Farmhouse 1551

Chapter 1551: Gossip Spreads

Originally I thought they were just gossiping, talking about King Ning and Consort Ning?

His face drooped, and he coughed with a hollow fist, saying, “Ladies, it’s better not to speak like this. Even if you must, please do not discuss King Ning and Consort Ning in my shop. This little shop of mine can’t bear the burden of such accusations.”

Everyone’s faces turned unpleasant, and they quickly jostled each other out of the shop.

Although this shop wasn’t under Gu Youyou’s name, it was under Miss Du’s name.

The inheritance left by Miss Du’s parents naturally included more than just Manxiu Building; there were quite a few estates and shops, among them this Satin Store.

The shopkeeper, knowing very well the close relationship between his master and Consort Ning, Gu Youyou, immediately reported this matter to his master, Miss Du.

Meanwhile, Aunt Chen, who was earlier lamenting about being deceived, parted ways with the others and slipped into a deserted alley, gently tapping on the wall. Soon, a cloaked figure appeared, handing her a slightly heavy pouch of money.

Aunt Chen excitedly opened the pouch, her heart leaping with joy upon seeing the heap of silver inside, and she quickly said, “Thank you, sir, really, thank you. If there is anything else you need from me, please remember to call on me!”

The cloaked person whispered, “You did well this time. Continue to amplify these rumors, and once they are known all over the city, you will be rewarded ten times this amount!”

Upon hearing this, Aunt Chen was so thrilled she could barely close her mouth, and with profuse thanks, she left the alley with the silver.

Driven by the desire to quickly earn ten times the silver for a handsome windfall, she disregarded the late hour, visiting everyone she knew and spreading the indignation everywhere.

When this matter reached Miss Du's ears, she went to the Ningwang Residence by dusk, but Gu Youyou was not there; she was at the Lin Residence.

The elderly lady of the Lin Family insisted that since it was rare for Gu Youyou to visit, she had to stay for lunch, and after lunch, she was urged to stay and watch the play.

The Lin Residence had been plagued with events over the years, the atmosphere always eerily stagnant, as if the whole house was on the verge of collapse. This was a troupe that Lin Xingyi had invited, mainly to entertain the elderly lady and change the household atmosphere.

Since Gu Youyou had arrived at the right time, she could only accompany the elderly lady to watch the whole play.

But after the play, she still couldn't leave; the elderly lady insisted she stay for dinner, which dragged out the entire day.

When everyone had dispersed, the old lady of the Lin Family kept Gu Youyou and Madam Lin behind to talk about serious matters.

"Ever since the incident with King Jin and the Ducal Residence, our family hasn't been the same. Youyou, Ayuan, I know what's on your minds, but life's challenges must still be faced!" The old lady's words made Madam Lin cry uncontrollably again.

The old lady sighed, "Ayuan, I know the loss of the Ducal Residence is hard on you. Regardless of what they have done, those people will always be your family, but I hope you can understand that they brought this upon themselves, and it's not anyone else's fault. Would it have been right for King Ning not to stop them and let them eradicate the Jin Imperial Clan? You know very well what they intended to do!"

Madam Lin nodded while crying and, after a good while, looked up to ask Gu Youyou, “Did you plan to uproot the Ducal Residence from the start?”

Chapter 1552: Worries

As things have come to this point, there’s nothing to hide. The ambition of the Ducal Residence is a fact, so Gu Youyou nodded slightly.

Madam Lin’s complexion turned a shade paler, and she said, “Did you know about their use of King Jin for a long time?”

Gu Youyou thought for a moment and said, “King Jin sent away Cousin Qianqing. That move was strange. Later, Cousin wrote me a letter asking me to help King Jin. Aunt knew that my greatest strength is my medical skills. King Jin discovered that the Ducal Residence had always been scheming against him, and it was about his infertility. I discovered this while treating King Jin’s illness!”

After hearing Gu Youyou’s words, Old Madam Lin and Madam Lin’s eyes flickered slightly. They exchanged a glance, and Old Madam Lin suddenly asked Gu Youyou excitedly, “You’ve treated King Jin’s infertility. Is he cured?”

Madam Lin was also looking at Gu Youyou excitedly.

Gu Youyou smiled faintly and said, “He was just injured, and the injury has been healed. But after being injured for so many years, it’s hard to say if he can still have children. If they do have one, they will surely send someone to bring back the news to us!”

Gu Youyou’s business deals were extensive, and they had never asked her about the exact whereabouts of King Jin and Lin Qianqing, which showed their great trust in her.

Old Madam Lin hurriedly said, “Good, good, if that girl Qianqing sends back the news, Youyou must inform Grandmother at the first notice!”

“I will,” Gu Youyou said softly.

Old Madam Lin looked at the now timid Madam Lin and sighed again.

She was such a proud person, never bowing easily even to the Emperor and Empress, and even when bowing, her back would remain straight.

Now it's over; almost all the people of the Ducal Residence are dead, those living are merely daughters married off, and even though she, Jin Yuan, is alive and her husband's family has never despised her, she already despises herself.

This meek and submissive look made Old Madam Lin feel pangs of heartbreak.

Old Madam Lin turned to Gu Youyou and said, "We're most worried about Qianqing, but she's not with us. We don't know where she is, so all the worry is in vain. But now Shenxing and Zixin's marriage arrangements have to be addressed. Your Aunt is now in no condition to help with anything, and an old woman like me can only leave Youyou to be burdened with such matters!"

"Lending a hand is no burden!" Gu Youyou smiled and said, "Being able to alleviate Grandmother's worries is Youyou's blessing!"

Old Madam Lin beamed with delight and said, "Not a trace of arrogance, easy to talk to, just like her mother!"

Madam Lin also managed to pull out a faint smile.

"Youyou, the matter of the Tao family's young lady you've been seeing on behalf of Shenxing, Grandmother is aware. But that Miss Tao is no longer young, and her family must be eager to marry her off. I think that Miss Tao is quite suitable, being the eldest legitimate daughter, adept at managing a household. You must keep a close eye on this matter, for such a good granddaughter-in-law cannot be lost."

Gu Youyou could only smile wryly and say, "We only met once, and nothing has been decided yet!"

Yet she was already being referred to as the granddaughter-in-law, how could that not embarrass the Tao family's young lady?

Old Madam Lin didn't see it that way and hurriedly said, "Didn't you already arrange for them to be alone together in a room? How can you say nothing has been settled with things as they are?"

At this, Madam Lin frowned and said, "Mother, a woman's reputation is very important. We should keep this matter to ourselves, for if Miss Tao doesn't marry into our family, it could affect her reputation."

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Chapter 1553: Going Back

Madam Lin, after all, comes from a prestigious family and is well-versed in the rules, allowing her to think more thoroughly about certain things.

Of course, Gu Youyou was also aware of these matters.

Upon Madam Lin's reminder, the Old Madam Lin suddenly realized, quickly changed the topic, and said, "In any case, we must keep a close watch. Whether it's good or not, let's just get someone married first and deal with it later."

Gu Youyou: "…" Fortunately, Lin Shenxing wasn't here, otherwise who knows what he would think after hearing this.

Madam Lin sighed softly, "It's all my fault for implicating them. If I had known it would turn out like this, I would have arranged their marriage years ago, before the Ducal Residence met with trouble. Even if the other party wasn't satisfied, considering the emperor's regard for Xingyi, they wouldn't dare break off the engagement and disgrace our Lin Family."

The mistress of the Lin Family came from the Ducal Residence, and the reason the Lin Family has managed to remain standing is relying on the emperor's favor.

Moreover, it's still uncertain who the future family head of Zhuzhao Country will be. If it ultimately ends up in Ningwang Residence's hands, then the Lin Residence would count as the family home of the Crown Princess of Ningwang Residence. By then, Lin Xingyi would be used even more importantly. Precisely because of this, Madam Tao, who previously hadn't considered a son-in-law from the Lin Family, decided to reconsider after Gu Youyou personally acted as a matchmaker.

The Old Madam Lin sighed, "But what's the use of saying this now? Still, we have to rely on Youyou. Youyou, what does the Tao Family say? Why not… let me discuss with your uncle and directly hire a matchmaker to propose the marriage."

Gu Youyou thought the old lady was too hasty and quickly said, "I'll ask about it tomorrow, so please wait a bit longer, don't rush to propose the marriage just yet!"

Really, she wasn't even sure what the Tao Family's attitude was. If she were to hastily send someone to propose, would they accept it or not?

Her uncle has a higher official rank than they do, and since she personally arranged the match, even if they were reluctant, they probably wouldn't dare to casually lose face, right?

That would be forcing someone against their will, wouldn't it? A marriage is a major life event and should be mutually agreed upon by both parties.

With a heavy heart, Gu Youyou returned to the Prince Residence, knowing that her grandmother was anxious about Lin Shenxing and Lin Zixin's marriage prospects, but she hadn't expected her to be this urgent.

Gu Youyou had Xiang Chun secretly inquire with the maid beside the old lady and learned that she had already entrusted several matchmakers to propose the marriage to several families. However, because of Madam Lin's unpredictable factor, reputable families were unwilling to establish marital ties with the Lin Family. Those that were too inadequate would lower the Lin Family's status, resulting in an impasse, which is why the Old Madam Lin has become so anxious.

"Alright, I trust you to handle things, Youyou, but really, you must hurry. Look at me; at this age, whether I can hold a great-grandchild in my lifetime depends on you."

Gu Youyou and Madam Lin could only smile wryly, with Gu Youyou saying, “Grandmother, rest assured, you are healthy and will certainly hold a great-grandchild.”

“Yes, mother, why say such things when everything is fine? As long as the Tao Family agrees, we will immediately proceed with the marriage proposal. If you want things to move quickly, we can combine the six ceremonial gifts into one. They can be married within a month, and in less than a year after the wedding, you will be holding a great-grandchild.”

Gu Youyou: “…”

Well, it is said that when people grow old, they become like this. She wondered if she would feel the same when she got older.

…

It was already dark when Miss Du finally awaited Gu Youyou’s return.

Jin Zijin had gone south to prepare a surprise, while Jin Xuyao was summoned to the palace, leaving only her at home, making it feel somewhat quiet.

Seeing Miss Du’s slightly bulging belly, Gu Youyou felt somewhat guilty for still needing her to run around and help out.

Chapter 1554: Is He a Fraud?

"What’s the urgent matter that you need me for so late? The sky is already dark, and you haven’t left yet?"

If it wasn’t urgent, Miss Du wouldn’t have waited until nightfall.

"You finally came back. I heard you went to the Lin Family with Young Master Lin this morning and stayed until now?"

"Isn’t that right?" Gu Youyou said, "My grandmother is very anxious and insists that I quickly inquire about the Tao Family’s intentions. It’s not appropriate for me to ask; it might pressure them. You are more familiar with Madam Tao, why don’t you ask her privately?"

Miss Du hastily said, "Oh my, why are you still concerned about other people’s marriage at a time like this? You should take care of yourself first!"

Gu Youyou was taken aback and asked, "What do you mean?"

If it weren’t something significant, Miss Du wouldn’t have waited until dark!

Thinking of this, Gu Youyou felt a pang of unease.

Miss Du said, "I have a satin store on West Street. The shopkeeper sent me a message today, saying he overheard some women secretly discussing certain matters in his shop, things that don’t paint you in a good light."

"What is it?" Upon hearing this, Gu Youyou suddenly thought of something and became calm.

With her reputation, who would dare speak ill of her behind her back? Those who do, she could identify with her eyes closed.

Finally, unable to bear it, they’ve started making their moves, haven’t they?

Gu Youyou’s lips curled slightly into a playful smile.

"What they said is indeed unfavorable to you." Miss Du asked worriedly, "I heard you were married to Prince Ning years ago in your hometown, Lotus Village, right?"

Just as she anticipated! Gu Youyou’s expression turned serious, and she said, "So what did they say?"

The only one who could have spread such information was Gu Wu.

Since Prime Minister Zhang took him in, he must have seen some value in him. Knowing her past might be considered a value, but so what? Hmph, they've miscalculated.

"The one making the most noise is a woman surnamed Chen whose daughter participated when Prince Ning was choosing a consort. To have her daughter participate, she spent her years of savings on a dress from our Manxiu Building. They say the consort selection was just a facade, that the true consort was already decided. The so-called Great Prince's consort selection was a scam, set up to swindle their money."

Gu Youyou was speechless. She admitted she made a fortune during a crafts competition in the Imperial Palace by hosting a launch event at the Imperial Garden, but leading citizens into consumerism has nothing to do with her, right?

If she guessed correctly, that woman's daughter probably didn't even qualify for the selection, did she?

Just filling out the application form wasn't something an average family's girl could do, because, in this era, ordinary girls couldn't even write their own names, so how could she be selected?

Gu Youyou pondered for a moment and said, "They must have been bribed. It's predictable that Gu Wu would cause trouble once he arrived in Beijing; he should have been eliminated long ago."

Gu Youyou's words startled Miss Du. She didn't know the old stories of the Gu Family, only that Gu Wu was Gu Youyou's uncle who had committed some wrongdoings and even been jailed.

Gu Youyou sneered, "What he did was already a capital offense. Back then, I thought killing him outright wasn't worthwhile. I intended to lock him up for a few more years, but then the flood hit Qingshui Town that year."

Chapter 1555: Just Sit Back and Enjoy the Show

Gu Youyou sighed and said, "Such deep water, everyone thought he died in the dungeon, but unexpectedly he's tough enough to live till now."

Miss Du didn’t ask what mistake Gu Wu made that turned his family against him, she only asked, "So, are you planning to have him killed?"

"No!" Gu Youyou shook her head and said, "He’s now being used by the Zhang Family, he’s no longer just a simple death row convict. The Zhang Family probably can’t wait for me to kill him to silence him, and when that happens, it would be impossible to explain even with ten mouths. That old fox, Prime Minister Zhang, seems unimpressive but is even harder to deal with than Jin Shien."

Miss Du thought for a moment, lightly nodded, and said, "In the Ducal Residence case, he managed to emerge the cleanest. Back in those days, the Ducal Residence’s influence was at its peak, who didn’t know that the Zhang Family was the closest with the Ducal Residence? But after the Ducal Residence fell, the ladies of his family were the first to commit suicide."

Miss Du said coldly, "It’s said that each of those women had a white silk and committed suicide collectively in the Zhang Family’s courtyard."

Whether they were willing or were forced is hard to say.

Cunning, ruthless enough, otherwise the Zhang Family wouldn’t still appear so glamorous among the officials after all these events.

The Emperor orchestrated Beijing’s upheaval a few months ago, such a formidable person must know the kind of person Prime Minister Zhang is. It’s just a mystery why he hasn’t acted against him.

"Then what do you plan to do?" Miss Du asked worriedly, "Did you mention it to Prince Ning? Shouldn’t we let Prince Ning handle this? The Imperial Family has numerous ways to suppress rumors."

"No need!" Gu Youyou said, "Zijin isn’t at the residence, he went to the south."

"Ah...? At this critical moment, what will you do?"

Gu Youyou sneered, "Returning the favor in the same way, dealing with them, I’m enough!"

Growing up amidst various schemes and plots, what hasn’t she seen? As such, she found the situation somewhat exciting.

"Sorry to trouble you for coming so late to tell me this, but don’t worry about it, I’m clear about it." She looked at Miss Du’s belly and said, "Let me check your peace pulse, if everything is fine, I’ll have someone send you back."

Miss Du generously extended her hand and said, "No need for you to send me, Zhonglin will come to fetch me."

"Hmm?"

"When you returned, my servant went back to inform Zhonglin. He should be arriving soon!"

To deal with Gu Wu and the Zhang Family doesn’t require Xuyao’s help from Miss Du; regarding matchmaking, she’s quite helpless.

Gu Youyou felt a bit embarrassed and laughed, "I still need you to oversee the matter regarding my cousin, my grandmother has been bothering me about it all day, probably because of this. Took me to a theatre, alas, I simply don’t understand it, nor like it, but couldn’t let her waste a good show!"

"Should I inquire at the Tao Family?"

Though Miss Du thought it might be too abrupt to inquire so soon, since Gu Youyou asked for help, she ultimately didn’t say much more, thought for a moment, and agreed.

"Alright, I’ll inquire about this matter as soon as possible!"

After speaking, she suddenly added, "Is Master Lin okay with this? Shouldn’t go asking the Tao Family willing, meanwhile Master Lin is unwilling."

Gu Youyou thought for a while, Lin Shenxing seemed not quite satisfied but didn’t object either.

Chapter 1556: The Court Discusses the Rumors

That's right, they've only met once, and as shy boys and girls, how can there be intense hormonal reactions? After all, not everyone can fall in love at first sight.

Looking at the attitude of the Lin Madam and the Lin Family, whether Lin Shenxing is willing or not seems unimportant. The key is that they are willing, and of course, it's the same for other families. In major matters of marriage, the ones who have the least say are the couple themselves.

"There's no issue with the Lin Family, now it depends on how the Tao Family thinks."

Gu Youyou speculates that whether the Tao Family is willing has little to do with the Tao Miss.

If the Tao Minister and Madam Tao love their eldest daughter greatly, then Tao Miss's favorable impression of Lin Shenxing that day would play a significant role.

Very soon, the servant from the gate came to report that Jie Huanzhi from the Jie Family had arrived.

Gu Youyou did not stay any longer and personally escorted Miss Du home.

…

In this world, the fastest spreading thing is rumors, especially about people like Gu Youyou and Jin Zijin who are renowned figures.

As soon as that news was released, it spread throughout the city overnight. By the next day's morning court session, rumors regarding Gu Youyou and Jin Zijin conspiring to deceive the world were already circulating vigorously!

"Did you hear? The selection of Ning Wang's consort back then was actually a sham. No matter how many people participated, the final choice would always be the current Ning Wang Consort, because

they were already a couple. That selection, supposedly unbound by origin, was clearly custom-made for the Ning Wang Consort."

Those who heard these rumors thought carefully, and the conditions set by the Imperial Family, along with the series of assessments, did indeed seem tailor-made for Gu Youyou.

So in their view, this was not a rumor; it was a fact.

They truly deceived everyone. The position of consort had long been pre-determined, and people were just fooled by them.

Especially the ministers whose families had daughters participating back then, one by one, they were enraged, feeling their daughters had been deceived and made monkeys out of them, who wouldn't be angry?

Prime Minister Zhang was most indignant, leading the charge: "My daughter Shiyu cried several times for not being selected, believing that despite years of hard study, she was outshined by a village girl with more talent. She even didn't pick up a pen for half a year because of this."

Prime Minister Zhang's indignant face clearly indicated that his daughter's talent was hit hard, even doubting life, he was furious to the point of wanting to hit someone, if only Gu Youyou were not here.

Lin Xingyi, however, disliked these words, and said, "Prime Minister Zhang, are you saying Ning Wang Consort's talent is just an undeserved reputation? Or are you saying Second Miss Zhang lost and is unwilling to accept it? Don't forget, the writing samples of Youyou were chosen by all the ministers together with the emperor, that can't be faked, right?"

Prime Minister Zhang snorted coldly, "It's hard to say whether Gu Youyou truly has talent, especially when such a major event as marriage can be concealed so cleverly, that small piece of writing sample, who can be certain?"

"So Prime Minister Zhang means Ning Wang Consort's victories were all fake?" Jie Huanzhi snorted coldly.

Jie Huanzhi, Prime Minister Zhang, and Lin Xingyi were all influential figures in the Imperial Court. Previously, Lin Xingyi was more low-key because his wife was a lady from the Ducal Residence, and he felt guilty.

Yet, when it came to Gu Youyou being criticized, he stood out and spoke for her unapologetically.

With these three starting to argue fiercely, other ministers who initially wanted to chime in closed their mouths, opting to watch first, and see which side wins before speaking.

Chapter 1557: Does Gu Youyou Have What It Takes?

Chancellor Zhang sneered disdainfully: “Ah! It’s not me who said everything is fake; it was actually you, Minister Jie, who said it.”

“Hmph, isn’t that what you meant?” Jie Huanzhi retorted with a dark face, raising his voice.

“Yes, that’s exactly how I see it.” Chancellor Zhang didn’t back down either, “How can a mere village girl have talent? Who’s she fooling? If village girls can become Top Scholars, then do all those studious scholars who have been immersed in books since childhood still need to take the examination?”

Lin Xingyi stepped forward, coldly stating: “It seems Chancellor Zhang looks down on village folks. Though I’m not talented, I did achieve Top Scholar while farming. According to what you say, Minister Zhang, am I also a fake?”

Lin Xingyi’s Top Scholar title was personally appointed by the Emperor; who dares call it fake? Wouldn’t that be questioning the Emperor?

Chancellor Zhang, who usually confronts everything and everyone, was suddenly at a loss for words.

Jie Huanzhi continued: “I heard from my second daughter-in-law that each season’s new design sketches at Manxiu Building are all designed by the Ningwang Princess. During the selection process for the princesses, when it came to embroidery, the Ningwang Princess made a dress themed on spring flowers, which won everyone’s applause. Does Chancellor Zhang also consider her a fake?”

The ministers are all men; they know little about clothing. These domestic matters are taken care of by their wives at home; they just wear them.

While they might not know about other clothes, the outfits from Manxiu Building are well-known to all.

In their homes, whether it's the primary wife or concubines, discussions on clothes often revolve around those from Manxiu Building; it's hard for them not to know.

Chancellor Zhang pursed his lips, his voice becoming softer, and his arrogance wasn't as rampant as before, lamely saying: "What's so great about knowing some embroidery? Which woman's family doesn't have someone who knows embroidery? If any woman who can embroider qualifies to marry into the Ningwang Residence, it would overflow already."

"…"

Jie Huanzhi said calmly: "Since you've admitted that the Ningwang Princess does indeed surpass the second Miss Zhang in embroidery, then let's talk about calligraphy. If the second Miss Zhang is unwilling to accept her defeat, I could shamelessly ask the Ningwang Princess for a piece of her calligraphy. I wonder if Chancellor Zhang dares to have the second Miss Zhang write a piece to compare?"

"Hmph, what's there to be afraid of? If she has the skills, let her write it face to face!"

"Write it then, come, come, let's go now…" Their tempers flared, reaching a confrontational point, neither yielding.

Everyone noticed that the quarrel in Taihe Hall had grown over unrelated matters, and some perhaps thought it was damaging to the nation's dignity, so they spoke up to urge restraint.

"Chancellor Zhang, Minister Jie, both of you shouldn't get too agitated. Let's discuss these matters after the court session."

"Hmph, who's afraid? Is deceiving people now justified or something?" Chancellor Zhang showed an unafraid attitude.

Jie Huanzhi didn’t back down either, saying: “I don’t know if the Ningwang couple deceived anyone, but I strongly disagree with you calling the Ningwang Princess’s talents mere hollow fame.”

“Who doesn’t know your daughter-in-law is close to Gu Youyou? What? Has the ever impartial Minister Jie started showing favoritism?”

“I’m merely stating the facts!”

“That’s debatable…”

“Here comes the Emperor!” With Eunuch Wan’s prolonged shout, their argument ceased.

Both glared at each other but respectfully greeted the Emperor.

The Emperor sat on the Dragon Throne, lowered his eyes, and gazed at the court attendees, saying: “Even from afar, I heard my beloved ministers showing great interest in some matters. Tell me, what are you all discussing?”

Chapter 1558: Dispute

Everyone looked back and forth, and finally, their gaze landed on Prime Minister Zhang.

Because regarding this matter, the most vehement and indignant was Prime Minister Zhang. He even blamed the Ning Prince’s wife for his second daughter’s inability to marry, claiming it was due to favoritism.

Prime Minister Zhang stepped forward, saluted the emperor, and said, "Your Majesty, recently there has been a matter spreading throughout the streets and alleys. I don’t know if it has reached the palace."

"What matter?" The emperor raised an eyebrow and asked.

"This matter is neither too significant nor too minor. It’s merely about the Ning Prince and his wife. It’s just some rumors from the streets, and I dare not discuss them rashly. If Your Majesty pardons me from saying it without consequence, only then will I speak."

"Oh, is that so?" The emperor looked at Prime Minister Zhang indifferently, with a thoughtful expression. After a moment, he said, "Since Lord Zhang says it’s merely street rumors, there’s no need to say it."

Prime Minister Zhang: "..." Shouldn’t the emperor have pardoned me from consequence?

Such an unexpected response left Prime Minister Zhang speechless, unable to utter a word.

Lin Xingyi and Jie Huanzhi both laughed, especially Lin Xingyi, who was visibly relieved.

He, after all, knew the facts; he knew Gu Youyou and Jin Zijin were married long ago. When Gu Youyou was staying at the Lin Residence, Jin Zijin would still climb over the wall every night to see her.

Had the emperor inquired, he really wouldn’t have known how to answer.

Not telling the truth would be a crime against the emperor!

Jie Huanzhi looked at Prime Minister Zhang gleefully and saluted the emperor, saying, "Your Majesty is wise. How can we discuss the Prince based on some unreliable street rumors? Your Majesty, I suggest investigating the instigators thoroughly and then interrogating them properly."

"Jie Huanzhi, don’t get carried away!" Prime Minister Zhang huffed and glared.

"How am I getting carried away? I am merely adhering to the truth."

"Hmph, what exactly is the truth? Perhaps summoning the Ning Prince and his wife to the court and questioning them properly would make it clear."

The two of them began quarreling again, disregarding the emperor sitting high up.

The emperor slammed his hand on the table, and everyone finally fell silent.

"Hmph, did neither of you hear my intention clearly? Are street rumors now to be brought to court for discussion? If you dare to slander the Prince again, don't blame me for punishing you two!"

It was only then that the two ceased this topic.

Jie Huanzhi did not feel pleased because the emperor forcibly suppressed this matter. Instead, he was worried.

The emperor's unusual suppression of this matter for the Ning Prince and his wife suggested he knew something. Could it be that the selection of brides that year was merely a facade, and the whole world was deceived?

Prime Minister Zhang did not say much more, because he knew the truth. The emperor could suppress it for a while but not forever. The more he acted this way, the more it showed their guilty conscience, and that was quite good.

...

Gu Youyou was not idle either. Upon learning that the rumor about her and Jin Zijin deceiving the public was spreading, she immediately had people blend in among those instigators, tracing the source of the rumors to a certain woman named Chen on West Street.

"Princess, those words were spread by that Chen Mashi. Do you want us to bring her in?"

Gu Youyou narrowed her eyes and said, "Yes, of course, but not by you all. Find some street hooligans and have them put her in a sack!"

Though the guard had many doubts in his heart and felt it inappropriate for the princess to engage in such a secretive act of using a sack, he said nothing more and went to the street to find some hooligans, who then, holding sacks, intercepted Chen Mashi as she went out alone.

Chapter 1559: Brought In

Since Gu Youyou doesn’t plan to openly catch the troublemaker, she naturally won’t show her true face, nor let anyone bring her into the Prince Residence.

In a secluded courtyard, Gu Youyou changed into a black outfit and donned a cloak that could cover her face, then sat in the main hall.

In the pitch-black room, there was only a beam of light the size of a thumb coming in from the ceiling. Gu Youyou lifted the fabric of the cloak and looked around, feeling quite satisfied with this place.

The dark and narrow space made the beams appear higher, making it a good place to conduct an interrogation.

"Princess Consort, they’ve arrived!" a guard disguised as a cleaner hurried in to inform Gu Youyou.

Gu Youyou quickly lowered the cloak’s curtain and said, "Got it, let them bring her in!"

Soon, two cunning thugs carried a sack into the room.

They were slightly surprised to see someone wrapped in black clothes sitting in the dark room, but said nothing more, for as soon as they dropped the sack, Gu Youyou tossed them a pouch of money.

They quickly opened the pouch to check the money inside and, finding a substantial amount, broke into a grin revealing their yellow teeth.

"Boss, if you need this kind of business in the future, just call on us. We handle such jobs swiftly, so you can rest assured!"

"Mm, off you go!" Gu Youyou said in a deep voice.

She deliberately made her voice low and hoarse, sounding like a sixty-year-old woman.

The two thugs, with many thanks, left with the money, followed by the cleaner outside.

He closed the door properly and then opened the sack containing the person.

The person inside was unconscious!

Gu Youyou indifferently said, "See if it’s her!"

The guard nodded, lit a lamp to verify if it was Aunt Chen.

Seeing that it was indeed her, he nodded to Gu Youyou and extinguished the lamp.

Then he took a basin of cold water and splashed it on Aunt Chen, who shuddered and woke up.

"Ah, who are you, and where is this?"

In the dim light, she could barely see two figures, but couldn’t make out their faces.

Of course, with Gu Youyou wearing a cloak, she wasn’t afraid even if the light was slightly brighter.

Upon seeing the situation, Aunt Chen knew she was in trouble, and recalling that she saw two thugs before she passed out, she naturally thought the other party was after money.

After all, she recently completed a major task for a mysterious person who was quite satisfied and paid her a lot.

Making a big sum, it’s possible to attract thieves!

So she cried out in panic, "Don’t harm me, how much silver do you want? I have silver!"

The guard beside Gu Youyou looked at her in surprise.

But Gu Youyou had already predicted that she would react this way.

She smiled faintly and said, "Madam Chen might have misunderstood. We don’t want your silver; on the contrary, we’re here to give you silver."

With that, Gu Youyou threw out a large money pouch, containing not silver, but a substantial amount of gold.

In the dim light, the gold was dazzling to the eyes.

Aunt Chen stared at it, almost mesmerized.

Gold, such a big piece of gold?

"Ma... Madam, what is this..." Aunt Chen stammered with a slight tremble in her voice, holding the gold. "What do you want me to do?"

There’s no such thing as free silver or gold in this world, even when that mysterious person made her a fortune, there were conditions attached.

To speak ill of Ning Wang and Ning Wangfei is not something an average person would dare to take on; she only accepted it with the mindset of the bold prosper and the timid starve.

Chapter 1560: Miss Du Can’t Sit Still Any Longer

And these two people in front of her were giving her gold, so what were their conditions?

Gu Youyou's lips curled into a faint smile, greedy for money?

Those who are greedy for money are despicable, yet they are also the easiest to deal with.

She said, "Whatever amount of silver they give me, I will give you the same amount in gold. The premise is that at critical moments, you must listen to me!"

Aunt Chen was also a smart person. Upon hearing this, she immediately caught the drift, her brows twitched, and she asked, "Madam, are you asking me to switch sides?"

Gu Youyou slowly replied, "I'm merely using their own methods against them. As for you, you're just taking money to solve problems for others. Either way, you're doing it for money, so naturally, you'll work for whoever pays more. Everyone takes what they need, what's wrong with that?"

Aunt Chen felt that taking money from a mysterious person and then betraying them was surely wrong, but listening to Gu Youyou's words, coupled with the temptation of receiving the same amount in gold, made her reluctant to refuse, though she still honestly took the gold and nodded blankly.

That's right!

She murmured softly, "Everyone takes what they need. He told me what he wanted done, and I've done it. Taking their silver wasn't a loss."

Gu Youyou said with a smile, "Indeed, what I like the most are smart people like those of the Chen Family. You took his money and did the job for him. Now that you've taken my gold, naturally, you'll work for me."

"Yes, yes, Madam, whatever instruction you have, just tell me."

Gu Youyou waved her hand and said, “You go back first. When the time comes, someone will reach out to you.”

…

Rumors continued to escalate, and everyone was increasingly worried about Gu Youyou.

Yet looking at her herself, she appeared nonchalant about it all.

Miss Du was uneasy and went to ask Gu Youyou again, “How do you plan to deal with this situation? Right now, Prince Ning isn’t around. Should I speak to Father and Zhonglin to see if they can come up with a way to suppress these rumors?”

Gu Youyou was meticulously teaching Jin Xuyao how to write characters, without raising her head, she quietly said, “Rumors are things that, even if suppressed, people will only refrain from saying openly. What use is that? People who don’t know the truth will just think I’m feeling guilty.”

“But didn’t you say that you indeed married Prince Ning a long time ago and that the consort selection was actually prepared for you?”

Gu Youyou put down the pen and whispered to Jin Xuyao, “That’s all for today. Go find Xiang Chun and the others to play.”

“Mother Consort, I haven’t finished writing!” Jin Xuyao lifted his head, eyes looking at Gu Youyou with grievance.

Gu Youyou looked at the half-written copybook and was momentarily stunned. She initially said she would teach him to finish writing this page, but with Miss Du’s arrival, only half the page was written.

Telling a lie to a child seemed not quite right, but she had serious matters to discuss with Miss Du at the moment.

Gu Youyou hesitated for a moment and said, “Write this much for now, finish the rest after lunch!”

Jin Xuyao’s naive and chubby appearance was very endearing, as he scratched his head, troubled, “But after lunch, I have to nap.”

Gu Youyou: “…”

“Then after your nap!”

Looking at his somewhat miffed Mother Consort, Jin Xuyao nodded grudgingly.

When he reached the doorway, he suddenly turned back and smilingly asked Miss Du, “Do you have a kid at home that is the same age as me?”

Miss Du’s son, Jie Yi, and Jin Xuyao were born on the same day, almost mistaken as twins; this was something Gu Youyou had already told Jin Xuyao.

Miss Du was momentarily taken aback, then laughed, saying, “Yes, indeed, our Yiyi and the Little Prince were born on the same day. Does the Little Prince want to play with Yiyi?”