Farmhouse 1291

Chapter 1291: Who is the Person Found?

The wooden structures in the cave were all dismantled by them and used as firewood to roast bear meat. Most of it had already been burned.

On the other side, Jin Zijin finally finished organizing all the useful items in the cave. He placed the booklet into his backpack, glanced at the remaining bear meat, and said: “That’s enough. Let’s roast a piece of meat, eat, and prepare to leave.”

“Leave?” Yue Rujing turned around quickly upon hearing Jin Zijin’s voice, his excitement evident: “Senior Brother, did you find the way out?”

Jin Zijin replied: “I now know what this place is. Naturally, I also know the way out.”

“Oh? What kind of place is this?”

Wiping the water from his hands, Yue Rujing eagerly ran over to Jin Zijin.

Jin Zijin glanced around before answering, “Its purpose should be similar to the ancient tomb in Tianmen Mountain, but the method is different.”

Yue Rujing froze, his previous smile vanishing as he turned serious: “Are you saying that this place can also… perform soul exchange?”

Jin Zijin said: “The people who built this place believed it could. As for whether or not it actually works, that remains uncertain.”

“Heh…” Yue Rujing sneered sarcastically: “They must be insane. How could they believe such outlandish tales? Squandering resources for this kind of thing, too? Just look at that coffin over there. The base is made from top-grade Ice Jade, even a small piece of it is worth a fortune. But here lies such a massive slab, already priceless on its own, yet they used it for the coffin’s bottom! Honestly, what a waste—even the black bear is enjoying luxury.”

Jin Zijin glanced at him indifferently and said: “You could sleep on it too.”

Yue Rujing staggered, laughing awkwardly: “Senior Brother, you must be joking. I was just kidding about that. No matter how valuable this thing is, it’s not worth risking my life for. Without it, we’d only be eating rotten meat right now.”

Jin Zijin walked to the center of the altar, staring blankly at the coffin.

Yue Rujing furrowed his brow and murmured: “Can this place really perform soul exchange?”

Jin Zijin didn’t respond. After a moment, Yue Rujing chuckled and said: “Senior Brother, do you believe in such things? How can a person’s soul possibly transfer to another person’s body? I certainly don’t buy it.”

Jin Zijin’s forehead creased. If it weren’t for meeting Gu Youyou, he wouldn’t have believed it either.

He took a deep breath and said to Yue Rujing, “It doesn’t matter whether we believe it or not. What’s important is that we cannot let him succeed, whether it’s real or false.”

By now, they had figured out that the Witch Doctor they had been searching for days wasn’t their master, Tian Jizi, but Yu Jizi.

And Yu Jizi’s appearance in Yunhe Mountain was obviously for his ludicrous attempt to defy destiny.

Yue Rujing punched the coffin with clenched fists, closing his eyes as his breathing grew irregular.

“If Yu Jizi is alive but Master is gone, what are we supposed to do? After all this time, we finally found a clue, but it turned out to be Yu Jizi’s.”

Jin Zijin said quietly: “Don’t worry too much. Master simply hasn’t been found yet.”

Yue Rujing, like a trapped animal, tightened his fists and shouted: “But if he’s alive, why hasn’t he returned? Even sending us a message would’ve been enough! Senior Brother, I’m truly afraid that Master might no longer be with us.”

Jin Zijin said: “If Master were truly gone, Yu Jizi would have come back long ago. He wouldn’t just let us destroy the foundation he built in the Dao Sect for so many years.”

Jin Zijin patted Yue Rujing on the shoulder and added: “Stop thinking too much. Let’s roast some meat. Roast more, so we can bring some for the journey.”

Chapter 1292: Leaving

No matter how much they thought about it, it was useless. Yue Rujing nodded and took out a knife to carve off the remaining scraps of meat from the black bear.

Jin Zijin went off to gather some wood again. With a slash of the dagger he carried, the wood ignited into a roaring fire.

After filling their stomachs, they packed the leftover bear meat into their backpacks.

Jin Zijin stared at the gently flowing stream and said, "This stream eventually flows into the great river beneath Yunhe Mountain. If we follow it, we can make our way out. But I’ve taken a look, and the passage is fairly narrow. It’ll be uncomfortable for the two of us to squeeze through."

Turning back, he glanced at the large coffin and said, "There’s another path, also connected to the stream. Look over there—the stream splits into two routes. One flows along the mountain wall, and the other has been artificially diverted into the formation around the coffin. The water flows continuously but never overflows, which means there’s another passage below for the water to escape through."

"A path beneath the coffin?" Yue Rujing exclaimed in surprise.

Jin Zijin said, "If my guess is correct, it’s right beneath us."

"Ah, then what are we waiting for, Senior Brother? Let’s lift this coffin together!"

"Alright."

...

After Gu Youyou was captured by Yu Jizi, she was taken all the way south. She sat in the carriage, opposite Yu Jizi himself.

He kept his eyes closed, seemingly resting. Gu Youyou stared at him intently, but he didn't move a muscle.

Outside the carriage, the young Taoist named Zhiqiu was driving. He occasionally glanced around, and when they reached a riverside, he brought the carriage to a stop and turned back to address those inside: "Master, Nanzhao's border is just ahead. We're out of water. Let me stop here and fetch some from the river."

"Mm, go ahead." Yu Jizi still didn't open his eyes.

Zhiqiu took the three water flasks hanging from the carriage and headed to the river to fill them.

Back at Tianmen Mountain behind Lotus Village years ago, when he heard his master's words and left, he couldn't rest easy. He hadn't gone far and just wandered around at the foot of the mountain.

Later, he saw people from both Tianzong and Xuanzong heading up the mountain, and then they started fighting. He hid secretly and didn't join in. Truth be told, he didn't even know what they were doing on that mountain. The discord between Tianzong and Xuanzong wasn't new, but it had never escalated openly. That time, the fight was intense, but he still didn't understand why.

It wasn't until he saw Yu Jizi, covered in blood, fleeing down from the mountain. Their carriage wasn't far off. Yu Jizi didn't say a word, just got onto the carriage and told him to drive, escaping as fast as they could.

They fled south, not stopping until they reached Nanzhao Country. Over the years, the only disciple to remain by Yu Jizi's side was him.

He considered it an honor and even thought he was luckier than the Senior Disciple Brother.

Once he had filled the flasks, he hung two of them back onto the carriage and carried the third, lifting the curtain to pass it to Yu Jizi. "Master, you must be thirsty. Have some water."

Yu Jizi let out a soft "Mm" and opened his eyes.

He took the flask, sipped once, and handed it back to Zhiqiu.

Gu Youyou licked her lips and said, "I'm thirsty too."

Zhiqiu shot Gu Youyou a cold glare, impatiently grabbing another flask from the carriage and tossing it to her.

"Drink sparingly, alright? If you drink too much, you'll need to relieve yourself again."

The mouthful of water Gu Youyou just took got sprayed out as she choked, coughing uncontrollably.

Isn't this treatment of a captive going a bit too far? She couldn't even have a drink without being reminded of her bodily needs! They might as well deny her water completely and let her die of thirst!

Chapter 1293: The Status of Yu Jizi in Nanzhao

Gu Youyou deliberately teased him, drinking half the water from the kettle before stopping, infuriating Zhiqiu, who cursed under his breath for quite some time.

Sitting back down, Gu Youyou stared at the motionless Yu Jizi and said sullenly, "Why exactly did you capture me? And what have you done to Zijin?"

She had asked this question countless times along the way, but Yu Jizi remained unresponsive.

This time, as they drew closer to Nanzhao Country, Yu Jizi unusually gave a reaction. He opened his eyes, looked at Gu Youyou, and replied, "I don’t know where Jin Zijin is."

After traveling for more than twenty days, this was the first thing Yu Jizi had said to Gu Youyou, and it was also the only thing.

Gu Youyou was taken aback. She had thought Yu Jizi wouldn’t bother responding to her at all, yet he answered her.

Don’t know?

Even though it wasn’t the answer she wanted, it was still the best possible one.

Not knowing meant Jin Zijin’s disappearance had nothing to do with Yu Jizi.

As long as it wasn’t related to him, they were likely safe.

She let out a sigh of relief, but her mind was still filled with even greater confusion.

"Then why exactly did you capture me?"

She had initially assumed Yu Jizi captured her because of Jin Zijin. If Jin Zijin’s disappearance wasn’t connected to him, then...

Suddenly struck by a thought, her eyes widened as she exclaimed, "If you’re planning to raise me as a drug host again, you’re too late. I already neutralized the poison. To prevent you from poisoning me again, I’ve already taken precautions by using the seedling method. Your venom techniques are useless on me now. Besides, raising a drug host takes time. How many years do you think you have left?"

Outside the carriage, Zhiqiu, who was driving, instantly erupted into a tirade upon hearing Gu Youyou’s words from inside.

"Master will live forever! No, Master will live a thousand years! Even if you die, Master will be fine and dandy! You vile woman, how dare you curse Master?! Are we being too nice to you? Master, we should just tie her up and hang her from the back of the carriage to let her run alongside it!"

Tied up and dragged behind the carriage? Gu Youyou shivered. This young Taoist had some truly twisted ideas.

Frightened, she wisely decided to hold her tongue. A smart individual knew when to back down. There was no need to spar with this cruel, malicious little Taoist.

So, she simply closed her eyes like Yu Jizi and pretended to meditate quietly.

The carriage continued its journey towards Nanzhao Country and eventually crossed the border of Zhuzhao Country. Seeing the Nanzhao people dressed in exotic clothing outside the carriage, Gu Youyou's heart sank bit by bit.

Yu Jizi was sitting inside the carriage, and they had already left Zhuzhao Country far behind. Who could possibly come to her rescue now?

In this world, other than Tian Jizi, who else could snatch someone away from Yu Jizi?

Jin Zijin and Yue Rujing were also in Nanzhao. They had come to Nanzhao looking for Tian Jizi quite some time ago. She didn't know if they had found him or if they were aware of her disappearance, now in the hands of Yu Jizi.

Anxiously, she endured a tense and uncertain half-month before the carriage arrived in a relatively bustling city.

Zhiqiu excitedly said to Yu Jizi, "Master, we've arrived in Taihe City."

Taihe City? The capital of Nanzhao Country?

Why had Yu Jizi brought her to the capital of Nanzhao Country?

She faintly remembered that back in Lingnan, when the Lingnan army had clashed with Nanzhao's border forces, Jin Zijin had mentioned that Yu Jizi's influence extended into Nanzhao.

If he had the ability to stir up a war between two nations and prompt Nanzhao to deploy their army, it was evident that his influence in Nanzhao was substantial.

Once they arrived at their destination, the carriage came to a halt. Gu Youyou and Zhiqiu followed behind Yu Jizi as he led them toward a palace brimming with local Nanzhao characteristics.

Along the way, they encountered numerous maids and servants, all of whom were exceedingly deferential to Yu Jizi.

Chapter 1294: Everyone's Here

"Witch Doctor."

"Great Shaman!"

"The Witch Doctor has returned! Quickly, inform the Emperor..."

Along the way, Gu Youyou learned that Yu Jizi was a revered Witch Doctor in Nanzhao, with a status seemingly no lower than the State Preceptor in Zhuzhao Country.

That was disastrous—was she now in enemy territory?

...

Gu Youyou's disappearance was concealed; the official explanation declared she had traveled to Nanzhao Country to expand her business and earn money.

Meanwhile, her son, Jin Xuyao, was left at home. Both the Emperor and the Imperial Consort grew uneasy and decided to bring Jin Xuyao into the palace to look after him. Although this explanation seemed absurd, it carried some merit in people's eyes.

As a Prince's Consort, especially one entrusted with caring for the child, it didn't seem proper for her to venture out frequently.

Yet for Gu Youyou, a merchant healer, staying confined to the inner chambers her whole life was never an option. Occasionally traveling for work was perfectly reasonable.

On the other hand, the Emperor dispatched men across the land to search for Gu Youyou's whereabouts. Upon learning that Jin Zijin too had gone missing, his thoughts naturally turned to Nanzhao Country. Thus, the majority of his agents focused their pursuits in that direction.

Imperial Consort Sheng cradled Jin Xuyao, her face brimming with worry, and said, "This child is truly unfortunate—how could both his parents go missing? Emperor, should we send more people to search? I've heard Nanzhao's relations with us aren't too friendly. If they've indeed gone to Nanzhao, it could be dangerous."

The Emperor stared blankly into space. After a moment, he asked, "How old is Xiao Jiu this year?"

"She'll be fourteen in two months," the Imperial Consort Sheng replied.

"Fourteen!" the Emperor murmured, then suddenly declared, "Two months from now, host her coming-of-age ceremony. Tomorrow, you will visit the ancestral hall and change Xiao Jiu's age to fifteen."

"Change Xiao Jiu's age?" Sheng's astonishment was palpable. Adjusting someone's age—what kind of situation was that? Why?

She dared not question the Emperor's reasoning. She simply listened as the Emperor instructed, "It might come in handy; just do as I say."

"Yes, Emperor." Sheng accepted the order, though her heart was filled with doubts.

Outside Yunhe Mountain in Nanzhao Country, Jin Zijin and Yue Rujing finally crawled out of the cave.

They hoisted a coffin out and discovered that beneath it lay a tunnel—a secret passage, part artificial and part natural. A gentle stream flowed from the cave down the mountain.

After days of crawling, they finally emerged from the cave.

As soon as they were out, they realized they were halfway down Yunhe Mountain.

Exhausted to the point of collapse, Yue Rujing lay on the slightly even grassland and lamented, "We made it out, Senior Brother. Should we climb back up?"

Jin Zijin gazed at the sprawling mountain range and replied, "He’s no longer on the mountain. We’re heading downhill."

"What?"

"Gathering herbs was a pretext; entering that secret tunnel was the real goal."

"He went in?" Yue Rujing’s face lit with shock. They hadn’t found any entrance or exit to the labyrinthine cave.

"Perhaps. Let’s go back first."

After being trapped for so long without relaying any messages to Marquess Yue, surely they were causing unnecessary worry.

Descending the mountain, the two began visiting various Nanzhao villages, searching for traces of Nanzhao’s unique Magic Poisonous Insect Techniques.

Perhaps the secrets lay within one of Nanzhao’s clans and their mystical traditions.

...

As a captive, Gu Youyou wasn’t mistreated.

She was housed in a stilted building in Nanzhao, and though her freedom was restricted, she lived fairly comfortably.

A few servants attended to her, ensuring that her basic needs were met without issue.

She inspected all the food provided to her—there was no poison. Everything seemed to be regular fare.

Chapter 1295: Set Phrases

To say that Yu Jizi brought her from afar to keep as a pet, that’s impossible, he’s not that bored. To say it’s for Jin Zijin, there’s no need to go to such lengths, which makes her question Yu Jizi’s intentions.

The one delivering the meal came again, but this time it wasn’t a servant from this Stilted Building, but Zhiqiu whom she hadn’t seen for days.

This little Taoist has quite the misunderstanding about her, always looking at her like she’s an enemy who killed his father.

He threw a basket of food on the table and said harshly, "You’ll meet the King of Hell soon, so hurry up and eat. It won’t kill you."

Gu Youyou: "..."

She sneered, "I didn’t expect you to be so loyal, but someone like Zhuo Qing isn’t worth it."

She originally wanted to say someone like Yu Jizi isn’t worth it, but since this kid was severely brainwashed by Yu Jizi, if she dared to criticize Yu Jizi, this conversation wouldn’t go anywhere, he’d explode, so she chose someone else to speak about.

Zhiqiu sneered, "How much of what you say can be believed? While my master wasn’t here, you destroyed Xuanzong, and the brothers and sisters all betrayed, all because of your sorcery. You want me to betray my master too, I tell you, it’s impossible."

Gu Youyou was speechless.

She said, "That’s an internal matter of your Dao Family, what does it have to do with me? I wasn’t even at the expedition meeting that day, I’m not taking the blame for this."

"Hmph, you weren’t there? Jin Zijin was. If it weren’t for you, this calamity of a woman, Jin Zijin wouldn’t have left the path. It’s not like he wasn’t enchanted by your kind of woman."

Oh my...

"This is simply god-tier logic, did you come up with it yourself or did Yu Jizi tell you this?"

Mentioning Yu Jizi, Zhiqiu was immediately on the verge of exploding, jumping up and cursing angrily, "You woman, stop trying to argue, everything is right in front of me, I don’t need others to tell me, I’ll see with my own eyes. Also, stop slandering my master, or I won’t be polite to you."

Gu Youyou sneered mockingly and said, "Then let me ask you, why did you join the Dao Family?"

"That’s my business, does it concern you?" Zhiqiu replied with a sour expression.

Gu Youyou smiled faintly and asked again, "Do you think what you’re doing now aligns with your original intention of joining?"

Zhiqiu: "..."

"Helping your master kidnap innocent women to achieve your unspeakable goals."

"I..." Zhiqiu defended, "You are a woman, yes, but you're not innocent."

Gu Youyou ignored him and continued, "You kidnapped me, but do you know I have a one-year-old child at home who's weaning, how innocent is he?"

"That... That's..."

Gu Youyou sneered, "Are you going to say he deserves it too, that he's not innocent either?"

"So you're saying we should have kidnapped your son too? Haha, you should have said so earlier, one more or less doesn't matter to us, should I make another trip to bring your son over so you can reunite as a family."

"Heartless, you're as heartless as Zhuo Qing..." Gu Youyou shouted loudly, "You say I'm not innocent? Then let me ask you, a seven-year-old child locked in a dark room by her family for ten years, force-fed poison despite being perfectly fine, does she deserve it?"

"What are you doing?" Zhiqiu was frightened by Gu Youyou's outburst.

"I'm just asking you, does she deserve it."

"That depends on what she did." Zhiqiu's arrogance noticeably diminished a bit.

Chapter 1296: To Lure Out Jin Ziyuan

Gu Youyou sneered coldly, "A seven-year-old child—do you really believe she could commit some heinous act so vile that her family would treat her like this?"

"Then her family must be crazy." Zhiqiu's face was icy as he said, "What are you trying to say with all this?"

"Why would her family do that?" Gu Youyou pressed on relentlessly.

"How would I know? I'm not her family." Zhiqiu took a step back, finding this woman truly formidable.

Gu Youyou wore an expression teetering on the edge of tears, her hands bracing against the table with such force that her knuckles turned white.

She said, "Because someone made her family do it. To achieve their unspeakable goals, they used those methods against a seven-year-old child. If one day, that child defied the odds and survived, don't you think she'd resist to stop drinking poison?"

"You... What are you really trying to say?"

Gu Youyou continued shouting, her voice full of anguish and fury: "Because I am that child! I was made into a tool by your so-called loyal master. I resisted, killed Zhuo Qing—not because I did anything wrong—but because I didn't want to keep drinking poison anymore! I was simply fighting for a chance at life. Am I supposed to just let you use me, trap me, and never fight back?"

"You... You're spouting lies! My master isn't like that, and Senior Zhuo Qing isn't like that either." Zhiqiu's face turned deathly pale, his anger boiling beyond restraint.

"Not like that?" Gu Youyou sneered, "Then what are you doing right now? Aren't you using me to achieve your unspeakable goals? And when your goal is accomplished, don't you plan to kill me?"

"We... We..." Zhiqiu's face switched between pallor and flush, resembling a child caught doing something wrong, completely at a loss.

Faced with Gu Youyou's unrelenting pressure, he staggered back, saying, "No, we're just trying to find Jin Ziyuan. He's been hiding too well—we've searched everywhere for him and couldn't find him. Master had no choice but to come up with this plan."

Oh, so it's all to lure out Jin Ziyuan?

Gu Youyou exhaled with some relief. The intense argument had dried out her throat, so she sat back at the dining table calmly, opened the lunchbox, placed each dish neatly on the table, and picked up a bowl of soup to take a sip and soothe her throat.

"You..." Zhiqiu looked at Gu Youyou, speechless. This woman, who was just brimming with righteous fury moments ago, suddenly became so calm. How could she even have the leisure to eat?

Gu Youyou replied nonchalantly, "Talking to you is exhausting. I've used up quite a bit of energy. Let me eat first, and then we can continue."

Zhiqiu froze, feeling completely played by her, led around in circles.

Cursed! He'd even revealed the true purpose of capturing her.

It infuriated him immensely. His master had warned him long ago not to speak too much with her. And yet, he didn't listen to his master's advice, did he?

Zhiqiu felt deeply ashamed of himself before his master. Huffing angrily, he flicked his sleeve and stormed off in frustration. His abilities weren't enough—he truly couldn't exchange too many words with this woman.

...

After Jin Zijin and Yue Rujing stepped out, they quickly contacted the Yue Marquess, and soon received news from Zhuzhao Country: Gu Youyou had been taken by Yu Jizi.

Yu Jizi wanted to draw out Jin Ziyuan and did not bother to conceal his movements. On the contrary, he deliberately and casually spread the news, making it easy for the Emperor's people to trace Gu Youyou's whereabouts.

Jin Zijin crumpled the letter in his hand into a ball, his aura turning menacing.

"Master hasn’t been found. He’s shown up first, as expected."

"Yu Jizi? Where is he?"

Chapter 1297: Scaling the Walls Again

Yue Rujing pried the crumpled letter out of Jin Zijin’s hand.

After unfolding it and taking a glance, he crumpled the letter and shredded it to pieces.

He said, “Nanzhao Country doesn’t trust doctors; they only seek help from witch doctors. Some powerful witch doctors hold statuses no lesser than their emperor. Yu Jizi infiltrated Nanzhao Country as a witch doctor, which honestly isn’t much different from our Zhuzhao State Preceptor. He’s nearly played this trick to its utmost limit.”

“Whether he’s played it out or not isn’t important; what matters is whether it works. I have long known his influence in Nanzhao is immense, but I never thought he’d end up being the Great Shaman of Nanzhao Country.”

“So, what are we going to do now? Head straight to Taihe City?”

Wherever Youyou is, no matter if it’s a dragon’s den or a tiger’s lair, he’ll go.

Jin Zijin packed his things angrily and set out for Taihe City.

Yue Rujing sent this information back to the Yue Marquess; it was no longer just a personal issue, but a matter of national affairs. Considering Jin Zijin’s special position, ensuring his convenient movements within Nanzhao Country might still require the emperor’s intervention.

The two disguised themselves as ordinary merchants upon arriving in Taihe City, first securing a room at an inn while collecting trade goods distinctive to Nanzhao, and simultaneously searching for Gu Youyou’s whereabouts.

The fact that the Great Shaman had brought in a woman from Zhuzhao Country was no secret. In order to lure Jin Ziyuan to come, information about Gu Youyou's movements was deliberately made public. That very day, they learned she had been placed by Yu Jizi in a village not far from the Imperial City.

It was the Great Shaman's place of cultivation, where people prayed to him for blessings against ailments—here, in this village. Besides the Great Shaman himself, the village housed countless of his disciples.

That night, Jin Zijin couldn't suppress his urge and sneaked into the village.

Gu Youyou had stood by the stilted building's second-floor window all day watching the shamans perform their rituals. Exhausted, she had gone to bed early.

Jin Zijin's sudden visit startled her awake, as she was a light sleeper.

"Who's there?"

"Shhh, it's me!" Jin Zijin leaned in and covered her mouth.

"Zijin?" Gu Youyou mumbled.

Jin Zijin let go of her. Only when he saw her safe and sound in the moonlight did he gradually feel reassured.

Gu Youyou felt as if she were dreaming. She lifted her hand to gently touch his face, and once she felt the warmth of a real person, she realized it wasn't a dream—he truly came.

"Why are you here?" Gu Youyou asked, caught between surprise and joy, but also filled with deep worry.

Earlier in the day, she had half-dreadfully watched as Yu Jizi led the witch doctors in their rituals from the window. Now that Jin Zijin had come here, wouldn't he be caught?

"You're here—I had to come." Jin Zijin sighed softly, then gently raised her face and kissed her on the lips.

Only after a lingering kiss did he release her, breathing heavily.

Gu Youyou felt turmoil within. These past days, anxiety over his safety had been eating away at her, and yet she secretly hoped he might come for her.

Now that he was truly here, she found herself torn: wishing he could stay longer, yet equally praying he would leave quickly.

"Yu Jizi is in this village; you need to be cautious," she said.

"I know." Jin Zijin embraced her tightly and said, "I can't take you away now. Since he dared to let me enter, he must know I couldn't leave with you unharmed."

"He knows you're here?" Gu Youyou exclaimed in shock.

"He certainly knows." Jin Zijin replied calmly.

"Then where have you been all this time?" Gu Youyou pushed him away, fixing him with a serious look.

Jin Zijin sighed lightly, pressing his lips together tightly before saying, "I'll tell you another time." Glancing outside, his expression made Gu Youyou understand his meaning clearly.

Chapter 1298: Didn't Bring It Out

There are ears against the wall.

"That old bastard, why isn't he dead yet?" Gu Youyou cursed angrily.

Jin Zijin chuckled lightly and reassured her, "Alright, just stay here for now. I just came to check on you. Knowing you’re okay is enough."

He felt helpless yet pained. This was Nanzhao Country, under Yu Jizi’s control. Even if their master returned, it might not be possible to take Gu Youyou away.

Nanzhao Country’s faith in the Great Shaman surpassed Zhuzhao Country’s reverence for the Dao Family.

Gu Youyou remained silent. She understood his predicament, but at the same time, she was worried he’d get the worse end of the deal here.

She raised her head and said, "Why don’t you head back first? I’ll be fine."

"Hmm?"

Gu Youyou hurriedly added, "He captured me to lure out Jin Ziyuan. As long as Jin Ziyuan doesn’t show up, he won’t do anything to me."

She looked intently into his eyes and mouthed the rest of her words: "But if Jin Ziyuan shows up, he absolutely won’t let me go."

So, go back and find Jin Ziyuan. Before you’re confident about rescuing me, make sure Yu Jizi never finds him.

Back at Tianmen Mountain, his Blood Sacrifice Soul Transfer Array was disrupted. If it weren’t for the fact that I had some use, he would’ve killed me long ago.

Jin Zijin lowered his eyes and stayed silent for a moment. Then he turned and leaped out the window, quickly disappearing into the night.

Gu Youyou hurriedly got out of bed, leaned against the window, and looked out at the village.

Under the moonlight, the village was quiet, without a trace of human presence.

He had left.

There was no need to pretend to be strong anymore. Gu Youyou covered her face and cried quietly.

One problem after another—when would life finally become peaceful?

...

In the inn, Jin Zijin had returned.

Yue Rujing hurriedly approached him, asking, "So? How did it go? Hey, why are you back alone? Where's President Gu?"

Jin Zijin was filled with frustration and heartache.

He knew exactly where she was. She was so close, within arm's reach, yet he couldn't take her away.

He didn't respond to Yue Rujing's question—he didn't even have the energy to deal with him. Turning around, he went straight to his bed and pulled the blanket over himself to go to sleep.

In this world, only two people could make him feel this much pressure. Yu Jizi was like an insurmountable mountain, blocking his path.

"Hey, senior brother, how did it go? Did you see President Gu? Did Yu Jizi catch you?"

Jin Zijin ignored him. He didn't want to speak right now.

Yue Rujing, exasperated and anxious, waited until midnight before heading to the Witch Doctor Village himself.

Gu Youyou hadn’t slept a wink all night. With her sharp hearing, she quickly detected someone entering her room.

But hadn’t Jin Zijin just been here earlier in the night? Why would he come back again?

She bolted upright, only to see Yue Rujing dressed in an all-white outfit before her eyes.

"What the..." Gu Youyou held her forehead in disbelief. "Why are you here? And why are you wearing white?"

When Jin Zijin had come, at least he had been dressed in black, fitting the role of someone sneaking around at night. But you? A whole white outfit—who were you trying to scare?

"Shh!" Yue Rujing motioned for her to keep quiet and asked, "Did my senior brother come by already?"

"He did." Gu Youyou answered, somewhat dazed.

"Then why didn’t you leave with him?" Yue Rujing looked a bit agitated and said, "You incompetent woman—do you know my senior brother is heartbroken? He’s lying under his blanket crying all night!"

"What?" Gu Youyou’s mouth twitched. She thought to herself: Jin Zijin isn’t that kind of person. You’d better hope he doesn’t find out you’re slandering him like this, or he just might kill you.

Chapter 1299: Captured

"What are you waiting for? Hurry up and get dressed and come with me! Senior Brother is crying under the blanket. If you don’t go comfort him, do you want him to cry himself to death?"

Gu Youyou: "..."

"He’s the one who said I can’t leave now. Spare me the effort." She was utterly fed up.

Yue Rujing froze in his tracks, his hurried demeanor suddenly stiffening.

"What? Senior Brother said you can’t leave?"

"Yes, that’s what he said."

Yue Rujing felt like his head couldn’t wrap itself around the situation. He asked, "If he can’t take you away, then why did he risk coming here?"

"He came to see me, alright?" Gu Youyou replied, exasperated.

"Aren’t you perfectly fine? We made sure of that beforehand."

"What do you know? He wouldn’t be reassured unless he saw it with his own eyes." Gu Youyou was done wasting words on him. "You better leave quickly. If Yu Jizi gets pissed off, he’ll slap you to death."

Yue Rujing was pushed toward the window by Gu Youyou, but he clung stubbornly to the windowsill, refusing to let go. "Hey, don’t push! I can’t leave here for nothing. If Senior Brother won’t take you away, I will."

Gu Youyou chuckled humorlessly. "You think I want to stay here? Of course I want to leave—if only I could!"

"Alright, as long as you want to leave, that’s good enough." Without warning, Yue Rujing reached out and scooped Gu Youyou up around the waist, flying out the window with her.

Gu Youyou froze in shock, suddenly aware that she was being dragged into disaster by him.

They hadn’t gone more than ten zhang away when a white-haired elder dressed in black appeared in front of them.

Yue Rujing’s gaze darkened, and he immediately positioned Gu Youyou behind him.

Gu Youyou sighed and pulled Yue Rujing back. Addressing the elder, she said, "I won’t try to escape. Ajing was just joking around."

Yu Jizi turned around and, with a faint, ambiguous smile, said to Gu Youyou, "Good to know you understand. Go back now."

Gu Youyou let out a long breath, lowered her head, and turned back toward where she had come from.

Yue Rujing looked at her helplessly before turning his gaze to Yu Jizi, his fists tightly clenched.

"What are you trying to do?"

Yu Jizi chuckled lightly. "With just a single command from me, you wouldn’t be able to take a step in Nanzhao Country."

"Hah, you think I’m scared of you?" Yue Rujing planted his hands on his hips. "If anything happens to me, do you believe for one moment my father wouldn’t immediately lead an army south, raze your sorry little nest to the ground?"

"I do believe you," Yu Jizi replied casually. "That’s precisely why I’ve chosen to turn a blind eye. But if you dare to ruin my plans, I won’t show mercy."

"Heh..." Yue Rujing smirked. "Now that’s going to be tricky. You must know why we’re here. Let’s face it—you kidnapped Senior Brother’s wife. Do you think he wouldn’t come to save her?"

Spreading his hands, Yue Rujing said, "See, the conflict between us is this big. Clearly, you’re doomed to treat us mercilessly, and we’re doomed to treat you the same."

After hearing Yue Rujing’s words, Yu Jizi was silent for a moment before nodding slightly and saying, "You’re right. It seems I’ve been too lenient with you."

Yue Rujing’s expression darkened. "What’s that supposed to mean? What are you trying to imply?"

Yu Jizi laughed heartily. "You’ll understand very soon."

With his hands clasped behind his back, Yu Jizi walked past Yue Rujing, heading toward the largest stilted building.

Yue Rujing clenched his teeth in fury. And just as Yu Jizi brushed past him, Yue Rujing spun around, drawing the sword at his waist and thrusting it toward him.

Yu Jizi didn’t even turn his head. With a gentle sidestep, he avoided the attack.

Yue Rujing, unwilling to stop at just one strike, immediately followed up with a second as his blade sliced through the air.

Yu Jizi smiled faintly, lifted his hand, and flicked his fingers against Yue Rujing’s Soft Sword. A crisp sound rang out, and Yue Rujing suddenly felt a powerful force reverberate through the blade, numbing his hand at the base of his thumb.

Chapter 1300: Meeting the Nanzhao Emperor

Just that one sword strike was enough for him to understand the gulf between himself and Yu Jizi.

Yu Jizi chuckled lightly and said, “You haven’t even grasped the essence of the Dao Family’s teachings. Truly unworthy of being Tian Jizi’s disciple. Since you’re so inept, why don’t I, as your elder uncle in the sect, teach you a proper lesson?”

As the words fell, Yu Jizi turned into a fleeting shadow and drew near Yue Rujing, striking a palm directly at his chest.

Yue Rujing instantly felt pain searing his throat, and a metallic sweetness surged up—he coughed up a mouthful of blood.

The remaining blood slipped down the corner of his mouth, blooming like crimson plum blossoms on his pristine white robes.

“You… you dare… My father…”

Yue Rujing staggered and nearly collapsed, but Jin Zijin, who arrived abruptly, extended a hand to catch him.

Jin Zijin’s star-like eyes gazed at Yu Jizi, and he said flatly, “If the fish die and the net tears, it serves no one’s interest.”

Yu Jizi sneered coldly, “At least you understand that. Keep that reckless junior in line.”

“Senior brother, I…”

Jin Zijin sighed softly and said, “Don’t speak for now. I’ll take you back.”

That single palm strike inflicted a serious wound on Yue Rujing, enough to keep him obedient for several days.

It was precisely because everyone wished to avoid mutual destruction that their predicament had grown increasingly awkward.

Soon, they realized that angering Yu Jizi tonight wouldn’t end with just a single strike.

Their identities were swiftly exposed—Jin Zijin and Yue Rujing were captured by the Nanzhao Emperor’s personal troops and taken into the Imperial Palace.

“So you are the Crown Prince of Zhuzhao Country?” The Nanzhao Emperor half-closed his eyes and asked Jin Zijin.

“Yes.” At this point, there was no choice but to admit it.

“Heh…” The Nanzhao Emperor let out a cold chuckle and said, “Do you understand the consequences of acknowledging your identity?”

Jin Zijin calmly replied, “What does His Majesty intend to do?”

“Hahaha…” The Nanzhao Emperor suddenly burst into laughter, then turned to the Nanzhao official beside him and said, “You tell him what I intend to do!”

The Nanzhao official smiled faintly, bowed respectfully to the Emperor, and then turned to Jin Zijin and Yue Rujing, saying, “It is said that Zhuzhao Country’s wealth rivals paradise itself. I wonder, how many cities might Zhuzhao Country’s Crown Prince be worth?”

Jin Zijin smiled lightly and said, “You may send an envoy to converse delicately with my father, see how many cities he’s willing to exchange for me.”

Jin Zijin’s composed demeanor seemed to unsettle the Nanzhao official slightly. With a cold snort, he turned back to the Nanzhao Emperor and said, “Your Majesty, you see? This Crown Prince of Zhuzhao is so arrogant—he assumes we wouldn’t dare harm him. Perhaps we should show him a taste of our power?”

Someone chimed in, “Indeed, look at his attitude. He acts like this is still Zhuzhao Country’s domain. Unless we show him a bit of force, he won’t grasp whose name rules Nanzhao’s lands.”

Jin Zijin remained composed as ever, but Yue Rujing seemed far less poised.

Still recovering from his injuries, his complexion retained a sickly pallor. Confronted with these provocations aimed at his senior brother, he fumed with anger and shouted, “Why don’t you actually

show us some force, then? But when the Lingnan troops march south one day, don't blame us for not cherishing peace!"

"Oh, and you are?" The Nanzhao Emperor raised an eyebrow and looked at Yue Rujing.

"Hmph!" Yue Rujing lifted his chin haughtily, his face full of pride.

"I'm the Princely Heir of the Lingnan Marquis Residence. The Emperor of Zhuzhao might be far away and prone to hesitation, but you might want to try capturing my father's only son and see how he reacts!"

The corner of the Nanzhao Emperor's mouth twitched slightly. Faced with this pampered, second-generation noble, he found himself momentarily at a loss for words.