

THE DOCTOR'S THREE-TIME MARRIAGE

Chapter 1

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[Marriage] On the fifteenth of July, it's advisable to make sacrifices, but not to marry. In the heart of Qian Country lays Su Village, deeply immersed in the autumn harvest season. When night falls, the last streak of crimson in the west is devoured, dissolving into the murky twilight. Groups of fatigued farmers, leading oxen, pulling carts, and lugging burlap sacks, trudge their way home after a long day of labor. A sudden blast of a suona startles a flock of sparrows into flight. The common people stop in their tracks and follow the sound with their gaze. They see a rickety litter, adorned with a clumsily tied, bright red flower, being carried hurriedly towards the east end of the village by two men. A heavily dolled-up matchmaker, panting heavily while struggling to keep up on her bound feet, still manages to maintain a facade of professional laughter. At first glance, she resembles a poorly painted wooden mask that one might find at a temple fair. Another man, chasing the litter, runs and blows the suona simultaneously. His melody is discordant, as if he is playing with his last, gasping breath. "Whose family is choosing to get married today? Aren't they afraid of bad luck?" "Who else could it be? It's Ning's son! They say he's on death's door, and the wedding is meant to bring him good luck!" "Has Su Daqiang really sold his granddaughter for just ten silver?" "He sold a granddaughter, but not one of his own!" "Then who is..." "It's the niece that came to him last year!" "The one named Su Liang? What a dreadfully unlucky name!" ... The litter creaks and groans as it finally comes to a halt, narrowly avoiding collapse. The matchmaker pounds on the door, causing it to

reverberate loudly. As no one answers, her old face falls, and the powder on her cheekbones begins to flake off. She mumbles to herself, "Did they change their minds?" As the piercing suona continues to play, the matchmaker leans forward, raising her hand high. However, just as she is about to knock, the door suddenly swings open, causing her short and plump figure to tumble inside, ending up facedown in the dust. She scrambles to her feet, her forced smile barely forming when a stiff cloth bag lands in her lap. "Hiss!" The matchmaker gasps in pain as she catches the bag, but her intrigued curiosity quickly outweighs the discomfort. She opens the bag, and her garishly painted lips stretch into a grin, "The bride is here, you should conduct the wedding ceremony while there's still time!" "Get lost!" This single word seems to be squeezed out of the teeth of a lean and stern-looking elder. The matchmaker shrinks back and exits, signaling for the litter bearers and the suona player to proceed. The elder glares at the worn-out litter outside, his fist clenching and unclenching. With a cold grunt, he slams the door and retreats. The matchmaker, clutching her money, hurries towards the west side of the village. Suddenly, the rapid sound of horseshoes approaching makes her stumble over and tumble into the shrubs by the road. Raising her head again, she sees a man on a horse galloping towards the east. The blurred silhouette of his retreating figure exudes an intimidating aura, and she swallows the curse that was about to escape from her lips. When Su Liang opens her eyes, she is surrounded by complete darkness. She intuitively believes she has landed in the Netherworld. Her memory is clear; she hasn't reached the Naihe Bridge yet. Coming from a family of physicians and her own military experience, she plans to analyze the components of the anxiety relief soup later... With these thoughts, Su Liang calms down. Death is irreversible. She resigns herself to her fate, waiting for the Underworld's attendants to guide her to Naihe Bridge where she'll reincarnate. The cloth curtain sways in the cool night breeze. With a sneeze, Su Liang reaches to open the curtain, eager

to see if Yanluo Hall is outside. Through the curtain, she touches a hand that feels warm. Startled, she questions if there's a living person in the Underworld? The fragile litter curtain comes off easily when she gives it a gentle pull. Looking up, she sees the night sky covered in countless stars and a man standing right in front of her. His face is concealed in shadow, making it difficult to discern his features. But those eyes, oh, they are beautiful! They sparkle like stars, a sight to behold even in their warmthless glory. "Get off." His voice is pleasing to the ear. However, Su Liang can't ignore the feeling that something is wrong... Her gaze drops, and her pupils constrict.

Traditional Chinese clothing? The man's hand, encased in the fabric of the curtain, is held tightly in Su Liang's grip, forgotten in her shock. Sensing something strange, she pinches it a couple of times. Despite no skin-to-skin contact, the feel is pleasing. His slender fingers are defined, perfect for playing the piano. Not a ghost, but a real, living person. Although Su Liang doesn't show it, her mind is in turmoil: Is she still alive? Has she time-traveled? "Today, we get married. It's time to conduct the ceremony." The man speaks again. His tone is indifferent, like the icy still water of a severe winter's day. Su Liang: ...I...am...done... An elder with a stony expression approaches, tears off the curtain, forcibly parts the two, and removes the red silk flower from the litter, ordering Su Liang to hold one end. As Su Liang silently takes hold, she hears "Young master, the 'hour' has come!" The muted voice emphasizes the word "hour" intentionally, its real meaning unclear.

There seems to be the sound of horse hooves in the distance. Su Liang is yanked out and, before she could get a clear look at the young master, a bridal veil falls on her face, obstructing her view. "Lift your feet." As Su Liang steps over the threshold, she is led further in. If this isn't a dream, then it must be time-travel. But she had not received any memories of the original host, and was completely clueless about the situation. The only certainty was that her previously robust body was now weak, and resistance or escape seemed

highly unwise. The ceremonial ritual wouldn't matter much, as long as there was no wedding night, everything can be discussed. With that thought in mind, she intended to figure out the situation first. "Bow to heaven and earth." Su Liang quietly asked, "Should I kneel?" "No need." The same magnetically appealing young male voice replied. Good looking eyes, pleasing voice, he should not be ugly... Su Liang silently thought as she bowed. On hearing the command to "Bow to the ancestors", Su Liang turned to continue the ritual. If she were to remove the veil, she would see a spirit tablet on the table, but it was completely blank. "The couple bows to each other!" Su Liang turned sideways, then, bumped into a head... "The ceremony is complete! Congratulations, sir!" However, Su Liang could discern that the congratulatory remarks were filled with undeniable melancholy, void of any joy. She was led into a room and sat down by the bed. The silken damask lightly fell onto Su Liang's knees, then hung down. The man let go of her. "You rest here," was said in a distant voice. "Oh," replied Su Liang instinctively. Footsteps, a closing door, followed by an opening and closing door next door. Su Liang let out a sigh of relief, looked down at the exquisitely embroidered shoes on her feet, touched her throbbing pulse and realized it was true- she had traveled through time. As the surrounding became quiet, Su Liang pulled off the veil, barely making out the furnishings in the room, when suddenly the door burst open! A tall and robust young man strode towards Su Liang, his eyes sharp and not the one who had performed the ceremonious bows with her earlier. Dark attire, a waist sword, hair bound with a jade crown, posture upright. His stride brought a chill wind, causing an overwhelming suppressive feeling. He was a lot more handsome and imposing than the generals she'd seen in TV shows from her previous life. "Who are you? Who let you in?" An old man appeared at the door. The man approached Su Liang, eyes glowing brilliantly, staring at her face. His words, however, were directed towards the old man behind him, "I am Nian Jincheng, the current grade-three Military Commander,

here by order to arrest the Gu Family's rebels. Anyone who obstructs me stands to die as well!" A shining token flew past Su Liang. She felt a surge of fury. Was the man who just married her a rebel? Having traveled through time, was she not even going to see tomorrow's sun? Through the man in front of her, she saw the old man who had previously been unpleasant to her. Now, he seemed anxious, "Sir, I believe you must have mistaken your location. My master is a Ning, we have never heard of Gu." Nian Jincheng ignored him, still fixed on Su Liang, "Did you willingly marry him?" Su Liang thought... Saying "No" might clear her involvement? But, being certain if the "bridegroom" was a rebel isn't confirmed yet. Trusting this aggressive general less, it's safer if she stayed on the "groom's" side. As long as he was safe, she would be fine. Thinking this, Su Liang lowered her gaze, timidly nodding as she clutched her red veil, "Yes..." Nian Jincheng's eyes narrowed slightly, he said in a deep voice, "I met the rebels while passing by Su village. I am craving some alcohol, and since you are having a joyous occasion here, I thought to ask for a cup of wedding wine. Apologies for disturbing you." Su Liang thought... I...can't...believe...you... The old man at the door visibly relaxed, hurriedly easing out with a smile, "It is a great honor for our Ning family to have a visit from you, Commander Nian. I will fetch your wine immediately!" Su Liang thought Nian Jincheng might leave, but he took out a Jade Hairpin from his bosom and placed it in her black hair. He stepped back, giving a formal salute saying, "I picked this up on the way. Congratulations on finding the man of your wishes. Consider this as a token of apology." As his words fell, he turned on his heels, and with great strides, he left. The door closed again with a thud. "Commander Nian, a small token from our young master, please accept." Nian Jincheng took the jar of wine, looking at the slender silhouette reflected on the neighbor's window. In the half-dark, half-lit environment, his grim face echoed, "I wish you both a prosperous future, growing old together. This I take my leave!" The sound of galloping horse

hooves faded away and the courtyard became quiet again. “Master, did he fail to recognize you, or...” “He knows it’s me.” “But if he plans to let you go, why come at all?” “This wasn’t his decision. Plus, he isn’t the only one who arrived.” “Thank heavens, he still remembers old times! But witnessing you married to a country girl must not sit well with him, after all, Miss Nian and you were betrothed since childhood.” “I married a wife, and I now have nothing to do with the Nian family. Nian Jincheng understands my intentions. Gu Ling is dead, from now on, only Ning Jing exists in this world.” “Alas! But how will this country girl be dealt with?” “We’ll talk about it tomorrow.” ... In the woods outside Su village, the night wind howled. Nian Jincheng pulled up on the horse’s reins, and out of the darkness emerged eight men in uniform, each wearing a waist sword. “I’ve confirmed that he is Ning Jing, the seventh son of the tea merchants of Xunyang, exiled by his family, now living here and just married. They are now in their wedding room,” Nian Jincheng addressed coldly. A soft and gloomy voice came from behind, “I had just gone to the village for some hot water, missed bumping into you, Commander Nian!” Nian Jincheng’s hand tightened on the reins, listening to the man’s shrill laughter from behind, “I heard that this Ning Qi married a girl who, although beautiful, couldn’t read a word, was lazy, rude, and uncivilized. So, she can’t possibly be the capricious Master Gu.” Nian Jincheng exhaled inaudibly, “Thank you for going through the trouble, officiate Han. Thus, we should look elsewhere!”