Farmhouse 1321

Chapter 1321: Back Again

Just as she was about to lose her temper, Jin Zijin finally put away his teasing smile and said seriously, "Sheng Qiaoyue is indeed Sheng Qiaoyue; she is not Sheng Guifei. The Emperor's decision to make her the Imperial Guifei was merely to deceive people, and Prince Qin is not her biological son either. This is all an act to obscure her and Prince Qin's true identities, a performance for Jin Yushu."

Gu Youyou was stunned, feeling confused about what she had just heard.

What did this mean?

Was the beloved Imperial Guifei Sheng Qiaoyue of Zhuzhao Country merely a façade? Just playing a role alongside the Emperor in a grand charade?

And Prince Qin, was he fake too?

"Then who is Prince Qin? Could he possibly be like Jin Fengzhao—a child purchased from somewhere?"

"What are you thinking? There can't be so many bought children. He is indeed my biological younger brother, a child born to another consort of the Emperor. That consort seemingly fell victim to Jin Yushu's schemes and was killed. No one expected that, although the consort died, the child inside her survived."

Gu Youyou remained silent as she listened. The Imperial Family's tales were always far more intricate and fascinating than anything she had ever read. One sensational story followed another, and within the Emperor's offspring, there seemed to be no trace of normalcy.

However, this revealed that Sheng Guifei was essentially a former maid left behind by Xiao Qinqin, which meant she was actually working for Jin Zijin.

With that in mind, leaving Jin Xuyao under her care seemed reliable enough.

After all, anyone who could become a favored consort under the watchful eyes of the late Empress would hardly be a fool. Moreover, those around her were indeed capable, directly answering to the Emperor himself.

...

Zhao Yanzhong’s wedding entourage had already entered Nanzhao territory, and the stunning landscapes along the way left Jin Liuying mesmerized.

She carefully used her charcoal pencil to sketch the beautiful sights she encountered along the way, storing them in her heart as she thought about how, once she entered her next cage, she would have enough material to paint for the rest of her life.

During their midway break, Zhao Yanzhong stepped into Jin Xuyao’s carriage and saw her sitting by the window, wholly absorbed in her drawing. He almost didn’t want to interrupt her.

But throughout the journey, she had tirelessly worked on her artwork, and her swollen eyes betrayed her exhaustion.

He quickly picked up a water flask and handed it to her, saying, "Drink some water first and take a break from drawing. Nanzhao Country is filled with countless mountains and rivers; you can sketch them when we arrive."

"I must record them now; I’m afraid I’ll forget them," Jin Liuying replied earnestly.

"Even if you forget, we can always return. As long as you wish to visit again and don’t mind the hardships of the journey, I can bring you back anytime," Zhao Yanzhong said.

"We can come back?" Jin Liuying paused her drawing and looked up at him.

Amused, Zhao Yanzhong replied, "Of course we can. You’re not a prisoner; no one is restricting your freedom."

"But..." Jin Liuying hesitated. "I'm a woman. Can I freely go outside?"

Zhao Yanzhong immediately understood her concerns. Smiling faintly, he sighed, "That's the rule in Zhuzhao Country, but it's not the same here in Nanzhao Country. Here, women can do what they enjoy, just like men. Wherever you want to go, you're free to go."

"Really?" At first, she thought Zhao Yanzhong was placating her due to her reluctance about the marriage. But now, they had already reached Nanzhao territory, and he continued to reassure her with such certainty. She couldn't help taking him seriously.

"We truly can avoid staying confined in one courtyard forever, exploring freely and pursuing our passions?"

"Absolutely. Moreover, our courtyards are situated amidst mountains and rivers. You don't even have to leave home to enjoy the scenery of towering peaks and flowing waters."

Jin Liuying froze for a moment, unable to speak for a long time.

Chapter 1322: Getting the Great Shaman to Take the Blame

His words were like a beautiful dream. Sitting in the courtyard at home, you could see high mountains and flowing rivers. Such a scene only appeared in her dreams, and once she dreamt it, she would paint it into her paintings.

Feeling that happiness had come too suddenly, in her joy she momentarily forgot herself. Jin Liuying couldn't help but pounce towards the dream-weaving man sitting opposite her. It was the unique scent of a young man at the tip of her nose that suddenly woke her up.

Jin Liuying was startled, hurriedly letting go of her hands, and sat upright.

Her eyes didn't dare to directly look at the person opposite, pretending to casually look out of the window.

Zhao Yanzhong's expression was also somewhat stiff. The sudden embrace caught both of them off guard.

He gently pressed his lips together, considering it a beautiful accident.

The convoy finally entered Taihe City. The Nanzhao Emperor, having received the news early, personally greeted them, showing how much he valued this marriage alliance with Zhuzhao Country.

Jin Liuying had dressed in her wedding attire and covered her head with a veil the day before entering Taihe City. At this moment, she was carried down from the carriage by Zhao Yanzhong, who was also dressed in a bright red ceremonial robe, and holding her hand, they went to meet the Nanzhao Emperor.

"Royal brother, this is the ninth princess of Zhuzhao Country, Jin Liuying."

"Royal brother!" Jin Liuying gently curtsied under her veil.

The emperor laughed heartily and said, "Good, good, the princess has had a tiring journey, quickly enter the palace."

The Nanzhao Emperor had already prepared the necessary items for their marriage, just waiting for them to arrive to marry according to Nanzhao's customs and enter the bridal chamber.

Nanzhao Country didn't have as many rules as Zhuzhao Country. They didn't consider auspicious days; as long as the man and woman fancied each other and could sing mountain songs back and forth, that would suffice.

To make the atmosphere lively, more than just one pair sang mountain songs; there were several pairs, and at night, everyone sang joyfully around the bonfire.

Jin Zijin walked with Gu Youyou towards the Nanzhao Emperor. Seeing the Crown Prince of Zhuzhao Country bringing a woman with him, the Nanzhao Emperor was also quite astonished.

While he was scrutinizing Gu Youyou, Jin Zijin introduced to him, "Your Majesty, this is my wife, Gu Youyou."

It was rare to introduce one’s wife by name; they were usually referred to as Jin Gushi, so his introduction surprised the Nanzhao Emperor even more.

However, in such a setting, as the Nanzhao Emperor, he naturally held his composure and smiled, saying, "So the Crown Princess has also come to Nanzhao Country, truly glorifying our country."

Jin Zijin said, "Recently, I fell ill. Ajing didn’t trust the witch doctor, so I asked my wife to come. Originally, my wife was invited by your Great Shaman to stay as a guest in the Witch Doctor Village and jointly discuss witchcraft and medical skills."

"Ah...?" This time the Nanzhao Emperor couldn’t hold back, his face full of astonishment.

"The Great Shaman researching medical skills? The Crown Princess is interested in our witchcraft?"

Isn’t it true that medical skills and witchcraft have looked down on each other for thousands of years?

In fact, the Nanzhao Emperor was quite an open-minded person. He wasn’t very superstitious. As far as he was concerned, whether it was witchcraft or medical skills, as long as it could save lives, it was fine by him.

If not, when the camp was infected with typhus back then, he wouldn’t have firmly insisted on trying the treatment plan sent by Yue Tingfang, against all odds.

The fact proved that it really worked. The death toll from the epidemic was minimized with Yue Tingfang’s treatment plan.

Facing the astonished Nanzhao Emperor, Gu Youyou merely smiled and said, "Your Majesty, I am a doctor and prioritize saving lives. Regardless of whether it’s medical skills or witchcraft, as long as it can save people, I like to study it."

Chapter 1323: The Attitude of the Nanzhao Emperor

The Nanzhao Emperor, upon hearing this, immediately felt a greater sense of fondness toward Gu Youyou.

To think someone in this world actually shares his thoughts! He had been thinking the same, but those stubborn old fogies clung to their beliefs. They worshipped the witch god and trusted no one beyond the witch doctors.

While he could govern a country, he couldn't change a person's faith—especially one that wasn't overly detrimental. Other than secretly cursing those obstinate fools as idiots, it seemed there was no need for further action.

The Nanzhao Emperor burst into hearty laughter and said, "A doctor who saves lives is wonderful! I hope you achieve something meaningful in Nanzhao Country. If there's anything you need help with, just let me know. I will do my utmost to assist you within my capacity."

That the Nanzhao Emperor would think in this way, his words carried a clear implication—it showed, at the very least, that he was not opposed to doctors.

Of course, it could also be mere politeness since relations between the two nations were amicable at the moment. Regardless, this was undoubtedly a pleasant surprise for both Gu Youyou and Jin Zijin.

Gu Youyou promptly seized the opportunity and said, "Your Majesty, perhaps you've never met me, but maybe you've heard of me."

"Oh? And you are…?"

"My name is Gu Youyou. Years ago, when the Lingnan Barracks suffered an outbreak of typhoid fever, the cure was devised by me. Later, the prescription sent to your country by Marquess Yue was also from my hand."

"Ah! So it was you?" The Nanzhao Emperor's face was filled with astonishment. He exclaimed, "I always assumed someone capable of curing such a disease must be a godlike figure akin to a Great Shaman. Yet, to my surprise, it's such a young lady! You've truly caught me off guard!"

Gu Youyou humbly lowered her gaze and said, “Your Majesty, witchcraft and medical skills each have their merits. There are illnesses the Great Shaman can treat that I cannot, and likewise, there are ailments I can cure that the Great Shaman may struggle with. That’s why the Great Shaman invited me here to collaborate in researching ways to save lives—for the well-being of the people.”

These words struck a chord with the Emperor. Back when the witch doctors failed to cure an illness, yet the doctors succeeded, someone else might have taken the chance to belittle the other party while inflating their own importance. But Gu Youyou didn’t do so. Instead, she acknowledged her own limitations while subtly emphasizing the value of medical skills.

A woman like this was remarkable, no less capable than a man. For such a place like Zhuzhao Country to produce a woman like her was truly hard to believe.

After meeting with the Nanzhao Emperor, Jin Zijin and Gu Youyou returned to their seats. Jin Zijin was frequently pulled to the bonfire by Yue Rujing and several Nanzhao princes, making rounds and drinking wine.

At this moment, a sneaky figure approached Gu Youyou, startling her.

When she saw the person before her clearly, she was truly taken aback.

“Why are you here?”

Searcy, dressed in the attire of a Nanzhao Palace Attendant, sat a bit far from the fire pit in the pitch-black night, making her difficult to recognize at first.

“I’m the accompanying maid of the Ninth Princess,” Searcy declared with righteous confidence.

Gu Youyou: “…”

She nudged Searcy and said, “Stop the nonsense. Do you think I don’t know what you’re up to? Sigh, if you’re here, then what about my son? Can that silly girl Xiang Chun handle things?”

“Well, I don’t know how to take care of children either. Your son is just starting to babble as he learns to talk—so noisy it’s frustrating.”

Gu Youyou: “…”

“Ah, forget about it. I’m already here; it’s up to you now.”

Searcy adopted a shameless attitude, making it clear she wasn’t going to budge and leaving Gu Youyou to deal with it however she saw fit.

Chapter 1324: Liking This Place

Gu Youyou naturally couldn’t do much about it, and she merely snorted coldly, “Our enemy this time is Yu Jizi, as long as you’re clear about that. People like you, who are probably useless, often end up dying quickly. If he’s unhappy, the first ones he’ll target are people like you.”

Searcy’s eyes gradually darkened, her tone indifferent as she replied, “That works out, doesn’t it? I have revenge to settle with him myself.”

Gu Youyou froze momentarily and then remembered—during the Dao Sect Crusade Assembly, when Huo Li outlined Yu Jizi’s crimes, it included the incident where Yu Jizi orchestrated the framing of an entire family of poison doctors.

Searcy had long known about that event.

Gu Youyou sighed and said, “Since you know about it, there’s nothing more for me to say. But you must remember, the first priority is to keep yourself alive. Only when your safety is guaranteed can you deal with Yu Jizi. Frankly speaking, I suggest you not provoke him; his temper isn’t as good as it used to be. If something happens to you, what about your coachman?”

“Coachman?” Searcy pointed toward the fire across from them and said, “Look, isn’t that him?”

Gu Youyou followed her finger and noticed that the person drinking behind Yue Rujing was none other than Searcy’s coachman, Gui Yunxi.

She twitched at the corner of her mouth, held her forehead helplessly, and said, “Why did he follow you here too?”

Searcy replied nonchalantly, “If you want to bundle him up and send him back to Zhuzhao Country, I won’t protest. I’d even thank you for it!”

Gu Youyou: “…”

…

When she saw Jin Liuying again, Jin had already adopted the appearance of a Nanzhao Country noblewoman, her hair styled as a matron.

This girl, who still had traces of youth on her face, had already taken the first steps into womanhood.

“Today you aren’t in the palace serving tea to your mother-in-law—why are you here?” Gu Youyou teased her with a faint smile.

The young girl nodded slightly, her face tinged with shyness, “There’s no such custom to serve tea to mothers-in-law here.”

“Oh, is that so? I nearly forgot.” Gu Youyou blinked and suddenly asked, “I heard the Fifteenth Prince is quite good. Is he treating you well?”

Judging by her expression, it was apparent that things were still alright. Yet knowing that she had married into Nanzhao in order to help deal with Yu Jizi, Gu Youyou couldn’t help but feel a lingering worry.

If she was living well, that was good. But if she wasn’t, Gu Youyou felt that she would risk defying the world to take her back.

“He’s quite nice; the weather here is pleasant, not cold,” Jin Liuying answered, sitting primly on the chair beside Gu Youyou with a faint blush coloring her cheeks.

Gu Youyou smiled, “This place is spring-like year round. Even in winter, the leaves on the trees don’t fall.”

“So it’s like Master’s glass greenhouse?”

Gu Youyou nodded slightly and said, “This is a natural greenhouse, a gift from heaven. Do you like it?”

Jin Liuying nodded earnestly, her smile growing deeper. She said, “I do. The Prince said the water in the courtyard is drinkable. I tried it—it’s so sweet! Completely different from the water in the Lotus Pond at the Imperial Palace.”

This was indeed one of the advantages of the Nanzhao Country. Even slightly prosperous families would channel mountain spring water into their courtyards. The water was fresh and constantly replenished, perfectly drinkable.

In contrast, the palace ponds were artificial, holding stagnant water. How could that compare to the flowing mountain springs?

When Jin Liuying truly experienced the essence of Nanzhao Country, she couldn’t stop talking. Her excitement spilled forth, endlessly chattering with enthusiasm.

“The mountains here are so numerous and majestic, even more beautiful than the landscapes shown in Master’s albums. I want to paint them all.”

Chapter 1325: Do Something

Gu Youyou laughed and said, "Then you’ll have plenty to paint. The mountains here stretch for thousands of miles, you won’t be able to finish."

Jin Liuying puffed her cheeks indignantly, "The Prince told me I don’t have to stay home all day. I can go wherever I want, and there’s no need to tell him. I have freedom. I can keep painting forever."

Gu Youyou paused slightly and couldn’t help but smile bitterly.

For Jin Liuying, being able to see mountains and rivers, and going out freely was happiness. Such a simple idea—perhaps it was good. As long as life was manageable, she could live very happily.

"Your Prince treats you so well," Gu Youyou raised a thumb at her.

Jin Liuying lowered her head bashfully and said, "Big Brother is also very kind."

Gu Youyou was stunned for a moment, then burst into laughter.

"Seeing you happy puts us at ease. We’re just afraid you’d sacrifice your entire life because of us. If that were the case, Master would feel guilty."

Jin Liuying blinked and said, "Seeing that Master is doing well also puts me at ease. When I heard you were captured by the State Preceptor, I thought he locked you up like a prisoner."

She paused for a moment, then suddenly added, "By the way, since Master isn’t imprisoned, why not return? Father is very worried about you all."

Gu Youyou fell silent for a moment, then raised her gaze to Jin Liuying, her eyes faintly carrying concern.

She said, "We still can’t return yet. Unless we completely resolve the matter with Yu Jizi, it would be pointless to go back."

"Then how do we deal with him?" Jin Liuying cautiously asked, "Master, can I help you?"

Gu Youyou looked at her with gratification and sighed, "Maybe we’ll need you, maybe we won’t. But Master hopes you won’t involve yourself if possible!"

"If Master does need me one day, please be sure to tell me."

She was only fifteen years old, always carrying an innocent and carefree demeanor of a young girl. How could she understand that dealing with Yu Jizi was far from simple?

Fortunately, during the years he spent recovering from injuries, Jin Zijin and Yue Rujing managed to clear out most of his followers within Zhuzhao Country. Now, his power was thin, and there were few people he could rely on.

If he wasn't pushed to the point of being completely strained, their own actions would only become even harder to carry out.

...

After Jin Liuying's grand wedding, Jie Zhonglin no longer had any reason to stay and bid farewell to the Nanzhao Emperor, heading back to Zhuzhao Country.

Yu Jizi hadn't returned yet. The journey to the East Sea was long, and finding someone there wasn't easy. He wouldn't return anytime soon.

If everything could be settled before Yu Jizi's return, it would be ideal. But changing thousand-year-old, deeply ingrained beliefs was no easy task. No matter how urgent Gu Youyou and the others were, they could only wait—for the right moment to prove their medical skills.

Jin Zijin and Yue Rujing needed to travel far and wide, gathering information about Magic Poisonous Insect Techniques.

They even sought out masters proficient in these techniques, humbling themselves as their disciples in hopes of extracting useful knowledge from them.

Yu Jizi was reputed to be exceptionally skilled at raising Poisonous Insects—likely a top-level master. As they say, "know your enemy and know yourself, and you'll win every battle." Even a last-minute effort was better than simply sitting idle.

During the excruciatingly long half month, their group would often set out together on excursions, climbing mountains and such. Gu Youyou and Searcy gathered large quantities of herbs to prepare for emergencies.

Jin Liuying would bring her drawing board, find a picturesque spot, and sit down to paint.

Having been pampered for fifteen years and going through half a month of upheaval in Nanzhao, she had become a completely different person.

Chapter 1326: Gathering Herbs by Oneself

She had completely shed her previous delicate demeanor as a refined young lady. Now, carrying a heavy pack, climbing mountains and wading through water posed no trouble for her, and even her facial features seemed to have gained a more resolute edge.

Searcy teased her, “If you were to go back to the Imperial Palace of Zhuzhao now, I bet no one would recognize you.”

“What’s wrong with me?”

“You look just like a tomboy now. And who did your hair? Don’t the girls of Nanzhao usually wear thick braids?”

Jin Liuying touched her head and said, “The Prince said tying my hair up would make mountain climbing easier.”

“Nowadays everything you do is because your Prince says so. Before this, wasn’t it all about what your master said?”

“That’s not true!” Jin Liuying’s face turned red as she stomped her foot and exclaimed angrily, “Searcy, your mouth is the most venomous!”

Gu Youyou had to step in to ease the tension, saying, “Alright, Liuying, go paint. Searcy, come over here, I need to go down to pick that herb growing in the crack.”

“The herb in the crack?” Searcy, seeing the direction Gu Youyou was staring at, exclaimed in shock, “Are you trying to kill yourself? That’s a cliff down there—if you fall, not even your bones will remain!”

Gu Youyou replied, “This kind of herb only grows in cracks. So, tell me, what’s the plan?” As she spoke, she pulled a rope from her backpack and tied it to a sturdy tree.

“Why don’t you ask your esteemed Prince to come over? Isn’t he skilled in Qinggong? Picking a few herbs should be as easy as pie for him.” Searcy glanced at the steep cliff and expressed her disapproval.

Gu Youyou rolled her eyes in response. “You’ve got to be kidding me. I don’t have time for that fuss!”

With that, she had already tied the other end of the rope around herself. Flashing a grin, she stepped onto the edge and began descending the cliff.

“Watch closely, you lot. Behold the prowess of your friendly neighborhood Spider-Man!”

Gu Youyou quickly found a suitable spot to land and made her way down to the herb growing on the precipice.

Above, Searcy and Jin Liuying broke out in a cold sweat, terrified that one wrong move would send her plummeting.

But it turned out that Gu Youyou was more than adept at cliff climbing. She collected the herb without incident and climbed back up in no time.

Jin Liuying patted her chest in relief. “Master, you’re so bold. Just looking at that high cliff makes my head spin.”

Gu Youyou laughed, “Good thing you didn’t follow me into medicine. As a traditional doctor, cliff climbing is a fundamental skill because countless precious herbs grow on cliffs.”

Searcy snorted coldly, “That’s only something barefoot doctors have to do to make ends meet. You, as the big boss, should be sitting in your clinic writing prescriptions instead. If your Prince hears about this, let’s see how he deals with you.”

Gu Youyou: “…”

Searcy’s mouth truly was merciless.

…

After waiting for most of the month, they finally got their chance.

“The Empress Dowager of Nanzhao Country is gravely ill. A dozen witch doctors danced rituals for two days straight, but it was all futile. Boss Gu, this is the perfect moment for you to act,” Yue Rujing said eagerly, his face lit up with excitement.

Gu Youyou’s eyes sparkled. Upon hearing the news, she couldn’t help but feel a surge of exhilaration.

She hurriedly asked, “Have they considered inviting a doctor?”

Yue Rujing’s face immediately fell. He snapped angrily, “Those stubborn fools only talk about waiting for the Great Shaman to return and haven’t even thought of asking you to take a look.”

Gu Youyou, however, wasn’t particularly surprised. This was exactly what she had anticipated.

Jin Zijin, his expression dark, turned to Yue Rujing and said, “Then find a way to make them invite her.”

Yue Rujing looked helpless and replied, “They simply don’t believe doctors can heal illness. They only trust witch doctors. If someone dies, they’ll claim it was the Shamaness summoning them back. What am I supposed to do about it?”

Yue Rujing suddenly seemed to think of something, her eyes brightened, and she said, “Gu Youyou, go find that girl Liuying. After all, that nearly dying Empress Dowager is her mother-in-law, she ought to be by her bedside serving her.”

Gu Youyou outright refused. She sighed lightly and said, “Not good, not good. Liuying just married into the family, and those old-fashioned conservatives already have some misgivings about her identity. If she takes the initiative to invite the doctor to treat the Empress Dowager, they might even suspect Liuying of trying to harm her.”

“Ah, this won’t do, that won’t do, so what now? You don’t understand, those people would rather let their Empress Dowager be killed by a witch doctor than voluntarily invite a doctor. So, if you’re hoping they’ll take the initiative to ask for a doctor, forget it.”

Jin Zijin curled the corner of his lips and said softly, “Indeed, Liuying can’t be the one to bring it up. But the Fifteenth Prince can.”

“The Fifteenth Prince?” Yue Rujing’s eyebrows twitched, and she said, “Can he speak on our behalf? It’s not just about saving the Empress Dowager; there’s risk involved too!”

Jin Zijin said, “The Nanzhao Emperor doesn’t entirely reject medical skills. However, as the Emperor of Nanzhao, he can’t openly propose that their traditional witchcraft is inferior to medical skills. But if someone else raises the point, as her son, his concern for his aunt (the Empress Dowager) provides a sufficient reason for him to act like a dim-witted monarch in the public’s eyes this one time.”

Gu Youyou paused, finding some logic in his words. She said, “Alright, then let’s have the Fifteenth Prince do it.”

“Alright, I’ll go speak to him.” Yue Rujing nodded in agreement.

Yue Rujing went to find the Fifteenth Prince. Meanwhile, Gu Youyou and Jin Zijin stayed home awaiting news, as she busily prepared the items needed for entering the palace.

The biggest benefit of Searcy's private visit was that she brought her set of medical equipment with her. Otherwise, even the most skillful woman couldn't cook without rice, and in a place like Nanzhao, that would've been a real issue.

"Are all the supplies ready?" Jin Zijin asked from behind her.

Gu Youyou packed the medicinal herbs into a separate box and said, "Pretty much, except some instruments are still being disinfected."

Whenever Jin Zijin looked at her peculiar instruments, he couldn't help but marvel at them.

He said, "What kind of brains do people from your homeland have to come up with so many bizarre things?"

Gu Youyou chuckled, "The people from my homeland are actually the people who live several hundred years from now. If you live for a few hundred years, you'll witness it firsthand. It's humanity's progress; nothing too extraordinary."

Jin Zijin froze; it was his first time hearing Gu Youyou make such a statement.

It sounded even more mystical than Yu Jizi's so-called Soul Exchange Technique.

This world is full of wonders, and he couldn't help but start believing it.

"In the Magic Poisonous Insect Techniques, I've heard there's a type of Poisonous Insect that can gnaw a person's soul away. Once someone loses their soul, they enter a state of pseudo-death."

Gu Youyou put down what she was working on and looked up at Jin Zijin.

"Is this what you've uncovered recently?"

Jin Zijin nodded and said, “Yes, this is the most sinister of all Poisonous Insects. Those afflicted with its venom lose their soul and become like living corpses—unable to move, their bodies gradually wasting away until they die.”

Gu Youyou was suddenly startled. From Jin Zijin’s description, the behavior of people affected by this insect venom sounded just like that of vegetative state patients.

There are many causes and methods for turning someone into a vegetative state. These people raising Poisonous Insects merely exploit people’s ignorance to achieve their goals.

That talk of souls being devoured by insects was nothing more than turning humans into vegetative husks.

Gu Youyou sneered disdainfully and said, “If only you could get your hands on such Poisonous Insects, bring me a few to examine.”

Chapter 1328: Astonishment

Perhaps the venom of those insects is the reason why people become vegetative.

"Hmm!" Jin Zijin responded softly, then added, "Yu Jizi probably wants to use this method to devour Jin Ziyuan’s soul, so he can replace it with his own."

After speaking, he took out the booklet from the cave earlier and flipped to a page for Gu Youyou to see.

It was a series of drawings. The first showed a person lying on a stone platform, covered with pitch-black insects crawling all over them. The person was writhing in agony.

The second image depicted the person completely stripped of their soul. Their eyes remained open, yet they seemed to see nothing. On the ground, a shattered shadow was being torn apart by a swarm of black insects.

Jin Zijin explained, "This shattered shadow represents the soul of the person on the sacrificial altar."

Gu Youyou felt a chill creep through her.

The third drawing showed several people washing the person on the altar meticulously, cleansing their body and painting it with intricate runes.

The fourth image illustrated a figure in a long robe releasing more insects onto the floor. These insects were noticeably larger than the ones that had consumed the soul.

Jin Zijin said he hadn't yet identified the type of Poisonous Insects these were.

Moving on, the fifth image showed the robed figure lying on the ground, with all the insects swarming around them, lifting them up.

No, to be precise, it wasn't the physical body being lifted but a translucent figure.

According to their interpretation, it had to be the soul of the robed figure.

The Poisonous Insects carried the robed figure's soul, step by step, towards the altar, placing it upon the prepared body on the platform.

Then, a miracle occurred. The soul of the robed figure began to merge with the body on the altar, and that body began to stand.

As they stepped down from the altar, their shadow seemed not entirely aligned with their body, parts of it spilling outward.

Then, countless insects swarmed in again, pressing the misaligned portions of the shadow back into the body.

After viewing the entire set of drawings, Gu Youyou marveled that this was like reading a horror novel come to life.

Setting aside the matter of whether such an outlandish thing could be real, just the sheer cruelty of this method showed how depraved Yu Jizi truly was.

...

Gu Youyou and Searcy were both preparing to enter the palace. Each had packed a large chest, merely waiting for palace emissaries to summon them.

Four hours passed, and as dusk approached, the gatekeeper finally arrived in haste.

"A message from the Princely Heir says people from the palace are arriving shortly. Be ready."

Oh, everything was already prepared.

Gu Youyou called out to Searcy, and the two sat in the courtyard pretending to know nothing, quietly sipping tea and chatting.

The palace emissary who arrived was a palace maiden in her forties. She conveyed the Nanzhao Emperor’s decree, inviting Jin Zijin and his wife to the palace for a discussion. No mention was made of treating the Empress Dowager.

Gu Youyou immediately grasped the Emperor’s intentions.

Without an official edict summoning them specifically to treat the Empress Dowager, she wouldn’t get the impact she hoped for. She was disappointed, but she could only tell Searcy to bring along the case and follow along.

The Nanzhao Emperor’s intentions were clear—they could treat the ailment, but earning any credit for it wouldn’t come easily.

As the ruler of Nanzhao Country, even if he trusted in medical skills, he was far too cunning to blatantly undermine centuries-old witchcraft traditions with medicine alone. Such a move would very well jeopardize his throne.

"Let’s go. One step at a time," Gu Youyou sighed.

In the Nanzhao Imperial Palace, the witch doctors had already been dismissed. As twilight descended, Gu Youyou and Jin Zijin appeared in formal attire, as though attending a banquet hosted by the Emperor.

Chapter 1329: Seeing a Doctor

Very soon, they were summoned into the Empress Dowager’s palace. Stripping away their false facades, the Nanzhao Emperor dismissed the palace attendants with a wave of his hand before speaking the truth to them.

“I apologize for any inconvenience caused to avoid unnecessary trouble.”

What else could be said?

After all, it was their own impatience that led to this. Gu Youyou smiled faintly and replied, “A healer’s duty is to save lives. There is no talk of inconvenience. Your Majesty is too kind.”

Searcy’s disdain for Gu Youyou grew yet again, feeling that she was becoming increasingly hypocritical.

Clearly, she cared a lot, yet she spoke as if she were above it all.

“And who is this?” The Nanzhao Emperor looked at Searcy in surprise.

Gu Youyou replied, “She is also a doctor, my assistant.”

The Nanzhao Emperor: “…” Do doctors now require assistants too?

“Crown Prince, please wait outside for a moment. The two doctors may come in to treat the Empress Dowager.”

Jin Zijin nodded without saying much.

Gu Youyou and Searcy were invited into the Empress Dowager’s bedchamber, where the elderly woman had already fallen asleep.

The Nanzhao Emperor moved as if to wake her, but Gu Youyou raised a finger to her lips, signaling him to remain quiet.

“Hold on, let me check first before waking her.”

The Empress Dowager of Nanzhao Country appeared to be a woman in her sixties, her hair meticulously combed by the palace attendants, equally split between black and white.

Currently, she was sound asleep. Her complexion appeared sallow, and she looked utterly exhausted.

Gu Youyou sighed softly, “The Empress Dowager looks terribly fatigued.”

The Nanzhao Emperor responded, “Indeed. My mother was tormented by those witch doctors all day long. She has eaten barely anything and only just managed to fall asleep.”

Searcy sneered from the side, “How can a patient hope to recover if they can’t even get proper rest?”

Gu Youyou quickly turned and shot her a sharp glare, forcing Searcy to reluctantly bite her tongue.

This made the Nanzhao Emperor feel rather awkward, but Gu Youyou smiled gently and said, “Your Majesty, please forgive her. She is a descendant of the Ghost Doctor family. The Ghost Doctor family members are known for their extraordinary skills and daring temperament, along with certain eccentricities. Please do not take it to heart.”

The Nanzhao Emperor had never heard of this so-called Ghost Doctor family, but from Gu Youyou's implication, it seemed this doctor was highly skilled, albeit with a peculiar demeanor.

Thinking about the exceptional talents within Nanzhao Country who often disregarded imperial authority, he felt more at ease.

As long as the Empress Dowager could be cured, he could hardly be bothered to argue with a mere young woman.

"Doctor Gu, please proceed."

Gu Youyou nodded lightly and took a seat on the stool beside the Empress Dowager's bed.

First, she checked her pulse before asking, "What are the Empress Dowager's symptoms?"

"Symptoms?"

"What kind of discomfort has she been experiencing?"

The Nanzhao Emperor sighed, "My mother began coughing over a month ago. Initially, we thought it was just a common cold. She took some pills provided by the witch doctors, but there was no improvement at all.

Now it has worsened. Sometimes her coughing becomes uncontrollable, and the sound of it can be truly unsettling. She just fell asleep, but it's possible she could be woken up by her cough at any moment."

"Coughing?" There are many causes for a cough; ideally, Gu Youyou would like to examine the Empress Dowager's throat. However, given how late it was, the era's limited lighting made it impossible for her to properly inspect the throat.

She stood up, retrieved some ointments and pills from her medicine chest, and said to the Nanzhao Emperor, “If the Empress Dowager wakes up coughing, have her take these pills. As for this ointment, apply it now. It will help suppress the cough during the night.”

The Nanzhao Emperor ordered someone to take the medicine from Gu Youyou and asked, “Is this all that is required?”

Chapter 1330: Change the Way of Thinking

Gu Youyou said, “It’s still not possible. But since it’s already so late, I can’t make a diagnosis. I’ll come by tomorrow at noon.” With the medical facilities being so poor, there was nothing she could do.

“In the daytime?” The Emperor of Nanzhao looked a bit troubled. The issue was…

He said, “My mother, the Empress Dowager, only trusts witch doctors. If she finds out that Dr. Gu is not a witch doctor, she may not cooperate. How about this—tomorrow, you dress like witch doctors so she thinks you’re one of them.”

Gu Youyou: “…”

Searcy turned her head with disdain. The fact that she hadn’t immediately said something sarcastic was proof of her incredible restraint.

Wouldn’t this save the patient while boosting the reputation of witch doctors?

Gu Youyou gave her a calming look. Life is unpredictable. Who knows what tomorrow might bring?

But at this point, she had no way to refuse. Since she couldn’t restore the name of modern doctors, she could only hope that the Emperor of Nanzhao would remember their contributions and support them more in the future.

Gu Youyou smiled and said, “Alright, Your Majesty, I’ll return tomorrow. I’ll take my leave now.”

“Mm, please!”

…

Gu Youyou walked back to the inn with a sullen face. Jin Zijin, knowing full well why she was upset, chuckled and said, “Witch doctors have been deeply rooted in Zhuzhao Country for over a thousand years. Do you think they can be abolished so easily? You’re too eager for quick results. Focus on curing the Empress Dowager first. Gaining the Emperor of Nanzhao’s genuine trust is already quite an achievement.”

Gu Youyou snorted coldly, “These people are so stubborn! They’re on the brink of death and still believe in those so-called rituals. If they could actually cure diseases, why would they need me?”

“Yes, yes, yes…” Jin Zijin’s smile deepened. When they got back to their room, he locked the door, scooped her up, and said, “Think about it from a different perspective. Imagine a person from Zhuzhao who doesn’t believe in witchcraft falls seriously ill. When they’re at the end of their rope, a stranger from afar suddenly tells them, ‘You’re not sick, you’ve been cursed. Taking medicine won’t help. To heal, you must drink this talisman water I prepared.’ Do you think they’d drink it?”

Gu Youyou stifled a laugh and said, “Of course not. Stuff like that would just make them die faster.”

“Exactly!” Jin Zijin pressed her down on the bed and kissed her. In a gentle voice beside her ear, he said, “To the Empress Dowager, you are that stranger from afar.”

“But it’s different. I can actually cure her.”

“But the Empress Dowager doesn’t believe that.” Jin Zijin chuckled. “To make her believe, you have to cure her first.”

“She doesn’t want to be treated.”

“Precisely. That same person from Zhuzhao wouldn’t believe that talisman water could cure their sickness. But what if you cured their illness without telling them it was the water that did it?”

Uh…

Gu Youyou stopped talking. Thinking about it like that, she seemed to understand the Empress Dowager's perspective.

For an atheist to consider ritual performances, at most, they would treat it as a joke. If they were asked to let the practitioners cure them, they would likely rather die first.

Perhaps in the eyes of the Empress Dowager, modern doctors like them were no different from such performers.

Looking at it from this angle, changing their minds truly seemed like a long and arduous journey. It would be as difficult as persuading a modern atheist to accept ritual healings.

Gu Youyou wrapped her arms around Jin Zijin's neck and leaned in to kiss him.

"Alright, I won't rush things. I'll focus on curing the Empress Dowager first."

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