Farmhouse 1621

Chapter 1621: Xiang Chun Oversteps Authority

Something’s wrong. He came from Prime Minister Zhang’s place, could it be...

Gu Wu came from Prime Minister Zhang’s, and those relatives who had a good relationship with Gu Youyou all received her care, except for those who didn’t get along with her, like Gu Wu.

Hmm...

Xiang Chun suddenly remembered the teachings of the princess yesterday. She said that the reason she kept Gu Wu was to keep this trouble in her own hands to avoid being used by others.

As the head maid beside the princess, Xiang Chun naturally must also have such awareness, otherwise, how could she serve her master?

So today, Xiang Chun made a decision for Gu Youyou, to capture this troublesome relative and imprison him with Gu Wu in one place.

"Capture and take away!" Xiang Chun said coldly.

Gu Shuisheng was thrown by Xiang Chun’s people into the dark stone house where Gu Wu was held, only then did he know that Gu Wu was living like a prisoner these days.

But didn’t they say that Princess Ning acknowledged Gu Wu as her father and took him back to the Prince Residence to enjoy life?

What is going on now?

"Dad!" Gu Shuisheng exclaimed in surprise as he looked at the person crouched in the corner.

Gu Wu slowly lifted his head, both hungry and thirsty, making his voice sound hoarse.

"Why are you here?" He was also utterly surprised upon seeing who it was.

Xiang Chun laughed coldly from behind, "Aren't you pleased I've reunited you father and son? Shouldn't you thank me?"

Gu Wu recognized Xiang Chun; she was a maid by Gu Youyou's side who seemed to have Gu Youyou's trust.

He hurriedly said, "You can't imprison Shuisheng. He is this year's Top Scholar of the autumn examination!"

"Ha!" Xiang Chun sneered, "Would someone like you, conspiring with the Zhang family, be qualified to be the Top Scholar? Do you take the Emperor for a fool?"

"You, you stop looking down on us, you despicable maid, what right do you have to imprison Shuisheng? Go call Gu Youyou, I want to see Gu Youyou!"

Xiang Chun stamped her feet angrily and scolded, "You might as well save your breath. Let me tell you, once you are here, don't expect to get out. Do you know what this place is? Hmph, of the people imprisoned here, nine out of ten went insane, and the remaining one committed suicide!"

Gu Wu was filled with a deep sense of dread. No matter how much he calculated, he hadn't expected Gu Youyou to have turned into such a person.

She actually dared to set up a private prison and abuse her power?

As the saying goes, the hard fears the calculative, the calculative fears the reckless.

Unless he doesn't value his life, he really shouldn't have crossed Gu Youyou.

"You... you are too much, tell Gu Youyou I am her father. Does she dare treat me this way, wanting to be struck by lightning?"

Whether or not he was the father, Xiang Chun didn't know, but judging from Gu Youyou's attitude towards Gu Wu, he probably wasn't.

Gu Youyou wasn't the type to be harsh on her father, unless the person was an utterly shameless rascal.

Xiang Chun spat, "Shameless old thing, how dare you pretend to be our princess's father? Hmph, wait till our Prince comes back to deal with you."

"Jin Zijin? Fine, I will see what Jin Zijin says when he comes back." In Gu Wu's mind, Jin Zijin was still an honest and simple hunter who didn't speak much.

Xiang Chun left haughtily with her people, but with Gu Wu still imprisoned and now Gu Shuisheng as well, this confrontation with Gu Youyou felt like a lost battle.

Gu Wu was utterly anxious, shouting loudly, "Why did you come here? Oh dear, what do we do? I am imprisoned, but if you are also imprisoned, what will you do if there's a chance at the imperial examination?"

Chapter 1622: The Top Three Candidates

Gu Shuisheng appeared a bit more composed and said, "The results will be out tomorrow. If I don't make it to the list, Chancellor Zhang will probably stop bothering me. But if I do get selected, he'll know I've come to Ningwang Residence and will figure out a way to get me out."

Gu Wu said, "So, if you manage to get out tomorrow, does that mean you've passed?"

Gu Shuisheng nodded gently, then asked, "Dad, what about you? Are you really Madam Ning's biological father?"

He no longer addressed her as big sister.

Gu Wu's eyes avoided him as he hummed angrily, "Does it even matter? Look at them, Erya, Sanbao, and Gu Youyou, which one of them treats me as their father? They don't even count me as a relative. Before, her second uncle and aunt kept suppressing her, but after the flood in Lotus Village, isn't she still being kind to her second uncle's family? She treats everyone better than she treats me. Even if I'm not her biological father, I'm still her third uncle, but look, look at her, does she have any conscience?"

Gu Shuisheng fell silent. He had seen plenty of twists and turns in large families, but he never expected a simple farming family to have so many complicated interpersonal issues.

Is Gu Wu really Gu Youyou's biological father? Honestly, he hoped he wasn't.

Having stayed in Beijing for over a month, although he seldom went out, he had learned quite a lot about Gu Youyou. Gu Youyou is genuinely a good person, well-regarded among the citizens, and can be considered an extraordinary woman. It would be a tragedy if someone like her had a father like Gu Wu.

...

The autumn exams results have been announced, and the top three have emerged, one of whom is Gu Shuisheng, recommended by Chancellor Zhang.

Which among the three will become the Top Scholar, the second-place Eye Witness, and the third-place Flower Seeker will be determined after an imperial examination, personally presided over by the Emperor.

The imperial examination is three days away, yet one of the top three, Gu Shuisheng, is nowhere to be found, causing quite a distress among the officials.

Chancellor Zhang naturally knew where Gu Shuisheng was, and he wasn't worried, merely spreading the word that Gu Shuisheng was with Gu Youyou.

Since arriving in Beijing, Gu Shuisheng had kept a low profile, which was unlike Gu Wu, who was known by everyone.

People were puzzled as to why Gu Shuisheng, who had the chance to become the new Top Scholar, was at Ningwang Residence with Gu Youyou.

Luckily, Chancellor Zhang hadn’t planned to discredit her, simply explaining, "Madam Ning recognized her father, Gu Wu, and moved him into Ningwang Residence. Naturally, Gu Wu’s adopted son, Gu Shuisheng, was also brought into Ningwang Residence by Madam Ning."

This slap in the face nearly infuriated Madam Lin to death.

"Oh, Xingyi, don’t stop me, let me ask at Ningwang Residence, what’s really going on with Youyou? I’ve explained for her, yet she’s still taken Gu Wu into the residence. Taking Gu Wu in is one thing, but also taking in Gu Wu’s adopted son, isn’t she publicly slapping me in the face?"

"She’s recognized him; how am I supposed to explain that to others? I swore at the teahouse that Youyou couldn’t possibly be Gu Wu’s bastard."

"Mom, Youyou had already informed you to not meddle in this matter; she’s a decisive person and knows what she should do. You just don’t worry about it."

"Not meddle?" Madam Lin shouted, "If I don’t meddle, then I’d have to let others insult your sister, right? I can’t stomach this, Xingyi, your sister has been dead for so many years, yet people still talk about her like this, what’s going on?"

Chapter 1623: Picking Up a Hot Potato

Lin Xingyi sighed, "Mother, the Zhang Family intends to smear Youyou, and with Gu Wu’s arrival, Youyou is determined to take them all in one fell swoop. Don’t worry, she knows what to do."

Gu Youyou had already made her arrangements, but the distance from Lotus Village to Beijing was significant, what she needed was time.

And the time was indeed approaching.

Everyone caused a fuss about Gu Wu's adopted child being brought into the Prince Residence by Gu Youyou. At that time, Gu Youyou found out that there was one more person in the dark room where Gu Wu was held.

"Who did this?"

There weren't many people who could do this behind her back. She stared at Xiang Chun, who stepped forward with her head lowered.

"Your Highness, it... it was the servant."

Gu Youyou's face turned dark as a pot bottom, but she patiently asked, "Why did you do this?"

Xiang Chun answered honestly, "Yesterday, I saw Gu Shuisheng shouting outside the Prince Residence, demanding to see you, and he didn't look like a good person. He even said he came from the Prime Minister's Residence. The servant thought that Chancellor Zhang had no good intentions, and since Gu Shuisheng was causing trouble outside our residence, he must have been instructed by Chancellor Zhang!"

She sneaked a glance at Gu Youyou and seeing that she wasn't angry, continued, "A few days ago when Gu Wu caused a scene, didn't Your Highness say to lock him up to avoid any trouble? So the servant thought to do the same, locking this troublemaker up to prevent any further issues."

If that Zhang Shuisheng were an ordinary person, Xiang Chun's actions wouldn't be wrong, but he wasn't ordinary; he had just become one of the top three in this year's autumn examination.

The old bastard Chancellor Zhang must have calculated this. Gu Youyou had been tricked by him.

Alright, a cold smile involuntarily curved at the corner of Gu Youyou's mouth.

"Go find out who is grading the exams this year."

Gu Youyou cherished talents, if Gu Shuisheng truly had skills, so be it. But if he was placed in the top three through Zhang Chancellor's maneuvers, she would not hesitate to be ruthless.

She was just looking for an opportunity to take down that old bastard.

Someone quickly replied, "The exam papers are typically graded by various ministries. Chancellor Zhang, Lord Jie, and Lord Lin will all participate. The top three essays are reviewed by each member involved in grading, and finally sent to the Emperor. Your Highness, although Chancellor Zhang is a scoundrel, he prides himself as a cultured gentleman and wouldn't shame the integrity of scholars. The top three exams should be fine."

Gu Youyou scoffed, as if someone like Chancellor Zhang could call himself a cultured gentleman with integrity. Why didn't Confucius strangle him out of frustration?

But then she thought, Chancellor Zhang wouldn't risk his entire family's lives just to go against her.

Scheming to manipulate exam results could result in the death of his entire family.

Gu Youyou smiled faintly, "So, Gu Wu has truly adopted a promising foster son? If that's the case, I'll go meet him!"

After walking a few steps, Gu Youyou paused again and said to Xiang Chun, "Bring Gu Shuisheng out to see me!"

She didn't want to go to that place, seeing Gu Wu disgusted her.

Xiang Chun, knowing she had done something wrong, was faster than anyone at running errands.

Soon, Gu Shuisheng was brought up by two guards she called.

Having been starved for a day and night, he wasn't as disheveled as Gu Wu.

Other than his lips looking a bit chapped, he didn't appear to have suffered much.

Chapter 1624: Remarkably Calm

Upon close inspection, his brows and eyes were delicate, more refined than the typical northern man. Even though he was dependent on others, his back was straight, showing some scholarly pride.

Gu Youyou had a knack for judging people, while Xiang Chun said just by looking, it was clear he wasn't a good person. Gu Youyou thought this adopted son of Gu Wu was just a lazy beggar, so she didn't give it much thought.

It seemed either Xiang Chun lied to her, or Xiang Chun's eyesight needed some treatment.

"Gu Shuisheng?" Gu Youyou sat at the main seat and asked indifferently.

Gu Shuisheng was also inspecting Gu Youyou, this woman from legend. Seeing her in person was indeed more extraordinary than what the stories told.

The numerous women he had seen throughout his life included his grandmother, mother, father's concubines, his elder sisters and sisters-in-law, and younger sisters, but none were like her.

She sat in that chair with an aura of authority without anger; such innate qualities cannot be learned.

She uttered the name Gu Shuisheng with a transcendence beyond their times.

Women here would never address unfamiliar men by name.

Nor would they have such a calm gaze towards unfamiliar men.

She... was indeed a remarkable woman.

Gu Shuisheng raised his hands and bowed respectfully, "I am Gu Shuisheng, paying respects to Ningwang's wife!"

"Hmm!" Gu Youyou nodded lightly and said, "Congratulations on ranking among the top three!"

Gu Shuisheng was slightly startled, without much joy or anger, he said calmly, "Thank you, Ningwang's wife, for informing me!"

Gu Youyou paused slightly and said, "You seem not very happy?"

Gu Shuisheng just calmly said, "Ningwang's wife misunderstood. Becoming a top scholar is a major event in every man's life. How could I not be happy?"

Gu Youyou raised an eyebrow and said casually, "So you're composed?"

She looked at Gu Shuisheng with admiration and said, "Not bad. Even after ranking top three, you remain calm. It's no wonder old Zhang Chancellor took notice of you. Not bad, not bad..."

In one sentence, Gu Youyou praised several times.

But calling Zhang Chancellor a sly old fox somewhat tainted her image.

Gu Shuisheng added another mark of 'strange' to Gu Youyou's label.

"Some things Zhang Chancellor did were inappropriate, though some were actually decent," Gu Shuisheng said.

Gu Youyou did not deny it, saying, "True, but that's for you. To me, forcing his daughter upon my husband is wrong."

Gu Youyou's words were sharp and unyielding.

Gu Shuisheng opened his mouth, lowered his head, and whispered, "No Prince has ever had just one wife. How can you prevent the Li family's daughter, or the Wang family's daughter?"

Gu Youyou took a deep breath, contemplated for a moment, and smiled, "I have to stop them regardless, you just watch if those Li family and Wang family daughters dare to make trouble at my residence?"

"Sooner or later they will..."

Gu Youyou, slightly irritated, interrupted before he finished, "You're overstepping. I called you here to leave my Prince Residence, not to lecture me on some Confucian principles. The system of one husband and many concubines may be normal for you, but for me it doesn't work, understand?"

Gu Youyou waved her hand, and soon someone came to lead Gu Shuisheng out, throwing him out of the residence's gate.

Such a fierce woman truly surprised him. He looked at the tightly closed door and the two fierce guards at the entrance. Shaking his head, he left the Ningwang Residence and headed towards the Chancellor Residence.

Chapter 1625: Debate in the Imperial Court

As soon as he returned to the Chancellor Residence, Chancellor Zhang had someone call him over.

Chancellor Zhang thought that Gu Shuisheng had lost everything, but unexpectedly he returned so quickly.

It seems that there are still things that Gu Youyou is cautious about, at least when it comes to the imperial examination.

"How is it? Did you see your father?"

Gu Shuisheng pressed his lips and nodded slightly.

Chancellor Zhang looked concerned and asked, “Is your father doing well at Ningwang Residence?”

Gu Shuisheng did not directly answer Chancellor Zhang, only saying, “Whether well or not, it’s the place he wanted to go!”

Chancellor Zhang didn’t like being spoken to in this way, but since it was a critical moment, he didn’t say much, only remarked, “As long as there’s nothing major, that’s good. You should also prepare yourself; you’ll be going to the palace for the final exam in a couple of days.”

“Alright, thank you, Chancellor Zhang!” Gu Shuisheng was now a pupil under Chancellor Zhang, but even when speaking to him, there was always a slight sense of detachment.

Chancellor Zhang understood this was because Gu Shuisheng had experienced significant upheavals in his life; it was indeed hard to trust anyone again for such a person.

But it was no matter, as he liked such people.

Chancellor Zhang smiled and said, “Then go back and rest early. During the final exam, don’t be nervous; just let it be natural.”

For Chancellor Zhang, Gu Shuisheng being able to rank in the top three had already surprised him.

He originally thought that if it didn’t work out this time, he would wait another three years for him. He did not expect him to make it to the top three on his first attempt, which was very good.

…

The rumors grew more intense, regardless of whether what Madam Lin said was true or what Gu Wu said was true, but due to Gu Youyou’s status as a daughter-in-law of the Imperial Family, everyone hoped she would step forward and proactively clarify the matter.

Yet, Gu Youyou, who was at the center of it all, never showed her face.

Today was the day of the final exam, and after observing the performance of the top three candidates, the Emperor had already chosen the suitable person in his heart.

However, this time it was strange, as he did not announce the rankings of the three candidates on the spot but rather let them leave first and wait.

Everyone thought that perhaps the Emperor found it hard to make a decision at the moment and needed to think it over, so they didn't overthink.

After the three candidates left Taihe Hall with anxious hearts, some ministers, however, became somewhat uneasy.

"Your Majesty, the various rumors outside detrimental to Ning Wangfei are increasing, should we ask Ning Wangfei to explain herself?"

"Explain what?" the Emperor asked indifferently.

Actually, everyone knew that it was somewhat inappropriate to ask the Emperor to handle Ning Wangfei's matter at this time because the Empress Dowager was ill, and the Emperor was a filial son, plus Ning Wangfei was treating the Empress Dowager.

Even if Ning Wangfei had committed a grave mistake, the Emperor could not possibly punish her at this time.

But some individuals, well-versed in the teachings of Zhu Xi and Cheng Yi and Cheng Hao, could not stand a disgraceful figure in the position of Ning Wangfei, dreaming of pulling her down.

Chancellor Zhang smiled faintly and said nothing; he knew that Gu Youyou would provoke public outrage by prohibiting Ning Wang from taking concubines.

If you block someone's future, it's no wonder they wouldn't let you have an easy time.

"Your Majesty, Ning Wangfei is the daughter-in-law of the Imperial Family. Her identity, every action represents the Imperial Family's face. If she's truly disgraceful, wouldn't that shame the Imperial Family?"

The Emperor slowly said, "Oh, I haven't worried about it, why should you?"

"Your Majesty, I was just anxious, afraid the Imperial Family would lose face…"

"Oh dear!" Chancellor Zhang, who most wished for Gu Youyou's misfortune, stood out to mediate, saying, "Ning Wangfei is managing many affairs, busy treating the Empress Dowager. She's so busy it's nearly comparable to Your Majesty; how could she find time to bother with those idle rumors? If something happens to the Empress Dowager, who could bear that responsibility?"

Chapter 1626: The Emperor's Ruthless Words

The minister immediately fell silent.

Dealing with Ning Wangfei was indeed not the right timing now.

How could she be so fortunate? Just when the Empress Dowager fell ill at this critical moment, even the Imperial Physician was at a loss.

The Emperor looked at Prime Minister Zhang with somewhat cold eyes, speaking such arrogant and satirical words openly in front of him. He was growing more and more insolent.

But should he deal with him? That's something he needs to consider.

"My beloved ministers, the matter of Ning Wangfei is full of suspicions. I will neither shield her nor wrong her. But this matter must be set aside for now. Prime Minister Zhang is right; at this critical time, I hope everyone refrains from disturbing her. If someone frightens her with ill words and causes any mishap to the Empress Dowager, I will make sure his entire family pays with their lives."

The Emperor was a man of a gentle temperament, rarely showing anger.

Seeing him speak harshly is a rare occurrence; a person who seldom gets angry suddenly does is always more imposing than someone frequently angry. The Emperor had uttered words threatening to kill entire families; naturally, no one dared to speak further.

…

The public opinion wasn't something the Emperor managed, but since that day when he issued harsh words at the court, the official pressure disappeared.

Gu Youyou continued to enter the palace as usual, treating the Empress Dowager. The Empress Dowager's condition was worsening, her rheumatism had become extremely severe, and she couldn't sleep from the pain every night.

Gradually, Gu Youyou noticed some issues.

The years of rheumatic torment not only affected her physical health but also seemed to have mutated.

Gu Youyou's expression grew heavy, observing the Empress Dowager sleeping after taking painkillers. She then discussed it with Searcy.

"Why don't you take some blood back to examine?"

Searcy sighed and said, "What's the difference in examining it or not? You should also see that the Empress Dowager won't survive."

"Shh!" Gu Youyou looked around, relieved that there were no outsiders present.

Treating the Empress Dowager, even if she truly wouldn't survive, shouldn't be voiced like Searcy did unless one wished for trouble.

Searcy pressed down Gu Youyou's hand and said, "We should try to let her live a few more days; otherwise, when she dies, you'll lose your shield. With your Prince not back yet, it would be troublesome."

"Do you even need to say?" Gu Youyou then took out a long needle to draw some blood from the Empress Dowager.

Regarding the Empress Dowager's illness, Gu Youyou never hid it from the Emperor. The Emperor was very aware that the Empress Dowager truly wouldn't make it this time. Seeing the Empress Dowager suffering, he understood what he needed to.

After listening to Gu Youyou's report, he sighed softly, "Treat as necessary, just don't let the Empress Dowager pass away too painfully."

Gu Youyou pondered for a moment and said, "The Empress Dowager's main pain comes from her legs. In the later stages, it's feared that she will need pain medication more frequently."

"Hmm, make the necessary arrangements, you can go back now," the Emperor said indifferently.

Gu Youyou bowed to the Emperor and was about to head back with Xu Yao.

The Prince Residence was not peaceful; she dared not leave Xu Yao by her side. So, she left him in the Imperial Palace. The Emperor seemed particularly fond of children lately, perhaps wishing to compensate for Zijin not growing up by his side, as the Empress Dowager remarked.

Just as she reached the doorway, the Emperor suddenly called her back, saying, "Zijin should be back soon, take good care of the Empress Dowager. Leave Gu Wu's matter to Zijin to handle."

Gu Youyou was slightly stunned, and nodded gently.

…

A few days later, Jin Zijin finally returned, accompanied by the village chief of Lotus Village and the County Magistrate of Qingshui Town.

Chapter 1627: Jin Zijin Has Returned

The village head is getting on in years, plus he fell seriously ill after fleeing a flood in Lotus Village years ago, and now he walks with a slight tremble, let alone enduring a long journey.

They waited for the village head to come along, which delayed them for several days on the road.

"The Prince has returned, Princess, the Prince has returned!" Xiang Chun exclaimed with childlike excitement, the news of Jin Zijin's return swept away the gloom hanging over the Prince Residence for days.

Gu Youyou hurried out, staring at the familiar figure with tears of joy uncontrollably welling up.

"What kind of broken house have you been fixing? Away for two months!" Gu Youyou couldn't help but complain.

Jin Zijin had already heard about the situation in Beijing; otherwise, he wouldn't have coincidentally traveled with the village head and the County Magistrate of Qingshui Town.

He tightly embraced Gu Youyou, chuckled softly, "The last time we'll be apart in this lifetime, hmm?"

Gu Youyou was suddenly taken aback and asked him, "What have you done?"

"The house!" Jin Zijin laughed.

Gu Youyou found it both amusing and frustrating, saying, "You're more eager for seclusion than I am. Imagine you, giving up being Emperor, I'm curious about how many straw cottages you've built."

Though Gu Youyou felt that living in a straw house was less comfortable than a large tile-roofed house, they had been through so much that they long learned that wealth and fame were fleeting; it didn’t matter anymore.

Even if it meant returning to the past.

Jin Zijin looked into her mist-filled eyes and whispered, "You’ll know when you see it, it’s a place you always wanted to visit."

A place I always wanted to visit?

Gu Youyou thought for a long time but couldn’t recall where she had always wanted to go.

However, at the moment, that wasn’t important; what’s crucial is dealing with Gu Wu first, so they wouldn’t leave behind a trail of gossip after they were gone.

Otherwise, their retreat would be tarnished, and others might say she, Gu Youyou, was fleeing in fear of her crimes, which was not her style.

"I heard the village head and County Magistrate came to Beijing with you, where are they?"

"I’ve arranged for them to rest in the guest rooms. After such a long journey, especially the elderly village head, they couldn’t bear it."

Gu Youyou: "..."

He had already arranged for the guests so soon, truly!

"So now... you are resting too?"

Jin Zijin smiled openly and said, "Yes, I need a good rest too!"

Gu Youyou originally wanted to say she'd go to the kitchen to instruct a few dishes he liked, but before she could get a word out, he had picked her up.

"Hey, put me down. It's broad daylight, aren't you going to rest?"

"It won't take long, very soon!" Jin Zijin held her as he strode toward the inner courtyard, causing waves of startled cries from the young maidens.

"Look, the Princess is truly blessed, men from royal families; who among them is like our Prince, having not even one concubine?"

"Exactly, consistently devoted entirely to the Princess for so many years, just like before."

The man simply washed up, then held her to continuously demand.

"I heard you particularly envy that Miss Du is going to be a mother again?"

Gu Youyou: "...Where did you hear that from?"

"I know everything happening here."

Including how she calmly faced various swirling rumors, he knew it all.

Jin Zijin said, "The first battle was exceptionally impressive."

Gu Youyou laughed and said, "It's nothing major, just that the Empress Dowager fell ill and things have been a bit hectic lately."

Jin Zijin nodded and asked, "Also, has Jin Ziyuan come by?"

Chapter 1628: Confrontation at Taihe Hall

"Ah? Hmm, yes, Madam brought him to find me."

"Awake?"

"Hmm, he’s awake. Our biggest concern was that the awakened person might be Yu Jizi, fortunately, it’s not. However, he doesn’t remember us either; he’s lost his memory!"

"Oh, amnesia?" Jin Zijin reflected for a moment and then said, "That’s quite good!" Otherwise, he would have to divert his attention to dealing with Jin Ziyuan.

Gu Youyou got up, dressed, and said, "Are you going to take a nap, or go out for something to eat?"

Jin Zijin immediately got up as well, sat on the edge of the bed, resting his chin on her shoulder, and said softly, "I’m not tired, and I ate something on the way. Tell me, what’s the current situation?"

Gu Youyou turned around and said, "Gu Wu is now in my hands, locked up in the stone chamber. Hmph, after not seeing him for years, he’s reached new levels of shamelessness, even claiming I am his daughter."

Jin Zijin laughed, "So you summoned the headman and the County Magistrate of Qingshui Town?"

"Yes, after all, he is a condemned criminal from the dungeon of Qingshui Town. Having been on the run for so long, it’s time for him to be brought to justice!"

...

Now that Jin Zijin has returned, and the witness is here, there’s no need to delay this matter any longer.

After resting for a night, Jin Zijin entered the palace the next day and went up to Taihe Hall.

This was the first time he proactively went to Taihe Hall.

The sudden appearance of Prince Ning in his imposing manner on Taihe Hall surprised a group of ministers greatly.

He began by saying, "Gu Wu is someone I have observed in Lotus Village for six years, more clearly than any of you present. I cannot understand how all of you were deceived by a condemned criminal like him who is full of lies?"

His words slapped everyone’s faces in the hall.

Just a condemned criminal?

Prime Minister Zhang was somewhat disconcerted.

Wasn’t he already sentenced, served his time, and released?

But someone of Jin Zijin’s status and position obviously wouldn’t speak recklessly.

This indicates that Gu Wu still hasn’t told the truth.

However, Prime Minister Zhang soon thought, whether he is a condemned criminal seems unimportant, the key is that Gu Wu claims Gu Youyou is his and his sister-in-law’s daughter, that Prince Ning’s consort, Gu Youyou, is illegitimate and should be executed.

Prime Minister Zhang stood forward and said slowly, "Prince Ning, I understand your desire to defend your wife, but you should also consider whether that woman deserves your protection! She is supposedly the daughter of your brother-in-law and sister-in-law, an illegitimate child! An illegitimate royal consort disgraces the Imperial Family, doesn’t it?"

Jin Zijin was blunt from the start, and naturally, Prime Minister Zhang wouldn’t hold back either.

The first round raised the tension on the scene to its highest point.

Jin Zijin let out a cold laugh, his eyes dark as ink swept over Prime Minister Zhang, and said calmly, "I wonder what the penalty is for slandering the Imperial Family? Prime Minister Zhang, kindly enlighten this prince!"

Prime Minister Zhang's heart skipped a beat, and with slightly diminished momentum, he said, "This isn't something I said, it was Gu Wu who said that Prince Ning's consort, Gu Youyou, is his daughter. Not just me, everyone knows about it, don't they?"

Being dragged down by Prime Minister Zhang, the crowd in the court could only cast resentful glances at him, but had to nod in agreement.

"Yes, Prince Ning, this matter has spread wildly outside, everyone in Beijing knows about it. They say your consort is illegitimate, everyone is watching to see how the Emperor will deal with the consort."

"Who told you that my consort is illegitimate? Just because someone says it, you believe it? Where's your brain?"

Chapter 1629: Calling the First Witness

Each time Gu Wu was called a bastard, Jin Zijin found it unbearably grating. In his absence, was this how they bullied his woman?

Jin Zijin gazed at the Emperor seated high above. The Emperor also glanced at Jin Zijin but did nothing more.

Heh... Jin Zijin sneered inwardly.

He is the Emperor; he is only fit to be the Emperor.

The Emperor would never show favoritism; he is a good Emperor. That is why Jin Zijin is eternally unfit for this position, because he cannot remain indifferent when others harm his family.

Before long, Madam Lin arrived.

Lin Xingyi was taken aback and asked, "Mother, why have you come?"

Madam Lin entered Taihe Hall, clad in her meticulously preserved first-rank Madam's official robe, her posture firm, exuding a touch of authority.

Madam Lin looked at Lin Xingyi and snorted coldly, "I have come, naturally, to be a witness for Gu Youyou. Humph, I want to see if that brat Gu Wu dares to speak nonsense in my presence."

Lately, Lin Xingyi has been unable to raise his head in front of Madam Lin, because he hasn't spoken up for Gu Youyou or taken any action.

Indeed, he feels wronged too. Gu Youyou repeatedly urged him not to get involved in these matters, saying she knew how to handle them herself.

Gu Youyou is a capable woman, different from ordinary women. Lin Xingyi trusts her greatly; otherwise, how could he stand by and watch those scoundrels insult his sister?

Madam Lin took a few steps forward with her cane and bowed to the Emperor, standing directly beneath him.

"Greetings to the Emperor!"

"Madam Lin, you may rise!"

Seeing this elderly woman about the same age as the Empress Dowager, and noticing her relying on a cane, the Emperor recalled the Empress Dowager's long-standing leg issues and quickly instructed Eunuch Wan: "Wan Decheng, grant a seat to Madam Lin!"

Few are bestowed a seat by the Emperor. Before Madam Lin, only the previous Ducal Residence's Duke had the privilege, but he was over eighty years old.

Soon, Gu Wu was brought in as well. Since he was to appear at the morning court, they feared he might faint from hunger, so last night, Gu Youyou specifically instructed someone to give Gu Wu an extra meal, consisting of two buns and a bowl of water.

Having eaten well at night, Gu Wu felt much more spirited in the morning.

Facing the full assembly of civil and military officials, he showed no stage fright; he knew this day would inevitably come, and he was done being locked in Gu Youyou's chamber these days.

After a brief moment of surprise, he quickly regained composure.

Seeing Gu Wu, Madam Lin, who had been appeased, could no longer suppress the rage in her heart and shouted harshly, "Gu Wu, do you still remember who I am?"

Having not seen each other for decades, how could he remember who this old woman was?

However, Gu Wu was not foolish; with a quick turn of thought, he guessed who this old lady was.

"Is it you? Madam Lin?"

"Humph, you do remember!" Madam Lin replied coldly, "You claim mutual affection between my daughter and you, saying Youyou is your daughter? Then tell everyone how you and my daughter were mutually affectionate!"

The Lin Family is based in Beijing, a fact long known to Gu Wu.

Since he came up with such a lie, he naturally thought about how to handle the Lin Family.

He fell to his knees with a thud and cried out loudly, "Madam Lin, I know you don't believe me, but I truly have loved Sister Lin since childhood, and Sister Lin loved me too. Surely you remember her returning from the street each time with a few little sugar figurines for me!"

Chapter 1630: Talking About the Past

Old Madam Lin nearly fainted from anger and said, "That's because you are the youngest brother in your family, and she thought she would eventually marry into your family as the eldest daughter-in-law, so she was kinder to her future husband's family. Why don't you mention how she would bring a bottle of wine for your father, two pieces of floral cloth, and a few pieces of fruit candy for your mother each time?"

Everyone present had extraordinary expressions on their faces upon hearing their conversation.

However, Gu Wu didn't think so and said again, "Every year, Sister Lin makes clothes for our family during the New Year, and mine are always done first."

Old Madam Lin replied indifferently, "That's because you have the thickest skin, and every year as soon as winter starts, you run to her asking for clothes."

Gu Wu clenched his teeth and yelled, "I asked her, and she said she likes me the most!"

Old Madam Lin knew her somewhat strange daughter well and rubbed her forehead, saying, "Back then, you were still young. The kind of 'like' she mentioned is different from what you think; she liked you as a child!"

This sentence, however, caused Old Madam Lin to lose an argument.

Everyone whispered, "How can a sister-in-law say she likes her brother-in-law?"

"Exactly, even liking as a child isn't right. Boys and girls shouldn't sit together past the age of seven. How old were they then?"

Gu Wu was elated upon hearing this. He knew that the 'like' from the somewhat strange Sister Lin was not in a romantic sense, but others didn't seem to think so.

Old Madam Lin, quick of mouth yet slowed by age in the argument, fell into Gu Wu's trap.

But it didn’t matter; she still wasn’t afraid of him.

"Back then, we wanted to take Lin Lian to Beijing, but she didn’t want to leave because she had deep feelings for the eldest son of the Gu Family since childhood. If not for this, my daughter wouldn’t have died early, and you wouldn’t be here talking nonsense today."

Gu Wu replied, "Sister Lin and I were childhood friends, born in the same year, and have always had a good relationship since childhood. Everyone in both villages knows this."

Old Madam Lin, stifled, angrily roared, "It’s all because of Gu Dalu. Without him, who would know you? If you keep talking nonsense, don’t blame me for being rude!"

She was angry, but being angry didn’t mean victory here. In the end, Old Madam Lin lost an argument again, and she was so angry her teeth itched.

Jin Zijin said calmly, "Grandmother, please calm down. Witnesses will arrive soon."

Soon after, a eunuch led the County Magistrate and village head from Qingshui Town, brought by Jin Zijin, into the room.

On the day of Gu Feng’s death, the village head was present, and he knew everything clearly.

Seeing Gu Wu, he was still very surprised, saying, "Gu Wu, you’re really alive, huh?"

The eunuch reminded him, "The person seated above is His Majesty, the Emperor!"

Having never met the Emperor before, he was immediately so scared that his legs went weak.

Jin Zijin walked over, helped him up, and only then did he feel a bit relieved.

He was really afraid that the man might be too scared to speak, leaving them to find someone else to testify.

The County Magistrate was much more composed.

As a minor official, he wouldn’t have had a chance to see the Emperor even if he worked till retirement, so he was also very excited to see him this time.

However, having witnessed big scenes before, he quickly calmed down.

The Emperor addressed them calmly, "Speak your part, but remember, you must tell the truth. If any of you dare utter a single falsehood, the penalty is death by a thousand cuts!"

The Emperor’s words were stern, and under this authority, the County Magistrate and village head dared not lie.

Gu Wu was also a bit flustered, never expecting them to bring the village head and County Magistrate here.