Farmhouse 1311

Chapter 1311: Gu Youyou’s Belongings

The two girls looked at each other and laughed, both letting out a sigh of relief.

"That’s good, I heard the fifteenth Prince is the Nanzhao Emperor’s brother, an uncle-level figure. I’m just afraid he’s too old."

"Not old, not old, at the prime of his youth."

...

Zhao Yanzhong was having a pleasant conversation with the monarch and ministers of Zhuzhao in the Taihe Hall, and the Emperor was very pleased with him.

Originally, he felt guilty about sending Jin Liuying to marry abroad, but now that he sees the fifteenth Prince of Nanzhao is such a talented person, his guilt lessened a bit.

No matter how good the person is, she has to be satisfied herself. Now, he just hopes she will be satisfied.

As it was approaching lunch, the Emperor asked Eunuch Wan to prepare the meal. Finally, Zhao Yanzhong privately handed a box to the Emperor, which was entrusted to him by Jin Zijin before his departure.

"What’s this?" the Emperor asked in surprise.

Zhao Yanzhong replied, "When I left Taihe City, your country’s eldest Prince handed me this box, saying it was something from the eldest Princess for the imperial grandson."

The Emperor furrowed his brows, took the box, and handed it to Eunuch Wan.

"Let’s invite the fifteenth Prince to dine first, please."

Zhao Yanzhong glanced at the box but said nothing, then followed the Emperor into Hanyuan Hall to dine.

Eunuch Wan was a person of rules; items from other countries must be inspected by the Ministry of Rites before reaching the Emperor and his consorts, fearing there might be something harmful inside.

But since this box was privately given to the Emperor by the fifteenth Prince, it didn’t need to go through the Ministry of Rites.

However, such things couldn’t be inspected by the Emperor himself; it was naturally done by eunuchs like him.

Eunuch Wan took it to the side hall, opened the box, and saw neatly stacked papers full of writing, unbound.

He casually flipped through a few pages and found they were just some interesting little stories.

Indeed, they seem like something the eldest Princess would give to the little imperial grandson.

Now that the little imperial grandson is almost two years old, he might understand some small stories.

With a smile, Eunuch Wan put the papers filled with little stories back, repacking them into the box.

He thought, someone who can write such stories must be a person full of childlike innocence and have a delicate heart. The eldest Princess is such a person.

Because Eunuch Wan was delayed by these little stories for too long, Jin Liuying, who had been waiting in the Imperial Garden, couldn’t help but come in, just in time to see Eunuch Wan holding a delicate box with a smile.

"Eunuch Wan!" Jin Liuying said unhappily, startling Eunuch Wan, who quickly said, "Oh, Your Highness Princess, this old servant is getting senile and momentarily forgot about your matter."

"How dare you forget about this Princess's matter?" Jin Liuying said angrily, seeing Eunuch Wan holding a box like a treasure, she pointed at it in surprise, "What treasure are you holding?"

Eunuch Wan hid the box behind him with a smile, saying, "This is not meant for you. It's something the fifteenth Prince brought, said to be entrusted to him by the eldest Prince for the little imperial grandson."

"For Xuyao?"

"Yes, it's personally written by the eldest Princess."

"Master wrote it?" Jin Liuying pushed Eunuch Wan into the corner, forcibly took the box, and said, "Since it's written by Master, I must see it."

"Ah, Princess, please don't, let it go. This old servant's old bones can't withstand your fussing, oh my waist..."

Chapter 1312: Secret Meeting

The eunuch Wan rubbed his waist, watching helplessly as the box was snatched away by Jin Liuying.

"You must be careful with this; the Grand Prince Consort wrote it herself. If it's damaged, this old servant couldn't possibly afford to compensate."

Jin Liuying opened the box and, upon seeing the familiar handwriting, her eyes suddenly grew moist.

She choked up and said, "Yes, yes, this was written by my master herself. The lady scholar always said that my master's writing was the best she's ever seen among women, and only she could write in such elegant script. It's truly my master's handwriting..."

She carefully browsed through and softly read the words aloud.

Those delightful little stories began to emerge vividly in her mind, and the graceful handwriting seemed to come alive with joy.

After reading a few pages, Jin Liuying closed the box and said, "It seems my master is faring well, to be able to craft such stories."

The eunuch Wan sighed and said, "Indeed, the Grand Prince Consort must be fine."

Seeing that time was slipping away, the eunuch Wan suddenly said, "Oh dear, I fear the banquet may already have ended. Princess, should we go and see the Fifteenth Prince of Nanzhao or not?"

Jin Liuying suddenly broke into a laugh and said, "No need. There will be plenty of time to meet him in the future. Whether it’s sooner or later, it’s all the same."

Joyfully, Jin Liuying returned to her Liuying Palace, intent on sharing this matter with Cui Yingying to brighten her mood.

Yet in her palace, she unexpectedly saw a stranger—an unfamiliar man—speaking with Cui Yingying.

It was unthinkable for a stranger to be in the Imperial Palace. Judging from his attire, he wasn’t a man of Zhuzhao Country, but carried an exotic air about him.

Could it be...

Jin Liuying quickly hid behind a pillar, carefully observing the Prince Consort her elder brother had chosen for her.

"The princess will return shortly. Please, Fifteenth Prince, wait in the room," said Cui Yingying.

Zhao Yanzhong cupped his hands and replied, "Since the princess is not here, I would rather not disturb her. I shall take my leave."

"Please wait a while; the princess will be back shortly," Cui Yingying urged.

Zhao Yanzhong felt the situation was somewhat inconvenient, but the young lady before him persisted in blocking his way. Being a guest, he felt it improper to leave, leaving him momentarily caught between choices.

Jin Liuying took a deep breath, gathering her courage, and stepped out from behind the pillar.

"Ah, the princess! Her Highness has returned," exclaimed Cui Yingying, hurrying toward Jin Liuying.

"Princess, where have you been? The Fifteenth Prince of Nanzhao has come to seek an audience!" Cui Yingying whispered and winked at her.

Jin Liuying playfully smirked at her and then addressed Zhao Yanzhong, "I just stepped out to check on my little nephew. My apologies, Fifteenth Prince, for keeping you waiting."

"You are too kind, Princess; I have only just arrived," Zhao Yanzhong replied.

Cui Yingying signaled to the palace maids in the hall, who promptly withdrew from Liuying Hall. In moments, only Jin Liuying and Zhao Yanzhong were left inside.

"Fifteenth Prince, please come inside and be seated. I have many questions for you," Jin Liuying said.

These words made Zhao Yanzhong see her in a new light. Before coming here, he had specifically inquired about the women of Zhuzhao Country, especially those of status, learning about their upbringing and manners.

The overwhelming consensus was that the women of Zhuzhao Country—particularly those of noble birth—had been raised to be deeply cultured and proper, holding strictly to the distinctions between men and women. Having heard this repeatedly, he summarized their traits with four words: delicate and pretentious.

Yet now, Jin Liuying cordially invited him to converse inside the hall, speaking frankly of her curiosity, showing not a trace of delicacy or pretension. The faint blush on her face was merely the shyness typical of a young maiden.

"After you, Princess," Zhao Yanzhong said.

With this, Zhao Yanzhong relaxed somewhat, feeling less constrained.

Chapter 1313: Chatting

"What would the Princess like to ask? I will certainly speak without reserve."

Jin Liuying smiled and spoke directly.

"I want to ask His Highness the Fifteenth Prince about someone. She is my mentor and is currently in Nanzhao Country."

Zhao Yanzhong furrowed his brows, thought for a moment, and asked in a low voice, "Is the Princess referring to the Crown Prince's wife of your country?"

"Yes, she is also my sister-in-law," Jin Liuying replied.

Zhao Yanzhong cupped his hands toward Jin Liuying and said, "I regret to say that I know very little about the Crown Prince's wife. I'm afraid I can't be of much assistance to the Princess."

"Oh." Jin Liuying appeared somewhat disappointed and asked, "She's all right, isn't she?"

Zhao Yanzhong thought for a moment and said, "The Crown Prince is still able to obtain things from her. She should be fine."

After a while, he asked again, "How did the Crown Prince's wife become the Princess's mentor?"

Jin Liuying smiled faintly and replied, "When she became my mentor, she was not yet my sister-in-law. Yingying was learning medicine from her, so I asked my imperial grandmother to make her my mentor as well. She said my temperament was not suited for being a doctor and didn't teach me much about medical skills, but she taught me how to paint because I loved it."

As she spoke, she pointed to the paintings on the wall and said, "Look, these are all painted by me."

Zhao Yanzhong stood up and carefully examined each painting.

Most were landscape paintings, with a few depicting people.

The landscapes depicted crystal-clear streams and emerald mountains, towering peaks covered in lush greenery, verdant hills and waters, and splendid rivers and mountains...

To his knowledge, the Princesses of the Zhuzhao Country's Imperial Family were never allowed to leave the palace, and there were no high mountains in Beiping. So how could her paintings feel so vivid and lifelike, as if she had truly seen these landscapes?

"Princess, where did these paintings come from?"

The paintings were Jin Liuying's pride and joy. Talking about them seemed to bring her to life, and she smiled as she said, "Although I haven't seen the great mountains and rivers myself, I've looked at books my mentor gathered for me from among the common folk. I imagine the real landscapes must look something like this."

Zhao Yanzhong was full of admiration and burst out laughing.

"The Princess loves landscapes? It's perfect because Nanzhao happens to be a land of mountains and rivers. If Nanzhao's scenery is second, no other country would dare claim to be first."

Jin Liuying's eyes sparkled brightly. She said, "Really?"

Zhao Yanzhong replied, "Of course. Nanzhao is filled with mountains and rivers. But climbing mountains can be very tiring. I hope the Princess won't complain when the time comes."

"How could I? If I can see the view from the mountaintop, no matter how tiring, it will be worth it!"

"In that case, when the Princess arrives in Nanzhao, I will surely take you up the mountains to see the sunrise over the sea of clouds."

"Wonderful! It's settled, then. My mentor said the sunrise from the mountaintop is the most beautiful. I must see it."

...

It had long been known that the Ninth Princess would marry into Nanzhao Country, so the Ministry of Rites had been preparing her dowry.

Now that the Fifteenth Prince of Nanzhao Country had come to escort the bride, the Princess's dowry was nearly ready and could accompany her departure at any time.

The Ministry of Rites selected an auspicious date, which was set to be three days later.

In the meantime, Zhao Yanzhong took advantage of these three days to investigate information about the former State Preceptor of Zhuzhao Country.

The State Preceptor of Zhuzhao Country once held a paramount position, equal to that of the Emperor. However, several years ago, he disappeared. Later, the disciple he trusted most revealed many of his disgraceful crimes, causing the reputation of the Dao Family to plummet in the eyes of the public...

The information Zhao Yanzhong gathered was highly unfavorable to the Great Shaman, which deeply unsettled him.

Chapter 1314: Return to the Homeland

If the State Preceptor was truly as he had inquired, then the Great Shaman's character was highly questionable. It seemed that once he returned, he must inform the Emperor about these matters.

"Fifteenth Prince, there is a young woman outside requesting an audience."

"Young woman?" Zhao Yanzhong didn't recall knowing any young women and asked, "Did she mention who she is?"

The gatekeeper replied, "She claims to be the wife of Lord Jie Zhonglin. This humble servant believes she has likely come to inquire about Lord Jie."

"Let her in," Zhao Yanzhong said.

Miss Du entered gracefully. She was a woman of the world, standing out as more poised compared to the average women from wealthy families in Beijing.

"Lady Jie, what brings you to me?"

Miss Du curtsied and said, "This humble woman wishes to inquire about the Grand Crown Princess. She is our employer, and in her absence, many critical decisions cannot be made without her instruction."

Zhao Yanzhong was slightly startled. He had assumed that Jie Zhonglin's wife would come to ask about Jie Zhonglin but did not expect her to inquire about the Grand Crown Princess, the woman abducted by the Great Shaman.

Why did everyone ask him about her?

This only piqued his curiosity further about what kind of woman she was.

She could make the Emperor, the Princess, and even the wives of ordinary court officials deeply concerned for her. An imperial decree, laden with grief, had sent a young princess to marry into the small Nanzhao Kingdom.

And both the Grand Crown Prince and the Princely Heir Yue had chosen to dwell long-term in Taihe City of Nanzhao for her sake.

Zhao Yanzhong let out a derisive laugh and said, “May I be so bold as to ask—just who is this Grand Crown Princess that her disappearance concerns so many people?”

Miss Du’s graceful bearing was truly pleasing to the eye. She replied gently, “The Grand Crown Princess once controlled a typhoid outbreak in Lingnan. Surely the Fifteenth Prince has heard of this? Her treatment plan saved countless people, including many from the Nanzhao Country.”

Miss Du was a clever woman. Gu Youyou had achieved many remarkable feats. For instance, her disaster relief efforts were much more dramatic than containing typhoid. However, those efforts had been in Zhuzhao Country and were irrelevant to Nanzhao.

Therefore, there was no need to elaborate on other achievements unrelated to Nanzhao. A single account—the one connected to Nanzhao—was sufficient.

Just as she anticipated, Zhao Yanzhong was taken aback by her words. Rising suddenly, he exclaimed in shock, “Her? The reportedly miraculous Divine Doctor of Zhuzhao Country is the Grand Crown Princess?”

“Indeed,” Miss Du confirmed.

Zhao Yanzhong stood frozen for a moment, opening his mouth but failing to voice further thoughts.

No wonder everyone was so anxious about her.

A woman such as this, valued by all, naturally had extraordinary qualities.

Zhao Yanzhong turned to Miss Du and said, “The Grand Crown Prince and the Princely Heir Yue are both in Taihe City as well. They are unharmed.”

…

Zhao Yanzhong was escorting Zhuzhao Country's young Princess Jin Liuying back to Nanzhao Country. Among the wedding entourage, there were two particularly notable individuals.

In addition to the palace attendant appointed by the Emperor to accompany Jin Liuying as part of her dowry, there were Gui Yunxi and Searcy.

Searcy had to seize this opportunity to accompany the party to Nanzhao Country, and Gui Yunxi followed out of concern for him.

Upon learning this, Searcy was utterly enraged.

"Why are you coming along? You're useless both in strength and skill—are you looking to get yourself killed?"

"And aren't you also useless in strength and skill? So why are you coming along?"

Searcy scoffed coldly, pulling out a Poison Needle and waving it in Gui Yunxi's face. "Care to test my capabilities?"

Gui Yunxi shrank his neck and retorted, "You're bullying me again, aren't you? No matter what you say, I'm sticking with you."

Chapter 1315: Yu Jizi Leaves

"Hmph, suit yourself. Stay away from me, don't drag me down."

Gui Yunxi: "…"

The wedding procession was on its way back, while Yu Jizi in Nanzhao's Taihe City received a message.

Jin Ziyuan has appeared, in the East Sea.

Since he kidnapped Gu Youyou, it's been over half a year without a single trace of Jin Ziyuan. This has left Yu Jizi deeply frustrated, but now there's finally word of Jin Ziyuan. How could he let this opportunity pass? He immediately summoned Zhiqiu.

"Master, what business do you have with Zhiqiu?"

Yu Jizi stood by the window, hands behind his back, gazing at the mountains and rivers outside, his eyes carrying an air of transcendence.

His head adorned with silver hair, his spine straight, the aura he exuded was shockingly ethereal.

Zhiqiu stared in astonishment, marveling inwardly at how his master was truly beyond compare. If only he could cultivate such an aura someday.

Yu Jizi didn't turn around and calmly replied, "There is news about Jin Ziyuan. I need to leave for a while. You stay here and guard Gu Youyou."

"Master, you're leaving?" Zhiqiu was surprised. "Didn't you say Jin Ziyuan would eventually fall into the trap himself?"

Yu Jizi sighed lightly. "Perhaps I underestimated him."

It's been so many years. Gu Youyou has married and even had children. Whether she still holds the same place in Jin Ziyuan's heart as before is hard to say.

"But…" Zhiqiu hesitated, looking uneasy, and said, "Jin Zijin and Yue Rujing have been lingering around this village. What if they come to snatch her once Master has left?"

Yu Jizi tilted his head slightly and said, "Then let them take her."

“Huh? Then wouldn’t all the effort we spent capturing Gu Youyou be wasted?” Zhiqiu asked, puzzled.

Yu Jizi showed a warm smile and laughed heartily, “Zhiqiu, even if they succeed in taking her, where could they possibly hide? As long as Tian Jizi doesn’t intervene, even if they bring her back to the Imperial Palace in Zhuzhao Country, if I want to act, I can still get her out.”

Zhiqiu breathed a sigh of relief, thinking to himself: Master truly has an awe-inspiring presence. If only he could achieve even half of what his master has someday.

But no one could have anticipated that this was a trap set by Jin Ziyuan before his departure.

Jin Ziyuan ultimately left with You Jiang to Qiuci, but before leaving, he played a trick on Yu Jizi.

Given Yu Jizi’s prowess, if not for being driven mad in his pursuit of Jin Ziyuan, he wouldn’t have fallen for such a scheme.

Though this act didn’t enable Jin Zijin to rescue Gu Youyou outright, it undoubtedly gave their faction a great advantage.

…

Upon hearing news of Yu Jizi’s departure, the following day Jin Zijin couldn’t resist sending Yue Rujing and Jie Zhonglin to the Witch Doctor Village.

The villagers came out in droves when they saw two strangers approaching, eyeing the three visitors closely.

“Have the honored guests come to the Witch Doctor Village for a specific matter?” the overseer asked.

Without Yu Jizi present, their demeanor was naturally haughty. Yue Rujing strode forward boldly and said, “My senior brother has been feeling unwell lately, so we’ve come to see the witch doctors.”

Illnesses requiring visits to the Witch Doctor Village were a common occurrence. The locals here believed in witch doctors and rejected regular doctors, much like how Zhuzhao Country worshipped the Dao Sect and shunned Buddhism.

Upon hearing they were here for medical treatment, the overseer quickly invited them indoors and asked, “Do you have a specific witch doctor in mind? If not, I can arrange one for you.”

Yue Rujing coughed lightly and said, “No, we’re from Zhuzhao Country. We don’t see witch doctors; we’ve come to find a doctor instead.”

Chapter 1316: Making Things Difficult

"Looking for a doctor?" The steward’s face immediately darkened, and he snorted coldly, "Zhuzhao people, I think you’ve come to the wrong place. We only have witch doctors here, no doctors."

"No, no, no, you do. We know you have a doctor here. You’re hiding the doctor and won’t let us treat our illness. If anything happens to my senior brother, even your Nanzhao Emperor won’t be able to bear the responsibility!"

"You all..." The steward was furious, his face ashen, and he snorted, "Whether His Majesty can bear it or not, we still don’t have a doctor here. This is a Witch Doctor Village."

"Oh? Is that so?" He suddenly pointed at a stilted building and said, "How come I heard there’s a doctor living in that building? What? Didn’t your Great Shaman tell you?"

"How could it be?" The steward looked surprised and shook his head, "We Nanzhao people don’t trust your doctors. Our Great Shaman couldn’t have brought back a doctor."

He knew a woman lived there, brought back by the Great Shaman from outside. Usually, everyone respected the Great Shaman immensely, and as long as he didn’t say anything, no one would ask. But he had never thought that the woman brought back by the Great Shaman was a doctor.

"Then go and ask her if she can cure my senior brother’s illness," Yue Rujing insisted relentlessly.

The steward thought Yue Rujing was utterly unreasonable and snorted coldly, "Our Witch Doctor Village doesn’t treat your patients. If you want a doctor, have the ability to go back to Zhuzhao Country to find one. We don’t have the doctor you’re looking for here. Go, go, someone, drive these two out for me."

In no time, over a dozen Nanzhao witch doctors arrived and surrounded Yue Rujing and Jie Zhonglin.

Yue Rujing was still provocatively shouting, but Jie Zhonglin, seeing the situation turning bad, quickly explained to the steward, "Everyone, please calm down for a moment and listen to what I have to say."

Jie Zhonglin was a cripple, and regardless of the type of healer, they always had a bit of sympathy for such people.

Seeing this young man’s humble attitude, in sharp contrast to the cursing Yue Rujing, their attitudes towards him improved significantly.

The steward gestured to the others to wait a moment. Then he said to Jie Zhonglin, "You seem to be a reasonable person. Fine, let’s hear what you have to say first."

Jie Zhonglin appeased the ignored Yue Rujing at his side, then spoke kindly to the witch doctors.

"You all have probably heard about the arranged royal marriage between Nanzhao Country and Zhuzhao Country. Considering the timing, your country’s fifteenth prince should already be on his way to Zhuzhao Country to marry the Princess."

The steward nodded and said, "That’s right. This is now known throughout the city; of course, we are aware of it."

Jie Zhonglin smiled and added, "I am the envoy of Zhuzhao Country, and the person who is ill is our Crown Prince. I kindly ask for the witch doctors’ assistance. The Crown Prince’s illness cannot be delayed."

"Zhuzhao Country’s Crown Prince?" Now the steward could not casually drive them away. He looked at the two with astonishment and, worriedly, said, "Since it’s the Crown Prince who is ill, it indeed can’t be delayed. Please, lead the way, and we’ll go to treat the Crown Prince immediately."

On the other side, Yue Rujing was sullen and said, "Who wants you to go? We’ve said we don’t want witch doctors; we want a doctor."

"We’ve said it, we don’t have a doctor."

"Then have the woman from the stilted building come with us to take a look."

"She was brought by the Great Shaman; we can’t let her go with you."

"Do you mean to delay my senior brother’s illness? Or should I take a trip to the Imperial Palace to ask His Majesty for a decree?"

Chapter 1317: Taking Gu Youyou Away

"You..." The Witch Doctor in charge completely lost his temper and said, "Aren’t you forcing people into an impossible situation?"

Yue Rujing chuckled and said, "I think you’ve got a stiff, inflexible monk-like brain that needs to be knocked around a bit."

Both factions were on edge, ready to draw their swords, when a handsome young man walked over and stood at the doorway. He addressed the noisy crowd, "Let them take her."

Everyone turned their heads and saw it was Zhiqiu. They all knew Zhiqiu was the Great Shaman’s disciple and held great respect for the Great Shaman, which extended to Zhiqiu as well.

The Witch Doctors quickly bowed respectfully to him and said, "Lord Zhiqiu, they want to take the woman upstairs away."

"I know," Zhiqiu said. "Let them take her. This is the master’s will."

Previously, Zhiqiu had been an inconspicuous figure among Xuanzong's tens of thousands of disciples, so characters like Yue Rujing naturally wouldn't recognize him. The way he dressed, however, looked distinctly like someone from Zhuzhao, especially his features, which carried the delicate and soft aesthetic of the Jiangnan Water Towns. With just one glance, they could tell he was from Zhuzhao Country.

Especially when he addressed someone as "master."

Yue Rujing sneered, "Another lackey of Yu Jizi."

Yu Jizi understood well; he knew that as soon as he left, this motley crew would be completely incapable of stopping them from taking Gu Youyou away. So, he simply did them a favor and let them take her first.

"Alright, straightforward." Yue Rujing stepped forward, patted Zhiqiu's shoulder, and said with a laugh, "Why haven't I seen you before? A new disciple of Yu Jizi?"

Zhiqiu's expression was icy as he clasped his hands respectfully to Yue Rujing and said, "Zhiqiu has spent over ten years at Xuanzong quietly in the shadows. Perhaps that's why Senior Brother Yue has never seen me."

"Quietly in the shadows? Well, well, what an understated presence..."

Yue Rujing nodded, burst into laughter, and strode out of the house toward the stilted building across the way.

The Witch Doctors frowned at Yue Rujing's arrogance, itching to rush forward and drag him down for a thorough thrashing. However, Zhiqiu endured it and held them back, so they had no choice but to restrain themselves.

"Lord Zhiqiu, are you really going to let them take the woman away? What about the Great Shaman..."

Zhiqiu interrupted, "We can’t stop them. This is also the master’s will."

Since that was the case, no matter how unwilling they felt, there was nothing more to say.

Yue Rujing swaggered upstairs and saw Gu Youyou. He chuckled and said, "Now we can take you away. Still planning to run off?"

Gu Youyou had already heard the conversations downstairs. When she learned Yu Jizi was leaving, she knew she would be able to leave this stilted building as well. However, she hadn’t expected Jin Zijin to make it happen this way.

"Is Zijin really ill?"

Yue Rujing froze for a moment but responded seriously, "Yes, he is ill."

Gu Youyou was suddenly startled and asked, "Really ill? What happened to him?"

Could it be they weren’t acting deliberately?

Seeing how anxious Gu Youyou looked, Yue Rujing couldn’t help but burst into laughter, saying, "Yes, he’s ill—lovesickness. That’s why you’re the only one he must have. Otherwise, why would I seek you out? I could’ve dragged a few Witch Doctors along instead. Just listen to the commotion downstairs!"

Yue Rujing went upstairs alone, while Jie Zhonglin waited downstairs, occasionally chatting with the curious Witch Doctors and onlookers.

"I’ve heard the Great Shaman’s witchcraft is extraordinary. As long as someone has even a breath of life in them, they can be saved, isn’t that true?"

Yu Jizi’s die-hard fans naturally wouldn’t miss the chance to promote the Great Shaman’s brilliance, chiming in one after another, "Of course! The Great Shaman’s witchcraft is well-known and undeniable."

"Two years ago, the girl from a nearby village fell ill. She was bedridden for days and couldn't get up, but it was the Great Shaman who cured her! He gave her a pack of some black paste, and she recovered instantly. Now she's lively and full of energy."

"Exactly, exactly. You all believe in our Great Shaman, don't you? His black paste cures all illnesses."

"Your Zhuzhao Country doctors are useless. I heard people say they use needles and even burn people with fire, and after all that, they still end up dead..."

Gu Youyou's face darkened upon hearing this. What they referred to as "using needles" was likely acupuncture, and "burning with fire" was probably cupping therapy. These were just ignorant ancient folks blindly believing in Yu Jizi's so-called talisman-burning skills?

Of course, Gu Youyou knew that Yu Jizi's dramatic rituals were merely part of an act tailored to the superstitions of this community. In truth, the water he gave the sick to drink had pre-prepared medicine dissolved in it.

The medical skills Yue Rujing possessed were taught by Tian Jizi, and Yu Jizi's abilities were genuinely effective. Otherwise, relying solely on deceit wouldn't have brought him his current status.

"Let's go—ignorant and unwise."

As she looked at these people, Gu Youyou suddenly had a realization.

Ignorant and unwise, huh? Perhaps she could turn their ignorance to her advantage, use it to challenge Yu Jizi, and ultimately vanquish him.

Through medical skills, she could replace the witch doctor's authority, letting people understand that healing comes from proper medicine—not from mere shamanic antics.

In that case, the battle ahead of them would be a conflict of faith.

...

With righteous confidence, Yue Rujing brought Gu Youyou back and escorted her into the post station.

Jin Zijin had been waiting for quite some time. He sat by the window, drinking cup after cup of tea. To an outsider, he might appear as relaxed as could be, but only he knew that each cup of tea was a futile attempt to suppress the anxiety boiling up inside.

Through the window, he saw that familiar figure step into the courtyard, and his heartbeat instantly surged to its peak. His hand, holding the teacup, began to tremble slightly.

Tea spilled over the edge, dripping onto the back of his hand, but he didn't even register the burning sensation.

"Youyou!" he murmured softly, his voice quivering with emotion.

The person who had entered the courtyard froze for a moment. Lifting her gaze, she saw the window beneath a tree full of begonia blossoms—standing there was a familiar figure.

He was just as she remembered: tall and upright, his eyes like a galaxy of stars. Yet compared to the cold indifference of years past, his gaze now brimmed with tenderness.

"Zijin..." she called to him softly, her smile eclipsing even the brilliance of the begonia blossoms.

Witnessing this moment, Yue Rujing—uncharacteristically perceptive—cracked a rare joke before tactfully making his exit.

"Look at that—love-struck illness! Doctor Gu, it's your stage now!"

The man inside rushed out, wrapping the woman in his arms as if to meld her entirely with his body, holding her so tightly she could barely breathe.

"Zijin..." Gu Youyou, feeling constricted to the point of breathlessness, said softly, "We've got all the time in the world ahead of us. We have a lifetime to spend together. See, I've returned safe and sound, haven't I?"

Jin Zijin loosened his grip, and they exchanged a smile.

Yes, what was there to fear?

Back then, when they were still in Lotus Village, they couldn't even see a path forward, yet they hadn't been this scared.

There's a saying: One doesn't fear losing what one hasn't gained.

But having held on for so long, he'd become prone to unease.

"I..."

"I..."

When they both began to speak at the same time, they burst into laughter.

Gu Youyou said, "Go ahead, you first."

Chapter 1319: The Plan

Jin Zijin said, "Let's go inside first, then you speak."

Following him into the room, Gu Youyou insisted that Jin Zijin speak first.

Helpless, he gently tousled her hair and said softly, "Alright, I'll speak."

The weather in Nanzhao is lovely, like spring all year round, with flowers blooming endlessly in every season.

From their vantage point, the courtyard was filled with blossoming crabapple flowers, vibrant and lush.

Jin Zijin’s voice flowed gently from within the room.

"I really want to take you back right now, immediately, so our family can reunite. But after thinking it over for an entire night, I can’t do that."

"Hmm?" Gu Youyou lifted her head, gazing up at his resolute jawline.

"If I take you back now, I can’t ensure that nothing else will happen to you. As long as Yu Jizi is alive, we won’t have the ability to live in peace. Yu Jizi is likely counting on this, which is why he dares to leave so assuredly."

Gu Youyou nodded slightly, letting out a soft sigh.

"I think it’s better if we stay. We must eliminate him completely to achieve true peace once and for all."

Gu Youyou leaned gently against him, wrapping her arms around his waist.

She said, "What a coincidence, I was thinking the exact same thing. These were the words I wanted to say."

"Oh?" Jin Zijin asked in surprise, "What’s your plan?"

Gu Youyou smiled and said, "In the time I’ve spent in the Witch Doctor Village, I’ve observed things clearly. People seek out the Witch Doctors not only because of faith but also because the potion in their talisman water does indeed contain medicine. I feel like this is a deception.

I want to stay and expose their tricks, to show people that it’s the doctors who genuinely heal illnesses, while Witch Doctors can only deal with superficial, minor ailments."

Jin Zijin laughed as well, replying gently, "Yu Jizi’s status among the people of Nanzhao is no less significant than what Zhuzhao Country experienced in the past. Changing the faith of the Nanzhao people is indeed a good approach, but it alone won’t suffice. I’ve discovered some other clues..."

Jin Zijin recounted to Gu Youyou everything that he and Yue Rujing had gone through at Yunhe Mountain. After finishing, he took out the things he had documented.

Gu Youyou flipped through them for quite some time but couldn’t make sense of them.

Aside from a small amount of written text, it was mostly filled with strange symbols, diagrams of formations, and such. She handed the booklet back to Jin Zijin and asked, "What are all these?"

Jin Zijin said, "If my guess is correct, for him to exchange souls, he no longer needs a Four-Yin Woman, only Jin Ziyuan."

Gu Youyou let out a sarcastic laugh. "Such fantastical nonsense could only be believed by someone so terrified of death that they’re bordering on madness."

"Youyou!" Jin Zijin furrowed his brows and said, "Anything is possible. For example, you..."

Gu Youyou’s words froze in her throat. Indeed, by their account, isn’t she a living example of a successful soul exchange?

Gu Youyou broke into a cold sweat, hurriedly saying, "No matter what, we cannot let him succeed. Yunhe Mountain, right? Let’s go destroy that cave."

Jin Zijin sighed and said, "Destroying the cave isn’t the key. The crucial part is..."

He stopped mid-sentence, then said, "Let’s not talk about this for now. Before he returns, you must find a legitimate reason to stay, one that will convince everyone."

Gu Youyou paused and said, "Then... you keep pretending to be ill, and I’ll act as your doctor?"

This idea was immediately dismissed by Jin Zijin. He said, "If I remain sick for too long, the Emperor of Nanzhao will likely insist on sending a Witch Doctor to treat me. If they can’t cure me, they’ll decide to send me back to Zhuzhao Country. This plan might work temporarily but is not a long-term solution."

He thought for a moment and said, "If my estimate is correct, the Fifteenth Prince should be returning soon. Once he is back, I’ll take you to the palace to meet the Emperor and formally introduce you as my wife."

Chapter 1320: Not Reassured

Gu Youyou was a little worried and said, “Won’t this provoke that old pervert to anger?”

Jin Zijin snorted coldly and said, “Before he gets his hands on Jin Ziyuan’s body, he won’t take things too far. His ultimate target isn’t you; as long as you can lure Jin Ziyuan over, it’ll be fine.”

“But right now…” Gu Youyou was slightly agitated and said, “I heard he got news of Jin Ziyuan in the East Sea?”

“No, Jin Ziyuan might act impulsively, but You Jiang by his side is an old fox. Having been tricked once, he’s not going to fall for the same trick again and again. Jin Ziyuan won’t be captured so easily; they’ve figured things out better than we have.”

…

Gu Youyou used the excuse of seeking medical treatment to stay on. The Nanzhao Emperor, upon hearing he was ill, sent over a witch doctor, but Yue Rujing rejected them outright, saying they didn’t trust witch doctors and trusted conventional doctors more.

Every country and ethnic group has its own beliefs, and the Nanzhao Emperor was fairly open-minded, not forcing them to comply.

A few days later, news came from the border that the Fifteenth Prince returned, bringing the little Princess of Zhuzhao Country with him.

Gu Youyou sighed and said, “That little girl suddenly marrying so far away, she must be heartbroken, right?”

Jin Zijin smiled with a mysterious look and said, “Not necessarily. Whether the marriage is far or close isn’t important; what’s important is whether she married the right person.”

“You picked the person? Are they good-looking?” Gu Youyou asked with interest.

Jin Zijin responded, “The person is decent; more importantly, Liuying likes them.”

“You even know about this?” Gu Youyou exclaimed in surprise.

“Yes, I already received the Emperor’s notification. By the way, the little stories you wrote—I’ve sent them back to the palace. Xuyao listens to them as bedtime stories and loves them.”

The smile on Gu Youyou’s face froze slightly, carrying a trace of bitterness.

She said, “I was planning to tell him those stories myself. I wonder if I’ll return before he grows up.”

“You absolutely will,” Jin Zijin assured her.

Gu Youyou did not continue on this topic and asked, “What about now? We’re all here in Nanzhao Country—who’s taking care of him now?”

“The Emperor brought him into the Imperial Palace. Now he’s personally under the care of Noble Consort Sheng. You can rest assured; Noble Consort Sheng will take good care of him.”

However, what Gu Youyou heard did not put her at ease. She exclaimed, “Noble Consort Sheng isn’t even caring for her own grandson, yet she’s looking after our son?”

You couldn’t fault her for being cautious—within the Imperial Family, what bizarre things couldn’t happen? Every incident was something beyond expectation. Moreover, after King Jin fell from power, the only ones eligible to vie for the throne were Jin Zijin and Prince Qin.

Sheng Qiaoyue used to be Xiao Qinqin’s maid. Perhaps she was deeply loyal to Xiao Qinqin back in the day, but that was years ago—hearts change over time. Faced with the choice between her own son and the late master’s son, even a fool would know what to choose, right?

She couldn’t believe it—Noble Consort Sheng, relying on the Emperor’s favor, wouldn’t want to strive for a better future for Prince Qin?

She said, “What if Noble Consort Sheng also dreams of becoming the Empress Dowager? Might she treat Xuyao poorly? Should you write a letter to the Emperor and ask him to watch over it personally?”

Gu Youyou’s concerns were well understood by Jin Zijin. He smiled faintly and said, “You’re overthinking it— not everyone is like Jin Yushu. Sheng Qiaoyue is still the same Sheng Qiaoyue she used to be. Don’t worry.”

“Oh, come on,” Gu Youyou felt unsettled. “Hearts are inscrutable. How can you be sure Sheng Qiaoyue is still the same person? You’re not even familiar with her.”

“Hmm… you’re right,” Jin Zijin nodded with amusement. His dismissive attitude left Gu Youyou deeply frustrated.