Farmhouse 1241

Chapter 1241: Human Rights?

"Not much, at most two taels of flesh." She said with a forced laugh and then sycophantically added, "I pale in comparison to you."

Jin Zijin clamped her chin, bit viciously on her lips, and then sucked with force.

"Your mouth really is infuriating enough to kill a person."

Gu Youyou winced in pain, murmured a sound, feeling her lips might have been bitten through by him.

She blinked her eyes in grievance and said, "Please respect my profession, doctors have human rights too."

"You dare speak to me of human rights? As a husband, I'm about to have no rights at all, and yet you talk to me about a doctor's human rights?"

"Nonsense, who says you have no rights, you have plenty. A patient before me is almost like a piece of pork; don't be so petty, you surely don't wish for him to be doomed to a childless future, right?"

"Does that have anything to do with me?"

"Yes, it does, you... ah? Mhm..."

Jin Zijin bit her lips again, pushing back the remaining words she had to say.

It was time for him to exercise his rights as a husband, lest she still have the mind to look at another man's 'size'.

After having her fully and thoroughly, Gu Youyou complained about his evil deeds while massaging her sore back that could hardly straighten.

"I’m at least known as the Divine Doctor; with this title, how can I stand by and not save a life? He’s your brother, my cousin’s husband, a relative after all; do you want people to point fingers at my backbone?"

"That’s if he even has the face to speak of it," Jin Zijin glanced at Gu Youyou with a pleased mood, and said, "When he undergoes surgery, I must be present."

Gu Youyou: "..." He agreed after all.

Would it damage the patient’s delicate self-respect? Hmm, right, first to give him an anesthetic shot; once he’s asleep with eyes closed, who cares if you watch or not, he wouldn’t even know if he’s been sold.

...

The next day, Jin Zijin went to the palace and informed the Emperor about this matter.

The Emperor had been extremely fatigued these days, and after hearing Jin Zijin’s words, he remained silent for a long time.

After a while, he stood up, took a small scroll from a secret compartment in the dragon desk, and summoned Jin Zijin to his side, handing him the small scroll.

Jin Zijin, puzzled, took the scroll and after reading it, was utterly shocked.

"What is this?"

The Emperor nodded lightly and sighed, "Indeed, the struggle for the throne three hundred years ago was far more intense than the current strife between myself and the Third and Fifth Princes. After the defeat of the eldest imperial son back then, he was imprisoned in Zongrenfu for life and died there a few years later. However, he had a young son who escaped the calamity. Later on, that boy assumed the identity of the son of the then Beiping Cavalry General and lived on. Over generations, his descendants

gradually replaced the direct lineage of the Great General, entered the political arena, and established what is now the Ducal Residence."

"In other words, Jin Shien is a descendant of the crown prince from three hundred years ago."

The Emperor sighed, "He probably believes that this world should rightfully belong to them, and so he might feel justified in his usurpation."

Jin Zijin sneered, "Now that you're aware of their disloyal ambitions, what do you plan to do?"

The Emperor pressed his lips together and said nothing.

Jin Zijin said indifferently, "I knew you would be troubled, but I have already thought of a solution for you. When the time comes, you just need to stabilize the situation, as you are always adept at balancing the various forces."

He placed the scroll with the secret on the Emperor's desk and said further, "Jin Fengzhao came looking for me; she wants to meet you."

The Emperor's brows lightly furrowed, still without a word.

Chapter 1242: Supervisor

"You don't want to see her?" Jin Zijin mocked him with a smile: "Indeed, there's no need to see her again. After all, her fate today is thanks to you. You never gave her wealth and honor, so she would never have tasted it. Had you not given her the courage to challenge the Empress, to be so arrogant, she would not have ended up so utterly isolated."

Speaking of this, he paused for a moment and indifferently continued: "Of course, she never really had any relatives to begin with. But she did ask me for one thing, to help her find her relatives."

The Emperor sat upright on the Dragon Throne, his expression unreadable.

After a while, he sighed lightly and said: “Let’s wait until the matter of the Ducal Residence is over before discussing this.”

Jin Zijin made a sound of agreement and said no more.

Although Jin Fengzhao approached him, after all, it was the Emperor’s concern.

Since the Emperor had arranged everything from the beginning, only he knew where Jin Fengzhao had been found.

…

King Jin had somehow deceived the watchful eyes around him; by the time Gu Youyou saw him, he was dressed as a commoner, his face smeared with a lot of mud, his trouser legs rolled up high, his body also covered in mud, having just set down a cart of vegetables.

It seemed he was there to deliver vegetables to the Crown Prince Residence.

Gu Youyou had Xiang Chun invite him into the house, the courtyard that used to be Doctor Searcy’s.

After she married and moved to the outer courtyard, this one was only occasionally inhabited, with work usually still carried out here.

Doctor Searcy was startled to see a vegetable seller enter the yard and was about to say something when she recognized that the seller was King Jin.

She felt a bit embarrassed upon seeing King Jin, making faces at Gu Youyou and whispering: “Why did you bring him here, have you gone mad?”

Gu Youyou said: “I’m not mad, he’s here for medical treatment.”

King Jin greeted Doctor Searcy with a bow and said: “Doctor Searcy.”

Doctor Searcy pursed her lips and asked: “Seeking treatment? What kind of illness? Infertility?”

Caught by her words, Gu Youyou stumbled.

King Jin’s face turned red.

Gu Youyou hurriedly reassured King Jin: “Don’t be upset; she’s my assistant. The success rate of the surgery is higher with her around.”

King Jin nodded lightly without saying anything else.

He had truly been fond of Doctor Searcy in the past.

Her venomous and aggressive nature attracted him like a beautiful Ice Snake.

But he was a man with principles, and since she chose to abandon him to marry a carter, after his initial wrath, he gradually let go.

Especially now, he felt nothing for women anymore.

“Alright, that’s settled then, let’s begin inside,” Gu Youyou broke the awkwardness.

After administering an anesthetic injection, Jin Zijin entered the room, and Doctor Searcy, slightly startled, said: “For such a surgery, the Crown Prince is supervising?”

Jin Zijin watched them with a cold gaze, making the temperature in the room seem to drop several degrees.

Although he did not speak, the expression on his face made it very clear that he was indeed there to supervise.

Gu Youyou stuck out her tongue and said: “Let’s just start, consider him invisible.”

With Jin Zijin’s resentful gaze prickling at her back, Doctor Searcy, despite her usual carefree demeanor, felt truly uncomfortable and could not really regard him as invisible.

The surgery was conducted under immense pressure.

As Gu Youyou reached out to undo King Jin’s belt, the transparent figure behind her suddenly coughed.

Her hand shook, and she motioned for Doctor Searcy to take over.

Although Doctor Searcy was typically forthright, she was, after all, a woman from ancient times.

She hesitated for a moment, her face blushing with embarrassment.

Chapter 1243: Post Surgery Banter

Just Gu Youyou and her were coping fine, but unfortunately, Jin Zijin was watching closely, making it awkward for her, a woman, to unbuckle a grown man’s belt.

This is clearly making things difficult for her, really.

The anesthetic had taken effect for quite some time now, but nobody had unbuckled their belts, causing awkwardness among the three of them.

In the end, Jin Zijin couldn’t sit idly by any longer. He stood up with a dark face, walked over to them, unbuckled King Jin’s belt, and with deep animosity, pulled down his pants.

His face darkened even more.

“Hurry up.” He clenched his teeth as he spoke.

“Oh, right, quickly!” Gu Youyou was startled for a moment, then hurriedly steadied her mind.

She had performed countless surgeries, some much more complex than this vas deferens surgery, and had never been nervous before, but today she was, and not very confident, either.

In her mind: If this fails, don’t blame me, it’s not that my skills aren’t adequate, it’s mainly because the house rules are too strict.

“Clean and disinfect, Searcy, what are you doing?”

Searcy hadn’t dared to look at all. If she had known there would be such a surgery today, she would have hidden away in advance.

Gu Youyou told her, “Haven’t I told you? The one thing to avoid in surgery is psychological burden. You must understand that in front of you is a patient, a life. A moment’s hesitation, a moment’s delay, might cost a life.

You handle this better than any of my other apprentices. Today is the day we establish our reputation, you cannot afford to falter.”

Gu Youyou’s words encouraged Searcy, and also gave Jin Zijin a different perspective on such matters.

He seldom saw Gu Youyou so serious on the operating table.

Searcy cleaned and disinfected King Jin, and Gu Youyou held the scalpel. Her serious demeanor, confidently handling the situation at hand, at this moment drew Jin Zijin in irresistibly, making him even forget that she was performing a vasectomy on a grown man.

Gu Youyou soon forgot that Jin Zijin was sitting by and watching. She quickly immersed herself in her work, and this time, the surgery was a great success.

But as she had said earlier, though the wound had healed, it was hard to say what the sperms' survival rate was.

After the surgery, Jin Zijin helped King Jin put on his clothes, and then left.

As the anesthesia wore off, he gradually woke up. Gu Youyou addressed the one sitting on the only chair in the room.

He moved slightly, the pain throbbing from the wound, dizzy a bit.

Gu Youyou said softly, "Don't move yet, just lie there. You can move after an hour.'

"Oh, then I…" King Jin turned his head and took a deep breath, asking, "Am I cured?"

Gu Youyou replied, "I can't guarantee that. I can only tell you that I have reconnected your severed vas deferens. Whether you can ejaculate normally after recovery is uncertain, given the long blockage, it's hard to say whether the sperm can survive.'

"Hmm, thank you!" King Jin said to Gu Youyou.

"Alright, you rest a bit. I'll be right here watching over."

King Jin looked around and noticed how special this room was, including the strange bed he was lying on.

He couldn't sleep, excited at the possibility of being able to hold his own child, his emotions stirred, yet he couldn't show it just now.

He started chatting with Gu Youyou about personal matters.

“Are all your things this unusual?” Seeing the strange room, he was reminded of the painting Lin Qianqing hung in her room.

Chapter 1244: A Satisfactory Consultation Fee

Lin Qianqing hurried away, and that painting is still in that room to this day.

When he was bored, he would sit in Lin Qianqing’s room, where the pitch-black painting always stood out conspicuously.

Gu Youyou glanced at him and said, "Are you referring to this room? This room is clean and regularly disinfected; it’s specially designated for performing surgeries."

"Surgery?"

Gu Youyou said, "Yes, some diseases cannot be cured just by medicine; surgery is a must. Like your condition, and also the kind of illness Yuancheng had that you’ve inquired about, both require surgical intervention."

"And... what about that pitch-black painting?"

"Pitch-black painting?" It had been so long that Gu Youyou had thoroughly forgotten about that painting and naturally didn’t know what he was referring to.

King Jin responded, "Qianqing said that you painted it, pitch-black, a Star Map."

Gu Youyou recalled and uttered an "oh," saying, "That one you’re talking about, your wedding gift."

"Yes, the wedding gift," King Jin affirmed.

Looking back now, every one of his weddings had become so ironic, with only the one with Lin Qianqing retaining a shred of dignity.

Gu Youyou started to laugh, saying, "Qianqing likes living freely, always curious about how vast the world truly is. Although the map I gave her is much larger than the world we see, in the grand scheme of the universe, it's just a drop in the ocean. We are but ephemeral beings within the cosmos, with no one knowing the true extent of this world."

King Jin couldn't help but smile wryly and said no more.

"What do you plan to do after you've recovered?" After a while, Gu Youyou asked.

King Jin chuckled bitterly and said, "Do you think someone like me deserves this?"

"Not at all," Gu Youyou replied succinctly, catching King Jin by surprise.

Gu Youyou said, "Why would you think so? There's no such thing as getting what one deserves. It's a fact that you've been schemed against."

King Jin was taken aback and even more astonished by Gu Youyou's words.

Indeed, she was different from ordinary women, no wonder someone like Jin Zijin had set his sights on her.

She certainly had her exceptional qualities! To be outplayed by Jin Zijin, he had no grounds to feel wronged.

But if he were to lose to Jin Zijin, he would concede wholeheartedly.

In dynastic histories, struggles for legitimate succession always had winners and losers; nothing to be so worked up about.

What he could not accept was the Ducal Residence harboring a rebellious heart, seeking to usurp the throne through him, stepping on his back to steal the state.

He felt a surge of hatred rising to his heart, fists clenched tightly, declaring, "Such a nation-stealing traitor deserves death by everyone's hands. I am a member of the Jin Imperial Family, not a man of the Jin Ducal Residence. Rest assured, I will provide you with a diagnosis fee that will satisfy you."

Gu Youyou and what Jin Zijin thought, he too was well aware.

Since that incident when he was twelve, he was forever estranged from the throne of Zhuzhao Country.

It's only now that he has come to see it clearly.

...

King Jin returned to his residence and spent a few days recuperating before resuming his daily routine.

Today, he dressed himself in clean and neat clothes, spruced up regally, before entering the Imperial Palace.

Ever since Jin Wei first arrived at Prince Jin Residence, he stopped regarding himself as a person.

His beard grew unkempt and his clothes wrinkled, and when hunger or thirst struck, he wouldn't always remember to eat or drink.

During those days, he was tormented to less than human, having lost much weight.

Every time he visited the Imperial Palace, the Empress would find him listless, which led her to cry countless times.

Now, seeing a radiant King Jin before her, she could hardly believe her eyes.

Chapter 1245: Showdown

“My son, do you have some good news? Why are you dressed so spiritedly today?”

King Jin’s mouth curled into a smile with an unclear meaning, and he whispered, “Indeed, there is good news. Would Mother like to hear it?”

“Yes, of course, I’d like to hear it. Tell me, my son, what is the good news?” The emaciated face of the Empress rarely showed a smile.

King Jin glanced briefly at Nanny Li, and the Empress then instructed Nanny Li to take the others and leave.

Only the two of them remained in the hall. King Jin felt dejected, a sour feeling rising in his heart.

He had thought it all through these past days; he knew that just like him, his own mother was also just a sacrifice.

Her aged appearance, almost catching up to that of his father, the Emperor.

When had she, who always cared so much for her well-being, become like this?

And that Nanny Li by her side, every time they talked about the matter of borrowing seed, it was her who was soothing them.

From this, it is clear that she had known all the procedures long ago.

The person Mother trusts most was planted by Jin Shien as a spy by her side, how terrifying this fact is…

“Xiaoran, what on earth is it?”

The Empress, keenly observant of changes in expression, noticed something unusual about King Jin.

King Jin looked outside the window and gestured for silence to the Empress, deliberately speaking in a louder voice, “I heard that the whereabouts of State Preceptor Yu Jizi have been discovered, Jin Zijin is in for it, naturally, I am delighted.”

The Empress understood his implication, and cooperated accordingly.

“Is this true? Xiaoran has indeed improved a lot.”

“Mother is getting on in years. If your son is still as clueless as before, always causing you worry, wouldn’t I be unfilial?”

“Remember to tell your maternal grandfather about this big affair and see what his next move is!”

“All right, after I leave the palace I will go to the Ducal Residence.”

Their seamless exchange had no flaws, prompting the person eavesdropping from behind the window to slowly leave.

The Empress breathed a sigh of relief and her demeanor became solemn.

“Was it Nanny Li eavesdropping?”

King Jin frowned deeply and said, “Yes, it was her.”

He spoke with some sadness, “I know Mother trusts her very much, but she is not trustworthy. She is a spy placed by Jin Shien right in front of you!”

The Empress, unaware of the recent events King Jin had been through, said sternly, “What exactly has happened? Surely you haven’t been instigated by someone, have you, to call your maternal grandfather by his name?”

With tears in his voice, King Jin said, “Mother, we are just pawns in the hands of others, please wake up… ”

The Empress finally realized the severity of the situation.

Nanny Li eavesdropping?

She was the person she trusted the most. In front of her, she had no secrets, so why would she eavesdrop?

Now considering King Jin’s words…

She helped King Jin up and said in a low voice, “Stand up and speak slowly. What is it that Mother can’t bear? Together we can face anything…”

King Jin stood up and sat beside the Empress, saying to her, “Mother, do you know why I am infertile?”

“Why?” The Empress was stunned, a dreadful premonition welled up inside her.

King Jin said, “When I was twelve years old, I stayed in the Ducal Residence for several days. I told you it was to play with my cousins, but actually, it was to recover from an injury.”

“Injured? When were you injured, Xiaoran?”

Thinking back on those things, King Jin felt a bitter pain in his heart.

He said, “I was injured by the adopted son of my uncle, but taking the opportunity of my injury, Jin Shien had a doctor sever my… That is the real reason for my infertility…”

Chapter 1246: The Humiliation Endured

King Jin, with tears in his eyes, recounted what happened when he was twenty at the Ducal Residence—from being lured into a martial arts contest that left him infertile, to the gradual strategic manipulations that forced them to resort to a surrogacy arrangement to maintain their current status.

A step by step scheme, each move in this chess game was impeccably executed, all for the purpose of usurping the throne of Zhuzhao Country.

And he and his mother were merely the best two pawns they had used.

The Empress, after listening, was silent for a long time, initially unable to accept that her own natal family, which she had always relied on, harbored such intentions.

It was only after an indeterminate amount of time that she murmured in a daze, “I was wondering, how could they have thought of the idea of surrogacy, insisting on using the descendants of the Ducal Residence. Whenever I hesitated, Nurse Li would help persuade me, dispelling my doubts.”

Poor her, she had always been kept in the dark. Under the guidance of Nurse Li, she had gone to Jin Shien herself to discuss the surrogacy matter, and had always felt that she wronged her own family.

Was she so foolish that she was being sold and yet helped count the money, didn’t the saying describe someone exactly like her?

The Empress looked over at King Jin with a dazed expression; the eyes full of grief and despair made this aging woman look utterly exhausted.

Tears streamed down from the corners of her eyes—one by one. Being used and betrayed, especially by her own family whom she had always trusted, was nearly enough to crush her last threads of willpower.

Her trembling hand reached up to gently touch King Jin's equally worn face, and with a quivering voice, she said, "My child, your mother has wronged you!"

If not for her greed, for her pitiful vanity, how could her son have suffered such humiliation?

In the Imperial Family, it is difficult to produce an heir. Unless one commits heinous crimes and stubbornly refuses to admit guilt, instead of being sentenced to death, one is usually imprisoned for life at Zongrenfu.

Even if her son could not father children, as long as he did not make mistakes, he would still remain a noble prince. Normally, the Emperor would arrange for a child to be adopted from one of his brothers; at least, he would not have to suffer such humiliation and could live a life of glory and wealth. But it was her selfishness that caused his ruin.

He would never recover from such a catastrophe.

After all, it was not entirely for herself; no matter what, she was still the Empress. In the future, regardless of who would become the Emperor, she would have a place as the Empress Dowager.

She only felt that she owed her family, who had always supported her from behind.

She enjoyed glory and wealth but could not bear to see her family's power diminishing bit by bit.

Yet, she never imagined that the person who led them to ruin was the relative she had always cherished.

"Mother, I cannot let it go like this; I cannot let their plans succeed!" After his sorrow, King Jin's face revealed intense hatred, his eyes brimming with bloodshot veins, teeth clenched tightly as if wishing to flay and dismember those who had harmed him.

The Empress, on the other hand, showed a hesitant look. She was pale, watching her son in such a state, at a loss for words.

She now realized that what she had relied upon was nothing more than the Ducal Residence.

Without the Ducal Residence’s support, her status in Zhuzhao Country wouldn’t even compare to Sheng Qiaoyue.

At the same time, she felt repeated waves of fear. If Xiaoran were to ascend to the throne under such circumstances, he would merely be meat in the hands of the Ducal Residence, ready to be consumed at any moment. Once they eliminated their adversaries, she and her son would truly become isolated and vulnerable, left to be manipulated by others.

She took a deep breath, her graying hair meticulously combed back, adding to the desolation of her appearance.

Chapter 1247: News of Tian Jizi

"Xiaoran, without the support of the Ducal Residence, only mother and son are left. How many of your people remain? How are we to oppose them? It is undoubtedly like throwing an egg against a rock."

A fierce light flashed in King Jin’s eyes, and he sneered coldly, "Does the Empress wish for this son to continue enduring? Mother, they are plotting to usurp the throne. Once they succeed, they will certainly not spare our lives." He shook his head softly, "Even if I die, I refuse to be a slave of a ruined nation, nor will I be an accomplice to traitors. This world belongs to the Emperor, we are not alone and helpless; we still have the Emperor, Father!"

The worry on the Empress’s face grew even more intense, for who better understood than herself what Jin Moning meant to her?

She was nothing but a tool used by Jin Moning; invaluable when useful, hence she is the Empress. But once she becomes useless, the first to wish her dead would be the Emperor himself.

Decades of marriage, yet he never regarded her as a wife, at best a crucial chess piece.

Always wanting to make a move, yet always suppressing herself with the excuse that the time was not right.

She closed her eyes gently, her face etched with despair.

If she were to simply let others manipulate her, how could she be satisfied?

Ostensibly, Jin Yushu lived a life more glorious than anyone else in the eyes of outsiders.

Only she knew the true bitterness of it all.

And the one who held the reins of her fate, she certainly would not let things end like this.

"Madam has only ten days left... That child’s full-month celebration is on that day..."

...

Yue Rujing hurriedly came to find Jin Zijin at the Crown Prince Residence as time flew by; in the blink of an eye, winter had arrived.

He didn’t have time to brush off the snow clinging to his body before he rushed to tell Jin Zijin, "This is true, there’s news of Master in Nanzhao."

Jin Zijin’s expression darkened, his joy or anger indiscernible, yet it was evident he was troubled.

Yue Rujing urged, "In another half a month, leaving Beiping will become even more difficult. By that time, heavy snow will have sealed the mountain roads. To go to Nanzhao, one would have to wait until the snow melts after the New Year. Who knows what might happen over these months? Maybe our hard-earned clue will vanish."

"Indeed." Jin Zijin expressed agreement, yet he said nothing more.

Now was the best opportunity to deal with the Ducal Residence, and relying solely on King Jin was definitely not enough. How could he leave at such a time?

"Hey, Senior Brother, quit hesitating and go now. After searching for so many years, we finally have a reliable lead."

Jin Zijin turned his head to look at Yue Rujing and said, "I cannot leave now."

Yue Rujing: "..."

"Dealing with the Ducal Residence is of the utmost urgency; we've finally seized such a good opportunity."

"What about our Master? Is he not important anymore?" Yue Rujing rolled his eyes.

"No, of course, he's important."

Yue Rujing: "...So?"

"So, you go, you should go quickly."

Yue Rujing's mouth twitched as he said, "Considering your current status, it's very inconvenient for you to openly manage matters of the Dao Sect. How will Sanqing Temple fare?"

"Leave it to Huo Li," Jin Zijin said placidly.

"Huo Li?" Yue Rujing said with a forced smile, "Are you joking? Can that kid Huo Li be trusted? Aren't you worried he'll betray you and side with the Dao Family's power against you?"

Jin Zijin paused, his demeanor very calm.

With a disdainful side glance at Yue Rujing, he said, "The world will still turn without you. You've worked with Huo Li for so long and still don't understand him. His biggest trait is being timid; he doesn't have the guts to betray us. Rest assured, compared to worrying about Huo Li's betrayal, finding our Master is more important."

Chapter 1248: Looking for Help

Yue Rujing was choked until his face turned crimson, but thankfully, he had grown accustomed to it.

"Well then, I will leave tomorrow."

...

Today, Lord Jie received a secret letter, along with a Jade Pendant, exactly the pledge he once gave to Gu Youyou.

He had thought that Gu Youyou would never need his help, that the Jade Pendant would never be returned, yet now it was back along with a secret letter.

Lord Jie let out a wry laugh and murmured to himself: "You have helped the Jie Family so much, you are benefactors to our family. Even without this Jade Pendant, with just one command from you, this old man would certainly lend all his support."

Curiously, he opened the secret letter and after reading it, he was completely stunned.

The letter detailed the entangled love and hate between King Jin and the Ducal Residence, with Gu Youyou hoping that Lord Jie could assist King Jin and seize the moment to uproot the Ducal Residence.

Lord Jie's body shook repeatedly.

Half out of anger, half out of fear.

It was outrageous how the Ducal Residence dared to usurp the country with such despicable means.

What surprised him even more was that 300 years ago, they had such a relationship with the Jin Imperial Clan.

What frightened him was that the Crown Prince had collaborated with King Jin and planned to use this opportunity to eradicate the Ducal Residence.

He could only sigh: Oh, how naively these young people think.

The deeds committed by the Ducal Residence were not merely usurpation, were they? If the Emperor truly wished to find evidence, there would always be something to find.

But why hadn't the Emperor done so?

Clearly, because they were untouchable.

If it was possible to move against the Ducal Residence, the Emperor would have done so long ago.

He could only hope that the Crown Prince was more thorough than he imagined. It might be impractical to completely eradicate the Ducal Residence, but delivering a lesson in defeat was still feasible.

Even a cornered rabbit will bite; if they truly intended to strike at them, they had to be well-prepared.

Thereupon, Lord Jie decided to write a letter to his eldest son.

Then thinking it over, it was almost the New Year, he should have a month's leave, he should be coming back soon, right?

With that thought, he put down the pen and threw Gu Youyou's secret letter into the stove to burn it.

At this moment, Jie Zhongsen had already returned. Having heard about Jie Zhonglin's affairs, he deliberately took leave early and returned to the Jie Residence, and the first thing he did was not to see his father but this brother who had returned from the dead.

Towards Jie Zhonglin, he felt guilty.

Time and again, he had arranged the most exhausting and dangerous tasks for him, even humiliating him by assigning him to guard the city gates, really just to force him back to Beijing.

How could his elderly father be without someone by his side?

But he never expected him to endure all those deliberate difficulties and even make a name for himself in the military, which frustrated and distressed Jie Zhongsen, pushing him to give his brother a strong dose of medicine, and making him disguise as a merchant to go to Xining for military espionage.

Upon learning of his brother's tragic death, Jie Zhongsen could not express enough remorse, so much so that he had not dared to return to face his own father.

"Eldest Young Master!"

"The Eldest Young Master has returned."

"Ah, Eldest Young Master, please wait a moment..."

Upon his return, Jie Zhongsen's first act was to rush into Jie Zhonglin's courtyard. Along the way, the maids and servants called out to him but he didn't respond.

With a bang, he kicked open the door, only to see that Jie Zhonglin was indeed alive. He was lying on a specially made bed, his leg suspended high, with Miss Du holding a bowl of medicine and feeding him.

"You... sister-in-law?" Seeing this scene, Jie Zhongsen realized he had been too impulsive and felt extremely embarrassed.

Unable to restrain his laughter, he said, "Haha, good, good, as long as you are alive!"

Chapter 1249: Full Moon Feast

After he finished speaking, he exited the room like a gust of wind, and a moment later returned, closing the door behind him.

Left behind were two people, both stunned and at a loss.

“Elder brother came back really early this year,” said Jie Zhonglin awkwardly.

Miss Du was stunned for a moment, then said, “I heard that he has always felt so guilty about what happened to you. Don’t you blame him?”

Jie Zhonglin’s eyes, clear as water, gazed at Miss Du and said, “No blame, I understand his intentions. Without his coercion, I would not have gone to that bandit’s village to rescue you, and then we would not have our Yiyi.”

As he said this, his face darkened, filled with a few traces of despair, and he continued, “It’s just a pity that I am disabled now; otherwise, I would have shown him what a hero his father was. When we were discovered back then, thirty-some of us facing against over a thousand adversaries.”

Miss Du stared at his empty sleeve and the corner of her mouth twitched as she said, “You could make it a story for him, about how heroic his father was once.”

“It’s just… I feel like I’ve let you down.” Jie Zhonglin used his remaining arm to caress Miss Du’s cheek, his voice choked with emotion, “I failed you in my best days, and now that I am disabled, you have to care for me.”

Miss Du blandly said, “Maybe it’s because my luck is not good, to not have the fortune to marry a normal man. You becoming disabled is just suited for me.”

Speaking thus, they shared a smile.

Jie Zhonglin said, “If there is a next life, I hope heaven is kind so that I may meet you in my prime and be the one to take good care of you.”

These words brought waves of sourness to Miss Du’s heart, and she said, “What are you saying? Don’t you believe in Doctor Gu’s medical skills?

She will get angry if she hears this, accusing you of tarnishing her reputation. She said your leg will heal; missing an arm doesn’t matter, but the leg must get better—otherwise, I refuse to serve you.”

…

The day of the full-month banquet finally arrived. Although the Emperor was not required to attend the full-month banquet for legitimate and illegitimate grandsons, this time he made an exception to attend.

Everyone thought that Prince Jin must still carry weight in the Emperor’s heart. Prince Jin had indeed suffered greatly; a Consort plotted against him, the principal wife ran away, and the birth of his firstborn son was from a concubine.

A series of blows had left Prince Jin entirely haggard; the Emperor surely saw it and felt pained in his heart, thus making an exception to attend his illegitimate grandson’s full-month banquet.

Considering the relationships between the Ducal Residence, the Empress, and other families, the full-month banquet for Prince Jin’s illegitimate son turned out to be much more lively than that of the grand Prince’s and Prince Qin’s twins. The servants at Prince Jin Residence were extremely busy; it was said that the elaborate gifts were even arranged by people sent from the Ministry of Rites.

After all, as dazzling as Prince Jin might be outside, one could not ignore the fully-exposed troubles within Prince Jin Residence.

The Consort plotted against others, the principal wife fled, and one concubine after another competed for favor—who would have the mind to care about your eldest son's full-month banquet? Surely, they couldn't expect Prince Jin, a proud man, to handle it?

Gu Youyou and Jin Zijin arrived somewhat late; by the time they got there, everyone had already started the feast.

The Emperor sat at the head of the table, beaming radiantly, evidently truly delighted.

Gu Youyou was taken aback for a moment, thinking to herself that this old Emperor really was capable. Jin Zijin had told her about this matter long ago; the grandson wasn't even his own flesh and blood, yet he could present such an attitude—his acting skills were indeed exceptional.

"The grand Crown Prince and Crown Princess have arrived…" The servant calling them into the room elongated his voice, and those responsible for welcoming guests directed them to their seats.

Chapter 1250: Bustling

The people sitting opposite them were Prince Qin and Xie Qinyun. It was said that Prince Qin's wife could not get out of bed anymore, and the Prince Qin Residence had fallen into the hands of Xie Qinyun.

Gu Youyou vaguely heard that Xie Qinyun was harmed by someone when she gave birth to twins, and that person was none other than Prince Qin's wife.

However, Prince Qin had no concrete evidence and could only take the approach of keeping family scandals private, completely neglecting Prince Qin's wife thereafter.

Prince Qin's wife was already in poor health, and this incident made her condition even worse. Dragging her frail body, she has been like this for two years, and now she is truly on the verge of death.

Thus, the one who could make public appearances was naturally Xie Qinyun.

"Ah, Youyou, come sit here, come here!" Xie Qinyun was very happy to see Gu Youyou.

Gu Youyou smiled lightly and tugged at Jin Zijin's sleeve.

He lowered his voice and said, "Go ahead, it will be very lively in a moment, and I might not be able to pay attention to you; take care of yourself."

Today's seating arrangement was not separated by gender but by status and position.

At their table were imperial relatives; since all the siblings of the old Emperor had passed away, there were no more of his generation's imperial relatives, so the table only included Gu Youyou and her husband, along with Prince Qin and Xie Qinyun, plus a Princess and her Prince Consort.

The Harem was controlled by the Empress, and the children of other concubines hardly had a presence; anyone who threatened the Empress would be harmed by her.

The Emperor did have many children, but only a few survived.

Regardless of whether they were alive or deceased, the Emperor reserved their places, so although there were only three living princesses, by the time it reached Jin Liuying, she was already called the Ninth Princess.

Gu Youyou had only seen this Princess a few times and was not familiar with her; the only person she could converse with was Xie Qinyun.

"Why did you come so late, I've been bored sitting here alone."

Surprisingly, Xie Qinyun still maintained her past purity, speaking straightforwardly, with clear distinctions of gratitude and grudges. It was precisely because of this trait that Prince Qin favored her.

"Who told you to come so early?" Gu Youyou laughed.

“Oh, it was none other than my Prince who insisted on arriving early, saying we cannot be later than the Emperor.”

“The Emperor isn’t here to see you anyway; he is here to see King Jin’s eldest son.”

“Exactly, ah! By the way, why did Qianqing run away, do you know about this?”

She paused, then lowered her voice and said, “You were closest to her, she must have told you before she ran, right?”

Gu Youyou shook her head and said, “No, I really don’t know about this matter.”

“Tsk tsk, everyone says you helped her escape, and you don’t know? Who are we to each other, come on, tell me, I won’t betray you, what are you afraid of?”

Gu Youyou helplessly said, “I know you just want to gossip a bit, but really, she didn’t come to me before running away.”

“What’s the matter then?” Xie Qinyun looked puzzled, saying, “What really is the matter with her, seriously, she is the chief wife, what is there to fear? Even if a concubine gives birth to the eldest son, the legitimate child has to come from her belly, right? But she just turned tail and ran off, this is like conceding defeat without a fight.”

Gu Youyou pursed her lips and said, “If you want to know what happened with her, just wait a little.”

“Hmm?”

Gu Youyou looked towards the high platform with a smile that was not quite a smile, guessing that once they had mostly finished eating or started offering toasts, it would probably be revealed.

Right, she thought, she should eat more quickly. Once the drama starts, there won’t be a chance to eat.

“Don’t worry about that for now, let’s eat quickly. Ah, my favorite dish has arrived…”