

All Hail 971

Chapter 971 - 971: A Gentleman Will Pursue a Graceful Lady

The way she glared and covered her mouth was just like when she was young. She was playful and cute, making Yin Huaixi want to laugh but not dare to. He could only hold back his laughter with all his might. His hands were not careless either. He quickly poured a cup of digestive tea and handed it over.

Yu Youyao quickly took the teacup and took a few sips. Then, she saw Yin Huaixi sweep away the remaining soup and dishes on the table at an unbelievable speed.

She did not eat elegantly, but she was not rude either. It just had the feeling of ending the battle quickly.

Why hadn't she realized in the past that he ate like he was in a war?!

At this moment, the sound of a gong sounded outside.

Yu Youyao immediately stood up. "Is the dragon boat race about to begin?"

"The three gongs are to remind the participants to board the boat immediately." Yin Huaixi nodded and walked out of the tent with Yu Youyao. There was a shade outside and a table and cushions.

As soon as the two of them sat down, a few maidservants served tea, snacks, fruits, nuts, and so on. They filled the table.

Then, familiar officials, generals, and their families came over to greet them.

When King Yue Fei and Eldest Princess Shaoyi arrived, they did not make a fuss, nor had there been any news earlier that they were coming to see the dragon boat race. When they saw them, they were all traveling in simple clothes and sitting together. Even the servants were pushed aside and did not go forward to serve them personally. No matter how stupid they were, they could still sense that something was amiss.

Then, they recalled that there had been rumors previously that King Yue Fei admired Eldest Princess Shaoyi's talent and character. What else did they not understand?

She was clearly a graceful lady. A gentleman would pursue her.

King Yue Fei was using the dragon boat race to seek favor with her.

Therefore, the people who had come to pay their respects were tactful. After being polite, they did not pester them anymore, in case they delayed King Yue Fei's approach and caused trouble.

The sheds of Madam Huang and General An Yuan's wife were arranged on both sides of Yu Youyao.

Yu Youyao thought of the city and the Hundred Herbs event. She couldn't help but ask, "It suddenly rained in the morning. How was the Hundred Herbs event?"

Mrs. Huang smiled. "The competition started at half-past six in the morning. Participants will be ranked based on the number of flowers, plants, and medicinal herbs picked within two hours. When it rained, the participants had already left the mountain. The competition continued as usual. However, many people who participated in the talent competition were drenched in the rain. Fortunately, there's a lot of rain in Liaodong. Everyone has made the corresponding preparations, so there won't be too much of a problem."

In the Liaodong area, it rained heavily every year in late spring and early summer.

Everyone was already very experienced in dealing with such weather.

General An Yuan's wife also smiled. "This rain has added a lot to this year's Dragon Boat Festival. Many commoners knelt down and shouted for the protection of the Dragon God. They all said that this year would definitely be a year of harvest."

The "sudden" rain during the Dragon Boat Festival in Liaodong made the refugees in the nearby areas overjoyed. Many people rushed out of their houses and knelt on the ground that was filled with mud in the heavy rain. They cheered happily and hugged their heads while crying.

The heavy rain completely washed away the haze in the hearts of the refugees.

Yu Youyao thought of the sweet potato vines that covered every piece of land in Liaodong and couldn't help but agree deeply. "Everyone's lives will get better and better."

Madam Huang continued to talk about the Hundred Herbs.

Yu Youyao listened with interest.

At this moment, there were two more bangs.

Yin Huaixi explained, "This is the last preparation for the participants. The dragon boat race is about to begin."

Yu Youyao felt a surge of excitement. She quickly sat up straight and looked at the river. The dragon boats of the various families were neatly parked at a blue belt that served as the starting line.

There was a sea of people on both sides of the riverbank, but the scene was so quiet that one could hear a pin drop.

Everyone looked nervously at the river.

When the last bell was rung, the dragon boats scrambled to break free of the blue belt and rowed forward bravely. Cheers erupted from the shore, and deafening shouts shot into the sky.

Yu Youyao subconsciously stood up. There were ten people on each dragon boat, and there were five people on each side. Each of them was holding an oar and rowing at the same time.

This process emphasized teamwork.

As long as there was a person who rowed faster, slower, or stronger, the dragon boat would slow down, or deviate from its position, causing it to collide with the dragon boat beside or behind it. Alternatively, because it deviated from its position, the boat would be a step behind.

There was a culture of unity here.

All the customs of the Dragon Boat Festival included people's yearning and expectations for a good life. A good life depended on everyone working together.

Madam Huang was the banker. She had set up a boat betting game, where the people placed their bets on which of the ten dragon boats teams would win first place. The bet was not big, and the people who participated were all familiar families. It was a small bet to increase the fun of the dragon race.

Such a bet was very common in the dragon boat competition.

Yu Youyao also offered ten taels of silver. "I bet on Team Cyan."

Team Cyan was the dragon boat of the Xie family.

The Xie family had contributed greatly to the successful holding of the various activities during the Dragon Boat Festival.

Unfortunately, the Xie family eventually obtained third place.

Yu Youyao's ten taels of silver were wasted.

General An Yuan's wife became the biggest winner. She teased, "I've saved on all my cosmetics this year." Then, she turned to Yu Youyao and asked, "When is the Jade Pavilion opening? When the time comes, take care of your business.

You have to give me a 20% discount."

Everyone knew that the outbreak in the camp could be controlled and prevented. Eldest Princess Shaoyi's incense medicine played a key role.

The reason why Jade Pavilion had never opened was because Eldest Princess Shaoyi fully supported the prevention and treatment of the epidemic and couldn't care less about opening it to earn money.

It was no secret that Eldest Princess Shaoyi was good at incense medicine.

Therefore, when General An Yuan's wife asked this, many of the madams present were very interested.

Everyone loved beauty.

They were all people with dignity. Rouge and powder were indispensable. Typically, when the families interacted, they had to put on makeup. If they didn't, not only would they embarrass themselves, but it would also be very rude.

One would dress up more glamorously and solemnly because they respected and valued the host.

Yu Youyao smiled and said, "I'm already preparing for the opening. I'll pick a date carefully after the Dragon Boat Festival. When the time comes, I'll give you a discount."

The dragon boat race consisted of three rounds in total.

After the first round began, the second batch reached the starting point.

After the first round ended, there was a bang, and the second round began right on the heels of the heels.

The pace of the competition was tight and tense.

By the time the three rounds were over, the sun was already setting in the west. Yu Youyao was still a little unsatisfied.

On the bank of the river, many people threw the dumplings into the river. No matter how difficult their lives were, they still generously sprinkled food into the river and let the fish fight for food. This was done to mourn their lost relatives and pray for safety.

Yu Youyao was deeply moved..

Chapter 972 - 972: Lifelong Wish

Yin Huaixi said, “The tradition of throwing rice dumplings stems from the Tai Dai preventing floods through water control in ancient times. Tai Dai brought people to manage the water in the Fenshui area of Shanxi. It’s a poor place, and it’s not easy to transport food. In order to resolve the food problem, people came up with the method of ‘delivering food through water’. They wrapped the food in reed leaves and placed it in a wooden bucket. The wood traveled on the water, sending the food down the river to the people who were managing the water. Along the way, there was also some food that was eaten by the fish in the water. Later, this method spread among the commoners, and everyone fought to imitate it. Until now, there were still commoners in Shanxi who use rice dumplings to offer sacrifices. There’s also a Tai Dai Mountain in the

Taiyuan area of Shanxi.”

Tai Dai’s flood control was earlier than that of Yu the Great.

However, Yu the Great controlled floods at the Yellow River, so his reputation exceeded that of Tai Da.

Yu Youyao’s heart skipped a beat. “Other than cherishing memories and paying respects to one’s deceased relatives, and praying for peace and tracing the roots, the custom of throwing away dumplings is also to think about the source of water, to show gratitude, to worship, and to show reverence for nature.” Unknowingly, the sky gradually darkened.

Those who didn’t throw rice dumplings would spend a copper coin to buy a festive lantern, light it, sprinkle a few grains of rice, and place the lantern in the river. The festive lantern would follow the river water.

Someone closed their eyes and made a wish towards the festive lanterns.

Some people watched the festive lanterns leave with tears in their eyes.

There were also people babbling words that only they could hear into the festive lanterns.

There were more and more festive lanterns on the river.

By the time it was dark, the river was covered with festive lanterns. The specks of lights were like a ribbon of light that followed the river and flowed downstream. They were beautiful.

Yu Youyao exclaimed, “It’s so beautiful!”

There was no rule during the Dragon Boat Festival that river lamps could not be lit. Many refugees had surged into the North. The refugees had experienced the pain of their families being destroyed. They did not have any food to throw out to mourn their deceased relatives, so they could only use a river lamp to entrust their heavy nostalgia for their deceased relatives.

Yu Youyao's interest was piqued. "Let's go and light the river lamps too!"

"Okay!" Yin Huaixi tilted his head to look at her.

The gray sky swallowed the last ray of light in the sky, and night quietly fell. At some point, yellow lanterns had been hung on the camp around the riverbank. Under the waning candlelight, the little girl's delicate face seemed to be covered in a hazy halo, making her seem warm and beautiful.

Yin Huaixi reached out and held her hand.

Yu Youyao stopped in her tracks and looked down. Her wide sleeves blocked their joined hands. She moved her fingers.

Yin Huaixi thought that he was holding her too tightly, so he couldn't help but loosen his grip. Then, right on the heels of that, tender fingers intertwined with his.

"Fiancé." Yu Youyao smiled until her eyes curved. The yellow candlelight in her eyes was bright and warm. "There are too many people on the riverbank. Hurry up so we won't get separated!"

Yin Huaixi smiled warmly. "Okay!"

The two of them held hands and arrived at a stall. In addition to selling all kinds of festive lanterns, there were also some materials for making festive lanterns. Yin Huaixi asked for two lanterns.

"Do you know how to make festive lanterns?" With that, Yu Youyao remembered that back then, Yin Huaixi had gone to Shandong to quell the rebellion. Before the Mid-Autumn Festival, he had sent Yin San a lamp that he had personally made for her. She liked it very much, so she placed the lamp on the lamp rack at the head of the bed and bathed in the hazy light every night to sleep.

Later on, she went all the way from Jingzhao to Quanzhou and to Xiangping City. This lamp had also accompanied her all the way.

Yin Huaixi knew how to make such a difficult lamp.

Naturally, a small festive lantern was not a problem for him.

"I've learned it from Chang Ningbo." At the mention of Chang Ningbo, Yin Huaixi couldn't help but recall that back then, when he went to Shandong to quell the rebellion, he was tricked by Chang Ningbo and learned this lantern-making skill that allowed him to get a wife. He gave it to a girl he "liked."

At that time, he was ignorant. As he regretted not being able to spend the Mid-Autumn Festival with her, he wanted to personally make a lamp to please the little girl. However, he never expected to be taught a lesson by Chang Ningbo.

He had to get the girl he liked!

At the thought of this, Yin Huaixi tilted his head. The little girl looked at him with sparkling eyes and an expectant expression. “Chang Ningbo relied on his lantern-making skills to get a girl he liked to be his wife. According to Chang Ningbo, his family’s ancestral lantern-making skills can get a wife, so I learned it.”

“Pfft.” Yu Youyao blushed. “Who cares about a lousy festive lamp from you?”

Yin Huaixi laughed and quickly set up a festive lantern.

Yu Youyao, who kept saying that she didn’t care, expressed a strong interest in the festive lantern. She looked at it without blinking and couldn’t help but ask questions.

Yin Huaixi took another set of materials and taught her step by step.

The materials had all been processed, so it was very simple to tie them up. Yu Youyao did not spend much effort to make a lantern. Although it was a little ugly, it was still a successful lantern.

In the end, this ugly lantern was naturally exchanged for a beautiful lantern that Yin Huaixi had made.

Yu Youyao held the festive lantern and couldn’t bear to part with it. “Other than festive lanterns, what else do you know how to make?”

Yin Huaixi thought for a moment. “I’ll make a kite for you another day.”

Kites were also a girl’s favorite thing to play with. It could be used in a wider area in the residence, and Yu Youyao liked it very much. Yu Youyao was overjoyed. “I want an eagle-like one.”

Yin Huaixi agreed.

Yu Youyao happily held the festive lantern and found a place with fewer people upstream. She squatted by the river and carefully placed the festive lantern into the river.

The festive lantern drifted slowly down the river. Yu Youyao quickly closed her eyes and began to pray.

First, she reminisced about her deceased mother and grandmother.

Then, she began to make a wish.

She never had much ambition. Everything she did were things that she could do well at the current point of time. Her wish was the same. She was just praying for her family and Yin Huaixi to be safe and successful.

Yin Huaixi also placed the festive lantern into the river and tilted his head to look at the little girl beside him, who had her hands clasped together and her eyes closed as she made a wish.

The dancing candle light shone on her, as if it had covered her with a holy and hazy veil. She was as bright and mysterious as a moonlight goddess.

At this moment, Yu Youyao’s long eyelashes trembled slightly as she opened her eyes. Her bright eyes seemed to be injected with a bright light, illuminating Yin Huaixi’s entire world.

“Yin Huaixi, tell me quickly. What did you wish for just now?” Her voice was pleasant, like an oriole.

Yin Huaixi shook his head. “I didn’t make a wish.”

“You didn’t make a wish?” Yu Youyao’s eyes widened as she repeated in disbelief, “If you didn’t make a wish, why did you put the lantern?! Don’t tell me you’re deliberately lying to me because you don’t want to tell me!” She looked at Yin Huaixi suspiciously.

“I don’t need to make a wish.” Yin Huaixi looked at her steadily, his eyes reflecting the lanterns not far away. It was as if a candle flame was burning with a burning warmth. “I’ve already obtained my lifelong wish..”

Chapter 973 - 973: Spoil the Fun

His eyes seemed to be at a burning temperature, making Yu Youyao’s face burn. She couldn’t help but dodge. “Is— Is that so? That’s quite— quite good. That’s right. No matter what you want, you can fight for it yourself and don’t need to make a wish. However, don’t you think that this small lantern carries the best hopes in people’s hearts as it rides the water? It’s a beautiful thing.”

“Although the oil paper used for the lanterns can be waterproof, they will still sink into the river over time. Moreover, if a large number of lanterns are placed in the river, they will block the river. Someone downstream will specially salvage the lamps in the river.”

The most beautiful things could only be placed in one’s heart for a long time. How could a small lantern carry his hidden oath of eternal love and an oath of life and death?!

Yu Youyao pouted and glared at him. “How can you spoil the fun?!”

It was indeed quite beautiful to have lanterns on the river.

However, as soon as he said that, when she saw the lanterns all over the river, she would wonder if her lantern would sink into the river or drift downstream and be salvaged with the mud at the bottom of the river.

The scene was too beautiful to look at.

After the Dragon Boat Festival, the commoners returned to a peaceful life. After a heavy rain, the crops were revitalized. The vines of the sweet potatoes had already covered the fields. The commoners could almost see the harvest a few months later.

Yin Huaixi lived in The Green House in the name of “Cousin Zhou.”

It was rare for Yu Youyao to be free. Just like before in the Yu Residence, she played the zither under the purple elm every day, practiced her calligraphy, read books, and learned feng Shui from Yin Huaixi. Her days were leisurely and comfortable.

With the opening of the Jade Pavilion, there were many things that needed to be agreed upon. In addition to makeup, powder, eyebrows, and lipstick, there were also flower dew, essence, and face

cream of various types. There were also incense medicines with health-nourishing effects. There were also incense medicines that could treat the body, such as Tianze Incense Pills and ointments. They expressed their opinions.

In the end, it was decided that the products would be sold in six large groups, corresponding to men, women, the old, the young, couples, and special incense medicine with healing effects.

Each collection had a special selling area. If one had any needs, they would go to the corresponding special area to choose and buy products.

As there were too many product categories, each large collection would also be divided into products and named after the collection.

For example, in the Beauty Yu collection, in addition to skincare dew, essence, and face cream, there was also the corresponding rouge, powder, lipstick, brow powder, and so on.

The Beauty Yu collection focused on roses. All the products had more or less added rose ingredients. They had the effect of nourishing and moisturizing the skin. Although the main ingredients were all the same, the supplementary ingredients were different. The production methods were different, and the effects were progressive and mutually promoted.

Thus, when products from the same series were stacked, the effect would be better.

Of course, the products could be bought alone or as a full set.

The products were categorized into the middle- and top-levels.

However, every month, some of the accumulated products would be sold at a 10% to 30% discount. Ordinary families could also buy the products of Jade Pavilion at a discount.

In the end, it was decided that they would divide the year based on the 24 solar terms. There were four seasons in a year, and six solar terms in each season. They would introduce new products every solar term. The incense medicine sold would also be suitable for the season.

After that, Yu Youyao looked for Yin Huaixi. "There are some expensive goods in Jade Pavilion that need to be exquisitely packaged. Anshan is abundant in all kinds of jade and jade materials. The people of Anshan are good at carving. Can I cooperate with them to make some outer packaging boxes and eggshell porcelain makeup boxes?"

Yin Huaixi had given her a set a long time ago. It was an eggshell porcelain box made with Xiuyan jade. The green eggshell porcelain was as thin as an eggshell and extremely light. There were even delicate patterns carved on it. It was simply exquisite, and she couldn't bear to part with it.

However, the craftsmanship of eggshell porcelain was too difficult. Without more than seven to eight years of carving experience, it was almost impossible to master.

"It's a good idea." Yin Huaixi put down the book in his hand and said with a smile, "However, it's too difficult to implement. There are only a handful of people who can have the craftsmanship to make eggshell porcelain that's as thin as a cicada's wings, as bright as glass, and as light as nothing. You might face a situation where the supply doesn't meet the demand."

Yu Youyao argued, "It's also a top-notch batch of expensive goods. It's also limited."

Yin Huaixi did not argue with her. "The craftsmanship of eggshell porcelain requires a lot of jade material. As far as we know, only jade from the Kunlun

Mountains is the most suitable to make eggshell porcelain jade artifacts. The Xiuyan jade is not bad either, but the texture has to be as delicate and tough as river millstone jade to be fine and thin."

River millstone jade was considered precious jade and was relatively rare.

The cost was too high.

Yu Youyao wanted to make eggshell porcelain makeup boxes because she thought that the Xiuyan jade was cheap, had many colors, and had a high luster. No other jade material could compare to it.

The idea that scarcity increases value was not bad, but Yu Youyao felt that the beauty of Xiuyan jade was comparable to the other three famous types of jade. However, it was a pity that the royal family gradually lost their favor for Xiuyan jade because of the Hetian jade produced at the Kunlun Mountains and the Lantian jade produced in the Qinling area.

The jade mountain in Anshan was a huge mountain.

She wanted to use the Jade Pavilion to improve the jade industry in Liaodong. She chose the craftsmanship of eggshell porcelain because the eggshell porcelain makeup box that Yin Huaixi had given her earlier was too exquisite.

While doing her daily makeup, when she saw the eggshell porcelain makeup box on the dressing table, she couldn't help but play with it in her hand.

Playing with stones and admiring jade were all things of the upper-class society.

As the top item among expensive items, the eggshell porcelain box would definitely be pursued by upper-class society. The reputation of the Xiuyan jade would quickly spread in the upper-class society.

Why should she worry about not having a market for Xiuyan jade?!

However, after hearing Yin Huaixi's words, she couldn't take the path of eggshell porcelain makeup boxes.

"You don't necessarily have to make eggshell porcelain makeup boxes." Yin Huaixi had also guessed what she was thinking. He changed the topic and said, "There are still some people who can do it if it's a little thicker and as thin as porcelain. Moreover, the people of Anshan are good at carving and their skills are very impressive. I guarantee that the makeup boxes made will be extremely exquisite."

Yu Youyao's eyes lit up. "Xiuyan jade is beautiful to begin with. After being carefully carved, it must be very exquisite." She had also gone overboard just now. "It's settled then. Even if we can't use eggshell porcelain to shock people at a glance, the makeup box carefully carved with the Xiuyan jade suits the position of a top-notch expensive item."

She was from an aristocratic family herself, so she naturally knew what kind of money was the easiest to earn.

Top-notch expensive goods were indeed better than other products in terms of materials and selection. However, the cost of production was also higher than other products. Despite this, one had to use them to know if the product was good or not. Under the premise that they were not used, the superiority of the product had to be displayed on some external levels to give people a psychological sense of superiority. Only then could people pay for it out of their own pocket.

The packaging of products was an important aspect..

Chapter 974 - 974: A Storm Is Coming

Yu Youyao made a decision. She looked for Bai Kui and Qing Xiu to discuss the style and label of the makeup box. In the end, they unanimously decided that all the makeup boxes and packaging would be marked with the word “rouge” written in seal script.

The seal script included oracle bone script, bronze script, and so on. Although there were many types of scripts in the Pre-Qin Dynasty, the words were all modified from the oracle bone script and were generally similar.

After the label of the products was confirmed, Bai Kui spent a large sum of money to send it to the government office for registration, bookmaking, and filing.

As long as one had money, there was nothing that couldn't be done in the government office. For many things, as long as they passed through the government office, it would save a lot of trouble.

For example, the product label was a mark of goods circulating outside. However, if one could make such a mark, others could also imitate or even forge it.

Spending a large sum of money to register, bookmark, and file their label in the government office was equivalent to this label being protected by the government office. If similar things were discovered on the market, they could ask the government office to set up a case and interfere. Anyone who was not brainless and blind would basically not do such a thing that would hurt the enemy 800 times and harm themselves 1,000 times.

Of course, sometimes, even if one spent a large sum of money, they might not be able to enjoy the protection they deserved.

Most ordinary people could only enjoy some protection of public security and the rule of law. Most of their rights were to serve the rich and powerful. For example, in the Jade Pavilion, as soon as Qing Xiu entered the government office with the Yu Garden token, she received the highest treatment. All the registrations, bookmaking, and records were of the highest level.

The government office even issued an official letter. This official letter was the voucher for the circulation of the Jade Pavilion in the future.

If the Jade Pavilion wanted to open a branch elsewhere, they only needed to take the official letter and register at the local government office to enjoy the

same treatment as they did in their local area.

At the same time, Bai Kui personally went to Anshan and contacted the local craftsmen who were good at carving to discuss matters related to the supply of makeup boxes and outer packaging.

As it was a business under Princess Eldest Shaoyi's name, Yin Huaixi had specially found a servant who worked in the army to bridge the gap.

Everything was logical.

With the opening of the Jade Pavilion imminent, Yu Youyao looked for Yin Huaixi, who specially wrote a couplet for the Jade Pavilion. "The bright pink 'rouge' reflects the treasure. The graceful 'jade' is hidden behind an emerald green veil."

It was also the origin of the name of the Jade Pavilion.

A veiled hat was used to cover the entire body, blocking the woman's jade face that had pink makeup on and her graceful figure. A woman's noble and beautiful appearance was vividly described. It also implicitly revealed her hazy beauty, making one's imagination run wild.

Her beauty was also reflected in her pink rouge.

By the time the Jade Pavilion officially opened, it was already late May.

Just this couplet alone attracted the wives, madams, and young misses of many wealthy families in Xiangping City.

In this world, who didn't want to be the noble, beautiful, and dignified woman in the poem?!

It had to be said that Yu Youyao had grasped a woman's spending mentality from the outside to the inside.

As soon as the Jade Pavilion opened for business, it received widespread attention. In addition, the products were exquisite, the service was thorough, and there were many types of products. The style of the products was also different from other rouge shops. They were novel goods that were not available on the market. A few days after it opened for business, they were bought.

In the blink of an eye, it was the end of May.

There was news from the capital that Yu Shuangbai was the "destined phoenix girl" and had received a reward from the Empress.

The script that Empress Ning had arranged for Yu Youyao played out again.

Not only that, but the Empress had also personally chosen two decent nannies from Yi Kun Palace and sent Auntie Dan Hong to the Second Mansion of the Yu Residence.

To the public, it was to teach Yu Shuangbai rules and etiquette.

However, anyone with discerning rules knew that she would be taught the rules of the palace. The etiquette also referred to the etiquette of the palace.

Everyone knew what the Empress was thinking.

Yu Youyao suddenly felt that it was finally here.

As expected!

Yu Shuangbai's acceptance of the "phoenix fate" made the battle for the throne even more intense. The Fourth Prince's suggestion to inspect the North was raised again and obtained the support of a large portion of the royalists.

Previously, Empress Ning had plotted for the Fourth Prince to inspect the North. This was an act with a hidden motive.

This time, the same suggestion was made at different times, but the meaning was already completely different.

With the support of the royalists, the Fourth Prince was no longer the same as before. Previously, he had copied Buddhist scriptures for the Empress Dowager, fulfilling his "filial piety" and becoming famous.

However, he still needed an opportunity.

This opportunity was to patrol the North.

Since ancient times, the royal family had sent princes to patrol. This was to reflect that the royal family observed the hearts of the people, showing the benevolent side of the Imperial Court.

This was undoubtedly the best opportunity to win over the hearts of the people and accumulate reputation.

Therefore, patrolling was a huge undertaking of the country.

At the same time, he could also use the excuse of the patrol to further rope in the "nobles" and officials in the North. This would become the Fourth Prince's strongest support.

Once the Fourth Prince completed his patrol and returned to the capital, he would be praised by the Imperial Court. At that time, the Fourth Prince's reputation would be great, and Empress Ning would naturally be able to marry Yu Shuangbai to the Fourth Prince.

Once the Fourth Prince had obtained the "girl with the phoenix fate", the Yu Clan would become his supporter. It was the best time for Empress Ning to ignore everyone's objections and take over to make the Fourth Prince the heir.

Now that the Fourth Prince had become the legitimate son, the Second Prince and the Third Prince had nothing to do with this matter.

However, this move was met with an unprecedentedly intense objection from the Xu Residence, led by Imperial Concubine Xu, and the Second Prince's party, led by Concubine Lan.

The court officials argued in the royal court, their saliva flying everywhere.

For a moment, there was a stalemate.

Yu Youyao couldn't tell exactly how she felt.

Yin Huaixi had never believed the ridiculous words "phoenix fate" and "phoenix girl". It was just like how she had never believed that Da Ji had brought disaster to the country.

All of this was just a ploy by the higher-ups to control the hearts of people and human nature.

Seeing that she did not look too good, Yin Huaixi said worriedly, "The Fourth

Prince can't come to the North."

Yu Youyao shook her head. "I'm not worried about that." She opened her mouth, wanting to say something but hesitated. She pursed her lips slightly and said, "The adult Yao Yao was manipulated and fooled by the phrase 'phoenix fate'. Her life was in vain. I'm a little worried about my Second Sister."

The matter of the phoenix fate was led by Madam Yao, and Empress Ning helped to encourage it. However, what did a thirteen-year-old girl like Yu Shuangbai know?

In the nightmare, there was very little about Yu Shuangbai.

However, there was no doubt that Yu Shuangbai was the same as her. Madam Yao had arranged her entire life and Empress Ning had manipulated her fate. No one would ask her if she was willing, and no one would care about her feelings.

Yu Youyao did not know if Yu Shuangbai was innocent in the nightmare, but in reality, Yu Shuangbai had done nothing wrong to her.

After all, it was not so easy to completely cut off their sisterly relationship that had lasted for many years..

Chapter 975 - 975: Fight for the Throne

Yin Huaixi's eyes darkened. "Madam Yao has benefited from this. Yu Shuangbai has also embarked on the same path as in the nightmare. Everything is destined."

Madam Yao believed that Yu Youyao had suppressed Yu Shuangbai's limelight.

However, from another perspective, no matter how glamorous Yu Youyao was, she wouldn't hinder Yu Shuangbai's future. Meanwhile, with the help of her

Eldest Sister, who had been conferred the title of imperial family member, Yu Shuangbai's glory was still to come.

If Madam Yao hadn't courted death, Yu Shuangbai's life would have followed the lot from 'A Blessing in Disguise' at the Precious Peace Temple back then.

Unfortunately, Madam Yao hated her eldest sister-in-law. How could she tolerate the daughter of her eldest sister-in-law being more outstanding than her own and suppressing her in every way?!

She wanted to manipulate her daughter and compete with Yu Youyao.

As long as Madam Yao was more obedient, she would stop Empress Ning from plotting against Yu Shuangbai on account of Yu Youyao and Yu Shuangbai's sisterly relationship.

Unfortunately, there were thousands of paths, but she had chosen the only dead end.

Yu Youyao was stunned for a long time. "I understand. Madam Yao chose the path herself. No one forced her. It's just that my Second Sister is innocent after all.

Without Madam Yao's active cooperation, it was impossible for Empress Ning to scheme against Yu Shuangbai and give her the "phoenix fate".

Madam Yao was from a famous family and had been raised by an aristocratic family. It was not to the extent that she did not expect the situation behind the identity of the “phoenix fate” to be so unpredictable. As a mother, Madam Yao should be less selfish and think more about her daughter. She would not personally send her daughter into the center of the storm.

Yin Huaixi scoffed. Yu Shuangbai was innocent, but he didn’t care. What he cared about was that in the nightmare, Yu Shuangbai was also the same person who had stepped on the bones of the adult Yao Yao and climbed up.

He wasn’t that magnanimous.

As the truth of the nightmare was gradually revealed, Yu Youyao came back to her senses from the shadow of the nightmare. She no longer indulged in the nightmare and separated reality from it.

Meanwhile, she was often brooding over the fact that the adult Yao Yao was alone and helpless in her nightmare. When she woke up from her dreams at night, her heart palpitated non-stop, and she was in a daze, unable to tell reality from her nightmare.

Therefore, when Madam Yao made the same choice as in her nightmare, he did not plan to interfere in this matter anymore.

In the nightmare, Madam Yao’s choice had cost Yu Youyao her life.

In reality, Madam Yao’s choice would end her biological daughter’s life.

There was no way out. She had asked for it.

What goes around comes around.

Yu Youyao did not know what he was thinking. She only sighed softly.

“Concubine Lan and Imperial Concubine Xu are not easy to get along with. They definitely won’t let it go easily. Second Sister has been involved in the battle for the succession for no reason, and her days won’t be easy. In the nightmare, with you plotting behind the scenes, Empress Ning naturally dealt with Concubine Lan and Imperial Concubine Xu with ease. There are also the connections you left in the palace to protect her. Second Sister is naturally safe, but in reality...”

The Yi Kun Palace had just opened not long ago, and Empress Ning was dealing with it alone. Concubine Lan and Imperial Concubine Xu were both a little overstretched, so it was inevitable that Yu Shuangbai would overlook something.

She had never doubted the vicious methods of those in power.

Yin Huaixi said calmly, “Since ancient times, not many women who bear the phoenix fate have a good ending. Yu Shuangbai has entered the center of the struggle for the throne and has no chance of escaping.”

She would either climb up the social ladder, like in her nightmare.

Alternatively, she would die.

There was no third option for her.

Yu Youyao's mood became very heavy.

In her nightmare, when "Cousin Zhou" left the capital, he had arranged many ways for her to live a peaceful life. However, she had been implicated in the battle for the throne and lost her life.

Power was a demon that devoured people's hearts.

Yin Huaixi knew that she was feeling terrible, so he changed the topic. "Currently, there's a huge commotion inside and outside the court over the Fourth Prince's patrol in the North. The battle for the position of heir has already completely begun. Next, the court will be in turmoil."

As expected.

The next day, news came from the capital.

An old official from the Imperial Court reported to the Imperial Court and said that the current situation was turbulent and the hearts of the people were fluctuating. He invited the Empress Dowager to escort the emperor to the court and manage the court to ensure peace.

The old minister's advice was not wrong. He wholeheartedly served the Imperial Court and did not let down his reputation as a loyal ruler.

The bad thing was that the emperor had been seriously ill for a long time and had not been to court for more than half a year. The hearts of the people in the court were already fluctuating, and there were already many speculations about the emperor's health. However, early on, the Empress Dowager was suppressing the situation. Furthermore, because of the delicate situation, no one was willing to come forward. Thus, the court could maintain superficial stability.

This old minister's advice had unknowingly brought the emperor and the Empress Dowager's illnesses to the table. This was an act of stirring up trouble in the court.

After the old minister came forward, the court officials wanted to see the world in chaos and fought to be the first. They asked the Empress Dowager to welcome the emperor personally in the court.

The court was in chaos.

Yu Youyao was shocked. "Has anyone in the court mentioned the Fourth Prince's patrol in the North recently?"

This sentence hit the crucial point. Yin Huaixi smiled faintly. "No."

"This is a diversion." If Concubine Lan and Imperial Concubine Xu wanted to stop the Fourth Prince from patrolling the North, they had to divert the attention of the court officials.

The matter of establishing an heir had to be decided by the emperor. Whether the emperor came to the court or not became the most important matter for everyone in the court.

Everyone in the court knew that the emperor had taken medicinal pills. In addition, the emperor had not been to the court for more than half a year. In the short term, the court officials would not suspect anything. However, it had been so long, so they should have had many speculations about the emperor's health.

They couldn't wait to find out what was going on with the emperor's health.

Only then would they know what to do.

If the emperor was in good health, it would be a huge crime to participate in the rebellion.

If the emperor's health was not good, regardless of whether it was for the sake of power or to stabilize the court and the country, it was already imminent to establish an heir. Fighting for the heir would become the general trend of the Imperial Court.

Previously, no one had dared to mention it because they were worried that they would anger the Empress Dowager.

Now that someone had stood out, the court officials naturally would not let go of this opportunity.

Yin Huaixi nodded. "The Empress Dowager couldn't suppress it. She used alarmist tactics to stir up the court and shake the reputation of the country. She dragged that old official to the Meridian Gate to be flogged to death. His corpse was placed at the Meridian Gate for three days before the chaos in the court was temporarily suppressed."

The court officials had to pass through the Meridian Gate to go to court. This move was heart-wrenching.

Yu Youyao did not look too good. The old minister was not innocent either. He had become someone's pawn. "Although the Empress Dowager killed that old minister with a thunderous method, this action undoubtedly indirectly proves that the emperor's health is not good enough and he can't come to the court. The court officials don't even have the last bit of scruples. The struggle for the throne will become more and more intense."

The old minister was just a stone to explore the way.

Although he was dead, this incident alone had stirred up the entire court.

This was a brilliant move.

The person who had schemed all of this was even more heart-wrenching..

Chapter 976 - 976: Stabbing You

Since ancient times, it was said that officials gave up their lives to maintain justice, and soldiers fought with their lives for victory. However, there were very few people with such boldness.

That old minister's surname was Gu, and he was not famous in the Imperial Court. He had wasted half his life and was already close to the age of compulsory retirement.

The Imperial Court had a clear rule that once an official reached 70 years old, they had to retire on their own. In addition, although one was still young, it was still acceptable to describe them as old.

Therefore, most officials would resign before they reached 70 or even 60.

The Imperial Court also needed new blood to continue operating.

In the first year of the Northern Song Dynasty, there was an official called Si Kejiu. He was over 70 years old but still did not take the initiative to resign, causing Song Taizu to be unable to stand it. He wanted to personally give an order to resign, but he felt that it was too ugly for an emperor to personally urge an official to resign. Hence, he stipulated that the people from the

Imperial Censor's Office should impeach those old officials and let them resign.

That Senior Imperial Censor did not have any achievements in the Imperial Court, nor did he have an outstanding background. What right did he have to stay in the Imperial Court until he was 70 years old?!

It had to be known that the officials of the Imperial Court each had their own task, and no one was dispensable. Every time someone left, it meant that there was a vacancy. Many aristocratic families specially watched the impeachment of the old officials to pave the way for their families.

From this, it could be seen that this Senior Imperial Censor was not simple.

It was not difficult to deduce that there was definitely someone behind his actions.

In that case, why was Imperial Censor Gu willing to sacrifice his life to stand out?

This began with the situation after the official retired.

Once ordinary officials left the officialdom, they would face a situation where their reputation and wealth were in the past.

Other than receiving half of their salary when they were still officials every month and still enjoying tax-free treatment, their lives were still very good.

However, compared to when they were an official in the court, it was completely incomparable.

Most people still could not accept such a difference. If they still had some connections in the court, they could still cherish their descendants and pave the way for their future.

However, the Imperial Court did all the work of offending others. For someone like Yu Zongzheng, who was born into a noble family and had the protection of a noble family, as long as there was any commotion in the court, it was not his place to take the lead. Even if the wind blew in the wrong direction and the Imperial Court denounced him, he would not step up. The first to bear the brunt were those officials who had no foundation and had even stood out.

As an official with no foundation or backing, the consequences could be imagined once the Senior Imperial Censor lost his power. Even if a promising descendant of the family entered the royal court in the future, he would also face the outcome of being ostracized and his future would be worrisome.

The Senior Imperial Censor was in his seventies. Before he retired, he had been a pathfinder for some people. Although he had lost his life, he had obtained protection for his descendants.

It could be considered the last time in his life that he could shine.

At this moment, this court situation was in line with the scheme of "fighting for the throne." Yu Youyao suddenly asked, "Who is this Senior Imperial Censor under?"

Was he under Concubine Lan, Imperial Concubine Xu, the vassal lord, or Yin Huaixi?

Yin Huaixi smiled. "He's under the King of Liang." Then, he changed the topic and said meaningfully, "However, this matter was instigated by Concubine Lan."

This was as expected, but it was also unexpected. Yu Youyao sighed a little. "The King of Liang has already stretched his hand so far."

Yin Huaixi smiled. "To the King of Liang, everything is ready, but the critical element is lacking. If there's no competition for the throne, how can there be a reason?"

Yu Youyao agreed deeply and frowned. "Senior Imperial Censor Gu is under the King of Liang. Does Concubine Lan know? Concubine Lan doesn't look like the kind of person who would ask a tiger for its skin."

In the past, the Weining Marquis Residence was powerful, and Imperial Consort Lu had a noble status. Not only was the Second Prince's status the most important, but he was also deeply trusted by the emperor. To the Second Prince, the King of Liang was a source of help. Of course, there were threats, but they were not impossible to suppress.

Today was different from the past. Ning Yuanbo's residence was in jail, and Concubine Lan no longer had the support of her maiden family. If she was involved with the King of Liang again, she would be asking for trouble and courting death.

Concubine Lan wanted to support the Second Prince and help him climb up the social ladder.

The King of Liang also wanted that position.

Concubine Lan couldn't suppress the King of Liang's ambition, so it was impossible for them to continue working together.

Yu Youyao thought of Concubine Lan, whom she had seen in the Longevity Palace when the emperor had conferred her the title of County Head. She deliberated for a moment.

Yin Huaixi asked, "Why do you think so?"

Yu Youyao said, "Concubine Lan is a very smart person. She knows how to judge the situation and is good at scheming. On the surface, she's smiling, but in the blink of an eye, she can stab you.

Her words were not groundless.

Back then, the eldest son of the emperor had died prematurely, and the Empress had suffered a huge blow and sealed the palace.

It was Concubine Lan who controlled the phoenix seal and the harem for many years.

The Great Zhou Dynasty valued the eldest son of the first wife. The dog emperor definitely doted on his eldest son who had just been born. It might not be the case that the dog emperor really wanted to kill the emperor's eldest son. However, it was inevitable that his feelings for the emperor's eldest son would become a little complicated because of the matter at the Ning Residence.

Even a monster would not hurt its own children. Furthermore, he was still an innocent child who had just been born and was not a threat.

No matter how one looked at it, it was impossible to explain the emperor's killing intent towards the emperor's eldest son.

The emperor might not have been the one who caused the death of the emperor's eldest son. Instead, someone had taken this opportunity to attack the emperor's eldest son.

Grand Tutor Yang was the emperor's teacher. His daughter who had been "married" out was like water that had been splashed out. If his daughter made a mistake, on account of the kindness of his teaching, Grand Tutor Yang did not deserve to be punished.

However, the dog emperor did not even let his mentor off, causing him to bear the name of "killing his master." It was obvious that he was really filled with regret for the death of the emperor's eldest son.

Next, the Second Prince took over as the eldest. Naturally, the emperor's deep regret and value for the emperor's eldest son was channeled towards the Second Prince.

The person who had planned all of this had polished the emperor's thoughts perfectly and made full use of them.

Looking at the harem, Yu Youyao could only think of one person who could grind the heart of a saint so accurately.

It was the former Imperial Concubine Lu, and the current Concubine Lan!

During this period of time, Consort Xu had been jumping up and down, manipulating the nobles of the North and causing trouble in the North.

In the end, she suffered a double loss.

The Han family's case in Xi'an was still under trial. The Han family's descendants, led by Elder Han, were still locked up in the residence. From the progress of the case, the Han family's pavilion could not escape punishment.

It seemed that all of this had nothing to do with Concubine Lan, but the Second Prince naturally suppressed the Third Prince and obtained a lot of reputation for being virtuous in the court.

Empress Ning and the Fourth Prince did not stop either. Their eyes were fixed on the Yu Clan's scheme. They were determined to not stop until they achieved their goal and even caused the matter of patrolling the North.

However, in the end, the "opportunity to patrol the North" that Empress Ning had painstakingly planned was also put on hold.

On the surface, Concubine Lan did not gain much, but the matter of the competition for the throne was ultimately decided by the emperor. Concubine Lan's "low profile" and "restraint" recently formed a sharp contrast with Imperial Concubine Xu and Empress Ning..

Chapter 977 - 977: When Will They Mobilize Their Troops?

Concubine Lan had thoroughly understood the Holy Decree. In front of the emperor, “no strife” was more useful than “strife.” From the beginning, she had already put on a posture of “no strife”. In the future, she would not be the one in charge of “strife for the throne”.

Many things did not seem to have anything to do with Concubine Lan, but on careful thought, Concubine Lan’s shadow was everywhere in the court.

Yin Huaixi continued, “Concubine Lan indeed didn’t know that the person who had joined the King of Liang was the Jiazhou Residence.”

The human heart was unpredictable. The Senior Imperial Censor was not eye-catching in the court. Perhaps even Concubine Lan did not take a mere Senior Imperial Censor seriously. In the end, someone took advantage of the situation.

The hunter became the hunted. Even though the actions of the Senior Imperial Censor allowed Concubine Lan to achieve her goal, wouldn’t this benefit the King of Liang instead?!

At the mention of the Jiazhou Residence, Yu Youyao’s pretty face darkened, and she subconsciously pursed her lips. “I thought that the Jiazhou Residence had always been under the King of Liang. It turns out that the Jiazhou Residence is a turncoat.”

Clearly, she was still brooding over the fact that the Jiazhou Residence had attacked the Xie Residence back then.

Yin Huaixi’s eyes darkened. “The former Marquis of Weining, Ning Yuanbo, has been indebted to the Jiazhou Residence. The Jiazhou Residence has always been obsequious and has gained Ning Yuanbo’s trust. It was also the Marquis of

Weining who put in the effort to transfer the Jiazhou Residence to Quanzhou.

During his tenure in Quanzhou, the Jiazhou Residence indeed did not let the Marquis of Weining down. The tribute sent by the Marquis of Weining every year made Concubine Lan extravagant in the palace and allowed her to win over hearts. She built a training hall for the emperor and refined medicinal pills, gaining his sacred heart. Therefore, Concubine Lan trusts the Jiazhou Residence very much.”

Yu Youyao immediately understood. “The Jiazhou Residence is actually Concubine Lan’s money bag.”

Yin Huaixi nodded.

When Yu Youyao was in Quanzhou, she had briefly interacted with the Jiazhou

Residence and had also sent someone to investigate his character. “The Jiazhou Residence has been in the Quanzhou Residence for more than ten years.officials are evaluated every three years, and the officials with the best evaluation will have priority in getting a chance to be transferred. The Jiazhou Residence had the backing of Concubine Lan, who was still the imperial concubine at that time. It’s impossible that he hasn’t been transferred for more than ten years. Concubine Lan didn’t plan to let the Jiazhou Residence continue to be promoted. She wanted him to be nailed in Quanzhou and continue

helping her with the money.”

Quanzhou's trade was prosperous, developed, and abundant with resources. Controlling Quanzhou was equivalent to controlling an endless stream of resources and money.

At that time, the Weining Marquis Residence was powerful and had subordinates all over the court.

If one wanted to win people over and nurture their henchmen, money was indispensable. This way, the importance of Quanzhou to the Weining Marquis Residence was highlighted.

The Jiazhou Residence had displayed an extraordinary ability to rake in money. How could Concubine Lan bear to transfer him elsewhere?

Yin Huaixi poured a cup of tea and handed it to her.

Yu Youyao reached out to take it and took a sip before continuing, "The Jiazhou Residence is old and cunning. His methods are quite ruthless. He definitely won't be satisfied with only being a fourth-grade local official for the rest of his life and helping Concubine Lan with her money. However, because of the power of the Weining Marquis Residence and Concubine Lan's favor, he doesn't dare to act rashly."

From the way the Jiazhou Residence handled matters, this person was cunning and ambitious. He was definitely unwilling to be subordinated.

"It wasn't until Ning Yuanbo's Residence lost power and Concubine Lan entered the Cold Palace that the Jiazhou Residence couldn't see a chance to continue advancing and wasn't willing to be controlled by Concubine Lan for the rest of their lives that he secretly sided with the King of Liang. Moreover, the King of Liang used to collude with the Weining Marquis Residence. Both sides had to exchange information. Controlling the Jiazhou Residence in Quanzhou was an important part. The Jiazhou Residence had long been involved with the King of Liang and it was already very difficult for him to escape. He had no choice." He joined the King of Liang because of his ambition and helplessness.

Yin Huaixi nodded and suddenly said, "The Jiazhou Residence is like a grasshopper after autumn. It won't last for long." He said casually, "After a while, when news of our marriage spreads and the King of Liang takes Quanzhou, the first person to be killed will be the Jiazhou Residence."

Yu Youyao was stunned for a moment. "Why? The Jiazhou Residence participated in the King of Liang's rebellion so early. It's obvious that the King of Liang trusts him very much. The Jiazhou Residence contributed greatly to the King of Liang's success in controlling Quanzhou. Even if the King of Liang goes straight to Quanzhou, he still has to rely on the Jiazhou Residence to continue controlling Quanzhou."

"What other reason could there be?" Yin Huaixi's lips curled up slightly. He looked at her with a focused gaze that made her face blush and her heart skip a beat. "You're my fiancée! From the day the Empress Dowager bestowed the marriage, we've been one. From now on, we'll share our honor and fortune."

There was another very important reason why he planned for the Empress Dowager to bestow the marriage.

That was, a marriage given by the royal family could not be annulled. There was no need to mention whether a divorce was possible.

This marriage could tie him and Yu Youyao together for the rest of their lives.

Yu Youyao was stunned at first, then her face turned red and she immediately understood.

The reason why the Jiazhou Residence had attacked the Xie Residence was because the King of Liang had instructed it. At that time, the King of Liang did not take a small County Head far away from the capital seriously at all.

Things were different now. She had become King Yue Fei's fiancée.

Due to various reasons, the news of the Xie Residence's evacuation from Quanzhou did not spread. However, the people involved knew very well that at the very least, King Liang would not go against King Yue Fei on the surface. Thus, he didn't leave anyone who had once offended the future Princess Consort of King Yue Fei by his side to avoid being exposed.

No matter what the reason for the King of Liang's rebellion was, it was treason.

However, at least on the surface, she had to stand tall.

This matter involved Eldest Princess Shaoyi and the Xie family. Now that even King Yue Fei was involved, the King of Liang had no choice but to treat it seriously.

Once the news of the Jiazhou Residence persecuting the County Head spread, it was very easy to associate it with the abnormality of the Quanzhou seal and the fact that the King of Liang had easily taken Quanzhou. Then, it would be very easy to associate it with the fact that the King of Liang and the Jiazhou Residence had long colluded.

In that case, the matter of the King of Liang setting up his troops had long been planned.

Although this was the truth, at least on the surface, he couldn't let anyone catch him red-handed.

Therefore, the King of Liang's dignified excuses like "the princes fighting for the throne and causing chaos" and "ridding the emperor of evil ministers" to raise his troops were rather groundless.

The King of Liang would not let others gossip about such a matter. If he abandoned the mere Jiazhou Residence, there would be no evidence for everything that had happened back then. The Jiazhou Residence would become a scapegoat.

If Yu Youyao and the Xie family were harmed, or if Yu Youyao did not marry King Yue Fei, the situation would be different.

After all, the King of Liang was afraid of King Yue Fei.

Yu Youyao avoided his shockingly bright eyes. "By the way, if the King of Liang makes a move, you, King Yue Fei, who's guarding the North, definitely can't stand by and do nothing. The Liaodong area is the first border. Not only will you bear the responsibility of resisting external enemies, but you'll also coordinate with the capital."

Yin Huaixi said calmly, "Look when the King of Liang will mobilize his troops."

Yu Youyao thought about it carefully and her eyes widened.

At this moment, the King of Liang, who Yu Youyao and Yin Huaixi had mentioned, was also discussing with his trusted aides when to mobilize his troops.

The King of Liang was wearing armor and sitting at the head of the table. There were a few aides dressed like scholars and generals who were also wearing armor..

Chapter 978 - 978: Real and Fake Heir

At this moment, Liang Jingxuan, who was wearing a sapphire python robe, said, “The Senior Imperial Censor’s corpse is on display at the Meridian Gate. The Empress Dowager used thunderous methods to quell the cries of the court and to make the emperor come to court. It’s obvious that the emperor is seriously ill and can no longer come to court to take charge of the court affairs.

The court officials are fighting fiercely over the succession. It’s already a mess. The three princes are fighting for the throne, causing chaos in the court. We can be considered to have a reason to send troops.”

The emperor had not appointed an heir. Now that the Empress Dowager and the emperor were both seriously ill, the appointment of an heir could no longer be delayed. However, there were three princes in the court. No matter who was appointed, the other two factions would be beyond redemption. Even if it was not to stabilize the court, they had to fight with all their might for their lives.

“Second Young Master is right. Now is the best time for us to set off.”

Immediately, a few generals chimed in.

On the surface, the blue-robed young master, Liang Jingxuan, was the second son of the first wife of the King of Liang. However, everyone present knew very well that he was the true legitimate son of the King’s Residence, the true heir of the King of Liang.

As for the one sent to the capital, he was just the son of a lowly concubine.

After the new emperor ascended the throne, the emperor’s expedition to the North had been a crushing defeat. The King of Liang knew that the opportunity he had been waiting for had come. From that moment on, the King of Liang had already been preparing for rebellion.

The birth of the “heir”, Liang Jingye, was also premeditated.

At that time, the one who was pregnant was a concubine in the backyard of the King’s Residence. After the concubine gave birth, the mother was chased away, leaving the child behind. The belly of the fake Princess Consort was borrowed, so the child naturally took over the identity of the eldest son of the first wife.

Meanwhile, the real legitimate son only came out of the Princess Consort’s womb the next year.

Even the “heir”, Liang Jingye, did not know that he was actually a scapegoat.

King of Liang looked at his legitimate son with a gratified expression. "You were the one who planned to use the Senior imperial Censor to further stir up the court and cause chaos." At this point, he subconsciously revealed a proud expression. "Haha, you really didn't disappoint me. Tell me again, why do you think that the time has come for us to mobilize?"

The King of Liang, who had been through hundreds of battles, definitely knew when to start fighting. These words were meant to test Liang Jingxuan, and he also wanted his legitimate son to perform in front of these old ministers.

It was said that an outstanding father would not have an ordinary son. This made them even more unswerving.

Liang Jingxuan looked refined and handsome, and his smile was gentle. His father had the intention to test him, but he also had the intention to show off. "All along, the biggest stumbling block that has been hindering our grand ambition is King Yue Fei in the north. Once we cause trouble, King Yue Fei will be the first to bear the brunt and will definitely rush to the capital to help."

As soon as these words were spoken, everyone present revealed wary expressions.

Even the King of Liang subconsciously sat up straight and his expression turned a little more serious. "Although King Yue Fei is young, he has quelled the rebellion in Shandong and cleared my name. After taking over Youzhou, he easily subdued 300,000 troops and stabilized the situation in the North. He controlled the drought in the North and shook the foundation of the local aristocratic families. It's obvious that he's a ruthless person. Compared to his father, he's even better."

The You army fought with the Di people all year round, and all of them were brave and good at fighting. The battlefield changed rapidly. Even if nothing went wrong, they did not have the confidence to win.

"However." Liang Jingxuan agreed deeply and changed the topic. "Things are different now. As long as we aim at the right time, no matter how powerful King Yue Fei is, he's nothing to be afraid of."

The King of Liang asked cooperatively, "Why do you say that?"

Liang Jingxuan analyzed slowly, "The North is vast and includes the three provinces of Liaodong and the seven lands in Shanxi, Shaanxi, Gansu, and Ningxia. Meanwhile, as the main suppliers of supplies, Shanxi and Shaanxi have suffered a hundred years of drought and can't even grow food. Even if they survive this ordeal, it will take at least three to five years for them to recover."

The aide nodded, clearly agreeing with the Second Young Master.

Promoting the planting of sweet potatoes could indeed solve the food problem in the North.

However, the sweet potatoes would not be harvested until October, which was in the second half of the year.

The North had settled almost two million refugees, so the food harvest had to be given to them first. Otherwise, if the commoners starved, there would definitely be chaos.

Under everyone's agreeable gazes, Liang Jingxuan's expression subconsciously revealed a hint of arrogance. "Ever since the drought, the Northern Barbarians have been active at the border. The

wars in the North have never stopped. The You army's combat strength and equipment have been exhausted, and their military supplies have been depleted. The North is very short of supplies. It's all thanks to the donations of the merchants led by the Xie and Bai families. However, donations aren't a long-term plan. Without a stable and long-term source of supplies, it's just an extreme emergency."

As the King of Liang who had been through hundreds of battles, he was deeply moved by this point. "Isn't that so? A war is a competition of martial strength and resources. In a situation where the military strength is the same and the strength is equal, whoever has the most resources will win. Therefore, no matter how many resources you usually hoard, it's never too much on the battlefield. Otherwise, why would I cooperate with the Marquis of Weining to help him steal the military power of Youzhou other than King Li of Zhou? I'm just coveting Quanzhou."

Of course, Quanzhou was only one of his goals.

If King Li of Zhou did not die, how could the Great Zhou Dynasty be in chaos? How could they be heroes in this chaotic world?!

A few generals chimed in—"

"Your Highness, you're right. In terms of martial strength, we've been plotting for many years. We're definitely not weaker than the You army."

"In terms of rations, the Liang Army, who has prepared for many years, has an innate advantage."

"Even our equipment is the best. It's much better than the You army."

"The Liang army is strong, so we're naturally not afraid of the You army."

Everyone spoke at once and compared themselves. Immediately, they felt a sense of superiority.

The King of Liang was very satisfied with Liang Jingxuan's performance.

The most important thing in a war was the morale of the army. They had been plotting for many years, but once the army rose, these old generals who had been loyal to the Imperial Court would more or less hesitate.

He had called these old ministers over today to further stabilize the morale of the army.

Liang Jingxuan continued, "In addition, the Imperial Court has issued a national policy in the North. In order to implement the national policy, most of the resources in the North are biased towards the refugees. A large number of refugees have just been settled down not long ago. It's a time when the people's hearts are unstable. We need King Yue Fei to intimidate the North, or there will be chaos in the North."

In the meaning between the lines, there was only one meaning. So what if King Yue Fei was powerful? It was fine if his current strength was inferior to the Liang army's, but he was also delayed by national policy. He was too busy. It gave them a chance.

Everyone present immediately looked happy. They could almost imagine their future wealth.

Liang Jingxuan had achieved his goal and calmed them down. “The older, the wiser. Although King Yue Fei is famous, he’s still young and frivolous. How can he compare to father and son, who have been through hundreds of battles and are scheming?”

“The heavens are really helping me.” Immediately, a general slapped his thigh and laughed..

Chapter 979 - 979: Follow to the Death

“Due to the drought, the Di people have been invading the North frequently in the past two years. If we send troops now, we’ll be able to take down all the cities along the way in three months at most and go straight to Quanzhou. In autumn, the Di people will have to stock up on winter supplies and will definitely come aggressively. King Yue Fei will want to resist external enemies, so he’ll be even more occupied.”

In comparison, the King of Liang’s advantage was simply too obvious. If he did not rebel at this time, he would have to wait until King Yue Fei stabilized the North?!

That would be akin to having his head kicked by a donkey.

Someone chimed in. “That’s true. When the Di people invade wantonly, the North will lose its defense. Then, the Di people will march straight in and take down the capital. The Great Zhou Dynasty might very well face a predicament of being sandwiched from the inside and out. It’s not like such a thing hasn’t happened in history. Even if the Imperial Court wanted to, they wouldn’t ask Yue Fei to order the King of the North to send troops.”

Yin Huaixi was the first barrier against the Northern Barbarians. They could not afford to lose him.

There were many troops in the capital, and they were the most well-equipped and elite troops of the Great Zhou Dynasty. There were also many generals who could fight. Yin Huaixi had to resist external enemies, so how could he spare the time?!

The King of Liang was waiting for this opportunity to take advantage of it.

“If King Yue Fei can’t send troops to help, we can avoid fighting him head-on.”

“It’s not that I’m afraid of King Yue Fei. His Highness’s goal is to stay in the capital and avoid fighting King Yue Fei head-on. It’s also to recuperate and conserve his strength. When His Highness takes over the capital and naturally occupies the defense, he can gather the remaining troops of the capital and reap the resources of the capital. At that time, he won’t be afraid of the North, which lacks resources.”

“King Yue Fei was tripped by the Northern Barbarians, so you don’t have to worry.”

After everyone discussed at once, they immediately realized that this was indeed the best time to send troops.

Not only could they avoid King Yue Fei, but they could also catch the Imperial Court off guard.

Although that was the case, there was still an aide who had objections. “Although that’s the case, the garrison stationed in the Rehe area is the first barrier to the three cities in the capital. The 500,000-strong army is not to be trifled with.’

The person guarding Rehe was Duke Duan, an old general who had been through hundreds of battles. Back then, it was also him who had initiated the palace riot with the Empress Dowager, who was still the Empress then, and helped her ascend the throne today. Only then did he have the wealth and glory of Duke Duan’s Residence.

Rehe was located in the north of Hebei and was neighboring the capital. The two armies were still fighting, and the Imperial Court had also sent more reinforcements to suppress the rebellion and exhaust them to death.

After taking down Rehe, the army would definitely suffer heavy losses and need a long time to rest. During this period of rest, the Imperial Court would continue to send troops to quell the rebellion.

This was also one of the reasons why there had been few rebellions by ministers since ancient times, and there were few successful ones.

Liang Jingxuan gave an aide a look, and the aide immediately understood. He immediately retorted, “Although that’s the case, the soldiers stationed in the

Rehe are usually raised indulgently in the army. They haven’t even fought a few decent battles. They’re only doing it on the surface. If they really go to the battlefield, they’ll become weaklings. How can they compare to our Liang army? All of them are experienced and brave.”

“Don’t forget that the three camps of the capital have 150,000 troops. In addition to the imperial guards and the Imperial Clan Guard, there are definitely more than 200,000 soldiers in total. They’re all the most elite troops of the Great Zhou Dynasty and are equipped with the best equipment and weapons.”

“Typically, when you take advantage of the king, why don’t you feel that your hands are burning? When it comes to it, you act like cowards and upset troop morale. Those who upset troop morale will be executed according to the law as a warning to filial piety.”

“Those bastards in the capital only know how to enjoy themselves. After so many years, they can’t even deal with Shandong. What’s there to be afraid of?!”

The room was immediately in an uproar.

The King of Liang did not stop them. Everyone who had been to the battlefield knew that prideful soldiers would definitely lose.

It wasn’t until two old generals almost fought that the King of Liang stopped them. “Everyone, please calm down. There’s no doubt about the strength and advantage of the Liang army, but on the battlefield, we have to fight with our lives. We can’t have any superior or lucky thoughts. This is a difficult battle to begin with. Everyone here trusts you with their lives. We have to go all out and be

confident in our strength. At the same time, we have to be cautious. Don't underestimate any opponent."

With just one sentence, they calmed down.

King Liang also knew that this was a tough battle. He wanted to fight because he had no way out. Previously, he had colluded with the Weining Marquis Residence to persecute King Li of Zhou. It was already a great rebellion.

Now that Ning Yuanbo's residence was in jail, because Concubine Lan had returned and the emperor was seriously ill, the palace was sealed. Ning Yuanbo's case had never been tried, which gave him more time to plan.

However, not inspecting Ning Yuanbo's case now did not mean that it would never be inspected. This matter was like a knife hanging over his head. If he was not careful, King Li of Zhou's outcome back then would be his end.

Was he willing?

NO!

After all, he was going to die. Why not take a risk before he died?

Now was the best time to mobilize troops. If they missed it, they would never have a chance again when King Yue Fei completely stabilized the North.

Liang Jingxuan naturally understood what the father was thinking. He took a dagger and cut it fiercely on his palm, and blood immediately gushed out.

He clenched his palm, and bright red blood slowly dripped into the wine glass, dyeing the bright wine red.

As the blood dripped, Liang Jingxuan raised his wine glass high and raised his voice. "I, Liang Jingxuan, am here to swear a blood pact with all of you. Please believe in us, father and son, and conspire with us. In the future, when we achieve our great ambitions, we will definitely reward all of you for your hard work and contributions. We won't let you down. Let's drink this glass of wine first!"

With that, he raised his head and downed his wine.

Immediately, an old minister also cut his palm and dripped blood into his cup. He raised his wine glass and stood up. "Your Highness, we'll follow you to the death. "

"We'll follow you to the death."

"We'll follow you to the death."

No one present mentioned Liang Jingye, the heir who had been sent to the capital as a "hostage." Everyone knew very well that from the day Liang Jingye stepped into the capital, he had been a dead person.

News that the emperor was seriously ill and could not come to the court spread privately in the royal court.

At this moment, someone in the court suggested that Ning Yuanbo's case be tried.

"Ning Yuanbo is suspected of cheating in the examination. He should be tried immediately, but because of many reasons, there was no choice but to postpone it again and again. Now, it's time for a conclusion to this case. It's time to give justice to those innocent students who were implicated in the fraud in the examination and died in vain. We can't let the hearts of the thousands of students in the world go cold."

These words stood on the high ground of righteousness and morality, and received the support of many court officials.

"The Imperial Court needs fresh blood to continue operating. The imperial examination is to choose talents to govern the country. It's a move that can determine the country. We can't be negligent. Ning Yuanbo's case has dragged on for so long, and many students are already criticizing it. If it continues to drag on, it will inevitably affect the prestige of the Imperial Court and the next examination.. "

Chapter 980 - 980: The Empress Dowager's Death

"In the past year, there has been a lot of backlog in the Imperial Court's government office. The students from all over the world have requested the Imperial Court to seriously investigate Ning Boyuan's case. It's indeed not good to delay this case anymore."

The memorials of the court officials were sent into the Longevity Palace.

At this moment, the Empress Dowager was already bedridden. She leaned against a large ginger-colored pillow and listened weakly to the eunuch's report about the situation in the previous dynasty.

"I heard that many students have already gathered at the Temple of Confucius and jointly protested to the Imperial Court, requesting a strict trial of Ning Yuanbo's case to seek justice for the thousands of students in the world...'

Hearing this, the Empress Dowager covered her mouth and coughed heart-wrenchingly. The eunuch looked at the handkerchief covering the Empress Dowager's mouth that was already dyed red with blood. His calves couldn't help but tremble, and cold sweat kept dripping from his forehead.

"Cough, cough, cough—I' The Empress Dowager coughed non-stop.

Auntie Shen quickly brought over a bowl of pear paste water and fed it to the Empress

Miraculously, the Empress Dowager, who was coughing non-stop, looked much better after drinking a bowl of pear paste water. Her coughing gradually stopped.

The Empress Dowager panted and said, "All of them are sanctimonious and dignified. To put it bluntly, they're just trying to eliminate dissidents..."

Ning Yuanbo was the Second Prince's external relative. As long as Ning Yuanbo's case was not tried and the crime was not conclusive, Concubine Lan would still not lose her power. There was still a group of people in the court who supported the Second Prince.

The trial of Ning Yuanbo seemed reasonable, but in fact, it was targeting the Second Prince and Concubine Lan. They wanted to take the opportunity to wantonly cut off the Second Prince's henchmen and implicate the Second Prince to completely eliminate him.

"How— How has the Emperor's health been recently?" The Empress Dowager's yellow face was abnormally flushed, and her hoarse voice seemed to have been rubbed by sand.

The eunuch's face was pale, and his mouth trembled. "He's still the same."

Before he could finish speaking, his legs went limp and he knelt on the ground with a thud. The emperor had already had a stroke. His mouth was crooked and his eyes were slanted. Previously, he couldn't speak properly but could still say words. Recently, he couldn't even speak. When he opened his mouth, saliva drooled from the corner of his mouth and he made a sound from his throat. After enduring for more than half a year, he was about to die.

Others might not know what was going on with the emperor, but how could the Empress Dowager not know?

The court officials were busy competing for power. Without the emperor's intervention, the matter of establishing a successor could not be resolved. Empress Ning, Concubine Lan, and Imperial Concubine Xu were not to be trifled with. If the three sides fought, they could still restrain one another. However, once the balance was broken, it would cause internal strife.

What broke the balance was the Senior Imperial Censor's advice.

There were already people who couldn't help but want to attack Concubine Lan.

Concubine Lan probably never dreamed that she would instruct the Senior Imperial Censor to divert the trouble and put aside the matter of the Fourth Prince's patrol of the North, only for all of this to be just a trap.

"Meanwhile, look at her..." Before she could finish speaking, large mouthfuls of blood gushed out of the Empress Dowager's mouth and nose.

"Empress Dowager." Auntie Shen was shocked and quickly rushed to the bed. Seeing that the Empress Dowager's eyes were rolled back and her mouth was open, she was breathing heavily. She shouted in a panic, "Someone, quickly invite the imperial physician in..."

The eunuch was shocked. His body suddenly crawled to the ground, but the "her" that the Empress Dowager had mentioned kept echoing in his mind.

He was the Empress Dowager's trusted aide, so he naturally understood that this "her" referred to Empress Ning.

The matter of the Fourth Prince's patrol in the North was Empress Ning's trap.

Empress Ning had first schemed for Second Miss Yu's "natural phoenix fate".

Then, she had instigated the royalists and mentioned the Fourth Prince's patrol of the North.

Everyone thought that Empress Ning had planned for the Fourth Prince to patrol the North to win over the hearts of the people and accumulate reputation. She had further roped in Yue Fei, the King of the North, and the officials in the North.

At that time, the Fourth Prince's reputation would be great, and the girl with the phoenix fate" would be naturally betrothed to the Fourth Prince.

With the support of the Yu Clan, Empress Ning naturally adopted the Fourth Prince as her heir.

But who would have thought that this was a trap?

The Second Prince had obtained a lot of virtuous reputation in the royal court. However, if the Fourth Prince traveled to the North, the "virtuous reputation" would probably change hands.

No matter how virtuous the Second Prince was, could he compare to the Fourth Prince's contribution to checking the hearts of the people on behalf of the emperor?

The Second Prince was the most shocked about the Fourth Prince's patrol of the North.

In order to stop the Fourth Prince from patrolling the North, Concubine Lan let the Senior Imperial Censor expose the news that the emperor was seriously ill. Thus, Concubine Lan had the initiative.

After suppressing Empress Ning's use of the "girl with the phoenix fate" to suppress the Fourth Prince, Empress Ning could no longer manipulate the royalists and cause trouble in the court.

Meanwhile, the Third Prince was useless and became easy to deal with.

Concubine Lan was right.

However, she had never expected that Empress Ning would feint.

Ning Yuanbo's case had never been tried. It was because the Empress Dowager did not want to break the balance of the struggle for the throne. However, Senior Imperial Censor Gu had stood out and broken the balance, so the Empress no longer had any scruples. She was using the royalists and thousands of students in the world to request a strict trial of Ning Yuanbo's case.

The balance that the Empress Dowager had painstakingly maintained had completely been broken.

When she heard the news of the Empress Dowager's death, Yu Youyao was having dinner with Yin Huaixi.

Yin Qi reported the news to Yin Huaixi. "The palace is already under full martial law. The Empress has stepped forward and will start to arrange the Empress Dowager's funeral."

Yin Huaixi subconsciously glanced at Yu Youyao.

Seeing that her smiling eyes were no longer smiling, he paused for a moment and put his chopsticks back on the plate.

Yin Huaixi asked helplessly, “It’s only a matter of time. Why aren’t you eating?” Yu Youyao had a complicated expression. “It’s just that it’s a little too sudden.”

Yin Huaixi picked up a piece of mushroom and placed it in her bowl. He coaxed gently, “The world is big, and eating is the most important. Try this dried mushroom with bamboo shoots. I specially found a chef who’s good at making

Min cuisine and made the mushroom taste like seafood.’

Yu Youyao forced herself to eat a few mouthfuls and really couldn’t eat anymore. “Actually, the Empress Dowager has never treated me badly for a long time. I only got to where I am today because of her protection. I just feel a little stifled.

Yin Huaixi also put down his chopsticks. “Yes, she’s someone you know. You usually don’t have much interaction. When you suddenly find out that she has passed away, you can’t help but feel a little sad. It’s human nature.”

Initially, she felt quite complicated. After hearing Yin Huaixi’s simple and straightforward words, Yu Youyao did not feel so uncomfortable anymore.

“Now that the Empress Dowager has passed away, I’m afraid the entire court will be completely in chaos.” Without the Empress Dowager to balance the court, the Great Zhou Dynasty would fall apart. It was already a foregone conclusion..