

## **Noble Wife 411**

### Chapter 411 Troubled Guests

The news of Qing Mei being driven away was brought back by Granny Miao.

“My lady, as per your instructions, I informed an old Granny about the incident where Third Lady mysteriously injured her foot. Afterwards, the eunuch who overheard our conversation went to report it to Lord Jing. After finishing his lunch, Lord Jing found an excuse to visit Third Lady. Later, at her place, he threw Qing Mei out. I heard that Qing Mei was still lying there, unable to move. Eventually, Second Young Master’s men took her to the East Mansion.”

Granny Miao reported, with a smile on her face.

The people would be delighted when something went wrong around Third Lady.

They were pleased by anything that caused a rift between Third Lady and Second Young Master. Granny Miao especially enjoyed such situations.

After being beaten yesterday, Qing Mei ended up staying with Qu Qiuyan, representing the desires of Qu Mingcheng. It was obvious that Qu Qiuyan felt frustrated by having to keep a maid who was clearly disloyal to her.

Today, when she injured her foot, it seemed like Qu Mingcheng was keeping a close eye on her, fearing that Qu Qiuyan would seek revenge from Lord Jing on her behalf. But now Lord Jing had visited, Qu Qiuyan would not tolerate it any longer. It was inevitable that she would cast Qing Mei aside.

No one would actually like to have a maid like Qing Mei in their hands.

Nobody wanted to use a maid who was clearly unfaithful.

Qu Qiuyan’s actions were influenced by this situation, and it was certain that she would act in the same way!

Qu Mingcheng's protectiveness towards the maid piqued Qu Moying's interest even more. Qu Mingcheng's recent actions were indeed quite suspicious, raising doubts about the maid's background.

It seemed necessary for her to investigate the specific origins of this maid. There were only a few people involved in the transactions of the Eastern Mansion, and the origin of this Qing Mei was highly questionable.

However, she didn't want to personally conduct the investigation. It would be more appropriate for Qu Qiuyan to do it.

"If Second Young Master of the East Mansion seeks medical treatment for Qing Mei or any other related matters, make sure to spread the news to the West Mansion. They must be fully informed," Qu Moying said, pausing briefly.

Since Qu Qiuyan didn't like this maid, Qu Moying decided to test her further. It would depend on how Qu Qiuyan would handle the situation. This time, even Qing Ju, who was by Qu Qiuyan's side, was at risk. Her resentment towards Qing Mei would only increase. With Qing Ju around, Qing Mei wouldn't fare well with Qu Qiuyan.

This maid was too suspicious. While she had been by Qu Qiuyan's side all along, it wouldn't raise too much suspicion. But now that Qu Qiuyan had pushed her out and Qu Mingcheng took over, the situation seemed increasingly unusual.

Qu Mingcheng was young, and Qu Zhizhen had always had ideas about him. He wouldn't want such a distracting maid by his side...

"I understand. There are a few trusted maids in the Eastern Mansion now. They will be the first to know about Qing Mei's news," Granny Miao responded promptly.

Qu Moying nodded. Her fingers lightly plucked the strings of the Qin, but her attention was elsewhere, her gaze serene.

"My lady, there has been some restlessness from First Lady these past few days," Granny Miao added.

“What do you mean?” Qu Moying’s finger pressed on the strings, abruptly halting the melody.

“Yesterday, there was an incident in the West Mansion. Madam Luo from the East Mansion secretly sent someone to visit First Lady, bringing a large bag of silk threads, brocades, and similar items,” Granny Miao explained. She had been keeping an eye on Yu and First Lady Qu Xuexin. Although they were currently confined, Granny Miao felt that they were restless, and who knew when they would cause trouble again.

“Embroidery threads, you say?” Qu Moying raised an eyebrow.

“Yes, embroidery threads and such. I specifically inquired about the embroidery workshop in the East Mansion. They said that First Madam’s maid took away a large bag of silk threads, claiming that First Madam wanted to focus on embroidering something and needed to concentrate. Because the embroideries are delicate and require a considerable amount of thread, they even brought in some additional supplies.”

Granny Miao explained after giving it some thought.

“Continue to keep an eye on them. Let’s see what beautiful things First Madam can embroider and whom they are intended for,” Qu Moying said, her lips curling with a hint of mockery. Qu Xuexin was persistent indeed, so she would let her try. Their own household had limited involvement with the East Mansion. If Qu Xuexin had such intentions, she was more than willing to lend a hand.

The small Qu Mansion was entangled with various powers, and she could now understand her father’s intentions more clearly...

For now, her primary focus remained on the Yue’s Gold Pavilion.

After Granny Miao left, Qu Moying patiently waited for news from the Yue’s Gold Pavilion. As expected, she didn’t have to wait long. Two days later, news arrived from Madam Duan of the Earl Ling’an’s Mansion. Someone had approached her, requesting a private meeting outside and emphasizing the importance of secrecy.

At the same time, Old Lady Ji tightened the restrictions on Madam Duan even further, finding an excuse to scold her and assigning her the task of copying the Lessons for Women ten times over. In other words, Madam Duan couldn't leave the house.

However, Madam Duan had still made an appointment to meet someone at a teahouse.

Upon receiving this information, Qu Moying instructed Yu Dong to prepare a veil, and she arrived at the designated teahouse earlier than the appointed time.

The teahouse location is excellent, right across from Yue's Clothing Pavilion and Yue's Gold Pavilion. With its three floors and impressive appearance, it attracts a considerable number of customers coming and going.

Qu Mo Ying arrived early, supporting Yu Dong's hand as they got off the carriage. Today, she didn't wear a veil, only a long curtain cap that concealed her identity.

Upon reaching the upper floor, they called a waiter to reserve a private room facing the main street. From there, they could clearly observe the people coming in and out of Yue's Gold Pavilion.

"My lady, should I wait downstairs?" Yu Dong asked as he assisted Qu Mo Ying in sitting down, glancing at Yue's Gold Pavilion through the window.

Qu Mo Ying shook her head and replied, "No need. Since we have an appointment with Madam Duan, and we know she won't come out, there's no need for her to hide. You wait here, and when you spot the lad servant we saw that day, go and invite them over."

As expected, they didn't have to wait long before seeing a lad servant standing in front of Yue's Gold Pavilion, anxiously looking around as if searching for someone. After a while of fruitless search, the servant called a waiter and made inquiries. Then, they went inside to speak with the manager, seemingly asking about the owner of Yue's Gold Pavilion.

Finally, the servant stood at the entrance of Yue's Gold Pavilion, appearing visibly worried.

Qu Moying noticed that the dishes were almost ready and nodded at Yu Dong. She left the room, and while the servant was still glancing around, he noticed Yu Dong approaching and was momentarily taken aback.

He thought no one would be able to come. Why was this maid here?

Seeing that Yu Dong was alone without any significant entourage, the servant breathed a sigh of relief. He promptly approached and said, "Where is your Madam? Our master has been waiting for a long time. He's in the teahouse across the street. Please bring your Madam out!"

The servant began complaining as soon as he approached but maintained a polite demeanor.

"Our master has been here for a while, just across the street. We've been waiting for you, but we didn't see your master," Yu Dong pointed toward the teahouse behind him.

"Your Madam is here?" the lad servant paused for a moment and asked anxiously.

"Naturally, she's been here for a while. Our master arrived, not Madam Duan," Yu Dong explained with a smile.

"Who is your master?" the servant inquired.

"You'll find out when you see him," Yu Dong smiled and beckoned the servant, who was still standing there stunned. "Hurry up and come over before they become impatient."

The lad servant followed Yu Dong, asking along the way, "Is your master Young Master Ling'an?"

That was the only person the lad servant could think of. Apart from Young Master Ling'an, there was no one else in the main household.

"You'll find out when you see him. In which private room upstairs is your master?" Yu Dong playfully smiled and continued walking.

The servant had no choice but to follow along.

When they reached the upper floor, he pointed to their own private room and said, "Our master is in there. Where is yours? You're not the only maid, are you?"

"Go to the private room and wait. Our master will arrive shortly!" Yu Dong smiled faintly. The private room was indeed nearby, just a short distance away, separated by only two other rooms. When they arrived, the room was empty, indicating that their Lday had arrived after they had.

Unexpectedly, someone indeed came here!

"Very well, please hurry. I'll go and inform our master," the servant nodded and entered his own private room, wearing a perplexed expression.

Another lad servant was already in the private room and asked upon seeing him, "What happened to that maid? Did Madam Duan from Earl Ling'an's Mansion arrive?"

The windows of this private room face the street, allowing Qu Moying to see from inside, and they can also observe the scene across the street.

"It's said that their mistress is here, but she isn't Madam Duan. I don't know who it is, but she is supposed to be right next to us and will be coming over soon," the lad servant stepped forward and respectfully reported to the occupants inside.

Seated by the window was a slender young master, with handsome features that carried a hint of aloofness. When he raised his striking eyes, they revealed a deep, mysterious hue, and his facial lines were well-defined. He exuded a sense of refined charm not commonly found among the young masters of the capital, though it wasn't overly pronounced.

"A female mistress, but not Madam Duan?" he spoke with a deep voice.

"I believe so. It should be a female mistress, but I don't know who she is. I suspect she might be the Second Madam." the servant replied.

They were all accompanying their young master on this visit and were well aware of the situation at hand. They had also thoroughly investigated the matters concerning Earl Ling'an's Mansion. As soon as the incident occurred, they promptly established contact with the chief maid by the side of Madam Xiao, the Second Madam of Earl Ling'an's Mansion, which led to the current situation.

"It's unlikely to be this Second Madam," the young master shook his head, his cold and handsome gaze shifting towards the outside as he pondered.

This Second Madam would not arrange to meet him alone, especially not with such a pretext. It would serve neither him nor her any good.

In this matter, Second Madam Xiao would undoubtedly maintain her distance in order to handle the situation smoothly.

"Excuse me, is anyone inside?" A knocking sound suddenly came from the door. The master raised his eyes, glanced at the door, and nodded to signal the lad servant.

## Chapter 412 The First Interaction

The lad servant stepped forward and opened the door, seeing Yu Dong in front and a woman with a drapery hat standing behind, her figure delicate.

Yu Dong also noticed the servant and approached him. "This is our Lady." she said.

"Our master is already waiting inside," the servant smiled and took a step back, making way.

In his heart, he couldn't help but think, "Lucky." The young master had no plans to go out originally, knowing that no one from Earl Ling'an's Mansion would come. But coincidentally, the young master had something to attend to, so he decided to stop by here first and then go about his business.

Unexpectedly, someone from Earl Ling'an's Mansion actually arrived.

Qu Moying followed Yu Dong inside and glanced up at the young master sitting by the window. He was in his twenties, with handsome features and a strong, firm appearance that didn't quite match the delicate aura of a refined scholar, even though he wore a dashing brocade robe.

His gaze swept over and landed on Qu Moying.

Qu Moying was certain she hadn't seen him before, but there was an unusually familiar feeling, as if she had encountered him somewhere.

Her slender eyebrows furrowed as she mentally reviewed the men she had met. In truth, she hadn't come across many men, just a few, but she was certain that none of them were the man in front of her.

This young master was an entirely different type from Lord Wei Pei Qingmin.

He had a rugged, sturdy build, with slightly darker skin.

Their eyes met silently through the veil. The difference was that Qu Moying clearly saw the other person's appearance, while the other person couldn't discern Qu Moying's features, hidden beneath the veil. His eyebrows furrowed slightly, revealing a hint of displeasure.

Then he averted his gaze, looking at Yu Dong, but he paused for a moment upon seeing her. Although the surprise was fleeting, Qu Moying still caught that momentary astonishment.

Had this person seen Yu Dong before?

"Now that the young lady is here, please have a seat." The young master gestured to the side but remained seated.

Qu Moying gracefully performed a curtsy before taking a seat across from him. Yu Dong stood behind her and also glanced at the young master before lowering her head.

“May I ask if you are the owner of the ruby involved in the Yue’s Gold Pavilion matter?” Qu Moying set aside her doubts and went straight to the point.

“May I inquire who you are?” The young master didn’t provide a direct answer and instead replied with a question.

“The owner of Yue’s Gold Pavilion.” Qu Moying stated calmly. Although the formalities at the Yamen were not yet completed, once they were done, she would rightfully be the owner. Furthermore, Madam Duan had already acknowledged her position as the store owner. It felt only natural to state this in advance.

“I recall that the owner of Yue’s Gold Pavilion is associated with the Earl Ling’an’s Mansion. I wonder which young lady from the Earl Ling’an’s Mansion you are? As far as I know, none of the three young ladies fit the description,” the young master said coolly, his gaze scanning Qu Moying with a hint of severity.

The three young ladies of the Earl Ling’an’s Mansion were well-known throughout the capital. First Lady was now the Crown Prince’s Princess Ji, the second was originally the Crown Princess but was gone, and there were various rumors surrounding the third young lady’s fate—some said she had died, while others claimed she had escaped. Moreover, the ages didn’t match up.

Although Qu Moying still appeared youthful in stature, she was fourteen years old, distinct from Ji Yanyue, who was merely ten.

“I am not a young lady from Earl Ling’an’s Mansion,” Qu Moying smiled faintly, unruffled. “The ownership has been transferred to me. Therefore, I will be handling all future matters with you.”

“What do you mean?” The young master’s eyes narrowed dangerously as he leaned back, emanating a formidable aura.

The young master in front of her didn't look like a merchant, but rather resembled a scion of a noble family, and one from a prestigious background at that. He carried himself with a certain grace and demeanor, as observed by Qu Moying.

Ji Hanyue, as the future Crown Prince's Princess, had been trained rigorously in her every move. The current master before her gave her a similar impression as before.

A man like this couldn't possibly be a merchant; Qu Moying couldn't bring herself to believe it.

There was a small detail that caught Qu Moying's attention when she entered the room. The Yue's Gold Pavilion belonged to Earl Ling'an's Mansion. When she entered, whoever saw her would assume she belonged to Earl Ling'an's Mansion. A merchant, upon seeing a young lady from a noble family, would certainly rise and greet her. It was common courtesy.

Even if one was plotting against Madam Duan's property, he would surely maintain a pleasant demeanor. It was the code of conduct instilled in the merchants since childhood. Yet here he sat, so casually and nonchalantly.

His demeanor and appearance were far from ordinary. Therefore, this supposed plot against the property of Earl Ling'an's Mansion couldn't be as simple as she had initially thought.

"Madam Duan has already transferred ownership of the store to me," Qu Moying stated frankly.

"This store still has pending matters. Are you daring enough to take it on, Lady?" The young master narrowed his eyes, a sharp glint flashing through them and landing on Qu Moying's veil.

However, he couldn't see her face, only faintly discerning a woman of remarkable appearance.

"Although this store currently belongs to Madam Duan, it is reasonable for her to sell it to me. After all, it was originally owned by my grandfather's family," Qu Moying calmly explained.

This matter couldn't deceive anyone. Since she had taken it on, she wasn't afraid of the other party discovering her identity.

Taking over it also meant taking on this troublesome matter.

“Mr. Zhao’s ruby is indeed a precious gem, but it is impossible for the entire Yue’s Gold Pavilion to be used as collateral. I kindly request that Mr. Zhao propose other terms. If I can fulfill your requests, I will do so,” Qu Moying straightforwardly conveyed her intentions.

“Lady, do you think that’s reasonable? The Yamen hasn’t officially transferred ownership of the store yet, has it?” Mr. Zhao smirked coldly, posing a counter-question.

“It’s true that there is no official documentation from the Yamen. However, Madam Duan and I have already completed the handover. The store is now mine, and the Yamen has processed some paperwork. There are still a few procedures pending, which can only be finalized once this case is completely resolved. That’s why I need to address the issue with you first.”

Qu Moying explained without hiding the truth. If this Mr. Zhao brought up this point, he must be aware of it. Concealing it any further would serve no purpose.

It was true that her status as the store owner was somewhat questionable, but only to a certain extent. If he insisted on using this against her, she could simply not see herself as the owner but rather as a representative of Madam Duan.

She had full authority to handle the matter because the store would be hers in the future. As the representative, she could exercise complete autonomy and wouldn’t need to seek further approval from Madam Duan.

The contract was already halfway completed, with the portion transferred by Madam Duan. Only the part confirmed by the Yamen remained.

Mr. Zhao’s gaze remained fixed on Qu Moying, as if reevaluating her. He furrowed his brow slightly. Her words sounded calm, but they preemptively thwarted all the arguments he had prepared. Her meticulous approach took him by surprise.

The young lady appeared incredibly fragile, almost delicate to the point of vulnerability. When she entered the room earlier, a gust of wind blew at the entrance, lifting her long drapery veil and swirling her dress. She exuded an ethereal and otherworldly aura, resembling a delicate treasure that should be carefully guarded in seclusion.

“What will you suggest we do?” He spoke in a gentle tone, acknowledging Qu Moying’s status.

“And what do you think? Since you came to the capital for business, it would be best to maintain harmony. If there is any need for the Yue’s Gold Pavilion, I will undoubtedly cooperate. However, I cannot hand over it to you. It is an ancestral store; its value cannot be measured in mere silver.”

Qu Moying said softly. She felt a slight relief as his question confirmed her initial assumptions.

All her previous thoughts were mere conjectures, and no matter how many conjectures she had, they might not have been accurate. However, his question provided her with some peace of mind.

He lightly tapped his fingers on the tabletop, pondering for a moment before saying, “I understand your suggestion, but I need some time to consider this matter.”

“Very well. If you make up your mind, you can inform the shopkeeper of the Yue’s Gold Pavilion.” Qu Moying stood up. Today’s discussion was merely a test for both parties. Since the other party had shown interest, it was clear that the matter couldn’t be resolved immediately. Qu Moying anticipated that Young Master Zhao would contact Xiao to ascertain the truth after he returned home.

The originally favored store had changed ownership, so it would not be easily agreed upon.

“Alright, I appreciate your help, Lady.” He nodded, indicating that they would discuss the matter further at a later time.

Qu Moying bid him farewell and left with Yu Dong. Mr. Zhao stood up and walked to the window, looking down. He saw Qu Moying descending from the upper floor, her maid removing her veil and shielding her from the light. She then boarded the carriage parked nearby.

“Master, who is that lady?” a servant approached, curious, and also looked down, catching a glimpse of the Qu Mansion’s carriage.

“Go and find out. There shouldn’t be many young ladies in the capital with eye ailments and the surname Qu.” He said as he observed the distinct emblem of Qu Mansion on the carriage. Being new to the capital, he was unaware of some of the lesser-known families.

To be able to receive Yue’s Gold Pavilion from First Madam Duan of Earl Ling’an and claim it was an ancestral store, knowing that the case was unresolved, and still daring to take over the shop, it indicated that this lady’s status was extraordinary, more than just the daughter of a merchant family.

She seemed to resemble a lady meticulously cultivated by a prominent family.

Is this how daughters from prestigious families in Great Zhou were raised? It was quite different from the image of a fragile young lady who required much assistance. She appeared delicate, the kind of person one would want to protect in their hands. However, her demeanor was sharp and decisive, suggesting she had a calculated plan...

#### Chapter 413 The Prince Who Became a Good Doctor After a Long Illness

Qu Moying didn’t go directly back to the Qu Mansion. When she left, she had already informed Old Lady Qu that she might return later. Since she was already outside, she naturally wanted to take a walk.

Granny Miao asked her to go to the herb store to find some herbs. She needed to prepare a few medicines to regulate her body. In previous years, Granny Miao would always prepare them for Qu Moying at this time. Although others like Yu Dong could also go, their ability to pick herbs couldn’t compare to Qu Moying’s. Granny Miao didn’t really trust their skills in selecting herbs.

Qu Moying seemed to have an innate sensitivity towards herbs. She had also learned about identifying and distinguishing medicinal herbs from Granny Miao.

The carriage stopped in front of a large herb store, and Yu Dong helped Qu Moying down from the carriage. She still wore a veiled hat, which was more convenient than wearing a veil when going out.

The carriage went to wait in a nearby alley, and Qu Moying entered the “Huaji Pharmacy” in front of her with Yu Dong.

Upon entering, she noticed that there were several doctors seeing patients inside. It seemed that there were more than one. They were sitting in a row, examining patients and dispensing medicine at the same time. The business seemed to be thriving.

What surprised Qu Moying the most was that she saw someone she knew there—Lord Wei Pei Qingmin.

Sitting near the counter was a young man with a pale complexion. Although he was wearing an ordinary robe without the usual extravagant decorations, he had only one lad servant accompanying him. He sat there casually, as if he were just an ordinary doctor. What was even more astonishing was that he had patients waiting to be seen.

The most remarkable thing was that many of the patients were young women, and they were all queuing up.

Was Lord Wei Pei Qingmin seeing patients for them?

This made Qu Moying stop in her tracks, astonished.

Everyone in the capital knew that Lord Wei was a sickly man, but she had never expected that he would also see patients. It was truly strange.

A shop assistant approached and smiled at Qu Moying, saying, “Miss, are you here to see a doctor too? Mr. Qing may be about to rest. It would be better for you to go and see some other doctors!”

So, these young women had all come to see Pei Qingmin?

The corners of Qu Moying’s lips curved slightly, finding it amusing. The fact that this Lord Wei, who was on the verge of deathly illness, had the leisure to help others and was specifically seeing young women as patients was truly surprising.

She glanced at Pei Qingmin's pale face, devoid of any color, and noticed the exhaustion he couldn't conceal. Qu Moying found his actions quite commendable.

At least this prince was different from what she had previously perceived—someone completely ignorant of civil matters and consumed by his own worries.

"Our lady isn't here to see a doctor, we just need to buy some herbs," Yu Dong stepped forward and cleverly explained.

"In that case, please... please," the shop assistant hastily stepped aside, secretly heaving a sigh of relief in his heart. Luckily, this young lady was here to purchase herbs. Going over there would have been too much for his master to handle.

He didn't know what those young women were up to. Clearly, they weren't sick, yet they still flocked to see the prince.

The quality of the herbs at Huaji Pharmacy was indeed excellent. Qu Moying inspected the items she had picked, and each one was good. However, she was slightly dissatisfied with the last one, Scutellaria. The quality seemed to be lacking compared to the instructions given by Granny Miao.

"Do you have a longer aged one?" Qu Moying inquired, looking at the Scutellaria in front of her.

"This is already the best. Even you look for it elsewhere, I'm afraid you wouldn't find anything better than what we have in our store," the shop assistant replied with a smile.

"Why?" Yu Dong asked curiously.

Qu Moying pondered in silence, also wanting to know why. The shopkeeper's words sounded confident, unlike excuses. While Scutellaria wasn't considered a rare herb, the long-aged ones she was looking for were indeed uncommon. However, even if they were uncommon, it was unlikely that other shops in the capital didn't have them. Huaji Pharmacy seemed to be exaggerating a bit too much.

“Because all the good Scutellaria has been taken by others!”

A calm voice came from behind. Qu Moying turned her head and saw Pei Qingmin’s extremely pale face. He seemed really unwell, as if he was on the verge of collapsing.

The patients in front of him had already been taken over by another doctor.

Qu Moying bowed to him, and Pei Qingmin seemed to recognize her by her maid.

“How many years of Scutellaria does Fourth Lady Qu need?” Pei Qingmin asked with a slight smile, taking a handkerchief from a fellow and wiping his hands.

“It’s best to have over a hundred years.” Qu Moying said. Since Pei Qingmin was hiding his identity, she didn’t need to be overly formal and risk ruining his affairs. “If not, then at least fifty years old.”

Finding a hundred-year-old Scutellaria was a rare occurrence. Qu Moying was seeking ones older than fifty years, which wasn’t considered particularly valuable under normal circumstances. However, it was surprising to hear such words from such a large herb shop.

“Not only Scutellaria, but also aged Astragalus is unavailable.” Pei Qingmin said slowly.

“Where did they all go?” Qu Moying asked in astonishment.

“To the palace!” Pei Qingmin replied.

To the palace? Was it the emperor? She had heard that the emperor’s health had never been good, but it was only a general knowledge. How could they be using so many aged herbs for a specific reason?

However, since Pei Qingmin mentioned the palace, Qu Moying couldn’t ask any further. What the palace needed was not something a lowly Vice Minister’s daughter could criticize.

Moreover, she was conversing with the current Third Prince, Lord Wei Pei Qingmin. It wasn't appropriate to pry too much.

"Then, let it be." Qu Moying said helplessly. Since there were no sufficiently aged herbs, she could only select some with lesser age. Although they would have weaker medicinal properties, it was better than having nothing at all. She instructed the assistant to choose some *Scutellaria* and weigh them.

After the selection was completed, she realized that Lord Wei was still there. Judging by his appearance, it was clear that he was struggling to stay upright. Qu Moying had no choice but to pause and softly say, "Your Highness, why don't you rest for a while?"

"I'm fine!" Pei Qingmin said. His expression today seemed much calmer than before, without the evident disdain he used to show towards Qu Moying.

Since he continued to stand, Qu Moying had to find a topic of conversation. She pointed to the side where consultations were taking place and asked, "Why is Your Highness helping people with consultations?"

"Having taken medicine for a long time, one can also gain some knowledge. I can also provide some assistance." Pei Qingmin said calmly.

"Your Highness is truly kind-hearted." Qu Moying complimented him.

"It's just some minor matters, nothing worth mentioning." Pei Qingmin responded indifferently, "If you want aged herbs, there is actually a place where you can find them."

"What place?" This was quite unexpected. Qu Moying looked up at Pei Qingmin. If there were good herbs available, she would certainly use them.

Granny Miao had always had high standards for herbs, and she would always be picky if they were unsuitable.

“The palace!” Pei Qingmin’s words completely settled Qu Moying’s thoughts. Good herbs with age were being collected in the palace, indicating that they were of great importance. How could she possibly acquire good herbs from the palace?

She was just a lowly Vice Minister daughter and didn’t have such capabilities.

“Since they are in the palace, they must be of great importance. I don’t have the ability to acquire them.” Qu Moying chuckled twice, feeling unwilling to continue discussing this matter with Lord Wei.

In fact, it was better for him not to say anything. But in the next moment, she halted her steps that were meant to continue.

“I have a method that can help you!” Pei Qingmin declared.

“What method?” Qu Moying inquired.

“Considering my poor health, Fourth Lady Qu, can you accompany me inside and have a conversation sitting down?” Pei Qingmin pointed towards the interior of the store.

“Is this Your Highness’s herb store?” Qu Moying hesitated for a moment, as the current situation seemed quite clear.

“Yes, it’s mine. Please come in with me,” Pei Qingmin motioned for her to follow as he walked ahead.

The two of them entered a room at the back of the shop, with Qu Moying following behind Pei Qingmin. As soon as they entered, she noticed a shelf filled with books—entirely devoted to medicinal knowledge.

Looking at the arrangement of the room, it appeared to be the place where this prince rested and read books.

The room was subtly fragrant, with a light medicinal scent. It was a refreshing and restorative aroma. Earlier, Pei Qingmin carried the same fragrance on him, most likely due to contact with it.

"Please have a seat." Pei Qingmin pointed to a chair nearby and proceeded to sit behind a desk within the room.

A servant accompanying him quickly brought a cup of tea and then retreated to the side.

Qu Moying sat down quietly, still wearing her veiled hat.

"Fourth Lady Qu, now that you are inside the room, there's no need to keep wearing it. It makes the conversation quite uncomfortable," Pei Qingmin leaned back, closed his eyes in comfort, and then opened them, giving Qu Moying a faint smile before speaking.

"My eyes are not in good condition, so I have to shield them from excessive light," Qu Moying responded calmly.

"No worries. I'll have someone close the windows for you!" Pei Qingmin raised his hand, about to call the servant to shut the windows and doors.

"Your Highness, it would be better not to close the doors and windows. It may cause unnecessary inconvenience," Qu Moying gently pursed her lips and advised. Under such circumstances, if the doors were closed, it would undoubtedly invite criticism.

"In truth, I'm merely curious about your appearance. I hope you would be so kind as to remove the veil and let me take a look." Pei Qingmin signaled the servant to return, his curiosity evident.

"Your Highness, rumors often have a grain of truth. They don't arise out of nowhere," Qu Moying lifted her head confidently and said, "Please enlighten me, Your Highness. How can you assist me in finding a sufficient quantity of aged Scutellaria?"

"Dowager Consort Qu is ill," Pei Qingmin slowly revealed, "And the medicine required includes the aged Scutellaria that you have been searching for."

“Dowager Consort Qu is ill?” Qu Moying was momentarily taken aback. She hadn’t anticipated this. She assumed it would be the emperor, not Dowager Consort Qu, who would mobilize such resources.

Within the palace, Dowager Consort Qu kept a low profile. Even during her time as Ji Hanyue, Qu Moying had never heard of such a Consort. If it weren’t for the fact that this Consort shared the same surname and had a connection with her in this life, she might never have known about her existence.

Could it be that this Dowager Consort Qu held an exceptionally special status?

#### Chapter 414 Your Highness, I don’t Understand What You Mean

“Dowager Consort Qu is seriously ill?” Qu Moying’s eyes, like water, lifted as she looked through the veil at Pei Qingmin and asked.

“Not extremely severe, but it’s Father Emperor’s wish, so we must be cautious and prepared. These specific herbs mentioned, of course, the longer the vintage, the better. I have collected those with long vintages found in the capital and brought them to the palace.” Pei Qingmin replied without hiding anything.

“But Dowager Consort Qu can’t possibly use such a large quantity alone, right?” Qu Moying was genuinely surprised. The emperor seemed to be highly concerned about Dowager Consort Qu, who was low-key and almost nonexistent.

It was said that Dowager Consort Qu had no children and only stayed in the palace due to the Empress Dowager’s favor. Otherwise, these childless consorts would usually retire to the Xinning Monastery for spiritual cultivation. She was allowed to remain in the palace instead.

“She can’t use that much, but it’s the emperor’s order. Who would refuse? I personally took care of this matter.” Pei Qingmin explained.

Qu Moying’s eyes brightened. “Your Highness, do you still have Scutellaria in your possession?”

Since he was the one responsible for acquiring the herbs, Qu Moying found it hard to believe that he had nothing on hand.

"I do have some, but they are meant to be delivered to the palace. Is Miss Qu interested in purchasing my stock?" Pei Qingmin asked with curiosity.

Qu Moying couldn't continue the conversation.

To imply that she had such intentions, stating it so matter-of-factly, and in the presence of a prince, seemed inappropriate. If she didn't mean it that way, then her previous words were truly meaningless. Why would she even bring it up?

"Your Highness, I was merely inquiring. If it's inconvenient, then never mind." Qu Moying smiled faintly, lifting the corners of her mouth and spoke vaguely.

She truly was just asking, and if he didn't have any, it didn't matter. At most, she would be scolded by Granny Miao for a few words.

"Why do you need them?" Pei Qingmin didn't say yes or no, and suddenly changed the topic, asking Qu Moying about something else.

"For body conditioning," Qu Moying stated candidly. There was no need to hide this reason.

"For yourself?" Pei Qingmin carefully observed Qu Moying, who appeared slightly more fragile and weaker than the average woman. Given his expertise in treating long-standing illnesses, he believed she needed body conditioning.

"Yes." Qu Moying confirmed.

"How about I provide medical treatment for you?" Pei Qingmin calmly proposed.

Qu Moying was momentarily taken aback. She didn't understand what had gotten into Lord Wei today. The way he acted was different from before. Why didn't he appear as disdainful as he had been in the past?

"Thank you for your kind offer, but I don't have any major illnesses. I just need some gentle toning. I have a special recipe that I've been using for years, and it has always been effective."

Regardless of the reason, Qu Moying felt that she should refuse.

Pei Qingmin didn't insist after being rejected. Instead, he smiled and said, "Dowager Consort Qu is ill, why don't you visit the palace to see her? I heard that Dowager Consort Qu cares deeply for you. She has never shown such concern for any other young lady before. Only you have broken that pattern."

"What pattern did she break?" Qu Moying detected a hint of other implications and asked.

"Dowager Consort Qu has always been low-key in the palace. Even I, as the prince, rarely see her. When there are important events, Dowager Consort Qu does not attend. Most of the newly-entered concubines in the harem in recent years are unaware of the existence of Dowager Consort Qu. Only those who have been here for a long time have heard of her, but it's just hearsay. She doesn't interact with other concubines on a regular basis."

Pei Qingmin's gaze fell on Qu Moying, with a hint of scrutiny. He was carefully observing Qu Moying's reaction.

Qu Moying sat quietly, her veil hiding her appearance, including her slightly raised eyes. At the corners of her eyes, there was a faint touch of dark red, subtly emitting a charming and mysterious aura.

However, she remained as calm as ever.

"Dowager Consort Qu has been so low-key, but because she summoned you into the palace, more people became aware of you. You might feel that this breaks the norm. Now that Dowager Consort Qu is ill, if you don't go to visit her, wouldn't you feel guilty?" Pei Qingmin continued.

“Of course, I should report to my grandmother and visit the palace to inquire about her health!” Qu Moying pondered and replied.

Regardless of the reasons behind this Lord Wei Pei Qingmin’s actions, she should indeed go and see this Dowager Consort.

Now that she knew about it, it would be considered heartless if she didn’t go. Moreover, the gestures shown by Dowager Consort Qu towards her were all benevolent.

“Let me teach you another thing!” Pei Qingmin said as Qu Moying obediently agreed. He tilted his head slightly, and a gentle smile appeared on his pale and handsome face.

“Your Highness, please go ahead.” Qu Moying said calmly. She didn’t think that this Lord Wei had nothing else to do, which was why he spoke to her in such a manner.

However, looking at the Prince’s expression, it seemed to be getting worse. It didn’t seem like he was casually talking to her.

But she couldn’t discern the specific reason; no matter how she looked at the Lord Wei, he shouldn’t have a good attitude towards her.

Since their first meeting, the Lord Wei had always been wearing a peculiar expression. Qu Moying didn’t know where she had offended him to cause such prejudice.

Of course, she had no intention of explaining either. Pei Qingmin and she were just strangers passing by. Since they were strangers, there was no need to explain things too clearly.

Misunderstandings or misinterpretations might be a good thing for two people!

“If you manage to win the favor of Dowager Consort Qu, she will give you not only some vintage Scutellaria, but even more precious things.”

Pei Qingmin smiled slightly, but his gaze was fixed on Qu Moying, observing her reaction.

Qu Moying's veiled hat seemed undisturbed, but it was unknown how her expression looked. However, one thing was certain—this Fourth Lady Qu seemed to have understood something. She remained silent for quite a while, which pleased Pei Qingmin. At least this Fourth Lady Qu wasn't entirely useless in his eyes.

Sometimes, coveting vanity could also be a good thing, right? It all depended on how one thought about it and utilized it.

"Your Highness, I don't understand what you said." Qu Moying stated.

Pei Qingmin's smile grew even warmer. He tilted his head, coughed softly twice, and then turned back. His face showed a faint blush. "Dowager Consort Qu is not an ordinary concubine. It would be a great opportunity to win her favor. For you, it would be a tremendous benefit."

The implication in his words was clear.

"Your Highness, I still don't understand your words." Qu Moying pretended to remain oblivious and didn't continue speaking.

But this reaction was exactly what Pei Qingmin wanted. "If you don't understand, it's fine. I have fulfilled the previous promise by helping you find a solution. Whether you choose to use it or how to use it, it is no longer relevant to me. I am tired now. If you don't mind."

Pei Qingmin started to politely dismiss the guest. He picked up the tea in his hand and took a sip before smiling faintly at Qu Moying.

"Your Highness." Qu Moying stood up, bowed slightly to Pei Qingmin, and then turned to leave with Yu Dong. It seemed that none of the royal princes were easy to deal with, including the weak Lord Wei who could barely hold on.

These words were cleverly spoken, arousing her interest while hinting at the great benefits involved. There was also a personal touch to it. No matter from which perspective, it was inappropriate and unwise for her not to visit the sick and win the favor of Dowager Consort Qu. It would make her appear indifferent.

Qu Moying didn't believe that the Lord Wei was genuinely so kind-hearted, but she couldn't figure out the underlying reason. It was a mystery for the time being.

Once inside the carriage, she closed her eyes and leaned against the wall, pondering for a while. However, she couldn't come up with an answer, so she decided to stop thinking about it. The matter seemed mysterious, so she stored it in her heart.

Currently, her focus was on the matter of Yue's Gold Pavilion, which was pressing.

"Yu Dong, what do you think of that Mr. Zhao?" Qu Moying asked without opening her eyes, "He looks somewhat familiar to me, but I can't remember where I've seen him."

"Your ladyship met this young Zhao before? I heard he arrived in the capital not long ago." Yu Dong replied in surprise. "I didn't notice any familiarity when I saw him. He didn't leave that impression."

Yu Dong had sharp eyes and could remember almost everyone she had seen. However, when she glanced at Mr. Zhao, she didn't feel like she had seen him before.

"Then maybe I was mistaken!" Qu Moying reached up and rubbed her forehead.

Although she said that, she still had a feeling that she should have seen him before. But upon careful consideration, there was no trace of a genuine memory of having met him.

When she returned home, Qu Moying went to see the Old Lady first. Today, too many things had happened, and she needed to inform the Old Lady so that she wouldn't be caught off guard later.

"Did Madam Duan give you the gold store beside Yue's Clothing Pavilion?" The Old Lady was surprised to hear about the matter concerning Yue's Gold Pavilion.

That store was not only profitable, but it was also almost as valuable as gold. How could it be given to someone else, especially to Qu Moying, who didn't have much money in hand? The Old Lady was well aware of that fact. It was also one aspect of her guilt towards Qu Moying. The little Yue's dowry originally included cash, and the store had generated significant profits over the years. However, all of it had been embezzled by Yu and couldn't be retrieved.

Although the Old Lady had provided some compensation, the amount was too large for her to fully cover.

"Yes, it's about the store. Madam Duan's involvement in the matter is unclear. Madam Ji has been keeping a close watch on her, not allowing her to handle any business affairs. Madam Duan has no other choice. Otherwise, the family store would have changed ownership and benefited someone else." Qu Moying explained, also mentioning the situation with Earl Ling'an's Mansion.

The Old Lady nodded repeatedly upon hearing this. Given the circumstances, it was understandable why Madam Duan had acted that way. It was better for the family store to remain in their hands rather than being taken advantage of by outsiders.

"Be careful, and if you encounter any difficulties, seek help from your father!" The Old Lady couldn't help but express her concern.

Chapter 415 Paramount Empress, the Former Empress of the Great Zhou

"Grandmother, I understand!" Qu Moying said obediently.

It was important to explain this matter clearly to the Old Lady, to prevent any unnecessary trouble caused by others.

If the Old Lady knew, it would be equivalent to Qu Zhizhen knowing as well.

If someone wanted to interfere in this matter, it would become inconvenient. The shop falling into Qu Moying's hands was beneficial for the Qu Mansion, and Qu Zhizhen would not let go easily.

Regardless of how it appeared, the transfer of the shop was willingly accepted by Madam Duan, and even if someone had objections, they couldn't say much. Qu Moying's identity destined her to be a reasonable candidate for the transfer, even if it meant Earl Ling'an's Mansion suffered a loss.

After finishing the discussion about this matter, Qu Moying brought up the topic of Dowager Consort Qu's condition to the Old Lady, explaining the incident of her chance encounter with the Lord Wei, Pei Qingmin. She provided a clear account of the situation.

Whatever the Lord Wei had in mind, she would deal with it carefully.

"Dowager Consort Qu is ill?" The Old Lady asked urgently, sitting up straight.

"Yes, that's what I heard. Grandmother, should I go to the palace to visit Dowager Consort Qu?" Qu Moying asked.

"Yes, of course you should go." The Old Lady replied emphatically. She pressed her hand on the table, looking somewhat uneasy. "Dowager Consort Qu allowed you to visit her in the palace anytime, but of course you can't actually go anytime. Let Granny Yan deliver the note first and wait for the news from the palace before going in."

Entering the palace required submitting a note in advance, and only after receiving permission from the person in charge could one be granted access. Although Qu Moying had previously received a special exception from Dowager Consort Qu, the Old Lady still wanted her to follow the rules when entering the palace.

As for the phrase "anytime," it had to be used at the most appropriate moment. Qu Moying couldn't let herself be complacent and think she could go whenever she pleased, as it could lead to trouble.

"Grandmother, according to Lord Wei, the emperor attaches great importance to Dowager Consort Qu's illness. He even brought many required medicinal herbs into the palace." Qu Moying asked tactfully, hoping to tap into the Old Lady's experience to understand the reason behind this.

The Old Lady's expression grew somber. Dowager Consort Qu had indeed been low-key, but the Old Lady was aware of it since Dowager Consort Qu shared the same surname.

The emperor's special attention and the abundance of medicinal herbs surprised her. Considering Qu Moying's words, she pondered the past events, but couldn't identify a reason why Dowager Consort Qu would receive such significant attention from the emperor.

The palace was different from the outside world, and the Old Lady, although not well-informed, relied on her age and experience.

"I am not sure why the emperor places such importance on Dowager Consort Qu, but Dowager Consort Qu was indeed a concubine of the late emperor. However, she was not particularly favored. As for why the emperor values Dowager Consort Qu so highly, it may be because she once showed kindness to him!" The Old Lady spoke slowly, offering the only reason she could think of.

Kindness? Was that a sufficient reason? Did the emperor need an old consort to show him favor? She heard that the emperor ascended to the throne at a young age and had enjoyed smooth sailing all these years.

Qu Moying questioned, unable to comprehend the situation. She quietly observed the Old Lady, waiting for her analysis. There were many things she didn't fully understand due to her young age and limited knowledge.

"I've heard... that Dowager Consort Qu had a close relationship with the emperor's Paramount Empress," The Old Lady hesitated for a moment, lowering her voice to enlighten her young granddaughter. However, she added, "I'm not entirely sure if it's true. It was something I overheard by chance."

"The Paramount Empress? I heard that she died in the cold palace?" Qu Moying's curiosity grew.

The empress was a forbidden subject within the palace. Crown Prince Pei Luo'an had repeatedly warned Ji Hanyue not to mention the Paramount Empress when meeting the Empress. It was even forbidden to discuss her anywhere else in the palace, to prevent rumors from spreading and potential trouble from arising.

These were the instructions Crown Prince Pei Luo'an had given when Qu Moying first entered the palace as the future Crown Princess. Reflecting on it now, Qu Moying found it all rather puzzling. She didn't quite understand the underlying reasons. When she asked Pei Luo'an about it at the time, he remained silent with a solemn expression, and she didn't press further.

"The empress's name was He, and her relationship with the emperor was extraordinary... But later, she became entangled in some accidents, leading to her confinement in the cold palace, where she eventually died." The Old Lady sighed.

"Is it true that Noble Consort He entered the palace because of the empress?" Qu Moying inquired.

Previously, she hadn't paid much attention, and she even thought Noble Consort He was a good person for voluntarily entering the palace to take care of her ailing sister from the clan. But now, considering Ji Youran's involvement, it seemed that everything about caring for her sick sister and subsequently being forced to stay in the palace was essentially a facade.

It was all a deceptive illusion.

Whether it was Ji Youran or Noble Consort He, they were merely leveraging a good reputation. It was likely that Noble Consort He had some connection to the empress being sent to the cold palace.

Qu Moying never could have imagined that her trusted sister would eventually wield a bloody dagger against her. The thought made her empathize deeply.

"That's what they say, but after that, Noble Consort He remained in the palace. The emperor issued an edict, and afterward, the Paramount Empress had an incident and was sent to the cold palace. I'm not quite sure about the details. Your father hadn't passed the examination at the time, and I couldn't inquire about the palace affairs."

The Old Lady sighed again.

"The empress didn't give birth to a royal prince?" Qu Moying continued to ask now that they were alone.

“No, she didn’t have any children. When the empress entered the palace, her family was affected by the chaos caused by the rebellion of the three lords. Once the forces behind her dwindled, the current empress and other noble daughters entered the palace,” The Old Lady explained, recalling some information she had pieced together later.

Qu Moying felt a sense of pity for this empress.

Although a royal prince, regardless of which consort gave birth to him, had the potential for the throne, even if he isn’t born to the empress, it wouldn’t be an issue.

However, the empress, who didn’t bear any children, witnessed others giving birth one after another, and in the end, she was sent to the cold palace. Her life was filled with sorrow and hardship.

On the other hand, Noble Consort He, who shared the same surname, climbed to a higher position using the empress as a steppingstone. Although the emperor may have felt some remorse toward the empress, that remorse was not directed at her. Instead, it benefited the cunning Noble Consort He.

Even if this empress were in the depths of the underworld, she would never forgive the emperor.

“Why did Emperor value Dowager Consort Qu because of Paramount Empress?” Qu Moying suppressed her sigh and changed the subject again.

“I’m not sure, it could be, or it could not be. I heard that the emperor still keeps her palace. There are rumors among the common people that the emperor cares most about Paramount Empress. But even so, what does it matter? She didn’t leave any children, and now she has already passed away.”

The Old Lady spoke, filled with sighs.

When Paramount Empress entered the palace, The Old Lady had not yet arrived in the capital. She only heard that Paramount Empress was incredibly beautiful and came from a prominent family. She had a close childhood relationship with the emperor. However, her family faced troubles, and their main lineage was wiped out. Later, Paramount Empress was confined to the cold palace.

The Old Lady believed that even without anyone plotting against her, Paramount Empress would have still felt depressed and miserable in such circumstances.

How long could she have endured? She had lost her family, had no children to carry on her lineage, couldn't even see her husband's face, and was constantly surrounded by scheming women in the palace. There was no way out for her.

"Grandmother, should I go and visit Dowager Consort Qu, then?" After hearing the Old Lady discuss Paramount Empress's situation, Qu Moying could only sigh inwardly and return to the previous topic.

"Both morally and reasonably, you should go and visit Dowager Consort Qu. However, if you go to the palace, only visit Dowager Consort Qu's palace. Don't go anywhere else without an official summons." The Old Lady nodded, contemplating for a moment before cautiously giving instructions.

Although Prince Yun held power and influence, it was still the imperial palace. If anything were to happen to Qu Moying in the palace, the Old Lady didn't believe that Prince Yun would be overly concerned.

If possible, she would rather Qu Moying be a regular wife of an ordinary family, unlike the current situation.

But now she couldn't make that decision.

"Grandmother, don't worry, I understand." Qu Moying nodded and promised.

Since the conversation with the Old Lady had already concluded, Qu Moying didn't linger. She bid farewell to the Old Lady and returned to her Qianyue House.

Meanwhile, the Old Lady sat on a chair, frowning, remaining silent for a long time.

Granny Wu, observing her expression, knew that she was worried about Dowager Consort Qu's situation. So, she offered a reminder, "Madam, you can discuss this matter with Second Master. He may know more about it than you do."

The Old Lady appreciated Granny Wu's suggestion, hoping that the Fourth Lady could visit the ailing Dowager Consort Qu since she didn't have any close relatives around. However, she was concerned about the potential trouble it might bring in the palace, hence her worries.

"Very well!" The Old Lady nodded.

Granny Wu went to the study outside to find Qu Zhizhen, who happened to be present. Upon hearing that the Old Lady wanted to speak to him about an important matter, he immediately put down what he was doing and headed to the inner courtyard.

After they were seated in the main room, the Old Lady recounted everything about Qu Moying's recent incident. Qu Zhizhen's brows furrowed as he listened.

"Zhizhen, do you think it's safe for Moying to go to the palace?" The Old Lady expressed her concerns.

"Is it Lord Wei who mentioned this matter to Moying?" Qu Zhizhen asked, his face serious. In reality, the Old Lady had already explained everything clearly, but he had some doubts.

Lord Wei was known for his refinement and indifference. He never involved himself in palace affairs. Moreover, considering his frail health, he wouldn't have the ability to do so even if he wanted. Why would he specifically mention such trivial matters to Qu Moying?

Although this matter might not be trivial for others, for Lord Wei, it truly was inconsequential.

He was a wealthy and idle prince. Regardless of which future emperor ascended the throne, it would not have any impact on him. Keeping a brother who posed no threat had tremendous benefits for the reputation of the next emperor.

Hence, the other imperial princes treated him well.

When Qu Moying spoke to the Old Lady earlier, she deliberately omitted certain words that implied Pei Qingmin's intentions. In her perspective, it seemed like the Lord Wei encountered Qu Moying and kindly brought up this matter.

"It was the Lord Wei who mentioned it. It must have been when he saw Moying that he recalled this matter. When she was still in the palace, she had once met the Lord Wei," the Old Lady explained with certainty.

Qu Zhizhen accepted this explanation.

"If Dowager Concubine Qu is truly ill and this message comes from Lord Wei, then we must certainly go and visit. Mother, don't worry, nothing will go wrong. Once Moying is ready, I will have someone deliver a note to the palace, requesting an audience with Dowager Concubine Qu." Qu Zhizhen said. This method was more reliable than Qu Moying personally delivering the note to the palace.

"Very well, let's proceed with that plan. I will prepare the gifts and also ask Moying to prepare something heartfelt. It doesn't need to be precious, only meaningful." The Old Lady replied.

The two of them discussed the details of Qu Moying's visit to the palace to see Dowager Concubine Qu. Afterward, Qu Zhizhen returned to the outer courtyard.

However, while he was halfway there, he suddenly saw his eldest daughter, Qu Qiuyan, approaching in a furious state. What could have caused another disturbance? Qu Zhizhen stopped in his tracks, feeling displeased.

## Chapter 416 Reporter

"Why are you acting so recklessly?" Upon seeing his eldest daughter approaching, Qu Zhizhen stopped in displeasure and reprimanded, "Where are your manners? What happened to the rules you've learned before?"

“Father, brother... how could he...” Qu Qiuyan, with tears in her eyes, felt wronged as she spoke. She wiped her tears with a handkerchief, but they continued to fall. She choked up and couldn’t speak for a moment. Frustrated, she stomped her foot in anger.

“Why call him ‘brother’? He should be called ‘second brother.’ What happened to your second brother?” Qu Zhizhen was dissatisfied with his daughter referring to Qu Mingcheng as her brother, as if Qu Moying was an outsider.

In the past, Qu Zhizhen didn’t pay much attention to it. He had almost forgotten about the daughter who was raised on the farm. She had a weak presence, and he disregarded the fact that Qu Qiuyan called Qu Mingcheng her brother.

But recently, he had started to pay more attention to this matter.

“How could the second brother do this? That maid... because of her, I ended up like this. He actually... helped her call for a doctor, took care of her, and I heard he even sent her flowers. And now she’s living with the second brother. What is he trying to do?”

Qu Qiuyan angrily reported.

She was driven by anger to seek out Qu Mingcheng, but she unexpectedly ran into Qu Zhizhen on the way.

She had just heard from Qing Ju that since Qu Mingcheng brought Qing Mei back, she had been treated like an honored guest. Not only did they call for a doctor, but they also sent flowers and gifts.

Qu Qiuyan ordered someone to beat Qing Mei, but Qu Mingcheng treated her so well. Qu Qiuyan felt as if her face had been slapped hard and couldn’t bear this humiliation.

Qing Ju, standing behind her, cautiously moved away from her, holding a handkerchief in her hands, keeping her head low and motionless. She appeared like a loyal maid.

She had only added some exaggeration to the news she had gathered.

This time, she almost lost her life because of Qing Mei. How could she not hate this sudden appearance of Qing Mei? If it weren't for the fact that Lady didn't have any other personal maids by her side, it would have been Qing Ju who sacrificed her life this time.

If Qing He were still here, Qing Ju knew very well that she would be the scapegoat. She had to be grateful that she was the most useful person by the third lady's side now.

Although they had survived the ordeal, the maids in charge were in trouble, and the entire family was sold off. It was said that when they were carried away, the maids in charge were already on the brink of death.

Most of the people in Furong House were personally chosen by Lady Yu. Whether it was the maids in charge, Qing He, Qing Mei, or even the rough maids in the courtyard, Qing Ju had a great relationship with them all.

Qing Ju and Qing He had grown up with Qu Qiuyan, and they had also been taken care of by the maids in charge when they were young. Although they each had their own thoughts now, their bond remained. Especially since Qing Mei suddenly appeared and gained the favor of the third lady and the second young master, they were privately unhappy.

And now, in order to protect Qing Mei, the second young master had pushed the maids in charge away. This made Qing Ju even more disheartened.

She had added some additional details to the news she had gathered. Since the second young master was so determined to protect this maid, it was normal for him to have a relationship with the third lady. However, she was just a loyal maid to the third lady. She had no relationship with the second young master. When the second young master pushed her away to bear the blame, Qing Ju started to have reservations about Qu Mingcheng.

"Your second brother is keeping a maid?" Qu Zhizhen was confused and didn't understand Qu Qiuyan's meaning. He furrowed his brow and said, "Nonsense! Instead of focusing on her studies, where would he find a maid? Go back home first, I will handle it."

This matter was indeed inappropriate. Qu Zhizhen wanted his son to study well and have a successful future. He didn't want him to be led astray by a maid.

But it was still too early for that now.

In noble families, to ensure that the future heirs would be successful, it was often forbidden to involve oneself with maids and such at this stage.

"Father, it's the maid I beat the other day. After the second brother took her away, he kept her by his side, pampering her with good food and drink. He even humbled himself to serve and protect her." Qu Qiuyan stomped her foot and angrily explained, feeling that she had to regain her reputation somehow.

"What nonsense!" Qu Zhizhen finally understood this time and his face grew cold. A mere maid had the audacity to influence the relationship between his daughter and son.

Based on this alone, this person could not be allowed to stay.

"Someone, go and drive that maid out of the East Mansion and sell her to those traveling merchants. Tell the second young master to focus on his studies and forget about these trivial matters," Qu Zhizhen turned to the servant beside him and commanded.

The maid could only be taken away by selling her to traveling merchants. Qu Zhizhen didn't want this maid to remain in the capital any longer.

The servant acknowledged and hurriedly went to deliver the message to the East Mansion.

Qu Qiuyan felt relieved when she heard this. She wiped away her tears and bid farewell to Qu Zhizhen. It would be best if her father could handle this matter. Let's see how her second brother would protect a mere maid now.

Thinking about how her second brother was so protective of a maid, Qu Qiuyan felt deeply unhappy, especially since she believed the maid had another master.

Why would her second brother bring a maid with another master to her side?

Was her second brother under the influence of some other woman? Qing Mei looked fine before, but after Qing Ju's reminder, Qu Qiuyan suddenly felt that the maid had a seductive and mysterious aura. She didn't seem to have a good background, so why was she brought to Qu Qiuyan's presence?

Qu Qiuyan wasn't a young master, so there was no point in sending such a seductive maid to her. Unless there were benefits involved, only then would it make sense to send her over.

After careful consideration, Qu Qiuyan realized that the benefits she possessed, which her second brother didn't, were the ability to get close to Crown Prince. In the future, when she entered Crown Prince's Mansion, her personal maid would accompany her. Did this mean that the maid could establish a connection with His Highness?

This thought sent a shiver down Qu Qiuyan's spine. She felt a surge of resentment towards Qu Mingcheng, who didn't protect his own sister but protected a maid sent by an unknown woman.

What was going on in his head?

If this were before, Qu Qiuyan wouldn't have listened to Qing Ju's words. But recently, Qu Mingcheng had even ordered her to be confined in Furong House to prevent her from speaking to Crown Prince. Just based on this, Qu Qiuyan was willing to listen to Qing Ju's advice.

Her second brother had truly changed. He had other women now and neglected his own sister.

"In a few days, your fourth sister will go to the palace to pay respects to Dowager Dowager Consort Qu. You should go as well." Qu Mingcheng called out to the content Qu Qiuyan.

"To pay respects to Dowager Consort Qu?" Qu Qiuyan looked up at Qu Mingcheng in astonishment.

"Dowager Consort Qu is ill. She has been close to our family in the past and treated you and your sisters well. It's normal for you to visit her together with Moying. Be cautious in your words and actions in the

palace, follow your fourth sister, and be careful not to make any mistakes or get into trouble again.” Qu Zhizhen advised.

Two daughters, one involved with Crown Prince and the other with the Lord Yun. Qu Zhizhen couldn’t decide whether it was good or bad.

But at this point, he couldn’t control the situation. He needed to find the maximum benefit.

Qu Qiuyan entering the Lord Yun Mansion would stabilize her position, and it seemed normal for her to follow Qu Moying in Qu Zhizhen’s eyes.

However, these words sounded harsh to Qu Qiuyan. Why should she follow Qu Moying, a blind girl who grew up in the village? What made her deserving of her company, someone who was pampered and cherished since childhood?

But looking at her father’s expression, she knew that even if she said something, he wouldn’t listen. So, she decided not to speak up.

With a faint smile, she pretended to be obedient, saying, “Yes, Father. I will make the necessary preparations!”

With a slight narrowing of the eyes and a mocking curl of the lips, Qu Moying was about to enter the palace again. Not bad! Perhaps there would be an opportunity? That place was beyond the reach of grandmother and father.

Dowager Consort Qu liked Qu Moying, but not all the palace staff may share the same sentiment towards Qu Moying...

“What? Qing Mei is being sold off?” Qu Mingcheng abruptly stood up; his expression extremely displeased.

“Yes, it’s the Second Master’s decision. Qing Mei has already been taken away with a group of people. They’ve left the mansion.” the servant whispered, observing Qu Mingcheng’s darkening face.

"Where are they taking her?" Qu Mingcheng clenched his teeth, his frustration evident.

This matter had nothing to do with father. Why would he get involved? Moreover, this was happening in the East Mansion, and father had never interfered with its affairs nor is it appropriate for him to do so.

Someone must have stirred up trouble and spread false information to father.

"She has been sent to the merchant's place. I heard they plan to sell her off to those wandering traders and take her away from the capital," the servant reported with increasing caution, noticing his young master's furious expression and taking a step back cautiously.

"Who is responsible for this?" Qu Mingcheng exclaimed with anger.

"I heard that it was the third lady who said something to the Second Master, and that's why he became angry and sent people over," the servant replied.

"What a mess!" Qu Mingcheng grew even more exasperated. His sister was truly useless. Not only did she fail to assist him, but she also caused trouble. Now even his father was taking action against the maidservants by his side.

There was no doubt that the situation had been exaggerated. However, he could not directly confront his father or attempt to rescue Qing Mei from him. All he could do now was come up with a plan.

He forcefully slammed the table, turned around, and strode out. He needed to find a solution at this critical moment.

Qu Mingcheng left the East Mansion on horseback, heading directly towards the city. Once outside the city, he reached the main road and turned into a small intersection. There, he found a large garden surrounded by numerous towering pine trees.

Despite the picturesque scenery as autumn breeze stirred, Qu Mingcheng had no interest in admiring it. He dismounted and approached the garden gate. As a servant noticed his arrival, the person hurriedly

went inside to report. After a short while, a young steward-like figure emerged and greeted him with a smiling bow.

“Is your lady not present?” Qu Mingcheng furrowed his brows and inquired.

“The lady is still in the capital, not here. Do you have any urgent matters?” the steward asked, his smile unwavering.

“Indeed, there is something urgent. The maid named Qing Mei, whom your lady recommended to me last time, is now being sold by my father. Hurry and send someone to redeem her. If you delay, it will be too late,” Qu Mingcheng said, his frustration evident.

#### Chapter 417 Fall in Love at First Sight

“What?” The steward was taken aback for a moment and couldn’t react immediately.

“The maid you sent last time, the one you said was very useful.” Qu Mingcheng’s tone became even more unpleasant as he hadn’t seen the master and this whole situation had become a mess.

“Oh, okay, I understand now!” The steward immediately grasped the situation.

Qu Mingcheng mounted his horse again, turned around with the servant, and left. Since the young lady wasn’t present, he felt he was unnecessary here. He didn’t want to waste any more words with a steward.

He had met this young lady by chance. At first sight, Qu Mingcheng was captivated by her charm. They had a pleasant conversation, and he found her eloquent and refined. Her every word and action were graceful and delightful. Despite being a woman, she possessed remarkable insight.

After investigating her background, he found that she was the legitimate daughter of a fallen aristocratic family. Although their family had declined, their social status was still prominent. They had influential

relatives serving in official positions, and their current residence was a secluded mansion where she sought seclusion.

Although she also had a place to stay in the capital, it was not convenient for them to meet due to societal norms. Thus, they chose to meet at this secluded place.

Since getting to know this Lady Xu Qinglu, Qu Mingcheng made it a point to visit her whenever he had free time. He would find various excuses to see her.

In each visit, they would engage in conversations, enjoying each other's company. Only the people around them and Lady Xu herself knew about it.

Qing Mei, the maid, was recommended by her as someone useful when he mentioned that his sister needed a capable maid. She had selected Qing Mei, an intelligent maid, from a well-off family in the capital. They were still in the process of training her, but Lady Xu believed she would be valuable. He had been given Qing Mei by Lady Xu, who repeatedly emphasized her usefulness.

This was also why Qu Mingcheng was determined to protect Qing Mei at all costs.

It wasn't just about the reputation of a maid but also the reputation of Lady Xu herself.

However, at this moment, Qu Mingcheng was helpless. If he dared to intervene further, he would face punishment from his father. He could only pass on the news for now. He felt that he had done everything he could to save Qing Mei.

If it weren't for this maid, none of this would have happened. She had caused embarrassment for both him and his sister. He was still angry with her, even though she was supposed to be a well-trained and clever maid. Could someone like her be considered clever? Qu Mingcheng was genuinely frustrated.

Initially, he had planned to take care of Qing Mei and send her back once she had recovered a bit. However, he hadn't expected his father to take action directly.

As Qu Mingcheng angrily left, the young steward turned to a servant accompanying him and said, "Pass on the message to the master that Qing Mei is in trouble and being sold."

"Yes!" The servant responded, mounted a horse, and followed behind Qu Mingcheng towards the city.

"Qing Mei is being sold?" Qu Moying had just settled down when she received this report from Granny Miao. Her long eyelashes fluttered twice, and her eyes remained calm like water.

This outcome was something she had anticipated.

Even if Qu Qiuyan can tolerate this maid because of Qu Mingcheng, Qing Ju by Qu Qiuyan's side cannot be tolerated. On that day, it was inevitable that someone would be scapegoated, and the only suitable candidate was someone close to Qu Qiuyan. Otherwise, they wouldn't have been able to enter Qu Qiuyan's room.

With two senior maids, if one was not suitable, the other would likely be pushed out.

It was not surprising that a maid in charge was ultimately chosen. The number of people Qu Qiuyan could use by her side had decreased. Moreover, it was not the time before. It was not so simple to find capable individuals. Although the maid in charge was capable, Qu Qiuyan would undoubtedly choose to protect Qing Ju, who was always by her side.

But what difference did it make? Qing Ju, who had experienced a brush with death, would surely resist, and this close companion would inevitably be sold off.

Qu Zhizhen would not allow such a maid to remain, not to mention that Qu Mingcheng's unusual favoritism toward this maid had strained his relationship with his sister. Qu Zhizhen also couldn't tolerate her.

"Granny Miao, spread the word about Qing Mei again. Say that Qing Mei may have already been sold by the Second Young Master's people!" Qu Moying contemplated for a moment and already had a plan in mind.

She wasn't holding onto the matter of a maid so tightly. Rather, she felt that this line of investigation was quite unusual. It was evident that Qing Mei had been sent specifically to deal with her.

There weren't many people who would target her, aside from those few in the Qu Mansion whom she detested. Liu Jingyu was also someone she didn't understand.

"I also thought the same, so I secretly passed along the message earlier, saying that I heard it from the East Mansion. They, in turn, claimed that the information came from the West Mansion. I was just someone gathering information, and in truth, I know nothing," Granny Miao said with a smile.

She fully understood the implications of her words.

The corners of her lips curled slightly. This matter was just a mere pawn in the game. She wouldn't waste manpower investigating the matter of a maid. If Qu Qiuyan had any intentions, she could investigate it herself.

One thing was certain—this was definitely a lead!

She was now giving Qu Qiuyan a wake-up call...

"Granny Miao, how do you find these medicinal herbs?" This matter wasn't worth any further consideration. Qu Moying stood up, holding her skirt, and pointed to the herbs on the table that had been purchased today.

Granny Miao had already noticed them. She took a few steps forward, examined a few of them, and smiled approvingly, nodding repeatedly. "Indeed, it's still your ladyship who should select. These two maids have no understanding of these matters. They've chosen poorly. I'm not comfortable using them, and you wouldn't feel at ease consuming them. These are good choices, well-selected. However, this *Scutellaria* isn't ideal..."

Granny Miao suddenly pointed at the open page showing *Scutellaria* and said, "Your ladyship, this is an especially important herb. If it's not of good quality, it will have a significant impact!"

This Scutellaria was something she had specifically reminded Qu Moying to pay special attention to.

“Granny Miao, there’s no better option. I’ve heard that all the high-quality Scutellaria has been taken to the palace. Dowager Consort Qu is sick, and Scutellaria is one of the main ingredients in her medicine. The emperor ordered all the aged Scutellaria in the capital to be collected for the palace. This is already the best Scutellaria that we could find!”

“The main ingredient?” Granny Miao murmured, with a hint of doubt on her face.

“Granny, do you think something is amiss?” Qu Moying noticed the peculiarity and asked in a soft and charming voice, tilting her head slightly.

“It’s not that there’s anything particularly amiss, but there’s something... Is the dowager’s illness particularly severe?” Granny Miao furrowed her brow and pondered for a moment before inquiring further, “Is your ladyship planning to visit the palace to pay her respects?”

Lady Qu Moying always had her own ideas, and this matter was originally not something Granny Miao should be concerned about. However, she still asked this time.

“That’s what I’m thinking, so I wanted to ask Granny Yan if it’s appropriate,” Qu Moying replied. As she spoke, Yu Chun had already led Granny Yan into the room.

Granny Yan stepped forward and bowed to Qu Moying, her gaze flickering over a table filled with medicinal herbs, revealing a hint of surprise. She had no idea that Granny Miao was knowledgeable in medicine.

“Granny Yan, Dowager Consort Qu is ill, and I heard it’s quite serious. Should I go and visit her? Are there any taboos I should be aware of?” Qu Moying asked. In the palace, things couldn’t be inferred using common sense. It was better to be cautious and handle matters with care.

“The Dowager is seriously ill?” Granny Yan also expressed astonishment. “She has always been in good health. Although she’s getting older, she hasn’t had any major illnesses. At most, she would cough once or twice.”

“Dowager Consort Qu has such good health?” This time, Qu Moying was also surprised. She noticed that Dowager Consort Qu’s age was similar to that of the Old Lady, but her health was quite poor. Whenever the seasons changed, she was prone to illness, especially during those days, when she needed extra care.

A few days ago, the Old Lady had been coughing for several days and only recovered after taking medicine for a few days. But now, she was still recuperating, claiming that her age left no room for negligence.

“Her health is truly excellent. It seems her mother came from a martial background and was skilled in swordplay during her time in the boudoir. Although she no longer practices those skills after entering the palace, her health is better than that of the other palace concubines. When the Empress Dowager was alive, she repeatedly praised her good health and expressed her envy for her strong constitution.”

Granny Yan explained, reaffirming her praise.

“I have served Dowager Consort Qu for quite some time, and I can confirm that her health is truly exceptional,” added Granny Yan.

“The emperor ordered people to collect various medicinal herbs from all over the capital. Any herb with a significant age was sent to the palace,” Qu Moying said with a serious expression after contemplating for a while.

“Could it be that the Dowager Consort Qu’s illness is truly that severe?” Granny Yan became anxious. Although she was now officially serving Qu Moying, she still had a sense of loyalty to Dowager Consort Qu. Following Qu Moying was, to a certain extent, following Dowager Consort Qu’s intentions. Otherwise, she wouldn’t have been asked to stay in the Qu Mansion at that time.

“It seems so. I was also thinking about it earlier. With such a massive effort, it must mean that Dowager Consort Qu’s illness is severe. Could it be true...?” Granny Miao didn’t dare to continue, but everyone in the room understood the implication behind her words.

Granny Yan’s face turned pale with worry.

Qu Moying gently pursed her lips, her long eyelashes casting uneven shadows on her snow-white skin. After a long pause, she said, "Right now, all our speculations are baseless. The most important thing is to go into the palace and find out."

Especially the words spoken by Lord Wei, Pei Qingmin—were they really just casual remarks or held deeper meaning?

In Qu Moying's perception, there was definitely a hidden meaning, but Lord Wei was an idle prince who didn't care about anything. Not only was he idle, but he was also plagued by illness. Even if he didn't intend to be idle, his health was undeniably weak. It was likely that Qu Moying could push him down with a single push.

Although Qu Moying hadn't taken Lord Wei's pulse, judging from his complexion and demeanor, she knew he wasn't pretending. His illness was genuine and debilitating.

For such a Lord Wei, it was unlikely he had ulterior motives, right? So, were his words really just casual? It was truly difficult to judge at the moment.

"Lady, I want to accompany you into the palace," Granny Yan volunteered. She genuinely worried about Dowager Consort Qu and wanted to see her in the palace.

"My Lady, I'll go too!" Granny Miao pondered for a moment and spoke in a low voice. She wanted to see what kind of illness had suddenly befallen Dowager Consort Qu and caused such a serious condition.

Qu Moying looked at both of them, knowing that they both had their own thoughts. She glanced at Yu Dong standing behind her and made a decision. "Granny Yan, you should go into the palace by yourself. I'll take Yu Dong with me. Granny Miao, you should stay here. I'm afraid I can't bring you into the palace."

Her current status meant she couldn't bring many people into the palace. At most, only one person was allowed. Moreover, when noble ladies entered the palace, they usually brought maidservants and rarely stewards like Granny Miao. It wouldn't be appropriate for her to accompany them.

As for Granny Yan, since she was originally from the palace, she could go ahead.

It was better for her to enter the palace first, and she can follow later. Since this time she entered the palace by submitting a note, she wouldn't need Granny Yan to guide her.

Granny Yan nodded. This was the best plan. It would appear that there was only one person, but in reality, there would be two people, taking advantage of her own identity.

"Your ladyship, when you see the condition of Dowager Consort Qu later, especially..." Granny Miao sighed helplessly since she couldn't go, furrowing her brow. "Perhaps I'm overthinking, but please make sure to carefully observe her appearance and ask the imperial physician about her condition."

Qu Moying nodded. Even if Granny Miao hadn't mentioned it, she understood what she meant. Granny Miao suspected that her illness was severe and something was amiss. That's why she wanted to personally see and inquire, but she couldn't bring Granny Miao into the palace with her.

The last time she saw Dowager Consort Qu, she seemed fine, with good spirits and a healthy body. Now, why did the emperor suddenly become anxious and initiate a city-wide search for a good medicine?

#### Chapter 418 The Condition of Dowager Consort Qu

This matter is urgent, and Qu Zhizhen acted swiftly. He immediately posted a note to the palace, and the response from the palace was quick as well. The two young ladies from the Qu family were allowed to enter the palace the next morning.

Apart from the gifts prepared by the Old Lady, there were also preparations made by Qu Moying herself. Qu Qiuyan also had to make some preparations. Since they were visiting as juniors, it was necessary to show their respect.

Early the next morning, Qu Moying wore a light pink dress and went to pay her respects to the Old Lady.

The dress was a very pale shade of pink, almost unnoticeable unless complemented by other garments. Her attire was light blue and looked elegant, like a slender and delicate flower. The long and wide eye veil covered her eyes but gave her a sense of ethereal grace as if she were ready to dance in the breeze.

Qu Qiuyan wore a light-yellow robe. Although the color wasn't particularly vibrant, it had a special elegance to it. Since they were going to the palace to visit a sick person, Qu Qiuyan couldn't dress too extravagantly. She had taken great care to make herself presentable, hoping to overshadow Qu Moying in the process.

Seeing Qu Moying's attire, which appeared partly white but was actually a light blue eye veil, it made her beauty even more extraordinary and different from others.

Yes, it was beautiful—a kind of elegance that seemed restrained and forbidden!

This only intensified Qu Qiuyan's jealousy and resentment. She couldn't help but think about when she could remove Qu Moying's eye veil and reveal her eyes, to expose the true appearance of her blind face.

Qu Qiuyan was very confident in her own looks. Even if Qu Moying's eyes weren't actually blind, she wouldn't look good. However, the binding band on Qu Moying somehow added a touch of drifting and gentle elegance, creating an indescribable sense of incompleteness and broken beauty that could even evoke pity.

Qu Qiuyan detested this feeling.

That wretched Qu Moying should have died in the farm and rotted away in the muddy ground. Why did she have to come back?

But that was not for her to decide. When she tried to take Qu Moying's life, she had allowed her to escape. Qu Qiuyan had been feeling stifled ever since. Nothing had gone well for her, and most importantly, her mother had been locked up. Even if she wanted to see her mother now, she had to do it in secret.

Of course, she didn't really want to see her mother at the moment. She always felt that it was her own fault for losing face. If she hadn't married her father as a concubine, she would have had a more legitimate position as the legitimate daughter.

Couldn't her mother have waited to marry in until after Qu Moying's birth mother had passed away?

Anyway, that birth mother was a short-lived ghost who wouldn't have lived much longer.

With great resentment, Qu Qiuyan got into the carriage.

Qu Moying was already sitting inside the carriage. After a glance at her, she didn't say anything. The fact that the two of them could maintain smiles in front of others was already a significant improvement.

Qu Qiuyan sat down and gave Qu Moying a cold glare.

The carriage was quiet, and they could only hear the bustling sounds of the street outside, sometimes near and sometimes far.

Finally, the carriage stopped at the palace gate. Yu Dong had been here before, so she was familiar with it. She handed over the note, and the palace guards, who were already aware of the matter, didn't give them a hard time and allowed them to enter.

Accompanied by their maids, the two of them walked through the long palace path and entered the palace. Inside, they saw two small sedan chairs already waiting.

There were two palace attendants standing by. When they saw Qu Moying and Qu Qiuyan approaching, one of the attendants stepped forward and said, "Third Lady Qu, Forth Lady Qu, Dowager Consort is already waiting for you."

He motioned toward the sedan chairs, indicating that they should get in.

Qu Moying and Qu Qiuyan both bowed to the attendant and then got into the sedan chairs. The chairs were lifted, and their maids followed them closely.

The group hurriedly headed towards the palace of Dowager Consort Qu.

Since it was a visit to a sick person, the attendants were in a hurry and walked faster than usual.

At a distant intersection, a beautiful woman in palace attire appeared, surrounded by several palace maids and attendants. Her face was delicate and her appearance charming. She seemed young and must have recently entered the palace as a consort.

“Who is entering the palace today?” she asked in a gentle voice, looking at the two distant sedan chairs.

“These two should be the two young ladies from the Qu Mansion. They are here to visit the sick Dowager Consort Qu,” a well-informed palace maid replied.

The palace was not always strict, and many pieces of news could be learned, especially in such matters.

“Dowager Consort Qu is so gravely ill?” The lady asked with a delicate smile, appearing calm and composed. She had recently entered the palace and had no knowledge of Dowager Consort Qu’s existence until now. If she hadn’t fallen seriously ill this time, causing such a commotion that even the emperor was alarmed, who would have known about this consort in the palace?

“That’s what they say, but I don’t know the specifics. I heard that the emperor has even visited her several times.” the palace maid cautiously replied.

“The emperor is truly filial!” The lady pointed towards the two distant palace sedan chairs; her eyes filled with a hint of indifference. “I heard that the Third Lady from the Qu Mansion will be accompanying His Highness, the Crown Prince, in the future. However, I’ve also heard that her character isn’t great. Why would His Highness accept anyone like this?”

The lady furrowed her brow, clearly unimpressed. She lightly covered her lips with a handkerchief, carrying a tinge of mockery.

"Naturally, it's because of Vice Minister Qu." the palace maid quickly replied with a smile, trying to please.

"Yes, it must be because of that reason. What a pity! There are many ministers in the capital, and the Qu family is not the only one. How did they choose someone with such poor character?" She pouted.

"I've heard that the Noble Consort also likes this Third Lady Qu," the palace maid responded with flattery, knowing that this lady had a younger sister who was also interested in His Highness, the Crown Prince. However, His Highness, did not respond to her affections, which angered this lady.

"How could the Noble Consort be fooled by her?" She expressed her dissatisfaction. Her gaze returned to the nearly invisible palanquin, a slight curve forming at the corner of her lips. "I've heard that the Fourth Lady from the Qu Mansion is the cousin of the Crown Princess, with a close relationship. She has an excellent reputation."

"That's what they say, but even if she's good, she's blind. Moreover, now that the Crown Princess is..." the palace maid dared not continue, her words clearly conveying the message that the Crown Princess was no longer present, and things had changed. The current influential figure in the Eastern Palace was Princess Ji, who had no connection with the Fourth Lady from the Qu family.

The palace maid knew that her mistress had a good relationship with Princess Ji, but held little regard for the Crown Princess. This Beauty, surnamed Li, had been in the palace for three years and had been selected through the draft. At present, she enjoyed a certain level of favoritism, surpassing others who had entered around the same time. She had been bestowed with the title of "Beauty."

"Let's go. The Dowager Consort is getting old, yet she brings in these two commoners. This palace is not a place where just anyone can be seen," Beauty Li sneered. She couldn't help but find the two young ladies from the Qu family disagreeable. She turned around, lightly shaking the fan in her hand, and departed. "I'll go and witness the spectacle later!"

"Yes, as you say, Beauty!" the palace maid echoed obediently.

After they left, a young eunuch emerged onto the path. He had come through a secluded route, obstructed by trees and vines. His steps were light, and Beauty Li, did not notice his presence.

The distance between the two parties was extremely close. Li's words resonated clearly, causing his eyes to flicker. His master had been seeking someone, and this Beauty Li, seemed to be a perfect match.

With this thought in mind, the young eunuch decided not to proceed with his task. He hurriedly turned around and rushed back to report...

Qu Moying and Qu Moying stopped in front of Dowager Consort Qu's palace gate. Granny Yan had been waiting there and quickly approached as she saw Qu Moying step down.

"Is Dowager Consort alright?" Qu Moying asked with concern as soon as she alighted from the chair.

Granny Yan shook her head, her brow tightly furrowed. "Dowager Consort's condition is not good."

From the looks of it, the situation was difficult to explain momentarily.

Qu Moying remained silent and followed another person who led the way towards the palace. Along the way, she noticed that the palace servants were quiet and calm. The air was thick with the scent of medicine, just like it had been when she was at the farm.

Two imperial physicians were observing as a chamberlain prepared medicine in the side palace, their expressions filled with anxiety.

Entering the main palace and then the inner chambers, Qu Moying caught sight of Dowager Consort Qu lying on the bed. She could hardly believe her eyes. Dowager Consort Qu, who had appeared spirited just before, was now emaciated and unrecognizable.

It has been quite some time since she last saw her, and it seemed like she has transformed into a different person. Her complexion was pale, devoid of any color, and there were faint traces of stains around the corners of her eyes. She lied on the bed, half-reclining with closed eyes, and if it weren't for the slight movement of her chest, one would almost think that the Dowager Consort Qu lying on the bed had already passed away.

"Your Highness!" Qu Moying and Qu Qiuyan stepped forward to pay their respects.

Dowager Consort Qu weakly opened her eyes and, upon seeing the people before her, a smile appeared on her face as she softly said, "Please... have a seat."

"Yes!"

"Yes!"

The two individuals took their seats on the chairs by the bedside, and Dowager Consort Qu looked at them with a smile. Finally, she seemed to recognize Qu Moying and beckoned to her.

Qu Moying hurriedly approached, reaching out to hold her thin hand. Discreetly, her fingers slid to Dowager Consort Qu's pulse, as instructed by Granny Qu.

"Your Highness."

"It's been a while since I last saw you in the palace, and I've actually missed you a bit. As one gets older, they tend to think of their younger generation, but I also fear disturbing you." Dowager Consort Qu sighed, a hint of sorrow in her expression, as if she had recalled something. She looked gently at Qu Moying.

"Your Highness, you will get better," Qu Moying reassured her softly.

"Whether I get better or not... actually... it doesn't matter much. After all, I am just one person..." Dowager Consort Qu sighed. At her age, she had seen and experienced everything, and even if she were to pass away, it wouldn't matter. She just felt a pity for the young girl in front of her who shared such a rapport with her.

If she had known about this poor young girl earlier, she would have surely extended her protection to her. This child had caught her attention and displayed more resilience and cunning than the Paramount Empress, whom she had protected years ago.

Observing her delicate and charming appearance, she could sense her unwavering determination and intelligence. She was eager to see how she would navigate her path...

"Your Highness, you still have me and the others. Grandmother has been concerned about your condition and specifically sent me to inquire about your needs. It may not be very convenient in the palace, but if there's anything you need, Grandmother will do her best to assist you." Qu Moying held her hand and gently released her pulse.

As her eyes deepened in thought, Dowager Consort Qu looked around the spacious inner palace adorned with numerous furnishings. Sunlight streamed through the half-closed windows, with a crane-shaped incense burner emitting a delicate, fragrant smoke, not too thick but rather refreshing.

Qu Moying's eyebrows furrowed tightly as she gazed at the incense burner.

"I thank your grandmother... but at my age, I don't currently require anything... Yet, your grandmother has been troubled for me!" She sighed.

"What did the imperial physicians say?" Qu Moying inquired.

Granny Yan, standing beside them, answered on behalf of Dowager Consort Qu, "The physician said that Dowager Consort is suffering from depression and indigestion due to accumulated food. Initially, they thought it was nothing serious, attributing it to the inclement weather causing a bit of cold and dampness, resulting in internal heat. However, the treatment has been increasingly ineffective, and Dowager Consort's condition has worsened. She is now very weak and unable to eat."

Granny Yan had entered the palace early that morning, about an hour ahead of Qu Moying, and had gathered this information beforehand.

## Chapter 419 Embarrassing or not

First, it was indigestion, followed by a cold. It may not be a significant issue, but it had now been treated to such an extent. The physicians were skilled, so it was impossible for them not to have noticed and allowed such a major incident to occur.

That's why the physician earlier was restless. The emperor had already expressed great concern, so they dare not be negligent.

Qu Moying pointed at the fragrant incense in the censer and said, "What kind of incense is this? It's better for the Dowager Consort's health to have proper air circulation."

After taking a glance, Granny Yan replied, "This is the incense provided by the palace. The Dowager Consort has always liked it, and these past few days, with her discomfort, she wanted to use more of it. Is this incense not good?"

"It's not that it's not good, but for someone who is getting older and is ill, it's better to use less of this kind of incense. Who knows if there are any ingredients in it that may contradict the medicine the Dowager Consort is taking?"

Qu Moying said.

She reminded Granny Yan, who nodded and then turned to look at Dowager Consort Qu, asking for her opinion. "What do you think?"

"Just remove it!" Dowager Consort Qu nodded with her eyes half-closed.

A palace maid came forward and removed the lit incense burner. Qu Moying glanced at Yu Dong, who took two steps forward and seemed a bit reckless while trying to pass by the palace maid but accidentally bumped into her, causing the incense burner to fall from her hand.

The sound of the incense burner hitting the ground startled everyone, and even Dowager Consort Qu opened her eyes and looked over.

Qu Moying furrowed her eyebrows slightly and said, "Yu Dong, apologize to the Dowager Consort!"

Yu Dong quickly kneeled down and pleaded, "Please forgive me, Dowager Consort."

Following her, the palace maids in the palace also knelt down and begged for forgiveness from Dowager Consort Qu. The maid was secretly annoyed. If it weren't for Yu Dong, an inexperienced maid who had just entered the palace, how could this trouble have occurred? But she didn't dare to defend herself proactively.

Dowager Consort Qu, who had little strength, waved her hand at them, indicating that they were forgiven.

Yu Dong and the maid stood up, handling the incense burner with great care. The burning incense had already gone out, with a broken piece fallen on the ground. As Yu Dong helped clean up, she absentmindedly put that fragment into her sleeve. Meanwhile, the court lady tightly clutched the incense burner, while cleaning up the remaining ashes.

Both of them refrained from speaking but worked diligently. In no time, they finished tidying up. The maid quietly withdrew, leaving Yu Dong feeling somewhat flustered. She hurriedly stood behind Qu Moying, afraid to make any more mistakes.

Qu Qiuyan glanced at Yu Dong mockingly. Indeed, the master wasn't competent, and this servant girl was the same. It was evident that she came from a humble background, her actions hurried and clumsy. Such behavior would surely disturb the Dowager Consort.

Ignoring Yu Dong's embarrassing display, Qu Qiuyan looked at a bowl of medicine placed on the table. She got up and gently asked, "Dowager Consort, would you like to take your medicine?"

Dowager Consort Qu shook her head. She really didn't want to drink that medicine; otherwise, it wouldn't have been left there for so long.

"Dowager Consort, taking care of your health is crucial, especially when you're unwell. How can you get better without taking medicine?" Qu Qiuyan said with a softer tone, showing evident concern on her face. Her hand had already reached the edge of the medicine bowl.

Dowager Consort Qu furrowed her brow slightly. She had no desire to consume the medicine. She raised her eyes to look at Qu Qiuyan, her gaze revealing annoyance and impatience. After being sick for so long, she had already grown weary of it.

“Don’t bring it over to me,” the Dowager Consort turned her back to Qu Qiuyan, effectively leaving her hanging there.

Qu Qiuyan was taken aback. She didn’t expect the Dowager Consort to be so dismissive, her face alternating between blushing and paling. If they weren’t in the palace, she would have pushed the bowl away and walked away in a huff.

However, she still had her wits about her, knowing that this was the palace and the person in front of her was the Dowager Consort. She gritted her teeth and calmly placed down the medicine bowl, as if she hadn’t noticed the embarrassment caused by the Dowager Consort.

“Dowager Consort, you won’t need the medicine for now,” Qu Moying reassured with a smile, trying to appease the Dowager Consort. Seeing her demeanor, it was reminiscent of a petulant child when they were sick, easily getting annoyed when things didn’t go their way.

Upon hearing Qu Moying’s words, the Dowager Consort’s body slightly turned, and a palace attendant helped her turn over.

“Have you had your breakfast, Dowager Consort?” Qu Moying raised her eyes to look at Granny Yan.

Granny Yan shook her head, wearing a worried expression. “Not yet. The Dowager Consort said she couldn’t eat; she has no appetite and doesn’t want anything.”

Taking medicine specifically for an ailment could easily dampen one’s appetite. Qu Moying had consumed plenty of medicine herself and understood this well. She also knew that the Dowager Consort despised taking medicine the most and didn’t want to hear the word “medicine.”

Her eyes glistened for a moment, and she smiled as she suggested, “Dowager Consort, would you like to take a walk?”

“I can’t walk!” The Dowager Consort sighed, indeed longing to go for a walk but feeling weak in her legs and feet, making it impossible to move.

“Just walk around inside here, go to the window and have a look. When I entered earlier, it seemed like a flower was blooming over there. I wonder what kind of flower it is; it looks beautiful.” Qu Moying extended her hand and pointed to the window, which was partly covered and obscured the view from the bed.

“Are the flowers outside the window blooming?” The Dowager Consort pondered for a moment, seemingly recalling something, her eyes gleaming with surprise.

“They are blooming, although not fully. They’re half-unfolded, making them even more beautiful. I wanted to ask the Dowager Consort what kind of flowers they are, as they look stunning.” Qu Moying said with a beaming smile.

Upon hearing this, the Dowager Consort regained her spirits. With the assistance of a palace maid, she managed to sit up with some difficulty, pointing her hand towards the window.

A maid approached and draped a cloak over her, then helped her shakily make her way to the window. The window was slightly opened, allowing a refreshing breeze to enter and dilute the scent of incense, making the air feel invigorating. Qu Moying and Qu Qiuyan followed behind the Dowager Consort as they approached the window.

Below the window, there was indeed a pot of flowers, the only one. It wasn’t large, but Qu Moying had indeed seen it when she entered. Judging by the carefully tended appearance of the flowers, they were in the early stages of blooming, emitting a refreshing scent. They seemed to be a type of chrysanthemum, although Qu Moying couldn’t quite identify the specific variety.

The fact that the leaves were only partially unfurled indicated that this had happened in the past few days, something the Dowager Consort must not have seen before.

She didn’t have many interests at the moment, but this single pot of flowers had captured her attention and she took great care of it. She hadn’t even seen the flowers in full bloom yet, which would surely captivate her even more.

She seemed optimistic, but she lacked vitality. She appeared indifferent to everything, as if nothing mattered anymore. This was not a good sign.

If a person lost the will to live, the situation became very precarious.

First, her spirits needed to recover, and then the appropriate medication could be administered for better results. Qu Moying had become quite knowledgeable in this area due to her long illness, similar to Lord Wei in some ways.

As expected, when the Dowager Consort saw the half-blooming flowers, her spirits improved considerably. She held Qu Moying's hand and chatted incessantly about the characteristics of this particular flower. Finally, under Qu Moying's persuasion, she returned to bed to rest. This exchange had rekindled some spirit in her, and she even felt hungry.

Looking at Granny Yan, she said, "Bring a bowl of porridge."

Granny Yan responded and left. Qu Moying reached out and touched the medicine bowl, which had already cooled down and couldn't be consumed anymore. She asked a palace maid to take it away and prepare a fresh batch.

Soon, the porridge and medicine were delivered. Qu Moying served a little over half a bowl of porridge to her before bringing the medicine bowl over with a smile. "Dowager Consort, it's time to take the medicine. It's necessary to consume it for your recovery. If you don't, how will your body get better?"

Qu Qiuyan sneered from the side. She had said the same to her earlier, but it only earned her a cold shoulder. She couldn't believe that Qu Moying wouldn't face the same fate this time. She was eager to see Qu Moying's embarrassed expression.

Maybe she would even spill the bowl, considering she had been the first and Qu Moying was just the second.

Imitating others was truly annoying!

"Taking the medicine won't make much of a difference," Dowager Consort responded, with a slightly improved spirit. She sighed and complained, "How can it be so easy? If it were that simple, the imperial physicians wouldn't be so anxious."

Qu Moying smiled and reassured her, "How can it be useless? If you move around a bit, have some light food, and then take the medicine, the effect will definitely be much better. I have already checked your pulse, and your pulse is fine, it's just that your spirits and mood are low. You feel lazy, but it's nothing serious. Once your mood improves, everything will be fine."

Qu Moying's smile and soothing words, coupled with her serious tone, made her appear interesting.

It was as if a child was trying to imitate an adult, and it was evident that she was making an effort to express herself, even though she lacked some confidence.

Dowager Consort smiled. She found this girl likable in everything she said and did. Seeing her sincere desire for her recovery, she didn't resist anymore. She reached out and took the medicine bowl from Qu Moying's hand. The medicine was no longer hot, so she tasted it before drinking it down.

Once Dowager Consort finished, Qu Moying quickly took the bowl and a palace maid came to assist her with a handkerchief.

Qu Qiuyan was so enraged that smoke seemed to come out of her nose. She had advised Dowager Consort before, but the old consort didn't care. Moreover, she even scolded her, but now she was smiling at Qu Moying, looking quite pleased. Qu Qiuyan nearly crushed the handkerchief in her hand, but she dared not lose her temper.

She lowered her head, trying to suppress her jealousy.

"You, girl, you lied to me! It's not that easy to recover. If it were, the physicians wouldn't be so worried," Dowager Consort sighed and playfully scolded.

But even if it was a lie, she felt it was for the better!

A person's sincerity towards her can be seen at a glance, even after spending so long in the palace. Who was genuine and who was fake, one can always discern it to some extent.

If she didn't possess such ability, she wouldn't have become the only old Dowager Consort to remain in the palace.

"Dowager Consort, I didn't deceive you. It's truly harmless! Dowager Consort, you also know that I've always had poor health before. I even almost lost my eyesight. But later on, it gradually improved. I can consider myself a doctor who has experienced a prolonged illness and become skilled in some basic medical knowledge. The imperial physicians may not have prescribed strong medicines for you right away, fearing any adverse effects. Instead, they opted for a slow and gentle approach. Although it may take longer, it's a more cautious method."

Qu Moying softly explained.

As Dowager Consort Qu nodded repeatedly in response to her words, she pondered and realized the truth in them. The imperial physicians indeed refrained from using powerful medications, as it was customary in the palace. They feared that one wrong move could lead to serious consequences. Gradually administering treatment seemed to be a safer approach.

It appeared that she was not entirely helpless after all!

Of course, not dying would be the best outcome. Her current days were rather pleasant. She didn't have to engage in conflicts with others. She lived quietly in a secluded corner of the palace, enjoying good food and restful sleep. Occasionally, she would catch sight of young girls who caught her eye. Who would want to die for no reason?

With these thoughts in mind, her anxiety subsided, and her spirits improved considerably. She chatted and laughed with Qu Moying, and despite Qu Qiuyan's attempts to interrupt, she failed to do so. Qu Qiuyan felt a mix of resentment and anger but didn't dare to act, so she could only stand aside and listen to their conversation.

Eventually, Dowager Consort Qu grew tired and wanted to rest for a while. Two imperial physicians came in to check her pulse. Qu Moying noticed that one of them was actually familiar—it was the same Medical Officer Zhang whom she had met earlier. Another physician accompanied him. After nodding to Medical Officer Zhang, Qu Moying and Yu Dong stepped out of the room.

Sensing the situation, Qu Qiuyan also stood up and respectfully withdrew to the outer palace.

Both of them knew that they couldn't stay and hinder the physicians from treating Dowager Consort Qu.

"Was that Medical Officer Zhang just now?" Qu Qiuyan inquired as soon as they were outside the main palace. She had also had a face-to-face encounter with Medical Officer Zhang earlier.

#### Chapter 420 The Third Lady Qu who was not Willing to be Alone

Qu Qiuyan also came face to face with Medical Officer Zhang, but he didn't give her a friendly look. He glanced at her coldly and walked past.

Their previous interaction was far from pleasant, although Qu Qiuyan had made amends in the end, it seemed to have little effect now.

"Medical Officer Zhang, didn't Third Sister explain to him before?" Qu Moying said indifferently, beckoning Yu Dong to casually descend the steps.

Qu Qiuyan originally intended to follow them, but after giving it some thought, she decided to stay. Since her previous explanation was inadequate, she would seize this opportunity to explain again.

Since Medical Officer Zhang was involved with Noble Consort He, she didn't dare to offend him, especially in the current situation. Crown Prince hadn't given her a clear answer either. She had only mentioned entering the mansion but hadn't specified her status. The palace hadn't given a definitive response either.

From the initial vague mention of marrying her to later declaring her a side consort, and then saying nothing more, whenever she brought it up, he would claim her reputation was too tarnished. He couldn't say anything now and had to listen to Noble Consort He.

Previously, her reputation was good, although her status was somewhat inferior, but she could still make some upward progress. However, recently her reputation had plummeted due to her own actions and the actions of Yu. Rumors were circulating outside that she had obtained her position as the rightful

wife through illicit means, likely due to the death of Qu Zhizhen's rightful wife. Otherwise, why wouldn't they tolerate the daughter of a former wife with an eye condition?

She entered the Qu Mansion with such a temperament, and then the Second Madam of the Qu Mansion died of dystocia. Most importantly, it was said that she was not even in the mansion when the dystocia occurred. This had an unclear karma with Yu.

Even if she wasn't directly killed by Yu, she should have been indirectly killed.

Then, it was said that Qu Qiuyan was repeatedly trying to harm this Fourth Lady Qu. Qu Qiuyan's reputation fell again and again.

Thinking about all this, Qu Qiuyan felt extremely frustrated. She didn't have any good feelings towards Yu since Yu had been placed under surveillance. She had visited her once or twice, but then had started to secretly avoid her.

She stood guard at the entrance of the grand palace for a while and when she saw the two physicians coming out, she took a couple of steps forward and gave a slight bow to Medical Officer Zhang, who was walking in the middle.

"Medical Officer Zhang."

Medical Officer Zhang furrowed his brow. He truly disliked the Third Lady Qu, but in the current palace setting, he couldn't completely ignore her. So he stood in place and nodded, "Third Lady Qu, you're being polite."

"How is the Dowager Consort's health?" Qu Qiuyan asked softly, her gaze filled with concern.

"The Dowager Consort's condition remains the same. It needs to be gradually treated," replied Medical Officer Zhang, his voice calm.

"Just a while ago, the Dowager Consort took a short walk and even went to the window to look outside. She was causing a fuss before and refused to take her medicine," Qu Qiuyan said, her face filled with

worry. “I don’t know if you have any methods to help the Dowager Consort recover more quickly. She’s getting older, and her body can’t endure this for much longer.”

The words made Medical Officer Zhang almost burst into laughter, as if they didn’t want Dowager Consort Qu to recover. Even the emperor had issued a decree, urging them to pay more attention and ensure Dowager Consort Qu’s speedy recovery. The Imperial Hospital had been doing their utmost, with several doctors stationed here, constantly discussing and adjusting the treatment plan, fearing the slightest mishap.

But now, it seemed that they were neglecting their duty when it came to Third Lady Qu.

This displeased not only Medical Officer Zhang but also the young doctor standing nearby.

Although he remained silent, his expression revealed a hint of coldness.

“Lady Qu, we will do our best, and we will also inform the emperor about this matter. Please.” Medical Officer Zhang said bluntly, arching his hand towards Qu Qiuyan.

He then turned around, bypassing Qu Qiuyan, and briskly walked away with another physician.

They left Qu Qiuyan standing there, seemingly abandoned.

The implication was clear—Dowager Consort Qu’s matter was of the emperor’s concern, but what significance did Lady Qu Qiuyan hold? On what basis did she dare to come here and question, even casting doubt on the medical skills of the Imperial Hospital?

Seeing the two depart, Qu Qiuyan’s face flushed with embarrassment and frustration. She glanced at the palace maids standing quietly in two rows outside the palace. Even though they had their heads lowered, she couldn’t help but feel they were mocking her. Unable to bear it any longer, she stomped her foot forcefully and descended the steps with determination.

With a fierce glare at Medical Officer Zhang ahead, she thought to herself, “What a narrow-minded old fool! I’m here to express concern for Dowager Consort Qu, to show my goodwill, and yet this wretched old man misunderstands me.”

This was not surprising. Qu Qiuyan had clashed with Medical Officer Zhang in the Qu Mansion before. Regardless of what Qu Qiuyan said now, Medical Officer Zhang would always have a biased perspective and never consider her to be kind-hearted or well-intentioned. Qu Qiuyan’s stay this time was bound to be in vain.

Furthermore, Qu Qiuyan was eager to prove herself, and her words had indeed been poorly chosen, giving rise to many suspicions.

Qu Moying ignored Qu Qiuyan. She didn’t want Qu Qiuyan to follow her. She purposely said those words to make Qu Qiuyan stay. Of course, she could guess that Qu Qiuyan wouldn’t have a good ending.

Medical Officer Zhang would never forget what had happened at the Qu Mansion. Qu Qiuyan’s appearance was enough to make Medical Officer Zhang avoid her for the rest of his life.

Qu Moying did not go far and chose a pavilion to sit for a while.

The pavilion only had two floors and was not very tall. However, when one sat on the top, the view was very wide. One could see the scenery at the entrance of the main palace. One could also see Medical Officer Zhang and another imperial physician walk around Qu Qiuyan and leave. Then Qu Qiuyan brought Qing Ju and walked down. Qu Qiuyan’s body was too weak. At this time, she really needed to rest.

Everyone knew that it was not a good time to go in now.

Qu Qiuyan looked down the steps and seemed to ask where Qu Moying was going. A palace servant pointed in the direction of Qu Moying. Qu Qiuyan narrowed her eyes and looked over. She turned and walked out. Looking at her, it was obvious that she was going to leave Dowager Consort Qu’s palace and walk outside.

Yu Dong, who was standing beside Qu Moying, also saw this scene and asked in surprise, “This time, we came to the palace to check on the Dowager Consort Qu’s illness. Now that the Dowager Consort Qu’s health is so poor, Third Lady still wants to go out for a walk?”

There was one more thing that Yu Dong didn’t mention. Dowager Consort Qu was a low-key person, so low-key that no one would remember that there was such an old Dowager Consort in the palace. If it wasn’t for the big commotion, perhaps many people wouldn’t know about this person. With Dowager Consort Qu’s personality, she wouldn’t want others to know about her or inquire about her.

If Qu Qiuyan went out like this, the people she met would definitely ask about it. Maybe there would be people who came to inquire about it because of the emperor’s attention. Qu Qiuyan went out like this, wasn’t it a good opportunity for people?

Moreover, she was here to visit the sick, not to enjoy the scenery. Dowager Consort Qu was so seriously ill, yet she still had the heart to slowly enjoy the scenery outside. It really made people feel that she was pretending to enter the palace this time.

“She also wants to go out for a walk and see if there is the right person.” Qu Moying smiled. If there were still people who also want to make trouble in this palace, they may do it together!

On one side of this building, there were windows all along. After pulling back the curtains, the view becomes clear. After Qu Qiuyan went outside, she looked around and chose the middle road to walk out.

The middle road was the widest, offering more opportunities to encounter people.

Qu Moying no longer paid attention to Qu Qiuyan. She turned away from the window and walked over to sit on the chair in the middle of the room. “Yu Dong, have you retrieved the piece of incense?”

“It’s in my sleeve. Would you like to see it now, Lady?” Yu Dong turned around as well and gently pinched her own sleeve. She had managed to slip the broken incense into it when the palace maid wasn’t paying attention.

“No need. Show it to Granny Miao when we go back. I sense that something is amiss, but I can’t be certain. Granny Miao must know something.” Qu Moying shook her head. If the incense was taken out, it would definitely emit a certain fragrance. It was better not to touch it for now.

Granny Miao’s behavior and actions clearly indicated that she had suspected something even before entering the palace. However, she hadn’t confirmed it at the time, so she remained silent.

Qu Moying was now certain that there must be something wrong with the incense. However, she was puzzled. Who would target such a low-profile Dowager Consort?

Indeed, her health had deteriorated significantly. When they had entered, the Dowager Consort had shown no desire to live. It was only after utilizing the carefully nurtured flowers that she had regained a bit of vitality and taken a few steps.

Qu Moying was well aware of the sensation of lying motionless in bed. Over the years, during her own bouts of serious illness, she had experienced the same state—gazing out of the window with lifeless eyes, unable to see anything clearly. She would simply wait for death quietly, without fear or dread. One could even say she felt neither sadness nor joy.

Looking back, Qu Moying realized that her previous self was actually more inclined to escape from the worldly affairs. She was a lonely individual in this world, with blood relatives who were cold and indifferent. As a young girl in her teens, she believed she had seen enough of the worldly glamour and the fickleness of human hearts.

Her long eyelashes fluttered slightly as she closed her eyes for a moment and then reopened them. She let out a long sigh and a faint smile curved her lips. “Let’s wait and see. Removing the incense should improve things, but...”

“But what?” Yu Dong asked instinctively.

Qu Moying sneered, “But there may be people who are unwilling to let it go and will try to light it again!”

If someone had sent this kind of scented incense, it was possible that there were individuals planted within her palace. Even if it had been removed before, they could now reintroduce it under the pretense of it being a habitual practice.

Habit was sometimes a convenient excuse that required no further explanation...

In the palace, ordinary people wouldn't have access to such scented incense. The fact that there was a problem with the incense delivered to Dowager Consort Qu or within the palace itself raised suspicions...