Farmhouse 1451

Chapter 1451 Persuasion

They had already sensed something unusual. The Emperor was shut away with the Empress Dowager, most likely because he was gravely ill.

Meanwhile, many in the Imperial Court were beginning to stir. It would be manageable if only the civil officials made a fuss, but the real fear was that the Beiping Army might seize this chance to storm the palace and force the Emperor's hand.

By then, the outcome would be decided, and they wouldn't even have the strength to cry.

Jie Huanzhi, who had always been composed over the years, was now extremely anxious.

"No, I must enter the palace tomorrow, I have to see the Emperor no matter what."

"Father, you must not!" Jie Zhonglin objected: "There's a reason the Emperor is seeing no one right now; it's safest if he remains inaccessible. Once you request an audience, tomorrow, officials like Lord Lu and Lord Wang will also flock to see the Emperor. Setting this precedent would be most disadvantageous to him."

Jie Huanzhi was not indifferent, but…

"But the Emperor's condition is truly worrying. By the way, where are the Princes now?"

Jie Zhonglin frowned and said, "The Princes probably still need more than a month to arrive. What we need to do is delay as much as possible."

"Over a month!" Jie Huanzhi nearly fainted upon hearing this and said urgently, "The Emperor has been secluded for over ten days, and it's becoming increasingly difficult to maintain control. Who has the ability to delay for more than a month? I certainly don't possess that skill!"

…

Madam Cheng invited Madam Lu and the young lady of the Lu Family to her residence for a visit. Madam Lu, due to her previously robust appearance, didn't have many friends. Madam Cheng was one of the few friends she had known since childhood, so she naturally wouldn't refuse.

"Your lotus pond always blooms better than others, and I just love seeing the flowers in your pond," Madam Cheng said warmly, holding Madam Lu's arm, while Madam Lu couldn't stop praising the landscape along the way.

"Knowing you like it is why I invited you. But this year, we came a little early, and the flowers aren't fully in bloom yet. In a few days, you should come again with your daughter-in-law."

Madam Lu said, "Ah! I could come alone, but you insisted on inviting her too?" Madam Lu lowered her voice and said, "If it weren't for your place, I wouldn't dare bring her out. You know, when the Ducal Residence was still in favor, taking her out was a show of prestige. But now, who dares to associate with anyone from the Ducal Residence? Oh dear, you wouldn't believe how frightened I was when trouble befell the Ducal Residence, fearing we'd be implicated due to this connection. Thankfully, the Emperor is merciful and spared us innocent ones."

Trailing behind them, the young lady from the Ducal Residence, the Lu family's daughter-in-law, became increasingly distressed, twisting her handkerchief helplessly.

Because Madam Lu was right, those from the Ducal Residence were now seen like a plague. If it hadn't been for her impending delivery back then, resulting in a healthy baby boy, she'd probably be dead from some random reason like her aunts and sisters.

Madam Cheng awkwardly said, "You mustn't speak like that; who knows about Tianyi's affairs, sigh!"

Half of her words left unsaid piqued Madam Lu's curiosity.

"What do you mean? Isn't that the case?" Madam Lu asked.

Before she realized it, Madam Cheng had led Madam Lu to a pavilion in the middle of the lake. The Cheng family's lotus pond was large, and speaking in the center of that pavilion meant outside ears wouldn't overhear unless the voices were loud.

It was the perfect place to discuss important matters.

Madam Cheng grasped Madam Lu's hand and invited her to sit down, personally seating the young lady from the Lu family before instructing the servants to bring fruit. Then she began to discuss serious matters.

Chapter 1452: Offer an Idea

"Madam Lu, we've been handkerchief friends for forty years, haven't we?"

"Yes, almost!" Madam Lu looked at Madam Cheng, her expression becoming serious.

"Given our friendship, I'll speak frankly. If you take it to heart, then give it some thought. If you don't, and think I'm speaking nonsense, just consider it a casual chat between sisters and forget it after listening."

With Madam Cheng being so earnest, Madam Lu couldn't help but pay full attention and asked, "What exactly is the matter?"

"You must promise that today's conversation remains between us, no matter the outcome, it must not be spread."

"Of course, I would never betray you. Hurry and tell me, what on earth is it?"

Madam Lu glanced at Young Madam Lu; she was curious, and Madam Cheng didn't ask her to leave, as if not fearing she'd spread the news.

Opposite her, Madam Cheng had already lowered her voice to discuss serious business.

“Madam Lu, how do you feel about the influence of Madam Lu and Master Lu in the Imperial Court after the Duval Residence affair ended?”

Madam Lu’s entire focus was on the inner household, she had no time to care about matters of the outer court.

She said awkwardly, “What changes could there be? Haven’t heard about any promotion?”

Madam Cheng was long accustomed to her way of thinking and didn’t mind it too much.

She said, “You don’t know? I’ve heard that because of your young madam’s status, many in the Imperial Court are deliberately suppressing Master Lu and Master Lu Jr.?”

Young Madam Lu turned pale, twisting the handkerchief in her hand even tighter.

Madam Lu looked over at her, but she didn’t even dare to meet her gaze.

“Is this really happening?” Madam Lu asked in astonishment, “Yet Madam Lin remains Madam Lin, isn’t Master Lin being ostracized as well?”

Bringing up something so distant caught Madam Cheng somewhat off guard.

After a moment, she nodded repeatedly, “Indeed, your Master Lu, Master Lu Jr., and also Master Lin, none of them have secured even a minor position yet, much worse than your family.”

“Oh dear, then…” Madam Lu looked at Young Madam Lu’s pale face, but in the end, didn’t say the harsh words.

Their family had so many daughters; a woman able to give birth to a son was greatly meritorious. No matter what, they couldn't possibly force their chubby grandson's own mother to death, could they?

Besides, due to the Duval Residence affair, she'd already lowered herself to the point of becoming like a servant.

"What do you think should be done about this?"

The Cheng family had also married a lady from the Duval Residence as a daughter-in-law, rumored to have died from grief, but who knows how she really died.

At this moment, the servant delivering snacks arrived, and Madam Cheng switched to topics of flowers, birds, and fishes. Once the servants retreated, she continued, "What can we do? Haven't you realized yet? The Emperor won't spare us."

"Us?" To Madam Lu, she only cared whether her status in the Lu family was secure, worried she might be demoted to concubine by her husband one day. Other matters she neither understood nor cared to.

She was straightforward, so she spoke directly, "Isn't your daughter-in-law already dead? Why is your family still not safe?"

Madam Cheng was used to Madam Lu's jumping thoughts and replied, "What I'm talking about isn't about the young madams, but the fact that the Emperor won't spare families like ours. Do you know, the least punishment for the Duval Residence's crimes is extermination of three clans? Our family, your family, are within those three clans of the Duval Residence, most critically considered by the Emperor as remnants of the Duval Residence."

Chapter 1453: Stakeholders

Madam Lu shook her head repeatedly, saying, "Impossible, our master is loyal only to the Emperor."

"Oh dear, Madam Lu, our master is loyal to the Emperor as well, but does the Emperor believe us? The key issue is that the Emperor doesn't trust us. He thinks our family is a remnant of the Ducal Residence."

“What?” Madam Lu looked incredulous and also began to grow anxious: “Then what should be done? If the Emperor believes we are remnants of the Ducal Residence, won’t he do everything he can to eliminate us?”

“Exactly!” Madam Cheng saw that Madam Lu was taking the bait and led her on vigorously: “The Emperor didn’t eliminate us remnants entirely back then, merely because he feared the size of these remnants, afraid they’d shake the foundation of the nation.

Back then he said he wouldn’t pursue it deeply, but that was just an expedient of the Emperor. The Emperor kept us, while gradually weakening my former master’s power in court. Once he’s completely marginalized, it will be the time of our family’s extermination. Madam Lu, you don’t usually manage these state affairs, but you should pay more attention to your General Lu. If he collapses, your family will be finished too!”

After listening to Madam Cheng’s words, Madam Lu’s heart was racing violently.

If their master is finished, won’t they also be finished?

Lately, especially lately, Madam Lu felt that General Lu seemed particularly busy, and her son too.

Could all this be related to the remnants of the Ducal Residence?

“What… how are you planning to act?”

Madam Cheng kept it a mystery, saying: “We have our ways. In any case, we won’t sit and wait for death.”

“Oh dear, Madam Cheng, you’re still holding something back from me? Quickly tell me what it’s all about!”

Madam Cheng looked like she was manipulated into revealing the details.

She lowered her voice and said: “You still don’t know, do you? The Emperor is seriously ill, almost at his end.”

Everyone is speculating that the Emperor is seriously ill; this matter has been circulating for a long time. Madam Lu knows about it, she nodded repeatedly, saying: “Who said I didn’t know about this? I do know, but hasn’t it been confirmed that it might just be the Empress Dowager who’s sick?”

“Impossible that it’s the Empress Dowager who’s sick,” Madam Cheng said with great certainty: “If it were the Empress Dowager, would they need to keep watch day and night, skip court sessions, and forbid others from visiting? Isn’t this obviously a cover-up?

I can assure you, it must be the Emperor who is ill, using the name of the Empress Dowager to recover. If the Emperor could get up, he wouldn’t skip court sessions. If you don’t believe me, go back and ask your General Lu about it. See what he says, in all these years since the Emperor’s accession, has he ever postponed a court session for anything.”

Madam Lu felt there was some truth in this because everyone was saying the same thing.

But what connection does this have with the plan they hold?

“Then what does Madam Cheng mean?”

Madam Cheng said: “Think about it, if the Emperor passes away, who will inherit the throne?”

“Naturally, it would be the eldest Prince. The eldest Prince is the legitimate eldest son; inheriting the throne is only right.”

Madam Cheng sighed deeply: “Ah! If the eldest Prince really ascends to the throne, it will be the end for us remnants of the Ducal Residence!”

“What do you mean by this?” Madam Lu’s heart skipped a beat.

“The extermination of the Ducal Residence was orchestrated by the eldest Prince. The Emperor didn’t eliminate us remnants because he was old and powerless. But the eldest Prince is different; from his decisive action in overthrowing the Ducal Residence, it is evident he is a man of prompt and ruthless action. He certainly won’t drag on and negotiate with us. Once he ascends to the throne as Emperor, he will surely clear away people like us with great force. Madam Lu, what do you think?”

Chapter 1454: Overturning the Case

Madam Lu was stunned for a long moment, unable to speak, her eyes vacant, as if pondering the severity of the situation.

Madam Cheng seized this opportunity to persuade the Lu family’s Young Madam, who had remained silent all along.

“Young Madam, are you willing to be the descendant of a traitor for your whole life? You were once a noble lady of the Ducal Residence, yet now you live a life worse than those from humble households. Are you content with this?”

The Young Madam of the Lu Family shook her head timidly.

“Exactly, none of us are content, so we cannot just sit idly by!” Madam Cheng sighed deeply, “Right now, there’s an opportunity for us to rise again, a chance for the Ducal Residence’s grievances to be redressed. Do you want it or not?”

“Grievances to be redressed?” The Young Madam of the Lu Family became excited and said, “Are you saying that our ancestors never actually committed treason, that it was all a false accusation?”

“Of course!” Madam Cheng replied with a look of surprise, “Oh dear, my Young Madam, you wouldn’t have always thought that Defender Duke was truly guilty, would you? Oh my, you are the lady of the Ducal Residence. How could the departed souls of the Ducal Residence rest in peace if they knew this!”

Madam Lu also reacted and hurriedly asked, “What exactly happened? Could it be that the case back then was fabricated?”

“Naturally, it was fabricated,” Madam Cheng replied, “Defender Duke had great accomplishments that overshadowed the sovereign, which is taboo for a minister. Unfortunately, they did not foresee this, providing the emperor with the chance to annihilate the entire family. Don’t you think the case was closed too hastily? Nobody even had time to react before Defender Duke committed suicide in prison. On the same night, everyone from the Ducal Residence was arrested, never given a chance to appeal, and sentenced for treason.

Back then, everyone dared not speak out, merely watching as the great tree fell, fearing being implicated. Only now do we realize that we were truly mistaken back then—how could they have left evidence for future generations to criticize? Those of us close to the Ducal Residence would not have a good ending. Madam Lu, Young Madam of the Lu Family, to ensure peace in everyone’s lives, there is only one way, and that is to redress the Ducal Residence’s case.”

“Redress the case? Easier said than done. That was the emperor’s doing. Who can admit their mistake, especially such a grave mistake,” Madam Lu said anxiously.

“It’s not easy, but we also can’t sit and do nothing, waiting for the Eldest Prince to come back and deal with us,” Madam Cheng urgently said, “Madam Lu, there is an opportunity right now. The emperor is gravely ill. As long as King Jin is established as the Crown Prince before the Eldest Prince returns, and King Jin becomes the emperor, whether or not he redresses the Ducal Residence’s case, those of us who were once close to King Jin would be preserved!”

…

Being reminded earnestly by Madam Cheng, Madam Lu was somewhat affected.

Madam Lu’s relationship with General Lu had never been good, and as Madam Lu aged, she gradually became indifferent to whether she was favored or not.

But this time, she was determined to discuss the matter of redressing the Ducal Residence’s case with General Lu, so she braced herself and went to the concubine’s quarters to get him.

She had done such things many times in her youth, but it was the first time in many years.

She quickly found out that General Lu was in the room of a concubine at the moment. Instead of rushing in with a kitchen knife in anger, she properly brought maids and elderly women to sit in the front hall to drink tea and asked them to fetch General Lu.

However, the maid from Concubine Jiang's room fidgeted for a long time without moving, which angered the already impatient Madam Lu greatly.

Chapter 1455: Wielding a Large Knife

She raised her eyebrows coldly and said, "What? Is the Madam unable to order you now?"

The notorious reputation of Madam Lu was well-known within the Lu Residence. Because she had given birth to the Lu Family's only son, no matter how outrageous her behavior, her position as the principal wife was unshakable.

The servants in the house were terribly afraid of her. A glare from her would instantly frighten them into trembling all over.

"Ma-Madam, the master and our Concubine are busy at this time, I dare not disturb them."

Madam Lu threw the teacup onto the ground and angrily said, "Shameless vixen, still busy when your rear is on fire? Hmph, I will go personally."

The maids were scared to death and quickly followed her.

"Madam, please wait a moment. Madam, it's so late already. Can't you talk about it tomorrow?"

"Madam, you can't go! The master will be angry..."

Despite the maids chasing and trying to persuade her, it was of no use. Apart from General Lu, no one could sway Madam Lu in this house.

Madam Lu hurriedly arrived outside Jiang Concubine’s room, and from inside came sounds that made people blush and quicken their heartbeat.

The master was still vigorous, and the maids with thin skin outside quickly lowered their heads with flushed faces, but only Madam Lu was furious, her face so angry it turned ashen.

She thought it was all the fault of that wretched woman back then; otherwise, she too would have blossomed and wouldn’t have turned into this tomboy appearance, spending her life envying these concubines.

The only time she was with General Lu was when she succeeded by drugging him.

How could these little foxes benefit from what was rightfully her man? How could she not be angry?

If she didn’t hear or see anything usually, it was fine, but today she happened to come across this.

She silently noted down Jiang Concubine, waiting for the autumn to settle accounts.

Madam Lu quietly left Jiang Concubine’s room, and everyone breathed a sigh of relief. But not long after, they saw Madam Lu return, holding General Lu’s usual weapon for combat — the large sword of General Guan!

With Madam Lu’s explosive temper, if she hadn’t heard, she might have tolerated it; now that she heard, how could she possibly endure it?

If she were the type to swallow grievances, she wouldn’t have sold several concubines of General Lu.

"Ah, Madam, what are you doing?"

"Madam, quickly put it down; this is the master’s killing sword..."

Madam Lu was tall and strong, her strength immense. Although she hadn't practiced martial arts, her energy was even greater than those who had.

Several maids and old women quickly hugged Madam Lu, embracing her arms, her legs, some even fearlessly grabbing the large sword directly.

Nevertheless, Madam Lu's strength was truly overpowering; she shouted 'Get out of the way,' shaking seven or eight maids and old women out.

She forcefully approached Jiang Concubine's room door, cleaving with the large sword, and the solid wooden door was instantly split into two.

Then, Jiang Concubine let out a piercing scream, slipped, and fell onto General Lu, followed by another miserable scream.

The servants were dumbfounded, not daring to approach, only able to watch from afar.

Madam Lu was startled by General Lu's tragic scream, hurriedly abandoning the large sword and entering the room.

General Lu was already unconscious, and Jiang Concubine was so frightened that her limbs went weak. She couldn't even cry before Madam Lu slapped her.

"Shameless little wench, how old are you? Not even twenty, right? Learn something good instead of seducing men."

Chapter 1456: Sold

"Madam, I dare not again, I dare not again, Madam, please spare me..."

Of course, Madam Lu wouldn't spare her. She grabbed her hair and dragged her out of the room, threw her naked body into the corner like trash.

"I'll deal with you later."

Madam Lu hurriedly sent for the doctor to check on General Lu's condition, while the concubine in the corner was helped up by her maid, dressed, and kept crying softly in the corner.

A woman's entire life depends on men, whether it's her husband or her son. Without them, she is finished.

Seeing how even a woman as coarse as Madam Lu could enjoy such honor, how could other women not envy her? They felt they were better off than Madam Lu in every aspect except that only Madam Lu had borne a son in the Lu Residence.

If they could also give birth to a son, and while young, still gain favor from General Lu and secure the entire Lu Family, it wouldn't be impossible.

With this thought, women always came forth to approach General Lu. Even when Madam Lu, a tigress, was watching over, many daring women still emerged.

Concubine Jiang was one of them.

No one in the Lu Residence would likely sleep this night.

After examining General Lu, the doctor regretfully told Madam Lu and Young Master Lu: "General Lu has injured his root, afraid he can never engage in intimacy again."

Concubine Jiang fainted upon hearing this.

Madam Lu's expression was quite remarkable.

Indeed, no one needs to fight over it anymore.

Faced with such parents, Young Master Lu felt quite helpless.

At the same time, he deeply sympathized with General Lu. Luckily his wife had a gentle temperament, if she were as fierce as Mother, he might as well become a Taoist early.

"When will my father wake up?"

"He'll wake shortly. That's not important, the key is such a matter may affect General Lu's physical and mental health," the doctor said with difficulty.

"What do you mean?" Madam Lu also grew worried.

Whether General Lu could function didn't matter to her. The key was that he was a warrior and couldn't become a sickly burden.

The doctor said: "In General Lu's condition, he needs at least one or two months of bed rest at home; that's the physical injury. Mentally, with a man reduced to this, especially a valiant man like General Lu, there's fear he can't overcome it inside, and should this spread out..."

Young Master Lu quickly said: "Doctor, please help keep this secret. Such matters must not spread within our Lu Residence."

The doctor hastily assured: "Young Master Lu, don't worry, we doctors know what to say and what not to."

"Then thank you, doctor!"

"Young Master is too polite, I'll leave some prescriptions for nourishing the body and take my leave."

"Doctor, please!"

After sending off the doctor, Young Master Lu gave the servants at home a stern talk.

Actually, few servants knew General Lu’s true condition. Most knew that Madam Lu, in a fit of jealousy, took a big knife and accidentally injured General Lu.

Soon, this matter was suppressed, and dawn was nearing.

No one slept this whole night, yet things were not over, Madam Lu still had to deal with Concubine Jiang.

Concubine Jiang cried like a tearful mess, kneeling and pleading with Madam Lu continuously.

"Madam, I didn’t mean to, please spare me, oh no, please spare my life, sell me..."

Chapter 1457: Eight Hundred Li Expedited

"Sell you?" Madam Lu said coldly, "Would you be willing to be sold to a place like a brothel?"

Concubine Jiang quickly nodded, saying, "As long as you don’t kill me, I’m willing to be sold anywhere, I... I’m willing!"

This Concubine Jiang, relying on her looks, was willing to be sold to the Lu Family to warm the bed of an old man. Would she also be willing to be sold to a brothel? This indeed refreshed Madam Lu’s view of the world.

In conclusion, she felt this was a shameless wretch.

Were it not for the fear of word getting out and ruining General Lu’s reputation, she might have actually granted her wish.

Lu Gongzi, standing to the side and finding it inappropriate for such a young woman, whispered to Madam Lu, "Mother, we can’t sell her."

Madam Lu understood Lu Gongzi's meaning. If this woman were sold, it would be no surprise if rumors about General Lu being impotent spread everywhere tomorrow. The Lu Family had already lost enough face and couldn't afford any more.

On the other hand, Concubine Jiang misunderstood, thinking that her beauty had captivated Lu Gongzi, and that he couldn't bear to sell her.

If that were the case, it would be wonderful. Although the master was also formidable, how could he compare to a young master?

She touched her face, thinking that her appearance was indeed more beautiful than the former Ducal Residence's young lady.

"Young master!" She looked up at Lu Gongzi with a pitiful expression, even managing to blink out a few tears.

The pitiable look was indeed alluring, but Lu Gongzi was not so desperate to accept anyone.

Madam Lu, seeing this, became furious and threw a cup at her, breaking Concubine Jiang's head, causing her to faint.

This shameless woman.

Madam Lu shouted loudly to the people outside, "Lock this wretch in the woodshed, don't let anyone give her food or drink, let her starve to death."

Exhausted from the day's events, Madam Lu was nearly at her limit.

However, she had more important matters to discuss.

She could only say to Lu Gongzi, "Since your father is like this now... he won't recover anytime soon, so I won't discuss this matter with him. You should go back and get some rest, I'll come to your courtyard at noon, there's an important matter to discuss."

Lu Gongzi pondered and said, "Mother, is this important matter the reason you sought out Father?"

"Yes, alas, let's not talk about it now, you go back and get some rest, we'll speak when you're refreshed."

...

The Emperor's condition had not improved here, and the Empress Dowager was anxious.

"Wan Decheng, has the express letter been sent out?"

Eunuch Wan replied urgently, "It's been sent, but the Crown Prince and Crown Princess are still so far away, they won't return quickly!"

"Ah, really, why did they have to travel so far? Even further than Nanzhao Country, young people with nimble legs can travel far, but it's troubling for this old lady."

The Emperor was still sleeping in the inner room, so the Empress Dowager dared not raise her voice, only whispering to Eunuch Wan.

"Whenever the Emperor was sick as a child, I watched over him. Back then, no matter how serious his illness was, I always thought a few more days of rest and some medicine would suffice, but this time, I am uncertain. The Emperor has never been ill for so long since he was a child, I am afraid!"

"Oh dear, Empress Dowager!" Eunuch Wan quickly said, "Please don't think that way, our Emperor will surely recover. Don't forget we have the Crown Princess. You trust her medical skills, don't you? As long as the Emperor holds on until they return, he will surely recover."

Chapter 1458: The Messenger

“Indeed.” The Empress Dowager said, “But it’s still so far!” Just thinking about the journey that must be completed day and night made the months seem to stretch beyond the horizon, far beyond what she dared to imagine.

“Forget it, forget it, go call the Imperial Physician, have them watch carefully, we must ensure the Emperor’s well-being.”

Feeling distressed, the Empress Dowager had Madam Li support her into the inner room.

To the outside world, she announced that the illness was her own, claiming she wished to pay respects to her lord, and since even the ancestral Empress was unavailable, she could only mutter to herself in the back hall.

At that moment, the messenger who had run several horses to death finally arrived, having come across a group of conspicuously dressed Taoists at an inn on the road to Qiuci.

Such a group was easy to recognize. The messenger dismounted and, among the crowd, identified Jin Zijin, hurriedly kneeling before him with the letter.

“Your Highness, an urgent message from Beijing.”

Having said that, he fainted.

He was a Hidden Guard by the Emperor’s side; if it had been anyone else, after running several horses to death, he himself would have nearly died.

Jin Zijin quickly took the letter, and Gu Youyou promptly ordered people to carry the unconscious messenger inside for emergency treatment.

Jin Zijin finished reading the letter and crumpled it into a ball, tossing it into the fire.

Then he instructed for the best horses to be prepared.

Yue Rujing, noticing something off about Jin Zijin's demeanor, hurriedly asked, "Whose letter is it? Has something happened?"

"Wan Decheng's."

Wan Decheng?

Yue Rujing was momentarily stunned, then said, "What's Wan Decheng sending an urgent message for?" Suddenly realizing something, he was taken aback, "Could it be… has something happened to the Emperor?"

Jin Zijin pressed his lips together, eventually saying, "It's said he's fallen ill. This letter was sent at the Empress Dowager's request."

"Then it must be serious."

"Yes, it is serious. We're waiting for Youyou to return and save him."

Yue Rujing spoke awkwardly, giving a cold snort, "What are those Imperial Physicians doing? They receive ample salaries day in and day out, yet in a critical moment, they can't save their master's life. Instead, they rely on Gu Youyou to return and save him."

He glanced upstairs, where Gu Youyou was treating the messenger.

He continued, "I thought Beiping had attacked. If the Beiping Army were coming, the two of us could ride fast horses back first, but Gu Youyou, delicate as she is, can't endure long periods of riding. If she could manage a continuous three-day ride, it would be remarkable. But if she has to return slowly by carriage… alas, can the Emperor wait?"

And they didn't even know the extent of the Emperor's illness. How could they know?

Jin Zijin sighed, "Prepare the things. We'll wait for the messenger to wake up before deciding."

Yue Rujing hesitated, "Do I have to go back too?"

"Yes!" Jin Zijin replied calmly, "You're right, the Beiping Army indeed plans to attack."

Yue Rujing: "…"

"The old man is ill, and I'm not in Beijing. Do you think they would miss such a good opportunity?"

"…No!" Yue Rujing shook his head.

"Alright, I'll go prepare now. This time we'll make sure to uproot them."

The messenger soon awoke, looking unwell but able to speak properly.

Gu Youyou asked, "I heard the Emperor is ill. Is it serious?"

The man propped himself up and hurriedly said, "It's very serious, extremely serious indeed. Otherwise, the Empress Dowager wouldn't have sent me with this urgent message."

The messenger detailed the situation in Beijing to Gu Youyou and Jin Zijin, telling them of the Emperor's seclusion at the Empress Dowager's place, the blur between the Empress Dowager's illness and the Emperor's, and also about those who were already beginning to stir.

Chapter 1459: Seeing Through the Cunning Plan

After everyone listened, they all felt that this was no ordinary situation. Now, Beijing was probably in deep turmoil.

Without further delay, leaving behind the main force to proceed slowly, Gu Youyou, along with Jin Zijin, Yue Rujing, and more than ten others, rode swiftly back towards Beijing.

…

Inside the Lu Residence, General Lu was completely crippled, and as of now, the Emperor did not know; but when the Empress Dowager learned of it, she felt as if the sky had half collapsed.

And Madam Lu was still unaware of the consequences her uncontrolled violent actions had brought about.

She was placing all her hopes on her son, Lu Tianning.

“Tianning, do you understand now? What should we do?”

Madam Lu recounted, embellishing the conversation Madam Cheng had with her a few days ago, to Lu Tianning.

Beside her, Madam Lu’s daughter-in-law cried softly, saying, “Husband, if great-grandfather was wronged, then the hundreds of lives of my family have all become unjust souls. They are all dead, while I linger on, unable to even avenge them. If I die in the future, how could I face them on the other side?”

Lu Tianning glanced indifferently at his wife but then shifted his gaze to Madam Lu’s face.

“Mother, is this all from what Madam Cheng told you?”

“Yes,” Madam Lu said, “Madam Cheng is an old friend of mine. Back when I was at my lowest, everyone disliked me, yet she never disdained me. She wouldn’t lie to me!”

“Ha…” Lu Tianning laughed coldly.

“Tianning, you don’t doubt Madam Cheng, do you? I think what she says makes sense. Look at the current situation, I heard the court is in chaos.”

Lu Tianning pressed his lips together and smiled faintly, “So what does Madam Cheng mean? What does she suggest you do? Rebel?”

Madam Lu was frightened and her face turned white, quickly saying, “No, no, how could there be rebellion? That’s a capital offense. Madam Cheng didn’t mean rebellion; she meant that before the eldest prince returns, we should rally together to vindicate the Ducal Residence. As long as the Ducal Residence’s grievance is cleared, we wouldn’t be considered traitors, right?”

“Ha, not traitors? Vindication?” Lu Tianning laughed coldly and loudly said, “Mother, you are truly muddled, the whole world knows that Guogong was disloyal. How can you vindicate him? Hmph, I think besides rebellion, there really is no way to clear his name.”

“You…” Madam Lu looked at her pale-faced daughter-in-law and said, “How can you speak like this about the Ducal Residence? Isn’t that your in-laws’ family? How do you expect your wife to feel?”

The daughter-in-law was already crying softly into her handkerchief.

Lu Tianning looked at her indifferently, his voice softened a few notches.

He said, “I’ve said it long ago, the Ducal Residence is done for. You are now one of the Lu Family. No matter what happens to them, it has nothing to do with you. If you still can’t come to terms with it, maybe you can follow your sisters’ and aunts’ examples. But keep all those improper thoughts in check; let today’s matter go, and I hope there isn’t a next time.”

Isn’t that telling her to die?

The daughter-in-law’s face was deathly pale, and she sat down on the ground, unsteady on her feet.

Madam Lu was livid with anger; this son simply did not believe them.

To vindicate the Ducal Residence, how do you know if you don’t even try?

Maybe it really is possible?

Lu Tianning swung his sleeves and left; he still had to go to the military. His father lay in bed, in such a state, and if he didn’t go to the military, wouldn’t it mean watching the traitors invade with open eyes?

“Ah, Tianning, Tianning…” Madam Lu could only watch helplessly as Lu Tianning left in anger.

Chapter 1460: Persuading One by One

In an instant, she again saw her daughter-in-law sobbing softly, unsure whether to scold her or comfort her.

Now everything is uncertain. Has the Ducal Residence been overthrown? Even the Beiping Army is something that the Emperor does not dare to move lightly against. If the case is overturned in the future, this daughter-in-law would become their living ancestor.

Right now, she cannot say anything to anyone.

...

The court hall was already in chaos, facing the empty Dragon Throne, everyone was talking and speculating.

"When will the Emperor come to the morning court, it has been so long, and there is no one to know how the Empress Dowager’s illness is going."

"Have you not inquired at the Imperial Medical Bureau? It is said that the Empress Dowager’s illness has been controlled, and the Emperor will return soon."

Everyone knew that it was the Emperor who was actually ill, not the Empress Dowager, so hearing this, they just assumed the Emperor was getting better.

Several of those remaining from the Ducal Residence looked at the expressions on the faces of those in the court, and suddenly someone said, "I recently heard something, alas, it is a pity the Emperor never appears, what can be done?"

"Lord Chen, what is it?"

"What else but the matter of the Ducal Residence!"

"The matter of the Ducal Residence?" Lord Gu was taken aback and said, "Wasn't the matter of the Ducal Residence settled long ago? What more is there to say?"

"Alas! Was it settled? What is the Beiping Army even doing? Do you really think it was settled?" said another person.

Lord Chen, who had spoken earlier, said, "This matter is not so easily settled. The National Duke died suddenly, who knows what happened."

Everyone knew the National Duke's death was suspicious. Someone of his stature, how could he possibly commit suicide? He was still waiting to overturn the conviction in court the next day. It can be said that it was absolutely impossible for the National Duke to commit suicide.

But the rule of "the winner is king, the loser is vilified" never changes. Back then, the Prince of the First Rank fiercely annihilated the Ducal Residence, who would dare to speak against it?

The expressions on everyone's faces were slightly strange. Lord Jie came over and said, "Regardless of what, the National Duke's intent to usurp the throne was indeed not without reason. It has been so long, I think everyone should stop discussing it here."

Everyone knew Lord Jie was in the Emperor’s faction. Since the Emperor had not said that the Prince of the First Rank had wrongly killed someone, how could anyone else say otherwise?

Lord Cheng stepped forward, walked over to face Lord Jie, and laughed heartily, "Lord Jie, you can’t say it like that, can you? The case hasn’t been thoroughly examined, yet the National Duke died unjustly. We all know why the charges were brought."

"Oh?" Lord Jie seemed to say, "According to Lord Cheng, you want to overturn the case for the National Duke?"

"Oh my, I didn’t say that!" Lord Cheng quickly replied, "Since Lord Jie said so, I think perhaps today, since we are here to see the Emperor, it wouldn’t hurt to revisit the National Duke’s case, wouldn’t you say?"

"Hmph hmph..." Lord Jie sneered repeatedly, his laughter filled with anger.

"I think you are just trying to profit from the chaos, Lord Cheng. It is best not to resurrect matters that have already settled. The peace we have is not easy to come by, do not risk your old life for some petty benefits!"

"Lord Jie, what do you mean by that?" Lord Cheng’s expression instantly changed, angrily pointing at Jie Huanzhi’s nose, "Although my rank may not be as high as yours, Lord Jie, I am not someone you can insult at will."

Jie Huanzhi said indifferently, "Lord Cheng, you exaggerate. I was merely reminding you, do not take advantage of the Empress Dowager’s critical illness, and the Emperor being busy taking care of the Empress Dowager without time to attend to the court, to go astray."