

Longevity 151

Chapter 151: Another Reward for Zhao Feng! Xia Wuqie's Shock! (Part 3)

For Ying Zheng, his heart was a tempest of complex emotions. He was a person for whom affection ran deep.

How could he possibly forget the mother-son bond they once shared? But the memory of being betrayed by the person he trusted most brought a bone-piercing pain with every thought. So, with her so close at hand, Ying Zheng's heart was gripped by a deep hesitation. He wanted to see her, yet he was afraid; he wanted to see her, yet he was filled with hate.

Ying Zheng stood outside the grand hall. Dozens of attendants knelt before it, none daring to make a sound. Zhao Gao stood behind him, equally silent. After a long pause, Ying Zheng finally made his decision and strode through the doors.

Upon entering, his eyes immediately fell upon the vacant-faced Concubine Zhao. She sat motionless in her seat, as if her soul had fled her body. Several palace maids were in attendance by her side.

Ying Zheng waved his hand. "You may leave."

The palace maids immediately withdrew.

Looking at Concubine Zhao, sitting there in a daze, Ying Zheng's expression grew even more complicated.

"After all these years, you haven't changed much."

"Queen Mother," Ying Zheng said slowly.

Although he spoke the word, it was not the intimate 'Mother' of his childhood, but the formal 'Queen Mother,' a title that betrayed the distance in his tone.

Hearing his voice, ripples of emotion finally disturbed the placid surface of Concubine Zhao's expressionless face. When her eyes fell upon Ying Zheng, they filled with fear, anger, and hatred.

"You killed my children."

"I'll kill you... I'm going to kill you!"

Concubine Zhao flew into a frenzy, lunging toward Ying Zheng. Her face, twisted with insane hatred, was like that of a mad demon. She was not looking at her own flesh and blood, but at an irreconcilable foe.

As Concubine Zhao charged, Ying Zheng did not dodge. His eyes still held a look of disappointment. When she swung her hand at him, he caught her wrist, gripping it tightly. His grasp was filled with the remnants of familial love, but even more with anger.

"Even now," he said, his eyes filled with despair, "are you still unrepentant?"

"I'll kill you! I'm going to kill you!" Concubine Zhao screamed madly.

"Plotting a rebellion is an unpardonable sin," Ying Zheng said coldly. "If you commit such an act, you must face the consequences. The only reason I have not killed you is out of consideration for our bond as mother and son. It was your crime, your rebellion, yet you hate me? What right do you have to hate me?"

He was truly and deeply disappointed by her actions. But Concubine Zhao refused to listen, thrashing wildly as if she wanted to tear him to pieces.

"It seems," Ying Zheng thought with boundless disappointment, his gaze growing colder, "I truly should not have come to see you. Unrepentant and beyond saving."

With a flick of his wrist, he threw Concubine Zhao to the ground. He turned and strode with purpose toward the hall's exit.

"Zhao Gao," Ying Zheng called out.

"Your servant is here," Zhao Gao responded at once.

"Arrange for the Tai Hou to be sent back to Yong City. Without my royal edict, she is not to take a single step outside the Yong City Royal Palace," Ying Zheng commanded in a chilled tone.

"Your servant obeys," Zhao Gao said, his heart trembling as he accepted the order.

Ying Zheng cast one last look back, his imperious demeanor tinged with a deep bitterness, before turning and leaving the grand hall.

After he left, the crazed Concubine Zhao gradually calmed down. Watching his retreating figure, a flicker of turmoil appeared in her lifeless eyes, though whether it was guilt or something else was impossible to say.

As Ying Zheng exited the side hall, he came face to face with Xia Wuqie.

"You saw her?" Xia Wuqie asked immediately. Having heard the news of Concubine Zhao's arrival, he had naturally come as well.

Ying Zheng waved his hand, and Zhao Gao and the surrounding attendants all withdrew. With no outsiders present, he slowly replied, "I saw her."

"How was it?" Xia Wuqie asked.

"She remains unrepentant. She treats me like an enemy," Ying Zheng sighed.

"Alas," Xia Wuqie sighed in return, not knowing what comfort he could possibly offer. In these circumstances, the bond between Ying Zheng and his mother was likely beyond repair. The only chance for reconciliation would be if Concubine Zhao were to admit her own wrongdoing.

But from the very beginning, when Ying Zheng had issued the decree to have her two illegitimate children executed, Concubine Zhao never believed she was at fault. Instead, she felt Ying Zheng was too cruel for not sparing the young boys' lives.

However, as someone who had witnessed the events firsthand, Xia Wuqie knew the truth of the situation. After Lao Ai's capture, the two young boys had also been taken into custody. Seeing Concubine Zhao's desperate pleas, Ying Zheng had actually felt a pang of pity. But a single sentence from those two children sealed their fate, forcing Ying Zheng's hand. For any ruler, the decision would have been the same.

They had said that when they grew up, they would seize Ying Zheng's throne and avenge their father. They believed the throne was theirs.

The idea was utterly laughable. Two bastards, daring to aspire to the throne of Qin. In the end, it was not just Lao Ai who was delusional, but Concubine Zhao as well. Her status came from her son; her son's did not come from her. Two bastards without a drop of royal blood, and they dreamed of seizing the throne. It was preposterous.

In an age where royal authority depended entirely on bloodline, Great Qin would never have tolerated Lao Ai's existence, even if he had successfully stormed the palace and captured Ying Zheng. The royal lineage of Qin had to be pure. This was an unshakeable belief of the Old Qin People.

Therefore, when Lao Ai rebelled, Ying Zheng had used a Royal Edict to call upon the entire population of Xianyang to suppress the traitors. Countless people of Qin rose up and annihilated the rebels. Even if Lao Ai had managed to seize the throne by military force, the entire state of Qin would have risen in rebellion, and the final result would have been annexation by other kingdoms. Of course, such an outcome was merely a fanciful joke.

"Father-in-law," Ying Zheng said with a bitter smile, "it seems she will never repent. I held out a sliver of hope, but I was wrong."

"So be it," Xia Wuqie said, shaking his head. "I thought that after so many years she might have changed. It seems I expected too much of her. I shall go see her. After all, we were once acquainted."

With that, Xia Wuqie headed toward the side hall.

Upon entering, he found Concubine Zhao slumped on the floor in a daze.

"Concubine Zhao," Xia Wuqie called out.

At the sound of his voice, she turned her head dazedly. Upon seeing him, a flash of fear crossed her eyes.

"It wasn't me... It wasn't me who killed you!" she shrieked in terror. "Xia Dong'er, go away! Go away!"

Clearly, the sight of Xia Wuqie had triggered some traumatic memory.

Hearing this, Xia Wuqie's brow furrowed. He strode swiftly to her side. "What did you say?"

"It wasn't me who killed you... It wasn't me..." Concubine Zhao trembled, stumbling backward as she stared at him.

"Dong'er is dead?" Xia Wuqie's eyes widened as he stared intently at her.

Although Concubine Zhao's words were fragmented, Xia Wuqie understood their terrifying implication. My daughter is dead? That had to be what she meant.

"It wasn't me... It wasn't me..." Concubine Zhao kept repeating the phrase, perhaps not even conscious of what she was saying.

Outside the hall, hearing Xia Wuqie's raised voice, Ying Zheng quickly ran back in. He heard Concubine Zhao muttering, "It wasn't me, it wasn't me," and was completely baffled.

Xia Wuqie's eyes turned red as he fought for composure. But in the end, he finally restrained himself. He released Concubine Zhao's hand and, collecting himself, said, "It's nothing!"

Ying Zheng looked at him in shock. I only just arrived, but I know this isn't so simple. I know my father-in-law's character; Xia Wuqie would never be so agitated over something trivial.

"Are you sure it's nothing?" Ying Zheng asked, unconvinced.

"It's nothing," Xia Wuqie insisted with a strained laugh. "Don't overthink it. Your mother... she has truly gone mad." Only he knew the bitterness behind that smile.

Ying Zheng glanced at Concubine Zhao, then back at Xia Wuqie, but ultimately said no more.

"Father-in-law," Ying Zheng said, "the ones who abducted her this time were from the Zhao state. The conspirators have been captured, and I must still interrogate them. If there is anything else you wish to ask her, do it now."

"I have nothing to ask," Xia Wuqie replied with a faint smile, maintaining his composure. "Go on with your interrogation."

Seeing this, Ying Zheng nodded and turned to leave.