Farmhouse 1601

Chapter 1601: Feigning Illness

He clutched his own arm and slammed it to the ground.

Shunzi quickly let go of him, anxiously asking, “What’s wrong, Dad? Are you okay?”

“No, nothing!” Gu Wu said, “These years of being a beggar have taken a toll on my body. I’m full of ailments, afraid that my old illness has acted up again.”

“An illness?” Gu Wu was startled and hurriedly said, “I’ll take you to see a doctor, you can’t delay an illness.”

With that, he was about to pull him.

Gu Wu hurriedly cried out in pain a few more times. Shunzi didn’t know where he had touched or where Gu Wu was hurting, so he had to let go of his hand again without touching him.

Gu Wu grimaced in pain and said, “Don’t, don’t touch me, I can’t be touched. Ouch, it’s killing me, Shunzi, once your father’s ailment acts up, he can’t walk anymore. Hurry and go get a doctor for me, I’ll wait for you right here.”

Shunzi, simple-minded and convinced by Gu Wu’s earnest painful expression, got up and ran towards the distance, still shouting, “Dad, you must wait for me, I’ll be back soon.”

Wait, wait for that naive fool!

Seeing Shunzi had gone far, Gu Wu got up and ran towards the Zhang Residence.

Shunzi looked back and was furious.

Being fooled just like that, now getting him out again would be harder than reaching the sky.

Feeling extremely frustrated, Shunzi was thinking about how to explain this to Erya when Sanbao came looking for him.

“Brother-in-law, you really are here, I’ve been looking for you for quite a while.”

“Sanbao?” Shunzi said in surprise, “Why are you here? Did your sister send you?”

Thinking of how Erya couldn’t bear to stay angry after all, his mood improved a bit.

Sanbao nodded while panting and said, “Yes, my sister asked me to call you back.”

Shunzi was delighted and said, “She’s not angry anymore?”

Sanbao shook his head and said, “Yes, she’s not angry anymore. Aunt Xiang Chun, the maid of the eldest sister, came and explained the ins and outs of the matter clearly. Let’s walk and talk as we go.”

Meanwhile, Zhang Shiyu quietly followed Gu Wu, eavesdropping on their conversation, but didn’t get any useful information, so she left disappointed.

…

The Lin Family was anxious about the union of their young master and young lady. After Lin Shenxing and the Tao Family girl’s marriage was arranged well, they consulted someone to choose an auspicious date soon.

Marrying within less than a month of knowing each other, this could be considered a flash marriage.

Gu Youyou selected some valuable gifts, mainly new glasswork products from Xiguang Residence, to send to them.

In this era, the various glass products from Xiguang Residence were a fashion, referred to as glazed items by them.

The Old Madam Lin held Gu Youyou's hand and said, "I thought you'd be too busy to come, but here you are."

Gu Youyou arrived quite late, just in time.

But she still asked, "I didn't miss the timing, did I?"

The Old Madam Lin said, "No, no, it'll start soon. I'm also just heading there now."

The weddings of ancient times were grand and complex, especially with families like Lin and Tao marrying into each other. The Tao Family was a wealthy family with some prestige, so they were quite particular. The Lin Family, to not lose face, despite the tight schedule, still did everything elaborately.

Starting from welcoming the bride, they kept bustling about until the evening.

When Gu Youyou got married herself, she was exhausted. But compared to being a guest, being the bride wasn't as tiring, after all, she only had to ride in a sedan chair, bow at the altar upon arrival, and then wait in the bridal chamber.

Gu Youyou watched the young Lin Shenxing offering toasts from the low table all the time and thought being the groom is much more exhausting than being the bride.

Chapter 1602: Jin Zijin Is Coming Back

Just looking at it makes me feel exhausted.

Seeing that she'd done enough, she bid farewell to the Lin Family and returned to the Prince Residence by herself.

The servant at the gate was all smiles and hurriedly said to Gu Youyou, “Princess Consort, there’s a letter, seems to be from the Prince.”

From Jin Zijin?

Gu Youyou’s eyes lit up as she immediately snatched the letter.

The letter was sealed with wax, and she eagerly tore it open.

In the sunset, it was Jin Zijin’s beautiful small script.

Yes, beautiful small script.

One would think a man like Jin Zijin would write with a more bold style, yet he preferred this beautiful small script.

It appeared with a touch of delicacy, as if written by a young maiden.

The first time she saw him write like this, she even teased him about it.

He merely explained, “These characters are easy to recognize, not every disciple can read cursive.”

Later Gu Youyou learned that most of his writing was transcriptions of Daoist texts. These books were for the disciples to read, and the small script of the Heavenly Scriptures was more easily accepted.

“Did the Prince say when he might return?” the guard casually asked upon seeing Gu Youyou standing at the entrance reading the letter.

Gu Youyou smiled faintly and said, “Soon, he said he’ll return after this busy period.”

What was the Prince so busy with out of town? Everyone was quite curious, but no one dared to ask.

After finishing the letter, Gu Youyou put it away, brought it into the study, and burned it.

They wanted to build a residence out of town, and this matter had not been told to the Emperor.

Perhaps, with the Emperor's ability, he knew, or perhaps he didn't want to deal with such things, so he remained unaware.

In any case, at this juncture, it was best not to let such matters leak, especially not to leave written evidence for the Emperor to find out.

Thinking about it, the Emperor was indeed somewhat pitiful, having few children to rely on. Jin Fengzhao was one and she had killed herself. Another grown son, Jin Liuying, married off to Nanzhao Country, perhaps never to return to see him again in this life.

Although King Jin didn't consider him an enemy, wanting to be a father was no longer possible.

It's said that the Emperor actually knows everything, he just doesn't say it, watching the Ducal Residence step closer to demise, yet it also troubled King Jin.

And as for how the Empress died, even without anyone saying, everyone could guess roughly, but it definitely had connections with the Emperor.

As for Jin Zijin, abandoned by him from an early age and raised in a Taoist Temple, although it was meant to protect him, he did not grow up at his side. The former Crown Princess Consort died because of him, leaving Jin Zijin with a lingering grudge, preventing him from enjoying the father-son bond.

Only with Prince Qin was it slightly better, yet the Emperor seemed not to want to pass the throne to Prince Qin.

Jin Zijin didn't want to be Emperor, and now he had no suitable heir, only Prince Qin; it was up to him to decide.

Gu Youyou ground the ink, picked up the pen, but didn't know how to reply.

After thinking it over, since he mentioned he would return soon, she decided to tell him the interesting stories that had occurred recently in Beijing to amuse him in his spare time.

With a clear mind, Gu Youyou quickly wrote a reply, completing it in one go.

She dried the finished letter, placed it into an envelope, and sealed it with wax.

At this moment, Xiang Chun rushed in and said to her, "Princess Consort, another letter."

Gu Youyou turned her head and saw Xiang Chun holding a letter much like the one in her hand.

She was slightly surprised, hadn't she just received a letter? How could another one have arrived?

Receiving two letters in quick succession, could it mean something urgent?

She hurriedly took the letter from Xiang Chun's hand, and seeing the handwriting, she was relieved.

Chapter 1603: From Song to Ballad

This was not written by Jin Zijin, it was written by Yue Rujing.

They've been back in Lingnan for a while now, but with the long journey, judging by the time, this was probably a letter sent just a few days after they arrived in Lingnan, maybe just to report their safety. Gu Youyou didn't think much of it, and tore open the sealed wax.

Yue Rujing's letter was quite extensive. First, he reported his safety, and then he said he was getting married, to form an alliance with Nanzhao, as per the emperor's decree.

Gu Youyou frowned. Getting married is one thing, but why emphasize it's the emperor's decree?

Having spent a few months with Miss Duan, Gu Youyou felt Miss Duan was actually quite nice.

Miss Duan had a carefree personality and admired Yue Rujing so much, so she thought their days wouldn't be too hard. In her view, Yue Rujing's reluctance to marry was mostly because of his long stay in the Taoist temple, where his heart had become calm like still water.

But it doesn't matter, those who haven't eaten meat find it disgusting, but once they taste it, they will crave it again.

She put the letter away, placed it in the drawer, to give to Jin Zijin when he returned.

Gu Youyou handed the reply she wrote for Jin Zijin to Xiang Chun, saying, "Have someone send this letter out as soon as possible, hurry up, okay?"

She calculated the time, and if it wasn't fast enough, Jin Zijin wouldn't receive it because he's coming back.

...

Prime Minister Zhang's house arrest was finally lifted, and on this day, Gu Wu was also released from his confinement.

He was used to living a carefree life, and being confined for these few days nearly suffocated him.

In the morning, Prime Minister Zhang told him he could go out for a walk, so he immediately went to the Accountant's Office to draw some silver and ran outside to enjoy himself.

Watching the heap of silver being given to a beggar again, Zhang Shiyu was furious.

"Dad, I said it already, if I can’t get married, half of the Zhang Residence will be mine."

Prime Minister Zhang’s face darkened, saying, "Since when do women inherit the family business? When you get married, Dad will prepare a generous dowry for you, the estate still belongs to your brother."

Zhang Shiyu stomped her foot and snorted, "You’re willing to give money to beggars, but not to me? Have you seen how much silver the old beggar spends in a day? Last time he got cheated out of a bottle of Daughter’s Red wine, that wine’s cost could cover my expenses for a year. Humph, he’s so generous, does he think our family makes money?"

"Alright, alright, women, no matter what age, are always so stingy."

Zhang Shiyu: "..."

"Stop yelling all the time, the show is about to start, just wait."

Zhang Shiyu’s eyes lit up, eagerly asking, "It’s about to start? Finally, when?"

Prime Minister Zhang smiled happily and said, "Soon, very soon, just these days. Oh, by the way, the imperial examination starts today, did Gu Shuisheng go?"

Zhang Shiyu was initially quite happy, but upon hearing her dad talk about either the old beggar or the young beggar, she got annoyed and said, "Yes, yes, Dad, are you waiting for that young beggar to become the Top Scholar and bring glory to the family?"

"You child, how many times do I have to tell you, Dad is just cherishing talent."

...

After being confined by Prime Minister Zhang for several days, Gu Wu only heard bits and pieces from the servants of the Zhang Family about how things were being spread outside, so he knew just a rough idea of what was going on.

This time, he came out of the Zhang Residence and heard firsthand the storyteller enthusiastically narrating at a restaurant, only then did he realize the seriousness of the matter.

He thought, why does Miss Zhang, the family's dominant daughter, keep giving him a hard time? Turns out, it was those guys' twisted rumors, turning it all into the stuff of legends.

"Da da... This Miss Zhang doesn't love wealth or power, but falls for the hotpot of pickled fish. From then on, she sees the chef who cooks fish as someone she yearns for, her lovesickness so severe it can't be managed... Da da da... She doesn't become the main wife but chooses to be a concubine, only to be stopped by a fierce woman, alas, a parent's heart for their children, the prime minister's urgent desire to save his daughter..."

Chapter 1604: Explanation

Gu Wu couldn't endure it any longer and hadn't finished listening, sweating profusely.

He wanted to find those two drinking buddies to clear things up, but he couldn't find them again; their families were gone, and no one knew where they had moved.

Since he couldn't find those two people, does this mean he has to bear all the guilt alone?

Miss Zhang's reputation had become so bad already; she was difficult to marry off, and now she desires to marry a chef as a concubine out of self-deprecation. Isn't it even harder for her to get married?

Could it be that Chancellor Zhang hadn't punished himself severely because he's truly not sane?

Feeling anxious, Gu Wu sat all morning, listening to the storyteller's increasingly absurd words. He believed that tarnishing Miss Zhang's reputation like this, Chancellor Zhang and Miss Zhang would sooner or later not spare him, so he finally couldn't sit still.

He stood up, deciding to explain the truth. No matter what, when he was chased out by Gu Youyou's guards and refused entry by Erya and Sanbao, it was Chancellor Zhang who brought him back, allowing him to experience the endless wealth of the rich.

Even if he dies now, it's not too bad a loss.

"Hold on!" Gu Wu came out of the box and loudly interrupted the storyteller.

The storyteller frowned and said displeasedly: "Who are you? Don't you know you can't interrupt us randomly?"

Gu Wu's fame in Beijing was quite large, and as soon as he stood out, someone immediately recognized him. As he approached, even the storyteller recognized him.

Ever since the incident about Miss Zhang's admiration for Shunzi from Erya Fish Manor emerged, everyone was looking for Gu Wu, but he was hiding in the Chancellor Residence and never came out; their search was in vain.

Who among ordinary people would dare go into the Zhang Family's mansion to take someone?

"Gu Wu? Is it you, Gu Wu?"

The storyteller was extremely surprised, and the listeners were also amazed.

"Ah, Gu brother, you've finally come; it's really difficult to find you."

Gu Wu's expression wasn't very pleasant; he naturally knew why these people were looking for him.

However, it's just as well. Today might as well be an auspicious day. He decided to speak clearly on the storyteller's platform in front of the guests.

Gu Wu hurriedly went up the storytelling platform, grabbed the coarse tea on the storyteller's table and drank it in one gulp, loudly speaking under the curious and expectant gazes: "I know everyone is amazed why Miss Zhang would fancy Shunzi from Erya Fish Manor, isn't that right?"

Everyone nodded; they were indeed very curious.

As for the rumor that Miss Zhang's heart was captured through her stomach by that bowl of fish, everyone listened to it as a joke.

The main issue was how Miss Zhang could have feelings for a fish-cooking chef?

Gu Wu slowly said, "Everyone might have misunderstood my words. I said Miss Zhang was interested in my son-in-law, and my daughter disagreed with her entrance, which is why Chancellor Zhang approached me. Of course, Shunzi from Erya Fish Manor is indeed my son-in-law, but the son-in-law Miss Zhang is interested in is not him."

Everyone: "…"

The storyteller beside him asked in surprise, "How many daughters do you have?"

Gu Wu glanced at him indifferently and continued, "Chancellor Zhang sheltered me when I was about to starve, and it has been a long time, yet I haven't done anything for them but have implicated Miss Zhang's reputation. This secret, I originally intended never to reveal. But I carelessly spoke the wrong words that day due to inebriation; if I don't speak out today, I cannot salvage Miss Zhang's reputation. Although I have once been a beggar, I understand the principle of acknowledging gratitude and reciprocating favors. I cannot harm Chancellor Zhang's family like this, right?"

Chapter 1605: The Son-in-Law I Spoke of Is Prince Ning

The audience below the stage just wants to know what secret he mentioned, who cares about the Zhang chancellor family's misfortune.

Besides, everyone knows that daughters from the Zhang Family are hard to marry off, especially the second miss born of the same mother as the eldest miss. No one wants to marry a venomous woman

who might cut off their family line, right? So, whether Shunzi exists or not, the second miss of the Zhang Family doesn't have a good reputation for marriage.

But after all, it was her mother and sister who did wrong, and she truly has been somewhat wronged.

"Hurry up, tell us, which son-in-law do you fancy?" someone in the audience urged.

To make him speak more fluently, they even tossed a few copper coins into the basket on the stage.

Gu Wu's mouth twitched, about to curse these people for treating him like a beggar, when he was immediately stopped by the storyteller.

"Master Gu, now that you've achieved a notable status, you can look down on this small change, just consider this small change as for the little one."

Gu Wu was startled, as the storyteller mentioned his notable status with those words, his heart was filled with joy, and he nodded with a smile.

Fine then, use it as compensation for your stage.

He was about to seize this opportunity to make himself truly distinguished.

"The son-in-law I'm talking about isn't Erya Yuzhuang's Shunzi, but Ning Prince from the Ningwang Residence!"

"Ah…?" A gasp erupted among the audience.

"The princess of Ningwang Residence, Gu Youyou, is my daughter. I've always been afraid to say this and felt ashamed for others to know. But I can't let my family shame drag down the Zhang chancellor's family. Alas! It's all my fault, admitting it lifts a weight off my heart!"

Showing a face of deep grief and bitterness, the storyteller was listening intently, immediately poured him another cup of tea, and appeased, “Master Gu, please have a cup of plain tea to quench your throat.”

Gu Wu drained the teacup in one go, then continued, “Everyone knows my children don’t acknowledge me and that I angered my father to death. But I’ve never said why I angered him to death. The reason, thinking you might have guessed, is because I did something to wrong my elder brother. The daughter born to my sister-in-law, Youyou, is actually my daughter…”

Everyone felt like they were listening to an epic, this family drama is even more thrilling than stories made up by the storyteller.

“But all of us have been punished; my elder brother and sister-in-law passed away early, and my second brother’s family sent me to the Governor’s Office, and I went to jail. I have atoned for the sins that needed atoning. It’s just this burden in my heart that I can’t get past. Spending years in jail is enough punishment, but this obstacle in my heart, I can’t bring myself to my children, so for years I’ve been wandering around, planning to just be a beggar.”

Everyone quickly asked, “Then how did you come to Beijing?”

Gu Wu sighed deeply and said, “Alas, I saved a child while escaping a disaster. His family fell from riches to poverty, though he used to be a young master of a wealthy family, he almost died as a beggar while wandering. He said his lifelong wish is to have a chance to take the imperial exams. When his parents passed away, he had also promised them he would become the Top Scholar one day. But as a beggar, he has no chance. So, as the exams approach, I thickened my face to bring him to Beijing, to look for Youyou’s help.”

“Then how did you end up at the Zhang chancellor’s house?” someone asked.

This time Gu Wu did not lie and said, “When we arrived, it was already very late. When we went to the Ningwang Residence, the guards there refused to let us in seeing we looked like two beggars. Later, we were seen by Miss Zhang, and she took us back to the Chancellor Residence.”

Chapter 1606: Madam Lin Refuses to Yield

The whole story unraveled like this, and after hearing it, everyone remained silent for a long while.

It truly was more riveting than a fabricated tale.

Gu Wu recounted the story publicly, and it spread so swiftly that it wasn't long before the whole city knew of it.

Opinions varied.

Some sympathized with Gu Wu, because he said he and his sister-in-law were mutually affectionate, but due to the order of seniority, since his elder brother hadn't married yet, as younger brothers, they could only wait in line. As a result of fate, the girl he liked became his sister-in-law.

Everyone could understand this rule, as it applied to every family. Unless the elder brother had special circumstances causing him to remain unmarried for life, only then would parents arrange marriages for younger siblings.

Those who sympathized with Gu Wu felt that it was his parents who mishandled the situation. Logically, the elder brother should marry before the younger. But unfortunately, special circumstances arose, which led to turmoil in the family and its ruin.

Another group, however, felt that Gu Wu had it coming.

Marriage decisions are traditionally determined by parents and matchmakers. You marry whom your parents choose for you; as children, one must comply, or else they are deemed unfilial.

Moreover, regardless of what feelings you previously had for your sister-in-law, since fate no longer links you and now she's your sister-in-law, you should show her the respect due to a sister-in-law.

There's a saying, "A sister-in-law is like a mother," and for this beast to spare neither his mother—imprisonment for a few years is lenient.

Of course, in an attempt to seek forgiveness from everyone, Gu Wu admitted his mistakes and apologized.

People felt he was willing to correct his mistakes and accepted his punishment, demonstrating a relatively decent attitude.

Yet, the most shocking revelation was regarding Gu Youyou, Princess Ning, Gu Youyou of Jisheng Hall, Gu Youyou of Xiguang Residence, suddenly found to be illegitimate.

If one adhered strictly to the law, illegitimate children could be punished severely or demoted to slave status.

But given Gu Youyou's current position and status, how could she be reduced to slavery?

This matter, while significant in terms of state affairs, was ultimately a family matter of others' business, into which outsiders should not intrude unnecessarily.

However, whether defending Gu Wu or criticizing him, or deliberating how to deal with Gu Youyou—they were all merely hearing one side of the story, Gu Wu's perspective.

When this news reached the Lin Family, the Lin Old Madam almost fainted with rage.

In these recent days, the storytelling teahouse was especially bustling, and people gathered there to discuss the matter, whiling away time, with even multiple versions of the story emerging.

One day, the Lin Old Madam, fuming with anger, arrived grandly with her maids and caregivers.

After having been in Beijing for many years, she rarely went out, but this time, that damn Gu Wu dared to slander her daughter's reputation in the storytelling scene. Her daughter and son-in-law's early deaths had always been her secret pain, and now even in death, they couldn't rest in peace—something she could not tolerate.

"Everyone, shut up!"

Hearing the crowd in the venue discussing the matter with relish made the Lin Old Madam furious, and she banged her cane loudly against the door.

The loud noise finally subdued the crowd into silence.

The onlookers didn't recognize the Lin Old Madam, but by her attire and entourage, they could tell she was the matriarch of some official household.

Such senior ladies often held imperial titles and esteemed positions, and offending them would not be wise.

The shop owner hurriedly approached obsequiously and inquired, "Madam, are you here to have tea or to listen to stories?"

The Lin Old Madam jabbed her cane at the ingratiating owner, angrily demanded, "Where is Gu Wu, where's that beast Gu Wu?"

Gu Wu?

Chapter 1607: Another Version

This name is currently at the top of the trending list, and whenever it comes up on the street, everyone has to stop and talk about it for a while.

The shopkeeper laughed repeatedly and said, "Madam, Mr. Gu hasn't come yet today, would you like to sit upstairs and wait for a while?"

"Hmph, wait?" Old Madam Lin lifted her eyes to look around, leaned on her cane, and walked straight to the storyteller's platform, chasing the storyteller off before taking a seat herself.

She huffed angrily and said, "Wait, of course, this old lady will wait. I'll sit here and see if this bastard dares to speak nonsense in front of me."

Everyone looked at each other, unsure who she was.

Someone, however, recognized her and whispered, “She seems to be Old Madam Lin, Lord Lin’s mother, and also the mother of the Princess Consort of Prince Ning.”

“Old Madam Lin?”

“Yes, Old Madam Lin. She’s a well-informed insider; let’s hear what she has to say.”

Gu Wu might not even come, and Old Madam Lin sat there for half the day without seeing him, getting a bit annoyed.

People below whispered, “Why not let the storyteller ask what nonsense Gu Wu spoke?”

“Exactly, this matter has been going around for two days, and no one knows what others are saying; it’s all from Gu Wu. Prince Ning isn’t here, and the Princess Consort hasn’t come out to explain. Finally, Old Madam Lin has come out.”

Several people discussed and waved the storyteller over, who quickly came down.

“What do you gentlemen want from an old man like me?”

Someone said, “While the old madam is here, why don’t you ask her what she says about it? It can’t just be sitting idle, and Gu Wu isn’t here every day.”

The storyteller agreed, thinking she might offer a version, and he could write a new story out of it.

“Don’t forget the tip!” the storyteller said.

“You won’t miss out,” the people below nodded repeatedly, urging him to hurry up.

Receiving a satisfactory answer, he eagerly approached Old Madam Lin.

The storyteller bent at the waist and said with a smile, “Old madam, you said Mr. Gu’s words are nonsense. May I ask what you mean by this? Is there… any hidden truth to it?”

Old Madam Lin snorted coldly and said, “What did he tell you?”

“Mr. Gu said he and Miss Lin were in love back then, and it was you parents who separated them…”

“Bah!” Old Madam Lin spat in the storyteller’s face.

She had been a fierce village woman in the past, cursing and swearing, just to protect her pair of children well.

Back in the day when her family rose, those terrible relatives all wanted to scrape off benefits. Before the family split, her mother-in-law even wanted to take over the money her daughter earned and give it to her other sons for marriage and living.

Because of her fiery nature, no one dared challenge her, so she resolutely took her children and split away to live independently.

Over the years, she became an official’s wife, adept in manners and literature, and few knew what she was like before.

“That bastard boy dares to spread such ridiculous rumors? My daughter and the Gu family’s eldest son had an arranged engagement from when they were very young, set by their grandfather’s generation. When they were discussing marriage, that bastard boy was just a child, not even ten years old. Tell me, could my daughter truly be in love with that brat? Hmph, even the second son of the Gu family wouldn’t dare concoct such lies, yet he dares to say it.”

People didn't know the grievances between the Gu and Lin families, but since their engagement was set by the older generation, Gu Wu must have known Miss Lin was to be his sister-in-law from a very young age.

Chapter 1608: A Story for Everyone

Gu Wu is the youngest son of the Gu Family, and the Lin Family's daughter is the wife of the Gu Family's eldest son. If they were truly involved together, it would indeed be a scandalous affair.

"At the time, we were against my daughter marrying the Gu Family's eldest son. If I had brought my daughter to Beijing, wouldn't she have married someone better than that Gu Family? It was because she had a deep bond with the Gu Family's eldest son since childhood that she couldn't bear to leave," continued Madam Lin, angrily.

Everyone was stunned. If what Madam Lin said was true, then Gu Wu must be lying.

But…

The storyteller wiped his cold sweat and said, "Did Old Master Gu also say the Princess of Ning is his daughter?"

Madam Lin was fuming, taking big puffs of breath, and coldly said, "Isn't he afraid of biting his tongue with such big talk? I could say the Jade Emperor is my son, would you believe it?"

Everyone: "…"

"So whose daughter is the Princess of Ning? My daughter and the Gu Family's eldest son conceived her."

"Who else could it be? Naturally, she's her parents' daughter."

Everyone felt Madam Lin had a point, but what Gu Wu said also seemed somewhat believable.

Someone else asked, “But didn’t Gu Wu enrage Old Master Gu to death over this matter? He shouldn’t be lying about such a thing, right?”

The crowd was in an uproar, saying, “Yeah, who would go around claiming they caused their own father’s death? The proprietors of Erya Fish Manor also said that the reason they disowned Gu Wu was because he angered the old patriarch of the Gu Family to death, leading their mother to commit suicide by jumping into the river.”

It seemed reasonable, for what else could have driven Gu Wu’s wife to her death by jumping into the river?

As for the affairs between Gu Wu and the Gu Family’s eldest son’s wife, and how they died back then, Lin Xingyi and Gu Youyou never told Madam Lin the truth. Lin Xingyi knew his mother’s temper; if she knew, she might cause a ruckus and die of guilt. The people had been dead for many years now, and they all hoped she could live a few more years.

So what Madam Lin knew was the version from many years ago, saying the Gu couple encountered a violent storm on their return from business and drowned in the river.

As for how Gu Wu ended up in jail, wasn’t it because he sold his niece, and the villagers caught him? That’s what Lin Xingyi told her.

Madam Lin said angrily, “How did he anger his father to death? This heartless beast sold his own niece. Back then, he sold Youyou just after she recovered from an illness. Fortunately, she was saved by the Prince of Ning.

At that time, Youyou was already the wife of the Prince of Ning, and the Governor’s Office sentenced him for the illegal trafficking of another man’s wife.”

Oh…?

Everyone exchanged looks, finding that what Madam Lin said seemed reasonable.

Someone remarked, “Trafficking could get you a few years in prison. If it were something more severe, he couldn’t have come out. I think what Madam Lin says makes sense.”

“Everyone has their own version of the story. Perhaps we should wait for Gu Wu to come and ask him.”

What’s the truth? Everyone was confused.

The storyteller was puzzled, saying, “But regardless of whether the Princess of Ning is Old Master Gu’s daughter or niece, if he’s making up such lies, it would be highly detrimental to the Princess of Ning. Why would he do that?”

Madam Lin snorted coldly, “He almost sold Youyou, and Youyou despises him deeply, so naturally, he doesn’t care about her. He fabricated this lie because he doesn’t want Youyou to have a good life. This person’s intentions are vicious; he wants Youyou dead. Just think about it. If it were truly as he says, could he do such a thing to his own daughter?”

Chapter 1609: The Empress Dowager’s Worries

Indeed, everyone suddenly realized.

Gu Wu’s words implied how good his relationship was with that sister-in-law, saying it was his elder brother who intruded forcefully, and he was very distressed about the daughter born to the woman he loved.

In that case, how could he harm his own daughter like this?

Clearly, what Madam Lin said seemed to be more truthful.

Soon, another version of the story spread among the people, and no one knew whom to believe.

Wanting to find Gu Wu to explain, Gu Wu had mysteriously disappeared, hiding in the Prime Minister Residence for several days without coming out.

In the Imperial Palace.

The Empress Dowager had been gravely ill these days, this time truly seriously, with Gu Youyou caring for her.

Naturally, she also heard those unpleasant rumors, saying the Princess Consort of Ning was of illegitimate birth and that the Imperial Family could not have an illegitimate princess consort, and she should be put to death.

However, Gu Youyou had no reaction to this matter and even instructed the few who knew the truth in Beijing and Jinxiu City not to get involved in these discussions, nor to defend anything, which left the Empress Dowager puzzled.

"Youyou, what are you really thinking in your heart?"

Gu Youyou smiled and said, "Empress Dowager, your health is very poor right now, worrying so much, even I won't be able to save you."

The Empress Dowager sighed, "Ah! What is there to worry about, I've lived enough in this life, even if I die, there's nothing to regret."

Perhaps knowing that her end was near, the Empress Dowager became more amiable, even changing the way she referred to herself.

Gu Youyou sniffed, tucked the Empress Dowager's arm into the quilt, and settled it properly.

The Empress Dowager indeed seemed to be at the end of her life; when Jin Tianyuan's brothers forced their way into the capital, she was so enraged that her health had declined greatly, but it was not easy for people of this era to live to her age.

As she said, there's nothing to regret; everyone has to die someday.

So she always told those concerned about her to take a normal view, it's okay, everyone has to die, she had no regrets.

"Youyou, are you really the biological daughter of Gu Wu?" The Empress Dowager had always wanted to ask but felt it was inappropriate to bring it up.

But thinking that she didn't have much time left, what was there to hesitate about, if she wanted to ask something, she should ask; if she wanted to say something, she should say it.

Gu Youyou replied calmly, "Naturally, I am not."

"Then...why don't you defend yourself when he says such things about you?" The Empress Dowager was somewhat agitated.

She feared that Gu Youyou might indeed be the genuine daughter of that scoundrel, and she would use her last strength, while she was still alive, to protect her at all costs.

Since she wasn't, that was good, but she couldn't understand how Gu Youyou, not one to let others defame her, didn't defend herself and let the rumors spread more vigorously.

"If it's really impossible, ask your father to step in."

"No need, I can handle this matter myself," Gu Youyou said.

The Empress Dowager sighed, "I heard even your grandmother couldn't hold back and spoke for you, why don't you explain this clearly to everyone?"

Gu Youyou responded calmly, "What use is my explaining? If they insist on talking about my parents' affairs, how should I, as their daughter, know? Anyone could explain such matters, but my explanation would be useless."

The Empress Dowager exclaimed, "But you can't just leave it be, don't let his lies become truth!"

Gu Youyou smiled, "Rest assured, Empress Dowager, I certainly won't just leave it. My words might not work, but someone else's will."

"Oh? Who?" The Empress Dowager was slightly relieved to find out Gu Youyou had a plan.

Chapter 1610: Jin Ziyuan Wakes Up

Gu Youyou said, "I have already sent someone to invite the County Magistrate of Qingshui Town, as well as the village chief. Only they can prove what really happened."

"Indeed!" said the Empress Dowager, "No matter how powerful rumors are, they are no match for solid evidence. But Youyou, can they truly prove it?"

In truth, she was wondering if the people being called were just delaying tactics. Nowadays, people are not naive, and the force behind Gu Wu is the Zhang Family, and that mouth of Prime Minister Zhang is quite formidable.

Hmm, even if it is a delay, you still need to find a reliable one!

Gu Youyou packed her things and stood up, saying, "Don't worry, Empress Dowager, I will clean up these messy affairs this time. It was my fault for being too soft-hearted back then, for not killing him!"

A flash of ruthlessness passed through Gu Youyou's eyes, a look that rarely appeared on her face as a doctor, which startled the Empress Dowager.

Gu Youyou smiled faintly and said, "Today Youyou will return, Empress Dowager. If there is anything you need, just send someone to call me."

She could only promise to do her best regarding the Empress Dowager's illness, without informing the Empress Dowager herself. As family, the Emperor was aware.

What great storms has the Emperor not weathered through? Other than the initial difficulty in accepting it, he has since come to accept it, simply hoping that the Empress Dowager could leave peacefully!

…

Gu Youyou had just changed clothes upon returning from the palace when she received news from the maid of Madam Ru.

“Princess, Princess, our young master has awakened.” The maid was elated, saying repeatedly, “Our madam is overjoyed and has sent me to invite the princess to come over quickly.”

Gu Youyou was also overjoyed, she didn’t even bother to change clothes, but instructed Xiang Chun to bring her medical kit and also called Searcy to go to Madam Ru’s place together.

He had been in a coma for so long, and this time Searcy’s medicine had a remarkable effect, his blood had also returned to normal. If he couldn’t wake up because of this, then there was nothing more she could do.

Gu Youyou and Searcy hurriedly boarded the carriage and headed to the house rented by Madam Ru. Along the way, Searcy was most concerned about who had awakened, so she asked the maid who had brought the message, “Did your young master say anything when he woke, was there anything unusual?”

The maid shook her head and said, “I only heard that he woke up, and then the madam sent me to invite the princess. I haven’t seen the young master yet.”

Gu Youyou: “…”

Searcy: “…”

Seeing Searcy’s worried expression, Gu Youyou advised, “Whatever it is, we have to face it. Since he has awakened, let’s go see him. Didn’t you already prepare a backup plan?”

Searcy seldom showed such a heavy expression, and she sighed, “Forget it, let’s take a look first.”

The carriage arrived at Madam Ru's courtyard, they got off the carriage, and quickly entered the door with the medical kit.

A voice came from inside the house, Gu Youyou held back Searcy, who was about to enter, and made a gesture for her to be quiet.

"Ziyuan, drink some porridge first, this is porridge that your mother personally cooked. She's been cooking some every day since she heard you were about to wake up, hoping you'll have some as soon as you awaken."

No man's voice came from inside, just the sound of Madam Ru holding a spoon and tapping the porcelain bowl.

The sound was pleasant, but carried a hint of eeriness.

Gu Youyou and Searcy exchanged a glance but did not speak.

Then they heard Madam Ru cheerfully say, "Don't be afraid, they'll be here soon."

Then there was the sound of drinking porridge, and after a while, a man's voice finally spoke.

"They? Who are they?" The man's voice was still somewhat hoarse, with a touch of strangeness.