Farmhouse 1021

Chapter 1021: Captured

"Qin Changlin, put him back," Searcy gritted her teeth and spoke in a low voice.

The sound seemed to seep through the gaps in her teeth, laced with helplessness and a chilling coldness.

This petite woman exuded an indomitable spirit and tenacity that embarrassed even the sturdiest of men.

"Go on, at worst it’s just death, but I will make sure I die before her," Qin Changlin said resolutely.

Usually, he babbled endlessly, but this time he had spoken something quite sensible.

Searcy handed Qin Changlin a pouch filled with silver, telling him, "The long needle seals the throat upon contact with blood, the short needle can knock someone out; be careful."

Gui Yunxi clung on stubbornly until Searcy finally kicked him away.

From the moment Gu Youyou had rescued her from Madam Lu’s hands, she owed her a life.

It was she who granted her a chance at rebirth, allowing her to forget she once was called Lu Xueying, and now, she was Searcy.

Gu Youyou had said this was the name of a witch from a myth, quite fitting for her. She guessed the "witch" her friend referred to must mean "evil god." Yes, she was an evil god—a bearer of poisons, a curse upon whoever she touched.

"Stop," Searcy stood up and shouted loudly at those men in black.

"It’s me you want, spare the innocent, come at me if you want fight or kill."

Everyone paused, looking at the woman standing among the pool of blood-strewn corpses like a resilient little plant.

One man in black slightly raised his hand backward, and a throng of men in black stepped back.

The men of Jin Zijin were nearly all gone, with only five remaining, all heavily injured.

Searcy said to them, "You've done your best, even though you're men bound by a death oath, there's no need for pointless sacrifice."

They looked around, pressing on their wounds, and retreated to the side.

Gui Yunxi hid behind the carriage while Qin Changlin, with tears streaming down his face, pulled him close.

Blaming himself for his uselessness; if he couldn't protect himself, how could he protect her?

One of the men in black approached, glanced at the three behind the carriage, and said coldly, "Take all the women."

He knew that death-bound men would not let those they protect face danger until they have fallen themselves.

But these men, although severely injured, had not fallen; their withdrawal was merely because this woman wasn't the one they were supposed to protect.

"Who are you people?" Searcy panicked.

If she couldn't handle it herself, then she was truly out of options.

"You don’t need to know who we are, but just to be safe, we’ll have to take both women from your group," he responded.

He looked toward the death-bound men who had picked up their swords again, asking, "Are you going to your deaths, or will you live to report back?"

Without a word, they chose to fight to the death as that was their destined fate.

"Stand down," Searcy shouted loudly at them, "Didn’t I make myself clear earlier? There’s no need for unnecessary sacrifice; take those two useless ones back."

"Fine, straightforward!" the man in black said.

...

By the time Gu Youyou woke up, she was already back in the carriage, with Searcy beside her.

Her head was still spinning, it was night, and she couldn’t clearly see Searcy’s face, just her sitting motionless.

It seemed there was no major issue, Gu Youyou took a deep breath, sat up straight, and asked, "What’s the situation now? How did we escape?"

"Escape?" Searcy said irritably, "They wanted all the women; we both got captured."

Chapter 1022: The Old Lover Invites You for Tea

freëwebnovel.com

"Captured?" Gu Youyou supported her head with one hand, quickly looking out the window of the carriage.

This was their carriage, but the people outside were not the familiar guards on horseback; instead, they were horseback riders clad in black.

Thus, they were indeed captured.

Gu Youyou’s expression suddenly darkened as she said, "Did you drug me? What exactly is going on?"

That teammate, drugging her at such a critical moment.

"I wanted to replace you, so I drugged you," Searcy said indifferently, looking quite weak. "Don’t worry, aside from us two, everyone else is fine. Oh, only five of the guards that Jin Zijin gave you are alive. They are severely injured too. Your idea was right. Knowing it was futile, it was better to reduce the casualties. Fortunately, these people didn’t intend to kill us, just to capture us."

The aftereffects of the drug were strong, and Gu Youyou’s head still hurt. The dizziness and the shaking of the carriage made her head spin even more.

She leaned back in the carriage and said, "Let’s take it step by step, could it be worse than Yu Jizi’s madness? After all, I have died twice before and am slowly getting used to it. It doesn’t feel so terrifying."

"What are you thinking about?" Searcy looked at Gu Youyou in surprise and said, "They haven’t said they want to kill us. Maybe it’s an old lover of yours inviting us for tea."

"Shut up!" Gu Youyou angrily sat up and said, "You have no filter. I really want to sew your mouth shut."

Even if this journey was heading towards death, it wouldn’t be lonely with Searcy’s sharp tongue to argue with now and then.

The carriage traveled for five days and stopped in front of a mountain.

Gu Youyou had been observing the terrain. The area was mainly plains, making the protruding mountain seem particularly abrupt.

If she guessed correctly, she should still be in the north.

This wasn’t hard to deduce. Once she got off the carriage in a while and observed the vegetation, she would know.

Different areas have different habitual vegetation.

"Miss Gu, please," someone said respectfully as they lifted the curtain for Gu Youyou.

These men in black all had their faces covered, and Gu Youyou didn’t know who he was.

The two weak women had no choice but to follow them out of the carriage.

Outside, the situation inside the mountain was not visible. After entering, they discovered that the mountain concealed many stockades, and the terrain was easy to defend but hard to attack. Even if they were bandits, they were big-time bandits.

Wait, bandits?

That suddenly reminded her of Jin Ziyuan.

According to Qin Changlin, he should be living in seclusion as a doctor in Qingshui Town. Could these bandits be related to him?

Don’t let Searcy’s glib talk turn out to be true, encountering an old lover.

Ugh, no!

She was being influenced by Searcy’s nonsense.

"This way, please!" They were led into a cave which, like the rest, was very concealed.

Both Gu Youyou and Searcy had excellent memories. By walking this way, they had already figured out much about this stronghold.

The cave was somewhat dim, but it did not affect Gu Youyou's vision; she immediately spotted the man standing in the cave.

She had seen this man only once, but she recognized him.

He was Ziyuan's associate, You Jiang.

Searcy had guessed right.

"Miss Gu," You Jiang greeted her with a smile.

"Miss Gu, it's been a long time. I have boldly invited Miss Gu to be my guest. You wouldn't be upset, would you?"

Gu Youyou replied with a smile that was not quite a smile, "Being 'invited' in such a manner does indeed make one displeased."

Chapter 1023: Please Be the Decoy

"Oh?" You Jiang elongated his tone and said, "That was due to compelling circumstances, unavoidable. Otherwise, we would not wish to be at odds with Miss Gu, especially since Miss Gu has some acquaintance with our Young Prince. After all, we have once saved Miss Gu, haven't you remembered that?"

Gu Youyou, a person who distinguished clearly between gratitude and resentment, slightly bent her knees towards You Jiang in a gesture of thanks and said, "Thank you for the rescue back then."

Since he mentioned saving her, expressing her thanks was the least she could do.

But now that they had captured her, that was an entirely different matter.

"Why have you captured me? What exactly do you want?"

Gu Youyou said calmly.

"Miss Gu, please take a seat first," You Jiang said, seating himself on a stone stool beforehand.

Gu Youyou glanced at Searcy, took a deep breath, and together they sat opposite You Jiang.

"Who is this?" You Jiang looked towards Searcy.

Gu Youyou said, "Her name is Searcy, she's a doctor, my business partner. Your men, fearing they might capture the wrong person, took us both. You wanted me, she has nothing to do with this. Shouldn't you release her?"

You Jiang's gaze shifted to Searcy, his eyes narrowing slightly.

This girl was just an ordinary person, without any martial skills, yet her sharp gaze managed to send a chill through him.

What kind of doctor was she? Doctors are supposed to save lives, yet it seemed as if she were more likely to harm people.

After examining Searcy for a moment, You Jiang laughed and said, "Since she is a friend of Miss Gu and it's not often we have guests, why not stay as a guest in the mountains? The weather is quite hot, and it's a good place here to cool off."

Gu Youyou: "..."

Searcy: "Whatever!"

She was also observing You Jiang, a man in his forties or fifties, far more robust than the average man of his age, with eyes clearer and more vibrant than those of younger men, filled with intelligence.

A man like him, if he let her go, she wouldn’t dare to run.

You Jiang laughed heartily and said, "Doctor Searcy is forthright, I’ve always admired frank people. Servants, please escort Doctor Searcy to the guest room for a good rest."

After Searcy was led away, only Gu Youyou and You Jiang remained in the spacious cavern.

"Let’s speak plainly, Mr. You, just say what’s on your mind," Gu Youyou said.

You Jiang’s smile vanished, and his expression turned solemn.

"To be honest," he began, "I’ve invited Miss Gu here to ask for your assistance."

"What help?" Gu Youyou said warily, "My abilities are limited, I’m afraid I can’t be of much help to you all."

Gu Youyou felt that the way he was looking at her seemed to imply coercion or enticement.

What were they up to? Rebels against the throne, and likely involved with the spreading rumors. What kind of help did they need from her? If it was to use her status as the wife of the Crown Prince to gather intelligence for them... she found it very likely.

But she, Gu Youyou, was a person with integrity, resolutely unwilling to do so.

"Miss Gu jests. Your abilities are well known to everyone," You Jiang said, scrutinizing the woman. Suddenly, he felt that this woman was quite a match for their Young Prince. She was extraordinary; her help would make their task much easier.

"You might as well tell me what it’s about," Gu Youyou said, disliking how his calculating eyes made her feel uneasy.

In a low voice, You Jiang said, "Here’s the thing, our Young Prince has been missing for a long time. The Madam is very worried, so she sent me to find him. I believe that if the Young Prince intends to avoid us, it will be quite difficult for us to locate him. That’s why we’ve decided on this strategy, to use Miss Gu to lure him out."

Chapter 1024: Admonitions

"How are we to entice him?" Gu Youyou’s gaze was frosty as she stared at You Jiang.

So Jin Ziyuan has disappeared, their Madam? That would refer to Madam Ru, right?

Put that way, with Madam Ru having betrayed her husband in the name of justice, extinguishing her kin, there must be a lot of exaggeration involved.

If Madam Ru’s story is exaggerated, then Prince five...

You Jiang interrupted her train of thought.

"The situation does not require Miss Gu’s concern, just stay in the mountains as a guest, and I will handle the rest."

Gu Youyou took a deep breath and remained silent.

Gu Youyou was kidnapped, and over at Jin Zijin’s end, they were already at odds with Prince Xining, incompatible as fire and water.

The news had yet to reach Jin Zijin’s ears, You Jiang’s men did not keep their promise; after taking her and Searcy away, they forcefully detained the others. The corpses and the scene of the fight were cleanly dealt with by them, with not a trace left behind, which meant the incident had not yet spread.

The spreading of rumors had been traced back to Prince five's head, on top of the evidence that Jin Zijin had collected over the years, which was irrefutable.

At this moment, he was in the Emperor's Imperial Study.

"Now, if we issue a decree and invite Prince five to the palace, then seize him in one fell swoop, it's the best opportunity."

The Emperor looked indifferently at Jin Zijin; he was seated while Jin Zijin stood, so to look at him, he had to lift his head.

"With his command over a 150,000 strong army, if it were possible to capture him, we would not have had to wait until now."

"Is it his army of 150,000 that you are hesitant about?" Jin Zijin's expression was calm, but his eyes were like the blade of a sword, poised to unsheathe.

The Emperor took a deep breath, gradually relaxed, and said, "Indeed, what concerns me has never been his army of 150,000."

"Then what are you waiting for? This is the best opportunity. He plans visits, spreads rumors, sowing discord among the people, and I have concrete evidence in my hands. If you let him go today, there will come a day when he will turn against you; removing this cancer cannot wait."

"But the State Preceptor is not dead, and he could emerge at any moment," the Emperor said a little excitedly, standing up to look Jin Zijin in the eye.

"If he never returns, will you just keep fearing to act against Xining? You've always feared Yu Jizi, thus you remain controlled by others. In my opinion, the correct move is to take advantage of his absence and eradicate Jin Mocong's influence. You always lose due to indecision."

A silence fell in the Imperial Study; the Emperor looked at Jin Zijin for a long time without speaking.

They stood facing each other, less than ten steps apart, neither speaking nor making a move.

Eunuch Wan led a Palace Maiden to serve tea, approaching the door of the Imperial Study, but sensing the tense atmosphere, he backed out, gesturing at the Palace Maiden holding the tea.

"Go back, come again later."

The Emperor and the Crown Prince had matters to discuss. It seemed there were important issues, and he sent everyone else away.

After the quiet settled in the room, the Emperor’s voice was heard once again.

His voice was not loud, even somewhat faint.

"What do you propose we do?"

Jin Zijin said, "First, issue a decree for him to come to the capital. He’s not foolish, he surely won’t come, and you can use his defiance as a pretext to march against him."

"But who will lead the fight? Dongzhou, Lingnan, Beimo, none are certain to follow orders."

Jin Zijin scoffed, "Those are the ailments left by your years of balancing power. However, if you don’t make this move, Jin Mocong will; if we wait for him to act, you will be put in a reactive position. Like this recent natural and man-made disaster, the rumors have proliferated against you. You might not be so lucky next time."

Chapter 1025: Serendipity

Fortunately, Youyou had managed to perfectly resolve the rumors spreading wildly; otherwise, who knows how many would have been seduced into becoming rebels.

The Emperor was well aware of all these matters, so he had intervened and secretly assisted Gu Youyou, making her actions proceed so smoothly.

"Youyou has made a contribution this time," he said.

A smile curled up on Jin Zijin's lips, happier to hear the Emperor praise Youyou than to praise himself.

He was like a young man tasting love for the first time, unable to help but smile when he mentioned the girl he liked.

The Emperor sat down, picked up the brush from the rack, and as he dipped it in ink and wrote, he said, "Four royal decrees, one each for Dongzhou, Beimo, and Lingnan; the remaining one, you will personally take to Xining. Do you dare to go?"

"Just write," Jin Zijin finally let out a breath of relief.

It wasn't easy to agree to disrupt the peace.

The rumors had provided a perfect opportunity.

And fortuitously, Yu Jizi had disappeared.

Yu Jizi, master, where had they gone?

Carrying the Emperor's decree, Jin Zijin went to Xining, and soon this news spread and also reached You Jiang's hands.

He had originally planned to lure Jin Ziyuan out using Gu Youyou.

As long as Gu Youyou was in his hands, Jin Ziyuan would naturally appear, but unexpectedly, he heard about Jin Zijin going to Xining with the royal decree.

It seemed that the plan had to change; Gu Youyou might still be of other use.

You Jiang stroked his beard for a long while, then said to his subordinates, "Take her with us, we return to Xining first thing tomorrow morning."

Qin Changlin and Gui Yunxi were captured and held in a decrepit village, overseen by a man in black.

Taking advantage of the man in black's distraction, Qin Changlin used the needle Searcy had given him to knock him out, then he and Gui Yunxi made their escape.

He was just a regular doctor and wasn't as ruthless as Searcy; he dared not use the poison needle on anyone.

"Quickly."

They smoothly exited the village, which had been deserted due to a disaster, and the residents had not yet returned.

Qin Changlin, being an outsider, was not aware of the situation concerning Gu Youyou and the others; Gui Yunxi thought for a moment and decided to first go to Sanqing Temple to find Yue Rujing, as ordinary people like them would find it difficult to locate Jin Zijin, and he wasn't sure if Jin Zijin had returned to Beijing.

However, halfway there, in a Shili Tea Shed while drinking water to quench their thirst, they unexpectedly came across an acquaintance.

He seemed to be traveling too and had stopped to rest momentarily.

Next to him was a chestnut horse; he drank some water and then gave some to the horse as well.

"Jin Yi?" Qin Changlin was surprised, having not seen him since his last trip to Lotus Village.

"I thought you hadn't escaped. How are you here?" Qin Changlin asked, astonished.

"Jin Ziyuan?" Gui Yunxi had not seen him since leaving Fusang Island.

He looked at Qin Changlin, as Qin Changlin referred to him differently.

Jin Ziyuan said, "My name is Jin Yi, styled Ziyuan. Where are you heading?"

"Doctor Gu and Searcy were captured by unknown men in black," Gui Yunxi said anxiously. "Do you have any way to quickly contact His Highness the Prince? He must not know about Doctor Gu's trouble."

"Youyou is missing?" Jin Ziyuan's expression darkened, and after a moment of thought, he said, "Alright, I understand. You two go back to Beijing. By the way, Jin Zijin is not in Beijing; he has gone to Xining. Do not worry about Youyou; I will rescue her."

Chapter 1026: Going to Xining

Qin Changlin and Gui Yunxi exchanged a glance, Qin Changlin's face filled with surprise as he asked, "Do you know who abducted her? Who are you?"

Wasn't Jin Ziyuan a doctor in his store? He looked quite destitute when I first met him.

Gui Yunxi tugged at him, signaling him not to ask random questions.

Jin Ziyuan's identity was strangely peculiar; as a commoner, his intuition told him that it was safer not to inquire into such matters.

Jin Ziyuan did not answer Qin Changlin's question and merely clasped his hands in a gesture of respect before striding away.

He headed towards the mountain where You Jiang was located.

...

"Where do you plan to take us? As someone involved, I suppose I should be allowed to ask," said Gu Youyou.

At that time, Gu Youyou and Searcy had already been taken out by You Jiang, their destination was Xining.

You Jiang smiled cryptically and said, "You'll know when we get there, Miss Gu can then see for herself with her own eyes."

Gu Youyou's expression gradually darkened.

This man was not one to keep his word. He had agreed to use her to lure out Jin Ziyuan and said they wouldn't need to go anywhere, just stay in the mountains and wait, but in just a few days he had changed his plans, which was too much.

Moreover, hadn't Jin Ziyuan said he would find a place where no one knew him to live peacefully? He had hidden away, perhaps to find a place for seclusion. Yet, these people were planning a rebellion in his name, so they were using her again to lure him out.

Gu Youyou clenched her fist and signaled to Searcy with her eyes.

Searcy gently shook his head, signaling with his eyes that they should wait until they arrived at the location.

Gu Youyou then hinted: I don't have much at stake, at worst I'll wait for someone to rescue me, but it's not the same for you. It might be better to look for an opportunity to escape on the way.

Searcy gave her a fierce look, telling her that he was a man of loyalty.

Gu Youyou: "..."

"You two had better not play any tricks," said You Jiang indifferently, holding a teacup. "I hope you will visit Xining as honored guests, not as prisoners."

Uh...

They might end up being tied up and dragged behind a horse.

"How could we dare, Mr. You's mood is as changeable as the weather of the northwest," chuckled Gu Youyou.

At lunchtime, the carriage stopped, and You Jiang got out carrying a teapot.

The group took out their dry food to share amongst themselves, and You Jiang also had someone give two flatbreads to Gu Youyou and Searcy.

Their group was disguised as merchants as they journeyed forward, and there were other caravans on the road who greeted each other from time to time.

The farther west they went, the sparser the vegetation became. It was Gu Youyou's first time in Xining. She had heard that Xining had a lot of deserts, and now she could see the landscape for herself.

In the past, Prince Number Five had volunteered to go to Xining to guard the desert, a place less prosperous than Beijing, but its sparse population made it a strategic place to defy the imperial court.

Jin Zijin, along with a few followers, finished reciting the imperial edict. The other party remained silent for a long time, not accepting the edict, thus both parties stayed in a deadlock.

"Uncle Number Five," Jin Zijin holding the edict while smiling but not really smiling, said, "I couldn't invite Uncle to drink a toast at Zijin's wedding, so if Uncle returns to Beijing this time, Zijin will definitely show you the hospitality of a host to the fullest."

Prince Number Five was only in his forties but looked only slightly younger than the emperor.

It seemed that the years had not been easy on anyone.

He suddenly smiled at Jin Zijin, reached out, and took the imperial edict. The gesture was like grabbing an ordinary item—he took it and casually passed it to an attendant at his side, showing no sign of reverence.

Jin Zijin slightly furrowed his brows, the anomaly flashing by momentarily.

Chapter 1027: No One Has It Easy

Prince Five laughed and said, "If I have the chance to visit Beijing, I must come and sit in your residence. I have always wanted to, but never had the opportunity."

He was referring to that residence when it was still Jin Moning's Crown Prince Residence. At that time, they looked down upon Jin Moning, who was born a Crown Prince, believing that the emperor would sooner or later depose him in favor of one of the children borne by his own mother. Therefore, he had never visited.

But who could have expected that the emperor would suddenly perish in the prime of his life, his death coming with absolutely no warning.

They suspected that it was Jin Moning who had a hand in it, it was just that they never had the evidence.

"If so, I am relieved," Jin Zijin said with a smile.

"However..." Prince Five's tone changed, expressing difficulty, "Recently, the Northwestern Desert has not been peaceful, and I'm afraid I cannot leave. How about this—why don't you go back first and report to our elder brother the emperor, and once I have pacified the Tatars of the Northwestern Desert, I will certainly head to Beijing at the first opportunity."

With a warm smile on his face, Jin Zijin said, "Zijin himself is quite idle and has nothing to do. Since the Tatars are rampant, why don't I stay to help you deal with them? In the future, I can accompany you to Beijing, making the journey a bit livelier."

The two maintained a seemingly harmonious facade, both smiling, yet their eyes told a different story.

"Hahaha..." Moments later, Prince Five suddenly burst into laughter and said, "So Zijin is also brave and skilled in battle! I thought you, having grown up by the Heavenly Master's side, knew only how to draw talismans."

"You flatter me too highly, Uncle. To my shame, despite many years beside my master, I have not mastered the arts of the Dao Family. However, during those years in Lingnan, I learned how to strategize and deploy troops under the tutelage of the Marquess of Lingnan and gained some insights."

Prince Five's eyes slowly darkened, and his smile became increasingly rigid.

He mocked him for not knowing how to fight but only how to draw talismans, and then he immediately told him that he had specifically learned how to arrange troops? And even had some insights?

The eldest among the disciples of Tianzong, favored by the Heavenly Master, was indeed not easy to deal with.

"Since that's the case, why don't you stay for now? You must be tired after several days of travel," he said.

Jin Zijin replied, "Thank you very much!"

Upon hearing that someone from Beijing had come to issue an imperial decree summoning Prince Five to the capital, Madam Fang had already become restless.

Not waiting for Prince Five to return to the backyard, she had already lifted her skirt and chased out to the front hall.

"Mocong, how did it go?" Madam Fang's face was somewhat pale as she asked anxiously.

"Let's talk when we get back," Prince Five said with a heavy expression.

In the backyard, Madam Fang's face grew paler and paler as she looked at the yellow imperial edict, saying, "So it has come after all? I knew he would not let us go; does he have to push us to extinction?"

"This day was inevitable. He is not foolish. In the past, we all underestimated him. Such a person is the most terrifying," Prince Five sighed. "Cousin, if it really comes to the worst, you should leave. Leave Zhuzhao Country and live an ordinary life!"

"Where else can I go?" Madam Fang's face was streaked with clear tears as she said, "My third brother is gone, and Ziyuan hates me to the bone. If I can't obtain justice for my third brother, if I can't personally take Jin Moning's life, even as a ghost, I would have no face to meet my third brother. I'll go nowhere. If I run away again, Ziyuan will only despise me more."

"Cousin, but when third brother did what he did, it was all to ensure our survival. If you can't live well, that would be the true disservice to third brother," Prince Five looked at Madam Fang, his eyes filled with a pity that was hard to tell whether it stemmed more from kinship or from admiration.

Chapter 1028: Meeting Prince Five

"What do you plan to do?" Madam Ru no longer had the delicate charm of her younger years, but that fragile flower-like demeanor had never changed, just one glance, one word from her could stir the heart.

"I..." The Fifth Prince's voice was somewhat hoarse. His affection for Madam Ru was true, willing to brave any danger for her in this lifetime, but because of the brother between them, he could only transform his deep affection into familial love.

He never called her sister-in-law, always 'cousin,' just like when they were young.

"I guess I still need to go to Beijing. The one who came to deliver the imperial edict was Jin Zijin, of the Dao Family."

Similarly, the Emperor feared the Dao Family, and the Fifth Prince also feared them.

If it were just Prince Jin Zijin, what would he have to fear? He wasn't even afraid of Jin Moning. But Jin Zijin of the Dao Family was different, the Heavenly Master and the State Preceptor were still alive, not dead. If one day they return...

"He promised to keep us safe." Madam Ru thought of Yu Jizi, her voice sharp with crying, "Don’t go, Jin Moning will not spare you."

"Not going would mean defying the imperial edict." The Fifth Prince sighed softly, "The State Preceptor’s whereabouts are unknown, and we don’t know when he will return, I have to go."

"Then I will go!" said Madam Ru.

"The edict was for me," the Fifth Prince said calmly, "Don’t worry, with 150,000 troops in Xining, he wouldn’t dare do anything to me unless he wants those 150,000 troops to turn into rebels."

Madam Ru paused, then said with a bitter smile, "Then what are you worried about? Jin Moning hasn’t summoned you to Beijing all these years, he must have made thorough preparations."

The Fifth Prince forced a slight smile and softened his voice, "Cousin, I’m just worried about the ’what ifs’... No, there won’t be any ’what ifs,’ I’m overthinking it. You just wait for me in Xining, I will definitely return safely."

After years in Xining, the Northwest Army had already become his, Jin Mocong’s, private army.

Beijing?

To go was necessary, but once there, he would make Jin Moning weigh whether he dared to keep him there.

A coldness flickered in the Fifth Prince’s eyes, making him appear colder than the clear sky above in the solitary courtyard.

Behind him, Madam Ru walked out of the yard and asked her maid in a low voice, "Has the Young Prince been found?"

The maid replied softly, "No, but Mr. You has made another discovery, he’s on his way to Xining."

"Oh? What discovery?" Madam Ru asked in surprise.

"The servant doesn’t know, but it’s said to solve the Prince’s urgent trouble."

...

Gu Youyou was brought to the Palace of Xining by You Jiang, where she was secretly taken to meet the Fifth Prince of Xining.

The man above looked at Gu Youyou and asked indifferently, "You Jiang, is she the crown prince’s consort? The renowned female doctor widely talked about among the people?"

You Jiang responded respectfully, "Your Highness, it is indeed this woman."

The Fifth Prince sized up Gu Youyou and after a moment asked, "You reported earlier that Ziyuan fought with Huo Li to save a woman, was it also her?"

You Jiang pondered for a moment, feeling that it wasn’t the time to discuss Jin Ziyuan’s interest in Gu Youyou, so he avoided those tangled reasons and just said, "Indeed, this woman. She has saved the Young Prince many times and provided him with medicine for many years. To repay her, the Young Prince gave her a life-saving Poisonous Insect, which saves her life whenever activated, thus repaying her kindness."

"Oh? So the time she was saved, it was with that Poisonous Insect?"

Chapter 1029: Meeting Madam Ru

"Indeed," You Jiang said.

"Um," Prince No.5 nodded lightly and said, "Since the life-saving grace has been repaid, it’s good, take her away."

Gu Youyou had been standing next to You Jiang, listening to their conversation. Without uttering a single line of dialogue, she was taken away, feeling somewhat disoriented.

Only You Jiang and Prince No.5 remained in the room, and it was then that Prince No.5's brows gradually furrowed.

"Do you want me to use her to threaten Jin Zijin?"

You Jiang said with a light laugh, "No, my Prince, not for you to use her to threaten Jin Zijin, but we invited Miss Gu to visit as a guest. Miss Gu had previously done a great favor for our Young Prince, so it's natural for us to invite her as a guest to show our gratitude. As for when she will return, that will depend on when the Prince can safely travel from Beijing back to Xining."

Prince No.5, stroking his beard, nodded lightly and said, "The idea is not bad, but what if Jin Zijin does not care for this woman's life as much as you think?"

"You don't know, my Prince, he cares a great deal."

Then You Jiang told Prince No.5 everything he had found out in detail.

After hearing You Jiang's words, Prince No.5 was filled with confidence for the journey to Beijing.

They did not plan to tell Jin Zijin immediately that Gu Youyou was in their hands; they would wait until they reached Beijing for the surprise.

"If that's the case, I shall return to Jin Zijin tomorrow and tell him he can start his journey to Beijing."

"Yes, the news of Gu Youyou's disappearance will soon reach Jin Zijin's ears, lest there be too much time for dreams at night."

Gu Youyou and Searcy were imprisoned in the King of Xining's palace, of which Jin Zijin was utterly unaware.

He was only slightly astonished, wondering why Prince No.5 had suddenly agreed to go to Beijing.

With that strong unease in his heart, he set off on the journey back to Beijing with Prince No.5.

Three days later, Gu Youyou was allowed to walk out of the courtyard.

"What are they up to?" Searcy felt uneasy, and so did Gu Youyou.

For the first time in years, she felt utterly without a clue.

Gu Youyou sat down under a white poplar tree with a stern face, gently shaking her head.

This courtyard did not resemble Xining's architecture. It had a bit of the flair of a southern garden, but since some southern plants did not thrive here, many resilient white poplars had been planted instead.

Searcy sat down opposite her and whispered, "The palace of Xining is heavily guarded, there was no escape on the road, and here we're even less likely to get away. But it's been so long, does the Eldest Prince know something happened to you? Will he think you are in Xining?"

Gu Youyou still shook her head gently, her intuition telling her that this situation might be more serious.

Footsteps could be heard coming from outside the courtyard, many of them, light and quick, belonging to women.

Gu Youyou spoke softly, "Someone is coming, perhaps one of Prince No.5's women."

That was her guess; as a 'guest' of such importance, the only one who could afford to bring a bunch of people would be one of Prince No.5's women.

Sure enough, soon several women entered through the round gate of the courtyard, the one leading them being the oldest in age but looking not at all old, quite an enchanting beauty.

Gu Youyou did not know whether to address the lady as Madam or Princess Consort, so she just stood up and watched her without speaking.

The other party, more knowledgeable about etiquette than she had imagined, led a group of maids and respectfully saluted Gu Youyou.

"Greetings, Consort of the Eldest Prince."

Although Gu Youyou was but a captive, she did not let her guard down just because the other party saluted her and addressed her as the Consort of the Eldest Prince.

She watched her, her voice low, "Are you a Madam or a Princess Consort?"

Chapter 1030: Guessed Who It Is

"I am Madam Ru." The beauty whispered softly.

Madam Ru? Gu Youyou scrutinized her carefully once more.

Madam Ru, the mother of Jin Ziyuan, the woman from the legends who had betrayed her own husband and son to survive.

Such a beauty, it really would have been a pity if she had died.

Gu Youyou did not know what she was here for and became more guarded.

Madam Ru gazed at the woman, feeling somewhat grateful to her, for she had heard that during Jin Ziyuan’s most difficult times, this woman had helped him!

Madam Ru’s expression softened, and with a slight smile, she said, "You don’t need to be so guarded around me. Every debt has its debtor, we won’t make things difficult for innocent people. All you need to do is stay here peacefully, and once everything is settled, I will let you leave."

Gu Youyou gave a wry smile. The person who had brought them here, You Jiang, seemed to have said the same when they were on that mountain, but what happened?

She really couldn’t trust their words.

"Thank you for your concern, Madam Ru," Gu Youyou said, her face laced with irony.

Madam Ru paused, sighed, and said, "Then settle in comfortably. If you need anything, you can let someone know to inform me."

After speaking, she signaled to someone behind her, and immediately, two maids walked up.

Madam Ru said, "These two are in charge of looking after you. Whatever you need, tell them to come find me."

Heh...

Gu Youyou couldn’t help but let out a sarcastic laugh; sending two maids to watch us would be more fitting.

"Thank you, Madam Ru!" Gu Youyou still said.

Searcy looked gloomily at the two maids, staring until they felt intimidated!

...

Jin Zijin returned to Beijing and missed the messenger who had come to report. By a twist of fate, it was only after arriving in Beijing that he received the news of Gu Youyou’s disappearance.

He arranged for Prince Number Five to stay at his own mansion and left the city that night to go to Sanqing Temple.

Gui Yunxi and Qin Changlin were both there. Upon seeing Jin Zijin, they told him in detail about what they had encountered that day.

Remembering the scene, Gui Yunxi still felt terrified and said, "It was too frightening. Those people fought like they didn’t care about their lives. Prince, I’m afraid it doesn’t bode well for the taken women; they were even more ferocious than robbers."

Yue Rujing sighed, "Little brother in the carriage, robbers wouldn’t throw their lives away; robbers are after wealth."

"Right, right, they definitely weren’t robbers. They specifically took the women, so the Prince’s consort and Searcy were both taken."

Jin Zijin moved his gaze to Qin Changlin and asked, "Did you make anything of it?"

Qin Changlin thought for a moment and shook his head, "I’m not sure, but Jin Yi might know something; he said he would rescue Sister Youyou."

"Jin Ziyuan?"

Qin Changlin nodded, "Yes, Jin Ziyuan. We ran into him unintentionally on our way back. Before this flood, he was continuously working as a doctor in Jisheng Hall in Qingshui Town."

Yue Rujing couldn’t help but laugh, saying, "Jin Ziyuan going to work as a doctor in Jisheng Hall, heh..."

Qin Changlin was puzzled and asked, "Who is he really?"

"He..." Yue Rujing said mysteriously, "It’s best not to ask."

Seeing Jin Zijin’s troubled face, Yue Rujing looked worried and said, "Senior brother, do you already know who it might be?"

Jin Zijin turned to him, his eyes dark as ink, then slowly said, "When I went to Xining to announce the decree, at the beginning, Prince Number Five was very clear. He would not come to Beijing, and even if he had to, he would come fully prepared. But one day later, his attitude changed drastically, and he actively sought me out, requesting to enter Beijing!"