Farmhouse 1161

Chapter 1161: Sophistry

"We should go out first; the Emperor and the others should be leaving soon too."

Jin Zijin’s eyes gradually turned colder as he let go of Gu Youyou, saying, "You wait here for me, don’t come out."

Did he think he could just walk away? That would be underestimating him.

Gu Youyou nodded lightly, not stopping him.

After Jin Zijin left, Xiang Chun and Searcy soon entered the room.

Xiang Chun looked at Gu Youyou with concern and sighed, "It’s a relief that it was just a false alarm, and no one got hurt. But I don’t know how the child will be divided; originally, it belonged to Miss Du alone, and now they’ve found the child’s father. Although the father is no longer alive, the grandfather is still here. I wonder if Mr. Jie will take the child away."

Gu Youyou smirked slightly and said, "That’s none of our business anymore."

She turned her face to Searcy and asked, "How did you think of finding Mr. Jie? And that letter..."

Searcy looked at the door and lowered her voice, "Before you mentioned that Miss Du’s lover might be the second young master of the Jie Family, so who else would I seek besides Mr. Jie? We can’t let Miss Du carry the stigma of being spoiled by bandits."

Gu Youyou was stunned for a moment and then nodded, "You found the right person."

But Searcy’s words were somewhat unpleasant. What did she mean by lover? They had been formally married before, after all.

Searcy added, "As for that letter, it’s fake. After I explained the situation to Mr. Jie, he immediately ground the ink and wrote that letter himself."

Gu Youyou nodded again and said, "Mr. Jie is indeed strategic and farsighted!"

If it weren’t for that letter, it would have been hard to convince everyone.

After all, Zhonglin is already gone, and there’s no proof in words alone.

In the outer room, the atmosphere was tense and hostile.

Jin Zijin didn’t plan to let it go and took the opportunity to make a move against the Empress.

"You have always been spying on me and slandering Youyou for surrogacy; what is your true intention?"

The Empress sneered and said indifferently, "You must have evidence to speak. I have never ordered anyone to spy on you. As for Gu Youyou being accused of surrogacy, aren’t all these things you’ve done suspicious? First, Gu Youyou concealed her pregnancy, then you hid a pregnant woman in your home; it would be difficult not to be suspicious. And whether the child is yours, that’s still in question."

"Oh? You want evidence?" Jin Zijin smirked, but his eyes were filled with coldness.

"Very well, I’ll give you evidence."

He clapped his hands, and in a short while, several maids and a servant were brought into the crowded room by guards.

It seemed there was no longer any business for the Imperial Physicians, but no one wanted to leave the drama, so they tried to squeeze to the sides to make room.

"What do you intend to do? Bringing out a few maids from your household to frame me?" The Empress wasn't worried; she had already prepared her defense.

"Who appointed these maids?" Jin Zijin asked indifferently.

The Empress answered with a smile, "Your residence doesn't have anyone, so is there a problem if I arrange people here? Not only in your household but also in the houses of King Jin and Prince Qin, most of the servants are arranged by me."

Jin Zijin smiled faintly, and with a stretch of his hand, someone handed him a large envelope.

He opened the envelope, which was full of specially made small notes, all written with the daily activities of him and Gu Youyou.

Jin Zijin handed the large envelope to the Emperor and then said to the Empress, "All these things were delivered by a vegetable farmer named Su. Perhaps you will say again, would I find a vegetable farmer to slander you?"

Chapter 1162: King Jin Cannot Have Children

The Empress's complexion changed as she said, "What wouldn't you do? Even resorting to surrogate childbirth, I..."

"Enough!" the usually gentle and soft-spoken Emperor suddenly roared in anger.

He tossed those notes onto the Empress's face, furiously saying, "Do you really think I'm blind to the play you've arranged today? Just because someone has a child, must you be so consumed by jealousy that you fabricate this surrogate childbirth scenario?

These notes, you claim you didn't concoct them, so what, are you suggesting they made these up to slander you? Whether it's slander or not, you know full well in your heart."

"I..." the Empress said in a panic: "Your Majesty, if I say I am truly wronged, would you believe me?" She shook her head and said, "No, you wouldn't believe me. Ever since he returned, you changed; even

though you were partial before, always taking Prince Qin's side, at least you were fair between me and Sheng Qiaoyue. But since his return, you've been completely biased towards him.

I know you feel guilty towards him, towards Xiao Qinqin, but you can't just indulge him in everything; after all, I am the Mother of the State, how can you allow him to slander me? You say I am jealous of Gu Youyou for giving birth to a son, then shouldn't I be even more jealous of Prince Qin's Consort, who birthed two at once?"

At that moment, Gu Youyou came out from that room.

She didn't want to come out, but there was something that really couldn't be handled without her.

Jin Zijin hurried forward to support her, with a reproachful tone, "Didn't we agree that you shouldn't come out? Why did you come out again?"

Gu Youyou chuckled at him, patted the back of his hand to reassure him, and then said to the Empress, "Because our child is the legitimate Imperial grandson, while King Jin will never be able to produce a royal heir. Before the position of the Crown Prince is secured, you can't just watch us give birth to a legitimate grandchild."

Gu Youyou's words stabbed deeply into the Empress's heart like sharp thorns.

King Jin's lack of heirs was a constant thorn in her side.

The other attendees were also shocked.

Upon reflection, however, it seemed reasonable; after all, there had been no news of pregnancy from the Prince Jin Residence for a long time.

It's not appropriate for outsiders to comment, but there was also the possibility that the women of Prince Jin Residence were too fiercely competitive, leading to lost pregnancies – indeed, such family scandals could not be aired publicly.

But since Gu Youyou was confident about King Jin’s inability, it was probably true, considering Gu Youyou is known as the Divine Doctor.

"Xiaoran is infertile?" the Emperor’s complexion turned pale as he asked the Empress in surprise.

The Empress’s face was already ashen as she shook her head and said, "No, how is that possible." She forced a stiff smile and said, "Your Majesty, don’t listen to her; Gu Youyou always has ill-intentions, she’s talking nonsense."

The Emperor said, "Then why has there been no news of pregnancy from Prince Jin Residence for so long?"

"He... Xiaoran is wholeheartedly devoted to his state affairs and loves reading. He is still young, without concern for heirs right now. I will speak to him in good time, and soon there will be." The Empress endeavored to explain.

She absolutely couldn’t allow anyone to think that King Jin was infertile.

The Emperor casually said, "It would still be better to have someone look into it."

The Emperor turned to the Imperial Physicians standing in the corner and said, "You all will visit the Prince Jin Residence tomorrow, to give King Jin a check-up."

"No, there’s no need, King Jin is well, what need is there for an Imperial Physician," the Empress said, visibly nervous.

"It is still better to check," the Emperor sighed.

The Empress’s face turned deathly pale, glaring poisonously at Gu Youyou.

Nurse Li hurried to support the Empress, to prevent her from falling.

There had already been an Imperial Physician who checked on King Jin. He wanted to say something but hesitated multiple times and didn’t dare to speak out.

Chapter 1163: Not the Right Time

The Emperor noticed his abnormality and said, "Imperial Physician Li, speak freely if you have something to say."

Having been called out, Imperial Physician Li had no choice but to stand up.

"Your Majesty, to answer Your Majesty, last year I did indeed attend to King Jin, and it seemed... it seemed..." Looking at the Empress’s furious gaze, he ultimately did not dare to continue, scared to the point of breaking out in a cold sweat.

Thinking to himself: How unlucky can he get, why did it have to be him!

"It seemed what?" A sharp glint shone in the Emperor’s eyes.

Imperial Physician Li had no choice but to say, "At that time, I could tell that there was indeed something wrong with King Jin, he knew it himself as well, he didn’t let me speak of it."

The Empress staggered a step and finally fainted.

The room descended into chaos, the palace maidens supported the Empress onto a chair to lie down, Imperial Physicians checked her pulse and pressed her philtrum, all bustling about busily.

But the Empress just wouldn’t wake up; even with a bleeding philtrum from the pressing, she stubbornly refused to regain consciousness.

Gu Youyou felt she wouldn’t come to, using the tactic of feigning faint in front of so many Imperial Physicians, that really was quite ruthless.

Although everyone knew she was feigning unconsciousness, but as she would not awaken, there was nothing they could do.

No one dared to pinch her philtrum anymore after that, for what if she woke and started settling accounts?

The Emperor, feeling a headache coming on, said, "First, take the Empress back."

Jin Zijin watched them coldly and said softly in front of the Emperor, "I will not let this go just like that."

The words weren't loud, but probably half the people in the room heard them, yet they could only pretend to be deaf.

This farcical scene, therefore, came to an end with the Empress, the instigator of the trouble, fainting away.

When everyone had left, the Emperor paused, passing by Jin Zijin he whispered to him, "Toppling her is easy, but toppling the person behind her is difficult, it's not yet the time, a lesson is sufficient for now."

"Fine, I will give you the opportunity," Jin Zijin said with a cold laugh.

...

When the Emperor left, he took all the people brought by the Empress with him, and the Crown Prince Residence finally returned to calm.

However, the spies the Empress left behind weren't so easy to dispel; they were all sent to the Ministry of Punishment's Prison, regardless of confession or how they confessed, the outcome was inescapable death.

After this upheaval, by clearing out the unclean elements within the residence, at least it wasn't at a loss, for now, whatever stirs within the residence, it would be difficult for the Empress to be informed.

Miss Du tidied herself up again, holding the child as she sat in the floral hall, with Cuiya standing by her side.

Cuiya’s face was swollen from a beating, still showing shades of purple and black.

Gu Youyou and Jin Zijin were also there, along with Lord Jie.

Lord Jie had only heard parts of the story from Searcy, not the whole picture.

He hurriedly asked, "What exactly happened?"

With a despairing demeanor, Miss Du stared blankly at the floor, tightly holding the swaddled infant in her arms.

While crying, Cuiya said, "To answer master, the child belongs to the Second Young Master; it was during our time in Xining, the Second Young Master once saved us."

"Then why didn’t you return to the Jie Residence, how did you end up in the Crown Prince’s consort’s place?"

Cuiya replied, "Miss was afraid you would take the child, so she dared not speak."

"What kind of talk is that? What does ’taking the child’ mean?"

"Miss wants the child to take the Du surname, to be considered part of the Du Family roots. It was the Second Young Master who forced Miss, she was unwilling."

With that said, Lord Jie understood.

But what could he say? The person was already dead.

Young people nowadays, he really couldn’t comprehend them; aside from grieving alone, he remained grieving alone.

He wanted to hold his grandson in Miss Du’s arms for a look, but he dared not.

Chapter 1164: Thinking of a Way Out

He feared that once he held the child, he wouldn’t be able to resist snatching it away.

Once a woman has given birth, she has no right to raise the child; the child must remain with the Jie Family. But such an act would be excessively cruel to her.

She has no family left, this child is her only kin, whereas he at least has a son and a daughter.

Alas, it’s all a tragic fate.

Exhausted, Official Jie stood up, paid his respects to Gu Youyou and Jin Zijin, and staggered out, each step exceptionally heavy.

Gu Youyou sighed and said to Cuiya, "Don’t rush to leave. Wait for your young lady to finish her confinement period before you go."

"Okay, thank you for the hospitality of the Grand Prince and his Consort," Cuiya replied gratefully, as she helped Miss Du back.

Seeing Miss Du’s condition, Gu Youyou held back from saying anything.

This matter required some time to be processed; pressing too hard would be useless.

Gu Youyou, having had a tiring day, yawned.

"I’m going to see if the little one is awake yet."

Newborns always sleep a lot; he had just fed and was now asleep again.

Jin Zijin sighed, "You always think of others first, neglecting yourself. Do I need to remind you of the state of your own health? Why do you wear yourself out like this?"

Gu Youyou was taken aback.

Then Jin Zijin, without waiting for her to say anything, lifted her into his arms.

He said, "I'm taking you back to rest first. I'll check on him later."

"He'll be hungry when he wakes up," Gu Youyou said.

"Don't worry, he won't starve; there's a wet nurse," he reassured her.

...

At dawn, the Imperial Physicians were ordered to form a group to visit the Prince Jin Residence to treat patients, but before they set off, the Empress headed there in a hurry with her retinue.

Such a disgraceful matter could not be concealed; she could hardly predict what would happen next.

King Jin was infertile; once this news broke out, all those who supported King Jin would turn away from them, and the Emperor would never entrust the realm to a King Jin without offspring.

After years of her efforts, and the unwavering backing of the Ducal Residence behind her, how could she face them, having invested all their hopes in her and King Jin?

Sitting pale-faced in the carriage, the Empress was overwhelmed with anxiety.

Mammy Li sighed softly, "Your Highness, please calm down. We need to think of a good solution."

"Ha, as if it’s easy," the Empress scoffed. "What solution can there be? If one can’t have children, they can’t. What solution can possibly be found?"

Mammy Li was in the same boat as the Empress; the Empress’s urgency was equally felt by her.

Considering this, she clenched her teeth and said, "Even if King Jin indeed has a problem, we cannot let the Imperial Physicians think he is infertile."

The Empress raised her brows, "What do you mean?"

Mammy Li spoke in a low voice, with gritted teeth, "We’ll arrange things in the Prince Jin Residence first, let the Imperial Physicians diagnose. If infertility is diagnosed, we’ll force them to acknowledge that King Jin is only temporarily ill and can be cured."

Lifelessly, the Empress said, "That’s merely a short-term deception, not a lifetime solution."

Mammy Li continued, "If nothing else works, we can have the women of the Prince Jin Residence bear children."

"How so?" The Empress sat up abruptly.

"As long as there’s blood of the Ducal Residence, does it matter who gives birth? As long as the old master doesn’t mind, why should we..."

The Empress hurriedly covered Mammy Li’s mouth, "This is a serious matter, I need to consider it."

Mammy Li, anxious, said: "Your Highness, this is our last resort. If King Jin really can’t do it, this is the only way to protect King Jin, your highness, and the glory and riches of the Ducal Residence."

Chapter 1165: How to Manage a Household

Forget the emperor, even the people of this realm, who would allow a prince without an heir to become the emperor? If we don't do this, all our efforts over the years will have been in vain. In any case, we must seek a surrogate, so what difference does it make from whom we borrow seed, right?"

The carriage had already arrived at the Prince Jin Residence's entrance. Nanny Li got off first, directing the servants to set down a stepping stool, and then helped the gorgeously dressed Empress alight from the carriage.

Since Nanny Li had spoken those words, her heart had never known peace.

All the way there, she pondered over this problem.

To hand over the throne to someone else, especially to Jin Zijin, Xiao Qinqin's son, was something she was utterly unwilling to do.

Of course, she was even less willing to allow Prince Qin to succeed. If that happened, the vile Sheng Qiaoyue would become Empress Dowager alongside her—could she afford to lose face like that?

Therefore, to ensure that King Jin ascends to the throne, it was imperative that he have an heir.

Just as Gu Youyou had mentioned, it couldn't be possible that all the women in the Prince Jin Residence were infertile unless the barren one was King Jin himself.

The infertility of King Jin had almost become a fact.

What she could do then was only to cover up this matter.

Whether by threatening the Imperial Physician or resorting to a surrogate, regardless.

Since the matter required surrogacy, choosing the seed from the Ducal Residence was indeed the best option.

After all, King Jin also carried half of the Ducal Residence’s bloodline.

"Mother, Mother, why have you suddenly come? You didn’t send someone to inform your son," said King Jin as he personally went out to receive her.

Unaware that she had entered the Prince Jin Residence, the Empress was still preoccupied with those thoughts, failing to notice the servants bowing to her, until King Jin himself came out to greet her.

"Mother, what’s the matter? Why aren’t you saying anything?"

Nanny Li knew that the Empress was struggling fiercely within her heart and quickly said to King Jin, "Your Highness, please take Her Majesty inside first."

"Empress, let’s go inside and talk; it’s cold outside, be careful not to catch a chill," said Nanny Li, supporting the Empress as they walked toward the house.

Only then did the Empress slowly come back to her senses and looked at King Jin.

"Xiaoran, have everyone withdraw. I have important matters to discuss with you," said the Empress with a serious expression.

Taking the matter seriously, King Jin quickly ordered everyone to leave.

He said, "What’s so urgent that it has you worried, Mother? Your sudden visit early in the morning—those principal consorts and side consorts are probably still asleep. I’ll have someone wake them up to greet you."

Upon hearing King Jin’s words, the Empress’s face darkened instantly, her primary concern forgotten.

"What? They haven’t gotten up yet?"

She had traveled all the way from the Imperial Palace to the Prince Jin Residence—and those daughters-in-law were still too lazy to get up?

"What time is it, and they're still not up? How do you usually run your household?"

King Jin curled his lips, thinking: If it weren't for the news of your arrival, I wouldn't be up either.

Who would have known you'd come this early in the morning?

Of course, he didn't dare say that out loud. He only said, "They don't need to attend court, so why get up so early? This isn't the Imperial Palace; there aren't so many rules here."

The Empress glanced at the sky, furious, and said, "The sun is about to rise, and your women are lazier than the sun! Go on, get them up, no discipline at all."

With that said, Nanny Li gave the palace maidens beside the Empress a look, and they gradually left the main hall's entrance.

King Jin's expression stiffened as he said, "Mother, isn't this a bit much? If your palace maidens summon them, they might think something serious has happened!"

"A serious matter has indeed occurred," the Empress said irritably. "Xiaoran, haven't I always taught you that without rules, nothing can be squared? How can you indulge those consorts like this? Tell me, what good are these women if they can't bear even a single child?"

Chapter 1166: Everyone is Up

"This..." King Jin said awkwardly, "Mother, weren't you suspecting that the problem might be with me?"

"Then have you slept with them?" Asking such a private question, the Empress was both embarrassed and angry.

King Jin, even more embarrassed by the inquiry, hesitantly replied: "Indeed I have, I believe I have no issues, but I just don’t know why they can’t get pregnant."

"Merely saying you’re fine doesn’t settle the matter. Just yesterday, I went to Gu Youyou’s place intending to oppress her with the issue of surrogacy, but instead, she turned the tables and even brought up your infertility. The emperor became angry upon hearing this and said that he should have been informed about your condition earlier. But how could I bring myself to speak of such a situation?"

King Jin felt as if struck by lightning. Stunned, he asked: "How could you let Father Emperor know about this?"

The Empress said helplessly: "It wasn’t me who told him, it was Gu Youyou who told your Father Emperor that you are infertile."

"Why would she suddenly talk about this?" King Jin said through gritted teeth, finding Gu Youyou utterly despicable.

"Ah, she herself can’t bear children, so she thought of surrogacy. I had solid evidence, but couldn’t match Gu Youyou’s craftiness. She had already fooled the Imperial Physician and the Emperor, making her body appear as though she’d had a child, leaving me no room to argue my case..." The Empress sighed with frustration, adding, "Just talking about yesterday’s incident makes me angry, Momo Li, you tell the rest."

The Empress had never suffered such a defeat, and now she didn’t even want to mention it.

Momo Li still remembered the important matters, and said to the Empress and King Jin: "Let’s not worry about yesterday’s matter for now. Gu Youyou’s medical skills are formidable, and we have suffered silently. Let’s just deal with the Imperial Physicians first."

"Imperial Physician?" King Jin looked bewildered.

The Empress suddenly said: "Yes, the Imperial Physician will come to see you later. We cannot let the Imperial Physician say whatever he wants. I came over early in the morning just to remind you. Go and

make arrangements now – today in the Prince Jin Residence, only entry is allowed, not exit, not even a fly should be let out."

King Jin, baffled by what exactly was happening, but seeing the Empress so solemn, could only listen to her for now.

King Jin went out and soon issued the confinement order for the residence, and at the same time, the women of various quarters hurriedly gathered in the main hall to greet the Empress.

The atmosphere in the residence today was different; everyone was very nervous.

The Empress kept a stern face throughout, glaring at the room full of kneeling women.

"Look at all of you, what a sight? No wonder none of you can lay eggs. Have you ever seen a chicken lay eggs when it doesn't even go out after the sun is up?"

Rushed to get up, they merely tidied up a bit and didn't have time to put on makeup. Naturally, they looked quite plain.

"Lin Qianqing, you are the chief consort, as the head of this household, how do you manage these concubines?"

Kneeling at the very front, Lin Qianqing glanced at Consort Zhang then spoke softly: "Mother, I have been unwell recently, and Consort Zhang has been managing the household affairs."

That was the reason King Jin had stripped her of her authority, but Lin Qianqing wasn't someone who could be easily bullied. Being too involved only led to mistakes; she thought it might not be too bad to feign illness and take a break.

"Consort Zhang?" The Empress's gaze shifted to the woman behind Lin Qianqing.

"Empress, I have only recently taken over the affairs of the house and am still not familiar with them. His Highness King Jin told me not to worry and take it slow."

Chapter 1167: Seeing a Doctor

Consort Zhang slightly lifted her head, speaking neither humbly nor arrogantly.

She herself carried a strong scholarly aura, making one perceive her as a well-educated and cultured person. Moreover, the Empress had already regretted making Lin Qianqing the main consort instead of favoring the daughter from the Zhang Family. Therefore, when Consort Zhang spoke of this matter, the expression on the Empress's face noticeably improved.

The Empress said lightly, "Since the main consort is ill, she should rest well. From now on, the affairs of the residence will be handled by Consort Zhang."

The words of the Empress left all the women in the room extremely surprised. Wasn't the Empress always known for her adherence to protocol? She was just speaking of rules moments ago, so why has she suddenly assigned such authority to Consort Zhang?

Not distinguishing between legitimate and illegitimate, unclear on seniority and precedence, what kind of rule is this?

Lin Qianqing could only give a bitter smile and kowtowed to thank for the grace.

For her, perhaps it did not matter much anyway, for this was not her desired role; it was thrust upon her by others.

Consort Zhang was also extremely shocked, but seeing a hint of disgust for Lin Qianqing in the Empress's eyes, her shock turned into joy.

The words spoken by the Empress were even more influential than those from King Jin himself.

In the future, even if she fell out of favor and someone wanted to take back the authority of managing the household from her, they would still have to consider the Empress's stance.

All the women kneeling on the ground rapidly churned their thoughts, speculating about who would truly hold sway in Prince Jin Residence in the future.

It seemed it was time to find an opportunity to make a good impression on Consort Zhang.

Just then, King Jin also returned, and seeing the somewhat tense atmosphere in the room, he slightly frowned, walked over to stand beside the Empress, and said to the women kneeling on the floor, "What are you all kneeling for? Get up, stand to the side."

The Empress wanted them to kneel a while longer, but seeing that King Jin had spoken, she couldn't undermine her son's authority in front of these women, so she waved her hand and said, "Everyone, get up."

Everyone stood up, lining up on either side of the room.

The main hall for receiving guests was quite large, so even with so many people, it didn't seem crowded but still very spacious.

Today, the Imperial Medical Bureau had come to give medical consultation to King Jin, but the Empress really couldn't bring herself to say it outright, so it came out like this instead.

"King Jin has not yet fathered any children, and His Majesty is deeply worried. By imperial decree, the Imperial Physicians from the Imperial Medical Bureau will visit Prince Jin Residence today to take pulses and treat illnesses, aiming to quickly conceive a royal heir. Everyone, there's no need to be alarmed or afraid, it's just to ensure everyone is healthy."

Everyone was secretly delighted, as they had been unable to conceive for so long; indeed, each had their thoughts. However, thinking of this era's mentality, where infertility was always seen as a women's issue and only few professionals would consider that men might also have issues, in fact, these women had never doubted King Jin's infertility.

But among the joyful crowd, there were exceptions, like Lin Qianqing, who remained expressionless as if such matters did not concern her.

The Empress, seeing her expression, became displeased and sternly said, slapping the table, "What, does the wife of King Jin not wish for the Imperial Physician to see you all?"

Lin Qianqing was about to say something but was interrupted by Nanny Li.

Nanny Li, who always looked to the Empress as her guide, surprisingly spoke in favor of Lin Qianqing.

"Your Highness the Empress, you just mentioned earlier, King Jin's wife has been unwell recently. Look at her, she has lost weight. Maybe let the wife of King Jin sit down!"

Surprised, the Empress gave Nanny Li a glance, thinking it over, she realized she had been somewhat harsh on Lin Qianqing. After all, she hadn't completely fallen out with Lin Residence yet; if Lin Qianqing was actually ill and she mistreated her openly, that indeed wouldn't be proper.

Chapter 1168: Abnormal

She said, "Offer King Jin's wife a seat!"

Lin Qianqing gave Madam Li a grateful smile and, without any formality, directly sat on the stool brought over by the palace maid.

King Jin really raised his eyebrows and asked, "When did you fall ill?"

She had indeed become thinner, but when had she been sick?

Lin Qianqing replied with a light smile, "Didn't the Prince say that I was ill, hence he handed all the household affairs over to Consort Zhang?"

King Jin choked on his words and fell silent.

All eyes were on Lin Qianqing, but nobody noticed that one person's complexion had turned somewhat pale after hearing about the Imperial Medical Bureau's examination. However, she covered it well, so no one realized it.

Soon, someone reported that the imperial physicians sought an audience.

Since all the preparations were in place, the Empress allowed the imperial physicians to be brought in.

A dozen elderly Imperial Physicians gradually entered the hall. Seeing a room full of women, they too were taken aback.

What was this all about?

Being stared at by a room full of women, the Imperial Physicians felt under great pressure.

"Your servants pay respects to the Empress, King Jin, and his wife!"

"Dispense with the formalities. Please start by examining these ladies," the Empress said, gesturing towards the women in the room.

Ah...? Examine them?

The Imperial Physicians were all confounded.

Madam Li explained, "If a woman cannot bear children, there ought to be an explanation. Why not let the Imperial Physicians start by examining all the noble ladies and madams first."

Everyone understood. It was unseemly to speak of male infertility. Since the Empress still clung to her last bit of hope, it was unfitting for them as subjects to tarnish her dignity.

They would just conduct the examination. There was no hurry; they were on imperial orders, after all.

"Then... may I ask which Madam would like to be examined first?"

The women were eager to try.

The Empress glanced at Lin Qianqing and said, "Naturally, it will be King Jin's wife first. Didn't you just mention that you were feeling unwell? It would be good for the Imperial Physicians to have a look."

The servants set up a row of examination tables for the Imperial Physicians, who then took their seats in order. Lin Qianqing was first in line, followed by a queue of others waiting to be examined.

After examining Lin Qianqing, the first Imperial Physician noticed her pallid complexion and said, "It seems that King Jin's wife hasn't been sleeping well lately. Pay attention to a balanced diet and ensure you get plenty of rest."

Lin Qianqing bowed her head slightly and thanked him.

"Thank you, Imperial Physician Hu."

Imperial Physician Hu released Lin Qianqing's wrist. She stood up and went to the first Imperial Physician's examination table.

The second one, the most skilled Imperial Physician Cui from the Imperial Medical Bureau, specialized in diagnosing poison. When he examined her, his expression suddenly became grave.

"King Jin's wife, please open your mouth and stick out your tongue," he requested.

Lin Qianqing, without a second thought, opened her mouth.

Everyone's attention was drawn to them, wondering why they needed to examine the tongue for a simple health check.

But what Imperial Physician Cui examined was not the tongue.

It was when she stuck out her tongue that he saw the upper palate of Lin Qianqing’s mouth.

Nobody expected that in an inconspicuous spot on her upper palate, there was a white patch with faint traces of bruising.

The previous Imperial Physician Hu, noticing Imperial Physician Cui’s troubled expression, quickly got up and moved over.

With a solemn face, Imperial Physician Cui indicated Lin Qianqing could close her mouth.

Imperial Physician Hu asked, "Imperial Physician Cui, has something happened?"

Imperial Physician Cui glanced at Imperial Physician Hu, sighed, and shook his head at Lin Qianqing, saying, "Please take a seat and rest for a while, King Jin’s wife."

Then, he casually beckoned a concubine of King Jin to come over for an examination, disrupting the queue.

Similarly, he first took the pulse of this concubine, then examined her upper palate.

Chapter 1169: Poisoned

After reading, his expression became even more grave.

Then the third, the same.

The Empress, sensing that something was amiss, hurriedly asked, "Imperial Physician Cui, has something happened?"

Imperial Physician Cui stood up and bowed to the Empress: "Your Majesty, perhaps the lack of heirs of His Highness King Jin really has nothing to do with King Jin himself."

"What?" The Empress was stunned on the spot.

All the ladies were stunned on the spot.

Nurse Li grunted in bewilderment, thinking that’s impossible!

A woman standing next to Imperial Physician Hu clenched her hand almost imperceptibly.

Must not panic, the more critical the moment, the less one should panic.

"What are you saying?" The Empress could hardly believe her ears.

"Your Majesty, what I mean is, perhaps the reason His Highness King Jin has no heirs is really not due to King Jin himself."

Although the Empress was extremely reluctant to admit that her son was infertile, deep down she had already accepted that King Jin was infertile.

But now the words of the Imperial Physician rekindled hope in her.

"What do you mean the cause is not with King Jin? Imperial Physician Cui, be more clear."

King Jin, momentarily taken aback, also hastened to Imperial Physician Cui’s side, urging, "What on earth is going on?"

Everyone was watching Imperial Physician Cui, who had mixed feelings in his heart.

He glanced around at the women in the room, feeling that these ladies were indeed pitiful and pathetic.

However, as a doctor, he was not going to concern himself with the petty squabbles among the women of the inner court. He would speak only what he should say, and do only what he should do.

He said, "Just now, when I examined the consort of King Jin and the two Madams, I found a common issue."

"What issue?" King Jin was incredibly anxious.

He was perplexed about not being able to father children.

He felt he had no issues, but how to explain that none of these women could conceive?

Listening to Imperial Physician Cui, it seemed everyone could not bear children—there must indeed be a reason.

"They have been poisoned!"

As soon as these words were spoken, the whole room erupted into uproar.

"This poison does no harm to the body of the poisoned themselves but leads them to infertility. Initially, the symptoms are not obvious. Apart from being unable to conceive, there are no visible abnormalities. However, as the poison lingers longer and deeper, some surface symptoms of poisoning can be detected, such as an abnormal color on their upper palate."

After hearing Imperial Physician Cui's words, the ladies began to open their mouths and look at each other.

"Eh, there's a white patch on your upper palate, and it even has a layer of purplish-blue."

"Yours is the same."

"Yours as well, alas, we really have been poisoned."

"Yes, who could be so malicious to poison all of us, preventing us all from bearing children."

Enraged, veins bulging in her forehead, the Empress roared, "Who is it? Who dares to scheme against me?"

Seeing Sheng Qiaoyue present her grandson while she had no grandchild to show, not to mention the revelation that her son was infertile, a series of blows had kept her up countless nights.

Now, at last, she was faced with the truth behind her lack of grandchildren.

The Empress, who had schemed against others her entire life, now faced someone daring to scheme against her; she could not bear it and resolved to flay the culprit alive.

After the Empress shouted fiercely, everyone in the hall was silenced by her demeanor; they all stood still, not daring to move or make a sound.

The Empress's sharp gaze swept over everyone, her face devoid of its usual gentleness, now twisted like a vengeful demon.

Chapter 1170: There Are Three

Old Madam Li stood beside the Empress, glanced over everyone, and then whispered to the Empress, "Let the Imperial Physicians check, whoever is not poisoned, has the biggest suspicion."

"Right, whoever isn't poisoned is the suspect." The Empress, agitated and disordered, calmed down gradually after being reminded by Old Madam Li.

She sat back down on her chair, watching the women in the room coldly.

Except for Lin Qianqing and two others who had just been checked, all other women were lined up for the Imperial Physician to examine.

Lin Qianqing still maintained some coldness, but she looked somewhat surprised after hearing that everyone else was poisoned, then her gaze shifted to another person who remained calm.

"How could someone harm us so ruthlessly."

The women in the room were still whispering secretively; this matter concerned everyone. After all, a woman's youth lasts only so many years, and after their prime, these women without strong backgrounds, having no children by their side, would just slowly wait for death alone in this residence. Hence, no one could remain calm.

"Silence..." Everyone was extremely anxious. Imperial Physician Li's command silenced them, drawing everyone's attention.

"What is it?" The Empress immediately stood up.

Standing before Imperial Physician Li was Consort Zhang.

Imperial Physician Li gave Consort Zhang a complex look, then turned to the Empress and said, "Empress, Consort Zhang shows no signs of being poisoned."

A single stone stirred up a thousand ripples; all eyes were now fixated on Consort Zhang.

Some were surprised, some resentful, and the Empress, naturally, was furiously uncontrollable.

Without caring about her image, she stepped down and slapped Consort Zhang across the face, furiously exclaiming: "You vile woman! After all the pains I have taken for you, it turned out you are the one harming Prince Jin to have no heirs."

Prince Jin's face filled with disbelief.

Frankly, Prince Jin didn't like Consort Zhang much initially, despite her beauty and literary grace, and although her fame among the ladies of Beijing was notable, Prince Jin, a bit illiterate and strongly male chauvinistic, couldn't stand a woman who was constantly eloquent with poems and songs. Compared to her, he found his clueless cousin Lin Qianqing somewhat more endearing.

But she was smart, quickly grasping Prince Jin’s preferences, and catered to them.

The gentlewoman outside, the wanton inside that Prince Jin fancied.

So, enjoying the pleasure, Prince Jin was fond of her, even giving her the butler’s authority in Prince Jin Residence, but unexpected to him, she turned out to be the one harming his woman.

At that moment, he felt both disappointed and heartbroken.

Everyone thought Consort Zhang was finished and she should beg the Empress for mercy.

Yet, she stood up from the ground, wiped the blood from the corner of her mouth, and saluted the Empress humbly but firmly: "Empress, several sisters have yet to be examined, perhaps let’s discuss after the examinations are complete."

Seeing her composure and the courage in her calmness, the Empress even felt a sense of guilt.

Indeed, she had been too anxious; there were still many women yet to be checked.

With a cold snort, she said, "Then let’s finish the inspections first."

These women were not only examined by one Imperial Physician but by several, ensuring accuracy after multiple confirmations.

So even with more than ten Imperial Physicians present, it took quite some time.

An hour later, three women knelt in the hall.

Consort Zhang still remained calm, looking justly fearless.

In contrast, the other two women were unsettled, trembling with fear.