorn!"

"Really?" the blind concubine grasps his sleeve. "Where is it?"

"At the street corner," the emperor takes out his money, "I'll buy it for you."

"No need, no need," the blind concubine says, "I can buy it myself," and takes out several copper coins from his sleeve.

Xiao Bao moves forward to lead him and they arrive at the candied hawthorn stand. The blind concubine hands the coins over, "I'll take three."

The man in the bamboo hat takes down three sticks and hands it to the blind concubine.

The blind concubine hands a stick to Xiao Bao, takes one for himself, then asks Xiao Bao, "Where's the guard?"

The emperor says, "I'm here."

The blind concubine hands over the last stick, and smiles, "This is for you."

The emperor is surprised, "For me?"

"Mm."

The emperor stares, "No one has ever given me candied hawthorn. You are the first."

"Huh, no one?"

He resolutely replies, "No one."

When the blind concubine hears this, there is an expression of sympathy on his face.

How sad, having no one who will buy him candied hawthorn.

He can't help but tiptoe to pat the emperor's head, "Don't be sad."

Xiao Bao watches anxiously and hurriedly reminds, "Your ladyship, he doesn't feel sad."

The emperor says, "No no, I am sad. You must comfort me."

The blind concubine crinkles his brows, "What is the matter with you two?"

What strange people.

He shakes his head and walks ahead with his candied hawthorn.

## **\*Chapter 7\*:**

7.

At dusk, the blind concubine feels cold.

"Xiao Boa, is it dusk now?"

Xiao Boa was about to answer when the emperor cuts before him: "Not yet, seems to not be for another two hours."

The blind concubine lets out a breath, face reddening slightly, "That's good. I was worried."

Xiao Boa says, "Don't worry master, daylight is long in summer, we won't be late."

The three drank tea at the teashop, bought sugar candy, and wrapped up some desserts. The moon had risen high. The emperor hired a horse carriage to take them back to the palace.

The sky had turned completely dark. The emperor lit a lantern and took the blind concubine back to the courtyard of his cold palace.

The blind concubine says, "I enjoyed myself today. Thank you."

The emperor shook his fan, "It was nothing."

The blind concubine took a bag of desserts from Xiao Boa and handed it over, "Keep these for yourself. You might get hungry later."

The emperor nodded and turned to leave but thought of something and turned back around.

"Take more care of yourself."

"Hmm?"

The emperor pursed his lips, "Nothing."

The blind concubine says, "Go on now, be careful on the way back."

The emperor agrees and leaves.

The blind concubine enters the house, puts the desserts on the table, then meows a couple times.

"Yu Li, come see what goodies I brought you."

Yu Li lays on the bed inside, wags his tail but doesn't move.

Xiao Boa goes over and picks him up by his tail, carrying him over to the blind concubine. Yu Li meows furiously and Xiao Boa glares back.

The blind concubine doesn't see, thinking that Yu Li is happy for the food.

"I bought yummy fish sticks."

He picks him up carefully.

Yu Li immediately curls in the blind concubine's arms, ignoring Xiao Boa in favor of licking the fish from the blind concubine's fingertips.

Xiao Boa rolls his eyes. You won't see him bickering with that narrow minded cat. He goes to draw the water.

As soon as the emperor returns to his sleeping palace, maidservants welcome him with tea. He reads through the official reports. Unknowingly, it has become late evening, and he does feel hungry.

Opening the blind concubine's paper bag, he finds popular desserts, finely made. He takes a bite along with tea.

To the door he calls, "Come in."

Immediately servants enter and bow in wait for orders.

"How long has it been since the grass in the cold palace was cut. It's tall enough to swallow a person. Who knows what kind of snakes and insects hide there. Have it gone by tomorrow."

The servant replies yes.

The emperor says, "Tomorrow bring in some birds. It doesn't matter what they look like as long as they sound good."

The servant replies yes again.

The emperor waves his hand, "You may go."

The sky has completely darkened. Inside the emperor's sleeping palace, all is quiet. A candle on the table reflects red light on a small part of the wall while everywhere else is enveloped in light and dark shades of black. The emperor raises the teacup and takes a small sip of tea. He lowers his eyes, thinking deeply in silence.

Ten or so days have passed and yet still nothing has been found about the blind concubine.

What his name is, when he entered the palace, how he came to be confined in the cold palace, not one spider's thread of knowledge.

Even more puzzling is what caused him to turn blind.

Everything concerning the blind concubine was like a gigantic puzzle, and the root of the puzzle was wiped clean by someone.

Hierarchy within the palace is rigid, control is strict. Even the names of the servants who bring food to the palace everyday can be found, then why not the blind concubine's?

It is like someone purposely hid away everything about the blind concubine.

The concubines in the harem, the maids and servants, if not all then most, know of the blind concubine, but there is no one who knows where he came from. If not by human effort, what can have made such an elaborate cover up?

The young emperor gathers his thoughts silently and remembers something the blind concubine said earlier that day in the teashop. His heart beats faster.

The blind concubine has almost fallen asleep but he won't let go of Yu Li.

Xiao Boa tucks in the blankets for him, "What is it master?"

The blind concubine's are round and big. He lightly says, "I feel like today was like a dream."

Xiao Boa says, "I think so too. But you were happy, right?"

The blind concubine's face is expressionless. After a moment of quiet, he says lightly, "When I wake up from this dream, what will I do?"

Xiao Boa sits down on the edge of the bed, "Don't think like that. You've suffered for so many years in the cold palace. Now you deserve to be happy."

"Foolish child," the blind concubine extends his thin pale fingers and grasps Xiao Bao's hand, "This is the Imperial Palace, there's no such thing as happiness."

Xiao Boa bites his bottom lip, "...no?"

The blind concubine shakes his head.

Xiao Boa doesn't make a sound and casts his head to the side.

"Do you still remember a couple years ago, when you were sent here to the cold palace to serve me?"

Xiao Boa nods his head. "M-hmm."

"That time I was helpless, no one to care for me, and I couldn't see. I prayed for death because I had given up all hope. You kneeled in front of me and called me master. In my heart I knew there was a child who would suffer with me from then on. Why not end it all, maybe you could end up with a better master with me gone?"

That day I decided to jump into the well, I had lost any will to live and I really thought I was going to die. I didn't think when I climbed onto the edge of the well, you would pull me back from behind. I almost made you fall in with me. I've always remembered this.

These years you've been by my side, you have never had a day of good fortune. I've caused you to suffer so much. Sometimes I feel that I'm a disaster alive. I want to die but I don't have it in me anymore.

I don't want to leave you. I don't want to leave Yu Li."

Xiao Boa raises his head, teary eyed, "Don't put the blame on yourself master. I've always been willing to follow you."

The blind concubine smiles, "Foolish child."

"In the future, if you get a chance, run far away from here and don't ever come back. Don't think about anyone. Don't care about anyone. Don't turn around no matter what you hear. Close your eyes and run away somewhere where no one can find you, understand?"

Xiao Boa shakes his head, his tears blurring his sight, "I'm not leaving you."

The blind concubine sighs, "I won't ever be able to leave the palace but I won't let you be confined here forever like me. One day, I'll let you go and leave this place forever. Think of it as me returning all those years you spent here."

Xiao Boa keeps shaking his head, unwilling to listen anymore, "If master doesn't leave, I won't leave either. I want to be by your side forever."

"This is the palace," the blind concubine's voice grows lighter, "nothing is real, nothing is sincere, not even the heart. Listen to me. Leave here as soon as you get a chance."

It seems as if the blind concubine has tired himself speaking, his eyes grow heavy.

Finally, hugging Yu Li, he closes his eyes.

## **\*Chapter 8\*:**

8.

The second day just past noon, the emperor appeared in the blind concubine's

courtyard waving his paper fan.

He had something interesting in his hand.

From far away, the blind concubine could hear the sound. He cried out in wonder, "It's the sound of birds. How lovely."

The emperor smiles widely, "I found them for you. They can sing."

He hands the bird cage to the blind concubine.

The singing of the two birds in the cage is sweet and pleasing to the ear as they hop up and down.

The blind concubine smiles, "Thank you for this."

Xiao Bao hangs up the bird cage and peers inside, "There's one with a red beak and the other with a silver head. They're very pretty."

Yu Li also peers into the cage and meows.

The blind concubine picks up the cat and pokes his head lightly with his finger, "Don't start getting any ideas."

Xiao Bao makes a mean face, "Master feeds you fish sticks every day, you glutton."

Yu Li felt bullied and meows a couple of times, his fluffy head curling into the blind concubine's chest.

The blind concubine defends Yu Li like his own flesh and blood, "Yu Li's no glutton, definitely not."

Helplessly Xiao Bao says, "Master, you didn't see his expression. He obviously wants those birds."

The blind concubine hurriedly covers Yu Li's ears and begs, "Alright, alright, stop talking or else

Yu Li won't be happy and run away."

The emperor laughs, "Keep them if you like. Feed them eggs and millet or corn flour every day."

Xiao Bao's eyes bulge, "Is that what we have to do?"

The emperor shakes his fan comfortably, "How else?"

Xiao Bao mumbles to himself, "They eat better than me."

The blind concubine giggles, "Oh you."

They sit down in the courtyard. The emperor takes out a small sandalwood box, "I brought tea leaves, steep these in water."

Xiao Bao takes the box.

The blind concubine asks, "You snuck away today to come here, didn't you?"

The emperor raises his brow, "How can one be sure?"

The blind concubine matter of factly says, "Being posted to guard the imperial chambers cannot be that easy a job."

The emperor sighs, "You found me out."

The blind concubine earnestly and sincerely says, "You'll never rise up if you keep this up."

The emperor leisurely shakes his fan, with a sigh, he says, "I don't think it's possible for me to go any higher either."

Xiao Bao brings out sandalwood serving tray, "Master, the tea is ready. Careful, it's hot."

The emperor pours a cup for the blind concubine, brings it to his lips to blow it cool, and gives it to him.

The blind concubine takes a slight sip and surprisedly says, "What good tea!"

The emperor's interest peaks, "O? You can taste that?"

"Mm," the blind concubine takes another sip, after a pause, says, "...Junshan silver needle."

The emperor claps his hands in delight, "Wonderful!"

The blind concubine dips his head in embarrassment.

Xiao Bao asks in wonderment, "How did master guess the name of the tea?"

The blind concubine brings the cup to his face, "This particular tea is sweet scented, mellow and rich on the tongue, and brightly colored. It is very pretty because when in the process of steeping, the silver needles will shoot up one by one and float in the cup, then slowly sink to the bottom. It's very interesting to see."

Xiao Bao's eyes stare at his cup, "The buds really are standing in the water!"

The blind concubine smiles "Bring the box that held the leaves over here."

Xiao Bao hands over the sandalwood box.

The blind concubine grabs a handful of leaves, fingertips rubbing them carefully, smelling them once more, and says, "These buds are stout and strong and have a sweet fragrant smell to them. If the leaves were golden yellow and brightly colored on the bottoms, then they would be of the best quality."

Xiao Bao claps and exclaims, "Master is a true genius!"

The blind concubine cheerfully smiles, "We don't have a better tea set. What a shame when we are having such good tea."

The emperor smiles, "The value of drinking tea lies in our joy and comfort. Do not let rules restrain you. Drinking tea is only a matter of enjoying a state of mind."

The blind concubine smiles, "You are right."

The afternoon sunlight spills onto the tiny courtyard and onto the blind concubine's pale porcelain face. The corners of his eyes and his brows are smiling. His lips are warmed a delicate red by the steam from the cup, making them unspeakably pretty.

If Yu Li hadn't suddenly scampered up to the blind concubine's knee like a gust of wind, the emperor might have kept on staring bog eyed at him.

The blind concubine's attention has been completely captured by Yu Li and he rubs its soft neck.

Yu Li comfortably tilts his head, flicks its tail, and squeezes its eyes shut.

"See, this is fun," the blind concubine says to his precious cat, "He was so skinny when we first found him; his hair was all dirty. Look how pretty, and clean, and glossy it is now."

The emperor says, "All due to your care."

The blind concubine says, "It's Xiao Bao who has been taking care of him. I can't see so I cannot feed or bathe him."

The emperor slightly shakes his fan, and innocuously says, "When did you find this cat?"

"Around five years ago, I guess."

Yu Li cries in response.

"At that time, you already couldn't see?"

"Mm."

Yu Li's two front paws start to stir restlessly."

"That is to say, you couldn't see starting from five years ago?"

The blind concubine tilts his head to think, "I think that was earlier, almost seven years ago."

Yu Li impatiently twists his body and the blind concubine rushes to grab him tighter so he doesn't fall. The tighter he holds Yu Li, the harder he struggles to escape.

The emperor closes his fan, "It is getting late and I should be getting back."

"Ah, yes," the blind concubine stands, "Be careful on the way back."

Taking advantage of this, Yu Li struggles out of his arms and in a flash has run far away.

The blind concubine sighs, "He's being naughty again."

The emperor smiles, "cats are all like that."

"Which just makes me worry all the more," the blind concubine says, "Even though he gets into trouble, I can't bear to yell at him. He's too precious to me for that."

The emperor's fingers rub over the hilt of his fan, his slender eyes narrow, "yes."

The blind concubine escorts the emperor out of the courtyard and warns, "When working in the palace, you must be very careful."

The emperor asks, "Careful of what?"

The blind concubine purses his lips, and lowers his head to say, "Accompanying the ruler is like accompanying a tiger."

The emperor slightly wrinkles his brow, "Is the emperor that terrible?"

The blind concubine grips his sleeves tightly, "mm."

The emperor narrows his eyes; his voice lowers several tones, "Why do you say that. You've never seen the emperor."

"I have."

"...what?"

The blind concubine's head dips even more, the tip of his nose almost touching his shirt, "Just be more careful. Do not speak, do not see, only do your job as you should. I-I'm still waiting for you to visit often."

The emperor has yet to come out of his stupor, but when his senses return, his next question is lost because the blind concubine has already turned around and returned to the courtyard.

Xiao Bao is washing the tea set. Seeing the blind concubine return alone, he nonchalantly asks, "Where's the guard?"

He says, "He left."

Xiao Bao says, "Oh."

The blind concubine's grey pupils stare at Xiao Bao, then he suddenly says, "Have you been keeping something from me recently?"

Xiao Bao's heart stutters, the sandalwood tray nearly slips from his fingers to crash on the ground.

"Why does master say that?"

The blind concubine knowingly smiles, "The guard that's been coming here these past couple of days isn't actually a guard, is he?"

"How...did you find out?"

His last syllable shakes.

The blind concubine cocks his eyebrow, "The rules of the palace are strict. It cannot be that easy to leave and come here to laze about and drink tea. Furthermore, what kind of guard has a fan?"

Xiao Bao mumbles, "Ah..."

The blind concubine folds his hand against his back and begins pacing around the courtyard, "Even though I can't see, my ears are sensitive. I can hear every time he opens, closes, and shakes his fan."

Xiao Bao says guardedly, "I can only see that his clothes are not of a lower grade. It doesn't seem like he is a bad person so I didn't say anything. Perhaps he is only some lord who likes to visit the palace."

The blind concubine pauses, "He isn't one of the regular nobility."

Xiao Bao's heart stutters and he forcibly calms himself, "What kind of person does master think he is?"

The blind concubine purses his lips, "Do you remember the tea you made earlier?"

"Mm."

"That was tribute."

Xiao Bao is shocked, "Tribute?"

"Mm," the blind concubine nods, "This tea was produced in Dong Ting Junshan. They have the shape of needles, thus they are called Junshan silver needle. If they were regular silver needle tea leaves, then there would be nothing to it, but the tea I drank today was Junshan's black tea. It has a very fine texture. No ordinary lord could have gotten ahold of this."

Xiao Bao says in a low voice, "So that's to say..."

The blind concubine smiles, "Maybe he is an influential prince."

Xiao Bao lightly says, "Ah."

"Even if he doesn't tell me the truth, I won't blame him," the blind concubine lowers his eyes, his eyelashes quivering, "In the ruling family, there are always things that cannot be said. If he can come here often and talk to me, I'll be satisfied."

Xiao Bao says, "Yes."

The blind concubine sits in silence for a moment. Only after a long while does he say, "I hope nothing happens to him because he is close to the emperor."

Xiao Bao reassures him, "Don't worry, nothing is going to happen to him."

The blind concubine's eyes stare into nothing, his eyes blank and unseeing like he has fallen deep into his memories.

After a long while, he sighs.

"We can only hope."

## **\*Chapter 9\*:**

When The Emperor returned to his imperial study, it was already early evening.

Since long ago, there was someone waiting for him inside the study room.

As the Emperor sat on the couch, he asked, "Regarding the matter 'I' asked you to investigate, how is the result?"

"Answer, Your Majesty. Your subject had brought the portrait of the Blind Concubine to the Bamboo Pavilion restaurant to make a discreet inquiry. The Bamboo Pavilion's manager confirmed that he recognized the Blind Concubine's appearance. He also said about the style of his dressing at that time, his bearing and how he conducted himself, was not like that of an ordinary household's child. Unfortunately, he couldn't clearly tell which family's young master he belonged to."

The Emperor slightly muttered to himself, "Since when has he no longer visited the Bamboo Pavilion?"

"Answer, Your Majesty. The manager said, it had been roughly seven years he hadn't seen the Blind Concubine."

The Emperor closed his eyes, waved his hand. That person bowed and withdrew himself.

.....

"That is to say, you couldn't see starting from five years ago?"

"I think that was earlier, almost seven years ago."

.....

"The manager said, it had been roughly seven years he hadn't seen the Blind Concubine."

Seven years ago, seven years ago.....

The Emperor's thoughts swirled around in his head, then he opened his eyes.

The Blind Concubine entered the palace seven years ago. Entering the palace less than a year, his eyes became blind.

Initially, for a person who had been banished to the cold palace, nobody would be bothered about or took interest to him. However, he couldn't become blind without any reason. His eyes had become blind before he entered the cold palace.

The vast and hazy mist little by little dispersed. Every little thing had started to become evident.

Seven years ago, this young man entered the Palace. Not long after he entered the palace, his pair of eyes somehow became blind. It caused him to be banished to the cold palace.

However, what had actually happened to cause that. Why he became blind.

Even weirder matter was, the Blind Concubine said he had met him before. But why he, regarding this sightless young man, had not even a slightest shred of impression.

Seven years ago, exactly what had actually happened...

Seven years ago...

"Brother!"

From the entrance, a clear voice of a child could be heard.

A small roundish and chubby figure charged in. Strode straight towards the imperial seat. Stretched his hands for a hug.

The Emperor remain unmoved, raised a brow as he asked: "Today, have you gone to the Great Teacher for your lessons?"

That child straightened up his waist and back, replied with a clear and loud voice: "Already."

His voice still the same as a little kid's voice.

The Emperor opened both his arms and took that child up to a hug, then placed him on his lap.

That child clutched on the Emperor's front robes. Causing the bright yellow of silks and satins to rolled roll in a curled wrinkle. "Older brother recently hasn't been in the imperial study room. Right after the court, even the shadow couldn't be seen. Aren't you in a somewhat amusing place to play?"

The Emperor laughed, saying: "You only know how to play."

That child pouted sulkily. Like a spoiled child, he said: "Where are you going, brother? Rui Ze wants to go too!"

"Where else can I go? Only strolling around inside the palace."

"Brother lied." That child who wore an expression of disbelief, made an uproar as he yelled, "Must have been in a fun place to play. Rui Ze also wants to go. Older brother must take Rui Ze there!"

The Emperor touched his nose lightly, "Still not so quickly go back and recite the lesson. Tomorrow, after getting hit several times by The Great Teacher, just by then you will be well-behaved."

The little man pouted his mouth to the point it could be used to hang a kettle. His shining black eyes kept on gliding in a disordered rotation. He climbed down from the Emperor's knee. Patting his clothes as he said: "If you don't want to tell me, just say that you don't want to tell me. I will eventually find it out."

Making a snorting sound from his nostril, he straightened up his chest and walked away with his hands clasped behind his back.

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The Blind Concubine was sitting in the small courtyard of the cold palace. The moon had risen up high for quite some times.

The air temperature gradually had become hot. The gentle breeze of the night also had become a very light wave.

Xiao Bao put the watermelon to fully soak in the cold water inside the wooden basin, hanging it under the eaves.

Blind Concubine said, "Don't be too busy, come, have a seat."

Xiao Bao said yes, took a stool and sat down beside the Blind Concubine.

Blind Concubine, slowly waving his fan, muttered, "Seems like the mosquitoes are already here."

Xiao Bao attentively propped up his ears, "Really?"

"Mm\*, I hear them."

(t/n : The 'Mm' here serves the same meaning as yes. The original text is a "mm")

Xiao Bao said, "Tomorrow, I will go find some wormwood to burn."

The Blind Concubine nodded, "Do be careful. The vegetation in the cold palace is dense. Snakes and bugs are plenty."

Xiao Bao replied, "Mm."

Inwardly, he said : His Majesty had ordered people to trimmed them, alright.

The Blind Concubine told him: "Use that frame inside my room, the ceramic one, it's shaped like a rabbit. It could be fun."

Xiao Bao nodded, "So master still had this kind of framed incense burner."

He tried to figure out, "I wonder, what kind of frame would the Emperor use?"

The Blind Concubine gently stroking Yu Li's soft and supple back, "The Emperor...uses an

aromatherapy filigree enameled furnace, cast with three dragons. The decorative pattern is elegant, it is impressively refined with its dignified air.”

“So it is like that.” Xiao Bao nodded as if suddenly he saw the light.

The next day, even before midday, The Emperor had come to the Blind Concubine’s small courtyard.

The Blind Concubine asked with a curious tone: “Why so early today?”

The Emperor said, “I have a lot of things to do today. I’m taking advantage of my break to come bring you something. I will leave right away.”

The Blind Concubine asked “What is it?”

Yu Li which on his legs also had been meowing, his ears moved about.

The Emperor took out from behind his back something similar to an article of daily used made of paper. Put it in the Blind Concubine’s hand.

The Blind Concubine realized what it was upon a touch. He couldn’t help but laugh.

“It is a kite.”

The Emperor told him: “Mm... It has a picture of peony.”

The Blind Concubine said: “Thank you ...”

The Emperor cautioned, “Be careful when you fly it, do not tumble.”

The Blind Concubine nodded and so the Emperor left.

Not long after, on the small yard gate, a flurry and fluffy little head appeared.

The small head peeked about here, looked around there, almost like an energetic Pekinese dog. Leisurely strolling for quite some time on the gate, finally carefully, reverently and cautiously put one of his feet to enter the gate.

Hesitating for a long while, finally another one of his feet also entered the gate.

The Blind Concubine couldn’t see, also couldn’t hear that extremely light footstep sound.

But Xiao Bao happened to have a glimpse, unable to restrain his “Ehh!” exclaimed: “Whose child is this?”

The little boy was startled upon hearing the voice, turned his body and was ready to run.

The little boy stopped in his tracks, putting all of his energy to vigorously gaze on the tip on his toes. His face slightly turned red.

The Blind Concubine admonished Xiao Bao, “You shouldn’t scare another person’s child.”

The Blind Concubine approached the little boy, squat down and courteously asked, “Whose child are you?”

The little boy remained silent while his whole face blushed. His hands nervously tugged the corner of

his clothing.

The Blind Concubine turned his head to where Xiao Bao was standing and said, "See, you have scared this child."

Xiao Bao glared: "I can clearly see that he is not a bit afraid."

The Blind Concubine gently stroked his fluffy little head, gently asked: "How did you manage to come here?"

"I... I followed behind my brother to come...."

The Blind Concubine made an "Ahh" sound, "The man just now is your older brother?"

"Mm!", The child eagerly nodded, "I wanted brother to take me here to play. He didn't agree. So I secretly followed him...."

"Is that so...?", The Blind Concubine said, "Then, let me accompany you to play."

The child suddenly lifted his head, "For real?"

"Of course!!"

"That's great!" The child jumped up in joy. His soft hair on his forehead was swaying about, "The palace people are so unwilling to play with me!"

This time, it was Xiao Bao's turn to be surprised: "You are such an unlucky child for you are unable to have fun?"

The young boy grumbled, his eyes downcast and his head drooped. "I want to climb trees, all of the palace maids knelt and begged me to not climb up. I just wanted them to play the trip and tumble game, (wrestling). In the end, all of them, one by one was like a pile of wooden logs, motionless and unmoved. I shouted until my throat hurt and my voice hoarse, still there wasn't anybody who came and hurled me...."

Xiao Bao thought: Who told you to have an Emperor as a brother. To change with me, I still wouldn't dare too.

The Blind Concubine had a slight urge to laugh, he pulled the child's hand, "Next time, if you want to play, just come and find me here, I will play with you."

"Mm." The child nodded his head repeatedly.

He perched up his chest as he ensured: "From now on, whoever dared to bully you, just tell me. I will protect you!"

The Blind Concubine narrowed his eyes into a smile: "Alright."

Then added: "You still haven't told me, what is your name?"

The child crossed his waist, straightened his back and puffed his chest, with a loud and clear voice he replied: "My name is Rui Ze. I am a prince!"

The Blind Concubine with an amused smile on his face, knelt down in front of him. Softly and gently

said: "Greetings, little prince."

The little prince followed the standard patterns: "Stand up."

Xiao Bao inwardly said: Good gracious! He truly looked like the real deal.

The Blind Concubine picked up the kite that the Emperor gave him just now and told Rui Ze, "Let's go outside and fly this kite."

The little prince promptly said yes. In the flapping of a wind, he had dashed out.

Xiao Bao still in the middle of feeding the two Acacia birds and called out to them, busily stretched out his head to say: "Be careful!"

Xiao Bao stomped his foot irritatingly, "I'm not worried about him! Let him be. I just want you to be careful. Do not because of bumps against that rice dumpling\*, you harm yourself!"

\*t/n : Rice dumpling , 肉粽 , Zongzi (sticky rice dumplings) are traditionally eaten during the Duanwu Festival, which falls on the fifth day of the fifth month of the lunar calendar (approximately late-May to mid-June).

The Blind Concubine amusingly laughed: "I know."

With his face beaming with a smile, "He is indeed a little prince, don't be so rude."

Xiao Bao was about to weep a tearless cry. Earlier, was an Emperor, then came a prince. Not to mention his not allowed to move about master. Why wouldn't they let them pass their lives quietly.

The Blind Concubine himself, of course he couldn't see at all. He was purely glad to have a child come to play. Smilingly holding the kite and went outside.

When the sky had almost dimmed in color, The Blind Concubine was holding the Little Prince's hand as they walked back to the small courtyard.

Xiao Bao was giving Yu Li its mixed kitten meal. Without raising his head, he said: "Just coming back after this late, where have you gone wildly to?"

The Little Prince's pitch black's pupil widely opened to a perfectly round shape: "How can you have the same exact manner of speaking with my brother!"

Xiao Bao also glared at him, "Little Lord, please don't compare me with that Honorable Lord."

With a smile all over his face, the Blind Concubine said: "Xiao Bao, It's getting late, just let him stay here and eat together with us."

Xiao Bao straightly refused the idea: "I don't have any spare time to wait on this Little Lord."

The Blind Concubine still hadn't the chance to say anything, the Little Prince had shouted out loudly: "How dare you! You're actually bold enough to go as far as to refute His Grace\*!"

\*t/n : actually it's his ladyship... but, I refused to used such feminine title, then, His Graceness or His Grace will sound better. XD

The Blind concubine hastily smoothed things over: "Alright, alright. My stomach is already hungry. After we eat, we will talk about this again, alright?"

The Little Prince exquisitely put his fair and tender little hands behind his back, made an "hmph!"

sound, then said: "As a Prince, I originally couldn't be concerned to argue with you! Arrange the meals!"

Xiao Bao's eyes became wider: This Little Lord's extravagance is even higher than the Emperor himself.

Because considering the Blind Concubine's reputation, he had to prepare the meals.

Not long after, he came back with pork steamed with ground rice wrapped in a lotus leaf and stewed eggplants in a thick soya sauce then served them on the table.

The Little Prince asked: "Just two kinds of dishes?"

Xiao Bao replied: "No. Only one."

He added: "The steamed pork belongs to His Grace, you can only eat this eggplant."

The Blind Concubine covered his mouth to hide his smile. "Xiao Bao, Do not quarrel with a little child."

He picked up piece of the fresh and tender steamed pork and put it on the Little Prince's bowl. "Eat slowly, don't get burn."

The Little Prince rolled his eyes at Xiao Bao, facing Xiao Bao and making a funny face. His little hand hoisted the chopsticks and ate from the side of the bowl.

The Blind Concubine couldn't help smiling, "This child is so much fun."

He himself was not moving his own chopsticks. Instead, he was only concerned with ladling up a big spoon of seaweed soup, brought it to the front of his mouth then cooled it by blowing it. Then he brought it to the Little Prince.

The Little Prince lowered his head to drink the soup. Sip by sip he gulped it down. Almost like a little animal, he wore a very cute and lovely expression.

After he finished with the soup, he licked his lips and patted his belly. "This is my first time eating together on the same table with people."

Blind Concubine replied: "Is that true?"

"Mm!", Little Prince nodded his head. "Even with brother, I haven't sat together on a same table to eat."

Xiao Bao interrupted him: "How about your mother? Surely you have sat together at the same table to have a meal with your mother?"

"I have never." Little Prince answered, "I haven't met my mother. Also I don't know who my mother is."

Xiao Bao was speechless.

After thinking for a while, Little Prince said: "Brother forbids the Palace's maiden to feed me, my wet nurse also is not allowed to feed me. I have to sit upright at a single table, eat by myself, there has never been anyone who fed me to drink the soup."

The Blind Concubine's hand which was holding the spoon paused for a while, after a good while, he said: "From now on, you can come over frequently. We can eat together."

"Alright!"

Happily, the Little Prince added, "I can order the palace's maids to bring in some delicious food and serve them here. Many kinds of dishes, also various sweets and pastries. Whatever we want to eat,

we can promptly ask the imperial kitchen to cook it for us.”

The Blind Concubine laughed: “Just by you coming over, I already feel so happy.”

Right after the sky had turned to dusk, the three of them finished their meals. The Blind Concubine helped the Little Prince to wipe his mouth clean. He held his hand until the gate of the small courtyard.

Xiao Bao was carrying a lantern in his hand, get ready to walk the Little Prince back to the palace.

The Blind Concubine couldn't help but worry. Attentively he warned them again and again: “Must be extremely careful, must take him home safely.”

Xiao Bao bowed and replied: “Your servant understands.”

Firmly held the Little Prince's small hand, he walked out the yard.

The Blind Concubine got back to his room, took Yu Li in a hug, slowly and gently caressed the kitten's soft and smooth fur, quietly drowning in his own thoughts.

About the time needed to finish a small cup of tea, Xiao Bao stepped in the courtyard with a lantern in his hand.

Upon hearing the sound of footsteps, the Blind Concubine perked up. “Are you back?”

Xiao Bao replied: “Mm!”

The Blind Concubine asked: “Did the Palace's maids all worry about him?”

Xiao Bao was laughing while he answered: “It is good that they are worried. They would lodge a complaint to his brother so this rice dumpling could be punished with a twig or bamboo.”

The Blind Concubine couldn't help but chuckle, “Why do you act like a child today?”

Xiao Bao twitched his brow, “When did I act like a child?”

The Blind Concubine continued: “When you bickered and verbally fought with the Little Prince.”

Also he added, “I was thinking, the usual Xiao Bao ordinarily would conduct himself in a serious and earnest manner, not saying a lot of words, why upon meeting the Little Prince, would he stamp his foot?”

Xiao Bao's eyes widened, his voice also heightened: “Obviously because that rice dumpling was bad news!”

The Blind Concubine clapped his hand and laughed loudly: “See, see .... There it is again.”

Pausing for a while, “I just realized, so Xiao Bao actually could reply defiantly, also could be angered by a child then quarrel equally against a child.”

Xiao Bao raised his head higher, “May I not?”

Teasing him with a smiling face, the Blind Concubine said: “Xiao Bao actually likes the Little Prince very much, doesn't he?”

Xiao Bao widened his eyes and made it almost look like a small bell: “How can I like that small rice dumpling.”

“It is so obvious that you like him.”

“I don't!”

“Xiao Bao definitely has a sharp tongue but is soft in heart.”

“Impossible.”

“If not, why would you cook such delicious steamed pork?”

“I cooked it for master to eat!”

“Well... why would you go out of your way to shape the steamed pork in a rabbit shape? You clearly know I couldn't see it.”

“.....”

“You wanted to please the Little Prince, didn't you?”

“.....”

Still in the same laughing face, the Blind Concubine said: “Actually you really do like the Little Prince, don't you?”

Xiao Bao finally couldn't stand it anymore and cried out loud: “I – Do – Not !!!!”

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At the time when the Little Prince arrived at his residence, the Emperor had been waiting for him inside his room for a long time.

“Why did you, without saying anything, just run off to the cold palace?”

“Nngg...” Little Prince bit down his lip. “Because brother wouldn't take me there.”

“So, you could just secretly follow behind my back, and thought that I wouldn't find out?”

“Nngg...” The fluffy head of the Little Prince dropped in posterity, quietly brought his eyes to look around disorderly.

“No need to look, nobody will plead forgiveness on your behalf.”

Little Prince behaved himself and brought his gaze back, to stare fixedly on the tip of his toes. Making a very pitiful expression.

The emperor pursed his own lip without speaking.

Rui Ze actually was Concubine Shu's son. Unfortunately, Concubine Shu passed away even before Rui Ze reached a full first month of his life. The Great Empress took a pity on him, brought him in to be raised in the palace. His mischievousness was not the least bit different from an ordinary kid. Very naughty but still being loved so dearly. This made people unable to hit him, yet unable to scold him.

Little Prince looked at that unspoken brother of his, he perked up his head, “I am thinking about bringing the Blind Concubine to live close to my palace.”

“What!?”

The Emperor thought that he heard it wrong.

“The Blind Concubine's current residence is no good. Brother must have known this too. On his arm, there are countless little red spots caused by the insects.”

The Emperor slightly pursed his lip again, not responding.

"The weather is getting warmer and warmer, the cold palace doesn't even have ice cubes to be relieved from the summer heat...."

Little Prince held the corner of his sleeves tightly, exhausting a lot of energy to muster up his courage, "If brother couldn't let him move out from the cold palace, I, I will just take him as my concubine, allow him to stay in my palace!"

"!"

The Emperor shocked and gasped for breath. Choked and coughed repeatedly.

"Impossible!!"

Little Prince hung down his eyes in disappointment. "Can't I? The Blind Concubine has treated me kindly. Flying a kite with me, feeding me to drink soup, also allow me to frequently go to have meals together.... Like a family."

The Emperor narrowed his eyes, slightly considered over the matter, then: "Letting him move out is a good idea."

The Little Prince's jet black pupils shone all of a sudden. His voice full of expectation: "Brother agrees??"

The Emperor crooked his brow: "However, he couldn't stay in your palace. For the time being, I will arrange for him to stay in the servant's quarters."

"Brother, you are so kind!!" Little Prince beamed with smiles. Placed his hand on the Emperor's knee and climbed up, hugging the Emperor's neck. "I know that brother would agree!"

"Put this matter aside, you have gone wild for the whole day, still not quickly go back and recite the verse of poem."

Little Prince didn't really care, he just wanted to act spoiled and played silly.

The Emperor used his fan to strike his head: "Tomorrow, if you can't recite, be wary of the Great Teacher's punishment. He could make you transcribe a hundred copies of the poem."

The Little Prince remained laughing happily, staining the Emperor's outer robe with his saliva.

Continued to rattle on: "After he moves out here, we can meet every day."

"The Blind Concubine must be so delighted."

"I still haven't known his name yet." Little Prince awkwardly knitted his brows. "However, he must possess a very nice name."

His voice filled with certainty.

The Emperor amusingly raised his brow: "How so?"

Little Prince raised his head to face upwards, earnestly said saying: "Because the Blind Concubine is a very gentle person. For a very gentle and kind-hearted person, certainly he will have a matching name as beautiful as a jade."

"Xiao Bao," the Blind Concubine called out as he stood at the entrance to the courtyard of the cold palace, "Have you put in order everything?"

"Yes, Master. I have packed several things we commonly use daily."

"Mm!" The Blind Concubine nodded his head. His fingers were stroking the old and shabby courtyard's gate, fluttering eyelashes, "Suddenly leaving this place, I actually feel reluctant to part with it."

Xiao Bao looked around the small courtyard and agreed, "After all, we have stayed here for many years."

The Emperor stood on the side and said, "The Little Prince said, if you feel reluctant to leave, you can come back to stay at this place one or two days a month. You can just leave your daily utensils here, and nobody will dare to move it. The Little Prince will send the maids to come regularly to sweep and clean this place."

The Blind Concubine felt a bit awkward: "Really have to thank the Little Prince. According to the palace maidens, it was the Little Prince who went to face the Emperor, begged and pleaded, so that the Emperor could agree and allow me to move out from the cold palace, to accompany the Little Prince in his study."

Halfheartedly, the Emperor replied, "Mm."

Inwardly he said, if not because he could not clearly state his status, why would he use the Little Prince's actions as an excuse, letting that little child Rui Ze take all the credit for himself.

He wore a very jealous expression.

The Blind Concubine moved in to the \*Serving House.

\*t/n (literally: 端灵轩 – Duan Ling Xuan, Duan – serve, Ling – effective, Xuan – a room like study, or lofty).

This place was near to the Little Prince's residence, also not very far from the Emperor's sleeping quarter. It wasn't big, but exquisitely decorated.

The Blind Concubine was very delighted. "I can smell the flowers' nice fragrant."

The Emperor said, "try to guess, what kind of flowers they are?"

The Blind Concubine attentively sniffed to smell, trying to draw out his memories for quite some time, "Dahlia, the Night Fragrance.... It seems like there are also Orchids and Lilies."

Xiao Bao clapped his hands in delight: "Your Grace guessed perfectly."

The Blind Concubine laughed and said, "I am very sensitive to sounds, smells and flavors, after all."

The Emperor told him: "From now on, you can stay here peacefully. Whatever kind of flowers you like, just tell the palace's servant and have them planted for you. If you are short of something, don't hesitate to say."

The Blind Concubine replied: "This is already more than enough. There isn't anything lacking. Do not exert another great effort for me."

Nodding his head, Emperor added: "The Little Prince's temper is still of a child, don't let him always have his way. I know that you have a very gentle temper, soft-spoken, but please don't dote on him too much, it will make him spoiled rotten."

The Blind Concubine nodded his head, "What you have said is right, I understand."

The Emperor put away his folded fan, reached out to hold the Blind Concubine's hand.

The Blind Concubine startled, out of reflex he tried to withdraw his hand, however, he was unable to do it.

“Living here, you must take better care of yourself.”

The Blind Concubine blushed a layer of crimson, a little bit nervous to speak: “Yes, I will...”

“I will come to visit you regularly.”

“Ehh?? This... This won't be good...”

The Emperor's brows twitched: “What matter won't be good?”

The Blind Concubine asked a question in reply: “Shouldn't you be still on your guard duty in the Emperor's quarter?”

The Emperor choked off all of a sudden.

“And also, I am here to accompany the Little Prince on his study”, The Blind Concubine perched up his head, in all seriousness, “It could be said, I will be occupied with my responsibility. I won't have any free time to drink and chat with you.”

Speechless, the Emperor could only look in despair at his predicament.

The Blind Concubine reached out and gave his shoulder a gentle pat, “You better head back to work. If you were caught by the guards on duty, your salary would be deducted.”

The Emperor had no choice but to suffer in silence. Stiffly from head to toe as if being pushed towards outside the door by the Blind Concubine.

Xiao Bao forced to hold back his laughter, bore it until his stomach hurt. There was an amount of unspeakable satisfaction.

When the Blind Concubine got back into the room, Xiao Bao held up his thumb: “Master, this kind of teasing truly is a masterpiece.”

Sipping a mouthful of tea, the Blind Concubine said: “Who told him to continuously hide the truth from me.” Letting out a bit of laughter, “Let him have a taste of suffering in silence's flavor.”

A palace's servant came and told them: “The Little Prince requests Your Grace to come to the Imperial Garden.”

The Blind Concubine asked: “What's the matter?”

The palace's servant replied: “The Prince is in the Imperial Garden practicing his combat skills.”

The Blind Concubine said: “Alright, I will go.”

Xiao Bao half believing – half doubting: “At this very young age child already learns combat skills?”

The Blind Concubine smiled all the while, “He is from a Royal household, naturally he must be skilled in both civil and military.”

After changing clothes, they followed the palace's servant to the Imperial Garden.

The Little Prince was having an expression of a person who had suffered bitterly and in deep hatred as he maintained his horse stance.

Upon seeing the arrival of the Blind Concubine, with both legs shaking and quivering, he cried out: “Your Grace, please help me to plead at the General!”

Feeling strange, the Blind Concubine inquired: “Why, what happened?”

The Little Prince put on a sad face: "I can't bear this stance any longer, but the General said I may not move, if I move, I will suffer a beating."

Xiao Bao interrupted: "This matter, it won't be good for His Grace to help you plead."

The Blind Concubine concurred: "Combat skills high value is in its persistence. You have to listen to the General, be good and practice hard."

The Little Prince had squatted until both his legs to his stomach were all shaking. He conveniently called them in as his reinforcement, but never thought that they would be unwilling to plead on his behalf. All of a sudden, he felt that he was treated unjustly. Putting his buttocks to sit on the ground, crying loudly like a baby.

The Blind Concubine was softhearted, he took out his handkerchief to wipe the tears for the Little Prince.

From quite a distance, a dignified voice resounded, coming close to their place: "Who said you can stop?"

The Little Prince was afraid, scolded by the voice who told him to stand up. He moved very fast to hide behind the Blind Concubine.

The Blind Concubine busily defended him: "The Prince is still a child, please don't blame him, General."

That dignified voice said: "I teach him combat skills, certainly everything must be in accordance to the rules. He cannot escape the corporal punishment."

Upon hearing this, the Little Prince recoiled beside the Blind Concubine leg. His little hands clenched tightly on the Blind Concubine's clothes. "The General's beating is so painful. Rui Ze is unable to bear pain..." His voice was choked, sounding extremely pitiful.

The Blind concubine bit down his lip, went to face the General, knelt down on the ground. "I am willing to be punished on behalf of the Little Prince."

"What!!" Xiao Bao cried out in shock, "Master, this couldn't be approved!"

That voice asked: "Who are you?"

The Blind Concubine hesitated for a while, "I am ..... An ordinary Imperial Concubine, newly appointed to wait on the Little Prince."

Rui Ze miserably rushed to come out from behind the Blind Concubine, hung low his head: "General, you can just punish Rui Ze. Rui Ze admits the mistake."

The Blind Concubine spoke: "General, are you happened to be the same General who two years ago triumphed over the other country and recovered the lost territory on the borderland. The General that upon hearing the name, the enemy troops will tremble in fear, General Qi Sheng?"

"You know me?"

The Blind Concubine stated word for word: "Even if for a long time I have lived in the depth of the palace, nevertheless, I always hear of General's fame based on great military, I have been admiring General's military accomplishment. How the General fought for the country, the extraordinary skill in the battlefield, it is truly of a hero. Please accept my respect."

General Qi burst out a loud laughter.

His sharp eyes keenly gazed at Rui Ze, "The Little Prince really did find a persuasive talker!"

Rui Ze looked like he was suffering from swallowing a housefly of hardship.

General Qi waved his hand, saying: "For the moment, you are excused from your corporal punishment."

Little Prince surprised and happy at the same time: "Really?"

General Qi crooked a brow: "Crying, kneeling, ruse of self-injury. Unfortunately, I could not enjoy this kind of drama with variety tricks!"

Xiao Bao immediately stepped forward to support the Blind Concubine and helped him rise, while fixing a glare at Rui Ze, the little rice dumpling.

The Blind Concubine came to in front of General Qi Sheng, faced upwards in respect, said: "All I have said just now was the truth."

General Qi said: "The battlefield is perilous, a trifle careless is precisely what caused you to be removed from the horse and become a dead body. Whether it is the Generals or the soldiers, everybody was going all out and readily to risk their life. Qi Sheng engaged in the battle, fought the enemy in hopes to be able to lead all of the \*brothers safely home. Unworthy of the Hero title."

\*t/n (He refers his troops as his brothers.)

The Blind Concubine fluttered his eyes, said: "Since ancient times, for they who marched into battle, who wouldn't want to be like that? I truthfully admire General, absolutely not because of pleading for the Little Prince, saying cheap flattery..."

"I know."

Qi Sheng cut off his words, sincerely said: "I know you meant what you said."

The Blind Concubine's whole face blushed.

His heart was slightly feeling happy.

General Qi Sheng told him: "The midday sun is scorching, don't just stand under it. Let me take you to a shady tree."

The Blind Concubine felt a little bit embarrassed, he refuted: "I am not that delicate, this is not even the hottest periods yet, why can't I endure it."

Laughing, General Qi Sheng said: "Just look at yourself, emaciated and looking so thin. Even a burst of wind can blow you away."

He brought the Blind Concubine to rest under a shady place. Rui Ze since earlier had taken a small tree's twig, digging the ant's hole in the ground. His head faced down on the small hole tunnel.

General Qi Sheng narrowed his eyes, his voice heavier to several degrees: "Little Prince, you really thought that this matter is concluded just like this? Right now, increase the practice for another hour, otherwise, if the Emperor inquires, do not blame me for not showing any mercy."

Rui Ze lifted his head as if someone had trampled on his tail. Immediately, His small face creased. Throwing away his small twig, crestfallen while stood up under the big scorching sun, resuming his horse stance's practice.

His face returned to his expression of a person who had suffered bitterly and in deep hatred.

Xiao Bao secretly laughed endlessly.

At the time they got back at night, Little Prince kept shouting his legs hurt, couldn't walk anymore, ordering the palace's servants to carry him back to his palace.

The Blind Concubine and Xiao Bao altogether got back with him.

The three of them entered the main room, Little Prince asked them: "Have a meal together with me?"

Ordering the palace's servants to arrange the meals.

The Blind Concubine said: "In a moment, I will give you your medicine and massage. Tomorrow you won't be hurt anymore."

Xiao Bao spoke: "Master, he wasn't hurt. Unmistakably, he just faked it, to make the General believe, he regretted that he couldn't be able to say that his leg has ruptured.

The Blind Concubine laughed slightly: "However, no matter what, the Little Prince had been suffering all day today. To have a little comfort, it is reasonable."

Rui Ze nodded his head with all his might: "It is a must."

The Palace's servant brought the cooled mung bean soup, the Blind Concubine ladled out a small bowl for him: "Drink slowly."

He hadn't finished his words, from outside the door, a loud voice announcing: "His Majesty the Emperor has arrived--"

The Emperor strode in a large step and entered the room, with a loud and clear voice saying: "I heard that this afternoon Rui Ze suffered the General's punishment. I came to check what had happened."

Upon hearing the voice, the Blind Concubine's whole body quivered and trembled in fear, hastily he turned his body to kneel on the floor.

The Emperor didn't expect that the Blind Concubine would be in Rui Ze's palace, caught off guard, his body distinctly became motionless.

The Blind Concubine was kneeling on the floor, the cuff of his sleeve exposed his pale arm. His frail fragile stature was slightly trembling.

The Emperor closed his fan and made a coughing sound, lowered his voice's tone: "I just remembered that I still have a few official documents which I haven't read yet. Next time I will come again."

Not staying for what he intended to check, he hurriedly turned his body and left.

The Blind Concubine remained in his kneeling position and didn't dare to lift his head. Whole body was intensely quivering.

Xiao Bao got closer to him: "His Majesty has left, it's alright." Exerting a great effort to support the Blind Concubine.

Little Prince also blurted out unwittingly: "How come your face became so pale?"

Xiao Bao looked closely and, indeed, the Blind Concubine's face was deathly pale, the color of the blood from his face was completely drained and his hand was icy cold.

The Little Prince hastily comforted: "Your Grace, you don't have to be afraid, Brother Emperor is very kind. Very rare to lose his temper and get angry, he doesn't scold people."

Xiao Bao felt that something was wrong, he got a little bit scared: "His Grace has got frightened, I will take him back to have a rest."

Being in rush while notifying their leaving, even without having their dinner, they quickly got out from Rui Ze's palace, back to their serving quarter.

In the serving quarter, even a single lamp was yet to be lit, Yu Li also ran off to no one knows where to. Such a big house appeared to be rather cold and cheerless.

The Blind Concubine walked with his unstable step. His body temperature had dropped. He was cold like a block of iron.

Xiao Bao supported his arms and brought him to enter his room, helped him to climb the bed and covered him with his quilt.

The Blind Concubine with his hollow eyes, let Xiao Bao to arranged everything for him, his greyish pupil was being unfocused.

Xiao Bao lit up several lanterns to make the room look brighter. Sat by the bed side, he rubbed the Blind Concubine's hand.

After a good while, his hand gradually got back its warmth.

"Master, what's wrong?"

The Blind Concubine took back his hand which was being held in between Xiao Bao's hands. He lightly answered: "Nothing..."

Xiao Bao got worried: "Master, you obviously have something wrong."

Shaking his head, the Blind Concubine turned over his body to face the wall. Unwilling to say another word.

"Is it because the Emperor came over unexpectedly?"

The Blind Concubine didn't respond to him, also didn't turn his body. Looked like he had firmly decided not to pay Xiao Bao any attention.

Xiao Bao had no choice but to comply: "Master, have a nice rest." He attentively tucked in the corner of the quilt for him.

Hearing the sound of the closing door, the Blind Concubine knew Xiao Bao had left the room.

He was all alone reclining on his bed. The surrounding had only the dimmed red candle flame.

Didn't know where Yu Li had ran off to. His hands now were empty without that creature to be held, to be touched. Emptiness in his heart made him flustered.

Actually, ever since he heard that voice, all he could hear was the voice of that person who claimed himself as an Imperial Guard.

His eyes might be blind, regarding voices, he was particularly sensitive.

No matter how that person tried to cover up, he couldn't be able to deceive his ears.

That person said he was an Imperial Guard, he suspected him as a Prince, never thought that he was actually an Emperor.

Why did he have to be the Emperor of all people?

The Blind Concubine huddled up his body as he trembled in fear, tightly closing his eyes.

Since the beginning, he had never expected a true heart in this cold as ice Royal Palace, only wished to have someone who would come to visit regularly, a friend to chat. Alas, even this shred of tender feeling, had also been torn to pieces.

The Blind Concubine opened his eyes. He lifted his pallid pale slender arm to his eyes. Of course, he couldn't see anything.

In front of his eyes, forever, there will always be the vast and unlimited darkness.

His fingers lightly touched his ghastly pale cheek, the tips of his fingers slowly began to shift, tracing his fingertip slowly along his skin, drawing shallow marks until it rested on his eyelids.

His eyes had become blind, for whole of his life, he would never be able to see anymore.

He didn't even know how Xiao Bao actually looked like.

And also Yu Li.

His most precious Yu Li. The Palace's people all said that Yu Li was truly beautiful, but he couldn't see it.

For all eternity, his eyes would be tragically an ashen grey, muddy, and miserably ugly.

The Blind Concubine bit down his lip.

Why did he have to be the Emperor of all people?

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The sky had become so bright, Xiao Bao was feeding the hanging on the eaves' birds.

The two Red-billed Leiothrix which they brought along from the cold palace, Every day chirped and chirped to notify the feeding time, hooted and chirped nonstop, as if they would never get tired of it forever.

He turned his body, and caught a sight of the Blind Concubine who noiselessly stood behind him. He was greatly startled.

"Master already up?"

"Mm."

The Blind Concubine seemingly not likely in a good spirit. He kept on massaging his forehead.

"Master, do you want to sit? The stone bench in the garden is cold, let me take the cushion first."

"No need", The Blind Concubine stopped him, "Where is the Little Prince right now?"

"Little Prince is at the Great Teacher's place to study, haven't been back yet. This afternoon, he will have his combat skill practice with the General."

Nodding his head, the Blind Concubine said, "I will go to see Little Prince in the afternoon."

Xiao Bao hesitated: "But Master is not in good health, have another rest for today."

"I'm fine", The Blind Concubine forced a smile, "We are able to move out here, it was all because of the Little Prince. There are many courtiers who watch us closely, do not attract any unnecessary gossip to cause slander."

Xiao Bao replied: "Master has Master's own reasons, it's not like I don't understand, I am just worried about you."

The Blind Concubine lightly laughed, "I know Xiao Bao concern for me." Paused for a while, "I have truly gotten better already. Let's eat. This afternoon, let's go to see the Little Prince's suffering."

Xiao Bao burst out in laughter: "Okay!"

For the lunch, the Imperial kitchen had prepared it for them. There were vegetables, and soup. Extremely exquisitely arranged in groups. The Blind Concubine simply had a taste of each meal, didn't eat much at all. Only said that it was because the weather was too hot and losing his appetite.

Xiao Bao told him: "This afternoon, I will go to tell the Imperial Kitchen, to bring in some appetizer. Master wants to eat the sour kind or the sweet kind of appetizer?"

The Blind Concubine reprimanded him: "We are only two people, there is no need to spread the food all over the table. It will be wasteful. In the former days, during the summer, I only have the mung bean porridge, this year we'll have it as usual."

Xiao Bao nodded his head: "I will comply with Master's wish."

After lunch, the Blind Concubine went to the Imperial Garden. The sky was slightly overcast, the sun was being obstructed by the clouds, pleasantly cool for a few degrees.

The Little Prince was playing with the General's scabbard. That scabbard even taller than him in comparison. Inlaid with sets of gems. Even with two hands, the Little Prince was still unable to hold it. He could only drag it on the ground, like a rake.

Xiao Bao said: "This little rice dumpling really knows how to spoil things."

The Blind Concubine lightly replied to him: "Every child, when they see things, will act this way."

Not long after, Qi Sheng also arrived at the Imperial Garden. Little Prince hastily tossed away

the scabbard. Behaved himself and exercised his kung-fu.

The Blind Concubine went to Qi Sheng, "We meet again, General."

Qi Sheng laughed and said: "Today also come to accompany the Little Prince?"

"Mm."

They engaged in an idle chat for a while. Qi Sheng looked up at the sky, saying: "The sky has been overcast. It looks like rain."

Nodding his head, The Blind Concubine said, "The humidity in the air indeed has become heavier."

"It has been hot for a long time. A spell of heavy rain will be good."

"Indeed it is as what General had said, heavier is better, so it won't be confusingly stuffy anymore."

Qi Sheng told him: "That being said, you better head home early, the Little Prince here has got me to watch over him."

Softly laughed, the Blind Concubine said: "Then I have to thank General."

Walking out from the Imperial Garden, in the middle of their way back home, Xiao Bao patted his forehead: "I almost forgot to tell the Imperial Kitchen about the mung bean porridge."

The Blind Concubine considered: "It is not a big deal."

Xiao Bao stated: "Who said three meals a day isn't a big deal? Master, you just wait here, I will go for a while and then come back soon."

The Blind Concubine said: "I know my way around."

Xiao Bao gazed at the sky for a while, "It is raining soon, from what it looks like, it won't be a spell of light rain, Master go going back first is a good thing." After saying that, he quickly ran off towards the Imperial Kitchen.

From this place, the distance to the Imperial Kitchen was not that far. However, the narrow path in the Palace was curving and revolving, it was quite time consuming. By the time he finished with the food issue, the sky, which had already been densely covered by the gloomy clouds, had started to send its drip and drop droplets of water.

A very light thread of rain had fluttered in the sky, just about to begin to scatter its soft and lithe water. And then, the rain's rhythm became heavier, in a very short time, it had become a heavy downpour.

Xiao Bao assumed that the Blind Concubine must have had gotten back safely to their serving quarter, therefore he wasn't worried at all. He intended to wait until the force of the rain became slower before heading home. The lightning in the sky was thunderous. The downpour getting more and more heavier, not showing the least bit tendency of decreasing. Xiao Bao bit his lip. Using his upper garment to wrap up his head, he broke into the heavy downpour.

Ran all the way to the serving quarter. When he arrived, he had already been drenched thoroughly.

He shook his head to throw the water away, took off his wet clothes, then heaved a sigh: "What a downpour!"

He added: "Fortunately, Master had come home earlier. Don't have to face the rain."

For a very long time, there wasn't any reply.

"Master??"

He called out continuously for quite some time, still no one there to answer him. Gradually, he generated a shred of ominous premonition. Hurriedly ran all over to the room, looked for the Blind Concubine in all direction of the house. However, even though he had ran all over the place, even the shadow of the Blind Concubine couldn't be seen.

From outside the room, the thunder was rumbling. Big droplets of water was pounding on the window, it was as if being violently knocked by hands. Xiao Bao uncontrollably felt nervous and alarmed. Without taking an umbrella, he turned his body and ran back into the rain.

The Emperor was in the middle of reading and amending the official documents in his Imperial study. From outside the room, the dense rain was covering like a curtain. He lifted his head to briefly take a look, then shifted his eyes back to the documents.

Someone came in to report, "The occupant of the serving quarter requesting to see Your Majesty, has been held back by the guards. That person refused to leave, still standing in the rain."

The Emperor creased his brow: "Serving quarter? Is it possible that the person is the sightless one?"

The servant answered: "That wasn't the person, this person's eyes are fine."

The Emperor gulped down a mouthful of tea, then said: "Ask him, what is the matter."

The Palace's servant said yes then quickly left, came back again after a while, got closer to the Emperor and whispered something into the Emperor's ear.

The Emperor's heart grew cold. "The Blind Concubine is missing?!"

Bowing while answering, the palace's servant said: "This was exactly what that person had said. Your humble subject conjectures, it is probably he lost his way in this downpour, there is also the probability of him slipping on the wet and slippery ground, not careful enough, he fell into the pond....."

"SHUT UP!!!" The Emperor shouted loudly, "Why have you still not quickly sent people to find him?!"

He suddenly stood up, a few strides had reached him to the outside, in an instant, his shadow had become a blur, covered by the curtain of the rain.

The palace's servant hurriedly got an umbrella, in a great rush followed behind him and got in the rain.

The Emperor hastened his way to the Imperial garden. The stones on the narrow path have been brushed clean and clear to the point of being glossed by the rain. Only a brief spell of carelessness would cause someone to slip and fall. The usual glamorous flowers, ceased all their activities and hung down their petals in the sprinkle of the rain's water. Looking all around, all one could see was the vast expanse of whiteness, foggy and misty. Deep in his heart, the anxiousness and worry all the more increased by this sight.

More of the Palace's servants joined the search party, scattered everywhere in all directions, carefully looked and searched. Suddenly, all the way from the bamboo forest, a voice echoed: "Found him!!"

Following the source of the sound, the Emperor went straight to the bamboo forest, the path under his feet was extremely muddy, each of the steps would create a deep hole.

The Blind Concubine was in the middle of the Bamboo forest, his clothes all soiled by the muddy water, his wet hair glued to his cheek, his eyes closed tightly, he had since long fallen in a state of unconsciousness.

Hastily, the Emperor walked to his place, not even the least bit cared that the Blind Concubine was covered in mud, he took him in his embrace. The body in his bosom was cold, like a block of ice, not even the slightest movement.

Xiao Bao hurriedly ran to come, looking at his master's current state, he almost broke to cry. "How is my Master?"

The Emperor ordered loudly: "Get back to the serving quarter, summon the Imperial Physician at once!"

They brought the Blind Concubine back to the serving quarter. The palace's servant took off his wet garments, wiped clean his body, and reclined him on the soft bed. Xiao Bao stayed by his side all along and held tightly the Blind Concubine's hand, even until when the Imperial Physician came to check the Blind Concubine's condition, he still refused to move from his side.

The Emperor brow was locked in a tight stitch, pacing back and forth in the room.

The Imperial Physician applied some acupuncture on the Blind Concubine, then removed them. The Emperor immediately stepped forward, "How is he?"

The Imperial Physician reported on the condition: "Fortunately, it is only a mere cold because he was drenched in the rain. There's nothing harmful. Take the utmost care and look after him for another 2 days, he should get better."

The Emperor confused: "If only drenched, how come he fainted?"

The Imperial Physician explained: "From the beginning, His Grace's body is already weak and delicate, he was strongly affected by the rain, and doubled by his heart's overweight trouble. Falling ill from the rain water, his physical strength is unable to endure, therefore he fainted just now. Even though there isn't anything serious, he still requires the most care and to carefully take good care of him. It is inadvisable to burden his mind, in order to avoid any mishap."

The Emperor took note on what the Imperial Physician had said. He strode to the bedside. Waited for a long time, until there was a faint sound from the Blind Concubine, indicating that he had regained his consciousness.

"..... Xiao Bao???"

His voice was weak and faint.

The Emperor said: "He went to get your clothes, he will be back very soon."

The Blind Concubine made an "Mm" sound, and knitted his brow in a frown.

The Emperor asked him: "Feeling unwell??"

The Blind Concubine shut his eyes and gasped for breath, managed with a great effort: "Feel like coughing, but I can't cough it out....."

The Emperor bent his body and with his soft and reassuring voice he said: "Wait a moment, I will call the Imperial Physician to check." Stretching out his hand to touch his forehead. His face became heavy and anxious, "Why are you running a fever?"

The Blind Concubine curled up and shivered with cold. He cast his face to face elsewhere: "I feel so cold....."

At the very same moment, Xiao Bao came back. In several steps, he already arrived at the bedside, "Master, you are awake."

Hearing Xiao Bao's voice, the Blind Concubine said in a faint voice: "I'm cold."

Xiao Bao reached out his hand to exam his forehead, secretly feeling terrible upon the intense fever he felt on his palm.

Flustered, he pleaded the Imperial Physician to check, to write the prescription, herbal medicinal herbs. The crowd of palace servants were busily coming in and out the room while holding the towel and the basin. They served the Blind Concubine to drink his medicine, all the way until the sky had turned to dusk.

In the evening, the Little Prince came to pay a visit, he stood in front of the hall in all his best manner.

Xiao Bao was holding a lacquer tray, raising the screen as he came out: "Master just fall asleep. He's already fine."

The Little Prince nodded his head. "It's good if he's fine."

Cast down his eyes, "How come His Grace could be in the Bamboo forest?"

Xiao Bao dumbfounded for a while, "..... it's still unclear."

Xiao Bao was so busy and worried for the Blind Concubine, busy to the point his feet were not touching the ground, running like the wind. He still had not the time to ponder about this matter.

Little Prince lifted his head to face upwards, clearly said: "I will come again tomorrow. You must take the best care of him."

Xiao Bao laughed. His face was rather worn out: "That goes without being said."

"Make a pinky swear."

"Huh??"

"Pinky swear to guarantee, you will take good care of him." His face looked serious and unbending.

Xiao Bao couldn't help but laugh lightly, squatted on his heels, passing his finger in front of this child.

Rui Ze earnestly tugged their pinky together, saying his pledge, his small face seemed dead serious.

Xiao Bao couldn't help but think that this child's disposition was actually very likeable.

If he was born into an average household, with both parents still alive, he would be a child that was loved by everybody.

After sending the Little Prince back, supporting his already so exhausted body, he brought a basin of clean water, back to the inner room.

The Emperor was moistening the towel, wrung it dry, then placed it on the Blind Concubine's forehead.

That sleeping face was still as pallid as before.

The fever had decreased for the moment, but it couldn't be said that everything would still be as steady at night.

The Emperor said: "Imperial Physician said that he has been shouldering excessive trouble, pent up in his mind... How can it be like that??"

Xiao Bao pursed his mouth, he wanted to say something, but hesitated: "..... Humble subject doesn't know..."

"You are with him all the time, how come you don't know?"

Xiao Bao hung down his head, "What is in my Master's heart, I am but a lowly subject, how would I know about it?"

The Emperor put on a troubled face, twisted his brows, "Was it because 'I' haven't treated him good enough?"

Xiao Bao hurriedly shook his head: "Your Majesty is very kind towards my Master, Master was also expecting Your Majesty's visitation."

"If it is like that, why is he still..." The Emperor abruptly fell silent, he recalled the Blind Concubine's warning to him. Staying by the Emperor's side, one must be extremely cautious, to be near the ruler is like being near the tiger. It was as if it was directed to most sovereign, the issue that had been weighed heavily on his mind.

His face was unable to hide the gloomy and darkened expression.

Xiao Bao looked at the Emperor's unusual expression, then quickly averted his eyes.

After a long while of silence, the Emperor said: "You take a good care of him."

Big steps strode out the room.

Upon seeing the Emperor's shadow disappearing behind the door, Xiao Bao finally could relax for a bit and heaved a relieved sigh.

These days were unlike the previously peaceful days.

He felt this fear most of the time.

Especially when he unexpectedly caught a sight of the soundless Emperor, standing behind the Blind Concubine and observing him in silence.

He was afraid to the point that his blood, from head to toe, became cold.

The Blind Concubine might not have known this, but Xiao Bao knew, yet willfully pretended that he didn't know, playing along with the Emperor to put on a play.

Every time he told the Blind Concubine "No problem" "Very good" "Master, please be at ease" all this time, he was being terrified in his heart.

He still didn't know what would happen in the future, he was confused, moreover, he was always in fear. He didn't have anything, but that person was the monarch of the country, all the rivers and mountains on the land were his possession.

If by any chance, he wanted to take away anything, how could he compete with that person? How could he protect the Blind Concubine?

Xiao Bao didn't know.

He didn't have anything, what belonged to him was his only dear life.

The next day, on the first glimmer of dawn, the Blind Concubine woke up.

Xiao Bao did not dare to sleep. He kept watch by the bedside all the time. Seeing that his master was waking up, he busily ordered the palace's maid to cook millet porridge.

The Blind Concubine stretched out his thin and slender hand, to stop him, and barely said: "I am not hungry."

Xiao Bao said: "Even though you are not hungry, you still have to eat a little. Yesterday you only had medicine, you didn't have your meal at all. You can ruin your stomach."

The Blind Concubine stubbornly shook his head, deadly grabbed Xiao Bao's hand, "You don't go. Stay here to accompany me."

There wasn't a shred of strength in his voice.

Xiao Bao's heart hurt to see him like that: "Okay."

The Blind Concubine pulled the corner of his mouth to grin, barely enough to be counted as a smile.

Xiao Bao held his hand firmly, "Master, how come you entered the Bamboo forest? Did you lose your way? You gave us a hard time searching for you."

The Blind Concubine closed his eyes, did not answer.

Xiao Bao waited for a long time, he thought that his Master wouldn't answer him.

"I didn't lose my way." The Blind Concubine's voice was extremely light, "..... I went there, to the Bamboo forest by myself."

Xiao Bao surprised, lifted up his head: "How come....."

"I was suffocated, thought about taking a breather in the Bamboo forest to let out the stuffy feeling, got drenched in the heavy rain, from head to toe, thoroughly got wet by the rain, so that my heart could be at ease."

The corner of Xiao Bao's eyes became red, "Why...."

The Blind Concubine let out a laugh, "Because I know that person is the Emperor."

Xiao Bao's heart froze and stunned, innumerable thoughts and feelings overwhelming his mind.

The Blind Concubine coughed in a low voice for several times, he was still in his poor health, even only to speak had already consumed most of his energy.

Xiao Bao muttered: "Master...Why did you do this?"

The Blind Concubine already closed his eyes again, knitted his brows, as if he was so tired, unwilling to speak any words.

Xiao Bao held his hand, his face was in deep grief, "Master... Is it worth the bother??"

It was not like he said that for The Blind Concubine to hear, seemingly he spoke to himself.

"Master has Master's consideration, but I only wish for Master to cherish yourself more. Don't burden yourself."

The Blind Concubine who closed his eyes all this while, as if he was sleeping, shook his head at this moment.

"As your master, I owe you so many things. I am thinking about how to pay you back, everything, entirely, what I have owed you..."

After recuperating for several days in the serving quarter, The Blind Concubine's sickness gradually took a turn for the better.

But there was still a trace of weariness on his face, under his eyes were slightly tarnished.

The Emperor came over to visit each and every day after he finished his morning court, fed him his medicine, porridge and once in a while would preach to him.

Xiao Bao did not dare to say much words. Could only stare at the tips of his feet and stood silently to the side.

The Little Prince also came to visit every day. Telling the stories of the Palace to divert The Blind Concubine from his boredom. This child, everyday no one knew where he usually went off to play, his shoes always carried in the faint scent of earth.

The Blind Concubine liked the Little Prince, whenever Rui Ze endlessly chattered and talked with his noisy voice, he would lean on the bedpost, laughing while listening.

Xiao Bao often complained and said that the little rice dumpling was being too noisy, that he might disturb his Master's resting time.

The Blind Concubine would laugh at him, "Our place here is too quiet. Upon the visit of the Little Prince, it becomes so lively."

Rui Ze turned to face Xiao Bao and stuck out his tongue at him.

General Qi also came to visit, two times.

He brought home the many days hadn't been seen Yu Li in his arm.

The Blind Concubine both surprised and happy, took over from Qi Sheng's hands his precious cat that was meowing and firmly trapped it in his embrace. Seemingly he hated so much to part with it.

Qi Sheng with his laughing tone said: "I know that you love her so much. After looking for a long time inside the Palace, found her and caught her."

The Blind Concubine replied: "Yu Li is very naughty, must have been hard to catch her."

Qi Sheng's face became slightly red, he rubbed his nose while saying, "Very true. Indeed it took lots of effort and energy."

Yu Li meowed and innocently blinked her penetrating sparkling like crystal cat's eyes.

The Blind Concubine affectionately propped her up and rubbed her nose against the tip of his nose, "You... You have troubled the General."

When Qi Sheng was about to leave, the Blind Concubine lifted up his quilt, wanted to get down from the bed to walk him out.

Qi Sheng immediately stopped him: "You just go back to rest, this way your illness will get better soon."

The Blind Concubine shook his head, he insisted: "I have been lying on the bed for several days already, my body is all stiff, and my bones feel like they can't be moved anymore. Walking for a while is good."

Together with Qi Sheng, he walked out until the gate of the serving quarter.

From the outside, the evening wind was blowing with a spell of cold air.

"General... If I have some problems that need General's help...." The Blind Concubine's light voice was fusing in the wind, "General can promise to help me?"

Qi Sheng answered him: "If it is within my ability, certainly I will be most grateful to be your help."

The Blind Concubine smiled slightly. He had been sick, all the more it made his already so thin body become thinner. His thin body seemed like it was swaying lightly. And his eye bags had become more obvious.

"I..... In that case, I will thank you in advance."

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"Master, tomorrow is the Dragon Boat Festival's day." Xiao Bao entered while holding a water melon. "The Palace is going to hold a grand banquet to celebrate."

"So fast, already the time for the Dragon Boat Festival again?" The Blind Concubine tilted his head, after a while, he burst out in laughter, "I am really in a muddle, aren't I?"

Master, how do you plan to celebrate it?"

The Blind Concubine was pondering, "Will The Little Prince attend the banquet as well?"

Xiao Bao shook his head, "He is too young to attend a banquet, his attendance is unnecessary. But General Qi seemingly has to attend."

The Blind Concubine told him: "We will just celebrate the festival together with The Little Prince."

Happily, Xiao Bao replied, "Alright."

Having porridge as their dinner, which was specially prepared by the Imperial Kitchen, the taste was light and not too strongly flavored, only a little hint of

sweetness, very delicious and refreshing, suitable for a meal in the hot weather.

The Blind Concubine was in a good mood, he had already eaten two small bowls of the porridge.

Xiao Bao asked him: "Master, do you want to fill your bowl again?"

"No.", The Blind Concubine shook his head, "Tomorrow we still have to eat the rice dumpling."

Xiao Bao abruptly reminded him: "Master, remember, you have to eat lots of meat filled rice dumpling, you have to put on more flesh."

The Blind Concubine laughed at him, "I haven't eaten meat for so many years, how come I got used to it now? We will leave it for The Little Prince, he loves to eat."

Xiao Bao curled his lips in protest, "Don't trouble yourself over that little rice dumpling. Every time he asked Master to lift him up in an embrace, I am anxious that Master might collapse and be weighed down by him."

Hearing these kinds of words, The Blind Concubine couldn't contain his laughter.

At night, after the oil lamp was lit, The Blind Concubine sat on the edge of the bed while staring blankly in a daze. Yu Li was resting on his lap.

After hesitating for a long while, Xiao Bao finally came to him and called out: "Master"

The Blind Concubine opened his hollow eyes, then turned to his direction, "What's wrong?"

Xiao Bao hesitating again, "Master, since you already know that that person is the Emperor..... In the future, how will you treat him?"

The Blind Concubine caressed the soft and lithe back of Yu Li, stroking its smooth as silk fur, slowly, he said: "Initially I had a little bit of complaints, but after I came around and figured things out, I no longer hold any complaints. In the depth of the Palace, is the place of unstopping turbulence as well as great waves of darkness. We don't have anyone to lean on, it will only bode us bad rather than good. If now we could have a backing, I can at least have a peace of heart."

Xiao Bao slightly pursed his lips: "Then... How about Master's feelings?"

The Blind Concubine paused his hand's movement, after quite a while he said:

"Regarding romantic feelings, I can be indifferent. Perhaps it has to do with my staying too long in the Cold Palace, my heart has frittered away."

Xiao Bao responded: "What if that person is sincere towards Master?"

The Blind Concubine laughed a bit, "Thousand pieces of gold is easy to obtain, a sincere heart is hard to get. If there is actually a person who treats me with sincerity, of course that would be good."

The sound of his voice had the same gentleness, but the expression on his face was not the same as with the former day's happiness.

Xiao Bao looked down, opened his mouth seemingly wanted to say something, to voice out his concern but found it hard to say.

In the end, he didn't say a thing, just walked out of the room and closed the door.

The Blind Concubine lied on the bed, the smile on his lips hadn't disappeared yet, hanging rigidly on the corner of his mouth.

"If he's really sincere, that will be very good", As if talking in his sleep, "If I do really have the Emperor's affection....."

Both of his eyes opened but remained blank, lacked of light, pupils were a slice of ashen white.

"Wouldn't it be the best bargaining chip?"

Yu Li made a low purring sound from its throat.

The Blind Concubine pleasantly laughed, lifting the cat which was in his bosom to the front of his eyes, "You are thinking the same, aren't you?"

This time, Yu Li didn't make any sound.

In front of his eyes was a layer of pitch black darkness, though he put it closer, he still couldn't see his most beloved treasured cat's appearance.

His heart generated a thread of uneasiness, he hung down his eyes in desperation.

"I don't need a lifetime of sincerity, even for only a while is enough", He held on to Yu Li's soft front paws, "only a while, it would be more than enough."

Didn't know what he was thinking about, The Blind Concubine was laughing,

almost like he was happy.

"I only need his temporary affection, then, I will be able to send Xiao Bao out from this Palace, and send you together with him, leave this Palace and don't ever come back anymore."

He lifted Yu Li again, and placed her in front of his eyes, his tragically ashen pupils directly faced with a pair of crystal clear penetrating cat's eyes.

"If he really has a genuine feeling, I will have his favor, right?"

Yu Li made another purring sound.

The Blind Concubine firmly believed that it was answering him, happily, he embraced Yu Li tightly in his bosom, circling it tightly with his arms, as if holding the world's most precious treasure.

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The next evening, before dusk, the Blind Concubine changed his robe and donned himself in a deep blue garment. He called out to Xiao Bao to come together with him to the Little Prince's Palace.

From the main door, Xiao Bao cut off his shouting voice, with a loud voice.

Also added: "I am feeding the birds first, after this I will go there."

Laughing, the Blind Concubine teased him: "Never thought that you are this kind of serious type once you set your heart on something."

Xiao Bao pouted with a sour expression, "Apparently serving Yu Li only isn't enough to make me suffer, now you have added another two birds, and they are the Emperor's bestowed upon us birds, we will commit a great sin if not careful enough and caused their death."

The Blind Concubine hid his smile with his sleeve, saying: "Yes, of course."

Both of them stepped out from the serving quarter, walked down the path to the Little Prince's Palace.

On Rui Ze's neck, hung down a string bag, a bag loaded with salted duck eggs. On the table, more than ten types of delicious meals were arranged neatly, all along with all kinds of particularly delicious rice dumpling. Upon the sight of the Blind Concubine, he laughed at once, as if he had gone crazy. Laughed so loudly and acted so spoiled, pulling the sleeve of the Blind Concubine and unwilling to let go.

The three of them entered the room to have their feast while chatting happily, using the chopsticks to eat the meals.

The Palace's servant peeled the rice dumpling for the Little Prince, but Rui Ze insisted on peeling it himself. The Blind Concubine agreed, took a rice dumpling and passed it to his hand.

The Imperial Kitchen cook's master's handicraft was truly exquisite. The rice dumpling was wrapped in a small and exquisite shape, did not even use the cotton thread to tie it together, instead it merely used a leaf to insert and fix it in its place. Rui Ze tried to tear it open, pulled and tore but still couldn't open it, he resorted to using his molar teeth to gnaw and nibble in order to breach it open. To peel the rice dumpling's leaf aside.

Xiao Ban ridiculed him: "What a way to peel, that is exactly the way a mouse will eat a rice dumpling."

Rui Ze placed the rice dumpling that he peeled with his teeth in the Blind Concubine's hand, his eyes sparkling, saying: "You eat this."

Xiao Bao threw him a sideways glance. The rice dumpling had been bitten by him to the point of losing its original shape, the grains of rice were also all over the table. Granted, Rui Ze was being careless. Xiao Bao took away the ruined rice dumpling and replaced it with a newly peeled one then put it in the hand of the Blind Concubine.

The Blind Concubine accompanied The Little Prince chatting and laughing, eating while talking, it was very lively. Without noticing, it was already nighttime.

The Blind Concubine stood up and went outside to take a breather.

In the sky, the first stage of the crescent moon was hanging proudly, illuminating the whole place with its silver white radiance. The dried twigs and leaves on the ground were piling up and joined together with its shadow. The wind was blowing, making the shadow of the trees seem like they were dancing and swaying.

From a nearby place, came through a not so unfamiliar voice, asking: "Why do you come out?"

Slowly, the Blind Concubine answered him: "I ate too much food, out for a walk."

Then added: "Why did you come here?"

The Emperor answered him: "The banquet in the Front Palace was already over, I just strolled along this marrow path, until I arrived here."

The Blind Concubine laughed, then sat on the stone bench.

The Emperor said: "I have something that I want to give you."

"Ehh??" The Blind Concubine lifted his head, "What is it?"

The Emperor answered him: "I will help you to put it on."

The Blind Concubine nodded his head, quietly sat. Waiting for the Emperor to put on something on his head. Stretched out his hand to touch, it was a jade hairpin.

"I have wanted to give it to you since long ago, I chose the best quality of Jade and had them transport it to the Capital, it took a lot of time and effort to polish it with the most exquisite carving."

The Blind Concubine lightly laughed, a laugh that carried along the sense of pain and bitterness.

In the end he said nothing, rose from the bench and turned his body, leaving the Emperor only with his lonely and desolate silhouette.

Today, at dusk, Xiao Bao was feeding Yu Li with her usual mixed cat food.

The Blind Concubine came out from his room, then asked: "Do we have wine stored in our house?"

After thinking for a while, Xiao Bao answered him: "During the Dragon Boat's Festival, General Qi sent people to deliver wine. Master, why do you ask this?"

The Blind Concubine pursed his lips, eyes downcast and directed on the floor, "Not for a special purpose, just suddenly had the urge to drink a cup or two of wine."

Xiao Bao laughed at him: "How strange, Master has never even once drunk wine before."

The Blind Concubine's face slightly blushed, twisting both of his hands together tautly.

Xiao Bao told him: "Master, wait here, I will go and get it."

Not long after, he came back while holding a small but exquisite wine bottle then put it on the table.

The Blind Concubine groped about until he touched the wine bottle, he grabbed it tightly in his embrace then he quickly went towards the outside of the gate.

Xiao Bao surprised and stupefied: "Master, you want to go out?"

The Blind Concubine turned his head and hastily voiced out an "Mm!" sound. Quickened his steps, he strode out to the outer part of the yard.

Xiao Bao shouted from the front door: "Where are you going to, Master? After I feed the cat, I will go

with you!”

The Blind Concubine quickly refused him: “I want to drink alone. You don’t have to worry. No need for you to come with me.”

“Master, be careful on your way....” Xiao Bao hadn’t finished what he wanted to say, The Blind Concubine already strode out alone to the outside of the yard then disappeared behind the black curtain of night.

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The Emperor was in the Imperial Garden, drinking with snacks. Unexpectedly, he caught a sight of someone’s figure approaching from afar towards his direction.

He couldn’t help but to be slightly surprised: Why is he coming to this place at this hour?

The Blind Concubine who was hugging the wine bottle arrived at the place that was not far from the Emperor. Groping wildly, he tried to find the stone table and bench the he could remember from his memory.

The Emperor quickly stood up, he held the Blind Concubine’s shoulder from in front.

Upon the sudden warmth that came in contact with him, The Blind Concubine was startled greatly, the wine bottle that he had been holding nearly slipped from his hand.

“Why do you come here all alone, even without Xiao Bao to accompany you?”

“It was I who asked him not to come with me”, The Blind Concubine’s eyes were glistening for a moment, “I heard from the Little Prince, he said that you often come here to drink, so, I wanted to find you to have a drink together.”

The Emperor laughed: “Don’t take all of Rui Ze’s honest words too seriously.”

The Blind Concubine looked down, “It is I whose being too blunt, I decided it myself to come and find you....”

“No, you are not”, The Emperor took the Blind Concubine’s hand, led him to sit on the stone bench, “What’s the point of drinking alone, two people, drinking and chatting, then it will become more delightful.”

The Blind Concubine lifted his cup of wine, slowly, he brought that cup of wine to his mouth, considering for a while, he held his sleeve then gulped down all of its contents.

The golden yellow liquid of the wine went straight down from his throat to his stomach. Hot and stung while burning. He was choked causing him to cough repeatedly. His entire face became very red in an instant. His chest suffered an intense undulated rise and fall.

The Emperor put down his cup, lightly patted his back, “Why drink in such a hurry?”

While coughing, the Blind Concubine answered him: “I heard that wine tasted sweet and mellow, who would have thought, it is this acid bitterness.”

The Emperor laughingly told him: “Wine’s taste needs to be slowly savored. Try the flavor and then smell, one at a time, this way you won’t taste any bitterness.”

The Blind Concubine shook his head and said to him: “This is my first time to drink wine, I don’t understand any knowledge about the art of drinking.”

The Emperor understood him: “Since this is your first time drinking, we must choose a milder flavor.” He ordered the servant to bring them rice wine. He poured it in the cup, then passed it over to the

Blind Concubine.

The Blind Concubine stretched out the tip of his tongue, carefully, he lightly had a taste of the liquid wine. Happily he said: "This one is better."

He sipped it little by little.

"How is it?"

"Indeed, there is a sweet fragrance, but this is seemingly not sweet at all."

The Emperor laughed again: "It might be, just slowly savor it."

The Blind Concubine knitted his brows, his expression was a little stubborn, "I don't want to slowly savor it. If you want to drink, just drink all of the wine. Even if it is such a strong wine, what is the point of drinking if not to drink until you get drunk?"

At a lightning speed, he took by force the wine pot which was being held by the Emperor, without pouring it into a cup he drank it all once it met his mouth.

The Emperor could only look at him while he forcefully tried to gulp down the wine. The wine's translucent liquid flew down and dripped on his neck, lining on his dazzling pale skin.

The Blind Concubine wiped his mouth, crooked his eyebrow, seemingly wanting to provoke: "How was that?"

The Emperor narrowed his eyes with a hint of a smile on the corner of his lips, he questioned in wonder: "What is wrong with you today? You aren't like your usual self."

The Blind Concubine's whole body was affected by the wine's effect. His face color also flushed and surged a layer of red. His eyes' corner was a little wet, "Who said I am not like my usual self? This is basically my usual disposition, whether you know or not, it is beyond your control...." He attempted to stand up with his rocking and swaying body.

The Emperor came to his support, "You are already drunk, I will walk you home."

The Blind Concubine grabbed the Emperor's front robe, he shook his head desperately, "I don't want to, I am not in the mood to go back yet."

Hearing this, the Emperor laughed amusingly, "So, in your opinion, where do you have the mood to go to?"

The Blind Concubine, under the effects of the wine, suffered an intense dizziness. In an off and on voice he spoke: "Your Palace, bring me there to have a look...."

The Emperor laughed with a low voice: "Alright."

Then ridiculed him: "Your body has become this weak, how can you walk?"

The Blind Concubine set aside a bit of hair on his forehead. Straighten up his back and raised his chest, it was like he felt elated and exultant: "You can bring me there in your arms."

The Emperor affectionately contained his laughter, put his big hand to hug his waist, powerfully, he carried him in his arms, positioned the Blind Concubine horizontally, (in a bridal style), with large steps he strode to his Royal Chamber.

Inside the Royal Chamber, the floor was paved with a beautiful bright rug, the curtain embroidered with a pattern of a dragon was hanging, the candles were red, dazzlingly brightened up the room. The Blind Concubine was curling up in the Emperor's embrace. In a daze, he said: "There is a nice fragrance."

The Emperor carefully looked at his face's contour thoroughly, then told him: "It is the fragrance of the incense."

The Blind Concubine closed his eyes and moved his nose, sniffing, "It is Ambergris."

The Emperor laughed loudly: "Truly, can't hide anything from you."

The Blind Concubine slowly opened his eyes, the light from the warm candle light reflected on his pupils, made his pupils seemed like they were twinkling. Word for word, he said: "Indeed, the fact that you are an Emperor, also can't be hidden from me."

The Emperor paused in surprise, but he didn't take offence, "Deep in my heart, I knew, eventually I would have to tell you about this, I kept thinking on how I should start the talk about this? I didn't expect for you to find out first. You... You don't blame me, do you?"

The Blind Concubine's lips were displaying a smile, his eyes were wavering like the reflection of the waves: "How can I blame you? You are being very nice to me, this is already more than enough."

The Emperor's eyes filled with deep and sweet affection, containing his happiness: "You thinking of it this way, will be my utmost happiness."

The Blind Concubine climbed down from the Emperor's embrace, took off his outer garment, carelessly tossed it on the floor. "Just now, I didn't drink to my heart's content, is there any wine here?"

The Emperor pulled him and turned him to face the Emperor, his whole face contained a profound laughter: "If you want to pleasure yourself, there is no need to use wine. In this world, there are many other ways to make someone feel pleasure....."

"Ehh??" The Blind Concubine made a light laughing sound. "What is this effective method? Please do tell..."

The Emperor hugged the Blind Concubine with his strong arms, circled him firmly in his embrace. He inched closer to him and whispered in his ear: "Do you know the way the Imperial Concubines serve me in the bedroom?"

The Blind Concubine was breathing in an uneven spell due to the tight embrace, he was panting and gasping for breath when he said: "Don't know, I don't know. How about if you teach me?"

The Emperor bit on the delicate ear lobe of the Blind Concubine, his lips were starting to kiss all over the Blind Concubine's face.

All the Blind Concubine could feel was like he was being wrapped around by a gust of wind. Soon after, his feet had already left the floor, and heavily put on the bed. His clothes got pulled here and there and became messy. His neck was under the torture of a damp, hot, yet overbearing biting. He couldn't help but moan.

His eyes couldn't see anything, however, his senses regarding body contact was extra sensitive.

The clothes on his body had been randomly pulled down. One of his legs were being forcefully lifted up and put on the Emperor's shoulder. When that man's fingers forced its way into his fragile back entrance's hole, The Blind Concubine was unable to hold in his shock and cried out in alarm. : "AH!!!"

The Emperor was concerned and asked: "What's wrong?"

The Blind Concubine slightly closed his eyes, his brows were forming into a knit: "Hurt..."

The Emperor answered him: "I will be gentler."

The Blind Concubine shook his head, gritted his teeth and said: "You just take care about coming in, you don't have to worry about me, I will be able to endure."

The Emperor took advantage of his body weight to press down. He kissed and sucked on the Blind Concubine's lips. His lower body since long ago had been aflame by desire. Without much explanation, he pried open the thin and slender fair skinned thighs of the Blind Concubine. Bent over, then he pushed in to enter.

The Blind Concubine's pair of eyes widened to form a round and circular shape at once. His pale fingers tightly gripped the bedcovers under his body, he almost wrenched his nails with this move. The severe pain on his body made his consciousness waver and become unclear. He was breathing with such difficulty, however, he could only firmly bite down on his lips, didn't dare to let any voice out.

The Emperor still wantonly galloped on his body, he moved spasmodically, both eagerly and swiftly. His eruption was close to bursting out, he wasn't able to show pity and tenderness towards his partner at the moment. He pressed down on the Blind Concubine's body and made another eager move.

The Blind Concubine closed his eyes tightly, he gritted his teeth tightly and locked his jaw. His lips had become bloody red because of the biting. His lower part was leaking and dripping wet. A faint smell of blood came to his senses. He let go his hand that was holding tightly the bedcovers, both of his hands seized the waist of the Emperor. Intermittently he said: "More... more powerful... It is still not enough....."

The intense thrusting made his words tear up into bits and pieces. He exerted himself to relax his soft body, to let the Emperor have his way in having more pleasure. The smell of blood from the lower part of his body was increasing and became denser. The fresh blood gushing out moistened his pale body, the redness was dazzling one's eyes with its crimson color.

The Blind Concubine eyes' were opened blankly, like he was already pained to the utmost, already no longer having any awareness nor could he feel anything. He opened his mouth, letting out a lowered soft cry, moaning between his breathing spell. Both of his legs were dangling on the man who topped him with a death grip, that body was moving in a regular movement.

Orange colored candle light was reflected on his tragically widened eyes, made a jumping and leaping movement in the middle of it. In front of his eyes, flashing through countless light and shadow. The memory was pouring like rain, rushing and breaking through his mind forcefully. In an instant, it made him have great difficulty breathing and nearly suffocated him. Even the physical pain was increasing more and more, he felt that his physical pain was still so much inferior compared to his mental pain and anguish. He wished that he could let more of his blood flow out and surge more turbulently. It would be the best if the blood could drown him, this way was the best way out, the most serene.

His consciousness was drawing thinner and lighter for each passing time.

In the end, he fainted.

The Blind Concubine woke up very late the next day.

After the sun already leant from the middle, slowly, little by little he opened his eyes. Intense aching could be felt from his waist, his bones felt like they were broken all over, his lips were also bitten to the point that his lip's skin were slightly split opened.

There was a fresh newly changed bed-mattress under his body. His body also had been washed and wiped clean, the medicine was smeared on his wounds.

When the Palace Servants were serving him by doing all of these things, he didn't even have the slightest awareness. From head to toe, his body was crying out in pain. The sharp pain from his rear entrance was unbearably painful. He couldn't even make the slightest movements.

The fragrance from the scenting furnace had been changed to another kind of elegant and pleasantly thin fragrant. The Blind Concubine closed his eyes, for a while, he laughed at himself.

Last night, he didn't know why but all of a sudden he recalled all the matters from many years ago. Perhaps it was caused by the too intense pain that aroused the agony which had been buried in the deepest of his memory. The pain was excessive and violent, by only remembering it, it had already pulverized him, he didn't want to recall that kind of memory anymore.

He reclined on the bed, from all over his chest, black and blue marks could be seen, he also couldn't raise his arms, his eyes were blank, without any wave or ripple.

By the noontime, the Emperor returned to the Royal Chamber, walked to the bed, and intimately kissed the Blind Concubine on his lips. : "Woken up?"

Nodding his head, the Blind Concubine asked the Emperor, "Your Majesty, about last night, were you content? Can you enjoy yourself to the fullest?"

The Emperor answered him: "Regarding that, of course I did."

The Blind Concubine hung his eyelids. "May I return now?"

The Emperor knitted his brows, "Return to where?"

"Return to the serving quarter. I slept here, it will attract attention and be hard to avoid any gossip, if there are many people who found out about this, it also won't be good for Your Majesty's reputation."

The Emperor raised one of his brows: "Who dares to say anything?" he bent down and spoke softly to comfort him: "I let you stay here, you can peacefully stay, later I will call Xiao Bao to come and accompany you."

The Blind Concubine lightly laughed, "Thank you Your Majesty."

The Emperor slowly caressed the Blind Concubine's thin and slender pale fingers, "Do not address me as an Emperor, just call my name, alright?"

The Blind Concubine blinked his eyes, "I dare not."

The Emperor cupped the Blind Concubine's hand and kissed the center of his palm, "I cherish you and want the best for you. I also want you to treat me differently, better than you treat the others. Call out my name, Rui Xuan."

He was so sincere in what he said, his pupils' light contained the calm of a deep water pond. He clamped his mouth and quietly waited. The words he said were touching to the point of hurting, The Blind Concubine moved his mouth, very slowly as he started to spill out the words: "Rui...Xuan."

The Emperor seemingly very delighted, lovingly kissed his palm again, "Good."

The Blind Concubine hung his eyes even deeper, his long and thick eyelashes covered his eyes. He had thought about hundred thousands of flowery intimate words to ingratiate himself with the Emperor, but now, upon the Emperor's sincere words, he had nothing to say in response.

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In the afternoon, Xiao Bao came to attend to him. First time entering the Emperor's Royal Chamber, he was overly cautious.

Until he entered the inner room, upon the sight of the reclining on the bed and couldn't move Blind Concubine, he anxiously went straight towards the bedside, the rim of his eyes became red instantly.

The Blind Concubine managed with a great effort to laugh at him, "Foolish boy, what do you cry for?"

Xiao Bao was unable to stop his tears, "Master, it is good that you are fine. I was worried the whole

night!”

The Blind Concubine mildly laughed, he couldn't contain a burst of sadness from spilling out. Worrying for him like this, probably only this kid would.

“You go and ask for hot water, I want to wash my body.”

Xiao Bao wiped his eyes, saying: “Master, didn't you already have yourself cleaned?”

The Blind Concubine shook his head, “That was someone else doing that for me, I want to wash myself, so I will be cleaner.”

Xiao Bao nodded his head, turning his body to ask for hot water.

The Blind Concubine opened his eyes, on the top of his head was a piece of bright yellow bed curtain, long and hanging down all the way to the floor. He couldn't see, of course he wouldn't feel neither joyful or sadness from this, all he did was quietly lay down on the bed.

The Palace Servants moved in a screen and a wooden barrel to the room. Pail after pail of hot water was being poured into that barrel. They also brought in fresh towels and clean clothes, placing them on a shelf.

The Blind Concubine told them: “You all can go out.”

The Palace's Servants answered him then one after another they withdrew from the room.

The Blind Concubine was facing Xiao Bao, “Help me to get up.”

Xiao Bao hastily stepped forward, carefully he help the Blind Concubine to climb down from the bed. The body in his embrace was thin and light, when the gauze had been slid down, the bruised marks were revealed.

Xiao Bao was shocked, he asked: “Master, this....”

The Blind Concubine answered him lightly: “It is not serious. It will disperse in several days.”

He got into the barrel.

The hot water was flowing out little by little and slowly flooded the floor. The wound on his lower part of the body was in contact with the water, the blood gushing out again, making the water gradually tainted by traces of bright red.

The Blind Concubine gritted his teeth to endure, he tried really hard to lift his arms, little by little he rubbed his body. On his forehead, because of the heat wave of steam, beads of sweat were showing. He lifted his head to look up, he breathed in a mouthful of air like he was drowning. His hair had been drenched and dripping wet, only an endless darkness before his eyes. His body as if it had been hollowed out and had become only an empty shell.

Xiao Bao circled out from behind the screen, “Let me wash it for you, Master.”

The Blind Concubine quickly cast his face aside to a darker place. “Don't look! Awfully filthy.”

“Master, what nonsense are you talking about?”, Xiao Bao got angry, “If you are not insulting yourself then you won't be satisfied?!”

The Blind Concubine looked down, not saying another word.

Xiao Bao rolled up his sleeves, clutched the towel and rubbed his back for him.

The body of The Blind Concubine was alarming thin, his face produced several strands of redness

from the hot water's steam. Xiao Bao heaved a sigh inwardly, then said: "Master, you are like this, so pure that it makes people unable to be at ease."

The Blind Concubine sitting in the barrel, staring blankly as if in a trance, after some time, he replied vaguely: "It doesn't matter."

Xiao Bao helped to take him out from the barrel, wiped clean his body, smeared the medicine on his wound then wrapped it properly with the gauze. Not even having enough time to put on the clothes, the blood had spread out again, striking to the eyes. Xiao Bao had no choice but to unwrap the gauze, smeared the ointment once again, then replaced the gauze with a new one and wrapped the wound properly once again.

After he tried it over and over again, Xiao Bao was finally able to bring the Blind Concubine back to the bed, tucking him in tightly with the bedclothes.

The Blind Concubine's entire body hurt severely. However, after he washed and bathed, compared to before, he felt cleaner.

Xiao Bao grasped his hand firmly, "Master, please listen to my advice, from now on, please treasure yourself more. Do not trouble yourself with any kind of problems. Don't be anxious."

The Blind Concubine absentmindedly murmured: "Mm."

Didn't know if he actually listened or not.

At dusk, The Emperor returned to the Royal Chamber. The Blind Concubine had eaten a little porridge. He was leaning on the bedpost.

The Emperor stepped forward and half hugging him, with his gentle voice: "Feeling better?"

The Blind Concubine made a light laughter: "I feel better."

With all his might he pressed down the painful feeling from all over his body.

The Emperor kissed him on his forehead. And spoke: "Last night, I was moving without much consideration, didn't expect I would hurt you, today, I was worried all day."

The Blind Concubine laid on the crook of the Emperor's arm, deeply inhaled a mouthful of air, "I am fine."

Both of them talked a little before the Palace's Servant brought in thick soup to the room.

The Emperor held the ladle, each time with a spoonful, he fed the thick soup to The Blind Concubine's mouth.

The Blind Concubine appeared low spirited, it took him quite some time before he was finally able to swallow down the whole soup.

The Emperor held that thin and weak body in a tight embrace in his bosom, earnestly said to him: "I will never let you have a rough time again."

The Blind Concubine closed his eyes, didn't utter a word.

The Emperor told him: "We will stay close to each other like this forever, what do you say?"

His lips lightly kissed the space between the brows of the Blind Concubine, then shifted to gently kissing his eyes.

Stay together for the rest of their life, how perfect.....

The Blind Concubine kept silent. The light of the candle peacefully rested in the fundus of his eyes.

The Emperor pressed on and asked once again: "What do you say?"

The Blind Concubine in his bosom, faced upwards to look up to his face, softly answered: "Alright."

The Emperor's face was containing his smiling expression, he too, laid on the bed, hands still held firmly around the frail body, he didn't want to let go.

The Blind Concubine wanted to hug the Emperor, however, both his arms felt heavy and sank, no matter how much he tried, he couldn't lift his arms up.

His eyes were opened albeit blankly. He could only curl up in the crook of the Emperor's arm. He couldn't help but tremble slightly.

The body by his side was big, strong and warm. But such kindness was unlikely to continue for long time.

The Blind Concubine bit down his lips very hard, to the point he could feel the blood dripping in his mouth, but this meant, he could push down the ache in the bottom of his heart, little by little.

In the end, he was unable to endure it, along his cheeks, two lines of clear and cold tears rolled down....

He was bedridden for a full day, afterwards, the Blind Concubine and the Emperor, with each passing day had become more intimate.

The Emperor would stay and treat him like his beloved person. Not even caring to avoid any suspicion in front of the Palace's servants.

Every day, they would eat together and read together.

The Blind Concubine could see nothing, the Emperor would read out loud for him to listen.

Once in a while, they would enjoy the beautiful moon from the front yard while rowing in a small boat to the middle of the lotus pond.

The Blind Concubine's body was weak and feeble. The Imperial physician wrote a prescription to build his health by taking nourishing foods. Two times a day. Slightly bitter.

The Blind Concubine unhappily drank the herbal medicine. He complained: "I have passed through many years without having the need to take any medicine and I am still fine. Nowadays, why should I suffer this kind of hardship?"

The Emperor patiently told him: "You have promised me to be with me for the rest of your life. If you stay like this, how can you fulfill your promise to be with me forever?"

The Blind Concubine said nothing to refute, he obediently drank down the herbal medicine bit by bit.

The Emperor put a block of crystal sugar into his mouth.

"During 'my' childhood, my temper was bad and surly. Often I cried and stirred up trouble for hours because I didn't dare to drink the medicine. The Great Empress would use crystal sugar to coax 'me'."

The Blind Concubine said to him: "Compassion is the heart of all parents in the world. The Great Empress extremely loved Your Majesty."

The Emperor bent down his body and lightly rubbed his eyebrows. His eyes were like the abyss of a deep pond. "You have to treasure yourself, don't ever let my heart hurt for you."

The Blind Concubine hung down his eyelids. Replying softly: "Yes, Rui Xuan."

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Today, the sun was shining rather gently. The Blind Concubine was being helped by Xiao Bao to go and sit in the Imperial Garden.

The Little Prince was also in the Imperial Garden, by his back, several of the Palace's servants dressed in identical robe followed him.

He sat on the stone bench by the Blind Concubine's side. He quickly ordered two little palace maidens to step forward and keep them cool with the big fans. He carried in both his hands all kinds of sweets, which had been arranged by the Palace's Servant.

Xiao Bao sucked on his own tongue: "Such ostentation and extravagance."

Rui Ze with his clear voice, like the voice of a child while reading out loud, said to the Palace's servants: "The Blind Concubine has resided in the Imperial Palace, he could be counted as half a Master already, you lots may not ignore him, understand?"

The Palace's servants were nodding their heads obediently albeit a little bit confused.

Rui Ze added more: "His Grace's eyes can't see anything; you all can't do without adding more of your attention to take care of him. Do not make things more difficult for His Grace, understand?"

The Palace's servants had to nod for another answer.

The Blind Concubine was unable to hold in his laughter, "I have made the Little Prince become troubled and anxious."

Rui Ze put his little hands behind his back, held up his round and circular face, then said: "It's only natural."

Qi Sheng strode into the Imperial Garden, he didn't wear his government official's robe today. Only wore a dark colored brocaded robe. On his waist, he fastened a jade belt, matching perfectly with his sword. His features were outstandingly handsome.

The Little Prince gave him a weird look while asking: "Today we don't have to practice, why does the General come to the Palace?"

Qi Sheng answered him: "The Great Empress was summoning me. On the way back, I came here."

The Little Prince asked again: "What business does the Royal Mother have?"

Qi Sheng replied: "It wasn't anything about the Country, it was merely about affairs in the Palace."

The Little Prince said: "Then you are coming just in time, come sit with us and let us eat these pastries together."

Xiao Bao raised his brows: "You think that everybody will like your too sweet to the point of sticking to the teeth sweet food?"

The Blind Concubine laughingly said: "Once in a while, eating these kinds of sweets won't be harmful."

Qi Sheng responded to him: "If it is like that, then it is better for me to accept deferentially than to decline your offer courteously."

With a giggle, the Little Prince tried to make a deal, "General, you have eaten my food, tomorrow, can you be a bit lenient? Allow me to lessen the practice for an hour?"

Raising his brows, Qi Sheng told him: "Sweets are the easiest to cause fat, by practicing martial arts one can avoid that. Tomorrow, you don't have to worry that you will be exempted, instead, you will get an additional one hour of practicing."

Rui Ze pulled a long face, softly, he leaned and got into the Blind Concubine's embrace, and lodged a complaint: "General is bullying me!"

Xiao Bao widened his eyes into circular shapes and glared at him: "Obviously you were the one who tried to bribe the General, your attempt failed so you are making a false countercharge."

The Blind Concubine covered his mouth and laughed for a while, "The General's intention is good, otherwise, if the next day you are suffering from a toothache, nobody would come to help you."

The Little Prince put on a suffering face: "But we will be happier when we eat sweet things."

The Blind Concubine gently caressed his fluffy small head, slowly, he told him: "That is correct. If there is sweetness in our mouth, we won't feel any bitterness in heart."

Xiao Bao and Qi Sheng both fell silent and didn't say a word.

The Blind Concubine also didn't have the intention to talk. He hugged Rui Ze tightly, as if there was something burdening his mind.

At the moment, the Imperial Garden became so quiet and peaceful, only the sound of a gentle breeze could be heard.

Not long after eating his sweets and pastries, the Little Prince stood up to take his leave.

The Blind Concubine warned him again and again: "After going back, remember to review your lessons, the Great Teacher will carry out examinations soon."

The Little Prince nodded his head, then said: "Brother has a waterside pavilion residence outside the Palace. It is on the center of a lake. In the summer time, it is perfectly pleasant and cool. I had begged Brother to lend it to me for several days. He already agreed. You also can come together with me."

The Blind Concubine slightly laughed, "Alright."

The Little Prince's eyes were sparkling with happiness, gleefully he said: "The lake has many Koi. Very beautiful. There are also aquatic birds, very early in the morning they will scream awfully loud. We can bring fish food there. We could feed the fish. It will be very amusing."

Xiao Bao cut him off: "You only know about playing for the whole day."

The Blind Concubine laughed: "If you study properly, of course I will listen to you."

The Little Prince happily went back.

Xiao Bao heaved a sigh: "That kid, he is actually easy to coax."

Qi Sheng stood up, spoke to the Blind Concubine: "Could we walk a bit to talk?"

The Blind Concubine answered him: "Of course."

With Qi Sheng, they walked to a secluded corner in the Imperial Garden, the Blind Concubine asked: "I wonder, what kind of affairs General Qi wants to talk about?"

Qi Sheng briefly paused for a while before he began to talk: "I don't want to hide the truth from you. Empress Dowager summoned me to the Palace today, the cause was none other than to talk about Your Grace's affairs."

The Blind Concubine's body was quivering, "..... General, please do explain."

Qi Sheng continued: "The Empress Dowager had known that recently the Emperor is only doting on you. This matter makes her heart extremely unhappy. The Emperor is her only son. Since this is about her beloved son, she is anxious, The Little Prince is her adopted son. Perhaps you already know."

Slowly, the Blind Concubine nodded his head, "Empress Dowager..... how will she punish me?"

Qi Sheng told him : "The Empress Dowager has been a vegetarian and praying to Buddha for many years, she only ordered me to take you far far away, not to step a foot in the Capital anymore."

The Blind Concubine looked down, said in a soft voice: "I understand."

Qi Sheng stretched out his hand and grasped his shoulder, "I don't want you to put yourself in great inconvenience, if you have something to say, don't be hesitant to speak and let me know."

The Blind Concubine said: "Xiao Bao, can he leave together with me?"

Qi Sheng shook his head: "He may not."

The Blind Concubine was worried, "He has been with only me, if I am no longer there, what about him?"

Qi Sheng was hesitating for quite some time, "I will think of a way, to arrange a nice place for him. You should just be at ease."

The Blind Concubine's eyes were brimming with tears, his lips were trembling greatly, "You don't understand. He didn't have any better place to go, if I go, it would only distress him to death."

Qi Sheng fell silent and didn't say anything.

The Blind Concubine asked him again: "When does The Empress Dowager want you to make your move?"

Qi Sheng let him know: "Tonight."

The Blind Concubine lifted his hung down head, firmly said: "Do not inform His Majesty about this matter. If the mother and son misunderstand each other for this reason, it will be my sin. Also, do not tell Xiao Bao. Just tell him that I only want to leave for a period of time. Let him stay peacefully at the serving quarter."

Qi Sheng assured him: "Will do."

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The sky's color gradually turned to a darker color. The Blind Concubine sent Xiao Bao away to fetch some cakes or pastries from the Imperial Kitchen. He himself changed his clothing to plain and neat clothes, groping wildly to find Yu Li, taking her in a tight embrace on his bosom.

He walked out the yard's gate, tracing the path from his memory, he walked to the direction of the appointed place and met up with Qi Sheng.

Qi Sheng helped him to enter the horse carriage that had been waiting by the side. The carriage quietly went out the Palace in secret. To the northern direction.

The horse's hoofing sound that stomped on the ground produced a rhythm. Ran in both a light and fast tempo. The wheels were raising a burst of dust.

Qi Sheng gave the carriage driver some instructions before he opened the curtain and joined in the carriage.

The Blind Concubine was leaning by the window. The Yu Li on his bosom was silently lying on its stomach, not moving nor meowing, totally quiet.

Qi Sheng spoke to him: "You are not blaming me?"

The Blind Concubine turned his head, "The Empress Dowager is merciful. She pardons my life and left me alive, I am extremely grateful for this. Even the Empress Dowager I can't resent, how could I blame you?"

Qi Sheng told him: "Even if the Empress Dowager ordered me to take you far away, she didn't appoint a designated place. I have been pondering for a while, finally I have decided to bring you to the place of my old friend. The distance from the Capital is not so far, it will take us only a few days. If you stay there, there will be someone to take care of you. I also can be at ease."

The Blind Concubine asked: "I wonder, what kind of old friend is this person?"

Qi Sheng answered: "When we were young, he and I were learning martial arts together under the same master. And then, I chose to enter the government as an Official, while he was only looking forward to a free and unrestrained life. Thereupon, he moved to the depths of a mountain, teaching martial arts to several small apprentices. Passing every day with a carefree and comfortable life."

The Blind Concubine nodding his head in agreement: "It is certainly the privilege of the people who live in the secluded area."

Qi Sheng laughed: "Very true. That residence was built on a perilous peak of a mountain. There is only a precipitous narrow path to reach there. By the yard side, there is a stream from a waterfall passing through, creating a crooked water path which flows to the pool in the middle of the yard. In the pool, there are fishes and lotus. Surrounded by pear trees, from spring to summer, the pear's flower petals will flutter and fly in the air, filling the entire garden with its sweet fragrance. Crowds of birds gather, truly like a wonderland."

The face of the Blind Concubine was letting out a happy smiling face, "You described it in such a way, I really want to go and have a look."

The carriage was moving for several days, on the foot of a mountain, it stopped.

Qi Sheng open the carriage's curtain: "We have arrived. Sorry to have you bumped about these past several days."

The Blind Concubine shook his head, "General, you said it like that, do you intend to make me restless? It was me who involved the General in such trouble and made you suffer this misfortune. I am sorry for the trouble."

Qi Sheng informed him: "The pathway to the mountain is uneven, it will be difficult and dangerous. Let me carry you on my back on the way up."

The Blind Concubine shyly answered: "How can I let you do something like that. If I have a walking stick, it will be enough."

Qi Sheng did not listen to his protest, he took the Blind Concubine down from the carriage, carried him on his back and strode to climb the mountain.

His ears could hear the loud sound of the wind. The Blind Concubine closed his eyes and tightly clutched on Qi Sheng's clothes. Roughly after about two hours walk, the tip of his nose faintly smelled the fragrance of the pear's flowers. The faint sound of the bird's song was looming in the distance.

"General, could we have arrived?"

His speech had yet to sink in when suddenly a cold and discouraging voice was coming their way: "What kind of wind could blow the Great General Qi to come here?"

Qi Sheng heard the words, lifted his head while laughing: "Haven't seen you for ages, come over to chat and talk."

That person measured with his eyes the young man on Qi Sheng's back, then said: "I wonder if it is only for a simple chat and talk. If you had no problems, would you still remember about me who lives in the depths of this mountain's wild forest?"

Qi Sheng could clearly hear the thorny words of that person, he had to carefully choose his words, "Indeed, I haven't come to see you for a very long time. You want to beat me or punish me, I can only go along with you."

That person made a loud 'Humph!' sound from his nose, ignoring Qi Sheng, he turned his body and entered the yard. Qi Sheng hurriedly followed him and entered the yard too.

The Blind Concubine laughingly teased him: "General also has times when he must acknowledge defeat."

Qi Sheng wiped his sweat, saying: "This junior fellow apprentice of mine, has the most eccentric characters, very changeable. Previously, when we were still practicing martial arts together, he often made people worry for him. And the Master happened to adore him the most, always letting him have his way, it made him develop a habit of arrogance and a willful temper."

The Blind Concubine climbed down from Qi Sheng's back and told him: "Go, look for him."

The both of them had entered the garden. The pears' flowers were fluttering in the air, giving out a delicate fragrance for a period of time. There were the mountain's rocks, a stream of flowing water and also an area of bamboo forest which stretched along to the outside of the garden. There were fish in the pond which was built by laying stones around it. The red and white colored patterns of the fish were very eye catching. The wind brought the flower petals and soaked them in the water, adding details to the dyed with the fragrance of layer upon layer of the pear flowers' pond water.

The Blind Concubine was stunned: "It is truly like a wonderland."

There was a little disciple who guided him to the winged room to have tea.

The tea was also a very good tea. They used the gathered dew from the early morning which had lingered on the petals of the pear flowers to brew the tea. The taste contained the lingering scent.

The Blind Concubine was seated in front of a table. A small piece of the tea leaf carelessly touched the tip of his tongue, the bitterness was intense.

This was the first time he was separated from Xiao Bao for such a long time. He didn't even say a word to bid him farewell. He must have been worried to the point of insanity.

Rui Ze had invited him to stay together in the waterside pavilion residence. Now that he could no longer go, he wondered if Rui Ze would get mad at him.

The Emperor, if he really had been worried for him, if he really would think of him. Leaving like this without saying goodbye, perhaps he had already flared up and lost his temper.

The Blind Concubine recalled the memory when the Emperor said that they would stay together with each other for the rest of their lives, his heart seized and ached.

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Qi Sheng was chasing that person and entered the other winged room of the garden. He followed

behind and coaxed him all the way. That person had not at the least cared for nor appreciated his nice words. Not even turning his head to look at him. Qi Sheng stepped ahead and took that person by his waist into his arms, forcing him to turn around and face him.

That person possessed a pair of phoenix eyes, the outer corner of his eyes were particular. His black eyebrows stretched high to his temples. His penetrating expression was haughty and arrogant. The set of plump red colored lips were beautiful and sweet. There was a faint trace of anger on his face.

“You still remember to come here?”

Qi Sheng admitted that he was in the wrong. He couldn't help but have to subdue himself in a humbling manner. If this kind of situation was allowed to be seen by his brothers who fought in the battlefield together in the former days, he wondered if their eyes would fall and drop.

That person pushed away his hands. Laughed coldly while saying: “At that time you said that even if you had joined the governmental duty, you would still frequently come to see me. In the end, you went to the battle on the borderline for several years. Now you come, acting in the same way as if we only haven't met for several months. You might as well bury yourself in the pile at the Great Wall. You've wasted my longing!”

Qi Sheng was brazenfaced when he pressed near, regardless, that beautiful man might have a fit of his explosive bad temper at any time, “It is me who left you restless, this time I am really not too busy so I hurriedly came to see you. If you want to punish me, just do it. Make me drink, or even hit me with a cane, as long as you are happy, I will take it.”

The beautiful person knitted his brows in disgust: “Who would want to hit you with a cane. Not only it is useless, it would hurt my hand as well.”

Qi Sheng got closer to the beautiful person's ear, he unexpectedly licked his earlobe, laughed with a rather deep meaning: “If you don't want to get hurt, you can just lay down. Avail yourself to laying with me, I can assure that I will make you feel comfortable.”

In an instant, that beautiful person's face flushed all red. Angrily, he widened his eyes, “This kind of dirty talk of yours, you have associated yourself too long with those crude old men at your military camp, you even have the audacity to act indecently in front of me!!”

Qi Sheng burst out in laughter. Using his strong arms, he lifted that beautiful person and pulled him into an embrace on his chest. With large steps, he strode into the inner room of the house. The beautiful person's whole face blushed. His fist was pounding like the rain, without rhyme or reason. His mouth grumbling and swearing, shouting beat, shouting kill, nonstop.

Qi Sheng's face remained calm when he closed the door, took the beautiful person and tossed him on the bed. At first, there was a loud noisy sound from inside the room, banging and clattering sounds; disordered crashing noises were heard for a period of time. As if there were things that had been carelessly swept to the floor, sometimes it was mixed with one or two cursing words. Afterwards, the noise gradually turned softer, replaced by the subtle sound of gasping and panting. Through the frame of the door, the sound had spilled out and was overflowing to the outside. The timbre was tainted with moaning. The voice that was previously filled with evil tendencies had now ceased to exist.

Because they hadn't met for a long time, Qi Sheng firmly pressed that person and made his move. That person also unable to have any regard for his face anymore, going all out with all his might to tempt and seduce, his mouth was billowing his breath incessantly.

He was actually thinking about having this kind of romantic intercourse with Qi Sheng for many days and nights. Why didn't this bastard comeback anyway? Meeting like today was not easy at all. Of course he would tangle his pair of legs in a death grip, swayed his hips wantonly and desperately strove for more.

The two people kept on shifting their ground, playing their tricks resulting in both of them dripping with

sweat, not stopping until the murky heavens covered over the dark earth.

The night had grown late.

The stream in the pear garden was murmuring. The Blind Concubine was still sitting on his place, silently without a word. The tea also had turned cold.

Qi Sheng and that beautiful person were coming from the other pathway of the garden and entered the room.

Qi Sheng said to The Blind Concubine: "This is my junior, his name is Jue Yu. From now on, you will live here, he will look after you, you can be at ease. Having said those words, he held Jue Yu's hand.

Jue Yu made a clear slapping sound with his palm and moved forward. Soon, he changed his face to a warm expression, and said to the Blind Concubine: "Qi Sheng and I are acquaintances from a long time ago. He brings people here for me to take care of, of course I will definitely attend to you. On the mountain is peace and quiet, the scenery is also very beautiful, most perfect for a living place.

The Blind Concubine replied to them: "Sorry for the trouble. Because of me you take on a lot of trouble."

-----

Qi Sheng stayed on the mountain for a night. The next day, very early in the morning he was rushing to get back to the Capital to report after carrying out his order.

Not long after the sun rose, the mist hadn't dispersed yet, the horizon revealing a faint orange color from the sun. Although it was already summer, in the chain of mountains, the air remained the same of freshness and coldness.

Jue Yu walked him until the gate of the garden. The usual arrogant and aggressive face had put on a thread of soft and gentle expression.

Qi Sheng turned his body and told him: "The morning dew is thick, you better go back."

Jue Yu angrily retorted: "You have stayed in the Capital too long that you have become slow witted and stupid. I am not that kind of delicate and fragile Prince. I am here all day long that it feels hot. How could I feel the cold?"

Qi Sheng's face held in his laughter, his fingers were gently touching Jue Yu's sleeve. On that silken material, he slowly stroked.

Jue Yu was not even a shred bit affected by his affectionate feelings. He told him: "Quickly go away! You don't comeback. You coming here is only a pain in the neck."

Qi Sheng remained with the same laughter, unexpectedly, he caught Jue Yu by surprise and nibbled on his lips. He sucked on both parts before releasing them. And then kindly said: "I am leaving. You have to take care of yourself."

Jue Yu coldly laughed, "Wanted to cover your short visitation with sweet words. That face of yours, just a glimpse of it could already make me angry."

Qi Sheng made an odd expression: "Eh?? You didn't say it like that last night. You entwined yourself tightly around me and begged me to play several times so you could get more."

Jue Yu's face immediately rose up to the color of red. His eyes had been ignited with the flame of fury. Swearing, he told Qi Sheng off: "Qi Sheng!! Are you already tired of living?? If you don't go, I will kick you down the mountain to be the dog's food!!"

-----

So, The Blind Concubine lived in the Pear Flower Garden on the mountain.

Every day he lived a simple and plain life. He drank the lotus leaf porridge. He smelled the fragrance of the flowers. He heard the sounds of the rushing down waterfall and the flowing swiftly stream. Hugging Yu Li to tag along, he went in all directions in this garden.

Jue Yu every morning would teach martial arts to some students in the garden until the sun set in the west.

The Blind Concubine would sit on the bench in the Pear Flowers Garden, listening to their marking shouts, every move they made would produce a sound of blasting wind.

Day by day passed by peacefully and delightfully. In addition, he had Yu Li to accompany him.

All the matters regarding the Royal Palace, seemed to be a long dream from the past.

The Blind Concubine felt, if like now, here and now he could forget about everything, in this place, the Pear Flowers Garden, he spent the rest of his life peacefully, it would be really great.

Jue Yu was also helping his less flourishing young students. They usually lived on the other side of the Garden. When the morning came, they all would draw water for washing and cleaning themselves. All day long, until nightfall, the noisy sound of their nonstop chattering while they were eating or playing, made the garden more livelier.

Whenever The Blind Concubine heard these children's noisy chatter, he couldn't help but recall about Xiao Bao, also about the Little Prince.

The young students all knew that The Blind Concubine had come from the Capital. They often surrounded him and asked about everything. Once they opened their mouths, there would be no end!! How was the Capital?? How was the Royal Palace?? How was the Emperor??

Every time, when they asked these questions, the Blind Concubine would force out his smiling face while answering, The Capital?? Of course it was bustling and busy every day. The Royal Palace?? Of course it was enormous...

The young students would hastily ask again: "How about the Emperor??"

"The Emperor??", The Blind Concubine paused and stopped for a while, "I have never seen the Emperor."

The young students would be nodding one after another, "The Emperor, of course is not some figure who could be easily seen."

The Blind Concubine was gently caressing Yu Li's smooth fur on his back, slightly laughing and replying: "Of course..."

Once in a while, he would sit by the pond's side with Jue Yu to have a chat.

Yu Li would lay prone on her stomach on the stone. Her eyes glistening while watching the leisurely, shaking their head and wagging their tail school of Koi in the pond.

The Blind Concubine slowly asked: "You and the General couldn't meet so often, do you miss him?"

Jue Yu raised his brows, "I will never miss him."

The Blind Concubine covered his laughter, "Your mouth says one thing but your heart means another."

Jue Yu did not respond. His face remained with his haughty and arrogant expression.

The Blind Concubine asked again: "When you miss him dearly, what would you do?"

Jue Yu told him: "What else could I do? I could only wait for him like this."

The Blind Concubine said: "General Qi is truly sincere and treasures you, your wait is truly worthy."

The days in the mountain passed like the fallen flower petals, day by day fluttered away with the wind.

The Blind Concubine stayed in this secluded place, isolated from the outside world, inside the Pear Flowers Garden, for quite some time already. To the point he already couldn't differentiate the time anymore, he didn't realize when the sun set or when it was time for nightfall.

Until one day, early in the morning. One young student hurriedly rushed in and ran toward the winged room. He was running while shouting: "Master, bad news!! At the Garden's gate, there were many people. They said they are from the Royal Palace. They came here to arrest someone!!!"

Jue Yu, upon the mention that they were coming from the Palace, without any reason, had a burst of anger.

"I knew it. There are no good things coming from that Royal Palace." He took the sword that hung on the wall, "The whole time we are here, there were never any problems. Now they are coming to look for one!!"

The Blind Concubine hurriedly stopped him, "You alone fighting against that many, we only have a group of children here, even if you are not to think about yourself, please think about the children."

Jue Yu held the sword tightly in his hand, then said: "I will go out to have a look."

Both of them stepped into the middle of the garden. At the garden's gate, a crowd of people wearing black were lining up. Soldiers with swords hung on their waist. The leader of those people was one with dashing eyebrows and starry eyes. Face was of tranquility. Wearing an embroidered brocade robe. On his waist, there was a fine jade. He didn't hold either sword nor sabre in his hand, only a folding fan.

Upon the sight of this person, Jue Yu let out a cold laughter: "Such a large spectacle, I was wondering who was coming!"

The Blind Concubine was unable to see, he busily asked: "Who are they?"

Jue Yu didn't answer his question. It was that person who saw the Blind Concubine, opened his mouth and said: "It's me!"

The Blind Concubine heard that voice, he was unable to restrain his cry: "AH!!"

Why is he coming?

He couldn't help but have a fit of panic in his heart.

How did he know that I am here? Was it General Qi who told him? But, General Qi wouldn't do that. It must be him, who interrogated and forced General Qi to tell. I have disappeared for a long while, I didn't even leave a word behind, will he hate me for that?

In that moment, he had thought of many possibilities. Each and every possibility made the Blind Concubine's heart skip a beat.

The Emperor moved forward a step, then spoke to him: "Go back with me to the Palace."

The Blind Concubine flustered and retreated while blurting out: "No... I can't go back!"

The Empress Dowager wouldn't let him be. If he went back, he feared that everything would only point to disaster. Perhaps, General Qi and Xiao Bao would also suffer a calamity together with him.

The Emperor's face was cold and rigid, he said: "You suddenly disappeared, 'I' dispatched people to look for you all over the Palace for several days, however, even your shadow was not to be seen. I suspected you must have gone out of the Palace. Made an inquire with the guards who were on gate duty. They said that on that night, there was nothing out of the ordinary. After being severely tortured for two days, they then revealed that Qi Sheng bribed the on gate duty guards. Hid you on the carriage and took you out from the Palace."

( /n : for some reason, the Emperor started to use the Royal 'I' from here onwards. all over. Maybe he was upset when he use the normal 'I' TBC rejected him, so he started to use Royal 'I' to show his superiority. \*shrugs\* maybe... XD )

The Blind Concubine bit down on his lips, his expression became gloomy : "It was me who begged General Qi to take me out of the Palace, Your Majesty, please don't blame General Qi."

The Emperor's face color changed, with a cold remark he said: "Both of you truly have a deep and profound feeling towards each other. Do you know what Qi Sheng told me? He told me that all this was definitely his idea, it has got nothing to do with you. He endured his punishment of ten whips, yet remained unwilling to tell where exactly he had brought you to. Both of you are the pair of unfortunate affectionate couple and I have become a complete villain!!"

The Blind Concubine with a 'thump' fell to kneel down on the ground. His head hit the icy cold and hard surface of the earth, "It is me who has wronged Your Majesty. I had committed a sin. Your Majesty, please, just punish me. Please let them go."

The Emperor's face appeared with a layer of icy cold expression. He articulated his words in a slow speech: "To secretly run away to the outside of the Palace, you will not end up with a light charge. No need to beg! I will also punish you, what are you worried for?"

He waved his sleeve, immediately, there were two imperial bodyguards who stepped forward. One from the right, one from the left, they pulled the Blind Concubine up from the ground and dragged him to the gate.

Jue Yu flew into a rage: "Rui Xuan!! What do you take my place as?!"

The Emperor's face sank like water. His pitch black pupil darkened as if bottomless, "Jue Yu. I was taking into account the feelings of the Former Emperor so I give you a way out by treating you leniently. Don't push your luck! If I wanted to destroy your small Pear Garden, it would be as easy as turning my hand. The Former Emperor had formed some kind of pledge with your father. Definitely not with me. You certainly understand, don't you!"

His words were filled with rage. His face had also turned livid with rage. He turned his body and strode out of the garden.

The Blind Concubine hung his head so deeply like he couldn't lift it up anymore. Blood was seeping out from his forehead. His originally plain but neat clothes had been covered in dirt. He was being fuddled while being brought down the mountain. His hands and his legs was being shackled by black and icy cold chains, just like that, he was thrown in the horse carriage.

The Emperor opened the curtain and entered the carriage as well. He said lightly to the carriage driver: "Go!"

The carriage slowly moved forward. The wheel grinded as it weighed down on sharp pointed rocks, then swayed violently.

The Blind Concubine couldn't bear it, he closed his eyes and stretched his hands to cover his ears. He curled up his body in a form of a ball.

The Emperor's face had still looked angry. Firmly, he jerked the hands and threw them down, "You make this kind of pitiful appearance, for whom?"

The Blind Concubine only shook his head, he tried hard to restrain his tears from falling down.

The Emperor spoke again: "I hold you dear, I do whatever for you. You actually commit this kind of shameless affair, who gave you the nerve?!" The last sentence was spoken with the utmost weight, as if the words were squeezed out from the space between his teeth.

The Blind Concubine, from head to toe, trembled greatly. He forced himself to get up and kneel before the Emperor. "It was me who caused the trouble. General Qi took me out of the Palace, I admit my wrong doing....." He bumped his head on the carriage floor and made a thumping sound.

When he lifted up his face, a thread of fresh blood was zigzagging like a centipede crawling down his face to the corner of his mouth.

His face was ghastly pale. His eyes were ashen and dimmed. The entirety of his face was completely lacking of the blood color. There was only the fresh blood from the corner of his mouth which was horrible to see as it astonished the heart.

The Emperor unexpectedly pushed him away, "I will never believe you again!"

The Blind Concubine's face was filled with despair seemingly already giving up all the hope. His body gradually slid down, slanted to the side, silent with no more words.

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After several days, the large troops finally arrived at the Capital.

Xiao Bao was in the middle of feeding the two red-billed leiothrix birds when he suddenly heard voices passing by from the front gate. It was a kind of clamoring voice. His heart skipped a beat. Hurriedly he put down the birds' food in his hand, then with lightning speed, he ran over to eavesdrop.

On the corner of a certain place, several of the Palace's maidens gathered and talked in a whisper. Xiao Bao carefully inched closer as he cautiously walked along the wall's side while sticking his ears out for better listening.

"Did you know? His Majesty has come back to the Capital today."

"The guards on the gate duty said, they brought back the Blind Concubine who absconded from the Palace."

"You guys didn't see the Emperor's face color. It was so dark to the point of being similar with the bottom of the pot. Frightened the front Palace's servants, even they didn't dare to bring in the tea."

"So, how was the Blind Concubine punished??"

"The Blind Concubine has been thrown into the prison, severe punishment is impossible to be evaded."

The Palace's maidens one by one nodding their heads in agreement and sighed with sadness.

Upon hearing that, Xiao Bao gradually sank in sadness.

At the time when the Blind Concubine disappeared, The Emperor also came to him and interrogated him. He was totally anxious to the point of losing his sanity at that time. That kind of expression was not easy to be feigned. Therefore, he escaped the calamity of the interrogation. The guards on the gate duty couldn't be as fortunate as him and imitate his luck, they were tortured severely during the interrogation and by then they confessed the name of General Qi. General Qi also suffered the whip punishment, but he stubbornly didn't say a word all through the punishment. In the end, The Emperor

caught that very day carriage driver; he could finally ascertain the Blind Concubine's whereabouts. Immediately he set out to search for him.

This time, The Blind Concubine returned to the Palace, he might have to endure the hardship.

His body was as weak as a cat. Even a gust of wind could blow him away. How could he endure any kind of punishment?

Upon these kinds of thoughts, Xiao Bao was on the verge of crying.

He had been taking very good care of the Blind Concubine. He would assist him for every little thing he needed thoroughly. The Blind Concubine couldn't see, so even the smallest chores he didn't want to let the Blind Concubine do. Scissors, sewing kits, he put them all in a far far away place, unreachable for the Blind Concubine. He even trimmed all the thorns on the flowers in the garden, Yu Li's nails were also clipped and pruned, he was afraid that if not being careful, all those things would hurt the Blind Concubine.

He had served the Blind Concubine for a very long time, the Blind Concubine despite being thin, there wasn't even a single scar on his body. The Blind Concubine was unable to see, even for the things in front of him, he could only grope wildly to feel it, therefore his hands could be easily injured. However, the Blind Concubine's hands, white and clean, his fingers also beautiful and well distributed, even the tiniest scraped mark couldn't be found.

But the Emperor, who only came not long ago, has the Blind Concubine's entire body already full of bruises and marks.

How could his heart not hurt?

How could he not be having a grudge?

The Blind Concubine was sitting in a dark and cold prison. The straw mattress under his body was wet. The iron shackles on his hands and legs were icy cold and difficult to bear. In front of his eyes forever would be the unlimited darkness. It was as if he was falling into a deep pond, a deep and quite icy cold lake. The water soaked him from his ankles, overflowed to his waist, drowned his neck, poured into his mouth, filling all his lungs. Little by little, the suffocating feeling tormented his body.

There was nobody that could help him and pull him out. He could only sink deeper and deeper. To the depths of darkness.

"Master!!"

There was a piercing anxious voice like a clap of thunder by his ear side, "Master, It's me, Xiao Bao!! Master, please wake up!!"

The Blind Concubine suddenly woke up with a start, he opened his mouth as if gasping for air. It was like he was just being saved from his drowning and being pulled to the land. Fresh cold air was gushing in and filled his lungs. Almost like hearing the calling.

Xiao Bao's voice was carrying the hint of sobs: "Master just now was spirited away. Only exhaled without inhaling. Your fingertips have also become white!!"

The Blind Concubine groped about to touch Xiao Bao's hand, once he touched it, he held his hand firmly: "How do you come here?"

Xiao Bao was answering him while crying: "I begged the Little Prince to bribe the prison guards, to let me enter and see you, Master."

The Blind Concubine gritted his teeth: "I am fine, it doesn't matter. You quickly leave!"

Xiao Bao was unwilling to go, "What are you going to do Master? The Emperor was enraged to the

utmost. Even the pleading and begging from the Little Prince he didn't want to listen to anymore. If by any chance something happened to Master in this prison, even if I was crying to death, I would never be able to get you back."

The Blind Concubine shook his head repeatedly. His power seemingly had been exhausted, "What I am afraid the most at the moment, definitely is not about this."

Xiao Bao's voice had become hoarse: "What are you afraid of, Master?"

The Blind Concubine slowly sighed a mouthful air: "Empress Dowager."

"Empress Dowager?"

"Mmh!"

"But....." Xiao Bao was hesitant for a while, "The Empress Dowager had already been a vegetarian and prayed for Buddha for many years already, she didn't mingle herself in the Palace affairs anymore. Master, why are you wary of her?"

The Blind Concubine shut his eyes and shook his head, "Others affairs, The Empress Dowager wouldn't mind. My affairs, the Empress Dowager most definitely would want to mind."

Xiao Bao was totally at a loss as he didn't understand.

The Blind Concubine laughed with a saddened tone for a while, "Who do you think was the one who messed with my eyes and made me blind a long time ago?"

The Blind Concubine's body was similar to a piece of rag, lying paralyzed on the ground. His mouth was panting and gasping for air without stopping.

Xiao Bao was looking at him, having difficulty opening and closing his mouth, so he worriedly inched his ears closer to that mouth. A faint voice was transmitted inside his ears. The more he listened, the more he got scared; his eyes opened widely to the point of becoming round.

After a good while, his face turned to that of a mournful face, his mouth murmured: "Master....."

His voice had yet to fade when suddenly he heard a noise of rubbing metal clashing violently.

Xiao Bao was startled. He lifted his head to face the source of the sound. Didn't know since when the prison door had been unlocked. The long iron chain was being hurled to the floor. About two or three prison guards carrying along a wooden pail gushed in from the prison tunnel.

He couldn't help but to grasp his sleeve tightly, rose his bowing back: "What do you want??"

The leader of the prison guards spat at him: "None of your business!! Go away!!"

Xiao Bao straightened up his body to block the prison door, "His Majesty hasn't given his order. What do you actually want to do??"

The prison guard raised his leg, kicked Xiao Bao straight in his abdomen. Xiao Bao made a pitiful 'hmph' sound, then tumbled, he became a huddle on the ground after he severely bumped against the limestone wall.

After kicking him, the prison guards entered the prison cell. Using their physical strength, they lifted and poured out all the water in the wooden pail. They poured the water from the head of the Blind Concubine to all over his body.

Xiao Bao was lying on his stomach, with a hissing voice as he shouted: "STOP!!"

The Blind Concubine's lips became greenish purple; he was already unable to move. As if like a

broken rag doll, twisted and toppled on the floor. Xiao Bao forcefully propped up his body, struggling to crawl to the prison door, pleaded with his mournful voice: "Master had once fainted because of being drenched in the Bamboo Forest, the Imperial Physician had warned that he must never get drenched anymore, otherwise, if he relapsed because of his former affliction, he might lose his life!"

The prison guards pretended that they heard nothing. Pail after pail of the icy cold well water was smashed on the Blind Concubine's face one after another and onto his body. Xiao Bao gritted his teeth and crawled to enter the prison. His thin and weak body was blocking the smashing icy cold water. While trembling greatly from head to toe, he shielded the Blind Concubine in his embrace.

The prison guard creased his brows and gave Xiao Bao a kick. Xiao Bao closed his eyes tightly, enduring the pain on his back, allowing his back to be kicked over and over again. Only biting down on his lips, hugging the Blind Concubine even tighter.

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In the Imperial Study Room.

The young monarch was sitting on his dragon chair. His face was cold and indifferent.

He had gone through his violent rage period, now his expression was as usual, moderate and placid. Only leaving a hint of pent up sadness in his eyes.

His attendant was telling him in a low voice: "Your Majesty, the Little Prince is coming."

Rui Ze with his wrinkled face stepped into the room, he was clutching the corner of his clothes, softly said: "Big Brother."

The Emperor oddly looked at the official document in his hand, not even raising his eyes to look up.

"Rui Ze knows, what I'm about to say perhaps will not be liked by Big Brother, however, I felt that I cannot leave it unsaid. The Blind Concubine is being locked in the prison now, Big Brother must also feel uncomfortable. If he did something wrong, just reprimand him slightly harsher would be enough. Why do you have to make it this serious? In the end, the one who will feel the heartache, wouldn't it be Big Brother? Big Brother is afraid that he might run away, from now on, just keep watch of him all day long, if not successful, then you can fasten a chain on him, make it so he couldn't run away for the rest of his life."

The Emperor creased his brows, "You are just a little kid. What kind of nonsense are you talking about?"

The Little Prince hung down his head, he felt wronged: "I was just saying whatever was on my mind. Rui Ze didn't know if what I said was being heard or not, but each word that I said was the truth."

The Emperor's heart was agitated for a while. He clutched the document in his hand until it left marks on his fingers. "This sort of matter is not your responsibility to think of. You just need to study properly with the Great Teacher. Despite there is or there isn't this problem."

Rui Ze suddenly lifted up his face, on his small face there were two trails of tears: "The Blind Concubine's body is weak. His body wouldn't be able to endure the prison's cold air. Big Brother, right now you are angry, of course you wouldn't take this into consideration. If by any chance the person really has gone for good. I would like to see what Big Brother will do!"

After saying that, he turned his body and ran out, he felt wronged as well as sorrow.

The Emperor threw the document aside. He was pacing back and forth in the Study, eyebrows tautly locked.

His attendant, with a hint of a smile said to sooth him: "Your Majesty, please don't be angry. What the Little Prince had said, actually has some logic in it. Your humble subject although hasn't talked with

The Blind Concubine, has seen the expression of Your Majesty when Your Majesty was together with The Blind Concubine. Your Majesty is truly treasuring the Blind Concubine, those kinds of eyes, are impossible to be faked.”

The Emperor breathed in a mouthful of air, then slowly said with his gloomy voice: “Prepare the ride.”

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Inside the prison was gloomy and the coldness was trembling. All year round unlit by the sunlight. Spread all over this place was the smell of moldy odor.

The guards at the prison gate bowed down, carefully and cautiously said: “Your Majesty is highly respected, it’s really unsuitable and inadvisable to enter.”

His Majesty made a heavy expression, said with a lowered voice: “Lead the way!”

One of the guards grabbed the torch, led the Emperor to enter the prison. They walked down a section of damp and slippery steps, down to the prison cells.

Inside the prison was moist and dirty. The bad smell of moldy odor offended the nose and caused people to feel sick as if overcome by nausea. This group of people walked down the long and narrow path like an alley. After making a turn on a curved end, they caught a glimpse of two bodies piling up while lying prone from the space between the cells.

The Emperor couldn’t help but wrinkle his brows: “What has happened here?”

Upon hearing the sound of a voice, Xiao Bao struggled to prop his body up from the ground. From all over his whole body, droplets of water were dripping following suit of each and every one of his movements. When he saw the one who’s coming was The Emperor, he was unable to restrain his anxious howl : “Your Majesty, Master fainted again!!!”

The Emperor’s heart skipped a beat, “How can that be?”

Xiao Bao explained with his hoarse voice: “Master was being punished, right now he is enduring this hardship. \*When a wall is about to collapse, everybody gives it a shove. The Court Official, in order to gain Your Majesty’s favor, was pouring icy cold water on him. Not after pouring ten pails of water did they finally stop. How could my Master stand that!!”

\*(t/n : meaning : Everybody hits a person who is already down.)

After hearing this, the Emperor was in a great wrath: “I haven’t ordered the Judicial Officers to do anything. There were actually people who were brave enough to perform this kind of illegal punishment?!”

The surrounding guards all fell down on their knees. Loudly shouted and begged for forgiveness while kneeling.

The Emperor strode to enter the prison cell; from the straw mat he took the Blind Concubine into his embrace.

The Blind Concubine’s pair of eyes tightly shut. Lips were of a purple color. From head to toe drenched through and through. It was like he was just being pulled out from the river. The Emperor stretched out his hand to examine him, his cheek was freezing cold, like an ice cube. The nose had ceased to breathe.

Rui Ze’s words suddenly filled his mind at that moment: “If by any chance the person really has gone for good. I would like to see what Big Brother will do!!” Sharp and loud, like a knife cut and pierced his ears.

The Emperor’s heart abruptly filled with fear and shook him, “Quick! Summon the Imperial Physician!!”

His voice unwittingly had a thread of detectable quivering.

The Blind Concubine was brought back all the way to the serving quarter in his embrace. The Palace's servants hurriedly prepared things all around. Boiled the water. Fetched the quilts and bed clothes. Got the Imperial Physician. All together in a rush of confusion.

The Blind Concubine was limply reclined on the Emperor's bosom. Unmoving. His body was cold to the extreme. Xiao Bao anxiously said: "In this condition, even washing him in a bath is impossible. Want to put him in a barrel of hot water, but I'm afraid that he might lose his life!"

The Emperor ordered: "Make haste and bring me some towels. The more the better."

Immediately, the Palace's Servants holding the tray of towels walked in the room in a line. Xiao Bao grabbed a towel and soaked it in the warm water, twisting to dry it before he handed it over to the Emperor. The Emperor took off the Blind Concubine's clothes, using the warm towel, he wiped and cleaned the Blind Concubine's entire body. The towel changed from one piece to the other, one by one, after a long while, that freezing cold body gradually regained its temperature.

When the night fell, The Emperor immediately rushed back to the serving quarter from the Front Palace after finishing his discussion regarding government affairs.

Entered only a step into the quarter, he already saw Xiao Bao carrying a porcelain bowl out from the room. His face had such a worried expression.

Stepped forward, he asked while glaring at him: "What happened?"

Xiao Bao answered: "With difficulty, he finally regained his consciousness, so I fed him to eat a small bowl of porridge. He vomited all of it. I fed him again. In the end, he vomited again. Even a mouthful of food he was not able to eat."

The Emperor raised the curtain and entered the bedroom. The Blind Concubine was clinging on the edge of the bed coughing, his face became red because of the cough, his back was undulating fiercely, like a small boat that rose and fell in the middle of a storm. His cough was so bad to the point as if he was about to cough out his heart and lungs.

The Emperor's sharp eyes swept and penetrated all the Palace's Servants who stood by the side. With his severe voice, he asked them: "How come it became this heavy? Hasn't the Imperial Physician given him the medicine?!"

The Palace's Servants were scared and their knees gave out, all of them knelt on the floor. Trembling with fear: "Answer Your Majesty, The Blind Concubine right now will vomit whatever we feed him, he even vomited the medicine. The Imperial Chemist is in the process of stewing a new one for him....."

The Emperor's face muscle twitched, "USELESS!! GET OUT!!"

The Palace's Servants were trembling all over. In haste they all withdrew while kowtowing.

The Emperor heaved a heavy sigh, he bent over to get closer to the bed.

The Blind Concubine's entire body was severely trembling. His teeth were firmly gritted. Often, he twitched and shuddered for a little while. The Emperor stretched out his hand to caress his forehead, but it was like touching a branding iron, scalding hot to the utmost.

His attendant hurriedly raised the curtain and entered the room, in a low voice he reported: "In front of the Palace, there is a person requesting to see Your Majesty. Your humble subject knows that he should not only for this reason come to circulate this notice, however, that person has the former Emperor's keepsake." He said that while assuming a piece of jade pendant in a shape of a floating white colored cloud.

The Emperor received the jade pendant, upon the sight, he said: "It's Jue Yu."

Jue Yu's medical skills were exquisite. His reputation as a fine doctor was well known. In his former years, when he was still venturing the \*Jianghu, he was already renowned as a youthful miraculous high skilled doctor.

The Emperor was taking this into consideration, without delay he ordered: "Quickly invite him in!"

Jue Yu was guided with respectful manner by the Palace's servant to enter the serving quarter.

His face was still as beautiful as ever, his muscles and skin were bright as snow, the usual haughty and arrogant expression, not the least bit nervous, as if he wasn't brought to enter a Royal House to meet the Monarch.

The Emperor said to him: "The Blind Concubine fell very seriously ill, would you look at his condition, please?"

Jue Yu put up a sneer on his face: "What goodness and what ability does Jue Yu have? How could I dare to let Your Majesty plead?"

The Emperor glanced at the Blind Concubine who was curling up on the long and narrow bed, said again: "If I have to plead to you, then I will surely plead."

Jue Yu crooked his eyebrows, "Your Majesty said it this way, Jue Yu will have his life shortened\*. Your Majesty owns the world. To destroy my small Pear Flowers Garden is as easy as turning Your Majesty's hand. But because Your Majesty took into consideration about the Former Emperor, he treated me leniently. This kind of plead, no matter what, Jue Yu can't possibly dare to take."

\*t/n : Have one's life shortened : a proverb to express that have one's allotted portion of life reduced by having/getting more than one's deserves.

The Emperor knew that he took the violent breakthrough to his Pear Flowers Garden several days ago to heart thus still held a grudge, hence, the Emperor unavoidably used a lightened manner of speak: "That day was my fault to charge in harshly. If it wasn't because of The Blind Concubine's matter that got me angry, it wouldn't have come to this point."

The young Monarch's voice was lowered as if he was whispering. Jue Yu still didn't feel grateful even a bit. He only slowly took his eyes to measure his slender fingers.

The Emperor was displeased, however, in the end, he retreated a step, "Don't hesitate to say whatever you want. If I can give you, I will give you."

Jue Yu raised the outer corner of his eyes, "The things inside the National Treasury such as gold and silver, pearls and jewels, deeds for piece of land, those kinds of treasures, not even one I desire."

The Emperor asked him: "In that case, what do you truly want?"

"A person."

"You wanted a person from my hand?"

Jue Yu's pair of eyes were clear and bright: "Exactly!"

Then he added: "I think Your Majesty already knows who this person is that Jue Yu wanted even without having to say the name."

The Emperor narrowed his eyes, "Of course."

Jue Yu's mouth leaked out a smile, "Like this, please Your Majesty decree an Imperial Order to grant me an agreement."

The Emperor asked: "Do you want me to allow him to resign from the government post and go

home?”

Jue Yu raised his eyebrows to the highest point, “Who wanted him to resign from his post? If he holds or doesn’t hold his post, it will be his own business. I don’t feel like caring for that.”

“Ooh?” The Emperor a bit confused, “So, what kind of agreement do you want me to grant?”

Jue Yu’s eyes were gleaming and wandered about, “Sell him to me as my slave’s agreement. The deed of slavery.”

The Emperor paused to think, then answered him: “Alright!”

From the sleeve of his clothes, Jue Yu took out a small light greenish blue colored pill. He fed it to the Blind Concubine. Not even an hour later, as expected, the coughing and vomiting had stopped. Soon after that, he calmly checked the Blind Concubine’s pulse, then carried out the acupuncture.

Xiao Bao stood by the side, he felt that this person’s acupuncture technique was unusual. Compared to that of the formal Imperial Physicians’ method, it was substantially different. Especially the way he twisted and rotated the acupuncture needles, and the way he lifted and stuck in the needles. He had never seen that kind of method anywhere.

Xiao Bao waited until the acupuncture had done, then busily stepped forward to ask: “Do you need me to get the medicine? I will immediately go and get it.”

Jue Yu casually said: “Don’t need to get the medicine.”

Xiao Bao was baffled: “Don’t need to get the medicine??”

Jue Yu pointed at the bed: “Do you think this kind of body can still receive that kind of medicine?”

Xiao Bao fell silent and speechless.

“It was not strange at all that he vomited whatever he ate, if he didn’t vomit, that would be a wonder.” Jue Yu took out from his sleeve a red sandalwood wooden box and gave it to Xiao Bao, “From now, every morning and night, feed him one. His food and drink must be light. The him right now has difficulty in chewing and swallowing the food. He could only take porridge, vegetables, and noodles. Be sure to remember to pulverize it all before giving it to him.”

Xiao Bao quickly replied: “I have kept it in my mind.”

Under this kind of medical treatment, his condition had turned very much for the better. He recovered and regained his consciousness; also he could already open his mouth to speak.

Xiao Bao of course very happy, but also couldn’t help but feel bitter whenever he was reminded about his critical illness: “Master, you have to endure this stage of illness, even your hair became dull and dried up.”

The Blind Concubine with his soft voice consoled him: “Wait until I am totally well, it will go back to normal.”

Jue Yu raised the curtain and entered the room: “If you can keep your life, here, I have a plenty of prescriptions to grow your hair back.” At the same time, he loosened up his long hair, rushing down like splashing water all the way to his ankle, contrasting his red clothes and his white as snow skin. Beautiful to the utmost.

The Blind Concubine gently said: “It will be good.” With his hoarse voice.

Jue Yu said again: “Your body has a lot of problems to begin with, yet, there were still more problems that one by one came to burden you. Let’s just see if you will be able to live until that day.”

Xiao Bao busily said in haste: "Master certainly will be able too; Master will live a long life for hundreds of years."

The Blind Concubine sadly laughed, "Stupid kid." His eyes were wet and a flash of misery was in them.

Jue Yu told him: "After all, it is your own body, you have to take good care of yourself."

The Blind Concubine slightly nodded, then he asked: "Why did you come?"

Jue Yu laughed for a while, "Originally, I didn't come for you. But who would have thought, I have received favor at a little cost. I even get a slavery deed. I didn't make this trip in vain."

The Blind Concubine curiously asked: "Oh? Tell me, let me hear about it."

Jue Yu sipped the tea. "I heard the news that Qi Sheng was punished by the Emperor, he suffered ten times the whippings, bedridden to recuperate. Thereupon, I especially rushed to come over and had a good laugh at him. By fortunate coincidence, I ran into His Majesty and he requested me to treat your illness for you. In my heart, I knew that I could take this as a cheap bargain, so I conveniently asked His Majesty to order an Imperial Decree, to grant me a slavery deed of Qi Sheng. From now on, I am the Master, he is the slave. If I want him to go east, he wouldn't dare to go west."

Xiao Bao's eyes widened and looked like a copper bell: "You can ask for that?"

"Exactly, why not!", Jue Yu playfully raised his brows, "I went to visit Qi Sheng in his General's residence. Looking at him pitifully laying on his stomach with his head hanging dejected, I couldn't help but feel happy inside. I then showed him the slavery deed sealed with the Imperial Jade seal, said, 'You were whipped by His Majesty as your punishment, not only you have fallen from the Emperor's favor, now you have been sold by His Majesty, if I don't want you, who else will want you?'"

After he said that, he laughed loudly. Causing the tea inside the cup shook disorderly.

Jue Yu sat and chatted with them in the serving quarter for quite some time. He told the Blind Concubine to rest properly, then rose to excuse himself.

Xiao Bao walked him out, then came back to the Blind Concubine's bedside.

"This Jue Yu, he is really unpredictable."

The Blind Concubine blinked his eyes, lightly and said: "It is as expected."

Obviously he knew the news about the General being hurt, he hurriedly galloped nonstop on his horse to come to the Capital.

Obviously he was worried, but he still had assumed an air as if the matter was not of concern on his face.

Obviously he was pained by his yearning love, yet he wouldn't let the person know. Once they met, he would taunt the person as if not the least bit concerned.

Obviously his heart was hurting, yet he remained with his haughty attitude, unwilling to lower his head.

This kind of stubbornness, this kind of loneliness, unwilling to put down the pride he loved so much.

Most probably would only lead to his own suffering.

The Blind Concubine curled up his body. His eyes were blank. He murmured to himself: "This Jue Yu, ultimately a person who says one thing but means another...."

After being nursed for several days, The Blind Concubine was already able to leave his sickbed, also he was already able to eat a little bit of fish.

Xiao Bao was extremely happy: "Master has become more and more better. Given another ten days or half a month you will be restored back to health."

The Blind Concubine laughed weakly: "Mm."

Jue Yu came to the Capital this time, not merely coming alone, but he also brought the Blind Concubine's cat, Yu Li, which was left behind in the Pear Flowers Garden. He temporarily resided in the General's official residence.

Xiao Bao said: "Young Master Jue Yu's medical skill is very brilliant. Also he has a beautiful appearance. Even if his temper is strange, he is exquisitely bright and clever, truly I don't know what the cause of his interest is."

From outside the door, there was a high pitched voice announcing: "His Majesty arrives---"

Xiao Bao knelt down with haste. The Blind Concubine also lifted his quilt, struggling to climb down off of the bed.

The Emperor took a large step and strode to enter. Quickly he helped to support him: "Don't move, just lay down properly." His hand was barely in contact with The Blind Concubine, he came to realize that the body under his touch was shaking and shivering as if cold.

The Emperor spoke: "Why is it, upon meeting me you are afraid to this point?"

The Blind Concubine stiffened his body, faced the other side.

The Emperor's face color slightly shifted. "You still bear grudges towards me?"

The Blind Concubine blinked his eyes, "I dare not."

The Emperor stared at him for a long time, toning down his manner of speaking: "I never had the intention to hurt you."

The Blind Concubine lowered his eyes, not even saying anything.

The Emperor did not say anything anymore. The two people held back their voices and the atmosphere became quiet. Each of them had their own various thoughts. Both remained silent. Quietly sitting face to face.

Roughly some times after nine in the evening, Xiao Bao put down the curtain and told him: "Master, just now, His Majesty has just left."

The Blind Concubine answered him lightly. Lying on the bed as if all over his body from head to toe felt exhausted. His sleeves were rolled up to his upper arms, revealing the many small bits of the scars.

Xiao Bao pulled and tugged the quilt for him, "Master, you can't keep this up. You are torturing yourself for nothing. Please just relax yourself."

The Blind Concubine did not make any sound.

Xiao Bao told him: "I will go to deliver a letter tomorrow. To ask for the servant from the General's residence to bring Yu Li here. Once Master sees Yu Li, your mood will be better for sure."

The Blind Concubine thought about his beloved cat, his face leaked out a hard to come by smile, "Very well."

Five years ago in the winter, he picked Yu Li up from the little yard's gate at the Cold Palace.

At that time, Yu Li was still a small kitten. Very small. Its fur was withered and yellowish, still couldn't open its eyes.

He took the small kitten and embraced it in his bosom, using his own body temperature to warm it. For a very long time. After a very long while, the thin and frail body in his bosom little by little starting to show some reaction. It emitted a very low crying sound.

The sound was very mild, seemed like a delicate thread of silk and satin. He almost couldn't hear the voice.

Xiao Bao was searching inside and outside the yard for its nest, but still couldn't find the cat's mother.

It was still a very small kitten but already abandoned by its mother. Xiao Bao was afraid that it couldn't make it alone.

But The Blind Concubine couldn't let it be. Whatever it was, it was still a living being.

It still hadn't opened its eyes yet, still hadn't seen the new sprouts of spring, the full bloom flowers of different colors in summer. How could it go away just like that before it even had the chance to see all of this?

Xiao Bao used up all his tricks to bring back some goat's milk. The Blind Concubine held the kitten, propping up his head. Xiao Bao fed him with a small ginkgo spoon, drop by drop he delivered the milk into the kitten's mouth.

It was just their first time feeding it, they were still inexperienced. The little kitten's head was set too high, resulting in the goat's milk choking the kitten to its lung. Making it almost lose its life. Afterwards, little by little they tried to figure out a way to feed it. At intervals of every four hours, they fed it its milk. The Blind Concubine wrapped it under his own inner garments tightly, embraced it next to his skin. Afraid that the room's temperature would make it drop its own temperature so if the little kitten fell asleep, it wouldn't be able to awaken anymore.

Now, when thinking back, that kind of small kitten, without its mother's milk, in the freezing cold winter, could survive and live, it was truly given from heaven's generosity.

Yu Li was raised and fed personally by his own hands. He lived in the Cold Palace for many years, without anyone to accompany him. Happiness, anger, sorrow and joy, these whole emotions were poured on Yu Li.

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The next day, Yu Li was brought back to the Palace.

Yu Li while staying in the General's residence was doing very good. Its whole body was snowy white. Soft to the touch to the point of moving people's heart. Its smooth and glossy back looked like a rouge jade. Adhering to its softness, once coming into contact with it, it would make people unable to stop.

The Blind Concubine embraced Yu Li in his bosom, without restrain, he kissed it dearly.

The cat in his embrace had a warm feeling that would make people feel relieved.

Yu Li quietly and peacefully lied prone. Its pupils were glistening, clean, clear and flawless. More beautiful than any glorious place in the world.

The Blind Concubine hugged her firmly, pressing against the tip of the cat's small and delicately tender nose.

He was sincere. He loved Yu Li to the core of his bones.

From the gate, a loud voice announced: "The Prince has arrived---"

The sound hadn't disappeared yet, Rui Ze's small figure had already come running in. He was carrying a carved food box. His small face was moist with sweat.

Xiao Bao asked him: "Why do you come here?"

"Of course to give His Grace delicious food."

Xiao Bao made a despising face: "You only care about eating."

The Blind Concubine pleasantly laughed, "The Prince is still a little child, naturally he would love to eat."

Rui Ze, for once felt that there was someone backing him up, he proudly lifted his chin towards Xiao Bao.

Xiao Bao opened the carved box. From inside, he took a crisp apple and sweet-scented Osmanthus cake as well as several snacks. He sliced the cake and handed over a small piece to The Blind Concubine's hand, also giving a piece to the Little Prince.

The Blind Concubine was about to put the sweet-scented Osmanthus into his mouth, Yu Li suddenly meowed loudly. It was beyond people's expectations when it suddenly leaped and bit the sweet-scented Osmanthus cake, at lightning speed, it gulped down the cake.

Xiao Bao couldn't help but reprimand that cat: "Ai ya. Look at you. You are indeed capable of doing this fine thing!"

His words hadn't sunk in yet, Yu Li abruptly shrieked severely. Its small body twitched violently. Its front claw waved wildly in the air. Its body abruptly lost its center of gravity, tumbling down from the bed. At the time when everybody lowered their heads to look at it, it had already ceased to move. Its huge cat's eyes were opened blankly. The limpid and clear pupils were still as penetrating as ever. However, there wasn't any trace of lively light anymore.

The Little Prince widened his eyes in fear. The cake in his hand fell and dropped, breaking into pieces on the ground.

The Blind Concubine was unable to see, he didn't know what exactly had happened. Anxiously he asked: "Where is Yu Li? What happened to Yu Li?"

Xiao Bao was gaping and dumbstruck. For a moment he completely failed to react. Distracted for several seconds, like a madman, he seized Rui Ze's front robe. Severely interrogating him: "You tell me, what is this all about? What was in that cake? The cake you gave to Master!"

The Little Prince was still a little child. Strictly being questioned, he was afraid to the point of crying, "I don't know! I was playing at the Empress Dowager's Palace, the Empress Dowager gave me that box with the cake and snacks, told me to bring it and give it to The Blind Concubine to have a taste. Also especially warned me not to secretly eat it. I don't know why it could be like this. I really don't know!!"

He was talking while crying, choked several times and coughed to the point that his whole face became very red.

Xiao Bao loosened his grip on Rui Ze's front robe. Seized with terror, he retreated a couple steps, tumbled and sat on the chair.

The Blind Concubine was extremely anxious: "You all quick tell me! What actually happened to Yu Li?!"

Xiao Bao's mouth was quivering, "Master. Yu Li is dead."

All of a sudden, The Blind Concubine felt like he had been enclosed by strong thunder, dumbfounded him on the spot. After a long while, tears slowly flowed down. Shrieking loudly exhausted and hoarsen his voice.

Xiao Bao didn't know what to do, he only hugged him tightly.

The Blind Concubine's heart was hurt like being twisted by a knife. Tears were dripping nonstop. He buried his head in Xiao Bao's waist and burst out into a heart-breaking cry.

Jue Yu collected the scattered on the floor cake, wrapping it in his handkerchief. He also took the carved food box on the table, without saying a single word he walked out.

The young Monarch was writing in the Imperial Study. Suddenly, a Palace's servant hurriedly came to report, saying something happened at the serving quarter.

The Emperor's writing brush paused, he lifted his eyes from the writing: "What did you say?"

The Palace's servant knelt down while trembling in fear: "It was the news coming from young Master Jue Yu, your servant dare not to ignore, immediately I rushed over to inform. According to the news, The Little Prince was also present at that place at that time. He was startled. Already he was brought back to his Palace by his wet nurse."

The Emperor pinched the writing brush so hard to the point his fingertips which held the writing brush turned white, "Recently, why did trouble happen one after another." There was a faint anger in his speech.

The Palace's servant who witnessed the unhappy mood of the Emperor, hastily lowered his head, he dared not to utter another word.

The Emperor strode with large steps to the serving quarter and entered the room. The Blind Concubine's pair of eyes were distorted, laying prone on the bedside, his withered hair was scattered, his eyes had become swollen from crying hard, sobbing and unable to make a complete sound.

Only a single glance could already make people's heart sting with pain.

The young Monarch bent his body, gently touched the Blind Concubine's brows and eyes with his lips.

The Blind Concubine didn't move at all, as if he no longer possessed any senses. Even his breathing spell had become so light and mild.

The Emperor pursed his lips, slowly he spoke: "I don't blame you anymore, for everything that had happened, I won't blame you anymore. You don't be like this."

The Blind Concubine gritted his teeth, shut his eyes, and said: "You go away!!"

The Emperor was startled: "What?!"

"I don't want to see you anymore! You go away!!"

The Emperor's face became cold and rigid, gritted his teeth in anger: "You actually wanted to torment me, tormenting your own self for how long so that you could be contented?!"

The Blind Concubine struggled to pull apart from the Emperor's hand, still with his choked by sobs voice he said: "Because of you..... even a peaceful life..... unwilling to give....." His throat was terribly hoarsened. His words were unable to complete his speech.

Jue Yu lifted the curtain and entered the room. His face was calm and quiet. Putting the carved food box on the table.

Xiao Bao busily stepped forward: "Have you found out anything?"

Jue Yu's eyes lightly swept past The Blind Concubine who was laying on the bed, said: "Let's go outside to talk."

The three of them lifted the curtain and walked out the room.

Jue Yu told them: "The poison was in the cake, all the food inside the box was mixed with the poison, it wasn't really only in the sweet-scented Osmanthus cake."

Xiao Bao made a light "Ah!" sound, covered his mouth with a look of disbelief.

Jue Yu said again: "The poison was not a deadly dose. The dosage was merely enough to poison a cat, dog, and a little child to death. However, The Blind Concubine's body is frail and weak, it hasn't recovered at all from his illness, therefore only a small bite would be enough to cause his death."

The Emperor upon hearing what Jue Yu had said, angrily said: "Who exactly had put in the poison? Truly is heartless and without compassion!"

Xiao Bao nodded his head: "The Little Prince also almost ate that cake!"

Jue Yu hesitated for a while, then as if muttering, he said: "According to my speculation, the only one who could put the poison, remained the Empress Dowager alone."

Xiao Bao's pupils contracted in an instant, he couldn't help but face towards the inner room and give a quick glance. But very quickly he lowered his head, acting like he didn't hear anything regarding this matter.

The Emperor's face had sunk like deep water, his voice also became heavy and serious, "This kind of talk, how do you explain your accusation?"

Jue Yu explained: "The cake and snacks and every meal within the Palace was cooked in the Imperial Kitchen before being delivered to each and every Palace. All along during the process, it had been inspected strictly. It was nearly impossible to poison the food. Needless to mention about the food which is about to be given to the Empress Dowager. The Palace's servants who acted as the food testers are about five to six people. If they truly intended to put the poison, and placed the blame on the Empress Dowager, the only way they could make their move was to smear the poison on the wooden case which the food was packed. However, I had cautiously investigated, this wooden box's exterior, the base inside, the tray, even the handle, all of them did not contain the poison, therefore, I am certain that the poison must be inside the food, during the cooking process it had already been mixed in with the poison. Jue Yu has the nerve to make a speculation on this matter. This food container wasn't really coming from the Imperial Kitchen. It was the Empress Dowager who ordered someone to make them in her own Palace. The Empress Dowager packed the poisoned food inside this box, made The Little Prince bring it and give it to be eaten by The Blind Concubine. The Blind Concubine has always loved the Little Prince, of course he wouldn't suspect that there was something unusual inside the cake. Today, if it wasn't for Yu Li, I wonder if The Blind Concubine and The Little Prince would have lost their lives at the same time."

Xiao Bao was extremely stunned by this: "When the Empress Dowager handed over this cake to the Little Prince, surely she fully understood that the Little Prince also might eat the cake as well. Rui Ze, however we see is also the Empress Dowager's own son that she personally raised. How could the Empress Dowager harm him?"

Jue Yu made a cold laugh: "The most poisonous is the heart of a married woman. Rui Ze wasn't really the son of the Empress Dowager. No matter how much he is being loved, when the time to abandon him should come, he would be abandoned without the slightest amount of hesitation. On the other side, The Emperor is truly her only son, in order to help the Emperor to achieve his goal, whatever it is, in the Empress Dowager eyes, nothing couldn't be sacrificed."

The Emperor knitted his brows, "The Empress Dowager ever since long ago didn't want me to meddle in the Palace's general affairs anymore, why did she want to do this?"

Jue Yu meaningfully threw a quick glance at the inner room, "I wonder if this matter has something to do with The Blind Concubine's past which we can't just ignore."

The Emperor's heart skipped a beat, said: "The Blind Concubine entered the Palace seven years ago. Not long after he entered the Palace, his eyes were hurt and he became blind. Soon afterward, he was cast away to the Cold Palace. Seven years ago, do you have any memory about any occasion seven years ago?"

Jue Yu asked: "Seven years ago?"

"Exactly!"

Jue Yu couldn't help but widened his eyes: "Your Majesty doesn't remember at all??"

The Emperor felt weird, then asked back: "Remember what?"

Jue Yu raised his brows: "Seven years ago, wasn't it when the previous Emperor met his demise and Your Majesty ascended the throne?"

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Xiao Bao came out from the inner room carrying the porcelain bowl. Worryingly said: "Master still refused to eat, Little Prince, please help to try to persuade him."

Rui Ze lowered his head, carefully and cautiously, he entered the inner room, went to the Blind Concubine's side.

The Blind Concubine's face was ghastly pale without any blood color. His eyes were hollow without any will to live. The jade hairpin which he used to bind his hair had gone missing. His dispersed hair was scattered to the both side of his cheek. His whole appearance resembled someone who had lost their mind.

Rui Ze stretched his soft and fair little hand, lightly caressed his face, getting his own face to inch closer, nearly pressed his nose to his face. Softly said: "I am sorry."

The Blind Concubine was staring blankly, his eyes were void and at a loss.

Rui Ze placed his forehead to lightly touch the face of The Blind Concubine which was cold as if without temperature, "I am sorry. It was me who was at fault."

"If you want to blame, just blame me."

"Don't be like this, alright?"

He was still a child, he didn't have any knowledge about what exactly had happened. Also, there wasn't anyone who dared to tell him.

He was still thinking that the Empress Dowager loved and endeared him. It was his own wrong doing. He was blaming himself. He only could apologize clumsily, at a loss of what to do.

The Blind Concubine slowly lifted his head, there was a layer of mist on his empty eyes. Afterwards, the tears gradually formed, accumulating more and more, becoming a pool in his eyes.

He couldn't see Rui Ze's brimming with tears eyes, Rui Ze's teary face.

Xiao Bao said that Rui Ze was like a small rice dumpling. Round like a ball. The robe he was wearing was of the finest silk and satin material. Running around happily and merrily.

After hearing this, he couldn't help but love him.

His love for Rui Ze, and his love for Yu Li, was all the same.

Although he was unable to see, the portion of his love not even the slightest amount could be lessened.

He couldn't blame Rui Ze. He could only blame himself.

If not for his existence, Rui Ze wouldn't have to encounter this kind of misfortune in his early age.

Being born in a Royal family, if he truly had to suffer this kind of incident sooner or later, he wished that it would come later, later in the far future.

The Blind Concubine with much difficulty lifted his arm, he took Rui Ze's small body into his embrace, firmly hugged him.

He gently touched Rui Ze's cold little face. His fingers came across the cold water stain on that face.

The Blind Concubine stretched his shaking and trembling hand, wiped away the tears on Rui Ze's small face.

"I don't blame you."

"I just hate my own self, it was me who wronged you."

His stomach was billowing, opening his mouth to vomit. However, he hadn't eaten for several days, his stomach was empty. Unable to throw up.

Gasping to pacify his breathing, he hugged Rui Ze even tighter.

He had lost Yu Li, he couldn't afford to lose Rui Ze and Xiao Bao.

The Imperial Palace was a very dangerous place after all.

Seven years ago it was like this, would it still remain like this for the next seven years.

He initially did not believe that in this gloomy and cold Imperial Palace a sincere feeling would exist.

He took the great pain to gain something by approaching the Emperor, he even had sacrificed his own honor. He only thought about getting the Emperor's temporary favor, so he could send Xiao Bao out of the Palace.

Unexpectedly, the Empress Dowager expelled him from the Capital. Even General Qi was involved and punished because of him. Now, even Yu Li was also had gone.

He almost harmed Rui Ze.

The Blind Concubine closed his eyes. From his throat, a burst of sweet and fishy smell roused.

He honestly wanted to leave this place.

The more he thought about it, the more his heart was seized like being twisted.

Ever since that day, seven years ago, since his eyes were never able to see anymore.

He would never forget the person who trampled and blinded his eyes. Forever.

He buried his hatred and grudged in the deepest part of his heart. Putting on an indifferent expression

on his face. An Expression without wave nor billow.

Once in a while, he would put on a smile.

The hatred in his heart did not lighten the slightest bit. Instead, it had become more and more deeper.

The overwhelming hatred almost drowned him, making his pair of eyes soak in the red color of blood.

He already couldn't see anything.

The young Monarch put down the official document in his hand. Slowly, he moved backward to lean on the Imperial Seat. It was windy on the outside. He was staring blankly at the leaves which waved in the wind through the window. Recalling the first time he met The Blind Concubine's sight.

At that time, the weather hadn't been hot like today. The sun was still warm and gentle. The narrow stone path to the Cold Palace was covered by dark green weeds which grew all over along the path. Continuously growing. Extended until reaching The Blind Concubine's little yard's gate. A spell of wind brushed through. Blowing the fully bloomed flowers of different colors. He lifted his sleeve to cover his face at once. Through the limitless scattered in all direction flower petals, he saw a figure in that yard.

Simple but neat clothing. Black hair. Among the scattered flower petals, slightly smiling.

The Emperor closed his eyes. That very same scene on that day appeared vaguely before his eyes.

There was a time when the sight of The Blind Concubine during that rainstorm appeared. In that bamboo forest. Covered with mud from head to toe. Cheeks were deathly pale. Motionless.

He knew that The Blind Concubine had a warm temper, soft spoken and would smile when he met someone. But he also felt that the Blind Concubine was treating him coldly. His words weren't truly from the bottom of his heart. Without any clear reason he would get angry at him.

Asked him why, he wouldn't say. Alone, he stared blankly with his big eyes. Not uttering even a word.

It was as if nobody could get close to him.

Yet, he loved Yu Li and Rui Ze so much.

Seemingly he was only indifferent towards the Emperor himself.

The Emperor knitted his brows into a frown. Suddenly, the entire stack of official documents which were on the table, with a rushed movement were swept away unto the floor.

Jue Yue pushed the door and entered. Unexpectedly, he caught the sight of the Emperor who just had his fit of anger. Jue Yu was unable to restrain his laughter, "What's wrong?"

Jue Yu in the Palace was entirely without any honorable status nor an emblem. Yet, he still was able to come and go freely. In the Palace as if strolling in a flower garden. The Imperial Bodyguards were unable to block him, to the extent that they simply didn't notice him.

The Emperor lifted his face, answered him irrelevantly: "I remembered, from long ago, your air kung-fu was the best among the brothers."<sup>1</sup>

Jue Yu narrowed his eyes, not responding to the Emperor's comment.

He actually never took the Imperial family seriously. Towards the internal conflict or the power struggle inside the Palace, he never had the slightest amount of interest. He only looked forward to his free and unrestrained days, comfortable and at ease, thus he could leisurely walk on the green and blue mountain path.

His childhood was filled with illness. Thereupon, he followed his father to practice the martial arts. At

that time, Qi Sheng already had become his father's student, hence he could be counted as his elder brother who learnt under the same master. And then, one day, a man led a kid who was about the same age as him to their mountain. That man wanted his father to become the master for this kid.

Father gave his consent and agreed to be his Master.

At that time, Jue Yu still wasn't aware about this kid's actual background. He only knew that this kid's name was Rui Xuan.

Afterwards, he knew from his father, Rui Xuan was a prince. The man who brought him to the mountain that day was actually the Emperor himself.

After the former Emperor's demise, Rui Xuan succeeded the throne and became the new Emperor.

Two years ago, there was a critical hostility at the borderline. Rui Xuan recruited Qi Sheng to enter the court as a General. To go to the battlefield. Qi Sheng agreed.

On the day Qi Sheng went down the mountain, Jue Yue, for the very first time in his life had a great quarrel with his elder brother. He stood in the rain on the narrow path of the mountain. His clothes soaked. His eyes were very red. In his fiercest tone: "If you go, I don't want to admit you as my elder brother anymore!!!"

In the end, he still wasn't able to make him stay. Couldn't stop his steps from going down the mountain.

Henceforth, the court had added a leader who led his troops to become the terror that stricken the enemy's troop, General Qi. In the Pear Flowers Garden, there was no longer the broad figure that he knew so well.

In a blink on an eye, several years had passed.

Jue Yu took a mouthful of air before he heaved a heavy sigh.

Towards the Emperor's family, he never had any good sentiment. Upon seeing the Blind Concubine, it was as if he was looking at the reflection of himself.

That pair of desperate, deathly stillness, without any liveliness eyes, not so long ago that was also embedded on his own face.

Jue Yu without saying anything walked out from the Imperial Study. Under the dim light of the night, he went to the direction of the serving quarter.

His steps were extremely light. Quietly without any noise he walked into the yard.

Xiao Bao was in the yard. Sprinkled the water. Suddenly, there was a warm body approaching from his back. He was frightened and opened his mouth about to scream. But was interposed by the hands which firmly covered his mouth.

Jue Yu inched closer to his ear and said lightly: "It's me." He brought his index finger closer and put it in front of his lips, making a keep-silent gesture.

Xiao Bao followed him to go to outside the courtyard. Just stopped after going so far.

The moonlight lit the earth with its layer of silver color. Jue Yu stood under the white and clean moonlight. His posture was tall. His black hair flew swiftly. Making his appearance picturesque. As if absorbing the spiritual influence in the world.

Xiao Bao was in a daze for a while.

Jue Yu lifted his eyes and smiled: "You knew about this matter, didn't you?"

Xiao Bao was startled, "Knew about what?"

"Regarding the Blind Concubine, as well as about why the Empress Dowager wanted to harm him again and again."

Xiao Bao hung down his head. A little bit difficult to breathe, "Why did Young Master Jue Yu think that I knew?"

Jue Yu quietly measured Xiao Bao who was facing downwards with his eyes: "That day in the serving quarter when I made a guess that the one who put in the poison was the Empress Dowager, I realized that your expression was unusual. I presumed, the Blind Concubine might have told you about this matter."

Xiao Bao was still facing downwards. With a soft voice, he said: "Young Master Jue Yu is exceedingly smart."

Jue Yu firmly looked at him closely, his eyes were sharp and penetrating, "Seven years ago, what actually had happened? How did the Blind Concubine's eyes become blind?"

Xiao Bao hurriedly shook his head, "I... I couldn't say."

Jue Yu told him: "You are just looking on helplessly as your Master suffers this hardship?"

Xiao Bao shook his head with all his might, "Master, he, he didn't allow me to say."

Jue Yu said: "If you tell me, I could think of a way to save him. If you don't say anything, if one day someone wanted to harm him again, we all could only helplessly look at him when he dies."

Xiao Bao closed his eyes tightly. His voice trembled: "Master said, seven years ago, he accidentally witnessed something he shouldn't have seen. Because of that, his eyes were blinded then he was casted away to the Cold Palace."

Jue Yu slightly weaved his brows, "This matter, was it related to the demise of the former Emperor and the coronation of the new Emperor?"

Xiao Bao paused, gritted his teeth and nodded his head.

Jue Yu asked: "Did your Master tell you, what this kind of not supposed to see thing was that he witnessed?"

Xiao Bao shook his head, "Master didn't tell me. Perhaps because of the weight of the matter, it was not appropriate to let me know. Perhaps because he was afraid that it would make me involved and put me in danger so he didn't tell me about that."

Jue Yu nodded his head. His pair of eyes under the moonlight had shifted slightly: "That day, the one who tampered with his eyes and made him blind, who is that person actually??"

"This....." Xiao Bao retreated a step, Couldn't help but look away, "I....."

Jue Yu watched closely at his reaction, for quite a while, then lightly said: "It's alright. You can go back."

He also warned: "Do not say anything to your Master."

Jue Yu turned his body. Under the shaded dim light of the night he went to the inner Palace, to the storehouse where the files were stored. He leaped onto the roof lightly, soundlessly he slipped into the storehouse. Each and every folder were placed neatly according to its particular time of record. Stack upon stack were piled up. He searched among the lined up shelves, occasionally extending his arm to get some more files. Under the trifling moonlight, he browsed and looked over the files.

A long while later, on his exquisite face appeared a satisfied smile.

It was already deep in the night.

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The Emperor was alone in his Imperial Study, drowned in his thought. The door was creaking, followed by a stepping sound which treaded towards him in the room.

Without opening his eyes, he spoke: "Regarding this matter, you are extremely careful and concerned. Come and go. Go and come."

Jue Yu pursed his lips, said: "I do this for my own satisfaction."

The Emperor paused briefly, "Did you find some sign of a positive outcome?"

Jue Yu said slowly: "This matter is only one of the Palace's piling grievances. It had been buried for a very long time. If Your Majesty didn't know, it is better to stay not knowing. After all, the suffering one will only be The Blind Concubine. With Your Majesty, it is of no importance. Your Majesty still wants to know?"

The Emperor opened his eyes, his pupils shone sharply, "I want to know."

Jue Yu conveniently pulled a chair in front of him and sat: "If so, please Your Majesty listen to Jue Yu's story."

In the Capital, there was a family with the surname Wen. The Wen family was a well-off family. From generation to generation, they passed down their medicinal skills. The best doctors with perfect skills. In the Capital, their reputation was very well known. The head of the Wen family, Master Wen Wen's medical skills were brilliant. He helped the sick people. In addition, he was modest and amiable towards others. Furthermore, he held his morality to the utmost.

In his middle age, Wen Wen had another son. Naturally he would love and adore his son with every core of his life. The youngest son was named Wen Mu Yan. To be born with fair and clear skin, agreeable with his round and bright eyes, he would laugh whenever he saw someone. Everyone in the family, without exception, would hold him carefully in the center of their palm.

Day by day, Wen Mu Yan grew bigger and bigger. His face was exquisitely soft and fair. He had a lively as well as an innocent disposition. His docile way of speaking made him very lovable. It was as if he was made of a blended honey and syrup's child, a very sweet child. The Wen family, from the elderlies to the young ones, there was no one who didn't love him.

In a blink of an eye, Wen Mu Yan had come to his flourishing period, the age between a child and an immature age of a youth. His eyes were limpid and clear as the crystal, it was like the magnificent water of the autumn lake. His body was donned in the best quality of silk material. A jade ornament hung from his waist. A great Young Master from a wealthy family.

One day, in the winter, the Emperor had suddenly fallen to an acute disease. The illness was very serious. The state of life or death was still unknown. The Imperial Physicians in the Palace, all of them were already at a loss of what to do. All of the courtiers had used up all of their ideas, but there was nothing that could be put to good use. Then there was a high official who suggested to them to recruit the famous doctors from the Capital to enter the Palace and help them examine the Emperor and to medically treat him. Who knows, probably, there would be a thread of hope for an opportunity to live on for the Emperor.

It was on a great snowing day, the Wen family residence entrance was being knocked on by some people. The Master of the Wen Family heard the intention of the officials who came, he had no way to decline their wish, thereupon, he agreed to go with the officials to enter the Palace. Wen Mu Yan was standing by his father's side, he also wanted to go together. Because his father had always spoiled

him with his utmost love, he had always followed his father closely, whenever his father went to examine his patients, he always brought him to tag along by his side.

Wen Wen spread and held the umbrella, Wen Mu Yan carried the medical kit. Both father and son entered the Imperial Palace on the day when the whole sky was filled with snow as far as one's eyes could see.

The Emperor's illness, as each day passed by, became more and more heavy. The old injuries which accumulated from many years ago had also shown their effects. Day by day, the Emperor was thinning down, his spirit had been broken as well. All the famous doctors from the Capital had known that the Emperor's illness had hit its critical point. It had already spread to all over his body and the marrow cavity of his bones. There was no way to reverse the desperate situation anymore, however, they had no choice but to routinely do the acupuncture and decoct the medicinal herbs every day to extend the life of the Emperor.

Since the day they entered the Palace, half a month had passed.

Wen Mu Yan and his father lived together in a residence which was not too far from the Imperial Pharmacy. He was still a youth, every day he only stayed inside the room to read books, once in a while he would play in a place near the Palace.

One day, the half month which was filled with snowing finally ended. The hard to see sun finally appeared. Its brightness of golden light shone upon the soft hair-tip of the youth.

Wen Mu Yan was very delighted from the bottom of his heart. He draped a thin fur coat over his shoulder and went out the room to have a walk in the snow.

Since the weather was so dazzlingly bright, he couldn't restrain himself from walking further. On the ground was the thick and deep snow accumulated from many days. The eaves, the benches and the steps, also had been covered by the thick snow. From faraway, each and every place in the Palace looked the same. The pathway was covered and couldn't be seen too. Wen Mu Yan was moving and rolling about on the whole ground which was covered by the white snow. He already didn't have any awareness about where he was actually at.

From behind, there was a door of one of the Palace room which suddenly moved by itself despite the windless weather. Making a creaking sound that passed to his ears.

Wen Mu Yan jumped in shock. He turned his body. He could see that there was a moving figure which compared to himself was slightly taller from inside the room. Most probably the figure was of a youth. A sense of curiosity rose from his heart. He treaded on the knee-length deep white snow, stepped forward to climb on a flight of steps, sticking his body in front of the door to peek inside the room.

Just a glance, he could see that it was a harmful matter.

Wen Mu Yan since childhood was brought up and cherished by the good care of the elder members of the family. Of course he would be an innocent and melancholic youth. He completely lacked any notion regarding the dangerous conflicts within the Palace chambers. He just thought that he had merely seen a simple out of the ordinary scene. He hardly realized how much conspiracy and scheming was contained in this calculated act. The scheming of the Monarch, since immemorial time, had been cunning without minding to do crafty things.

Without the slightest amount of awareness that he had fallen into a very dangerous situation, he turned his body and prepared to leave. However, he was too late.

The hidden place guards in black already found out about his presence. Quietly without a noise, they leaped out from their hidden place, from behind, they covered Wen Mu Yan's mouth. They dragged him to enter the side room and threw him on the floor, then entirely closed the door.

Wen Mu Yan was pressed to kneel on the icy cold floor tile. Unable to lift his head. Even though he

was still young and couldn't understand the matter, at this very moment, he could also smell the perilous smell of this situation. Not long after, a row of troops entered the side room, lit up the furnace, the incense fragrance from the burner was burning with a crackling sound. From the top of his head, there was a cold voice of a youth: "How much have you seen?"

Wen Mu Yan's body quivered, stating the truth as things really were: "I didn't see anything....."

His speech was of a child, indeed he didn't see anything. However the him at this moment didn't know how to explain and no matter what he said, the owner of the voice wouldn't have believed him.

A deep voice of a woman fell to his ears, "It doesn't matter whether or not he saw anything. This person definitely can't be freed and sent back to his place. Simply exterminate him. Then cast away his body on the dried up well in the Cold Palace."

One of the guards in black stepped forward: "Presently, His Majesty is seriously ill. The Imperial Palace is being guarded tightly by the Imperial Guards, one after another they make their rounds and strictly patrol around. It is easy to kill him and prevent him from divulging the secrets, but when disposing the body it would be hard to deceive the public eyes and ears. There are numerous threads in the inner Palace, If by any chance the other concubines found out about this matter, and take advantage from this, the many years hard work, wouldn't it be destroyed in a mere moment?"

That deep voice of the lady said again: "If so, just blind his eyes then cast him away to the Cold Palace, assign someone to strictly watch him. His Majesty is already at the point of death, he could only barely live for several days. Deal with this matter carefully. After the new Emperor ascends the throne, even if someone found out about this matter, they would be unable to do anything anymore!"

That cold voice of a youth which he heard first also said: "What are you waiting for?! Act quickly!!"

After saying that, he didn't stay for any longer, waving his sleeve, he walked out of the room.

Wen Mu Yan's hair was grabbed tightly to make him immobile. They forced him to face upwards. The limpid as autumn waters eyes were filled with tears. His mouth repeatedly cried out with his sorrowful cries.

That woman's voice was coldly laughing, her bright red nails were passing through the youth's cheek. Leaving traces of deathly pale marks on that cheek, "It is too bad for these pair of beautiful eyes."

Wen Mu Yan was tightly held. He could only look on helplessly at the coming to damage his eyes pliers with the bright red charcoal from the distance getting closer and closer. He continued to plead, his voice was both miserable and sorrowful, his whole heart was filled with despair. The severe pain that was raided on his eyes, his entire self was as if was being roasted and rolled in a burning frying pan. With each and every one of his pores, he screamed out in a horrible shriek of pain. His whole face was covered in the charcoal's ash. The bloodshot crimson red eyes were covered by the ash to the point of being black. The flesh and blood of his pupil were turned over. The pain felt like it was tearing into his heart and lungs. The pair of sharp and beautiful eyes, from then on were blinded by the burning charcoal.

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Jue Yu faced the swaying in the wind with unpredictable movement of the tongue of the flame on the table. His voice felt as if it came from a very distance place: "After that, Wen Mu Yan was thrown into the Cold Palace, to let him live and perish by himself. Also, the one who is taking care of him, Xiao Bao, is none other than one of the Empress Dowager's people who was assigned to watch Wen Mu Yan under the Empress Dowager's order."

Time was really capable of burying everything. Devouring everything. Concealing every existence and making it fade away. the former Emperor demised, the new Emperor succeeded the throne, the raising war on the borderline seven years ago, who else could remember on that very day, in that icy cold palace, there was a youth that suffered this kind of dreadful thing.

"The Empress Dowager at that time had certainly planned in detail, to erase every record regarding Wen Mu Yan entering the Palace. Since then, the Wen Family had lost any correspondence. The officials who worked at the Imperial Pharmacy also couldn't investigate his trace. Wen Mu Yan been dead ever since that day. Only in the Cold Palace, there was a blind concubine. If not because of Your Majesty's by random chance of stepping into the Cold Palace, meeting the seven years watched over by Xiao Bao, Wen Mu Yan, probably The Empress Dowager had also forgotten about this youth."

"The Empress Dowager's scheme to exile Wen Mu Yan out of the Capital was unsuccessful, resorted to poisoning the cake and snacks to poison him to death. Perhaps afraid that Wen Mu Yan remembered that day of hostility, purposely approached Your Majesty in order to take his revenge."

Jue Yu evoked the corner of his mouth, there was a faint bright light flashing on his pupil, "I am very curious. That day, Wen Mu Yan from that room door, what kind of circumstances had he actually seen?"

The face of the Emperor was white as frost. His lips were tightly closed. Not uttering even a word.

Jue Yu's mouth corner raised even higher, but his smiling face was gloomy and cold, "In Your Majesty's heart, to ascend the throne, how many shameful, rotten, messy as well as filth had been done? The things that you have done on that day, you don't have the courage to admit them now?!"

The Emperor fell silent. After a long while, he said: "The me at that time, was also helpless with no way out."

Jue Yu laughed loudly, "What a convenient 'helpless with no way out!'"

The Emperor's face turned pale. His train of thought as if turning back to that snowy day.

His lips were unable to hide his trembling, "Wen Mu Yan, he..... he saw me altering the former Emperor's posthumous edict..."

That day, all the Imperial Guards that had been guarding the hall had been sent away with an excuse. The whole room in that hall from front to rear was absolutely empty. He used this gap to slip into that room. Opened the rosewood wooden cabinet which was situated inside that room, drew out a brocaded box.

The Former Emperor had been bedridden with a lingering disease for a long time, living from hand to mouth in a precarious state. Therefore, since long ago he had established a testamentary edict which he put in this room.

His eyes skimmed through that edict, soon after that, he spread a tough white silk paper, dipped the tip of the writing brush in the thick and black ink, imitating the handwriting of the former Emperor, he wrote down an artificial Imperial Edict to set himself as the next Emperor. Then he burnt down the original edict, using the Imperial Jade seal which he stole, on that tough white silk paper, he stamped it with the scarlet bright red seal and put it back in the brocaded box.

Everything was conducted in an unusually smooth way. It should have been flawless. Unfortunately, in the very end, when he was about to seal the brocaded box, by the door, a child had seen him doing that.

His heart was thumping wildly in a great shock. The charge for a criminal who faked an Imperial Order to seize the throne was extremely severe. The family from his mother's side, his uncle's family and several hundred lives all would be left without a graveyard. Under the threat of this kind of punishment, he hardened his heart. Listened to his Mother's instruction. Ordered people to make Wen Mu Yan blind.

On that day, Wen Mu Yan was firmly pressed down on the floor. He actually never had the chance to see this youth face.

What Jue Yu had said wasn't wrong. There were a lot of rotten secrets hidden in the corrupted Imperial Family. Wen Mu Yan merely caught a glimpse of him putting the seal on for a split second, he had to ruin this youth's pair of eyes.

For all eternity, the fact would be buried just like that.

That tearing up the heart and splitting the lung kind of pain and the wailing shrieks were swept away by the screams of the fierce wind and the cruel snow of a faraway place. To a place that couldn't be heard by anybody.

This youth, who had lost his eyesight, was lonely and in solitary, day after day, in the small yard in the Cold Palace, living quietly as if he had died.

Nobody knew how many tears he had shed, how many sleepless nights he had experienced, alone in his pitch black world, in the silent and still nights.

This kind of matter was already not of importance anymore.

In the Imperial Palace, Wen Mu Yan had already ceased to exist.

Now, in the Imperial Palace existed only a blind concubine. The Blind Concubine wouldn't shed his tears. Also wouldn't cry. He no longer had any sense nor responded. Only those blank eyes. Miserably ashen pupils. Face without any expression. Without saying a word.

He was no longer the child at that time who was carrying the carved jade, fair with jet black eyes.

The one who blinded his pair of eyes, was not other people, it was the Emperor himself.

The Emperor's face became ghastly pale, slowly, he moved his back backward to lean on the chair.

When Rui Ze just met the Blind Concubine, he firmly believed that he must have a very nice name.

"Because the Blind Concubine is a very gentle person. For a very gentle and kind-hearted person, certainly he will have a matching name as beautiful as a jade."

Wen Mu Yan.

Wen Mu Yan.

Mu Yan.

The Emperor continuously repeating this name in silent.

Indeed, a very beautiful name, as beautiful as a jade name.

The Emperor came by himself to the serving quarter, lifted the curtain and entered the room.

The Blind Concubine was reclining by the edge of the bed. His arm was hanging low as if broken. His face bared a dejected expression.

The Emperor secured him in his bosom. With his arms he held him tightly. Said in a mutter: "Mu Yan, I have wronged you."

It was seven years too late, this flat apology.

The Blind Concubine remained in his stillness. His lips quivered for a while, "This was the matter of past events, Your Majesty needn't be concerned."

The Emperor hurriedly lifted his head, "You have been loathing me, for many years, holding in your hatred, isn't that right?"

The Blind Concubine coldly pushed the Emperor to pry open his embrace, "In any case, I wouldn't be able to go back to my original state. What's the point of talking about it?"

The Emperor couldn't say a word. His hands remained in the tight embrace, unwilling to let go.

"The jade hairpin that I gave you, why don't you put it in?"

The Blind Concubine lightly answered him: "Not used to wearing it, I casted it aside."

The Emperor lowered his head, after a while, he raised his head again, "Whatever you are used to handling, I will order people to make it and bring it here."

The Blind Concubine shook his head, "Whatever is in the Palace, I can't get used to. I don't want to stay here."

The Emperor's expression slightly changed: "You may not go out of the Palace, I will never let you go."

The Blind Concubine closed his eyes, there was a trace of despair on his face.

The Emperor couldn't bear to see him like that, "I am sincere towards you. From now on, I will always protect you. Shield you. I will not let anyone to hurt you anymore."

The Blind Concubine sat silently, his weak and delicate body shivered with cold.

The Emperor's lips gently touched his icy cold cheek. Slowly he said: "You... will you forgive me?"

The Blind Concubine, upon hearing what the Emperor had said, laughed in grief, "Will not! Even if I have to die, I will not forgive you!"

His voice was squeezed out from the space between his teeth. Mustering all his strength.

The Emperor didn't say anything, just kept on embracing him, unwilling to let him go.

Before leaving, with a more serious manner of speaking: "I will never let you go. For all eternity."

The Blind Concubine was paralyzed on the bedside. His face was without any reaction. Only his nails were sunken deeply into his flesh, the center of his palm now bled.

After the Emperor left, Xiao Bao hurriedly entered, saying: "Master don't be angry at the Emperor again. You are suffering for nothing."

The Blind Concubine slowly slipped onto the bed, gradually he let out laughter, "I don't feel anything like suffering or not. That time I had suffered the utmost pain. Now, I can't feel such a feeling anymore."

The next day, The Emperor came to the serving quarter again. The Blind Concubine climbed down the bed. He groped wildly beside the table to try to find the teapot.

The Emperor stepped forward and helped him get the tea, he passed it over to in front of him, "Careful, it is very hot."

The Blind Concubine upon hearing the Emperor's voice, his whole body turned rigid. His arms slowly hunged down.

The Emperor said: "If you want to hate me, then just hate me. Don't hurt yourself."

The Blind Concubine raised his hand to take the small teacup. Without warning, he threw the teacup with the tea inside on the floor. The teacup had fallen from a high place, broke into pieces.

The Emperor not at all minded his attitude. Stretched out his hand to gently caress the Blind Concubine's cheek, "I still remember several months ago, the expression you had when you knew that you could finally go out of the Palace. Also your lively and cheerful face at that market. If I close my eyes, I could recall all of those memories vividly."

The Blind Concubine was expressionless. Motionless. Also speechless.

The Emperor said again: "You told me, you hope that I could often come to see you. Accompany you and talk with you. I am now here with you, for all my life I will never leave. Please smile a little."

The Blind Concubine retreated a step backward. Mockingly he said: "That was all merely a joke. Your Majesty took it seriously?"

The Emperor's fingers were smoothing out the sleeve of The Blind Concubine. Looking down he said, "All that you have said, I took it all seriously."

The Blind Concubine hurriedly pushed away his hand, "You only lie to me!!"

The Emperor stepped forward to hug him, "I am truly earnest towards you. Why are you unwilling to believe me, Mu Yan?"

The Blind Concubine desperately struggled from his hug. His hands were slapping the Emperor's shoulder and upper arms unstopping. "Don't use that name to call me!" Each and every word, he shouted out his with his saddened and hoarsened voice. He pushed and struggled to get free, resulting in him falling to the floor. His hand accidentally pressed on the smashed porcelain.

The Emperor's face became pale, with a strict voice he warned him: "Why are you being so careless?! To flare up and do as you please just to act recklessly!"

He took Wen Mu Yan's pair of hands. Spread them to examine. In the center of that palm was filled with the pieces of broken porcelain. The blood was pouring.

Even though the Imperial Physician had been summoned, yet he still anxiously ordered the Palace's servant to go to the General's residence to call Jue Yu to enter the Palace.

When Jue Yu hurriedly came to the serving quarter, the Blind Concubine had already fallen asleep. His sleep was not comfortable. He was sleeping lightly.

"Mu Yan's body is already so broken. At this rate, I was afraid that he wouldn't hold up until he's thirty-five. If he doesn't take good care of himself like this, even if the greatest doctor, Hua Tuo, was still alive, he would also feel quite helpless for this situation."

The Emperor retorted: "I also don't want him to be like this, however with his current temper, sometimes, he truly asks me to lose my temper to the point that I would kill him if I could."

Jue Yu said again: "Wen Mu Yan, his first time meeting Your Majesty in that Cold Palace, had no idea that Your Majesty was the one who caused his blindness. That was because Your Majesty's voice at that time was still of a youth. Not same at all with the current voice. Afterwards, it was known, yet, there wasn't the slightest bit of intention for revenge. He only thought about leaving this place and going faraway. He is a good child. From his early ages he already suffered that kind of misery. This sickness of the heart needs the heart to be cured. For now, you must just yield to him and listen to his will."

The Emperor hesitated for a moment, then said: "I can agree to whatever he wants, all except the matter of leaving the Palace. For all my life, I will never let him go."

Jue Yu fell silent all of a sudden.

At that time, the first time when Qi Sheng went down the mountain to enter the court, if he was the

same as the Emperor today, definitely without compromising, who knows what kind of relationship the both of them might have had now.

Even if Qi Sheng might have hated him, however, he wouldn't have had to suffer the pain in his heart for bitterly waiting for him.

The Emperor asked him: "Mu Yan's eyes, are they curable?"

Jue Yu cast a quick glance to the inner room, said in a soft voice: "There is no way to cure his eyes. It can't be cured anymore."

The Emperor stroke his folding fan, his fingers because of the pressure had become white. After a long while later, he said: "Can't be cured anymore, it is also good."

Jue Yu stood on the outside for quite some time. Looking at the Palace's servant cooking the medicine on the slow fire. Entered in and out from the serving quarter, but he didn't see Xiao Bao's figure. He asked lightly: "Where is Xiao Bao?"

The Emperor answered him: "He is someone assigned by the Empress Dowager after all. I can't be relaxed. I placed him somewhere else."

Jue Yu said again: "Xiao Bao has served Mu Yan with all his heart. Besides, when he was assigned to serve at the Cold Palace, he was still a little child. He didn't have any calculated plans. He only accepted the order from the Empress Dowager. He had followed Mu Yan by his side for so many years. Making an all out effort. Dependably taking care of him. Mu Yan actually couldn't be parted with him."

After he paused for a while, he continued: "Mu Yan towards Yu Li, Xiao Bao, and Rui Ze's heart, is actually the same."

The Emperor's face color darkened, "Towards whoever, he will be friendly. Only towards me he would be rigid and less spoken. Rui Ze came to visit, he talked and laughed with him. Once he heard my voice, he became silent at once."

Jue Yu heaved a sigh, "You have to give him some more time. Be patient. To cultivate the heart is the same as to cultivate the body. You have to do it slowly."

After two days, The Blind Concubine gradually felt something was wrong.

"Where is Xiao Bao?"

The Palace's servant with the utmost respect answered him: "Answer, Master. Xiao Bao was temporarily assigned to serve at another palace."

The Blind Concubine knitted his brows, "Why?"

"This...." The Palace's servant hesitated for a while, "The Emperor had ordered, Xiao Bao to be moved to serve at another palace. When will he come back, your humble subject doesn't know."

The Blind Concubine staggeringly stood up, then anxiously said: "Xiao Bao has been with me from the very start."

The Palace's servant said: "But this is His Majesty's order...."

"I want Xiao Bao to come back. He has been with me. If he had to follow other people, it would put him in a great inconvenience. I... I want him back...."

The announcing loud voice from outside notified: "The Emperor has arrived---"

The Blind Concubine once hearing that, hurriedly went towards the door. Stretched his hands to

grope wildly, he touched the front robe of the Emperor. Immediately he seized it in his palm and pulled it, "Where is Xiao Bao? Where did you send Xiao Bao to?"

The Emperor helped to support him, told him: "Xiao Bao is serving in another palace."

"I don't believe it!" The Blind Concubine's pair of eyes tightly closed, shook his head with all his might, "Why did you send him away? It because you have ruthlessly punished him, isn't it? Tell me!!"

The Emperor frowned, "Why did you say it like that?"

"I just want Xiao Bao back!!" The Blind Concubine loosened his grip on the Emperor's front robe then suddenly fell, knelt down, bumped on the brick: "I beg you... let him come back. Don't kill him..." His voice hoarsened very much.

The Emperor angrily said: "You get up first! The floor is cold. Your body has recuperated for several days."

The Blind Concubine shook his head, his eyes had become very red, "Please let Xiao Bao come back. He has always been with me. Please don't harm him, let him come back. I beg you....."

He said that with sobs, his face color was red. He had started to cough violently.

The Emperor couldn't stand it and yielded: "You stand up first, I will let Xiao Bao come back, alright?!" Both of his hands carried The Blind Concubine in a bridal embrace, bringing him back to the bed. That body was very cold. His palm was covered with nothing but sweat.

The Blind Concubine's soft and weak body was slanted. The roundish droplets of tears were flowing from the corner of his eyes. Flashing through his cheek, dripped and dropped on the cotton-padded mattress. "In any way I am unable to see, you could just lie to me....."

His heart was really hurt.

As if as precious and valuable as a frail thing, once it was smashed and broken, it couldn't be repaired nor mended anymore.

The Emperor ordered to let Xiao Bao back to serve at the serving quarter.

Bao was brought by the Internal Affairs Head Administer back to the serving quarter.

All along the way, he kept silent without saying anything.

When he had just entered the Palace, he was assigned to serve at the Empress Dowager's Palace. Because he was still so young, he had to suffer the bullying and humiliation. The cries from being beaten and punished everyday were never ending. One winter, the Empress Dowager needed someone to go to the Cold Palace to watch over a sinner. The Palace's servants all were unwilling to go, so they pushed this matter on him. He didn't understand anything, to the extent that even The Empress Dowager's face, he had never seen before. He was just brought to the Cold Palace by an old Administer.

Once, The Blind Concubine asked him, what kind of fruit was it that he liked to eat.

He answered after a very long time, it was an orange.

As a matter of fact, he was a mere servant. Never ate many kinds of fruits. Until now, he could only remember the flavor of an orange.

There was a time during winter, on his way back to the Cold Palace, he picked up an orange. Probably when they sent them to the rear palace, one of them dropped down unknowingly.

He hurriedly picked it up, hid it in his sleeve, slightly running all along on his way back to the Cold

Palace.

The Blind Concubine was hugging Yu Li and warmed themselves in front of the furnace.

On the furnace, they boiled water. The hot steam from inside the kettle made the lid of the kettle move.

He stepped forward and gave the orange to him, "Master, eat this."

The Blind Concubine told him, "You eat it. It was rare to be able to pick this up."

He shook his head, "I want Master to eat it. Master's body is unwell, the whole winter you haven't eaten a single fruit yet."

The Blind Concubine said, "Then we will share it."

After saying that, he peeled the orange, divided the orange's segments, put it on the kettle's lid. The hot steam was raised up little by little through the kettle's lid. Warming up the orange.

The Blind Concubine passed some of the segments to him, saying, "Here, have a taste."

He put it in his mouth, immediately, a burst of warm juice poured out, impressively warm. With some sweet scent. This kind of flavor, almost made people melt.

The Blind Concubine smilingly asked him, "Delicious?"

He nodded his head with all his might.

The Blind Concubine told him, "Before, during the winter, mother would feed me oranges, I thought it was cold so I was unwilling to eat them. Mother would warm it like just now. I leaned on my mother's bosom, watching her peel the orange segment by segment, then put them on the kettle lid. The steam slowly raised, warming the kettle's lid, the oranges also would be warmed little by little. Eating the sweet and warm orange during the winter, that kind of feeling, really couldn't be compared to other things."

He and The Blind Concubine had been together for many years, The Blind Concubine had never once gotten angry at him. To the point of when he was angry, The Blind Concubine would exhaust his mind to find a way to comfort him.

He and The Blind Concubine fed and raised Yu Li together. Basking in the sun on their small yard together. Chatting idly. Sitting peacefully together until the sun fell behind the mountain.

He loved when the Blind Concubine was having a smiling expression.

The life in the Cold Palace was hard, however, he felt that that was the happiest period of his life.

He was a just mere servant, he hadn't eaten many kinds of fruits. However, he felt that the most delicious fruit in this world, he had already tasted.

In that winter, in front of the little furnace.

That kind of feeling, truly couldn't be compared to other things.

The moment he entered the serving quarter, Xiao Bao caught a glimpse of the staggering Blind Concubine that came running his way.

He hurriedly walked forward, "Master, be careful. You could fall!"

The Blind Concubine hugged him tightly, on his face, he was wearing a tearful smile.

Xiao Bao's heart was stung by a spell of pain, "I am here, I am here."

The Blind Concubine seized his hand, not wanting to let go, as if afraid if once he let it go, he couldn't grab it anymore.

Xiao Bao was a little embarrassed. He shyly laughed: "Master, Xiao Bao will never go, for the rest of my life, I will stay by your side."

"Stupid child!" The Blind Concubine revealed a smile which hadn't been seen for a long time, "You are saying foolish things again."

He held Xiao Bao's hand, saying his heartfelt, "Master wants you to go out of here after all."

Go to a far faraway place, never to come back.

"Master, don't say those kinds of words again", Xiao Bao lowered his head, "Wherever Master is, so is Xiao Bao, I will never leave your side."

The Blind Concubine didn't say anything anymore, just slightly laughed.

Once in a while he would say these two words "Stupid child."

He was already dead, decayed and turned into dust, he could never have whatever he desired anymore.

He poured out all of his hopes and entrusted them onto this child, Xiao Bao.

If Xiao Bao could go out from the Palace, be free, he would also be free, without any regret.

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Today Jue Yu came to visit him at the serving quarter. General Qi also tagged along.

The Blind Concubine's mood had become better, he drank a small bowl of porridge.

Jue Yu told him: "This evening, I will set out to go home to my Pear Flowers Garden. Qi Sheng also will go home with me."

The Blind Concubine wasn't able to restrain his smile: "Then, congratulations."

Jue Yu proudly lifted his face upwards, from his sleeve, he drew out the Deed of Slavery and fluttered it in the air, "Right now I am the Master, he is the slave, I told him to go home, he wouldn't have the guts to disagree."

Qi Sheng bent over to plant a kiss on Jue Yu's face, then gently said: "Of course, I am all yours."

Jue Yu said to Mu Yan: "We are leaving, you have to take care of yourself, the prescription that I gave you, take them on time on a daily basis, you may not skip even once."

The Blind Concubine nodded his head: "You don't have to worry."

He suddenly grabbed Jue Yu's hand, "I want to ask you a favor, you have to agree."

Jue Yu asked: "What kind of favor?"

"Take Xiao Bao out of this Palace", The Blind Concubine earnestly said, "Wherever is fine, Pear Flowers Garden is fine, to the end of the world is fine too, even to the rivers of Jiangnan is also fine. Take him out. Go to a far faraway place. Never to come back."

Jue Yu was shocked, "Then, what about you?"

"Right now, there are more than ten of the Palace's servants serving me alone, I will be fine and take good care of myself. You two must promise me to ensure Xiao Bao's wellbeing and take him out. I can only trust you guys."

Jue Yu still hesitated, The Blind Concubine turned to Qi Sheng, "I had asked General Qi before, if in the future I had a favor to ask, would General Qi would help me out. That time General Qi had assured me, if it was within his ability, he would be most grateful to help me out. Do you remember this, General Qi?"

Qi Sheng paused, then nodded his head.

The Blind Concubine's eyes gradually poured out his tears, "I only have this wish. You two must promise me. Only you guys could take Xiao Bao out from this Palace. Once you guys are out from here, I will never have another opportunity to send him out."

Jue Yu bit his lips, seemingly he made his decision: "Alright. I promise you."

The Blind Concubine said: "I sent Xiao Bao to fetch the silks and satins at the Palace gate, when you two are about to go out, you surely will meet him. No matter what he has to say, willing or unwilling, without the slightest hesitation, just take him and go."

Entering the late summer, the weather had become hotter.

The Blind Concubine sat on the serving quarter's soft divan. His head leaned on the pillar. His eyes were slightly closed.

Since the last time Jue Yu came to visit, half a month had passed. Since Xiao Bao had left the Palace, also had been half a month.

That child was brought out to the Palace without having the chance to bid his farewell. He went just like that. They even hadn't the chance to meet for the very last time. Whatever wellbeing-wish he wanted to say, now he no longer had the chance to say it anymore. He couldn't part with Xiao Bao, he couldn't part with the child who accompanied him for seven years. Nevertheless, he had to harden his heart in the end.

Didn't know whether or not that child would hate him. Whether he would nag at Jue Yu. Also he didn't know, if he had had a good sleep during the journey. Now he actually had sent him out to the outer world safe and sound.

In this lifetime, he would never see that child anymore.

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In the middle of July, the heat was great. His appetite was not good at all. Couldn't eat anything. He even couldn't gulp down the porridge. The Palace's servants who served him in the serving quarter, all were frightened to death. All of them knelt down and begged him to eat something. He endured the urge to vomit and swallowed the food. The more he ate, the more he suffered. Finally he threw up. Vomited on the quilt and on the bed and made them dirty.

The Blind Concubine's body, by each passing day had become more and more thinner. The Emperor couldn't help but feel very worried.

The Imperial Physician didn't dare to give him much prescription. Everyday only letting the Palace's servants to decoct medicinal porridge mixed with lotus seed and honey as his supplement to compromise his Qi and blood circulation.

The Blind Concubine reclined on the soft divan, once he reclined, it would be for the whole day. This soft divan was the same divan they brought along when they moved out from the Cold Palace. Xiao

Bao ever seated on it, Yu Li ever leaned on it, but at the present, remained him alone to use it.

When the sun had inclined, the Palace's servants would move the soft divan to the yard, placed it under a shady tree. The Blind Concubine when he was reclined outside would feel as if he went back to the little yard at the Cold Palace. Xiao Bao sat on the rattan chair not far from him, Yu Li laid prone by his side, he only needed to stretch his hand a little, he could already touch the slippery and smooth fur of Yu Li.

He recalled only those memories, the memories which put himself behind the screen, with each particular display it would absorb his already weak strength to live on.

The Emperor would come to accompany The Blind Concubine straight after court. To the point he handled the government affairs along with other affairs from the serving quarter. Whenever The Blind Concubine laid on the soft divan, he would surely let The Blind Concubine to rest his head on his lap, to make him more comfortable.

He talked to The Blind Concubine, The Blind Concubine would close his eyes. Once in a while he would give a "hm" sound as a response, not knowing if he was actually listening or not.

The Emperor hugged The Blind Concubine, lowered his body, with his lips he touched the Blind Concubine's forehead, "What do you want me to do so you would be able to forgive me?"

The situation with The Blind Concubine didn't improve at all, the Young Monarch's expectation had already grown smaller.

He loved Wen Mu Yan, yet Wen Mu Yan hated him.

He wished that Wen Mu Yan could let go of his hatred and live comfortably with ease.

A gentle breeze passed by, the hair on The Blind Concubine's forehead fluttered a bit.

He opened his mouth, softly he said: "Let me out of the Palace."

From these past three days, this was the first time he talked with the Emperor in a complete sentence.

The Emperor pursed his lips, slowly replied to him: "Fine, I agree."

In the end, he couldn't bear to see his most beloved person suffering, gritting his teeth, he made a promise.

The Blind Concubine was taken to the inner room. The Emperor's attendant moved forward and bowed: "Your Majesty will really let the Blind Concubine out from Palace?"

The young Monarch gazed forward, his eyes faced the faraway place, "I have said that I will never let him go."

The attendant carefully tried to inquire the Emperor's meaning, "So, Your Majesty wants to...."

"Inside the Palace, there is a secluded pavilion, built in the middle of a lotus pond. It has been uninhabited for a long time. You, take some people to sweep and clean it, arrange and decorate the appliance according to an ordinary household. After several days, let Wen Mu Yan move into that pavilion."

After he received the order, the attendant excused himself.

On one early morning, at the first glimmer of dawn, The Blind Concubine was helped by the Palace's servant to enter a horse carriage. Travelling for roughly an hour, the horse carriage slowly stopped. The Palace's servant lifted the carriages' curtain, "Master, we have arrived."

The Blind Concubine was curled up in his brocaded quilt, didn't even open his eyes, lightly said:

"That's good if we have arrived."

They led him to enter the house. Hearing the Palace's servants move the implements they brought along, he only stared blankly, didn't utter a word.

After the sun inclined, the Palace's servant came to report : "Master, everything has been put in order properly. This house is very far from the Imperial Palace, also very far from the downtown area, very quiet and peaceful, surrounded by a pond, there is only a bridge which connected this place to the outside. Master in here can recover better. Your humble subjects will go back to the Imperial Palace to report."

The Blind Concubine answered him: "Alright."

Palace's servants left one by one, only leaving behind a small attendant to help him draw the water and clean the house.

The Blind Concubine softly asked him: "Are there any fish in the pond?"

The small attendant replied: "Answer, Master. There are lotuses on the pond. The whole pond is covered by the lotus leaves, maybe there are fish there."

On the lips of The Blind Concubine, slowly a smile appeared, "Well, it must be very beautiful."

"Yes, It is. It is very beautiful", the small attendant happily told him, "The Lotus's leaves are of fresh green, The Lotus itself are of a pinkish color, seemingly they wanted to reach the heaven. Extremely beautiful."

The Blind Concubine gently laughed: "Is that so?"

He finally got out from the Palace. Suffering for a very long time, finally he could leave the Palace forever.

The Emperor from a place not far from him secretly fixed his eyes on him.

After a very long time, for the first time he could see a smile on that pale face again.

He had almost forgotten the smiling expression of Wen Mu Yan.

So, when he could see it again today, he felt that it was as beautiful as the first time when he saw it.

Wen Mu Yan thought he had already left the Palace to a faraway place, moved into an ordinary house somewhere in Capital.

He couldn't go to him, also couldn't make a sound.

He could never chat together with Wen Mu Yan again.

Could only like this, secretly, silently, stand on the pavilion, from faraway, gazing lovingly at him.

His personal attendant asked him: "Your Majesty, will come again tomorrow?"

The young Monarch unable to shift his eyes from him, nodded his head slowly.

He wished that he could be like this for many years ahead.

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The Blind Concubine since then lived peacefully in that house.

He wasn't aware for how long he had been living there. He only knew that the summer had passed.

Autumn had gone by. The winter also had passed through. This was another beginning of the spring time in another year.

His face gradually regained the color of blood, his fingers also weren't the same pale color as before.

He finally had some strength to live. Wanted to speak to someone. Or maybe held a little idle chat. However, there was only a dreadful stillness in the house.

There wasn't the slightest bit of a human voice in the house.

He ever earnestly hoped, Xiao Bao and Yu Li could be together forever with him. Smelling the fragrance of the blossoming flowers. Listening to the sound of the insects. Basking in the sun during the day. At night, sitting under the starry sky. Randomly chatting about whatever. Staying together forever. Together for a very long long time in the future. Remaining as they were.

Xiao Bao and Yu Li had already agreed.

He thought it would come true.

But now, Yu Li had already died, Xiao Bao also wouldn't come back anymore. The one who left here was him alone.

There was hatred that resided in his heart. Resented himself for staying alive, to be able to move about. He didn't know if he actually ruined the one he hated or actually ruined himself.

Actually, he really wanted to see Yu Li's white as snow fur. Wanted to see Xiao Bao's face. Wanted to see the small, soft and fair face of the Little Prince, his roundish body. He also wanted to see what would General Qi look like in his formal attire. Wanted to see the shining brightly black hair and eye-stroking red clothes of Jue Yu.

But this kind of thing would be impossible to fulfill.

The Blind Concubine exhaustedly reclined on the soft divan. Slowly closed his eyes.

He had always wanted to leave the Imperial Palace. Going back to the town and to have resided in an ordinary house with a yard.

Wished for so many years, finally he could fulfill his wish.

He was no longer The Blind Concubine. There were also no more people who would call him The Blind Concubine.

He actually had a name, a very beautiful name at that.

However, the people who would call him by that beautiful name, there wasn't a single person anymore.

He soundlessly reclined on the soft divan. He suddenly felt that his surroundings were excessively quiet.

His eyes were unable to see, reclined in this place and reclined in the yard at the Cold Palace, actually didn't have much difference.

At that time, Yu Li was cuddling in his arms, once in a while would swing her tail. Xiao Bao would run about to splash the water, doing chores, feeding the two birds which hanged on the eaves.

But now, there wasn't a single sound anymore.

He was already unable to distinguish, was he actually still alive or already dead. He was already broken up into pieces.

At first, it was only his eyes that unable to see, now, his heart also had become a blank space.

Previously, there was someone who would secretly look at him attentively from quite a distant, despite he would never be able to see forever.

But now, that person would never look at him anymore.

Didn't matter if that person's heart was sincere or not. He didn't want it.

Because he wanted to leave the Palace badly, from the very start, he had prepared to give up everything.

Sometimes he would also feel pain.

From the bottom of his heart raised a kind of sharp pain like being gnawed.

When he felt that kind of pain, his body would tremble greatly. He would curl his body into a circular form while his face was covered with tears.

But only at that time, his heart would be at ease.

He could only be certain.

He was alive.

## Epilogue

Originally I wanted to write a short story. In the Imperial Palace, once lived a blind concubine. His eyes were unable to see, alone and lonely he lived in a small yard. Every day, there was a person who would come to see him. However, he didn't enter the yard, also didn't talk with him, only watched him from faraway and then quietly without a noise he would leave.

Why did the situation become like this? What had actually happened to make these two people become like this? Please bear in mind, sometimes, there was also this kind of story.

This kind of feeling was extremely peaceful, extremely pure.

The Blind Concubine got all he wanted in the end. The Emperor could also stay by the Blind Concubine's side and watched over him forever. Truly a perfect and suitable ending.

There is a time, being sightless, is also a form of happiness.

