Farmhouse 1561

Chapter 1561: Appealing to the Taihe Hall

Currently, the child is too young. Gu Youyou originally planned to wait until he grew older to introduce him to more little friends, but looking at Jin Xuyao, he seems quite impatient.

Jin Xuyao nodded eagerly and said, “I do want that. Can Aunt Du bring Yiyi over tomorrow?”

“Yiyi is older than you. You can call him Brother Yiyi!” Gu Youyou said with a smile.

“But it’s still Yiyi; that’s what Aunt Du calls him!”

“Aunt Du is his mother!” Gu Youyou explained.

“Then Yiyi can call me Xuyao; that’s what my mother calls me too!”

This little rascal, it’s just impossible to have him call Yiyi Brother; if this continues, it’ll get confusing.

“Fine, fine, call him whatever you like! Now you can go out and play!” Gu Youyou said in exasperation.

After Jin Xuyao left, Miss Du finally said, “Xuyao has grown up in the palace these years, but he doesn’t seem estranged from you.”

Speaking of not being estranged, it made Gu Youyou angry, recalling the moment she saw him in the secret room, he didn’t recognize her at all.

It’s normal not to recognize someone, but it would be better if no one recognized anyone. Instead, he recognized his father, which made her so jealous.

Gu Youyou said, “How can he not be estranged? When I first came back, he didn’t recognize me. It’s only recently that our relationship has improved a bit.”

Miss Du nodded gently and said, “That’s true; you did leave Beijing when he was just starting to remember people.”

Gu Youyou’s face darkened, and she cursed, “That damn Yu Jizi. Fortunately, the suffering wasn’t in vain, and he’s finally dead.”

“Oh, by the way, did you ask about my cousin’s marriage? What did the Tao Family say?”

Compared to those past events, Gu Youyou was more concerned about current matters.

The other day, the old lady from the Lin Family also sent someone to ask.

Miss Du sighed and said, “You have so many things on your plate, yet you still worry about others. Don’t worry; I’ve asked about it. Regarding the matter between Lin Gongzi and Miss Tao, I originally planned not to trouble you and let the families handle it themselves, but you still ended up asking.”

“Hmm?” Gu Youyou was delighted and said, “Do you mean it’s settled?”

Miss Du nodded with a smile and said, “That’s right, it’s all settled. We’ve invited the best matchmakers in Beijing, and the first betrothal gifts should be delivered today!”

“The betrothal gifts are already being delivered?” Gu Youyou was quite surprised, “So soon!”

“Yes, both families are in a hurry, and they’re no longer young. I mentioned it the day before yesterday, and the Lin Family invited matchmakers yesterday, preparing betrothal gifts to deliver to the Tao Family.”

Gu Youyou was choked up hearing the phrase “not young anymore.”

How old are they exactly, and they’re already called not young?

Comparison is the death of happiness; truly, you can’t compare.

“Now I can rest assured. Next, it’s time to arrange a marriage for Lin Zixin, right?”

Miss Du stared wide-eyed and said, “Really, I think you should handle your own affairs first. You don’t know, everyone is so worried about your matters. And how coincidentally, Prince Ning happens to be absent.”

“What is there to worry about?” Gu Youyou laughed, “We’ll talk after going to Taihe Hall.”

“Going to Taihe Hall?” Miss Du was utterly shocked, looking at her, and said, “If this matter is brought to Taihe Hall, it means you’re facing punishment. This is deception against the whole nation. I heard that many unsuccessful candidates have jointly submitted petitions for the emperor to thoroughly investigate this matter, demanding an explanation from you and Prince Ning.”

“All the better!” Gu Youyou said calmly, “I indeed owe everyone an explanation, and I’m looking forward to going to Taihe Hall.”

Chapter 1562: Drunken Questions

Miss Du: "..."

She’s so confident, what else do they have to say?

But they all know that Gu Youyou and Jin Zijin were already married in Lotus Village, that’s a fact, isn’t it? What other method does she have to turn the tables?

After sending off Miss Du, Searcy leaned against the door, laughing maliciously: "I also want to know what method you plan to use to turn the tables?"

Gu Youyou put away the unfinished calligraphy on the table, a cold smile playing at her lips as she said: "Do you think these people are just looking for trouble over a small matter to offend the Ningwang Residence?"

Searcy raised an eyebrow: "How is it a small matter? Marriage is a lifelong affair, especially when it involves marrying into the Imperial Family."

"Ha!" Gu Youyou said: "Do you think everyone is a top pick? There are plenty of sensible people in this world; do they really have no self-awareness about whether their daughter can become the Ningwang Consort? The reason they are bitterly opposed to me is driven by self-interest.

And for these common folks, the most direct motivation is money. Those who stir up trouble probably forgot, this lady lacks nothing but money. Heh heh, Searcy, just watch how I will crush the troublemaker with Silver!"

Upon hearing Gu Youyou say this, Searcy thought that the person trying to harm Gu Youyou was going to be really unlucky.

...

Gu Wu is oblivious to worldly affairs, idly squandering the Zhang Family's Silver at various taverns in Beijing, indulging in food and drink, and befriending some low-character drinking buddies.

Everyone knows he is the biological father of the Fish Manor's boss, Erya, yet strangely enough, this biological father has gained the favor of Chancellor Zhang and now resides at the Chancellor Residence.

The Fish Manor boss isn't short of money, the Zhang Family has wealth and power, anyone who can make connections with these two relationships naturally enjoys interacting with him.

In just half a month, Gu Wu has become a bit of a local celebrity in Beijing.

"Brother Gu, why haven't your two children recognized you yet, have you entered the gate of Fish Manor?"

Gu Wu threw a pouch of money on the table angrily: "I can go in anytime I want, just feel it’s not the right time yet."

He lowered his voice and said: "Shhhh! I can’t leave the Chancellor Residence for now; if my two Eryas recognize me, wouldn’t I have to move to their house and live with them? But right now, I can’t live with them, I have a big task to complete at the Chancellor Residence, understand? A big task!"

Today, Gu Wu was a bit tipsy.

Several drinking buddies poured him a drink, persuaded him to drink a glass, and then asked: "May I ask, Brother Gu, what big task?"

They’ve always been curious why Chancellor Zhang would take Gu Wu in, so naturally, they wouldn’t miss such a good opportunity and pressed him.

"Shhhh!" Gu Wu made a hush gesture, saying: "The time is not right; I can’t reveal the secret!"

The people persuading him to drink were slightly stunned, thinking Gu Wu probably needed a few more drinks, so they quickly poured a few more for him and urged him to drink them down.

"Fine, fine, let’s not talk about it, the important thing is for Brother Gu to eat well and drink well."

"Mm, eat well and drink well!" Gu Wu said with a hiccup.

Seeing him staggering, one of them sitting opposite quickly signaled to another.

That person then asked in a low voice: "No matter how good the food in this tavern is, it probably doesn’t compare to what the chef at Chancellor Zhang’s house can make, so why doesn’t Brother Gu stay in Chancellor Zhang’s manor and enjoy the chef’s skills, instead choosing to come out for a modest drink? Chancellor Zhang surely has a lot of good wine stored too, doesn’t he?"

Gu Wu chuckled and said mysteriously, "I go out drinking for a reason."

"What reason?" Everyone was surprised.

"Oh, it’s because Chancellor Zhang is going to help me with something!"

"Chancellor Zhang is helping you?"

In these times, who would help someone without a reason? Especially someone like Chancellor Zhang, how could he help a homeless man like you without a reason?

Who doesn’t know that Gu Wu begged his way to Beijing?

"Shh, I’ll tell you a secret!"

"What secret?" The more mysterious Gu Wu acted, the more curious everyone became.

"I’m going to become royalty soon, be related to the emperor by marriage!"

"What?" Everyone was incredibly shocked.

Everyone knows Gu Wu is the uncle of Princess Gu Youyou of Prince Ning, which already makes him royalty. But how could he become related to the emperor by marriage? He only has two children, and his daughter is already married! And the emperor doesn’t have an unmarried princess. Could it be that Gu Wu has another daughter that everyone doesn’t know about?

"Oh, Brother Gu can now become the emperor’s in-law? Oh, Brother Gu?"

Just as they were intrigued further by Gu Wu, the speaker fell asleep midway and was snoring.

Someone regretfully said, "Oh well, let’s just send him back. We won’t get anything more out of him today!"

Every day, attending to a drunkard like Gu Wu was terrible luck for those assigned to his courtyard.

The maids in the east wing resigned themselves to clean up Gu Wu and get him to bed, while Gu Shuisheng in the west wing was engrossed in reading a book by candlelight.

Servants would report to Chancellor Zhang on the daily affairs of Gu Wu and Gu Changsheng.

Gu Wu, as expected, was becoming increasingly known in Beijing.

When speaking of Gu Wu, people could always say a few things about him.

Like the old man from Erya Fish Manor, the uncle of Princess Ning, and the beggar taken in by Chancellor Zhang.

But Gu Changsheng was somewhat peculiar.

Though he claimed to be a beggar from a farming family, he could read and write, and his demeanor was cultured, not at all a natural beggar.

Chancellor Zhang sent people to investigate Gu Shuisheng’s background, but they wouldn’t return anytime soon.

However, he discovered Gu Shuisheng could read, so he intentionally left some books in his path.

Initially, he would sit where the books were left, reading them and waiting for the owner.

Later, he roughly understood the situation, smiled lightly, and took the books back to read slowly.

The books Chancellor Zhang gave him became increasingly complex.

The Zhang Family was famed for its literary grace; all Zhang family members, male or female, were more talented than other children, and their collection of books was unmatched.

Gu Shuisheng read with great interest, while Chancellor Zhang, stroking his beard, found it increasingly amusing.

The next day, Gu Wu went out as usual.

He first made a scene outside Erya Fish Manor, then invited his rogue friends for meat and drinks.

Chancellor Zhang, after court, sent someone to summon Gu Shuisheng.

Gu Shuisheng went to the usual place where he found books, but this time no book was there; he was disappointed when the butler approached.

"Young Master Gu, our master invites you to the study."

Chapter 1564: Gu Shuisheng

Butler Zhang emphasized the word "study" heavily, and upon hearing it, Gu Shuisheng could almost confirm that the person who frequently borrowed books was Chancellor Zhang.

He carried a hint of concern, pondered for a moment, and said respectfully, "I trouble Butler Zhang to lead the way!"

From the moment he decided to read, he could no longer hide it.

So be it, he was merely someone who could read.

Guided by Butler Zhang, Gu Shuisheng entered Chancellor Zhang's study.

Chancellor Zhang's study was unique; the walls were divided into compartments, all of which were now opened by Chancellor Zhang, revealing the books stored within.

Three floors in total, filled with all kinds of books, which startled Gu Shuisheng.

He had never seen such an extensive collection before.

Chancellor Zhang emerged from behind a screen, smiling faintly, and said, "Shuisheng, I heard you enjoy reading?"

Gu Shuisheng was momentarily taken aback, nodded slightly, and then saluted, saying, "In response to Chancellor Zhang, Shuisheng indeed has this hobby."

"Hahaha..." Chancellor Zhang laughed heartily, saying, "Loving to read is good. In books, one can find houses of gold, in books, one can find beauties like jade. Coincidentally, the Zhang Family is a renowned literary family in Beijing. In this city, if the Zhang Family dares to claim the second place, no one would dare claim first. It seems Gu brother bringing Shuisheng to my Zhang Family is also a matter of fate. Shuisheng, from now on, for the sake of this rare fate, I have decided to let you browse the books here freely, just like my own children."

Gu Shuisheng was overjoyed and quickly said, "Then I thank Chancellor Zhang!"

He was delighted to see the books, yet thinking that Chancellor Zhang might exploit his father for some unsavory purposes gave him a sense of guilt.

Books obtained through such means, what could he say?

He merely felt that the person whom Chancellor Zhang schemed against was unfortunate.

As Gu Shuisheng earnestly browsed through the multitude of books, Chancellor Zhang, holding a book, sat leisurely by the side, humming the current season’s popular tunes and sipping tea intermittently.

Seemingly indifferent, he would intentionally or unintentionally glance at the books Gu Shuisheng switched, noting what he was reading.

The books he chose to read left him somewhat surprised.

With his experienced gaze, he could even participate in today’s imperial examination.

Chancellor Zhang sat up straight, put down the teacup, and said, "Shuisheng, can you write essays?"

No matter how well one can read, if they can’t write essays, or write poorly, it is of no use. This is the flaw of the imperial examination. Chancellor Zhang knew well that a person’s talent isn’t necessarily reflected in how well they write essays.

Gu Shuisheng turned to look at Chancellor Zhang, somewhat surprised.

After a moment, he nodded and said, "I can write a little!"

In truth, he wrote essays very well, and had it not been for an incident, he should have participated in the last imperial examination.

But who could predict the affairs of the world? Reality was as it was, and no past glory could change the fact that he had become a beggar now.

Chancellor Zhang, lost in thought, suddenly had a bold idea.

He stood up and approached Gu Shuisheng, stroking his beard as he observed him up and down.

He stood erect, as straight as a pine. Even when facing him, there wasn’t a trace of fear in his eyes, unlike the usual hunched posture of ordinary beggars.

Such cultivation was not just about extensive reading but also linked to the environment he grew up in.

He wasn’t a born beggar, nor should he have become one.

Who exactly was this beggar rescued by Gu Wu?

Chapter 1565: Can You Write an Essay?

Even after spending years as a beggar, he still couldn’t bend his upright back.

"Chancellor Zhang?" Feeling somewhat uncomfortable as Chancellor Zhang gazed at him with an unusual look.

"Hmm, write an article for me to see!" Chancellor Zhang said with a smile.

"Write an article?" Since Chancellor Zhang had asked, he wasn’t surprised that Chancellor Zhang would want him to write an article.

"On what topic?" he asked again.

"Just..." Chancellor Zhang looked around and, after thinking for a moment, said, "On the topic of ’The Prince Breaks the Law and is Punished Like a Commoner!’"

Gu Shuisheng was taken aback, his face turning a bit pale.

Though he had stayed inside the Chancellor Residence reading books, he was still aware of the uproarious rumors outside.

Miss Zhang Shiyu, the daughter of Chancellor Zhang, participated in the concubine selection contest with the current Princess Ning, but Miss Zhang lost in the final round to the current Princess Ning. She

had been dissatisfied ever since she learned from her adoptive father, Gu Wu, that they were actually in a marital relationship long before.

And that Princess Ning was his sister, whom he had never met (he is the adoptive son of Gu Wu).

These days, they had been scheming against that Princess Ning. His adoptive father, Gu Wu, was running around every day because of these matters, all of which he was aware of.

Yet, Chancellor Zhang was asking him to write an article on ’The Prince Breaks the Law and is Punished Like a Commoner’ at this time.

’The Prince Breaks the Law and is Punished Like a Commoner’? It sounds nice to say it that way, but it’s not really true.

Ordinary commoners can’t really be compared to the princes.

Let’s not forget that it’s the prince’s father who rules the land, and if the father is partial and protective of his son, who dares say anything?

Therefore, how this article should be written was worthy of careful thought. A poorly written piece might lead to being used by Chancellor Zhang as a scapegoat, becoming a casualty of their struggle.

"What, can’t write?" Chancellor Zhang asked, seeing that Gu Shuisheng didn’t look very good.

Gu Shuisheng pressed his lips together and said, "It’s not that I can’t write, but it’s challenging to write, especially when it involves discussing princes recklessly..."

"Oh! Shuisheng, you’re being too cautious." Chancellor Zhang said with a faint smile, "Write it, I’ll read it, and after that, I’ll destroy it right in front of you without leaving a trace."

Chancellor Zhang seemed determined to have him write this article titled "The Prince Breaks the Law and is Punished Like a Commoner," and he, a beggar under the roof of others, seemed to have no choice but to comply.

Ever since he narrowly escaped death, he had been adapting to circumstances, losing the right to refuse.

He had become a high-class beggar, exchanging articles for food and drink, which was quite fair.

Gu Shuisheng lightly nodded and said, "Shuisheng will go back now and write it. Tomorrow, I'll bring the article for Chancellor Zhang to review."

Chancellor Zhang smiled with satisfaction and said, "That's the right spirit, go on!"

...

The rumors grew increasingly fervent, and on this day, Gu Youyou finally received a summons from the guard by His Majesty's side.

She knew such a day would come, and it approached quickly.

Considering the timing, she had been getting up early to dress decently and appropriately for the past two or three days.

It was essential to first suppress the opponent in demeanor.

"Princess Ning, His Majesty invites you to Taihe Hall!"

It happened to be during the early court session, which was especially trying for her uncle and Minister Jie, battling verbally with Chancellor Zhang's faction every day for her wasn't easy. Even Minister Jie, who was loyal solely to His Majesty, was now being said to be part of the Ning Prince's faction.

Such is the nature of power struggles; even though the princes have good relations and aren't competing, some idle ministers still dispute on their behalf, creating factional disputes often without anyone realizing.

Chapter 1566: Gu Youyou Is a Ruthless Merchant

When Gu Youyou appeared, the court was still in a heated debate.

"If they were already married back in Lotus Village, it's easy to find out, but I'm afraid she won't dare to admit it!" Prime Minister Zhang sneered.

On this point, those who knew the real situation felt somewhat guilty.

Lin Xingyi said, "Even if they were married long ago, what of it? Youyou's talents surpass all the daughters of noble families, and her abilities are evident to everyone."

"Abilities? Do you mean the ability to deceive?" Prime Minister Zhang laughed aloud: "Lord Lin, there's a saying that goes, 'No profit without trade.' The most deceitful people in the world are merchants. An item worth one or two pieces of silver, once in a merchant's hand, would be sold for ten. Even then, they claim they're losing money.

Everyone, tell me, isn't this how merchants are? Hmph, the most skilled liars are merchants. Who knows what tricks Gu Youyou used to fool Prince Ning!"

Lin Xingyi's face turned livid with anger, saying, "And where do you find your superiority? If you're so capable, live only on your salary and shut down your family's shops. Indeed, no profit without trade; an item worth one or two sold for ten is because someone is willing to pay. Honest merchants don't engage in coercion."

Even Magistrate Xie's daughter-in-law followed Gu Youyou in business and made a profit. It's not just Magistrate Xie; tell me, which noble family doesn't have shops or estates?

Prime Minister Zhang's sweeping criticism sank even himself, causing great dissatisfaction among everyone.

“Prime Minister Zhang, even though we acknowledge that merchants hold the lowest status in society, there’s no denying that their hard work in transporting goods north and south has been convenient for us.”

“Indeed, for the sake of making a living, shouldn’t we pay a price for their effort?”

“Exactly, earning nine pieces of silver. If the goods from Xining or even Qiuci were brought to Beijing, ninety pieces of silver wouldn’t be too much. Do you realize how arduous the journey from Qiuci to Beijing is for merchants? They also have to guard against robbers along the way!”

“Exactly, Prime Minister Zhang, earning money this way involves risking their lives. Do you think merchants should make no profits? Why not try it yourself?”

Prime Minister Zhang had a triumphant look.

“Ladies and gentlemen, we seem to have forgotten the subject of our discussion today.”

Unintentionally, their discussion seemed to have strayed far from the main issue.

Originally, the topic was about whether Gu Youyou and Jin Zijin knew each other and were married before, pretending not to know to deceive everyone. It had now evolved into whether merchants should earn profits.

The Emperor’s calm composure was developed to perfection long ago. No matter how fierce the court debate, it wouldn’t disturb him as he dozed off.

“The Princess Consort of Ning arrives!” With the eunuch’s sharp voice outside, the Emperor finally opened his eyes and sat up straight.

The chattering crowd in the court also stopped their arguments.

Gu Youyou was dressed in the formal attire of the Imperial Family's daughter-in-law today, elegant and dignified. She walked in with head held high, her demeanor such that no one would believe she had once been a village girl, and a merchant, a doctor at that.

Such as she was, she appeared every bit a lady of a noble family, a woman deserving to be a consort of a prince.

"Greetings, Father Emperor!" Gu Youyou respectfully saluted. Prime Minister Zhang's eyes were full of disdain, thinking Gu Youyou was utterly shameless.

The Emperor raised his eyes and said blandly, "Rise."

"Thank you, Father Emperor!" Gu Youyou expressed her gratitude calmly.

Chapter 1567: Who's Afraid of a Confrontation?

Gu Youyou just wanted to enrage Chancellor Zhang. Only the official wives of the princes have the right to call the Emperor "Father Emperor". Their consorts and concubines can only call him "Emperor".

Don't even mention that your Zhang Shiyu has no chance of becoming one of the princes' concubines in this lifetime. Even if she did, she would still have to refer to the Emperor as "Emperor".

"Have you heard the recent city rumors?" The Emperor, seeing Gu Youyou remaining calm and even inadvertently smiling, felt reassured.

Zijin's judgment isn't flawed, having heard this for so long and yet remaining unmoved. Aside from having a plan in mind, who else could remain so composed?

"I have heard," Gu Youyou said.

Chancellor Zhang smiled proudly, "Then tell me, is it true that they are saying you and Ning Wang have long been married?"

"The city rumors aren't unfounded. They speak the truth; indeed, Ning Wang and I have been married for a long time." Gu Youyou smiled brightly, glanced at Chancellor Zhang, and then looked at the Emperor, saying, "In my opinion, we are indeed married and have long been in a marital relationship. Only, Ning Wang says since we did not have a formal ceremony or consummate the marriage, without the rituals and realities of marriage, it isn't a true marriage."

What? What does this mean?

How come they feel confused hearing this?

What does it mean without the rituals and realities of marriage?

Chancellor Zhang had heard that their place in Lotus Village was just a rundown hut with only one small bed. Could it be that one stood while the other lay to sleep?

Chancellor Zhang laughed, "Who are you fooling? When in Lotus Village, they lived together in the same place, a man and a woman sharing a room. Do you still dare to say there was no reality of marriage?

The whole village drank your wedding wine, and you still dare to say there is no marital name? Gu Youyou, I'd like to hear what you say counts as marriage?"

"Hmm, yeah, what counts as marriage?" Gu Youyou blinked her innocent eyes and spread her hands, "I'd like to know too, why don't you tell us, Chancellor Zhang? I hear that the Zhang Family is famous for its scholarly tradition, surely you know these things better than the Ministry of Rites?"

Chancellor Zhang was nearly choked, saying, "I've read the classics and do great things for the country and its people. The small matters of wedding rites are always handled by women. Why should I know them?"

Gu Youyou calmly replied, "Chancellor Zhang, those words are misguided! Only with the wedding rites can a man and woman become husband and wife, and then bear children to continue the human lineage. If those who study the classics don't even understand the wedding rites, isn't that just being a rogue?"

"What, you... you..." Chancellor Zhang suddenly raised his voice, his face turning bright red with anger.

A rogue? But he is a scholar. Back then, he entered the court as a Top Scholar, how could he withstand such an accusation?

Scholars making a mistake is a wrong, scholars drinking and listening to music is elegance, even if scholars are..., it becomes a romantic tale. Among scholars, farmers, artisans, and merchants, scholars' status ranks first, who dares speak ill of scholars?

This Gu Youyou actually said not knowing the wedding rites equates to being a rogue?

And in front of so many people.

Seeing those people trying to suppress their laughter, he was so angry he could have torn Gu Youyou apart.

However, Chancellor Zhang was a significant official, so moderation was necessary, one must give him some face to avoid causing disappointment among others.

Seeing that Gu Youyou not only held her own but could also anger Chancellor Zhang to death, the Emperor had no worries.

Chapter 1568: Afraid of You?

"Assistant Minister of Rites, explain to Princess Ning and Prime Minister Zhang what the Rite of Heqi is? Initially, were Princess Ning and Prince Ning considered husband and wife in their relationship?"

The Assistant Minister of Rites was forcefully brought forward, first saluted the Emperor, then separately saluted Gu Youyou and Prime Minister Zhang, before asking Gu Youyou, "Dare I ask Princess Ning, when you and Prince Ning got married, did you have the wedding ceremony?"

Gu Youyou replied, "No, I was seriously ill at the time, so that part was skipped."

Everyone showed a look of surprise, as they saw the Assistant Minister of Rites ask again, "Then, was anything used to replace the wedding ceremony for Princess Ning?"

"No, there was nothing!"

The expressions in everyone’s eyes grew even stranger.

Prime Minister Zhang slowly had a somber look and didn’t look pleased.

"Then did you drink the Heqi wine, perform the Rite of the Zhou?"

"No!" Gu Youyou continued to shake her head.

Everyone thought it was increasingly odd, what did it mean to live together under the name of a married couple when there was nothing?

The Assistant Minister of Rites had understood by then, nodded towards Gu Youyou, and then turned to the Emperor saying, "Your Majesty, if what Princess Ning said is true, then her relationship with Prince Ning back then couldn’t be considered as husband and wife."

Jie Huanzhi laughed and said, "Since it was not a marriage, then it can’t be considered deception, isn’t that right, Prime Minister Zhang?"

Prime Minister Zhang snorted coldly, "How can it not be? Since the Assistant Minister of Rites said their relationship wasn’t as husband and wife, then why does Princess Ning think they were?"

Gu Youyou, with a half-smile, retorted to Prime Minister Zhang, "Why then, Prime Minister Zhang, did you conclude from a few marketplace rumors that the relationship between me and Prince Ning was that of a married couple? Is it possible that Prime Minister Zhang knows something?"

Prime Minister Zhang felt somewhat guilty but said, "What could I possibly know? Don’t make reckless accusations."

"Whether I’m making reckless accusations, I think Prime Minister Zhang knows very well," Gu Youyou said with a soft smile.

"Hmph..." Prime Minister Zhang snorted coldly and said, "Even if your past relationship wasn’t as husband and wife, isn’t it true that you lived together?"

Gu Youyou raised an eyebrow and said smoothly, "Yes!"

She didn’t believe Prime Minister Zhang could make any more waves and couldn’t out-argue him, the shameless rogue.

His fussing was merely for his daughters who couldn’t be wed and sons who couldn’t find brides.

Originally, she thought his children were quite pitiable, but on second thought, they were unfortunate to have parents like such.

Prime Minister Zhang, having received Gu Youyou’s affirmative response, laughed and said, "As long as you admit it, whether you are true husband and wife or not, in the eyes of others, you are considered a married couple, wouldn’t you agree with what I said?"

"Yes!" Gu Youyou replied indifferently, "Back then it was for medical treatment, the neighbors in the village are quite aware of this. I wonder where Prime Minister Zhang’s information came from, as the people spreading these rumors seem unaware of the situation from back then, what could be the reason?"

Gu Youyou spoke with intent, and while others might not understand, Prime Minister Zhang was well aware.

Of course, the fact that the beggar living at Prime Minister Zhang’s house was Gu Youyou’s uncle wasn’t a secret either.

Prime Minister Zhang sneered and said, "Princess Ning, even if you have a thousand tongues, you can’t deny the fact that you deceived the world. You and Prince Ning knew each other long before, and the Prince threw out such conditions for selecting a consort; everyone thought it was the wishes of the Imperial Family, yet it was all for you. The position of the First Princess Consort was pre-determined, and you deceived so many young women into competing. Can you dare say you weren’t deceiving them?"

Chapter 1569: That Was the Emperor’s Fault

Prime Minister Zhang spoke passionately, gritting his teeth and spitting as he talked.

Everyone frowned, looking at Gu Youyou with some concern for her.

Prime Minister Zhang was pressing hard, regardless of whether Prince Ning and Princess Ning’s relationship could be considered as a marriage, they could not deny that they had deceived the world.

Gu Youyou was momentarily stunned, her expression gradually becoming sorrowful.

After a while, she deeply bowed to everyone, saying, "It was wrong of us to deceive you all, I, Youyou, am willing to apologize in front of the whole world."

The entire crowd was in an uproar, everyone thought Gu Youyou would continue to argue with Prime Minister Zhang, but unexpectedly, she apologized.

So what is this, admitting defeat?

Prime Minister Zhang was smug, even letting out an uncontrollable laugh.

But losing? Can Gu Youyou admit defeat?

While everyone was lamenting, Gu Youyou gradually stood upright, raised her head, and slowly said, "Back then, I was just a village girl about to die from illness, and everyone in Lotus Village knew Zijin was a single hunter from our village. My family sent me to marry, a village girl marrying a hunter didn’t seem inappropriate."

Everyone nodded, whispered among themselves, agreeing with Gu Youyou's words. Meanwhile, they anticipated what she would say next.

"It's just that I was seriously ill back then and couldn't complete the wedding ceremonies, and rural folks in the mountains aren't that particular, naturally considering the sending-off and receiving enough. Only later, due to certain events, we traveled to Lingnan, then to Beijing, and when we arrived in Beijing, everyone knew Zijin's identity at the time, related to an internal struggle within the Dao Family, which I won't elaborate on here.

I hope everyone understands that at that time we couldn't be together under the guise of marriage not out of intent to deceive, but due to unavoidable reasons, solely related to the Dao Family, and not concerning anyone else. Later, Zijin reclaimed his identity, acknowledged his ancestry. Without the Dao Family's constraints, he transformed from a hunter to a prince, what do you think he should do?"

What should he do?

Everyone hadn't reacted when they heard Gu Youyou say again, "Perhaps you think that as a prince, he could naturally disregard the wife of humble origin, especially when there was no real marital relationship, and should marry a daughter of a powerful minister to solidify his position, correct?"

The crowd seemed to catch on to something, nodding repeatedly.

Lin Heyi sighed with relief, knowing this woman, like his sister back then, was uniquely different in this world, her thoughts had an otherworldly quality for the era, consistently bringing astonishment to people.

Prime Minister Zhang's smug look was gradually changing, unable to keep his smile, his expression appeared stiff.

"But Zijin is not that kind of person, at that time, what he thought of was the debt to his wife, he felt without a grand wedding, he was wronging me, so he planned to marry me again."

That seems fine, back then they had no conditions for a wedding ceremony, later appearing as prince and princess in front of everyone, certainly couldn’t just be sent off and received, even if they agreed, the Ministry of Rites wouldn’t agree.

However...

Prime Minister Zhang coldly snorted, "Your remarriage doesn’t concern anyone, but why did you organize a selection for consorts? Wasn’t this deceiving all the women who came to participate?"

"That wasn’t my fault!" Gu Youyou said calmly, then looked at the emperor.

"Father, I’ve heard this had something to do with you?"

The emperor was slightly stunned, somewhat at a loss.

It turned out she counted him in as well.

Chapter 1570: Yes, It’s My Fault

Forget it, considering she once saved my life, I’ll lend her a hand.

Everyone turned their gaze to the Emperor, who was resting his head and nodding off. The Emperor waved his hand and casually said, "Yes, this matter is my fault. I apologize to all of you!"

How could anyone dare to let the Emperor apologize? Once he uttered those words, everyone knelt down, heads touching the ground.

The Emperor, with a hint of weariness, whispered, "Rise, all of you. I speak the truth, and I indeed should apologize to you."

Everyone glanced at each other before slowly standing up.

One by one, they stood respectfully, with heads bowed.

The Emperor continued, "Ning Wang is not like King Jin or Prince Qin. He has never stayed in the Imperial Palace since birth, and I've never seen him. He returned from the common people, inevitably carrying things incompatible with the palace, and he told me he has a wife, an ordinary commoner.

Naturally, I could not accept his commoner wife. I thought, since no one knew of this matter, why not pretend it never happened and let him choose a virtuous and talented wife from the Minister's daughters? But as Youyou said, Zijin is not such a person. He values loyalty and affection and wouldn't dismiss his wife in such a manner. He insisted on marrying Youyou and even quarreled with me over this.

Considering that he was found so late and the father-son reunion wasn't easy, abandoning his wife was indeed inappropriate. So, I gave them an opportunity. If he claims that common woman is so good, then let's give them a chance. If she can still stand out among the noble ladies regardless of birth, then I'll allow them to marry.

This way, we can test Youyou's talents and also the talents of women across the land. After the selection, whether the young ladies truly have merit will become clear. I thought it was a good thing, but I didn't expect those who weren't chosen to think that way, which I didn't anticipate. Yes, exactly!"

Between the lines, the Emperor seemed to be saying those young ladies were quite narrow-minded. He usually spoke little, yet today he managed to speak so much that it equaled his usual speech for ten days. Everyone listened in amazement, feeling that hearing the Emperor speak so much was a sheer delight.

Some even forgot the Emperor was explaining the recent rumors concerning Ning Wang and his princess.

But once they reflected, they felt utterly speechless.

Turns out the Emperor knew everything all along, but why didn't he speak sooner?

Oh, he sat on the Dragon Throne every day, dozing while listening to their heated arguments below? He knew everything yet said nothing.

When did the Emperor become so devious?

Gu Youyou's simple apology and the suggestion of Ning Wang's arrangement better reflected his loyalty and righteousness. The Emperor's explanation was impeccable, thoroughly silencing everyone.

Chancellor Zhang felt as though he swallowed a fly—disgusted yet unable to spit it out, suffocating him.

He calculated extensively but never anticipated the Emperor would speak for them. Given the Emperor's temperament, he should utilize various connections, especially now.

Especially now that the court had dismissed many officials due to the Ducal Residence's affair, with many newcomers promoted. Shouldn't he use this perfect opportunity and utilize marriage alliances to stabilize his power?

Yet, he actually stood up to speak for Gu Youyou. It infuriated him.