Farmhouse 1441

Chapter 1441: Stirring Restlessly

It's been ten days, and the Emperor's illness hasn't improved, merely controlled by the Imperial Physicians without any deterioration.

A few days ago, various lies were enough to cover things up, but it's been so long now. The Empress Dowager's illness can be understood; after all, she's old, and sickness strikes like a mountain collapse.

But the Emperor has been staying in the Empress Dowager's palace and forbids anyone from visiting, and he hasn't attended the morning court—this doesn't make sense.

Rumors have spread from somewhere, suggesting that it's not the Empress Dowager who's ill, but the Emperor.

The Emperor and Empress Dowager are doing this only to mislead others.

If that's true, what severe illness has kept the Emperor behind closed doors for more than ten days?

The court is in turmoil, with everyone exhausting all means to probe the situation inside the palace. If this matter is confirmed, who knows what kind of bloody storm it might provoke?

The Emperor is naturally aware of the current situation; despite not being well, he's already struggling to get up.

"Your Majesty, please wait a few more days, temporarily quell the urge to rise." The Empress Dowager is also anxious. If she hadn't been keeping watch herself, the Emperor would have gone to court by now.

But she heard the Imperial Physicians clearly: the Emperor's health is already in grave condition, and if he continues to overburden himself, even a Fairy couldn't save him.

The Empress Dowager doesn't understand the matters of the former court; she only knows that the Emperor cannot continue like this, that he must cooperate with the Imperial Physicians to recuperate properly.

"Mother, I can't delay any longer. I feel my health has significantly improved over the past few days, and I can attend the morning court now."

"No, no, you must heed the words of the Imperial Physicians. Now that Zijin isn't here, what if something happens to you?"

Eunuch Wan was also earnestly advising from the side, "Yes, Your Majesty, the people outside are merely speculating; they still dare not ascertain the truth of the matter, nor dare they act recklessly. Just recuperate for a couple more days, until your complexion is better, and then it's not too late to go out…"

"Right, right, they won't find out so quickly, Your Majesty, rest well for two more days!"

The Emperor truly lacked the strength to argue further, only admitting that going out now, anyone with a keen eye could see he's forcing himself to attend court, thereby confirming their suspicions instead.

Faced with this, it was better to rest properly for two more days.

The Emperor said to the Imperial Physicians: "I'll give you only two more days. In two days, I must seem like a person with no illness."

The two Imperial Physicians appeared troubled but could only nod helplessly.

They only hoped the Emperor would cooperate diligently.

…

Lin Xingyi, anxious and restless, finally decided to secretly visit Jie Huanzhi at night.

Jie Huanzhi was roused from his sleep and, upon seeing Lin Xingyi, was equally astonished.

“Master Lin? It’s so late; is there something urgent for Master Lin?”

“Master Jie, indeed there is an urgent matter.”

Seeing Lin Xingyi’s serious demeanor, Jie Huanzhi dared not be negligent and quickly invited him into the house.

Lin Xingyi followed Jie Huanzhi into the study and then removed his cloak.

He said, “To be honest with you, I’m visiting Master Jie’s residence so late because of the matter concerning the Emperor.”

“The Emperor?”

Lin Xingyi replied, “Master Jie also knows that lately, the restless figures within the court are already stirring because of the possibility that it’s the Emperor who is ill, not the Empress Dowager.”

For many years, Master Jie has been close by the Emperor’s side, being as wise as a sage.

Everyone has sensed the Emperor’s abnormality, guessing it’s not the Empress Dowager but the Emperor who’s ill—how could he not know?

Chapter 1442: Undercurrents Rising

But it seems like the emperor trusts no one this time, no one has been secretly summoned, so all the speculations can only remain as speculations.

Lin Xingyi said seriously with a stern face, "Lord Jie, whether these rumors are true or false, we cannot just sit and wait for our doom!"

"That’s right, we cannot just sit and wait for our doom," Jie Huanzhi said. "We need to thoroughly investigate those who are restless, it’s best to have someone keep an eye on them and see if they are in contact with anyone from Beiping."

"Exactly, that’s what I mean," Lin Xingyi said. "They say when the tree falls, the monkeys scatter, but if the fallen tree rises again, it might attract even more monkeys. Those fence-sitters have already been harboring grudges over the previous incident with the Ducal Residence, and since many of their secrets are still in the hands of the remnants from the Ducal Residence, they might say things that are disadvantageous to the emperor out of self-interest or because of their threats."

Jie Huanzhi felt a pang in his heart and fully agreed with Lin Xingyi’s viewpoint.

It took a lot of effort to bring down the Ducal Residence, we can’t let them rise again.

But those over a hundred thousand troops in Beiping still cannot be ignored.

...

Beijing appeared calm on the surface but turbulent underneath, while Jin Zijin and his party traveled at a leisurely pace on the road.

"The sunset is infinitely beautiful, just nearing dusk!"

Gu Youyou had never sat on top of a carriage before despite having sat in one for so long.

She gently leaned her head on Jin Zijin’s shoulder, and their shadows stretched long under the setting sun, a sight that tortured the black and white Taoists passing by.

"Hey, hey, hey, my dear, did you see that? Shall we sit on the top too?"

Searcy, lying inside the carriage, laboriously stretched out her head. Watching those two, she felt like they were torturing the life out of her.

She also wanted to be on the roof watching the sunset, she also wanted to feel the cool breeze on top, but her body couldn’t handle long periods sitting up, so she could only lie down.

Blame it all on Yue Rujing, he made her lose so much silver.

"Darling...?" the driver wasn’t even properly driving the carriage, still yelling from outside.

Searcy pulled the blanket over her head, refusing to look or listen.

"Hey, darling, are you sleeping? The view is so nice now, why not sleep later and enjoy it awhile?"

Darn it...

Searcy yanked off the blanket and snapped, "Drive your carriage, if you drive into the ditch, I’ll poison you!"

Gui Yunxi: "..."

His lady was angry, so he dared not speak.

In another carriage, Duan Xiaomei persistently begged Yue Rujing to go up on the roof and enjoy the view.

"Just look, the scenery outside is so beautiful. I’ve never seen such a lovely sun, it’s like it’s emerging from the sand. No, it’s more like it’s sinking into it. So beautiful..."

Beautiful? Hmph... Anywhere you are, he never found it beautiful.

Yue Rujing shifted to a more comfortable position, simply turned his face to the inside of the carriage to ignore her.

There were only two carriages in their party, others rode camels.

Because the road was all desert, horses consumed too much water, while camels did not.

If it weren't for Duan Xiaomei, actually just one carriage would suffice.

But oh no, she was full of airs, and even demanded a separate carriage.

And what was even more infuriating was that Gu Youyou and her elder brother were now sitting on the roof of their carriage.

Sitting above him, whispering sweet nothings of love, how is that fair?

"Hey, let's go, Searcy's carriage top is empty."

"If you want to go, go yourself, I'm not going," Yue Rujing replied grumpily.

Chapter 1443: Huyang Forest

"What's the fun in going alone? Love happens when two people are together." She looked at the elongated shadows beneath the carriage with a face full of envy.

Chasing after him this far, who knows when she'll ever catch up.

Thinking of this, she felt a bit tired.

“Yue Rujing, aren’t you going? How about sitting up and having a chat with me?”

“What is there to talk about with you?” Yue Rujing sneered.

Then he turned over irritably.

“Anything!” Duan Xiaomei said happily, “For example… what kind of girls do you like? The doctor said you might like someone romantic, a bit persistent, is that true?”

“What?” Yue Rujing sat up instantly, slapped the roof, and shouted, “Don’t talk nonsense, or you’ll get a rotten tongue!”

Gu Youyou was discussing Western Regions’ culture with Jin Zijin when such discordant sounds abruptly disrupted her mood for small talk.

“Yue Rujing, don’t want to sit in the carriage? Ride a camel instead!”

“Hmph, I’ll ride!” Yue Rujing’s stifled voice came from below.

A while later, he left and mounted a camel.

Duan Xiaomei hurriedly chased after him, laughing loudly, “Haha, it’s okay not being on the roof. We’re not that tasteless. Riding a camel to see the scenery is even better!”

She climbed onto the camel behind Yue Rujing.

Upon seeing this, Yue Rujing immediately quickened the camel’s pace, leading it to run toward the front of the caravan.

Duan Xiaomei, accustomed to Yue Rujing’s antics, rode her camel, chasing after him.

Up ahead, Yixi teased, “Brother Yue, little sister is chasing after you so hard, why don’t you wait for her…”

As soon as he finished speaking, laughter erupted.

Gu Youyou also started to find it amusing and said, “Zijin, look, I think they’re quite a match.”

Duan Xiaomei has a heroic and bold spirit rarely found in other women.

As for Yue Rujing, if you didn’t know him well, you’d be captivated by his grace. The two of them riding camels and dashing through the desert is a unique sight.

Jin Zijin also laughed, a rare occurrence to see him smile so openly.

He said, “Duan Xiaomei’s personality isn’t too dull, and Ajing wouldn’t get along with those overly reserved noble ladies. They do seem like a pair of joyfully-bickering frenemies; now, Marquess Yue can be at ease. Just that Ajing does have some aversion to Duan Xiaomei indeed!”

That’s true, Gu Youyou noticed it too.

They were nearing the edge of the desert, with a vast stretch of the Huyang Forest and fresh water ahead.

Everyone became excited.

Worry loomed that if they continued on like this, both people and horses would run out of water.

“Ajing, Yue Rujing, look over there, there’s trees and water…” Duan Xiaomei excitedly shouted, her camel picking up speed, racing toward the Huyang Forest, sand streaming behind.

Yue Rujing squinted to see clearly, called out to those behind, and hurriedly dashed over too.

“There’s water ahead, hurry!” The whole caravan rejoiced.

Duan Xiaomei stopped her camel not far from the lake and ran over to take a sip of fresh water.

But just as she drank her second sip, an arrow whistled toward her.

Having spent years on the battlefield, she wasn’t easily hit by arrows. With just a flip, she dodged it.

Then another arrow came.

She turned sideways, reached out, and forcibly caught the arrow in her hand.

“Who? Who’s shooting arrows in secret?” she shouted angrily toward the forest.

Up in a tree, a person in strange attire raised a bow and loudly said, “Who are you? This Huyang Forest and water are our possessions.”

Chapter 1444: Being Trapped

“What? Water is mine and yours separately?” In Duan Xiaomei’s dictionary, such a concept never existed. She laughed loudly, “What a joke, yours? You call it, will it answer?”

Of course, in the mind of the person holding the arrow, such a concept had never existed either.

A lake of water, you call it, will it answer?

Clearly, this woman was trying to stir up trouble, wanting to seize their water source.

“Which tribe do you belong to? Are you trying to steal our water?” The person holding the arrow became angry.

“Hey, what if I just take it?” Duan Xiaomei thought she had never seen such an unreasonable person and took out her whip, walking towards him.

“What are you trying to do? Stop, or don’t blame me for being rude!”

The person held his bow and arrow fully drawn, ready to shoot at her.

But Duan Xiaomei had already tasted this person’s archery skills earlier, which were really not impressive. She felt there was no need to fear such a person. So she laughed mischievously and snapped the whip in her hand with a loud crack.

This woman wasn’t afraid at all? Well, the person with the arrow wasn’t a pushover either.

He quickly shot an arrow and then swiftly climbed up a tree, took out a whistle, and blew it fiercely.

Soon, a bunch of people came bursting out from the Huyang Forest, shouting, jumping from tree to tree, surrounding Duan Xiaomei.

On the other side of the lake was Yue Rujing, drinking water. He didn’t want to be near Duan Xiaomei, so he chose a spot further away, unexpectedly hearing Duan Xiaomei’s cries.

Men dressed in primitive garments, painted colorful patterns on their bodies, revealing everything except the vital parts.

The person hiding in the tree, who she had seen first, was the most clothed among this group.

With her skills, she could handle a few people, but facing a crowd rushing at her with bows, arrows, knives, and forks, she was left only with fear.

“Ajing, Yue Rujing…”

Yue Rujing patted the camel, letting the well-watered camel return to the group by itself, then looked towards Duan Xiaomei who had fallen into a Savage Tribe.

Lacking her usual spirit, at this moment, she was like a little white rabbit forced into a desperate situation by a pack of wolves.

Yue Rujing hesitated for a moment, while Duan Xiaomei spotted the white figure standing on top of a Huyang tree not far away.

She waved incessantly at him, her voice crying, “Yue Rujing, I’m here, I’m here, quickly save me!”

“Ha…she can actually ask for help?”

Yue Rujing leisurely crossed his arms, watching her with a bit of schadenfreude.

“Hey, aren’t you coming down?” She pointed at Yue Rujing and said to the Savage Tribe people, “That person’s with me, he told me to steal your water…”

Yue Rujing staggered, nearly falling off the treetop.

In the next moment, countless arrows and catapults were aimed at Yue Rujing.

“Who are you? Come down!” The leading savage demanded.

Yue Rujing’s mouth twitched; he thought he must have lost his mind to come over and have a look. He should have ridden his camel and fled.

It was said that tribes like this lacked women the most, especially those who could have children.

How nice to leave Duan Xiaomei here to be a bride of the savages.

“I don’t know her, I have nothing to do with her. You guys carry on, I’ll just leave first!”

Yue Rujing was about to turn away when countless arrows were already shooting at him.

He cursed loudly, had no choice but to draw the Soft Sword from his waist to knock down the arrows.

“Duan Xiaomei, you damn well set me up?” Yue Rujing was very angry. When it came to setting traps, the person he admired most was Gu Youyou, who had set up their senior brother miserably, also implicating him.

Chapter 1445: A Deal

Another person who dares to trick him has appeared in this world.

"Who told you to stand by and watch me die? If I’m doomed, then let’s all be doomed together!"

Just then, the people behind also caught up. Jin Zijin, sensing something was amiss, handed the camel’s rope to Gu Youyou, and leaped down, quickly reaching Yue Rujing’s side to help him knock down the incoming arrows.

The Dao Family members who arrived first saw this scene and started fighting with the Savage Tribe.

The people from the Savage Tribe, who were only slightly stronger than ordinary people, were no match for the Dao Family members, and were quickly beaten back, their weapons scattered all over the ground.

Had it not been for the Dao Family members’ intention to spare lives, these dozens of savages wouldn’t have been enough for them to cut down.

"Don’t move, everyone stop."

A savage with the most paint on his face held a sharp dagger to Duan Xiaomei’s neck.

"If you move again, I’ll kill her," the savage threatened.

"Hey, hey, don’t move, I don’t want to die, sob sob..." Duan Xiaomei cried, if she died here, she wouldn’t rest in peace, even as a ghost.

"Who are you people? Why did you attack our friends?" Yixi stepped forward and asked.

The savage holding Duan Xiaomei said, "We are people from small neighboring countries, homeless due to war, forced to gather into this tribe. We have a strict division of water sources; this area of water belongs to our tribe. These two not only stole our water but also attacked our sentry tribesmen."

Gu Youyou, catching up behind, breathed a sigh of relief; it was easier to deal with when they weren’t unreasonable savages, just some refugees.

She stepped forward and smiled gently at the people opposite, "We are just passing by and want to replenish some water. Of course, we won’t take it for free; we can barter. What do you need?"

Everyone, seeing Gu Youyou’s good attitude, gradually lowered their guard.

"We need cloth, food, medicine, what do you have?"

Gu Youyou thought for a moment; they didn’t have much food, as over a hundred people needed to eat.

Initially, they didn’t expect so many people to come to escort Tian Jizi’s ashes, and they left in a hurry, not having prepared in time.

But they could give them some cloth and medicine.

Gu Youyou turned to discuss with Jin Zijin.

"We're almost at Xining, right? Let's leave Searcy's medicine behind; give them the rest. And the cloth!"

Some pieces of cloth bearing Western Region styles, which Gu Youyou originally intended to take back and try selling. Since they encountered this situation, she thought it wouldn't hurt to let them have it and buy some more later through merchants.

"Hmm, you decide," Jin Zijin said in a low voice.

In the end, they left a large amount of medicine and cloth, and successfully exchanged for Duan Xiaomei and enough water.

After this incident, Duan Xiaomei became much more reserved, and whenever she saw Gu Youyou, she felt somewhat guilty.

Afraid that Duan Xiaomei would have some kind of psychological barrier, Gu Youyou had to smile and explain to her, "Even if not for you, we would have had to trade with those people to get enough water. Giving them those supplies wasn't because of you, so don't worry."

"Are you... always this kind to people?" Duan Xiaomei timidly looked at Gu Youyou.

Gu Youyou shook her head with a smile and said, "No, I'm a businesswoman; it was just a transaction."

"So many good things just for some water?" Duan Xiaomei was greatly surprised and said, "If everyone did business like you, they'd go broke."

Chapter 1446: Discussing Important Matters

Gu Youyou smiled and said, “I just look at problems differently than you do. You think it’s a loss, maybe those refugees feel they lost out too.”

“Them losing out? Just for a few bags of water?” Duan Xiaomei sneered.

Gu Youyou said seriously, “Water sources in the desert are extremely precious and can save lives. And what I gave them can also save lives when necessary, and is also very precious. So this trade is just for mutual needs; no one loses or gains much advantage.

You, ah, think water is worthless because the place where you’ve lived since childhood doesn’t lack water. In your eyes, water might be the most useless thing. But in this place, didn’t you see a lot of animal bones in the desert we passed through before?”

“Yes, I did. Why did they die in the sand?”

“Couldn’t find a way out of the desert, had no water to drink, and died of thirst.”

Duan Xiaomei was momentarily stunned.

In her impression, there might be millions of ways for humans to die, but dying of thirst wasn’t one of them.

You should know that in the southern regions, there’s plenty of mountains and water. Where there are mountains, there’s water, especially sweet mountain springs, which they can drink anytime they want.

It turns out water is such a precious thing in the desert.

Gu Youyou was thinking that she had treated this miss too well on this journey, when in fact the water supply for the team had long begun to dwindle, except that she hadn’t had any shortage.

“One man’s meat is another man’s poison; whether anything is precious or not is relative. You’re still young and might not understand now, but in the future, when you have something you cherish more

than your own life, you'll understand. Let's go, hurry to bed, we still have to rush on tomorrow morning."

…

The Emperor has been tirelessly taking care of the Empress Dowager in her palace for over ten days now.

Each day he remains secluded, the voices of suspicion grow louder.

On this day, remnants of the Ducal Residence faction gathered in one place, discussing this matter.

"I think now is the best opportunity. The Emperor is definitely sick, and very seriously ill, maybe this time he won't come out of the Renshou Palace alive. Just as Jin Zijin is not in Beijing, we should quickly assemble everyone, force the Emperor to abdicate and transfer the throne to King Jin."

"Hmph, King Jin? That ungrateful wretch?"

"Ah, Master Yu, no matter how ungrateful King Jin is, he is still the Emperor's son. When a son takes over his father's throne, no one in the world dares to say anything, but if the Emperor were to suddenly die and King Jin doesn't become Emperor, who are you planning to make? Jin the Great General?"

"Hmph, naturally Jin the Great General!"

Another advised, "Master Yu, we understand your thoughts, of course, we all think King Jin isn't qualified to be Emperor. Jin the Great General is most qualified. But the timing isn't right. If Jin the Great General becomes Emperor, it would be an act of overthrowing the dynasty. When Jin Zijin comes back, he could right the wrong openly.

But if King Jin became Emperor, it would be different. King Jin is also a legitimate son of the Emperor, raised by the Emperor's side from childhood. It's possible the Emperor might pass the throne to such a son, right? Anyway, King Jin is just a puppet; he won't affect us. We just use his name to control the court until the right opportunity comes, and once things are settled, see what they have to say then."

“But King Jin is infertile!”

“Oh dear, you stubborn fool, can’t you say that he found the Divine Doctor to cure him? Just give him a child, who in the world would dare say it’s a fake?”

Chapter 1447: Starting Activities

“Haha…” Jin Tianzhong, who secretly returned from the Beiping Army to the Ducal Residence, stood up and laughed, “Master Cheng is right. Back then, when Jin Zijin took advantage of the heavy snow that blocked the roads, he secretly managed the affairs of the Ducal Residence. We shall repay him in kind, taking advantage of Jin Zijin’s absence and quietly resolving this matter ourselves.

When the major situation is set, if Jin Zijin still dares not bow down, then he is surely rebelling. Honestly, my elder brother sent me secretly to Beijing with this very intention. Master Cheng, after the affair is completed, my elder brother will not fail to give you your due reward!”

Master Cheng repeatedly raised his hands in respect and said, “Honored by Great General Jin’s regard, Cheng truly feels apprehensive.”

“Haha, Master Cheng, don’t be so modest. Master Cheng is indeed a man of great talent!”

Jin Tianzhong put his hands on his hips, looking around at everyone in the secret chamber, and continued, “Compared to back then, there are fewer advisors of the Ducal Residence. Where are the others?”

Master Cheng hastily replied, “The situation with the Emperor is still unclear. Everyone has families and dares not gamble with the lives of their whole families, so they dare not act rashly.”

“Hmph, these fence-sitters.” Jin Tianyuan sighed, “Forget it, for those we can rely on, it’s only you all. As for the others, try your best to draw them in, and if not, we will deal with them after the matter is settled.”

Everyone's faces lit up with smiles; as they say, fortune is sought from danger. When they achieve great success one day, their immense wealth will return.

The Ducal Residence affair is extensive, and the Emperor hasn't pursued it deeply, only because he doesn't want to disturb the overall situation. However, those close to the Ducal Residence, although untouched, have already been secretly oppressed.

Like them, who have already fallen out of the Emperor's favor, will eventually have their power slowly eradicated without impacting the situation, and then each will be eliminated completely. So, they have no recourse but to rebel along with the Beiping Army.

But merely planning here is useless; the key is to coerce the court. To coerce requires an army, and luckily, of the various armies, the Beiping Army is the closest to Beijing.

Someone asked, "Has Great General Jin mentioned when to dispatch troops?"

Without illness, all their talks here are merely empty words.

Jin Tianzhong laughed heartily and said, "As for dispatching troops, my elder brother has long since made a decision; you don't need to worry about it."

…

To control Xining, the Xiao family army moved out the majority.

The existing hundred thousand troops near Beijing are in the Emperor's hands, commanded by Xiao Jinfei and General Lu.

Lu Youchang's only son, Lu Tianning, married a lady from the Ducal Residence, with Empress Jin Yushu acting as the matchmaker. After the fall of the Ducal Residence, because that lady gave birth to a son for the Lu Family, she received special care and now lives well.

She is also one of the two daughters from the Ducal Residence who married into Beijing and survived.

The other is Lin Xingyi's madam, Jin Yuan.

Master Cheng hesitated for a long time before entering the main madam's quarters, which he hadn't visited in many years.

The maid in the household was clearly astonished; the madam had aged and no longer shared a room with their master.

Yet at this late hour, which was bedtime, it was the first time in years their master had come to the madam's courtyard so late.

"Madam, madam, the master is here."

Madam Cheng had already changed into her nightwear and was ready for bed when she heard the news, and she was momentarily stunned, unsure whether to change or not.

Chapter 1448: Starting from the Rear Courtyard

In her view, Minister Cheng coming to her room at this hour must be for some serious business; it would never be for consummating their marriage with her, this old woman.

Thinking this over, she decided to change back into her clothes.

Minister Cheng rushed into Madam Cheng's room in a flurry, just as she had changed back from her sleeping clothes.

Seeing this scene, he felt a bit embarrassed, realizing he had indeed neglected his lawful wife over the years. Even though they wouldn't share the same bed anymore, he should still visit her more often.

“Madam, are you planning to sleep?”

Madam Cheng smiled as she finished dressing, “Since you are here, my lord, I won’t hurry to bed. Is there something you wish to discuss with me?”

Minister Cheng hurriedly replied, “Indeed, there is something I need to discuss with you.”

His use of the word “discuss” made Madam Cheng pay more attention.

They sent all the servants away and closed the door before speaking slowly.

“Madam, I heard you’ve been on good terms with Madam Lu these past two years?”

Madam Cheng was momentarily stunned, then watched Minister Cheng cautiously and laughed suddenly, “Why are you suddenly interested in matters between us women, my lord?”

Minister Cheng laughed heartily, “There’s a way for our family to regain its former glory, but it requires your involvement, Madam. What do you think about this…”

Madam Cheng’s eyes lit up, noticing Minister Cheng’s cautious expression toward her, she felt a sense of superiority and said, “Your words are quite formal, my lord. As husband and wife, we share both honor and disgrace. Restoring our family’s former glory is my responsibility as well. Whatever you need, just let me know, and I will do my utmost. But I also hope you remember: the master is the master, and the concubine is the concubine.

No matter how fond you are of the young concubines, do not forget their status. They are mere playthings for a man and should not be brought into public view. And the children born to concubines are illegitimate; their status is not equal to that of legitimate children. Even if illegitimate daughters marry the legitimate sons of others, they will only be concubines!”

A cold gleam flashed in Minister Cheng’s eyes, but he lowered his head and repeatedly agreed.

Madam Cheng was pleased with Minister Cheng's attitude before she asked, "My lord, tell me, what do you need my help with?"

Minister Cheng squinted his eyes, lowering his voice, "Invite Madam Lu here discreetly, and it would be best to also invite the young Madam of the Lu Family."

Madam Cheng's mind raced for several moments before she was suddenly startled, "The young Madam of the Lu Family is a daughter of the former Ducal Residence family. You're talking about restoring the family's former glory, could it be…"

"Shh… Madam, it's best that you understand without saying it out loud!"

"Oh dear, if this fails, it could end in the execution of our entire household. My lord, perhaps we should discuss this further," Madam Cheng expressed her disapproval. Although their life now was not as prosperous as before, it was far better than the Ducal Residence, whose entire family was executed.

Minister Cheng's face turned stern as he snorted coldly, "Fortune favors the bold. How can one achieve immense wealth without taking great risks? You are too timid, woman!"

Seeing Minister Cheng's displeased expression, Madam Cheng closed her mouth.

Minister Cheng continued, "Do you think we can remain safe and sound as we are now? Dream on!"

"What? Didn't the Emperor say no one except those from the Ducal Residence would be pursued?" Madam Cheng's expression changed.

Chapter 1449: Various Factions Stirring Restlessly

Minister Cheng said, "The Emperor is not pursuing the matter now because too many people are involved. If he punishes everyone, it would destabilize the very foundation of the nation. Over the past few years, the Emperor has been promoting new people, slowly transferring the power from those of us who have been here long. If I don't make some moves now, I'll be completely sidelined soon.

Once we become completely useless, we'll either end up gradually falling into despair or be arbitrarily given a crime and executed, which would lead to the ruin of our family. It's better to seize the opportunity while we still have some usefulness and strive for a future for our family."

Minister Cheng looked at Madam Cheng, then softened his voice and sighed, "Don't worry, my dear, I know the boundaries I must respect. Those other women are just a fleeting fancy; I treat them kindly when I'm in a good mood, and if not, you can sell them off as you please. See, when there's something important, I still consult with you, don't I? In the future, this home will be inherited by the legitimate sons you bear."

Hearing these words from Minister Cheng, Madam Cheng finally felt at ease and made up her mind.

"Alright, tomorrow I will send an invitation to Madam Lu, inviting her to our home to admire the lotus flowers in the pond."

Minister Cheng laughed and said, "Good, take good care of those lotus flowers."

…

Fusang City, East Sea

General Che summoned Jie Zhongsen to the study today and handed him a freshly opened secret letter.

"Take a look at this, haha, these people…" He said halfway, shaking his head and laughing while writing with a brush.

This action piqued Jie Zhongsen's curiosity about the secret letter. He took the letter and unfolded the paper.

After reading its contents, Jie Zhongsen couldn't laugh. His eyebrows furrowed in anger as indignation filled his heart.

But upon looking at the unfathomable General Che, he quickly calmed his mind.

The letter was a handwritten note sent by Jin Tianzhong, commander of the Beiping Army. It mainly conveyed that he hoped General Che of Dongzhou would remain passive and not interfere in certain matters.

It was common knowledge that Jin Tianzhong of Beiping was planning to make a move against Beijing sooner or later.

His mention of certain matters couldn't have been clearer. Does this mean they're planning to act?

Jie Zhongsen asked softly, "Then what is your intention, General?"

General Che looked up and smiled faintly, "Pretend ignorance; let's watch the tigers fight from atop the mountain and wait for the outcome before taking action."

"But if the Emperor wins, will it make him…"

"Ah!" General Che waved his hand and said, "We're not refraining from action; we're just waiting for the results before intervening."

General Che thought for a moment and said, "Here's the plan: you take your men secretly towards the Imperial City, set up camp nearby, and don't rush to act—await my command!"

He was doing well in the East Sea and fundamentally hoped for no changes in the Imperial Court, but some people are just too restless, rushing to their own end, and can't be stopped.

Jie Zhongsen didn't understand General Che's inner thoughts; he only felt that as a subject, such an action was overstepping boundaries.

However, recalling General Che's past connection with the Ducal Residence, and now disclosing this matter to him, did it suggest that General Che's loyalty might still lie with the Emperor?

By revealing this to him, was he truly ignorant or pretending not to know?

Back when the Emperor wanted a trusted aide in the East Sea, he first thought of the ever-loyal Jie Family.

Among the two sons of the Jie Family, he was the one selected.

Jie Zhongsen left General Che's place and swiftly sent this crucial information to Beijing, into the hands of Jie Huanzhi.

Chapter 1450: Family Letter

Jie Huanzhi received the message late at night and couldn't care about anything else. He couldn't even wait until morning and was eager to find someone to discuss it with.

"Go, get the second young master here."

The old servant thought that at this hour, the second young master must be resting with the second young mistress, and it wouldn't be convenient to disturb them. But seeing his master in such an urgent state, he had no choice but to brace himself and knock on Jie Zhonglin's door.

The first to come out was Cuiya, the maid by the second young mistress's side. She rubbed her sleepy eyes and asked, "Fang Bo, what business do you have with the second young master so late?"

"It's not me looking for him, it's the master."

"The master?"

"Yes, the master seems very anxious. Please, go and inform the second young master that the master is waiting for him in the study."

Cuiya hastily agreed and ran inside to knock on the bedroom door.

Jie Zhonglin, who was in the crucial moment of trying to conceive their second child, was suddenly interrupted, and his temper, dormant for years, instantly flared.

“Get lost!” A shoe hit the door, scaring Cuiya to retreat repeatedly.

The second young master speaking in such a tone felt so distant, like a dream.

What happened today? Could he have quarreled with the young mistress again?

Thinking of this possibility made Cuiya anxious, fearless of even the Heavenly King now.

She banged on the door, shouting, “Second young master, second young master, Fang Bo came and said the master is looking for you.”

What could he want in the middle of the night?

Facing Cuiya’s urgent and persistent knocking, his strong-willed spirit couldn’t hold on any longer.

He turned over and sat up in bed, rubbing his face in frustration.

Miss Du slowly put on her clothes and said, “Go and see. If father is looking for you at this hour, it must be urgent.”

“Alright, I’ll be back soon.” Jie Zhonglin cupped Miss Du’s face with his free hand and kissed her, the intense lust in his eyes gradually fading.

After dressing, he reached the courtyard gate, seeing Fang Bo waiting anxiously. Now he was sure that his father must have something urgent.

“Fang Bo, do you know why my father is urgently looking for me?”

Fang Bo replied, “It seems that the eldest young master sent a letter home, but I don’t know the details.”

In the study, only a small lamp was lit, and Jie Huanzhi anxiously paced back and forth.

After Fang Bo brought Jie Zhonglin to the study, he left quietly.

Seeing Jie Zhonglin arrive, Jie Huanzhi gradually calmed down.

“Zhonglin, come quickly. I fear something major is about to happen in Beijing.”

Jie Zhonglin, still somewhat unsatisfied, saw his father’s serious demeanor and straightened up.

“I heard that elder brother sent a letter home. Did he mention anything particular?”

“Yes, it’s the letter your elder brother sent.”

Jie Huanzhi handed Jie Zhongsen’s letter to Jie Zhonglin. The pages bore ordinary content, but when heated over a fire, unusual things appeared.

After reading it, Jie Zhonglin remained silent for a long time. After some time, he finally spoke, “Father, do you think elder brother means General Che will intervene or not?”

Jie Huanzhi replied, “Mobilizing the army takes time, and distant water can’t quench present thirst. The point isn’t whether General Che intervenes or not, but that we can’t sit and wait. We must at least find a way to send Xintong and Yiyi away!”

Jie Huanzhi resumed his anxious pacing and said, “What do we fear most? We fear they’ll use our family against us. Let’s send Xintong and Yiyi to your brother; only then will they be safe and I can be at ease.”

“Alright. I’ll arrange it tomorrow!”