

Medical Princess 1071

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Chapter 1071: Substitute Another Woman for Lady Ming

The Empress Dowager was so furious that she decided to choose more consorts for Chu Liuchen. Upon receiving her order, Nanny Wei hurried out of the palace.

The Butterfly Clothing Shop's address was very easy to inquire about. Before heading there, Nanny Wei asked the carriage to park in an alley aside. Watching the guests coming and going, she felt very satisfied with this good shop because it could make a big profit.

Wei Dahai came from nowhere. When he saw Nanny Wei, he hurried forward to salute her and whispered, "Aunt, please wait for a moment. I'll invite her over. She should avoid being seen by Princess Chen's people in case of trouble. Otherwise, Lady Ming might not dare to tell the truth."

"How dare she! We're in the capital near the Emperor. Does she really dare to order the guards of Prince Chen's Mansion?" Nanny Wei didn't expect Shao Wanru to be so aggressive and was in a peeve over it.

She had felt a little guilty because what happened before was faked, but now, she flared up a little. If Princess Chen had no regard for laws, she might implicate Prince Chen. It would be better to get rid of her.

"It is just because we're living in the same city with the Emperor that Princess Chen feels reassured and emboldened. Everyone knows that the Empress Dowager and His Majesty dote on Prince Chen very much. Princess Chen has been taking advantage of Prince Chen's powerful connections. Please wait for a while, and I will come back immediately," Wei Dahai said.

He had already thoroughly prepared for this and walked to the Butterfly Clothing Shop in the gaze of Nanny Wei, who was still in a rage.

When he entered the shop, the shop-boy inside recognized but ignored him, doing what he was supposed to do. The shopkeeper had already told everyone to leave him alone. Except for the shopkeeper's office, he could go wherever he wanted as long as he didn't disturb the normal business operation of Butterfly Clothing Shop.

But a sensitive fellow still reported Wei Dahai's coming to Madame Dong.

Madame Dong was stunned. She didn't know what else Wei Dahai would say to her at this time. Since Princess Chen had the final say on this shop, she could do nothing about it. Is Wei Dahai still unwilling to give up? Was he plotting something?

Rolling her eyes and thinking for a while, she uttered a few words under her breath to the shop-boy who came in to deliver the message. Then, the shop-boy nodded and left.

Wei Dahai walked around the store for some time but bought nothing. Finally, he turned to a corner and met a woman in her thirties. Wei Dahai seemed to know her. After exchanging a few words, they walked out together. The shop-boy, who had kept his eye on Wei Dahai, saw them leave together and get on a carriage in the depths of an alley.

The shop-boy swiftly ran inside to tell Madame Dong, "Madam, Lord Wei took a middle-aged woman out and went to a carriage in the alley on our right. The carriage curtains were drawn, so I didn't see who was inside clearly. I faintly saw there might be a woman."

"A middle-aged woman? Who is she?" Madame Dong was stunned and asked.

"I asked others in our shop, but no one knew her. They said the middle-aged woman had stayed inside for quite a while and didn't seem to be from a rich family. She dressed like and looked like you. When she was in the shop, we talked about her, saying you were like sisters."

The shop-boy said.

"Sisters? So, we look similar. Wei Dahai took out a woman looking like me from my shop. Then others might regard her as me!"

Madame Dong's face changed. Thinking of what Princess Chen had warned her, she stood up in shock and said, "I'll go and have a look!"

She left the shop-boy behind and ran out. There were several carriages in a row, and the shop-boy quietly came out with her, pointing to one of them.

The style of the carriage was very ordinary. It looked like one of the most ordinary carriages on the street and had a curtain hanging in front of it.

Since Madame Dong had been dealing with clothes in her shop, she had a sharp eye for them. The fabric of the curtain was by no means ordinary. It remained low-key but was extraordinary. Honestly, it was even far superior to the cloth made for ordinary people's clothes.

Even though she didn't touch the curtain herself, Madame Dong knew it in her heart.

Only carriages of those who were wealthy or noble could be equipped with such top-notch curtains. Madame Dong had seen his carriage several times when Wei Dahai came here. Although his carriage was much more spacious, the curtain on it couldn't compare with the curtain before her.

"The people inside the carriage must not be ordinary. What is Wei Dahai trying to do? Is he plotting something?"

After thinking for a while, she waved her hand and called the shop-boy over, whispering in his ear. The shop-boy nodded, turned around, and ran out. At the roadside, he caught a carriage and went to the Prince Chen's Mansion.

When the shop-boy left to deliver the message, Madame Dong thought it over and returned to the shop. Then she went upstairs and found a window facing the alley. As expected, she saw the carriage she had noticed just now. Hiding behind the curtain, she watched the carriage intensely. Madame Dong could feel there was something strange about it.

In the carriage, the middle-aged woman bowed deeply to Nanny Wei. Before she could get up, her face was covered with tears, and her voice was choked with sobs. "Please... please help me."

"Are you Lady Ming?" Nanny Wei measured "Lady Ming" with the eye and asked slowly.

"Yes... I am Lady Ming!" "Lady Ming" replied.

"Get up and talk!" Nanny Wei said gently.

"Lady Ming, get up first. Aunt will take care of you and won't let Princess Chen force you to do anything. You can keep your shop," Wei Dahai said with concern. He reached out to help "Lady Ming" sit down on one side.

Nanny Wei glanced "Lady Ming" up and down a few more times and felt she was pleasing to the eye, so she further softened her voice. "Have you decided to return to Dahai?"

"Nanny, he and I... We are childhood sweethearts. Our misunderstanding has been solved, and fate has brought us together. We are not young anymore. Even for our own sake, we should let go of the past. How can we take the past too hard? Nanny, please help us!"

"Lady Ming" said, wiping her tears.

"Is Princess Chen really going to take your shop away?" Nanny Wei kept silent for a while and asked slowly.

"Princess Chen thinks this shop is excellent and takes a fancy to it. That day, she threatened me with the matter related to Infanta Yuan'an and asked me to sell the shop to her, saying it could be regarded as compensation for her loss. Otherwise, she would definitely mess up my shop and make it impossible for me to manage the business. Nanny, I only have one daughter. Over so many years, we have depended on each other for survival. Finally, we keep this shop going and have saved some money."

"Lady Ming" cried more bitterly, revealing the helplessness and sadness of a poor woman. This reminded Nanny Wei of the days in her childhood when she was alone and helpless. She felt more and more sorry for "Lady Ming".

"Well, I know. Since Princess Chen bullied you with her power, I should report it fairly. You can go back now and do business as usual. When this matter is over, you can marry into Wei's Mansion!"

Nanny Wei said kindly.

"Thank you, Nanny. Thank you so much." "Lady Ming" was so excited that she wanted to kneel again but was stopped by Wei Dahai. "Don't do that. Aunt is always kind-hearted and can't bear to see vulnerable people like you suffer. You should go back first. I'll talk to my aunt for a while."

"Okay, I'll go first!" "Lady Ming" dabbed her eyes and nodded. Then she bowed to Nanny Wei gently and got out of the carriage, going straight to the Butterfly Clothing Shop as if she were its shopkeeper.

Madame Dong, peeking at them upstairs behind the curtain, saw the middle-aged woman come out. She called a shop-boy over, asking him to go downstairs to follow her. While she still hid in that blind corner and continued to monitor what was happening downstairs.

A while later, Wei Dahai came out. When he got off the carriage, he looked around and saw no one had noticed him, so he went to the back of the alley. There were also several carriages parked there, one of which was his.

After he climbed into the carriage of his mansion, the coachman made a turn and left from the back of the alley.

Nanny Wei's carriage stopped for a while, and the coachman drove the carriage away. Since Nanny Dong stood high, she could look into the distance. When she saw that the carriage seemed to be heading for the Prince Chen's Mansion, she frowned tightly. "Her Highness guessed right. This matter is far from over."

Wei Dahai was so bold that he dared to confront Princess Chen. It seemed that Wei Dahai was not as useless as she had thought. If she guessed correctly, this carriage should be from the Palace.

Fortunately, she had sent someone to inform Princess Chen in advance. Even if someone from Palace suddenly visited Princess Chen, she must have prepared a solution. Madame Dong had faith in Shao Wanru.

Although Madame Dong was worried, this didn't throw her into a panic.

She came out from the curtain and went downstairs to her accountant's office, staying inside for a while. Then the shop-boy whom she had asked to go out came back.

"Madam, that woman doesn't live far away. She entered our shop and walked around for some time. Seeing no one pay attention to her, she left through the back door. I followed her and found she lived nearby in a courtyard two blocks away. Her place was not big, but the door was closed tightly. I made a few inquiries and learned that only a woman lived there with a female servant. No one knew whose mistress she was. Anyway, the man of the house seldom came and was always secretive about what he did. Anyway, others seldom saw him there."

The shop-boy reported.

"Can you remember the address?" Madame Dong nodded and asked worriedly.

"Trust me, Madam. I'm familiar with this area and won't mess up the turns and streets. Next time you want to see this woman, you can go with me, and I'll make no mistake about it," the shop-boy said, patting his chest with assurance.

Madame Dong nodded and handed a tael of silver to the shop-boy who thanked her repeatedly and withdrew.

Nanny Wei's carriage stopped before the Prince Chen's Mansion, and the coachman stepped forward. The guard at the gate stopped him and asked sharply, "Who is it?"

"Nanny Wei, the Empress Dowager's personal servant, is here with Her Majesty's order. Please inform Princess Chen of this!" The coachman folded his hands in salute and said.

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Chapter 1072: Two Traps Set in a Row

As soon as these guards heard Nanny Wei served the Empress Dowager, they didn't dare to neglect them and immediately sent someone to report it. After a while, Yujie appeared at the door, walked to the carriage, and bowed respectfully. "Nanny Wei."

"The Prince Chen's Mansion is really grand. It took me so long to see Princess Chen's servant!" Nanny Wei asked the coachman to lift the curtain and looked at Yujie with hostility.

"I'm very sorry for the inconvenience, Nanny. Our mansion is indeed a little big. My Lady got the news and sent me out, but I was still late and kept you waiting outside for a while longer." Yujie greeted Nanny Wei with a smile, overlooking her angry words.

Meanwhile, she asked the coachman to follow her into the manor.

When they arrived at the parking lot of the Prince Chen's Mansion, Yujie helped Nanny Wei get out of the carriage and said with a smile, "Nanny, you used to come through the side door. Why did you choose to come in from the front door today? Unlike the side door, it's not so convenient to come and go from the front door. You must be tired."

She smiled before speaking, which made Nanny Wei unable to vent her anger for a moment.

"Is Her Highness busy?" Nanny Wei asked lightly, ignoring Yujie's pleasantries.

"My Lady lives a life of leisure. When His Highness is away, she has been waiting for him to return. Other than that, she only needs to prepare a birthday gift for the Empress Dowager," Yujie said with a smile.

She wasn't slow and steadily led the way in front. It was much shorter than the distance from the gate to the backyard, and the parking lot was close to the inner court.

This parking lot was for the carriages of those female family members.

Along the way, Nanny Wei no longer responded to Yujie. Whatever she said, she would give a grunt to show she heard it. Later, Yujie was at a loss for words and could only stop talking. In silence, she led Nanny Wei to Shao Wanru.

There were needles and thread in Shao Wanru's room, and various kinds of thread were scattered there, bright-colored ones, exquisite ones, and some were in dull colors. On the table aside were a lot of brocades and one unfinished table screen, which was not large but very exquisite. It was almost done, but some corners still needed to be sewn.

A length of thread was left outside. Shao Wanru held the needle and thread in her hand, and a few servant girls were helping her in the room. When Nanny Wei came in, she put down the thread and turned around, smiling. The moment Nanny Wei saw her delicate elfin face, she couldn't help gasping with admiration at her unrivaled beauty, though she had seen many beautiful women in the Palace.

In Nanny Wei's eyes, Princess Chen was exceedingly gorgeous, but in her heart, she thought Princess Chen was as vicious as a viper.

Shao Wanru was even willing to do such despicable acts to collect wealth. Since Nanny Wei was simmering with resentment and still remembered Wei Dahai's critical remarks about Shao Wanru, she could hardly force a smile at her.

Fortunately, she had been imbued with what she had seen and heard in the Palace for a long time, so she always had a fake smile on her face to avoid unforeseen trouble. Hurriedly taking two steps forward, she was about to bow to Shao Wanru. Shao Wanru was slightly taken aback and immediately stepped

forward to hold Nanny Wei up, saying she was overwhelmed by her unexpected salute. Then Shao Wanru gently led Nanny Wei to sit down on a chair beside her.

“Your Highness, is this prepared for Her Majesty?” Nanny Wei raised her eyebrows and asked with her eyes on the table screen.

“What do you think of it?” Shao Wanru asked merrily, seemingly quite satisfied with her work.

“It’s a good choice. Her Majesty will like it.” Nanny Wei praised with a faint look.

“You’re an experienced servant serving Imperial Grandmother by her side, so I guess you must understand her tastes. Please give me some advice. What do you think I should improve on it?” Shao Wanru asked sincerely.

Nanny Wei tilted her head to look at it. Reaching out her hands, she picked it up and turned it around. “Your table screen is very exquisite. Her Majesty will definitely be satisfied to see such a fancy screen. Now that my master is aged, she likes showy things and prefers to see young girls dressed in vibrant colored clothes that can make them stand out in the crowd.”

She let his eyes settle upon the table edge and said, “My Lady, your table screen is so delicately made, and the embroidery patterns on it are so beautiful. My master will love it. But if you could change this part, it will be more appealing in her eyes.”

Nanny Wei pointed to the screen edge. There was a circle of decorative border, which was not long but made the screen more elegant.

The trimming, neither long nor short, was just right.

“Do you mean to broaden the border?” At first, Shao Wanru didn’t understand Nanny Wei’s meaning, hanging her head to think. After a while, her eyes lit up.

With a smile, Nanny Wei added, “Elder people like to see younger generations in red and other bright colors because they can bring a lovely jubilant atmosphere.”

Thus, the size of the small trimming should be increased while there should be more bright colors. But if she made the changes, the secondary would supersede the primary — the screen edge would outshine the pattern on the table screen, which would put the central part in the shade.

The different arrangements of the screen patterns and other accessories suggested hierarchical relationships between power holders and their subordinates.

Shao Wanru bent her head to check it with a hint of doubt, feeling it might not be a good idea.

“Your Highness, you can do whatever you want. Anyway, Her Majesty would like any gifts from you. Prince Chen is one of her favorites, and she also cares about you very much,” Nanny Wei said with a smile.

It meant that the Empress Dowager liked her on account of Chu Liuchen, which was not favorable for a woman. One day if Chu Liuchen no longer loved her, she would be left alone and helpless.

As a daughter-in-law who had just married into the royal family, she must ingratiate herself with her husband's family members, let alone the Empress Dowager, a mighty figure holding great power. Moreover, she couldn't rely on Chu Liuchen to win over the Empress Dowager's love. Shao Wanru needed the Empress Dowager to value her. In this case, even if Prince Chen married some new consorts, Shao Wanru would have someone to depend on.

"Then I'd better change it. Qu Le, pick some vivid trimmings and show them to me. I want bigger and brighter ones." Shao Wanru immediately instructed Qu Le.

Qu Le nodded, put down the pair of scissors in her hand, and went to pick up some new frills from the pile of brocade and colorful threads.

"Your Highness, what do you think of this?" Qu Le dug out a bright red trimming. The embroidery was twice as long as the original one. At first glance, it looked redundant that couldn't match the elegant colors on the screen.

"Nanny Wei, help me have a look..." Shao Wanru said hesitantly, looking up at Nanny Wei imploringly as if she wanted Nanny Wei to make the decision.

"Your Highness, it will do if you think it's good. I'm just a servant. I can't decide for you!" Nanny Wei refused with a smile.

How could she help Shao Wanru choose the edges? If the table screen used the kind she had suggested, the Empress Dowager would dislike it and even get angry. If the hostess of a mansion couldn't even pick up the proper border for a screen, how could she be a competent master? The Empress Dowager would think that Shao Wanru might mess up the Prince Chen's Mansion.

"Well... let's pick another one!" Shao Wanru looked at the red trimming and said helplessly.

Nanny Wei nodded with a smile. She didn't say yes or no, but let Shao Wanru choose for herself. Frankly, the previous one was perfect. Any longer, larger, or more gorgeous ones wouldn't be suitable. So, whatever adjustments Shao Wanru made, the Empress Dowager wouldn't like it, especially at this moment when the Empress Dowager was very critical of Princess Chen.

Given these adverse conditions, the Empress Dowager would become more dissatisfied with Princess Chen because she couldn't do anything good!

Wei Dahai was right. Since they had confronted Princess Chen, they couldn't let her gain the upper hand. Besides, according to her many years of experience in the Palace, Nanny Wei knew that once they chose to be hostile to Princess Chen, they had to smash her power and make sure she could never stage a comeback. Otherwise, Princess Chen might become their terrible threat in the future.

Wei Dahai and Nanny Wei agreed on this point.

Once again, Princess Chen took out another bright-colored and wide embroidery. Although it looked better than the previous one, it wasn't nice at all. Looking at Princess Chen try this one with a pleased expression, Nanny Wei sneered in her heart. Indeed, the Empress Dowager appreciated young people wearing gorgeous clothes, but not Princess Chen.

Throughout the years, Prince Chen liked the elegant style. In the Empress Dowager's mind, her best grandson was delicate and graceful. If Shao Wanru had nothing to do with Prince Chen, the Empress Dowager would like to see her in red on her birthday. However, Shao Wanru was now Princess Chen.

When Shao Wanru showed up with clothes that didn't match Prince Chen's, the Empress Dowager wouldn't like it even if Prince Chen wasn't present.

Beyond that, the table screen would show Princess Chen couldn't differentiate between primary and secondary. The Empress Dowager would absolutely loathe her.

Nanny Wei's suggestion set up two traps for Shao Wanru.

She didn't believe that Princess Chen could successfully avoid them. Even if she somehow decorated the table screen properly, she would choose the wrong clothes and accessories.

At this time, the Empress Dowager should be selecting Misses of aristocratic families from their portraits. When she went back, she would seize the opportunity to recommend a few Young Madams with forceful character to the Empress Dowager. Princess Chen in front of her couldn't suppress any of them and would certainly come to no good end.

It was Nanny Wei's fiendish plan. At this time, she was not in a hurry and watched Shao Wanru and her maids bustling around. A shadow of a smile touched her mouth as if she was very satisfied with the few items Shao Wanru had just picked up.

But she didn't express her approval. After all, as the Empress Dowager's personal nanny, she must be very cautious about expressing opinions.

Shao Wanru was busy for a while and suddenly seemed to think of Nanny Wei. She hurriedly put down the ornamental edges in her hand and said with an apologetic smile to Nanny Wei, "Nanny Wei, I'm really sorry for leaving you aside. You specially came to me today, so is there anything I can do for you?"

"No big deal. Her Majesty remembered the Butterfly Clothing Shop you talked about and thought it was a good shop, so she didn't want you to intervene in its business and specially asked me to tell you that," Nanny Wei said politely with a smile.

Shao Wanru froze and blinked her clear eyes. After a long while, she asked, "So, do you mean Imperial Grandmother takes a fancy to this shop?"

"I'm sorry, but I can't conjecture why my master wanted to do this. I just came here to pass on this order. Now that the message has been delivered, I will have to return." Nanny Wei stood up and said goodbye.

"Nanny Wei, please wait a moment!" Shao Wanru stood up and bowed to Nanny Wei. "I have another question. I wonder if you could remove my doubt?"

"Princess Chen, you might be too young to know some rules. You can ask only when you're allowed to do so. And you'd better not ask the question that you shouldn't ask," Nanny Wei stood still, glanced at Shao Wanru, and said with a trace of sarcasm across her eyes. "She is Princess Chen, so what? Still, she is frightened by a few words from me."

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Chapter 1073: The Fake Shopkeeper's Real Identity

"Nanny Wei, what do you mean?" Shao Wanru asked with her face darkening.

"Her Highness, I have made it very clear. If you are determined to get this shop, you can go and plead with Her Majesty for it," Nanny Wei chuckled and said in a low voice.

After saying that, she went out but suddenly stopped when she reached the door and said, "Her Highness, I'm tired, so I'll go back to the Palace from the side door. So, please send someone to inform the coachman about that and let him go back to wait!"

After saying that, she walked to the side door with easy familiarity because she knew the way very well.

Nanny Wei visited the Prince Chen's Mansion frequently. In the past, when she delivered things for the Empress Dowager, she always went through the side door.

Yujie was so angry that her face turned livid. Looking at Nanny Wei's back, she almost couldn't refrain from rushing over to stop her.

Shao Wanru sat down calmly, raised the corners of her mouth slightly, and said to Yujie with a smile, "What's all this about? Are you really angry?"

Yujie turned around, let down the curtain, and exploded, "My Lady, she has gone too far. Yes, she serves Her Majesty, but you are Princess Chen! How could a servant like her slander you?"

"She had met Wei Dahai. The matter seems to be related to Wei Dahai. I underestimated him, a really capable man to connect with Nanny Wei. When I mentioned the Butterfly Clothing Shop yesterday, Nanny Wei didn't look right. Sure enough, there is something fishy about it."

Shao Wanru said in no hurry, pushing away the trimmings before her, "Let's put the original one on the screen!"

Knowing that Nanny Wei came with malevolent intentions, she had well prepared for it. The screen was merely a tool to test Nanny Wei. Now she could conclude that Nanny Wei held great malice against her.

Madame Dong had sent a shop-boy to deliver the message and tell them everything they had seen. So, Shao Wanru even learned that the middle-aged woman coming out of Butterfly Clothing Shop dressed like Madame Dong and was about the same age as her: she imitated Madame Dong on purpose.

A fake shopkeeper tricked Nanny Wei, but Nanny Wei wouldn't have been fooled so readily if she had held no prejudice against Shao Wanru.

Both Nanny Wei and Wei Dahai were surnamed Wei, so their relationship was evident.

After Nanny Wei left the Palace, she went straight to the Butterfly Clothing Shop. Wei Dahai had been waiting outside after getting the message. Since he had prepared a fake shopkeeper to deceive her, he must have already known that Nanny Wei was leaving the Palace.

Nanny Wei came to the Prince Chen's Mansion, announcing that she came here with the Empress Dowager's order, which meant that the Empress Dowager should have known about it. By inference,

Nanny Wei might have cast a slur on her before the Empress Dowager or asked someone to cook some evidence against her. In a fit of anger, the Empress Dowager sent Nanny Wei out to verify it.

However, Nanny Wei didn't enter the shop to find out the truth. Instead, she only listened to Wei Dahai's explanation and rushed to criticize Shao Wanru in the Prince Chen's Mansion, full of malice. It could be seen that Wei Dahai must have bewitched her.

"My Lady, Nanny Wei was cheated. Why didn't you make everything clear?" Qu Le was a little more friendly, thinking they could forgive Nanny Wei, who was taken in by false statements.

"She has been prejudiced against me already. No matter how much truth I share with her, Nanny Wei won't believe my words. Anyway, she won't listen to me." Shao Wanru talked slowly. Her face darkened, and her watery eyes turned cold.

She had never been a merciful person. Since Nanny Wei had set her heart on scheming against her and never doubted Wei Dahai's statements, then she didn't need to explain.

Today, Nanny Wei went to the Butterfly Clothing Shop, which proved that she had said damaging things about her before the Empress Dowager. If Nanny Wei was a good person, she should verify Wei Dahai's words before believing him. After all, if she didn't handle such a thing properly, she might bring a fatal and overwhelming disaster to innocent people.

Nanny Wei heard and trusted only one side. In that case, following Wei Dahai's suggestions to deal with Shao Wanru was committing evil.

Many people in this world could always come up with an explanation for their evil actions, thinking that they were on the right side. Before they acted, they didn't think things through, but after the damage was done, they kept finding excuses to absolve themselves from blame.

Shao Wanru had always been a cold-hearted person. Others might have no choice or have some misunderstanding to plot against her, but Shao Wanru couldn't stand bringing damage to herself!

"My Lady, Nanny Wei is the Empress Dowager's personal maid. After leaving the Butterfly Clothing Shop, she went straight to frighten you in our mansion. Does it mean that the Empress Dowager was also not happy with you? But before you left the Palace yesterday, Her Majesty liked you very much, didn't she?"

Yujie restrained her anger and became worried.

Nanny Wei was different because she had been the Empress Dowager's most trusted servant. Though Prince Chen was distinguished, he was the most filial to the Empress Dowager.

"It doesn't matter!" Shao Wanru said, "Let's wait and see. We've picked up a set of clothes. Now, we're going to make a new set in the same style and use lighter colors."

"My Lady, the Empress Dowager likes to see bright-colored clothes, and it will be her birthday party. The set we chose has a festive air. You look good in them, but why do you want to make a new one with lighter color?"

Yujie asked in confusion.

That gorgeous and magnificent set of clothes was embroidered with flying peonies. The royal scarlet coat showed off Shao Wanru's fair face, which wasn't colorless and pallid. Instead, she had naturally pink cheeks, and her skin was as delicate and white as jade. When she was in this set of clothes, her servant girls were stunned by her beauty and couldn't help praising it.

Most of Shao Wanru's clothes were light-colored, so she had never worn such bright red ones, especially with peonies regarded as flowers of wealth. Honestly, it wasn't easy to match with such resplendent clothes. But when Shao Wanru put them on, she looked stunningly beautiful and glamorous.

The Empress Dowager would be happy to see her in this bright set with peony patterns on her birthday.

"Is it because of Nanny Wei's words just now?" Qu Le blinked her eyes, thought for a moment, and said with a frown, "But I think she was talking about the table screen's rim. She said that deliberately because she wanted you to replace the suitable trimming with a gaudy one."

"This rim doesn't match. Can you see it?" Shao Wanru picked up the last piece they chose. It was long with tassels. Although it looked wonderful alone, it didn't go with the table screen. Anyone who wasn't dull would know it was inappropriate.

Nanny Wei had been serving in the Palace for such a long time, so how could she make such a simple mistake?

Her words could mislead Shao Wanru for a while, but Shao Wanru would realize the mistake after some time. Even if she didn't notice anything, the servant girls would find out it was not appropriate.

Nanny Wei deliberately diverted their attention but concealed her true intentions. The most important thing was to make Shao Wanru believe she should wear gorgeous clothes. Shao Wanru had thought she should do that before. However, after hearing Nanny Wei's words, she felt it might be inappropriate.

Suddenly, Shao Wanru remembered that the Empress Dowager had sent Chu Liuchen several pieces of clothes made in the Palace. They were all in an elegant style. Even if there were some decorative patterns, they were not eye-catching and embroidered with gold threads. Those clothes appeared brightly elegant and noble but not gorgeous.

Chu Liuchen had no gorgeous clothes. So, if she wore such showy clothes, she would not be a match for Chu Liuchen. The Empress Dowager wouldn't like to see that this couple was not suited to one another.

With this in her mind, a trace of coldness flashed in her eyes that gradually turned icy cold. Gorgeous? Her skin had been pretty white, and her lips were bright and rosy. In her previous life, Old Madam Wen and Gu Xishu drove her out of the Mansion of the Prime Minister. Since she had the dazzling appearance, she would appear ill-matched with Chu Liuchen if she wore gorgeous clothes.

Their differences would be more conspicuous.

Others might not pay attention to it, but the Empress Dowager was different, for she had always cared about Chu Liuchen's health. At that time, if anyone with ill intentions made a few unpleasant remarks, she was very likely to get into trouble.

If the Empress Dowager banished her from the Palace before everyone present, she would be too ashamed to be Princess Chen in the future. Moreover, she would definitely be severely punished.

If people were out to condemn someone, they could always trump up a charge. In Shao Wanru's previous life, she had been thrown out of her home for such an absurd reason.

In this life, she encountered the same trick.

Nanny Wei lured her to wear gorgeous clothes because she wanted to ruin Shao Wanru.

Even the Mansion of the Prime Minister would do such a thing. If the Empress Dowager in the Palace went furious, she could make Shao Wanru suffer much more.

In the past, even if the Empress Dowager was not happy about it, she might not show such feelings in front of others. But the situation was different now. With Nanny Wei's slanderous talk, a great calamity would be impending over Shao Wanru if she was not careful.

"His Highness has always dressed in a graceful and elegant style, so I can't be gorgeously dressed. I'll make a set of light lotus red clothes with light golden and simple embroidery patterns. The gold color is a symbol of nobility. So, using some golden threads to embellish the clothes could show my distinguished identity as Princess Chen," Shao Wanru paused and added, "I'm Princess Chen, so I should wear clothes in the same style as His Highness. If he is here, our clothes will match."

Whether Chu Liuchen was here or not, she should choose her clothes according to Chu Liuchen's style and mustn't outshine him.

At this time, the two maids also understood. They looked at each other with lingering fear on their faces.

"My Lady, don't worry. I'll go and get a few pieces of cloth first. After you choose some, I'll ask the embroidery room to make the clothes as soon as possible," Qu Le said with a nod and turned to Shao Wanru's warehouse, in which there were many high-quality pieces of cloth.

Shao Wanru nodded. Initially, she wanted gorgeous clothes embroidered with magnificent and complex patterns, but there was no need to make these clothes now. Therefore, her servants only needed to embroider some simple designs on her clothes with gold thread. The gold thread represented luxury which could show her identity and status. This way, Shao Wanru could get the clothes she wanted in time.

"Yujie, go and invite Madame Dong here." Shao Wanru said to Yujie again.

There were some things that she had to ask Madame Dong. They'd better get fully prepared for the fake shopkeeper, and Nanny Wei would inevitably make more trouble. Since she had many things to deal with, Shao Wanru had to cope with shifting events by preparing in advance.

Madame Dong arrived at the Prince Chen's Mansion quickly with people from the Rui'an Great Elder Princess's Mansion. Shao Wanru had inquired about the Imperial Household Department from Rui'an Great Elder Princess.

Madame Dong came in first and told Shao Wanru about the fake shopkeeper. That woman lived in a courtyard near the shop. The hostess might be Wei Dahai's mistress, and the fake shopkeeper was very likely to be her trusted nurse.

[Medical Princess](#)

Chapter 1074: Who Manages the Imperial Household Department

Madame Dong guessed it out. Later, she specially asked the shop-boy to inquire about it. When she was preparing to report it to Shao Wanru, Yujie happened to come over.

“Wei Dahai’s mistress?” This result surprised Shao Wanru.

“Yes, it was just my guess. Wei Dahai has been very meticulous about everything. If that woman had been a complete stranger, he wouldn’t have casually grabbed her to pretend to be me. That household was very mysterious, and its male master seldom appeared. I asked the shop-boy to describe Wei Dahai’s appearance. Sure enough, someone said it was him.”

Madame Dong said in detail.

“How long has he kept his mistress there?” Shao Wanru pondered over this for a while.

“I’ve specially asked about when they moved there. It was a few years ago. Although the male master was rarely seen, some people could spot him once or twice after a long time,” Madame Dong said. When she realized the woman might be Wei Dahai’s mistress, she deliberately told the shop-boy to get more specific information about them.

“Keep an eye on his mistress,” Shao Wanru said coldly. This clue was a pleasant surprise. Then, she added, “If there is anything unusual, send someone to report it immediately. As for the other things, do them in the same way as before. If Wei Dahai comes over, leave him alone. Mind your own business. If he asks about the shop, don’t tell him anything.”

“You can rest easy, My Lady. I know what you mean. If he asks, I’ll tell him that it has nothing to do with him and let him not think too much about it. Xiuer has already straightened out her thinking and is no longer on his side, saying her biological father had died early in her heart. Now, I feel assured,” said Madame Dong.

She worried about Dong Xiuer the most for fear that Wei Dahai would fool her. But when Xiuer overheard the conversation between Wei Dahai and her, she no longer had him in her heart. In the future, no matter what he said or promised, she wouldn’t believe him.

“Xiuer lives too close to you now. Let her move to another place. She can ignore him, but Wei Dahai is her father after all. It’s not good for her, the younger generation, to be rude. Her family can live on my estate outside the city for the time being. I’m afraid Wei Dahai might maliciously scheme against you and your daughter once he fails to persuade Xiuer.”

Shao Wanru was not as optimistic as Madame Dong, so she made arrangements, just in case.

Madame Dong immediately realized what Shao Wanru meant and nodded vigorously in approval. To express her gratitude for her immense practical help, Madame Dong was about to kowtow to Shao Wanru. When she realized she had completely ignored Wei Dahai’s evil character, her back was covered with a cold sweat. As Xiuer’s father, he was heartless to her. Ultimately, he might kidnap Xiuer and threaten Madame Dong with her.

Shao Wanru motioned Yujie to help her up and waved her hand, saying, “Madam Dong, you should be careful. Nothing serious will happen in the shop, but don’t go to places outside where there are few people. Whenever you go out, take some shop-boys with you. Wei Dahai may be more devious and sinister than you can imagine.”

Again and again, Madame Dong nodded and said, "My Lady, don't worry. I won't come out unless there's something important. Even if I have to leave the shop, I'll ask a few shop-boys to go with me. I will never act alone, let alone go to isolated spots. Wei Dahai is a real villain, a venomous one."

It only worried her that Wei Dahai might deceive Xiuer, but little did she think that Wei Dahai would combine threats with promises. Moving out was the best way for Xiuer and her family to avoid potential dangers.

After giving Madame Dong instructions, Shao Wanru sent some people to go with Madame Dong and help Dong Xiuer move away. Then Shao Wanru invited over an old maid, the Nanny in-charge of Rui'an Great Elder Princess's Mansion, who had been waiting in the side room.

Upon entering, the old maid in charge bowed to Shao Wanru and said, "Your Highness, my master wanted to come over to talk about it with you in person. But some guests happened to come over. Our master was afraid that you would be anxious, so she specially asked me to pay a visit and tell you about the affairs of the Imperial Household Department."

"What do I need to know?" Shao Wanru asked.

"My master said the Imperial Household Department was in the hands of Duke Cheng'en, who arranged its affairs in the name of managing," the Nanny in-charge reported with a smile.

The Imperial Household Department was in charge of Palace affairs. Though the person in charge had no real power in the imperial court, he enjoyed the second-ranking slack position, which was a high official rank. It was either royal descendants who controlled the Imperial Household Department, or people related to women in the imperial harem.

The Duke Cheng'en was never ordinary. He was the Empress Dowager's brother, and could be regarded as the Emperor's uncle.

"Is he the Empress Dowager's elder brother?" Even though Shao Wanru knew it, she still asked.

"Yes. According to my master, Duke Cheng'en started handling its affairs many years ago. There was nothing significant that happened during this period. She didn't know why you asked about it. If there is anything, please tell my master."

The Nanny in-charge of Rui'an Great Elder Princess's Mansion was obsequious to Shao Wanru.

"Who suddenly came to see Grandma?" Shao Wanru abruptly changed the topic and asked.

"Infanta Yuan'an and Ruiping Great Elder Princess. In the past, Ruiping Great Elder Princess was not very close to our master. Recently, for some unknown reasons, she visited my master frequently," the old maid in charge answered.

Shao Wanru had an inspiration, "Why did they come today?"

"Nothing serious. They just wanted to inquire about your doctor because they heard there was a miracle-working doctor with remarkable medical skills in the Prince Chen's Mansion. Infanta Yuan'an wanted the great doctor in your mansion to examine the wound on her face. But since it was inconvenient for you to receive guests, Ruiping Great Elder Princess brought Infanta Yuan'an to our master."

The old maid answered cleverly.

The so-called miracle-working doctor in the Prince Chen's Mansion was Qi Jue.

The Empress Dowager found this highly skilled doctor, especially for Chu Liuchen. On purpose, she let him live in the Prince Chen's Mansion, which meant Qi Jue served exclusively for the Prince Chen's Mansion. Because he was not an imperial physician in the Palace, he could not be summoned by others at will.

No matter who wanted to ask Qi Jue for treatment, they had to get Chu Liuchen's consent. Since this excellent doctor oversaw all the medical records of Chu Liuchen, his importance was self-evident.

Chu Liuchen had been in poor health, so his medical records were kept out of reach of others. Beyond all doubt, this great doctor, with his unique value and importance, had superior status in the Prince Chen's Mansion.

"Hasn't Infanta Yuan'an recovered from the injury on her face?" Shao Wanru asked in confusion. According to what Infanta Yuan'an had said, Prince Zhou should have sent Doctor Qiu to see her.

"There seemed to be something wrong with her wound. I stayed outside just now and didn't hear it clearly. They said her wound's condition was not good and wanted to ask the miracle-working doctor of Prince Chen's Mansion to look at it. My master meant that if Your Highness thought it was okay, they could see the doctor. Otherwise, they would have to drop the idea. But it wasn't a good thing to help them."

The Nanny in-charge passed on Rui'an Great Elder Princess's message.

Though the two families were not close to each other in the past, they kept in close contact lately. Since Ruiping Great Elder Princess and Infanta Yuan'an had been so subservient, it was hard for her to refuse them. However, Rui'an Great Elder Princess was unwilling to put Shao Wanru in an awkward situation, so she just said those words.

Shao Wanru's eyes darkened. It was indeed inappropriate for her to intervene in this matter. After thinking for a while, she said, "Go and tell my grandma that I'm indeed not feeling very well. Push their request away for the time being, and let's talk about it later."

She refused to receive guests with the excuse that she was in poor health. Even Rui'an Great Elder Princess seldom came over, let alone others. That was why Infanta Yuan'an didn't go directly to her but to Rui'an Great Elder Princess's Mansion first.

The two families appeared to have a good relationship, so they should go to Rui'an Great Elder Princess's Mansion to sound out Shao Wanru's view on this matter. If Shao Wanru agreed, they wouldn't be afraid of being rejected at the gate.

The Nanny in-charge responded briefly. After conveying all the necessary information, she took leave of Shao Wanru.

"My Lady, if Infanta Yuan'an's face hasn't recovered yet, it may affect her marriage." Qu Le came in with a few pieces of satin. She had just stood aside and heard the talk in the room. At this time, when the visitor left, she stepped inside.

"According to the schedule, it should be affected. When Infanta Yuan'an was in Palace, she trusted Doctor Qiu very much and didn't even allow the imperial physicians to reapply for medicine. Doesn't she believe him now?"

Shao Wanru muttered to herself.

"Doctor Qiu's medicine might be useless!" Yujie curled her lips and said.

She appreciated doctors like Mingqiu Nun and would never like Doctor Qiu. No matter how fantastic his medical skills were, she despised such a doctor without medical ethics.

Wang Yishu died because of Doctor Qiu's "superb" medical skills.

"My Lady, we can't help Infanta Yuan'an. Who knows what medicine Doctor Qiu has given her? If she recovers, Doctor Qiu will take the credit. If not, our mansion will take the blame," Yujie turned back and advised Shao Wanru not to get involved.

"My Lady, this matter about Infanta Yuan'an will be very tricky to handle," Qu Le echoed.

Shao Wanru nodded, feeling a nameless feeling rising in her. "Could it be that Doctor Qiu would no longer treat Infanta Yuan'an? Why would she come to beg me?"

Nevertheless, there was no hurry at the moment. Her grandma would turn down this request, and she had closed the gate to visitors. Although she had gone out once, there were still rumors that she was feeling unwell. Infanta Yuan'an and Rui'an Great Elder Princess wouldn't come to see her rashly. During this period, she lived a much quieter life inside the mansion.

At the moment, it was vital to focus on the Imperial Household Department.

"Go and bring Qing'er to me!"

Due to a sense of foreboding, Shao Wanru needed Qing'er to investigate Duke Cheng'en of the Imperial Household Department. What happened to the Empress Dowager in her previous life was probably related to her biological brother, Duke Cheng'en.

No one but Duke Cheng'en got off with a whole skin after the appalling tragedy on the Empress Dowager's birthday.

If it had been someone else, his property would have been confiscated, and his entire family would have been exterminated. At least, he would have been dismissed from his post and could never be an official again. But Duke Cheng'en was the Empress Dowager's brother, which could explain some things...

When Duke Cheng'en returned from the court, he casually strolled on the street. Not young anymore, he didn't like sitting in the carriage all the time, so he often got out of the carriage on the street not far from home and asked the coachman to drive the carriage back first. Then, with his hands clasped behind his back, he strolled home, followed by one or two servants.

He walked unhurriedly and happily.

Duke Cheng'en knew his limitations. Though he was in charge of the Imperial Household Department, many things were done by his subordinates. Every working day, he only needed to present himself for the morning call and provide a few signatures.

When nothing major happened, he would go back to his mansion early. While strolling leisurely through the street, he enjoyed watching the goods in different shops along the way. Always smiling in a good mood, he looked pretty amiable.

Medical Princess

Chapter 1075: The Collage of Maple Leaves Showed up!

Duke Cheng'en was well aware of his situation. It was already impressive enough for him to be Duke Cheng'en and live a peaceful and prosperous life. As for other matters, he wasn't that capable of being too ambitious.

His sister was the Empress Dowager, and his nephew was the Emperor. He was satisfied with that.

Duke Cheng'en was an elder who was quite friendly to others. He passed through the street often. When people who knew him greeted him, he would respond delightedly with a nod.

The Imperial Household Department managed all miscellaneous items in the Palace. Thus, Duke Cheng'en thought he should pay attention to the prices of some goods on the market. Otherwise, if the prices of goods bought by the Imperial Household Department were much higher than the current market prices, others might think he had pocketed the difference.

Sometimes, when coming across some really nice goods and confirming they wouldn't bring extra problems, Duke Cheng'en would place an order for them and send these goods to the Palace.

When some astute businessmen learned about it, they treated Duke Cheng'en with particular enthusiasm. Some even deliberately waited on the roadside to see if they could please Duke Cheng'en, who might take a fancy to their goods in passing.

If the Palace accepted their products, it would bring them more profit and a lasting fame. As long as the Palace had ordered those businessmen's products, even only once, they could brag and blare about their success upon returning. For a businessman, it was a matter of honor that they had done business with the Palace, which proved that they would be very capable of running the business.

Others would know it was safe and secure to do business with him.

Therefore, Duke Cheng'en always received a lot of hospitable greetings on his way back.

Duke Cheng'en, in a cheerful state of mind, strolled all the way and greeted people from time to time. Occasionally, he would go into a shop to see items inside, but he hadn't met anything satisfactory. So, he just passed by those shops casually.

"Your Grace, we got several choice goods today. How about taking a look at them?" When they passed by an antique store, the shopkeeper had been waiting for him by the door for a long time. As soon as Duke Cheng'en emerged, he greeted him from a distance.

This shop was Duke Cheng'en's favorite. Whenever he was nearby on weekdays, he would pay a visit to it. So, he was familiar with the shopkeeper here.

As he strode into the store, he asked, "What are your fine goods?"

"You will know when you see them," said the shopkeeper, beaming while leading Duke Cheng'en in.

They went straight to the reserved lounge and sat down when a shop-boy brought them tea just in time. Duke Cheng'en took a sip and praised, "Your tea is not bad!"

"Your Grace, I'm flattered. Everyone knows that most of the tea you drink is rewarded from the Palace. I only have some ordinary tea leaves, but they're quite fresh," the shopkeeper said politely with a smile.

"Your tea is not just fresh, right?" Duke Cheng'en took another sip, savoring every drop.

Spring tea had already come into the market, and the Palace sent him a batch of new tea. However, Duke Cheng'en was surprised to find that the tea before him tasted better.

"Your Grace, you're amazing to notice its delicate flavor. To be honest, the tea is not for sale. There are only a few tea trees grown in my hometown, and my family has taken good care of them. When it was almost time, we invited young girls to pick tea leaves before the real beginning of cool autumn. After that, highly skilled craftsmen were invited to roast tea leaves on the spot. It took a lot of effort to make a batch of tea, though not much. If you like the tea, I can share with you one catty. That's all I can offer!"

The old shopkeeper was pretty acquainted with Duke Cheng'en, so he spoke frankly.

"Okay, then, thank you for that!" Duke Cheng'en smiled at him with gratitude. He took a fancy to this flavor, which tasted even better than different kinds of top-grade tea from the Palace.

However, the tea was the shopkeeper's secret stash. Since the small amount of tea was far from enough for people in the Palace to share, it might cause trouble if he brought it to the Palace.

The number of things provided for the Palace must be guaranteed. Otherwise, they might not satisfy noble madams in the Palace who liked the tea and wanted more. In that case, they had better not do that and avoid the trouble in the beginning. What was worse, if they couldn't give the Emperor what he was eager to get, they might be beheaded.

It is said that articles of tribute to the Palace were always the best, but not absolutely so.

Seeing Duke Cheng'en accept the tea leaves, the shopkeeper clapped two times. Two shop-boys waiting at the door instantly came in with a few brocade boxes and paintings.

The brocade boxes were opened one by one while the paintings were placed aside.

The shopkeeper stood up, pointed at one of them, and smiled at Duke Cheng'en. "Your Grace, what do you think of the jade pendant?"

At first glance, this blood-red piece of jade looked extraordinary. It was glittering and translucent without any flaws. The bright red jade dazzled Duke Cheng'en's eyes, and he knew immediately it couldn't be a common piece.

Duke Cheng'en rose to his feet and picked up the jade pendant. While nodding in admiration, he said, "Not bad. Nice. Very good. It's good stuff."

He took it up and examined it against the sun. Indeed, it was sparkingly bright and exquisite.

"Please look at this." The shopkeeper smiled, gesturing at another brocade box. There was a ruby in it. It was cut a little but was still a whole piece, which was rare in the market. At the sight of the ruby of excellent quality, Duke Cheng'en couldn't help gasping in admiration again.

In the third brocade box was a red piece of something unknown that looked like a mushroom, but it was not.

"What's this?" Duke Cheng'en asked curiously, reaching out to grab it.

"Your Grace, slow down. This is not the way to take it!" The shopkeeper held out his hand and stopped Duke Cheng'en. Then, with meticulous care, he carried the brocade box before Duke Cheng'en. "Your Grace, smell it!"

"Is this... blood glossy ganoderma?" Duke Cheng'en got a sniff of the air around it. A waft of faint herbal fragrance drifted into his nostrils, refreshing him immediately, and his eyes lit up.

The shopkeeper gave him a thumbs up. "Your Grace, you are of excellent judgment. It's genuine blood glossy ganoderma! It's not big but has grown for many years."

"Fabulous. Good, very good!" Duke Cheng'en praised repeatedly.

"Please come and see if you like any of these paintings. They are all original, and their provenance has been examined. So, you don't have to doubt their authenticity."

The shopkeeper walked up to a few paintings, picking up one. He unfolded it and spread it out on the table.

Duke Cheng'en walked over and nodded as he appreciated it. He barely had gains in the imperial court but had an artist's eye for scripts and paintings. The piece before him was indeed good.

After viewing the first one, he turned to another. Anyway, the few pieces were impressive. Though inferior to the three previous things, they were also fine-quality goods that couldn't be found on the market.

After viewing all items, Duke Cheng'en said, "I want them all. Give me a discount, or they'll make me bankrupt."

"Your Grace, you must be joking. You can even effortlessly take over my shop, let alone these small items. This money is not much to be particular about." After the business was done, the shopkeeper in a good mood naturally flattered Duke Cheng'en and asked a shop-boy to lead Duke Cheng'en's servant to pay the bill.

"It's the Empress Dowager's birthday. I've always wanted a few unique gifts for Her Majesty. Recently, I've spent a great deal of money recently," Duke Cheng'en chatted.

He had specially entrusted the shopkeeper with finding these things. Though he needed more, it was good to get some of them first.

"Your Grace, how could you complain of being hard up before humble businessmen like me? But since you've mentioned it, I'd like to sell them at a 10% discount this time. It's generous enough, isn't it?" The shopkeeper looked distressed.

“Okay, great! Thank you for that, dear boss!” Duke Cheng’en laughed heartily.

This shop had built up a fine reputation. It offered no discount, no matter how many things its customers bought. This time, the shopkeeper made an exception especially for Duke Cheng’en, giving him a 10% discount.

These items were worth a mint. In this way, they undercharged Duke Cheng’en a lot of money.

“Your Grace, please visit our shop more often,” the shopkeeper said happily.

While they were talking, the shop-boy and servant had figured out the total price. Then, after telling the shop-boy to get cheques for silver from his Madam with his servant, Duke Cheng’en continued wandering through the streets.

As soon as he walked out of the door, Duke Cheng’en suddenly saw a shop-boy chasing after him.

“Your Grace, my boss said there was another painting. Do you want to see it?” The shop-boy looked unfamiliar, but he was wearing the uniform of the shop Duke Cheng’en had just visited and caught up with him from behind. Duke Cheng’en thought the shopkeeper must have found something suitable just now.

He turned around and walked back.

“Your Grace, you don’t have to walk back. Just stay here and have a look. Our shopkeeper asked me to bring it back if you didn’t like it. In this way, you can save yourself the trouble of running around,” the shop assistant said cleverly, pointing to the shop not far away. “Our shopkeeper said that if you liked it, I could take it to your mansion. As for the money, he could negotiate it with you later. He doesn’t need to worry about your credit, right?”

The shop-boy was good at talking with customers. After he finished his words in one breath with a smile, Duke Cheng’en repeatedly nodded in agreement. Then he looked back at the door of the shop not far away. Although it was nearby, it would be troublesome to go back. There was indeed no need to go there for a painting. With the trustworthy relationship between the shopkeeper and him, the shopkeeper must know he would pay the bill eventually.

It was just a matter of a painting. There was indeed no need to return to the shop. Duke Cheng’en nodded, took the painting, and opened it. When Duke Cheng’en saw the whole picture, his eyes immediately lit up.

Maple leaves were used as the base of this painting. In his mind, he had imagined precisely the same wonderful picture. Duke Cheng’en had asked painters in the Palace to draw the same kind of paintings, but none of their works was satisfactory.

The Empress Dowager had two biological sons and raised a third child, so she had three sons under her name. If the picture needed to express the affection between the Empress Dowager and her sons, it should include a mother and three princes.

The painting before him had all the necessary elements, almost perfectly reflecting Duke Cheng’en’s thoughts.

The woman in the painting looked kind and was feeding a child medicine. The child seemed to be the oldest. Another child was leaning on the woman's side with admiration, his limpid eyes watching his elder brother on the bed drinking medicine. Beside them, the youngest one was playing a ball. This adorable child turned around and looked at his mother and two elder brothers.

The scene made this picture very suitable, especially with its perfect artistic conception. The best part of the painting was the maple leaves, which formed most of the background. Even the women's clothes, skirts, children's jackets, and the quilt on the bed were made of maple leaves. Only a few ink strokes were added to the small blank space.

Others might not know that the Empress Dowager had a small hobby, but Duke Cheng'en was very clear about it. The scene shown in the picture was appropriate for her, so he thought the Empress Dowager would love it.

Medical Princess

Chapter 1076: Returning to the Capital at Full Speed

The sky had already darkened, but the carriages were still moving along the road.

Although Princess Yuyan was sitting in the carriage, she looked weary. She pulled aside the curtain and looked out with a gloomy face.

"Go and ask. Why can't we stop to rest? We will be in the wild again if we keep going ahead!" Princess Yuyan protested angrily.

"Your Highness!" The palace maid looked at her sheepishly because she didn't dare to see Prince Chen.

"What are you afraid of? Do you think he will kill you? He can't do that! No matter what, you are my maid." Seeing the cowardly palace maid, Princess Yuyan reproached grumpily.

Princess Yuyan had been pampered and spoiled in the past, so how could she stand this sort of hardship? When Chu Liuchen ordered the team to proceed slowly, she would go and visit him in a good mood from time to time. At that time, although Chu Liuchen ignored her, he was friendly. However, Prince Chen seemed to have lifted his softhearted mask after that incident.

"Your Highness, Your Highness..." The palace maid was so scared that she cried, knelt in the carriage, and begged, "Your Highness, I dare not!"

"You useless bitch, since you are useless, why do I have to keep you?" Princess Yuyan reached out in a great rage and slapped her hard in the face, venting all her anger on the palace maid.

The palace maid was knocked down in the carriage, screaming in pain with a clear palm print on her face.

"Princess Yuyan, what's the matter?" A cold voice suddenly came from outside the carriage, so harsh that it frightened and froze people in the carriage.

"Nothing serious. I just wanted to ask Prince Chen when we could rest." Princess Yuyan explained softly, her hand hanging in the air. Slowly, she let her hand drop after briefly touching her temple.

Outside the carriage, the guard answered coldly, "His Highness asked us to drive for another two hours. You can rest in the carriage!"

"How is His Highness?" Princess Yuyan lifted the curtain after putting on a worried look and asked with concern.

"Thank you for your concern." The guard answered indifferently, turned around, and left on his horse.

Princess Yuyan banged the curtain in her hand, her face livid with rage. Evidently, Prince Chen didn't take her seriously. One day, she would make Chu Liuchen fall for her and beg her to cast a glance at him.

"Your Highness..." The palace maid said timidly.

"Get up!" Princess Yuyan ordered harshly, secretly gnashing her teeth with anger. Chu Liuchen had killed one of her palace maids.

That night, she brought a palace maid to deliver a bowl of soup to Chu Liuchen, but Chu Liuchen asked someone to kill the maid with one sword strike. The scene was still Princess Yuyan's nightmare.

The people around her were all trembling with fear. No one dared to provoke Chu Liuchen, so she had no one to inquire about the information for her.

Princess Yuyan considered herself to be of unmatched beauty. In Xu State, many men tried their best to ingratiate themselves with her, but Prince Chen showed no tenderness toward her. She was unwilling to believe it.

Chu Liuchen must be blind not to see her beauty. When he realized how stunningly beautiful she was one day, Princess Yuyan would let him know the consequences of offending her.

In her mind, Princess Yuyan made this heartless decision. The guard had already urged the horse forward and came to the front of Chu Liuchen's carriage to report, "Your Highness, everything is fine. I have already passed the message!"

"Any objections?" Chu Liuchen's lazy voice came from the carriage.

"The two princesses and the two officials all thought it was a good idea to return to the capital quickly." In an unemotional voice, the guard answered flatly without considering the reality.

He heard that Princess Yuyan beat and scolded someone in the carriage and that Commandery Prince Qing smashed the cup. Anyway, he automatically ignored all of this and thought they all agreed. Since Princess Yutao and Ningyuan Army General had no objection, how could they oppose it?

In the carriage, Chu Liuchen leaned against the soft couch and said gently, "If anyone disagrees, report it to me."

"Yes, Your Highness!" The guard's heart skipped a beat, and he felt it was better not to bother Prince with such trivial things.

"Master, at this speed, can we arrive in the capital in time?" Xiao Xuanzi looked out of the gauze window. It was getting dark, and they had to move with lanterns soon. But even so, he considered it unlikely that they would return to the capital before Empress Dowager's birthday.

It would be too late even if they kept going quickly like this.

"I'll go first!" Chu Liuchen said in a casual manner.

Xiao Xuanzi's face suddenly turned solemn, and he sat straight to say, "Your Highness, your health..."

"I've almost recovered. I'll be fine when taking good care of myself!" Chu Liuchen chuckled. With a trace of coldness, his tender eyes appeared as sharp as an ice-breaking awl. "Since they all hope I can't go back, I must return in time to celebrate my Imperial Grandmother's birthday."

"Your Highness, who wants to stop you from entering the capital?" Xiao Xuanzi swallowed hard and asked cautiously.

Xiao Xuanzi asked just now subconsciously. After that, he remembered his master was not as weak as he appeared. The toxin had been removed from his body, and he was in the recuperation stage now. In the past, he was indeed in poor health. At present, he was just pretending to be weak.

Prince Chen had been fragile since he was a child, but he was accustomed to practicing martial arts. After detoxifying the poisonous substance, Prince Chen was much healthier than ordinary people. Yet Xiao Xuanzi was still worried. Over the years, Prince Chen's health was above everything, so it had become his habit to think this way.

"It doesn't matter who did it. I have to make sure that they can see me at my Imperial Grandmother's birthday party!" Chu Liuchen gave a little chuckle.

"Master... I am really worried about you going to the capital alone. I want to go with you," Xiao Xuanzi said.

"You stay here and sit in this carriage for me." Chu Liuchen shook his head and said indifferently. He looked gentle but somehow created an indescribable spooky and chill atmosphere.

It was indeed too late for such a large group of people to rush to the capital, but Prince Chen didn't need to take them with him. He could ride back with a few guards. As for his carriage, with Xiao Xuanzi inside, no one dared to open the carriage to see if he was inside.

Princess Yuyan had been trying to get closer to him. For the time being, she didn't have the energy and dared not to do that, which was very good. He had been away from the capital for so long, so he needed to go back earlier.

"Master, what if Princess Yuyan sends someone to snoop around your place?" Xiao Xuanzi asked. Other people wouldn't take the initiative to see Prince Chen, except for this bumptious Princess Yuyan, who was always looking for opportunities to show up before his master.

Killing one of her palace maids brought them a few peaceful days, but they couldn't guarantee that she would no longer send someone over.

"If so, kill the person!" Chu Liuchen ruthlessly ordered as if he were talking about something romantic instead of killing.

"Yes, I understand," Xiao Xuanzi said, beaming.

He had been serving Prince Chen long, so how could he not understand his master's thoughts? However beautiful Princess Yuyan was, he wouldn't spare a glance for her. He had given all his tenderness to Princess Chen, so any other woman in his eyes was no different from men — they were all nothing special but humans.

For him, these people were divided into two groups only: useful and useless.

If Princess Yuyan approached, they could disgrace her. After they delivered severe blows to her pride, she wouldn't dare to get any closer.

"In a few days, I will go straight back to the capital. I'll find someone to dress up like me, so you go on the trip to the capital in a hurry. Everything will be fine as long as Qin Huaiyong doesn't suspect anything. Chu Qing seems to be sensible enough and won't bother me." Chu Liuchen snorted.

After the incident with Princess Yuyan, Chu Qing had stayed quiet these days.

"Your Highness, do we still need to intercept Commandery Prince Qing's messages to the capital?" Xiao Xuanzi whispered his question. Along the way, Chu Qing had repeatedly sent messages to the capital, but they were all intercepted. The matter about Princess Yuyan was an accident, and Commandery Prince Qing seemed very anxious. Since he received no news from the capital, he kept sending new letters over there.

"Sure. Intercept all his letters, no matter whom he writes to!" Chu Liuchen pursed his thin lips. "If he insists on sending letters to the capital, wiping out a few of his subordinates will silence him!"

"Yes, Master. I see!" Xiao Xuanzi immediately understood what his master wanted, knowing full well that his master would punish Commandery Prince Qing as a warning to others. Commandery Prince Qing had done a lot of things behind. Although he looked honest, he was pretty scheming.

Shao Wanru didn't know that Chu Liuchen intended to leave the group and hurry to the capital alone.

She was listening to the news Qing'er got. Words from Qing'er sent chills up her back.

It was actually Duke Cheng'en. Or, not surprisingly, it was Duke Cheng'en.

"Sent to the Duke Cheng'en's Mansion?" Shao Wanru finished listening to Qing'er's report, wrinkling her long and slender eyebrows thoughtfully. "Is there anything wrong with the picture or the maple leaves?"

"It is unlikely to be maple leaves. But if not, what will go wrong?"

"How can I get this painting from Duke Cheng'en? He must have bought such a painting as the Empress Dowager's birthday gift." Princess Chen pondered, slightly biting her lips. It hadn't been long after she married Chu Liuchen, and she didn't visit the Duke Cheng'en's Mansion before, so it was not convenient for her to take the initiative to call on Duke Cheng'en at this time.

"Yes, it was sent to the Duke Cheng'en's Mansion. I only sent one person to keep an eye on him. The shop-boy was seen delivering the painting to the Duke Cheng'en's Mansion. After that, he blended into the crowd. Our person turned around and entered a shop later on. But when he searched around, the shop-boy was already gone."

Qing'er said.

The shop-boy was very cautious. Even though the shop-boy did not find that someone was following him, he acted with some sensitivity.

“Go on watching the Duke Cheng’en’s Mansion. If Duke Cheng’en takes that painting out, report it to me immediately!” Shao Wanru bit her lip gently and said.

Anyway, she had to get the painting. Even if she didn’t get it, she had to destroy it. It was a pity that she hadn’t yet found an excuse to go to the Duke Cheng’en’s Mansion.

She had no reason to go there, let alone get the painting.

Shao Wanru mildly twisted the handkerchief between her fingers, suddenly stood up, and said decisively, “Let’s go to my grandma’s place now!”

Since Shao Wanru couldn’t do it herself, her grandmother could. Compared with her, a newly married wife of Prince Chen, it was more reasonable for her grandmother to drop in on such an old aristocratic family.

She needed a justifiable reason to go to the Duke Cheng’en’s Mansion. Now only her grandmother could solve this problem...

Medical Princess

Chapter 1077: A Surprise: Doctor Qiu Returned to His Home Village?

Rui’an Great Elder Princess was very surprised that Shao Wanru came over at this time. She took her hand and let her sit down. After looking her up and down and ensuring that she was no different from before, Rui’an Great Elder Princess breathed a sigh of relief.

She wanted to see her granddaughter before, but Shao Wanru told her not to come over and said if she visited, someone would inquire about the news.

“Why would you come to see me today? Is there anything wrong?” Rui’an Great Elder Princess asked with concern.

Shao Wanru had told her not to visit each other, but she suddenly came here. Rui’an Great Elder Princess was really worried.

“Grandma, I’m fine. I just want to see you. What happened before is over. It’s okay to come and see you now!”

Shao Wanru smiled, pulling and shaking her grandmother’s hand.

Shao Wanru didn’t want to get Rui’an Great Elder Princess involved in the matter of the painting.

It was best not to know about this kind of thing. Her grandmother was stubborn and had a quick temper, so it was safest to keep it from her.

What happened in her previous life was unimaginably queer. She didn’t have to explain too much to her grandma, which would only trouble her.

"Look at you. You've been so mysterious and didn't let me see you. And you didn't tell me what had happened in detail. What was going on? Why would the Emperor's imperial guards come to your mansion?" Rui'an Great Elder Princess waved her hand and asked after everyone else had left.

This matter had worried her for several days. She believed in her granddaughter's words and did nothing. Otherwise, she would have gotten out immediately to see the Empress Dowager in the Palace.

It was never a good thing for any mansion when the imperial guards of the Emperor showed up there, for they would usually come with fatal disasters. However, these guards generated "loud thunder, little rain" this time, which made others more skeptical.

Chu Liuchen was not in the mansion, so Shao Wanru was the first one they suspected.

Rui'an Great Elder Princess felt relieved and trusted her granddaughter after Shao Wanru strategically dealt with matters related to Marquis Xing's Mansion with ease. She listened to Shao Wanru's words and forcefully fought down her impulse to take any action.

"Grandmother, it was no big deal. They came for surviving evildoers of the former dynasty. Someone must have leaked the news to the Emperor on purpose, so he sent his guards over. Fortunately, the chief supervisor was there. As a princess who managed the inner court, I was of very little use then, though I had a noble status."

Shao Wanru said smilingly, her watery eyes crinkling into a smile. Seeing that she replied with a casual air, Rui'an Great Elder Princess was convinced that the matter was nothing serious.

Rui'an Great Elder Princess breathed a sigh of relief because she feared something terrible had happened.

The chief supervisor of Prince Chen's Mansion was someone even she had to show some respect for. He had once been the general steward in the deceased empress's place and protected the young master wholeheartedly. To secure his young master's safety, he even didn't want to stay in the Palace. For this reason only, Rui'an Great Elder Princess appreciated this loyal general steward.

Thinking about what happened that day, she had a deep gratitude toward the chief steward. Zhuozhuo was smart, but she was young after all and wasn't very experienced. When encountering severe trouble, she would be flustered. Luckily, the chief supervisor made arrangements and solved this big problem.

Thinking of this, Rui'an Great Elder Princess still felt a burst of lingering fear. No one expected the Emperor to send the imperial guards to the Prince Chen's Mansion. There were some guards sent by him standing before the gate of Prince Chen's Mansion, but they were there to protect the Prince Chen's Mansion instead of disturbing Princess Chen's peaceful life.

She had thought that the Emperor was going to crush Prince Chen.

"When you return, bring a gift to the chief supervisor in your mansion and thank him for me!" said Rui'an Great Elder Princess.

"Thank you, Grandma, on behalf of him!" Shao Wanru accepted it fully at ease, smiling brightly.

Given her grandma's character, she would thank the current chief supervisor. If she refused the present, it would arouse her grandma's suspicion, so it was best to accept it cheerfully.

"Grandma, hasn't Infanta Yuan'an's face fully recovered? I heard that the former doctor had good medical skills. Didn't the treatment work?" Shao Wanru changed the topic and asked curiously.

Rui'an Great Elder Princess planned to visit the Prince Chen's Mansion, but she dropped this idea because Infanta Yuan'an and Ruiping Great Elder Princess suddenly called on her.

Her question successfully attracted Rui'an Great Elder Princess's attention. She shook her head and said, "That doctor is good, but I heard that he had returned to his home village!"

"Was he back home?" Shao Wanru was stunned for a moment because this reason came as a total surprise to her.

"Did Doctor Qiu have a hometown? Where was his hometown? After a few changes on his household register, no one would know which place was his real hometown."

"That was what I heard. There was something wrong with his family, so he had to go back. He left some medicine for Infanta Yuan'an, but she accidentally broke the medicine container. So, she was anxious to find another doctor with excellent medical skills." Rui'an Great Elder Princess sighed.

Rui'an Great Elder Princess was frank and outspoken but had a sympathetic heart. She couldn't bear to see Infanta Yuan'an in tears. When they came over that day, although Infanta Yuan'an had a veil on her face, she took it off and showed the wound to her. There were indeed scars on her face. A woman's appearance was the most precious. In particular, Infanta Yuan'an was about to marry Prince Zhou.

With such a face, her wedding couldn't be a decent event for her. Instead, it was going to be humiliating.

"Did Doctor Qiu return home?" Shao Wanru didn't believe it from the bottom of her heart. She had lived in the Marquis Xing's Mansion for three years but had never seen Doctor Qiu go back home. Mingqiu Nun had mentioned Doctor Qiu was an orphan. Thus, how could he have a hometown?

It was obviously an excuse. "But what matter of vital importance that Doctor Qiu had to handle in person?" He even gave up treating the wound on Infanta Yuan'an's face halfway!

"Did he leave to see another person more important than Infanta Yuan'an? Or were there any other reasons?" Shao Wanru really couldn't figure it out at the moment.

With all kinds of thoughts in her heart, Shao Wanru still looked calm and said with a smile, "Why wouldn't Infanta Yuan'an go to find an imperial physician in the Palace? All imperial physicians in the Imperial Institute of Medicine have excellent medical skills. How could they want a doctor in my mansion? Besides, Doctor Qi never gives medical advice to outsiders."

Qi Jue had left with Chu Liuchen, which was unknown to others. Yet, Shao Wanru didn't intend to reveal the information to others.

"Ruiping Great Elder Princess told me that Yuan'an didn't trust the imperial physicians in the Palace, saying they couldn't cure her. These imperial physicians with poor judgment even asked her to wipe off the ointment on her face." Rui'an Great Elder Princess explained.

Shao Wanru was speechless for a while. Infanta Yuan'an looked down upon the imperial physicians working for the Palace but only took a fancy to the miracle-working Doctor Qi in the Prince Chen's Mansion. The reason sounded pretty unconvincing.

“What did you tell them?”

“I only said you were not in good health. You had struggled to go out once, but you could hardly pull yourself up to meet outsiders. Even I didn’t go to disturb you for fear of consuming your limited energy. So, I told them they could only wait and see,” said Rui’an Great Elder Princess. Then she looked at Shao Wanru and reminded her, “I refused them with this excuse, but today you came out in good condition. I’m afraid that Infanta Yuan’an will come to us again and may even go directly to the Prince Chen’s Mansion. You should be prepared for that.”

“Don’t worry. I got it.” Shao Wanru responded with a nod. Since she had come to the Rui’an Great Elder Princess’s Mansion, she was not seriously ill. It would no longer be proper for them to turn down their request for this reason.

“It’s a tricky matter. She had received treatment from another doctor but hasn’t fully recovered. If her scars heal after the doctor in your mansion takes over her case, her previous doctor will get the credit. However, if she doesn’t recover, it will be your mansion’s fault. Prince Zhou’s wedding is a big deal where there’s no room for risk,” Rui’an Great Elder Princess spoke without reservation because Shao Wanru might be too young and ignorant to understand how serious this matter was.

“Grandma, trust me. I know it, and I won’t take this task!” Shao Wanru assured her.

“But if she comes to you, what would you do? You can’t refuse her directly, can you?” Rui’an Great Elder Princess was still worried. After thinking about it over and over again, she felt Shao Wanru shouldn’t have come out during this period. It was best for her to get out after Chu Liuchen went back home.

When Chu Liuchen was home, no one dared to go and ask for an insult in the Prince Chen’s Mansion.

At present, when her granddaughter was in charge of the mansion, unlike Chu Liuchen, she had to receive guests with courtesy!

“If she asks for help in our mansion, I have a solution. Rest assured, Grandma!” Shao Wanru said with complete confidence, smiling and patting her chest with assurance.

Looking at the confident look on her delicate small face, Rui’an Great Elder Princess laughed despite worries filling her heart.

Then she took her hand and sighed. “Zhuozhuo, if you need anything, just tell me. I know I am not very capable, but I can always do something to protect you.”

Her grandma looked worried and concerned, and Shao Wanru couldn’t help feeling deeply touched. She reached out to hug Rui’an Great Elder Princess and said, “Set your heart at ease about it, Grandma. With you, I feel secure!”

In her previous life, Rui’an Great Elder Princess was forced to live an ascetic life in a nunnery, lone and helpless because all her families were dead. Though she had a noble and distinguished status, Rui’an Great Elder Princess had no choice but to end up in the nunnery. Shao Wanru wouldn’t believe it was her genuine and sincere desire to accept such a fate.

The eye corners of Rui’an Great Elder Princess reddened slightly. She reached out to pat Shao Wanru on her thin shoulder, feeling very weepy. Her granddaughter was really sensible and intelligent. At such a

young age, Shao Wanru was so prudent and capable that she could even make strategic plans for her grandma and Hao'er. Thinking of her laborious efforts, Rui'an Great Elder Princess was suddenly overcome by sorrow.

If Shao Wanru had grown up in soft surroundings, she wouldn't have endured so many hardships and racked her brain to survive. Rui'an Great Elder Princess would rather see her granddaughter live happily under the protection of her parents and other family members, though she might become naive and ignorant.

How could she have gained such a keen insight into matters if she had never been pushed into a desperate situation?

Shao Wanru rarely talked about the affairs of the Qin's Mansion to Rui'an Great Elder Princess. Even if she mentioned something, she would put bad things aside and only share joyful things that happened in her childhood. Rui'an Great Elder Princess knew her granddaughter didn't want her to feel worried, so she reported only what was good while concealing what was unpleasant.

Her granddaughter was just so considerate that she secretly bore a heavy responsibility. But how many heavy burdens could such a delicate girl shoulder?

"Grandma, I'm fine and feel very happy with Prince Chen, you, and Hao'er." Shao Wanru seemed to have seen through her mind, and threw into her arms and said softly. She hugged Rui'an Great Elder Princess tightly and let her go with a smile.

"You, you..." Rui'an Great Elder Princess couldn't utter a word. "Why does she ask for so little? A little happiness can make her happy." Rui'an Great Elder Princess choked with sobs, feeling very distressed about Shao Wanru's great strength of character.

"Grandma, I have something to trouble you today!" Seeing her grandma cry, Shao Wanru hurriedly shook her sleeve and begged like a spoiled child.

"What is it? Tell me!" Rui'an Great Elder Princess asked anxiously because she was eager to help.

[Medical Princess](#)

Chapter 1078: Going to the Duke Cheng'en's Mansion

"How are you getting along with the Duke Cheng'en's Mansion?" Shao Wanru asked, fluttering her long eyelashes.

In case of any incidents, she didn't tell her grandma the truth. Her grandma was straightforward and couldn't hide anything, so the less she knew, the safer she would be.

"The Duke Cheng'en's Mansion? The Empress Dowager's parents' home?" Rui'an Great Elder Princess asked in surprise, "What happened in the Duke Cheng'en's Mansion?"

"Nothing serious, Grandma. It's for the Imperial Grandmother's birthday. I've married into the Prince Chen's Mansion, and Chu Liuchen is not at home now. It's my first time preparing a birthday gift for my Imperial Grandmother. My gift should please her. But since I haven't known her long, I want to inquire about her preferences from the Duke Cheng'en's Mansion."

Shao Wanru lowered her head shyly, her fair and tender face flushing slightly with embarrassment.

As a newly married young lady, she looked uneasy, but her delicate face was radiant with delight and shyness. Seeing her like this, Rui'an Great Elder Princess smiled delightedly. This was what a newly married woman looked like. She was always worried that her young granddaughter couldn't remain lovely and innocent when carrying the heavy burden of responsibility.

At present, it seemed that she was satisfied with her marriage. Otherwise, she wouldn't look so cherubic.

"Okay, it doesn't matter. Madam of Duke Cheng'en and I are on pretty good terms. Tomorrow, we can visit her and ask her about the Empress Dowager's preferences." Rui'an Great Elder Princess said with a smile, "I also know some things she likes. You don't have to go there to get the information."

Having been the Empress Dowager's sister-in-law for so many years, she had a not-bad understanding of her preferences.

"Of course, you know some, but Zhuozhuo wants more details. If I accidentally annoy Her Majesty, she will not be happy with me. It will even bring disgrace on Prince Chen," Shao Wanru said with a shy smile. What she said was very in line with her current identity.

Sure enough, newly married daughters-in-law were afraid of not being favored by the elders of her husband's family and even accidentally offending them. Daughters-in-law of ordinary families were like this, let alone Shao Wanru, who had married into the royal family, the greatest family in the world.

"Okay, okay, it's all up to you!" Rui'an Great Elder Princess repeatedly nodded, suddenly feeling they might as well visit the Duke Cheng'en's Mansion together. As soon as Shao Wanru returned to the Prince Chen's Mansion, she sent a notification to the Duke Cheng'en's Mansion.

She took Shao Wanru to the Duke Cheng'en's Mansion early the next morning.

Madam of Duke Cheng'en, who received the message long ago, had been waiting for them.

When Shao Wanru followed Young Madam of the Duke Cheng'en's Mansion to a parlor, an old lady sitting in the center stood up, her face wreathed with smiles.

Though Madam of Duke Cheng'en was the Empress Dowager's sister-in-law, her status was inferior to Rui'an Great Elder Princess and Princess Chen.

"Madam, why stand on ceremony? It's not the first time that I've been here." Rui'an Great Elder Princess quickly took two steps forward, pulled up Madam of Duke Cheng'en, who was about to bow and said with a smile.

"Yes, you're right, but Princess Chen is coming to our place for the first time. I should treat her with courtesy and enough respect!" Duke Cheng'en said with a smile and intended to salute Shao Wanru again.

With a graceful lift of her hand, Shao Wanru signed for her not to do so and said while beaming, "Madam, that's very kind of you. You are my elder, so you don't have to be so polite."

Madam of Duke Cheng'en looked at Shao Wanru, who was of peerless beauty and exceedingly refined, and couldn't help nodding in her heart in admiration. This was the first time she had seen Shao Wanru in

person. She had heard from the Empress Dowager that Prince Chen had taken a fancy to Shao Wanru and even had waited for her for a few years.

With this in mind, she thought more highly of Shao Wanru from the bottom of her heart. Unlike her, many people didn't take Shao Wanru seriously because she was young and just happened to win the favor of Prince Chen. Perhaps, she would soon be in disgrace with Prince Chen, who appeared to be gentle but was very cold-hearted. No one could win his heart.

Shao Wanru married into the Prince Chen's Mansion only because of her outstanding appearance.

Madam of Duke Cheng'en was aged and had experienced many things. Prince Chen was indeed ruthless. Initially, she intended to let one of her granddaughters marry Prince Chen. In her mind, though Prince Chen might not live long, he had a distinguished status.

However, Prince Chen didn't show a little bit of enthusiasm toward her granddaughters. When anyone of them met Prince Chen, he was well-mannered, but in Duke Cheng'en's eyes, he viewed them without any real feel as if looking at lifeless items. From that moment on, Madam of Duke Cheng'en had no intention of marrying her granddaughter into the Prince Chen's Mansion.

Prince Chen chose this girl himself and had waited for her for three years, so it was apparent that he cared much about her. Madam of Duke Cheng'en watched Chu Liuchen grow up and knew that once this cold-blooded prince fell in love with Shao Wanru, no one could replace her.

Princess Chen looked indeed extraordinary, not only in her appearance but also in her manners.

It was said that Shao Wanru had been raised in the Qin's Mansion since she was a child. Her life was not very good: without a biological mother to teach and support her, she even had to deal with her adoptive mother's sinister plots. Yet, despite all of this, her words and deeds were as good as that of Misses from aristocratic families. Honestly, she was even more decent in some aspects.

She deserved to be Princess Chen.

In the parlor, the three took their seats according to their positions. Rui'an Great Elder Princess was in the major guest seat, accompanied by Shao Wanru and Young Madam of the Duke Cheng'en's Mansion on either side of her.

"Great Elder Princess, how could you find some time to see me today?" Madam of Duke Cheng'en put down the teacup in her hand and asked with a smile.

"No big deal. It's just about the Empress Dowager's birthday. What good stuff has your mansion prepared? Could I see them for references?" Rui'an Great Elder Princess also set down the teacup and said with a smile.

She had discussed this request with Shao Wanru on their way here.

"To be honest, our manor has not prepared many gifts. My husband has brought some back and is still searching for new ones." Madam of Duke Cheng'en said with a smile.

In the past few days, Duke Cheng'en brought things back to the mansion practically every day. He said that he would choose the best ones but couldn't make up his mind in such a short time. Instead, he kept bringing things to his mansion almost every day.

At first, Madam of Duke Cheng'en paid great attention to them and checked these presents one by one. Then she became insensitive to the new items and just gave the money to the servant who went to pay the bill. Seeing that a great deal of money had gone, Madam of Duke Cheng'en told her husband not to buy so many things on impulse. He should only take these things that were remarkably good in his eyes.

"If you want to have a look, I will ask someone to show you what he has bought these days. They may not be good. After all, he can't make sure everything he selected can strike the Empress Dowager's fancy."

Madam of Duke Cheng'en said again while instructing the old maid behind her to take out all the things that Duke Cheng'en had bought these days.

The old maid took a few people to the Duke Cheng'en's study and moved a lot of things over to the parlor.

Rows of gifts were presented on the table. One brocade box was placed above another. Behind them were many scrolls of scripts and paintings.

"Why are there so many?" Rui'an Great Elder Princess opened her eyes wide in surprise. Looking at the table full of various items, she gasped for a while and said, "Are... are you going to send all of them to the Empress Dowager?"

"How could it be!" Madam of Duke Cheng'en smiled bitterly and said, "His Grace is ignorant of miscellaneous affairs. Whenever he saw something he likes, he would buy it and take it back, thinking the Empress Dowager must also like the things he took a fancy to. However, when he encountered a new good item, he felt it was better than the previous ones. With words of praise from the seller, he would think the new piece was the best and pay for it."

Madam of Duke Cheng'en had criticized her husband several times for this habit. Each time, Duke Cheng'en promised that he wouldn't do it again. However, because Duke Cheng'en was too trusting, he would listen to others' words the next day and think it was right to buy more things. Once again, his wife's repeated warnings to him passed his ear like a puff of wind, and he forgot them all.

Shao Wanru stood up curiously, walked around the table, and asked Madam of Duke Cheng'en, "Your Grace, may I have a look?"

"Do as you please, Your Highness!" Madam of Duke Cheng'en waved her hand and said. She had sharp eyes and could tell that Rui'an Great Elder Princess came here mainly to accompany Princess Chen.

Princess Chen had just married into the royal family. To please the Empress Dowager, she specially came here to see gifts picked up by the Duke Cheng'en's Mansion. In this way, she could know better what the Empress Dowager liked, which was really thoughtful. Madam of Duke Cheng'en admired Shao Wanru enormously, so she was willing to let her view all these gifts. Since the Empress Dowager liked Prince Chen, people in the Duke Cheng'en's Mansion should be nice to visitors from the Prince Chen's Mansion. Moreover, Madam of Duke Cheng'en was very fond of Shao Wanru.

"Your Highness, please have a look. Here is a piece of jade." Young Madam of the Duke Cheng'en's Mansion walked over, opened a brocade box, and showed it to Shao Wanru.

Shao Wanru looked into it. It was a piece of red jade, which looked beautiful.

"Here is a pair of jade bracelets." Young Madam of the Duke Cheng'en's Mansion opened another box with two exquisite and brilliant bracelets made of blood jade.

"A jade pendant."

The blood-jade ornament appeared simple and unsophisticated, obviously a rare ancient treasure.

"Please look at this ruby. It's a crude stone and hasn't yet been made into an artifact, so it can be matched with any gold accessories!"

"This tea set is made of blood-red cinnabar."

"These are 101 pink pearls, which can be made into a string of beads for clearing the heart and calming the mind."

"This is red..."

She opened the brocade boxes one by one. When these top-quality items, red or pink, came into view, Shao Wanru and Rui'an Great Elder Princess were stunned.

"I know the Empress Dowager prefers vibrant colors, but I've never heard she likes them to this extent!" Rui'an Great Elder Princess blinked and asked tentatively.

She had no idea that the Empress Dowager liked red so much. Did she neglect something important in the past? She had been the Empress Dowager's sister-in-law for so many years but never found this.

Madam of Duke Cheng'en gave a wry smile and said, "Do you think the Empress Dowager has such a partiality for red? It's His Grace who likes it. He said the Empress Dowager was quite fond of red ornaments a long time ago, so the gifts he prepared were all this red stuff. In fact, during these years, the Empress Dowager still likes red but doesn't express a strong preference. Only His Grace is a little confused and always thinks the Empress Dowager favors red!"

Speaking of this, Madam of Duke Cheng'en felt helpless. She had tried to persuade him but couldn't change his mind, no matter what she said. The Empress Dowager had gained her current status, so she no longer needed red to emphasize her position as the Empress like a long time ago. However, Duke Cheng'en was not to budge on the issue.

[Medical Princess](#)

Chapter 1079: The Meaningful Maple-leaf Painting

1079 The Meaningful Maple-leaf Painting

Madam of Duke Cheng'en knew her husband had something weighing on his mind.

It was related to the Empress Dowager.

At that time, he failed to live up to his expectations and couldn't support his sister. So, although his sister was the legal wife, she had been suppressed by a woman whom her husband favored. Whenever he thought of it, Duke Cheng'en felt sorry for his sister. Therefore, he devoted his energies to searching for red items for his sister. Since he had no strength to support his sister strongly, he kept sending her items that could display her dignity as a legal wife.

He was more than happy to lend her moral support.

Duke Cheng'en always felt sorry for his sister. Because he had never achieved anything significant and couldn't be his sister's robust backing, she was often upset by some unkindness. Yet, he seemed to have forgotten his sister was the Empress Dowager now. Besides, the current Emperor was not the Empress Dowager's husband but her biological son, who had to show enough respect for her.

The Empress Dowager no longer needed bright red clothes and ornaments to show her dignity and nobility as a legal wife.

Madam of Duke Cheng'en could see these things more clearly than her husband, so she repeatedly persuaded him to stop buying. However, he was bigoted and stubbornly believed that his sister would like everything he chose for her.

Since the Empress Dowager was happy with that, he made great efforts to get more to please his sister.

He was incompetent, but at least he could provide his sister with fine clothes and ornaments.

"His Grace thinks his sister had some hard times in the past!" Madam of Duke Cheng'en explained with a bitter smile.

Shao Wanru understood it and turned to look at these objects helplessly, setting her eyes on the scripts and paintings aside. Today, she didn't come here for the things in these brocade boxes.

Seeing that, Young Madam of the Duke Cheng'en's Mansion hurriedly took out a scroll and opened it. A landscape painting appeared in front of them, which seemed to be an authentic one.

Young Madam of the Duke Cheng'en's Mansion placed the painting before Shao Wanru and opened another painting named Cold River Night Fishing.

She put down the one in her hand and opened another.

One after another, these scrolls were unfolding. There were various paintings of beautiful scenery, different people, prosperous cities, and journeys.

Shao Wanru's liquid eyes drifted over these paintings and finally stopped on a few similar ones.

Most of these paintings were about mothers and sons: children playing, a mother and her sons having fun together, and a mother sewing new clothes for her sons.

These pictures varied but showed the same theme — the mother and sons living in harmony.

"These paintings... are almost the same!" Shao Wanru said softly as her fingers glided over a few paintings of mother and sons playing around.

"Father thinks it was best to prepare these pictures for Her Majesty. He has been searching for a picture reflecting the harmonious relationship between the Emperor and the Empress Dowager. Besides the Emperor, he wants all the Empress Dowager's children to be on one painting." Young Madam of the Duke Cheng'en's Mansion, a middle-aged woman already, was pretty intelligent.

When noticing Shao Wanru's figures sliding across the painting, she understood what she was thinking and quickly explained with a smile.

Everyone present knew the reason for Duke Cheng'en's choice.

"Which one does His Grace think is the best?" Shao Wanru's eyes fell on the painting, and she asked gently with curiosity that matched her age, fluttering her long eyelashes a few times.

"He said every piece was good, but none fit the feeling he imagined." Young Madam of the Duke Cheng'en's Mansion shook her head. "No painting satisfied him. I heard he had asked painters in the Palace to draw one for him, but he couldn't pick up one he thought was the most suitable."

Madam of Duke Cheng'en could do nothing about it when Duke Cheng'en insisted on doing this, and Young Madam of the Duke Cheng'en's Mansion was also under much pressure.

"Is there the most suitable one among these paintings?" Shao Wanru asked meaningfully, "Hasn't Duke Cheng'en found one that satisfied him?"

As she spoke, she casually lifted one painting to see, put it down, and picked up another one.

Her words reminded Madam of Duke Cheng'en, who thought for a moment and said, "There is one. He just got a painting and thought highly of it, but I didn't take it seriously and didn't look at it. I heard it was made of maple leaves. Is there anything like that among these paintings?"

With this, she came over to check but did not find the painting. Then she turned around and said something to the old maid behind her. The old maid nodded and left. After a while, she came back with a box.

Judging from the box's exterior, Shao Wanru could tell this painting must be more exquisite than the previous ones.

Opening the box, Madam of Duke Cheng'en carefully spread the painting and showed it to Shao Wanru, saying, "I forgot it. His Grace had mentioned this, saying that if he couldn't find a better one, he would choose this one and present it to the Empress Dowager before all the officials. Even the Emperor could feel her deep affection for her sons at that time!"

The whole picture gradually appeared before them, which gave a vivid description of a mother and three sons. One son was lying on the bed, seemingly ill. Her mother was taking good care of this sick eldest son. Another son was leaning against her affectionately, looking at the Eldest Brother on the bed. Near them, their ignorant youngest brother played happily and didn't notice what was happening with their mother and two elder brothers.

It was a hot and harmonious picture. Even though Shao Wanru was mentally prepared, she didn't find anything unusual.

"It's made of maple leaves. This... is so ingenious!" Rui'an Great Elder Princess stepped over and murmured in appreciation.

With maple leaves as the base, the painting was artfully tailored. There were only a few strokes in the blank space, making the mother and sons more vivid. Even veins of leaves were ingeniously arranged impressively.

"It's amazing. Great... It's wonderful indeed. Not only is it suitable to be a birthday present, but it shows ingenuity. This piece is an invaluable asset." The longer Rui'an Great Elder Princess appreciated it, the more she liked it.

It was the Empress Dowager that the mother with three sons was referring to!

In the painting, the mother looked at her eldest son lovingly, and the second son was leaning against her side tightly. As for the third son, who was little and innocent, he was playing cheerfully by himself near them.

"It's indeed good. I didn't pay attention to it and haven't seen it before. Sometimes, my husband will do some improper things. I didn't expect this piece to be so appropriate. Impressive!" It was the first time Madam of Duke Cheng'en had seen this painting. Duke Cheng'en rarely made her proud, and she smiled with pleasure.

Shao Wanru looked through the painting. An extraordinary piece of art indeed! Making a painting with maple leaves was a marvelous idea. No wonder it would be sent to the Palace to please the Empress Dowager.

It would be presented to the Empress Dowager and slowly unrolled right before the Empress Dowager, the Emperor, officials, and all their family members...

This painting was a decent and appropriate birthday gift for such a grand scene. Though the Duke Cheng'en's Mansion was an aristocratic family without real power, it was the Empress Dowager's parents' home. So, it would do them no good when Duke Cheng'en often sent priceless treasures as if the Duke Cheng'en's Mansion were fabulously wealthy.

Only scripts and paintings like this were both elegant and prominent.

The Empress Dowager would love this ingenious painting with maple leaves. If Shao Wanru hadn't known a little about the painting in her last life, she wouldn't have used maple leaves as the backing and added a few brush strokes to make the image more outstanding.

But no matter how she viewed it, she didn't feel anything wrong with the painting.

But because of it, the Empress Dowager was confined to her bed with a severe illness. How could such a painting do that and become the source of the rebellion launched by Prince Zhou?

As Shao Wanru held the painting in her hand, her long eyelashes fluttered, and her eyes became more penetrating and thoughtful.

"Zhuozhuo, why are you so interested in this painting?" Rui'an Great Elder Princess saw that Shao Wanru was absorbed in her thoughts and looked at it over and over again as if she was reluctant to let it go. She couldn't help laughing.

"Grandma, please don't tease me," Shao Wanru said coquettishly, reluctantly putting down the painting. Remaining calm and collected, she cast a meaningful glance at Yujie, who was standing quietly beside her.

Yujie understood what her master meant. Immediately, she took a step forward and whispered in surprise, "It looks so similar to the painting prepared by my master."

She spoke in a low voice to herself and didn't intend to interrupt their conversation, but everyone heard her words clearly since they were standing nearby.

"Zhuozhuo, have you also made a painting with maple leaves?" Rui'an Great Elder Princess smiled and asked.

Shao Wanru nodded shyly and said with a little embarrassment, "It can't compare with this one from the Duke Cheng'en's Mansion. I made it with maple leaves by myself."

"What a coincidence! May I see it?" Madam of Duke Cheng'en was also interested in it and asked with a smile.

"Of course!" Shao Wanru readily agreed with a nod. Then she nodded at Yujie. Before she came here, she had intended to watch this maple-leaf painting and let others know about her artwork.

Shao Wanru drew her painting with the same purpose.

Yujie turned around and went out. After a while, she took out the prepared painting from the carriage and put it in a box. Then she came back to everyone, opened the box, and cautiously took out the painting inside.

When Rui'an Great Elder Princess and Madam of Duke Cheng'en saw the work of art inside, they nodded repeatedly. It had a decent artistic conception, which could show Shao Wanru's remarkable painting skills. The unique thing was the incomparable originality it displayed.

"Your Highness is clever and deft." Madam of Duke Cheng'en couldn't help complimenting repeatedly.

The painting of the Duke Cheng'en's Mansion was purchased outside, but the one of the Prince Chen's Mansion was made by Princess Chen herself. It was clear which one was better. For the Empress Dowager, a gift made by her granddaughter-in-law would be more meaningful than an item sold in the market. In comparison, the painting of the Duke Cheng'en's Mansion paled.

Since it was a birthday gift for the Empress Dowager that would be shown to the Emperor and all the officials, it should be special. There were two paintings with the same style, and the one from the Prince Chen's Mansion was more outstanding, so Madam of Duke Cheng'en wanted to give up the one from her mansion.

Though this painting was exquisitely made, it was not by a famous artist. Its originality made it remarkable. But now, even its marvelous design was no match for Princess Chen's. It was better not to send this painting; otherwise, it would humiliate the Duke Cheng'en's Mansion.

Two cunning pieces of artwork with similar creative ideas shouldn't show up simultaneously. It was nothing shameful for the better one but was bad for the inferior piece.

"Princess Chen's painting is striking, and you made it yourself. Her Majesty will like it." Young Madam of the Duke Cheng'en's Mansion repeatedly praised.

Shao Wanru blushed and replied with a few polite words. After that, she asked Yujie to put away the painting. When it was almost time to go, she thanked Madam of Duke Cheng'en and left.

Madam of Duke Cheng'en and Young Madam walked them to the door together. Seeing them get on the carriage and leave, Madam of Duke Cheng'en returned to her courtyard by holding Young Madam's hands. After sitting down, she ordered her trusted old maid to wait for Duke Cheng'en at the study's door. As soon as he was back, she should invite him over to discuss something important...

Duke Cheng'en didn't know that Shao Wanru's painting outshone his, and he bought that maple-leave picture in vain.

After going back to his mansion, he headed for his study to appreciate the satisfactory painting again. To his great surprise, Madam's maid stopped him, saying that his wife wanted him to come to the inner court first.

Duke Cheng'en, who had no idea what had happened, followed the old maid in. When he entered the door, his eyes immediately fell on the table — his precious painting was right in the box on the table. For a moment, he had no clue of what was going on.

He entered the room. With his hands behind her back, he stepped to the table, looked at the painting, and turned back to ask in confusion, "What's wrong? You said you didn't want to see the paintings I bought, didn't you?"

"Is this your birthday gift for the Empress Dowager?" asked Madam of Duke Cheng'en.

Duke Cheng'en turned around to sit beside her, nodded, and said with a smile, "This painting is not bad, right? It matches the occasion with fancy ideas. It'll add glitters to the Empress Dowager's birthday. Moreover, the Emperor will feel grateful for her warm affection."

The more Duke Cheng'en thought about it, the more pleased and satisfied he became.

"You'd better not give it to the Empress Dowager in public. It is not an unparalleled birthday gift." Madam of Duke Cheng'en waved her hand and said bluntly, "Ru'an Great Elder Princess and Princess Chen came over. Princess Chen also took out a painting that looked very similar to yours. It was even more exquisite. More than anything, she herself created the painting with maple leaves!"

"What? How... how is that possible?" Duke Cheng'en lifted his head in shock and was utterly flabbergasted.

Recently, he had been concentrating on looking for a suitable painting for the Empress Dowager. This maple-leaf painting was the best one he could find with the most fantastic idea. Before this, it had never entered his mind that maple leaves could be used to make a painting.

How could anyone else also get such an intriguing idea? In particular, it was Princess Chen. And she made it by herself. The Empress Dowager would prefer hers, for it required much more effort than his.

"His Grace, it's true. Our daughter-in-law and I had seen it," Madam of Duke Cheng'en reached out to rub her forehead and said helplessly.

Her husband was all right, but he was just too sweet-tempered and over-credulous. And he wasn't capable enough. Nevertheless, despite all of this, Madam of Duke Cheng'en thought it was no big deal as long as he was fine and didn't make any big trouble. Of course, it was better not to do anything shameful.

Since the Duke Cheng'en's Mansion was the Empress Dowager's parents' home, anything shameful they did would dishonor Her Majesty.

"This painting will conflict with Princess Chen's, and it can't compare with hers. You'd better not use it as a birthday gift, lest it should embarrass you. What's more, you are an elder. How can your gift resemble a junior's? You might as well let it go!"

They had already known that Princess Chen would also send a maple-leaf painting even better than that in their mansion. Even if theirs looked better, Madam of Duke Cheng'en thought they had to give it up.

Elders ought to humor juniors a little, not to mention that it was Princess Chen. When others heard about it, they would only commend Duke Cheng'en for his generous and decent manner.

Princess Chen was newly married, and it was her first time picking up a birthday gift. If she wanted to curry favor with the Empress Dowager, she should try her best.

The Duke Cheng'en's Mansion was the Empress Dowager's parents' home. Since Her Majesty doted on Prince Chen, the Duke Cheng'en's Mansion should do something to support Princess Chen. In any case, the Duke Cheng'en's Mansion had to give way to Princess Chen on this matter.

Honestly, they could do nothing about it if they didn't know Princess Chen had also prepared a maple-leaf painting and accidentally presented a similar piece as hers. Now that they had learned about this, Madam of Duke Cheng'en felt it was inappropriate for them to pretend ignorance about this matter.

"Is her painting similar to the one I found?" Duke Cheng'en looked at his painting sadly and felt quite unconvinced. It was not easy for him to get such a painting, so he really didn't want to return it.

"Of course, they're alike, and hers is better. Your painting can't compare with that of Princess Chen. You bought the painting, so it's far less meaningful than hers," Madam of Duke Cheng'en discouraged him mercilessly, making him feel his painting was worthless.

Duke Cheng'en felt so wronged because he highly valued the painting and felt a great yearning to send it to his sister. But since Madam of Duke Cheng'en said so, he couldn't ignore it. He lowered his head in low spirits and said, "Since Princess Chen has a similar one, then... forget it. I won't give it to the Empress Dowager!"

Yet he thought the Empress Dowager would love to see such a gift.

The more Duke Cheng'en thought about it, the sadder he became. He felt all his hard work was for nothing and couldn't take it. With a peculiarly blank look, he looked toward the painting on the table, his heart throbbing. He felt reluctant to resign himself to defeat.

He appeared downcast, seemingly utterly disheartened. Helplessly, Madam of Duke Cheng'en rubbed the place between her eyebrows and said, "But if you insist on giving it to her, there is a way!"

"What could I do?" Duke Cheng'en's spirits lifted. He sat up and looked at his aged wife with a severe countenance.

His wife could always come up with many brilliant ideas, while he was usually out of ideas. Sometimes, he had to ask his wife for advice.

"If you stick to your opinion and are sure the Empress Dowager will like it, you can give it to her in private!" Madam of Duke Cheng'en said helplessly, feeling that her husband looked increasingly like an obstinate child. If she didn't appease him today, he would stay depressed for several days.

He would be in low spirits, and it was not a good thing for old people to remain inert.

"Could I?" Duke Cheng'en's eyes lit up, and he asked excitedly.

He didn't have to send it before the Emperor and officials, but he was confident that the Empress Dowager would like it. If he couldn't give it to his sister, he would feel bad about it.

"It's okay, but you must make it clear Princess Chen's painting is better and you shouldn't bring it to her. However, you can't help doing it because you're pretty sure she'll like it." Madam of Duke Cheng'en reminded him.

"Okay, okay, I know. I'll pack up and see Her Majesty in the Palace in a while." Duke Cheng'en nodded repeatedly. As long as he could send it out as his sister's birthday gift, he would be happy and wouldn't care about what he had to do and say.

He just wanted the Empress Dowager to see his good intention and feel happy about it.

"Zhuozhuo, how did you know about the painting?" asked Rui'an Great Elder Princess. She had been surprised initially, but when she chewed over it, she was confused.

Shao Wanru suggested going to the Duke Cheng'en's Mansion, and it was also Shao Wanru who took out a similar painting.

"Grandma, I heard Duke Cheng'en got a painting similar to mine. So I specially asked you to help me inquire about it. If my painting wasn't as good as theirs, I should put it away and not present it to the Empress Dowager. Or, if Madam of Duke Cheng'en said anything improper about it, I wouldn't take it as a birthday gift either."

Shao Wanru lowered her head in embarrassment and apologized with shame in her eyes, "I didn't know what precisely would happen, so I didn't explain it to you in detail. Please forgive me, Grandma!"

Rui'an Great Elder Princess hated to see her granddaughter like this, so she waved her hand carelessly and said, "Since you've married into the royal family, you can't share everything with me. Just tell me what you can say and keep those things you can't say to yourself. There's no need for you to tell me some of Prince Chen's things. You know, the royal family has many rules. After marrying into the Prince Chen's Mansion, you should always look out for Prince Chen because you're his family."

When she said that, Rui'an Great Elder Princess stopped and said steadily, "No matter what you have done, I will stand on your side, but you don't have to tell me everything."

Shao Wanru's nose twitched, and she could hardly hold back her tears. In her previous life, she and her grandma had missed each other. In this life, her grandma gave her all her love.

She would protect her grandmother and all the people who loved her.

"Grandma..."

Biting her lip and suppressing the sadness in her heart, Shao Wanru raised her head with tears but showed a smile. "Grandma, don't worry. I know how to protect myself. More than that, I'll protect you and Hao'er."

"My little girl..." Rui'an Great Elder Princess, a person of strong character, said with tears in her eyes, "Little girl... what are you talking about? I should protect you two. Your irresponsible mother made things as miserable as this. She left you two little children and died..."

Thinking of her deceased daughter, Rui'an Great Elder Princess couldn't help but shed tears.

She had been angry with her daughter, but now her daughter made her heart ache: How could she die when she had old and young at home? Why didn't she know how to treasure her life?

"Grandma, don't be upset. You have Hao'er and me. We will live a good life." Shao Wanru comforted Rui'an Great Elder Princess.

She reached out to pull her grandmother's sleeve and shook it gently, looking like a lovely and innocent little girl. Seeing that, Great Elder Princess felt a little less pain in her heart. Although her daughter was gone, her children were still with Rui'an Great Elder Princess. For the sake of this pair of lovely grandchildren, she couldn't collapse.

She had to be their strong backing. Even if her granddaughter was Princess Chen and no longer needed her support, Rui'an Great Elder Princess felt she must hang on.

"You... have you found out anything about the matter related to Shao Jing?" Thinking of her daughter, Rui'an Great Elder Princess suddenly remembered what Shao Wanru had mentioned, her face instantly turning solemn. "If Shao Jing did it, I will never let him go."

"Grandma, we have to investigate this matter. Without any concrete evidence, we can't make it clear. There is no hurry." said Shao Wanru.

She hoped that she could do these things by herself. Her grandma was aged and not good at disguising herself. After all of this was settled, she would tell her grandma everything.

She couldn't perturb her grandmother, let alone make her angry and worried. She had revealed something to her before, but it was because she had to get some information.

She would personally avenge her parents.

Her father died because of Shao Jing, who was also closely related to her mother's death. Madam Jiang, Madam of Marquis Xing, must have known the inside story.

However, these things happened long ago, and it was not easy to find evidence. Shao Wanru would take it slow and push her enemies into the abyss of destruction step by step.

"Grandma, I'll tell you after I find the truth. I need some scripts and paintings now. Can you find some for me?" Shao Wanru, for fear that Rui'an Great Elder Princess kept asking these things, hurriedly changed the topic and talked about the important thing she needed to do...

"What kind of painting do you want?" Rui'an Great Elder Princess was drawn to this matter and exclaimed in surprise, "The painting you've prepared for the Empress Dowager is nice. Do you need more?"

She was worried that Shao Wanru didn't know how to choose gifts, so she patted her hand lovingly and remarked, "Too many gifts aren't necessary. Just pick the best one for her. The Empress Dowager has seen all kinds of good things. The expression of your goodwill is the most important thing. Your painting of maple leaves expresses your kind feelings and has a striking originality. It is the best. Why take the trouble to collect other inferior gifts?"

"Grandma, I want to view more scripts and paintings. Maybe I can do better," Shao Wanru explained.

"That's good. I have some. You can take away any of them that takes your fancy." Rui'an Great Elder Princess nodded approvingly, thinking that Shao Wanru meant to put all paintings' ideas together to perfect her previous painting.

"I certainly will see the calligraphy and paintings you collected. But, Grandma, please also pay attention to other works of art for me. If you encounter any suitable ones, buy them for me. Later on, pass on a message saying that you are looking for some first-class artworks," Shao Wanru made an immediate explanation. Anyway, she should first spread this news.

"Okay, I know!" Rui'an Great Elder Princess agreed with a nod.

"Sister." Shao Yuanhao came out from the door curtain. He has grown up to be an early youth, no longer the profligate boy he used to be. As he saw Shao Wanru, his eyes lit up with joy. He took two steps forward and bowed respectfully to Shao Wanru and Rui'an Great Elder Princess. "Greetings! But why didn't you take me with you when you went out?"

Shao Wanru smiled. The outlines of his face showed his fine features, which were somewhat different from Shao Wanru's. He looked handsome. Though his face was still childish, Shao Wanru could tell he would become a man of remarkable presence.

Compared to three years ago, he has not only grown taller but has also been more sensible. He was no longer the little boy who cried with a flood of tears when forced to study three years ago.

"You should concentrate on your study. How could we disturb you?" Shao Wanru said.

"Hao'er, come here and sit next to me!" Rui'an Great Elder Princess said, looking at her beloved grandchildren with a bright smile.

Shao Yuanhao sat beside Rui'an Great Elder Princess and said, "Sister, I've been very serious about studying. Even if I went out with you, I wouldn't delay my study. Before Prince Chen left, he told me to accompany grandma and you if you had to deal with something. Since there are no other men at home, I should be there to support you even if I don't need to do anything!"

Shao Yuanhao threw back his slim shoulders and promised, feeling that his brother-in-law was right. Shao Yuanhao feared Prince Chen at the beginning, but he now admired him very much. Of course, he changed his attitude through a painful process. Anyway, he didn't feel like mentioning the insignificant past. As an ignorant and mischievous boy, Shao Yuanhao had done many improper things that he couldn't bear to think of!

Prince Chen said he must accompany his dear wife though he was sick and weak. Likewise, Shao Yuanhao was also obligated to look after his elder sister as a man, though at such a tender age.

Seeing him display the firm attitude of a mature man, Shao Wanru and Rui'an Great Elder Princess exchanged a glance and couldn't help smiling in unison.

"Great, Hao'er, study hard, and I'm waiting for you to realize your big ambition," Shao Wanru said with a smile.

"Sister, don't worry. I will back you up. If, if Chu Liuchen dares to bully you... I, I will never spare him."

Shao Yuanhao clenched his fists. Although slightly frightened, he still gritted his teeth with determination to show that he could keep his word.

He was afraid of this scheming brother-in-law, but even so, he must demonstrate his masculinity before his sister, letting her know he could protect her.

Shao Wanru stood up, walked to Shao Yuanhao, and asked softly, "Hao'er, you've grown up and are now the Heir of Marquis Xing. But Hao'er, if... I mean, if you lose the title, can you bear it?"

"I don't care. I'll be fine if you and my grandma are okay," Shao Yuanhao said without hesitation.

When he was little and naive, people in the mansion often told him that his Eldest Brother would take charge of this mansion. Everything there had nothing to do with him. Everyone, including his personal servants, kept telling him to eat, drink, and have fun. Having been gradually influenced by what he constantly heard, Shao Yuanhao never took the title of "heir of a duke" as his.

Whenever talking about his parents in the mansion, all the people around him would shake their heads, blaming them for being irresponsible. Tragically, they not only caused Old Madam to lose her son and daughter-in-law, and left him without parents at such a young age. According to these people, Infanta Qinghua, Shao Yuanhao's mother, was overly self-opinionated and unfilial to Old Madam back then. Later, Infanta Qinghua instigated her husband to leave the mansion, which was the start of the tragedy.

In a word, his parents brought the great calamity upon themselves, while the mansion had been treating them with the utmost tolerance and kindness.

These remarks made Shao Yuanhao very uncomfortable because he had begun to learn some facts about life. He even scolded and beat his servant for this. But even so, they insisted on gossiping about his parents. Even if they didn't say it before him, they would talk behind his back and intentionally let him hear their conversation.

At that time, he was too young to handle mundane affairs. So, he went straight to tell Old Madam and Madam Jiang, who he thought loved him the most. On the surface, they appeased him and gently reproved the servants who gossiped behind him. After that, these servants stuck to their old way and slandered him secretly with ever-increasing intensity.

Shao Yuanhao was puzzled about this situation in the past, but now he understood everything.

All this was because all the people in Marquis Xing's Mansion took malicious pleasure in seeing him in misfortune. Deep in his heart, Shao Yuanhao didn't want at all to be the heir of the duke of Marquis Xing's Mansion.

“Sister, the position of the heir of the duke is of little significance. I don’t care whether I have it or not,” Shao Yuanhao said in all seriousness with a straight face.

Looking at this pair of grandchildren, Rui’an Great Elder Princess was on the verge of crying and turned away from them to wipe her eyes with a handkerchief. Like Shao Yuanhao, she also took the Marquis Xing’s Mansion title lightly. After so many years of trouble, she simply couldn’t bear to see the second branch of Marquis Xing’s Mansion get the title that initially belonged to her daughter and son-in-law.

If it hadn’t been for the second branch, her daughter and son-in-law wouldn’t have been forced to leave the capital. All the tragedies wouldn’t have happened.

Fortunately, both Shao Wanru and Shao Yuanhao were sensible. Lucky for Rui’an Great Elder Princess, her granddaughter had come back and helped her bring Hao’er to her mansion. Now that she could bring him up in person, these people in the Marquis Xing’s Mansion could no longer harm his healthy growth.

Her two grandchildren had a close blood relationship with masters in the Marquis Xing’s Mansion, so she couldn’t understand why these people were so partial and treated them harshly.

“Zhuzhuo, Hao’er doesn’t care about this title of nobility, and I don’t care about it either. Do what you want to do!” Rui’an Great Elder Princess wiped the tears from the corners of her eyes, turned around, and said with a bright smile.

Shao Wanru pulled Shao Yuanhao to sit down beside Rui’an Great Elder Princess. With her other hand on her grandmother, she said, “Grandma, rest assured!”

She fluttered her long eyelashes twice, secretly hiding the sharp light in her eyes. They didn’t have to give up this title, but Shao Wanru wanted to know how the people she cared about looked at it. Since no one cared, she had a plan in her heart.

If some people believed she and her grandma cared most about the title of nobility of Marquis Xing’s Mansion, they would be terribly disappointed!

It would be great if someone took this title as a trump card...

“Rui’an Great Elder Princess is collecting calligraphy and paintings?” Zhao Xiran looked at Madam Zhao in astonishment and asked.

Madam Zhao lowered her head, twisted her handkerchief, and shook her head. “Your father had inquired about it. Rui’an Great Elder Princess is gathering artistic works for Princess Chen.”

“Why does Princess Chen need those things? For the Empress Dowager’s birthday?” Zhao Xiran asked in confusion, “If so, she should have made preparations early. Her Majesty’s birthday is just around the corner. Why would she suddenly think of collecting them? Wouldn’t it be too hasty?”

“Your father wanted to know... if it was because of... that?” Madam Zhao said, drawing a half circle in the air with one hand. It was the entire Marquis Xing’s Mansion that she was referring to.

“It can’t be. Princess Chen hasn’t returned here. How could she suddenly do such a thing?” Zhao Xiran whispered.

She had asked all servants to leave, so only she and her mother were in the room. Today, Madam Zhao came to visit her daughter.

Shao Hua'an couldn't sit still here and ordered two servants to carry him to the study in the front yard.

The condition of his injuries was stable. He just needed to recuperate. Since he was grievously wounded, he would have to lie in bed for at least a few months. Besides, he was no longer able to ride a horse.

"Haven't you gotten any information from your husband?" Seeing her daughter make no progress, Madam Zhao asked discontentedly. Her question sounded like a disgruntled reproach.

"Mother, if I knew, why didn't I tell you and father?" Even her mother couldn't understand her. Zhao Xiran was annoyed. "I accepted this marriage to help my father. Haven't I done well enough?"

After that, she cried with grievance. Thinking of the baby she lost, she felt sadness welling up.

It was true that she married into the Marquis Xing's Mansion with ulterior motives. Nevertheless, she also wanted wholeheartedly to have a happy life with Shao Hua'an. It never entered her mind that she would get into this terrible state. In the past, she was ambitious and arrogant, believing she could earn a good living no matter what.

Unexpectedly, she suffered setbacks soon after marrying into the mansion. Bad things happened one after another. She was at a loss for how she could change her fate.

When Zhao Xiran got married, she didn't expect this mansion to be on the decline, especially at such a fast speed.

Tears showered down Zhao Xiran's cheeks. In a hurry, Madam Zhao appeased her. "I'm so sorry. I was very worried. Your father failed to handle things well, and now he has to rely on you. He is afraid that the Emperor will know about it. Not only can't he save his life, but all the people in our mansion may also be put to death. Your father has no choice!"

Speaking of this, Madame Zhao also burst out crying.

"Xiran, we've been hard on you. I'm sorry you have to go through so many annoying things in the Marquis Xing's Mansion. I would never have agreed to this marriage if I had known this earlier. How I wish I hadn't listened to you and your father."

Thinking of these frustrating things, Madame Zhao felt dejected. If it hadn't been for her husband, her daughter wouldn't have had to waste so much effort and energy.

Madam Zhao raised Zhao Xiran from birth. Her daughter had always been smart and quick-witted, even better than her son. Even Minister Zhao had repeatedly mentioned that it would be great if Xiran were a son.

But her daughter had gotten bogged down in the abyss of misery because of the Marquis Xing's Mansion, and she couldn't get away.

When Madam Zhao was also in tears, Zhao Xiran calmed down and put away her sense of grievance. With a soft voice, she consoled her mother, "Don't be sad. What's done is done. We should take more

time to achieve our goal. If those characters are in this mansion, I think what we want is most likely in the study of Hua'an's father, but Hua'an doesn't know about it."

She had searched inside and outside her husband's place several times, including his study. Beyond that, directly and indirectly, she had asked Shao Hua'an about this matter many times. However, every time she mentioned this topic, Shao Hua'an looked absolutely ignorant of it.

"As a daughter-in-law, you can't search for Marquis Xing's study at will." Madam Zhao wiped her tears, and her forehead knotted in a frown.

The once-prosperous Marquis Xing's Mansion was deteriorating rapidly, but people here still had to comply with the strict rules of aristocratic families. It was inappropriate for Zhao Xiran to rummage through things in her father-in-law's place, which would undoubtedly arouse suspicion. What was worse, if there appeared any rumors intolerable to the ear, her daughter might feel too ashamed to live.

"I could hardly get a chance in the past, but I might make it now. I am in charge of the mansion. Old Madam isn't in the inner court, and Madam Jiang is locked up. People of the third branch don't care about other people's business. As long as I don't provoke them, they won't say anything."

Zhao Xiran composed herself and said.

Now was an excellent time to seek an opportunity; even so, it was not easy to succeed. As a daughter-in-law, she should never interfere in affairs at Shao Jing's place.

"Recently, Mother, I think there is something unusual with my father-in-law!" Zhao Xiran said thoughtfully.

"What's wrong?" Madam Zhao was shocked. She warily glanced around and asked in a low voice.

"I'm not sure about it. I sent some people to keep an eye on his courtyard. In the past few days, he has spent much more time there. Occasionally, there was a flicker of light from the place piled up with sundries that few people would visit, but the light didn't last long. It seemed that someone was searching for something. But the person couldn't always do that, especially when every time my father-in-law was in the mansion," Zhao Xiran said.

Since she suspected Shao Jing, she certainly would pay special attention to him.

In the past, she had no chance or ability to do that. Recently, everyone in the Marquis Xing's Mansion lived in terror and uncertainty. As a result, it became much easier for her trusted subordinate to spy on that place.

She managed the inner court. Two elders, Old Madam and Madam Jiang, the former was not in the mansion, and the latter was locked up. Since she was solely responsible for the inner court, these servants vied to fawn over her.

"Mother, I think there is nothing special about Princess Chen collecting paintings. You can go back and tell my father that. If he is still worried about it... Well, aren't you in contact with Rui'an Great Elder Princess? It's okay for you to visit her sometimes and inquire about it. But you can't talk too much. My father should keep an eye on what's happening outside the mansion, and I'll go on carefully handling the affairs in the Marquis Xing's Mansion."

Zhao Xiran briefly summarized the whole situation when noticing that her mother was still panicked.

“Okay, that’s all we can do now. Take care.” Madam Zhao wiped the corners of her eyes and nodded gravely. She looked up at her daughter, feeling extremely distressed. “You’ve suffered a lot this time. You must not be careless. Take good care of yourself. Madam Jiang is vicious. It’s better to lock her up like this forever.”

Madam Zhao was very anxious to see the death of Madam Jiang. Only then would her daughter get her revenge.

“Don’t worry. I know what I should do,” Zhao Xiran said softly.

After chatting about some intimate things, Madam Zhao got up to leave. Today, she came to tell Zhao Xiran that Princess Chen was collecting scripts and paintings. Since Zhao Xiran was not clear about it, she had to go back and tell her husband about it.

After Madame Zhao left, Zhao Xiran sat down with a gloomy face.

She didn’t tell Madam Zhao all the facts. How could she casually enter her father-in-law’s courtyard? Even if she found something unusual, she had no right to search his place.

Things in the past were full of twists and turns. Her father only found part of the truth. According to what he knew, he concluded that Shao Jing had the thing and kept it in his mansion.

Mishaps happened one after another in the Marquis Xing’s Mansion, but they didn’t inflict heavy losses. Shao Jing must have given something to someone in exchange for protection.

Of course, money was never what descendants of the royal family cared most about. It couldn’t be Shao Jing’s loyalty, either. These people might have been glad to accept the Duke Xing’s Mansion in the past. But now, there wouldn’t be anyone willing to support the declining Marquis Xing’s Mansion. In that case, Shao Jing must have offered something that these people were interested in.

This item was highly likely to be the item that Zhao Xiran’s father had been looking for.

It was lost long ago. Her father had been living with fear and trepidation for so many years, for fear that something horrifying would happen. Back then, the deceased emperor entrusted him with this task and asked him to look for it. To his dismay, the former Heir of Duke Xing elicited the message from him. When her father set out to look for it, it had been long gone.

This matter was entrusted to her father by the deceased emperor before he died. After the present Emperor ascended the throne, her father didn’t dare to act rashly. Later on, almost all the people who knew about this matter were dead. Her father thought this matter was over, so he just needed to wait and keep this secret with great care.

Somehow, the former Heir of Duke Xing got the news and visited her father. Under his threats and inducements, her father had no choice but to reveal the truth to him. After that, this Heir of Duke Xing disappeared into the crowd.

It was said that he fell out with his family and left with Infanta Qinghua.

He never returned after leaving.

Minister Zhao was on tenterhooks every day, very afraid that Shao Jiang would find those things and present them to the Emperor. He would be in serious trouble.

The only way was to find these objects and submit them to the Emperor to make up for his mistakes.

Shao Jiang was dead. Minister Zhao pried the news that Shao Jing must have murdered Shao Jiang. At that time, Shao Jing was also at the border. Later, he heard that Shao Jiang died in an accident and that Infanta Qinghua, his widow, became crazy after being brought back to the capital. She also passed away shortly after giving birth to a son.

Her ignorant young child couldn't tell anything. There seemed to be no way to investigate this matter.

Shao Jiang and his wife, who knew about this matter, were all dead.

At first, Minister Zhao watched Shao Jing closely because he thought it was Shao Jing. When Shao Wanru, Shao Jiang's daughter, appeared, Minister Zhao had a new suspect. This was why Zhao Xiran hurriedly married into the Marquis Xing's Mansion.

At first, they kept the Marquis Xing's Mansion in suspense. But after Shao Wanru returned to the mansion from the Yuhui Nunnery, Minister Zhao agreed on the marriage between Zhao Xiran and Shao Hua'an.

In those days, no outsiders could see Shao Wanru due to her identity.

However, things were changing so fast. Minister Zhao and Zhao Xiran could hardly cope with their difficult position. When Zhao Xiran moved into the Marquis Xing's Mansion, she thought she could easily find out the truth and get what his father needed. However, she didn't succeed in carrying out her intention. Involuntarily, Zhao Xiran began to doubt her ability.

"Eldest Young Madam, old maid Han has something to report to you!" Qiu Yue, her personal maid, reported in the corridor.

"Let her in!" Zhao Xiran put aside a myriad of thoughts crowding into her mind and said gently.

Qiu Yue lifted the curtain and came in. She was one of Zhao Xiran's two maids who moved here with Zhao Xiran when she married, and the other was Qiu Lian. They were Zhao Xiran's trusted followers. At present, they helped her deal with the affairs of Marquis Xing's Mansion.

Following her was an old maid in her fifties, who was very thin and small. She was shrewd looking. When entering the room, she kept her eyes averted but didn't dare to be presumptuous. In a hurry, she bowed respectfully. "Greetings, My Lady."

"Don't bother!" Zhao Xiran waved her hand. She had accepted this old maid in the Marquis Xing's Mansion as her reliable helper. She was merely a servant who took care of a large area of flowers and plants outside Shao Jing's courtyard, so it was convenient for her to go in and out of Shao Jing's place.

"My Lady, I saw the light in the room last night. I seemed to have seen more than one shadow but couldn't see clearly. After that, the light went out. I kept staring at that place until midnight. Later, I was so sleepy that I almost fell asleep. Suddenly, a loud noise came out. I was shocked. When I looked over there, the light flickered again. Then there was no more sound."

Old maid Han reported.

She was in low spirits, her eyes bloodshot. She must have stayed up late.

“Okay, thank you for your hard work. You can go down and get your reward later! Go on watching that place.” Zhao Xiran nodded and said.

“Thank you, My Lady. Thank you so much. I will.” Old maid Han repeatedly thanked with gratitude.

After Qiu Yue took her out and rewarded her, she returned to the room. Seeing Zhao Xiran sitting there with a gloomy face, she hurried forward and bowed, “My Lady.”

“How is First Young Master?” Zhao Xiran asked suddenly. She had sent Qiu Yue to Shao Hua’an’s study to see if he needed anything.

“First Young Master said he didn’t need anything. He was studying in the study and told you not to worry,” Qiu Yue said, thinking that First Young Master was a good man. When badly wounded, he was still devoted to studying and wanted to get the honorary title of Eldest Young Madam.

After he injured his leg, Shao Hua’an was depressed for a period of time. Unexpectedly, he strove to improve and decided to achieve something big by studying wholeheartedly. He said he had wasted so many years and never thought of seeking a bright future through study. Now that he had lost the position of the heir of a duke, he found his purpose in life. Since his leg was broken, he could focus on studying.

Zhao Xiran sighed softly. Her husband’s words comforted her.

Shao Hua’an was talented and knowledgeable, but he had never considered taking the imperial exam. If he sincerely concentrated on reading books in search of success and fame, he could make it.

Shao Hua’an could let go of the position of the heir of a duke, but she couldn’t do it.

Shao Yuanhao was so young and not close to the Marquis Xing’s Mansion. How could he get the title? Since she married into this mansion, she had only seen Shao Yuanhao a few times. Obviously, he only considered himself the grandson of Rui’an Great Elder Princess, who had nothing to do with the Marquis Xing’s Mansion.

No matter how she looked at it, this title should belong to Hua’an.

“Go and ask about his situation every day. If there is anything he likes to eat, send it to him immediately. Let old maid Han go on keeping an eye on that place. Tell her to report to me if there is anything.” Zhao Xiran ordered methodically.

She had to do all the things one by one. Her father had taught her more things than methods of dealing with affairs in the inner court. Compared with women who only knew how to fight for their husband’s favor, she was much more tactful. If she were a man in Shao Hua’an’s current situation, she would make the same choice as Shao Hua’an. So, she admired her husband more and more...

After returning from Rui’an Great Elder Princess’s Mansion, Shao Wanru immediately sent someone to invite the chief supervisor.

When the chief supervisor sat down, she immediately told him what she had seen in the Duke Cheng'en's Mansion and asked for his advice.

The chief supervisor tightly frowned when listening to Shao Wanru's detailed account of the painting. His face changed as he listened to her. When Shao Wanru stopped, he asked hurriedly, "Was the Empress Dowager... Was the mother in the painting feeding the eldest son medicine?"

"It should be like that. The child was lying in bed with a towel covering his forehead. His face was pale, and the medicine in the bowl was black. It didn't look like the ordinary drink at all." Shao Wanru thought about it carefully and said. At that time, she deliberately saw it clearly because she wanted to come back and tell the chief supervisor about it.

Since the chief supervisor had served in the Palace, he might know something.

Compared with others, the chief supervisor was most likely to know about this kind of thing. Her grandmother acquired many messages merely by relying on hearsay, which she could not take seriously.

"That... that bowl... what did it look like..." The chief supervisor's face turned dreadfully pale. His lips trembled twice as he asked in a low voice.

Shao Wanru couldn't remember what the medicine bowl looked like. At that time, she didn't pay attention to the bowl but only observed the appearances, manners, and other things related to the figures and their movements. However, she overlooked the medicine bowl. When she thought of it, it seemed that the patterns on the bowl were very clear. She just cast a glance at it and didn't watch it closely.

Seeing that Shao Wanru couldn't come up with an answer, the chief supervisor reminded her, "Was the bowl... with a bright red pattern on a white background... and with a pearl-playing pattern?"

Even though so many years had passed, when the chief supervisor mentioned this matter, he still felt that his throat tightened and his back was sweating.

Hearing his descriptions, Shao Wanru thought for a moment and recalled something, "Yes, the background was white because white could set off the patterns. The bright red pattern was very conspicuous. This was the first thing I saw. Were there any beads? Yes, there were, and they were also very eye-catching."

Shao Wanru said, recalling little by little.

The chief supervisor nearly collapsed and reached out his hands to steady himself against the table. Then he looked at his trusted subordinates in the room and waved his hand, motioning for them to leave. At this time, even his henchmen couldn't hear this highly confidential thing.

Seeing the chief supervisor do that seriously, Shao Wanru also ordered the few trusted maids to leave with a wave of her hand. They closed the door slightly, leaving only the chief supervisor and Shao Wanru in the room.

After everyone left, Shao Wanru whispered to him, "Sir, is there anything wrong?"

"Your Highness, there are some things that I don't dare to say, and I don't even know if they're true. It was just that the former empress was also there at that time, so I followed her and had a look."

Speaking of this, the chief supervisor paused and hesitated. Honestly, he didn't want to mention this kind of thing. Or even if he had to mention it, he should say it to his master instead of Princess Chen. But his master was not in the capital, and Princess Chen was brilliant. In addition, the Empress Dowager's birthday was around the corner. If anything happened and Princess Chen was not in the know, he was afraid she would fall into someone's trap.

"Sir..." Shao Wanru urged him in a low voice.

"Your Highness, it's inconvenient for me to say anything about it, and I may omit something. I'm worried that you may get it wrong," the chief supervisor looked up and said with a pale face.

"Rest assured. I know what's important. Anything related to Her Majesty can't be a small matter." Shao Wanru said calmly.

Of course, she knew how to handle it well. She still had a lingering fear about what had happened in her previous life. Even the Empress Dowager and the Empress were involved, so how could it be a trivial matter?

Even if she didn't know the exact details, she wouldn't act rashly or tell anyone about it.

Although there was a nervous look in Shao Wanru's eyes, she maintained her composure. What she was going to know was a huge secret in the Palace, yet her face didn't turn ashen with fear.

The chief supervisor gently exhaled and said slowly, "I don't know all the things that happened back then. I only remembered that the deceased emperor was seriously ill, and his condition was getting worse. The Imperial Institute of Medicine had sent someone to inform the former empress and the Empress Dowager of this. That day, the Empress Dowager personally fed the former emperor the medicine, but before he finished drinking the medicine, he died... and the medicine bowl rolled to my feet..."

At this point, the chief supervisor couldn't finish what he was saying. Even though many years had passed, he still remembered the scene clearly.

No one had expected that the former emperor would suddenly pass away. Many people in the hall subconsciously looked toward the Empress Dowager. Only he lowered his head because he noticed the medicine bowl under his feet. Then these people were all found guilty of ignoring their masters' majesty. Later on, all of them met a violent end.

The former emperor had passed away, and the whole country was in mourning. Who would care about the death of a few servants in the Palace?

The chief supervisor stayed alive. He didn't look at the Empress Dowager, so he didn't irritate her. Besides, he knew the former empress must have done something in the Palace to keep him alive.

He buried the event deep in his heart after the former empress died. It had never occurred to him that this matter would be brought up again. His lips trembled a few times, and it took him a long time to calm down. "Your Highness, it's all in the past. But the appearance of this painting proves that someone must have also known what happened that day. The person wants to hurt the Empress Dowager..."

The chief supervisor stopped there, but Shao Wanru understood what he was referring to.

This painting was meant to accuse the Empress Dowager of murdering the deceased emperor.

Shao Wanru suddenly saw the whole thing in a clear light when the chief supervisor's words helped her solve many doubts. The three children were referring to the three sons of the Empress Dowager. Her eldest son was sick, her second son was close to her, and the third son was playing alone. When she was feeding the eldest son the medicine on the bed, the second son leaned on her. It seemed that the mother and the second son loved each other deeply, but this scene could also mean that the mother and the second son conspired to kill the eldest son.

The mother and the second son snuggling up together showed they were close, so they might gang up on the deceased emperor.

In this case, how could the Empress Dowager not be shocked and angry when she saw such a painting?

"Did the former emperor really... die because of this bowl of medicine?" Shao Wanru knew that she should not ask this question. Even if she had to know the answer, she should let Chu Liuchen do this. At this time, she swallowed hard, trying to make herself appear calmer. Her long eyelashes hid the panic in her eyes.

In her mind, the Empress Dowager was the only elder who sincerely cared about Chu Liuchen! She was Chu Liuchen's grandma who loved him wholeheartedly. If Chu Liuchen learned about her false display of affection, it would be a great blow to him!

He had always been alone and had given up hope for many years. Shao Wanru didn't know what would happen if he suffered such a fatal blow. She was panicked.

"The deceased emperor was seriously ill at that time. The Imperial Institute of Medicine stated that... At that time, the Empress Dowager would not... be so irrational," the chief supervisor replied with an ashen face.

He had hidden these words in his heart for many years, and now he was still very nervous when mentioning this horrifying thing.

Shao Wanru breathed a sigh of relief, pinched the handkerchief in her hand hard, and felt that her hands were wet. Slowly, she put her mind at rest.

She knew what the chief supervisor meant. As long as the Empress Dowager was not stupid, she wouldn't deal with and murder the deceased emperor at that time. Her eldest son was dying, so how could she plot against him? Even if she did nothing, the deceased emperor could only live for a few more days. Therefore, unlike what the painting suggested, the Empress Dowager had no intention of killing her eldest son.

That was to say, the Empress Dowager loved Chu Liuchen genuinely, and she didn't do it because she felt guilty about killing his father.

The Empress Dowager was still Chu Liuchen's Imperial Grandmother, who had been very affectionate toward him.

"Sir, were there any other people present at that time?" Feeling greatly relieved, Shao Wanru asked again, and the huge emotional burden in her heart was significantly reduced.

"The Empress Dowager and the former empress were both there with the deceased emperor's trusted subordinates. Most of these people were dead. Even if some survived, I don't know where they are now." The chief supervisor forced himself to calm the turbulence in his breast. After composing himself, he could speak much more fluently.

"Is the Empress there?" Shao Wanru asked again. This matter should have something to do with the Empress. Otherwise, the Empress would not have been implicated later.

"The Empress was not there. Back then, she was just a princess and didn't come to see the deceased emperor. The Emperor was also not there either. When the incident happened, he was not in the Palace. It was the Empress Dowager who invited him over. After the deceased emperor died of illness, the Empress Dowager and the former empress talked things over and asked the Emperor to go there. When they were discussing, I and the others all withdrew."

The chief supervisor pieced together what had happened and said.

Back then, everything happened suddenly and came as a surprise to all.

"So, no one knows the conversation between the Empress Dowager and the former empress?" Shao Wanru said thoughtfully. Their conversation was the crux of the matter. In this conversation, they must have discussed who would ascend to the throne, Chu Liuchen, who was still a baby in swaddling clothes, or the second son, who was young and vigorous.

"No one knew it. At that time, only the Empress Dowager and the former empress were inside, but I felt their conversation was pretty short. It seemed they made the final decision in a few words." The chief supervisor calmed down and said while recalling.

Did they choose the successor to the throne just after a brief conversation? Shao Wanru was stunned. Wasn't they supposed to think about it carefully? Even if the former empress didn't care about the throne, she had to fight for her son. How could she give the throne to the current Emperor without demurring?

This was truly puzzling.

A woman may be soft, but a mother should be strong. Why didn't the former empress do something for her son?

In history, there was no lack of emperors ascending to the throne when they were still babies in their mothers' arms. Why didn't the former empress do likewise? She couldn't understand the choice of the former empress. Something seemed to have been missing. As a result, she always felt that things that happened at that time were against common sense.

"Your Highness, who can dig it out? I think it's most likely to be the current Empress. After all, she's the only one who has the ability to dig up such a thing. And there must be someone behind the painting. Someone deliberately sent the painting to the Duke Cheng'en's Mansion. If Duke Cheng'en presents it to the Empress Dowager before all the officials, something sensational will happen!"

The chief supervisor had lived in the Palace for a long time, so he had developed a keen insight into matters. After connecting the head and the tail of this matter, he immediately thought of the possible

trouble. Then, he reminded Shao Wanru that something serious would happen if the painting were displayed at the birthday party before so many important figures.

Shao Wanru's face clouded, and there was a severe look in her penetrating eyes. She fully understood what the chief supervisor meant.

Others might not understand the painting presented to the Empress Dowager before many others on her birthday, but how could the Empress Dowager not understand it? When the painting displayed by her brother dredged up a distant memory, the Empress Dowager might not bear the scene and faint. After that, she would be seriously ill.

The Emperor could also get the hidden meaning of this painting. Even if he was not on the spot, he must have asked about it later, so he also knew the truth. When he saw that the Empress Dowager could only remain in bed due to an emotional breakdown, he would fly into a towering rage. To his dismay, the Emperor had nowhere to vent his anger because this painting was from Duke Cheng'en, his mother's brother.

The Emperor could not punish Duke Cheng'en when the Empress Dowager was still sick, so he didn't do anything to Duke Cheng'en, who presented the painting in public. This matter seemed to have quieted down quickly as though nothing had happened.

But later, there should be some rumors in the imperial harem saying that the Empress Dowager murdered the deceased emperor. Her health deteriorated rapidly, and she had been sick and depressed in her bed until she died of grief.

All of this implied that the mastermind behind this scheme was the Empress.

Few people in the Palace knew what had happened back then, and the Empress would be the most suspicious. The Empress was the one most likely to target the Empress Dowager because she would become the most powerful one in the imperial harem as long as the Empress Dowager died.

As a result, the Emperor broke into a furious rage and locked the Empress up. What was more, he was even considering deposing the Empress. Later on, Prince Zhou rebelled. It could be said that Prince Zhou wouldn't get any benefit from the whole thing.

So it was not done by the Empress and Prince Zhou but by someone else. Could it be Chu Liuyue's mother, Consort of Virtue, or Prince Cheng outside the Palace?

Shao Wanru's brain worked fast. At present, she suspected these two people the most.

In her previous life, Chu Liuyue failed in the end. Shao Wanru didn't know why he failed. As for what happened to Prince Cheng, she had no memories of that.

Shao Wanru reached out to rub her temples to relax. In her previous life, she was far from the center of power, so she didn't know many things. Besides, some of her memories were missing. Thus, she didn't know the specific details.

"Your Highness, you should be careful!" The chief supervisor reminded her when he saw that she was silent. Since Princess Chen saw the painting, she would be involved.

When his master was not in the mansion, he must not let anything wrong happen to Princess Chen. This was also what Prince Chen had repeatedly told him before he left.

“Your Highness, before Prince Chen left, he said that if people in the Palace became suspicious of you, you should wear the delicate natural jade he had given you.”

The chief supervisor reminded again.

Shao Wanru certainly remembered the tip-top jade pendant. Back then, the Empress Dowager saw it and agreed to her marriage with Chu Liuchen for the time being. Then she exchanged it with another jade pendant and gave it back to Chu Liuchen, who had been wearing it all the time.

Before he left the capital city, Chu Liuchen deliberately left this jade pendant to her and said she would think of him when seeing it. That pendant turned out to be a shield that he had prepared for her early. In her heart, Shao Wanru felt deeply touched. Biting her lips in determination, she nodded in agreement.

As she had expected, someone from the Palace came soon to tell her the Empress Dowager summoned her to the Palace.

Shao Wanru dressed up a little, put on the jade pendant from Chu Liuchen, and followed the messenger to the Empress Dowager’s Palace.

There was no one else in the hall, and the Empress Dowager was sitting magisterially on the principal chair.

Shao Wanru, sharp-eyed, saw a wet patch on the ground. Although it had been cleaned up, she could still tell that this place must have been dripping wet. In the far corner, there was a piece of porcelain that had not been taken away in time.

Shao Wanru guessed that Duke Cheng’en had been here and presented the painting to the Empress Dowager. Fortunately, no one else was there, so the gift from Duke Cheng’en didn’t bring shame on the Empress Dowager and humiliate her in public. At this time, she could still remain calm.

Many things got tangled up, so Shao Wanru had no choice but to make Duke Cheng’en present the painting before the birthday banquet. If he showed the painting on her birthday before the Emperor and his officials, it would cause quite a stir.

But the Empress Dowager had an aversion to her because of Nanny Wei. At this time, the Empress Dowager had a bias against her, so it was challenging to tide over the upcoming crisis.

Subconsciously, Shao Wanru pressed the jade pendant near the hem of her skirt and calmed down.

She was in difficulty but felt relieved when touching the item Chu Liuchen had prepared to protect her.

She took two steps forward and knelt respectfully before the Empress Dowager. “Greetings, Imperial Grandmother!”

The Empress Dowager’s stern and unsmiling eyes fell on her. She didn’t let Shao Wanru get up and began to survey her instead. In the end, her eyes moved down and fell on the jade pendant hanging on her waist. Only then did she look less serious.

She gave this jade pendant to Chu Liuchen, so how could she not recognize it? She was depressed when learning that her dear grandson gave it back to Shao Wanru again and again.

However, no matter how unhappy she was, it reminded her that Shao Wanru was the only woman Chu Liuchen had fallen in love with over so many years. Though very displeased, the Empress Dowager suppressed her anger toward Shao Wanru.

“Get up!” The Empress Dowager said lightly.

Of course, if Shao Wanru were proven to harbor evil intent, she would not show mercy. But before that, the Empress Dowager had to stay calm and prevent herself from convicting Shao Wanru because of one-sided remarks. After all, what happened at that time had nothing to do with Shao Wanru. Even Rui’an Great Elder Princess knew nothing about it.

Everything seemed to have nothing to do with Shao Wanru.

Shao Wanru responded and stood up.

“I heard you visited the Duke Cheng’en’s Mansion?” The Empress Dowager asked coldly.

“Yes. I saw a painting of Duke Cheng’en there. It was similar to what I had prepared but more meaningful and made me ashamed. So, I want to see the other artists’ works to improve my painting.” Shao Wanru lowered her head and answered softly without any hesitation.

She had been collecting paintings because she needed some famous paintings as references to perfect the painting she had prepared.

Shao Wanru did that only to cope with the Empress Dowager’s possible questions. Luckily and unexpectedly, it attracted the attention of Zhao Xiran and the people in Minister Zhao’s Mansion.

Seeing that she answered smoothly and with full composure, the Empress Dowager nodded in her heart. “She seems to have nothing to do with that matter.”

“How did you know there was such a painting in the Duke Cheng’en’s Mansion? Why would you bring one of your paintings at that time?” The Empress Dowager asked again.

She suspected Shao Wanru because Shao Wanru quickly brought out her painting at that time.

“I took the painting with me even when I went to my grandmother’s place. Initially, I just wanted to ask Madam of Duke Cheng’en for some advice. She was the closest to you, so I supposed she must know your tastes. I hadn’t finished my painting so that I could modify it a little.”

Shao Wanru explained unhurriedly as if she didn’t notice the Empress Dowager was scrutinizing her face.

She had planned to go to the Duke Cheng’en’s Mansion early. Also, the notification card about their visit had been sent there in advance. Thus, it sounded reasonable for her to come with the painting.

Madam of Duke Cheng’en was the Empress Dowager’s sister-in-law, so the Empress Dowager had been close to her in the past.

After this explanation, the Empress Dowager thought it was nothing sinister for Shao Wanru to take her painting to the Duke Cheng'en's Mansion. Besides, Shao Wanru carried herself with ease and natural poise. If she was caught scheming something, she should appear guilty and nervous.

"How long have you prepared your painting?" The Empress Dowager looked a little relaxed. Although she was dissatisfied with her, evidence was needed to prove that Shao Wanru was plotting against her.

"Yes, I've been doing it for a long time. I began collecting maple leaves when I was in the Yuhui Nunnery." Shao Wanru looked a little shy and lowered her head even more. "Prince Chen told me that you liked maple leaves."

Some beautiful maple leaves were worthy of being appreciated and collected. Some people loved flowers, while others loved maple leaves.

Of course, the gift should be something the Empress Dowager liked.

"When I was in the Yuhui Nunnery, something happened between me and Secondary Consort Shao. At that time, there were a lot of maple leaves in the maple woods, so I picked up a lot of them. Later, I did it a few more times and finally got these good ones," Shao Wanru added.

Something did happen in the maple forest of the Yuhui Nunnery — Shao Wanru had plotted against her.

Since the Empress Dowager intended to let Shao Wanru marry Chu Liuchen, she paid special attention to her and certainly heard about this incident. At that time, Nanny Wei had no malice against Shao Wanru and knew Prince Chen seemed to care much about her, so what she told the Empress Dowager was beneficial to Shao Wanru.

Thinking of Secondary Consort Shao, the Empress Dowager frowned and was very unhappy. That lady seemed to have linked with Commandery Prince Qing. She heard they even did some shady activities in the maple forest. At the thought of Secondary Consort Shao, who had married her son, the Empress Dowager felt sick, although that woman had been locked up in the Cold Palace.

Since Shao Wanru mentioned this, she did have evidence to prove that she had prepared for the painting early. It was not that she made this painting on purpose after she knew something confidential.

"Sit down!" The Empress Dowager pointed to the chair aside and motioned for Shao Wanru to sit there.

Shao Wanru answered softly, walked to the chair, and sat down. She looked natural and at ease, not overly relaxed after being nervous. Every movement she made was normal.

"It seemed that she knew nothing about it!"

In her heart, the Empress Dowager was sure that it had nothing to do with Shao Wanru and that she couldn't be the person behind the plot.

Since it was not her, the Empress Dowager no longer asked her about the maple leaves. She changed the topic and said, "What happened to the Butterfly Clothing Shop you mentioned before? Did that female shopkeeper really want to give you the shop? How could she give it up and let you get all the profits?"

Shao Wanru knew she no longer suspected her because of the painting. Otherwise, the Empress Dowager would not have asked about such a trivial matter.

At this time, Shao Wanru felt truly relieved in her heart. Finally, she managed to dodge this disaster, but she didn't show it on her face. In a leisurely manner, she raised her head and reported, "Imperial Grandmother, there is something behind this matter, and... it is related to Nanny Wei. I don't know how to tell you the whole thing!"

It was a rare opportunity for Shao Wanru, though she didn't know how Nanny Wei had slandered her before the Empress Dowager and how she and Wei Dahai had plotted against her.

The matter they talked about before was so secretive that the Empress Dowager didn't want others to hear their conversation, so even Nanny Wei was not with them.

In fact, it didn't matter whether she trusted Nanny Wei or not. When Shao Wanru talked about some secrets with the chief supervisor, she also asked Yujie and the others to go out. Knowing too many secrets was not a good thing for them.

The Empress Dowager must have had the same considerations, which showed that she trusted Nanny Wei very much. Shao Wanru was fully aware that she should be more careful when talking about Nanny Wei.

"It has something to do with Nanny Wei? How could it be possible?" asked the Empress Dowager.

From her surprised reaction, Shao Wanru knew what she said had successfully attracted the Empress Dowager's attention. At first, she just asked this question casually after making sure that Shao Wanru had nothing to do with the matter related to the maple leaf painting. To her great surprise, the shop was relevant to Nanny Wei.

"The heartless man had a relationship with Nanny Wei, which I didn't know before. Today, I've just learned from the shopkeeper that someone pretended to be her and colluded with Lord Wei to deceive Nanny Wei," Shao Wanru said.

Then she told the whole story in detail.

She said that when the shopkeeper saw Wei Dahai come over, he took a female guest out of the shop. Because the female guest looked and dressed like the shopkeeper, shop-boys paid attention to her. Later, when Wei Dahai entered the shop and led the female guest away, a shop-boy followed them to a carriage. The shop-boy heard Wei Dahai introduce the woman to the people in the carriage, saying she was the shopkeeper of Butterfly Clothing Shop. In addition, he called the person in the carriage his aunt, who was said to be a maid serving the Empress Dowager.

The shop-boy couldn't hear everything clearly nor understand their conversation, so he went back to report this to the shopkeeper. The shopkeeper felt that something was wrong and immediately reported it to Shao Wanru.

"Someone pretended to be the shopkeeper of Butterfly Clothing Shop and misled Nanny Wei?" The Empress Dowager immediately believed it, her face darkening.

She believed in Nanny Wei. If Shao Wanru said Nanny Wei conspired with them, the Empress Dowager wouldn't buy it. But when she said that Wei Dahai lied to Nanny Wei, the Empress Dowager believed it right away. Shao Wanru's words couldn't be more authentic, and she looked perfectly calm without any sense of guilt.

"If you don't believe it, you can check it out. According to the shopkeeper, that woman is the trusted nurse of Lord Wei's mistress, who is about the same age as the shopkeeper." Shao Wanru dropped another sensational message.

She asked the Empress Dowager to investigate it by herself. Since Nanny Wei was involved in this matter, she wouldn't send her to do the survey. As long as it was not Nanny Wei, others could easily find out the truth and learned the news that Wei Dahai kept a mistress outside his mansion.

Previously when Nanny Wei was with them, Shao Wanru usually replied cryptically and never directly mentioned Wei Dahai's name. But when Nanny Wei was not here, she could talk about Lord Wei without scruples.

There was Lord Wei, Nanny Wei, and so many other pieces of evidence to verify. Immediately, the Empress Dowager believed everything Shao Wanru mentioned.

Her expression changed dramatically as soon as she learned about and believed the whole story.

The Empress Dowager remembered the dropped contract she had seen before. If what Shao Wanru said was true, that contract must have been faked, and the story that Shao Wanru lost the contract was also a lie.

Did all of this mean that Nanny Wei was disloyal to her? So, she deliberately led the Empress Dowager to the contract to mislead her.

When they came back from outside the Palace that day, Nanny Wei had helped her choose Misses from aristocratic families. The Empress Dowager could still remember everything clearly. In the past, Nanny Wei would advise her to let Chen'er choose for himself. If Prince Chen picked up any lady, the Empress Dowager would no longer need to do so many things. In this way, the Empress Dowager wouldn't make Prince Chen feel uncomfortable.

That day, Nanny Wei didn't persuade her to give up this idea. Instead, Nanny Wei suggested that she choose a few noble ladies to marry into the Prince Chen's Mansion, saying that they could guarantee Prince Chen's wealthy life in the future.

Long ago, the Empress Dowager had such an idea, but it was no longer suitable for the current situation. Although the Empress Dowager had disappointed Shao Wanru because of the Butterfly Clothing Shop, she didn't intend to make Shao Wanru leave Prince Chen. Once Misses from distinguished families married Prince Chen, the whole Prince Chen's Mansion would be in a mess.

At that time, the Empress Dowager felt nothing weird, and she even nodded in approval after hearing Nanny Wei's advice. Now when she calmed down and pondered on this matter, she immediately found that there was something unusual. The Empress Dowager began doubting Nanny Wei's loyalty to her.

Impossible! That was impossible!

As the Empress Dowager's trusted maid, Nanny Wei had gone through ups and downs with her. How could Nanny Wei betray her at this time? Wei Dahai must have deceived Nanny Wei.

Thinking of this, the Empress Dowager vigorously suppressed the uncomfortable feeling in her heart and said, "You go back first. I'll have to check it out first."

"I see. Thanks for that, Imperial Grandmother!" Shao Wanru stood up, bowing respectfully to the Empress Dowager. Then she turned around to leave, but the Empress Dowager suddenly stopped her. "Wei Dahai, I seem to have heard this name. Is there anything else about him?"

"I don't know that." Shao Wanru shook her head and said with doubt in her bright watery eyes.

"So, she really has no idea about that." The Empress Dowager looked at her and waved her hand, signaling her to withdraw.

Shao Wanru stepped out of the room as she was told. Seeing Nanny Wei standing at the door, she smiled gently, nodded to her, and was about to leave.

"Greetings, Princess Chen!" Nanny Wei took the initiative to say.

Shao Wanru stopped and asked, "Nanny Wei, what's the matter?"

Nanny Wei looked Shao Wanru up and down several times and found nothing improper. However, she was pretty confused. The Empress Dowager had even thrown a teacup at Duke Cheng'en, but how could Princess Chen come out safe and sound?

"I just want to know if Her Majesty is angry?"

"Imperial Grandmother asked me some questions. Why could she get angry?" Shao Wanru said, looking at Nanny Wei calmly.

Nanny Wei felt increasingly confused. When the incident happened, she happened to be outside. It was said that the Empress Dowager hit Duke Cheng'en in person with a teacup. In a mess, Duke Cheng'en went back home in a panic. She had intended to go in and comfort her master, but she was told that the Empress Dowager needed to spend some time alone to calm down, and no one was allowed to get in.

Shao Wanru came later, but now she seemed fine. Nanny Wei was greatly surprised.

Duke Cheng'en was the biological brother of the Empress Dowager. Although Duke Cheng'en was not that capable, the Empress Dowager had always been very good to him. How could Princess Chen get out of trouble when even Duke Cheng'en suffered?

Recently, the Empress Dowager liked Princess Chen less and less. She even wanted to get some new consorts for Prince Chen!

Nanny Wei had a bad feeling in her heart, so she stopped Shao Wanru.

"Yes, I made a mistake. This way, please, Your Highness!" Seeing that she couldn't get any information, Nanny Wei stepped aside, reached out to show the way, and replied respectfully.

Nanny Wei reflected on what she had done in the Prince Chen's Mansion. At that time, she soon regretted losing her composure. How could she arouse the vigilance of Princess Chen? She should have behaved as usual.

Before others, Nanny Wei returned to normal. Although she was the Empress Dowager's trusted maid, she had always been respectful to the royal family members in public.

Shao Wanru responded with a light smile and turned to leave without taking it seriously.

With a deep frown, Nanny Wei stood behind her and watched her go down the high steps, feeling perturbed. In the past, whenever the Empress Dowager came across anything, she would tell her the first time. But now she didn't even allow her to enter. What happened?

The Empress Dowager didn't tell Nanny Wei about it. At present, what she cared most about was the matter of the maple leaf painting. So, she invited the Emperor over and asked all the servants to leave.

The Empress Dowager put the painting brought by Duke Cheng'en on the table, looked at the Emperor, and said, "Look at this painting!"

The Emperor didn't know what had happened. Seeing his mother's serious look, he took the painting and unfolded it in confusion. His face immediately changed. He slammed his hand on the table and said sharply, "Where did this come from?"

The Empress Dowager sighed and smiled bitterly, "It's from Duke Cheng'en!"

The Emperor was at a loss for words. He would think that the person was against his mother and him if it were someone else. But it turned out to be Duke Cheng'en. The Emperor could guarantee that his kind but useless uncle would never do such a thing deliberately.

The Empress Dowager was Duke Cheng'en's biological sister. If something terrible happened to his sister, how could he be at peace?

The Emperor took a deep breath and said with a gloomy face, "Who set Duke Cheng'en up?"

His uncle was indeed a good-for-nothing. From time to time, some people would swindle some money out of him. The Emperor never accused him when learning about these things about money. However, he was becoming more and more irritated by his foolish behavior. How could he dare to send this painting to the Empress Dowager?

"Worse still, he had intended to demonstrate it to me before all the officials." The Empress Dowager gave a long sigh. Fortunately, he didn't choose to do that. At least the current situation is not that bad. He didn't bring disgrace on the Emperor and her in front of all the officials.

"Duke Cheng'en has made great progress in bringing trouble upon us. He even had the guts to do such a stupid thing! Then why did he choose not to do it?" The Emperor said furiously. Since Duke Cheng'en had always been a man who would spoil rather than accomplish things, the Emperor had decided to remove his uncle from the Imperial Household Department. The older he was, the more muddle-headed he became. At such an old age, it was better for him to recuperate at home so as not to cause any new trouble.

"It was Princess Chen. She happened to visit the Duke Cheng'en's Mansion with a painting of maple leaves she made because she wanted to ask them what I liked. Madam of Duke Cheng'en felt that the painting in her mansion could not compare with Princess Chen's, so she let Duke Cheng'en bring the painting to me before my birthday, saying that it was a token of his kindness!"

The Empress Dowager felt hatred and anger, but she could do nothing.

Her elder brother did it all out of kindness, though this action was stupid. How dare he present it in front of the officials without scrutinizing it?

"Mother, don't worry. I will investigate the people around Duke Cheng'en. I will find out the people behind it and deal these people a crushing blow." The Emperor pushed the painting aside and had a clear idea.

This matter had something to do with people in the Palace. Perhaps, it was the Empress, Consort of Virtue, and several other high-ranking imperial consorts. Of course, the Empress was the most likely to be related to this plot, followed by the Consort of Virtue. It was because both of them had grown-up sons.

"Don't alert the suspects." The Empress Dowager nodded and reminded him.

"Mother, rest assured! I will be careful about it." The Emperor nodded. After thinking for a while, he said, "Mother, you'd better take a look at Princess Chen's painting first, lest something unexpected happen again!"

With the lesson drawn from Duke Cheng'en's mistake, the Emperor was afraid that Princess Chen would be ignorant and would send a similar painting to Empress Dowager.

Nanny Wei had walked back and forth outside the Palace gate many times, feeling troubled and uneasy. Absentmindedly, she pretended to look at the Palace gate and the sky, but she was in terror and uncertainty.

"What did Princess Chen say to my master? Why did she even invite over the Emperor?"

"Is there anything that I don't know happened? What is going on?" In the past, the Empress Dowager would ask me to serve her. What went wrong? Was it about Wei Dahai?"

When Nanny Wei thought about this, her heart fluttered more and more wildly, and she felt very guilty about lying about the contract. Of course, the story about the contract was cooked up by Wei Dahai and her. It was her nephew who told someone to bring the contract to the Palace and dropped it there. Then she accompanied the Empress Dowager to take a walk nearby, and they saw it.

If the Empress Dowager learned the truth about this matter, she would be in a towering rage.

Nanny Wei's face turned livid. She gulped for air, repeatedly telling herself not to panic and trying to calm down. Maybe it was not what she had guessed. No matter how furious the Empress Dowager was about this, she didn't have to look for the Emperor, let alone let him take action.

Over and over again, she told herself not to scare herself. It couldn't be that thing. It couldn't have happened.

The heavy gate opened wild, and the Emperor, wearing a bright yellow brocade robe, stepped outside. Hands behind his back, he looked at the people standing by there. Finally, his eyes fell on Nanny Wei. "Nanny Wei, Imperial Mother is inside. Go and serve her!"

After that, he strode out with his servants waiting at the gate.

Nanny Wei answered respectfully. After the Emperor left, she straightened up, trying to calm her flustered mind, and walked into the main hall.

The Empress Dowager was sitting in the main hall, still with a sullen face. Hearing her voice, she looked up at Nanny Wei solemnly. Again, Nanny Wei's heart began racing.

"Your... Your Majesty!"

"Deliver my imperial order: tell Consort of Virtue to come over." The Empress Dowager said coldly.

"Your Majesty, did anything happen? She has always been filial to you!" Nanny Wei asked tentatively.

Consort of Virtue had been accompanying the Empress Dowager for many years. Nanny Wei knew her master liked her, though she was not the Empress.

"Did I ever say she was unfilial?" The Empress Dowager's cold, icelike, and distant eyes landed on Nanny Wei as she said, "We have been standing together through thick and thin for so many years in the Palace. One kind of person can't live long here. You should know that, right?"

"What, what kind of..." Nanny Wei asked. Fear made her teeth chatter.

"Those who betray their masters and talk too much." The Empress Dowager said flatly.

Nanny Wei's back was covered with cold sweat, and she lowered her head in a panic. She gritted her teeth and composed herself before replying, "I understand. I'm going to invite Consort of Virtue over."

No matter what, what happened to Consort of Virtue had nothing to do with her.

"You can leave now. Be cautious with your words!" The Empress Dowager waved her hand and said.

She was in no mood to deal with Nanny Wei's matter. Compared with the trouble started by Duke Cheng'en's painting, Nanny Wei's thing was just a small matter.

After their discussion, she and the Emperor agreed that the Consort of Virtue and the Empress were the most likely suspects.

Yet, they couldn't investigate the two of them together, for it might expose their purpose. Thus, to find out who was the most likely to be behind this plot, the Empress Dowager would ask the Consort of Virtue while the Emperor would go to see the Empress.

Consort of Virtue came quickly. Upon seeing the Empress Dowager, she bowed with great respect and began asking about the Empress Dowager's health condition. She was a favorite with the Empress Dowager and was in the leading place among the four consorts. It was only right and proper that she gave birth to the eldest son of the Emperor.

After chatting with Consort of Virtue for a while, the Empress Dowager asked her to go back and sit in the main hall alone, pondering deeply.

She was very reluctant to recollect what had happened that day: she helplessly watched her son die before her. There had always been a doubt lingering in her mind — she wondered if her eldest son really died of illness.

Otherwise, why would he suddenly pass away halfway through the treatment?

The imperial physician had always said that his illness was worsening and that there was no hope. But, never had he mentioned that her eldest son would die in a few days. Besides, he died abruptly without leaving his last words. Could he no longer endure his long illness? Or was there something unexpected?

The Empress Dowager had secretly sent people to investigate it but found nothing.

The past event was brought up again, implying that she had something to do with it. Who did it? This person knew the Palace inside out...

Pieces of news secretly spread out from the Palace, and those who got the information were silently terrified.

First, the Empress Dowager harshly scolded Duke Cheng'en and smashed a cup against him. Later, the Emperor met the Empress while the Empress Dowager called in Consort of Virtue. It was heard that the Emperor was severely scolding the Empress loudly in his Imperial Study. When Consort of Virtue came out of the Empress Dowager's palace, she was preoccupied with anxiety and nearly fell over on her way back.

How could one painting from Duke Cheng'en cause all of this?

A painting couldn't be powerful enough to lead to these grave consequences. Duke Cheng'en was useless, but the Empress Dowager had always respected him. So, even if she was displeased, she couldn't throw a teacup at him. When Duke Cheng'en was walking out of the Palace, he hadn't yet wiped off all the blood stains on his forehead. Some people who saw him said he looked pathetically embarrassed.

This matter must have been of great importance and caused by Duke Cheng'en.

With his character, Duke Cheng'en must have been deceived by someone and said something improper to the Empress Dowager, which annoyed her and got him into trouble. After that, Duke Cheng'en was dismissed from his post with little work in the Imperial Household Department. It could be seen that he had incensed the Empress Dowager and the Emperor.

Then the Empress and Consort of Virtue also got involved in that.

Such a matter caused these reactions. Many people guessed that this matter must be related to the succession of the throne.

When discussing the establishment of the crown prince in the imperial court, many officials argued that the vacancy of an heir was very bad for a nation. So, these officials asked the Emperor to make the decision early and not to leave them on tenterhooks.

On this premise, what happened made some sense. There were so many imperial consorts in the Palace. Why didn't they question others but only the Empress and Consort of Virtue? It must be because of Prince Yue and Prince Zhou.

As for Prince Xin, he was young and had been too much ignored by the Empress Dowager and the Emperor. He was said to be in poor physical condition recently and had not appeared in public for a long time. Even if Consort Ming in the Palace had some ambitious ideas, so what? Prince Xin was much less competitive than Prince Yue and Prince Zhou.

Were they going to choose the crown prince? Everyone was anxious and worried about who would be chosen, always regarding the answer as something of a great enigma. Anyway, they had to deal with it cautiously and wait for the final decision from the Palace. Which prince would the Emperor and the Empress Dowager choose to become the heir to the throne?

This was something big that would affect everyone in the next few decades.

Changes in the imperial court might cause awful disasters...

In the Empress's Phoenix Palace, the Empress slammed her hand on the table, gnashing her teeth in anger.

"Your Majesty, don't be angry." Her trusted Nanny soothed her in a soft voice.

"How can I not be angry? How do I know what happened that year? I'm suspected of taking advantage of some things to stir up trouble in the Palace! But I was not there back then. I know nothing about the matter." The Empress said rather fretfully.

For some inexplicable reason, the Emperor rebuked her and even ordered her to kneel as a punishment. For the Empress, it was a disgrace to her. She had been respected as a motherly model of the nation. After this, how could she manage the imperial harem in the future?

She was living in peace in the Phoenix Palace. Then there came the unforeseen misfortune. She was in a peeve over it, like having a fishbone stuck in the throat.

She had been sitting up high in a leading position for so long and had only suffered one setback because of someone. Most importantly, she didn't have the slightest idea of what was going on and why the Emperor would blame her without rhyme or reason.

"Your Majesty, you didn't do this, then it could be Consort of Virtue. Prince Yue has always been resourceful, and Consort of Virtue is used to progressing with preconceived plans. Both you and she were asked to answer questions, but only you were reprimanded. It's thus clear that Consort of Virtue came well prepared."

Her personal Nanny helped her analyze.

While listening to her, the Empress nodded vigorously. She fell prey to the dark scheme because she was ill-informed. The Emperor and the Empress Dowager invited her and Consort of Virtue, so Consort of Virtue was also a suspect. For her, since she didn't do it, it must be Consort of Virtue.

"That bitch!" The Empress was very anxious to visit Consort of Virtue's place and give her a few tight slaps to make her see her inferior position.

"At this time, you shouldn't lose your temper. It is best to calm down, think about this matter, and investigate it carefully. You can't go to see Consort of Virtue on impulse."

The personal Nanny knew the Empress' temper. Seeing her master clench her teeth in bitter hatred, she knew things might go wrong. Thus, she hurriedly tried her best to soothe her anger.

"Your Majesty, your words and deeds will affect Prince Zhou, so you can't implicate him!" The Empress got so furious that she gasped for breath. The Nanny feared she would mention Prince Zhou again in a moment of impulse.

Hearing that, the Empress looked a little less irritated. At this time, she mustn't make any move without thinking carefully. The Emperor had just severely rebuked her so that she couldn't provoke any more dispute. Since she was the Empress and had a legitimate son, she would never allow Consort of Virtue's son to override her and her son.

"I can bear it," the Empress said through gritted teeth.

"I've asked around. After Duke Cheng'en brought trouble to himself, the Empress Dowager met Princess Chen first and asked her to leave. Nothing serious happened. After that, she sent for the Emperor. As soon as His Majesty returned his Imperial Study from the Palace of Benevolent Peace, he asked you to come over!"

The Nanny got enough information from the outside and figured out the whole thing. In fact, it was not exactly a secret at all. In just a while, many people had secretly learned about some things. In the Palace, many people were keen on collecting this kind of message.

"I'll see Princess Chen tomorrow!" The Empress gritted her teeth, suppressed her anger for the time being, and said. It was already late, so it was inappropriate to order Shao Wanru to enter the Palace. Otherwise, she would meet Princess Chen now and make everything clear.

"But such a thing happened today. You should find a really good reason to summon her tomorrow. Do you think so?" The personal Nanny suggested helpfully.

"There is a reason, a justifiable one. She can't refuse to come!" The Empress said with hatred. At this moment, she even had a grudge against Shao Wanru. She resented the Shao sisters for a long time and hated them even more at this time.

"Her Majesty wants me to see her in the Palace?" asked Shao Wanru in surprise. She had just had breakfast, and a familiar face came to her. Unexpectedly, it was Nanny Xi.

"Yes, my master said she hadn't seen you for a long time. You had been ill before, and she was worried about you. So, she specially asked me to invite you and wanted to discuss something about Secondary Consort Shao with you in passing." Nanny Xi said with a broad smile. Her attitude was completely different from when she was in the Marquis Xing's Mansion.

With kindness, her smile appeared pretty amiable.

"Something about Shao Yanru?" Shao Wanru secretly frowned because she didn't want to interfere in Shao Yanru's things at all. Who knew what this unruly woman had done?

"I've never been in charge of her business. Why didn't Her Majesty look for my Second Uncle?" Shao Wanru asked. Nanny Xi's last sentence was crucial, but she didn't want to get involved in Shao Yanru's business. Or it could be said that she didn't want to do it when Chu Liuchen wasn't around. She alone was not powerful enough to deal with Shao Yanru in the Palace.

Shao Yanru's business was too deep to be fathomable!

"She intended to invite the elders of Marquis Xing's Mansion, but at present, no proper elder in its inner court could do that. My master had thought it over and found you were the only person she could meet. So, Your Highness, please go ahead! Her Majesty is waiting for you!" Nanny Xi said with a smile. Her words sounded reasonable, and this invitation was irresistible.

The Empress just told her to come without issuing a formal order. Even so, Shao Wanru had to go.

The Empress invited her for a good reason.

Shao Wanru could only nod and ask Nanny Xi to go back first. She would arrive later.

After Nanny Xi left, Yujie and Qu Le looked nervous. Yesterday, the Empress Dowager summoned their master, and today the Empress wanted to see her, which would never be a good thing. Worse still, Shao Yanru was involved in it.

Secondary Consort Shao's affairs had nothing to do with their master.

"Your Highness..."

"My Lady..."

"Don't worry. She probably wants to ask about what happened when I was in the Empress Dowager's place yesterday," Shao Wanru said, fluttering her long eyelashes. She had no idea what had happened in the Palace yesterday. However, according to her memories of her previous life, the Empress would inevitably be rebuked, but she suffered less than last time.

At least at present, the Empress Dowager was fine and didn't get humiliated in front of all the officials.

The Empress Dowager and the Emperor would certainly break into a furious rage when finding anyone plotting against them. Yesterday, the Palace must be in a state of unrest, so the Empress summoned her today.

The stir caused by this matter was much less severe than in her previous life. Only some people in the Palace were amidst secret turbulence. At least, the situation looked peaceful on the surface from the outsiders.

After washing up and changing into a lotus-pattern dress of different shades of light blue, Shao Wanru entered the Palace from the side door with Yujie.

Someone immediately reported it to the Empress when they arrived at the Phoenix Palace. With a big grin, Nanny Xi came out and said, "Your Highness, please. Her Majesty has been waiting for you for a long time!"

With this, she stepped aside to make way for Shao Wanru and let her go first.

Shao Wanru nodded at Nanny Xi and walked into the hall while Yujie stood outside in well-mannered silence.

When she was inside and saw the Empress sitting high in the main seat, Shao Wanru stepped forward and bowed.

"Princess Chen, please sit down!" The Empress said politely and asked a palace maid to lead Shao Wanru to sit down on a brocade stool nearby.

In the hall, there were three or four young and beautiful consorts besides the Empress. They were all looking at Shao Wanru curiously. They were here to pay their respects to the Empress and were about to leave after chatting with the Empress for a while. But the Empress said it was not a big deal and asked them to stay longer.

"I heard the Empress Dowager was shocked yesterday, and you were involved in it. What exactly had happened? How could the Empress Dowager get into a great rage?" The Empress came straight to the question.

Shao Wanru slightly lifted her eyes and said with a little surprise, "Was she angry?"

She had a puzzled look on her delicate and fair face.

The Empress looked at Shao Wanru's face but didn't detect anything unusual. Then, she said slowly, "Princess Chen, do you know your visit yesterday caused a great disturbance in Palace?"

Shao Wanru's face also darkened. The Empress pushed all the blame onto her without investigating.

"Your Majesty, Imperial Grandmother just asked me a few ordinary questions and asked me to go home. She didn't mention anything else but a few trivial matters about the Duke Cheng'en's Mansion. Do you want to inquire about what she said then?"

The Empress, thinking Shao Wanru was weak, was bullying her and intended to put all the blame on her.

In her previous life, the consequences were catastrophic and damaging. Although she had done a lot in this life to prevent devastating things from happening, she couldn't afford to bear the responsibility for the turbulence in the Palace. According to the Empress's exasperated look, Shao Wanru knew the Emperor must have rebuked her, which was a better result after she changed the major accident to a minor one in this life. If everything in her previous life had happened, the Empress would have been locked up.

"How dare you speak to Her Majesty like that?" A consort rebuked harshly for the Empress.

"Your Grace, what should I say now? Should I say what the Empress Dowager ordered me not to say?" Since Shao Wanru's face clouded, she no longer pretended to be weak and let the Empress step on her.

"You, you audacious..." No one in the hall had expected that Shao Wanru would suddenly become so tough. The imperial consort, who flushed scarlet after being scolded, couldn't utter a word.

She couldn't say that the Empress's words mattered, so Princess Chen could ignore the request of the Empress Dowager and tell the Empress whatever she wanted to know.

"No matter how brave I am, I'm not as bold as you, Your Grace. You're driving a wedge between the Empress Dowager and the Empress. How can I casually spread confidential words the Empress Dowager has forbidden me to tell others? Everyone in the Palace knows the rule. Even if I have stayed in the Yuhui Nunnery for three years, I understand this rule. Why don't you know it?"

Shao Wanru mocked her.

Since she wasn't going to play the weak, she might as well be fierce both in look and voice.

At this critical moment, the Empress didn't have the guts to make a big deal out of it because she hadn't been cleared of all suspicion. She would have to face imminent disaster if she stirred up more trouble.

"Princess Chen, how dare you talk nonsense? How could I sow discord between them? You are slandering me!" The imperial consort couldn't sit still after being criticized by Shao Wanru. She stood up and argued aloud in a furious. She just wanted to help the Empress, but she didn't expect Princess Chen was not someone to be trifled with.

The other imperial consorts didn't say anything, and their expressions changed when they looked at Shao Wanru.

At first sight of Princess Chen, everyone felt she was gentle and delicate. Her eyes and brows were full of tender charms. With her outstanding facial features, she was exceedingly beautiful. Such a woman like her must be gentle and pitiful. But since no man was here, no one would take pity on her.

No one had expected that her character was widely distant from her appearance. She dared to fight for a powerful position even before the Empress.

A few smart consorts observed the Empress's expression and lowered their heads.

The Empress was in charge of the imperial harem and managed all the consorts, but Princess Chen was dauntless and unyielding.

Prince Chen was a very difficult character. Who knew what kind of big trouble he would make after he came back? They were not the Empress. No matter how aggressive Prince Chen was, he couldn't do anything to the Empress.

The large hall suddenly quieted down. Some consorts folded the handkerchief in their hands, some tidied up their sleeves, and some played with the bracelets around their wrists. They all pretended not to see what was going on before them.

"Your Grace, the Empress and the Empress Dowager can judge the meaning of your words. As for the slander, I never said it was you. Why did you insist on bearing the responsibility out of your guilty conscience?" Shao Wanru said coldly.

Since they talked about everything open and aboveboard, Shao Wanru was not afraid of consorts like her at all. The consort before her was eager to fawn over the Empress. Before the Empress started the argument, she jumped out to defend her. It was a pity that she didn't know how humble she was.

"I just wanted to ask you what you said in the Empress Dowager's place yesterday. Since Her Majesty didn't allow you to tell others, you could keep it a secret. You didn't have to despise the Emperor's

consort. At least, she is your elder.” The Empress finally spoke with displeasure, and her tone was reproachful.

The imperial consort responded quickly and knelt before the Empress with a thud. She cried sadly, “Your Majesty, I just gave Princess Chen a kind reminder. How could she treat me so harshly? I feel ashamed to meet His Majesty again.”

After that, she stood up and covered her face with her long sleeves as if she was going to bump against a pillar nearby.

The palace maids on the side hurriedly stopped her. The imperial consort was all tears, and her voice was choked with sobs. When several palace maids pulled her to prevent her from doing anything stupid, she fell and knelt on the ground, crying. “Your Majesty, please uphold justice for me!”

“Princess Chen, it was originally a small matter. I don’t know why you had to make such a scene. How can I explain it to the Empress Dowager and His Majesty?” The Empress looked at Shao Wanru with a gloomy face and said, “Since you provoked this conflict, I should punish you. You must...”

“Wait!” Shao Wanru raised her voice and interrupted the Empress.

The imperial consort who had fallen to the ground burst into tears again, waving her hands and feet as if she was trying hard to get up.

“Your Majesty, I really don’t know what happened. You asked me about the conversation yesterday between the Empress Dowager and me. I told you Imperial Grandmother didn’t allow me to reveal the secret. Then, this lady stood out to accuse me and forced me to share the secret. A moment ago, she even deliberately threatened to kill herself, and you immediately decided that she was right and I was wrong, and you were going to punish me. You think I didn’t do it right, so I should tell you about the confidential chat with the Empress Dowager yesterday. Is that the right thing I must do?”

Shao Wanru looked at the Empress calmly. She connected everything that happened, and her analysis sounded logical and reasonable.

The Empress let her supporter malign her. After that, she could justifiably punish her. However, no matter what punishment she planned to inflict on her, Shao Wanru wouldn’t accept it. Otherwise, she would harm her dignity and even Chu Liuchen’s.

They wanted to sacrifice the Prince Chen’s Mansion to preserve the Empress’s dignity, and the Empress was going to shift all the blame onto the Prince Chen’s Mansion. Shao Wanru could never retreat at this time!

“Princess Chen, do you know what you were referring to?” No one in the hall spoke except for the imperial consort who had been forced to argue with Shao Wanru. In this case, the Empress had to ask personally.

“Your Highness, I know what I’m talking about. Even if the Empress Dowager and the Emperor were here, I would say the same thing,” Shao Wanru raised her head and said coldly.

She showed no fear and looked steadily at the Empress, her soft and charming eyes appearing piercing and steely as the Empress watched her closely.

With her current status, the Empress couldn't punish her in private. Since it was so, she did not have to give in to the Empress. In her eyes, the Empress was just making an empty show of her strength. Shao Wanru knew she didn't dare to do anything to her.

After Shao Wanru finished speaking, the Empress was so angry that her face turned pale. But as Shao Wanru had expected, her anger gradually cooled. In the end, even her face had strangely softened.

She asked someone to pull the imperial consort up and let her sit aside.

"Princess Chen, I had no intention of asking about the conversation between the Empress Dowager and you, but I'm worried about the peace of the imperial harem. Since the Empress Dowager ordered you to keep it a secret, I won't blame you. It's just that you've made such a mess with this consort. It's really embarrassing. No matter what improper things she has done, you've been disrespectful."

The Empress reproached her again, but her voice was not as stern as before.

Shao Wanru withdrew the stern look on her face and stopped before going too far. With great respect, she bowed to the Empress and said in a tone that was neither humble nor pushy, "Just now, I thought someone intended to plot against my Imperial Grandmother, so I spoke too hastily. Your Majesty, please forgive me."

She said that she spoke impetuously but refused to admit her mistake.

By saying that, she also meant to stick up for the Empress Dowager. Therefore, even if the Empress wanted to blame Shao Wanru, she had no reason. It was because what she said was reasonable, and there was no mistake.

"Your Majesty, please uphold justice for me!" Shao Wanru remained calm, but the imperial consort panicked. She looked up at the Empress and begged while wiping her tears.

She also regretted it in her heart. At the moment, she was in a dilemma. If she had known this result, she would not have rushed out. Unexpectedly, Princess Chen looked so young and delicate, but she had such a strong temper. Even if the consort made a terrible scene, she failed to drag Princess Chen into trouble. If the Emperor learned about this, she might have to suffer.

At this moment, she was no longer interested in gaining merit but only in avoiding blame.

The other imperial consorts lowered their heads. They had wanted to help because the Empress seemed to be in a superior position. But at present, they all felt grateful that they didn't react fast enough in the beginning.

"You go back first. I will explain it to His Majesty!" the Empress said.

The imperial consort didn't dare to make any more trouble and left tearfully, holding a palace maid's hand.

"Princess Chen, I will report it to His Majesty." The Empress said lightly.

"Thank you for your justice, Your Majesty." Shao Wanru bowed respectfully again.

"In fact, the most important thing is the matter about your eldest sister. That was why I invited you here. I just asked about your chat with the Empress Dowager in passing. You know, because you had been to the Palace yesterday, a lot of things happened. Since I'm in charge of the imperial harem, I should ask about everything clearly," the Empress Queen said seriously.

She had brought up the topic of "the discord between the Empress Dowager and the Empress," so she had to explain it away at this time.

Shao Wanru, knowing full well when to stop, slightly knitted her willowy eyebrows and asked, "Did anything happen to Secondary Consort Shao?"

"She is seriously ill," the Empress said.

Shao Wanru looked up in astonishment and asked, "Really?"

"She fell ill before. At the start, she just caught a chill, but her condition worsened. The imperial physicians went to see her and said she only had a slim chance of surviving with her illness." The Empress said solemnly.

"Did all the imperial physicians say so?" Shao Wanru said with a deep look in her watery eyes. "Is Shao Yanru going to die of illness?" She really couldn't believe it.

"The imperial physicians said so. This time, I asked you to come to the Palace to see her. If anything untoward should happen to her, she won't feel regretful, for she has seen someone from her family of origin. Recently, no one but you can go here on behalf of the Marquis Xing's Mansion." The Empress said.

"Thank you, Your Majesty." Shao Wanru agreed.

She couldn't refuse. Outsiders knew she didn't get along well with Shao Yanru, but it was not the time to bother about it. When Shao Yanru was about to die, how could she still bear a grudge against her? If Shao Wanru didn't go to see her, others would look down on her because she was cold-blooded.

"Come on, take Princess Chen to see Secondary Consort Shao." The Empress waved her hand and ordered.

Nanny Xi stepped out from behind the Empress, took the order with a big smile, and left with Shao Wanru.

Seeing Shao Wanru leave, the few imperial consorts also excused themselves. Right after getting out of the Phoenix Palace, they all breathed a sigh of relief. In their hearts, they secretly decided not to intervene in anything related to Princess Chen in the future because they couldn't afford to offend her.

They didn't dare to provoke Prince Chen and Princess Chen!

After everyone left, the Empress's face clouded, and she revealed the anger she had tried hard to hide. How could even the inferior Princess Chen get the nerve to disobey her?

"Your Highness, don't get angry. Princess Chen has Prince Chen backing her up, so you can't punish her without the most careful thought. But without Prince Chen, Princess Chen is nothing!"

A personal Nanny beside her came forward to soothe her.

“Your Majesty, don’t worry. Do you remember Princess Yutao from Xu State? I heard she was a beauty with a heroic spirit. Prince Chen is in poor health, so he will prefer women of valiant and heroic bearing.” Another Nanny advised.

Hearing their words, the Empress looked a little relieved and nodded. “I have underestimated Princess Chen. I didn’t expect her to contradict me.”

She had thought it would be a piece of cake to inquire about what had happened in the Empress Dowager’s place from Shao Wanru. To her great dismay, Shao Wanru was so difficult to deal with that the Empress was at a loss for the right words to frame her up. In addition, she acted in an overbearing manner. With Chu Liuchen behind her, the Empress really didn’t dare to do anything to her, not to mention that the Emperor had just rebuked her yesterday.

In the near future, she should not cause any more trouble. But what exactly did Shao Wanru say to the Empress Dowager yesterday? Because of that, the Empress Dowager was in a rage, and the Emperor scolded her.

The Empress was deep in thought, thinking about how to get the answers to these questions. If she knew who was playing tricks behind her back, she would never let the person go!

Of course, Consort of Virtue was the most likely one. Chu Liuyue had been targeting the throne. He and Chu Liuzhou had plotted against each other many times.

“Keep an eye on Consort of Virtue. Whenever Prince Yue enters the Palace, ask some people to monitor his schedule closely!” The Empress said unwillingly. She believed that she could find something if she closely watched Consort of Virtue.

The Empress didn’t get any benefits from Shao Wanru, so she vented all her anger on Consort of Virtue. Although some people had secretly watched Consort of Virtue for her, she dispatched more this time.

From time to time, several servants would pass by the place where Consort of Virtue lived. For a time, all the people in the Consort of Virtue’s place remained in a state of suspicion and fear...

Shao Wanru followed Nanny Xi, and they walked for a long time before arriving at Shao Yanru’s residence. It was a small courtyard much smaller than Shao Yanru’s courtyard in the Marquis Xing’s Mansion. There were only three simple rooms. Although one was the main room, it was just slightly bigger than the two side rooms.

As soon as Shao Wanru entered the room, she smelled a strong smell of medicine.

A palace maid squatting in the corridor heard the sound and looked up. When she saw Shao Wanru, she was pleasantly surprised. In a hurry, she dropped the palm-leaf fan in her hand and ran over to bow to Shao Wanru. “Greetings, Your Highness!”

She was Han Dan, the palace maid with Shao Yanru.

“How is your master?” With a wave of her hand, Shao Wanru motioned her to stand up and asked.

"Our master, our master..." The rims of Han Dan's eyes turned red. She wiped her tears but couldn't even speak a word.

"Your Highness, I'll go back and report to my master." Nanny Xi didn't go in. She looked at the empty and low courtyard with disgust and said.

"Thank you, Nanny Xi!" Shao Wanru nodded and said.

"Nanny Xi, please wait a minute. My master has something important to tell you!" Mo Yan, Shao Yanru's servant girl, suddenly appeared in the corridor. She was sent to the Palace to serve Shao Yanru later. Shao Wanru saw her not long ago, but she looked much thinner and more gloomy.

She walked to the corridor and bowed to Shao Wanru sideways. Then she also saluted Nanny Xi. Mo Yan had met Nanny Xi when in the Marquis Xing's Mansion.

Nanny Xi looked at her from head to toe and said arrogantly, "I have something else to deal with in my master's place, so I won't see Secondary Consort Shao."

After that, she turned around and was about to leave. With Shao Yanru's poor situation, anyone who saw her would have a bad time. Nanny Xi couldn't see the benefit of going in.

"Nanny, don't go yet. It's from my master!" Mo Yan took out a small purse from her breast pocket and handed it to Nanny Xi. Nanny Xi took it and pinched it to feel what was inside. It was not a banknote but more like a piece of jade. She could feel that it was smooth but angular.

Although she didn't know what it was, she knew it should be a nice piece.

Before Shao Yanru entered the Palace, she was the legitimate eldest daughter in the Marquis Xing's Mansion. Thus, she had a lot of good items. This one in the pocket must be one of them. Compared with those cheques for silver, it was much more valuable.

Thinking of this, Nanny Xi immediately smiled and said, "Since your master said so, I'll go and have a look. Your master has been ill for a long time. If it goes on like this, it will be troublesome."

"Thank you for your concern, Nanny Xi. Our master said she felt much better and should be fine after drinking a few more doses of medicine." Mo Yan breathed a sigh of relief and smiled faintly.

Shao Wanru shifted her eyes from Nanny Xi's face to Mo Yan. So, Shao Yanru was not seriously ill, but just sick.

For this reason, the Empress summoned her to the Palace so that she could ask about what had happened in the Empress Dowager's place yesterday. Shao Yanru's illness was just an excuse.

Sure enough, Shao Yanru was not so easy to die. Even though she was in such a mess in the Palace, she could still secretly stir up trouble.

"Your Highness, let's go in and have a look!" After Nanny Xi finished talking with Mo Yan, she said to Shao Wanru with a smile.

Shao Wanru nodded and walked inside.

She hadn't seen Shao Yanru for a long time, but no matter how long it had been, she wouldn't forget that the person lying in this room was a beautiful villain with a murderous heart that was vicious to the extreme. Shao Wanru had to deal with her with the greatest care at any time in case Shao Yanru should take advantage of the information to cause trouble.

Even before she entered the Palace, Shao Yanru had done many dirty things...

It was a very plain room, and the simple decoration was not bad. However, the layout was far inferior to that of Shao Yanru's room in the Marquis Xing's Mansion.

Fortunately, the arrangement was simple but clean.

They turned around the screen and saw Shao Yanru on the bed. She was dressed in very simple white clothes and leaning against the headboard with a white ribbon on her head. She looked very haggard, and her rosy lips were pale. It could be seen that Shao Yanru was in a pretty bad condition.

But inexplicably, she looked pitiful.

Shao Wanru stood still and looked at Shao Yanru's face. She had seen the emaciated Madam Di and Madam Jiang thinned to the bone, but she had never seen Shao Yanru when she was very thin.

This skinny and pitiful beauty could make others feel sorry for her.

She had been the eldest legitimate daughter of the Marquis Xing's Mansion, yet she ended up in such a humble, pitiful position.

Leaning against the headboard, she was expecting visitors eagerly with a sorrowful look in her eyes. Her tousled hair fell untidily on her back. Her clothes were simple, but they did not affect her attractive appearance. Shao Wanru's heart also skipped a beat when she saw her.

Since Shao Yanru no longer lived the same wealthy life as before, she looked much less flashy and more pitiful. She was already in such a miserable state, and her days were numbered, so no matter how big the past event was, others would feel reluctant to haggle over old grudges with her!

"Fifth Sister, Nanny Xi!" Hearing the voice at the door, Shao Yanru looked up at them, the rims of her eyes slightly red. She looked excited and reached out her arms to prop herself up from the bed. However, she was frail, so she collapsed.

Han Dan hurriedly stepped forward to support her and slowly lifted her to sit on the bed. Then, she put several thick cushions behind her so that she could lay bolstered up in bed.

Shao Yanru leaned back and said weakly, "Thank you for coming to see me, Fifth Sister and Nanny Xi!"

"Are you feeling any better?" Nanny Xi looked Shao Yanru up and down and asked.

"I'm slightly better. The medicine sent before was very good...I felt much better after taking it!" Shao Yanru said softly. Although she looked weak, she was beautiful.

"That's good! Great!" Nanny Xi said with a wide smile and looked around. In the end, her eyes fell on several long brocade boxes on the table.

There were three or four brocade boxes, and the top one was half-opened. Several ginseng roots could be seen outside. Her eyes lit up. Ordinary people couldn't afford such good ginseng.

Shao Yanru, in poor condition, didn't seem to be able to afford this kind of ginseng. Besides, it was obvious that the ginseng in these boxes was sent by someone.

"If you need anything, I'll tell the Empress." Nanny Xi's eyes were glued to these brocade boxes with ginseng as she made these polite remarks.

The Empress loathed Shao Yanru. Even if Shao Yanru begged her in person, she would ignore her.

This time, an imperial physician had come to help Shao Yanru. It was said that she had asked someone else for help. Nanny Xi did not care much about it at first. The one who was willing to help must have casually invited an imperial physician over merely for the sake of the Marquis Xing's Mansion.

Unexpectedly, she saw such tip-top medicinal materials here. It meant the person didn't do it merely for the sake of courtesy. Could Secondary Consort Shao turn the tables one day?

Nanny Xi was old and sophisticated. When she entered the room, she noticed that though Secondary Consort Shao looked languid, her delicate face was fragile and pitiful. Even Nanny Xi was startled by her morbid beauty. If a man saw such a pitiful and beautiful countenance, his heart would ache for her.

What if the Emperor saw her like this?

Thinking of this, she immediately became more concerned about Shao Yanru. She picked up a stool and sat before Shao Yanru's bed. Holding Shao Yanru's hand in hers, she looked at her and said with tears, "Why are you so weak? You looked fine before, but now you have become so sick. Please don't worry. I will ask the imperial physician to take good care of you. You'll get better soon."

"Thank you for your kind words, Nanny Xi!" Shao Yanru said. A faint blush suffused her pale face as she lowered her head shyly. Even when Nanny Xi saw her like that, she felt a sudden tender pity for her, her heart pounding fast.

"Well, have a rest first, and I will come to see you later!" Nanny Xi said after seeing her, "I won't disturb you and Princess Chen now!"

"Mo Yan, see Nanny Xi off for me!" Shao Yanru ordered softly.

Mo Yan responded and walked out with Nanny Xi.

"Your Highness, please sit down!" The smile on Shao Yanru's face slowly faded away. She closed her eyes powerlessly, looked at Shao Wanru standing beside her, and said.

Shao Wanru sat down, staring at Shao Yanru's face with penetrating eyes in silence.

"Is it particularly satisfying to see me in a sorry plight? You must think I got the punishment I deserved. Right?" Shao Yanru said with a casual air and added with a wry smile, "Indeed, I have only myself to blame. I brought this upon myself, but... I feel so regretful!"

Speaking of this, Shao Yanru lowered her head with red eyes, unwilling to let Shao Wanru see the weakness in her eyes. Then she slowly raised her head and said, "Fifth Sister, my bad! I was wrong!"

"Fifth Miss, please save our master." Mo Yan came in and saw this scene. She knelt before Shao Wanru and wiped away her tears. "If we're locked up in here any longer, our master will die."

Han Dan also knelt and begged, "Please save our master, Your Highness!"

Shao Wanru's eyes looked extremely calm. She overlooked the two servants kneeling on the ground and landed her eyes on Shao Yanru. At this time, Shao Yanru appeared extremely pitiful. Her delicate face was full of regret and hatred, and she seemed overburdened with remorse. She looked at Shao Wanru with eager eyes as if Shao Wanru was all her hope.

"Secondary Consort Shao, whether you believe it or not, I just came here today to visit you, a patient, according to the Empress's order. I've seen you will recover soon, and I'll have to go!"

After saying that, Shao Wanru stood up, turned around, and walked out.

"Fifth Miss!"

"Your Highness!" Mo Yan and Han Dan called anxiously.

Shao Wanru didn't stop walking and continued going outside. At first, Yujie was a little taken aback, but she hurriedly followed up after a brief pause.

"Master, I'm going to get Fifth Miss back." Mo Yan stood up and was about to chase after Shao Wanru.

"There's no need!" Shao Yanru said with a cold snort. She hid the weakness on her face and said with a trace of gloom across her eyes. Shao Wanru's visit today was unexpected for her.

Initially, she wanted to improve their relationship through this gathering. Even if they couldn't forget old grudges entirely, they could at least relieve the tension between them. Unexpectedly, Shao Wanru reacted like this.

"Master..." Seeing Shao Wanru walk out of her sight, Mo Yan stamped her feet anxiously.

"Shao Wanru won't give in so easily!" Shao Yanru looked out of the room with gloomy eyes, without the slightest weakness she had a while ago. Shao Wanru was just an accident. She could include such an accident in her plan, but it didn't matter if there wasn't Shao Wanru.

Moreover, this incident had sort of happened.

"Master..."

Shao Wanru came out of Shao Yanru's room and went straight to the Prince Chen's Mansion.

Yujie led the way in front. She was an expert at finding her way. It was the first time she had visited this place, but she had paid attention to remembering the way. Therefore, they didn't get lost.

The place was very remote, and they hardly saw any people around.

After they walked for a while, a eunuch abruptly came from the side of the road. With a kind smile, he looked pretty amiable, "Greetings, Your Highness!"

The eunuch smiled and blocked Shao Wanru and her servant's way.

"Who are you?" Yujie stepped forward and stopped him. She looked him up and down warily. Neither of them had seen this eunuch.

"Consort Lan ordered me to send this letter to Princess Chen!" The eunuch took out a letter from his chest pocket and handed it over.

Yujie, not entirely convinced, asked, "You serve Concubine Lan. Can you prove it?"

"I have nothing to prove this, but Nanny Zheng, Princess Chen's trusted maid, used to be Consort Lan's personal palace maid. She had always been with my master." The eunuch lowered his voice and said with a smile, "Your Highness, please accept the letter first. I am afraid that others will see it!"

Before Yujie could say anything, Shao Wanru said softly, "Take it!"

Yujie took it obediently and hid the letter in the deep pocket on her sleeve.

"Your Highness, my master asks you to be careful. The palace remains far from tranquil. If you send a birthday gift to the Empress Dowager, pick up an ordinary gift. You don't have to choose something eye-catching. Prince Chen is not at home, so you should be more cautious. Don't cause unnecessary trouble for him."

Seeing Yujie receive the letter, the eunuch breathed a sigh of relief. After delivering the message, he saluted Shao Wanru again before he turned around and left.

"Hey, you... How could you say that..." Yujie was so angry that she could hardly restrain herself from stamping with rage. His words suggested that her master was a troublemaker who always got Prince Chen in trouble on purpose.

Shao Wanru stopped Yujie, shook her head at her, and ordered calmly, "Let's go!"

"My Lady..." Yujie was furious, but she could only continue walking out. The rest of their way was very peaceful, and no more unexpected people appeared.

They didn't go to the Phoenix Palace of the Empress. Instead, they took a turn before the Phoenix Palace and returned to a familiar road. Then they walked straight back to the Prince Chen's Mansion.

When they arrived at the main room, Shao Wanru sat down. Qu Le served tea and asked with concern, "My Lady, Her Majesty invited you over. Did she make things difficult for you?"

"Of course she did. An imperial consort even quarreled with our master and was taken away." Yujie was standing outside the hall at that time. When seeing the imperial consort returning with tears running down her cheeks, she was quite perturbed. Fortunately, her master had been very calm after coming out. Also, Nanny Xi seemed to be very obsequious to her master.

"No big deal. The Empress forced me to yield to her and say what the Empress Dowager had discussed with me. Everything is fine now!" Shao Wanru shook her head. Unless she ended up in a desperate situation, the Empress wouldn't go all out. "Yujie, give me the letter and invite Nanny Zheng here!"

She had to let Nanny Zheng check this letter to see if it was from Consort Lan.

"Yes, I will bring her to you right now!" Yujie nodded, took out the letter from her sleeve, and presented it to Shao Wanru respectfully. Then she left in a hurry to get Nanny Zheng.

Nanny Zheng came quickly. After entering the room, she bowed to Shao Wanru first.

"Nanny, take a look at this letter. Did Consort Lan write it?" Shao Wanru came straight to the question.

Nanny Zheng took the letter and looked at it with a solemn face. When she saw the handwriting and a small mark on the envelope clearly, she nodded and said, "My Lady, it is indeed from Consort Lan. There is a tiny mark here. Do you think it looks like an orchid?"

Shao Wanru took the letter, looked at it, and shook her head. The mark was very light and small, but it didn't look like an orchid at all. It seemed that she accidentally made it.

"My Lady, please turn it over and look at it again," Nanny Zheng said with a gentle smile.

Shao Wanru turned the letter in her hand around. When she looked at the mark again, it was a bit like an orchid to her. But if Nanny Zheng didn't tell her about it in advance, she might not guess it right because the pattern was in the cursive style.

"Before I left the Palace that day, Consort Lan had told me this. Originally, I planned to go to the Prince Chen's Mansion that day." Nanny Zheng sighed with a trace of bitterness in her eyes. "My Lady, rest assured. Consort Lan will never harbor any bad intentions toward you."

Shao Wanru glanced at Nanny Zheng and asked, "Consort Lan, what's her relationship with His Highness?"

"I don't dare to reveal their relationship." Nanny Zheng lowered her head.

Seeing her reaction, Shao Wanru knew she would not tell her, so she didn't pursue the matter. Instead, she opened the letter and began to read it. The more she read, the more serious her face became.

The letter described what had happened in the Palace yesterday.

The Emperor rebuked the Empress in the Imperial Study, and Consort of Virtue was summoned to the Empress Dowager's place. Many people in the Palace were wondering what Shao Wanru had said to the Empress Dowager after entering the Palace. Was it a coincidence? Or did the Empress Dowager specially order Shao Wanru to see her?

Before Shao Wanru came, Duke Cheng'en met the Empress Dowager, who then scolded him severely. In a towering rage, the Empress Dowager even hit him. After Duke Cheng'en left, she had a conversation with Shao Wanru first. Then the Emperor came to see her. Finally, she talked with Consort of Virtue.

In the overall situation, Shao Wanru was like a round peg in a square hole among all these people. She looked like an outsider who accidentally got involved but also seemed to be the centerpiece of the whole thing.

Consort Lan warned Shao Wanru that people in the limelight would bear the brunt of an attack, so she should keep a low profile and avoid making any trouble. Chu Liuchen was not in the capital, so she had to be more careful. Moreover, she told Shao Wanru that Chu Liuchen couldn't arrive in the capital before the Empress Dowager's birthday...

Shao Wanru looked at the letter in her hand twice before slowly putting it down, tightly knitting her willowy eyebrows. She knew these words were not groundless.

"My Lady, did Consort Lan say anything crucial?" Seeing her put down the letter, Nanny Zheng said anxiously, "Did anything serious happen? Otherwise, Consort Lan would not have contacted you at this time."

Shao Wanru glanced at Nanny Zheng in surprise but did not ask for the reason. She simply nodded and said, "They talked about what happened in the Palace yesterday. The Empress was scolded, and Consort of Virtue was also involved. I had been to the Palace to meet the Empress Dowager yesterday. Many people think that these things might have something to do with me!"

Upon hearing her words, several trusted subordinates could not help gasping.

"My Lady, did someone direct all the attention to you on purpose?" Yujie asked.

"I also think so. Why do they feel this matter must have something to do with you?" Qu Le echoed.

Shao Wanru tightly pursed her pink and tender lips and remembered what the Empress had done. On the sly, someone aggravated a complicated situation, put all the blame on Shao Wanru, and made her the center of attention. Then the Empress confirmed those rumors. She kept the few imperial consorts in her place because she wanted them to spread the word that Shao Wanru was the key that had triggered all these things.

The Empress summoned her not to learn about the talk between her and the Empress Dowager but to prove to others that this rumor was authentic, which imperceptibly put Shao Wanru in danger.

Before she read Consort Lan's letter, she was a little confused and couldn't see the whole picture clearly. But now, Shao Wanru immediately understood that she was in a perilous situation: when various forces suspected her, how could she come to a good end?

"My Lady, you should be even more discreet at this time. Since His Highness is not in the mansion, you are the only master. Nothing can go wrong with you." Nanny Zheng looked more nervous than Shao Wanru. Her face paled a little, which showed that she was in a panic.

Nanny Zheng had always been steady and reliable, though this was not the first time the two servant girls saw Nanny Zheng in a fluster. Yujie and Qu Le's faces immediately clouded.

"My Lady, please pretend to be sick!" Yujie came up with an idea and said.

Nanny Zheng shook her head and said, "No, this excuse sounds unconvincing, and the others will know that our master cooks her illness up on purpose. It will make her more suspicious in their eyes. Besides, when some people intend to deal with Your Highness, they can do it even if she fakes illness."

Pretending to be sick at this time was too far-fetched. In the past, when nothing serious happened, it was okay for Princess Chen to pretend to be sick. At the very worst, she would displease the Empress Dowager.

Now was not the best time.

"Then... Then let's move out early to avoid the trouble. We can leave the mansion. Perhaps, we can move to the Rui'an Great Elder Princess's Mansion?" Hearing that some people might hurt Princess Chen, Qu Le was so scared that she reached out to pull Shao Wanru's sleeve and said, "My Lady, let's go to the Rui'an Great Elder Princess's Mansion. There are many guards!"

If Prince Chen were here, they certainly didn't need to care so much about it. But now, Princess Chen was the only master in the mansion, so Qu Le was deeply worried.

"We can't do that. If we hide there, we might bring trouble to Great Elder Princess. Although the Rui'an Great Elder Princess's Mansion also has many guards, those guards are far inferior to those in Prince Chen's Mansion!"

Nanny Zheng objected again.

"We can't do this, and we can't do that. Then, what should we do? We can't just watch Her Highness get into trouble!" Qu Le was so anxious that she was about to cry.

Before they talked about it, Qu Le sensed no danger. But after hearing Nanny Zheng's analysis, she felt that lurking dangers surrounded them. In her eyes, no place was safe anymore.

Shao Wanru composed herself, pondered for a while, and said, "I'll stay in the Prince Chen's Mansion, not going anywhere else. I don't need the maple leaf painting anymore. I'll use the table screen!"

Shao Wanru personally embroidered the table screen she prepared as a birthday gift long ago. After all, one painting was not enough, and it was more thoughtful to present it with a table screen. But since the painting with maple leaves had become the key to everything, it was better not to take it out.

"The table screen and other treasures will be my gifts for the Empress Dowager."

These gifts, neither outstanding nor shabby, were a token of her regard. As a granddaughter-in-law, she needed to send some gifts, though they were not particularly eye-catching.

Without the maple leaf painting, she could, at least, make people less suspicious of her.

This time, she made a very unwise move. Initially, she didn't want Chu Liuchen to be sad, for he had always cared about the Empress Dowager, who doted on him. Unexpectedly, because of this painting, Shan Wanru brought trouble upon herself. It could only be said that this matter was overly complicated. She had only a smattering of knowledge of what happened in her previous life and thought little about this matter.

She could only remedy the situation like this.

"My Lady, what if someone comes to stir up trouble in our mansion?" Yujie was still worried. Even if her master had adequately prepared the birthday gifts, she thought they had many other things to worry about.

There were not many guards in the Prince Chen's Mansion. Before Chu Liuchen left, he had informed Shao Wanru about this. The chief supervisor took charge of some of his subordinates. According to Chu Liuchen, she could use these people in a crisis. However, Shao Wanru didn't want to let these people protect her at this time.

This would attract more attention to Chu Liuchen. She couldn't put Chu Liuchen in danger because of her negligence.

There were so many people secretly spying on them when their future remained problematic. It was not right and proper for Chu Liuchen to expose his strength in front of others, which would give him much trouble.

"Nanny Zheng, I know what to do. Don't worry. You can go back first, and don't go anywhere tonight. Restrain the others in the mansion with Nanny Yu. Something may happen tonight. Don't panic. I will ask the chief supervisor to arrange everything. We'll all be safe."

Shao Wanru comforted them.

"My Lady, will we be fine?" Nanny Zheng was visibly not convinced. Watching Princess Chen, who still looked like an overgrown little girl, Nanny Zheng was quite worried.

Although Princess Chen did not look as weak as she appeared, she was just a young girl who hadn't even reached the age of fifteen. At such a young age and being brought up in the boudoir, she had never faced a dangerous situation like this.

"Nanny Zheng, please set your heart at ease about it. I will ask the chief supervisor for ideas. Even if I'm at a loss, the chief supervisor will always be there for us, won't he?" Shao Wanru said unhurriedly.

Seeing that she was so calm and unperturbed, Yujie and Qu Le felt relieved and even produced a light smile. Princess Chen would always have a way of solving problems, so they didn't have to panic.

Only Nanny Zheng still felt worried. After thinking for a while, she added, "My Lady, if you have no other way, I will go to the Palace to beg Consort Lan, asking her if you can hide in her place. Consort Lan will protect you and not let anyone hurt you!"

"I shouldn't go there. Consort Lan herself has been occupied with continuous troublesome things. Something bad will happen if she spares her time and energy to protect me. Nanny Zheng, rest assured. I will be fine." Shao Wanru refused with a smile.

If Consort Lan hadn't gotten anything to worry about, the Emperor wouldn't confine her to a place to protect her. Under the Emperor's protection, she could stay safe. But still, she had been locked up in one place and had not much freedom to go around. Shao Wanru did not think it was a good idea to go into the Palace and ask Consort Lan for help. Moreover, she had to think of some good reasons and explanations when telling others why she must go to the Palace and why she had to find Consort Lan.

Since she didn't want to leave the Prince Chen's Mansion, there must be a reason for that, and she also had a reason, which could prevent those who wanted to hurt her secretly from launching assaults.

She persuaded Nanny Zheng to leave. Qing'er and the chief supervisor were led to her together. After the chief supervisor heard the whole story from Shao Wanru, his face changed drastically. He had experienced ups and downs in the Palace, so he knew Shao Wanru was in a dangerous situation.

"Your Highness, you are now the key to everything. After the maple leaf painting emerged, the Emperor and the Empress Dowager will inevitably suspect Prince Yue and Prince Zhou as well as Consort of Virtue and the Empress behind them. This matter hasn't been disclosed in public, so they are secretly

conducting a thorough investigation. At this critical moment, if anything happens to you, the key of the whole matter, we'll be in one heck of a mess." The chief supervisor immediately grasped all the key points and pointed out the hidden danger for Shao Wanru.

The person behind this matter hadn't yet emerged.

It might be the Empress or Consort of Virtue in the Palace, but perhaps, neither of them had done that. It could be someone else who deliberately stirred up trouble and fanned the flames of disorder, pushing the imperial court and the Palace into chaos and even forcing the Emperor to subdue his son.

The previous scheme centered around the maple-leaf painting, but at present, every intrigue revolved around Shao Wanru.

Shao Wanru was crystal clear that if nothing happened to her, others would investigate this matter slowly and secretly. Even if others were suspicious of her, they couldn't know the truth. The Duke Cheng'en's Mansion would keep silent. Around this topic, the Empress Dowager and the Emperor would also maintain a wall of silence. As for Shao Wanru, she would undoubtedly button up her mouth.

But if anything happened to Shao Wanru, this matter couldn't go into hiding. Then, it would cause earthshaking changes to the entire imperial court and even the whole situation. Both the court and the commonality would be in tumult. What was worse, new forces might suddenly come to the fore.

In her previous life, the incident started on the birthday of the Empress Dowager and ended with Prince Zhou's rebellion. The trouble was over on the surface after Prince Zhou died.

Other things happening during this period were unknown to Shao Wanru. She seemed to have had only a limited view of the whole affair. Accidentally, she had fallen into the eye of the storm.

"Sir, now that things have come to this, I have an idea. What do you think of it?"

A group of people riding their horses was going on their trip in a hurry, galloping along the government-financed road at full speed. All of them were in black suits of light armor. At a glance, pedestrians on both roadsides knew they weren't ordinary people and hurriedly jumped aside to dodge them.

Suddenly, one of them pulled sharply on the reins and stopped. Behind him, his followers did the same thing in unison.

They rested in the pavilion on the side of the road for the time being, and some surrounded the pavilion, not allowing any unrelated people to get close.

Chu Liuchen wore a dark cloak hanging loosely from his shoulders and a veil to keep out dust, revealing only his stunning eyes. With a fierce look in his blazing eyes, he appeared less refined and delicate at this time.

As he sat on a stone bench in the pavilion, a carrier pigeon fell from the sky and landed in the hands of a guard beside him. The guard skillfully took out a rolled-up letter under its feather and presented it respectfully to Chu Liuchen.

Chu Liuchen took it. After he browsed through it, his eyes turned cold and deep. He narrowed his eyes thoughtfully and asked for the writing brush and ink.

“Yes.” The guard hurriedly prepared the writing tools. Chu Liuchen stood up, held the writing brush, and thought for a moment before finishing a letter in one go.

After that, he took up the paper to see it and nodded.

When the ink dried up, the guard came over and folded the paper. Then he put it under the carrier pigeon’s wings and tossed it into the air. It spread its wings and disappeared eventually into the horizon.

“How long can we reach the capital city?” Chu Liuchen sat down again and asked.

“Before the Empress Dowager’s birthday.” The leader of the guards said with great respect. They left the carriages behind and hurried to the capital city on horses because they intended to catch up with the Empress Dowager’s birthday.

The carriages were far behind them, carrying the two princesses from the Xu State to the capital city. The one at the forefront belonged to Chu Liuchen, who was not there. Only Xiao Xuanzi was left to deal with the others in case anyone should find out that Chu Liuchen was gone.

Of course, even if either the two princesses from the Xu State, Qin Huaiyong, or Chu Qing found anything wrong, Chu Liuchen did not care at all. He only worried that someone would secretly hinder him from returning to the capital city quickly.

There were always accidents along their way back to the capital city — some people deliberately tried to stop him. So, he got rid of the carriage and rode a horse swiftly to the capital city like the wind.

“Master, did anything happen in the capital city?” Ancheng, the leader of his guards, asked. When Ancheng was little, he became an orphan and was picked up by Chu Liuchen from a pit of bodies. After that, he followed Chu Liuchen and served him heart and soul.

Something did happen in the capital city. The chief supervisor, the only one who knew Chu Liuchen was hurrying back, sent this carrier pigeon. They didn’t even reveal all the news to Shao Wanru for fear that someone would target her. It was best to keep this matter from her.

Unexpectedly, even so, some people started conspiring against her.

Whenever Chu Liuchen thought of Shao Wanru in danger, his eyes turned icy cold. Since they intended to mess with her, he decided to throw these people into turmoil. They didn’t want him to enter the capital city so fast, did they? In that case, he might as well cause an uproar among them first.

“No big deal. Let’s march faster and return to the capital city as soon as possible.” Chu Liuchen slightly squinted his eyes and smiled with an evil and chilling look.

“Master, are you feeling all right?” Ancheng, feeling worried about his health, asked softly. Even though his master was much better now, those who had accompanied him for a long time would still be anxious.

His master had depended on medicine for so many years. Did he fully recover?

“I’m in good condition!” Chu Liuchen said lightly. Gracefully, he stood up and strode to the horse outside the pavilion. After taking the reins from a guard, he pulled the reins and got on the horse. Then, the

group of guards behind him also rode on their horses. With a swing of the horsewhip, they galloped forward.

Ancheng was on the first horse beside Chu Liuchen. With concern, he looked at Prince Chen on the horse before him and sighed in his heart. "Xiao Xuanzi is right. Our master will go to protect Princess Chen regardless of his health!"

He thought more highly of Princess Chen.

Even though Ancheng had always been strong, he could hardly bear this rapid march. Unlike him, Prince Chen had always been sick and weak. Even if he recovered at present, he was just as healthy as an ordinary person.

Ancheng gave the signal to a guard beside him. The guard nodded, got out of their team, and pressed ahead to find a place for refreshment. When there was a suitable place, they would persuade Prince Chen to have a good rest.

Ancheng took a few steps back and whispered to Qi Jue, who was on a horse near him, "Doctor Qi, our master's health..."

Because of this hasty journey, Qi Jue was so exhausted that he didn't even want to say a word. Impatiently, he waved his hand, puffing for breath, and said, "Don't ask me. I'm whacked. His health is much better than mine. But if we go on like this, he can't stand it, no matter how healthy he is. You'd better persuade him to rest early!"

Qi Jue felt that he suffered a great loss. Initially, he felt great following his master's carriage because they would rest from time to time. But why would they suddenly leave the carriage and march in a hurry? Besides, he was asked to go with them. But he was just a doctor, not a guard. Why must he follow them? In fact, it didn't matter whether they had him or not!

"That's good. Take care, Doctor Qi!" Hearing that his master was in good health, Ancheng was relieved. Looking at Doctor Qi's feeble look, he teased, "Doctor Qi, you'd better do some exercises. If you remain delicate in health, I'm afraid no woman wants to marry you!"

"Alas, what are you talking about!" said Qi Jue a little crossly after wiping the sweat off his face. He hated it the most when others talked about his marriage.

"Doctor Qi, take care. I have to go and see our master!" Ancheng laughed and left.

Chu Liuchen and his men covered their tracks and advanced rapidly to the capital city, which was beyond everyone's expectations. At present, all these people were focused on the Prince Chen's Mansion.

The chief supervisor received the message from the carrier pigeon in the evening. After sitting in the room for a while, he went to see Shao Wanru. After the two of them had a discussion, the chief supervisor returned to deal with affairs at the outer court. As usual, he handled most of the matters of the Prince Chen's Mansion.

This chief supervisor stayed up late every day to do his work. Since he had made Xiao Xuanzi his heir, Xiao Xuanzi could usually share some of the burdens. As a result, when Xiao Xuanzi was away from the mansion with Chu Liuchen, he became especially busy.

Darkness was gathering. It was almost late spring, so the weather was getting hotter, and it got dark later. But even so, after the sunset, the light was fading rapidly. The night grew blacker.

In Shao Wanru's inner court, the lights were still on, and she didn't fall asleep. Under the lights, there seemed to be a few servant girls with her. Now and then, there were voices rising, which sounded clear in the night.

A man in black came out of nowhere and suddenly broke into the Prince Chen's Mansion. After an arrow was shot at the figure showing up in the half-open window, women screamed, and some people shouted, "My Lady, My Lady!"

"Come here! Save Her Highness!"

"Anyone! Help!" A servant girl rushed out and cried aloud.

In the night, a man in black looked around blankly. The people he brought were still here and hadn't taken action yet. How could someone go and shoot an arrow right into Princess Chen's room?

But shouldn't assassins use swords? Some people used arrows. Attacking in a big way was not a good sign. This place was connected to the imperial Palace, with its gate protected by guards sent by the Emperor. At first, they planned to get to work undetected, but was their plan ruined by others?

"Leave!" The leader in black ordered decisively. Whether Princess Chen was fine or not, they could not stay here any longer.

When they were on their way to leave by leaps, another group of men in black appeared on the opposite side. It seemed that they were about to walk away too. The two groups bumped into each other.

Both sides were stunned for a moment and began fighting. Anyway, the two parties working for different masters were not on the same side.

Many people were plotting against Princess Chen in secret. Since they had encountered each other, they could go ahead to strike.

As blades flashed coldly in the dark, blood splashed, and screams rang out continuously. They all exerted every ounce of their energy to eliminate the other side. Then they would flee from the scene as fast as they could. No one dared to stay here any longer. The whole city would be under martial law if the matter were blown up. The longer they stayed, the greater the risk of them being exposed. Who wouldn't fight desperately?

Lots of crossbows aimlessly shot into the crowd. No one knew where they came from, and many people were injured under the indiscriminate attack.

Lights seemed to have come up in the outer court. From there, lots of people rushed over. These men in black belonging to different groups felt that serious trouble was imminent. In response, they helped

each other to escape and killed those who were too severely wounded to go away. Immediately, all the men in black dispersed and ran for their lives separately.

The chief supervisor finally rushed over with guards.

Half of these guards were from the Prince Chen's Mansion, and the other half were sent here by the Emperor.

Dead black-clad men were scattered inside and outside Princess Chen's courtyard. The bloody scene astonished everyone.

The chief supervisor hurriedly stepped forward to knock on the courtyard door, but no one inside opened it. A guard jumped in from the wall and opened the door. There, they saw several servant girls and old maids serving in this place, but they felt weak all over and couldn't move at all. After all, women in the inner court had never experienced this. They were so freaked out that their face paled. Their legs were so weak that they could hardly stand. Therefore, none of them could get on their feet to open the door.

The chief supervisor tore into the main room and said to the guard with a gloomy face, "Hurry up. Get doctors here."

It was evident that Princess Chen was in critical condition.

"Princess Chen is just a lady living in the inner court. How could anyone think of murdering her? And with heavy crossbows? Enlighten me, how could crossbows in the army show up in the Prince Chen's Mansion? Were they going to slaughter Princess Chen or wipe out the entire Prince Chen's Mansion? Princess Chen is merely a delicate woman. What the hell was wrong with you?"

In a magnificent hall with a high ceiling, the Emperor angrily threw away the memorials near him, which happened to land around Prince Yue and Prince Zhou.

The two princes stood before the other officials, and the Emperor didn't fling the few memorials far away. Therefore, they happened to drop right before them, and one even hit Prince Yue on his head.

Nevertheless, Prince Yue didn't make any sound after being smashed, nor did he dare to touch his head. He just stood very still.

Did the Emperor bang the things on the two princes deliberately or accidentally? It was hard to figure out what he meant. What was more confusing was that Prince Cheng also came to the imperial court.

In the past, Prince Cheng seldom attended the imperial court. Why did he happen to come here today? Was it a coincidence or something else?

"Has Princess Chen been attacked? Why would anyone hurt Princess Chen?" Many officials were at a loss. Not all of them were well-informed, especially regarding things in the Palace.

Princess Chen was involved in the previous matter, but many officials didn't know about it. Thus, they felt completely in the dark about this question and didn't know the purpose of others targeting Princess Chen.

It was just a princess, and she was Prince Chen's wife. Why would anyone harm Princess Chen when Prince Chen was not in the mansion? Did these princes intend to do something that couldn't bear the light of day?

It would sound more reasonable if some people were plotting against Prince Chen. How would these people make such a mess only to deal with the harmless Princess Chen living in the inner court? In particular, it was heard that they had used heavy military crossbows. Ordinary people, who were not allowed to keep these crossbows, would be charged with a felony for collecting them. Based on what they learned, some people had stored up and used such powerful military crossbows, which deeply shocked everyone.

Were these people planning to rebel?

In a panic, these officials glanced at Prince Yue and Prince Zhou from time to time. Some looked at Prince Cheng. Frankly, Prince Cheng also looked suspicious, didn't he?

Ordinary people couldn't use so many powerful weapons. The others might haven't figured out why they wanted to murder Princess Chen, but it didn't matter. Nevertheless, one thing was sure: it must have been done by royal family members.

At present, the three people were indeed the most suspicious. Of course, it also might be Prince Xin, who was not in the imperial court now.

However, it was much less likely for Prince Xin to do that compared to the few princes in the imperial court.

"Tell me, why did you want to kill Princess Chen? If Prince Chen had been home, you would have turned to attack him instead, wouldn't you?" The Emperor reproached them, pointing to his sons one by one in a frenzy of rage.

The Emperor received the report right after last night's incident. Something had happened in the Prince Chen's Mansion, and Princess Chen was wounded. She was in the room but happened to lower her head back then, so she luckily avoided the arrow. But still, she was hurt. When everyone was in the ensuing panic, someone rushed in and stabbed her. At this time, Princess Chen was still lying in bed, and her life was uncertain.

Thinking of this, the Emperor couldn't help shuddering with anger.

"I'm still alive, and all of you can't bear it. You can't even put up with the Prince Chen's Mansion. Who else can you tolerate? It would be best for you to kill all the other royal descendants after I die. Right?" The Emperor pounded on the table hard and growled.

Chu Liuyue and Chu Liuzhou couldn't stand the pressure anymore, and they knelt with a thud.

Prince Cheng looked at his two nephews and the Emperor, his furious brother sitting on the throne. Then he had no choice but to kneel. At present, they were the only ones in the court who were supposed to take the blame.

"Imperial Father, I left the Palace late yesterday, so I spent the night where I lived in the past." Chu Liuyue explained.

"Imperial Father, I was out drinking with my friends yesterday, and someone can testify for me," Chu Liuzhou said with a righteous look.

"Imperial Brother, I was listening to the sutras yesterday. Many people in the Huaguang Temple can prove it for me!" Prince Cheng sighed and said helplessly.

Their explanations could dispel others' suspicions of them. In addition, they all had alibis and witnesses for last night.

But they all happened to be occupied with something yesterday and had people to prove it, which made others on the spot a little suspicious.

How could all of them have something to do last night and witnesses? Such a coincidence sounded overly deliberate. Could all three of them have intervened in it?

The officials kept their mouths shut but secretly guessed who did it. It must be one, two, or even three of them. Otherwise, how could it be so coincidental that all three of them had alibis? Usually, even if they were in their mansions last night, they might not have witnesses to prove it.

If their movements weren't suspicious, they must have faked it on purpose.

The three princes also noticed the problem. With sullen faces, they looked at each other, feeling each other very suspicious. How could it be such a coincidence?

"Oh, lucky for you! All three of you have witnesses. Even better, your witnesses are not from your mansions. Did I blame you unjustly?" The Emperor sneered with a livid face.

"Imperial Father, I don't dare!"

"Imperial Father, I decided on it long ago and didn't act on impulse yesterday!"

"Imperial Brother, I've also made the appointment early with the monks in Huaguang Temple."

Their contrived explanations were virtually the same in essentials. Even the most slow-witted officials could see that something was wrong: the three princes had some skeletons in their closets.

"I will find out the truth and won't spare anyone who did this!" The Emperor snapped, "Guards! Send Prince Yue, Prince Zhou, and Prince Cheng back to their mansion and keep them under close surveillance."

He intended to detain all the princes.

The officials knew they could no longer look on and do nothing. One after another, they knelt on the ground. Only two Prime Ministers remained standing before them.

"Your Majesty, please think it over. This incident might be a frame-up. Supervising and controlling all three princes can be exactly what the one behind this hopes for!" advised Prime Minister Zhang.

Prime Minister Wen also said, "Your Majesty, there are many questionable points. But in any case, Princess Chen isn't in danger now. So, I suppose it's inappropriate to confine the three princes because of her!"

“Please reconsider it!”

“Your Majesty, please think carefully!” All the officials kowtowed together.

In the main hall, the Emperor watched the officials kneeling on the ground coldly, his face clouding over and his gaze icy.

Derong, the chief eunuch responsible for writing documents, stood there motionlessly, keeping his eyes fixed on his nose. He didn’t dare to make a sound because the Emperor flared up. As a humble eunuch, he had better not get involved in it.

The imperial court was in a mess, and the imperial harem was also in chaos. The Empress knelt before the Empress Dowager, crying sadly. Beside her, Consort of Virtue also sobbed too bitterly to straighten herself up.

“Mother, this has nothing to do with the two princes. Prince Yue and Prince Zhou couldn’t be that crazy to hurt Princess Chen. What’s the good of harming Princess Chen? Why would they do that at all costs? Mother, please intercede with His Majesty for the two princes. His Majesty wants to lock them up.”

When the Empress begged for mercy, she especially mentioned Chu Liuyue.

The news that the Emperor exploded with rage in the imperial court quickly reached the imperial harem. This time, the Empress and Consort of Virtue, who had been going against each other, stood together and pleaded for the two princes wholeheartedly.

“Your Majesty, Prince Yue has been sensible and kind since he was a child. How could he dare to do such a thing? He appears cold-hearted because many women have been excessively enthusiastic about him. But in fact, he has a mild nature. Your Majesty, please investigate this matter. Don’t let His Majesty misunderstand the two princes!”

Consort of Virtue choked with sobs. Compared with the Empress, who occasionally became aggressive, Consort of Virtue looked much gentler.

Consort of Virtue was the biological mother of the Emperor’s first son, which made her more important than the other imperial consorts. Later, in the leading place among the four consorts, she was favored by the Empress Dowager.

At this moment, she prostrated herself before the Empress Dowager, crying too hard to get up.

“Mother, Prince Zhou and Prince Yue are innocent. Please save them and don’t let them get involved in these things. Princess Chen is fine. I heard that she was much better!” The Empress said as she wiped her tears.

“Your Majesty...” Consort of Virtue wept out.

“Okay, stop talking!” The Empress Dowager slammed her hand on the table heavily, her gloomy eyes sweeping across the faces of the Empress and Consort of Virtue.

What happened last night was so unexpected that the Empress Dowager still couldn’t believe it. How could anyone use such powerful weapons merely to deal with Shao Wanru? Were they planning to rebel?

Who could get and hide such heavy and mighty crossbows? They were killing machines several times more destructive than ordinary arrows. When the Empress Dowager thought that Princess Chen was nearly killed last night, her heart still fluttered with fear.

“If Shao Wanru were dead, what would happen to Chen’er? He might not accept the grievous news and die. Did these people merely want to kill Princess Chen? No, they obviously wanted Prince Chen’s life.” With this in her mind, a wave of fierce wrath rolled up in her.

Consort of Virtue, who had given her a good impression, became an eyesore. The Empress Dowager didn’t believe it had nothing to do with the other princes.

“Why can’t you tolerate Chen’er? You can’t stand him even though he is in such poor health! This time, Princess Chen is injured. Would Prince Chen be your next target?” The Empress Dowager reached out to point at the Empress and Consort of Virtue and scolded them angrily.

“Imperial Mother, I didn’t.”

“Your Majesty...”

“Anyone? Come here and take the Empress and Consort of Virtue back. Before this matter is settled, they should temporarily stay in their own places. As for all the affairs in the Palace, I should let...” The Empress Dowager thought for a while and continued, “Let Consort Ming take charge of them with two elder imperial consorts.”

The Empress Dowager announced her decision.

“Imperial Mother...” The Empress whined. She had always been managing the affairs in the imperial harem. To her great dismay, such an incident deprived her of her power. How could she take such a consequence lying down?

“All of you should leave now. Let’s talk about it after we find out the truth!” The Empress Dowager said sharply. She had already made up her mind. The Empress and Consort of Virtue must be kept under observation in the Palace lest they should conspire with her two grandsons outside the Palace and stir up more trouble. Although Consort Ming was also a suspect, she was much less suspicious than them.

It was best to let Consort Ming replace the Empress for the time being and perform her duty of managing the imperial harem.

Shao Wanru was indeed wounded — her arm got injured. Of course, she herself, instead of others, did this.

Mingqiu Nun was changing fresh dressing for her wound. Then, she said, “My Lady, you should be careful. If the sword went deeper, it would hurt your major blood vessels and risk your life!”

Mingqiu Nun remembered the time when dealing with Shao Wanru’s wound before and couldn’t help palpitating with anxiety and fear. Since she could be considered Shao Wanru’s master, how could she not feel distressed when Shao Wanru was seriously wounded?

In the past few years, Mingqiu Nun had been living a quiet and peaceful life in the Yuhui Nunnery. When she knew Shao Wanru was seriously injured, she was greatly frantic with worry.

"Please don't worry. I'm fine now, right?" Looking at Mingqiu Nun's pallid countenance, Shao Wanru stayed calm and said with a smile.

Her left arm was cut and carefully bandaged. In the past, she always had a fine color on her white and delicate face. However, her complexion became pale and pasty, and even the corners of her mouth turned colorless. Her black hair hung loosely down her back, making her look daintier and more slender.

At this moment, she endured the pain of the wound and comforted Mingqiu Nun with a smile. Mingqiu Nun was kind-hearted, so Shao Wanru felt reluctant to let her get involved in this disturbance. It was better for her not to know it.

"So ruthlessly they struck. Who on earth were they? They wanted your life!" Mingqiu Nun looked at the window broken by the arrow and said. The broken window had been replaced by a new window, but the heavy crossbow grazed the desk and left its shocking trace. At one glance, one could tell that the crossbow was powerful.

Fortunately, it didn't hit Shao Wanru and her servant girls. Otherwise, if the arrow had been shot in someone's arm, the arm would have been broken. If it had thudded into someone, the person would have been killed immediately.

The dead bodies in the courtyard had been dragged away, and the blood had been washed away. Mingqiu Nun had a keen sense of smell, so she could still smell blood. Inexplicably, the unpleasant smell made her feel the whole courtyard was gloomy.

All the servant girls and old maids were walking in the courtyard with fear and trepidation as if the invisible fierce aura from yesterday was still lingering in the air.

No woman in the inner court had witnessed such a gory scene.

"Madam, is our master okay?" Yujie lifted the curtain and came in, asking urgently. Since the incident happened last night, the servant girls here hadn't slept. Though their faces were as white as paper, they felt greatly stressed and did not want to sleep.

"She needs a good rest!" Mingqiu Nun observed Shao Wanru's face and told Yujie, "Recently, make sure to let your master have a good rest. Talk about those annoying things after His Highness comes back. She was merely a lady in the inner court but suffered such a big disaster. It's really..."

Speaking of this, Mingqiu Nun sighed. Even if she was not involved, she felt something strange about it. Very likely, it was related to the succession of the throne in the royal family.

Affairs like this in the royal family would greatly fluster ladies in the inner court, especially girls like Shao Wanru. In Mingqiu Nun's eyes, Shao Wanru was actually an immature little girl.

"Trust me. I will take good care of my master!" Yujie breathed a sigh of relief. Since Mingqiu Nun said this, Yujie knew her master must be fine. She turned to look at Shao Wanru whose delicate face had become ghastly pale. Even though Yujie was not injured, she still had a lingering fear.

If she hadn't seen it with her own eyes, she couldn't have believed that her master dared to stab her arm with a sword.

Blood spurted from the nasty cut. The few servant girls stood there transfixed with horror. After all, no one had expected that their master would really cut herself in real earnest.

Even a man couldn't do such a courageous act, but Princess Chen, a tender woman, had the guts to do it.

"My Lady, Great Elder Princess comes!" Qu Le came in and reported in a hurry.

"Yujie, please take Mingqiu Nun to rest!" Yujie nodded and left with Mingqiu Nun.

Rui'an Great Elder Princess held Shao Yuanhao's hand and walked in with unsteady footsteps. When she entered, she almost fell at the door.

"Zhuozhuo, you...you...you...are you okay?" Seeing Shao Wanru lying on the bed, Rui'an Great Elder Princess asked with bloodshot eyes. She had been tough and strong, but she could hardly stand up. If Nanny Gao and Shao Yuanhao hadn't supported her, she would have collapsed long ago.

"Grandma, I'm fine!" Shao Wanru forced a smile and comforted Rui'an Great Elder Princess.

Shao Wanru was lying there, her face pale and bloodless. Rui'an Great Elder Princess couldn't help remembering her daughter. At that time, she also lay there with an ashen face and never woke up again.

No longer could she restrain her tears as she hurriedly took two steps forward and reached out to grab Shao Wanru's hand. When Rui'an Great Elder Princess felt the little warmth in her hand, she breathed a sigh of relief and choked out, "You're okay. Great! It's so good you're fine!"

"Sister, are you okay? Do you need more doctors?" Shao Yuanhao also came forward and asked worriedly like a grown-up.

"I'm all right. Don't worry!" Shao Wanru said softly, smiling.

Qu Le brought a chair and invited Shao Yuanhao to sit on it while Rui'an Great Elder Princess sat at the head of Shao Wanru's bed.

"What happened last night? Did some people attack the Prince Chen's Mansion at night? What did they want to do? Prince Chen is a prince with no real power. Can't they even tolerate him?" Rui'an Great Elder Princess tried to compose herself and said through clenched teeth.

Everyone could see this attack must be related to the few princes fighting for the throne.

Rui'an Great Elder Princess got the message a little late. The news that Shao Wanru had an accident nearly scared her into unconsciousness. Then, Shao Yuanhao brought her here with him. At that moment, Rui'an Great Elder Princess seemed to have come back to the day when her daughter died, and she could no longer think clearly.

She felt better only when she saw Shao Wanru was fine.

"Grandma, I'm fine. The Emperor will find out the truth!" Feeling the warmth from her grandma's hands, Shao Wanru felt touched in her heart.

"I'll go to look for the Empress Dowager in the Palace. Prince Chen hasn't affected anyone's business and has been sick and weak for many years. But they can't tolerate him and even you when he is slightly better. These people are too heartless!" Rui'an Great Elder Princess rebuked angrily.

"Grandma, don't go there now. The Palace must be in a mess now. The Empress and Consort of Virtue will get you involved in this matter," Shao Wanru comforted her grandma and said.

"So what if I'm involved? I'm not afraid of getting into trouble because of this." Rui'an Great Elder Princess said in resentment. She was very anxious to go into the Palace and rebuke Prince Yue and Prince Zhou before the Empress and Consort of Virtue, who must have instigated the two princes to do the evil thing. Otherwise, who would attack Shao Wanru?

These cruel-hearted people couldn't even tolerate Princess Chen, who was not a threat to them. If any of them ascended to the throne one day, only a few people might stay alive. Rui'an Great Elder Princess didn't believe others would have no idea about it.

"Grandma, it may or may not be done by them. Let's wait and see. Stay here to take care of me, okay?" Shao Wanru was afraid that her grandma would rush to the Palace to make trouble.

Before the situation became clear, she didn't want Great Elder Princess to get involved.

At this time, horrible things might happen to whoever got involved in the dispute. The best way was to wait for some time. Since this disturbance was not a small matter, the Emperor would investigate it. That night, they had drawn out a lot of people in black. Though well prepared, she was pretty taken aback. To make the show more authentic, she stabbed herself with a sword.

She had planned to let the guards left by Chu Liuchen in the mansion fake an ordinary assassination of her. She discussed it with the chief supervisor, and they agreed to carry out their plan at night. But later, the chief supervisor came over, saying that he had received new orders from Chu Liuchen: more people would part in the assassination so that she and her servant girls should hide.

In fact, it was not Shao Wanru who stayed in her room that day. She and a few servant girls were hiding in the wing room. Therefore, the crossbow entering the room didn't hurt anyone, but the noise was loud.

After that, several groups of black-clad men were drawn out. In the darkness, many people were locked in a tangled fight, but no one knew who the other parties were. When the chief supervisor rushed in with some people, those intruders wearing black clothes had run away. Then, Shao Wanru returned to her room with her servant girls and cut herself with a sword.

Everything had been arranged except that Shao Wanru stabbed herself, which was a complete surprise to everyone. The chief supervisor almost passed out when learning that Princess Chen was injured for real.

Prince Chen had reminded him many times to protect Princess Chen well, but he didn't expect that she was still hurt. The chief supervisor kept blaming himself for having failed his master.

At that time, Shao Wanru had clearly seen more than two batches of black-clad men. There seemed to be about four groups. They looked like two parties, but how could four teams show up?

There were three groups respectively from the Prince Yue's Mansion, the Prince Zhou's Mansion, and the Prince Cheng's Mansion. Then, who sent the fourth squad? These people from the Prince Chen's Mansion didn't appear when those men in black were attacking each other in the melee. These people from the Prince Chen's Mansion shot the crossbows and quietly retreated. None of them was injured or died there.

Shao Wanru decisively stabbed herself after discovering the appearance of the fourth group. The matter was so complicated that she did not want to expose Chu Liuchen's secret merely because of a fake wound on her.

Since she was supposed to get injured, she had better have a real wound in the eyes of everyone, whether the imperial physicians from the Palace or other people. This was why she didn't hesitate to cut herself on the spot.

A lot of people might be implicated in this matter, but Shao Wanru couldn't let the Prince Chen's Mansion get involved. In this case, it would be her responsibility to prove their innocence.

"Grandma, many people in black came here yesterday. I don't think they belong to one large group. I'm afraid that many people will be involved. I'm the victim, so you should know the right thing to do and the principles to follow. Even if the Emperor doesn't want to look into the matter, he has to get to the bottom."

Shao Wanru implicitly reminded her grandma.

Rui'an Great Elder Princess, after all, had experienced big events. Before this, she only cared too much about Shao Wanru to think clearly. After listening to Shao Wanru's advice, she pondered for a moment and knew now was the best time to do it. No matter how the Emperor viewed it, this matter had to be investigated, and it had to be surveyed thoroughly. Some people struck a prince's mansion with military crossbows late at night. Then, would these people attack the imperial Palace next time?

If the Emperor could not guarantee his safety, how could he sleep peacefully? Even if this trouble was stirred up by his sons, so what?

"Do you know when Prince Chen will return to the capital city?" After calming down, Rui'an Great Elder Princess paused and asked with a serious look. She wanted to say something but stopped on second thought. "I heard from Ruiping that Prince Chen couldn't come back before the Empress Dowager's birthday. So, no one in your mansion can go to inquire about the news before the Emperor, even in this critical situation..."

There was no male master in the mansion, and the female master was injured. It was inconvenient for others in the mansion to ask for information from others. Rui'an Great Elder Princess had wanted to ask around, but Shao Wanru told her not to act rashly at this time.

If this condition continued, the Prince Chen's Mansion couldn't get any new messages and might not rise to the emergency. Therefore, Rui'an Great Elder Princess had been very worried.

In fact, Rui'an Great Elder Princess kept a few words to herself. The words from Ruiping Great Elder Princess had some hidden meanings: Prince Chen had been wandering about to enjoy the landscape

with Princess Yutao from the Xu State, and that was why he returned so slowly. In addition, it was said that Princess Yutao was the most beautiful woman in her country.

Rui'an Great Elder Princess didn't like her implications, which terribly worried her. Yet, it was not the right time to talk about it with Shao Wanru. She feared these words would disturb the balance of her granddaughter's mind.

"Grandma, rest assured. Chu Liuchen will return to the capital city soon!" Shao Wanru said softly.

If it had been her plan, she wouldn't have done such a violent and tragic thing. The chief supervisor then secretly told her about Chu Liuchen's plan, so she did that to cooperate with Chu Liuchen's plot. Of course, Chu Liuchen had never asked her to stab herself. Thinking of this, Shao Wanru felt inexplicably guilty.

When Shao Wanru recalled the chief supervisor's deathly pale face, she felt sorry for him.

The chief supervisor meant to let a servant girl get injured. Never had he asked Shao Wanru to hurt herself.

However, at that time, Shao Wanru felt that their plan could work better only when she was wounded for real. Moreover, as she was proficient in medical skills, she knew the best place to stab herself. As a result, though her wound looked terrible, she wasn't seriously hurt.

"I heard the woman from the Xu State, Princess Yutao... She is outstanding..." Rui'an Great Elder Princess frowned tightly. At the sight of her granddaughter's colorless face, she couldn't bear to keep the news from her. What could she do if Princess Yutao insisted on marrying into the Prince Chen's Mansion?

Recently, Rui'an Great Elder Princess had frequently received the news about Princess Yutao from outside, which terribly upset her.

At first, she was never suspicious of Chu Liuchen, who had expressed his intention to marry Shao Wanru three years ago. Chu Liuchen told her his health was not as bad as the rumors said. If he were well nourished, he would get better. In the past, he abandoned himself, so he didn't recuperate well. After that, as Chu Liuchen had promised, he was getting better.

Though he still looked as sickly as before, he was good in other aspects. Even the Empress Dowager had said happily that even his incompletely cured illness seemed to be eliminated, and he only needed to nourish himself well.

Only then did Rui'an Great Elder Princess feel relieved. However, there were a great many rumors about Princess Yutao, which reached her ears from time to time.

Princess Yutao seemed to have determined to marry Chu Liuchen. But what about her granddaughter? As a princess of a country, Princess Yutao would never be Chu Liuchen's consort.

But if so, would her granddaughter become a consort instead?

Impossible. Rui'an Great Elder Princess had already made up her mind. If the Emperor had such an intention, she would smash herself to death in his audience hall before all the officials. After this tragedy, the Emperor wouldn't dare to make her granddaughter a consort or a secondary legal wife.

Although she had gotten ready to do it, Rui'an Great Elder Princess was reluctant to see her granddaughter be heartbroken, especially when her granddaughter had suffered so much.

Rui'an Great Elder Princess had wanted to keep something from her granddaughter. But she felt that she couldn't hide it. So, Rui'an Great Elder Princess thought she might as well tell her granddaughter the truth so that she could prepare for future changes.

"Don't worry, Grandma. Everything will be fine." Hearing her words, Shao Wanru instantly knew what she meant, so she comforted her grandma with a smile at once.

"Princess Yutao from the Xu State..." Rui'an Great Elder Princess thought that Shao Wanru did not understand, so after coughing in a low voice, she explained in detail, "She has been going back to the capital city with Prince Chen. Something might happen on this trip. The Xu State is a small country. Since it is too remote, it is inconvenient for our state to send troops there. Thus, the imperial court mainly takes the policy of conciliation to deal with them."

Depriving Shao Wanru of her position as Princess Chen to appease the Xu State and its princess was not a big deal for the royal family because it could ensure the peace of the two countries.

Rui'an Great Elder Princess didn't think it mattered, but it was related to her only granddaughter, so she was very unwilling to give in.

"Grandma, don't worry. Nothing bad will happen. Even if Princess Yutao accepts this marriage, Prince Chen will make an excuse and refuse it. Besides, Princess Yutao won't marry into our country. It's Princess Yuyan, Second Princess of the Xu State, that will enter the capital city and get married." Shao Wanru comforted Rui'an Great Elder Princess in a soft voice. She did not want her grandma to worry about her.

Seeing that Rui'an Great Elder Princess held back the words which sprang to her lips, Shao Wanru knew some people must have deliberately delivered the rumors to her.

With her grandma's character, how could she believe it? Shao Wanru guessed that the rumor must have been mentioned before her many times.

"It's not Princess Yutao. Instead, the Second Princess of the Xu State will get married?" Rui'an Great Elder Princess was stunned and asked in astonishment. She had never heard of such a thing.

"That's right. Please be at ease, Grandma. Princess Yuyan and Commandery Prince Qing have been in a close relationship for a long time. She will marry Commandery Prince Qing when she comes to the capital city. Princess Yutao is just going to send her off, and it has nothing to do with Prince Chen," Shao Wanru smiled and explained.

"That's great!" Rui'an Great Elder Princess was overjoyed, feeling freed from a grievous burden. Her solemn face broke into a wide grin.

"Prince Chen has promised to treat my sister well." At first, Shao Yuanhao didn't understand, but now he knew what they were talking about. Immediately, he responded with dissatisfaction, "Grandma, Prince Chen promised me that on the day my sister got married! If he dares to marry any princess of the Xu State, I will not spare him!"

Hearing his childish words, Rui'an Great Elder Princess and Shao Wanru burst out laughing.

"Grandma, who told you that Princess Yutao of the Xu State was going to marry Prince Chen?" Shao Wanru asked after laughing.

"Ruiping liked talking about it when she visited me with Yuan'an. Also... Madam of Prime Minister Zhang occasionally came to see me with her daughter, and she had mentioned it."

Rui'an Great Elder Princess said.

"Madam of Prime Minister Zhang and Zhang Qilan?" Shao Wanru was slightly stunned.

"Yes, but Ruiping and Yuan'an talked about it the most. As for Madam of Prime Minister Zhang and Zhang Qilan, they casually brought up this matter only once when Ruiping was around."

Rui'an Great Elder Princess thought for a moment and nodded.

"Are you close to Madam of Prime Minister Zhang?" Shao Wanru asked curiously. She had never heard Zhang Qilan mention this before.

"Well, not exactly. We have occasional contact but don't see each other often. Recently, because Prince Yue paid me visits sometimes, people from Prime Minister Zhang's Mansion met me a few more times," Rui'an Great Elder Princess said.

Chu Liuyue was very nice to Rui'an Great Elder Princess but not sincere. For so many years, he often came to see Rui'an Great Elder Princess, who had been living in widowhood. Zhang Qilan would marry into the Prince Yue's Mansion, so she need to please Prince Yue's elders by going to the Rui'an Great Elder Princess's Mansion with Madam of Prime Minister Zhang.

It was not strange for them to do that.

However, Shao Wanru just had a strange feeling. She couldn't tell it clearly or explain it. It was an uncomfortable intuition.

There were no elders in the Prince Chen's Mansion, and Princess Chen was sick, so Rui'an Great Elder Princess moved into the Prince Chen's Mansion to take care of the injured Shao Wanru as an elder.

Shao Yuanhao also stayed at the Prince Chen's Mansion as a guest. Also, he invited his tutor over and let him live temporarily in the guest room of Prince Chen's Mansion.

The courtyard, which had been messed up by those men in black, was restored. Rui'an Great Elder Princess managed the affairs while Shao Wanru rested quietly to recuperate.

The rewards from the Palace kept coming like flowing water. First, the Empress Dowager sent some good items. Then there came things from the Empress. Besides Consort of Virtue and Consort Ming, some other consorts also sent gifts to the Prince Chen's Mansion. Shao Wanru had only heard of the titles of most of them but didn't know who they were.

For a moment, the Prince Chen's Mansion became lively.

Guards cordoned off the gate of Prince Chen's Mansion and would closely question anyone who came there for fear that anything horrifying would happen again.

In this case, many aristocratic families who wanted to make a special trip to call on Princess Chen remained quiet. If they went to the Prince Chen's Mansion at this time, it would be easy for them to have some accidents. Thus, many people decided to wait and see.

Prince Yue, Prince Zhou, and Prince Cheng were all punished by forbidding them from leaving their mansions.

From time to time, soldiers from the Five-district Military Department could be seen investigating others in the capital city. They would arrest anyone who was furtive in movements. All of this happened on the surface. It was unknown how many more people were surveying this matter in the dark. For a time, all the people in the capital city were in a state of extreme suspicion and fear.

In her Phoenix Palace, the Empress knelt before the Emperor and said with tears in her eyes, "Your Majesty, Zhou'er didn't do it. He has always been reckless. Among the princes, he is the least scheming one. This time, Princess Chen was hurt, but why would he hurt Princess Chen for nothing?"

A few days had passed since the accident. This was the first time the Emperor stepped into her Phoenix Palace after the incident. As soon as she saw the Emperor, the Empress shed tears of grievance.

The Emperor looked down coldly at the Empress with a gloomy face full of disappointment.

"At first, I thought you were capable and let you manage the entire imperial harem. I didn't expect that... you couldn't tolerate Prince Chen."

"Your Majesty, what are you talking about? I can't understand it." The Empress asked anxiously, her heart throbbing.

"How could you not understand what I said?" The Emperor asked coldly with a gloomy look in her eyes. He had just come back from Consort Lan's place. Now, feeling angry and annoyed, he didn't know how he could give vent to his pent-up feelings. A few things that happened recently, for instance, the maple-leaf painting sent to the Empress Dowager and the sneak attack targeted Princess Chen, were like a fishbone getting stuck in his throat, and he could not bear it any longer.

"I have thought it over. Among all the people in this Palace, you knew best the tableware used by the deceased emperor. Am I right? The Empress?"

The painting vividly showed the medicine bowl used by the deceased emperor and the scene when the Empress Dowager fed the medicine to him. How could the painter have described the scene that day in detail if no one had revealed it to the painter?

In the large hall, wisps of light fragrance wafted out of the incense burner decorated with a phoenix head, which was refreshing and relaxing.

The Empress, however, tensed up and felt cold as if her heart had fallen into a freezing cave. The center of her back was sweat-stained. Her hands placed on both sides of her skirt were also wet with sweat.

"Your Majesty..." The Empress wailed, her eyes bloodshot. Then she choked out, "Your Majesty, it has been many years since I married you. I know what I can't do and have never overstepped. I didn't intervene, and your people handled this matter later. Why do you suspect me now? What happened that year, that year..."

The Empress looked very painful. Slowly, she pressed her bosom and continued, "If, if I had wanted to deal with Prince Chen, why would I have made efforts to harm Princess Chen instead..."

Speaking of this, the Empress smiled wanly. "There are other things, aren't there? That was what you told me personally and what only I know about!"

Her voice sank. She spoke in a low mumble as if to herself. However, the Emperor heard it clearly, and his gloomy face changed slightly.

"Your Majesty, you were just a prince when I married you. When the deceased emperor was on the throne, I was drawn into the fight in the imperial harem and almost lost my life. Back then, you proved my innocence. After that, I followed you wholeheartedly. Even though...even though you didn't care much about me in your heart, I still performed my duty with devotion. But you accused me of plotting behind the scene. I can't be responsible for what I haven't done."

"I was not on the spot when the thing happened in the Palace. Only those present could know about it, right? Your Majesty, you didn't go to ask about these witnesses but came to blame me. I feel so wronged. If you think those who weren't present could do it, then Consort of Virtue, Consort Ming, and Prince Cheng are also suspects!"

When the deceased emperor died, only the Emperor entered the Palace. After he ascended to the throne, his principal wife and consorts also went into the Palace with him. In such a mess, anyone could do it.

In merely a few days, the old dynasty was replaced with a new one, and it was not the deceased emperor's son who succeeded the throne. Officials held different opinions about it. Many affairs of the imperial court hadn't been settled yet, let alone things of the imperial harem.

At that time, the imperial harem was in a mess. It was not difficult for someone to get a few palace maids who had seen what happened. Besides the Empress, those imperial consorts entering the imperial harem could also do it. Since everything was in turmoil, no one knew who did it.

The Emperor fell silent. Of course, he understood what the Empress said. When he thought about the whole thing carefully, he thought her words made sense.

He had just thought that it was most likely to be the Empress. But on second thought, he found that many others could also do it. Some consorts went to the Palace with the Empress. Many others, like Consort of Virtue and Consort Ming, moved to the Palace with him from his previous mansion. As for Prince Cheng, he especially came to the Palace to accompany the Empress Dowager, who had just lost her eldest son. It was also possible for him to do that.

"Your Majesty, if it weren't for the chaos at that time, how could we not find that Commandery Prince Qing's mother was pregnant? How could we let her move into the Yuhui Nunnery with a prince in her belly?"

Looking at the Emperor's face, the Empress knew that her words worked and appeared more and more pitiful.

After the former emperor passed away, only his consorts without any children would be sent to live in the Yuhui Nunnery. Those who had given birth to a child would be left behind. When they were taken to

the Yuhui Nunnery, the imperial physicians would check their pulse first. They would go to the Yuhui Nunnery if everything was okay.

However, the previous emperor suddenly died, and the entire Palace became a mess. As a result, the pregnant consort held back the information that she had been pregnant and entered the Yuhui Nunnery with a baby in her belly.

Two lines of tears fell from the Empress's eyes, but she did not reach out to wipe them away. She allowed the tears to slide down her cheeks slowly. "Your Majesty, if you don't believe me, you should deprive me of my position. I am willing to take all the blame. But you won't suspect Prince Zhou, will you? He was just a newborn baby back then!"

Her words sounded pathetic to the extreme, and large teardrops rolled down her cheeks. After saying this, she sobbed too bitterly to speak.

When the Emperor heard her pitiful words, his expression softened a little, but he was still angry. "You were the Empress and had been in charge of the imperial harem. After so many things had happened, you couldn't be absolutely ignorant of them all, could you?"

"Your Majesty, I...I also wanted to learn about many more things and manage the imperial harem well. Then, you could focus on the affairs of the imperial court, but...but how could I have a hand in everything? That day, something happened in the Empress Dowager's place. Before I invited Princess Chen to ask her about this matter, I had to find another reason in case others would misunderstand her."

The Empress explained with grievances. Without reservation, she mentioned why she had asked Shao Wanru to meet her in the Palace that day and didn't use any other excuses to cover her real purpose up. Those excuses might fool others but not the Emperor. Given the Emperor's character, it was best for her to be honest about it.

"Your Majesty, there were so many things in the imperial harem. You didn't allow me to get involved in many of them, so I ignored these matters, whether they were about the Empress Dowager or Consort Lan...I listened to and attended to your every order. But sometimes, I had to inquire about something to maintain the peace of the imperial harem. Wasn't it part of my duty? Your Majesty, what exactly should I do to earn your trust?"

Speaking of this, the Empress was all tears.

The Emperor fell silent and looked at the Empress deeply, trying to perceive something from her face. Although she felt wronged, she forced herself to hold back her grievance feeling. For a moment, he heaved a deep sigh in his heart. "Do you really have no idea about it?"

"Your Majesty, if you don't believe me, you can call Princess Chen over and ask her if she revealed anything to me that day. What I have done is to maintain the peace of the imperial harem. I don't know anything else. As for the previous thing you blamed me for, I was busy taking in the people of the imperial harem and cleaning up those belonging to the former dynasty. At that time, I had just entered the Palace. How could I get so many people to do the investigation?"

"Then, who do you think is the most likely one?" The Emperor's manner relaxed.

"Your Majesty, I don't know. I have been in the imperial harem and only paid attention to the trifles there. You have always been in charge of those significant matters related to our fate. If you don't know about it, how could I know?" the Empress said, wiping her tears.

The Emperor lapsed into silence as the Empress sobbed out her grievances with strategies. First of all, she said she felt wronged. Then, she strategically mentioned the matter related to Consort Lan, hinting that she had endured a great grievance. Then, how could she not accept other things? All of this proved she was kindhearted and generous and would not harm others.

Consort Lan lived alone in the imperial harem. Though she was said to be "locked up," it was just a way to protect her. In this way, she didn't need to greet others day and night, including the Empress Dowager and the Empress. Measures were taken mainly to protect her. The Emperor granted her many privileges merely because she was the deceased empress's younger sister.

Every time the Empress thought of this, she felt her heart was in great pain as if ten thousand ants were gnawing at it. How wouldn't she wish Consort Lan could die as soon as possible.

However, she did not dare to do anything to Consort Lan. After staying with the Emperor for so many years, she had long ago learned that Consort Lan was the woman that the Emperor loved sincerely. But because she was the deceased empress's younger sister, Consort Lan couldn't get a high position and might be hated by other jealous women in the imperial harem, so she was "grounded."

The Empress knew Consort Lan sneaked out sometimes, but she pretended not to know it. She even knew that Consort Lan had always wanted to get in touch with Chu Liuchen but was rejected by him.

She thought that she was generous enough to deal with the matters of Consort Lan, who was safe and sound at the moment. Not only did the Emperor protect her, but she also indulged her. At this point, the Emperor must be grateful to her.

This was also an important reason why she tolerated Consort Lan for so many years and kept things about her strictly confidential.

Although she and Consort Lan also had secret conflicts, at least on the surface, she was a fair and kind Empress. With this, the Emperor would doubt her less.

"Get up. Have a good rest these days. I have something else to do!" The Emperor stood up and said with an ambiguous attitude. He did not blame the Empress, which meant that he sort of believed what the Empress said.

"Yes, I understood!" The Empress nodded and said softly with tears in her eyes.

The Emperor strode away. The Empress stood up with her hand on the chair. Her eyes turned cold, and her back was soaked in a cold sweat.

At that moment, she clearly sensed the Emperor's intention. If she gave a wrong answer just now, she might lose her high position as the Empress.

How could he care so much about the insignificant Princess Chen? Long ago, she knew that the Emperor treated the former empress differently. But why did he even have to protect her son?

The son of that unchaste woman was sick and would die at any time. Did he want to pass the throne to this bastard?

How could she accept it? She was the Empress and the master of the imperial harem.

The former empress had died long ago, and even her bones were rotten. How could she compete with her? Consort Lan, even if she was the younger sister of the former empress, so what? Consort Lan was just a substitute for her sister.

As a shadow, she had her duties and limitations. Did she want to rely on Prince Chen to make her the Empress Dowager?

"Your Highness, Prince Zhou secretly sent someone in!" A Nanny came in and reported carefully.

"Tell him not to act rashly. Do what we should do, and make no more careless moves." The Empress ordered.

"Prince Zhou was worried about your health, so he specially sent a miracle-working doctor here," added the Nanny.

"Who? A miracle-working doctor? Stop messing around! Aren't there any imperial physicians in the Palace?" The Empress was stunned for a moment and reproached.

"But this person...has already come in!" The Nanny's face twitched. It was not that she didn't want to stop the doctor but that Prince Zhou had sent him together with the message.

"Nonsense. Who needs a miracle-working doctor at this time? Send this person out of the Palace," the Empress growled in a towering rage.

"Yes, I'll arrange it right away." The Nanny nodded and was about to withdraw, but the Empress stopped her. "Let him wait in the side hall with the imperial physicians!"

Since the doctor had already entered the Palace, sending him out would arouse suspicion. It was better for the doctor to stay here. For one thing, it displayed Prince Zhou's filial piety. For another, it meant they were perfectly open in all their actions. In addition, it would sound perfectly reasonable to the Emperor if he heard she let the doctor stay with the imperial physicians. At this time, they had better do everything in an open and aboveboard way so as not to awaken the Emperor's suspicion.

The Empress thought this was the most difficult time for her, and she couldn't afford to arouse the Emperor's suspicion, not even the slightest.

At present, she could be considered to be grounded. Her power had been divided and given to Consort of Virtue and Consort Ming. Outside the Palace, her son was also forbidden to leave his place. Thus, she could no longer discuss matters with her son.

Everything happened fast. Not only Prince Zhou but also other people had sent assassins there. To everyone's surprise, such a small assassination eventually caused a sensation.

Assassinations were usually completed in a low profile. Even if these killers successfully finished off their targets, they would keep silent and lie low. How could anyone carry on the assassination in such a big way by using heavy crossbows from the army? It should be an assassination instead of a forcible kill.

Which fool would choose such a heaven-shaking killing weapon to kill Princess Chen, who lived in the deep inner court?

Princess Chen didn't count for much in this situation. But because she had been involved in the Empress Dowager's matter, others thought she had also joined the competition for the throne and was even a key figure. Her sudden death would generate a lot of unexpected results. Once anyone shifted the blame onto someone else, it might cause enormous damage.

After a brief discussion, the Empress and Prince Zhou decided to assassinate Shao Wanru. Now thinking back on the whole thing, they were not the only ones with such a plan.

The Empress had such a panic fear after the incident. Fortunately, she had thought about what would happen if their scheme failed and was discovered, so she had prepared a series of countermeasures.

At this moment, it was time to deal with sudden changes. How were they doing so far?

Nothing serious had happened to her and her son, which was the best result they could get.

Then, who else was secretly plotting against Shao Wanru? Did they want to kill Shao Wanru, create confusion, and fish in troubled waters? In the end, they pushed the blame on her. After thinking everything over and over again, the Empress only came up with one suspect: Consort of Virtue. Only Consort of Virtue, who had arranged many back-ups in the Palace, was powerful enough to compete with her.

It was bound to be Consort of Virtue or Prince Cheng.

The Empress didn't pay much attention to Prince Cheng in the past. But now, things related to him happened one after another, which made Prince Cheng especially suspicious in her eyes. Besides those imperial consorts, Prince Cheng might also know what had happened in the past. Back then, Prince Cheng had been raised by the Empress Dowager and was favored by her.

It was said that he had devoted himself to studying Buddhism and wanted to become a Buddhist monk. However, after talking animatedly about it for so long, he still wasn't a real monk. It was just his deceptive trick to deflect suspicion from himself.

Everyone knew that she and Consort of Virtue were bitterly hostile to each other. At present, only Prince Yue was the most likely one to compete with her son. When their people came back from the scene that day, they said there were several groups of people instead of two, which meant that the third and fourth parties must have intervened.

If no one in black hadn't come back to report this, the Empress would have only guessed that. Now she was sure that Prince Cheng had also sent some people there.

No one knew what had happened in the Empress Dowager's place. Shao Wanru had been involved accidentally and became the key. Everyone secretly felt it had something to do with the fight for the throne. Shao Wanru's death would inevitably arouse the others' suspicion of Prince Zhou and Prince Yue. At this time, the least likely one would usually benefit.

The Empress thought the whole situation over and concluded Prince Cheng was the likeliest to gain benefits.

The Empress thought that Prince Cheng was the most likely to use military weapons compared with Consort of Virtue. First, he would benefit from the struggle between the two princes. Secondly, he had been to the army before, so it was much more convenient for him to get these military crossbows.

Chu Liuchen was not in the capital city, and Chu Liuxin was just being childish. In fact, it was only worthy of investigating Prince Cheng.

“Ask Prince Zhou to keep an eye on Prince Cheng secretly and send more people.” The Empress gnashed her teeth and said sinisterly. This time, she must have been set up by Prince Cheng. Unexpectedly, there was Prince Cheng around them, who glared at the throne like a ravening and dangerous tiger.

The Nanny answered and left.

Meanwhile, in her living place, Consort of Virtue was also issuing similar instructions to her subordinates. Even in Consort Ming’s place, Consort Ming was pondering this question: if all the princes suffered the loss of power, who was the most likely to benefit?

In the past, the throne was not passed to the former emperor’s son but to his brother. Would they follow the same old road this time? In this case, Prince Cheng was indeed their most formidable enemy.

Prince Cheng was very annoyed. This incident gave him a terrible headache. He had circled his study several times but couldn’t stop. He had been hiding in the dark and planning for so many years. At present, he just needed to slowly haul in the net and watch Chu Liuyue and Chu Liuzhou fight for the throne.

But now, his ambition was unmasked.

Although the Emperor did not say anything, he grounded him, as he did to Chu Liuyue and Chu Liuzhou. It seemed to be fair. The Emperor sent his guards to guard the gate of each mansion.

But how could it be the same with Prince Cheng?

He was the Emperor’s younger brother, so he was not supposed to take over the throne. Chu Liuyue and Chu Liuzhou were the most likely to be the heirs to the throne. Then why would the Emperor treat them equally and ground all of them? This meant he was fighting for the throne like Chu Liuyue and Chu Liuzhou.

“Master, what do you think?” After turning a few circles, Prince Cheng sat down, picked up the teacup on the table, and took a few gulps before putting it down heavily.

Master Jieyan would come to live in the Prince Cheng’s Mansion from time to time. Everyone knew that he was Prince Cheng’s good friend and an eminent monk indifferent to fame and wealth. For this reason, it was not surprising for him to appear in the Prince Cheng’s Mansion.

Prince Cheng was also glad that Master Jieyan was with him at this time.

“Your Highness, don’t worry!” Master Jieyan remained calm.

“I know I should stay composed, but how can I not be in a hurry? At this time, whoever shows up in the limelight will become the public enemy. The Emperor, my brother, must have discovered my ambitious

intention.” Prince Cheng was in a fret. His heart, which had always been peaceful, could no longer be at ease.

He had been practicing an ascetic life for many years, but all his previous efforts were wasted.

“Your Highness, it looks like you made the same mistake as Prince Zhou and Prince Yue, but that is not the case. The Emperor hasn’t found anything. It is impossible to punish you for your crime. He won’t bring Prince Zhou and Prince Yue to justice. Otherwise, will he pass the throne to Prince Chen or Prince Xin?”

Master Jieyan sneered, curling up his lips with sarcasm.

In his opinion, Prince Chen and Prince Xin couldn’t be suitable candidates. Prince Chen, needless to say, was not the Emperor’s biological son. Besides, he had been sick. How could he inherit the throne?

As for Prince Xin, Master Jieyan thought he was childish and immature and couldn’t bear such weighty responsibility.

For the Emperor, the proper candidates should be Prince Zhou and Prince Yue. Therefore, he wouldn’t punish both of them, which suggested Prince Cheng would also be fine. After all, the Emperor couldn’t let go of his two sons and punish his younger brother, who wasn’t closely related to the throne. His decision should sound convincing to all the officials!

“Chu Liuchen may inherit the throne. He is the eldest legitimate son of the deceased emperor. It is proper for him to take the throne. If so, he could get the support of many old officials who had worked for the deceased emperor. It would be even more justifiable for him to ascend to the throne than Chu Liuzhou,” Prince Cheng said. He was not that optimistic.

“Perhaps it’s the most reasonable for Prince Chen to get the throne. If the Emperor wants to pass the throne to him, he just needs to say the word. Better still, no one will say that the Emperor murdered the deceased emperor back then. But so what? Prince Chen is not the biological son of the Emperor, and the Emperor will not pass the throne down to his nephew instead of his biological son. If Prince Chen feels like fighting for the throne, he will not live long. With his frail body, he will die when facing a minor accident.”

Master Jieyan said disapprovingly.

Prince Cheng fell silent and thought his words made sense. However, he suddenly stood up in annoyance and said, “Who is so stupid as to assassinate Princess Chen with a crossbow? Wasn’t the person afraid that my imperial brother knew it?”

Thinking of this, Prince Cheng felt very aggrieved. He couldn’t figure out who was so stupid to cause such a considerable disturbance. After that, they all suffered and were grounded. The words and behavior of his imperial brother in the main hall that day didn’t seem to be unintentional. It was obvious that he had noticed something.

Prince Cheng had been scheming for so long, and he had pretended to seek no fame or wealth for a long time. He had always stayed invisible to others in the fight for the throne. Now someone uncovered his ambition and pushed him under the watchful eye of everyone. Flames of wrath leaped into Prince Cheng’s breast, making him very uncomfortable.

“Master, could it be done by the people over there?” Prince Cheng stopped, tilted his head, and looked at Master Jieyan with a gloomy face.

“That’s impossible. They wouldn’t be willing to make such a big deal out of it. If they irritate you, they will have to suffer!” After thinking for a while, Master Jieyan shook his head and denied it.

Those people felt even more reluctant to attract the Emperor’s attention. When Prince Cheng was noticed, he would be fine for the time being. But if those people were brought to the Emperor’s notice, they would die no matter what. The surviving dregs of the previous dynasty were looking for a place to live, so it was not a big deal, and they wouldn’t take the initiative to do something sensational.

“Since it was not done by them, who else would do it? The people who came back from there reported that at least three other groups had come. Two of the groups belonged to Chu Liuyue and Chu Liuzhou. Then, who dispatched the third assassination squad? And who was trying to fish in troubled waters? Could it be Chu Liuxin?” Prince Cheng muttered to himself, thinking the third team shouldn’t have been those remnant evil elements of the previous dynasty.

“It doesn’t seem to be Prince Xin. Maybe the people returning from the scene feared you would punish them, so they deliberately added one more group. At that time, there was such chaos that no one could see it clearly.” Master Jieyan thought it was impossible and shook his head.

“Since no one couldn’t have done it, who precisely sent the third group? The most important thing is which group used military crossbows. How could they take the road to their doom and dare to violate my imperial brother’s taboo?” Prince Cheng’s mind was in a whirl. He circled twice with his hands clasped behind his back but couldn’t come up with any brilliant idea. He could only growl, “How could such a champion idiot also want to seize the throne?”

Prince Cheng was like this, and so was Chu Liuyue. Several groups of people who took action on the sly guessed each other, but they couldn’t figure out who had caused such big trouble. At this time, the one who manipulated all of this behind the scenes was pushing on with his journey to the capital city by galloping at full speed.

No one had expected Chu Liuchen to use this opportunity to achieve his end. Yet, little did he know that Shao Wanru stabbed herself with a sword to prove her innocence...

While Chu Liuchen was spurring the flying horse on his way to the capital city, even at night, Shao Wanru welcomed the imperial physician.

The imperial physician took a female physician with him. After feeling Shao Wanru’s pulse, the female physician came in to change the fresh dressing for Shao Wanru’s wound. After that, she left.

Rui’an Great Elder Princess sat outside with a severe face, and the female physician came forward to salute her.

“How is Princess Chen?” Rui’an Great Elder Princess asked coldly, looking nervous.

“Your Grace, Princess Chen should take good care of herself,” the female physician replied respectfully.

“How is she?” Rui’an Great Elder Princess asked again.

“Princess Chen is seriously injured.” The female physician had to admit that although she was mentally prepared, she was greatly shocked when seeing Princess Chen’s haggard look. Princess Chen was nearly killed. Fortunately, it was close, but she didn’t die!

Thinking of the position of that wound, the female physician still had a lingering fear.

Because of Princess Chen, everyone in the Palace was very scared and jittery. If something terrible happened to her, it was unknown how a reign of terror would overwhelm all the people related to the Palace. Even so, everyone in the Palace felt in danger for fear that they would be surveyed and severely punished. Even the imperial physicians were implicated. They hadn’t come back after being taken away.

At this time, everyone was cautious with their words and actions. Any slight mishap might bring them a fatal disaster.

“How is the medicine for her?” Rui’an Great Elder Princess took on a ghastly expression. It was widely known that she doted on her granddaughter, who was lost and eventually returned to her. Sure enough, she would look distressed.

“The medicine for her is of high quality.” The female physician hurriedly replied.

Rui’an Great Elder Princess stopped asking and waved her hand to let her withdraw.

The female physician carefully retreated to the door and left the Prince Chen’s Mansion with the imperial physician who brought her there. When they returned to the Palace, they met the Emperor first.

The female physician certainly did not dare to lie and told him the whole truth. After hearing their report, the Emperor asked them to leave and was immersed in thought.

Princess Chen was indeed injured. In particular, she was severely hurt and almost lost her life. This demonstrated that this matter had nothing to do with Chu Liuchen.

Others might not know Chu Liuchen’s feelings for this young Princess Chen, but the Emperor was very clear about it. Because of Princess Chen, Chu Liuchen no longer lived in self-abandon, and his health gradually improved. In the past, no matter how the others asked him to take care of himself, he would never listen and let his health worsen.

From this point, it could be seen that Chu Liuchen liked Shao Wanru, so he would never hurt Shao Wanru. Besides, she was so badly injured that she was almost killed.

Chu Liuchen cared about Shao Wanru’s well-being more than his own life.

When the Emperor thought of this, his last doubt about Chu Liuchen was cleared up. It couldn’t be Chu Liuchen.

The Emperor only knew that Chu Liuchen couldn’t hurt Shao Wanru but had never imagined Shao Wanru taking the initiative to stab herself with the sword. She did that on purpose to dispel the Emperor’s suspicion of Chu Liuchen.

Chu Liuchen wouldn't harm her, but it didn't mean she wouldn't hurt herself. Besides, she was proficient in medical skills and knew how to stab herself appropriately. Her wound looked fatal, but she had strategically avoided touching the most dangerous part of her body.

The Emperor did not expect the seemingly weak Princess Chen would be so decisive and cruel to herself.

Lots of women in the Palace were used to intriguing each other. Many were extremely cruel and merciless to others and were even capable of the most heinous acts. However, that was how they treated others. How could any of them be so decisive and cruel to themselves?

In addition, Shao Wanru's appearance was as fragile as Chu Liuchen, which was deceptive. No one had thought that Shao Wanru had cut herself with a sword.

As long as the Emperor didn't doubt Shao Wanru, he wouldn't suspect that Chu Liuchen sent those people with military crossbows.

In the next few days, both the imperial city and the imperial Palace were under martial law. Any suspicious person would be immediately arrested and interrogated.

There emerged many suspects. When the Ministry of Justice handed over the outcome of many trials to the Emperor, the Emperor was so pissed off that he pounded the table angrily. "The remnant evildoers of the previous dynasty! How are they still alive?!"

"Your Majesty, it has something to do with the leftover evils of the previous dynasty. I heard some of them had lived near the Prince Chen's Mansion but disappeared later!" The minister of the Ministry of Justice reported.

The people sent by him caught a lot of people, most of whom were people of goodwill. Only a few of them were very suspicious, but it was not easy to let them confess. Only one or two of them couldn't hold on and revealed a few things but not many. They were only responsible for a small amount of work, so they didn't know much.

"Search through the entire capital city. Execute the whole family of anyone involved with the leftover evils of the previous dynasty," the Emperor ordered with hatred.

After the previous dynasty, so many years had passed, but evil remnants were secretly stirring up trouble. Now, they were audacious enough to create a nuisance in his Palace.

"Your Majesty, I think the leftover evils of the previous dynasty did it to alienate you from the princes. The Empress Dowager's birthday is coming soon, and the princes should still be released," Prime Minister Wen suggested.

Prime Minister Zhang looked at Prime Minister Wen. He narrowed his eyes, thought for a moment, and nodded in agreement. "Your Majesty, since Prince Yue and Prince Zhou are above suspicion, let them out first. They can't still be locked up on Empress Dowager's birthday."

"Your Majesty, I will find out what these leftover evils of the previous dynasty have done. I will never give them any chance to make more trouble," the minister of Ministry of Justice promised.

The Emperor fell silent. After a while, he said, "But the truth of this matter hasn't yet been found!"

"Your Majesty, although this matter has not been investigated clearly, it is definitely related to the leftover evils of the previous dynasty. If the two princes are always locked up like this, it will harm their reputations. In the future..." Prime Minister Zhang paused, but everyone in the Imperial Study understood his meaning.

If there were no accidents, one of them would inherit the throne. At this time, regardless of the truth, they were locked up, which would become a black mark against the future emperor. Since they had discovered that the previous dynasty's evil remnants were involved, they might as well shift all the blame to them to put an end to this matter.

Prime Minister Wen echoed, "Your Majesty, you'd better release the two princes first. The day after tomorrow is the Empress Dowager's birthday. If you release them at this time, it will show the deep affection between the royal family members and that the two princes are innocent. As for the investigation into other things, it can be done secretly!"

It was inconvenient for Prime Minister Zhang to mention some things, but not for Prime Minister Wen. Prime Minister Zhang's daughter was going to marry Prince Yue as his legal wife, which made him no outsider in this matter. Thus, he couldn't talk about this matter at will.

But Prime Minister Wen was different. He wasn't directly relevant to the two princes, so he could offer unbiased opinions.

Hearing what they all said, the Emperor nodded and said, "Let go of Prince Yue and Prince Zhou first. Although their punishment is lifted, they are not allowed to enter the Palace and should read more books in their mansions."

The Emperor would withdraw the guards at the gate of their mansions but didn't intend to let them go out. Though they were released from supervision, they should take the initiative to stay in their places. In this way, it would do less harm to their public reputations.

Prime Minister Zhang and Prime Minister Wen nodded, feeling it was appropriate to deal with this matter in this way.

"Anyone? Come here and give out my order to withdraw the guards before the Phoenix Palace!" The Emperor ordered again. Since Prince Zhou was no longer suspected, he shouldn't keep the Empress under surveillance.

A eunuch answered and left.

Shao Wanru recovered a bit fast. The wound was on her left arm, so she only needed to take care of her left arm and ensure it stayed still.

However, she looked ghastly pale after losing too much blood and was as white as a sheet. She leaned against the bed and asked several maids to take out the table screen she had prepared. She kept the maple leaf painting under lock long ago. The birthday gift she chose to present to the Empress Dowager was this table screen.

"My Lady, are we really going to hang this decorative border on it?" Yujie looked at the trimming in her hand, tried it, and turned back to ask.

This frill was unsuitable no matter how she looked at it. With large and long fringes, it looked wonderful, but when it was added to this elegant table screen, they were unpleasant to the eye.

"Use this one!" Shao Wanru said with a nod. She had thought about it for the past two days and finally decided to use the border recommended by Nanny Wei.

"My Lady, you said that it would be best to use the one we chose first. But why do you change your idea? This one looks disgraceful at first glance!" Qu Le also advised.

Shao Wanru raised her long eyelashes and said softly with a smile, "I kept a low profile back then because the situation was inappropriate. But things have changed. Even if my table screen isn't decent enough, the Empress Dowager won't be angry with me. If such a table screen is presented, the Empress Dowager will be suspicious!"

"Why?" Yujie asked in confusion and looked at the long tassels in her hand.

"How will you view such an incongruous gift?" Shao Wanru asked, smiling.

"I think you do it on purpose. Am I right, My Lady?" Qu Le hesitated for a moment and said. It must be her deliberate plan, for no rational person would make this table screen so intolerable to the eye.

"I haven't recovered yet, and I was seriously wounded," Shao Wanru said meaningfully.

Yujie rolled her eyes and said, "My Lady, you are still sick, and the table screen from you looks so unpleasant to the eye. The Empress Dowager will suspect that someone has sabotaged this gift on purpose. Even if she doesn't mention it at that time, she will know it in her heart!"

"My Lady, do you want the Empress Dowager to ask about it?" Qu Le's eyes lit up, and she felt that she had guessed it right.

Shao Wanru shook her head and said, "No!"

"No?" The two servant girls were stunned. Both Yujie and Qu Le thought so. Why would she bother to do it if it were not for this reason?

"His Highness will be returning to the capital city soon. Even if His Highness wants to investigate the assassination, he won't be allowed to. His Majesty won't let him interfere in it. At most, he will let him sit in on some trials and discussions. But the matter of the table screen is different. It will be less significant than the survey of assassination and will not connected to political reasons. If His Highness insists on interfering, the Emperor will surely allow it."

When Shao Wanru thought that Chu Liuchen would return to the capital city soon, she couldn't help smiling tenderly. Although he hadn't been away for a long time, she often thought of him and hoped he would return to the capital city as soon as possible. Thinking that she could see Chu Liuchen soon, Shao Wanru couldn't help blushing slightly. Her pale face with a touch of redness appeared surprisingly tender and sweet.

Of course, those who knew she made the severe wound with a sword wouldn't think so. Her two servant girls viewed their master differently. Princess Chen's delicate appearance with tenderness and charm was only a false impression that she wanted to give to others. As a matter of fact, Princess Chen

was incredibly tough. How could she be as weak and powerless as ordinary women? Of course, she showed a different side to Prince Chen.

Seeing the smile on Shao Wanru's face, the two servant girls couldn't help smiling. Prince Chen would arrive in the capital city. Finally, Princess Chen had someone to rely on, and she would never stab herself with a sword in the future. Seeing their master cut herself, the few servant girls nearly fainted out of fear. After all, none of them expected Princess Chen to do that, which was not what they had planned...

The assassination was so significant that the Emperor would not let Chu Liuchen intervene.

Even if Chu Liuchen had been clear of all suspicion, the Emperor would not let him get involved. However, the thing about the table screen was different. Obviously, it was a frame-up that happened before Shao Wanru was injured.

Wei Dahai was not simple. Shao Wanru had a hunch that such an unimportant person, who appeared inconspicuous, was related to many events.

If Chu Liuchen investigated such a person, he seemed excessively mean and made people feel strange. But if there were a reason, it would be another matter...

On the day of the Empress Dowager's birthday, the Palace of Benevolent Peace was permeated with a jubilant atmosphere.

There would be a great feast for everyone present in the main hall. It was still early, and no one had come yet. From time to time, those busy imperial servants would go to the Palace to fetch something. Nanny Wei was responsible for many things and was terribly busy.

When the womenfolk came later, they would go to the flower platform first and only come to the main hall at the start of the banquet.

The Palace gate opened early, and carriages were parked one after another. The palace sedan chairs were ready at the door of the inner part of the Palace. Madams whose husbands were officials above the fourth-rank official got off the carriage with the Misses of their mansions and walked through the long passageway behind the Palace gate. The elders could get on the imperial sedan chairs. Others walked to the Empress Dowager's Palace of Benevolent Peace while chatting.

When some people met those close to them, they would chat and walk in together.

In previous years, the atmosphere in the Palace was the most relaxed at this time. This day could be the most relaxing day for everyone in the entire Palace.

But today was not like before. The dull atmosphere in the Palace seemed to have faded a lot, but it was not the case. Although the Empress had been released and was accompanying the Empress Dowager, everyone could tell that this matter was not over.

In the past years, Prince Zhou and Prince Yue would enter the Palace early to spend some time with the Empress Dowager. However, at this time of this year, several princes were still detained outside by the Emperor. Later, the Emperor would come in with a group of officials and several princes to pay their respects to the Empress Dowager. After that, the banquet would begin.

A tall flower terrace was in a garden outside the Palace of Benevolent Peace.

Many rare flowers surrounded the high platform. The flowers were in garish colors, and even the air had a faint floral fragrance, which was very pleasing.

The weather was nice. When it was neither cold nor hot, Misses dressed up very brightly. Those who had failed in the Pageant or had not participated in it before wanted to take this chance.

At that time, the princes only chose their legal wives and picked up only a few consorts. Notably, there was Prince Xin, who had not even chosen a legal wife. Today, Consort Ming was here, so there might be an opportunity for those Young Madams.

Something bad seemed to have happened to Prince Yue and Prince Zhou. Therefore, many people aimed at Prince Xin, who had been unnoticed by all. At least Prince Xin was also the Emperor's son.

It was unclear to all who could win the position of crown prince. Before the final result came to be obvious, anyone might get it. Who could be sure that Prince Xin had no chance?

Even if Prince Yue and Prince Zhou did something unforgivable, the throne wouldn't be passed down to Prince Chen anyway.

Many people thought so in their hearts. After receiving instructions from their parents, Misses were also waiting with joy. If Consort Ming or Prince Xin liked one of them, she might be the future Princess Xin!

Of course, some people had been thinking highly of Prince Yue or Prince Zhou, so they wanted to marry into their mansions as their consorts.

Some Young Madams who were not interested in getting married would make efforts to please the Empress Dowager. No matter what their purposes were, the Misses sitting before the flower platform were all well-dressed.

On the flower platform were several rows of tables filled with fruits and snacks. Chairs were placed beside the tables for the Madams and Misses to rest and sit down.

There were several gauze curtains set up right opposite the flower platform. The one in the middle was the largest, which undoubtedly belonged to the Empress Dowager, the Empress, and several highest-ranking imperial consorts.

On the right was a much smaller curtain for other titled imperial consorts to rest.

The tent on the left was reserved for the princesses born in the Palace, their daughters-in-law, and granddaughters-in-law.

Some sharp-eyed people noticed a particularly small tent near the Empress Dowager's big tent, and some people were in it. They were recognized as maids of Rui'an Great Elder Princess.

It was said that Princess Chen, who was seriously injured, also came and stayed to rest in that tent. It was the first time that Princess Chen celebrated the birthday of the Empress Dowager, so she came here, though she wasn't fully recovered. After she presented her gift, she would go back home to rest without attending the banquet.

Everyone knew Princess Chen was severely wounded. It was said that she had been close to death. Unexpectedly, Princess Chen would come over.

This matter had not been settled yet. The Emperor's attitude was ambiguous. The Empress and three Princes had been punished all because of Princess Chen. If any other accidents happened to her, some people would have to take the blame.

There were all kinds of comments about this.

Zhang Qilan couldn't sit still beside Madam of Prime Minister Zhang. Luo Xiaowan had come to sit with her, so she pushed her face toward Luo Xiaowan's ear and said, "Let's go and see Princess Chen?"

Luo Xiaowan intended to see Prince Chen long ago, but people in her mansion didn't allow her to, saying that Prince Chen's Mansion wouldn't receive any guests for the time being. Rui'an Great Elder Princess had been watching over her in Prince Chen's Mansion, and she only wanted Princess Chen to rest well.

Hearing Zhang Qilan's words, she nodded.

They walked to the most inconspicuous small tent together. As soon as they arrived at the tent's entrance, they saw that Nanny Gao, the trusted maid of Rui'an Great Elder Princess, was guarding the tent, so they hurried forward to salute.

Nanny Gao returned the salute politely.

"Nanny Gao, is Princess Chen inside?" Zhang Qilan asked in a low voice, pointing to the tent's inside.

"Her Highness is in poor health, so she struggled to be here. Rui'an Great Elder Princess asked her to rest. She was resting in repose with her eyes closed at this moment. When the Empress Dowager comes over, she will present her gift and go back," Nanny Gao said.

"There is a bed inside?" Zhang Qilan asked in astonishment.

"The Empress Dowager offered this favor and even prepared a bed for Princess Chen. Otherwise, Princess Chen wouldn't be able to hold on there. Princess Chen is filial. Her Majesty originally asked her not to come, but she didn't listen. She will have to watch someone present her gift to Her Majesty." Nanny Gao sighed and said helplessly,

"Is Princess Chen badly hurt?" Luo Xiaowan asked anxiously.

"She was seriously injured and almost died. Fortunately, she was blessed with good luck and survived." Nanny Gao put her palms together devoutly and kept making bows to the air with gratitude.

Zhang Qilan looked deeply at Nanny Gao, who appeared excited and frightened after the accident. Then, lightly frowning her arched eyebrows, she said, "Nanny Gao, can we go in and see Princess Chen?"

Nanny Gao looked awkward. She looked at Zhang Qilan and Luo Xiaowan as if she had no right to agree to her request.

Luo Xiaowan didn't want to push Nanny Gao into an awkward situation, so she pulled Zhang Qilan's hand and said, "Nanny Gao, then we'll come to see Princess Chen next time. Please tell her to take good care of herself and recover without any aftereffects."

"I will. Thank you, Miss Zhang and Miss Luo!" Nanny Gao nodded repeatedly and put down her hands that she had put together to pray.

Luo Xiaowan pulled Zhang Qilan's hand and motioned for her to go, but Zhang Qilan was unwilling to go. She deliberately tilted her head to look into the tent from the part that was slightly lifted up.

Seeing Nanny Gao look slightly displeased, Luo Xiaowan forcefully pulled Zhang Qilan away. They had been too rude just now.

When they reached a place far away from the tent, Zhang Qilan shook off Luo Xiaowan's hand unhappily and said, "Xiaowan, I just wanted to see if Princess Chen was okay and only needed to glance at her from a distance. I wouldn't disturb her. Why wouldn't Rui'an Great Elder Princess let me see her no matter what?"

"Qilan, Princess Chen is injured and has been forcing herself to struggle up and send her gift to Her Majesty. Without the part of sending gifts, Princess Chen might not even come here."

Luo Xiaowan said.

"So what? Since she is here, we should go and see her. It's rare for us to have such a chance to meet her. Maybe she needs our help!" Zhang Qilan said with displeasure.

"But Rui'an Great Elder Princess doesn't allow us to go over..." Luo Xiaowan murmured. Nanny Gao was guarding the entrance, which explained everything. "Princess Chen is so seriously hurt that she doesn't have the strength to talk to us now. We can't help her and may even waste her energy."

"But I'm worried if I can't see her!" Zhang Qilan said.

"Then... then what should we do?" Luo Xiaowan looked around and asked, not knowing what to do.

"How about we go to see her secretly?" Zhang Qilan rolled her eyes and said with a smile, pointing to the back of the tent.

"There's no one behind." Luo Xiaowan looked at that place and said helplessly.

"Let's gently ask Princess Chen a few questions. I'll ask her how she is doing to make sure she is fine. I don't want to do anything else. We can't rest assured until we get to the bottom of it," Zhang Qilan said.

What she said did make sense. Although Luo Xiaowan was timid, it should not be a big deal to say a few words across the tent. Eventually, she agreed with a nod, then shook her head. "No. Rui'an Great Elder Princess is there. It's useless for us to go there. We will be discovered."

"What are you worried about? Rui'an Great Elder Princess will go to meet the other princesses later. Princess Chen is not feeling well, so she can't stay with her all the time. She doesn't want to disturb Princess Chen's rest, does she?" Zhang Qilan pointed to the tents prepared for the princesses and said, feeling very pleased with her idea.

"Then... OK!" Luo Xiaowan agreed with profound resignation.

They didn't return to their seats and had been waiting there. After a while, they saw Rui'an Great Elder Princess come out, but Nanny Gao still stood at the entrance. Obviously, she was afraid that someone would break Shao Wanru's rest.

After Rui'an Great Elder Princess left, the two looked at each other and turned to the back of the tent. There was indeed no one in the shady area. It was a quiet place with no one around.

They didn't take their servant girls with them and walked to the back of the tent hand in hand. When they arrived at the small tent, they moved about more and more softly.

It wasn't winter, so the tent was not tightly set up. They could even hear some people talking inside. For fear of being noticed by others inside, they were very cautious.

Suddenly, Zhang Qilan stopped and pulled Luo Xiaowan hard. Luo Xiaowan was drawn to the right side fast. If she hadn't reacted quickly, she would have fallen.

"Qilan..." Luo Xiaowan was about to say something but saw Zhang Qilan nervously put her finger before her mouth, intending to hush her. Immediately, her footsteps became lighter...

They walked over cautiously without any noise and stood outside the small tent.

"My Lady, if you don't feel well, go to sleep first. I'll wake you up later." The tent wasn't that soundproof, so they could hear Yujie's voice coming from inside.

"No, I'm fine!" Shao Wanru said in a very low voice, which could hardly be heard without listening carefully.

Yujie hesitated for a moment and said, "My Lady, you know, Great Elder Princess can present the gift on your behalf."

Shao Wanru leaned against the couch with a large cloak covering her up. The set of clothes she had chosen before was just right. Although it was in quiet colors, it looked noble and graceful because of the embroidery pattern outlined by gold threads, which was very suitable for her status as Princess Chen.

Her black hair was tied up and held in position by merely a hairpin.

Her plain face, without any make-up, was still of dazzling beauty. However, her pallid face and pale lips made her look extremely frail.

"I won't bother grandma. Since I can still get up, I have to do it myself. It's also a display of my filial piety," Shao Wanru answered softly, her eyes falling on the tent.

Her tent was built on the spur of the moment. The Empress Dowager didn't intend to let her come over and allowed her to rest at home.

However, Shao Wanru insisted on coming, so servants in the Palace came up with an idea to build a tent for her. They decided to let her rest here and go back if she was tired.

The tents were temporarily set up. Besides, the weather was neither hot nor cold, so the tent's material was a little thin.

Coincidentally, this tent was facing the east, and the sun had already risen, so she could see the shadows of two people on the tent. Two women were standing beside the tent.

When Shao Wanru was looking at the shadows of the tent, Yujie also saw them. She was stunned for a moment. Then, she wanted to go over there but saw Shao Wanru gently waving at her.

She immediately understood what her master meant and was about to say something when Qu Le, guarding outside the tent, suddenly came in and said, "My Lady, Her Majesty is here to see you!"

As she said, she stepped aside, and the Empress walked in with two palace maids.

With her hands pressing down on the bed edge, Shao Wanru tried to get up. However, the Emperor reached out to stop her with a smile and said, "Don't do that. You are so seriously injured. There is no need to get up at all."

"Greetings, Your Majesty." Shao Wanru leaned sideways, lowered her head to greet her, and said, "I'm injured and can't make a full salute. Please forgive me, Your Majesty!"

"Look at you! You are so seriously injured. Why would you apologize for not getting up? You've shown your best filial respect to Her Majesty by attending her birthday banquet. Her Majesty once told me that you must be very bored when spending so much time in the mansion alone. It's good that you chose to be here. I'm worried about you, so I came to see you. You don't have to get up."

The Empress walked to the couch and looked at Shao Wanru with a benign look.

"What did the imperial physician say?"

"The imperial physician said that I should take good care of myself. If my arm couldn't fully be recovered, it would become useless." Shao Wanru lowered her head and said with a bitter smile.

If a young girl in her prime lost an arm at this time, she wouldn't stand the tragic result.

"The imperial physician didn't say it for sure. He meant if you made a good recovery, you still had a chance. I heard that Prince Chen has a miracle-working doctor with excellent medical skills. You will be fine with him around." The Empress comforted her.

"Doctor Qi is not in the capital city. He went out with His Highness in case His Highness suffered poor health on the trip!" Shao Wanru said, forcing a smile. It could be seen that she was trying hard to look happy, though she was sad.

"It doesn't have to be so troublesome. Prince Zhou has sent a good doctor into the Palace to nurse my health. I happen to be fine, so I brought him here to treat you," the Empress said with a smile.

A person dressed in the clothes of an imperial physician came in with a medicine chest on his shoulder. Upon entering the tent, he bowed to Shao Wanru first.

"Does she think I'm feigning illness?" Shao Wanru sneered in her heart, and her eyes fell on the imperial physician coming over. There was an understanding smile on her lips. It turned out to be an acquaintance: Doctor Qiu!

"But didn't he return to his home village?"

"Feel Princess Chen's pulse and see how badly she has been hurt. If she needs any medicinal materials, I will try my best to get all the superior medicines for her," the Empress ordered.

Doctor Qiu answered and stepped forward.

Yujie took the small cushion for pulse feeling from Doctor Qiu, put Shao Wanru's hand on it, and covered her wrist with a handkerchief before retreating aside.

The tent became quiet, and everyone's attention fell on Doctor Qiu.

After a while, Doctor Qiu put down his hand and observed Shao Wanru's face. Her face was drained of color, which showed that her illness had taken a heavy toll on her.

Doctor Qiu had seen Shao Wanru when she was still Fifth Miss Shao. At that time, she was gorgeous and vivid, but now she was weak and pale.

"Doctor Qiu, how is her illness?" asked the Empress.

Her son sent Doctor Qiu to her, so the Empress trusted him very much. Those imperial physicians in the Palace were all thoroughly sophisticated. Even if they knew something, they would not say it. She brought Doctor Qiu here to see if Shao Wanru was truly injured because the Empress always felt something fishy was going on.

"Her Highness is seriously injured. She needs to take good care of herself. Otherwise, she'll suffer from after-effects," Doctor Qiu said bluntly.

"How could it be real?" The Empress frowned because such a result was totally different from what she had guessed, so she froze there for a moment.

"Your Majesty..." Shao Wanru raised her watery eyes and looked at the Empress.

"Well, do you need any special medicinal materials?" When the Empress was awakened, she coughed awkwardly and asked.

"Thank you, Your Majesty. Our mansion has plenty of them," Shao Wanru said.

There were a lot of medicinal materials in the Prince Chen's Mansion, which might be even more than those in the Palace. Because of Chu Liuchen's poor health, he would receive rewards from Palace from time to time. They had sufficient medicinal materials.

"That's good. If you need anything, tell me. Take good care of your health. Prince Chen is not in the capital city. When the person in charge of the mansion is away, you should be more careful." Seeing that she could not find anything, the Empress said a few more polite words and left with Doctor Qiu and her servants.

After the Empress left, Qu Le said indignantly, "My Lady, did Her Majesty come to check if your injury was true?"

"Maybe she thought I wouldn't be so seriously wounded!" Shao Wanru muttered.

"That night, you had a narrow escape and nearly dead. Those arrows would have hit us if we hadn't been standing by the window." When Yujie mentioned these things, she shivered with fear.

Qu Le's voice also began to tremble. She was not willing to mention what had happened last night. How could any girls spending most of their time in the inner court ever experience the brutal assassination that day? "My Lady, from now on, more guards in the mansion will make more inspection tours every

day. The chief supervisor said the Emperor had sent more guards over and wouldn't allow such a thing to happen in our mansion again!"

"My Lady, His Majesty will find out who intended to hurt you. These men in black attacked us by vicious means and obviously wanted to kill you!" Yujie gnashed her teeth and said angrily, "I only hate myself for not knowing martial arts. Otherwise, I would find out who wanted to kill you that day."

"Is Princess Chen here?" When they were talking, a voice came from outside the tent.

The voice was sharp, which belonged to a eunuch in the Palace.

Yujie hurriedly went out to welcome them, and after a while, she came in with a group of people. Shao Wanru actually knew the two in the front. One was Consort of Virtue from the Palace, and the other was Prince Yue, Chu Liuyue.

It was reasonable for Consort of Virtue to come, but it was rude for Prince Yue to come in here.

Shao Wanru sat up, supported by Qu Le's hands. Then she struggled to stand up and salute but was also stopped by Consort of Virtue.

"Princess Chen, you don't have to be so polite. I just came to see you. I heard you were seriously injured and planned to see you, but I haven't found the right chance to do it." Consort of Virtue smiled more sincerely than the Empress. She looked very kind with her gentle female image, which always helped her make a great impression on others.

A woman who could give birth to the eldest prince was indeed extraordinary!

"Thank you, Your Imperial Highness. I... I'm fine!" Shao Wanru said. Now that Prince Yue was here, it was inconvenient for her to lie down again.

"It's good that you're fine. His Majesty will find out what happened that night. He won't let go of those who make you suffer so much," Consort of Virtue comforted her. Her eyes fell on her arm and her face. Indeed, Shao Wanru seemed to be badly injured. At this moment, her complexion was way different from before. Her illness could be seen at a glance.

Chu Liuyue didn't say anything and just stood near Consort of Virtue silently as if he casually dropped in on her with his mother. Yet, his eyes were glued to Shao Wanru's face. He carefully observed her expression to see if she had applied white powder to cover her face.

After a long time, he concluded that Princess Chen was injured for real. She wasn't pretending.

Consort of Virtue soothed Shao Wanru for a while and was about to leave. Before Chu Liuyue left, he suddenly said in a deep voice, "Third brother is not in the capital city. If you have anything inconvenient to tell the Palace, you can send someone to the Prince Yue's Mansion for help."

"Thank you, Your Highness!" Shao Wanru murmured her thanks.

After Consort of Virtue and Prince Yue left, the tent became quiet again. Qu Le held Shao Wanru's hand and helped her lie down again. After lying down, Shao Wanru sighed in a low voice and looked at the two shadows on the tent. The shadows shook twice and were gone...

"My Lady..." Yujie whispered.

Shao Wanru smiled a little sadly, her long eyelashes fluttering twice, and she slowly closed her eyes. "Let Nanny Gao tell other imperial consorts that I'm too feeble to receive guests if they come over!"

She hadn't yet recovered from the wound. If visitors came one after another, she could not hold on any longer.

"Yes, I'll inform Nanny Gao right away!" Qu Le nodded and left to tell Nanny Gao, who was guarding outside. Rui'an Great Elder Princess left Nanny Gao here because she feared some people would disturb Shao Wanru's rest.

Though Nanny Gao couldn't keep the Empress and Consort of Virtue out of the door, she could stop others.

Outside the tent, Zhang Qilan lowered her head and looked at her toes silently for a long time with a sad look.

Luo Xiaowan had never seen her look like this. She hurriedly reached out to pull her and asked in a panic, "Qilan, what's wrong with you?"

After leaving the small tent just now, they had arrived at this place, far away from the tent. Thus, they could no longer hear the sounds in the tent, and those in the tent couldn't hear their conversation either.

"Xiaowan, do you think Prince Yue likes me?" Zhang Qilan thought for a while and suddenly asked.

Luo Xiaowan flushed, subconsciously looking around. When she was sure that no one noticed them, she breathed a sigh of relief. How could Young Madams from aristocratic families like them say something like that? But Zhang Qilan had been her good friend for many years, so she knew that Zhang Qilan was not that strictly upright and correct in behavior.

Was it because she had misunderstandings about what had just happened?

In Luo Xiaowan's heart, although Zhang Qilan was a good friend, Princess Chen was her benefactor. She didn't want them to have any bad feelings about each other.

After pulling herself together, she suppressed the shyness in her heart and said, "Qilan, of course, he likes you. You said that he often sent you gifts. Since you were chosen as Princess Yue, Prince Yue always brought you many things whenever he went to your mansion. When you encountered problems, Prince Yue would come to you as quickly as he could."

"Why would he come to see Princess Chen? And he came when Princess Chen was still lying in bed. It was inconvenient for her to see some other men. Although he is the elder brother of Prince Chen, it was not polite to see Princess Chen at this time." Zhang Qilan stared blankly at the ground. It was unknown if she was talking to Luo Xiaowan or herself.

These words were hidden deep at the bottom of her heart. At first, she didn't believe those words and thought they wouldn't affect her. But now she realized the reality was contrary to what she thought — she had been unconsciously influenced. Was Shao Wanru the one Chu Liuyue liked in the beginning?

Chu Liuyue couldn't make Shao Wanru his wife, so he chose to marry her, who must be less attractive than Shao Wanru in his heart. But even so, Chu Liuyue still had feelings for Shao Wanru. When he heard that Shao Wanru was injured, he deliberately went to check up on her with Consort of Virtue, despite the fact that others might think he behaved frivolously.

"Is he just unable to let go of Shao Wanru in his heart?"

"If that is the case, how does he think of me? Am I a substitute for Shao Wanru?"

Zhang Qilan had a lively personality, and she was proud. How could she be willing to be a replacement? Moreover, she became a replacement for Shao Wanru, her good friend!

"Why didn't Shao Wanru tell me about her relationship with Chu Liuyue? Aren't we friends?"

"Could it be possible that she wants to keep in touch with Chu Liuyue behind me? I'm the future Princess Yue and the one who will marry Prince Yue. Why does Shao Wanru keep hold of Prince Yue? She married Prince Chen, didn't she? Why must she do this? Isn't she afraid of letting me down?"

Luo Xiaowan, quite taken aback by her reaction, hurriedly said, "Prince Yue went there to keep Consort of Virtue company. If Consort of Virtue insisted on visiting her, what could he do? Don't think so much about it. Prince Yue didn't say anything but one sentence in the end."

Looking at Zhang Qilan's sinister expression, Luo Xiaowan panicked.

"He didn't say much, but the one sentence he said was the most forcible one. He told her to go to him for help when necessary. But why must she look for him? Who is he? He is just Prince Chen's cousin. When Prince Chen is not at home, he should avoid arousing suspicion rather than take the initiative to reach out to Princess Chen. The Empress also paid the visit, but Prince Zhou didn't follow her. Why would Prince Yue come?"

Zhang Qilan's eyes were bloodshot as she wept out her grief to Luo Xiaowan.

The Empress went there, but Prince Zhou didn't come. Then, when Consort of Virtue visited Shao Wanru, Prince Yue came along with her, which meant something was wrong. Zhang Qilan didn't think that she thought about it too much. There was definitely something wrong between Shao Wanru and Prince Yue!

"Qilan, it must not be what you think. Prince Yue must have come there for other reasons." Luo Xiaowan, burning with anxiety, hurriedly appeased her.

She was weak, but it did not mean that she was stupid. She could see the whole thing more clearly than Zhang Qilan. After all, those closely involved usually cannot see as clearly as outsiders.

"I'm tired and want to go back to rest!" Zhang Qilan shook her head and turned back.

"Qilan..." Luo Xiaowan still wanted to say something to calm her down, but Zhang Qilan left decisively without looking back. Then, she could only follow her with a wry smile. Luo Xiaowan didn't want her to feel hatred toward Princess Chen. They had been good friends, but why would it be like this now?

It was not proper for Prince Yue to do this. At this time, to avoid arousing suspicion, he should not go to see Princess Chen. Inexplicably, she got a little annoyed with Prince Yue. It was indeed his fault. Just

now, she had witnessed and heard the whole thing, so she was sure that Princess Chen had nothing to do with this matter.

Zhang Qilan returned to her seat, throwing herself onto the seat heavily. She looked distressed. Madam of Prime Minister Zhang, who was talking to the Madam next to her, noticed her unusual act and asked softly, "What's wrong? Are you not feeling well?"

"Mom, I'm fine. I just have a headache!" Zhang Qilan reached out and touched her head.

The Madam next to them said with concern, "Are you sick? The weather has been good recently, but it's easy to fall ill when the season changes."

"She's still a naughty child. She has been pretty fit and will be fine after a little rest!" Madam of Prime Minister Zhang replied with a smile.

"Thank you, Madam. In fact, I'm tired of walking. I'll recover in a while!" Zhang Qilan thanked the Madam decently.

Shao Xiaowan came over and sat next to her. When she saw that Zhang Qilan's face had returned to normal, she breathed a sigh of relief. She was really afraid that Zhang Qilan would make a scene recklessly. It would humiliate Prince Yue and Princess Chen.

She reached out to hold Zhang Qilan's hand. Feeling that her hand was icy cold, she hastily gripped it with great care and looked at Zhang Qilan, trying to comfort her.

Zhang Qilan turned around and smiled at her. Her face was indeed much better than before. She leaned over and said to Luo Xiaowan in a low voice, "I misunderstood them just now. Don't tell Princess Chen. Otherwise, she might laugh at me!"

"Don't worry. I won't. It's indeed...But I will ask Princess Chen about it in the future." Luo Xiaowan vigorously expanded her chest and said. No one could be more delighted than her when she saw that Zhang Qilan got past this matter. How could she tell Princess Chen something that had not been confirmed? It might damage the friendship between them.

Everyone would lose control of their emotions sometimes. The key problem was that Prince Yue didn't do this thing properly.

After thinking for a while, Luo Xiaowan suddenly thought of a rumor. She hesitated for a moment but still leaned over and whispered in Zhang Qilan's ear, "In fact, I heard that First Miss of the Marquis Xing's Mansion...that woman."

To avoid being overheard by others, she deliberately said it vaguely, knowing Zhang Qilan could understand.

Shao Yanru, First Miss of the Marquis Xing's Mansion, was the one that everyone thought might become Princess Yue at first. Luo Xiaowan thought that if Prince Yue had some connections with someone, it must be Shao Yanru, definitely not Princess Chen.

"Don't talk nonsense." Zhang Qilan reached out and pinched Luo Xiaowan hard. Her arched eyebrows slightly creasing in pain, Luo Xiaowan frowned. "I know, he wouldn't have an...with her."

"Well, that's good. It's good that everyone is fine!" Seeing that Zhang Qilan bore no grudge, Luo Xiaowan cracked a smile. It was good that everyone was still the same...

"My Lady, who were they?" When the two long figures left, Yujie asked carefully, "Were they palace maids?"

They couldn't be men because they wore women's outfits.

Palace maids came and went most frequently.

"No, they aren't palace maids!" Shao Wanru shook her head with certainty and pointed out their traits. "One of them has a hairpin with a string of pearls. Besides, they wore more than one hairpin."

Since their shadows were quite stretched, she couldn't see them so clearly. Vaguely, she saw a string of pearls shaking near the hairpin above one woman's head. There was not only one but a row of pearls. Besides, there was more than one hairpin in her hair. Thus, she couldn't be a palace maid. The palace maids were dressed in the same style today, and there was no such a luxurious row of pearls on their hairpins.

Another woman had no hairpin with pearls, but Shao Wanru could tell she used a few hairpins sticking out high from her hair. This woman should be a noble lady entering the Palace for the banquet.

Neither of them had taken any servant girls with them.

A trace of darkness slipped across her watery eyes. She hoped they were not the two people she thought of.

In this life, she was cautious and meticulous about everything at her heart. Not many people were like this among all the people she knew.

"My Lady..." Yujie wanted to say something more but was interrupted by Shao Wanru. She reached out to touch her head and asked, "Is Doctor Qiu still with us?"

Just now, the Empress asked Doctor Qiu to stay here because she feared that Shao Wanru would feel uncomfortable later.

Both Doctor Qiu, brought by the Empress, and Prince Yue were here to check up on her. The Empress did it more straightforwardly: she let Doctor Qiu feel her pulse, while Consort of Virtue brought Chu Liuyue here to see if she was truly injured according to his past experience.

Fortunately, Shao Wanru was indeed injured, so she was not afraid of being examined by them.

They all suspected that the Prince Chen's Mansion had plotted the whole thing. So, the more seriously she was hurt, the less suspicious Chu Liuchen would be.

"Doctor Qiu is still here. My Lady, he is not a good person." Hearing Shao Wanru's words, Yujie answered immediately because she loathed Doctor Qiu.

As a doctor, Doctor Qiu brought death to his patient. How could she like a doctor like that? People like Doctor Qiu could no longer be called a doctor. They were actually more like killers who murdered others by underhand, subtle means.

Shao Wanru didn't like Doctor Qiu either. When such a person staying at her tent entrance kept watching her movements, how could anyone like it? However, the Empress ordered him to stay here in the name of protecting Shao Wanru. How could Shao Wanru refuse such a well-meaning offer?

Shao Wanru slightly rolled her liquid eyes and hit upon an idea. She didn't want Doctor Qiu to stay nearby, so she had to ask someone to take him away. Doctor Qiu appeared to be a nobody like Wei Dahai, but Shao Wanru couldn't help being on guard against them...

When Infanta Yuan'an came over, she didn't see Doctor Qiu. She was still wearing a veil, so her countenance couldn't be seen.

Ruiping Great Elder Princess didn't come — Infanta Yuan'an came to visit Shao Wanru alone with her servant girl.

Ruiping Great Elder Princess had often taken Infanta Yuan'an to the Rui'an Great Elder Princess's Mansion, so Nanny Gao didn't stop her when seeing her coming over. Instead, she stepped aside to let her in.

Infanta Yuan'an was quite pleased by this treatment because Nanny Gao, in the name of Rui'an Great Elder Princess, had rejected several imperial consorts who came over together.

Upon entering the tent and seeing Shao Wanru's pasty face, Infanta Yuan'an was secretly delighted. Yet, assuming an air of concern, she took two steps forward, sat down on the chair next to Shao Wanru, and asked with concern, "How did you get hurt so badly? Are you all right?"

"I'm fine. Thanks for your concern," Shao Wanru replied in a feeble voice.

Since her wound had not healed yet, she did not dare to speak loudly, giving people a feeling of weakness.

"You are in poor health, but why did you come here? The Empress Dowager asked you to rest, didn't she?" Seeing Shao Wanru's listless and pale look, Infanta Yuan'an was so happy that she could barely refrain from smiling. It took her a lot of efforts to hide the joy in her heart and ask seriously.

"Imperial Grandmother said I didn't have to come, but I thought I should be here. This is the first time for me to attend her birthday party!" Shao Wanru said softly.

Infanta Yuan'an felt depressed at the sight of Shao Wanru's smile. "How could she still be alive? Why didn't the killer shoot her to death?"

"Prince Zhou, as the legitimate son of the Empress, was supposed to be the first to marry. But somehow, Prince Chen married before him. Otherwise, I would have been the one who called the Empress Dowager 'Imperial Grandmother' in a justified way like her.

"I could have strengthened the tie with the Empress Dowager through her birthday banquet. After all, it's much easier for the first granddaughter-in-law to win elders' favor. But now, Shao Wanru snatched away everything."

"It's not good for you to hold on like this!" Infanta Yuan'an said with more concern on her face.

"The Empress just came over and brought me a doctor surnamed Qiu. He doesn't seem to be from the Palace. I heard Prince Zhou sent him to the Palace before, and he stays in the Phoenix Palace. Right now, he is waiting for orders outside the door. If I don't feel well, I can ask for his help. He has excellent medical skills," Shao Wanru said, beaming with satisfaction.

"Doctor Qiu?" Infanta Yuan'an asked in surprise.

"Yes, his family name is Qiu! Do you also know him?" Shao Wanru asked with curiosity.

Of course, Infanta Yuan'an had heard of this doctor. How could she not know him? When her face was injured, Prince Zhou specially asked Doctor Qiu to treat her wound, and the treatment was very effective. But later, she was told that Doctor Qiu had returned to his hometown, which turned out to be a lie: he actually entered the Phoenix Palace. Because of his absence, Infanta Yuan'an had to find another doctor.

Why would Prince Zhou ask Doctor Qiu to stay in the Palace when the Empress was fine?

Inexplicably, Infanta Yuan'an felt a little annoyed. "What does Prince Zhou mean? Is he not satisfied with me, or does he take a fancy to another woman? How could he be so careless about my appearance?

"The appearance is of great significance for any woman. How could he take Doctor Qiu away from me?"

"Is the Empress not feeling well?" Infanta Yuan'an forcibly suppressed the anger in her heart and asked.

"Not feeling well? No way. Her Majesty seems to be in good health. When I went to the Palace that day, she asked me to see Secondary Consort Shao, who had been in bad condition and badly needed the imperial physician's treatment." Shao Wanru shook her head in confusion and added, "I suppose Her Majesty has been very well, hasn't she?"

"Shao Yanru? He must have done that for Shao Yanru."

At once, Infanta Yuan'an confirmed that it was all about Shao Yanru. Without thinking it over, she knew Prince Zhou must have sent Doctor Qiu to the Palace for Shao Yanru. "That bitch has been keeping in contact with Prince Zhou." Infanta Yuan'an twisted her handkerchief hard a few times and could no longer suppress the anger in her heart.

She lurched to her feet. "I've asked Doctor Qiu to treat my injury before. I wonder if he can check on my wound now."

"Oh, Doctor Qiu had taken care of your face?" Shao Wanru said in surprise, "Then you'd better let him have a look at your face. I heard that Doctor Qiu has excellent medical skills. Moreover, if you've changed your doctor, you might have to use different medicines. Perhaps, the properties of medicines given by the two doctors might impose restraints on each other, which is bad for the wound's recovery."

"Thanks for that!" Infanta Yuan'an didn't stand on ceremony with Shao Wanru and said, only feeling her anger flame up.

She might not have cared so much if Shao Wanru had mentioned someone else. But Shao Yanru was not someone irrelevant. As the granddaughter of Ruiping Great Elder Princess, how could she know nothing about the relationship between Shao Yanru and Prince Zhou? However, Ruiping Great Elder Princess had

advised that Shao Yanru had become the Emperor's Secondary Consort and would never have anything to do with Prince Zhou, so she had let go of this matter.

Did this mean that Prince Zhou got in touch with Shao Yanru again?

Shao Yanru was sick, and Prince Zhou took Doctor Qiu into the Palace with the excuse that the Empress needed him. They worked in unison to help Shao Yanru. It must be the truth. No wonder they suddenly withdrew Doctor Qiu, who had taken great care of her wound. They feared she would be suspicious, so they told her that Doctor Qiu had returned to his home village.

Back to his hometown? What a nice try! He didn't return to his hometown at all. Instead, he was in the Palace, checking on Shao Yanru.

Others might not know about the dispute between Chu Liuyue and Chu Liuzhou in the Palace, but Infanta Yuan'an learned something. As the future Princess Zhou, how could she not be in a rage? Shao Wanru's words touched the most sensitive spot in her heart, and she could not hold her jealousy and anger on a leash.

As soon as Infanta Yuan'an walked out of the tent, she forced a smile and asked Nanny Gao, "Nanny Gao, have you seen Doctor Qiu?"

Nanny Gao pointed to the side and said in astonishment, "Eh? He was there, but where is he now?"

"Where did he go? He must have gone into hiding upon seeing me. Sure enough, he feels guilty."

In a burning fury, Infanta Yuan'an came over with her servants. As expected, she saw Doctor Qiu hiding aside. As soon as she noticed his astonished look when seeing her, she was sure that he had been avoiding her. Infanta Yuan'an could no longer control the anger ignited by Shao Wanru in her heart. She took two steps forward and rebuked, "Guards, take this person away and flog him ten times. He is disrespectful to me!"

She couldn't do anything to Prince Zhou, but she could ruin his subordinate who took orders from him. After this harsh punishment, Doctor Qiu could no longer attend Shao Yanru.

As the imperial infanta, she didn't need reasons to beat a doctor who was not even an imperial physician.

"Infanta Yuan'an..." Doctor Qiu attempted to defend himself, but several eunuchs came over and dragged him away. In the future, Infanta Yuan'an would be Princess Zhou, who was likely to be the future Empress. So, everyone in the imperial Palace was more than willing to do something to curry favor with her.

Doctor Qiu was given a beating for no reason. To his dismay, he couldn't find a place to sob out his grievances. Thus, he had no choice but to find a young eunuch who looked kind, asking him to deliver a message to the Empress. Then he limped back to the Phoenix Palace. Given his condition, he couldn't stand outside Princess Chen's tent anymore.

Infanta Yuan'an gave vent to her anger by giving Doctor Qiu a violent beating, which was a trivial matter. The eunuch didn't even see the Empress, for her servants had blocked him.

The Empress was accompanying the Empress Dowager, so she was too occupied to deal with such a thing of no significance. Besides, Infanta Yuan'an merely inflicted punishment on a doctor. Since she was the Empress's future daughter-in-law, how could anyone dare to make her pay the price for that?

The people serving the Empress nearby didn't take this matter seriously. As a result, the Empress didn't even know what had happened.

When the Empress Dowager came over, the Empress accompanied her to meet those Old Madams and Madam Dowagers, each of whom had noble character and high prestige. The whole time, the Empress sat aside with a bright smile, pretending to be a filial daughter-in-law.

What had happened before seemed to have nothing to do with her. Although many people knew the Empress hadn't been cleared of her suspicion, so what? She was still the Empress, and Prince Zhou was still the legitimate son in the Imperial Palace, the most likely prince to ascend the throne. In this case, no one dared to offend her.

At this time, all the guests here were female members of the invited families. Prince Yue, who had come to send the message on behalf of the Emperor, also went to the front. There were songs and dances prepared by the Empress going on the flower platform.

They had been rehearsing these shows for a long time.

In the morning, these people, arranged by the Empress, focused on singing and dancing. In the afternoon, some Young Madams went up to demonstrate their talents.

The birthday banquet specially prepared by the Emperor would last for the whole day. When the officials and their family members entered the Palace, they would stay there for a day. After lunch, they would have a little rest and gather to watch these Misses' fantastic shows, which was the major event today.

Compared with the singing and dancing of the palace maids, the superb performance of these Misses was the most eye-catching, which could also show the dignity of the Empress Dowager. Otherwise, her birthday banquet would be the same as that of an ordinary Old Madam.

Some began to offer gifts to the Empress Dowager one after another. Of course, presenting gifts before the Emperor and his officials was considered the most honorable thing. However, some people, who preferred keeping a low profile or whose gifts were not particularly outstanding, didn't think it necessary to wait until later. Anyway, it wouldn't make any difference. So, they began to demonstrate their gifts at this time.

Those unremarkable gifts might be more than one piece. If they presented their gifts earlier, they were less likely to awkwardly demonstrate the same ones others had shown.

It was still early, and everyone presented their gifts quickly. As one item was offered, the Empress Dowager would enjoy it with other noble ladies. Then, the next one would be sent over. It was also pleasant to watch the performance on the flower platform while appreciating various gifts. In the meantime, those Madams and Young Madams sitting outside could still chat leisurely.

"My Lady, they start presenting gifts!" After Yujie got the news, she went back to the small tent. Shao Wanru was waiting there for her message. Hearing Yujie's words, she nodded. It was the best time. She

was injured and could not hold on there until the banquet. So, she planned to go back to rest after sending the gift.

Because of her injury, the Empress Dowager wouldn't criticize her even if she did the job rather incompetently! She didn't want to waste such a rare opportunity. A shadow of a smile touched her mouth, bringing an air of easy assurance and calmness. Then, she reached out to put her hand on Qu Le's and said, "Help me up. I'm going to present the gift in person!"

Today, she made this trip to the Palace to show her sincerity by presenting the gift. Since it was a show of good faith, she had to do it properly...

The Empress Dowager was in the large tent in the middle, and some people with high status originally in the two tents on each side also came over. Some princesses and imperial consorts of high distinction stayed beside the Empress Dowager, chatting with her. From time to time, the Empress Dowager smiled as she heard something particularly funny from a few of them.

Some Madams sent a few gifts over. After the Empress Dowager viewed the gifts, they withdrew from the tent.

In a hurry, Nanny Gao came in from the outside and whispered something in the Empress Dowager's ear. Then, the Empress Dowager nodded with a smile and said, "Let Princess Chen in!"

Nanny Gao nodded and walked out. Some with sharp ears heard the Empress Dowager's words and couldn't help winking at those they knew well. "Is Princess Chen here to deliver the gift in person?"

The assassination of Princess Chen caused a mighty uproar. Everyone knew that some people wanted to destroy Princess Chen and even used the crossbow in the army. But when others heard that Princess Chen had survived the unexpected disaster, they sighed with emotion, saying that Princess Chen was fortunate enough to stay alive in such a violent scene.

No one had seen Princess Chen since she was shot. It was said that she had been in poor physical condition. But now, she could get up. It seemed that her injury was not as severe as they had imagined.

She was indeed a blessed woman!

Shao Wanru came in with the support of Yujie's hand. With her injured arm hanging down, she put the other fine one on Yujie's hand to prop herself up. She plodded forward slowly with a pale face as if she would pass out at any time.

"Anyone? Go and help Princess Chen!" the Empress Dowager ordered.

Immediately, a palace maid walked over and supported Shao Wanru with extreme caution, not daring to touch Shao Wanru's wounded arm hanging aside.

"Greetings, Imperial Grandmother!" Eventually, Shao Wanru stepped up to the Empress Dowager, gasping for breath. Though it was a short distance, dizziness overcame her, blurring her vision, and her fair and delicate forehead was dripping sweat. At first glance, the others knew she could not hold on anymore.

“You have suffered terrible injuries, but you insisted on coming. Hurry up and help Princess Chen sit down,” ordered the Empress Dowager. A eunuch had set up a chair between the Empress Dowager and Rui’an Great Elder Princess.

Yujie and the palace maid helped Shao Wanru to sit down.

Rui’an Great Elder Princess shot out her hand to support Shao Wanru, observing her face anxiously. When she checked on Shao Wanru before, her face looked pale and bloodless, but now her face was drenched with sweat — she must have taken a lot of effort to come over. Her miserable condition made Rui’an Great Elder Princess’s heart ache, and she stretched out her handkerchief to wipe the sweat on Shao Wanru’s face.

“Look at you... You’re so seriously injured, but... you insisted on presenting your gift to Her Majesty.” Rui’an Great Elder Princess choked with sobs and gnashed her teeth, trying hard to suppress the bitterness in her heart.

This was the first time the Empress Dowager had seen Shao Wanru after she was injured. At this time, she couldn’t help but be stunned. She had asked Nanny Gao to send medicinal materials to Shao Wanru several times. Nanny Gao reported that Princess Chen was okay and only needed to recuperate each time. However, Shao Wanru looked much more badly hurt than Nanny Gao had described. She couldn’t help looking at Nanny Gao with a frown.

There was a trace of displeasure in her eyes.

“Grandma, this is a token of the regard of Prince Chen and me... How can I let someone else demonstrate it for me?” Shao Wanru said softly with a happy smile. She turned to look at the Empress Dowager and said, “Imperial Grandmother, please don’t blame me for being late!”

“You... little girl... It is so considerate of you to do that! If you are not in good health, you should go back and rest early. Don’t worry about anything else. I’ll be there for you!” Her face was drained of color, and her forced smile looked slightly unnatural. Yet, the Empress Dowager could see she was struggling hard to do well on her birthday. The Empress Dowager couldn’t help feeling sorry for her, thinking that Shao Wanru was so genuine and sincere that she came to send her gift in person even at this time. Merely for her filial heart and Chen’er’s goodwill, the Empress Dowager was willing to protect Shao Wanru.

“Imperial Grandmother, after presenting my gift, I’ll have to apologize and return home,” Shao Wanru said and nodded to Yujie, who had been waiting aside. Yujie went out and came back with a brocade box in her hands after a while.

She placed the large brocade box in the center of the table and took out a table screen from it. Many people widened their eyes in surprise as soon as they saw the gift.

They were astonished, not because of its exquisite embroidery but because of the gorgeous and long trimming added under the table screen. They didn’t go together. Or, more specifically, this frill didn’t match the table screen at all. This pair was simply offensive to the eye.

For a moment, Nanny Wei was slightly taken aback and looked at the table screen in astonishment, blinking her eyes in disbelief. “Is... Is this the piece I’ve praised and recommended? Anyone with eyes could tell that they were ill-matched. Was Princess Chen blind to see it?”

“Even if she couldn’t see that the decorative border was not suited to the table screen, were all the people around her blind?”

“The trimming doesn’t go with the elegant table screen at all, whichever way I look at it: its color, pattern, or material. How could Princess Chen really send it to the Empress Dowager?”

Nanny Wei’s heart jolted, and she inexplicably had a bad feeling. “What does Princess Chen want to do?”

The imperial consorts around the Empress Dowager began to whisper, glancing sideways at Shao Wanru. So, this was the gift that Princess Chen carefully selected for the Empress Dowager regardless of her poor health?

Judging from Shao Wanru’s bloodless face, they could tell that she was serious and was not joking, but the match was too ridiculous.

The Empress Dowager was also stunned and looked at the table screen in astonishment.

“Imperial Grandmother, I embroidered this screen and drew the painting myself. May your fortune be as boundless as the sea, and may you live a long and happy life,” Shao Wanru said in a low voice. Everyone could see that she was weak from her illness at this time, but she still forced a smile. Seeing her like this, Rui’an Great Elder Princess felt her stomach knot.

“This child has been injured so badly, but she insists on sending her gift in person. Why is she so stubborn?”

Rui’an Great Elder Princess could be said to be the only one who ignored the table screen. She had been nervously watching Shao Wanru — Once Shao Wanru had any problem, she could deal with it immediately.

As for what birthday gift she had prepared, Rui’an Great Elder Princess didn’t think it was important.

“Thank you... for your effort!” At this time, the Empress Dowager couldn’t bear to blame Shao Wanru and only felt tender and protective toward her. She reached out and patted Shao Wanru’s hand gently. “Go back and have a good rest. When Prince Chen comes back and sees you like this, he will blame me for not taking good care of you!”

“Thank you, Imperial Grandmother. I know.” Shao Wanru said. She raised her eyes with gratitude to Nanny Wei. “I had no idea about your preferences. Fortunately, Nanny Wei told me this frill was good, so I decorated the table screen according to your taste.”

As soon as she said that, Nanny Wei’s face changed drastically. She looked at Shao Wanru in horror. It had never occurred to her that Shao Wanru would send this gift and tell her ill-intentioned suggestion to the Empress Dowager in public.

If Princess Chen wasn’t injured, Nanny Wei could say anything against her as she wanted. She could even instigate the Empress Dowager to choose consorts for Prince Chen. Also, she could tell the Empress Dowager in private that Shao Wanru was not fit to be Princess Chen because she couldn’t even choose a proper gift. With these tricks, she could make the Empress Dowager loathe Princess Chen.

But now, her words against Princess Chen might bring disaster to her. The Empress Dowager took pity on Princess Chen, who had suffered terrible injuries. Moreover, she struggled to come over just to give the birthday gift to the Empress Dowager in person. The Empress Dowager would say she liked her gift, no matter how unattractive it was.

Princess Chen came with sincerity to celebrate the Empress Dowager's birthday when she was so severely injured. Anyway, in this situation, no one would believe her slanderous talk.

"Your Majesty, I didn't say that!" After Nanny Wei thought carefully about it in her heart, her legs went weak, and she couldn't help kneeling. "Did Her Highness misunderstand me?"

"I... I made a mistake?" Shao Wanru was a little confused. She swayed and almost fell down. Rui'an Great Elder Princess hurriedly held out her hand to steady Shao Wanru and said impatiently, "It doesn't matter if you got it wrong. You're seriously ill. It's no big deal if you have misheard. Her Majesty won't blame you for that!"

"What is this all about?" The Empress Dowager asked, looking at Nanny Wei with a gloomy face.

"Your Majesty, when I went to deliver your message to Princess Chen that day, she was choosing the trimming for the table screen. The piece I happened to see was this one. Princess Chen tried it and asked me how it was going with the screen. At that time, she was in high spirits. Since Princess Chen was a noble master, as a servant, I mustn't put a dampener on her, so I said it was not bad. Maybe Princess Chen misunderstood me because of this. It was my fault. Please punish me, Your Majesty!"

Nanny Wei reacted very quickly. As the cause and effect of this matter flashed in her mind, she got a reason to explain.

Anyway, that was what she had said. Could Princess Chen give other evidence?

Shao Wanru rose to her feet by holding Rui'an Great Elder Princess's hands and was on the verge of collapse. Others were deeply alarmed for fear that she would pass out any time if she couldn't hold on any longer. "Imperial Grandmother, I... I must have made a mistake. If you don't like it, I'll pick up another one and send it over!"

She said nothing to defend herself. Because she exerted too much strength, she broke out in a cold sweat on her forehead. The few imperial consorts nearby could see that. Nanny Wei gave a justifiable explanation while Princess Chen almost admitted her mistake. But looking at her fragile look, others began thinking carefully about Nanny Wei's words and her cool composure. Many inexplicably felt Nanny Wei had deliberately schemed to embarrass Princess Chen.

Uncontrollably, they looked at Nanny Wei with alert.

If any of them came across the same thing, they might be fooled like Princess Chen. After all, Nanny Wei said this as the Empress Dowager's personal Nanny, a trusted servant.

Needless to say, Nanny Wei was up to no good and had deliberately set up Princess Chen.

"I like it. How could I not like it? Go back and rest first. We'll talk about it later. I'll grant you a reward later!" The Empress Dowager said gently and waved her hand to motion Nanny Wei to get up.

Then she asked someone to send Shao Wanru back because it seemed she couldn't hold on any longer. Seeing the Empress Dowager beaming with delight, Shao Wanru was relieved and left to rest in the tent nearby. After getting some rest, she would ask someone to help her get into a soft sedan chair and return to the Prince Chen's Mansion from the side door.

This matter seemed to be over: Nanny Wei was right, Princess Chen gave the proper gift, and the Empress Dowager liked this style of table screen.

The table screen was put away, but Nanny Wei, standing behind the Empress Dowager, broke out in a cold sweat on her back...

This matter was not over...

When Shao Wanru returned to the small tent, she was almost exhausted. Going back step by step had used up every ounce of her energy. Finally, she collapsed on the couch feebly and closed her eyes. Rui'an Great Elder Princess covered her gently with a soft cloak and gave Yujie and Qu Le some instructions in a low voice.

She carefully told them not to go back in a hurry and let Shao Wanru sleep for a while. If she was in good spirits, she could go back and even come to watch the performance in the afternoon. In any case, she wouldn't have to run around like this.

Though this tent was small and was at the back, it was still in the middle. As long as the tent's curtain was lifted, Shao Wanru could see the performance on the high flower platform. There was no need for her to go outside to watch the show.

"Your Grace, should Her Highness attend the banquet later?" Yujie asked.

Rui'an Great Elder Princess shook her head and said, "She doesn't have to go to the banquet. If she doesn't want to return when she wakes up later, tell Nanny Gao to ask the people from the imperial kitchen for lunch. She can have lunch in this tent. After that, ask some people to clean it up. Then she can wait here for the afternoon performance!"

"No... I'll go back!" A weak voice came from the bed. Shao Wanru felt dizzy. After she struggled to offer her gift, she could no longer hang in there.

She had told Yujie that she wanted to see the performance in the afternoon, but now she was too listless to do that.

"Yes, you'd better go back to rest. You can watch this kind of performance at any time. Your health is the most important thing." Rui'an Great Elder Princess breathed a sigh of relief. She was really afraid that Shao Wanru would insist on watching the fun. After all, she was a young girl. At this time, she might choose to stay.

It was the best thing that Shao Wanru brought it up herself.

Rui'an Great Elder Princess came over and tucked the cloak in firmly. She sighed heavily and said, "Alas, you..."

Rui'an Great Elder Princess was at a loss for words when seeing her coming over with terrible injuries. Her eyes fell on Shao Wanru's pale, almost transparent face, and her nose twitched. If her parents had

been alive, she could have lived a carefree life under the protection of her parents. How could she become so sensible?

Even though she was seriously injured, she still struggled to come over to celebrate the Empress Dowager's birthday.

The more Rui'an Great Elder Princess thought about it, the more she felt sorry for the overly considerate child.

"Grandma, I'm fine!" Shao Wanru couldn't open her eyes but whispered. It wasn't that she didn't want to open her eyes but that she didn't have the strength to do so. She had used up all her strength at the Empress Dowager's place. She didn't even hear the footsteps when Rui'an Great Elder Princess left. Slowly, she fell asleep.

When she woke up again, she reached out to touch her head and felt it didn't hurt as much. Then, she opened her eyes.

"My Lady, you've woken up!" Yujie said joyfully with surprise. Then Shao Wanru saw her appear in her sight. "What ails you?"

Shao Wanru shook her head and replied, "I'm fine!"

"My Lady, you've slept for four hours!" Qu Le said with red-rimmed eyes and hurried over to check Shao Wanru's complexion. Seeing that her master looked much better than before despite her pale face, she breathed a sigh of relief.

The longer they waited, the more flustered and scared they became. They even disturbed the Empress Dowager, who had sent the imperial physician to check on her. Luckily, the imperial physician said she had just fainted because of her severe injuries. Upon hearing that it was not a matter of life and death, the two servant girls felt slightly relieved but were still very worried. When they saw that Shao Wanru had woken up, they finally breathed a sigh of relief.

"I've slept for four hours?" Shao Wanru asked with her long eyelashes fluttering a few times and reached out to touch her head, which was still a little dull.

She had thought that she would be fine after a short rest, but she didn't expect that she would have slept for four hours. The banquet should have begun by now.

She listened carefully. Sure enough, it was quiet outside.

"Did all the people outside go to the banquet?" Shao Wanru asked.

"Yes, they all left. Great Elder Princess specially came to see you and left when making sure that you were fine!" Yujie said.

Qu Le walked back to the table, where there was a food basket. "My Lady, it's getting late. Please eat something. We'll stay and watch the show if you're in good spirits later. If not, we'll go back. Great Elder Princess said that there was nothing interesting to see. It was just that some Misses wanted to marry the princes by taking this chance."

Yujie went over to help and pulled the table to Shao Wanru's couch. Then she opened the food basket and took out the dishes one by one. It was actually a sumptuous feast.

There were eight dishes, one soup, and a large bowl of rice.

The big food basket was almost full.

The dishes were still hot. It seemed that when they had just been served, Shao Wanru happened to wake up. It was just the right time to eat them when they were neither hot nor cold!

Shao Wanru's eyes fell on a bowl of soup with pork ribs and yam in the middle. A few pork ribs were added to flavor the soup. There were some yams in it, but when she took a closer look, she saw mushrooms and the like. The aroma of meat with the rich fragrance of mushrooms smelled delicious.

"The eunuch delivering the meal said that the Empress Dowager specially ordered the imperial kitchen to make this soup for you. Besides yams and mushrooms, they added some nourishing seasonings, which are very suitable for you to drink. Great Elder Princess also sent someone to emphasize that you should take good care of your health and drink it as much as possible!"

Yujie explained with a smile when she saw that Shao Wanru was focused on the bowl of soup.

It was very fragrant indeed. When she smelled it carefully, she noticed a faint scent of medicine in the fragrance of meat and mushrooms. It was no longer an ordinary bowl of soup but a medicinal cuisine.

Qu Le poured her a bowl of soup, and Shao Wanru took a sip. The soup tasted fragrant and smooth. With the fresh flavor of the meat, it became more appetizing. The taste of traditional Chinese medicine was mild, which seemed to have made the soup more palatable.

However, as soon as the soup entered her mouth, Shao Wanru's face changed slightly.

"What's wrong?" Yujie, who had been paying attention to Shao Wanru's expression, saw her frown and asked hurriedly.

Shao Wanru put down the bowl, wiped the corners of her mouth with a handkerchief, and asked, "Who sent the soup?"

"It was said to be a eunuch from the imperial kitchen. The Empress Dowager specially asked someone to make it, and Great Elder Princess also sent someone to let you drink more. Is there anything wrong?" Yujie asked.

Yujie, imbued for a long time with what she had seen and heard near Shao Wanru, had become more meticulous.

The food from the Palace was delivered by a eunuch she had never seen before, so she was undoubtedly on guard. But when the person sent by Great Elder Princess urged her master to drink the soup, she immediately threw away her doubt. "What's wrong with the soup?" Yujie's gaze fell on the bowl of soup.

Among these dishes, this soup was the most fragrant and had a medicinal smell that the other dishes didn't have. It sent out a strong fragrance.

“The eunuch brought it here. Then my grandma specially dispatched someone to tell us about it. Perhaps, she was afraid we would not believe it, right?” Shao Wanru raised her eyebrows, looked at the soup and the other dishes, and said, “Put this bowl of soup on the other table. Its fragrance covers the flavors of other dishes!”

Although Qu Le and Yujie didn’t know the reason, they still obediently removed the large soup bowl in the middle. The rich fragrance before Shao Wanru immediately faded.

“Cover the lid!” Shao Wanru ordered.

Yujie did as she was told and covered the soup bowl.

“Yujie, come and smell it. Are there any other flavors in the dishes?” Shao Wanru closed her eyes and muttered. Although she had designed her injury, she had lost so much blood. How could she fake her feeble condition? Just now, to show her sincerity, she insisted on walking over step by step to see the Empress Dowager and moved back, inch by inch.

She had used up all her strength. Although she was much better after a nap, she still felt weak all over and couldn’t handle laborious work.

Fortunately, Yujie was here. When it came to traditional Chinese medicine, Yujie knew more herbs and was more familiar with them than Shao Wanru.

Yujie came over, picked up a few dishes before her, and began to identify them one by one. Without the mixed flavor of traditional Chinese medicine and the meat soup, the smell of these dishes that were no longer covered by the strong soup fragrance became apparent.

After smelling them, Yujie took out two of the dishes. Then, after a moment of hesitation, she took out the big bowl of rice and put it together with the two dishes.

Afterward, Yujie suddenly knelt with a thud and apologized, “My Lady, I overlooked this problem!”

“Tell me, what’s the matter?” Shao Wanru was not surprised. With her eyes closed, she slightly raised the corners of her mouth, trying hard not to waste her energy.

“There seems to be a strange smell in these two dishes, but I’m not sure about it. When I smelled it carefully, I found the scent of traditional Chinese medicine in the soup. I don’t know if the two dishes picked up the traditional Chinese medicine smell in the soup. I can confirm that something is in the rice. This bowl of rice has been drugged. I used to have a sensitive nose, but I didn’t find anything unusual this time. After all, Great Elder Princess sent someone to tell me, and the rich scent of the soup concealed the other scents. I almost made you...”

Speaking of this, Yujie showed hatred and anger on her face. Because of her negligence, Princess Chen was nearly murdered. Princess Chen would have been killed this time if she hadn’t kept a calm mind.

The most genius design was that she and Qu Le would be fine even if they also ate this meal.

No one would know how the Princess died. They might think she died because she had braced herself to send the birthday gift. No matter how her death was investigated, no one would doubt the food.

Qu Le didn't understand these things. At this time, when she heard Yujie's words, her face also changed greatly. She looked at the rice on the table in horror and asked in astonishment, "Is it... poisoned? Who... who wants to murder you? Didn't the Empress Dowager specially instruct them to cook the meal? How could even the people in the imperial kitchen be part of this scheme? No way. The imperial kitchen has been under the most stringent regulation, hasn't it?"

The imperial kitchen was one of the most critical places in the Palace. The royal family had always been afraid that people would poison their food, so the background of anyone working in the imperial kitchen was thoroughly surveyed. Only innocent people who had done anything wrong could enter the imperial kitchen. In addition, the Emperor would send his people to check on the kitchen from time to time to ensure that nothing would go wrong with their food.

This was also why Qu Le and Yujie didn't doubt much about the food. Now it seemed that it was not the case, so how could the two servant girls not be panic-stricken?

"No, it's not poison!" Shao Wanru, resting on the bed, said softly and slowly opened her watery eyes, which appeared clear and cold.

"Is it a kind of medicine that can invigorate the circulation of Qi and blood?" It sounded like a question, but Shao Wanru was not asking. Instead, she was telling the truth.

Yujie wiped away her tears and nodded vigorously. "Yes, My Lady. It can promote Qi and blood circulation. If you eat it with the medicated food best for your health, you will bleed badly, and your wound will burst open. We can't find out the truth, no matter how much we want to!"

"Get up, and let's talk!" Shao Wanru ordered.

"My Lady..." Yujie still wanted to say something, but Shao Wanru shook her hand and said, "Get up before we go on our conversation."

Qu Le pulled Yujie up. Both of them were angry and hateful, and their eyes were bloodshot. They thought they had protected their master well, but they didn't expect someone to almost succeed in murdering their master by taking this chance. If their master hadn't kept a cool head, she might have been dead now. In that case, they wouldn't absolve themselves from the blame even if they died ten thousand deaths.

"There should be nothing wrong with these people in the kitchen. The main suspect should be the person who delivered the meal. Perhaps, someone else sent the meal today. Or, poison might be put into the meal on the way. My grandma sent a person. Someone must have encouraged my grandma's maid to come over and tell me those words. Of course, the person did it to convince me of the matter... As for this bowl of soup, this superb medicated dish plays the most important role."

Shao Wanru analyzed in a low voice.

Everything planned by this person was perfectly coherent, and the person even knew that the Empress Dowager would ask someone to send her a bowl of medicinal food. This showed that this person was very familiar with the Empress Dowager's character.

Since Shan Wanru was injured, sending her a bowl of soup was necessary. Of course, the medicinal cuisine would be the best. Seeing her poor condition, the Empress Dowager would inevitably instruct

the imperial kitchen to make her a bowl of medicinal cuisine, which must have contained the smell of traditional Chinese medicine. Although there was also a faint smell of medicine brought by the medicine sprinkled into the rice, it was not apparent among the flavors from those dishes and herbs.

Moreover, the person who intended to poison her didn't know the dishes Shao Wanru would like to eat. However, judging by her poor health, Shao Wanru must not have eaten much. If she didn't eat the medicine put into her meal, the person's sinister plot against her would fail. Therefore, the person sprinkled the poison on the rice.

Even if she had little appetite, the two servant girls would persuade her to eat more. After all, she was recuperating now, so she should eat more.

"My Lady, who on earth wants to take your life?" Yujie asked, grinding her teeth with rage.

"This person should know that I have medical skills. Otherwise, there was no need to cover the smell of the drug with the strong fragrance of the soup. Then, only ordinary soup would be served," Shao Wanru said slowly and slightly narrowed her liquid eyes. "This person wanted to kill me. Besides, this person knew what happened in the Palace today. Or even if the person didn't know it, he or she must have learned what had happened from others!"

There weren't many people who could meet these conditions.

"My Lady, could it be Secondary Consort Shao?" Qu Le was struck by a thought and asked.

When Princess Chen married into the Prince Chen's Mansion, she greatly offended Madam Jiang and Secondary Consort Shao. The two of them had devoted themselves wholly to hurting Princess Chen, but they eventually met their tragic fates, which they brought upon themselves.

There was hardly anyone who wanted to murder Princess Chen except for the two of them. Moreover, Princess Chen had treated Old Madam when she stayed in the Marquis Xing's Mansion, so everyone there knew that Princess Chen had some medical skills.

In addition, Secondary Consort Shao was living in the Palace. It seemed that she matched all the conditions.

"My Lady, it's unlikely to be Secondary Consort Shao. She can't even protect herself in the Palace, so how could she get the energy to plot against you?" Yujie shook her head and said, thinking it was impossible.

Although Secondary Consort Shao knew her master well and had the motive to harm her, she wasn't capable of scheming against Princess Chen in the Palace.

Secondary Consort Shao couldn't order the Empress Dowager's servants, not to mention that the person should be familiar with the Empress Dowager's character. How could Secondary Consort Shao say anything when she couldn't even go anywhere near the Empress Dowager?

"Even if it's not her, it has something to do with her. She couldn't approach the Empress Dowager, but she could ask someone else to do it. In other words, she can't deal with me in person but can secretly ask others to do things for her. She has helpers in the Palace." Shao Wanru said slowly, with a trace of coldness flashing across her eyes.

It sounded unreasonable, but after carefully reflecting on the whole thing, she thought it made sense.

“Who, who would help Secondary Consort Shao?” Yujie asked in confusion, “With her terrible state, how could there be anyone who thinks highly of her? Perhaps, Prince Yue or Prince Zhou?”

After she finished speaking, Yujie was also shocked.

“It’s possible. I think Prince Yue and Prince Zhou must have been supporting her. Secondary Consort Shao wants to deal with you because of the old grudges. And Prince Yue or Prince Zhou may have done it to deliver a terrible blow to Prince Chen. You’re injured but survived the disaster. This time, they are determined to watch you die.”

Qu Le repeatedly nodded, feeling that Yujie’s words made sense.

After their assassination failed, they devised another plot, which would inevitably take away Princess Chen’s life. If Prince Yue or Prince Zhou had been involved, some things could have been done. It was not a big deal for them to change or order a person in the imperial kitchen. Coupled with Secondary Consort Shao’s knowledge and hatred for Princess Chen, they could act in time according to the circumstances.

“Not them! There is a more suspicious person!” Shao Wanru shook her head and said. She had always suspected that person, but she did not want to stir up trouble since that person had been very mysterious. Now it seemed that that person had already taken the initiative to hurt her, even if she had been trying to avoid the dispute.

“The dishes without medicine are safe, and we can also drink the soup. I’ll have some, and so should you. As for the rice, you can eat some. It’s okay for you because you are not wounded,” said Shao Wanru.

If she didn’t eat anything, she wouldn’t have the energy to think. Only after getting something to eat could she gain some strength to think about tricky things.

Because she was sick and weak, her reactions were much slower than usual. Those people must have figured out that she must eat something to recharge her strength and energy. Initially, she had to eat this bowl of rice. But now, she could no longer eat it. Fortunately, she could still eat other dishes.

Yujie and Qu Le hurriedly helped Shao Wanru up. After she sat down with her back against the couch, Yujie brought over two suspicious dishes so that Shao Wanru could smell them. Shao Wanru shook her head, indicating that they were okay. The scent of the soup must have wafted over them, so she seemed to have smelled medicine on them.

The servant placed some dishes and the soup on the same layer. After a long time, the other dishes also picked up the strong smell of medicine, which seemed to be drugged.

Yujie and Qu Le brought the soup and ate something together with their master. Then they stopped eating.

After Shao Wanru was full, she felt refreshed and slightly knitted her willowy eyebrows. “Am I the sole target? They spent so much effort and even mobilized their power in the imperial Palace only to deal with me, a useless princess to them?”

"I've been seriously injured. Even if I died here, it would not be too surprising.

"Today is the Empress Dowager's birthday. I've deliberately announced that I would come to present the birthday gift in person. They could plot against and murder me, but is that all?"

Shao Wanru reached out to rub the space between her eyebrows. In her previous life, she didn't hear about this kind of thing. Of course, she wouldn't inquire about it at that time and only occasionally heard something from the servants in the Palace. She would enter the Palace later on when the Pageant was held. It had been three years since this moment. What had happened in the Palace had passed.

This sort of thing was not something that these servants in the Palace could casually talk about.

In this case, did only the incident about the maple leaf painting happen on the Empress Dowager's birthday? Was there anything else? Prince Zhou rose in revolt. He was forced to do that, wasn't he?

What made Prince Zhou and the Empress feel that rising in rebellion was their only way out? Did they think it was their best choice?

In this life, the incident about the maple leaf painting also happened. It was brought under control, and not many people knew about it, but still, it happened. Also, the Empress was involved. But even after this incident and the assassination targeted at her that might have been planned by Prince Zhou, the Empress was still the Empress, and Prince Zhou was still the legitimate son of the Palace.

Anyway, Prince Zhou and the Empress had not been pushed to a dead end, so they did not need to rebel.

But what if something happened at this time that made the Empress and Prince Zhou the only ones to blame? For example, her death?

Shao Wanru suddenly felt a chill in her mind, and an ice-cold, brutal look slipped across her watery eyes. "Did someone plan to use my life to force Prince Zhou to rebel? So, in the last life, what events had been added to the Empress and Prince Zhou so that they had to rise in rebellion?"

Some traces of her two lives were similar, while some were different. Due to the loss of her memory, Shao Wanru couldn't remember the specific situation.

If she guessed it right, the Empress should have advised her grandma to send someone to remind her.

Shao Wanru suddenly asked, "Yujie, Qu Le, if you see the person who delivered lunch again, can you recognize him?"

Yujie and Qu Le looked at each other and nodded with certainty. "My Lady, we were afraid that something would happen just now, so we deliberately took a few more glances and remembered his appearance!"

This person was probably a eunuch in the Empress's place.

She would die for nothing if she couldn't find out the truth. Once the case was entirely cleared, it would involve the Empress. With the assassination in the Prince Chen's Mansion and the poisoning incident happening in the Imperial Palace, the Empress would inevitably find it difficult to convince the public

that she was innocent. Thus, Shao Wanru thought that as soon as the cause of her death was uncovered, the Empress would lose her high position.

Risking her life to make the Empress fall out of power.

She was dead, and the Empress and Prince Zhou were also implicated. In the end, Prince Yue was the one who benefited, right? And Shao Yanru?

Shao Wanru still felt that she hadn't yet figured out the overall situation.

So, when things had come to this, it didn't matter whether she was alive or dead, did it?

"Is Her Highness awake?" A shrill voice suddenly came from outside the tent. The unique, high-pitched voice undoubtedly belonged to a eunuch in the Imperial Palace.

Shao Wanru motioned to Yujie, and Yujie hurriedly got out of the tent. Looking at the eunuch standing before her, Yujie asked unhappily, "What's the matter?"

"Great Elder Princess is worried about Princess Chen, so she sent me here to ask if she has woken up?" The eunuch bent down slightly and said with a smile.

"Are you sent by Rui'an Great Elder Princess?" Yujie looked the eunuch up and down and asked. After what had happened just now, her heart was still fluttering with fear, so she asked him in detail at this time.

Rui'an Great Elder Princess was not the only Great Elder Princess who had entered the Palace today. Therefore, she had to make it clear in case she should get confused and leave loopholes to others.

"Yes, Rui'an Great Elder Princess sent me here." The eunuch nodded vigorously with a smile. He seemed to be good-tempered. Of course, with Princess Chen's noble status, no eunuch in the Palace dared to act rudely.

"Go back and report to Rui'an Great Elder Princess that my master has woken up. There is nothing serious. She can rest assured!" Yujie said.

"Well, I'm going to report it to Her Grace now. You can serve Princess Chen for lunch!" The eunuch replied with a bright smile, as if he was sincerely worried about Shao Wanru. Then he turned around and left without saying anything else.

Everything seemed to be normal. The information he got was that Princess Chen had woken up and was about to have lunch...

"Then you can go back!" Yujie waved her hand and turned into the tent, but the eunuch didn't leave immediately. After rolling his eyes a few times, he carefully approached the sheer curtain hanging down to the ground.

The curtain of thin and light material was not thick, but it was not very transparent. Thus, he could vaguely see the figures inside when he got close to it.

"My Lady, Great Elder Princess wanted to know if you had dinner!" The eunuch heard a servant girl report. It sounded like the servant girl who had come out to meet him.

"My grandma has always been so worried about me!" The feeble voice of the woman should be Princess Chen's.

"My Lady, let us serve your meal!" Another woman's voice came from inside. It was another servant girl with Princess Chen.

"I'll have some soup. I don't feel like eating." Princess Chen's voice sounded very weak.

"My Lady, you're not in good health, so you ought to eat more. Please eat some rice before drinking the soup, okay?" The servant girl advised.

"Well... okay!" Although Princess Chen felt reluctant to do so, she listened to her suggestion.

The sounds of bowls and plates colliding came out of the tent. The eunuch nodded with satisfaction, turned around, and left to report to his master.

After the eunuch left cautiously without any noise, Yujie asked in an undertone, "My Lady, the eunuch has gone. Do you want me to follow him and see who is plotting against you?"

"No!" Shao Wanru said, her intelligent eyes as cold as a deep pool, "It's useless for you to go there. We're in the Palace. Besides, this eunuch is not an important person. Even if you follow him, you'll only see another servant from the Palace later. If you go on watching that servant, you will leave some traces."

"My Lady, are we going to let them plot against you?" Yujie said indignantly. Not only did they scheme against her master, but they even sent a eunuch to check on her for fear that her master had not eaten the poisonous rice yet. Princess Chen had repeatedly asked her not to act rashly for the time being. Otherwise, she would have slapped the eunuch several times in a fit of anger.

"We don't have to do anything now. An accident is around the corner!" Shao Wanru said coldly.

When the eunuch came over, she struck upon an idea. She remembered their target in the last life was Chu Liuchen.

Yes, Chu Liuchen was the most fragile and could hardly stand some strong herbs. The medicine for stimulating blood circulation in the rice was overpowering. As long as he was injured, it was easy for him to bleed heavily. Though he had no wound, he was in poor health, so Chu Liuchen could not stand the drug either.

She didn't know how Chu Liuchen had escaped in the last life. Perhaps, he had been as healthy as he was now, so the drug exerted no effect on him. Nevertheless, one thing was sure: they were all plotting against Chu Liuchen in her last life. It was because Chu Liuchen was the most suitable target. The medicine that was not harmful to others might be lethal for him.

These people were indeed detestable!

"Help me lie down. I want to have a rest!" Shao Wanru said.

Yujie and Qu Le exchanged a glance. Though puzzled, they still assisted her to lie down as they were told and covered her with the cloak again.

"Some people should be coming later. Just tell them that something happened to me. I've been lying still on the bed, and you can't wake me up!" Shao Wanru's long eyes fluttered, and her eyes were deep and steely.

"My Lady, if an imperial physician is sent here, he will find out we're lying," Qu Le said.

"Don't worry. I've been rather ill lately, so I may slip into a trance when sleeping," Shao Wanru said.

When in a trance, the person can neither sleep soundly nor stay awake. This symptom usually happens to the weak ones. In this state, the person can't be woken up by whatever method. In addition, the wounded person who lacks Qi and blood and is in weak health is very likely to die. At present, Shao Wanru was in poor condition, so the two servant girls looked pretty worried.

They feared that something terrible might happen to their master in her sleep.

Her watery eyes squinted at the food on the table that had not been tidied up yet and ordered, "When the Empress Dowager comes back, Yujie, go to see Her Majesty and tell her that you can't wake me up no matter how hard you've tried!"

Since these people wanted to use her life as a stepping stone, she would make a bigger deal out of it...

"My Lady, I understand. When Rui'an Great Elder Princess comes back later, should we tell her the truth first?" Yujie nodded and asked.

"You don't have to tell my grandma the truth. She is straightforward and is not good at hiding her true feelings, so telling her might ruin our plan. It's better to keep her in the dark!" Shao Wanru shook her head and said. With her grandma's forthright character, others could tell the difference even if she thought she had done a good job hiding the secrets. The best way was that she knew nothing about it, so all her reactions would be authentic.

In this way, their story would appear more convincing.

"But if Rui'an Great Elder Princess comes back and wants to see you, what should we do?" Qu Le had other doubts. She was afraid that Rui'an Great Elder Princess would come to check on Princess Chen. If her master looked fine at that time, they couldn't tell the Empress Dowager, who came later, that their master was not feeling well.

Their panic expressions wouldn't look real.

If they dared to report their master's condition to the Empress Dowager, why didn't they say it to Rui'an Great Elder Princess, Princess Chen's biological grandmother?

"If my grandma came earlier than Her Majesty, you would make a panicky scene right away. But if they were back together, you should go straight to the tent in the middle to see the Empress Dowager." Shao Wanru thought it over and came up with a solution.

Under normal circumstances, Rui'an Great Elder Princess would accompany the Empress Dowager to come here. They were sisters-in-law in a good relationship. In addition, she had said that she would go back, so Rui'an Great Elder Princess should not have come to see her early.

But this did not mean that it was impossible. Therefore, Shao Wanru came up with two ideas.

The Empress Dowager would eventually know her bad condition, informed by either the people of the Prince Chen's Mansion or Rui'an Great Elder Princess.

Shao Wanru didn't want to get Rui'an Great Elder Princess involved, so she could only hope that her grandma would come later.

Of course, those who planned behind the scenes were unwilling to involve Rui'an Great Elder Princess either. People from the Prince Chen's Mansion would appear more agitated than Rui'an Great Elder Princess when reporting this emergency to the Empress Dowager. It would be much easier for them to attract the attention of the Empress Dowager and the Emperor.

After giving Yujie and Qu Le a few more detailed instructions, Shao Wanru closed her eyes to rest. She seemed to have fallen asleep in a daze, or maybe not...

Rui'an Great Elder Princess wanted to come over early because she was worried about Shao Wanru. She had sent someone to see if her granddaughter had a good meal. Also, she told her to eat more. However, she still felt worried when hearing the Empress's words.

The banquet was very lively. Each gift for the Empress Dowager was of fine quality, but Rui'an Great Elder Princess wasn't in the mood to appreciate them, for she was very concerned about her granddaughter's health.

When all the gifts had been shown, and everyone had almost finished eating, she took out a handkerchief to wipe her mouth and wanted to get up.

"Where are you going?" Ruiping Great Elder Princess, who was sitting nearby, saw that she was leaving and asked in a low voice. All the people at this table were princesses, and they were close to the table of the Empress Dowager.

"I'm worried about Princess Chen, so I want to go and see her!" Rui'an Great Elder Princess whispered the truth.

Ruiping Great Elder Princess glanced at the Emperor sitting in the middle with enthusiasm and softly persuaded her not to go away, "No one has left at this time. If you withdraw like this, you will displease His Majesty!"

"But Princess Chen is in poor health!" Rui'an Great Elder Princess argued.

She certainly knew that it was not improper for her to leave early at this time, but she was not at ease. She felt inexplicably uneasy and thought she must go there and check up on Shao Wanru.

"If you go now, Princess Chen may have gone back. Didn't she say that she would go back?" Ruiping Great Elder Princess suggested, "Everyone is happy today, and the Empress Dowager and the Emperor are in high spirits. If you go out at this time, you may stir up trouble."

When Ruiping Great Elder Princess mentioned that Shao Wanru might have returned home, Rui'an Great Elder Princess hesitated a little. It was okay if her granddaughter was there. But if Shao Wanru weren't there, she would go there in vain. Maybe someone would use this as an excuse to slander her.

When Rui'an Great Elder Princess was alone in the past, she had always been free. Anyway, she had no one to care about. Others might not approve of her deeds, but so what? She didn't care. But now she

was no longer alone and must protect her granddaughter and grandson well, so she shouldn't do things merely according to her own will.

After thinking for a while, she took Ruiping Great Elder Princess's advice and sat down.

The banquet lasted for another two hours. The Empress Dowager didn't leave immediately. Instead, she took a group of people close to her to the inner hall to chat.

The Empress Dowager was supposed to have a rest at this time, but she was in a good mood today and looked energetic. A group of princesses and imperial consorts of the royal family accompanied her. As they were talking joyfully together, she didn't feel exhausted.

After a short rest, someone came to report that the flower platform was ready and invited the Empress Dowager to go over.

Therefore, the Empress Dowager moved to the flower platform with the Empress, imperial consorts, and princesses.

The crowd surrounded the Empress Dowager and the Empress and went over together. When they walked up to the previous big tent, they suddenly heard a commotion before them. The Empress Dowager frowned slightly but didn't care much about it. There were so many people in the Palace today, so sometimes it would be a little noisy.

But then the noise grew louder, and there seemed to be people crying.

"Someone? Go and see what's going on." The Empress Dowager ordered.

A palace maid answered and left. After a while, she rushed in with a flustered look and said, "Your Majesty, Princess Chen is in danger. She had a meal... Then she never wakes up..."

"What?" Rui'an Great Elder Princess wanted to stand up, but her legs were so weak that she staggered and almost fell. Fortunately, Nanny Gao was quick-witted and hurriedly reached out to help her up. Finally, Rui'an Great Elder Princess could stand firm.

"Who... Who had an accident?" Rui'an Great Elder Princess reached out her trembling hands to hold Nanny Gao, her face ghastly pale.

"It's... Princess Chen!" the palace maid answered timidly.

"Zhuozhuo..." Rui'an Great Elder Princess almost fainted. After trying hard to calm down, she suddenly pushed Nanny Gao's hand away and hurried away. When she reached the tent entrance, a hairpin on her head hooked the sheer curtain and tore off a piece of the curtain. Rui'an Great Elder princess struggled and ran out, regardless of the fact that her hairpin had cut through the curtain.

Nanny Gao chased after her in a hurry.

"Let's go to see her together!" The Empress Dowager was anxious and angry, pushing herself up from the table.

"Imperial Mother, please summon the imperial physician first!" The Empress reminded her.

The Empress Dowager nodded and asked someone to call the imperial physician over. Then she went to the small tent with some people.

When they arrived at the tent, they saw Rui'an Great Elder Princess sitting on the couch in a panic. Shao Wanru was lying on the bed, and she held her hand with tears streaming down her face.

The Empress Dowager staggered and only managed to stand still by holding a palace maid's hand. After taking a deep breath, she asked solemnly, "How is Princess Chen?"

"Your Majesty..." Rui'an Great Elder Princess was helped up by Nanny Gao and struggled to salute the Empress Dowager. However, right after she called out, she burst out crying.

"What's wrong with Princess Chen?" The Empress Dowager ignored Rui'an Great Elder Princess and hurried to the bed. When she saw Shao Wanru lying motionless on the bed with a pale face, she was shocked and almost fell.

Her grandson had asked her to take good care of Princess Chen thousands of times. How could she die at her birthday party banquet? How could she explain it to her grandson?

"What on earth is going on?" After pulling herself together, the Empress Dowager turned around and asked Yujie and Qu Le, who were kneeling on the ground. The Empress Dowager had seen the two servant girls who served Shao Wanru.

Nanny Wei reached out to help the Empress Dowager sit down on a chair aside.

The Empress sat on another chair while those imperial consorts and princesses crowded at the tent entrance. They all looked inside nervously. Princess Chen looked fragile when presenting the gift, but it had never occurred to them that she would suddenly die.

How could her life end abruptly?

Since everyone here had some connections with the royal family, they certainly took it as a plot against Princess Chen's life. Some people tried to assassinate Princess Chen and even made a big scene. Last time, Princess Chen narrowly escaped death, but it didn't mean that she could also survive this time.

Those people familiar with each other exchanged glances, knowing full well that they were thinking the same thing.

"She was fine before. How could such a thing happen? You didn't serve her well, did you? Some people, come here! Take the two servant girls away and heavily flog them twenty times." The Empress Dowager was in a towering rage. When her grandson returned and asked her how Princess Chen ended up like this under her protection, she would feel too guilty to answer him. Would Chen'er think that Princess Chen had an accident because she had struggled to send her the birthday gift?

Thinking that she might take the blame, the Empress Dowager Queen could no longer suppress her anger.

"Your Majesty, please spare us. My master was fine before and even got up to have the meal. After that, she went to sleep... Then, she became like this." Yujie cried loudly and kowtowed hard several times on the ground.

Qu Le kowtowed twice to the Empress Dowager and sobbed out, "Your Majesty, when Her Lady fell asleep, she was all right. We had been waiting on her. But she didn't get up after sleeping for so long, so we went up to wake her up. But no matter how hard we tried, Her Lady didn't wake up. We panicked and reported it to you."

The two servant girls kowtowed very hard. Though on the mud ground, they repeatedly kowtowed with thuds. Instantly, they got a blue mark on their foreheads.

"Did she become like this... after the meal?" Rui'an Great Elder Princess asked hurriedly. At this time, she was so anxious that she ignored the Empress Dowager. Now her granddaughter was lying there with a pallid face. Seeing that there was no trace of blood on her face, she was greatly flustered.

"Yes, my master didn't want to eat at first. But Great Elder Princess sent someone to tell her to have the meal. So, my master ate a little more, but... but... Why couldn't she get up for no reason?" Yujie explained in tears.

Shao Wanru was lying stone still on the couch. Her face was colorless, but her expression was extremely calm. Under the cloak, her hands could be seen folded properly before her chest, as if she were sleeping as usual.

"Having a meal? Was it because of the food?" Though Rui'an Great Elder Princess was smiling, she looked more painful than when she was crying. She looked around with her alarmed and panicky eyes, seemingly searching for something. Finally, she saw the food basket in the corner of the tent. "Check, check what's in it. Is there anything strange in it?"

"Your Majesty and Your Grace, when only the two of us were in the tent, a eunuch of the kitchen came to take the hamper, but we didn't give it to him. He was not the one who sent the lunch here. Why would another person come to do this after such a short time?" Yujie said.

"Great Elder Princess had specially sent someone to ask my master to eat more. Otherwise, my master wouldn't have had more food..." Qu Le added in tears.

"I... The Empress reminded me, so I asked someone to come here." Rui'an Great Elder Princess muttered subconsciously to herself.

The Empress Dowager was calmer than her. At this time, she had already collected herself, her eyes falling on the Empress's face. "You asked the imperial kitchen to prepare lunch for Princess Chen, didn't you?"

In the beginning, it was the Empress Dowager who wanted to prepare the lunch for Princess Chen and was about to send someone there. It happened that the Empress's servant would go to the kitchen for the banquet, so the Empress took over the matter. The Empress Dowager didn't feel anything wrong about this, but it turned out that the meal went wrong. Upon hearing Rui'an Great Elder Princess's words, everyone on the spot felt that something fishy was going on with the food.

Did the Empress plan this?

It sounded reasonable if this matter was done by the Empress. The assassination targeting Princess Chen hadn't yet been investigated thoroughly. But there were only a few people who might have schemed

against Princess Chen. The Empress and Prince Zhou were very likely to do this. Since their previous plan failed, they devised a second plan to murder Princess Chen.

The Empress appeared gentle and kind on the surface, but she was vicious. How could she be so kind-hearted?

The Empress could do such a thing to Princess Chen. After all, the Empress was the leading suspect if anything unusual happened in the Palace.

"Imperial Mother, I indeed had asked someone to order lunch for Princess Chen according to your instruction." Seeing that the Empress Dowager was suspicious of her, the Empress was angry and resentful, but she had to stand up and explain.

"The eunuch who took back the food basket was not the one who sent it over. Do you know that?" The Empress Dowager questioned her sternly with a cold face. As soon as the imperial physician came, she would tell him to check the food first.

Everything in the Palace should be done according to the strict rules. No one was allowed to take over other people's business at will.

"Imperial Mother, I don't know it. I have no idea why the imperial kitchen would send different eunuchs. I'll investigate it now. Once I find out who did this, I won't let the person go easily." The Empress hurriedly said, eager to put the blame elsewhere.

"Punish a few eunuchs? If something bad happens to Princess Chen, you'll only punish two eunuchs. Do you disdain Princess Chen or look down on Prince Chen? If Prince Chen gets into trouble for no specific reason like this, you'll promise to punish some people and leave this matter behind, won't you?"

The Empress Dowager rebuked, pounding the table angrily with annoyance.

All the princesses and imperial consorts kept quiet out of fear and lowered their heads, not daring to say a word.

When the Empress Dowager and the Empress had a fierce dispute, how could they dare to say anything with their inferior status? At this time, they might be put to death because of an indiscreet remark.

Many people were secretly sizing up the situation. It was said that Prince Chen would arrive in the capital city soon. No one knew what terrifying things he would do then.

It was not all because Prince Chen highly valued Princess Chen. On the surface, Prince Chen had been gentle and refined, but he was an overbearing bully who held grudges. If he was enraged, it was hard to predict what would happen next.

He wouldn't yield an inch, even to his eldest brother or second elder brother.

"Imperial Mother, I'll find out the truth and the people behind this. Princess Chen wouldn't suffer in vain." The Empress was in a peeve over it. Somehow, she had to be responsible for this, but she hadn't done anything. She just asked someone to deliver the message and offered to help out of kindness. It turned out that she was wrong to do all of this.

If she had known this, she wouldn't have kindly reminded Rui'an Great Elder Princess. The whole episode turned out to be entirely her fault.

Yujie wiped away the tears from her bloodshot eyes and said, "Your Majesty, I can recognize the two eunuchs. I've seen the one who delivered the meal and the one who came over to get the food basket. We've paid some attention to them and remembered their looks!"

"We can identify them!" Qu Le echoed.

"Take one of them to the imperial kitchen to pick out the eunuchs!" The Empress Dowager ordered coldly. She had made up her mind. Though she was completely surprised by Shao Wanru's accident, it didn't happen to Chu Liuchen after all. Although the Empress Dowager looked at the Empress gloomily, she stayed rational.

"Anyone? Come here and take a person away to identify the eunuchs!" The Empress ordered loudly.

"There is no need to use your people. My servant will take her there!" The Empress Dowager said, looking at her servants in the Palace of Benevolent Peace. Then, a eunuch came over and took Qu Le away as the Empress Dowager had ordered.

The Empress was humiliated in public. There was a flash of anger in her eyes, but she couldn't say anything. The Empress Dowager was preventing her from doing something on the sly.

Speaking of this, the Empress felt aggrieved and angry. After all, she was inexplicably involved in this matter. In the previous, the Empress had been trying to ease the relationship with Shao Wanru so that the Emperor and the Empress Dowager would stop suspecting her. But now she was suspected of plotting against Shao Wanru. She was so annoyed that she almost lost control.

The imperial physician entered in a hurry and saluted the Empress Dowager and the Empress. Then he was taken to the corner to check the dishes Princess Chen had had.

First, he tested the food with silver needles but found nothing wrong. Then he checked all the things carefully. When he figured it out, his face changed drastically.

"What do you think?" The Empress Dowager asked.

"Your Majesty, there is the medicine for promoting blood circulation in the rice. Princess Chen's wound hasn't healed yet. If she had taken this medicine, she would... would..." The imperial physician stammered. He had only heard that something had happened to Princess Chen, but he didn't know what exactly it was. Judging from the current situation, he deduced that Princess Chen's wound must have burst open, and she had bled to death.

"Zhuzhuo!" Rui'an Great Elder Princess wailed. Her body crumpled, and she passed out.

Nanny Gao reached out to hold Rui'an Great Elder Princess and cried out anxiously, "Your Grace, Your Grace!"

"What happened?" A cold voice suddenly came from the door. The Empress, who was about to speak, was suddenly shocked and felt a chill on her back...

Why would Chu Liuchen come back? Didn't they say he was far away from the capital and couldn't come back soon?

Chu Liuchen, standing at the entrance, looked worn out by the long journey. His light-colored brocade robe was not as bright and tidy as usual. His handsome face looked a little weary. His pale skin was almost transparent, and only the corners of his mouth were light red, which made him look more indifferent than others.

At this moment, his eyes looked gloomy, as if he were a diabolical devil from hell. The Empress, who turned around to see him, couldn't help but take a step back in horror. Subconsciously, she clutched her chest in fear, her heart beating wildly.

Chu Liuchen, known to be treacherous and ruthless, might suddenly turn hostile. He was gentle and cheerful a moment ago, but the next moment, he might become cold and cruel. But at least in front of the Empress, he was usually very refined and elegant. However, he inexplicably made people feel that he was gloomy and frightening. The Empress had never seen him like this before.

Not just the Empress but also these princesses and imperial consorts spontaneously stepped back cautiously to avoid Prince Chen's eyes. His bloodthirsty gaze made them feel suffocated.

Only the Empress Dowager stood up in surprise and said, "Chen'er, you finally come back!"

According to the message from the Emperor, Chu Liuchen couldn't attend the Empress Dowager's birthday party in time, which greatly upset the Empress Dowager. So, when Chu Liuchen cropped up before her, she was joyfully surprised. But immediately, she felt guilty. After all, Princess Chen, lying on the couch, had just had an accident.

She hurriedly took a few steps forward, trying to stop him from looking inside.

"How can I not care about your birthday? I hurried back to the capital at top speed. I just went to report to Uncle the Emperor, and now I'm here to see you, my Imperial Grandmother!" Chu Liuchen said and withdrew his cold eyes. His eyes turned soft only when he looked at the Empress Dowager.

After that, he lifted his robe and knelt before the Empress Dowager. "Imperial Grandmother, I wish you long life and happiness. May you have prosperity every year, and may blessings descend upon every house!"

"Great... good, blessings descend upon every house!" The Empress Dowager was so excited that she helped Chu Liuchen up. As she examined his gorgeous face, the rims of her eyes turned red. Then, holding his hand, she exclaimed with emotion. "It's good that you're back. I'm so happy that you're here!"

"Imperial Grandmother, if I don't come back, I may not see Zhuozhuo one last time, right?" Chu Liuchen's face suddenly turned cold again, and his eyes darkened. His clear eyes hardened and looked as spooky and deep as the bottomless hell.

Several imperial consorts, who had just gotten over the shock, immediately lowered their heads in horror, not daring to look at his extremely good-looking face again.

Men could also be pretty, but this beautiful man was not gentle and refined. On the contrary, he had a bloodthirsty aura, as if he could destroy everyone here in an instant.

"Princess Chen, Princess Chen, she... she..." Rui'an Great Elder Princess slowly regained consciousness from her shock. She was not frightened by Chu Liuchen and only felt very aggrieved and furious. Taking a step forward, she walked up to Chu Liuchen and angrily denounced, "What did you promise me? You said that you would take good care of Zhuozhuo, but how could she end up like this under your protection? You... you..."

Rui'an Great Elder Princess felt angry and annoyed, and her breath came in convulsive gasps.

Chu Liuchen put down the Empress Dowager's hand and bowed deeply to Rui'an Great Elder Princess. Then he raised his head and said, "Great Elder Princess, don't worry. I will catch the murderer who came after her."

"What's the point of doing that? Just now, already... Someone poisoned the food and hurt Zhuozhuo." Rui'an Great Elder Princess lost control and cried out loud.

Chu Liuchen pursed his lips tightly, and there seemed to be a storm forming in his eyes. After a long while, he slowly asked, "Who did it?"

"It was... it was said the Empress's people delivered the message to the imperial kitchen..." Rui'an Great Elder Princess was distressed and said with tears in her eyes, "Zhuozhuo is a wretched child. She lost her parents when she was a child and had been wandering outside. Even if she had returned to her original family, no one loved her sincerely. Finally, she married you, and I thought her misery ended and her happiness began. I didn't expect that... I didn't expect that she would end up like this. If I had known... If I had known it, I wouldn't have allowed her to marry you. At least she could have stayed alive and lived a peaceful life!"

Her granddaughter was merely a woman who had spent most of her time at home. How could anyone bear such a big grudge against her and want to kill her? Anyway, she died in the Imperial Palace. Everyone knew that the ultimate reason for her death was Prince Chen. If some people aimed at Prince Chen, they would deal with Princess Chen first.

Thus, it was reasonable for her to say that Shao Wanru died because she married Prince Chen!

Some soft-hearted people couldn't help lamenting Princess Chen's miserable life. What had happened to her in the Marquis Xing's Mansion was widely known. The elders there had been unkind to Princess Chen. At present, Old Madam was sent to live a secluded and hard life. Although there was no specific reason for that, those well-informed people learned that Old Madam was punished for her cruelty to Shao Wanru.

If nothing had happened, how would an Old Madam have chosen to live an austere life instead of enjoying a comfortable life in her mansion?

"Please rest assured, Great-aunt. I will find out the truth!" Chu Liuchen said. His eyes fell on Shao Wanru, who was lying on the couch inside. At this time, Shao Wanru was still lying on the wide couch, soundless and stirless.

"Imperial Grandmother, you should return with my great-aunt first. Just leave the imperial physician here," Chu Liuchen murmured. Though he said this to the Empress Dowager and Rui'an Great Elder Princess, his eyes were still fixed on the person lying inside.

"Chen'er... you... don't be too sad..." The Empress Dowager tried to appease him. She was really worried about Chu Liuchen.

"Don't worry. I'm fine!" Chu Liuchen said, his eyes still glued to her beloved woman inside.

The Empress Dowager still wanted to say something, but she didn't know where to start. Helplessly, she sighed and left with the others. At first, Rui'an Great Elder Princess felt reluctant to leave. But when she saw Chu Liuchen's look, she could do nothing but walk out while crying. As she walked to the tent entrance, she abruptly said, "Tell the imperial physician to examine her carefully. She was fine. How could she not get up after falling asleep? Maybe she can be saved!"

After saying this, she walked away with the help of Nanny Gao behind the others.

The Empress Dowager also heard her words. In astonishment, she turned around and saw Rui'an Great Elder Princess, who was sobbing too bitterly to speak. She had wanted to say something to her, but on second thought, she thought Rui'an Great Elder Princess couldn't answer her questions anyway. So, the Empress Dowager could only give up, shaking her head. Rui'an Great Elder Princess might have cried so hard that she couldn't think straight. How could the imperial physician bring the dying back to life?

After all, Rui'an Great Elder Princess only had one granddaughter, and she had always doted on her the most. Perhaps, she believed that her granddaughter still had a feeble thread of life.

It was good for the imperial physician to see her. The Empress Dowager didn't take Rui'an Great Elder Princess's words seriously. However, she completely forgot that Rui'an Great Elder Princess was the only one who had touched Shao Wanru when they came in. Thus, only Rui'an Great Elder Princess knew that Shao Wanru was still breathing, though she was lying there motionlessly.

The Empress, those imperial consorts, and other princesses had the same idea as the Empress Dowager. They all thought that Rui'an Great Elder Princess must have been in a confused state of mind after suffering such a great blow. She was full of wild talk. How could a dead person come back to life?

No one cared about Rui'an Great Elder Princess's words.

The Empress didn't even look up and just lowered her head with anxiety. It had been difficult to deal with this matter, and it became even more tricky now. Somehow, she was deeply involved in this matter. When Chu Liuchen was not around, she could hardly get rid of it. Now that Chu Liuchen had come back, she knew it was almost impossible for her to be cleared of suspicion.

Infanta Yuan'an, next to Ruiping Great Elder Princess, had been in a good mood. With pleasure, she deliberately looked back at the sheer curtain hanging behind her and silently raised the corners of her mouth. "Shao Wanru is dead. That's great!"

It was better for a woman like her to die. No matter how much Prince Chen loved her, she was ill-fated. How could she compare with her, who was blessed with a wealthy and distinguished life?

Infanta Yuan'an was born at the best time and was blessed with an honorable fate. In contrast, Shao Wanru suffered a grim fate. So, how could she stand in comparison with Infanta Yuan'an? Besides, Shao Wanru had turned Infanta Yuan'an down without considering her feelings. Infanta Yuan'an's grandma had asked her to curry favor with Shao Wanru and make friends with her. But now, Shao Wanru died, which was great news for Infanta Yuan'an.

Though all these people looked solemn, they had different thoughts. The Empress Dowager returned to the big tent. There wasn't a trace of a smile on her face.

The Empress was also in a state of preoccupation. Since the two remained silent, no one else dared to speak. Only Rui'an Great Elder Princess's sobs could be heard from time to time in the big tent.

In the small tent, the imperial physician carefully reached out to feel Shao Wanru's pulse. Feeling the faint warmth coming from her hand, he finally relaxed and looked surprisingly at Princess Chen, who was lying on the bed. "She is not dead?"

He came here later than others. As soon as he entered, he saw that Princess Chen was lying there stock-still and that Rui'an Great Elder Princess had burst into loud sobs. For a time, he thought Princess Chen was dead. When Prince Chen asked him to feel her pulse, he was terribly frightened. How could he feel the pulse of a dead person? But he didn't dare to refuse this frightening Prince Chen, so he touched her hand while shivering.

Now he took a deep breath of relief and felt that he had come back to life. Fortunately, Princess Chen was still alive, and Prince Chen was not crazy. Back then, Princess Chen lying on the couch seemed to have died, but Prince Chen still ordered him to feel her pulse. He had feared that Prince Chen might madly slaughter him if he could not feel her pulse.

After calming down, he carefully felt the pulse and frowned.

After a long while, he put down her hand.

"How is she?" Chu Liuchen asked coldly, with his steely eyes on the imperial physician.

The imperial physician shivered and hurriedly said, "Her Highness should be fine!"

She had suffered a significant loss of Qi and blood, so she was very fragile. Princess Chen had a delicate body. It was a miracle that she survived after suffering such a severe injury. But nothing else had happened to her: she had no poisoning symptoms and was unimpaired by the drug that could invigorate blood circulation. The imperial physician felt pretty strange!

"Since it's not a big deal, why doesn't she wake up?" Chu Liuchen asked with a chill in his dark and fathomless eyes, "If you only made a perfunctory effort and talked nonsense to get rid of this matter, I'll kill you!"

Though his tone was calm and unhurried, his eyes looked ice-cold and sinister, which made the imperial physician's heart race with fear. He understood that Prince Chen was serious and didn't threaten him in a fit of anger.

Initially, the imperial physician wanted to tell the truth, but now he began to doubt if he had made the correct judgment. "Could it be that something bad happened to Princess Chen but I failed to see it?"

Chapter 1080 Duke Cheng'en's Thoughts

Duke Cheng'en didn't know that Shao Wanru's painting outshone his, and he bought that maple-leave picture in vain.

After going back to his mansion, he headed for his study to appreciate the satisfactory painting again. To his great surprise, Madam's maid stopped him, saying that his wife wanted him to come to the inner court first.

Duke Cheng'en, who had no idea what had happened, followed the old maid in. When he entered the door, his eyes immediately fell on the table — his precious painting was right in the box on the table. For a moment, he had no clue of what was going on.

He entered the room. With his hands behind her back, he stepped to the table, looked at the painting, and turned back to ask in confusion, "What's wrong? You said you didn't want to see the paintings I bought, didn't you?"

"Is this your birthday gift for the Empress Dowager?" asked Madam of Duke Cheng'en.

Duke Cheng'en turned around to sit beside her, nodded, and said with a smile, "This painting is not bad, right? It matches the occasion with fancy ideas. It'll add glitters to the Empress Dowager's birthday. Moreover, the Emperor will feel grateful for her warm affection."

The more Duke Cheng'en thought about it, the more pleased and satisfied he became.

"You'd better not give it to the Empress Dowager in public. It is not an unparalleled birthday gift." Madam of Duke Cheng'en waved her hand and said bluntly, "Rui'an Great Elder Princess and Princess Chen came over. Princess Chen also took out a painting that looked very similar to yours. It was even more exquisite. More than anything, she herself created the painting with maple leaves!"

"What? How... how is that possible?" Duke Cheng'en lifted his head in shock and was utterly flabbergasted.

Recently, he had been concentrating on looking for a suitable painting for the Empress Dowager. This maple-leaf painting was the best one he could find with the most fantastic idea. Before this, it had never entered his mind that maple leaves could be used to make a painting.

How could anyone else also get such an intriguing idea? In particular, it was Princess Chen. And she made it by herself. The Empress Dowager would prefer hers, for it required much more effort than his.

"His Grace, it's true. Our daughter-in-law and I had seen it," Madam of Duke Cheng'en reached out to rub her forehead and said helplessly.

Her husband was all right, but he was just too sweet-tempered and over-credulous. And he wasn't capable enough. Nevertheless, despite all of this, Madam of Duke Cheng'en thought it was no big deal as long as he was fine and didn't make any big trouble. Of course, it was better not to do anything shameful.

Since the Duke Cheng'en's Mansion was the Empress Dowager's parents' home, anything shameful they did would dishonor Her Majesty.

"This painting will conflict with Princess Chen's, and it can't compare with hers. You'd better not use it as a birthday gift, lest it should embarrass you. What's more, you are an elder. How can your gift resemble a junior's? You might as well let it go!"

They had already known that Princess Chen would also send a maple-leaf painting even better than that in their mansion. Even if theirs looked better, Madam of Duke Cheng'en thought they had to give it up.

Elders ought to humor juniors a little, not to mention that it was Princess Chen. When others heard about it, they would only commend Duke Cheng'en for his generous and decent manner.

Princess Chen was newly married, and it was her first time picking up a birthday gift. If she wanted to curry favor with the Empress Dowager, she should try her best.

The Duke Cheng'en's Mansion was the Empress Dowager's parents' home. Since Her Majesty doted on Prince Chen, the Duke Cheng'en's Mansion should do something to support Princess Chen. In any case, the Duke Cheng'en's Mansion had to give way to Princess Chen on this matter.

Honestly, they could do nothing about it if they didn't know Princess Chen had also prepared a maple-leaf painting and accidentally presented a similar piece as hers. Now that they had learned about this, Madam of Duke Cheng'en felt it was inappropriate for them to pretend ignorance about this matter.

"Is her painting similar to the one I found?" Duke Cheng'en looked at his painting sadly and felt quite unconvinced. It was not easy for him to get such a painting, so he really didn't want to return it.

"Of course, they're alike, and hers is better. Your painting can't compare with that of Princess Chen. You bought the painting, so it's far less meaningful than hers," Madam of Duke Cheng'en discouraged him mercilessly, making him feel his painting was worthless.

Duke Cheng'en felt so wronged because he highly valued the painting and felt a great yearning to send it to his sister. But since Madam of Duke Cheng'en said so, he couldn't ignore it. He lowered his head in low spirits and said, "Since Princess Chen has a similar one, then... forget it. I won't give it to the Empress Dowager!"

Yet he thought the Empress Dowager would love to see such a gift.

The more Duke Cheng'en thought about it, the sadder he became. He felt all his hard work was for nothing and couldn't take it. With a peculiarly blank look, he looked toward the painting on the table, his heart throbbing. He felt reluctant to resign himself to defeat.

He appeared downcast, seemingly utterly disheartened. Helplessly, Madam of Duke Cheng'en rubbed the place between her eyebrows and said, "But if you insist on giving it to her, there is a way!"

"What could I do?" Duke Cheng'en's spirits lifted. He sat up and looked at his aged wife with a severe countenance.

His wife could always come up with many brilliant ideas, while he was usually out of ideas. Sometimes, he had to ask his wife for advice.

"If you stick to your opinion and are sure the Empress Dowager will like it, you can give it to her in private!" Madam of Duke Cheng'en said helplessly, feeling that her husband looked increasingly like an obstinate child. If she didn't appease him today, he would stay depressed for several days.

He would be in low spirits, and it was not a good thing for old people to remain inert.

“Could I?” Duke Cheng’en’s eyes lit up, and he asked excitedly.

He didn’t have to send it before the Emperor and officials, but he was confident that the Empress Dowager would like it. If he couldn’t give it to his sister, he would feel bad about it.

“It’s okay, but you must make it clear Princess Chen’s painting is better and you shouldn’t bring it to her. However, you can’t help doing it because you’re pretty sure she’ll like it.” Madam of Duke Cheng’en reminded him.

“Okay, okay, I know. I’ll pack up and see Her Majesty in the Palace in a while.” Duke Cheng’en nodded repeatedly. As long as he could send it out as his sister’s birthday gift, he would be happy and wouldn’t care about what he had to do and say.

He just wanted the Empress Dowager to see his good intention and feel happy about it.

“Zhuzhuo, how did you know about the painting?” asked Rui’an Great Elder Princess. She had been surprised initially, but when she chewed over it, she was confused.

Shao Wanru suggested going to the Duke Cheng’en’s Mansion, and it was also Shao Wanru who took out a similar painting.

“Grandma, I heard Duke Cheng’en got a painting similar to mine. So I specially asked you to help me inquire about it. If my painting wasn’t as good as theirs, I should put it away and not present it to the Empress Dowager. Or, if Madam of Duke Cheng’en said anything improper about it, I wouldn’t take it as a birthday gift either.”

Shao Wanru lowered her head in embarrassment and apologized with shame in her eyes, “I didn’t know what precisely would happen, so I didn’t explain it to you in detail. Please forgive me, Grandma!”

Rui’an Great Elder Princess hated to see her granddaughter like this, so she waved her hand carelessly and said, “Since you’ve married into the royal family, you can’t share everything with me. Just tell me what you can say and keep those things you can’t say to yourself. There’s no need for you to tell me some of Prince Chen’s things. You know, the royal family has many rules. After marrying into the Prince Chen’s Mansion, you should always look out for Prince Chen because you’re his family.”

When she said that, Rui’an Great Elder Princess stopped and said steadily, “No matter what you have done, I will stand on your side, but you don’t have to tell me everything.”

Shao Wanru’s nose twitched, and she could hardly hold back her tears. In her previous life, she and her grandma had missed each other. In this life, her grandma gave her all her love.

She would protect her grandmother and all the people who loved her.

“Grandma...”

Biting her lip and suppressing the sadness in her heart, Shao Wanru raised her head with tears but showed a smile. “Grandma, don’t worry. I know how to protect myself. More than that, I’ll protect you and Hao’er.”

“My little girl...” Rui’an Great Elder Princess, a person of strong character, said with tears in her eyes, “Little girl... what are you talking about? I should protect you two. Your irresponsible mother made things as miserable as this. She left you two little children and died...”

Thinking of her deceased daughter, Rui’an Great Elder Princess couldn’t help but shed tears.

She had been angry with her daughter, but now her daughter made her heart ache: How could she die when she had old and young at home? Why didn’t she know how to treasure her life?

“Grandma, don’t be upset. You have Hao’er and me. We will live a good life.” Shao Wanru comforted Rui’an Great Elder Princess.

She reached out to pull her grandmother’s sleeve and shook it gently, looking like a lovely and innocent little girl. Seeing that, Great Elder Princess felt a little less pain in her heart. Although her daughter was gone, her children were still with Rui’an Great Elder Princess. For the sake of this pair of lovely grandchildren, she couldn’t collapse.

She had to be their strong backing. Even if her granddaughter was Princess Chen and no longer needed her support, Rui’an Great Elder Princess felt she must hang on.

“You... have you found out anything about the matter related to Shao Jing?” Thinking of her daughter, Rui’an Great Elder Princess suddenly remembered what Shao Wanru had mentioned, her face instantly turning solemn. “If Shao Jing did it, I will never let him go.”

“Grandma, we have to investigate this matter. Without any concrete evidence, we can’t make it clear. There is no hurry.” said Shao Wanru.

She hoped that she could do these things by herself. Her grandma was aged and not good at disguising herself. After all of this was settled, she would tell her grandma everything.

She couldn’t perturb her grandmother, let alone make her angry and worried. She had revealed something to her before, but it was because she had to get some information.

She would personally avenge her parents.

Her father died because of Shao Jing, who was also closely related to her mother’s death. Madam Jiang, Madam of Marquis Xing, must have known the inside story.

However, these things happened long ago, and it was not easy to find evidence. Shao Wanru would take it slow and push her enemies into the abyss of destruction step by step.

“Grandma, I’ll tell you after I find the truth. I need some scripts and paintings now. Can you find some for me?” Shao Wanru, for fear that Rui’an Great Elder Princess kept asking these things, hurriedly changed the topic and talked about the important thing she needed to do...