Farmhouse 1331

Chapter 1331: Went to Fusang Island

Yu Jizi chased all the way to the East Sea, where he heard that Jin Ziyuan had gone out to sea in search of something.

He suddenly remembered Gu Youyou mentioning that she had tossed the Youying Pearl into the East Sea. Could it be that Jin Ziyuan was searching for the Youying Pearl?

Whether it was truly thrown into the sea remained uncertain, but he knew that the disappearance of the Youying Pearl inside Gu Youyou's body was definitely related to the East Sea. That time they had sailed out...

At this thought, he hesitated no longer. No matter the reason, he had to set off to sea—to Fusang Island, to see for himself.

"Boatman, when do you usually go out to sea to fish?"

The fisherman, startled when he turned back to see a snowy-haired elderly figure, jumped slightly. He had been diligently mending his net and hadn't noticed anyone approaching.

Just by looking at this elder, he carried an aura of otherworldly dignity.

His surprise lasted only a moment, and then he quickly replied, "Sir, we go out to sea every day around here, though the distances vary. If you're looking to buy fresh fish, you'll need to wait a bit longer—today's fishing boats haven't returned yet."

"No, I don't want to buy fish," Yu Jizi chuckled heartily. "If there's anyone heading to Fusang Island, I'd appreciate it if you could let this old man know."

"Oh?" The fisherman's eyes widened with surprise. "Are you planning to embark on a large vessel out to sea, sir?"

"That’s right. Having lived a lifetime, I thought it fitting to see more of the world in my twilight years. I’ve heard Fusang Island is rather extraordinary—I’d like to witness it for myself."

The fisherman looked troubled, sizing up Yu Jizi before vigorously shaking his head, saying, "Sir, you must reconsider. Going out to sea is grueling work, and at your age, I fear you might not endure the hardships. Allow me to offer some advice: better to stay home and let your children care for you properly."

"I have no children." Yu Jizi replied.

"Ah?" The fisherman felt awkward suddenly and said, "Uh—pardon my poor phrasing, sir. Please don’t mind."

Yu Jizi laughed, saying, "Think nothing of it. An old man like me doesn’t really care about such things. Everyone leads their life differently, and for me, solitude and quiet are the preferred ways to live."

The fisherman felt even more awkward now, finding the elder increasingly peculiar.

Still, since this eccentric old man seemed to be alone, the fisherman figured that even if something happened at sea, no relatives would come to trouble them. In the end, he agreed to the odd request.

"We’re planning to set out for Fusang Island tomorrow evening, sir. If you don’t mind, you can find us then."

"Tomorrow evening?" Yu Jizi pondered briefly, then reached into his garment and pulled out a fist-sized gold ingot. Tossing it to the fisherman, he said, "Then I’ll leave it to you. I’ll come back tomorrow evening."

The fisherman stood there, stunned by the unexpected weight of the gold ingot, unable to find his voice for a moment. When he finally gathered his wits, Yu Jizi was already far down the shore.

Holding the ingot aloft, he shouted after Yu Jizi, "Sir, wait! You don’t need to pay me!"

As he chased after the elder, he began to realize something unusual—no matter how fast he ran, the figure ahead seemed to recede even farther with each step.

What’s more, the old man’s silhouette was clearly strolling leisurely along the sandy shore.

"Sir, I cannot take your gold!" The fisherman called out, breathless, as he ran. His voice was loud, but Yu Jizi’s retreating figure grew faint.

Just as the elder’s silhouette was about to vanish entirely, his voice echoed back.

"Keep it. I’m old now; such things are of no use to me."

The fisherman stood frozen, astonished.

The elder’s figure had nearly disappeared into the distance, and yet his voice resonated as clearly as though it were spoken right at his ear.

Could it be... could he be an immortal?

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Chapter 1332: What disease?

Gu Youyou and Searcy dressed carefully the next day and followed Jin Liuying and the Fifteenth Prince into the Imperial Palace.

To outsiders, it was said that they were witch doctors invited by the Fifteenth Prince to pay tribute to the Empress Dowager.

The Fifteenth Prince was the youngest child of the Empress Dowager and the late Emperor, and he was especially favored. Knowing that his son and daughter-in-law had specifically invited witch doctors for her, naturally, she was delighted.

“Cough, cough, cough…”

Gu Youyou and Searcy had yet to enter the Empress Dowager’s sleeping quarters when they heard her violent coughing.

That kind of incessant coughing, one after another, truly unsettled those who heard it.

Gu Youyou asked Searcy softly, “What illness does her coughing sound like to you?”

Searcy hesitated for a moment, then suddenly raised her head and said, “Throat inflammation?”

Gu Youyou nodded slightly, then added, “It’s not just throat inflammation. After lasting this long, it’s likely progressed to the lungs.”

Searcy exclaimed, “Then it’s even more troublesome.”

Gu Youyou chuckled lightly and said, “Treating it with herbs would take longer, but we have antibiotics.”

Jin Liuying waited outside with Gu Youyou and Searcy, while the Fifteenth Prince stayed inside to prepare the Empress Dowager.

“Mother, the witch doctors I’ve brought today are different from the ones you’ve seen before. They’re skilled individuals. All you need to do is cooperate properly, and if you cooperate well, we’ll definitely be able to cure your cough.”

The Empress Dowager coughed violently as she nodded and said, “Cooperate, cough, cough, cough, I cooperate every day. Tell… tell them to come in.”

Gu Youyou and Searcy carried two medicine chests into the room. Due to the relatively good status of women in Nanzhao Country, the sight of two female witch doctors did not provoke any discrimination.

“Please, treat the Empress Dowager,”

said the Fifteenth Prince to Gu Youyou and Searcy.

Gu Youyou nodded to him, sat beside the Empress Dowager, and conducted a simple examination. She then ordered someone to open a window and checked her throat.

The Fifteenth Prince asked anxiously, “How is she?”

Gu Youyou replied, “The Empress Dowager’s throat is swollen and inflamed. The situation is dire. The coughing has lasted so long that we’ve missed the optimal treatment period.”

The Empress Dowager, reflecting on how no witch doctors had ever examined her throat before, immediately felt that the ones her son brought were reliable.

Her attitude improved significantly, and she said to Gu Youyou, “My throat has felt uncomfortable for a long time—painful, with something that I just can’t seem to expel. I try not to cough, but it won’t let me.” She pointed at her throat.

Another violent wave of coughs came, and it seemed like she was about to vomit. The palace maidens hurriedly grabbed cloths to catch it.

Upon inspection, they were shocked to find she had coughed up blood.

The Fifteenth Prince’s expression changed, and he exclaimed, “Mother, when did your coughing get this severe to the point of coughing blood?”

“It’s nothing, just a little bit,” the Empress Dowager said hoarsely while covering her mouth.

A palace maiden by her side sobbed and said, “The Empress Dowager was like this two days ago. She was afraid of worrying the Emperor and the princes, so she didn’t dare to tell anyone.”

The Fifteenth Prince sighed heavily, full of guilt.

The Empress Dowager comforted him and urged him not to worry. After letting out a soft sigh, she said to Gu Youyou, “I know this illness is probably beyond curing. Those who cough up blood rarely recover. You two witch doctors, don’t worry too much. If you can’t heal me, I won’t blame you.”

“We will do our best to treat you, and we hope the Empress Dowager can do her best to cooperate,” Gu Youyou said.

“Hmm!” The Empress Dowager pressed her hand to her throat, then to her chest and lungs, saying, “Here, and here, both hurt terribly.”

Chapter 1333: Put it another way

Gu Youyou nodded lightly and said, “Then first, we need to treat your throat. Once the swelling and redness subside, it won’t hurt anymore. As for the heart and lungs, that might take a little longer!”

“Alright, I’ll listen to you. Just let me know how to treat it. Should we arrange an incense altar?”

Gu Youyou shook her head with a smile and said, “Your health isn’t great; such effort might not be suitable. We won’t treat it like that this time. I have another method.”

“Another method?” The Empress Dowager looked utterly astonished.

Gu Youyou glanced at Searcy, who then opened up her toolbox and pulled out the items she needed.

When the Fifteenth Prince saw the long needle, he grew visibly uneasy. It was Jin Liuying who hurriedly grabbed his arm and whispered, “This method of using medicine is extremely effective. Aside from my master, no one else knows how it’s done.”

The Empress Dowager was also startled by the thick syringe and exclaimed, “This… you’re going to jab someone with a needle? Isn’t that meant for jabbing voodoo dolls?”

Searcy rolled her eyes dramatically and said, “If your illness wasn’t severe, jabbing a voodoo doll would suffice. But your sickness has become quite serious—jabbing a doll won’t help. That evil entity has been lingering within your body for a long time. We must jab it directly to get rid of it.”

Gu Youyou silently gave Searcy a thumbs-up. That analogy was spot-on.

The Empress Dowager took a deep breath and said, “Oh, it’s not to jab me, but the evil entity within me? Fine, fine. Help me figure out where that hateful thing is in my body.”

Searcy scrutinized the Empress Dowager intently for a moment, then suddenly exclaimed, “Ah, I see it.”

“Where is it?”

Everyone in the room became excited.

“It’s… Empress Dowager, it’s on your butt.”

Everyone: “…”

Searcy looked troubled and said, “Well… that’s just where it ended up. What can we do about it? Empress Dowager, do you want to jab it or not?”

The Empress Dowager looked conflicted. After everything she’d been through in the past few days, enduring this as well didn’t seem like too much. Gritting her teeth, she said, “Jab it! Kill it for me.”

“Alright then! Everyone else, step out. I don’t like outsiders watching while I perform my witch doctor rituals.”

Seeing that Searcy could handle the Empress Dowager alone, Gu Youyou followed the others out of the room.

Moments later, the Empress Dowager's screams echoed through the hall, causing everyone outside to turn pale in fright.

But seeing the other witch doctor calmly standing there, they couldn't say much and instead turned their gazes toward the Fifteenth Prince.

Jin Liuying clung tightly to the Fifteenth Prince's hand, trying to calm him down.

Before long, Searcy was done and called everyone back in.

The Fifteenth Prince hurried to the Empress Dowager's side to check on her condition.

"Mother, did it hurt a lot?"

The Empress Dowager shook her head and said, "Not too much, just a little prick. It was that big needle that scared me."

Searcy packed up her tools and said, "One jab per day. Empress Dowager, I'll come back tomorrow to give you another shot."

"What? Every day?" The Empress Dowager was stunned, her face full of misery.

Gu Youyou said, "Alternatively, you could skip the needles and take medication instead, but it'll take longer to recover. Do you want it quick or slow?"

"I… what exactly is wrong with me?"

By now, she felt utterly tormented by all the witch doctors.

Gu Youyou smiled faintly and said, “It’s nothing major, just that prolonged coughing has damaged your throat, which in turn affected your heart and lungs.”

The Fifteenth Prince’s expression turned grave. “The heart and lungs are damaged? Can that even be treated?”

Chapter 1334: Who is the Great Shaman?

Gu Youyou smiled faintly at him and said, “Others cannot treat it, but I can. As long as you follow my instructions and implement my plan, it can be treated.”

The Fifteenth Prince clasped his hands toward Gu Youyou and said, “In that case, I thank you in advance.”

After all, in their minds, this coughing ailment—once blood is coughed up from the heart—is deemed beyond cure by medicine.

Gu Youyou paid no attention to her and instead personally wrote the prescription for the Empress Dowager. She told the Fifteenth Prince to come to her later, as there were some things required for treating the Empress Dowager’s illness that would take time to prepare.

The Fifteenth Prince delegated this matter to Jin Liuying, while he himself… The philosophy of the witch doctors was deeply rooted in his heart as well. While he listened to Jin Liuying and brought her to see the illness, he also planned to invite a few skilled witch doctors to examine the Empress Dowager, if only to determine whether her condition had truly harmed her heart and lungs.

“What’s the matter? You don’t trust her?” The Emperor of Nanzhao, upon learning the news, supported the Fifteenth Prince in seeking a few more witch doctors for consultation. However, he had thought the Fifteenth Prince would fully trust Gu Youyou, since it was his suggestion to call her in the first place.

The Fifteenth Prince replied, “I do trust her. The prescription for that bout of dysentery in the military camp years ago was written by her. That year, she happened to serve as the attending doctor at the Lingnan Barracks.”

“Oh? You’ve already investigated her.” Now the Emperor of Nanzhao was surprised.

The Fifteenth Prince nodded lightly and said, “Yes, Liuying told me. If one were to look into it, it would be an easy matter; she has no reason to deceive me.”

The Emperor of Nanzhao nodded lightly, feeling that what he said made sense. However…

“Then why are you still calling in a few witch doctors for an examination?”

“Mother’s illness is severe; naturally, caution is necessary.” The Fifteenth Prince spoke slowly. “If their identities are exposed in the future, we’ll have a fallback plan, won’t we?”

The Emperor of Nanzhao narrowed his eyes, increasingly admiring his young brother.

“Oh, by the way.” The Fifteenth Prince suddenly remembered something and spoke out with urgency.

“What’s the matter?” The Emperor of Nanzhao rarely saw this younger brother lose his composure like this.

The Fifteenth Prince opened his mouth to say something but hesitated, unsure whether it was appropriate to share this matter with his elder brother, the Emperor.

The Emperor of Nanzhao stared at him and burst into laughter, saying, “What are you thinking? What could possibly make you so hesitant?”

To the Fifteenth Prince, the Emperor of Nanzhao was ostensibly his elder brother but, in reality, was akin to a father. The old Emperor had passed away early, and the Fifteenth Prince had no memories of him. To him, his brother was as much a father figure as an Emperor.

But this matter… If spoken aloud, it might undermine the faith they had always held dear.

The Great Shaman might very well be a person from Zhuzhao Country, perhaps even the State Preceptor of Zhuzhao Country.

They had never known where the Great Shaman came from or who he was. Figures as revered and mystical as the Great Shaman were often believed to be celestial beings emerging from deep mountains, and thus who or what he was seemed unimportant. Many even felt that his aura of mystery made him better suited for the role.

But if he turned out to be the State Preceptor of Zhuzhao Country, that mystique might be shattered.

“Yanzhong? What’s the matter?” The Emperor of Nanzhao saw the Fifteenth Prince suddenly grow serious and followed suit, setting aside his laughter.

The Fifteenth Prince sighed softly, lifted his gaze to meet the Emperor of Nanzhao’s eyes, and asked, “Royal Brother, do you know who the Great Shaman is?”

The Emperor of Nanzhao chuckled and said, “Does it matter who the Great Shaman is? No one knows who he is.”

The Fifteenth Prince nodded helplessly and said, “Then, Royal Brother, have you ever considered who he might be?”

Chapter 1335: His Relationship with the Dao Family

“A figure like the Great Shaman…” The Nanzhao Emperor narrowed his eyes and gazed into the distant sky.

The faraway horizon was dotted with stars, and most of the moon had hidden itself behind layers of clouds.

A man like him was akin to an untouchable star, as mysterious as the moon itself.

Despite dispatching countless men in secret, the emperor had failed to uncover his background.

Standing atop the high walls, the Nanzhao Emperor softly said, “He is an elderly man with snowy white hair, yet his physique is even more robust than that of young men. Like… an ancient fairy who walked out from the depths of the mountains.”

The Fifteenth Prince remained silent and nodded lightly.

The Nanzhao Emperor’s thoughts drifted back to years long past. He clasped his hands behind his back and spoke again in a hushed tone, “I recall that when my father was alive, the Great Shaman stayed in the Witch Doctor Village for three whole years. Then he vanished. The year my father passed, he returned to oversee the burial rites and then left again. Afterward, for over ten years, he did not appear. It was only in recent years that he surfaced again. This current stay is his longest since those three years during my father’s reign.”

“When I was a child, I heard my father say that the Great Shaman had been around since my imperial grandfather’s time, and even during my imperial great-grandfather’s reign, he had appeared.”

As he said this, the emperor turned to the Fifteenth Prince and asked, “How many years old do you think the Great Shaman is?”

The Fifteenth Prince thought for a moment and replied, “If you disregard his head full of white hair, he looks to be no older than forty.”

“Indeed.” The Nanzhao Emperor nodded. “A man like that — if not a fairy, then what is he? Who else can live to such an advanced age and yet remain so vigorous like the Great Shaman?”

“There is!” The moment the Nanzhao Emperor finished speaking, the Fifteenth Prince declared firmly, “The Dao Family of Zhuzhao Country has a method for attaining longevity. However, only the successors of Tianzong and Xuanzong within the Dao Family are eligible to cultivate this method. Imperial brother, during my visit to Zhuzhao Country to marry the princess, I heard some things about the Dao Family.”

The Nanzhao Emperor’s brows twitched, and a trace of greed flashed in his eyes, though his expression quickly returned to normal.

In the pitch-black night, the Fifteenth Prince did not notice.

“What things?” the emperor asked calmly.

“Regarding the State Preceptor of Zhuzhao Country,” said the Fifteenth Prince. “I suspect that the Great Shaman might actually be the State Preceptor of Zhuzhao Country.”

“Ah…?” The Nanzhao Emperor’s face showed utter astonishment. He exclaimed, “How could that be? The State Preceptor of Zhuzhao Country holds a rank equivalent to their emperor. Why would he come to a small place like ours?”

“Because something happened to him,” the Fifteenth Prince replied.

“What happened?”

“I heard that internal conflicts arose within the Dao Family. It seems the situation escalated to a matter of life and death. A major event occurred several years ago—what exactly it was, I couldn’t determine. However, I am certain that this event dealt a severe blow to the State Preceptor. When you align the timing, it coincides almost perfectly with the period shortly before the Great Shaman arrived in our Nanzhao.

Even if the Zhuzhao State Preceptor were to return now, restoring his position would be next to impossible. My guess is that this is why he refuses to return.”

The news brought by the Fifteenth Prince was nothing short of monumental.

The Nanzhao Emperor pondered for a moment and finally said, “These words must not be shared with outsiders. Let us observe further before making any decisions.”

The Fifteenth Prince nodded and then added, “There is one more matter I need to tell you, imperial brother.”

Chapter 1336: Pressured to Get Married

“What else?” The Nanzhao Emperor had received too much news tonight, making it hard to process.

“Your humble servant also heard that the Crown Prince of Zhuzhao currently staying in our guesthouse is the senior disciple of Tianzong, and that Yue Rujing is the second disciple. The ones who schemed to disgrace the State Preceptor of Zhuzhao were none other than them.”

“Then…” The Nanzhao Emperor was utterly shocked, opening and closing his mouth several times before finally speaking: “So according to you, the real reason the Crown Prince of Zhuzhao and Yue Rujing have come to our remote little corner isn’t about matchmaking for the younger sister after all, but because of… the Great Shaman.”

“Precisely. Otherwise, why haven’t they left yet?” The Fifteenth Prince said slowly, “The Crown Prince’s wife was once in the hands of the Great Shaman. And how did she end up there?”

Nanzhao Emperor: “…”

“Your humble servant suspects that even Zhuzhao’s proposed political marriage with us is merely a convenient excuse for them to carry out their plans.”

The Nanzhao Emperor was stunned again and said, “So what you mean is that Zhuzhao isn’t sincere about the marriage alliance?”

“Not necessarily. It’s just that the Crown Prince’s purpose in coming here to deal with the Great Shaman is undeniable.”

After hearing this, the Nanzhao Emperor fell silent for a long moment, his thoughts whirling.

Finally, he pressed his lips tightly together and said, “Since their true aim is the Great Shaman, and the Great Shaman might very well be the former State Preceptor of Zhuzhao, we should act as mere spectators. It’s best not to get involved in matters such as these!”

“Indeed.” The Fifteenth Prince nodded, “Imperial Brother, I’m telling you all this because I hope you won’t get dragged into their struggle. I’ve heard there’s someone even more formidable than the Great

Shaman who hasn't appeared yet; this someone is the Heavenly Master of Tianzong, the teacher of the Crown Prince of Zhuzhao and Yue Rujing. Internal conflicts within the Dao Family are common. The Emperor of Zhuzhao is quite clever—he's never gotten involved."

Of course, in truth, he dare not intervene.

"Hmm, let's not speak of this to anyone; we'll pretend we know nothing. As for Yue Rujing… we'll cooperate just a little," the Nanzhao Emperor said, squinting his eyes.

…

On one hand, Gu Youyou was treating the Nanzhao Emperor's elderly mother, while on the other, Yue Rujing was being urged into matchmaking efforts.

One reason for their extended stay in Nanzhao was due to the Emperor of Zhuzhao's intention to marry off his daughter, forging a bond between the two nations. The Crown Prince, doting on his younger sister, had disguised himself to personally inspect the situation.

Later when Jin Liuying's husband had been selected, they even married. Months had passed and yet they hadn't left.

So the next excuse for their continued stay became Yue Rujing's apparent delay in choosing a bride.

In the meantime, they'd soak up the exotic sights and customs.

People thought, surely they couldn't let him waste too much time picking a spouse, right? Considering the reserved nature of Zhuzhao citizens, they're probably too shy, so someone suggested to the Nanzhao Emperor that he should take the initiative. Perhaps he could present some suitable women before Yue Rujing, or create opportunities for them to "accidentally" meet—who knows, they might just fall for each other?

Thus, today, as Gu Youyou and Searcy entered the palace to treat the Empress Dowager, a colorful and flamboyantly dressed maiden arrived at the guesthouse.

“Excuse me, is the Princely Heir staying in the guesthouse?” The young woman popped her head in, peeking around inside and startling one of the gatekeepers who had been dozing off.

Startled, they raised their heads to see a close-up of a grinning youthful face overhead.

“Oh, young lady, who are you looking for?” The porter hurriedly stepped back, only to trip over the threshold, tumbling flat on his back.

Chapter 1337: The Matchmaking Visitor Arrives

The young girl burst into hearty laughter, leaving the gatekeeper boy embarrassed and flustered as he got up awkwardly to join her laughter.

“Miss, who are you looking for?”

The girl laughed until she could laugh no more, clutching her stomach to stop, and said, “Didn’t I already tell you who I’m looking for? Why are you asking me again?”

“Huh? You said?” The gatekeeper boy looked shocked.

The girl laughed again and said, “Oh, you must have fallen asleep earlier, huh? You’re supposed to be guarding the gate, but you’re snoozing instead? I’m going to report you.”

With that, she pushed past the gatekeeper boy and swaggered boldly into the inn.

“Hey, hey, who are you? You can’t go in there!”

The boy, realizing he had been played, snapped back to attention and hurried to block her path.

The girl planted her hands on her hips and said, “You dare to stop me? I came here with an imperial decree. And you, a gatekeeper who’s been dozing off, dare to stop me?”

The gatekeeper boy was instantly stunned.

Looking her up and down, the girl's outfit was indeed not something ordinary people could afford to wear. Even if she didn't have an imperial decree, she was undoubtedly a young lady from a wealthy family. But this place was an inn—the kind reserved for important figures from Zhuzhao Country. Just saying you have an imperial decree doesn't make it true.

Looking at her empty hands, it was clear she had no decree.

The gatekeeper boy straightened his posture in an attempt to look more competent and said, "Miss, please produce the imperial decree for us to inspect."

"There's nothing to inspect," the girl said, spreading her hands wide. "I came with His Majesty's verbal order."

"…"

"A verbal order? How am I supposed to know whether it's real or fake? Surely you're not some rich lady out here just messing around with us? Miss, this is an inn housing critical figures from Zhuzhao Country. If you're looking for fun, I suggest finding another place to amuse yourself. This place isn't suitable for your games."

"Who's messing with you?" The girl pointed at the gatekeeper angrily and said, "Do I look like the kind of person who spends their time idly trolling others?"

The gatekeeper boy was too stunned to respond, though truthfully, he was thinking: yes, she does.

Because at this point, the ruckus had already stirred someone inside the inn to come out.

Yue Rujing emerged, leisurely flapping a folding fan as he strolled out. If it weren't for the moment when he slapped a big mosquito mid-walk, slightly detracting from the grace of it all, every movement of his would have been utterly captivating.

“What’s all this noise? It’s so early in the morning; can’t a person get some sleep?”

Yue Rujing had never kicked his late-sleeping habit. If it weren’t for urgent business, he wouldn’t be up until the sun was high in the sky. So even though it was hardly early at this point, to him it still felt like the break of dawn.

Anyone meeting Yue Rujing for the first time would be awed by his ethereal aura. But only people like Gu Youyou who knew him well could regard that aura as hopelessly tacky.

The girl, upon first seeing this man, naturally lost herself in a brief moment of admiration.

But within seconds, she snapped out of it and realized: this must be Yue Rujing, the Princely Heir of Lingnan, right?

“Princely Heir Yue!” The girl raised a hand in greeting, her gesture bold and hearty. At the same time, she began sizing up the man standing before her.

Yue Rujing closed his fan and looked at the unfamiliar young girl with a hint of surprise.

They didn’t have any friends around here, and he certainly didn’t know of any young lady from Nanzhao Country.

“And you are…?” Yue Rujing stretched out his tone as he asked.

The girl flashed a sweet smile, dimples blossoming on her cheeks. Her neatly-groomed look gave her an air of valiant sprightliness, but when those dimples appeared, she suddenly seemed a touch more endearing.

“This humble girl is Duan Xiaomei from the Duan General Residence. Greetings, Princely Heir Yue.”

Chapter 1338: A Rather Direct Personality

“Duan General?” Yue Rujing raised an eyebrow and thought for a moment. He was certain he had no ties with the Duan Family. On the contrary, due to past battles between the Duan Family and Lingnan, there was quite a bit of animosity.

He gave a half-smile that didn’t reach his eyes as he looked at the young lady from the Duan Family. “Miss Duan, who might you be looking for at the courier station?”

“Looking for you.” Duan Xiaomei replied bluntly. “His Majesty said you’ll be marrying into our Nanzhao for a political alliance. He thinks that our Duan Family in Nanzhao functions similarly to your Yue Family in Zhuzhao: military lineage, a fitting match.”

The Emperor of Nanzhao had originally instructed Miss Duan to handle the matter more tactfully, perhaps through some orchestrated “chance encounters” to approach Yue Rujing. However, being a straightforward person, she decided to head out at the crack of dawn to the courier station and lay everything bare immediately.

After hearing her words, Yue Rujing was momentarily stunned.

After a while, he burst into laughter, though the laughter was one where the face smiled while the heart did not. The more he laughed, the more his expression looked worse than crying.

“Well… I think whether people are compatible or not has nothing to do with family background, don’t you think?”

Yue Rujing had thought that as long as he stayed out of the Nanzhao Emperor’s way, everything would be fine. Who would’ve guessed the Emperor would go as far as summoning the young lady directly to his house? What could he even say now?

The girl nodded lightly and said, “True, I also think compatibility has nothing to do with family background. Whether someone comes from a military lineage is equally irrelevant. For instance, some may be born as commoners and still achieve great feats, eventually becoming a Great General. But then there are those from renowned martial families who…”

Duan Xiaomei scanned Yue Rujing in disdain, saying, “Young Master Yue, why are you so frail and skinny? Could you possibly hold your own on the battlefield?”

Yue Rujing stumbled, and the folding fan he had been leisurely twirling in his hand fell to the ground.

He wanted to snap back, but considering he was a gentleman and she’d come as a guest, losing his temper at a young lady would be unbecoming. Taking a deep breath to suppress his irritation, he spoke evenly, “Miss Duan, there’s an old saying: you can’t judge a book by its cover. Those who are big and brawny are like wild bears in the mountains. Now, can wild bears ride into battle?”

Duan Xiaomei was noncommittal and merely replied awkwardly, “Having a strong and healthy physique is essential. Honestly, with your build, Young Master Yue, it’s quite worrying. If not for my being from a martial family, you’d be more than satisfactory—a few points prettier than the flowers in the courtyard.” She paused before continuing, “But given my status, my parents hope I’ll marry someone who can ride into battle alongside me. Someone like you… let’s just leave it at that and revisit the matter another time.”

Her expression was one of utter disdain; clearly, Yue Rujing did not capture her interest at all.

Meanwhile, she muttered under her breath, lamenting how the once-legendary Yue Marquess’s legacy had been squandered on a son who seemed so effeminate.

Yue Rujing felt an inner “what the hell” burst from his heart and stood there staring at the girl as she swaggered off. For a long time, he couldn’t say a single word.

Sure, Nanzhao and Zhuzhao had different aesthetic standards, but surely not this different?

All his life, wherever Yue Rujing went, people admired him. It seemed only two people had ever disdained him. Gu Youyou didn’t count—she wasn’t normal. The second one was now Duan Xiaomei.

It wasn’t until she’d been gone for quite some time that Yue Rujing finally exploded in fury: “Dammit, why don’t you just marry a black bear? Strong and sturdy…”

Wait, no. He should be the one doing the rejecting, not the other way around.

Fuming, he stomped his foot. Suddenly, he stepped on something underfoot.

Looking down, he realized it was the folding fan he'd dropped earlier.

Yue Rujing hastily picked up the fan and brushed off the dust.

Damn these Nanzhao mosquitoes—big and everywhere! This folding fan was his primary weapon against them; he certainly couldn't afford to lose it now.

…

Chapter 1339: Pedantic

Gu Youyou was in the Imperial Palace checking the Empress Dowager's pulse, then let Searcy administer an injection.

After taking medicine for a day, the Empress Dowager said to Gu Youyou, "I feel my throat isn't as sore anymore."

Gu Youyou smiled and replied, "The medicine is working. Keep it up for a few more days, and you'll recover."

Searcy picked up where she left off, "These medicines are incredibly difficult to produce. If we made them ourselves, it'd be too time-consuming, so we've been purchasing them from Zhuzhao Country."

The Empress Dowager immediately frowned and said, "Our Witch Doctors are so skilled; why do we still need to buy medicines from Zhuzhao Country? The doctors from Zhuzhao are all frauds—how can their medicines cure illnesses?"

Gu Youyou could take her time reasoning with the Empress Dowager, but Searcy didn't have the same patience. She retorted, "Without their medicines, your illness wouldn't get better. Look at those previous Witch Doctors—they almost worked you to death without curing you!"

"That's because they were incompetent. Didn't you manage to cure me?"

"We were only able to cure you thanks to Zhuzhao Country's medicines. Empress Dowager, seriously, you're being too stubborn! What does it matter where the medicine comes from? What matters is that it cures your illness and saves your life, don't you agree?"

The Empress Dowager's face darkened. She seemed to want to say something but couldn't find the right words.

It wasn't as if she wanted to die, right? If it were just a minor ailment, she could easily throw a tantrum and refuse treatment, but this illness affected her heart and lungs. If she refused their treatment and returned to those former Witch Doctors, wouldn't that truly be courting death?

The Fifteenth Prince stood behind the Empress Dowager and, seeing her distress, softly counseled, "Mother, let's focus on recovering first. Don't worry about other things for now."

"Alright." The Empress Dowager glanced at Gu Youyou and then at Searcy. She felt Gu Youyou was quite a good Witch Doctor—competent at treating illnesses, gentle in temperament, and as meticulous with her patients as an adult caring for a child.

But that Searcy Witch Doctor was infuriating. If not for giving some face to her youngest son, she would've had someone come in and slap her a few times.

A Witch Doctor daring to lecture her—she was acting as though she were a Great Shaman!

Gu Youyou had finished her tasks and explained everything in detail. She tucked the Empress Dowager in with a thin blanket and spoke warmly, "Empress Dowager, please remember my dietary restrictions—don't touch even a bit of the foods you shouldn't eat. If you keep your mouth in check, you can avoid taking unnecessary medicine. Given your age, you need to pay even closer attention to these details than the average patient.

I won’t be coming tomorrow. Searcy will visit to administer another injection. Remember everything I’ve said. I’ll come back to check on you the day after tomorrow.”

As a modern doctor with professional ethics, Gu Youyou’s signature smile seemed innate. Her smile carried a natural warmth, making every patient feel comforted regardless of the circumstances.

Even when they had to swallow bitter medicine, they would comply, unable to bring themselves to refuse such a dedicated Witch Doctor.

The Empress Dowager nodded hastily, thinking, “Whatever she says goes.”

Gu Youyou nodded with satisfaction and said, “Then we’ll take our leave now. Empress Dowager, take care of yourself and be sure to get plenty of rest.”

“Alright, alright. Fifteenth, quickly help see them off for me.”

It wasn’t until Gu Youyou and Searcy had walked far away that the Empress Dowager suddenly sat up in bed with a start and exclaimed, “Wait a moment, who’s coming to treat me tomorrow? Is it that Searcy Witch Doctor?”

The Palace Attendants replied, “Yes, the Witch Doctor with the surname Gu just said so. She won’t come tomorrow but will return the day after tomorrow. Tomorrow it’ll be that Searcy Witch Doctor giving you the injection.”

Chapter 1340: Is It Over?

"Ah, why did I agree to this?" The Empress Dowager was so regretful she could feel it in her bones, shouting loudly, "No, I don’t want that annoying Witch Doctor giving me acupuncture. I want the one who loves to smile, the one who loves to laugh..."

...

Tonight’s dinner was a scene of mixed emotions. Jin Zijin had a mountain of documents to review, even during the meal, his hands were still holding a book.

Gu Youyou ate leisurely, but her mind was busy thinking about other matters.

Yue Rujing, over there, seemed to have suffered some kind of blow. He regarded the dishes with enmity, this one displeasing, that one unsatisfying.

The tableful of dishes was practically ruined by him.

Gu Youyou reached out with her chopsticks only to come up empty, snapping her out of her thoughts.

"Yue Rujing, what kind of tantrum are you throwing today? You've scattered the dishes all over the table! How are we supposed to eat now?"

Yue Rujing looked up—another woman criticizing him, which made him even more frustrated.

He shouted, "So you're bullying me because I have no temper, is that it? Today, I'm just going to make a mess of the table! What are you going to do about it?"

Gu Youyou: "..." Something's off with this guy today... What...

"Did you get dumped..."

That sentence was like stepping on his tail. Yue Rujing instantly felt as though a massive stone was pressing down on him, filling him with unbearable anguish.

Damn it, women are just so annoying—so damn annoying.

He sneered coldly, "Do you believe it? A man like me, the Princely Heir, can have any woman I want. If I just beckon with my finger, they'd swarm me, and you'd drown in their saliva! Believe it or not?"

Gu Youyou: "..."

She was full of questions, and finally turned to Jin Zijin.

Jin Zijin finished his last bite of food, put down his chopsticks, and simultaneously set aside the book in his hand, saying, "Well, it seems the Nanzhao Emperor is trying to arrange a match for Ajing. This morning, he summoned a young lady, but as soon as she saw him..." He cast a glance at Yue Rujing with faint disdain and continued, "The young woman thought he was too frail and didn't take a liking to him."

"Hahaha... Yue... Yue Rujing, you effeminate weakling, you've got your comeuppance today!"

Gu Youyou burst into uncontrollable laughter upon hearing this, clutching her stomach and unable to stop for a while.

Yue Rujing stared at Jin Zijin with a face full of grievance, looking utterly pitiful.

"Senior brother, it's one thing for others to make fun of me, but how could you treat me this way?"

Gu Youyou, still laughing, moved over to Jin Zijin and declared her dominion.

"Hey, hey, where are you looking? This is my man."

Yue Rujing: "...I'm a man. What are you thinking?"

Jin Zijin: "..."

Gu Youyou stopped laughing and started looking at him warily.

She gritted her teeth and said, "That's exactly why I have to watch out for you. Sometimes, male love rivals are more dangerous than female ones. If you fall for a woman, there's still a chance to pull you back—after all, I'm a woman too. But if you fall for a man, then it's game over..."

"You, you, you..."

Yue Rujing widened his eyes in shock, unable to speak for a while.

Jin Zijin’s face turned stormy. He didn’t care whether Gu Youyou had finished eating; he hoisted her up and carried her to their room. With a few sharp smacks to her backside, he growled, "Game over? Let me help you experience it firsthand!"

"Ah...? Please spare me, milord. I was wrong..."

...

The Nanzhao Emperor appeared deeply committed to Yue Rujing’s marriage prospects. After bringing one young woman on the first day, within the next ten days, multiple eligible ladies and Commandery Princesses followed.

Since the Emperor didn’t have any marriageable Princesses for an alliance, he hoped Yue Rujing might take a liking to one of the Commandery Princesses.