

All Hail 661

Chapter 661 - 661: Thank You

Nanny Liu also had tears streaming down her face. “Matriarch, you have to take care of yourself. Eldest Miss is still counting on you...”

Without suffering the pain of others, you don’t know the pain of others. The Matriarch had lived too hard in this life. She had schemed for her entire life, and none of it was for herself.

The next day, another imperial edict came from the palace. This time, it was an order from the Xie family.

Madam Xie had passed away many years ago, and her imperial edict had been received by her daughter, Yu Youyao.

After this experience, Yu Youyao was much calmer.

Eunuch Zhu looked at Yu Youyao and smiled. “County Head of Shaoyi, the mingfu has been completed, so I brought it over.”

Yu Youyao’s eyes flashed slightly, and she quickly thanked him. “Thank you, Eunuch.”

She did not think that Eunuch Zhu had the leisure to come over to read the imperial edict and even help her bring her mingfu over. This was clearly not a coincidence, but a special one.

Eunuch Zhu’s voice was gentle. “It was nothing. County Head Shaoyi, you’re too polite.”

With that, he clapped

A few palace maids carried silver palace plates and entered one after another. In the blink of an eye, they stood in a row in the front hall.

On the palace plate, there was a pearl-green crown, a large red sleeved shirt, a real purple embroidered golden robe, a lanshan, and a matching pendant. Every item was exquisitely carved.

The title of nobility of the imperial family was different from an imperial order. It was represented by red, a phoenix, purple, golden patterns, and so on. There was a large red satin embroidery at the waist that symbolized the nobles of the clan.

It was roughly similar to the imperial order, but the patterns were different. The colors were also gold and purple. It looked more imposing and solemn, but it followed the rules strictly.

Yu Youyao’s level as a fifth-grade county lord was inferior to her grandmother.

Yu Youyao thanked Eunuch Zhu again.

Eunuch Zhu nodded with a smile and did not even sit down. He only said, “The emperor is worried about the drought and there’s a flood in Zhejiang. Recently, his health has been deteriorating. It’s not convenient for me to stay long, so I’ll return to the palace to serve him.”

It seemed that he had not said anything, but the words “drought” and “flood” had already expressed what he meant.

After Eunuch Zhu left, Old Madam Yu stared at the luxurious county lord's order on the table. "I'll order someone to send a token to the palace in a while. Tomorrow morning, you'll wear this county lord's outfit. Go to the ancestral hall first and offer the memorial to the ancestral hall. After paying respects to your ancestors, follow me into the palace to show your thanks!"

The drought could be slowed down, but the flood could not be delayed.

Eunuch Zhu was reminding their family to enter the palace as soon as possible to thank the emperor.

Yu Youyao nodded. "I understand, Grandmother."

Old Madam Yu was not in good spirits. "You've already learned all the rules in the palace from Nanny Xu, so there's no need for me to say anything else. Anyway, we'll be together tomorrow. Just learn from me. You're a county head, and this is your first time entering the palace, so it's inevitable that there will be some oversights. The palace won't hold it against you."

There were many rules in the palace, and it was not something that could be explained clearly by one person.

If she went once, she would know what to do the next time.

Yu Youyao nodded. "I know the rules of the palace. Grandmother, don't worry."

Old Madam Yu smiled and forced herself to perk up. She also mentioned all the rules and matters that she needed to be paid attention to in the palace. She even repeatedly explained some important things a few times. She said that she did not have to say much about these rules, but she was still worried about her granddaughter. Unknowingly, she spoke too much.

By the time she finished speaking, almost an hour had passed.

Old Madam Yu looked exhausted and said, "Money is just a worldly possession. Now that there are natural and man-made disasters, even if there aren't so many schemes in the palace, our family still has to do our best. It's not just because of you. Don't let one's imagination run wild."

Her grandmother was worried that she would think that the schemes in the palace were all directed at her. The Yu Residence was only implicated by her, so she blamed herself.

Actually, this was not wrong.

From the beginning to the end, the scheme in the palace was only her money.

Yu Youyao did not feel that she should blame herself for this. However, when she saw that her grandmother was becoming thinner and older day by day, she still felt terrible.

She suppressed the bitterness in her heart. "In life, there are things to do and not to do. All I ask is a clear conscience. Grandmother taught me this since I was young. I've always remembered your words."

Old Madam Yu was in a daze for a moment. "My mother taught me the same thing when I was young." Unfortunately, she still remembered this sentence, but she still felt guilty. "Not only do I have to remember, but I also have to display it."

Yu Youyao looked at her grandmother's stumbling back and suddenly realized that there was a lot more white hair on her grandmother's head. Her eyes turned red.

“Grandmother—” Yu Youyao called out delicately.

Old Madam Yu subconsciously turned around.

Her granddaughter threw herself into her arms and hugged her waist tightly. “Grandmother, you have to be fine.”

Old Madam Yu’s eyes turned red. She did not hug her granddaughter and say anything personal like before. She only patted her back. “If you’re well, I’m well.”

Ever since April, the smile on her grandmother’s face had decreased day by day, and she had become more and more worried about her. She often held her hand and explained many things, often talking about the past.

She also tried her best to hand over all the matters in the residence to Concubine Jiang and not let her get involved anymore.

She tried her best to help her grandmother recuperate, but her grandmother was old and had been sick for many years. Her foundation was severely damaged, and her body had barely recovered a little. She was also weakening because of her Yang issues.

During this period of time, many schemes in the palace had followed. One after another, they were all hurdles that her grandmother could not get over.

They were directed at her and the Yu Residence..

There were even more schemes that happened and she didn’t know the reason behind them.

Her grandmother’s spirits were deteriorating day by day. Even if she increased the amount of spiritual dewdrop, it was useless.

Yu Youyao was really worried, but no matter how worried she was, she couldn’t help her grandmother resolve all the worries in her heart. Old Madam Yu returned to An Shou Hall to have some peace.

Qing Xiu came over to report, “Master is here.”

Old Madam Yu leaned against the couch, twirling her prayer beads in her hand. She said weakly, “I know why he came to look for me in such a hurry.” At this point, a look of mockery appeared on her face. “Tell him that I’m not feeling well. Tell him to go back on his own. He doesn’t have to tell me what to do in the palace tomorrow. Although I’m a woman, I know what to do to not let down the emperor’s grace. There’s no need to go to Yao Yao. We’ve already prepared what needs to be prepared.”

With that, she seemed to be really tired. She stopped twirling her prayer beads and slowly closed her eyes, leaning against the couch to rest.

Qing Xiu lightened her footsteps and quietly left the inner room, relaying what the Matriarch had said..

Chapter 662 - 662: Entering the Palace

Yu Zongzheng's face turned green. Since Matriarch had already said that she wasn't feeling well, he couldn't continue disturbing her. He changed the topic and asked about Matriarch's health.

Qing Xiu lowered her head and replied, "In March and April, her appetite wasn't very good. During this period of time, she seemed to be in a much worse state. She forgets things that happen quickly, but she remembers what happened in the past more clearly."

Yu Zongzheng frowned. "Did you invite an imperial physician over to take a look?"

Qing Xiu said, "Yes. The doctor is invited every ten days, and the imperial physician is invited every month. They all say that Matriarch is thinking too much and needs to rest and recuperate."

Yu Zongzheng nodded and instructed, "Serve Matriarch well."

Qing Xiu quickly agreed.

As soon as he left An Shou Hall, Yu Zongzheng's expression darkened. During this period of time, it wasn't that he hadn't sensed that Matriarch was becoming colder and colder to him.

Back then, in order to pave the way for Second Brother, Matriarch had asked him to marry Madam Xie.

Now that it was his turn to pave the way for him, Matriarch's attitude had changed. Could it be that in her heart, only Second Brother's future was important?

Just because he was inferior to Second Brother, he should be stepped on by Second Brother for the rest of his life?

Should he give up even the opportunity that was at his fingertips?

Madam Xie had been conferred the title of a third-grade woman, but this matter did not cause any ripples in the capital. The Dragon Boat Festival happened at the same time the dams in Zhejiang were destroyed. This had caused an uproar and everyone was in a panic.

The emperor gave three oral orders in a row to resist the disaster, save the people, and deal with corruption.

The official documents of the Imperial Court's disaster relief were also posted in the government office.

However, this was not enough to calm the hearts of the people.

The commoners in the south had suffered from water disasters, were displaced, and were filled with sorrow. The commoners in the north who had suffered from the drought also felt a sense of fear.

The hearts of the people were in chaos!

The next day, Yu Youyao got up before dawn.

After taking a bath and washing her body, Nanny Xu helped Yu Youyao change into her mingfu. At the same time, she explained all the rules in the palace.

She told her what to do when she encountered different grades of palace maids and eunuchs. They were to go from the second palace gate to where the Longevity Palace would pass. They were not to touch anything in the palace until they reached the Empress Dowager's palace...

The spoke for an hour.

Although the mingfu made by the Internal Affairs Department were of her size, the ready-made clothes were much larger. They were very loose on the body, but they were very heavy.

One mingfu was enough for a lifetime.

Yu Youyao arrived at An Shou Hall.

Yu Jianjia suddenly looked over, and her heart skipped a beat. She looked at Yu Youyao in a daze, her eyes unable to hide the fire in them. For a moment, she couldn't even look away.

The county lord's mingfu was different from Old Madam's. The ceremonial robe was really purple and had the golden patterns of the Phoenixes. Although it was not as good as Old Madam's in terms of status, it looked more noble than Old Madam's.

People had to wear clothes, and Buddha had to wear gold!

Yu Youyao, who usually looked light and weak, was wearing this magnificent mingfu. Even the sparrow had become a phoenix on a branch. She looked imposing and dignified, as if taking another look was disrespectful to her. Such honor was really something that others could not compare to.

But on what basis?

Yu Jianjia's eyes hurt from the pure and bright pearls and jade on Yu Youyao's crown. Her heart felt like it was being pricked by a needle.

She kept telling herself!

Yu Youyao only obtained the title of county lord because she had a rich external family.

The title of County Head of Shaoyi was not obtained with her own ability. She had to spend a large sum of money to buy it. She was not a true noble lady of the imperial family at all.

It was just a fancy name.

Old Madam Yu forced herself to perk up and take care of her granddaughter's imposing and solemn county lord mingfu. She couldn't help but smile. "She's really beautiful. I only hope that our Yao Yao can enjoy glory and wealth in this life."

For some reason, Yu Youyao's eyes turned red as she nodded slightly.

Yu Zongzheng's eyes flickered, but he couldn't hide his excitement and joy. "Mother, don't worry. Yao Yao's future wealth is still ahead."

Since ancient times, a woman's status depended on her father. In the future, Yu Youyao's wealth and future depended on him.

Old Madam Yu's expression darkened. She brought her family to the ancestral hall. The ancestral hall was an important place. Usually, women were not allowed to enter during sacrifices. Women were only allowed to step into the ancestral hall for family matters.

As a descendant of the Yu Clan, Yu Youyao had been conferred the title of county lord. This was also a huge matter that would bring glory to her ancestors.

When they arrived at the ancestral hall, Yu Zongzheng solemnly handed the memorial in his hand to Yu Youyao and stepped forward to offer incense.

Yu Youyao held the memorial and bowed three times first, then nine times. After that, she stood up and placed the memorial on the table. She knelt down and bowed again. “Youyao of the Yu Clan has received the Yu Clan’s teachings. I will remember your ancestral virtue and shine brightly. I will definitely not let down the emperor’s grace.”

After leaving the ancestral hall, the sky lit up.

Yu Youyao accompanied her grandmother and ate some bird’s nest porridge before getting into the carriage to enter the palace.

It was not a short journey either. After entering the palace, there were many rules. It was not appropriate to eat too much. She had to drink as little water as possible, in case she lost her manners in the palace.

Every time they wore the mingfu and entered the palace, they would be so tortured that they couldn’t even breathe.

Only by deeply experiencing the might of the heavens would the reverence in their heart deepen.

The carriage stopped at the second palace gate.

Yu Youyao helped her grandmother into the pavilion not far away to rest.

The grandmother and granddaughter ate some tea, soup, and snacks before finally feeling a little more energetic.

About ten minutes later, Auntie Shen, who was in front of the Empress Dowager, walked over with a few palace maids and eunuchs. She also brought a medic with a first aid kit and a headscarf.

Yu Youyao quickly welcomed her and bowed to Miss Shen. “Hello, Aunt Shen.”

Aunt Shen’s smile deepened as she held her hand. “There are many etiquette and rules in the palace. Save your energy as much as you can. Otherwise, you’ll be tired after all this.”

Her expression and tone were filled with friendliness. As the main palace maid in front of the Empress Dowager, her attitude often represented the Empress Dowager’s attitude.

Yu Youyao was flattered. “Thank you, Aunt Shen.”

Auntie Shen patted her hand in satisfaction. It had been a few years since they had last seen each other. Eldest Miss Yu had grown older and had become more well-behaved. Even when she entered the palace, she lowered her eyes and looked calm. She only greeted everyone and did not talk about their relationship. After that, she would only thank them and not say any words. She would respect them and follow the rules. She did not say anything that she should not say.

This was what a smart person should do.

Only then did Old Madam Yu come over slowly. “Thank you for specially coming over to receive us, Aunt Shen.”

Auntie Shen’s smile did not fade. “Matriarch, you’re too polite. Yesterday, you handed over a token to enter the palace. When the Empress Dowager found out, she was very happy. She was worried that this journey would exhaust you and cause your body to suffer, so she asked me to call a female doctor over to receive you.” At this point, she changed the topic. “Matriarch, you have now entered

the palace. Don't be in a hurry to see the Empress Dowager. Rest first and get the female doctor to take your pulse and rest your body..”

Chapter 663 - 663: Look Up

Old Madam Yu and Yu Youyao quickly squatted down and bowed. “Thank you for your grace, Empress Dowager.”

After being polite, the group returned to the pavilion and sat down. The female doctor took Old Madam Yu's pulse. “Matriarch, you're depressed. Have you been feeling tightness in your chest, dizziness, insomnia, and palpitations recently?”

Old Madam Yu nodded.

After confirming the illness, the female doctor took out a black medicine from the medicine box.

This medicine was the size of a big red date and couldn't be swallowed in one gulp. She divided the medicine into small pieces and placed them on a plate. “This is a blood circulation pill. It's mainly used to treat internal obstruction of the blood clots. Matriarch, you can take it at ease.”

“Thank you, Doctor.” Yu Youyao bowed and thanked her, then served her grandmother the medicine.

Her grandmother had a Yang problem and had to take the Blood

Revitalization Soup every day. It seemed that the effect of this medicine should be better than ordinary medicine. Otherwise, the Empress Dowager would not have specially instructed the female doctor to take her grandmother's pulse and give her the medicine after she entered the palace.

The palace was also worried that her grandmother was not in good health and would make a mistake in the palace.

After taking the medicine, Old Madam Yu rested for another ten minutes, and her expression softened a little.

After taking her pulse, the female doctor nodded.

Auntie Shen arranged a soft sedan chair and helped Old Madam Yu enter the palace.

This was the Empress Dowager's grace. Old Madam Yu could only accept it and not decline. Otherwise, it would be disrespectful to the Empress Dowager and she would be punished for disrespect.

Under Aunt Shen's guidance, they arrived at the Longevity Palace without taking a detour.

Yu Youyao lowered her eyes and followed Aunt Shen into the outer hall of the Longevity Palace.

As far as the eye could see, it was golden and dazzling. It was monstrously dignified and cold, as if there was an invisible pressure pressing down on her heart, making her not even dare to breathe loudly.

When they arrived at the outer hall, Aunt Shen's smile relaxed. “Matriarch and County Head of Shaoyi, rest in the outer hall first. Eat some food, and recuperate. Wait for the Empress Dowager to summon you.”

Yu Youyao said gratefully, "Thank you for taking care of me along the way."

Miss Shen's eyes lit up and she held Yu Youyao's hand. "If you want to thank the Empress Dowager later, thank her. I'm also doing as she instructed." What a sensible girl.

She was in the second palace and had a job to do, so she naturally did not say much.

When she arrived at the hall, she naturally had to report to the Empress Dowager and thank her gratefully. If others heard this, they would also think that she had done the job assigned by the Empress Dowager well.

If she was dignified, the Empress Dowager would also be dignified.

Although, with her status, she no longer needed such dignity.

But who wouldn't like the icing on the cake?

What was rare was that she had the intention to be neither servile nor overbearing and be kind to others.

Yu Youyao quickly agreed.

Auntie Shen entered the inner hall, and the palace maids served tea and snacks one after another.

"Hurry up and eat something to fill your stomach." As she spoke, Old Madam Yu picked up a yellow snack that looked like a lily and placed it on a small plate. She handed it to Yu Youyao. "This is a pine nut lily. It's made of plum pork, egg yolk, and pine nuts. It's shaped like a lily and is fragrant and delicious. It's an imperial cuisine. You can't eat it outside."

At this point, her eyes revealed some nostalgia—

"When I entered the palace in the past, I liked this. When I returned home, I also instructed the kitchen at home to try making it. It looks similar, but I just can't make it taste like the one in the palace." At this point, she couldn't help but smile. "I think the Empress Dowager thought that you were still young and greedy, so she ordered someone to prepare a lot of exquisite snacks from the palace."

The last time she came, she had prepared medicinal cuisine and snacks that were easy to digest.

Yu Youyao's gaze shifted. Her grandmother wouldn't have taken a plate of snacks to talk for no reason. She thought about how the Empress Dowager had arranged everything well along the way and expressed great grace to them.

Now that they were in the Longevity Palace, no matter how wary and reserved they were, they should let down their guard a little.

At the thought of this, Yu Youyao smiled. "Then I'm in luck today."

The pine nut lilies were crispy and not greasy. She ate three in a row and was still a little unsatisfied, as if she could eat until her stomach couldn't take it anymore.

In addition, there were also sweetheart cake, honey cake, coconut glutinous rice cake, sesame cake, barbecued pork puffs, and so on.

Yu Youyao had never eaten anything like this before.

Yu Youyao did not stand on ceremony and ate a lot.

After eating, Yu Youyao helped her grandmother to the side hall. She tidied her appearance before returning to the outer hall to continue waiting for the Empress Dowager to summon her.

The Empress Dowager did not make them wait too long.

After a while, an eunuch came over to summon them.

The little palace maid drew the bright yellow curtain on both sides. As soon as the grandfather and granddaughter entered the inner hall, they handed the brocade box in their hands to the little palace maid beside them.

A palace maid stepped forward and placed two bright yellow cushions on each side.

Yu Youyao lowered her head and stared at the ground, not daring to move around. Since her grandmother was kneeling, she followed suit. The ground was paved with gold bricks, and it was dizzying. The high and mighty scrutiny and gaze of the higher-ups pressed down on her head, and her neck felt sore and swollen.

After a while, Yu Youyao heard a high and mighty voice above her head. “Get

Yu Youyao heard her grandmother thank her. “Thank you, Empress Dowager.”

She also followed behind her grandmother and thanked the Empress Dowager.

Right on the heels of that, a little palace maid walked over and helped her up. Yu Youyao lowered her eyes, not daring to look up or glance around.

The Empress Dowager was sitting on the phoenix couch. In the inner room, she was wearing a round-collared red sleeved top, with bright yellow sleeves on the outside. There was a golden phoenix embroidered on the top, and she had combed her hair into a bun. She was wearing a green crown with nine phoenixes on her forehead. The nine phoenixes on the crown had tassels in their mouths, making her look beautiful.

One of her hands was wrapped around her prayer beads and rested on the armrest of the phoenix head on the couch. Her other hand was casually placed on her lap. The nail on her little finger was carved with phoenixes and treasures.

The Empress Dowager sized up Yu Youyao.

She was a 13 or 14-year-old girl with a slender figure. Even though she was wearing a heavy County Head’s mingfu, it couldn’t hide her delicate waist, soft bones, and excellent manners.

The Empress Dowager softened her voice. “Raise your head and let me take a good look at you.”

Yu Youyao almost had no intention of disobeying. Under the Empress Dowager’s scrutinizing gaze, she slowly raised her head.

She had a pair of crescent eyebrows, a pair of sparkling eyes, a beautiful nose, red lips, and a fair oval face.

The Empress Dowager couldn't help but praise, "You're beautiful and vibrant. The emperor didn't give you the title of County Head of Shaoyi for nothing." At this point, her tone became a little gentler as she looked at the seat beside her. "Sit beside me."

Yu Youyao was not the typical dignified and beautiful girl that the elders liked the most, but she was delicate and bright. Anyone who saw her would have their eyes light up, and they would no longer hold anyone else in high regard..

Chapter 664 - 664: Brilliant Ancestral Virtue

Immediately, a palace maid placed a brocade basket beside the Empress Dowager.

Yu Youyao bowed and replied obediently, "Yes!"

After showing her etiquette, she walked over with lowered eyes and sat down obediently beside the Empress Dowager.

Seeing that she was neither servile nor overbearing, the Empress Dowager's smile deepened. She turned to look at Old Madam Yu, who was still standing, and said gently, "Sit down too. Don't tire yourself out from standing."

Old Madam Yu lowered her head to thank her. The little palace maid helped her to a cushioned chair.

The Empress Dowager liked Yu Youyao and held her hand. "Good child, what books have you been reading at home?"

A gentle smile appeared on her face as she held her hand kindly, like a loving elder. Even her questions were usually asked by ordinary elders when they saw their juniors. She did not put on any airs.

Unknowingly, it made people lower their guard and forget that the person in front of them was the high and mighty Empress Dowager.

Yu Youyao smiled shyly and replied in a low voice, "The family hired a female teacher for me. I read 'Lessons for Women', 'Internal Training', and 'The Analects of Women'. I also read 'The Four Books' and a little of 'The Five Classics'.

Reading the books for women was for the sake of virtue, the Four Books for understanding, and the Five Classics for etiquette.

They were all things that young ladies should learn.

The Empress Dowager's smile deepened. "It's good to study more. If women study more, they can also know etiquette, virtue, and kindness." At this point, she changed the topic and said, "The female teacher who taught you is Ye Yingqiu, right? She's a person with both talent and virtue. In the early years, before she divorced, she had followed her mother-in-law into the palace to meet me. I liked the brush she made and I've been using it for many years."

They were just chatting about family matters, but they were being polite with every word and sentence. As such, Yu Youyao did not dare to be complacent. "Grandmother also said that as a descendant of the Yu Clan, I have to read more books to remember my family's virtue and highlight my ancestor's contributions without bringing shame to the family's style." At this point, she pursed

her lips and smiled. “Ms. Ye often taught me that we can't take the saying ‘it's a virtue for women to be untalented’ out of context. It doesn't mean that women don't need to be talented in studying. Instead, it's to persuade women to prioritize virtue. Even if we do not have talent, we still have to be virtuous.”

What was the ancestral virtue and merit of the Yu Clan?

It was nothing more than the word “loyalty” personally bestowed by Emperor Gaozu. Since the Empress Dowager mentioned “virtue”, she naturally followed along.

When the Empress Dowager heard this, her smile deepened and she patted her hand. “The whole Yu Residence is very loyal. The emperor and I will remember it.”

She raised her eyebrows and looked at Yu Youyao.

The slender and weak girl was sitting beside her, but she did not seem flustered or timid. Her legs were closed and her hands were folded on them. She was slender and sat upright. Her back was thin and straight, but she was not rigid. Instead, she had a noble and gentle aura.

Although such an attitude was polite, in front of the nobles, it was inevitable that people would think that she was disrespectful.

However, her shoulders naturally collapsed, and she bent her jade neck, revealing a gentle and respectful expression.

Anyone who saw this would exclaim, “Such great character!”

The Empress Dowager looked at the Treasure Pavillion. There was a white porcelain vase. It was delicate and smoother than jade. The slender bottleneck was very similar to the fair neck of the County Head of Shaoyi. It was smooth and beautiful.

Putting aside her status, she really admired Yu Youyao a little. “No one is as good at teaching as your grandmother.”

These words were clearly praising her grandmother, but they were also praising her in a different way. Yu Youyao smiled shyly. It wasn't appropriate to mention her own elders, so she subconsciously rubbed the palace token at her waist.

The Empress Dowager noticed her actions and looked down. Yu Youyao had a colorful belt around her waist that only relatives were qualified to wear. There was a palace token hanging on it.

This was probably the palace token that she had asked Auntie Shen to personally choose and give to Yu Youyao back then.

The Empress Dowager smiled again. “She's young and pure. She's also good looking when she smiles and is kind and graceful. She's youthful and fresh and this means that she's clean and incorruptible. She is beautiful, untainted, kind and virtuous.” At this point, she paused for a moment and continued, “Now that I've seen you today, you are indeed as I described back then. Your grandmother has raised you to be virtuous.”

This was the Empress Dowager's comment about her back then. Yu Youyao was flattered. “I'm ashamed!”

The Empress Dowager patted her hand and changed the topic. “Good child,

Duke Rongs Residence was too ridiculous earlier and made you suffer.”

Yu Youyao’s eyes turned red, and she quickly said, “The emperor and the

Empress Dowager dote on me and uphold justice for me. I’ve received the Emperor’s grace and am deeply grateful for it.” At this point, she suddenly stood up and walked up to the Empress Dowager. She knelt and bowed. “I heard that the Empress Dowager is worried about the drought and is sympathetic to the suffering of the people, and would like to raise money for disaster relief. I’m also willing to share the Emperor’s and the Empress

Dowager’s burdens and help the thousands of commoners of the Great Zhou Dynasty.”

As soon as she finished speaking, the little palace maid serving her handed the brocade box back to Yu Youyao.

Yu Youyao reached out to take it and raised the brocade box above her head. “Although I don’t have the Empress Dowager’s virtue, I still have the heart to follow you. ”

The Empress Dowager glanced at Auntie Shen.

Auntie Shen hurriedly stepped forward and took the brocade box.

Only then did the Empress Dowager say gently, “You’re too kind. Get up quickly. You’re the County Head of Shaoyi, personally bestowed by the

Emperor. You have the title of a royal relative. Don’t kneel for no reason.”

Yu Youyao lowered her head and wiped her tears. She said hoarsely, “Thank you, Your Majesty, for the Empress Dowager’s grace.”

With that, she bowed again before asking the palace maid to help her up and sit on the brocade chair.

The Empress Dowager stuffed the handkerchief into her hand. “Hurry up and wipe your tears. The Emperor has conferred the title of County Head of Shaoyi. From now on, be it relatives or foreign ministers, no one will dare to humiliate you casually.”

These words counted as a promise.

However, how heavy this promise was depended on how much money she had donated.

Yu Youyao lowered her eyes and carefully took the Empress Dowager’s handkerchief. After wiping her tears, she handed it to the palace maid serving her.

The palace maid quickly handed her a cup of tea.

Yu Youyao ate a little before she calmed down a little. “I’ve already sent my old servants to Zhejiang with a token to transport 60 carriages of food and oil, and 20 carriages of medicinal herbs there. They’ll be used to help General Ye and the officials sent by the Imperial Court to save the people.”

Just now, she had donated silver for the drought, but now, she was donating food for the water disaster.

There were 60 carriages of rice and 20 medicinal herbs. These ingredients were all profitable businesses. In total, it was not a small sum.

The Empress Dowager solemnly held her hand. "County Head Shaoyi, you're wise and righteous. I thank you on behalf of the Emperor and the thousands of commoners of the Great Zhou Dynasty.."

Chapter 665 - 665: Princess Liyang

Yu Youyao lowered her eyes. "Your Highness, you're being too serious. I'm a citizen of the Great Zhou Dynasty. I've been nurtured by the Great Zhou Dynasty and have benefited from the Emperor's benevolence."

"Good child!" The Empress Dowager patted her hand, her tone filled with satisfaction. She turned to look at Old Madam Yu. "Go back and recuperate carefully. In the future, when you're free, bring the County Head of Shaoyi into the palace to walk around." With that, she looked at Yu Youyao. "Liyang and the County Head of Shaoyi are about the same age. They might be able to play together."

Speak of the devil!

As soon as the Empress Dowager finished speaking, the bright yellow curtain fell, and a young girl in a golden robe and rabbit-patterned makeup walked into the house.

The golden robe was woven with golden threads to form intricate patterns.

This golden thread was not simply a thread, but one that was made of actual gold.

At a glance, it looked magnificent and bright.

Yu Youyao lowered her eyes.

Indeed!

Princess Liyang was bright and beautiful. After entering the inner hall, she walked straight to the Empress Dowager and bowed. "Greetings, Grandmother."

Without waiting for the Empress Dowager to answer and finish bowing, she sat on the couch beside her and said in a delicate voice, "What did Imperial Grandmother say about me just now?"

The smile on the Empress Dowager's face became much more genuine. She turned to look at Yu Youyao and introduced, "This is Liyang." Then, she smiled and said to Princess Liyang, "This is the eldest daughter of the first wife of the

Left Assistant Minister of the Ministry of Official Personnel Affairs, Yu

Youyao. Not long ago, she was conferred the title of County Head of Shaoyi. She's a good person with both virtue and talent."

Princess Liyang looked at Yu Youyao curiously.

Her head was combed into an ingot bun, and she was wearing a phoenix crown with pearls in it. The crown was inlaid with pearl jade. When she tilted her head, the tassels on the crown swayed lightly.

In the Great Zhou Dynasty, accessories like hairpins, flowers, crowns, and tassels were popular. Therefore, such accessories were also varied and exquisite.

Yu Youyao couldn't sit still anymore. She quickly stood up and bowed. "Greetings, Your Highness."

As the daughter of an external minister, she had to be polite and introduce herself personally.

Princess Liyang quickly stood up and walked up to Yu Youyao. She kindly held her hand and helped her up. "You're Grandmother's delicate guest today. You don't need to be so generous." Her lips curved into a bright and benevolent smile. "Two years ago, I heard Grandmother mention the County Head of Shaoyi. Seeing you today, you're indeed beautiful."

As she praised her, her eyes landed on Yu Youyao's slender waist. Such a slim and weak waist was like a willow branch, as if it would break with a snap.

It was really enviable.

Her own frame was a little bigger. No matter how she tried, she looked thicker.

Yu Youyao quickly said, "Your Highness, you flatter me. Grandmother often mentions that Your Highness is bright and generous, and as beautiful as a hibiscus."

Princess Liyang smiled and changed the topic. "Speaking of which, we are rather fated."

Yu Youyao's eyelashes trembled slightly. She had already guessed what she was going to say next. Indeed!

Princess Liyang changed the topic. "I wasn't in good health when I was young. It was also because Imperial Grandmother pitied me that she sent Auntie Xu to me to take care of me for a few years. I originally wanted to beg Imperial Grandmother to let Auntie Xu stay and serve me, but Auntie Xu wanted to leave the palace, so I gave up. Later, Auntie Xu entered your family."

Yu Youyao pursed her lips and chuckled. "I see. Auntie Xu rarely mentions anything about the palace after entering our family, but I don't know about

Princess Liyang smiled and asked, "How's Auntie Xu?"

Yu Youyao replied, "Auntie is still the same, Your Royal Highness."

Princess Liyang nodded in relief. "That's good. Auntie has been in charge of the palace for half her life, and it's been hard on her. Imperial Grandmother often says that your Yu Residence is loyal and righteous, and is a rare good family. When Auntie went to your family, she could also enjoy a good life. This way, I can feel more at ease."

They seemed to be chatting, but the meaning behind Princess Liyang's words was exactly the same as the Empress Dowagers.

From the looks of it, it was not unreasonable for Princess Liyang to be doted on by the Empress Dowager.

Yu Youyao blushed. "It's also because the Empress Dowager thinks highly of our family. Auntie usually teaches and takes good care of me. Our family should take good care of her."

Princess Liyang smiled and changed the topic, asking about what was happening outside the palace.

The two of them came and went clueless, chatting warmly.

At least in the eyes of others, that was right.

The Empress Dowager turned to look at Old Madam Yu. “The two of them hit it off at first sight. Let them play as they please. The two of us are old and can talk nicely.”

Old Madam Yu was about to say, “Yes—”

The eunuch’s sharp voice came from outside, “Concubine Lan has arrived.” Princess Liyang and Yu Youyao stopped talking.

The Empress Dowager’s expression darkened a little. “Please come in!”

After a while, the bright yellow curtain was lifted on both sides, and Concubine Lan entered the inner hall.

She had combed her hair into a peony bun, and she was wearing a large peony flower inlaid with red and gold. Every petal of the peony was as thin as a cicada’s wing. As she walked lightly, it trembled slightly on her head. She was wearing a ten-pleated dress, and each pleat at her waist was of a color. There were ten colors, and every pleat was embroidered with flowers and birds, inlaid with jewelry.

Concubine Lan was beautiful, as graceful and luxurious as a peony. She was absolutely dazzling.

Concubine Lan stepped forward with a smile and bowed. “Greetings, Empress Dowager.”

The Empress Dowager said calmly, “Don’t stand on ceremony!”

Concubine Lan stood up and sat in the seat below the Empress Dowager. Only then did she look at Old Madam Yu. “After Old Master Yu passed away, Matriarch Yu didn’t enter the palace much anymore. Speaking of which, I haven’t seen you for many years. Have you been doing well?”

Her tone was a little quiet.

Old Madam Yu couldn’t sit still anymore. She quickly stood up and bowed to Concubine Lan. The little palace maid in front of Concubine Lan cleverly stepped forward to stop her.

Concubine Lan also quickly said, “You have to stop. In the Empress Dowager’s palace, how can I deserve your bow? You’re a guest that the Empress Dowager has been looking forward to.”

In terms of grade, Old Madam Yu was of the same level as her. Although she was a palace concubine and her status was different, there was still etiquette between “emperors and ministers.”

However, Old Madam Yu’s etiquette still depended on the occasion.

Today, Old Madam Yu was here to visit the Empress Dowager, not her.

This was not her Lanyi Palace, but the Longevity Palace.

Old Madam Yu took the opportunity to sit back in her chair. “Thank you for your concern, Consort Lan. I’m still fine.”

Concubine Lan smiled and inadvertently looked at the young girl sitting beside the Empress Dowager. Her gaze couldn’t help but pause. “This must be County Head Shaoyi.” Her eyes sized up her, and she couldn’t hide her surprise and praise. “She really takes after her mother. She’s a beautiful woman..”

Chapter 666 - 666: Concubine Lan

The mother and daughter were exactly the same. One was beautiful, while the other was delicate. They were both bright and dazzling.

Compared to her, others inevitably fell behind.

It wasn't that they didn't look as good, but that the County Head of Shaoyi was glowing. The spotlight was on her.

Yu Youyao quickly stood up and bowed to Consort Lan. "Thank you for your praise."

If it weren't for the fact that there had long been conflict between the Yu Residence and Ning Yuanbo's Residence, it would be extremely good for such a delicate beauty to be matched with the clueless Emperor's son. Concubine Lan felt that it was a pity, but she didn't show it on her face. She smiled and said, "County Head Shaoyi, there's no need to be so polite. Hurry up and sit down. Otherwise, the Empress Dowager will blame me for troubling her delicate guest."

Yu Youyao thanked her and sat back down.

Concubine Lan glanced at Princess Liyang for a split second. She took a brocade box from the palace maid. "The Empress Dowager wants to raise money for disaster relief. I also have the intention to share the Emperor's burden."

Auntie Shen took it with a smile.

Yu Youyao noticed that Concubine Lan's gaze flashed past Princess Liyangs. It was cold and indifferent, unlike the attitude of a palace concubine towards a legitimate princess.

She casually picked up her teacup and used sipping on the tea as a facade. She glanced at Princess Liyang from the corner of her eye. When Princess Liyang looked at Concubine Lan, her smile faded a little.

"You're too kind." Even though she did not like Concubine Lan's ostentatious behavior, the Empress Dowager had to admit that Concubine Lan was a smart and sensible person.

The Emperor had made such a big move, and the Yu Residence was not a fool.

Concubine Lan had chosen the time when Old Madam Yu brought County Head Shaoyi into the palace to specially deliver the disaster relief money. She was telling the Yu Residence that this money-raising initiative was legitimate and not made to target the Yu Residence. She showed that even the Palace was doing their part.

This could be considered to have fulfilled the palace's plan.

Concubine Lan took the opportunity to mention the flood in Zhejiang. The few adults in the house had to join in. After talking about the flood, it was inevitable that she would mention the drought in the north.

With that, she became more talkative.

It wasn't until quarter to noon that the Empress Dowager looked exhausted.

Only then did Concubine Lan tactfully leave.

Old Madam Yu also did not want to overstay.

The Empress Dowager said, "It's getting late, and I'm tired. Matriarch and the County Head of Shaoyi can go to the side hall to rest and stay in the palace for lunch."

Old Madam Yu and Yu Youyao quickly thanked her.

When she returned to the inner room, the Empress Dowager first opened the brocade box that Old Madam Yu had handed over. There was a stack of banknotes inside, and she had also prepared a booklet. The booklet indicated the number and limit of this stack of banknotes, which totaled 100,000 taels.

Old Madam Yu had donated money on behalf of the first branch of the Yu Residence. 100,000 taels of silver was already beyond her expectations.

In the past, when the palace was collecting money, it all depended on how much each family was willing to give. Those with weaker families had dozens or hundreds of taels of silver, and those with stronger families had hundreds or thousands of taels of silver. Those who had donated more than 5,000 taels of silver could be counted on one hand.

The Empress Dowager sighed softly. "It hasn't been easy for Old Niadam Yu all these years either. She spent 100,000 taels at once. Other than eating vegetarian food and chanting Buddhist scriptures and consecrating

Bodhisattva, it's also because of the Emperor's great kindness that she wanted to contribute more."

Auntie Shen also said, "Old Madam Yu is kind-hearted."

The Empress Dowager had originally estimated that if the Yu Residence could take out 50,000 taels, they would already be repaying the Emperor's grace.

It was impossible to rely on just money to relieve the disaster.

With this number, the various families in the capital more or less had a considerable sum. There was not enough to resolve the disaster, but at the very least, it could resolve their urgent needs.

Now that it had far exceeded this number, it was obvious that the Yu Residence was really considerate.

The Empress Dowager opened the box of the County Head of Shaoyi and took the book. She was stunned for a long time.

Auntie Shen's breathing tightened.

The Empress Dowager closed the book and placed it into a box. "Now, I feel that it's still a little lacking for the Emperor to just confer Eldest Miss Yu the title of County Head of Shaoyi. With this deep sense of righteousness, it's enough to be conferred the title of Princess." She handed the box to Auntie

Shen and said calmly, "Take it to the imperial study and hand it to the

Emperor." At this point, she hesitated for a moment and added, "The Yu

Residence has lived up to its loyalty and unity. In the future, we'll treat them even better."

She had donated a total of a million taels of silver, and the palace knew all the businesses under the County Head of Shaoyi's name. This one million taels of silver was almost half of the profits of all the manors under her name for ten years.

Other than for the sake of the Emperor's grace, she was probably like Old Madam Yu, and was raised with a Bodhisattva's heart to be willing to fork out such a large sum of money.

Auntie Shen carried the box all the way to the imperial study.

Eunuch Zhu quickly welcomed her. He glanced at the brocade box and smiled. "Auntie Shen is here. The Emperor has just finished dealing with the memorial and is having a headache over who he should send to Zhejiang to relieve the disaster. Please come in."

Auntie Shen looked down at the brocade box in her hand and understood. She smiled and entered the imperial study with Eunuch Zhu.

The Emperor's face was pale, but his cheeks were abnormally flushed. Clearly, he had just taken the medicinal pill not long ago. Auntie Shen handed the brocade box to Eunuch Zhu and relayed that Old Madam Yu and the County Head of Shaoyi had entered the palace to thank him. After saying a few words, she said, "The Empress Dowager is full of praise. The Yu Residence had shown their loyalty and integrity. The County Head of Shaoyi did not let down the Emperor's grace."

There was no need for her to say the rest. The Emperor would understand.

Eunuch Zhu handed over a brocade box.

The Emperor smiled. "I naturally know how loyal the Yu Residence is." Auntie Shen left after hearing this.

The imperial study fell silent. The Emperor opened the brocade box and looked satisfied when he saw the number inside. However, there was an unfathomable glint in his turbid eyes.

The Emperor looked at the box for a long time before closing it. He said ambiguously, "Even an unmarried young miss of the inner residence is richer than me. Tell me." His gray eyes stared at Eunuch Zhu and he asked word by word, "Am I a failure as the Emperor?"

Eunuch Zhu knelt on the ground with a thud, and his heavy shirt was instantly drenched in sweat. "The Emperor has been benevolent, so the Yu Residence and the County Head of Shaoyi County have given up their family wealth to share the Emperor's burden." At this point, even his teeth were chattering, and his voice was trembling uncontrollably. "It's, it's because someone betrayed the Emperor's kindness and deceived..."

In the past, there was the Zhejiang capital that embezzled money from the army. Later, there was the Ministry of Works that joined forces to supervise the river. The officials of Zhejiang embezzled money from repairing the river. This money was a huge sum every year.

Eunuch Zhu lowered his eyes.

Only with a comparison could the loyalty of the Yu Residence be highlighted.

Indeed!

At the mention of this, the Emperor sneered. “That’s right. There are loyal and unyielding officials like the Yu Residence in the court, and there are also blood-sucking leeches.” At this point, his expression suddenly darkened.

“They think that I won’t be able to deal with them because they are far away from my authority. I’ll make them spit out everything they’ve swallowed since the past with interest!”

Eunuch Zhu lowered his head a little more, not even daring to breathe loudly..

Chapter 667 - 667: Holy Decree

The Emperor continued, heard that the County Head of Shaoyi even sent all the food, oil, and medicinal herbs in her shops in the Jiangnan area to relieve the disaster. A woman from the inner residence is also magnanimous. She’s so understanding and righteous that she’s superior to all the civil and military officials in my court.” At this point, he smiled faintly. “Minister Yu has raised such a good daughter.”

Eunuch Zhu’s heart suddenly relaxed.

The Emperor was no longer keeping an eye on Eldest Miss Yu, but completely shifted his attention to Zhejiang. The diversion had worked.

“Someone!” the Emperor shouted. Immediately after, an eunuch rushed into the house and lowered his head to listen to the decree. “Pass down my holy decree. I propose for Yu Zongzheng, the Left Assistant Minister of the

Ministry of Official Personnel Affairs and also the 13th Imperial Censor of the Imperial Court to be appointed to patrol Zhejiang. Three days later, he will go to Zhejiang to relieve the refugees and comfort the people.”

Eunuch Zhu lowered his eyes. The Emperor had not been in court for a long time and the 13th Imperial Censor of the Imperial Court had his power stolen by the Ministry of Rites. The division of power in the cabinet was ambiguous.

The 13th Imperial Censor was usually managed by the Imperial Court, but when he performed his duties, he was not under their control. He directly reported to the Emperor.

Although the official position of an Imperial Censor was low, he had extraordinary power when he went out on behalf of the Emperor. He had the right to report big matters and make decisions on small matters. He could “supervise the elders” and “supervise them with superiority”. He could independently exercise his authority and inspect the governance of officials. He was not restricted and controlled by any officials.

There was no local official who couldn’t be controlled by the Imperial Censor.

As long as there were no major mistakes in the disaster relief, Yu Zongzheng would have made a huge contribution.

It seemed that after returning from the disaster relief in Zhejiang, with such a great contribution, he would not be able to remove his title as the Imperial Censor of the Imperial Court. From now on,

even if it was a cabinet meeting, he would have a place. Although his official position was low, his power was close to that of a court official. Even without entering the cabinet, he could compete with the court officials.

Yu Zongzheng had a good mother and a great daughter.

At Ipm, Old Madam Yu and Yu Youyao bade the Empress Dowager farewell and returned to the residence.

Before she left, Auntie Shen held a box with a smile and handed it to Yu

Youyao. "I heard that the County Head of Shaoyi likes the snacks in the palace, so the Empress Dowager ordered someone to prepare a recipe. When the

County Head of Shaoyi returns home, you can make it yourself."

Yu Youyao was flattered. She quickly took the box and squatted down to bow. "Thank you, Empress Dowager."

Auntie Shen smiled and pulled her up. She patted her hand. "In the future, when the County Head of Shaoyi is free, please visit the palace to talk to the

Empress Dowager."

Yu Youyao quickly agreed.

Old Madam Yu took a soft sedan chair, followed by a group of palace maids and eunuchs. They were all holding gifts from the Empress Dowager. They were all exquisite snacks, engraved tea, spices, medicinal herbs, and so on.

They were rare tributes from various places and had been carefully prepared.

When they reached the second palace gate, Yu Youyao bade Auntie Shen farewell before helping her grandmother into the carriage.

The carriage drove out of the inner palace and left the palace.

Yu Youyao pouted and raised her hand to take off the crown on her head. "The crown is heavy to begin with. After entering the palace, I didn't even raise my head. My neck is about to die of soreness." Not only did she take off the crown herself, but she also leaned over and took off her grandmother's crown. "I'll rub Grandmother's shoulders and neck."

Old Madam Yu did not criticize her. She felt sorry for her and said, "I know that you suffered today. Go and rest yourself. I'm not like you. This is not the first time I've entered the palace, so it'll only take a short rest for me to recover."

Before entering the palace, she had broken out in a cold sweat. When she arrived in front of the Empress Dowager, she watched as her granddaughter responded to the Empress Dowager fluently. Every word and sentence was generous and appropriate. Be it rules or etiquette, she was thorough and did not miss anything. She was not like the little girl who had entered the palace

for the first time. She was even calmer than her.

With such a temperament, she thought that no matter what situation she was in in the future, she would be able to deal with it calmly. Such a temperament was not something that ordinary young misses could have. It was because Linghuai had raised her to have a heart and broad horizons.

From the looks of it, in the past few years, she had allowed the cousins to be close. Even if there were some things that were against the rules, she would turn a blind eye.

The relationship between the two of them was far closer than that of ordinary cousins. In the future, not only would Linghuai have scruples about their relationship, but their deep relationship would also allow him to protect Yao Yao more fully.

Chun Xiao handed her a cup of jade laurel tea. Yu Youyao ate some and asked, “Grandmother, from what I see, Concubine Lan is a smooth-talking person.

Why is she the only one who ignores Princess Liyang?”

Ordinary people were either trembling in fear or being cautious when they entered the palace. Although this was her first time entering the palace, she could actually still observe such subtleties.

She had really worried for nothing. Old Madam Yu felt proud and sad.

“Actually, this matter isn’t a secret in the capital. It’s just that no one dares to say it.”

Yu Youyao became even more curious.

Old Madam Yu did not keep her in suspense. “Think about Princess Liyang’s title carefully.”

Yu Youyao was stunned for a moment before she immediately reacted. “Her title mentions a horse and the mountain in the North called Li Mountain. How did the dignified princess of the Great Zhou Dynasty be called a horse?” As soon as she finished asking, her mind exploded. Her cousin had mentioned before that back then, the dog Emperor had traveled north on his own and was surrounded by the Di army. Duke Ning was worried about the Emperor’s safety and hurriedly brought his troops to save him. He had also been ambushed by the Di people in the area of Li Mountain and finally died tragically.

Moreover, Duke Ning and his son were generals who were good at riding and archery.

“That’s right.” At the mention of what had happened back then, Old Madam Yu also sighed. “Concubine Lan has a princess under her name and was conferred the title of Princess Zhao Ping. It means clear and fair. Although she’s the daughter of a concubine, her title is as honorable as that of a legitimate wife.”

In the morning—

It was obvious how much the Emperor valued this concubine’s Princess.

Yu Youyao couldn’t help but ask, “Why is that? Surely the Empress wouldn’t have applied for such a title for her daughter as a tribute to her father and brother?”

Old Madam Yu shook her head. “Because Princess Liyang wasn’t birthed by the Empress to begin with!”

“What?” Yu Youyao’s eyes widened, and she did not react for a moment.

Right on the heels of that, Old Madam Yu threw out another shocking explosion. “No, it should be said that Princess Liyang isn’t birthed by the Emperor and the Empress, nor is she of the royal family’s bloodline.”

Yu Youyao’s head exploded again. She suddenly understood. “Could it be that

Princess Liyang is the young miss of the Ning Residence? What's going on?"

Princess Liyang's title already explained everything, but she hadn't thought about it before.

No wonder no one dared to mention this.

Old Madam Yu frowned, as if she did not really want to mention this matter. "Back then, the Ning Residence was convicted. In the Ning Residence branch, other than a weak concubine's son who was especially kind to the Emperor and was sentenced to exile, the others were all beheaded. The other legitimate and collateral branches of the clan were also sentenced to exile..

Chapter 668 - 668: Censor

Without her grandmother saying anything else, Yu Youyao could most likely guess what happened.

Indeed!

Everyone knew the truth of the matter, but no one dared to mention it at all.

Old Madam Yu sighed softly. "On account of the relationship between the Ning Residence and the Empress back then, the Emperor was especially kind and pardoned the Ning Clan when this matter was over. The Ning Clan was allowed to return to the ancestral land to live. Princess Liyang was the only descendant of the Ning Residence."

Yu Youyao's lips curled up slightly, revealing a hint of cold mockery.

It seemed that Princess Liyang was the only heir left behind by the concubine's son who had been exempted from the death penalty.

The Ning Residence had taken on a black calamity that affected the entire family. In the end, the Ning Clan still had to thank the Emperor for his mercy.

It was really ironic.

Old Madam Yu continued, "That concubine's son did not survive the pain of exile. He only left behind a young daughter and passed away. The Ning Clan brought a newborn baby into the capital to thank them. There were no children in the Central Palace. The Empress asked the Emperor for grace and raised this child by her side. She also asked for a title and she became Princess

Liyang.

Yu Youyao understood a little. In the past dynasties, there had been precedents of the last daughter of a meritorious general being conferred the title of Princess and brought into the palace to be raised.

There were no children in the Central Palace. The Emperor had no reason to refuse when the Empress wanted to bring his niece into the palace.

In addition, the court officials knew very well about the matter at the Ning Residence. In order to protect his reputation and face, the Emperor naturally had to treat the Empress well, as well as the bloodline of the Ning Residence and even the Ning Clan. This way, the court officials would not be disappointed.

The reason why the Empress Dowager doted on Princess Liyang so much was because of the Empress.

She also had the intention to compensate the Ning Residence.

No matter how much Princess Liyang was doted on, she was not of the true royal bloodline. There was indeed no need for Concubine Lan to take Princess Liyang seriously.

Old Madam Yu twirled her prayer beads. "What a sin!"

Yu Youyao also knew what her grandmother was referring to. She couldn't help but think of what had happened to King Li of Zhou and feel a little sad.

Old Madam Yu changed the topic. "Money is just worldly possessions. It's fine if we donate it. Natural and man-made disasters are endless. As long as it's a citizen of the Great Zhou Dynasty, no one can take care of themselves alone. Donate more, lest others think that our family is hiding something and keep an eye on us. That will bring endless trouble in the future."

If they couldn't satisfy the appetite of the higher-ups, not only would they be dissatisfied, suspicious, and thankless, but there would probably be a second time, a third time...

Yu Youyao nodded. "Cousin also mentioned that since the Empress Dowager said that it was a money-raising disaster relief, at least half of the money donated will be used on the commoners."

In order to make it easier to help her cousin accumulate food, in the past two years, she had sold many businesses under her name with the excuse that they were incurring losses. She had secretly bought houses and properties with the money.

The Imperial Court could only find out about the businesses on the surface.

With the huge profits from the escort business and the merchant ship, the dowry businesses that her mother had left for her was no longer worth as much.

She donated food and medicine to Empress Dowager's disaster relief. She had also donated a million taels of silver in one go. In everyone's opinion, she had spent most of her assets and indeed lived up to the Emperor's kindness.

Old Madam Yu also nodded. "The Empress Dowager has many schemes, but she still has some style. The Emperor is obsessed with alchemy, and the court is not peaceful. The reason why the Emperor can sit steadily on the dragon throne is also because the Empress Dowager is good at gathering the servants inside and out." At this point, she sighed again. "The Great Zhou Dynasty has a clear rule that the harem is not allowed to do political work. Otherwise..."

She did not say the rest, but Yu Youyao understood. It should be reliable to raise money for disaster relief, so she felt a little more relieved.

After returning to the residence, Old Madam Yu was exhausted. She had just changed out of the cumbersome outfit and was about to lie down for a while when Qing Xiu came over to report, "Master is here."

Usually, at this time, Eldest Son was in the government office. It seemed that there was another move in the palace. Old Madam Yu sighed softly. "Help me up."

“Grandmother, rest. I’ll talk to Father.” Yu Youyao was worried about her grandmother. She did not even return to the Jade Courtyard, but assisted Nanny Liu with helping her grandmother wash up. She was still wearing the County Head’s mingfu. Old Madam Yu shook her head. “From now on, you should stop getting involved with your father.” Yu Youyao’s heart skipped a beat. She lowered her head and said nothing.

Yu Zongzheng rushed down from the government office and arrived at An Shou Hall. He was still wearing his official uniform when he saw Nanny Liu helping the exhausted Matriarch out. His eldest daughter was still wearing the County Head’s uniform.

He quickly stepped forward and bowed. “Mother, you must be tired.”

Old Madam Yu waved her hand. “I entered the palace today to express our thanks. On behalf of the Yu Residence, I donated 100,000 taels of silver. Yao Yao took out most of her assets and donated a million taels of silver. It’s as you wish.”

Yu Zongzheng’s expression froze, as if someone had poured a bucket of cold water on his head. No matter how excited he was, he cooled down. “Just now, the emperor issued a holy decree for me as the 13th Inspection Censor of the Imperial Court and personally appointed me to go to Zhejiang to relieve the disaster.” At this point, he bent down and bowed again. “It’s all thanks to Mother’s consideration for my future.”

Yu Youyao gasped.

The Imperial Censor of the Great Zhou Dynasty had real power. However, the Emperor had not been to court for a long time and did not trust the court officials. Instead, he trusted the eunuchs in the palace that he could control.

The title of the Censor became useless. The job of patrolling was indirectly handed over to the eunuchs.

It had been a long time since the Emperor had appointed an Imperial Censor.

On the other hand, Yu Zongzheng was the Left Assistant Minister of the

Ministry of Official Personnel Affairs. The authority of the Ministry of Official Personnel Affairs was to be in charge of the appointment and dismissal of civil officials in the world, examinations, promotions, conferred titles, transfers, and so on. It also had the responsibility to inspect official governance.

The Imperial Censor was also an official on behalf of the Emperor. His authority involved generals, and he was even directly appointed by the

Emperor. He was not under the official system of the Ministry of Official Personnel Affairs.

Be it civil servants or generals, there was nobody in the Great Zhou Dynasty that Yu Zongzheng could not manage.

Yu Zongzheng did not enter the cabinet, but he became a true minister.

It was no wonder that Yu Zongzheng had even schemed against his family.

No one could help but be tempted by this pie.

Old Madam Yu tightened her grip on her prayer beads and her expression darkened. “Don’t thank me. In the eyes of the nobles in the palace, the 100,000 taels of silver from the Yu Residence is not even enough to fill the gaps between your teeth. If you want to thank someone, thank you for marrying a good wife and giving birth to a good daughter. She gave up most of her dowry and money to help you become an official.”

Yu Zongzhengs expression was a little complicated. He couldn’t help but think of Madam Xie. The one million taels that Yao Yao had taken out must have been from Madam Xie’s dowry business.

Old Madam Yu didn’t even look at his expression. “Not only did Yao Yao donate money, but she also donated all the food, oil, and medicinal herbs from 60 grain shops and 20 medicine shops in the Jiangnan area. These are all the reasons you are going to Zhejiang to help with the disaster. You should thank Yao Yao..

Chapter 669 - 669: Living Up to the Emperor’s Grace

Yu Zongzheng was overjoyed. The money allocated by the Imperial Court for disaster relief was not much, and Zhejiang had a lot of disasters. With the 20 ships of food from the Xie family and the food and medicine donated by his eldest daughter, the job was much easier.

Yu Zongzheng was both proud and gratified that his eldest daughter had sacrificed so much for him. “The eunuch who went to the government office to deliver the holy decree today said that the Emperor praised you for being understanding and righteous. He said that Yao Yao is kind-hearted and did not let down the loyalty and virtue of the Yu Clan. He even praised the family for being upright and one that accumulated kindness and virtue. That’s why he entrusted the disaster relief to me. He hoped that I would not let down my ancestors and live up to the Emperor’s grace.”

Yu Youyao lowered her eyes. “I thought it would be difficult for Father to go to Zhejiang. Luckily, I could be of help to you.” At this point, she bowed slightly. “I wish you all the best on this trip to Zhejiang and that you’ll be in good health.’

Yu Zongzheng coveted power and status. He had the noble demeanor of a descendant of an aristocratic family in his bones and did not value money. Moreover, he had also become the 13th censor and was directly appointed to serve the Emperor. He definitely wanted to use this opportunity to make a contribution and satisfy the Emperor. Being sent to Zhejiang to relieve the disaster was also the best outcome.

Previously, Yu Zongzheng had mentioned to her that he wanted to ask for an order for her mother. She had more or less guessed that if Yu Zongzheng wanted to improve his standing, he would have to make a great contribution to the Imperial Court.

Previously, he had thought of helping out with the drought.

Later on, when there was a flood in Zhejiang, she guessed that they were going to Zhejiang to relieve the disaster.

This was the reason why she had donated food and medicine.

These words touched Yu Zongzhengs heart. He said happily, “Alright, I’ll thank you for your blessing.”

Yu Youyao smiled and said nothing.

The next day, Eunuch Zhu came to the Yu Residence again with many rewards from the Emperor and the Empress Dowager.

Although there was no news of Yu Youyao donating money, food, and medicine in the palace, it was not covered up. Every family had spies in the palace and they knew what had happened clearly.

This was also deliberately done by the palace.

The entire capital knew that the Empress Dowager was going to implement the fund raising for the disaster relief.

The various families in the capital were not fools. Yu Youyao had been conferred the title of the County Head, and the late Eldest Madam Xie had also been conferred the title of a virtuous woman. The Emperor's grace was really vast.

Naturally, the Yu Residence had to "repay" the Emperor.

This was a scheme by the palace.

With Yu Youyao's deep understanding and righteousness, all the families in the capital knew that this money collection was not a small matter.

The Empress Dowager's collection of money was targeted at all the servants inside and out, including local officials. The direction of the wind in the capital often represented the direction of the Great Zhou Dynasty, and the nobles and merchants from all over the country were also involved.

Therefore, the collection of disaster relief money went very smoothly.

This also made Yu Youyao heave a sigh of relief. If she raised more money, the people who would be affected in the second half of the year would have a better life.

In mid-May, Yu Youyao received a message from the steward of a manor in Ningbo, Zhejiang.

The fields in more than ten counties in Zhejiang were flooded, and the people affected by the disaster lost their harvest for the second half of the year.

At this time, it was too late to plant anything.

After planting more than a hundred acres of sweet potatoes in the manor, they planned to distribute the harvest to the affected commoners and teach them how to plant them. In July and August, when the sweet potatoes were harvested, the commoners could pinch the sweet potato leaves to quench their hunger. In the second half of the year, when they were most short of food, they would be able to live after harvesting the sweet potatoes.

Yu Youyao sent a pigeon to ask him to arrange it as soon as possible. She also found Steward Li from the Rogue Manor to ask him some questions.

Steward Li said, "The temperature in Zhejiang is moderate, and there's a lot of light. The sweet potatoes should live very well. I reckon they can be planted until late May. They can probably also be planted in June, but it might affect production."

Yu Youyao finally heaved a sigh of relief.

Next, Yu Youyao kept paying attention to the money collection and the disaster relief situation in Zhejiang.

In the blink of an eye, it was June.

It had been a month since her cousin had left the capital, and she had only received one letter from him during this period. She was not worried that anything would happen to him, but she missed him very much.

At this moment, Yin Huaixi, whom Yu Youyao was worried about, was not in a hurry to meet Harmon after arriving in the North. Instead, he led his troops to patrol the drought in the North every day and the planting of sweet potatoes.

There were not many paddy fields in the North, and most of them were dry lands, with more sandy land.

After the successful planting of the sweet potatoes, Yu Youyao bought a large amount of farmland and forests in various areas of the North. There were many dry lands in the North, and the land prices were very cheap.

In the Great Zhou Dynasty's paddy field, an acre of land required more than ten taels of silver. Different areas had different prices, so it was impossible to estimate.

The fertile land was about five to six taels per mu, which was a relatively stable value. Ordinary land was less than three taels, and the sand land in the North was less than three to four hundred copper coins per mu.

Potatoes were not picky about land, but they were more adaptable to sand and could grow more.

As such, the planting of sweet potatoes in the North had already reached a certain scale this year.

Later on, Yu Youyao suggested cutting the plants and replanting, and greatly expanded the agricultural land.

The steward even used the name of the Yue Fei's Residence to distribute the excess sweet potato vines to the commoners to plant.

Yue Fei's Residence was extremely prestigious in the North. When King Li of Zhou was still alive, he was very concerned about agriculture. Every family had a few acres of sand land. The commoners did not suspect anything and followed suit.

The steward in charge of the manor looked regretful. "Last year, the cotton in the manor was also tried and grown. Although it was fruitful and hadn't bloomed, the experienced old farmers in the manor said that it was because the planting was late and it was dry. They originally planned to expand the planting this year, but it was dry in the north this year. Eldest Miss also instructed that sweet potatoes should be planted on a large scale this year. We can continue planting the cotton in the future when the weather is good."

There was some cotton planted in the manor, but the situation was not very good.

Yin Huaixi did not know much about farming, but when he saw the growth of the sweet potatoes in the manor, he felt that they were not bad, so he asked about it.

The steward had also been Yin Huaixi's subordinate in the past, so he naturally did not hide it. "The land in the manor is rented out to the families of the martyrs to plant first. There's no need to pay the rent. The seeds are all produced by those in the manor themselves. The manor will get 70% of the food harvest, and the farmers will get 30%. Many of the work in the manor is also prioritized for the families of the soldiers with poorer families. As they have work to do, their lives have improved a lot."

In the past, the steward was also a soldier under King Li of Zhou. Later, his leg was injured, and it hurt every autumn and winter. He could no longer go to the battlefield, so he retreated.

Naturally, he also hoped that the families of the soldiers would live a better life.

Therefore, he was very grateful to Eldest Miss.

Yin Huaixi understood after thinking for a moment. The sand land couldn't produce food, and the commoners weren't willing to rent it. If they had the time, they might as well explore it themselves.

By renting the land to the families of the martyrs without charging rent or providing seeds, not only could they farm for free, but they would also receive 30% of the food. They would definitely think that this was the preferential treatment that the Yue Fei Residence had given them. Naturally, they would do their best and not fool them.

In the first few years, because of the lack of supplies, there were indeed too many casualties in the North. Furthermore, because of the limited supplies, even though her father tried his best to compensate the families of the martyrs, their lives were still very difficult..

Chapter 670 - 670: Harmon

After Yin Huaixi took guard of the North, he put a lot of effort into creating an "escort" business that specializes in traveling up to the North. It indeed brought in more trade, and the North had become much more prosperous. However, the lives of the people in the lower classes had not improved much.

Meanwhile, Yu Youyao's actions had indeed brought about greater improvements to the people.

In this aspect, he was far inferior to Yu Youyao.

The steward did not know what he was thinking. "Not only did Eldest Miss buy land in Youzhou, but she also bought farmsteads and mountains in all the towns in the North. The farmsteads are planted with sweet potatoes and peanuts, and the mountains were planted with pine, elm, and wood. These are all trees that can last for more than ten years in the North. Eldest Miss said that these wood will become material in the future. In the long run, the people will be able to reap great benefits. The job of planting trees is also handed over to the families of the martyrs and poor soldiers."

Pine, elm, and wood were all commonly used wood in the Great Zhou Dynasty. Wood was not cheap to begin with. After they are fully grown, it is a guaranteed profit.

Everybody knew that the North had been dry during the past two years. Eldest Miss had long been worried about a drought, so she bought a lot of mountains and asked the families of the martyrs and

poor soldiers to plant trees. With work and money in hand, their families could also stock up on food. If there was a drought, they wouldn't starve to death.

Eldest Miss also said, "I have more than enough money. Planting trees is a hundred-year plan. If I can benefit and help others along the way, why wouldn't I do it?"

The steward continued, "Not only that, but Eldest Miss also brought chestnuts, walnuts, and so on from other places to the North to plant. She said that these dried fruits are very adaptable to the environment, so they can definitely be planted. There's nothing we can do about the lack of supplies in the North, but we can create better conditions for people. Dry fruits are also valuable. In the future, when we promote agriculture in the North, it will also be an income.'

Only then did Yin Huaixi realize how much the little girl had done for him and the North.

As they traveled, there were stewards who were proficient in agriculture who followed them and recorded the crop situation everywhere. Thinking of how Heavenly Works had benefited Qianqiu, they also felt that this was a good move.

It was only now that Yin Huaixi realized that Yu Youyao had a long term plan. Without a steward who was proficient in agriculture, how could Yu Youyao know that chestnuts were adaptable to the environment and could live in the North?

As the steward was born and raised in the North, he had many things to say regarding this. "So far, Eldest Miss has lived in the North for 16 types of crops obtained from other places. Eldest Miss said that this was also inspired by sweet potatoes. Although the soil and water of the land determine what crops can grow on it, as long as we understand the nature of how the crops grow and find someone who can proficiently plant them, we can adapt them to different habitats. This is much easier than planting some new seeds without knowing how they will grow. It doesn't matter if she doesn't succeed immediately. She can just try again to plant them which would just take a little more time and effort. Once she succeeds, it'll be a blessing to the North..." When the steward mentioned Eldest Miss, he had endless things to say.

Yin Huaixi was also happy to listen, so he did not interrupt. Thinking of Yu Youyao, who was far away in the capital, he was both proud and happy. At that moment, he lost the mood to inspect.

Immediately, he rode his horse and raised his whip, rushing back to the Yue Fei Kings Residence.

Currently, Uncle Sun was performing acupuncture on Yin Yi.

Yin Yi was Yin Huaixi's personal guard and also his substitute. He had eaten and lived with him since he was young. Back then, on the battlefield in the North, it was also Yin Yi who protected him from being trampled to death by the chaotic horses.

At that time, Yin Yi's leg was broken by a horse.

Yin Huaixi had specially brought Uncle Sun back with him. He planned to let Uncle Sun help Yin Yi recuperate first. The next time he returned, he would let Uncle Sun treat Yin Yi's leg.

Yin Yi wore a mask and called out respectfully, "Young Master."

Yin Huaixi nodded and asked Uncle Sun, "How's his health?"

Uncle Sun rolled his eyes. "His health is much better than yours back then.

After recuperating carefully for a while, he can be treated with acupuncture."

All these years, Eldest Miss Yu had also made all kinds of incense medicine, so Yin Yi's leg had been recuperating well.

Yin Huaixi nodded and asked, "How's the deployment at the narrow Yu Pass?"

Yin Yi replied, "Young Master, don't worry. We've already sealed the entrance to the narrow Yu Pass according to your instructions. No one is allowed to enter or leave the place for a month. We'll also send troops to guard all the entrances."

Yin Huaixi said calmly, "Send the defense map of the narrow Yu Pass to Harmon and tell him to meet there in ten days. Of course, that's if he dares to come."

Since it was a deal, both sides had to show a certain amount of sincerity.

The narrow Yu Pass was the first line of defense between the North and the Northern Barbarians. Although it was in the North's territory, both sides had a way out.

If Harmon wanted to make a deal with him, he had to follow his rules.

He had sent someone to send over the defense map of the narrow Yu Pass. With it, Harmon could also make some preparations, so that he wouldn't be too passive when he arrived there.

This was also his sincerity.

Three days later, Yin Huaixi received a message from Harmon, who agreed to meet at the Yu Pass.

Harmon was not a fool. Although the narrow Yu Pass was the Great Zhou's territory, the Di people had been plundering in the narrow Yu Pass all year round and were very familiar with the nearby terrain. They also had a way out.

The North was also suffering from a drought. As long as King Yue Fei was not too stupid, he would not act rashly.

Moreover, the warhorses of the Northern Barbarians had always been a rare resource of the Great Zhou Dynasty. King Yue Fei would definitely be more than happy to have them.

He had taken a step back when he made the trade request.

King Yue Fei requested to meet at the narrow Yu Pass. Then, he sent over a defensive map and also advanced and retreated.

Since both sides had made a concession, they had already expressed their sincerity.

He had no reason to refuse.

Seven days later, Yin Huaixi brought a thousand elite troops and personally headed to the narrow Yu Pass. Harmon also brought a thousand elite troops and led them there.

Both sides had a tacit understanding. The places where they camped were separated by a distance.

After resting for a while, on the third day after the two sides set up camp, Yin Huaixi and Harmon met on the top of a mountain at the narrow Yu Pass.

Harmon was almost 40 years old. He was tall and burly, with a short beard under his nose, looking very heroic and strong.

Seeing Yin Huaixi standing on the school canopy, Harmon was very shocked. Wariness and fear appeared in his eyes. He stared at Yin Huaixi's legs and subconsciously tightened his grip on the scimitar at his waist.

Yin Huaixi's leg had actually recovered?!

He immediately felt fear. For a moment, he even thought that it would be best to make a deal with King Yue Fei this time.

This was a good start. If the deal could continue, both sides could also have a truce.

King Li of Zhou of the Great Zhou had guarded the North for many years, but the Northern Barbarians had not gained anything. Instead, they had suffered heavy losses in the battle six years ago and had yet to recover.

In the past two years, King Yue Fei had been guarding the North and the two sides had fought several times to test each other. Harmon felt that King Yue

Fei was even more difficult to deal with than King Li of Zhou.

If they continued to fight, the Northern Barbarians would definitely suffer..