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The Princess Wei Yang - Chapter 01-22

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Forewords

The Princess Wei Yang

(锦绣未央)



Author: *Qin Jian* (秦简)

Genre: Ancient, Politics, Rebirth, HE

Translated by *solstar24*

Forewords:

Life is unpredictable. Her husband loved her stepsister, deposed her as Empress and even forced her son into death. In that Cold Palace, she was forced to drink poisonous wine. So in the next lifetime, she made a promise to never do good deeds and help others, to never step into the palace and to never become the Empress!

At the Prime Minister's estate, the mistress' daughter is reborn into a she-devil.

An evil stepmother? I will make sure you go to Hell!

A two-faced, hypocritical older stepsister? I will rip apart that beautiful façade!

A scheming younger stepsister? I will throw you into the grave!

You guys didn't let me live peacefully so you should also expect the same!

Initially wanted to stay away from disaster as far as possible; however, a man's heart is like a needle in the sea—impossible to search for, impossible to understand.

The man who once swore to abandon her yet became someone who can't live without her.

The enemy from the past lifetime suddenly confesses his feelings for her.

Even worse, she is bothered by a handsome man with a thick-skinned who doesn't know how to give up!

>>

Chapter 01

Chapter 01: The Deposed Empress

Da Li.

Under the roof of the Cold Palace, Li Wei Yang counted six fleas in her long hair. It's been years since she last bathed, causing her to feel as if there was a thick armor on her body. Catching fleas has become the only method to kill time.

12 years. She has been imprisoned inside the Cold Palace for 12 years. Wei Yang lifted her head up into the sky. Every time it rains, her legs would ache, becoming so painful that it made her want to go crazy.

She was Prime Minister Li Xiao Ran's biological daughter. Unfortunately, she was not born from the first wife but a mistress. Her mother was merely a maid of lowly class. Not to mention, she was born in February, coinciding with the saying that any female born in the month of February was a misfortune to the family. As a result, her father sent her to a distant relative to be raised in foster care. However, even the distant relative didn't want to raise a mere stepchild born from a lowly maid. They sent her off to a rural area for her to survive on her own. Her father was the Prime Minister and her family background was one of the most powerful and influential in Da Li yet she had to depend on herself to do house chores and even farm work.

She was abandoned and forgotten. If it wasn't for the fact her older stepsister, Li Zhang Le, refusing to marry that person then her father and Da Furen (*first wife*) would probably never spare her a second look . . .

Zhang Le, Wei Yang, their mere names set them worlds apart.

When she first returned to the Li's estate, she was filled with joy and happiness. She had naively believed her father had finally remembered her, only to have overheard her father say to her beautiful and elegant stepsister, Li Zhang Le: "Xian Hui, you can be at ease now. Wei Yang will take your place and marry Tuo Ba Zhen instead."

Older sister Li Zhang Le was also given the name Xian Hui. Her name was truly

beautiful, at least that was what Wei Yang thought at the time. Soon, this particular name would become her worst nightmare.

Eventually, she listened to her father's decision and married the Third Prince, Tuo Ba Zhen, instead of Zhang Le. She willingly and wholeheartedly helped Tuo Ba Zhen realize his ambitions, slowly watching as he went from Third Prince to become the Emperor. She had even given birth to his son, Yu Li. Once Tuo Ba Zhen became Emperor, he also made her Empress. All of this happened within 8 years.

Tuo Ba Zhen once said she had soft skin and was a first class beauty. But a first class beauty still could not be compared to a fairy with ethereal beauty. Just a glance and anyone could see the difference between them was wide and embarrassing.

What happened after? *After. . .*

Every time Li Wei Yang remembers that particular day, she would burst out laughing. Laughing at her young and naive self, laughing at the present her and the past her, at how different the two have become.

She could still remember that night clearly. The palace maids and everyone in Kun Ning Palace was punished immediately on scene, as if they were impatient to bring it all to a conclusion or to keep everything a hidden secret. The maids weren't even brought to the torture chamber but were punished right outside of her bedchamber.

The entrance to Kun Ning Palace was locked. All the ones to be punished had their mouths stuffed and muted. In a blink of an eye, Kun Ning Palace had turned into a bloody mess. Li Wei Yang was dragged in front of Emperor Tuo Ba Zhen.

In Tuo Ba Zhen's usual astute gaze, there was now a sharp, cold and ruthless look. "You bitch! She is your blood-related sister and yet you so cruelly tried to harm her."

Li Wei Yang was filled with anguish but still said, "Harm her? I have never harmed her!"

Mercilessly Tuo Ba Zhen hit her in the chest causing blood to spill out of Li Wei Yang's mouth. He looked at her with disdain. "Wretch! Zhang Le was suffering in

labor but I wasn't there. A maid went to look for you, pleading for your help, but why did you closed your doors and turned your head the other away? It's obvious you were trying to harm her! If I didn't come back in time, both mother and child would've died!"

Lifting her head, her eyes fell on Tuo Ba Zhen. He was just as handsome now as then, like he didn't belong in this world. The truth is, she has never understood this man in front of her. She herself didn't know who the man she loved was, what kind of person he was. One minute he could be gentle and sweet, but he could also be cold and ruthless. She felt like a laughingstock for being deluded in her one-sided affections for him, not realizing that he had never needed her.

Li Wei Yang laughed coldly. "Your Majesty is thinking of jiejie, but have you ever thought of Yu Li – our son? On the same day yours and jiejie's child is to be born, my Yu Li was severely ill and suffering on his deathbed! Is it wrong of me to call upon the Imperial Doctor? Zhang Le is human, but so am I! She has successfully given birth. Even the child is given the title of Crown Prince upon birth, but my Yu Li has died! You once promised me you would let Yu Li become the Crown Prince. Aren't you already the Emperor? Why are you changing your mind? Why!?"

His face was cold, looking at her with indifference. "I already gave you the title of Empress, but you still don't think that's enough! You're greedily eyeing the title of Crown Prince too!"

Li Wei Yang could only taste blood in her mouth. Her voice was cold and frosty like glaciers. "Empress? That's right, I am the Empress, but the royal decree to depose me is already sitting in front of you. You were merely waiting for Zhang Le to finish giving birth so that you could stamp your seal! Tuo Ba Zhen, what have I done wrong? I've been married to you for eight years. How have I treated you?" she asked as she pulled open her outer shirt to reveal a scary scar on her chest.

"In the 38th year of Xiandi, I shielded you from an assassination attempt and left a scar right here in the middle of my chest. In the 40th year of Xiandi, knowing that the Crown Prince had poisoned the wine, I drank it in your stead. In the 41st year of Xiandi, knowing Seventh Prince wanted to kill you, I traveled day

and night by horse for thousands of miles just so I could inform you! In the 42nd year of Xiandi, when you were aiding in the disaster relief and got infected, I alone took care of you for 48 days straight! When you became the Emperor, what did you promise me, do you even remember? You said as long as you are the Emperor, I will always be the Empress. But then right after, you became infatuated with Li Zhang Le. Not only did you let her son become the Crown Prince, but you also wanted to depose me! Tuo Ba Zhen, you truly did not disappoint me!”

Tuo Ba Zhen stared at her with an indifferent and apathetic expression. His apathy was so natural, as if he was born with that countenance. His expression made her heart feel as if it was being squeezed tightly, feeling as if a very small but very sharp needle had suddenly stabbed deep into her heart at the moment she least expected it. She took in a sharp breath of air. However, on her face remained a stubborn look but deep in her gaze was grief and loss.

“Zhang Le is the person I love. Even though my original intention was to depose you, I was still going to let you reside in the palace so that you don’t have to worry about food and shelter and live comfortably for the rest of your life.”

“Live comfortably for the rest of my life?” Something sharp poked a hole inside her chest. First the hole was small but slowly, little by little, the hole became bigger, until it felt like her heart had been completely crushed. Li Wei Yang was like an iceberg about to crumble and shatter into pieces. They were a married couple for eight years, experiencing the ups and downs together. At his most difficult time, she was the only one beside him but when he became the Emperor, he suddenly loved Zhang Le. He wanted to depose her but at the same time, said he didn’t want her to worry about food and shelter.

“Everything I’ve done was for you. Just to protect you, I didn’t even care about my own life but in the end all I’ve received is a saying to not worry about food and shelter? 8 years! We’ve been husband and wife for 8 years, but it can’t even be compared to Li Zhang Le’s beauty. A comfortable life? Who needs a comfortable life? All of the danger and suffering I endured is to achieve what I have today but you so easily handed it to some other woman! Yet you want me to be grateful towards you guys?”

Tuo Ba Zhen pounded his hands down on the table. The teapot fell to the ground. He frowned. "Shut up! What other woman?! Zhang Le is your sister!"

Li Wei Yang sneered. "Sister? She is the fairy sent from heaven, she is the noble young lady of the Li family, and what about me? I'm merely the mistress's daughter, a misfortune that my father wouldn't even look at, like the dirt on the ground! If she had really thought of me as her sister, how could she steal my husband from me? How could she steal the position of Crown Prince from my son?"

Tuo Ba Zhen softly scoffed. He lowered his gaze onto Li Wei Yang's pale face. His gaze was wicked and intimidating to the point it could make a person forget how to breathe. "Zhang Le is pure and kind-hearted. She wouldn't even kill an ant. You can't be compared to her! As for Yu Li, he has no respect or sense of filial piety. He dared to say disrespectful things towards Zhang Le. He has no rights to be the Crown Prince!"

Pure and kind-hearted? Since young, she was always the one helping others and doing the good deeds, but the person to benefit from it all was her sister. It's simply because she has the face of an Angel, beautiful enough to make others believe her heart was also a reflection of her appearance.

Li Wei Yang wanted to laugh at herself. His voice was like a sword, stabbing straight into her heart as blood oozed out. It felt like there were hot tears streaming out of her empty, dried up eyes.

Her eyes were filled with unspeakable despair. "That's right, I can't be compared to Zhang Le but Yu Li is innocent. He's a 4 year old child. There are many things he doesn't understand. He sees his mother hurting and crying, that's why he couldn't help but to say some resentful words towards Zhang Le, but you're so cold-hearted to lock him up for 3 days and 3 nights!"

Tuo Ba Zhen emotionlessly stared at her without saying a word.

Her heart broke even more. "If it weren't for that, his lungs wouldn't be infected. He wouldn't have to die at an age so young! He's your flesh and blood. All because of one word from you that he is too disrespectful and you treated him like that. Am I wrong? I called upon all the Imperial Doctors to treat him because I want to save my flesh and blood! You only think about Li Zhang Le. My

Yu Li was suffering from a high fever. He told me that he was hurting. Do you understand how painful it was for me? If I could, I would trade my life in exchange for his. That precious son of yours has you and Li Zhang Le, but Yu Li only has me! Why should I go see Li Zhang Le and take care of her? At that moment, my Yu Li was fighting between life and death. Right now I don't need anything. All I want is for Yu Li to live again! I hate Li Zhang Le, I hate her to death. I hate that I can't mince her into pieces!"

"You bitch!" Tuo Ba Zhen was furious. He was filled with disgust and disdain for this woman before him. "If you want to hate then hate me! She didn't want to enter the palace but it was me who forced her to enter the palace, wanting to make her the Empress. She's an innocent and kind-hearted person. How could she possibly have such an evil and scary little sister like you?" He walked quickly towards Li Wei Yang and evilly pulled on her hair. "I will definitely not forgive you! I want you to suffer for the rest of your life! Guards! Cut off this bitch's legs and throw her into the Cold Palace!"

Then Wei Yang saw some sort of yellow thing. The palace was dark and somber, but that yellow thing blinded everything else. It was even brighter than the candlelight, penetrating through the entire world. She knew right then that it was the Emperor's royal decree to depose the Empress.

The Eunuch announced the decree. Somewhere, there was a pair of eyes that looked like poisonous arrows wanting to shoot through her heart. Her soul was lost, she was empty. All thoughts disappeared inside her head except for two words: revenge and hatred. She could not hear a word; her devastated soul had long flown away to somewhere far, far away.

Tuo Ba Zhen, you are ruthless. Truly ruthless!

Holding her heart, she lay down on the ground but he didn't spare her a second look. He lifted his foot and kicked her mercilessly. This kick didn't just hurt her physically but had trampled on her dignity and spirit.

Li Wei Yang laughed hysterically. She had once said she loved Jiang Nan's landscape. One of these days, when everything has come to an end, she wanted to go to Jiang Nan to view its scenery, to drink good tea, to listen to the best folk songs and to travel the world. Tuo Ba Zhen said he would remember those words

for the rest of his life. And it's because he remembers, that's why he used this method to punish her. She said she wanted to travel the world, so he cut off her legs. She said she wanted to be Empress, so he deposed her and threw her into the Cold Palace. Tuo Ba Zhen, you are truly sinister, truly ruthless!

Under the Cold Palace's roof, Li Wei Yang slightly narrowed her eyes.

Afterwards, Tuo Ba Zhen made Li Zhang Le into Empress, made her son into Crown Prince. For the rest of their lives, they were loved and bathed in glory whereas Li Wei Yang had been forgotten and abandoned. Staying alive was merely to prolong the last breath. She had promised herself to live longer than Li Zhang Le. She must live longer than Li Zhang Le!

Right then, the doors to the Cold Palace opened. Li Wei Yang saw a faint ray of light through the crack in the door.

"Li Wei Yang, kneel and accept the decree!"

Kneel? Her legs were amputated, so how can she kneel?

Li Wei Yang didn't understand what the man was saying. His voice was hoarse yet sharp to the ears. She was dragged out into the hallway by someone.

"The Emperor has decreed: the deposed Empress Li has no virtues and does not reflect on her wrong-doings, instead cursing the new Empress day and night. She is granted the poisoned wine!"

"Consort Li, don't blame others. The Empress has been terrified and restless, losing sleep at night. The Emperor found a diviner and it was determined that your karma is too strong and opposes the Empress. You should hurry and go reincarnate!"

Poison wine. Of course it was going to be poison wine! Her life was spent as a good wife. She did everything for him. She was a good Empress. On the battlefield, she didn't care about her own health but personally went around and encouraged the soldiers' morale. When a natural disaster happened, she immediately donated silvers and gold to the citizens. Even if he got angry at her, she helped him point out and corrected his faults. She treated the palace maids and eunuchs with tolerance and kindness. But what happened to her now? When she was met with misfortune, not a single person has come forward to

help her.

Li Wei Yang laughed like a maniac. “Tuo Ba Zhen, Li Zhang Le, good for you guys! You guys treated me so well! In the next lifetime, I – Li Wei Yang – swear to never do people favours, to never step into the palace and to never become the Empress!”

The senior eunuch looked at the deposed Empress Li with pity and sighed deeply. “Drag her down.”

Miles away, Li Wei Yang’s voice could still be heard. Her voice was hysterical but also filled with painful suffering. That noise sounded like endless curses filling up the entire palace, instilling fear into people’s hearts. . . .

Chapter 02

Chapter 02: The Unwanted Daughter

The candlelight was very faint.

Li Wei Yang was lying on the bed when she suddenly woke up. She could clearly hear the conversation going on outside.

Outside the room, Mrs. Ma was speaking cautiously. “Mother, do you think we should go find a doctor for Third Miss? After all, she was sent by the Li’s. If she dies. . .”

After listening to her daughter-in-law’s words, Mrs. Liu’s face turned cold and callously replied, “The lass thinks she’s a noble lady, but from what I heard, she was born from a lowly maid who was in charge of washing feet. Not only that, she was born in February—an utter misfortune. The Li’s are a reputable family. They couldn’t kill her so they sent her off to their distant relatives in Ping Cheng. Furthermore, Lao Tai Tai and Li Furen became sick consecutively. Isn’t she a bad luck star to her family? That’s why they panicked and sent her off to us here in the village! In my opinion, not only is she a misfortune, she’s a lazy pig. Every time she’s given a small task, she would act as if it’s killing her. That stinking lass!”

Li Wei Yang startled at the conversation. She studied the environment. This room didn’t have much of anything. The most it had was a square table, four wooden chairs, a wardrobe and last but not least, the wooden bed she was currently lying on. *This place is*—Her mind was suddenly foggy. The outside conversation still went on loud and clear.

“When she was at the Li estate, she had maids and never had to do anything strenuous. Today she was a little careless and fell into the crack between the ice sheets, causing her to fall ill. It’s not exactly her fault. . .” Right now the weather was extremely cold yet Mrs. Liu had forced Wei Yang, a young girl, to go do the laundry at the frozen lake. Mrs. Ma didn’t have the heart to watch. Her voice became more worried and restless.

Mrs. Liu coldly scoffed. “Even for a stillborn, there will be room left for

affections but this 3rd Miss is totally useless. I gave her a small task but she can't do it as if I told her to do something impossible. What they say is true, who does she want to deceive. If I don't shove her, she won't move. Other people only take two steps but she has to take three steps. Watching her pretending to be ill over there makes me angry. Might as well leave her outside and let her freeze to death!" As those words were spoken, she looked intently at Mrs. Ma with a chilling expression. "Do you think I don't know? You pity that little wretch. Since you pity her then you go ahead and do the laundry for her!"

Mrs. Ma quickly said, "Mother, you're right. I won't say any more nonsense."

Mrs. Liu breathed heavily as she stood up then slammed the door.

What's happening? Aren't I already dead? How come I'm lying here? Li Wei Yang wanted to move but her whole body was drained of energy, as if there were no bones in her system. She carefully thought over everything. Right then, someone lifted the curtains and walked in. Soon, Li Wei Yang was sitting up in someone's arms. This person's shoulders were small and skinny with a soft chest and there was some sort of locust smell.

"Eat some congee. After sweating, the fever will get better."

A warm breath of air hit her face. Li Wei Yang thought she saw a ghost as she stared at the woman weirdly. If she remembered correctly, this village woman, who was about 20 years old, was Mrs. Ma—the oldest daughter-in-law of the farmer family she had lived with before. But how can this be? Clearly she was given the poison wine, but after a blink of an eye, she was seeing the familiar faces from 23 years ago. . .

At 16 years old, she married Tuo Ba Zhen. 8 years later, she became the Empress. Afterwards she was imprisoned in the Cold Palace for 12 years. When she passed away, she was already 36 years old. However, Mrs. Ma looked the way she was 23 years ago. This was completely unbelievable! Instinctively she looked at her hands. They were skinny, slender and porcelain white. This pair of hands didn't belong to a 36 years old woman but a pair of hands that belonged to a young maiden. As the thought crossed her mind, there was a flicker of horror in Li Wei Yang's eyes.

Mrs. Ma spoke with concern, "What is it? Do you still feel cold?" Her voice was

filled with warmth and one could tell that she was actually genuine. “We need to go find a doctor but my mother, she . . . sigh. . .”

Li Wei Yang looked at the bowl of congee in Mrs. Ma’s hands. She didn’t know what kind of rice was used to cook the congee but there was a strange smell coming from it. For some reason, her eyes began to moisten. If this was a dream, she hoped to never wake up from this dream because she has a feeling—a feeling that she was still alive.

Li Wei Yang was about to speak but suddenly, she saw another person lifting the curtains and quickly stepped inside.

Mrs. Ma was holding the bowl of congee, looked up and saw Mrs. Liu’s expression. Her whole body trembled.

“What are you doing?! Get up!”

Mrs. Ma startled and hurriedly let go of Li Wei Yang. She stood up and was about to put the bowl down on the table but because of her anxiousness, some congee was spilled. It burned her hand but she forced herself to endure the painful scalding and carefully set the bowl down on the table.

Witnessing how brazen her daughter-in-law was to secretly give Li Wei Yang food and even clumsily spilling some out, Mrs. Liu boiled with anger. She grabbed the bowl of congee on the table and threw it into Mrs. Ma’s face. There was the sound of the bowl shattering on the ground as Mrs. Liu pointed at Mrs. Ma. “You bitch, I already said you can’t give her food. Do my words go in one ear and out the other? If you don’t want to live in this house then scram! Don’t stay here and embarrass me!”

The pitiful Mrs. Ma was drenched by the bowl of congee. Her entire body was red from the scald. There were tears in her eyes but she didn’t dare to utter a single word. All she could do was hold tightly onto her shirttail as she gently wiped off the congee and proceeded to clean up the mess on the floor.

Mrs. Liu hadn’t changed one bit from her memories. She treated others meanly without any compassion. It didn’t matter if it was herself or Mrs. Ma, Mrs. Liu would treat them like slaves. Li Wei Yang stared intently at Mrs. Liu. She wanted to talk, but Mrs. Ma quickly winked at her, as if telling her to not say anything otherwise she would get even more punished.

Mrs. Ma was a kind daughter-in-law, but no matter what she did, this evil mother-in-law couldn't see it. She would spend the entire day looking for faults. When she saw Mrs. Ma defending Li Wei Yang, she immediately thought Mrs. Ma was trying to go against her, making her resentful towards both of them.

Li Wei Yang clenched her teeth and wordlessly stared at Mrs. Liu.

Instinctively Mrs. Liu glanced at Li Wei Yang. Mrs. Liu saw a frosty coldness in Wei Yang's gaze. Her heart jumped as she shouted, "Are you crazy to look at me like that?!"

Li Wei Yang didn't have time to ponder why she was reverted back to her 13 years old self when the thought took a turn. Underneath her chest, she felt a jade pendant. This jade pendant was given to her by her biological mother when she was still a baby.

Her father had sent her off to the Li's distant relative in foster care until she was 7 years old. In the beginning, they had given her maids and servants but eventually, they realized Prime Minister Li had no intentions of bringing her back to the Capital. Instead, under someone's persuasion, she was sent to the rurals and had to live with the farmer's family. Each month, 10 silver were given for the living expense.

Six months ago, for some reason, the living expense was no longer paid. Mrs. Liu had gone to their door and asked three times but the Li's relatives didn't care. For that reason, Mrs. Liu resented her further. Not only did she treat Wei Yang as a maid to slave around, Mrs. Liu was also abusive. She didn't let Wei Yang leave and would call people to hit her until she developed bruises all over her body.

Mrs. Liu looked at Li Wei Yang's appearance, furrowed her brows and yelled, "You little slut, what are you stupefied for!"

The jade pendant was the only thing her mother had left for her to remember by. She had risked her life to hide it, afraid to let Mrs. Liu set her eyes on it. *But today.* . . Li Wei Yang lifted her head to look at the older woman. There was a flicker of coldness in her gaze, but in a blink of an eye, a brownnosing smile had appeared. "Aunt Zhou [1], more or less you have taken care of me. I don't have anything to show my gratitude except for this jade pendant, which I want to give

to you as a token of appreciation.”

If she remembered correctly, the Pisces jade pendant would be discovered and stolen by Mrs. Liu two weeks later. Back then, she had wanted to get it back only to suffer under cruel physical abuse. Later on when she became Third Prince’s wife she had sent people to go look for it. However, the village had experienced an epidemic and a majority of the villagers had died, including Mrs. Liu. As a result, the jade pendant could not be found.

Mrs. Liu couldn’t believe the jade pendant she had always desired but was secretly hidden somewhere was now being offered to her by Li Wei Yang herself. She became happier but scoffed coldly and snatched the jade pendant from Wei Yang’s hands. She said, “This is not enough!”

Mrs. Ma was shocked, looking at Li Wei Yang like she didn’t know this young girl. From what she knew, Wei Yang had always carefully hidden away the jade pendant and would never allow anyone else to take it away. How could she suddenly give it to Mrs. Liu . . .

Mrs. Liu held onto the jade pendant, her mood was better. She made a noise and sneered, “Forget it, you can stay on the bed for today but tomorrow, you have to wake up and work!”

Li Wei Yang’s smile was gentle and obedient. “Of course Aunt Liu. Tomorrow I will definitely work!”

Mrs. Liu was surprised with Li Wei Yang’s obedience. She was about to say something but right then, a tall man entered. When he saw the scene inside, it was as if he was used to it. With an angry face, he glanced over Mrs. Ma, looking somewhat scornful and forcefully laughed. “Mother, why are you so angry? Let’s go. I bought a block of silk today at the market that looks exactly like Li Furen when worn. Come with me and take a look!” he urged and dragged Mrs. Liu outside.

As Mrs. Liu was being dragged, she turned around and said to Mrs. Ma, “If I catch you giving her food again, I will skin you!”

After Mrs. Liu disappeared, Mrs. Ma held her face and burst out into tears.

Li Wei Yang looked at Mrs. Ma and slightly shook her head. One shouldn’t be

weak and a pushover. There were many ways to get back the jade pendant. To deal with a swindler like Mrs. Liu, one would have to use an even more wicked method!

Footnotes.

[1] It's not a typo. Zhou is her husband's last name. Liu is her maiden last name. I suppose Wei Yang used it interchangeably as Aunt Zhou/Liu.

Chapter 03

Chapter 03: A Simple Meal

Right now it was February 12 in the 31st year of the Yong Ming Empire. In other words, she had traveled back to 23 years ago. This year she was 13 years old.

For the entire night, Li Wei Yang was tortured by the memories of her “previous lifetime”. She hated that she couldn’t cry out loud because the chamber was too small. A tiny noise could be heard by someone else so she had to hold in the powerful sobs. She was terrified that if she closed her eyes, she would revert back to the crippled person who was abandoned in the Cold Palace. She was afraid to hear the Li’s name. Except when she thought of the two people she hated most in this world was living comfortably at the the Capital, she was angry she couldn’t use a sword to slash them a million times over. . .

After crying until the tears have dried up and all the turbulent emotions have been expressed, she gradually calmed down. Li Wei Yang lifted her head and looked through the window at the night’s sky. Her eyes turned dark and bleak.

When she was alive before, she had believed what matters was to do your part right and know where you stand, to put your best efforts into everything and you will naturally receive good karma in the end. But who would’ve thought that those things were unrealistic and illusive. She had traded her compassion and kindness in return for a terrifying betrayal and heartache.

Her father was heartless, her husband was bitter and resentful, and even that person whom she thought of as her good sister. . .Even though she couldn’t be compared to Li Zhang Le’s beauty, but she had been faithful and loyal to Tuo Ba Zhen. For him, she had ignored the line between life and death. Had it not been for her, Tuo Ba Zhen would have died long ago. He wouldn’t have the chance to become the Emperor. Yet she has become the trash that has been discarded into the Cold Palace.

Heaven has granted her a chance for rebirth. Li Wei Yang inhaled deeply, her gaze was determined. There were no reasons to be mercy towards those people.

Someday, this debt they owe her, she will ask for it back from each and every single one of them!

The night began to disappear. A day had passed by. In a blink of an eye, a new day had begun.

Mrs. Ma was hesitant.

She didn't know if she should wake up Li Wei Yang. The rooster was about to make the morning call, but if Li Wei Yang continued to sleep, she was going to get a scolding from Mrs. Liu. Mrs. Ma contemplated then reluctantly stepped into the bedchamber, but she soon discovered that it was empty. There was not a single soul. She panicked.

Where was Wei Yang? Looking at how clean the room was, she was surprised.

In the kitchen, Li Wei Yang paced back and forth. She had finished warming up the soy milk, poured steaming congee into everyone's bowl, carefully prepared the pickled cucumber on a separate plate and finally, placed the pot of congee onto the table.

Upon seeing Mrs. Ma's stunned expression as she entered the kitchen, Wei Yang smiled. "Lian Zi jie, I have already prepared the meal."

Mrs. Ma's maiden name was Lian Zi, but Wei Yang had never addressed her name with such affection before. Until now, she had always been scared and nervous, like she was about to burst out crying anytime.

Of course Li Wei Yang knew what the other person was thinking. Before she was 7 years old, there had been maids and servants to help with her daily routine. Then suddenly she was sent off to the countryside to survive on her own, naturally it would be hard to endure. Especially in the latter half of the year when Mrs. Liu couldn't get her hands on the living expense, she had become more abusive and mean. Consequently Wei Yang became even more terrified and nervous, like a deer caught in headlights.

But right now, when she has already experienced Tuo Ba Zhen's ruthlessness and cruelty, experienced the agony of her broken legs and the 12 years of imprisonment in the Cold Palace, what was Mrs. Liu? She was an insignificant obstacle. No, she couldn't even be considered an obstacle. She was simply a

small rock on the road. What was there to be afraid of?

Thinking of this, Li Wei Yang smiled and said, "Aunt Zhou and them are almost here. Lian Zi jie should hurry up with the preparations."

In total this family had five members. The head of the family was Zhou Qing. He was the groundskeeper for the Li De house and was usually not at home. Then there was his wife, Mrs. Liu, his eldest son, Zhou Jiang and his wife, Mrs. Ma, and last but not there was the youngest daughter, Zhou Lan Xiu.

Mrs. Ma stared at Wei Yang in confusion, but Wei Yang merely grinned and stepped outside.

At the Zhou's shabby house, the large gates slowly opened as a whimsical young girl about 12-13 years old carefully brought out a wooden tub. The wooden tub was filled with clothes. The girl was dressed in blue but it had turned black after being repeatedly washed. On the back, there was a section that had been patched up again. Her hair was tied up into two small buns. She was dressed in rags but she appeared serene. She had a delicate, ovular shaped face. Her skin was especially white. Her eyebrows were long with a pair of phoenix eyes that shone clearly and were filled with spirit, a structured nose and small mouth. Her black hair illuminated her figure, turning the worn-out clothing into a lovely sight. Compare to other girls in the village, she was no doubt prettier. As a result, when she walked out, a lot of eyes had strayed towards her.

Li Wei Yang wore cheap clothing and had no make-up on, but her face remained calm and composed, as if she didn't notice the staring. With the wooden tub in hand, she made her way towards the riverside.

Then again what was the use of beauty? Before she had thought her appearance was quite exceptional too, but when she returned to the Capital and saw Li Zhang Le, she understood the meaning of beautiful like a fairy. Compared to Zhang Le, her beauty was considered common.

Li Wei Yang stopped by the riverside and squatted down. With power, she used the washing bats to beat the dirt out of the laundry. The washing bats pounded on the clothes and created the *pow, pow* sound. Water splashed up and sprayed onto her clothing and face, but she was unaffected and focused on the task. There was no hint of resentment.

The other girls, who were also laundering, noticed her. They nudged at each other and glanced at her through the corner of their eyes. They exchanged smirks and whispers, gossiping like a bunch of sparrows.

“Look, look, the precious xiaojie (*young miss*) is here doing the laundry.”

“How pitiful! Look at what she’s wearing. It can’t even be compared to us.”

“Is she really the Prime Minister’s daughter? How come not a single courtier has shown up to visit her?”

“Aiya, don’t you know? She was born in February and was said to be a curse towards her father! They were in a hurry to kick her out. In other words, they have no intentions of seeing her again!”

“Oh, it’s better to be a village maiden like us than the Prime Minister’s unwanted daughter! If it was me, I would have been angered to death!”

“Exactly! Even if it was given to me, I wouldn’t want it!”

Each and every word flew into Li Wei Yang’s ears. She remembered when she was really young she had carried the hopes and dreams of one day returning to the Capital to live a promising life. However, every time she imagined it, her self-pitying would intensified along with other griefs and sorrows. . .

The corner of her lips curved into a smile. Before the rebirth, it was because of these people’s words that had made her shed thousands of tears. But at this moment, she stood up and walked towards the upland (*source of where river begins*) instead.

This fabric was actually what Mrs. Liu uses as her socks. The long fabric was stinky. Li Wei Yang held onto the long fabric and beat it down with the bat. The dirty and stinky water flew down stream to where the other girls were. They were still busy gossiping so they hadn’t noticed.

Once she finished laundering the clothes, Li Wei Yang grabbed the tub and stood up.

Everybody looked at her strangely, feeling as if something about her was different. Despite what they said, she continued to maintain a calm and composed appearance, as if – as if an adult was watching a bunch of ignorant

children fooling around. . .

When she returned to the Zhou's house, the sky was still bright. Mrs. Liu had just finished her meal and was sitting on the porch flossing her teeth with a toothpick. Seeing Wei Yang, her eyebrows furrowed. She wanted to say something but for some reason, she swallowed it down, got up and went back inside.

Mrs. Ma came over and handed Wei Yang a tortilla bread. In a small voice, she said, "Father-in-law has returned."

Zhou Qing? Li Wei Yang raised her brows, staring at Mrs. Ma.

Mrs. Ma stiffened up. Li Wei Yang, this girl was still young but her eyes. . . There was something there that didn't match her age. It was mature and stony.

No wonder Mrs. Liu hadn't yelled or did some scolding today. . . In a flash, there was a bright smile on Li Wei Yang's face, like the flowers blooming in spring. She said thanks to Mrs. Ma, lowered her head and ate the tortilla bread. Her throat was dried up to the point it was hurting but she was happily devouring it.

That's because the golden opportunity to punish Mrs. Liu has finally arrived.

Note: It seems this novel has garnered a lot of interest so I will make this the main translation project. Just a heads up that this is my first period novel translation and it's a translation of a translation (from a Vietnamese source), so there is the risk of lost in translation. However I will try my best so forgive me if there's mistakes/errors and feel free to (kindly) correct me haha ^-^

I noticed a few comments mentioning this was similar to Mei Gong Qing. Personally, since I've read both novels, I don't think it's anything like Mei Gong Qing except for the rebirth premise. Mei Gong Qing had more romantic interactions between the leads compared to this novel. (Not to say there isn't any swoon-worthy moments just. . .less?) This novel involves more battle of the wits/palace politics and exacting revenge in the cruelest manner. Um well you'll know what I mean later. Anyway I like both novels! I couldn't help put in my two cents after seeing the mention though hehe.

Chapter 04

Chapter 04: Punishing Mrs. Liu

Zhou Qing was a man who had the ability to see the broad picture compared to Mrs. Liu. He had never treated Li Wei Yang too wickedly because his principle was to leave himself a route to retreat for all types of situation. Consequently every time he returned home, Li Wei Yang would have several days of peace and tranquility.

Having finished cooking, she extinguished the fire. Li Wei Yang opened her eyes, which was blurry from the steam. After a while of contemplation, she gradually stood up. She was about to massage her tired limbs when a voice flew in from the doorway.

“You damn lass, you’re being lazy again. Hurry up and clean up the kitchen! I’ll come back later to see if you’re still being lazy!”

Li Wei Yang slowly glanced over the young girl, standing at the door, with her arms on her hips, glaring at her. This young girl was only older than her by a year but was taller than her by a head. Her face was pretty but the sour attitude had ruined her natural beauty.

Zhou Lan Xiu was filled with jealousy as she stared fixedly at Li Wei Yang’s delicate features. She scoffed inwardly then turned around and left. She instructed over her shoulders, “Remember to thoroughly clean the pots. Also, the floor should be cleared of puddles. The miscellaneous items on the stove should also be organized!”

Li Wei Yang stood in the tiny kitchen, her eyes on the girl’s back then promptly grinned. Half an hour later, she finally finished cleaning the pots, hunched her back and began to clean the floor.

At this moment, Zhou Lan Xiu poked her head through the window and said, “It’s not going to be clean if you do it like that. You have to kneel down and clean! How can you not know! Oh and the water tank is empty. After you finish, fill up the water tank. Did you hear me?”

Li Wei Yang wiped off the perspiration on her forehead and chin. Then she continued on with the chores.

It had always been like this. As the daughter of a farmer family, Zhou Lan Xiu had to work as well but she would constantly think of ways to dump all the chores onto Wei Yang. Afterwards she would claim all the credits for the housework. She would go out and proclaim how busy and tired she was too, claiming that she had to take care of the spoiled xiaojie who didn't know how to do anything. Not only that, every day when it was time for Wei Yang to eat, all that was left were two cold buns and a little bit of soup. Before, Li Wei Yang would cry while she worked but now, she didn't care about anything. Despite how exhausting the chores were, she could still endure it.

At night, Zhou Qing didn't stay home for dinner. He was invited for dinner by the village head. A groundskeeper like him was plenty a dime at the Li's in Ping Cheng but in this small village, he was a highly regarded person.

Li Wei Yang knew that Zhou Qing had an amazing tolerance for alcohol. Each time he would drink until midnight before coming home, thus giving her a very good opportunity. She calculated the time, waiting until it was peaceful at midnight. She silently picked up the red fabric that she had purposely kept hidden when she was doing the laundry earlier in the day. Standing up, she opened the doors and walked up next to the fence. She hooked the red fabric onto the fence and stared at it for a long time, softly chuckled and quickly returned to her room.

In the middle of the night, there was the abrupt sound of the front gates being opened. Li Wei Yang strained her ears and listened attentively. There was the sound of commotion and then she pretended she didn't hear anything.

Right at this moment, a drunken Zhou Qing returned and saw in his chamber was the tall and broad silhouette of a man. He turned grim and immediately awakened from the drunken stupor. He went to retrieve a knife and with a *bam*, kicked open the door.

This simple sound had startled everyone inside the house, except for Li Wei Yang who still had both eyes closed but was silently listening to the happenings outside.

Abruptly there was a smacking sound, as if someone had just been harshly slapped in the face. Following it was Zhou Qing's yelling.

"You slut, you waited until I'm not home to call over another man! You have no shame! What? You don't know? I clearly saw a male figure running out from your room! You dare to be so shameless and say you don't know anything. If one day someone kills me, I'm afraid you're going to say you don't know either."

Once the words were spoken, it was followed by two more slaps. It was obvious the person being chastised was Mrs. Liu.

Not waiting for a defense from Mrs. Liu, Zhou Qing shouted again, "Quickly kneel down! I want you to clearly explain who that man was! If you stay silent, tonight will be your funeral!"

Then there was the sound of Mrs. Liu sobbing and pleading. "I'm innocent! How can I do something so humiliating?"

Inside the room, Zhou Qing spit onto Mrs. Liu's face and said, "Innocent? Who is trying to implicate you? There's no one here who resents you to implicate you!" He began beating her again.

Mrs. Liu wasn't going to give up. She held onto Zhou Qing's sleeves and fought back.

Zhou Qing continued to berate, becoming even more infuriated. With one hand, he pulled Mrs. Liu's hair and dragged her across the floor, hitting and admonishing simultaneously. "You have sullied the Zhou's honour!"

In fact, Mrs. Liu did have a lover but they only met up when her husband and son were not home. Hooking the red fabric onto the fence was their secret code. Tonight she didn't hang up the red fabric but for some reason, her lover had come by. She was in the middle of opening the backdoor to let her lover out but unexpectedly, her husband had returned.

Right now her chest felt like it was being punctured by a million arrows and there was no way to avoid it as Zhou Qing continued to beat her. She mustered up all the strength to escape.

Zhou Qing roared, "You slut, come back here!"

He chased after her into the courtyard and managed to grab a hold of her hair. Mrs. Liu moaned and fell to the ground.

Zhou Qing was about to hit her again but Zhou Jiang ran out and said, "Father, father! Stop it, stop it! Mother won't do something like that! Let's go back into the room and talk it out! Let's talk it out!"

Mrs. Liu heard it and instantly understood her son's meaning. She burst out into sobs again, wanting to create an even bigger uproar so that Zhou Qing would have to think twice. "You came home drunk and were seeing things! And now you want to wrongfully accuse me!"

Zhou Qing laughed coldly. "Wrongfully accuse you? As if! Tonight I drank half a liter of wine. It's not enough to intoxicate me to the point I can't differentiate between a man and a woman! I can't believe you're already this old and can still do something like that. These past few years when I'm not home, who knows how many times your lover has visited! Why are you still pretending to be prim-and-proper in front of me?"

"Fine, you don't believe me then I'm going to kill myself! Even if I die, it's because you Zhous forced me to!" Mrs. Liu was a contemptuous woman. She jumped up with intentions of banging her head against the wall.

However, Zhou Qing had quick reflex and grabbed both of her arms. "You dare to threaten me with suicide?" He threw her onto the ground and drove his foot into her chest. The more he thought about it, the angrier he became. He turned around, grabbed the door latch, and proceeded to repeatedly beat up Mrs. Liu.

Mrs. Liu's cries were like the sound of slaughtered pigs, echoing into the distance.

Li Wei Yang shifted her body, the corner of her lips slightly curved upwards. This is what they call the evil we bring upon ourselves are the hardest to bear.

Upon hearing the upheaval, the neighbours opened their gates and stepped out.

Mrs. Ma and Zhou Lan Xiu, who were in their respective rooms, had long heard it but Mrs. Ma was the daughter-in-law and thus, did not dare to intervene in her in-laws' affairs. Zhou Lan Xiu had wanted to help her mother, but when she

saw how murderous her father looked through the window, she couldn't move an inch.

Zhou Jiang looked at the surrounding and quickly interrupted Zhou Qing. In a loud voice, he said, "Father, you've drunk too much. It's already very late, let's not cause a commotion and wake up our neighbours." Saying so, he walked forward and snatched the door latch and pulled Zhou Qing to the side. He whispered, "Father, let's slowly talk it out. Even if you want to use your fists, we should still go inside. It's awkward to let the neighbours see."

Zhou Qing glared at Mrs. Liu. He had beaten her up to the point she was gasping for breath. Nonetheless his anger was still not appeased as he brutally kicked Zhou Jiang. "I'm not home and yet you can't guard the house either! How humiliating and shameful! Bring her in!"

Zhou Qing swallowed down his anger and supported Mrs. Liu, who was beaten to the point of trauma. Mrs. Liu was a haughty woman. Despite being beaten nearly to unconsciousness, she kept on insisting her innocence. She didn't stop crying either.

Moments later, Zhou Qing's berating could be heard. "Shut up! It's late, why are you wailing like it's someone's funeral!"

Instantly the world was peaceful.

Hearing this sentence, Li Wei Yang couldn't hold it in anymore and guffawed.

Chapter 05

Chapter 05: The Pigs Have Escaped

Mrs. Liu had to stay in bed for seven days. During these seven days, Zhou Lan Xiu continued to berate her with words but nobody laid a finger on Li Wei Yang. As a result, these seven days passed by with ease. Coupled with Mrs. Ma's help, she was able to eat until her stomach was bloated.

Seeing that Li Wei Yang had finished with the laundry, Zhou Lan Xiu walked over and handed her a bucket filled with pig's food. "Go feed the pigs!"

In the rural villages, feeding the pigs was considered an important responsibility. Normally Mrs. Liu wouldn't let others perform this task, instead assigning it to Zhou Lan Xiu. Since Mrs. Liu wasn't present at the moment, Zhou Lan Xiu immediately dumped the responsibility onto Wei Yang.

Li Wei Yang smiled happily and said, "Yes, Lan Xiu jiejie!"

With her delighted, smiling expression, Li Wei Yang received the bucket filled with pig's food and carried it towards the pigsty.

The Zhous raised a total of eight pigs. With a grin, Li Wei Yang looked at the bunch of pigs. She pondered then scooped a bit of the feed and dumped it into the food bin. Instantly the pigs rushed over towards the food and fought each other for it. Li Wei Yang watched as they shoved and pushed each other, each wanting to have a bite, and immediately came up with an interesting idea. She surveyed the surrounding, set the food bucket on the pigsty, opened the gates and freed the pigs. The eight pigs that have been imprisoned in the small pigpen for so long suddenly had their freedom as they rushed out at the speed of light.

Li Wei Yang stepped to the side to avoid the stampede. Upon seeing all of the pigs have escaped, she slightly smirked. Afterwards, she picked up the bucket filled with pig's food and silently exited the house from the back gates. She rounded the house towards the water well that the villagers used the most and dumped the entire bucket of pig's food into it. Watching the water gently splashed up and about, Li Wei Yang gently smiled.

A few people passed by but Wei Yang didn't talk to them. They looked at her strangely, pondered for a bit then left. Li Wei Yang briefly looked at the daylight. She decided to sit down on the ground, crossed her legs and stared at the entrance of the village in the distance.

After waiting for about half an hour, she saw Wang xiansheng [1] and the village head slowly walking towards her. She was happy.

If anyone wanted to return to the village, they would have to pass by this water well. Initially she wanted to wait for the village head to pass by, but unexpectedly there was also Wang xiansheng. This Wang xiansheng was the village's only scholar. Despite having failed many times at the exams, he was nevertheless the only one in the village who was literate and read books. Thus, the person who liked to reason the most, moderate other people's affairs, demonstrate justice and build himself a good reputation was none other than this very Wang xiansheng.

Li Wei Yang immediately stood up. As she roughly wiped her eyes, she was also looking at the well with a nervous, terrified countenance.

The village head passed by and looked at Li Wei Yang with suspicions. "Li guniang [2], what are you doing here?"

The village head was merely asking out of convenience but suddenly, Li Wei Yang lifted her head, revealing her worries and sadness. She said, "Lan Xiu jiejie told me to feed the pigs. I was careless and clumsy and accidentally poured the pig's feed into the well. What should I do, what should I do. . .Tonight I'm going to be beaten to death!"

The village head was horrified. "What? What did you do?"

Li Wei Yang displayed a confused and terrified expression. Then she promptly burst into tears. When outsiders saw, they would be sympathetic and conflicted. "What should I do, what should I do! I'm definitely going to be beaten to death. I'm going to be beaten to death! I don't dare to go back, so I might as well just jump into this well!" With that said, she climbed onto the well, as if she was actually going to jump down.

The village head panicked, thinking that if someone really committed suicide in this well then all the other villagers would no longer be able to drink from it. He

rushed over and held tightly onto her. “A million times, please don’t do it! Let’s carefully talk it out!”

Wang xiansheng observed for a long while. He stroked his beard and asked, “How can there be something like this? From what I heard, you stay at their house but they are given living expenses every month. How could they force you to feed the pigs?”

Li Wei Yang used her sleeves to wipe her face, looking very sorry. “Before my family sent 10 silvers every month for the past five years but now they have stopped. . .”

“What?! 10 silvers every month?!” Wang xiansheng jumped from shock. He taught for the village but each year, not a single student could donate 2 silvers for renovation! It was really unfair! He breathed heavily and looked at Li Wei Yang, thinking the Zhous were too greedy. 10 silvers for the past five years, which meant these past five years they had gotten 600 silvers. How much did it cost to raise a small girl? Even if they had to raise her for the rest of her life, it still wouldn’t cost 600 silvers! And yet, they treated her like a servant girl for them to order around as they please. How unreasonable! He glowered, filled with outrage for the injustice. “Let’s go! We need a clear explanation from the Zhous!”

The village head also thought the Zhous were out of line. Seeing the village’s highly regarded and educated scholar storming up front, he quickly chased after but didn’t forget about Li Wei Yang as he craned his neck and said, “Let’s go! Don’t cry!”

Li Wei Yang wiped away the fake tears and hurried after them.

Right at this moment, she heard a strange, sarcastic laughter. She stopped and craned her neck but couldn’t see a single person. Perhaps she had misheard? Li Wei Yang furrowed her eyebrows. She could hear the village head up front urging her to follow. Once again, she looked around her. Confirming that there was no one else, she started walking again.

She was probably hearing things.

The moment he stepped through the gates, Wang xiansheng yelled loudly, “Zhou Qing! Come out here quick! How could you guys let a lady in the Capital

feed the pigs? She's not a servant for you to slave around!"

Zhou Qing rushed out of his room. Witnessing this scene, he became stupefied.

The village head said, "That's right. She stayed at your house but had given so many silvers. You guys shouldn't take the money and bully her, forcing her to do strenuous chores!"

Right then, Mrs. Ma and Lan Xiu stepped out, staring at Li Wei Yang with shock.

Li Wei Yang said pitifully, "Village head uncle, it was me who wanted to help Lan Xiu jiejie. Don't blame her. She didn't force me to do it! It's my fault. Initially I thought the bucket was too dirty and shouldn't let the pigs eat dirty food, that's why I went to clean it. In the end, I was careless and dropped all of the pig's food into the well. It's my fault! I'm so clumsy that I can't even complete such a simple task!"

The village head glanced at Zhou Qing and said, "You are so. . . you suddenly told her to feed the pigs but she's a lady from the Capital, she wouldn't know how to do those things! Not to mention, she lives at your house but already gave you the money. Even though they have stopped sending you the money, the amount you have accepted over the years is more than enough to raise her for another 80 years! You shouldn't treat her like a servant girl!"

To avoid people gossiping and tarnishing the Zhou's honour, Mrs. Liu would usually berate and abuse people behind closed doors. As a result, Zhou Qing would turn his head the other way. Unfortunately, the village head and the village's only scholar were both here at the moment, causing the neighbours to look over.

It was a blow to Zhou Qing's dignity. He spun around and cruelly kicked Zhou Lan Xiu. "You lazy, I told you to feed the pigs. How would she know how to feed the pigs!"

Li Wei Yang lowered her head, looking genuinely apologetic. In other people's eyes, she looked even more pitiful. Despite how much the villagers liked to gossip and be envious of Li Wei Yang's beauty, they were still very simple-minded. In their opinion, the Zhous had received so much money from the Li's then they should also treat their daughter kindly. How could they bully her instead?

Being pointed at by his close neighbours, Zhou Qing couldn't control his temper. He meanly slapped Zhou Lan Xiu. "It's all because of you causing me problems!"

Li Wei Young thought to herself: *This is just the beginning.*

True enough, shortly after, they heard Zhou Jiang racing forward with a pale face. Horror-stricken, he exclaimed, "Father! The pigs! The pigs have all escaped!"

Footnotes.

[1] Xiansheng (先生) – Teacher/Professor/Sir

[2] Guniang (姑娘) – Miss, way to address a young maiden

Chapter 06

Chapter 06: Old Friends Reuniting

Thanks to the escaped pigs incident, Li Wei Yang became the focus of the village. Zhou Qing and Mrs. Liu no longer dared to slave her around but allowing her to stay home all day was also irritating. They agreed to let her work at the teahouse not far from from the village.

The teahouse was managed by Zhou Jiang and Mrs. Ma, selling simple teas and tortilla bread for travelers passing by the village. It was a convenient way to make money. Mrs. Ma felt sorry for Li Wei Yang who was just a young girl and yet had to endure so much suffering. So she assigned Wei Yang the easy task of boiling the water for the teas and didn't force her to do anything else exhausting.

Wei Yang was adding wood to the fire when Mrs. Ma hurriedly rushed in. She saw Wei Yang busy but urged nonetheless, "Wei Yang, hurry up a bit! We need a little bit more hot water. Also bring out 10 tortilla bread. We have a special guest at the teahouse."

Li Wei Yang did as she was told. She walked towards the door but felt confused. There were plenty of travelers and guests from the South and North, but there had never been anyone who was considered a 'special guest'. The special guest Mrs. Ma mentioned, what kind of person was it? She slowly walked up to the door and quietly observed the front of the house.

Standing under the cover was a bunch of bodyguards dressed in blue. It was hard to see the person sitting in the middle of the crowd. In the middle of twenty normal horses was a rare white horse with a silver and red-striped saddle, creating an overwhelming atmosphere.

Mrs. Ma repeated her urgings. "Wei Yang! Hurry! Don't let the guests wait too long."

For some reason, there was an ominous feeling inside of Li Wei Yang, as if the moment she stepped outside something bad was going to happen. Her feet couldn't move, staying motionlessly in one spot.

“Wei Yang? Why aren’t you coming out?” Zhou Jiang was impatient then quickly laughed as he apologized to the guest. “That girl’s a little dense and slow. I will carefully discipline her later.”

Then there was a voice that sounded like one of the bodyguards. “No problem, just hurry and bring over the tea. My master is in a hurry.”

Looking at the situation, there was no way to retreat. Li Wei Yang contemplated and decided she should still go out. She took half a step but abruptly froze after glancing over the person sitting in the middle. In a flash, everyone’s eyes were on Li Wei Yang. Even that young man lifted his head and briefly looked at her.

He sat in the middle of everyone. He had a pair of eyes that shone brightly like the moon but there was also an aloofness in it. Those eyes were bright enough to the point it made others find it difficult to open their own eyes. From afar, one could see a coldness that separated him from the rest of the world. His white attire was embroidered with a downwards pattern that was carefully and expertly quilted. His gaze was steadfast like the stream but also frosty like the ice. Those pair of eyes flickered over Li Wei Yang.

Li Wei Yang shuddered. She quickly lowered her head after the brief glance. She held the tray up to her eyebrows and lowered her head as much as possible, covering up her face so that person wouldn’t be able to see her. She took a few more steps and handed the food over to Mrs. Ma. Then she covered her face, pretending to be afraid of strangers. She hurriedly returned to the small storage space in the back of the house. It was only then did she breathe a sigh of relief.

The middle-aged man sitting beside Tuo Ba Yu said to him, “Your Highness, it’s about to get dark. Should we go look for somewhere to stay for the night?”

Tuo Ba Yu didn’t look at him. His frosty gaze was fixed on the place where Li Wei Yang had disappeared to. There was a hint of humor in his eyes. This girl, it was the same girl he had seen that day. . .

The girl was about 12-13 years old and adorned a worn-out white attire that had been patched up in some places. Perhaps she had been fanning the stove fire because her face was stained by some black marks. Tuo Ba Yu noticed Li Wei Yang’s hands were fair but also very skinny, barely any meat. Her black hair was

long and messy, which was haphazardly tied up on top of her head. Despite her intentions to hide her face, her big black eyes still shine with a strange, inexplicable feeling. That petite figure provoked a sense of protection, making one want to protect her, to take care of her.

Shaking his head, Tuo Ba Yu thought he was being weird. He couldn't believe he would harbor such a ridiculous, unrealistic thought. Remembering how she had deceived the others previously, amusement surfaced in Tuo Ba Yu's eyes.

This girl was very interesting!

As he replayed the scene in his head, he casually said, "No, we will speed up and rest at the small town up ahead. We have to set out early tomorrow and return to the Capital on time."

Zhan Shuo quickly agreed. He didn't have the guts to say otherwise. He knew Seventh Prince's personality too well. When he tells you to do something then that means he has already made up his mind, despite using a negotiable tone of voice.

Very quickly, the crowd had finished their teas, got up on their horses, went past the village but didn't stop as they raced forward, heading towards the North.

Li Wei Yang watched the dust created by the horse's hooves. There was a ghost of a smile on her mouth. Who knew that the first familiar face she would come across again after the rebirth would be him—Tuo Ba Yu! Seventh Prince!

Tuo Ba Yu was Tuo Ba Zhen's archenemy. They had fought and competed countless number of times but a victor could still not be named. Li Wei Yang remembered that person also had a pair of cold, emotionless eyes. The corner of her mouth slowly lifted up. Right now, Seventh Prince should still be schooling outside but he had suddenly returned to the Capital. A storm must be happening in the Capital.

She lowered her head and stared at the calluses on her hands. Reuniting with familiar faces, they stood in the light while she hid in the dark. This feeling was indeed fascinating.

The sun eventually set, replaced by a crescent-shaped moon, bringing along

with it thousands of stars that lit up the entire evening sky. They arrogantly shone their lights down onto the world. The humid air was appeased by the presence of the moon, causing the temperature to become cooler and easing the people.

Li Wei Yang walked behind Zhou Jiang and Mrs. Ma as they headed back to the Zhou's house.

An excited Mrs. Liu dashed forward and held onto Li Wei Yang. She was brimming with happiness. "Xiaojie, there's good news for you!"

Both Zhou Jiang and Mrs. Ma were stupefied in their spot. They didn't understand what was going on as they stared at Mrs. Liu. They wondered if she had taken the wrong medicine because she was suddenly so nice towards Li Wei Yang.

Li Wei Yang stared at Mrs. Ma's glowing face. Her eyebrows furrowed then unfurrowed. Then she pretended to be startled. "Aunt Zhou, what's wrong's with you?"

Mrs. Liu pretended not to notice the weird expression on Wei Yang and quickly replied, "Li jia [1]! Li jia sent their people!"

Her behaviour was full of enthusiasm as Li Wei Yang thought of a possibility. "Li House in Ping Cheng?"

"That's right, that's right! Li da laoye [2] sent Lin Mama [3] to visit you!" Mrs. Liu was beaming. It wasn't only Lin Mama but also 100 silvers as an expression of gratitude.

Li Wei Yang thought it was strange. According to the previous lifetime, she would have to wait for another year before Prime Minister Li would remember someone like her and send people to pick her up. Only then would the Li House in Ping Cheng quickly send someone to this village to pick her up and move her back to the estate in Ping Cheng. Afterwards they would announce to everyone that she had recovered from her illness. Following that they would send her back to the Capital. . .How come it was happening a year earlier?

At this time, a fair-skinned woman who was older than 30 in a blue silk dress with a gold brooch on her hair and gold earrings came out of the room. She

smiled and said, “Nubi’s [4] greetings to San xiaojie [5].”

Li Wei Yang stared at her. It really was Lin Mama from the Li House in Ping Cheng. She was the female servant with the highest status at the Li’s in Ping Cheng. She softly grinned. So it seems everything was true. Perhaps the Li House in Ping Cheng had received some sort of news from the Capital and made their first move by quickly bringing her back to Ping Cheng.

Great, this was very great!

Footnotes.

[1] Jia (家) – family/house; therefore, Li jia = House (of) Li

[2] Da Laoye (大老爷) – grand master (of a family)

[3] Mama (妈妈) – older female servant, usually has a high status

[4] Nubi (奴婢) – servant/slave; also used as a pronoun when a servant addresses herself to someone of higher status/rank

[5] San xiaojie (三小姐) – third young miss; third daughter of a family

Chapter 07

Chapter 07: Returning to the Li's Estate

Having stayed at the Li's in Ping Cheng for half a month, they then assigned Wei Yang two servant girls and two mamas for her journey back to the Capital. The horse carriage was sent by the Prime Minister's estate. On the curtain were gemstones of different colours braided together and the silk was a majestic crimson colour, complementing the exquisite embroidering of the peony flower. The interior décor of the carriage were lavish and sophisticated compared to the frugal, plain-looking exterior.

Li Wei Yang tossed it a brief glance and didn't look at it anymore. She knew the carriage was simply a tool for Da Furen to use and intimidate her.

This was only the beginning.

Inside the carriage, Bai Zhi carefully set the hot cup of tea down onto the small table made out of rosewood. She glimpsed at Li Wei Yang who had her eyes closed and was resting. She was anxious, wondering if she should make any small talks with Wei Yang. She felt San xiaojie didn't have the typical aura of a lone person travelling on a journey.

She glanced over Zi Yan who was sitting on the opposite side. Noticing the same weird expression on Zi Yan, she became even more nervous. They were both servants sent by the Li's in Ping Cheng to take care of San xiaojie. However, they didn't have a grasp of this San xiaojie's personality so they didn't dare to open their mouths.

Li Wei Yang gently closed her eyes as her memories flew back to that year when she returned to the Prime Minister's estate. Cautiously she had stepped into the Prime Minister's estate as Da Furen scanned her from top to bottom.

A bright and benevolent smile appeared on her face as she said, "Oh! This child really does have good fortune! Go help her change garments."

Back then she was always timid and fearful, restless and nervous, but when she heard those words she was filled with gratitude. A meager concubine's

daughter like her who was born in February, if it wasn't for Da Furen's benevolence, why would father suddenly remember her existence?

Unfortunately back then, she was oblivious to the disdain and callousness hidden deep in Da Furen's eyes.

When she had arrived at the Prime Minister's estate then, Li Wei Yang was illiterate. She couldn't even read a single word. She had been the image of a typical country bumpkin. Should news spread that she was a child born from the Prime Minister's estate but couldn't read or write, people would ridicule with laughter.

She reminisced on the past when Tuo Ba Zhen was a prince with no reputation, lacking power and ability to become the next Emperor. For those reasons, why would father and Da Furen marry off her beautiful and fairy-like older sister, Li Zhang Le, to the empty-handed Tuo Ba Zhen? Nonetheless, Tuo Ba Zhen still had his respectable and noble adopted mother, Wu Xian Fei, which was why it was hard to decline the proposal. However, none of them could've guessed that later on Tuo Ba Zhen would go on to be crowned the Emperor. Furthermore, the village bumpkin some years ago, who couldn't even write her own name, was going to become the Empress.

Back then, after her meeting with Da Furen, she had then followed a servant out. When they passed by a study room, there was the sound of someone reciting a poem.

Li Wei Yang had heard the voice resonating:

"The peach tree is young and elegant;

Brilliant are its flowers.

This young lady is going to her future home,

And will order well her chamber and house."

At that time, Li Wei Yang was illiterate but she felt that the person's words and tone was soothing.

She was about to listen more, but was frightened by a scream. "Ah! What are you doing here?"

Surprised, Li Wei Yang lifted her eyes and saw a pretty young girl looking at her with wide-eyes.

The xiansheng, who was reciting the poems, also turned to look. Li Wei Yang heard the xiansheng questioning, “Is she a servant in the estate?”

Just a simple question like that had turned Li Wei Yang beet red and speechless.

The pretty girl stared at her. Obviously she had already guessed Wei Yang’s real identity but still covered her mouth and giggled. “Servant! Why would we have such a filthy servant in our estate?” Her words were filled with ridicule.

Li Wei Yang had lowered her head and stared at herself. Compared to the aristocratic young ladies from the noble houses, she was from the opposite side of the world. She clenched her hands, feeling dissatisfied.

The pretty girl was relentless. “What are you still standing here for? Can’t you see you’re disturbing xiansheng’s lecture? Leave!”

“San xiaojie, we should go.” The servant beside her had whispered.

Li Wei Yang had hoped there was a hole in the ground for her to crawl into.

Right then, somewhere, a gentle voice spoke up. “Chang Xi, she’s your san jie – Wei Yang! How can you be so unreasonable?” That voice had relieved her, sounding like a voice from Heaven.

Shortly after, she had discovered the girl who had helped her was Li Zhang Le. Li Wei Yang had stood in the same spot for a long time, as if she was dumbfounded. She had never met such an exceptional person before. She had never heard of a voice so pretty. She had secretly thought to herself: *Even a fairy can’t be compared to her. . .*

“San xiaojie! San xiaojie!” Zi Yan softly called her name.

Li Wei Yang slowly opened her eyes. She sat up straight and grinned. It was a slight grin but it still made her look spirited and adorable. “What is it?”

Zi Yan smiled and said, “San xiaojie, we’re almost there.”

Li Wei Yang pulled the curtains closed. The horse carriage had just passed the gates of Zheng An and will soon arrive at Changmen where the Prime Minister’s

estate was. The Prime Minister's estate was not located in a busy area, neither was it beside any other noblemen's manor. When the estate was first built, a certain prince had wanted it and had especially asked for it from the Emperor but eventually thought the location was somewhat undesirable, thus he didn't live there anymore. Later on, the said prince was discovered to be conspiring to usurp the throne and was unsuccessful. As a result, he had committed suicide via poison wine. His wealth was expropriated and the estate was seized by the Imperial Household Department. Finally, it was sold to the Li's and passed on for generations.

The estate was originally built by the prince for his retirement. In the garden, there were rockeries and rows of wisteria. It was extremely elegant and refined. When it came to space, the garden could not be compared to other more luxurious manors in the Capital. However, when it came to architecture and design, it was considered one of the best.

It was a short distance, but the cold and monotone sound of the horse's hooves made it seemed as if time was stretching on.

Eventually after some time, the horse carriage came to a stop.

Outside came the genteel voice of an old female servant, "San xiaojie is here!" Then she placed a small stool down next to the horse carriage. Bai Zhi and Zi Yan stepped down from the horse carriage using the stool. Afterwards they turned around and helped Li Wei Yang down the carriage.

She entered the estate and walked past the corridor. On both sides of the passageway, numerous bamboo birdcages were hung up high. There were robins, larks, red and yellow orioles and even red necks, blue necks, parakeets, doves, *etc.* The hundreds of varying bird types sang in unison, creating a smooth and laidback melody. Li Wei Yang looked briefly at the eagle and its sharp gaze before calmly turning her attention elsewhere.

Along the pathway, there were a bunch of servants dressed in green with blue accessories. They stood there silently but when they saw Li Wei Yang, they bowed down with respect. The scene was exactly the same as in her previous lifetime.

In the previous lifetime, when she saw those servants, she became nervous

and uncoordinated. Thinking back to it, Da Furen could've sent someone to teach her the proper etiquette or someone from the Li's in Ping Cheng could've briefly described it to her, but there hadn't been anyone. Instead they had allowed her to appear uncultured in front of the servants, allowing others to think a country bumpkin could never change its ways.

Li Wei Yang reminisced on those times. She grinned, but didn't stop walking as she looked at the countless servants surrounding her. She continued to follow the leading servant. Bai Zhi and Zi Yan hurriedly followed in her steps.

“Did you see? That person is San xiaojie!”

“She's pretty. Even her conduct looks good! Didn't someone say she grew up in a village?”

“That's right, xiaojie truly is xiaojie. She didn't let her upbringing affect her manners and behaviour and turn her into a cowardly person!”

Li Wei Yang had no interest in their discussion. She walked straight towards He Xiang Yuan (*Lotus Court*).

A servant thoughtfully pulled up the screen when she saw Wei Yang approaching. She cheerfully said, “San xiaojie.”

Li Wei Yang smiled slightly and nodded her head towards the servant then she stepped into the room.

Bai Zhi and Zi Yan followed inside. The floor was made out of yellow mosaic tiles and it was polished to the point it was reflective like a mirror. Over their heads was a beautiful octagonal lantern and the pillars were made out of rosewood with ivory inlays which shone brightly. Everything else was made out of pearwood and/or blackwood with traditional flowers engravings. It was luxurious and hard to look away from.

The two servants from Ping Cheng felt as if they had stopped breathing.

It was so extravagant!

Li Wei Yang, who should've been shocked by the luxury in this estate, didn't even care to spare those things a glance. She gracefully stepped forward. With a smile, she bowed down in respect to Lao Furen who was sitting high up in the

middle.

“Wei Yang’s greetings to grandmother, mother and the two aunts.”

Chapter 08

Chapter 08: Benevolent Mother, Filial Daughter

The previous Prime Minister, Li Chang Sheng, had passed away in his mid years. His wife, Meng *shi* [1], had been so distressed that she had left the main court and moved into a lesser courtyard to recuperate. She was afraid the main court would remind her of her late husband so she had decided to move to He Xiang Yuan, which was the furthest away from the main court. He Xiang Yuan was very isolated, thus she rarely questioned the estate's internal affairs.

This paternal grandmother, Meng *shi*, was quite reticent and was a woman of few words. She rarely socialized with others. Nonetheless, she was fair and just in the way she handled matters. She has never wrongfully accused or mistreated anyone. For this reason, Li Wei Yang had always harbored good feelings towards her. Unfortunately, in the previous lifetime, Lao Furen's health was bad and had passed away long before Li Wei Yang became the Empress.

In the chamber, Meng *shi* sat in the middle, adorned in a turquoise silk tunic with the five blessings pattern embroidered on it. On her head was a mink fur headgear with a jade piece stitched in the middle. At Li Wei Yang's graceful movements, she gently nodded her head and simply said, "It's good that you're back."

For some reason, upon hearing this sentence, Li Wei Yang's eyes became red. Everyone saw it and suddenly felt a rush of emotions.

A woman in a honey coloured Xiangzhou silk dress with a round neck, accessorized with a gold phoenix brooch in her hair, chuckled and approached Li Wei Yang. She helped Wei Yang stand up and studied her from head-to-toe. Then she smiled and said, "Lao Furen, take a look. She is truly well-behaved!" She looked at Da Furen who was sitting on the other side. "Congratulations to you, sister-in-law. You have gotten another beautiful gem of a child."

Da Furen, Jiang *shi*, chuckled lightly but there was no humor in her eyes. She carefully studied Li Wei Yang and said, "She really is a well-behaved child. Come over here and let me take a closer look."

Li Wei Yang glanced up from the corner of her eyes but kept on her face a bright smile. Her countenance was respectful and obedient. She gently walked past the second daughter-in-law, Wen *shi*—the person who had helped her stand up earlier. She demurely walked towards Jiang *shi* and slightly bowed down. “Mother.”

Jiang *shi* looked at her with affection and care. “They say Ping Cheng’s fengshui is very good, to the point it can help nurture someone into an exceptional and talented person. When you were just born, you were as small as a kitten. Your body and health wasn’t good either but now, you look a lot healthier. This is a good resulting from a setback!”

Good fengshui? Nurture into an exceptional, talented person? Li Wei Yang coldly laughed inside. She was just short of being nurtured into death, but that person has the nerves to say it was a good resulting from a setback. This kind of thick skin was definitely not normal.

She gently smiled. “What mother said is right. It’s because over the past few years, Wei Yang has received your care and concern.”

When these words were spoken, in other people’s eyes, Li Wei Yang would seem like a person who knew her manners. If she were to complain to Lao Furen at this moment that she had been abused, Lao Furen would simply scold Da Furen with a few simple words. At the same time, Da Furen could push the blame and responsibility onto the carelessness of the maids and servants. In the end, it would not affect Da Furen. Instead Li Wei Yang would be left with the impression of being an ignorant person.

So when Li Wei Yang said those words, Jiang *shi* was impressed and broke into a grin. She reached out for Wei Yang’s hand and said, “It’s good that you understand my well-intentions. Now that you’re back, you should spend more time with your sisters. If you lack anything, just come and talk to me.”

The third daughter-in-law, Zhou *shi*, quietly watched this scene without a word of opinion. On the other hand, Wen *shi* was smiling with ridicule. From the beginning to the end, Lao Furen had no expression as she fiddled with the Buddhist mala beads in her hand.

“Wei Yang will definitely listen to mother’s words. I will spend more time with .

. . my sisters.” In other people’s eyes, Li Wei Yang’s face had turned pink and she appeared to be very acquiescent.

Da Furen briefly glanced at Zi Yan and Bai Zhi behind Wei Yang. She nodded and said, “It doesn’t look good to have only two maidservants with you. Hua Mei, from now on you will follow San xiaojie and take care of her.”

A petite maid with a pair of delicate phoenix eyes stepped forward and greeted Li Wei Yang with respect.

“You’ve grown up now, so it’s not enough to have only two first rank servants by your side. For now, you will be assigned another one. After the New Year’s, another one will be assigned to you. I have already prepared all of the second rank servants for you. As for the third rank servants, the selection process is still ongoing. It should be ready soon enough.” When speaking these words, Da Furen appeared to be a sincerely, benevolent mother.

Li Wei Yang grinned with gratefulness. She knew that it wasn’t only Da Furen who was judging her at this moment, but there was also Meng *shi*, Wen *shi* and Zhou *shi*. They were all studying her and judging her. In this entire family, father was the Prime Minister and Da Furen Jiang *shi* was the official person in charge of managing the estate’s internal affairs. However, in these past few years, Erfang and Dafang [2] was caught in a cold war and then there was also Sanfang. . .All in all, their scheming and psychological warfare were inevitable.

For a person who had just returned like her, the most important thing was to have a strong support.

Da Furen looked at her, furrowed her brows and said, “Child, why are you dressed so thinly?” She then waved her hand. “Bring over the cloak I’ve prepared.” In front of everyone, she smiled and personally wrapped the cloak around Li Wei Yang.

The cloak was light but warm. On the light pink silk cloak was the dotted pattern of a peony flower, which was sewn on it with gold thread. Beside it, there were also cloud patterns sewn in black thread. The interior of the cloak was made of white mink fur, making it look very warm and soft.

However, when Li Wei Yang touched it, she immediately discovered the cloak was old and had already been used. Clearly Da Furen wanted to emphasize her

dignity and magnanimity in front of everyone, so she had especially looked into the back of her wardrobe and found the cloak, using the second-hand cloak to appear benevolent and conscientious.

Wei Yang said, "Thank you, mother."

Precisely then, someone came in to relay a message to Jiang *shi*. "Da Furen, Yu Shi Furen has gifted 5 rolls of Liu Yun Ge silk from Ning Zhou. You should take a look."

Da Furen nodded and smiled happily. She said, "Lao Furen, I shall take my leave. There's a few things I have to take care of. Wei Yang, when I'm done, I will bring you to your father."

Li Wei Yang hurriedly replied, "Yes, mother. Please don't worry."

The mala beads in Meng *shi*'s hands subtly moved as she simply nodded her head. Da Furen quickly took her leave. The moment she left, Erfang and Sanfang also stood up. Erfang Wen *shi* even glanced at Li Wei Yang with disappointment. She thought she would be able to watch the concubine's daughter incriminate Jiang *shi*, but it turns out, Li Wei Yang was a mere coward. She had suffered through so much hardships and abuse and yet she had no courage to say it.

Once the three furens left, it was calm and quiet.

Meng *shi* glanced at Li Wei Yang with her delicate features. For some reason, she suddenly sighed and then said to Luo mama standing beside her, "Lead this child out."

Li Wei Yang knelt down on the ground and earnestly kowtowed in front of Meng *shi*. Afterwards she followed Luo mama out.

As Luo mama led Li Wei Yang towards the canopy, she abruptly heard Li Wei Yang yelped out loud. She stopped in her footsteps. "San xiaojie, what's the matter?"

Li Wei Yang shook her head, but there was a strange expression on her face. As if without thinking, she touched the back of her neck. Luo mama didn't say anything further and resumed her steps, but purposely slowed down. She tossed a look at the back of Li Wei Yang's neck and noticed the presence of red spots, similar to wounds caused by needles. Blood was slowly oozing out as well. Luo

mama froze up.

Li Wei Yang seemed to be enduring it to the best of her ability, but tears were already appearing.

Luo mama couldn't stand it any longer. Smiling, she said, "San xiaojie, this embroidered cloak is beautiful. Recently Lao Furen has wanted something similar to it. Could you possibly let me borrow the cloak for two days so I can study the embroideries?"

The kind of garments Lao Taitai wore would definitely have a different kind of colour and pattern than the ones she would wear. Li Wei Yang immediately understood the hidden meaning but feigned ignorance anyway. She obediently removed the cloak and gave it to Luo mama. Luo mama received it. Perhaps it was by accident or it was on purpose, her fingers brushed against the mink fur inside the cloak. Luo mama's expression changed.

"Luo mama, what's wrong?" Li Wei Yang innocently asked.

Luo mama briefly glanced at the bunch of servants surrounding them. The smile on her face didn't go away. "Nothing's wrong. San xiaojie should go and familiarize yourself with your new residence. I have to return to Lao Furen's side."

Li Wei Yang looked at the cloak that Luo mama was tightly holding in her hands. She gently smiled and said, "Yes, Luo mama should hurry back."

Translator's Note: Sorry guys! Updates will be a bit slower from now on since I have a few things on my plate at the moment. The chapters are slowly getting longer and more descriptive as well now that Wei Yang is back in the Capital.

Footnotes.

[1] Shi (氏) – suffix that refers to the woman's maiden surname

[2] Dafang (大房) – Refers to the Prime Minister's wife/his branch of the family. Erfang, Sanfang, etc. refers to the other branches in the extended family (In this case, Erfang is the wife of the Prime Minister's younger brother, same

logic with Sanfang, etc.)

Chapter 09

Chapter 09: Surrounded by Flowers

Luo mama brought the cloak back to He Xiang Yuan and dismissed all of the servants. Then she said to Meng *shi*, “Lao Furen, there’s something I have to tell you.”

Meng *shi* noticed the serious expression on Luo mama’s face and nodded her head. “What is it?”

Luo mama carefully retold everything that had happened. “Even though these are the kind of things I shouldn’t concern myself with, but San xiaojie is really pitiful. She had no idea and even thought of the cloak as a treasure. After all, she’s still a child. She doesn’t know how to take precaution against others.”

Listening to Luo mama, Meng *shi* felt suspicious as she took the cloak. She brushed her hands gently against the cloak two times and discovered a strange feeling. Abruptly she looked down. “Hm, what is this?”

Underneath the layer of the soft and warm mink fur, there was an area that was prickly and poked into the skin. Upon closer inspection, it wasn’t fur but several small needles. The needles were very thin. If a person didn’t look at it carefully they wouldn’t notice the difference.

“Why do the clothes have these things in it?” Meng *shi* furrowed her eyebrows.

“Sao xiaojie in the end is still a young girl. She wouldn’t know about these things. The needles are so small that it’s not easily seen. Not to mention, the fur helped cover it up. The person wearing it won’t be able to notice, but the moment the person makes any sort of movements, the needles will poke into their skin.”

“Those wicked servants! How dare they do something like this!?” Meng *shi* roared, infuriated.

Even though she wasn’t there to watch over Li Wei Yang grow up, Wei Yang was still her grand-daughter. Not to mention, she was a delicate and well-

mannered child. She had just returned to the estate and yet, who had the nerves to scheme against her already? Meng *shi* contemplated for a while. Aside from Da Furen Jiang *shi*, there was no one else who had the nerves to do something like this!

Meng *shi*'s expression darkened. "This cloak was gifted right in front of me. Is she trying to cause me troubles?"

Luo mama rarely saw Meng *shi* in an angry state. She hurriedly lowered her head. "Lao Furen, there's a chance this isn't Da Furen's doing. The way Da Furen treated San xiaojie was with kindness—"

"Kindness? That child wasn't born from her, so what does it matter if there's kindness or not?! I had thought that she was someone of noble background, who understood what to do and what not to do, and that she won't stoop low like others but as it turns out, she has become muddle-headed too. Our family cannot let words spread that we are someone who abuses and mistreats the concubine's daughters. Luo mama, you go and bring Mo Zhu to San xiaojie."

"Yes," Luo mama promptly replied.

Even though Lao Furen was someone who rarely questioned the estate's internal affairs, but she was also a person who was cold on the outside and hot-tempered on the inside. If there were things she couldn't let pass, she will definitely do something about it. If it was just a bunch of tiny needles, all one had to do was remove it. However, Lao Furen was worried that Da Furen would do something else and words will spread, thus hurting the Li's generations of reputation. Fortunately for San xiaojie, this time she will have Lao Furen's people beside her. Da Furen will need to think twice before taking any actions against Wei Yang.

Meng *shi* contemplated some more and said, "Since you've already brought this cloak here, remove all of the needles before returning it, but you must not say a word of it to San xiaojie."

"Yes, I understand," Luo mama replied.

At this moment, Li Wei Yang was heading towards the flower garden with a servant leading in the front. Along the way, Li Wei Yang was restless. She was filled with uncertainty regarding the impact of those tiny needles. In truth, the

needles weren't Da Furen's doing. She wouldn't take actions without considering the effects of it on herself first. The needles were a part of Li Wei Yang's plan. She had attached the needles when no one was looking. Using this opportunity, she wanted to let Meng *shi* know that Da Furen was in fact a two-faced, hypocritical person.

Right then, a voice sounded from the opposite study room. It was the voice of a person reciting poems, a voice that was easy to listen to. It startled Wei Yang.

"San xiaojie, that is Da xiaojie reciting poems with all the other xiaojies!" Hua Mei explained.

Li Wei Yang looked at her speechlessly.

Thinking that Wei yang was listening, Hua Mei continued on, "Our Da xiaojie is like a fairy from heaven. Not only is she kind-hearted and compassionate, her skills are exceptional. She is good at everything. Before, all the other xiaojies didn't read books and poems but Da xiaojie went up to Da Laoye and said even females should have some form of education. As a result, Da Laoye journeyed to Mount Yuan and personally invited the most famous female teacher back to the estate. This kind of special hospitality is probably the only one here in Da Li!"

Li Wei Yang placed her hand on the banister as she silently tightened her grip on it. A casual grin appeared on her face. "Is that true? Dajie is truly capable."

Suddenly, the sound of a young girl's giggling came from the distance. "Who are you? Why haven't I seen you before?"

Li Wei Yang looked over and saw two beautifully dressed young girls slowly approached from the other side, where the study room was. One of them was pointing at her and asking the question. She didn't want to run into these people so early on, but it seems they are the one who wanted to walk right up to her door. She grinned. Perhaps history was repeating itself.

"San xiaojie, the one who just spoke is Wu xiaojie. The person standing beside her is Si xiaojie," Hua Mei whispered the reminder.

In a blink of an eye, Wu xiaojie, Li Chang Xi had already appeared right in front of her face. Chang Xi wore a short-sleeved, pale-blue dress. On her hair was a small pair of beautifully crafted brooch and around her neck was a pure gold

necklace encrusted with jewels. She had an elongated, oval-shaped face, eyes were slightly slanted, and in between her brows was a small dot. Her cheeks were rosy pink and when she laughed her mouth was slightly parted, revealing rows of purely white teeth. At first glance, it was hard not to like her.

Beside Wu xiaojie was another similar looking young girl, though she was dressed in blushed pink. Her features resembled Li Chang Xi, but appeared to be more gentle-looking. She was none other than Si xiaojie, Li Chang Xiao.

“Si mei, Wu mei.” Li Wei Yang smiled, looking innocent and yet bashful. The afternoon sunlight shone on her face causing her beauty to radiate.

Si xiaojie, Li Chang Xiao, nodded and smiled cordially at Wei Yang. On the other hand, Li Chang Xi was chuckling with mockery and looking very arrogant. “You’ve just returned and already calling us meimeis. Who said you can address us like that?”

Li Wei Yang blinked her eyes and said, “I can’t call you meimei? Then should I call you jiejie?”

Li Chang Xi was caught off-guard. Her eyebrows immediately furrowed as she looked at Li Wei Yang from top to bottom. She noticed Wei Yang could actually be considered quite pretty. She had soft, porcelain skin, black hair like ink and perfectly drawn brows. Compared to the image of a foolish country bumpkin that Chang Xi had in mind, it was completely different. She suddenly felt unhappy. “What’s the meaning behind your words? Are you trying to look for troubles?”

The person looking for trouble is you! In Wei Yang’s dark, black eyes, there was a flicker of coldness. However, it came and disappeared so fast that it wasn’t noticeable. On the surface though, she continued to smile. “Si meimei, I have to go give my greetings to father. Don’t block my way.”

Li Chang Xi thought Li Wei Yang was a being coward. She became even angrier. “You wretched misfortune born in February! How dare you talk to me like that?”

Si xiaojie, Wu xiaojie, they were all just like Li Wei Yang—the concubine’s daughters. In the previous lifetime, Li Wei Yang didn’t understand why Li Chang Xi was always trying to pick on her, especially when she hadn’t done anything towards Chang Xi. However, now she finally understood why. In life, there was a

certain group of people who simply likes to cause drama. When it was calm and peaceful, those people would try to stir up something for the sake of it. Not to mention, she was the new person who had just returned. If they don't bully her and try to subdue her now, in the future, how could they do as they please?

There was not an ounce of anger on Li Wei Yang's face. There was only a calm smile. "That's right. I was born in February. Wu mei, what kind of opinion do you have on my birthday?"

Seeing that Li Wei Yang wasn't upset, Li Chang Xi was even more irritable. She was about to say something but suddenly, a genteel voice spoke up. "Chang Xi, San mei had just returned. How can you be so rude to her?"

Upon hearing this voice, Li Wei Yang felt a cold breeze against her back. *This voice*, even if a hundred years has passed, she will still never forget it.

Li Zhang Le!

She slowly turned around. Her eyes fell on the unequivocal beauty elegantly approaching them. . .

Chapter 10

Chapter 10: Big Sister Li Zhang Le

A slender and elegant figure of a beauty slowly appeared. She had a pair of exquisite eyes with long lashes, wearing a pale green dress with Begonia flowers embroidered on the skirt, shimmering like the afternoon sunshine. A translucent sash was tied around her waist which emphasized her petite figure, slender as the willows yet graceful as the canaries in the breeze. Her hairstyle was simple, accessorized only by a gold bodkin with a peach-shaped pearl. The pearl dangled low and helped to highlight her soft and attractive features, making her look naturally youthful and elegant.

Under the blue skies, she walked forward slowly with a smile. It made everyone feel as if a thousand flowers were blooming in the spring, like the moon in mid-Autumn. A genteel music seemed to have sounded from all directions as cranes flew around, causing everyone to have lost some of their souls.

This is Da xiaojie Li Zhang Le's charismatic appeal. No one could escape from it.

Li Wei Yang stared at her. In her gaze was the subtle hint of sorrow. No wonder she had lost to Zhang Le. Such beauty, such soothing and mellow voice, any man who saw her would be softened.

Li Wei Yang was a traditional woman. Once she has fallen in love with someone, she was going to love with everything she has. Eight years of being husband and wife with Tuo Ba Zhen, she could say that she has given him everything—heart and soul. Even when everyone in this world was against him, she would be the one to defend him, love him to the point of disregarding her own life.

They have lived together for eight years. For the entire eight years, to be kind to a person you didn't love—even if it was eight days, it was already exhausting, let alone eight years! As a result, she had to give Tuo Ba Zhen a round of applause. He was able to put on an act for so long, enduring it until the moment he became the Emperor. It was only then did she realize the person he wanted from the start had been Li Zhang Le.

Though thinking about it, it seemed right. Compared to the Li estate's Da xiaojie, the difference was like heaven and earth. Li Wei Yang realized that, despite having already lived for half a person's lifetime, she was just the supporting character in the story. How laughable and yet pitiful.

"Chang Xi, how can you speak like that to San mei?" Li Zhang Le furrowed her brows, looking at Li Chang Xi. Her expression was filled with disapproval.

Li Chang Xi, who was in the middle of putting on an intimidating presence, immediately changed her attitude. She walked up to Li Zhang Le and grabbed her arm, swinging it back and forth like a child. "Da jie, I was just kidding with San jie. Don't tell mother about it, otherwise I will definitely be scolded!"

Those pretty eyes of Li Zhang Le steered over to Li Wei Yang's face. She smiled and said, "That will depend on whether or not your San jie will forgive you. If San mei agrees, then I will also let it go but if San mei don't want to, then there's nothing I can do."

Li Chang Xi stared at Li Wei Yang resentfully.

Li Wei Yang laughed coldly on the inside but on her face was a smile. "Da jie don't need to worry. It's true that Wu mei was only kidding with me."

Li Zhang Le nodded. "That's good then. Chang Xi, go and apologize to your San jie."

Li Zhang Le was still Li Zhang Le. She was always playing the role of the middleman, always appearing demure and fair, compassionate and approachable. In the past lifetime, this act had deceived her into trusting Zhang Le, yet in the end she was the one being backstabbed. And the one to stab her in the back was this very compassionate and approachable sister. Compared to Li Chang Xi, Li Zhang Le was a lot more arrogant with a sense of heightened ego. The way she used her status to intimidate others was a lot more disdainful than Chang Xi by tenfolds.

In Li Wei Yang's eyes, there was a flicker of coldness. It had gone as fast as it had appeared so that no one was able to pick up on it.

Standing on the side, Li Chang Xi stated icily, "Sorry, San jie!" When she said the two words 'san jie', she emphasized it in a way that made it seem as if she

was clenching her teeth.

With a gentle expression, Li Wei Yang smiled. "It's okay, Wu meimei."

Li Chang Xi didn't say anything but glared at Li Wei Yang viciously.

Li Zhang Le walked forward, patting on Li Wei Yang's arm. "From now on, we are good sisters. Let's not be too antagonistic but more open-minded. Wu meimei, we should go. Xiansheng is waiting for us. San meimei, you should also hurry along and go greet father. You shouldn't delay it anymore."

Li Wei Yang noticed that she was vaguely defending Li Chang Xi but feigned ignorance.

Li Chang Xi became even more resentful. As she walked by Li Wei Yang, she purposely stretched out her foot to trip Wei Yang. Li Wei Yang saw it but acted like she didn't and continued on with a straight posture. Li Chang Xi smirked with arrogance as she waited for Wei Yang to humiliate herself in front of everyone. She heard Li Wei Yang softly cried out but for some reason, Li Zhang Le suddenly tripped over as well. The both of them had fallen over into the pond.

Li Chang Xi was horrified.

"Da jie! Da Jie!" Li Chang Xiao, who was abandoned behind, quickly rushed over.

Li Wei Yang was covered in muddy water, looking like a wild duck crawling out from the pond. When she stood up, she immediately extended her hand to pull Li Zhang Le up as well. The pondwater only reached their waist. Nothing would happen as long as they stood up. Unfortunately, Li Zhang Le's beautiful skirt and dress was dirtied and her hair was all over the place. She was scared into a daze, having no clue as to what had just transpired.

Li Chang Xi did not expect for Li Zhang Le to have fallen over as well. Her sole intention was to embarrass Li Wei Yang. Everyone present was scared into silence.

Li Chang Xiao quickly instructed the dumbfounded servants standing by, "Stop looking! Quickly help Da xiaojie and San xiaojie up!"

One by one, Li Zhang Le and Li Wei Yang stepped out of the pond, drenched in

muddy water from head to toe.

As Li Wei Yang got out, she said with grievance, “Wu meimei, I know that you don’t like me but how could you possibly push Da jie into the pond too? You are too much!”

Suddenly, everyone’s gaze turned on Li Chang Xi.

Due to the fact that she had grown up under Da furen’s wings and had a close relationship with Li Zhang Le, she would often use that as an excuse to overlook and step on everyone, but at this moment, even she couldn’t believe this situation.

She stuttered, “No . . . Da jie, I didn’t . . . I just wanted to push her over . . . I didn’t know it would turn out like this!” She looked over to her biological sister, Li Chang Xiao. “Si jie, you saw it right? Help me say something. I didn’t push Da jie! It’s Li Wei Yang! It’s definitely her! She dragged Da jie down!”

In truth, Li Chang Xiao had witnessed Li Chang Xi’s attempt to trip Li Wei Yang. However, she wasn’t able to capture any suspicious gestures from Li Wei Yang, particularly as to why Da jie had tripped as well. Da jie was Da furen’s heart. Even if it was a small mistake, they could be skinned for bringing harm to Zhang Le.

Li Chang Xiao realized the magnitude of the situation. Her face paled as she quickly defended, “Da jie, Chang Xi definitely did not mean to –”

Li Wei Yang lowered her head, appearing very pitiful. “Da jie, everything’s my fault. If I hadn’t angered Wu meimei, this wouldn’t have happened to you.” As she finished speaking, she took the initiative to use her own clothes to wipe off a footprint on Li Zhang Le’s skirt. Earlier when Li Chang Xi attempted to trip her, she had used the opportunity to step onto Li Zhang Le’s skirt and drag her down, causing Zhang Le to fall into the pond with her.

Li Zhang Le’s gaze hesitated between Li Chang Xi and Li Wei Yang. During the confusion and chaos, she could only vaguely remember someone had grabbed her but she did not know who it was exactly.

Li Chang Xi’s embarrassment turned into anger. She pointed at Li Wei Yang and shouted, “Why are you pretending to be pitiful?! It was your fault!” She wanted to rush over and grab Li Wei Yang’s arms.

The servants had never witnessed the xiaojies being so imprudent so they did not know what to do.

Right then, everyone heard an authoritative voice. “What kind of troubles are you causing here?!”

Everyone turned around.

Not far from there was Prime Minister Li.

Everyone was stupefied.

Chapter 11

Chapter 11: Light Punishment as Warning

Li Xiao Ran wasn't too old. His hair was jet black, bounded high up and wearing a yellow official's hat. Underneath the hair was a wide forehead, further down was bushy and long brows, a pair of stern-looking eyes and his mouth was slightly pressed together, looking extremely serious. Li Wei Yang rarely saw him laughing in an easygoing manner. At the very least, she has never witnessed him laughing with her.

Li Wei Yang slowly lowered her head, hiding the emotions in her eyes. How many years has it been since she last heard Li Xiao Ran's voice?

At this moment, an anxious voice belonging to Da furen Jiang *shi* also spoke up, "Zhang Le, what's wrong with you?" At the same time, she pulled Li Zhang Le closer to her side, examining carefully from head to toe, afraid that there was something wrong with her daughter. Her eyes did not hide the restlessness and worries.

Li Zhang Le's eyes reddened, looking pitiful and yet still enduring it. She pulled on Jiang *shi*'s clothes and said, "Mother, it's so cold."

Jiang *shi* hurriedly removed her coat and wrapped it around Li Zhang Le's frame instead. Holding Zhang Le's hands, she said, "Aiya, your hands are so cold. What happened?" She turned around, her piercing gaze stopping on Li Wei Yang.

Li Xiao Ran furrowed his brows. His eyes and voice was filled with coldness. It was also firm, with an astuteness that seemed to know everything about the situation. "You're Wei Yang? Why did you already cause trouble just as you returned to the estate?"

Everybody's expressions changed as they all looked at Li Wei Yang. They were no longer looking at her as if she was the San xiaojie but an alien specie. She had just returned to the estate and yet was already unfavoured by the laoye. How can she peacefully live through the days from now on?

Initially, Li Chang Xi's face was pale as a ghost but when she realized Da furen

was targeting Li Wei Yang, she was comforted. On the other hand, Li Chang Xiao had a gentle and kind personality and just as she was about to speak up, Li Chang Xi abruptly pinched her. Her eyes, which were filled with delight at other's misery, glanced in Li Wei Yang's direction. Then she looked over to Li Zhang Le's dirtied dress, winked at Li Chang Xiao and gestured her to stay quiet. All she had to do was watch the scene unfold, for Da furen will definitely punish Li Wei Yang.

Li Wei Yang laughed inwardly. Before it was like this as well. In their eyes, she couldn't even compare to the dirt underneath their feet. How pitiful of her to have blindly rushed into their arms as if they were truly her family! It was indeed laughable. As she faced these same people right now, she no longer had any feelings of pain and suffering. There was only the determination to win. So let's bring it on because she wasn't afraid of anyone. Looking at these bunch of chicken eggs, thinking they were something special, only to have met her – the impenetrable boulder – let's see who was going to crash and burn!

Li Wei Yang looked at Li Xiao Ran. A gentle smile formed across her face as she slowly bowed down. "Father, it's the first day Wei Yang returned and yet I have caused such troubles for Da jie. I am truly apologetic. Not to mention, Da jie had even helped me –" her gaze fell on Li Zhang Le's face, eyes brimming with gratitude, "Everyone says Da jie is like a fairy. I have just returned but have already received Da jie's kindness and concern. Compared to what others have said, she is a hundred times more kind and compassionate. But. . ." she abruptly changed the flow of the conversation as her innocent eyes turned to Li Chang Xi, "Wu meimei, you were truly careless. If you hadn't bumped into me, Da jie wouldn't have fallen into the pond because she was trying to help me. Why didn't you look where you were going?"

Li Chang Xi was horrified. She had thought that, in front of father and Da furen, nobody would dare to say a word otherwise. To her surprise, Li Wei Yang had a quick and sly tongue, brazen enough to even defend herself. Immediately, Li Chang Xi's face reddened as she jumped to defense, "Father, mother, Chang Xi does not dare to do such a thing! Li Wei Yang obviously – No, San jiejie fell down by herself. For some reason, she dragged Da jie down with her! Everyone saw it with their own eyes!"

Li Wei Yang was not afraid of Li Chang Xi's intimidating presence. The bright

afternoon sun was reflected off her bright eyes, which was expressed with surprise. “Wu mei, how could you say something like that? Father, if you don’t trust Wei Yang’s words, then just ask Da jie. Da jie is the fairest person here. She won’t be biased just because she’s close with Wu mei and I’m the new person in this estate, is that right?”

Li Zhang Le startled. She did not expect Li Wei Yang to shower her with so many compliments. If she responded in Li Chang Xi’s favour, then it would appear as if she was unfairly siding with Wu mei. Even if father trusted her, there was still going to be some lingering of suspicions.

After contemplating, there was a slight hint of chagrin on her face as she said to Li Chang Xi, “That’s right, Wu mei. You’ve been careless. How could you cause Wei Yang to fall over the railings? If I hadn’t been there to pull San mei back, Wei Yang’s forehead would’ve hit the rocks. San mei’s beauty would have been ruined!”

Not surprisly that was how it turned out. Li Wei Yang hid a cold smile tugging at the corner of her eyes. She thoroughly understood of Li Zhang Le’s character. At any point in time, Zhang Le will always choose to protect her image as a kind and compassionate person. If she were to say Wei Yang had pulled her down, then wouldn’t she have become the idiot? On the other hand, if she were to say she was the one to rescue Wei Yang then that would be a different story. Despite growing up with Li Chang Xi, in a flash of a second, Li Chang Xi has become a mere stepping stone for her good reputation.

After listening to the explanation, Li Xiao Ran stared intently at Li Zhang Le. “Is that true?”

Li Zhang Le hesitated for a brief moment before quickly nodding her head. Turning to Wei Yang, she said, “San mei had just returned but something like this was allowed to happen. Being the older sister, how could I simply stand there and watch San mei get implicated?”

The moment she opened her mouth to speak, Li Xiao Ran immediately believed her. Where this child was concerned, he still very much doted on her.

Seeing the bright smile on his face, Li Wei Yang lowered her head, shielding the look in her eyes, a cold smile tugged subtly at the corners of her mouth. Father,

very soon you will discover the kind of mishaps this angelic daughter of yours will bring! She will have to pay for her hypocrisy!

Da furen coldly glanced at Li Chang Xi. “Chang Xi, how have I taught you? What happened to your etiquettes? Not only did you almost cause injuries to your San jie, you had also caused Da jie to be drenched from head to toe. From now on, you are to kneel in the ancestral hall for three days! You are not allowed to stand up without my permission!”

The smile on Li Zhang Le’s face was as warm as the spring breeze. “Mother, meimei’s stubbornness is because she is still young. San mei will feel uneasy if the punishment is too heavy.” Then she turned towards Wei Yang with a grin. The sun shone onto her face, illuminating her ethereal beauty. “Isn’t that right, San mei?”

Li Wei Yang’s smile was faint yet in her eyes seems to be a raging fire. “Da jie is right. It’s all my fault. If I hadn’t returned today, Wu meimei wouldn’t be so upset with me and your dress wouldn’t be soaked. Wu meimei, don’t be upset with me!” It looked as if she wanted to come to peaceful terms, reaching out to hold Li Chang Xi’s hand.

Li Chang Xi was outraged as she flung Li Wei Yang’s hands off of her. Looking terrified, Li Wei Yang took two steps backward.

Li Zhang Le’s beautiful eyes instantly darkened. How pitiful that the iron cannot be refined into steel. Chang Xi did not live up her to expectations. Her mother would have listened to her words and let go of the situation but it doesn’t seem to be the case now. . .

Li Chang Xi had been rash about her anger, only realizing afterwards in horror that she had made a mistake.

As expected, Li Xiao Ran was infuriated. “You have no sense of propriety! Take a look at yourself! Three days? You are grounded for one month and you are to copy the woman’s text a hundred times before you can be released!” Then he turned around and walked off without ever looking back.

Da furen was horrified as she quickly chased after him. “Laoye, laoye, don’t be angry—”

After the two of them left, Li Chang Xi turned red with anger. “Li Wei Yang, you are a despicable person!”

Despicable? If you hadn’t started it, none of this would have happened as a result. Li Wei Yang stayed in her spot.

Meanwhile, Li Chang Xi was pulled back by Li Chang Xiao. “That’s enough. Haven’t you already given us enough scare?”

Wei Yang grinned, her eyes was clouded with murk, causing Li Chang Xi to feel as if she was being stabbed by a sharp and cold knife. However, it only lasted for a few seconds. In a flash, Li Wei Yang’s eyes had become clear and innocent again. Nothing else could be detected.

“Enough! Wu meimei, stop with the tantrum!” Li Zhang Le chided as she slowly walked forward.

Li Chang Xi was still unhappy as she stared at Wei Yang with resentment. Nonetheless she didn’t dare to make another sound.

“From now on, we – as sisters – shouldn’t be arguing with one another. Instead we should be living with each other in peace and harmony.” Li Zhang Le’s face radiated with grace and elegance, sparkling like clear crystals.

“Yes, Da jie,” Li Wei Yang replied softly, as if she was whispering.

Looking at that pure and calm smile on Wei Yang, for some reason, a dark shadow clouded over Li Zhang Le.

Chapter 12

Chapter 12: Tea Brewing Skills

She was enveloped in darkness as blood oozed out of the broken legs, being tormented day after day. . .

Li Wei Yang awoken from the nightmare, drenched in cold sweats. Even her clothes and blankets were drenched in cold sweats.

She was panting until Bai Zhi lifted up the aqua blue curtains and asked in a low voice, “San xiaojie, are you alright?”

Li Wei Yang instinctively glanced at the bed with its paisley design. She had only been dreaming. She was still alive. Shrouded in the dark, Li Wei Yang had a vague expression on her face. A few strands of hair drenched in sweats had matted to her forehead.

“San xiaojie, did you have nightmares again?” Bai Zhi asked cautiously. “Do you want to drink some water?”

Li Wei Yang shook her head.

Right then, Mo Zhu came in and asked in a gentle voice, “Are you feeling unwell, San xiaojie?”

Mo Zhu and Bai Zhi were on the night watch today. Li Wei Yang briefly glanced at Bai Zhi.

Bai Zhi immediately said, “No, it’s just the blanket is too thick causing the sweats!”

Bai Zhi was a smart servant. Li Wei Yang thought to herself, that year, the Li’s in Ping Cheng had also gifted Bai Zhi and Zi Yan to her. Unfortunately, she had pitied the two of them, feeling sorry that they had to suffer with her, so she had never gotten close to the two of them. She had listened to Da furen’s advice by allowing them to leave and start their own family. Right now, she needed some help and these two servants also needed to be tested once more.

Mo Zhu was Lao furen, Meng *shi*’s, second rank servant. She was then

promoted to a first rank servant when she was ordered to serve San xiaojie.

After listening to Bai Zhi's explanation, Mo Zhu turned around and stepped out to retrieve the warm water that was being boiled on the stove. Returning with the warm water, she said, "Nubi will help xiaojie bathe."

Li Wei Yang nodded.

Mo Zhi was quick. She poured the boiled water into a tub then she took out a handkerchief made out of burlap and scented with fragrance. She dipped it into the water then assisted Bai Zhi in bathing and changing Li Wei Yang's clothes.

After changing out of the moist clothes, Wei Yang's mood was better and she felt calmer. She looked at the two servants and smiled. "There's nothing else to be done. The two of you should go rest. Should I need anything, I will call you."

The following afternoon, Zi Yan brought over a small green ceramic bowl.

She said, "San xiaojie, this was delivered from the kitchen. They said Laoye had invited over some guests today so they haven't been able to prepare lunch. You should drink the chicken soup first."

Wei Yang was not like Zhang Le who had her own private kitchen. Instead she had to eat with everyone else. Listening to Zi Yan, Li Wei Yang simply smiled and said, "Okay." She opened the lid and with a brief glance, she realized the chicken soup was watered down. There was only four pieces of chicken meat in the soup, composed of the head, neck, butt and breast. They were mostly bones, however. Nothing was edible.

Li Wei Yang could only smile.

There were rules to be followed in Li jia. On the surface, the way they treated the concubine's children seemed to be fair and void of favouritism. The decors were all expensive and luxurious items. From appearance, it seemed as if Da furen was an extremely fair person. However, all of these expensive items have been recorded and tracked down. It could not be thrown away or damaged; otherwise one would have to compensate for it. In total, she only had two set of clothings that were presentable in front of guests. She had already been here for a month. Despite Da furen often sending people over to take measurements for the new tailored clothings, those new clothings haven't actually materialized.

In the past lifetime, Jiang *shi* hadn't reacted this way. She hadn't been so obvious and had maintained her good image of a benevolent and kind stepmother. Unfortunately, it seems as if she was holding a grudge from the last time Wei Yang had caused her precious daughter, Li Zhang Le, to be drenched from head to toe. Consequently, Zhang Le had the coughs for two days.

It seems like even the servants were starting to look down on her. Li Wei Yang looked at the soup with a ghost of a smile on her face.

Zi Yan's eyes reddened. "San xiaojie, I had argued with the kitchen staff, but they said it was the rules that even the other xiaojies had to follow yet San xiaojie was the one being picky about the food. They also said when the other xiaojies wanted to eat something in particular, they would pay extra for it. San xiaojie could do the same."

Pay extra? Li Wei Yang shook her head, laughing. She was infamous for being the unloved concubine's daughter. She had no money to give the servants and staff. Da furen was sweet on the outside but bitter on the inside. She had gifted Wei Yang a lot of things but there was no money which could be used for practical things. Even worse, she couldn't sell the gifts for money. Those servants must have already guessed Wei Yang didn't have any money. *How interesting!*

Li Wei Yang's eyes brightened. She helped Zi Yan stand up. "Bring over the scissors."

Zi Yan had no idea what Wei Yang wanted to do but she obeyed nonetheless. Her eyes were fixated on Wei Yang nervously, afraid that Wei Yang was thinking of doing something reckless.

Li Wei Yang grinned and took off her coat. Using the scissors, she cut off half of her sleeves then allowed Zi Yan to haphazardly patch it up again. When it was all done, she put her coat back on. Nobody could tell there was something wrong from the outside.

She stood up and said, "I heard Wu meimei is already up and about. Perhaps she's doing her greetings at Lao furen's."

Zi Yan looked at Wei Yang with a clueless expression.

"Let's go to Wu meimei." The smile on Wei Yang's face became even brighter.

There was also a hint of slyness.

Stepping out of her chamber, Li Wei Yang had plastered on a bright and cheerful expression. After all, nobody liked to stare at a mournful expression, including Lao furen!

He Xiang Yuan was lively, filled with a fragrant scent. Da furen was sitting beside Lao furen. They were discussing plans for the New Year.

Li Zhang Le was in a snow white dress made out of fox skin with patterns of clouds and red begonias. When it came to appearance, she was a lot more eye-catching compared to the other xiaojies. Her stunning outfits were a perfect complement to her beauty as well. Even if she was just sitting in one spot, she was still very attractive. The other maidens in the room simply could not compare to her. At this moment, she had on a delicate smile as she listened to her mother's words, looking very elegant and patient.

On the other hand, Li Chang Xi was wearing a coat made out of mouse skin with patterns of red roses. Her head was accessorized with rubies and a pair of matching earrings that dangled from her earlobes. Her smile was natural and easygoing, completely hiding the sluggish and fatigued look from being locked up inside her room for an entire month. It was obvious she had become a lot more clear-minded after the punishment. She was wholeheartedly trying to get on Lao furen's good side, sometimes speaking up to retell a light-hearted story. Despite the efforts she put in though, Lao furen remained calm and unfazed.

Si xiaojie, Li Chang Xiao, was quiet and reserved like always. Now and then she would lift her head up and glance at Er xiaojie, Li Chang Ru, who was Erfang's daughter. Everytime she looked over, she would catch Li Chang Ru staring intently at Li Zhang Le with resentment and jealousy.

Everyone in this room looked as if they were living in harmony with one another but the truth was they all had ulterior motives.

A servant, Lu Xin, brought over a tray and placed a cup of tea beside each and every person.

Lao furen, Meng *shi*, picked up the cup and took a sip of it. She startled. "Oh? The flavour of this tea is great."

Upon hearing so, Li Zhang Le also picked up the cup and took a small sip. Then she agreed with a compliment, “Mm, even the colour of the tea is pretty. The flavour is long-lasting too. It is definitely premium tea.” She looked towards Lu Xin and said, “As expected of someone under Lao furen. You are talented at everything. I have never tasted such greatly brewed tea!”

Tea brewing skills in this period was considered elegant and high class. It wasn't just popular with the royalties and beaurocrats; it was even popular among the commoners. Not to mention, Da xiaojie Li Zhang Le was one of the many tea specialists, having been taught by a professional. To receive her compliment must mean the person had exceptional tea brewing skills.

Everyone in the room began to taste the tea and complimented on it.

A smile plastered across Meng *shi*'s face. “Lu Xin, your tea brewing skills have improved drastically. This calls for a reward.”

Lu Xin bowed down. “Lao furen, this tea was not brewed by me but San xiaojie.”

Everyone in the room was astounded. There was a complicated expression on Da furen's face.

In Lao furen's eyes though, there was a smile. “Oh, was it Wei Yang? Tell her to come in.”

All her efforts had done little to impress Lao furen, but Li Wei Yang had easily received Lao furen's praises. Li Chang Xi looked at Li Wei Yang who was entering the room. She was instantly filled with anger and resentment.

Chapter 13

Chapter 13: Retaliating With Someone Else's Power

Li Wei Yang was full of confidence that once Lao furen drank her tea she would not be able to drink tea brewed by anyone else. Due to the fact that Tuo Ba Zhen was a tea lover, and wanting to make him happy, she had searched for reputable tea sommeliers and had received their tutelage. After eight years, she was confident enough to say that her tea brewing skills was superb and could not be surpassed by anyone else.

She was not afraid of Da furen investigating the matter either. All the xiaojies of the Li's in Ping Cheng knew how to brewed tea. She had stayed in Ping Cheng for quite a while so it was logical that her tea brewing skills had improved as well.

Naturally Meng *shi* was very satisfied with the tea. She looked at Wei Yang as her smile became a lot warmer. "The way you brewed the tea is not like everyone else. Where did you learn your tea brewing skills?"

In the previous lifetime, because she was the concubine's daughter born in February, she was always very cautious of her manners and speech. At all occasions, she would simply be sitting quietly in a corner and would never casually converse with Lao furen. However, she was no longer like that.

She replied, "Lao furen, when I was at Ping Cheng, they had invited Dong jia's San Niang to teach the xiaojies how to brew tea. I had participated and learned a few skills as a result, but I'm afraid I'm still an amateur."

Da furen's expression turned for the worse. Even Li Zhang Le had furrowed her eyebrows. Had only learned a few skills and yet was able to brew such tea? If she had been seriously committed from the beginning then wouldn't that mean. . .

Dong jia's San Niang was a famous and highly respected tea sommelier. Unfortunately, she had difficulties moving and walking about so she had never left Ping Cheng. Li Zhang Le had once thought of inviting her to the estate but sadly there was no fate. To have heard such things from Wei Yang, for someone as prideful as Li Zhang Le, it was like a declaration of war.

Li Wei Yang had observed both mother and daughter's expression, but did not show it on her face. She simply said, "Lao furen, can I borrow the cup of tea for a minute?"

Meng *shi* slightly nodded her head.

Li Wei Yang stepped forward, picked up the cup of tea beside Meng *shi* and gently swirled it around. Afterwards she placed it back down as Lao furen looked down and noticed that a peony flower had appeared inside the cup of tea. Steam rose from the cup, creating an illusive mood.

Sitting on the side, second daughter-in-law, Wen *shi*, was curious and scooted closer to take a look. As she looked into the cup, she was taken by surprise. "I had no idea a flower could be created like that! Your skills are truly exceptional!"

Li Zhang Le's expression changed. Suddenly, she stood up and walked over. At the sight of the peony flower, she was immediately speechless.

Li Wei Yang humbly responded, "It's just a simple trick but at least it could bring a smile to Lao furen's face. Dong jia's San Niang was able to create the mountains and river out of the tea leaves. Now that's the kind of talent that makes other speechless with applause."

A simple trick? Yet not a single person in the Capital was able to do the same thing.

Meng *shi* was fixated on the cup of tea. The peony flower slowly disappeared as she let out a small sigh.

Meanwhile, Wen *shi*'s eyes narrowed and she asked, "San xiaojie, what happened to your sleeves?"

When Wei Yang's arms were relaxed by her side, it was not noticeable but the moment she lifted her arms, the sleeves were incidentally lifted as well, revealing the mismatched sleeves underneath. Li Wei Yang had been waiting for this question all along. She quickly dropped her arms and said with embarrassment, "It's nothing."

"What do you mean it's nothing? It's obvious your inner sleeves are very short!" Wen *shi*'s daughter, Li Chang Ru, purposely voiced out in a panic, as if she had discovered a huge secret.

As soon as she heard those words, Da furen stared fixedly at Li Wei Yang. Her gaze was sharp, like the edge of a sword ready to kill. She smiled and slowly said, “Wei Yang, what is this about?” Despite doing her best to hide her emotions, her tone was still stony and everyone present was able to pick up on it.

Li Chang Ru blinked her eyes excitedly and said, “Da baimu, can’t you see? Wei Yang’s clothes aren’t the right size for her! Aiya, how pitiful. She doesn’t even have something as simple as fitting clothes.”

Li Wei Yang lowered her eyes to the ground. She appeared nervous and uneasy, but on the inside, she was laughing. Da furen placed a huge significance on her appearance and dignity, especially when she was in front of Lao furen and the other daughter-in-laws. However, since Da furen had purposely neglected to provide her with proper clothings and necessities, why should Wei Yang help save her face value? Even if Da furen became even more resentful of Wei Yang as a result, her reputation would be tarnished once it’s known to everyone that she mistreats the concubine’s daughters. The Prime Minister’s reputation would also be on the line and because of that, Lao furen would definitely get involved.

Wen *shi* laughed out loud and said, “Da sao, can it be that you still haven’t gotten a simple tailor for Wei Yang’s clothes? She’s already been back for a month.”

Meng *shi* looked at Da furen with impatience. Even if Da furen was a fierce person, her face still turned red at this moment.

Li Zhang Le quickly defended, “Mother had said before that she would get Wei Yang four new set of clothes. Why hasn’t it arrived yet? It must be those servants shirking their responsibilities!” Zhang Le darted her eyes towards Wei Yang. Even though she was reprimanding, there was also pity in her tone of voice as she stared at Wei Yang, as if she was staring at her most beloved younger sister, masking the iciness underneath. “San mei, you should have said something to me instead of wearing such attire out into the public. Wouldn’t it embarrass mother as well?”

Wei Yang’s mouth curved into a small grin, without a modicum of fear. “What da jie said is right, but our sizes are different, otherwise I would have bothered you already.”

Despite being the concubine's daughter, she was nevertheless the Prime Minister's daughter. How was it possible to let the Prime Minister's daughter use hand-me-downs? Li Wei Yang knew for certain that Li Zhang Le had no intentions of giving her used clothings either, but she had chosen her words carefully and with meaningful intent so as to make Zhang Le speechless.

As expected, Zhang Le was forced to swallow down her defense as anger boiled up inside of her. All the other girls had always listened and showed their respect towards her and yet, Li Wei Yang was not one of them. Li Wei Yang must be crazy!

Da furen did not display any signs of anger. Even if she was angry, she would never show it on her face or voice it out loud. Doing so would undermine her elegant and benevolent image. But today Li Wei Yang had given her a slap to the face by appearing in public dressed improperly.

The room was dead silent, so silent that one could hear the sound of their own heart beating.

Making an enemy out of Da furen was not a good decision, but so what? Previously she had been obedient and submissive but still ended up as someone else's pawn in a chess game. In that case, she would rather take the initiative to change her fate. Right now, she was gambling on Lao furen's desire to protect the Li's reputation.

Zi Yan, who had followed Wei Yang, had rolled her hands into tight fists underneath her sleeves as her body trembled. On the other hand, Wei Yang continued to maintain a smile on her face. There was not a flicker of fear or submission in her eyes.

Meng *shi* looked at Da furen and calmly said, "You've been quite neglectful."

Lao furen generally did not have any interest for the estate's internal affair and had never reprimanded Da furen. Nonetheless, with this one sentence alone, it showed that Lao furen was taking Wei Yang's side on this matter. Anger spread throughout Da furen's body as her face became even redder, her breath became labored and she shot up from the chair. She was truly outraged now—angry to the point she could no longer maintain her façade.

Despite being the matriarch of the family, her husband was the Prime Minister

and placed great value on respect and family rules. For that very reason, Lao furen must never be angered or disrespected. Not to mention, Wen *shi* was always looking at her with a pair of hawk-eyes, ready to nitpick at her faults anytime. She could do nothing except to tolerate and endure it. To top it off, she had to keep up with her image as the benevolent, sophisticated and fair Prime Minister's wife and mother to all the concubine's daughters.

Li Wei Yang was simply the concubine's daughter. If she wanted to teach the girl a few lessons then the first thing she had to do was to calm down and not do anything rash and reckless. There were still many more opportunities left in the future to put Li Wei Yang into her place.

So, even though she was outraged, Da furen turned to Lin mumu with a serious look and shouted, "Kneel down!"

Lin mumu froze up in surprise. Everyone in the room was also taken back.

Chapter 14

Hi everyone! Thanks for still following this blog and waiting on my translations. I am back to continue translating but I won't be able to translate at super-speed like I did before. I've gotten a lot of requests for a characters list because people are getting confused with the similar names?? (umm who are you guys confused about? Is it the sisters?) Anyways, I will try to make one later when I have more time....

Chapter 14: Stepmother Bleeds

Da furen regained her calm composure and coldly scolded Lin mumu, "I had especially assigned you the task because strangers would make me restless. I have told you so many times to quickly bring her the new clothes. How come you haven't gotten it done? Wei Yang is our Li jia's San xiaojie, the Prime Minister's daughter. How can she tolerate your slowness? It's unreasonable to make our San xiaojie wear old clothes out in public. Is it because you guys want to create misunderstandings between us mother and daughter? To make others think that I am treating San xiaojie badly?"

Listening to Da furen's words, Li Wei Yang remained respectful but was coldly laughing on the inside. Da furen was Da furen for a reason. She did not waste a single breath beating around the bush. Every word she spoke was spot-on. Wei Yang could bring up the same reasoning, but if she did then Da furen would not have any face left. On the other hand, when Da furen said these words, she was practically pushing the blame onto Lin mumu.

Lin mumu was quick to react as she immediately kneeled on the floor and admitted her faults in between sobs. Lin mumu said it was all her fault, that it was her irresponsibility and incompetence that brought about this matter. Even though Da furen had verbally given her the task, Lin mumu knew it was not Da furen's real intentions to make new clothes for Wei Yang. It was all due to the incident regarding Li Zhang Le that had caused Da furen to be upset, which was why these past two days, Da furen was in fact waiting for Wei Yang to come and

beg for forgiveness. But who would've known that Wei Yang would directly seek out Lao furen instead?

San xiaojie looked weak and fragile, but she was actually very smart. If she had been any bit more foolish she would've gone to Da furen and asked for justice and lose her face value in the process. However, she had purposely waited for this moment where Lao furen and Wen *shi* was both present to bring up this case and put Da furen into a difficult position. There was nothing Da furen could do but to swallow down her anger.

“Hurry up and apologize to San xiaojie!” Li Zhang Le yelled out loud.

Due to Zhang Le's beauty, even the way she spoke was filled with elegance and sophistication, but when it came into Wei Yang's ears, for some reason, all she heard was a two-faced person talking. It filled Wei Yang with disgust and resentment. Wei Yang was not like Li Chang Xi and the others, who only wanted to gain Da furen's favours with sweet-talk and praises, so that in the future, they could secure a good marriage. Wei Yang knew Da furen was more than willing to use them as a stepping stone for Li Zhang Le's future.

Continuing with the act, Lin mumu kneeled down in front of Wei Yang to apologize. “San xiaojie, it's all my fault. Nubi will immediately tell them to bring over all of the new clothings to you. I guarantee you will like them too.”

Looking horrified and panicky, Wei Yang immediately backed away and looked at Da furen. “Mother, this, this is really. . .” She spoke extra slowly, stumbling on her words, as if she wanted to beg mercy for Lin mumu's sake.

Da furen gently replied, “Wei Yang, don't you worry. Just leave everything in my care. Should you feel any injustice in the future, I will help you teach these irresponsible servants a lesson!”

Wei Yang bowed down with gratitude. “Thank you, Mother. I shall leave everything in your care.” After today, Wei Yang was sure nobody was going to easily look down on her.

Meng *shi* examined Wei Yang then waved her over. “Come here, child.” Wei Yang walked over as Meng *shi* signaled Luo mumu. “It's been a month since you've been here. I have a present for you.”

Luo mama understood immediately as she returned a few moments later with a small box in floral designs. Inside the box, it was filled with jewelry and accessories.

Li Chang Xi peeked inside and noticed an expensive yet exquisite brooch with Begonia flowers on it. It was the brooch she been vying for for a long time from Meng shi. She had spent so much time and effort by Meng shi's side but was never given the brooch and yet today, Lao furen was giving it to Wei Yang. Her eyes were filled with jealousy and resentment as she glared at Wei Yang.

Li Wei Yang was surprised as well. She had never expected Lao furen to gift her with these things. A warm sensation ran through her body. Obviously this was Meng shi's way of telling everyone that she had Wei Yang on her mind.

Wei Yang was filled with gratitude towards Lao furen. Despite her actions, Lao furen didn't yell at her but instead was willing to become her support. She didn't say another word as she kneeled down and kowtowed in front of Lao furen. "Thank you Lao furen. I will remember your grace."

Meng shi smiled, knowing that Wei Yang had understood her intentions.

In a blink of an eye, Da furen's expression had stiffened.

Wen *shi* quietly laughed to herself. Anything that made Da furen uncomfortable and miserable was something that made her happy. As a result, she reached up and pulled out the gold phoenix brooch in her hair and placed it into Wei Yang's hands. "Good child, this is my gift to you as well."

Wei Yang shyly received the brooch and secretly darted a look in Da furen's direction. She noticed how green Da furen's face had become and was glaring at Wen *shi* instead. Wen *shi*, on the other hand, disregarded Da furen and laughed cheerfully.

Li Zhang Le quickly regained her composure and quietly coughed. Da furen immediately responded by turning towards Wei Yang and acted as if it was nothing. In a kind voice, she said, "Dear child, come over here! I have prepared a gift for you earlier. I might as well give it to you right now." Da furen had given Li Wei Yang some decorations that had looked expensive but was rather really useless. However, seeing the gifts Lao furen and Wen *shi* had given, she had to do something to match them as well. With everyone's eyes on her, Da furen

swallowed down her anger and removed her onyx bracelet. Suppressing a painful look, she put the bracelet on Wei Yang's wrists. "This piece of jewelry is expensive as it came from the palace. Take it."

Having once been an Empress, she knew that Jiang *shi* was telling the truth regarding the origin of this bracelet. Smiling, she said, "Thank you, Mother."

Da furen's mouth was slightly crooked from the suppressed anger. Nonetheless, she still kept her smiling pretense. "Silly child, there's no need for thanks!"

Li Chang Xi was brimming with jealousy as she evilly sneered, "Wei Yang, it looks like you've hit the fortune! Mother had actually wanted to save that bracelet for Dajie, but she's giving it to you instead!"

Upon hearing it, Li Wei Yang made a gesture to remove the bracelet. "If that is the case then Wei Yang cannot accept it!"

Da furen wasn't going to let Wei Yang return the gift as she glared menacingly at Chang Xi before returning to Wei Yang with a warm smile. "Silly girl, you are also my precious child. There is nothing wrong with giving it to you. You must accept my generosity!"

Seeing Da furen's two-faced personality, Wei Yang couldn't be any happier. "Then I shall thank you again, Mother!"

Li Chang Xi's eyes had widened with resentment. On the other hand, Li Zhang Le casually shifted her gaze elsewhere, towards the silver incense burner inlaid with lotus patterns and gems as she thought to herself how ignorant Chang Xi still was despite the numerous times she had been taught by Da furen. There were no signs of improvements. What was a bracelet? Today Lao furen had shown her support for Wei Yang, so how could Da furen go against it? It would only give *Wen shi* an opportunity to mock them.

As Wei Yang was leaving, Luo mumu chased after her down the hallway. "San xiaojie! Lao furen asked if you could, from now on, to come by and brew tea for Lao furen every day."

Li Wei Yang immediately replied, "Luo mumu, how could you put it like that? Being filial to Lao furen is something a granddaughter must do."

Her obliging attitude made Luo mumu happy. Wei Yang did not waste Lao furen's good intentions.

Once she returned to her bedchamber, Wei Yang opened the box Lao furen had given her. It was then that she discovered a hidden compartment in the box. Removing the red fabric covering the hidden compartment, she saw ten shiny silvers.

Zi Yan could only cough, unable to say anything else.

Wei Yang froze. All the jewelry and clothing she was given was not practical. She could not sell those presents and neither could she give it to servants in exchange for favours. Except for silvers, everything else was useless in times of need. Lao furen had known that everything that had happened today was an act and yet, she still gave Wei Yang these silvers. *Why?*

Chapter 15

Chapter 15: Scheming

When Da furen returned to her Fu An Yuan, she silently sat down and unhappily drank her tea.

“Li Wei Yang, that insolent! She has become a lot bolder! How dare she go against mother?!” Li Chang Xi exclaimed impatiently, filled with resentment.

Da furen lifted her eyes to Li Chang Xi as the corners of her mouth tilted down but she didn't say anything.

“Wu meimei, how could you say such things about San mei? It is very disrespectful.” Li Zhang Le furrowed her brows. Even though she thought Li Wei Yang deserved a lesson or two, but in front of others, she still wanted to protect her kind-hearted and compassionate image.

Li Chang Xi rudely scoffed and said, “Da jie, didn't mother tell you to investigate her background? Saying that she's talentless and a coward, but look at her now. Not only is she tactful, but she didn't look like a coward at all. It's nothing like what the investigation said.”

Da furen angrily glared at Chang Xi and asked, “Chang Xi, what are you thinking?”

Chang Xi looked at Da furen and gently replied, “Mother, from the way I see things, it's time for the maid we sent over to finally show us her capabilities.”

Da furen paused for awhile before laughing out loud. “You are right.”

The expression in Chang Xi's eyes changed into a colder look. “Right now, she has Lao furen's protection but what if the person she angered was father? Everyone will remember she's a misfortune born in February and then. . .” She trailed off vaguely but stared fixedly at Da furen, a huge grin on her face.

“You are indeed clever.” Da furen's smile deepened. “This is definitely not a bad idea.”

Li Chang Xi's happiness was more than obvious as she hurried over to

brownnose Da furen. “Mother, today you gave her a bracelet!”

Da furen grinned as she gave instructions to Lin mumu to bring over a pair of phoenix brooch made of jadeite. She gave it to Li Chang Xi. “One is for you, the other is for your Si jie.”

What did Si jie do? Nothing! Li Chang Xi had always been annoyed by this blood-related sister of hers. She decided to keep the two brooches for herself instead but said thank-you to Da furen anyway.

Li Chang Xi wasn't extremely stupid but neither was she extremely smart. However, Da furen liked this about her. She needed a Li Chang Xi who would obey her orders, a hot-headed Li Chang Xi who would jump out and do all of the underhanded tricks. This way, it would allow her and Zhang Le to stand and watch on the sideline while keeping their hands clean.

After awhile of gossips and conversations, Li Chang Xi left.

“Mother, you are very tolerant towards her,” Li Zhang Le commented, staring at Li Chang Xi's silhouette. “If you continue like this, I'm afraid she will become unruly and cocky.”

“Silly child, that's exactly what I want.” Da furen laughed coldly. “On this side, there's Erfang who's narrowminded, then there's also the scheming Lao Wu, and last but not least, the simple-minded Lao Si, only this way will they be of help to you.”

Li Zhang Le understood the implication behind her mother's words and gently smiled as she sat down beside Da furen. “Mother, isn't there also the addition of a clever San mei now?”

Da furen lifted a corner of her mouth. “Wei Yang is definitely not stupid but very soon, she will make a mistake.”

Ever since Wei Yang's incident in front of Lao furen, the clothes were instantly delivered. It didn't even take up a day for the clothes to be delivered. There was a pair of clothes for each and every season.

Wei Yang chose the light and soft outfit. It was red and silver with flower imprints. On the inside was a thick layer of cotton that is very warm and could be worn in the middle of winter. All of this meant her plan was successful.

Li Wei Yang was sitting in her bedchamber. She was drinking tea and wondering what to do with the silvers that Lao furen had gifted.

Hua Mei rushed in from the outside, holding a pair of beautifully sewn shoes. “San xiaojie, I noticed your shoes have been worn out and saw that Da xiaojie had a pair of shoes that were delicately sowed with a phoenix pattern so I have sowed one for you too! Xiaojie, look, do you like it?”

Li Wei Yang briefly glanced at the shoes. The shoes were made out of a crimson coloured brocade with golden phoenix designs. Each line of thread was intricately sewn. Clearly a lot of effort and time have been spent on the shoes.

Hua Mei carefully examined Li Wei Yang and repeated, “Xiaojie, do you like it?”

Li Wei Yang tried on the pair of shoes right in front of Hua Mei. A smile immediately crawled across Wei Yang’s face as she nodded her head, looking like an innocent girl excited by her favourite gift.

Hua Mei silently sighed in relief as she lowered herself to fix Wei Yang’s shoes. As if unintentionally, she said, “Right now, everyone’s been commenting on how elegant and beautiful San xiaojie is. Compared to Si xiaojie and Wu xiaojie, you’re so much prettier!”

Knowing not to mention Da xiaojie, whose beauty was like a fairy, it seems this girl wasn’t *that* stupid. Li Wei Yang pretended not to hear Hua Mei’s comment as she carefully inspected her shoes instead.

“Nubi is new to the estate but has heard all the mumus saying how San xiaojie was born from Qi yiniang and that Qi yiniang was also very beautiful in her youth!” Hua Mei exclaimed, as if she couldn’t hold it in any longer.

Suddenly Wei Yang lifted her gaze to Hua Mei. Under Wei Yang’s gaze, Hua Mei felt nervous and immediately lowered her head. She proceeded to slap her own face and said, “Nubi is wrong! Nubi has spoken too much!”

Unexpectedly, Wei Yang giggled and said, “Hua Mei, this pair of shoes is indeed very beautiful!”

Seeing that Wei Yang wasn’t angry, Hua Mei was relieved and continued, “It’s good that San xiaojie likes it. Aiya, xiaojie must be so lonely without your biological mother at your side, unlike Si xiaojie and Wu xiaojie. They have Si

yiniang to take care of them. At the very least, they could lively happily each and every day.”

Li Wei Yang blinked and purposefully replied, “Hua Mei, what are you trying to say?”

Hua Mei knew how to read people’s expressions and words. “Nubu has heard from the others that, for these past two days, Qi yiniang’s illness have worsened.”

Upon hearing Hua Mei talking about Qi yiniang, Wei Yang unknowingly touched the pendant she was wearing underneath. When she was about to leave Ping Cheng, the Lis in Ping Cheng had helped her retrieved this pendent. The pendant was the only gift she had from her biological mother.

Qi yiniang, also known as Tan *shi*, was originally a servant beside Da furen who was in charge of washing feet. One time when Li Xiao Ran was drunk, he had impregnated Tan *shi* with Wei Yang who was born in February and eventually forced to leave the estate. To show off her benevolence, Da furen allowed Tan *shi* to become a *yiniang*. In the Li’s estate, all the other yiniangs had a proper background, had beauty or had a child who was respected. They were able to use those factors to strengthen their position in the estate, all except for Qi yiniang. She had no background and had given birth to a child in the unfortunate month of February. Thus, she had angered Li Xiao Ran. In the previous life, she had passed away due to an illness half a year before Wei Yang returned to the estate. However, in this lifetime, Wei Yang had returned to the estate one year earlier so Qi yiniang was still alive.

In the past month, Li Wei Yang had used every means to find out news regarding Qi yiniang but all she had found out was that Qi yiniang was not favoured by Li Xiao Ran, had no reputation or status, had a weak body and was sent to live in the isolated Nan Yuan by Da furen. Nan Yuan was far. It was separated from the main courtyard and located right beside the servants’ bedchambers.

Not only was Qi yiniang the poorest out of everyone, she was also the one who everyone else stepped on. The thought of it was painful to Wei Yang, like a needle pricking at her heart. But then Hua Mei was Da furen’s people and right

in front of Wei Yang, she was talking about Qi yiniang. There *has* to be a catch.

Wei Yang laughed on the inside, but on the surface, she calmly stared at Hua Mei. Since they have already taken the first step, she couldn't sit still and do nothing either. However, it is still unsure who's going to be the actual loser in this game of chess.

Chapter 16

Chapter 16: Merciless, Heartless

After coming to a decision, Li Wei Yang displayed an expression filled with hesitation and worries. She intentionally stammered, “Qi yiniang . . . Qi yiniang . . . what’s wrong with her?”

Hua Mei recognized Wei Yang’s curiosity and hurriedly responded, “San xiaojie, Qi yiniang’s illness is going to worsen when winter arrives, afraid she won’t be able to endure past the year. . .” As she spoke, she was carefully studying Li Wei Yang, not missing any changes in expression.

The smile on Wei Yang’s face gradually disappeared, replaced by a crest-fallen look. “Qi yiniang is my birth mother but all I can do is watch her suffer . . .”

Hua Mei reminded, “San xiaojie, now that you’re doing better, shouldn’t you help out Qi yiniang? At the very least, you should go and visit her.”

Li Wei Yang blinked a few times. “But right now Qi yiniang is heavily ill. I heard father had instructed no one is allowed to visit in case one might be infected by the illness.”

Hua Mei smiled and said, “San xiaojie, you can sneak out at night to visit her, isn’t that right? I’ll help you scope out the area in case someone arrives. If someone does come, I’ll immediately notify you. Then nobody will know right?”

Li Wei Yang continued to be reluctant. “If father knew I broke the rule, he’s going to be very angry.”

“I have no rights to persuade you, but San xiaojie, just think about it. Qi yiniang is your birth mother! Even if laoye knew, there’s nothing he can do about it,” Hua Mei said.

Hua Mei wanted to encourage her to visit her birth mother in order to infuriate her father? No way, it couldn’t be *that* simple.

Wei Yang laughed, as if she finally understood. “Hua Mei, you’re so clever! Let me think about the time and I’ll tell you when later.” Watching as Hua Mei disappeared, the look in Wei Yang’s eyes turned frosty.

Behind the curtains, Bai Zhi slowly appeared. “San xiaojie, you must not listen to her!”

Li Wei Yang glanced at Bai Zhi and asked, “Why not?”

Bai Zhi paused for a second but she truly did not want to see her young miss get into trouble so she said, “Xiaojie, please don’t mind me for saying this, but everything that Hua Mei has said, it is too suspicious.”

It seems Bai Zhi was not that simple-minded and naïve. Li Wei Yang grinned and said, “Greed has no boundaries. There are some people who can’t live without seeing me suffer.” Then she tossed the pair of beautifully sewn shoes aside.

Bai Zhi startled. “San xiaojie, you already knew. All the more, you mustn’t go!”

Li Wei Yang tapped rhythmically on the table as her smile broadened. “No, we must go!”

That afternoon, Li Wei Yang told Hua Mei that they were going to pay Qi yiniang a visit at around 7pm. However, when the sun had just set at around 5pm, Li Wei Yang had taken Bai Zhi and the two of them silently left their yard from the back doors.

“San xiaojie, didn’t you told Hua Mei to meet up at 7pm? Why are we—”

Li Wei Yang grinned. Her eyes were sparkling with wiles. “If we waited until then, we would only be stepping into their traps!” Visiting her birth mother was a must, but the time in which they visited Qi yiniang had to be carefully mapped out. The timing had to be perfect so that Da furen didn’t have a way out, thinking that her scheme had been successful, and at the same time, it should give her enough time to find a leeway should anything go wrong.

Li Wei Yang and Bai Zhi made their way towards Nan Yuan carefully and silently, without bumping into anyone on the way. Nan Yuan was extremely peaceful and isolated. There were weeds growing on both sides of the walls and there were only three rooms in the yard. There were barely any servants at Nan Yuan.

There was a strong stench of medicinal herbs as one neared the door. Li Wei Yang had changed into a servant’s clothing before she left and had purposely

lowered her head, trailing after Bai Zhi. When Bai Zhi entered the courtyard, she saw a servant girl coming out to welcome them. The servant girl was wearing a faded cotton attire with dirty stains here and there.

Upon seeing Bai Zhi, the servant girl's eyes widened in surprise. "You are—"

Bai Zhi smiled and opened the container in her hands for the servant girl to take a look inside. "I've been instructed by San xiaojie to deliver this chicken soup to yiniang."

The servant girl was horrified. Isn't there already someone in there, why is there another delivery? The servant girl quickly replied, "These two jiejie, Zhao mumu also said she came to visit yiniang under San xiaojie's instructions. She's currently talking inside!"

Zhao mumu? The mumu working in her courtyard? It was as if Li Wei Yang suddenly stopped breathing. She had a strange feeling about this. Leaving the other two behind, she lifted the curtains and quickly stepped inside. In the room, there was only a bed and about two wooden vanity dresser. On the table was an old flower vase. The windows were tightly shut, making the atmosphere very oppressive.

However, as she focused on what was happening inside, the scene startled her. Zhao mumu was feeding soup to the sickly *furen* laying on the bed. Without thinking, Li Wei Yang hurried forward and roughly smacked the bowl of soup out of Zhao mumu's hands.

The soup spilled all over Zhao mumu who was infuriated. "Who dares?!"

Li Wei Yang coldly snorted. "Zhao mumu, have your eyes gone blind that you don't even recognize me?"

Recognizing the person in front of her, Zhao mumu panicked. Didn't Hua Mei say San xiaojie would come a few hours later? Why is she here at this time?

"Who told you to feed this soup to Qi yiniang?!" Li Wei Yang's voice was firm and stony, sounding nothing like a fragile thirteen year old girl.

Zhao mumu was overwhelmed by her aura and stammered, "It's . . . It's . . ."

"Wei Yang? Are you really Wei Yang?!" The *furen* laying on the bed froze

before snapping out of her daze and reached for Wei Yang's hands.

Qi yiniang was truly a delicate person. Although she was still quite young, her appearance had aged and she looked sickly. There wasn't enough meat on her. She was so skinny that the jade bangle on her wrist could fall out any minute.

It was the first time Li Wei Yang met her birth mother. Her eyes reddened unknowingly. Without replying to Qi yiniang, she quickly blinked her eyes a few times, pointed to the ground and said, "Zhao mumu, who gave you the guts to do such a brazen thing that you are attempting to murder Qi yiniang?!"

Zhao mumu was about to lie but then noticed a few ants had died on the ground next to where the soup had spilled over. Obviously their deaths were caused by the poisonous soup. There was nothing she could say as she turned and ran for the door.

In an icy tone of voice, Li Wei Yang commanded, "You two, catch her for me!"

Bai Zhi and the other servant girl exchanged a glance. Immediately the two cornered and grabbed a hold of Zhao mumu, one on the right, one on the left. Zhao mumu struggled violently in between. Meanwhile Li Wei Yang walked up to her and gave her a harsh slap across the face. The sound resonated in the room.

"This is for daring to murder Qi yiniang!"

Zhao mumu was angry and in pain as she screamed, "San xiaojie! I was sent to care for you by Da furen! You can't hit me!"

Not only do I want to hit you! I will also get rid of you! In a flash, Li Wei Yang had made a decision as she picked up the flower vase on the table and raised it high over Zhao mumu's head. Zhao mumu looked at the vase with a horrified expression. Even though Wei Yang's hand was raised high over Zhao mumu's head, but when she was facing those pair of frightful eyes, she couldn't deliver the deathly hit. Logic told her she had to be decisive about this but deep down in her conscious, it was not an easy thing to take away someone else's life with your own two hands.

"San xiaojie, if you lay a finger on me, you won't be able to take responsibility —" Zhao mumu noticed Wei Yang's hesitation.

But it was for these words that had helped Wei Yang with her heartless

decision.

Using all of her strength, she smashed the flower vase on Zhao mumu's head. Immediately blood seeped out of Zhao mumu's head, her eyes widened and her body became limp. The two servant girls panicked and let go of Zhao mumu as Zhao mumu's bloody corpse fell to the ground.

"What is there to be afraid of?! She was the one who came here wanting to murder Qi yiniang. This is the ending she asked for!" Li Wei Yang's face was pale as a ghost as she set down the flower vase. After a while, she regained her composure as she stared at the other three people in the room. They were still frozen in horror.

Bai Zhi calmed down then lowered herself to check Zhao mumu's pulse. "It looks like . . . It looks like she has stopped breathing!" she announced shakily.

Li Wei Yang stared icily at Zhao mumu. This old mumu had listened to Da furen's instructions to come here and murder Qi yiniang. If she had arrived according to the time set with Hua Mei then her birth mother would have died by the time she came. If she had been merciful earlier and let Zhao mumu live, there was no doubt that Zhao mumu would run to Da furen and told her everything that had transpired. When that happened, there would be nothing left for the two of them except death. Therefore, she was not wrong.

"Xiaojie, what should we do now?" A sweat dropped from Bai Zhi's forehead, landing on her eyelash. San xiaojie's strong personality was not normal like others. She had already decided to serve xiaojie; therefore, she will not do anything to betray her young miss.

Li Wei Yang was about to talk when Qi yiniang, who had seen everything on the bed, quickly said to her servant, "Cui'er, go find a bag and put her corpse in it. Then tie it to a heavy rock and throw it into the lily pond behind the window. You must be decisive and quick, do you understand?"

Chapter 17

Finally another important male character appears...^^

Chapter 17: Perfect Crime

Qi yiniang's illness was severe because she started coughing violently after a few simple words.

Li Wei Yang walked over and tightly held on to her hands. "Mom."

Including the first lifetime and this lifetime, this was the first time she ever called Qi yiniang "mom". It made Wei Yang both nervous and scared. She had been too calm before. If Da furen had decided to push for the murder to happen an hour earlier, there was a chance she would never be able to see her birth mother again.

The servant girl named Cui'er, despite being very frightened, she was not stupid either. Knowing the dire situation at hand, she immediately went out to look for a bag. Afterwards, along with Bai Zhi's help, the two of them shoved Zhao mumu's corpse into the bag and put in heavy rocks as well. Unfortunately, Zhao mumu was too heavy, not to mention the addition of the rocks' weight, the two girls wasn't able to lift the bag. Seeing this, Li Wei Yang decided to help the two girls lift the bag. It took a lot of energy, to the point of exhaustion, for all three of them to toss the heavy bag into the pond behind the windows. Upon hearing the big splash made by the bag, the three of them exchanged a look and sighed in relief.

"Be thorough about cleaning the blood stains in the room. Even that bowl of soup, take it all away. Your actions must be quick and efficient. Don't let others notice," Li Wei Yang instructed matter-of-factly.

Sitting on the side and watching, Qi yiniang slightly trembled. She would have never expected Wei Yang to save her at the critical moment. Not to mention, she was very decisive in her actions.

After everything was done, Qi yiniang held tightly on to Wei Yang's hands.

“Child, hurry and return to your chamber. Don’t stay here any longer, lest you get pulled into trouble as well.”

Looking at Qi yiniang’s face, Li Wei Yang stubbornly shook her head. “No, Wei Yang won’t go. Wei Yang wants to stay with mom.”

“Zhao mumu is Da furen’s people—” Qi yiniang suddenly coughed again.

Wei Yang scooted closer and gently smoothed her back. In a gentle voice, she said, “Mom, you mustn’t worry about Da furen or how she’s going to trouble me. I have my ways to deal with her.”

Qi yiniang shook her head. “No, Da furen isn’t someone you can easily deal with.”

Li Wei Yang nodded and caressed Qi yiniang’s face. She noticed Qi yiniang’s forehead was burning hot. She turned to Cui’er. “How is my mom’s illness?”

Cui’er’s eyes were wet but Qi yiniang was looking at her with a look that said to not say anything. In the end, Cui’er couldn’t keep it in any longer. “San xiaojie, Qi yiniang’s life has been difficult. At first it was only a cold but no one allowed her to see a doctor. Not to mention, the food had been halved. Without the needed care, yiniang’s health has become worse over time.”

Li Wei Yang pulled out five silvers and shoved it underneath Qi yiniang’s pillow. “Mom, take this. Let Cui’er turn it into smaller coins and use it to go out and buy medicine.”

Without thinking, Qi yiniang immediately refused. “No, it should be me who should be supporting you. How can I take your money?” After saying so, she took off the jade bangle on her wrist and gave it to Wei Yang.

Even if a person was made out of steel, they could nevertheless tell who was genuine to them. In Qi yiniang’s eyes, there was only care and affection that came from deep within the heart.

Wei Yang’s eyes began to burn as she shook her head. “Mom, lao furen really likes me. All of these silvers were given to me by lao furen. I’m living very well so you don’t have to worry.”

Qi yiniang nodded as she suppressed the urge to hug her daughter and cry.

With unshed tears, she said, “Wei Yang, it’s all because of my uselessness.”

“Mom, the person who turned you into this state . . . someday, I will let that woman have a taste of her own bitter medicine!” Her voice was cold and vicious. It didn’t match someone of her age.

Qi yiniang panicked and covered Wei Yang’s mouth. Cui’er was her trustworthy confidante. Bai Zhi was able to be trusted as well but even so. . .

“You mustn’t speak such nonsense! I only want you to grow up, get married and live peacefully. It is the best outcome to wish for. Regarding revenge, don’t think about it anymore. The most important thing is to live a peaceful life.”

These were the words only your birth mother would tell you. Wei Yang felt a fierce emotion stirring inside of her but she couldn’t utter a word.

Qi yiniang was about to continue but was interrupted by a strange sound.

Plop!

The noise turned Qi yiniang pale and horrified, as if she couldn’t believe what she had heard. She held on tighter to Wei Yang. “Wei Yang, do you hear that?”

“Zhao mumu has resurrected?!” Cui’er exclaimed in shocked horror.

Li Wei Yang stood up from the bed. “Let me go take a look.” She quickened her steps towards the window and stared out at the lily pond. She noticed behind the rockeries there was the shadow of a person. Small stones were falling into the pond, creating the *plop plop* sound. Turning around, she smiled at Qi yiniang. “Mom, don’t worry. It’s the rockeries that haven’t been tended to. Small stones are chipping off of it and falling into the water.”

After one glimpse, Li Wei Yang was certain there was a person behind the rockeries. But who could it be? When they tossed Zhao mumu into the pond, she wondered if that person had seen what happened.

Coming to this thought, Wei Yang held Qi yiniang’s hands and said, “It’s time for me to go. I will come back and visit you again.”

Knowing Wei Yang couldn’t stay for long, Qi yiniang didn’t want to part with her but had to as she reminded, “You must be careful.”

Li Wei Yang knew that Da furen was going to bring Li Xiao Ran over. For this

reason, she had to prepare for the next act but she didn't want to disclose this to Qi yiniang.

Leaving Nan Yuan, Wei Yang told Cui'er to show her the way. Then she took Bai Zhi with her and walked past the lily pond towards the rockeries which was made out of stones from Taihu Lake. From this standpoint to where Nan Yuan was, all one could see was a field of weeds and grass that had grown tall enough to reach a person's waist. Anything else was but a blur. Therefore, it was impossible to have seen Zhao mumu being tossed into the water. She sighed in relief knowing the secret was safe.

About to leave, she suddenly heard a stifled moan.

Their gazes followed to the other side where they saw a small boy, approximately 8-9 years old, captured by two indistinguishable mumus. One of the two mumus was viciously choking his neck causing the boy to struggle violently. His porcelain like skin quickly turned white. His jet black hair was a mess. His arms and legs were flailing in the air.

Li Wei Yang was taken aback. Then Bai Zhi whispered into her ears, "Xiaojie, that's San shaoye!"

She was horrified upon hearing that. San shaoye, Li Min De, was the adopted son of third aunt-in-law Zhou *shi*. 7 years ago, third uncle, Li Xiao He, passed away due to poor health. They didn't have an heir so news of Zhou *shi* looking for an adopted child quickly spread. Back then, Da furen had thought about sending over a child from the Li's bloodline in order to control Zhou *shi*. The plan was for the child to inherit the large amount of dowry from Zhou *shi* as well as all of Li Xiao He's wealth. Second aunt-in-law, Wen *shi*, had the same idea in mind. As a result, Da furen and Wen *shi* had fought over this for a while. However, even though Zhou *shi* may be gentle and kind, she was not a coward. With Lao furen's help, she brought over Zhou Min De, who was the child of a distant relative, and made him into the adopted son. Due to this incident, she had angered Da furen and Wen *shi*. In other words, this Li Min De was a thorn in Da furen's eyes.

There was a flicker of terror in Bai Zhi's eyes. Li Wei Yang was hesitant. How could she save him? There was those two mumus. She wasn't that stupid to think she could take them both on.

A few moments later, the boy was no longer struggling. His head was tilted to one side, looking like a dead crane.

One of the mumus laughed coldly. “Throw him into the pond. We’ll say he lost balance, fell into the water and drowned himself.”

Witnessing all of this, Li Wei Yang finally understood everything. So this was how the poor child had died in the previous lifetime. No wonder when she returned to the Li’s estate, Zhou *shi* had distanced herself from everyone and became anti-social. She must have been traumatized by the unfortunate incident.

The still body of the boy was thrown into the water. His red silk clothing could be seen floating on the surface before slowly sinking down. The two mumus stayed and watched until his body had already sunk down. One of the mumus even looked around the area to make sure no one was around to witness their act. They left only when they were sure it was a perfect crime.

When the two mumus finally disappeared, Bai Zhi grabbed Wei Yang’s hands in a panic. “Xiaojie, what should we do now?”

Qi yiniang, Li Min De, these two people were consecutively murdered. It was as if these two incidents had something related to her! Li Wei Yang suddenly stood up and without a single word, took off her shoes and jumped into the freezing water.

Bai Zhi was shocked, unable to react fast enough to stop Wei Yang. All she could do was stand and watch as the long black hair gradually disappeared underneath the water until there was nothing left. . .

Chapter 18

I thought I should clarify some relationships (it may be complicated) before we get started on this chapter and delve further into the story. Li Xiao Ran is the Prime Minister who is Wei Yang's father. Li Xiao Ran has two brothers (as far as I remember and up to this point of the story). Those two brothers have wives and children. The second brother married Wen *shi* (whom you have already met in a previous chapter) and the third brother, who is already dead in the story, married Zhou *shi*, who adopted Li Min De as her son (because they didn't have any children of their own). Alternatively, the second brother and his branch of the family may be referred to as "*Erfang*" and the third brother's branch = "*Sanfang*".

So Li Min De and Li Wei Yang are more like cousins than siblings, although not really either because he's adopted. I know it's confusing, as with all these ancient novels and their complicated relationships, and we haven't even mentioned the royal family yet. Regarding the age, Wei Yang is said to be thirteen years old and Min De—according to Wei Yang—is probably 8-10 (let's say 10) years old but of course, this is based on her opinion and what he looks like on the outside. All I can say is there's more to Min De than meets the eye. Anyway, things are getting juicy from this chapter onwards. . .

Chapter 18: Covering For Each Other

Witnessing this scene, Bai Zhi panicked to the point of almost fainting.

Unlike what she was expecting, a few moments later, Li Wei Yang had resurfaced and dragged Li Min De out of the water. Even though Li Min De was still young, he was nevertheless a guy and therefore, it was hard for Wei Yang to pull him out. If she had loosened her grip by just a little, she would have dropped Min De back into the water. Bai Zhi quickly rushed over to help. Together, the two of them dragged him out onto the shore.

Li Wei Yang touched his chest. "Still warm." Then she started to use all the techniques she had seen villagers used to save a drowned person. First she

pressed down on his chest two times then used her knee to press on his stomach. After a while, Li Min De, who had become unconscious due to suffocation, came around and was able to breathe again. Coughing two times, he spat out the water in his system and regained his conscious.

Finally he was breathing again. Li Wei Yang sighed in relief.

Li Min De turned around. His eyes were dark black but also clear and sparkling like the stars in the sky. He had a set of full, long lashes which still had water droplets dripping from them. Li Wei Yang was startled, noticing that his features were even more dazzling than the sunlight. Goodness, he was so beautiful that it was unbelievable. His eyes were alluring and attractive, even if he wasn't smiling. He had smooth, porcelain-like skin. If he was a girl, he would definitely be able to compete with Li Zhang Le's beauty. Not to mention, he was probably only ten years old right now.

His crystal clear eyes sparkled and he was about to say something but was interrupted by Li Wei Yang. She covered his mouth. "Don't scream! If you scream, I'll leave you here right now!"

Bai Zhi shuddered. Xiaojie's voice sounded like she was a bandit on the way to steal someone else's belongings.

Li Wei Yang noticed how dazed Li Min De seemed as he stared at her. She reached up and touched his face. It was soft and white, like tofu in water.

"I'm your San jie, Li Wei Yang." As she spoke, she cued Bai Zhi to remove her dry outer shirt for Min De. Then she proceeded to remove Li Min De's wet outer shirt but suddenly, out of him fell a half-moon jade with a red string to wear around the neck. Without looking at the necklace, Li Wei Yang put it back on his neck. She then gathered his wet shirt together.

Li Min De sat still, staring at her with a pair of shimmering eyes.

Li Wei Yang stared at him. Truly, the longer she stared at that face, the more beautiful it became. However, she grabbed the collar of his shirt and said, "Go back and tell your mother that Da furen wanted to kill you and it was I, your San jie, who saved you. Understood?"

This looked like a scene of intimidation and threats. Bai Zhi's voice was stuck in

her throat as she stared with wide eyes.

Li Wei Yang stared intently at Li Min De. She was about to abandon him but Li Min De, who had just been through a near-death experience, was afraid of being abandoned the most at this moment. He reached out and grabbed a corner of her dress then quickly threw his arms around her. “San jiejie!”

The feeling of warmth enveloped her, in addition to the weakened voice, she suddenly felt clumsy. A long moment later, she finally hugged Li Min De back.

He was truly a nice child. She was abruptly reminded of Yu Li, her son in the previous lifetime. He used to always act like this in front of her. Every time he saw her, he would rush over and throw himself at her. There was pain in her chest. Unable to control herself, she started pinching Li Min De’s face before caressing it. Li Min De was still young but also very acquiescing. He sat still in one spot and let this strange sister touch him to the point his face was distorted.

Bai Zhi furrowed her brows. She thinks that xiaojie had forgotten this child was ten years old, meaning he was only three years younger than xiaojie herself. Thinking of this, Bai Zhi coughed loudly. Li Wei Yang snapped out of her daze and relinquished Li Min De.

She reminded Li Min De, “There’s nothing to worry about anymore. Remember, in the coming hour, you shouldn’t appear in front of anyone else. Let them think that you’re already dead. What happened today, besides your mother, you must not tell anyone else!” Her nails dug into his shoulders and her eyes was burning with a fiery flame, intimidating others. Underneath the fiery gaze, Li Min De was frozen and stupified. Without knowing, he nodded his head.

Li Min De carefully walked off, dragging with him Bai Zhi’s oversized shirt. He was clever to choose the road where nobody took. Seeing this, Li Wei Yang nodded in satisfaction. Earlier, at the most critical moment, he even pretended to faint so that the two mumus thought he had already died. He was a clever child indeed.

Bai Zhi took a few steps before she made a noise.

Li Wei Yang also noticed it. In the grass, there was a dead white crane. In Da Li, white cranes were considered a symbol of good fortune. They were exceptionally

precious and rare. Even the prime minister's estate didn't have any white cranes and yet, here was one. Not to mention, it was already dead. An icy smile formed on Li Wei Yang's face. Then she dug a hole and buried the white crane deep down.

When everything was done, a strong wind blew over causing Bai Zhi to shudder. "Xiaojie, what should we do now?"

Li Wei Yang gave it some thought then said, "Go back and get me a change of clothes, one that I would wear on a daily basis. Remember to be careful and to not make a sound lest it captures someone's attention."

Bai Zhi nodded.

Watching as Bai Zhi disappeared, Li Wei Yang hid behind one of the rockeries.

The bait had been dropped. Obviously it was time to reel it in. She knew those people were going to arrive very soon.

At this moment, Da furen and Li Xiao Ran, with the addition of Wu xiaojie, Li Chang Xi, was making their way towards Nan Yuan.

"Laoye, a white crane suddenly flew by the estate, heading in the direction of Lake Bibo behind Nan Yuan, you must come and take a look!" Da furen said with a chuckle.

Li Xiao Ran nodded his head. This was a symbol of good fortune.

Li Chang Xi was beaming with happiness as well. Just the thought of the misfortunes waiting for Li Wei Yang was enough to get her excited.

Halfway there, Hua Mei was seen rushing over from the side road with a panicky expression.

"Aren't you San jie's servant? What are you doing here?" Li Chang Xi yelled.

There was a hint of uneasiness and impatience on Hua Mei's face. She wanted to tell Da furen that she couldn't find San xiaojie anywhere. Perhaps San xiaojie had left to Nan Yuan before her, but laoye was here and she dared not say anything.

Li Chang Xi had no patience and urged, "Where is San jie? You should be serving her!"

Earlier Hua Mei had rushed over to Da furen's place to relay the news but when she returned, she couldn't find Li Wei Yang anywhere. She was frightened and burst, "San xiaojie heard of Qi yiniang's illness and wanted to visit her. Nubi. . . nubi. . ."

Li Xiao Ran's face darkened as he said to Da furen, "This child doesn't know what the rules are. Even if she wanted to go visit, she should have at least told you first."

Da furen smiled cheerfully like the Goddess of Mercy. "Haiz, the child's been away for so long that it's understandable she doesn't know the rules and protocols."

Li Xiao Ran snorted loudly. He was not happy with Li Wei Yang. Not only was she born in the bad luck month of February, she wasn't looking after her own behaviour and action. Even if she wanted to visit her mother, she should at least say something to Da furen. How ignorant!

The moon had already come out, shining down on the procession of people below.

The interruption had dampened Li Xiao Ran's mood to see the fortunate white crane. He slowly walked towards Lake Bibo and stared at the clear water which reflected the moon on the surface. There were only tall, wild grasses and no sighting of the white crane anywhere. His expression immediately turned for the worse.

"Didn't you say there was a white crane?"

Even Da furen was surprise about this. She had clearly instructed someone to put the dead white crane at this spot, but how come she couldn't see it anywhere? Nonetheless she remained calm and composed.

"Perhaps it's just too dark around here and it's hiding somewhere in the wild grass."

Li Xiao Ran's mood dropped even lower as he furrowed his eyebrows. He was about to turn around and leave when suddenly, a panicky mumu rushed towards them. Behind her was about 3-4 other people. Each one of them was holding a lantern.

“San shaoye! San shaoye! Where are you?!”

Da furen’s stiffened expression began to relax as she tried to suppress the blissful feeling inside. “Aren’t you Min De’s wet nurse? What’s wrong that you’re looking for Min De?”

Who cares if the dead white crane could not be seen, the important matter was Li Min De!

Chapter 19

sithkazar has made a lovely and detailed [character map](#) for the novel if anyone really needs it as guidance.

I like Qi yiniang, even though she's quite docile and submissive, and I kind of pity her too. She is powerless but she is a good mother, at least she tries to be with what she has, even if she lacks a lot compared to the other yiniangs...

Chapter 19: Cursed Fate

The wet nurse Zhang *shi* kneeled down. "Da furen, in the afternoon, I had taken San shaoye out for fresh air in the garden but shaoye had disappeared. I looked everywhere several times. There's only this place left to search."

Li Xiao Ran's eyebrows furrowed even more. Sanfang didn't have any children. All they had was the one adopted son. If something happened, it would be uncertain whether or not Zhou *shi* would be able to endure it. As he contemplated, he questioned, "Does San furen know about this?"

The wet nurse's face paled. "No, she doesn't. Nubi was afraid furen wouldn't be able to endure it. Instead I said Lao furen had invited San shaoye over."

Li Xiao Ran knew how important the child was to Zhou *shi* and immediately ordered people to search for him.

The corners of Li Chang Xi's mouth lifted up. "That's right, we have to search thoroughly, otherwise who knows if someone could slip and fall into the pond in this dark night."

Li Xiao Ran looked at her stonily. "What kind of jiejie are you that you would curse your San di? Preposterous!"

"I was simply worried about San di and had said something nonsensical!" Li Chang Xi quickly responded.

Li Xiao Ran snorted coldly.

Da furen glanced over the still water. In a quiet voice, she said, "Laoye, what

Xiaowu said isn't wrong. Everything is possible. Wasn't it last year that Zuo Yushi's youngest son fell in the water when he was playing around? There's so many people here. You and I should head to Nan Yuan and rest there while we wait for the results."

Li Xiao Ran couldn't believe the heap of misfortunate events happening. His mood worsened as he nodded his head and made his way towards Nan Yuan.

Meanwhile Da furen was giving orders, "Thoroughly search the area around the waters." Then she briefly exchanged a look with Li Chang Xi.

Li Chang Xi understood right away. "Mother, don't you worry. I'll stay behind and make sure we'll find San di."

Satisfied, Da furen took her people and headed towards Nan Yuan.

Li Chang Xi regained her composure as she lifted her chin and arrogantly barked, "All of you, hurry and search that area over there!"

Everyone present immediately began searching the wild grass and the pond. Using their lantern, they walked around and repeatedly called "San shaoye". However, even after a long moment, there was still no reply.

Right then, someone shouted in horror, "San shaoye's shoes!!" The person picked up the floating shoes, holding it as if it was a precious gem, and handed it over to Li Chang Xi.

Li Chang Xi nodded and said, "Oh no, it looks like San di really did fall into the water. Hurry and search again!" In her head, she was going over what the two mumus had said, that they had tossed the body into the pond. It must be somewhere here. The body should float up anytime soon. Li Chang Xi instructed the people to search carefully and they quickly obeyed.

Li Chang Xi waited for a very long time, to the point she was losing patience. Looking around, for some reason, she suddenly slipped and fell. She yelled out loud but didn't even have enough time to hold onto the rocks before she found her body sinking into the water.

Growing up in the Capital, Li Chang Xi had an easy and luxurious life as a xiaojie. She didn't know how to swim. The only thing she could do was splash around and raced forward. Out of nowhere, she felt a pair of hands grabbing her

ankle and pulled her downwards. Her mind went blank as she screamed at the top of her lungs only to end up drinking water instead. She panicked. The weeds in the pond were deadly as they tangled around her, causing her to struggle vigorously. As a result, she found herself even more tangled to the point she couldn't breathe.

In the waters, she thought she saw a pale, white face. But it was gone as quick as it had appeared, not giving her a chance to examine carefully, as if it was just her imagination. Her entire body was dragged down.

“Quick! Quick! Hurry and rescue Wu xiaojie!” Meanwhile on the shore, everyone was shouting in unison. In a matter of seconds, bodyguards came running over and yet, everyone was hesitant to jump in. This was because everyone knew how precious Wu xiaojie's body was. If she was touched by a man not worthy of her status then death would be the only way out for the man.

At long last, there was a wet nurse who knew how to swim as she jumped in the water. Time passed as the nurse searched for Li Chang Xi. Eventually she was found tangled with all the weeds. The nurse quickly swam over and dragged her out of there onto the shore. Everyone began to surround Chang Xi. Her pupils had dilated and turned white causing everyone to panic as they started slapping and shaking her. Soon, Li Chang Xi began to breathe again.

One of the wet nurses suddenly made a noise. Everyone focused and noticed on the left side of Li Chang Xi's face was two wound marks. The marks appeared to be made by a sharp rock. The wound was so deep that one could see the bones and it didn't stop bleeding either.

Everyone present knew this was going to be a big problem. They began to shout loudly, “Quick! Quickly bring Wu xiaojie to Nan Yuan!”

In a hurry, they carried Li Chang Xi to Nan Yuan. As everyone entered Nan Yuan, they immediately saw Li Xiao Ran sitting in the yard and Da furen had a strange expression on her face. Qi yiniang, who was supposed to be sick, was also present and cautiously serving tea.

When Li Xiao Ran entered Nan Yuan, he had intended to lecture Li Wei Yang. However, Li Wei Yang was nowhere to be found. Added to that, he witnessed a whole bunch of people carrying Li Chang Xi inside, causing him to be upset.

“What happened now?!”

A wet nurse instantly spoke up, “Laoye, Wu xiaojie was standing beside the water and for some reason, she suddenly fell in. I thought it was very weird.”

Li Xiao Ran abruptly stood up.

Da furen rushed over to Li Chang Xi’s side with affection. When she saw Li Chang Xi’s face though, she was frightened and stumbled backwards. “Aiya, my poor child, what happened to your beautiful face?”

Li Xiao Ran briefly looked at Li Chang Xi’s face. His heart dropped. The wounds have ruined the face!

“Nubi also found San shaoye’s shoes but we couldn’t find the body. Nubi’s afraid San shaoye has already fallen into the water and met an unfortunate fate. . .” the wet nurse explained.

Da furen was initially shocked over the fact that Qi yiniang was still alive and then she had to see Li Chang Xi’s ruined beauty. She suppressed the panic within her, putting on a sorrowful expression. “Our family has always been peaceful. . .”

Lin mumu added her two cents on the side, “Ever since San xiaojie returned, the misfortunate things kept happening. This time, her cursed fate had even killed San shaoye. How are we going to explain this to San furen? Not to mention, San shaoye is the sole heir to Sanfang!”

Qi yiniang’s face turned ashen. She finally understood this was all part of Da furen’s scheme. And part of Da furen’s scheme was to associate her supposed death to Wei Yang’s cursed fate. Wei Yang was supposed to visit Nan Yuan and as a result, caused Qi yiniang’s death. To top it off, her fate had also caused the sole heir of Sanfang to die. Even if Wei Yang was innocent, in order to give Sanfang justice, laoye would definitely punish Wei Yang. . . .

Da furen . . . is truly vicious!

Qi yiniang quickly knelt on the ground. “Laoye, Wei Yang is only a child. This has nothing to do with Wei Yang. Wei Yang—”

Lin mumu glared at Qi yiniang. “Qi yiniang, what you said is incorrect. San xiaojie shouldn’t have ignored the rules set out by laoye and visited Nan Yuan.

The moment San xiaojie arrived, San shaoye disappeared and right now, even Wu xiaojie is injured. Qi yiniang, how can you say this has nothing to do with San xiaojie?”

“Father, what has happened here?” A voice sounded from outside the courtyard. Then slowly, Li Wei Yang, along with Bai Zhi, entered. She was wearing a pale yellow dress, looking like the first blossom in spring. It was fresh and youthful. Her eyes were big and sparkled with clarity, yet there was suspicion in her gaze as she walked in.

Li Xiao Ran was stunned. He was about to get angry, but for some reason, he couldn't anymore.

Da furen was tense. Then she immediately put on her benevolent mother act. “Wei Yang, because of you, San furen's beloved son has disappeared. It looks like we cannot keep you here in our estate!”

Li Wei Yang's eyes widened, looking very innocent. “Mother, what did you just say about San di? But I just saw San di playing in the flower garden!”

Da furen's expression instantly changed.

Chapter 20

Chapter 20: Ruined Beauty

“What did you say?!” Li Xiao Ran was shocked.

Li Wei Yang’s face was rosy, her eyes clear. “Father, I saw San di playing at the flower garden. Afterwards, he was picked up by San furen. I even held his hand and scolded him, saying how he kept running around everywhere to the point he lost a shoe and didn’t know where he lost it.” As if she just noticed the lost pair of shoe, she beamed happily. “Aiya, so this is where it’s been? San di is so mischievous to play near the water and get his shoes wet.”

Realizing he was overreacting earlier, Li Xiao Ran became much more relaxed but then his eyebrows furrowed. “Why did you come to Nan Yuan?”

Li Wei Yang grinned. “Father, lao furen said I had too less people in my courtyard. Today, I followed lao furen’s instructions to choose a few servants from Hui Chun Hall. As I passed by Nan Yuan, there were a lot of servants surrounding the outside. Someone said both mother and father were presently here so I came to give my greetings.”

Li Xiao Ran stiffened whereas Da furen’s expression had become frigid.

“Have you chosen any?” Li Xiao Ran questioned.

Li Wei Yang’s expression was a mixture of fear and happiness. “The steward mumu said she had prepared five servants for me and I could choose three out of the five. But they all seemed good to me, so I was going to go to lao furen to help me make a decision.”

Wei Yang had recently returned to the estate, picking out a few servants to help out was an understandable thing. But why did Hua Mei said Wei Yang had gone to visit Qi yiniang? Li Xiao Ran remembered the white crane that didn’t exist and Hua Mei’s reluctance to speak. He immediately came to conclusion that this was a scheme to hurt their father-daughter relationship. His intense gaze glanced over Da furen.

Da furen was thinking that she had definitely underestimated Li Wei Yang.

First, the white crane could not be found anywhere. Then, Qi yiniang was still alive. Added to it, San shaoye, who was supposed to be dead, was alive as well. All of this proved that Li Wei Yang was the reason those two were still alive. And the only evidence left behind was—

Not giving Da furen a chance to speak, Li Wei Yang exclaimed in horror. “Aiya, what happened to Wu mei? The wounds on her face is so serious?”

Da furen scoffed. “Who knew why she suddenly fell into the water and even got that injury!”

Li Wei Yang appeared genuinely surprised. “Right now, Wu mei—”

Precisely then, Li Chang Xi stirred.

The servant girl beside her yelled excitedly, “Wu xiaojie has waked up!”

Li Chang Xi sat up. Instinctively she touched her face but saw her hand was stained with so much blood. “I—what’s wrong with my face?! Mother, what’s wrong with my face?!” she exclaimed in terror.

In a pitiful voice, Da furen explained, “Chang Xi, your face is injured. Don’t touch it anymore. I have already instructed someone to go find the doctor. You just stay still and rest.”

Li Chang Xi noticed Li Wei Yang standing beside her. She abruptly jumped up. “You bad luck star! Everything is your fault! You caused me to become like this!” Li Chang Xi panted heavily, pointing her finger at Li Wei Yang’s nose.

“Wu mei, what’s wrong with you?” Li Wei Yang was stunned. “Who had upset you so?”

“You don’t know?! Ha! You’re a wicked monster! If it’s not because of your cursed fate, how could I have possibly fallen into the water out of nowhere?!”

Li Wei Yang looked at her nonchalantly. “Wu meimei, you should mind what you say. Even though I was born in February but up to now, both mother and father are still in good health. If you say something like that, then you’re obviously not giving mother and father any face!”

Li Wei Yang didn’t use any menacing words, but it still infuriated Li Chang Xi to the point of madness. After hearing those words, the irate Li Chang Xi wanted to

shove Li Wei Yang as she shouted, “You’re a shameless person! You did this to me and dare to say you had nothing to do with this?!”

Qi yiniang panicked. All she wanted to do was rush forward and protect her daughter, but at this moment, Cui’er pulled her back from the side. It was then that she became clear-minded. Due to her lowly status, she couldn’t do something like that.

Meanwhile, Li Wei Yang’s mouth slightly twitched. The attempt to harm had failed, instead she ended up ruining her own beauty and yet, she had no ounce of regret. Did she think everyone else was dead? Like expected, before Li Chang Xi could even lay a finger on Wei Yang, she was stopped by the mumus and servant girls standing by.

“Be quiet! You with this behaviour, can you still be called a xiaojie?!” Li Xiao Ran was breathing hard as he pointed at Li Chang Xi.

Li Chang Xi struggled and yelled, “Father, my face has been ruined! Can’t you see, it’s all because of that bad luck star, she cursed me! She turned me into this state! Father, kick her out of the estate, kick her out!!”

Li Xiao Ran stiffened up.

Li Wei Yang casually responded, “Wu meimei is correct. It is father’s decision on how to handle matters. If there’s something you want to say then say it with clarity. Yelling and shouting like this, it is making father lose face.”

Unable to free herself from the servants’ grasp, she could only angrily yell at Li Wei Yang. “You damned wretch! Don’t think so highly of yourself. You’re just a person of lowly status! You wicked monster!”

Li Wei Yang laughed coldly on the inside. Even though Li Chang Xi had menace in her, she was nevertheless still a young girl. Choosing this time to recklessly throw a hissy fit, all it’s doing is making Li Xiao Ran lose his patience. Li Xiao Ran was a person who put a lot of emphasis on rules and status. Right now, Li Chang Xi did not look like the prime minister’s daughter but a petty and noisy woman.

So Li Wei Yang merely looked at Li Xiao Ran with sadness. “Father, all Wei Yang has done was to go and choose a few servants. Wu meimei fell into the water is because her *bazi* (eight characters) is weak and offended the water ghost. Yet,

she kept saying it's because I cursed her. Where did I curse her?!"

There was a deeper meaning in her words. She had her father, mother and even her birth mother. None of them had been "cursed" but she had the time to go and "curse" a stepsister who she had no relations with?

In truth, the fault lay on Da furen who hadn't thought of the fact that Li Wei Yang had guarded herself against Da furen. First, Wei Yang went to Nan Yuan earlier than expected to rescue Qi yiniang. Had she not, this whole "cursed the birth mother" thing would have become reality. She would've accidentally involved Li Min De and caused his death too. Should it all happen, Li Xiao Ran would have no choice but to punish Li Wei Yang. But right now, Li Chang Xi was blaming Li Wei Yang for making her fall into the water when in fact, she had fallen in herself. It was truly too forceful, perhaps even intentionally.

Da furen silently understood that Li Chang Xi's worth had ended here. A concubine's daughter whose face was ruined, there was absolutely no worth in it. Not to mention, she was showing off her pettiness and narrow-mindedness in front of everyone. It was all done for! Nonetheless, Da furen had no intention of stepping in to mediate. At the end of the day, Li Chang Xi was merely a pawn in her chess game. Even at the significant moment, she could be easily disposed. Therefore, Da furen stayed silent but her face had fallen, her cold eyes stared intently at Li Wei Yang.

As expected, Li Xiao Ran with his frosty expression glared at Li Chang Xi. "You be quiet for me! You don't need your esteem anymore?!"

"Father, she caused me to fall into the water. . . and my face . . . my face is completely destroyed!" Li Chang Xi continued on yelling at the top of her lungs.

There was ice in Li Xiao Ran's gaze. He yelled loudly, "I'll find the best doctor to cure you but I don't ever want to hear you repeat another single word!!"

Li Chang Xi summoned her strength to struggle but she was held tightly by the servants. Her eyes reddened, looking like she wanted to mince Li Wei Yang's flesh.

The best doctor? Li Wei Yang secretly laughed. The scar was her big gift to Li Chang Xi. Even if the famous doctor Hua Tuo was resurrected, he wouldn't be able to cure it completely.

Her eyes shifted over to Da furen.

Next, it's your turn!

Chapter 21

Chapter 21: All An Act

Fu An Yuan

Doctor Lin applied the ointment onto Li Chang Xi as she stared at him with a hopeful gaze.

The doctor sighed and said, “Wu xiaojie, it’s impossible for your face to heal and look as it was before.”

Li Chang Xi’s expression immediately changed. She smashed the tea cup on the ground and sobbed. Si yiniang Zhou *shi* and Li Chang Xiao hurriedly rushed over with a handkerchief in hand.

Da furen’s cold eyes glanced over Siyiniang Zhou *shi*. Zhou *shi* came from Jiang Nan. She spoke with elegance and genteel. Even the way she behaved was delicate. She was talented in poetry and artwork. Furthermore, she had a curvy and voluptuous figure which was very attractive, even after she gave birth to Li Chang Xiao and Li Chang Xi. Therefore, she was doted on by Li Xiao Ran.

Looking at these mother-daughter trio, Li Zhang Le slightly furrowed her eyebrows. Nonetheless, the slight movement of the eyebrows caused Doctor Lin to take in a sharp breath. No wonder everyone was always saying the Prime Minister’s first daughter was beautiful like a fairy. They were definitely right.

Da furen softly coughed, causing Doctor Lin to snap out of his daze.

“Doctor Lin, Wu mei still hasn’t married. A woman’s beauty is very important to her. Please do everything you can to help. Also, you must keep this a secret so that words don’t get around.” Li Zhang Le’s tone was gentle and fluid.

Doctor Lin thought, not only was Da xiaojie remarkably beautiful, she was also very kind-hearted. The combination was such a rare sight. He clasped his hands together and said, “Da xiaojie, regarding Wu xiaojie’s scar, I will definitely do everything that I can. As for keeping this matter a secret, this isn’t the first time I’ve worked for Li *jia*. Da xiaojie, please do not worry.”

Li Zhang Le nodded then instructed a servant to lead the doctor out.

In the room, the sobbing was still going on.

“What are you crying about? Haven’t you scared enough people?” Da furen stonily asked.

Li Chang Xi was aggravated. She was bawling to the point it was hard to breathe. Beside her, Si yiniang witnessed the scene with pain. There was resentment in her eyes.

“Furen, this time you must avenge for Chang Xi!”

Da furen slammed the tea cup on the table. Her expression was one of anger. “Avenge, avenge! All you know is to avenge. This is because *Wu yatou* messed up, otherwise, things wouldn’t turn out this way either.”

Si yiniang froze then tears began to fall from her eyes, aggrieved.

Da furen hated this face of Si yiniang the most. The only reason she was being tolerant of these three was because she had a use for them later on.

“Si yiniang, there’s no need to agonize. Mother didn’t say she would ignore you guys either. However, San mei is really too good at her speeches. Not to mention, father has trust in San mei’s innocence as well. Even if mother wants to defend Wu mei, there is nothing else she can do,” Li Zhang Le placated. Her words were obviously targeting Li Wei Yang.

As expected, Si yiniang had a look of hatred.

It was clear that it was Xiao Wu who had bothered San jie first. Consequently, she brought about her own Karma. The corner of Si xiaojie, Li Chang Xiao’s mouth twitched, but she couldn’t utter a word.

Da furen’s tone became a lot friendlier. “*Wu yatou* grew up beside me. To see her wounded like this, how I can not feel pain? I didn’t expect for Wei Yang, despite her young age, to be so vicious and wicked. Now she has ruined *Wu yatou*’s beauty. Haiz, but right now, she is lao furen’s confidant. Laoye has trust in her as well. Even if I have something in mind, I won’t be able to use it. You guys go back first. Give me some time to think this through thoroughly.”

Si yiniang suppressed the feeling of resentment and helped Li Chang Xi up. Li Chang Xiao turned and glanced at Da furen, who was sitting inside the room. She

felt that, even though Da furen had a kind face on, but under the light, somehow she seemed extremely cold.

Li Zhang Le watched the retreating figures as her gaze became icy. “Mother, what happened today. . .”

Da furen grinded her teeth together with loathe. “I did not expect for this San *yatou* to be such a dangerous character!”

“If mother wants to make it difficult for her, there are plenty of methods. We should wait for an opportunity when lao furen and father are not at home and all we have to do is directly kill her.” Li Zhang Le casually enjoyed a cup of tea, but her voice sounded like she was killing an ant. If there was an outsider in the room right now, they would not be able to believe those vicious words could come out of the famous and beautiful Da xiaojie of the Prime Minister’s estate.

“Even though your father doesn’t say it outright, but he is already suspicious of me. If I do something right now, I will be giving others the opportunity to grab a hold of my weakness. I will lose more than I gain. It’s better to let someone else do the dirty work.”

The daughter naturally is the one to understand the mother best. Li Zhang Le had obviously guessed Da furen’s intention. Smiling, she said, “Si yiniang is quite the devil. Will she let us manipulate her?”

Normally she wouldn’t but the circumstance right now. . . Da furen smiled.

Wu xiaojie getting into an incident, Da xiaojie was the most concerned for every day she came to visit. Not only that, she also prepared the meals. She was regretful for not taking better care of her little sister. She had even taken the bird’s nest that Da furen had given to her, thoroughly prepared it, and brought it over to Li Chang Xi. Everyone saw it. They felt that Da xiaojie was even more compassionate and open-minded.

During this time, nothing happened to Li Wei Yang. She slept and ate normally. She was not worried about Da furen or Si yiniang bothering her because she understood Li Xiao Ran’s personality. After this incident, this Prime Minister father of her will know that there was someone in the estate with ulterior motives. On the outside, Li *jia* have always been harmonious and has a strict hierarchy but now, someone’s life was threatened. If he continues to pretend to

be blind, his reputation, esteem and career will be affected. Everyone in the Li's estate won't be able to escape either. So, one can see that there will be some peaceful times in *Li jia*.

However, even though those people weren't going to come look for, it didn't mean she will do the same.

Half a month later, the first time she paid a visit to Shuang Yue Ge (*Twin Moon Chamber*) to see Li Chang Xi, she coincidentally met Li Zhang Le coming out of the chamber. Under the sun, her face had obviously been carefully made up, making her even more charming. She was dressed in a silk coat with floral patterns. At a simple glance, the long dress with peony flowers could be seen peeking out, layers upon layers with incandescent beauty.

Li Wei Yang blinked several times, a beaming smile on her lips. "Da jie."

Li Zhang Le smiled and nodded at her. There was no change in her expression as she said, "San mei, are you here to visit Wu mei?"

Li Wei Yang nodded. "Da jie looks very happy. Is there some good news?"

Li Zhang Le blinked prettily. There was a subtle hint of mirth hidden in her eyes. "It's almost the end of the year. Da ge is coming back soon. Haven't you heard, San mei?" Once she finished speaking, the servant girl beside her spoke up to remind her that Da furen was anxiously waiting for them. Li Zhang Le grinned then left.

Li Wei Yang watched her retreating figure. She was contemplating when Zi Yan, who was standing behind her, softly sighed.

"Da xiaojie is so beautiful."

"Da shaoye is coming back soon?" Meanwhile Bai Zhi questioned.

The two maids' point of interest was completely different.

Li Wei Yang briefly glanced at Bai Zhi, impressed. On her lips was a barely noticeable frosty smile. That's right. The Li's Da shaoye, Da furen's biological son, *Li Min Feng* was coming back. In the first lifetime, he was Tuo Ba Zhen's good friend, confidante and loyal subject. She remembered the chaos in that previous lifetime, remembered when she kneeled down to beg him, but he simply

slammed the door in her face and refused to see her.

He had given her one sentence: *“Simply an insignificant concubine’s daughter but you’re overestimating yourself!”*

Overestimating yourself. Li Wei Yang lifted her head and looked at the bright sunlight. Suddenly she turned around and walked towards Shuang Yue Ge.

Abruptly, Bai Zhi said, “Xiaojie! Wu xiaojie, she—” Li Chang Xi was definitely going to bawl her eyes out and scream at the top of her lungs.

Li Wei Yang didn’t turn around but merely smiled. “Knowing there’s tigers on the mountain, that is why we go. Let’s go. I have my own reasons.”

Chapter 22

I am going to address this here once and for all: this novel is **NOT** dropped until you see me posting up an official announcement on the blog saying I'm dropping the translation for good. I will not be replying to such repetitive questions (ie. why is there is no update, is this novel dropped, etc) and will be deleting them.

When I have a lot of time, there will naturally be more updates. When I don't have a lot of time, there might only be one or two updates per month, or none at all. If you can't wait for the updates, you are welcome to find other sources. I understand you are excited about the novel but please also understand that **TRANSLATING THIS NOVEL IS NOT MY JOB**. I do have a job that is taking up A LOT of my time and energy on top of everything else. To those patient supporters, I thank you kindly.

Chapter 22: Adding Oil to the Fire

Entering Li Chang Xi's compound, it was filled with a deep fragrant smell. Li Wei Yang was slightly taken aback. She paused at the doorway and contemplated deeply before continuing on.

In the common area, Si yiniang Zhou *shi* chuckled and stood up to welcome the guest before taking a seat in the chair with the lowest status. Her resentment could not be seen. Meanwhile on Li Chang Xiao's face, there was unspeakable worry but she didn't say anything, silently standing to the side.

"Today San xiaojie's timing is off. Wu xiaojie had just fallen asleep," Zhou *shi* said with a smile. She had almond shaped eyes that resembled a lake in springtime. Even though she was the birth mother, in front of other people, she didn't have the rights to call the xiaojies by their full name.

Had just fallen asleep? Li Wei Yang smiled. "It's okay. I am here to visit Wu meimei. It is the thought that counts." Her eyes gently studied Zhou *shi*. Zhou *shi* was in a honey coloured silk dress. The bottom of the dress was embroidered with twin lotus flowers. She didn't look like a *furen* who had given birth to two

daughters. No wonder Li Xiao Ran doted on her.

At the same time, a servant had silently gone to Li Chang Xi's bedroom to tell her Li Wei Yang was here to pay a visit.

Li Chang Xi abruptly stood up and grabbed a pink flower vase on the table. She flung it at the door. "Get lost! Tell her to get lost immediately!" She could not suppress the fierce hatred in her voice.

The flower vase shattered to pieces as the water inside spashed everywhere onto the floor. The resenting voice penetrated through the myriads of curtains, passing into everyone's ears. Zhou *shi*'s expression immediately turned into that of embarrassment. Li Chang Xiao abruptly jumped to her feet, but quickly realized she had acted impolitely and slowly sat back down. She could not hide the anxiousness on her face.

Instinctively Zhou *shi* glanced at Li Wei Yang. She noticed the other's eyes, clear and shimmering like ripples of water, was also staring back at her. Zhou *shi* startled. When she regained her composure, Li Wei Yang's gaze had the hint of a smile in it. There was nothing abnormal about it. Zhou *shi* concluded that this young thirteen year old girl in front of her was not as simple as she appears.

Any person to experience this type of incident would feel embarrassed, but Li Wei Yang seemed to have not heard those menacing words telling her to get lost, as if she did not hear the sound of the vase being shattered. Either the person was too stupid to understand a thing or was a sly person whose true thoughts never showed. Zhou *shi* believed in the latter. But a concubine's daughter who had grown up in the village, how can she mature to this point?

Li Wei Yang's smile was not affected in the least bit. "Si yiniang, earlier I had smelled on you a special but familiar kind of scent. Do you have a liking for the Xue Li fragrance?"

Xue Li fragrance? Si yiniang was puzzled. She had never heard of this type of fragrance before.

Li Chang Xiao questioned with curiosity. "What is that?"

"Even though Ping Cheng may not be as flourishing as the Capital, but there are plenty of new and interesting things. For example, the Xue Li fragrance. The

prolonged use of this type of fragrance is said to improve a woman's skin complexion as well as maintain its youthfulness."

Si yiniang furrowed her brows. She was unfamiliar and had never harbored this type of fragrance with her. What did Li Wei Yang mean by this?

Li Wei Yang continued, "The Xue Li fragrance may be good but it is not suitable for everyone. This is because in the ingredients for Xue Li, there is a particular ingredient called Tian Zhi. If the user have some sort of wound or scar on the skin, the skin will not be able to heal and scab properly. Instead it will rot away. Fortunately Si yiniang does not harbor any flesh wounds, right?"

Listening to the explanation, Zhou shi's face turned white.

Li Chang Xiao's eyes widened. "San jie, what you said is true?"

Li Wei Yang nodded. "Of course it is the truth. Xue Li has a unique scent. I recognized because I have encountered this fragrance before on Mo yiniang, uncle's most favored yiniang. I was curious so I had asked her about it."

This Uncle Li was father's younger brother and he was the head of the Li's household in Ping Cheng where Li Wei Yang had temporarily stayed. He had a beautiful concubine, Mo yiniang, who came from a brothel. She was over 40 years old but she had taken extreme care with her skin, so she looked like a young 18 years old girl instead. It was quite unbelievable. The fact that Uncle Li was crazily smitten by this yiniang was passed on by those who had visited Ping Cheng.

Xue Li fragrance was one of the many methods used by Mo yiniang in her skincare routine. The bad thing about Xue Li fragrance is that the prolong use of it will cause one to become infertile. The second bad thing is that it will stop the natural healing process of wounds. Scars won't be able to scab but will rot away instead. A noble lady wouldn't dare touch a wicked thing, but they were often used by those who came from brothels to attract men.

Li Wei Yang knew this but pretended not to know. "Si yiniang, what's wrong with you?"

Zhou shi's hands were tightly fisted, hidden inside the long sleeves. She couldn't suppress herself as her nails dug deeply into her palms. The fragrance in

this room was supposed to be from the Yu Rong ointment gifted by Da furen. She had said the ointment would help to heal Chang Xi's wounds. Who knew it was actually something so vicious and dirty?

Li Wei Yang tossed a brief look beyond the curtains. Peeking from behind the curtains was the beautiful face of a lady. Her chin was slightly thin and there was a frightening scar on her cheeks. There was a surprised look on her face. The lady behind the curtains suddenly realized she was discovered and quickly turned around and walked off. As she turned around, a corner of the red dress flapped. The ruby curtains moved and made a noise. A strand of ruby fell on the ground and shattered as rubies rolled everywhere.

Li Wei Yang watched as a ruby rolled to her feet. Then she lifted her head and stared into Si yiniang's terrified face. She stood up, slightly grinned and bid goodbye.

Walking out from Shuang Yue Ge, Zi Yan was still clueless.

"San xiaojie, why is there Xue Li fragrance in Wu xiaojie's chamber? Everyone had said that, as a result of using this for a long time, Mo yiniang became infertile and couldn't have children. Wu xiaojie still hasn't married. . ." she curiously wondered, but as she got to this point, she seemed to have realized something. She immediately stopped talking as a look of fearful panic took over.

"There are some things that only require the eyes to see. You should pretend you are deaf and mute, understand?" Li Wei Yang stopped in her tracks and looked at Zi Yan.

"Understood." Zi Yan lowered her head, but her fingers kept trembling.

Bai Zhi sighed to herself. The Prime Minister's estate, compared to the Li's manor in Ping Cheng, was a lot more frightening.

Li Wei Yang lifted a corner of her mouth as she turned around, looking back at Shuang Yue Ge.

Da furen obviously wanted Si yiniang and her daughters to loathe Wei Yang, which was why she had intentionally delivered this kind of fragrance. First, she wanted Li Chang Xi to never be able to heal from the scarring. Henceforth, Li Chang Xi would hate her. It would also traumatize Zhou *shi*. Secondly, she

wanted Li Chang Xi to walk around with the scar so that everyone knew Wu xiaojie was harmed by Li Wei Yang. Thirdly, even if Li Chang Xi was able to marry into a good marriage due to her position as the concubine's daughter from the Prime Minister's estate, she was still just a concubine's daughter whose face was ruined and could never give birth. In this way, she would have to listen and obey to each and every word of her maternal family, specifically Da furen.

It was one stone hitting three birds. . .

Unfortunately, Da furen may be vicious, but she was doing more than required. This time, Li Chang Xi may be stupid but her birth mother was not. Li Wei Yang had thought she was going to have to say a lot more to make Si yiniang understand, but thankfully, Da furen's Xue Li fragrance had helped her instead. Da furen wanted to stand on the outside and watch the fight, yet she didn't know she had brought the fire to her own home.

Li Wei Yang tilted her head back as the bright sunlight shone down on her long lashes. . . .

>> Characters & Misc. Guide <<

The Princess Wei Yang

Here is a useful and wonderfully created character map if you are really confused.

>> [Character Map](#) (created by *sithkazar*)

Main Characters

Li Wei Yang

- also known as *San xiaojie* (third daughter)
- born in February and is considered an unlucky charm
- concubine's daughter
- was previously an Empress before she got deposed in the first lifetime
- 13 years old at start of story

Li Min De

- also known as *San shaoye* (third young master) or *San di* (third little brother)
- adopted son of Sanfang (Li Xiao He and Zhou *shi*)
- said to be 10 years old at start of story; real age is unknown

Tuo Ba Zhen

- Wei Yang's ex-husband/Emperor in the first lifetime
- also known as *San Huangzi* (Third Prince)

Supporting Characters

{{ The Li's Estate }}

Jiang shi

- also known as ***Da furen***
- first daughter-in-law
- Li Xiao Ran's legitimate wife
- Zhang Le's birth mother

Li Min Feng

- also known as ***Da shaoye*** (first son)
- Zhang Le's older brother
- Da furen's biological son
- in previous lifetime, was Tuo Ba Zhen's friend and loyal subject

Li Zhang Le

- also known as ***Da xiaojie*** (first daughter); famous for her fairy-like beauty
- the "legitimate" daughter born from the first wife

Li Chang Xi

- also known as ***Wu xiaojie*** (fifth daughter); born from same mother (Si yiniang) as Li Chang Xiao
- concubine's daughter

Li Chang Xiao

- also known as ***Si xiaojie*** (fourth daughter); born from same mother (Si yiniang) as Li Chang Xi
- concubine's daughter

Li Xiao Ran

- Prime Minister
- Wei Yang's father
- Oldest sibling; has two smaller brothers

Meng shi

- also known as ***Lao furen***
- grandmother
- favours Wei Yang

Tan shi

- also known as ***Qi yiniang***
- Wei Yang's birth mother
- was Da furen's servant (mainly washes feet) before she got promoted to *yiniang*

Wen shi

- second daughter-in-law

Zhou shi

- third daughter-in-law
- married Li Xiao He (who had already passed away)
- adopted mother of Li Min De

{{ Servants/Guards }}

Bai Zhi

- Wei Yang's maidservant

Zi Yan

- Wei Yang's maidservant

MISC.

- *nubi / nucai* – Used as pronoun similar to “I” but used by servants to those of higher/more respectable status
- *xiaojie* – Young Miss
- *shi* – Refers to a woman's maiden surname before marriage
- *yiniang* – Concubine/Mistress status
- *mumu* – Way to address an older maid, usually wet nurse
- *di / didi* – Little brother
- *jie / jiejie* – Big sister
- *mei / meimei* – Little sister
- *ge / gege* – Big brother
- *shaoye* – Young Master
- *Sanfang* – Refers to Li Xiao Ran's third brother and their branch of the family
- *Erfang* – Refers to Li Xiao Ran's second brother and their branch of the family
- *laoye* – Old Master
- *yatou* – girl/servant girl
- *jia* – house (ex: House Li)

TO BE ADDED/UPDATED AS STORY PROGRESSES...

(NOTE: Not all characters are listed. Only characters who has some significance to the story is listed.)