Farmhouse 1171

Chapter 1171: Who Poisoned?

The Empress stared intently at the three young women before her, all at the age of bloom, each as beautiful as a flower, yet who would have thought they harbored such venomous intent, actually wishing to render her childless.

Of course, she herself had once been their age, fully aware of the blood and storms hidden within these harem walls, and naturally, she understood why they did what they did.

She fixed her gaze on the female to the far left and asked, "What's your name?"

The girl looked rather young, around the age of thirteen or fourteen, and was in fact extremely beautiful.

But she had never before witnessed such a grand spectacle and was so frightened that her lips turned purplish and she trembled without being able to utter a word.

After a brief lapse, King Jin spoke up for her.

"Mother, it surely isn't her. She entered the residence merely ten days ago. Imperial Physician Cui had mentioned it before; the deep poisoning would only manifest later on. Since she has not been in the residence long, perhaps she hasn't been poisoned, or the poisoning isn't severe, which is why there are no symptoms."

Fury swelled within the Empress. Seeing that her son even dared to bring such dubious women into his fold only fueled her anger.

No wonder she didn't recall seeing such a young one; this petty aura, clearly not from a respectable birth.

"Where is she from?"

"She is... a gift from a friend of mine," he said.

"Who?" the Empress pressed relentlessly, seizing this opportunity to purge the undesirable elements from her son's side.

"It's... my cousin from the Ducal Residence, Jin Wei!" Today, the Empress seemed off, and King Jin dared not further provoke her.

"Hmph, this Jin Wei is becoming more and more outrageous. Nurse Li, have him summoned to the palace to meet me another day."

Nurse Li affirmed with an "Understood."

Only then did the Empress turn her attention back to the three kneeling individuals. Since King Jin had spoken for her, the young maiden was ruled out.

She was escorted to stand aside.

These questionable women needed to be dealt with, but not at the present moment.

The Empress glared fiercely at her and continued to interrogate the remaining two women.

Consort Zhang had just been questioned; the Zhang Family had a good relationship with the Ducal Residence, and several aunts and young ladies in her family were from the daughters of the Zhang Family.

Daughters from the Ducal Residence had also married into the Zhang Family; hence, the Empress truly hoped that the culprit wasn't Consort Zhang from the bottom of her heart.

If it really was her, then don't blame the Empress for turning ruthless.

Let alone the Zhang Family, even the Ducal Residence, if they dared to cause her to be without offspring, she would never let them off lightly.

"What about you, Madam Zuo, the daughter of Zuo Honglin?"

She was someone whom the Empress had personally selected and recognized.

Her father Zuo Honglin held a fourth-rank official position, having some worth, which was why she had originally chosen this woman.

"I... I don’t know, but I didn’t poison anyone!" Madam Zuo, already terrified with a drained face, cried out for justice loudly.

"I have no idea why I wasn’t poisoned, but the poison was certainly not administered by me."

"Did I say you were the one who administered the poison?" The Empress’s eyes bulged, making her appear even more menacing.

"Why are you so keen on confessing? Could it be that you have a guilty conscience?"

Madam Zuo, scared out of her wits, shook her head continuously, "No... it’s not me, I usually don’t go out, and I don’t associate with the other sisters; I simply don’t have the opportunity to poison anyone!"

At this moment, Lin Qianqing stepped forward to speak on her behalf.

"Mother, Madam Zuo is unassuming, and she indeed does not venture out. Administering poison to so many is beyond her means."

"Oh? And how do you know it wasn’t her? Tell me, why hasn’t she been poisoned?" the Empress asked Lin Qianqing sarcastically.

Lin Qianqing glanced at Consort Zhang and continued, "Madam Zuo is not favored, and the food she eats is all grown by herself in the courtyard.

As far as I know, Madam Zuo's mother died early, and her stepmother did not like her. During her time at her parental home, her life was very difficult, surviving only on the food she and her maid grew in the courtyard. She is used to this kind of life, so even in the Prince Jin Residence, she lives the same way, and that's why she was not poisoned."

"Is that so?" the Empress raised an eyebrow.

She naturally did not have so much leisure to understand the matters of the back residences of her officials' families. Hearing Lin Qianqing say this, she felt that Madam Zuo seemed somewhat pitiable.

No wonder she developed such a timid nature.

Then at this moment, Consort Zhang indifferently said, "Does the Princess mean to say that if it wasn't Madam Zuo, then it must have been me who did it?"

"Humph, whether it was you, you know it best in your heart," Lin Qianqing bluntly retorted.

Consort Zhang's face changed color, but only for a moment, then it normalized.

The Empress, suppressing the anger in her heart, sternly asked Consort Zhang.

"Then you should also explain, why weren't you poisoned?"

Consort Zhang calmly bowed to the Empress and whispered, "Replying to Your Majesty, perhaps it's because I have always been a vegetarian."

"Vegetarian?"

Consort Zhang slightly smiled and said, "Yes, my father said that bodily desires, what are there to exhaust? Being frugal is also a way to cherish blessings and prolong life. Although I have married into Prince Jin Residence, I dare not forget my father's teachings and have always kept them in my heart and acted on them."

"Huh..." the Empress scoffed coldly, saying, "So what you mean is, there's a reason for you three who were not poisoned?"

Consort Zhang remained silent, saying nothing.

But she still stood neither servile nor overbearing.

This kind of person is indeed talented, but what a pity...

Jin Yushu has been able to hold her position today, standing unshaken in this position, and is not a fool either.

Among these people, who benefits the most?

For other women, even if one of them gave birth to a son, given their status, even if only they had a son, the outcome would most likely be to leave the child but remove the mother, while her own son would have to be adopted by a woman with a strong background.

But for Consort Zhang, if she has a son, Lin Qianqing's position as the principal wife would likely be over.

Yet the Empress still has some doubts, since she wasn't poisoned, why hasn't she conceived?

The person who knows the most about this would be King Jin.

The Empress turned her head and asked King Jin, whose gaze seemed a bit dull, "Xiaoran, what do you think?"

"Ah?"

"What?"

King Jin, discovering two doubts in succession, couldn’t even listen clearly.

Out of impatience, the Empress angrily said, "I’m asking you what’s going on, these three women were not poisoned, so why don’t they have children?"

King Jin hesitated, then said, "That youngest one, she has just entered the residence, doesn’t count. As for Madam Zuo... I only saw her today, I hardly ever notice such a person!"

Madam Zuo was so ashamed she almost wanted to find a hole to crawl into.

The Empress angrily said, "She has been in the residence for two or three years, and you haven’t even seen her?"

This foolish son, Madam Zuo hasn’t been poisoned, if you had paid a bit more attention, maybe there would already have been offspring.

It seems Lin Qianqing was right, Madam Zuo is certainly low-profile.

"And what about her?" the Empress angrily pointed at Consort Zhang and said.

King Jin’s face flushed as he spoke, "Previously... I called for her a few times, found it dull, so I didn’t call on her again. But lately, I mostly stay in her room and still, she hasn’t become pregnant, which is indeed strange."

Chapter 1173: Resort to Some Tactics

The Empress only felt her head was splitting in two, rubbing her temples for a while before she finally recovered her strength.

King Jin hurriedly said: "Mother, it’s not about asking why no pregnancy has come yet, but about finding the person who administered the poison. With such a person staying within the residence, no one could conceive."

The Empress came around and felt that King Jin finally said something reliable.

He’s right; first thing is to find the person who administered the poison and deal with them.

In her view, Consort Zhang was the prime suspect.

All these years, when had she ever heard that the Zhang family were pacifists?

They’re capable of enchantments.

"Consort Zhang, it seems you think this palace is easy to fool," said the Empress.

The Empress glanced at Maid Li, who usually understood the Empress’s meaning with just a look, but today she was oddly slow on the uptake.

No, slower by several beats.

She was puzzled, wondering how treating King Jin for illness could have triggered such a multitude of problems.

She was well aware that bringing down Consort Zhang was no small matter.

But having such a woman remain in Prince Jin Residence was also undesirable.

She was struggling with how to handle this matter properly; alas, the incident was so sudden, she hadn’t had the chance to send a message to the Ducal Residence.

"Maid Li!"

Seeing Maid Li's mind wandered far away, the Empress had no choice but to call out to remind her.

Today, for some unknown reason, the Empress found Maid Li oddly peculiar; this was already the third time she had drifted off, or at least the third time that had been noticed.

"Empress Your Majesty!" Maid Li hurriedly focused her mind and said to the Empress: "Why not send someone to search Consort Zhang's quarters, and bring all her maids in for a thorough interrogation?"

The Empress nodded: "This palace has the same intention."

These young girls have greatly underestimated the Empress's tactics; if she had managed to battle all the women of Crown Prince Residence to none left, how could she be without capabilities?

And this Maid Li, she was the accomplice.

Maid Li took several capable palace maidens and left, heading first to Consort Zhang's courtyard.

Consort Zhang only then revealed a hint of fear.

The Empress suddenly arrived early in the morning, unknown to anyone.

King Jin's infertility was a disgrace, tightly concealed, hence the Empress's sudden move took everyone by surprise without anyone knowing.

Everyone wore different expressions, uncertain who could be the culprit, so they all stood quietly aside, remaining silent.

Those who had been poisoned, on the other hand, began to feel fortunate.

Fortunately, the poisoner was impartial and hadn't kindly spared them, else even with mouths all over their body, they would probably be unable to explain clearly.

As for that new young girl, let that pass, but Madam Zuo really had luck on her side.

Sigh! Perhaps not so fortunate, for she aspired to keep a wise distance, to be invisible, and hence, they truly had no opportunity to poison her.

The Imperial Physicians looked at each other, seemingly at a loss.

What in the world was happening? They were only here to treat illnesses, and now had somehow gotten into trouble.

Especially Imperial Physician Cui and Imperial Physician Hu, their faces full of concern.

The Zhang Family was not to be trifled with; if the real poisoner turned out to be Consort Zhang, they would have offended the Zhang family.

Soon Maid Li returned, carrying a small porcelain bottle in her hand and leading a maid by the arm, pushing her to the ground beside Consort Zhang.

She handed the small porcelain bottle to the Empress, saying: "This was found in the maid's room; it's not perfumed powder, she was shilly-shallying, unable to give a clear explanation."

The Empress passed the porcelain bottle to Imperial Physician Cui, saying: "Imperial Physician Cui, please take a look, see if this is it."

Imperial Physician Cui took it over, observed it, smelled it, and even tasted a bit of the contents.

After a moment, he shook his head: "This isn’t poison; it is common Fritillaria powder, used for suppressing coughs."

Chapter 1174: Her Methods

A moment later, he shook his head and said, "This is not poison, it is ordinary fritillary powder, used to stop coughs."

The maid hurriedly said, "Yes, yes, it’s called fritillary. Your Majesty the Empress, this servant, this servant’s mind doesn’t work well, I have a poor memory, I forgot the name for a moment."

Consort Zhang barely perceptibly smiled, but quickly regained her composure.

The Empress’s eyes widened in fury, almost spitting blood from anger, and she loudly commanded, "Award ten slaps and throw her out."

The maid truly felt wronged; she merely coughed and took some fritillary powder, whom did she offend?

"Have you found anything else suspicious?" asked the Empress to Madam Li.

Madam Li said, "Since this person has managed to poison the women of Prince Jin Residence, it seems we are dealing with a formidable individual."

Madam Li glanced intentionally or unintentionally at Consort Zhang and suggested, "Why not have an imperial order from Your Majesty the Empress to search the entire residence?"

The Empress had set her heart on rooting out the cancer today and naturally had no objections, saying, "Very well, proceed immediately."

Consort Zhang’s body stiffened, and even without any change in her expression, one could perceive a difference.

Lin Qianqing stared at her and said softly, "There is a saying, ’One who does evil cannot live.’

Consort Zhang forced a smile and said, "What do you mean by these words, Sister Princess?"

Lin Qianqing smiled, "You'll understand later, just watch the Empress's methods for now."

A moment later, screams from women outside the courtyard could be heard, piercing deeply into one's heart, causing all the delicate ladies to tremble.

Consort Zhang's expression changed drastically, because she recognized those screams; they all belonged to her maids.

She hurriedly knelt before the Empress and said, "Your Majesty the Empress, please spare those little maids, they have grown up with your servant since childhood..."

The Empress sneered coldly and said, "Don't worry, as long as they don't bite back, I will of course spare them; I am always very generous to those who have meritorious service."

Consort Zhang turned deathly pale, not sure if under the Empress's severe methods, they could keep their lips sealed.

After a while, the screams ceased, and a maid walked quickly into the hall, respectfully saying to the Empress, "The kitchen maid has confessed."

The Empress waved her hand and commanded, "Then take that kitchen maid away and continue the interrogation."

Today the Empress came well-prepared, having originally sealed off Prince Jin Residence to compel the Imperial Physicians to cover up the matter of King Jin's infertility according to her methods, yet unexpectedly, it led to uncovering a major case.

How dare they target her, very good.

"Your Majesty the Empress, please... " In her panic, Consort Zhang tried to plead but suddenly didn't know how to beg.

Gazing at her with anger, the Empress gnashed her teeth and said, "Consort Zhang, how exactly do you plan to plead for yourself? Are you ready to confess?"

"I..." Consort Zhang shook her head and said, "No, it wasn't my doing, they are just a few worthless maids. If they truly committed acts they should not have and were executed by Her Majesty, they deserved it."

"Ha... Haha..." The Empress suddenly looked upon Consort Zhang with utter disdain, full of contempt and dislike in her eyes.

A person who refuses to face reality until the bitter end, she encountered one just yesterday.

That Gu Youyou was that kind of person; however, Gu Youyou truly had the ability to deny everything, the skill to make the dead appear alive, to argue black as white.

She wanted to see how Consort Zhang would attempt to turn the tide, to alter the situation.

She refused to believe that she, who had navigated the Zhuzhao Country's harem for decades, could be bested by a young girl two days in a row.

Chapter 1175: Recruited

Today, if she cannot cure Consort Zhang, she might as well write her name backwards.

"Gu Youyou does not admit it; at least she did not drag her own maid down with her, still protecting those around her. You're stubborn, utterly disregarding the loyalty between master and servant. I really want those maids to see how you betrayed them."

Consort Zhang bit her lip tightly, no longer speaking.

This humiliation is enough for her to ponder over for a lifetime.

However, whether she has a lifetime to ponder is yet to be seen.

The Kitchen Maid is far inferior to Consort Zhang’s maids; without even resorting to torture, they confessed everything after just seeing the maids’ miserable state.

At this moment, the Kitchen Maid knelt before the Empress, telling her everything she knew in detail.

"Empress, your servant was forced. If your servant did not listen to them, they would harm my family, making sure we would never have a good day ahead."

Madam Li angrily interjected: "Then speak plainly, what exactly did they ask you to do?"

"I... I don’t know!"

"Hmm?"

"They just gave me some white medicinal powder to add to the meat soup they ate. Whenever a new Madam arrived, she had to drink that soup laced with the medicine. Initially, I did not know what it was, but over the years, there were no reports of any Madam in the residence being pregnant. As someone who has been there before, even if I didn’t understand it all, I roughly guessed."

"Who gave you that medicine?" the Empress asked sharply.

"It was... was..." She looked at the pale-faced Consort Zhang, then turned her head to look outside the door.

A moment later, a woman, battered beyond recognition, was thrown in; the Kitchen Maid trembled and said, "It was... her."

Consort Zhang’s maid was thrown in, her wretched state startling the women in the room into screams, each of them covering their eyes, not daring to look.

All ten fingers were bloody, with all fingernails pulled out.

Fingers are connected to the heart; no wonder the screams were so shrill just now.

Flipped over by two guards, everyone saw that her nose was gone, savagely cut off with a sharp instrument.

It was too tragic; seeing that face, the screams of the women in the room rose again in waves.

Imperial Physician Cui sighed and shook his head to the Empress, "This girl has fainted, Your Majesty. May this servant examine and treat her?"

"Hmm, go ahead!" the Empress said indifferently.

King Jin sighed, wanting to say something, but shrank back after receiving a stern glance from the Empress.

He remembered how as a child, he had seen the Empress handle women competing with her for favor this way; these forms of torture had not been seen for many years, and now, it scared him once again.

It turns out she hasn't changed at all over the years.

In the past, she said she did it to protect herself; if she wasn't ruthless enough, she would be the one with a cut-off nose.

But now... who would dare to harm her?

Imperial Physician Cui administered acupuncture to the maid, and soon she woke up.

Pain surged through her body, so intense she nearly fainted again.

In her scattered consciousness, she heard someone asking who had given the wives at Prince Jin Residence the poison that caused their infertility.

In a daze, she mumbled: "It was... the Madam!"

"The Madam?" The Empress was taken aback, "Which Madam?"

The maid said: "Which other Madam could it be? Naturally, it's our Madam Zhang. Our Madam said, only if our young lady conceives before everyone else, only if she alone is able to give birth, can she become the wife of King Jin, and eventually the Empress. The most powerful family outside court has to be the Zhang Family. Therefore, she gave medicine to our young lady, instructing us to feed it to all the women in the residence."

Chapter 1176: Go to Gu Youyou for the Antidote

Consort Zhang knew she was finished. Her face was so pale that there was not a trace of blood left, and she no longer had the strength to argue.

The Empress looked on at her own masterpiece with satisfaction. This trick she had once mastered to perfection, and now, after years of disuse, it still worked just as well.

First, they were fed a packet of hallucinogenic drugs, then tortured. In such a state, half real, half illusionary, they would honestly spill everything when asked.

The Kitchen Maid, seeing that Consort Zhang had already fallen from grace, kowtowed non-stop to the Empress, and spilled all of Consort Zhang's wrongdoings in one breath.

From the first time she poisoned Lin Qianqing, to after the Madams entered the Prince Residence and she gave them infertility soups, drugged them.... She continued until she reached the last one, a young girl who had just entered the Residence.

Trembling, she took a packet of powdered medicine, crying to the Empress, "Your Majesty the Empress, I know this is an atrocious act, I kept delaying it, telling them I hadn't found the right opportunity.

"In fact, I was hesitant about whether to hand this medicine over to Prince Jin, it's this drug, that has kept the Madams and the Prince Consorts infertile to this day."

What the Kitchen Maid said was no longer important, whether it was true or false.

Imperial Physician Cui took the powdered medicine, examined it carefully, and nodded to the Empress, saying, "It's this one, the very poison that the Prince Consorts have been afflicted with."

With both testimony and physical evidence, the Empress was trembling with rage.

Madam Zhang, she never wanted to harm Madam Zhang, but Madam Zhang actually crossed her bottom line, committing such acts.

Let Madam Zhang not even think about escaping, the Zhang Family is done for.

The Empress closed her eyes and took a deep breath, then asked Imperial Physician Cui, "Is there still hope for them? Is there an antidote for this poison?"

This was a question of great concern to everyone. If they could not bear children in this lifetime, what hope would they have?

Imperial Physician Cui frowned and said, "The poison can be cured, but this slow-acting poison takes time to both affect and to cure. My medical skills are limited, perhaps the Empress might want to ask the Crown Prince's Consort, she surely knows more about antidotes than I do."

Gu Youyou?

Again, Gu Youyou?

The Empress almost spat out a mouthful of old blood in anger.

Forget it, for the sake of her grandson, she would endure.

"Prince Jin's Consort, you have a good relationship with the Crown Prince's Consort. You handle this matter," she said.

"I...."

Before Lin Qianqing could say anything more, the Empress, rubbing her temples in distress, continued: "I am tired as well, you all may leave."

Lin Qianqing knew saying anything more was futile, so she could only accept the order and leave.

The news of Gu Youyou giving birth had not yet reached Prince Jin Residence. Lin Qianqing was preoccupied with the thought of Youyou being close to her delivery date, how could she allow her to toil?

Forget it, leave the matter for later.

Lin Qianqing, leading the women out of the main hall, and the Palace Maidens and maids also left one after another.

Of course, the Imperial Physicians left too, leaving only Imperial Physician Cui.

Imperial Physician Cui was already quite calm. The Empress's cruelty wouldn't change based on his disposition, so he might as well see what she wanted to do next.

A mere doctor, relying on his craft to make a living, hadn't provoked or offended anyone.

The Madams whispered amongst themselves.

"So it was Consort Zhang who harmed us, all my efforts to seduce Prince Jin were in vain then?"

"Oh indeed, and to think I was worried about not trying hard enough, always failing to conceive!"

"Cough, cough..."

Lin Qianqing had no choice but to speak up to prevent them from continuing: "Do you not find it humiliating enough?"

Everyone quickly shut their mouths, now trying to ingratiate themselves with Lin Qianqing.

"Prince Consort Sister, when you go to the Crown Prince Residence, could you bring me along too?"

"Oh dear, I want to go too."

They were all poisoned, and Imperial Physician Cui had said it was difficult to cure. Now their only hope rested with Gu Youyou.

...

Chapter 1177: Suspicion

The news of Prince Jin Residence being sealed off still leaked out, and then, it was heard that more than a dozen Imperial Physicians from the Imperial Medical Bureau went to the Prince Jin Residence. Madam Zhang immediately sensed that something was amiss.

Both sealing off the residence and summoning Imperial Physicians, could it be that...

"Oh dear, Minister, could it be that Daya has been exposed?"

As Minister played with a mynah bird, he said indifferently, "Don’t be hasty. It’s said that King Jin is infertile; they are there to treat King Jin’s ailment."

"But it’s not that King Jin is infertile, it’s actually that..."

"Silence!" Minister Zhang coldly said, "Is this something that can be spoken of recklessly? Be careful that disaster comes from the mouth."

Upon reconsideration, Minister Zhang thought, "Daya herself has not been with child for quite a while, could it really be that King Jin has an issue?"

"No way." Madam Zhang quickly said, "Blame Daya for being obtuse. Previously, she did not grasp King Jin’s preferences, always showing off her literary talents, which made King Jin disdain her. Only recently has she begun to understand, knowing that King Jin likes the sort of goods from Yangliu Lane. Hmph, King Jin has no taste either."

Minister Zhang laughed heartily, "What do you know? A man who isn’t romantic wastes his youth; young men should like women with such charm. Daya has been spoiled by you, but fortunately, she has now come to her senses. She’s intelligent, as long as she realizes, she’s sure not to suffer."

Madam Zhang’s face turned red with shame at Minister Zhang’s words.

Although Madam Zhang was somewhat reassured by Minister Zhang’s words, she still felt extremely anxious in her heart.

After much hesitation, she still asked the maid to prepare some items, planning to pretend to know nothing and take a look at the Prince Jin Residence.

...

Only a few people remained in the hall, and this matter was not yet settled, so these few were also not at ease.

Imperial Physician Cui was taking the pulse of Consort Zhang, diagnosing her condition.

Since she wasn’t poisoned but still had not conceived, the Empress could not overlook this matter.

"How is it?" The Empress, seeing Imperial Physician Cui constantly frowning, couldn’t help but ask.

Imperial Physician Cui bowed and said, "Your servant truly cannot diagnose any problem; of course, it could also be that your servant’s medical skills are insufficient. Perhaps..."

"Leave us." The Empress knew what he was going to say, probably about seeking Gu Youyou again.

The Empress could not bear any mention of Gu Youyou at the moment, so without waiting for Imperial Physician Cui to finish speaking, she immediately interrupted him.

"Yes, your servant will take his leave." Imperial Physician Cui did not want to stay any longer anyway.

Consort Zhang knelt on the ground, glanced at the Empress, then looked at King Jin, and after a moment, she burst out laughing, saying, "Could it be that King Jin truly has a problem?" If so, had all her efforts been in vain?

"Shut up, you vile woman, how dare you speak?"

"Is it not so? Then why don’t you let Imperial Physician Cui check on King Jin?" Consort Zhang knew her fate was sealed and thus recklessly lashed out.

Furious to the point of losing her wits, the Empress angrily ordered, "Nurse Li, slap this vile woman."

Nurse Li complied, rolling up her sleeves and delivering several resounding slaps.

Having been pampered since childhood, Consort Zhang was not accustomed to such treatment; Nurse Li’s slaps quickly drew blood from the corner of her mouth, and her face swelled enormously.

King Jin turned his head away. Although he felt Consort Zhang deserved death, he underestimated his mother's methods towards women, leaving some shadows in his heart. Seeing a woman being beaten, bloody scenes would emerge in his mind.

These were different from the bloodshed encountered in fights between men. The bloodshed here was more tragic and unbearable to witness.

The Empress continued to threaten coldly, "For committing such heinous treason, it wouldn't be too much to flay you alive a thousand times over."

Chapter 1178: Let's Take a Look

"Ah, let go of me..." Consort Zhang, with her mouth and face covered in blood from being beaten, continued to be hit by Nurse Li as the Empress did not order to stop.

Consort Zhang forcefully pushed Nurse Li away and shouted: "You can't treat me like this, I am the most beloved Miss of the Zhang Family. Do you want to break ties with the Zhang Family?"

Seeing her still defiant, the Empress became even angrier.

She commanded Nurse Li to stop and furiously said: "Zhang Family? Hmph, you dare to mention the Zhang Family to me? I tell you, because of you, the Zhang Family is also ruined. When the time comes for a thousand cuts, rest assured, the Zhang Family will accompany you."

"You... you dare to go against the Zhang Family? Without the support of the Zhang Family, the Ducal Residence is like a bird with a broken wing."

"You still dare to threaten me? It seems you won't cry until you see the coffin. Take her down, hand her over to the Ministry of Punishment's Prison. I will report to the Emperor to rigorously investigate the poisoning incident."

The Ministry of Justice, once handed over, it's no longer a family matter, plotting against the Prince, that is a matter of the state.

Only then did Consort Zhang begin to feel afraid, but the Empress was in a rage, harboring the intention to kill the entire Zhang family, how could she care about a mere Consort Zhang.

"This... might not be appropriate, we could just handle this matter discreetly," Nurse Li anxiously said.

The Empress glanced coldly and said: "I understand your concerns, Nurse, but now the Zhang Family has become lawless. If we do not take this opportunity to suppress their arrogance, they will sooner or later climb on top of my head. You don't need to worry about this matter. I will explain it to my grandfather myself."

Nurse Li still hesitated, but since the Empress has spoken, she had nothing more to say.

She said: "Alright then, Your Majesty is wise, I will listen to you."

Nurse Li took Consort Zhang out, leaving only the Empress and King Jin in the grand hall.

The Empress slumped into the chair, the commanding aura she exhibited earlier disappeared in an instant. Now, she looked just like any ordinary woman, an ordinary mother looking at King Jin.

"My son, everything I do is for you. I hope you don't think I'm too cruel like them."

King Jin walked up to the Empress and whispered: "Mother, Xiaoran understands."

"Good, as long as you understand," the Empress quickly regained her spirits and said to King Jin: "There's one more thing, I hope you also won't think too much of it."

"What is it?"

Speaking of this matter, the Empress felt reluctant, but she had to face it.

She said: "Mother knows you might not be happy hearing you might be infertile. But if we are ill, we need to be treated, right? While the Imperial Physician is present, let us have Imperial Physician Cui take a look. Even if there's an actual illness, Mother guarantees he wouldn't dare to speak carelessly."

"I... I am really not ill," King Jin said somewhat agitatedly.

"Alright, Mother knows you're not ill. Consider it just a check for well-being, let Imperial Physician Cui take a look."

"No, if he checks, how can I face people?"

In that era, infertility was typically a matter concerning women. If a man couldn't reproduce, he'd be better off dead.

The Empress's heart ached, and she hurriedly said: "We won't check for infertility, let's just check for well-being. Today is a good opportunity, everyone's attention is on Consort Zhang scheming against the heir, they won't suspect you."

King Jin, still agitatedly, seeing the Empress insisting, could only agree.

"Fine, let him come in and check."

Chapter 1179: Making a Big Scene

Having just left, Imperial Physician Cui was summoned again; the Empress had been angered and felt unwell, requesting his attendance for a check-up.

In truth, it was to examine King Jin for his infertility issues.

Madam Zhang from the Zhang Family requested an audience outside, but as the Empress had ordered to allow entry but no exit, Nanny Li decided to let Madam Zhang in.

This time, the Empress had been angered by Consort Zhang, determined to settle scores with the Zhang Family. However, Nanny Li was well aware that making an enemy of the Zhang Family was not a wise

move. And yet, what Madam Zhang did was indeed excessive; if let off the hook, wouldn't the Zhang Family think they could be easily bullied?

Who knows what they might do in the future, taking advantage of the Empress's regard for the Zhang Family.

So they could not just let it go.

Nanny Li pulled Madam Zhang aside and whispered: "What you've done has been exposed, Consort Zhang has confessed everything."

Madam Zhang's face turned pale, but she feigned calmness and feigned ignorance.

"What do you mean, Nanny Li? I don't understand."

Nanny Li, uncertain when the Empress would come out, had no intention of keeping Madam Zhang in suspense and said coldly: "Hmph, I'll just tell you straight, the poisoning at Prince Jin Residence against the princes' consorts by your daughter has been exposed. The Empress's visit to Prince Jin Residence was precisely for this matter. Moreover... your daughter has already admitted to the Empress that it was you who instructed her. If you don't believe me, I can take you to see Consort Zhang right now."

"What?" Madam Zhang, seeing Nanny Li's serious demeanor, ultimately became frightened and couldn't keep up the act.

"Really?" she asked anxiously.

Nanny Li stood firmly and said indifferently: "Do I look like I'm joking with you?"

Madam Zhang was no fool; since Nanny Li spoke to her privately about this matter, there must be more to say.

Panic stricken and sweating, she asked: "What do you mean, Nanny Li?"

Nanny Li said: "It seems you are a smart person, Madam Zhang, so I will speak candidly."

"Please speak, Nanny Li."

"The Empress has no intention of settling this privately and has already sent someone to notify the Ministry of Justice to start an investigation."

"The Ministry of Justice starting an investigation?" Madam Zhang was so scared that she lost all color and burst into tears.

"What should be done then? Please enlighten me, Nanny Li."

Nanny Li said: "The Zhang Family and the Ducal Residence have had a close relationship for many years, intertwined like one family. Such a serious matter can't be overlooked. My meaning is, if it really comes to an irreversible situation, I hope you could take the blame upon yourself and not implicate Prime Minister Zhang."

"So you mean... you are..." Madam Zhang found herself unable to continue as her legs began to weaken; it was only Nanny Li's timely support that kept her from falling to the ground.

They were planning to sacrifice her to preserve the interests of both families.

If it truly came to that, naturally she would not drag down the Zhang Family.

Madam Zhang lowered her head, her expression ashen, and sighed: "Why won't the Empress show any mercy? I did this all for the sake of both families' past kindness..."

"Madam Zhang!" Nanny Li became displeased, saying: "Madam Zhang, when you did this, why didn't you think about the goodwill between our two families then?"

Imperial Physician Cui had already been inside for an hour, and chatter proliferated among those outside.

"Why is it taking so long? With such a major incident, could it be that the Empress has actually been angered into a serious condition?"

Some people, unconcerned, simply watched from the sidelines.

"In any case, it was Consort Zhang who incited her anger; if something serious happened, the Zhang Family would have to shoulder the blame. You weren't called in, what's your hurry?"

Chapter 1180: Borrowing Seed

"Indeed, if there really is a matter of life and death, Imperial Physician Cui would surely call us all in."

As they were speaking, the great door opened, and Imperial Physician Cui came out, his head covered in sweat.

He looked as if he had aged ten years.

The other imperial physicians hurriedly approached him and asked, "Is the Empress alright?"

Imperial Physician Cui shook his head and waved his hands, saying, "It's nothing, nothing."

If it's nothing, why do you look as though your mother has died?

"What actually happened?"

Imperial Physician Cui continued to shake his head, clearly indicating he would not speak of it.

There was nothing anyone could do, and they could only stop asking.

Since the Empress had not told them to leave, they could not go and just stood in the courtyard, continuing to gossip.

Meanwhile inside the palace, the Empress was weeping bitterly, and King Jin stood silently by her side, apparently still not recovered from the shock.

He was infertile, it turned out he was truly infertile.

He had thought before, if he, a man, were infertile, it might be better to just die, but now that it was true, he seemed to lack the courage to die.

If he died, what would his mother do? He was the hope of the Ducal Residence, and what about those hundreds of people in the Ducal Residence? And what about Prince Jin Residence?

So he really couldn’t die.

"Mother, don’t cry anymore. Since I cannot have children, I will think of a way to adopt one. Didn’t Prince Qin just have two sons last year? I will talk to father emperor about adopting one."

"Shut up," the Empress scolded fiercely: "Even if I have to smash my head and die, I won’t bear to see Sheng Qiaoyue’s face."

"But..." King Jin choked the rest of his words in his throat.

He had looked down on Prince Qin his whole life, how could he willingly do such a thing?

Even if he had no one to care for him in his old age, he didn’t want to adopt a son from Prince Qin, but what other choice did he have now?

"There’s still a way." After the Empress had cried enough, she gradually regained her composure.

"What way?" King Jin quickly asked.

"Your infertility must not be known." The Empress stared fiercely at King Jin with bloodshot eyes and gritted her teeth: "This must never be known, Imperial Physician Cui... I trust he dares not speak out, after this matter, I will have someone silence him!"

The Empress's eyes revealed a frightening madness, startling King Jin into shivering.

"Mother, what are you thinking?" King Jin asked in shock with wide eyes.

"You must have a descendant, you must have a son." The Empress's eyes became increasingly frantic.

King Jin sensed something terrible was about to happen, and he forced a painful smile, saying: "But I cannot have children..."

The Empress took a deep breath, gathering great courage before finally speaking those words.

"No matter, mother will find a way to get you a child..."

With a clatter, King Jin stumbled and fell to the ground.

He looked at the Empress in shock, his face full of disbelief.

A surrogacy?

How would that even work?

"No... Mother, you must be joking with your son, right?"

"Mother is not joking with you." The Empress, heartbroken, stood up from her stool and reached out to help King Jin.

"My child, you have suffered, don’t be scared, your mother can manage everything for you, it’s okay if we can’t have children, we can..."

"No, it’s not okay!" King Jin shouted loudly.

The noise from King Jin was so loud that even those outside heard it.

Everyone stopped whispering. No other sound came from the room.

"What happened now? Why is King Jin so loud?"

Inside the room, the Empress felt nothing but bitterness in her heart.

She didn’t want to do this either, but was there any other way?

If King Jin couldn’t procreate, then the imperial throne would definitely not include King Jin.