Farmhouse 901

Chapter 901: Stripping in Public

"Spared?" Jin Fengzhao sneered, "This woman thinks she's above everyone, bumping into me in my own palace. If I spared her, wouldn't that mean any random Tom, Dick, or Harry could disrespect me? Do you think I would not punish you, too, you lowly maidservant, if you test me?"

Pale-faced, Auntie Li addressed Gu Youyou, "Auntie Li, thank you, but pleading with such a person is futile. Youyou has caused trouble; please don't get involved, Auntie Li, lest you get dragged down with me."

Auntie Li looked at Gu Youyou worriedly and dared not speak further.

Gu Youyou's words had enraged Jin Fengzhao, her face turning a shade of iron blue. She slapped Gu Youyou across the face, cursing, "A lowly female doctor dares to speak to me in such a way? Hmph, as for a reason, don't say you offended me today; even if you had said nothing at all, since when does my judgment require a reason? I can punish whomever I wish without justification. Take her away."

Gu Youyou's cheek burned with pain. She had never felt so infuriated since her arrival in this era.

It was the first time in both her lives that she had been slapped and humiliated.

It was bad enough coming from true royalty, but to add insult to injury from an imposter?

Gu Youyou was taken to a palace hall by Jin Fengzhao. The splendid Zhaoyang Hall had been her residence before her marriage; as Zhuzhao Country's most beloved princess, she retained the palace even after her wedding, returning for brief stays whenever she pleased.

Upon seeing Gu Youyou taken away by the Princess, Auntie Li hurriedly reported the incident to the Empress Dowager.

The Empress was about to leave when Auntie Li's panicked arrival startled her.

Auntie Li quickly paid her respects to the Empress Dowager and Empress, "Empress Dowager, Empress, bad news. Doctor Gu encountered the Princess on her way to Liuying Hall, and the Princess has taken her away."

Both the Empress and Empress Dowager were stunned; as far as they knew, there was no animosity between Gu Youyou and Jin Fengzhao.

"What happened? Explain clearly," the Empress Dowager commanded.

Auntie Li replied, "It might be because of the clothes Doctor Gu is wearing today. The Princess seemed very angry at the outfit, even hitting Doctor Gu, and now she has been taken away."

"Oh no," the Empress said, realizing, "Youyou is wearing the latest design from Manxiu Building. The Princess adores Manxiu's work; with her temper, she cannot stand to see someone wearing something she doesn't yet possess."

The Empress Dowager also grew anxious, urging, "Then go quickly, check on her at Zhaoyang Hall. Feng Zhao has a fierce temper; don't be too late, or the girl might not be there anymore."

The Empress acknowledged quickly and scurried off to Zhaoyang Hall with her attendants.

Still uneasy, the Empress Dowager ordered a Palace Attendant, "I'll go too. Only I can rein in Feng Zhao's temper."

...

Gu Youyou was held down by several matrons, as they stripped her clothes and gagged her.

Because Gu Youyou was particularly biting with her words, Jin Fengzhao, though not afraid of her, refrained from arguing with a commoner and simply ordered her mouth to be gagged.

This time, Gu Youyou was truly enraged. Being slapped and stripped in public was more humiliating than when Yu Jizi had broken her ribs.

An imposter indeed. As long as she survived today and made it out of this palace, she would make sure the woman's true colors were revealed.

Stripping her clothes? It was madness!

For a Princess to behave like a common street thug, such acts were befitting only of the riff-raff from the streets.

Chapter 902: Refreshing Worldviews

Gu Youyou let out a whimpering sound as Jin Fengzhao smiled with self-satisfaction.

"The clothes from Manxiu Building are something a commoner like you can afford to wear? I haven't even received my order yet, and you dare to show off in front of me, let's see how I deal with you."

Damn, when did I deliberately show off in front of you?

The wet nurse stripped off the clothes from Gu Youyou's body and placed them respectfully on a gold-trimmed tray, presenting them to Jin Fengzhao, saying, "Princess, here are the clothes."

This lunatic imposter princess, with a face full of smiles, fondled the fabric of the clothes, exclaiming with delight, "It is indeed Manxiu Building's Long E, the very set I ordered. Dress me in it."

Gu Youyou's eyes widened in disbelief... She was actually going to strip her clothes off in front of her, and wear them in front of her?

Gu Youyou considered herself devoid of such peculiar tastes. To wear clothes someone else had worn? Only if she were so poor that she had nothing to wear, or under some extraordinary circumstances.

Jin Fengzhao was much plumper than Gu Youyou, and naturally, the clothes looked a bit small on her, but it wasn't exactly ugly to say. It was obvious at a glance that they didn't fit properly.

For a poor family, wearing clothes that were too big or too small was quite normal; after all, they didn't have enough silver to constantly buy well-fitted clothes.

But for someone of the Princess's status and position, stepping out in a dress that did not fit was surely inviting ridicule, especially when it had been forcibly stripped from someone else.

Yet, she was complacent and asked the palace attendants beside her.

"How do I look in this outfit compared to that lowly commoner?"

The palace attendants answered in unison, "The Princess's grace is unparalleled. Compared to the Princess, that commoner is like mud to clouds."

Gu Youyou: "..."

There are eccentrics everywhere, especially in Beijing.

Seeing that Gu Youyou no longer resisted, Jin Fengzhao's eyes were even more filled with surprise. Perhaps this woman also thought that the clothes looked much better on herself than on Gu Youyou.

She narrowed her eyes and shouted, "Un-gag her."

The cloth that had been stuffed in Gu Youyou's mouth was removed, and though she had had plenty to say just a moment ago, she suddenly didn't know what would be appropriate.

This... what should she say now?

"How is it?" She turned around in a circle.

Gu Youyou’s mouth twitched as she said, "My opinion doesn’t count. Why don’t you wear it and take a stroll in the Imperial Garden?"

Jin Fengzhao’s face stiffened instantly, then her expression turned cold as she furiously said, "Pin this lowly commoner to the ground and bring the paddle."

Gu Youyou thought, damn, this woman’s moody and unpredictable behavior was impossible to understand.

There wasn’t anything especially wrong with what she said, was there? Then why did it bring on another beating with the board?

"Hey, hey, I haven’t offended you, and yet you’ve stripped off my clothes."

"Daring to say I don’t look good in this is offending me."

"I didn’t say you didn’t look good..."

"If you didn’t say I looked good, it means you think I don’t look good."

Gu Youyou: "..."

After being stripped of her clothes and left in her white undergarments, she was now being pinned to the ground. Two imposing wet nurses had already brought the paddle, ready to start smacking her on the rear, just awaiting Jin Fengzhao’s command.

A chill went through Gu Youyou’s heart, and she suddenly recalled the palace maidens in television dramas who were beaten to death with paddles. It was true that, for people like them, squashing a servant was as easy as stepping on an ant—no reason needed at all.

But Gu Youyou knew she would not die here today. Auntie Li would definitely have gone to the Empress Dowager by now, the Empress would be somewhere nearby too, her rescue was surely on its way.

Chapter 903: Outrage

At this moment, what she should do was to fight for time.

Gu Youyou cursed angrily, "Hit me? You fat woman, even if you hit me you won't bring any flair to it, if you've got the guts, take a stroll around the Imperial Garden and see how people laugh at you, you fatso. There's a saying that honest advice grates on the ears, I'm merely telling the truth."

Princess Zijin wasn't actually fat, she simply had a slightly fuller figure due to an excellent standard of living.

But any woman can't bear being called a fat woman.

Jin Fengzhao pointed at Gu Youyou with a trembling finger and said, "You... you dare to curse this princess?"

She was born with a golden key in her mouth, the most honored Princess of Zhuzhao Country, the eldest daughter of the late Empress. She had never suffered such grievance in all her years, and she quivered with rage, unable to utter a word for a long while.

Gu Youyou bit her teeth and said indifferently, "This isn't cursing, it's merely stating a fact. The palace attendants around you dare not speak the truth, claiming the ugly as beautiful, it's not flattering you, it's harming you, causing you to be laughed at when you step outside."

"Who dares to laugh at this princess?" Jin Fengzhao glared.

Gu Youyou sneered, "Right, no one dares to laugh at you, hence you have always been oblivious to what is called beauty and what is ugliness. Let me be the one to tell you then. Your current appearance, clad in clothes forcefully taken from me, do you think you look beautiful just by changing your attire? In actuality, you look even uglier than your true self now, this is what is called ugly."

She quite aptly mocked her for wielding power under the identity of Jin Zijin.

Even with the distinguished honor of being a princess, she couldn't change the vulgarity in her bones.

"You lowlife, shut your mouth," Jin Fengzhao roared, "Hit her! Beat her to death..."

"Stop!"

The moment Jin Fengzhao's voice fell, before the nannies could even move to act, the Empress had already arrived.

She looked at Gu Youyou who was pinned down on the ground, then turned to look at Jin Fengzhao.

At that moment, Jin Fengzhao was shaking with anger, seeing the Empress without any surprise, she continued to roar, "What are you waiting for? Do as I command, beat her, beat this lowlife to death!"

With the Empress present, how could the nannies dare to beat her? And the only princess who dared to scream in the presence of the Empress was her alone.

The nannies were in a difficult position, looking back and forth between Jin Fengzhao and the Empress.

The Empress sighed as she looked at Gu Youyou, and with a rare display of anger on her face, she said to Jin Fengzhao, "Princess Zijin, Youyou is merely a commoner. How has she offended you to warrant such a lethal abuse?"

She had obviously seen clearly, because at this moment, Gu Youyou was dressed in undergarments, while the too-small green clothes worn by the princess were indeed the attire Gu Youyou had been wearing before.

It was irrational and demeaning for a princess to fight with a commoner over clothes.

Since the day this woman was brought back, she had found her displeasing. Seeing that she was a girl, she let it go, so as not to be accused of intolerance, but had she been a boy... she would have certainly sought a way to kill her.

"This princess's affairs are none of your concern. She's not one of the concubines of the Harem under your command."

Jin Fengzhao's arrogance had surpassed Gu Youyou's expectations. She had not anticipated her utter lack of fear in front of the Empress, and from her proud demeanor, she seemed to hold the Empress in contempt.

"How dare you, Jin Fengzhao, are these words fitting for a princess to speak? Do not presume that, just because you're doted on by His Majesty and Sheng Qiaoyue, you can speak to this Empress in such a manner."

Chapter 904: Start Tearing

The Empress somewhat regretted that back when the Emperor ascended the throne with the support of the Ducal Residence, she hadn't taken the opportunity to kill this woman.

If she had acted at that time, even if the Emperor had known, he wouldn't have done anything to her.

But now it was different, she had married, and had her husband's family. Since she hadn't acted back then, there really was no point in moving against her now.

However, this woman's arrogance was infuriating, truly painful to watch.

"You?" Jin Fengzhao truly looked down on the Empress, her face full of disdain. "Had it not been for my mother's accident, do you think you could have become the Empress? You were merely a minor concubine in the Crown Prince Residence back then. Now you're the Empress, have you forgotten how you used to grovel before my mother?"

"What did you say?" The Empress was furious.

"You defy the norm and disrespect your elders. I still can't deal with you? Someone, go, invite the Emperor over..."

It was true she had been a concubine, but that was when the Xiao Family had great influence, and when the Emperor was still the Crown Prince, he married her, Xiao Qinqin. Xiao Qinqin was his primary wife, and she had nothing to say about that. But that was all so many years ago.

Besides, she hadn't been a minor concubine for long and had never groveled before Xiao Qinqin.

When she entered the Crown Prince Residence, the Xiao Family had already fallen from grace, so the then Crown Prince had to seek other powerful backers, which led him to the Ducal Residence.

After she entered the residence, the Emperor favored her greatly. He spent every night in her room, nearly infuriating Xiao Qinqin to death.

So all things considered, aside from the position of primary wife which Xiao Qinqin had secured first, she hadn't lost to Xiao Qinqin in any way.

Jin Fengzhao, arrogant and haughty, snorted coldly: "Just wait, when Father comes, let him see with his own eyes how his wife bullies the daughter of his rightful wife."

The Empress and Jin Fengzhao were now thoroughly at odds, and Gu Youyou, though she was the person involved, was completely forgotten by everyone, becoming an unnoticed onlooker.

Hearing Jin Fengzhao's words, the Empress rolled her eyes, almost fainting from frustration.

Jin Fengzhao was the only person in the palace who could infuriate the Empress to such a degree.

This woman had entered the palace as a child and invariably accused her stepmother of bullying whenever she thought she was about to be disciplined.

Once during an early morning court session, she even ran to Taihe Hall and declared it in front of all the court officials.

Everyone said she was speaking childishly, yet they believed her.

Reflecting on various incidents, the Empress was so enraged that she lost all reason.

She shouted loudly: "Fine, fine, I want to see if I, a duly enthroned Empress, can deal with you. Someone, strip the clothes off her back. Shameless, stealing the clothes of commoners to wear yourself, I want to see just how thick your face really is."

That Xiao Qinqin could give birth to such a daughter, she could never have dreamed of it.

"How dare you, Jin Yushu, if you dare lay a hand on me, I'll tell Father... Ah, what are you standing around for, drag these lowly maids away for me!"

Clearly, the Empress had better resources than the Princess, having more people was an advantage, and the palace maidens and matrons all joined the fray, causing chaos in Zhaoyang Hall.

Gu Youyou was completely ignored, Jin Fengzhao's maidens and matrons were all fighting; to avoid getting hurt, she quickly hid in a corner.

It seemed as though she had caused this issue, but in reality, it had little to do with her.

Seeing the Empress and Jin Fengzhao's behavior, it was clear this was not their first fight. Even if it hadn't been for her, they would have found another reason to clash.

Chapter 905: Qingluan Jade Pendant

Jin Fengzhao was pinned down on a soft couch, her clothes being ripped apart by the Empress's people, looking utterly disheveled. The cries of the various women in Zhaoyang Hall mingled together, creating a magnificent chaos.

Suddenly, a green object flew out, falling crisply to the ground.

The palace maidens and matrons continued, but the Empress's face had already changed color.

What did she see?

Qingluan Jade?

How could the Qingluan Jade be in Jin Fengzhao’s hands?

No, no, this couldn’t be possible.

For years she had coveted the Qingluan Jade, which represented the lineage of the Jin Imperial Clan and was to be passed only to the Empress and the Crown Princess Consort. Yet, it disappeared with Xiao Qinqin and couldn’t be found. Unexpectedly, it was on Jin Fengzhao.

"Stop, all of you stop," the Empress yelled, her eyes wide as she bent down to pick up the green jade pendant.

Gu Youyou held her breath, never expecting that in the struggle, her clothes would tear and the Qingluan Jade pendant she had hidden and carried with her would fall out.

The Empress recognized the item, which now posed a serious problem.

Holding the Qingluan Jade pendant, the Empress’s face was filled with shock, her voice tinged with disbelief. Gradually, her expression turned terrifying.

"It’s in your hands? How could it be in your hands? This item is passed from mother-in-law to daughter-in-law, not daughter-to-daughter. You, a princess, dared to hide it?"

This represented a status within the Imperial Family, only to be held by three people.

The Empress Dowager, the Empress, or the Crown Princess Consort.

The former Empress Dowager did not pass this item to the Empress but directly to Xiao Qinqin, who was the Crown Princess Consort then, angering her immensely.

Gu Youngy’s heart raced, previously aligned with the Empress, but due to this jade pendant, her betrayal was imminent.

All she could hope for was the Emperor’s swift arrival, and the Empress Dowager too—ah, why hadn’t the Empress Dowager come? Was fate truly against her?

"This..." Jin Fengzhao, disheveled, her clothes torn and hair in disarray, was bewildered as she saw the terrifying expression on the Empress’s face. She didn’t recognize the item at all.

Right, she didn’t recognize it; it wasn’t hers. It fell out from inside these clothes; it belonged to that commoner.

Jin Fengzhao scoffed, "Why are you glaring at me so fiercely? This isn’t mine. It fell from these clothes, belonging to that commoner."

The Empress froze, recalling that the item indeed fell from the clothes.

Now, it was her turn to be confused.

How could the Qingluan Jade Pendant be in Gu Youyou’s hands?

Gu Youyou had already prepared her explanation and, seeing the Empress looking her way, hastily said, "Your Majesty, this item indeed belongs to this commoner, I don’t know... is there a problem?"

Her confused appearance seemed even more bewildered than both the Empress and Jin Fengzhao.

The Empress, looking at Gu Youyou’s innocent expression, gradually calmed down.

Indeed, the item had disappeared with Xiao Qinqin years ago, and considering Xiao Qinqin had been cast out for many years, it was plausible for it to have circulated among the common folk.

She had been too agitated.

The Empress’s expression slowly softened, asking Gu Youyou, "Where did you obtain this jade pendant?"

Gu Youyou honestly replied, "In the past, when this commoner was in Lingnan, I went up the mountain to gather herbs and saw this jade pendant with a boater. Seeing its excellent quality, I spent some silver to buy it from him."

"And from where did that boater acquire it?"

The Empress remained agitated but then thought that Gu Youyou buying the jade pendant didn’t necessarily mean she knew its origin, so she changed her question to, "Where is this boater located?"

She was determined to find out the full story.

Chapter 906: The Origin of the Jade Pendant

Gu Youyou was genuinely afraid that the Empress would have someone inquire further, so she hastily replied, "The commoner suspects that such a fine quality Jade Pendant could not have been afforded by the Boater, which is why when the commoner first purchased it, she did indeed ask the Boater about the origins of this Jade Pendant."

"Where did it come from?" the Empress asked eagerly.

What exactly had happened to Xiao Qinqin in those days and her subsequent whereabouts, her escape to Qi Mountain, were the things he had always wanted to know.

Gu Youyou said, "He mentioned that it was given to him by someone who took his boat but did not have the Silver to pay for the fare, claiming that the Jade Pendant would serve to cover the boat fare."

The Empress’s old maidservant, Li Momo, whispered something in her ear, after which the Empress slightly nodded her head.

Others might not have heard, but Gu Youyou heard it crystal clear.

What Li Momo told the Empress was that Xiao Qinqin indeed had fled to Lingnan back in the day. She was relentlessly pursued and had to endure hardships, living in the open without shelter. The possibility of her taking a boat without the Silver to pay for it made it very likely that what Gu Youyou had said was true.

After hearing these words, Gu Youyou breathed a sigh of relief, as she had passed the test with the Empress.

Moreover, this Jade Pendant belonged to Jin Zijin, signifying his identity.

Regardless of whether he wanted it back or not, she had always intended to return it to him.

Now, in her cowardice, in an attempt to save her life, she had sold his Jade Pendant.

Oh, that's not right; it wasn't she who sold it. After all, she spoke the truth about Jin Zijin who hadn't brought Silver and had given the Jade Pendant to the Boater as payment for the boat fare. She indeed purchased it back with real money.

"The Emperor has arrived, the Empress Dowager has arrived..."

Just at that moment, a eunuch's voice, neither too sharp nor too dull, drew out from outside the hall.

Shortly after, both the Emperor and the Empress Dowager simultaneously appeared in Zhaoyang Hall.

The Empress, holding the Qingluan Jade Pendant, seemed somewhat at a loss.

Caught in the excitement of the moment, she hadn't thought of how to broach the subject with the Emperor and Empress Dowager.

The people in Zhaoyang Hall knelt down in unison, greeting the Emperor and the Empress Dowager.

"We greet Your Majesty the Emperor, Empress Dowager!"

The Emperor, looking at everyone, saw clearly that there had been a fierce engagement here.

Aside from the Empress, not a single person was presentable.

And there was a woman, dressed only in her undergarments; appearing like that before the Emperor was a grave offense.

Gu Youyou thought to herself that she was indeed unlucky today.

But though Jin Fengzhao was not just in her undergarments, her disheveled appearance was even worse than Gu Youyou's—the garments that she had been wearing were now torn to shreds, hanging from her body.

The Emperor, seeing this scene, was somewhat taken aback and said sternly, "Rise, all of you."

His gaze then fell on the Empress's hand, and his eyes abruptly darkened.

"Why is this Qingluan Jade Pendant in the Empress's hand?"

Since the Emperor had brought it up, the Empress dared not keep holding it and hastened to hand over the Qingluan Jade Pendant to the Emperor.

She thought: Since this item should be passed down through sons and not daughters, handing it over to the Emperor could mean that it would be returned to her.

"Your Majesty, the consort has only just seen this Jade Pendant herself. According to Doctor Gu, it is something she happened to purchase. A person who took a boat without Silver to pay the fare gave this Jade Pendant to the Boater as payment, and Doctor Gu saw it and bought the Jade Pendant with a considerable sum," the Empress said.

The Emperor turned his gaze to Gu Youyou and asked, "Is that so?"

Since Gu Youyou did not lie but merely withheld who gave the Jade Pendant to the Boater, she replied without a change of expression, "Your Majesty, it is indeed so."

Since the Jade Pendant had not passed through the hands of the Empress Dowager or that of its former owner, she did not recognize it.

She felt that at such a critical juncture, focusing on some Jade Pendant that appeared out of nowhere was really improper; addressing the current situation should be the priority.

Chapter 907: Continue Tearing

"Oh my, Emperor, let’s discuss this Jade Pendant another time. First, let’s see what all this is about. Feng Zhao, just look at you; aren’t you a sight? Go and change those torn clothes already. And Youyou, where are your clothes? Someone, fetch Doctor Gu a set of clothes—how can we maintain any dignity like this?"

The Empress Dowager busied herself with cleaning up the mess, while the Emperor and Empress still had their minds entirely on the Qingluan Jade Pendant in hand.

The Emperor’s unfathomable gaze was fixed on Gu Youyou, which made her feel uneasy inside.

Despite being a scoundrel, this old Emperor was incredibly shrewd.

Gu Youyou had been thoroughly seen through by him the last time, leaving no chance to deceive him. So what about this time?

She spoke the unequivocal truth, wouldn’t it be too much if he still didn’t believe?

Jin Fengzhao felt deeply wronged today; she had never feared the Empress, and yet today, the Empress had humiliated her in front of her own entourage.

Immediately, she clung on to the Emperor’s sleeve, crying out incessantly.

"Father Emperor, the stepmother is bullying me; look, she’s had someone tear my clothes to shreds..."

She always referred to the Empress as "stepmother," though she ought to call her "mother"; indeed, a strange title, and for the Empress, a great insult.

But without a word from the Emperor, no one could do anything to her.

Jin Fengzhao’s arrogance was deliberately indulged by the Emperor. Some say that the Crown Princess Consort’s death had always haunted the Emperor, hence his partiality to the Princess.

The Emperor harbored enduring love. During his days of hardship, the Xiao Family had risked the lives of the old general and the eldest son to help him. The Princess was just a girl after all; favoring her a little was harmless, so outsiders did not find it improper.

However, the Emperor’s behavior was unusual today; usually, he would have coaxed his eldest daughter more diligently.

But today, he only held the Jade Pendant, his gaze fixed solely upon it.

To find that the Emperor ignored his disheveled, crying Princess, could that be possible?

"Father Emperor?" the Princess tugged at the Emperor’s clothes, "Father Emperor, what’s wrong with you? Look at your daughter, see how she has bullied me. Father Emperor, it’s all because Feng Zhao lost her birth mother when she was young. If my mother were still alive, she would never have allowed the stepmother to bully me!"

The Empress's face turned an ashen hue, barely restraining herself from tearing the insolent girl's mouth apart.

When Xiao Qinqin was alive, she had suppressed her, and now even in death, she had left this curse to trouble her. The Empress truly regretted not having had the heart to kill her back then.

"You bully the weak, disrespect your elders, and behave despotically. As an elder and as the reigning Empress of this palace, it is only right that I teach you a lesson," she said.

"I'm merely disciplining a lowborn, how does that concern you? It's just that you resent me because, unlike you who was once a concubine, my birth mother was the principal wife!"

"Shut your mouth."

The Empress was on the verge of striking her with a slap.

"Hmph, I hit the nail on the head."

The Empress Dowager, feeling her head ache from the noise, stamped her cane and bellowed, "Enough, all of you be quiet!"

The Empress Dowager's authority was still respectable; at the sound of her cane, both the Empress and the Princess fell silent.

With a frown, she pointed at the Empress and the Princess and said, "Look at yourselves, what are you doing? You, as an elder, do not behave as one should. Regardless, you should not have allowed the Palace Attendants to tear her clothes. She is, after all, a Princess and the most esteemed in Zhuzhao Country. And you—at your age, not a child of three. You've been married into the Xiao Family for over a decade, yet have not given them a single child. Do you intend to end their lineage? Had you the capability to bear children, they would be of marriageable age by now. Just look at yourself, even Jiujiu is more sensible than you are."

Chapter 908: Who Becomes the Master of the World

The Empress and the Elder Princess were obviously not convinced.

However, the fact that the Empress had stood in the Imperial Palace for so many years without faltering wasn't solely because she had the Ducal Residence backing her.

Aside from being driven to distraction by Jin Fengzhao, she was rather sensible under normal circumstances. She knew clearly what should be done and what should not.

At this point, when the Empress Dowager scolded them both, she instinctively shut her mouth and stepped aside.

For Jin Fengzhao, not having children was her lifelong regret, one could criticize her for anything else, but not about her childlessness.

Had it been anyone else, she might have attacked the person on the spot; it was only because it was the Empress Dowager who spoke these words that she managed to restrain herself.

She was foolish, and instantly rebutted.

"How could it be my fault for not bearing children? What can I do about it, I also wish to have a child, but I just can't conceive. The Imperial Physician said that my poor health since childhood is the reason I can't bear children. And why was my health poor from childhood? Wasn't that because my mother suffered hardships while she was pregnant with me, and who caused this?"

Bringing up the deceased Xiao Qinqin was always her strong suit, and a weapon that could immediately soften the hearts of the Empress Dowager and the Emperor.

"Still, you shouldn't harm your Prince Consort's other concubines' children, you should at least leave some lineage for others. What would people say about you, and how would they speak of your father, the Emperor? All those stories from the previous dynasty, they've reached this old woman's ears."

Jin Fengzhao felt incredibly wronged by this; it was all because she couldn't bear children.

A moment later, her gaze turned fierce, and she yelled loudly at the Empress Dowager, "What do you know? The Prince Consort's concubines all hate me to the bone. If I let them bear children, wouldn't they turn the world upside down? If everything in the house were to be inherited by the concubine's children, what would be left for me? Would I even have a way to survive?"

"What nonsense are you talking about?" the Empress Dowager's face turned livid with anger, her body trembling.

Granny Li hurried to help the Empress Dowager sit down.

The Empress Dowager, pointing at Jin Fengzhao with her walking stick, said, "As long as our Jin Royal Family still rules this world, who would dare to bully you? The current Emperor is your father, the future Emperor will be your brother, your own nephew. Even if you don't have one of your own, no one will dare to bully you."

"Hmph, naturally, the Emperor is my father, and no one can bully me while the Emperor reigns, but what will happen when the Emperor is no longer here, which brother will then become the Emperor? Jin Xiaoran? Just look at the stepmother's face and you'll know. They aren't tearing me apart alive, and if they can refrain from doing that, they're already doing my father a favor. Can I still expect him to support me?"

"You... you..."

This really was getting more and more outrageous; the Empress Dowager couldn't get a coherent sentence out for a long time.

On the other hand, the Emperor seemed as if he hadn't heard a word they said, as though he'd locked himself in another world.

In that world, there was that wisp of ethereal shadow, seemingly far away in the heavens yet appearing so close at hand. Filled with boundless sorrow and regret...

The Emperor's eyes were somewhat moist. For many years, he had always kept his emotions well under control, and no one could guess what was on his mind. Only in the quiet of the night did he suddenly remember something.

Gu Youyou put on the clothes delivered by the Palace Maiden and stood in the corridor of Zhaoyang Hall, attempting to reduce her presence as much as possible.

Jin Fengzhao's actions had undoubtedly overturned her worldview.

If it were a normal family, their quarrels might be understandable.

Chapter 909: Punishment

The Imperial Family has always valued etiquette and propriety, seeing a Princess behave so arrogantly and unguardedly is indeed... quite rare.

Moreover, the Empress Dowager spoke rightly, she is not a child anymore. She is the same age as Jin Zijin, thirty years old, yet she still acts as whimsically as a child.

Could this really be a result of being spoiled, spoiled by the Emperor?

The Emperor does not seem like an incompetent ruler, why would he do this?

In order to make up for his neglect towards Xiao Qinqin, he became a powerful father, allowing his daughter to act willfully.

But, Feng Zhao knew very well in her heart that her reliance was merely on the Emperor's favor. If one day the Emperor passes away, and the throne goes to the Empress's son, her good days would come to an end.

But who is to blame? Knowing that things change, yet deliberately offending those who should not be offended.

She was just a harmless girl; if she could have kept to herself, the Empress, a woman capable of great things, might not treat her kindly, but wouldn't trouble herself to make her life difficult.

Gu Youyou suddenly felt fortunate that the child was switched years ago. If not for the switch, today's Jin Zijin might have been like her, a second-generation heir unable to firmly hold onto power even if the Emperor passed the throne to him.

"Moning, say something, look at her, see what you've spoiled her into."

The Empress Dowager suddenly felt helpless and had to ask the Emperor for assistance.

The Emperor paused, shifting his gaze away from the Jade Pendant, clenched his hand tightly around it.

He faced the Empress Dowager, speaking gravely, "Mother speaks rightly; it's my fault, I spoiled her. The Princess has shown great disrespect to the Empress Dowager. Come, take her to Zongrenfu to reflect properly."

Upon hearing this, everyone was stunned.

What's going on?

The Princess had disrespected the Empress Dowager not just once or twice, there were even more serious instances, and the Emperor had at most only reprimanded her, but when had he ever locked her up?

Locked up, and in Zongrenfu?

Feng Zhao could hardly believe her ears.

Impossible? No, it couldn't be true.

The Emperor really wanted to lock her up in Zongrenfu?

"Father, I am Feng Zhao, what's wrong with you?"

Could it be that the Emperor had encountered some troubles, and was in a bad mood, thus treating her this way?

The Emperor did not look at her but only told the Empress Dowager calmly, "Mother speaks extremely rightly, Feng Zhao is not young anymore, yet still acts willfully and disregards elders; we can't treat her as a child and indulge her. Since I can't teach her well, and Xiao Jinfei can't teach her well either, it's better to send her to Zongrenfu to properly learn some rules. Whenever she understands and learns, she can then come out."

The Empress paused for a moment before a smile gradually appeared on her cheeks.

She had long noticed the Emperor's filial nature, the older the Empress Dowager got, the more filial the Emperor became. She dared to disrespect the Empress Dowager in front of the Emperor; it serves her right.

Of course, it related to the incident earlier where someone tore her dress and angered her, she deserved it.

However, sending her to Zongrenfu seemed to be a harsh punishment.

And Feng Zhao was left terrified.

Her only reliance had been the Emperor's limitless affection, and now that the Emperor wanted to lock her up in Zongrenfu, whom could she depend on?

Others would be good enough not to kick her while she's down.

But even the Empress Dowager felt it went too far; Zongrenfu was the Imperial Family's prison, locking the Princess in Zongrenfu would not look good for the Imperial Family's reputation.

Chapter 910: It's Time Now

Empress Dowager then said to the Emperor, "Moning, perhaps we should let the matter of Zongrenfu pass. It doesn't matter much if this old woman gets talked back to a few times; I won't live many more days anyway. But locking her up in Zongrenfu, how unsightly would that be for the Imperial Family's reputation? How about this—send her back to Jinxiu City with a few palace maidens, and order her to study at home. Whenever she learns her lesson, then she can come out."

"Father Emperor!" Jin Fengzhao now looked terrified and hopeful as she gazed at the Emperor.

Zongrenfu—if she were locked up in Zongrenfu, not to mention whether she would suffer there, just this confinement alone would disgrace her completely inside and out.

The Emperor still wore an expressionless face, his voice low but exceptionally clear.

"What are you waiting for? Take her away."

Great Eunuch Wan Decheng, who was very familiar with the Emperor, seeing the situation, knew the Emperor was truly angry and not just playing around.

He was indeed planning to lock up the Princess in Zongrenfu.

He sighed, stepped forward to support Jin Fengzhao, and said, "Princess, the Emperor is truly angry this time. Let's go."

"No, I won't go. Father Emperor, what's wrong with you? You would never treat me this way, would you?" She pointed at the Empress and shouted loudly, "It's you, you vile woman, what have you done to my father?"

"Insolence, this is outright rebellion, take her away immediately, Wan Decheng."

The Empress stamped her foot in anger.

"I won’t go, let me go, how dare you lay hands on me, do you want to die?"

"Silence her mouth," the furious Empress commanded.

"Jin Yushu, you will not die a good death... Ah, mmm..."

At last, the world was quiet.

"Consort Sheng has arrived!"

Somehow Consort Sheng heard about this and rushed over. As she entered Zhaoyang Hall, she saw the chaotic scene.

Princess Jin Fengzhao, being held by two eunuchs with a piece of white cloth stuffed in her mouth, kept moaning at her.

Consort Sheng glanced at her, intending to remove the white cloth from her mouth, then retracted her hand.

She hurriedly walked up to the Emperor, lifted her skirt, and knelt down, "Your Majesty, what has happened to Feng Zhao? What has she done to make Your Majesty so angry?"

The Emperor looked down at her indifferently and said, "The time has come."

Hearing this, Consort Sheng immediately fell silent.

Great Eunuch Wan then signaled the two eunuchs, who immediately took Jin Fengzhao away to Zongrenfu.

What kind of riddle were the Emperor and Consort Sheng playing? It made the Empress feel uneasy.

Jin Fengzhao's misdemeanor wasn't caused solely by the Emperor; that vile woman Sheng Qiaoyue had regarded that little vile girl as a deity, raising the stakes. The Emperor punishing Jin Fengzhao today, Sheng Qiaoyue should not be this calm; she should be drowning in tears, pleading.

That had always been the custom.

Jin Fengzhao was taken to Zongrenfu, and the palace maidens and eunuchs serving her couldn't escape punishment either. They were all sent to Yeting Palace to perform labor.

Now it seemed the incident with Jin Fengzhao was resolved, and everyone then turned their attention to Gu Youyou standing awkwardly in the corner.

If truth be told, it was she who had triggered today's events.

Empress Dowager sighed and said, "Youyou, you have indeed been wronged today. Feng Zhao is domineering, and the dress is from Manxiu Building, which is quite valuable. Later I will have someone compensate you with Silver."

Gu Youyou was startled and hurriedly said, "Empress Dowager, there's no need. I am also one of the silent partners at Manxiu Building. The dress is not expensive if only the cost is considered; I can simply make another one."