

The rumor is always bigger than the truth

Saiunkoku Palace gossip

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It had been one of this uneventful days, where the time felt like stretching endlessly. In front of the mirror sat a small feminine figure getting her hair ready with pins, while her silky dress already was. She paid heed not to wear her finest garment today, because she intended to head directly for the kitchen to make some manju buns for herself. Partly because she was hungry now and partly because it would cease the boredom of this dragging morning. Surely she could ask for it, even demand them to bring her some but that wouldn't be the same, also they wouldn't taste the same. Finally the last pin was set in place, but before she could check her hairstyle with a last proofing gaze again, there was a knock at her door.

Shuurei sighed shortly „Come in please“. The door got opened and a young lady came in, nearly older than Shuurei was and bowed to her in humility.

„You may excuse my sudden intrusion but I haven't seen her majesty for hours and was wondering if there is anything her highness is needing. You rarely seeking my assistance, kougou-sama so I was worried.“

Shuurei looked to the young woman without answering first and tried to hide her disappointment that the sudden visitor was her new lady-in-waiting and not Ryuuki she rarely had seen these days. The woman before her remained in her bowed position, giving Shuurei the time to observe her carefully. Her lady in waiting was a fine, loyal woman, feminine and well mannered too. No matter how many times Shuurei asked her to be less formal, she always insisted to speak to her in an all formal language, even now. It's already had been months since her wedding, months since people around her started to regard her in a different way, just because she was wearing the title of an empress now. Yet it was still not enough time for Shuurei to

get used to it.

„Su-Lin-san raise yourself please. I'm grateful for your concern, but I don't need anything." Then she paused for a moment, thinking. "...Well though maybe there is one thing."

„Yes, milady?" Su-Lin's wide, brown eyes looked expectantly to her mistress.

„How long have you been working on my side now?"

Su-Lin was surprised about this question, „Umm....three...three... months, kougou-sama."

„I see, so just a month less than I'm here," she smiled. "Well I may insist on the issue that you please call me Shuurei or Shuurei-sama, when we are alone. I'm not a friend of all those formalities, so they should just be used when needed, okay?"

Su-Lin shook her head "...but it's impossible...", though a straight gaze of Shuurei hushed her protest instantly. "Err...okay if kougou...Shuurei-sama demanded it, I should do this", she finished and shifted nervously beside her.

Shuurei nodded pleased „Yes I do and you should respect the wish of an empress, right? Well if you excuse me, I'll head to the garden now", she said and stood up from her seat to the entrance.

Su-Lin smiled as she watched her leaving. No, her mistress was all but the usual empress, she always heard scary tales of as a child. This empress was kind and righteous as the king was and hence Su-Lin liked her. So she just hoped Shuurei-sama wouldn't find out about the newest palace gossip so fast. Not when his majesty seemed to put so much energy in to avoid that the empress would become acquainted with it. And Su-Lin thought the king was well advised to do so, because she doubted Shuurei-sama would be very happy to know about it.

Shuurei yawned as she stepped out from her room in the morning sun, she had slept long today yet still was tired. She blamed the arduousness of the long journey for it, which still troubled her. It had been a late hour yesterday, where she had returned to the palace. Returned from a one week trip to visit her sick father in the Kou province, where he now lived since he became the leader of the Kou clan. Though after seeing her already on the mend being father and clearing her worries about him, there was still one cater remaining. Namely Ryuuki's cold behavior toward her in the last time. Yeah, she knew he was a busy man ruling a country, yet she couldn't shake off the feeling of him acting weird. For example the case with her journey, she expected him to protest long, to not letting her go on such a far and probably dangerous trip.

Though he practically shoved her out of the palace and wished her -along with Seiran- a good journey. Shuurei sighed, as she turned the corner to the kitchen, maybe it was

just her being moody lately, which strengthen up the impression of Ryuuki strangely avoiding her. *No*, Shuurei shrugged on that thought, *she was neither stupid nor blind, there was definitely something cooking and it wasn't the manju buns*. She just had to find out what it was...

Shuurei was about to enter the kitchen to distract herself from the heavy thoughts of hers, as she heard two maids talking to each other during their work. They haven't noticed their royal visitor yet and Shuurei decided to leave it at that. If she had learned one thing in her long time in the palace, whether as official or empress, there was nothing more informative as to eavesdrop to the good old palace gossip. Well most the time at last.

„Do you have heard....the one maid started, the latest rumor going around here?“

„No I haven't, tell me“ replied the other one excited.

„Oh you won't believe it.“

„Really?“

Shuurei rolled her eyes, it was one of *those* conversation. The gossip ones with much air and few content in it, with those the personal seemed to enjoy themselves at times. She felt stupid to waste her time on something like that, not that she hadn't enough to spare of it today, but still. *Well time for my appearance then*, she thought and was about to set her foot in the door as they continued speaking,

„Yes it goes around for a week now, quite a besetting one“

Hearing this sentence, she froze in her movements and immediately pulled her feet back to the corner again. *A week? A new rumor in that time frame?* Her mind was quick puzzling the pieces together, like always. *Wait, it couldn't possibly be something involving a certain husband of mine, or?* She hoped they hadn't recognized her yet, while she remained in the corner and pricked her ears for the following words of them.

„Yes ,yes its not officially yet, though this is only a matter of time and the source is believable. I heard it first hand from her. Its about his majesty...“, the one maid laughed. The tick-tack of porcelain interrupted her talk.

Dang, I was right. Shuurei hold her breath and straightened herself up, now she was really curious about the outcome.

The maid lowered her voice a bit, while saying, „Due to the heir problem, it seems like that his highness gave up monogamy. Which means despite the fact he only got married with the Kou-princess lately, he now is searching for another woman to take also as his wife.“

„Oh, I always thought he’s too much of a man for just one woman...maybe I should volunteer for this position too.“, the other one said and both maids laughed coltish on this joke.

What. The. Hell. ???

This could not happening. She froze on the spot. Shuurei didn’t wanted to believe her ears, yet she heard those words which let her whole body tremble and jolted all different kind of emotions through her system. Anger, disbelieve, hurt, jealousy, denial, disappointment. All of them at the same time, too much for her to name them all. A part of the rationality left within the storms of her emotions despairingly tried to tell her that she shouldn’t believe some cheap palace gossip but the circumstances of the rumor were just too fitting to badmouth it as false. There was Ryuuki’s nervously and weird behavior toward her lately and the journey which lasted one week, exact the time frame where this rumor started spreading. No this all were just too convenient to be a coincidence. *So in her absence, he had all planned this?* Shuurei pushed back the tears and felt her body shaking violently of wrath now. She was determinate to visit this scoundrel of a husband to make his life to a living hell, before she would allow herself to cry.

Meanwhile the two women came out of the kitchen, talking again, the younger women up front.

„You know the most delicate part of it? The empress doesn’t seem to kn...ouch...“, the younger maids words were interrupted by bumping into a feminine person. „Hey watch you...“, she yelled first but stopped death track with both, her words and motion as she recognized who the person in front of her actually was.

Shit.

Something in her mind kept telling her that she might get murdered by the empress on the spot, if she didn’t excuse herself repeatably for running into her. *Hell if needed she would do that until the end of her life.* The murderous intent in her majesty’s eyes were just too present to ignore. „I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I’m sorry, she repeated over and over again while bowing to her. Not that Shuurei cared about, not now.

„Out of my way“, Shuurei just muttered loudly and practically shoved her aside, storming away.

„Was that...“, the older maid behind her asked in bewilderment and blinked, pointing into the direction Shuurei had disappeared to.

„Yes indeed...and I can be glad to be still alive. God that was scary. I don’t want to be in the skin of the emperor now. Not for the world.“, the younger maid uttered with her eyes still wide open.

„Oh, so she heard that, huh?...“, the other maid replied and starred back to her in shock.

„Whaaaat? Again?“, the emperor sat at his desk and starred utterly bewildered on the huge pile of what seems to be newly arrived papers of marriage proposals. „W-we thought we finally got rid of this ridiculous rumor, during the week where Shuurei was away and yet look at THIS,“ he pointed at the huge pile and made a face. „Shuueiiii, what should we do now? The rumor is still spreading, even our announcement didn't changed a thing.“, Ryuuki buried his head into his hands, sighing despairingly.

„Well you can't exactly say that your highness, today there are only half as much marriage proposals than yesterday“, Shuuei laughed slightly and observed the hectic commotion of his emperor with a mixture of amusement and pity. *He knew that the king was going to be a dead man, if Shuurei-sama would hear of it.* They magically made it until now that she didn't became acquainted with it, but now after she was back from her journey, this was only a matter of time.

Ryuuki just throw him a glare, before he wallowed in self- pity again.„Who is the persistent source of this palace gossip, just who, Shuuei? What should we do when Shuurei will find out about it? Oh, we fought so hard and long for her heart, what if she will hate us now?, he frowned. Only thinking on Shuurei's horrid and furious reaction on this gave him the goosebumps. *If she wouldn't kill him instantly, she would leave him sleeping on the ground for months....or even worse never back in her bed again.* He shrugged on this awful thought, before looking pleadingly to his friend.

„Unfortunately your majesty, we haven't found the source yet, for it must be a indeed clever one. Spreading the rumor carefully at first but slowly more persistent now, that it even became believable for the ministers. Well the results of that we can see here, Shuuei stated and pointed at the stack of documents. "I don't actually understand the purpose of making this whole commotion but somehow this seems to be effective“, he sighed.

„What makes the circumstances even worse is that this idea slowly gets approval by the grand advisers, due to the fact that Kougou-sama haven't conceived a child yet“, his prime minister Yuushun chipped in. "But I also have send a letter to Kou Shouka-sama to explain that matter, like your majesty asked me too. So this should get solved with the letter's arrival ...at least what concerned the Kou clan", he explained and was clearly referring to Shuurei with it.

Ryuuki smiled faintly „Good good, thank you, Yuushun. Though what concerns the heir affair; Thats none of their damn business“, Ryuuki muttered angrily, before he found back to a more suitable language for an emperor. „We understand that we have to get a heir as soon as possible now we are married, but this is a personal matter between the empress and us. And we don't want another woman, we just need....“, he stopped dead track with his words as suddenly a voice broke through the closed doors of his office.

„RYUUUUKIIII!!“

Oh shit.

Shuurei's voice announced her arrival before she actually was there ...and the tone in it raised Ryuuki's hackles, letting him gulping in fear.

He was as good as dead.

Not a moment later the door flew open with a big whoosh and a very pissed off, furious empress entered the room. Yuushun and Shuuei starred at her in fear for a second, before they exchanged a quick glance to each other, both definitely more than grateful not being into the emperors shoes by now.

„Shu-Shu-Shuurei“, Ryuuki stammered, his eyes wide open on this scary sight.

SHUT UP!“, she growled, heavily shaking of anger. Ryuuki winced on its overwhelming sound and pressed himself back into his seat, as if he could hide there.

Ookaaay, this was just the sign for leaving. As much Shuuei would have loved to see the live execution of Saiunkoku's emperor by his wife, but he thought it would be indeed better for his life to pass on this one. He just valued it too much for that little fun, no thanks.

„You have been a good emperor, it was nice knowing you“, Shuuei murmured to the congealed Ryuuki and patted him on the back before quickly heading to the door.

Yuushun took this chance to do the same, mumbling something like, „I forgot the papers in the archive,“ before hasty leaving the war ground together with Shuuei.

The door closed behind them and clicked as it snapped in. That was the only sound for one, two painfully seconds. They were alone now, leaving Shuurei up in front of her startled husband without saying anything. She only stared full of rage at him. Ryuuki's mind raced, searching for the right thing to say now, if there was a chance to say something at all.

"Listen, Shuur...", he started agitated, gulping hard.

„So this is all about?“, she cut in his words, nearly screaming. "You chased after me for years and now that you have me, I'm not interesting enough anymore? So you decided you need a new woman to toy with? Is it that? Or do you just want a more elegant, refined woman? Then why marrying me in the first place?", she swallowed hard on this words, feeling the jealousy and hurt jolting through her body.

He frowned. Dammit, this rumor brought her old complexes back to the surface. He stood up from his seat, reaching out to her. "Shuurei its not like that, I just need...., he tried to explain, yet got interrupted by her again.

"...what an heir?, she narrowed her eyes. Oh I know that already, because you are the goddamn emperor and I'm not stupid, thank you very much. "Well, she blushed

faintly, I'm sorry I'm not as fecund as the usual woman, though you might have more luck with the new one. I just thought you would have the guts to tell me it personally, because I thought you would love and respect me at least that much", she yelled disappointed in his face. Guess I was wrong, she thought and suppressed the tears.

"As for me, I'm moving out of our bed and from our accommodation".

Hell no. All but that! Ryuuki thought shocked. He had accepted to sleep on the ground for weeks -if necessary- but without Shuurei at all was unbearable. And all just because of a stupid rumor. He gritted his teeth and tried to reach out for her, for an embrace. Where words were forlorn, maybe actions could prove her wrong.

"Don't touch me, you jerk", she took a few steps back and reluctantly pushed his hands away from her. Ryuuki couldn't do anything for a moment than to stare at her, open-mouthed.

"Oh...,she added in a deridingly tone, you now what is most ironic on all that? Concerning the heir issue, I probably could already be....argh forget it you idiot", with those words she furiously turned around and stormed out of the office. Ryuuki followed her, numbed of her words he needed a moment to realize.

„Wait, wh-what did you just say?, he asked, stunned. Shuurei however ignored him and didn't stopped walking forward -through the hall, then out to the garden. Always with Ryuuki behind her. He sighed mentally, she was just too much of a stubborn head at times, though if needed he would follow her all day to make her listen to him. Regarding Shuurei, he wasn't less stubborn.

To the people crossing the way of the royal couple this must have been a very strange, not every day scenario to see here at the palace. Where the emperor despairingly followed his wife, constantly mumbling things like „Its just a rumor and not true. I only love you, or I don't need anyone else“ to her, which didn't really seemed to impress her much in her angry walk...let alone stopped her.

Though for one person, this was a most amusing view as they continued their spectacle in the garden, where he stood. It had been too quiet, too boring here in the palace the last months anyway, so it was good too see that his plan had worked out. And that the empress finally knew (and believed) the rumor, he had spread so carefully. He laughed gleefully behind his fan, as he watched from a safe distance how the idiot-emperor followed his sweet niece, but failed to make her listen.

Yes it might have been a bit childish, maybe even too drastic to plan all this, to make such a commotion for this tiny amusing moment. However Reishin knew how fast rumors would spread in the palace, so scheming it wasn't really that difficult. Unfortunately it wouldn't take long until they would be back to their gross lovey-dovey anyway. Still in his eyes this view was worth it and so he enjoyed the desperate actions of this snotty-nosed brat very much.

Just because Reishin couldn't hinder Shuurei's wedding with this good-for nothing king, didn't meant he couldn't have at least his fun.

A/N: La fin :D Kougou-sama ist übrigens japanisch für Kaiserin/empress. ;)