**Farmhouse 1541**

Chapter 1541: A Visit to Claim Kinship

Erya was also very surprised to see what Gu Wu looked like now.

But it's only been a few years, and he's already aged this much?

Yes, he spent several years in prison. Big sister said, during the years he wandered, he was a beggar, probably suffered a lot, so he aged quickly.

But now?

Erya observed Gu Wu.

He looked like a rustic nouveau riche, eager to wear the most expensive things from home.

On the contrary, dressed like this, he appeared more like a country bumpkin.

But where did he get these luxurious clothes? A gift from Chancellor Zhang?

Facing Gu Wu, although Gu Youyou had warned her, she still felt at a loss.

Not long after, Shunzi and Sanbao also came out.

Their expressions were not very pleasant, but in front of so many guests, they really didn't know what to do.

As the saying goes, family scandals shouldn't be publicized, but for someone like Gu Wu, who caused the ruin of a good family, are they supposed to shield him?

Obviously, that's not possible either.

Seeing his own son, Gu Wu cried with emotion and immediately went to grab Sanbao's hand.

"Sanbao, I'm your dad, Sanbao…"

Gu Ren showed a trace of disgust in his eyes, instinctively stepping back, leaving Gu Wu grasping at air.

Gu Wu awkwardly withdrew his hand, but he was not angry, sighing deeply, "When Dad left you, you were still young. It's normal you don't remember Dad, after all, Dad is so old now. It's okay, Sanbao, Dad is back now. Daddy's here to live a good life with you all!"

Erya's Fish Manor was in a prime location in Beijing, and as meal time approached, people gathered quickly to see the spectacle.

People whispered, guessing who this self-proclaimed father of the proprietress was, he looked like a parvenu.

Those familiar with Erya's family were even more puzzled; they had never heard them mention having a father.

Some who were even more familiar had even heard Erya say that her father was dead.

In fact, everyone truly believed Gu Wu was dead.

Gu Wu cried old tears looking at Erya and Sanbao, "What's wrong with you all, say something? Don't you really recognize your Dad? Look closely?"

He pushed his wrinkled old face forward.

Erya's gaze toward him was filled with increasing hostility.

Thinking back on big sister's words, she just felt Gu Wu came with ill intentions.

She knew about the little disagreement between Gu Youyou and the Zhang Family. Taken to the Zhang Residence by Zhang Shiyu, and then two days later dressed like this to recognize kin at her Fish Manor?

Why would Chancellor Zhang dress him up like this? Is he a philanthropist? Clearly not!

So, Gu Wu must have reached some agreement with that Chancellor Zhang, and it was certainly not in big sister's favor.

Erya said coldly, "Who told you to come looking for us?"

Gu Wu was slightly taken aback, then looked hurt.

"Erya, I'm your Dad! If I don't come to find you, who can I find? Our family has been separated for so long, now we're finally reunited, Erya, don't you want to see Dad? Ah, yes, Dad is old, and you despise Dad for being useless, don't you?"

Those emotional blackmail words were really something, making Erya tremble with anxiety, unable to speak for a moment.

Shunzi quickly pulled her behind him, whispering, "Don't get excited, we're at our front doorstep, this isn't the place to talk about this stuff. If a scene happens here, we'll fall into their trap. You head back first, I'll keep watch."

"I…"

Chapter 1542: Public Opinion

"Sanbao, you go back too, take your sister back with you!"

Both the brother and sister were not suited to stay any longer. Gu Wu chose to speak this way in front of everyone, counting on the fact that business people wouldn't dare to make too much of a scene.

Over the years, Sanbao had lived harmoniously with his sister and brother-in-law. The three of them understood each other very well, and he listened to Shunzi.

But faced with the aggressive Gu Wu, who should have died years ago, he just couldn't swallow this anger.

Young as he was, he had witnessed his mother's death firsthand; he still couldn't forget it. Yet here he was, facing the man who killed his uncle and aunt, drove his grandfather to death, and forced his mother to her end. Was this the father he had always respected?

What was he supposed to do?

He didn't listen to Shunzi and take his sister back. Instead, he gritted his teeth and said coldly, "What do you want to do now?"

The onlookers watched these few people with great curiosity, thinking it was a reunion but feeling that there was something strange about the atmosphere between them.

From the old man's words, it was clear he had been separated from his children for many years; it was hard for them to finally meet.

But from Erya and Gu Sanbao's demeanor, it seemed that the truth was not simple. Facing their long-lost father, why did they seem so hostile?

In any case, they were not happy, nor did they show any intention of family recognition.

"Oh dear, you guys go back quickly!" Shunzi was incredibly anxious.

Gu Wu's face darkened and he said, "Shunzi, what do you mean by this? What? Don't you recognize me? Back then, when you and Erya wanted to get married, I was opposed to it. Yes, at that time our family was better off than yours, and I looked down on you. That was my fault. But so many years have passed, you've had two children with Erya. Shouldn't you call me father-in-law by now?"

Shunzi was left speechless.

He thought to himself: Gu Wu really came prepared, even knowing all about their situation.

Gu Wu continued, "I have been separated from my son and daughter for many years without seeing them. Today, we are going to reunite in front of everyone in the neighborhood. So why are you trying to push my son and daughter indoors?"

Someone in the crowd said, "Yeah, Shunzi, is this really your father-in-law? It sounds like it. You haven't denied it, so why not invite him in?"

"That's right, Erya and Sanbao, how could you act like this towards your father?"

Seeing the crowd siding with Gu Wu, Shunzi grew more anxious.

The siblings were indeed in a predicament now. If they went back, it wasn't right, but not going back wasn't right either. They might end up having to invite him in!

Gu Youyou stood by the glass window watching and felt a sense of anxiety for them.

Miss Du whispered, "Filial piety is the foremost of virtues. The Gu siblings really aren't doing the right thing."

However, at this moment, Gu Wu took the role of peacemaker and explained to everyone, "You all might not know, but do you remember when the south flooded a few years ago?"

"Yes, I remember. I heard that's when Erya and Sanbao came to Beijing to seek refuge with relatives."

"Ah! During that time, the flood separated me from them. I've spent these years looking for them everywhere, and it was only a few days ago that I found their whereabouts, so I hurried to find them. After not seeing each other for so many years, they might have thought I was already dead, and seeing

me suddenly, they’re a bit unused to it. Everyone, please don’t mind, don’t blame them—Erya and Sanbao have always been very filial to their parents since childhood; they’re good kids!"

Gu Wu’s words increasingly led everyone to feel that Erya and her brother from Fish Manor were truly in the wrong.

Chapter 1543: Denying Him

Shunzi had a stomach full of grievances, and his smile looked exceedingly awkward.

"Father-in-law must be joking. How could they possibly..."

"Shunzi, step aside!"

Erya suddenly intervened, her voice loud, blocking the rest of Shunzi’s words.

"Erya!" Gu Wu remained unfazed. Did he not understand his own daughter? She had a bit of a temper, but he wasn’t afraid of her.

Erya snorted coldly, "Weren’t they saying you died in prison? How are you still talking?"

Gu Wu’s expression changed immediately, a flash of malice in his eyes.

Sanbao looked at his sister in shock; she had brought up the imprisonment. Everyone knew about Gu Wu’s imprisonment, but if this was dragged into the open, it would be detrimental to their eldest sister!

He didn’t understand it when he was young, but now he did.

A woman’s reputation is so important. The matter of someone being infatuated with his sister-in-law, leading to hatred that resulted in killing his brother and sister-in-law and driving his father to death, was no longer just his own problem, but an ugly scandal of the Gu Family.

Eldest sister is now the Ning Princess Consort; such a family scandal getting out would be harmful to her.

He hurriedly tugged his sister’s sleeve, pursing his lips and shaking his head.

The people watching the commotion around them were also stunned. Was this father imprisoned, and that’s why these siblings treated him like this?

Then why was he imprisoned?

Erya shoved Sanbao aside, stepping forward, she said, "Unless my mother and grandfather can come back to life, don’t even think about walking through this door!"

He pointed to Erya Fish Manor as he spoke.

Gu Wu opened his mouth, but couldn’t say a word.

Erya glanced coldly at the onlookers, saying, "Sorry to let you have a laugh, but this is our family’s affair, I hope it won’t ruin your mood to eat fish."

Erya did not explain why she treated her father this way, but from her few words, it was clear the matter was not as this elderly man seeking his kinship claimed, just went missing during the flood and couldn’t be found for a while.

Of course, they were intensely curious about what really happened, but judging from Erya’s demeanor, she wasn’t going to say any more.

Then, Erya took Sanbao back into Fish Manor.

Shunzi smiled apologetically to everyone, "Sorry for letting you witness this. There are family matters today, so Fish Manor will not open for business. Everyone, please disperse."

"Shunzi, to the kitchen!" Erya’s voice called out shortly after.

Shunzi quickly replied, "Hey! Coming!"

Shunzi glanced at Gu Wu, whose face was grim, and then turned to go inside Fish Manor.

The crowd hadn’t dispersed, because Gu Wu hadn’t left yet.

Gu Wu looked at the curious townsfolk and sighed deeply, "Back then, some mistakes were made. Their grandfather already had poor health, but unexpectedly, he passed away in anger. Later, they accused me of angrily driving my father to death and sent me to prison, where I stayed until just before the flood."

The crowd sighed with emotion.

Someone asked, "Was it the pair of siblings who reported you to the authorities?"

Gu Wu spoke ambiguously, neither confirming nor denying.

"Sigh, it’s all in the past, better left unmentioned!"

Another person added, "Old folks can’t handle being upset. Back in the day, my grandpa passed away upon seeing my eldest aunt have three daughters in a row, thinking our line would end. But no one sent my aunt to prison, wasn’t that going too far!"

Gu Wu wore a look of helplessness and said, "It’s all over. Everyone’s now fine. Seeing those two siblings doing so well, I’m at ease. After I went to prison, I heard their mother took her own life, unable to cope. They’re probably blaming me for that."

Chapter 1544: This Beggar

"Oh my, why did your wife commit suicide too?"

"After my father died, I ended up in prison, leaving their mother to raise the siblings alone. Life was tough for her, and apparently, she couldn’t take it anymore and drowned herself in the river at the edge

of the village. No matter what, their mother died because of me, so it’s understandable that they don’t acknowledge me. All these years, they still treat me the same as the year I was taken away!"

Gu Youyou stood by the window, coldly watching Gu Wu sniffling and tearfully recounting his miserable life and regret for his mistakes and failings towards his children to the crowd gathered in front of Erya’s Fish Manor.

The ignorant masses listened to his story, understanding bits and pieces, and felt sympathy towards him. Already, some busybodies had gone to knock on Erya’s Fish Manor’s door.

Miss Du quietly asked Gu Youyou, "Judging by Erya and Shunzi’s character, the matter might not be as he says. Is he your uncle?"

Gu Youyou gently nodded and said, "Indeed, the situation is not that simple."

Unable to let him talk nonsense, Gu Youyou turned to Madam Tao, who was at a loss, and said, "I’m sorry for neglecting you, Madam Tao. I need to step out for a moment."

"Please, feel free, Your Highness!"

As Gu Youyou stepped out, the curious Madam Tao turned to ask Miss Du.

"Isn’t the Erya Fish Manor across the way run by the princess’s cousins? And the man claiming to be their biological father is the princess’s uncle?"

"Yes!" Miss Du said. "The princess wasn’t born into nobility, and that’s no secret!"

"Oh, his children don’t acknowledge him!" Madam Tao said, looking at Gu Wu downstairs.

Miss Du said, "The owners of Erya Fish Manor have trustworthy character. It’s this person, who seems to be protecting his children at every turn, yet pushes them towards being perceived as unfilial with every word, who doesn’t seem like a good person."

With Miss Du’s reminder, Madam Tao agreed.

She said, "After all, he is someone who’s been in prison, but we don’t know what he did to anger his father to death!"

Just then, a young man dressed as a waiter stepped forward and said to everyone, "You can’t just call the owners of Erya Fish Manor unfilial without knowing what mistake this father made. Sir, didn’t you say that your children were very filial to you before? Why don’t you tell everyone what exactly you did to anger your father to death, which got you sent to prison?"

"I..." Gu Wu was at a loss for words, looking troubled.

Gu Youyou returned to the room, a slight smile playing on her lips.

Miss Du quietly asked, "Was that waiter arranged by you?"

"Yes, I couldn’t let him say anything he wanted!"

"I’m curious too, what did he do that was so egregious to anger your grandfather and end up in prison."

Gu Youyou’s face darkened, and she said in a low voice, "Naturally, something worse than a beast would do!"

The waiter arranged by Gu Youyou pressed on and suddenly exclaimed, "You... aren’t you the old beggar who was asking for food behind our tavern a few days ago? I even kindly gave you a plate of clean pastries. Hey, why are you dressed so finely today?"

Gu Wu’s face turned a purplish shade, and he angrily said, "What beggar? Do I look like a beggar to you? You’re the beggar!"

The waiter insisted, "No, you are that beggar. I remember you!"

Gu Wu gritted his teeth and said, "Young man, you can eat carelessly but not speak carelessly! When did I ever ask you for food?"

Chapter 1545: He’s a Little Excited

“How am I speaking nonsense? Look at this outfit of yours; it must have cost at least a hundred taels of silver, right? But didn’t you say you were a refugee fleeing from disaster? You found your way to Beijing and managed to find Erya’s Fish Manor. Everyone, take a look—who can afford such expensive clothes while fleeing? If everyone were like you, we’d all be fleeing!”

Everyone suddenly realized and said, “Indeed, we might believe if you said you begged your way to Beijing, but dressed like a wealthy landowner, aren’t you afraid of being robbed on the way?”

Quickly, the scene took a dramatic turn, and those who had supported Gu Wu earlier felt that the situation wasn’t so simple and almost got deceived by him.

Yes, children don’t disown their father without reason. Erya’s family has been in Beijing for many years, and the neighbors trust their character.

Gu Wu didn’t expect a few words from an employee to shift public opinion.

Seeing that the timing wasn’t right today, he began to push through the crowd.

But the employee seemed to have a grudge against him, insisting on chasing him down.

“Uncle, where are you going? Weren’t you here to find your children? Why are you leaving?”

Gu Wu angrily said, “Can’t you see they’ve already closed the door? Get out of here!”

Though Gu Wu was old, after years as a beggar, he fled swiftly and quickly disappeared into an alley.

…

Gu Wu's commotion ruined the beautiful mood. Thinking about how kindly Madam Lin treated her, if Gu Youyou couldn't manage to do her this one favor, it would be letting her down.

Gu Youyou composed herself and said to Madam Tao, "Really, I've made a spectacle of myself for you, Madam."

Madam Tao, understanding the situation, said, "No worries, no worries. Every family has difficult people to deal with. But it seems your uncle won't easily give up, and since he is an elder, mishandling the situation could greatly impact their entire family."

Indeed, it truly does cause harm.

Soon after, the bashful Miss Tao returned.

Madam Tao quickly asked, "How did it go?"

Miss Tao bit her lip, full of embarrassment and difficulty.

Miss Du smiled understandingly, "No rush, Madam Tao and Miss Tao can discuss it further back home, perhaps?"

Seeing her daughter's discomfort, Madam Tao quickly agreed.

How could she ask her daughter right now? It was indeed her impatience and negligence.

After bidding farewell to Madam Tao and Miss Tao, Gu Youyou also said goodbye to Miss Du, then hurried back home.

"Has the Prince returned?"

The guard at the door said, “He has returned, just now!”

She found Jin Zijin in the study, and seeing her enter, he quickly put away a piece of paper on the desk.

“What are you hiding?” Gu Youyou asked curiously.

He put his fingertip to his lips, making a gesture for silence, and said, “This is our future home, it’s not finished yet. I’ll show it to you once it’s done!”

Gu Youyou was astonished, “Is this what you’ve been busy with these days?”

Jin Zijin nodded and said, “Yes, yesterday I went to Rucheng. There’s a craftsman there with excellent skills, but he has an eccentric temperament. I had to visit him in person to invite him. Once it’s done, we can leave!”

Gu Youyou exhaled and didn’t say much, only saying, “Don’t be too busy; there’s no rush to leave!”

“Alright, everything is almost ready, and the construction should start soon. Tomorrow, I’ll leave Beijing to personally check it out!”

“You’re leaving tomorrow?” Gu Youyou asked, surprised.

Jin Zijin smiled and said, “Yes, how can I rest assured without seeing it for myself?”

Chapter 1546: Adopted Son

Gu Youyou originally intended to talk to him about Gu Wu, but seeing him so enthusiastic about his future home, she ultimately didn’t bring it up.

Of course, part of the reason was also due to her personality; being such a strong-willed person, merely dealing with Gu Wu should be manageable, otherwise, how could she survive?

Besides, she felt that Jin Zijin's temperament really wasn't suited for battling with petty people like Gu Wu.

After thinking it over, she said, "Shall I help you pack your things?"

"You, you go first, I'll be right back!"

After seeing Gu Youyou leave the study, he reopened the scroll.

A perfect valley, with the manor in the deep mountains resembling a bright pearl on the earth, so dazzling and radiant!

"Youyou will surely like it."

…

Gu Wu returned to the Zhang Residence with his tail between his legs, having gained nothing, and was naturally in a foul mood.

Returning, he vented his anger on the maid Xixi in the courtyard where he lived, and only after shouting did he feel somewhat relieved.

Xixi went to cry by the wall, which Gu Shuisheng saw, prompting him to enter the room and ask Gu Wu, "Father, why did you make Miss Xixi cry?"

Gu Wu scoffed, "None of them have a conscience, they all look down on me, even a serving maid looks down on me. Do you think I shouldn't scold her?"

Gu Shuisheng pursed his lips and said lightly, "Father, Xixi is a maid, but we are not the masters of the Zhang Residence. Prime Minister Zhang has kindly taken us in, so how can we act like the masters and scold his maids?"

Gu Wu looked up at Gu Shuisheng and said, “What’s going on today? That unfilial daughter and son don’t recognize me, and they made a fool of me at their doorstep. Now even you find me unbearable, right? Hmph, don’t forget who saved your life.”

Gu Wu saved him, thinking that in this life, it would be hard for his own children to acknowledge him. Being a prisoner, he was also afraid that the Governor’s Office in Qingshui Town would trouble him again. So he rescued Gu Shuisheng, raising him as a son so that he would have someone to care for him in old age.

Yet he didn’t expect that bringing Gu Shuisheng along for so many years would not lead to a stable life; instead, they became beggars. Seeing that life was unbearable, and the days as a beggar were utterly dreadful, after much thought, he conceived a plan to deceive Gu Youyou, thus making up his mind to come to Beijing.

Meeting the Zhang family in Beijing and learning about the circumstances of Erya and Sanbao were unexpected joys.

Each surprise one after another made him feel destined to have benefactors, thinking of himself as an extraordinary person. Gradually, what he imagined in his heart and reality became a bit blurred, naturally leading him to believe he was richer than even Prime Minister Zhang. Why should he hesitate to scold a maid?

Looking at this adopted son, he scoffed, “You have great fortune, and good luck. There are so many refugees, yet I happened to save you. No matter what, you call me father. Someday, when I become royalty, I won’t forget you.”

Gu Shuisheng pursed his lips and stayed silent. In recent days, he had also seen that in Gu Wu’s heart, it wasn’t about him becoming royalty; he already considered himself as such.

After a moment, he asked again, “Father, why doesn’t Second Sister recognize you?”

Regarding Erya and Sanbao’s matters, Gu Wu had already spoken.

Gu Wu coldly said, “After all, we’ve been apart for so long, it’s just something they can’t understand for the time being. Don’t overthink, I’ll naturally handle these things, and once settled, I’ll take you to meet them. There’s food and drink at the Zhang Residence, so just stay here and keep yourself well-fed.”

Chapter 1547: It’s Good He Didn’t Succeed

A servant informed Zhang Shiyu that Gu Wu was putting on airs in the residence, so much so that he even disregarded the young lady and the master, and had scolded Xixi to the point of tears.

Zhang Shiyu thought that Xixi was usually a carefree girl, so if she was brought to tears, it must have been excessively harsh.

In a fit of anger, she headed towards the courtyard where Gu Wu resided, accompanied by a few house servants, coincidentally running into Gu Shuisheng coming out of the courtyard.

“Stop!”

Gu Shuisheng halted, raised his hand, and saluted Zhang Shiyu.

“Miss Zhang, what business do you have with Shuisheng?”

“Hmph…” Zhang Shiyu’s tone was unfriendly as she coldly snorted, “You haven’t forgotten your status just because you’ve been living in this high gate mansion for two days, have you? Don’t forget, you were the beggars I picked up from outside, do you understand beggars?”

Gu Shuisheng’s pupils shrank, and he lowered his head, cupping his hands and whispering, “I have always understood, we are the beggars picked up by Miss Zhang!”

“Good that you know!” Zhang Shiyu’s tone softened a bit, saying, “Since you’re someone who understands, I won’t go in. You go tell your beggar father to understand his place and not put on airs higher than the master’s!”

Thinking of that disgusting old beggar, even going in to warn him felt beneath her.

In the end, hesitantly, she decided not to go.

“Yes, Miss Zhang,” Gu Shuisheng said softly.

Zhang Shiyu returned with her people, and not long after, a servant reported to her the reason for Gu Wu’s anger today.

“Miss, Gu Wu went to Erya’s Fish Manor, and they didn’t let him in.”

“Hmm, what happened? Didn’t he say they were his biological children?”

The servant said, “Yes, but they don’t recognize him.”

“Why?”

“I heard they have a grudge against him. Gu Wu is someone who has been in prison; they say he angered his father to death, and his wife committed suicide. It’s no wonder his son and daughter won’t acknowledge him. It’s just unclear what he did to anger the head of the Gu Family to death!”

What did he do?

While outsiders do not know, Miss Zhang is well aware. Gu Wu had confessed long ago.

He had an affair in his own elder brother’s room, his grand-niece became his child, and he even killed his brother—it’s no surprise the old man was angered to death.

But her father said it was not yet time to expose this scandal.

Zhang Shiyu's eyes flashed with a cold smile, and she said lightly, "This isn't something for you to worry about, get on with your tasks!"

She then tossed a piece of silver into the servant's hand.

The servant, beaming with joy, nodded repeatedly, "Yes, yes, Miss, I will continue to monitor that old beggar!"

"Hmm, go on! Report anything suspicious to me immediately!"

Then, Zhang Shiyu turned and discussed the matter with Chancellor Zhang. Chancellor Zhang merely chuckled, "Since you know, of course, your father also knows."

She was puzzled and said, "He didn't acknowledge his kin, and yet father is pleased? If even the siblings at Erya's Fish Manor don't recognize him, how could we expect Gu Youyou to acknowledge him in the future?"

Chancellor Zhang laughed, "Whether or not he is acknowledged isn't the most important thing. The important thing is that today it was lively on that street, everyone now knows there was a person who went to Erya's Fish Manor to recognize relatives but was turned away. That person had been in prison; his family conflict likely resulted from something he did wrong, causing his father's death and his wife to jump into the river. Due to these matters, his only son and daughter don't recognize him.

And the most curious thing to everyone is what exactly he did wrong that led to the ruin of his family. Shiyu, do you think this path is well paved?"

Chapter 1548: Not That Easy to Get Rid Of

After Prime Minister Zhang's reminder, Zhang Shiyu exclaimed, "Wonderful!"

She excitedly said, "Did father predict this outcome long ago?"

"Haha, the workings of heaven should not be revealed, and it's best not to predict everything in the world. Father dares not claim to foresee all matters clearly."

Immediately, Zhang Shiyu's smile faded as she said, "Even if he has made a contribution this time, his arrogant behavior in the residence, putting on airs bigger than father's, is undeniable. Does father not plan to warn him?"

Prime Minister Zhang said, "Ah, the worse his temper, the more he appears vulgar, right? I serve him with good food and drink, letting him think he's an important person. In the future, when he's with his children, or with Gu Youyou, he'll feel conflicted. I want them to know that Gu Wu is not someone to be easily dealt with."

"Hmm? Father's intention?"

Prime Minister Zhang tapped Zhang Shiyu on the head and said, "Silly child, think about it. If he was still a beggar now, going to Gu Youyou and revealing his identity as her father, asking for food and drink, what would Gu Youyou do?"

"What would she do?"

Prime Minister Zhang laughed and said, "If she's ruthless, she might kill him to save her reputation. If she's not so harsh, she might give him some silver to send him off. As a beggar, enough Silver Tael can make them tempted and get rid of them. But now? Gu Wu believes he's of royal connection, the Emperor's relative. Can you send him off with silver now?"

We have to admit, Prime Minister Zhang guessed correctly about some things. Gu Wu's initial purpose for entering Beijing was to extort money from Gu Youyou; he wasn't born a beggar, naturally he didn't want to be one for life.

Zhang Shiyu snorted coldly and said, "That old beggar must be greedy, accustomed to the good life in our house, a little silver won't send him off!"

"Exactly!" Prime Minister Zhang laughed heartily.

Old ginger is spicier, and Zhang Shiyu admired Prime Minister Zhang greatly after listening to his words.

With her father helping her scheme, she couldn't believe she couldn't outsmart Gu Youyou.

…

Jin Zijin left decisively, feeling somewhat anxious about the promised beautiful future.

For years now, since the day he arrived in Beijing, he had secretly been longing for the time when everything would settle, and he could lead the life he desired with his wife and children.

Even if it wasn't for Gu Youyou, he wouldn't stay in Beijing forever and certainly wouldn't fulfill the Emperor's desire to become an Emperor.

With everyone threatening them gone, he thought everything was settled, but he knew nothing about the invincible dung beetle that had reached his doorstep.

Gu Youyou arranged for a clever servant to work at a pastry shop under her name, right across from Prime Minister Zhang's residence.

The purpose was to monitor everyone in that manor.

As she soaked a powerful sedative prepared by Searcy on the poison needle, she casually murmured, "The Zhang family intends to scheme against me, how do you think they plan to act?"

Searcy, a self-admiring person who looks down on everyone, sneered and said, "They haven't started, have they? What are you worrying about? Deal with them as they come. Why fear what they might do? Let's see how they act first."

"You're right," Gu Youyou said, "but this morning, I arranged for a servant to work as a clerk in the pastry shop opposite the Zhang Family."

Chapter 1549: Rumors Spread

Searcy rolled her eyes and said, “You’re taking things too seriously. Just because you had a son for your Prince, what’s he gonna do to you?”

Gu Youyou: “…”

Talking about such things with a narcissist like Searcy was pointless, so Gu Youyou changed the subject, “What about you? I heard the Lu Family hasn’t reached out to you for a long time.”

“Isn’t that better? Enjoying the peace and quiet!”

“Hopefully!” Gu Youyou said with a hint of sarcasm, making Searcy’s teeth itch with anger.

Why did someone as invincible as her have to be born into the Lu Family?

Xiang Chun rushed in to report, “Princess, Young Master Lin has arrived!”

“Shenxing?”

Gu Youyou was a bit surprised; it was his first time coming to see her!

“Take him to the flower hall first!” Gu Youyou said.

She changed her clothes before heading to the flower hall.

Lin Shenxing was standing by the window, looking at the uniquely designed floor-to-ceiling windows; this was his first time at the Ningwang Residence.

“What brings you here today, Shenxing?” Gu Youyou asked with a faint smile after observing for a moment.

Lin Shenxing quickly turned around, cupped his hands, and said, “Cousin!” His face reddened, and he awkwardly said, “Grandmother insisted I come and relay a message, on behalf of the Tao Family!”

For a single young man, such questions were indeed embarrassing. However, the old grandmother at home was extremely anxious. The family had encountered many issues recently, and she was truly worried that the marriage matters of him and his sister would be affected by those incidents. Additionally, it was commonly said that happy events could dispel bad luck, so Grandmother hoped he would marry soon to drive away the bad luck that had lingered at home for years.

Gu Youyou was momentarily stunned and then laughed, “This is a lifelong matter. Grandmother is too anxious; she should give people time to consider!”

She carefully observed Lin Shenxing, although she didn’t know how satisfied he was with the young lady from the Tao Family. In any case, he didn’t dislike her and was definitely not averse to it.

This was good, just fearing that the person she picked would not be interested in him.

With Gu Youyou saying this, Lin Shenxing became even more embarrassed.

His face grew even redder, and with a bit of hesitation, he opened his mouth as if to say something but couldn’t, and after a while, he rubbed his nose and said, “Then I’ll go back and report to Grandmother like that!”

Gu Youyou found it somewhat amusing and said, “I’ll go with you, so Grandmother won’t doubt you later.”

Lin Shenxing beamed with delight and said, “Great, thank you, Cousin.”

After giving a few instructions, Gu Youyou went with Lin Shenxing to the Lin Family, and at that moment, a rumor had already started spreading in Beijing.

In a Satin Store, several women were picking fabrics while whispering to each other.

“Hey, hey, do you all remember that big event a few years ago when the Crown Prince was choosing a concubine?”

Living in Beijing, of course they remembered. The grandeur of the Imperial Family selecting a Crown Princess from the commoners back then was still vividly remembered even years later!

“Aunt Chen, why bring that up all of a sudden?”

Aunt Chen snorted and said, “That year, my eldest daughter was just fifteen, and she also signed up!”

“Your eldest daughter went too?” Aunt Zhou exclaimed, “How far did she get?”

“Get through what?” Aunt Chen snorted coldly, “It was all a scam, the Crown Prince at that time, now His Highness Ningwang, they clearly deceived everyone.”

“What do you mean?” The other ladies quickly glanced around, ensuring no one was paying attention before pulling Aunt Chen aside and saying, “Aunt Chen, you usually mind what you say, why are you being so reckless today? How can you speak ill of the Crown Prince here? If someone overhears, you could get in big trouble, even risk execution.”

Chapter 1550: They Fooled Everyone

Aunt Chen snorted disdainfully, “I know this kind of thing shouldn’t be spoken about recklessly, but I just have to tell you all, or I simply can’t get over it in my heart!”

“What do you mean by that?” Everyone felt that Aunt Chen was speaking in a roundabout way and grew a bit curious.

“Ah!” Aunt Chen sighed deeply, “Us ordinary folks, aren’t we just trifled with by those noble Princes? They say everyone has a chance, but the Crown Princess was decided long ago; they’re just playing with us for amusement. Isn’t that infuriating?”

People looked at each other, and those who hadn’t heard of these matters naturally didn’t understand what Aunt Chen meant.

After being stunned for a moment, someone asked, “Does Aunt Chen mean that the choice didn’t matter, and the Crown Princess is actually Gu, the doctor from Jisheng Hall?”

Aunt Chen snorted, “We’ve all been deceived. Gu Youyou actually knew the Crown Prince long ago, and they got married among the common people. Later, didn’t the Crown Prince return to the Imperial Court? Probably, he felt it was inappropriate for a Prince to marry a common girl’s daughter and staged such a show, deceiving everyone.”

Everyone secretly clicked their tongues. If it were truly as Aunt Chen said, they indeed were quite treacherous.

They were already married, yet they still staged a selection for the Crown Princess and even said commoners could participate, making fools of everyone. Isn’t that deception?

But now, they’re the Duke Ning and Duchess Ning, so what are we ordinary folks to them? Even being toyed with, we can only grumble silently. If it were ordinary people, we’d surely sue them.

“Is that true?” Aunt Zhou found it hard to believe, “I heard Gu the doctor truly has skills; otherwise, would the Emperor agree?”

Gu Youyou’s medical skills are visible to all; it’s said that her calligraphy was chosen by various Ministers, and the clothes Manxiu Building customizes every year; most of those designs are her work, which everyone sees. They can’t be faked.

So, there are still people speaking up for Gu Youyou, “Maybe there’s some misunderstanding? Apart from her humble origins, Gu the doctor truly matches the Crown Prince in every way.”

Aunt Chen pursed her lips and snorted, “Aunt Zhou, no matter how great Gu Youyou is, she shouldn’t toy with us! I’m not saying she lacks ability, but I’m indignant that they staged a Crown Prince selection and toyed with us. Ai, I saved my private money for over ten years. To make sure my eldest girl could get chosen, I gritted my teeth and took it all out to buy an outfit from Manxiu Building for her.

Hmph, I heard there are quite a few like me, foolish enough to spend their life savings, mostly to buy Manxiu Building's clothes, just so their daughters could be selected. I guess this whole selection was a trap they set with the purpose of earning our money. Look at how wealthy Manxiu Building is now? Didn't they just swindle us?"

"Then… isn't Gu Youyou's character too despicable, deceiving us for money?"

"Isn't it? Those outfits cost as much as our family would spend in several years without food or drink, all cheated away by them. Thinking about this, my heart aches… a stabbing pain!"

These few people started speaking quietly, but soon couldn't suppress their ever-growing emotions, growing louder and louder.

The Shopkeeper on the side was initially oblivious, but after listening for a while, and as the voices of the women grew louder, he finally caught on to the conversation.